

# TTG

## A S I A

No. 1649/December 16 – 22, 2011



## year-end issue

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# Headline grabbers

Covered by our team of travel trade journalists across the region, these news items were worth us taking notes



## Jan



The demise of Belgian tour operator **Best Tours** forces hotels and groundhandlers in Asia to re-examine their risks. The trade expects more European players to follow suit.

**A new brand campaign**  
**Wonderful Indonesia** launches. **Outbound tour operators** predict double-digit growths in business this year as incentives stage a comeback.

**IATA's proposal to increase remittance frequency and**

**shorten the reporting period** from bi-monthly to weekly from January 2012 has Hong Kong travel consultants up in arms, claiming the move would cause cash flow problems.

**Surprise, surprise** Several big producers of longhaul travel are rejected as hosted buyers at the ASEAN Tourism Forum, sparking a debate on who should be offered such privileges, bearing in mind that volumes from Asia are also growing.



**Bali is thrust into the spotlight**, due to an Australian health alert on Legionnaires' disease and a quote by the Australian tourism minister encouraging Australians to travel domestically.

**Air France's** resumption of flights from **Paris to Phnom Penh** after a 35-year hiatus opens the market for longhaul travel from Europe.

**Myanmar Airways International's** new flight from Siem Reap to Yangon sees the **re-**

**introduction of a visa-on-arrival facility** for foreign visitors. Asian DMCs **Destination Asia** and **Exotissimo Travel** ready for **launch of operations in Japan**.

**Surprise, surprise** The relaunch of **www.ttgasia.com** and **TTG Asia e-Daily** receives kudos from readers, who like the refreshed look, new sections, flip books of the print copies and the return of Adam Tan.

## May



Indonesia and the Philippines push for **greater visibility in the Middle East**, as the former appoints a new Visit Indonesia Tourism Officer and partners a wholesaler to launch a brochure, and the latter hires a marketing representative.

Indian OTA **MakeMyTrip** kicks off its **South-east Asian expansion** with the majority acquisition of Singapore's **Luxury Tours & Travel**, eyeing similar deals in Malaysia and Thailand.

Google, which snapped up **ITA Software**, reveals **the future of airline searches** on its engine, displaying flight times, ticket prices and supplier links.

**Escalating taxes in the Maldives** put a damper on demand.

**Surprise, surprise** Hotel investors are given a reality check at **HICAP UPDATE**, as they hear how a growth slowdown in Asia is imminent.

## Jun



Travel professionals seek **protection against force majeure** events, such as a directive by Hong Kong's Travel Industry Council to free members of the need to do transport refunds.

**Ticket prices are poised to go up** from January 2012, when airlines will be subject to the European Union's Emissions Trading System.

**Kolkata guns for travellers from China, the Middle East and Singapore**, with the arrival

of three international airlines and a new airport terminal.

In celebration of **Singapore Hotel Association's 50th anniversary**, a TTG special edition reflects on how the city's hotels have evolved, including their attitudes towards trade partners.

**Surprise, surprise** Sri Lanka's withdraws its visa-on-arrival facility for citizens of 79 countries, much to the chagrin of the trade. Online visa applications will require a fee.

## Sep



The **US and eurozone debt crisis** starts to claim its victims, with Asian inbound operators reporting weak summer and winter performance.

**Travel from Indonesia erupts**, buoyed by push factors – a strong rupiah and rising GDP – and pull factors – courting by Asian NTOs and an influx of LCC flights to neighbours.

**A new trade association for Indian outbound** is established, with major inbound players

expecting outbound to soar in a few years.

Thai Airways International (THAI) introduces its light-premium carrier, **THAI Smile Air**, which will launch next July.

**Surprise, surprise** The United Federation of Travel Agents Association overhauls its membership model, opening up to individual travel companies, not just national associations. Travel professionals, however, doubt its relevance.

## Oct



**Demand for Thailand sinks**, as the country grapples with a widespread flood crisis.

**Firefly's impending discontinuation of flights** from Kuala Lumpur to key points in Sabah and Sarawak hits a sore spot. The airline also came under attack for closing its Johor Bahru hub.

Thailand's decision to **raise the visa fee for Indian nationals** is both praised and criticised, with some saying it is reason-

able, and others, disastrous for groups.

**New lady at the helm for Indonesia:** Dr Mari Elka Pangestu takes over from Jero Wacik, and now heads the renamed Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy.

**Surprise, surprise** Online knows no boundaries. Three inbound rivals come together to form hotel booking channel **Raja Kamar International**, offering Indonesian inventory.

# Mar



Cancellations sweep across the region, as **Japan outbound suffers** in the wake of the tsunami and earthquake.

Travel to South-east Asia will cost more in the coming season, a result of currency appreciation, fuel surcharges and new taxes. **Prices for some destinations shoot up** by as much as 25 per cent.

**Egypt acts to restore demand** among Asian travellers, as many continue to stay away due to the month-long protests which began in January.

**Surprise, surprise** M&As. Kuoni's move to buy Gullivers Travel Associates is hailed by the trade as transformational, allowing the tour operator to cash in on the fast-growing B2B online market. TUI Travel PLC and Intrepid Travel Australia join forces to form Peak Adventure Travel Group, the largest adventure travel company with 20 brands under its belt.

# Apr



Indonesia's hotels embrace **online platforms**, as chains foresee such sources accounting for an increasing share of their business.

Thai-based **Asia World expands aggressively** in the region, sealing a joint venture with Transviet to establish a Vietnam outfit.

Big tour operators like Kuoni UK and German-based Transorient Touristik start to feature **the Philippines in brochures**.

**Japan sales resume** and jaw-dropping deals surface.

TTG's PATA 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary & Conference special edition offers **an insight into tomorrow's tourism**, as industry leaders discuss changing technology and client demographics.

**Surprise, surprise** Who says OTAs are merely competition? Expedia announces a dedicated programme that gives out commissions to travel consultants across Asia.

# JUL



ASEAN NTOs commit to the revised **Feel the Warmth campaign**, agreeing to double their annual contribution.

**IndiGo's new overseas routes** will trigger a wave of Indian outbound to Dubai, Thailand and Singapore, while another LCC, **Jetstar, makes further inroads into China**, announcing a Beijing extension as part of its Melbourne-Singapore service.

**Air passenger capacity between Indonesia and Australia**

will go up by 70 per cent, garnering mixed reactions.

Mainland Chinese tourists can now tour Taiwan without joining a group, heralding **a new era in cross-straits travel**.

**Surprise, surprise** Despite turmoil in the Arab world earlier in the year, South-east Asian destinations report strong growth from the Middle East, as the peak travel season for the market begins.

# AUG



Opinions are divided on the **share swap between Malaysia Airlines (MAS) and AirAsia**, with some fearing that the national carrier would adopt a low-cost model. MAS had already weathered a few turbulent months prior to this, posting a first-quarter net loss and witnessing exits by key executives.

A year after the Manila hostage crisis, **the Philippine Department of Tourism (DoT) appoints a new Hong Kong/Macau marketing representative**. Back home, DoT's search for a new secretary begins, following Alberto Lim's departure.

**New management group Archipelago Hotels & Resorts** emerges with the takeover of The Datai, Langkawi.

**Surprise, surprise** India-listed Cox & Kings' planned takeover of Holidaybreak UK forces us to do a double take. Yes, Asian companies are now buying European ones...

# NOV



No longer being able to rely on longhaul, **China inbound tour operators diversify**, identifying either new source markets or widening their businesses to include MICE and outbound.

Travel alerts issued by five countries on **terror threats in India** draw vehement protests from inbound players, as India enters its high season.

**Indonesia's red-hot online market** sees new players, with KAH Group teaming up with a former Wotif product director to launch Golndonesia.com.

Taiwanese travel companies gear up for **listings on the stock exchange**, hoping this will provide the publicity and funds needed to grow their operations.

