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# S'pore hotels get tactical

Promo rates, value-adds are dangled

**By Linda Haden**  
**SINGAPORE** Inbound specialists are seeing a raft of promotions offered by upscale hotels in Singapore, which are believed to be a pre-emptive move to shore up revenue as the global economy continues to shudder.

Alex Chan, director and general manager, Hong Thai Travel Services, told *TTG Asia*: “The corporate market is starting to slow for five-star properties. Next year seems even more challenging because of the uncertainty in Europe. Hotels are offering promotional rates, and they are more aggressive with discounts. (As a result) we’ve managed to upgrade customers from four-star to five-star hotels.”

Helen Goh, director of marketing (inbound), Vacation DMC, surmised that hotels were slashing their rates by as much as



Chan: market slowdown

20 per cent during promotional periods, including Chinese New Year and weekends. “On top of special rates, more four- and five-star hotels are offering value-adds such as free Wi-Fi and late check-outs. In addition, many properties are rolling out their promotions a lot earlier than they normally do so that DMCs have a longer lead time to secure bookings,” she said.

However, according to Goh, most of the promotions are aimed at Asians, who are shunning Singapore for less expensive destinations such as Thailand.

She added: “On the flipside, there are hardly any promotions offered to longhaul markets despite the fact that we’ve seen a sizeable lapse in demand from

*Continued on page 5*



## In his father's footsteps

One of Asia's next-generation hotel owners, the soft-spoken and calm Thirayuth Chirathivat has fire in his belly to make Centara Hotels & Resorts Thailand the number one chain in the region, reports **Raini Hamdi** – see page 10

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# Missing from the action NTOs flock to China

Burmese operators jostle for a chance to be part of tourism boom

**By Raini Hamdi and Liang Xinyi**  
**SINGAPORE** Myanmar's local tour operators are urging buyers to give them a chance instead of using regional DMCs based in Thailand or Vietnam.

A local tour operator, speaking on the condition of anonymity, expressed frustration that overseas tour operators, particularly in Europe, tended to deal with regional FDI (foreign direct investment) players instead of directly with local players because they perceive the regionals as "safer" and "more reliable" than small and medium-sized Myanmar operators.

Though arrivals in Yangon rose 45 per cent to nearly 260,000 from January to September, as official statistics shows, local player New Motion Travels & Tours expects to handle only 600 to 700 pax this year, albeit this represents a doubling from last year. Another local agency, Interconnection Travels, expects to handle 1,000 pax this year and 1,200 pax next year, up from 500 pax last year.

New Motion's marketing



**Niemeijer:**  
growth for all

manager Marlar Kyaw said: "It is good for overseas partners to deal directly with local operators as tourism is our main income and it helps livelihoods. They get better prices, while correspondence with local operators is quicker now. A few years ago, yes, it was difficult to communicate, but now, there is the Internet and the country is really changing – we are able to deal with overseas tour operators. This is why we attend tradeshows such as ITB Asia and ITB Berlin, so that we can penetrate the market."

"We have to share the business of course, but if the overseas tour operators pick the small businesses, they can help these companies become bigger."

Asked what advantages local operators offered, Interconnection's director of sales, Thant Sin Oo, said: "The FDIs are big vol-

ume, group series. Local operators are able to give a more local experience as we understand our country better, plus the groups are smaller, so we can specially tailor the programmes," he said.

Regional players such as Khiri Group said local players need not necessarily lose out. "In fact, a small player in Myanmar can become a niche player – there's a lot of interest in that right now," said co-founder & CEO, Willem Niemeijer. "As long as you are creative, say, even with a three-person team, you can still get a business going with the Internet. Business in Myanmar is all about being small now – the (major) hotels are not even represented in the country now – unlike Thailand where it's more about bargaining power in an established tourism industry."

However, Frank Hasso Wiegand, managing director, Focus Asia (Europe), said FDIs would still have an edge. "The strength (of regionals) lies in client knowledge, so Western operators know the needs of Western clients better," he explained.

**HONG KONG** The upsurge in China outbound traffic is driving increasing numbers of NTOs to base themselves in China, leaving a minimal physical presence in Hong Kong, a trend that has picked up pace over the last year or so.

In 2011, Tourism New Zealand closed its Hong Kong office in favour of a mainland one, while VisitBritain downsized its Hong Kong team and saw the departure of veteran Jane Fong. About a year ago, Tourism Victoria's Hong Kong office also uprooted to Guangzhou.

The latest example is the restructuring of Tourism Australia's Greater China operations, which will see the retirement of Hong Kong-based regional general manager, North Asia, Johnny Nee, after 19 years of service. He will not be replaced. Instead, TA will shore up its China presence with three new offices in Guangzhou, Beijing and Chengdu.

Jetour Holiday China chairman, Ronnie Ho, described this phenomenon as unavoidable as China delivers growing numbers.

However, Morning Star Travel Service's general manager, Danna Cheung, remained upbeat. "Hong Kong is a mature

market and even though some (NTOs) are not around, we are still well-connected and informed. Shorthaul destinations like Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan and South Korea are still doing a perfect job, but Tourism New Zealand seems off the radar," she said.

Carmen Tam, manager of Hong Kong, Tourism Australia, said: "This is a trend given the bigger potential up north. We are not ignoring Hong Kong. Rather, we can now be more focused (on Hong Kong), as I used to cover both Hong Kong and Southern China."

Tam is also the newly elected chairman of the Association of National Tourist Office Representatives in Hong Kong, established in 2006. There are currently 19 members, and she vowed to realign the NTOs' resources to raise their profiles and plan themed promotions or events to stimulate outbound travel.

"It's difficult to make a difference as a single NTO, and we could have a better platform. Membership wise, we welcomed Yap Visitors Bureau recently, and hope to pin down Japan, Singapore and Dubai," said Tam.

– Prudence Lui



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## Indian airfares rise as flight capacity tumbles

**By Shekhar Niyogi**

**KOLKATA** Airfares, both international and domestic, are soaring in India due to a reduction in seat capacity by Indian carriers, with fares likely to reach levels of 30-35 per cent higher than last year's.

Flight capacity has taken a hit from the complete halt in services by Kingfisher Airlines following the suspension of its licence to fly, and a fall in flights from carriers. Air India has decreased flights by 6.2 per cent and Jet Airways has cut services by 10.9 per cent for the winter season.

At press time, a Mumbai-Singapore roundtrip ticket on Jet Airways is priced at a record high of Rs49,699 (US\$921) compared to Rs30,000 at the same time last year. The same airline is selling New Delhi-Bangkok return flights at Rs26,961 compared to Rs21,000 in 2011.

Fares are expected to jump further during the Diwali and Christmas holidays in the coming months.

Rajendra Churiwala, director-eastern region, IATA Agents Association of India, said: "Airlines are cashing in on the shortage of seats in the high holiday season, but it is discouraging many potential tourists to fly because of the substantial increase in total holiday budget. An average family of four now needs to pay at least US\$1,000 more for just their flights."

Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) sources said that airlines like IndiGo will increase their flights by 30 per cent, SpiceJet by 8.9 per cent and GoAir by 14.8 per cent. Nevertheless, the absence of Kingfisher and the substantial cutback by

Air India will be conspicuous.

Exacerbating the situation are high airport landing charges and user development fees charged by the New Delhi and Mumbai airports, which has already squeezed out carriers like AirAsia X, who cite prohibitive costs.

Acting on these concerns, the DGCA has abolished the airport development fees in the New Delhi and Mumbai airports effective January 1, 2013. Proposals

for increases at the new Kolkata and Chennai airports have also been struck down.

Currently, New Delhi's and Mumbai's airports charge Rs1,300 and Rs600 for every international traveller respectively.

Sajan Gupta, director, Vayu Seva Tours & Travel, said: "Our tour package cost has been affected by higher and unstable

airfares, while the exchange value of the Indian rupee remains high, making the per capita cost outflow substantially higher."

While the reduction in airport development fees will reduce the burden on airlines flying to these cities, it is yet to be seen if the reduction in costs will be passed on to passengers. However, this may encourage international carriers to fly to India, which could increase seat inventory adequately so airfares are rationalised in the near term.

Meanwhile, demand for new aircraft is also high, with Indian carriers placing large orders. Air India, for instance, took delivery of its first Boeing 787 Dreamliner in September, and should receive the rest by 2016.



**Churiwala:** fares  
are a barrier





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# Agents seek protection against airline defaults

## New insurance scheme in Indonesia aids in deposit refunds

By Mimi Hudoyo

**JAKARTA** Ticketing agents in Indonesia warmly welcomed a new insurance scheme that will help them to obtain full refunds in the event that an airline goes belly up.

Specially designed to protect against Indonesia's non-IATA airline members that require agents to use a top-up system for deposits in order to make purchases, an agreement was recently signed by the Indonesian Ticketing Agents' Association (ASTINDO) and the Association of the Indonesia Tours and Travel Agencies (ASITA) Jakarta with a consortium of Indonesian insurance companies led by Raya Insurance.

ASTINDO chairman Elly Hutabarat said the scheme would be especially useful for agents who sell domestic air tickets as Indonesian airlines that work on the basis of top-ups have a large domestic network.

She said: "After years of efforts to find a solution to protect our business against airline defaults, we've finally found it."

Under the agreement, participating agents will get full refunds of their deposits, including tickets that have been issued for flights that have not flown.

Earlier this year, Sriwijaya Air and Bank Negara Indonesia issued a virtual credit card for agents to replace their deposits

but this found limited success, as members found the 1.5 per cent premium on the ticket value for the merchant fee and insurance too high, and the scheme was only bundled with one bank, said Hutabarat.

In contrast, the new agreement does not involve the airlines and no dedicated bank account is needed.

ASTINDO board member Rudiana explained that agents could pick which deposits they wished to insure and pay 0.17 per cent of its weekly sales of that airline's tickets, as well as submit a weekly sales report.

"If an airline stops its total operations for three days, ASTINDO and ASITA Jakarta will send a notification to Raya Insurance. Members send in their claims within one week, and agents get their money back within one month."

There would be no need to wait for the government's decision on the fate of the airline, saving agents time and energy in fighting with different parties to reclaim their deposits, as in the cases of Adam Air and Mandala Airlines, said Rudiana.

Quizzed if the 0.17 per cent premium was reasonable, Rudiana pointed out: "If you deposit an amount of Rp100 million (US\$10,416), your premium is Rp170,000 (per week). You can easily spend this amount taking a

taxi (from city to the airport) or having lunch in Jakarta."

Chairman of ASTINDO Bali and Bali Harapan Utama Tours & Travel director, Junaidi Januar, said agents in Bali had been longing for such a scheme and he was waiting to hear more about it.

Citing the recent example of AirAsia's change of plans to acquire Batavia Air causing anxiety among agents, he said many tried to finish their deposits as they feared the impact on the latter airline.

"If we had insurance backing us up, we wouldn't need to worry about such things," he said.

