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# Phil rate hikes raise eyebrows

Tour operators fear Boracay's price jump

By Rosa Ocampo

**MANILA** Travel consultants in the Philippines warn that the rate hikes being planned for the April 2013-March 2014 season – mainly in Boracay and by as much as 20 per cent – will have a negative impact on selling the destination, which is already seen by some as expensive.

While there is no official word from Boracay hoteliers (hotels contacted by *TTG Asia* did not want to discuss their rates), travel consultants like Eleanor Ng, operations manager – domestic, HRG Marsman Drysdale Travel, said rates for the next season had started to come in, with some showing increases.

Said Gregor Zacj, general manager, Blue Horizons Travel & Tours: “We receive complaints everyday that the Philippines is much too expensive compared to city hotels in Bangkok as well as beach resorts in Koh Samui, Krabi and Phuket.

“In the eyes of the Europeans, the Philippines is a developing country, and they believe it is a fairly cheap destination. Once they look at the rates, they are shocked to see how expensive it is, especially compared to other Asian destinations.”

He added that Western travellers already incur higher costs. “In general, European travellers spend more money (to come to this region); this begins with the longhaul flight to the Philippines, which on average is six times higher than the airfare from South Korea, for example.”

However, Hotel Sales and Marketing Association (HSMA) president, Margie Munsayac, defended the planned increase in Boracay's hotel rates as coming from a lower base, when prices took a tumble last year following China's travel blacklisting of the Philippines. Insufficient room

*Continued on page 2*

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## The guiding light



Guided tours only for old people? Trafalgar sees that the product has to evolve, or its future is dim. CEO, Gavin Tollman, tells **Raini Hamdi** how he's guiding the tour operator through change, and why travel consultants too must act – see page 7

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## Giving something back to Thailand

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

Last month, Best Western International joined hands with World Vision to take part in a charitable initiative aimed at making a real difference to the lives of disadvantaged communities in Thailand.

The Best Western volunteers made a four-day trip to northeast Thailand to donate valuable goods and equipment to schools and communities. Following the long journey from Bangkok to Nong Bua Lamphu Province, the volunteers spent four days meeting local children and teachers, renovating school classrooms and handing out much-needed school materials and sports equipment. In addition, the group visited local communities to inspect local rice-growing areas and offer support.

This all forms part of our broader CSR program. As we have our Asian headquarters in Thailand, it is essential that we understand our local communities and work alongside each other, arm in arm. Only by doing this can we really give something back to our home country.



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# Muslim travel grows

Indonesia gets serious with new working group, which will establish guidelines

By Mimi Hudoyo

**JAKARTA** Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy has soft launched shariah tourism in a bid to capture a wider market mix.

Indonesia's deputy minister of tourism and creative economy, Sapta Nirwandar, said: "The demand for shariah tourism is huge, and Indonesia actually has the products to offer but we have not packaged them in such a way that they meet the needs of shariah-conscious travellers."

He added that the ministry had formed a working group together with the National Shariah Board – which issues halal certification in Indonesia – academics and the tourism industry to set up guidelines for products, train human resources and for marketing.

Speaking during the launch event in December, Singapore-based halal travel specialist Crescentrating CEO, Fazaal Bahardeen, pointed out that the market was indeed huge.

He said: "The world's Muslim population currently totals 1.6 billion, representing 23 per cent of the world's population. The number is estimated to reach 2.2 billion by 2030, representing 26.4 per cent of the world population, and 50 per cent are below 25 years old."

Crescentrating & Dinar-Standard's Global Muslim Life-

Money to be made

# 12

Muslim travel expenditure as a percentage of global outbound tourism expenditure in 2011, or US\$126 billion



Ismail: don't overdo it

style Tourism Market 2012 Report showed that Muslim travel expenditure in 2011 totalled US\$126 billion, representing 12.3 per cent of global outbound tourism expenditure.

"Muslim tourist expenditure's annual growth rate is expected to be at 4.8 per cent between 2012 and 2020, higher than the global expected average growth rate of 3.8 per cent for the same period," Fazaal said.

By 2020, Muslim tourist expenditure is expected to be

US\$192 billion, representing 13.4 per cent of global tourism expenditure, according to him.

Indonesia's Shariah Hotel and Restaurant Association chairman, Riyanto Sofyan, said the domestic market was equally sizeable.

"The number of domestic tourists in 2011 was 239 million trips with an economic turnover of Rp158 trillion (US\$16.6 billion). With 88 per cent of our population being Muslim, the number of trips could reach 210 million," said Riyanto, who is also president commissioner of Sofyan Hotels, which operates a number of shariah hotels within the country.

"There is actually a growing number of shariah-conscious consumers in Indonesia, and we have received requests for halal-labelled products and places of interest," he noted, adding that with such a huge Muslim population, the destination had taken for granted that its tourism products were automatically halal.

Travel consultants TTG Asia spoke to welcomed the new initiative by the tourism ministry.

Focus Indonesia general manager, Anthony Johannes, said: "It will provide more choice for travellers who seek such products, but it is too early to see how much business will grow by."

"So far we have not received any concerns from the Middle East market about their holidays in Indonesia. They request for halal food, hotel rooms with signs that indicate the direction in which they should pray, prayer mats and toilets with showers. We are able to provide that here."

Marintur executive director, Ismail Ali, said: "I think we need to start small, by expanding the number of halal-certified products, having clear labels for such products, then promoting it to specific markets (with Muslim populations)."

However, he cautioned against creating an image of Indonesia as a shariah destination.

Acknowledging the concern, Sapta explained: "While the products are meant to cater for the needs of halal-conscious travellers, they are not exclusive to Muslim travellers. By developing this market, we want to diversify the tourism products that Indonesia has to offer and provide an additional option for both the travel trade and tourists to choose from."

"It is similar to the banking business here, where a conventional bank can have a shariah unit within the bank or a separate entity within the group. Customers, regardless of their religious beliefs, can choose from these products."

## Thai-Cambodian visa off to slow start

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

**BANGKOK** The implications of the Thai-Cambodian joint visa, which finally took effect on December 27, 2012 (TTG Asia e-Daily, January 3, 2013), are not as far-reaching as expected.

India and China are among the 35 countries eligible for this new visa scheme, which allows tourists to spend up to 60 days each in Thailand and Cambodia without having to apply for separate visas.

Jack Bartholomew, general manager, Khiri Travel Cambodia, said: "With this joint visa policy, it will save our Indian clients the trouble of applying twice, as they only need to get the visa from the Thai or Cambodian embassy, and just pay the amount upon arrival."

"Furthermore, this joint visa will help clients to see Cambodia as a more accessible destination, and I foresee a trend of clients adding Cambodia onto their main holidays in Thailand. The more people know about it, the more likely it is to have an effect, although I think this arrangement will impact Cambo-

dia's business more than Thailand's."

Tourism Council of Thailand president, Piyaman Tejapaibul, added: "Only 20 nationalities still need a visa to visit Thailand. But this joint visa can potentially create a win-win situation for both Cambodia and Thailand, especially since China and India are the biggest source markets to benefit from this joint visa policy."

However, Asian Trails' manager for the China market, Grace Chen, was more ambivalent about the benefits. "We haven't seen any impact so far. Our MICE clients from China tend to stay only five to six days in Thailand, so it's unlikely they will extend their trips to Cambodia."

"Unlike Western tourists who spend two weeks or more in South-east Asia, the Chinese prefer spending that amount of time on longhaul destinations such as Europe and the US instead, so it's hard to use this joint visa policy as a drawcard for Chinese travel-

ers to Thailand or Cambodia."

The cost of applying for the joint visa also makes it unattractive to travellers from the West, most of whom already enjoy visa exemptions to Thailand, pointed out Simon Sweet, director of sales, Footsteps in Style.

He explained: "For instance, a British traveller may incur US\$15 to send his passport by special post to the Cambodian embassy in the UK and another US\$20 for the visa fee, which makes it US\$35 altogether. Compare that to coming straight to Thailand, where a British national already enjoys a visa waiver and only pays US\$20 (for a visa on arrival) when he enters Cambodia. What we want to see is no visa charges for Cambodia."

