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Lombok cheers KL direct flights

Traffic both ways expected to spike

By Mimi Hudoyo and S Puvaneswary
JAKARTA/KUALA LUMPUR
The long-awaited direct route hoped for by the Lombok trade is expected to open markets beyond Malaysia to as far as China and India.
AirAsia announced last week it would offer thrice-weekly services between Kuala Lumpur and Lombok, Bali's less famous neighbour, starting October 12 (TTG Asia e-Daily, August 15, 2012). Available on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays, it is the only airline providing direct services on this route.
The travel trade in Lombok has been anticipating a slew of new flight connections since the opening of the Lombok International Airport last year.
Lombok Sumbawa Promo chairman, Awan Aswinabawa,



Awan: win for accessibility

said: "This is good news indeed. The trade members here have been waiting for the materialisation of the route for three years. "We expect the service will attract Malaysians to visit Lombok. However, Kuala Lumpur is AirAsia's main hub with flights from all over the world, so the service provides a path for travellers from beyond Malaysia to come to Lombok."
The NTO is initially eyeing China, followed by India. "We have done roadshows in China and brought in fam trips from China, but accessibility has been an issue," Awan said.
He added that AirAsia's network also included several cities in India, providing an opportunity to tap the huge outbound market there.

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Urs Eberhard, Switzerland Tourism's EVP-markets & meetings, talks to Raini Hamdi about the role of NTOs in distressing times – see pages 8 & 9

Tough as Matterhorn

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Betting on Batavia

Direct sell unlikely if AirAsia's handshake is to be believed

By Mimi Hudoyo

JAKARTA AirAsia is sending positive signals to Indonesian travel consultants that its takeover of Batavia Air (*TTG Asia e-Daily*, July 26, 2012) will not mean direct distribution to consumers for Batavia.

One of the first moves the LCC made was to invite the Indonesia Ticketing Agents' Association (ASTINDO) for a meeting, during which it expressed its intention to change its image as an airline that cuts out the middleman, according to ASTINDO board member Rudiana.

"They (stressed) that in Indonesia, travel consultants are partners with whom they can grow together with," Rudiana said.

ASTINDO's head of international ticketing, Pauline Suharno, pointed out that Indonesia AirAsia had built a relationship with agencies and in fact was the only airline in Indonesia other than Garuda Indonesia which used the domestic BSP.

Rudiana added: "Travel consultants are a major distribution channel for Batavia Air therefore I trust AirAsia will be wise and involve us in the future."

Rudiana said ASTINDO would form a small working group to formulate agreements with AirAsia as its members hoped they could sell AirAsia based on commission.

At present, Batavia Air will continue to operate its existing routes and will maintain its name.

Agencies *TTG Asia* spoke to however said they were looking to see how the sale to AirAsia and its Indonesian partner, Fersindo Nusaperkasa, would change the stakes later on.

"We've yet to see the outcome of this marriage," said Incito Tour Makassar managing director Sebastian Ng.

"What we hope is for AirAsia to strengthen the existing Batavia Air's network and not cut its so-called 'pioneer' routes," he added, referring to Batavia's remote destinations such as Maumere (Flores), Ambon (Maluku) and Manokwari (West Papua).

Fersindo Nusaperkasa president director, Dharmadi, said: "We will see how it goes and evaluate along the way what's most efficient (for the airline)."

Tri Harta Indah Surabaya

managing director, Inge Erikasari, agreed: "Tours are our main business so, with the acquisition, we look forward to better connectivity regionally and domestically, so that we can develop more packages."

"One point that needs improving is Batavia Air's timetable. Its Surabaya-Lombok flight is in the evening and the return flight is in the morning. Both leisure and business traffic want to arrive in Lombok in the morning and leave at the end of the day," she said.

While Batavia Air has some regional and international routes (Singapore, Jeddah, Riyadh, Kuching, Dili and Guangzhou) the domestic market contributes 80 per cent of its business.

Launched in 2002, the airline last year ranked fourth after Garuda Indonesia, Lion Air and Sriwijaya Air, holding an 11.3 per cent marketshare of Indonesia's domestic traffic of 66.1 million passengers.

Indonesia AirAsia has three per cent of the domestic marketshare, according to Dharmadi, who is also Indonesia AirAsia's president director.

Continued from page 1

M'sia trade hopeful

Lombok has an additional 1,500 rooms coming online this year on the mainland and on Gili Trawangan, as well as nightlife attractions.

Kuala Lumpur-based travel consultants were equally excited. Nantha Travel & Tours managing director, M Nantha Gopal, said: "It is a serene destination. We will promote it to honeymooners, as well as those looking for peace of mind. I think this destination is easy to market to associations (such as those for yoga and meditation)."

He explained that travellers had to previously arrive in Bali and continue their journey by car or sea to Lombok.

The new direct flights are also seen as a chance to attract more Indonesian travellers.

Columbia Leisure operations manager, Ken Tan, expects enquiries from FIT, family travel and MICE customers from Lombok and will be pushing destinations such as Kuala Lumpur, Genting and Malacca.

"We will promote it to honeymooners, as well as those looking for peace of mind."

M Nantha Gopal
MD, Nantha Travel & Tours

DoT moves to fill gap

By Marianne Carandang

MANILA The Philippines' Department of Tourism (DoT) is expanding marketing in ASEAN in a bid to make up for a shortfall in arrivals.

The target for 2012 has been revised downwards to 4.5 million to 4.6 million, from 4.9 million, in part due to the ongoing territorial dispute over the Scarborough Shoal, which has discouraged group and leisure travel from China.

Its marketing representative in Malaysia, Melissa Ong, has been given added responsibility for Thailand, while Charles Leong, marketing representative in Singapore, is overseeing Indonesia.

"We will be using the remaining months of 2012 to network with tour operators and travel firms in Thailand and Indonesia to bring more of (their) tourists to the Philippines," said DoT director and group head Asia-Pacific, Corazon Jorda-Apo.

She noted: "Arrivals from Thailand and Indonesia in the last two years have been increasing through the efforts of our two leading carriers, Cebu Pacific and Philippines Airlines, and in spite of almost no marketing from us. We hope to double the arrivals in about 18 months."

Ong and Leong would initially

focus on the travel trade based in Bangkok and Jakarta respectively. "Next year, invitational tours with presentations and B2B meetings will take place, in cooperation with Cebu Pacific and Philippine Airlines," said Jorda-Apo.

The efforts would be complemented by consumer advertising in these markets.

The NTO would also strengthen presence in top markets South Korea, Japan and the US, and emerging markets India and Russia.

ASEAN is the Philippines' third most important source market, bringing in 8.5 per cent of all arrivals.

Despite the downward revision of arrivals target, the Philippine trade remains upbeat, thanks to DOT's tourism campaign, *It's more fun in the Philippines*, and the upcoming PATA Travel Mart.

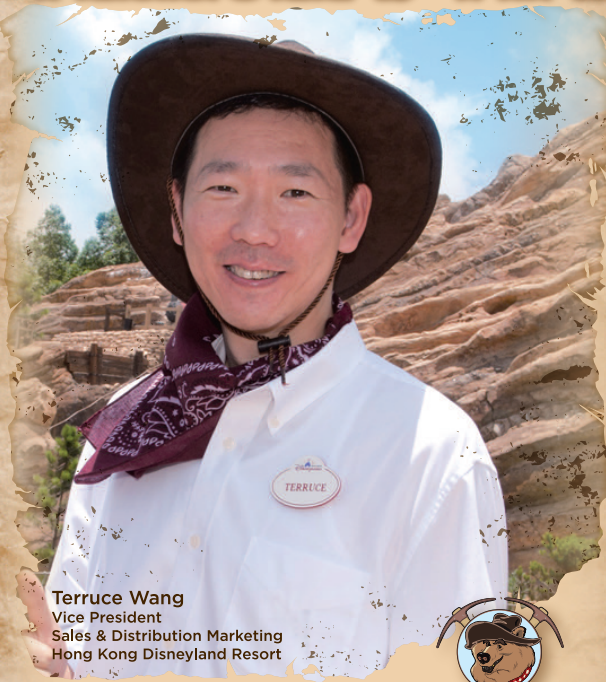
The Philippines Tourism Promotions Board, which is expected to take over the NTO's marketing activities likely by 2013 is currently spearheading activities for the mart, to be held in Manila this September.

It is also finalising the programme for the 2013 Philippine MICE Convention, slated for March 6-9, 2013, at the SMX Convention Center in Davao.



Leong: Thailand challenge

TERRUCE'S TIPS



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



A RUNAWAY ADVENTURE

I have always been a big fan of movies about the American Old West, imagining what it would be like to explore the great frontier, brave desert mountains and stumble across mining towns in California. 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.hkdltravelagents.com.



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Tourism Data



Hotel overnights in Europe set to increase, but travellers from Germany are more modest in their choices than holidaymakers from the UK or Russia; Singaporean travellers head farther abroad during long weekends; Australia's hotel rates on the rise

Poll

Is Thai AirAsia making the right move by shifting from Suvarnabhumi to Don Mueang?



