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Rupee slide hits outbound

Domestic travel rises in popularity among Indians

By Divya Kaul

NEW DELHI A depreciating rupee, coupled by a steep rise in airfares, has hit India's outbound market, driving up tour package prices by as much as 25 per cent. The Indian rupee has plunged by about 20 per cent against the US dollar in recent months.

"Even though queries have not dropped drastically, conversion rate has gone down," said Ajay Jaipuria, president, Society of Foreign Travel Operators.

E M Najeeb, chairman and managing director of Airtravel Enterprises India, concurred: "The increase in prices of travel packages has, to a great extent, hampered the holiday plans of Indian travellers."

To cope with higher costs of travelling abroad, Jaipuria is advising his clients "to take short holidays of seven to 10 days instead of 12 to 15 days, enabling them to keep within their spending limits", while Najeeb is floating deals to add volume to his bookings.

Najeeb said: "If the passengers have to be motivated to travel, the first and foremost thing is to offer value-for-money holidays that provide great satisfaction to travellers. New locations and experiences have to be innovated and packaged for them."

As outbound packages become pricier, some Indian travellers are turning their attention to domestic holidays.

"Domestic destinations like Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh are gaining in popularity as outbound packages become more expensive, said Subhash Verma, president, Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India.

"The Kashmir valley is receiv-

ing as much as 40 per cent of tourists from West Bengal this season, compared to 20 per cent last year," said Angshuman Basu, co-partner, Destination Tours.

At the same time, room rates across popular Indian destinations are also clearly on the rise, based on the latest Hotel Price Index (HPI) report by Hotels.com. Average room rates in New Delhi have seen a nine per cent increase to Rs5,914 (US\$107), while prices in Mumbai are up by three per cent to Rs6,539. Bangalore recorded a five per cent rise to Rs4,595, while Chennai experienced only a marginal price rise of one per cent to Rs4,707.

Commenting on the HPI report, Hotels.com head of marketing, South-east Asia, Rajiv Malhotra, said: "The depreciating rupee against most other currencies could be a key reason for the upswing in domestic travel, hence resulting in hotel room rates rising at popular destinations like Jaipur, Goa and Manali.

"Cities like New Delhi, Bangalore and Mumbai also show a hike in room rates because they are business and cultural hubs, and are also well-connected to other tourist destinations."

However, some did not believe that the falling rupee would result in any major gain for domestic tourism.

Najeeb said: "I don't think that Indian travellers would turn to domestic destinations as an alternative even as outbound packages become more expensive. Travellers choose to travel to domestic destinations to enjoy a different feel and experience, not because their options for overseas holiday are affected."



Jaipuria: shorter tours an option

BREAKING GROUND

After transforming the way travel is bought, can online travel companies continue to make huge, not incremental, innovations? Barney Harford, president & CEO of Orbitz Worldwide, says yes and shows Raini Hamdi how he is breaking ground at Orbitz – see page 6



Win A Coaching Programme Worth US\$7,000

Tipsheet columnist Adrian Caruso (refer to page 8) is giving away a three-month online coaching course to provide one winner with a makeover of their travel agency business. 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. Visit www.ttgasia.com for more contest details.

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Panorama looks east

By Mimi Hudoyo

JAKARTA Panorama Destination, the inbound arm of Panorama Leisure Group, will focus on tapping the Asian market to make up for declining arrivals from Europe.

Panorama Destination executive director, said: "We have been developing the Asian market since 2010 and have seen rapid growth from Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, China and Indochina. Sri Lanka is also seeing strong growth, especially the incentive segment."

Rocky Praputran, Panorama Destination managing director, said: "We are looking at possibilities of (establishing) our presence in Thailand once again. We are renewing talks with potential partners. It could be a representative office or a joint venture, but we expect our presence there by this year."

Panorama Destination was buoyed by the stabilising situation in Thailand, which posted an increase of almost 20 per cent in arrivals last year.

The company had originally aimed to open an office in Thailand, but its plans were thwarted

after the Thai capital was affected by political protests.

Despite a bigger Asian customer base, Achmad said the company still needs to grow the shorthaul market further as regional visitors tend to stay shorter and spend lesser than the longhaul market.

"In the first quarter of the year, the total number of pax handled went up by 3.2 per cent, but revenue fell 2.6 per cent compared to the same period in 2010," he said.

This year, Panorama Destination is targeting to serve 118,000 customers and reach a revenue of 266 billion rupiah (US\$28.2 million).

Achmad revealed that the company's performance last year was affected by the EU financial crisis. Europe comprised 72 per cent of its business last year, with major source arrivals from the Netherlands, France, East Europe and Switzerland.

Panorama Destination's revenue fell 4.1 per cent from 265.5 billion rupiah in 2010 to 254.2 billion rupiah last year. It also saw a 7.9 per cent drop in customers handled, from 116,419 pax in 2010 to 107,212 pax.

TERRUCE'S TIPS



Terruce Wang
Vice President
Sales & Distribution Marketing
Hong Kong Disneyland Resort

A RUNAWAY
ADVENTURE

I have always been a big fan of movies about the American Old West, imagining what it would be like to explore the great frontier, brave desert mountains and stumble across mining towns in California. This summer at Hong Kong Disneyland, I can begin my own Wild West adventure with the opening of Grizzly Gulch, the latest and biggest expansion in area to open at the Park. I invite you, too, to come and discover your inner pioneer!

BECOME A PIONEER AT
GRIZZLY GULCH

I'm most excited about the **Runaway Mine Cars**, which are equally famed and feared. It's a high-speed, multidirectional terrain-style coaster that will take you on a hair-raising journey through the twists and turns of Big Grizzly Mountain. The brave ones on board the mine cars will be rewarded with spectacular views of whole Park. But hold on tight as grizzly bears force your mine car to hurtle out of control, before an unexpected explosion blasts your mine car off the mountain. It's a runaway adventure that you'll never forget.

The excitement of the coaster ride is just the start. Part of **Grizzly Gulch** was accidentally built on an active geyser bed and nicknamed Geyser Gulch by townsfolk – so watch where you tread. Be careful that the water tower, perilously listing sideways, doesn't dump its load on you! Or embrace your inner mischief-maker and use the blacksmith's bellows to start a water fight with your friends! There's no better place to cool down with some soakingly good merriment, and no better excuse to buy some nice new dry clothes in the Park.

After braving the coaster ride and the water, it's time to start your search for gold. A good place to begin is at the **Assay Office**, which houses the biggest gold nugget ever found in Big Grizzly Mountain. Or discover your inner villain by capturing yourself as an outlaw in a WANTED poster at the **Jail House**! And don't forget to capture your adventure on camera with Mickey, Minnie, Chip and Dale, who have all donned their Wild West outfits, and are joined by Disney's friendliest grizzly bears – Koda and Kenai.

Your adventures don't stop there, as expeditions are bound to work up hefty appetites. There're plenty of food choices throughout Grizzly Gulch, as well as wagons full of souvenirs exclusive to Hong Kong Disneyland.

PLAYTIME NEVER ENDS AT
HONG KONG DISNEYLAND

If you still haven't had your fill of fun, head for Toy Story Land. Andy's speediest toy car **RC Racer** will take you on a 27 meter-high U-shaped roller-coaster ride that will get your adrenaline pumping. Then your mission includes falling from 25 meters high in the **Toy Soldier Parachute Drop** and chasing your tail in the **Slinky Dog Spin**.

Four other Lands and countless other experiences await you and your Guests in Hong Kong Disneyland. I look forward to working with friends and colleagues in the tourism profession to help countless more Guests embark on their own magical adventure. For more information on Grizzly Gulch and Toy Story Land, please visit: www.hkdtravelagents.com



Beyond the kingdom

Thai hoteliers' international expansion plans pick up pace

By Chami Jotisalikhorn
& Liang Xinyi

BANGKOK/SINGAPORE

Thai hospitality groups are entering a more aggressive mode of overseas expansion, as they seek to build global portfolios and tap on opportunities in new destinations.

David Shackleton, COO of Dusit International, said: "We've gained the necessary international experience in different locations to give us the confidence to move into new emerging destinations." Besides Thailand, the group has existing properties in Manila, Cairo, Dubai and the Maldives.

A bearish domestic market also drove Dusit's strategy shift to overseas expansion, so as to enable the group to "build a larger base of hotels and gen-

erate income from diversified sources and new markets," said Shackleton.

The group will roll out its Indian debut, Dusit Devarana New Delhi, later this year, while upcoming projects include Dusit Thani Abu Dhabi, dusitD2 New Delhi, Dusit Devarana Hainan and dusitD2 Pasadena – its first foray outside Asia.

Another major player seeking wider reach abroad is Centara Hotels & Resorts. Director of sales & marketing, Philip Hall, said: "While we still see opportunities to grow within Thailand, it would not be as fast as in recent years, so we are encouraged to expand overseas."

The Bangkok-based group will boost its current 54-property portfolio with 11 new management contracts – of which

five are overseas – this year. Its second Bali property, Centara Grand Nusa Dua Resort & Villas, is set to open in 3Q2012, while Centara Passikudah Resort & Spa and Centara Ceylands Resort & Spa will debut in Sri Lanka.

Travis White, director of business development at Anantara, which is owned by Minor Hotel Group, said the time is ripe to continue Anantara's expansion internationally as it is firmly established in Thailand.

