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### Hotels: Marketing Representation

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# Choking smoke haze stifles tourism

Cancellations, postponements in M'sia, itinerary tweaks in S'pore

By S Puvaneswary and Lee Pei Qi  
SINGAPORE/KUALA LUMPUR

An acrid haze created by forest fires in Sumatra, Indonesia has blanketed parts of Malaysia and the whole of Singapore since June 15, causing some tourists to alter their travel plans.

The haze, said to be the worst in history, brought air pollution readings in Singapore soaring past 400 on June 21, while in Muar, Johor the index rose to a frightful 750 on June 23. These levels fall under the hazardous range according to the countries' environment ministries.

Some travellers, concerned about their health, had cancelled or postponed their trips, said inbound operators in Malaysia.

The largest cancellation so



Singapore's icons now a blur

far is by 11 teams that were supposed to participate in the Johor Rugby Carnival on June 22 and 23, organised by the Johor Rugby Union. This left a 150 roomnight dent in the books of The Puteri Pacific Johor Bahru.

Raaj Navaratnaa, general manager at New Asia Holiday Tours & Travel in Johor, told *TTG Asia* that there was a deferment from a 120-pax incentive group from Indonesia to 4Q2013, as well as cancellations from a number of FIT travellers from Australia.

"We have no takers for tours in Johor at the moment because of the haze," he added.

Nanda Kumar, managing director of Hidden Asia, said: "We have re-routed our Malacca and Johor tours to Cameron Highlands and Resorts World Gent-

ing, as we do not want to risk the health of our clients. Six travellers from Northern India who were due to arrive end of June have cancelled their trip."

Although R A Jits Travel & Tours Perak still runs tours to Kuala Lumpur, Malacca and Johor, its managing director, Harminderjit Singh, said a 12-pax meeting and incentive group from Thailand had postponed their trip to Johor for now "after reading reports about the haze".

"We have also received queries from our partners in India about the situation here," he added.

The situation appears less dire for inbound operators in Singapore, who said travellers were happy to merely tweak their itineraries to minimise outdoor exposure.

Alicia Seah, CTC Travel Singapore's senior vice president of marketing and public relations, said: "Our groups from Hong Kong are worried but they are still in Singapore and our local guides have provided them masks and additional supply of mineral water."

Continued on page 2



## Steering SWISS

He joined SWISS as CEO in July 2009 and has been navigating the company through strong headwinds. For inspiration to build a hardy future for SWISS, Harry Hohmeister tells *Raini Hamdi* he looks to everywhere but the airline industry – see page 10

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## Thais celebrate Japan visa waiver

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

**BANGKOK** Thai outbound agencies are now gearing up for a travel boom to Japan, following Japanese authorities' recent announcement to waive short-stay visas for Thai and Malaysian nationals this summer.

Hailing the relaxed regulations, Association of Thai Travel Agents' president, Sisdivachr Cheewarattanaporn, said: "This visa will encourage more Thais to visit Japan, as well as those who are still deciding where to go for their vacations. Both FIT and group tour segments will be boosted, as anyone can just decide to go, without the hassle of applying for a visa. It definitely makes work easier for Thai travel agencies offering tours to Japan."

Suthipong Pheunphiphot, president of Thai Travel Agents Association (TTAA), agreed: "We were expecting the number of Thai visitors to surpass 300,000 this year, but with the visa exemption, the figure is likely to hit 400,000."

According to statistics from Japan National Tourism Organization, Thailand is already the country's top South-east Asian market. Thai arrivals to Japan grew from 214,881 in 2010 to 260,859 in 2012, while visitor arrivals from January to May this year rose 52.9 per cent to 181,300 over the same period last year.

Having recorded a 10 per cent increase in outbound tours from Thailand to Japan since early this year, AA Travel Service's president, Sanguan Phornprathipdeva, is now expecting a further hike of 15-20 per cent.

He said: "Currently, a visa to Japan costs 1,700 baht (US\$55) per pax for group tours and 2,400 baht per pax for single applications, so the expenses saved with the visa exemption plus a weakening yen – which dropped from 40 baht (to 100 yen) last year to about 32 baht now – is likely to spur Thais to spend more during their Japan travels."

HIS Tour has received a steady stream of calls from Thais to enquire about its Japan packages since the visa waiver was widely publicised in the local media, according to senior tour planner, Pitiphong Yodphet.

The company is in the midst of rolling out special promotions to net Thai travellers' surging interest in Japan. Pitiphong said: "We will run a 5D3N all-inclusive promotion priced at 28,000 baht; a similar package last year would cost 39,000 baht."

HIS Tour will also launch charter flights to Japan by HIS-backed, Bangkok-based Asia Atlantic Airlines in July, adding to existing charter services to Japan operated by Thai Airways International and JetAsia Airways.



# Love for Malaysia hots up this summer

Unrest in once-popular Turkey is said to be the key factor driving Middle Eastern travellers to Malaysia

By S Puvaneswary

**KUALA LUMPUR** Travel consultants strong in the Middle Eastern market to Malaysia are predicting double-digit year-on-year growth for this summer, with some attributing the stronger demand this year partly to a diversion of traveller interest away from Turkey and Europe.

Andy Muniandy, director of sales and business development at Malaysia's Asian Overland Services Tours & Travel, expects more than 20 per cent growth this summer over the last.

He said: "At the recent Arabian Travel Mart, our (agency partners) told us that Turkey was a popular destination in summer because of its close proximity (to the Middle East), weather, shopping, attractions and similarity in religion. But with the current

unrest, (Middle Eastern travellers) have turned to other destinations, and Malaysia will gain from this. We are also getting bookings from Middle Eastern travellers who (are skipping) Europe because of the floods. It will take some time before the floods recede, the places cleaned up and things are back to normal."

Dilshad Mousoof, manager – business development of Sharjah-based Explore the Wonders, said: "We anticipate a 15 per cent year-on-year growth in (bookings for) Malaysia this summer holidays and a 15-20 per cent year-on-year growth for Thailand."

Dilshad began seeing the shift in traveller interest from troubled Turkey to Malaysia and Thailand in the first week of June. It was mainly for travel from the third



**Dilshad: growth on the horizon**

week of June, with a majority heading home before the fasting month of Ramadan commences on 9 July.

Ramadan this year will be followed by the Eid Ul Fitr celebration, which has divided the peak summer travel season into pre- and post-Eid Ul Fitr. The first wave of travel from the Middle East emerged on June 10 and is expected to taper off in the first week of July. The second wave is expected to run from August 11 to the first week of September.

"Forward bookings for August look promising. We have many family bookings with a

minimum stay of 10 nights," Dilshad said, adding that the floods in Europe had not washed out customers' interest in the region.

Explaining the strong bookings, he said: "Malaysia used to benefit from long stays of 14 days or more during this period but now we are seeing a new group of travellers who are staying for seven to 10 nights. They tend to take short breaks but on a more frequent basis. We have also done regular campaigns and promotions for (consultants) to promote travel to Malaysia, Thailand and other parts of South-east Asia this summer."

Dilshad added that business to Malaysia also picked up after the company set up a branch in Kuala Lumpur last September.

In terms of volume, he said Thailand was a close second to

Malaysia as the Tourism Authority of Thailand was aggressive in marketing to the Middle East and awareness of destinations beyond Bangkok, such as Phuket, Pattaya, Krabi and Chiang Mai was growing.

Solihene Abdullah, Got2Go Travel & Tours Malaysia's business partner, expects a growth of more than 30 per cent this pre-Eid period, with most bookings from Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

He believes that his company's new B2B online booking system, which went live last August, will fuel this growth. While it was still too early to predict how bookings would fare post-Eid, he said enquiries were "healthy" and feedback received from partners in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Cooperation Council countries were positive.



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## Speak well or lose out, Thailand

By Greg Lowe

**BANGKOK** Thai tourism operators must improve their language skills or risk losing out to intense competition from other South-east Asian nations when the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), which aims for free movement of goods, services, investment, skilled labour, and freer flow of capital in the region, is formed in 2015, senior industry executives say.

The issue was driven home last month when JobStreet.com's English Language Assessment, which surveyed 1.5 million job applicants across Singapore, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, found Thai workers possess the poorest English-language skills in the region, scoring an average of just 55 per cent compared with Singaporeans who led with 88 per cent.

Willem Niemeijer, founder/CEO of Khiri Group, said the

language handicap "is a serious barrier to business growth".

He added: "This is not just about English skills, but quality of education in general. Some crucial management jobs will end up going to other ASEAN nationals, limiting career prospects for Thais."

However, calls for tourism practitioners to upgrade their language skills were not new and Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) had taken steps to address the issue by launching its *English for MICE* programme early-2012, said Nichapa Yoswee, director of MICE capabilities at the bureau.

Nichapa said the course, conducted through 60 classes over a 15-week period, focused on enhancing various attributes, from understanding technical terms and improving written and spoken English to strengthening presentation and negotiation

skills. To date, almost 300 MICE operators have graduated.

TCEB is developing new courses for other ASEAN languages, which it hopes to launch in October this year.

Richard R Brouwer, CEO of Diethelm Travel Group, noted that "serious travel companies" have also invested in language training.

"(But the need for better) language skills will only be part of the impact (of the change in the competitive landscape that comes with the formation of AEC). A more serious impact will be the language skill (requirement) in combination with the willingness of people to work for a lower...monthly reward. Companies should carefully analyse the possible (social) consequences and not be blinded by the potential reduction in expenses (from the economic integration)," said Brouwer.

Continued from page 1

## Tourists in Singapore not put off

Seah said there were no cancellations but tour programmes had been adjusted. For instance, outdoor sightseeing tours of Chinatown, Little India and Merlion Park, subjected to the tourists' consent, would be conducted from within the bus.

Attractions such as Singapore Flyer and DUCKtours suspended operations on June 20 and 21, when the haze was at its worst. Journeys, which conducts daily themed walking tours in Singapore, also chose to cancel programmes on days when the Pollutant Standards Index (PSI) exceeded 100.

Singapore's Star Holiday Mart has also been spared from cancellations, but its managing director, Dennis Law, said: "If the haze situation (continues into the next month) and worsens, we will see cancellations...of five to six per cent.

"Besides the health concerns that tourists will have, we can expect flight delays due to (low visibility) and this will affect their travel plans. Clients have every right to cancel or change their travel dates because this is a definite problem. Even (residents in Singapore) are worried about it."

Communications with travellers is key at this point, according to Michael Lee, director of Star Holiday Mart.

He said: "We have been emailing (our travellers) updates on the PSI and what is reported in the news. We want to be transparent, so that they will be (ready) when they get here."

Although the air in Singapore has cleared substantially over the weekend, schools in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Malacca have been ordered shut at press time on June 24 due to the worsening haze.



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# More Chinese wanted

**By Mimi Hudoyo**  
**JAKARTA** Indonesia Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy will push destinations beyond Bali to the Chinese with a series of programmes aimed at achieving one million arrivals this year, an ambitious rise of more than 60 per cent over last year.

Minister Mari Elka Pangestu, said: “China is one of the markets which have booked healthy growth. The January-April arrival figures showed an increase of 26.6 per cent over the same period last year.”

Arrivals from China in 2012 hit 618,223, representing an increase of 25.4 per cent over 2011.

“We have signed an agreement with major travel associations in China (to promote and sell Indonesian products), particularly beyond Bali.

“We have organised two fam trips (among others) to Jogjakarta, Solo and Labuan Bajo (Komodo),” said Mari.

Next, the Ministry’s marketing team will organise a sales mission to six cities in Greater China – Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Nanjing and Qingdao – in August, with a sales target for October, China’s peak season.

The Ministry’s director gen-

eral of marketing, Esthy Reko Astuti, said: “The challenge is Bali will be very busy with APEC, which will take place in the first week of October, but this (event) is a good opportunity to promote destinations beyond Bali.”

Esthy said the Ministry had worked with key travel associations in Shandong, Guangdong, Shanghai, Zhijiang and Sujiang, as well as travel agencies Ctrip and GZL to organise B2C promotions in the six cities.

“The participating members already have Indonesian partners (who will take care of the land arrangements), so they will sell the packages to the public in these cities.

“Apart from Bali (which the market knows well), we are offering Jakarta, Bandung, Jogjakarta, Lombok and Komodo, while the products will include ecotourism, shopping, culinary art, culture and heritage.”

She said these six cities had huge potential in China.

“Qingdao, for example, has

a high GDP and the market has not been tapped much by (our) competitors,” she said.

The Ministry will also work with the travel trade to create tactical campaigns.

Makassar Tourism Promotion Board chairman, Nico Pasaka, has appealed to the Ministry to include his destination in beyond-Bali promotions.

“Out of 758,000 Indonesian Chinese living in Guangzhou, some 259,000 were from Makassar (South Sulawesi). There is a potential to attract these people with ‘homecoming’ and nostalgic tours,” he said.

Indonesia Tourism Promotion Board (ITPB) board member, Didien Djunaedi, said: “From the ITPB roadshow last year, we learnt there was a big interest to visit Manado from Guangzhou.”

Both Nico and Didien identify flight connections to these destinations as an obstacle to growth.

Nico said: “We have approached Garuda to connect Guangzhou-Hong Kong-Makassar and Bali, but have not heard from them.”

In response to Nico’s concern, Esthy suggested: “We could start with chartered flights (to develop the demand).”



Mari: promote beyond Bali



# Sri Lanka pushes homestays

**By Feizal Samath**  
**COLOMBO** Sri Lanka is actively engaging local villagers in opening up their homes to foreign travellers, in hopes of creating 10,000 rooms from community tourism by 2016.

