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Sri Lanka VOA stirs debate

Government, trade disagree on impact

By Shekhar Niyogi

KOLKATA Sri Lanka's planned withdrawal of its visa-on-arrival facility (VOA) after September 30, for citizens of 79 countries, continues to be a hot issue between the government and the travel trade.

W.A. Chulananda Perera, Sri Lanka Immigration and Emigration controller-general, insisted the industry would not be affected by the new online visa application system, which he said would make it easier for tourists.

After application submission and payment of a yet undisclosed fee, visitors would be able to get their visas in one to three days, he explained. Only two countries that offer a reciprocal privilege to Sri Lankan nationals – Singapore and the Maldives – will still be granted the VOA facility.

But most interviewed from the travel trade feel otherwise. "We really hope the government will not introduce this scheme,"

said Hiran Cooray, chairman of Jetwing and PATA. "If they do, we have to make it as hassle-free as possible, so that the impact is minimised."

This decision could affect arrivals from India, which had 85,000 visitors to Sri Lanka in 2009 and 120,000 in 2010, and has projected arrivals of 170,000 in 2011.

Tina Kanuga, of Mumbai-based Bathija Travels, said: "There will be a drop of at least 40 per cent in Indian tourist demand for Sri Lanka. Till now, the visas were free of charge, but now, a visa fee will be levied."

Nagsri Prasad Sashidhar, from Mumbai-based Mercury Travels, agreed: "Sri Lanka was very attractive for us, given the VOA facility. We would recommend it as a good option to tourists who were going to the Maldives. The withdrawal will cause numbers

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TTG Asia e-Daily

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Poster boy for local talent

It's 50 years of Singapore hotels (see Special Edition this issue), yet few locals have cracked the luxury hotel sector the way Arthur Kiong has. **Raini Hamdi** asks the MD, hotel operations, Asia-Pacific, Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts why – see page 6



A Special Edition
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Garuda opens new route

Trade praises Makassar-Singapore flights, but says marketing could have been better

By Mimi Hudoyo

JAKARTA Garuda Indonesia's launch of direct Makassar-Singapore flights last week is seen as helping grow arrivals from Europe, even as the travel trade expresses discontent on how and why it was not previously informed of the plan.

Makassar Tourism Board chairman, Nico Pasaka, said: "The direct service opens a new path for South Sulawesi and eastern Indonesia to increase our share of Europe, which is our major traditional market. Europeans make up 75 per cent of our market, with cultural and adventure travel as the main attraction of this region."

Garuda is building up Makassar as its third hub, after Jakarta and Bali. Garuda president and CEO, Emirsyah Satar, said: "Makassar is growing fast as a business city and it is strategically located in the eastern part of Indonesia."

Incito Tours managing director, Sebastian Ng, added: "Travellers who need to connect in Ja-



Ng: fresh hopes

karta or Bali to get to Makassar now can fly here directly from Singapore. With Makassar becoming Garuda's hub, connected with (10) destinations in eastern Indonesia, travellers bound for the popular diving spots of Manado (North Sulawesi), Wakatobi (South-east Sulawesi) or Raja Ampat (Papua), and other cultural and nature spots in Kalimantan or Maluku, can use the same network."

He explained further: "This lessens the concern of some travellers about having to take an airline that is still under the EU ban to connect to the second- or third-tier destinations."

The absence of Garuda flights to Europe in the last decade and the negative perception of Indonesia's security severely affected the sector in the late '90s. It is only recently that business

has started to pick up, with Europeans starting to travel to Sulawesi again.

Jakarta-based MarinTur executive director, Ismail Ali, said: "Looking at the destination and the seat configuration, it seems that business traffic and the outbound leisure market are their targets, and these are indeed big markets."

Garuda is using Boeing 737-500 aircraft with a capacity of 12 Business Class and 84 Economy Class seats.

"However, as an inbound operator talking about a national carrier, I think we can maximise the service with the longhaul market," said Ismail.

"This will rely on whether Garuda gives competitive pricing, and whether it has a cooperation agreement with Singapore Airlines to fly their longhaul travellers to Makassar and beyond."

But while the travel trade was excited by new opportunities, they questioned the flag carrier's decision to start the service without conducting any

pre-opening marketing efforts with them.

Nico said: "We did not hear about the service until last month, when the airline brought a delegation from Singapore to promote outbound travel. As a national carrier, isn't inbound travel a priority for them?"

"I wish Garuda had told us much earlier," Ng added. "In the short-term, we may be able to get the expatriates living in Singapore to come, but for the longhaul, the next opportunity will be winter."

"The question is, can we rely on Garuda to keep its daily schedule? We don't want to start promoting, producing brochures, and by the time tourists want to come, the frequency drops."

He further added: "Why don't they start with three or four times a week and increase to daily flights as the market grows?"

"We don't want to end up fighting with overseas partners when we do packages for departures and suddenly the flight frequencies are reduced."

Continued from page 1

Online visas

to fall and make the destination less appealing to our clients."

Arrivals from Turkey, another key market, is also predicted to drop. "(Citizens from) Turkey did not need a visa to enter Sri Lanka," said Aynur San of Istanbul-based Oniva Tours.

"Countries who do not need visa are always more attractive. Most of the countries in Asia do not ask for visas from Turkish nationals, therefore there is more demand to go to Asia than Europe. This will have a negative effect."

But Marian Stanley, of South Melbourne Travel, Australia believes this would not be the case for her market: "Australians know there are many places they visit that will require a visa and consequently make those arrangements prior to departure. It will not have a great impact."

Initially debated in August last year, the VOA withdrawal was put on hold because of large-scale representations by the local trade, which feared a drop in tourist arrivals.

The move is believed to be partly to stem illegal immigration from some neighbouring countries.

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Tourism Data



Research on how the East Japan earthquake and ongoing Fukushima nuclear crisis is affecting the local hospitality industry; and Abacus discusses the impact of technology on Asian travel businesses.

Hot Deals

Expedia is offering travel agents in Singapore a S\$100 (US\$81) bonus on top of commissions; Centara has introductory rates at its new Vietnam resort; and Ascott is offering a Bangkok Getaway Promotion package.

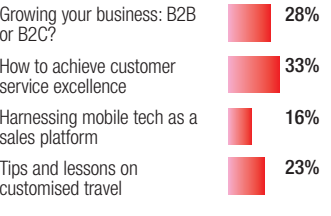


Tipsheet

Exotissimo launches a series of real-time online webinar presentations to deliver latest product news to agents. The next offering lined up is Laos for Beginners by Georgie Walsh (Laos product manager) on June 16.

Poll

We asked what topic the trade would like to see discussed at the first TTG Travel Agent Conference.



S'pore hotels rock

A PARTY has been laid out for the 50th anniversary of the Singapore Hotel Association (see our special edition this issue, *50 Years of Singapore Hotels*, pages 14-31) and there is indeed much to celebrate.

Not long ago, the city's hoteliers were berated for having no guts to charge high rates, unlike their counterparts in Hong Kong. Today, the figures speak for themselves. Last year, Singapore's average room rate (ARR) rose 14 per cent, according to a survey by corporate travel services company, HRG. The increase, HRG noted, was faster than Shanghai, Beijing and yes, Hong Kong, which is not experiencing a glut, unlike the two markets.

The fortune is spilling into 2011, with ARR increasing 13.9 per cent to S\$226 (US\$184) in Q1, according to latest Singapore Tourism Board figures.

Economy hotels are clearly the top performer, both in ARR and RevPAR growth (24.2 per cent and 30.3 per cent respectively). At the recent Hotel Investment Conference Asia-Pacific Update in Singapore, it is clear this is one segment that is of interest to investors, one of whom told *TTG Asia* he was keen on investing in an economy hotel in the suburbs of Singapore that have a high concentration of offices or which are industrial parks.

Economic growth, changing

ARR, AOR and RevPAR, Q1 2011

Q1 2011	ARR		AOR		RevPAR	
	\$	% Δ	%	% Δ	\$	% Δ
Overall	226	13.9%	85	1.3%pt	191	15.7%
Luxury	366	9.0%	79	-0.9%pt	287	7.7%
Upscale	255	13.6%	85	2.1%pt	218	16.5%
Mid-Tier	180	19.5%	86	0.0%pt	154	19.5%
Economy	107	24.2%	84	3.9%pt	90	30.3%

Source: Singapore Tourism Board

Not long ago, the city's hoteliers were berated for having no guts to charge high rates... Today, the figures speak for themselves.

customer demand and a new generation of owners are among the factors that have led to a better spread of hotels in Singapore, enriching the city's accommodation product range.

Singapore's ability to command higher room rates does not stem from having more gutsy hotel marketers alone, who have a wider range of distribution channels in order to maximise yield. Hoteliers have government's vision of a first-world city to thank, and an effective destination marketer in the STB.

But with higher rates come the greater responsibility to ensure a real increase in value-for-money,

which will leave a guest happy to have parted with more. This can only be done through service innovation.

The challenge lies in attracting the best talent to the industry, and retaining them with competitive salaries and approaches that recognise fundamental changes in the way today's generation of employees want to work.

As it is, the hotel industry is not a fun industry, and pays little in relation to the long working hours and to other sectors like banking. It can no longer rely on a staff's passion for the hotel industry to keep him and get the best out of him.

Most commented on www.ttgasia.com

Google's magical flight search tool

SEARCH engine giant Google's release of an online search tool to help travellers quickly see which airlines serve a specific route, flight times and frequencies had our readers all excited and curious. Chennai's Senthil said: "That's a great move. I really wonder how it is possible without CRS/GDS, where most of the airlines file their databases!"

Sri Lanka's rates leave a bitter taste

NOT everyone was enthusiastic about Sri Lanka's launch of a new five-year tourism masterplan. Thailand's Fred Harvey said: "If tourism is to improve in Sri Lanka, then the government is going to have to exercise price controls over the extortionate rack rates and menu prices of the hotels in resort areas. These hotels charge European prices, yet pay their staff Sri Lankan wages. Tourists understand this immoral scheme and will be voting with their feet by walking away."

Jetstar's boo-boo?

JETSTAR'S move to charge travellers in Australia and New Zealand for counter check-ins has led Australia's Ray Hall to compare it to another airline, which adopted the ancillary revenue-generating measure back in 2009: "Jetstar is really trying very hard to emulate Ryanair. So passengers who are challenged with the check-in kiosk, either technically or physically, will be penalised? Yet another reason to look for good off-peak fares on full-service carriers."

Tracker

An update on major issues and events from the past

Sichuan earthquake

A 7.9 earthquake rocked Sichuan, China on May 12, 2008.

THEN Nature's wrath devastated parts of the province, with the Wenchuan and Beichuan counties bearing the heaviest brunt. Popular scenic spots Dujiangyan and Jiuzhaigou suffered extensive damage, as did the famed Wolong Giant Panda Reserve in Wenchuan. Several ancient sites also collapsed.

The Chinese authorities put a stop to incoming tourists in the first few months while the destination underwent repairs. Tourism business continued to suffer a year later, with hotels in Chengdu and other cities such as Yibin and Zigong seeing poor occupancies.

NOW Sichuan has re-emerged with new attractions, tourist products and other related infrastructure. Last year, the province realised RMB188 billion (US\$29 billion) in tourism income, surpassing the amount earned before the earthquake and exceeding the provincial government's targets. The China National Tourism Administration and the Provincial Government of Sichuan officially opened the 2011 Sichuan International Tourism Festival on April 19 in Shuimo, Wenchuan county. The event, which concluded on May 15, was held to commemorate the devastation.

FUTURE Sichuan is expected to welcome 290 million visitors and receive some RMB210 billion in tourism-related receipts by the end of this year.

CORRECTION
The Checking In piece on Radisson Hotel Brunei Darussalam in our May 27 issue erroneously had a picture of The Brunei Hotel. We regret any inconvenience caused.



EDITORIAL
Raini Hamdi
Group Editor (raini.hamdi@ttgasia.com)
Gracia Chiang
Editor, TTG Asia (gracia.chiang@ttgasia.com)
Karen Yue
Editor, TTGmice (karen.yue@ttgasia.com)
Brian Higgs
Assistant Editor, TTG Asia Online (brian.higgs@ttgasia.com)
Amee Enriquez
Senior Sub-editor (amee.enriquez@ttgasia.com)
Sirima Eamtako
Editor, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos (sirima.eamtako@ttgasia.com)
Mimi Hudoyo
Editor, Indonesia (idmfasia@cbn.net.id)
Catherine Monthienvichienchai
Editor, Special Projects (catherine.monthien@gmail.com)
Sim Kok Chwee
Correspondent-at-large (aviasian.images@gmail.com)
Ellen Chen
Correspondent, Malaysia (ellenchen07@gmail.com)

Marianne Carandang
Correspondent, The Philippines (mcarandang@gmail.com)
Prudence Lui
Correspondent, Hong Kong (prului@yahoo.com)
Amy Fabris-Shi
Correspondent, China (amy@scribesoftheorient.com)
Shekhar Niyogi
Chief Correspondent, Kolkata, India (niyogis@gmail.com)
Anand and Madhura Katti
Correspondent, Mumbai, India (anmkatti@mtnl.net.in)
Sharmila Chand
Correspondent, New Delhi, India (chand.sharmila@gmail.com)
Feizal Samath
Correspondent, Sri Lanka (feizalsam@gmail.com)
Vivian Lee
Correspondent, South Korea (wei_wei_cheng@hotmail.com)
Faith Chang
Correspondent, Australia (faithchang26@yahoo.com)
Redmond Sia, Haze Loh
Creative Designers
Lina Tan
Editorial Assistant

SALES & MARKETING
Michael Chow
Publisher (michael.chow@ttgasia.com)
Katherine Ng, Marisa Chen
Senior Business Managers (katherine.ng@ttgasia.com, marisa.chen@hk.china.com)
Jonathan Yap
Business Manager (jonathan.yap@ttgasia.com)
Cheryl Tan
Corporate Marketing Manager (cheryl.tan@ttgasia.com)
Tan Ee Hiang
Marketing Executive (tan.ee.hiang@ttgasia.com)
Cheryl Lim
Advertisement Administration Manager (cheryl.lim@ttgasia.com)
Carol Cheng
Assistant Manager Administration and Marketing (carol.cheng@hk.china.com)
PUBLISHING SERVICES
Tony Yeo
Division Manager (tony.yeo@ttgasia.com)
Agnes Loy
Senior Production Executive (agnes.loy@ttgasia.com)
Nancy Lee
Production Co-ordinator (nancy.lee@ttgasia.com)

Carol Wong
Circulation Executive (carol.wong@ttgasia.com)
TTG ASIA MEDIA
Darren Ng
Managing Director (darren.ng@ttgasia.com)
OFFICES
SINGAPORE 1 Science Park Road #04-07 The Capricorn, Singapore Science Park II Singapore 117528 Tel: (65) 6395-7575 Fax: (65) 6536-2972 contact@ttgasia.com; www.ttgasia.com
HONG KONG 11/F ING Tower 308-320 Des Voeux Road, Central, Hong Kong Tel: (852) 2571-9333 Fax: (852) 2806-0646
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Travel Hall of Fame

The Travel Hall of Fame, displayed in the Raffles Hotel Museum on the third level of Raffles Hotel Singapore, showcases accolades, artefacts and memorabilia of the region's most exceptional travel organisations. Since 2002, luminaries who have won the prestigious TTG Travel Award at least 10 times have been conferred the title of Travel Hall of Fame Honorary. Singapore Airlines and Singapore Changi Airport are the Travel Hall of Fame's pioneering honorees, having been voted by Asia-Pacific's travel trade as Best Airline of the Year and Best Airport of the Year respectively, for more than a decade. Hertz Asia-Pacific joined this elite family in 2005. Recently inducted were Star Cruises, Royal Cliff Beach Resort Pattaya, Abacus International and SilkAir.