**Surprise, surprise** To reflect the changing role of travel retailers, *TTG Asia* drops the term 'travel agent', replacing it with 'travel expert', 'travel consultant' or 'travel professional'.



Loss-making **Indian airlines cut flights**, affecting outbound travel demand to destinations such as Singapore and Thailand.

Cruise lines pour resources into education and training of travel experts in Asia, lamenting that the **weak distribution network** is one the key limiting factors for the growth of the market here.

**Thailand and Japan** – two countries struck by major calamities this year – mull measures to rebuild tourism.

Major Japanese outbound travel group **H.I.S. Co. jumps into inbound** with its acquisition of Japan Holiday Travel.

**Surprise, surprise** As destinations look for ways to enlarge their presence in the Indian market, Tourism New Zealand moves its newly-appointed regional manager to Singapore instead, citing easier access to airline and trade partners.



## In Memoriam

The industry bid farewell to a few good men in 2011, among them, as reported by *TTG Asia*:

**BOBBY TOH** The veteran hotelier succumbed to cancer on January 7 at the Singapore General Hospital.

Toh's career in the hospitality industry spanned more than three decades. He was last with Indonesia-based Golden Seal as group general manager of Metro Hotel Sydney and Quality Hotel Singapore. He previously held positions as group general manager of Sokha Hotels and Resorts in Cambodia, group general manager of Far East Hospitality, and senior vice president of sales and marketing at Le Méridien in Singapore. Toh left behind his wife, Florence, and two daughters aged 13 and nine.



**HANS HAENSEL** Haensel passed away on May 2 in Dubai after a long battle with cancer. He served the Emirates Group for many years and was its senior vice president, destination & leisure management division.

"Hans Haensel was not only a stalwart in travel and tourism, he was an exceptionally humane and compassionate friend and colleague," said Emirates Holidays' senior vice president, Frederic Bardin. "Always supportive of his staff, Hans recognised and encouraged them as well as helped them forge their careers. Hans' generosity also extended to friends, acquaintances or employees he found to be in difficulty, financially or otherwise."

"Hans' pioneering spirit and keen foresight towards the development of tourism in Dubai is the rich legacy he leaves behind."



**MIKE ANNETTS** The founder and former managing director of TTG Asia Media passed away from a heart attack in June in the Gold Coast, Australia. He was 72.

Darren Ng, managing director, TTG Asia Media, remembers Annetts as "a very focused, hands-on person when it came to editorial". "But we remember him more as a polished gentleman who had a presence and a lot of gravitas about him, and one who certainly enjoyed a tipple every Friday," Ng said.

TTG Asia Media's general manager, exhibitions/events, Ooi Peng Ee, added: "Mike was a quiet man, but whatever few words of wisdom he shared with you, you could be sure of their lasting impact. His guiding principles still serve as my compass as I navigate the challenges of the business."



**TC CHUN** The managing director of Goodmiles, a Brunei-based DMC, passed away on August 7 in Bandar Seri Begawan. Chun had been a part of Brunei's tourism industry for over 30 years.

A reader, Rudi Herrmann, wrote: "He was a greatly responsible person. He personally took care of my first guests, which I sent to Freme Travel at the time. He was the door-opener to Brunei for me and the company I worked for. While many colleagues were extremely sceptical about 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 which I set up with him. Whenever I had a question or needed any price, I could just ring him up and got a satisfactory reply."

"Surely the industry lost a great professional who had done his part in developing tourism in the country he chose to live in."



**DATO' WINSTON TAN** The president of Bayview International Hotels & Resorts passed away on October 16. The soft-spoken and unassuming leader was a real ambassador of the Bayview brand – his pleasant demeanour, humility and gentlemanly ways spoke greatly of Bayview's brand values.

*May they rest in peace.*

# Revving up for year of growth



It is green for go as travel professionals expect inbound traffic across Asia to get going in 2012 despite the problems holding back some traditional longhaul source markets

## INDONESIA



**2011** We are looking back on an excellent business year. Green stands for steady growth, which we experienced again during 2011. Green is also the colour of nature. We introduced a recycling system for our clients' water bottles and office paper, taking a big step forward to become a more environmentally-responsible company.

**2012** More competition in the destination, a difficult economic situation in many source markets and hotel suppliers directly targeting consumers will create more challenges for us next year. Red does not only suggest that our blood pressure will be raised, but it also represents what we require to master the coming year – strength, courage and energy.



### André Seiler

Managing director, Asian Trails Indonesia

## SINGAPORE



**2011** It was a reasonably good year. Our performance was not expected to be as robust as that which we managed to pull off. The leisure part of our business was very steady. On the corporate end, no cancellations were made although there were some cutbacks.

**2012** We hope that business will pick up to pre-2008 levels in 2012. Our prospects are significantly better compared to the last six months of 2011, as our clients mainly come from across South-east Asia, which is still undergoing relatively robust growth. However, the threat of an economic implosion in Europe and a worldwide recession is creating a lot of confusion and uncertainty.



### Janet Tan-Collis

CEO, East West Executive Travellers

## MALAYSIA



**2011** Despite being a challenging year for the industry in general, our company managed to post a relatively good performance for 2011 thanks to the continued support of our business partners. Our success is also attributed to our team's tireless efforts and commitment to innovation, sustainable tourism and customer satisfaction.

**2012** As global economic uncertainties continue to take centre stage, we see 2012 as a year to be cautious and prudent in our business approach. Having said that, we also believe that there will always be demand for unique and rewarding travel experiences. It is with this in mind that we will continue to offer innovative products and rethink business strategies in accordance to market needs.



### Kingston Khoo

Product development manager, Discovery Overland Holidays

## THE PHILIPPINES



**2011** We are excited about the new tourism brand which is due by the end of this year or early next year, as well as the positive resolution we had at last month's Tourism Congress. Even though we were not able to proceed with the government-led marketing programme this year, the market was definitely up, with new business from Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia. This year ended on a positive note.

**2012** I think it will be busier than 2011. We were surprised to receive queries from as far afield as South America. We are reaching markets that we have not touched before. We are now developing a range of programmes which include pilgrimage tours for groups from Indonesia and Singapore. We are also looking forward to the start of renovations at NAIA Terminal 1.



### Cesar Cruz

President and general manager, T.R.I.P.S. Travel

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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.

Singapore Airlines and Singapore Changi Airport are the Travel Hall of Fame's pioneering honorees, having been voted by Asia-Pacific's travel trade as Best Airline of the Year and Best Airport of the Year respectively, for more than a decade. Joining this elite family are Hertz Asia Pacific, Star Cruises, Royal Cliff Beach Resort Pattaya, Abacus International, SilkAir and Lotte Tour



**THAILAND**

**2011** Tourism to Thailand could be best described as a mixture of red, amber and green, depending on what month you were looking at the traffic lights. After the elections and before the floods kicked in, the signs were pretty positive. Despite the continuing trend of people booking later, our forward bookings were healthy. But the reporting on the floods certainly did not help the last three months of the year.

**2012** It should probably be described as green. I believe there is a pent-up demand for Thailand and, as long as things remain peaceful and the flood-water drains away, there should be a strong rebound next year.

**John Watson**

CEO, Diethelm Travel Group

**INDIA**

**2011** It was good but not as good as anticipated. Year-on-year growth was eight to 10 per cent. Traditional source markets underperformed and new markets were still finding their comfort levels. Inbound arrivals depend primarily on the spending budgets of overseas clients, which vary based on the economic condition of their countries.

**2012** We expect at least 15 per cent growth in January. However, the travel advisories issued by the US, Canada, the UK, Australia and New Zealand at the start of the 2011 winter season have dampened bookings. So 2012 may get off to a slower start than usual, but I expect it to pick up speed by spring.

