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Manila's high rate surprise

But building boom will keep rises at bay

By Rosa Ocampo

MANILA The city's rates have become dearer than those in Thailand – and even Hong Kong – but a hotel construction boom is expected to level this off while offering travellers more accommodation options.

Eleanor Ng, operations manager-domestic of HRG Marsman Drysdale Travel, estimated that Manila hotel rates across the board were 30-40 per cent higher than in Bangkok.

Princess Panganiban, reservation officer of Intas Destination Management, said feedback from clients was that rates in Manila were higher than in Hong Kong, considering what they got was the equivalent of an inn in Hong Kong, but classified as a three-star in Manila.

A check by *TTG Asia* on agoda.com for a July 25 check-in and July 27 check-out confirms that Manila hotels are indeed pricier than their counterparts in Bangkok and not much cheaper than in Hong Kong.

A deluxe room at Dusit Thani Manila costs US\$163, compared to US\$142 at Dusit Thani Bangkok. Hotel rates in Hong Kong are just US\$20 more than their similar counterparts in Manila. At the Marriott near Manila's international airport, for instance, a deluxe room with breakfast (summer promotion) costs US\$194. At the SkyCity Marriott near the Hong Kong airport, a promotion on deluxe room with breakfast costs US\$207.

Inbound tour operators said

hotels usually offered them 30-40 per cent discounts on contracted rates, thus it was still cheaper for the traveller to book hotels through their overseas partners' retail agencies than direct online with the hotels.

But in a scale never seen before in the country, Manila will have 2,034 new hotel rooms this year, and nearly 6,000 rooms in the next three years.

Ng said the hotel construction boom was "a good wake-up call for hotels" to be more competitive. It would also ease the room shortage, felt the most when big groups and conferences were in town.

Operators worry though that the city still lacks the most basic infrastructure, such as transportation, to cater for business, luxury or the niche VIP travel – even as a good chunk of the hotels coming online are deluxe hotels.

Jayne Lim, inbound sales and marketing manager of Blue Horizons Travel and Tours, said there might be one or two suppliers of limousines in Manila but not in Boracay, Cebu, Bohol and other places in the country. There was also a limited number of companies providing helicopter services. Yet, there is demand for high-end travel from Europe and the US, according to Lim.

Ng said local facilities were sometimes not up to par internationally for this market, including access to VIP concessions upon arrival at Manila's international airport and the quality of ground transport and hotels.

The dream merchant

Chang Theng Hwee is unfazed by niche requests to Antarctica or the Serengeti in Tanzania. The founder and MD of Country Holidays Travel Singapore speaks to **Brian Higgs** about transforming dreams into reality – see page 8

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- 10 Thailand looks to count more on domestic tourism

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Myanmar's cap too little, but not too late

By Liang Xinyi

SINGAPORE Myanmar's Ministry of Hotels & Tourism needs to do more than just implement a US\$150 rate cap (*TTG Asia e-Daily*, July 6) if it is serious about reeling in damage done to the destination by hotels reneging on signed contracts, according to tour operators interviewed.

While hotels are supposed to observe the cap when they sign new contracts, operators said this was no guarantee they could get rooms, and that there were ways for hotels to circumvent the cap.

"Some hotels might sign contracts directly with tour operators abroad or sell their rooms



Su Su Tin:
skeptical

online – which are not subjected to the rate cap," Exotissimo Myanmar managing director, Su Su Tin, said.

U Hla Shwe, managing director of Yangon-based Dandaryi Travel & Tours, who said hotels had ignored his requests for contract rates, added: "Hotels are likely to circumvent this order by adding charges for various reasons."

Asian Trails Myanmar managing director, Thomas Carnevale, said: "It's hard to say whether hotels will abide as there is no legal framework that could force them to do so." The problem, he pointed out, was that the room supply was too low.

What was needed, said CEO and co-founder of Khiri Travel Group, Willem Niemeijer, was a licensing department, similar to the one in place at the Tourism Authority of Thailand, allowing complaints of unlawful practices to be lodged.

"The greater challenge still lies in the honouring of contracts on the part of Myanmar hotels," Niemeijer said.

But, for all their despair about hotels not honouring contract rates and their inability to secure rooms, tour operators are continuing to see unstoppable demand.

Exotissimo Myanmar roped in a 40 per cent year-on-year

Continued on page 3

"The construction boom is a good wake-up call for hotels to be more competitive."

Eleanor Ng

Operations manager-domestic, HRG Marsman Drysdale Travel

M'sia hopes for Arab springback

Post-Eid bookings may make up for decline suffered

By S Puvaneswary

KUALA LUMPUR Malaysian tour operators are still hopeful that the Middle Eastern market will build up for the upcoming post-Eid Ul Fitr travel season, after suffering weak demand since the summer holidays started in early June.

The summer holiday season – traditionally peak period for the Middle Eastern market to Malaysia – this year falls into the Muslim fasting month of Ramadhan and Eid celebration, thus dividing the season into pre- and post-Eid. The first wave of Middle Eastern travellers came from early-June to mid-July, while the second wave is expected to begin in the third week of August to early-September.

Rather than a wave, the travel trade saw just ripples in the first part of the season, despite its efforts to make the destination attractive.

Saf Maju Travel & Tours manager, Prince Mahmud Doel, said his pre-Eid bookings this year showed a 15 per cent year-on-year decline.

But forward bookings give rise

to hopes that the second part will indeed be better. “We are hopeful that the market will pick up,” said Andy Muniandy, director of sales and business development of Asian Overland Services, whose Middle Eastern market posted a 10 per cent year-on-year decline. He based his optimism on “early bookings” from the Middle East, even though the market is famous for having last-minute travellers. These forward bookings were mainly from the Gulf Cooperation Council states.

Prince said he had received a number of bookings from honeymoon couples requesting for island destinations, whereas there was none pre-Eid.

Similarly, Asia Experience Tours account manager (Middle East), Mani Ponniah, has received forward bookings from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Oman.

But she prefers not to be over-buoyed: “It is too early to predict how strong the market will be post-Eid, bearing in mind that Malaysia is a longhaul destination and the remaining post-Eid

holiday period is less than 10 days.”

Summer holiday trends among the Middle Eastern travellers had also changed, said Mani, with this year posting a stronger demand for three- and four-star hotels, especially among those travelling with large families.

World Avenues executive director, Ally Bhoonee, said hotels generally had changed “their wait-and-see attitudes” and became more flexible, which helped to enhance the appeal of the destination.

He said: “Some hotels offered complimentary room upgrades and a free night for every four nights booked. These efforts have made the destination affordable, but still we are competing with other regional destinations such as Thailand and Indonesia for the (same) market.”

Insufficient seat capacity and direct flights to Kuala Lumpur was another factor, said Asian Overland’s Andy.

Many Middle Eastern travellers were also choosing Europe and Turkey over longhaul destinations in South-east Asia due to cheaper airfares and the depreciation of the Euro, Muniandy added.



Andy: remains hopeful

Thailand eyes luxury travel as daily spend rises

By Timothy France

BANGKOK Thailand’s luxury tourism sector appears poised for growth, boosted by rising average spend and a burgeoning inventory of high-end hotels.

In 2011, Thailand recorded a 20 per cent year-on-year hike in arrivals, while per capita daily expenditure increased by more than five per cent in each regional market. Even European and American travellers were spending more, with daily spend rising seven per cent (US\$126) and five per cent (US\$146) respectively last year.

Andre van der Marck, general manager of Khiri Travel Thailand, which saw a small increase in luxury bookings this year, insisted on the potential of an ultra-luxury market in Thailand, particularly among the emerging markets.

“The Chinese want to spend, but as yet have no idea where to spend it. Rich Indian travellers are also arriving in greater numbers and they want the best. America and Europe will maintain demand because the ultra-rich stay rich,” he said.

Reflecting van der Marck’s optimism is Meg Evans, Anantara’s area director of sales and marketing - Thailand: “We are seeing year-on-year increases in occupancy for every single month so far this year. Our properties (in Phuket, Koh Phangan and Koh Samui) are seeing anywhere

from three to nine per cent growth in guest arrivals.”

“(Anantara’s) growth is down to better brand awareness in all locations, and Thailand is still a top luxury destination,” she added.

Other tour operators adopt a more cautious outlook, though. Niels Steeman, group products director, Destination Asia, observed that demand had not kept pace with the growth of deluxe options, especially hotels, in Thailand.

“The luxury leisure travel segment remains stagnant, even though the (overall) market is on the rise,” he added.

Van der Marck added: “There are no coordinated efforts to tap into (different) geographic and demographic markets, such as the ultra-rich. Past attempts to do so had failed, like the Thailand Privilege Card for example.”

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), deviating from its traditional broad, product-based marketing campaign, appears keen to tap the luxury inbound market.

According to Suthipong Pheunphiphop, president of the Thai Travel Agents Association (TTAA), TTAA is currently in talks with TAT, the Association of Thai Travel Agents and the Ministry of Tourism and Sports to collectively design a project targeting the luxury sector. However, no additional information was available at press time.



Van der Marck: room for luxe



New tunes by the Sukosols

Portrait-perfect, the Sukosol family, led by Kamala Sukosol (centre) launches their new flagship property, The Sukosol, formerly Siam City Hotel, Bangkok, which has undergone a 400 million baht (US\$12.6 million) renovation.

The family also unveiled its latest property, The Siam, in June. Spread across 1.2 hectares by the Chao Phraya River, the 39-room boutique resort was designed by Bill Bensley, who appointed the luxurious retreat with spacious pool villas and a Muay Thai gym.