Grand Hyatt Macau

Designed for successful business events



The Pool Deck offers countless opportunities for staging events creatively

Since opening in 2009, the Grand Hyatt Macau has enhanced Macau’s appeal considerably as a centre for meetings, incentive travel, conventions and exhibitions (MICE).

Rising out of the City of Dreams in two towers, it is a sight that promises extraordinary grandeur. Its lobby, vast and striking with a sweeping backdrop of marble, welcomes the visitor in awe-inspiring splendour. The MICE venues and accommodation standards are equally impressive.

With a mix of superb facilities, state-of-the-art technology and impeccable services, Grand Hyatt Macau indeed has a starring role at Macau’s City of Dreams. MICE visitors will soon discover that a stay or attending an event here can easily become the main attraction.

Designed for business events

The entire second level area is dedicated to events – the **Grand Ballroom** with its eight-metre high ceiling is almost 2,000 sqm, and can be divided into four sound-proof sections. Next door, the 780 sqm **Salão do Teatro** features an open show kitchen capable of hosting 20 chefs, with live video cameras and projection screens, and banquet seating for 300 guests. It is also the only ballroom in Macau

blessed with natural daylight. The **Salão do Teatro** can also be easily dressed up to a stylish Modern & Chic or elegant Oriental theme.

MICE planners can also choose from the **eight meeting salons** for smaller functions of 40-100 people, which are complemented by two Salon Lounges for break-out receptions and a Business Centre.

For a more casual atmosphere, the **Pool Deck** on Level 3 is one of the largest in Macau. Centred around a 40-metre long swimming pool, it features a water lounge, VIP cabanas and space for 420 sit-down guests. The Pool Deck can be also set up for various functions in different styles.

The adjacent **Pool House** is also available for meetings, cocktails and sit-down dining, offering an indoor-outdoor ambience for up to 120 guests.

These fine facilities are supported by the hotel’s professional events team, which ensures the success of any event held here. Meeting packages give planners the best value.

Grand Club Privileges

There are two towers – the 424-room **Grand Tower** and premium 367-room **Grand Club Tower**.

Guests staying at Grand Club Rooms and Suites have access to the

“Given the sheer scale, variety and unique nature of our event venues, alongside the world-class entertainment available at City of Dreams—all of which can be handled through one billing account—Grand Hyatt Macau is a truly integrated destination, and we feel confident that it will be a huge attraction to MICE organisers.”

Paul Kwok
General Manager
Grand Hyatt Macau

Full Day Meeting package

- **Full day meeting package** is now available at HK\$600 per person. This includes: use of the appropriate meeting venue from 09:00-17:00; welcome coffee and tea, and morning and afternoon coffee breaks; lunch; amenities such as writing pads, pens, bottle water and mints; and AV equipment such as microphones and a projector and screen.

Prices are subject to 10% service charge and may change without further notice.



A modern and chic theme for events at Salão do Teatro



A spring floral theme at the Pool Deck



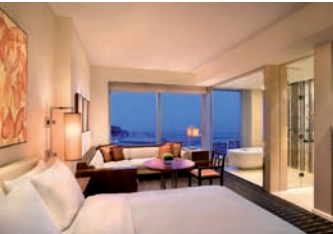
A garden theme at the Pool Deck



Grand Ballroom



Grand Suite



Grand Deluxe King Room

exclusive **Grand Club Lounge**, a sprawling 855-metre facility that occupies the entire ground floor. Here, a 250-seat lounge with a bar and open kitchen offers complimentary buffet breakfast, all-day light refreshments and evening cocktails. Grand Club guests enjoy dedicated check-in and check-out, complimentary garment pressing and free use of any of the two boardrooms for one hour daily.

Sensational treats

Delegates are in for a treat at Grand Hyatt Macau. The 225-seat **Beijing Kitchen** replicates the successful format of its sister restaurant at Grand Hyatt Beijing. A signature restaurant of the City of Dreams, it features authentic northern Chinese fare complemented by Western fine wines, gourmet coffee and European desserts.

Beijing Kitchen is also a visual treat: four show kitchens let you get up close with the making of dim sum and noodles, duck roasting, preparation of northern wok-fried dishes, and Chinese & Western desserts.

mezza9 Macau is inspired by the international dining concept of mezza9 at the Grand Hyatt Singapore. It features elaborate counter displays and theatrical show kitchens. With a bold design, the 292-seat space dazzles the palate as well as the eyes.

All-round wellness

Delegates will have much to relish with a stay at Grand Hyatt Macau. Fitness buffs will appreciate the 24-hour **Fitness Centre**, with the latest gym equipment and classes conducted outdoors.

The **Isala Spa** is a sanctuary where a variety of treatments incorporating traditional Chinese medicine principles are on the menu. ■

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THE FIRST LEADING TOUR OPERATOR IN VIET NAM

Arthur Kiong, MD, hotel operations, Asia-Pacific, and SVP, group marketing services, Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts

It's 50 years of Singapore hotels (see Special Edition this issue), yet few locals have cracked the luxury hotel sector the way that Kiong has. **Raini Hamdi** asks him why

Poster boy for local talent

You are the poster boy for local talent and give credence to the Singapore Hotel Association Training and Education Centre. Why is someone like you still so rare?

While many Asians have risen in the travel and hospitality field – look at the CEOs of Singapore Airlines, Singapore Tourism Board or Fraser Hospi-

tal, for example – there still is an intriguing lack of Asians who have made it into the luxury hotels sector in Singapore. When I started in 1983, the GMs and marketing directors of the best hotels in town were foreigners. Fast forward to 2011, nearly three decades later, the GMs of luxury hotels such as Ritz-Carlton, Four Seasons and even Raffles Hotel continue to be foreigners. At least, back then, we had Jennie Chua as GM of Raffles Hotel.

Why?

A lack of critical mass is a factor.

Indonesia or the Middle East because coming from Singapore, which is seen as first-world and equipped with talent, academic qualifications and Mandarin language skills, they are not disadvantaged.

So you end up with three that go into the luxury hospitality sector and, here's the crux, they start out at a disadvantage.

How so?

Firstly, the luxury hotels recruit from the named schools or universities, like Cornell or Lausanne, and even if these insti-

Fourthly, we don't live the lifestyle. It's like I'm the pope, but I'm not Catholic. We live a dual life. We may talk about the overtones of berries and wine, but in reality, we eat *kaya* (coconut jam) toast for supper.

In your long journey to your position, what are the lessons?

I realise you must be the architect of your career.

In order to succeed, you need to have the three Cs. The first C is the ability to conceptualise your career, and keep conceptualising it while you are on your job. The second C is you need to have the conviction to be able to persuade others. And the third C is having the courage to execute.

But conceptualising is not a particular strength of Singaporeans – they are very good in complying. And in terms of conviction, Singaporeans in general like consensus (rather than persuading others to buy their conviction). As for courage to execute, generally, they are good managers, but not leaders. They'd much prefer a tell-me-what-you-want-me-to-do-and-I'll-do-it approach rather than taking the risk and accountability in executing something.

So it is not that opportunities are not given to locals?

If opportunities are not given to you, you have to go out and look for them, right?

But at the end of the day, I also sincerely believe in the spiritual aspect. There are many points in one's career where things hap-

pen through a higher force and not just through one's ability or the luck of the draw – a higher force that creates a confluence of circumstances that makes success happen so beautifully or a higher force that gives you the courage to stand your ground almost beyond your own logic.

So, in your position, are you employing more locals?

In fact, I go the extra mile to be colour-blind. My VP of marketing is Italian, I've got Japanese ...

Isn't that ironic?

At the end of the day, it is not a case for Asians or non-Asians. I don't make it a point to give the opportunity to Asians. I make it a point to recognise people for their talent. Because if you employ only Asians, then it is reverse discrimination.

Asian owners, even today, want to have foreign GMs, which is perceived as discrimination on their part. But when they say they want a foreign GM, what they are saying is they want a person who is savvy, able to articulate, have good people skills – all the attributes I mentioned earlier.

So it is up to anyone, Asian or otherwise, to go get those attributes if they want to rise in the luxury hospitality sector or find something else that comes more naturally to them.

It has taken a long time for Asians to rise in the sector because it is a sector that is still ruled by the Western lifestyle. It will change with the rise of Asian travel, but it will take generations to change.

"We don't live the lifestyle. It's like I'm the pope, but I'm not Catholic."

Every year, out of, say, 100 graduates that go into the industry, 70 per cent fill the skills-oriented jobs and 30 per cent are managerial. Of the 30, many go into four-stars and to places like China, Vietnam, In-

dustrys have a local chapter, it's not good enough for them.

Secondly, bearing and turnout are important to this sector, but this is neither something that is emphasised locally nor does it come naturally.

Thirdly, in this sector, you need to be savvy, able to articulate and have good people skills – these are three different attributes altogether. While Asians are savvy, generally, their ability to articulate and their people skills do not come naturally.



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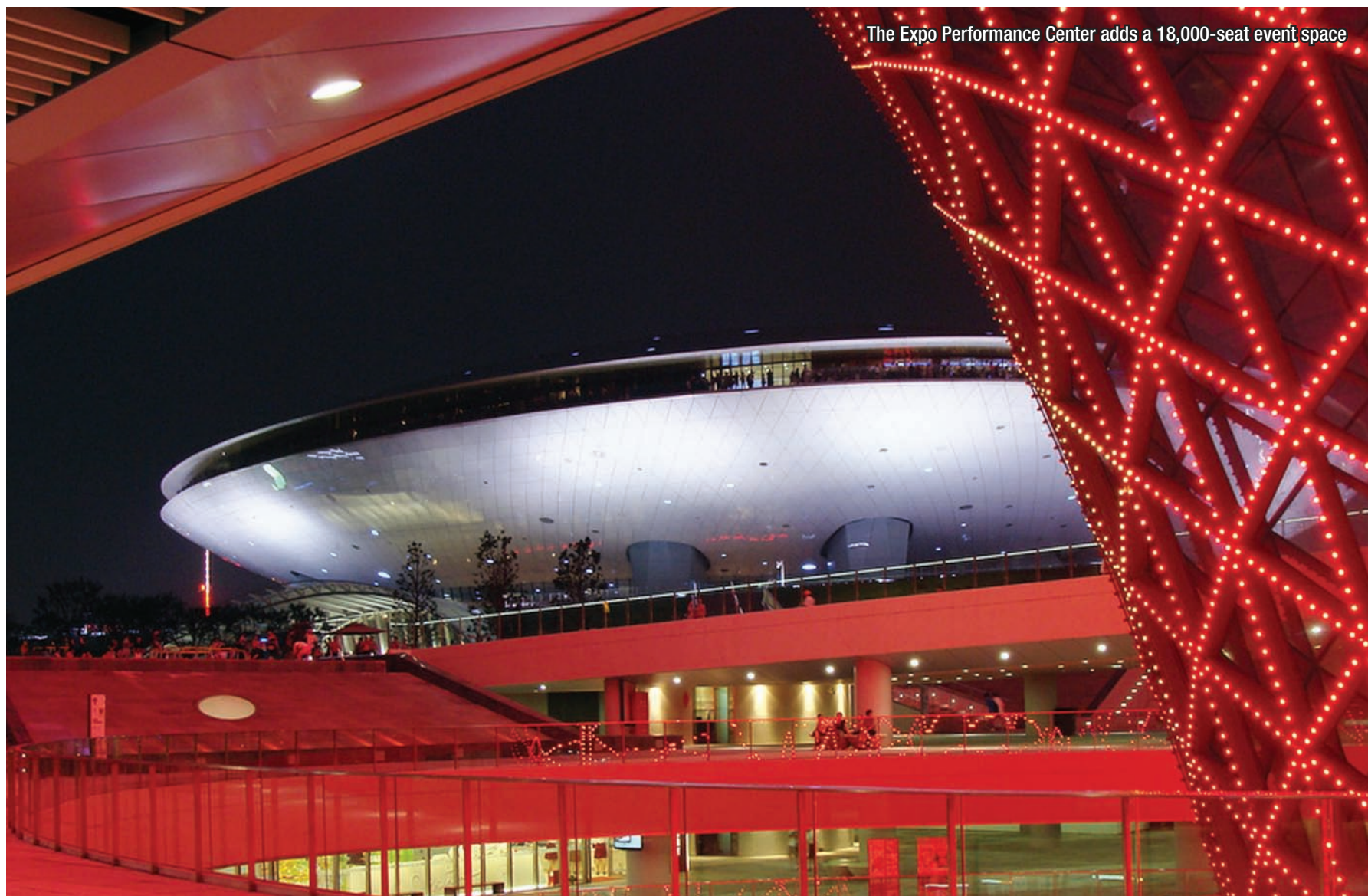
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The Expo Performance Center adds a 18,000-seat event space

Shanghai's surprises

New attractions dot the ever-evolving cityscape, report **Gary Bowerman** and **Amy Fabris-Shi**

NTO Hosting the 2010 World Expo catalysed a stellar tourism year for Shanghai, which attracted 8.5 million international tourists and 113 million domestic visitors in 2010. This year, the Shanghai Municipal Tourism Administration (SMTA) is seeking to build on that success.

"The first year of the city's 12th Five Year Plan is 2011, so Shanghai will build itself into an international tourism city by developing more tourism attractions and providing incentives for inbound travellers," said Patrick Chen, deputy director of international tourism promotion, SMTA. The plan will see the city investing RMB40 billion (US\$6.2 billion) on tourism, with the aim of increasing tourism revenue to RMB520 billion by 2015, a growth target of 70 per cent from 2010's performance.

One of the ways it intends to do this is by building a duty-free shopping centre in Pudong, hoping to emulate Hainan Island's success. More are slated for the Shanghai International Cruise Terminal and Hongqiao Airport.

