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LCC thinking at MAS?

Some agents fear low-cost ways will creep in at legacy carrier following CCF signing

By N. Nithiyananthan
KUALA LUMPUR Agents are divided over the collaboration between Malaysia Airlines (MAS) and AirAsia, with some concerned that the low-cost carrier (LCC) model might creep into MAS, while others are confident it was for the best.

With AirAsia's head honchos, Tony Fernandes and Kamarudin Meranun being on the MAS board following the signing of a Comprehensive Collaboration Framework (CCF) between the two carriers on August 9 (*TTG Asia e-Daily*, August 10), a senior industry source pointed out that AirAsia would be privy to MAS strategies and would then be able to adopt counter-strategies for itself.

"This is clearly a conflict of interest," said the source, who did not want to be named.

GrandLotus Travel Agencies director K. Thangavelu added: "We do not want MAS to adopt AirAsia's operating style and remove incentives from agents."



Thangavelu: no to AirAsia style

But Malaysian Association of Tour & Travel Agents (MATTA) president Mohd Khalid Harun said: "This is a very good development that would benefit the travel industry. Both airlines can do better with good management. They can learn from each other's strategies. A (MATTA) working committee will be meeting with MAS soon to discuss the way forward."

Apple Vacations & Conventions managing director Koh Yock Heng said: "The collaboration will help each airline have a distinct identity. It is good for agents. We are more than happy to see MAS operating as a full-service premium airline."

The CCF – subject to an anti-trust analysis – has clearly defined the two carriers' business turf. MAS will focus on the premium

segment, while its subsidiary Firefly will become a full-service carrier flying regional destinations. AirAsia and AirAsia X will continue operating low-cost services to short, medium and longhaul destinations.

While this process involved an assessment of their respective network services, Fernandes had said that there would be no rationalisation of routes or purchase of aircraft.

As it was "about growth", all the airlines would continue to compete on or for similar routes or carve out new destinations for different target markets.

This was confirmed by a senior AirAsia source, who declined to be named.

The source said that prior to the CCF signing, AirAsia had received "policy guidance" from the government that there would be no restrictions for it to fly to all routes flown by MAS, with the exception of Sydney being temporarily delayed.

"Both AirAsia, AirAsia X and

MAS served different segments, and we remain on an aggressive expansion plan, which includes flying to both major (and secondary) airports," the source said.

Asked whether the CCF was prompted by this development, the source said that discussions on the deal had been ongoing before the government's clearance.

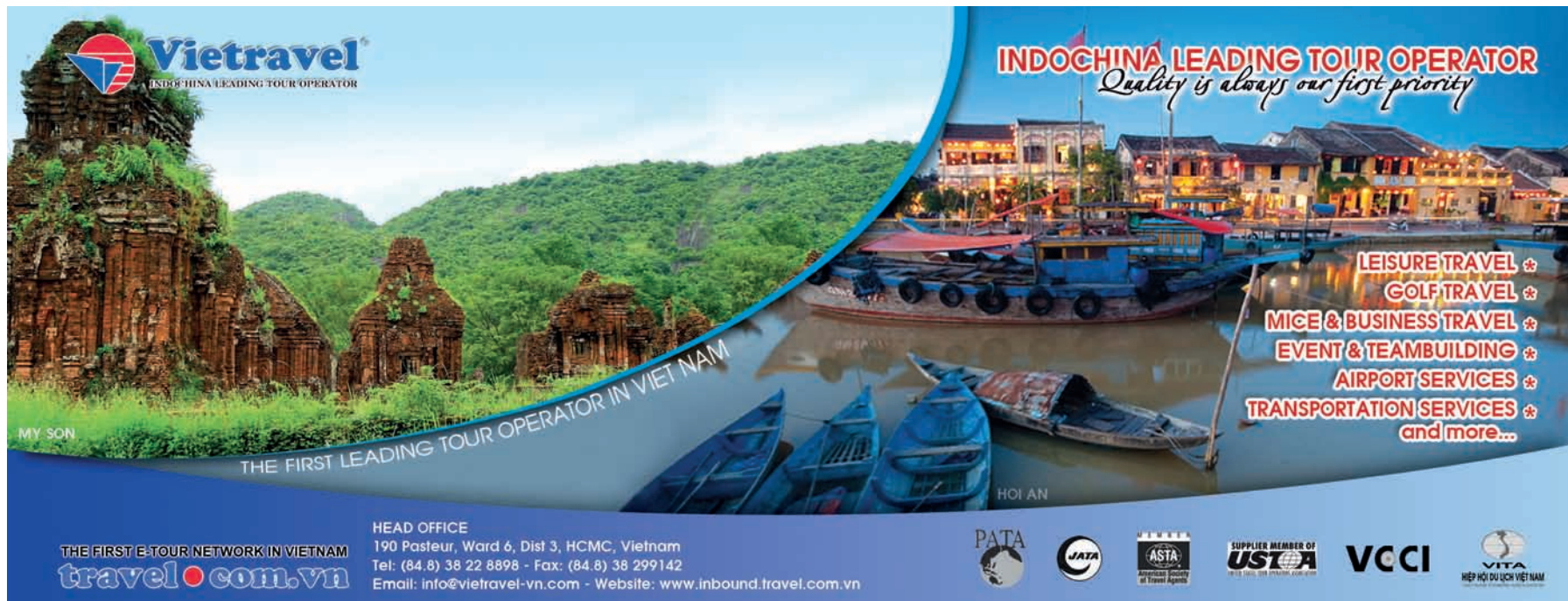
The source added that most of the immediate collaboration was expected in areas like purchasing, engineering, ground support services, cargo services, catering and training.

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PATA JATA ASTA SUPPLIER MEMBER OF USTOA VCCI VITA

DoT's head hunt

Trade pins hopes on a qualified successor with all-round skills

By Marianne Carandang

MANILA The search for a new Department of Tourism (DoT) secretary has begun following Alberto Lim's abrupt resignation last Friday (*TTG Asia e-Daily*, August 12), with names of potential candidates, including advertising veteran Ramon Jimenez and House of Representatives member Risa Hon-tiveros-Baraquel, floating to the surface.

Barring delays, President Benigno Aquino III is expected to appoint Lim's replacement on August 31.

The Philippine travel trade warns that after major setbacks that rocked Lim's tenure, including the Hong Kong tour bus hostage situation in Manila in August 2010 and the *Pilipinas Kay Ganda* branding, the industry needs a candidate with the right qualifications.

Philippine Travel Agencies Association (PTAA) president, Aileen Clemente, said: "The public will recall the marketing and branding concerns with the DoT, but there is so much more to deal with – access, policy reform and making the Philippines competitive in tourism development."

"Lim's successor has to be a strategist. Tourism encompasses infrastructure, transport and structured coordination."

"He also has to have the organisational skills and communication skills to reach out to other stakeholders," she added.

The post is also notorious as a

revolving door. Since the DoT's reorganisation in 1986, there have been 11 secretaries and only three – Vicente Carlos, Richard Gordon and Joseph Durano – were adept enough to make it past the three-year mark. Lim lasted just over a year. While awaiting Lim's

Tourism Congress vice president Jaime Cura said that the organisation would not endorse anyone as Lim's successor, instead putting "its complete confidence in the ability of the president" to choose the next secretary.

The Tourism Congress is

"Lim's successor has to be a strategist. Tourism encompasses infrastructure, transport and structured coordination."

Aileen Clemente

President

Philippine Travel Agencies Association



Lim: lasted just over a year

successor, it is business as usual with the DoT, according to spokesperson Benito Bengzon Jr.

"We will continue with our programme

for 2011. Budgets are approved, projects will move as planned. Our proposed work programme in 2012 has also been submitted to Congress, and we don't see any changes," he said.

"Of course we have to give leeway when the new secretary is appointed," he added.

A new brand campaign has also been put up for bid and is scheduled for launch by early 2012, but insiders say this is taking too long to happen.

the only governing body that is able to nominate and elect members to the Tourism Promotions Board (formerly the Philippine Convention & Visitors Corp) and, indeed, was one of the many controversial thorns on Lim's side, as he reportedly refused to recognise its legitimacy, as mandated under Philippine law.

Lim's last public appearance before announcing his resignation was at the Philippine MICE Conference 2011 held in Cebu last week, where he delivered the opening address discussing the potential of MICE in boosting the country's tourism arrivals.