Hot Deals

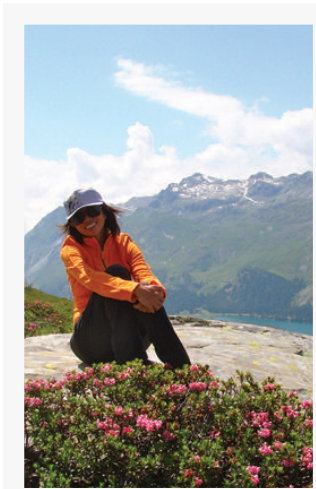
New World Hotels offers 18 per cent commission for travel consultants; Outrigger Laguna Phuket (below) offers 25 per cent off best available rates for stays in two-bedroom villas



Hot Moves

AirAsia appoints Logan Velaitham as Singapore CEO; Mandarin Oriental makes GM appointments across Chiang Mai, Hong Kong, Jakarta, Singapore, Taipei & Tokyo; Cindy Tan joins TripAdvisor as VP, display advertising sales for Asia-Pacific

Finding thirsty donkeys



An opportunity to reshape Asian travel to Switzerland is there for the taking.

Raini Hamdi Senior Editor



YOU CANNOT force a donkey to drink if he is not thirsty.

These days, many NTOs in Europe are scratching their heads over to what to do to make their traditional markets return to shore. These markets have all but shrunk as the eurozone gets mired in a mountain of debt.

One of the hardest-hit destinations is Switzerland. Already an expensive country, the strength of the Swiss franc against the euro just makes it worse. Many Swiss themselves prefer to travel outside their beautiful homeland, including to Asia, where the franc goes further, the vacation is exotic, the climate warm. Granted, the quality of the holiday you get in Switzerland, like that of Japan, is in its own league, but when budgets are thin, one can quickly learn to settle for less.

Hence, millions of Swiss francs in revenue have been wiped out in the last few years from the exodus of the traditional markets to Switzerland (see page 8). One only needs to see how sparsely populated hotels everywhere are in the summer that is nearly ending to know that the debt crisis is biting hard. Indeed, some hotels already have had to let go of staff; not a few would have to close if the debt crisis prolongs.

The urgency to find new markets, such as Asian ones, to fill the huge gap left by the traditional markets has become critical for Switzerland. Herein lies the opportunity for both the NTO and Asian tour operators to work hand-in-hand in reshaping the pattern of Asian outbound to the country.

Thus far, the Asian markets in general visit for

only a night as part of a European tour, go to only a few hotspots such as Luzern and Interlaken – i.e., the wealth is not spread out throughout the whole industry – and are unwilling to spend a lot of money on accommodation (even though they will happily part with huge amounts on Swiss watches).

But, at a time when Switzerland Tourism is all eyes and ears in finding ways to get more Asian travellers to visit, stay longer and experience the diversity of the destination in order to spread the wealth, Asian tour operators will find a more willing and flexible partner with whom they can create new demand from Asia to Switzerland.

The NTO is working with STA Travel in Singapore, for instance, to attract youths with modestly priced itineraries that will at the same time help change the perception of Switzerland as expensive and conservative. Train travel, hostel accommodation, outdoor adventure, nightlife, etc, will all be part of the programmes that are being created.

Years ago, Switzerland Tourism's executive vice president-markets & meetings, Urs Eberhard, also turned to youths when the oil crisis eroded the UK marketshare to Switzerland (see page 8). When the crisis subsided, he got back not just the older travellers but new demand in the form of UK youths, a segment that continued to be rewarding as they entered the workforce and earned higher disposable incomes.

Adversity can bring out the best ideas that shape future travel.

You may not be able to change stubborn donkeys, but you sure can bring new ones to the water.

Most commented on www.ttgasia.com

Myanmar's local hotels jump on rate hike bandwagon

Dirk van Beek from Yangon said: "Hotel businesses, whether local or foreign owned, will have to experience that a short-term strategy won't pay the bills over a longer period. Tourists know the value...Myanmar is beautiful but not gold. Other ASEAN countries have even more to offer. Keep your prices normal, get your infrastructure right, invest in training staff in restaurants and hotels. Do not get over excited; the hotel rates will correct themselves over time."

Yangon's King Arnandar added: "The raising of rates by two to three times at hotels in Myanmar is quite a bitter thing for ordinary travellers and the country itself, as it will create a bad image for the tourism industry. Hotel owners respond based on supply and demand, though it seems unethical. (Implementing) regulations on pricing is only a short-term solution. The (authorities) should try to solve the problem by increasing inventory."

Singapore travel experts report buoyant outbound

Country Holidays Travel's David Song said: "Firstly, not all Singaporeans are bargain hunters. I like to think of Singapore travellers as being in a developmental phase. Growth in niche, tailor-made travel has grown tremendously. They are looking for experiential and conceptual travel products. If price slashing is always the focal strategy, then I'm afraid there won't be enough focus on product development. Run-of-the-mill travel products have their place, and it would be silly to totally stop promoting them. However, the question is: how long more will run-of-the-mill products and price slashing work in the longer term and within the bigger picture? The key is conducting a sustainable business model through a carefully construed approach and responsible marketing.

Tighter squeeze on Jet Airways flights to London

Asia's the Voice commented: "Anybody who seriously considers travelling longhaul in a (Boeing) B777 (aircraft) equipped with 10 seats per row should have their head examined. Such narrow seating is a threat to health and should not be allowed by any authorities. I did this twice (Emirates, Austrian Airlines) without knowing beforehand, and it was absolutely horrible. Sadly, so many airlines now dare to do this, not only the two aforementioned, but also KLM (Royal Dutch Airlines), Air France and now Jet. Let's hope the customers vote with their feet (as long as they don't suffer from thrombosis after being squeezed onboard such an airline for 10 plus hours).

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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.

South-east Asia feels the pinch

Rupee and other woes trim Indian inbound

By S Puvaneswary and Linda Haden

KUALA LUMPUR/SINGAPORE

Travel consultants in Singapore and Malaysia were unenthused about forward bookings from the Indian market, which is now experiencing pricier travel to this region.

Business volume from India had dipped 40 per cent for the first half of this year compared to 2011's figures, according to Vacation Singapore DMC's senior manager, Harmeet Singh.

"The rupee depreciation, currency fluctuations, the new airport departure tax introduced by the Indian government, alongside the cut in air capacity with the demise of Kingfisher Airlines and recent strike by Air India pilots, have weakened demand from India to Singapore considerably," he explained.

Similar trends were also observed by Malaysian tour operators. Luxury Tours Malaysia manager, Ganneesh Ramaa, said leisure business had fallen by 20 per cent during India's peak summer travel season, while forward bookings were slow.

Nantha Travel & Tours expects a 40 per cent dip in meetings and incentives from September to December, said managing di-

rector, M Nantha Gopal. Two groups have postponed their trips to Malaysia indefinitely due to the overall package cost which has exceeded their budgets.

Travel experts predict the Indian inbound market to stay fragile for the rest of the year and into 2013.

"It is a wait-and-see approach for now. However, it is apparent that the Indian outbound market to Singapore will not bounce back until the global economy and the rupee recover," said Singh.

Ajambar Basnet, general manager of Chariot Travels, believed the high cost of visiting Singapore was also a deterrent.

He said: "Prices in Singapore – be it for hotels, restaurants or attractions – remain a nagging issue. Of late, Singapore has become a lot more expensive relative to nearby destinations such as Thailand and Malaysia. (Indian) travellers have to downgrade to a lower hotel category or cut their length of stay."

On the other hand, demand from the high-end segment of Indian inbound travellers remains steady, said Kuala Lumpur-based Paradise Travel & Tours executive chairman, Pardip Kumar Kukreja.



Ramaa: 20 per cent decline

M'sians lured to South India

By S Puvaneswary

KUALA LUMPUR The significant depreciation of the rupee against the ringgit has triggered Malaysian outbound travel to South India, with agencies reporting longer stays and higher budgets among clients during the Hari Raya holiday season until end-August.

According to Malaysian travel consultants *TTG Asia* spoke to, strong demand to the South Indian cities of Chennai, Kochi and Tiruchirappalli was catalysed by low fares and direct connections provided by budget carriers, AirAsia and Air India Express. Both LCCs have flights from Kuala Lumpur to Chennai and Tiruchirappalli, while AirAsia also flies daily between Kuala Lumpur and Kochi.

Nantha Travel & Tours recorded a 15 per cent surge in demand to Chennai, Kochi and Tiruchirappalli from mid-July until end-August, said managing director M Nantha Gopal, who attributed the increase to low airfares

on LCCs and the sales season in South India. An increasing number of honeymooners were also opting for India too, he noted.

Topaz Travels travel consultant, Sharitha Rajendran, has seen a 20 per cent growth in demand to South India and average stays rising from four to six days this year. "There is also higher demand for four-star properties, whereas previously the trend was budget accommodation," she added.

However, consultants reported sluggish demand to Mumbai and Delhi due to hikes in Malaysia Airlines (MAS) airfares, which rose some 15-20 per cent when MAS became the sole carrier on this route. AirAsia X exited North India earlier this year.

Gopal said the price difference of a one-way fare between AirAsia's South Indian destinations and MAS' Delhi and Mumbai flights could be as much as RM500 (US\$160), equivalent to an extra three or four days in a South Indian ground package.



Gopal: budget fares a draw

ADVERTORIAL

INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN ASIA'S BOOMING TRAVEL INDUSTRY

Despite uncertainties in the global economic environment, Asia is poised for growth in the travel and tourism industry. The same trend was noted by the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, which indicated that Asia will see growth of 4 to 6 percent year-on-year in 2012, outstripping the global average of 3 to 4 per cent.

