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Strong outflow during Lebaran

More Indonesians travel on bigger budgets

By Mimi Hudoyo

JAKARTA Indonesians are travelling and spending more for this year's Lebaran holiday season, reported outbound operators.

Sales volume for the country's biggest holiday period that comes after the fasting month of Ramadan has exceeded that of the June-July school holidays by 30-40 per cent, travel experts estimated. This is despite the fact that the peak season falls between August 15-25 this year, barely a month after the school holidays.

Said Rudiana, WITA Tour's director of sales and marketing: "During the school holidays, parents with children finishing schools were busy looking for new higher institutions of learning. Besides, different schools have different holiday periods, while the university semester will only start in September, so Lebaran is a time when the whole family is on holiday and can travel together."

For WITA Tour, business for this year's Lebaran rose a significant 18 per cent from the same period last year, according to Rudiana.

He added: "Since April when we received a high demand for incentive travel, indicating a robust economy, we have anticipated Lebaran holiday (demand) to be fantastic. Many travel consultants have increased their group bookings (to suppliers) by up to 20 per cent more than last year."

Similar trends were observed at Panorama Tours Indonesia, which not only saw demand growing 30 per cent from last year's Lebaran and around 40 per cent from the school holidays earlier this year, but also custom-

ers ready to spend more, according to managing director Leisure Travel Management, Meity Monica Lukito.

She said: "We have noticed that packages featuring premium airlines (such as Singapore Airlines, Cathay Pacific Airways and Garuda Indonesia) are selling well, while the more economical packages (on carriers such as Philippine Airlines, Valuair and Sriwijaya Air) are less popular, a sign that travellers have (bigger) budgets than before."

Indonesian travellers are also inclined to pay more to visit their favourite destinations, such as South Korea.

Tri Harta Indah Surabaya managing director, Inge Erikasari, said: "All flights to South Korea, be it on Garuda Indonesia, Korean Air or AirAsia, are chock-a-block, despite the higher package prices. The land programme for a nine-day trip can cost more than US\$1,000, compared to only US\$500-US\$600 during the normal season."

Both Rudiana and Meity agreed that a weaker euro against the US dollar and rupiah, as well as an easier visa application process at various EU embassies in Jakarta have contributed to the outbound travel boom.

Expounding on Indonesians' destination preferences, Rudiana said: "There are three market segments. The luxury market can afford to spend between US\$6,000 and US\$8,000 per person and are going to places like the Baltic countries and Alaska; for the middle and upper-middle segments, the biggest demand is to East and

Continued on page 2



Newly married

Now in bed with Tune Hotels, Bangkok-based Red Planet Hotels is charging ahead with one deal a week, one opening a month. CEO, Tim Hansing, tells **Timothy France** he believes the marriage will be a harmonious one – see page 8

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Air promos not helping

By S Puvaneswary

KUALA LUMPUR Hotels and travel consultants were unenthusiastic about Malaysia Airlines' (MAS) recent tactical promotion for domestic travellers, which they felt was badly timed if the aim was to stimulate the market.

Launched on August 1 and valid until August 5, it applied

to bookings made for travel in September. One-way, all-inclusive fares between East and West Malaysia were offered for

RM174 (US\$56), while return fares cost RM348. Airfares between East and West Malaysia are usually perceived to be high.

Dorsett Regency Hotel Kuala Lumpur general manager, Christina Toh, said the promotion would have had a bigger impact for the trade if the travel period coincided with the Muslim fasting month, which is currently ongoing.

She added that it also defeated the purpose of encouraging domestic travel as September was the "lead-up to the end-of-year school examinations".

Kota Kinabalu-based Borneo Trails general manager, KL Tan, said: "We're not getting much domestic business partly because it is Ramadan and Muslims generally don't travel during this period. July and August are usually the peak travel season for the UK and Europe market but the volume of our business this year has dropped by 10 per cent."

Pullman Kuching director of sales and distribution, Hazel Chua, said her hotel occupancy in the first and second week of August was in the 50s, as government, corporate and leisure business had slowed. However, she expects business to pick up

Continued on page 3

Amadeus muscles up as IT player

Sees future of travel in next-gen search tools, travel agency automation and single PNR concept

By Gracia Chiang

NICE Once known primarily for its GDS, Amadeus is now seeing its role evolve into that of an IT consultant, with its latest focus on arming travel professionals with mid-office solutions, OTAs with search tools, as well as airlines and airports with technology platforms.

Speaking to media at its Executive Briefing Centre near Nice, Amadeus Asia-Pacific president, David Brett, said one of the company's major projects in the region was the Amadeus Travel Office Manager (ATOM), an intuitive, web-based solution that integrates with the GDS and streamlines workflows by eliminating the paper trail.

Explained Brett: "If you talk to travel (consultants), what they want are tools to help manage the internal workings of the agency more than a front-office desktop. It is perhaps less excit-

ing but actually more useful.

"Agencies everywhere suffer from high turnover rates and they don't want to spend a lot of time training staff how to use technology."

Launched last year, ATOM is already available in Thailand, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore, and will be released progressively in more markets.

Another area that Amadeus is concentrating resources on is in search. Brett pointed out that with the increase in travel choices through the Internet, customers were getting more frustrated.

"We want to address the information overload by providing technology that allows the individual traveller to shape his own offering to a greater degree, presenting it in an easy-to-use format," he said.

Brett further highlighted a recent study undertaken by PhoCusWright showing that while

Numbers that matter

1995 The year that Amadeus began operations in Asia-Pacific. It was then just a pure-play GDS.

500,000 Its system now offers over half a million fares, up from 20,000 fares when it first started.

23 The number of airlines in Asia-Pacific who have ditched legacy IT systems and adopted Amadeus' Altéa.

nearly half of the travellers in developed markets had a specific place in mind when planning for trips, the figure was smaller in emerging markets (a third).

Making similar observations, Amadeus' director, operational research & innovation, Francois Laburthe, said: "This (means)

players in the travel chain have to take into account not only the management of bookings but... the way they handle the shopping experience, display their products and enable easy comparison."

Among the products Amadeus is intending to roll out include a door-to-door search tool for TMCs that will churn out results combining various modes of transport required such as flights, trains, car rentals and taxis, as well as a Travel Seeker iPad app that breaks away from usual form-based searches. Suitable for OTAs or leisure agencies with a web presence, the latter relies on geo-location to display on a map flight prices from a traveller's point of origin, destination activities and Facebook friends who have been there.

As for the age-old GDS, Brett revealed that Amadeus was currently studying how to bring

cruise content into Asia. LCCs are also a new market, as travel consultants are demanding to be able to book them, while some carriers who did not use to distribute through the GDS are changing their mind, he added.

Amadeus is playing up its USP of being able to foster closer industry collaboration as most full-service airlines in Asia-Pacific now use its Altéa IT platform, meaning that travel experts who book through Amadeus can view and make changes to passenger information using a single PNR. In addition, airports in the region are also now being courted by a new division within Amadeus, which will allow for more seamless travel management.

Said Brett: "If a passenger is on an Amadeus carrier and the booking was done on Amadeus, you keep visibility when there's a crisis and disruption. Another benefit is synchronisation."

Continued from page 1

Shorthaul travel remains strong

West Europe; and those with lower budgets choose to travel to neighbouring countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand."

Meity added that Australia, Turkey and South Korea were also in high demand among Indonesians, while travel to Japan had almost fully recovered from the tsunami impact.

Moreover, a strong demand for shorthaul destinations does not necessarily mean travellers have lower budgets, she pointed out.

"They may spend more in Asia than those who go to Europe because they take the extended family along," said Meity.

TTG Intelligence

Analysis by Murray Bailey

AirAsia's growth slows

Seats sales for the three* AirAsia divisions rose 13% in the first half of 2012 to 16.5 million, still a pace slower than the 20% growth in 2011 and the 16% growth in 2010.

The Malaysia division remains dominant – comprising 59% of the Group's total seat sales, versus 62% two years earlier.

Cabin load factor is lowest for the Indonesia division – at 77% – but operating costs are likely lower in Indonesia, making this less of a marketing concern for the group.

AirAsia's performance, Jan-Jun 2012

Division	Seat sales, million	Growth, %	Seat factor, %
Indonesia	2.7	15.6	76.7
Malaysia	9.7	10.6	80.1
Thailand	4.1	18.5	82.2
Total	16.5	13.3	79.9

* Excludes Philippines data, which was only available from March. Source: Calculations by Travel Business Analyst (TBA) from AirAsia's base data.

APAC's arrivals climb 10%

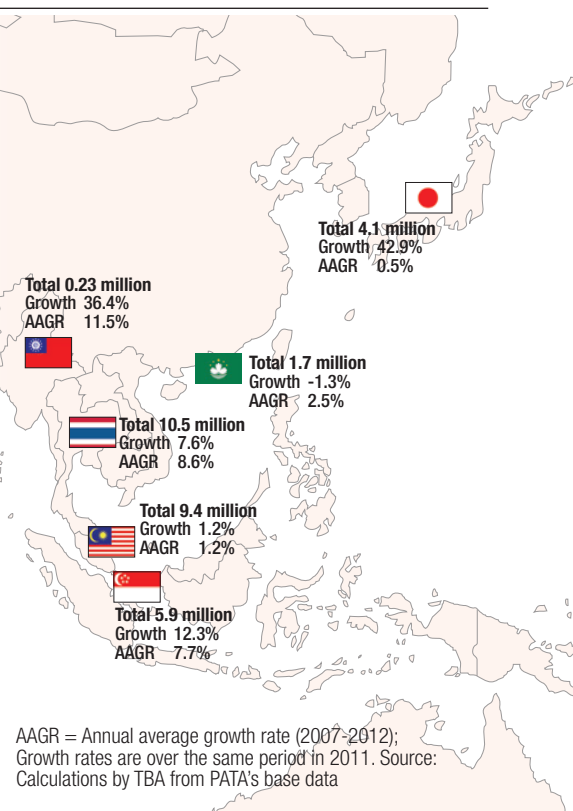
Visitor arrivals in Asia-Pacific is growing about 9.9% year to date, based on latest PATA data.

Japan recorded the most growth at 1.2 million visitors (as of June), following a boost starting March – one year after its 2011 triple-hit. In percentages, Myanmar's 36% (as of May) was almost as fast as Japan's 43%.

But growth over the past five years is different. Malaysia – whose methodology overstates its count relative to most other destinations by about 50% – managed only 1% annually (as of May). Also weak is Macau's 2% (as of May).

Strongest of the heavyweights is Thailand, which chalked up 9% (as of June). Given Bangkok's recent problems – forced airport shutdown, serious riots and floods – the message for marketers is puzzling.

Singapore is growing well at 8% (as of May), but is still lagging behind Thailand.



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Time for budget to boom

Tune brand to roll out in Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand

By Timothy France

BANGKOK Red Planet Hotels, which last month acquired a 16.05 per cent stake in Tune Hotels, aims to deliver brand consistency to the budget stay sector across Asia, operating in the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, China and Bangladesh.

Tim Hansing, CEO of Red Planet Hotels (interviewed on page 8 in View From The Top), said the growth of LCCs in the region is fuelling demand for budget accommodation.

"There is a very obvious gap here in Asia, where there is no quality branded budget product across the region. You have bits and pieces, which is why we saw an opportunity in Asia, to roll out the whole (Tune) brand," he told *TTG Asia*.

By the end of this year, Red Planet Hotels will have 10 operating hotels with 1,623 rooms in Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia. It is currently doing one deal a week and opening one hotel a month.

"The best opportunities are in the Philippines. It's kind of been the perfect storm there for us because land rates and rental rates are low. Nobody has been building hotels in the Philippines for 10 years, so hotel rooms are hard



Hansing: void in Asian market

to find and very expensive suddenly," Hansing said.

He added that his biggest competitors in terms of brands was Go Hotels in the Philippines, FaveHotels and Amaris in Indonesia, while there was no one in particular in Thailand.

Tobias Fischer, business development manager, Go Vacation Thailand, noted there was definitely a need for a standardised budget hotel brand with a chain affiliation.

"Budget hotels have many flaws, so international travel (consultants) prefer using recognised chains because they offer a reliable and standardised product," he said.