In a press statement, he said: "I leave the President's Cabinet gratified that the foundation for the tourism growth has been laid, in keeping with the President's vision of inclusive growth."

Singaporeans back on the road, but not fully

By Linda Haden

SINGAPORE After a dismal performance in the first half of 2011, some agents in Singapore are reporting a spike in demand for holidays abroad.

ASA Holidays, one of the first to hold a preliminary sales fair in the run-up to the annual NATAS Travel Fair to be held from August 26 to 28, had a "really amazing showing that took the company pleasantly by surprise," said head of marketing and communications Eileen Oh.

Oh said: "The sales we generated far surpassed our expectations. We hit a five-year sales record, and we raked in almost double the total amount collected last year."

CTC Holidays saw an equally impressive performance at its pre-NATAS sale. Travellers made a total of 2,600 bookings at CTC's fair this year, compared to 2,000 in 2010, said Alicia Seah, senior vice president, marketing & PR, CTC Holidays.

"We are highly confident that we will be able to make up for the shortfall we experienced in the first half, especially if the airlines we work with increase their charter flight capacity, particularly to China, (South) Korea and Japan," Seah said.

The strength of the Singapore dollar relative to other currencies had played an integral part in spurring more Singaporeans to travel further afield in the second half of 2011, she added.

Chan Brothers, which con-

ducted a private sale over the July 2-3 weekend, saw a 200 per cent increase in bookings over a regular weekend, according to group managing director Anthony Chan. During its August 7 pre-NATAS fair, it generated S\$12 million (US\$9.9 million) in sales revenue, 20 per cent higher than the year before.

In comparison, Hong Thai's anniversary sale in July was relatively subdued. Stella Chow, manager, Outbound Tours, said demand was recovering but had yet to return to previous levels. "Nonetheless, long-haul is doing well, and we are seeing some upward movement for China. (South) Korea and Taiwan are also holding up," she said.

Eva Wu, spokesperson for SA Tours, said the number of bookings to the US and Europe at its pre-NATAS fair held on July 31 swelled by 15 per cent on the previous year.

"Management is satisfied with the results, but this is still a tough year. To be honest, sales were not as good as in 2010," Wu said. "We do not expect to make up for the shortfall we had in the first half of the year, as we anticipate a bumpy road ahead."

SA Tours was adopting a wait-and-see approach. Wu said: "With so much economic uncertainty globally, we are keeping our promotional initiatives to the bare minimum and are taking steps to ensure that we do not drive our marketing costs up."



Chan: 200 per cent increase

PATA Singapore rewards productivity

SINGAPORE The PATA Singapore Chapter, with the sponsorship of the Workforce Development Agency (WDA), has launched the second productivity competition, Our Productivity Story 2011, for the travel and tourism industry.

A total of S\$36,000 (US\$29,800) in cash prizes is up for grabs. Travel and tourism companies in Singapore just need to pitch their best productivity success story in a 1,500-word essay. The best two essays from each of the three travel and tourism categories – hotels, travel agents and others – as selected by a panel of judges, will qualify for the next round.

Six finalists will then work with a dedicated production company to turn their productivity story into a short video. All six videos will be available online for industry members and for the public to vote on from November 14-30.

Visit www.patasingapore.org.sg/pata_new/comp_story.php for more information.

Direct bookings a threat to OTAs

By Sirima Eamtako

BANGKOK Gullivers Travel Associates' recent statement on stop sell orders for Thailand and Indochina (*TTG Asia e-Daily*, July 29 and August 2) has fuelled debate that many OTAs will disappear in the next five to 10 years.

Prominent hotel sources, who spoke under the condition of anonymity citing the sensitivity of the issue, said that bookings from OTAs were declining while hotels were getting 40-50 per cent of business from their direct online channels, where rates are better by 10-30 per cent and they do not have to pay commissions of 15-32 per cent.

However, Chris Bailey, Centara Hotels and Resorts sales and marketing senior vice president, said that unlike other independent hotels and chains that were trying to increase direct business, Centara made it a point to strike a balance between bookings from its own website and from its partners, including OTAs.

Centara now receives more

than 50 per cent of its bookings directly from its branded website. "But we are not arrogant enough to not want business from OTAs worldwide. OTAs still generate huge business for us," Bailey said.

He acknowledged, however, that some changes were in store as the chain expanded its sales and marketing structure, the headcount of which would grow to 120 people at the Bangkok headquarters, and streamlined the number of its global partners. The group is planning to discontinue contracts with 15-20 partners starting this winter season.

"These are, in general, not big producers, though our evaluation process will look to maintain partners that want to work with us, are easy to work with and are less time-consuming," Bailey said.

Accor is also seeing growth in direct online booking. The chain,

however, would not comment further on strategy.

But operation director for Thailand Paul Stevens alluded to a balance being maintained by the group. "Bookings through traditional agents and operators constitute over a third of the total bookings, while online travel agents and direct online bookings through Accorhotels.com are constantly growing in proportion."

Stevens added: "More consumers travelling for their own leisure will surf the Internet to find good deals and compare prices."

Onyx Hospitality Group is taking a more cautious view of its distribution direction. Senior vice president sales Suravut Thongtham said the group worked closely with trade partners and followed contractual obligations.

"There's been no change in

our policy or practices, but market dynamics have been better this year than last year," Suravut said.

With a healthier market situation now compared to last year, a source from another hotel chain said it was up to the hotel how it wanted to deal with room availability and rate, and issue stop sell orders at times.

Asian Trails CEO Luzi Matzig, however, pointed out that stop sell orders by hotels in Thailand were a non-issue, as there is plentiful supply.

"If a hotel does not want the business, we can go to another hotel," he said.

But Matzig added that in some beach destinations like Phuket, Koh Samui and Hua Hin, it might be difficult to secure rooms during the high season. He said that it all boiled down to how hotels wished to do business, as well as supply and demand.

"I am an hotelier too, so I know both sides," he said.



Bailey: striking a balance



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Ask the Expert



Now in session

Ali Yilmaz was appointed Google's head of Travel, South-east Asia in March 2011. He is the expert to turn to for queries related to the online travel ecosystem and digital marketing strategies.

Q Will online travel agents gain enough momentum to eventually overtake tour operators?

Log on to view answers and to post your own question

Tourism Data

Asia-Pacific and the Middle East have become hotspots for inter-regional, long-distance air travel; South Asia and South-east Asia are driving Asia-Pacific's tourism boom; Indonesia's skyrocketing economic growth is propelling investment in luxury hotel-branded villas in Bali.

Hot Deals

Rest Detail Hua Hin launches travel industry rates; Marriott offers Meet for Free packages at its Renaissance Koh Samui, and Courtyard by Marriott and JW Marriott properties in Bangkok; Safe2Travel offers commissionable golf packages for the Presidents Cup in Melbourne.



Tip Sheet

Accor launches specialist programme in 19 Indian cities; Staging Connections starts online portal listing venues in Australia & New Zealand; Hyderabad Airport launches loyalty programme for agents.

Feeling cooked

From Thomas Cook Group cooking its CEO (*TTG Asia e-Daily*, August 3, 2011), to riots in London – the news that's coming out of the UK these days is as tiresome as the US debt and Eurozone crisis, which plunged stock markets into an abyss last week. The UK market, a traditional, loyal source for many Asian destinations, is looking increasingly raw.

The shocking departure of Manny Fontenla-Novoa from the Thomas Cook Group reflects the huge challenges facing UK tour operators, even the ones – or should that be *especially* the ones? – with a great name and history such as Thomas Cook.

Fontenla-Novoa himself is a great name in business, but not great enough in the face of a shrinking share price and dwindling profits. The board said this as much when it said it "is focused on restoring confidence in the group, which has been impacted by concerns over debt levels and the poor performance of our UK business".

"We are taking actions to strengthen the balance sheet, including a disposal programme that we expect to realise up to £200 million (US\$328 million)," said Michael Beckett, chairman, Thomas Cook Group, when announcing Fontenla-Novoa's immediate stepdown.

Of a few Thomas Cook

groundhandlers in Asia contacted by *TTG Asia* reporters, only one, Marcel Boeni, business development manager, Travel Centre Asia, Thailand, said that the tour operator's business had been good this year and the agency was looking to see an even stronger high season this year.