Pictured with the matriarch of the Sukosol family and president of Siam Hotels & Resorts are: executive vice president, Marisa Sukosol Nunbhakdi (front row, left); chief financial officer and vice president, Daranee Sukosol Clapp (front row, right); project director, Sukie Clapp (second row, right); and creative director, Krissada Sukosol Clapp (second row, left).

Airfares up, commission down

By Shekhar Niyogi

KOLKATA Drastic reduction of domestic flights by Kingfisher Airlines and Air India has led to a sharp hike in domestic airfares across the country.

Airfares began to increase in March when 242 flights were axed, resulting in a loss of 24,000 seats.

A one-way Mumbai-Delhi ticket, for instance, now costs Rs8,000 (US\$143), compared to Rs5,000 last year.

Iqbal Mulla, president, Travel Agents Association of India, said: “The increase in domestic airfares has come about due to the change in the demand-supply equation in the first (half) of 2012.”

“Unless seat inventory on key routes increases, prices may remain high as there is hardly any seasonality in the domestic airline business.”

Moreover, Air India and Jet Airways have reduced agents’ commission from three per cent to one per cent since July 16, which has led to IATA-affiliated travel consultants levying a han-

dling fee on customers for ticket issuance. As a result, domestic airfares are expected to spiral upwards from Rs225 to Rs325 per sector, while international fares may rise by Rs775 to Rs6,500.

Rajat Sawhney, managing director, Rave Tours & Travels, said:

“We work on very low margins, so a reduction in commission will be disastrous.”

Anil Punjabi, chairman - east, Travel Agents Federation of India, who also opposed the commission cut, said: “Less than three per cent commission does not make any sense and should be built into the fare. This will create mayhem in the market as the issuance fees charged to customers will not be uniform and will lead to a price war.”

Adding to consultants’ woes, many airlines offer cheaper fares on their websites than to IATA-

approved agencies. P P Khanna, director of New Delhi-based Diplomatic Travel Point, said: “Airlines must ensure that they do not sell tickets at prices lower than that which can be offered by travel (consultants). Parity must be maintained for fair trade practice.”

Furthermore, IATA will implement weekly remittance payments in India from November 1, a move that is likely to affect smaller firms the most.

Rakesh Lamba, director, Prakriti Holidays said: “Reduction of commission and weekly payment are the death knell on small travel businesses. (Not) every ticketing company (has the ability) to diversify as a tour operator or hotel consolidator overnight.”

To regulate the operational procedures and safety norms of domestic carriers in the troubled Indian skies, civil aviation minister Ajit Singh has mooted the launch of an additional regulatory body to work alongside the Directorate General of Civil Aviation.



Sawhney: “disastrous”

Indonesia-Korea boost

Additional air rights spark hopes of even bigger two-way flow

By Mimi Hudoyo

JAKARTA Two-way traffic between Indonesia and South Korea is set to grow as a result of both governments' agreement to increase air rights between the two countries from 10 flights to 23 per week as of March 2013.

Garuda Indonesia has used seven of the 10 flights, while Korean Air has used all the quota. The two carriers operate direct flights between Seoul and Jakarta and Bali. With the additional flights, Batavia Air has reportedly agreed to start flying to South Korea next year, while Lion Air and AirAsia were said to have showed an interest.

Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy deputy director of promotion for Asia, Jordi Paliama, said the agreement was timely as the ministry had appointed a new Visit Indonesia Tourism Officer (VITO) Korea and opened an Indonesia Centre in Busan last March. The centre serves as an information point and is equipped with an Indone-

sian café showcasing Indonesian food, coffee, drinks and musical performances.

Royal Pita Maha director of sales, Pande Sutawan, hopes the additional flights would result in better flight schedules and the opening of new markets should the LCCs take them up.

"Currently the market from South Korea is predominantly honeymooners flying the legacy airlines and staying in upmarket properties. I hope the LCCs will open up new market segments," Pande said.

Pande, who had just returned from a South Korea sales trip, noted that South Koreans currently preferred Hawaii, the Philippines and Bangkok as they were visa-free destinations, with shorter flight times and cheaper prices.

"Korean Air's flight to Bali arrives late at night, which means that travellers lose a day of their maximum only five-day holiday," he pointed out.

Meanwhile, the number of In-

donesian visitors to South Korea in the first half of the year was up 50 per cent compared to the same period last year, according to Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) Jakarta Office director, Kwon Jong Sool, who expects the new agreement to further boost traffic.

"The agreement will facilitate mutual exchange between two countries in terms of trade, business and leisure.

"Secondly, customers will have more options in terms of prices and flight schedules. Lastly, it will create more competition among carriers that will hopefully mean more promotions to attract customers and efforts to improve service."

Both Kwon and Jordi call for airlines to open services from Busan to Jakarta or Bali. Kwon said: "The south-eastern area of South Korea such as Busan, Pohang and Ulsan are industrial zones. Last year, around 300,000 South Koreans visited Indonesia, 40 per cent for business. Therefore, Jakarta-Gimhae (Busan) should be the second direct air link to serve this need."



Pande: let there be LCCs

Continued from page 1

DMCs expand in Yangon

growth in the first quarter, with the UK, North American and Australian markets posting the strongest rises, mainly due to the removal of travel sanctions to Myanmar, while Asian markets like Singapore, Malaysia and China were starting to show greater interest, said Su Su Tin.

Asian Trails Myanmar also saw the fastest growth from the UK market, with figures doubling over the past months, according to Carnevale.

Several DMCs in fact had moved to bigger offices in Yangon, reflecting their continued confidence in Myanmar's tourism sector despite its current growing pains.

Said Khiri's Niemeijer, whose Yangon office has just shifted to a heritage building in the city's downtown: "We need more space for our growing team. We started our business in Myanmar last year and obviously the country has been in, for the most part, very positive light in the international press. The positive image has boosted arrivals."

Exotissimo Myanmar has also relocated from Sakura Tower to bigger quarters in MNB Tower to accommodate its expanding

team. The company has further divided its existing French, German and English departments into three clusters (FIT, MICE and groups) and expanded its adventure and HR departments.

But Laurent Kuenzle, group managing director of Asian Trails, cautioned against being too optimistic.

Said Kuenzle: "The interest has increased from all our source markets – that is, until people see the price.

"Myanmar was an affordable destination for most markets until last year. It is not anymore today. Myanmar, in the short-term, is going to be an elitist destination. Only passengers who are able and willing to pay a premium, meaning a tour package price at least 50 per cent more expensive than what it used to be a year ago, will be able to travel."

Niemeijer on the other hand is completely sold on Myanmar. He stressed: "Hotels are not the focal point of our tours – experiencing the warm nature of the people of Myanmar and the culture is. We maintain our focus on the culture and authenticity of the region while still finding a way to accommodate each client."



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Tourism Data



Pattaya is on track to receive a record eight million hotel guests in 2012; global air traffic results for May indicate a general downward trend in demand, according to IATA; Indonesians are travelling further and wider for their Lebaran holidays this year, according to Wego.co.id

Poll

Is hotel branding in danger of becoming farcical?

- Yes, there are way too many brands out there!
- No, there's always room for growth. The more the merrier.

Hot Deals

Riverside Majestic Hotel in Kuching (below) offers additional benefits with its Genius@WOK meeting package; Sheraton Macao rolls out opening deals for MICE planners



Hot Moves

Arthur Kiong to spearhead Far East Organization's hospitality division as executive director and CEO; Kevin Leong joins the Asian Cruise Association as general manager; Michael Sengol steps down as CEO of Meritus Hotels & Resorts

More cheer in leisure



In downturns, leisure tends to increase as businessmen find more opportunities to go on holidays.

IF THE lights for business travel are amber, then those for the leisure market must still be green.

Company CFOs surveyed worldwide said they were likely to cut travel budgets this year, while the Global Business Travel Association is projecting a slowdown in international growth of business travel in the near term (see page 9).

In a separate study released last week by AsiaRooms.com, its inaugural Traveller Confidence Index found that the global average score for overseas leisure travel propensity was 61.4 points, higher than business travel's 57.1 points. Around 15,000 travellers were surveyed during the first quarter.

In Singapore, for instance, travel experts have noted that during economic downturns, outbound leisure travel tends to increase as businessmen find more opportunities to go on holidays with their families. And if recent travel fair showings are anything to go by, it sure does not feel like doom and gloom.

In fact, it has been reported that companies are so bullish about business that they have signed up in record numbers for the National Association of Travel Agents Singapore fair this August, the country's biggest biannual consumer travel show.

At least one company has expanded its booth size by 50 per cent from the February edition, and there will be at least 1,145 booths and 167 exhibitors – the largest number in the fair's 25-year history.

Travel consultants are also expecting sales growth leading up to and during this period to be between 20 and 30 per cent up from last year.

Without doubt, consumer sentiment remains high across Asian markets, not just in Singapore. However, several scenarios are likely to play out

should bad news continue to filter in.

For one, Asian travellers, while still desiring to travel, are likely to become bargain-hunters, which means you should be proactive about reaching out to customers months ahead of peak travel periods with attractive offers.

Because they will seek out deals in advance, they will also be tempted to pick up that cheap LCC ticket during an online promotion, leaving you to convince them that you can take the hassle out of their holiday by selling them a land-based add-on that fits their needs.

Two, all-inclusive packages have proven to be in demand during belt-tightening times as consumers perceive them to be value-for-money. This includes products such as cruises and full-board accommodation, which you could consider promoting more of when there is financial uncertainty.