Anantara recently launched its new boutique brand Avani in Sri Lanka, and will open new hotels in China's Sanya, Xishuangbanna, Wulong (Chongqing) and Emei (Chengdu), as well as Laos, Mauritius, Oman and India, within the next two years.

Mixed reactions to LCCs' move

By Timothy France

BANGKOK Thai LCCs have been ordered to relocate to the old Don Mueang Airport to ease congestion at the main Suvarnabhumi Airport, a move that has garnered varied responses among the trade.

Brian Sinclair Thompson, president of the Board of Airline Representatives, said: "A lot of business are now connected between legacy carriers and LCCs, and that demand is what keeps Bangkok ahead of Kuala Lumpur as a regional hub. The connectivity appeal of Suvarnabhumi will suffer as a result."

Airlines were also concerned about the inconvenience inflicted on transiting passengers, who will have to travel 40km across a traffic-choked city.

Thailand-based DMCs, on the other hand, had expressed ambivalence at the move as they did not foresee real impact on their business.



Brouwer: limited impacts

Richard Brouwer, COO of Diethelm Travel Group, said DMCs had coped with similar situations in the past, so he "(did not) see much of an issue if it was LCCs or pure charter operations being moved".

Asia World Destination Management director, Max Jantasuan, agreed that the impact on DMCs, particularly the MICE sector, would be minimal.

He said: "If they are going to separate by airline types, there will be no problem, but we will have to pay attention to it."

Airports of Thailand (AOT), which operates both Suvarnabhumi and Don Mueang, is

offering incentive packages to LCCs with concessions on landing fees – already 30 per cent lower than Suvarnabhumi.

Meanwhile, Thompson sought AOT's fair treatment of all carriers. "If the cost structure is favourable, it would appeal to regional carriers serving point-to-point traffic," he added.

However, the negotiation table appeared skewed towards Thai AirAsia (TAA), the country's largest LCC, which has demanded sole use of Don Mueang's Terminal 1 (T1) as part of the relocation deal.

TAA's request has sparked an outcry among rival carriers, which questioned the logic of giving TAA sole usage of T1 before Don Mueang meets its handling capacity of 14.5 million passengers, given that Terminals 2 and 3 are not ready for commercial operations.

Experts question TTEC's necessity

By N. Nithiyananthan

KUALA LUMPUR The Travel and Tours Enhancement Course (TTEC), a compulsory programme introduced by the tourism ministry to raise the standards of the travel trade, has met with heavy criticism.

The requirement for at least the deputy general manager to attend the course as a condition for renewal of licence has aggravated the situation, especially when the trainers are juniors.

Discovery MICE president, Lee Choon Loong, said: "We are leaders of (this) industry yet we have to attend this. What is there to learn from the newcomers?"

Albert Tan, president, Tong-

yan Travel & Tours, said that while they welcome any initiative beneficial for the industry, this policy should apply to new companies, not those that have been around for 20 to 30 years. He asked: "Just by attending a one-day course, I get a certificate and a renewal of licence, but how has my knowledge been enhanced?"

Cost was also an issue. Renewing an inbound licence costs RM100 (US\$40) a year but it costs RM350 to attend the TTEC. Tan said: "(The cost) is too high and the time could have been used for business development."

Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (MATTA) Academy board member

and certified TTEC trainer, Joseph Xavier, who is also business development manager of World Discovery Travel, said that "trainers are subject matter experts" and "are experienced to conduct such courses".

"I am aware that some trainers in other institutions, including tour guides, may not be geared towards handling high-end individuals and this is where the latter may have felt insulted," he added.

Lim said the issue had been raised in a dialogue with the tourism minister and they were asked to provide names of qualified trainers. A three-day workshop will also be held to revamp the training module.

Efforts to obtain feedback from the tourism ministry were unsuccessful.

Changi Airport cosies up to trade

Singapore's CAG connects the dots in destination marketing, takes the lead in more tradeshow

By Gracia Chiang
SINGAPORE The Changi Airport Group (CAG) is stepping up its engagement of inbound operators in Singapore, including providing them with financial support to attend tradeshow in traditional and new markets.

Speaking to *TTG Asia*, CAG vice president, passenger development, Peh Ke-Wei, said: "Traditionally, airports are not active in trade engagements. They give incentives to airlines to fly to their airports, but (when it comes to) market development efforts and promoting the flight, most airports leave it to the airlines.

"We rent and build the booths and invite partners to come with us (for tradeshow). We believe trade engagement is still important, especially for our inbound partners. They need a platform, and it's quite challenging if they are on their own."

He added that CAG became active in destination marketing

in late 2010, following Singapore Changi Airport's corporatisation in 2009.

CAG will be at a number of new shows this year, including ASTA's Travel Retailing & Destination Expo in Los Angeles and CITM in Shanghai, the latter billed as a NATAS Singapore pavilion. In January 2013, it will also make its debut at SATTE in New Delhi, bringing along at least four to five trade partners.

Other shows it now attends are MATKA in Helsinki, EMITT in Istanbul, TUR in Gothenburg, MITT and OT-DYKH Leisure in Moscow, and ABAV in Rio de Janeiro.

Peh explained that these were identified not only from an air hub development perspective, but to give inbound operators opportunities to penetrate new markets such as the Nordic countries, Turkey and Brazil, while still being present in major tradeshow held in India, China and Russia, some of which the

Singapore Tourism Board (STB) has pulled out from. CAG is also organising roadshows, having just concluded one that covered six secondary cities in China.

"We are doing what STB did previously...If there are certain market (segments) they now focus on, such as premium or FIT, we will see if CAG can come in to help cover the other segments," he said.

For marts in new markets, CAG absorbs the booth cost. However, in other better-known destinations, prices can range between S\$2,500 and S\$3,500 (US\$1,945-US\$2,723).

Peh said: "CAG's management is totally supportive of this, and we are for the long term. For this kind of market development efforts, you don't see results straight away. We're quite confident we're in the right direction.

"We're building the market ahead of supply. We want to build demand so that airlines are more convinced that they can mount flights to Singapore. We support the trade so that they can support the airlines."



Peh: forging closer trade ties

First pavilion helmed by NATAS

SINGAPORE The first Singapore pavilion led by the National Association of Travel Agents Singapore (NATAS) at the Arabian Travel Mart (ATM) was said to be a success, although many felt that more could have been achieved if the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) had played a bigger role.

"NATAS did an excellent job in setting up the pavilion and all associated logistics in such a short span of time. However, it could not replace the STB and the gravitas its presence would have injected into the show," said Tony Aw, senior inbound manager, Hong Thai Travel.

Said Samson Tan, CEO, GTMC Group: "We received a flurry of enquiries from Middle Eastern buyers from various countries, but we found it difficult to sell effectively as we ran out of (STB's official) marketing collateral pretty quickly.

"Moreover, since the repre-

sentative from the STB office was not constantly around, at times it was difficult to handle queries which were out of our remit and to improve chances of sealing a deal."

Despite this, Anita Tan, director of industry, NATAS, said: "STB tried its best to support our efforts in spite of its limited resources. The Dubai regional office (also) organised a networking event for delegates and sellers." Tan added that STB had offered to help organise a series of pre-ATM roadshows next year.

Star Holiday Mart managing director, Dennis Law, said: "Arrivals from the Middle East to Singapore have stagnated owing to the political upheaval and straining economies... There's more of a need than ever for STB and inbound (operators) to work hand in hand to beef up marketing efforts."

– Linda Haden



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Tourism Data



JacTravel predicts a 30 per cent dip in London hotel occupancy during Olympics; ZUJI registers rising Singapore outbound travel; rich Chinese believe local airlines and hotels lag behind global players

Hot Moves

Marisa Aranha joins The Soneva Group as MD sales & marketing; Park Hotel Group appoints Melvin Lim as VP; Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts MD hotel operations (Asia-Pacific) and SVP of group marketing services, Arthur Kiong, resigns

Hot Deals

W Singapore - Sentosa Cove (below) rolls out opening deals; Life Resorts offers travel consultants incentives for Halong Bay cruise bookings; Four Seasons Singapore extends value-added benefits to guests



Poll

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

Target different markets, but only till the worst is over	38%
Woo the China market with attractive rates and incentives	19%
Lobby the government to find an amicable solution ASAP	43%

Inspiration from online



If you are sincere about servicing the customer, you will be king.

FOR owners of brick-and-mortar travel companies to survive, perhaps they can try and get into the minds of their biggest competitor today – young guns like Barney Harford who helm Orbitz Worldwide US, or Deep Kalra, who's behind MakeMyTrip India (Harford is featured in this issue, see page 6; Kalra in the last issue).

Harford is 39 years old, Kalra is 42, which meant they started out their careers on the back of the online travel growth – indeed, helped shape it.

Harford joined Microsoft in 1999, in its new online travel venture called Expedia. One of his earliest contributions was Hotel Price Matcher, which allowed consumers to name the price, place and room category, and Expedia would come up with a match, usually lower than the price the consumers had wished for.

Kalra launched MakeMyTrip in 2000, revolutionised the online travel booking space in India and reaped rewards from its listing on NASDAQ in 2010.

In personality, they could not be more different. Harford is fast, furious and passionate in speech, Kalra speaks gently and measuredly. But one thing strikes me as common: Their raison d'être in business – consciously, sub-consciously, unconsciously – is The Customer. It's as if this is ingrained in their blood.

