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No. 1703/March 28 – April 10, 2014



# Unhappy endings

**TTG ASIA REPORTERS** When hotel management changes hands acrimoniously, tour operators are left to pick up the pieces.

Clients are owed an explanation, and the reassurance that what they booked is what they will get, even though the brand has changed and a new management may mean different styles and standards. Marketing collaterals have to be amended, relationship with the new management rebuilt all over again.

In the worst-case scenario, the tour operator-hotel ties are simply severed. David Kevan, partner, Chic Locations UK, recalled years ago being advised by a well-known brand in Hong Kong on December 28 that the owner had brought in a new management/GM and the rate would increase effective January 1, take it or leave it. "As we had several clients arriving in the first two weeks of January, we had no option but to accept, but it left a sour taste, both professionally and financially," said Kevan. "We absorbed the cost but moved clients to other hotels from February onwards as we no longer had confidence

in the new management."

Last year saw a string of break-up announces in Asia, including Mandarin Oriental Dhara Devi, Chiang Mai, Le Méridien Khao Lak, Hilton Iru Fushi, Maldives, Shangri-La Hotel, Mumbai and, perhaps the most bitter of this lot, the takeover of The Chedi, Chiang Mai and its rebranding to Anantara.

"The change at Dhara Dhevi (now managed by the owner) was a concern for many of our agencies as it's an expensive hotel and clients wanted to be confident it would be managed to the same level," said Hamish Keith, COO and co-owner, Exotissimo Thailand. In the case of Chedi, the agencies seemed less concerned as Anantara is a strong brand, he said.

Roger Haumueller, managing director, Asian Trails Thailand, said in many cases, upmarket clients are worried when a well-known brand becomes a local brand, even though there are locally managed hotels that do an outstanding job, he said.

— Read the full analysis on page 3


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# Same but different

As it turns sweet 16 this year, Frasers Hospitality is now dipping its toes into hotels. CEO Choe Peng Sum tells **Gracia Chiang** how the serviced residence operator is moving forward following a high-profile acquisition by Thailand's TCC Group — see page 9



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# Freer flow of labour

Will talent mobility within ASEAN bring benefits? By **Mimi Hudoyo**

**I**n tandem with the formation of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015, the tourism sector is on track to implement the ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professionals (MRA-TP) by the end of next year.

Conceived to facilitate the mobility of employment for skilled tourism labour within the region, the MRA-TP allows qualified tourism professionals from ASEAN member states to apply for jobs in other ASEAN member countries.

## Setting up standards

Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy's Resource Development Agency chairman, I Gede Pitana, explained that member countries agreed to certify professionals using ASEAN toolboxes (training manuals) when the MRA-TP was signed in 2009.

However, of six identified labour divisions, only the training toolbox for housekeeping has been completed and its master assessors and master trainers trained last year. Tool boxes for front office, F&B, food production, tour operators and travel agencies are due to be finalised this year.

"If we waited for all the toolboxes to be ready to start certifying, it would have been unlikely that we would achieve the targets set for 2015, therefore, a second mechanism was set up," said Pitana.

"The ASEAN Tourism Professional Monitoring Committee (ATPMC) then came up with the idea of establishing a regional secretariat for ASEAN tourism professionals, which is a pool of master trainers and master assessors," he added.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Tourism Ministers Meeting in Kuching in January, the ministers adopted the terms of reference for the establishment of a regional secretariat in Indonesia to facilitate the implementation of the MRA-TP in 2015.

As each member country has developed and applied its own competency standard, certificates issued by individual countries will be assessed against the ASEAN standard.

Other new training projects and activities this year include developing the ASEAN Tourism Professional Registration System, training ASEAN master trainers and master assessors for front office and F&B services as well as the pilot project for housekeeping under the MRA.

## Restrictions apply

Although the MRA-TP seeks to foster "free movement", job seekers cannot simply pick an open-

ing in another country and apply for it.

Souhn Manivong, director general of tourism development department at Laos' Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism – who also represents Laos as the chair of ATPMC – said: "The qualified talents need to register themselves with the ASEAN Professional Registration System, and companies in the member countries who need certain talents can look at the list and invite (candidates).

"So the movement of professionals is by invitation," he said, adding that once the match is made, the rules and regulations of the host country apply.

Try Chhiv, deputy director general of tourism at Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism and secretariat director at the Na-

undersecretary for tourism planning and promotions at Philippines' Department of Tourism, an average of 25,000 Filipinos graduate from hospitality and tourism-related programmes each year, enough to fill the country's growing need for talents.

However, Dennis Law, former managing director of Star Holiday Mart Singapore and now executive officer and general manager of global inbound business, JTB Asia-Pacific, foresees significant movements of labour, especially from less developed economies, resulting in a loss of skilled manpower for some countries.

Singapore is likely to attract "all brains", Law said, adding that few Singaporeans want to work in the service industry. However, this might put a strain on the country's infrastructure and cre-



tional Committee for Tourism Professionals, added: "(ASEAN) applies a matching system, so not everyone can just come and work in Cambodia. On the other hand, we also have our own laws (limiting) the number of foreign workers – this will balance domestic and regional manpower."

Souhn estimates some 2,000 ASEAN tourism professionals will possess ASEAN-recognised certificates by the end of 2015.

## Job fight or flight?

The MRA will bring both pros and cons to a country, noted deputy director of department of international cooperation & ASEAN, Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism, Hoy Phireak. "It is good because we need to fill the gaps (in the country), and (Cambodians) can also get regional exposure and come back to share their experience," he said.

Aung Myat Kyaw, chairman of the Union of Myanmar Travel Association, agreed: "Some are concerned that job opportunities will be taken by foreigners, but (others) see the entry of foreign professionals as a chance to learn the expertise of others."

According to Daniel Corpuz,

ate social problems, he opined.

More concerned about the readiness of the Indonesian workforce, Indonesia Hotel and Restaurant Association chairman, Yanti Sukamdani, said: "On one hand, I will be happy to see Indonesian talents getting a job in other countries as it will lift the image of the country.

"On the other hand, we will see competition at home. We see more and more international investment coming, and it is natural that (foreign companies) want to bring in their talents to ensure business is running (well) and profitably," she added.

Rakyat Travel Malaysia's general manager, Adam Kamal, pointed out that not all companies will employ foreigners. "It will depend on whether (companies) need an expertise that cannot be found locally, and they also need to consider the remuneration for foreigners," he said.

Overseas talents are not necessarily more expensive than hiring locals though, Yanti commented. "The Indonesian labour unions keep asking for an increase in regional minimum wages. If competent foreign workers are more economical, can the Indonesian talents compete with them?"

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# Caught in a break-up

More disputes between hotel owners and operators are likely. **Raini Hamdi** finds out why and the impact on tour operators

*\*Additional reporting by Paige Lee Pei Qi and S Puvaneswary*

One of the most common causes of hotel break-ups is sub-par performance, according to people close to the matter.

But this begs the question, what is sub-par performance?

Sometimes it is outright incapable management, where the hotel is performing at levels below what its competitive set is able to achieve, making the owner see red. But at other times, it can be downright relative: unsatisfied owners who think the hotel could perform better even if the management already is producing results.

And when markets become challenging due to an oversupply or unforeseen crises, tensions run high, particularly if an owner is in financial difficulty. Disputes then arise between owner and operator on how best to address the issue.

"In Asia, it is more common for business groups to have full control over their businesses and the contracting out of management to another party is not well understood or accepted. It fact, generally in Asia, expertise is not well-respected without 'skin in the game'," said Mark Edleson, president, Alila Hotels & Resorts.

"(Therefore), it is important during the contract negotiation to go over the major points of control as well as the financial issues to try to ensure a full understanding by the developer/owner of the relationship being entered into. Even then, it is not certain that they will be well internalised or respected."

Robert Hecker, managing director of Horwath HTL Asia-Pacific, said this management/alignment of expectations between the two parties is "definitely not always done properly", causing issues to arise. "In some cases, it's what the operator expects from the owner, not just what the owner expects from the operator," he said.

Then, some marriages are just wrong to begin with. In this, Giovanni Angelini, hospitality consultant, noted that most hotel operators, in their eagerness to expand, do not do proper feasibility studies, including

thorough market analysis, background check of the owner and expectations of the partnership.

"The drive to expand is so strong," said Angelini. "ROI is dropping in most areas, except Hong Kong and Singapore, and some owners are facing financial difficulties. The blame then goes to the operator who in most cases has promised too much in order to get the contract but cannot produce the numbers."

Kevin Hall, managing director of Questus Hospitality Consultants Thailand, which represents a string of owners, said some chains are over-stretched in certain markets, causing revenue to be cannibalised and less experienced and qualified managers hired at hotel level. Others, new to certain markets, over-estimate their knowledge/capability to manage the hotel in those markets.

He added: "Owners are also



**"Owners are also objecting to ever-increasing central services charges and forced purchases (by hotel chains) under the guise of brand standards."**

**Kevin Hall**, managing director, Questus Hospitality Consultants Thailand

objecting to ever-increasing central services charges and forced purchases under the guise of brand standards.

"They are objecting to loss of control over their assets and their employees."

## More break-ups expected

Graeme Dickson, partner at Baker & McKenzie, said he is not seeing rising disputes in Asia currently. Horwath's Hecker also said the recent spate of break-ups is not indicative of a trend.

"Sometimes you see increased activity of such disenchantments when market conditions become challenging or when expectations may be unrealistic or unaligned. I supposed when such instances hit the press, it may also encourage those with simmering disenchantments to finally take



**Edleson: More likely in Thailand**

steps, so these spurts of activity might appear to be a trend, but are really just cycles of occurrences," he said.

Going forward, however, several consultants believed unhappy endings will be a trend, specially when they look at the hotel landscape today.

Said Bill Barnett, managing director of C9 Hotelworks: "There is such a rise globally of hotel brands, that disputes become inevitable. Tack on nearly a decade now of the meteoric rise of new-build properties, so hotel



**Angelini: No proper checks made**

will see changes of hotel operators will be China, as business in general is weak due to overbuilding and owners are hunting for better deals, or decide to run their own properties."

Alila's Edleson said: "Our experience is that it is more likely to occur in Thailand than in other destinations."

Asked if the legal/regulatory framework, especially in tertiary markets in Asia, is viable for owner-operator relationship, Edleson said: "The legal framework in Asia generally favours the 'home' party. This generally means the international operator is disadvantaged. As such, it is probably a good idea to avoid litigation as a solution. In most cases, only the very largest of management companies are financially able to defend themselves in cases of premature break-ups."

Hecker noted that particular legal/regulatory environments could indeed "influence where and the frequency of such occurrences (i.e. where it is easier to accomplish)".

## Brand importance

So tour operators may well brace themselves for more hotel break-ups.

Asked how their clients react when they slept the night in, say, a Chedi or Setai one night and woke up to an Anantara or a self-managed hotel the next, most tour operators said clients do not really care – provided the incoming brand is of equal status and quality, facilities and pricing remain the same. The exception is the extremely loyal clientele of brands, such as Amanresorts or Four Seasons junkies.

Said Chic Locations' Kevan: "When we advise clients of the change, the first thing they want is an assurance on the pricing, facilities and the general style of



**Hecker: Misaligned expectations**

the resort, which in 90 per cent of the cases will remain at least in the first year."

For tour operators, that's the issue – the uncertainty in the long run if the hotel or resort will remain the same, and the terms just as good, especially if the new management is an unknown.

"If the hotel is taken over by an unfamiliar brand or a weaker brand, we would usually adopt a wait-and-see approach before we support the new brand," said Country Holidays Singapore general manager, Jess Yap.

Ganneesh Ramaa, manager, Luxury Tours Malaysia, recalled that when The Datai, Langkawi was taken over by Archipelago Hotels & Resorts in July 2011, the short-term impact was minimal as the new management honoured the terms and clients of the unique beach resort in the heart of a tropical rainforest didn't care who was managing it. However, said Ramaa: "We suffered when getting new bookings. Our overseas wholesalers had never heard of Archipelago and the terms became unfavourable. For example, we didn't get as many room allotments and room rates were not as competitive as before."

"As the hotel was not supportive, we didn't support them in return."

As it turned out, Destination Resorts & Hotels (DRH), which bought The Datai, disbanded Archipelago in 2012 and the resort is back on its feet under general manager Anthony Sebastian, who is also DRH's SVP hotel management overseeing the expansion of Datai Hotels & Resorts, two properties of which are opening in Desaru Coast.

It may be a happy ending in the case of The Datai. For others, who knows how the chapter will unfold after a separation?





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Hot Deals



The Garden Hotel, Guangzhou is offering an Early-Bird Special for the spring edition of the 115<sup>th</sup> Canton Fair,

with a 64m<sup>2</sup> deluxe room priced at RMB2,388 (US\$386) per room night for certain dates from April to May, inclusive of one buffet breakfast; The Ascott is offering a minimum of 30 per cent off best flexible rates for online members for stays until December 31



Hot Moves

Sean Choo Shyang Lin becomes general manager of Sunway Lagoon Theme Park; Justin Guo is appointed area general manager, China and general manager of Pan Pacific Suzhou, Pan Pacific Hotels Group; Oriol Montal (above) is now general manager at JW Marriott Phuket Resort & Spa

In Pictures



Conrad Bali's general manager Jean-Sebastian Kling (right) and his team celebrating the hotel's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary earlier this month. Follow us on [instagram.com/ttgasia](https://www.instagram.com/ttgasia) for more updates

Painful lessons from MH370

As I write this, it is assumed that Malaysia Airlines' (MAS) missing plane has gone down in the southern Indian ocean. However, traces of the jet have yet to be found, and the why and how linger after two long weeks.

While the hunt has been described as searching for a needle in a haystack, the Boeing 777-200ER is, after all, a modern flying machine measuring some 64m in length and 61m in wingspan.

I'm no aviation expert, but it's baffling that in this day and age we can locate our mobile phones with the help of an app but not a plane outfitted with advanced technology.

Clearly I'm not the only one scratching my head over this. Airline chiefs have been reported as sharing the same surprise.

The mystery of MH370 has thrown up many questions, ranging from airline IT and border security to corporate travel policy.

1. Will this cause airlines to relook their systems? In a *Bloomberg* report, IATA CEO, Tony Tyler, said this incident should prompt the industry to examine the introduction of real-time data transmission so that aircraft can be continually tracked. There have also been calls to upload black box data to the cloud. While it's great that airlines have been looking at ways to cater to consumers' connectivity needs in the cabins, it seems they also urgently need to plug technology gaps in the cockpit.

