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# Growing pains for Myanmar

No solution in sight to runaway hotel contracts

**By Raini Hamdi and Rahul Khanna**  
**FRANKFURT/YANGON** An industry meeting to resolve hotel contract issues (*TTG Asia e-Daily*, May 4, 2012) has failed to yield any solution, deepening concern among tour operators who say their credibility is at stake.

“Hotels were asked to provide sensible solutions, but we have yet to get them,” said Laurent Kuenzle, group managing director of Asian Trails, who said the meeting was attended by the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism (MoHT), hotels and DMCs.

Khin Maung Yin, a director of Myanmar Tourism Board (MTB), said MTB had been trying to broker a solution but could not force hotels to comply. “We don’t have the authority to fix prices – not even the MoHT can do that. But this issue is not good for the tourism industry and needs to be resolved soon. We have already developed a reputa-

tion as being the most expensive destination in South-east Asia.”

Rates had soared 300 per cent within a short period of time, said Bruno Leunen, managing director of Inspiration Myanmar, who had no choice but to tell buyers at IMEX in Frankfurt last week that they should come back “er, may be next year”.

Kuenzle said there would be enough people willing to pay the higher rates; rather, it is the lack of professionalism on the hotels’ part that is causing angst among tour operators.

“The main worry is some hotels do not want to issue contracts and/or do not guarantee rates. Some hotels have issued contracts, cancelled them, issued new ones at higher rates, cancelled those and re-issued new contracts again. These contracts are not only for new bookings

*Continued on page 2*

Deep Kalra, founder of MakeMyTrip India, shares with **Raini Hamdi** how he made his trip to riches and stardom – see page 8

## Deep pockets at last



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# New B2B online platform

## Biyahe Ko pulls together content to benefit Philippine retailers

**By Marianne Carandang**  
**MANILA** A new B2B website established by GI Philippines Corp (GIPC), a joint venture between Chennai-based Hermes and Manila-based Shroff International Travel Care, is poised to attract smaller travel agencies in the country with its significantly lower joining fees and wide range of domestic and international inventory.

Biyahe Ko (www.biyaheko.com), which means ‘My Trip’, is open to participation from start-ups with proper agency paperwork, charging an initial investment deposit of only P2,000 (US\$46). It is offered as both a white-label product, allowing travel consultants to utilise its storefront, and as a back-end content source.

“There are an estimated 5,000-7,000 travel agencies all over the Philippines, of which only 221 are IATA-accredited,” said Arjun Shroff, a director of GIPC.

Biyahe Ko gives non-IATA agencies access to ticketing in-



Shroff: boon for non-IATA agents

ventory from international airlines. It is currently partnering Abacus, with other GDSs such as Galileo and Amadeus to follow. No GDS training is required.

Domestic airline tickets, sold online through proprietary APIs, are also available.

Such a distribution platform provides a boost to the domestic ticketing market in two ways.

First, it overcomes the cash bond requirement that travel consultants applying to sell tickets on their own need to fork out. For example, Cebu Pacific may charge anywhere between P50,000 and P2.1 million, depending on the inventory required. Second, it paves the way for fairer competition, as it circumvents an exclusive selling clause imposed by some carriers.

Meanwhile, the integration of GDS content means that Biyahe Ko will also cater to large leisure travel companies and corporate travel experts who are “very com-

fortable using whatever (GDS) language”, said one of GIPC’s directors, RM Palani Yapan.

“We offer a technology solution. If (travel firms) want to just use our search engine and develop their own front-end, they can,” said another GIPC director, Sanu John.

Some transactions like hotel reservations are still conducted offline at the moment. Besides Chartis, major travel insurance brands are expected to come on-board soon, while bus and ferry content will be incorporated. Mobile apps for BlackBerry, iPhone and Android phones are also in the pipeline.

Biyahe Ko is the second Indian-Philippine venture to offer online distribution services in the country after Via.com, which was launched in 4Q2011.

Hermes’ initial plan is to focus on the Philippines’ “virgin” B2B online market, although it also sees growth potential in the B2C space. It is also looking to expand to Indonesia and Vietnam, followed by Malaysia and Singapore.

Continued from page 1

## Travel firms blast Myanmar hotels

but for the existing ones, meaning we have to change rates that have been confirmed already not once but twice.”

“In some countries, this causes legal issues as overseas tour operators guarantee rates to their clients once a booking is confirmed. This also damages our credibility as our clients don’t understand what is happening and don’t believe what we are telling them,” said Kuenzle.

Tin Tun Aung, secretary of the Union of Myanmar Travel Association (UMTA) and owner of Thingazar Travel and Tours, said: “We confirm the price with the clients four months before the visit but the hoteliers raise the room charges (just) before the visit. How can we ask the clients to pay more in this situation?”

“For example, a room that was US\$25 could be as high as US\$120 now. We have no idea if a room that is US\$70 will suddenly become US\$250 when our client arrives!”

Kuenzle said: “Now that we don’t have to explain the political situation any longer, we find ourselves having to explain (this mess).”

But Kyaw Htun, secretary of

the Myanmar Hoteliers Association (MHA), said travel companies had the upper hand in negotiating room rates during the lean years.

He attributed the soaring rates to a lack of investment in new hotels over the past decade and the sudden growth in arrivals.

“Shareholders don’t get much profit from their hotel investments. So I think we should not blame either side for what is happening now,” he said.

Traders Hotel Yangon spokesperson Lwin Mar Aung said the increases were “just business”.

“We can’t have constant room rates, it will change depending on demand, so we don’t make contracts with every travel agency. We are also giving more priority to online booking,” she said. “Agencies also seem to think that we don’t want to sell bookings to them but actually we don’t have rooms left – all are full.”

According to Kuenzle, hotels in Yangon and Mandalay are now less keen to court tourists during the low season as well, due to rising corporate travel from the region by companies wanting to set up shop in the country since its political reform.

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TTG Intelligence

Analysis by Murray Bailey

### LCC seat capacity surges ahead

LCC traffic in Asia-Pacific is growing fast – if capacity growth\* is a good indicator. For 1Q2012, intra-Asia-Pacific LCC seat capacity was 25% of the total. Not only did LCC capacity increase 44% from 2011, its share also grew from 19% – back in 2001, its share was just 1%. Meanwhile, the overall flight capacity in Asia-Pacific rose 8% to 295 million seats.

\*Calculations by Travel Business Analyst (TBA) from past and current monthly OAG Facts data.

44%

Growth in LCC capacity in APAC in 1Q2012

25%

Share of LCC capacity in APAC in 1Q2012

### AirAsia's sales growth slows

Seat sales in AirAsia's three main divisions (Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand) increased 14% in 1Q2012, lesser than the 19% growth recorded in the same period in 2011 and the average annual 17% over the past five years. Seat sales in the Malaysian division grew 12% – a rate slower than normally associated with growing LCCs – while the Indonesian and Thai divisions did not gain in overall share. This year, Malaysia sold 59% of total sales – hardly any change from its 60% in 2008.

| Division  | 2012            |           |         | 2011            |           |
|-----------|-----------------|-----------|---------|-----------------|-----------|
|           | Seats (million) | Growth, % | AAGR, % | Seats (million) | Growth, % |
| Indonesia | 1.3             | 16.4      | 19.8    | 1.1             | 22.4      |
| Malaysia  | 4.8             | 11.6      | 16.6    | 4.3             | 17.2      |
| Thailand  | 2.1             | 17.3      | 17.0    | 1.8             | 22.7      |
| Total     | 8.2             | 13.8      | 17.2    | 7.2             | 19.3      |

AAGR = average annual growth rate (2008-2012) from calculations by TBA on AirAsia or stockmarket indicators.

### China and Japan in top 10 for bednights in European cities

In 2011, two of the top 10 source markets for bednights\* across 57 main European cities were from Asia. International bednights recorded a total of 193.4 million, a rise of 7%. Contrary to common perception that China is the only sizeable Asian market for Europe, Japan recorded 4.1 million bednights – almost double of China's. While European cities registered a 22% growth in bednights from China, that was still slightly less than the overall growth in Chinese outbound travel last year – up 22.4%, according to PATA data.

\*Bednights from visitors staying in all accommodation types.  
Source: European Cities Marketing

| Country ranking | Bednights (million) | Growth (%) |
|-----------------|---------------------|------------|
| 1               | 17.3                | +1.8%      |
| 2               | 15.5                | +4.7%      |
| 3               | 12.8                | +0.1%      |
| 8               | 4.1                 | -1.6%      |
| 9               | 2.1                 | +7%        |



# Bali loses Oz market to competition

Strong dollar drives demand for longhaul trips, while destination is no longer perceived as value for money

By Mimi Hudoyo

**JAKARTA** Bali is anticipating a drop in arrivals from Down Under as more Australians take advantage of the strong currency to travel longhaul or are swayed by low prices in neighbouring destinations.

Hoteliers *TTG Asia* spoke to said they were told by Australian wholesalers that bookings to the Indonesian island were expected to dip between 15 and 20 per cent this year, while traffic to the US and Europe was increasing up to 60 per cent.

Nyoman Astama, general manager, Bali Niksoma, foresees a slowdown during the peak holiday season. He said: "With the buoyant economy and the strong Australian currency against the US dollar, Austral-

ians are using the opportunity to travel longhaul."

Cos Matteo, sales and marketing manager, Venture Holidays Australia, observed that the market to Bali was down by about 10 to 15 per cent compared to last year. He said: "I think Bali hotels have priced themselves out of the market for Aussies, who want good value destinations."

He added that Thailand and Malaysia offered better value, while cruises in the US and Europe were also popular options.

Growing regional competition was also a concern of some Balinese hoteliers. Royal Pita Maha director of sales and marketing, Pande Sutawan, said: "Longhaul destinations are not our competitors...I'm more con-

cerned about the neighbouring countries, especially Thailand, which is also aggressively promoting in Australia. Wholesalers have requested that we maintain current rates." He urged

**"Bali hotels have priced themselves out of the market for Aussies, who want good value destinations."**

**Cos Matteo**

Sales and marketing manager  
Venture Holidays Australia

local airlines and stakeholders to launch promotional packages to compete with Thailand.

However, at least one hotelier was optimistic. Ismullah Lahsin, general manager of White Rose

Hotel & Villas and Sun Island Boutique Villas & Spa, believed the shortfall was temporary. "We have been harvesting good revenue from the market for the last few years, so it is alright to

50 per cent, which are okay," he said.

Ismullah expected the revenue loss to be partly made up for by the launch of Air New Zealand's direct Auckland-Bali services in June, as well as growing traffic from the Philippines and other markets.

Bali Village marketing group executive director, Herdy Sayoga, said his resort would continue marketing in Australia and New Zealand. "We have just returned from a sales mission in both countries and will do one more in September to attract the high-end markets. We will also put up promotional programmes to attract the weekend market and young travellers from Australia." – **Additional reporting by Greg Bondar**



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# Singapore locks in fly-cruise hub status

By Linda Haden and Gracia Chiang

**SINGAPORE** The opening of the downtown Marina Bay Cruise Centre Singapore (MBCCS) – the destination's second cruise terminal – and the rise in the number of ships homeporting here are fortifying the city-state's role as a fly-cruise hub.