Every question I asked of Harford always leads back to The Customer. Whatever invention he's thinking about doing goes back to whether this will bring value to the customer in helping him to

maximise his travel expenditure. So a question like the disadvantages of discounting for hotel partners would genuinely perplex him.

“Our goal is to make the user experience super simple and make sure we have the powerful tools to help consumers slice and dice and make the most of their travel dollars,” he told me.

Harford is currently big on personalisation. He uses data analytics to slice and dice his customers so that the right product and price are pushed to them.

What makes him potent in the online travel business is also his love for travel and the passion to spread it to more people – he's one of the first people ever to climb Mustyr, the highest point of the Torugart-too mountain range on the Kyrgyzstan-China border.

Meeting people like Harford and Kalra bring to life for me the fundamental lesson in successful businesses, which is, focusing on the customer. It's true yesterday and has become even truer today.

It does not matter whether you are an online travel agency or a brick-and-mortar travel retailer: If you are sincere about servicing the customer, you will be king.

Raini Hamdi
Senior Editor

Most commented on www.ttgasia.com

Illegal tour guides pose threat to S'pore's image

As Singapore continues to receive an influx of visitors, unlicensed tour guides are fast becoming a bugbear for its tourism industry.

Dennis Hwang from Singapore said: “STB (Singapore Tourism Board) will never solve this problem - Singapore is an open market. However, the Woodlands checkpoint can play a part by inspecting every single tour or coach entering Singapore, ensuring a local tour guide has been engaged before allowing the group to proceed. Malaysia is doing so.”

US-based Fred Harvey suggested: “Singapore has the technical resources to set up sting operations around Merlion Park and Chinatown. When (solicitations by unlicensed tour guides) occur, undercover officers immediately intervene and nab the offender(s). Of course, STB has to be serious about detecting the infractions. A few well-publicised arrests will reduce or clear the problem.”

Why each and every hotel should take it personally

In the previous issue of *TTG Asia*, deputy group editor Gracia Chiang wrote an opinion piece about the lack of personalisation in Singapore's hotel industry, which elicited a spirited response from Adrian Caruso, founder & CEO of TA Fastrack Australia.

“I totally agree that the hotel industry is a little retarded – not just in Asia but globally. Most hotels are still practising ‘mass marketing’ and ‘mass customer service’. I stay in a hotel nearly every week and 95 per cent (of the hotels) do not personalise my experience with them,” he said.

“Once hotels start adopting a customer-centric business model and know more about their clients' preferences (especially past customers), the more loyalty they will receive, and the more repeat customers and referrals they will get, which means less spending on new customer marketing.”

Malaysia mulls restoring VOA for Indian travellers

The Malaysian government's proposed reinstatement of a visa-on-arrival (VOA) facility for Indian nationals has met with approval from the local travel trade.

“It would be a wise move for the Malaysian government to implement the VOA to entice (more) Indian tourism arrivals,” said Resorts World Genting's Vincent Teh, adding that he hoped the two countries would eventually implement a reciprocal visa policy.

“The Indian High Commission (in Malaysia) should grant VOA or charge a certain fee to allow Malaysian individuals to apply for multiple-entry visas (to India) for up to two years. A good model to emulate is the China visa (afforded to Malaysians),” he said.

“If the Indian government is looking for fast-tracked development and tourism promotion to the country, then they must be bold enough to make good decisions.”



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Travel Hall of Fame

The Travel Hall of Fame, displayed in the Raffles Hotel Museum on the third level of Raffles Hotel Singapore, showcases accolades, artefacts and memorabilia of the region's most exceptional travel organisations.

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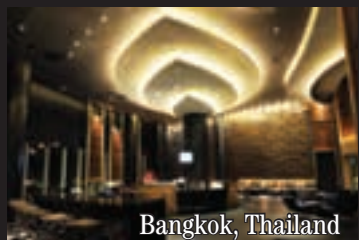
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BEST WESTERN Shinjuku Astina Hotel Tokyo
Tokyo, Japan



Bangkok, Thailand



Seoul, South Korea



Yiwu, China



PLUS PREMIER

Barney Harford President & CEO Orbitz Worldwide, US

After transforming the way travel is bought, can online travel companies continue to make huge, not incremental, innovations? Harford, 39, gives a resounding yes, and shows **Raini Hamdi** how he is breaking ground at Orbitz, which also owns ebookers, CheapTickets, HotelClub, Asia-Hotels, etc

Are OTAs making huge leaps in innovation or is what we're having now pretty much it?

We've come so far in the last 15 years with online travel. At the same time, I believe there is so much more we can do to make it even better.

How?

I think personalisation, for example, is going to be a big thing going forward.

We fundamentally believe there is an opportunity to understand the behaviour of consumers on our websites – what their preferences are, what their shopping purchases are – and use that to make personalised recommendations to them.

Did you know, for example, that people shopping on the Mac typically spend US\$20 more per night than those shopping on PCs?

Why is that?

It's a different consumer – Macs are more expensive. So when we see someone shopping on a Mac, we're going to recommend them a slightly different hotel.

Similarly, we know that people who are travelling with kids prefer different hotels than those travelling without kids, so we actually have developed a kid-friendliness index for every hotel on our web. Also, a kid-avoidance index. So based on search, we are able to change what we recommend. That's really important because 90 per cent of what we sell in terms of hotels is one of the hotels on the first-page results. Fifty per cent is one of the first five hotels and 25 per cent is the first hotel on that sort, so being able to nail it with the first five properties in particular is really important.

So if someone tells you there is not much going on with OTA innovation, you'd say...

...rubbish. There's huge innovation. The innovation that is going on is not a new model but on ground-breaking ways a consumer can book travel, for example, via mobile on the same day, via private email sales or mobile-only sales, via personalised dynamic packaging – finding new ways to work out which hotel and which flight to show to customers – and reworking the packaging display with our global platform.

Let's talk about that. Since joining Orbitz as CEO in January 2009, a key change is your new global platform.

Yes, we invested US\$145 million to basically put all our consum-

"The innovation that is going on is not a new model but on groundbreaking ways a consumer can book travel, for example, via mobile on the same day or personalised dynamic packaging."



Breaking ground

er-facing businesses on one platform; we call it a global platform. We operate 12 businesses across Europe which came together through acquisitions. When Orbitz acquired that combined entity, they were on a multitude of different platforms. We migrated them to one common global platform. Since then business growth rates have been phenomenal, both topline and bottom-line, a testament to how strong and efficient the new platform is.

How does it make a difference?

The speed with which we can innovate. As an example, five years ago, we might have felt excited if we were updating our website six times a year. Last year, we updated our website over 800 times a year – that's more than once a day. It is continually changing and, within any given period, we may be testing a variety of differ-

ent treatments, so one set of users will see one thing, another set will see something else, and our statisticians are studying the differences.

It also allows us to launch groundbreaking mobile apps. Today we're seeing over 12 per cent of hotel searches being executed on mobile devices. For customers, it's a real value proposition because if you search using a mobile device, we're actually able to show you exclusive mobile-only rates. We call them Orbitz mobile steals and these are rates that are 20 to 30 per cent off available only on mobile.

Why do mobile bookings enjoy these steals?

Our supplier partners recognise that 55 per cent of our mobile bookings are for the same day vs typically 15 per cent (on website). They know this inventory is go-

ing to expire; they don't necessarily want to show that discount to every single customer under the sun and recognise we put fences around it.

So we highly encourage customers to get the best possible deal by using, one, our mobile app, especially if they are looking at a same-day booking and have access to a mobile device and, two, by signing up for our emails for Orbitz insider steals, which are 72 hours every week from around mid-day Tuesday to mid-day Friday, where we select six to seven beautiful properties around the world that are being discounted 50 per cent or more from the normal price.

No wonder hotel chains are fed up with OTAs – you're encouraging the customer to book last-minute and wait for the best deals.

I don't think we're educating

customers to do that. I think, instead, we are giving them the empowerment. These consumers are going to book same day anyway; we're empowering them to be better informed. In the past, these customers might walk in to the hotel and get a walk-in rate, which you know is not the best, the hotel knows it's got the customer there. Now the customer turns his mobile on, we recognise where he is and in five seconds the app shows him a broad selection of hotels around where he is that are available to-night with the prices.

Our goal is to make the user experience super simple and make sure we have the powerful tools to help consumers slice and dice and make the most of their travel dollars. We think of ourselves as a travel maximiser: we help you get the best possible travel experience for the limited budget that you have.

What do you think of Roomkey, yet another attempt by chains to regain control of customers?

Competition is always good for customers. But it is tough to develop a compelling hotel site. That's the reason why there aren't that many players in the space and not many new entrants. It's a lot of investment – look at how much we've spent on our common platform.

I look at Roomkey and they don't have user reviews – how can you have a hotel site without user reviews!

You're an avid traveller yourself.

Yes, and I fundamentally believe travel has an incredible role to play in creating friendships between cultures. The opportunity we have is to use technology and data analytics to make travel a more fulfilling experience for consumers.

You were Expedia Asia-Pacific's president and made inroads for Expedia in China, with the controlling stake in eLong, Japan and Australia. Would you do the same for Orbitz in Asia?

Due to limited resources, no, but there is huge opportunity to expand HotelClub in Asia. It's been the more challenging part of the business in the last couple of years but we recently put Tamer Tamar, president of ebookers, over that business. He's now responsible for both, is fully engaged and has interesting ideas.

