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## More route cuts for Malaysia

**KUALA LUMPUR** Travel consultants reacted strongly to an alleged plan by Malaysia Airlines' (MAS) to axe its Dubai service and close its Kota Kinabalu hub, among other network changes the airline is making.

A local newspaper reported last week that MAS intended to drop several routes due to cost-cutting, including those to Dubai, Johannesburg, Buenos Aires and Cape Town.

**Muniandy: why Dubai?**

In a related move, it would also stop using Kota Kinabalu as a hub and cease flights from there to Haneda, Osaka and Seoul.

Asian Overland Services Travel and Tours director of sales (Middle East) Andy Muniandy said: "I am shocked. It is a weird decision that defies logic...Dubai is a main hub for the region, and nearly every airline stops over there. When MAS previously

*Continued on page 2*

# The heat is on(line)

### Indonesia's hotels say new booking sites will challenge offline

**By Mimi Hudoyo**

**JAKARTA** With two Indonesian online travel firms emerging over the last month, hoteliers are warning that traditional offline players will be increasingly sidelined if they don't evolve.

TTG Asia reported during ITB Asia that Panorama Group, Dwidaya Tour and Travel and Smiling Tours collaborated to form hotel booking channel Raja Kamar International, while this month, KAHA Group teamed up with former Wotif product director for Thailand, Indonesia and Indochina to launch Goin-donesia.com.

Local hotel chains said the emerging Indonesian online market had caught their attention, even though the majority of bookings were still from abroad.

Aston International vice president, sales and marketing, Norbert Vas, said: "The Indonesia-based (online travel firms) will stimulate the market, and I'm sure e-commerce in (secondary) destinations will grow."

He shared that online contribu-



**Khen: online revenue soars**

tes about half of revenue for hotels in Bali, while it is between 22 per cent and 30 per cent for those in Jakarta and two per cent to five per cent for secondary destinations.

Vas added that Aston's Bali boutique properties were already sold entirely online, and there would be a pilot project to do the same for a new budget property next year.

Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts corporate e-commerce manager Andy Khen explained that smaller hotels in secondary cities had trouble getting the signature on file for credit cards, preventing them from working with international online travel firms. However, local online firms now offered a variety of payment modes.

Khen pointed out that Santika's June-October online revenue was double that of January-May, and comparing October with January, the figure was four times higher.

Dafam Hotels and Resorts managing director Andhy Irawan said: "Our company is less than a year old, and online already contributes 15 per cent of revenue."

Online channels widened customer base and helped to obtain better occupancy and yield, hoteliers said.

However, Mekar Wisata Tour & Travel Jogjakarta director Tusi Kuswenda said: "The online business is not without flaws. How many booking frauds have we heard of? As long as we adhere to contracts and produce (business) for the hotels, they will always partner with us. After all, hotels do not put all their eggs in one basket."

Go Vacation Indonesia executive manager, product & contracting, Marika Gloeckler, added: "For a destination like Indonesia, our German clients still need an offline tour operator like us to arrange their trips."

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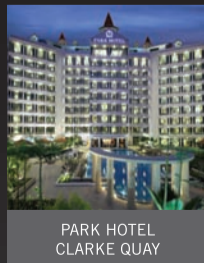
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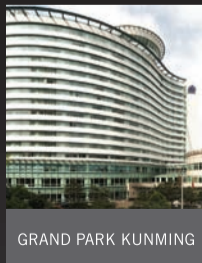
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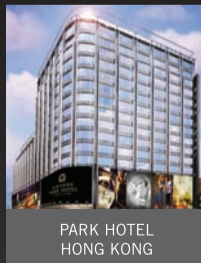
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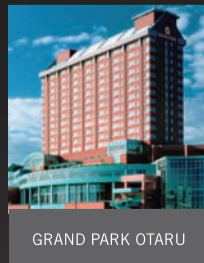
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## TTG Intelligence

Analysis by Murray Bailey

## CHINA OUTBOUND

21

Increase, in %, from  
January to September

## Travel consultants



The number of travel companies in Asia-Pacific increased by 4% in 2010. Revenue increased much faster, by 28%. Sales per company would have been an average of 23% higher.

Asia-Pacific's growth compares to a fall in the number of travel companies in Europe (9%) and the US (8%) last year. Their revenue growth rates were also less – 7% for Europe and 18% for the US.

Source: Extrapolations and comments by Travel Business Analyst (TBA) based on data from IATA's Billing & Settlement Plan made available this month. Data for the US is from Airlines Reporting Corporation.

## VISITOR TRENDS

There were a number of sometimes-surprising trends in regional inbound travel this year.

**19** Australia had a tough year, with falls in visitor arrivals in four of the first eight months. Visitor arrivals from China, however, grew at 19%, making up for the loss in arrivals from Japan. There were 60,000 more travellers from China; 48,000 fewer from Japan.

**3** After a two-month fall in the number of foreign visitors (excluding those from Hong Kong and Macau), arrivals in the year-through-August increased 3%, considered slow growth for China.

Source: Data from PATA, comments by TBA

Growth in the third quarter is estimated to have been an even-faster 29%.

This is much faster than other semi-official data. During a recent press conference, Taleb Rifai, head of the UN World Tourism Organization, put China outbound growth through August at 17%.

Official data is usually released between March and June each year.

Source: Estimates by TBA

Continued from page 1

## Inbound will bear the brunt

dropped Lebanon and Kuwait, this affected inbound business."

Muniandy was not convinced by the explanation that MAS might shift its hub to Abu Dhabi as had been reported.

"Abu Dhabi is not the main hub for the region. Also, hotels in Abu Dhabi cost much more than what they charge in Dubai. It will increase costs," he said.

Holiday Tours & Travel senior vice president Robert Lim echoed this sentiment. "I am quite surprised about Dubai. It could be because there are other airlines flying to the Middle East and on to Europe."

He added that he did not have much business to Buenos Aires, but the loss of Johannesburg and Cape Town would impact incentive travel.

PST Travel managing director Ngiam Foon explained that the measures would affect inbound travel more, as outbound travellers had other options to those destinations.

Corporate Information Travel senior manager Shirley Ho agreed, but said the develop-

ments do not bode well for the airline in general.

"It does not look good for MAS as a national carrier because its hub is becoming small," she added.



Ngiam: outbound holds out

According to the unnamed source quoted in the local report, the termination of routes to Johannesburg, Buenos Aires and Cape Town would commence in February, while the pullout from Dubai would be done gradually, first with the reduction of weekly flights and those via Karachi and Damman.

The decision to close its Kota Kinabalu hub was also an unpopular one, with the destination already upset over the exit of Firefly.

Popular Express Travel operations manager Christopher Chung said: "It will reduce our Japanese business by half. We handle a lot of inbound business from Japan."

"The market is just recovering and (the Japanese) are starting to travel again. If MAS goes ahead, we are back to square one."

– N. Nithiyananthan



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# Listing ambitions rise

Taiwanese companies see trading of stocks as next phase

By Glenn Smith

**TAIPEI** Taiwanese travel companies are taking their businesses to the next level, with at least two firms hoping that a listing on the Taiwan Stock Exchange (TWSE) will help them gain visibility and expand operations.

Phoenix Tours International became Taiwan's first travel expert to be listed on the island's main board last month, and its peers are expected to follow in its footsteps.

Phoenix, whose stock was already trading on the GreTai Securities Market (GTSM), Taiwan's over-the-counter bourse with a lower listing criteria, managed to hit TWSE's minimum paid-in capital requirement of NT\$600 million (US\$19.9 million) due to an unprecedented earnings per share of NT\$6 this year. GTSM requires a paid-in capital of NT\$50 million.

President Antonio Liao said the motivation to list was image-building, not capital-raising. "People will notice, and customers will feel more comfortable dealing with Phoenix," he said,

adding that travel firms already had "enough cash".

"It will also help us form alliances with partners in the trade, as well as globalise our business."

Liao explained that Phoenix was now gunning for high-end clientele. Forty per cent of its income currently comes from outbound to Europe, and it has opened an office in Paris to better serve this segment. For China inbound, the company is focusing on selected visitor groups with better yields instead of low-priced tour groups. Separately, it is also expanding its home-based travel consultant network instead of opening more brick-and-mortar stores.

Liao said several other major travel companies in Taiwan were also intending to be listed, prompting Phoenix to be one step ahead of the competition.

One of them, Lion Travel, told *TTG Asia* that the environment in Taiwan was now ripe for such a move.

Vice president of finance, Sam Huang, said: "Taiwan's travel industry is growing, and will continue to do so in the coming years."



Liao: important to be noticed

Taiwan is seeing a jump in mainland visitors in recent years due to a relaxation of rules, and the government has set a 10-year goal of increasing tourist arrivals from five to 10 million.

Huang said Lion planned to have its IPO by the third quarter of 2013, bypassing GTSM and targeting for a direct listing on TWSE. He singled out retail store expansion, vertical integration and brand enhancement as good reasons to list.

Lion aims to double its retail presence in Taiwan to 100 outlets and expand into China. It will also increase its fleet of tour buses to cater to more cross-strait tourists.