Sun Tour and Travel Surabaya managing director Yongky Yantomarko felt that the scheme would benefit ASTINDO East Java members and also bring renewed activity to the chapter.

Rudiana said the insurance would initially be available to ASTINDO members in Indonesia and ASITA Jakarta members. Roadshows are being planned in Bali, West Java, North Sulawesi, East Java, East Kalimantan, West Nusa Tenggara, Jogjakarta, Surabaya, Aceh, Ambon and Ternate.

In addition to being a boon to agents, the scheme also covers natural deaths of passengers during the course of travel from one airport to the next, worth Rp50 million.

Hutabarat said: "This is a plus point for passengers who book their tickets through agents amid the increasing efforts of airlines selling direct."

# PATA gets act together

By Raini Hamdi

**SINGAPORE** PATA aims to increase its membership to 1,000 corporations and NTOs by mid-2013, from 800 currently.

A new recruitment drive has been launched, putting active PATA players, including the PATA executive committee members, to work on recruiting new members or getting those that had left to rejoin.

"PATA has around 100 'activists' – people who invest time attending meetings and recommending activities PATA should do – and we're arming them with a proposition pack which is as neat and simple as an Apple iPhone package that explains the revitalised PATA proposition," said PATA CEO, Martin Craigs.

"All activists have to do is to recommend PATA and give the pack to three potential members. There is nothing more powerful than a personal recommendation."

Asked how many new members PATA had attracted since he came on board a year ago, Craigs said around 100 had either joined or rejoined. These include ports and airports members such as the Changi Airport Group Singapore and Chongqing Yangtze Gold Cruise; corporate members such as Chartis Asia Pacific and Pan Pacific Hotels Group; travel agency members such as Guillin Everyone International Travel and Xian Holiday International Travel Service, as well as consultancies and the academia.

"The target of 1,000 is not that aspirational. We want members to build their business off our platform, at the same time help us build up our offering and service. It's the classic case of aligning mutual interests," said Craigs.



PATA CEO Martin Craigs and China National Tourism Administration vice chairman Zhu Shanzhong

He added it was also crucial that PATA continued to have a diverse membership, not just the big corporates but SMEs and even micro-enterprises, a sector that has shown vitality in the region, he said.

In the one year with PATA, Craigs restructured the PATA offering as Next-Gen PATA, with advocacy, innovative events, research and human capital development as core pillars.

He also started the PATA Hub City Forum as a means of getting PATA to go to the membership, instead of the traditional approach of members going to PATA through its key events such as the PATA Annual Conference.

Another way forward is a policy decision to ensure PATA has a higher percentage of people under 35 years old, and a minimum number of women, on its board, according to Craigs.

Craigs believes that PATA has preserved its sense of unity and continuity, and that following its 60th anniversary celebrations, is now moving forward.

"We have created the platform to move forward, but it's up to the people, not us, to judge, and the way they can judge is by participating, by coming in or back to the family," said Craigs.



Continued from page 1

## Competition intensifies

Europe and the US, probably because hotels believe that even with promotions in place, this would not stimulate significant volume, given the dire economic state of these markets.”

Luxury Tours & Travel's assistant manager for B2B reservations, Cindy Chin, stated that hotels along Orchard Road were the most active in promotions. “Hotels there have been feeling the heat in recent years, as more corporate and leisure arrivals have gravitated towards Marina Bay properties,” she said.

Chan highlighted that hoteliers will have to up the ante next year, especially with more supply coming online in Singapore.

Goh also warned: “A flood of new properties coming up in the Iskandar region of Johor and in Bintan pose a real danger to Singapore's hotels too,” she said.

Representatives of high-end hotels at ITB Asia 2012, however, said performance was still robust, with Mandarin Oriental Singapore and Capella Singapore both seeing growth in leisure and MICE bookings. — **Additional reporting by Gracia Chiang**

# Malaysia plans new blitz

### New campaign and tax incentive for tour operators in the works

By S Puvaneswary

**KUALA LUMPUR** Malaysia's Ministry of Tourism is sharpening its race for higher tourist yield with the introduction of the *Visit Malaysia 2013/14* campaign next year.

According to a reliable source within Tourism Malaysia, the new campaign, which is backed by a development fund of RM358 million (US\$117.1 million) from the government and aims to welcome 26.8 million tourist arrivals, seeks to promote Malaysia as a popular destination among high-spending travellers and raise awareness of lesser-known locations in the country.

*Visit Malaysia 2013/14* was also said to have been created to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the entry of Sabah and Sarawak into the federation of Malaya to form Malaysia in 1963.

The source revealed that 2013's budget would cater for tax incentives for tour operators who bring in at least 750 foreign tourists or handle 1,500 local tourists a year. Tax incentives will come in the form of a three-year tax exemption, beginning 2013.



Thangavelu: go for longhaul

stands that the travel trade would be given at least six months of lead time to market and package events related to the campaign.

Event highlights are being worked out and an announcement is likely to surface in mid-2013. It is expected that the calendar will include new events with international appeal as well as popular annual dos such as the Rainforest World Music Festival in Kuching; the Petronas Malaysian F1 Grand Prix; the 1Malaysia Contemporary Art Tourism Festival; A Journey Through Time, a watch and jewellery showcase; and the 1Malaysia International Shoe Festival. World-class attractions will also be brought in.

Malaysian Indian Tour & Travel Association president and

At press time, plans are to start the campaign in September 2013 and have it run through to December 2014. *TTG Asia* understands that the travel trade would

Malaysian Association of Tour & Travel Agents vice president, research & technology, K Thangavelu, said the new campaign and its string of events would “be a bonus for international visitors”.

Ping Anchorage Travel & Tours CEO, Alex Lee, believes that the introduction of new events under the campaign will make it “easier for tour operators to achieve the target” required for tax exemption, a benefit he regards as a form of “good encouragement”, especially for smaller tour companies.

Thangavelu said: “Moving forward, the government should also look at attracting longhaul tourists by improving air connectivity as these tourists have a tendency to stay at least a week in Malaysia.”

“If we continue to rely only on regional markets where we have good air access, we will not be able to achieve the (ministry's) target of 36 million tourists and RM168 billion tourist receipts by 2020. While tourists from neighbouring countries may visit all year round, their stay (spans) two to three nights only.”

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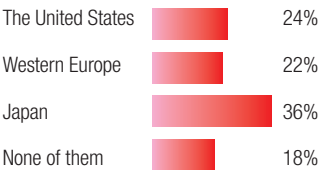
Tourism Data



Airline passengers are looking for more self-service and mobile-based offerings, according to SITA; time wastage is the top bugbear for business travellers, says Carlson Wagonlit Travel; Accor's research reveals that Malaysian business travellers took slightly more international than domestic trips in 1H2012 compared to the average Asia-Pacific traveller

Poll

Which of these traditional source markets is showing the strongest signs of recovery?



Hot Moves



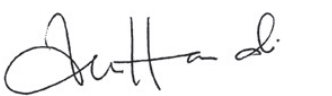
Ho Yuen Sang (left) and Alexander Knigge, both previously with Jetstar Group, join Tiger Airways as MD and CCO respectively; Helen McCabe-Young (centre) rejoins Kerzner International as EVP, sales & marketing for One&Only Resorts; Patrick Andres (right) succeeds Simon Nowroz as VP and regional managing director, Asia-Pacific for Travelport, while Damian Hickey comes onboard as VP, distribution sales and services, Asia-Pacific

# Can Asian CEOs think?



The rising Asian middle class should bring with it a rise of the Asian hotel brands, Asian hotel GMs, local tour operators. Has it?

Raini Hamdi  
Senior Editor



ASIA still is the real deal for the captains of our industry (read about it on *TTG Asia e-Daily*, October 18, 2012 and *TTG Asia e-Daily*, October 12, 2012). Their faith in the region has not come undone, even as the euro debt crisis is undoing years of strong Asian economic growth.

And why should their confidence be shaken? The region's massive population, growing middle class and huge infrastructure development makes it "the most powerful demographic story on earth for travel and tourism", said Christopher Nasseta, president & CEO of Hilton Worldwide. Ho Kwon Ping, executive chairman of Banyan Tree Holdings, sums it up in a powerful imagery of "rainbow tourism" – travel demand that isn't just basically white, but yellow, brown, black, even pink – and the opportunities this paradigm shift presents.

But opportunities are different from responsibilities. So, at the Asia Travel Leaders Summit Singapore gala dinner, where Ho was named CNBC Travel Business Leader of the Year, I asked him, what's the biggest responsibility of Asian travel leaders today?

"This is the time Asian travel leaders have to be thought leaders for their industry and look 20 years and beyond. What do we want to do that will affect the lives of Asian people 20 years from now and transform this entire industry?" he said.

To me, that hits the nail on the head. Our industry needs thought leaders if the sea change it is experiencing is to be harnessed effectively.

The rising Asian middle class, the basis of tourism explosion in the region, should bring with it a rising Asian everything – rise of the Asian hotel brands, rise of the Asian hotel general managers, rise of the local tour operators (see article 'Missing

in action' on page 2), to name a few.

Has it?

Only to a degree. My feeling is there is still a lot of work to be done and there is not enough thinking going on.

A case in point is a panel discussion on 'The rise of Asian hotel brands' I listened to during the recent HICAP (Hotel Investment Conference Asia-Pacific) in Hong Kong. Half the time was spent on defining the Asian hotel brand, but to me the real question is: Rise to where? What do Asian hotel brands want to benchmark themselves with, how high is their ceiling, how do they get there?

The rise of Asians to top posts in the industry is one whole thought process by itself, and I'm glad to hear that questions such as whether there should be a structured approach to nurture Asian talent are being looked into seriously. Ho himself is a strong advocate. "The implication of rainbow tourism is not just Chinese people eating Chinese food in Paris. It's much more than that. The opportunity for young people to aspire to be a GM today is 10 times more than it was 20 years ago, when the GM would always have to be Caucasian because of the guest mix," he said.

Are Asian countries also thinking hard about their attractiveness as a place to live (which will also translate to as a place to visit) 10, 20, 30 years from now and putting in the foundations today?

A slowdown in economic growth in the region is a blessing in disguise; it gives leaders a chance to think. I hope they use it. Then rainbow tourism will really take many Asian industry aspirants somewhere over the rainbow, where the skies are blue, and the dreams that they dare to dream...*really do come true.*

Most commented on www.ttgasia.com

## Refurbished Suntec to host enlarged ITB Asia 2013

Jayesh Ashar from India said: "The two-floor concept is a recipe for disaster as delegates with a fixed appointment list will have to work their way through busy elevators and escalators. Expansion is good but an ideal tradeshow would be spread across the same floor. I urge ITB Asia to keep this in mind."

## TACentre.com attracts Philippine, Hong Kong outbound

Mark Lee from Singapore said: "Using TACentre.com saves us a lot of time. Instead of having to contact three separate operators for flights, accommodation and attractions/tours, I just need to go into the system and check for availability. Another big plus is that the system is free to use and has lots of product offerings."