2. Will employers emphasise duty of care and ensure stricter policy compliance? The potential loss of 20 key Freescale Semiconductor employees onboard has made corporate travel managers sit up, with many vowing to review their own booking processes. At TTG Asia Media, we too took immediate action to ensure teams were split up while travelling to Shanghai for the upcoming IT&CM China. While inconvenient, such a step was necessary to mitigate risks.

3. Will security be tightened to eliminate immigration loopholes? If not for the investigation into the plane's disappearance, the two Ira-



The mystery of MH370 has thrown up many questions, ranging from airline IT and border security to corporate travel policy.

nians travelling on stolen passports might have never been discovered. More worrying is that Interpol confirmed that both passports were added to their database after their theft in Thailand, but no checks were made by any country.

ASEAN has been moving towards the breaking down of national boundaries for freer movement of manpower, tourists, etc within the 10-member bloc (see page 2). Are we able to trust each other's border controls to weed out unwanted intruders?

4. What will it take for Malaysia and MAS to recover from this disaster? This was supposed to be *Visit Malaysia Year*, and hopes were high that the campaign would be able to deliver 28 million tourist arrivals, up from 25.7 million in 2013 and 25 million in 2012.

With two-thirds of the passengers on MH370 being Chinese, the way the crisis has been handled has incensed China, which is currently the third-largest market for Malaysia.

As for the struggling flag carrier, it had recently reported its fourth straight quarterly loss in the last three months of 2013, bleeding RM1.2 billion (US\$355 million) in 2013, almost thrice what it suffered the previous year. Just this week, one of its jets also had to make an emergency landing.

It's going to take a well-thought-out disaster recovery plan to get travellers excited about the destination and airline again once this blows over.

For now, I am joining all others in praying that MH370 will be found. And hopefully, the lessons from this tragedy will be taken to heart so that all that has happened would not have been in vain.



Gracia Chiang  
Deputy Group Editor and  
TTG Asia Editor

Most commented on www.ttgasia.com

A fair future?

In the last issue of *TTG Asia*, our news analysis mulled the future of consumer travel fairs and questioned if they were losing their edge in the face of competition from online portals.

The Travel Corporation's Robin Yap, based in Singapore, commented: "Absolutely 'fair review'. Thank you for your wisdom and I totally concur with everything you wrote. I have shared your views with my local brand directors and set them thinking for the next show."

NACTA ditches 'travel agent' for references to members

US-based National Association of Career Travel Agents (NACTA) has found in a member survey that travel agents prefer to be called travel consultants. Bennie Connor from Anguilla said: "I do agree. I have been putting my profession as travel consultant for more than 25 years."

UK to reform 'crazy' air passenger duty from 2015

The UK government has announced it will abolish two higher bands of air passenger duty for longhaul destinations with effect from April 1, 2015. AirAsia's Logan Velaitham, posting from Singapore, wrote: "AirAsia X can relaunch its longhaul, low-cost service to UK to link Asia and under-served Asian markets to UK and Europe. Cross-border hindrance (is) detrimental to the economy."

Garuda selects Amsterdam as European hub, commences non-stop service

Commented Nugroho Setiatmadji from Jakarta: "Indonesia and Holland have long historical ties and thus it sounds logical for Garuda Indonesia to decide to introduce a non-stop flight between Jakarta and Amsterdam. Travellers will benefit from this quick direct service."



**EDITORIAL**  
Karen Yue  
Group Editor ([karen.yue@ttgasia.com](mailto:karen.yue@ttgasia.com))

Gracia Chiang  
Deputy Group Editor ([gracia.chiang@ttgasia.com](mailto:gracia.chiang@ttgasia.com))

Hannah Koh  
Assistant Editor, TTG Asia Online ([hannah.koh@ttgasia.com](mailto:hannah.koh@ttgasia.com))

Paige Lee Pei Qi  
Assistant Editor, Singapore ([lee.peiqi@ttgasia.com](mailto:lee.peiqi@ttgasia.com))

Xinyi Liang-Pholsena  
Assistant Editor, Thailand ([liang.xinyi@ttgasia.com](mailto:liang.xinyi@ttgasia.com))

Kathy Neo  
Copy Editor ([kathy.neo@ttgasia.com](mailto:kathy.neo@ttgasia.com))

S Puvaneswary  
Editor, Malaysia/Brunei ([puvanes@ttgasia.com](mailto:puvanes@ttgasia.com))

Mimi Hudoyo  
Editor, Indonesia ([ldmfasia@cbn.net.id](mailto:ldmfasia@cbn.net.id))

Sim Kok Chwee  
Correspondent-at-large ([aviasian.images@gmail.com](mailto:aviasian.images@gmail.com))

Greg Lowe  
Correspondent, Thailand ([ttg@thegreglowe.com](mailto:ttg@thegreglowe.com))

Marianne Carandang, Rosa Ocampo  
Correspondents, The Philippines ([marianne.carandang@ttgasia.com](mailto:marianne.carandang@ttgasia.com), [rosa.ocampo@gmail.com](mailto:rosa.ocampo@gmail.com))

Prudence Lui  
Correspondent, Hong Kong ([prului@yahoo.com](mailto:prului@yahoo.com))

Shekhar Niyogi  
Chief Correspondent, India ([shekhar.niyogi@ttgasia.com](mailto:shekhar.niyogi@ttgasia.com))

Rohit Kaul  
Correspondent, New Delhi ([rohit.kaul@ttgasia.com](mailto:rohit.kaul@ttgasia.com))

Feizal Samath  
Correspondent, Sri Lanka ([feizalsam@gmail.com](mailto:feizalsam@gmail.com))

Redmond Sia, Goh Meng Yong  
Creative Designers

Lina Tan  
Editorial Assistant

**SALES & MARKETING**  
Michael Chow  
Group Publisher ([michael.chow@ttgasia.com](mailto:michael.chow@ttgasia.com))

Marisa Chen  
Senior Business Manager ([marisa.chen@hk.china.com](mailto:marisa.chen@hk.china.com))

Shirley Tan  
Senior Business Manager ([shirley.tan@ttgasia.com](mailto:shirley.tan@ttgasia.com))

Karen Cheung  
Business Manager ([karen.cheung@hk.china.com](mailto:karen.cheung@hk.china.com))

Jonathan Yap  
Business Manager ([jonathan.yap@ttgasia.com](mailto:jonathan.yap@ttgasia.com))

Cheryl Tan  
Corporate Marketing Manager ([cheryl.tan@ttgasia.com](mailto:cheryl.tan@ttgasia.com))

Stephanie Toh  
Marketing Executive ([stephanie.toh@ttgasia.com](mailto:stephanie.toh@ttgasia.com))

Cheryl Lim  
Advertisement Administration Manager ([cheryl.lim@ttgasia.com](mailto:cheryl.lim@ttgasia.com))

Carol Cheng  
Assistant Manager Administration and Marketing ([carol.cheng@hk.china.com](mailto:carol.cheng@hk.china.com))

**PUBLISHING SERVICES**  
Tony Yeo  
Division Manager ([tony.yeo@ttgasia.com](mailto:tony.yeo@ttgasia.com))

Nancy Lee  
Desktop Publishing Executive ([nancy.lee@ttgasia.com](mailto:nancy.lee@ttgasia.com))

Carol Wong  
Senior Circulation Executive ([carol.wong@ttgasia.com](mailto:carol.wong@ttgasia.com))

**TTG ASIA MEDIA**  
Darren Ng  
Managing Director ([darren.ng@ttgasia.com](mailto:darren.ng@ttgasia.com))

Raini Hamdi  
Senior Editor ([raini.hamdi@ttgasia.com](mailto:raini.hamdi@ttgasia.com))

**OFFICES**  
**SINGAPORE** 1 Science Park Road  
#04-07 The Capricorn, Singapore Science Park II  
Singapore 117528  
Tel: (65) 6395-7575 Fax: (65) 6536-0896  
[contact@ttgasia.com](mailto:contact@ttgasia.com); [www.ttgasia.com](http://www.ttgasia.com)

**HONG KONG**  
Unit 2001-2005, 20/F Harbour Center,  
25 Harbour Road, Wanchai, Hong Kong  
Tel: (852) 2237-7174 Fax: (852) 2237-7227

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- SilkAir (2010)
- Lotte Tour (2011)
- Hong Kong International Airport (2013)
- Raffles Hotel Singapore (2013)

TTG Asia Media is pleased to announce that it is setting up a virtual TTG Travel Hall of Fame, which will enable us to showcase the accolades, artefacts and memorabilia of the region's most exceptional travel organisations in a far more effective way and to a global audience.





# How women can climb the ladder



Opportunities abound for women in hospitality and tourism, says HR professor **Thomas Baum**, who spoke at a recent conference in Singapore. Here are some tips to succeed at the workplace

A rapidly growing Asian hospitality and tourism sector has fuelled a shortage of skilled labour in the industry. However despite this talent shortage, women are still significantly under-represented in supervisory, managerial and executive roles.

There are many reasons for this including conflicting personal priorities and male-dominant corporate mindsets; however for those women looking to succeed in the industry there are still plenty of opportunities out there.

Ultimately planning your ca-

reer path, selecting companies with established gender diversity policies, gaining relevant experience and building a strong personal network will help you on the way to success.

**Set realistic career goals**

All new entrants to the industry need to be realistic about their career progression and will need to invest time to learn about the industry as a whole.

Regardless of gender, it's important for you to identify what you want out of your career and to pursue those goals. For wom-

en, it's important to look beyond the traditional gender roles to see the wide variety of jobs that the industry offers. Today, there are an increasing number of women excelling in what are traditionally thought of as male-dominant roles such as chefs, bartenders and hotel general managers.

**Choose a conducive environment**

When choosing companies to work for, it's important to do your research and look for those with the right policies in place that support gender diversity.

Companies such as Accor and Hilton Worldwide are leaders in this field, committed to improving opportunities and choices for its female employees around the world.

They have active programmes to encourage and support the participation and development of women at all levels. For example, Hilton Worldwide recently signed the UN Women's Empowerment Principles solidifying its pledge to promote equal opportunity for women.

These companies often look to work with like-minded partners across the industry to expand opportunities for its employees. French luxury hotel chain, Sofitel, which is managed by Accor recently collaborated with the Diageo Bar Academy to support the training and development of female bartenders in time for International Women's Day.

**Gain a broad range of experience early on**

The industry traditionally favours those with a well-rounded career profile. Women should be mindful to gain experience across a wide variety of different operational departments and develop a well-rounded career profile early in their careers. This experience is essential to move up the corporate ladder and you should aim to achieve these goals before other domestic commitments come into play.

**Play an active role within the industry**

Getting involved in mentorship programmes is another great way to build your network, which will help you to move up the corporate ladder. If your company does not have such a programme, joining a professional association

which provides the training and support, as well as networking and mentoring opportunities is a good option. Also, get involved in related conferences and seminars such as the recent Women in Hospitality and Tourism in Asia conference, presented by Diageo Asia Pacific in partnership with Hilton Worldwide, to get to know like-minded individuals who may provide you with contacts and insights into the industry.

**Family support**

The hospitality and tourism industry lends itself to long hours and unpredictable schedules so discussing your chosen career path with your support network is essential. Strong family support will enable you to invest your time early on and gather a broad range of experience needed to succeed.

Beyond individual efforts, stakeholders from across the hospitality and tourism industry must also come together and work on developing an inclusive environment that promotes gender diversity. Helping to secure flexible working arrangements, safe and secure environments as well as policies that identify future leaders is essential to increasing female representation in senior roles.

*Professor Thomas Baum from Strathclyde University is the author of International Labour Office's working paper International Perspectives on Women and Work in Hotels, Catering and Tourism. He recently presented at the Women in Hospitality and Tourism in Asia conference, held in Singapore on March 7 as part of Diageo's Plan W: Empowering Women through Learning programme.*

TTG Travel Pursuits

Compiled by The Fox

QUIZ

1 With which company are both AirAsia and Singapore Airlines planning to create airlines in India?

2 Ritz-Carlton plans to open a hotel in which China city in 2015?

3 Which are Virgin Australia's three airline shareholders?

4 History: What was the previous spelling for Bangkok's Don Mueang and Seoul's Gimpo airports?

Illustration by

Benji Krishnan

1 Tata Sons. Both no-frills AirAsia India and the full-service not-yet-named airline with Singapore Airlines are due to start flying over the next year or so. 2 Nanjing. 3 Air New Zealand, Etihad Airways, Singapore Airlines. The Virgin share is from the Virgin Group. 4 Don Mueang, Kimpo.

Is this your agency?

Service is good when TTG Asia calls Survottam Travels (ST) in Kolkata to enquire about a relaxing overseas getaway

TTG Hello, may I speak to someone who handles overseas travel?

ST Good morning, sir. This is Subrata. Can I help you?

TTG Morning. I want some information on overseas holidays.

ST International ticketing or packages?

TTG Holidays. I will discuss ticketing later.

ST Where would you like to go?

TTG I have travelled quite a bit, so can you suggest a new and interesting destination?

ST What kind of a holiday do you like, sir? Very active or easy? Are you travelling alone?

TTG I want to relax and not do too much. I will travel with my wife.

ST Well I have several options. I could offer you Krabi in Thailand which is quite remote and has some very good hotels. You could go to Sicily or Sardinia in Italy or Malaga or Mallorca in Spain. All very relaxing. Do you play golf, sir?

TTG I do. What do you have in mind?

ST Well there are several resorts that combine golf, spa and beach. They could be perfect for you.

TTG How much will it cost me? I want to travel in December.

ST If you are looking at winter, the Asian destinations will be great. I can also offer you a combination of Sri Lanka and Maldives.

TTG That sounds interesting. If I want to stay for six days in Sri Lanka and four days in

Maldives, how much will it cost? I need five-star hotels but not necessarily top of the line.

ST It should not be more than US\$5,000 for the two of you, sir. But I will work it out and call you back.

TTG Good. You may also email me the detailed itinerary, flights, hotels and your price offer.

ST I will do that by this afternoon, sir. Thank you.