Maeve Nolan, product & operations manager of Backyard Travel, which handles tourists mainly from the US, Europe and Australia, agreed: "Only a regional visa that includes Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia would be of any significant value."



Piyaman: China and India boost

Continued from page 1

## High prices may not be 'tolerated'

supply plus better demand are also driving prices up.

Manila hotels, on the other hand, which are already 30 to 40 per cent dearer than those in Thailand, cannot hike rates as much as they prepare for the onslaught of new competition, said industry players.

HSMA's Munsayac said: "Tour operators will always complain of high rates, but that is still a business decision for every destination. Demand will always drive prices up."

Despite this, HRG's Ng called on hotels to remain competitive. "You don't know which market would drop you – any catastrophe in the economy somewhere can affect tourism here. So don't put all your eggs in one basket (just) because volume is there."

Added Blue Horizons' Zacj: "Once a negative image is absorbed by travellers, it takes years to make it good again. The stakeholders are not aware of the potential danger when rates are too high and the market will not tolerate them."

# Visit Malaysia Year kicks off

A fuller events calendar aims to attract 28 million tourists in 2014, especially big spenders

**By S Puvaneswary**  
**KUALA LUMPUR** Tourism Malaysia has begun promotions for the Visit Malaysia Year (VMY) 2014 campaign, in a strategic bid to move from mass to high-end markets.

Initially planned to run from September 2013 through to 2014, the launch date was pushed back to prepare the country's 28 million people to welcome the world. The campaign's goal is to draw 28 million tourists in 2014, two million more than 2013's target.

Malaysia's tourism minister, Ng Yen Yen, explained: "We set up a VMY secretariat only in October 2012, and we decided to spend a year preparing rather than rushing through it, as we want to do a good job."

"We have to make sure the country is ready in terms of service levels, tourism infrastructure and security."

The focus has also changed. While originally intended to mark the golden jubilee of Sabah and Sarawak's entry into the Fed-

eration of Malaya to form Malaysia in 1963, the campaign will now celebrate Malaysia's multiculturalism and unity, embodied in its *Celebrating 1Malaysia Truly Asia* tagline.

While next year's list of events has not been finalised, Ng revealed that new events would debut, while homegrown ones such as the Malaysia International Shoe Festival, Fabulous Food 1Malaysia and Colours of 1Malaysia would be enhanced to attract international participation.

Inbound operators are excited about the greater visibility this will bring. Adam Kamal, Malaysian Inbound Tourism Association's honorary secretary-general, said: "It is timely to have (the campaign) in 2014, as it will also coincide with Malaysia hosting the ASEAN Tourism Forum."

"It will be a good opportunity for tour operators to see what the destination has to offer and to learn more about what's in store during this campaign period."

The promotional campaign, together with its logo and theme

song, was officially launched by Malaysian prime minister, Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak, on January 19.

A three-day carnival jointly organised by the Ministry of Tourism and Tourism Malaysia was also held at Bukit Jalil National Stadium in Kuala Lumpur last week to create awareness of the economic importance of VMY.

The campaign is in line with the Ministry of Tourism's wider ambitions to shift the country's emphasis from mass, middle-income tourists to high-end travellers by 2020.

Such a shift would reduce the strain on Malaysia's natural resources and conserve its natural attractions, while more than doubling the country's tourism receipts, from RM60 million (US\$19.9 billion) to RM168 million in 2020.

Going forward, the ministry wants to grow tourism arrivals even further, from the anticipated 28 million in 2014 to 36 million by 2020.

## Viewpoint

What do you expect from Visit Malaysia Year?



"As planning is important to ensure a successful Visit Malaysia Year, we hope that the calendar of events will be ready before ITB Berlin in March so that we can start promoting it to our business partners overseas."

**Mohd Khalid Harun**  
President  
Malaysian Association of Tour & Travel Agents



"Indonesians love travelling to Malaysia. But not much is known beyond Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Malacca and Genting although Malaysia has a lot more to offer. Tourism Malaysia should step up promotional efforts during Visit Malaysia Year, so as to generate interest in other destinations."

**Royanto Handaya**  
President director  
Panorama Tours Indonesia

## HK trade looks to CNY after disappointing Christmas

**By Prudence Lui**  
**HONG KONG** Major outbound travel consultants disappointed by lacklustre traffic last Christmas have pinned their hopes on the Chinese New Year (CNY) season instead.

For December, the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong reported negative 7.7 per cent growth in levy income at HK\$1.8 million (US\$229,560), while the number of transactions tumbled 11.9 per cent to 423,270 compared to 480,402 in 2011, according to IATA. Total billing plunged 12.3 per cent to HK\$1.5 billion.

Steve Huen, executive director, EGL Tours, said: "Given the five-week time gap between Christmas and CNY, consumers could do two trips. But this did not happen, and one reason is that many schools rescheduled examinations to straight after the Christmas holiday, discouraging family travel. The third round of quantitative easing by the US Federal Reserve also resulted in inflation and jacked up tour prices."

He observed that travel demand remained strong nevertheless, and projected a 10-15 per cent price hike. While turnover will increase, he added that the number of travellers from the mature Hong Kong mar-

ket was not growing drastically. Consumers are also spending less while holidaying due to the weakening Hong Kong dollar.

Dannia Cheung, general manager, Morning Star Travel Service, agreed. "We haven't experienced such slow traffic before, especially to Taiwan. (This is because) many Hong Kongers have been to the island before, and other factors such as school examination dates and the surge in supply of chartered flights to Taiwan by travel consultants."

However, CNY bookings look rosy as the holiday spans Sunday to Wednesday. EGL Tours has sold more than 90 per cent of its Japan tours, while Morning Star's tours to Bangkok, South Korea and Japan are almost full. Hong Thai Travel Services, which also performed worse than expected over Christmas, noted that tours to the US, Australia/New Zealand and the Mediterranean were 70 per cent booked, and South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam, Beijing and eastern China were 80 per cent reserved.

General manager, Jason Wong, said: "By taking two more days off, one can enjoy a week-long holiday. I predict about 10-15 per cent overall growth, especially for longhaul."



**Huen: strong CNY bookings**

## TTG Intelligence

Analysis by Murray Bailey

### Singapore, the largest outbound market in Asia-Pacific

China is numerically the largest Asia-Pacific outbound market by far – 2.5 times bigger than the next, Japan. But taking into account population, Singapore is the largest – 50 per cent bigger than the next, Hong Kong. The number of outbound trips by Singapore residents is 50 per cent higher than the actual population – meaning each person takes an average of 1.5 trips. Marketers, in theory, would get a better return if they concentrated on these two markets.

This year, Singapore residents will spend US\$4,400 per person, compared with US\$2,900 for Hong Kong and US\$1,250 in Australia. China's population pushes it well down the table, its US\$70 average falling below, for instance, Thailand's US\$86.

Market	Spend per pax*, US\$	Growth+, %
Singapore	4,427	6.7
Hong Kong	2,873	6.1
Australia	1,238	3.6
New Zealand	821	5.5
Malaysia	448	17.8
South Korea	402	-0.7
Japan	229	6.7
Thailand	86	4.2
China	70	29.8
Philippines	44	14.5
Indonesia	29	10.0
India	12	10.5
Taiwan	NA	3.8

\*Full-year, if growth rate is maintained  
+Varying periods, most through June  
Source: World Tourism Organization, Travel Business Analyst

### Hotel prices on the rise

Travel management group Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CWT) has forecast growth in air and hotel prices for 1H2013. For airfares, its lowest expectation is a one per cent drop in Australia, and the highest, six per cent up for Singapore. For hotel rates, it predicts a five per cent fall for India, and the highest growth, again for Singapore, at nearly nine per cent. Travel Business Analyst (TBA) calculates average growth at four per cent.



Source: Carlson Wagonlit Travel

Compared to CWT's 2012 forecast, TBA estimates that its 2013 outlook is lower for airfares but much higher for hotel rates.

### Share of online bookings at 25%

PhoCusWright expects online travel bookings will grow at almost twice the rate of all travel in 2013 – 15 per cent compared to eight per cent – to stake 25 per cent of total bookings, or US\$91 billion.

Japan is expected to fall from a 41 per cent share of the online total in 2011 to 37 in 2013; Australia and New Zealand, 18 to 16 per cent; while China will grow from 14 to 17 per cent; India, nine to 10 per cent; and South-east Asia, 12 to 14 per cent.

