

VIEW FROM THE TOP

Having assumed the role of Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group's president Asia-Pacific earlier this year, Thorsten Kirschke talks about broadening the business model and two new brands



40tude
Forty Years, As Strong As Ever



BITCOIN: FAD OR FUTURE?

This P2P currency may not be taking over the world yet, but is one to watch as more travel companies mine its potential



SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The trend to watch the waste line is rising in both the leisure and MICE sectors, as our Roundtable shows



A NATURAL PROPOSITION

Langkawi is keen to raise its ecotourism allure further by leveraging its bounty of nature-related events and attractions



CASTING THE NET WIDER

Can all-luxury Maldives become a destination for the greater masses?



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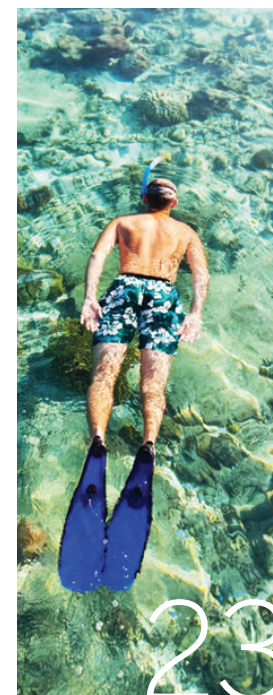
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Destination:
Maldives



Just as the travel trade has to do its job in reassuring customers that the destination is safe to visit...we too have ours to do in informing our readers.

NAIVE TO SHUT DOWN THE MEDIA

Soon after protestors in Hong Kong began Occupying Central, it was reported that Instagram was down in China.

While drawing incredulous reactions around the world, the move is hardly surprising in a country where Facebook and Twitter were banned by Beijing in 2009 after riots in Xinjiang province.

As a journalist, I have been told umpteenth times that the pen is mightier than the sword, i.e. I better be careful about what I choose to write because it has the power to impact positively or negatively.

I fully agree. Working for a company that is a publisher of travel trade news, the additional dimension is that what we print can drive tourism towards or away from a destination.

Having said that, I don't support actions by governments or other parties to muzzle the media. I have been part of conversations where people blame CNN or other international news outlets for broadcasting images of the devastation, etc. Yes, reporting without context has no place in the hallowed halls of journalism. But to want TV networks or newspapers to stay away from covering the incident or play it down – that is just being naive.

Just as the travel trade has to do its job in reassuring customers that the destination is safe to visit and finding ways to bring back business, we too have ours to do. And that is to inform our readers or audiences of latest happenings in a destination and how it might affect them. So, we're sorry, but regardless of whether you brush us off in the hope that the story will die a natural death, it will find its way into our columns.

Now that I've made my point, I have several suggestions on how newsmakers can help 'shape' coverage. In the event of a security or health scare, make it a priority to get the true story out as soon as possible. For example, when news of the Ebola virus broke, stakeholders in other parts of Africa were quick to issue press releases to say that the outbreak is contained in the faraway west.

In the aftermath of a crisis, journalists can sometimes draw wrong conclusions based on the little information they have access to. To counter that, ensure that the media has as many facts as they need to file an accurate piece. If it means approaching CNN and offering to do a phone/video interview, then do it. Most often, what I witness is that companies or destinations are not sure of who can say what when a problem hits. And as a result, they try to fend off the media or respond with silence.

Despite what you may think, journalists are not obsessed with bad news as moths are to light. It's fairly simple. If three out of five people we approach for a story says "no comment", no surprise that we end up quoting the two who are willing to be interviewed. Are their comments the most representative of the situation? Likely not. But again, we are just doing our job.

Engage, not discourage journalists; use social media to rebuild and restore. Help us to do our job better.

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COMING UP

NEXT ISSUE:
OCTOBER 24,
2014

VIEW FROM THE TOP James Reed, CEO and group managing director, Destination Asia

TECHNOLOGY App app and away – we feature travel agencies who have developed their own apps

BUSINESS TRAVEL With corporate travellers seeking more value, what roles can TMCs and GDSs play?

WE LIKE



Taking inspiration from postage stamps – a fitting reference to travel and exploration – the *Visit Philippines 2015* logo (it comes in a series) highlights the many offerings the destination has to offer, from history & culture to sports adventure and lifestyle & entertainment.

Travel agencies and event organisers are also encouraged to use the microsite within the *It's More Fun in the Philippines* website to promote their activities to an international audience.

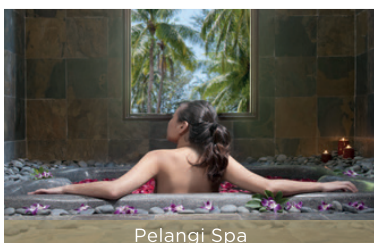


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Analysis

Committed to taking care of its visitors, the Philippines is not taking any chances when it comes to travel safety. Yet major source markets are reacting to recent crimes against tourists. **Rosa Ocampo** sizes up the situation

COVERING ALL BASES

Recent events in the Philippines have cast a pall over inbound travel due to the perceived increase in risks to foreign tourists.

Early last month, South Korea's embassy in Manila expressed alarm over "the rising incidence of crimes committed against South Koreans while in the Philippines either on vacation or on business".

Ambassador Hyuk Lee said in a statement that South Korean businessmen would avoid the Philippines and seek safer places for doing business if crimes against South Koreans persist.

Less than two weeks later, China advised its citizens not to travel to the Philippines due to criminal gangs that preyed on the Chinese and the plot of a misguided group to damage Chinese interests which, fortunately, was thwarted by the Philippine National Police (PNP).

The latest Chinese travel advisory follows hot on the heels of a worsening territorial dispute between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea. Two years ago, China went for the jugular by imposing a five-month travel ban on the Philippines and embargo on some of its exports.

Even after any travel warning is lifted, it takes a while for the market to return, as in the case of Hong Kong, which imposed a group travel ban on the Philippines when several of its citizens were killed during the hostage-taking crisis in Manila four years ago.

Although the travel ban was lifted this April, groups from Hong Kong are still not returning.

Bookings cancelled

This time, the effect of China's decision is immediate and jaw dropping. Cebu Pacific, Tigerair Philippines and AirAsia Zest have cancelled some 200 charter flights between China and Boracay scheduled from September to December.

In Boracay alone – the Chinese's most preferred destination – over 20,000 room reservations from September until next March were also cancelled, causing untold losses and foregone revenues.

This was confirmed by Philippine sellers at the recent PATA Travel Mart. According to Nikki Mesa-van Der Tak, director of sales & marketing, Ambassador In Paradise Resort in Boracay, a Chinese group of 14 pax has just pulled out. Chinese travellers comprise the bulk of the hotel's guests especially during the year-end period.

The Bellevue Resort in Bohol has also just received cancellations from two Chinese groups of around 40 pax each, said resident manager Rommel Gonzales. "It is a misperception that the whole of the Philippines is dangerous just because of one isolated incident."

Some Chinese buyers also said they were steering clear of the Philippines, although one of China's biggest travel agencies has seen "little concern" from its travellers, who still consider the islands of Boracay and Cebu safe.

Ye Chang Jiang, duty general manager of China International Travel Service, pointed out that Boracay and Cebu are top destinations

among the Chinese. "The Philippines is rising as a must-see destination for the Chinese," he observed.

While China's concerns may be valid, one travel consultant who did not want to be named bemoaned a blanket travel ban covering the entire Philippines rather than just specific destinations.

"It sends the wrong signal that the entire country is risky when in fact there are only isolated cases of crimes against foreigners in some destinations," she said.

For instance, countries like the US, the UK and Australia issue travel advisories mainly to certain areas of Mindanao, including specific parts of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

Mindanao also continues to be promoted abroad, with tourism secretary Ramon Jimenez Jr highlighting Camiguin, Siargao, Davao, Cagayan de Oro and other attractive destinations on the island that are bereft of security problems.

Strengthening security

Nonetheless, the Philippines is not taking security concerns lightly.

The Department of Tourism (DoT) in tandem with the PNP, local government units and other tourism stakeholders have established several programmes aimed at creating a safe environment for tourists.

DoT trains cops under a certification programme called Tourist Oriented Police for Community Order and Protection (TOP COP). Some 24 tourist destinations in the country have benefited from TOP COP, which has seen 2,085 policemen graduating from phase one and 1,785 currently training for phase two.

The first phase covers tourism awareness, a technical tour of tourist destinations, effective customer service, etc. After attaining a pass, cops can enroll for the second phase on crisis management covering natural and man-made disasters, first aid and basic life support, among others. A third phase will be introduced next year, including foreign language courses.

Other measures to protect tourists include Bantay Turista, an organisation of the Tourist Police; an ongoing upgrade of tourist hotlines; and beefing up of tourist assistance centres in ports, airports and beaches.

The Philippine Travel Agencies Association (PTAA) is also an active participant in stakeholder talks touching on security issues. "We always want coordinating meetings. It's very important to have open lines of communication and a healthy dialogue," said PTAA president John Paul Cabalza.

Meanwhile, the travel trade is not letting down its guard. A travel consultant dealing with the upscale market said: "We provide our own tours, own buses, and we only go to destinations that we know are safe and hotels that have high security measures."

However, as a sign that this is indeed a delicate issue, many industry members were hesitant to go on record for this analysis, out of concern that it would further tar the country's image. – *Additional reporting by Paige Lee Pei Qi*

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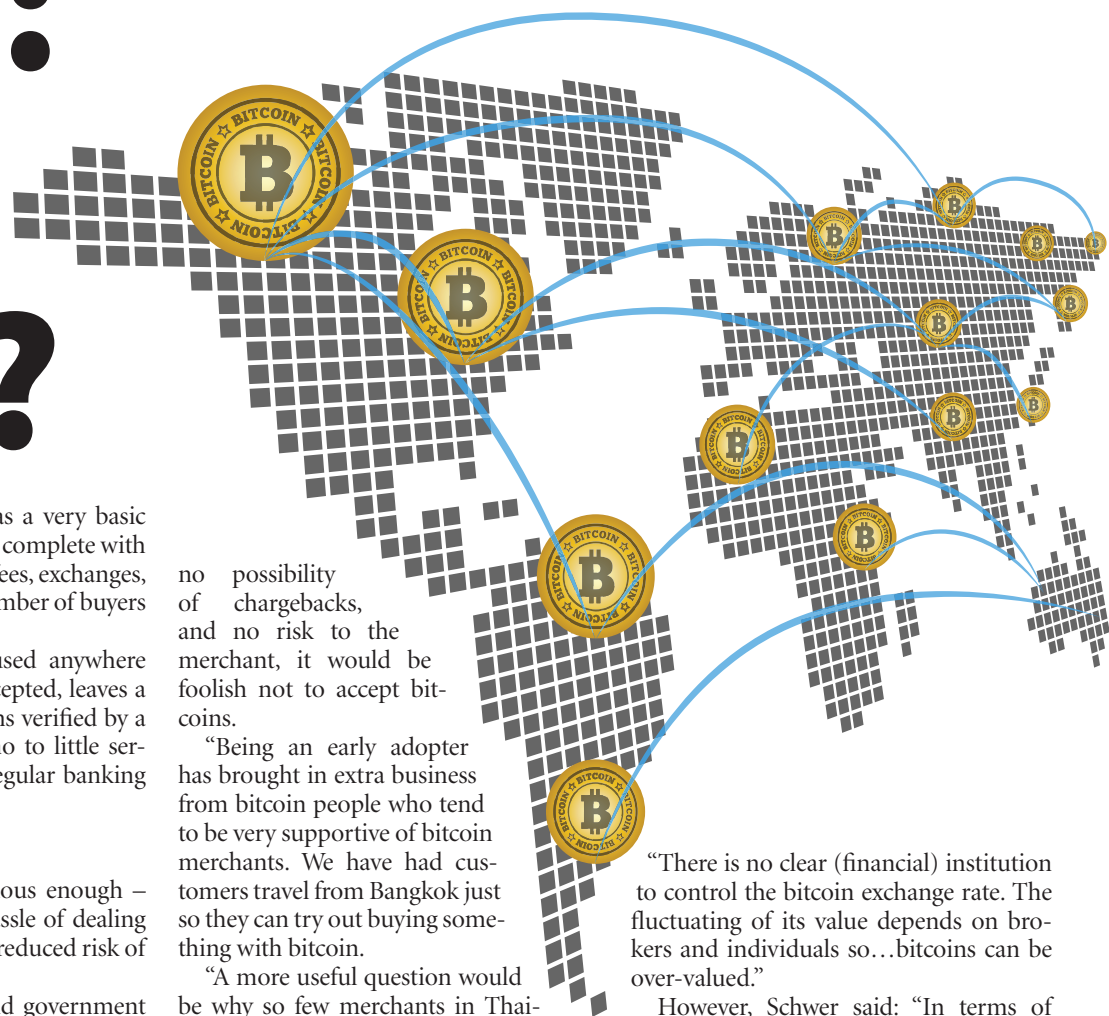
Philippine travel consultant, on China's latest travel warning

Analysis

This P2P currency may not be taking over the world yet, but is one to watch as more travel companies mine its potential.

By Hannah Koh, Xinyi Liang-Pholsena and Mimi Hudoyo

BITCOIN: FAD OR FUTURE?



As if the travel industry hasn't had enough, struggling to deal with disruptors like last-minute booking apps and the temperamental algorithms of big boys like Google and Facebook – here comes the bitcoin.

Las Vegas' the D and Golden Gate casino hotels began accepting bitcoins this year, driven by consumer demand, and the first bitcoin ATM has just appeared on the tourist strip. Expedia also announced in June it is accepting the currency as a form of payment for hotel purchases. The OTA, however, declined to comment for this article.