Fischer said: "Budget hotel brands are becoming very popular, particularly among shorthaul travellers staying in major cities for a short time."

He believed that the proliferation of budget hotel brands in Asia would not take away business from higher-tier accommodation, but instead enlarge the

pie for all destinations, especially in cities such as Singapore where supply is short and rates are high. Even Bangkok, which has an oversupply and an availability of four-star rooms at three-star rates, is good ground for the low-cost model, he said.

Fischer said: "With rapid growth in regional low-cost air travel, tourists from India and Indonesia are generating high demand for budget hotel services."

"I don't expect travellers will downgrade accommodation with the growth of the branded budget hotel sector; instead it will bring more people to the destination."

As for China, Hansing was slightly cautious in expanding as rapidly. He explained competition in the market was a lot stronger, with well-established domestic hotel groups already present and the frantic growth of international chains.

"We are not planning to open one hotel a day in China because I believe it will come back and bite shareholders. In fact the last time I looked, the values of those hotels in China have declined significantly," he said, adding that this reflected the fact that supply was growing too quickly.

Philippines introduces new hotel rating system

By Rosa Ocampo

MANILA The Philippine Department of Tourism (DoT) has adopted a new star-rating standard for hotels, resorts and serviced apartments, a move much welcomed by industry players who say the current one is too vague.

The new system will grade accommodation between one and five stars using a points system that takes into account the inventory, availability and quality of facilities and services.

The current system classifies hotels and serviced apartments as economy, standard, first or deluxe, and resorts as A, AA, AAA or special interest, resulting in confusion and expectation gaps among overseas guests. These are also given out based on facilities, instead of service rendered.

Everyone will now "speak the same language" with the new classification, said Eleanor Ng, operations manager inbound, HRG Drysdale Marsman Travel.

"The new grading system will provide a clearer and more credible means of determining the offerings a property has, thus enabling guests to easily iden-

tify the accommodation type that best suits their needs," said Chanelle Garvey, director of sales and marketing, Sofitel Philippine Plaza.

She added: "It will help create a fair playing field for promoting hospitality brands in the market. Communications can now provide a much more accurate presentation of a property, which will be most beneficial to the consumer."

Emily Malate, vice president of marketing, Image Travel and Tours, was hopeful that hotels and resorts, especially those outside Manila, would adjust to the new standards and help tour operators to better sell these properties.

However, Sofitel's Garvey said she did not believe that the new system would have a large impact on the quality of service and accommodation rates, "except that properties would become more vigilant in living up to the standards of their category".

Originally due to launch in 4Q2012, implementation of the new guidelines will be delayed to next year as DoT is looking for a third-party auditor.



Garvey: more transparency

Continued from page 1

Competing with outbound traffic

in the second half of September.

"It would have helped if MAS had introduced a tactical promotion to stimulate domestic travel during Ramadan as Sarawak's inflow of tourists is highly dependent on flights out of Kuala Lumpur," Chua explained.

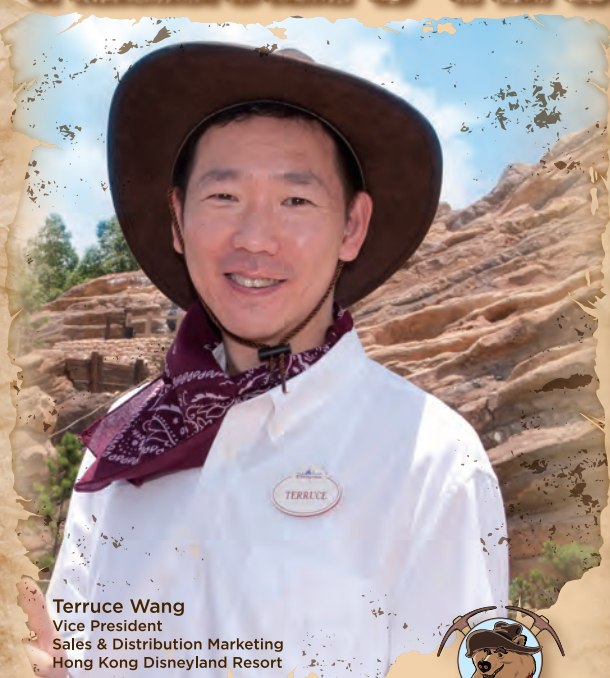
Industry members were also critical about the decision to launch the domestic promotion only after the international one, which was announced four days earlier for travel from August 1 to November 7, covering over 31 destinations.

"We lost a potential market of travellers as (domestic travellers) would have already made their holiday arrangements," said Dorsett Regency's Toh.

Asian Overland Services Tours & Travel director of sales and business development, Andy Muniandy, said the airline should have engaged travel consultants in order to plan a meaningful tactical.

He added: "MAS should have given ample advance lead notice to the public about the domestic fare promotion and not announce it on the launch day itself. The booking period, ending August 5, is also too short. Even domestic travellers need time to plan their holidays."

TERRUCE'S TIPS



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



GRIZZLY GULCH

灰熊山谷

A RUNAWAY ADVENTURE

I have always been a big fan of movies about the American Old West, imagining what it would be like to explore the great frontier, brave desert mountains and stumble across mining towns in California. My dream recently came true at Hong Kong Disneyland, when I embarked on my very own Wild West adventure at Grizzly Gulch, the latest and biggest expansion in area to open at the Park on July 14. This summer, I invite you to come to Grizzly Gulch and discover your inner pioneer!

BECOME A PIONEER AT GRIZZLY GULCH

One of my favorite experiences in Grizzly Gulch was the **Big Grizzly Mountain Runaway Mine Cars**, which are equally famed and feared. It's a multidirectional terrain-style coaster that takes you on a unique journey through the twists and turns of the entire Grizzly Gulch. The brave ones on board the mine cars will be rewarded with spectacular views of the wilderness landscape. Hold on tight though, as a grizzly bear family forces your mine car to hurtle out of control before an unexpected explosion blasts your mine car off the mountain. It's a runaway adventure that I'll never forget, and I'm sure you won't too!

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

And don't forget to capture your adventure on camera with Mickey, Minnie, Chip and Dale, who have all donned their Wild West outfits, and are joined by Disney's friendliest grizzly bears – Koda and Kenai.

PLAYTIME NEVER ENDS AT HONG KONG DISNEYLAND

If you still haven't had your fill of fun, head for playtime in Toy Story Land. Andy's speediest toy car **RC Racer**⁽¹⁾ will take you on a 27 meter-high U-shaped roller-coaster ride that will get your adrenaline pumping. Then your mission includes falling from 25 meters high in the **Toy Story Parachute Drop** and chasing your tail in the **Slinky Dog Spin**⁽²⁾.

With the exciting new attractions in Toy Story Land and Grizzly Gulch, your Guests will need more than one day in order to complete their magical experience at Hong Kong Disneyland. Recommend your Guests to take advantage of the new **2-Day Ticket**, as it offers flexibility to your Guests to explore the Park in two days over a 7-day period. I look forward to working with you, our tourism industry friends, to help your Guests embark on their own magical adventure. For further information on Grizzly Gulch and Hong Kong Disneyland, please visit:

www.hkdtravelagents.com.



© Disney / Pixar Toy Story Land is inspired by © Disney-Pixar's Toy Story © Hasbro, Inc. (1) © Mattel, Inc. (2) © Poof-Slinky, Inc.



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Tourism Data



Carlson Wagonlit Travel expects moderate rate hikes around the globe next year; Thailand inbound posts a 7.6 per cent year-on-year gain; Investment in Phuket's hotel sector is forecast to exceed US\$315 million for the first-time ever, says Jones Lang LaSalle Hotels.

Poll

Is hotel branding in danger of becoming farcical?

- Yes, there are way too many brands out there! 68%
- No, there's always room for growth. The more the merrier. 32%

Hot Deals

Banyan Tree Lang Co (below) offers introductory rates; The Strand Yangon launches Tee Off In Style golf bundle; Villa Maly offers Discover Luang Prabang package



Hot Moves

Suntec Singapore installs Arun Madhok as permanent CEO; Michael Bayley becomes president & CEO of Celebrity Cruises; Bruce McKenzie joins Hilton Worldwide as senior vice president, operations-Greater China and Mongolia

The bigger Myanmar issue



The greatest advantage emerging destinations has is a choice to decide its tourism course.

Raini Hamdi Senior Editor

Signature of Raini Hamdi

I WAS skeptical that Myanmar's Ministry of Hotels & Tourism could control the issue of runaway rates – until I got hold of a letter from the ministry to a Singapore-owned hotel in Yangon, saying it was going to restrict the re-entry of the hotel's senior general manager within six months from the date of the letter (July 23) over complaints the hotel had “changed the contracts with different rates from time to time”, and whom it found to be “still selling the expensive room rates on the basic room type”. It asked the owning company to “re-place someone who can manage the hotel” in place of the senior GM during the period and that the re-entry of the senior GM would be reviewed upon “progress of the situation”.

It is understandable that hotels are trying to cash in when, at long last, it's raining arrivals. They've suffered losses through long, empty years and to expect temperance from them with regards to room rates, in the interest of the destination's long-term reputation, is a bit much. Where the hotels went wrong was in chopping and changing contracts so much, that it became unreliable to work with Myanmar.

Given that demand is going to be outstripping supply for some time, hotels should know that they would be able to enjoy higher rates in a matter of time and, indeed, should be allowed to. Market forces should determine prices, not limits such as the rate cap of US\$150 per room per night imposed by the ministry. The fact is, there are enough tourists and business travellers who are willing to pay high rates. And for all their moanings, tour operators are expanding their offices in Myanmar, as reported in *TTG Asia* in last issue, which means there is still a lot of business despite higher rates or difficulties in getting rooms.

However, rates should be increased gradually and honourably, as that's good for business.

The greater issue facing Myanmar is deciding

what kind of tourism it wants, not worrying whether its rates are higher than neighbouring ASEAN. With an English-speaking population, ethereal views such as the thousands of temples and pagodas rising in the plains of Bagan, unspoilt beaches, etc, Myanmar could be the next Thailand, the next Bhutan, or somewhere in between.

The greatest advantage emerging destinations has is a choice to decide its tourism course. Too often, blinded by the quick bucks tourism brings, they forget they have a choice. That's when over-development or haphazard development happens, and the soul of a destination – the sum of its environment, culture, heritage, lifestyle – the very reason why it is prized, is lost. This is what will spoil a destination's long-term reputation – *not* high rates.

Bhutan, for me, remains the model Asian country that understands from early on tourism's double-edged sword. Most countries do understand tourism's potential to destroy, but few have the discipline, or aren't self-serving, to control mass tourism with measures such as a high visitor tax per day. Bhutan does not get high revenues from tourism as a result of keeping volume at bay, but it sure is richer in the long term for preserving its right to keep its environment, culture, heritage and lifestyle.

If you call this elite tourism, I'd say go on, be an elitist. If that ensures self-preservation, why not? Why shouldn't countries with the goods be premium destinations for only those who can pay higher dollars? The mature tourist destinations in South-east Asia themselves are now trying to reverse their courses and attract more quality tourists.

I certainly hope Myanmar will shun mass tourism and tilt the scale towards quality tourism. Now is the time for its tourism members, whom I am certain love Myanmar, to help shape its destiny.

And in doing so, I hope they will remember that some things are not for sale.

In response to hotel branding in danger of

It is understandable that customers may be confused by the many different brands that have been introduced to the market during the last few years (as said in Raini Hamdi's Opinion in *TTG Asia*, July 13, 2012).

However, when you look at the market today, our guests are more and more demanding and are seeking a unique experience. They are also more knowledgeable and make their own decision

of where they will spend their savings for the vacation they have been looking forward to.

To hoteliers, being just a five-star hotel is no longer enough to compete in today's market. Brands and labels are created to inspire and attract the attention of our guests and our customers; the challenge is how to get the message across.

In the case of Sofitel, which is hardly new to the market, the

brand has been through repositioning since 2008 and the strategic decision at that time was to create two supplementary labels anchored to the core brand Sofitel Luxury Hotels. The two labels, as we refer to them within the organisation and in all our external communication, are Sofitel Legend and Sofitel So. Hotels carrying the Sofitel Legend label or the Sofitel So label are still considered a Sofitel brand; this is re-

“To hoteliers, being just a five-star hotel is no longer enough to compete in today's market.”