Designed to accommodate the world's largest ships, the new 28,000m<sup>2</sup>, S\$500 million (US\$393 million) terminal welcomed its first liner last weekend, Royal Caribbean International's (RCI) 3,840-pax *Voyager of the Seas* (*TTG Asia e-Daily*, May 28, 2012).

Constructed to handle 6,800 passengers at one time, the new terminal alongside the existing Singapore Cruise Centre at Harbourfront are anticipated to draw 1.5 million passengers annually in five years' time, up



The newly opened cruise terminal will double Singapore's berth capacity

from one million now. Both centres have two berths each.

Featuring 80 check-in counters and up to 40 immigration counters, MBCCS also features a check-in desk for Singapore Airlines, SilkAir and Qantas passengers. According to Melvin Vu, CEO, SATS-Creuers Cruise Services, which operates the terminal on a 10-year lease, a similar service may be added

for other airlines' passengers in the future.

Second minister for trade and industry and home affairs, S Iswaran, said Singapore was well positioned to capitalise on the fly-cruise industry in Asia owing not only to its geographic location but also its excellent air connectivity. "With MBCCS, more cruise ships will be able to homeport and call on Sin-

gapore and Asia. People come to Singapore in order to board their cruise ships or to disembark in Singapore before going home, which means the fly-cruise component is (becoming) quite important," he said.

More ships are expected to call or homeport in Singapore over the next year, including Celebrity Cruises' *Celebrity Millennium*, Princess Cruises'

*Sun Princess* and *Dawn Princess*, Costa Cruises' *Costa Victoria* and *Costa Atlantica*, RCI's *Mariner of the Seas*, Holland America Line's *Zaandam* and Seabourn's *Seabourn Quest*.

This year alone, Singapore expects a total of nine maiden calls, almost double the number of new sailings in 2011.

Aw Kah Peng, STB's outgoing chief executive, explained that in order for Singapore to become a regional fly-cruise powerhouse, the city-state has to build neighbouring nations' cruise capabilities as well as its own. She said: "We are spending an increasing amount of time liaising with our counterparts in neighbouring nations – sharing ideas and holding workshops – to discuss issues related to this sector, to develop potential itineraries and to share best practices."

Marina Bay Cruise Centre Singapore





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Here's what you've missed

## Adam Tan

Our mystery man examines Singaporeans' predilection for vacations where they laze around on the beach and pamper themselves silly in spas



Expedia, Harris Interactive

## Hot Moves

Chakrapong Paladsongkram takes over as the new GM of Furama RiverFront Singapore; Hervé Joseph-Antoine joins Pacific World as global managing director; Delta Airlines promotes Jeffrey Bernier to managing director, Asia-Pacific

## Tipsheet

Insight Vacations releases its 2012/13 Winter Europe brochure featuring three new tours: 9 days Rome to London, 8/11 days Sicily in depth with a Malta option and a 9 days highlights of Spain (below)



Miguel A. Morias

## Poll

What should the Philippines travel industry do to tide over the ongoing territorial dispute with China?

- Target different markets, but only till the worst is over
- Stick to wooing the China market, but with attractive rates and more incentives
- Lobby the government to find an amicable solution ASAP

# Do take it personally



If suppliers are serious about personalising their offerings, why not start with their core product and how that is sold?

Gracia Chiang  
Editor, TTG Asia



RETARDED, was how a Singapore-based hotel chief described the industry at a recent panel discussion on innovation.

Pan Pacific Hotels Group president and CEO, A Patrick Imbardelli, made this cutting but possibly spot-on observation at the Singapore edition of PATA's Hub City Forums last week.

He explained that while hotels had systems to retrieve information about arriving guests, these currently "tell you everything about the customer that you don't need to know".

Instead of being privy to a guest's flight number, what reception staff should be armed with were details such as how many hours the customer had been travelling in order to better anticipate needs, especially for someone who might be checking in after a longhaul trip, Imbardelli said.

His point was that hotels had to do better in customising experiences, a resounding concern raised by numerous speakers and participants during the half-day session.

One attendee said what rankled him was how most hotels were still sticking to the decades-old pricing model of charging guests a full daily rate even if they arrived late at night and had the room until only late morning/noon. Hotels have perishable inventory but so do rental car companies, he argued, yet the latter allows customers to book by flexible hourly blocks.

Though simplistic, it is very true. If suppliers are serious about personalising their offerings, why not start with their core product and how that is sold?

This is especially crucial in Singapore where rates have continued their upward march and the industry is being rallied to work towards 'quality tourism'. Travellers to Singapore, many of them corporate road warriors with increasingly sophisticated tastes, are going to start expecting something extra from hotels here to justify the high prices.

Even as hoteliers attempt to address that, another group in the supply chain that they have to tailor-make solutions for are employees.

According to reports, Singapore is expecting some 10,000 rooms to be added from now until 2016, raising the country's inventory to over 50,000 rooms. This burgeoning supply combined with the reality that the city-state's workforce is projected to contract in 2017 due to fewer births should make hospitality executives nervous.

Attracting and retaining today's Gen Y talent requires thinking outside the box, redesigning roles, reporting structures and training programmes, said panellists at the forum.

As a Gen Y-er myself, here's what I think every forward-looking workplace should offer:

- An exciting job scope: Young people like new challenges and being entrusted with responsibility. Brands like Ibis are already equipping staff to serve in multiple capacities, so this idea is not far-fetched.

- Good career prospects: There must be a real recognition that Asians can do the job. How many branded hotels here have general managers that are local? Gen Y-ers are in a hurry to progress and they will run for the exit the moment they realise that they are 'stuck'.

- A global experience: Gen Y-ers aspire to travel frequently. Some are even willing to take a gap year to do that. Although hotels may not be able to match wages in other more lucrative sectors, why not offer promising employees the chance to do an overseas stint with a sister property once a year?

Hotels in Singapore have always been looked upon with envy by their neighbours, but they need to get more creative in meeting the needs of their customers – both internal and external – if they want to be able to compete with other destinations or other industries for that matter.

## Most commented on www.ttgasia.com

### Where is the money in social media marketing?

In response to comments by Scoot's head of commercial, Steven Greenway, on the benefits of social media engagement being overhyped, David Song from Singapore said it was "subjective" and depended on how far a company was willing to go to engage the market.

Instead of "dabbling with mobile advertising on buses, cabs and suspense/curiosity marketing", Scoot could have "leveraged on the potential sales available via its huge (Facebook) fan base of 50,000, by "transferring its booking engine onto Facebook and developing strategies to encourage consumers to book via Facebook", he said.

### PATA's Next Gen: Go beyond being inspired

Charles Man from Sino American Tours US was heartened by PATA's forward-looking strategy of adapting to the times and targeting the Next Gen traveller. He also applauded *TTG Asia's* suggestion for PATA to combine its annual conference and travel mart as "another innovative idea to save travel time and costs".

To attract Next Gen travellers, Man suggested: "The PATA countries, DMCs and local tour operators should create more in-depth and interesting itineraries to meet their demands in nature, culture, local cuisines and wines or new sights."

### AirAsia charts path from regional to global airline

Our story on AirAsia's plans to become a global player drew differing views.

John Eyton from Malaysia said: "What happened to all their 'longhaul' plans for London, Paris and Middle East? They let down many who had booked flights to and from London and Paris. They damaged tourism into Malaysia by withdrawing their European flights."

Leo from New Zealand said: "New Zealand also didn't seem to work out for them. And passengers from here weren't even given the option to fly on an alternative carrier – we had the option of grabbing an AirAsia flight from Australia or a refund."



TTG Travel Trade Publishing is a business group of TTG Asia Media

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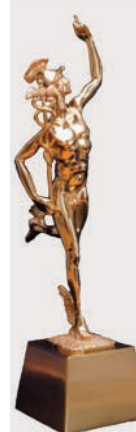
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## Best Western keeps faith in resilient Thailand

Thailand has been hit by many unfortunate setbacks in recent years; both manmade and created by Mother Nature. But no matter what disaster befalls the country, Thailand has proven its resilience. Despite the severe flooding that devastated parts of the country in 2011, visitor arrivals to Thailand surged 12% last year, and are expected to rise even further this year, growing 20% to a record 19 million.

Best Western International firmly believes in the strength and long-term potential Thailand has to offer, and this is being proven by a new series of hotels being developed in the country. We recently opened the luxury BEST WESTERN PREMIER Sukhumvit hotel in the heart of Bangkok's business and entertainment districts. This modern, 145-room hotel marks the debut of the BEST WESTERN PREMIER brand in central Bangkok, and means that Best Western now operates all three of its unique collections – BEST WESTERN, BEST WESTERN PLUS and BEST WESTERN PREMIER – in the heart of the Thai capital.

And that's not all! Best Western's Bangkok portfolio will expand even further this year with the launch of the 256-room BEST WESTERN PLUS Grand Howard, while two other hotels – a 160-room hotel in the Chang Tower and a 180-room property in the Chaengwattana district – will see Best Western's Bangkok portfolio grow to eight hotels.

We all hope that Thailand has seen the last of its recent setbacks, and that the country is allowed to develop into a prosperous and thriving country. At Best Western, we are trying to make that happen.

## TIP SHEET

JUNE 1 – 7, 2012 • TTG ASIA 6



## MYTHBUSTER SIMON SAYS

In this new column series, Travelport's president and managing director, Asia-Pacific, **Simon Nowroz**, examines assumptions about travel distribution

**Myth**  
The travel agency model is fast becoming unsustainable, thanks to the Internet

**Fact** The fact of the matter is, travel consultants still play a fundamental part of the travel planning process and their expertise is highly valued by travellers. However, you can't ignore the power of online, and as they say, if you can't beat them, join them.

Many agencies today successfully integrate online into their existing business. Whether it's offering an online booking tool on their website or using social media channels for lead generation and marketing, purely offline travel businesses are slowly becoming a thing of the past.

In fact, the growing popularity of mobile devices, on-the-go payment options and location-based services has given rise to a new truly integrated retail experience. It marries the latest technology

and convenience of online with the high touch of personal service that only face-to-face interaction can give.

It seems that the rise of online has created a new breed of brick-and-mortar travel agencies. They are more agile, more capable and savvy business people. Instead of being everything to everyone, they have focused on an area of specialty, directing their attention towards winning and retaining loyal clients. Many have also successfully introduced service fees and premiums to reduce the reliance on airline commissions and incentive payments.

There's no doubt that today's travellers are well-researched, incredibly resourceful and always connected. They have at their disposal a wealth of online book-

ing channels, information guides and social media platforms all designed to fulfill their travel needs in the least amount of time with minimal hassle.