Hotels The pace of new openings in 2009 and 2010 has

slowed, although several are set to open from 2012. This includes Mandarin Oriental and Four Seasons in Pudong, and Jing An Shangri-La near Nanjing Road.

Significant 2011 hotel openings include the 574-room Kerry Hotel Pudong, Shanghai and the 401-room Jumeirah Himalayas, also in Pudong. The 720-room Marriott Hotel City Centre near People's Square and the 307-room Andaz in Xintiandi are both slated for summer.

New hotel clusters have emerged, most notably around the riverside Bund, where The Peninsula Shanghai and Hyatt on the Bund have been joined by Waldorf-Astoria Shanghai on the Bund, Fairmont Peace Hotel, Hotel Indigo Shanghai on the Bund, Les Suites Orient Bund Shanghai and The Waterhouse at South Bund.

Rates There is less downward pressure on rates from new supply in 2011. Some 6,838 rooms are expected to open this year, compared to 8,864 in 2010, as per Jones Lang LaSalle Hotels.

Some of these new projects seem likely to slip into next year, however, as only 1,877 new rooms are currently slated for



"Booking windows have shortened considerably and room inventory is still growing. Nevertheless, we maintain a relatively positive outlook for 2011. Creative and market-oriented strategies will be crucial in securing business."

Gottfried Bogensperger
General manager
Hyatt on the Bund

2012. Total existing internationally-branded rooms in Shanghai is expected to reach 40,306 by the end of 2011, up from 23,236 at the end of 2008, based on Jones Lang LaSalle data.

Up until April, Shanghai's average occupancy was down to 50.6 per cent (compared to 52.7 in the same 2010 period), according to STR Global. However, ADR for the first four months of 2011 was up 5.6 per cent to RMB808.3 and RevPAR was up 1.3 per cent to RMB408.9.

Products

The 2010 World Expo bequeathed a legacy of tourism venues. The Expo's centrepiece, China Pavilion, as well as the national pavilions of Saudi Arabia, Spain, Italy, France and Russia remain open to the public. The 18,000-seat Expo Performance Center, shaped like an oyster shell, has also reopened as the Mercedes-Benz Arena for sporting and entertainment events.

In addition, the Rockbund development, featuring a cluster of upscale bars, clubs, restaurants, museums and a boutique hotel in revamped heritage buildings, will open in phases.

Currently under construction

is the 632m Shanghai Tower in Pudong, which will open in 2014 with the world's highest hotel managed by China's Jinjiang chain. Phase one of Shanghai Disneyland in Pudong, projected to open in 2014, also broke ground in June.

Access Shanghai is spearheading China's air travel expansion. Shanghai Pudong International Airport handled 17.2 million overseas passengers in 2010 – more than any airport in China and up 9.4 per cent year on-year. In May, it welcomed its first scheduled Airbus A380 service, when Emirates upgraded its Dubai-Shanghai service.

The 2010 revamp of Shanghai's second airport, Hongqiao, is also assisting growth, as it now services the Hong Kong route, among other East Asian cities.

China will build 56 new airports nationwide by 2015, when total annual passengers are expected to top 450 million.

The key transportation issue in 2011, however, is the ongoing rollout of the high-speed rail network, including the June launch of the 1,318km Beijing-Shanghai line, linking the two cities in four hours and 48 minutes.

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District in Shanghai aspires to trap MICE

Songjiang determined to become the city's "meetings valley"

By Karen Yue

Songjiang, one of Shanghai's 18 districts, is promoting itself as the city's new MICE valley, even as it is working to overcome some challenges.

The district, located 30 minutes away by train from the city centre, is home to three five-star MICE-friendly hotels – Le Méridien She Shan Shanghai, Sofitel Shanghai Sheshan Oriental and Songjiang New Century Grand Hotel Shanghai – providing close to 1,000 rooms.

"We now have a mix of domestic and international meetings, thanks to the presence of many Fortune 500 companies with offices in Shanghai," said Sun Hong Jian, a senior officer with the Songjiang District Commerce and Tourism Division.

"But we want to have a more focused action plan to convert Songjiang District into a 'meetings valley' and attract meeting groups from the city."



Le Méridien She Shan Shanghai is one of Songjiang's MICE hotels

She explained that Songjiang's close proximity to Shanghai's city centre would allow event planners to twin both destinations or provide corporate groups a quieter alternative.

Sun's action plan includes hosted site inspections for meeting planners, and organising table-top meetings and forums that bring together corporate clients and local suppliers.

However, she admitted that Songjiang's ambition was faced with two key challenges – the

lack of experienced destination management companies or travel agencies with experienced meetings operations, and the district government's limited understanding of MICE.

"The concept of MICE is still very new to us. We have realised that there's so much more to MICE than just meetings. We have to attend seminars to learn about the business and how else to make Songjiang District more attractive to corporate clients," she said.

Beijing's global quest

By Raini Hamdi

Beijing is looking to set up offices in the cosmopolitan cities of New York, Paris and Hong Kong, among others, in its new journey to be a "global metropolitan city". The move will enable China's capital to learn best practices in these cities, as well as mutually promote tourism and MICE.

In an interview at IT&CM China in April, Beijing vice mayor Ding Xiang-Yang said he believed in inter-border and global cooperation as a way of improving city planning and development, as well as Beijing's tourism fortunes. He said that promotional agencies would be established in New York, Paris and Hong Kong, and cooperation would be between different levels of government offices.

"Our agreement will be focused on attracting tourists from these cities and establishing a strategic scheme to learn their best practices," he said, adding that Beijing also wants more business trips and business events to be held in the city.

Last year, Beijing received 4.9 million foreign tourists, with

tourism accounting for seven per cent of its GDP.

While Beijing is home to monuments such as the Great Wall of China, much of its past has been erased by rapid development. Asked what best practices Beijing wants to learn, Ding said: "We want to have an understanding of their tourism management and operational plan. As well, in my opinion, Beijing needs to have a unique identity of its own – if Chinese go to France, they buy perfume. Italy, leatherware; South Africa, diamonds. I often ask, what do you want to buy in Beijing? Sure, we have the Peking duck, calligraphy brushes, etc, but how do we have a unique identity and promote it to the world?"

Asked if a healthy competition exists between Beijing and Shanghai for business events, he said: "We compete with every city!" Beijing hotels' RevPAR, though improving, has not yet returned to 2007 levels. STR data showed a RevPAR of RMB399 (US\$61) for year-to-date October 2010, 32 per cent lower than same-period 2007.



Ding: emulate top cities

Space theme park eyed to boost Hainan tourism

By Brian Higgs

China's Hainan province is banking on ground-based space tourism to give its visitor numbers a blast-off, with the proposed launch of its space theme park sometime in 2014.

Yu Dengyun, deputy director general, Committee of Science and Technology, China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation, said at PATA's 60th Anniversary and Conference in April: "I dare not forecast when the first Chinese tourist will be able to go into space. Maybe we should start thinking about ground-based space facility tourism first."

The theme park will give visitors the opportunity to explore space shuttle launch pads and other ground facilities, watch the launch of space aircraft and see what it is like to be on the moon and Mars. "The experience will be very different to watching it on television," Yu said.

State-owned China Radio International reported that the theme park, with an investment value of RMB30 billion (US\$4.6 billion), is expected to finish in 2013 and open to the public in 2014. About 15,000 tourists are estimated to visit during its first year.

Lin Fangxian, deputy director of Hainan Aerospace Investment Management,

the company undertaking the project, was quoted as saying that an agreement with the China Astronaut Research and Training Center had also been reached to set up an educational camp for young space science enthusiasts.

PATA conference keynote speaker, Eric Anderson, chairman and co-founder of Space Adventures, which sent the first tourist into space in 2001, likewise felt that ground-based space tourism was a market with huge potential.

"The most-visited museum in the world is the Smithsonian National Air and Space museum in Washington.

"It has been 50 years since the first human successfully went into space orbit. Only about 500 people have visited space in this 50-year period. This is fewer than the number of billionaires in the world," he said.

While hoping to eventually expand space tourism to the masses, Anderson admitted that the cost of space travel had tripled from about US\$20 million per person per trip 10 years ago to close to US\$60 million today, making it a luxury limited to those who can afford the astronomical fees. This amount excludes travel insurance – a couple of per cent of the princely sum.

"I dare not forecast when the first Chinese tourist will be able to go into space. Maybe we should start thinking about ground-based space facility tourism first."

Yu Dengyun

Deputy director general, Committee of Science and Technology, China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation



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Checking in

Langham Xintiandi



Brian Higgs checks into the city's second Langham and finds an unforgettable experience lying in wait

LOCATION Ideally located in the heart of Xintiandi, Shanghai's upscale shopping, eating and entertainment hub, The Langham Xintiandi soft-opened last October, with its grand opening scheduled for September or October this year.

The surroundings are decidedly bourgeois, with luxury shopping options, from Cartier and Louis Vuitton to Gap and Coach. Access to the city subway network is nearby. A mere two-minute stroll will bring you to the South Huangpi Road station on Shanghai's Metro Line 1.

ROOMS Staying in one of the rooms at The Langham Xintiandi is akin to having your own private paradise, with all the trimmings expected of a five-star hotel and more.

The hotel offers 357 rooms and suites, varying in size from a 40m² Grand Room to an amazing 345m² Chairman Suite. Each is adorned with a 40-inch flat-screen television and floor-to-ceiling windows, creating an avenue for natural light to stream through.

The huge bed was a dream to sleep on. The bathroom came with a dual-basin vanity and oversized bath, while the toilet was of the high-tech Japanese variety, complete with pre-warmed seat, built-in bidet, blow-dryer, and a lid with a motion sensor.

F&B The hotel has a fair range of dining options.

Cachet Restaurant is open all day and offers Asian and Western cuisine. Breakfast is served here. The restaurant's Sunday brunch even boasts a harp player for entertainment, a nice change from the usual grand piano.

Guests can unwind after the day is done with a chilled cocktail at Cachet Martini Bar.

For the more health-conscious and those in need of a refresh-



ing drink, Cachet Juice Bar offers an array of fruit juices and nutritious snacks. Cachet Lobby Lounge, with its relaxing mood lighting, is the perfect venue for a quiet coffee or afternoon tea.

The F&B option that impressed me the most was the outdoor seating venue Cachet Al Fresco, which is perfect for enjoying the warm sunshine on a pleasant day in autumn or spring.

Ming Court Chinese Restaurant offers the entire gamut of Chinese cuisine, ranging from Shanghainese and Cantonese favourites, to Sichuan's tear-inducing spicy dishes.

FACILITIES The Langham Xintiandi is well-equipped to handle both big and small events, with its almost 2,000m² of customisable meeting space.

The Xintiandi Grand Ballroom can hold up to 300 pax banquet-style and 600 in a theatre-style setting. The hotel also has a specially designed Meetings Suite – where meeting, dining and relaxation venues can be combined into a single area for added convenience.

During their free time, guests can head to Chuan Spa to be pampered, work out in the 24-hour gym or take a dip in the 25m indoor pool.

Name The Langham Xintiandi

No. of rooms 357

Rate From US\$294

Contact details

Tel: (86-21) 2330-2288

Fax: (86-21) 2330-2233

Email: txtd.resv@langhamhotels.com

Website: xintiandi.langhamhotels.com

SERVICE Members of the staff are eager to please, knowledgeable, eloquent and able to converse fluently in both English and Mandarin.

VERDICT A regal experience to pamper even the most spoilt. A stay here is definitely worth repeating over and over again.

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Getting connected

Travel agents are enhancing their online presence to capture a new generation of customers. *TTG Asia* reporters give their websites a whirl

Hong Thai Travel, Hong Kong

Background The company established a corporate website in 1999, providing comprehensive product information. Major revamps were carried out in 2001 and 2006, with the latter resulting in a real-time online booking system for hotels. This service was extended to air tickets and cash coupons in 2007 and MTR Airport Express tickets in 2009.

Performance It has an average of more than 80,000 page impressions and around 10,000 visitors to its website every day. Online bookings contribute about five per cent of total sales, and this is expected to register a double-digit growth in two years, said the agent's spokesperson.

Usability The website speaks for the brand – a one-stop travel department store. The colourful site is packed with useful information such as destination details, visa procedures and dates of pre-departure briefings. Clear categorisation allowed me to easily locate what I needed. It also took me less than a minute to register as a member in order to enjoy perks like discount coupons. However, the site is only in Chinese, as 70 per cent of its users are local.

Future plans It is developing a “virtual counter” concept, with service levels matching that of its offline retail stores. It also plans to have all tours, packages and admission tickets available on its online booking platform and allow customers to check their booking information via the website. – **Prudence Lui**



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Chan Brothers Travel, Singapore

Background The company was among the earliest in the market to set up a B2C website in 1999. It has since developed and revamped its hotel and flight portals, offering instant confirmation for over 100,000 hotels and 40 airlines.

Performance There are around one million page views and 120,000 unique visitors every month. Online bookings account for some 10 per cent of turnover, but Chan Brothers group managing director Anthony Chan said that the company is working towards growing this to 30 per cent in three years.

Usability Flight and hotel deals are highlighted prominently on the home page, making it impossible to miss. Getting to the booking stage was a breeze, but I wished the hotel portal allowed me to search according to price. Flight results, on the other hand, can be sorted by price, airline and even duration of trip. The tour segment is the least well-served online, as package information is merely an uploaded print version. Chan said this is still being looked at, as tour content is usually detail-heavy and customer queries are many, making it difficult to pre-empt.

Future plans Only hotel bookings allow for online payment, but this capability will soon be extended to other bookings. A major revamp is planned for next year, to improve the online booking experience, integrate the call centre and website, and to allow user-generated content such as videos. – **Gracia Chiang**

Panorama Tours Indonesia

Background Panorama started online travel agent (OTA) Astaga.com in 2000, but closed it down in 2001, citing an immature market. Three years ago, it developed the current website to provide essential information about the company and its products. A revamp is in progress, and its first phase is expected to be completed in four months.

Performance The website is one of the most visited among local agents, according to independent surveys, but this has not necessarily translated into bookings. President director Royanto Handaya said Panorama would be a “brick and click” company offering online booking tools, but not an OTA.

Usability Good at-a-glance information on agency services, special offers and company-related news. It also has an airline booking tool, which is easy to navigate. Itineraries and package prices are displayed, but there are no links to relevant sites, such as visa requirements. Information on hotels is also limited to those within the Panorama group. The website is mainly in Bahasa Indonesia, fitting for its clientele.