**Vijay Thakur**

President, India Vision Tours &amp; Travels

**INDIA**

**2011** It was a fairly stable year. The impact of the debt crisis was minimal as India's dependence on traditional markets has lessened thanks to emerging markets such as Russia, China, Thailand, Malaysia, South Africa, Ukraine, Australia, etc. Today, they account for sizeable numbers and are recording steady growth.

**2012** Business is on track. It does not seem that there will be any major impact on leisure travel. However, we need to tread cautiously, especially in some of the volatile European markets. European and American tourist shortfalls, if any, will be offset by the emerging markets. Customers are looking for value at every stage. Online is now a preferred booking channel, and the trend of advance bookings seems to be changing, with most clients choosing to book late.

**Arjun Sharma**

Managing director, Le Passage to India

**HONG KONG**

**2011** The city has been concentrating too much on China. The influx of mainland visitors has jeopardised other source markets, leading to high hotel rates, a shortage of coaches and a lack of up-to-par English-speaking tour guides.

**2012** I am cautiously optimistic for next year due to the global economic uncertainty. But if the business environment does not improve, it will affect us. Many new hotels have also opened in Macau, and we are actually generating business for them because of groups that enjoy multi-destination travel.

**Paul Leung**

Managing director, Holiday World Tours

Contributions by Linda Haden, Mimi Hudoyo, N. Nithiyannathan, Marianne Carandang, Sirima Eamtako, Shekhar Niyogi, Anand and Madhura Katti and Prudence Lui

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# Our hottest des

With favourable exchange rates fuelling an outbound boom, what did Asian travellers book this year and where are they going next?



**Jamie How**

Vice president  
International Tours  
Malaysia

**2011** It was a year for Europe and cruises thanks to the strength of the Malaysian ringgit against the euro and US dollar. When combined with the promotional airfares on offer by carriers, it made our European packages even more affordable.

**2012** We are still looking at destinations in Europe for 2012. This is mainly due to the volatile economic situation in Europe and the weakness of both the pound and euro against the ringgit. With various carriers giving hot offers throughout the year (which we anticipate), it will make the packages even more attractive. We also foresee interest in packages focusing on sports. The 2012 London Olympic Games will drive this demand.



**Veena Patil**

Managing director  
Kesari Tours  
India

**2011** Switzerland, Paris, the UK, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore were the bestsellers. Travelling to Europe is every Indian tourist's dream, and Switzerland has been made popular through Bollywood films. Paris is considered classy, and being on top of the Eiffel Tower or at the Louvre is exhilarating for any Indian traveller. A fascination with the UK continues thanks to its former colonial rule in India. In Asia, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore are value-for-money destinations for the mass market and high-end travellers. We are seeing a lot of short breaks and repeat business to Singapore. Marina Bay Sands and Universal Studios are happening places.

**2012** Europe's aura will continue to attract Indian travellers for the next 25 years. Indians will not be affected by the global economic turmoil. We have 60 new products for Europe including emerging destinations such as Croatia, Slovenia and Russia. South-east Asia will be popular for first- and second-time visits.



**Royanto Handaya**

President director  
Panorama Tours  
Indonesia

**2011** Shorthaul destinations such as Singapore, Hong Kong and China were the bestsellers for Indonesia's outbound market. Indonesians' strong buying power, as well as new attractions in destinations, especially in Singapore, drove the market upward. The growing middle-class population beyond the major cities also provided a huge and increasing customer base. The same trend was also seen for longhaul destinations such as Australia and Europe. This was driven by the much stronger buying power of the country's upper middle class.

**2012** The trend will be much the same as in 2011, with similar factors fuelling growth. This means that the winners will be the same – Singapore, Hong Kong, China, Australia and Europe. Singapore is still a very attractive destination, and Australia has been riding high thanks to the additional outbound seat capacity from Indonesia. I predict there will be some spillover to South Korea – a rising star that promises magnificent natural tourist attractions, latest fashions and cultural charms. Vietnam and Cambodia, the two hidden treasures of Asia, will also be popular in 2012.



# tinations



## Anthony Chan

Group managing director  
Chan Brothers Travel  
Singapore

**2011** Top destinations for 2011 were China, Europe, Taiwan, South Korea and Australia. These are classic year-round destinations for Singaporeans. However, the markets that made the biggest leap in 2011 over 2010 to date were the US and Europe, with close to 80 and 30 per cent growth respectively. Europe has traditionally been a favourite for Singaporean travellers across the demographic spectrum including families, PMEBs, honeymooners and senior citizens. The favourable exchange rates have definitely been a boon for travellers to Europe and the US, and these have definitely contributed to the leap in demand. We expect this trend to continue should exchange rates remain at this level. As well as regular advertising campaigns, sales events and special projects, unique packaging such as themed tours is key to drawing more attention to these destinations.



**2012** Based on forward bookings to date for the first quarter of 2012, demand for these top five destinations continues to surge. Barring any calamities, we can expect this trend to continue throughout 2012. Further, based on this booking momentum, we can also expect the forward demand for Japan to help it climb back into the top destinations' list by the end of 2012. This is due to returning confidence in the destination and the fact that Japan has always fared well generally, especially during the March to May cherry blossom season.



## Josefina Baena

General manager  
New Era Travel and Tours  
The Philippines

**2011** Our bestselling destination this year was Hong Kong, closely followed by Shanghai and Beijing. Hong Kong is a major family vacation destination, especially for Filipino families, as it offers, among others, Disneyland and Ocean Park. Part of its attraction is that it is not really an expensive destination. Although China's visa requirements are stricter now, we have many first-timers who want to see sites such as the Forbidden City and Great Wall and enjoy flea-market shopping.

**2012** For next year, we anticipate Singapore will be big for family vacations. It is a bit more expensive than Hong Kong, because of the high price of hotel accommodation, but it has lively attractions such as Universal Studios. Those with more disposable income will probably want to try the casino at Resorts World Sentosa.



## Ronnie Ho

Chairman  
Jetour Holiday (China)

**2011** Taiwan was the bestselling shorthaul destination from Hong Kong due to the unfortunate disasters in Japan and Thailand. In fact, Taiwan has invested a lot to package itself in recent years and has been aggressively pushing for more overseas promotions to tap this market further.

**2012** In 2012, the upward trend for Taiwan will continue as the destination delivers what people from Hong Kong need – good food and entertainment. Cross-straits flights between Taiwan and China have also released air seats. Additionally, more gateways are opening for direct flights.



## Charoen Wangananont

President  
Thai Travel Agents Association

**2011** The bestselling destinations for outbound Thai travellers were Asian countries such as China, Japan and South Korea. This was mainly thanks to the ease of travel. However, the flooding affected outbound travel from Thailand, with a 10 per cent decline in September and a substantial drop in both October and November.

**2012** The picture remains unclear.



Contributions by N. Nithiyananthan, Anand and Madhura Katti, Mimi Hudoyo, Linda Haden, Marianne Carandang, Prudence Lui and Sirima Eamtako



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# A travel bucket list

Hotel chiefs tell **Raini Hamdi** their must-see places and the activities they dream to accomplish in their lifetime



1. Diving in Palau will be a lifetime dream. Thus, I must first learn to dive. The beautiful place of Palau charms me.
2. When I was younger, I hiked and climbed mountains. I would like to climb Mount Everest. Many have conquered the mountain with determination and enthusiasm. For me, perhaps just to the base camp.