T Markland Blaiklock Senior Vice President Sofitel Asia-Pacific

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Travel Hall of Fame

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

Since 2002, luminaries who have won the prestigious TTG Travel Award at least 10 consecutive times for the same award title have been honoured in the Travel Hall of Fame.

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

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Condolences pour in for Raj Travel boss

Several readers have expressed their sympathies over the recent passing of Lalit Sheth, the 56-year-old owner, chairman and managing director of Raj Travel World in Mumbai, whose death was said to be prompted by financial losses.

Valmiki Hari Kishan, general manager-products & marketing for TripGoTrip.com in Chennai, said: "This is shocking news for the entire industry. We have all witnessed the way (Raj Travel World) started and created landmarks in the industry. I want to share my heartfelt condolences at the sudden death."

Gilbert Khoo, managing director, SEA Overland Travels Bangkok, said: "I vaguely remember Mr. Sheth from when I attended SATTE in New Delhi five to six years ago. It is very sad indeed to hear of his demise. My deepest condolences to his family and staff members."

PanTravel Jakarta president director, Elly Hutabarat, said: "I can't remember whether I personally met Mr. Sheth. But I can imagine the burden he has carried. Our thoughts are with his family. The members of the travel industry in Indonesia send their condolences."

"It saddens me to read about the ending of a tourism entrepreneur. Although I did not know him, my thoughts are with his family," said Robin Yap, managing director, The Travel Corporation, Singapore.

Shanghai extends 72-hour visa-free access to foreign transit arrivals

CN Shanmugham from Chennai said: "China must look into offering 10-day visa-free access to foreign visitors. Even 72 hours is not enough for a tourist to experience an entire province. Visas are a big issue for Indian tourists travelling overseas. And both India and China require inbound tourism in a big way."

Tibet to develop new theme park attraction on the outskirts of Lhasa

MB Khadka from Kathmandu said: "From a tourism and cultural point of view, it is good to hear that a theme park will be constructed in Tibet. This will stimulate more inbound tourism growth for the province. We always appreciate such industry developments."

becoming ludicrous

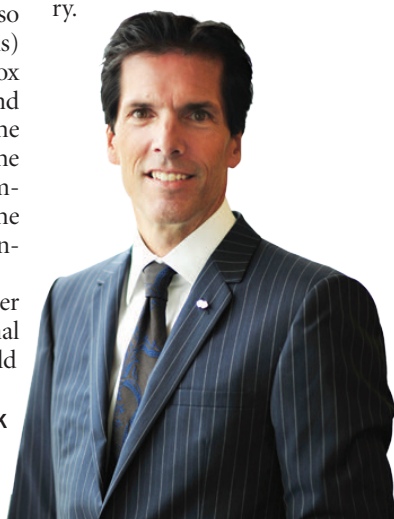
flected not only in the name but also in the operating standards, the logos (they both carry the same font type as the Sofitel core brand), distribution channels (they are all distributed on Sofitel.com), as well as the essence of French flair.

Sofitel So is a label that was first introduced in Mauritius in December 2010. The label carries with it all the Sofitel Luxury Hotels operating standards with some embellishment unique to the label to target Sofitel Luxury Hotels guests who prefer a more 'design boutique hotel' experience. Each Sofitel So property has a signature French designer (an example of one of the French flair elements that it shares with the core brand) that includes so far Kenzo Takada (Mauritius) and Monsieur Christian Lacroix (Bangkok), and the design and concept of the hotel express the soul of the destination where the hotel is located. For our upcoming property in Singapore, the hotel name will be Sofitel So Singapore.

Sofitel Legend, on the other hand, caters to more traditional travelers who prefer old-world

charm and a palace experience. This element is unique to Sofitel Legend properties only. Similar to Sofitel So, the label offers to guests service standards that are uniquely Sofitel but take them a notch higher with services such as the full butler and the history of each Sofitel Legend property itself. The label was launched in 2009 with the introduction of Sofitel Legend Metropole Hanoi followed by Sofitel Legend The Grand Amsterdam in 2011.

Sofitel's communication strategy for this exercise is to base our key message around the brand's core values which all lead back to our link to France and highlight the uniqueness of each property depending on the labels they carry.



T Markland Blaiklock

ADVERTORIAL

HARNESSING THE BEST OF ASIA'S TRAVEL INDUSTRY

The G20 recently announced the inclusion of travel and tourism as a driver of economic growth with the potential to create millions of new jobs and billions of dollars of GDP. Attesting to the newfound status of the industry is Asia. According to the UNWTO, the region will increase its global market share of international tourist arrivals to 30 per cent in 2030 (up from 22 per cent in 2010) and businesses in both the upstream and downstream travel supply chain have been quick to leverage opportunities to establish their footprint in Asia.

TravelRave: A common ground to connect

In celebration of Asian tourism, the Singapore Tourism Board has taken the lead by creating TravelRave, a comprehensive regional platform bringing business leaders together to discuss potential collaborations that can fuel the growth of Asia's vibrant travel and tourism industry. Beyond setting the industry abuzz with complementary business events, the week-long TravelRave also offers a common ground for the industry to connect over insightful exchanges about Asia, the new powerhouse of travel and tourism.

Referencing the *Tourism Towards 2030* statistics, Mr. Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General of the UNWTO said, "TravelRave is an innovative initiative and a perfect platform to leverage the dynamism of Asia's tourism. According to our long term forecast, Asia will be the fastest growing region for international tourism within the coming two decades and TravelRave enables the sector to harness this vast growth potential."



Opening Ceremony at ITB Asia

The Secretary-General could not be more accurate. Industry demand to be a part of TravelRave continues to grow in the third edition of TravelRave. ITB Asia, the key tradeshow under the TravelRave umbrella is a good example of this.

"Each year the show gets bigger and better. We increased capacity by 20 percent after a record performance in 2011 and this year, five months before ITB Asia, there was already a waiting list of companies still interested in participating at the event," said Nino Grüttke, Executive Director of ITB Asia.

Highly focused on converging the best minds of the travel and tourism industry, the annual TravelRave, Asia's most influential B2B platform, is set to drive meaningful business discussions across the sector and provide industry professionals with a deeper understanding of Asia. Mr. Henning Boysen, Chairman of the Kuoni Group and TravelRave 2011 participant probably sums it up best, "If you want to grow and develop your business in this region, you'll greatly benefit from participating at TravelRave."

TravelRave 2012 will be held from 15 to 19 October in Singapore. To find out more about events under TravelRave, visit www.travelrave.sg or join in the discussions @TravelRaveSG on Twitter and TravelRave group on LinkedIn.

TravelRave Highlights:

- **Asia Pacific Tourism Destination Investment Conference (15 -17 October)**
Supported by the International Hotel Investment Association, this event will focus on Tourism Infrastructure Development and Hotel Investment Opportunities across Asia.
 - **Aviation Outlook Asia (17- 18 October)**
Asia's leading C-level aviation industry platform will see more than 300 CEOs and senior-level executives participate in strategic discussions on the Asian aviation market.
 - **Web In Travel Conference (15-17 October)**
A cutting edge conference on travel distribution, marketing and technology in Asia Pacific
 - **Hotel Technology Conference 2012 (16 October)**
Hotel Technology 2012 will feature a full day conference and discuss the latest trends in hotel technology.
 - **ITB Asia (17-19 October)**
ITB Asia features the full range of travel products, services and goods. It also functions as a knowledge platform for the industry along with the concurrently held ITB Asia Convention and partner events.
- By invitation only:
- **Asia Travel Leaders Summit (16 October)**
 - **Singapore Experience Awards and Conversation (15 October)**
 - **World Travel Awards (18 October)**

TRAVE! 2012 RAVE
15-19 October



A-Zs of Successful Agencies

Competition



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

Travel consultants compete for customers against a number of entities, but most are unsure of where their true competition lies. When somebody asks you whom you compete against for business, what's your answer? Do you even have an answer? You probably have one, but is it the right answer?

Too often we get caught up in what everyone else is doing and not what we should be doing as business people. We focus on the external world and what is happening to us instead of focusing internally on what we can do to meet the needs of our clients.

Do you worry about what websites like Expedia and Orbitz are doing and the fact that they might steal your clients away from you? What about suppliers? Do you fret that a supplier is going to take a direct booking from one of your clients and leave you out of the equation?

Stop worrying and start acting like the professional that you are supposed to be. Instead of worrying, encourage your clients to explore what they are interested in on their own as you work to get them set up on a trip. It's not like they aren't aware of these websites or these travel companies. They are most certainly already on these sites before you even hear from them, taking a look around and trying to come up with ideas for a potential trip.

When you encourage their curiosity you make them more relaxed and comfortable with your business. When you try to put blinders on them and insist they don't need to do any of that, you make them wonder what you are trying to hide.

In a word, be open! Be open to some competition and open to the thought of your clients satisfying their curiosity about what you might be suggesting or recommending. This will help you in a myriad of ways.

For example, it gives you the chance to explain that both Orbitz and Expedia have embraced traditional travel consultants through affiliate programmes. You can tell your clients that they are doing this because most consumers who are book-

ing anything other than a hotel room or a point-to-point airline ticket seek out the advice of a professional. You can complete the thought by saying you like the idea of "if you can't beat them, join them" coming from these online agencies.

If you are a member of Hotel-Rewards, for example, you can also let them know you have access to those same exact hotel rates and deals, but with a twist. The twist is that you are an actual person standing by the hotel booking and ready to assist in any way possible.

What about travel suppliers and that dreaded "direct" word? You can explain to your client that going direct to the supplier means no other choices are going to be presented in their decision-making process.

When was the last time a supplier recommended another one as a better fit for a particular client? Indeed, when was the last time they even asked any questions about what a particular client's needs are and matched them with the right product?

For you as travel experts, competition is actually a good thing because you'll typically come out on top when you use these scenarios in your day-to-day business.

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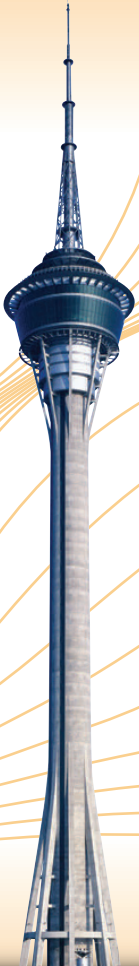
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Painting the town

From an initial franchise agreement, Red Planet recently became Tune Hotels' third-largest investor with a 16.05 per cent stake. What attracted you to the brand in the first place?

When we set up Red Planet (in 2010), we came across Tune and thought it was a great niche in the market. There is a very obvious gap here in Asia, where there is no quality branded budget product across the region, and we saw an opportunity (to be a major franchisee).

In this day and age, people are looking for a value connection. There needs to be a relationship between what you are buying as a consumer and the amount of money you are being charged for it. Two or three years ago, that value connection did not really exist in the marketplace in terms of the hotel space.

Why the need for such a major investment?

We acquired shares from a seller in return for cash and shares in Red Planet. It was part of the long-term strategy in terms of "it would be a great opportunity if this happened", but we did not include it in our business plan because it was too good an opportunity to count on. So we are very happy about it.

We've invested in Tune because it's a global scalable business, which means the pie that our shareholders now own is going to get fairly substantial and fairly large. Tune Hotels plans to do an IPO at some point, and the bigger and more diversified a platform you have, the more valuable your business is going to be.

Where will the company be in the near term?

Our business plan states that we should have 80-100 hotels within the next three years. We are planning to raise an additional US\$100-US\$120 million of capital (primarily from Japan) by the end of this year. With that money, we will effectively be doing one hotel deal a week, so we are ramping up. What we've got now is a good dress rehearsal, opening one hotel a month; we've got the structure in place, so really it's just a case of a few extensions.

Now that you have a share in Tune, how do you plan to further the relationship?

We're great friends with Tune, and we've had a number of discussions about how we can move forward together. Obviously the acquisition of shares was the best way to do that.