Southeast Asia has already registered a 13 per cent increase in foreign arrivals for the first two months of 2012, according to preliminary data released by the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA).



Asia Pacific Hotel & Tourism Investment Conference 2011

One of the factors contributing to the increased domestic and regional travel in the Asia Pacific is the burgeoning middle class and higher disposable incomes. According to the Abacus International Report, travel by the middle class will grow as Asia expects to add at least an additional 2.5 billion people to its middle class by 2030.

"Asia continues to be a key engine of growth for tourism, and travel and tourism businesses are increasingly venturing to Asia to capitalize on the opportunities there," said Ms Neeta Lachmandas, Assistant Chief Executive of the Singapore Tourism Board (STB).

Increasing investment

Indeed, billion-dollar investments are catering to the increasing affluence of Asian travellers. Singapore for example, has attracted tourism investments ranging from the two Integrated Resorts by Las Vegas Sands and Genting Group, to more hotels, which contributed to an increase in the number of hotels from 268 to 304 by the end of last year. Over in Shanghai, the Shanghai Disney Resort is expected to be completed in 2015. It is clear that investors from within and outside Asia are gradually expanding their footprint in the world's largest and most populous continent.

Global hoteliers have been quick to identify windows of opportunity by building to cater to the upward demand ahead. In June 2012, The Holiday Inn Express marked the brand's first foray into Southeast Asia with the opening of The Holiday Inn Express Bangkok Siam. The fast-growing hotel chain also announced plans to open 12 new properties in the region in the next two years.

Another pocket of growth in hotels is China. According to STR Global, which tracks the supply and demand data for the hotel industry, China will account for 56 per cent of about 410,000 hotel rooms in the pipeline for Asia-Pacific. Therefore, having a keen sense of the opportunities in Asia is crucial for business leaders who are looking to expand their reach.

TravelRave: Exploring Asia's travel and tourism opportunities

To enable more travel business leaders to leverage the abundant opportunities in Asia, STB has taken the lead to gather key influencers from the industry by creating TravelRave, a one-stop travel trade festival that not only provides the opportunity for insightful exchanges about Asia through multiple travel events within a week, but also offers a platform for participants to connect with others from the different sectors of the travel supply chain.

For instance, the inaugural Tourism Destination Investment Conference Asia will focus on Hotel Investments and Tourism Infrastructure Development across Asia. This event was first introduced in 2011 as a half-day conference and has since evolved into a three-day event this year. While hoteliers may form the bulk of the participants, experts from other sectors are also expected to attend the event.

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.

TRAVE! 2012 RAVE
15-19 October



MYTHBUSTER SIMON SAYS

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

Myth

Air availability searches are still the best way to book flights.

Fact

Many travel consultants today continue to use the long-established air availability search, which means that in order to find the best fare for their clients, they look up a schedule of available flights, then dive into a handful of options and price them.

This practice was established long ago in the days when GDSs did not have the capability to search and price a routing at the same time. Consultants were often forced to work by intuition to focus on flights they knew to be suitable based on cost and customers' preferences.

There are several problems of course. First, you only know what you know; by only looking at a shortlist of flights, it is easy to overlook a cheaper alternative. Second, it is very time consuming as you usually have to look at pricing a number of different flight options.

GDS technology has greatly advanced since then, and today flight search tools offer fast and effective ways to book.

Fare shopping not only calls for available flights, but also retrieves

the price for each routing to present the results in an orderly fashion.

The best GDSs can also process complex multi-segment routings, along with hundreds of flights in a matter of seconds. In fact, fare shopping powers most of the world's leading OTAs.

At our recent industry roadshows, a travel expert from Australia challenged us with a seven-sector itinerary to South America – the kind of complex itinerary experienced consultants deal with on a regular basis.

Instead of the usual search for air availability, our product manager made a flight search using our new graphical booking application, Travelport Smartpoint App. In less than a minute, the results were returned and the consultant admitted that the same itinerary would normally take her around four hours to complete.

So for those air availability warriors out there, it might be worth giving fare shopping a go. You never know, a few clicks could save you hours of precious time!

AmaWaterways makes a splash

Luxury operator eyes Indians' keen interest in cruises

AmaWaterways, a luxury river cruise specialist, is gearing up to launch its international products in India through Gurgaon-based TRN Marketing, a division of Indian Travel Promotion Company (ITPL).

From September, a promotional price of US\$1,999 per person for a seven-night cruise, inclusive of all meals and excursions, will be rolled out in New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai. Package prices may see a further increase to US\$2,999 when additional offerings are available.

ITPL's marketing strategy includes collaborations with outbound tour operators selling Europe and South-east Asia, two regions where AmaWaterways has a strong presence in. The intention is to also develop a line of travel companies that specialise in river cruises and accompanying packages.

In Asia, AmaWaterways' 14-day programme combines Vietnam and Cambodia, with cruises in Halong Bay and Mekong River and excursions to Angkor Wat.

Popular programmes in Eu-

rope include a cruise along the waterways of Belgium and Holland during the tulip season, as well as multi-country cruise itineraries along Danube River and Rhine River.

"A lot can be expected of luxury river cruises, as their itineraries feature frequent ground excursions to many places of interest and scenic spots while cruising, unlike the boring high seas."

Veneeta Rawat
Director
Amazing Vacations

Acommodating between 100 and 180 guests, AmaWaterways' vessels offer spacious state-rooms, complimentary Wi-Fi, free-flow beer and wine during

meals, and cuisine approved by international gastronomic society Chaîne des Rôtisseurs.

Amitava Mukherjee, ITPL's general manager of business development, said: "Deep-sea cruising is very popular with Indian tourists, and the luxury market is growing. We expect high-end river cruising to become popular too."

The Indian travel trade expressed optimism about the uptake of river cruises among their clients.

Said Veneeta Rawat, director of Amazing Vacations, Mumbai: "A lot can be expected of luxury river cruises, as their itineraries feature frequent ground excursions to many places of interest and scenic spots while cruising, unlike the boring high seas."

Vineet Gopal, managing director of Engee Holidays, New Delhi, said: "Luxury river cruises with high-end cruise vessels like AmaWaterways are sure to be a hit with discerning Indian tourists. I think the corporate sector will also show interest in such cruises for their incentive groups." – **Shekhar Niyogi**

@OneRobin's list

Robin Yap is the managing director of The Travel Corporation Singapore, which specialises in holiday experiences from escorted tours to river cruising. The avid blogger and Twitterer shares his travel wisdom in numbers

4 recommendations to destination marketers

At last count, I have travelled to over 300 cities in 40 countries in the past 28 years, and what amazed me most was how some destinations managed to carve out an appealing niche in a very crowded marketplace. Marketeers wish to maximise their promotional dollars. Some try to include everything about the destination without really focusing on the key message. Some change the tagline so often that nobody really remembers what it represents. But some have also managed to build on the success of an effective tagline.

Here are some pointers to bear in mind:

1 Message consistency One of the greatest taglines was and still is Singapore Airlines' *A Great Way to Fly*. The theme song, *Singapore Girl - You're A Great Way to Fly*, never fails to invoke images of a gentle Singapore Girl. For destinations, think Aloha and instantly you will shout "Hawaii"! A good tagline or slogan should be kept and perhaps be tweaked a little to reflect the change of times but never totally replaced.

2 Celebrities sell Some destinations promote their magic by leveraging on the popularity of their celebrities and TV programmes. This is not anything new but works all the time, from James Bond movies to Korean dramas. Tourism boards and various statutory boards must work very closely to create the hype. Marketing a destination should not just be the job of the tourism board; all stakeholders should coordinate their efforts.

A great leader or personality can be equally synonymous with a destination. In my opinion, Singapore's

greatest marketer is our former prime minister Lee Kuan Yew. Mention his name and people of a certain generation instantly think of Singapore.

3 Go viral The explosion of social media platforms has allowed marketers to reach out to a younger audience. Guam became a hit with Taiwanese wedding couples, while the Maldives a heaven for travellers from China due to its high exposure on social media.

4 Mega events One of the best ways to showcase a destination is to host a mega event like the Olympics. But if there is no follow-through, the recall value of a brand or destination quickly evaporates after the show. In sports marketing, mention soccer and a few destinations spring to mind. Sports has a global appeal, and should be integrated into a country's tourism calendar. The trouble is that sports authorities and tourism boards often have different KPIs and don't work together to create a holistic destination appeal.

Yours Truly @OneRobin (www.onerobin.com)

TTG Travel Pursuits

Compiled by The Fox

QUIZ

1. Which Thailand-based airline recently made its first flight?
2. In which Asia-Pacific airline has Abu Dhabi's Etihad Airways bought shares?
3. Is the name of the international airlines trade body IATA or ICAO?
4. Is Starwood's top-end hotel brand called St. Regis or Ritz-Carlton?
5. Name one of the earlier names of SriLankan Airlines.



Illustration by rajith krishnan

1. Thai Smile, a subsidiary of Thai Airways International.
2. Virgin Australia
3. IATA (International Air Transport Association) is the trade body for civil aviation bodies.
4. St. Regis, Ritz-Carlton is part of Marriott.
5. Air Ceylon, followed by Air Lanka. It changed to its current name in 1998.