## Bandung seeks new markets to nip price war in the bud

Elly Hutabarat from Jakarta said: "Friends from the travel industry, do not underestimate your products. Do not sell too cheaply. We will repeat our mistakes of the past: starting a price war instead of a service war. Bandung hotels are good, so are the tour operators. We need enough margin to develop our human resources and maintain our services as well as products."

## Dragonair spreads its wings to Yangon

Nugroho Setiatmadji from Jakarta said: "Congratulations to Dragonair for launching flights to Yangon. The new connection will enhance Cathay Pacific and Dragonair's presence in Myanmar, and facilitate travel convenience between Hong Kong and the South-east Asian country."



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

4 Ps of Sustainable Tourism

I was following the *TTGAsia.com* survey on sustainable tourism, which asked if the concept was idealistic or realistic. The results showed a lack of understanding and appreciation of what the issue is about.

Of the respondents, 49 per cent believed sustainable tourism is achievable but takes time, an alarming 31 per cent didn't know what it means, while the remaining 20 per cent thought it to be more fluff than substance.

Whether fluff or substance, without enough noise made and champions leading the cause of sustainable tourism, our natural resources will be depleted, leaving nothing for future generations.

Just like smoking, everybody

knows cigarettes are bad for health yet few smokers stop voluntarily. Nevertheless, the health authorities and the government continue to raise the issue and publicise the harm of smoking.

It's not that much different when it comes to sustainable tourism.

**1 Prevent** Prevention is better than cure. Once a monument is destroyed, it can never be rebuilt. I believe we are living in a civilised society, and are now able to prevent such unnecessary destruction.

Bhutan is a good example of this, deliberately controlling the number of tourists allowed in each year to prevent harm to its environment caused by mass tourism. It has also banned smoking at the cost of not being able to collect tobacco tax.

This clearly demonstrates the determination of the Bhutanese

government to prevent any harm to the environment and health, even at a cost.

**2 Promote** We need to explain better, communicate better and promote better the value of sustainable tourism.

A general manager of Singapore Airlines once told me: "Sometimes the things you do are right, but it is your explanation and reasoning that are wrong."

Everything starts from the home and school. If we start inculcating in this generation the value of protecting our environment, we might stand a chance of saving it in the future.

National tourism boards should form a sustainable tourism committee and encourage all tourism stakeholders to subscribe to this cause.

Better still, recognise and reward

companies that demonstrate their efforts to promote sustainable tourism through solid action.

Likewise, leading media like *TTG Asia* should also add this category in their annual awards to recognise such stakeholders.

**3 Preserve** Tourism stakeholders can help preserve the destination's environment.

On our part, Insight Vacations' partnership with University of Glasgow's Centre for Battlefield Archaeology has paved the way for the centre to study significant WWI sites in France, and to investigate the hidden history of Scotland's Cambuskenneth Abbey and its role in the Battle of Bannockburn.

Trafalgar Tours is also supporting the UK's National Trust to protect the coastline and countryside in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**4 Protect** Protecting our heritage, our tourism assets and our environment should not be just the job of our government but every citizen.

In Singapore, I serve as vice chairman of the green committee at the North West Community Development Council, where we have a string of green activities to promote the 3Rs – reduce, reuse and recycle. We have appointed 15 Green Champions to work with volunteers in planning and implementing environmental programmes within the district.

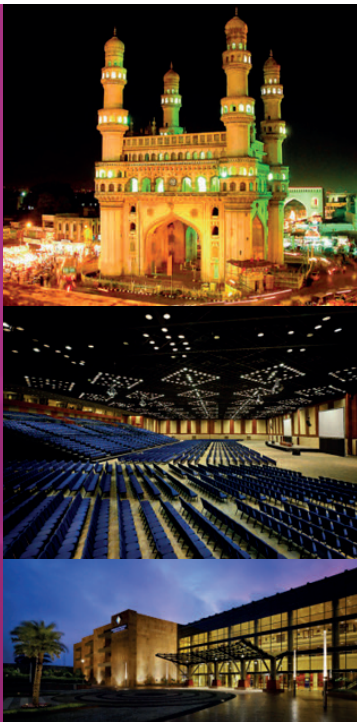
Similarly, tourism stakeholders should also make a concerted effort to use recycled paper for their brochures and other collaterals.

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## TTG Travel Pursuits

Compiled by The Fox

## QUIZ

1. Which airline in India was forced to stop operations in October?
2. IT&CM Asia and CTW Asia-Pacific in Bangkok recently celebrated which anniversaries (two different dates)?
3. Which airline plans to switch its transit hub from Singapore to Dubai starting 2013?
4. Which country will host the next ATF, in January 2013?
5. Formosa International Hotels bought the Regent brand in 2010. Name one of the two hotel groups which owned Regent before this.



Illustration by Benjith Krishnan

1. Kingfisher Airlines, following disputes with its employees, its air operator's certificate was also suspended on October 20 after it failed to meet the regulator's concerns about its operations.
2. 20 years for IT&CM Asia and 15 years for CTW Asia-Pacific.
3. Qantas, after signing a cooperation agreement with Emirates.
4. Laos, in the capital Vientiane, organised by TTG Events.
5. Four Seasons from 1992, then Carlson Hotels from 1998.

## Humour

1. Proposed new marketing slogan for Gulf Air – *Closing the Gap*.
2. If freight airline FedEx merges with UPS will it be renamed FedUps?
3. If ANA started an inflight messenger service would it be called an anagram?
4. Would a fast-food restaurant in India be called Curry-in-a-Hurry?

MYTHBUSTER  
SIMON SAYS

In this column series, Travelport's group vice president, business development, **Simon Nowroz**, examines assumptions about travel distribution

**Myth**  
GDS technology is old and hasn't moved with the times.

**Fact** This myth needs to be put to bed...forever! And thankfully I believe most travel consultants would agree.

You have only got to think of how far the GDS has come from the green screen and cryptic environment to the dynamic desktop of today. Or perhaps recall the time when airfares were the only activity on the GDS, and compare this to the plethora of content we now have access to, including hotels, cars, rail, tours and more.

There have been many milestones since the GDS first launched in the 1960s, from the introduction of electronic ticketing to the launch of merchandising and ancillary services, and the creation of a truly open platform.

Not only has the GDS moved with the times – as we've seen with the introduction of apps and mobile solu-

tions for travel experts – but it has led the way in taking travel into the next era.

These are my top six GDS innovations:

**Universal API** The development of the first universal application programming interface (uAPI) has delivered a single connection to a world of content. uAPI has not only improved efficiency and reduced training and software costs for travel consultants, but streamlined the travel supply chain and improved the customer offer greatly.

**Next-generation desktop** The GDS is so much more than a booking tool for travel buyers. Rather, it has become a powerful, integrated platform that now delivers access to a wide range of content, pricing and intuitive tools.

**Point-and-click technology** A faster way to research, book and manage travel, point-and-click navigation means less training and fewer keystrokes.

**Universal language** Travel consultants can use commands from any GDS within a cryptic environment, thanks to intelligent translation now available through GDS apps. This is a major step forward.

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**Thirayuth Chirathivat**  
CEO  
Centara Hotels & Resorts

One of Asia's next-generation hotel owners, the soft-spoken and calm Thirayuth has fire in his belly to make Centara Hotels & Resorts (CHR) Thailand the number one chain in the region, reports **Raini Hamdi**

# In his father's footsteps

**In April, you succeeded Gerd Steeb, who's been with CHR for 20 years. How's it been?**

Everything is going as normal. Though I took over officially in April, I was kind of an acting CEO since June last year, when Gerd had semi-retired. I worked closely with him and learned a lot from him and from our chairman (his father, Suthikiati Chirathivat). Before that, my role was handling projects and development; in the past year, I learned more about the business.

**Have you always been groomed for the position?**

Probably. Nobody knew as it never was never specified that I would be the next CEO.

**Was it something you wanted?**

I was guided by my father. After I graduated from university, he said since we have a hotel, I should look at working in it. So I started as a trainee in Centara Ladprao Bangkok. I found I liked hotels, so I studied hotel management in RIT (Rochester Institute of Technology, US).

**What do you like about hotels?**

The industry is evolving all the time, so you learn all the time. I like development the most – you form an idea from scratch and see it to the finished product. You also work with all the key areas – rooms,

F&B, etc – to create the right product.

**So CHR can expect huge growth in development from you then.**

Our strategy is to be asset-light. Currently, of the 32 hotels in operation, 14 are owned or JVs, the rest managed. Going forward, we are

looking at minimum eight to 10 managed projects per year, and one owned/JV hotel every two years.

**Would you hire other international brands to manage your hotels as you did previously?**

Not anymore, as we have developed the infrastructure, and our five brands cover all segments: Centara Grand Hotels & Resorts, Centara Hotels & Resorts, Centara Residence & Suites, Centara Boutique Collection and Centara Hotels and Resorts.

Soon, we'll be launching our new economy brand.

There's potential to grow CHR not just in Thailand but the region, and by region, I mean up to India and the Middle East, where we have one or two projects close to signing.

**How are Asian home-grown chains perceived today and how are they better than global chains?**

In Thailand, we are well recognised. The industry knows us and our brands, and we want to use this to expand to other countries.

I think we can match the product of the international chains but we can be better at people.

You travel a lot too and you know the service levels here, especial-

ly in Thailand, are much more refined and detailed compared to Europe, at least from my experience. We want to be better by refining further our service and consistent standards; this is something that can never end.

**As CEO, how are you different from Gerd Steeb?**

The business has to grow faster. Gerd's done a great job. He had to centre on our own projects, and he was a good, experienced hotelier. But as you know it takes four years to build a hotel and capital is limited, so we must transit to a management company. We've been putting in the systems and the people to do that in the last few years. So I continue and build on what we have achieved to date.

**But you are the new generation hotel CEO. Surely you'd like to bring in new ideas?**

I'm comfortable with the asset-light model and I'm also driving the growth of our new economy brand. We've talked about the economy brand for two years, but we've not really pushed it.

As well, our business can continue to evolve. For instance, we can expand our spa business and convention centre hotels, both here and outside Thailand.

**How involved is your dad in CHR?**

He's the chairman, he does not run the day to day. We look to him for comments and guidance, but we are the ones who execute the ideas, make them happen.

**What key lessons have you learned**

**from Gerd Steeb and your dad?**

My father is very, very detailed, always asks why, why, why, and he expects answers. He said beauty comes later, function comes first, and he has a clear vision of where he wants his hotels and the group to be. These are important learnings.

Gerd is very good when it comes to operation. So I have the best insights of both worlds, vision and execution.

**Are you a visionary?**

I have to be. But, the operation has to be able to cope and follow. There is no point if we, say, come up with something futuristic and the operation cannot follow. There has to be a balance.

**But your dad had Gerd Steeb. Who do you have?**

Gerd still acts as an advisor.

**Are you an entrepreneur or hotelier?**

(Laughs) I'm a mix of both.