Huang added that Lion would also build its brand, having developed a corporate identity supported by advertising.

# Neighbours benefit from Japan and Thailand crises

By Prudence Lui

**HONG KONG** This year's double disasters in Japan and Thailand – popular among Hong Kong outbound traffic – have resulted in demand being diverted to other regional destinations such as Taiwan and South Korea as well as Singapore and Malaysia.

Sunflower Travel Service managing director Cindy Young said traffic to Taiwan doubled after the Japan tsunami, and this was likely to grow due to the flooding in Bangkok.

"Both Taiwan and Bangkok are similarly priced," she added. Young pointed out that even though the price of South Korea tours had gone up by more than 50 per cent, it remained an in-demand destination.

Likewise, Wing On Travel also saw double-digit growth for traffic headed to South Korea after the Japan calamity.

Hong Thai Travel Services deputy general manager Daniel Chan said South Korea provided a good alternative to Japan due to its ski, hot spring and nature offerings.

He added that travellers had also switched from Thailand to

Singapore and Malaysia as they were tropical destinations too. "People have no choice. For Thailand, only Koh Samui and Phuket are still hot, but they have limited flight access."

For the first nine months, Korea Tourism Organization recorded a 20 per cent increase in Hong Kong visitors, reaching 225,702 visitors. Its spokesman said: "Choice of destinations in the region has decreased (because of the crises). We have also observed some repeat traffic from those who visited (South) Korea more than a decade ago."

However, some like EGL Tours executive director Steve Huen said the surge in Hong Kong arrivals to South Korea could also be attributed to the increased air capacity, with inaugural flights by Air Busan and Jin Air, as well as additional flights by Jeju Air.

He agreed that South Korea benefited from Japan-bound travellers between March and May, but said the situation had changed. "Our traffic (to Japan) recovered to almost 90 per cent (of last year's level) in July/August, and September was even better than last year," he said.



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# Role of buyers, media

THE role of the overseas tour operators and media in influencing travel has resurfaced again as Thailand suffers significant cancellations.

Frustrated Thai inbound players point out that the cancellations are unnecessary, saying buyers have not done their proper research or consulted their groundhandlers, whom they could trust to give a reliable and accurate assessment. After all, which partner worth his salt would recommend groups to come should a place be unsafe?

Yet, overseas tour operators are wielding the ax based on their Foreign Office advisories – which Asian Trails' CEO Luzi Matzig thinks are largely self-serving for governments that issue them – and based on what they see on the news. Yes, the media, in particular, cable TV news channels, are under fire again for airing dramatic images as if “the whole of Bangkok is under water”, as lamented by Minor Group's chairman and CEO, Bill Heinecke.

Both pointed out the following reality:

- There is no problem to operate tours on an almost normal itinerary.

## Sound bites



“When tour operators cancel trips, this has a knock-on effect (of making Thais suffer more) as so many rely on tourism for their livelihoods.”

**Bill Heinecke**  
Chairman/CEO  
The Minor Group, Thailand

- All transfers operate normally, and all hotels except the Sofitel Centara in Ladprao and the Chao Phaya Park are open and fully functional.

- The main airport is Suvarnabhumi and international flights are coming in and out as usual. There is no problem for passengers to transit through Suvarnabhumi to other destinations in Thailand or elsewhere in Asia. The airport, plus roads and trains between the city and the airport, are all functioning normally.

While it is not hard to understand the frustration of the Thai inbound players, they too need to face a hard reality. Fact is, crises have become commonplace. But what is also commonplace now is a tourism destination.

There are many more alternatives for buyers as countries turn to tourism as a cash cow. Thus, when one destination is down, business is simply diverted elsewhere. Just look at how the line-up of destinations has changed for Hong Kong outbound travellers (see page 3), as a result of Japan's earthquake and Thailand's flooding.

Unfortunate? Yes. Fair? Only if indeed it is dangerous to send groups to a destination. In the case of Thailand, it is unfair and is a move that only exacerbates the impact the floods have had on the livelihoods of Thais, many of whom rely on tourism.

In this instance, there is a compelling argument for overseas tour operators to have the moral

obligation to a destination-in-crisis, especially if it's one which they have long milked in good times – such as Thailand, which under normal circumstances is such a darling because it is exotic and cheap.

A moral obligation will force a tour operator to check the facts first, explore all avenues first, rather than taking the easy way out and cancelling.

Otherwise, words, such as these ones from a New York-based tour operating company which cancelled two groups without consulting its local partner in Thailand, simply ring hollow:

*“Just wanted to let you know that our thoughts and prayers are with all of our friends in Thailand, specifically (your) staff and guides and their families and friends.”*

*“We share your pain during this national crisis and trust that with the hard work and determination of the Thai people, once the troubles pass (sic), Thailand can get back on its feet and move forward. We wish all of you the best of luck and think about you during this difficult time.”*

Blah, blah, blah.



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## Adam Tan



Join our mystery man as he tells us why he's had to reconsider his love for traditional 10-course Chinese wedding banquets.

## Hot Deals

Angsana Hangzhou (below) launches introductory rates; Ascott's Citadines Xingqing Palace Xi'an offers discounted opening rates; Renaissance Harbour View Hotel Hong Kong introduces festive meeting packages



## Hot Moves

Interstate China Hotels & Resorts Company appoints Max Ng as senior vice president of development; Landmark Lancaster Hotel Group appoints Albert Cheong as area general manager Thailand

### CORRECTION

In our October 28 issue, we reported in *Asia's biggest bargains* that Global Blue works with over 27,000 retailers, shopping brands and hotels. The figure should have been 270,000.

In November 4's *Hong Kong agents face up to BSP changes, welcome later deadline*, we learnt from an interview with the Agency Programme Joint Council chairman as well as the Travel Industry Council's publication that weekly remittance and reporting frequency will be fully implemented from January 2015. However, it should have been July 2013. It is the average maximum credit period that will see a two-phase implementation (21 days from July 2013 and 15 days from January 2015).

Most commented on [www.ttgasia.com](http://www.ttgasia.com)

## MAS' multiple bombshells rock travel trade partners

Malaysia Airlines' (MAS) abrupt axing of flights to Buenos Aires, Dubai, Cape Town and Johannesburg as part of a cost-cutting exercise has been met with dismay from both local and overseas tour operators.

Jose Granell from Buenos Aires-based Beachcomber Tours & Travel said: “We are a tour operator which has sold for years Malaysia Airlines to Asia. Now we have pax for January and February and the seats are booked and paid...we are worried what will happen to the business if Malaysia Airlines decides to stop flying in the middle of our high season.”

Tom Fan from Malaysia's PNL Travel said: “MAS is having one of the highest fare prices in the market, and yet they are losing money? So further dropping of routes will really save MAS?! When others are expanding and making money, why can't MAS do the same?”

## Support pours in for TTG Asia's call for reinvention

There was a notable wave of enthusiasm following TTG Asia Media Travel Group group editor Raini Hamdi's rallying call for travel consultants to reassess their USPs and to realise the need to sell themselves better in her blog entry titled *Don't sell yourself short*.

Jean-Charles Le Coz, chairman of Bali Hotels Association and general manager, Nikko Bali Resort & Spa, said: “Let's all work on this and make the job of travel experts easier, to keep the human side of our business alive. But remember, in these changing times, only the most astute will survive!”

Meanwhile, Nicki from Malaysia voiced support for the decision to substitute ‘travel agent’ with an updated alternative. “Yeah! Must change!” he said. “Although late...but better than nothing. Hope that national agencies such as MATTA will follow suit.”

## Scepticism for Perak's overseas marketing drive

Some of our readers are doubting whether Perak's attempts to draw overseas visitors through a Visit Perak Year will be successful.

Singapore's Ibnie Tamas said: “I have been participating in all the travel trade fairs held in Singapore, but I have not seen any of the relevant parties promoting Perak for the past three years. I don't think they are up to standard to promote their state to the world...or even to Singaporeans.”

Perak's ygbenor said: “The Visit Perak Year 2012 is just hype. Mere announcement of a Visit Perak Year will not bring the tourists. It should have started 18 months ago to get at least the Singaporeans to come...and lots of promotion, literature, programmes etc to entice the tourists. Unless the authorities can think tourism and act tourism, Perak can forget about being a tourist destination.”



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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 consecutive times for the same award title have been honoured in the Travel Hall of Fame.

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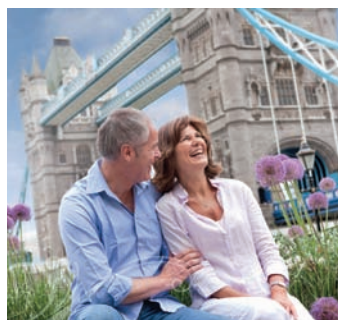
# Trafalgar sells insider's advantage

A new regional office in Singapore aims to grow Asian demand

**SINGAPORE** Trafalgar, which earlier this month established its regional headquarters in Singapore, has introduced a range of products under its new positioning, The Insider, designed to offer travellers 'unique experiences, moments and insights' that they would not be able to discover independently.