In Asia, there is an ambitious project in Bali to turn the popular destination into a 'bitcoin island' by year-end, where bitcoin would be the currency of choice. Rakuten's CEO, Hiroshi Mikitani, has also said the Japanese online retail giant will sooner or later accept bitcoins.

What, I hear you cry, are bitcoins? Is that the money they use in Pokemon games? Fret not, you are not alone in your digital alienation, so let's go back to the basics.

The Oxford Dictionary describes bitcoins as "a type of digital currency in which encryption techniques are used to regulate the generation of units of currency and verify the transfer of funds, operating independently of a central bank".

In other words, it's a new international, borderless currency that has real world value and is being traded electronically

through the Internet. It has a very basic ecosystem underpinning it, complete with digital wallets, transaction fees, exchanges, and a small but growing number of buyers and sellers.

The currency can be used anywhere on earth as long as it is accepted, leaves a public ledger of transactions verified by a chain of miners and has no to little service fees as compared to regular banking services.

Bang for your bitcoin

The advantages seem obvious enough – low transaction fees, no hassle of dealing with physical money and a reduced risk of theft.

The absence of bank and government control can also be a boon for peoples in countries where these institutions are corrupt, as well as a solution for the unbanked or people with no access to banking facilities, said Lawrence Chan, director of public relations of the Association of Crypto-currency Enterprises and Start-ups, Singapore (ACCESS), which was registered in Singapore only in mid-2014.

Tomas Forgac, founder of Coin Of Sale, which alongside with Bitcoin Indonesia, is aiming to convert Bali into a bitcoin island, has also been quoted in the media as suggesting it can be a way to help Indonesians cope with chronic inflation.

Peter Noldus, director of Pattaya Beer Garden in Thailand, which accepts bitcoins, said: "As there are virtually no fees,

no possibility of chargebacks, and no risk to the merchant, it would be foolish not to accept bitcoins.

"Being an early adopter has brought in extra business from bitcoin people who tend to be very supportive of bitcoin merchants. We have had customers travel from Bangkok just so they can try out buying something with bitcoin.

"A more useful question would be why so few merchants in Thailand accept bitcoin when the use case is so extremely strong."

Interestingly, bitcoins can be employed as a marketing strategy.

Stephen Schwer, general manager, MacKay Tourism, has been putting together an online booking system and payment gateway for tourism in Mackay, located on the eastern coast of Queensland, and is gunning for bitcoin payments to be allowed.

"The reason I want to accept bitcoin as a payment method is essentially for the sake of targeting a suitable market for our destination. The Mackay region is for people who want to try something new. We are off the beaten track. We are on the road less travelled. We appeal to people who want to try new things.

"The same goes for bitcoin users. They have a similar mindset to our target market, in that they aren't afraid to tell their friends they are using a new, digital currency that hardly anyone else is using."

High hopes, low uptake

Yet for the myriad benefits bitcoin enthusiasts espouse, take-up is inching along.

Asked why, ACCESS' Chan said: "Unless your bread and butter comes from the technology industry, people tend to be more conservative and afraid of liability. It's still super early days, and it was only one-and-a-half years ago that the Singapore tech community took note of bitcoins.

"(Internationally), there's been no remarkable example of bitcoin adoption."

Hans Tjandra, general manager of Bookpanorama.com, was pessimistic about the outlook of bitcoins in Indonesia, noting that the absence of an intermediary party implementing safety measures in transactions means bitcoins are vulnerable to hacking and fraud. He added:

"There is no clear (financial) institution to control the bitcoin exchange rate. The fluctuating of its value depends on brokers and individuals so...bitcoins can be over-valued."

However, Schwer said: "In terms of risks, the same risks that exist for usual online payments exist for bitcoins. It is also a more volatile currency at the moment. But as with any currency investment, there are risks and there are benefits."

As it stands, bitcoin adoption can be likened to a chicken-and-egg scenario. Government, banks and the general population are wary of this new digital upstart, and the lack of professionals getting in on the action means the currency will continue to be a little suspicious to the tech unsavvy.

Said Chan: "Where are the bitcoin accountants, lawyers, security specialists? There isn't a support industry right now, which makes the bitcoin companies relatively weak."

Regardless, Hans commented that bitcoin could, in fact, find room to grow in the region.

"Hong Kong tycoon Li Ka-shing has invested heavily in BitPay (which powers the D and Golden Gate hotels in Las Vegas). If he succeeds in adopting this payment method in his companies and lobbies the government for recognition, then bitcoin has a chance to be adopted by other companies, in other countries," he said.

On its website, the World Travel and Tourism Council also stated earlier this year: "Either way, BitPay processed over US\$100 million in 2013, and this is something that should not be sniffed at."

At this stage the future of bitcoins in the travel industry seems certain, but when it will become mainstream is anybody's guess.

Quipped a travel marketing researcher: "Bitcoin is an interesting topic...but I wonder if bitcoins will happen in our lifetime when we still have much of the industry grappling with websites and trying to get them out of the 1990s."

How to use bitcoins

1. Typically, you start by setting up digital wallet online. A good number of websites online provide options tied to hardware, in the cloud, on your desktop and/or mobile device.
2. Once you've got your wallet, you will have a 34-36 character-long alphanumeric bitcoin address that will allow you to make transactions. New addresses can be generated at any time, which is recommended by some as an additional safety precaution.
3. Users can then start receiving bitcoins from other users, or go to a bitcoin exchange to buy bitcoins much in the same way you go to a money changer before a trip. An increasing number of retail outlets are accepting bitcoin payments. Here are some:
 - Expedia.com

- Bacchanalia, 23A Coleman Street, Singapore
- Bartini Kitchen, 29 Boon Tat St, Singapore
- Pattaya Beer Garden, Beach Road, Pattaya

A note of caution

- Bitcoin value is volatile because of its "young economy, novel nature and sometimes illiquid markets", says bitcoin.org. Bitcoin sites advise users against storing their life savings in bitcoin for these reasons.
- Transactions are not completely anonymous due to their traceability, so some effort must be made to protect your privacy.
- Though not official currency, most jurisdictions require individuals to pay tax on all properties of value, including bitcoins.



REDISCOVER THAILAND WITH BEST WESTERN

As one of the world's most sought-after tourist destinations, Thailand offers a multitude of exciting options for guests.

For decades, this Kingdom has been enticing international guests with its unsurpassed mix of charming culture, breath-taking beaches, superlative shopping, exhilarating nightlife and exotic cuisine.

And with the country now at ease once more, there has never been a better time to rediscover this Southeast Asian jewel.

Best Western International now has a collection of 12 hotels across Thailand, from the bustling streets of Bangkok to the palm-fringed bays of Phuket, the tropical islands Koh Samui and Koh Phangan to the ancient temples of the northeast.

And as Thailand grows as a destination, we continue our rapid expansion across the Kingdom. This fall we have introduced the stunning new **BEST WESTERN Patong Beach** in Phuket, which overlooks the azure waters of the Andaman Sea in the heart of one of Thailand's foremost destinations.

And in addition to this, Best Western International plans to open a further three hotels across Thailand in the near future, providing almost 500 more comfortable rooms for guests.



BEST WESTERN PLUS Grand Howard, Bangkok



BEST WESTERN PLUS At 20 Sukhumvit, Bangkok



BEST WESTERN PREMIER Sukhumvit, Bangkok



BEST WESTERN Mayfair Suites, Bangkok



BEST WESTERN PREMIER Amaranth Suvarnabhumi Airport, Bangkok



BEST WESTERN Klassique Sukhumvit, Bangkok

Bangkok

With its bustling markets, bright lights and aromatic street food, Bangkok can often be a sensory overload for travelers. But with its unparalleled retail offerings, exquisite golden temples and labyrinth of waterways, this is also a city that rewards exploration. With six hotels in the Greater Bangkok area, including all three of our key brands, Best Western International provides a wealth of options for travelers to the Thai capital. Enjoy the luxurious surroundings of the **BEST WESTERN PREMIER Sukhumvit**, which is located in the very heart of the city, or take advantage of our two excellent upscale hotels, **BEST WESTERN PLUS Grand Howard** and **BEST WESTERN PLUS At 20 Sukhumvit**. Classic city center midscale options are available at **BEST WESTERN Mayfair Suites** and **BEST WESTERN Klassique Sukhumvit**, while the luxury **BEST WESTERN PREMIER Amaranth Suvarnabhumi Airport** is a stunning city hotel with close proximity to Suvarnabhumi Airport.

Phuket

With its endless stretches of golden sand and a blissfully warm climate, Thailand's largest island has long been the jewel in the country's tourism crown. Best Western International is now proud to be able to offer three properties in Phuket, including both luxury and midscale options. Located on the stunning golden sands of Bangtao Beach, **BEST WESTERN PREMIER Bangtao Beach Resort & Spa** offers all the facilities and services one would expect from an international luxury resort, in an idyllic setting. Meanwhile **BEST WESTERN Phuket Ocean Resort** and the brand new **BEST WESTERN Patong Beach** are setting new benchmarks for modern midscale hotels in Phuket.

Gulf of Thailand

Nestled like jewels in the warm waters of the Gulf of Thailand, the twin islands of Koh Samui and Koh Phangan provide the perfect tropical setting for any holiday. In green hills overlooking Samui's popular Chaweng Beach, **BEST WESTERN Samui Bay View Resort** offers an unsurpassed location. And over on neighboring Koh Phangan, the seafront **BEST WESTERN Phanganburi Resort** gazes back across the Gulf towards Samui, perfect for a getaway from Bangkok.

Northeast Thailand

Finally, in the up-and-coming city of Buriram, close to the spectacular ancient temples of Phanom Rung Historical Park, **BEST WESTERN Royal Buriram Hotel** brings the company's international standards of comfort and service excellence to Northeast Thailand. No matter where your next Thai adventure takes you, all our hotels provide the same levels of comfort, convenience and connectivity that guests have come to expect from every Best Western International hotel across the globe, including complimentary Wi-Fi.



BEST WESTERN Royal Buriram Hotel, Buriram



BEST WESTERN Phuket Ocean Resort, Phuket



BEST WESTERN Phanganburi Resort, Koh Phangan



BEST WESTERN Patong Beach, Phuket



BEST WESTERN PREMIER Bangtao Beach Resort & Spa, Phuket



BEST WESTERN Samui Bay View Resort, Koh Samui

BEST WESTERN HOTELS IN THAILAND

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BEST WESTERN PREMIER Bangtao Beach Resort & Spa, Phuket
BEST WESTERN PREMIER Sukhumvit, Bangkok
BEST WESTERN PLUS At 20 Sukhumvit, Bangkok
BEST WESTERN PLUS Grand Howard, Bangkok
BEST WESTERN Klassique Sukhumvit, Bangkok
BEST WESTERN Mayfair Suites, Bangkok
BEST WESTERN Patong Beach, Phuket
BEST WESTERN Phanganburi Resort, Koh Phangan
BEST WESTERN Phuket Ocean Resort, Phuket
BEST WESTERN Royal Buriram Hotel, Buriram
BEST WESTERN Samui Bayview Resort, Koh Samui

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ASK THE EXPERT

FOCUS ON CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

At Air New Zealand we operate on the ethos that we fly people, not planes. As an international airline, we deliver uniquely Kiwi journeys to more than 13 million passengers who fly to, from and within New Zealand each year.

The most important journey for us, however, is the customer experience journey. I strongly believe that building a distinctive brand and culture around the customer experience journey helps players to differentiate themselves from the competition and attract consumer interest and support.

In today's globally connected world, it's more important than ever to ensure that we play in the right markets, work with the right partners and grow through the right channels. It's crucial that the travel trade is also aligned and working cohesively to convert the opportunities that exist and deliver a world-class travel experience.

It's a fast-evolving world and industry that we operate in, and it's imperative we evolve too. Underpinning our ability to keep up with a changing environment is our willingness to embrace new technologies and innovations – particularly when it comes to connecting with a younger generation of Millennials.

To improve brand awareness and gain loyalty with a youthful, more tech-savvy customer base, we've implemented a digital strategy that has included launching an innovative mobile app and positioning social media as a key customer communication and response channel – our Facebook page is currently the most popular corporate page in New Zealand. We've also teamed with celebrities such as Betty White and Bear Grylls

to produce quirky safety videos that have succeeded in injecting a dose of fresh energy and pop culture into our brand – drawing millions of views on YouTube.

Above all, however, we believe the key to building loyalty and brand presence is putting people – both customers and employees – at the heart of our decisions. Ultimately every other aspect of our business can be copied, but our people are what sets us apart from our competitors. Investing in a strong culture empowers our staff to deliver their best work, leading to greater service for customers and a direct impact on our bottom line – which allows us to reinvest back into our business.

We pour resources into this area because we recognise its value. We regularly seek feedback from customers and base business decisions on those insights. In fact, we were one of the first airlines in the world to create a Customer Experience team focused on enhancing the customer experience. These enhancements include investing in a modern fleet, upgrading our airport lounges, creating a Customer Care team with world-leading turnarounds in customer feedback and refreshing our loyalty programme in response to member feedback – a move that has seen membership numbers soar.

Our goal is to sustainably grow our business year after year while focusing on the things our customers truly value. We will achieve this by ensuring we operate in the right markets, by working smarter and aligning with the right partners, by simplifying our business to drive out unnecessary cost and complexity, and of course, by always striving to remain innovative and creative.



The most important journey is the customer experience journey.

Christopher Luxon, CEO, Air New Zealand will be sharing more insights on customer experiences at the Asia Travel Leaders Summit in Singapore as part of the TravelRave festival, which runs from October 27-31, 2014

WHO GETS THE BOOKING?

TTG Asia's reporter tries to make a booking for a stay at Diamond Bay Resort & Spa in Nha Trang, Vietnam, and finds the resort's own branded website to be more informative and user-friendly than that of online travel agency Asiana Travel. He thus chooses to book with the resort directly despite a higher room rate.