Humour

- 1 If Sands' earlier hotel in Cotai, Macau fails to see a downturn coming, can we ask: "Is the Venetian blind?"
- 2 If Eva Airways cancels a flight, will it become 'Neva Airways'?
- 3 If Cathay Pacific starts a fare war, will it become 'Cathay Aggressive'?
- 4 Proposed new marketing slogan: Qatar Airways – Clearing the Air



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Urs Eberhard
Executive vice president-markets & meetings
Switzerland Tourism

Tough as Matterhorn



For 24 years, Urs Eberhard has marketed Switzerland to the world. He now finds the traditional markets he's worked hard to build crumbling before his eyes as Europe deals with a mountain of debt. But, tough as the Matterhorn, Eberhard hikes up to explore new peaks. He talks to **Raini Hamdi** about the role of NTOs in distressing times

How badly is the eurozone debt crisis affecting the Swiss tourism industry?

We've lost quite a substantial number of overnights, thereby quite a substantial amount of income from the whole euro market – Germany, Holland, Belgium, Italy, France, the UK, etc.

In the last five years, we lost almost 20 per cent from Germany, 30 per cent from the UK; in absolute figures that translates to millions of overnights and millions of Swiss francs lost.

How many millions?

In total, from the traditional markets, looking back five years, we lost nearly half a billion Swiss francs, about CHF470 million (US\$482 million), in income.

On the other hand, we are gaining an enormous amount of new visitors from markets like China, India, South-east Asia, (South) Korea, Australia, Russia and also markets in eastern Europe, the Baltics, Nordic countries, etc. Through the increase, we made an extra of over CHF300 million in the last five years.

If there wasn't the debt crisis, could you have accommodated such increases from the new markets?

Yes. The yearly average occupancy of Swiss hotels is less than 50 per cent. Of course, during summer vacation, Christmas, New Year, Luzern is full, but hotels in the back valleys are not full. Or the winter resorts aren't full in summer, while the summer resorts are not full in winter, so if you average it all out, it works out to less than 50 per cent occupancy on an annual basis.

But the issue is, the new markets go to only 10 to 20 per cent of the destinations in the country – certain icons or must-sees like Luzern and Interlaken – so the

growth is concentrated on only a few hot-spots, while the loss from the traditional markets is spread throughout since these markets have been coming to Switzerland for the last 100-150 years and visit all places throughout the year. Therefore, our strategy, as a national tourist office, is really to diversify and spread the growth of the new markets.

But this is not so easily achieved. If you travel to Paris, you want to see the Eiffel Tower. As a first-time traveller to Switzerland, you'd want to see Luzern, the Jungfrau, and we must understand that. But we need to encourage second-time travellers from new markets, or those who seek a deeper or mono-European tour, to go to new routes.

This is why we're really trying to give new itineraries and ideas to tour operators and ground operators, so they feature both the hotspots and creative themes, say, honeymoons, multi-generation travel, soft adventure, snow and ski, train travel. By doing this, we hope people will spend two or three nights in Switzerland.

Is the length of stay so short – only a night?

Yes, as you know, once a market opens to overseas travel, it's always the series groups after business travel and official visits, and these first-time travellers want to see eight countries in 10 days.

It's the same when the Americans, English, Russians started travelling. And for the first-time series, it's always the hot-spots first that they want to see, London, Paris, Venice, Luzern – in the old days, it's called the grand tour and heaven forbid we change that.

But once they start to return, that's when we must make sure the tour operator is offering something different. That's

why we are working with them to create new ideas, like the best of Switzerland, discover Switzerland as a mono-destination, or instead of eight European countries, why not just three nights in Italy, Switzerland and France and explore them deeper. And we show them how and what they can do.

Are you still seeing growth from Asia, despite signs of the Chinese and Indian economies slowing?

Asia is still growing – and on an extremely successful 2011. In the first six months, China grew 24 per cent, South-east Asia 15 per cent, Australia almost 10 per cent, India, Japan, South Korea 10 per cent each. There are warning signs – India's going to be a bit difficult we understand. The Olympics in London, from what we hear, kept Asians away due to tight flight capacity and higher pricing. So we're expecting that July and August results might be weaker.

You've been marketing Switzerland since 1998 and helped shape the product and the markets for it throughout those 24 years. You must have encountered crises. How are these times different?

If I look back on such a long time, the industry is cyclical indeed. The difference is, the crisis we have today has never been so widespread; it touches the whole of Europe in such a dramatic way.

The most dramatic crisis I could think of was when I was based in the UK. In 1993/1994, it was really deep in the oil crisis and hurt the market terribly. We had to counter the situation when we lost 50 per cent of the business. We had to see what could we do to bring back the Brits to Switzerland, and we started to explore,

as we do now in Asia, new opportunities where we had a competitive advantage.

We started with the young snowboarders of the UK; we organised a snowboard championship in Covent Garden, which attracted 100,000 spectators and lots of TV coverage and, all of a sudden, we were able to change the image of Switzerland as being this old, traditional destination for old people into a fun, young, new destination.

We were so lucky as there was a lot of snow in Switzerland, the UK economy went up again, and this was the turning point. From then on, the market went up again for the next 10 years and we more than doubled the number of UK visitors from 2008 with not just the old demand, but the new demand from the younger travellers.

There's always something good in adversities, isn't there?

Yes, you become more creative, you don't take things for granted, you can't allow yourself to be lazy and wait like a fat cat in front of a mouse hole. You have to get up and find the mouse holes.

But the difference with this crisis, as you said, is it's so widespread. Does that make you a nervous cat despite having gone through the UK crisis?

It makes us very nervous. It does worry us tremendously because there is not a lot you can do. You cannot make the country 30 per cent cheaper and they will come. As the French saying goes, 'you cannot make a donkey drink when he's not thirsty'.

What we've realised is that all the new customers in the traditional markets – i.e., the customers who desired to go to Switzerland once – have dropped out because of the poor economic situation. The ones that are still coming are the loyal customers who know the product, know they get a lot of value from being in Switzerland and feel at ease in the country. Our strategy is to work on that loyal base and cut back efforts a little bit on targeting new customers. If we do target new customers, we go about it in a focused way.

In the UK, for instance, we work with the Royal Horticultural Society. They have 350,000 members; they all love gardens. So we go to them and say hey we have beautiful alpine gardens, islands like Brissago with beautiful gardens, and if you are interested in receiving more information, we will send you some Edelweiss seeds. The interest we got was incredible. We then built an alpine garden at the Hampton flower show, worked with tour operators on introducing special garden tours and invited a few media members to write about these tours, so once again it's a very integrated approach and very focused.

So niche marketing is the way to go now.

At the moment, you have to go niche. If we do the big ads in the paper saying 'Switzerland is beautiful, come to Switzerland', it will not work because the donkey is not thirsty. But if we go to the niche, where the donkey is thirsty for a special beverage, we have a chance he will drink.

Is that the biggest challenge for NTOs such as yourself?

The challenge for NTOs is that the industry is looking at you to promote the whole country, but the customer does not want a whole-country sell. He wants specific recommendations that suit his needs from a neutral, trustworthy source. So we're caught between the expectations of the industry and expectations of the client.

Both are our customers, but it's a fine line to fulfil the demands of the industry

and still give the end-consumer a decent answer, especially now, when the industry has become more accountable for its spending and has become impatient to see results (60 per cent of Switzerland Tourism's funding is from the government, 40 per cent from the industry). This impatience may result in industry partners going their own way (in marketing) and we may lose the strong umbrella approach we now have, which I'm absolutely convinced is the most effective approach.

Also, a lot of our partners are financed

by the number of visitors they get and fewer visitors mean less spending.

What keeps you going?


The product keeps me going. I would not have the same emotional ties if I were to sell a machine! And I'm fortunate to sell a country like Switzerland.


The whole travel industry is also a people business and I can look back to all my postings and all the friends I've made – it's a sense that you've left a footprint in the markets with your work.

What are you proudest of to date?


The turnaround in the UK is something I'm very proud of.


I also find it most rewarding that we are able to bring most of the partners under one umbrella to promote Switzerland as a country and not have split groups doing their own things, which will dilute the message. The Swiss government, too, trusts us and has been giving us more funding each four-year period in the last 12 years, even for 2012-2015, despite the difficult times we're in.





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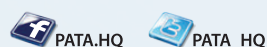



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Clockwise from top left: Singapore Airlines' Business Class; a Boeing Business Jet, which is increasingly seen as a time-saving business tool; Emirates' First Class

Sim Kok Chwee takes readers into the world of premium air travel, which has never seen better days, innovation wise, even despite the shaky economy

There was a time when almost every international airline or flag carrier had to absolutely have First Class service. It was a prestige and a sign of being able to rub shoulders with the world's best.

Today, luxury air travellers often end up in Business Class as many airlines have given First Class the boot. Only about 35 airlines belong to the exclusive group that still does, according to a *Forbes* report. But to be fair, many airlines – including those that still offer First Class and others that do not – have upgraded their levels of service in Business Class to the point where the divide is blurred.

Premium travel appears to be holding up well against a landscape dominated by softening growth in many of the world's major economies. New York-based Harrell Associates, which does airfare benchmarking, reported that the average one-way First Class ticket for a European and Asian carrier is US\$6,922 and US\$7,377 respectively.

Even as many airlines are seeing their profits dive in recent quarters, premium travel grew at 8.6 per cent in March 2012, the latest data given by IATA on the segment. Even if the effects of the previous year's tsunami in Japan and the Arab Spring were taken into account, this sector still grew a respectable four per cent.

