

**VIEW FROM THE TOP**

Just like the travel agencies it serves, Amadeus, too, is expanding into new business lines, says newly appointed Asia-Pacific president Angel Gallego



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**PEER POWER**

As P2P travel sites multiply, will the rise of the sharing economy grow the pie or eat into it?



**BETTING BIG**

Sri Lanka is mulling whether to raise its stakes in casino development, as it seeks to compete with other Asian neighbours who are also building IRs



**AN INDEPENDENT STREAK**

Why do some hotel owners prefer to be independent? How do they choose a hotel marketing company to represent them?



**GEARING UP FOR ACTIVE HOLIDAYS**

Asians are becoming daredevils, with more seeking out adrenaline-pumping activities in New Zealand



**AMBITIONS ON THE RISE**

Developments in Dubai and Abu Dhabi continue unabated, as both cities ready to reap the benefits from Expo 2020

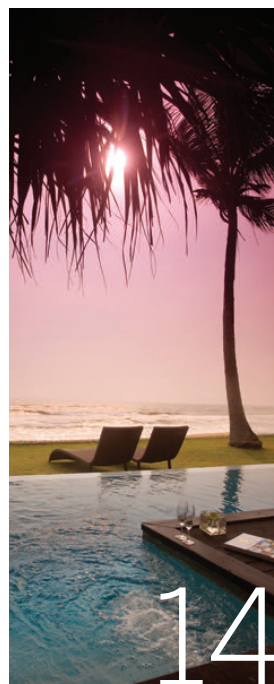


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Report:  
Adventure &  
ecotourism



Guide: Hotel  
marketing  
representation



Destination:  
Hong Kong



Destination:  
Middle East



An independent hotel, as I realised, brings with it the thrill of discovering something new – which is fundamentally what holidays and travel are about, aren't they?

## TO BRAND OR NOT?

**I was rather concerned before my last business trip when I found out I had been booked to stay at an independent hotel.**

What would the rooms be like? Would the service be up to par? All my worries were put to rest when I checked into The PuLi, Shanghai, my home for the next few nights as I reported from ILTM Asia.

Truth is, I had gotten so used to hotels like InterContinental, Sheraton, Hyatt and Mercure – great brands with consistently good standards – you immediately knew you'd be in safe hands.

But on this trip I was pleasantly surprised at how much I enjoyed being 'free' from typical definitions of how a business hotel should look and feel. For example, the usual check-in counter was anything but – if you blinked, you'd probably mistake it for the long bar, which is what it merges into as it stretches across the lobby, sitting low to the ground and fronted with armchairs that guests can recline in while waiting for paperwork to be done. Adjacent to that was the Library – another unusual sighting on the ground floor – which had bookshelves that reached the ceilings, and carried artefacts and thousands of books.

Then you had the dark and handsome interiors, softened by the property's signature scent and swaying bamboo trees beyond the glass windows, making me feel like I was in the midst of the forest, when in fact I was smack in the middle of the busy city centre.

You know the feeling you get when you wake up in a hotel and momentarily forget which city you are in...that did not happen at The PuLi. The sense of place was there at every corner from the brass incense burner I found in my suite to the Chinese cabinet in the lobby.

In this issue of *TTG Asia*, we look at hotel marketing representation (pages 14-15). Newcomer to Singapore's hospitality scene, One Farrer Hotel & Spa is one such hotel that has chosen to go at it alone. Its owning company believes that this would give it the full autonomy to tailor its offerings and establish a unique hospitality, wellness and F&B experience for its guests. Good on it!

An independent hotel, as I realised, brings with it the thrill of discovering something new – which is fundamentally what holidays and travel are about, aren't they? Stepping into The PuLi, it immediately felt fresh, contemporary and unconventional. It was like I had stumbled upon an 'undiscovered' property that had the goods. And do I need to say what kind of bragging rights this gives today's well-travelled set on social media? Cue #wanderlust, #traveltuesday and other hashtags one can dream of.

Could the new breed of lifestyle brands be the comeback that chains need? Yes, I'm talking about your Indigos and Alofts that have emerged over recent years, but also upcoming Millennial-focused ones like Radisson Red by Carlson Rezidor and the repositioned Eaton by Langham (*TTG Asia e-Daily*, July 2, 2014).

Brands have traditionally been great in meeting customer expectations, but in order to surpass them and delight, they need to overcome that challenge of sameness, and surprise. Because now the words 'cookie cutter' just don't cut it anymore.

**Gracia Chiang**

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### COMING UP

**NEXT ISSUE:**  
**AUGUST 8, 2014**

We're celebrating 40 years of TTG Asia and 40 years of Asian tourism in our commemorative issue on 8/8!

**BLAST FROM THE PAST** Tourism veterans reminisce the good old days with anecdotes that will make you gasp  
**GAME CHANGERS** How airports, airlines and attractions have transformed Asian destinations over the decades

**PEEK INTO THE FUTURE** Industry chieftains offer a glimpse into how integrated resorts, cruise ships, travel distribution and more will look like in years to come

### WE LIKE



Hong Kong Association of Registered Tour Coordinators celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a 208-page book on culture, heritage and travel in Hong Kong, drawing from the first-hand experiences of veteran association members. Topics range from the history of Hong Kong's currency to petty person bashing.

Targeting visitors to Hong Kong, the book is available in Chinese at local bookstore chains for HK\$78 (US\$10). An English version is also being considered. All earnings will go to the association for member training.





# Analysis

Integrated resorts are gaining a fast foothold across Asian countries eager to boost tourism, and Sri Lanka is now mulling whether to raise its stakes in casino development. **Feizal Samath** reports

## BETTING BIG

In a bid to attract high rollers to the fledgling tourism industry, the Sri Lankan government has plans to introduce high-end casinos into the country through three integrated resort (IR) projects in the capital, Colombo, although efforts have been thwarted by a strong Buddhist clergy and opposition parliamentarians.

Protests urging the government to ban upmarket casinos have been held around the site of Australian casino mogul James Packer's resort in Colombo. The other two IRs are by John Keells Holdings (JKH), owner of Sri Lanka's largest hotel chain; and businessman Dhammika Perera, owner of three existing casinos.

The government has bowed to the protests and approved the three resorts sans casinos. Unofficial JKH sources said the company is proceeding with its resort with or without a casino, which is just a small part of the resort compared with its 2,500-pax convention centre. The other two resorts declined to comment.

Some inbound trade players believe that the emotive protests seem out of place in Sri Lanka, which already has five casinos in Colombo, albeit mostly for foreigners, as well as hundreds of horse racing betting shops.

"We need the casinos," said Mahen Kariyawasam, president of Sri Lanka Association of Inbound Tour Operators. "And if one is to argue about morals and cultural norms, what about the existing casinos and many betting shops?"

Chandra Wickramasinghe, chairman, Connaissance De Ceylan, agreed: "There is nothing new to complain about; we have been having casinos. Only now the sector is being enhanced with more facilities."

Wickramasinghe argues that Sri Lanka needs to attract all kinds of travellers, especially if the country is aiming for 2.5 million tourists by 2016, up from

below 500,000 in 2009. The casinos

can be used to attract the very rich niche gambling segment whose patrons come in on special carriers, he opined.

Luxe Asia executive director, Chaminda Dias, remarked: "If we are to attract 2.5 million tourists, we need to provide something in Colombo which will always be the centre of tourism, and huge benefits come from casinos. (We are told that) the new upmarket casinos will be well regulated and would be strictly for foreigners, so there won't be much of a cultural or moral impact."

Said Athula Amarasekera, an urban planner and director at

Singapore-based Design Team 3 with several projects in Sri Lanka: "Casinos have branded and developed themselves as comprehensive MICE locations than mere casinos, which add value to the city as a destination."

### More nightlife options needed

Another issue, Kariyawasam pointed out, is Colombo's dearth of night attractions and entertainment options, which is need-

or spend just a day or two in the capital, which is about 30km from the international airport. Hotels drawing mostly business travellers often complain about the lack of nightlife in the city, where there are just a few nightclubs and pubs, and most restaurants close by 23.00.

Furthermore, according to official figures, 75 new hotels will be constructed in Sri Lanka in the next three years with a total of 5,300 rooms, of which 2,080 will be in Colombo. Queried a government spokesperson: "When we reach 10,000 rooms (in the next few years – registered and unregistered) in the city, what would tourists do at night?"

Welcoming the government's move to develop McCallum Road (where two of the controversial IR projects are to be located) as an exclusive leisure, recreation and entertainment zone, Surath Wickremasinghe, Colombo-based urban planner and president of the Chamber of Construction, opined: "We are building hotels at a rate. There are hundreds of new rooms coming up in Colombo but where are the entertainment facilities, a prerequisite for tourists?"

### In the footsteps of neighbours

The success of Singapore, which gradually allowed casinos after years of reluctance, has also been cited by the authorities to counter public criticism. Said Srilal Miththapala, former president of Tourist Hotels Association

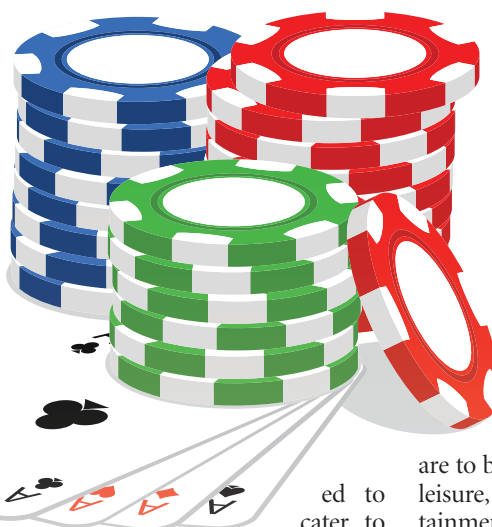
and now a tourism consultant: "When Singapore found tourism growth slowing down, it realised the need for new products to stimulate and rejuvenate tourism. The two casinos have jump-started Singapore tourism, which is growing exponentially again."

Malin Hapugoda, managing director of Aitken Spence Hotels, agreed: "If we are expecting to bring in many tourists then we have to follow markets with the emerging casino sector. Even Muslim Malaysia has casinos." He suggests Sri Lanka follow Singapore's example of charging local residents entry fees to the casinos to discourage gambling.

Apart from Singapore, IRs are already a vital component of tourism development in several Asian countries including Macau, Malaysia, South Korea and a likely new entrant, Japan.

South Korea forbids its citizens to gamble at casinos (except at an inconvenient location south-east of Seoul) and currently has 16 foreigner-only casinos. Meanwhile, Resorts World Jeju is scheduled to open in stages from 2017, with owner Genting Singapore expecting to break ground in 3Q2014.

Over in Japan where lotteries, pachinko and betting on horse and boat races are already legal, the government is also close to legalising casino gambling ahead of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics to boost tourism. Prime minister Shinzo Abe last month visited Singapore's two IRs, where he was quoted as saying gaming has achieved great success there, and Japan would need to consider policies to prevent crime and gambling addiction, as Singapore has done.





ed to cater to the steady growth of Indian, Chinese and South Korean visitors.

Hapugoda concurred: "We need to attract the rich Chinese and Indians with all-night shopping and high-class restaurants."

Amarasekera added: "Cities like Dubai and Bangkok are major tourist destinations without casinos but they have other major attractions including iconic architecture, quality shopping, world-class restaurants or river rides. In Colombo, you get bored after one night."

Indeed, most tourists visiting Sri Lanka rarely visit Colombo





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\*All meat items served at Tahitian Terrace in Adventureland and Explorer's Club Restaurant in Mystic Point are certified by The Incorporated Trustees of The Islamic Community Fund of Hong Kong.



## Analysis

# PEER POWER



Some call it the sharing economy, others term it collaborative consumption, but all these are just names for a growing movement of locals opening up access to their accommodation or offering to become activity hosts for a fee.

Peer-to-peer (P2P) websites are part of the international share economy that Forbes estimated to be worth some US\$3.5 billion with stellar growth exceeding 25 per cent in 2013.

Although the concept first started in the US, the phenomenon has caught on quickly in Asia and especially South-east Asia, according to the *Nielson Global Survey of Share Communities*. The survey found that Indonesians ranked second globally for likelihood of using websites to rent products and services (including non-travel-related items) and the Philippines, fourth.

### The quest for authenticity

It's easy to see the appeal of collaborative consumption today. Travellers are more price-conscious than ever with a world economy on the mend; this coupled with rising Internet penetration rates and a tech-savvy generation comfortable with online transactions plus a growing penchant for FIT travel have created fertile ground for P2P services to take root.

But the greatest selling point of such services may be the promise of a less cookie-cutter experience for authenticity-seeking travellers – with Millennials being a significant subset of this group – be it a stay in a heritage shop-house in Singapore's Chinatown district, a home-cooked Teochew and Foochow fusion dinner in Kuala Lumpur or a Vietnamese sand painting workshop led by a local artist in Ho Chi Minh City.

"The sharing economy gives both travellers and locals the op-

portunity to connect with each other – which makes it so powerful," said Jia Jih Chai, Airbnb's managing director of South-east Asia and India. "We see that travellers have a thirst for a unique travel experiences – where they get to live like a local and get personalised recommendations on neighbourhood bars, restaurants and shops from someone in the know."