**What motivates you in this job?**

I want to see the business grow, but it has to be profitable and sustainable growth. I want Centara to be the number one chain in the region.

**What are your biggest challenges?**

The competition, the business environment and finding qualified people as we keep growing.

**Is there a business leader who inspires you?**

My dad. He's a real entrepreneur, he wants to prove something – I find that very inspirational.



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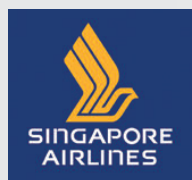




# Full-service airlines stay strong despite headwinds

By Sim Kok Chwee

Although the world's economic centre of gravity has in recent years shifted towards Asia-Pacific, it has not immunised airlines in this region from the fallout of ailing economies in Europe and the US and, for a brief period, the Arab Spring. A falling demand for Chinese goods in the West has dampened China's efforts to emerge from a economic slowdown and its ability to power the entire region, but this seemed to have bottomed out by October. While economic challenges are not new to the airline industry, their timing and duration coincide with high oil and food prices, natural calamities and rising unemployment in many markets, thereby conspiring to bring about a perfect storm. In spite of this, airlines operating in this region have defied the odds and submitted report cards that bring some cheer as 2012 comes to a close.



Despite being one of the most acclaimed carriers worldwide, Singapore Airlines (SIA) has not been spared the negative impact of the economic woes in Europe and the US, strong competition from the powerful Gulf airlines and low-cost carriers as well as high oil prices. The airline appears to have arrested the decline in quarter earnings, and in September, carried 1.5 million passengers (an increase of

6.1 per cent year-on-year) and raised its passenger load factor by one per cent to 80.6 per cent – powered by strong summer travel originating in the Americas and Europe. This rebound comes amid positive news that the Chinese economy appears to have bottomed out too.

**CURRENT DESTINATIONS** SIA and Virgin Australia have expanded their codeshare arrangement in August to cover Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, as well as additional cities in Australia and China. Both airlines can expect to benefit from Qantas' decision to operate its Kangaroo Route services to London through Dubai instead of Singapore.

After Lufthansa ceased its Munich-Singapore-Jakarta route in October, SIA re-

stored its Singapore-Munich-Manchester route to a daily service.

Growing demand for business travel to Myanmar has also led to SIA's decision to launch daily services to Yangon, replacing seven of 16 SilkAir services on Airbus 320s with its own 323-seater Boeing 777-200.

**PLANNED DESTINATIONS** For the summer 2013 season, SIA has already announced additional services from Singapore to Fukuoka (from five-times weekly to daily service), to Moscow and Houston (from five-times weekly to daily service) and to Osaka-Kansai (from 11 to 14 weekly services).

According to a reliable industry source, SIA has been granted permission by the Italian authorities to operate between Mi-

lan and New York, which if proven true, could be a high-yield 'Bankers' Route'.

From 4Q2013, SIA will cease its non-stop Singapore-Los Angeles and Singapore-Newark routes, ending two of the world's longest commercial flights.

**FLEET** Since August, SIA has announced a slew of planned improvements to its products, in-flight connectivity and in-flight entertainment systems, which will be rolled out on its new fleet of eight B777-300ERs, 15 A330-300s (delivery of both will begin in 2013) and 20 A350-900s (delivery beginning in 2014).

With 19 A380s already in operation, SIA has placed a new US\$7.5 billion order for five more A380s and 20 A350s for delivery in 2017, adding to the earlier order



**JAPAN AIRLINES**

Japan Airlines (JAL) declared bankruptcy in January 2010 and underwent restructuring as it sought protection from the all-too-familiar Chapter 11 of the US. Once safe from creditors, the airline shed tens of thousands of employees, terminated loss-making routes, grounded and sold many non-fuel efficient airplanes, closed down its dedicated freight operations and went through an attitude reform beginning with admitting that its dire situation resulted from internal mis-

takes and not external forces. The entire company embraced the multi-pronged JAL philosophy of simplifying the business, striving for perfection and working earnestly.

The Enterprise Turnaround Industry Corporation injected ¥350 billion (US\$4.4 billion) into JAL, and as its current president Yoshiharu Ueki continues to steer the company into stability and profitability, the airline was able to repay this investment together with a dividend of ¥300 billion. In the process, JAL restored the *tsuru* (crane) logo ditched in 2003 and listed its shares on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in September. When JAL received the first two of 45 Boeing 787 Dreamliner orders in March, Ueki said: "We will concentrate on improving our service, product and network, and the Dreamliner allowed us to achieve this."

**CURRENT DESTINATIONS** In addition to adding a third daily service between Tokyo and Singapore in late-October, it will also launch services to San Diego and Helsinki in December 2012 and February 2013 respectively, with both routes being operated on B787s.

**PLANNED DESTINATIONS** On a visit to India, Ueki disclosed that JAL is seeking to increase services to New Delhi, and is also exploring establishing services to Myanmar, Cambodia, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Ueki disclosed that JAL is targeting to increase capacity – measured in available seat kilometre – by 25 per cent in the next five years.

**FLEET** Deployed on flights to Moscow, Boston, Beijing, New Delhi and Singapore

and on longhaul trans-Pacific flights, the B787 is up to 18 per cent more fuel-efficient than the B777.

The B787 also enjoys tremendous popularity with passengers as a result of its revolutionary features such as dimmable windows – which are already the largest on an airline – higher cabin humidity and pressure (both factors mitigate the effects of long-distance flights and jet lag), stability in flight and quieter cabin.

JAL has customised the mood lighting in the B787 cabin with pastel green and pink hues to match the green shoots and the cherry blossoms of spring respectively, with corresponding colours to match other seasons.

The Japanese carrier expects to have 10 B787s by the end of the current fiscal year and 33 B787s by the end of its 2016 fiscal year.



The Gulf carriers continue to make headlines throughout the aviation industry, most recently for their earth-shaking moves made in the airline alliance arena. While Emirates inked a 10-year alliance with Qantas that caused the latter to realign its Kangaroo Route, Qatar Airways was courted by oneworld member British Airways and in early October, confirmed its entry into oneworld. Pending all necessary due diligence, Qatar is expected to join oneworld within

18 months.

In an interview with *Bloomberg*, Qatar Airways' CEO Akbar Al Baker said: "Several years ago, I have said that the future of the airline industry will somehow or the other belong to an alliance. I was never against an alliance." He described the International Aviation Group's CEO Willie Walsh as "very forward-looking".

With a touch of irony, Al Baker noted that Qatar Airways' first codeshare flights with an European carrier were with Lufthansa. "Unfortunately, their strategy was to kill competition," he said.

**CURRENT DESTINATIONS** This year, the airline added 12 new destinations including Baku, Tbilisi, Baku, Zagreb, Erbil, Baghdad, Perth, Kilimanjaro, Yangon, Ma-

puto, Belgrade and Warsaw. Significantly, Qatar Airways grew its footprint Down Under with Perth added to Melbourne – its first Australian destination launched in 2009.

**PLANNED DESTINATIONS** The airline intends to launch 15 or 16 new destinations in 2013. The Doha-Ho Chi Minh City service will be extended to Phnom Penh starting February 20, 2013. Three more destinations – Gissim, Najaf and Chicago – have also been announced for the first four months of next year. Al Baker has let on that Qatar Airways has plans for another three destinations in the US: Detroit, Atlanta and Boston.

**FLEET** As the Gulf carriers stamp their

mark on the airline industry, Qatar Airways continues with its stellar growth in both fleet and network.

The airline has a current fleet of 111 aircraft – 67 of which are widebody aircraft, including seven freighters – with an impressive tally of more than 250 aircraft on order and option. This includes a firm order for 10 Airbus A380s, the first of which will be delivered in January 2014 for deployment to airports that face severe slot restrictions. It also has an order/option for up to 80 A350s and is currently considering a further order for 20 Bombardier CSeries aircraft (with a further option for another 20).

The airline has begun to reduce the size of its fleet of Airbus A330, with Air Seychelles receiving one that will eventually





From left: Singapore Airlines' (SIA) Airbus A380-800; a Qatar Airways cabin; SIA's in-flight entertainment system; Qatar Airways' A320

for 20 A350s. It now has firm purchase or lease orders in place for 68 widebody aircraft, excluding the 20 B787 Dreamliners that will be transferred to low-cost subsidiary Scoot.

**OTHER DEVELOPMENTS** The SIA group has also grown its overall footprint with expansion by SilkAir, Tiger Airways and Scoot – the latter pair have agreed to introduce passenger and baggage interlining to tap the growing travel demand between South-east Asia, India and Australia via the Singapore hub.

SIA is also spending S\$20 million (US\$16.4 million) to upgrade its SilverKris lounges in various cities, starting with the Sydney Airport in mid-2013.

**OTHER DEVELOPMENTS** Going forward, JAL, which already has a joint business agreement with American Airlines, has inked a similar agreement with British Airways, thereby allowing it to share revenue, coordinate flight timings to maximise connection possibilities and coordinate fares.

Customers can also choose a combination of one-way segments on the airlines in a single round-trip itinerary, which are offered at unprecedented fares available for such flexibility.

In transitioning from a bankrupt airline to becoming one of the most profitable at the time of its relisting on the Tokyo Stock Exchange – a period spanning about 973 days – JAL has proven that the phoenix, or in this case, the crane, can rise from the ashes and fly proudly again.

be deployed to China.

Qatar Airways' first B787 Dreamliner has already been handed over by Boeing, but will only enter service after being fitted with in-flight connectivity at Charleston in the US. Its B787s will be the first in the world to have this facility, and these will initially be deployed to London. Further deployments will be decided depending on the aircraft's performance on the Doha-London route.

**OTHER DEVELOPMENTS** The New Doha International Airport is nearing completion and, pending successful trials, should open in 2013. Besides offering Qatar Airways a sparkling new home base, the airport will also provide it with ample room for growth.

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For the longest time, inbound travel into Myanmar existed under the shadow of the country's political struggles and international trade sanctions. As Myanmar continues to introduce political reforms resulting in the easing of sanctions in many countries, travel to the country has kicked into high gear. Airline seats and hotel rooms are now in short supply, and international airlines are lining up to restore services or launch new services to Yangon.

**CURRENT DESTINATIONS** Myanmar Airways International (MAI) commenced a Yangon-Bangkok-Singapore service on October 28. The Yangon-Kuala Lumpur service has also been increased from five-times weekly to daily, while the nonstop Yangon-Singapore

service has been increased from 10 weekly to 12 weekly, although it will revert to the former frequency from January 1, 2013.

In China, MAI currently only operates to Guangzhou, and will continue to feed traffic through this gateway.

The airline also has a thrice-weekly service from Mandalay to Bodhgaya in India, but the aircraft is deployed out of Yangon.

Although MAI has no traffic rights to launch domestic services, it recently gained permission to operate once- or twice-weekly services between Yangon and Mandalay starting November. Seats on this route can only be sold outside of Myanmar, but this is a timely infusion of capacity into Upper Myanmar during the upcoming peak winter season.