Others voiced no growth or a slight decline, and drastic drops, with the ones in the latter group being most concerned about the UK market overall.

"We used to handle about 600 pax a month (from Thomas

"Sometimes they don't realise they had swallowed poison. Instead of getting big and healthy, they got sick."

Cook UK) before the global economic crisis in 2009, but that has since dropped to 50 to 150 pax," said its groundhandler in Bali, Bali Tours & Travel managing director Ida Bagus Nada. "When big companies swallow the little ones to grow, sometimes they don't realise they had swallowed poison. Instead of getting bigger and healthier, they got sick. We used to get business from the small, individual agents even if the number was small."

"The CEO exit will have some impact definitely, as management and policy will change...and there are other external factors, such as the new wave of economic crisis in Europe," he added.

Adrian Wong, head of FIT and Hotelbeds at Pacific World Singapore, which handles Gold Medal UK, a Thomas Cook brand, said the revenue/demand remained stable – only a one per cent decline. "We're seeing bigger growth in other regional markets such as China, which is helping to prop up business," he said.

It appears the UK market has, in the words of a UK tour operator, been reduced from a "significant" market to just "important". The source believes the big boys in the business in fact have switched their room allocations from the UK to markets such as Germany, Scandinavia or Russia, which could produce better results without them having to resort to aggressive accounting to entice a market that lacks confidence and disposable income. In fact, Thomas Cook was seen as slow to do so.

In Asia as well, many hotels do not want to prostitute themselves rate-wise, as they now have alternative markets such as China and India to prop up occupancies.

Sad that a great market has been reduced in significance. Reading the news in the UK just makes us feel truly cooked.

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Garuda Citilink's lofty ambitions

Bali's Gerald van Amerongen believes that Garuda Citilink's plans to operate independently from parent airline Garuda Indonesia are in vain.

"They are coming a few years too late," he explained. "AirAsia and Lion Air are the big players in Indonesia. I can't see how Citilink will be able to beat them."

Air India retains home support

Despite Air India's failed bid to join the Star Alliance, our India-based readers still believe that their national airline will be successful in the long run.

India's Jayesh Ashar said: "I flew Air India from Mumbai to London. The service levels, legroom, food quality, cleanliness, entertainment – all were perfect! I understand that some people have problems on other routes, but if Air India can get this one route right, I am sure they can do the same all over their network."

Chennai's Rattan Narula added: "I feel that Air India's interests would have been better-served as Star Alliance members. Air India management would do well to set its own house in order, without losing more time, to be able to derive benefits from such an important association."

Remembering Brunei's TC Chun

Former partners were quick to laud the efforts of TC Chun, managing director of Goodmiles DMC, in promoting Brunei tourism over the past 30 years. Chun passed away on August 7.

Penang's Rudi Herrmann said: "He opened the door for the company I worked for to initiate tourism to Brunei. While many colleagues were skeptical about possible tourism into Brunei from the Western world, he inspired me to never give up. I do believe that my former company still features some of the itineraries that I set up with him."

Sound bites



"If 'rumour' is an Olympic sport, Thailand's travel industry would win a gold medal."

John Watson, CEO of Diethelm Travel Group, dismissing speculation the group is resizing and closing Diethelm Events. He said the company was in great shape and is set to grow to 13 destinations this year and 14 next year, from 12 now.

But he admitted having to resize Diethelm Travel Thailand in response to reduced income as a result of the country's well-publicised political rift last year. That, however, does not mean closing Diethelm Events. "We are not closing Events. We generate excellent revenue from this segment in many markets."

"We should create the slogan Credible India to substitute Incredible India."



Vithal Kamat, chairman and managing director, The Orchid Ecotel, Mumbai, when asked what was needed from the government for tourism in Mumbai to improve. He said the tourism policy of Maharashtra was more than 50 years old.



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TTG Asia is published by TTG Asia Media Pte Ltd. It is mailed free on written request to readers who meet predetermined criteria. Paid subscriptions are available to those who do not meet the criteria. Annual airmail subscriptions are US\$180 to Asia and US\$199 elsewhere. Cover price US\$5. MICA (P) 039/09/2010 PPS 619/02/2012(022706)

Printed by Times Printers Pte Ltd
16 Tuas Avenue 5, Singapore 639340

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.

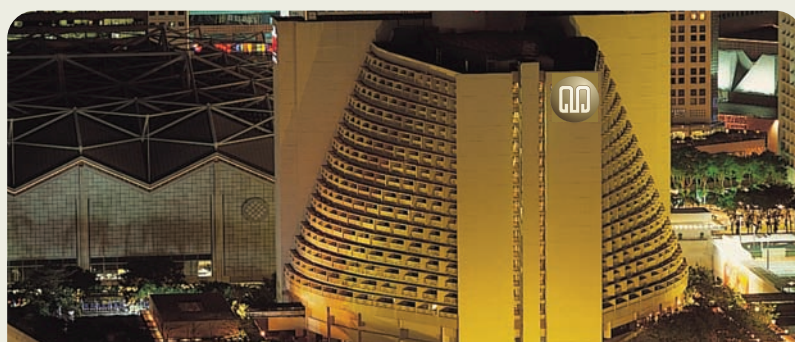
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COLUMNIST Hui-Wan Chua

Look to the basics

Everybody in the travel industry is in the business of retail – whether it's selling travel experiences, hotel rooms or technology know-how – and failing to see this can steer companies off course.

To get back on track, consider some simple retailing techniques. Successful retailers create memorable experiences that enable them to stand out from the crowd.

Evolve your store concept If a store looks tired, chances are customers feel the same way too. Update your look and engage your customers. Small touches, such as serving drinks on arrival or introducing iPads at every terminal, make trip planning fun and interactive.

Exceed expectations Understand what motivates and delights your customers. Respond to requests quickly, make suggestions and keep in touch afterwards. It's the little things that count, and exceptional service cultivates loyalty.

Communicate Tap your database to promote your business and source new sales. Be proactive and consider regular promotions and events to connect with past and potential clients.

Make your brand known Promotions are most likely to hit the mark when you



"We're so caught up in work that we often lose focus."

do your homework. Research marketing trends, understand your target audience and find a way to stay relevant.

Satisfy your frontline A happy workforce is an engaged workforce. Introduce regular social activities and invest in staff training. A knowledgeable team will add value to your business and promote your agency as an industry expert.

Hui-Wan Chua is Travelport's senior regional director, Asia, and she engages travel agency customers on a daily basis.



This column is the first of a three-part series leading up to the TTG Travel Agent Conference in October. Learn more about how to retail travel, as well as other tips for your business at the three-hour programme. Turn to page 13 for details.

Retailfront

Kesari Tours Mumbai offers an exceptional level of personalised and professional service



PRESENCE Kesari Tours' head office is conveniently located on the ground floor on a prominent street in Mahim, which is situated in the centre of Mumbai.

A 35mm video display continuously showcasing various destinations draws the attention of pedestrians walking past the storefront.

Well-dressed doormen open the door with a smile for every incoming customer, before directing them to comfortable sofas in the lobby.

APPEARANCE The inviting, glass-walled, air-conditioned office is divided into various sections catering to different travel segments including tour groups, MICE and FITs.

Coffee table books on various destinations are spread out on the central table in the lobby, while a broad selection of over 50 magazines and brochures are neatly stacked on a side rack.

A receptionist ushers guests to one of the many customer relations executives in an adjacent hall, seated behind desks that are arranged in tidy rows. There are 18 desks in total, manned by staff who are mostly attired in neatly-pressed black and red uniforms.



EASE Customers in the main hall are seated a good distance from each other to ensure privacy.

The staff member assigned to us dealt with our requirements patiently, and we enjoyed the interaction.

After our discussion, we were led to a nearby conference hall where we were handed information booklets about the destination we had enquired about. A video about our destination of interest was then played.

Another mini-theatre on the premises is used for briefings and staff training.

We also found out that Kesari has a call centre in its back office operated by 20 staff members attending to enquiries from 10.00 to 18.00.

SUGGESTIONS While Kesari Tours Mumbai easily wins clients over with its slick appearance and professional service, having more offices across the city will definitely help it become more accessible.