Last year, Airbnb rolled out its Neighborhoods feature, a service that allows travellers to browse maps, photography, public transportation and tips from Airbnb hosts alongside its listing of rooms for rental in each sub-district, blurring its distinction as merely a home-booking service.

In order to widen its range of offerings, Singapore-based P2P tours and activities booking site BeMyGuest earlier this year acquired Indiescapes, which features curated travel experiences across South-east Asia. It has also expanded into Manila by opening an office there.

Clement Wong, founder and CEO of BeMyGuest, said: "(P2P companies) actually widen the pie by bringing non-traditional suppliers into the travel ecosystem – suppliers (who offer activities) such as prata-making classes, tea appreciation, parkour, etc.

"Our content and booking management technology empowers these suppliers who were previously not in the travel industry to enter and distribute to the travel ecosystem, thus widening their distribution and marketing channels for free."

The firm is in the midst of cementing partnerships with "some of the largest travel industry players" and will announce them in the months ahead.

Said Wong: "We have had an overwhelming response from the travel industry both for content

syndication (API, white labels, referrals & affiliation partnerships) as well as small businesses and P2Ps wanting to use our multi-award-winning content and booking management technology to distribute to the rest of the travel industry."

### No threat to traditional businesses?

Traditional travel and tourism players that *TTG Asia* spoke to were not fazed by the meteoric rise of P2P platforms in the region.

Klaus Gottschalk, general manager of Grand Mercure Singapore Roxy, said: "Hotels will not be in direct competition because they operate on a totally different platform, catering to different demographics as well as psychographics of guests who prefer bookings via a more conventional and tested establishment."

Nonetheless, Gottschalk welcomes the possibility of P2P services growing on a larger scale, viewing it as "an extra channel to promote a destination which will in return create a more robust environment for our industry".

Stephane Junca, managing director of Secret Retreats, a collection of luxury boutique properties, cruises and camps across Asia, pointed out: "Airbnb and WithLocals, like Agoda and Booking.com, are generalist platforms. There is no selection of properties, no common link or similar experiences – they target all clients."

Inconsistency of quality could also be a turn-off for travellers. Pas Cher Hotel de Bangkok's executive sale & marketing consultant, Padej Jantarasorn, contends that purveyors of short-term apartment rentals are likely doing it for the income than a genuine interest in providing hospitality services.

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With more travellers turning to peer-to-peer services like Airbnb, BeMyGuest and Voyagin, will the rise of the sharing economy grow the pie or eat into it? By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena and Hannah Koh

“Not only do they lose in terms of convenience and comfort, safety is also a paramount concern too – hotels have round-the-clock security but there’s a higher safety risk for room rentals,” he said. “And if the air conditioner breaks down at 11pm at night, who can you call to look into the problem?”

Kitichai Siraprapanurat, managing director of Navatas Hospitality, operator of Bangkok Food Tours, also argues that the economic benefits from P2P exchanges do not necessarily trickle down to the grass-roots level.

“P2P hosts are generally expats or well-educated locals proficient in English and the Internet, but they tend to focus on urban experiences and are not quite able to offer experiences in rural areas due to communication barriers,” he opined.

“On the other hand, we use qualified guides who earn their stripes through extensive training and education on Thai culinary culture, and who can act as the real go-betweens between travellers and local food vendors, for example. So I’d say we offer authenticity in different ways.”

Maeve Nolan, general manager of Bangkok-based Backyard Travel, agreed: “I think while P2P companies will carve out a part of the travel audience, many people will return to managed travel. It’s just much easier and more reassuring to work with bonded and licensed agencies and operators; there is more security, wider-ranging destination knowledge and travel consultants are trained to make the process easier.

“As their disposable incomes and responsibilities increase and time gets ever shorter, many of these Millennials will realise that expert and qualified travel consultants and tour operators are essential partners in travel.”

However, Nolan foresees consolidation among P2P enterprises as the segment matures. She said: “They may try to marry up ToursByLocals with Airbnb – somewhere, somebody is probably doing this right now. Whatever company came out of such a marriage would also simply become a sort of P2P DMC.”

#### Growing pains – Asian style

Despite its buzzing outlook, the issue of regulation, or the lackthereof, is one that dogs the P2P sphere worldwide.

In New York, Airbnb was embroiled in a legal battle for possible violation of state housing and occupancy tax laws. Meanwhile, protesting cabbies in cities including London, Paris, Berlin and Madrid claim taxi-hailing apps like Uber are not competing on a level-playing field.

BeMyGuest’s Wong observes that because of a greater need to engage with local authorities in Asia, the growth of the sharing economy in this region does not necessarily follow the same trajectory as that in the West, which saw a ground-up approach beginning with individuals offering a small amount of products on their own in a freewheeling way. In Asia, one would instead find smaller companies aggregating this content from different individuals, paving the way for P2P services.

He elaborated: “The P2P market in Asia is a hybrid model, with small- and medium-sized providers of tours and activities leading the charge, and individuals falling into the long tail instead of the opposite in Europe and the US.

“The P2P market growth in Asia, un-

like in other parts of the world, has to be hand-in-hand with local authorities as they have a stronger say in how the travel industry shapes up.”

Regulations are no doubt a concern for BeMyGuest, which mostly works with fully licensed suppliers in Singapore and

runs a strict accreditation programme in less stringent markets, according to Wong.

Last month, a group of six companies in Singapore also banded together to establish the Sharing Economy Association to raise awareness of collaborative consumption and promote dialogue with the

government. Vacation rental site PandaBed is among its members.

But if stronger government intervention as well as rising professionalism are the future of the P2P travel landscape in Asia, this poses another question yet: Is this still the sharing economy?

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## View from the top

Just like the travel agencies it serves, Amadeus, too, is expanding into new business lines. Newly appointed Asia-Pacific president, Angel Gallego, tells [Gracia Chiang](#) that the trade needs to get content and channels right

# LOOKING TO DIVERSIFY

### You were VP of Western Europe, Middle East and Africa, what surprised you when moving to this part of the world?

It's a cultural journey for me, a very intensive one. We all come with our own impressions in mind of what Asia-Pacific is, only to realise there is no one Asia-Pacific. It's very difficult to draw a common line culturally and from a business standpoint.

There are vast differences among Japan, South Korea, China, India, South-east Asia, Australia... The structure of the airline players, hotel industry and travel agencies, the way they engage with each other, their business models and how they position themselves in the marketplace are very different.

### With this in mind, what then are your key priorities for the region?

There are some commonalities to address. To name a few that stand out for distribution: low-cost carriers (LCCs), hotels, online travel agencies (OTAs), corporate travel specialisation. These four are top of the list in the key priorities we're establishing for every large country in Asia.

LCCs are more important; hotels are accounting for more of the profit of travel agencies, whose majority of sales were from air tickets before; many large travel agencies see embracing online as unavoidable; and corporations are also demanding more technology specialised to the needs of their businesses and travellers.

### How are you helping travel agencies?

What we're providing is a combination of three things: content, technology and services.

Firstly, their needs for content are growing, so we need to expand our range of content. Agencies would have been satisfied with just getting our air content 10 years ago, but today they tell us air is only a fraction of their sales, network carriers is a fraction of that, and their profit balance is drifting towards other products.

They are saying, "I sell more products, so I need more content. The more you can help me aggregate that content seamlessly so I don't have to jump from database to database, the more you help."

Secondly, there's pressure to have more channel capability in a coherent way. Every agency today acknowledges that travellers are multichannel consumers, so they want to enable mobile and relate to meta-search. We need to help agencies engage consumers from the inspiration phase.

### Yes, agencies today have to embrace digital channels.

Mobile and online are very different things. Mobile is a very powerful channel for interacting with the traveller. The fact that the screen of smartphones are growing, bandwidth is improving, applications are more lean to manage data exchanges on the Internet – this means we can do things on smartphones that were unthinkable years ago.

The demand (for mobile), at the beginning, came from a servicing viewpoint rather than a selling viewpoint. However, the moment (agencies) provide that, they start realising the selling potential within that space as well.

We're developing a new mobile solution, expected for launch later this year, which is designed to make travel easy. It's a digital, multichannel technology that addresses traveller needs at every stage of the journey from inspiration to management and experience. It will enhance our travel agency customers' ability to offer a personalised service by delivering check-in capabilities, flight status updates, local maps and services right to the traveller's phone.

### And for online?

The challenge is the informed or biased traveller. If you're an offline player sitting in front of somebody who has been influenced by whatever he saw when browsing the Internet, (that customer) knows what he wants at the price he wants it, and he believes he can get it at that price because he saw it. Agencies say, "How can I participate in that influence?"

For online travel specialists, the challenge today is that the inspirational phase is starting to happen in a big time beyond their reach because it's on metasearch companies as well as user-generated content sites like TripAdvisor. They feel like people who are landing on their sites are already influenced, and they want help with merchandising and inspiration solutions.

### On that topic of technology solutions, Amadeus has been muscling up as an IT player, is this because the distribution business is dwindling?

That's not right. Our distribution business grew seven per cent last year (for Asia-Pacific). That's a lot higher than the industry average. Our distribution business is now 20 plus years old, but still growing. It's

healthy, and we're very happy about that.

But it's true that in the last two years we've been intensively looking into (new areas). We don't need to wait until we have a problem with our older business lines. I wouldn't say it's hardcore diversification. All of them are in the neighbourhood of what we do, capitalising on synergies or assets we have today.

With airline IT growing very nicely, we're moving vigorously into airport IT because we have a very nice departure control set of applications that we thought was easily adaptable to airports. We are developing applications in house, plus acquiring companies that complement our portfolio like UFIS.

Same with hotels. We've been a very large player for many years, particularly in the corporate travel space. Now our ambi-

## 10 NEED TO KNOWS ABOUT ANGEL GALLEGO

■ **Who is in your family?** Wife, two kids, parents, brother, sister

■ **What do you do for fun?** Sports photography, reading, family gatherings

■ **Your ideal vacation?** Walking in the mountains

■ **How do you book your own leisure trips?** Travel agencies mostly

■ **What are you reading right now?** *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius

■ **How do you stay healthy?** Jogging four times a week, occasional basketball and mountain trekking

■ **Favourite food?** Spanish paella

■ **A bad habit you cannot kick?** Smoking cigars

■ **Your pet peeve, something that never fails to annoy you?** On serious matters: dishonesty. Day to day: constant in-flight announcements in three languages while working or watching a movie

■ **Most people don't know that you can...** Be a very resourceful DIY husband

tion is to participate in leisure hotel distribution and hotel IT. We're making sizable investments, again a combination of in-house R&D and acquisition of relevant players like Newmarket.

### Will you be focusing on certain countries within Asia?

The needs of every market are different. The needs to invest in a country like South Korea, for example, are very sizable. It's a very large country, with very specific needs. Korean Air will be migrating its passenger service systems to Amadeus' Altea this year. The uniqueness of the Korean market is that Korean Air also owns a GDS called Topas. Topas and Amadeus have been working together for more than two years to create Topas SellConnect, which has been in operation since May. We are progressing towards full market adoption, expected by the end of August. We believe our system is more powerful in breadth of content but also in managing the content available.

China is very important, and it's a step-by-step process there. The regulation in the GDS environment has relaxed to a sensible degree over the last few years – I wouldn't say to a full degree. International airlines can now choose to work with GDSs like Amadeus for international air travel in China. To date, Air France, KLM and Lufthansa have received approval from Civil Aviation Administration of China to use Amadeus.

We have also just received IATA BSP certification in China which means that Amadeus is one step closer to giving authorised travel agencies the ability to fulfill the entire billing and ticketing process of travel products offered by foreign BSP airlines in the market.

Agencies' needs for content are growing, so we have to expand our range. Travellers are also multichannel consumers; we must help agencies engage them from the inspiration phase.

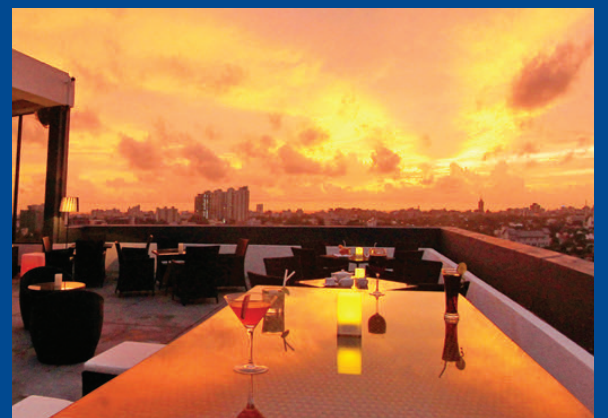




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# Agency

Take heed of tech-savvy agencies that have transformed their businesses and pick up new ideas on how to do better



Below: Rajji Rai (third from left) with his team; a customised car interior by DC Design

## INNOVATORS

# COOL CARS, ENHANCED CUSTOMER DATABASE

By Rohit Kaul

**WHO** Rajji Rai, chairman of Uniglobe Swifttravel and president of Travel Agents Association of India

**WHAT** Uniglobe Swifttravel has started to use One Source, a booking engine that saves all the travel information of its clients. The New Delhi-based, B2B travel company has also tied up with Indian concept car design firm DC Design to offer customised interiors and exteriors for vehicles extensively used by tour operators.