Its 2012 programmes have been significantly enhanced, and now feature elements such as Be My Guest dining experiences, where travellers are taken to family-run or unique establishments; Local Experts who provide insights into culture and landscapes; and Hidden Treasures, exposing customers to off-the-beaten-track locations.

These are offered through a range of vacation options – Family Experiences incorporates educational and action-packed activities, First Class is a luxury range of European tours, Cost-Saver delivers up to 30 per cent savings for customers, and the new At Leisure is a 28-itinerary-strong collection of flexible trips for customers who desire more time to explore destinations.



In select locations, those travelling on At Leisure itineraries will be able to enjoy local guided sightseeing in groups no larger than 25 people. The average group size is 40.

Trafalgar's tours are priced between US\$1,200 and US\$3,000, last from five to 32 days, and are categorised as leisurely, comfortable or lively, depending on the duration of stay at specific stops and the total number of destinations visited. Customers can choose from single or multi-destination tours in Europe, North America, Britain, Asia (China, Vietnam and Cambodia), Africa and South America.

With the opening of its Singapore office, Trafalgar intends

to nurture direct relationships with new travel consultants and tour operators in Asia, while strengthening existing ties.

One-day seminars will be held in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines to equip travel professionals with the knowledge required to sell The Insider range. An online training module is also set to roll out globally in December.

Trafalgar's regional director for Asia-Pacific, Nicholas Lim, recommended that consultants focus on selling the At Leisure and Family Experiences products. The former targets individuals "who have never been on a guided tour before, and who are therefore a good new potential market to tap", while the latter will be generally popular with a sizeable number of Asian holidaymakers, he predicted.

A base commission of 10 per cent is offered to all consultants, while outstanding performers will receive up to 15 per cent. Last-minute bookings and deals are available, and early birds receive a 10 per cent discount.

– Linda Haden

## Retailfront

MTR Travel's Hung Hom store is a useful Hong Kong stop, but its service is limited



**PRESENCE** Simplicity is key. The store is neither huge nor grand, but conveniently located. The small kiosk is under a escalator inside the Hung Hom Railway Train Station, attracting passing commuters.

**APPEARANCE** It may have a simple set-up, but space is maximised by having posters mounted onto the wall behind the counter, while the shopfront and side walls have posters and leaflet holders. The open concept enables easy interaction between staff and clients. Employees look neat, donning casual short-sleeved shirts.

**EASE** Service is smooth and efficient, but one has to be patient. Due to its lack of seating area, clients have to stand in line. In front of me was a family who needed help with last-minute hotel bookings upon arrival. The assistant offered me a city map while I was waiting. When I



got to meet her, the advice given was professional, and she stated the pros and cons of planning my day trip to two theme parks. There was no hard sell at all.

However, she could not help with air bookings. Most of the products offered were inbound, such as tours, park and rail tickets, hotel booking and FIT rail/hotel packages for China. This could be because of its limited shop space and waiting area.

**SUGGESTIONS** It would be a good idea for staff to keep an eye on leaflet holders placed outside as all of them were empty. Additional headcount would also help, as there was only one counterstaff, who had to handle walk-in and phone queries. It would also have been better if she had instructed customers to queue up in order to prevent interruptions. – Prudence Lui



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# Online presence of airlines



**Singaporeair.com**  
**1 Do travel consultants use it?**  
The Singapore Airlines (SIA) website is perceived primarily as a source of information for travel professionals. Citystate Travel senior manager Ian Cheah said its staff would “check seat maps, obtain contact details for overseas offices and view customers’ bookings that they made independently for trip-planning purposes.”

**2 How does it compare to other booking channels?**  
Mansha Ashok, manager-leisure and cruise, Ramesh Travel Service, said the GDS was “faster and more user-friendly”, while Alicia Seah, senior vice president, marketing & PR, CTC Travel, said “certain ticket classes, whether for corporate or FIT, are found exclusively on the GDS”.

**3 What’s great about it?**  
A website revamp, rolled out by SIA in May, changed the overall look and usability of the website. Cheah said this resulted in an attractive interface.

**4 What’s bad?**  
Technical faults. A travel consultant who did not want to be named said: “My clients have actually asked for us to book through the GDS on their behalf as the website has become too much of a hassle – credit card details are not captured and the site is just too slow.” – **Linda Haden**



**Garuda-indonesia.com**  
**1 Do travel consultants use it?**  
DealKeren.com travel development director Johanes Chang said he used the website for domestic and international flight bookings, although not frequently.

**2 How does it compare to other booking channels?**  
More complicated than GDS, said Chang. “To make a flight reservation through the airline website is definitely more time-consuming, especially when our customers expect us to provide alternative flight schedules,” he added, explaining that it becomes even more difficult when it involves a variety of airlines. In addition, managing different settlement plans with airlines is another key challenge, he pointed out.

**3 What’s great about it?**  
Chang appreciated the comprehensive range of information, including travel tips.  
**4 What’s bad?**  
“It takes a long time to load the page, the page design is too plain compared with their frequent flyer website, the font is too small, and there’s too much travel industry jargon and too many links and

pages,” said Chang. He added that the search-to-purchase steps could be more user-friendly. He was also surprised that an error notification during a transaction asked consumers to contact their travel consultant, when the passenger was making a direct online reservation with the airline. – **Mimi Hudoyo**



**Philippineairlines.com**  
**1 Do travel consultants use it?**  
The Philippine Airlines (PAL) website is commonly accessed by travel consultants for benchmarking. For instance, Gene Hari-Ong Gan, managing director, Everyday Travel and Tours Corp, said he used it to “compare rates and see their latest specials”.

**2 How does it compare to other booking channels?**  
Vivian P Orlanda of Pentravel Tours said she preferred the GDS for her bookings. “When we sign into Abacus, we are also able to receive memos on the status of their flights. If flights are cancelled on the PAL system, we know right away,” she said.  
**3 What’s great about it?**  
Mainly its promotions, said travel professionals. In particular, its Midnight

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# As flag carriers strengthen their digital shopfronts, what do travel consultants think?

Special, which offers special rates for domestic and international flights between Saturday 7pm and Sunday 7am. The website is also useful for retrieving Mabuhay Miles records and obtaining information on destinations within PAL's network, said Linda Tan, owner and operations manager of JLT Travel & Tours.

**4 What's bad?**  
"We have to pay for ticket bookings by credit card, but passengers need to present the credit card used in the transaction at check-in time," said JLT's Tan. This makes it hard to add on service fees when the customer's credit card has to be used during the time of booking. – **Marianne Carandang**

## Cathaypacific.com

**1 Do travel consultants use it?**  
Blue Sky Travel general manager Angela Ng said she seldom visited the Cathay Pacific Airways (CX) website as she would receive regular updates on discount fares and special offers directly from the airline. "However, I make good use of its seat reservation service, which allows passengers to lock-in their seat 24 or 48 hours prior to departure," she added.

**2 How does it compare to other booking channels?**  
The GDS is an excellent channel that also rewards, said Ng. "It's pointless to book via the CX website as there is no commission. The GDS system is much more comprehensive with a good record system of how many air tickets we sell. Once we hit a certain quota, we garner rewards such as the waiving of the monthly fee for GDS rental."

**3 What's great about it?**  
The ability to secure the best available seat for clients. "It's a value-added service we provide," Ng said.

**4 What's bad?**  
Searching for bookings made. Ng explained that the website requires the air ticket or membership number in order to retrieve booking records. She preferred the GDS, which requires only basic information, such as passenger surnames, to call up a booking. – **Prudence Lui**

## Malaysiaairlines.com

**1 Do travel consultants use it?**  
World Discovery Travel business development manager Joseph Xavier said he turned to the website when certain fares can only be booked online. A ticketing manager who declined to be named said she used the website when passengers request for help to book a ticket on the Internet – but for a fee.

**2 How does it compare to other booking channels?**  
Said Xavier: "I manage corporate travel, so I rely on the GDS and there is little reason for me to use the Malaysia Airlines (MAS) website." The same ticketing manager said: "Whenever MAS has promotions we go in to check. Yet we usually find that these promotional fares are also on the GDS. We use Amadeus."

**3 What's great about it?**  
Both interviewees said the usability of the

website was acceptable. Its graphical user interface is useful, said Xavier.

**4 What's bad?**  
Speed. "The main issue is the waiting time during peak periods when the usage is heavy," said Xavier. – **N. Nithiyananthan**



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\*The following day





## Lodging Brands Deliver Hospitality

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

The lodging industry continues to evolve its digital presence as travelers tap new technology to research properties, book stays and engage with hotels. The need for properties to deliver hospitality 3.0 in a digital age has never been more important as it is today.

Operating without a flag can be a challenge, as on the customer side, brands deliver value in three core areas: ensuring properties are bookable through multiple digital channels, managing traveler reviews and assisting with customer care in real time.

Today, hotels need to think beyond simply having a web presence. Travelers in growing numbers are using smart phones and tablets to research travel, with 16 percent of recently surveyed travelers saying they use their smart phones to book trips, according to a 2011 Amadeus Report.