Thirdly, the weekend getaway market will become more important, so take note of long weekends and make sure you capitalise on them by giving travellers ideas on how they can fully utilise those public holidays.

Yes, the eurozone may be falling apart and even China may be in for a hard landing, but there is still reason for optimism in this corner of the world. How well you do will depend on how smart you are at sales and marketing.

Gracia Chiang
Deputy Group Editor



Most commented on www.ttgasia.com

Hotel branding ludicrous

Patrick Morris from Indochina Travel Company in the US said: "Let's not forget the Six Senses debacle. With a known name, the Six Senses, we had to suffer through 'Evason', 'Hideaway' and 'Sanctuary', which served only to confuse everyone."

Martin from Sydney said: "I couldn't agree with you more on hotel branding. It's a joke...brands should stand for something and have substance, not just be cooked up during some marketing brainstorm session."

Lee from Singapore said: "Love your article on hotel branding - so true. Thanks for saying what we are all thinking."

Mark from Singapore said: "I found your editorial on branding right on the mark. People are really stretching to create more brands to further saturate attractive destinations. I agree with you, however, that they can't possibly do justice to their owners with so many flags appearing so close together in some major markets."

Tourism Australia bids adieu to Maggie White

Mark Armsden from Red Planet Hotels in Bangkok said: "Well done Maggie! A terrific leader and it was a pleasure working with her during my time at Australian Tourist Commission/Tourism Australia."

Rudy Prasetyadi from Australia Centre in Jakarta said: "Good luck Ibu...it was a pleasure working with you, and your great friendship makes everything fun!"

Mythbuster: The travel agency model is fast becoming unsustainable, thanks to the Internet

Raquel Calma Nakayama from Manila said: "Great article, Simon (Nowroz, president & managing director, Asia Pacific, Travelport). It addresses a lot of the myths about the future of travel agencies. Change is definitely inevitable, not anymore a choice...but a must."

"I am grateful that Travelport has always been supportive when changes are made. Please continue inspiring and challenging us with your insights. People like you who are supportive and understanding of travel (consultants) are a minority. Wish there were more like you. More power, Simon!"

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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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Best Western Australasia is proud to introduce the newly built BEST WESTERN PREMIER Hotel 115 Kew, Australia's first BEST WESTERN PREMIER property.

Rob Anderson, Chief Executive of Best Western Australasia, said "We're sure guests will be delighted with the distinct style and personalised service offered to them by the new BEST WESTERN PREMIER Hotel 115 Kew. As our first PREMIER property in Australia, we are thrilled with the quality of this property".

The PREMIER brand now joins 14 BEST WESTERN PLUS properties, an initiative by Best Western to help guests choose the right hotel for their needs. The BEST WESTERN PREMIER Hotel 115 Kew is conveniently located just ten minutes from the Melbourne CBD, flanked by Hawthorn to its south, and Balwyn to its east.

The 112-room hotel offers rooms with state of the art technology and design features including 42" LED televisions and Apple iMac minis which have been integrated with the specifically designed guest information and media centre.

The full-service hotel also offers concierge services, 24-hour reception, 24-hour room service and valet parking.

The hotel restaurant – "115 Grill & Brewhouse" operates seven days a week and is open from 6:30am to 11:00pm. Executive Chef Stefan Blee uses modern and classical cooking techniques to create a contemporary style of cuisine which draws inspiration from locally sourced products. Meals are matched with a comprehensive wine list housed in the temperature controlled cellar and a full range of beers including a selection of their own craft beers brewed in the hotel's micro-brewery.

The hotel also features a fitness centre, onsite bar and a modern business centre, making it the perfect accommodation option for the business traveller.

Best Western Australasia will be opening its second PREMIER property in Perth in October 2012, the BEST WESTERN PREMIER The Terrace Hotel.



Australasia

East Europe tours pick up

Insight Vacations goes for wider spread in its 2012/2013 programme

SINGAPORE Encouraged by the swelling demand for Eastern Europe itineraries, premium tour operator Insight Vacations has added eight such products in the last two years, with one of its newest being the seven-day Vienna, Prague & Budapest featuring Christmas markets. Prague is now used as the starting point instead of Vienna to allow for a more leisurely pace.

Growth for Eastern Europe tours among Asian travellers has shot up between eight and 16 per cent this year, said Sheryl Lim, regional director, Asia, Insight Vacations. Over a four-year period (2008-2011), it averages out as a 25 per cent increase.

"Eastern Europe is really a hot destination for Asians. I attribute our growth to the expansion of tours to this region, especially over the last one year. We have also introduced places and routes less explored beyond common destinations," she said.

Tours now cover countries



A new seven-day itinerary allows for more time in Vienna (above)

such as Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia and Bulgaria.

"Our loyal customers are always coming back to us asking if we have more to offer. Thus, we have created unusual itineraries

that will take them to new and interesting destinations that they would not have tried to cover on their own because of language problems, the hassle of self-booking hotels and researching transport availability," said Lim.

She pointed out that prices

of Eastern Europe tours were also generally lower compared to Western Europe ones, due to the living standards and currencies in those countries. Prices of its 16 tours range from US\$1,375 for the seven-day Vienna, Prague & Budapest to US\$6,785 for the 17-day Grand Tour of Russia, Ukraine & Crimea.

However, Lim explained that these itineraries were still costlier than "cookie-cutter tours", due to accommodation choices of at least four-star and above in central and scenic locations. Examples are Hilton Vienna and Sofitel Budapest Chain Bridge. There are also more sightseeing and experience inclusions, such as a swim at a historic bath house in Budapest and a visit to a secret Soviet submarine base.

She said travel consultants could earn a 10 per cent commission on the tours, while a current early bird offer that shaves off US\$210 per couple will run until August 26. – **Gracia Chiang**



MYTHBUSTER
SIMON SAYS

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

Myth
A small company like mine has no need for costly and complicated GDS solutions

Fact In a small business, every dollar counts, as do the minutes you dedicate to servicing clients, processing bookings and administrative tasks.

With increasing competition on all fronts, it is vital that agency owners equip their business with the right tools to 'sell' travel rather than 'process' travel. This mantra applies to both retail and corporate travel companies, big and small.

A good GDS solution will allow you to do this.

Whether it's leveraging the tools and products already in

place, or exploring other investment initiatives that deliver cost savings, a good GDS solution will help you boost your bottom line.

GDS solutions are becoming faster, more intelligent and better at helping you optimise the way you work. These small savings, second by second, can add up to make a big difference on the balance sheet.

Other GDS solutions can also help automate the booking process by removing duplication and storing valuable customer data that is reusable for future bookings.

Increasingly, ancillary products and third-party content are becoming readily available through the GDS, reducing the need for travel consultants to visit multiple websites to fulfill customer requests.

These exciting capabilities are all designed to help drive efficiencies, promote time savings and most importantly, enable you to focus on the customer experience and new business opportunities.

As they say, pain in the short term will bring about gains in the long term.

TTG Travel Pursuits

Compiled by The Fox

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	W		S				V			
2					T					A
3	^a	E	H		^b	B		R	O	
4				K						
5	E						T		F	
6			N		S					
7	A						A		K	
8				^a P					^b	Y
9	^a E		S			^b J		T		

ACROSS 1. Somewhere, 3a. CEH, 3b. Oberoi, 4. OK, 5. Staff, 6. Sands, 7. Hack, 8a. Pa, 8b. EY, 9a. East, 9b. Jets, 9. Fakes, 10. AAL.

DOWN

- What is the name for product prices that a travel company gives others to retail?
- Two-letter code for AirAsia.
- A district with the same name in Hong Kong, London, and New York.
- Abbreviation for Department.
- Abbreviation for the organisation that promotes tourism into their destination.
- Which city will host the next ATF in January 2013?
- Some tourists like them; Gucci doesn't.
- The body that runs India's major airports.

ACROSS

- The three brands belonging to Six Senses have been split. Which is the one still owned

by the group's founder, Sonu Shivdasani?

- (a) Abbreviation for the owning company of the Eastern and Oriental Express train.
- (b) An international hotel group from India named after its founder.
- Two-letter code for Czech Airlines.
- Management gives the orders; who carries them out?
- Las Vegas group with resorts in Macau and Singapore.
- The name for a hotel's standard room rates.
- (a) Two-letter code for Philippine Airlines.
- (b) Usual two-letter abbreviation for economy class.
- (a) Another name for Asia.
- (b) If aircraft do not have propellers, they have these.

Humour

Travel industry vs Real world

Industry phrase	Real-world meaning
Negative growth	Drop
Niche operator	Small company
Quality is better than quantity	We did not reach our budget
50% of rooms face the park	50% of rooms have no view
5-star at 3-star rates	3-star



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Chang Theng Hwee
Founder &
managing director
Country Holidays Travel

His customers are multi-millionaires who expect to be blown away by once-in-a-lifetime experiences. Chang Theng Hwee of Singapore-based Country Holidays Travel tells **Brian Higgs** how his job is about transforming dreams into reality, and why going niche isn't just about being pricey

The dream merchant

Tell us more about your products.

Our most expensive is the Antarctic programme. The resort guests stay in has only six rooms, each with a private plunge pool, and the cost ranges from US\$9,500 to US\$16,000 per pax.

However, Africa is definitely my choice for 'most luxurious'. There's just something about the place that makes people want to splurge. Whether it's observing elephants in their natural habitat, enjoying champagne and quality cuisine under the stars, staying in accommodation equal to a Four Seasons...it is truly the experience of a lifetime.