Asiana Travel	Diamond Bay Resort & Spa
<p>APPEARANCE The OTA's website is quite an assault on the senses initially with plenty of flashing banners to distract you. Once you see past these, there is a 'Hotel' tab that can be clicked, but it becomes apparent that the search function does not search hotels on the website. The only way to search is by area, which is very time consuming.</p>	<p>APPEARANCE The hotel's homepage is clean and inviting, and shows a welcoming balance between images and text. There is a clear reservation tab to help steer you in the right direction for a fast booking.</p>
<p>PRODUCT I find the hotel is listed as 'Diamond Bay Resort and Golf' – which is incorrect. There is plenty of information on the resort with the option of a 'live chat' with a travel consultant. There are no add-ons at this point – just a choice for room and bed type. Rates are listed as starting at US\$160.</p>	<p>PRODUCT There are plenty of images that show each room type and a drop-down menu to add extra requests, such as non-smoking. Room rates are clearly visible next to the room types, with a filter also available.</p>
<p>EASE OF BOOKING There is no drop-down calendar to choose dates from, which I find annoying. Bookings can't be made online, but through email. I sent my request and received a reply four hours later.</p>	<p>EASE OF BOOKING The booking process is clear and simple with dates openly displayed to choose from. It is possible to register your details, including credit cards, to shorten the process as a returning customer.</p>
<p>PRICE My verification stipulated a Garden Superior room including breakfast for US\$115. There were also a number of combined extras offered and a transfer each way for US\$25. The email did not verify the action required to secure the room.</p>	<p>PRICE A Garden Superior room including breakfast is listed at US\$134. A few add-ons are offered, such as transfers each way for US\$25. It also informs that a bus shuttle is available for just US\$5. There is a clear breakdown of costs and services.</p>
<p>VERDICT I found the OTA frustratingly time consuming as I was unable to find the hotel using their 'search' tool. There was plenty of information on the hotel but it was hidden deep within the site. The hotel's branded website made the booking process simple and quick. It provided sufficient information without being overbearing. Even though Asiana Travel offered the room for US\$19 less, I would feel more confident booking through the hotel's website.</p>	



View from the top

He's been with the group for 20 years and in April this year took over from Simon Barlow as Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group's president Asia-Pacific based in Singapore. Thorsten Kirschke tells [Raini Hamdi](#) he is open to franchising and aims to expand the chain's two new brands in the region

SEEING RED AND BLU

Your predecessors created a lot of growth. By year-end, the group will operate more than 100 hotels across Asia-Pacific. How do you hope to top that?

There is still a lot of demand for branded, reliable hotel brands. Markets like India and China drive the growth because of their sheer size but there are other pockets such as Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, and new sparks, for example Myanmar or even Bangladesh, where many international chains are trying to make an entry. We are present there (Bangladesh) with one hotel in operation and another in pre-opening.

Australia, the surrounding New Caledonia and New Zealand are yet another great potential for branded inventory.

What's your strategy?

Three-pronged. One is to deepen our strategic alliances. They come in several shapes: some are on the back of an articulated contract, like a JV, others are more built around relationships, but no matter what they are, they are fundamental to development in this part of the world.

For example, the SM Group (in the Philippines) is a contractual agreement with the commitment for development over several years but, as we know, it is a private family that is at the base of this company. Here's where Carlson Rezidor has a huge advantage because we ourselves are a private company and we do understand the values that drive a family business. Thereby, the relationship aspect with that company becomes more important. Understanding the 'mechanics' and not being forced to report to a stock exchange on a quarterly basis is of great value.

What's the second prong?

To broaden our business model. We see the opportunity for controlled franchise development, and to target conversion opportunities, which previously were not as clear on our agenda for growth.

For example, we are evaluating a multiple-unit franchise agreement in China with a well-respected group that owns one of our properties today and several others. This could be a fantastic recipe for future growth, provided our partners demonstrate the capabilities of operating the hotel within the brand promise.

Has Carlson Rezidor done any franchising in Asia-Pacific to date?

In India, there is a master licence agreement for Country Inns & Suites with CDMS (Country Development & Management Services, a joint venture between Country Inns & Suites and Chanakya Hotels since 1998). Other than that we have stayed away from franchising which is precisely why I believe there is opportunity for future growth as we see capabilities evolve in this part of the world.

How have capabilities evolved?

We see owners becoming more 'educated' as the hospitality industry grows in Asia-Pacific. Some of them have started to form their own management companies.

The China group for example has start-

ed to build its own management capability, as in people and resources. We have a long-standing relationship with the company; we have known the properties' GMs for many years. So there is an opportunity to expand this relationship under the umbrella of franchising.

India too, is a long-standing relationship. We have deep trust in each other. They were the founding members in driving our presence today in India. We are the largest international hotel operator in India and this would not happen if it hadn't been for the mutual trust. This proves that franchising as a business model and vehicle for growth has its merits even in developing markets and particularly here in Asia-Pacific.

How do you intend to franchise and is it only for Country Inns & Suites?

We would not give an exclusive master licence either for a brand or a territory – that is one step ahead in this business model, particularly in China.

We're open to franchise all brands, but the higher

the segmentation, the more complex it becomes. In China, we are considering the higher-positioned brands, Radisson and Radisson Blu, for franchising, but again it is case-by-case evaluation. What I'm saying is we are not ruling out franchising anymore. We would be negligent if we do not consider the increased capabilities investors have assumed over time, and franchising as an avenue for growth as a result of it.

So selective franchising and conversion targeting is the second dimension we are pursuing for further growth in the Asia-Pacific region.

Why are conversion opportunities on your agenda now?

A report some years back identified a list of conversion opportunities in Asia-Pacific but the number then was not very large. We see that growing and, of course, we know conversions are lucrative and fast-to-market, so we have identified this as a platform to grow.

These can be existing hotels where agreements are expiring, or conversion of potentially non-branded to branded assets, or on the rare occasion, re-adaptive use of existing buildings. As the real estate market in Asia-Pacific matures further, we'll see more of that going forward.

10 NEED TO KNOWS ABOUT THORSTEN KIRSCHKE

■ **Who's in your family?** Wife, son and two dogs

■ **What do you do for fun?** Enjoying time with my family and lots of outdoor sports

■ **Your ideal vacation?** Family vacations and spending time with old friends

■ **How do you book your own leisure trips?** Easily, with the help of my PA

■ **What are you reading right now?** Stacks of business literature

■ **How do you stay healthy?** Eat well, exercise well, and listen to my body and mind

■ **Favourite food?** Linguini with lobster from Esca in NYC, if not my mom's recipe for roulades

■ **A bad habit you cannot kick?** I will let you know when I'm rid of it – and no, it's not that bad.

■ **Your pet peeve, something that never fails to annoy you?** Being stuck in traffic

■ **Most people don't know that you...** enjoy ice fishing, but only if it's not less than minus 20 degree Celsius and it's sunny!



So what's the third prong?

The third is the introduction of new brands into market, Quorvus Collection and Radisson Red (*TTG Asia e-Daily*, July 25, 2014). Quorvus is a luxury brand by affiliation, catering to hotels that are clearly looking for a platform and distribution while protecting

dream up brands so they can get management contracts?

Every company has to grow. Whether it is retail, fashion or liquor, companies are expanding their portfolios continuously, not for sake of growth but in response to new and evolving demand from changing demographics, markets and different consumer trends around the world. Ikea is not what it was 20 years ago, and we can quote many other companies from other industries that have evolved over time.

Of course underneath all that is the looming danger of commoditisation when we bring new brands to the market and I know this is also on the minds of my colleagues around the world.

But I think the industry is doing a good job.

Really? I see a lot of sameness in the rush to cater to Gen Y, for example.

Of course you'd find global international chains collectively responding to the changing demand – that is only logical. The question then becomes who is delivering and executing to the best of the consumer expectations. You can't just develop a brand on a piece of paper, you must be able to deliver it.

As customers change, won't your older brands be sidelined by the new brands?

No, we have taken great effort to rejuvenate our portfolio – our Radisson Re-imagined initiative was probably one of the largest brand renovation projects. We also developed the fourth generation of Country Inns & Suites so that the brand is more relevant to younger travellers.

So we do always manage our brands to stay relevant but of course every brand can only ever evolve so much in its rightful positioning, and there is always an opportunity to launch new ones. The upscale select brand, for example, was not an opportunity that existed 15-20 years ago, when mostly upscale, full-service hotels were built. That was also the time all the great brands of the world were travelling globally.

So what's next – a Green? Is there another gap the group wants to fill?

I know there are still segments we're not covering today – we do not have a brand in the economy/budget sector, for instance.

Is it a fair criticism that chains just

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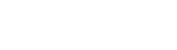
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HOTELS



SHERATON ZHUHAI, CHINA

Opening in November, the 548-room Sheraton Zhuhai Hotel will adjoin the Zhuhai International Convention & Exhibition Center in the city's Shizimen District. The 19-storey waterfront hotel offers 2,070m² of meeting space, four dining outlets and a fitness centre. The opening package starts from RMB1,288 (US\$210; excluding 15 per cent surcharge) per night for bookings between November 12 and December 31.



NOVOTEL PHUKET KARON BEACH RESORT AND SPA, THAILAND

Located on Phuket's Karon Beach, the new 224-room resort boasts three pools, a fitness centre, all-day-dining restaurants, a pool bar, a sports bar, a spa and 24-hour in-room-dining. The resort is currently offering an introductory promotion where guests can stay three nights and pay for only two, plus complimentary breakfast for two, valid from October 15 until December 19.



THE REVERIE SAIGON, VIETNAM

Come December 15, The Reverie Saigon is set to debut in Ho Chi Minh City within a 39-storey, mixed-use development. The 286-key hotel will boast room interiors featuring furnishings and craftsmanship by Italian design houses such as Provasi, Colombo Stile, Visionnaire and Giorgetti. Facilities include an outdoor pool, a spa and fitness centre, a Chinese restaurant, and a fleet of Bentleys and Rolls-Royces.



GOLDEN TULIP ESSENTIAL DENPASAR, INDONESIA

Located on Bali's Jalan Gatot Subroto Barat No. 101, the 94-room Golden Tulip Essential Denpasar marks the second Golden Tulip hotel in Indonesia, featuring complimentary in-room Wi-Fi, six function rooms with a capacity for up to 150 pax, an outdoor swimming pool, the luxury Dedari Spa and the Branche Restaurant, Bar & Lounge.

TRANSPORTATION

BANGKOK AIRWAYS ADDS NEW ROUTES, FLIGHT FREQUENCY

Bangkok Airways will launch new services and add frequency on some routes this winter. New services by the carrier include thrice-weekly Chiang Mai-Mandalay, four-times-weekly Chiang Mai-Yangon, twice-daily Chiang Mai-Udon Thani and daily Chiang Mai-Phuket flights. These new sectors will begin operations from October 26, and are now open for bookings. The airline will also step up frequency on the Bangkok-Krabi (from thrice- to four-times-daily) and Bangkok-Chiang Rai (from twice to thrice-daily) routes on October 26 and November 1 respectively.

SIA, VIRGIN AUSTRALIA BRING LOYALTY PROGRAMMES CLOSER

Frequent flyers with Singapore Airlines (SIA) or Virgin Australia can opt to convert Miles and Points between both programmes and receive new benefits in a conversion scheme exclusive to the two airlines. From this November, SIA's KrisFlyer members can access non-flight benefits offered by Virgin's Velocity Frequent Flyer. They are also able to redeem flights across all classes of travel on Virgin Australia including premium economy, and earn Status Credits on domestic, trans-Tasman and Pacific Islands codeshare flights operated by Virgin. Velocity passengers will also have access to an improved online booking capability for SIA and SilkAir flights. Less Velocity points will be required for seats on SIA services, and they can earn Points on all fare classes with SIA and SilkAir flights.



Restaurant and lounge of Emperor Cruises' ship

EMPEROR CRUISES TO LAUNCH ALL-INCLUSIVE CRUISES IN NHA TRANG

Emperor Cruises, a joint venture between Luxury Travel and Huong Hai Halong, will become the first luxury cruise operator to offer five-star experiential travel in Nha Trang Bay. From February 2015, Emperor Cruises will offer day cruises around the bay as well as sunset cocktails and dinner on board a junk cruise boat. The cruise operator will also launch its overnight luxury cruise ship in Nha Trang Bay in June 2015, which will mark the first of a total of five ships in this particular project. Inspired by Emperor Bao Dai who used to sail Nha Trang Bay half a century earlier, the newly built, custom-designed traditional vessel features three decks that come with a restaurant, two bars, a library, a massage room plus 15 luxurious en-suite cabins with private balconies.

ACTIVITIES



Juliette Binoche in *Clouds of Sils Maria*

4TH RENDEZVOUS WITH FRENCH CINEMA

From November 28 to December 7, the fourth edition of the Rendezvous with French Cinema will be held at Alliance Française de Singapour, Shaw Lido and The Cathay Cineplex. Featuring a line-up of the best of contemporary French cinema, the 2014 edition of the festival presents 16 new films and will open with the biggest French comedy of the year, *Serial (Bad) Weddings*, at The Cathay Cineplex. The festival will also pay special tribute to Juliette Binoche, with the Singapore premiere of her latest movie, *Clouds of Sils Maria* (which competed for the Palme d'Or at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival), in her presence. The screening is held in conjunction with the Singapore International Film Festival. A photo exhibition titled *In-side Cannes* will be held at the Alliance Française, bringing the magic of Cannes to Singapore. Ticketing information is available at www.rendezvouswithfrenchcinema.sg.