Would we merge with Tune? We would

never rule that out. We could also develop regional platforms together.

The franchise agreement was the engagement, the share acquisition the marriage, and then the kids after this. So it's a blue-sky future and we're not ruling out anything.

How many times have you stayed in a Tune hotel and what were your experiences like?

I can't remember how many times. It's a hotel that I helped design, so I think it is fabulous. If you go onto TripAdvisor, some people call it a "nest", and I just shout with joy when I see that because (the hotels) are comfortable, they are small, but everything is around you. For example, there is a little fold-down table and next to that there is an international plug at table height. It's the little things that count for so much. That's why I like staying there because it's just so easy.

The one thing our customers are asking for is a refrigerator in the room, so we might do that in some markets, but that's amenity creep and I'm not sure we like that.

How do you keep a lid on costs yet still maintain standards?

Our fixed overheads are very low. We outsource housekeeping and security, so housekeeping is effectively cost per occupancy. We have no F&B outlets, no expensive chefs. We have receptionists, security, a couple of maintenance guys, and that's it. We can survive quite a severe winter on

what we have without any impact on the quality of service and customer experience whatsoever.

To maintain standards we've put in place a number of physical (promises) that the brand delivers on, namely a five-star bed, feather pillows, high-quality linen, a power shower, TV channels that you actually want to watch and quality Wi-Fi. That's on the product side. Then of course, the hotels are spotlessly clean, we have high levels of security, and the girls at the reception desk know what they're doing and we have a rigorous training programme.

Broadly speaking, many low-cost models have left travel consultants out in the cold. How will you be working with the trade?

The reality is that we're in markets where local travel (consultants) dominate, so how stupid would you be to ignore them? We're here to service demand, and places like Hat Yai, Pattaya and Patong are heavily reliant on travel (consultants), and it would be foolish not to realise that. So travel (consultants) are our friends.

We have very good working relationships with them in Hat Yai, and we are starting relationships with them in Pattaya. We need them and they are a force in the business.

The issue is that if you come from a four- or five-star background travel (consultants) are not your friends because they are low-

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s red

Now in bed with Tune Hotels, Bangkok-based **Red Planet Hotels** is charging ahead with one deal a week, one opening a month. **CEO, Tim Hansing**, tells **Timothy France** he believes the marriage will be a harmonious one

cost, high-volume, but that's what we want.

But will low cost mean low returns?

I spent eight years working for Kingdom Hotel Investments, where I did US\$3 billion worth of deals in emerging markets, all at the five-star level. What is clear is that if you want to make money, it is the low-cost budget hotel sector that will deliver faster returns. We are expecting anywhere between 15-20 per cent return on capital deployed a year on these hotels. Most up-market hotels will struggle in the first year to make even a three per cent return.

The drawback with the budget space is that you have to develop scale quickly. We have US\$180 million of projects under construction at the moment, which is effectively one Four Seasons (property), so we have to get it done quickly otherwise corporate overheads will eat us alive. Building scale in the budget business will give us the returns.

How dangerous is it to expand so aggressively?

We've managed to do it effectively because we've got a team of people who have done it before, so none of us are new to it. We knew we were going to do this on such a scale, so we've built a structure that can cope with it.

Scale can often hit without you planning for it, and as a result you can get growing pains as a company. We've not had that because we've known that we were going to expand this quickly and this rapidly.

Are there any challenges that you have not been able to foresee?

There is always someone somewhere in the world doing something stupid that you can never foresee. There are licensing issues in Indonesia; you've got people making up planning regulations as they go along. It's a lot of small things, but there has been nothing major so far. You can usually see things coming on the horizon and form a contingency plan.

“Scale can often hit without you planning for it, and as a result you can get growing pains as a company. We've not had that because we've known that we were going to expand this quickly and this rapidly.”

What other interests does Red Planet have?

None at the moment; we are keeping focused. That's the key: keep focused, keep it simple, do it properly, do what you know.

We have no plans to diverge.

We could as we've got a lot of hotel expertise and about 150 years' experience within the company in terms of buying

buildings and operating hotels. But at the moment, with this acquisition particularly, it wouldn't be something we would look at. However, the door is always open.



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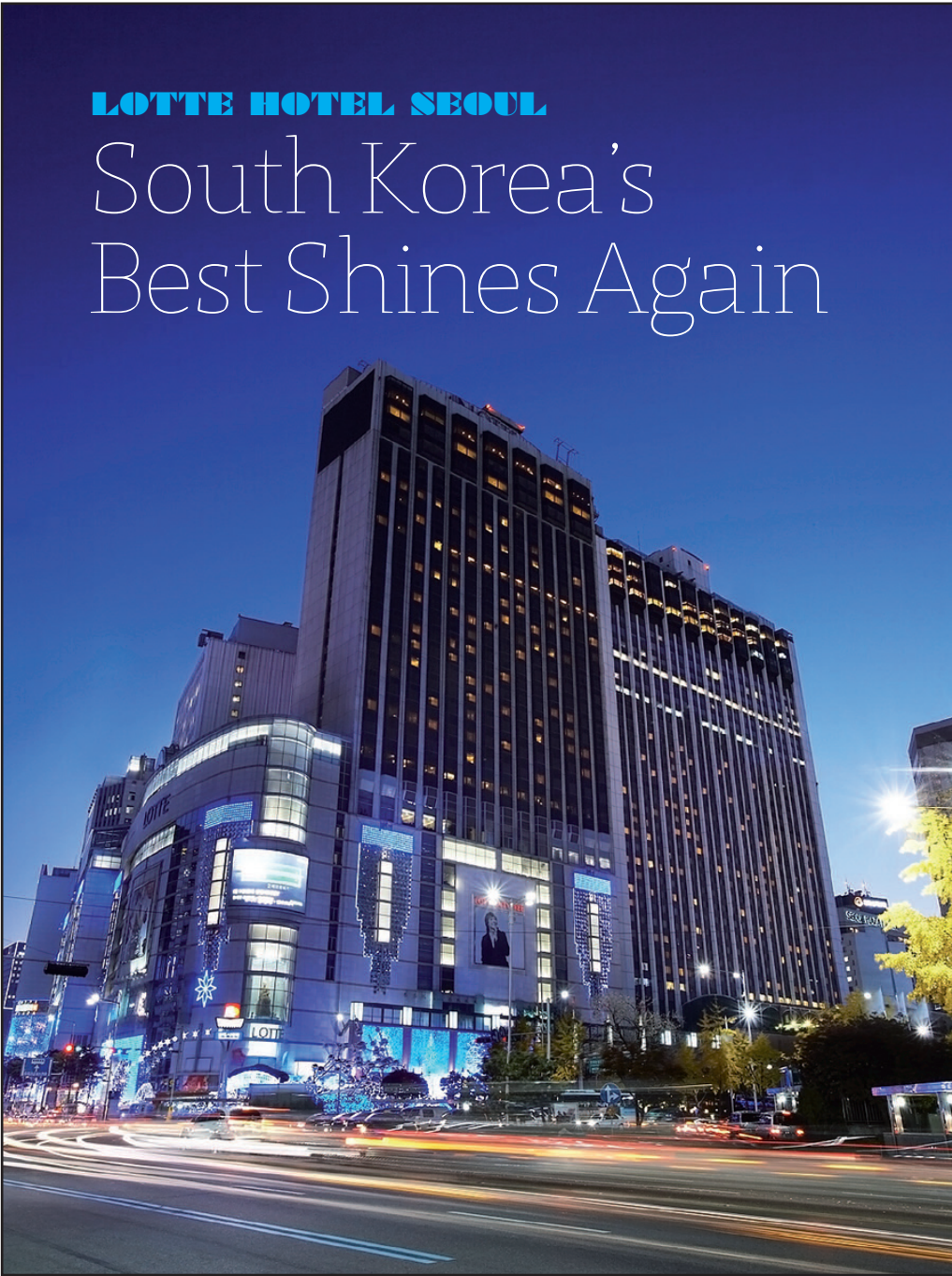
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These innovative start-ups are revolutionising the travel research and booking process, moving away from conventional OTA models. *Linda Haden* and *Divya Kaul* speak to their creators for a dose of inspiration



Success metrics	Where most of the traffic comes from	Trade partnerships	Under development	I am/am not an OTA...
At this early stage, virality ratios and user retention numbers are more important to us. Once we hit the goals for these metrics, then we can move towards new performance indicators such as volume and revenues.	We have been predominantly marketing in Singapore, as that's where our main traction lies. Currently, we are gathering data to move out of Singapore as quickly as possible.	Agoda, AirAsia, Tiger Airways, Jetstar, Batavia Air, Kal Star and Merpati Airlines are our current partners, although we look to expand this further.	We're really excited about some of the new functionalities that we're bringing in, but of course, I can't go into detail. On the operations side, we are hiring a community manager and graphic designer.	Our interface is very different from the default set-up used by OTAs for the last 15 years, which seem to be trying to turn users into travel professionals. Flocations is a fresh way to travel.
We've planned over 25,000 trips to 100 different countries. We have almost 4,000 guides around the world.	Thirty per cent comes from India, while 40 per cent comes from the US. Our traffic is growing 25 per cent month-on-month without spending a single dime on customer acquisition so far (mainly through SEO and word of mouth).	We've partnered with Expedia, Agoda, Viator, MakeMyTrip and hundreds of other travel companies as an affiliate. This allows us to fulfill our travellers' booking needs. We're actively looking to work with tourism boards.	We're building something very innovative that is still under wraps at next.mygola.com – expect it to launch in August.	We don't see ourselves as an OTA; instead, as a layer of trust on all the innovative services that have come up in travel in the past decade. We combine the high touch of a travel consultant with the enormous power of the Web.
We look first and foremost at our revenue stream, the size of our membership base and the number of bookings generated.	Most of our customer base is concentrated in the APAC region.	Presently, we deal exclusively with the hotels featured on our site.	Hopefully, in the next couple of months, we will be able to unveil our retail product: we will be selling selected hotels all year round, instead of just two weeks at a time as we do now.	We are a private sales site that features only selected hotels to an exclusive set of customers in a closed environment. We are distinct from an OTA in terms of how we generate sales.
The size of our audience, and the number of listings and bookings are our main metrics.	Our bookings come from virtually anywhere, with a rough mix of 70 per cent from outside APAC. We tend to attract a younger demographic, and they book a wide spectrum of properties, from budget to luxurious.	None specifically at the moment, but we are in talks with a range of travel-related suppliers such as spas, transport companies and tour providers to provide more enriching experiences for travellers.	South-east Asia is our starting point, but we are hoping to make inroads elsewhere in Asia. We plan to fill the gap (in the social-stay market) by developing Asian-language sites and by using Asian currencies.	We do not see ourselves as an OTA. travelmob is an online marketplace for social stays, connecting property owners and potential guests in a transparent, seamless and secure manner.
Our success is measured based on the usage duration and frequency of visits to our website. We also benchmark our performance against our competitors in terms of usability, features and resources.	The bulk is derived from Singapore, although we are receiving significant demand from Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, the US and India as well.	Qiito has been working with the Taiwan Tourism Bureau for almost half a year, showcasing Taiwan's attractions and sights on our website. This tie-up has been successful so far.	We intend to strengthen our presence in South-east Asia first. With a timeframe of three months each, we will target various countries and user groups. We want to launch a Mandarin website and set up an office/partnership in China in the future.	We do not see ourselves as an OTA because we do not plan trips or sell any packages. Users pick up information that interests them and build a travelogue. They are able to modify an existing one or build from scratch.



LOTTE HOTEL SEOUL
South Korea's
Best Shines Again

ADVERTORIAL

NO STRANGER to readers of *TTG Asia*, Lotte Hotel Seoul made news recently by again winning the Best Hotel in South Korea award at the International Hotel Awards (IHA) held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on April 27, 2012.

The award follows a series of renovations at the flagship hotel of the Lotte Hotel Group with leading international hotel design companies such as SOM, Wilson & Associates and HBA. Not only does it look stunning after the makeover, its latest innovations would surely impress and win the hearts of travellers to the capital city. There is now a Ladies' Floor for female travellers — a first in Korea — and Pierre Gagnaire à Séoul, a French restaurant by three Michelin-starred chef Pierre Gagnaire.