Year	Online bookings, US\$, in billions*	Growth, %	Share, %
2013	91	15	25
2012	79	18	24
2012	79	18	24
2011	67	26	22
2010	53	33	20

\*Online bookings by leisure travel and unmanaged business travel (business travel that is not covered by corporate business travel policies)  
Source: PhoCusWright





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## Tourism Data



US business travel spending is on the rebound in 2013, according to GBTA; Bangkok hotels shine amid mixed performance for APAC in November, based on STR Global data; Kroll Advisory Solutions' Global Fraud Report reveals that half of travel businesses were hit by fraud in the last one year

## Hot Moves



Kathleen Tan (left) pilots AirAsiaXpedita as new CEO; Anthony Gill (centre) takes helm as GM at The Nam Hai Hoi An; Hans Loontjens (right) is appointed GM of Renaissance Harbour View Hong Kong; Ian Ekers joins Singapore's The Sentosa, A Beaufort Hotel as GM

## Hot Deals



Starwood dangles introductory rates for new China hotels; SWISS rolls out promotional airfares

to Europe; Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts offers discount packages in Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, Singapore and Phuket for Chinese New Year; Centara Grand Resort Island & Spa Maldives (above) offers an all-inclusive room rate

# ASEAN's 2015 promise



ASEAN is entering an exciting period, with the ASEAN Economic Community blueprint driving it towards a single market by 2015.

Raini Hamdi  
Senior Editor

The curtains closed on the 32<sup>nd</sup> ASEAN Tourism Forum yesterday (January 24) and as host country Laos bids farewell to the more than 1,000 sellers, buyers and media who attended, it is worth reflecting on the promise of South-east Asian tourism.

The region is entering an exciting period, with the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) blueprint driving it towards a single, globally competitive market by 2015. The AEC promise is for a region with free movement of goods, services, investment, skilled labour and a freer flow of capital, which has immense benefits for travel and tourism.

As it is, ASEAN's tourism industry is shining like never before, the rising middle class among its more than 600 million people alone a rich source of visitors for the region, never mind the massive populations of its dialogue partners.

As a destination, its favourite description of itself as a region of diversity has never rung truer, never been more appealing. Cultural diversity aside, ASEAN offers a rich palette of diverse and contrasting sights today, from Singapore's aspirational tourism attractions to Myanmar's astoundingly exotic ones.

Last year, no fewer than five new airlines launched in South-east Asia, namely, AirAsia Philippines, Singapore's Scoot, Indonesia's Mandala, Thai Smile and Lao Central Airlines. There will be more opportunities for the LCCs among these carriers to increase their market share this year in Myanmar and Vietnam, where LCC penetration is below the global average of 26 per cent, according to the Centre for Asia-Pacific Aviation.

Accessibility is also getting better on the visa front. A significant regional initiative was the single visa agreement for Thailand and Cambodia, ef-

fective December 27 last year (see page 2). Tourists from 35 countries could apply at the embassy of either country for a stay up to 60 days in Thailand and 60 days in Cambodia. The agreement between Thailand and Cambodia for the single visa comes under the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) framework, an initiative mooted by Thailand in 2003.

Is it any wonder that ASEAN countries saw great arrivals numbers last year – Thailand surpassed the 21 million mark on December 28. Myanmar hit its own record – there were 1.1 million foreign tourists last year, a 30 per cent rise over 2011.

What can derail this golden period for ASEAN?

One is political stability, such as conflicts involving the Preah Vihear Temple, or Thailand's political situation. Another is the global economy, which still is a huge source for concern.

Yet another is environmental sustainability, for which ASEAN ranks so poorly in a World Economic Forum ASEAN Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2012. This is worrisome, as the strength of ASEAN's tourism attraction lies in its "spectacular landscapes and attractions, vast ecosystems with stunning wildlife, and rich culture and history", as the report pointed out.

And for travel and hotel companies in ASEAN, while a free movement of goods, services, investment, skilled labour and a freer flow of capital in the region spells opportunities, it is only for those who prepare themselves for it but a threat for those who don't. My advice is to read up on the AEC, understand its implications and muscle up the resources to harness its opportunities and fend off the threats. After all, 2015 is only two years away, a blink of the eye in today's digital age.

## Most commented on www.ttgasia.com

### India cramps Malaysian outbound with new restriction

In response to a new ruling by the Indian High Commission disallowing Malaysians to stay in India for more than 30 days at a time, Vincent Teh from Kuala Lumpur said: "The Indian government is looking forward to creating more foreign direct investment opportunities in the country but such a restriction may jeopardise (this)...Is it because Malaysia is a Muslim-majority country or underdeveloped?"

### Future of Underwater World Singapore remains uncertain

Nugroho Setiatmadji from Jakarta said: "In my humble opinion, Underwater World may need a perception audit. This way it can identify its strengths and weaknesses, and find out ways to attract more visitors. I find it ironic that ASEAN citizens are surrounded by many seas yet lack the interest to visit Underwater World."

### China and India prop up tourism growth in Nepal

MB Khadka from Kathmandu said: "Our two neighbouring countries have vast populations that can increase tourism growth in Nepal, but questions remain. First, has the government taken a keen interest on how to grow tourism in Nepal? Also, Nepal Tourism Board should explore new products and destinations in Nepal for tourists. Like Tibet, we should not be happy until we have secured 50 per cent growth in Nepal's inbound tourism."

### New Vietnam Airlines flights spur Indonesians' wanderlust

Le Phong Tran from Ho Chi Minh City said: "This is absolutely great news for both Indonesia and Vietnam. Indonesia, especially Bali, is a very interesting new market for the Vietnamese. Vietnam is also an amazing destination in South-east Asia."

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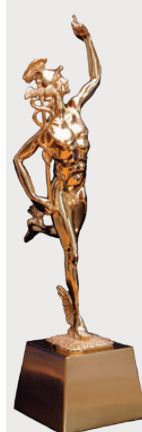
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# What’s on the shelves

In this new section, we round up the latest product news in the marketplace, from hotel openings and airline developments to new tours and tech solutions

[ TRANSPORT ]

**IndiGo's new Chennai-Singapore route** Indian low-cost carrier IndiGo is currently offering introductory roundtrip Chennai-Singapore fares starting from Rs15,998 (US\$290) for its daily and direct service commencing March 1. However, it has temporarily suspended sales of its Delhi and Mumbai flights to Singapore, as part of a rationalisation exercise. New routes to Singapore from Hyderabad and Bengaluru are also being considered.





**Bangkok Airways adds Mandalay and Krabi** Bangkok Airways will introduce twice-daily Bangkok-Krabi flights on March 31 and four-weekly Bangkok-Mandalay flights from September 16. Tickets to both destinations are already open for booking. Services will also be ramped up for the Bangkok-Trat (three daily flights) and Bangkok-Male (five weekly flights) segments, starting March 31.

**Seamless transfers for Tiger Airways' flights at Changi** From February 1, Tigerconnect will allow customers with connecting flights at Changi to collect their onward boarding passes at the transfer desk in the transit area and continue with the second leg of their journey without immigration and baggage concerns. The service will cost S\$16 (US\$13) per person per flight connection.

Tigerconnect will be made available across the carrier's network of 50 destinations, including those of its partner airlines Mandala Airlines and SEAir, as well as on joint itineraries offered with Scoot.