To meet the target of 2.5 million visitors by 2016, the country needs 45,000 rooms, up from the current 23,000.

The government launched an expanded homestay programme for tourists last week, offering financial grants to interested persons to upgrade their homes to meet the required standards.

“One of the key elements of the programme is developing themed villages, where foreigners can live and experience the traditional culture and lifestyle,” said a senior official of Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA).

Currently, SLTDA’s website

lists some 160 homes with two to four rooms each under the homestay programme, but the authority aims to increase this number sharply.

“The main objective of community tourism is to ensure the village also benefits from this sector,” the official added. Targeted travellers include students, backpackers and families seeking “a different kind of experience.”

Ahintha Amerasinghe, managing director, Worldlink Travels, is supportive: “This is an excellent idea. In fact, I started the first homestay website 10 years ago and received many overseas enquiries, but it didn’t take off because of the war then.”

Tourist arrivals more than doubled to over a million last year, from less than 500,000 in 2008 and after the end of a violent ethnic conflict in May 2009.

Amerasinghe, who also has a

12-room upmarket hotel in the central hill station of Kandy, said he got the idea of homestays after his family spent two wonderful nights at a farm in New Zealand.

Visitors to Sri Lanka are now looking for experiences other than staying in hotels and enjoying the beach. For example, Amerasinghe shared, a wealthy foreign couple who booked the penthouse in his hotel, chose to arrive in a rickety tuk-tuk.

SLTDA is assembling a team of hospitality experts and architects to offer free upgrading advice. “We have the deluxe, superior and standard categories, with the standard (village homes) requiring a room of about 11m<sup>2</sup> with a comfortable bed and bathroom,” the SLTDA official said.

Homestay room rate starts at around US\$20 per night with breakfast, lower than what is charged at hotels, from US\$40.



## A rewarding friendship

Thailand’s Minister of Tourism and Sports, Somsak Pureesrisak (right), presenting David Kevan of Chic Locations UK with the *Friends of Thailand* award. Thailand has consistently been the tour operator’s top-selling longhaul destination.

## Playing the race card

**By Greg Lowe**  
**BANGKOK** An international motor-racing circuit is being built in Buriram with the aim of making the north-eastern province’s capital one of Thailand’s top five tourism destinations.

Construction on the two billion-baht (US\$64.9 million) Buriram International Circuit is due to be completed in October 2014.

“We would like (Buriram) to be a top-five destination in Thailand,” said Thanaisiri Chanvitayaron, project director for Buriram Business Group. The facility would host car and motorcycle races but would not pitch for Formula One, opting instead for Super GT, Moto GP and WSBK events.

Newin Chidchob, regional powerbroker and a former deputy minister, is the driving force behind the course. He already helped put the town on the sports map by building the 23,000-capacity i-Mobile Thunder Castle Stadium and football academy, home to Buriram United, at a cost of US\$20 million.

The circuit and stadium are expected to draw more tourists to the town, which is becoming more popular with business and leisure travels, partly due to its proximity to the Thai-Cambodi-

an border.

A spokesman for Best Western, which is opening the 81-room Best Western Royal Hotel in Buriram this quarter, said demand was expected to increase since the town would be a major attraction for football and motor race fans.

Suravut Thongthae, senior vice president of sales at Amari, which is opening the 60-room football-themed Amari Buriram United in Q4, said: “Sports tourism is an emerging market for Thailand’s domestic and international visitors.

“Buriram is well known for its rich history and football. It also boasts numerous temple ruins. The local football team also has a strong reputation.”

Tourism Authority of Thailand said it had not received official confirmation of the plans. However, Chookiet Potito, director of its Surin office, which covers Buriram, said the new sports attraction would strengthen the province’s appeal.

The NTO is also developing the Ancient Khmer route to leverage the region’s cultural heritage. It will promote archaeological sites in Buriram, Surin and Sisaket, as well as Angkor Wat in neighbouring Cambodia.



Suravut: history, sports focus

### TTG Travel Pursuits

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## Tourism Data

According to an analysis by IdeaWorksCompany and CarTrawler, 53 airlines reported US\$27.1 billion in ancillary revenue in 2012, compared to 50 airlines reporting US\$22.6 billion in 2011. United Airlines was the top airline in terms of revenue generated from ancillary sales for 2012



## Hot Moves

Paul Chong (below) has been named vice president of business development at Carnival Asia; Subramanian Ramadorai is now non-executive chairman of AirAsia India



## Hot Deals

Dusit International has launched a summer special, giving guests who book at Dusit Best Available Rates 35 per cent of total expenditure in credits, which can be used in the hotel for dining or spa treatments; Ascott is offering 30 per cent off best available rates at its Europe properties and 20 per cent for China residences. Terms apply



Dusit Thani Hua Hin

# What's quality tourism?



Quality tourism is not about higher receipts. It is what tourism should be about right from the start.

Raini Hamdi  
Senior Editor

*Raini Hamdi*

Everywhere I turn to, sure enough there is an ENTO that is chasing 'quality' tourism.

It is so with small countries such as Singapore, larger ones like Thailand and destinations outside Asia such as Switzerland, which are going after the Asian tourist dollar.

Singapore dreams of high-yield travellers as, being small, it has supply challenges. So how nice if every single room, be it three-, four- or five-star, could go to someone who fully appreciates what the city has to offer, said Singapore Tourism Board's (STB) CEO, Lionel Yeo (TTG Asia, June 14, 2013).

Switzerland Tourism dreams of the Asian guest who will sit down and enjoy its spectacular nature and fresh air. Fresh air is free, but it hopes that in the course of breathing it, the Asian tourist will also order a bottle of wine, relax by the Limmat, enjoy the old and modern Zurich, before spending more days elsewhere in the country (see page 14).

Thailand seeks an "equilibrium" between quantity and quality of arrivals. If you have more than 24 million arrivals – its projection for this year – you too can afford to desire a bit more quality in the kind of tourists you attract.

All three NTOs view 'experiential', 'customised' or 'niche' travel as the key to 'quality' or 'high-yield' tourism. But Yeo said there was a "misunderstanding" that Singapore only wanted rich or high net-worth individuals when STB outlined its direction for quality tourism.

So what is quality tourism, if it is not about attracting the rich who have the means to spend?

My own criteria:

– **If receipts are spread.** A place like Macau, for instance, attracts high-rollers who roll in bundles of cash. But who benefits? Not restaurants, shops, attractions, etc, as these high-rollers are interested

only in gambling.

– **If there is visitor participation.** It is indeed sad for a destination if visitors are merely bussed around and taken to dine and shop in commission-based places only. Everyone loses out (except the bus, restaurant and shop owners). The customer does not leave with memorable experiences, while the community is not any richer as it loses the opportunity to learn about visitors from other places.

– **If it is not only for the rich.** My latest quality tourism experience was hiking up 1,700m on a Swiss mountain called Obersteinberg to stay in a hotel without electricity and shower facility. But I woke up each morning and slept each night with the Jungfrau right in front of me – how's that for quality? If such an experience was only for the rich who, say, would be ferried up in a helicopter, with an entourage of chefs ready to lay out a grand buffet, it would be downright unjust. But the well-marked and safe trails, and the super-clean and charming hotel, meant that anyone with good health, good shoes and some money could enjoy the uniqueness of the destination.

My accommodation was CHF85 (US\$92) per night half board, with the motherly service staff kept dishing out more food to anyone who wanted more salad, pasta, etc, at dinner. The setting compelled me to spend more on F&B – wine, cheese, cake, etc – and I spread the earnings to an establishment whose policy was to support the local community and environment.

Quality tourism is not about higher receipts. It is what tourism should be about right from the start: meaningful journeys that let us discover other places and people, and ourselves.

The fact that we have to define it shows how far we've gone with mass tourism.

## Most commented on www.ttgasia.com

### Mixed response to eco, adventure focus at Thailand Travel Mart Plus

Our report on this year's Thailand Travel Mart Plus included criticism from buyers such as Brad Moss, that the mart had not featured enough adventure activities and sellers.

Soren Wettendorff from Bangkok, said: "Being the one mentioned (in the article) from Thailand Ecotourism and Adventure Travel Association, I sincerely agree with Brad Moss (that Thailand is too focused on beach resorts, shopping and mass tourism). The eco and adventure tourism niche was totally overlooked in the big picture although it should have been one of the four 'promoted' elements."

"We were hard to find and blended in with cabarets and amusement parks. Not to forget that many of the real adventure companies are small and driven by passion, most would not have the budget to participate on their own. Last but not least; no adventure operators were invited to take part in pre- and post-show tours, which I find very disgraceful."

### Region cheers Japan's visa policy liberalisation

Japan recently announced a host of changes to the visa requirements for tourists coming from South-east Asia. Bernadette de Leon from Manila, said: "This is exciting news for travel consultants who want to sell Japan. The country is so proud of its rich history, culture and unique dining experience...I salute JNTO for making the wise decision to ease visa application. They will definitely enjoy an increase in arrivals of Filipino tourists."

### Peter Gautschi dies in car crash in Myanmar

Peter Gautschi's passing triggered an outpouring of grief and memories. Gina Kindschi Bloom from Stockton, California, wrote: "I have been in touch with Peter since my vacation with him in 1973 and his many stops in San Francisco many years ago. I am so sad, and will miss being in touch with him."

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## Travel Hall of Fame

Since 2002, TTG Asia Media has honoured luminaries that have won the prestigious TTG Travel Award for at least 10 consecutive times for the same award title in the Travel Hall of Fame.

At present, these exceptional organisations and their years of induction are:

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

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





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# What does it take

SHATEC, the hotel and tourism school of the Singapore Hotel Association, turns 30 years old on July 2. The pioneer in hospitality training and education has produced many leaders who now helm the industry in the region and beyond. Here are five of them and their tips on how to make it to the top\*

\* Excerpts from SHATEC's commemorative book, written by Raini Hamdi, which will be presented during SHATEC's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner at Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore on July 2, 2013

## Arthur Kiong

CEO  
Far East Hospitality, Singapore

**How did you find your job calling and what does it take to rise to the top?** I never started out wanting to be in the hotel business. It's an industry I stumbled into – the opportunity was there and I was available. I think life is very much like that even though I am quite the meticulous planner. However, as the adage goes: Man proposes but God disposes.

Many people say, “follow your dreams, do what you love”. I learnt to love what I do and as a result lived my dream.

**What's your mantra?** In everything, give thanks.

**What's your advice to young graduates?** Nobody owns your career but you. You must know your strengths and limitations. Work on your strengths and manage your limitations.

In the first few years, work for strong brands. It will teach you systems and expose you to good practices.

Architect your resume but be careful not to job hop, you need to stay a minimum of two years in a company to build credibility and capability.

Take on the challenging assignments. Work overseas. Volunteer to do the hard

stuff that others are intimidated by.

Always look for the strengths in others and make their weaknesses irrelevant.

While climbing the ladder to career success, never kiss up and kick down. Relationships are important and what goes around, comes around.

Always perform a level up. Do more than you are paid and you will end up being paid more than what you do.

Success is proportionate to your ability to conceptualise, your conviction to persuade and your courage to execute. Master all 3Cs.

Always question the status quo and challenge yourself to find a better way to achieve the desired outcome.

Never make money your primary motivator. Find a better reason.

## Kellvin Ong

Project director,  
South Beach Hotel & Club, Singapore

**How did you find your job calling and what does it take to rise to the top?** After spending six years with the Republic of Singapore Navy, I was looking to pursue a new career and came across a Hyatt advertisement. When they asked me what position I was looking for, I immediately replied front office manager! I didn't know what it took to be one.

They offered me a position of front desk clerk.

After working for nearly a year, the hotel sponsored me to join SHATEC as its pioneer batch, in NTC-2 in Front Office course. The course gave me better insights into what the industry had to offer. I worked my way up from entry level to tour coordinator, sales manager, regional sales manager, conventions & incentives sales manager, director of sales, director of marketing, financial controller, EAM - F&B and Rooms, VP - Development and finally general manager with various chains.

**What's your mantra?** “When given lemons, make lemonade. Life is all about challenges; it's what you make them out to be.”

**What's your advice to young graduates?** Don't be afraid to get your hands dirty.

## Nicholas Lim

President-Asia  
The Travel Corporation, Singapore

**How did you find your job calling and what does it take to rise to the top?** I was just 12 years old and worked as a door boy at a local five-star hotel over Christmas as the management felt it was nice to have young boys greeting guests during the festive season.

That vacation job kickstarted my passion for the industry. Once I tried to be an engineer, but it was dreadful. So I decided to jumpstart my career in the industry and studied at SHATEC. And when I returned to the industry, it felt good and right.

**What's your mantra?** Your people (team), brand and bottomline matter. Everything else is secondary.

**What's your advice to young graduates?** You must constantly have the desire to excel and grow. Leave your Facebook and Twitter at home, read business publications and expand your mind. You are hired based on what you can contribute to the organisation, not how popular or how many 'likes' or 'friends' you have.

## Nikheel Advani

COO and principal  
Grace Bay Resorts, Turks & Caicos Islands

**How did you find your job calling and what does it take to rise to the top?** I was planning to be an engineer and at the age of 16 my father had a heart-to-heart conversation with me about the “value of money”, “how he was rich and I was not” and “I had to go out and earn my living”. He was generous though; he said I could stay at home and he would pay for any education that I qualified for anywhere in the world.