While simple point-to-point itineraries have traditionally been the domain of OTAs, we are now witnessing their migration towards effectively dealing with complex itineraries, with multiple cities, stopovers and add-ons. With this evolution, the need for offline travel experts to re-examine how they deliver their service is critical.

As Charles Darwin once observed, it is neither the strongest of the species that survives nor the most intelligent, but the one most adaptable to change. The travel agency model is one fine example of this.

## Uniworld adds Italy cruises

New itineraries reflect rising interest in river journeys among Asians

**SINGAPORE** Uniworld, The Travel Corporation's boutique river cruise brand, has added Italy to its collection.

The 13-day Splendors of Italy itinerary combines a seven-night river cruise along the Po and the Venice Lagoon with a two-night land stay in Florence and three nights in Rome. A cruise-only option, Venice and the Po River, lasting eight days is also available. Both itineraries are scheduled to debut in Spring 2013.

Melvin Loh, senior sales manager for The Travel Corporation, said bookings for any itinerary in the preview 2013 brochure from

now until June 30 would receive an early bird discount of up to US\$2,400 per couple.

"We believe that these cruises will appeal to discerning Singaporeans who have been to Europe before who now want to tour at a leisurely pace and who are keen to experience the richness of Italy," he said.

The new itineraries will also be sold in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines via the firm's GSAs.

New travel consultants will be offered a 10 per cent commission if they sign up to sell Uniworld's 2013 brochure, which will be of-

ficially launched in August.

Chan Brothers Travel product manager, Tevin Ong, said river cruises offered clients an interesting alternative to touring Europe.

"However, we often find that we need to tell customers that the prices quoted are all-inclusive and that the cruises offer good value for money to convince them to make a booking."

"Nonetheless, although this is still a relatively new product for us, we've noticed that once a client has been on a Uniworld cruise, they are apt to want to go again," he said. – **Linda Haden**



## Win A Coaching Programme Worth US\$7,000

Love the tips offered in *TTG Asia's* A-Zs of Successful Agencies but need help to put them into practice? Tip Sheet columnist Adrian Caruso, founder and CEO of TA Fastrack Australia, is giving away a 3-month online coaching programme that will provide 1 winner with a make-over of their travel agency business.

A former travel agency and hotel owner/operator, Caruso now coaches travel, tourism and hospitality businesses throughout the region.

### Coaching includes

- An in-depth analysis of an agency's travel business including a step-by-step Master Action Plan to help the agency achieve its business goals
- 9 x 1 hour strategy and mentoring sessions with Adrian Caruso to implement the strategies outlined in the action plan
- 3 x 1 hour training sessions for agency staff over the web
- Critical evaluation of all course assignments given
- Access to a vast library of top-notch travel business success tools

### Expected results

The winner will receive a Master Action Plan that includes a step-by-step road map that will guide the agency towards a minimum increase of 61% in profits within 90 days. This is based on the condition that the agency completes the work outlined after each strategy and mentoring session, and it achieves a 10% increase in the five key profit areas of business the agency will be primarily working on during the 3 months.

*This contest is open to all travel agency owners or top management in travel agencies. Tell us in less than 100 words about your agency and what you'd like to start doing differently in your business. Send in your entries to [ttgnewsdesk@ttgasia.com](mailto:ttgnewsdesk@ttgasia.com) with 'Contest Submission' in the subject line by June 8.*

## TTG Travel Pursuits

Compiled by The Fox

A light-hearted section where we take a word, alter it by adding, subtracting or changing some letters – and giving it a new definition:

- 1 **Tofitel**. Hotel brand that many customers stick to.
- 2 **Sheratom**. Very powerful hotel brand.
- 3 **Ramadan**. Hotel brand whose restaurants open only after sunset.
- 4 **Aeroplout**. Devious plan against a Russian airline.
- 5 **Amis**. Is there something wrong with this car rental company?

## Humour

### QUIZ

1. Which are the biggest LCCs in Asia-Pacific, the US and Europe in terms of seats sold?
2. We asked the founder of a hotel group in Hong Kong: "Was this man daring or mental?" What is the name of his hotel group?
3. What are the names of Zuji's OTA associates in the US and Europe?
4. What is the new name for India's IT city, Bangalore?
5. A famous writer decides to build an Aman resort. What name should he give it?



1. AirAsia (30 million in 2011), Southwest (110 million), Ryanair (76 million)
2. Man darin Or rental
3. Travelocity and Lastminute
4. Bengaluru
5. Aman Resorts (Amanuensis meaning writer/secretary)





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body, and soul.*

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**Deep Kalra**  
**Founder & CEO**  
**MakeMyTrip, India**

After his blockbuster IPO on NASDAQ in 2010, Deep Kalra can look back and say he was resilient, not stubborn. He shares with **Raini Hamdi** what it takes to make your own trip to riches and stardom

# Deep pockets at last

## How did you make this trip?

I started with a job in a bank and at the end of two years I knew I was not cut out for banking. In fact I had this morbid fear that I was going to die on my deathbed writing a credit proposal! It was non-stimulating, not non-adventurous and not impactful. Maybe it was early days and I was impatient by nature. But I was wondering, what impact was I making? I was doing corporate banking. The new, exciting young companies were being turned down by the credit department – ABN AMRO, being a Dutch bank, was conservative – and the ones that were there forever got approved, so it was not very exciting.

Then something bizarre came along. An American company, AMF Bowling, which sold 10,000 bowling lanes in China, wanted to expand in India where there was no bowling at the time. I got excited as it was an entrepreneurial job – a one-man army and no rules. I spent four years there and understood the whole business from how you lay lanes to finding investors to buy this equipment and installing it. I had 200 lanes to show for at the end of it, so clearly not a success.

## But it gave you entrepreneurial insights?

Yes, the most important was that I would not be scared or deterred to do something when there were no rules.

But it did make me want to join a large company where systems and processes were in place. So I did, with GE Capital, and it was to find new avenues for distributing our consumer finance products and the new avenue was the Internet. So I was working a lot on the Internet and the more I interacted with the medium on a professional and personal level, the more I was convinced that the time was right to jump onto something that I thought would do very well, MakeMyTrip.com.

## Why an OTA?

For me the epiphany if there was one – though I don't think it was one moment but gradual – was when I put my wife's car for sale on a site called automartindia.com and it fetched Rs20,000 (US\$368) more than the traditional channel. Then in July 2000, I wanted to take her on a holiday to Phuket. We went online – I think it was asiarooms

or asiahotels – and we had the same accommodation at US\$70 compared with US\$100 a travel consultant offered us.

Today I know with authority that the hotel was working with many consolidators in Thailand and those worked with other consolidators in markets like India, who were working with small travel agencies.

So there were three guys in the line, each making perhaps US\$5-US\$10 on the booking and by the time you got it, it would be more expensive than if you had gone direct or to one intermediary. I don't like direct; one intermediary, like online, is a good idea (laughs).

## When you launched on April 1, 2000, were there other OTAs?

A host of them came up at the same time, we were the first wave, but all of them perished.

## Why hadn't MakeMyTrip?

I'm just stubborn. I think though there is a fine line between resilience and stubbornness, and my saying is, if it works out, you can give yourself a pat on your back and say you're resilient.

But at that moment, you were in the zone and you were just saying to yourself, 'listen, there's light at the end of the tunnel, the graphs tell you they will intersect, it'll take a couple of years, stick with it.'

Things were bad – 2001 to 2003 were our darkest hours – because people were not used to buying online and we weren't getting the promised second funding because of the dotcom bust. So we were pretty much on our own. So either we paid three months and shut shop, or we carried on. The hardship would go on for one, two years and we had to take the biggest cuts.

My two co-founders took massive cuts. For 18 months I didn't draw a salary. And the team shrunk from 42 to 24 over a weekend because some people thought this was just too risky. But I don't grudge anyone – each of us has our own personal situations. We decided we wanted to fight it out and today, am I glad we did.

It's hard to build and create, so if you believe that there is something there, don't give up on it easily. Especially if you are in your early 30s (he was 30 years old when MakeMyTrip was launched), it's irrelevant if you

have to spend six months more, one year more on it. I'd say, even if there's a 25 chance you're successful, go for it.

## And the rest, for you, is history.

Yes, the turning point was in 2004/2005 when India started to open up, the low-cost carriers came in and we saw the opportunity to use technology with them. In 2005, we did Rs20 million in gross bookings; it's 50 times that number today.

## But it was inbound in the beginning, right?

Yes, non-resident Indians based in the US coming home. They were used to buying online using Expedia, Travelocity, etc, and they were buying largely air.

Today, almost 90 per cent of bookings are India residents travelling within India and overseas, which are growing at crazy rates.

## So what's next for you, being young still, 42 years?

It's a great question and I ask myself that. To be honest, when you list a company, you make a conscious choice that you're not exiting but actually growing

the company. What we've got now are resources – we've raised US\$80 million in cash from the IPO and I'm doing a lot of M&As (TTG Asia, May 4, 2012), the first in Singapore and we're looking in that region still.

So I'm totally fixated now on growing the business and if there is a plan B, I'd definitely like to spend more time on – it's cliché but true – giving back. That's going to be my next move, though I don't know when.

I'm sure I won't end up doing another for-profit venture. I think I got more than I ever wanted on a monetary scale. So I'm quite content and it's important we keep taking care of shareholder value, but if we can give back...

We only have one life. Unlike most Hindus, I don't believe in life after death. I believe there is only one life, so you want to live it well.

## What drives you at work now?

Making the company a great place to work. We take pride that for two years in a row now, we've been voted among the top three companies to work for in India.

Our culture is transparent and open. Our philosophy is tell people what they need to do, coach and mentor, but don't tell them how to do it, otherwise you are not going to get good managers.

We also spend a lot of time doing things together. We consciously try not to make the gap become too big between management and other folks. Once a month at least, I have lunch with a batch of 20 guys at the most junior level from the different departments, so I can listen to feedback from them.

What also drives me is making every customer a brand ambassador of MakeMyTrip. It's easy if you are an expensive brand like Apple or a luxury brand like Oberoi, but not so easy when you are a value brand.



WTTG Global Summit





# Vote Now

## For the best and brightest in the Asia-Pacific Travel Trade

### The 23rd Annual TTG Travel Awards 2012

The Asia-Pacific's most prestigious annual travel industry awards, the TTG Travel Awards returns for the 23rd year to celebrate travel in the Asia-Pacific, recognising the excellence of those who raise industry standards to new heights.

#### Your Vote Matters!

As an industry professional familiar with the latest developments in the region, you represent the voice of the Asia-Pacific travel trade in helping us identify the organisations most deserving of the coveted Hermes trophy.

Vote for your favourite travel suppliers and travel agencies through the following voting form, or on our online voting form.

[www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards](http://www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards)

**Closing Date: 3rd August 2012**

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Award Categories

1. Travel Agency Awards

Winners in this category are decided by votes from industry suppliers.