We feel better about how it is positioned right now. It's a strong brand in Australia in particular, and we have a decent presence in South-east Asia and Hong Kong, so we'll be building that up.

the asian luxury travel buyer's choice

Which three names come to mind when you think of the most prestigious luxury hotel chains in the world?

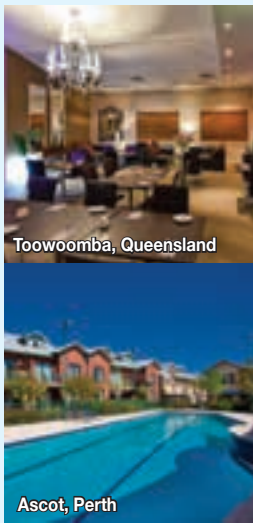
Visit our webpage to participate in this short survey.

The Top 40, and many other useful guides, will be featured in the inaugural issue of TTG Asia Luxury this October.

TTG Asia Luxury –
the Asian luxury travel buyer's
choice of reading material.

www.ttgasia.com/luxury

TTG ASIA
[LUXURY]
for buyers of premium travel and luxury meetings



Toowoomba, Queensland

Ascoot, Perth

Best Western turns 55

2012 will be one of the biggest years for Best Western Australasia as we expand our product offering to PREMIER hotels, and celebrate our 55th birthday in Australia.

From humble beginnings in 1957, as the Motel Federation of Australia, now over 180 Best Western properties extend their hospitality daily, across Australia, New Zealand and Fiji. The Best Western brand has grown and evolved, and become a much-cherished icon in Australia, as it has been part of most Australians lives, and their travelling history.

In late 2011, we launched 14 new BEST WESTERN PLUS properties, and this year, will launch two new PREMIER properties, the very first in Australia. These new PREMIER properties will be located in Melbourne and Perth, which are both central business and tourist locations. Our new PREMIER properties offer distinct style, personalised guest services, and will leave a lasting impression.

Every Best Western hotel and motel in Australia is located in key CBD or regional locations, including Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane, Adelaide and Darwin. Each property is individually owned and managed, but meets the strict Quality Assurance standards that Best Western sets for its properties.

Each Best Western property promises a friendly Australian welcome, international quality standards, and the facilities you need when you're travelling for business or pleasure.



Australasia

Ripening markets

Russia and neighbours coming up strong

By Rosa Ocampo

MANILA Aside from the rapidly growing Russian market, inbound operators in the Philippines have started to pursue heretofore negligible markets from the rest of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Baltic territories and countries in Eastern Europe.

While Russia continues to be one of its biggest markets, delivering bookings even during the lean months of June to August, T.R.I.P.S Travel is diversifying to less-traditional markets.

Marketing manager Felise Cruz said during the first few months of this year, T.R.I.P.S Travel hosted groups from Lithuania and the Czech Republic.

Blue Horizon Travels & Tours CEO, Alexander Stutely, said the company was also getting more tourists from CIS, such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan and Ukraine. The company recently held a fam trip for 14 Russian travel experts to Boracay and Bohol, and will offer similar trips for key partners in CIS on a case-by-case basis.

He added that the growing Russia and CIS markets could help fill the gap left by the Chinese market due to the ongoing territorial dispute, if the Philip-

piners relaxed visa restrictions for travellers hailing from those countries.

Stutely pointed out that the Russian market was seeing double-digit growth and now accounts for about 15 per cent of Blue Horizon's inbound volume, although it used to be "much, much smaller".

Participation at European travel fairs would help attract new markets, but the private sector could do more to grow business by raising awareness about the Philippines and educating the travel trade in Russia and the CIS, he added.

As many CIS tourists come from landlocked countries with harsh winters, they prefer the sun and sea destinations in Boracay, Cebu, Bohol and Palawan, as well as nightlife options, said inbound operators.

Cruz said the Russians were a high-spending group that was easy to deal with. They save up for their winter holidays, prefer one-stop shop travel companies and are independent travellers who favour four- to five-star accommodation, although three-star arrangements are also becoming popular. Most of their time is spent within the hotel, resulting in high earnings for hotels on F&B and other services.



Stutely: educate Russia and CIS



@OneRobin's list

Robin Yap is the managing director of The Travel Corporation Singapore, which specialises in holiday experiences from escorted tours to river cruising. The avid blogger and Twitterer shares his travel wisdom in numbers – tips you can also pass on to your clients

8 must-knows for a good holiday

- 1 Travel with like-minded buddies who share the same view on truly wanting a great time. There is no right or wrong kind of travellers: some are more careful with what they spend while others are more generous. So, having the right company is important.
- 2 Choose a destination which suits your budget so that you need not restrain yourself from having a great meal, buying a gadget that you have been eyeing or visiting a monument that you have read so much about.
- 3 There is no perfect tour but a positive mind will allow you to enjoy your holiday even if things do not turn out the way you wanted. Remember you are going on a holiday, not on a fault-finding mission. You want to bring back beautiful photos and great memories, not learn to write a complaint letter.
- 4 The cost of your holiday is not the price you pay when you book. It includes all expenses incurred on the trip that are not included in the tour price. Thus, ensure you take time to understand the tour content. Don't expect to pay for a low-capacity car and want it to perform like a sports car!
- 5 One of the greatest experiences I had travelling on international coach tours is making friends from all over the world. I learned how older Australian travellers age gracefully, how the American education system works, how Asians respect their elders while on tour, and I have also received invites to the homes of those I met on the tour.
- 6 For destinations close by, finding a resort to unwind as a FIT traveller is a good option. For farther destinations with different languages and driving styles, you must have a lot of time and patience if you decide on an FIT arrangement.
- 7 A good and experienced tour leader is not someone put on a tour just to accompany the group.
- 8 Bringing your three year-old on a longhaul programme-packed group tour can be energy draining because it is not easy for little ones to keep up with the pace, schedule and time difference. It is better to bring them when they are older and more ready.

Yours Truly @OneRobin (www.onerobin.com)

A-Zs of Successful Agencies



In this regular column, Adrian Caruso, founder and CEO of TA Fastrack Australia, dishes out advice to travel experts. A former travel agency and hotel owner/operator, Caruso now coaches travel, tourism and hospitality businesses throughout the region.

I love social media, and I find it especially powerful as a marketing tool. But social media marketing doesn't replace email marketing. In most cases, both work together so well that to engage in social media marketing without an email strategy can nullify your impact completely.

Who will you ignore?

Today, your customers, prospects and stakeholders communicate in various ways. Some love Twitter, some Facebook, some even (gasp!) direct mail.

Which segment can you afford to ignore? Marketing today cannot revolve around your preferred communication style. You have to communicate in a style your customers and prospects like.

Email: the original social media

Email is still today's common denominator of communication. It is the core of social media. More importantly, email allows you to monetise social media.

Preferred marketing vehicle

Consumers in Asia, the US and Europe use email as their primary communication vehicle. It is also their preferred choice to receive marketing messaging as they can control it – opt in, opt out, delete or ignore altogether.

An overwhelming 95 per cent of Internet users aged between 18 and 64 use email. Most use it several times a day, every day. More than half check their email over six times a day!

Older consumers, especially

An even higher percentage of Internet users aged 65 and above use email. Their usage has more than doubled compared to other age groups.

In most cases, email access is the sole reason they purchased a computer. They want to communicate with friends and family, and email is how it is done today.

Death is exaggerated

Last year, a nonsensical headline in my local newspaper (I read it online, of course)

Social media

caught my attention. I hoped no one would see it. Unfortunately, it was picked up by every news service in the country. The headline proclaimed: "Email is dead".

This was a quote from the COO of Facebook, so perhaps there was a conflict of interest. (Irony: Facebook launched its email service soon after.) Few months later, I read that Facebook was dead. This made me feel better. Last month, I read that blogging is dead.

I don't know about you, but I missed these funerals. I still use all these tools every day, and I have a large audience that does too.

Recently, Gallup did a survey on whether people become less involved with email as they get more involved in social media. The result was the opposite: more social media means more email.

In the US, over 235 million people send and read email many times a day, every day. Can you ignore email? Maybe you don't need it, as long as you already have more than 235 million paying customers.

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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

Closing Date: 3rd August 2012

An event by:

TTG | Publishing
Travel Trade

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

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Business Travel - meetings, incentives, conventions & exhibitions
企 业 旅 游 报 C H I N A

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 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.

- 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

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 – Australia	
2.	Best Travel Agency – China	
3.	Best Travel Agency – Chinese Taipei	
4.	Best Travel Agency – Hong Kong	
5.	Best Travel Agency – India	
6.	Best Travel Agency – Indochina (Cambodia, Laos)	
7.	Best Travel Agency – Indonesia	
8.	Best Travel Agency – Japan	
9.	Best Travel Agency – Malaysia	
10.	Best Travel Agency – Singapore	
11.	Best Travel Agency – South Korea	
12.	Best Travel Agency – Thailand	
13.	Best Travel Agency – The Philippines	
14.	Best Travel Agency – Vietnam	
15.	Best Corporate Travel Agency Best travel agency specialising in serving the needs of corporate travellers.	
16.	Best Online Travel Agency 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.

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.

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.