VERDICT Responses were efficient and contextual. The company's range of itineraries is not extensive, but more than adequate, covering popular and some rare destinations. Subrata sent me the itinerary and detailed offer that afternoon. An added note mentioned alternative hotel choices and flights. Significantly, he named the golf courses and green fees in and around Colombo. – **Shekhar Niyogi**

## Travel industry versus real world

Industry phrase	Real-world meaning
The India market has great potential	We still don't get much business from India
We will focus on the China market next year	We were the last ones to see China is such a big market
The hotel's public areas have been renovated	Our rooms need renovation
This hotel is our best-kept secret	Business is not so good here
This flight operates via our hub	We don't have a direct flight





# Best Western

# Expands Across Enchant



BEST WESTERN Mahboula, Kuwait



BEST WESTERN Hotel Doha, Qatar



BEST WESTERN PREMIER Muscat, Oman

With a history stretching from the very cradle of civilization to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century's ultra-modern icons, the Middle East offers a range of attractions unrivalled anywhere on Earth.

From the ancient manmade wonders of Petra and the Pyramids, to the region's very latest engineering masterpieces, like the Burj Khalifa and Palm Jumeirah, the Middle East is a modern day Aladdin's Cave of tourist treasures, with a multitude of magical experiences.

All of which is driving ever-increasing numbers of international tourists to the region. And catering to this new generation of Middle Eastern travelers, Best Western International is applying its 68 years of hospitality expertise to this ancient, yet rapidly emerging region.

Currently, Best Western operates nine exquisite hotels across six Middle Eastern countries - Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. These modern properties provide a total of just over 1,080 international standard hotel rooms throughout this vibrant region, all with such contemporary amenities as flat-screen TVs and complimentary Wi-Fi.





BEST WESTERN Olaya Suites Hotel, Bahrain



# ting Middle East



BEST WESTERN PLUS Bakkah Awan Hotel, Saudi Arabia

Hotels range from internationally-recognised midscale BEST WESTERN products in major regional hubs like Riyadh and Doha, to contemporary upscale BEST WESTERN PLUS properties in the emerging Gulf hubs of Manama and Al Khobar, and luxury BEST WESTERN PREMIER hotels in regional capitals like Muscat. And every Best Western hotel, whether it be a midscale, upscale or luxury property, offers a true flavor of its local market.

But such is Best Western's confidence in the Middle East market, the company has firm plans to launch at least 14 new hotels across the region over the next two years. These new openings will include the company's first hotels in Iraq, and not fewer than 12 new hotels in Saudi Arabia, including a stunning upscale hotel - BEST WESTERN PLUS Al-Ahsa Grand Suite & Studios.

With these new openings, Best Western is bringing more comfortable and convenient hotel accommodations to this vibrant region.

For more information on our hotels in Asia, visit [www.bestwesternasia.com](http://www.bestwesternasia.com)

f [facebook.com/BestWesternAsia](https://facebook.com/BestWesternAsia) Available on the App Store



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### How have things changed since TCC Group became the major shareholder?

The main structure that was changed was the splitting of F&B into Fraser and Neave (F&N). That's quite a good move because shareholders would view F&N as a pure play for F&B. And then on the property side under Frasers Centrepont there are three main arms – office, retail, and serviced apartments and hotels.

### TCC has got about 15 overseas properties including InterContinental Singapore and Hôtel Plaza Athénée New York. Will you be taking over any of these hotels?

Fraser Hospitality Group will have an asset management arm that handles what we call third-party management if we don't own or manage (the properties). It will also oversee the performance of all our existing Frasers properties. Frasers Hospitality Pte Ltd is the management company for all the serviced apartments.

We've always been either owner-managed or we manage our own. So this is an addition to the arm which is a good move because it's the same business; it's just growing our asset management arm.

If the property is not performing very well, there are options for us to manage it on our own and rebrand it. As of now there are no plans to rebrand (any property).

### How different is running hotels from serviced residences?

It's different but also the same. If you look at our serviced apartments, basically it's the rooms division of the hotel...We don't have that many F&B outlets and that's one of the main differences, but at the same time, a lot of hotels are now scaling back on F&B outlets. Other than major convention hotels, the main profit margin would come from rooms. It's quite synergistic.

### Are you going to create your own hotel brand?

We could. We are now crossing the first bridge from Frasers into Capri (the group's hotel-residence brand). It's not unforeseen that we would potentially move into pure hotel play as well.

But we would concentrate first on Frasers, Capri, (second-tier brand) Modena, then we might go into hotel branding. I think there is still a lot of growth (in serviced residences).

We started with two properties in Singapore with 400 apartments. Now including sign-ups, it's grown to 15,000. In the next five years, we want to grow from 15,000 to 30,000.

### Where are you looking for growth?

We're beginning to find a lot of value in Europe. Up to three, four and even five years ago, the prices of land and building were all very high. Right now we find a lot of the prices are more realistic. We've invested in Barcelona, Hamburg, Berlin, Munich,

Frankfurt, London. We'll continue to look at Spain, Madrid, Milan, the Netherlands, London again, Paris and even Eastern Europe. A lot of people might still be staying away but we think it's going to come up very well.

We're beginning to see a lot of funds moving into Europe again so that window of opportunity is slowly closing, but in the property cycle it's still about seven, eight o'clock.

### Why are you so confident about Europe when others are cautious?

Land and building prices have dropped quite substantially because of the problems in the

ing to grow quite a bit in Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta. In Jakarta alone, we'll have six projects.

### Would you still be concentrating on serviced residences?

We're not averse to investing in hotels if we see a good location and capital appreciation is there, but the priority would be serviced apartments.

There is a reason for that. In terms of a niche market, it's still not as overcrowded and there's a lot of business coming through especially from corporate travel. A lot of our properties are averaging 80 to 90 per cent occupancy and at very very good rates.

Frankfurt, Shanghai, Jakarta and (across) Europe.

### Tell us about the travellers you're seeing.

We're seeing a lot of project groups. Instead of one, two nights or years, they stay for one, two, three weeks or months. From consulting, finance and banking to oil and gas, shipping and engineering, they are flying into a city, getting the project done then flying back. Companies can't afford to have them fly in and out because of airline and hotel costs. At the same time we don't see as many with families. A lot of the project and taskforce

groups comprise mainly singles and younger executives...We see more families in emerging markets like China, but more singles in mature markets.

There's a big market for young and travelling executives, and that's where Capri, Fraser Place and Modena (can grow).

Previously the trend words were pampering, fussing, butler service, luxurious. But we're seeing a lot of move away into lifestyle and high-tech needs. This younger set of travellers wants something different. That's why we don't want cookie-cutter (properties). It's a lot cheaper for us to fix to a design and multiply that throughout, but the young are looking for an experience. It has to be inspiring and new.

### Who or what inspires you?

I'm a Christian, so God and the Bible inspire me. That's where I find my sense of calmness in the course of growing the business. There are many ways of getting things done in various countries, but we don't need to get into under-the-table money or things like that.

For example, when we first went into Beijing, we were advised to list the property as having a permanent establishment in Tianjin and become a shadow play because of the clampdown in foreign investments and red tape in the capital. Another advice was to split our US\$100 million investment into two parts so that we would be outside the radar (of the central government). We decided against them.

Finally we got through with the investment based in Beijing. I also found out later that the properties that went into other jurisdictions were fined heavily and there were back taxes that caused a lot of companies to do very badly.

There are many ways to grow a company; you might have to take a longer, tougher way, but you sleep better at night.

## Choe Peng Sum, CEO, Frasers Hospitality

# Same but different

As it turns sweet 16 this year, Frasers is now dipping its toes into hotels. Choe tells **Gracia Chiang** how the serviced residence operator is moving forward following a high-profile acquisition by Thailand's TCC Group

economy, yet hotel rates have not. Therefore the yields that we are looking at for investment are still very doable. If you look at leveraged internal rate of return, it has surpassed into the teens. It's exactly where we want to be.

The yield play in Asia has jumped up too high. For example, in Singapore, cost has reached S\$1.5 million (US\$1.2 million) per room. At that kind of rate, yields can be as low as sub four per cent. Even in China, land prices have gone up too high in the top-tier cities, so we've gone into second-tier cities. Recently we purchased a project in Dalian, but the prices are catching up really fast.

### Where else are you eyeing?

The extended stay market is pretty strong in Europe, the US and Australia. That's where we can really grow this business even more. But we've not even gone into South America, Russia or Africa, which we probably will. So far our only reach in Africa is Nigeria. The Frasers brand is going to be ready by end-2015 in Lagos and Abuja.

We still want to be engaged a lot in China, while South-east Asia, too, will continue to grow for us. The situation in Bangkok is a bit difficult, so we'll have to wait until it blows over. Manila is coming up quite well; we're go-

Another reason is because in a lot of jurisdictions, serviced apartments can also be zoned residential, and of course the valuation for residential is a lot higher. So there is still an option, an exit route, should the time be right for residential play. It's a lot easier in terms of investment outlook. Whereas for hotels, most of the time you have to use, buy or sell it as a hotel.

Capri gives us a very strong in-between. We need to have hotel licences for Capri but at the same time, it has the stability of mid- to longer stays. (Opened last year)

our Capri in Singapore is performing at over 90 per cent occupancy... and our rates are in fact very close to the Crowne Plaza at the airport. Since then we have moved very quickly; I can count at least 10 new properties coming up for Capri. We started in Singapore, we launched in Ho Chi Minh City, and we're going to open in Kuala Lumpur, Brisbane,





# IT'S ALL HAPPENING AT COTAI STRIP RESORTS MACAO!



Macao has rapidly established itself as a top-flight leisure destination, attracting millions of tourists from across Asia and around the world. Cotai Strip Resorts Macao is proving especially popular for romantic getaways and family breaks. There are over 9,000 guestrooms and suites to suit all budgets and tastes, 100 international dining outlets, 600 duty-free options and relaxing spa – all under one roof. The sheer variety of choice is a compelling reason why Cotai Strip Resorts Macao has been such a hit. Here are just a few of the attractions four of Cotai Strip Resorts Macao's hotels have lined up for Spring 2014.

## So much choice, so much variety!

### *Choose romance at The Venetian® Macao...*

The winner of Asia Leading Fully Integrated Resort from World Travel Awards 2013 and The Best MICE Hotel in Macao 2013 by TTG China Travel Awards, The Venetian Macao is the number one choice for couples who want to spend a romantic trip together. The Venice-themed attractions, with the amazing replicas of Campanile Tower, the Doge's Palace, The Venetian Lagoon and Rialto Bridge, provide a flavour of Italian elegance. At Shoppes at Venetian, the beautifully crafted Venetian Gondolas and serenading gondoliers are ready to glide through canals and take couples on a romantic journey.

The largest and the most diverse 330-plus luxury duty free shopping experience offers unparalleled options at The Venetian Macao, including "Tiffany & Co" and "Butani" which offer an extensive selection of jewellery, as well as timepieces. There is also "The Atrium" luxury store overflowing with quality products from over 100 world famous brands, from fashion and



*Gondola ride glide through the canal at Shoppes at Venetian*

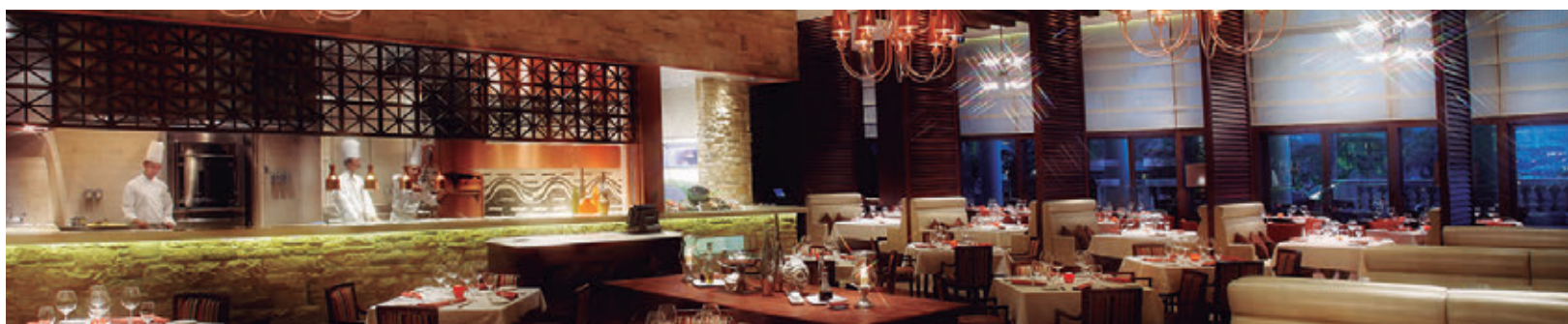


*North - the traditional cuisines of Dongbei and Sichuan regions in China*

style, beauty and fragrance, fine food and wine, technology to gifts for loved ones back home.

As an integrated resort, The Venetian Macao offers over 30 dining outlets to delight one's tastebuds with savoury cuisines ranging from authentic Macanese favourites, sensational Asian dishes and international flavours, together providing an unforgettable dining experience.

For an authentic taste of Italy, Portofino offers traditional trattoria-style seafood, pasta or pizza with spacious interiors and comfortable al fresco dining on the terrace overlooking the swimming pools. North is renowned for its traditional cuisines of Dongbei (Northeast) and Sichuan regions of China, while Golden Peacock, our Michelin-starred restaurant brings the flavors of India. These are just three great options to round the evening off.



*Portofino – the traditional trattoria-style Italian cuisine*





Shrekfast with the DreamWorks Gang!



All Star Parade at Shoppes at Cotai Central

## Choose family fun at Holiday Inn Macao Cotai Central & Sheraton Macao Hotel, Cotai Central...

At Cotai Strip Resorts Macao, the Holiday Inn Macao Cotai Central and Sheraton Macao Hotel, Cotai Central are the fantastic options for families with the DreamWorks Experience activities for children. The Meet-and-Greet at Paradise Gardens offers ample photo opportunities with the larger-than-life DreamWorks characters, The All Star Parade at Shoppes at Cotai Central provides children an experience of a beautifully choreographed procession, and Shrekfast, the only DreamWorks themed character breakfast in Asia. To ensure a fresh experience, new characters will successively join the DreamWorks gang to surprise guests, just recently Mr. Peabody and Sherman joined the All Star Parade. After an action-packed day, the whole family can sit down and mix and match the delicious buffet, a la carte and living cooking station at Feast! The 33-DreamWorks themed family suites at Sheraton Macao Hotel, Cotai Central would make a great accommodation choice.