Marketing Division Vice President of the hotel Ms Kim Sun-hee said the award recognises the large-scale investments by the hotel and its aim to become a global hotel group. She said innovations will continue to elevate Lotte Hotel Group to among Asia's top three by 2018.

The hotel, which opened in 1973, is a well-established icon of prestige in South Korea's hospitality industry and represents the peak of luxury in the city for international visitors.

The hotel group has recently expanded overseas with the opening of the six-star Lotte Hotel Moscow. New overseas Lotte properties will open in Hanoi, Vietnam (2014) and Chongqing, China (2016).

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- Gimpo Airport
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MUSIC FESTIVALS

Setting the stage right



ZoukOut, one of Singapore's most popular music draws among foreigners

Music festivals are finding their way onto events calendars across Asia, but they don't always strike the right note with travel consultants. Reports by **Linda Haden**, **Chami Jotisalikorn**, **S Puvaneswary**, **Mimi Hudoyo** and **Rosa Ocampo**

Asia's travel companies are keen on bigger business from music fans around the world, but only a handful have managed to capitalise on such opportunities so far.

Singapore's annual dance music festival ZoukOut drew 28,000 revellers in 2011, of which some 45 per cent were from abroad. Over the last few years, festival organiser Zouk has worked closely with youth travel specialist STA Travel to distribute tickets and packages through the latter's local and overseas offices.

Sofie Chandra, Zouk's marketing and business development manager, said the take-up rate for packages had remained steady in the last few years, although free-and-easy options were now more in demand. She added that Zouk was open to working with more travel firms.

For Kuching-based CPH Travel Agencies, sales from the Rainforest World Music Festival has posted a 10 per cent year-on-year growth over the last three years, said director of sales, Hannah Choo, who credited this largely to Sarawak Tourism Board's aggressive marketing efforts.

The company offers two types of music festival packages to clients, most of whom come from West Malaysia and Singapore, and in small groups of family or friends. The basic package includes tickets and accommodation, while sightseeing tours are added for those who are extending their stays.

Kuala Lumpur-based DMC, AOS Conventions & Events, has even jumped into the events fray itself. In November 2011, it organised the inaugural Langkawi Live Music Festival at the Frangipani Langkawi Resort & Spa, also part of the AOS family.

Group managing director,



Brazil's Raiz De Cafezal at Sarawak's Rainforest World Music Festival (above); Thai band Paradox at Pattaya International Music Festival

Anthony Wong deemed the two-day event a success as it attracted about 1,000 music lovers from around the region. Both music festival packages were well received, he said. One included accommodation, meals and transfers, while the other had only tickets and meals.

Still a relatively new segment

In other destinations such as Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines, however, turning music festivals into tourist magnets is still in its early stages.

Addie Hirunkate, managing director, Destination Asia Thailand, said events in her country were mainly aimed at the domestic market, making it difficult to attract overseas visitors. "We really need promoters to look at bringing more world-renowned music festivals like WOMAD or to create Thailand's own world-class music festival," she added.

Diethelm Travel Thailand managing director, Hans van den Born, said the company had no specific itineraries incorporating music festivals, although it had "regular promotions and write-ups in various media to create awareness of the music festivals Thailand has to offer".

While the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) does not have exact figures of foreign tourists who come specifically for these events, spokesperson Chattan Kunjara Na Ayudhya, said the Pattaya International Music Festival – the most popular one – sees international and Thai tourists swelling to 400,000 during the event, made up of mostly younger travellers. Another prominent event is the Hua Hin Jazz Festival, which attracts an older demographic. Around 50,000-70,000 tourists visit the town during the period, and numbers are rising, said TAT.

Indonesia has a growing number of music festivals, such as the Java Jazz Festival in Jakarta, Kereta Kencana World Music Festival in Solo and other more traditional ones, but many major travel consultants have not been able to sell these effectively.

Association of the Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies South Sulawesi chapter board member, Nico Pasaka, said: "Most festivals in Indonesia are announced at the last minute. Although it is an annual event, the exact dates are usually decided too close to the event, making it difficult for us to package and promote."



Pattaya International Music Festival

Hellen Xu, Panorama Tours Indonesia managing director of travel management, added: "There is always a possibility that a festival or music concert is cancelled at the last minute for any reason. While the admission fee is refundable, there is no (refund) guarantee for room bookings and deposits made with hotels." As a result, Panorama only focuses on selling tickets to local customers.

Ironically, the musically-destination of the Philippines currently does not have any major festivals it can promote overseas. Some organisers of international concerts are also not interested in the overseas market. Renen de Guia, head of Ovation Productions, which has staged Lady Gaga and Sergio Mendes & Brasil 2012 in Manila, said "the domestic market was big enough".

This may change, however, with the emergence of bigger venues in Manila, including the SMX Convention Center and the Mall of Asia Arena. Current events targeted at mainly domestic tourists may also stand a chance of going international.

The Backdoor Ventures Arts & Music Festival, which is now in its sixth year, has already secured

a move from the Megatrade Hall to the bigger SMX Convention Center. Founder Jay Viriña said he plans to involve the foreign embassies in the Philippines in marketing.

Blue Horizons Travel and Tours inbound sales and marketing manager, Jayne Lim-Ong, recalled that negotiations for an international jazz festival fell through some two years ago, due to insufficient facilities to accommodate up to 4,000 people.

Hand-in-hand marketing

Destination Asia's Addie suggested that organisers worked with the trade from the event's inception. "We need more advance notice to effectively promote music festivals," she explained.

Panorama's Xu added: "They could involve us in their promotional activities and make us their appointed agents as we have many outlets, both in Jakarta and outside the city."

Singapore-based Tradewinds ceased selling tickets and packages for ZoukOut and Mosaic Music Festival due to insufficient sales, according to a company spokesperson. She said: "Generally, these events are not well-advertised abroad to music fans, and they are too Singapore-centric. Organisers should do more to market these festivals abroad."

However, one organiser said a more fundamental issue was the profile of festival attendees. Steven Woodward, general manager of Midas Promotions, which does Singapore's SINGFest, explained that selling tickets and packages to foreign travellers was "not financially viable for travel companies and event organisers in general as most overseas music festival-goers prefer to travel independently and make their own arrangements".

First person

Healing the world through music

TTG Asia's very own **Feizal Samath**, a veteran concert organiser, discovers that it's possible to combine charity shows with tourism

If Paul McCartney, Jennifer Lopez or the Eagles are performing in Singapore, Thailand or Malaysia, you can be sure that wealthy Sri Lankans will jump on the first flight out to rock the night away.

Post-war Sri Lanka is starving for good entertainment because top celebrities are often too costly for local organisers to hire for a single show. So far, only musicians from a bygone era – think Lobo, Cliff Richard, Engelbert Humperdinck and Olivia Newton-John – have performed on Sri Lanka's shores as their fees are friendlier to local budgets.

Sri Lanka-based travel experts have since tapped this demand by actively promoting overseas music packages, which include a business-class air ticket, hotel accommodation, concert tickets and a once-in-a-lifetime chance to meet the idols.

Musical concerts are a great way to promote the country. In a small way, I have also contributed to the craze for interna-



American musician Bob Livingston (left) and World Bank's country director of Central Europe and the Baltic Countries, Peter Harrold (right), have performed at previous Country Roads concerts

tional acts by staging my own charity concert, Country Roads, in Sri Lanka for the past 24 years. Organised by Country Music Foundation (CMF), a non-profit organisation that I founded in 1988, CMF aims to raise money for needy children, particularly those affected by war.

The organisation has come a long way over the years to raise about eight million Sri Lankan

rupees (US\$60,000). While this might seem like small change in the world of big-ticket events, this drop-in-an-ocean kind of fundraising has helped to improve the lives of hundreds of disadvantaged children across the country by working with international agencies like UNICEF, Save the Children UK and local community groups.

CMF has brought in musi-



children of this country. My own band also plays at these concerts.

In 2013, Country Roads will be going to the Maldives, marking our inaugural effort at staging a concert to raise funds for Maldivian children.

The Maldives, with its over 100 exotic resorts, will be a perfect stage for exclusive concerts. It has already attracted a jet-set crowd and celebrities such as Richard Branson and Ronaldo, who are assured absolute privacy whenever they visit.

Now visualise Beyonce, the Black Eyed Peas or the Rolling Stones singing around a campfire on one of these secluded islands. Can you imagine how much one would pay for this kind of up-close encounter with a celebrity in an intimate setting? Thousands, I would guess!



Feizal Samath
Correspondent,
Sri Lanka

MARINA BAY SANDS, 17–19 OCTOBER 2012

— Advertorial —

ITB ASIA 2012'S RECORD CONFERENCE LINE-UP DELIVERS VALUABLE INSIGHTS INTO THE ASIAN TRAVEL INDUSTRY

ITB Asia, The Trade Show for the Asian Travel Market, will see a number of new conference partners and exhibitors at this year's show. Now in its fifth year, ITB Asia will be held from 17-19 October at The Sands Expo and Convention Center, Marina Bay Sands, Singapore.

The conference component has always been a key element of ITB Asia's knowledge-sharing platform, addressing key issues facing the travel industry. This year, ITB Asia has upped the game again by deliv-

ering the largest ever conference line-up featuring over 3700 minutes of high-powered content. The show also recently announced the addition of three new conference partners - MCI, National Association of Travel Agents Singapore (NATAS) and Panacea Publishing Asia.

Overall exhibitor space for this year's show is also up 20% following a record performance in 2011. Visitors can expect a strong showing from Asian tourism boards and international hotel groups.

Notable exhibitors include Tourism Authority of Thailand, Starwood Asia Pacific Hotels and Resorts and Hilton Worldwide. Pan Pacific Singapore will also be making its debut as the Official Partner Hotel for ITB Asia 2012.

"Every year we enhance the different components that make up ITB Asia so the show gets bigger and better. ITB Asia, with its highly regarded list of delegates, is the ideal platform for buyers and exhibitors to network with industry leaders to generate business leads, and enhance their presence in this dynamic region," said Nino Gruettke, Executive Director of ITB Asia.

ITB Asia 2012 promises to be even more exciting, and has completely sold out its floor space five months ahead of the event.

This year's show will also showcase a revamped layout to help visitors navigate the event with even more ease and increase exposure for exhibitors.

Save the date
ITB Asia 2012:
17–19 October

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The capital's famous Forbidden City, which can be booked for corporate galas

Bobby McCall

On the prowl for MICE

Beijing is taking giant steps to shake its reliance on domestic leisure tourism. By **Brian Higgs**

Arrivals

According to the Beijing Municipal Commission of Tourism Development (BMCTD), the city received 102.9 million visitors during the first half of 2012, up 9.8 per cent over the same period last year. This includes 2.5 million overseas arrivals, a 4.2 per cent year-on-year jump, but meagre compared to the domestic market.

The capital garnered RMB157.7 billion (US\$24.7 billion) in tourism revenue from January to June, an 11 per cent year-on-year increase. Foreign visitors contributed US\$2.6 billion, 4.2 per cent more than the same period last year. In 2011, foreign visitors spent an average of US\$1,041 per pax, an increase of 1.1 per cent over the year before, while the average spend per visitor per day was US\$248.

TUI China CEO, Marcel Schneider, said 2012 had been a “very good year so far”, with “inbound business dominated to a large extent by group tours on classic China itineraries” to places like Beijing, Shanghai and Xi’an.

However, the fastest-growing segment was FITs, he noted, especially those keen on soft-adventure tourism products. “Last November, we launched a spe-

cific brand, PureQuest Adventures, to cater to this segment. For 2013, business is already confirmed for the mid- to long-term,” said Schneider.

NTO

BMCTD has also stepped up efforts in developing the city’s MICE capabilities. Sun Weijia, vice chairman, BMCTD, said: “The (domestic) leisure market is maturing and already starting to plateau. Domestic visitors spend about four to five days in Beijing, but still don’t spend enough. The MICE segment, however, is still in its infancy. Developing MICE will enable us to supplement existing markets and grow our overall industry.”