We also have 12 to 15 Signature Departures per year. These are our top-of-the-line products, with a maximum of 16 persons per group. Perks include entrance into the State Hermitage museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia before it opens or a private visit to the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo.

Wow, we're impressed. Were you always in the travel business?

I graduated with a banking degree from the National University of Singapore in 1988 (he's 48 now). Even as a student, I was actively involved in Rovers, a club which provided fellow students with travel services. We organised adventure expeditions to places like the Himalayas.

After leaving school, I continued to organise travel for friends and family. Having done the math, I realised it was a lucrative business and decided to strike out on my own in end-1992. I spent a year mapping out the strategy and finally launched Country Holidays in early-1994.

When we first started, it was just my wife (Siew Yim) and I. She handled operations, while I was in charge of sales. We concentrated on niche products such as hiking in Nepal, India and the Himalayas, and adventure travel in Africa. Our strategy at that time was creating in-depth cultural trips to exotic destinations.

Why the niche?

When Country Holidays first started, travel consultants in Singapore were mostly focused on run-of-the-mill trips to Europe and the US. They didn't have any notion of adventure travel or tailor-made itineraries. If you really love travel, however, you won't

go for such products.

As a general rule, we never feature the usual Disneyland or common sights. Unique itineraries in familiar destinations is our strategy now.

We believe that we should only market places where we have been to and would love to visit again. Whichever destination we sell, one of us (in the company) must have been there.

Travelling and selling travel should be about passion. I'm a firm believer that if you're passionate enough about something, you'll definitely end up doing it well. These days, we can effectively cover so many destinations because many of our consultants are avid travellers themselves.

40-65, and are a mix of legal and financial types, professionals, business owners, doctors and even politicians, including seven ministers from the last two Singapore Cabinets.

Our products need a base of sophisticated, discerning and well-heeled consumers who more often than not aren't first-time travellers. We need markets where we can graft out a distinct competitive advantage and where there are unserved needs.

Back in 2000, we started to feel the limitations of the Singapore market, but were wary of expanding overseas. However, during the SARS crisis in 2003, which really affected our business, we realised the need to venture abroad to tap larger markets. China was booming at the time, and we opened our first overseas office in Shanghai in 2003. We opened an office in Hong Kong in 2004 and expanded to Beijing in 2005. After that, we finally decided to take a breather and consolidate (laughs).

Now, Country Holidays employs about 50 staff across offices in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing and Singapore. We operate in India, China,

India, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan, Tibet, Middle East, Africa, South America and Eastern Europe.

Right now, 45 per cent of our business is from Singapore; Hong Kong contributes 30 per cent; Shanghai 20 per cent; and Beijing five per cent. As for the client mix, it's 50-50 expatriates and locals in Singapore, while in Hong Kong, Shanghai and Beijing, the majority are locals.

How much are you focusing on China?

I believe there is a huge untapped luxury travel market in China. In April, we launched a new brand called *Jun Chi* ('galloping gentleman'), targeting elite Chinese travellers. Many travel firms say Chinese elite travellers only go for luxury products and don't know how to appreciate the subtle things in life. I don't believe this. The Chinese have over 3,000 years of history and culture, and based on our own experience, they seem highly capable of appreciating the culture and essence of a destination.

Hong Kongers and even mainland Chinese are very sophisticated travellers. They view destinations very differently from our Western and English-educated clients. When they visit Russia, for example, they're a lot more interested in the country's communist past. And before they head to Africa, they're already aware of concepts such as a migration safari.

How have your customers across markets evolved?

(A decade ago), our customers weren't so sophisticated. Now the situation is different, and they are travelling everywhere.

In the past, we were able to recommend places like Singita (Game Reserves in Africa), and they would say 'thank you' and take the package. Nowadays, they're more demanding. We have to give them more variety, more options, and really value-add to the product.

It has a lot to do with our own knowledge as travel consultants. These days, so much information is already available over the Internet, and staying relevant to the consumer is a constant challenge.

"A lot of companies start out in a niche by assessing how lucrative it can be... We don't want to be just another expensive agency."

What sets you apart from other luxury operators?

Even though our products are high-end in terms of price, it's not just about featuring Michelin-star restaurants or five-star hotels. A lot of companies start out in a niche by assessing how lucrative the segment can be. We don't set out to make our customers pay a lot of money and we definitely don't want to be just another expensive agency.

We believe in catering to our customers' exact interests and tastes, allowing them to visit destinations they really want to visit, do the things they really want to, and in the process gain an in-depth, meaningful and insightful experience. You need to have a deeper understanding of what you want to do for your chosen niche.

Who are your clients?

Most of our customers are aged



In holding pattern

Stuck in the waiting lounge rather than cleared to take off – that’s the prognosis of the business travel market in the coming months, as summed up by **Raini Hamdi** and **Linda Haden**

Cloudy economic growth prospects are forming a frost on the corporate travel market.

IATA’s latest air traffic results, for May, already indicated a general downward trend in demand.

A global survey of 541 CFOs by American Express/CFO Research Services released that same month suggested that the pool of travel resources was not likely to increase this year. The majority of respondents (42 per cent) said their companies were likely to spend less on travel. More than a quarter (29 per cent) said their firms were likely to spend the same amount on travel. Only 29 per cent said their organisations were likely to spend more.

Corporate travel will never completely disappear as companies still need direct their travel resources to the form of travel that is most likely to support revenue growth, as the AMEX/CFO monitor pointed out. Several CFOs it interviewed said conference calls were rarely an adequate substitute for in-person meetings when it came to developing business. The research quoted Jeral D’Souza, vice president and regional controller of Cargill Asia Pacific, Singapore subsidiary of the US-based supplier of food and agricultural products as saying: “We definitely didn’t see any reduction in the last two quarters of 2011. As people try to retain or grow the business, they have to travel. In Asia, the culture of doing business is not by phone; a lot of it is by meeting face-to-face.”

But, rather than stellar growth, all reports indicate a business travel market that is in holding pattern in the coming months.

Whether Singapore or the US, domestic or international, a slowdown in business travel is imminent. CFOs in Singapore, cautious about the economic



Jones: “Put systems and processes in place now.”



Vournakis: “Opportunity to negotiate better rates.”



McCormick: “Think twice before cutting travel spend.”



Source: American Express/CFO Research Services

outlook as the country’s external-oriented sectors still face challenging times due to persistently uncertain global growth indicators, are holding the line on travel spending, according to the AMEX/CFO monitor.

Over in the US, Michael McCormick, Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) executive director and COO, said: “Earlier this year, we created a number of shock scenarios modelling the potential impact of the European debt crisis on business travel here in the US.

“In our Moderate Shock Scenario we predicted that a pro-

longed recession in Europe would result in a flattening of business travel spending in the US. Unfortunately, it now seems that this shock scenario is becoming a reality.”

GBTA is now expecting only a 0.4 per cent growth in total international outbound business trips from the US this year to 6.8 million and has scaled back on the volume for next year, when it expects just 3.7 per cent growth to seven million – or a full percentage drop from its earlier projection.

“Business travel to the Far East, particularly China, has

been a boon for international outbound travel from the US for the last few years. However, falling economic growth rates in China will likely lead to less trade and hence, fewer trips from the US. The projected slowdown in China and the economic challenges in Europe will lead to lower levels of international growth in the near term,” said GBTA in its latest forecasts released last month.

McCormick’s concern, shared by TMCs interviewed, is that organisations may overreact in the challenging economy, slash their travel budgets and end up weak-

ening their competitive position, particularly when the economy improves.

“That is the exact opposite of what they should be doing,” McCormick said.

“Beginning in December 2007, we saw companies make difficult decisions with their business travel budgets to the tune of 13 per cent from the US\$271 billion peak in 2007 – a peak-to-trough decline of US\$34.7 billion. Companies cannot afford to overreact just because there may be clouds on the horizon. Benching road warriors will only impact sales exactly when companies need to focus on growth. The return on investment for business travel is too good to pass up.”

TMCs interviewed believe now is the time for firms to put in place the best possible travel management programme and invest in technology to ensure compliance (see article below).

Nick Vournakis, senior vice president and general manager for Carlson Wagonlit Travel Canada, said: “Companies must perceive the current turbulence as a key opportunity to negotiate better travel rates as prices are expected to soften.

“Negotiate and secure preferential rates – and then lock them in. Understand purchasing patterns of corporate travellers, use online travel management tools to secure savings and use data to draw insights on where best to negotiate savings with suppliers.”

American Express Business Travel’s director of advisory services-Japan, Asia-Pacific, Australia, Carl Jones, agreed. “Demand-side factors still look good for the (Asian) corporate travel market overall. But it has become more crucial than ever for firms to establish the systems and processes in place to track and manage expenses, including travel, to secure long-term growth in the midst of uncertainty,” he said.

Technology must play bigger role in travel management in Asia

With European leaders still fumbling around on how to resolve the debt crisis, organisations must keep a closer watch on outflows, including travel, which is their second largest controllable expense, according to TMCs.

Using technology to ensure compliance is a key arsenal, but despite the proven savings it brings, adoption rates in the Asia-Pacific region are still lower than the global norm.

GetThere’s Corporate Travel Benchmark Report found that in 2011, only

68 per cent of businesses based in the region used online travel management tools, compared to 77 per cent worldwide.