## Choose luxury at Conrad® Macao, Cotai Central...

Conrad Macao, Cotai Central was ranked No.1 hotel in Macao and one of the top 25 Hotels in China by TripAdvisor 2013, as well as Best Luxury Suite Hotel in Asia by World Luxury Awards 2013, to name just a few. It is a luxury resort hotel offering a truly personalized level of service that meets the needs of every guest. Unwind with a soothing Spring Fusion Massage at The Bodhi Spa where guests will find complete harmony in body, mind and soul, after a sumptuous spa treatment, or stay and rest in the gorgeous Presidential, Chairman or King Deluxe suites. When evening comes, Conrad Lounge offers a selection of international oysters from around the globe paired with Deutz Brut Rosé pink champagne or other premium wines. Inspired by eight periods from China's history, our Dynasty 8 all-day signature Chinese restaurant is perfect for those seeking tastes of the Middle Kingdom.



King Premier Suite at Conrad Macao®, Cotai Central

## The perfect holiday starts right here, right now!

No one in Asia offers you more fun things to do and see at better value for money prices than Cotai Strip Resorts Macao! Like to make a reservation or find out more about how Cotai Strip Resorts Macao's five star hotels and resorts will add a little magic to your next intimate long weekend or family holiday? Check out the special packages below:

### Fabulous Spring Package - The Venetian®Macao

Rates from HKD1,998\*  
Stay period: 1 March - 31 May 2014

#### Offer Details:

- Accommodation for two in a luxurious suite
- Choice of daily breakfast or buffet lunch
- One-way Cotai Water Jet tickets for two or enjoy a Gondola Ride for two
- MOP100 Shopping and Dining Dollars
- In-suite Free Wifi

#### Stay for an extra night and receive:

- MOP200 Shopping and Dining Dollars



For enquiries, please call +853 2882 8877 or E-mail us at [room.reservation@venetian.com.mo](mailto:room.reservation@venetian.com.mo)

### Sheraton Getaway Package – Sheraton Macao Hotel, Cotai Central

Rates from HKD1,598\*  
Stay period: 10 February - 30 June 2014

#### Offer Details:

- Accommodation for two in a Deluxe King or Twin Room
- Breakfast or lunch for two
- One-way Cotai Water Jet tickets for two; or MOP200 Sheraton Spa and Restaurant Vouchers
- Free in-room Wi-Fi
- Additional MOP200 Sheraton Spa and Restaurant Vouchers

#### Stay for an extra night and receive:

- Exclusive gift – TWG “Moments Tea”
- Palms afternoon tea set for two



For enquiries, please call +853 6262 5237 or E-mail us at [travel.sheratonmacao@staystarwood.com](mailto:travel.sheratonmacao@staystarwood.com)

### Sophisticated Traveller Package – Conrad®Macao, Cotai Central

Rates from HKD2,398\*  
Stay period: 1 March - 31 December 2014

#### Offer Details:

- Accommodation for two in a Deluxe Room
- Round Trip Limousine service (pick-up and departure)



For enquiries, please call +853 8113 6000 or E-mail us at [macao.reservations@conradhotels.com](mailto:macao.reservations@conradhotels.com)

### DreamWorks Package - Holiday Inn Macao Cotai Central

Rates from HKD1,448\*  
Stay period: 1 March - 31 May 2014

#### Offer Details:

- Accommodation for two in a King Superior Room
- Shrekfast with the DreamWorks Gang for two

#### Stay for an extra night and receive:

- Asian set breakfast at Yum Cha for two



For enquiries, please call +853 8113 9000 or E-mail us at [HolidayInnCotai.Reservations@IHG.com](mailto:HolidayInnCotai.Reservations@IHG.com)



# The fun goes

As competition gets fiercer, Asia's integrated resorts pull out all the stops to ensure the crowds keep coming

## Resorts World Sentosa

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

Since opening in January 2010, Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) has constantly added new attractions to lure new and repeat visitors alike.

According to Tessa Er, vice president of resort marketing, RWS' anchor attractions – Universal Studios Singapore and Marine Life Park – registered growth in visitor numbers in 2013.

Marine Life Park, which introduced new experiences including dolphin interaction programmes, welcomed more than three million visitors last year, she revealed.

To complement the interactive Trickeye Museum slated to open by mid-2014, RWS is developing a Korean cluster at the waterfront stretch, which will include more Korean F&B and fashion outlets.

In order to continue garnering

“top-of-mind recall” for both new and repeat visitors, RWS will roll out key campaigns quarterly in 2014 to raise brand awareness across its key markets, as well as more signature events.

For example, Er said the Halloween Horror Nights at Universal Studios Singapore will be enhanced to “scare more local and regional fans” in its fourth installment (see Test Drive on page 15).

“Our Marine Explorer tours and Ocean Dreams sleepover programmes at the SEA Aquarium have been very popular with families,” she said.

“Riding on this trend of fun learning, the Marine Life Park will also roll out more educational activities to enhance visitors' experience at our attractions.”

To further tap the FIT segment, Er said: “We will also be enhancing our online and mobile platforms, as well as extending our partnership with travel portals, to provide easier access and targeted deals for our guests.”

**What's new** Set to open in RWS by mid-year, the 800m<sup>2</sup> Trickeye Museum will comprise six theme zones featuring 80 3D paintings and optical illusion masterpieces, allowing guests to not just view the paintings but walk into them and become part of the masterpiece. The Singapore outpost will also feature unique aspects such as the city's thriving ecosystem of nature and wildlife.

## Marina Bay Sands

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

Marina Bay Sands (MBS) is beefing up its shopping and entertainment offerings to fortify its standing as a premier lifestyle destination in Singapore.

Last November, Las Vegas Sands (LVS) and Beckham Ventures entered into a partnership which will see former footballer and fashion icon David Beckham consulting on the development of dining, retail and leisure concepts at MBS.

Details of the partnership remain scarce, although LVS is expecting to cash in on Beckham's immense popularity in Asia to promote both Singapore and Macau properties.

MBS has recorded a “positive momentum and growth” in the retail segment, according to John Mims, senior vice president of worldwide sales and resort marketing Asia, Las Vegas Sands Corp.

“With growing interest and demand from premium luxury brands to expand their presence at The Shoppes at MBS, we will see many luxury duplex stores being completed in 2014,” he added. “Many of these brands, such as Bulgari, Cartier, Dior, Miu Miu and Versace, will have their largest stores in Singapore at The Shoppes upon completion.”

Meanwhile, MBS continues to look out for headlining entertainment acts. In March, a free live

simulcast of The Rolling Stones concert was projected in high definition on a 14m-wide LED screen at the Event Plaza as part of MBS' open-to-public music festival.

Upcoming shows include the multi-million-dollar musical production *Grease* and live theatrical performance *Tap Dogs*.

Mims said: “We will conduct direct surveys and marketing research to understand the regional market dynamics as well as what our guests want to see, whether (it is) a Broadway musical, an intimate concert or a global headlining act,” he said.

**What's new** Premium luxury brands like Bulgari, Cartier, Dior, Miu Miu and Versace will expand their presence at The Shoppes at MBS, with many duplex stores being completed this year. Renowned shows such as *Grease* and *Tap Dogs* have also been lined up.

## Hong Kong Disneyland

By Prudence Lui

A stream of attractions at Hong Kong Disneyland (HKDL) over the last few years has helped it to stay popular, as has strong trade marketing programmes.

According to HKDL vice president of sales and distribution marketing, Terruce Wang, the three new themed areas launched over the past 18 months – Toy Story Land (2011), Grizzly Gulch (2012) and Mystic Point (2013) – have enabled the destination to build “more fun, memorable and comprehensive experiences” for repeat visitors and diverse age groups.

With increasing number of FITs opting for more packed itineraries and shorter stays, HKDL has bolstered its exposure through partnerships with OTAs and airlines to reach out to these fragmented segments.

Wang added: “We have de-

signed more diversified travel products, for example, travel packages consisting of flight tickets and accommodation in the resort's themed hotel, and special discount on admission tickets for designated boarding pass-holders, to meet the needs of FITs from different parts of the world.”

On the industry front, HKDL runs regular updates on the destination's latest developments, in addition to webinars, exclusive preview days and in-market trade briefings.

He added: “We also work closely with our travel trade partners to diversify our products with creative special offers such as themed packages and offerings, F&B and merchandise discount coupons. Moreover, in-market trade briefings were staged across major cities in Asia-Pacific, using the ‘edutaining’ approach of education and entertainment to convey the essence of fun in the new experiences, which helped in encouraging trade partners to develop creative travel products.”

More satellite offices in China have also been set up and liaison representatives appointed in key overseas markets to ensure timely and effective communication with the trade.

Between October 1, 2012 and September 30, 2013, the number of visitors for HKDL's fiscal year hit 7.4 million. Overall hotel occupancy climbed to a record 94 per cent and guest spending also reached a new high with a six per cent year-on-year increase.

**What's new** A new night parade called *Disney Paint the Night* will debut later this year, while upcoming initiatives include HKDL's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 2015, the launch of a new Iron Man attraction in 2016 and a 750-room resort-style hotel in 2017, which will boost the resort's room inventory by 75 per cent to 1,750.



Trickeye Museum at Resorts World Sentosa



The Rolling Stones concert at Marina Bay Sands



on

## Ocean Park Hong Kong

By Prudence Lui

With visitor attendance projected to reach 8.5 million by 2020, Ocean Park Hong Kong has planned several new attractions in 2014 and a 495-key hotel in 2016, following the completion of a HK\$5.5 billion (US\$0.7 billion) redevelopment and expansion programme in mid-2012.

Recent themed debuts include The Rainforest, Thrill Mountain and Polar Adventure, which have raised the park's number of attractions from 35 to over 80. Upcoming attractions in 2014 include a new shark aquarium and a koala exhibition, while a new water park will debut in 2017.

Recognising the importance of providing attractions "culturally relevant" to targeted markets, Ocean Park has weaved Hong Kong's cultural heritage with Old Hong Kong – an attraction featuring typical street scenes from the 1950s to 1970s – and taken reference from local fables and ghost stories to create characters and offerings during Halloween, pointed out the park's sales director, Rosalind Siu.

To drive higher attendance, Ocean Park has installed Wi-Fi on site, and rolled out a virtual guided tour, promotions and instant feeds on social network platforms. It is also establishing more digital payment methods.

Although China's new tourism law implemented last October has led to a 30 per cent drop in group business in 4Q2013 compared with the same period in 2012, Siu maintained that targeted marketing campaigns have enabled Ocean Park to attract more FITs and locals.

To engage the trade, Ocean Park is participating in major travel fairs and trade shows in key source markets, and also works closely with tour operators in China and South-east Asia to develop packages for outbound tourists.

"From time to time, we organise outreach programmes for both large and small-scale travel (consultants) and media overseas to promote our big five events and new attractions. We also offer site visits and guided tours for the trade to keep them updated on the latest changes in the park," said Siu.

In the 2012-13 fiscal year (ended June 30, 2013), attendance exceeded 7.7 million, up nine per cent from previous year while 2013 attendance rose one per cent to 7.5 million.

**What's new** Shark Mystique is due to open in mid-2014, followed by Adventures in Australia (Koala



Cotai Strip Resorts Macao's Streetmosphere performers

exhibit) by the end of this year. The 495-room Ocean Hotel and Tai Shue Wan Waterpark are scheduled to launch in 2017.

## Cotai Strip Resorts Macao

By Caroline Boey

Like the diversification drive within Macau's tourism industry, Cotai Strip Resorts Macao is also stepping up on non-gaming developments as part of its growth strategy.

"Important growth (has been) achieved in non-gaming operations such as hotel, retail and entertainment offerings," noted Fanny Chan, director of destination marketing of Cotai Strip Resorts Macao, which comprises Sands Macao, The Venetian Macao, The Plaza Macao and Sands Cotai Central.

"The company's fundamental multi-tiered integrated resort development strategy, which features convention, exhibition, hotel, retail and entertainment offerings, helped drive 17.4 million visits in 4Q2013 to our properties, including more than eight million visitors to The Venetian Macao alone," she added. For the whole year, Cotai Strip Resorts Macao welcomed nearly 63 million visitors.

Two major developments, the 3,000-key Parisian Macao and the 700-key St Regis Tower, are currently under construction and targeted for completion in late-2015.

To keep its entertainment value high, A-list celebrities and pop stars such as Rihanna and Justin Bieber as well as boxing legend Manny Pacquiao have been brought in, while upcoming acts include The Rolling Stones and Stacey Kent.

Among the new marketing ideas is DreamWorks Gang Private Party, a fun setting for corporate events and special occasions of any size, following last year's debut of the DreamWorks Experience offering breakfast and interaction opportunities with DreamWorks characters.

"We constantly work with our trade partners to provide them with (information on) upcoming events and hotel packages as well as different marketing materials. They are actively passing the information on to their clients through cooperative advertising, their websites

and social media platforms," she added. A series of B2B tradeshow and B2C consumer shows in overseas markets have also been planned this year.

**What's new** The DreamWorks Experience includes Shrekfast – a buffet breakfast experience where guests can interact with DreamWorks characters – and DreamWorks All Star Parade. The 3,000-room Parisian Macao and the 700-room St Regis Tower are two major developments targeted for completion in late-2015.

## Sunway Lagoon

By S Puvaneswary

As one of the oldest amusement parks in Asia, the 21-year-old Sunway Lagoon is no stranger to competition.

"When (Sunway Lagoon) first opened (in 1993), we had no competitors in the city. Today, our competition is from other theme parks in South-east Asia, (with) destinations like Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines made accessible with cheap airfares from LCCs," commented Bill Holman, consultant director of Sunway Lagoon. "The Internet is our other challenge as everybody can surf to see what new attractions are available at theme parks elsewhere."

The destination currently offers attractions ranging from an interactive zoo featuring small animals to adrenaline-pumping activities like paintball shooting and bungee jumping and a water theme park with one of the world's largest surf pools.

Holman looks to the 2015 debut of Nickelodeon Land – the first such theme park in South-east Asia – featuring water-based attractions and live shows as a "game changer" for Sunway Lagoon, as the new concept will appeal to a younger crowd aged two to 15.

Besides attracting an increasing number of corporate events, Sunway Lagoon's leisure share has "increased exponentially", growing 10 per cent last year from 2012 and posting a 26 per cent year-on-year increase in January 2014, he shared.