- Best Travel Agency – Australia
- Best Travel Agency – China
- Best Travel Agency – Chinese Taipei
- Best Travel Agency – Hong Kong
- Best Travel Agency – India
- Best Travel Agency – Indochina (Cambodia, Laos)
- Best Travel Agency – Indonesia
- Best Travel Agency – Japan
- Best Travel Agency – Malaysia
- Best Travel Agency – Singapore
- Best Travel Agency – South Korea
- Best Travel Agency – Thailand
- Best Travel Agency – The Philippines
- Best Travel Agency – Vietnam
- Best Corporate Travel Agency
- Best Online Travel Agency

2. Travel Supplier Awards

Winners in this category are decided by votes from travel consultants and experts.

Airline Awards

- Best North American Airline
- Best European Airline
- Best Middle Eastern Airline
- Best South Asian Airline
- Best South-east Asian Airline
- Best North Asian Airline
- Best China Airline
- Best Pacific Airline
- Best Regional Airline
- Best Asian Low-Cost Carrier

Hotels, Resorts, Serviced Residences & Spa Awards

HOTEL Chains

- Best Global Hotel Chain
- Best Regional Hotel Chain
- Best Local Hotel Chain
- Best Hotel Representation Company
- Best Luxury Hotel Brand
- Best Mid-range Hotel Brand
- Best Budget Hotel Brand

HOTELS – Individual Property

- Best Luxury Hotel
- Best Mid-range Hotel
- Best Budget Hotel
- Best Independent Hotel
- Best Boutique Hotel
- Best City Hotel – Bangkok
- Best City Hotel – Delhi
- Best City Hotel – Hanoi/Ho Chi Minh City
- Best City Hotel – Jakarta
- Best City Hotel – Hong Kong
- Best City Hotel – Kuala Lumpur
- Best City Hotel – Macau
- Best City Hotel – Manila
- Best City Hotel – Seoul
- Best City Hotel – Singapore
- Best City Hotel – Taipei
- Best City Hotel – Tokyo
- Best New City Hotel
- Best Airport Hotel

RESORTS – Individual Property

- Best Beach Resort
- Best Resort Hotel (Non-Beach)
- Best New Beach Resort
- Best Integrated Resort

SERVICED RESIDENCES

- Best Serviced Residence Operator

SPAS

- Best Spa Operator

BT-MICE Awards

- Best Airline – Business Class
- Best Business Hotel
- Best Meetings & Conventions Hotel
- Best BT-MICE City
- Best Convention & Exhibition Centre
- Best Convention & Exhibition Bureau

Travel Services Awards

- Best Airport
- Best GDS
- Best Cruise Operator
- Best NTO
- Best Theme Attraction

3. Outstanding Achievement Awards

The winners in this category are decided by the TTG Asia editorial team.

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

4. Travel Hall of Fame

The Travel Hall of Fame honours organisations that have won at least 10 consecutive times at previous editions of the TTG Travel Awards. These special award winners will be recognised at every TTG annual awards presentation ceremony. Votes for them will not be counted.

Inducted Travel Hall of Fame honourees are:

- Singapore Changi Airport (2002)
- Singapore Airlines (2002)
- Hertz Asia-Pacific (2005)
- Royal Cliff Beach Resort, Pattaya (2006)
- Star Cruises (2008)
- Abacus International (2009)
- Silkair (2010)
- Lotte Tour (2011)

VOTING INSTRUCTIONS AND GUIDELINES

For Travel Agency and Travel Supplier Awards

1. Please use the correct voting form.

Voting Form A: Travel Agency Awards

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

Voting Form B: Travel Supplier Awards

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

Online Voting Forms

You can opt to vote using our online form [www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards](http://www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards) instead.

2. Voting Criteria

Please refer to the voting criteria for **each category** and **title** to ensure that all judging is done on an equal basis.

3. Voting Rules

- Only one voting entry per person is allowed – using the voting form or online voting.
- All votes are confidential.
- Voting forms are published in TTG Travel Trade Publishing print titles and are available online at [www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards](http://www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards).

- No responsibility will be accepted by the organisers for voting forms lost, delayed or damaged in the post.
- There are no pre-nominated contenders for any voting awards.
- The results for TTG Travel Awards 2012 are final and no correspondence will be entertained.
- Voting forms will be tabulated and evaluated by an independent auditor in Singapore.
- The closing date is **3rd August 2012**.

4. Voting Form Submission

Completed voting forms are to be returned to:

SINGAPORE

Ms Lina Tan (TTG Travel Awards 2012)  
TTG Asia Media Pte Ltd  
1 Science Park Road #04-07 The Capricorn  
Singapore Science Park II  
Singapore 117528  
Tel: (65) 6395-7575 Fax: (65) 6536-0896

HONG KONG

Ms Carol Cheng (TTG Travel Awards 2012)  
TTG Asia Media Pte Ltd  
China.com Inc  
11/F ING Tower No. 308 Des Voeux Road  
Central Hong Kong  
Tel: (852) 2237-7272 Fax: (852) 2806-0646

VOTING FORM A: TRAVEL AGENCY AWARDS

For voting by • Hoteliers • Airlines • Car rental companies • Cruise operators • National Tourism Organisations • GDS companies • All other travel professionals (except travel consultants, tour operators and destination management companies)

VOTE ONLINE AT  
[www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards](http://www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards)

Criteria

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

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

|     |  |  |
|-----|--|--|
| 1.  | Best Travel Agency – <b>Australia</b>  |  |
| 2.  | Best Travel Agency – <b>China</b>  |  |
| 3.  | Best Travel Agency – <b>Chinese Taipei</b>   |  |
| 4.  | Best Travel Agency – <b>Hong Kong</b>  |  |
| 5.  | Best Travel Agency – <b>India</b>  |  |
| 6.  | Best Travel Agency – <b>Indochina (Cambodia, Laos)</b>   |  |
| 7.  | Best Travel Agency – <b>Indonesia</b>  |  |
| 8.  | Best Travel Agency – <b>Japan</b>  |  |
| 9.  | Best Travel Agency – <b>Malaysia</b>   |  |
| 10. | Best Travel Agency – <b>Singapore</b>  |  |
| 11. | Best Travel Agency – <b>South Korea</b>  |  |
| 12. | Best Travel Agency – <b>Thailand</b>   |  |
| 13. | Best Travel Agency – <b>The Philippines</b>  |  |
| 14. | Best Travel Agency – <b>Vietnam</b>  |  |
| 15. | Best <b>Corporate</b> Travel Agency<br>Best travel agency specialising in serving the needs of corporate travellers.   |  |
| 16. | Best <b>Online</b> Travel Agency<br>Best online-based travel agency offering the most user-friendly and effective interface to meet client needs. This online travel agency must also boast the best sales and marketing network in terms of service innovation. |  |

|                   |                |  |               |  |
|-------------------|----------------|--|---------------|--|
| VOTER INFORMATION | Name:          |  | Passport no.: |  |
|                   | Job title:     |  | Company:      |  |
|                   | Address:       |  |               |  |
|                   | Country:       |  |               |  |
|                   | Telephone no.: |  | Fax no.:      |  |
|                   | Email:         |  | Signature:    |  |

Please refer to the next page for  
**VOTING FORM B:**  
**TRAVEL SUPPLIER AWARDS**

**VOTING CLOSES**  
**3rd August 2012**



# VOTING FORM B: TRAVEL SUPPLIER AWARDS

For voting by • Travel Consultants • Tour Operators • Destination Management Companies

VOTE ONLINE AT  
www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards

## Airline Awards

### Criteria

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

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

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

## Hotels, Resorts, Serviced Residences & Spa Awards

### Criteria

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

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

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

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

### HOTEL CHAINS

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

33. Best **Budget** Hotel Brand  
Best hotel chain operating a network of economical properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.

### HOTELS – Individual Property

34. Best **Luxury** Hotel  
Best hotel catering to the upmarket traveller. This hotel must also boast the best visual appeal and ambience reflecting upmarket status.
35. Best **Mid-range** Hotel  
Best mid-range hotel catering to the traveller who seeks three- to four-star quality and comfort.
36. Best **Budget** Hotel  
Best hotel catering to the budget traveller.
37. Best **Independent** Hotel  
Best non-chain (ie not part of a network of properties) hotel.
38. Best **Boutique** Hotel  
Best small, fashionable and unique hotel.
39. Best **City** Hotel – **Bangkok**
40. Best **City** Hotel – **Delhi**
41. Best **City** Hotel – **Hanoi/Ho Chi Minh City**
42. Best **City** Hotel – **Jakarta**
43. Best **City** Hotel – **Hong Kong**
44. Best **City** Hotel – **Kuala Lumpur**
45. Best **City** Hotel – **Macau**
46. Best **City** Hotel – **Manila**
47. Best **City** Hotel – **Seoul**
48. Best **City** Hotel – **Singapore**
49. Best **City** Hotel – **Taipei**
50. Best **City** Hotel – **Tokyo**
51. Best **New City** Hotel  
Best city hotel that opened in 2011/2012.
52. Best **Airport** Hotel  
Best hotel – located within the vicinity of an airport – that caters to travellers in transit.

### RESORTS – Individual Property

53. Best **Beach** Resort  
Best resort located by a beach. This resort must also boast the best visual appeal and ambience reflecting local flavour.
54. Best **Resort** Hotel (Non-Beach)  
Best resort not located by a beach. This resort must also boast the best visual appeal and ambience reflecting local flavour.
55. Best **New Beach** Resort  
Best beach resort that opened in 2011/2012.
56. Best **Integrated** Resort  
Best hotel offering comprehensive accommodation, shopping, dining, entertainment and sports.

### SERVICED RESIDENCES

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

### SPAS

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

## BT-MICE Awards

### Criteria

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

## Travel Services Awards

### Criteria

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

VOTER INFORMATION

|                |  |               |  |
|----------------|--|---------------|--|
| Name:          |  | Passport no.: |  |
| Job title:     |  | Company:      |  |
| Address:       |  |               |  |
| Country:       |  |               |  |
| Telephone no.: |  | Fax no.:      |  |
| Email:         |  | Signature:    |  |

VOTING CLOSES  
3rd August 2012



# AGENCY WEBSITES



# Leveraging new platf

## Holiday Tours www.holidaytours.com.my

**PRESENTATION** The home-page is visually appealing with attractive images and large headlines. The main banner – a series of rotating photographs each featuring a different promotion – did not change too fast and offered enough time for me to read the package highlights.

The use of big font sizes to separate the different sections were useful in guiding me to what I was looking for. A navigation panel with drop-down menus displays information on additional products and services such as travel insurance.

**CONTENT** The website offers information on a wide range of products and services, with terms and conditions, special offers and hotel details displayed in a clear, concise manner.

While the booking engine allows the reservation of flights and packages online, users cannot complete the deal immediately as they still have to fill up a supplementary booking form and await further response from the company.

**STANDOUT INNOVATION** The Abacus-powered flight booking engine is a standout, providing a list of flights and their respective prices to the chosen destination. Another standout is the online chat service. Within two minutes of submitting my name, phone number and address, a customer service representative connected with me online and responded to my queries with precise answers. On exiting the system I was even asked if I would like a transcript of the ‘conversation’.