“Research shows that compliance remains a top priority in this period of austerity. Technology is certainly the means to achieve this end. It can help alter behaviour ensuring employees adhere to travel policies and procedures, track spending and to secure savings,” said Carl Jones, director of advisory services-Japan, Asia-Pacific, Australia at American Express Business Travel.

ness Travel.

Carlson Wagonlit Travel’s senior director for the solutions group, Asia-Pacific, Mike Orchard, said that travel managers in Asia were well aware of the technological tools at their disposal but most remained inert due to the complexity of integrating different technologies onto a single platform. “Clearly, there’s ample opportunity for players in the travel management sphere to develop and deliver products that can draw disparate (technology) tools together,” he said.

Conversely, Orchard also stressed that it was not enough for companies to rely on technology alone to keep expenses in check. He said: “The interpretation of data generated by technological tools still requires human intervention, driving insights on where best to make savings.

“The role of travel management companies and corporate travel managers has evolved – we must now become trusted advisors, adopting technology to identify and resolve problems.” – **Linda Haden**

GBTA solidifies Asian presence

By Linda Haden

US-BASED Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) is making inroads into Asia, with Welf Ebeling – appointed as GBTA's regional director for Asia in December – spearheading its drive to become the unifying voice for corporate

travel professionals in the region.

Having established a presence in both Australia and New Zealand in 2010, GBTA picked Bangkok as the location for its first regional Asian headquarters in April. Shortly after, Hong Kong became the second location for a GBTA registered office.

It is expected to be fully operational by the fourth quarter of this year.

A locally staffed office in China, either in Shanghai or Beijing, is scheduled to open by end-2013. The GBTA will look to establish a presence in India sometime in 2013, once it gains a firm footing in North

and South-east Asia.

"GBTA's expansion programme will occur gradually. This has been a deliberate move to ensure that it progresses strategically, without becoming overstretched in the process," said Ebeling.

He said it was an opportune time for the GBTA to enter Asia, given "the rapidly expanding awareness about controlling business travel expenses and the subsequent growing need for greater business travel management expertise within the region".

As of April, the GBTA had 20 individual members in Asia. Comparatively, it has 5,000 members in the US and 2,500 in Europe on its books. Nevertheless, this figure is expected to increase rapidly as the GBTA extends its reach, and as Asia's economies continue to move ahead.

In line with its global vision, the Asian arm of the association will focus on education, research, industry and career advocacy as well as providing networking opportunities for its members.

Within the research sphere, GBTA plans to unveil a study on travel policies in Asia, a first for the body, at the annual Corporate Travel World (CTW) Asia-Pacific and Incentive Travel & Conventions Meetings Asia (IT&CMA) taking place in October in Bangkok. Based on a survey of leading corporate travel managers in the region, the report, which forms part of a wider global study, will highlight specific challenges faced by corporate travel professionals in Asia.

"There's a dire need for Asian corporate travel managers to understand the issues impacting the Asian business market, especially in terms of (travel) policy. What works in the US and Europe might not work in Asia, given the region's cultural idiosyncrasies," Ebeling said.

Education is also a key priority, with the body planning to roll out tiered academic programmes under its GBTA Academy umbrella. Ultimately, it hopes to team up with up to five local institutions in China, India and Singapore to run its tertiary-level courses by 2013.

The GBTA's US-centric curriculum will be modified to match Asia's unique market attributes.

To further strengthen its voice in Asia, GBTA formed an Advisory Board for Asia in May comprising four members initially.

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?

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for buyers of premium travel and luxury meetings

"What works in the US and Europe might not work in Asia, given the region's cultural idiosyncrasies."



Welf Ebeling
GBTA's regional director for Asia



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Finding the right fit

	Destinations used	Strengths	Weaknesses	Viewpoint
<div><p>Most booked</p></div>	<p>Asia Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong, Japan</p> <p>Europe Italy, France, Spain, Switzerland</p> <p>Middle East Dubai</p> <p>Africa South Africa</p> <p>Americas US, South America, Canada</p> <p>Oceania</p>	<p>Strong network of luxury choices. Product variety is great, as it has a versatile range of old architectural hotels. – Eliza Ma, director and general manager, TLX Travel Hong Kong</p> <p>Provides a lot of support, and informs us about latest hotel news. Site visits also inspire us to try different ideas. – Faye Handley, director, Red Events Singapore</p> <p>Particularly good with commissions. – Suthipong Pheunphiphop, managing director, Glory Travel Thailand</p>	<p>Deals mainly with big players and offers less commission to mid-size firms. Has limited staff and there is no strong communication channel between travel consultants and the company. – Ashwani Gupta, managing director, Dove Travel</p> <p>Quality of services varies between locations. I would like to see more standardised service across different countries. – Suthipong Pheunphiphop, managing director, Glory Travel Thailand</p>	<div><p>The brand is well-established in Asia-Pacific and positively received by clients. It meets the rapidly changing customer preferences and requirements in terms of its depth and breadth of properties. However, it has a flat commission structure, and should look at tiered commission scheme to incentivise travel consultants who can prove themselves. – John Chan, senior manager, sales, distribution and global support, PYO Travel Malaysia</p></div>
<div></div>	<p>Asia Hong Kong, Indonesia, China</p> <p>Pacific Australia, New Zealand</p> <p>Middle East UAE</p>	<p>Wide selection of five-star properties and rates are good. – Chris Ng, managing director, MP Travel & Tours Malaysia</p> <p>Channels for instant bookings and special deals offered. – Budiman Sumardi, Asia leisure manager, Smailing Tour Indonesia</p> <p>Attractive commissions, which are given out on a timely basis, as well as exclusive deals and promotions. Helpful in providing VIP services and assisting in MICE deals. – Deepak Narula, managing director, Aman Travels India</p>	<p>Needs to create stronger brand awareness as people still mistake it for a hotel chain, rather than its primary role as a marketing company. – Deepak Narula, managing director, Aman Travels India</p>	<div><p>Our customers prefer known names, and its hotels are easier to sell to customers. Worldhotels has a good range of products and rates offered are competitive, allowing us to make better profits. However, travel consultants are not educated on all available products. We have to discover them ourselves. There should be workshops for frontline staff. – Guldeep Singh Sahni, managing director, Weldon Tours & Travels India</p></div>
<div><div><p>Least booked</p></div></div>	<p>Asia Indonesia, China</p> <p>Europe</p> <p>Middle East UAE</p>	<p>Meets the needs of very rich clients who like to be pampered when they are on holiday. – Chris Ng, managing director, MP Travel & Tours Malaysia</p> <p>One of the few companies that shows interest in MICE business. It also offers detailed and personalised service, as well as special accommodation options. – Rosanna Leung, head of project and business development, MICE World Hong Kong</p>	<p>Rates are high and commissions are not attractive enough. It should consider extending value-added offers such as welcome drinks and late check-outs. There is also a need for more fam tours and trade fair participation to raise its profile. – Rosanna Leung, head of project and business development, MICE World Hong Kong</p>	<div><p>We sell its properties in the largest numbers as it has the pick of the bunch for boutique properties we favour. Having said that, we don't tend to use marketing and representation companies that much as they offer a particular type of property in each instance, whereas everything we do is bespoke. While they may be fabulous at improving our knowledge, we don't necessarily book through them. – Lucy Jackson, director, Lightfoot Travel Hong Kong</p></div>
<div></div>	<p>Asia Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Macau, Japan</p> <p>Europe France, Italy, Spain, Portugal</p>	<p>Business travel-friendly due to good response time when providing quotations. Also accepts a wider range of credit cards for payment, and is well-prepared for meeting and event bookings. – Carlson Wagonlit Travel Indonesia president director Royanto Handaya</p> <p>A good variety of hotels and also has special deals occasionally such as a free night's stay for a two-night booking. – Unnamed Philippine travel consultant</p>	<p>Value-added services such as airport transfer arrangements could be provided. – Carlson Wagonlit Travel Indonesia president director Royanto Handaya</p>	<div><p>It has lots of hotels, and channels for booking are easier and faster. Commissions are also good, and big discounts are offered when you're booking for a leisure group or incentive. Some of their hotels were recommended to me by tour operators in those destinations. – Alexander Divinagracia, general manager, Globalwings Travel & Tours Philippines</p></div>

TTG Asia asked 20 travel experts which of these companies they worked with most closely and why. Top concerns were brand awareness, product variety, ease of booking, commission structure and service standards

Compiled by
S Puvaneswary, Prudence Lui,
Linda Haden, Mimi Hudoyo,
Rosa Ocampo, Divya Kaul and
Timothy France

	Properties booked	Strengths	Weaknesses	Viewpoint
	Asia Malaysia, Sri Lanka Europe France, Italy	<p>Good selection of properties that meets the varying needs of our clients who span the mid- to upper-luxury tiers. Highly active when it comes to offering deals and promotions, as well as provides good reservation support and aftercare. – Javiny Lim, managing director, Quotient TravelPlanner Singapore</p> <p>Its strength is product variety, which means better client satisfaction. – Chamnong Intarot, managing director, Sawasdee Holidays Thailand</p>	<p>A major weakness is that many of its properties do not have enough staff to take care of all customers. For example, we have found that some huge hotels have only one receptionist. – Chamnong Intarot, managing director, Sawasdee Holidays Thailand</p>	<p>It offers a tasteful collection of one-of-a-kind properties that is perfect for sophisticated and discerning clients. In addition, a host of gourmet programmes are available. Its portfolio fits our vision of offering customers unique, bespoke experiences. Lodges, bungalows and accommodation that provides in-room butler services in exotic destinations are popular with our clients. – David Song, digital media & marketing, e-commerce manager, Country Holidays Singapore</p>



From left: Hotel Ritz Madrid (The Leading Hotels of the World); The Darling in Sydney (Worldhotels), Kumarakom Lake Resort in Kerala (Small Luxury Hotels of the World), Royal Plaza on Scotts in Singapore (Preferred Hotel Group), Ceylon Tea Trails in Sri Lanka (Relais & Châteaux)



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Once sleepy Western Australia is awakening with sparkling new developments. By **Gracia Chiang**

Arrivals

Buoyed by the business visitor and VFR segments, Western Australia is surging ahead of nation-wide growth figures, recording 739,000 international visitors in the year ending March, a 3.5 per cent increase compared to the Australia average of 1.1 per cent. Last year, it also bucked the national trend of marginal decline (0.2 per cent) in international arrivals, posting seven per cent growth.