**Jason Peck**  
CEO  
Furama Hotels International  
Singapore



1. Hiking in Patagonia.
2. Cruising the Amazon and Antarctica.

**Peter Borer**  
COO  
The Peninsula Hotels  
Hong Kong



1. Take an expedition cruise to Patagonia from southern Chile. I've seen breathtaking images of ice fjords, glaciers and colonies of Magellanic penguins and cannot wait to experience such a remote part of the world. I've been told that Patagonia is one of the most beautiful and natural places on earth.
2. Spend two weeks with my family on a remote resort in the Indian Ocean where mobile phones and BlackBerry will not work. I would hopefully learn to dive by then, and discover 1,000-year-old shipwrecks and swim with manta rays.
3. Cycling around Provence, cycling being the operative word. There's something very alluring about the south of France – miles of lush greenery and vineyards, ancient stone villages, majestic plain trees lining long stretches of roads. A year in Provence might be too long but certainly a month would be nice.
4. I am quite fascinated by Inner Mongolia. The vast grasslands and the country's rich culture and history would make this an interesting adventure. I would definitely want to camp out in a traditional yurt.
5. Drive across Arizona, with a detour to Monument Valley, Utah to see the magnificent sandstone formations. It would also be fun to feel like I'm in the midst of a John Wayne movie set.

**Aiden McAuley**  
Regional vice president Asia-Pacific  
Swissôtel Hotels & Resorts  
Singapore



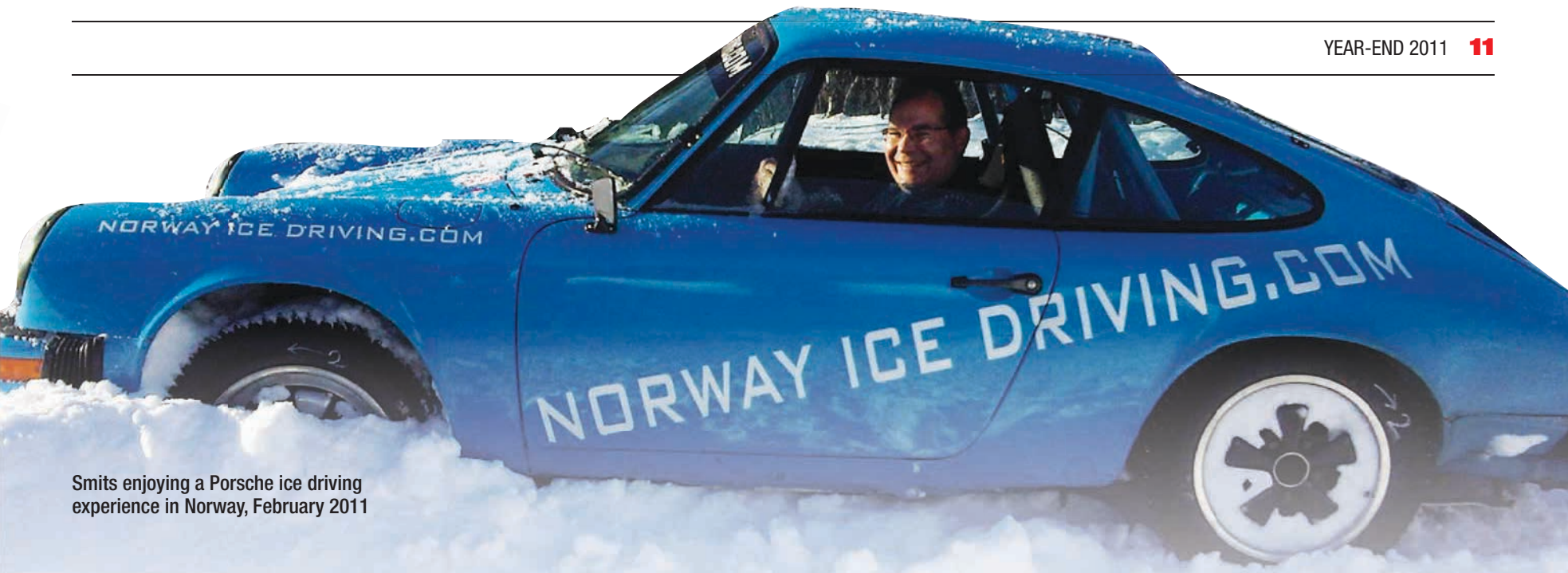
1. Top of my travel bucket list is Tibet. The one time I was there was for a business trip, so I did not really get the opportunity to explore it. While there I took photos of local villagers, and I noticed how sad they looked. I eventually learned that it was because they believe when you capture them on film, it's like taking a part of their soul away. That intrigued me. I have been wanting to go back ever since to learn more about the people – their psyche, the values they have and what they believe in. Everything and everyone seemed like they had a rich story to tell.
2. Do absolutely NOTHING in Hawaii. What bliss to be as free and easy as I could be in this tropical paradise! Succulent roast pork among other *luau* favourites from the *imu* (earth oven), *lomilomi* massage, an abundance of musical talent and hula dancing from the beautiful Hawaiian people, communing with nature and immersing myself in the fascinating culture of Big Island.
3. Most important on my list is a religious pilgrimage to the miraculous Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes in Lourdes, France – considered among the greatest pilgrimage sites of the world. As a Marian devotee, it is an experience I would be very blessed to have. It will be a journey of spiritual renewal for me.

**Michael Sengol**  
CEO  
Meritus Hotels & Resorts  
Singapore



1. Trekking in Nepal and Ladakh, the Himalayas
  2. Going on safari in the Okavango Delta in Botswana, southern Africa
  3. Meditation with monks in Bhutan
  4. Crossing Australia in a caravan with the entire family
  5. Crossing the US on a Harley-Davidson with my wife
  6. Skiing in Canada (Whistler)
  7. Running the half marathon on the Great Wall, China
  8. Running the Two Oceans Ultra Marathon in Cape Town, South Africa
  9. Going back to the Maldives to relax – it's paradise on earth
- And there are lots more I would like to do before I kick the bucket!

**Martin Rinck (left, with children)**  
President Asia-Pacific  
Hilton Worldwide  
Singapore



Smits enjoying a Porsche ice driving experience in Norway, February 2011

- 1. I love the outdoors and I'm passionate about resort locations, so the top dive sites of the world definitely interest me, especially the Bismarck Sea in Papua New Guinea, Palau in Micronesia, the Cocos Island in Costa Rica and the Red Sea at the Straits of Tiran.
- 2. The Amazon and the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu. Adventure meets history – definitely a great story to tell after the fact over a glass of Scotch.
- 3. And speaking of Scotch, as a fan of whiskies, the whisky distilleries of Scotland are definitely on my list, including the Isle of Jura.
- 4. While we're on the subject of drinks, I shared last year that part of my year-end ritual is to reflect on the past year over a good bottle of red wine. So I'm putting the Valtellina and Tenuta Castello di Grumello vineyards in Italy, near Lake Como, on my list.
- 5. Borneo. I've made a personal commitment to the conservation of orangutans – having grown up in Malaysia – and I'd love to spend time at the Sepilok Orangutan Sanctuary and Nyaru Menteng Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre.

- 6. Trinidad and Cuba, the former being my birthplace, the latter being the home to great cigars, Art Deco and vintage cars.
- 7. The Grand Prix circuits in Monaco, Belgium and France. As you can probably guess from my picture, I'm a fan of fast cars!
- 8. The Paris-Dakar Bike Race and the Dakar Rally. The bike race clocks 7,000km in three weeks starting in Europe through Algiers and eventually finishing in Senegal. The Dakar Rally is a 9,000km racing over 14 days that kicks off in Argentina and finishes in Peru.
- 9. Petra, Jordan. I now look after Asia, the Middle East and Africa, and this portfolio gives me the opportunity to get to know some of the world's most famous heritage sites, including this historical and archaeological site.

Jan Smits  
CEO, Asia, Middle East & Africa, InterContinental Hotels Group, Singapore



I've made a personal commitment to the conservation of orangutans – having grown up in Malaysia – and I'd love to spend time at the Sipilok Orangutan Sanctuary and Nyaru Menteng Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre.