Future plans It will launch a series of online capabilities for basic travel agent and tour operator services, such as sale of tickets, hotels, free and easy packages, and, to a certain extent, leisure series packages. Also under development is a payment gateway, which enables customers to pay in rupiah even for prices quoted in US dollars. – **Mimi Hudoyo**



Kangwal Holiday, Thailand

Background The website was started five or six years ago, and is regularly maintained by various departments – tour, ticketing and hotel reservation – when there are updates.

Performance Traffic statistics are not available, but direct bookings through the website constitute about 20 per cent of total business. Most bookings are from individuals, while corporate and leisure groups usually call to book.

Usability The site's design is clean and straightforward, and its home page displays available services in a nutshell. Scrolling to the bottom also reveals information on tours and other packages. However, the website does not have a search and book capability, although it appears to have such a function. I attempted to search for hotels and air tickets, but was redirected back to the landing page. Users can instead book through web order forms accompanying offers listed. Phone numbers are also posted online, and the agent explained that its customers still preferred to call and book. As the company focuses on Thai customers, content is only in Thai.

Future plans Kangwal plans to make its website more interactive over the next two to three years. However, this will still depend on buying habits, as the company noted that only some customers were willing to make payments online, especially for sums above 5,000 baht (US\$165). – **Sirima Eamtako**



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A Special Edition 50 years of Singapore hotels by **TTG** ASIA



Contents

Singapore's hotel industry has been transformed beyond recognition. Today, it is one of the most vibrant in the region, enjoying high occupancies and even higher room rates. It hasn't been always that way. *TTG Asia's* special edition in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of the Singapore Hotel Association is an insightful and interesting guide for travel agents in the region on how Singapore hotels have evolved, and the future of the industry amid changing customer mix and demand and changing distribution.

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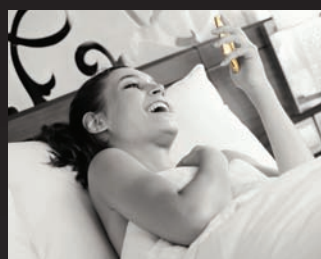


On why there are still so few female GMs

Yes, it is true that in 50 years of the hospitality business in Singapore, women general managers are as hard to spot as Superman whizzing by in the sky. This is probably because women have a lot more choices in life to enjoy and to find fulfilment in. She can be a mother, a wife, a daughter, a career woman.

Besides, what would she wear? Dark suits with carnations in lapels? Cheongsams? Been there, done that. Too limited a wardrobe choice. ”

Jennie Chua, CEO, The Ascott Group, and the first female hotel GM in Singapore (Raffles Hotel) – See Women on Top, page 20



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Shall we dance?

“People tend to think of it as a ‘love-hate’ relationship because our goals are opposing. Hotels need inbound business the most during weekends; agents need rooms throughout the week. When business gets rough, we run to agents for support; when business is booming, we are seen to ignore the agents. On the other hand, agents are seen to switch hotels at the drop of a hat (or rate!). This is where relationship building and trust influence the ‘dance’, to find the right balance of when to give or take. It is all very unscientific, something which no revenue or yield management guru will be able to predict.

The successful relationship acknowledges there will always be another peak, another trough around the corner, to ‘dance’ again.”

Richard Ong, general manager, Carlton Hotel Singapore – See **Changing Relationships**, pages 18-19

Chain reaction

“Singapore is gaining popularity and clout as a tourist destination. Five decades ago, we didn’t have as many quality hotels, sightseeing options, activities and definitely nothing like the IRs (integrated resorts). Asia’s growth and prominence in recent decades have created wealth for the Asian region. With people having more income and travel becoming more affordable, Singapore hotels (and homegrown chains) have benefited from these macro trends.”

Allen Law, director, Park Hotel Group
– See **Homegrown Chains**, pages 26-28



It’s about people, not beds

“Put it this way: We are not in the room and F&B business serving people. Rather, we are in the people business serving rooms and F&B.”

Heinrich Grafe, general manager, Conrad Centennial Singapore

“Guests should feel that they are staying in accommodations with heart, rather than bed factories.”

Chia Kwok Ping, president, TCC Land, which owns InterContinental Singapore – See **Software Issues**, page 24

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Changing Distribution

The great migration

By Gracia Chiang

Offline to online. Indirect to direct. While traditional distribution channels such as brick-and-mortar travel agents and the GDS retain their importance in filling up rooms, brand websites and online intermediaries



are emerging as the stars to watch, said Singapore-based hoteliers.

At InterContinental Singapore, offline

"We cannot ignore traditional distribution channels, which will not be replaced in the short term."

Ananda Arawwawela

Managing director, The St. Regis Singapore

channels such as voice, fax and walk-ins used to deliver almost 95 per cent of bookings a decade ago, but this has tumbled to 50 per cent. Online channels, on the other hand, now account for 26 per cent of bookings, up from 0.5 per cent before.

Among online channels, Swissôtel Merchant Court notes that numbers from both direct and indirect sources are on the rise. Bookings from online travel agents (OTAs) shot up to 14 per cent last year, from 1.5 per cent in 2005, while brand website bookings climbed to 10 per cent, from 2.5 per cent.

Other hotels such as The St. Regis Singapore, Mandarin Orchard Singapore, Carlton Hotel Singapore, Concorde Hotel Singapore, Ibis Singapore on Bencoolen and The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore are likewise seeing growth in the online distribution segment. Hotels cited the better accessibility of the Internet and a savvy clientele as some of the boost factors.

Carlton Hotel Singapore general manager Richard Ong said technological advances, such as greater bandwidth and higher speed, had led to the Internet's improved penetration among consumers in the last few years.

As "customers are increasingly empowered to seek information from different sources", this has changed booking behaviour, observed The St. Regis Singapore managing director Ananda Arawwawela.

InterContinental Singapore general manager Tash Tobias attributed the shift partly to a "growing confidence" in consumer data protection and the safety of using credit cards for online purchases.

"The OTAs were seen as merely a place to sell distressed last-minute inventory, whereas today, they are partners that enhance presence and attract guests where individual hotels are unable to reach directly," explained Puneet Dhawan, general

manager, Ibis Singapore on Bencoolen, which gets more than 40 per cent of its business through online channels.

With the proliferation of smartphones and tablets, hoteliers were also unanimous in their forecast of further online channel growth, pointing out that mobile booking would only grow in popularity.

Highlighting that most hotels already see over 30 per cent of business coming from their own websites, Mandarin Orchard Singapore general manager John Sartain went as far to say that travellers of the future were likely to secure their bookings directly with the suppliers, cutting out the middleman.

For now though, conventional channels, such as the GDS, still remain a key engine of bookings. As examples, the percentage of total bookings that the GDS contributes is 70 per cent at Carlton Hotel Singapore, 24 per cent at InterContinental Singapore and 10 per cent at Swissôtel Merchant Court.

The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore general manager Peter Mainguy added that while the growth in online bookings via its brand website could be mainly attributed to independent travellers, travel agents and corporate guests are still generally utilising the GDS to transact.

Swissôtel Merchant Court's general manager Rainer Tenius also pointed out that it was not always clear-cut who was using what. "Traditional travel agents are also using brand websites or OTAs to book if they don't have allotments anymore or can find a good deal online."

"We cannot ignore traditional distribution channels, which will not be replaced in the short term," said The St. Regis Singapore's Arawwawela.

Ibis Singapore on Bencoolen's Dhawan agreed. "It is imperative not to forget that we are in the hospitality business and there will still be guests and clients that require the personal touch and service to make their buying decision."

Amadeus Asia Pacific president David Brett was confident that the multi-channel environment is here to stay. "I still believe that people want choice. If you do direct connect, you're reducing choice. The whole reason the GDS came out was to aggregate information."

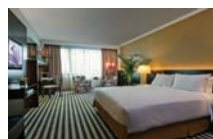
"... there will still be guests and clients that require the personal touch and service to make their buying decision."

Puneet Dhawan

General manager, Ibis Singapore on Bencoolen,



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Changing Relationships

The end of bully tactics

By Karen Yue

A game of cat and mouse.

This is how a senior director of a notable travel agency described the relationship between Singapore's inbound agents and its hoteliers in the earlier years.

He explained: "When the market is good, the hotels' directors of sales go into hiding and we have to run around to look for them.

"When the market is bad, these directors of sales and their general managers



miraculously appear at our doorsteps. This game was played in the 1980s, the 1990s and even today. Of course, with Singapore now being so popular with tourists and corporate travellers, it is our turn to

"Younger hoteliers eat, sleep, drink technology and the bottom line defines their performance. They have no historical ties with agents and are not obliged to do anything for them."

Judy Lum

Group vice president for sales and marketing,
Tour East Singapore

run around in search of our hotel friends."

While the description drew knowing giggles from the trade, other travel agents pointed out that times had changed for the better. And much of the credit goes to a relationship that has been nurtured over a long period of time – and even across generations.

"There are many great relationships between agents and hoteliers," said Judy Lum, group vice president for sales and marketing at Tour East Singapore.

Many of these relationships have survived over the years, despite the ever-changing demands of hotel owners.

"There are some highly-intelligent individuals in the hotel industry who saw the opportunity to turn their marketshare around or to obtain new longhaul markets during (tough) times, and they extended their hands out to us," added Lum.

Park Hotel Group vice president, Mohd Rafin, agreed that times had changed and "big bully tactics" from leading travel agents were a thing of the past. "Some of the big boys (travel agencies) back then had a take-it-or-leave-it attitude towards hoteliers and they came down very hard on the poor sales directors," Rafin recalled.

Now, he said, there was a much better sense of friendship and loyalty from the travel agents, especially from seasoned players such as Tour East's Judy Lum, World Express' Tan Chee Chye and his son Darren Tan, and RMG Tours' Clement Tan.

"They are very open, very frank when it comes to business," commented Rafin.

Lum said: "These relationships have kept the agents and hoteliers together, despite the fact that agents now feel that hoteliers have turned their backs on them."

On the other side of the coin, Rafin pointed out that with some agents, "their loyalty to hoteliers run as deep as (the discounts) on room rates".

Dennis Law, managing director of Star Holiday Mart, explained that the problem was with the high turnover in hotel manpower. "Hotels are always changing their decision makers, the directors of sales and general managers, making it hard to build a relationship," he said.

Having said that, Law was confident of seeing a more balanced relationship in the future. "The integrated resorts will create stability in the marketplace. Inbound agents will get greater business opportunities from the increased interest in Singapore. And with even more new hotels being developed now, room rates will soften."

He said that at the end of the day, all inbound agents were looking for was for hoteliers to be fair. "The leisure, corporate and high-roller customer segments are all different and we need hoteliers to support us with rates to work with these segments. And we want a long-term relationship with hoteliers, not just short-term gains."

Will the new generation of travel agents change the future agent-hotelier relationship? Rafin thinks so, saying that his sales directors found the "young ones more business savvy and approachable".

Lum, however, begs to differ: "Sadly, I think it will be a challenge to see any improvement. It is a generation issue. Younger hoteliers eat, sleep, drink technology and the bottom line defines their performance. They have no historical ties with agents and are not obliged to do anything for them. They work with anyone who is able to assist them in meeting their objectives."

"Some of the big boys (travel agencies) back then had a take-it-or-leave-it attitude towards hoteliers..."

Mohd Rafin

Vice president, Park Hotel Group

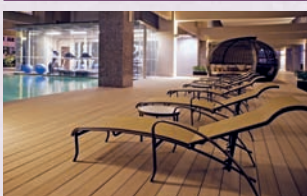
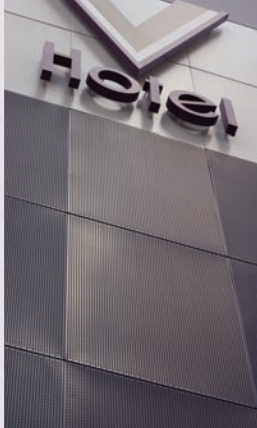
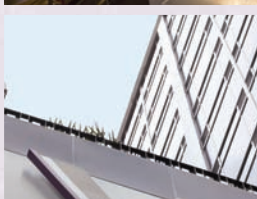
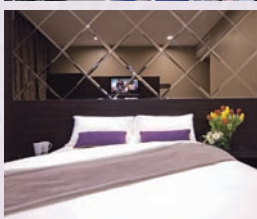
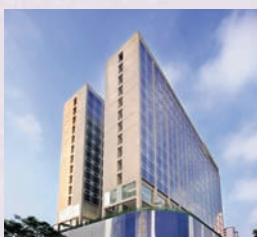
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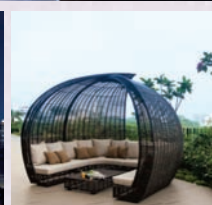
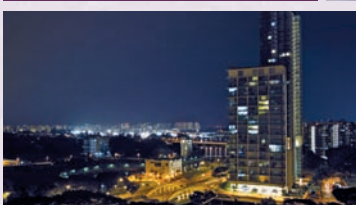
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To stop or not to stop (over)

From its days as a colonial trading outpost, to its position now as a key aviation hub in Asia-Pacific, Singapore has always been a popular transit point for travellers: many stopping for just a few short hours while their aircraft is being re-fuelled or to transfer from one flight to another.

More than 20 years ago, Singapore Airlines – and its tour operating arm Tradewinds Tours and Travel – set out to capitalise on these transit passengers, encouraging them to explore the potential of Singapore as a destination in its own right.

Their answer was the Singapore Stopover Holidays programme which, priced well below regular rates, included an overnight stay at one of the island's many world-class hotels, along with tours and transfers.

The Stopover programme continues to be successful today. Packaging hotel accommodation, transfers and tours, as well as offering food and travel discounts, it offers longhaul customers the chance to explore the country at a highly discounted rate.

“Our belief is that customers who have a great time in Singapore while on transit will

develop an interest to come back for a longer holiday to Singapore and to the region,” explained Tradewinds Tours and Travel’s general manager Sheldon Hee.

And, while some hoteliers may grimace at the rates extended to the Stopover Holidays, Hee believes its existence is beneficial to the industry, enabling hoteliers to “reach out to a segment of consumers who are generally travelling beyond Singapore’s shores”.

But does the programme really generate the leads the industry is promised? Vacation Singapore DMC’s general manager Alex



Yip is not so sure. “Many of them will look at Singapore more as a place for respite after their exotic holidays in Indonesia or East & West Malaysia. The chances of them considering Singapore as a destination are very slim.” – **Sim Kok Chwee**



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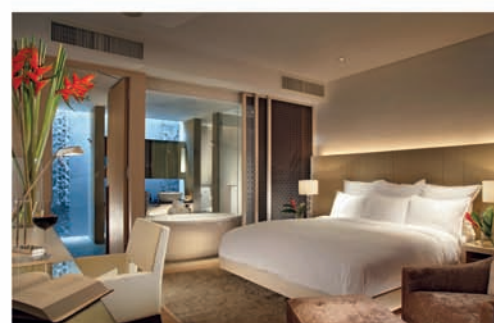


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ASIA



Women on Top

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it's a female hotel GM

By Raini Hamdi

Why are there
so few female
GMs?