NTO

Tourism Western Australia's (TWA) challenge is to raise the state's leisure appeal, which it is trying to do with its destination brand, *Experience Extraordinary*, launched in 2010. It is also developing a destination brand for Perth.

This month, the NTO signed a two-year co-operative marketing agreement with Qatar Airways following the launch of its thrice-weekly Doha-Perth service, focusing initially on the UK and Germany. TWA has also singled out Indonesia for increased marketing activity through its Singapore office, while continuing to maintain efforts in key sources such as Singapore, Malaysia, China, South Korea, Japan, New

Zealand and the US.

Events

TWA is now roping in events as an integral part of its strategy. While many acts used to be marketed independently, Eventscorp, a division of TWA, will now "align the right events to the right business visitation opportunity", said executive director Gwyn Dolphin, who was hired in January to spearhead these initiatives. This will mean allocating a portion of tickets to be packaged into tour programmes, cooperating with airline and tour operators through alliances, and ensuring that TWA advertising now features key events.

Some 90 sporting, culinary and cultural events have been lined up for the 2012/2013 calendar, with more than half outside of Perth, in line with the NTO's aim to disperse travellers across the region.

Chief among them is the brand-new Margaret River Gourmet Escape to be held from November 22-25. It expects to attract 10,000 visitors in its first year, and will feature 40 food and wine events headlined by noteworthy chefs such as Heston Blumenthal and Rene Redzepi.



"With the arrival of China Southern, we're starting to see a trickle of leisure business from China. We've seen some fairly significant demand increases in Perth, so rates have grown quite a bit; about 25-30 per cent year-on-year."

Matthew Talbot
Director of sales
Hyatt Regency Perth

Access

Besides Qatar Airways' new Doha-Perth route beginning July 3, another significant development is Perth's first direct air link to China, which was created last November when China Southern Airlines started Beijing-Guangzhou-Perth flights three times a week.

As of April, Singapore Airlines offered the most non-stop capacity into Perth, with 21 flights a week, followed by Emirates (Dubai) and Qantas (Hong Kong and Singapore). There are a total of 16 international carriers operating to 12 destinations.

In order to make the rest of the region more accessible, Tourism Western Australia CEO, Stephanie Buckland, said the priorities were the "potential redevelopment of the Busselton airport" in the southern Margaret River region, and the "establishment of international flights to Broome", the northern gateway to the Kimberley. Feasibility studies are being conducted for the former, with the intention for it to first receive flights from the east coast before international ones. For the latter, which is already capable of handling international services, a service from Singapore is being targeted.

Perth Airport is also undergoing a A\$750 million (US\$762 million) transformation over the next three years, which will see a new domestic terminal being built next to the international one, and expansion in its arrival and departure halls.

A lesser-profiled initiative is the development of the Kimberley Aerial Highway, a series of airstrips that provides small-plane access to remote areas of the Kimberley. In the past year, TWA has been working closely with industry partners to promote it, while also investigating the need for additional tourism infrastructure in iconic spots.

Hardware

Work commenced in April on a 10-hectare waterfront project that will link the Swan River to the CBD. Key tourism elements include several hotel sites and a cultural centre.

In November, the 15,500-pax state-of-the-art indoor venue, Perth Arena, will open its doors in an area that is also seeing massive changes. Running east-west across the heart of the city, Perth City Link will reconnect the CBD with the Northbridge entertainment district.

Living with a room squeeze

The mining boom and influx of corporate travellers may backfire on leisure, reports **Gracia Chiang**

1 How bad is the hotel crunch? Thanks to high occupancies, hoteliers in Perth are enjoying dizzying rates, especially on weekdays. A three-star room can be priced at A\$300 (US\$303), said GTA Australasia inbound operations manager, Roxy Chan, who cited the example of a “short-sighted” motel who wanted to cease allotments.

The problem is particularly acute in the CBD. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in the year ending December 2011, average occupancy rate (AOR) at establishments in the CBD increased by 3.6 per cent to 84.1 per cent against the previous year, while RevPAR stood at A\$168.50, a 15.1 per cent jump.

Hyatt Regency Perth director of sales, Matthew Talbot, said: “For the last 20 years we’ve worked on a flat leisure rate all through the year but now we’ve broken it down to a weekday and weekend rate.”

Although figures are not as high outside the city centre, both

parameters are also trending upwards. In Perth and its surrounds (Experience Perth region), AOR was 78.3 per cent and RevPAR was A\$150.80, a 4.4 per cent and 14.7 per cent climb respectively. In Western Australia, AOR was 68.3 per cent and RevPAR was A\$121.40, a 5.4 per cent and 13.5 per cent hike respectively.

2 How is the trade coping? Inbound tour operator Valentino Holidays managing director, Peter Chim, said: “We are educating travel (consultants) to (send groups) over the weekend, but not everyone can follow that schedule. It’s no longer a matter of how much is the room, it’s a matter of whether we can even get the rooms.” He added that groups that could confirm at least two months in advance stood a higher chance of securing accommodation.

“Some hotels are helping us by trying not to increase their rates so much, so that they are still within the budgets of South-east

Asian travellers,” Chim added.

Choice Hotels Australasia, which operates brands such as Comfort and Quality, was now “pushing people 20 minutes outside of the CBD in the likes of Sorrento Beach”, said its general manager, sales and marketing, Aileen Cobern. “Perth city is full,” she remarked.

Despite these challenges, GTA Indonesia general manager, group sales, Tim Dyer, was hopeful that Western Australia could still be successful as a new product, and was at ATE 2012 to look for nature and wildlife options.

“My market goes to South America and Africa looking for very unique and vivid places. I want to see if some of the Indonesian specialists can start selling Western Australia for its endemic species. These are not price-sensitive tours,” he explained.

3 What measures are being taken? Late last year, Western Australia became the only state to offer hotel development

incentives. These include the provision of Crown land at reduced market rates, flexible floor space bonuses and infrastructure grants. At least two prime sites have been released, including the downtown Fire Emergency Services Authority House.

“The government realised there was a failure in the market despite very favourable trading conditions,” said Tourism Western Australia CEO, Stephanie Buckland.

Forthcoming inventory may ease the situation slightly, with three new hotels scheduled to open their doors later this year, namely the 236-room Fraser Suites Perth, the 56-room Quincy Boutique Hotel and the 12-suite Terrace Hotel.

As of March, there were 121 establishments (mostly four-star) providing 10,984 rooms in the Experience Perth region, out of a total of 343 establishments (mainly three-star) offering 21,799 rooms throughout the state.

4 Will an aggressive events strategy only exacerbate the shortage? Eventscorp, a division under the state NTO, is rolling out several new events in the coming year, but some industry members have voiced concerns about reeling in more visitors than hotels can handle.

Eventscorp executive director, Gwyn Dolphin, said: “A lot of the events are weekend-related. We’re also looking at how we can try to deliver (more events) to the wider region.”

“One of the first conversations we had was with the hotels association in Perth. The (hotels) understand what we’re trying to achieve, and we have a positive relationship. It’s an ongoing discussion about having the right events at the right timings.”

But Valentino Holidays’ Chim was unconvinced. “It will (make prices) worse. And if the event is held in Margaret River, you would also have to pay for the cost of a coach, including the captain’s accommodation.”

Products

A taste of the outback in Western Australia’s Broome and the Kimberley



A scenic flight on Kimberley Aviation’s Cessna 210



Eco Beach’s beach houses (above); Matso’s Broome Brewery’s beer sampler (below)



Cable Beach Club’s Durack Suite

Kimberley Aviation

For those short on time, this flying adventure is perfect for taking in the varied landscapes of the region. Guests will not only be at 1,700m (in a cool six-seater or eight-seater), but descending on remote airstrips where there are options such as camel trekking, led by an indigenous community who will regale with Dreamtime stories and offer a steaming cup of billy tea and fresh damper bread, as well as a boat visit to one of the area’s oldest pearl farms and a lesson on how the little gems are cultivated. There are four tours (half-day/full-day) starting from A\$495 (US\$505), but the husband-and-wife team often gets requests for customised programmes.

Contact

Tel: (61-04) 2911-2407

Email: info@kimberleyaviation.com.au

Cable Beach Club

This Oriental-influenced sprawling resort has one of the best addresses in Broome, thanks to its location along the must-see Cable Beach. Inspired by the region’s 19th century pearl rush which saw an influx of Chinese and Japanese, Asian travellers will feel right at home amid terracotta warriors and *torii* gates. A wide range of accommodation types are set within 10 hectares of gardens, namely studios (surprisingly spacious), bungalows, villas and suites. There is also an impressive number of facilities such as four dining options (including a Thai restaurant), two swimming pools, tennis courts, a spa and salon, and a gym. Open year-round, rates start from A\$322 (US\$332) during low season (October-March).