**WHY** Through One Source, Uniglobe Swifttravel has been able to create a central database with clients' details, varying from their seat preference to visa expiry dates and jet privilege card number. As a result, it is able to provide superior service to its repeat customers, according to Rai.

The company's modified tourist vehicles include such features as luxury interiors, attractive exteriors and a wide range of technology options – from TVs and Wi-Fi to fridges and reclining seats – to enhance comfort on longhaul journeys.

Rai is positive that the domestic demand for luxury travel will grow in India. "Travel (experts) expect this segment to

grow at about 25 per cent annually, and our custom-designed vehicles are going to prove to be unique and groundbreaking for this segment," he added.

"We are going to be the first-class equivalent on the ground."

**TARGET** Rai shared that the firm is competing with OTAs in terms of rates offered to customers. Additionally, the agency provides extensive trip planning, airport meet-and-greet services, plus support and guidance to clients from the minute they take off till they land again.

"This is the reason that, in addition to our existing corporate clients, we have made many new corporate tie-ups," Rai remarked.

The agency is also looking to increase its profitable cruise business along with private air charters.

"If you look after the small things the big things will look after themselves. We will keep working towards providing the best-quality products for our clients and the growth of the company will be an inevitable by-product," concluded Rai.

## ASK THE EXPERT

# COMMUNICATION BREEDS LOYALTY

Amid intense competition, many businesses in the travel, tourism and hospitality industry are focusing on customer service to differentiate themselves from competitors. In today's online world where word of mouth and ubiquitous reviews can make or break a travel agency or hotel, top-notch customer service is no longer an option, and is especially pertinent during the peak travel seasons when organisations have to keep pace with a surge of travellers.

Whilst finding new clients is vital to growth, keeping existing customers has a more significant impact on a company's survival. Software provider SAS estimates that it costs companies 10 times as much to gain a new customer as it does to retain a current one – due to lost revenue over the customer's lifetime, which far outweighs marketing and sales promotion costs.

### Customer loyalty drives the bottom line

Customer loyalty is the foundation for both the repeat customer as well as the devoted fan, though they are certainly not equally weighted in worth. Economic-based loyalty is present when customers keep doing business with a company simply because the cost of switching to an alternative is greater than the perceived benefits – which is how customers become repeat customers. However, attitude-based loyalty exists when

customers continue to do business with a company because they trust the organisation to act in their best interests – which is how customers become devoted fans.

According to a study by CIO Insights, a simple five per cent change in customer retention rate could swing profits as much as 25 per cent, so it is critical for organisations to focus on the ROI on programmes and processes aimed at building customer loyalty, especially enduring relationships with devoted fans.

### Building attitude-based loyalty

A company's contact centre – the primary touch point between the organisation and its customers – is where attitude-based loyalty must be cultivated. Contact centres that surpass customer expectations have the strongest ability to gain and maintain their trust, thereby garnering superior attitude-based loyalty.

Several tools available in the market today enable contact centres to create an environment that is conducive to attitude-based loyalty. For example, multichannel interactions allow the customer to choose the most comfortable mode of communication at the time, while call-back options place the scheduling power in the customer's hands.

To achieve a cohesive communication strategy and offer a more responsive experience to travellers, organisations can turn to

a unified communications (UC) solution that combines all communication channels into a single interface, allowing real-time management of voice, IM, video and conferencing. The additional costs of installing these tools may be recovered through improved customer service and heightened attitude-based loyalty, which is more efficient and requires less call volume for the contact centre.

### UC case study: Lasseters Hotel Casino

Lasseters Hotel Casino, located in the Australian outback, implemented ShoreTel's feature-rich UC system during its operational overhaul of its aging, unstable and expensive-to-maintain legacy PABX telephony environment.

The resort benefitted from enhanced functionality such as queue management – ensuring better customer service and call management during peak times – and leveraged the system's reporting tools, gaining deeper insight into peak periods and optimising resource scheduling in order to meet demand. All in all, the new UC system delivered increased staff productivity, minimised costs and a simpler, more personalised way of managing rooms and guests at the hotel.

In conclusion, innovative UC tools can help organisations to enhance customer satisfaction and attitude-based loyalty, therefore placing them in good stead to compete in this fast-paced but lucrative industry.

A company's contact centre is where attitude-based loyalty must be cultivated.



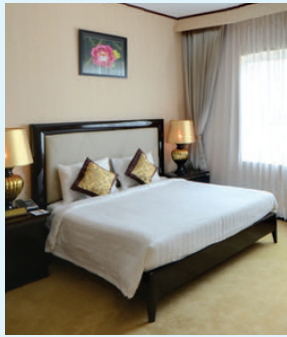
**Bruce Downing**  
Managing director of Asia and South Africa, ShoreTel



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## HOTELS



### Best Western Arrives on Phnom Penh's Riverside

By Glenn de Souza,  
Vice President International  
Operations - Asia & Middle East  
Best Western International

Best Western International is delighted to unveil a new riverside hotel in the heart of Cambodia's up-and-coming capital, Phnom Penh.

The BEST WESTERN River Palace Hotel is set on the banks of the Tonle Sap River and offers 59 rooms and suites, many of which overlook the river and all of which offer complimentary Wi-Fi. The hotel also includes a restaurant, bar, fitness center, meeting space and a spa featuring the only Turkish hammam in Cambodia.

The opening of this excellent hotel means that Best Western is now present in Cambodia's two leading destinations- Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.

It also means that ahead of the launch of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015, Best Western is now present in eight ASEAN countries, including six of the region's capital cities.



THE WORLD'S LARGEST  
HOTEL CHAIN®



### DOUBLETREE BY HILTON JOHOR BAHRU, MALAYSIA

DoubleTree by Hilton Johor Bahru has opened on July 1, offering 335 rooms and suites, an events and meetings floor spanning over 2,140m², four F&B outlets, an outdoor pool, a 24-hour fitness centre and multi-level parking. It is located within the state's CBD in the heart of the upcoming Iskandar Region, less than 5km from Johor-Singapore Immigration Checkpoint.



### ONE&ONLY HAYMAN ISLAND, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

Following an extensive facelift, the 160-key One&Only Hayman Island has reopened in Australia's Great Barrier Reef with an all-suite Pool Wing, rooms and suites with ocean/lagoon views, beach villas and penthouses. There are F&B outlets, a spa, a fitness centre, separate family pool and children's beach area, and an adult-only pool.



### TUNE HOTEL ASEANA CITY, MANILA, PHILIPPINES

Tune Hotels has launched its ninth hotel in the Philippines, the 200-key Tune Hotel Aseana City in the centre of Aseana City in Paranaque, a new precinct in Manila. Like other Tune hotels, it offers five-star beds, high-speed Wi-Fi, housekeeping services, electronic keycard room access, CCTV systems and keycard access into the main lobby after midnight.



### GRAND HYATT TAIPEI, TAIWAN

Grand Hyatt Taipei has completed the first phase of its renovation. Featuring Western and Chinese design styles as well as marble bathrooms with walk-in showers or tubs, the 853 new rooms range between 33m² and 40m² at the grand and deluxe levels and go up to 83m² for an executive suite. The 221m² presidential suite offers a view of Taipei 101 Tower.

## ACTIVITIES

### WINGS OF TIME SHOW TAKES FLIGHT AT SENTOSA

Singapore's Sentosa Island has launched multimedia night show *Wings of Time* since June 17, featuring a range of effects from robotic water fountains to pyrotechnics. French events company ECA2 was brought in to work on the project.

*Wings of Time* tells the tale of two teenagers, Rachel and Felix, who help a bird-like creature, Shahbaz, find its way home through time and space. Shows run daily at 19.40 and 20.40 along Siloso Beach. Premium seats are priced at S\$23 (US\$18) while standard seats cost S\$18 (S\$15 for local residents).



© ECA2, Julien Pante

### THE SOUND OF MUSIC AIRS IN SINGAPORE

Home of West End musical theatre, London Palladium, is bringing its famous musical, *The Sound of Music*, to the MasterCard Theatres at Marina Bay Sands from July 11 to August 10.

This critically acclaimed production tells the uplifting story of a fun-loving governess who changes the lives of the widowed Captain Von Trapp and his seven children by reintroducing them to music, culminating in the family's escape across the mountains.

Shows run at 20.00 from Tuesdays to Fridays, 14.00 and 20.00 on Saturdays, and 12.00 and 18.00 on Sundays. Ticket prices start from S\$65 for a D Reserve seat to S\$780 for a VIP Box of four seats.

## TRANSPORTATION

### KOREAN AIR UPS CHINA FREQUENCIES

Korean Air has increased flight frequencies on its China routes this month.

Incheon-Mudanjiang flights have been raised to five times weekly, Seoul/Incheon-Beijing flights to 14 times, Incheon-Yanji flights to seven times, and Incheon-Guangzhou flights to seven times.

Incheon-Wuhan frequencies will be stepped up to five times weekly come July 26, while Incheon-Shenzhen route will get three additional flights from August 1.

### SILKAIR LAUNCHES HANGZHOU FLIGHTS

SilkAir kicked off its first flights to Hangzhou end-June, marking the beginning of services to its eighth destination in China.

The four-times-weekly service operates every Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday on Airbus A320 aircraft in a two-class configuration.

Flights depart Singapore at 10.00 to arrive at 15.20 in Hangzhou, while return flights take off from the capital of Zhejiang province at 16.20 to reach Singapore at 21.25.

### CAMERA, LIGHTS, VACATIONS!

Lifestyle travel consultant John B Sutherland has taken luxury travel to a new level with the launch of a movie-themed experience in Asia, in response to high net worth clients' demand for more extravagant and unique holidays.

Complete with props and distinguished Hollywood art directors and producers, clients can turn a marriage proposal into a romantic short movie, star as a pirate in a swashbuckling treasure hunt, recreate a favourite scene from a book or movie, or act out their own life stories, among other creative possibilities.

Similar to pre-movie planning, the client first submits a literary or visual narrative which will act as a script listing the specific points the experience should have. Once the client approves the script, the design process starts and a 2D or 3D form will be presented before completing the story. The design process takes a minimum of two to three weeks for approval. Budgets start at around US\$300,000.

For more information, contact [john@johnbsutherland.com](mailto:john@johnbsutherland.com).



Britten Jones in partnership with Luxury Action

## TECHNOLOGY

### THREE NEW AMADEUS SOLUTIONS IN TAIWAN

Amadeus has rolled out three new travel agency solutions during its annual *Shaping the Future of Travel in Taiwan* forum.

The Amadeus All Fares Plus is a web-based, low-fare search and comparison solution integrated into the Amadeus Selling Platform, allowing travel agencies to see all GDS and non-GDS content within a single display.

The Amadeus e-Faresheet works with Amadeus All Fares Plus by providing a complete view of all the fares filed by a single airline, and enables airlines to electronically distribute fares to travel agencies complete with multilingual support. It is a locally developed solution for Taiwan, an Amadeus spokesperson told *TTG Asia*.

The Amadeus Auto Ticketing is a web-based ticketing solution enabling travel agencies to standardise and simplify ticket issuing with greater flexibility, thanks to 24/7 ticket issuance and quality checking.

Amadeus All Fares Plus and Auto-Ticketing will be launched across Asia-Pacific in the coming months.



In this tie-up with Travel Business Analyst (TBA), we crunch numbers that matter and make them meaningful. Plus, look out for our Hotel Barometer every month

China tops Asia-Pacific meetings

Our calculations from a partial publication of data from International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) on association meetings\* in 2013 indicates China moved fractionally ahead of Japan.

Our analysis is based on five-year annual averages, motivated by those in the MICE segment of the travel business who tell us that single-year figures can be distorted by unusually big or small events in one year.

Overall, regional growth was slower in 2013 – around 5% compared with an annual average of 7% over 12 five-year periods (starting 1997-2001, then 1998-2002, etc, through to 2009-13).

ICCA's own analysis notes 2013 as another good year – “continued strength”.

Performing worse in 2013 than their annual averages were China, Japan and Australia. Ahead were South Korea and Singapore (which we have added into the country counts; ICCA includes it only in the city counts).

Among the cities, there are some significant changes:

- Singapore remains well ahead and grew much faster in 2013 than its annual average.
- Beijing fell in 2013. China's overall visitor business has been slow (arrivals of foreign nationals down 3% in 2013), and this appears to have been matched by the meetings business.
- Seoul stormed ahead, but its annual average growth rate is only 7%, and so this may be a one-year spurt.
- Bangkok stumbled, likely caused by its continuing socio-political disturbances. The fall seems likely to continue this year, which would let Hong Kong into the top five city list.