[ HOTELS ]

Regent Phuket Cape Panwa and Regent Bali	Best Western Premier Hon Tam Resort & Residences	Swissôtel Goa	Sama-Sama KL International Airport
			
<p>Regent Hotels and Resorts will welcome Regent Phuket Cape Panwa and Regent Bali this year, becoming flagships for the brand in their markets.</p> <p>Launching this month, Regent Bali (pictured) is situated on the eastern part of Bali's coastline in Sanur. The hotel features a four-hectare tropical garden, a 200m beach, 94 suites, one beachfront Regent Villa, 25 Regent Residences, a spa and two dining outlets.</p> <p>Regent Phuket Cape Panwa will open in December, offering 70 rooms with panoramic sea views and 35 pool suites. The resort is located on the south-eastern tip of Phuket.</p>	<p>Best Western International has opened this month the second hotel under its Best Western Premier brand and fifth property in Vietnam.</p> <p>Located on Hon Tam Island close to Nha Trang, the 49-bungalow eco-resort is only accessible by boat.</p> <p>Accommodation options range from the Deluxe Bungalows to the Family Suite Bungalows, each featuring a private balcony and equipped with amenities such as flat-screen televisions and Wi-Fi. Facilities include four F&amp;B outlets, a swimming pool, spa, fitness centre, karaoke room and meeting spaces.</p>	<p>Swissôtel Hotels &amp; Resorts is expanding its Indian portfolio with the opening of a resort hotel in Calangute, northern Goa. First guests are anticipated to be welcomed in the first quarter of 2013.</p> <p>Set within a tropical garden are 135 guestrooms and suites, complemented by an all-day dining restaurant, pool bar, cafe, fitness centre, adult and children's pools, children's club, as well as conference and banquet facilities. There will also be an exclusive beach club.</p> <p>Swissôtel currently has a property in Kolkata and three others under development in Mumbai, Noida and Bengaluru.</p>	<p>Malaysia Airports Holdings has made its foray into hotels, launching its new airport hotel brand, Sama-Sama. It will own and operate the five-star full-service hotel adjacent to the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) as well as the existing transit hotel – which will be rebranded as Sama-Sama Express KLIA. Malaysia Airports will also operate KLIA2's transit hotel when the terminal opens.</p> <p>In the Malay language, <i>sama-sama</i> means "togetherness" and "you're welcome".</p> <p>Malaysia Airports manages and operates 39 airports in Malaysia, and also has operations in India and Turkey.</p>

[ TECHNOLOGY ]

Amadeus has launched its Amadeus Travel Office Manager Mobile, said to be the first mid-office system mobile application for travel agencies.

An extension of Amadeus Travel Office Manager (ATOM), it was developed to enable travel consultants to work on the go, enabling access to booking data, pricing and management reports.

Travel consultants will be able to check task queues created in ATOM and take action on due or overdue tasks, or assign them to colleagues; access supplier and customer contact details, email and message; and get an overview on daily booking sales and payment reports.

The app is offered to ATOM customers as a free download at [www.atom.amadeus.com](http://www.atom.amadeus.com) and through the Apple App Store for both iPhones and iPads. It is available to customers in Hong Kong, Mongolia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.

[ ACTIVITIES ]

**1 Tuk tuk tour of Thai markets** InterContinental Samui Baan Taling Ngam Resort is allowing guests to hop onto a tuk tuk with the resort's executive chef for a culinary tour of Koh Samui's organic farms. The half-day experience includes a specially prepared lunch using the freshly bought ingredients. Participants also have the opportunity to get into the kitchen for an exclusive cooking class with the chef.



**2 Golfing in Hainan** Mission Hills Haikou has launched two short-stay packages for golfers and their families: the 2D1N Spa & Family Escape and 3D2N Lavastone Golf Experience. The first comes with spa and dining vouchers, while the second includes three rounds of 18-hole golf. Both offer a volcanic mineral springs experience. The 518-key resort has 10 golf courses, 12 F&B outlets and an aquatic theme park, among other offerings.



**3 Hot air ballooning over Khao Yai** The 64-room Kirimaya resort has rolled out a ballooning adventure, which takes flyers soaring above a UNESCO World Heritage rainforest and wineries. On touchdown, a champagne breakfast is served, complemented by a live jazz band. A two hours' drive from Bangkok, Kirimaya offers a choice of accommodation including four tented villas with spa pools.





# The guiding light

**Gavin Tollman** | Guided tours only for old people? Trafalgar sees the light that the product has to evolve, or the future of guided tours is dim. Its CEO tells **Raini Hamdi** how he's guiding Trafalgar through change – and why travel consultants too must change

## You've repositioned Trafalgar as 'The Insider'. Why?

Two important shifts. One, other travel products were evolving. Hotels became destinations all in themselves; their objective is, when you check in, you don't leave. Or cruise lines – I always found it quite ironic that people go on a ship to ice skate, climb walls, which are land-based activities. Guided holidays on the other hand remained much the same.

I was running Trafalgar in the US in the mid-90s, left and came back in 2009. As an outsider looking in, I started asking questions. I didn't just want to see us have a product that succeeded, I wanted to develop a product that became an aspirational way to travel. It was never lost on me when I ran Trafalgar in the mid-90s in the US that when we said, 'we run an escorted tour company' and people said, 'oh these are for old people – buses and a superficial way of travel'. Those were the stereotypes.

## But there's truth in those stereotypes.

Not necessarily. There were elements that were. The product was changing but the change was not communicated.

In 2009, we interviewed over 20,000 guests on what they remembered the most of their travel with us. Not one spoke about the hotel, size of the coach, the nuts and bolts. All they spoke about were the memories that were created. Yet, when you looked at our brochure, not just ours but our competitors, we were communicating exclusively on the nuts and bolts – great bed, this and that.

So we began experimenting, and one of the first Be My Guest experiences was a lemon grove in Sorrento, owned by two sisters. When guests gave their feedback, that was all they wanted to talk about: how the mama – a true Italian personality who loved everyone; unfortunately she passed away – cooked the pasta, gave each of them her limoncello, and on and on.

So we knew we were on to something and started creating different experiences over the next couple of years to bring a destination alive. What we stopped doing was rolling over itineraries.

## So the gap lies in providing experiences?

That's just one element. Another is, 100 per cent of agencies that adopted The Insider position – not just in Singapore but around the world – stopped talking about nuts and bolts and were selling packages based on experiences. And everyone's business grew year over year.

## So is the onus on wholesalers like yourself to ensure the survival of travel agencies by offering something different?

It's a symbiotic relationship. I've been a vocal critic at times of the travel agency community because I don't believe at times they take enough responsibility for their own success. Yes, we have created a unique programme, but what I would like to see, and encourage agencies do, is: try. Try to talk about the experiences. Don't sell the nuts and bolts. The world is changing and they need to be changing with the times too.

## What is it with travel consultants that they just sell the nuts-and-bolts?

Because that's what they've always done. The Trafalgar sales team – and Nick's a great example (Nick Lim, regional director, Trafalgar) – spends a lot of time getting consultants to think differently. (Last year) was the second year Trafalgar had its own team in Singapore and we doubled our business in a year. By opening the office in Singapore (previously it was handled by a GSA, Holiday Tours), we took greater control of our own destiny and our own message to the market. Not that the previous partner did anything wrong. They are still a good partner of ours. But the difference is I now have greater and direct control, through Nick, on retraining, communica-

tion, distribution, creation of collateral and many other facets. It's working.

## Is it easy to retrain and change the mindset of agencies?

It's a long journey. We are still at the foundation stages of building this, but it's working and it will get bigger and far more robust. I don't believe for a second that every agency would jump on board but I do believe there is the momentum, and more agencies will understand and be involved.

## Are agencies the same everywhere?

I've never been asked that question before (pause). I think every country comes with a different set of challenges. Where we are successful is we develop the strategy globally and we let the local MD or GM execute what is right for their marketplace.

Asia is very responsive and I'm excited about the prospects Asia holds. Business has more than doubled – Nick and team won the Trafalgar sales office of the year for 2012. I'm working hand in hand with Nick because I expect our business from Asia to grow a lot more, so what I'm beginning to do is ensure our travel directors begin to understand and appreciate the diversity, cultural differences and expectations of a whole new market.

**"Yes, we have created a unique programme, but what I'd like to encourage agencies to do is: try. Try to talk about the experiences. Don't sell the nuts and bolts."**

## Do you run departures just for Asians?

No, they all go into the same product.

I've always believed successful guided tours come not through the power of smaller groups. It's nothing to do with size. It's having like-minded people travelling together. Group travel can be one of the most enjoyable ways of experiencing a destination. And a smart travel director can navigate through the group and create the friendships and the discoveries.

That's why we make small changes such as having a welcome reception on the first day. It's as though you're having a party at your house, not a sit-down and an opportunity for the director to tell you where you'd be going, what you'd be doing. No longer. The travel director starts creating the bonds and friendships. It happens organically. We use social media to get guests to meet before they start the journey.