– Anand and Madhura Katti



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Organizers:

- China National Tourism Administration
- Yunnan Provincial People's Government
- Civil Aviation Administration of China

Time: October 27 (Thursday) to October 30 (Sunday), 2011

Venue: Kunming International Convention & Exhibition Center

Scale: Area: 50,000 sq m Number of standard shell scheme booths: 2,000

主办单位:

- 中国国家旅游局
- 云南省人民政府
- 中国民用航空局

时间: 2011年10月27日(四)至10月30日(日)

地点: 云南省昆明市国际会展中心

规模: 展览面积: 50,000 平方米 预设标准展位: 2,000 个

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When it comes to the decor and inviting, spacious environment that welcomes guests in each of the suites, much attention was given to creating an authentic Khmer feel. This includes the exquisite furniture and decorations chosen by the resort's Cambodian design team, which drew its inspiration from the rich history and culture of the Khmer people and region.

BEST WESTERN Suites And Sweet Resort Angkor blends the fascinating charm and character of its destination, with all the facilities and amenities expected by today's modern traveller. In the well-appointed guest suites this includes cable/satellite flat screen TV, alarm clock, direct dial telephone, in-room safe, desk/work area, fully stocked refrigerator and minibar, coffee and tea making set and hairdryer, while the elegant bathroom features a separate rain shower stall. Free wireless Internet access is provided both in the suites and the resort's public areas, allowing guests to stay connected 24 hours.

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The great location enjoyed by BEST WESTERN Suites And Sweet Resort Angkor also sees it within a few minutes' drive of shops, restaurants serving various international cuisines, entertainment outlets, tourist markets and two golf courses. Siem Reap International Airport is 3 km from the resort, served by direct flights from regional points like Bangkok, Vientiane, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Seoul and Taipei as well as the Cambodian capital Phnom Penh.

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Homegrown stars



Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts – by Mimi Hudoyo

Brand Hotel Santika Premiere

Description International-standard four-star hotels with a touch of Indonesian hospitality. While all hotels have the same quality of service and facilities, each is unique in its design, surrounding environment and cuisine in order to showcase the local culture.

Price Between 600,000 rupiah (US\$71) and 1,600,000 rupiah for the lowest category, up to 5,000,000 rupiah for the Premiere Suites

Portfolio Six, all in Indonesia: Jakarta, Malang, Jogjakarta, Semarang, Bali, Manado

Target growth Two new properties are opening this year: Hotel Santika Premiere & Convention Center Medan and Ambarukmo Palace Hotel by Santika Indonesia. The target is to have 10 properties under this brand in the next three to five years.

Competitors and your edge over them Accor's Novotel and Mercure, Aston International's Aston hotels, and Hotel Aryaduta's properties. Premiere properties are always strategically located and the brand is synonymous with the 'Indonesian home', said Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts corporate promotions manager Vivi Herlambang.



"They deliver the service expected of four-star properties, and bring out the Indonesian character in their restaurant menus, and genuine and warm staff. But they have not been able to standardise their facilities in all properties to accurately reflect the Hotel Santika Premiere brand. They also have not been able to create a smoke-free indoor public area."

Malia Sayuti, managing director, ATA Travel Service Jogjakarta



Centara Hotels and Resorts – by Sirima Eamtako

Brand Its four-star properties are mainly under the Centara Hotels and Resorts branding, while some fall under the Centara Boutique Collection and Centara Residence & Suites.

Description The core objective is to exceed expectations and deliver a consistent but sometimes surprising experience, and most importantly, an enjoyable stay, said Centara Hotels and Resorts sales and marketing senior vice president Chris Bailey. Properties deliver a range of accommodations of ideally between 150 and 400 rooms. Facilities and services are designed for broad appeal to cater for a multi-national market.

Price Varies, depending on locations and markets

Portfolio 28 in total spread across Centara Hotels and Resorts (17 in Thailand and three overseas); Centara Boutique Collection (six in Thailand); and Centara Residence and Suites (one in Thailand and one overseas)

Target growth More than 50 properties within four to five years

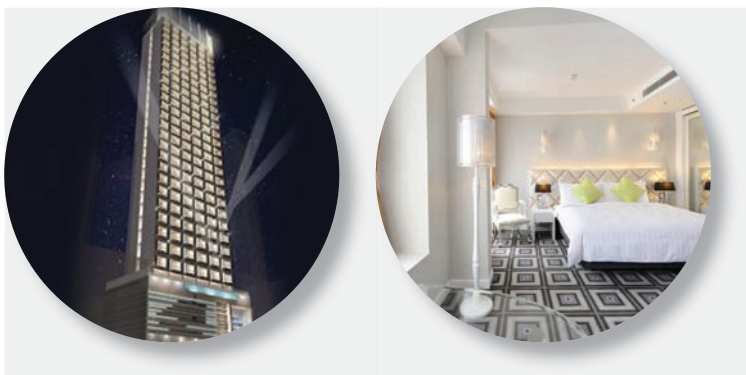
Competitors and your edge over them "This is also hard to pin down as it differs by property. However, the chain strives to be ahead of the game and does not wait to see what competitors are doing," added Bailey.



"Most of Centara's hotels are in good locations and they are well known in the local market. Centara has a positive reputation, leading clients to think of their hotels as five-star products. I did not know they have four-star hotels. This may be misleading as people might expect a five-star standard of service, but not receive it."

Suwart Jitjornongmate, CEO, SI Tours

Less visible but equally brimming with promise, we shine the spotlight on Asian hospitality chains, many of whom are growing their midscale hotel portfolio



Kosmopolito Hotels International – by Andrew Dembina

Brand Dorsett Regency Hotels and Resorts

Description Sleek business hotels providing executive travellers exceptional and efficient service, supported by technology and innovation to deliver an interactive experience, said Kosmopolito Hotels International (KHI) executive director, business development, Winnie Chiu.

Price Depends on the season, but rates are in the median of the midscale price range

Portfolio One in Hong Kong, one in Wuhan, China, and one in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

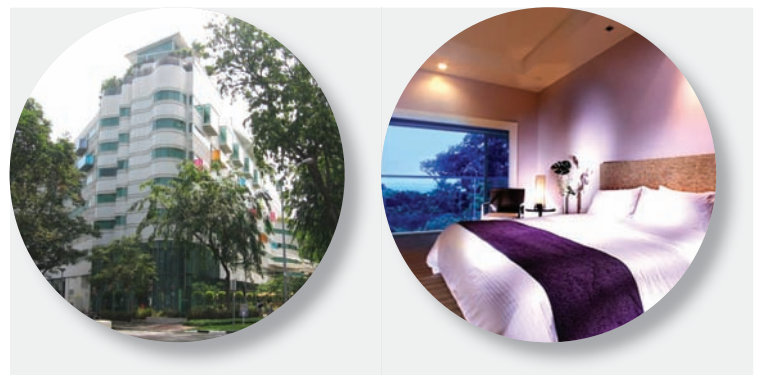
Target growth Two more in Hong Kong are scheduled to open in the fourth quarter of 2011 and first quarter of 2012. China continues to be a key market for KHI as it seeks further expansion of its network there to capture the domestic travel market. It is also looking to enter Thailand, Japan and Australia.

Competitors and your edge over them Accor's Holiday Inn, Starwood Hotels & Resorts' Four Points, Marriott International's Courtyard by Marriott, Hyatt Hotels and Resorts' Hyatt Regency and other branded midscale hotels. "Our competitive advantage is we offer a five-star experience with a four-star price," said Chiu.



"Although their Hong Kong property is a bit far away from city centre, both its hardware and software compensate for the location. The hotel design is fresh and energetic, and rooms have unique design features and the latest electronic entertainment gadgets. It has the potential to become a very popular choice – overall a very impressive and efficient four-star hotel."

Richard Woss, managing director, ATI Travel



Far East Hospitality – by Linda Haden

Brand Its main four-star brand is Village Hotels & Residences, which has both types of properties as its name suggests.

Description All of Far East's Village properties are situated in the heart of Singapore's ethnic enclaves and are designed to reflect their cultural heritage. They also offer easy access to the Central Business District and target both corporate and leisure travellers.

Price Published rack rates start from S\$380++ (US\$311)

Portfolio Far East has seven four-star hotels, three of which are branded as Village hotels: Albert Court Village Hotel, Changi Village Hotel, Landmark Village Hotel.

Target growth Only one other Village hotel is on the cards. The former Paramount Hotel and Shopping Centre in the East Coast area is slated for a major refurbishment and will become a Village hotel.