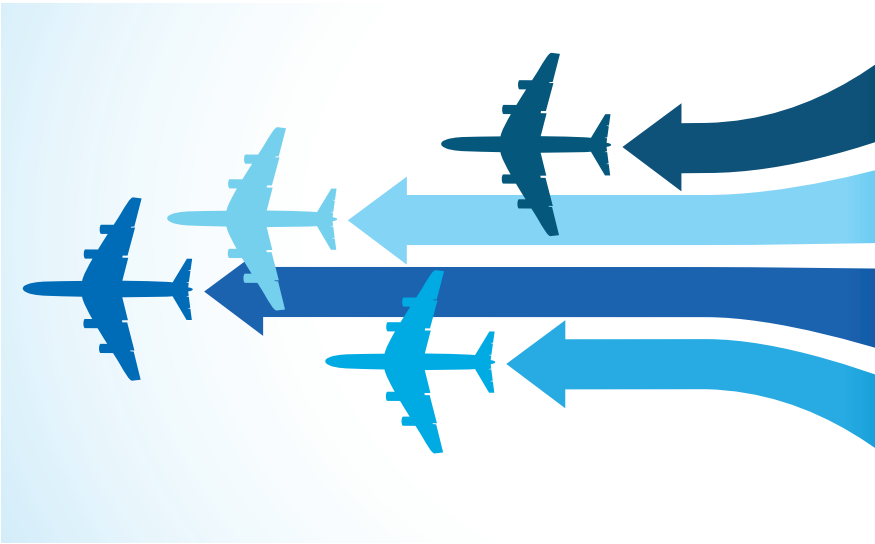
*\*Meetings must be organised on a regular basis; rotate between at least three countries; have at least 50 participants.*

Composite number of meetings in Asia-Pacific, annual average				
Country	2009-13	Growth*, %	AAGR, %	Share, %
China	296	9.3	13.8	25.4
Japan	295.6	0.3	5.2	25.3
Australia	219	-8.7	3.0	18.8
South Korea	212	13.5	10.3	18.1
Singapore	144	16.7	9.1	12.4

City	2009-13	Growth*, %	AAGR, %	Share, %
Singapore	144	16.7	9.1	28.4
Beijing	104	-3.7	10.1	20.4
Seoul	101	25.0	6.9	19.9
Bangkok	80	-11.4	9.0	15.7
Sydney	80	8.1	3.8	15.7

Notes: Estimates by TBA for 2007 data input. AAGR = annual average growth rate, 1997-01 to 2009-13. \*Single-year 2013 over 2012. Source: Calculations by TBA from base ICCA data

Singapore air traffic's surprising falls



The number of air passengers travelling between Singapore and Thailand has fallen 17% over the first four months of this year.

That is not a surprise, but some other falls perhaps are.

Although the fall on China routes is only 1%, the cause is difficult to determine. In the first two months, patterns were affected by changes in Lunar New Year holiday dates. Some observers believe that March (-5%) and April (-8%) were affected by the MH370 incident, even though this was a China/Malaysia matter.

The substantial fall of 14% on UK routes, is obviously a concern for Singapore Airlines, as the UK is its biggest route operation into Europe. The airline does not break out much traffic data, but its total seat sales over the same period increased only 1%.

Indonesia routes – the biggest country-pair route – showed strong growth, 12%, thus making it easily the biggest growth in actual numbers, near 270,000. There are indications that some of this traffic was diverted from Thailand routes.

Likewise for Hong Kong, 13%, where some city-leisure traffic might have switched from Bangkok.

Air passenger traffic to and from Singapore, Jan-Apr 14

Region	No, x1,000	Growth, %
Indonesia	2,487	12
Malaysia	1,786	7.9
Thailand	1,433	-17.2
China	1,519	-1.1
Hong Kong	1,231	12.8
Japan	842	9.3
South Asia	1,445	2.2
Oceania	1,929	5.9
UK	382	-14.4
North America	165	-16.6
All routes	17,317	2.4

Notes: Selected route patterns. Source: Department of Statistics, Singapore



HOTEL BAROMETER

In the latest available month (March) in 2014 the shock continues to be Bangkok's fall. Occupancy down 44%, ARR down 23%, pushing RevPAR down 57%.

As there is often a lag – with rate falling more slowly than occupancy – this could get worse before it gets better. But because winter is generally the city's high season, hotel managers and owners will feel the pain for most of this year, even if business recovers quickly.

The hope must be that the business environment will recover to sustain results through the shoulder season.

There are occupancy falls elsewhere – Ho Chi Minh City, the Maldives, Singapore – but when overall travel is growing, an occupancy change like this can sometimes be operating adjustments. Management may decide, for instance, to push for higher rates at the expense of occupancy, or vary the market mix, etc.

In this same month, Vietnam visitor arrivals grew 21%, Maldives 6%. Data for Singapore is late, but airport traffic was down 2%, and the visitor count might

have fallen around 5%.

Whatever, Singapore's hotel rates fell slightly that month by 1%. Rates in HCMC and the Maldives increased.

Rates in the Maldives – the highest in Asia-Pacific – are still increasing. At one time, there seemed a possibility that the China market, now the biggest for the Maldives, would push rates down. Results so far indicate that this is not happening.

That said, occupancy at 75% is not good for this period of the year, and may bring pressure on rates as the year progresses.

Hong Kong remains the region's best all-rounder, challenged in the world only by New York (which reached 81% occupancy that month). Though Hong Kong's occupancy growth of 3% may look modest, growth is consistent, and with high occupancies, RevPAR is close to ARR.

The overall hotel TBA-100 Index in March stood at 94 – representing a 6% fall compared with the same month in 2013. This is caused primarily by the falls in Bangkok.

Of the three parts that make up the TBA-100 Index, occupancy fell 7%, average room rate fell just 3%, but the resulting RevPAR fell 8%.

Notes/Caveats: Although rates are quoted in US dollars, the data is supplied by hotels to TBA in local currencies, and thus changes in exchange rates can affect figures.

Different categorisation of hotels across countries may also distort the rate comparison. For this reason, percentage changes of ARR within a city may be a surer comparison of market progress. TBA-100 Index is a measure to standardise hotel results over numerous cities. The comparison is with results for the same month a year earlier.

Hotel operating results in selected cities, March 2014

Location	Occupancy, %	Growth, %	ARR, US\$*	Growth, %	RevPAR, US\$*	Growth, %
Bangkok	45.7	-44.4	101	-23.1	46	-57.3
HCMC	79.6	-2.2	126	2.8	100	0.6
Hong Kong	90	2.7	261	4.8	235	7.7
Maldives	75.2	-5.7	814	7.6	612	1.5
Shanghai	63.3	2.5	114	8.7	72	11.4
Singapore	85.5	-2.3	194	-1	166	-3.3

Notes: Compared with same month a year earlier. ARR = average room rate, RevPAR = revenue per available room \*Calculated at exchange rate. Source: Hotels to TBA



## Report Adventure & ecotourism

# GEARING UP FOR ACTIVE HOLIDAYS



Tourism New Zealand (TNZ) and travel suppliers are noting that Asian travellers are more adventurous than before, with a growing number of Indian and Chinese travellers opting for skydiving, bungy jumping and kayaking, while Malaysians, Singaporeans and Indonesians opting for cycling and softer activities like walking and trekking.

Said David Craig, general manager, Asia, TNZ: "The Chinese travellers are adventurous. They are going for everything. Not so long ago, many New Zealanders thought that the Chinese were quite happy to go on coach tours.

"Now they go skydiving, kayaking... they are very open to (new) experiences."

Ann-Louise Riddell, head of marketing, NZONE Skydive Queenstown, agreed: "About three years ago, we barely saw any Chinese doing skydiving; today it is our third-biggest market after Australia and India."

The company has also been embarking on its own promotions in China, in addition to TNZ's efforts to bring Chinese celebrities to the country to skydive.

"Now, almost every week, we have (Chinese) couples (skydive) and make a marriage proposal," Riddell added.

Traffic from the Indian market has also received a shot in the arm, with Bollywood artistes trying out the sport apart from accompanying the trade on sales missions in India.

"We have had extended families comprising parents, five to six-year-old kids and grandparents over 60 years old skydiving together," she said.

While the two countries contributed around 3,000 travellers to the company

## TRIED & TESTED

### Meritus Pelangi Beach Resort & Spa Langkawi

TTG Asia Media descends on Langkawi for a teambuilding trip and has a ball... but *Hannah Koh* isn't so lucky.

**LOCATION** Meritus Pelangi is a 20-minute drive from the island's international airport, occupying a 14.2ha plot right on Cenang Beach. Here the sand is soft and the breeze, balmy, and as you recline into a hammock while the skies streak red from the sunset, you would be forgiven for thinking this is paradise.

**ROOMS** The resort's 352 guestrooms and suites are scattered throughout its grounds in 51 one- and two-storey chalets made from dark wood and reminiscent of traditional Malay houses. Punctuated by small lakes but linked by broad footpaths, the resort recreates the easy communal vibe of a kampung.

The Lakefront Room I stayed in was clean and spacious at 46.5m<sup>2</sup>, and came in a palette of earth tones. The room included a sitting area, workdesk, porch and a roomy bathroom into which was merged the vanity area and closet space. However, I woke up the next day to find the air con-

ditioning unit dripping water steadily onto the already wet minibar area. Fortunately that did not happen the second night.

**F&B** Catering to a group is not easy but the resort managed it with aplomb. All-day dining restaurant Spice Market served up a wicked fried *kway teow* and a fantastic lamb soaked in a savoury and refreshing mint sauce, although the quality of its breakfast buffet could be improved.

Cba is the resort's beachside restaurant and bar offering views of the sunset that kindly arranged a beach dinner for the TTG team. Two crackling bonfires flanked the dining area as we feasted under the stars, a setting perfect for weddings and parties. Like Cba, Pelangi Lounge at the main lobby also hosts live performances at night, while Cascade Pool Bar serves refreshments by the eponymous pool.

**FACILITIES** Options here include a swimming pool, fitness centre and the Pelangi Spa. Wi-Fi servers were down



most of the first day but were problem-free the rest of the stay.

I have shunned most group activities in my life so I was surprised to find teambuilding by the Meritus team fun. It was rounded up with a pep talk from the trainer.

**SERVICE** I had clearly been assigned the nightmare room – water supply to my chalet was stopped for a good few hours, and despite the staff's quick response, another crisis soon reared its head as draining the bathtub led to a flooding in the shower area that threatened to spill over to the rest of the bathroom. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry with the latest turn of events after a whole day of having no Wi-Fi, but the staff rose to the occasion again and fixed the problem. This was fol-

lowed up by a call from the operator to check if all was well, a gesture I very much appreciated after the day's high jinks. That said, it seems no one else had problems on this scale.

**VERDICT** An idyllic resort allowing groups to enjoy each other's company while maintaining distance. Good for companies and extended families.

**Name** Meritus Pelangi Beach Resort & Spa Langkawi  
**No. of rooms** 352  
**Rate** Lakefront room, from RM900 (US\$280)  
**Contact details**  
Tel: (60-4) 952-8888  
Email: [resvn.pelangi@meritushotels.com](mailto:resvn.pelangi@meritushotels.com)  
Website: [www.meritushotels.com/meritus-pelangi-beach-resort](http://www.meritushotels.com/meritus-pelangi-beach-resort)



Asians are becoming daredevils, with more seeking out adrenaline-pumping activities in New Zealand, writes [Mimi Hudoyo](#). Plus [Hannah Koh](#) checks out an old favourite on Langkawi

last year, Riddell said Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore also contributed to the overall total of 5,000 Asians last year.

Similarly, AJ Hackett Bungy Queenstown saw significant growth of the Chinese market in the last couple of years after the company launched the Kawarau Zipride, a three-line flying fox.

"This is a softer version of the bungy jumping we created to attract more participants. It has turned out to be successful with the Asian market, especially the Chinese and the Indians, while we are also starting to see some Malaysians and Singaporeans," said Regan Pearce, sales manager of AJ Hackett Bungy Queenstown.

Meanwhile, New Zealand has also been developing cycling trails around the country in the last three to four years to attract cycling enthusiasts around the globe.

Mischa Mannix-Opie, regional manager, South & South-east Asia, TNZ, said: "Cycling is one of the special interest activities people will travel for, and as part of New Zealand's efforts to attract travellers, the government has injected some funds for developing cycling tracks around the country."

According to Evan Freshwater, manager of New Zealand Cycle Trail Inc which manages and markets the cycle trails, some NZ\$100 million (US\$87.2 million) from fundraising efforts as well as public

and private sectors were spent to develop and improve 23 trails around the country in the last few years.

While the major cycling market comes from the US and Europe, New Zealand is tapping Asia too.

Mannix-Opie said: "We have just had a travel (consultants') fam trip with a focus on cycling and walking."

One of the regions visited was Central Otago.

Pam Broadhead, marketing and product development manager, Central Otago, said: "We offer the 150km Central Otago Rail Trail following an old railway line from Middlemarch to Clyde, which was turned into a cycling or walking trail 20 years ago."

With the trail taking between three and five days to finish, Broadhead added: "This is an easy trail. Most of our clients are over 40 years old and families on holiday. Along the way, they can enjoy the local food, taste the local wine and stay in various accommodations."