**EASE OF USE** This site is user-friendly and easy to navigate. Transactions can be done online via direct credit card payment or funds transfer to the company’s bank account.

**VERDICT** This website offers diverse products and services, and its well-structured layout is easy to navigate. It could, however, consolidate the number of different sections on the homepage and group them according to clearer-defined themes, such as domestic travel, international travel, international events and domestic events. – **N. Nithiyananthan**

## Guangdong China Travel Service www.gdcts.com

**PRESENTATION** The website design is modern and trendy with eye-catching icons and colourful banners. It uses vivid images to illustrate a product, compelling users to click to find out more. The online chat function stays at the top right-hand corner of the browser, hence saving search time should a user require the feature.

**CONTENT** The site is informative with different service categories – from FIT, to ticketing and cruises – listed on the menu bar. Online transactions are possible through its partnership with Tmall.com, a B2C online shopping platform under the Alibaba Group.

The company has about 50 per cent of its products and service items listed online, but these are mainly confined to its signature products and regular itineraries.

**STANDOUT INNOVATION** As the first travel consultant in Guangdong to set up a website in the mid-1990s, the company has subsequently upgraded its site and added more functions over time, from just basic information in the beginning to providing promotions and consultation services in 2000 and launching online transactions in 2008.

In the next six months, the site will undergo a complete revamp to include a new patented system that will provide must-know information like weather and local emergency contacts. It aims to provide a one-stop experience for users.

**EASE OF USE** Its simple layout allows easy access of information, while the live chat function caters to urgent queries – I tried using it and the response time was quick. The website’s default language is Chinese though, and despite the option of switching to English, Japanese or Russian, only the company’s profile page is available in other languages.

**VERDICT** Efficient, and one is spoiled for choice. – **Prudence Lui**

## Asiatravel www.asiatravel.com

**PRESENTATION** The home-page is cluttered with numbers and icons, which can be off-putting for some users. The site appears more functional than aesthetic; it was apparently not designed to inspire travel, but rather targeted at individuals who already have a destination or itinerary in mind.

**CONTENT** Asiatravel.com showcases a comprehensive product range, enabling users to make instant bookings for flights, cruises, coaches, hotels, transfers, attraction tickets and tours. However, there is little to differentiate itself from other standard travel websites due to its lack of travel-related content such as client’s stories, travel news and destination images. Hotel reviews and testimonials from past clients are displayed on the site though.

Even though the homepage can be translated into 11 languages, linked pages will be displayed in English first until users click on the language tab to select their preference. There is also the occasional translation error and not all pages can be displayed in other languages.

**STANDOUT INNOVATION** A contrast to other Singapore-based travel websites, attraction tickets, tours and transfers can be booked in advance at this site. Itineraries targeting specifically business and MICE travellers are also available for viewing, but unlike the leisure products on offer, they cannot be booked online.

**EASE OF USE** The site is easy to navigate, with each section on the homepage divided into various sub-fields. The flight booking engine is a little more complicated to use as one has to be familiar with international airport codes, otherwise one can scroll down a (long) list of destinations to automatically generate codes.

**VERDICT** Despite its broad array of travel products, the website should include more attractive visuals and additional content, such as travel stories by previous clients, to foster greater interest and generate higher traffic. The website design should be simplified to reduce graphical clutter. – **Linda Haden**

## Horizon Travel & Tours www.horizontravel.ph

**PRESENTATION** A B2B-B2C hybrid platform, the site is functional enough for its main users – retail sales agents – but not particularly attractive for consumers. It is packed with information for users to follow up with offline enquiries – they seem to encourage it with their office addresses and hotlines prominently displayed. Attempts to interact through social media channels are visible, with links to its Twitter and Facebook accounts.

**CONTENT** This content-rich site allows users to look up cruise promotions, international airline schedules and overseas tour packages, in addition to information on support services like travel insurance and visa application. This is significant considering the number of travel companies in the Philippines who still use their websites primarily for branding. The information provided goes beyond the initial-query types, cutting down on time customers have to spend on phone calls or store visits.

**STANDOUT INNOVATION** Horizon has clearly anticipated the needs of its different clientele. On the B2B side, Horizon has a separate log-in for retailers to check package rates and conditions before sending in their purchase orders to confirm bookings – few wholesalers offer this service.

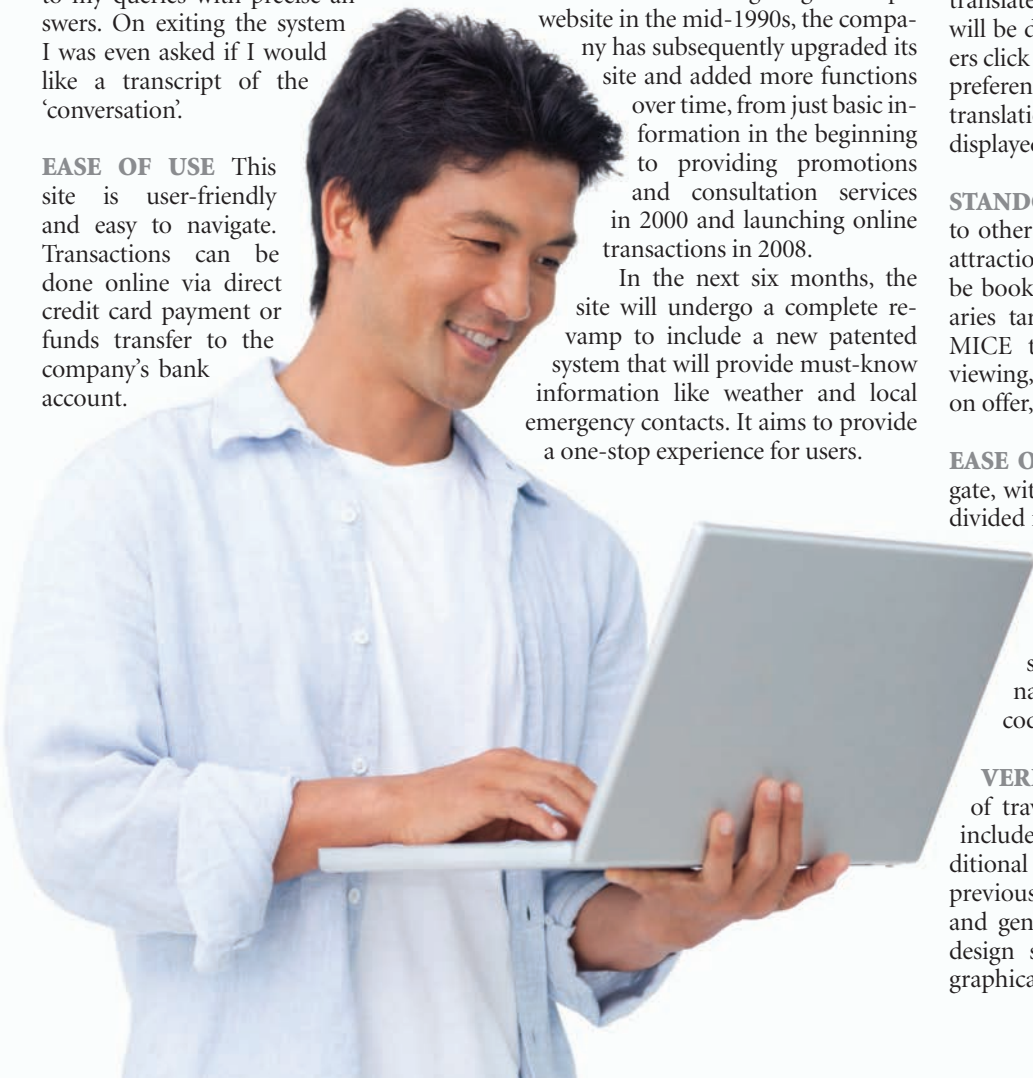
**EASE OF USE** The horizontal-oriented layout allows users to obtain information quickly. However, the layout is not consistent across the secondary pages: some pages display social media widgets, while others highlight bargain tours.

Direct bookings are not possible as the website does not have a booking engine. An Adobe Acrobat reader is required to access information for overseas tour packages (most are attached as PDF files).

**VERDICT** This website works better for partner agents and bargain-hunting consumers, as well as clients who prefer some kind of human interaction to assure them of service delivery. Package rates are regularly updated, but back-end improvements could be made to allow dynamic updates. Design could also be more appealing. – **Marianne Carandang**

## Hong Thai Travel Services www.hongthai.com

**PRESENTATION** Billed as a one-stop travel retail store, Hong Thai’s website reflects its branding fully with a simple, colourful layout and minimal use of distracting flash banner ads. Overall, the design is functional and straightforward, similar to other travel websites.





# orms

More travel firms are growing their online business by launching new-generation websites. Our reporters click their way through these stores to give their reviews

**CONTENT** The site houses a rich array of content under one roof. Apart from standard packages and special offers, there are also destination videos, which were originally broadcasted on mobile advertising platforms on local buses. Transactions for flights, cruises, hotels, tours and even Airport Express train tickets can be made instantly through its online booking system.

**STANDOUT INNOVATION** Hong Thai was the first travel consultant in Hong Kong to develop its own group-buy platform, allowing clients to enjoy special offers with fantastic discounts within a limited time period. So far, packages rolled out include Macau's House of Dancing Water, Shenzhen's OCT East resort, and for destinations such as Taiwan and Singapore. Group-buying offers will be rolled out regularly for different products.

**EASE OF USE** Products and services are clearly categorised and colour-coded for easy identification. However, the site is only available in Chinese so this limits its target audience. Also, if you encounter any problem online, there is no live chat feature to provide instant assistance; instead, you have to contact its call centre.

**VERDICT** Functional – you get what you want with a few clicks. – **Prudence Lui**

**Aman Travels**  
www.bookajourney.com

**PRESENTATION** The website features an eye-catching colour scheme of blue, green and white. Its clean and crisp layout displays different sections clearly, with an additional sitemap at the bottom of each page for users to home in on information.

**CONTENT** It offers a wide array of travel products, including domestic flight tickets, domestic and international hotels, domestic and international holiday packages, forex, visa and passport information, and corporate travel solutions. It also has an agent platform to attract B2B clients, while also being connected to major social networks to reach consumers.

**STANDOUT INNOVATION** Its listing of domestic and overseas holiday packages on the extreme right column is unlike most Indian travel websites that only highlight their hotel and flight bookings. This site also offers 24/7 customer service support.

**EASE OF USE** User-friendly and provides easy access to information and services. For example, its flight booking engine allows users to select a flight easily according to preferences, including choice of airline.