Jan Smits  
CEO, Asia, Middle East & Africa, InterContinental Hotels Group, Singapore



- 1. Top of my travel bucket list is the Alaska cruise (and he has accomplished it twice). You come up-close to the massive ice walls of Alaska's tidewater glaciers, some more than 40-storey high. Nothing compares to the sight of monumental glaciers calving icebergs into the sea, some of these icebergs the size of large buildings. When it does, the force is so great that it rocks even the largest of cruiseliners from side to side. The sound of the massive chunks of ice breaking away is thunderous, and it is as sobering as it is life-changing.
- Witnessing this first-hand has made a deep impact on the way I view climate change and global warming. Its effects on our world and what this means for my children's children really hits home when you view a spectacle like this. I would strongly recommend anyone to make the trip.

Ananda Arawwawela  
Managing director  
The St. Regis Singapore



- 1. Spend an annual holiday in Germany's nicest resort until my life's end, the Traube Tonbach in Baiersbronn. We go there twice a year and, to me, no hotel is better than this in Germany and no host more sensational than the Finkbeiner family.
- 2. Swim from Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru to Angsana to Baros in the Maldives. This is a 7km swim. My wife and 10-year-old son have done it. I'm still practising.
- 3. Bicycle over the Alps from Munich, Germany to Meran in northern Italy. I bicycle a lot and have a friend who pushes me to do this, but time is the issue.
- 4. Travel the entire Chinese Silk Route by bike. I've seen bits and pieces of the route; it is not the same when you just fly in and out.
- 5. I am fortunate that I can see so much from being in the hotel world, and one day I just want to teach part-time and pass on my knowledge and experience to young and interested people.

Bernold Schroeder  
CEO  
Jin Jiang International Hotel Management Co  
China



- 1. I'm inspired by what my father does – doing charity work, helping the less well-off and building hospitals in poorer countries, as well as having time to be around my family and close friends.
- 2. Places to visit – Cuba, Africa and the stadiums where Arsenal won the Premier Leagues.

Ravi Chandran  
Senior vice president/managing director  
Spa operations  
Banyan Tree Spas  
Thailand



- 1. Rio during the Carnival
- 2. Machu Picchu ruins high in the Andes mountains, one of the new seven wonders of the world
- 3. Cape Town – the beauty of the city is compared to Vancouver, and safaris into the national parks can be arranged.
- 4. St Petersburg – one of the most beautiful cities of the world
- 5. Ride a Harley along the French Riviera coastline on a beautiful day.
- 6. Outer space if it becomes affordable, since it's on my wife Sofi's list.
- 7. Recently-restored and fully-renovated, Sofitel Legend Old Cataract, combined with a cruise down the Nile.
- 8. Cruise from Vancouver to Alaska – natural beauty at its most sublime.
- 9. Tibet and the Himalayan mountains – natural beauty at the roof of the world
- 10. If it comes back, cross the Atlantic in the Concorde one-way and return on the QE2.

Markland Blaiklock  
Senior vice president  
Sofitel Asia-Pacific  
Singapore

# Going places



## --> Thailand



"I would like to visit Thailand. Due to the recent flood crisis, its tourism industry is now facing a difficult time. I want to contribute to its recovery by making a personal visit there as Japan received much support from Thailand after the March earthquake and tsunami. One of the main purposes of my travels is to take a break and relax. I think travelling enables people to connect with one another and become closer. I also gain a better insight into the local culture by finding out how the local people live, what they are interested in and their lifestyles. Through my interaction with the locals, it gives me ideas on how to attract more travellers to Japan."

### Ryoichi Matsuyama

President, Japan National Tourism Organization

## --> Australia

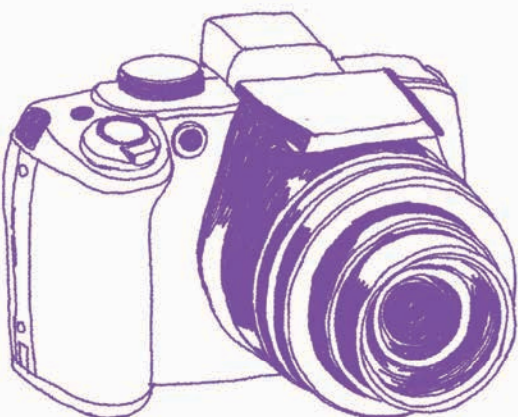


"My end-of-year holiday will be on the mighty Murray River where every day is just so relaxing. Fishing, golf, waterskiing, friends, family, fun. It's summertime in Australia so lots of time will be spent outdoors enjoying the great lifestyle that we have at that time of year. There's also always plenty of events happening in Melbourne over summer, like the Australian Open. It creates a great atmosphere in the city as the world's best talents in tennis take centre court. I'll be going to a few matches. I have three children so all my holidays are in Australia because it is easy to get around."

Overseas? I really want to get to Africa to see a giraffe in its native habitat. I think they are amazing creatures. When I am on holiday, I completely switch off. I think about the comparisons after that, but in the meantime, holidays are to replenish the heart and soul."

### Andrew McEvoy

Managing director, Tourism Australia



## --> Australia



"Home to Melbourne for Christmas then down the Bellarine Peninsula to Point Lonsdale and my family's beach house for the remainder of the vacation. This place has beautiful beaches: a protected beach facing Port Philip Bay and a surf beach. Long walks along the beach are favourite activities. It also has a small village feel and there are great places for coffee too."

Botswana is on my wishlist of overseas destinations. So many friends have been there this year and their feedback has been impressive. Choosing the right lodge to stay in is crucial to the experience as animal sightings top the list of to-dos. It will also offer opportunities to use my Canon DSLR camera and wide-angle zoom lens. I usually holiday in exotic vacations that are very unusual and different from Australia. It then becomes easy to switch off especially when I undertake treks in the Himalayas! Occasionally, destination development will slip into the conversation especially when tourism there is in its infancy."

### Maggie White

General manager South/South-east Asia and Gulf countries, Tourism Australia



## --> Taiwan



"It is really difficult to find time for an overseas vacation these days, so I would generally go to a hot spring health resort in Taiwan."

If I could take an overseas vacation, I would like to go to Japan. I visited Tokyo in June for the Taiwan Hope Tour programme that we organised for victims of the March earthquake and tsunami, but official obligations kept me from experiencing the country at that time. Besides relaxing, I would like to travel to the Tohoku region to visit friends and see how Japan is coping in the aftermath of the disaster, learn about tourism operations and give whatever encouragement I can for the early recovery of Japan's tourism industry."

### Janice Lai

Director-general, Taiwan Tourism Bureau

## --> US



"This year, I'll be heading to California to celebrate the Christmas holiday in Los Angeles. The city means 'the angels' in Spanish, and for me it will be a heavenly escape from the cold of winter! It is ideal this time of year as you can enjoy the best of both

worlds: frolic on the beach one day and ski the slopes of the surrounding mountains the next! Why do I love LA? It's trendy and culturally diverse. I'm looking forward to checking out the latest restaurants and attractions. And as always, I'll be taking notes!"

### Maureen O'Crowley

Vice president, Seoul Convention Bureau, Seoul Tourism Organization



## --> Japan



"I am thinking about a trip to Japan, as I am a huge fan of sushi. As much as I enjoy the food, I also enjoy watching the chefs prepare sushi with exquisite skill, which is almost like an art. I have a couple of favourite restaurants which I crave to visit from time to time."

### Anthony Lau

Executive director, Hong Kong Tourism Board

## --> New Zealand



"Queenstown in New Zealand without a doubt. It has unparalleled natural beauty, completely breathtaking. Moreover, it is truly 'green', and being a former scientist I appreciate that a lot. It is probably the cleanest place on this planet. I love New Zealand as a country

to vacation in."