The region also saw the launch of two new trails last October. The 34km Roxburgh Gorge Trail provides a one-day ride between Alexandra and Roxburgh Dam, following Clutha Mata-Au River.

"The experience is different, starting with an easy bicycle ride of 10km, followed by a jetboat ride for another 10km,



Cycling in Central Otago

before cycling to the end of the trail," Broadhead explained.

The 73km Clutha Gold Trail from Lake Roxburgh Dam to Lawrence, on the other hand, offers a heritage experience showcasing the area's history of early Maori moa hunters, Chinese gold miners, Euro-

pean pastoral farming, mining and rail.

TNZ's Mannix-Opie said that the NTO would continue to work with the trade to develop more adventure travel itineraries. "Next year we will look at paid marketing and advertising space in special interest publications," she added.



**Travelport**   
Redefining travel commerce

## Travelport redefines the travel conference experience in Bali

In recent years, Travelport has set the pace for travel industry events with our annual Customer and Partner Conference. Last month, we raised the bar again with a compelling conference based on the theme of "Redefining Travel" preceded by an interactive online workshop. The two events drew more than 350 delegates including C-level executives from corporate and leisure agencies, TMCs, OTAs, legacy airlines and low cost carriers, hotels, developers and other suppliers. Delegates enthused about the incredibly high quality of speakers and content, as well as the spectacular networking dinners at the Grand Hyatt Bali resort, the W Hotel and the stylish Metis restaurant.

For more information about how Travelport is redefining travel commerce, check out [www.travelport.com/vision](http://www.travelport.com/vision)



# Guide Hotel marketing representation

## AN INDEPENDENT STREAK



ONE FARRER HOTEL & SPA, SINGAPORE  
– PREFERRED HOTEL GROUP

**No. of rooms** 250

**Positioning** Five-star luxury hotel, three hotel concepts in one, trend-setting urban resort. Opening in phases from August

One Farrer Hotel & Spa is the hospitality/lifestyle centrepiece of a mixed use development called The Connexion that includes a state-of-the-art conference centre, a private hospital and specialist clinics.

The owning company, The Farrer Park Company, believes that being an independent hotel gives One Farrer Hotel & Spa full autonomy to tailor its offerings and establish a unique hospitality, wellness and F&B experience for its guests.

The hotel has chosen Preferred Hotel Group (PHG) to represent it, saying PHG will give it a global platform, the endorsement of a renowned brand, connectivity to online and travel agency reservations

systems, and on the consumer front, its point-based loyalty programme iPrefer. PHG also has a network of 36 global sales offices and access to 16 frequent flyer programmes.

Richard Helfer, director of The Farrer Park Company and chairman of One Farrer, likes that each member hotel is required to meet or exceed the Preferred standard of excellence, which is anonymously reviewed yearly.

He added: “PHG’s integrated quality assurance measurement programme, which allows member hotels to aggregate and analyse reviews and comments from 45 consumer review and social media sites, is also a valuable platform for helping the hotel to understand residents’ experiences. This will be a significant tool that aids the hotel’s efforts in continuously improving its standards.”

THE PATINA, CAPITOL SINGAPORE  
– LEADING HOTELS OF THE WORLD



**No. of rooms** 157

**Positioning** Experience-led hospitality, celebrates individuality, art, architecture, heritage and culture. Opening 1Q15

The Patina, Capitol Singapore, is owned by the Kwee family, which owns luxury hotels such as The Ritz-Carlton, Capella, Conrad and Regent in Singapore. The Patina represents an amalgamation of over 50 years of expertise and experience in luxury hospitality, and the move from owning to operating a hotel.

For representation, it has picked Leading Hotels of the World (LHW) as its collection of luxury hotel brands fits the bill, and has track record and international presence, said Marc Dardenne, CEO of Patina Hotels & Resorts. He likes its “bespoke” rather than “cookie cutter” sales/PR efforts based on each hotel’s needs.

“With their global sales, marketing and PR presence, we can leverage and tap on their databases and expertise in target markets, especially emerging markets like India, Russia and China,” said Dardenne, adding that LHW’s loyalty programme, Leaders Club, also enables Patina to reach out to high net worth individuals.

PRINCE HOTEL & RESIDENCE  
KUALA LUMPUR  
– WORLDHOTELS



**No. of rooms** 445 (plus 157 serviced apartments)

**Positioning** A corporate hotel located in the heart of Kuala Lumpur

The hotel is a franchise of Prince Hotels & Resorts Japan and is operated independently with affiliation to Worldhotels.

Being independent allows autonomy on decision-making among the hotel executive committee team on strategies pertaining to branding, positioning, providing a unique guest experience and driving profit, said general manager Tim Quarm. Hence, senior managers are trained to be entrepreneurs of their own business units and to be creative hoteliers, he said.

The challenge commonly faced by independent hotels is a lack of awareness of the property and connection to the international travel trade as compared to international hotel chains. A marketing representation gives that exposure, and it picked Worldhotels for “its relevant tools, up-to-date innovations/strategies and experienced marketing personnel based in various regions”, said Quarm, who also likes the bridge to multinational corporations that Worldhotels provides.

## TRIED & TESTED

### The House Hotel, Istanbul

Raini Hamdi checks into Design Hotels member, The House Galatasaray, Istanbul, and gives her verdict on representation

**LOCATION** In Istanbul’s bohemian Cukurcuma quarter. The Design Hotels’ affiliation reassures me that ‘bohemian’ is hip, not hippie – I would not have booked it otherwise. The taxi winds its way through streets of artsy cafes and antique shops. A good and interesting location indeed, with the tramway and subway that take you direct to major attractions being within walking distance of the hotel.

**DESIGN** This is a 20-room boutique property conserved from a 1890s five-storey Ottoman mansion. It therefore has an original story, architecture and, restored by a leading Turkish design firm, Autoban, it has design. So Design Hotels is true to its selection. But is it comfortable?

**ROOMS** With a mansion-turned-hotel, there are clearly limitations. There is no elevator and there is a rain-shower cubicle standing in a corner of my bedroom, looking odd. My suite is on the third floor – just perfect as the breakfast room is

on the rooftop, fifth floor, so two floors up for breakfast and two floors down for sightseeing.

I love my suite, which comprises a living room, bedroom and a small bathroom. The ceilings are so high, enhancing space and light. The polished parquet floor adds warmth. The whole accommodation is crisp white and on one wall are golden dove ornaments, a fitting symbol of the city which has doves flying around its towering structures. The amenities are luxurious – two flat-screen TVs, excellent Wi-Fi, a crisp white bed you just want to dive into.

I would say the design aspects are subtle and admirable if you spare a thought to



how they come together. But if you’re not a design buff, it’s still a luxurious, comfortable room with a modern makeover.

**FACILITIES** The breakfast room is a delight as it offers views of downtown Istanbul and Galata Tower, and feels so homely and inviting, what with its fireplace, exposed wooden beams and brass-studded leather sofas.

**SERVICE** Like a private home, this house opens its heart to you. Upon arrival, they send up a bottle of wine, a huge box of gourmet chocolates and fruits. Housekeepers along the corridors smile warm-



ly, as we would if we were making the guest room in our homes. Overall, the service is friendly and efficient.

**VERDICT** In line with Design Hotels’ portfolio and as good as its name promises – it really is a house hotel!

**Name** The House Hotel Galatasaray, Istanbul  
**No. of rooms** 20

**Rate** From 119 euros (US\$162)

**Contact details**

Tel: (90-212) 252-0422

Email: reservation@thehousehotel.com

Website: www.designhotels.com/hotels/turkey/istanbul/the-house-hotel-galatasaray



Why do some hotel owners prefer to be independent and how do they choose a hotel marketing company to represent them? *Raini Hamdi, Xinyi Liang-Pholsena, Paige Lee Pei Qi, Mimi Hudoyo and S Puvaneswary* find out

### INDIGO PEARL, PHUKET – DESIGN HOTELS



**No. of rooms** 177

**Positioning** Offering cultural, design and architectural lifestyle experiences

Indigo Pearl is owned by veteran hotelier Wichit Na-Ranong who prefers to be independent so he can embrace the brand pillars of cultural heritage, creativity, design and architecture and a close connection to north Phuket with its rich history, national parks, high-quality beaches and tin-mining origins.

For representation, it needed a company that understands this positioning and its unique product. Thus, it settled on Design Hotels which, said general manager Christopher Oakes, also shares its entrepreneurial spirit and enables it to reach high-quality niche markets.

Said Oakes: “Indigo Pearl is not a typical resort; it is very art- and design-focused with a deep connection to the destination. So it is not mass market, but attracts a more refined guest profile.

“We feel Design Hotels demonstrates a strong understanding of our ideals and, with its ability to open up new regional markets to us and increase business across direct and retail channels, we believe they are a good fit.”

Oakes said the resort has expanded its visibility and profile with new travel consultants at events, exchanges and sales missions organised by Design Hotels.

### ALEENTA PHUKET -PHANG NGA RESORT AND SPA – SMALL LUXURY HOTELS OF THE WORLD



**No. of rooms** 44 (plus 44 in development)

**Positioning** Luxury, “all suites, all private” concept, smallest room being 80m<sup>2</sup>

Aleenta Phuket is owned and managed by AHMS-The Collection, a hospitality management company under the leadership of founder/MD Anchali Kijkanakorn, who aims to cater to like-minded hotel owners/developers around Asia.

For representation, it picked Small Luxury Hotels (SLH) as it shares the same ethos as AHMS. Anchali is also chairman of the board of SLH, the first female and Asian representative to be elected to this position. “SLH has a wide reach globally and their selection of hotels guarantees the correct brand associations and connotations for us at all times,” she said.

“SLH has regional sales and PR teams worldwide including key emerging markets like China, India and Russia as well as all traditional markets.”

On the technical side of distribution SLH provides a state-of-the-art Internet booking engine, seamless packaging opportunities, full GDS connectivity with systems support from a dedicated account manager, she said. It audits all hotels each year. SLH Club Members also has over one million customers who book SLH hotels at least twice per year, and Anchali said they are “perfect guests with the highest ADR and incremental spend”.

### THE BALE, NUSA DUA, BALI

*\* Name of former representation company withheld*



**No. of rooms** 29

**Positioning** A hideaway for couples, adults-only policy, luxury pool villas, butlers, gourmet cuisine, spa

The resort is owned by an Indonesian-based company and is managed by Lifestyle Retreats, a Singapore-based boutique hotel management firm. It ended its hotel representation partnership last year as the actual room/revenue production had decreased yearly while production from OTAs and the hotel’s websites increased.

“This is a market shift which I believe is affecting marketing affiliations across the board,” said Jose Luis Calle, managing director, Lifestyle Retreats. Calle believes representation firms can help properties without a brand or solid marketing team to penetrate markets, but once these hotels have positioned themselves, it is a challenge to justify the expense of representation if it’s not supported with actual production of room nights and turnover.

“Representation companies are not always necessary, although I sincerely appreciate their contribution especially during the pre-opening of The Bale in 2002. It put The Bale on the map and gave us the right exposure in a number of magazines. Production through their website represented a significant amount of the overall turnover of the property. Those were the good days definitely,” he said.

### ROYAL PLAZA ON SCOTTS, SINGAPORE – PREFERRED HOTEL GROUP



**No. of rooms** 511

**Positioning** Deluxe business hotel

After being part of a hotel chain for 25 years, Royal Plaza on Scotts, owned by Sajahtera Investments, went independent to “allow us the flexibility to respond to a fast and ever-changing market”, said general manager Patrick Fiat, who believes personalised service delivery is a challenge for chain properties around the world to implement and manage.

Saying it takes two to tango in all partnerships, the first criterion in selecting a representation firm is to ensure it has similar business practices and ideals. He thus settled on Preferred Hotel Group (PHG).

Fiat said: “We have seen a healthy growth in business every year since we embarked on the partnership more than 15 years ago.

“We have gained support from various regional offices to secure corporate RFPs from global MNCs. This translates to a substantial amount of direct business from frequent business travellers of these corporations. PHG also helps to enhance our brand in the global market.”

He added that PHG also reaches out to global travel agencies online and offline, which is a good source of business. “The hotels can use this to their advantage by balancing out the seasonal demands and booking costs,” he said.

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# Destination Hong Kong

## Destination in numbers

**19.4 million**

The total number of visitors to Hong Kong in Jan-April 2014, up 14.2 per cent year-on-year

**17.8%**

The biggest year-on-year growth demonstrated by South Korea, hitting 420,743 in Jan-April 2014

**215,321**

Total passenger throughput (arrivals and departures) recorded for Jan-Mar 2014

Tai O on the western side of Lantau Island draws as Hong Kong's oldest fishing village

# UNLEASHING THE POWER OF LANTAU

With overcrowding at Hong Kong's main tourist haunts becoming a thorny issue, local authorities are seriously looking into developing Lantau further.

The Lantau Development Advisory Committee, which was established earlier this year after the 2014 Policy Address, will take into account major infrastructural projects in the area.

Future synergy between Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta is also an important consideration, in view of the completion of Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau bridge in 2016 and the Tuen Mun-Chek Lap Kok road link in 2018 that will greatly shorten the distance between both destinations.