**VERDICT** A website with lots of potential but the quality of English can be improved. – **Divya Kaul**

# PATA TRAVEL MART 2012

September 25-28, 2012  
SMX Convention Center  
Metro Manila, Philippines

**PATA**  
Pacific Asia Travel Association

**Next Gen**

"PATA once again managed a great Travel Mart with lots of possibilities and new opportunities. After all the business sessions PATA has spoiled us with excellent social networking. Thanks!"  
**Mr Tony van der Vegte, Managing Director, Van der Vegte Travel Consultancy, The Netherlands**

"It's PATA and I know what to expect, thus, I went with great expectation to source for different, not run of the mill program and like-minded partners to work with. Not only was there great partners, the programs offered was outstanding. Hope Manila would be even better!"  
**Mr Patrick Lee, Regional Director, Best Travel Deals, Singapore**

"We need more choices in Asia Pacific region to offer to our high spending clients. PTM2011 fulfilled this objective and I'm grateful both to the organizer and exhibitors who wisely invested in stand space. A truly enjoyable and productive event and hope it can be repeated in Manila."  
**Sir David Christopher Kilgariff, Chairman & Managing Director, Kingsleydrummond VIP Events/Centenaryclub.com, UK**

## The Host Destination

*The capital of the Philippines -- its heart and soul -- is Manila.*

Manila is an intriguing blend of the past and the present, of striking contrasts and contradictions. Blessed with significant historical and cultural destinations, it is likewise enriched with skyscraping edifices, world-class convention facilities, state of the art shopping malls, entertainment and restaurants that serve international gastronomic delights.

**PATA TRAVEL MART 2012 VENUE**



The SMX Convention Center is the largest private venue in the Philippines for trade events, industry conventions, corporate functions and international exhibitions.

Conveniently located beside SM Mall of Asia, the world's fourth largest shopping mall, and with in close proximity to prestigious hotels and key public transportation systems, the SMX convention Center has made itself one of the best flagship establishments of the Philippine meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions/events (MICE) industry.

With ongoing developments for office space, residential condominiums, and a 15000-seat arena, as well as a luxury hotel integrated within the SMX expansion project, the SMX Convention Center and the rest of the Mall of Asia Complex is set to become a premier convention destination.

*Manila*



Banaue Rice Terraces

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**Sellers - Register now to ensure prime space location**  
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**Register by June 30, 2012 for pre-scheduled appointments**

HOST:



OFFICIAL CARRIER:



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# A Tokyo revival

Premium quality, new luxury attractions and emerging markets are bringing back the well-heeled to city, reports **Raini Hamdi**



A night view of the city from Conrad Tokyo

Luxury hotels in Tokyo are hopeful that this year will see a revival of the high-end leisure travel market, now that Japan is more or less off the headlines with the 3/11 earthquake tragedy.

The months of March and April kept their hope afloat as hotels in the city saw bookings materialising at short notice, bumping up occupancies unexpectedly.

Said Malcolm Thompson, general manager of The Peninsula Tokyo: “You might open the month with, say, 35 per cent occupancy on the books but see that double within the month.”

He added: “We were really on a roll until January/February last year, with forward bookings for the cherry blossom season last year looking very good. Then came the tragedy in March, which saw all the bookings cancelled. I think people still wanted to come to Japan and were waiting for a trigger. Easter this year was the trigger. We had families from the US, who were planning to visit last year, visiting this year.”

## Silver spoon

# Gordon Ramsay at Conrad Tokyo



It is the only Gordon Ramsay restaurant in Asia – and how special, writes **Raini Hamdi**

**AMBIENCE** It's a long restaurant and it's lovely to be walking the whole stretch of it to reach my table, which is right at the end. Maitre d', Nourry Lebbad, is escorting me so gallantly.

I am a huge fan of Gordon Ramsay; his screams in *Hell's Kitchen* are a scream. This restaurant is no *Hell's Kitchen* of course. It is hushed, warm and intimate, 70 seats at the most. The decor is elegant and minimalist – much like Ramsay's cooking style – and the simplicity allows one to focus fully on the food.

I'm on the 28th floor of the Conrad Tokyo, next to a 7m floor-to-ceiling window which brings into full view an enormous building stacked to the skies with offices, whose neon lights are still burning away at night as if no nuclear reactor has ever been switched off in Japan.

The contrast to the mood lighting and romantic ambience at Gordon Ramsay is just incredible. I'm so glad I'm on the right side of the road – and life – to be sipping a fine Montrachet selected by Lebbad while some sala-

ried men, I bet, are still slaving away on the other side.

Lebbad presents me a beautiful card with Ramsay's artistic signature embossed in gold on black background. I open it and see a jaw-dropping menu.

**MENU** A six-course modern French. I've stopped eating foie gras and substitute the first course with tomato stuffed with lobster. This is followed by tortellini of crab and scallop; John Dory a la Arnold Bennett Gironde; roasted and braised red wagyu bone marrow; Gianduja soufflé; and cylinder of pineapple and mango.

The main ingredients may all sound ordinary but what comes out is truly extraordinary and reflects Ramsay's cooking style of putting just one or two ingredients on the plate, then slamming the dish home with utterly delicious side dishes and sauces.

The tomato stuffed with lobster, for instance, is accentuated by ginger, lemongrass and pistachio, while the tortellini has caviar, celeriac and champagne – one sheer genius of a course – and the fish is served with abalone and sea urchin.

No wonder this restaurant has been awarded one Michelin star four years in a row by the *Michelin Guide Tokyo Yokohama Shonan*. Along with Conrad's China Blue, one of just seven

Chinese restaurants awarded a Michelin star, it does seal the hotel as a hot table in Tokyo.

**PRICING** The Prestige Menu costs ¥22,000 (US\$277) including tax and service charge, which is what one can expect to pay in Michelin-star restaurants.

**SERVICE** Many Michelin-star restaurants have an in-bred stiffness and formality about them, but not here.

Not when you have a Maitre d' as fine as Lebbad.

His manners are impeccable, he serves with grace and aplomb, he has extensive knowledge of F&B (his pick of wine to pair with each course is spot-on) and to cap it all, Lebbad has a real sense of humour.

Michelin-star restaurants need people like this to make them an accessible, complete and memorable experience.

For me, the evening is a perfect 10.

Name Gordon Ramsay  
Where Conrad Tokyo  
Contact details  
Tel: (81-3) 6388 8000  
Email: FB.ConradTokyo@conradhotels.com  
No. of seats 68  
Verdict **\*\*\*** Legend \*\*\* must recommend to clients  
\*\*\* good  
\*\*\* recommend @ your own risk





Fears of holidaying in Japan have abated. In fact, what may stand in the way of revival is not so much safety consideration, but the European debt crisis and the strong yen, which is now about ¥78-¥80 to the US dollar, compared to ¥150 pre-Lehman. This derails Japan's effort to position itself as not an abnormally expensive destination.

But industry players believe the luxury market is resilient and discerning about the real value of a Japan holiday, which is premium and aspirational.

Said Gregor Andreewitch, general manager, Conrad Tokyo: "Of course it is difficult for Tokyo to compete on price. Thailand or Indonesia has fantastic properties at half the price. But there comes a point when a client must decide what suits his needs."

"Japan has many unique things to offer. It's a different planet here. The people are so polite. If you buy something,

they wrap it so beautifully you don't want to ever open it again. The quality you get is simply unrivalled."

Jesper Koll, head of Japanese Equity Research, JP Morgan, speaking from a panel at the recent WTTC Summit in Tokyo, refuted Japan was expensive.

"When I arrived 26 years ago, yes, Japan was mega-expensive.

But in the last 20 years, there has been an adjustment and disinflation. I urge you to go to the convenience store here in Tokyo and compare, like for like, the price of milk, orange, etc, to the price in New York or London. Prices in Tokyo are more or less the same; the city is no longer super expensive," he said.

Kazuko Abe, general manager inbound travel sales and marketing division of Kinki Nippon Tourist, said the US and Asian luxury travel markets "are not so affected by the exchange rate" and are "gradually returning". Europe, however, is still "not so good" due to the

debt crisis.

Many inbound players have thus ventured into Eastern European markets such as Poland and the Czech Republic, and Asian markets such as Indonesia, whose economy is booming.

This fact is also not lost on Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), which is seeking the Indonesian government's nod to open an office in Jakarta (*TTG Asia e-Daily*, May 28, 2012). Motonari Adachi, JNTO's executive director in Singapore, expects the office to open by next year. He said Indonesia, along with the Philippines and Vietnam, were added as priority markets this year.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government also went on a roadshow in South-east Asia earlier this year to highlight new attractions in the city.

This includes the 290-room Palace Hotel Tokyo, which opened on May 17 in the Marunouchi district, where The Peninsula Tokyo is also located (see *Checking In* below).

Part of a ¥90 billion mixed-

use development, The Palace Hotel Tokyo replaces the former Hotel Teito and Palace Hotel that occupied the same site – a moatside location beside the Imperial Palace.

Said Palace Hotel Tokyo president, Takashi Kobayashi: "This hotel is Japanese through and through, from its ownership and management, to its service protocols and its picture-perfect location by the Imperial Palace gardens and moats."

"For domestic and international travellers alike, whether they are with us for business or leisure, we hope they will walk away saying, to have stayed at Palace Hotel Tokyo is to have experienced the very essence of Japanese hospitality."

Another new attraction is the Tokyo Skytree, which opened on May 22 as the highest tower in the world now at 634m. It is located in the Sumida Ward, where the Edo culture remains to this day. Its glass-covered observatory and air corridor offer visitors the sensation of walking on air and it bills itself

as the new sightseeing spot and landmark from which to view Tokyo's skyline.

STR Global's latest available figures show Tokyo registering the largest occupancy increase in Asia in March, rising 47.6 per cent to 84.7 per cent over March 2011. The city also experienced a RevPAR increase of 58 per cent to US\$148.

High-end hotels are encouraged, saying they need to build up ARR and can only do that if there is a healthy balance between corporate and leisure travel.

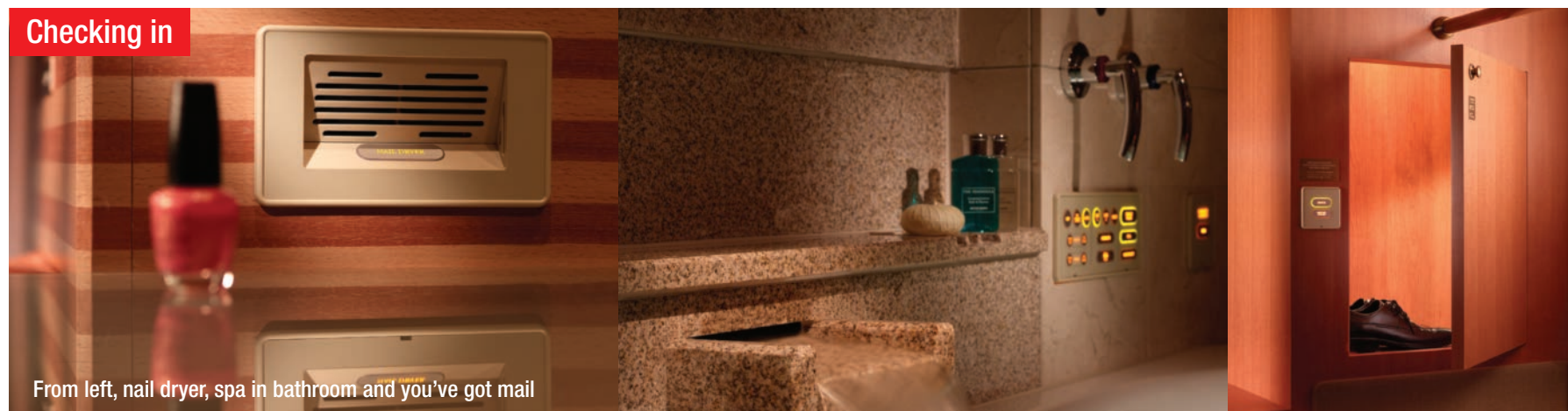
Both The Peninsula and Conrad Tokyo will be rolling up their sleeves again at ILTM Asia in Shanghai this month, as they did last year after the disaster, to put Japan firmly back on the radar of the luxury travel market.