Armed with a RMB20 million MICE war chest, BMCTD has been busy hosting networking events for MICE professionals, and has rolled out an online platform providing details on local suppliers, venues and service providers as well as established the Beijing Alliance for MICE Development, a grouping of local MICE companies which aims to facilitate knowledge sharing.

Earlier this year, BMCTD also signed an MoU with Shanghai Municipal Tourism Administra-



“Inbound tourism to Beijing has traditionally been (overly) concentrated around the (domestic) holiday periods. That’s why we’ve decided to focus on developing the MICE segment.”

Sun Weijia

Vice chairman

Beijing Municipal Commission of Tourism Development

tion outlining cooperation on joint bids for international MICE business, concerted promotions targeting overseas markets and pooling of resources when either city hosts international events.

Hotels

Last year, Beijing’s inventory stood at 598 star-rated properties, of which there were 63 five-star, 127 four-star, 207 three-star, 181 two-star and 20 one-star hotels.

Properties set to join the fold by end-2012 include the 325-room Conrad Beijing; the Four Seasons Hotel Beijing with 313 guest rooms, including 66 suites; and EAST, Beijing, a 369-room hotel which will form part of the INDIGO mixed-used development in Chaoyang District.

Rates

Over the first five months of this year, the average daily rate (ADR) for five-star hotels in Beijing was RMB878, a 10.8 per cent jump over the same period in 2011. ADR for four-, three- and two-star hotels also grew, hitting RMB497 (+7.4 per cent), RMB345 (+5.6 per cent) and RMB222 (+5.0 per cent) respectively.

Christopher Chung, direc-

tor of sales & marketing for The Ritz-Carlton and JW Marriott Hotel Beijing, attributed the rate hikes across the board to “rising labour costs and inflation”.

“The minimum wage in Beijing rose by 8.6 per cent in January. Variables costs and cost of goods have also gone up,” he said.

From January to May, the average occupancy for five-star hotels in the capital was 61.1 per cent, compared to 59.7 per cent a year ago. Over the same period, average occupancy for four-, three- and two-star hotels was 57.7 per cent (-0.3 percentage points), 53.3 per cent (+1.1 points) and 51.1 per cent (+4.4 points) respectively.

Access

AirAsia X launched on June 22 four-weekly Kuala-Lumpur-Beijing services, featuring both premium and economy seats. Frequency will rise to a daily from August 6.

National carrier SriLankan Airlines expanded its thrice-weekly Colombo-Bangkok-Beijing service to a daily from July 15.

Flag carrier LOT Polish Airlines revived thrice-weekly Warsaw-Beijing flights on May 29 following a four-year hiatus.

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My choices

Beijing

Compiled by
Brian Higgs & Nadia Chung

What is your biggest
challenge right now?

What must be done?

What do you need from...

What are the prospects for
2012?



Sun Weijia
Vice chairman
Beijing Municipal Commission of Tourism
Development

Beijing already has a very high level of inbound traffic, so the challenge lies in creating a better travel environment for these visitors to raise their overall level of satisfaction.

Last year, we started the High-end Tourism Development and Tourism Consumer Services Departments. They've since created many new tourism products, and established an incentive programme that encourages travel companies to design high-end travel products.

hotels and airlines? Hotels and airlines should work with us as partners. For example, we've gotten a lot of sponsorship support for the SITE 2012 International Conference we're hosting in September. This makes it easier for us to recommend products to travellers.

Recent rainstorms have damaged the market. Based on preliminary figures, we've lost billions due to the weather. We're thinking of ways to restructure our offerings to make up for the loss.



Marcel Schneider
CEO
TUI China

Europe is our largest inbound market, but the travel sentiment there is not very encouraging due to the financial crisis. The weakening euro also means that longhaul trips have become more expensive, and airfares are also increasing due to rising oil prices.

We've started to tap emerging markets, such as South America. We have a Spanish-speaking department focused on acquiring business from the continent, and have been seeing healthy growth and a lot of high-end business coming from there.

your staff? Improve our ability to cater to Asian markets, which are closer to home compared to those in Europe. Many rival DMCs have a specific skillset to cater exclusively to Asian markets, which is difficult for us to match.

Overall, we've seen inbound growth of about 25 per cent over the past six months. In Europe, Germany appears to be in a stronger position compared to the French and Spanish markets.



Christopher Chung
Director of sales & marketing
The Ritz-Carlton, Beijing and JW Marriott Hotel
Beijing

The biggest challenge for our hotels in Beijing right now is finding ways to attract the right kind of talent.

Human resource plays an important role in ensuring a sustainable and robust development. We need to ensure that we have an efficient reward structure in place, which will be effective in the longer term.

the government? The local authorities will need to ensure that proper education and training for hospitality staff are made available at all levels, in both public and private institutions.

2012 started off weak in terms of demand, but there has been an uplift from the second quarter. We hope the year will finish stronger post-Olympics, with everyone back to usual business.

Checking in



Tangla Beijing



The inaugural property under HNA Group's five-star brand lives up to international standards but can do better, discovers **Brian Higgs**

LOCATION Situated on Chang'an Avenue, about 5km west of the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square, Tangla Beijing is quite a distance from the airport and other major attractions in the capital. However, the central government offices and Beijing Financial Street are nearby, which makes the location perfect for business travellers looking to stay in the vicinity of domestic and international financial institutions and the local regulatory authorities.

ROOMS The hotel offers 380 contemporary rooms and suites, divided into Deluxe, Business and Executive categories. The rooms are large and comfortable, but some fixtures are starting to look a little worse for wear, which is surprising considering that the property has barely seen three years of operation. My room had a separate living room, and the king-sized bed and window shades provided for a restful sleep.

The hotel, however, is frequented by chain-smoking domestic businessmen types, so make sure you insist on a non-smoking room on checking in if you want to avoid the smell.

F&B There are several dining options at Tangla Beijing, including the aptly named Tang

Name Tangla Beijing
No. of rooms 380
Rate From RMB600 (US\$94)
Contact details
Tel: (86-10) 5857-6688
Email: reservation.bj@tanglahotels.com
Website: www.tanglahotels.com/en_index.asp

Place, a fine-dining Cantonese restaurant with 15 private rooms, and Café d'Or, an all-day dining outlet serving international cuisine. Breakfast at Café d'Or was a pleasant affair, with a wide spread of western and Chinese delights to choose from.

FACILITIES Leisure amenities include a large gym, an indoor swimming pool, a beauty salon and mahjong rooms. The highlight is the spa, which features seven treatment rooms, a private hydrobath, a *tantsu* (a form of tantric shiatsu) zone, plus six foot ritual locations.

MICE facilities at the hotel include several meeting spaces and a business centre.

SERVICE The staff are amiable enough, but really need to be more proactive in pre-empting hotel guests' needs rather than having to be prompted. For a start, it would help if they focus more on their guests, instead of their mobile phones.

VERDICT Great for clients who want to stay in upscale accommodation, but are unwilling to splash on foreign international brands.

TUI China seeks MICE business expansion

BEIJING TUI China has experienced exponential growth in MICE business in recent times, prompting the company to step up efforts in further developing the segment.

"We're trying to ride the MICE wave (in China), and there's definitely a lot of good growth potential. We're concentrating on building our business not only from Chinese firms, but also from multinational companies with a local presence," said TUI China CEO, Marcel Schneider.

"At the moment, our inbound MICE business is stable, but the real growth for us is in the domestic and especially the outbound market. Despite the unfolding financial crisis elsewhere, there just seems to be a natural robust demand for outbound travel in China," he added.

According to Schneider, TUI China's MICE business now comprises 25 per cent inbound, 25 per cent domestic and 50 per cent outbound. The majority of outbound MICE groups head to European destinations, with some going to the US and Africa.

While admitting it was a challenge going up against more established local competitors such as China Travel Service and China Youth Travel Service, Schneider remains optimistic.

"We've only been in China since 2003. We're young and lean and mean, and are hoping to

grasp the opportunity to establish our brand among Chinese consumers," he explained. "We're staking a claim in areas where we believe we can provide a good alternative and add value with our international approach."

In terms of inbound leisure, group tours on 'classic' China itineraries to Xi'an, Beijing, the Yangtze region and Guilin continue to form the backbone of TUI China's business, said Schneider.

However, he revealed that there had been a "slight shift towards more segmented, themed travel products", while destinations for repeat travellers were becoming more exotic. "Tibet is becoming more popular, as are Sichuan, Yunnan, the Silk Road, and Guizhou," he said.

Keen to highlight Tibet as an up-and-coming destination, Schneider believes it has become more attractive in recent times due to improving rail and air connections, hotel infrastructure and restaurants.

"Travel to Tibet is now seasonal, with the peak in April-October. However, we want to promote travel during winter (November-March). This is a very attractive time to visit with a lot of pilgrimages taking place, fewer domestic tourists and you get to see a more authentic version of the destination," he said.
— **Brian Higgs**

Checking in

The Ritz-Carlton, Beijing



This is where you'd want to book clients into for an opulent and mind-blowing experience in the lap of luxury, says **Brian Higgs**

LOCATION Situated on Jian Guo Road in Beijing's Chaoyang District, The Ritz-Carlton is nestled among a throng of luxury fashion boutiques and the adjacent Shin Kong Place shopping complex. It is also within reasonable driving distance of the Central Business District, Sanlitun Village and the Dashanzi and Caochangdi Art Districts, where guests can indulge in a myriad of shopping, culinary and nightlife attractions.

ROOMS The hotel has a total of 305 rooms, including 38 suites and 61 Ritz-Carlton Club Level rooms. The rest of its inventory

comprises of Deluxe Rooms and Deluxe Garden View Rooms, both measuring a sizeable 48m². I stayed in one of the Executive Club Suites, which seemed more like a souped-up home away from home, rather than just another functional hotel room.

F&B There is an abundance of F&B options, with six different outlets to choose from. The lobby lounge accommodates 60 pax in a classic English manor setting for afternoon tea or champagne; The Ritz-Carlton Bar can host 70 pax for cocktails and live entertainment; while the Davidoff Lounge offers cigars and choice wines for up to 140 pax.

For full meals, there is Chinese fine-dining establishment, Yu, which can comfortably seat 110 pax and has seven private dining rooms and a tea master; Aroma, an all-day dining restaurant serving international cuisine for up to 140 pax; and Barolo, where you'll find traditional Italian fa-

vourites with a modern twist in a space suitable for 60 pax.

FACILITIES Located on the top floor of the hotel, the health club is spread out over a massive 2,500m². Natural light floods the entire space, which houses a heated indoor lap pool, a Jacuzzi, and steam and sauna rooms. Featuring a Balinese therapist in-residence, the spa offers 10 treatment rooms including a Nail Bar, a Couple's Suite, an Aqua Therapy Room, a Vichy Shower and six single treatment rooms with private balconies. The well-equipped fitness centre is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

On the 16th storey, The Ritz-Carlton Club Lounge has a dedi-

cated concierge, a cavernous living room, a cosy Internet corner, an executive meeting room, and five daily F&B servings. Guests staying in Club Level accommodation can also avail of a complimentary 24-hour limousine service to locations within an 8km radius of the hotel.

MICE facilities encompass 1,100m² of meeting and conference space, including a 650m² ballroom divisible into four function rooms, a 150m² wedding chapel, nine meeting rooms, a boardroom and a business centre.

SERVICE Staff are impeccably trained, ever-alert to guests' needs and are willing to go the

Name The Ritz-Carlton, Beijing
No. of rooms 305 keys, including 38 suites and 61 Ritz-Carlton Club Level rooms
Rate From RMB2,500 (US\$392)
Contact details
Tel: (86-10) 5908-8888
Email: rc.bjsrz.leads@ritzcarlton.com
Website: www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/Beijing

extra mile to ensure that customers feel like royalty.

VERDICT Perfect for high-end clients who want to kick back and soak in the luxurious surroundings over a weekend getaway in the Chinese capital.



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Tangkuban Perahu, a dormant volcano in Bandung, attracts hordes of tourists who come to view its crater and hot springs up-close

Bayu Harisa

Destination heats up

Bandung revs up marketing efforts to stoke up interest among regional tourists. By **Mimi Hudoyo**

Arrivals Thanks to expanded seat capacity from Malaysia and Singapore, direct arrivals to Bandung have posted double-digit growth since 2008. Direct arrivals to Bandung were 78,998 in 2009, rising by 14.3 per cent to 90,278 in 2010, and surging by 27.7 per cent to 115,285 in 2011.