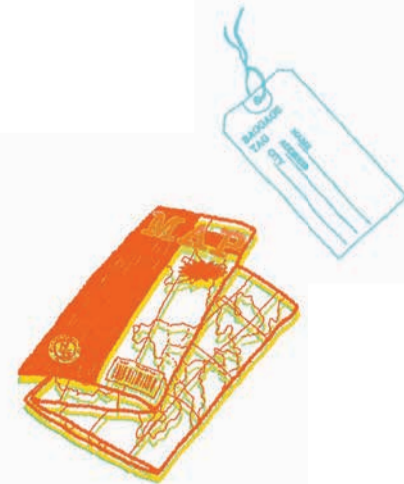
I visit places for a break and invariably start thinking what we could emulate and how we could learn from them in marketing our destinations. What is their model of development and could this work in India?"

### Dr Lalit K Panwar

Chairman and managing director, India Tourism Development Corp



We asked NTO chiefs around the region where they are packing their suitcases for this holiday season – and do they ever take a *real* break?



## --> Sri Lanka



"I prefer holidays in Sri Lanka. There is still so much to explore and it's full of variety. I generally prefer Asian destinations when I travel overseas now.

Traditional destinations like Europe do not offer anything new. Most Asian destinations such as China are different and they are changing fast.

When I travel, I always try to learn from what I see. There are always tips that I can use to improve tourism in Sri Lanka. That habit is because of my current job."

### Dr Nalaka Godahewa

Chairman, Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority

## --> Indonesia

"I usually visit destinations in Indonesia where the locals celebrate Christmas. I have not really decided where to go this year, but it is probably Papua. In the last seven years since I became a minister, I chose to travel in Indonesia for holidays rather than overseas because it was a good chance to spend time with my family within the country. There are just so many interesting places here. Besides, I have had many chances to visit other countries for work. Celebrating Christmas with the locals allows us to experience local traditions.

Wherever I go on holiday, it is never completely a break. It is inevitable that I compare notes. For example, I like to see how handicraft markets are managed. In Lima, Peru, there is a market in the city centre where representations of products from different parts of the country are sold. In Thailand, there are one-village-one-product programmes, and the products are displayed in showrooms along a street in Chiang Mai. Both provide one-stop shops for bulk buyers and tourists buying souvenirs. It is a learning experience to see which is more suitable to develop in Indonesia."

### Dr Mari Elka Pangestu

Minister, Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy

Contributions by Raini Hamdi, Gracia Chiang, Karen Yue, Mimi Hudoyo, Shekhar Niyogi, Glenn Smith, Feizal Samath and Andrew Dembina

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Chong Yong Fee | Singapore Alive Pte. Ltd., Singapore

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Kevin Mead | IGAF Worldwide, United States of America

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# The Good, The Bad and The Ugly



The ups and downs in a year of aviation are charted by **Sim Kok Chwee**



## The Good 😊

### 1 A Dreamliner comes true for All Nippon Airways

Boeing finally delivered its first B787 Dreamliner to launch customer, All Nippon Airways. It does not matter that it was three years late, it is a dream realised for airlines (which will benefit from lower operating and maintenance costs), for travellers (who will enjoy the higher cabin pressure and other game-changing features) and especially for the environment (as it burns 15 per cent less fuel and has lower carbon emissions compared to aircraft of similar size).

### 2 Japan Airlines back in the black after major shake-up

In January 2010, Japanese business confidence was rocked to its foundation when Japan Airlines (JAL) declared bankruptcy and sought protection from creditors while it restructured. Unprofitable routes were shed, excess

manpower trimmed, its dedicated cargo operations – one of the largest in the world – were closed down, and many aircraft including all its B747s were retired and sold. The airline even restored the *tsuru*, a Japanese crane, as its logo. By the second half of 2011, JAL was profitable again.

Achieving that in a year which saw Japan's Tohoku region crippled by the triple disasters of earthquake, tsunami and nuclear contamination should serve as an inspiration to all airlines seeking to reverse their fortunes. The *tsuru*, like its better-known counterpart, the phoenix, has risen from the ashes. JAL's approach should perhaps be studied by oneworld partner American Airlines which recently sought Chapter 11 protection.

### 3 Singapore Airlines' Scoot joins in the low-cost carrier game

Singapore Airlines (SIA) surprised the world with its decision to establish a medium- and long-

haul low-cost carrier. Obviously aimed at curtailling growing ambitions of Qantas' subsidiaries – Jetstar International and Jetstar Asia – it also gives SIA a stab at the growing value-conscious market.

More importantly, this move by an airline considered by many as conservative has created a huge buzz wherever its fleet of B777s reaches. Scoot is a name that has generated much discussion, but Sydneysiders are as excited as Singaporeans as they await the inaugural service in mid-2012. It remains to be seen whether other Asian carriers will follow in SIA's footsteps.

### 4 Lufthansa leads the way as industry goes greener

Lufthansa German Airlines conducted a six-month trial using a 50:50 mix of biofuel and kerosene on one engine on an A321 flying between Hamburg and Frankfurt, partially financed by the German government and in

cooperation with a number of research groups.

With this, Lufthansa ensures that sustainability remains the cornerstone of the entire production process from the plantations to the plane. Although biofuel is more expensive than fossil fuel, such tests, along with cross-border cooperation in straightening air routes, will make aviation a leader among the world's industries in environmental responsibility.

### 5 Manufacturers offer fuel-efficient aircraft

Another win for the environment and airlines. Both Airbus and Boeing have confirmed their commitment to rolling out more fuel-efficient models of their A320 and B737 families of aircraft. The A320neo and B737 MAX will use the latest technology and fuel-efficient engines to deliver significant improvements to bottom lines. Carriers have rewarded Airbus and Boeing with



## Highlights

**2012 - Year of the Russian Tourism in China**  
By the chance of "Year of the Russian tourism in China 2012", the Federal Agency for Tourism of Russian Federation, as the Partner Country of GITF 2012, will make high-profile appearance at the show together with the China National Tourist Office (CNTO).

**Strategic Partner - Emirates Airline**  
After years of cooperation, the GITF organizer- Hannover Milano Fairs and the international top airline- Emirates recently announced strategic partnership to carry out comprehensive cooperation.

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Hall 16.2 and Hall 14.2 are set as international hall and themed hall, exclusively open to trade visitors during 1-2 March, and also open to public visitors on 3 March. Hall 15.2 will be open to public visitors during the whole exhibition period.



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massive orders. Although deliveries are still some years away, there is light on the horizon.

## The Bad 🙄

### 6 Air India's bid to join Star Alliance flounders

Air India's aspiration to join Star Alliance came to a jolting halt in July when the alliance terminated the process of integrating the carrier, citing failure by Air India to meet certain minimum requirements. Joining the alliance was potentially one of the key initiatives to pull Air India out of its dire predicament. When Air India gobbled Indian Airlines in a not-very-smooth merger, it suffered a bad bout of indigestion at a time when a crop of competitors appeared on the domestic aviation scene. After numerous financial bailouts, the airline remains a major liability for Indian taxpayers.

### 7 Tiger Airways falls foul of safety standards

Tiger Airways' operations in Australia were suspended by the country's authorities on July 2 for about six weeks due to safety lapses exposed by two instances of aircraft breaching minimum height requirements during landing.

The suspension lost the airline

about S\$2 million (US\$1.5 million) per week and resulted in heads rolling at the top. As the year draws to a close, the airline's operations in Australia are still only about half of what they were before the suspension.

### 8 Eurozone crisis poses threat to airline profits

Just this month, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) sounded a warning for 2012 as it revised its industry outlook. Even with airline profit margins at already less than two per cent, IATA's profit forecast for next year is US\$3.5 billion, which translates into a profit margin of just 0.6 per cent. It was originally estimated at US\$4.9 billion.

The threat of debt default by various European economies, and the crisis of confidence resulting from that, will only deteriorate further as negotiations drag on. According to IATA, if the situation evolves into a full-blown banking crisis and European recession, the global aviation industry could suffer losses exceeding US\$8 billion in 2012.