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

China centric or eccen

A move by a slew of hotel chains to have their brand names and products sing to the tune of Chinese guests, with two well-known players even launching new Chinese brands, raises interesting questions:

Aren't great brands supposed to be aspirational across geographical boundaries – ever seen the LVMH conglomerate launching Chinese-specific brands?

Do Chinese consumers want a new Chinese hotel brand? After all, a May 2012 report by CAP Strategic Research shows the top 10 hotel brands – as rated by 300 'super-rich' Chinese consumers (average annual household income of US\$136,000) and 330 'affluent' consumers (average annual household income of US\$67,000) in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou – are international names such as Shangri-La, Hilton, Ritz-Carlton and Sheraton. None of the homegrown made it to the list.

Are some hotel chains pandering too much to China that they have to launch Chinese brands? Does it mean then that there is a need for Indian, Indonesian, etc, brands?

Will international guests feel comfortable staying with brands specifically designed for Chinese guests?

The race to capture the vast China opportunity has had chains carving out two different strategies.

One camp, which includes Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts and Accor (see box, Who does what), stops at localising the name and product to suit Chinese clientele. The other, which includes InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) and General Hotel Management (GHM), believes China and Chinese hospitality can spawn new hotel brands, with IHG even envisioning its Hualuxe can go outside China and be a global brand one day, the way its Holiday Inn, which originated in the US, has travelled far and wide.

Puzzled

But Giovanni Angelini, former Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts' CEO who led the chain's expansion in China, is puzzled by the need to localise one's brand in China, let alone launch a Chinese brand.

He recalled: "From my experience, we never encountered difficulties with this in the past. In most cases, the local authorities and local developers in China were proud to have a recognised, international brand name in their area and always preferred an international brand versus a local brand name.

"Has the market demand

changed so much in the past couple of years? I don't think so."

Asked what he'd do today, Angelini said: "I would use the same brand or brands that the company uses all over the world. The location's potential and the local spending power dictate if it would be a five star product or three or four stars based on the brands I have."

Similarly, Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide president and CEO, Frits van Paasschen, pooh-poohs the need for a Chinese brand, even though he is smitten by Asia, China in particular, which helps Starwood build better hotels.

"I don't think of our brands as being Western brands, but global brands," said van Paasschen.

"The key to having a global brand is to appeal to basic human needs that cut across cultures, ages, generations and incomes. So a desire to have a sense of wellness and refuge in a hotel, a desire to be extravagant, to feel like you are in a creative atmosphere – those things cut across cultures.

"The more important thing is not having a Chinese brand, or Japanese or French. It is having global brands that work anywhere in the world," he said.

Interpret, not replace

Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts president and CEO, Jean-Gabriel Pérès, told *TTG Asia* "there is just one brand – Mövenpick", despite localising the name to Rui Xiang and adapting the product to Chinese guests.

"We know that to do business effectively in the Chinese market, we need to interpret the brand and provide Chinese guests with the aspirational experience they would expect from a country such as Switzerland," said Pérès.

The chain is talking to a "growing number" of Chinese guests in its Swiss hotels to understand, for example, what they enjoy about Swiss cuisine – "but more importantly how they would like to see it interpreted at home".

It expects business at its three upcoming hotels in China to be majority Chinese initially but to "over time encourage our broad mix of international customers to explore some of China's more interesting destinations".

Asked if non-Chinese guests would be happy at Rui Xiang, Pérès said: "The Swiss are famous for their ability to work across cultural borders, and we bring this skill to the way in which we operate our hotels. For Western guests visiting Mövenpick properties in China, the traditional Swiss expertise will be evident to help make their stay as pleasurable in the way they have come to expect."

Fairmont Hotels & Resorts'



Smits: "I see a huge opportunity for Hualuxe in South-east Asia."



Van Paasschen: "Global brands work anywhere."



Angelini: "Has the market demand changed so much?"

president, Jennifer Fox, said sister brands Raffles Hotels & Resorts and Swissôtel were well-positioned in China. "We (Fairmont) are not currently thinking of any separate brands, especially when we hope to tap the China outbound market to stay in our properties worldwide. But who knows.

"At this stage we hope to maximise our brand's potential. Compared to other hotel brands, we are a latecomer. The Chinese luxury travel market continues to grow and we have to compete by offering new experiences they can't get from the domestic market."

Different positions

IHG, in comparison, is in a different position, already the largest international hotel group in China operating more than 160 hotels across 60 cities with five brands.

With China's insatiable hotel development, it believes there is room for another brand. With Hualuxe, IHG is the first global chain to seed a brand in Asia, a prospect seen a long time coming, since most international brands had originated from the West and transported to the booming East.

So why China and not, say, India?

Explained Jan Smits, IHG's CEO for Asia, the Middle East & Africa: "India is a slightly different market. The whole of India has only 150,000 branded rooms today; compare that to 100,000 branded rooms in New York city alone. India has a long way to go yet to get scale. I'm just opening my first Holiday Inn Express in India in September; a lot of my brands are not deployed yet.

"China on the other hand is in a different stage of growth. We honestly see an opportunity for a new upscale brand to service the scale in China, where the domestic market is expected to reach 3.3 billion people in 2015,

trick?

China's growth as a world destination and as a visitor source for the world has ignited a feeding frenzy among international hotel chains to localise their brands and even launch new Chinese brands. Raini Hamdi reports



Pères: “There is just one brand – Mövenpick.”

and to service Chinese consumers wherever they go. Outbound trips from China are projected to grow from 10 million to more than 100 million in the next 10-15 years (citing UNWTO predictions). “I see a huge opportunity for Hualuxe in South-east Asia, for example, which gets a lot of Chinese visitors. Over time, I believe Hualuxe can become an international brand. Look at Taj or Oberoi – they originated from India but became global brands.” Added Smits: “We don’t develop brands very often. The last, Indigo, was 10 years ago. When

we develop one, it’s for good reason and we do enormous amounts of research and consumer insights before we do it.” GHM’s Ahn Luh joint venture, meanwhile, is strategic in giving it access to funds and special locations in China, where it can continue to create destinations in themselves rather than hotels, according to observers (GHM’s president Hans R Jenni is not available for comment at press time). Its partner, Beijing Tourism Group, is China’s first provincial-level, wholly state-owned tourism enterprise. The other, Great Ocean Group is a Beijing-based private holding company which invests in real estate projects in China that are respectful and responsible towards the environment and history. Ahn Luh banks on UNWTO predictions that China will become the world’s most visited country and caters to both the world’s “most discerning” travellers and Chinese guests. China makes the world go round.

Who does what



General Hotel Management: Ahn Luh
This is an entirely new brand, created by Beijing Tourism Group chairman Duan Qiang, Great Ocean Group founder Whitney Duan and Amanresorts founder Adrian Zecha, who co-founded GHM with Hans R Jenni.

Positioned as an upscale brand, Ahn Luh will cater “to the world’s most discerning travellers, as well as the growing Chinese tourism market”, said the partners. The Ahn Luh group’s first project is Ahn Luh Dujiangyan in Chengdu. The Dujiangyan Irrigation System, along with Mount Qingcheng, are on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Ahn Luh resorts will be a fusion of old-world Chinese hospitality with contemporary elegance while contributing to an eco-friendly environment. Each is “handcrafted” to incorporate the arts and culture of its particular locale. The resorts typically have 50 to 100 rooms and villas, with room sizes from 60m² to 120m². There are private villas and residences. Features include ‘dian xin’ breakfast, all-day Chinese-style tapas bar, indoor and outdoor pools, a library and cigar lounge, airport concierge and a fleet of Wi-Fi-enabled cars. Each hotel will also house a retail shop selling regional goods and traditional Chinese medicine, a spa, a tai chi centre and meeting facilities for executive retreats. Future developments are in major cities and tourism destinations throughout China. In the pipeline are hotels in Beijing, the Pearl River Delta and south-west China. Ahn Luh literally means ‘a peaceful and tranquil forest setting at the foothill of a mountain’.



InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG): Hualuxe Hotels & Resorts
This is an entirely new brand designed specifically for the Chinese traveller. Hualuxe means ‘majestic China and luxe’. It will offer what IHG believes, through research, are the four priorities for Chinese guests: tradition (reflected in hotel design, welcome experience, tea culture, F&B, etc); rejuvenation (natural surroundings – think lobby gardens and resort bathrooms even); status (VIP arrival, unique Club Lounge, specialty F&B hosts, etc); and familiar spaces (multi-function suites, rejuvenation centre, tea house, etc that are conducive for social interactions and business meetings). Hualuxe will launch initially in tier one, two and three cities and resort locations in China. In time, it will open in major cities elsewhere in the world so Chinese travellers can have the same experience abroad. The first Hualuxe is expected to be open in late 2013/early 2014. IHG expects the brand to be in over 100 cities in China in the next 10-15 years.



Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts: Rui Xiang
Integrated a Chinese name, Rui Xiang, into the Mövenpick brand, which remains prominent. Rui Xiang is feng shui-checked and literally means ‘brings you enjoyment and luck with Swiss quality’. Hotels in China will adapt to Chinese guests’ tastes. Cuisine for example, is a fusion of Chinese, international and specifically, Swiss-inspired touches. Lobbies, public spaces for entertaining and room design will have Chinese sense of place. The chain’s first opening will be a 380-room resort in Sanya next year, followed by a 300-room hotel in Jiading, a rapidly growing business hub of greater Shanghai. In 2015, it anticipates a unique offering in Chifeng, gateway to Inner Mongolia, where it will operate not only a hotel but a rest state guesthouse with a Chinese restaurant and VIP Club. Mövenpick has also unveiled a Mandarin website and appointed a vice president development, Sunny Li, based in Shanghai.