While I was studying engineering, I did private catering for European embassies and worked at luxury hotels as a banquet waiter, bartender and dishwasher in the stewarding departments. It was an amazing experience and I just loved it – serving Chinese banquet dinners, taking care of VIPs at the embassies, mixing cocktails at weddings and dishwashing till the wee hours of the morning with a diverse team. A year went by and I sat down with my folks and told them that I loved this work more than engineering and I wanted to pursue a professional career in this industry. They were both supportive and in July 1989, I joined the F&B programme at SHATEC. It changed my life and gave me the solid foundation to build upon and made



- 1 Arthur Kiong
- 2 Justin Quek
- 3 Nikheel Advani
- 4 Nicholas Lim
- 5 Kellvin Ong





# to make it?

me the leader I am today.

This foundation, hard work and great mentors were the secrets of my success.

## What's your mantra?

- 1) Always have a vision – if you don't know where you are going you are not going to get there;
- 2) Work hard and work smart – you need both to get to the top;
- 3) Always take time to praise your team members who give it their best shot – you will be surprised at the quantum leap in performance.

## What's your advice to young graduates?

Always have great mentors throughout your whole career. There are leaders who take a personal interest in your growth and provide guidance and wisdom through their years of experience. Here is what one of my mentors told me: In your 20s, it is all about experience. Volunteer and be proactive in getting any additional experience in the business that you can, even if it doesn't pay well.

In your 30s, it is all about position. Grow within your department and be exposed to as many positions within the business in an upward accent within the organisation until you reach the top.

In your 40s, it is all about making money and achieving results through your team members.

In your 50s, it is time to give back to the community, to the industry, to your country and leave a legacy! So far this advice has been invaluable to my success!

## Justin Quek

*Director  
QBS Dining Concepts and principal chef  
Sky on 57, Marina Bay Sands, Singapore*

**How did you find your job calling and what does it take to rise to the top?** My travels and curiosity about the world shaped my culinary path.

I grew up in the Queen's Street/Bugis area, tending to my parent's fruit stall and developing a love for and familiarity with local food. At the age of 20, I joined the merchant marine as a steward. I remembered being fascinated by how simple ingredients could be turned into gourmet meals. This fascination eventually became a passion and I started teaching myself to make everything I could think of – breads, pastries, classic dishes, etc, from the different countries we docked at.

After this little adventure, I enrolled at SHATEC and trained at Mandarin Oriental, Singapore and The Oriental Bangkok (now Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok). A cooking tour of France followed and I found myself working in famed kitchens like Roland Mazere's Le Centenaire and at Jean Bardet in the Loire Valley, among others.

I ended off my year in France by training in England at the Roux brothers' restaurants, Le Gavroche in London and Waterside Inn in Berkshire. This was when I also picked up the French language.

It was my insatiable hunger to learn new things and explore the unknown that finally led me back to Singapore to carve out the path to where I am now. In 1994, I co-founded Les Amis, a French restau-

rant, with my good friend Ignatius Chan, and stayed there for nearly a decade before opening my own restaurants in Taipei and Shanghai. Life has been good to me, especially since I've had little formal schooling

after leaving school at the age of 16.

**What's your mantra?** Always work hard and never give up. Learn from the best and never take for granted any advice given to

you. Better yourself through your mistakes.

## What's your advice to young graduates?

In addition to the good foundation you have built, you need to be open to criticism – this is how you learn the most. If you learn from the mistakes you make, it will make you a better person. Finally, go out and try other chefs' cuisines. Learn from them because if you don't, you won't be able to improve and you won't have a point of comparison between your cuisine and theirs.

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# Steering SWISS

**Harry Hohmeister**  
CEO, Swiss  
International Air Lines

He joined SWISS as CEO in July 2009 and has been navigating the company through strong headwinds. For inspiration to build a hardy future for SWISS, Hohmeister tells **Raini Hamdi** he looks to everywhere but the airline industry

## SWISS posted a CHF24 million (US\$26 million) operating loss in the first quarter. Why?

Yes. Three reasons. One, increased fuel prices and we did not have the hedging we had in 2011. Second, the Swiss franc is a strong currency not just against the US dollar, yen, British pound, etc, but the euro too, so we're sitting in a high-cost island compared to the rest of Europe and are 20 per cent more expensive than other European carriers just through the currency strength. Third, while central Europe is quite strong, all around us is getting weaker and weaker. We also depend on this traffic and therefore are affected by the structural problem Europe has.

## You've been implementing future-oriented initiatives as part of SCORE, Lufthansa Group's Change for Success programme, to strengthen SWISS long-term. Is this helping?

Yes, we have 128 projects – we have more projects than people (laughs) – and by this year, I expect we will already see a turnaround, and by 2015, we will be back on track.

It is not about cost-cutting but about investing in new aircraft and technology, and redesigning processes, especially in areas such as distribution, efficiency management and productivity.

We have to reinvent ourselves because the European industry is in a structural change and if we don't follow this change, we will not survive. Many airlines already went bankrupt in Europe or had to shrink dramatically. Therefore we have to rebuild ourselves somehow structurally, while guarding our position as a premium airline. So we really have to rethink everything, consider doing things differently or not doing them anymore.

## Why aren't there strikes at SWISS, as there have been at Lufthansa?

Lufthansa is a different company.

## But it owns you.

But that does not mean it is the same company.

We are a medium-sized airline. We operate close to 100 aircraft, not like Lufthansa with 400 aircraft, Air France with 300 or British Airways with 200 aircraft. These are huge machines and there, process management is important. For SWISS, people management is more important than process management because of the size of our company. So I know many of our captains, co-pilots, flight attendants, etc. And when I am at the shop-

ping centres, for sure I would meet 10 to 15 people (laughs) who would come up to me and say, 'oh, I have to tell you something'. So it's very hands-on. This also makes us different in that we can be faster at decision making and implementation.

## How do you motivate your staff?

It's not easy to ask people to work more, but I think we are realistic people. We look around and we see that our competitors are no longer the former state-owned companies but state-supported ones such as Emirates, Etihad Airways, etc, which have lots of money and can undertake many opportunities.

As well, I think our employees are motivated by our commitment. The latest example is the management (board members) forgoing five per cent of their salary (from July 1 to end-2015).

Our people also understand that a re-

structure takes time; we're just in the middle of it. But they are seeing a lot of ideas and innovative plans for the future, which is good.

## In securing a sustainable future for SWISS, which airline do you benchmark with?

For me it is simple – forget benchmarks; we have to find our own way. An airline is a commodity business; without its own profile, it is not a special product. So we develop our own new first class, new check-in procedures, new pricing concept, etc. Of course we look at what our competitors are doing, but we don't copy what they do.

In fact, we look outside the airline industry, for example, to the banking sector, to see what we can adapt, or to a country like Japan. We have brought the *kaizen* (Japanese word for change) attitude into SWISS. We sent a team to Japan for train-

could learn a few management lessons from them, or they from us.

But when you see an ATM dispensing cash – that's a technology we airlines now use for check-in, borrowed from the banking sector. In the future, I believe we don't need the check-in machines at the airport anymore; with the SWISS app, you can check in with your iPhone or BlackBerry. Banks are now copying that from us; in Switzerland, UBS, for example.

## So what initiative are you proudest of to date?

Our social media approach is one. In Switzerland, we are the company with the highest social media penetration. And we have only one person behind it, not a huge team! I'm also proud of our customer service, not just through the call centres but our personal care centre which looks after our top 10,000 customers. Our people follow the itineraries of these customers – if he is stuck somewhere, they will help him immediately and automatically; he does not even have to call. Other airlines only have, say, different access times only for their valued customers. I think we're innovative with our customer service concept and with contact management through social media.

## What's your strategy for Asia?

We're close to the end of our current strategy in Asia and now we must start to think of the next phase. We've been growing to Asia in the last few years, opening up New Delhi in 2007, Shanghai in 2008, Beijing in 2012 and now Singapore (direct daily Zurich-Singapore service took off in May, see *TTG Asia e-Daily*, May 14, 2013). That's one new destination between Asia and Switzerland every year or every second year, which is quite aggressive.

Now we need to lean back and think of the next steps. The Asian markets we have entered – Singapore, Beijing, etc – are quite huge for us; everything afterwards will be smaller, which will not fit well with our fleet strategy (SWISS has ordered a fleet of B777-300ERs which will be delivered by 2016 or 2017). The aircraft will bring 50 per cent more seats than the A340-300, so in the future we will have bigger planes, smaller markets.

So what to do? We don't know yet. Anyhow, there is no pressure now to open a new Asian connection as SWISS is well covered with eight Asian destinations. I believe Asia will grow further, so new opportunities will arise in the next three to four years.

## What are your flying habits like on SWISS?

When I enter the aircraft, I say hello to the maitre'd cabin, then I knock on the left-hand door to the cockpit to say hello and sometimes they invite me to stay. Sometimes, we discuss fleet management and pilot salaries in the cockpit. If I'm travelling longhaul, I'll go to the galley and talk to the crew.

**“Why should I benchmark with an industry that is in itself bankrupt?”**

ing, then we reviewed how it could be implemented effectively for us.

I've always said, we have to learn from other industries, not ours. It's also more fun. Why should I benchmark with an industry that is in itself bankrupt? In every aspect – financing, balance sheet, cost management, system management – don't benchmark with airlines, it does not make sense.

## What could you possibly learn from banking these days.

(Laughs) Yes, lately, I'm not sure if we







# HONG KONG DISNEYLAND RESORT CELEBRATION OF SALES EXCELLENCE 2012

**May 16 , 2013 Hong Kong Disneyland Resort**

Hong Kong Disneyland Resort celebrated the completion of its expansion plan with the premiere of Mystic Point. To recognize the continued support from the travel trade throughout the journey of the expansion, the Resort hosted the annual Celebration of Sales Excellence 2012 event to honor the achievements of its trade partners. These VIP guests were treated a spectacular and unforgettable evening, concluding in Mystic Point, filled with Disney's brand of entertainment and surprises which showcased the Resort's appreciation for the longstanding support extended by its valued partners.

A total of 20 Sales Excellence Awards were presented to top travel trade partners who achieved exceptional sales performance over the past year. The 2012 Top Sales AchievEAR of the Year award was presented to GZL International Travel Service Ltd.



Hong Kong Disneyland Resort 2012 Top Sales AchievEAR of the Year award was presented to GZL International Travel Service Limited. Photo moment with Disney friends and Cast Members as Chairman of the Board Director for GZL International Travel Service Limited, Jianxu Lu (left), received the award from Randy Garfield, Executive Vice President of Worldwide Sales & Travel Operations for Disney Destinations (right).

The magical night continued after the awards ceremony with VIP guests invited to a sneak peek of Mystic Point. The Mystic Point Gala Evening was hosted by Terruce Wang and other officiating guests, including Andrew Kam, Managing Director of Hong Kong Disneyland Resort, Randy Garfield, Executive Vice President of Worldwide Sales & Travel Operations for Disney Destinations, Aliana Ho, Vice President of Asia Pacific Regional Sales and Travel Operations for The Walt Disney Company (Asia Pacific) Limited, as well as Larry Leung, Director of Travel Trade Sales for Hong Kong Disneyland Resort.

During the Gala Evening, VIP guests were invited to ride on the new themed area's landmark feature, the Mystic Magneto-Electric Carriage, for a highly immersive adventure in Mystic Point. They were also treated to a sumptuous dinner at The Explorer's Club Restaurant, its exotic décor reflecting the cultures and styles of Egypt, Russia, Morocco, India and China. Festivities continued at Mystic Point's Garden of Wonders, where exquisite desserts and drinks were served, and a live band struck enchanting tunes for guests to further enjoy the celebration at this immersive themed area.



Representatives of all the winning travel agencies enjoyed the magical moment on stage together with Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse, Randy Garfield, Executive Vice President of Worldwide Sales & Travel Operations for Disney Destinations (front row, 3rd from left), Aliana Ho, Vice President of Asia Pacific Regional Sales and Travel Operations for The Walt Disney Company (Asia Pacific) Limited (front row, 3rd from right), Terruce Wang, Vice President of Sales and Distribution Marketing, Hong Kong Disneyland Resort (front row, 2nd from right) and Larry Leung, Director of Travel Trade Sales for Hong Kong Disneyland Resort (front row, 2nd from left).

This year, a brand new Sales AdvanceEAR Award was introduced to recognize five companies who have taken significant steps to advance their cooperation in promoting Hong Kong Disneyland during this past year.

To mark the special occasion, the annual celebratory awards ceremony was hosted at Disney's Storybook Theater, where more than 200 VIP guests from the travel trade industry were surprised and delighted by the venue's Broadway-style glamor. In true Disney fashion, the entertainment for this special occasion was tailor-made and exclusive, featuring a re-arranged medley of classic Disney songs performed by singers, dancers and Disney friends to leave guests with lifelong memories of the awards ceremony.



The Mystic Point Gala was hosted by Terruce Wang, Vice President of Sales and Distribution Marketing, Hong Kong Disneyland Resort (3rd from right) and other officiating guests, including Andrew Kam, Managing Director of Hong Kong Disneyland Resort (4th from left), Randy Garfield, Executive Vice President of Worldwide Sales & Travel Operations for Disney Destinations (3rd from left), Aliana Ho, Vice President of Asia Pacific Regional Sales and Travel Operations for The Walt Disney Company (Asia Pacific) Limited (2nd from left), as well as Larry Leung, Director of Travel Trade Sales of Hong Kong Disneyland Resort (2nd from right).



During the Gala, VIP guests were invited to ride on the new themed area's landmark attraction, the Mystic Magneto-Electric Carriage, and enjoyed a sumptuous dinner at The Explorer's Club Restaurant.