It did not help that IATA's warning was issued on the same day that Standard & Poor's similarly warned that "the ratings of eurozone members were at risk (of a downgrade)".



The recent volatility in the world economy looks set to stay. It means managing our way through the short-term cycles and doing what it takes to win in the long term. We are not going to slow down on investments for short-term gains, but we need to be flexible.

**John Slosar**  
CEO  
Cathay Pacific Airways



## The Ugly 🙄

### 9 Qantas is grounded by its own management

On October 29, Qantas' management – frustrated with the unions – decided to shut down the airline without warning. Qantas' aircraft all over the world were frozen in their tracks. Over a 48-hour stand-off, more than 68,000 passengers were stranded. This drastic action was justified by a management claim that union actions cost the airline US\$70 million. Ironically, the grounding itself also chalked up a bill of US\$70 million. Added to this was a further hit to the tune of US\$27 million in relation to lost forward bookings and US\$29 million to be spent on service recovery.

This was a rare instance when passengers became pawns as an airline's management waged all-out war on its unions. Had the management given a couple of days' notice, passengers could have re-evaluated their plans and avoided being stranded. The shutdown did force the government to step in but talks have failed at the time of going to press. Spending US\$29 million in the form of free tickets may be small change in the management's deep pockets, but the damage to the proud Qantas

brand may be more lasting than it would admit to.

### 10 A not-so-hidden tax on European traffic

Despite all the pleas by airlines, professional aviation bodies and governments around the world, the European Union (EU) continues to bulldoze through a thinly-veiled tax masquerading as the Emissions Trading System (ETS). Airlines operating into Europe will be taxed for the entire journey from the last port of call before entering European skies – a scheme that maximises revenue, exercises EU sovereignty in airspace outside its jurisdiction and creates an unequal playing field. South-east Asian carriers operating non-stop from their airports are taxed far more than carriers from the Middle East.

There is not a shred of evidence that anything significant is being done for the environment. If the EU wants to be more environmentally responsible, it should have worked more diligently in delivering a single European sky that unravels the kinks and aerial excursions that result in unnecessary fuel being burned. In a year in which airlines' razor-thin profits are being assaulted on all fronts, money-grabbing schemes are sprouting like mushrooms after a monsoon.

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**Dr. Mari Elka Pangestu** has been selected by Indonesian President Soesilo Yudhoyono to lead the newly restructured Ministry for Tourism and Creative Economy Indonesia. This ministry will continue to house the Host Committee of ASEAN Tourism Forum 2012 and onwards.

For updated event information, visit  
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# Bouquets and bric

**Raini Hamdi**  
Group Editor

**Best** My best interview this year was with Moshe Safdie, design architect of the much-photographed Marina Bay Sands and ArtScience Museum in Singapore. He was as spectacular as the 'wow' architecture he created – so articulate and interested in discussing the dangers of 'starchitecture' in Asian tourism or urbanisation. He was also gracious in taking the time to send me an email saying he enjoyed the article.

**Worst** A bomb blast in the morning and an earthquake in the evening during the PATA Travel Mart in New Delhi are hard to beat. It's sad because my Indian friends are among the warmest, friendliest and most-forgiving people I know (if they are reading this, they would probably give the thumbs up and say, "well-chosen Raini"). And also because it made me ponder: what-ever happened to the days when buying and selling travel was more glamorous and exciting (in the right sense of the word)?

**Gracia Chiang**  
Editor  
TTG Asia

**Best** A successful blend of business and pleasure during the Visit Japan Travel Mart. I learned not only about the market recovery and picked up good contacts, but saw the autumn maple leaves turning a beautiful scarlet in the temples of Kyoto, took a shower at a bath-house in Yokohama, nibbled on *takoyaki* in Osaka and dashed for a *shinkansen* to Tokyo. Experience is truly the best teacher – one can really only write about a destination when one has lived in it.

**Worst** I met up with a senior executive of a chain of resorts and the interview took slightly longer because it was an in-depth piece. However, my interviewee became impatient after awhile, answering questions curtly. I was also not asked if I had visited any of its properties before or offered an invite. As said in my best experience, the converse is also true. It's hard to write about a product effectively when you've not experienced it. That, plus a brusque contact.

**Karen Yue**  
Editor  
TTGmice

**Best** It must mean something when the president of the Jeju Tourism Organization invited me – not the other press representatives – to make a speech and toast at the end of the annual Jeju International Green MICE Week on behalf of *TTGmice*. Jelly knees aside, it was a proud moment for the title.

**Worst** This particular trip saw the earth moved under my feet. I also danced in the rain. You would think that I had fallen in love, but no. I experienced my first earthquake when I was in New Delhi for the PATA Travel Mart. And that happened hours after a bomb went off outside the Delhi High Court, a short distance from the exhibition hall. As well, rain poured almost every day, and the leaking roof of the exhibition hall created surprise waterfalls that I had to leap away from. Leaking air-conditioning ducts above the press room also meant I had to huddle under a brolly while banging out stories for the daily newspapers on my laptop!

**Brian Higgs**  
Editor  
TTG Asia Online

**Best** PATA's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and Conference in Beijing, where I had the opportunity to interview CNN's renowned business correspondent Richard Quest on the much-maligned role of the media in crisis reporting. We ended up in a heated debate, with Quest reasoning that it was the media's responsibility to accurately report what is happening on the ground during disasters, even if tourism ends up being negatively impacted by the news.

**Worst** My attempts to interview several North American travel industry representatives of Asian descent during the China International Travel Mart was a nightmare. Unlike most of the other participants at the mart, this demographic was particularly allergic to being interviewed and always seemed to have an excuse to avoid engaging in conversation.

**Linda Haden**  
Assistant Editor

**Best** Meeting Sarina Bratton, the founder and managing director of Orion Expedition Cruises. She was enigmatic, animated and poised, and her bubbly personality certainly helped to put me at ease during a rather serious interview. It was definitely an eye-opening experience and one that completely altered my perception of cruising as a staid and boring activity left best to retirees.

**Worst** I was struck down by Murphy's Law at IT&CMA in Bangkok – almost everything went horrendously wrong. I contracted conjunctivitis, the outfit I had chosen for the Travel Awards dinner ripped even though it was the first time I had tried to put it on and the hotel hairdresser went ballistic on my hair, giving me a 1980s Maggie Thatcher coiffure. Whenever I was close to getting a juicy quote or story, interviewees were either distracted by a phone call or were whisked off by someone else. To top it all off, a creepy, old guy kept tailing me.

**Sirima Eamtako**  
Editor, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos

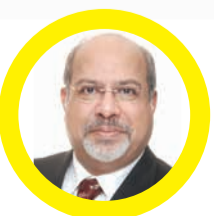
**Best** I enjoyed the professional arrangements for my trip to Bangalore for the Destination Britain & Ireland APMEA. All programmes ran like clockwork, from media briefings and workshops to appointments. At one point, I spent a tad too long interviewing a buyer, and the VisitBritain's PR gave me a nudge to move on to the next appointment. Results: a range of news stories and reports for TTG's various titles.

**Worst** Prior to a press briefing for a Bangkok hotel's anniversary, I called to confirm the exact commencement time so I need not wait around. Upon arrival, I was told that registration had not even begun and the event would not start until an hour later. We were told to enjoy the coffee break. When the briefing started, it was short and the general manager could not comment on many questions. Luckily, I managed to secure enough information for just one news story from the property's owner representative.

**Mimi Hudoyo**  
Editor  
Indonesia

**Best** A fam trip to Pentingsari Tourism Village in Jogjakarta where I witnessed how the people's welfare had increased as a result of tourism. I was told that the tuber crops planted by local women were gaining popularity among younger guests. These were once the staple food of the older generation, and can hardly be found anywhere else. Village tourism has been around for a while, and I have heard of results during seminars and workshops. But the visit to Pentingsari really proved that community-based tourism is not merely propaganda.