Earlier in 2011, the Lantau Development Alliance (LaDA) comprising local community leaders and industry representatives had already been formed for the promotion of the island.

LaDA chairman, Allen Ha, said: "We aim to offer an enhanced travel experience to both local and overseas visitors, and to brand Lantau Island as a dynamic tourist destination. Last September, we launched *Lantau Fiesta*, a series of events including *Silvermine Bay Music Festival*, *360 Bread-tacular*, *Tai O Water Wedding*, *Disney's Sparkling Christmas*, as well as Mui Wo guided tours, *Spanish Carnival*, *D'Deck Loving Christmas* and *Handmade Hong Kong Christmas* market in Discovery Bay.

"Owing to its success, we are planning to make *Lantau Fiesta* an annual signature affair. The next instalment is in the pipeline, with an aim to bring fun and surprises to visitors through a spectacular and exciting line-up."

Meanwhile, major attractions and hotels on Lantau have unveiled development plans or the addition of new/enhanced products. Hong Kong Disneyland will open a new themed area based on Marvel's *Iron Man* in 2016 as well as a new hotel in 2017.

Ngong Ping 360 (NP360) will don a

new look this year following its revamp of the Monkey's Tale Theatre at Ngong Ping Village into the 3D theatre Motion 360 and live theatre Stage 360 featuring action-packed performances themed with classic Hong Kong movies. Other activities, such as the special effects-themed Movie Makeup FX and Green Scene Filming, were recently launched.

The park's managing director, Wilson Shao, said: "In 2014, NP360 plans to launch a wide range of programmes and services to position itself as the gateway to west Lantau Island as well as a leading tourist destination."

NP360 has also partnered local enterprise Dialogue Experience Square (DES), which specialises in experiential learning activities in complete darkness or silence, to offer corporate training programmes for guests. DES experience development manager, Ramona Lam, said: "NP360 intends to create a variety of new experiences and one of them is the Sensory Tourism: Silence Motion 360.

"This programme is the world's first

teambuilding event conducted through drama elements amid beautiful natural surroundings. It provides a diversified, interactive communication training for local and overseas corporate and MICE groups."

The 325-room Auberge Discovery Bay Hong Kong, which opened in 2013, is also courting the island's rapidly growing number of incentives, conventions, exhibitions.

Director of sales and marketing, Joanna Kan, believes there is a need to develop more all-in-one trips or joint campaigns, since visitors nowadays are seeking more unique and experience-based itineraries.

Said Kan: "Lantau has become a major destination for leisure and MICE events. We were the first to join the Walt Disney World Good Neighbor Hotels programme early this year. Apart from the ability to purchase admission tickets to Disneyland at our hotel, guests can also take advantage of complimentary shuttle bus services to and from the attraction. The bus journey takes only 20 minutes."

LaDA's Ha added: "Lantau can be similarly positioned to Orlando in the US as a mid-priced business hub to attract overnight and MICE visitors.

"However, before that, a greater variety of facilities such as four-star hotels and shopping outlets need to be built. Only with more facilities can visitors be attracted to stay longer and spend more on Lantau."



Could Lantau become the Orlando of Hong Kong? With more attractions and events coming on stream, the island is just realising its tourism potential, reports **Prudence Lui**

**Viewpoint**

What should be considered when developing Lantau Island as a new destination?



**Freddy Yip, member of working group on convention and exhibition industries and tourism, Economic Development Commission**

“Transport infrastructure needs to be improved. The completion of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau bridge will mean busy road traffic that the existing network may not be able to

handle.

It's also vital not to create another West Kowloon with skyscrapers but to retain the local character, i.e. its colonial history, countryside ambience and heritage. While additional hotels and shopping malls are indispensable, I disagree with the use of simplified Chinese language for signages as the traditional style is characteristic of Hong Kong.”

**Ken Chang, vice president, Associated Tours**

“Developments should be focused on areas along existing airport rail lines rather than on the remote countryside, which lacks accessibility and requires huge resources.

Since we have Disneyland on the island (as a precedent), new tourism attractions also have to be big or striking to wow people.”



**How to sell**

**DO** Riding the **Ngong Ping 360** cable car from Tung Chung to Ngong Ping Village takes about 20-25 minutes. Guests may pick up more information on the attraction and its surrounding areas by listening to a brand new audio guided tour, which can be downloaded from its official website and WeChat.

**STAY** As the city's newest resort hotel opened in 2013, **Auberge Discovery Bay Hong Kong** has been doing well since, especially from family staycations on the weekends. It also draws local MICE and wedding business with its scenic waterfront location and only seaside chapel in Hong Kong.

Apart from its spacious outdoor venues, the hotel also offers a tranquil environment and a wide range of leisure experiences, such as horse carriage riding and hiking.



Auberge Discovery Bay Hong Kong

**EAT** Situated along the waterfront promenade and connected to Tai Pak Beach, **D'Deck Discovery Bay** is an alfresco dining hotspot that offers a relaxing ambience and spacious environment with 20 thematic restaurants. Choose from Korean, Japanese, Thai, German, Mexican, Caribbean, Spanish and Indian cuisines, among others. The 180° seaview and nightly Disneyland fireworks also make for a satisfying visual experience.

**SEE** **Tai O Fishing Village.** Apart from viewing stilt houses erected along the stream, soak in the strong village culture when strolling along the narrow alleys. The revitalised old Tai O Police Station built in 1902 has also been turned into the UNESCO-awarded Tai O Heritage Hotel, making it worth a visit. Guided tours are provided.



D'Deck Discovery Bay



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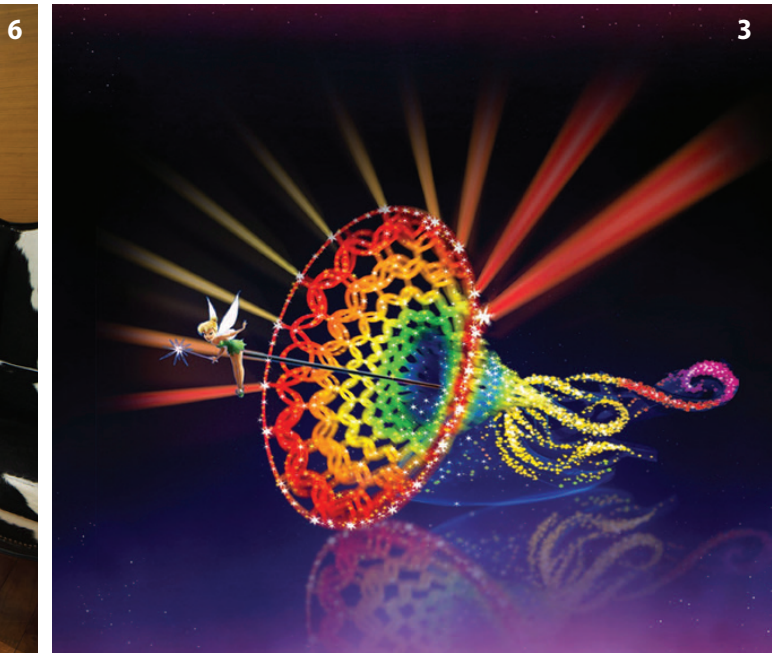
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# Destination Hong Kong

## NEWS IN A MINUTE



**1 iclub Wan Chai Hotel**  
Regal Hotel International has re-named the 99-room Regal iclub Hotel in Wan Chai as iclub Wan Chai Hotel. The group will continue to open more iclub hotels in the coming months, namely iclub Sheung Wan Hotel and iclub Fortress Hill Hotel in 2014 followed by iclub Soho (2015) and iclub To Kwa Wan (2016). This new brand emphasises on chic and simple design with an eco-friendly service philosophy.

Meanwhile, the chain is also pioneering a mobile key check-in service, which will kick off at its soon-to-open Sheung Wan hotel. Guests can use their mobile device and/or the traditional key card for check-in and to access their room.

**2 Iconic design hub PMQ**  
Soft-opened in May, PMQ, the former Hollywood Road Police Married Quarters, has been transformed into a creative and design hub. Almost half of the over 100 tenants are in the fashion and household product design sectors, with the rest belonging to areas such as fashion accessories, food, furniture, design services and design galleries. Exhibition space and event facilities are available.

**3 Disney Paint the Night**  
Hong Kong Disneyland will woo visitors with a new night parade from October 2014. Using a magic paintbrush and vivid imagination, sorcerer Mickey will light up the night. By harnessing the power of Tinker Bell's pixie dust, Mickey will paint visions inspired by classic Disney Pixar stories. Lightning McQueen, Sulley and Mike will be featured in a Hong Kong Disneyland parade for the first time, while Tinker Bell, Ariel, Belle, Buzz Lightyear, Woody and other Disney friends will immerse onlookers in a world of light and colour along Main Street, USA every night.

The resort will also introduce new offerings to celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2015.

**4 Bibò**  
Newly opened Bibò at Hollywood Road serves up a modern take on classic French cuisine with great wines and cocktails. Helmed by three Michelin-starred chef Mutaro Balde and featuring Alain Ducasse of the Plaza Athénée Paris, French *gastronomie gourmande* is emphasised, with everything homemade from the bread to the ice cream. Signature dishes include the pan-seared foie gras coupled with grenadine-poached rhubarb. At the bar is a dynamic menu of handcrafted cocktails from the classics of the 1930s, created by mixologist Alexandre Châté.

This fine dining outlet is also an international first for its melding of the world's most renowned contemporary and street artists together in one space. Find, for instance, installations by Vhils, Invader, JonOne, Stohead, Kaws, JR and Mr Brainwash as well as hangings and works by Banksy, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Damien Hirst.

**5 360 Lantau Sunset Tour**  
The 5.5-hour 360 Lantau Sunset Tour is a new tour extending into the evening. Organised by 360 Holidays, the programme comprises riding the Ngong Ping cable car; visiting Ngong Ping Village, Big Buddha and Po Lin Monastery; viewing the sunset at Tai O; sighting rare Chinese white dolphins out in a boat; dining at Tai O Heritage Hotel; and stargazing at Cheung Sha Beach.

Participants need to assemble by 15.30 in Ngong Ping Village. The tour can be conducted in three languages – English, Mandarin and Cantonese.

**6 Two hotels rebranded**  
Hotel Nikko Hongkong in Tsim Sha Tsui East has been rebranded as New World Millennium Hong Kong Hotel from July 2014. The collaboration between New World Hotels and Millennium & Copthorne Hotels,

will see a phased HK\$120 million (US\$15.5 million) renovation of the 464-room property and will remain open to guests during the makeover.

Meanwhile, the former J Plus Boutique Hotel at Causeway Bay has been relaunched as J Plus Hotel by YOO (pictured) in May following a HK\$10 million renovation. Originally designed by Philippe Starck,

the 10-year old hotel is introducing street art throughout the property and now has a relocated street level main entrance and lobby on Pennington Street. The 32 studios and 24 suites have also been given a fresh lease of life with graffiti stickers on their ceilings and colour themes like Dreamy Pink, Tangerine Joy, Sunshine Yellow and Tranquil Blue.

## MY WAY

**Paul Pei**

Executive director, hotel and hospitality, Ocean Park

### What are your hobbies?

Going to the gym is one of my favourite hobbies. At Pacific View where I live, there is a spacious gym well-equipped with some of the most updated equipment available. It is a quiet place where I can unwind, exercise, enjoy some private time and forget about work.

I also play golf and my greatest desire now is to be proficient at this game, which I have tried to master for 20 years. There is a saying that the worst day on a golf course is better than the best day in the office. I never knew that hitting and chasing a little white ball over 7,000 yards could be so enjoyable.

### What is your favourite watering hole/restaurant in town?

Wu Kong Shanghai Restaurant in Causeway Bay.

The food is excellent and the service good. The staff know me well and there is always a very big welcome. It is easily accessible from anywhere in Hong Kong. Whenever I entertain there, I always get excellent feedback.

The food business is very difficult in Hong Kong as there are so many restaurants, resulting in extremely fierce competition. It is great to see this restaurant doing well and serving its clientele consistently.

### Where do you and your wife hang out





**Poll on ttgasia.com**

Should Hong Kong develop Lantau Island as an alternative to overcrowded tourist hotspots?

Yes **65%**No **65%****TRIED & TESTED****Gateway Hong Kong**

*Prudence Lui* is impressed by this Marco Polo hotel's brand new look, feel and service.

**LOCATION** The hotel in the heart of Tsim Sha Tsui is attached to Harbour City shopping complex and office towers, and between its sister hotels Marco Polo Hongkong Hotel and Prince Hotel along Canton Road. After a year's revamp completed last September, a new entrance now sits next to that of the mall, away from the noisy traffic on Canton Road.

**ROOMS** All 11 Continental Suites were completely redesigned to be simple but chic, adopting a warm colour tone for the carpet and sofa. The vanity, comprising a big mirror, a makeup mirror and two sinks, sits in the middle of the room. The bathroom offers a standing shower as well as a tub, with sliding doors providing privacy. Entertainment is afforded by a flat-screen LED TV. As I often read and write in a hotel room, good lighting is always important for me, which was not a problem here given the availability of two lamps on the long

writing desk plus two reading lights above my bed with adjustable brightness. Another plus is the free Wi-Fi.