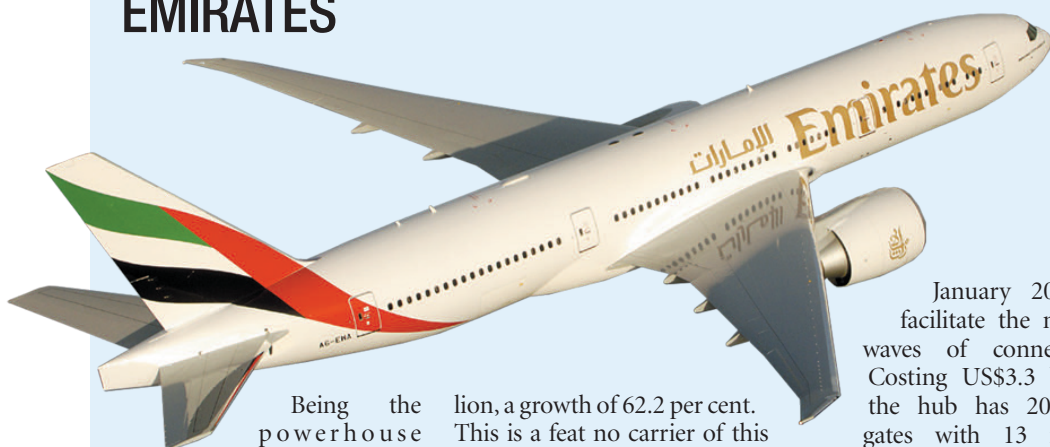
TECHNOLOGY

JABABEKA HELPS SECONDARY DESTINATIONS GO DIGITAL

PATA'S Indonesia Chapter (PIC) is taking the lead in developing secondary destinations in Indonesia, beginning with a pilot programme in Cirebon that aims to drive tourism to the port city, which is on the north coast of Java and three hours away from Jakarta. With support from Indonesian industrial estate developer, Jababeka, PIC is creating B2B and B2C platforms, making tourist attractions and other services in a destination more accessible to both the travelling public and the trade. A B2C booking platform for Cirebon will be launched on October 23. Hotels, travel companies and convenience stores within Indonesia can also connect with the network, enabling travellers to buy entry tickets through offline means or directly via the website.

MID-EAST CARRIERS POWER AHEAD

EMIRATES



Being the powerhouse of the Middle East, Emirates has sent more than ripples across the oceans of the world. Its growth is phenomenal and is perhaps adequately illustrated by the number it carries.

In the year ending March 31, 2010, Emirates carried 27.5 million passengers. In the year ending March 31, 2014, the number carried was 44.5 mil-

lion, a growth of 62.2 per cent. This is a feat no carrier of this size could match, and the trend continues with more A380s being delivered and a whole new fleet of technologically advanced airplanes on its order books.

Emirates has now received more than 50 of the 150 A380s it has ordered, making it the largest A380 operator by a long shot. It is therefore no surprise that the airline opened an A380 hub at Dubai International Airport in

January 2013 to facilitate the massive waves of connections. Costing US\$3.3 billion, the hub has 20 A380 gates with 13 remote stands. This terminal alone has the capacity to handle 15 million passengers annually and comes complete with 202 rooms of four- and five-star standards.

The airline had to temporarily reduced the size of its operation this April and May while maintenance works were carried out at its home base. However, since then ex-

pansion of capacity has resumed, with more to come:

- Deployment of A380 to Frankfurt from September 1
- Second daily A380 service to Mauritius starting October 26 – replaces the B777-300ER
- Dubai-Dar es Salaam, Tanzania from 7 to 12 weekly starting October 26
- Dubai-Rome adds a third daily service from October 26
- Dubai-Johannesburg from 3 to 4 daily from October 26
- Dubai-Budapest new daily service from October 27
- From December 1, service to Bahrain from 3 to 4 daily, Doha from 6 to 7 daily, Kuwait City from 5 to 6 daily and Muscat from 2 to 3 daily
- Expansion of A380 services to San Francisco (December 1) and Houston (December 3)
- Deployment of bigger B777-300ER on daily Dubai-Brussels starting February 1, 2015 – replaces B777-200LR

Asian footprint

For its size, it is surprising that Emirates is not serving more Chinese destinations. It currently operates to Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Hong Kong, but in south Asia, it operates to 10 cities in India, five cities in Pakistan as well as Dhaka, Colombo and Male. Clearly India and South Asia are an important market for Emirates, with



Emirates Business Class

ETIHAD AIRWAYS



Long viewed as the other carrier from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Etihad Airways is beginning to assert its position as UAE's national carrier. As is the business model for each of the ME3, Etihad is riding on connections across the world with Abu Dhabi as its hub. As such, many of its passengers arriving in Abu Dhabi connect onto flights fanning out across the Middle East, Europe, Africa and the east coast of North America.

Like Qatar Airways, Etihad is also a late operator of the A380, but the carrier has utilised this advantage to push the innovation boundary in conceptualising its premium class product onboard. The delivery of its first Airbus A380 in the final quarter of 2014 will facilitate its deployment on one of the three daily services to London-

Heathrow. By March 1, 2015, the A380 will also be deployed on a second daily service to London-Heathrow and by May 2015, all three services will be operated by the A380. On June 1, 2015, the A380 will head in the opposite direction to Sydney, thus offering a homogenous A380 product along the entire Kangaroo Route.

Etihad is also close to receiving its first B787-9 Dreamliner, which will be deployed next year to destinations including Dusseldorf, Moscow, Brisbane, Mumbai and Washington DC.

The induction of these two types has allowed Etihad to up the ante in the premium class arena, especially with the A380 where the airline will have four classes. In the uber-luxurious segment, Etihad has unveiled The Residence, promising a VIP travel concierge service from the moment a booking is made. Up to two travellers will have a living room, a separate bedroom and an

ensuite bathroom – touted as the only three-room suite in the sky. For first class, Etihad's answer on the A380 is the First Apartment – besides the amenities one finds in a suite, it also features a wardrobe and a bathroom complete with shower facilities.

On the B787-9, the First Suite will offer privacy with ambient lighting, a personal wardrobe, a chilled drinks cabinet and space to entertain another guest.

On both the A380 and B787-9, Etihad will also have the Business Studio, which converts into a fully flat bed of up to 80.5 inches. Every one of these studios will have aisle access.

And in economy, a new Smart Seat comes complete with a fixed wing headrest, adjustable lumbar support, mobile and Internet access.

Complementing these hardware upgrades, Etihad's home hub, Abu Dhabi Airport, is also constructing a mid-field ter-

minal that will be completed in 2017.

Etihad maintains a keen lookout for strategic assets to acquire – mainly airlines (mostly in different degree of distress). These airlines have been valuable for the feed they provide to Etihad's own services and these include: Aer Lingus (Ireland), Air Berlin (Germany), Air Serbia (Serbia), Air Seychelles (Seychelles), Alitalia (Italy), Darwin Airlines – rebranded as Etihad Regional (Switzerland), Jet Airways (India) and Virgin Australia (Australia).

Etihad has also actively pursued codeshare arrangements with various carriers, and some of the more recent partners include Philippine Airlines and Air Malta (July) and Gol – a carrier from Brazil (September). It has also formed strong codeshare bonds with SkyTeam members such as KLM, Air France and Garuda Indonesia.

Capacity expansion on existing routes include:

- Karachi, Pakistan (from once to twice daily service starting October 26)
- Kuwait City (from 33 to 35 services weekly starting October 26)
- Astana, Kazakhstan (from 1 to 2 weekly from September)

- Almaty, Kazakhstan (from 4 to 5 weekly from September)

In June 2015, Etihad will also delink its current service to Singapore and Brisbane. Singapore will be served daily with an A330-300 turnaround service while Brisbane will be served non-stop with the B787-9.

New destinations for 2015 include:

- Kolkata (February 15)
- Madrid (March 29)
- Entebbe, Uganda (May 1)
- Edinburgh (June 8)
- Hong Kong (June 15)



The Residence, available on Etihad's A380

With bigger aircraft coming into service over the next year, the much-feared ME3 airlines are using the chance to enlarge their network and enhance their product. [Sim Kok Chwee](#) looks at the trio, plus an up-and-coming competitor

Airlines from the Middle East have enjoyed a growth trajectory that is already stellar by historical standards but to the dismay of their counterparts from other parts of the world, there will be no let-up. On the contrary, the competition posed by carriers from

the Middle East looks set to grow.

From orders placed in recent years, these carriers are receiving bigger and ever more fuel-efficient airplanes that further improve the bottom line and passenger appeal. The much-feared ME3 – Emirates, Etihad Airways and Qatar Airways – may just be joined by Turkish

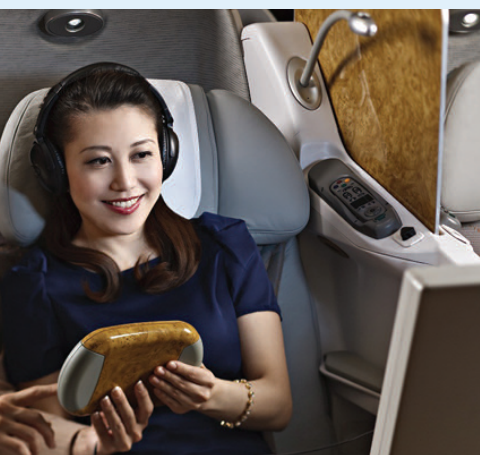
Airlines, which similarly aspires to ambitions equal to that already achieved by the trio.

In addition to growing organically through fleet and network additions, each of the four carriers has embarked on its own strategy. Two of these – Qatar Airways and Turkish Airlines – have decided

to join global alliances, while Emirates has secured a strategic alliance with Qantas Airways to make it the midpoint on the Kangaroo Route, replacing Singapore, Hong Kong and Bangkok. Etihad Airways takes a completely different tack, electing instead to acquire a whole slew of airlines as well as inch closer to SkyTeam carriers.

huge numbers travelling via Dubai to Europe and North America. Australia and New Zealand also represent a key market that Emirates has successfully tapped into with the Qantas alliance.

Where its coverage in South-east Asia is limited to just seven cities, it makes up with high frequencies to cities such as Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. With more A380s and B777-300ERs being delivered, China will probably feature more strongly.



- Algiers, Algeria (June 17)
- Baku, Azerbaijan (October 1)
- Tbilisi, Georgia (October 2)
- San Francisco (November 18)
- Dar es Salaam (December 1)

Asian footprint

Etihad currently serves Asian markets stretching from Kazakhstan to South Korea and New Zealand and unlike its fellow ME3 carriers, key markets are China, North Asia, Australia/New Zealand and South-east and South Asia. These markets offer connecting traffic to Europe, Africa and the Americas.



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QATAR AIRWAYS



© Airbus SAS 2014. Photo by master timothé Gausse

Almost 21 and certainly coming of age, Qatar Airways continues to solidify its position as a pre-eminent Middle Eastern carrier. Having received the first of 10 Airbus A380s on order on September 17, Qatar Airways has set October 10 for its inaugural deployment of the A380 to London-Heathrow, with a second daily deployment scheduled to begin on December 1. Paris too will be served with the A380 on a daily basis starting November 1. By end-2014, Qatar Airways will have received four

A380s and is also expected to become the first airline to receive and operate the Airbus A350-900XWB.

On its newly introduced Airbus A380s, Qatar Airways will have three classes with a total seat count of 517. Both premium class cabins are located on the upper deck of the A380, as is a private lounge and a small section for economy class. The main deck is completely configured for economy class.

Going forward, Qatar Airways is planning what it described as a substantial rev-

olution in the business class cabin.

Chief executive Akbar Al Baker promised it will be a "first class product sold as business class", but reveals nothing of its form and flavour. This move is not surprising given that the airline is following a worldwide trend to reduce first class service. It is also steering clear of another trend towards premium economy class, considering its new economy class product equal to premium economy, "but at a cheaper price".

In the race to end-2014, Qatar Airways will be adding two new destinations, beginning with a daily non-stop flight from Doha to Phuket operating an A330-200 from October 26. This will be followed by a twice-weekly A320 service to Asmara in Eritrea. It will also return to the Doha-Denpasar route with a daily non-stop service using the B787-8 – this service was previously operated via Singapore.

Capacity growth is also planned for the following routes:

- B787-8 replaces the A320 on daily flights to Vienna starting September 1
- Doha-Bucharest-Sofia from 5 weekly to daily starting October 1
- Doha-Dubai from 13 to 14 daily and Doha-Dubai Al Maktoum from 3 to 4 daily, both starting October 26
- Deployment of a B787-8 to Moscow on a daily basis starting November 1, replacing the A320 on one of two daily services

- Madrid will be served 10 times weekly starting November 16, up from a daily frequency
- A fifth weekly flight to Miami will be added starting November 17
- An additional frequency will be added each week to Nairobi starting November 20
- For the month of November, one of two daily flights to Frankfurt will be operated with the higher capacity B777-300ER instead of the B787-8
- Fourth daily service to Bangkok will be reinstated starting December 16

As a significant portion of passengers arriving into Doha connect to another flight within a short span of time, the airline's value proposition has become more attractive since April when it moved to the newly opened Hamad International Airport. Although it will initially have the capacity to handle 29 million passengers annually (thrice the designed capacity at the former Doha International Airport), plans are in place to boost this to 50 million passengers per year, with potential for further growth that could place it second only to Dubai Al Maktoum Airport.

Asian footprint

China, Japan and Australia and South and South-east Asia are key markets, with much of its traffic connecting to Europe, the Middle East, Africa and even the east coast of North America. The airline is also strongly promoting connections to Sao Paulo in Brazil. As is the case of most carriers operating to Asia, China remains the market with the greatest promise. Australia too holds promise, but it is a destination that has seen a glut of international capacity. Chinese carriers are increasingly making inroads into this market and pitching themselves as a cheaper alternative from Australia to the rest of Asia and Europe.