Contact

Tel: (1800) 199-099

Email: info@cablebeachclub.com

Broome Sightseeing Tours

Hop onto a luxury coach for a two-hour tour of balmy and laid-back Broome, the biggest town in the Kimberley. Discover its rich history and get up-close to restored pearling luggers; visit Sun Pictures, said to be the longest running outdoor cinema in the world; view Gantheaume Point’s sandstone formations; learn about the distinctive red soil called *pindan*; and stop for pictures along scenic Cable Beach. A highlight has to be cooling off at famous Matso’s Broome Brewery, where guests can sample its mango, ginger and chilli beers, as well as a mixed platter of kangaroo and crocodile meat. A\$55 (US\$57) for adults and A\$40 for children (aged six to 16).

Contact

Tel: (61-08) 9192-0000

Email: tours@broomesightseeingtours.com.au

Eco Beach

An hour-and-a-half from Broome, this retreat is ideal for families and corporate groups who love the outdoors. The keyless and TV-less resort embraces nature and wildlife with its 30 tents, 25 villas and two beach houses. Among its sustainable initiatives are a hybrid power system that relies heavily on solar energy and organic gardens that grow 70 per cent of all fruits and vegetables required. A comprehensive menu of activities includes fishing trips, whale watching, turtle patrols, yoga and a fun spa treatment known as Mud N Bubbles, which entails slapping on mangrove mud and sipping champagne by the beach. Open April-January, rates start from A\$132 (US\$136) during low season (November onwards) for groups.

Contact

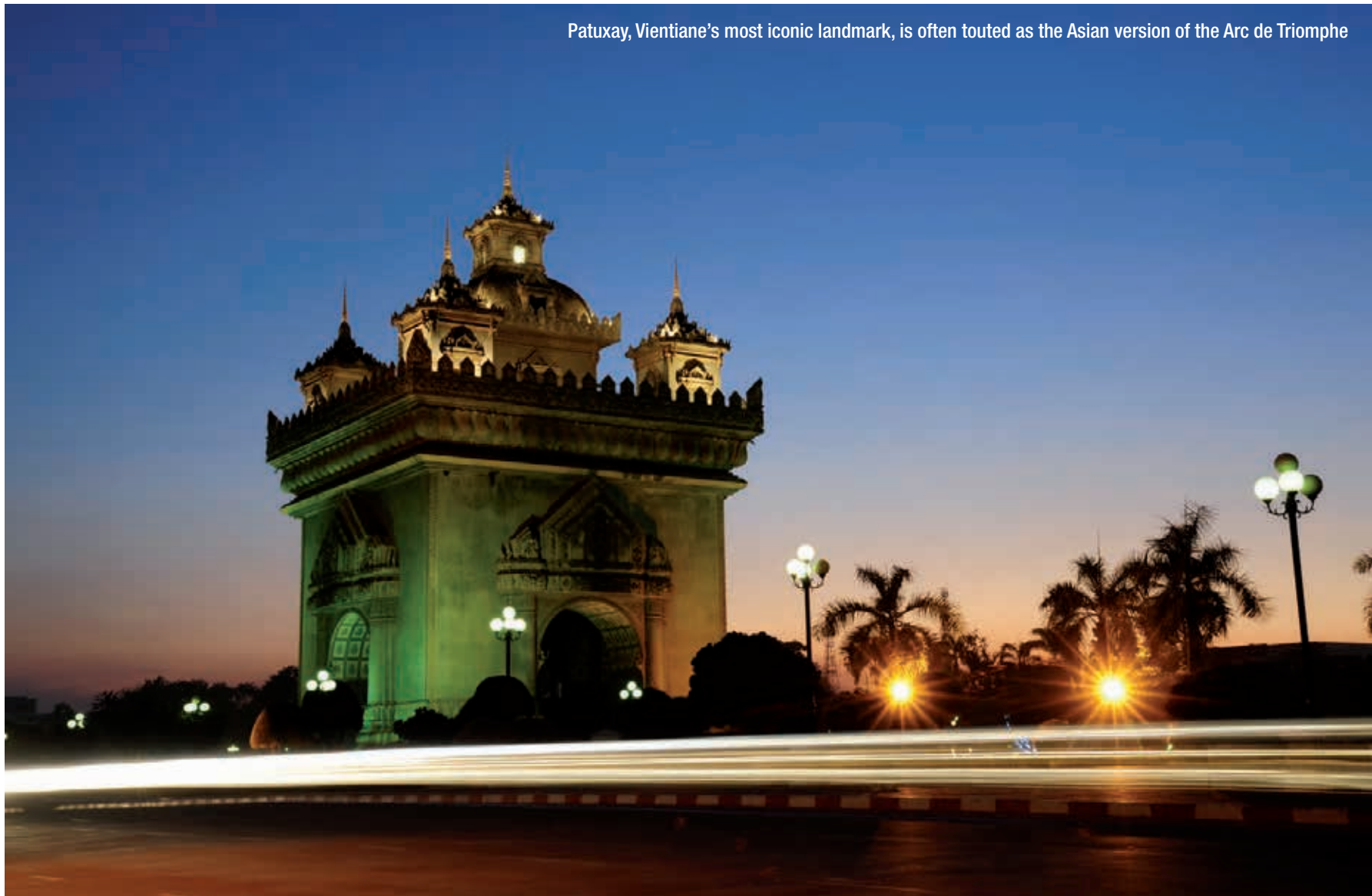
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Steve Lloyd Smith

All photos by Gracia Chiang

Patuxay, Vientiane's most iconic landmark, is often touted as the Asian version of the Arc de Triomphe



A balancing act needed

Laos risks losing its laid-back charm in the pursuit of development. By **Timothy France**

Arrivals

International arrivals to Laos rose eight per cent year-on-year to reach 2.7 million in 2011, according to the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism. Despite the positive result, last year's growth was a marked drop from 2010, when visitor arrivals increased by 25 per cent.

Demand has since picked up pace. Laos welcomed 846,564 international visitors in 1Q2012, a rise of 11 per cent. ASEAN tourists grew 10 per cent year-on-year to comprise 78 per cent of Laos' total arrivals, of which more than half came from neighbouring Thailand. South Korea and China were star performers, posting strong growths of 33 per cent and 42 per cent respectively. In key Western markets, the UK climbed eight per cent, the US increased four per cent, while Germany fell by 10 per cent.

Looking ahead, Laos is targeting 3.7 million arrivals by 2015, which will require a nine per cent growth rate for 2012 – way surpassing the 2.9 million visitors or 6.4 per cent growth estimated for this year.

Aviation

Flag carrier

Lao Airlines will expand its international network with charter services to Seoul and Tokyo in 3Q2012. It will also launch thrice-weekly services to Guangzhou in November, in addition to existing flights to Kunming and Jinghong in China.

In March, Nok Air started a daily Fly'n'Ride service, which offers flights from Bangkok to Udon Thani in north-eastern Thailand, followed by onward bus transfers across the Thai-Lao border to Vientiane, with a total journey time of five hours.

Beginning late May, AirAsia boosted the flight frequency on its Kuala Lumpur-Vientiane route from thrice-weekly to daily. However, its Thai affiliate was denied a request for a Bangkok-Vientiane service.

Products

Under construction is Vientiane New World, a US\$600 million large-scale development by the Mekong River, which will offer a mix of high-rise office buildings, apartments, convention facilities, shopping malls, cinemas and hotels when completed. However, some travel trade members were concerned that a project of this scale could threaten the charm of



“(The authorities) are trying to make Laos a more attractive destination for the Asian market, but this will probably hurt the Western market, which comes for its French colonial charm.”

Jason Rolan
General manager
Khiri Travel Laos

the capital.

Jason Rolan, general manager, Khiri Travel Laos, said: “(The authorities) are trying to make Laos a more attractive destination for the Asian market, but I think in the long run this kind of deal will probably hurt the Western market, which comes to see its French colonial charm.

“To arrive (in Vientiane) and see such a shiny, new city in this part of the world would come as a shock to some people.”

Some US\$2.1 million is also being spent on road development in Xieng Khuang province to improve access to Phukheng Mountain, a popular viewing site. Already two-thirds complete, the project is due to be completed by the end of this year. Plans to resurface roads east to Viengxay caves in Houaphanh, home to the communist government during the Vietnam War, are also in the pipeline.

Hotels

Laos' accommodation establishments grew significantly from 1,870 in 2010 to 2,473 in 2011. While guesthouses dominate the hospitality sector, the number of hotels jumped by more than 20 per cent in 2011, with development concentrated

in Vientiane, Luang Prabang and Champasak, three main tourist destinations in the country.

In Vientiane, 90 villas are currently being constructed along the Mekong River. These are expected to host world leaders during the upcoming Asia-Europe Meeting Summit in November.

Vang Vieng, a backpacker hotspot, is turning upmarket with the July debut of the 34-key luxury Riverside Boutique Resort.

Access

The Thai government will finance the 7.8km railway extension between Thailand's north-eastern Nong Khai and Tha Naleng station in Vientiane's outskirts. The additional link is due to finish within two years and will offer access into central Vientiane.

The Japanese government is funding the expansion of Vientiane's Wattay International Airport at a cost of US\$23.4 million. When completed, the facility is expected to process 1.6 million passengers annually by 2016.