"Our new marketing strategy is to encourage visitors to take pho-

tos and videos using their smartphones as these will be posted on social media channels. It is free advertising for us," Holman added.

At the same time, Sunway Lagoon is examining new avenues such as more TV and digital-based advertising in its major markets to support travel consultants, in addition to hosting regular fam trips for the trade and attending major travel and tourism fairs within Asia.

**What's new** Sunway Lagoon recently opened Tiger Land while the Wildlife Park is currently being upgraded to exhibit more endangered animals. A high dive show will be performed thrice daily at the Giant Surf Pool area from May 1, and Cleopatra's Adventure will be introduced in the Scream Park attraction in 2H2014. Nickelodeon Land will debut in 1Q2015.

## Legoland Malaysia Resort

By S Puvaneswary

Legoland Malaysia Resort hopes to woo more international visitors, having transformed last year from a theme park into a resort and with several upcoming attractions on the way.

Mark Germyn, general manager of Legoland Malaysia Resort, said: "Since the opening of the Legoland Hotel in November 2013, we are seeing visitor growth not just from our resident market (Johor and Singapore) and local domestic tourist market (Klang Valley) but an increase in the number of international tourists."

To attract more foreign visitors, Legoland will train its sights on its two key international markets, Indonesia and Hong Kong. "In Q2, we will organise roadshows and ground events in Indonesia to drive stronger tourist visits. In Hong Kong, we will continue to do both B2B and B2C marketing," Germyn shared.

However, Germyn also acknowledged that the biggest challenge in attracting families in Malaysia and Singapore – the park's two biggest resident markets – lies in their preference for travel during school holidays. "Thanks to good response from Indonesia, Hong Kong and other Asian countries, we are also busy when there are

no school holidays in Malaysia and Singapore," he added.

Other initiatives to boost leisure visitation include an Annual Pass – a particularly value-for-money programme for the local market, according to Germyn – plus F&B promotions and Lego-building activities on a monthly basis.

Besides roadshows, trade missions, fam trips and media engagement to keep the industry abreast of the park's developments, Legoland also offers incentives to trade partners and works closely with tourism offices and airlines to create attractive packages.

**What's new** This month will see the opening of Lego Legends of Chima Miniland – which comes less than a year after the launch of the *Legends of Chima Movie* at the 4D Cinema. This will be followed by the Q4 debut of Lego Star Wars Miniland, a fully air-conditioned indoor attraction featuring all the six Star Wars films and over 2,000 Lego models.

## Bukit Gambang Resort City

By S Puvaneswary

Visitor attendance at Bukit Gambang Resort City (BGRC) has been on the ascent in recent years, with the number of visitors to its Water Park steadily rising from 521,000 in 2011 to 610,000 in 2012 and 646,000 in 2013, according to head of marketing, Nasiruddin Nasrun.

At the same time, average visitor revenue has also seen a corresponding increase, growing from RM27 (US\$8.20) in 2010 to RM32 in 2011 and RM35.40 last year.

The addition of the 868-room Arabian Bay Resort in October 2012 boosted inventory to 1,866 rooms, while the Safari Park is the latest of BGRC's theme parks to open in September 2013.

For 2014, the resort will focus on promoting the new safari park and improving its services. "Opening up new attractions doesn't guarantee visitors will come if there are no promotions being done," said Nasiruddin. "We are now looking at promoting our resort to foreign visitors, especially those from the Middle East, China, Singapore and Indonesia."





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[www.itcmchina.com](http://www.itcmchina.com)

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Aimed at nurturing the future leaders of the MICE Industry, this full-day programme is catered to students pursuing degrees in meetings and events management, tourism or related business or administration studies. It offers

the best and brightest students a chance to experience real-life industry challenges and an insightful glimpse into a dynamic MICE career. This event is held in conjunction with IT&CM China 2014.



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16 to 17 April 2014 | Shanghai World Expo Exhibition & Convention Center

During this 3-hour workshop, ICCA members will learn a variety of database skills including the use of the ICCA database, how to locate business leads and the use of other ICCA business tools. The training will be conducted in English and is suitable for all levels of database users.



### TTG China Travel Awards 2014

[www.ttgchina.com/ttg-awards](http://www.ttgchina.com/ttg-awards)

17 April 2014 | InterContinental Shanghai Puxi Hotel

The TTG China Travel Awards has been recognising the best of Greater China's travel industry since 2008. This prestigious annual event honours stellar Travel Suppliers across Airlines, Hotels & Resorts, Serviced Residences and Travel Services segments in the region. Respected as one of the travel industry's most prestigious travel awards, The 7th Annual

TTG China Travel Awards 2014 will applaud 60 exemplary industry partners for their success in maintaining quality standards to ensure a stellar experience for all. This TTG Travel Trade Publishing event is proudly organised by TTG China, with the support of TTG-BTmice China, TTG Asia, TTG India, TTGmice, and TTG Asia Luxury.



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[www.cimcf.org](http://www.cimcf.org)

17 to 18 April 2014 | Le Royal Méridien Shanghai

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[www.sinofastlane.com](http://www.sinofastlane.com)

19 April 2014 | Shanghai

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# INTEGRATED RESORTS

BGRC's location on the east coast of Peninsula Malaysia poses a challenge in marketing to leisure visitors, as domestic visitors, especially those residing in Klang Valley, have to be convinced that the resort is "less than a three-hour drive from Kuala Lumpur", Nasiruddin explained. Foreign visitors also need to be persuaded that it "is as attractive as traditional destinations such as Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Langkawi".

Urging travel agencies to sell beyond the usual hotspots, she added: "They should be brave enough to take bold steps in promoting new destinations as this will also increase the (range of) destinations and attractions that they can offer to their clients."

In addition to conducting trade fam trips and working with the tourism authorities to enhance its presence in the industry, BGRC has also engaged a Dubai-based marketing representative to promote the resort to agencies in the Middle East. Besides participating in ATF, it will also be present at ATM and other B2B travel fairs targeting the Chinese market.

**What's new** The addition of the 868-room Arabian Bay Resort in October 2012 and the opening of the Bukit Gambang Safari Park in September 2013, which has five regions such as Wild Savannah and Night Jungle. Sprawled across approximately 100 football fields, up to 420 species of animals can be found in its rainforest.

## ➔ Resorts World Genting

By S Puvaneswary

Despite the three-year closure of its Outdoor Theme Park since September 2013, Resorts World Genting (RWG) is still raking in strong business, according to the resort's spokesperson.

During Lunar New Year, visitor headcount to the park was about 150,000 on the first day, similar to

previous years' attendance figure during the same period.

The resort kicked off the year with the Transformers' 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Exhibition and International Buskers Festival. Although the much-anticipated Twentieth Century Fox World theme park is set for a 2016 opening, guests would still get to participate in related activities and meet iconic mascots in the coming months. Other new developments this year include an additional 1,300 rooms at the First World Hotel.

Meanwhile, there will be attractive offers of shows, rooms, F&B and indoor theme park tickets, plus concerts at the Arena of Stars with artistes scheduled to perform every week.

"Today's holidaymakers are well travelled and have higher expectations. Bringing in an international brand such as Twentieth Century Fox and developing the world's first theme park (of its kind) in Malaysia would offer tourists an exciting experience and new perspective when choosing a venue for their holiday," said RWG's spokesperson, who added that the resort would also be introducing a new cable car system as well as more retail, F&B and accommodation offerings when the park opens.

Travel agencies remain an important conduit in spurring continuous growth in room sales and tourist arrivals for the resort, which is working closely with Tourism Malaysia and Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Bureau on roadshows and tradeshow overseas to reach its target markets.

**What's new** Further upgrading of hotel rooms and additional 1,300 rooms at First World Hotel. There will also be activities centred around Twentieth Century Fox World, which is scheduled to open its first theme park globally at RWG in 2016.

## ➔ Resorts World Manila

By Rosa Ocampo

While Resorts World Manila (RWM) has not introduced new attractions of late, it is keeping a strong marketing and promotion focus on the non-gaming sector.

RWM has recreated Filipinos' love for fiestas by frequently hosting feasts, parades and revelry, including a month-long Christmas celebration, to bring in more visitors "regardless of niche markets", said Martin Paz, vice president for marketing communications.

To sate Filipinos' love for beauty pageants, RWM has staged the Miss Resorts World Manila beauty contest and hosted several beauty pageants. Reality shows and contests are also crowd pullers. A membership card was also recently introduced to non-gamers, allowing cardholders to earn and use points for purchases, discounts and freebies.

"They're bringing the leisure and events markets not just from Manila but from provincial clientele as well," observed John Paul Cabalza, president, Philippine Travel Agencies Association. "You also see small associations and groups from, say, Visayas, holding their events at RWM."

"We have contracted rates for their hotels," said Marjorie Aquino, inbound sales and marketing manager, Blue Horizons Travel and Tours, adding that RWM has built up good rapport with the trade.

These marketing and promotions, which include an extensive social media campaign, have reduced the perception that RWM is a costly place, drawing attention to its three hotels for budget, mid-range and upscale travellers. It has also rolled out a staycation programme for families at its all-suite Maxims Hotel.

**What's new** The expansion of Marriott Hotel Manila – featuring a new wing with 228 guestrooms



Aquazone wave racers at Legoland Malaysia

and a three-storey convention centre – and Maxims Hotel's 170 additional suites are due to complete by 2015. Hilton and Sheraton hotels, each with 350 guestrooms, as well as Belmont Luxury Hotel and Savoy Hotel with 500 rooms combined, are expected to come online in the next three years.

## ➔ Solaire Resort & Casino

By Rosa Ocampo

Solaire Resort & Casino, the first of four integrated resorts at the Entertainment City along Manila Bay, has just marked its first year anniversary.

However, the destination has faced some hurdles in attracting the leisure market as its major non-gaming leisure facilities – a 1,800-pax theatre, a high-end retail area and more F&B outlets – will be launched only within this year. While it has the usual line-up of concerts, boxing matches and shows, most events are now held in its Grand Ballroom.

In addition, Solaire's reputation as an expensive destination also makes it a challenge to find the

right formula while working with the trade.

Philippine Travel Agencies Association (PTAA) president, John Paul Cabalza, noted that Solaire has an open door to events and works with travel agencies by offering contracted rates.

According to Bill Barnett, managing director of hotel and hospitality consultancy C9 Hotelworks, Solaire has shifted to MICE and corporate clientele because it is unable to attract foreign gaming guests.

Unlike Resorts World Manila and City of Dreams Manila, as a free-standing integrated resort operator without foreign connections, Solaire lacks the advantage of having the "database of existing regional clients who have credit lines which can be extended to their Philippine properties", Barnett posited.

**What's new** Solaire expects to launch within 2014 an additional 300 suites, a Broadway-style theatre for up to 1,800 pax, a retail area housing up to 35 luxury brands, another 3,000 parking spaces, a night club and more restaurants.

## Test drive

# Universal Studios Singapore Halloween Horror Nights

**As a gutless fan of horror movies, Hannah Koh gets the spooks wandering through a parade of vampires and things that go bump at night**

**WHY** Started a mere three years ago, Universal Studios Singapore's Halloween Horror Nights has become a much-anticipated fixture every October. Taking place during the park's after hours, the event has been gaining rave reviews from the local media and friends alike.

**WHAT** The third edition featured six haunted attractions: three full-fledged horror houses

and three zones beleaguered by vampires and other supernatural beings.

I braved two of the three haunted houses: Adrift, a ship floating on the seas since 1910, and Songs of Death, the interior of a Chinese opera house. While the first took the biscuit in shock factor and special effects, the second proved to be more chilling as its familiar cultural reference points such as blood-red talismans – traditionally meant to ward off evil or hold it in – would have been picked up by ethnic Chinese visitors.

Of the three scare zones, I enjoyed the Convention of Curses the most. Held in the Egypt-themed area of USS, the 366<sup>th</sup> edition of the tradeshow featured



two rows of booths with supernatural creatures hawking wares such as smoking potions and body parts while goblins, blue-skinned bipeds and pharaoh's guards with rock-hard biceps walked the show floor. Tongue remained firmly in cheek here and it seemed to be the only attraction with a sense of humour.

Regular points of interest including the Transformers simulator, Canopy Flyer and Revenge of the Mummy were also open.

Visitors who had been scared stiff could seek refuge in the Chill-out Zone where food, drinks and live music were available.

**HOW** I agree with the warning on the Halloween Horror Nights website that the event may be too intense for children under 13, yet there were families with children in tow, presumably to soak in the scary atmosphere.

When putting together a package for families with young-

**Name** Universal Studios Singapore Halloween Horror Nights  
**Rate** Trade prices for 2013 were S\$54 (US\$42) for general admission.  
**Opening hours** Most Friday and Saturday nights in October and early November, and October 31; 19.00-01.00  
**Contact details**  
Tel: (65) 6577-9977  
Email: mice@RWSentosa.com

er children or incentive groups, it is advisable to purchase the Universal Express passes that will give priority access to all rides. With the pass, the longest I waited was 20 minutes for the Transformers ride; regular patrons could wait up to two hours for entry into a haunted house.

For the more well-heeled, USS can also arrange a three-hour RIP guided tour around the park.