Accor: Grand Mercure (Mei Jue)
Tweaked its Grand Mercure logo, incorporating the Chinese name, Mei Jue, and Grand Mercure underneath it. Sticks to the Grand Mercure proposition as an upscale brand anchored around connection to local area through relationship with local art and culture and walking tours. In China, this is enhanced. The first hotel adapted to the new positioning, Grand Mercure Shanghai Zhongya, has employees conversant in Shanghainese. Name badges bear Chinese characters, followed by a pinyin translation, enabling staff to use their given names. Guests are welcomed by staff wearing qipao, a traditional evening dress. Signature services include daily tai chi lessons, and free head and shoulder massages for guests staying on premium floors. Accor’s nine other Grand Mercure hotels in China are due to adopt the new identity. The chain plans to have 65 Mei Jue hotels by 2015.

Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide

Launched a Starwood Personalized Travel programme to cater to the unique needs of Chinese guests traveling abroad. The programme, which has debuted in some 20 Starwood hotels worldwide to date, features teapots for brewing Chinese tea, packets of instant noodles, translated welcome materials and travel guides, on-site translation services, Mandarin-language restaurant menus and familiar favourites such as congee, a staple in Chinese breakfast. Programme is communicated to guests upon check-in.

Hilton International

Hilton International’s Huanying, which means ‘welcome’, debuting in San Francisco on August 16, will provide have a front desk staff fluent in Mandarin, a dedicated Chinese television channel and an extensive selection of Chinese breakfast dishes. Some 30 Hilton properties have enrolled in the programme.

China’s big four lift off

Sim Kok Chwee navigates readers through the evolving fleet of major Chinese airline groups

The aviation landscape in China is dominated by four main airline groupings, namely Air China, China Southern Airlines, China Eastern Airlines and Hainan Airlines, which have their bases in Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Haikou respectively. However, today their subsidiary companies are sprinkled all over China and have begun operating services from each other’s bases.

A few private airlines have also managed to gain a foothold, such as Sichuan Airlines, which has major stakes in Chengdu Airlines and Hebei Airlines; the budget Spring Airlines; Okay Airways; and Juneyao Airlines.

China’s carriers have also become highly sought after by the world’s airline alliances. Air China is a Star Alliance member while Skyteam has snared China Southern Airlines, China Eastern Airlines, Shanghai Airlines and Xiamen Airlines. Oneworld alliance is the odd one out without a member airline from China, although the alliance has a hold in Hong Kong.

Not long ago, China was the engine of growth for aviation, travel and tourism in Asia-Pacific and the world. As foreign airlines made a beeline for Chinese coastal cities and second-tier destinations like Chengdu, Wuhan, Chongqing and Shenyang, Chinese carriers reported sterling financial results.

But by 2011 when the US and European economies softened, Asian economies began to weaken and airlines’ earnings became a barometer of this trend. Asian airlines such as Cathay Pacific Airways, Singapore Airlines and China’s main airlines faced massive decline in earnings.

Despite a hungry domestic market, China’s industrial production is slowing in 2012, and its economy seems to be headed for a not-so-soft landing.

However, CEO of IATA, Tony Tyler, remains confident of China’s role. He said: “With over a quarter of the world’s travelers expected to be Chinese by 2015, and


as China’s airline industry evolves, it could be a driving force in global aviation.”

Yet he warned of issues related to airspace control and congestion in the ‘airport golden triangle’, an area bounded by Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

Although the weakening economy is a concern, China’s inbound and outbound

tourism remain strong. China has also reported a GDP growth of around seven per cent year-on-year, higher than most major trading nations. When China returns to its high-growth trajectory, one can expect to be dazzled by its sheer numbers again.

The following tables represent a snapshot of where China’s big four are headed.



Photos by Paul Spijkers

		CHINA EASTERN AIRLINES				
		Associated Airlines				
Aircraft	Number	CHINA EASTERN	BUSINESS JET	SHANGHAI	JOY AIR	CHINA UNITED
A319		14				
A320		125				
A321		22				
A330-200		10				
A330-300		15				
A340-300		4				
A340-600		5				
A366-600R		7				
AVIC MA60					6	
B737-300		16				
B737-700		45		7		2
B737-800		19		37		9
B757-200				10		
B767-300				4		
B767-300ER				3		
B777-300ER		20*				
Bombardier CRJ200		5		3		
Bombardier C300			1			
Bombardier GLEX			1			
Embraer ERJ-145		10				
Embraer Legacy 650			1			
Gulfstream G200			1			
Gulfstream G550			2			
Hawker 800XP			1			

		CHINA SOUTHERN AIRLINES		
		Associated Airlines		
Aircraft	Number	CHINA SOUTHERN	CHONGQING	XIAMEN
A319		41	3	
A320		80	5	
A321		57		
A330-200		15		
A330-300		8		
A380-800		3 / 2*		
ARJ21-700				6*
B737-300		25		
B737-700		35		17
B737-800		59		58 / 30*
B757-200		13		6
B777-200		4		
B777-200ER		6		
B787-800				6*
B777-200ER		6		
Embraer ERJ145		6		
Embraer E-190		12		

*Aircraft on order

AIR CHINA

		Associated Airlines							
Aircraft	Number	AIR CHINA	DALIAN	SHANGDONG	TIBET	BEIJING	SHENZHEN	KUNMING	HENAN
A318						1			
A319	33			3		5			
A320	21 / 19*					51 / 28*			
A321	35 / 6*								
A330-200	24 / 8*								
A330-300	6 / 17*								
A340-300	6								
A350-900	10*								
B737-300	18		7						
B737-700	18		3			4	6		
B737-700BBJ						1			
B737-800	80 / 43*	3	41 / 15*			44			
B737-900						5			
B747-400	4								
B747-400 Combi	5								
B747-8 Intercontinental	5*								
B757-200	7								
B777-200	10								
B777-300ER	7 / 12*								
Bombardier CRJ200			5			1			
Bombardier CRJ700			2						
Bombardier CL605						1			
Bombardier GLEX						1			
Embraer E-190									4
Falcon 7X						2			
Gulfstream G200						1			
Gulfstream G450						5			

HAINAN AIRLINES

		Associated Airlines						
Aircraft	Number	HAINAN	CAPITAL	GRAND CHINA	LUCKY AIR	TIANJIN	WEST AIR	DEER JET
A319		24			3		4	2
A320		13				4	5	
A330-200	6 / 1*							
A330-300	4							
A340-600	3							
B737-300	4							
B737-400	5							
B737-700	3				8			
B737-700BBJ								2
B737-800	80		3	3				
B767-300ER	3							
B787-800	10*							
Bombardier CL605								1
Bombardier GLEX								1
Dornier DO328JET						28		
Embraer ERJ145LR						25		
Embraer E-190						45		
Falcon 7X								1
Gulfstream IV								4
Gulfstream V								3
Gulfstream G200								7
Gulfstream G450								1
Gulfstream G550								12
Hawker 800								4
Hawker 850								2
Hawker 900								3
Hawker 4000								2

Gardens by the Bay is the latest addition to the necklace of attractions downtown



Gardens by the Bay

Rising expectations

Buoyed by strong visitor arrivals, Singapore pushes for greater growth in quality tourism. By **Linda Haden**

Arrivals Singapore's tourism industry continues to flourish, with visitor numbers rising 14.6 per cent in 1Q2012. Taiwan, one of the city's top 20 source markets, posted the largest increase at 44.7 per cent, followed by China, which grew 31.6 per cent. Thailand was the only key market to shrink, dipping 4.5 per cent.

The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) projects arrivals of 13.5-14.5 million visitors and up to S\$24 billion (US\$18.7 billion) in tourism receipts in 2012, signifying a potential year-on-year rise of 10 per cent and eight per cent respectively.

Visitorship at key attractions grew 7.3 per cent to 49.7 million between 2010 and 2011, although tourists and foreigners comprised slightly less than half of the figures, according to the Association of Singapore Attractions.

NTO In March, STB unveiled its new vision and strategy to seal Singapore's position as a quality, world-class destination. The NTO has allocated S\$905 million for industry development over the next five years,

of which two-thirds will be pumped into seeding new tourism ventures and projects, while the rest, tourism-related education initiatives.

Following its first differentiated marketing campaign for China last year, STB launched the *Get Lost and Find the Real Singapore* campaign in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth in March to highlight the nation's offbeat offerings and to overturn Australians' perception of Singapore as a stopover destination.

The third campaign, *The Holiday You Take Home With You*, targets the Indian market, spotlighting four types of enriching experiences – family fun, active lifestyle, culinary and romance.

STB also has a new chief executive, Lionel Yeo, from this month.

Hotels Singapore's room supply is set to grow 4.2 per cent year-on-year between 2011 and 2014, as outlined by Horwath HTL. By 2014, the city will have 47,129 rooms, just over half of which will be in the mid-tier category. As of 2011, Singapore had some 41,624 rooms.

STB's preliminary results for 1Q2012 showed that ARR rose



"It's great that STB is focusing on quality tourism. Singapore needs it and STB wants to help firms that can make this a reality."