Plans are also afoot to expand the runway and upgrade facilities at Pakse International Airport in southern Laos, with a US\$5.7 million loan provided by the Thai government.

Laos loses longhaul to neighbour

Timothy France finds that Myanmar's travel boom is fast eclipsing Laos' tourism prospects

Myanmar's rapidly growing tourism sector is casting a long shadow on the allure of neighbouring countries, but nowhere is the impact as sharply felt as in Laos.

Annual growth in international arrivals to Laos has fallen from 25 per cent in 2010 to 11 per cent in 2011, while tourism officials have forecasted a conservative six per cent growth in 2012.

Richard Brouwer, chief operating officer, Diethelm Travel Group, said that Laos' inbound market, particularly from European sources, had suffered from the rising interest in Myanmar.

Kirsten Focken, marketing advisor to the Lao National Tourism Association (LNTA), agreed. She said: "Laos is losing market share in the region in terms of longhaul visitors from Europe and the US. Growth is very slow and decreasing from some of the biggest tourism markets in the world like Germany."

Focken added: "There is no real investment in professional marketing activities. There are insufficient new innovative products, and the general cost of travel (to Laos) relative to other countries has been increasing at a higher rate."

Many industry observers were also critical of the state's destination marketing efforts, saying that there needed to be stronger and more relevant activities. The *Visit Laos Year 2012* campaign has had so little visibility that DMCs apparently have not seen residual effects.

Last year's organisational restructuring – which saw LNTA merging with the Ministry of Information and Culture to become the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism – was also deemed to have affected the resources allocated for promotional campaigns and strategy co-ordination.

More importantly, perhaps a fundamental challenge for Laos is its lack of appeal as a standalone destination as it is generally perceived as an add-on for regional tours, the trade noted. The emergence of Myanmar has consequently stolen its thunder, Khiri Travel Laos general manager, Jason Rolan, explained.

"Laos arrivals have definitely been affected by Myanmar. We still get a lot of enquiries for Laos, but we are competing with Myanmar now as people consider going to one of the two. Myanmar has so many things to offer that people don't usually add other countries onto (the itinerary)," he said.

With the exception of several pioneering tour operators, Focken pointed to the overall lack of product innovation in the Lao tourism landscape.

New heritage sites are being developed across the country with international assistance, but many private-sector projects, such as Vientiane New World, are undertaken by Chinese and Vietnamese companies without wider industry consultation or integration into a clear destination plan.

In addition, many such products seem to disregard the country's key assets, which, as highlighted in the Lao Tourism Satisfaction Survey 2012, are "the hospitality of the Lao people, nature and traditional Lao life", Focken emphasised.

"It is therefore of utmost importance to preserve these assets. Marketing messages should focus on these key assets and what type of experiences visitors can enjoy dur-

ing their visit," she said.

"At the moment the numbers show development is not going in the right direction, and Laos is in danger of losing more market share."

Development is not without its benefits though, said Rolan. "There are always new things coming along, especially new routes. As more roads are paved, it becomes easier to get around," he said.

However, while greater access and connectivity will facilitate Laos' tourism development, a coordinated approach is still needed to address its dwindling tourism market share in the region.

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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
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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
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- Best Marketing & Development Effort

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- Royal Cliff Beach Resort, Pattaya (2006)
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- 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.

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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

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- 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



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No. 1664/July 27 – August 9, 2012



THE WORLD'S LARGEST
HOTEL CHAIN

*Dynamic
Malaysia*

BEST WESTERN RISES IN KUALA LUMPUR

Malaysia is land of beautiful contrasts. From the ultra-modern capital city Kuala Lumpur, to the 100 million year-old rainforests, this modern Asian tiger is developing fast, without losing track of its roots.

And Best Western International will soon match this dynamic country's fast-paced expansion with the development of its first hotel in Kuala Lumpur.

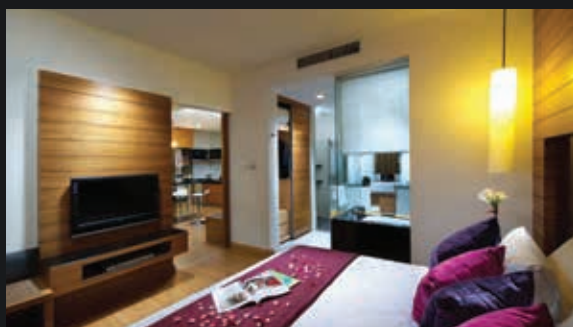
Opening its doors in May 2012, the BEST WESTERN PREMIER Dua Sentral will be located in the heart of the city's new business and transport hub, KL Sentral. The new hotel will also mark the launch of the luxury Best Western Premier brand in Malaysia, offering a new level of comfort and service excellence to the increasing number of travelers visiting this blossoming city.

BEST WESTERN PREMIER Dua Sentral will feature 364 contemporary rooms ranging from 34 to 183m², each including free Wi-Fi, LCD interactive TVs, DVD players and iPod docking stations, meaning guests can stay connected at all times.

Diners at the hotel will be treated to an array of epicurean experiences, including the Kembali Kitchen which serves traditional Malaysian and international dishes, Hugo's on 6, a fusion restaurant combining Mediterranean and Oriental flavours, and Grill 582, which offers the finest steaks and sumptuous seafood.

Business travelers and groups will also be catered for with eight function rooms able to host from 12 to 192 delegates, while those wanting a more relaxing experience can unwind in the infinity-edged swimming pool and Best Western's signature Bhuvana Spa.

In fast-growing Malaysia, Best Western expects to reach new heights!





EXPLORE KL FROM THE NEW BEST WESTERN PREMIER DUA SENTRAL

The opening of the BEST WESTERN PREMIER Dua Sentral this month provides a huge range of sight-seeing and business opportunities for travelers to Kuala Lumpur.

Due to its prime location in the heart of the KL Sentral transport hub, BEST WESTERN PREMIER Dua Sentral offers quick and easy access to all of the Malaysian capital's major attractions. Here is Best Western's guide to the major sights and sounds of Kuala Lumpur:

Petronas Twin Towers: No trip to KL would be complete without a trip to the Petronas Twin Towers. At 452 metres tall, the structures are the tallest buildings in Southeast Asia and tower above the city. They are connected by a two-storey sky bridge, from which visitors are offered the best views of the city.

The Golden Triangle: The beating heart of KL's commercial, retail and entertainment sectors, the Golden Triangle is home to several huge shopping malls, such as Star Hill Gallery and Pavilion. At night, the streets of Bukit Bintang are packed with shoppers and al fresco diners.

Chinatown: Located on Petaling Street, also known as 'Chee Cheong Kai' (Starch Factory Street) - a reference to its tapioca-producing roots - KL's Chinatown is a bargain hunter's paradise. During the evening, its streets transform into a lively and vibrant night market, packed with hundreds of stalls.

Masjid Negara: Malaysia's national mosque is a not only a place of worship but also an architectural icon. Based upon the Grand Mosque in Mecca, the Masjid Negara has one main dome, 48 small domes and a 73-metre tall minaret. The mosque was completed in 1965 at a cost of more than MYR10 million (US\$3.3 million).

Bukit Nanas Forest Reserve: Despite being a modern metropolis, KL has managed to retain elements of its natural heritage. In the very heart of the city lies the Bukit Nanas Forest Reserve - a 10.5-hectare area of hillside forest which is home to many species of flora and fauna. Daily tours are available.

Dataran Merdeka: Translated as 'Independence Square', this is where Malaysian flag was hoisted for the first time on the occasion of the country's independence in 1957. The square includes the historic Sultan Abdul Samad Building, and plays host to Malaysia's annual National Day Parade.

KL Convention Centre: Underscoring KL's place as one of Asia's main conference and event hubs, KLCC is a huge complex located in next to the Petronas Twin Towers. It offers more than 20,000m2 of function space, including theatres, exhibition halls, ballrooms, conference halls and meeting rooms.

BEST WESTERN PREMIER Dua Sentral offers fast and easy access to all these attractions and more, via the KL monorail, bus terminal and taxis.



BEST WESTERN AND MALAYSIA – COMBINING THE BIGGEST AND THE BEST!

Malaysia is a land of superlatives, with an array of impressive landmarks created by both man and Mother Nature.

Rising 452-metres above the city, the famed Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur are the tallest twin towers in the world and the highest buildings in Southeast Asia, while the eastern province of Sarawak is home to the largest cave system in the world – the Mulu Caves. Malaysia will also become the first Asian country in the world to have a Legoland theme park, when the hotly-anticipated new attraction opens in 2013!

With so many superlatives, the expansion of Best Western, 'The World's Largest Hotel Chain', in Malaysia is highly appropriate.

Best Western International now operates three hotels in Malaysia – the 121-room BEST WESTERN Kinabalu Daya Hotel in Kota Kinabalu, the 100-room BEST WESTERN Marina Island Resort, close to the stunning tropical islands of Pangkor and Pangkor Laut, and the 50-room BEST WESTERN Sandakan Hotel & Residence, in Sabah province.

The launch of the BEST WESTERN PREMIER Dua Sentral will more than double the company's Malaysia-wide inventory to almost 700 rooms, but the expansion doesn't stop there! Future Best Western hotels are being planned in locations across the country, including Melaka, Ipoh, Klang, Shah Alam and Petaling Jaya. Further openings in KL are also being planned.

The combination of Malaysia and Best Western will surely prove to be winning partnership in the years to come.





*“Experience a **PREMIER** Way of Life”*

*Discover the new **BEST WESTERN PREMIER** ... more than just a hotel stay.*



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