**VERDICT** A great night out for teens and adults alike.



Keeping it personal

Often criticised as  
are striving hard to

				
<p><b>John Brown</b>, chief product officer, Agoda.com</p>	<p><b>Chua Hui Wan</b>, CEO, Zuji Singapore</p>	<p><b>Anita Ngai</b>, senior director of marketing, Hotels.com Asia Pacific</p>	<p><b>Clarence Lin</b>, head of marketing, Asia-Pacific, AsiaRooms.com</p>	<p><b>Boh Tuang Poh</b>, executive chairman and CEO, Asiatravel.com Holdings</p>
<p><b>Is it hard for OTAs to personalise/customise?</b></p> <p>Personalisation/customisation is something that all OTAs aspire to do. Currently, there are not many OTAs doing a great job at this largely because they don't have enough data about customer preferences and lack the technology and content required for personalisation.</p>	<p><b>Is it hard for OTAs to personalise/customise?</b></p> <p>The Zuji site is built to cater to the wide demographic of customers and we offer full empowerment for our customers to make their own choices. We aim to provide customers with the best possible experience when customising a holiday, giving them the option to mix and match. When customers are stuck with finding a hotel, our algorithm for packages helps to recommend the most suitable accommodation.</p>	<p><b>Is it hard for OTAs to personalise/customise?</b></p> <p>We want to provide the best and most suited experience to visitors to our site, so personalisation is a natural step in the path to improving our service.</p>	<p><b>Is it hard for OTAs to personalise/customise?</b></p> <p>Being in the digital space means that we are able to understand how consumers behave on site, which allows us to introduce more options at lower cost in a scalable manner. Our complex technologies identify and tailor accommodation choices to the individual user.</p>	<p><b>Is it hard for OTAs to personalise/customise?</b></p> <p>Consumer preferences are constantly changing; customisation is an ongoing process. The real challenge is to be able to establish and cater to the mainstream requirement of every market. We review site data and CRM to narrow down our marketing to avoid wastage of resources.</p>
<p><b>Is OTA homogeneity an issue?</b></p> <p>No. The most important thing is creating a better customer experience. Although many OTAs might look the same on the surface, the best ones offer a great deal of variety in terms of usability, inventory, content, etc.</p>	<p><b>Is OTA homogeneity an issue?</b></p> <p>Yes. We see an increase in the number of travel websites that are not really OTAs, but meta-search or comparison sites. Customers may not see the difference, but these sites may lead them to a travel booking engine that might not be established or trustworthy.</p>	<p><b>Is OTA homogeneity an issue?</b></p> <p>At first glance, OTA websites may seem quite similar and difficult to differentiate. But once you've actually performed a full search on several websites for a hotel in a specific city, you will soon notice the differences from site to site and distil the strengths of different OTAs. The level of detail on a website is often not obvious until you actually use it to book.</p>	<p><b>Is OTA homogeneity an issue?</b></p> <p>Our software and hardware differentiators have proven effective. Our book now, pay later policy with instant confirmation and no cancellation fees, coupled with a rich, user-friendly experience, have been great differentiators.</p>	<p><b>Is OTA homogeneity an issue?</b></p> <p>Personalisation is important, and we focus on areas like product mix, frequency of communication, clarity of marketing messages and conducive site design to enhance a customer's search experience.</p>
<p><b>How are you overcoming these challenges?</b></p> <p>Very simply, we try to change and adapt our interface for different nationalities and different customer types. If customers respond well, we keep the changes. If not, we start over with something new.</p>	<p><b>How are you overcoming these challenges?</b></p> <p>We believe in maintaining a strong and trustworthy brand, delivering good customer service and presenting customers with a wide choice of travel options to suit their needs. We also believe in providing value-added information on our site, such as our Zuji Travel Guide, which helps customers make informed decisions about their travel options or while they are on the road travelling.</p>	<p><b>How are you overcoming these challenges?</b></p> <p>We are constantly looking for ways to improve our customer experience and have been using big data to achieve that. In addition to the website, Hotels.com provides strong offline customer service support, so if a traveller has an emergency situation, we can still help them through our call centres around the clock, in their local language.</p>	<p><b>How are you overcoming these challenges?</b></p> <p>AsiaRooms.com has the first loyalty programme in the region that provides direct cashback for accommodation spends, a valuable unique proposition. Our all-new app, completely redesigned for the latest mobile operating systems, will also be launched soon, giving customers the flexibility of choice in booking platforms.</p>	<p><b>How are you overcoming these challenges?</b></p> <p>We developed an online system for products that used to be transacted by physical tickets. Today, many consumers and even the trade buy our standalone tours, transfers and barcoded e-tickets of theme parks and attractions.</p>
<p><b>How are you using data/technology in your business?</b></p> <p>At Agoda.com's scale, just measuring how customers respond to our website involves literally terabytes of data on an hourly basis, so we have to employ the latest big data technologies to do that.</p>	<p><b>How are you using data/technology in your business?</b></p> <p>We believe in maintaining a strong and trustworthy brand, delivering good customer service and presenting customers with a wide choice of travel options to suit their needs. We also believe in providing value-added information on our site, such as our Zuji Travel Guide, which helps customers make informed decisions about their travel options or while they are on the road travelling.</p>	<p><b>How are you using data/technology in your business?</b></p> <p>Mobile is a clear focus for us, especially in Asia-Pacific where smartphone penetration is so high and the mobile device could be someone's first personal access point to the Internet. We are spending a lot of our resources on making sure Hotels.com's mobile experience is optimised.</p>	<p><b>How are you using data/technology in your business?</b></p> <p>AsiaRooms.com has developed a Traveller Confidence Index (TCI) that tracks leading indicators for travel propensity, spending confidence and regional momentum. These insights allow us to develop effective go-to-market strategies and tailor products and services.</p>	<p><b>How are you using data/technology in your business?</b></p> <p>We have been building an in-house system capable of managing a global inventory of all the different travel components. This system develops and manages packages of different permutations based on real-time pricing and availability. Our interface has been enhanced to distribute content and pricing to other online businesses worldwide. Our own payment gateway is also integrated with all major credit and charge cards worldwide and we are now entering the final phase of enhancing users' site experience.</p>
<p><b>What other resources/enablers are helpful?</b></p> <p>We are always looking at technology providers with new offerings that can help us provide better service. We are working with companies that measure social satisfaction, trying out cloud computing services, testing new forms of social advertising, trying new big data services and more. Often these things don't work well for us or we decide it's more advantageous to do things in-house. Either way, we are always looking around for new systems, strategies and methodologies to explore.</p>	<p><b>How are you using data/technology in your business?</b></p> <p>Big data enables us to really dive deep into the minds of customers and understand their travel behaviour and overall preferences. We use that to customise and develop services and products that are relevant to customers. Mobile platforms are also something we are looking into.</p>	<p><b>What other resources/enablers are helpful?</b></p> <p>As 4G network service rolls out in more markets, we expect to see more people using their mobile devices to book. We have been building features into our app to take advantage of the higher speeds and enhanced capabilities.</p>	<p><b>What other resources/enablers are helpful?</b></p> <p>We work with a range of class-leading technology firms to grow revenue through fast, personalised web experiences, manage complexity from peak demand and implement data collection. A great deal of multivariate testing helps us remove the guesswork and empowers us with information, so our marketing decisions are based on real-time data.</p>	<p><b>How are you overcoming these challenges?</b></p> <p>We have been building an in-house system capable of managing a global inventory of all the different travel components. This system develops and manages packages of different permutations based on real-time pricing and availability. Our interface has been enhanced to distribute content and pricing to other online businesses worldwide. Our own payment gateway is also integrated with all major credit and charge cards worldwide and we are now entering the final phase of enhancing users' site experience.</p>
<p><b>How are you matching what offline agencies can offer?</b></p> <p>We don't make recommendations, our customers do. Agoda.com has over 6.5 million hotel reviews from actual travellers. Our scale also means that our most-booked hotels are pretty good bets for customers. These days, people want choice and they want to be able to evaluate what like-minded travellers are doing on their own. That's a better fit than a consultant who claims to understand the customer, but really doesn't.</p>	<p><b>How are you matching what offline agencies can offer?</b></p> <p>We operate a 24/7 customer service centre and have an offline sales call number should our customers require help with their bookings. We also have a free live chat function on our website which we recently enabled.</p>	<p><b>How are you matching what offline agencies can offer?</b></p> <p>We offer convenience and speed, allowing users to book 24/7 with instant confirmation, as well as our Welcome Rewards loyalty programme, which offers one free night with every 10 nights booked. We also have more than 260,000 properties available on one single platform, along with verified guest reviews. The amount of experience and expertise we have accumulated in serving customers with different needs, continuously builds our role as a travel consultant.</p>	<p><b>How are you matching what offline agencies can offer?</b></p> <p>We aim to dispel any belief that an OTA like us is a faceless digital entity. Apart from having a multilingual call centre staffed by travel experts 24/7, we help customers through a 'live chat' on our site. Our concierge Ask AsiaRooms is also available should one prefer to seek travel advice through social media channels. In addition, international travel experts on our community site are always happy to connect for tips.</p>	<p><b>How are you matching what offline agencies can offer?</b></p> <p>We also likely to still be the only OTA that displays the addresses of all our offices in Asia and the Middle East. When you visit our offices, you will be welcomed by reception counter consultants who are able to serve travellers face to face.</p>
	<p><b>How are you matching what offline agencies can offer?</b></p> <p>A live chat will be launched in March. This is useful for those who book our all-in-one flight packages. Our ready-built packages are being expanded continuously while system filters and keyword tags are constantly enhanced.</p>			<p><b>How are you matching what offline agencies can offer?</b></p> <p>A live chat will be launched in March. This is useful for those who book our all-in-one flight packages. Our ready-built packages are being expanded continuously while system filters and keyword tags are constantly enhanced.</p>



# lacking the human touch, online sellers tell **Gracia Chiang** how they recognise the preferences of each customer while carving a niche



**Keyur Joshi**, co-founder and chief commercial officer, MakeMyTrip.com

**Is it hard for OTAs to personalise/customise?**

Online stores have a history of what you have purchased and they track visits. This reveals information such as where a customer lives, if they prefer expensive or low-priced items, etc.

**Is OTA homogeneity an issue?**

Visitors and repeat customers look for an intuitive, predictable interface, and to weave that with an element of surprise and discovery is the challenging aspect.

**How are you overcoming these challenges?**

The process is easier for those whose purchase history or browsing behaviour is captured in our database. Repeat visitors who have not shopped with us earlier are retargeted with offers deemed relevant to them based on previous browsing history. For existing shoppers, personalisation is much more in-depth and comprehensive.

We have a loyalty programme and customers receive customised offers on special occasions. For non-members we attempt to provide a personalised experience by identifying their device type and adapting our offers.

**How are you using data/technology in your business?**

Data from multiple sources is consolidated and analysed using different parameters to improve sales and marketing effectiveness. This information helps us to analyse trends and customer preferences.

**What other resources/enablers are helpful?**

We use third-party solutions to help us become more effective in leveraging the information at our disposal. We are also big proponents of an open source/collaborative approach to technology. There is an opportunity to tap mobility, cloud, big data and collaboration to affect positive cultural reform.

**How are you matching what offline agencies can offer?**

Our strategic approach is fashioned by technology and innovation. Our travel-related and destination-expertise matches that of the best in the industry. Customers know they can expect the best value-based deals. Further, they get the added advantage of convenience and ease of access – whether through website, walk-in stores or full-service mobile apps across all operating platforms.

**Christian Lukey**, commercial director, HRS

**Is it hard for OTAs to personalise/customise?**

It is a challenge but not the hardest to do because it has always been a priority. We developed as a leisure website adapted to the needs of the client. This experience in leisure is a big strength in developing our B2B website.

Our website offers the opportunity to create a personal account, which centralises all the bookings (personal bookings + business bookings). For our B2B website, personalisation is very advanced as it is customised specifically for the company in terms of branding and content.

Our big selection of hotels worldwide also allows us to personalise our offers.

**Is OTA homogeneity an issue?**

It can be an issue. If customisation is too developed, we can lose the homogeneity of the website. We have always tried to keep the homogeneity of the website during personalisation. Furthermore, one of our challenges is to maintain homogeneity between our B2C and B2B websites.

**How are you matching what offline agencies can offer?**

We adapt our B2B website to the travel policy of the company and in the way the travel manager desires. In this aspect, HRS starts to be a travel consultant for the company.

We also offer much more than the website: a variety of tools and services that cover the whole value chain from hotel procurement and payment solutions to the transmission of relevant data for the analysis of accommodation expenses. Intelligent solutions for conference and group bookings complete our services.

We have a high availability of hotels, while our hotel sales managers contribute with their knowledge of the local market and customer service. The question is what are travel consultants offering nowadays, as often their own knowledge of a distant destination comes from the information found on general public websites.

**Should offline agencies be worried?**

No because HRS is working with traditional agencies. We have integrated our full content into the core GDS as well as mainstream OBTs. Depending on the market maturity, pure offline agencies may be challenged but solutions are there to support and give them easy access to the same (or better) content available to consumers.

**Christian Mischler**, co-founder and COO, HotelQuickly

**Is it hard for OTAs to personalise/customise?**

We are optimising our offers real-time, based on 12 different factors – some are user-dependent, others hotel- or even market-dependent.

We follow a pull strategy (we learn which hotels a member prefers and show him/her more of these) instead of a push strategy, which is followed by many OTAs (e.g. “flash sale!”, “1 room left only!”, “price will increase soon, book now!”, etc). We feel the market gets less receptive to these buzzwords and quality is key.

**Is OTA homogeneity an issue?**

Absolutely. Especially because of “rate parity agreements” enforced by OTAs, it really does not make any difference whether I book a room on any of the OTAs. OTAs are applying a one size fits all, trying to capture business travellers, families, singles, couples, etc. This results in an average product, and there are limited ways to offer the same product.

We focus on a niche: mobile last-minute booking. We can optimise everything to build a superior product just for that very unique use case, resulting in a different value proposition.

**How are you overcoming these challenges?**

We listen to the market and further improve our app constantly, product-wise and with regards to offers. We are currently working on a more granular business intelligence tool that will allow us to better predict which hotel an individual user is likely to book.

**How are you using data/technology in your business?**

We love to push the limits and technological advancements help us to deliver a better end-user experience. Big data is only one element of it.

**What other resources/enablers are helpful?**

We are first movers in many aspects and some technology companies even pay us good money to integrate their services in our app. We receive requests from traditional OTAs to develop mobile platforms for them.

**How are you matching what offline agencies can offer?**

We are not competing with offline agencies; sometimes we collaborate directly. We are in a very niche market for which we barely have any competition.

## How can OTAs do better?



**Angel Gallego, president, Amadeus Asia Pacific**  
We see vast potential in turning search into an engine of discovery and inspiration. Gone are the days of only finding the cheapest fare. Our research shows that there is a substantial group of travellers who do not have a destination in mind when searching.

OTAs need to start thinking outside of the traditional city pair/travel date box. For example, Amadeus Extreme Search allows consumers to search by budget range, group size, number of days and the minimum temperature at the destination.

OTAs are evolving their offering from pure online intentions to hybrid models of Internet, call centre and in some instances, retail shops. These players have become specialists in managing traveller needs through call centres.

OTAs are leveraging big data to better understand travellers’ behaviour and desires, and for clearer visibility on their competitors in their markets. By applying analytics to the goldmine of consumer data, they can adapt their offerings in response to real-time market conditions.

They are also tapping big data to improve their search engine marketing decisions and to deliver the most relevant and bookable recommendations to travellers, to address the challenge of the fast-increasing “look to book” ratio.