Having a hotel brand behind a property ensures photos that show well on all devices, and that bookings can be made securely through all devices. Ultimately, this delivers more guests to the hotel – and more revenue.

Hoteliers are primarily focused on managing the day-to-day operations of their properties. Having the backing and support of a brand to monitor and respond to property reviews on sites like TripAdvisor and Facebook ensures owners can focus on their primary goal of delivering outstanding guest care. One bad review can have widespread, negative impacts on future travel, but one positive review can deliver incremental revenue.

Finally, providing customer care in real time can be a mounting task. While most disputes are best resolved between the local operator and a present guest, a brand offers broader – often global – assistance to ensure that guests have alternative channels in the event of a lingering dispute. This keeps travelers loyal not only to the hotel but to the entire brand.

Given a growing popularity of social media sites, an increased use of smart phones and new tablets introduced regularly, hotel owners greatly benefit from a brand's backing to deliver hospitality in a digital age.



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# LONGHAUL TRAVEL



Ecuador tourism members, led by Guzmán (centre), at the recent ITB Asia, their first Asian travel tradeshow

# Hidden jewel Ecuador

Attractions-laden country out to charm travel experts here, says **Gracia Chiang**

Small South American country Ecuador, which has not taken serious steps to court the Asian market until now, is muscling its way into the region, assisted by a marketing budget that has multiplied three-fold.

Speaking to *TTG Asia* at the recent ITB Asia, its first Asian travel tradeshow, Tourism Promotion Secretary Carlos Guzmán said the country's goal was to make tourism revenue the top contributor to its economy, overtaking income from oil.

Tourism is currently in fourth place.

Armed with a new country brand – *Ecuador Love Life* – that represents the locals' affection for their way of life and their warm hospitality, the ministry will begin hosting fam trips from Asia

next year, as well as attend several tradeshow in China, South Korea and Japan, aside from coming to ITB Asia again.

It is also negotiating with airlines for joint advertising campaigns.

Observing a gradual increase from Asia-Pacific markets, which accounted for slightly over one per cent of total arrivals in 2000 compared to between three and five per cent last year, Guzmán explained that Ecuador shared close links with the region such as its collaboration with Singapore in the areas of commerce and biotechnology.

Ecuador received one million visitor arrivals in 2010, and Australia and China are its largest Australasian markets. Guzmán said the plan was to grow Aus-

tralian arrivals to between five and 10 per cent of total arrivals within five years. It is also looking to increase numbers from Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea and Japan.

"We want to enter new markets, but also offer a high quality of experience to visitors at the same time," he added.

Guzmán explained that the country had the world's densest biodiversity per square metre, citing the Amazonian jungle, snow peaks of the Andes, the UNESCO World Heritage Site Galápagos Islands and the Pacific Coast as highlights.

Ecuador is being positioned as a destination for ecotourism and adventure travellers, but also for the average tourist. Said Guzmán: "Ecuador is an excellent

starting point as we are the sum of South American experiences."

However, he emphasised that this "conscious tourism" growth should not be at the expense of local cultures and the environment, adding the Ecuador government was probably the only one in the world that included the "rights of the earth" in its constitution. In that respect, guidelines had been issued to tour operators, he said.

Infrastructure-wise, Guzmán said the government had a five-year plan to develop the international airport in the coastal city of Manta as a South American hub. There are currently more than 19 airports in Ecuador, five of them international.

"We have a good product, but we are a hidden jewel," he added.

## LAN a deal to South America

CHILE-based LAN Airlines, which flies into and within South America, wants to grow its reach in South-east Asia, having established a GSA in Singapore in early 2010.

It is seeking partnerships with travel professionals and ticketing agents in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand, who will be supported by the Singapore-based GSA.

Juan Carlos Selman, senior sales manager-Asia of LAN, said: "These partnerships mean that agents in those markets will be able to access LAN fares, products, and sales and marketing support."

LAN has debuted a LAN Pack programme in Singapore, which

consolidates travellers from various travel companies and arranges for a combined departure. As of October 18, 15 companies in Singapore were interested.

"LAN Pack is specially developed for markets that find it hard to get enough (leisure) volume to South America," explained Selman, who added that traffic from Singapore mostly comprised business travellers involved in the thriving marine industry in South America.

The airline will help travel professionals on the programme negotiate for better rates with suppliers. It will also provide marketing tools.

Selman expects the programme to garner enough num-



bers for a group departure in April.

CTC Travel Private Collection vice president, Dennis Soon, said: "LAN Pack is a good tool, especially when we lack sufficient volume for a group departure to South America. It is difficult to sell the destination to Singaporeans. Our affluent customers who regard personal safety as a top priority won't consider South America, while incentive clients find the flight distance

too daunting. It takes two days to fly to, and another day to fly back. Companies cannot afford to take so many days off work for an incentive trip."

Cuseko Travel representative Chong Hwee Min said more travellers were gaining an understanding of the destination. The company will bring a 20-pax high-end leisure group from Malaysia to nine destinations in Central America next February.

– Karen Yue

Test drive

# A taste of Belgium



**Sirima Eamtako** marvels at Belgium's European charm as Thai Airways International celebrates its new Bangkok-Brussels route

**WHY** Hergé's *Adventures of Tintin* and the beautiful paintings of Peter Paul Rubens and Jan van Eyck spring to my mind when anyone mentions Belgium. They are followed by beers – hundreds of them – and the place where the fate of the European Union's economy is decided.

I never had the urge to explore Belgium until I watched *In Bruges*, a dark comedy starring Colin Farrell and Ralph Fiennes.

Despite the film's violence and its bitter black humour, the town's medieval buildings were so impressive and so beautiful it made me want to be 'in Bruges'.

**WHAT** The starting point of any visit to Belgium is Brussels and the classic guided tour of the key attractions and landmarks.

I was blown away by the stunning architecture of the Grand Place, described by French poet Victor Hugo as the most beautiful square in Europe. I was also amused by a story of how a witch turned a wicked boy into the famous Manneken-Pis – a statue of a small naked urinating boy.

But there is more to see and experience, including the flea market in Place du Jeu de Balle and 80 museums that cover subjects from fine arts to comics.

Bruges and Ghent are just beautiful. In Bruges, I felt as if I had slipped back to medieval times, thanks to the romantic canals, whitewashed house fronts, gilded architecture and rows of chocolate and lace shops.

Ghent is like a set for a fairytale. It boasts Gothic and Flemish Renaissance architecture and the late Gothic St Baafskathedraal built in the Middle Ages.

The highlight in Ghent was the Van Eyck brothers' altarpiece at St Bavo's Cathedral. This set the mood for a visit to the Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp and its stunning paintings by Rubens.



The Grand Place in Brussels

Belgians are famous for cooking and brewing. There are more than 500 varieties of beer – of which I only tasted a dozen, and myriads of shops and restaurants selling chocolates, waffles and mussels with fries.

A good way to see Bruges and Ghent in all their glory is to take a guided boat tour.

**HOW** Thai Airways International (THAI) launched its newest and 72<sup>nd</sup> destination – Brussels – on November 17, becoming the first carrier in South-east Asia to

operate a direct flight between Thailand and Belgium.

It has promotional airfares under the "I Fly THAI to Brussels" campaign with prices from 35,880 baht (US\$1,165) for a roundtrip Bangkok-Brussels-Bangkok and 42,015 baht for a roundtrip from Bangkok to Brussels (returning via any other THAI destination in Europe to Bangkok) until February 29, 2012.

**VERDICT** Belgium has more to offer than the Grand Place and

**Name** THAI's Bangkok-Brussels service

**Frequency** Three times a week

**Aircraft** Boeing 777-200ER, 30 Royal Silk class seats, 262 economy class seats

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Manneken-Pis. Brussels, Bruges, Ghent and Antwerp offer a medley of languages, cultures and traditions that need more than just one day to explore.

## Fitur highlights its profile as a business forum

The fair will strengthen its initiatives aimed at opening up new trade opportunities for participants



**F**ITUR (Feria Internacional de Turismo), the International Tourism Trade Fair, which will take place from 18 to 22 January 2012, aims to serve now more than ever as an effective tool for the tourism industry. With this objective in mind, fair organisers have strengthened initiatives aimed at promoting meetings between professionals, effectively opening up new business opportunities. Among these strengthened initiatives is the second edition of the FITUR Workshop, where professionals invited to the fair through the Foreign Buyers Programme can hold B2B meetings with fair exhibitors. This year, in order to cater even more closely to the interests of FITUR participants, exhibitors choose the buyers who are invited to the fair. This guarantees a high degree of interest in the corresponding interviews and, in turn, the potential for business at these meetings.

B2B interviews are also an essential tool in the INVESTOUR Africa initiative, which will be staging its third edition in 2012. During this initiative, a series of pre-arranged interviews based on participants' business profiles and preferences will be organised between Spanish entrepreneurs and top representatives from both public and private sectors of the African tourism industry. After the excellent results achieved with this initiative throughout Africa's tourism industry, INVESTOUR America will be inaugurated as a new feature at this year's edition of INVESTOUR Africa. This new scheme will place representatives of tourist initiatives and projects on the American Continent in contact with potential partners, in particular exhibitors from the 166 destinations and regions taking part at the fair.