Janet-Tan Collis
Chief executive
East West Executive Travellers

11.4 per cent to reach S\$258.70, while occupancy rate hit 87 per cent, one per cent higher than the previous year.

Growth may moderate slightly this year. Room rates are expected to hike five to 10 per cent this year, while occupancy will reach 83 to 86 per cent, according to a recent CBRE Hotels study.

However, developers continue to be confident in investing in the city.

Eric Levy, managing director, Tourist Solutions International, said: "Singapore is considered to be a safer bet. RevPAR per square footage is better than other Asian cities and the country remains stable, economically and politically. There's certainly a lot of opportunity here for modest, secure returns, given the good pace of growth in tourism arrivals."

Access Both China Eastern Airlines and SilkAir launched flights from Singapore to Wuhan in April. Hainan Airlines started a new service to Taiyuan via Haikou in May.

Scot, Singapore Airlines' low-cost offshoot, commenced flights to Sydney and Gold Coast – the latter a new link – this month. The carrier will debut flights to

Bangkok in July, Tianjin in August, and Tokyo and Taipei in October.

The Budget Terminal will shut in September to make way for the construction of the new Terminal 4, expected to be operational by 2017.

Changi Airport recorded 12.3 million passenger movements in 1Q2012, 12.9 per cent higher than the same period in 2011.

Cruise Singapore's second cruise terminal, Marina Bay Cruise Centre Singapore, began operating on May 26, welcoming the largest-ever ship to home-port in Asia. Royal Caribbean International's *Voyager of the Seas* was the first ship to dock at the terminal, which is set to be fully operational by year-end.

MICE 2011 was a stellar year for Singapore, which hosted 2,130 conventions, conferences and tradeshow, up 46 per cent from 2010.

As part of its new five-year strategy, STB will partner MICE players to co-create and anchor signature content. Some S\$300 million has been allocated to boost the MICE sector.

Leaping over barriers

Tourism sector needs to tackle shortcomings in service and HR to be ahead, reports **Linda Haden**

1 What does Singapore need to do to have an edge over other destinations? Singapore possesses several advantages, but these have to be complemented by high-quality services.

Tour East group vice president of sales and marketing, Judy Lum, said: “Inbound travel consultants should set a high standard for themselves, build up a dependable reputation, and ensure speed and efficiency in responding to RFPs.

“You can have the most compelling destination but if local consultants do not respond well, do not seem capable of meeting expectations or use poor-quality equipment, then overseas consultants will think twice before sending their clients over.”

Janet Tan-Collis, chief executive, East West Executive Travellers, shared a similar stance: “Firms have to focus on quality and offer personalised, bespoke services to stay one step ahead. Technology cannot replace or replicate the human touch and

meet all HR requirements.”

2 What challenges need to be overcome? Despite Singapore’s constant evolution of its tourism products, industry observers concurred that the

rooted negative perceptions (of the sector),” said Bill Black, president, SilverNeedle Hospitality, at the recent PATA Hub City Forum in Singapore.

Meeting the needs of a Gen Y workforce is another challenge.

“Inbound travel consultants should set a high standard for themselves, build up a dependable reputation, and ensure speed and efficiency in responding to RFPs.”

Judy Lum

Group vice president of sales and marketing, Tour East

city’s aim to become a world-class destination is undermined by a lack of quality manpower. This shortage is set to worsen, as the city-state’s workforce is projected to contract in 2017 due to fewer births.

“It is very difficult to find individuals, particularly locals, willing to take on roles in tourism and hospitality due to deep-

Mohd K Rafin, senior vice president, Park Hotel Group, said: “Gen Y-ers are sharp and smart, and they want to be on the fast track to managerial roles. We’ve adapted to their needs but many others have not done so. It’s time (for the sector) to take stock.”

To retain younger staff, the trade should craft multi-faceted

roles that impart a broad range of skills, and provide inspiring mentors, he suggested.

3 As part of its quality tourism push, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) wants to attract global firms to set up operations here. What do you think? Samson Tan, CEO, GTMC Group, said: “This does not make sense from a business perspective. Looking at the economic uncertainties in Europe and the US, it is quite a big risk for overseas players to venture into new territories. It is more likely that a foreign company would take over or initiate a joint venture with local parties to enter Singapore.”

Dennis Law, Star Holiday Mart managing director, said foreign players new to Singapore and Asia would struggle to make their mark. He said: “You need in-depth, first-hand local knowledge to be successful. It’s not something that happens overnight. Local players will always have the upper hand.”

4 Which areas do you need assistance from STB? Local trade members felt that STB could do more in marketing Singapore overseas.

Law said: “STB should consolidate their resources and work hand-in-hand with inbound consultants to stimulate market share by responding to market changes – there’s a need to bring back joint (marketing) campaigns and tradeshow support. They should not leave the industry to its own devices.”

On the other hand, Lum suggested that STB should revamp the Tourism Technology Fund scheme to make it easier for firms to adopt innovative measures. She said: “First and foremost, outline the qualification criteria so that consultants do not waste time (applying). Secondly, set a time limit for approval so that consultants can proceed with or without funding. Finally, STB should ensure that personnel reviewing the application understands the (travel) business.”

Checking in

Singapore Marriott Hotel



This Orchard Road icon now sports a fresh interior after a multi-million dollar facelift. **Linda Haden** checks in and gives her verdict on the hotel’s new look

LOCATION Housed in a regal, pagoda-like structure at the corner of a bustling intersection, Singapore Marriott Hotel is approximately a 25-minute drive from the airport and 15 minutes from the Central Business District. It sits in the same building as the flagship Tangs department store. Orchard MRT station, which is connected to the hotel via a cavern of underground passages, is a mere three-minute walk away.

ROOMS The bright, newly refurbished rooms are swathed in beige and brown tones, accented by greys and navy blues, giving it a distinctively sombre, masculine appearance. In contrast, the bathrooms, decked in pale granite, exude a sophisticated, relaxed feel.

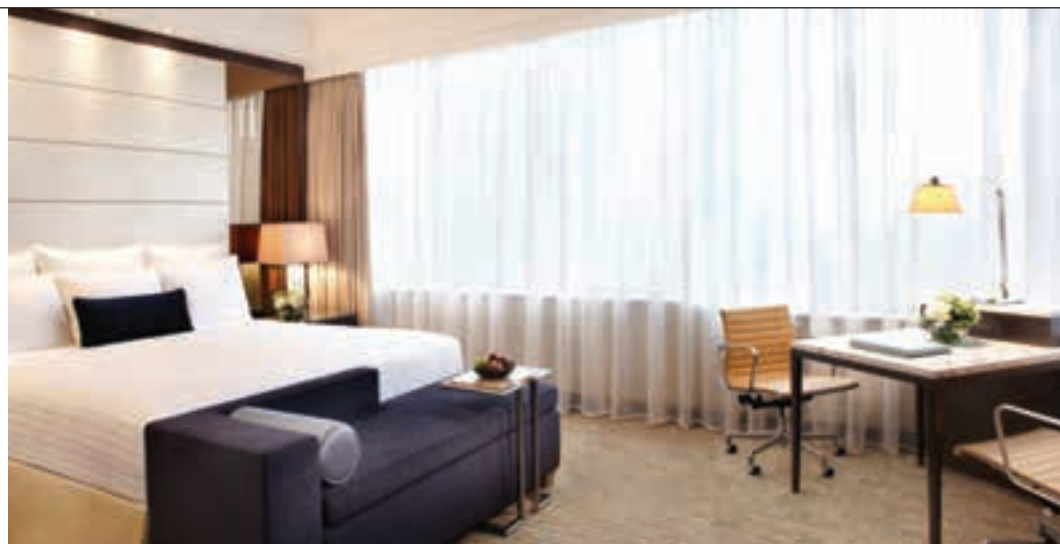
My 35m² Executive room on the 30th floor looked out onto the busy traffic traversing Scotts Road. A 37-inch LCD TV hung

squarely in front of the snug king-sized bed on a wood-panelled wall. A sleek iPod/iPhone dock sat on a bedside table – a boon for Apple aficionados like me. Two pairs of black Byford socks were stashed in a sideboard for absent-minded (male) business travellers. Although these items were not listed on the minibar menu, I later discovered that they were chargeable.

A handy vanity area was tucked in a corner of the compact bathroom. Although there was no bathtub, there was a rain and handheld shower. Bulgari toiletries, exclusive to the Executive floor and suite guests, were arranged neatly next to the sink and on a shelf in the shower.

In-room Wi-Fi or Ethernet access costs an eye-watering S\$26.75 (US\$20.90) per day. Fortunately, the Executive lounge on the 27th floor offered free access.

F&B Marriott Café has been given a complete overhaul, with the garish black-and-gold décor giving way to muted shades of brown and beige. Open daily from 06.00 to 22.00, the restaurant now boasts an open kitchen and multiple live cooking stations. The café’s buffet breakfast



was one of the most elaborate I had ever seen. Hot Asian and international dishes were served in bright orange Le Creuset cast-iron casseroles placed atop electric hobs, while an impressive array of fresh salads, cold cuts, crusty breads, delectable pastries and fruit juices adorned the cold buffet table.

Crossroads Café, which features a new menu, has also been revamped to resemble a modern European bistro.