According to data from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, Bandung's direct arrivals reached 58,604 between January and May, rising 26.5 per cent from 46,316 over the same period last year.

However, Jakarta's Soekarno-Hatta International Airport – about three to four hours' drive away from Bandung – remains the main gateway for travellers from other parts of the world.

NTO The West Java Tourism Promotion Board (WJTPB) was launched in late 2011 with a budget of Rp2 billion (US\$212,000) from the regional government to focus on internal promotion and enhancing co-operation with the local government and private sector.

The board is setting up a representative office in Kuala

Lumpur this year. Said WJTPB chairman, Cecep Rukmana: "By having a representative in the market, we can be more active in travel events in Malaysia, and working together with VITO (Visit Indonesia Tourism Officer) Malaysia, we can better respond to the needs of Malaysian travellers – the biggest inbound market for us."

"Tourists come to Bandung mainly for (bulk) shopping, and Pasar Baru is the most popular destination. We need to educate the market (about the fact) that we have much more – spa, golfing and special interest tours within and beyond Bandung."

"The provincial government has tasked WJTPB to increase Bandung's international arrivals to 20 per cent of the total number of arrivals to Indonesia within the next four years," said WJTPB vice chairman, Herman Muchtar, who estimated it was currently just 10 per cent of the country's overall arrivals.

As such, the West Java government has agreed to support the region's tourism growth through maintenance of roads (to tourist attractions) and working with related government offices to accelerate the development of the airport," Cecep added.



"Our representative office in Kuala Lumpur (will) tap the upper-middle market with quality products within and beyond Bandung. We can be more active in travel events in Malaysia."

Cecep Rukmana
Chairman
West Java Tourism Promotion Board

Hotels The Trans Luxury Hotel Bandung opened in June with 282 rooms, four F&B outlets, a spa and extensive meeting and banquet venues such as a 1,250m² ballroom, a 6,000-pax convention centre, 17 multi-purpose board rooms, a VIP room and several outdoor venues.

The hotel's general manager, Alex Jovanovic, said: "We hope to set a new standard of accommodation for Bandung and cater to the high-end market."

The Trans Luxury Hotel will kickstart efforts by targeting customers of its sister companies who also belong to Indonesia-based CT Corp, such as Bank Mega. In addition, it will work with tour operators Vayatour and Antatour – both also part of CT Corp – to attract travellers from Russia, China and the Netherlands.

Meanwhile, Accor will add over 400 rooms when both Pullman Bandung Golf Resort and Convention Center and Mercure Bandung Setiabudi are launched.

The 156-unit Panghegar Dago Resort & Spa is due to open in 2013, while in the economy sector, Vio Hotels Indonesia will debut three Bandung properties within the next two years.

Products Cecep from WJTPB revealed that new products were being developed, such as surfing in Cimaja beach in Pelabuhan Ratu. "The beach is internationally (ready) for surfing, and we are finding a consultant to develop and promote the product internationally."

MICE ibis Bandung Trans Studio Hotel, when combined with the Trans Luxury Hotel next door, will "create a convention destination with a total of (nearly) 900 rooms and extensive convention facilities", according to Patrick Sibourg, general manager, ibis Bandung Trans Studio.

Puntama Convex's CEO, Wisnu Budi Sulaeman, said: "MICE in Indonesia is growing rapidly, and the investors in Bandung have capitalised on the opportunity very well."

"Panghegar Hotel, (one of Bandung's first hotels), for example, has transformed into Grand Royal Panghegar with bigger, revamped meeting facilities."

Similarly, GH Universal Hotel Bandung, a luxury property with 105 rooms, is now focused on promoting its meeting and incentive facilities.

Beeline for regional travel

Bandung eyes repeats from Malaysia and Singapore, while Thailand looks promising, reports **Mimi Hudoyo**

1 How has Bandung evolved? Bandung has grown beyond a weekend destination with expanded MICE facilities and improved accessibility. Last year, West Java received more than 16 million domestic arrivals and some 700,000 international travellers, of which the majority visited Bandung.

Bandung has flight connections to seven Indonesian cities – Denpasar, Jogjakarta, Surabaya, Tanjung Karang, Semarang, Makassar and Palembang – as well as Singapore and Malaysia. AirAsia is also said to be considering Bandung-Bangkok flights.

Accor Indonesia director of operations, Michel Vivier, said: “Apart from Malaysia and Singapore, a major market is Indonesia, especially Jakarta, as business to Bandung will grow with the capital.”

2 What are the existing challenges? The rapid growth of arrivals has not been sup-

ported by infrastructure development. Traffic congestion at the airport and on the roads needs to be resolved.

Honey Vacation Malaysia CEO, Abu Hassan, said Bandung also needed more new attractions to retain its appeal.

GoIndonesia managing director and CEO, Yusuf IJsseldijk, added: “Bandung has great nature and culture assets but they have not been developed fully. Many hotels have created team-building facilities and activities, but we need more (standalone) attractions (that capitalise on) Bandung’s culture and nature.”

Warning Bandung of rival destinations, PHP Travel & Tours Malaysia director, Azhar Ahmad, said: “Travel interest to Vietnam is growing. Malaysian travellers love to shop, while (Vietnamese) food is more similar.”

3 What is being done to improve the product range? West Java Tourism Promo-

tion Board (WJTPB) chairman, Cecep Rukmana, said: “We are going beyond Bandung to areas such as Garut, Tasikmalaya and Cirebon, where we have identified potential attractions to develop and promote.”

With the right packaging, products like Garut’s natural hot springs and tailor-made leather jackets, Tasikmalaya’s embroidery handicrafts, and Cirebon’s batik, glass-painting art and food can be marketed to regional and international tourists, Cecep added.

He added that special interest products were also being prepared, such as mountain trekking, cycling, spa and wellness, for marketing in Singapore and Malaysia next year. Bandung also plans to start bidding for international MICE events.

Nusa Ina Leisure Jakarta executive director, Jongki Adiyasa, said: “Bandung has a great variety of hotels to meet different types of travellers and budgets.

Most notable is the development of new branded hotels in West Java’s secondary cities, like Garut and Tasikmalaya.”

Panghegar Group and Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts have launched properties in these cities, paving the creation of new routes and extension of tourists’ stay in West Java.

Jongki said: “(European) tour operators have dropped Pangandaran Beach from their itineraries and transferred passengers by train from Bandung to Jogjakarta directly (instead) because the drive between Bandung and Pangandaran is too long (four hours).

4 Are new markets being looked at? According to Herman Rukmanadi, Association of the Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies West Java chairman, Kuala Lumpur is the main source market in Malaysia for Bandung, hence it is crucial for West Java to have a representative in the capi-

tal to educate repeat travellers to travel beyond Bandung.

“We will also start penetrating other Malaysian states, such as Penang and Kota Kinabalu,” he said, adding that Singapore’s special interest and student segments would also be targeted.

Herman, who also heads Bha-ra Mekar Wisata Tour & Travel as managing director, said: “We have been developing the Thai market, combining Bandung with Jogjakarta and Jakarta, and we have seen significant growth. I’m confident this market will boom for Bandung in the next couple of years the way Malaysia has.”

WJTPB’s Cecep expects to start advertising and participating in trade events in Thailand next year on the back of AirAsia’s impending Bangkok-Bandung service.

In addition, he said the bureau was also keen to woo Chinese tourists and was studying potential products for the market.

Test drive

Trans Studio Bandung



Mimi Hudoyo heads to a popular mega tourism complex and discovers a worthy competitor to the region’s theme parks

WHY One of the world’s largest indoor theme parks, Trans Studio Bandung is part of an integrated development incorporating a shopping mall, convention facilities and two hotels – Trans Luxury Hotel Bandung, touted to be a six-star, and ibis Bandung Trans Studio, the brand’s biggest property in Asia – making it a one-stop venue that can be visited year-round, come rain or shine.

WHAT Screams of excitement rang throughout the park when I visited. Although it was a weekday, the park was quite busy – I was told it was still less than half the crowds seen during the weekends and school holidays.

The 4.2 hectare theme park is divided into three zones – Studio Central, Lost City and Magic Corner – with 20 rides, many of which are designed for those who like to test their guts. These include the Yamaha Racing Coaster (said to be the world’s fastest with backward motion), Giant Swing and ‘haunted’ rides through Dunia Lain (Other World).

Those who wish to avoid the adrenaline can visit the Trans Broadcast Museum and learn about TV programme production or the secrets of movie special effects. Kids will enjoy the Dunia Anak (Kid’s World) and the teenagers, the Science Centre.

One of the newer attractions, 4D Marvel Superheroes, is a simulator featuring Spider-Man, the Hulk, Captain America



Name Trans Studio Bandung

Rates Rp150,000 (US\$16) on weekdays, Rp200,000 on weekends and public holidays, as well as an additional Rp200,000 for VIP access

Opening hours 10.00-21.00 (Monday-Friday), 09.00-22.00 (weekends and public holidays)

Contact

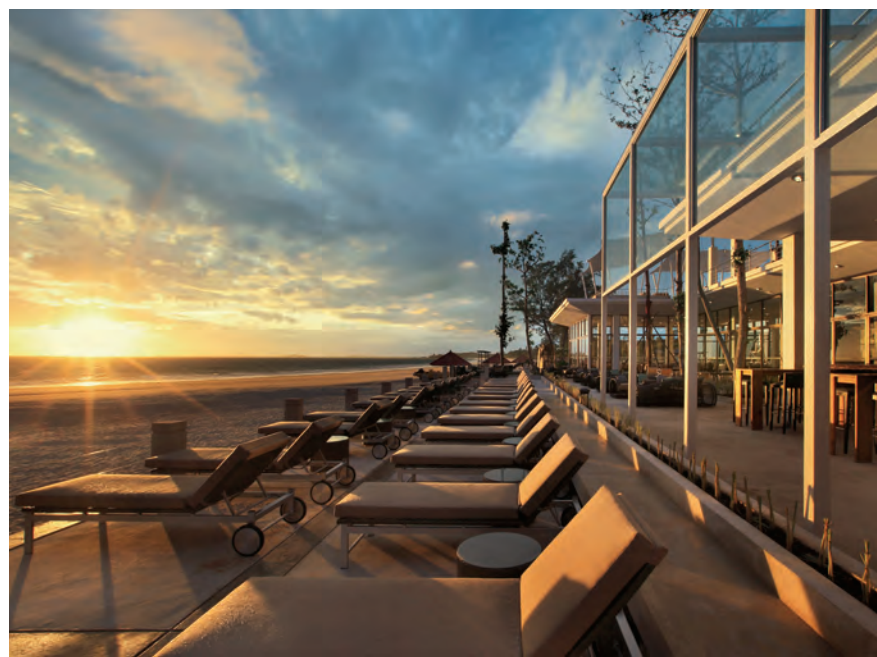
Tel: (62-22) 9109-9999

Website: www.transstudiobandung.com

and Iron Man, dispelling the notion that the park is not international enough.

HOW A thrilling destination in its own right, the venue can host events of various themes. The amphitheatre can seat 500 guests or up to 1,500 people for standing receptions; Trans City Theatre offers 500 seats; and F&B outlets in each zone can accommodate at least 100 people.

VERDICT An ‘edutaining’ playground for all ages, particularly for the young – and brave.