It appears that at the apex of the travel pyramid, premium air travel is still resilient and represents a lifeline for airlines that continue to improve and stay a step ahead of their well-heeled customers.

Door-to-door pampering

For many airlines, the perks begin on the ground. Complimentary limousine transfers at both ends of a flight are offered by airlines such as Etihad Airways and its partner, Virgin Australia. Others offering this service include Emirates and Virgin Atlantic Airways. While premium travellers themselves are no strangers to being chauffeur driven, such complimentary transfers are often in the latest models of some of the world's most recognisable car labels. Lufthansa, for example, offers its First Class passengers at Frankfurt Airport that extra German touch with this transfer being conducted in a Porsche. Meanwhile, many that do not offer this service provide butlers and meet-and-greet services from kerbside to lounge.

Once in the airport, airlines treat premium class passengers to lavish lounges. Thai Airways International's lounge at Suvarnabhumi Airport, Cathay Pacific's at Hong Kong International Airport and Qantas' lounge at Sydney Airport have garnered more trophies than they have shelves to display them. Carriers from the Middle East and Asia-Pacific are also notable for their opulent and at times even over-the-top lounges.

At Changi Airport's Terminal 3, Singapore Airlines operates dedicated lounges for Suites, First Class and Business Class travellers. Those travelling in the airline's Airbus A380 Suites – branded as a class beyond First – get a private room. From the soothing brown/beige colour palette and carpeting to soften footsteps to

its children's playroom (with minders if needed), the entire facility is geared towards creating a quiet oasis. Dining in this lounge comes close to that in a bespoke restaurant with an à la carte food and drinks menu to match. Staff track boarding times for each passenger and gently cue them in a timely fashion.

Lufthansa's First Class lounge at Frankfurt Airport offers valet parking and personal assistants, à la carte dining and self-service buffet, a cigar lounge, showers and bath tubs that come complete with rubber ducks!

Shower spas and double beds

The advent of planes such as the Airbus A380 and Boeing 747-8 Intercontinental has given airlines greater flexibility in customising the aircraft cabin. The uppermost tier of luxury travel is dominated by the suites onboard the A380s of Singapore Airlines and Emirates.

From the outset, Singapore Airlines harvested feedback and ideas from premium passengers and engaged luxury yacht designer Jean-Jacques Coste to create its critically acclaimed suites in a three-year process. Only 12 of these are found on each A380 and when transformed into a bed, an added touch of luxury comes from the beddings that promise the same nocturnal comforts of home and upscale hotels. The centre pair of suites can also be converted into a double bed for couples if so desired.

Just this month, the airline announced it had appointed two world-renowned design firms, DesignworksUSA and James Park Associates, to help develop the next generation of in-flight cabin products. Work is currently underway to "further distinguish the airline's First Class from the competition and provide customers with a unique premium feel and experience", it said in a press release. Enhancements will be made to its First Class seat,

in order to offer more privacy and personal stowage space and improved seating comfort, as well as its cabin environment, starting from its new B777-300ERs that will be entering service in the second half of next year. This will be followed by A350s and B787s, in addition to possible retrofits to aircraft already in service.

Emirates, too, has installed enclosed suites that come with a host of features including a personal mini-bar, ambient lighting, vanity table and wardrobe. It is the only airline to offer two Shower Spas onboard each A380, offering First Class passengers the opportunity to take a shower at 35,000 feet. A tonne of water is carried to ensure this facility never runs dry, although with each of the 14 high net-worth travellers being transferred from their palatial homes and luxury hotels in limousines, one wonders if they truly need a shower. It is nevertheless a novelty that only a select few can tick off as bragging rights.

Not to be outdone by its peers, Lufthansa's First Class passengers onboard its fleet of B747-400s are pampered with both an armchair and a bed – instead of a chair that converts into a bed. Its First Class cabin onboard the A380 comes with a cabin air humidifier and sound-absorbing curtains and carpet. A urinal – the only one in the air – has also led to cleaner toilet seats, something which has gained the approval of the airline's female premium travellers.

Even though restaurant-quality dining options are already offered at airlines' premium lounges, well-heeled customers are offered further customisation onboard ranging from choosing when to have their meals to pre-selecting specially designed ethnic and signature dishes from top chefs. Lobster, truffle and abalone are often featured as are comprehensive wine lists that will make even the most discerning wine connoisseur envious.



From left: Lufthansa's Business Class in the B747-8; Emirates' Shower Spa for First Class travelers onboard the A380; Chinese gourmet treats in Singapore Airlines' Suites and First Class

Upward trajectory of private jets

Despite such luxurious cabin offerings, many premium corporate travellers – and increasingly even leisure ones – have turned to private jets to bypass crowded airports and the hassle of heightened security processes. Cash rich and time poor, these busy executives are conveyed right into the secondary towns where their companies' investments are located.

Over the years, the average size of business jets has grown, and today Boeing's Business Jets (BBJs) range from the equivalent of a B737 (more than 150 of these have been sold since 1996) to a B747, while its keenest competitor offers jets as small as the A318CJ right up to an A380.

A high degree of customisation is offered, said BBJ president, Steve Taylor. "If you can imagine it, it's either being done or is probably being engineered," he added. Think interiors that replicate an old English library or planes equipped with a full kitchen, bedrooms and even a putting green.

Service that doesn't stifle

However, there is still one luxury that only a select group of airlines can deliver, namely service and the human touch.

Singapore Airlines' crew serving in premium class cabins are trained to instinctively identify and note a passenger's likes and dislikes. Such observations are then conveyed to other colleagues on the flight as well as those serving on an onward sector beyond a transit stop where a crew change takes place.

The airline's assistant manager (human factors and grooming), Foo Juat Fang, likened the cabin attendant's role to that of a personal butler. She said: "Passengers communicate cues pertaining to how they like the service to be delivered and crew members must pick up on these cues. It is not about constantly asking passengers for their preferences but relying on non-verbal cues."

Foo added: "Our service philosophy means that in the premium cabin, the passenger never needs to activate the crew call button. A crew member will always be around, be there to anticipate the passenger's service needs and meeting it before it is even articulated."

This means that when a passenger unbuckles his safety belt, a crew member immediately does a quick survey to ensure the washroom is clean. While the passenger is away, the cabin attendant tidies up the seat, folding the blanket and even getting a glass of warm water or a towel ready when the passenger returns.

This is a tall order to deliver with any degree of consistency, but also perhaps the ultimate luxury that premium travellers value. It is clearly the reason why certain airlines continue to be firmly placed at the top ranks of international passenger surveys.

Given its resilience, luxury travel may just be what can help airlines lift their bottom lines and ride out the storm in today's turbulent economic landscape.

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Are alliances yesterday's news?

During an era where airlines are haemorrhaging millions of dollars due to volatile fuel prices, growing competition and the global economic slowdown, carriers are seeking ways to cut costs and increase scale in order to stem the bleeding.

Signing up with a global alliance may be a tried-and-tested solution, given that an expanded reach caters to the needs of high-value frequent travellers, but also delivers increased revenue generation and cost-saving opportunities through rationalisation of members' networks, as well as joint purchasing and marketing initiatives.

Today, the three largest passenger airline alliances in the world, Star Alliance, SkyTeam and oneworld, jointly control 53.6 per cent of global air capacity, according to CAPA – Centre for Aviation.

None, however, has managed to capture the hearts of Middle East carriers, such as Etihad Airways, Qatar Airways and Emirates, all of which have thus far refrained from entering into alliances.

These three airlines, backed by their oil-rich government supporters, have expanded their respective networks so quickly and successfully, raising the question of whether alliances are becoming irrelevant, especially in the face of increasing competition from these 'superconnectors'.

Independence prized

Earlier at this year's IATA's 68th AGM & World Air Transport Summit in Beijing, Emirates president, Tim Clark, insisted that the days of alliances were numbered, especially if they failed to keep pace with fast-evolving market dynamics. "Over the past few years, there has been evidence of a new force emerging in civil aviation," he said.

Clark pointed out that the sixth-freedom Gulf carriers, which were trying to achieve a truly global scale, would independently reach into geographical regions where alliances had carved out separate spheres of influence among members.

Emirates, for instance, has thrived on carrying passengers from West to East and vice versa via Dubai, bypassing the tradi-



Tim Clark
President
Emirates

tional London, Paris and Frankfurt hubs.

"There will be an (increasing) acceptance of these kind of business models, which are likely to become more prolific in the next 10 to 15 years. There are a lot of airlines, even in alliances today, that want to chart their own destiny and will want to perhaps disengage from the old way of doing business in the alliance structures," he added.

In an earlier speech to the European Aviation Club in 2009, Clark had even gone so far as to state that "Emirates has never belonged to and does not have any plans to join an alliance". He explained: "We see alliances as hav-



Christian Klick
Vice president, corporate office
Star Alliance



John Slosar
Chief executive
Cathay Pacific

"There are a lot of airlines, even in alliances today, that want to chart their own destiny."

Tim Clark
President, Emirates

ing significant anti-competitive elements and believe that our membership in one would be an artificial brake on our own business plans."