## HONG KONG DISNEYLAND RESORT 2012 TOP SALES ACHIEVEAR OF THE YEAR GZL International Travel Service Ltd.

### HONG KONG DISNEYLAND RESORT SALES EXCELLENCE AWARD 2012

Asian Links Holiday  
China Travel Service (Hong Kong) Limited  
Golden Win International Travel Services Limited  
GZL International Travel Service Limited  
Hua Yi Tour Limited  
Shanghai Ctrip International Travel Service Company Limited  
SL Travel Company Limited

Cathay Holidays Limited  
Comfort Travel Service Company Limited  
Gray Line Tours of Hong Kong Limited  
Holiday World Tours Limited  
JTB (Hong Kong) Limited  
Shenzhen Gangao  
Travoo China Limited

China International Travel Service of Zhongshan Company Limited  
Freedom Travel Limited  
Guangdong Nanhui International Travel Service Company Limited  
HS Travel International Company Limited  
Million Tour Limited  
Shenzhen Sightseeing Company Limited  
(In alphabetical order)

## HONG KONG DISNEYLAND RESORT 2012 SALES ADVANCEEAR AWARD

Airlink Travel & Tour SDN BHD  
Westminster Travel Limited

Ann's Travel Service Company Limited  
(In alphabetical order)

Asia Travel Network Limited Good Friendship (Hong Kong) Limited

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Finland Tourist Board

# Finland taps its Polar forces to woo Asians

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

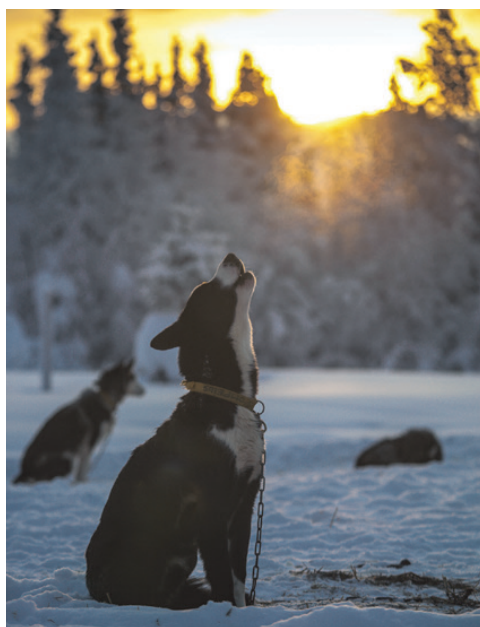
Each winter, when the Arctic night skies light up with auras – also known as northern lights – hordes of Japanese and Chinese tourists flock to Lapland in northern Finland to watch the spectacular phenomenon, shared Finnair’s media relations director, Paivyt Tallqvist.

Indeed, Japan has become the top Asian source market for Finland, which welcomed 176,936 Japanese tourists in 2012, a rise of 20 per cent from 2011, according to statistics from Finnish Tourist Board (MEK). Japanese visitors also chalked up the highest daily spend at 126 euros (US\$168), a significant amount above the average expenditure of 59 euros per day for foreign travellers in 2012.

At the same time, China has rapidly emerged as a source market for this Nordic nation too. Last year, Chinese arrivals



**Paterson: Finnair sees strong growth from the Far East. Above, Finland’s Northern Lights remains its stellar attraction for Asian visitors; right, huskies are often used for sled tours in Finnish Lapland**



reached 100,075, up 8.7 per cent from 92,099 in 2011.

The rise of these two Far Eastern countries as visitor source

markets has prompted MEK to reassess its previously Europe-centric marketing strategy.

Mervi Holmén, MEK’s direc-

tor of nation brand and marketing, said: “We will not pull out from Europe as it is still very important for us in the future, but our marketing emphasis will be stronger in Russia, Japan and parts of China from the beginning of next year.”

Shanghai, Chongqing, Beijing and Hong Kong – also destinations that Finnair flies to – have been identified as MEK’s focal cities in Greater China. The NTO is “negotiating joint activities and marketing campaigns with Finnair”, according to Holmén; further details will be unveiled in September when the board finalises its marketing plans.

As the flag carrier and largest airline of Finland, Finnair is a key player in attracting Asian travellers to the country and will work with the tourism authorities where its objectives are “aligned”, such as selling Lapland as a destination for the outbound segment in Japan, according to the airline’s senior vice president commercial, Allister Paterson.

He quipped: “Finland wants to bring people to Finland, whereas we want to bring people to Helsinki, then either have them stay in Finland or elsewhere in Europe. We’re just as happy if they land in Finland and leave

again.”

Having rolled out an Asian-centric strategy with plans to double its revenue from Asia-Europe traffic by 2020 from a 2010 baseline, Finnair continues to leverage on the geographical location of its Helsinki base to tap growth opportunities in Asia-Europe traffic.

Earlier this month, Finnair began thrice-weekly flights to Xi’an and Hanoi, becoming the first European airline to connect these cities and bumping up its Asian destinations to 13. Xi’an is the airline’s fourth destination in China, following Shanghai, Beijing and Chongqing.

Said Finnair deputy CEO, Ville Iho: “North Asia-North Europe is the sweet spot for Finnair. Going via Helsinki saves four hours on average, an important consideration for business travellers.”

Paterson agreed: “The Asia-centric approach works better for the Far East markets...The majority of our growth and revenue over the last couple of years has been from Asia.”

Second-tier cities in China are clearly on Finnair’s development radar, Paterson pointed out. “We’re the first ones into Chongqing and Xi’an from Europe as a non-stop (service). These cities are secondary markets but they are big – Chongqing has 30 million people.

“We are seeing good load factor on our Asian routes, although they are lower on developing markets like Chongqing and Xi’an...Not everyone knows the Polar route, so we need to teach geography (to the travel trade). There is a lot of growth left in Asia, which we plan to grow.”

However, further network expansion in Asia will be restricted until the airline starts to take delivery of its 11 Airbus A350 aircraft order in 2015, according to Iho. Finnair’s executives declined to reveal new destinations on the company’s radar.

In addition, Qatar Airways’ and SriLankan Airlines’ upcoming entry into Oneworld will also spell opportunities for Finnair to extend its reach, said Paterson.

Meanwhile, MEK has no plans to ramp up its presence or marketing efforts in India or Southeast Asia at the moment “due to limited resources”, Holmén revealed.

## In Dresden, a wet spring fails to dampen spirits

The eastern German city of Dresden, which was affected by the recent severe flooding in Central Europe, has made good strides in recovery as the water level in the Elbe river subside.

According to Dresden Marketing, the city is no longer on the highest state of alert and almost all roads and streets are open to traffic again. The historic centre of Dresden was spared the floods; the museums in Pillnitz

Palace have reopened while the Saxon Steamship Company fleet and the Elbe ferries are set to resume service when the river level has fallen further. Only several riverside hotels and F&B outlets had to temporarily suspend business.

“To anyone who asks how they can help, we say, ‘Come to Dresden, visit our beautiful city and attend some of the major cultural activities and events that are

due to take place in the coming weeks’,” said Marco Bensen, chairman of the board at DEHOGA Dresden and managing director of Inside by Meliá Dresden. “There is no reason to cancel any trips you may have planned.”

To celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of Richard Wagner (1813-1883), the famed German composer who spent his childhood and youth in Dresden, the city has rolled out a year-long line-up of activities.



Dresden urges tourists to return



# Travelport agencies and partners inspired in Shanghai

More than 270 airline partners, travel agency customers, developers and colleagues joined Travelport's "Inspiring Travel" conference in Shanghai in early June, for two days of sharing insights, exchanging views and having fun!

From the welcome reception at Brown Sugar in Xintiandi to the closing Shanghai Chic dinner at Three-on-the-Bund, overlooking the spectacular Pudong skyline, it was an action-packed agenda of keynote presentations, lively panel discussions, case studies and instructive workshops. A truly inspiring experience for all!



1. Travelport's Jason Clarke and friends from Taiwan 2. Travelport's Patrick Andres opens the conference 3. An inspiring story of survival and personal transformation from keynote Yossi Ghinsberg 4. Travelport's Ian Heywood opens up on the Merchandising Platform 5. It's party time! 6. Chilling out at Brown Sugar nightclub 7. Travelport's Damian Hickey moderates a lively discussion with Jetstar, Tiger Airways, Cleartrip and PST Travel 8. The happy team from Malaysia 9. Tiger Airways Kaneswaran Avili 10. A summer's night on the Bund 11. Travelport Golf Classic at Agile Binhai 12. Enjoying dinner with a view 13. Getting into the spirit of Shanghai Chic



# Sunny Asian market for Switzerland

By Raini Hamdi

Switzerland Tourism expects five to 10 per cent additional visitors from Singapore and Australia as a result of Swiss International Air Lines' (SWISS) direct daily Singapore-Zurich service, which took off on May 13.

The NTO has set aside "a special budget" to promote Switzerland in both markets, according to Switzerland Tourism's executive vice president, Urs Eberhard.

"We have seen time and again that every direct connection into our country brings five to 10 per cent additional visitors," Eberhard said.

Arved von zur Muhlen, SWISS' head of sales & marketing-Intercontinental, noticed "a shift" in Australian visitors using Hong Kong as gateway to Europe, to Singapore, as a result of the Singapore-Zurich service. "Now that we have started this service, our customers from Australia who flew Australia-Hong Kong-Europe are now flying Australia-Singapore-Europe. It may balance out over time, but this is what we're seeing now. This is not an issue, as it means we have more seats for our Hong



Kurt Ruffli



**Eberhard: Expects more success from South-east Asia.** Left, a Singapore traveller hikes up Obersteinberg – Switzerland Tourism aims to create more "immersive" tours for seasoned Asians

Kong customers," he said.

Australia is a growth market for Switzerland, as is the whole South-east Asian region.

"The direct Singapore-Zurich service is an important trigger. If you fly to London, Paris or Rome (to tour Europe), you might or might not visit Switzerland, but if you fly to Zurich, you are likely to spend some time in the

country before going on, adding overnights for us," Eberhard said. Zurich, along with Luzern and Geneva, is the most popular destination among South-east Asian visitors, he added.

South-east Asia, which Eberhard said had been "a success story for us from 2008 to 2012", is on track to contribute some 500,000 overnights in Swit-

zerland by 2016, from 350,000 overnights now. "That's a year-on-year increase of 10-20 per cent, depending on the South-east Asian market. Indonesia is hot on the heels of Thailand in growth, but Singapore remains by far the most important market, which was why we opened our office here in June last year."

The average spend of South-east Asian visitors in Switzerland is around CHF350 (US\$379) per day, which is 30 to 50 per cent higher than the average spend of Chinese visitors, according to Eberhard.

His plan is to target more seasoned travellers from South-east Asia – as well as China – in a bid to improve yield.

Switzerland Tourism is working with agencies in South-east Asia and land operators in Switzerland to create new products and itineraries that go beyond Swiss icons such as the Jungfrau, Titlis, Lucern and Interlaken.

"We hear from the agencies that their discerning travellers want deeper experiences, so together with the agencies, we're trying to create new icons in, say, the eastern parts of Switzerland,

where there is a lot of century-old traditions and colourful festivals their clients can enjoy.

"It's a mix of us getting an education on what Asians want and us giving new ideas to the travel agencies. We are coming up with seven to eight new itineraries which we hope can be in the programme in 2014," Eberhard said.

Switzerland Tourism has given the Asian market a lot more focus since 2008, when the impact of the US and European debt-crisis started to bite its visitorship from traditional markets.

Eberhard said in the end Swiss travellers themselves saved the day. "We were extremely afraid that the strong Swiss franc would cause Swiss travellers to abandon Switzerland and holiday in Italy, France, etc. But the domestic market has been stable – if it had left us, that would have been a problem. The domestic market is 33 to 34 per cent of the total market.

"This attests to the quality and value they get in a Switzerland holiday, which visitors from Australia and South-east Asia recognise as well," he said.

# Britain trains sights on China, India

By Greg Lowe

VisitBritain, the national tourism agency of the UK, will focus on growing emerging outbound markets such as China, India and the Middle East as a key strategy to reach its target of 40 million tourist arrivals and an expenditure of £31.5 billion (US\$42 billion) by 2020.

The Asia-Pacific, Middle East and Africa (APMEA) market is expected to account for two million of the targeted nine million visitor arrival increase to Britain by 2020, contributing £1.9 billion of the anticipated £12.8 billion rise in inbound tourism spending.

While the US and Australia remain core visitor source markets for Britain, VisitBritain is increasingly looking east for long-term sustainable growth, said its director of overseas networks Keith Beecham.

"About 179,000 Chinese travelled to Britain last year, compared with one million from Australia, our fourth biggest value market," said Beecham, who deemed China an important market despite its "relatively modest travel number".

"We are also looking at emerging opportunities where arrivals are growing 10 to 30 per cent per annum and are generally high-spending visitors."

Some 339,000 Indians visited Britain last year and VisitBritain aims to raise the figure to



VisitBritain

500,000 by 2020. It is also targeting 382,000 Chinese arrivals in 2016, up from 179,000 last year.

To tap growth from these focus markets, the NTO and its partners have implemented a series of initiatives that go beyond its global *GREAT Britain – You're Invited* marketing campaign.

In China, VisitBritain has injected an additional £2 million this financial year, a move that follows the recent appointment of a dedicated travel trade representative in Beijing by London & Partners, the capital's tourism promotion agency.