FITUR 2012 will also host the staging of a Brokerage Event, which aims to create new opportunities to find trade and technology partners throughout Europe. This would facilitate the exchange of experiences with companies from the international market, opening up new opportunities for marketing products, services and technologies linked to the field of tourism.

### Focusing on areas of greatest potential

This year, FITUR will highlight one of the business segments of greatest potential within the market: LGBT. Following the excellent results achieved at the first edition, the fair aims to raise the profile of this segment, boosting the participation of companies and destinations that specialise in the LGBT segment. The fair will also support conferences aimed at professionals interested in reaching this sector of society.

The fair will also continue to strengthen and promote sustainability in tourist establishments. FITUR GREEN, which is organised by the fair in conjunction with the WTO, will stage its third edition in 2012, introducing professionals to latest-generation solutions and to companies that are able to help set up more eco-friendly tourism models. In order to highlight the important role that technology plays when it comes to achieving this goal, this edition of FITUR GREEN will feature the participation of the Hotel Industry Technological Institute (ITH), a body that will contribute all of its experience within the field to boost the sustainability of the tourist industry.



The National Congress on the Management of Travel Companies, an event organised by the Iberian Association of Travel Company Managers (IBTA), will also be staged at FITUR for the second consecutive year. By introducing the attending travel managers, all of whom have high professional profiles and decision-making power, to the products and services exhibited at FITUR, this Congress will provide new trading opportunities for fair participants.

In short, in its endeavour to bring the leading players within the tourist industry together, FITUR seeks to provide a boost for the travel sector while ensuring that professionals gain maximum benefits from their attendance at the fair.

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All work and no play at TravelRave 2011?  
On the contrary, delegates had their fun at Rave On!  
TravelRave Party by the Bay at the mega travel and tourism festival. With a breathtaking view of Singapore's Marina Bay skyline as a backdrop, delegates let their hair down while mingling and exchanging views with other delegates and industry experts at One on the Bund. Live performances by local act Jack & Rai added zest to the whole party, while a fashion show by One Design at Clifford Pier wowed the delegates.

**Rave on, we say!**

▼ A lovely toast from the hosts of the evening, Aw Kah Peng (third from right) and Melissa Ow (second from left) from Singapore Tourism Board, joined by the team from TTG Asia Media (from left) Marisa Chen, Darren Ng and Katherine Ng.



# RAVE ON! TravelRave PARTY

by the bay

19 October 2011 | One on the Bund



Susanah Toh (left) and Sylvia Huang, from Singapore Tourism Board, glam it up for the camera.



Richard Ireland from terrapinn (left) and Adeline Lim from Singapore Tourism Board pose for a toast.



Valerie Badilla from Scarlet (left), shares a friendly hug with Andrew Stephen from TransAsia Airways.



Cheers to Singapore! Steven Howard from Asia Travel Tips (left) with Stephen Morton from e Global Travel Media.



From left: Michael Chow, Katherine Ng and Marisa Chen (second right) from TTG Asia Media, Michael Sengol and Janice Azupardo from Meritus Hotel & Resorts, and Rodney Yew from Discover Holidays (Asia).



From left: Kunthea Eng from Euro-Khmer Voyages, Chan Onchanh from Book Lah, Geraldine Lim from Wego, Stephen Morton from Global Travel Media, Dean Wicky from Wego, Chartchai Pothong, and Peter C K Tay from 11- Infotech System Co. Ltd, and Ben Cheok from Don Chan Palace pose for a shot with the iconic Marina Bay Sands..



◀ Maria Rios (left) and Sir Richard Rowley Bt. (right) from Mansley Travel Apartments join Thomas Wong from The Traveller to smile for the camera.



From left: Samuel Manalo Jr. and Kelvin Tan from Royal Caribbean Cruises, Michael Chow from TTG Asia Media, Edward Yap from Kingfisher Airlines, Katherine Ng from TTG Asia Media, and Atul Bhatara from Kingfisher Airlines.



From left: Floyd Cowan from Asian Journeys, Raini Hamdi from TTG Asia Media, Michael Sengol from Meritus Hotel & Resorts, Prabhat Verma and Vikram Trivedi (far right) from SITA and Andreas V. Koch from Riverview Hotel Singapore.



◀ Beautiful smiles for the camera from Joycelyn Dowdall (left) and Mark Dowdall from Aviation Labour Group.



◀ Paul Er from Marriott (second from left), shares a drink with the lovely ladies of Tour East: (from left) Kathryn Loh, Karin Lee, ShiYi Tay and Diana Liu.

Asian fashion at its eclectic best, presented by Calvin Yeung from One Design, showcased new perspectives on the traditional Chinese qipao. >



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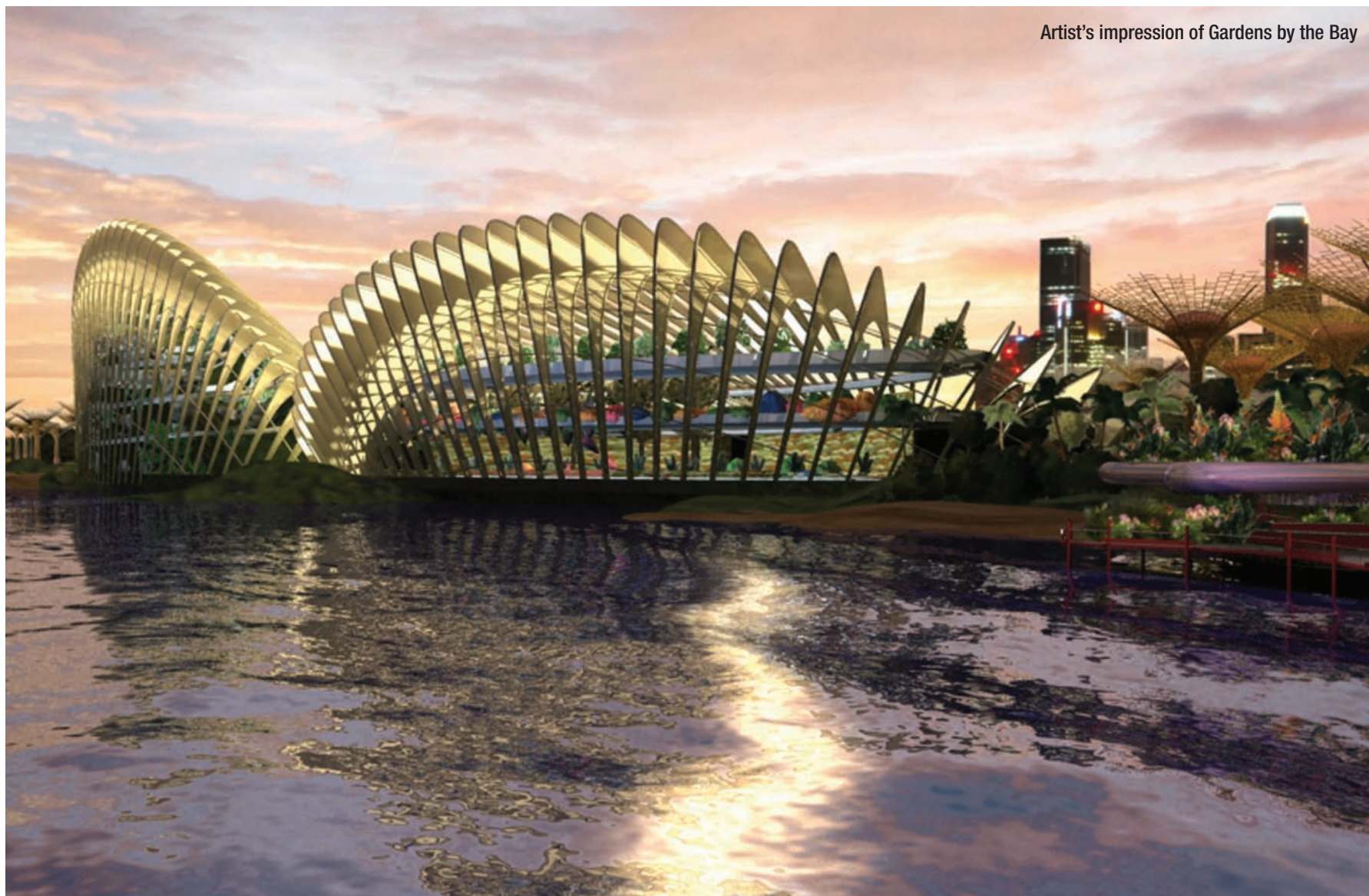
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**ONE ON THE BUND**



Artist's impression of Gardens by the Bay

Courtesy of Singapore Tourism Board

# Only way is up for 2012

New attractions and more routes should lead to an influx of arrivals, writes **Linda Haden**

**Arrivals** Some 8.8 million tourists arrived in Singapore between January and August, a 15.5 per cent increase on the same period last year. Indonesia was once again the top source market, followed by China, Malaysia, Australia and India. Among the top five markets, China posted the biggest increase, growing by 38.8 per cent over the same period in 2010.