Guests seeking a laid-back dining experience should head to the al fresco Pool Grill on the fifth floor, which serves contemporary European cuisine. The Executive Set Lunch that I sampled was fresh, wholesome and tasty, definitely a value-for-money and excellent choice for health-conscious travellers like me.

Java+, Marriott’s newest all-day dining outlet, serves a broad range of sandwiches, pastries and coffee.

Cantonese classics including dim sum are available at Wan Hao, while guests looking for an evening pick-me-up should head to the Living Room, concealed behind the lobby.

FACILITIES Recreational facilities include an extensive 24-hour gym and swimming pool, both of which were refurbished in 2009. The in-house spa – operated by The Retreat Spas Singapore – appeared a little worn, and I was sorely disappointed that the Jacuzzi in the women’s changing room was closed for repairs during my stay. The spa menu featured packages tailored for men but there was none for women, another telltale sign that the Marriott’s guests are predominantly male.

Meeting facilities have yet to be upgraded, and no plans are in place to refurbish function spaces in the near future. The hotel boasts 13 meeting rooms, totalling an impressive 1,482m².

Name Singapore Marriott Hotel
No. of rooms 393
Rate From S\$420 (US\$329) a night for a Deluxe room
Contact details
Tel: (65) 6735-5800
Fax: (65) 6831-4774
Website: www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/sindt-singapore-marriott-hotel

Standing at 706m², the Grand Ballroom is the hotel’s largest function space, seating a maximum of 600 pax.

SERVICE All staff members were friendly, polite and professional. They were able to answer my questions adequately and attended to my requests promptly.

VERDICT A straight-laced business hotel for the no-nonsense businessman, equipped with all the amenities that make for a comfortable and pleasant stay.



IT'S SHOWTIME THIS SUMMER AT MARINA BAY SANDS

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Singapour Sabre d'Or, featuring the Grand Masters of Chinese cuisine, closes the Summit

A La Carte Productions

Top chefs love Singapore, discovers Raini Hamdi, who speed-dated them at the just-concluded World Gourmet Summit 2012

Singapore a new magnet for masterchefs

Top chefs are loving Singapore, which can only mean one thing: the melting pot is bubbling, the dining scene is becoming far livelier and more fascinating than visitors imagine it to be, and the destination can rightly bill itself a gourmand paradise.

I asked Bruno Ménard, a three-star

Michelin chef who moved to Singapore in January and will be launching new restaurants here under Délicae Hospitality Management, why he chose the Lion City and not China. His answer made me realise Michelin-star chefs are human too.

"I love Singapore. I have come here for

so many years and have lots of friends here. My family and I feel good here," said Ménard. "Nothing is grown in Singapore, but it has the tradition of the people. That's how you get the flavours of the melting pot; that's the way America was created. You have fantastic and fresh products from all over the world; you can spend \$2 on street food or \$600 at Robuchon.

"Singapore is booming today. Ten years ago, only the banks came. Today, people are coming not just to see their banks, but for leisure. Also, the population has grown from three to five million and will continue to grow, so I see a lot of potential. Ten years ago, Singapore was not known as a place you can eat well. Today, all the chefs in the world visit at least once because of events like this (the World Gourmet Summit) and they want to come back again."

Events such as the Summit are a congregation, where fine talent in cooking and new F&B ideas are worshipped. This year's Summit, the 16th edition, saw 15 visiting masterchefs from Australia, China, Denmark, France, Italy, Japan, Peru, Russia, Spain, the UK and the US. And how exciting the F&B scene turned over the 11 days the Summit was held from April 23 to May 3.

For the first time, I heard of fruit-eating piranhas, tandoori venison and eating off the wall, literally. Masterchef Pedro Miguel Schiaffino of Restaurante & Bar Malabar in Lima was telling me how Amazon food was being rediscovered in Peru and he was presenting it at BLU in Shangri-La Singapore during the Summit.

"We work with products which have not been seen even in Peru, for example, piranha fish that eats fruits. It is huge and very tasty, bred in farms, not from the wild, as sustainability is important to us. Another unique ingredient is algae that grows 3,500m in the Andes.

"Amazonian food is a lot similar to Asian food in terms of the rustic techniques, like grilling food wrapped in banana leaves or cooking food in bamboo. We also use tumeric and ginger a lot."

Local chefs such as Manjunath Mural of The Song of India restaurant in Singapore showed equal passion in coming up with new ideas – although what he said did make my stomach churn. Said Mural: "Although we are an Indian restaurant, we

serve foie gras with chilli powder, star aniseed, curry masala and semolina. Guests love it. They also asked me, how is it that you have venison in Indian cooking? Well, venison is eaten in Rajasthan.

"Next, I want to bring in tandoori crocodile, or maybe tortoise, which is also interesting. Guests want something different all the time."

Another local chef, Janice Wong of 2am:lab, was introducing "edible installations", where guests in a, say, cocktail reception, are brought into a space or area and eat off the walls and ceiling. The event, Food Revolution 2012, was held at Suntec Singapore from May 24-29. Said Wong: "The idea is to inspire you and to make you remember the event. How often do we have canapés and champagne at networking cocktails. With edible installations, people tend to interact with a piece of art, but also with each other. It's meant to be fun and memorable. It combines food and art, which is the big trend now.

"Increasingly, people are not satisfied with just good food. Then again, if people don't expect more, there is no growth."

Over the 11 days, some 7,000 guests were feted with 38 core events and 11 Epicurean Delights, according to organiser A La Carte Productions, a subsidiary of Peter Knipp Holdings. These events included celebrity and charity dinners, wine masterclasses and dinners, special themed dinners, Up Close & Personal events with visiting chefs, hands-on workshops and gastronomic jam sessions. Tickets were priced from S\$18 (US\$14) to S\$1,000.

The party may be over until next year, when the Summit is held from April 16 to May 26. But Singapore is still dancing at prospects of an F&B scene that genuinely salivates. I, for one, wait with much anticipation at what Chef Ménard will do.

"I am happy to come here with my expertise and experience and put that in, say, a bistro, not where people expect me to go," he said.

You're pretty welcomed, Chef.



Raini Hamdi
Senior Editor



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Silver spoon

Taratata



Although Taratata means 'what-ever' in French slang, the pretty French bistro is hardly nonchalant about its food, service and decor, discovers **Karen Yue**

Name Taratata
Where 35A Keong Saik Road
No. of seats 56 indoors; six outdoors
Contact details
Tel: (65) 6221-4506
Email: taratata@taratata.sg
Website: taratata.sg
Verdict  Legend  must recommend to clients
 good
 recommend @ your own risk



AMBIENCE I chanced upon Taratata in the least expected place – along a quieter strip of shophouses on Keong Saik Road in Singapore’s Chinatown. A pretty French bistro in what was once Singapore’s most prominent red-light district? Wow.

But why am I even surprised? Singapore is evolving and the cultural enclaves are throwing up exciting new dining outlets.

Taratata’s decor is distinctively European. It features red leather booth seats, black-and-white floor tiles, pretty iron-and-glass pendant lamps and black-and-white photographs of France set against light-coloured walls.

This is all Parisian chic, according to the bistro’s website.

Taratata is so cosy and approachable that one could put fork to plate with a louder than usual clink and not risk looks of reproach from fellow diners.

Taratata’s intimate interior makes it perfect for small parties. It has a lovely area right at the back, which was used for a fancy dinner party by a group of well-dressed ladies when I was there on a Saturday evening.

The year-old bistro is also popular for corporate lunch and dinner events, and can be hired entirely for a minimum spend.

My only gripe is Taratata’s ventilation. Its welcoming open plan interior – there are no doors or walls between the bistro and the

streets outside – meant that Singapore’s stifling heat is brought inside. The six-seat outdoor dining area, especially, could definitely use more fans.

MENU According to Taratata’s spokesperson, the name for the bistro was chosen for its whimsical vibe, reflecting the fuss-free nature of the establishment and cuisine.

Helmed by French duo Bertrand Raguin and Philippe Nouzillat, Taratata’s kitchen whips up French favourites such as steak tartare, beef bourguignon, foie gras and escargots.

An extensive à la carte menu is available, whetting diners’ appetite with a selection of soups

and appetisers, meats and seafood, and desserts.

I swooned over my dinner of lobster bisque, a dozen escargots baked perfectly in herbed garlic butter and roasted lamb rack with garlic crust and rosemary sauce.

PRICING Soups and appetisers range from S\$14 to S\$27 (US\$10.90-US\$21), while main dishes from S\$29 to S\$52. The priciest main dish is a 200g Wagyu beef hanger steak. Desserts are priced from S\$4 for a single scoop of ice cream or sorbet to S\$28 for a selection of farm cheese.

A substantial three-course

lunch menu with coffee or tea is offered for only S\$30⁺⁺. The lunch set includes options such as clam chowder, quiche Lorraine with goat cheese, spring lamb, poached red snapper, and four types of desserts.

Taratata is also able to customise a menu for private gatherings, subject to a minimum spend of S\$30 for lunch on Mondays to Saturdays; S\$48 for dinner on Mondays to Thursdays; and S\$60 for dinner on Fridays and Saturdays. Prices are per person and exclude drinks and taxes.

SERVICE Smiles are very powerful tools in the service industry and they are for free. I am glad that the service staff at Taratata know this well. Apart from their cheerful disposition, they were very attentive, appearing genuinely eager for us to sample the best of what the chefs have to offer.



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