Winds of change

It remains to be seen if Emirates' counterparts are indeed of the same mind. Rumours have been swirling in recent months that oneworld is exploring

bringing either Qatar Airways or Etihad Airways into its fold. Even though CAPA predicts that adding Etihad Airways will only boost oneworld's share of the world's available seats from 12.1 per cent to 12.5 per cent, while adding Qatar Airways will boost it to 12.7 per cent, the impact of one of the Middle East carriers finally breaking ranks to join a global alliance would be truly



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Brian Higgs peeks into the future of global alliances, which until now still exclude the three Gulf giants

game-changing.

What's certain for sure is that there will be an evolution in alliance structures in the near future, which will enable individual members to express creativity in the way they grow their businesses.

"I believe that alliance structures are going to change over time, to the extent that (member) airlines will have more opportunities to expand their reach in areas where the market makes sense," said John Slosar, chief executive, Cathay Pacific, a founding member of the oneworld alliance.

"(Alliances) will (eventually) allow growth in certain areas when players within their grouping want to do their own thing at their own pace. I see this happening because more and more carriers are reacting to the way the world is moving, with regards to the aspirations of the travelling public and multi-segmentation," added Emirates' Clark.

"If you align yourselves in the way that alliance structures have done in the past, which is to follow the traditional segmentation of markets, then that's not going

to be the way to survive.

"You've got to align to this huge opportunity that we have, which is multiple segmentation – there are far more people coming to the market and they want to travel farther than they ever did before," he added.

Unbeatable clout

Meanwhile, advocates of global alliances continue to hold fast to their beliefs that the model is a viable one. Christian Klick, vice president, corporate office, Star Alliance said such groupings remained relevant because they feature "advantages which no single airline can offer and which frequent travellers do appreciate".

"Only the alliances offer truly global travel solutions, where passengers are able to travel within one system to any corner of the globe, have access to more flights and routing alternatives, priority services and lounges, and superior mileage programmes that allow them to earn and redeem miles on every flight within the alliance," he said.

Cathay Pacific's Slosar was also adamant about the endur-

ing value of alliances. "Alliances generate (clear) benefits (for their member airlines). They certainly generate benefits for us, and there are good ways of tracking these benefits. No airline is yet global enough to cover all the segments that customers in the various markets would like to cover.

"The point where an individual airline has enough global presence everywhere, including domestic areas, to really offer a truly global brand...that still seems to be a long way off, and till we get to that point, there's still going to be value in alliances," he said.

National carriers such as Malaysia Airlines, SriLankan Airlines and Garuda Indonesia seem to agree, given that the first two have signed up to join oneworld in 2012 and 2013 respectively, while the third will enter SkyTeam's ranks next year.

SriLankan Airlines CEO, Kapila Chandrasena, said: "Joining the (oneworld) alliance will put SriLankan firmly on the global aviation map and improve Sri Lanka's connections with the rest of the world."

How they stack up



Star Alliance

- Founded in 1997
- 28 member airlines
- 679 million passengers a year
- Network covers 193 countries, 1,356 destinations
- US\$182.2 billion in total revenue
- Controls 23.4 per cent of global capacity
- Future members: Shenzhen Airlines (2012), EVA Airways (2013)



SkyTeam

- Founded in 2000
- 17 member airlines
- 531 million passengers a year
- Network covers 178 countries, 983 destinations
- US\$157.6 billion in total revenue
- Controls 18.1 per cent of global capacity
- Future members: Aerolíneas Argentinas (2012), Xiamen Airlines (2012), Garuda Indonesia (2013)



oneworld

- Founded in 1999
- 11 member airlines
- 324 million passengers a year
- Network covers 149 countries, 810 destinations
- US\$105.5 billion in total revenue
- Controls 12.1 per cent of global capacity
- Future members: Malaysia Airlines (2012), SriLankan Airlines (2013)

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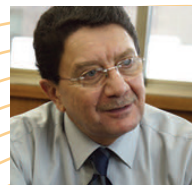
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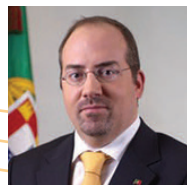
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The Melaka Sultanate Palace, a replica of the sultan's residence



Making history work

Malacca wants to leverage on its heritage offerings to woo more tourists. By **S Puvaneswary**

Arrivals

Malacca is targeting 13 million arrivals this year, of which international tourists comprise 30 per cent, or 3.9 million visitors. This is an increase of 834,134 over arrivals in 2011, which totalled 12.2 million, of which 3.1 million were international visitors.

The top five international markets recorded for 2011 were China, Singapore, Indonesia, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Most international tourists spend an average of two to three nights in Malacca.

shopping, convention, health, education, agrotourism, food trails, youth tourism and Malacca My Second Home, which is specifically targeted at expatriates."

Overseas marketing will be directed at South-east Asia, East Asia (China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea) and South Asia (India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka).

"We work closely with Tourism Malaysia to promote the state and its attractions through roadshows, table talks and fam programmes," said Abdul Kadir.



"Our members are developing more heritage and gourmet trails, including Jonker Street, the Portuguese Settlement and Umbai, to encourage visitors to stay longer during the weekdays."

William Chan

Honorary secretary
Malaysian Association of Tour
& Travel Agents Malacca

rooms. Located right in the heart of the city, it is within close proximity to heritage sites and retail outlets, as well as major businesses.

Pantai Puteri Hotel is another new, three-star beachfront hotel which opened in November 2011. Facilities include five meeting rooms that can be opened up to fit 500 people in theatre seating. The hotel can also arrange for teambuilding activities by the beach and for baby-sitting services, said its hotel manager, Abdul Aziz Harun.

A third fairly new property is Casa Del Rio, a boutique hotel which opened last May. Situated by the Malacca River, it is a stone's throw from the heart of the historic city. Its 66 rooms blend Mediterranean style with Peranakan touches.

Ping Anchorage Travel & Tours CEO, Alex Lee, welcomed the addition. "Malacca needs special hotels with local architecture where guests can experience the local culture and heritage. Malacca lacks this," he said.

Airlines

Malacca received its first direct connection to a domestic point when Malaysia Airlines' subsidiary, Firefly,

commenced a thrice-weekly service to Penang in April, linking the two UNESCO World Heritage cities.

Two Indonesian airlines currently fly between Pekanbaru and Malacca. Wings Abadi Airlines, known as Wings Air, flies three times weekly utilising ATR 72-500 turboprop aircraft. Sky Aviation flies five times weekly and utilises Fokker F50 aircraft.

Two hours away from Malacca is the key gateway city of Kuala Lumpur, which is also experiencing a capacity growth (see page 15).

Attractions

Opened last year, Jonker Bird House on Tun Tan Cheng Lock Road allows visitors to learn about bird's nest production through a walking tour to a replica of a limestone cave. Visitors can also see swiftlets building their nests.

An upcoming attraction is Hang Tuah's Village, which is being developed by the state government in Kampung Duyung. The village will be a replica of the Sultanate of Malacca in the 15th century. A tribute to the legendary Malay warrior, this attraction is scheduled to open next year.

NTO

The recognition of Malacca as one of two Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca by UNESCO in 2008 has given the state's promotional efforts a boost.

Melaka Tourism Promotion Division general manager, Abdul Kadir Md Idris, said: "With our slogan, *Visit Historic Malacca Means Visit Malaysia*, we want to inform and educate travellers that Malacca has so much to offer. Our division has classified 12 tourism subsectors to promote both domestically and internationally. These are history, culture, recreation, sports,

Hotels

There are currently 241 hotels in the state. Twelve new hotels are scheduled to open within the next two years, increasing room inventory by 3,000 from the present 12,852, said Abdul Kadir.

Demand for rooms usually exceeds supply especially during weekends, school holidays and public holidays, resulting in most hotels imposing a higher weekend rate. The average rate of a five-star property in Malacca is about RM285 (US\$91) per day.

A recent opening this year is the Hatten Hotel Melaka, a four-star business property with 704

More eastern links needed

Malaysia's regional connectivity has risen, but access remains weak for Sabah and Sarawak. By **S Puvaneswary**

1 What new flights have been launched recently? Airphil Express commenced thrice-weekly services between Manila and Kuala Lumpur on June 21.

AirAsia X, which began twice-weekly services between Kuala Lumpur and Kathmandu on July 3, will ramp up frequency on this sector to thrice-weekly from September 15. Meanwhile, Malaysia Airlines' (MAS) thrice-weekly services on the same route will start on September 1.

Firefly, a wholly owned subsidiary of MAS, introduced four weekly services between Kota Bharu and Singapore on August 10 and thrice-weekly services between Penang and Koh Samui on August 11. It also started a new service from Subang to Hat Yai on August 17.

2 What are inbound tourism players doing to capitalise on the growing links? According to Marzuki Mohd Ali, tour consultant of Al Quds Travel, Firefly's new Kota Bharu-Singapore

pore flights has greatly shortened travelling time between the two cities. Previously tourists from Singapore had to travel by rail from Johor Bahru, by road from Singapore or transit at Kuala Lumpur first.

To boost inbound tourism, the Kota Bharu-based company is targeting Muslim travellers from Singapore with itineraries that include shopping, food trails and beach stays at Perhentian Island, Marzuki added.

For Luxury Tours Malaysia, senior manager, Arokia Das Anthony, said the direct flights from Kathmandu provided an opportunity to sell tours combining Kuala Lumpur with a beach destination, such as Penang or Langkawi, and a highland resort such as Resorts World Genting.