According to a spokesperson for the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), the nation is well on its way to meet the target of S\$30 billion (US\$23.3 million) in tourist receipts and arrivals of 17 million by 2015.

**NTO** STB revealed in an e-mail statement to *TTG Asia* that the YourSingapore destination branding would be used in 2012.

When asked about upcoming marketing plans, STB stated it strived to “create value for our visitors by providing innovative solutions that will enhance their Singapore experience”.

Moving ahead, STB intends to “work with our industry to enhance the delivery of innovative products and experiences to address the needs of our visitors”.

**Access** Between January and September 2011, passenger movements at Singapore Changi Airport grew by 11.3 per cent to 34.2 million. As at October 1, Changi is served by more than 100 airlines operating over 5,900 weekly flights to 210 cities.

A flurry of routes launched in the first few weeks of the fourth quarter. IndiGo started its maiden Singapore-New Delhi route – becoming the first low-cost airline to do so. It also added a Singapore-Mumbai flight. Tiger Airways launched Cebu flights and Hainan Airlines’ second Singapore route began operating to Haikou. Jetstar Asia started flying to its fifth mainland China destination with thrice-weekly flights to Ningbo. SilkAir became the second airline after Bangkok Airways to ply the Singapore-Koh Samui route and linked Changsha to Changi for the first time.

By end-2011, Changi will also be connected to the Russian Far East for the first time thanks to Vladivostok Air.

Last month, Lufthansa joined Singapore Airlines (SIA) and Qantas Airways in operating A380 aircraft from Changi for its Singapore-Frankfurt service. With the addition of Lufthansa,



“Rising costs and a shortage of qualified manpower are the main challenges the travel trade will face in 2012.”

**Yvonne Low**  
Executive director  
The Traveller DMC

Changi is touted to be the world’s busiest multi-carrier A380 hub.

Plans are also afoot at SIA to deploy Airbus A380s on its daily Singapore to Frankfurt and New York flights come January 15. It will ground its aging B747-400 fleet. As well, SIA’s budget carrier Scoot is set to take-off in mid-2012.

Meanwhile, Royal Caribbean International’s 3,840-pax cruise liner, *Voyager of the Seas*, will make its inaugural sailing to Singapore in May 2012. It will dock at the new International Cruise Terminal, which is set to open by end-2011.

**Hotels** Hotel rates continue to climb. As of August, according to STB, average room rate (ARR) stood at S\$241.40 (US\$188), a rise of 5.8 per cent since January and 7.4 per cent over the same month in 2010. Average occupancy rate hit 85 per cent in August, after reaching a high of 93 per cent in July.

“We anticipate ARR to increase by five to 10 per cent in 2012,” said Jonas Ogren, area director-Asia, STR Global.

More than 2,000 rooms will be added to the supply in 2012, upping the number to close to

41,000 by year-end, as outlined by Horwath HTL. Days Inn, W Hotel and Ramada will be making their first foray into Singapore next year. “I see no danger of a room oversupply in 2012,” said Ogren.

Mid-market and upscale hotels will be the main beneficiaries of the expected influx as Singapore adds attractions and events, said Robert McIntosh, executive director at CBRE Hotels.

**Products** A host of new attractions will be ready by 2012. Resorts World Sentosa’s Maritime Experiential Museum & Aquarium opened in October and its Marine Life Park will open by the end of the year. Chinatown will also get its own information hub in December, which is said to be an attraction in itself. Three new walking tours for the area have also been developed.

The first phase of Gardens by the Bay is poised to welcome visitors in June 2012, while River Safari, branded the world’s first river-themed wildlife park, will open in the third quarter.

For MICE, Singapore EXPO is upgrading its infrastructure and is due to open a new meetings facility, MAX Atria, in early 2012.

# SANDSATIONAL EVENING

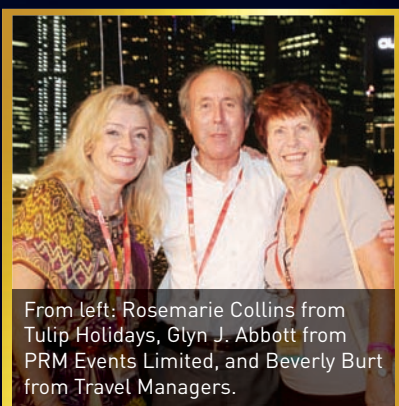
WITH MARINA BAY SANDS

20.10.2011  
Avalon

It was an evening of glamour with Marina Bay Sands at Avalon, one of Singapore's newest and most exclusive clubs, where ITB Asia delegates showed how they could party as hard as they could work. With world-renowned deejays and dancers to entertain the delegates, the event was nothing short of fantastic. Throughout the party, delegates were able to network and share ideas with other trade professionals – all while having a Sandsational time!



The rocking hosts of the party: Marina Bay Sands, Avalon, and TTG Asia Media.



From left: Rosemarie Collins from Tulip Holidays, Glyn J. Abbott from PRM Events Limited, and Beverly Burt from Travel Managers.



From left: Anthony Lim from Anthony Tours and Tedjo Iskandar from Destination Networking.



From left: Ivy Yeo and Jamie O'Brien from Asia Escape, Ailynn Seah and Kenneth Leong from Marina Bay Sands, Manson Adams from Asia Escape, and Nyoman Astama from Bali Niksoma.



Gianna Brunet from Communications and Training (left), and Eva Cheong from Seri Pacific Hotel.



Elzena Ibrahim (left) and Val Chua (right) from Marina Bay Sands, and Stefan Christensen from Destination Asien.



From left: Michael Chow from TTG Asia Media, Judy Lum from Tour East, and Jeffrey Ong from Oasia.



From left: Katherine Ng from TTG Asia Media, Finn Gerlach from KAS, Evan Lewis from Accor, and Thibault Paquin from iVenture.



Ooi Peng Ee (far left), Raini Hamdi (second left) and Darren Ng (far right) from TTG Asia Media, and Kitty Wong from K&A International.



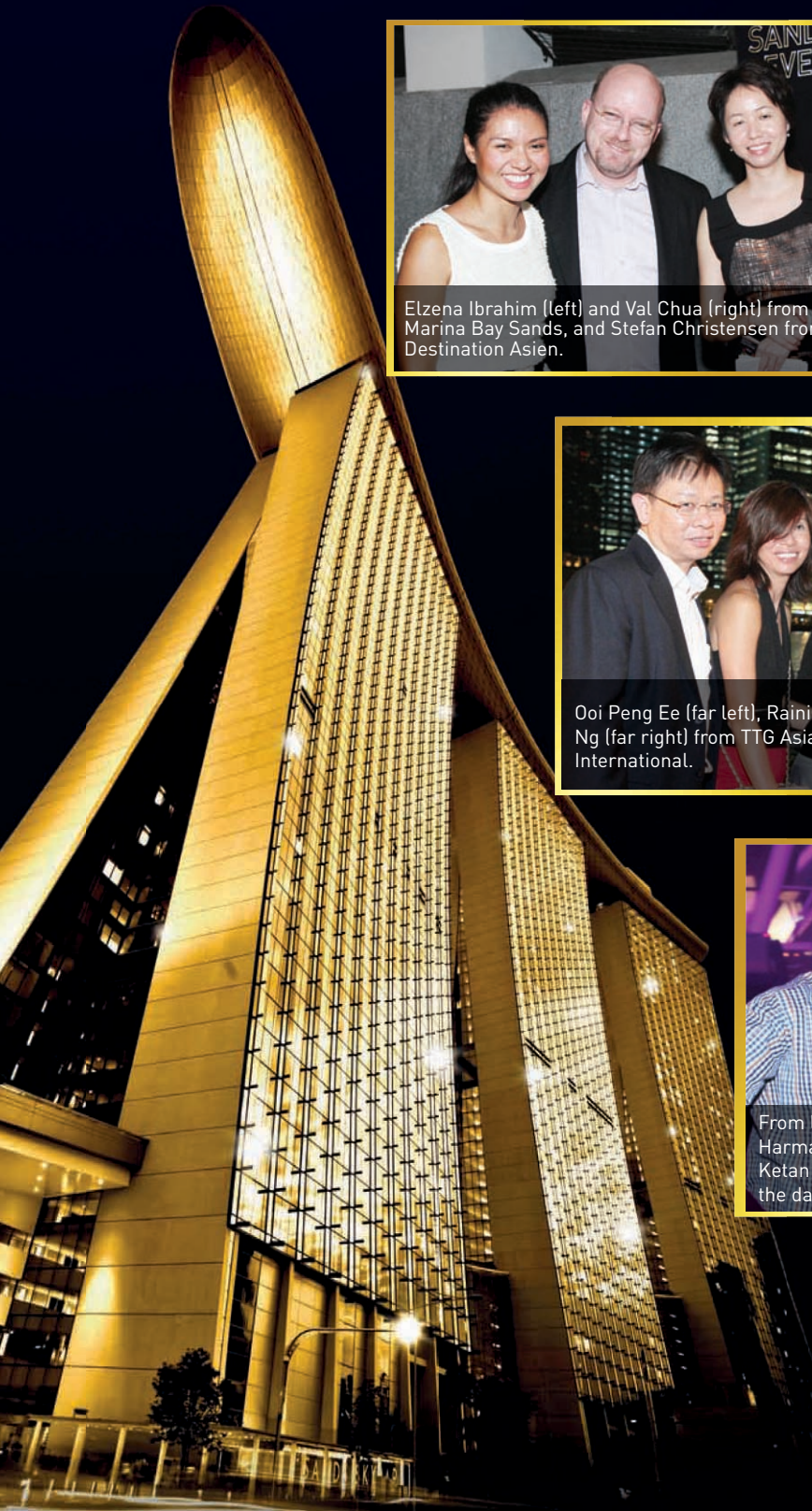
From left: Dato Gan Eng Kwong from PYO Travel, Alex Chan from Hong Thai Travel Services, Sandeep Sinha from Blue Yonder Holidays, Hazel Leow from Nirwana Gardens, and Helen Goh from Vacation Singapore Asia.