**F&B** Gone are the memorable but outmoded outlets Coffee Mill and La Brasserie. I liked the hotel's only F&B option, Three on Canton on 3/F, a new dining concept which puts the café, bar and alfresco dining under one roof.

I forewent breakfast at Club Lounge and came here instead. Kudos to the simple design with floor-to-ceiling windows ensuring abundant daylight and a view of the hustle and bustle on Canton Road below. A private room for 12 people is available, which doubles as a venue for the chef table dinner hosted by Jason Green or overseas guest chefs. The alfresco dining area is connected to the café and bar as well as the mall. The setting is relaxing with high tables and sofas. Overall, this is a good place to be for private events or happy hour drinks.

**FACILITIES** With more than 400 shops and restaurants in Ocean Terminal – one of the three Harbour City malls – to keep guests occupied, Gateway has only three

function rooms, plus a club lounge with a library and a meeting room. Through the mall, guests can make their way to Marco Polo Hongkong Hotel for swimming or Prince Hotel for the gym.

To ease guest arrivals by car or taxi, a transit lobby just steps away from the main hotel lobby has been added on the ground floor of Harbour City, where staff can receive guests, process check-ins and store luggage.

**SERVICE** The hotel staff were attentive and efficient. It took me less than five minutes to check in and arrive at my room. Guests arriving at the side door facing Canton Road must be prepared to walk up some steps, though the concierge may offer to help if they spot you.

**VERDICT** Thumbs up for the hotel's convenient location and relaxing ambience.

**Name** Gateway Hong Kong

**No. of rooms** 400

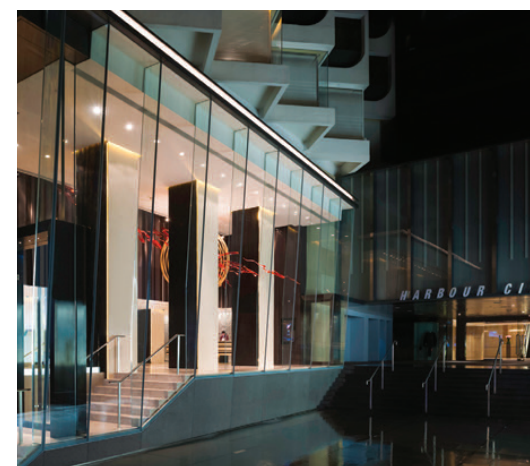
**Rate** Continental Suite: HK\$4,650 (US\$599) + 10 per cent service charge per night

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**during the weekends?**

Weekends and any time off is devoted to my wife. I am gladly her chauffeur when she runs errands or works out at the fitness club, before going for a meal. We also enjoy driving around to see new developments in town and how Hong Kong changes by the day – I am fascinated just watching people on the crowded streets.

We sometimes venture to the outskirts just to experience different parts of Hong Kong, as no two places are the same. The malls, restaurants and stores may be similar but the people are different and it really is the people that make Hong Kong so fascinating.

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

The local fast-paced life is all around in the entire city, perhaps more visible in places like Mong Kok, Tsim Sha Tsui, Causeway Bay and Wanchai.

I get a big kick going to restaurants for breakfast or lunch and finding everyone engrossed in reading a newspaper or magazine. It is interesting to see how the locals often get together for a meal yet engage in newspaper reading instead of talking with one another.

Shopping malls are a big attraction, and there are so many in Hong Kong. Although the stores are very much the same, each mall offers a different experience.




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# Destination **Middle East**

# AMBITIONS ON THE RISE

## **Destination in numbers**

**11 million**

The number of visitors Dubai recorded in 2013, growing 10.6 per cent over 2012

**2.6 million**

The number of guest nights recorded in Abu Dhabi in 1Q2014, a 22 per cent increase year-on-year, while hotel occupancy climbed eight per cent to 79 per cent

**32,259**

The number of Chinese arrivals in Abu Dhabi in 1Q2014, a surge of 208 per cent, making China the fourth largest overseas source market after India, the UK and Germany



Dubai's ever-changing skyline reflects the monumental developments that have shaped the city over the last few decades; Atlantis, The Palm is pictured

**T**he Middle East has moved away from being a primarily business destination to one that offers a gamut of leisure activities attracting vacationing families.

Eager to carve out a niche as leisure destinations, both Dubai and Abu Dhabi are actively courting families and encouraging longer stays, currently pegged at 3.8 nights and 2.2 nights respectively.

Besides substantial support from Emirates and Etihad Airways, their respective NTOs are also focusing on prime source markets such as Saudi Arabia, India and Russia by growing global flight connectivity.

In February, Dubai introduced five-year tax breaks for builders of three- and four-star hotels to widen affordability in the hospitality sector. Inventory is set to grow from 84,534 rooms across 611 hotels in 2013 to 114,000 rooms across 751 hotels by 2016; by 2020 the supply is expected to reach 150,000 rooms, according to Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM).

Emphasis too is placed on conventions and congresses, a segment that DTCM sees as a precursor for the leisure market,

as business delegates are likely to return to Dubai for longer leisure sojourns in future.

Last year, Dubai unveiled its Tourism Vision 2020, setting a target of 20 million annual visitors by 2020, up from 11 million in 2013.

DTCM director-general, Helal Saeed Al Marri, said: "Between October 2020 and April 2021, the Expo will attract more than 25 million visitors, 70 per cent of which will be from outside the UAE – the largest number of international visitors in the Expo history."

Dubai is currently raising some 32 billion dirhams (US\$8.7 billion) to host Expo 2020, four-fifths of which will be spent on new projects including a crocodile park, zoo and safari park, miniature models of world monuments, traditional fish markets and souks, a wetlands museum, butterfly garden, 5,000-species palm park and underwater hotel. The historic Dubai Creek, which sought to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site this year, will resubmit its bid again next year.

Furthermore, the Expo 2020 is expected to not only create unprecedented awareness of Dubai as a tourism destination but also spur the growth of new hotels and entertainment attractions.

Upcoming icons in Dubai include Mohammed Bin Rashid City (MBR City), a mixed-use development located close to The Palm Jumeirah. Besides an extensive park, the mega project will boast a Universal Studios theme park with more than 100 hotels, an area designated for art galleries, as well as Mall of the World – the world's largest shopping centre. Due to complete by 2019, MBR City's first phase is scheduled for completion in 2014.

Another multi-faceted leisure project located in Jebel Ali, Dubai Adventure Studio Fun Park, will feature five separate theme parks, including the Bollywood Park with a Broadway-style theatre; a marine park with aquariums, water slides and a children's park; a night safari park with views of the desert; and the Dubai Adventure Studios due to soft-open in 3Q2014.

The Palm Jumeirah will also soon be home to The Pointe, a 136,000m<sup>2</sup> waterfront haute cuisine and entertainment destination with views of the Atlantis across the bay, as well as the Nakheel Mall measuring over 90,000m<sup>2</sup>.

Welcoming the new developments, Sunny Augustine, executive director, White Sands Tours & Travel, commented: "The expansion in the Palm area will at-

tract more tourists and enable us to provide more leisure options to our guests."

Kulwant Singh, managing director of Lama Tours, expects an increase in leisure sales of 24-25 per cent this year and 18-20 per cent in the remaining years leading up to Expo 2020.

Meanwhile, Abu Dhabi, the emirate's capital and second largest city, is anticipating spillover effects from the Expo 2020. "Those visiting the Expo will no doubt be open to discovering other parts of the country," said Mubarak Hamad Al Muhairi, director-general of Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority (TCA Abu Dhabi).

The NTO is also banking on the growth of attractions, from art and culture museums and luxury resorts on Saadiyat Island to entertainment attractions on Yas Island, to lure more leisure visitors to the city.

Ferrari World Abu Dhabi has started an expansion programme to introduce new rides, street entertainment and seasonal shows, with the project expected to complete by 2015. Neighbouring Yas Mall is due to debut in 4Q2014.

Abu Dhabi's Economic Vision 2030 spells out its aim to reach 7.9 million tourists and 80,000 hotel rooms by 2030, up from 2.8 million tourists and 26,000 rooms in 2013.



Having won the rights to host Expo 2020, Dubai now aspires to be the world's top holiday spot, backed by a raft of large-scale development projects. By **Shekhar Niyogi**

**How to sell**



A hot air balloon ride over undulating sand dunes

**DO** As the sun rises, enjoy a 30-minute **hot air balloon ride** over endless sand dunes at 900m above ground, taking in breathtaking aerial views of Dubai's skyline, the surrounding desert and sea. This can only be done early at dawn. Rides are operational between October and May, and cost about 1,000 dirhams (US\$272) per person. Following the ride, tuck into a hearty breakfast in a desert oasis.

**SEE** While Dubai has cultivated an image of glitzy malls and soaring skyscrapers, it is also home to a trove of cultural treasures. Head to the **Dubai Museum**, the city's oldest existing building that dates back to 1787. Nestled in the Al Fahidi Fort, the museum showcases antiquities, artefacts and life-size dioramas, presenting the traditional way of life in the emirate before the discovery of oil. Entry costs less than US\$1 per person.

**EAT** Located in Al Bustan Rotana Dubai hotel lobby, the **Blue Elephant** is an authentic Thai restaurant that also serves Japanese, Malay and Indonesian cuisine. Designed like a

traditional Thai village with waterfalls, streams and lush greenery, the ambience is serene and the service, prompt. *Tom yam goong*, green chicken curry, *som tum* and sweets served in a coconut shell are must-haves.

**STAY** The 275-room **Al Bustan Rotana Dubai** is located in the heart of the city, with shopping malls, fine dining establishments and the airport just minutes away. The rotunda in the lobby offers a lively ambience for leisurely conversations or brisk business discussions over a free-flow supply of tea and dates, while the hotel is also home to a diverse array of international cuisines.



**Viewpoint**

Will Dubai's allure as a destination be compromised in the pursuit of its ambitious visitor arrival targets?



**Anis Aridi, sales manager, Alpha Tours, Dubai**  
"Dubai has the infrastructure and systems to support rapid growth in terms of hotel rooms and airport capacity. It is investing in more efficient transport systems and stepping up construction of new entertainment attractions.  
However, the concern is maintaining an equilibrium between growth and sustainability for its residents as any deficiency in civic infrastructure or high real estate costs and rentals will drive people away from Dubai, thus reducing its image, value and strengths."

**Mhd Nidal Al Tarabichi, president, Al Tarabichi Travel & Tourism, Dubai**  
"Rising from a small trading village to a mega metropolis, Dubai has planned its growth. I do not think that it will allow its growth aspirations to destroy its unique features.  
The trick will be in balancing its attractiveness as a combination destination product, (catering to) leisure, business, MICE, cruise and incentive (markets). There should not be an overt focus on any one segment. But there should be a conscious decision to attract the three- and four-star hotel clientele too. It should also embrace not just GCC nations but also South and South-east Asian (markets)."



**TRIED & TESTED**  
**Beach Rotana Abu Dhabi**

Among the plethora of modern hotels in the Middle East, the 20-year Beach Rotana Abu Dhabi still retains an old-world charm, says *Shekhar Niyogi*.

**LOCATION** Located in the main business district of the UAE capital, the 565-room flagship hotel of the Rotana group boasts its own private beach and adjoins the Abu Dhabi Mall.

**ROOMS** I stayed in a 40m<sup>2</sup> Premium room with a king-size bed, Jacuzzi bath, rain shower and high-speed wireless Internet. All amenities were meticulously replenished.

**F&B** Dining was a jovial experience at Brauhaus, which offered a wide array of German draft beers and schnitzels, with single portions that were big enough for two.

Set on a wooden structure at the jetty's end, Finz offers fresh seafood – including high-quality salmon imported from Norway – over great views of the sea.  
Trader Vic's, a buzzing water hole that stays open till late, offered standing room only when I visited with a friend for a couple of margaritas.

Other cuisines like Italian, Oriental and North Indian as well as a steakhouse are also available in the hotel.

**FACILITIES** The decor marries modern and Oriental styles, as evident in the

grand rotunda lobby and an adjoining coffee shop that makes a welcoming spot for lazy afternoon conversations or a quiet read while the world passes by.

The banquet facilities host 'ladies only' wedding parties, as well as receptions for visiting dignitaries. Aside from the 120m private beach, the hotel also features a 10-room spa, gym, squash and tennis courts and two swimming pools.

**SERVICE** Room service was very attentive. I asked for sparkling water with a slice of lime (instead of a lemon wedge) and my poached egg for breakfast to be done a particular way, and the staff remembered these details throughout my stay. The IT person helped to solve my problem with the Wi-Fi Internet access, bypassing the usual route to connect my laptop directly with the server.

**VERDICT** Its wide-ranging facilities will cater to busy corporate travellers while its oasis-like atmosphere will appeal to others seeking a laid-back vacation.