3 What about East Malaysia? A concern among the trade is the lack of direct international flights and high airfares out of Kuala Lumpur, which dampen travel demand to Sabah



Malaysia Airlines will begin services to Kathmandu

and Sarawak despite their rich natural and cultural assets.

Arokia Das said pricey airfares between Kuala Lumpur and Kota Kinabalu or Kuching have hindered the promotion of the East Malaysian states to price-sensitive markets like Nepal and India.

Sharing a similar stance was Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents Sabah chapter chairman, K L Tan, who pointed to the high airfares between East and West Malaysia as a deterrent to budget-conscious international visitors intending to extend their stay to Sabah.

In addition, the competitive

airfares offered by MAS and Air Asia from their Kuala Lumpur hubs to overseas destinations have "encouraged locals to travel abroad, rather than encouraged domestic travel between East and West Malaysia", he noted.

Citing an example, Tan said MAS' recent promotional fares to Hong Kong started from RM426 (US\$136), one-way. By comparison, a one-way ticket from Kuala Lumpur to Kota Kinabalu costs about RM200.

Hence, to enhance domestic tourism, Malaysian carriers could make their airfares to Kota Kinabalu and Kuching more attractive, he urged.

4 What is being done to improve air access to Sabah and Sarawak? To patch the gaps in air connectivity, Sabah tourism, culture and environment minister, Masidi Manjun, said during a recent press conference that the state governments of Sabah and Sarawak were looking at the viability of purchasing majority shares in MASwings, a MAS subsidiary operating out of East Malaysia, and turning it into a regional airline. Discussions were still in the preliminary stages, he added.

Routes Asia 2014, which will be held in Kuching next year, may pave the way for more airlines to launch services to Sarawak.

Said Sarawak Convention Bureau's managing director, Mike Cannon: "(Routes Asia 2014) is a good win for Sarawak as the idea is to improve links between Sarawak and the rest of the world, not only Asia. It won't happen overnight and that's all right. We always look long term for business."



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Riyadh launch marks key stage in Best Western's expansion

By Glenn de Souza
Vice President International
Operations – Asia & the Middle East
Best Western International

Best Western International has achieved many 'firsts' in recent months. Following our debut in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur and the announcement of our first hotel in Nepalese capital Kathmandu, we are delighted to unveil our first hotel in Riyadh, the capital of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Perhaps the most pleasing thing about the new BEST WESTERN Orchid Hotel is the fact that it comes just a few months after our debut in Saudi Arabia. In the first quarter of 2012 we launched the BEST WESTERN Sand Rose Suites in Al Khobar, and the response to the Best Western brand in the Saudi Arabian market has been fantastic.

This gave us confidence of our ability to expand in the country, and our arrival in Riyadh marks a key stage in our nationwide roll-out. Located on King Abdul-Aziz Road in downtown Riyadh, BEST WESTERN Orchid Hotel is located close to all major companies and government departments, making it ideal for business travelers, and our free Wi-Fi is sure to be incredibly popular with all guests.

Now our Saudi Arabian expansion will really gather pace. In the next two years, Best Western International expects to open nine new hotels in seven cities across the Kingdom, adding 1,589 rooms to the country's inventory.

Watch this space, the BEST WESTERN Orchid Hotel is just the start of a blossoming future for both Best Western and Saudi Arabia.



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Name Wildlife Theatre Melaka
Showtimes 15.00 and 19.30, Tuesdays to Sundays
Rates RM10 (US\$3.20) for children and RM15 for adults on weekdays; RM15 for children and RM20 for adults on weekends and public holidays
Contact
Tel: (60-16) 6612-998
Email: info@wildlifetheatre.com.my
Website: www.wildlifetheatre.com.my

Wildlife Theatre Melaka



At this new attraction, **S Puvaneswary** finds herself amused by the funny antics of the performers

WHY Launched in Malacca late last year, the Wildlife Theatre makes for a great family destination, bringing together children and parents. Educational aspects are cleverly embedded into the twice-daily performances, and everyone comes out of the shows a little wiser.

WHAT The hour-long perfor-

mance took place in a semi open-air amphitheatre with a good sound system. The show kicked off with a couple of racoons doing tricks on stage, followed by parrots 'speaking' and interacting with the crowd. It was a fun prelude to what was to come.

One of the animal trainers carried a long, fat python and requested for two volunteers – one male and female – to go on stage. That was when the show got really interesting. When the male volunteer refused to hold the snake, the trainer disappeared behind the stage, only to reappear moments later and surprise the volunteer from the back by

garlanding the slithery creature round his neck. I was so tickled by the look of surprise on the volunteer's face.

For the final scene, the two volunteers were asked to open a box and guess the weight of the object inside. I expected the item to be a snake, but out popped a jack-in-the-box that surprised our male friend so much that he instinctively stepped backwards and fell into the pool. The audience laughed so hard that all of us had tears in our eyes.

Had the show organisers gone overboard? Not really. The "volunteer" was actually a staff who was play-acting all along.

HOW While keeping the audience entertained throughout the performance, the emcee also weaved interesting facts into the show, such as what each of the animals ate, where they were from, their life cycles and so on.

Moreover, the close interaction between the host, performers (both humans and animals) and the audience made this show very entertaining.

VERDICT The show was so humorous that no one would be able to leave with a straight face. I would not mind watching it a second time.

Checking in

Marvelux Hotel



Opened last November, this budget hotel is convenient and comfortable enough for leisure travellers, writes **S Puvaneswary**

LOCATION I could not have asked for a better location. The six-storey hotel is a five-minute drive to main tourist attractions such as the Dutch-built Stadthuys, Chinatown, St Paul's Hill and Jonker Walk museums.

It is also a short drive away from Melaka Sentral, the state's transportation hub that connects domestic services as well as interstate buses and taxis from every corner of the peninsula. I saved quite a bit on taxi fare with such a central location.

ROOMS My room on the 5th floor was equipped with a large 32-inch LCD television set and comfortable beds. The attached

bathroom had a strong rain shower, hot water and a hairdryer.

While there was complimentary wireless Internet access throughout the hotel, other facilities for the business traveller fell short in my opinion. Take the work station, for example. The table was a bit too small for comfort and I had to sit on a stool as there was no work chair!

FACILITIES I missed not having an iron and ironing board in the room. It would have been so much more convenient than having to go down to the common ironing room on the third floor. But this was a budget hotel, I had to remind myself.

Meeting facilities are limited to three function rooms, the largest of which can accommodate 80 people in classroom seating.

F&B Mar'cious Café & Dining served great food. I was really impressed with the spread of local dishes for tea on my day of arrival,



including a snack seldom seen outside of Johor – fried banana fritters served with spicy sauce.

It also serves my favourite nasi lemak for breakfast and the restaurant here does it well. I loved the service at the restaurant – fast, efficient and friendly.

TRADE APPLICATION Book ahead if you need rooms on weekends, Malaysian school vacations and public holidays, as rooms are hard to get here and elsewhere in Malacca during these periods.

There is ample, free, open-air

Name Marvelux Hotel
No. of rooms 100
Rate From RM148 (US\$47) for superior rooms on weekdays, and from RM188 on weekends and public holidays
Contact details
Tel: (60-6) 2818-888
Email: reservation@marveluxhotel.com
Website: www.marveluxhotel.com

parking right outside the hotel.

VERDICT A good, well-maintained hotel ideal for leisure travellers on a budget.



View of the Royal Hamarikyu Garden and Tokyo Bay from Conrad Tokyo

Conrad Tokyo

Full recovery at last

Foreign arrivals are back and an LCC revolution is waiting in the wings. By **Raini Hamdi**

Arrivals International arrivals to Japan had returned to 2010 levels by June. In the first six months, Japan saw 4,048,600 foreign visitors, just 3.6 per cent lower than the same period in 2010, according to preliminary figures from the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO).

But the recovery was not equal all around, with the strongest growths coming from Indonesia (30.6 per cent up), Vietnam (28.4 per cent), Malaysia (12.1 per cent), Thailand (18.3 per cent) and Taiwan (10.8 per cent), while several key Asian markets were still on their last lap to reach pre-3/11 earthquake levels. Arrivals from Singapore, for example, were still a good 12.7 per cent less, while those from South Korea, Japan's number one market, were down 18.3 per cent. Likewise, while important long-haul markets such as the US and the UK had all but recovered, others such as Canada (-12.3 per cent), France (-16.4 per cent) and Germany (-12.4 per cent) still had some ways to go.

JNTO JNTO Singapore's executive director, Motonari Adachi, blamed concerns over

radiation for the slower recovery from Singapore, even though there had been no reported cases of Singaporeans returning from Japan with radiation-related illness. Japan Tourism Agency commissioner, Norifumi Idee, in a speech at the World Travel & Tourism Global Summit in Sendai/Tokyo in April, pointed out that airborne radiation levels were in fact lower in Sendai or Tokyo than in cities such as Singapore or Seoul.

JNTO Singapore is going on the offensive to achieve full recovery from the Lion City. A 20-page *My Japan Holiday Guide* was distributed to more than 350,000 households in Singapore through the local newspaper, *The Sunday Times*, on August 19. It has also kicked off a three-month outdoor campaign involving display advertisements in buses and MRT stations in Singapore.

JNTO will also open an office in Indonesia by next year, its third in the region after Singapore and Thailand. Indonesia, along with Vietnam and the Philippines, has been added to its list of priority markets this year, according to Adachi.