Why should
there be more
female GMs?

How do people
react when you
say you are a
hotel GM?

Tash Tobias
InterContinental
Singapore



Running a hotel may be an immensely satisfying job. However, the demanding nature of the job and the unpredictable hours may take a toll on family life, so most women in the industry have naturally leaned towards functional roles, especially in sales, marketing and human resources, or left the industry altogether. If you want to run a hotel and have a family too, you need a supportive partner or a company that understands that work can be done from anywhere at any time these days. Ideally, you need both!

It is the very same reason why there should be more female board directors, heads of state, etc. Diversity brings new perspectives, which ultimately means innovative ways of solving problems or optimising opportunities.

If I am with a male colleague or business associate, another person I am introduced to will often assume that "he" is the general manager – which can really be embarrassing for all present!

Kanchan Kanwar
Holiday Inn
Orchard City Centre



There has always been a perception that women are not serious enough and will not give it their best, as they have other priorities such as family, home and health. I wanted to avoid saying it, but it has been boys' club for a long time. Yes, it has taken longer than all other industries for women to make their mark in hotels. Women draw a better work-life balance than men and may not be that ambitious as they manage other important relationships in their lives – children, parents, husbands, etc. At such intersections, they opt for keeping their emotional links rather than a show of professional prowess.

It is known that women have higher EQ, enthusiasm and drive. Caring, nurturing and affection are part of their DNA, which makes them perfect for people-centred performances both from an employee and a customer perspective. This is at the very core of our business of managing hotels. Women also have the intrinsic capability of being multi-faceted in their approach: forthright yet diplomatic at the same time, which is so suitable in managing relationships in this industry. Over the years, women have successfully learned to live life in all its dimensions and are great role models. Just look at Kathleen Taylor, president and CEO of Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts.

One does get the odd "what are you doing here" look. But on a more serious note, they have come to realise that women can deliver as well, if not better, and one does get words of encouragement and admiration. I am proud to say that IHG (InterContinental Hotels Group) is leading the way in Asia-Australasia with more opportunities for women to step in as GMs.

Supriya Ghosh
Hotel Fort Canning



Traditionally, men have always held the senior management positions in the hospitality industry. But in this modern forward-thinking society, capability has proven to be the determining factor, therefore more and more frequently, females are given a chance to excel.

In this era, men and women are perceived as equals in the workplace. Women are able to bring both a business sense and a personal and feminine touch to the hospitality industry. My advice to anyone, whether you are male or female, is that if you are focused, hardworking and prove your worth, you will achieve your career plan – after all I've invested over 20 years to get to where I am today.

A raised eyebrow is the most common response I get, but people understand soon after that how a hotel is run has nothing to do with your gender but discipline and management of staff. People wonder how I juggle work and personal life, but then the realisation is that a man also faces the same issues on work-life balance.



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A Special Edition 50 years of Singapore hotels by **TTG**



Changing Skyline

A wider range of hotels

By Amee Enriquez

Does Singapore have the right mix of hotels for customers of the future?

As of January 2011, the city had more than 250 hotels, with a total room inventory of around 47,000 rooms, according to the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), which classifies hotels into four categories – luxury, upscale, mid-tier and economy – based on a combination of factors like

average room rates, location and product characteristics.

Standard average room rates for 2010 were S\$352 (US\$286) for luxury, S\$238 for upscale, S\$169 for mid-tier and S\$100 for economy. Last year's records show the mid-tier as the most sought-after category, with the highest standard average occupancy rate of 87.1 per cent, followed by upscale (86.8 per cent), economy (85.7 per cent) and luxury (78.7 per cent).

Real estate advisory group CBRE Hotels, in a recently released report, anticipates occupancy levels to be between 83

per cent and 86 per cent this year, on the back of a healthy economy and a projected increase in visitor arrivals.

Thanks to the mushrooming of boutique hotels and the entry of economy brands such as Ibis and Holiday Inn Express, the hotel skyline has also never been more interesting.

"We do have a good spread of hotels in different categories, catering to the needs of all types of travellers," said Margaret Heng, executive director of the Singapore Hotel Association (SHA).

SHA currently has 113 hotel members, collectively accounting for more than 90 per cent of gazetted room count.

Justin Chew, executive director of STB's Hospitality, Industry Development I Group, echoed Heng's sentiment: "Singapore currently offers its visitors a wide range of accommodation options that meet different needs and cater to various consumer demographics. Hotel developers are driven by commercial considerations, with hotel types already catering to market demand.

"Developers today are also more attuned to the consumer, who is becoming increasingly discerning. Responding to the growing demand for unique accommodation experiences, for example, we

have seen in Singapore a corresponding increase in the number of boutique hotels. Some notable names which sprung up in the past two years include The Club Hotel, The Saff, Hotel Fort Canning, Moon Hotel and Wanderlust."

The trend of boutique hotels, classified under the upscale category, is also seen by CBRE as "likely to continue growing in the near future".

Outbound tour operators from Indonesia, the country with the most international visitor arrivals to Singapore last year, agree that the current crop of hotels in Singapore is about right across categories for their market.

"There have been many top-star hotel developments in Singapore in the last five years, and many get a high percentage of Indonesian guests," said Smailing Tour Jakarta head of leisure Hadi Saputra.

However, "the majority of holidaymakers from Surabaya look for three-star and budget accommodation", said Sun Tour Surabaya managing director Yongky Yanwintarko. "If we are talking about supply, I think there is a shortage during peak seasons. Otherwise, there are enough rooms for these categories." – **Additional reporting by Mimi Hudoyo**



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New kids on the block

Q. Which hotel did you stay at when you first visited Singapore and how do you think the hotel landscape will look 50 years from now?



Roger Lienhard, senior vice president, Hospitality & Retail, Resorts World Singapore

The first hotel I stayed in Singapore was the Grand Hyatt in 1986. Design of rooms are quite different now as compared to the past. We have more frequent travellers jet-setting around the world and, as a result, design of hotel rooms are more tailored to their needs, such as having luxurious bathrooms and comfortable beds for a good night's sleep.

Restaurants in hotels used to be a means to an end – to feed hotel guests who need to eat. But dining has made a comeback in hotels, as more hoteliers realise the importance of positioning their restaurants on par or if not better than independent outlets to attract not only hotel guests but also members of the public. The Joël Robuchon Restaurant and L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon at Resorts World Sentosa are good examples.

We'll probably be seeing more hotels in skyscrapers, like the Ritz-Carlton in Hong Kong or the Burj Al Arab in Dubai.



George Tanasijevich, interim CEO, Marina Bay Sands and managing director, Global Development, Las Vegas Sands Corp

I first visited Singapore in 2000 and stayed at the Ritz-Carlton. I found it to be a great hotel with excellent service and rooms in an outstanding location. From the Ritz, I got my first glimpse of the area that would years later be the site of Marina Bay Sands. In many respects, the pace of change in Singapore has been quite rapid over the past 10 years.

However, the country has remained true to the fundamental principles and core values that make it such a great place to live and work. I expect this to continue over the decades to come.

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Software Issues

Service me, please

By Brian Higgs

Service quality and innovation have never been more critical for the hospitality industry in Singapore.

With rates ballooning across different hotel categories – Singapore had the highest hotel room rates in Asia last year, according to Hotels.com’s annual Hotel Price Index – customers have come to expect better and unique service.

Travel agents such as Chan Brothers Travel’s executive director Chan Guat Cheng believe service quality and innovation have outweighed branding in determining where clients stay.

“As hotels sprout up to meet rising travel demand, rates have become competitive to the point of being almost imperceptible among hotels in the same category. Guests choose hotels that offer the best value proposition within their budget constraints, without any brand loyalty. Service quality and innovation thus become the key factors in enhancing service differentiation and, at the same time, inducing financial gains for the hotels,” Chan said.

The good news is, service quality and innovation standards for hotels in Singapore are up to the mark, according to agents, and have become the norm rather than the exception.

It has not always been that way. Agents used to complain of service levels they



Grand Park City Hall

felt were not up to par with international standards.

“Most hotels in Singapore, regardless of category, have incorporated service quality and innovation as part of their service concepts. Our customers are generally satisfied with both hardware and software, namely customisation options and technological improvements,” Chan said.

With the opening of the two integrated resorts, which means more choices for customers, hotels are only more conscious of the need to improve service quality and innovation.

Goodwood Park Hotel, for example, has signed up with the government-led Customer Centric Initiative to champion service excellence and raise service standards in the industry. The hotel is intensi-

fying its internal training programme for staff, in addition to increasing the number of mystery audits.

Conrad Centennial Singapore is also not standing still. Said general manager Heinrich Grafe: “We have got to keep innovating and recreating to stay ahead.”

Conrad’s strategy is to get its staff to recognise the individuality of each customer and address his unique preferences in order to establish an emotional connection at every service touchpoint.

“Each time we wow a customer, we need to define what that experience was for him and begin to work towards sustaining and, more importantly, redefining a new and higher level of wow experience when he next returns. We are our own

competition,” said Grafe.

But herein lies one of the biggest challenges which hoteliers and agents both agree on – ensuring customer-facing staff are well-equipped and well-trained to exceed service expectations.

Dennis Law, managing director, Star Holiday Mart, observed: “There is a requirement for a service-first mindset and leadership. Singapore hotels should start grooming the next generation of leaders and focus on improved communication and going the extra mile.”

“This is a worthwhile investment,” agreed Patrick Fiat, general manager of Royal Plaza on Scotts, who has pioneered unique benefits for both staff and guests in order to differentiate itself from competitors.

An owner’s perspective

Get personal

Look beyond productivity and efficiency, and aim at delivering a more personal and guest-centred experience, urged Chia Kwok Ping, president of TCC Land, which owns InterContinental Singapore.

“As a key infrastructure of the tourism industry, hotels need to enhance the visitor experience. At a time when occupancy is high, hotels must step up to cater to the increasing demands of guests.

“Currently, there is a shortage in human resources and the industry uses foreign labour and training to relieve pressure. To move the industry forward, we should

look beyond emphasising productivity and efficiency, and towards delivering a more personal and guest-centred experience. Guests should feel that they are staying in accommodations with heart, rather than bed factories.”

Chia also believes that the industry must attract more local service staff to enhance the service experience.

“Using foreign labour may provide temporary relief to the tight, local labour market. However, overdependence may result in long-term ramifications.

“It is now common to be served by a foreigner in the hotels. As a visitor, interaction with locals could be as important as having taken that roller-coaster ride in the theme park here. Ultimately, the industry

needs to attract more local service staff because they play the role of ambassadors of the hotels and the country,” he said.

Increase the appeal of the hotel industry to locals via measures beyond salaries and benefits, he said.

“In conjunction with the Singapore Hotel Association’s 50th anniversary and Singapore Tourism Board’s Your Singapore campaign, we must continue to deliver that unique experience and make our visitors perceive value in visiting Singapore. Part of this is to have more local experiences.

“Hotels have to complement this experience in order for the visitors to come back. Hotels that can fulfil this element will naturally become an investor’s choice,” Chia concluded. — **Raini Hamdi**





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Homegrown Chains

A great way t

By Raini Hamdi

The rise of Asian hotel management companies is one of the most compelling stories in the history of the industry. Once, flags on the roofs of hotels in the region were mostly international. Today Asian brands have broken through the dominance, with opportunities to fly further and farther.

From the pioneers – Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts, Regent Hotels & Resorts and Amanresorts come to mind – a gush of Asian names have made it regionally, internationally or on home turf. Hong Kong has its Langham Hotels International and New World Hospitality, to name just two; China, its Jin Jiang Hotels and Gloria Hotels and Resorts; and Thailand gave birth to Dusit International, Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts, Centara Hotels & Resorts and Onyx Hospitality Group.

Singapore is no less active. Brands such as Millennium & Copthorne and Pan Pacific are now owned by Singapore entrepreneurs and while the city lost Raffles Hotels & Resorts to foreign ownership, Raffles is still associated with Singapore. There was just one Raffles Hotel; back then, Jennie Chua would fume when anyone wrote ‘the Raffles’.

“There is just one Raffles, there shouldn’t be a ‘the’ in front of it,” she would say crisply. Today, there is the Raffles in Paris or the Raffles in Dubai, from the roots of the grande dame on Beach Road, Singapore.

Singapore entrepreneur Christina Ong created Como Hotels & Resorts, outwitting her own husband, property, entertainment and hospitality tycoon Ong Beng Seng, in international footprint (his Concorde Hotels & Resorts has made it only to as far as Malaysia but, in a region so hungry for new brands, don’t discount a wider footprint). Others such as Meritus Hotels & Resorts and Far East Hospitality, too, may not be growing rapidly yet outside Singapore, but are holding court at



Diana Ee-Tan
Board member, Singapore Tourism Board
and former president, Raffles Hotels & Resorts



Michael Sengol
CEO
Meritus Hotels & Resorts



Raphael Saw
COO
Far East Organization's hospitality division

But while Singapore Airlines (SIA) has become the benchmark for the global airline industry, Singapore hotel brands are nowhere near the feat SIA has achieved.

home as recognised brands and are honing their competitiveness further.

Younger hotel owners are also making a mark, such as Allen Law with his Park Hotel Group or Majestic Group’s Loh Lik Ping with his boutique properties. (See Gen Y, page 29.)

And if one counts serviced residences as part of the industry, Singapore is a hard act to follow, with companies such as the Ascott Group and Fraser Hospitality expanding globally at breakneck pace.

But while Singapore Airlines (SIA) has become the benchmark for the global airline industry, Singapore hotel brands are nowhere near the feat SIA has achieved. The good news, however, is the stars are in their favour and the decade will be an exciting period where Singapore hotel management groups can really extend themselves, according to hotel chiefs interviewed.

“I think the biggest opportunity for our homegrown chains today lies in the shift in economic growth from the West towards China, India and other parts of Asia,” said Diana Ee-Tan, board member of Singapore Tourism Board and former president, Raffles Hotels & Resorts. “Today, substantial global lodging development growth is powered by these economies, with 33 per cent of the global pipeline of rooms being in China and India.”

“Asian hotel brands have thankfully also become stronger, with a number of them recognised today to be on par with some Western brands in terms of qual-

ity. In the context of Singapore homegrown brands, whether they be our luxury brands, smaller chains such as Rendezvous Hospitality, Far East Hospitality or Amara Hotels & Resorts, or our serviced residence brands such as Ascott, Frasers or Village Residences (under Far East Hospitality), due to the China and emerging markets factor, greater access to public equity markets and hundreds of brand-building platforms across the Internet, opportunities abound for them to expand into new geographic markets and grow brand equity at double the pace today compared with some 30 years ago.”