TURKISH AIRLINES

The success of the ME3 carriers inevitably leads others to emulate their success. Interestingly, a dark horse has emerged in the form of Turkish Airlines whose home base interestingly straddles two continents – Europe and Asia. A Star Alliance member, Turkish Airlines has inked a number of code-share agreements including those with fellow members, LOT Polish Airlines and Singapore Airlines.

It plans to increase its fleet from 267 aircraft in April 2014 to 450 in 2023. In 2013, Turkish Airlines' operating revenue hit US\$9.8 billion – a strong 19 per cent year on year. The airline expects this to grow 17 per cent to US\$11.4 billion in 2014.

Fuelling such lofty growth ambition is the development of

a new international airport in Istanbul slated for completion in 2019. The airport will cost a whopping US\$35 billion and be able to handle 150 million passengers annually.

New routes and capacity include:

- Istanbul-Malta from 5 to 7 weekly from October 2
- Istanbul-Hannover from 14 to 17 weekly from October 26
- Istanbul-Stuttgart from 25 to 28 weekly from December 2
- Istanbul-Luanda, Angola new twice-weekly service from January 4, 2015
- Istanbul-San Francisco new 5 weekly service from April 13, 2015, which will increase to daily frequency by May 11, 2015
- Istanbul-Chicago with B777-300ER replacing A330-200 starting May 11



Turkish Airlines' First Class

- Istanbul-Jakarta served daily with non-stop service. It is currently served via Singapore

Asian footprint

Turkish Airlines has a fairly even spread of destinations in North, South-east and South Asia, but its Asian network currently ends with Jakarta as its southern-most point. Australia and New Zealand are mostly served via its strong codeshare agreement with Singapore Airlines, but signs are evident that the airline has Sydney on its radar.



Social

From the newest executive movements to recent trade celebrations and major upcoming events, we round up the latest happenings to keep you plugged in

GALLERY ON THE SIDELINES OF PATA TRAVEL MART...

Photos by Eric Beaulieu

PATA GRAND AND GOLD AWARDS

Twenty-nine PATA Grand and Gold Awards were presented this year on September 19, with *TTGmice* winning for the fourth time the PATA Gold Award for Travel Journalism – Industry Business Article. TTG Asia Media managing director, Darren Ng, receives the award (right)



PATA YOUTH SYMPOSIUM

Over 200 young professionals, students and lecturers participated in roundtable discussions at the Royal University of Phnom Penh on September 17 under the theme *What Do You Want to Share with the World? Tourism and Cultural Integrity for Cambodia*



ASEAN TOURISM INVESTMENT FORUM

A PATA panel at the forum on September 18 covered major topics such as air connectivity, human capital development and the ASEAN Economic Community's goal of regional economic integration by 2015



Best Western Brings Sense of Style to Phuket

By Glenn de Souza
Best Western International's
Vice President International
Operations - Asia & the Middle East

Best Western International has unveiled a new hotel in Phuket which we believe will bring a new sense of style to the island's mid-scale market. The new 224 room BEST WESTERN Patong Beach opened in October, located less than 1km from the famous white sands of Patong Beach.

An outdoor, infinity-edged swimming pool overlooks the Andaman Sea, while the light and spacious Mana Restaurant serves up delectable local and international cuisine.

And as with all Best Western hotels worldwide, Wi-Fi is free throughout the property.

BEST WESTERN Patong Beach is a wonderful example of our new generation of hotels in Asia.

With its modern design, full range of facilities and Best Western's legendary service, I am confident reinvigorates the midscale sector in Phuket and be extremely popular with our guests.



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Asia Travel Leaders Summit

October 28, Singapore

Created by the Singapore Tourism Board, the by-invitation-only event will gather the Asian travel and tourism industry's leading minds to delve into issues such as how to attract Millennial talent.

Aviation Outlook Asia

October 28-29, Singapore

This C-level networking platform is not only a place to explore new ideas and learn best practices, but an opportunity to develop partnerships.

ITB Asia

October 29-31, Singapore

This tradeshow for the Asian travel market will showcase a full range of products and services. It will also feature conferences (see TTG Asia's below), workshops and seminars that focus on key issues facing the industry.

TTG Asia Technology Conference

October 30, Singapore

Join us in lauding the winner of the 40tude Innovator Award at our complimentary event. Themed the 5Cs, topics covered range from content and channels to customer marketing. Visit www.ttgasia.com/ttgconference.

Hotel Management Summit Singapore

October 30, Singapore

This conference addresses all operational/management challenges and is co-located with the Hotel Technology Conference.

All smiles and thumbs up as we wrap up yet another successful PATA Tavel Mart 2014!

17 - 19 September 2014, Phnom Penh, Cambodia



UNWTO Spain's Xu Jing, UNESCO Cambodia's Anne Lemaistre, PATA's Martin Craigs, Ministry of Tourism Cambodia's So Mara and UNWTO Spain's H Varma



Ministry of Tourism Cambodia's In Thoeun, Dara Airport Hotel Cambodia's Yin Yin Aye, Ministry of Tourism Cambodia's Ok Dararidh and Ministry of Tourism Cambodia's Nim Sovann



Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism Laos' Kettasone Sundara and Anousone Douangsovath



Macleay Valley Travel Australia's Bryn Davies and Imperial China Tours Australia's Ju Yang



Golden Sand Hotel Cambodia's Dara Sok and White Sand Palace Cambodia's Helen Pheakdey Kong



JTB Singapore's Dennis Law, Dynasty Travel International Singapore's Michael Lim and VLK Travel Cambodia's Lav Heng



Hotel Equatorial Melaka's Emmelynn Kuan and Hotel Equatorial Malaysia's Jess Kaw



Fun Express Czech Republic's Hana Prusova and J&T Concierge Czech Republic's Eva Klejmová



Sona Travels India's RK Arora, State Express India's Harish Bhatt and Shree Siddhivinayak Ayurveda India's Bhairav Tawshikar Kulkarni



Gray Mackenzie & Partners UAE's Jude Alphonso, Ormeir Travel Agency UAE's John Varkey Kailath, Uniglobe Indica Travel & Tours India's Shiban Kotru, Ad Voyage Travels India's Sandeep Jain and Rakaposhi Tours Pakistan's Akbar Shareef



RZ Travels US' M Zaki and Ministry of Tourism Cambodia's Thong Khon



Indochina Heritage Travel Cambodia's Dang Van Nhan, Vietravel Vietnam's Jimmy Hai Phan and Nguyen Thi Bich Thuy, and Sunshine Director Worldwide Air Holdiays UK's Steve Gouldby



Egyptian Tourism Office India's Adel El Masry and Phoenix Voyages Vietnam's Edouard George



Garuda Indonesia Thailand's Somchai Attasivanon, S Sugito and Aree Hapermpool



Province of Bohol Philippines' Edgar Chatto (centre) with the country's lively contingent



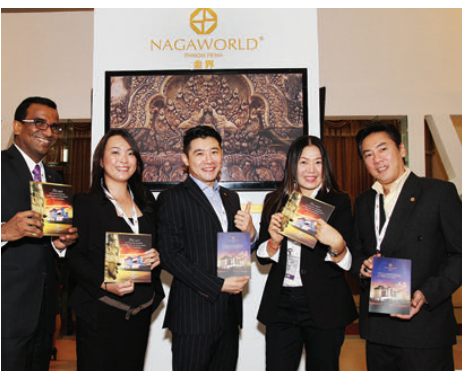
Jakarta City Government Tourism and Culture Office's Cucu Ahmad Kurnia (4TH from right)



Iskandar Regional Development Authority Malaysia's Mohammad Rosly Md Selamat, Wan Suziana Wan Othman, Farhanna Nazaruddin (right) Peak Destination Management Company Thailand's Michael Stewart, and Johor Tourism Department's Badrul Hisham Kassim



The Samaya Seminyak-Bali's Virgi (seated), Hotel Santika Jakarta's Agustinus Agung Pramudito, Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts' Guido Andriano, The Samaya Bali's Ray Clark, Infinity Holidays Australia's Judy Anglim and Hotel Santika Jogja's Denny Ermansyah



Nagaworld Phnom Penh's Philip Ommen and Melanie Loong, Nagacorp Cambodia's Pern Chen, and Nagaworld Phnom Penh's Ngai Fong Chin and Jerome Lee



**See you in Bengaluru for
PATA TRAVEL MART 2015!**

Government of Karnataka's RV Deshpande (fifth from left) with the Indian delegation

Report Sustainable tourism

More effort is being taken to ensure both MICE and leisure travel generate as little waste as possible, participants of this Roundtable tell *Raini Hamdi*.

When did you start doing meeting impact reports? Briefly, how is it done?

TENG Marina Bay Sands (MBS) started offering the Eco360 Meetings Impact Statement in 2012. These reports are prepared only upon request by our clients and are for individual events. Each report collects data on social, environmental and economic impact of the meeting. Data on energy and water usage, and waste produced, are collected based on the total floor space (measured in m²) during the rental period. The total energy consumption per event is calculated based on the readings of the individual energy meters installed within our MICE facilities. Other specifics such as the number of delegate attendees, event duration and amount of food consumed are also taken into account. Global Reporting Initiative indicators are subsequently used to determine key reporting metrics that are material to our clients.

MARATOS Our Meeting Impact Report (MIR) is one of 25 initiatives under (the chain's) Sustainable Meeting Practices, applicable across all our nine brands, launched in May 2010. Data is entered into an online Sustainability Resource Centre and the key indicators tracked include: energy and water consumption; waste management, including reduction of waste sent to landfills through recycling (glass, paper, plastic and metal) and environmental savings; composting; material selection and reuse; sustainable food choices; and volunteer programmes offered. The report is then converted to a PDF and sent to the customer via email.

SIMONS MCI made a solid commitment in 2007 by signing the UN Global Compact. Since then we have been providing our clients with detailed sustainability strategies and reports.

WONG We have been doing this since nine years ago, without extra cost to clients. It is part of our CSR initiative and our team members spend extra hours on it, on top of their usual tasks. Being green is my personal philosophy. With the client's agreement, we compile data through electronic or physical survey forms, sometimes with video interview sessions with participants.

It has become a 'must-have' from a 'good-to-have'.

RICAUITE Greenview has been working with event organisers to report the holistic impact of their events since 2011. Holistic because the report is a culmination of strategy and programme implementation. The process begins first with identifying the factors related to an event that are the most impactful, most relevant to its specific community or pose reputation risks. For example, if it's a food tradeshow, the key event issues are food donation, composting, food sourcing, etc. How to create a programme to improve performance in those areas?

Reporting the performance and sustainability story is the last component.

Although it is getting easier to measure the impact of a hotel stay, the challenge remains how we can effectively measure the impact of activities that leisure travellers do when they are outside the hotel.

Yes, large multinational companies, through the RFP process, are giving preference to hospitality companies that offer sustainable meetings. This trend is gradually spreading to Asia-Pacific...

One big challenge is lack of waste infrastructure, especially in Asia. Composting of food scraps is uncommon, as is recycling in some places. It's tough for tourism businesses to address this individually.



Kevin Teng
Executive director of sustainability
Marina Bay Sands Singapore



Nichlas Maratos, vice president, sales and marketing operations Asia-Pacific, Starwood Hotels and Resorts, based in Singapore



Eric Ricaute
Founder/CEO
Greenview, based in Singapore

WATCH THAT W

Greenview works with clients to go through this process, learning, growing and improving with each event.

We help planners understand all the players and their impact, then facilitate the collection of data to calculate an event's carbon footprint and create KPIs that allow planners and their partners to see how they are performing and progressing. We have also been working to make impact reporting easier, helping to standardise calculations and key items to report. An example is the Hotel Carbon Measurement Initiative with the hotel industry, which standardises the carbon footprint of a room night and meeting space rental.

What follow-ups are made after these reports have been issued?

TENG All data collected for the impact statement can be included in the overall sustainability report prepared internally by the individual event planner/organisation. These sustainability reports state the key objectives and the performance for the event. We also use the data collected for the impact statements to assist organisers to develop goals and targets for their future events through identifying key areas of improvements.

RICAUITE The reporting process in-

creases awareness and brings attention to important topics that can be changed for a particular event, but most likely can be changed permanently for more efficient and effective event execution.

When a planner works with a vendor partner on a sustainability programme they create a case study for that vendor to use to market its abilities and value. Many times programmes continue and grow after an event.

One important component that can be incorporated into the report is a perception analysis of attendees or exhibitors, asking them how they perceive the sustainability or socially responsible degree of the event. The results each year can be an indicator of the programme's success.

What is driving the need for these reports?

RICAUITE Companies have always recognised the power of the brand and more are quickly realising the role CSR plays for the brand. Events are a unique touchpoint with attendees and powerful opportunity to reflect an organisation's values. Planners themselves want to minimise reputational risk and maximise positive associations with their organisation and brand by hosting sustainable meetings. This then trickles down the supply chain. Hotels,

caterers, venues, AV providers, staffing organisations, etc are responding to consumers as well as investors. Also, reporting helps organisers manage their programme each year as they essentially have a memorialised plan of action and programme, and results that they can carry forth and improve upon each year.

TENG I agree. As more companies start to introduce climate protection goals as part of their overall corporate strategy, they are increasingly placing more focus on measuring and reporting the environmental impact of their events. Demand for event impact statements are driven by corporate clients and these reports are often being used to create the baseline data for future event goal setting.

MARATOS Yes, large multinational companies, through the RFP process, are giving preference to hospitality companies that offer sustainable meetings. This trend is gradually spreading to Asia-Pacific. To capitalise on it, we are looking at how the programme can be made more relevant to our customers in Asia-Pacific. We hope to roll it out more broadly early next year.