Said Peninsula's Thompson: "Actually, by the end of last year, at ILTM (in Cannes), all the Virtuoso (luxury travel) agencies we spoke to were already very positive about Japan. They said people would forget and they would return because they love Japan."



Thompson:  
Easter trigger

## Checking in



From left, nail dryer, spa in bathroom and you've got mail

# Peninsula: The other royal treatment



For a royal treatment close to the Imperial Palace, check into The Peninsula

Tokyo, where the devil is in the details, says **Raini Hamdi**

**LOCATION** In the prestigious financial district of Marunouchi, and I can see the Imperial Gardens clearly from my room.

It is a free-standing 24-storey luxury hotel, a rarity in itself, since the others are part of high-rise office buildings or multi-use complexes. This does make a difference to sense of arrival; I feel immediately connected to the hotel. Outside, the neighbouring buildings are grey on an early Monday morning; step inside and the hotel feels warm and inviting.

The chandelier in the centre

resembles a shower of fireworks raining down on the lobby. Guests are having breakfast in the lobby cafe, adding soft chatter and life to the place. A staff welcomes me by name and leads me to the reception. We pass a unique, if not a little odd, bamboo sculpture. I read later that it's Japanese designer Keisen Hama's depiction of a dragon, and that there are nearly 1,000 artworks created mostly by Japanese artists in the hotel.

**ROOM** A deluxe park view king room and, ooh, so neat and supremely intuitive. It is spacious and ultra-comfortable not simply because it is bigger than a standard deluxe room, but because the design, use of space and in-room technology are well-thought and unobtrusive. The flatscreen TV, fax, printer, telephone, etc, are all tucked be-

hind beautiful cherrywood cabinets. There are no columns as these are hidden too.

I'm never a fan of high-tech rooms – they usually irritate me as they don't work – but The Peninsula Tokyo is fast converting me into one. A 'spa' button in the bathroom dims the lights, plays spa music and sets 'privacy' for the phone and doorbell all at once. In darkness, a night light button creates a softly-lit 'path' that guides me to the toilet.

Unsure of the climate and what to wear as I've just arrived, an outdoor temperature and humidity level display in the spacious dressing room shows me how to dress. That's when I also notice a nail dryer in the dressing room and 'the box' – a Peninsula hallmark – in which messages, newspaper, cleaned shoes are delivered.

This clearly is an innovative

room yet it is not cold without character. In fact, it has a lot of Japanese character, which is also employed in a very detailed manner – note the Ajiro ceiling panels, woven kimono thread patterned carpets and the horse chestnut sliding door, to name a few examples.

**SERVICE** I would have liked the hotel to have The Peninsula Hong Kong's personal touches, like serving tea immediately after arrival, or touching up the room when a guest goes out, but in Japan, where labour costs are high, it is probably understandable.

The staff I interact with at breakfast and at concierge desk, however, are extremely polite, helpful and efficient, living up to my idea of inimitable Japanese hospitality.

**F&B/FACILITIES** Five restau-

**Name** The Peninsula Tokyo  
**No. of rooms** 314  
**Rate** From ¥60,000 (US\$755)  
**Contact details**  
Tel: (81-3) 6270 2888  
Email: ptk@peninsula.com  
www.peninsula.com

rants, including the dazzling rooftop restaurant, Peter, which offers 360-degree views of Tokyo and the Imperial Gardens; a modern lounge bar; two ballrooms; six function rooms; a wedding chapel; a Japanese ceremony room; a fitness centre, The Peninsula Spa by ESPA; and a fleet of Rolls-Royces and BMWs for transfers and Mini Coopers to take guests for sightseeing or shopping.

**VERDICT** The other royal treatment just a stone's throw from the Imperial Palace.





Demand has not kept up with the rate of new launches in the city

Shanghai Municipal Tourism Administration

# Shanghai's room surplus

Demand is moving back up, but rates remain inferior to those of key Asian cities. By **Linda Haden**

**Arrivals** Foreign arrivals dipped by 3.9 per cent to 8.2 million in 2011, according to the Shanghai Municipal Tourism Administration (SMTA). While the momentum generated by the 2010 World Expo has died down, this figure is still higher than that during pre-Expo, when inbound traffic was around six million.

All major inbound markets slipped into negative territory in 2011 due to the global economic slowdown, with the exception of South Korea and Russia. Visitors from Hong Kong and Macau fell by 23.2 per cent and 39.5 per cent respectively. Excluding the SARs, Thailand and Malaysia posted the largest decline at 27.3 per cent and 24.7 per cent respectively.

Despite the fallout, SMTA predicts that foreign tourists will hit 8.3 million by end-2012.

**Hotels** Shanghai's occupancy and rates are markedly lower than those of other Asian cities due to a room glut. According to NTO statistics, in 2011, average occupancy of hotels in Shanghai was 55 per cent, compared to 86 per cent in Singapore and 89 per cent in Hong Kong.

In 2011, Shanghai hotels charged an average daily rate of US\$75.60 versus Singapore's US\$195.10 and Hong Kong's US\$173.40.

Hotel analyst STR Global said that as of February, Shanghai had 10,582 rooms in the pipeline. By 2013, the city is expected to have over 50,000 rooms, the majority of them managed by global brands including Four Seasons, Marriott and Shangri-La.

Crystal Song, director of sales, JW Marriott Hotel Shanghai Tomorrow Square, said: "Hotels (in Shanghai) are under immense pressure. Some hotels, especially local ones, cut rates to unsustainable levels, making it difficult for international branded hotels to lure price-sensitive domestic guests."

Some global brand operators have reported marginal jumps in hotel and occupancy rates this year, while most expect the situation to improve with more MICE arrivals.

Local operators, which depend more on domestic leisure guests, were less certain. "There's been a definite lull in domestic visitors since the Expo ended. We continue to target markets outside mainland China, but we don't expect numbers to rise significantly. Rates and margins (for



"The demand (for hotels) is there and it is increasing, but it is simply not keeping pace with supply."

**Christophe Lajus**  
Chairman  
International Branded Hotels of  
Shanghai Association

local hotels) are lower now than in 2010, and it looks like they will remain for the time being," said Jackson Zhou, deputy manager, sales & marketing, Oriental Riverside Hotel Shanghai.

**MICE** Shanghai's suppressed rates, however, have helped to garner more interest for the destination.

At April's IT&CM China, An-eel Gupta, director, Anjali Travel and Tours India, said the firm's volume of corporate and MICE travellers had risen by 50 per cent so far this year. Sapinah Itam, director, regional accounts, Global Cynergies, said enquiries from Singapore had also increased by 10 per cent year-on-year.

Municipal authorities will continue to upgrade air and road infrastructure, while working in partnership with both domestic and international organisations to bolster MICE arrivals, said SMTA chairman Dao Shuming at the recent China International Meetings & Conferences Forum 2012 (read more on page 17).

The SMTA also intends to double Shanghai's exhibition space to 15,000,000m<sup>2</sup> by 2015, with its crown jewel being a colossal 500,000m<sup>2</sup> expo centre in

the Hongqiao commercial hub.

Industry members are highly supportive of SMTA's efforts to enhance Shanghai's MICE sector but warned that it will be tricky. "Shanghai has the hardware to become a major MICE destination but local authorities are working with limited (financial) resources that restrict the city from going head to head with rivals like Hong Kong and Singapore, especially in terms of marketing," said Robert Lohrmann, general manager, Renaissance Shanghai Zhongshan Park Hotel.

**Access** This summer, China Eastern Airlines will add three Pudong-Paris flights to its weekly schedule of seven flights. In March, Scandinavian Airlines began non-stop Copenhagen-Pudong flights and Etihad Airways launched flights from Abu Dhabi to Pudong. Eight new routes were opened last year, including direct flights to Mauritius, the Maldives and Tehran.

Shanghai's Pudong and Hongqiao airports handled some 74.6 million passengers in 2011, a 3.7 per cent rise from 2010. As of January, Shanghai was served by 95 airlines, with links to 230 international destinations.



# Shanghai plans great leap forward

**Patricia Wee** looks at how the city's post-Expo business prospects spur its MICE ambitions

MORE than a year after the successful staging of the World Expo 2010, Shanghai is eyeing greater growth to position itself as a global business and tourism hub. Tourism revenue reached RMB305.3 billion (US\$48 billion) in 2010, a 30 per cent rise from the previous year, based on figures from the Shanghai Tourism Industry Development Conference.

As part of its 12th Five-year Plan (2011-2015), the city will invest RMB40 billion to attract 10 million foreign visitors and generate a 70 per cent rise in tourism revenue. One key development will be Shanghai Disneyland in Chuansha, Pudong, which is expected to open in late 2015.

Earlier this year, the government announced it will also invest RMB120 billion during this five-year period to expand and augment the city's modern service industry clusters. Among the five new zones earmarked for development is the former World Expo site, which will become an

exhibition zone. A complex with business, accommodation, F&B facilities will be built on-site. There will be four hotels – including a Hyatt and a Conrad – and a 47,900m<sup>2</sup> shopping mall.

By 2015, Shanghai also plans to double its exhibition space to 15,000,000m<sup>2</sup>. The China Expo Convention & Exhibition Complex, in Hongqiao Business Park, is set to be the world's biggest expo facility when it is completed in five years' time. Twice the size of the Shanghai New International Expo Center – currently the city's largest – the new 500,000m<sup>2</sup> complex will host the China International Industry Fair and the Shanghai International Automobile Exhibition.

The Shanghai Municipal Tourism Administration (SMTA) aims to raise its MICE profile globally by attending international tradeshows like AIME, IMEX, AIBTM ICCA and EIBTM, as well as hosting two fam tours in September – the SITE China Conference Post Tour and the National Association

of Career Travel Agent Conference Post Tour.