**Name** Beach Rotana Abu Dhabi  
**No. of rooms** 565  
**Rate** From 500 dirhams (US\$136) per night  
**Contact details**  
**Tel:** (971-2) 697-9000  
**Email:** beach.hotel@rotana.com  
**Website:** www.rotana.com





# Destination Middle East

## Poll on ttgasia.com

Dubai recently introduced tax breaks for three- and four-star hotels. Will the emirate lose its high-end appeal with more midscale hotels?

Yes 30%

No 70%

## MY WAY

### Nadia Nassar

Cluster director of group sales, InterContinental Hotels Group, Dubai

#### What are your hobbies?

I like to read books, go to the beach and fish in the Arabian Gulf. Fishing can be an exciting activity for visitors and incentive groups.

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

My favourite local food is Middle Eastern. I go to a Jordanian restaurant called Rawabina for the most authentic Middle Eastern dishes. They serve one of my favourites called *mansaf*, which is a dish of lamb cooked in fermented, dried yogurt. It is served on a flatbread topped with rice and meat, and garnished with almonds, pine nuts and sauce poured over it. Another place I frequent is a Palestinian

and Jordanian restaurant called Zaroob.

#### Where do you go for day trips?

Yas Island is one of my favourite places for day trips. The beaches are amazing and Ferrari World is a very fun place to visit. This area is growing into an entertainment destination for people of all ages – Yas Mall is coming up and new rides are being added to Yas Waterworld.

#### Name three places in Dubai you would take first-time visitors to.

1. A desert safari followed by an authentic Middle Eastern dinner, with belly dancers, fire shows, camel rides and henna body tattoos by Alpha Tours or Arabian Adventures.
2. The Dubai Mall – the aquarium and dancing water show are must-sees – and the Mall of the Emirates – the indoor skiing slope is amazing.
3. Besides gold and jewellery shopping at the Gold Souk, there is also the Spice Souk; the Cloth Souk, which offers modern and traditional Arabian and Indian outfits; and the Perfume Souk featuring Arabian Oud and all kinds of scents in one area. These souks provide great shopping with an authentic Middle Eastern feel.



Dubai Mall's aquarium



Ferrari World in Abu Dhabi



## NEWS IN A MINUTE

### 1 Dubai Food Festival

Following its inaugural edition earlier this year, Dubai Food Festival will return to the city next year to showcase the emirate's diverse culinary culture driven by its fast-expanding F&B sector and some 200 nationalities who call it home.

Pop-up restaurants on three beaches will highlight Emirati, Mexican, Egyptian, Italian, French and Japanese cuisines, with restaurants all over the city vying to woo tourists with tastings events and promotions.

### 2 Viceroy expands in the UAE

Following its flagship Yas Viceroy in Abu Dhabi, Viceroy Hotels will soon roll out a series of landmark developments in the UAE.

Viceroy Dubai Palm Jumeirah will debut in late-2016 on the base trunk of The Palm Jumeirah. Located within Dubai's business and financial centres, the 76-storey Viceroy Dubai Sheikh Zayed Road will open in late-2016 while sister property Viceroy Dubai Business Bay will offer similar qualities and experiential amenities when it launches in 2017.

### 3 Dubai to welcome Six Flags-branded theme park

Texas-based Six Flags Entertainment Corporation has entered into a partnership with Dubai's Meraas Leisure and Entertainment to open its first branded theme park outside North America. Slated for a late-2017 opening, the Six Flags-branded theme park in Dubai will be located within Meraas' multi-themed park project in Jebel Ali.

### 4 Cruise port upgrades go full steam in the Middle East

Abu Dhabi's Mina Zayed Port is currently developing a dedicated cruise terminal that can handle at least three vessels simultaneously, while Dubai has been upgrading Port Rashid to accommodate seven vessels, up from its current five.

Jordan's Marsa Zayed cruise terminal project in Aqaba will also be completed in 2015.

### 5 Al Ain Wildlife Park and Resort

In Abu Dhabi's heritage area, plans are afoot by Al Ain Wildlife Park & Resort to redevelop the 900ha destination into the largest wildlife park in the Middle East as well as an environmentally sustainable centre that offers visitors interactive experiences to learn about desert wildlife and traditions.

Within the park, the Al Ain Zoo is



Dubai Cruise Terminal

home to over 4,000 animals across 180 species, of which more than 30 per cent are endangered like the Arabian oryx, Arabian leopards, Arabian sand cats and Arabian ghaff tree, also known as the 'umbrella tree' whose numbers depleted with the onset of the oil boom.

### 6 Qatar Airways' new home

Qatar Airways commenced in end-May full operations at Hamad In-

ternational Airport (HIA). Located 16km from the centre of Doha, travel time to the airport is around 25 minutes.

Big on efficiency, HIA has implemented IATA's Fast Travel options ranging from check-in to self-boarding. It is also piloting industry solutions for enhanced security, making it the third airport globally to adopt Smart Security after Amsterdam-Schiphol and London-Heathrow.



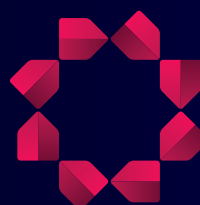
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# CTW Asia-Pacific Corporate Travel World

17th CTW Asia-Pacific  
**30 Sep – 2 Oct 2014**  
Bangkok Convention Centre at  
CentralWorld Bangkok, Thailand

## A Winner With Corporate Travel Professionals

- **Delivers On Learning Corporate Travel Best Practices, Sourcing, Negotiating and Buying New Products / Services Objectives Agreed 95% of 2013 delegates**
- **80% of delegates felt Quality Conference Programme Surpasses The Competition**
- **88% will Attend CTW Asia-Pacific Again & Recommend It To Colleagues and Peers**

"A valuable networking opportunity with industry peers. CTW Asia-Pacific broadened my knowledge, and gave me a better understanding on how I can **apply that knowledge in my organization.**"

**PT Saipem Indonesia, Indonesia**  
Rika Sari, Business Support Officer

"Gained useful and up-to-date **information relevant to my work.** Am also satisfied with the quality of exhibitors I met."

**Continental Automotive Holding Co. Ltd, Shanghai, China**  
Angela Lim, Executive Assistant to Vice President

"A motivating experience meeting like-minded peers with similar goals."

I was able to put some of my cost-saving initiatives into perspective and also have new and exciting ideas to trial as well."

**Corrs Chambers Westgarth Lawyers, Australia**  
Stephani McKay, Travel Team Leader

"**Excellent caliber of speakers** with useful and relevant topics. Another valuable aspect was learning about the common challenges of my corporate travel counterparts in other companies."

**Accenture Australia Pty Ltd, Australia**  
Katherine Hopcroft, Travel Management Specialist

"Added opportunity to **showcase our latest corporate productivity solutions.** We were able to inform buyers about our new tools that can help them improve their business operations and enhance the customer experience."

**Abacus International**  
Rebecca Daniels, Director – Global Accounts

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# Social

## GALLERY

### TTG ASIA MEDIA

TTG's recent company retreat saw some 40 staff flying into Langkawi for a 3D2N programme. On the agenda were exciting teambuilding games at Meritus Pelangi Beach Resort & Spa, and a cable car ride and mangrove tour organised by Asian Overland Services Tours & Travel.



### JAPAN NATIONAL TOURISM ORGANIZATION (JNTO)



JNTO and Japan Tourism Agency co-organised a fam trip to key Japanese cities for Indian travel consultants from May 28 to June 5 (the group in Miyajima pictured above).

### SHANGRI-LA'S BORACAY RESORT & SPA

Shangri-La's Boracay Resort & Spa recently launched *Sunglasses at Work – Meet by Design*, a destination meeting concept combining business and leisure.



Top: Shangri-La's Boracay Resort & Spa general manager Amit Oberoi, director of communications Patricia Javier, and Asian Dragon magazine marketing and sales manager Christine Uychiaoco. Bottom: Shangri-La's Boracay Resort & Spa director of sales and marketing Aris Delos Santos-Ote delivering a speech

### DIAMOND PRINCESS

Hong Kong-based travel consultants and their families boarded the *Diamond Princess* for its inaugural cruise in the Japan Sea from June 11 to 20.



Seated, from left: Carnival Corp's Nancy Chung (third) and Package Tours' Frankie Yuen (fourth). Standing, from left: Sunflower Travel's Cindy Young (first), Jetour's Ronnie Ho (fourth), Wincastle Travel's William Leung (fifth), Carnival Corp Korea's Gee Chan (sixth) and Carnival Corp's Jay Ting (seventh)

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



## PATA TRAVEL MART 2014

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Phnom Penh, Cambodia

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# Connect

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

## WHO'S SAYING WHAT

### Instagram



Flying high at Garuda Indonesia's Partner Appreciation Night!



Let the games begin! #ttgasia's annual teambuilding trip kicked off yesterday on the beautiful beaches of #Langkawi with a host of games designed to foster team spirit. But with a team this tight, the odds are ever in our favour!



Mid-afternoon surprise from Pan Pacific Serviced Suites Beach Road #Singapore that turns one this year! Bespoke cupcakes, anyone?



A peek into our four-eyed future? At #AIBTM, Xinyi Liang-Pholsena tries her hand Google Glass, courtesy of event technology company Sli.do that demonstrated how the gadget can be used by event moderators to see and integrate best questions from the audience.

### Tweets

#### FOOTBALL FEVER SAMBAS INTO THE SPIRITUAL CAPITAL OF THE BEAUTIFUL GAME, BRAZIL. WHAT DOES THIS BRING TO TOURISM?

**@ecoindex**  
From pink dolphins to eco-lodges, Brazil hopes #WorldCup will boost #tourism

**@BBSRBuzz**  
#Sandart from #puri #beach in #odisha for @FIFAWorldCup #WorldCup #WorldCup2014 #FIFA2014 #travel #tourism #FIFA



**@AxelKoster**  
#Qatar unveils luxurious off-grid floating hotels for 2022 #Worldcup. #Tourism #Hotel #Social #AxelHappy #Media

**@AxelKoster**  
#WorldCup tourists expected to spend \$3 billion in @VisitBrasil and over \$2,500 each w/o airfare #tourism

### Most commented

#### SPOTLIGHT ON MUSLIM TRAVEL AT 1<sup>ST</sup> INTERNATIONAL HALAL TOURISM CONFERENCE/EXPO

"It is a bold and encouraging step to invite 1.5 billion Muslims to see the world, to meet peoples of different cultures and traditions, to learn and to educate them on the Muslim way of thinking. All strength to you in your efforts. Bravo!" - Sayed Mohammed, Mumbai

#### TNZ INVESTS IN SINGAPORE ROADSHOW TO IMPROVE MICE BUYERS' PERCEPTION OF NEW ZEALAND



"There will always be people and groups keen on NZ given its reputation of fresh air and greenery. It is a matter of using the right incentives and targeting the market segments that will see Tourism NZ achieve its objectives despite what these experts may say." - Harry Tong, Singapore



## TRAVEL PURSUITS

### QUIZ

1. Air India has just restarted flights to which European country?
2. Who recently wrote an open letter concerning the situation in Thailand?
3. Which airline does not belong – Air China, China Airlines, China Eastern Airlines, China Southern Airlines?
4. Outside Asia: Is Etihad Airways' home base in Abu Dhabi, Dubai or Sharjah?
5. History: What is the name of the resort company Adrian Zecha set up after separating from Amanresorts (which he also founded)?

(1) Italy. Air India's Boeing 787 flight operates to Milan and Rome from Delhi. (2) Bill Heinicke, who heads Minor International, called for a better understanding by nations and media in their coverage of Thailand's political developments, which is based in Taiwan. (3) China Airlines, which is based in Taiwan. (4) China Airlines, which is based in Taiwan. (5) While Qatar Airways, making up the region's big three, is based in Qatar and not the UAE. (6) Amanresorts, from 1998 to 2000, after which he returned to Amanresorts and left again in May 2014.

### TRAVEL INDUSTRY VERSUS REAL WORLD

Industry phase	Real-world meaning
"Other flights are full, but ABC Airlines still has many seats left"	"I will never fly on ABC Airlines"
"That bulkhead seat has more legroom"	"You will be seated next to babies crying through the night"
"ABC Airlines has introduced special fares for its 17 <sup>th</sup> anniversary"	"Business sucks"
"This is an environmentally friendly, rustic resort"	"There is no air-conditioning" and/or "Bring mosquito repellent"

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- Singapore Changi Airport (2002)
- Hertz Asia Pacific (2005)
- Royal Cliff Hotels Group (2006)
- Star Cruises (2008)
- Abacus International (2009)
- SilkAir (2010)
- Lotte Tour (2011)
- Hong Kong International Airport (2013)
- Raffles Hotel Singapore (2013)

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- What your key businesses are and goals for the company
- What problems you encountered
- How you used IT to overcome them and reach objectives
- How these solutions benefited your customers
- How these solutions benefited your staff, bottom line

**Contest Closes on 29 August 2014**

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Forty Years, As Strong As Ever

\* Prize will be presented at TTG Asia's Technology Conference at ITB Asia 2014 and winner will be required to present his/her winning entry during the TTG conference. TTG Asia will be covering the winner's flight and accommodation for the presentation.





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