From left: Ashwani K. Gupta from Dove Travels, Harmandeep Singh Anand from Jagsons Travel, and Ketan Thakkar from Dove Travels partying it out on the dance floor.



From left: Marc Armengol from Hotusa Hotels, Hugo Gonzalez from Goico Travel, and José María Sánchez Morente from Viatges Cosma Tour.



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MARINA BAY Sands SINGAPORE



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# No more bargain deals for MICE

Even the predicted hotel building boom will not peg back hotel prices for 2012, reports **Linda Haden**

MICE organisers and inbound operators in Singapore are still haggling with hoteliers over escalating room rates, a wearisome issue for some as Singapore's economic momentum slows.

Singapore hotels are now the second most expensive in Asia in terms of average daily room (ADR) rate. In the 12 months to July, as outlined by CBRE Hotels, the ADR in Singapore hit US\$228, just below the top contender, Hong Kong, which registered an ADR of US\$231.

"Generally, the Singapore hotel market is still doing well. Occupancy rates are still up and room rates are still on the rise," stated Robert McIntosh, executive director-Asia-Pacific, CBRE Hotels. He projected that even with a predicted 10 per cent increase in room supply into Singapore between this year and 2013, rates will not fall.

Occupancy rates have also climbed, giving hoteliers ample room to manoeuvre rates to obtain higher yields. In the 12 months to July, as claimed by

CBRE pointer

# 228

City's ADR in US\$, the second highest in Asia

CBRE Hotels, occupancy rates in Singapore rose from 83.9 to 85.3 per cent. Revenue per available room (RevPAR) grew by 16 per cent in the 12 months to July to US\$242, the third largest jump within Asia.

Owing to the bullish room rate and occupancy figures, hoteliers have remained optimistic in spite of the ongoing uncertainty in global financial markets in both Europe and the US and the looming threat of the contagion spreading to the Far East.

"Presently, we are still looking at increasing hotel rates in 2012 as demand continues to remain high. Although we can expect demand to slow compared to previous years, I believe that the industry as a whole will focus on building and sustaining rates as operating costs continue to increase, particularly payroll and utilities," said Aiden McAuley, managing director, Fairmont Singapore & Swissôtel The Stamford, and regional vice president, Asia-Pacific, Swissôtel Hotels & Resorts.

Rosalind Ng, managing director (Asia), IIR Exhibitions, and president of the Singapore Association of Convention and Exhibition Organisers and Suppliers, said the relatively high room rates had stopped some from picking Singapore.

"Yields for event managers are getting smaller and it has definitely become a game of the survival of the fittest," she said. Nonetheless, she added that Singapore's service standards were second to none and that hotel-

iers had to leverage on this advantage.

Inevitably, it has become difficult for inbound operators to ensure that their clients receive good value for money. "It has not been possible to embark on any promotional campaigns to drum up arrivals as the hotels no longer see the need for it," lamented Judy Lum, senior vice president of sales and marketing, Tour East.

At the same time, inbound professionals in Singapore have experienced cuts to room allocations as their bargaining power when negotiating room rates weakens. "Gone are the days when we could strike a bargain with hotels, resting assured that rooms will be given to us when required. We are getting a bad deal and are losing out a fair bit – rates can change at the umpteenth minute. Our margins have eroded and our takings have become slimmer," said Priscilla Khoo, manager-leisure, World

Express. She added that hotels were now inclined to offer better rates to online travel companies.

Fortunately, the rising room rates have not lead to cancellations among the inbound operators *TTG Asia* spoke to. However, members of the trade have adopted various measures to keep costs down.



McAuley: rate rises in 2012

Bonvo Travel's general manager Andy Michaels Lim said: "We promote hotels that we have good relationships with, as they offer us more competitive rates.

Moreover, we are also upfront and transparent about which hotels we have strong ties with."

Isabella Hon, marketing manager, City DMC, said: "Our clients have not cancelled any event directly due to the high rates. Instead, most opt to reduce the number of nights spent in Singapore while some decide to switch to lower hotel categories, for instance, choosing a four-star hotel in place of a five-star."

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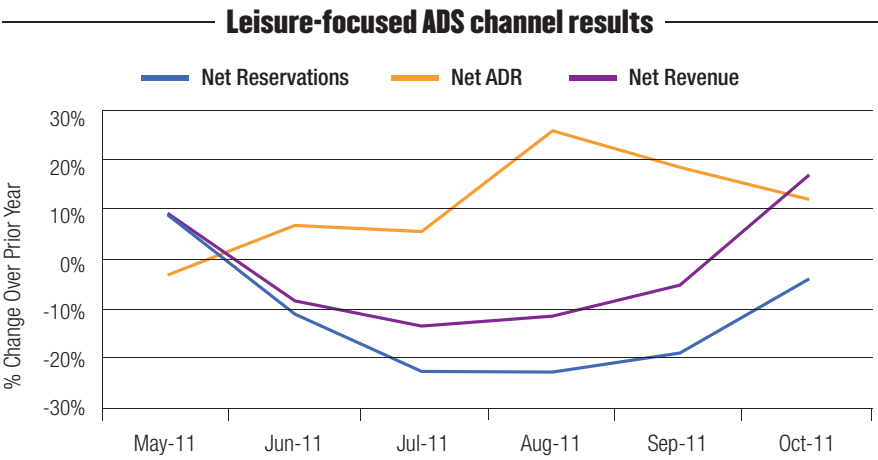
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# Climbing the ladder of growth



	Oct-11	Oct-10	% change
Net average length of stay (nights)	2.70	2.48	9.2
Net average booking lead time (days)	41.88	43.48	-3.7

Data represents bookings from the leisure-focused alternative distribution system (ADS) channel which consists of purely Internet bookings. This includes non-GDS online third-party channels or online travel agents primarily used by consumers. The data is stated on a date of booking basis and a constant exchange rate is used for calculations in order to eliminate currency exchange rate fluctuations.

Singapore experienced a surge of visitors in 2010 over 2009, and continued to register great year-over-year gains into 2011. Booking volume, however, was hindered by the Japanese earthquake and tsunami crisis in March, as seen above.

This has improved over recent months, as reservations have been recorded as well on their way back to positive growth over

last year. One reason Singapore is faring well amid debt issues in Europe and the US is because most of its visitors originate from the Asia-Pacific region, where economies have been more stable. Singapore's leisure sector also garners its share of longhaul bookings from business travellers choosing to leverage company-paid airfare by adding on a vacation segment.

The average daily rate (ADR) of hotels in Singapore is a strong driver of its tourism performance. ADR in Singapore has generally maintained double-digit growth over last year as a result of both high business and leisure demand. Rising Asian affluence, easier and greater air connectivity with cities across Asia, Singapore's shopping and entertainment draws, and status as a leading meeting and conference destination, all make for continued demand and rate growth.

The average length of stay (LOS) for leisure trips made to Singapore remains higher than the global average, and unlike the global trend, is still showing growth over last year. Leisure trips lasted an average of 2.7 nights in October versus the global leisure average of 1.97. Booking lead time for trips to Singapore, while approximately the same as booking lead time last year, is still significantly longer than the global average. Singapore's trips were booked an average of 41.88 days ahead of travel in October, versus the global average of 16.85 days.

These results speak of two key aspects of leisure travel: consumer confidence and consumer behaviour. Singapore's long average booking lead time indicates a strong comfort level to plan and set aside money for travel to the city, stemming from the region's more stable economic environment. At the same time, trips that are moderate or short in length are popular

not only from a cost standpoint, but can be made frequently by today's travellers with increasingly busy schedules.

Travel to Singapore seems to have a bright future. Recent openings of integrated resorts – virtual one-stop facilities encompassing hotels, casinos and other entertainment – hold great appeal to tourists. Promotions and improved product offerings by low-cost regional air carriers add to consumers' interest in taking more frequent, short-distance getaways. The country's tourism board also continues to play an active role in attracting arrivals, touting its clean and green environment, high-quality medical services, meeting venues, events and attractions.

It comes as no surprise that industry reports expect Singapore to be a top market worldwide for travel performance in 2012 with regard to combined travel demand and rate growth over 2011. Yes, a bright future indeed.