SMTA, which recently released its Shanghai Incentive Travel Survey Report 2011 based

## Inbound tourism

# 10

The number (in million) of foreign tourists Shanghai is gunning for by 2015.

on responses from 352 MICE-related companies in Asia-Pacific, found that most incentive travel lasts three to four days and is tied in with business activities.

About 83 per cent of respondents expressed willingness to organise incentives in Shanghai, in light of the city's cultural and

shopping attractions and high security level.

Some 90 per cent of groups have fewer than 100 pax, with an average budget of US\$300 per person per day. Most clients prefer to book directly with hotels, underscoring the influence of the Internet and direct sales on the way accommodation is secured.

Some 50 per cent of bookings are made six to 12 months in advance, 46.7 per cent are made three to six months before an event and a third of bookings are made less than three months before an event.

Only 30 per cent of operators charge a planning fee, showing the lack of acceptance for this type of payment method.

Although China saw a drop in the number of Japanese incentive groups after the 2011 Tohoku earthquake, it also lured some foreign incentive travel away from Japan to Shanghai. Incentive travel from Japan grew in the second half of 2011.

Shanghai has hosted several

big events so far this year, including the 14<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on Microbial Ecology, Bus World Asia, China (Shanghai) International Boat Show and F1 Chinese Grand Prix.

Last year, the continued launch of new hotels without the Expo-induced demand resulted in declining market performance when compared to 2010. Market-wide occupancy fell to 61 per cent while average daily rates (ADR) of the top- and mid-upper-tier hotels dropped to RMB1,383 and RMB725 respectively in 2011.

Horwath HTL Shanghai director, Zoe Wu, however is optimistic in her outlook for this year. "In 2012, we expect demand growth to slightly outpace supply growth given the limited good sites for high-end hotels in central Shanghai, rising land and construction costs and limited available high-end brands. As demand gradually catches up with supply, ADR and market occupancy are projected to increase gradually," she said.

## Two cities, one vision

SHANGHAI and Beijing broke new grounds when they signed an MoU earlier this year to jointly develop MICE tourism and target international events.

The strategic partnership was inked during the recent China (Shanghai) International Meetings & Conferences Forum in April, which was co-hosted by Beijing Municipal Commission of Tourism Development (BTD) and Shanghai Municipal Tourism Administration (SMTA).

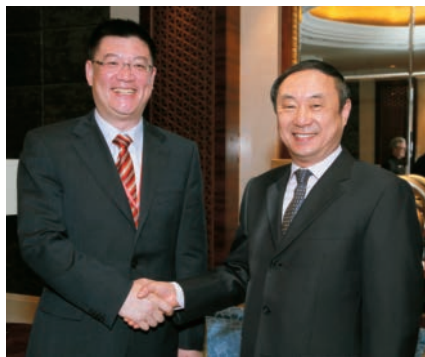
Moving forward, both cities will jointly bid for international MICE, share resources like the Shanghai Meetings Ambassadors programme, and embark on mutual marketing and promotion efforts targeting overseas markets. The pact also includes cooperation when either city hosts international events, such as the ICCA Annual Congress 2013 in Shanghai, which will see pre- and post-event tours to Beijing.

"Beijing and Shanghai have always had some form of cooperation, but this is the first time that we are joining hands to promote China as a single MICE destination," said SMTA vice chairman, Connie Cheng.

"Shanghai on its own is relatively small and what we can promote is limited, thus we need to engage bigger players to increase our competitiveness. Both cities have their unique advantages...The collaboration will better enable both destinations to meet the needs of different events."

Sun Weijia, BTD deputy director general, said: "Through the agreement, we will create synergy in promoting each city in overseas markets, as well as the overall China brand."

Noor Ahmad Hamid, regional director, Asia-Pacific, ICCA, said: "People have always been talking about the rivalry be-



Sealing the deal: Beijing's Sun Wenjia (left) and Shanghai's Dao Shuming

tween Beijing and Shanghai, but now that the two largest players in China are sitting at the same table, the cooperation is important and will better enable them to snare international events. Instead of killing each other, it is very important they have acknowledged the need to cooperate and win more MICE business together."

Martin Sirk, CEO, ICCA, added: "All of us are really excited to see this close collaboration between Shanghai and Beijing. Three to five years ago, the leaders in both cities did not even talk to one another."

Aloysius Arlando, CEO, Singex Group, said: "Beijing and Shanghai are the two MICE powerhouses in China. The partnership is an important and logical step moving forward, especially in view of heightened regional competition. It makes sense to pool their collective resources and evolve into a powerful magnet for the country."

"When there is single mindedness at the government level, it will filter down to industry, and this is a great move given China's focus on trying to get the industry to work with the government."

– Brian Higgs



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Checking in

# Shanghai Marriott Hotel City Centre

 Marriott Hotels and Resorts' largest hotel in the city is not just meeting-friendly, it's ideal for leisure visitors too, says *Patricia Wee*

**LOCATION** The 39-storey Shanghai Marriott Hotel City Centre, located on Xizang Road, provides easy access to the city's business, cultural and shopping attractions. Nanjing Road Pedestrian Street, People's Park, the Bund and People's Square are all within walking distance. An adjacent shopping mall will open this summer.

**ROOMS** The plush rooms cater to the comfort of busy road warriors. All rooms have 42-inch LCD TVs with plug-and-play MP3 and laptop connection, iPod docking stations, Wi-Fi and Marriott's Revive bedding.

The large marble bathrooms also boast separate showers and full-size bathtubs. An exclusive staircase from the Executive Lounge leads to the hotel's two 124m<sup>2</sup> Sky Suites, each with their own landscaped roof terrace and al fresco dining. Besides the Sky Suites, other luxury category suites are the Chairman Suite, the Marriott Suite and the River View Suites. Other accommodation options are 504 Deluxe Rooms, 160 Executive Rooms and 48 Executive Suites.

**F&B** There are no lack of dining choices. Marriott's signature Chinese fine-dining restaurant Man Ho serves Cantonese and local cuisines. Its executive chef holds the title of 'Master Chef of Chinese Cuisine'. Must-try dishes include steamed rice flour and red rice roll with crispy dough and sticky filling. Man Ho has 10 private rooms, the largest seating up to 25 and featuring a two-

room suite with a dining and lounge area, a mahjong table, TVs, a pantry and butler service. Inagiku's first restaurant in Shanghai can also be found here, and top-grade sushi, teppanyaki and tempura are prepared by three chefs from Tokyo. Five private dining suites are available. Shanghai City Bistro offers buffet and a la carte international specialities such as pastas, salads and tandoori meats. A large glass atrium gives guests at The Lounge a unique winter garden setting to enjoy breakfast, tea and snacks. The outdoor wooden deck of Java+ is also perfect for a cuppa and pastries on a pleasant day.

At all restaurants, iPads are available for those who are dining alone and waiting for meals to be served.

**FACILITIES** The Health Centre has the latest gym equipment and a personal trainer, an indoor pool with jacuzzi, a steam room and a sauna. There are seven treatment rooms at the spa. The Executive Lounge offers express check-in services, all-day refreshments and evening cocktails, and complimentary use of the boardroom for two hours. The entire fifth level offers 2,000m<sup>2</sup> of meeting and convention space. The Grand and Junior ballrooms can host 550

**Name** Shanghai Marriott Hotel City Centre  
**No. of rooms** 720  
**Rate** From RMB1,580 (US\$250)  
**Contact details**  
Tel: (86-21) 2312-9888  
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and 220 guests respectively. **SERVICE** Staff are friendly, helpful and alert to guests' needs. **VERDICT** Conducive for high-level business events and convenient for FITs who like to be near tourist sites.

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# Phillippines tackles China fallout

Hit by massive cancellations, destination intensifies efforts in pursuing the US, Japan and South Korea

By Marianne Carandang

**MANILA** The Philippines is turning its attention to markets such as the US, Japan and South Korea to fill the void left by cancellations from China tour groups.

As the standoff between China and the Philippines continues, tourist hotspots such as Boracay are facing not just a shortfall in room demand but revenue losses in F&B, water sports activities and island boat rides (*TTG Asia e-Daily*, May 24, 2012). Some properties have reported cancelled roomnights up to a year in advance, leading to talk of resorts dropping prices.

Benito Bengzon Jr, Philippine Department of Tourism (DoT) assistant secretary for international tourism promotion, said: "We've just come back from the Memphis in May (International Festival), the first time we've undertaken a fairly high-profile event in the heart of the US."

The festival provided DoT

with an insight into positioning the Philippines with "more of the mainstream US market", he added. Currently, many visitors from the US are second- or third-generation Filipino Americans.

The NTO roped in musicians, dancers, a chef and a heritage conservation expert to showcase its art and culture in Memphis.

Although the US, Australia and Europe are possible alternatives to China, Dada Estonactoc, director of sales and marketing at Nandana Boracay, cautioned that they were seasonal markets. In contrast, there had been "healthy forecasts" for the China tour and FIT market into March 2013, she added.

Hannah Yulo, director of Paradise Garden Resort Hotel and Convention Center in Boracay, said her hotel was now targeting the domestic market and South Korea and Japan, but added that these would take time to develop. "There hasn't been a lean season

in Boracay in one year," said Yulo.

The DoT is also gearing up to promote its new country branding in Japan during the annual Philippines business trade mission. Delegates will call on four destinations covered by local carriers – Nagoya, Osaka, Fukuoka

and Tokyo.

Meanwhile, Boracay properties are preparing to turn up in full force at the Philippine Tour Operators Association's Philippine Travel Mart from August 10-12.

Airline executives at Zest Air,

which was compelled to temporarily cancel its Shanghai-Kalibo charters, are optimistic that the situation would improve even before then. The service might be back in operation by end June, said Nickel Laude, manager for passenger sales at Zest Air.



Bengzon: target other markets

## Who pays for unused rooms?

**MANILA** China's travel advisory for its citizens has left Philippine tour operators with a trail of issues on cancellation charges and pre-booking refunds.

The most contentious, according to the trade, is the cancellation charges levied by hotels in Boracay for pre-booked rooms cancelled a few days before the booking date, which travel consultants want waived on the grounds that China's travel advisory is a force majeure and that they are making losses too.

Some hotels in Boracay are asking for up to 50 per cent of

cancellation charges as they were unable to sell unoccupied rooms in such a short notice. The cancellations occurred during Boracay's high season.

The Philippine Department of Tourism has appealed to hotels to be more lenient. While most resorts are cooperating by not charging usual cancellation fees, a handful are not budging.

Cancellation and refund policies are stipulated in booking contracts, but it's not always clear whether this is applicable when a travel advisory is issued.

Mary Ann Ong, China mar-

ket director for Blue Horizon Travel & Tours, said: "We try to be more understanding, since it's an official warning."

Meanwhile, local agencies have also started to refund their Chinese customers. Some are asking that the refund be used to offset future bookings, as both sides are optimistic that the travel advisory will not be permanent.

However, Ong said Chinese travel experts would have already made alternative plans for summer bookings. She predicts the earliest spike will be during the 2013 Chinese New Year. – Rosa Ocampo

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