In addition, VisitBritain will soon launch a *China Welcome* initiative to educate the British travel trade on the specific



**Beecham: India and China are fast-growing markets for Britain.** Above, a steam train passes above beach huts in Devon; right, Bodiam Castle is one of the UK's most iconic heritage sites



requirements and preferences of Chinese visitors, said Joss Croft, marketing director, VisitBritain.

Flight capacity between the two countries will also be expanded when British Airways starts its thrice-weekly service between London (Heathrow) and Chengdu via Shanghai on September 22.

Furthermore, the recent £2 million, two-year *Britain, A Tradition of Luxury* joint marketing campaign launched by VisitBritain and Emirates to target affluent international travellers between 35-55 years old is set to play a significant role in India, whose outbound segment is generally younger and more adventurous than China.

Promoting destinations outside of London, which are visited by 53 per cent of all arrivals to Britain, is another key strategy of VisitBritain to garner more international footfalls.

While VisitBritain will not launch major promotions in South-east Asia due to budget constraints, it has identified key "nurture" markets such as Indonesia (see *TTG Asia e-Daily*, May 15, 2013).

As well, the BritAgent programme will continue to play an essential role in educating travel experts, said Croft. Over 3,170 of 5,150 agents are based in APMEA, with China and India accounting for about 1,900.





The waterways of Venice continue to keep Asian visitors spellbound

# Italy charms Asian shoppers

By Shekhar Niyogi

The third most visited country in Europe with 17.3 per cent of the continent's total arrivals after Spain (23.2 per cent) and France (26 per cent), Italy has shifted its focus to the fast-growing BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) nations as well as Japan.

According to Confcommercio data, Italy's inbound tourism revenue peaked at 36 billion euros (US\$48 billion) and 47.4 million inbound tourist arrivals in 2012. The most visited regions by international tourists are Venice, Tuscany, Rome and Emilia-

Romagna.

"Indian tourists to Italy have grown 94 per cent in the last five years" said Marco Bruschini, director-general of Italian State Tourist Board (ENIT). "Some 467,000 Indians travelled to Italy in 2012, up from 191,000 in 2007."

Having just reopened its Mumbai office in May 2013 after a year-long absence, ENIT will establish the Italia Academy for the Indian travel trade in 3Q2013 and will bank on Italy's popularity as a setting for Indian films.

"Asia is emerging quickly as a

prime source market...The Italian travel trade is gearing for the market shift from traditional sources like the US and Germany and reorienting itself to India and China," said Beatrice Stefanelli, incoming & events consultant of Bologna-based Viaggi Salvadori, which has designed shopping and gastronomy tours to capture a larger slice of the Asian inbound market.

As Chinese, Japanese and Russian tourists form a large segment of its clientele, Castel Guelfo The Style Outlets has rolled out Asian-centric initiatives, said

marketing specialist Margherita Macchia. "We are targeting India and China, as brands that are currently being advertised and retailed in these countries add outlets in our malls. Personal shoppers trained in Asian tastes and preferences are employed to help them shop (at our outlets)."

The perception of Italy as a luxury shopping destination will lure more visitors from China, travel experts opined. Chinese arrivals to Italy are expected to grow by more than 15 per cent each year from 2012-2016, according to the *World Travel Mar-*

ket Global Trends Report 2012.

Wang Chenchen, European operations executive of Beijing-based U-tour, remarked: "Italy will be big in the next five years for Chinese outbound. We have seen more than 30 per cent growth year-on-year."

However, direct flight connections between Italy and China remain limited, with most links currently served by Air China and China Eastern Airlines.

Samuel Wong, managing director of Hong Kong-based Jetway Express, said: "More direct flights (from China) to Rome and Milan will improve numbers by at least 20 per cent. However, since China is a large country, flights will have to originate from several source cities other than Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou to realise the true potential from this market."

ENIT's efforts to woo Japanese tourists with more roadshows and trade fam trips have paid off, as Japan is Italy's second largest non-EU visitor source market. Said Izumi Sasamori, manager of Tokyo-based Athteion: "The exposure to Italian tourism products has helped us to promote Italy well and the number of tourists to Italy is growing at least 15 per cent annually. Gastronomy is a binder as we pride ourselves on our cuisine too."

## Mattala all set to welcome the world

Sri Lanka's new international airport promises a great trip for travelers as well as for this Indian Ocean Island's economic prosperity

It's not often that airports are launched. And it's not often that new airports create so much buzz. That's why the opening of Sri Lanka's newest international airport is worth checking into.

Formally inaugurated on 18th March, 2013, by Sri Lanka's President, Mahinda Rajapaksa, the Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport (MRIA) plans to handle up to 1 million passengers and over 6,000 aircraft movements per year under Stage I. Further expansion will see the new airport increasing passenger capacity to an additional 5 million and boost the current 10 parking bays to 20.

Located in Mattala in the southern city of Hambantota, MRJA is the country's 2nd international airport. Until now, Sri Lanka's only other international airport was in Katunayake on the west coast of the country. Known as the Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA), it is just a short drive away from the capital city of Colombo. However, tourists traveling to most parts of Sri Lanka and exporters transporting produce from farmlands had to settle for a long drive by road.

With the launch of MRJA all that looks set to change.

### The Eco Airport

MRJA, which began construction in November 2009, is built on 2,000 hectares of land. It boasts a 3,500 metre long runway with 75 metre width which can accommodate even an Airbus A380. Set amidst landscaped gardens, the airport features a 10,000 square metre passenger terminal, a 5,000 square metre cargo building, two aerobridges and an iconic 41-metre-high control tower.

A salient feature of the airport is that it was built with the

surrounding rich flora and fauna in mind. The airport buildings and infrastructure are designed to blend in with the verdant greenery around the aerodrome. As a result, MRJA has been billed as an Eco Airport going to great lengths to preserve the environment.

Besides serving as an alternative to BIA, the Mattala airport plans to become an aviation hub not only in the country but also in South Asia. The strategic location of the airport also enables airlines to cover over 60 per cent of the world within 8 hours from MRJA. And, what's an airport without connectivity?

### Easy Access

For travelers, Mattala airport's main appeal is its strategic location. The airport provides easy access to some of the most famous tourist attractions in Sri Lanka.

Among the nearby attractions are the sprawling wilderness of Yala and Udawalawe national parks. And a quick trip from Mattala will take travelers to some of the famed beaches in Sri Lanka such as Arugam Bay and Trincomalee on the east coast.

Mattala also provides a quick getaway to the mountains of Sri Lanka. Nuwara Eliya and Kandy are the perennial favourites. A key feature of any trip to these misty mountains are the many tea plantations, waterfalls, botanical gardens, and unspoiled nature that mark the landscape.

### The jewel of the south

Besides propelling Sri Lanka's tourism industry, Mattala is also a key driver in ushering economic prosperity to the largely impoverished heartland of the country.

The new airport is part of President Rajapaksa's "Mahinda Chintana" or "Mahinda Vision" for the economic development of the nation. The Hambantota district has been one of the key focuses of this programme. The region has seen the construction of a deep water port in Magampura, 20 kms away from Mattala, which aims to transform the region into a logistics and sea-air trans-shipment hub and also give a boost to upcoming industrial and manufacturing parks nearby. The port is also just 10 nautical miles from one of the world's busiest shipping routes connecting the West with Far East.

Hambantota has recently seen the unveiling of a 35,000-seat international cricket stadium and sports complex as well as a state-of-the-art convention centre. Under construction are a range of international hotels by chains such as Shangri-La; a cutting-edge IT park; and an oil refinery and chemical engineering plants. The Sri Lankan Government has also ensured that Hambantota is well connected to the rest of the country, especially the capital of Colombo via the Southern Expressway, which will be extended all the way to Hambantota.

So far, the Mattala airport has attracted international carriers such as Air Arabia and Flydubai, while other airlines have shown growing interest. Naturally, among the first to takeoff from MRJA was the country's national carrier, Sri Lankan Airlines.

The launch of MRJA is not just symbolic of a boom currently being experienced by Hambantota, it is also a sign to the world that this island nation is heading on to something far greater.



**MATTALA  
RAJAPAKSA INTERNATIONAL  
AIRPORT**





# To Gather, To Honour 14th JUNE 2013

Over a hundred travel professionals born and bred in Malaysia returned home to honour their long-time colleagues and friends, Lim Babin and Dato Abdullah Jonid, better known as Che Lah. Babin was one of the pioneers to promote tourism in Malaysia internationally and is now advisor to the Malaysian Inbound Tourism Association. Dato Abdullah Jonid was the former Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board director-general.

Good friends celebrating good times together – there's just no better reason for a gathering!



Reliving good old days - Babin with his ex-Mayflower staff.



Albert Cheong with Dato Abdullah Jonid.



Babin with MATTA President Dato Mohd Khalid.



An iPad to keep track of past, present and future.



Babin with (from left) Anthony Ang, General Manager, Northam All Suites Penang, Vincent Pillai, Director of Operations, Dorsett Grand Subang, Rohana Ramli, Managing Director, Residence Hotels & Resorts, Willie Ooi, Senior Vice President, Gloria Hotels Group China and Michael Chow, Group Publisher, TTG Asia Media.



Babin with Datin Chen of Royal Selangor.



From left: Darren Ng, Managing Director, TTG Asia Media, Babin, Dato Abdulla Jonid, former Director General and Chairman, Tourism Malaysia and Boris Chang, Managing Director, Global Holidays.



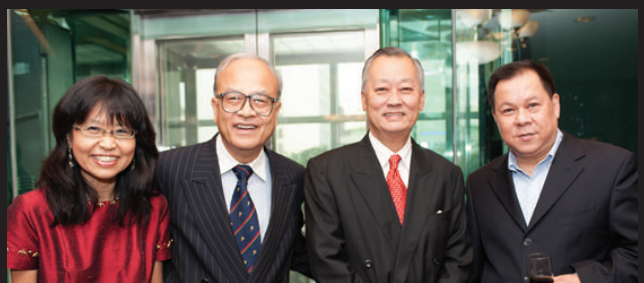
Catching up over dinner, from left: Tunku Iskandar, Group Executive Chairman, Melewar Group, Dato Azizan Noordin, Deputy Director General (Planning), Tourism Malaysia, and Yong Poh Shin, Managing Director, Royal Selangor Pewter.



Anthony Wong enjoys a reunion with old friends.



An iPad for the future and a Giant Picture from the past.



From left: Lee Ping and Azlan Hussain, Federal Hotel, Dato Eric Lim, Cititel and Willie Ooi, Gloria Hotels China.



From left: Hanley Chew, CEO, Hotel Integrations, Babin. Rebecca Wong, former Director of Marketing, Pelangi Beach Langkawi, and Boris Chang.



From left: Boris Chang, Babin, Argus Salim & Peter Mueller.







Cast Your Vote Now!

# Recognise the exemplary In the Asia-Pacific travel trade

The 24th Annual TTG Travel Awards 2013, Asia-Pacific's most prestigious annual travel industry awards, returns to honour the best organisations in the industry for their achievements and contributions.

We need to hear from you.

As a trade professional, you are the voice of the industry. Your opinions will help us discover which organisations have contributed to raising the industry's bar of excellence.

We ask that you take a few minutes to vote for your choices in the following form, or on our online voting form

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

Closing Date: 2nd August 2013

An event by:

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for buyers of premium travel and luxury meetings



Award Categories

1. **Travel Agency Awards**  
Winners in this category are decided by votes from industry suppliers.
- Best Travel Agency – Australia
  - Best Travel Agency – China
  - Best Travel Agency – Chinese Taipei
  - Best Travel Agency – Hong Kong
  - Best Travel Agency – India
  - Best Travel Agency – Indochina (Cambodia, Laos)
  - Best Travel Agency – Indonesia
  - Best Travel Agency – Japan
  - Best Travel Agency – Malaysia
  - Best Travel Agency – Singapore
  - Best Travel Agency – South Korea
  - Best Travel Agency – Thailand
  - Best Travel Agency – The Philippines
  - Best Travel Agency – Vietnam
  - Best Corporate Travel Agency
  - Best Online Travel Agency

2. **Travel Supplier Awards**  
Winners in this category are decided by votes from travel consultants and experts.

Airline Awards

- Best North American Airline
- Best European Airline
- Best Middle Eastern Airline
- Best South-east Asian Airline
- Best North Asian Airline
- Best China Airline
- Best Pacific Airline
- Best Regional Airline
- Best Asian Low-Cost Carrier

Hotels, Resorts, Serviced Residences & Spa Awards

- HOTEL Chains**
- Best Global Hotel Chain
  - Best Regional Hotel Chain
  - Best Local Hotel Chain
  - Best Hotel Representation Company
  - Best Luxury Hotel Brand
  - Best Mid-range Hotel Brand
  - Best Budget Hotel Brand

HOTELS – Individual Property

- Best Luxury Hotel
- Best Mid-range Hotel
- Best Budget Hotel
- Best Independent Hotel
- Best Boutique Hotel
- Best City Hotel – Bangkok
- Best City Hotel – Delhi
- Best City Hotel – Hanoi/Ho Chi Minh City
- Best City Hotel – Jakarta
- Best City Hotel – Hong Kong
- Best City Hotel – Kuala Lumpur
- Best City Hotel – Macau
- Best City Hotel – Manila
- Best City Hotel – Seoul
- Best City Hotel – Singapore
- Best City Hotel – Taipei
- Best City Hotel – Tokyo
- Best New City Hotel
- Best Airport Hotel

RESORTS – Individual Property

- Best Beach Resort
- Best Resort Hotel (Non-Beach)
- Best New Beach Resort
- Best Integrated Resort

SERVICED RESIDENCES

- Best Serviced Residence Operator

SPAS

- Best Spa Operator

BT-MICE Awards

- Best Airline – Business Class
- Best Business Hotel
- Best Meetings & Conventions Hotel
- Best BT-MICE City
- Best Convention & Exhibition Centre
- Best Convention & Exhibition Bureau

Travel Services Awards

- Best Airport
- Best GDS
- Best Cruise Operator
- Best NTO
- Best Theme Attraction

3. **Outstanding Achievement Awards**  
The winners in this category are decided by the TTG Asia editorial team.
- Travel Personality of the Year
  - Destination of the Year
  - Most Entrepreneurial Travel Company
  - Best Marketing & Development Effort

4. **Travel Hall of Fame**

The Travel Hall of Fame honours organisations that have won at least 10 consecutive times at previous editions of the TTG Travel Awards. These special award winners will be recognised at every TTG annual awards presentation ceremony. Votes for them will not be counted.