**PLANNED DESTINATIONS** In the longer term, MAI hopes to gain permission to base aircraft in Mandalay to operate direct services to Bangkok and elsewhere, such as Singapore. It is await-

ing the allocation of slots before launching thrice-weekly flights from Yangon to Hong Kong. Further expansion to South Korea in 2013 and to Japan from 2014 is being considered. Other routes in the making are Yangon-Mandalay-Gaya (thrice weekly) and Yangon-Mandalay-Bangkok (four-times weekly).

Said Ye Jhan, MAI's country manager Thailand and Cambodia: "There are many Myanmar workers in Dubai, but the airline is actively considering operating to Abu Dhabi because we do not have the strength to compete head-on with the likes of Emirates and Qatar Airways." Qatar Airways has just relaunched thrice-weekly flights between Doha and Yangon.

**FLEET** Faced with the possibility of a reduced market share as airlines clamoured to launch flights to Myanmar, MAI quickly supplemented its fleet of four owned Airbus A320 with a further two on lease from Bulgaria's BH

Airlines. Unlike seasonal leases of an A321 in the summer of 2010 and 2011, the latest leases are for a longer term and will be used to operate the year-round Yangon-Bangkok-Singapore service.

Ye Jhan revealed that MAI is considering A330 or similar-sized aircraft, with ongoing discussions with both Airbus and Boeing as it looks to operating in the Middle East.

**OTHER DEVELOPMENTS** To support MAI's expansion, managing director Si Thu spoke of the critical need to implement efficient IT systems. It is relying on its decade-long relationship with SITA to introduce new systems for passenger management (multi-channel distribution including an online booking engine, and working with codeshare and interline partner airlines), passenger processing at the airport (check-in at the counter, kiosks and via mobile devices, baggage handling and security), as well as airport and flight operations over the next three years.



Although recent political changes in Myanmar has made it the star of the Mekong region, Laos – and in particular Lao Airlines – is not keen to bask in the shadow of its larger neighbour.

**CURRENT DESTINATIONS** A year after introducing two Airbus A320s and thrice-weekly services between Vientiane and Singapore, Lao Airlines is embarking on further expansion in the last quarter of 2012. This includes ramping up the flight frequency on the Vientiane-Singapore route from thrice- to four-times weekly.

**PLANNED DESTINATIONS** A thrice-weekly Vientiane-Guangzhou service will be kicked off on November 29 using A320, while a thrice-weekly Vientiane-

Danang service using ATR72-500 will begin on December 4.

Scheduled charter flights from Seoul-Incheon (A320) and Busan (A320) will also start on December 21 and December 31 respectively.

**FLEET** In late-2012 and 2013, Lao Airlines will take delivery of two new 70-seater ATR72-600 turboprop aircraft, adding to the four ATR72-500s already in operation. The airline is progressively retiring its fleet of Chinese-made MA60 aircraft and reconfiguring them to pure freighters.

**OTHER DEVELOPMENTS** Despite not having the capacity and capability to operate to longhaul markets, Lao Airlines has not been deterred from targeting longhaul visitors. Departing in the evening, its Vientiane-bound flights from Singapore are timed to maximise longhaul feed from Europe and Australia arriving via Changi.



## Tangled alliances

It once appeared inevitable that any airline with a decent network would eventually join one of the three airline coalitions – Star Alliance, SkyTeam and oneworld. Until recently, it seemed certain that none of the major Gulf carriers saw any value in joining alliances and, to be fair, it seemed equally certain that none of the alliances welcomed them.

Qantas blamed the runaway growth of the Gulf carriers for its ailing global operations and the Australian government for granting the latter liberal rights. In September, Qantas terminated its 17-year-old agreement with fellow oneworld member British Airways (BA) and took up a decade-long alliance with Emirates.

Speculation of Qatar Airways joining oneworld soon surfaced even as CEO Akbar Al Baker continued to deny the alliance rumours. Hours before Qatar's oneworld membership was confirmed on October 8, Abu Dhabi-based Etihad Airways stole the limelight by announcing that airberlin – a new oneworld member in which it has an almost 30 per cent stake – was breaking its oneworld allegiance to ink a commercial partnership with Air France-KLM from the SkyTeam alliance instead.

In the same dignified manner that BA declared its break from Qantas as amicable, oneworld bravely sanctioned its members' flirtations with airlines outside the coalition. Indeed, this is not without precedence as oneworld member Cathay Pacific holds a stake in Air China, a Star Alliance member, while Chile's LAN from oneworld has also merged with TAM, a Brazilian carrier aligned with Star Alliance. Emirates is now in talks with American Airlines (AA), a founding oneworld member, to explore a commercial partnership of sorts.

In one fell swoop, three major Gulf carriers are now aligned with oneworld. Qatar is the only one to directly join oneworld, while Emirates and Etihad have the side-door entry through Qantas and airberlin respectively. If alliance memberships are like marriages, oneworld members appear to be particularly polygamous.

Malaysia Airlines (MAS) and SriLankan Airlines, both oneworld members designate, were looking to their pending membership in oneworld to enhance their sustainability, but now face the prospect of having to work with Qatar from within the alliance. If BA – having sponsored Qatar's entry into oneworld – were to partner the Gulf carrier on the Kangaroo Route, what is the likelihood of it returning to serve the London-Kuala Lumpur route? Similarly, the Qantas-Emirates alliance questions the likelihood of Qantas serving Kuala Lumpur since it has sponsored MAS' entry into oneworld. And if Air France-KLM partners Etihad on flights to Australia, it could potentially hurt KLM's existing cooperation with MAS on the Kuala Lumpur-Australia sectors. Could this be the reason for MAS' sudden decision to divert its Airbus A380s from the Sydney route to Paris?

Amid the flurry of airline partnerships, a oneworld member seems to embrace the sanctity of its marriage to the alliance – Japan Airlines (JAL). Thus far, it has inked significant relationships with MAS, BA and AA, all within the alliance. On the fringe, it has fewer codeshare agreements with a slew of airlines globally.

When asked by *TTG Asia* if JAL would seek commercial partnerships with a non-oneworld member, president Yoshiharu Ueki gave an emphatic "no". – **Sim Kok Chwee**



Jet Airways was in the red for five quarters in a row, but in 3Q2012 posted a net profit of US\$5 million against a net loss of US\$24 million a year ago.

**CURRENT DESTINATIONS** In March, Jet Airways boosted its connection from tier-two Indian cities, such as Raipur, Bhopal and Nagpur, as well as southern cities, including Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Chennai and Kochi.

Since September 10, Jet Airways suspended its Brussels-New York JFK service, but continues to serve the Chennai-Brussels route on a daily basis, with Brussels remaining a 'scissor hub' for its Mumbai-Brussels-Newark and New Delhi-Brussels-Toronto routes. The airline also suspended its Mumbai-Johannesburg, Chennai-Kuala Lumpur and

Chennai-Dubai services.

**PLANNED DESTINATIONS** Having been granted capacity increases, Jet Airways will add 14 weekly flights to Singapore, and seven each to Dhaka, Chittagong, Male and Dar es Salaam, the last three being new routes. The airline has also received the thumbs up for 56 new flights to the Middle East, of which 14 will be used for Kuwait.

**FLEET** The airline has 11 Airbus A330-200s, five Boeing 777-300ERs, 47 B737-800s, seven B737-700s, two B737-900s and 18 ATR72-500s. On order are 10 B787 Dreamliners, five A330-200s, four A330-300s, 46 B737-800s and five ATR72-600s

**OTHER DEVELOPMENTS** There are rumours that Jet Airways is being courted by Star Alliance over its rival Air India. – **Additional reporting by Shekhar Niyogi**



# South America heats up

Aided by growing air access, at least one country is in hot pursuit of Asians, says **Gracia Chiang**

Encouraged by closer business ties between Asia and South America and the maturing of tastes among leisure travellers in this region, Peru is looking East to tap high-growth markets.

In just the last three years, the Peruvian government inked free trade agreements with South Korea, Japan and China – significant because what usually follows is the opening of air routes, PromPeru account manager – Asian markets, Rocio Florian, told *TTG Asia*. She explained that this was the case for Korean Air, which started operating cargo flights last year and is now preparing to mount passenger flights in December via the US.

Last year, tourist arrivals from Asia to Peru climbed by 26 per cent, surpassing the growth from traditional markets such as Europe (six per cent) and the US (one per cent). Japan, in particular, jumped by 47 per cent, and has the highest expenditure per day. However, Asia still represents 3.8 per cent of overall arrivals, which stood at 2.6 million.

In the pipeline is a consumer advertising campaign in Japan, fam trips and the appointment of a PR agency in South Korea, as well as door-to-door visits to Chinese tour operators, Florian said, adding that other markets showing potential were Hong Kong and India. PromPeru will also be returning to ITB Asia next year, with a bigger contingent.

Also noting a rise in Chinese and Indians was Guru Sharma, managing director, Travel Group Peru. “Besides the lack of direct flights, visa issues remain a challenge, especially when cross-country tours are popular. Indians often combine Brazil, Argentina and Peru,” he said.

Florian shared that marketing efforts in Asia had been concentrated in Japan



With Machu Picchu as its star attraction, Peru remains a firm favourite in itineraries

thus far, where there have been initiatives such as promotion subsidies, training and roadshows. As a result, tour operators there now offer options for Peru as a mono destination, compared to only combined packages back in 2004.

“Machu Picchu is a strong icon, but gastronomy is becoming important. Lima has been declared the gastronomic capital of South America. Now people stop for at least a day in Lima,” said Florian.

When asked whether there was enough capacity to accommodate rising numbers of travellers, Florian said the rate of annual room growth in Peru was 20-25 per cent, with this year seeing the debut of

brands such as Hilton and JW Marriott.

Carol Sum, general manager (operations) of Malaysian travel agency Parlo Tours, said the entry of Middle Eastern carriers into South America over the last few years had improved connections, as they also served Kuala Lumpur frequently.

In 2010, Qatar Airways opened a service to Buenos Aires via Sao Paulo. Earlier this year, Emirates added two more South American destinations to its network: Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. Etihad Airways will also be launching Sao Paulo flights next June.

Said Sum: “More supply means lower airfares. Once a very expensive place to

visit, Malaysians can now afford to go to South America. We’re also looking at cutting the standard three to four countries in a package to one to two; that would bring down the cost a bit more.”

Country Holidays Singapore product development consultant, Andy Yeo, said besides the expansion by Middle Eastern carriers, Singapore Airlines’ new flights to Sao Paulo last year had also boosted South America’s appeal.

“Air access has improved, and people are looking for new destinations. We’re looking at starting something in Venezuela and featuring it as a new destination.”