**Worst** A product presentation by an integrated resort of a neighbouring country. Jakarta travel professionals and the media were invited. There was no Q&A session, and no one from the resort was willing to speak to the media. One executive even asked me to e-mail my questions to the PR person. I wondered why they bothered to invite media in the first place? They could have just sent a press release.



# kbats

What better way to wrap up the year than by taking a jaunt down memory lane? Here are the bits we want to remember and those we want to forget, as told by our team

**Shekhar Niyogi**  
Chief Correspondent  
Kolkata, India

**Best** A smooth ride at the Domestic Tourism Conclave at The Lalit in New Delhi. I was impressed by how it was organised and executed with precision: the panel discussions, B2B interface, and even the entertainment and cocktail dinner. Punctuality was outstanding.

**Worst** Some events leave much to be desired, like the PATA Travel Mart in New Delhi's Pragati Maidan where I witnessed water dripping from exposed air-conditioning ducts, and when it rained, the roof leaked profusely, wetting the exhibition area. We had to work in the press room with umbrellas over our laptops. The event organisers had foresight though – our welcome pack had umbrellas!



**Anand and Madhura Katti**  
Correspondent, Mumbai, India

**Best** The interactive quiz at the launch event of Hong Kong Disneyland Resort's Toy Story Land was full of fun. The audience was divided into groups of three, and vied to win gold, silver, bronze medals, and of course, the Woody doll. All facts about the attraction, its characters, packages, special celebrations and other information were made known to travel experts in an exciting manner.

**Worst** A new cruise company cancelled its launch event twice after sending out invites – and there was no word after that. A few weeks later, we spotted its stall at a travel trade fair, and representatives said the company was up and running and that its ship had completed two trips. They had done away with the launch event, not sure of making it for the third time!

**Sim Kok Chwee**  
Correspondent-at-large

**Best** This has been a year of many good media events, and those organised by IATA were notable for the thorough preparation and background material made available. Two interviews also stood out. Air Astana CEO Peter Foster has a clear vision of where Kazakhstan's national airline is headed. While he is in no hurry to reach his goals, he wasted no time in articulating the airline's measured growth and results. Lao Airlines' two-man team in Singapore was equally passionate about promoting the airline's services and selling Laos' tourism products. Both gentlemen have amassed tremendous experience in the course of their careers, but were humble in admitting that there was still lots to learn.

**Worst** As much as I try, I cannot recall any particularly negative experience in the course of news-gathering. It's either a very good year or my memory is fading since crossing the half-century mark.

**N. Nithyananthan**  
Chief Correspondent  
Malaysia

**Best** Visiting the Lost World of Tambun theme park. Although it is Perak's biggest tourist attraction, I knew very little about it. I was pleasantly surprised to find how well it had been developed around the limestone cliffs, with minimal disruption to the environment. It was also good to learn about the unique products offered including the natural hot springs, tin mine and petting zoo.

**Worst** The Perak state government wanted to announce the launch of its Visit Perak Year 2012, and media from Malaysia and Singapore were invited. With Perak's chief minister and top brass present, along with thousands of onlookers in Ipoh's main green space, I waited eagerly to hear details of the campaign strategy. Sadly there were none. It turned out to be more of a political event that was followed by performances by popular singers. Fortunately, I managed to salvage some details at the ensuing press conference.

**Marianne Carandang**  
Correspondent  
The Philippines

**Best** New Department of Tourism (DoT) Secretary Ramon R Jimenez Jr was invited to speak with key members of the Philippine Tour Operators Association at a recent gathering in Batangas. There was open and transparent discussion about many issues: tourism marketing, airport facilities, airline taxes. Jimenez demonstrated concern, determination and confidence. The meeting left many feeling optimistic and excited about DoT's future direction.

**Worst** Reporting on Philippine Airlines' plans to spin-off non-core services and witnessing the crisis unfolding in the streets near Manila's NAIA Terminal 2. Striking workers camped out in the area for days, disrupting travellers and creating chaos. Many in the industry were torn by the proceedings.

**Prudence Lui**  
Correspondent  
Hong Kong

**Best** I thoroughly enjoyed the gala dinner organised by Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong to thank its VIPs. The candlelight dinner served at a long table for 100 guests demonstrated the hotel's creativity. There was also live entertainment by two vocalists from Australia, as well as culinary delights prepared by award-winning chefs Uwe Opocensky and Yves Matthey. The highlight was when a team of chefs marched out and turned the dining table into a fantasyland made of chocolate desserts, including creations such as scarlet high heels and two-wheeled carts.

**Worst** I had to endure a busy five-day MICE fam to Taiwan. The itinerary was packed to the gills as the organiser wanted to showcase what was on offer. We also had last-minute cancellations including a long-awaited teambuilding activity which involved making steamed pork dumplings. It was also tough to pack and unpack every day due to four different hotel stays.

**Andrew Dembina**  
Correspondent  
Hong Kong

**Best** Both best and worst experiences involved the Chinese port city of Dalian. The destination is aesthetically ordered, with well-kept heritage structures from years of colonial rule. It has also won a string of awards for being one of the world's most liveable cities. Its lesser-known treasures are its dramatic National Geopark, hot springs and ski resorts – all of which are increasingly receiving marketing attention.

**Worst** Dalian is generally friendly to tourists, at sights, hotels, spas and restaurants I experienced. But its NTO appeared indifferent to my need for tourism information. Although it did provide recent visitor statistics, promises on data ranging from accommodation to transport plans, as well as industry perspectives from senior executives, frustratingly, never came through.

**Glenn Smith**  
Correspondent  
Taiwan

**Best** Prior to working for *TTG Asia*, I thought I knew what 'travel agents' did – they sit around waiting for customers to walk through the door and buy airline tickets. That misperception died, however, upon visiting one of Taiwan's big travel retailers. The office tour took an hour, and there were departments for inbound, outbound, specialty travel, and online and offline publishing...It was an eye-opening experience and an extremely valuable lesson.

**Worst** The Taipei International Travel Fair has a reputation for crowds, but how bad could it really be, I wondered. On the opening day, things started well, but by noon it was impossible to navigate the aisles, let alone push my way through to the booths. As I was leaving, I ran into a retired in-law who told me he had been waiting in line for two hours. Turned out he was one of the over 200,000 attendees buying discounted travel packages and accommodation.

**Feizal Samath**  
Correspondent  
Sri Lanka

**Best** Witnessing the ceremonial issue of an official stamp bearing the name of a popular, authentic Sri Lankan restaurant of a Colombo hotel. The event was attended by a prominent Sri Lankan minister, but it took just 20 minutes and the minister and his bodyguards were off, leaving other invitees to relax and enjoy delicious home-made food, while mingling with tourism professionals.

**Worst** Driving to the opening of a new boutique hotel, about 20km south of Colombo. The place was filled with politicians and their bodyguards who controlled the car park and any other vacant slots outside. After spending 10 unsuccessful minutes trying to find a safe parking spot near the seaside hotel, I returned home in disgust – soothing my frustrations with a nice, cool beer!



- 1 Raini Hamdi
- 2 Gracia Chiang
- 3 Karen Yue
- 4 Brian Higgs
- 5 Linda Haden
- 6 Haze Loh, creative designer
- 7 Redmond Sia, creative designer
- 8 Lina Tan, editorial assistant



From left: Sirima Eamtako, Mimi Hudoyo, Sim Kok Chwee, N. Nithyananthan, Marianne Carandang, Shekhar Niyogi, Anand Katti, Madhura Katti, Prudence Lui, Andrew Dembina, Patricia Wee (new correspondent China), Glenn Smith, Feizal Samath and 'most wanted' resident photographer Patrick Tan

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