Inducted Travel Hall of Fame honoraries are:

- Singapore Changi Airport (2002)
- Singapore Airlines (2002)
- Hertz Asia-Pacific (2005)
- Royal Cliff Hotels Group (2006)
- Star Cruises (2008)
- Abacus International (2009)
- Silkair (2010)
- Lotte Tour (2011)

VOTING INSTRUCTIONS AND GUIDELINES

For Travel Agency and Travel Supplier Awards

1. Please use the correct voting form.

Voting Form A: Travel Agency Awards

For voting by hoteliers, airline staff, car rental companies, cruise operators, national tourism organisations, GDS companies and all other travel professionals (except travel consultants, tour operators and destination management companies).

Voting Form B: Travel Supplier Awards

For voting by travel consultants, tour operators and destination management companies only.

Online Voting Forms

You can opt to vote using our online form [www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards](http://www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards) instead.

2. Voting Criteria

Please refer to the voting criteria for **each category** and **title** to ensure that all judging is done on an equal basis.

3. Voting Rules

- Only one voting entry per person is allowed – using the voting form or online voting.
- All votes are confidential.
- Voting forms are published in TTG Travel Trade Publishing print titles and are available online at [www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards](http://www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards)

- No responsibility will be accepted by the organisers for voting forms lost, delayed or damaged in the post.
- There are no pre-nominated contenders for any voting awards.
- The results for TTG Travel Awards 2013 are final and no correspondence will be entertained.
- Voting forms will be tabulated and evaluated by an independent auditor in Singapore.
- The closing date is **2nd August 2013**.

4. Voting Form Submission

Completed voting forms are to be returned to:

SINGAPORE

Ms Lina Tan (TTG Travel Awards 2013)  
TTG Asia Media Pte Ltd  
1 Science Park Road #04-07 The Capricorn  
Singapore Science Park II  
Singapore 117528  
Tel: (65) 6395-7575 Fax: (65) 6536-0896

HONG KONG

Ms Carol Cheng (TTG Travel Awards 2013)  
TTG Asia Media Pte Ltd  
China.com Inc  
11/F ING Tower No. 308 Des Voeux Road  
Central Hong Kong  
Tel: (852) 2237-7272 Fax: (852) 2806-0646

VOTING FORM A: TRAVEL AGENCY AWARDS

**For voting by • Hoteliers • Airlines • Car rental companies • Cruise operators • National Tourism Organisations • GDS companies • All other travel professionals (except travel consultants, tour operators and destination management companies)**

VOTE ONLINE AT  
[www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards](http://www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards)

Criteria

Best **Travel Agency** in its respective category in terms of:

- Professionalism and excellence in staff.
- Best value-added services to client.
- Best use of computer technology applications to help improve efficiency and effectiveness in services provided to client.

1.	Best Travel Agency – <b>Australia</b>	
2.	Best Travel Agency – <b>China</b>	
3.	Best Travel Agency – <b>Chinese Taipei</b>	
4.	Best Travel Agency – <b>Hong Kong</b>	
5.	Best Travel Agency – <b>India</b>	
6.	Best Travel Agency – <b>Indochina (Cambodia, Laos)</b>	
7.	Best Travel Agency – <b>Indonesia</b>	
8.	Best Travel Agency – <b>Japan</b>	
9.	Best Travel Agency – <b>Malaysia</b>	
10.	Best Travel Agency – <b>Singapore</b>	
11.	Best Travel Agency – <b>South Korea</b>	
12.	Best Travel Agency – <b>Thailand</b>	
13.	Best Travel Agency – <b>The Philippines</b>	
14.	Best Travel Agency – <b>Vietnam</b>	
15.	Best <b>Corporate</b> Travel Agency	
	Best travel agency specialising in serving the needs of corporate travellers.	
16.	Best <b>Online</b> Travel Agency	
	Best online-based travel agency offering the most user-friendly and effective interface to meet client needs. This online travel agency must also boast the best sales and marketing network in terms of service innovation.	

VOTER INFORMATION	Name:		Passport no.:	
	Job title:		Company:	
	Address:			
	Country:			
	Telephone no.:		Fax no.:	
	Email:		Signature:	

Please refer to the next page for  
**VOTING FORM B:**  
**TRAVEL SUPPLIER AWARDS**

**VOTING CLOSES**  
**2nd August 2013**



# VOTING FORM B: TRAVEL SUPPLIER AWARDS

For voting by • Travel Consultants • Tour Operators • Destination Management Companies

## Airline Awards

### Criteria

- Best **airline** in its respective category in terms of:
- Providing the best service, network and schedules.
  - Most agent-friendly in terms of reservations, confirmations and commission payments.
  - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas, incentive programmes and servicing.

17. Best **North American** Airline  
Best airline based in North America operating Asia-Pacific routes.
18. Best **European** Airline  
Best airline based in Europe operating Asia-Pacific routes.
19. Best **Middle Eastern** Airline  
Best airline based in Middle East operating Asia-Pacific routes.
20. Best **South-east** Asian Airline  
Best airline based in Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, The Philippines, Singapore, Thailand or Vietnam operating Asia-Pacific routes.
21. Best **North Asian** Airline  
Best airline based in South Korea, Japan, Chinese Taipei, Macau or Hong Kong operating Asia-Pacific routes.
22. Best **China** Airline  
Best airline based in China operating Asia-Pacific routes.
23. Best **Pacific** Airline  
Best airline based in the Pacific operating Asia-Pacific routes.
24. Best **Regional** Airline  
Best airline based regionally operating Asia-Pacific routes.
25. Best **Asian Low-cost Carrier**  
Best airline based in Asia-Pacific that operates on a low-cost strategy.

## Hotels, Resorts, Serviced Residences & Spa Awards

### Criteria

- Best **Hotel Chain** in its respective category in terms of:
- Most consistent in products and services.
  - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas, incentive programmes and servicing.

- Best **Hotel/Resort/Serviced Residence/Spa** in its respective category in terms of:
- Best services and facilities.
  - Best range of value-added benefits.
  - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

### HOTEL CHAINS

26. Best **Global** Hotel Chain  
Best hotel chain operating a network of properties globally.
27. Best **Regional** Hotel Chain  
Best hotel chain operating a network of properties in the region.
28. Best **Local** Hotel Chain  
Best hotel chain operating a network of properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.
29. Best Hotel **Representation Company**  
Best company providing the most agent-friendly products and services and showing the best marketing effort in generating sales for member hotels via agents.
30. Best **Luxury** Hotel Brand  
Best hotel chain operating a network of luxurious properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.
31. Best **Mid-range** Hotel Brand  
Best hotel chain operating a network of mid-range properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.
32. Best **Budget** Hotel Brand  
Best hotel chain operating a network of economical properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.

### HOTELS – Individual Property

33. Best **Luxury** Hotel  
Best hotel catering to the upmarket traveller. This hotel must also boast the best visual appeal and ambience reflecting upmarket status.
34. Best **Mid-range** Hotel  
Best mid-range hotel catering to the traveller who seeks three- to four-star quality and comfort.
35. Best **Budget** Hotel  
Best hotel catering to the budget traveller.
36. Best **Independent** Hotel  
Best non-chain (ie not part of a network of properties) hotel.
37. Best **Boutique** Hotel  
Best small, fashionable and unique hotel.
38. Best **City** Hotel – **Bangkok**
39. Best **City** Hotel – **Delhi**
40. Best **City** Hotel – **Hanoi/Ho Chi Minh City**
41. Best **City** Hotel – **Jakarta**
42. Best **City** Hotel – **Hong Kong**
43. Best **City** Hotel – **Kuala Lumpur**
44. Best **City** Hotel – **Macau**
45. Best **City** Hotel – **Manila**
46. Best **City** Hotel – **Seoul**
47. Best **City** Hotel – **Singapore**
48. Best **City** Hotel – **Taipei**
49. Best **City** Hotel – **Tokyo**
50. Best **New City** Hotel  
Best city hotel that opened in 2012/2013.
51. Best **Airport** Hotel  
Best hotel – located within the vicinity of an airport – that caters to travellers in transit.

### RESORTS – Individual Property

52. Best **Beach** Resort  
Best resort located by a beach. This resort must also boast the best visual appeal and ambience reflecting local flavour.
53. Best **Resort** Hotel (Non-Beach)  
Best resort not located by a beach. This resort must also boast the best visual appeal and ambience reflecting local flavour.
54. Best **New Beach** Resort  
Best beach resort that opened in 2012/2013.
55. Best **Integrated** Resort  
Best hotel offering comprehensive accommodation, shopping, dining, entertainment and sports.

### SERVICED RESIDENCES

56. Best **Serviced Residence** Operator  
Best serviced property catering to mid- and long-term staying guests.

### SPAS

57. Best **Spa** Operator  
Best managed and operated spa or network of spas in the region.

VOTE ONLINE AT  
www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards

## BT-MICE Awards

### Criteria

- Best services and facilities catering specifically to the BT-MICE market.
  - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing the BT-MICE market.
  - Most desirable and attractive incentives and value added services to business travellers and MICE planners.
58. Best **Airline – Business Class**  
Best business class airline across the board.  
Refer to Airline Criteria.
59. Best **Business** Hotel  
Best hotel catering to the business traveller.  
Refer to Hotel Criteria.
60. Best **Meetings & Conventions** Hotel  
Best hotel catering to meeting and convention needs.  
Refer to Hotel Criteria.
61. Best **BT-MICE City**  
The city most friendly and desirable to business travellers and for MICE planners to host their events.
62. Best **Convention & Exhibition** Centre
  - Best facilities.
  - Best value for money.
  - Most flexible in catering to MICE planners.
  - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.
63. Best **Convention & Exhibition Bureau**
  - Most efficient, flexible and friendly in terms of response to enquiries and information.
  - Most effective in raising awareness of MICE at government and community levels.
  - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

## Travel Services Awards

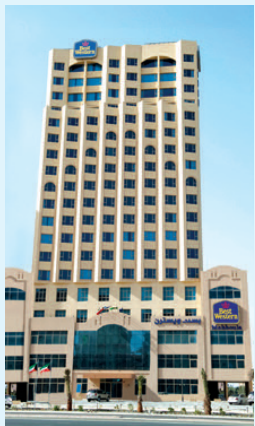
### Criteria

- Best product, services and facilities
  - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.
64. Best **Airport**
  - Best facilities.
  - Most user-friendly, efficient and hassle-free immigration.
  - Most organised baggage claim.
  - Best planned floor layout, with easy ground access.
65. Best **GDS (Global Distribution System)**
  - Most comprehensive network offering ease of operation and user friendliness.
  - Most efficient and reliable system.
66. Best **Cruise Operator**
  - Best product in terms of service, routes and schedules.
  - Best onboard programme and facilities.
  - Most agent-friendly in terms of reservations, confirmations and commission payments.
  - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas, incentive programmes and servicing.
67. Best **NTO (National Tourism Organisation)**
  - Most efficient, flexible and friendly in terms of response to enquiries and information.
  - Most effective in raising awareness of tourism at government and community levels.
  - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.
68. Best **Theme Attraction**
  - Best ambience.
  - Best facilities and services.
  - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

VOTER INFORMATION	Name:		Passport no.:	
	Job title:		Company:	
	Address:			
	Country:			
	Telephone no.:		Fax no.:	
	Email:		Signature:	

VOTING CLOSES  
2nd August 2013





## Best Western debuts in Kuwait

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

Best Western has launched its first hotel in Kuwait; the BEST WESTERN Mahboula.

Located in the Mahboula area of Kuwait City, home to modern corporate and residential complexes, the new 18-story hotel will feature 96 rooms with views across the glittering Arabian Gulf. All guest rooms, including 16 suites, feature complimentary internet access, while the property will also be a hub for the corporate market, with two dedicated floors of conference and banqueting space. These include a selection of meeting rooms and ballrooms, plus a modern business center.

For the leisure market the hotel offers a swimming pool and gymnasium, while a broad selection of food and beverage options are also on hand, including a restaurant, serving all-day international cuisine, a lobby lounge and poolside café.



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# We are family

Independent hotel groups are building alliances that gain them instant brothers and sisters in distant places. As with extended families, they look out for and share resources with one another. Here's a look at three such alliances and how agencies can tap on them

## Global Hotel Alliance (GHA)

By S Puvaneswary

### When it was formed

GHA will celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in March 2014.

### No. of members now

GHA is the world's largest alliance of independent hotel brands. It has 19 member brands covering nearly 350 hotels in more than 60 countries. The growth is expected to continue with a target of 500 hotels within the next five years.