Competitors and your edge over them No specific ones as it varies considerably based on the location of each hotel, said the group's spokesperson. The primary strength of all the properties is their location, she added.



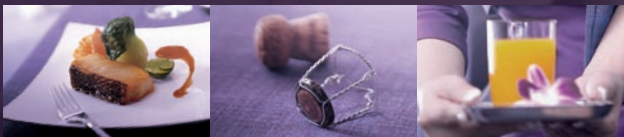
"The locations of their hotels are great, especially for the Asian markets which prefer to be close to the tourist hubs. However, the branding of the hotels has been inconsistent over the years and we are still unsure what 'Village' stands for or what it offers."

Alex Yip, general manager, Vacation Singapore DMC

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Tourists are trickling back to attractions like Mount Fuji (pictured)

Sun rising on the land

Foreign arrivals are returning, thanks to improved perception and deals, reports **Raini Hamdi**

Arrivals Signs of recovery in foreign arrivals are giving the trade reason to be hopeful. PATA Strategic Intelligence Centre quotes an estimated 21 per cent increase in foreign arrivals to Japan to 358,000 in May, compared to April. Asian source markets such as Taiwan, Thailand and Singapore produced better results in May, it said.

But the fact remains that arrivals are still way below what they were before the tsunami. Japan was riding high, with healthy increases in foreign arrivals in January and February. But, as a result of the March 11 disaster, foreign arrivals were down 32 per cent in the first five months over the same period in 2010.

Domestic tourism recovery has been stronger than international. But given May's improvement over April's pitiful harvest, the trade is optimistic. Hilton Worldwide's vice president, international operations, Japan, Korea and Micronesia, Oded Lifschitz, is guessing the industry will "substantially bounce back within 2012".

Marketing A multi-agency effort has been

launched to re-instill confidence in Japan's safety as a holiday destination. This involves fam trips and disseminating accurate information. According to Naoyoshi Yamada, vice commissioner, international affairs, Japan Tourism Agency – the body to which JNTO reports – a supplementary budget of ¥4.15 trillion (US\$0.05 trillion) has been approved by the government to help the industry recover.

A speedy recovery is in the interest of many and, to this end, there has been no lack of effort.

Fact is, Japan has become important: in a market such as Singapore, the destination's woes virtually caused a visible slowdown in the outbound market overall, with big agencies such as CTC Travel and Tradewinds Tours & Travel citing a psychological effect of the disaster in dampening Singaporeans' mood to travel. Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) confirmed the number of visitors from Singapore per week dropped to 600 pax, from 3,500 pax, in the aftermath of the crisis. Singapore Airlines launched unheard-of fares, while the Changi Airport Group provided funds to help airlines sustain flights between Singapore and Japan.



"How quickly the industry bounces back will depend on the solidarity and cooperation within the travel and hospitality community, government support, and creative solutions we deliver to our customers and partners."

Oded Lifschitz

VP, international operations, Japan, Korea & Micronesia, Hilton Worldwide

Hotels Hotels are jumping into bed with airlines and JNTO to initiate traffic back. As well, they are making a presence at key shows, particularly in Asia, to help correct perceptions of safety.

An example is The Peninsula Tokyo at the recent ILTM Asia in Shanghai. Said its general manager Malcolm Thompson: "Although international corporate business started coming back from mid-April, business is still tough, as it is a perception issue. International meetings are hard to replace immediately. So we have to be at trade shows in the region, as the regional market will be the strongest for us in the short term."

He added: "Frankly, there is no better time to visit Japan than now. Good rates are available and there are no queues at popular attractions."

But Hilton's Lifschitz believes the industry must be strategic beyond just price point. Japanese leisure consumers, for instance, are booking at much shorter lead times.

Hilton therefore localised its current global campaign, The Great Getaway, by adjusting its terms and conditions to suit cus-

tomers needs while still stimulating traffic.

Access According to UBM Aviation, scheduled international air seat capacity to and from Japan is around 6.095 million for July, some 2.5 per cent behind July 2010.

All airports in Japan are in operation. Sendai Airport has also re-opened with flights to and from Haneda (Tokyo), Itami (Osaka), New Chitose (Sapporo) and Centrair (Nagoya).

At the sidelines of the 67th IATA AGM in Singapore recently, Japan Airlines president Masaru Onishi sounded an optimistic note about the future. Following the airline's bankruptcy last January, it had trimmed international and domestic capacity by 40 and 30 per cent respectively and retired its fleet of Boeing 747-400. It also instituted a range of cost-cutting measures and focused on returning to profitability.

He said: "These measures we have taken as part of our re-organisation have helped us better cope with the unexpected crisis following the devastating earthquake and tsunami." – **Additional reporting by Karen Yue and Sim Kok Chwee**

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* Some of our topics and speakers as of August 19, 2011



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Martin Symes, CEO, WEGO



Sheldon Hee, GM, Tradewinds Tours & Travel Singapore



Hajar Ali, founder, Urbane Nomads Singapore



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



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Gunung Mulu in Sarawak: ecotourism is a cornerstone of Malaysia's high-yield plans

Generating dividends

Malaysia is banking on high-spending tourists to boost revenue, reports **N. Nithiyananthan**

Arrivals

Tourist arrivals increased by 4.2 per cent to 24.6 million in 2010 compared to 2009. This upward trend persisted into 2011, and the number of visitors grew by 1.2 per cent to 1.9 million in January compared to January 2010. At this rate, Malaysia is on track towards achieving its long-term goal of attracting 36 million visitors by 2020.

Neighbouring countries continue to dominate arrivals, with Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and Brunei accounting for more than 73 per cent of arrivals in 2010. This was followed by China, India and Australia, with arrivals from India recording the fastest rate of growth (17 per cent) between 2009 and 2010.

Red Apple Travel & Tours, a specialist in the inbound Indian market, saw its business increase by 20-25 per cent this year.

Managing director, Arokia Das Anthony, said: "The numbers can only go up; we are barely scratching the surface. The Indian market shows a lot of promise."

NTO

The Ministry of Tourism is making a concerted effort to introduce niche products targeting the high-yield market.

Golf tourism (see page 16), helicopter tourism and ecotourism have been identified as key areas of development.

Deputy tourism minister, Dr James Dawos Mamit, said: "Ecotourism is a burgeoning global phenomenon and it could help the country generate surplus tourism revenue."

Medium- and longhaul markets have been earmarked for such ecotourism tours, with primary targets being Europe, the US and Australia. Visitors from the three regions are expected to comprise 50 per cent of the market.

States rich in biodiversity such as Johor, Perak, Selangor, Kedah (Langkawi in particular), Sabah and Sarawak, have been slated as suitable destinations.

In line with its strategy to draw affluent visitors, Tourism Malaysia is staging events such as the 1Malaysia Contemporary Art Tourism Festival, which was held in July. Malaysia will also host the first IAGTO Asia Golf Tourism Association Convention in April 2012 for the first time.

Hotels

Malaysia had 1,610 hotels in the budget and three- to five-star categories pro-



"(Ecotourism) products appeal to those from Europe and mature markets such as Hong Kong and Japan."

Yap Sook Ling

Managing director
Asian Overland Services Travel & Tours

viding just over 161,000 rooms as of February. Of these, Kuala Lumpur had 236 hotels and 30,000 rooms.

New hotels scheduled for completion in the capital over the next five years include The St. Regis; Grand Hyatt; Pullman Bangsar; Best Western Premier Dua Sentral; Hilton Garden Inn; Mövenpick; and Park Regis.

Hotels in Kuala Lumpur had an average occupancy of 66.9 per cent in 2010, a rise of 4.2 percentage points over the previous year. Meanwhile, the average hotel occupancy in Malaysia declined by 1.6 percentage points to 59.3 per cent in spite of an increase in overall arrivals in 2010.

Dr Mamit said this could have been a result of more tourists opting for homestays, an increase he described as "dramatic".

MICE

The Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB) is set to host three major meetings in 2012.

Collectively, the 25th World Gas Conference, the 14th Congress of the International Society for Peritoneal Dialysis and the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons Annual Scientific Congress are projected to generate

US\$19 million in tourism revenue. About 7,500 delegates are set to attend the meetings.

Earlier in February, MyCEB launched its Industry Partner Programme (IPP), which provides cooperative sales and marketing opportunities, sales lead distribution, shared market intelligence and networking opportunities. So far, over 80 firms have signed up for the IPP.