## So with all the changes, are you getting younger people joining your tours?

Remarkably so. We're still speaking to our core market – seniors or those who see guided tours as a safe way to travel, but we're also appealing to the younger generation who are time-deprived and looking for experiences. We're making the pie bigger while still keeping our core market.

## Have prices increased due to higher costs of providing experiences?

It has not. Our value proposition has never been greater. You pay a little more but you get exponentially more.

## So what's next?

We've launched new components such as Hidden Treasures and Unique Insights, brought in and trained travel directors to think differently, hired a lady who was in charge of training at Virgin Airlines and created a one-week customised training called Professional Development Programme, which every travel director goes through. We make them see travel through the guest's eyes. I want us to be a customer-centric organisation. We've also gone on a talent acquisition, and I do believe I have the best and the brightest people on board.

So what's next is we're working on The Insider, part two, to be launched in October this year for 2014. It's like the iPad, iPhone – we just have to get better at it. I want to ensure we use the local knowledge, expertise and experience that we have to develop 'bragging rights' for customers, the goosebump moments they will brag about to their friends, so they want to come back with us.

## What legacy would you like to leave the brand?

I would like to have changed the industry. I want it to become an aspirational way of travel.

## Who's your biggest competitor?

We're leading the pack, but I'm like Phil Knight (Nike's founder), who saw nothing but his competitors. If he saw Puma and Adidas on sportsmen at the Olympics, he couldn't be successful. I have the same DNA. I see competitor coaches and never my own. If I see six Singaporeans in a competitor coach, I'd call Nick and say, what did we do wrong? (laughs)

Seriously, we're out in the front and the responsibility is ours to remain there.







# Luxury Manila

## Big brands enter, but is that enough? By Rosa Ocampo

New upmarket hotels that will rise over Manila's skyline over the next five years will drive the demand for the Philippine luxury travel sector.

A total of 5,797 hotel rooms will enter the upper-end market by 2017, or a growth of 37 per cent. Luxury supply grew only 3.2 per cent between 2004 and 2011, said Bill Barnett, managing director of Thailand-based asset management and hospitality consulting C9 Hotelworks.

Clustered mainly in Newport City near the international airport, Entertainment City along Manila Bay and Bonifacio Global City across from the Makati CBD, these hotels include a Grand Hyatt, Shangri-La, Hilton, Westin and Sheraton, apart from Fairmont and Raffles Makati, which opened last December.

Barnett said last year was "great" for the destination, with investors and chains having caught up with the bullish mood



**Barnett: extreme makeover**

in the Philippines. Manila's upmarket hotels enjoyed high occupancy and rates in general, as was the trend over the past years.

But the question was whether the country could sustain the sentiment, maintain economic and political stability, and address the need for an "extreme makeover". Barnett said the Philippines should develop other attractions as the four multi-billion dollar integrated resorts being constructed in the Entertainment City would not be enough to lure luxury tourists.

Investments are focused on gaming and luxury hotels there and at Resorts World Manila in Newport City. But other demand generators like amusement and theme parks, cruise, MICE facili-

ties, wellness and medical tourism are needed if the destination aimed to rival Macau and Singapore, he said.

The Philippines also has to develop Intramuros – Manila's historic Walled City – and other existing attractions to keep pace with the changing pattern of Asia's tourism caused in part by a rising middle class.

Being the maritime of the Pacific, the Philippines already has the port facilities to develop cruising, which is a big come-on for many destinations. It should also be able to go into medical tourism, as Thailand has been able to attract people from the Middle East and Indochina with its quality medical facilities.

One of the opportunities that has not been tapped in the Manila Bay area is the MICE business, which Barnett pointed out already accounted for 14 per cent of the total market in Manila despite security problems.

## Ferragamo's idea of luxury

The grandson of the famous Italian shoemaker is a hotelier and Relais & Châteaux ambassador 2013. Raini Hamdi talks to him about luxury



### What's it like to be named Salvatore Ferragamo?

It's an honour to bear the name of my grandfather. From a work standpoint, sometimes it helps, other times not. The funniest thing is people mistake me for my grandfather and are surprised by my young age (41 years old).

### What can luxury travel and fashion learn from each other?

Both represent elegance, style and creativity. In the case of Italy, both the fashion industry and luxury resorts are able to represent to the world the elegant, historical but always innovative style of the Italian culture.

### Growing up in the Ferragamo family, what to you is true luxury?

For me, and for busy people, it is the normality of things and moments.

### What has changed about luxury products?

Now the value of luxury is not determined by the raw material of the product, but the creativity, originality and uniqueness. Obviously, then, the name of the creator helps a lot.

### Will the European luxury travel market be healthier this year?

It is difficult to predict. Of course we hope for the best.

### How has the market changed?

The market has also targeted the less wealthy. People are always busy and so they desire a great vacation, a unique experience.

### Biggest challenge facing luxury travel?

Maintain quality, renew constantly.

### What is your duty as Relais & Châteaux (R&C) ambassador?

Represent this great family, its values and its message. I also hope to raise awareness of my estate, Il Borro (a medieval hamlet in Tuscany which he restored as a hotel, with the site producing quality wines once more).

### Does Il Borro attract Asian luxe travellers?

Yes, we've been working hard for a few years with Asia, with R&C and wine partners/enthusiasts.

## A new chapter opens for Dusit

DUSIT International, which now has veteran hoteliers Giovanni Angelini, David Shackleton and Jeffrey Flowers on board the ship, is sailing into golden seas, with at least five hotels confirmed to open this year in diverse locations and each showcasing new brand standards.

The five hotels, all new-builds and management contracts, include a Dusit Thani in Guam, Hainan and Abu Dhabi; a Dusit Devarana in New Delhi; and a Dusit D2 in Pasadena (US).

In the pipeline are a Dusit Thani in Jeddah, a Dusit Devarana in Hainan and a Dusit D2 in New Delhi. This month, CEO Chanin Donavanik (left) expects to sign a Dusit D2 in Nairobi and, in February, seal a JV in China with a local partner to manage and develop Dusit hotels in the country, as the group has done in India.

Last year, a Dusit Thani Mal-

dives was opened.

"Now we can expect to open seven to 10 hotels every year," said Chanin. "All our new hotels will be really good. Some are going to be the best in their market. The hotel in New Delhi, for example, is going to be the most talked about hotel when it opens, because of its unique design and feel – an intimate luxury home with only 50 rooms in the first phase and 70 rooms afterwards. The Dusit Thani in Abu Dhabi will be grand, possibly with the best conference facility there. The hotel in Guam is by far the best hotel in Guam."

Asked why the places were far and wide and the challenge this would pose to operation, Chanin said: "That's why I have good people. David (formerly with InterContinental Hotels Group and Starwood Hotels & Resorts) is running the day-to-day op-

eration (as COO) and Giovanni (former CEO of Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts) is setting up the standards/systems and also oversees development. These are people who know what to do, and you will see the way we grow will be more structured and the quality of our hotels will be much more consistent."

He said the locations were strategic. "Maldives is considered the number one beach resort destination in Asia. Guam will help raise our brand awareness in North Asia – now, aside from the traditional Japanese guests, Guam is attracting more (South) Koreans and Taiwanese. Russians do not need a visa to Guam and there's also a push for visa-free for Chinese. Guam's hotel occupancy is 80-90 per cent.

"And if we want to move westward from Thailand, naturally we have to be in India."

The group now has development offices for China (in Hong Kong), India, Middle East and Europe (in Dubai) and North America (which is covered by Flowers, formerly with Marco Polo Hotels).

"We have people and offices in place, that's why we are growing. As well, as a Thai brand, we are seen as neutral – not American, not European – and other Asian luxury brands have gone out of Asia and created successful stories, which is good for Asia and for us," said Chanin.