SIMONS Sustainability reports are common in other industries. There's strong

The trend to watch the waste line is rising. In the MICE sector, meeting impact reports are being generated. The same can be done for leisure travel, as *Raini Hamdi* discusses in this Roundtable

I agree that in Asia we'll see a lot of change in the coming years. The Singapore Exchange is already introducing sustainability mandatory reporting guidelines for publicly-traded corporations...

You've got to work together as one team to (make leisure travel greener). Apart from that, always communicate constantly with all in-house guests and incentivise them for taking part in green programmes.



Roger Simons
Group sustainability manager
MCI, based in Singapore

Anthony Wong
Chairman
Asian Overland Services Malaysia

ASTE LINE

political pressure and increased investor focus on how sustainable businesses are. I agree that in Asia we'll see a lot of change in the coming years. The Singapore Exchange is already introducing sustainability mandatory reporting guidelines for publicly-traded corporations, while the Securities and Exchange Board of India is mandating Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) disclosure for India's top 100 listed companies and most recently a ruling that companies should donate to social causes. The Hong Kong Stock Exchange is moving to a 'comply or explain' approach for ESG reporting by 2015. Events are very much a part of a company's ecosystem and increasingly their impact will become part of higher-level reports.

Investors are also now seeing that companies with a strong sustainability strategy and report are actually financially outperforming those that don't, so investors now look to sustainable business as equally as consumers in many markets are.

Lastly mega events are very much driving the trend specifically in the events industry. It (sustainability) is a major requirement of an Olympic bid or a FIFA World Cup, and this mentality is slowly filtering down to business events and large exhibitions.

What are the biggest areas of waste with events?

TENG At tradeshows, unused pamphlets/brochures and food waste.

MARATOS Paper.

SIMONS It depends on the type of event. Exhibitions can create a lot of solid waste through carpeting and temporary stand constructions, while the largest source of waste from conferences is often food and paper. But the biggest sustainability impact from international events is always carbon emissions from flights.

RICaute Totally agree – exhibit hall move-in and move-out generates incredible amounts of waste. Cardboard and plastic films are expected, but carpet, furniture and unused collateral fill dumpsters with quick turnarounds between events and limited dock space.

Any edible food that can be donated and is not is an unacceptable waste of resources.

Meetings are moving towards digital solutions and apps, but the amount of printing that gets disposed of onsite is still very high.

So many registration materials and giveaways end up being left in hotel

rooms. Companies need to find ways to add value to attendees through experiences and creative solutions rather than more stuff and more signs with logos on them.

WONG Energy, water and food, especially at the venue. This is why good architecture design with green in mind is vital during the planning stage to save as much energy as possible. The country we live in is near the equator – air-conditioning is necessary but it also drains large amount of energy. Why cool the whole centre at 16 degree Celsius? For water, we normally replace glasses with free bottled water and a water station. This not only saves water but a huge amount of plastic. As for food, as we all know, there is always a large quantity of food wasted after tea breaks and lunches. Instead of throwing food away, why not work with the venue to send the food to charity houses?

Why meet at all if it generates waste?

WONG Nothing can substitute face-to-face meetings.

Can leisure travel impact be measured?

SIMONS With technology, it is definitely possible. At Westin Hotel Singapore, we have 56 guestrooms on the hotel's 38th and 39th floors that have been equipped to monitor and track energy consumption via a meter on the in-room IPTV system.

WONG Yes, the basic green principles are almost the same. Same elements apply – energy, water and food, especially in the hotel.

TENG Although it is getting easier to measure the impact of a hotel stay, the challenge remains how we can effectively measure the impact of activities that leisure travellers do when they are outside the hotel.

RICaute I disagree. It's actually easier for leisure travel, which is already being done on certain levels for transport and hotels. It's more a matter of purpose – companies will report for certain reasons, while individual travellers want to know how they can make a difference.

What are you doing to help make leisure travel stays greener?

TENG Since MBS started operations in 2010, we have been looking for ways to further reduce our environmental impact through leveraging technology and streamlining our operational processes. As we continue to ramp up our sustainability drive through Sands Eco 360, we are also exploring ways to minimise the impact created by our leisure travel guests while maintaining a high service standard.

WONG We work together with NGOs, academia, PATA and the industry. You've got to work together as one team to achieve this. Apart from that, always communicate constantly with all in-house guests and incentivise them for taking part in green programmes.

MARATOS At Starwood, we have rolled out a number of guest-facing sustainable initiatives. In addition to the Green Room, which is available at Westin Singapore and Westin Beijing Financial Street, we have a Make a Green Choice Programme (MAGC, pronounced as magic) where

guests can choose to reduce the environmental footprint through ways such as declining housekeeping for up to three days in a row.

By participating in MAGC, guests save up to 186 litres of water, 0.19 kWh of electricity, 25,000 BTU of natural gas and 207 millilitres of cleaning product chemicals per night.

In most hotels, we have replaced the architectural lights with High Efficiency Lighting; low-flow faucets and shower heads have been installed; and the key card system and motion sensors are in place to reduce energy usage.

RICaute The biggest step we took was to standardise carbon footprint for hotels. We convened research among most major hotel companies and Cornell University, called the Cornell Hotel Sustainability Benchmark, which provides benchmarks, publicly available, for energy, water and carbon for room nights and floor area. Hotels can benchmark themselves, and it stimulates an element of competition.

More importantly, these benchmarks can be used for programmes for guests to offset the carbon footprint of their stay. That is what's missing from travel. You book an airplane ticket, a train ticket, rent a car, even ship a package, all of them have carbon offset options. However the hotel component was missing. Hopefully we've solved that so that the entire trip can be counted for and offsetting increased.

What's the biggest waste with leisure travel?

TENG Food waste.

RICaute Yes, by far food waste. Preparation of menus, leftover food and food scraps. By weight it's the heaviest, and everyone eats while they travel.

One big challenge is lack of waste infrastructure, especially in Asia. Composting of food scraps is uncommon, as is recycling in some places. It's tough for tourism businesses to address this individually; it needs to be collectively addressed by the destination. And we still have a major task of building awareness that people need to place their waste in the correct bin when waste separation is available. That takes political will to do, and involves the more complex issues of investment and infrastructure.

Also the attitude of abundance of food is one that may need to be addressed – think of those big opulent buffet stations and how they are going to end up throwing food away when there are so many hungry people in the world.

SIMONS The waste question needs to be turned on its head and we need to ask, how can we prevent waste at all?

Redefining waste as a resource is key. There is no "away" when something is "thrown away" and, in many businesses, anything "wasted" is an inefficiency. We need to bring that thinking into the way we see waste, and focus on how we extract as much value out of what we've used only once or have no need for – a "cradle to cradle" approach.

There are many smart businesses that are selling their waste and developing strong revenues from it, but there are also a lot of companies that still pay for valuable metals and other resources to be taken away!

Destination Malaysia

A NATURAL PROPOSITION



Langkawi leverages its natural assets as its strongest drawcard

Langkawi is focusing on ecotourism and nature activities as part of its ambition to become a premier island destination.

To this end, there have been efforts to introduce new products such as the Discovery Centre and The Gemalai Village.

Initiated by the Langkawi Development Authority (LADA), the Discovery Centre (working name) at Kilim Geoforest Park, is due to open by end-2015. Some RM18 million (US\$5.7 million) has been allocated for the Discovery Centre, which would function as an archival and reference centre on Langkawi Geopark's geology, flora and fauna. There will be exhibition boards, display cases, video presentations and interactive experiences that centre around Langkawi's geological and nature heritage.

LADA's manager, tourism division, Rosnina Yaacob, said: "The Geopark is the core behind our *Naturally Langkawi* branding. The Discovery Centre will make it easier for people to understand and appreciate Langkawi's heritage which dates back more than 550 million years; it is even older than the dinosaurs."

At the Oriental Village, a 13ha eco-theme park and an exclusive island resort will be built over the next three years. In

the first phase of the development, the key attraction will be the Omnidome 3D flight, a 3D theatre showcasing the island's beauty, created in partnership with *National Geographic*. Other attractions include a bio-dome highlighting the flora and flora of Langkawi, a cultural village with an amphitheatre and a 250-room hotel. The first phase is due to be completed in 1Q2015.

Meanwhile, The Gemalai Village opened on May 1 and comprises six individual village-style houses on a paddy field, providing rustic accommodation and activities for guests. (see How to Sell next page). "It gives local visitors a chance to relive their childhood experiences, and

foreigners a chance to experience local life," said Rosnina.

Also coming up on the island's events calendar is the Asian Bird Fair (ABF), which will be held in Langkawi for the first time from November 29-30. Organised by Malaysian Nature Society and hosted by LADA, this niche event seeks to promote the protection of birds and their habitats, and encourage bird watching.

More than 200 participants, including 20 foreign and local media delegates, are expected to take part in the fifth edition of ABF, held annually in different countries since its debut in 2010.

LADA's CEO, Khalid Ramli, said: "Hosting this event will help position

Destination in numbers

30%

The percentage of rooms in Langkawi that belong to the four- and five-star categories

133

The number of weekly flights between Langkawi and Kuala Lumpur, versus 16 weekly flights between Langkawi and Singapore

2,200-2,600

The average spend, in Malaysian ringgit, of international leisure tourists to Langkawi per visit, equivalent to US\$682 to US\$806. Business visitors spend three times more on average compared with leisure tourists

Langkawi, which enjoys a healthy and a balanced ecosystem, as a bird-watching destination."

During this event, Malaysian Nature Society will designate Langkawi as the hornbill island of the world, according to Andrew Sebastian, ABF coordinator and the society's head of communications. He added: "For an island of this size to have three species of hornbills is incredible. There is the Great Hornbill, of which 160 birds have been sighted, the Oriental Pied Hornbill and the Wreathed Hornbill."

In some sense, LADA's aim to get Langkawi listed among the world's top 10 island destinations – outlined in the Langkawi Tourism Blueprint launched in 2011 – has been realised: TripAdvisor has ranked Langkawi among its top 10 islands in Asia for three consecutive years since 2012.

Acknowledging that there is no single organisation or official body that benchmarks and evaluates islands, Khalid said: "Rankings are subjective and depends on what travel magazines and people say about Langkawi."

He added that Langkawi's UNESCO Geopark status, conferred in 2007, further enhances the destination's *Naturally Langkawi* branding, offering more than just beautiful beaches and islands. Furthermore, LADA is leveraging nature-related events to boost Langkawi's natural appeal.

LADA is also in talks with airlines and relevant authorities to welcome more direct flights from the Asia-Pacific region.

Hosting the Asian Bird Fair for the first time will help position Langkawi, which enjoys a healthy and a balanced ecosystem, as a bird-watching destination.

Khalid Ramli
CEO, Langkawi Development Authority



Viewpoint

Are Langkawi's Geopark status and nature-based attractions enough to draw visitors?

Arokia Das, senior manager, Luxury Tours Malaysia

"Langkawi's UNESCO Geopark status carries weight and has put Langkawi on the world map for nature products and attractions. German and other European tourists as well as Indian tourists are really interested to visit Langkawi and make a special trip there because of this. Langkawi has lovely beaches, but the Geopark (status) is the icing on the cake."



Adam Kamal, general manager, Rakyat Travel Malaysia

"Asian travellers are getting more interested in nature and not just focused on shopping. We use the Geopark status as well as legends and myths of Langkawi as selling points to attract Asian and European nature lovers. We are also promoting Payar Island Marine Park as a diving destination."

How to sell

SEE The 2.2km **Langkawi SkyCab** cable car ride is the steepest on earth and takes visitors to the peak of Mount Machincang (708m above sea level), where the view of the surrounding islands and hillside flora is simply breathtaking. This cable car experience offers visitors a chance to see at close range unique geological formations of the Machincang range that were formed around 450 million years ago. On clear days, visitors can also see the borders of Thailand and Indonesia.

EAT **Seashells restaurant** at Laman Padi (Rice Garden) on Chenang Beach is a great place to sample local traditional food such as satay, kampong fried rice, oxtail soup and *char kway teow* in a Malay village setting. Cultural dances are performed on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings from 20.30 to 22.00.



DO Go swimming, snorkelling or diving at **Payar Island Marine Park**, which comprises four islands – Payar Island, Kaca Island, Lembu Island and Segantang Island. It is located approximately 15 nautical miles west of Kuala Kedah, 19 nautical miles south of Langkawi Island and 32 nautical miles north of Pulau Pinang.

Payar Island Marine Park is West Malaysia's only marine park, with visibility in the water averaging 9-15m. Located on the south-western tip of Payar Island, Coral Garden is covered with bright, multi-coloured soft corals and is a magnificent sight to behold.

STAY Located in Laman Padi at Chenang Beach, **The Gemalai Village** offers tourists a rustic experience. It comprises six one-room thatched houses with attached bathrooms and showers built on stilts over a paddy field. Guests can indulge in local activities such as catching mudfish in the paddy field, planting rice, learning to cook local dishes and cycling. Launched on May 1, The Gemalai Village is managed by LADA Eco-Tourism.



The Gemalai Village

TRIED & TESTED



The Westin Langkawi Resort & Spa

S Puvaneswary checks into The Westin Langkawi Resort & Spa and goes away impressed by the staff's excellent service that went far beyond the call of duty

LOCATION The resort is a half hour's drive from the airport. I felt like a queen sitting behind the driver and chauffeured in the hotel's BMW 7-series limousine. The ride from the airport was very scenic, passing by kampong houses, paddy fields and the main town area.

ROOMS The feeling of being indulged continued when I stepped into my spacious two-bedroom villa. On the rectangular dining table there was a huge watermelon carving with the words, 'Welcome To Westin Langkawi', alongside trays of fruits and assorted chocolates, a refreshing mocktail, two bottles of wine and a personalised, handwritten card from Tengku Ramizan, the resort's director – catering & convention services.