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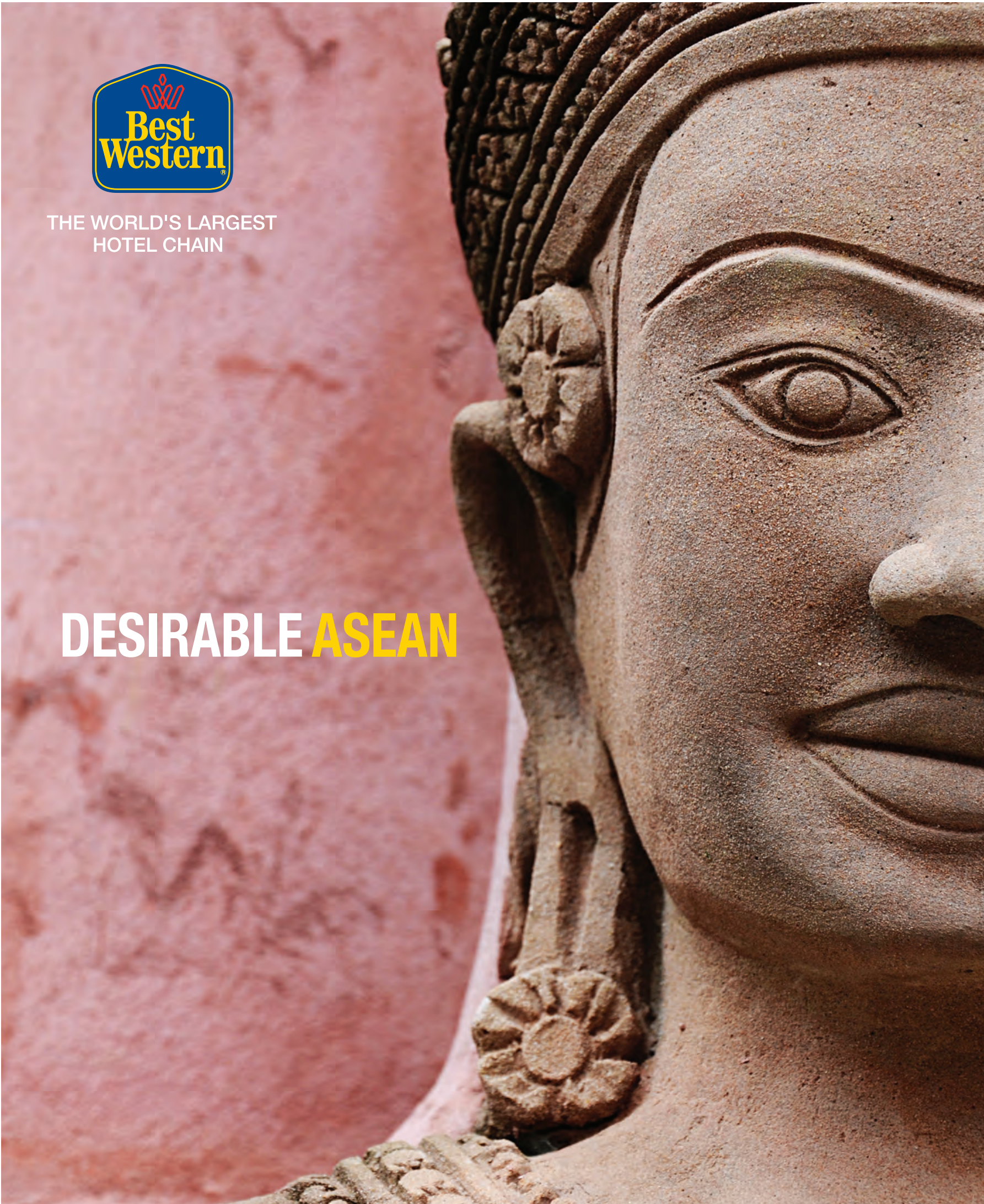


No. 1665/August 10 – 23, 2012



THE WORLD'S LARGEST
HOTEL CHAIN

DESIRABLE **ASEAN**





SOUTHEAST ASIA SURGING FORWARD AT THE CROSSROADS OF THE WORLD

Southeast Asia has long been at the crossroads of the world. In the region where the Indian Ocean meets the Pacific, Eastern/Western Traders have for centuries, even millennia, converged to exchange not only goods, but ideas, culture and wisdom.

The result is a magnificently rich blend of civilizations, strong in identity yet with a wonderfully varied set of traditions and beliefs that make Southeast Asia one of the most culturally diverse regions in the world.

This blend of cultures has continued into the 21st Century, but now not only traders are able to experience this incredible land, but travelers and tourists. And unsurprisingly, Southeast Asia has become one of the world's hottest destinations in the world today.

According to the UNWTO, tourist arrivals to Southeast Asia will almost triple to a staggering 187 million visitors per year by 2030, and it is not hard to see why. From glistening, golden sands and clear, turquoise seas, to lush jungle-clad mountains, Southeast Asia's varied landscapes are famed the world over for their unsurpassed beauty.

And of course, in the 21st Century – Asia's century – the region's cities are booming. Once low-rise urban centers are soaring into gleaming, thriving metropolises; testaments to the rapid growth and new-found affluence of Southeast Asia's 'tiger economies'.

And this increasing wealth is fueling another major trend; intra-Asian travel. An explosion of regional budget airlines and a rising middle class are enabling more and more Southeast Asians to explore lands beyond their borders. With the launch of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015, offering visa-free travel to more than 600 million Southeast Asians, the boom in intra-Asian travel is surely yet to reach its zenith.

So what is Southeast Asia doing to cater for this influx of new visitors? Aside from the outstanding natural beauty of

this exotic region, tourism development is growing at an unprecedented pace. World-class airports, international hotels, theme parks and sprawling shopping malls are mushrooming across the region, while an influx of mega-events, from sporting extravaganzas to international music acts, are now arriving on Southeast Asia's shores.

Meanwhile, Singapore's new integrated resorts will soon be mirrored in the Philippines and Vietnam, where a huge new leisure and business complexes will incorporate hotels, conference facilities, retail plazas, spas, golf courses and gaming centers and more.

These modern marvels are not competing with, but complementing the region's natural and historic heritage. With sites such as Angkor Wat, Bali's rice paddies, Halong Bay and Thailand's jewel-like islands and of course, it is no surprise that visitors are flocking to Southeast Asia.

And 21st Century Southeast Asia is now creating new landmarks of its own – future world heritage sites that will be enjoyed by visitors for centuries to come. In Malaysia the Petronas Towers now stand as soaring symbols of the country's prosperity, while Singapore's Marina Bay, with its huge observation wheel and impressive architectural diversity, has become a new focal point for the city. Contributing to Southeast Asia's fast-paced development, Best Western is planning to almost double its collection of hotels in the region from 35 today to more than 65 across eight countries. By 2015, Best Western will offer more than 8,000 comfortable, convenient and value-for-money hotel rooms to the ever-growing number of travelers visiting the region.

At the crossroads of the world, where ancient meets modern and traditional beliefs go hand-in-hand with high-tech development, Southeast Asia is only heading in one direction – forwards. And with the world now increasingly looking towards Asia, the region's journey is only just beginning.

INSPIRATIONAL INDONESIA

A land of 17,508 islands and more than 238 million people, Indonesia is one of the world's most richly diverse countries.

Blending lush rainforests, dramatic mountain ranges, golden beaches and bustling cities, the country is home to a staggering range of natural and manmade wonders. And as one of the so-called 'RICHI' nations that are expected to lead global economic growth in the years and decades to come, Indonesia is set to become a major player on the world stage.

Catering to the increasing number of travelers to this expansive country, Best Western currently offers five hotels in three Indonesian destinations – Bali, Jakarta and Solo.

In beautiful Bali, Best Western offers three properties in the thriving Kuta area. The **BEST WESTERN Resort Kuta** and **BEST WESTERN Kuta Beach** combine to offer more than 200 modern, comfortable rooms, within walking distance of the area's favorite holiday hotspots, such as the island's biggest shopping mall, water park, world-class nightlife and of course, the golden sands of Kuta Beach.

These popular hotels were recently joined by a new arrival on the Kuta scene – **BEST WESTERN Kuta Villa**. Set back from the hustle and bustle of Kuta's lively entertainment scene, this sublime hotel offers an altogether more relaxing experience. Set among lush, landscaped gardens, providing an atmosphere of serene seclusion, **BEST WESTERN Kuta Villa** features 50 rooms all including outdoor showers, separate bath tubs and flat screen LCD TVs, while a selection of villas also offers the luxury of private plunge pools.

In Jakarta, the pulsating heart of this booming nation, the newly-built **BEST WESTERN Mangga Dua Hotel & Residence** offers 168 rooms perfect for both short and extended stays. And surrounded by one of Southeast Asia's largest shopping complexes, this hotel is the perfect place to indulge in some retail therapy.

But while Indonesia is best known for Bali's beaches and Jakarta's thriving commerce, the country is home to some of Southeast Asia's fastest-growing metropolises. One such city is Solo, which is home to Indonesia's first upscale BEST WESTERN PREMIER hotel. With 148 high-end hotel rooms and a plethora of first class facilities, including a spa, indoor and outdoor pools, exquisite restaurants and a ballroom, the contemporary **BEST WESTERN PREMIER Solo** is not only serving demand for business and leisure travel to the city, but also driving it.

And with plans to more than triple its Indonesian portfolio to 17 hotels by 2015, including debuts in some of the country's fastest-growing cities such as Surabaya, Bandung, Semarang and Samarinda, Best Western will play a key role in this fast-growing country's development in the years ahead.



INVITING VIETNAM

Snaking more than 1,600km down the eastern coast of Indochina, from the spectacular limestone karsts of Halong Bay to the dramatic Central Highlands and the lush landscapes of the Mekong Delta, Vietnam offers an incredible array of attractions for travelers.

So it is no surprise that tourism to Vietnam is booming. In 2011 the country welcomed more than six million visitor arrivals for the first time, as more and more leisure travelers explored the countries shores. And with the twin economic hubs – Hanoi in the north and Ho Chi Minh City in the south – generating a new-found economic prosperity to the country, business travel is also booming.

Historic Hue, the former imperial capital of Vietnam’s Nguyen dynasty, is home to the country’s first upscale **BEST WESTERN PREMIER** hotel. Located in the heart of the city, on the doorstep of UNESCO World Heritage-listed palaces and citadels, **BEST WESTERN PREMIER Indochine Palace** offers the perfect base from which to explore this enchanting city. With more than 220 upscale rooms and modern facilities including a spa and swimming pool, **BEST WESTERN PREMIER Indochine Palace** offers an oasis of luxury amid Hue’s historic landmarks.

Meanwhile, in the delightful Central Highlands, **BEST WESTERN Dalat Plaza Hotel** is perfectly situated in the heart of the city, overlooking Xuan Huong Lake. Designed in a beautiful French colonial style, the hotel offers more than 90 rooms and an exquisite range of facilities.

In addition to these fantastic hotels, Best Western has firm plans to launch eight new hotels in Vietnam - four on the coast in Nha Trang, two in the central city of Danang and two more in the up-and-coming coastal towns of Qui Nhon and Vung Tau. With these new hotels, Best Western is gearing up to cater for Vietnam’s tourism boom for years to come.



CAMBODIA: CULTURAL CAPITAL



Home of the ancient Khmer empire, which once spread across swathes of Southeast Asia, Cambodia is a treasure trove of cultural heritage. And of course the centerpiece of this historic kingdom is Angkor – the world famous temple complex which is now visited by millions of tourists every year.

Named on every bucket list of places to visit, Angkor is not simply a single temple, or ‘wat’, but a staggering collection of buildings in a range of architectural and religious styles, spread across a huge area close to the town of Siem Reap. While each individual temple and building can be explored on foot, the full complex is best explored over several days, with the help of a guide.

And for those wanting a comfortable, convenient base from which to explore the treasures of Angkor, **BEST WESTERN Suites and Sweet Resort Angkor** is the perfect choice. Ideally located less than ten minutes’ drive from Angkor’s main entrance, the resort has a traditional Cambodian village ambience which offers guests a real sense of the local culture.

After a day’s temple-hopping, guests can relax in their own private pool or lounge on the private terrace. Then after dark, the hotel is perfectly placed just minutes from central Siem Reap, allowing guests the chance to explore the thriving town’s restaurant and bar scene.

But of course, Cambodia is developing fast and Siem Reap now offers a great deal more than Angkor’s temples. Visitors can now enjoy fast-paced activities such as quad-biking or helicopter rides, relax in one of the area’s many excellent spas, or play golf on world-class courses designed by stars such as Nick Faldo.

However you choose to spend your Angkor adventure, **BEST WESTERN Suites and Sweet Resort Angkor** offers the perfect place to stay.