He stressed that Dusit International remained committed to grow in Thailand, its base for 63 years. It has a US\$150-US\$160 million property fund listed on the stock exchange, which may soon be converted into a REIT, and is actively seeking hotels to acquire and put into the fund. – Raini Hamdi





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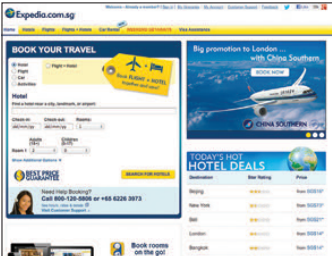
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Competing for clicks

Expedia

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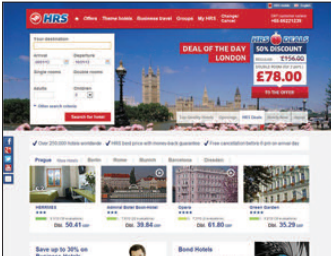
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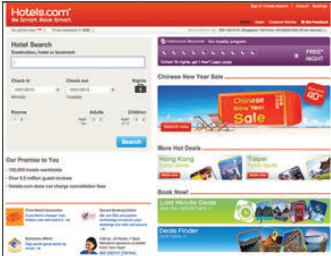
HRS

Christian Lukey, commercial director, HRS



Hotels.com

Abhiram Chowdhry, senior marketing director, Hotels.com Asia-Pacific



Asiatravel.com

Fred Seow, vice president marketing



Who

Expedia has close to 30 localised sites across the globe. In Asia, we operate hotel-only sites in Indonesia, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea along with full-service sites in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Japan and India.

An Asia-Pacific OTA with a network of offices across Singapore, Hong Kong and Australia, and part of the Travelocity family of companies.

HRS operates a worldwide hotel portal for private and business travellers. Headquartered in Germany, the company has a large selection of hotels worldwide with tens of thousands of independent hotels and hundreds of hotel chains.

Hotels.com is an online accommodation booking website with more than 85 sites globally. Hotels.com is part of Expedia, Inc.

Asiatravel.com is a pan-Asian OTA with two core brands: Asiatravel.com (consumer) and TAcenre.com (trade). We also have local travel agency and IATA licences, thus providing ticketing, tours and group operations in some locations.

Inventory

Over 150,000 hotels and more than 400 airlines to destinations worldwide. Expedia is also the exclusive third-party OTA for AirAsia inventory, allowing travellers to book AirAsia flights on any of Expedia's travel sites worldwide.

Over 400 airlines, 100,000 hotels worldwide, and thousands of car hires, activities and attractions as well as travel insurance. New deals are updated every day.

250,000 hotels in 180 countries. Our inventory covers all popular destinations in Asia, and is growing to include secondary cities in South-east Asia, as well as South Asia.

Over 155,000 properties around the world ranging from international chains and all-inclusive resorts to B&Bs.

Over 800 airlines and 110,000 hotels worldwide. Our land content includes sightseeing tours and transfers. Unique to our database are tickets to attractions such as Universal Studios Singapore, Hong Kong Disneyland, Sunway Lagoon Malaysia and the Singapore Flyer.

Customers

Expedia.co.jp draws the largest amount of online transactions simply because it was our first Asian site established seven years ago. The rest of our localised sites are currently also on the same growth trajectory.

Zuji has presence in Singapore, Hong Kong and Australia. Having a reputable standing in these markets, we also enjoy traffic and bookings from Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, China and New Zealand.

Both business (60 per cent) and leisure (40 per cent) travellers. Over 35,000 companies currently use HRS to book rooms for business purposes, a 17 per cent increase compared to a year ago. HRS already generates about 40 per cent of its bookings outside Germany. China and South-east Asia are key markets for us as they are major drivers of the global economy.

We attract leisure and business customers. Welcome Rewards, which allows our customers to earn one free night by accumulating 10 nights at partner properties, is seeing great pick up among travellers and small and medium-sized enterprises. It has allowed us to access new segments of customers. We are also seeing positive uptake for our mobile apps.

Two-thirds of our customers are from Asia and the rest are from the Middle East and Europe. There has been strong growth in inter-regional travel. Our flight booking engine supports reservations of up to nine people in a single transaction, and we believe FITs will be an important market in the future given the strong traction in flight package bookings.

Business model

We make travel products and services available both on a stand-alone and package basis. Under the merchant model, we facilitate bookings of hotel rooms, airline seats, car rentals and destination services from our travel suppliers, i.e. we are the merchant of record. Under the agency model, we act as an agent in the transaction, passing reservations to the supplier.

A variety of compensation and connectivity models are used across product groups. Prepaid, postpaid, commissionable fares and markups are all part of the range that Zuji uses in its arrangements with suppliers. Suppliers feed Zuji through the GDS as well as direct API feeds and allocation models.

Use of the HRS hotel platform is generally free and we receive commissions from hotels based on the actual booking turnover. Inventory is mainly supplied through our extranet solution but we are also connected to channel managers, as well as the CRSs of major hotel chains. We collaborate with airlines, city portals, and also car rental and rail companies for bookings.

We are integrated with most channel distributors to receive dynamic rates and inventory from major hotel chains, while we provide smaller, independent hotels with an extranet site. Our booking engines are supported by Amadeus, which gives us access to over 90 per cent of airlines. Our offices and appointed operators access our system to encode land content.

Expansion

Expedia entered Asia in March 2011 on the back of a joint venture between Expedia, Inc and AirAsia, a first-of-its-kind partnership between an LCC and OTA. In slightly over a year, we added three new full-service sites to our fold, bringing the total number of full-service localised Expedia sites to five in the region. In 2013, we will be expanding with sites in more markets, as well as adding new and innovative products, including visa assistance, car rentals, weekend getaway tabs and travel insurance.

Zuji has, over the decade, developed tools to empower travellers with the freedom to self-plan their ideal journeys. This includes dynamic packaging, flight flexible date search, hotel star ratings, reviews and neighbourhood search. One of our newest products is Top Secret Hotels, where rates are guaranteed to be the lowest online. The catch is that customers book without knowing the name of the hotel at first. Our leadership positions in Singapore, Hong Kong and in Australia will form the basis for continued growth in 2013.

HRS opened its first international branch in Shanghai in 2002. Now, we are the third-largest online travel provider for corporate clients in China. Our international expansion continues with the opening of our Singapore office as the gateway to South-east Asia. We will focus particularly on the emerging markets in Asia and Eastern Europe, and on increasing our hotel portfolio in growth regions such as South America and India. We will continue to work on our mobile products and aim to become a full-service provider for corporate customers.

Hotels.com introduced its first Asia-Pacific (APAC) website in Australia in 2003, followed by local Asian language sites in 2008. Now, we have 15 sites in 10 languages. A big milestone was the launch of the Welcome Rewards programme in 2011 for APAC. That same year, we unveiled our first mobile apps for iPad and iPhone customers, and have since expanded this to other mobile platforms. Our continued focus will be to make our mobile apps more user-friendly. We also plan to enhance the Welcome Rewards programme.

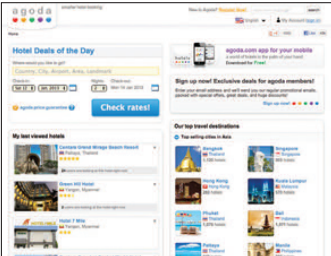
We conceptualised online hotel reservations in 1995 and our business was publicly listed in 2001. This enabled us to expand to our current network of 16 offices in 11 countries. In mid-2012, we soft launched all-inclusive travel packages offering instant confirmation for the entire itinerary. We have started featuring LCCs and building up multiple-sector packages for extended travel options. We will now focus on creating more content for longhaul destinations, while building up a global network of marketing agents.



Asia’s online booking space is getting more crowded, with more players muscling in. Hannah Koh, Gracia Chiang and Raini Hamdi get insights into who’s doing what

Agoda.com

Robert Rosenstein, CEO



A brand under the Priceline Group, Agoda.com is a pan-Asian online hotel reservation service focused on providing the lowest available hotel prices in every destination worldwide. We cater to 38 languages.

Over 250,000 hotels in 37,000 cities and 179 countries, including five-star luxury resorts, villas, hotels of every category and even backpacker accommodation.

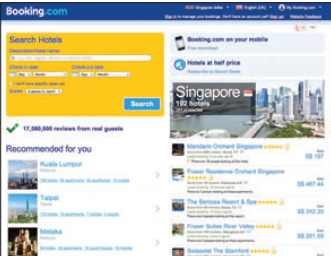
Our strength is the Asia-Pacific region, where we offer over 51,000 hotels. Our database is currently in the millions.