The villa came with a private pool that I enjoyed immensely. At 260m², the villa is simply great for a large extended family or a group of friends. The two rooms, separated by a spacious living room, are too far apart for TV sounds from one room to travel to the other. There is also a private TV room that can be converted to a third bedroom, should the need arise. Facilities also include a kitchen with coffee-making facilities and a stove for cooking.

SERVICE A friend had asked me to purchase sea cucumber cream for her, and this came into my mind as I passed by posters along the road leading to a sea cucumber factory during my ride from the airport. Unfortunately it had closed for the day, and the driver, noting my disappointment, drove me into town where I could get the cream. I was touched by his thoughtfulness.

On the first night at the resort, I realised I had forgotten to bring my hand-phone charger. The receptionist who answered my call did not have a charger for my Samsung Galaxy Note 3 model, so I switched off the phone to make the battery last. Fortunately, two staff came

by the villa about 10 minutes later and brought a charger. What touched me was that it belonged to one of the staff, who offered to loan it to me – a total stranger!

Throughout my three-night stay, there were many examples of the staff going beyond the call of duty.

F&B On my first night, I was treated to cocktails at Float, a private jetty with a high rooftop and open sides, while I watched the sun set on the horizon. Stretching into the sea, this breezy venue is a favourite for romantic dinners, small wedding ceremonies and even private meetings for small groups of up to 40 people.

This was followed by a dinner beside the beach in a semi open-air private dining area known as Anjung Damai. Watching the ferries sail in the distance while listening to the waves and having a private butler bring in course after course specially prepared by executive chef Chandran Narayanan were divine experiences that could not be replicated elsewhere. I felt utterly spoilt.

The following night, I was treated to a spa by night dinner on the spa deck, under a bright full moon and overlooking the Andaman Sea. A personal butler pampered me through a healthy three-course meal that included Vietnamese tuna and vegetable rolls, honey lemon glazed salmon fillet with asparagus, boiled saffron potatoes with cream cheese sauce and a sweet dessert of chocolate mousse.

These dining experiences complement the resort's other F&B outlets, Seasonal Tastes Restaurant, Tide, Breeze Lounge and Splash, all with great views of the Andaman Sea and mountains in the distance.

FACILITIES I loved the 80-minute Heavenly Massage which was so relaxing that I fell asleep. And since I was learning to swim at the time, I couldn't resist practising my strokes at the infinity pool. With a beach so clean and with soft sand and plenty of reclining beach chairs, I couldn't have asked for more.

VERDICT A place with 'soul', providing unforgettable experiences.

Name The Westin Langkawi Resort & Spa
No. of rooms 202 rooms and 20 villas
Rate From RM1,007 (US\$316)
Contact details
 Tel: (60-4) 960-8888
 Email: westin.langkawi@westin.com
 Website: www.westinlangkawi.com

Destination Malaysia

NEWS IN A MINUTE

1 New regional routes for AirAsia, AirAsia X

AirAsia recommenced its Kuala Lumpur-Danang route with four weekly flights on August 29. The route is AirAsia's third destination to Vietnam from Malaysia, in addition to flights to Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. The flights were withdrawn in June 2013 as part of the airline's route network realignment.

Meanwhile, AirAsia X, the long-haul affiliate of the AirAsia Group, commenced four weekly flights services between Kuala Lumpur and Xi'an on July 2. Xi'an is the airline's fifth destination in China after Hangzhou, Chengdu, Beijing and Shanghai. AirAsia X is the only airline offering direct flights between the two cities.

2 Sama-Sama Express klia2 ideal for transit travellers

Strategically located in the international departure area of Kuala Lumpur's new low-cost carrier (LCC) terminal, Sama-Sama Express klia2 allows international transit passengers to check in at the hotel without having to clear Malaysian customs and immigration if they are on a layover between flights. Opened in May, the hotel offers 70 chic and comfortable rooms ranging from 14-48m².

3 klia2 plans for growth

Launched in late June, Malaysia's

new klia2 can handle three times the capacity of the previous LCC terminal. It is expected to receive 25 million passengers by year-end, and has the capacity to handle up to 45 million passengers annually.

Located 2km from KLIA's main terminal building, the 257,000m² klia2 features easy inter-terminal transfers.

The Malaysian government has allocated RM1 billion (US\$311.2 million) for the aviation industry, of which RM700 million will go to the development of a new air traffic management centre at KLIA to facilitate traffic increase from 68 to 108 movements per hour on three runways.

4 Starwood pads up Malaysia portfolio with two new hotels

Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide has two new hotels in its Malaysian pipeline.

Scheduled to open in Selangor in 4Q2014, the 249-key Four Points by Sheraton Puchong (pictured) will boast 1,100m² of meeting space, a swimming pool, two F&B venues, a fitness centre and free Wi-Fi.

The 350-room Le Méridien Putrajaya, slated for a 2015 opening, will provide two restaurants, a fitness centre, spa facilities, a swimming pool and over 1,630m² in events space, plus easy access to the city's attractions including the IOI City Mall debuting in 2014.

5 Pullman Miri Waterfront to open in 4Q2015

Sarawak is banking on a new hotel and ties with Brunei to promote northern Sarawak, particularly Miri City, as a MICE destination. Leveraging Miri's proximity to Brunei, Sarawak's tourism minister Abang Johari Openg said the state will collaborate with Royal Brunei Airlines to promote Northern Sarawak packages using Bandar Seri Begawan as the main gateway.

He added that Miri's current 2,400-room inventory will be boosted when the 328-room Pullman Miri Waterfront opens. MICE facilities at the hotel include a ballroom with seating capacity for 1,000 pax and six state-of-the-art function rooms.



MY WAY

Michael Schlueter

General manager, The Westin Langkawi Resort & Spa

What outdoor activities do you enjoy?

I regularly play golf with my wife and I also go sailing with friends to explore the different islands in Langkawi. There are three golf courses in Langkawi that we frequent: Els Club Teluk Datai, Gunung Raya Golf Resort and 99 East Golf Club.

What is your favourite food and where do you go for the most authentic versions?

I love fried rice and beef or chicken *rendang* (dried curry). Privilege Restaurant & Bar at Perdana Quay, Telaga Harbour Park has a nice interpretation of local food.

Which three places in Langkawi would you take first-time visitors to?

A mangrove tour to enjoy the sights and sounds at Kilim Nature Park. The river cruise allows visitors to enjoy glimpses of animals and birds that live in the park, and hear the sounds of insects. They will also enjoy the spectacular sights of unique limestone rock formations and caves.

Eagle watching at Kilim River or Pulau Singa Besar.

For culinary experiences, I would take visitors to Privilege Restaurant & Bar or The Cliff Restaurant & Bar Langkawi, which offers magnificent views of the sun setting and the lovely Cenang beach.



Lake of the Pregnant Maiden



Eagle watching at Kilim River

What would you recommend for a day trip?

Take an island hopping tour package that covers three islands, Lake of the Pregnant Maiden (Tasik Dayang Bunting), Pulau Singa Besar (Big Lion Island) and Pulau Beras Basah (Wet Rice Island), in about four hours. This tour allows for varied water activities such as swimming, snorkelling, paddling and canoeing as well as eagle watching.

Where should travellers go to experience the local way of life?

You will find the local (ways of life) everywhere. There is no one particular place.

What souvenir would you recommend?

Langkawi batik shirts. You can also design your own batik shirt if you visit a batik factory or try your hand at painting your own.

Destination **Maldives**

With the development of mid-market offerings, can the hitherto all-luxury Maldives become a destination for the greater masses? **Feizal Samath** reports

Capital city Male, the jumping-off point for visitors to the rest of Maldives

Brian Knausen



Destination in numbers

711,704

The total number of tourists to the Maldives in January-July 2014, up 11.8 per cent year-on-year

291

The number of accommodation units, totalling 26,894 rooms as at end-July 2014, compared with 251 units and 26,016 rooms end-July 2013

75.6%

The average occupancy rate in January-July 2014, up from 73.3 per cent in the corresponding 2013 period

CASTING THE NET WIDER

The Maldives is shifting focus from its long-standing one-island, one-resort tourism concept to a new strategy geared towards promoting the mid-market through the development of guesthouses and shared resources.

In the current 80-plus luxury resorts, infrastructure development has been restricted to 30 per cent of the island, with the tallest structure being in line with the tallest tree. This is in contrast to the new model, which would have high-rise structures and differently owned properties on one island with common facilities.

As an example, the government had launched in July Thumburi Integrated Resort Development on the uninhabited twin islands of Thumburi and Hulhiyandhoo in Laamu Atoll in northern Maldives. The project aims to build a total of 200 rooms in 23 units under three different categories, including beach villas and four- to five-storey hotels by 2015. Thumburi will have separate beach clubs/bars, wellness and spas, dive schools, restaurants and shopping centres as common facilities.

The development will be managed by the Maldives Marketing & Public Relations Corporation (MMPRC), which will be spearheading similar developments on each of the Maldives' 23 atolls, adding 2,100 beds to the current inventory of over 30,000 rooms across the Maldives in the next five years.

Explaining the rationale for creating more guesthouses and mid-market hotels selling from US\$100 per night compared with existing resorts which sell from US\$300, deputy minister of Tourism, Hussain Lirar, told *TTG Asia*: "China is our largest source market. Recently I met some Chinese agencies. They said the Maldives is a must-visit destination but it is expensive. They suggested a mid-market range."

MMPRC director, Adam Mohamed, said the new mid-market development would help attract 150,000 to 200,000 additional arrivals, mostly from China, by 2017.

In fact, the Chinese are so important – representing more than 30 per cent of incoming traffic – that at the main Ibrahim Nasir International Airport, passengers waiting to board a flight to China are greeted by live announcements in Chinese

language, a facility airports in South Asia don't normally offer.

Another objective of the new mid-market strategy is to spread the benefits of tourism to small businessmen willing to invest US\$600,000 to US\$3 million per unit, compared with single resort investments costing the wealthy between US\$60-70 million.

Liveaboard Association of Maldives president, Ismail Hameed, said there would be demand for mid-market facilities. He said Laamu Atoll, for example, where the Thumburi project is coming up, is one of the most attractive destinations for divers and surfers who are always looking for cheap options like guesthouses.

Michelle Flake, co-founder of Koamas Luxury Escapes Maldives, agreed there is definitely a need for good quality three- and four-star resorts at reasonable prices.

"The few that are operating do extremely well," she said, pointing out also that if there were more affordable resorts and lower airport fees, charter flights might resume.

Industry groups also support the new project, given that dozens of unregulated guesthouses have sprung up on other islands.

On the promotions front, Abdulla Ghiyas, president – Maldives Association of Travel Agents & Tour Operators, believes more money needs to be spent on state-sponsored overseas campaigns, which has come down to around US\$2-2.5 million from a post-tsunami spend of US\$9 million.

To that, MMPRC's Mohamed said the NTO is ramping up promotions and targeting the US and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). "Our focus next near would be the BRICS countries, with Brazil definitely on the cards. We are also taking part, for the first time, in WTM," he said.

This year, MMPRC's focus is on roadshows and participation in 18 trade exhibitions, including a luxury travel show in Las Vegas in December, targeting honeymooners and water sports enthusiasts.

Meanwhile, luxury offerings continue for the Maldives as the industry awaits the November opening of the 60-room Amilla Fushi Island Resort on Baa Atoll, which boasts a treehouse concept.

Another recent development has been the exclusive use of islands by a single individual, such as the case of a Saudi prince who in January booked an entire island of 50 rooms exclusively for his family and friends, and an adjoining island for staff, for about three weeks. The Saudi prince's visit, supposedly to the luxurious Velaa Private Island, has resulted in a few more offers to hire entire islands by single clients, industry sources said.

Destination Maldives

Viewpoint

Should the Maldives have more mid-market offerings?

Abdulla Ghiyas, president, Maldives Association of Travel Agents & Tour Operators

"Unlike the proposed Thumburi development, there are several previously opened guesthouses on inhabited islands that are unregulated and where locals have clashed with visitors over cultural issues, etc.

There should also be a control on mid-market beds before there is an oversupply, triggering a price war. The Maldives is the birthplace of innovative tourism. Take Louis Vuitton's Cheval Blanc Randheli resort – it is selling an exclusive fashion. We should not lose that image with unregulated accommodation."



Michelle Flake, co-founder, Koamas Luxury Escapes Maldives

"The Maldives as we know is one of the top honeymoon destinations in the world. I believe most honeymooners would love to return again with their families four or five years later, but if there are only luxury resorts at luxury prices this would not be affordable to your average family. For tourism to continue to grow in any destination, there must be options for all clients worldwide, no matter what their budget is.

If more of the current mid-market resorts upgrade and all new resorts that come up continue to be luxury resorts, then the Maldives will be too expensive for the average traveller."



How to sell

DO You don't need to be a swimmer to snorkel in the clear blue waters. At **Conrad Maldives Rangoli Island**, cautious Chinese and Japanese guests wear goggles and life jackets and wade in less than knee-deep water to peep at life beneath. Absolutely no danger! Or take a *dhoni* ride on a fishing expedition with plenty of baracudas, tuna, rainbow jacks, etc to catch. A surfers' paradise, most islands have great waves.

SEE Prepare yourself for one of the most spectacular views of sea creatures from special galleries at resorts like **Taj Exotica Resort & Spa** where guests gather every evening during feeding time. Watch long-tailed stingrays, guitar sharks, manta rays and an array of other creatures, or take a ride in a pressurised whale submarine to see the coral reefs deep under water.

A visit to an inhabited island to see local artisans in their workshops and buy some of the beautiful local crafts is also a good option.