A particular advantage Singapore chains have is the association with the country brand itself, a miracle story of transformation that brings to mind qualities such as guts and gameness, determination and diligence. Patrick Imbardelli, president and CEO of Pan Pacific Hotels Group, the Singapore-based management company which now owns the Pan Pacific and Parkroyal brands (born in Japan and Australia respectively), can attest to this.

Said Imbardelli: “The Singaporean association has certainly worked well for us – we’re seen as credible, well-managed, financially sound and able to compete on our own terms.”

He added: “A big difference is that there was never a strong sense of what ‘Singapore’ was five decades ago. A Singapore brand that’s going inter-

national now – just by association to the country brand and other successful homegrown brands like Singapore Airlines – already carries so much brand equity even before they are through the door.

“By that count, homegrown chains have great opportunity to leverage on this reputation that Singapore has established for itself – outward-looking, able to compete on international terms yet still retaining a very strong sense of Asian heritage and culture,” he said.

Singapore itself has become a hotbed, as strong destination branding and tourism infrastructure development fuel arrivals and turn the tap on the industry’s creative juices. On the demand side, this is happening at a time when Asians are travelling like never before, are needing more sophisticated experiences, and are being exposed to the quality of products and new approaches by Singapore hotels. All this augurs well for homegrown brands, whether expanding at home or abroad, said CEOs.

Raphael Saw, COO of Far East Organization’s hospitality division, said: “With the increasing sophistication among customers, their lifestyles and



Patrick Imbardelli
President and CEO
Pan Pacific Hotels Group



o stay

demands change accordingly. Such changes drive, to a certain extent, the various new products we see in the hotel industry today.

“From the romantic colonial era of the Raffles Hotel, to the convention or business hotels of Orchard Road, to the mega integrated resorts, Singapore has come a long way.

“The different needs of the international traveller have allowed hotel developers to create more granular products to satisfy their needs. In Singapore, not only do we have huge convention hotels serving the MICE industry, we also have a plethora of hip, niche boutique hotels as well as luxury hotels with recognised international brands.”

Michael Sengol, CEO, Meritus Hotels & Resorts, added: “The authorities have done a great job – Singapore’s success in branding and destination marketing, strong underlying fundamentals, and ideal tourism infrastructure will continue to fuel exponential growth in arrivals for the long term. Throw in the decreasing cost of travel and you have a destination hub that offers a unique, one-stop business and leisure experience, with facilities and services that are amongst the best in the world.

“On the home front, the demand is there for more supply of guestrooms to keep up with the pace and cater to different markets, both new and existing. Globally, there is certainly the opportunity to capitalise on Singapore’s strong reputation as a provider of quality.”

Observed Eric Brand, general manager and director of operations of Amara Singapore and Amara Sanctuary Resort Sentosa: “The big difference with five decades ago is that we now have sev-

eral homegrown brands that have gained much experience and developed some very creative and innovative approaches to our industry. This allows them to confidently expand beyond the borders of Singapore. This trend can only grow further in the years to come with the tremendous growth experienced in this part of the world.”

Agreeing, Richard Ong, general manager, Carlton Hotel Singapore, said: “Over the last five decades, we have accumulated good management experience and expertise to enable us to market and operate our own properties independently. The advent of the Internet also opened up enormous opportunities. It has effectively levelled the playing field somewhat for our homegrown chains to compete with large international chains in marketing, distribution reach and awareness globally.”

Asked what she would like to see happen with the progress of homegrown chains, Ee-Tan said she hoped the mid-tier hospitality brands could follow in the footsteps of the luxury and serviced apartment brands and venture into new regional and international destinations.

And for all Singapore chains, that “all their regionalisation and globalisation thrusts will gather rapid momentum and propel a few of them into the ranks of world-class hotel companies, in terms of size, market capitalisation, capabilities and brand equity.”

“Further, I hope that as world-class hotel companies, their standards will become de rigueur for excellence in standards in hospitality worldwide.”

With the stars all aligned, look out – here come the SIAs of the Singapore hotel industry.

Describe the Singapore homegrown hotel brand

“Design- and tech-savvy, yet immersed in the warmth and the traditions of Asian hospitality – akin to listening to heartwarming nostalgic Asian music via iPod/iPhone!”

Eric Brand, general manager and director of operations, Amara Singapore and Amara Sanctuary Resort Sentosa

“Where international hospitality standards meet the warmth and passion of Asian hospitality.”

Allen Law, director, Park Hotel Group

“Some personality traits would be:

- pride in being homegrown – the association with Singapore being perceived as an imprimatur of quality
- a strong disposition towards providing genuine care and service in a warm, responsive and professional manner
- and a keen and energetic orientation towards finding new creative ways to stay engaged with both guests and staff so as to sustain high levels of performance.”

Diana Ee-Tan, board member, Singapore Tourism Board, and former president, Raffles Hotels & Resorts

“Strong. Engaging. And enduring.”

Raphael Saw, COO, Far East Organization’s hospitality division

“Outward-looking, able to compete internationally and still retaining a very strong sense of Asian heritage and culture; yet still very much in search of a personality or charm that’s more than all of that and how this personality can come through better.”

Patrick Imbardelli, president & CEO, Pan Pacific Hotels Group

“Singapore chains, just like the Carlton Hotels, should be vibrant, cosmopolitan and efficient. We combine the best of the Asian spirit of hospitality with the highest international standards. Our own unique brand of hospitality is the perfect blend of good business acumen, Asian grace in hospitality, and the Singaporean obsession with efficiency and performance.”

Richard Ong, general manager, Carlton Hotel Singapore

“We have grown to be more savvy, and we have set the bar pretty high globally in terms of the service and profit discipline we demonstrate in managing and operating successful businesses. As a brand, we represent the best of Asia.”

Michael Sengol, CEO, Meritus Hotels & Resorts



Eric Brand
General manager and director of operations
Amara Singapore and
Amara Sanctuary Resort Sentosa



Richard Ong
General manager
Carlton Hotel Singapore



WHY NOT IRAQ?

By Glenn de Souza
Vice President International
Operations – Asia & the Middle East

Compared to other countries in the region, Iraq holds good promise when considering the economy, the people, the salaries and financial resources. There are a number of international airlines, as well as cargo carriers, now serving the country. These were among the many positive points of Iraq which have triggered the interest of Best Western International for its next step of brand expansion!

The first hotel – BEST WESTERN PREMIER Erbil Hotel – is due to open in 2nd Quarter 2014 in Erbil city, near the recently built international airport. Targeting business and leisure guests, it will offer 160 rooms in Standard, Junior Suite, Deluxe Suite and Executive Suite categories, all lavishly appointed with the likes of free satellite TV, direct dial telephone, wireless internet access, tea/coffee set and 24 hour room service.

Erbil is a natural choice for Best Western's first Iraq property. The capital of Iraqi Kurdistan it is Iraq's fourth largest city and a prominent trading centre with key road links out of the country, in addition to its increased air access.

This promising destination holds vast potential as both a major business centre and a fascinating tourism spot. BEST WESTERN PREMIER Erbil Hotel brings with it the global sales and marketing reach, revenue generation and promotional power enjoyed by The World's Largest Hotel Chain®.

Construction will start in September 2011. Once completed, the hotel will feature a restaurant, lobby lounge, spa, meeting and conference facilities and casino.



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A Special Edition 50 years of Singapore hotels by **TTG**



How some chains are seizing the opportunity

Amara Hotels and Resorts

Has two confirmed greenfield projects in Shanghai and Bangkok due for opening in late 2012/early 2013. "We are constantly looking out for opportunities to expand the Amara brand within the region and beyond," said Eric Brand, general manager and director of operations of the two Amaras in Singapore.

Carlton Hotels

Launched a new branding and positioning; redoubling efforts to market itself internationally. "We try to maximise our exposure and returns in all the distribution channels, enhance our website and web presence, and work with our many partners. We hope that with these efforts, we will be able to extend the reach of our branding and awareness on a global basis," said general manager, Carlton Hotel Singapore, Richard Ong.

Far East Organization (FEO) Hospitality Division

Developing different hospitality products to cater to all types of travellers. In October 2009, it launched a new brand, Village Hotels & Residences, setting the stage for

business expansion locally and overseas. As its name implies, the Village brand recreates the convivial, community-minded flavour of a village, while simultaneously retaining a contemporary outlook. Three hotels and four residences from FEO's stable of 17 hospitality properties were brought under the Village brand. These properties draw inspiration from their surrounding precincts to provide guests with a truly experiential stay. The group has also created niche hotels, such as The Quincy, which has an avant-garde, distinct and edgy personality. For the businessmen, it has a cluster of business-class hotels, with the latest addition being Oasia Singapore Hotel. At the other end, FEO has also developed serviced apartments.

"With greater choices and more variety in hotel products, we are able to reach out to a wider geographical capture and mix of tourist traffic," said COO Raphael Saw.

In addition to product development, it has also enhanced its operating model and streamlined service infrastructure to meet the high expectations of today's travellers.

Meritus Hotels & Resorts

Extending its network of properties in key

gateway cities and breaking into under-penetrated markets. "We are intent on growing the brand strategically – wherever there is opportunity for growth we will be there. New developments we are eyeing span fast-growing business and tourism hubs in South-east Asia, China, Europe and the Middle East. But more than the quantity of hotels, we will deliver quality as a brand. After all, the best hotel is yet to be run!" said chief Michael Sengol.

Park Hotel Group

Expanded rapidly in Asia in the last few years, growing from one hotel in 2005 to eight hotels today. "We intend to continue growing through development and acquisition opportunities in the region, and will further expand to include a management contract arm this year. We have already received numerous requests from owners to manage their hotels, and this year, we have decided to move into hotel management. This is a good sign that Park Hotel Group is gaining credibility and prominence as a developer, hotel manager, as well as a regional brand," said director Allen Law.

The internationals

At home in a vibrant city-state

Two global chains which made Singapore regional base tell **Raini Hamdi** the upside

Jan Smits, CEO, InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) Asia Australasia:

My passion for hotels began right here in Singapore. My family used to spend months staying at the Goodwood Park Hotel in the late '60s and early '70s. As a young boy I was fascinated with what went on behind the scenes in a hotel – from the doorman who greeted me by name to the engineers who took me to the back-of-house, so you could say my formative experience at Goodwood Park set the scene for my current career.

The evolution of the hotel industry mirrors the growth of Singapore as a city. Every decade added more vibrancy to the hotel industry. Many still remember the distinctive Cockpit Hotel in the '60s and the proliferation of international brands that began in the '70s. Then came the big convention centres like Suntec and the Singapore Expo in the late '90s. Along with attractions like the F1 Singapore Grand Prix and the Great Singapore Sale, the city has secured its place as a regional tourism and conventions hub.

Personally I'm glad IHG made the deci-



Smits: quality service

sion to move our regional headquarters to Singapore just before the new millennium. Singapore's welcoming business environment, its infrastructure and high standards of living all benefited us in growing our Asia-Pacific business.

Nearly 50 years on, the Singapore hotel industry has so much to offer the world – from venerable icons like the Raffles Hotel to the cutting edge like Marina Bay Sands. What I hope remains unchanged is the level of service. I was reminded of that when I returned to Goodwood Park after many years. The doorman was still there – and he still remembered me to greet me by name. Having started my journey with the hotel sector here in Singapore, and now running the operations for one of IHG's fastest growing regions based out of Singapore, it does feel like coming full circle. I wish SHA many more milestone celebrations to come.

Michael Issenberg, chairman and COO, Accor Asia Pacific

Accor first entered Singapore with the Novotel brand in 1982 and has developed its network to what is today four hotels and three brands represented.

The Singapore hotel market has evolved significantly since those early days. Today there is a much greater level of institutional investment in the sector and hotel ownership is a focused business. This has ensured continual investment and improvement in the business and, when complemented by the commitment to promote Singapore as a destination, has resulted in the constantly improving performance of the sector.

Since moving to Singapore in 2008, I have been amazed at the capacity for Singapore to soak up the additional supply that has come online and particularly so in 2010 with the opening of the integrated resorts. This is a validation of the strategy of the Singapore government to constantly attract new events and promote tourism to Singapore.



Issenberg: strong demand



Gen Y

Breaking the mould

By Raini Hamdi

How differently do you view the business compared to the way your elders view it?

Law The hospitality landscape has changed significantly from 20 to 30 years ago – competition is getting stiffer, and consumers are more well-travelled and getting more sophisticated. The Asia-Pacific region is gaining clout and investor and consumer focus is shifting here.

Due to the emergence of e-commerce, and mobile and social media, younger generation leaders place more focus on reaching out to the consumer. With advancements in technology, you no longer need a brick-and-mortar office to reach out and respond to your customers. Teleconferencing and emails have made it easier to connect with partners and guests.

Preferences of customers have also changed. Good service and warm hospitality are now taken for granted (given the competition out there). Customers expect more than just good service and a comfortable room. Internet connectivity is a must-have; a business centre, spa and gourmet options are also now part of the “basic package”.

The current generation of leaders focuses a lot more on branding. Now, the smaller groups, niche brands and boutique outfits can compete neck and neck with the big boys. As long as they get their positioning right, they will find demand in the market.

Loh For me, the hotel industry is much more open, and I come into the business with much less preconceived notions. Honestly, to me, a lot of the work is fun and about doing new concepts and designs. I’m probably much less concerned (but not totally disinterested) about the hard numbers than a traditional hotelier.

One change you’d like to see happen in the hotel industry?

Law To be able to attract more talent by changing the perception of the hospitality industry as an occupation that “serves” people, to one that provides “service” with the ability to make a difference to the lives of people that cross our path every day.

Loh I would like to see more interesting two- or three-star properties and more original concepts in hotel design. At the moment, a lot of it is cookie-cutter stuff.

Since you started in the business, what is the one difference you have made that you’re pretty proud of?

Law We have grown from one hotel to eight hotels in the region, from an unknown brand to a significant player in the Asian hospitality industry, within a short period of five years.