Hotels A return of in-



"The growth from Malaysia and Indonesia is a positive sign that Japan has made a comeback and further growth should be expected from these two countries."

Motonari Adachi
Executive director, JNTO Singapore
(which oversees Malaysia and Indonesia)

ternational leisure travellers is just what hotels need to strengthen rates. "Corporate business (the backbone of occupancy post-3/11) is based on volume, thus the average rates are lower, whereas the leisure business books suites and stays longer," explained Malcolm Thompson, general manager, The Peninsula Tokyo.

Jones Lang LaSalle Hotels Japan managing director, Tom Sawayanagi, in his final update of Japan's hotel market after the quake in April, expects RevPAR of Tokyo's full-service hotels to outperform 2010 levels in the latter half of 2012, based on the full recovery of inbound volume.

3/11, along with the eurozone debt-crisis, has also enforced a bigger commitment to Asian markets among hotel owners. Fujita Kanko, which owns the Four Seasons Hotel Tokyo at Chinzanso and will manage the hotel from January 2013 under the name, Hotel Chinzanso Tokyo, opened a Seoul office on August 1, its second overseas office after Shanghai, which was opened in 2010.

"(This) demonstrates our firm commitment to the Asian market," said president & CEO,

Kazumasa Suezawa. "Our campaign to aggressively globalise our clientele is the beginning of a new chapter for us."

Access The most exciting development is the entry of three LCCs in Japan, which is a boon for improved connectivity, apart from their huge potential to generate new domestic and inbound demand. AirAsia Group, CEO, Tony Fernandes, described it as "the beginning of (a) revolution".

Japan is small, yet diverse and geographically spread out, posing a challenge for inbound operators to understand and maximise its full offerings, as pointed out by Hiromi Tagawa, JTB Corp president & CEO, during the WTTC summit panel.

With LCCs, tour operators now have more leeway in combining, say, a Tokyo city break with a beach getaway in Okinawa or snowboarding in Hokkaido. Peach Aviation, based at Kansai International Airport (Osaka) started flying in March, while AirAsia Japan, a JV between ANA and AirAsia Group, based at Narita, inaugurated services on

Continued on page 18

Checking in

Conrad Tokyo



A corporate traveller would feel at the top of his game at this hotel, but it's an equally mean machine for your leisure clients, **Raini Hamdi** discovers

LOCATION Situated 37 floors above the Shiodome business district – home to major Japanese companies such as Nippon Television, ANA and Fujitsu – and boasting impressive MICE facilities and a design as sleek, slinky and stealthy as a jaguar, Conrad Tokyo has got it made for corporates. But one must not forget it has the goods for leisure travellers too.

I discovered a luxurious urban resort – the sort that will tempt your clients to stay in rather than out. How does one resist its Michelin-star restaurants, its indoor lap pool or its Mizuki Spa, the largest hotel spa in Tokyo?

And venture out if they must, your clients will find that even

though the hotel is not situated in the most swinging of places, its location is convenient. It is just 20km away from Haneda Airport. It is also connected to the subway, which makes attraction-hopping easy (on the pocket too, given Japan's high taxi fares).

General manager Gregor Andreevitch drew me an itinerary which got me to Ginza by foot – the popular shopping and entertainment district is within walking distance – and easily by subway to Asakusa, Tokyo's old temple town, and to Akihabara, where, if it lits, this electronic town has it.

Best of all, if your clients, like me, have always wanted to visit the one-of-its-kind Tsukiji Fish Market at dawn, there's no other more convenient place to stay than at Conrad Tokyo, as the market is just around the corner.

ROOMS I stayed in a Bay View King Suite. The view did not disappoint. With the suite towering over both the Royal Hamarikyu



Conrad Tokyo's 25m lap pool in the sky

Garden and Tokyo Bay, the panorama was spectacular.

About 83m² in size, my suite was anything but homely and compact. It is your typical luxurious five-star hotel suite, with a separate living room, bedroom and walk-in wardrobe, and all the amenities one would expect of such an accommodation.

Its modern Japanese design did achieve a sense of place, even though it was not too imaginative – headboard and floor carpet with sumi-e cherry blossom motif, bolsters with Japanese foliage pattern, traditional lantern-style lamps and the like.

F&B Have money? Splash it here! I had a sensational evening at

Gordon Ramsay at Conrad Tokyo (see Silver Spoon, June 1, 2012 issue). It's the only Gordon Ramsay restaurant in Asia and is every bit worthy of the Michelin star it has received annually since opening.

China Blue, which serves Cantonese, is also a must. It's one of just seven Chinese restaurants awarded a Michelin star. The food was incredibly delicious.

There is also a Japanese restaurant, Kazahana, which offers three dining arenas, kaiseki, sushi and teppanyaki counters.

All three restaurants are exceptional in their design, and seal Conrad Tokyo's reputation as a hot table in town.

Given such F&B standards,

Name Conrad Tokyo
No. of rooms 290
Rate From ¥37,000 (US\$473)
Contact details
Tel: (81-3) 6388-8000
Fax: (81-3) 6388-8001
Email: tokyoinfo@conradhotels.com

I was surprised that the food served at the executive lounge during happy hours was paltry. One area for improvement.

SERVICE Particularly wonderful at Gordon Ramsay; efficient throughout the hotel

VERDICT Towers over competitors with its superb F&B, dramatic high ceilings and complete and classy facilities

Checking in

Best Western Shinjuku Astina



The hotel looks and feels like a new property, and wins **Karen Yue** over with its location in one of Tokyo's liveliest wards

LOCATION For most travellers who get around Japan on the country's dominant JR Group rail service, Best Western Shinjuku Astina makes a convenient accommodation option in Tokyo.

It took me just 10 minutes to walk from the JR Shinjuku Station, past sprawling shopping malls, alluring restaurants and izakayas, and the lively entertainment district of Shinjuku. I knew right away that my day in Shinjuku would be so fun.

It was a bonus that there was a well-stocked 24-hour convenience store on the ground floor of the hotel.

ROOMS The hotel has 206 rooms, all of which offer free Wi-Fi Internet access. Various room types are available: standard rooms, business floor rooms (which come with a 12.00 check-out time, secure elevator access and other perks), and the more

luxurious executive floor rooms. The hotel also appeals to female travellers with four Lady's Rooms.

I stayed in a standard room on the 10th floor, which I found to be more spacious than most Japanese city hotels. Light-toned wood wall panels and cream colours dominated the interior, providing a comfortable ambience.

F&B There is only one dining outlet in the hotel. Stella Cafe Restaurant serves breakfast and lunch, and offers an all-you-can-drink wine with appetiser deal for ¥1,500 (US\$19) per pax from 15.00 to 18.00.

FACILITIES Public spaces in the hotel, as well as my room, were very well-maintained, so much so I thought the hotel opened recently. It was in fact opened in March 2008. Facilities include an executive lounge and vending machines on all floors except the 7th, while services offered at the hotel include laundry and personal computer rental.

SERVICE Service staff spoke clear English and were always ready with a smile.

VERDICT Clean, comfortable, well-located and affordable – what more can a leisure traveller ask for?

Name Best Western Shinjuku Astina Hotel Tokyo

No. of rooms 206

Rate From ¥20,000 (published)

Contact details

Tel: (81-3) 3200-0220

Fax: (81-3) 3200-0223

Website: <http://eng.bw-shinjuku.com>



Kazuyuki Iwakata, AirAsia Japan's CEO, revealing celebratory fares at the LCC launch to Sapporo and Fukuoka on August 1

JAL unfazed by LCCs

Continued from page 17

August 1 with daily flights to Fukuoka, Okinawa and Sapporo. The latter's entry is also expected to further boost arrivals from Malaysia, with its longhaul arm, AirAsia X, offering promotional fares as low as RM399 (US\$129) one-way from Kuala Lumpur to Tokyo and the option to fly onto AirAsia's new domestic network.

Jetstar Japan, whose first flight took off on July 3, operates daily flights from Narita to Sapporo, Fukuoka, Okinawa and Osaka. From August 24, it will also operate daily flights from Kansai to Sapporo and Fukuoka.

Jetstar Airways' new international connection from November 1, Darwin-Singapore-Osaka, will boost Northern Territory and Singapore links to the new Jetstar Japan domestic network.

"This new service means Darwin will be connected to Osaka as well as Tokyo, and by extension, to... Jetstar Japan's domestic network," said Jetstar Group CEO, Jayne Hrdlicka. "For Australian and Sin-

gaporean tourists, this new connection will make it easier to explore everything Japan has to offer."

As with AirAsia, the group always looks for opportunities "to join the dots", added Hrdlicka.

A revitalised Japan Airlines (JAL) meanwhile is unfazed by the new competition from LCCs.

The carrier, which has turned around from its abyss in January 2010 with a record-breaking operating profit of ¥205 billion (US\$2.61 billion) for the fiscal year ending March 2012, holds a one-third share in Jetstar Japan.

JAL president, Yoshiharu Ueki, said: "We believe the LCC represents a new mode of transport and creates demand in a market that we don't (serve)." (*TTG Asia e-Daily*, August 1, 2012)

Besides, about 84 per cent of JAL's domestic revenues are from Tokyo (Haneda) and Osaka (Itami) airports.

"Landing slots are limited; it is almost impossible to get a slot at these two airports," he explained.

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