Hotels provide us directly with inventory to sell. We also handle all aspects of the transaction, fulfillment, penalty collection and customer service on behalf of the hotel. We only charge a fee for a successful booking, usually a percentage of the amount we collect.

Our focus this year is to continue to offer more accommodation choices. Also, we want to ensure we cater to bookings through tablets and phones, which our customers prefer. They are also interested in social sharing and validation, so we are working to create new features via social networking sites to accommodate that.

Booking.com

Anoeska van Leeuwen, director, corporate communications



An online hotel and accommodation reservations company with more than 85 offices worldwide, also part of the Priceline Group. Our website is available in 41 different languages, with at least seven Asian ones. We also operate an in-house customer service team.

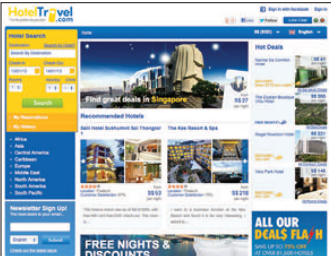
Over 260,000 hotels and other accommodation available in 178 countries.

We operate under an agency model, providing an online platform where accommodation partners make their rooms available and we facilitate reservations. Unlike our competitors, we do not buy or sell rooms, and guests do not pay Booking.com. The guest pays the accommodation directly (usually on checkout), who in turn pays us a commission afterwards.

Asia is a key market for us, and we will continue investing to increase our presence and availability in the market. We don't provide regional data, but we have announced various partnerships in the region in the last year, with Ctrip in China and Japan Airlines in Japan, for instance. We intend to invest in a new customer service centre in the region, add more local talent as we grow our business, and acquire new hotels and other types of accommodation to serve the needs of our customers.

HotelTravel.com

Amit Saberwal, chief business officer – hotels, MakeMyTrip



An online travel information and hotel reservations service company based in South-east Asia. In 2012, HotelTravel.com was acquired by MakeMyTrip. Our primary focus is Asia-Pacific's most popular destinations. We offer support in more than 10 different languages.

More than 85,000 hotels in over 130 countries globally, covering at least 1,300 cities.

Our key source markets in this region are India, Singapore and Malaysia. We also see strong business coming from China, France, Australia and Japan. Our key destination markets are India, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. Besides these, we see great demand for China, the UAE and Australia.

We have a dual model (agency and merchant) to offer more flexibility. We have a homegrown CMS, as well as connections to various GDSs, PMSs and channel managers like RateGain and SiteMinder. We also have content integration on over 150,000 hotel sites.

We are geared up for growth in 2013. India is one of the fastest growing outbound travel markets of the world, and HotelTravel.com will benefit from MakeMyTrip's large customer base. Our customers and partners will also benefit from the strength of MakeMyTrip's booking platform and relationships with over 10,000 hotel partners in nearly 400 cities in India. We will look to leverage our content edge. We will also scale up our mobile offerings through the mobile site and apps to promote deals and offerings on the go.

AsiaRooms.com

Clarence Lin, brand development lead



Part of TUI Travel, AsiaRooms.com is an online accommodation site based in Asia. We are an Asian specialist for accommodation, from both a destination and source market basis. Available in five different languages, we are supported by a multilingual 24-hour call centre.

Over 60,000 hotel partners worldwide in all key cities across Asia, North America and Europe. Selection ranges from boutique accommodation and ultra-luxury six-star hotels to beach huts.

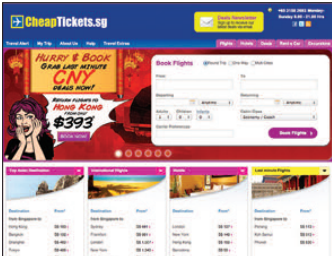
Key source markets are Singapore, Thailand, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia and Hong Kong.

AsiaRooms.com adopts an agency model and receives remuneration from hotel partners post stay. Commissions are aligned with industry norms. Partners are able to update their own price, room availability and any other information via an extranet system.

AsiaRooms.com first started in 2000 and was acquired by TUI Travel in 2007. A rebranding exercise was carried out in 2010, where we developed a new brand logo and articulated our USPs such as book now, pay later; instant confirmation; and no cancellation fees. We will continue to channel resources into Asia-Pacific markets, as we continue growing our inventory and look at ways to make our site more user-friendly. In terms of marketing, continued emphasis will be placed on digital marketing and social media to connect with consumers.

CheapTickets

André Hesselink, CEO, CheapTickets.sg



CheapTickets is part of Travix International, a global OTA with presence in 19 countries in the Americas, Europe and Asia. Travix is under BCD Holdings, the owner of BCD Travel. In Asia, CheapTickets has sites in Singapore, Hong Kong and Thailand.

All airlines, including LCCs, can be booked through CheapTickets' sites. For hotels, we team up with strong players like Agoda.com in Asia and EasyToBook/Expedia in other parts of the world. For car rentals, the company has partnered CarTrawler.

The markets in Singapore, Hong Kong and Thailand are similar to a large extent. CheapTickets services travellers going on vacation, travellers visiting friends and relatives, and unmanaged business travellers.

Travix is an agency that negotiates agreements with its partners. Inventory is accessed through the GDS and direct connects.

Since CheapTickets.sg's inception in November 2011, we have sealed a deal with Agoda in Singapore and strengthened ties with tourism boards around the world. Thailand and Hong Kong counterparts were launched at the beginning of 2012 and, together with CheapTickets.sg, have experienced monthly double-digit growth. CheapTickets plans to launch in China and India in 1Q2013 to cater to the booming travel markets there, while CheapTickets.sg will run extensive marketing campaigns and focus on social media and mobile integration.





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Ancient pagodas dot the plains of Bagan in central Myanmar

# Room supply lags behind

Arrivals and flights are moving, but bottlenecks are in the hotel sector. By **Rahul Khanna**

**Arrivals** In the first six months of 2012, international tourist arrivals jumped by over 30 per cent year-on-year, and more than one million are expected to visit Myanmar by end-2012, said Htay Aung, minister, Ministry of Hotels & Tourism.

**Access** Hong Kong-based Dragonair began Yangon flights on January 9, while national carrier Myanmar Airways International (MAI) will debut thrice-weekly Yangon-Hong Kong flights in early 2013, and plans to operate more routes out of Mandalay, including Bangkok, Singapore and Kunming. Locally, Golden Myanmar Airlines kicked off the country's inaugural low-cost domestic flight between Yangon and Mandalay on January 11.

These add to a raft of new flights launched by international airlines that came into operation in 2012. Korean Air spearheaded the charge in September, and was quickly followed by Qatar Airways, EVA Air, ANA, Singapore Airlines and Thai AirAsia the following month. In November, German carrier Condor launched a weekly Frankfurt-

Yangon service.

MAI also started a daily round-trip Yangon-Bangkok-Singapore service in October and a thrice-weekly Mandalay-Gaya (India) flight in November.

Regional carriers such as Biman Bangladesh Airlines, SriLankan Airlines and Pakistan International Airlines also plan to launch flights to Myanmar.

To support the nation's burgeoning aviation links, Myanmar's Department of Civil Aviation is engaging the private sector to upgrade Yangon International Airport – to double capacity from 2.7 million to 5.5 million – and its domestic airports.

Construction work on Hantawaddy International Airport in Bago, a 3,642-hectare site 77km north of Yangon, will resume in June, picking up from where it stopped in October 2003. When completed in December 2016, the airport will be able to handle up to 10 million passengers a year.

**Hotels** Myanmar continues to suffer an acute shortage in the mid-range and high-end segments, though this should improve when 1,670 new rooms become available in Yangon this



**“We struggled with skyrocketing hotel rates in 2012. With growing arrivals and international flight connections, what we need are more hotels and skilled workers... Until (sufficient) infrastructure is built, 2013 will be a scary year.”**

**Pearl Phyu Phyu Mar**  
Managing director  
Seven Star Tours

year, according to the Ministry of Hotels & Tourism. Another 1,255 and 2,455 rooms are scheduled to come online in 2014 and 2015. Based on 2011 figures, there are 731 licensed hotels that supply more than 25,002 rooms.