GHA's member brands now comprise Anantara, Art Series, The Doyle Collection, First Hotels, Individual Collection, Kempinski, The Leela, Lungarno Collection, Marco Polo, Mokara, Omni, Pan Pacific, Parkroyal, QT, Rydges, Shaza, Tangram, Tivoli and its latest brand, Rixos Hotels.

### Why it is needed

Tim Davis, GHA's head of membership services, explained: "The alliance provides independent hotel brands with a network of like-minded hotels which, while strong in their local environment, need incremental revenues and cost savings in order to compete with the larger international chains. GHA uses a common technology platform to drive incremental revenues and create cost savings for our members."



Rixos The Palm Dubai, part of GHA

### Scope of alliance

Davis said: "Membership in the alliance offers cost savings in distribution and technology and incremental revenues through global preferred agreements with key consortia, sales offices in New York and London, partnerships with 15 airlines and a loyalty programme that provides rewards and recognition for travellers across all member brands."

### Achievements to date

One achievement is GHA Discovery, a loyalty programme launched in June 2010 which provides rewards and recognition for guests across all member brands. GHA Discovery now has more than three million members and provides "quantifiable incremental revenues to all brands", said Davis.

The programme is focused on giving members authentic, memorable experiences than the points-based system common among large international chains. Its Local Experiences reward members with a large selection of adventures not easily available to the general public.

GHA Discovery also offers benefits such as free Internet access, room upgrades, guaranteed room availability and local amenities.

### Future plans/alliance with other alliances

Said Davis: "An alliance exists to look after its members. As such, growth needs to be carefully planned to ensure philosophical as well as geographical fit. Nevertheless, GHA expects a target of 500 hotels within the next five

years as it expands its coverage globally."

### How travel agencies can tap on this alliance

Julia Schroeder-Mundell, GHA's shared services manager, explained: "Travel planners can reassure their clients that they don't have to stay in cookie-cutter accommodations and sacrifice their excitement of staying in a one-of-a-kind property for the security of predictable service levels.

"GHA is one point of contact to experience 19 individual brands. Each brand is the arm to the wider network and can assist agency specialists with request for proposals and meeting requests in their locality.

"GHA has an umbrella code 'GL' in the global distribution systems, which makes booking GHA hotels easy. This code is available for use by all travel experts using Worldspan, Amadeus, Sabre and Galileo."

The alliance also has an online course for travel experts. GHAspecialist.com is a platform for them to find out more about GHA's brands and their unique selling points. Upon successful completion of the online course, planners will have access to travel agency rates as well as special offers. In addition, all those who complete the course will automatically be enrolled in a monthly prize draw for an iPad mini.



## Luxury Lodges Of Australia

By Raini Hamdi

### When it was formed

January 2010 and launched in June 2010 as a membership association.

### Why it is needed

The Australian travel landscape has changed significantly in the past decade, explained Penny Rafferty, executive officer of Luxury Lodges of Australia.

The development of a number globally-lauded properties, such as the Southern Ocean Lodge, Emirates Wolgan Valley Resort and Spa, Qualia, The Louise, Bamurru Plains and Saffire, along with the rejuvenation under new ownership of properties like Lizard Island, El Questro Homestead and Longitude 131,

meant that for the first time, Australia had a critical mass of high-end, experience-focused lodges and camps. But perceptions of Australia were not in line with the quality of product available.

The group was thus formed to create a collective voice for high-end, experiential travel in Australia and to undertake marketing activity of these players to key global markets collectively.

### No. of members now

18

### How it works

Luxury Lodges of Australia is funded through annual membership fees paid by the lodges.

The board and management comprises five owners/representatives of the lodges, along with Rafferty, who is the sole employee of the alliance and

manages its marketing and other activities.

### Scope of alliance

Primarily a marketing initiative, although there is some word-of-mouth and shared information among the properties on staffing, resources and feedback to improve guest experiences.

Key areas of marketing activity are focused on website/SEM/SEO, attendance at key trade shows, facilitating other promotional activities for the group and producing and disseminating collective print materials.

### Achievements to date

Said Rafferty: "Certainly we have seen traction with the collective message in our key markets. The understanding that there are multiple, exciting and uniquely Australian itinerary options for upscale travellers has increased.

Travel and media partners are using Luxury Lodges of Australia as a central point of reference. And we are seeing guests travel to the lodges, and between the lodges, using us as a reference and benchmark for upscale Australian adventures."

### Challenges

Changing perceptions takes time and money. Said Rafferty: "Educating people about the depth, diversity and uniqueness of the high-end Australian experiences is vital to our mission, and challenging. Thankfully we have a great partnership with Tourism Australia which launched the first aspirational campaign for Australia last year."

### Future plans/alliance with other alliances

None at this stage in either case. "We're not about having more

and more members for the sake of growth. It is about showcasing the best of the best in Australia's diverse regions," said Rafferty.


### How travel agencies can tap on this alliance

Use it as a central point of reference for the new era of Australian high-end experiential travel.

There is a suite of tools for travel and media partners, most of which are on its website ([www.luxurylodgesofaustralia.com.au](http://www.luxurylodgesofaustralia.com.au)).

A range of suggested itineraries help kickstart tailored travel plans for clients. There is also a Family Friendly Lodges summary. Also available are brochures, videos and image libraries that are central for anyone promoting, planning or selling Australian luxury travel.

Trade and media partners are free to use any of this content.

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## Dorsett Hospitality International (Hong Kong) and Diamond Resorts International (US)

By Prudence Lui

### When it was formed

April 2013

### Why it is needed

The main purpose of this alliance for both parties is to increase sales from the respective feed markets into the respective travel destinations at a relatively low cost. The alliance also helps to increase brand awareness at both ends.

### Scope of alliance

The alliance helps Dorsett Hospitality International and its respective brands to be introduced to Diamond Resorts International's client base in North America and Europe (primarily the UK), and vice versa. Dorsett currently

does not have properties or any sales and marketing representation in these markets.

One of Diamond's core values is offering choice. Through the alliance, it widens the choice for guests, especially in key Asian destinations where Diamond is not represented.

### Achievements to date

According to Dorsett's senior vice president of sales & marketing Philip Schaetz, the alliance went live on May 19 and instantly delivered bookings to the Dorsett portfolio. Each destination where Dorsett is represented has a special feature on the Diamond Resorts website, delivering key information of each property to

travellers ([www.diamondresorts.com/Hong-Kong-Resorts](http://www.diamondresorts.com/Hong-Kong-Resorts))

### Future plans/alliances with other alliances

Already in existence is an alliance with Agora Hospitalities in Japan, where Dorsett and Agora cross-promote each other in their respective markets. Agora Hospitalities is also a key affiliate in Japan for Diamond.

The next phase of the Dorsett/Diamond alliance is to actively cross-promote each other on their respective sites to the FIT traveller. Agencies or travellers could book the best available rate for any hotel within the network globally. This function will be ready in the next two months.





# Far East plans to launch ARCH

By Raini Hamdi

Singapore-based Far East Hospitality (FEH) is planning to launch ARCH, an alliance of regional collaboration of hotel owners.

CEO Arthur Kiong said the plan was still in its early stages, with FEH studying who it could possibly partner. "We're looking at like-minded companies in

Hong Kong, Australia, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia which are strong in their home base but are seeking a platform to spread their wings and share resources."

Kiong envisioned that the owners could collaborate on operational processes and efficiencies, marketing, sharing talent across region and joint procurement, among others.

"In marketing, for example, 10 to 15 per cent of my inventory will never be used. If I can trade this inventory with an owner in, say, Indonesia, I could offer my customers in Singapore a resort experience in his resort and he could offer his customers a city experience in my hotels. Right now, I could only offer my customers stays in our other properties in Singa-



The Quincy Hotel

pore," he said.

FEH Management is Singapore's biggest hotels and residences operator. FEH's portfolio comprises eight hotels and 10 residences with a combined inventory of more than 3,500 units. Hotels in Singapore include The Quincy Hotel, Oasia Hotel, Village Hotel Changi, Orchard Scotts Residences and Orchard Parksuites.

## Preferred offers higher commissions

Travel agencies will earn a 15 per cent commission when they book Preferred Hotel Group's (PHG) members for stays through August 31. Bookings can be made via GDS under master chain code PV and search for Earn Extra in Asia Pacific. Participating hotels include:

### Preferred Hotels & Resorts

- Hotel Mulia Senayan, Jakarta, Indonesia
- The Landis Taipei, Taiwan

### Summit Hotels & Resorts

- Dong Fang Hotel, Guangzhou, China
- EAST Hotel, Hong Kong
- Harbour Grand Hong Kong
- Regal Airport Hotel Meeting & Conference Center, Hong Kong
- Regal Hongkong Hotel
- Parkyard Hotel Shanghai, China
- The Suryaa New Delhi, India
- The Zuri Whitefield Bangalore, Bengaluru, India

### Sterling Hotel

- Regal Oriental Hotel, Hong Kong

### Sterling Design Hotel

- The Fleming, Hong Kong

PHG recently launched its new brand websites ([www.PreferredHotelGroup.com](http://www.PreferredHotelGroup.com)) and introduced a mobile website allowing users to personalise their on-site experience and inspire them to book at its collection of more than 650 hotels in 85 countries.

The mobile channel features the same streamlined functionality, user-friendly booking tools and vibrant photography as the main site, making on-the-go travel planning easy and enjoyable.

The brand sites will be available in Japanese and German later this year.



The Landis Taipei, a PHG member

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Tourist arrival growth has slid to single digit; Singapore Changi Airport pictured here



Singapore Tourism Board

# Losing the attraction

Inbound tourist numbers are not growing fast enough, at least to fill excess rooms. By **Lee Pei Qi**

**Arrivals** While Singapore continued to see an upward march in visitor numbers and tourism receipts for 2012, growth had in fact dropped to a single digit. Some 14.4 million tourists arrived in Singapore last year, a nine per cent increase over 2011, while tourism receipts recorded S\$23 billion (US\$18.4 billion), a mere 3.6 per cent increase. In 2011, visitor arrivals and tourism receipts grew 13 and 17 per cent respectively.

China and Japan registered the most optimistic growth, as the number of tourists from these countries and the amount they spent saw double-digit growth during the first three quarters of 2012 over the same period in 2011, based on latest figures from the Singapore Tourism Board (STB). Visitor arrivals from China grew 23 per cent to 1.5 million, and arrivals from Japan climbed 17 per cent, with 554,000 visitors.

In light of the economic conditions, STB has made a conservative forecast of 14.8 to 15.5 million arrivals and tourism receipts of S\$23.5-24.5 billion for 2013.

**NTO** In view of slower

growth in tourist arrivals, Singapore's next phase of tourism growth would thus have to come from increasing the yield through visitor spend, rather than just visitor numbers.

Singapore's second minister for trade and industry, S Iswaran, said arrivals could not grow "indefinitely and sustainably" at the rates of recent years.

"Domestically, our land and manpower constraints mean we need to find new ways to do more with less," he said.

Hence, the new Kickstart Fund, which supports experimental lifestyle concepts with tourism potential, will help to sharpen Singapore's offerings in pursuit of quality growth. It offers grants of up to 50 per cent of qualifying costs per project, capped at a maximum of S\$75,000. Projects could range from art tours to live events.

**Cruises** Larger ships were previously unable to call at Singapore because the cable car attraction nearby Singapore Cruise Centre necessitated height restrictions. However, the birth of Marina Bay Cruise Centre Singapore has since allowed Singapore to cater to big-



"Domestically, our land and manpower constraints mean we need to find new ways to do more with less."

**S Iswaran**  
Singapore's second minister  
for trade and industry

ger cruise ships.

STB's director of cruise, Ong Huey Hong, said: "In 2012, Singapore saw more than a threefold increase in the number of maiden voyages to the city, compared to 2011. These maiden calls included the largest ships to ever home-port in Asia."

According to Ong, Singapore's cruise industry performance has been on an uptrend. From 2003 to 2012, cruise passenger throughput grew at a compound annual growth rate of 6.5 per cent. The cruise passenger throughput in 2012 was 907,000 with 332 ship calls.

**Access** Singapore Changi Airport welcomed the arrival of Golden Myanmar Airlines in April. The carrier operates daily services connecting Singapore via Yangon to Mandalay, a new city link for Singapore Changi Airport.

Also in the same month, Sichuan Airlines commenced twice-weekly services connecting Singapore to Nanning in China. This makes Singapore Changi Airport the most connected point in South-east Asia to China, with connections to a total of 24 Chinese cities.

**Hotels** After a lacklustre 4Q2012, Singapore's hotels are in for a challenging year with flat demand expected for 2013.

The OCBC Investment Research has forecast that Singapore's hotel room supply will grow at 5.8 per cent per annum, faster than the demand for rooms which is predicted to grow at 5.4 per cent per annum. The report stated that average length of stay per visitor was declining partially in reaction to the strong Singapore dollar, while the industry is facing potential oversupply in the medium term.

The report expects the industry to continue struggling to sustain margins given a tight labour market, higher operating costs, and the lack of near-term catalysts to prop up RevPAR.

According to STB, average room rates stood at S\$257 for 2012, a year-on-year increase of four per cent. Average occupancy rate, however, remained at 86 per cent. RevPAR of the hotels rose slightly to hit S\$257, up from S\$247 last year.

In order to drive up efficiency levels across all hotels, STB encourages the industry to leverage on technology and upgrade manpower facilities.