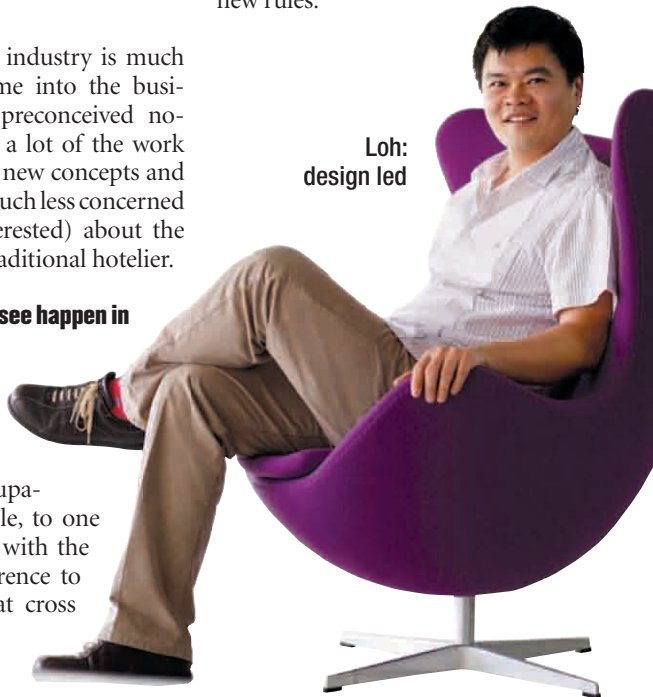
Loh Giving boutique hotels a positive profile.

What is the biggest opportunity young Asian hotel owners have today?

Law That we are in the best place in the world right now. The Asian market is booming, and the hospitality business is growing from strength to strength. We have the benefit of location, macro factors and local knowledge, and this opportunity will allow many Asian hotel owners to expand and grow.

Loh Well, the industry in Asia in general is still relatively immature, so there are many opportunities to do something out of the box. We can afford to be new and innovative! Asia is the new frontier for travel and it’s time for Asian hoteliers to set new rules.

Loh:
design led



What’s your biggest pet peeve about hotel general managers?

Law To apply their creative juices and think out of the box more often.

Loh Most of them need to seriously loosen up and not take themselves too seriously. They are in the business of making sure the guest is happy and they should have fun doing it.

Law: consumer driven



✱ Please be forewarned that you just may run behind schedule. That bubble bath while watching a midnight movie may be why. That cocktail at Gravity Bar may have been one too many. Massage at our spa may have been too therapeutic. And your bed may just be too inviting. But here’s a gentle reminder to adjust your schedule accordingly. Premier Club Room, at Carlton Hotel Singapore. It’s All Here.

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In conversation with young hotel owners:

• Allen Law, Park Hotel Group • Loh Lik Peng, New Majestic Group



A Special Edition
50 years of
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Asia



A Tribute

Pakir's legacy

By Margaret Heng

I am delighted to be given this opportunity by *TTG Asia* to write a tribute to Pakir Singh, my ex-boss, predecessor and mentor.

As a boss, Pakir was extraordinary. He was a great leader and mentor who showed us that you do not have to be loud or commanding to get the work done. In his soft-spoken yet firm way, he was persuasive in motivating us to produce excellent work.

His ability to inspire has certainly brought out the best among the staff and the membership.

Pakir is a staunch advocate of human resource development. It was his commitment and passion in this area that propelled SHATEC to become one of the top hotel and tourism schools in the region and in Singapore.

He is one person who practises what he preaches. He loved training, and despite his busy schedule, found time to train the students at SHATEC. Some of the stu-

dents he taught had shared with me that he was an excellent trainer who prepared them well for the industry. It was tough going for most of them, but they enjoyed his lessons as he made learning fun and experiential at the same time.

He not only found time to teach the students, he also put aside time to train the trainers of SHATEC as well. They were equally enamoured by him as a trainer.

Anyone who has heard Pakir deliver a speech at any forum would agree that he is a great and eloquent speaker. His charis-



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Few would argue that SHA and its training institute, SHATEC, owe a great deal to one man, Pakir Singh, who was executive director of the association for 26 years before retiring in November 2005 due to ill health. A visionary, fighter, powerful speaker, first-rate trainer and strong advocate of human resource training and development, Pakir also contributed hugely to ASEAN tourism, navigating the often-tricky and sensitive ASEAN tourism public and private sectors with his engaging and diplomatic ways. *TTG Asia* invited Margaret Heng, executive director of SHA, to pen this tribute.

ma and eloquence made him very much sought-after as a speaker at seminars and conferences, not just in Singapore but all over the world. He is also well-known for his ability to speak off the cuff.

His speeches and presentations were often insightful, thought-provoking and peppered with a tinge of humour.

Those who know Pakir well will agree that although a fighter, he is a gentle one – quite an oxymoron. In his own quiet and soft-spoken way, Pakir was a force to be reckoned with, pushing forth his views and ideas to gain acceptance. He is not one to give up easily without trying. This is one reason why he was able to play a key role in helping the industry overcome the many ups and downs in his 26 years with SHA.

It was also this fighting spirit that was instrumental in driving both SHA and SHATEC to greater heights.

Pakir is also a visionary. Back in the '80s, he already saw the need for trained manpower, not only in terms of quality but also quantity. He is also a strong believer of productivity. This message was found in most of his presentations and in his meetings with the membership. Today, more than ever, training and productivity have become buzzwords for the hotel and tourism industry.

It therefore does not come as a surprise that his foresight and leadership have earned him many awards and accolades. These include the TTG Travel Personality of the Year Award (Pakir was the first to win the award when it started in 1989), STB's Special Recognition Award (2005 Tourism Awards) and UBF Food Solutions Lifetime Achievement award (2004) under the WGS Awards of Excellence.

Thank you, Pakir, for being my mentor and for nurturing and developing me to who I am today. All of us from SHA and SHATEC (past and present, including *TTG Asia* group editor Raini Hamdi) continue to wish you well.

PATA TRAVEL MART 2011

September 6-9, Pragati Maidan
New Delhi, India



One of the fastest growing tourism markets in the world, India is hosting PTM2011 in the capital city of New Delhi

The travel and tourism industry in Asia Pacific has recovered from the global recession during 2008-2009, with international visitor arrivals surpassing the 400 million mark for the first time last year, generating a growth rate of 10%.

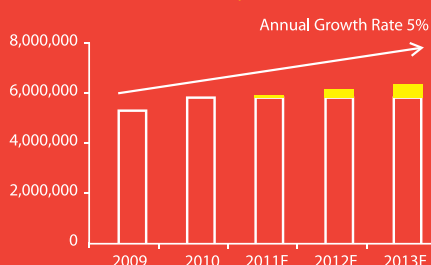
In 2010, the Indian-subcontinent or South Asia emerged as the fastest growing sub-region of 13% in foreign arrivals.

India, a key market both as a destination and a source market, presents huge opportunities:

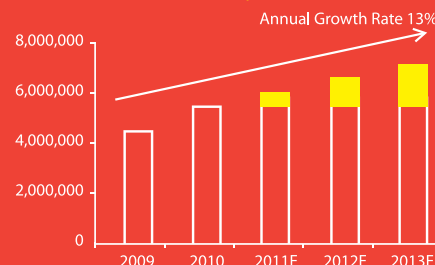
Arrivals to India account for 66% of total international visitor arrivals to South Asia. Foreign arrivals to India surged 9% to over 5.5 million in 2010, and is expected to grow at annual rate of 5% to 2013.

The Indian outbound travel market is expanding at an even faster pace, growing at an annual rate of 12% in the past five years and is expected to continue to grow at a rate of 13% to 2013.

Arrivals to India, 2009 - 2013



India Outbound, 2009 - 2013



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You are the judge

We value your opinions in bestowing the title of "industry's best". Your voice is the best embodiment of the travel industry's sentiments in recognising the top performers. Vote for your favourites in these two categories (and its segments):

Travel Supplier Awards

- Airline Awards
- Hotels • Resorts • Serviced Residences • Spa Awards
- BT-MICE Awards
- Travel Services Awards

Travel Agent Awards

TTG salutes the finest and most accomplished

In two other categories, exceptional individuals and organisations are identified and acknowledged for their accomplishments.

These two categories of awards are:

Outstanding Achievement Awards

Under this category, TTG's editorial team determines the winners in these awards:

- Travel Personality of the Year
- Destination of the Year
- Most Entrepreneurial Travel Company
- Best Marketing & Development Effort

Travel Hall of Fame

The Travel Hall of Fame honours organisations that have won at least 10 times at previous TTG Travel Awards. Although they will not be voted for again, these special award winners will be recognised at every TTG annual awards presentation ceremony. Votes for them will not be counted. Travel Hall of Fame - Inducted Members are:

- Singapore Changi Airport (2002)
- Singapore Airlines (2002)
- Hertz Asia-Pacific (2005)
- Royal Cliff Beach Resort, Pattaya (2006)
- Star Cruises (2008)
- Abacus International (2009)
- Silkair (2010)

How to vote

Instructions and Guidelines

VOTE ON PAPER

(Please use the correct voting form)
There are two voting categories and accompanying forms

Voting Form A: Travel Supplier Awards

For voting by travel agents, tour operators and destination management companies only.

Voting Form B: Travel Agent Awards

For voting by hoteliers, airline staff, car rental companies, cruise operators, national tourism organisations, GDS companies and all other travel professionals (except travel agents, tour operators and destination management companies).

CRITERIA

To ensure that nominees are judged on an equal basis, each category has its own set of criteria. Please use them as a guide when casting your votes.

AWARDS CITERIA

TRAVEL SUPPLIER AWARDS

Airline Awards

Criteria

Best **airline** in its respective category in terms of:

- Providing the best service, network and schedules.
- Most agent-friendly in terms of reservations, confirmations and commission payments.
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas, incentive programmes and servicing.

- Best **North American** Airline
Best airline based in North America operating Asia-Pacific routes.
- Best **European** Airline
Best airline based in Europe operating Asia-Pacific routes.
- Best **Middle Eastern** Airline
Best airline based in Middle East operating Asia-Pacific routes.
- Best **South Asian** Airline
Best airline based in the Indian subcontinent operating Asia-Pacific routes.
- Best **South-east** Asian Airline
Best airline based in Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, The Philippines, Singapore, Thailand or Vietnam operating Asia-Pacific routes.
- Best **North Asian** Airline
Best airline based in South Korea, Japan, Chinese Taipei, Macau or Hong Kong operating Asia-Pacific routes.
- Best **China** Airline
Best airline based in China operating Asia-Pacific routes.
- Best **Pacific** Airline
Best airline based in the Pacific operating Asia-Pacific routes.
- Best **Regional** Airline
Best airline based regionally operating Asia-Pacific routes.
- Best **Asian Low-cost Carrier**
Best airline based in Asia-Pacific that operates on a low-cost strategy.

Hotels • Resorts • Serviced Residences • Spa Awards

Criteria

Best **Hotel Chain** in its respective category in terms of:

- Most consistent in products and services.
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas, incentive programmes and servicing.

Best **Hotel/Resort/Serviced Residence/Spa** in its respective category in terms of:

- Best services and facilities.
- Best range of value-added benefits.
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

HOTEL CHAINS

- Best **Global** Hotel Chain
Best hotel chain operating a network of properties globally.
- Best **Regional** Hotel Chain
Best hotel chain operating a network of properties in the region.
- Best **Local** Hotel Chain
Best hotel chain operating a network of properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.
- Best Hotel **Representation Company**
Best company providing the most agent-friendly products and services and showing the best marketing effort in generating sales for member hotels via agents.
- Best **Luxury** Hotel Brand
Best hotel chain operating a network of luxurious properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.
- Best **Mid-range** Hotel Brand
Best hotel chain operating a network of mid-range properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.
- Best **Budget** Hotel Brand
Best hotel chain operating a network of economical properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.

HOTELS – Individual Property

- Best **Luxury** Hotel
Best hotel catering to the upmarket traveller. This hotel must also boast the best visual appeal and ambience reflecting upmarket status.
- Best **Mid-range** Hotel
Best mid-range hotel catering to the traveller who seeks three- to four-star quality and comfort.
- Best **Budget** Hotel
Best hotel catering to the budget traveller.
- Best **Independent** Hotel
Best non-chain (ie not part of a network of properties) hotel.
- Best **Boutique** Hotel
Best small, fashionable and unique hotel.
- Best **City** Hotel – **Bangkok**
- Best **City** Hotel – **Delhi**
- Best **City** Hotel – **Hanoi/Ho Chi Minh City**
- Best **City** Hotel – **Jakarta**
- Best **City** Hotel – **Kuala Lumpur**
- Best **City** Hotel – **Manila**
- Best **City** Hotel – **Seoul**
- Best **City** Hotel – **Singapore**
- Best **City** Hotel – **Taipei**
- Best **City** Hotel – **Tokyo**
- Best **New City** Hotel
Best city hotel that opened in 2009/2010.
- Best **Airport** Hotel
Best hotel – located within the vicinity of an airport – that caters to travellers in transit.

RESORTS – Individual Property

- Best **Beach** Resort
Best resort located by a beach. This resort must also boast the best visual appeal and ambience reflecting local flavour.
- Best **Resort** Hotel (Non-Beach)
Best resort not located by a beach. This resort must also boast the best visual appeal and ambience reflecting local flavour.
- Best **New Beach** Resort
Best beach resort that opened in 2009/2010.
- Best **Integrated** Resort

Best hotel offering comprehensive accommodation, shopping, dining, entertainment and sports.

SERVICED RESIDENCES

- Best **Serviced Residence** Operator
Best serviced property catering to mid- and long-term staying guests.

SPAS

- Best **Spa** Operator
Best managed and operated spa or network of spas in the region.

BT-MICE Awards

Criteria

- Best services and facilities catering specifically to the BT-MICE market.
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing the BT-MICE market.
- Most desirable and attractive incentives and value added services to business travellers and MICE planners.

- Best **Airline – Business Class**
Best business class airline across the board.
Refer to Airline Criteria.
- Best **Business** Hotel
Best hotel catering to the business traveller.
Refer to Hotel Criteria.
- Best **Meetings & Conventions** Hotel
Best hotel catering to meeting and convention needs.
Refer to Hotel Criteria.
- Best **BT-MICE City**
The city most friendly and desirable to business travellers and for MICE planners to host their events.
- Best **Convention & Exhibition** Centre
 - Best facilities.
 - Best value for money.
 - Most flexible in catering to MICE planners.
 - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.
- Best **Convention & Exhibition Bureau**
 - Most efficient, flexible and friendly in terms of response to enquiries and information.
 - Most effective in raising awareness of MICE at government and community levels.
 - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

Travel Services Awards

Criteria

- Best product, services and facilities
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing

- Best **Airport**
 - Best facilities.
 - Most user-friendly, efficient and hassle-free immigration.
 - Most organised baggage claim.
 - Best planned floor layout, with easy ground access.
- Best **GDS (Global Distribution System)**
 - Most comprehensive network offering ease of operation and user friendliness.
 - Most efficient and reliable system.
- Best **Cruise Operator**
 - Best product in terms of service, routes and schedules.
 - Best onboard programme and facilities.
 - Most agent-friendly in terms of reservations, confirmations and commission payments.
 - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas, incentive programmes and servicing.
- Best **NTO**
 - Most efficient, flexible and friendly in terms of response to enquiries and information.
 - Most effective in raising awareness of tourism at government and community levels.
 - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.
- Best **Theme Attraction**
 - Best ambience.
 - Best facilities and services.
 - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

TRAVEL AGENT AWARDS

Criteria

Best **Travel Agency** in its respective category in terms of:

- Professionalism and excellence in staff.
- Best value-added services to client
- Best use of computer technology applications to help improve efficiency and effectiveness in services provided to client.