Access

Industry players are optimistic that the new low-cost carrier terminal at Kuala Lumpur International Airport, scheduled to open in 2012, will help boost traffic further.

Almost 58 million passengers passed through Malaysia's 39 airports in 2010, a 12.7 per cent growth over 2009.

The country's airline sector is set to undergo an overhaul, with the recent share swap deal between Malaysian Airlines and AirAsia. Both the flag carrier and Malaysia-based LCC will now synchronise their schedules and frequencies, instead of competing with one other.

This month, EGYPTAIR also recommenced its daily service to Kuala Lumpur, after a five-month hiatus.

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Teeing off to score a hole-in-one

Malaysia is gearing up to develop the lucrative niche segment of golf tourism. By **N. Nithiyananthan**

1 Why is Malaysia focusing on golf tourism? Golf tourism plays an integral role in the country's plans to bolster tourism revenue. Tourism is one of the 12 National Key Economic Areas (NKEA) identified to kick-start the government's economic transformation programme, and golf tourists are said to spend one and a half times more than leisure tourists.

Tourism minister, Dr Ng Yen Yen, said: "The tourism NKEA has highlighted the need for the private sector to work with the tourism ministry to set up a golf tourism taskforce and to create a national plan to develop golf tourism as a key product to attract high-yield tourists."

She added that the ministry aimed to increase revenue generated by the sport by 15 per cent a year from RM200 million (US\$65.5 million) in 2010.

2 Is the country able to meet the needs of avid golfers? Malaysia boasts over 200 golf facilities ranging from short nine-hole courses to 54-hole complexes, Dr Ng pointed out.

She said: "Golfers have a choice of playing on courses designed by some of the most famous figures in the game, as well as a choice of diverse settings to play in, such as the highlands, coastal towns or near jungles. These courses are complemented by luxury hotels and resorts."

3 What progress has been made in developing the sector? Formed in March, the Malaysia Golf Tourism Association (MGTA) is a collaboration among the Malaysia Golf Association, Golf Club Managers Association, private sector and the government.

It also comprises travel agents, ground operators, real estate and course owners, hotel owners and representatives from Malaysia Airlines, which regularly sponsors golf events.

Said Dr Ng: "The tourism ministry, in collaboration with the MGTA, will encourage golf facility owners to work with tour promoters to produce creative packages that will attract foreign golfers to Malaysia to experience their golf facilities, as well as oth-



er local attractions, cuisines and culture."

Three strategies will be implemented by the ministry: increasing exposure by leveraging on existing offerings such as international golf events; establishing a dedicated golf tourism taskforce to bring the golf tourism industry together to plan and execute joint marketing efforts; and providing tax exemptions for selected items that are large cost components for golf courses such as fertilisers and buggies.

The ministry has also held seminars to promote golf tourism in selected target markets including Japan, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines.

4 What about MGTA? At the launch of MGTA earlier this year, pro tem chairman Paul

Gibbons explained that the association would embark on a strategic five-year development plan with the core objective of turning Malaysia into the 'Golf Destination of Asia'.

To date, MGTA has met the tourism ministry regularly to carve out plans. It also hosted a fam tour for 24 travel agents in July.

To track golf tourists, MGTA will collect data using software that will be freely distributed to golf clubs.

Some 86 specialised agents now market Malaysia as a golf destination globally, a number MGTA is aiming to grow.

Affidah Adam, assistant tour operator, MST Golf Vacations, said the company began promoting golf holidays in August 2010. It has an average of about 50 cus-

tomers booking such vacations every month, with most choosing three-day trips. Clients are mainly from Hong Kong, China and Singapore.

"We now offer three packages lasting between three and 14 days. Rates start from RM1,080 per person," she said.

Gibbons added: "Over 85 per cent of golf tourists to Malaysia are Singapore day-trippers. The main challenge is to attract golf tourists from medium- and longhaul destinations."

5 How is MGTA tapping international expertise? MGTA has been working with the International Association of Golf Tour Operators (IAGTO), which held a one-day seminar in March for golf club owners and managers.

Gibbons added that Malaysia's hosting of the first-ever IAGTO Asia Golf Tourism Convention next April will also help raise the country's profile. The trade fair brings together specialised golf travel agents from across the world, as well as suppliers from Asian golf destinations.

Checking in



DoubleTree by Hilton



Is Hilton's first DoubleTree in South-east Asia all it's made out to be? **Ellen Chen** checks into an executive room

LOCATION The 34-storey DoubleTree by Hilton sits within Kuala Lumpur's Golden Triangle district. It is strategically located at the junction of Jalan Ampang and Jalan Tun Razak, minutes away by taxi from the iconic Petronas Twin Towers, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre and Embassy Row.

Opened in August 2010, the hotel is part of an integrated development, The Intermark, which also comprises office towers and a retail podium.

A covered walkway leads to the Ampang Park LRT metro station, connecting passengers to Kuala Lumpur Sentral Station in 15 minutes. Kuala Lumpur International Airport is a 40-minute ride away.

ROOMS The hotel has a fresh and contemporary look. Large windows offer great views of the city skyline, including the Petronas Twin Towers.

Executive rooms feature spacious workspaces and are equipped with high-speed Internet access and high-definition multimedia interfaces, allowing guests to connect their laptops to a 32-inch LCD television. I had a particularly restful sleep in the room's plush bed.

Upon arrival, executive-floor guests are whisked to the lounge on the 34th floor for a private check-in. These guests also receive a complimentary breakfast.

The five Terrace Suites on the top floor come with private terraces offering breathtaking views of the city, especially at dusk.

F&B Malay, Chinese Indian, Ibanese, Nyonya and Kristang specialties are prepared in open kitchens at Makan Kitchen, the hotel's signature 350-seat restaurant. Tosca, situated by the pool,

Name DoubleTree by Hilton Kuala Lumpur
No. of rooms 540
Rate From RM355++ (US\$118) per night
Contact details
Tel: (60-3) 2172-7272
Fax: (60-3) 2172-7270
Website: kl.doubletreebyhilton.com

is an Italian trattoria, and wine connoisseurs can sample fine wines at The Cellar Door.

FACILITIES Over 1,850m² of flexible function space is available, including a pillarless Grand Ballroom. Leisure facilities include a saltwater swimming pool and a gym equipped with Precor Fitness machines.

SERVICE The helpful staff are fluent in English and Malay, while some can speak several Chinese dialects. The warm, large chocolate chip cookie handed to all guests at check-in makes for a lovely welcome.

VERDICT A centrally located hotel with excellent facilities for business or leisure.

Silver spoon

Green Green Organic Kitchen



This restaurant in Kuala Lumpur sets out to educate customers that organic food can be tasty yet inexpensive, writes **S Puvaneswary***



MENU A deep passion for travel and food experimentation led four friends to open this restaurant, which sells dishes made with organic ingredients, in early 2010. Its founders – a medical doctor and three nutritionists – even incorporated an on-site consultation room where customers receive dietary advice.

Green Green serves an array of local, Japanese and Western delights. It also offers *kaiseki ryori*, Japanese haute cuisine. Two days' advance notice is required for the *kaiseki*.

Local dishes have been adapted to ensure that they are not only visually appealing, but tasty and nutritious too.

Besides organically grown vegetables, only two kinds of meat are served – deep-sea fish and free-range chicken.

The *nasi lemak* (coconut rice) I ordered came with a generous portion of fried chicken. Mushroom crackers were served in place of the traditional side of anchovies. Fresh ground chillis were also used instead of the usual fiery shrimp paste. This

Name Green Green Organic Kitchen
No. of seats 60
Opening hours 12.00 to 21.00 every day except Mondays
Contact details
Tel: (60-3) 9221-0133
Email: greenorgkitchen@gmail.com
Verdict 1

dish was in contrast to my appetiser of crispy vegetable rolls, which was quite bland.

AMBIENCE The dining space is spotless as footwear is banned. Low tables and stools occupy the larger of two dining areas which seats 40. It is a popular venue for private functions. The smaller dining area has a normal set-up.

SERVICE Efficient staff ensure guests are not hungry for long.

PRICING A la carte items start from RM13 (US\$4.30). *Kaiseki ryori* costs between RM138 and RM188 per person.

*This article was held back due to space constraints. The writer has since left TTG Asia Media.