**Ming Foong, director, OTA, Asia-Pacific, Travelport**  
We will continue to see more OTAs improving personalisation and user experience, as we’ve seen in the past two years. We are noticing more iterations of the search process such as integrating map searching, humanising search through semantics, expansion into mobile and differentiating how consumers interact with the business on each of these different platforms.

In the past year, we have launched several new products that are geared to supporting OTAs. Priceline.com, for example, has built a highly interactive and engaging search interface powered by our Flex Explore product. It has advanced the research process into a fun, personable experience that seamlessly integrates to the booking flow. This increases engagement and time spent on an OTA booking site, which are both key factors in driving conversions.



**Martin Symes, VP, marketing, Abacus**  
The yields, particularly on domestic flights are very low, but the cheap deals attract traffic, so the challenge for OTAs is to align low-cost flights with higher yielding products.

Only a few OTAs offer dynamic packaging, even fewer fixed packages effectively. Activities, tours and rental cars are still an afterthought and they shouldn’t be, as new entrants are specialising in selling these secondary products to gain traction.

OTAs currently tend to be geared to different marketing channels, but they need instead to pivot around their various customer groups and not just based on purchase history. Some have begun to focus on the personas of those visiting their sites, grouping them by common characteristics. Others are embracing personalisation based on data gathered from external sources, such as the referral from a partner site, to make intelligent assumptions on what an individual customer might want.

The most progressive are also remarketing to them: a traveller may visit an OTA then later go to a media outlet and see an offer for the destination they were searching from the same site to encourage them back to the OTA.

We also believe that mobile technology in travel, in combination with big data, is going to be very powerful and so we are investing further in this area.





Krabi is seeing stronger interest from overseas travellers attracted by its limestone karst landscapes and stunning coastline

# Rising star of Andaman

Krabi grows foreign air links but needs to tackle seasonality of international arrivals. By **Greg Lowe**

**Arrivals** Krabi's tourism sector continues to thrive, according to the most recent full-year figures from Thailand's Ministry of Sports and Tourism. The destination received close to 3.2 million visitors in 2012 – just over half of which were foreigners – recording a 18.6 per cent growth from the previous year. Visitors stayed an average of 4.2 days, with each spending 3,521 baht (US\$109) per day on average to generate a total tourism revenue of 48.3 billion baht.

Preliminary figures for 2013 indicate this positive growth trend is set to continue. Some 247,558 international visitors arrived in Krabi as their first port of entry, up 49.8 per cent from 2012. There were 31,251 foreign arrivals in January 2014, up 11.6 per cent from the same period last year. Total arrivals, including foreign tourists travelling to Krabi from other destinations in Thailand, are expected to grow.

Krabi's top five source markets, which all expanded in 2012, were Sweden (173,314, +3.8 per cent); Germany (118,901, +21.2 per cent); France (98,836, +20.8 per cent); the UK (95,340, +6.3 per cent) and Malaysia (94,067, +23 per cent).

**NTO** Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has been strengthening efforts to broaden Krabi's source markets, according to Sugree Sithivanich, the NTO's deputy governor for marketing communications.

"TAT's Krabi office has been trying to penetrate new potential markets such as India, Russia, South Korea, Japan and Indonesia as well as stimulating their travel throughout the year while attempting to maintain repeat tourists (from markets) such as Malaysia, China and Singapore," he said.

Beyond working with the private sector to promote the destination at key international trade fairs and roadshows, TAT is also highlighting the area's adventure tourism activities such as Krabi Rock and Fire International Contest in April, Krabi - Enlive Sea Kayak Championship in May and Sheraton Krabi Trophy Adventure Race in September.

**Access** Air access has improved significantly over the past year at Krabi International Airport. The opening of the new terminal for domestic flights in April 2012 has also expanded its



"Krabi is still a highly seasonal market. They haven't managed to address the lack of business in low season... Also, there's nothing much in the (hotel) pipeline."

**Bill Barnett**  
Managing director  
C9 Hotelworks

capacity from 4.4 million to 8.8 million passengers a year.

In November 2013, Thai AirAsia launched daily flights between Singapore and Krabi while raising the frequency of its Bangkok-Krabi service to eight flights a day, followed by a new daily Krabi-Chiang Mai service in December.

Bangkok Airways added a third daily flight on its Bangkok-Krabi service last December, following the launch of the route in March 2013. Nok Air started twice-daily Bangkok-Krabi flights in January 2014 and Malaysia Airlines began four-times weekly flights from Kuala Lumpur in February.

**Hotels** Increased airlift and the new airport terminal have improved local tourism business, said Veeranat Limprasutr, executive general manager of Mercure Krabi Deevana.

"Both direct and charter (flights) have increased at Krabi International Airport," he said. "With these flights Krabi can have a much better low season than in previous years."

While Krabi boasts some very good quality accommodation, Diethelm Travel Thailand

managing director Hans van den Born feels that the destination's overall offerings need to be improved across the board. Otherwise, business will remain patchy, he opined.

"You have the likes of Pimalai (Resort & Spa) and Rayavadee but I wish Krabi had more pool villas," he said. "The market is very seasonal. (Koh) Lanta experiences are still quite limited; people are generally visiting the area for relaxing family time."

On the other hand, Bill Barnett, managing director of C9 Hotelworks, sees potential in Koh Lanta. He said: "(Koh Lanta's) still full of snowbirds from Europe, and the bridge between Lanta Yai and Lanta Noi islands will be completed this year. This will help Krabi's overall (tourism) business."

**Rates** Scant data is available for Krabi's accommodation market. According to STR Global, RevPAR has grown from 2012 driven mainly by rising occupancy. At end-2013, Krabi's average daily rate slid 1.3 per cent year-on-year to 3,963 baht, occupancy climbed 19.5 per cent to 61.2 per cent and RevPAR rose 17.9 per cent to 2,425 baht.



# Crisis mellowed, but far from over

Trade says Bangkok cancellations have been few, but drop in new bookings is a concern. By **Greg Lowe**

**1 What's the lowdown on Thailand's political crisis?** Thailand has been mired in yet another political crisis since November 2013, when initial protests against two bills the government attempted to pass soon transformed into an anti-government movement.

The Bangkok Shutdown campaign from January to early March saw demonstrators occupy several key traffic intersections across the city. Earlier this month, some 700 people were reported injured and 22 killed during clashes, as well as shootings and grenade attacks.

Fortunately, some peace and normalcy have gradually returned, with the government lifting the State of Emergency on March 18.

Generally, Thailand remains safe, as the protests have largely been contained within Bangkok. Tourists have not been targeted and the risks of being caught up in the violence are low away from protest sites. Other Thai destinations are fine.

**2 What has been the cost of the demonstrations?** Minister for tourism and sports, Somsak Phurisaisak, told the media the demonstrations possibly cut January's arrivals by between 500,000 and one million visitors, resulting in losses of up to 22.5 billion baht (US\$69.4 million).

While most hotel chains with properties near the Bangkok rally sites declined to comment on how the demonstrations have affected business, DMCs said occupancy in some downtown hotels hit as low as 15 per cent in February.

One of the largest inbound operators, speaking on condition of anonymity, said his business dropped almost 45 per cent year-on-year during the peak season in January. Many longhaul travel specialists, such as Go Vacations, said while they have suffered few cancellations, the biggest problem is the decline in bookings for the next peak season (2013/14).

**3 Have all travel-related businesses suffered as a result?** Not all travel companies have seen their business suffer as a result of the political crisis. One DMC, who also wanted to remain anonymous, told *TTG Asia* it recorded double-digit growth in revenue for the first two months of the year, over the same period last year.

Tim Russell, marketing director at luxury-focused Remote Lands (Thailand), said the company did not receive any cancellations. "Bangkok is just a starting point for most of our clients, who stay here for a few days before travelling to other destinations," he said.

Most travel companies said they have

not had to cancel many Bangkok tours as there are plenty of alternative routes and attractions available away from the key flashpoints. One said while the Inter-Continental Hotel Bangkok has seen occupancy plummet due to its location next to a main rally site, some of its F&B outlets have allegedly seen good business due to the influx of affluent protesters.

MICE business has been decimated, however. Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau reported MICE arrivals in January-February dipped almost eight per cent, a revenue loss of 1.2 billion baht. Most local companies have reported increasing deferrals and cancellations, along with a drop in new bookings for the year.

**4 Have key destinations outside of Bangkok been affected?** Recent figures provided by Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and the Ministry for Sports and Tourism show international arrivals in Phuket, Krabi, Koh Samui and Chiang Mai increased in December 2013 and January. The Andaman resorts posted growth of around 10-15 per cent, Chiang Mai enjoyed a year-on-year increase of 85 per cent in both months, and Koh Samui's foreign arrivals rocketed by 15 per cent in December and 207 per cent in January.

Pattaya, however, saw business drop



Lumpini Park, one of the rally sites

due to its proximity to Bangkok, with the crisis clipping arrivals by a few hundred thousand visitors per month, according to Bundarik Kusolvitya, president of Thai Hotels Association's Eastern Chapter.

**5 Which source markets have been worst affected?** Short- to middle-haul markets have been worst hit, though many travel specialists say these markets will bounce back quickly once the situation calms down. TAT told *TTG Asia* the most sensitive markets in January were Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait, which saw arrivals dip year-on-year by 27.8, 27.1 and 24.9 per cent respectively. The most resilient markets were Egypt, South Africa, Brazil, Spain and Russia, which posted increases ranging from 22.8 to 63.8 per cent.

## Silver spoon



## Ciao Restaurant



For the quintessential Italian alfresco dining in Bangkok, head straight to Ciao, suggests **Raini Hamdi**

**LOCATION** The riverside terrace of Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok is, in the evening especially, a magical setting. Lights twinkle from decorated trees. The grand old dame could not look more splendid. Life on the river entertains – a group was having gangnam-style disco aboard a private party cruiser!

**AMBIENCE** I felt relaxed right away as the restaurant manager and staff welcomed me warmly and as the 'easy' vibes of the restaurant started to rub off on me. I understand that some 70 million baht (US\$2.2 million) was spent to create this chilled and relaxing atmosphere. I will never again think that creating a 'casual' restaurant is easy or cheap!

The open-air area seats 54 pax, with a striking 15-seat counter bar as the centrepiece. There is also an air-conditioned Chef's Table at the back, with eight seats, but I much prefer alfresco dining even though the evening was a little humid.

**MENU** Che bello! Here's a menu that's wholesome yet sophisticated, classic yet modern, brimming with dishes I want to eat unlike some menus these days where every second word about the dish is some undefined ingredient (read: expensive) from far-flung areas like Paraguay.

I liked being able to have Spuntino (i.e. Italian tapas) while I took my time to decide what to eat. I liked being able to choose whether to have classic appetisers, pastas and mains, or the chef-inspired ones. Chef Luca Casini draws new interpretations of classic dishes from his experiences across Europe and Asia. Our parma ham bruschetta, for example, had parmesan over it, which gave the taste a new richness. Seaweed in the slow-poached tiger prawns with pomelo salad added dash.

For Italian food aficionados, there's even a list of Luigi Guffanti cheese and a list of Levoni salumi selection on the menu.

**PRICING** From 170 baht for a bruschetta, while the most expensive main, wagyu beef tenderloin, costs 1,800 baht.

**SERVICE** Above all, the service was what made the evening memorable. It was as if a button had been pressed and this action in turn mobilised a whole crew to greet me, serve me and shower me with care and attention. That's why this veritable hotel, now under a female general manager, Amanda Hyndman, is still mighty after all these years.

**Name** Ciao Restaurant  
**Location** Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok

### Contact details

Tel: (66-2) 659-9000  
Email: Mobkk-Ciao@mohg.com  
mandarinoriental.com/bangkok



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This year's Indonesia Fashion Week reeled in close to 80,000 visitors



Indonesia Fashion Week

# Impressing with style

Becoming a fashion centre, luring quality visitors are on Indonesia's cards. By **Mimi Hudoyo**

**Arrivals** Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy hopes for arrivals to touch 9.2 to 9.5 million this year, a rise of six to eight per cent over 2013. Total arrivals in 2013 hit 8.8 million, above the targeted 8.6 million and 9.4 per cent higher than 2012's.

Bank Indonesia's latest report also shows tourism revenue increased from US\$8 billion in 2011 to US\$8.30 billion in 2012, and went up further to US\$9.30 billion last year.

Tourism minister, Mari Elka Pangestu, said: "The travel and tourism sector last year was the highest contributor among the import and export service sectors...Therefore, we need to continue increasing the number of quality travellers too. Longer stays and more spending mean more revenue for the country."

Meanwhile, January 2014's arrivals reached a record high of 753,079, which is 23.6 per cent higher than January 2013.

Arrivals from Singapore, Malaysia, China, Hong Kong and Taiwan were high over the Lunar New Year holidays, while visitors from Australia, the US, UK, France and the Netherlands

showed double-digit growth, helped by the improving economy of these countries and the appeal of Indonesia as a value-for-money destination due to the weaker rupiah.

**NTO** Developing Indonesia's creative industry has paid off for tourism.

Striving to be one of the world's fashion centres by 2025, Indonesia is taking steps towards that through *Indonesia Fashion Forward*, a programme co-organised by Indonesia Fashion Week and British Council, with support from the tourism ministry. This brought together experts from the Centre for Fashion Enterprise UK to share knowledge of the fashion business with young local designers.

The annual Indonesia Fashion Week, which took place in February, also attracted 527 exhibitors and 128 international buyers from Malaysia, Singapore, France, Germany, the US, Sri Lanka, India, Taiwan, Thailand and China; over 1,000 national and international media representatives; and nearly 80,000 visitors, with total transactions of Rp30 trillion (US\$2.5 billion).



"Events like Indonesia Fashion Week and Java Jazz Festival have shown close co-relations between tourism and the creative sector. They are important in promoting Indonesia to the world."

**Mari Elka Pangestu**  
Minister  
Ministry of Tourism  
and Creative Economy

**Access** Hainan Airlines started thrice-weekly direct Beijing-Bali services in January using Boeing 767-300ER aircraft. The launch is expected to boost Chinese arrivals, which is targeted to reach 970,000 this year, up from 747,921 in 2013.

Meanwhile, Garuda Indonesia joined SkyTeam in March. Its president and CEO, Emirsyah Satar, said: "Garuda connects SkyTeam's global network to one of the largest economies in South-east Asia via its hubs in Jakarta, Denpasar, Makassar, Medan, Surabaya and Balikpapan." Alliance members also now have greater access to Australia through Garuda's services to Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney; and to Japan with flights to Tokyo's Narita and Haneda airports.