– **Additional reporting by Liang Xinyi**

## Checking in

# Le Royal Monceau Raffles Paris



It is impossible not to fall in love with this Philippe Starck-designed hotel, which makes you feel you’ve found home. It’s a study in looking effortlessly chic. **Raini Hamdi** is charmed, beguiled and bewitched

**LOCATION** Minutes away from the famous Arc de Triomphe and Champs-Élysées.

**DESIGN** The building dates back to 1928. It closed in 2008 and re-opened in October 2010 after a complete interior transformation. The hotel or project must have inspired French designer Philippe Starck deeply, for only an inspired person could produce so charming a hotel which captures the Parisian chic completely and encapsulates the Raffles brand identity as a luxurious residence rather than hotel.

This property breaks all the rules in hotel design to effect a homely, comely atmosphere. The reception is nicely hid-

den away, for example; when you check in, they make you feel it’s wonderful to have you back, as if you’ve lived there all your life. I’m certain Starck obsessed over the design details – at every corner, on ceilings, walls, floors, there is an interesting artistic detail to look at – a Siberian knick-knack here, an Italian vase there – yet the final product appears so effortless and not at all contrived.

**ROOM** I booked a Gallery Suite of about 65m<sup>2</sup> in size, but mirror effects and traces of a personal collection – party photos on a wall, a signed acoustic guitar, framed handwritten letters, lampshades with scribbled notes on them, a scarf here, a pearl necklace there – make this room huge in personality and residential feel. I was struck by the whiteness of the room and its shine, which comes from the steel and glass world of the bathroom and that awesome bed decked out in plush, crisp, white linen. All this emanates purity and cleanliness, what makes the room feel so inviting.

Be prepared to be surprised again: my bedside table is actually a chair (every

piece of furniture has been designed by Starck). The suite has two flat-screen TVs which are hidden behind mirrors and are invisible until switched on. Genius!

**ART** Complementing the art and culture slant of the hotel are its own art gallery and an Art Concierge service which alerts guests to important art exhibitions and happenings. There’s also a bookstore with a collection of 700 books on contemporary art, design and architecture.

**F&B** All the restaurants are designer F&B outlets worth looking at even if you’re not dining in them. The Italian Il Carpaccio has walls constellated with sculptured seashells, for example, while the French restaurant, La Cuisine, recreates the atmosphere of a large family dining room.

**VERDICT** I’ve never described a hotel as being magical. This one is pure magic with its detailed and perfect execution of the design concept. Topped by the fine service Raffles is known for, be prepared to fall in love in Paris.



**Name** Le Royal Monceau Raffles Paris  
**No. of rooms and suites** 85 rooms and 64 suites  
**Rate** From 950 euros (US\$1,229)  
**Contact details**  
 Tel: (33-1) 4299-8800  
 Email: paris@raffles.com  
 Website: www.leroyalmonceau.com



# Swiss in tactical mode

New strategies target Asia-Pacific as traditional markets falter, writes **Raini Hamdi**

Switzerland Tourism, which opened a South-east Asia office in Singapore in June, is sealing partnerships with tour operators in the region to develop new itineraries targeting specific market segments.

In Singapore, for instance, it is working with STA to attract youth travel. Special itineraries for 18- to 25-year-olds are being sewn up, aimed at debunking the perception that the destination is out of reach for youths due to high costs.

Said Urs Eberhard, Switzerland Tourism's executive vice president-markets & meetings: "They (youths) don't know that Switzerland can be modestly-priced. You can travel by train, stay at youth hostels, have an outdoor adventure. They don't know that there's incredible nightlife and lots of fun in Zurich, Lausanne, Basel – look at the Zurich Street Parade (on August 11), where nearly a million people turned up to dance, to club, to party."

Apart from youths, the NTO is targeting Asian MICE groups, multi-generation family travel, seniors, premium travellers, culture lovers, train travellers and romantic/honeymoon clients.

Its tactical strategy of going after specific market segments with new itineraries arises from the need to spread out Asian arrivals beyond the usual hotspots and make them stay longer, at

a time when Switzerland is seeing massive drops from its traditional markets.

The European debt crisis wiped out some CHF470 million (US\$482 million) in income from traditional markets in the last five years. New visitors from markets like China, India, South-east Asia, South Korea, Australia, Russia and Eastern Europe brought in over CHF300 million during the period. Alas, tourists only visited must-see icons like Luzern and Interlaken, said Eberhard.

"The issue is, the new markets go to only 10 to 20 per cent of the destinations in the country, so the growth is concentrated on only a few hotspots, while the loss from the traditional markets are 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. We need to encourage second-time travellers from the 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. By doing this, we hope people will also spend more than two or three nights in Switzerland.

"We are also working with tour operators 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."

Switzerland Tourism will jointly market the new itineraries to travel agencies and consumers.

"Our approach is an integrated one, working with tour operators to create new itineraries, working with agencies so that they are educated about these itineraries and are able to sell them well, doing joint marketing activities to educate the consumers that there is more to the country than they think," said Eberhard.

South-east Asia is Switzerland's fourth booming market after China, India and Russia. Singapore is its largest South-east Asian market, accounting for some 35 per cent of the South-east Asia total arrivals, followed by Thailand (30 per cent). However, growth is fastest from Indonesia, up 46 per cent last year, Eberhard said.

"For leisure travel, Asia is growing still – 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," said Eberhard.



1080 Media

## VisitBritain in post-Olympic push

In the wake of a successful Olympic Games, the UK tourism promotion agency, VisitBritain, has begun a new phase of its four-year *GREAT Britain – You're invited* marketing campaign.

Though the Olympics attracted billions of viewers globally, the challenge now is to convert that exposure into arrivals, particularly from high spending markets like China. Christopher Rodrigues, chairman of VisitBritain, said: "We are determined to avoid the post-Games decline that has hurt so many previous major event organisers."

The post-Games push will see VisitBritain resume its £35 million (US\$56.8 million) campaign targeting 14 international cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Mumbai, New Delhi, Melbourne and Sydney.

Strategic trade partnerships will also be established in the new phase of the campaign. VisitBritain will work with British Airways on tactical promotions in China, India and Japan, and with Virgin Airlines in Australia. A further £1.2 million will be spent on partnerships with travel consultants, targeting outbound travel from China and India in particular, on a match funding basis. Each partner will invest equal sums to cover product development, advertising and marketing campaigns.

The programme is also intended to encourage tourism dispersal, as Asian travel to the UK remains very London-centric.

"Potential partners must be interested in selling Britain, have the financial capacity to match funding, and have sufficient market penetration to spread the word," said Sumathi Ramanathan, Asia manager for VisitBritain. Flight Centre and Beijing Caissa International Travel Service have already been identified as partners in Australia and China respectively.

Meanwhile, the number of BRIT Agents – certified travel consultants who understand how to sell Great Britain as a destination – has reached 1,500 in Asia, and they are expected to play an important role in driving UK-bound tourism.

In 2011, arrivals from the AMEA region grew at 14 per cent year-on-year. Yet this growth has not been replicated in the early months of 2012, with year-to-date growth registering just one per cent by end-May. Meanwhile, major markets Australia and China recorded negative annual growth through the same period, down 10 per cent and 22 per cent respectively.

Ramanathan said this was in line with the NTO's own prediction as the early months of the year were always a relatively quiet time.

"For the Australia market, total number of visits in 2011 was 1.1 million compared with 986,000 in 2010. That's 11 per cent higher than 2010. For the China market, total number of visits in 2011 was 149,000 compared with 109,000 in 2010. That's a 36 per cent increase.

"Arrivals are not a sprint but a marathon. With a healthy sustained period across the year, we remain confident that our overall 2012 forecast is on track." – **Timothy France**



Michael Fess

The mighty Pilatus and Lake Lucerne, Switzerland

# France seduces newer markets

The world's number one destination with 81.4 million international visitors last year saw Asian arrivals growing as fast as its bullet train TGV – 10.4 per cent compared with the 4.8 per cent average growth of foreign arrivals to France.

Though Europe and the Americas still form the bulk of international visitors, the Chinese are now the number one foreign customers in French department stores while the Japanese are the top visitors of major cultural sites and monuments in France, according to Atout France director-Japan, Frédéric Meyer, based in Tokyo.

Australia, India and China all saw increases of almost 24 per cent last year, while the Japan market is still in recovery following the 3/11 tsunami. In the

first five months of this year, room nights from Asia-Pacific were up 16 per cent over the same period in 2011; Japanese room nights in France rose 22.5 per cent in April and 11.7 per cent in May.

Meyer said Asia's positive economies, along with the weak Euro and increased awareness of French products, French "art of living" and French destinations, were all reasons for the strong performance.

But due to fierce competition for a slice of the Asian pie by both Asian and long-haul destinations, Atout France would continue to direct more marketing efforts in the region rather than simply let popularity do the job.

Asia-Pacific delegates, for example, comprised the largest delegation (21 per cent) at the Rendez-vous en France Travel

showcase in Paris in late March, the largest ever Asian representation at the show.

"Asia has the potential to grow further, as Asian visitors could visit France in all seasons," said Meyer. "China, India, Japan, (South) Korea and Australia are all current key markets, while South-east Asian countries, particularly Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia, are markets with real potential. They should be in the Asian delegation of next year's edition of Rendez-vous en France Travel showcase in Toulouse.

"Furthermore, France is proud to welcome the Ryder Cup for the first time in 2018. Many Asian players will join the competition and this will be great promotional support for our destination, as golfing is very popular in most Asian countries." – **Raini Hamdi**





Resorts World Sentosa's Marine Life Park claims to be the world's largest oceanarium

Resorts World Sentosa

# Singapore stays afloat

New cruise centre and highly anticipated attractions make a splash, reports **Linda Haden**

**Arrivals** Tourism in the city-state remains robust, with visitor arrivals rising 11.4 per cent between January and June, according to latest figures available from the Singapore Tourism Board (STB). China posted the largest jump of the top 20 source markets during this period, increasing by 29.1 per cent, followed by Taiwan at 27.2 per cent. Three of the top 20 source markets weakened – Thailand (1.8 per cent), the Philippines (0.8 per cent) and Hong Kong (three per cent).

Tourism receipts in 1Q2012 grew by eight per cent to an estimated S\$5.8 billion (US\$4.7 billion). Indonesia, China and India were the biggest spenders. China and India also posted the biggest growth compared to the same quarter last year. While receipts in China were bolstered by an upswing in leisure traffic, India's performance was fuelled by growth in higher-spending business traffic.

Opening next month are long-awaited attractions such as River Safari's Giant Panda Forest and Resorts World Sentosa's Marine Life Park, which are both expected to continue to drive arrivals to Singapore in 2013.

**Hotels** The 240-key W Singapore Sentosa Cove opened its doors on September 16, bringing the total number of hotels on Sentosa to 14. Mövenpick Heritage Hotel Sentosa is planning to open its new 63-suite heritage wing on December 1. Sentosa Leisure Group is also accepting bids for a potential 550-room heritage hotel site situated between Capella and Amara Sanctuary Resort Sentosa.

According to STB, figures for January to August highlight that ARR rose 8.1 per cent year-on-year to hit S\$258.50. AOR, on the other hand, reached 87 per cent, on par with 2011.