From late last year, a new foreign investment law allows businesses to be 100 per cent foreign-owned, and the government is offering five-year income tax exemptions and 50-year land leases, with the option for further extensions. This is good news to global hotel chains like Starwood Hotels & Resorts who are interested in entering the country.

The 270-room Centrepoint Towers Hotel in Yangon and 100-room Nawarat Hotel in Hlaing Township are scheduled to launch around April 2013. Shangri-La Group will unveil a 240-unit serviced apartment project near Kandawgyi Lake in 2013, with another 460 rooms to come in 2015. Rose Garden Hotel Yangon will open 60 rooms this year, but pad up inventory with 255 more rooms in 2014.

To ease the room crunch, the Myanmar Investment Commission has put historic state-owned buildings in central Yangon up for tender for conversion into hotels and the ministry has cre-

ated 11 hotel zones in popular tourist regions, with more to come. Last May, the President's Office also green-lighted a new 250-hectare zone at Inle Lake, which can fit 16 new hotels.

Meanwhile, Ngwe Saung beach is gearing up for the 2013 Southeast Asian (SEA) Games. Five hotels that have been temporarily closed since 2006 will reopen and the ministry plans to launch four more hotels in 2013, which will push the total room count at Ngwe Saung to 840.

**NTO** Recognising that rapid tourism development could boost Myanmar's economic development but impede long-term sustainable development, the ministry organised the first Responsible Tourism Week in February 2012 in Nay Pyi Taw.

Successive conferences and support from the Germany-based Hanns Seidel Foundation, international and national consultants and some 350 stakeholders in Myanmar culminated in the Myanmar Responsible Tourism Policy. The draft received approval from the Ministry of Hotels & Tourism in September and will serve as the foundation for a tourism master plan.



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Michal Barszap, President/CEO of ITS Tours, Meetings & Incentives, USA

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Agnieszka Kaminska, Project Manager of Impuls Travel, Poland

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Gabe Dakwa, Travel Manager of Agilent Technologies, USA

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Leena Andrews, APAC Travel Manager of Juniper, India



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Ice WonderLand

**Orient-Express’ Orcaella**

Orient-Express’ new river cruiser, *Orcaella*, will take to the Irrawaddy River in 2013. Sailing between Yangon and Bhamo, the four-deck, 50-guest boat will operate from January to April and July to December. There is



View aboard Orcaella

an observation deck, an all-day lounge and bar, a swimming pool, a fitness centre, a spa, as well as a resident doctor. It is suitable for corporate events too, with a deck that is large enough for 70-80 people.

**Contact**  
Tel: (65) 6395-0678  
Website: [www.orient-express.com/web/orc/orcaella.jsp](http://www.orient-express.com/web/orc/orcaella.jsp)

**Ice WonderLand**

Myanmar welcomed its first-ever ice park when Ice WonderLand opened its doors on February 25, 2012. Located in Kandawgyi Park near Shwedagon Pagoda, the attraction features a small playground and ice sculptures

of famed buildings and personalities from around the world. Visitors should come warmly dressed, as the average temperature in the attraction is below freezing point – between -5°C and -10°C. Light thermal coats are also available for loan, and there is an emergency clinic with a doctor and nurses on standby.

**Junction Square**

Junction Square opened on March 2012 in Yangon. Nestled on Pyay Road and Kyuntaw Road in Kamaryut township, the new 3.6-hectare mall offers more than 27,871m<sup>2</sup> of shops selling apparel, jewellery, IT products, furniture and more.

Junction Square also has three movie theatres and a health and wellness centre on the third floor.

**Daily charters to Nay Pyi Taw**

Daily charter services to Nay Pyi Taw began on September 9, 2012, operated by FMI Air Charter, a subsidiary of First Myanmar Investment. The thrice-daily Yangon-Nay Pyi Taw service is operated using the 44-seat ATR 42 and 16-seat Beech 1900D. Flights depart at 07.00, 11.30 and 16.00.

**Contact**  
Website: [reservations@fmiair-charter.com](mailto:reservations@fmiair-charter.com)

Tracker

An update on major issues and events from the past

**Room rate cap for foreign hoteliers**

In early 2012, some 30 travel consultants sent a letter to the Ministry of Hotels & Tourism urging it to tackle “profiteering” by foreign-owned hotels in Yangon after prices tripled in less than a year on the back of strong demand.

**THEN** The ministry imposed a US\$150 limit on standard rooms on June 25, warning that foreign-owned hotels that failed to abide by the regulation could face difficulties in renewing visas for expatriate staff or extending property leases. Hotels were also told to submit correct room and occupancy rates to the ministry.

**NOW** By the time the minister of hotels & tourism met with hoteliers, travel consultants and tourism players on July 17 to discuss this matter, hotels were already complying with the ministry’s instructions.

**FUTURE** With rates less of an issue, the problem of room shortage has come to the fore.

FITUR 2013:  
BRINGS TOGETHER THE  
INTERNATIONAL TOURIST  
INDUSTRY

Two new forums devoted to Tourism Know-How and Wine-Based Tourism Accommodation will constitute the main new features at the fair.

During its thirty-third staging, **FITUR**, the International Tourism Trade Fair, which is due to take place between 30th January and 3rd February 2013 at Feria de Madrid, will bring together more than 9,500 companies representing 167 countries and regions, as well as all of the Spanish regions.

**TWO NEW AREAS OF BUSINESS**  
With a view to boosting tourism business, **FITUR** has incorporated two important new features. First of all, the fair will present the forum known as **FITUR KNOWHOW & EXPORT**, a unique initiative on the international scene that seeks to add value to the business dealings and innovative activities of the industry’s companies. The aim is to promote the tourism expertise, know-how and management skills of Spanish companies, who are able to present their potential, their know-how and their experience, together with their products and services, to buyers from other markets, serving as export models.

The second new feature at **FITUR** on this occasion consists of the section known as Wine-Based Tourism Accommodation, which will bring together a wide selection of hotels specialising in wine-based tourism. This segment, whose activities revolve around the world of wine, offers considerable growth potential, based on a balance between culture, the environment and wine and culinary opportunities, all of which make wine destinations highly attractive options.

**WORKSHOPS**  
During the staging of the fair, **FITUR** will once again rely on its workshop formula, which has produced highly favourable

results at previous events, proving to be an effective tool when it comes to facilitating business meetings between tourist companies and foreign buyers, especially in two fast-expanding markets such as those of Africa and the Americas.

In this respect, we might mention **INVESTOUR Africa** (31st January), a forum organised in conjunction with Casa Africa and the UNWTO. During the fourth staging of this event, participants will be introduced to a series of African tourism projects, with a view to promoting a sustainable tourism model that generates opportunities for businessmen and potential Spanish investors.

**MONOGRAPHIC FORUMS**  
**FITUR** will also feature a series of monographic sections, with their corresponding exhibition areas and/or conference programmes, all of which cater for the growing development and specialisation of the tourist market. In this sense, **FITURGREEN**, which is organised in conjunction with the Hotel Technology Institute (ITH) and in collaboration with the UNWTO and the Madrid Tourist Board, focuses on energy-saving and efficiency measures within the realm of hotel management.

**FITURTECH**, which is organised in collaboration with the Hotel Technology Institute (ITH) under the heading of the “Next Travel Generation”, will present the latest new developments

regarding technology applied to tourism. This section will also feature the special presence of the Spanish astronaut, Pedro Luque. Based on an eminently practical approach, this forum will host the staging of different sessions on aspects such as hotel web optimisation, security in times of crisis and cloud computing, among others.

The third consecutive staging of **FITUR LGBT**, which is promoted by Diversity Consulting, caters for a segment that represents 10% of the tourist market throughout the world and 15% of overall tourist expenditure. This section will present some of the key recommendations that will enable professionals to enter or adapt to this market.

**A FORUM FOR ANALYSIS AND DEBATE**  
As is customary on the day before the inauguration of **FITUR**, the Twenty-Sixth Latin American Conference of Tourism Ministers and Businessmen, CIMET, will take place on 29th January, bringing together tourism professionals and representatives from this continent.

All of this information (general information, conference programmes, plans, exhibitor catalogue...) is available on the **FITUR** web page, [www.fituronline.com](http://www.fituronline.com). Furthermore, for the first time it can also be downloaded by means of the **FITUR** app from the user’s mobile in any format.



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