In September, the airline will launch a Jakarta-Amsterdam-London service.

**Hotels** Growing interest from hotel investors has led to the establishment of new management companies in Indonesia such as InnSula' Hotels and Resorts.

Its CEO, Divya Prakash Ahuja, said: "Our positioning is to provide quality service in the three- and four-star segments. We have emerged with a new standard of affordable comfort and luxury."

Innsula' currently manages Rattan Inn in Banjarmasin and Talaga Spa in Bali. The former is undergoing a revamp and expansion.

The company will also manage a 170-key hotel, targeted to open end-2014 in Pulo Gadung, Jakarta, and another 300 plus-key hotel in the city centre. It is aiming to operate 10 hotels by end-2016.

Meanwhile, Rumah Manis Hospitality opened its first three-star Lynt Hotel in Jakarta in January. It now manages one hotel in Makassar, Panakukan Pena Mas, and plans to operate five hotels by 2015, mostly in the budget and midscale categories. The group has set a goal to manage 10 hotels by end-2016.

Lynt Hotel Jakarta general manager, Yos Oktariza, said: "Indonesia still needs (a large) number of rooms to accommodate the growing number of inbound and domestic travellers in the coming years. The key is to find the right market for our hotels."



# Jogjakarta seeks bigger spotlight

Better air links transform city into a gateway, but consumer awareness is still poor, writes **Mimi Hudoyo**

**1 How has improved accessibility helped?** Last year, SilkAir started thrice-weekly services between Singapore and Jogjakarta, while Tigerair commenced daily services.

Dewatha Nusantara Tours and Travel product and marketing manager, Agnes Priyanti, said: “(With the new links) we have seen some French groups and FITs coming directly from Singapore to Jogjakarta.”

Apart from the usual two nights in Java-Bali overland tour packages, Agnes has also seen some travellers on four-day/three-night trips in the city.

André Seiler, managing director, Asian Trails Indonesia, said the direct links have enabled his company to avoid traffic congestion in certain areas on Java, and to start the Java trip from Jogjakarta or neighbouring Solo, where SilkAir is also flying to.

“We have already excluded Jakarta and Bandung from most overland itineraries,” said Seiler, adding that the majority of traffic does not even touch down in Jakarta, but enters Indonesia

through Jogjakarta or Solo.

Regionally, the city has seen arrivals grow from Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, said Mekar Wisata Tours and Travel managing director, Tusi Kuswenda.

Data from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy shows direct arrivals to Jogjakarta’s Adisucipto International Airport in 2013 increased 46 per cent over 2012. January 2014’s arrivals also rose 108 per cent year-on-year.

**2 What products are hot?** Combining classic tours with village tourism is gaining popularity, said Agnes.

When visiting Borobudur in Magelang, travellers can plant fruit trees, ride horse carriages, and learn to play traditional music at neighbouring Candirejo Tourism Village. And at Candran Village, Imogiri, they can participate in rice planting and drop by Museum Tani Jawa (Java Agricultural Museum).

Dewatha Nusantara is developing an off-road tour from Magelang, following three river

**Oversupply?**

32

Number of three- to five-star hotels in 2013, totalling 4,200 rooms

banks to Jurangjero. Off-road tours are new in Jogjakarta and the company’s French partner would test the route, said Agnes.

**3 Are there enough hotels?** Association of the Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies Jogjakarta chapter chairman, Edwin Ismedi Himna, said: “With the increasing supply in the last couple of years, Jogjakarta now has more than enough rooms to meet the expected rise in international visitors due to the enhanced air connectivity.”

However, not everyone felt the same way. Indonesia Hotel and Restaurant Association (IHRA) Jogjakarta Chapter chairman, Istidjab Danunegoro, said: “Average occupancy for the city’s star-rated properties was 57.7 per cent, not to mention the non-star properties numbering some 13,700 rooms with occupancy below 30 per cent. There is an oversupply in the city now.”

Average room rates for mid-to upscale hotels ranged between Rp300,000 (US\$27) and Rp550,000.

**4 What are the challenges?** Regional markets, especially Singapore, still lack awareness of the city.

Edwin said: “There is some but not significant growth in Singaporean arrivals.”

Eastparc Hotel general manager, Erny Wasiat, said: “Most travellers know Borobudur and Prambanan temples but not Jogjakarta. Some were surprised we have many quality hotels here.”

Tusi, who is also a board member of Sleman Regency

Tourism Board, said: “At NATAS Fair (in Singapore last month), what we mostly did was explain that the Kelud volcano (which recently erupted) is hours’ drive away from Jogjakarta and the debris was blown far away by the wind. This shows (Singaporeans’) awareness of the destination is not quite there.”

She added the board is participating in more travel fairs, including MATTA Fair in Malaysia and Thailand International Travel Fair. More promotional programmes would also be launched.

Erny said Jogjakarta needs the help of the regional government and Visit Indonesia Tourism Office to raise the profile of the city, while Agnes believes airlines’ commitment to serve the routes is also important.

Edwin said: “Airlines need to fill seats both ways, so they need the outbound traffic from here too.”

“But we have not seen any NTO from the region promoting here, although I think (there is a) market.”



## Hilton Bandung



**Mimi Hudoyo** is touched by this hotel’s willingness to go the extra mile for its guests

**LOCATION** The hotel is strategically located in the heart of the city, close to the many dining and entertainment options at the Paris Van Java mall, factory outlets, the zoo and local eateries. It is about two kilometres from the airport, but walking distance from the Bandung railway station.

**ROOMS** My elegantly furnished 45m<sup>2</sup> room on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor is claimed to be the biggest in the city. It was nice to check into it after a long day’s work and find a warm, scented flower bath awaiting me. Though I only had five minutes to enjoy the bath before getting ready for a dinner appointment, it really refreshed me.

The floor-to-ceiling windows provided a nice view of the city. Business travellers will appreciate the ergonomic chair, work desk and high-speed Internet connection. As it was a weekend, I chose to lie on the comfortable bed with well-supporting pillows, watching a movie on the 37-inch TV.

**FACILITIES** The hotel’s rooftop lifestyle and recreational area includes a fitness centre and outdoor swimming pool with a sundeck and view of Mount Papandayan.

The Jiwa Spa has a menu for adults as well as kids, who can either have their

Name	Hilton Bandung
No. of rooms	186
Rate	From US\$150
Contact details	
Tel:	(62-22) 8608-6999
Email:	bandung.sales@hilton.com

own treatment or enjoy one together with Mom or Dad. I chose to have my one-hour massage in the evening so that I could relax and go to bed right after, but I actually fell asleep while having the treatment.

MICE is an important market for the hotel, which has one ballroom and 10 meeting facilities.

**F&B** The breakfast menu at the Purnawarman offered a lot of sumptuous items, as did the buffet lunch. There were various kinds of soups, noodles, as well as West Java specialities and European options. I loved the freshly made noodles with a choice of spicy and sour chicken or beef broth, as well as the colourful shrimp, fish, vegetable and peanut *kerupuk* crackers.

For guests with lounge access, the canapés at afternoon tea and evening cocktail at the Executive Lounge were fresh, tasty and beautifully presented. This is the place to go for light meals in the evening.

My Italian dinner at Fresco, a poolside bar on the rooftop, was also enjoyable. I had chicken pasta, pizza and some wine.

**SERVICE** The hotel staff were not only friendly but professional and efficient. My check-in and check-out experience at the Executive Lounge was speedy, and my transport and luggage was already on standby when I reached the lobby. The hotel is willing to go the extra mile in anticipating the needs of its guests – the warm bath prepared for me upon arrival was one example.

**VERDICT** A hotel with attentive service.

## Test drive

# Mount Merapi Lava Tour



**Mimi Hudoyo** conquers the slopes of Mount Merapi during an exciting, bumpy Jeep ride

**WHY** Mount Merapi is one of Indonesia’s most active volcanoes, and its last eruption in 2010 was said to be the largest since the 1870s. Three years on, some locals have returned to the site and rebuilt their homes. However, traces of the havoc remain and travellers can see them on a 4WD Jeep tour.

**WHAT** Yoes Adventure has a Lava Tour that takes travellers on the three-passenger Jeep Willys up the southern slope. My 90-minute trip started at Kaliurang, and passed Kali Kuning, a former tourist destination destroyed by the lava; as well as Petung Village located between the Opak River and Gendol River, which was also badly affected by the disaster, to Kali Adem Village.

The road up was smooth initially but became rough as the Jeep entered the disaster-stricken areas. The driver cum guide skilfully navigated on sand- and gravel-laden roads, while passengers screamed

in excitement as the vehicle crawled up or plunged down steep slopes. We stopped for photo-taking at spots with breathtaking views of the majestic Mount Merapi.

We also visited places of interest along the way such as Museum Sisa Hartaku, a private museum displaying remnants of a home destroyed by the eruption. A clock hung with its arms pointing at 12.05 (past midnight), evident of the time the hot lava swept the area. We also passed called Batu Alian, a huge rock that looked like a human face; an old bunker built during the Dutch colonial era; and Gendol River, the main channel of the lava flow and also the highest point of the tour. It was a spectacular experience standing in the middle of the river and taking in the clear views of Mount Merapi.

**HOW** Yoes Adventure has taken groups of up to 150 people on a trip. Apart from the Lava Tour, it offers a Sunrise Tour and a tour combining the Jeep tour and cycling to the famous Borobudur or Prambanan temples. It also caters for company outings, tailor-making the programme to include teambuilding games.

Bookings need to be made at least a day before the trip, especially when travelling in big groups and during peak seasons.

**VERDICT** Soft adventure, but thrilling nonetheless.

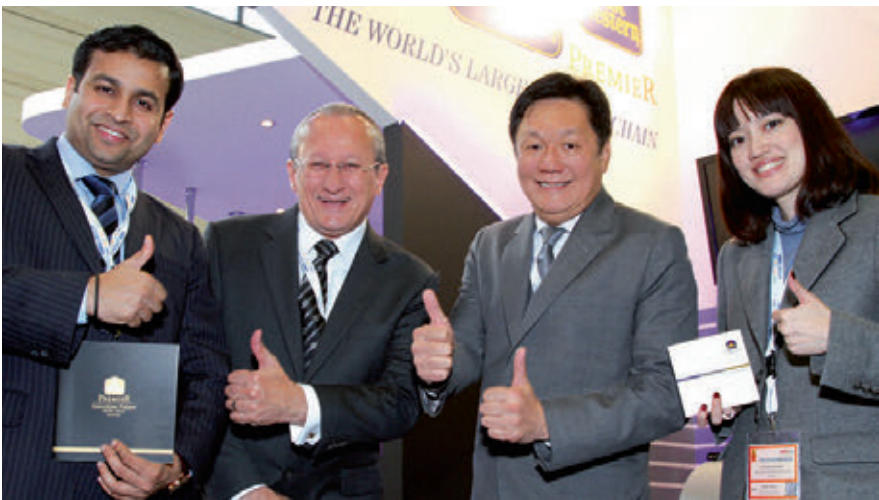
Name	Lava Tour by Yoes Adventure
Rates	Rp300,000 (US\$25) per person
Contact details	
Tel:	(62-878) 3934-8544
Website:	kaliurangadventure.blogspot.com





5-9 March 2014 | Berlin, Germany

# Great times at ITB Berlin



TTG Asia Media's Darren Ng (second from right) with Best Western International Asia & Middle East Paul Suvodip, Glenn de Souza and Vick Sriprapat



Kuah (Langkawi) state legislative assembly member Nor Saidi Nanyan, Langkawi Development Authority's Khalid Ramli, Rosnina Yaacob and Lina Azlina Zali



Meritus Hotels & Resorts' Paul Stocker and Guy Fotherby with Marina Mandarin Singapore's Kurt O Wehinger (centre)



Park Hotel Clarke Quay Singapore's Dino Lim, Park Hotel Group's Nicholas Ni, Grand Park City Hall Singapore's Elinda Ong, Park Hotel Hong Kong's Peggy Lo, Park Hotel Group's Mohd K Rafin and Pauline Cheung



Bangkok Airways' Tortrakul Smakul, Sutee Yongudomkit, Chulin Kocharoen, Nandhika Varavarn, Puttipong Prasarttong-Osoth, Varong Israsena, Plernpis Kosolutasarn and Komkrit Ngamwongwiro



Harbour Grand Kowloon Hong Kong's Doris Li, Harbour Plaza Hong Kong's Billy Wan, The Kowloon Hotel Hong Kong's Ice Cheng, Harbour Plaza Metropolis Hong Kong's Lucetta Chan, The Kowloon Hotel Hong Kong's Victor Chan, and Harbour Grand Hong Kong's Elaine Chow



Ministry of Tourism & Creative Economy Indonesia's Agustini Rahayu and Esthy Reko Astuty, Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia's Fauzi Bowo, Government of Badung Regency's Gde Agung, Ministry of Tourism & Creative Economy Indonesia's Sapta Nirwandar, Sofitel Indonesia's Goran Aleks, Ministry of Tourism & Creative Economy Indonesia's Nia Niscaya and Firmansyah Rahim





Department of Tourism (DoT) Philippines' Nedalin L Miranda, DoT Germany's Marie Venus Q Tan, DoT's Domingo Ramon C Enerio III and Susan Del Mundo, Philippine Airlines' Salvador C Britanico Jr and TRIPS Travel Philippines' Cesar R Cruz



Furama International's Vione Tan, Florence Loke and Francis Tan, and Furama Chiang Mai's Wirachart Wathaphanich



Centara Hotels & Resorts Thailand' Supatra Chirathivat, Thirayuth Chirathivat and Jurairat Mongkolwongsiri



Accor's Vivek Badrinath and Jean-Luc Chretien (back row, third and fourth from left) and Accor Asia-Pacific's Graham Wilson (first row, left), along with the team, all set to welcome buyers

## Highlight for TTG Asia Media



## TTG signs on 11-Infotech to power Roomonger

TTG Asia Media's managing director Darren Ng (centre, right) seals the deal with Thailand-based 11-Infotech System's CEO business development Chartchai Pothong to applause from fellow Travflex user companies including Tour East Australia and CBS Travel Asia. 11-Infotech System's product will power TTG's B2B e-commerce portal Roomonger for real-time room bookings with instant confirmation.



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