Ithaa at Conrad Maldives Rangali Island

EAT Try out **Ithaa**, the world's first and only all-glass under-sea restaurant, at Conrad Maldives Rangali Island, a 30-minute seaplane ride from Male. Ithaa, which celebrates 10 years in April 2015. Located 3m below the Indian Ocean and encased in 12.5mm thick clear acrylic, the restaurant seats up to 14 guests, with the dinner menu priced at US\$300 per head. This will be an unforgettable experience – eating and drinking with fish

swarming all over amid natural coral reefs.

STAY The Maldives has a range of accommodation options from upscale resorts, some of which sell over US\$10,000 per night, to small hotels, guesthouses and budget units from US\$50. **Traders Hotel** in the capital of Male has comfortable rooms, good restaurants and is very close to government offices.

NEWS IN A MINUTE



1 No breather for the Maldives as bed tax returns

The US\$8 tax per bed per night for all Maldivian resorts will be discontinued in November but in the same month, the national GST rates are set to increase to 12 per cent from the current 8 per cent.

The bed tax was allowed to lapse in December 2013 but restored in January. Maldivian tour operators had then expressed concern over the resumption of the tax.

However, Maldives Association of Tourism Industry's secretary general, Ahmed Nazeer, said hoteliers are in agreement with the restoration of the taxes, pointing out that they are required to continue social welfare schemes in the Maldives.

2 Innovative resort to open soon

The 60-room Amilla Fushi Is-

land Resort on Baa Atoll is due to open in November, a project that has created excitement among the leisure trade due to its innovative concept.

Created by Tom McLoughlin, the hotelier who created the world's first underwater spa at Huvafen Fushi and the first underwater nightclub at Niyama, Amilla Fushi's unique concept is its luxury tree-houses among other new features.

With eight restaurants and the Maldives' first fish and chips shop, the resort is being promoted as the nation's first resort-with-residences concept, where eight family beach houses will be available on 50-year leases.

A couple of kangaroos, brought from Dubai Zoo, are also said to have been released on Amilla Fushi few months back.

3 Mega Maldives reconnects with more Chinese cities

Mega Maldives resumed thrice-weekly flights in June to Chengdu, Chongqing and Hangzhou after having suspended these services last year.

These seasonal flights will operate from June to mid-December and again between mid-January to March, officials said.

CEO George Weimann said since the airline wanted to consolidate operations to Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong, it stopped seasonal flights to these three second-tier cities last year.

The three-year old airline, which presently only flies to Greater China and Palau island in the Pacific Ocean, is also opening routes to Jeddah and Jakarta in the next few months. It plans to increase its fleet to between six and eight aircraft by end-2014 by leasing Boeing aircraft.

4 HPL ceases management of Rihiveli Beach Resort

Management of the Rihiveli Beach Resort Maldives has been passed on to Castaway Maldives, as HPL Resorts (Maldives) disposes of its interest in the property's owning company, MAT.

HPL Resorts (Maldives), a wholly owned subsidiary of Singapore-based Hotel Properties (HPL), has run the resort since 2004.

The island lease for the Rihiveli Beach Resort Maldives expires in end-2015.

5 Culinary competition drew over 300 chefs

The Maldives first-ever culinary competition held in August in Male attracted more than 300 chefs, mostly from resort islands competing in different categories.

A team of judges mostly chefs flown in by seaplane from neighbouring Sri Lanka, was joined by Gissur Gudmundson, president of the World Association of Chefs Societies for the three-day event which coincided with the Food and Hospitality Asia 2014 exhibition.

"This is the first culinary challenge in the Maldives, a country that would be admitted as our 101st member shortly," said Gudmundson at the inauguration of the exhibition and culinary challenge.

6 Top brands vying for awards

Over 100 resorts, airlines and safari vessels are vying for honours at the third edition of the Maldives Association of Travel Agents & Tour Operators' Maldives Travel Awards on November 21 at Kurumba Maldives resort.

The event, the only one of its kind in the Maldives, had an online public vote from June 15 to September 30, and will involve a judging process.

TRIED & TESTED

Velaa Private Island, Noonu Atoll

Feizal Samath is overwhelmed by the sheer splendour and top-quality service of this Maldivian luxury hideaway

LOCATION The 20ha resort opened in December 2013 at Noonu Atoll in the Maldives. It's a 45-minute seaplane transfer from the Ibrahim Nasir International Airport.

ROOMS Unlike traditional resorts, Velaa offers different types of accommodation, including exclusive residences that come at a whopping US\$30,000 a night!

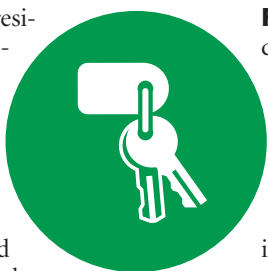
At the seaplane jetty, I was greeted by my own personal butler and driven in a buggy cart along sandy tracks, past the golf course, the striking ivory-white Tavaru Tower and the kids' club before reaching the Sunset Deluxe Water Pool Villa, which was going to be my little world of luxury for less than 24 hours.

Separated by canvas sails and wooden pillars, each villa has its own uninterrupted view of the ocean and private pool facing the sunset.

Everything in the comfortable living room is top-quality branded items – towels, linen, soft pillows, etc. Wi-Fi is avail-

able, though the intrepid traveller should as far as possible enjoy this private luxurious island and minimise contact with the outside world.

The air-conditioning was too cold at first, but thankfully the temperature could be adjusted to the required level. The butler was at my beck and call throughout the stay. After a shower in a designer bathroom, I had an dip in the infinity pool on the deck. It was ecstatic.



F&B Staying just one night didn't provide enough time to try out all of Velaa's fine-dining options. I had a light snack at the beachfront all-day restaurant Athiri. Although I'm not a connoisseur of food and wine, it is impressive that all restaurants in the resort are overseen by Michelin-starred chef, Adeline Grattard from Paris.

At Aragu & Cru, Velaa's signature restaurant which has an overwater setting, I relaxed on the lounge deck with a glass of champagne before moving in for dinner. Tavaru Tower is the centrepiece of the island: a striking tower where live cooking from a Teppanyaki kitchen and an extensive wine cellar are located. The wine

cellar's 30-page wine list has rare offerings such as the 1956 Domaine de la Romanée Conti; a vintage Salon Champagne; and the 1870 Blandy's Verdelho Solera. The wow effect is completed by the open elevator that moves in a circular direction right to the roof top, helping you pick a choice wine or two, which I did.

Avi is a casual pool bar by day and a vibrant cocktail bar complete with a DJ by night.

FACILITIES Never played golf in my life but handy with a cricket bat, I walked into the stunning and technologically advanced José María Olazabal Golf Academy and nine-hole course for a lesson. After a few shots in the indoor studio, I tried my hand outside and miraculously scored a few holes-in-one, surprising even the resident golf pro.

The resort also offers other recreational venues for yoga, squash, tennis, water sports and traditional Maldivian boating, among other activities.

SERVICE The staff were warm, friendly and attentive.

VERDICT An excellent resort that provides value for money and great private butler service. It is luxury living at its best.



Name Velaa Private Island, Noonu Atoll
No. of rooms 48
Rates From US\$1,500 + taxes
Contact details
 Tel: (960) 6565-243
 Email: reservations@velaaprivateisland.com
 Website: www.velaaprivateisland.com

MY WAY

Ranjit Phillipose

General manager, Taj Exotica Resort & Spa, Maldives

Where do you go to relax?

I play badminton for an hour every day to help me relax and de-stress. Sundays are days off when I relax at home – eating a late brunch, having an afternoon siesta and maybe watching a movie. When I am able to get off the island, our family usually flies to a city nearby for some retail therapy, or, for longer breaks, we travel somewhere for a completely different experience, such as a safari.

What is your favourite food? And where do you find it?

I am a foodie by nature and will try anything and everything. In fact, when I travel, a lot of it is about dining at the best restaurants as well as eating local fare – even street food. My favourites are probably tapas and Chinese food, though nothing can beat my mum's mutton curry with rice.

Where is the best hangout for music lovers?

I love music and I listen to all kinds, but my favourite is Bollywood music. I try to have the latest collection of Bollywood songs on my iPad at all times. The best place for music lovers is at the Equator Bar at Taj Exotica,

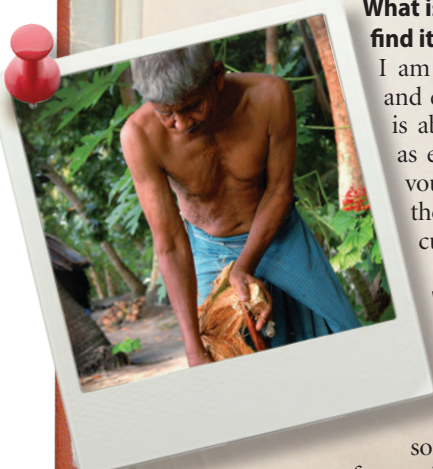
where we have some very talented local artistes that play live in the evenings. The number of talented local musicians in the Maldives is amazing.

How do you avoid getting bored on a faraway resort?

There is no time to get bored. Days and months just fly by. I guess time flies when you are having fun! There is always something to do on the island other than work. We have lots of sports facilities for badminton, football and volleyball, and a gym. Also, I jet ski once in a while and go snorkelling or sailing. Fishing is always a way to relax – though it isn't really my cup of tea.

Which three places in the Maldives would you take a first-time visitor?

Number one, without a doubt, would be a snorkelling trip to experience the amazing underwater world of the Maldives. I would also take them to a sandbank in the middle of the ocean, and a Maldivian village to see the local way of life and culture, which is very different from the resort experience.



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ICYMI: Tune in to what's been going on at ttgasia.com and the social media space. Plus, we end off on a light-hearted note



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WHO'S SAYING WHAT

Most commented



CHINA SLAPS NEW TRAVEL BAN ON THE PHILIPPINES WHILE SOUTH KOREANS GET JITTERY OVER DESTINATION'S SECURITY

Make no mistake – the mainland Chinese ban on travel to Philippines is political. It's retaliation for Philippines (and Vietnam, to its credit) insisting on the use of international law to settle disputes about the Spratly Islands, a small group close to Philippines. The Chinese want the oil and gas in the area. They'll stop at nothing to achieve their aim.

I also find claims by South Koreans that the Philippines is "unsafe" ridiculous. As an Australian, I've been there numerous times and never had a bigger problem than a taxi driver ripping me off a bit – this happens in Sydney and Melbourne too. I feel less safe in Thailand and Bali than in the Philippines. Which begs the question: are these South Korean businessmen treating Filipinos properly and with true respect? – Observer, Australia

CONTROVERSIAL REGION IN SOUTH PHILIPPINES OPENS UP FOR TOURISM

Living in the Philippines since over 40 years and having travelled to the south quite often, I agree there are gorgeous places in southern Mindanao, but still I will never recommend to any of my friends to go there as tourists. It is just too risky and bandits are, sadly, still very active, especially in Zamboanga and the southern islands. Davao and general Santos are good places to visit though but I still shy away from the ARMM region. – Roger Begre, Manila

IMMERSIVE, COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM TAKES OFF, BUT MARKETING CHALLENGES REMAIN

We need web links for these community tourism projects and ways to connect that work. Far too many of these noble programmes exist in the training and report stage only. Train the locals to be digitally literate. Can visitors make reservations? Can visitors like or recommend the services on Facebook or TripAdvisor? - Ron Mader, US

IT'S GONNA BE SAFER TO EAT IN LAOS

Having just spent a month in Luang Prabang where we ate at quite a few restaurants (and didn't get sick) I'd opine that the Mark certification programme is a waste of resources. However, I would readily concede that it would be a useful tool to disenfranchise most of Luang Prabang's smaller establishments. – Simon, Australia

TTG ASIA MOURNS PASSING OF PR GOPAL

I knew PR Gopal since the days when I was secretary-general and later, president of MATTA, and as well as when I was president of ASEANTA and FATA, when he was president of NATAS. He was always supportive of close cooperation with MATTA as well as of ASEAN initiatives. We grew to be friends and continued to be in touch by email and the couple of times when I went to Perth. He continued to be incorrigible even when he was not feeling so well! We will all miss him. – Tunku Iskandar, Kuala Lumpur

Tweets

That time of year has come again, when TTG Asia Media's events arm calls on the region's MICE and corporate travel sectors to convene in the travel hub of Bangkok for the annual IT&CM Asia and CTW Asia-Pacific tradeshow and conference. Here's what our speakers, reporters and delegates had to say about this year's show.

@MyCEB In #Bangkok #Thailand for #itcma 2014. Let's catch up! Do drop by our Booth C1 #malaysia #myceb

@IMEXSarah Choo Leng Goh is sharing best practice examples in sustainability at the Future Leaders Forum at #itcma



@hh_koh Speaking to a #Sapporo CVB rep at #ITCMA for our video dailies. He's a little bit...cold.



@CesareOrtis Happy birthday to @TTG_Asia #itcma #ctwap

@HugoSmartyPants Association Days @ IT&CMA draws interest from association executives, professionals and CVBs

@DanJStrass Saying good bye to all my new friends from IT&CM Asia. One of the best conferences for 2014. #itcma

GET REEL

TTG Asia Media is reaching out to audiences with new video content this year at the annual IT&CM Asia and CTW Asia-Pacific.

Get up to date on the latest developments in BT-MICE as TTG speaks to the movers and shakers on the show floor in our Video Dailies: Has Thailand recovered post-coup? How do you catch more Indonesian MICE? And what's new on the travel safety front in terms of technology usage? Visit youtube.com/ttgasia to find out.



Watch TTG's managing director Darren Ng and publisher Michael Chow grooving to The Wanted, and relive the highlights of the show through the event overview at youtube.com/itcmactw.



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MCI (P) 098/09/2014 • PPS 619/02/2013(022926)

Printed by Times Printers Pte Ltd
16 Tuas Avenue 5, Singapore 639340

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

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