Singapore's room supply is set to grow by 11.8 per cent between 2012 and 2014, according to Horwath HTL. By end-2014, the city-state will have 55,587 rooms, 65 per cent of which will be mid-tier and economy.

Pointing out that this year's occupancy and rates were high, Robert McIntosh, executive director Asia Pacific, CBRE Hotels, said: "Hoteliers will face more resistance to rate hikes next year."

**Access** A slew of airlines commenced new flights to



"Singapore hotels will be minimally impacted by the economic crisis. I expect healthy occupancies and moderate rate growth in 2013."

**Scott Swank**  
General manager  
Pan Pacific Singapore

and from Singapore this year.

Firefly began four-times weekly flights to Kota Bharu on August 16, while low-cost airline Scoot launched four-weekly flights to Tianjin on August 23, on the heels of its Bangkok service in July. The carrier also introduced thrice-weekly flights to Taipei in September.

Meanwhile, Drukair's inaugural service connecting Singapore to Bhutan's city of Paro began operating on September 5.

Qantas' new alliance with Emirates will axe Singapore as a stopover on the Kangaroo Route from next April. Nonetheless, Qantas will continue to fly between Singapore and five Australian cities, and the carrier is due to up capacity on flights heading out of Australia via Singapore to other Asian locales.

Scoot and Tiger Airways signed an agreement on October 1, allowing each carrier to market joint itineraries between Phuket, Ho Chi Minh City and Kuala Lumpur (served by Tiger), and Sydney and Gold Coast (served by Scoot).

Singapore Changi Airport handled 4.3 million passenger movements in August, a 10.9 per cent rise compared to the same period in 2011.

**Cruises** Last month's official opening of the Marina Bay Cruise Centre Singapore doubled the city-state's berth capacity, easing the crunch at Singapore Cruise Centre's international passenger terminal at Harbourfront.

Melvin Vu, CEO of terminal operator SATS-Creuers, expects to receive 75 ship calls, with about 200,000 visitors passing through in the first year. Singapore welcomed 394 ship calls and 942,000 in passenger throughput in 2011. Liners like Princess Cruises' *Diamond Princess* and Royal Caribbean International's *Voyager of the Seas* were among the first to dock, bringing roughly over 6,000 pax.

Meanwhile, Costa Cruises is partnering STB and Changi Airport Group to nurture the fly-cruise market here, with plans to launch marketing initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region.

Gianni Onorato, president, Costa Cruises, said a key issue limiting growth in Asia's cruise sector was a lack of awareness. "This has to be addressed by engaging actively with travel consultants who can help us reach potential passengers, especially first-timers," he said.





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# Hotels taking root outside the city

Onslaught of new rooms in the near term is expected to put a halt to rapid rate growth. By **Linda Haden**

Hotel supply outside central Singapore is expanding at a brisk pace, spurred by the Urban Redevelopment Authority's (URA) masterplan to build leisure zones, business parks and industrial areas to the east and west of the central business district (CBD).

Data drawn from Horwath HTL highlights that three city fringe hotels, totalling 570 rooms, came onstream in areas outside the CBD as of July. Comparatively, five hotels are expected to open in outlying districts next year, amounting to an additional 1,346 rooms, including Ramada Singapore at Zhongshan Park, Days Hotel Singapore at Zhongshan Park, One Farrer Hotel & Spa, Aqueen Hotel Paya Lebar and Fairy Point Hill Changi. A further 260 rooms are expected to open outside the CBD in 2014.

In line with its decentralisation strategy, three land parcels earmarked for hotel development were released by the URA in the first half of the year. One site is situated within Jurong Lake, an upcoming mixed-use commercial and leisure precinct in the west; another sits in the



Opening in Zhongshan Park are Ramada (left) and Days Hotel (right)

historical district of East Coast; and finally, another in the Rangoon/Farrer Park area.

Tony Cousens, general manager, Ramada and Days Hotels Singapore at Zhongshan Park, believes that there has long been a need for hotels outside the city centre.

Wyndham's twin openings, for instance, will change the whole landscape of the Balestier area, breathing new life to this sleepy neighbourhood by helping to spur the development of other tourist and lifestyle attractions in the vicinity, while

offering visitors more choice in economy and mid-upscale accommodation, he said.

Hoteliers and industry analysts felt that the growth in hotels in outlying districts would not dent demand for existing properties within the CBD in the longer term.

Cousens explained: "I am optimistic that there will be sufficient demand to fill the additional room supply expected in and out of the CBD up to 2015, particularly for three- and four-star properties where there's currently a shortfall." He added

that the additional room supply would cause a dip in rate growth next year, but this could accelerate once again in 2015 if tourism arrivals continue to swell.

However, Helen Goh, director of marketing (inbound), Vacation DMC Singapore, said: "Despite the threat of additional supply in the near term, the contract rates hotels have offered us for 2013 have increased by as much as 20 per cent...Even after factoring promotions and discounts, room rates in Singapore will still remain high in 2013 and 2014 compared to other neighbouring destinations."

Meanwhile, the government's push to develop outlying districts into tourism and business zones has given way to hybrid properties that marry both the hotel and serviced residence concepts. Capri by Frasers and Park Avenue Rochester are examples.

"The concept of a hotel residence came about as we noticed a trend in corporate travellers making fewer trips or staying for extended periods of time on a single trip," said Jastina Balen, director group branding and com-

munications, Frasers Hospitality.

She added: "We chose to locate our very first Capri outside the city at Changi Business Park as there is an ample number of local companies and MNCs within the vicinity to generate sufficient demand to make our concept financially viable. In addition, we can leverage on local employees in the area to beef up our F&B takings. Occupancy now stands at about 80 per cent, and we believe this concept holds a lot of potential in Singapore due to its sheer uniqueness."

Bidding wars for hotel land parcels outside of the city centre are expected to intensify, according to industry observers, as land-scarce Singapore is still viewed as a stable and lucrative market for hotel investments.

"Singapore's sound economic fundamentals relative to neighbouring destinations ensures that it remains a blue-chip investment for hotel developers. Both local and international players will be vying for the plots that URA releases outside the city centre," said Robert Hecker, managing director, Horwath HTL Asia-Pacific.

## Checking in



## Landmark Village Hotel



The centrally located hotel offers an accessible base for exploring some of Singapore's most storied quarters, **Liang Xinyi** discovers

**LOCATION** Nestled on Victoria Street just beside Raffles Hospital, Landmark Village Hotel is located within walking distance from Bugis MRT Station and popular shopping malls such as Bugis Junction and Bugis+. Several historic districts lie in close proximity: just across the hotel, the atmospheric Kampong Glam enclave is dotted with Middle Eastern restaurants, *hookah* (water pipe) cafes and the golden-domed Sultan Mosque, while a 10-minute walk in the other direction will lead to Waterloo Street and Little India. Its proximity to the East Coast Parkway expressway means that Changi Airport can be reached within 20

minutes by cab.

**ROOMS** I stayed in a newly renovated 32m<sup>2</sup> Premier Room, which was part of the hotel's recent S\$2.8 million (US\$2.3 million) refurbishment efforts. The airy room exuded a contemporary feel with its brown-and-beige hues, Moorish-style carpet and wallpaper, and a bathroom equipped with a rain shower, a refreshing contrast from the more dated look in the lobby and hotel exterior. A 40-inch LCD TV, a workstation and a recliner armchair occupy one side of the room near the window, leaving plenty of walking space in the wooden-floor room. The bed was huge and comfortable, while in-room amenities such as a hair dryer and an iron were clearly displayed.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> floor, my room commanded a good panoramic view of the swimming pool below, the clay-tiled shophouses along Arab Street and gleaming skyscrapers nearby, while the Sin-

gapore Flyer and the sea could be spotted in the distance.

Half of the 200 32m<sup>2</sup> Superior/Deluxe Rooms will be upgraded to the new Premier Rooms, but the property also has the 32m<sup>2</sup> Club Room and the 64m<sup>2</sup> Executive Club Suite, both of which come with all Executive Lounge benefits like complimentary coffee and tea, calls and in-lounge breakfast.

**F&B** Of the hotel's three F&B outlets, two are stalwarts on the local dining scene. Mooi Chin Place, whose culinary reputation harks back to the 1930s, is famed for Hainanese delights such as pork chop, chicken rice and mutton soup.

Overlooking the pool, Riverwalk Tandoor beams the spotlight on northern and southern Indian cuisine, serving up all-time favourites like tandoori prawns and *murgh malai kebab* (marinated chicken skewer).

Offering a good selection of

beers and cocktails, the poolside Shades is a cosy al fresco spot to wind down after a day of sightseeing or business meetings.

**FACILITIES** The gym and the outdoor pool on the fifth floor are venues for relaxation, while the poolside area can also function as an events venue – the 500m<sup>2</sup> upper deck can host 200 guests and the 400m<sup>2</sup> lower deck can host 300 guests.

For small- to medium-sized meetings, the fifth-floor Galaxy Room can accommodate up to 170 guests in theatre style within its 114m<sup>2</sup> space. On the sixth floor, both Landmark 1 and 2 – each measuring 102m<sup>2</sup> – can accommodate up to 120 guests in theatre style.

The third-floor lobby stocks plenty of pamphlets and brochures containing information on the Kampong Glam neighbourhood, which make handy guides for tourists eager to check out points of interest.

**SERVICE** As some renovations were still ongoing on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor during my stay (they will be complete by 1Q2013), there was

**Name** Landmark Village Hotel

**No. of rooms** 393

**Rate** From S\$200 (US\$163) per night for a Premier Room

**Contact details**

Tel: (65) 6297-2828

Email: info.landmarkvillage@stayvillage.com

Website: www.stayfareast.com

a note from the general manager notifying guests about possible noises during the day, but I did not encounter any inconvenience. When I could not log on to the in-room Wi-Fi with the access code given, the problem was quickly resolved with a call to the reception. Later that evening, I also asked for a bottle of wine to be opened, and the uncorked bottle was returned to us a swift five minutes later. At breakfast, the staff was quick to replenish food items on the buffet table.

**VERDICT** The hotel affords a value-for-money stay in a central location with easy access to culturally rich districts of Singapore. The wide selection of halal dining outlets in the vicinity also make it a suitable choice for Muslim travellers.



Checking in

Pan Pacific Singapore

 A long-established landmark in Singapore's Marina Bay unveils a brand new look and feel to **Linda Haden**

**LOCATION** The Pan Pacific welcomed guests to its refreshed rooms, lobby and dining facilities in September after an extensive S\$80 million (US\$65.5 million) five-month makeover. Located in the vibrant Marina Bay district, which lies approximately 15 minutes away by cab from the airport, this landmark hotel has been an indelible part of the Singapore skyline since it was completed in 1986.

**ROOMS** All rooms in the basic-tier Deluxe category (42m<sup>2</sup>) were given a cursory facelift and are now furnished in a contemporary style, while the modern mid-tier Panoramic Rooms (42m<sup>2</sup>) and Harbour Studios (46m<sup>2</sup>), found only beyond the 22<sup>nd</sup> floor, were subjected to a bold makeover and now fea-

ture dark accents of brown and grey instead of neutral shades. All rooms and suites have been equipped with IP televisions. The Harbour Studio I was allocated afforded panoramic vistas of Marina Bay.