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Bohol's Panglao island, the site of new high-end resorts

Jewels of the south

Cebu and its neighbour Bohol are oozing luxury and MICE potential. By **Marianne Carandang**

Arrivals According to accommodation statistics, Cebu received more than 810,000 foreign and local tourists from January to May, a 10.4 per cent increase compared to the same period last year.

Among Cebu's top overseas markets, South Korea registered a 54.2 per cent increase and Japan, despite its troubles, grew 7.4 per cent. However, numbers for China and Hong Kong, two other strong markets, fell by 60 per cent and 52 per cent respectively, mainly due to last year's hostage incident in Manila.

For neighbouring province Bohol, which receives many of its guests via Cebu, China continued to be the most important market, followed by the US, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan.

Overall, the country logged 1.6 million visitors in the same period, a 12 per cent year-on-year increase.

NTO Much attention has been given to Cebu, with the Department of Tourism (DoT) adopting a cluster development approach in its marketing. For example, Bohol's Panglao island is being highlighted as a popu-

lar alternative to Boracay, Davao and Palawan.

The DoT is also hoping to build Cebu's reputation as a MICE destination, having showcased its offerings at the recent Philippine MICE Conference held in the city.

Said Cebu City Marriott Hotel general manager Bruce Winton: "Travellers to Cebu are a half-business, half-leisure crowd."

Three large venues are available for planners: the Cebu International Convention Center, the Waterfront Cebu City Hotel & Casino and the recently opened Radisson Blu Hotel Cebu.

Hotels Outside Metro Manila, Cebu and Bohol are where most of the new openings over the next few years will be. By 2014, both destinations will get an additional 550 rooms or so.

Cebu city is seeing an upsurge in downtown mid-priced hotels, while on Mactan island, Crimson Beach Resort & Spa has added 250 suites and 40 pool villas and Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts has taken over the management of the former Hilton property.

Crimson Beach Resort & Spa sales manager Nel Kintanar said upscale resorts in Cebu had spe-



"Cebu is equipped to handle business conventions in the city, and allows visitors to easily access beach activities and marine life after that."

Hans Hauri
General manager
Marco Polo Plaza Cebu

cial appeal for the growing Middle East market due to the privacy offered by villas.

"The Middle East market wants relaxation and pure luxury. They are looking to explore Manila, Cebu, Boracay and Bohol," said Shroff International Travel Care managing director Arjun Shroff, adding that typical guests are seeking holidays of between 10-15 days.

Over in Bohol, luxury accommodations have also turned up in recent years, such as the Blue-water Panglao Beach Resort and Eskaya Beach Resort & Spa.

Rates Hotel Sales & Marketing Association president Margie Munsayac said rates in Cebu were "very competitive".

According to her, city hotels command roughly P4,000-6,000 (US\$94-141) during the regular season, with very few peak periods. Resort hotels are within the P5,000-7,000 range in regular season and can go as high as P8,000-9,000 in the high season.

Bohol, on the other hand, has low inventory and high rates, she added. Properties on Panglao island can fetch P6,000-15,000 in high season and P4,000-10,000 during the off-peak period.

In terms of occupancy, Cebu hotels were hitting an average of 70 per cent or up, while those in Bohol were achieving 70-80 per cent, said Munsayac.

The good news is that rates in Cebu and Bohol have increased by less than five per cent this year, according to Edna Faustino, product development manager, CCT 168 Travel and Tours.

This is in comparison to rates in the capital that have gone up by 10-15 per cent, she said.

Access Cebu's air links are receiving a fillip, with new low-cost flights from its key markets. In the last year, Air Busan announced a new Busan-Cebu service; Airphil Express rolled out a Cebu-Hong Kong service; and Zest Air introduced a Cebu-Shanghai service.

In addition, Cebu and Bohol will also receive priority funds for airport infrastructure under the 2011-2016 National Tourism Development Plan. Mactan International Airport in Cebu will get terminal expansions, new air bridges and additional waiting lounges, while plans are afoot for the expansion of the current Bohol airport in Tagbilaran or its transfer to Panglao.

Hotel industry boom

New rooms are opening all over, says **Marianne Carandang**

A building spree is sweeping across the country and the result will be an additional 10,524 keys over the next three years, with over 4,000 rooms slated to open by the end of 2011.

Of these, 2,707 will spring up in the National Capital Region, or Metro Manila, injecting a 20 per cent boost in capacity across all segments.

Metro Manila's new business district, Bonifacio Global City, close to Makati City, will benefit from the entry of the Grand Hyatt, Shangri-La and Ascott brands in a few years.

Eyes are also on the rise of the

Entertainment City in Manila, a 40-hectare integrated resort project. In a recent development, the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp ruled last month that all four major investors must provide at least 800 rooms each before being able to use their casino licences, which means their room counts may be higher than originally declared.

By regions, Central Visayas, where Cebu and Bohol are located, has the second-largest room pipeline after Metro Manila. The two provinces are poised to receive more than 550 rooms each.

Cebu, which is promoting itself as both a leisure and MICE

destination, has seen small to medium-sized hotels that cater to business and value-conscious travellers open in recent months.

Bohol, on the other hand, is receiving an influx of high-end accommodations, building its reputation as a quieter alternative to tourist hotspot Boracay with its ecotourism products. Another flurry of hotel construction is expected after plans for the new Bohol airport are finalised.

The other regions with rooms opening from 2011-2014 are Northern Mindanao (870 rooms), Cagayan Valley (236 rooms), Bicol (83 rooms) and Eastern Visayas (83 rooms).

Significant projects for this year and next

Source: Department of Tourism, accurate as of June



Products

Bohol's luxury resorts and ecotourism offerings



Bohol Bee Farm

Bohol Bee Farm Resort and Restaurant

What A charming organic restaurant, bee farm, handicraft centre and gift shop on Panglao island. Food lovers can order a la carte or try the country-style buffet; do not leave without trying the organic flower salad with lemon herb or honey mustard dressing and the ginger-flavoured ice cream. Freshly baked cassava chips and cassava flour pizzas, squash muffins and sweet potato bread can also be had. A 28-room bed and breakfast allows guests to stretch visits into stays.

Contact
www.boholbeefarm.com



Dolphin watching, Pamilacan

Island hopping to Pamilacan and Balicasag

What March to June are the best periods for whale and dolphin watching off the island of Pamilacan. Combining whale watching with a trip to the marine sanctuary of Balicasag is a popular option. Snorkelling showcases some of the best Balicasag has to offer, but die-hard divers can go all the way and do 100m night dives to see more of the island's underwater treasures.

Contact
For land and boat arrangements accompanied by a tour guide, call Zarah Dejaresco from Angels' Wings Tours & Travel at (63-38) 412-2645/411-5717 or (63-917) 304-2139

Eskaya Beach Resort & Spa

What Tagged as the ultimate getaway on Panglao, the resort has 15 exclusive villas, several with their own infinity pool, private outdoor jacuzzi and breathtaking views of the Bohol Sea. Sea-view villas face east, so do not miss the sunrise. The resort organises its own tours and has a dedicated divemaster. Complimentary touches include Wi-Fi access, a shiatsu massage, and transfers to and from the airport or ferry terminal.

Contact
www.eskayaresort.com



Danao Adventure Park

Danao Adventure Park

What A one-and-a-half-hour drive from most Panglao and Alona beach resorts, visitors can conquer their fears through an eco-adventure tourism concept known as E.A.T. Danao. The famous 'plunge' is a canyon swing that launches riders into a 45m free fall within a 200m-high gorge, while other activities include zip lining, caving, rappelling and kayaking.

Contact
www.eatdanao.com

Bluewater Panglao Beach Resort

What The latest resort on Panglao island is the third of Bluewater's properties in Central Visayas. The 54-room property is designed with Neo-Filipino touches and includes 46 deluxe pool view rooms, four family lofts, three honeymoon pool villas and one family villa. The Amuma Spa offers Filipino hilot, Namikoshi shiatsu and a Travel Revive Fusion massage for tired travellers. Nanny services, diving, snorkelling and non-motorised water sports, as well as inland tours, are available.

Contact
www.bluewater.com.ph



Bluewater Panglao Beach Resort



BEST WESTERN PLUS® Descriptor Launches in Asia

By David Kong, President & CEO
Best Western International

This year, Best Western introduced the new BEST WESTERN PLUS brand descriptor. North American hotels led the way in implementation last February, followed by a global launch in April. To date, more than 800 hotels fly the BEST WESTERN PLUS flag. They can be found on every continent (except Antarctica) with many more in the pipeline.