*In this tie-up with TTG Asia, Pegasus Solutions provides an up-close look at destination-specific hotel performance. Data and analysis is based on over four billion monthly transactions processed through Pegasus' hotel switch technology. Besides tracking leisure-focused ADS channel results, Pegasus also looks at transactions made through the business-focused GDS channel. For regional trends, visit [www.pegas.com/thepegasusview](http://www.pegas.com/thepegasusview).*

## Silver spoon

# 83 on Club Street

 This new bar-cum-dining concept promises creative bites in eclectic surroundings, says **Linda Haden**

**MENU** The food is distinctly French but with a contemporary twist. There is a sophisticated selection of cold and hot bar bites, sharing platters and delectable desserts.

Based on the manager's recommendations, I ordered three dishes – 83's take on escargot, drunken snail croquettes; codfish beignet served with spicy sauce *rougaille*; and Cajun-crusted tuna fillet.

I first sampled the drunken snail croquettes, which were served piping hot from the deep fryer. They were crisp, and surprisingly, not that oily. Butter, infused with a hint of garlic, oozed out as I took bites out of the breadcrumb-covered croquettes.

The tomato-based *rougaille* was the perfect complement to the codfish beignet, which was essentially battered and deep-fried codfish. And a silky Béarnaise sauce with crushed peanuts accompanied the fresh, seared tuna fillet.

I ended the meal with a smooth and bittersweet chocolate mousse, one of the most luscious desserts I've had in a while.

83 has an extensive cocktail list, as well as a good selection of wines, spirits and Swiss beers to keep tipplers happy.

**AMBIENCE** Veteran restaurateur Olivier Bendel's third venture, 83, is an edgy assimilation of haute dining, progressive sounds and gritty modern art.

Copper walls, Georgian paneling and leather Victorian chairs combine with neon-coloured art displays to give the dining space a unique so-called 'Jules Verne on acid' setting. The urban artwork on show, created by Singapore-based artists, is changed every six to eight weeks.

Late Wednesday through Saturday evenings, DJs spin a collection of house, electronic and bass selections.

**SERVICE** Highly attentive staff who ensure that patrons have an enjoyable, hassle-free evening out. However, the outlet does not take reservations.

83, which has a maximum capacity of 150 pax, is available for private rental from Mondays to Thursdays for corporate meetings or events. All packages are customised.



Photos courtesy of Ale Consulting on behalf of 83 on Club Street

**Name** 83 on Club Street  
**No. of seats** 48  
**Opening hours** Monday to Thursday, 12:00 to midnight; Friday, 12:00 to 02:00; Saturday, 18:00 to 02:00; closed on Sundays  
**Contact details**  
Tel: (65) 6220-4083  
[www.83clubstreet.com](http://www.83clubstreet.com)  
**Verdict**    must recommend to clients  
 good  
 recommend @ your own risk

**PRICING** A la carte items range from S\$6 (US\$5) to S\$46. Daily happy hours start from 15:00 all the way to 20:00.



## Checking in



Photos courtesy of Rendezvous Hotel Singapore

## Rendezvous Hotel Singapore



A top-to-toe makeover has given the downtown property a refreshing design update, says  
**Ameé Enriquez**

**LOCATION** Rendezvous Hotel Singapore embodies the 'location, location, location' mantra. On 9 Bras Basah Road, it is merely a few minutes from almost everywhere that matters.

The Bras Basah Circle Line station is literally across the street. Buses and taxis are plentiful, and there is ongoing construction on another MRT line scheduled for completion in a few years adjacent to the hotel. However, alighting from a taxi may cause some confusion because of the traffic re-routing.

Because the hotel is in the centre of activity, those checking in are spoiled for choice when it comes to what to do. Museums? The National Museum and Singapore Art Museum are just blocks away. Shopping? You don't necessarily have to go to Orchard – but minutes away if you must – as there are also malls in the area.

**ROOMS** The refurbished guestrooms are tastefully done in brown, white and beige. Warner Wong Design | WOW Architects and WOW D-Lab also succeeded in giving the driveway, lobby and interiors a calm and serene feel, while the revamped Straits Ballroom now features new flooring, custom motif wall panels and crystal chandeliers.

The S\$25 million (US\$19.5 million) work that started in February is slated for

completion before year-end.

I was booked in a Premier room on the sixth floor, and this was definitely one with a view. I could see the dome of the National Museum from my spacious bathroom, which had a nice tub and a separate shower stall. The bed was so comfortable, I didn't want to leave it when I settled in for the night.

The only downside? Limited TV channels and no Wi-Fi Internet, which I understand will be available in all rooms and public areas by January 2012.

**F&B** This month, the hotel is set to open the botanical-themed Rendezvous Gallery, a new dining concept with restaurants and a cafe. The Straits Cafe continues to offer a selection of local favourites on its buffet menu, including the popular *laksa* and durian desserts. I also sampled a high tea set at the Palong Bar, where I enjoyed savouring its miniature sandwiches, cakes and pastries.

**SERVICE** Generally efficient.

**VERDICT** A good option, especially if you are looking for a tastefully-designed hotel in a convenient location.

**Name** Rendezvous Hotel Singapore

**No. of rooms** 298 rooms and suites

**Rate** From S\$240++ (US\$190) per night for a superior room

**Contact details**

Tel: (65) 6335-1880

Email: [reservations@rendezvous.com.sg](mailto:reservations@rendezvous.com.sg)

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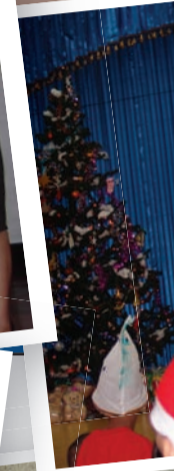
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# BEST WESTERN IS HELPING MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE

Playing an active role in the many and diverse societies and communities in which its hotels are a part and helping to lead the way forward to a greener world environment are important issues at Best Western International. Through its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs 'Best Western for a Better World' and 'Best Western for a Greener World' the hotel company is doing its part in making the world a better place.



## BEST WESTERN FOR A BETTER WORLD

Best Western works closely with leading global relief organization 'World Vision' to help children in need. Best Western properties support children living in poverty through regular donations which help poor communities through providing access to basics like food, consumable water, health care, education and economic development.

## THAILAND'S WORST FLOODS IN 50 YEARS

In the attempt to help and relieve the effects from the current flooding situation in Thailand, Best Western International has prepared and donated survival kits to the victims in the affected areas where BEST WESTERN PLUS Serenity Hua Hin has also launched a program called "Together for the Flooded" in order to raise funds and supplies for those residing in Lopburi Province, which is one of the severely affected areas, to help those that are now lack of living necessities.

The hotel has also contributed all donations from the staffs and guests to Thai PBS, TV Station in Bangkok and make sure that all donations are handled with care and properly delivered to those who really need them.

## HUMANITARIAN AID MISSION FOR AREAS AFFECTED BY NATURAL DISASTERS...

Best Western International provides humanitarian aid when natural disasters strike, in the form of financial donations and much-needed goods and relief items.

## PHUKET'S MANGROVE PLANTERS

Playing their part for a healthy environment, staff from BEST WESTERN Allamanda Laguna Phuket helped make up a Laguna Phuket team that planted 2,800 mangrove saplings at Baan Bangrong on Phuket. The annual tree planting event aims to raise awareness of global warming and help build greener communities.



## BEST WESTERN FOR A GREENER WORLD

As of 2011 Best Western made it mandatory for all member hotels to have in place ‘green practices’ programs and policies consisting of (at a minimum):

1. A recycling program
2. An energy conservation program
3. A water conservation program
4. A local conservation program.

As Best Western hotels and resorts are encouraged to ‘go green’, so are Best Western’s corporate offices through reducing, reusing and recycling policies.

Best Western International has launched the project “Growing a Greener World” in cooperation with ‘Volunteer Spirit Organization’ since April 2010, and again in 2011 under the campaign ‘Best Western Grows Mangrove Forest’, organized in conjunction with Mangrovestation 6. Staff from its Bangkok Head Office and representatives of member hotels has embarked on an environmental mission to plant mangrove trees at a mangrove forestation. In doing so, Best Western is highlighting the importance of these trees both to the ecological system and local communities.

Among other CSR projects are “Light for the Blind” campaign in association with Thailand’s Foundation for the Blind under the Patronage of HM the Queen, “Bringing Smiles to our Children” campaign to help underprivileged children in Thailand and Asia in association with World Vision, and the “Used Cards for Better Future” campaign to improve the lives of children with Cerebral Palsy in association with the Foundation for Children with Disabilities.

The campaigns are all key elements of Best Western’s efforts to give back to the communities in which it has been a member for over 65 years.

“As Asia’s fastest growing international hotel chain, Best Western International is in a prominent position to highlight the importance of protecting the environment and helping local communities. The tourism industry continues to grow fast, yet we aim to grow along with – and not at the expense of – society and the environment. Our efforts today are helping formulate the global standards of the future, as we aspire to make the world a better place” said Best Western International’s Vice President of Operations – Asia and Middle East, Glenn de Souza.

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