Unlike other rooms, the Studio did not have a balcony as this had been converted to house a large desk and a bar, stocked with a minibar and tea- and coffee-making facilities.

A massive bathtub sat at one end of the spacious bathroom, which was tiled in white marble, while the shower and toilet were housed in separate stalls. Hansgrohe fittings gave the bathroom an opulent finish.

Light streamed into the bathroom from the bedroom through a glass panel, which could be curtained off with an automatic blind for added privacy.

**F&B** Three restaurants are perched on the third floor, including the renowned Cantonese restaurant Hai Tien Lo, which was moved from the 38<sup>th</sup> floor; The Edge, a brand new interac-



Pan Pacific Singapore

tive dining space featuring seven open kitchens offering Asian and Western cuisine; and Rang Mahal, the hotel's long-serving tenant that serves Indian delicacies in a fine dining setting. Atrium, situated in the revitalised lobby, boasts an extensive drinks list and a 22m bar. The deli, Pacific Marketplace, is another new offering on the ground floor. Keyaki, on the fourth floor, is an authentic Japanese restaurant.

**FACILITIES** For an additional S\$50-120 (US\$41-98), Harbour Studio and Panoramic Room guests will be able to access the newly installed Pacific Club on

the 38<sup>th</sup> floor. Offering spectacular views of Marina Bay and the South China Sea, the club floor features private rooms and offers privileges such as champagne breakfasts and refreshments. For leisure, guests can head to St Gregory Spa, take a dip in the swimming pool or work out in the state-of-the-art gym.

The hotel has 27 meeting rooms and two function spaces, totalling 2,970m<sup>2</sup>.

**SERVICE** Check-in was carried out swiftly by a staff member wielding a tablet as I sat in one of the pod-like seats in the lobby. Two jars filled with cookies

Name	Pan Pacific Singapore
No. of rooms	790
Rate	From S\$330+++ (US\$270) for a Deluxe Room
Contact details	Tel: (65) 6336-1861 Email: singapore@panpacific.com Website: www.panpacific.com

and chocolates were delivered shortly after I entered my room. Staff were courteous but discreet, going about their duties in a quiet, professional manner.

**VERDICT** A functional hotel with an excellent range of F&B and leisure facilities that make for a comfortable stay.

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Test drive

Port of Lost Wonders

 **Linda Haden** says ahoy to Sentosa's Port of Lost Wonders, an outdoor play area for the very young and young at heart

**WHY** Port of Lost Wonders (POLW), which opened in April, is a milestone project for the Sentosa Development Corporation, which is trying to make the island more family-friendly. Touted as an outdoor children's club, POLW, which spans 9,000m<sup>2</sup>, is situated along Palawan Beach and designed for children aged two to 12. The attraction, which holds a maximum of 750 people at any one time, gives parents a well-deserved break as their off-spring play within a secure setting.

**WHAT** Shrieks of laughter rang in the air as I approached the front gates. A tent housing a makeshift stage was hoisted close to the main entrance. Here, children and grown-ups were treated to entertaining skits and a wildlife show.

Right next to the stage was a little garden where children got their hands dirty potting seedlings.

Adults and children alike gravitated towards the centre, enthralled by the thrills and delights offered by the pirate ship-themed splash zone.

The foam pool proved to be another popular distraction, with children scrambling over one another to get in.

Parents sat at picnic tables lined along the periphery of the pirate ship or within Port Belly, the only restaurant in POLW. The 40-seater facility serves a delectable array of Western snacks and dishes. Picnic baskets can also be purchased if desired.

Linda Haden

Name	Port of Lost Wonders, Sentosa
Rates	S\$8 (US\$6.50) for weekdays and S\$15 for weekends per child. Accompanying adults enter for free.
Opening hours	10.00 to 18.30 daily
Contact details	Email: polw@sentosa.com.sg Website: www.polw.com.sg

Sun worshippers will be happy to know that sunbeds for two are available. Mums and dads will be able to partake in a leisurely picnic or tête-à-tête, as they sink into these comfortable beds, overlooked by palm trees.

For some indoor fun, the air-conditioned Play Den is where little ones can participate in arts and crafts and storytelling sessions.

**HOW** POLW is ideal for families staying at hotels without childminding facilities. Birthday packages, including invitation cards, decorations and catering for up to 20 children, cost between S\$799 (US\$653) and S\$1,300.

**VERDICT** An excellent option for families who love the outdoors. However, it can get extremely crowded, especially on weekends.





To many years of great partnership ahead! From left: Sharma Tourist Development Consultancy's Nilesch Sharma, Sumira Mathur, Madhya Pradesh Tourism's Vivek Mathur, M.P.State Tourism Development Corporation Ltd.'s Mohan Yadav and Seema Yadav (far right), and TTG Asia Media's Darren Ng.



Boogieing the night away are Amur Voyage's Diakova Elena (left) and Au Service De L'Evenement's Serge Tapia.



Travelife's Angelica Bayona (left) and Transhotel's Bert Goethals.



Hamming it up for the camera together are, from left, Resorts World Sentosa Singapore's Asogan Jaganathan, Discover Holidays (Asia)'s Rodney Yew, Unique Luxury Hotels' Dhammaras B. Kasem, and Anytime Hotels' Sanjay Hakhu and Rishi Budhadev.



From left: Ngong Ping 360's Angela Sue, Dragon Trail Interactive's Jens Thraenhart, PATA's William Calderwood, TTG Asia Media's Darren Ng, PATA's Ben Montgomery and Lac Hong Voyages's Robert Tan.



From left: Carpediem Association's Elena Diana Archetti, Hotel4U.com's Ed Mestre, Happy Days Tunisia's Walid Hnid, and Communications & Training's Gianna Brunet having a blast.



Hyatt Hotel and Casino Manila's General Manager Richard Simmons (right) and his brother, Mark.



From left: Hong Kong Tourism Board's Yeeman Lee and Ellen Wong, Neptune Travel's CP Sharma, and Incheon Airport's Kwang-Hee Yang and Hee-Young Cho.



Imperial Palace Waterpark Resort & Spa Cebu Philippines' Jan Tiongson, Kuta Cemerlang Bali Jaya Tours' Al Purwa, Hyatt Hotel and Casino Manila's Christine Pelagio and Bem Damoslog share a drink.



Toasting good times together are (from left) Regency Tour's Neeraj Rustagi, Anytime Hotels' Sanjay Hakhu, Engee Holidays' Vineet Gopal, Jetair Tours' Harleen Kaur, Magical Holidays' Reena Chopra, Rave Tours & Travels' Rajat Sawhney, UBM India's Pallavi Mehra, and Guarav Travels' Rajeev Sabharwal.



From left: Travelport's Michael Yates, Silver Needle Hospitality's Mark Simmons, TTG Travel Trade Publishing's Michael Chow and Katherine Ng (far right), and Hyatt Hotel and Casino Manila's Richard Simmons.



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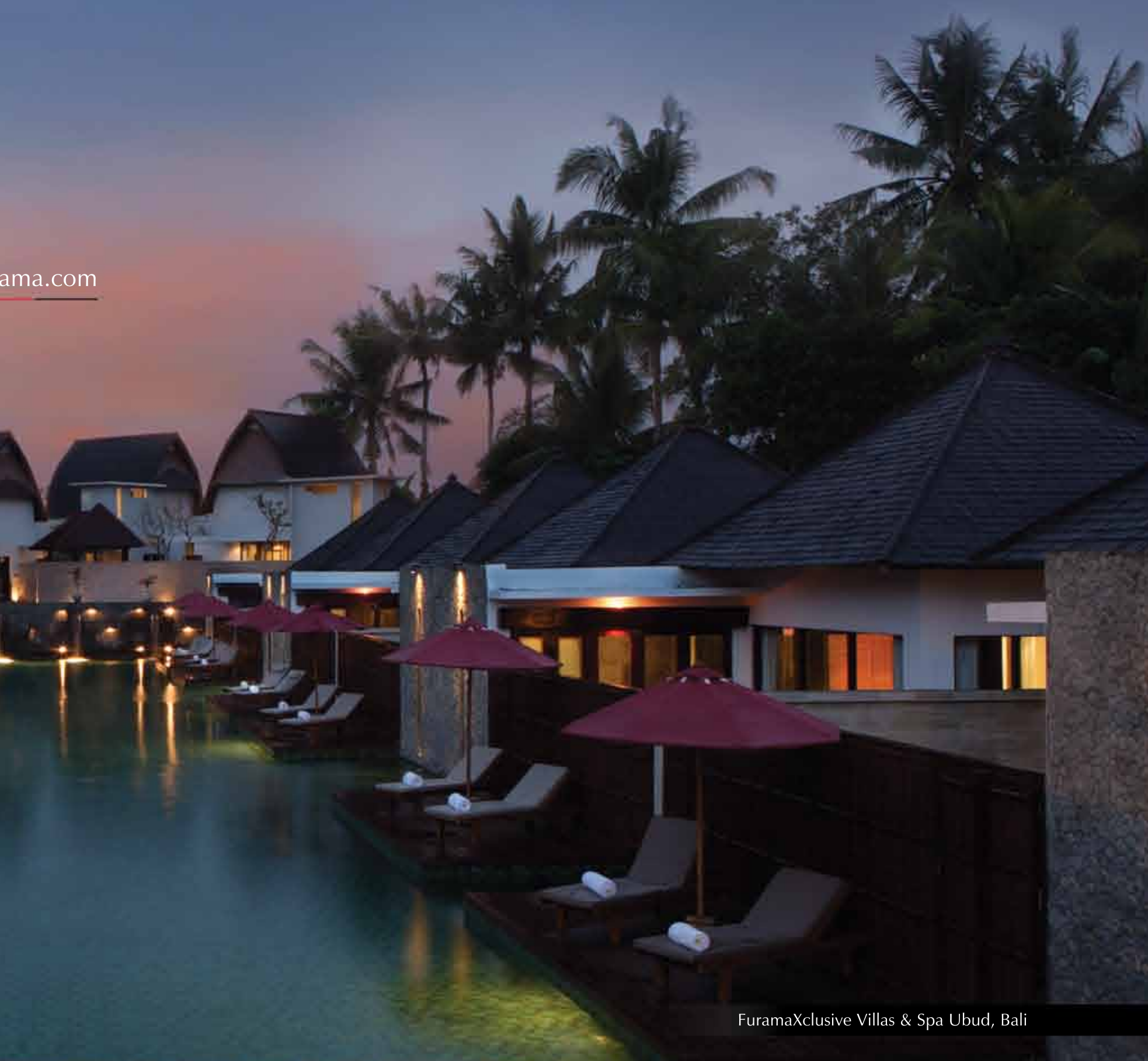


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