As the name implies, BEST WESTERN PLUS hotels offer something extra. In Asia, you'll recognize BEST WESTERN PLUS hotels by contemporary furnishings and stepped-up amenities like free wireless internet access, on-site fitness facilities, bathrobes and slippers, and 32-inch televisions, among others. The first BEST WESTERN PLUS hotel in Asia is located in Bangkok: the BEST WESTERN PLUS @20 Sukhumvit. Another recent addition is the BEST WESTERN PLUS Serenity Hua Hin.

As you may know, Best Western gives its affiliates the option to customize requirements to fit local customs and market demands, as long as they meet our base global standards. What does this mean for the BEST WESTERN PLUS descriptor? In the United States, for example, BEST WESTERN PLUS hotels offer in-room mini refrigerators. In Europe and Australia, hotels can choose from a list of approved features to enhance the guest experience – such as fresh flowers in the lobby, specialty coffees and teas, and upgraded bath amenities.

Different travel occasions require different levels of comfort, which is why we now offer three different types of hotels, BEST WESTERN, BEST WESTERN PLUS and BEST WESTERN PREMIER. The descriptor program has been hailed by trade and consumer press and well-received by our global clients. Descriptors are allowing us to leverage our key advantage – diversity of hotels, locations and price points -- by properly setting guest expectations.



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Revival mission

DoT appoints Leung to restart Hong Kong demand a year after crisis

By Prudence Lui

HONG KONG A year after the Manila hostage crisis (see *Tracker*, right) the Philippine Department of Tourism (DoT) is attempting to revive arrivals from Hong Kong and has appointed JJ Explorer tours as its new marketing representative for Hong Kong and Macau.

David Leung, former regional director for Tourism Queensland who owns JJ Explorer, now bears the arduous task of reigniting demand. The Hong Kong government, which raised its Outbound Travel Alert for the Philippines to black – the highest warning – on August 23 last year, has given no signs that the alert would be lifted. This is despite repeated calls by the DoT to have the travel ban reconsidered.

Leung, who reports directly to the DoT's Manila head office instead of its South China branch, has mapped out a series of plans to restore confidence and traffic from Hong Kong.

A new campaign will encompass media familiarisation trips, monthly trade seminars from mid-September, a new website and apps.

According to Leung, the new campaign aims to inform potential visitors about the latest products such as Resorts World Manila, touted to be Asia's largest shopping mall. New destinations like Palawan, Davao and Bohol will also be showcased.

"The Philippines has been a popular destination for Hong-kongers, but itineraries for group tours are dated and need to



Hong Kong: Philippines still on the black list

be repackaged," Leung said.

"The Philippines delivers a range of versatile products that appeal to different age groups and needs, so we will also push FIT packages," he added.

New travel agents are also being looked at. "Apart from traditional leaders, we are looking at new agents because they may have their own source of clientele," he said.

Leung said that the timing was good to try and resuscitate the market, as the Philippine government had implemented various measures to rebuild tourists' confidence, such as deploying the police to guard key attractions.

Agents beg to differ, saying the travel ban is the problem.

According to agents, there is little incentive for them to promote the Philippines, as insurers are refusing to cover group as well as FIT trips to the country as long as it remains on the Security Bureau's blacklist.

Morning Star Travel Service's general manager, Danna Cheung, said: "The victims' relatives are still fighting for compensa-

tion from the Philippine government. In reality, the Philippines is only one of our many products and it is not a major destination. We do not intend to push the Philippines this year," she said.

Managing director of Win-castle Travel (HK), William Leung, said: "The appointment of David Leung is a good sign. He is a veteran who always has creative ideas but ultimately, agents would like the Security Bureau to lower its warning level against the Philippines."

A spokesperson from the Bureau, however, remains non-committal.

"We will monitor the improvement measures undertaken by the Philippine authorities to restore the confidence of Hong Kong residents to travel to the country closely," the spokesman said.

On the whole, inbound arrivals to the Philippines grew 13 per cent in the first quarter of 2011, after reaching a record high last year.

However, visitor figures from Hong Kong remain weak.

Tracker

An update on major issues and events from the past

Manila hostage crisis

A disgruntled ex-police officer hijacked a tour bus carrying Hong Kong tourists in Manila for 11 hours on August 23, 2010. Eight tourists were killed and nine injured before the gunman was shot dead by a police sniper. Hong Kong's Security Bureau then issued a travel advisory strongly urging its residents to avoid the Philippines.

THEN Mass cancellations ensued, especially in Chinese-heavy markets like Bohol, Cebu, Boracay and Manila. Hong Kong arrivals fell by 40 per cent on average for three consecutive months. Mainland China visits dropped between 51 and 57 per cent in the same period.

NOW Mainland arrivals are nearly back to pre-crisis levels, but Hong Kong numbers are still down. Arrivals from Hong Kong have declined by 17.1 per cent from the same period last year. "The market only improved in March this year. Many felt compelled to cancel due to last year's incident," said Vanessa Guimbarda, sales officer, Bohol Beach Club.

FUTURE Tour operators and hoteliers are adopting a wait-and-see stance. "We cannot force the issue as it is about security. Give it a little more time; perhaps another 12 months and it will recover," said Cencorp's managing director John Paul Cabalza.

According to the DoT's assistant secretary Benito Bengzon Jr, airlines and their respective agents are optimistic that the Hong Kong market will bounce back. – **Marianne Carandang**

Bandung gets growing pains from more access

By Mimi Hudoyo

BANDUNG Additional seat capacity from Singapore and Malaysia to Bandung is driving more new products and helping to promote neighbouring cities, but is putting pressure on the city's infrastructure, which is already bursting at the seams.

Bandung welcomed additional flights from Malaysia last Tuesday (August 16) when Firefly started its thrice-weekly service from Johor Bahru.

This came barely a month after Indonesian carrier Batavia Air started flying between Singapore and Bandung. SilkAir is purportedly planning to introduce a Singapore-Bandung service later this year.

Currently, AirAsia operates four flights a day from Kuala Lumpur and two flights a day from Singapore. Malaysia Airlines also operates a daily service from Kuala Lumpur.

Malaysia's PST Travel Services' senior incentive manager Alex



Tong: potential limited

Tong said: "Bandung's appeal lies in its shopping – which offers good quality at value for money prices especially for garments and household

goods. In addition, the cuisine is nice and the people are friendly."

Bhara Mekar Wisata president director Herman Rukmanadi said: "The destination is selling so well despite its limited infrastructure as both regional and national airlines are opening and adding services to the city."

Vayatour Bali manager Hanafi Sastrawinata said: "The opening of Trans Studio Bandung is a new draw, as it is (one of) the biggest indoor theme parks in the world that travellers want to experience."

However, a potential backlash

might ensue from the increase in seats if the government does not respond soon, according to the Bandung travel trade.

Bandung's small airport and road transport network, as PST's Tong pointed out, meant it could only target FITs and families, and not groups exceeding 200 people.

Kagum Hotels' general manager sales and marketing Yos Oktoriza said: "Accommodation-wise, Bandung can cater to any market, but the city authorities need to do something about the roads.

"Traffic is getting worse. We need a new airport, as the current one cannot be expanded."

Atalanta Tours CEO, Ameriawati Atmadibrata, said: "The airport issue is crucial. Custom services need to be improved and investment in new equipment needs to be made to speed up processes."

Bandung city government tourist office head, Priana Wirasaputra Wasdi, said there were

plans for a new airport in Majalengka, 90km from Bandung, to replace the current airport, Husein Sastranegara."

A private company was also planning to build a 30km monorail from the north to the south of Bandung to ease congestion, Priana added.

As well, to provide tourists with alternatives, the city government is developing a new cultural tourism centre on a six-hectare site in Ujung Berung.

The centre is slated to open in 2013, according to Priana.

Agents are also starting to introduce destinations beyond Bandung "like Tasikmalaya, which is famous for its embroidery and Garut for leather jackets," according to Herman.

"They are gaining popularity among Malaysians," he said.

According to Atalanta's Ameriawati, the trade has also started promoting rural tourism, teambuilding and other outdoor activities in West Java to Singaporeans.