- Best Travel Agency – **Australia**
- Best Travel Agency – **China**
- Best Travel Agency – **Chinese Taipei**
- Best Travel Agency – **Hong Kong**
- Best Travel Agency – **India**
- Best Travel Agency – **Indochina (Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam)**
- Best Travel Agency – **Indonesia**
- Best Travel Agency – **Japan**
- Best Travel Agency – **Malaysia**
- Best Travel Agency – **Singapore**
- Best Travel Agency – **South Korea**
- Best Travel Agency – **Thailand**
- Best Travel Agency – **The Philippines**
- Best **Corporate** Travel Agency
Best travel agency specialising in serving the needs of corporate travellers.
- Best **Online** Travel Agent
Best online-based travel agent offering the most user-friendly and effective interface to meet client needs. This online travel agent must also boast the best sales and marketing network in terms of service innovation.

OR VOTE ONLINE!

www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards

12th August 2011

VOTING FORM A: TRAVEL SUPPLIER AWARDS

For voting by • Travel agents • Tour operators • Destination Management Companies You Can Also Vote Online Now @ www.ftgasia.com/ftg-awards

Do refer to the voting criteria on the facing page when casting your vote

Voting Rules

- Only one voting entry per person is allowed – using the voting form or online voting.
- All votes are confidential.
- Voting forms are published in TTG print titles and are available online at www.ftgasia.com/ftg-awards.
- No responsibility will be accepted by the organisers for voting forms lost, delayed or damaged in the post.
- There are no pre-nominated contenders for any voting awards.
- The results for TTG Travel Awards 2011 are final and no correspondence will be entertained.
- Voting forms will be independently tabulated and evaluated by an independent auditor in Singapore.
- The closing date is **12th August 2011**

Submission

Completed voting forms are to be returned to:

SINGAPORE
Ms Lina Tan
TTG Travel Awards 2011
TTG Asia Media Pte Ltd
1 Science Park Road #04-07 The Capricorn
Singapore Science Park II Singapore 117528
Tel: (65) 6395-7575
Fax: (65) 6536-2972

HONG KONG
Ms Carol Cheng
TTG Travel Awards 2011
TTG Asia Media Pte Ltd
China.com Inc
11/F ING Tower No. 308 Des Voeux Road
Central Hong Kong
Tel: (852) 2237-7272
Fax: (852) 2806-0646

Organisation / Country		Organisation / Country	
Airlines			
1. Best North American Airline		28. Best City Hotel – Manila	
2. Best European Airline		29. Best City Hotel – Seoul	
3. Best Middle Eastern Airline		30. Best City Hotel – Singapore	
4. Best South Asian Airline		31. Best City Hotel – Taipei	
5. Best South-east Asian Airline		32. Best City Hotel – Tokyo	
6. Best North Asian Airline		33. Best New City Hotel	
7. Best China Airline		34. Best Airport Hotel	
8. Best Pacific Airline		RESORTS – Individual Property	
9. Best Regional Airline		35. Best Beach Resort	
10. Best Asian Low-Cost Carrier		36. Best Resort Hotel (Non-Beach)	
		37. Best New Beach Resort	
		38. Best Integrated Resort	
Hotels • Resorts • Serviced Residences • Spas		SERVICED RESIDENCES	
HOTEL CHAINS		39. Best Serviced Residence Operator	
11. Best Global Hotel Chain		SPAS	
12. Best Regional Hotel Chain		40. Best Spa Operator	
13. Best Local Hotel Chain			
14. Best Hotel Representation Company			
15. Best Luxury Hotel Brand		BT-MICE	
16. Best Mid-range Hotel Brand		41. Best Airline – Business Class	
17. Best Budget Hotel Brand		42. Best Business Hotel	
HOTELS – Individual Property		43. Best Meetings & Conventions Hotel	
18. Best Luxury Hotel		44. Best BT-MICE City	
19. Best Mid-range Hotel		45. Best Convention & Exhibition Centre	
20. Best Budget Hotel		46. Best Convention & Exhibition Bureau	
21. Best Independent Hotel			
22. Best Boutique Hotel		TRAVEL SERVICES	
23. Best City Hotel – Bangkok		47. Best Airport	
24. Best City Hotel – Delhi		48. Best GDS	
25. Best City Hotel – Hanoi/Ho Chi Minh City		49. Best Cruise Operator	
26. Best City Hotel – Jakarta		50. Best NTO	
27. Best City Hotel – Kuala Lumpur		51. Best Theme Attraction	

VOTER INFORMATION

Name:

Passport no.:

Job title:

Company:

Address:

Country:

Telephone no.:

Fax no.:

Email:

Signature:

Closing Date: 12th August 2011

VOTING FORM B: TRAVEL AGENT AWARDS

Do refer to the voting criteria on the facing page when casting your vote

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For voting by • Hoteliers • Airline staff • Car rental companies • Cruise operators • National Tourism Organisations • GDS companies • All other travel professionals (except Travel agents, Tour operators and Destination Management Companies)

You Can Also Vote Online Now @ www.ftgasia.com/ftg-awards

Organisation / Country	
52. Best Travel Agency – Australia	
53. Best Travel Agency – China	
54. Best Travel Agency – Chinese Taipei	
55. Best Travel Agency – Hong Kong	
56. Best Travel Agency – India	
57. Best Travel Agency – Indonesia	
58. Best Travel Agency – Indochina (Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam)	
59. Best Travel Agency – Japan	
60. Best Travel Agency – Malaysia	
61. Best Travel Agency – Singapore	
62. Best Travel Agency – South Korea	
63. Best Travel Agency – Thailand	
64. Best Travel Agency – The Philippines	
65. Best Corporate Travel Agency	
66. Best Online Travel Agent	

VOTER INFORMATION

Name:

Passport no.:

Job title:

Company:

Address:

Country:

Telephone no.:

Fax no.:

Email:

Signature:

Closing Date: 12th August 2011



TRAVEL AWARDS 2011 Vote Now!

TRAVEL SUPPLIER AWARDS

Airline Awards

1. Best North American Airline
2. Best European Airline
3. Best Middle Eastern Airline
4. Best South Asian Airline
5. Best South-east Asian Airline
6. Best North Asian Airline
7. Best China Airline
8. Best Pacific Airline
9. Best Regional Airline
10. Best Asian Low-Cost Carrier

Hotels • Resorts • Serviced Residences • Spa Awards

HOTEL Chains

11. Best Global Hotel Chain
12. Best Regional Hotel Chain
13. Best Local Hotel Chain
14. Best Hotel Representation Company
15. Best Luxury Hotel Brand
16. Best Mid-range Hotel Brand
17. Best Budget Hotel Brand

HOTELS – Individual Property

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19. Best Mid-range Hotel
20. Best Budget Hotel
21. Best Independent Hotel
22. Best Boutique Hotel
23. Best City Hotel – Bangkok
24. Best City Hotel – Delhi
25. Best City Hotel – Hanoi/Ho Chi Minh City
26. Best City Hotel – Jakarta
27. Best City Hotel – Kuala Lumpur
28. Best City Hotel – Manila
29. Best City Hotel – Seoul
30. Best City Hotel – Singapore
31. Best City Hotel – Taipei
32. Best City Hotel – Tokyo
33. Best New City Hotel
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BT-MICE Awards

41. Best Airline – Business Class
42. Best Business Hotel
43. Best Meetings & Conventions Hotel
44. Best BT-MICE City
45. Best Convention & Exhibition Centre
46. Best Convention & Exhibition Bureau

Travel Services Awards

47. Best Airport
48. Best GDS
49. Best Cruise Operator
50. Best NTO
51. Best Theme Attraction

TRAVEL AGENT AWARDS

52. Best Travel Agency – Australia
53. Best Travel Agency – China
54. Best Travel Agency – Chinese Taipei
55. Best Travel Agency – Hong Kong
56. Best Travel Agency – India
57. Best Travel Agency – Indochina
(Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam)
58. Best Travel Agency – Indonesia
59. Best Travel Agency – Japan
60. Best Travel Agency – Malaysia
61. Best Travel Agency – Singapore
62. Best Travel Agency – South Korea
63. Best Travel Agency – Thailand
64. Best Travel Agency – The Philippines
65. Best Corporate Travel Agency
66. Best Online Travel Agent

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Carbon-saving scheme irks trade

Europe's move to cut airline emissions could drive up flight prices and threaten its hub status

By Gracia Chiang

SINGAPORE Ticket prices of flights from and to Europe are likely to go up next January when the aviation sector will be fully included in the European Union's emissions trading system (EU ETS), despite continued opposition from airlines overseas.

The EU has set a cap on carbon dioxide emissions, with airlines having to pay for emissions that exceed those limits.

Speaking to media on the sidelines of the IATA AGM in Singapore earlier this week, Lufthansa CEO, Dr Christoph Franz, estimated that the ETS would result in an additional annual cost of 150 to 350 million euros (US\$220 million to US\$512 million), depending on the actual price of certificates.

He explained that while the airline had started to purchase certificates, it had not yet introduce any ETS surcharge in ticket prices as there were still doubts whether the scheme would be implemented as scheduled.

Dr Franz added that the ETS was being met with vehement

protest from some countries which "have even announced retaliatory measures against EU carriers, which will then increase the competitive disadvantage for European carriers".

Some 4,000 aircraft operators around the world will be affected by the scheme, with many arguing that the EU has no right to unilaterally impose this on carriers from other countries.

US airlines will take their case to the European Court of Justice next month, while the China Air Transport Association has said it would recommend "harsher counter-measures" against flights by European carriers operated in and out of China.

At a CEO forum during the IATA AGM, Emirates Airline president Tim Clark said the EU's scheme would likely spawn a series of ETS-like measures in other regions like Asia and the Middle East, further burdening the industry.

"We are now perhaps the highest taxed entity of any business on the planet today," he said.

Garuda Indonesia president

Viewpoint

What kind of effect will ETS have?



global efforts to reduce emissions."

"Uncoordinated and punitive regional measures distort markets and undermine

Giovanni Bisignani
Outgoing director general and CEO
IATA

and CEO, Emirsyah Satar, added that as more governments followed suit, the increase in costs could likely be passed on to the consumer.

Still others were worried about Europe's position as a hub. Antonio Romero, chairman of Iberia and IAG, said this would be a big disruption to the normal evolution of the market.

"The impact is a clear one. If you can make a connection



riers, which will then increase the competitive disadvantage for EU carriers."

"Some countries have even announced retaliatory measures against European carriers,

Dr Christoph Franz
CEO
Lufthansa

avoiding Europe, you would...It's going to affect traffic."

Australian Minister for Infrastructure & Transport Anthony Albanese agreed that this would distort the market, echoing the call for an "international system that isn't discriminating".

IATA's outgoing director general and CEO Giovanni Bisignani had also earlier urged Europe to reconsider its stance.

"Uncoordinated and punit-

tive regional measures distort markets and undermine global efforts to reduce emissions. The EU ETS is a US\$1.5 billion cash grab that will do nothing to reduce emissions," he said.

However, Europe appears to be unfazed by even such vocal opposition. "When some parties start to threaten specific European companies, I think Europe should be very firm," European Commissioner for Climate Action, Connie Hedegaard, told *Reuters* in an interview.

Europe has maintained that the inclusion of aviation in the ETS is expected to have only a minor impact on ticket prices. Airlines, however, point to an already-fragile economic environment, where profits are being eroded by high fuel prices.

IATA has further downgraded its 2011 airline industry profit forecast to US\$4 billion, a 54 per cent fall compared with the US\$8.6 billion profit forecast in March and a 78 per cent drop compared with the US\$18 billion net profit recorded in 2010.

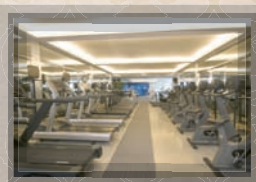


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Pattaya's fortune rises

By Sirima Eamtako

PATTAYA/BANGKOK Value-for-money Pattaya is witnessing a strong demand growth, though rates are not expected to follow suit just yet.

Destination Asia (Thailand) managing director Pornthip (Addie) Hirunkate said it would cost more than US\$200 for a room at a five-star hotel in Phuket, Koh Samui and Hua Hin, and more than US\$100 for a room at a four-star hotel. In Pattaya, however, a five-star hotel room would be priced at around US\$100 and a four-star hotel room would be roughly US\$70 to US\$80.

These markedly lower rates as well demand from emerging markets such as India, Russia, China and Eastern Europe are pulling in the crowds, said tour operators.

Traditional markets are also strong. Go Vacation Thailand managing director Christoph Mueller said: "I assume it is still the very good value for money which drives demand from the German market to Pattaya, which is one of the cheapest destinations in Thailand on all side expenses such as food, shopping, etc."

He said he did not foresee a rate increase as the number of rooms in Pattaya was increasing.

Asian Trails CEO Luzi Matzig agreed. "There is never a problem getting a room in Pattaya which, to me, still has too many hotels," he said.

According to the Thai Hotels Association Eastern Chapter, Pattaya has 703 hotels and 45,205 rooms as of January. At least 477 rooms are slated to come online next year, with Centara Hotels and Resorts due to open four properties in the city.

However, Pattaya hoteliers were urged not to skew available supply towards spe-

cific markets such as Russia, especially during the high season from November to March.

Pathfinders Travel managing director Ashley Monteiro said: "The Indian market is a year-round business and hotels must strike the right balance between all markets, and not only look to fill their rooms with Indians during the weekdays of the low season."

He said Pattaya was attractive to the Indian market because the budget per head for a meeting and conference group fell within a price bracket of 30,000 Indian rupees (US\$672) to 35,000 Indi-

an rupees, less than the cost of holding the event at a beach location within India.

"But it is frustrating," said Monteiro. "During the high season, we don't have rooms because the Russian market has booked and paid in advance for almost all the hotels in Pattaya."

"The way I see it, the Russian market is only growing stronger and other markets such as India are looking to other destinations," he said.

According to Monteiro, Russians are paying contracted rates of about 200 baht (US\$6.60) to 300 baht higher per room-night compared to Indians. The former travel in pairs and stay for long periods of between 10 and 14 days while the latter are short-notice FITs and stay for just a few nights, he said.

Asia World managing director Stephen McEvoy said the demand from the Russian market for Thailand in general was growing by 200 per cent year-on-year (year-to-date) from both charter and wholesale segments, with demand moving beyond the typical high season to becoming year-round business.



Hirunkate: significant savings