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# Revamp, re-engineer, refresh

Singapore steps up to meet the discerning visitor's demand for products with a difference. By **Lee Pei Qi**

AS SINGAPORE continues rolling out new attractions almost every other day, creating a pipeline of unique and innovative content is one of the priorities set for its tourism industry.

Singapore Tourism Board (STB) director of attractions, dining and retail, Ranita Sundramoorthy, said: "Singapore's tourism sector has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, and the addition of new attractions has generated renewed interest among travellers to revisit Singapore."

However, she highlighted that attractions need to be different to sell.

"Future attractions must be able to enhance Singapore's attractiveness as a leisure destination by offering unique, differentiated experiences that will appeal to the more discerning travellers," she said.

Current top attractions in Singapore include Resorts World Sentosa (RWS), Marina Bay Sands and Gardens by the Bay due to their fresh appeal.

RWS assistant communications manager, Clement Ng, said the opening of RWS since 2010 had been a "game-changer for the tourism industry". He said RWS had seen over 30 million visitors to date, and they were targeting 17 million visitors in 2013 alone.

According to Ng, RWS's competitive edge lies in their ability to present "unprecedented offerings", with the most recent example being the Marine Life Park which opened last November.

In their bid to touch the hearts of their visitors in the Marine Life Park, Ng said they had launched "immersive programmes", which included scuba diving and personal interaction with the sharks and dolphins.

As for Gardens by the Bay



New attractions roll out at a fast pace in Singapore

which opened last June, 4.5 million visitors have visited them to date.

Labelling the gardens as a horticultural-themed leisure destination, Peggy Chong, deputy chief executive officer, Gardens by the Bay, said: "Gardens by the Bay is unique because we combine the traditional elements of a garden with wow factors such as striking architecture, novel ways of presenting plants and innovative programming."

To ensure they do not attract just one-time visitors, Chong emphasises the importance of "continuous engagement" which they achieve by periodically changing the floral displays.

Travel consultants concur on the appeal of such novel offerings.

Judy Lum, group vice president of sales and marketing at Tour East Singapore said: "Thematic options such as flora and fauna give depth to what Singapore has to offer, and can attract traffic from the high-yield market, especially the more discerning travellers."

Chan Brothers Travel marketing and communications manager, Jane Chang, said: "Such new attractions will allow us to expand our offerings and cater to various segments of the market – drawing first-time, repeat and higher-yield travellers."



**Sundramoorthy: be unique, fresh**

more itineraries that are catered to discerning travellers", meaning less of the mass-market, single-day tours but more of those that offer "deeper immersion".

Association of Singapore Attractions (ASA) chairman, Kevin Cheong, agrees with STB's strategy. He said: "An attraction cannot be limited to what we want tourists to see; it should portray the lifestyle and social dwellings

that we want to share with our foreign friends.

"We should not merely promote tourism, we should invite tourists to celebrate tourism with us through our everyday lives and the Singapore lifestyle."

STB will also launch a series of workshops in July, which will see leading consultants engage with attraction players in master classes to develop more in-depth products.

While a myriad of new attractions continues to be injected into the tourism landscape, there is the danger that existing attractions might be left behind.

Michael Lee, director of Luxury Tours & Travel, said: "We see traffic from older existing attractions moving over to the new hot spots."

He cites the example of Mount Faber Park, which is one of the oldest parks in Singapore. The park used to be an attractive destination but now it is "almost forgotten".

STB's Sundramoorthy agrees that it is important for existing attractions to stay relevant and

to "regularly refresh their offerings".

Wildlife Reserves Singapore's (WRS) CEO, Lee Meng Tat, said WRS – which owns the Jurong Bird Park, Night Safari, Singapore Zoo and River Safari – makes a good example through its bid to "always progressively upgrade and revamp".

To create a new, immersive wildlife experience in the Jurong Bird Park which has been opened since 1971, Lee said they launched a new breeding and research centre last year to showcase what went on behind the scenes, from incubation to weaning.

Not wanting to be left behind as well, Night Safari opened a new Wallaby Trail last year, which immersed visitors in the nocturnal world of animals from the Australasian region.

ASA's Cheong said: "From a product standpoint, we need to reinvent and re-engineer the experiences we are delivering because it is no longer a 'one size fits all' equation, but a 'not all can fit one size' generation."



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Test drive

# Marine Life Park



Whether you choose a wet or dry experience, a fun time is guaranteed, reports *Gracia Chiang*

**WHY** Resorts World Sentosa's two latest attractions mean there are more reasons for clients to return or plan for longer stays. Said to be the world's largest oceanarium, the SEA Aquarium is home to 100,000 marine animals of over 800 species. The Adventure Cove Waterpark, on the other hand, will appeal to thrill-seekers with its six water slides and immersive experiences.

**WHAT** Starting from the Typhoon Theatre at the Maritime Experiential Museum, guests are taken on a multi-sensorial journey, with passengers 'transported' to the depths of the ocean amid a violent storm. The storyline is a clever one, as visitors are greeted by a shipwreck habitat in the SEA Aquarium as soon as the doors open.

Take a slow walk through 10 zones that range from the Strait of Malacca to the Arabian Sea, showcasing some 49 habitats. You will pass colourful reef fishes, giant spider crabs and electrifying sea jellies, but the highlight for me was watching the playful bottlenose dolphins, which were

showing off their diving prowess and frequently swimming up close. Despite the controversy over the dolphins, I must say the experience was educational.

I also sat down to admire the manta rays and sharks that call the Open Ocean Habitat home. With its over 8m tall and 36m wide viewing panel (it won a Guinness World Record for this), it is undoubtedly the centrepiece of the aquarium.

Also facing this underwater gallery are the 11 Ocean Suites, which offer the chance to sleep in the deep at a cool S\$2,400++ (US\$1,917++) a night. Their two-storey designs feature bedrooms with a sea-level experience, while living rooms open to an outdoor deck with a Jacuzzi. However, I found it odd that aquarium visitors were able to see silhouettes of guests when the curtains in the suite were not drawn.

One level above the SEA Aquarium is the Adventure Cove Waterpark. Unlike typical water parks, this one incorporates interactive marine life elements, such as being able to snorkel with 20,000 fishes and wading with rays, but the latter has an extra charge. There are also plans for shark feeding programmes in the future.

Those who miss Fantasy Island on Sentosa will also be glad to know there are six water slides, including a hydro-magnetic



Shark Seas showcases various jaw-dropping species

coaster that propels riders through climbs and drops in just 40 seconds. More subdued attractions include the wave pool at Bluwater Bay; Big Bucket Treehouse, where children can play with water squirts and scale a cargo net; as well as the lazy Adventure River that snakes through 14 environments.

**HOW** It is possible to include both the SEA Aquarium and Adventure Cove Waterpark in a day's itinerary, as the former can be covered in a few hours. There are also multi-park passes that offer the option of packaging Universal Studios Singapore.

Indoor and outdoor event venues at both parks are available for weddings, product launches or corporate functions, although most of the MICE bookings have been for the SEA Aquarium so far. Some of the clients that have held events

**Name** Marine Life Park  
**Rates** Separate one-day passes are needed for the SEA Aquarium and the Adventure Cove Waterpark, each priced at S\$29 for adults and S\$20 for children and seniors. A non-peak one-day pass to the aquarium includes admission to the Maritime Experiential Museum and Typhoon Theatre.  
**Contact details**  
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in the Ocean Gallery include Singapore Airlines (250-pax cocktail reception during its World Marketing Conference last November) and the Singapore Economic Development Board (200-pax dinner in February).

**VERDICT** Worth visiting at least once.

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Mr. Muhannad Qarouni, Journalist of Al Bayan Newspaper-UAE, receiving 'The Friends of Thailand Award 2013' from His Excellency, Mr. Somsak Pureesrisak, Minister of Tourism & Sports.



Mrs. Juthaporn Rerngronasa, Deputy Governor of International Marketing (Europe, Africa, Middle East and America) delivering a speech at the forum to trade buyers and sellers on 5 June.

### Thailand Travel Mart Plus Amazing Gateway To The Greater Mekong Subregion (TTM+): The Biggest Travel Business To Business Opportunity

With cooperation between the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and the Thai tourism industry, Thailand has the honour to be the host of the largest B2B event 'Thailand Travel Mart Plus Amazing Gateway to the Greater Mekong Subregion' (TTM+).

The event, first organised in 2001, has the uttermost objective to promote the tourism and service business

in Thailand and its Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) counterparts. Small and medium entrepreneurs (SMEs) have also been supported on the international stage with their products on offer. The major markets include Europe, South East Asia, Eastern Asia, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as emerging ones; such as, the CIS countries, Eastern Europe, Middle East, South America, and South Africa.

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Mr. Greg Richard, key speaker for "Bangkok Needs Repositioning through Creative Tourism Techniques and Implementation."



More than 75% of trade participants were satisfied with the business generated at TTM+ 2013.



Niche markets including Health & Wellness, Honeymoon & Wedding, Golf and Ecotourism were represented by 39 sellers.



The largest percentage of trade buyers at TTM+ 2013 came from the United Kingdom.



The Thailand pavilion at TTM+ 2013.



More than 700 trade buyers and sellers participated in TTM+ 2013.



The Great Mekong Sub-region was represented by 5 National Tourism Offices: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam and Yunnan (People's Republic of China).



Ecotourism – one of the most promoted tourism sectors at the event.



Trade delegates during their post-show visit to Tha-Sadid Market at the gateway to Laos, on 8-11 June.



Bangkok grapples with overcrowding as tourist arrivals continue to post remarkable growth

Tourism Authority of Thailand



# Coping with popularity

While Bangkok retains its destination shine, it has to better manage soaring arrivals. By **Greg Lowe**

**Arrivals** Bangkok arrivals increased by almost 25 per cent year-on-year to 5.9 million from January to April this year, according to statistics from the Thai Immigration Bureau.

China retained pole position as Thailand's top source country as visitors from the Middle Kingdom skyrocketed 97 per cent to a record 1.2 million – second only to 1.8 million arrivals from Europe, which recorded a relatively lacklustre growth of 9.6 per cent.

The other top five source markets were Japan (486,342, up 20.3 per cent), Russia (440,744, up 35.4 per cent), South Korea (304,900, up 17.8 per cent) and India (299,699, up 10.1 per cent).

Kasikorn Research Center is forecasting 19.2 million foreign tourist arrivals in Bangkok this year, up 11.3 per cent from the previous year, with related spending projected to grow by 10.1 per cent to 348 billion baht (US\$12.4 billion).

in Bangkok, extending the stay of tourists from Asia and South Pacific, and introducing these relatively immature source markets to emerging Thai destinations.

The Bangkok and Beyond strategy (see page 30) encourages Asian visitors to stay longer in Thailand by supplementing a trip in the capital with an excursion along one of the five promoted routes: Nakhon Nayok-Korat (Khao Yai), Ayutthaya-Ang Thong-Suphan Buri, Nakhon Pathom-Kanchanaburi, Amphawa-Hua Hin and Chanthaburi-Koh Chang.

TAT has teamed up with Campervan Thailand to promote self-drive holidays along the Khao Yai route to the Australian and New Zealander markets. However, the NTO admits the strategy is unlikely to resonate with travellers from mature markets such as Europe and North America, or shopping-focused and medical tourists from the Middle East.



**"Bangkok will see 6,000 new hotel rooms by 2014. For (travel experts) and guests alike, this will ensure the destination remains competitive and offer great value."**

**Andrew J Wood**  
President  
Skål International Thailand

tel Sukhumvit Bangkok (177 rooms), Bangkok Marriott Hotel Sukhumvit (296 rooms) and Mercure Bangkok Siam (189 rooms). Opening later this year is the 280-room Hilton Sukhumvit Bangkok, while the 222-room Park Hyatt Bangkok will debut early next year as part of the up-scale Central Embassy project.

Research by Colliers International Thailand estimates an additional 1,816 luxury and upper-scale rooms will come online this year, bringing the segment's total inventory up from 18,846 to 20,662, with an additional 440 rooms at midscale properties. This will mark the second biggest annual increase in room inventory since 1995, after last year's 3,171 new rooms, according to the report.

Bangkok hotels saw average occupancy of 70-75 per cent from March to April, dipping from 80-85 per cent in the first two months of 2013, according to the Thai Hotels Association.

**Access** Vietnamese LCC VietJetAir launched Bangkok as its first international destination with a daily service from Ho Chi Minh City on February 10, followed by a daily Hanoi-

Bangkok flight on June 1.

Jetstar Asia will add eight more weekly flights totalling 2,800 seats between Bangkok and Singapore from July 8, while THAI Smile started operating five weekly flights to Mandalay since March 31. Norwegian Air Shuttle has started its low-cost, longhaul flights from Oslo to Bangkok on June 23.

Airports of Thailand plans to invest 10 billion baht (US\$320 million) to renovate Don Mueang International Airport, which is now promoted as a LCC hub to relieve pressure at the overcrowded Suvarnabhumi International Airport. However, airline alliance oneworld has warned Thai authorities that ditching its former single-airport policy and repositioning Don Mueang as an international airport would hamper connectivity in the city.

**Events** The 14<sup>th</sup> World Gourmet Festival will take place at Four Seasons Hotel Bangkok from September 2-8. Bangkok's 15<sup>th</sup> International Festival of Dance & Music will bring a worldwide cast of performers to Thailand Cultural Centre from September 13 to October 15.

**NTO** Surging arrivals and group tours, mainly from China and Russia, have spurred Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) to devise a threefold strategy aimed at reducing overcrowding

**Hotels** Bangkok has seen a number of notable openings in the first half of 2013, including Best Western Premier Sukhumvit (145 rooms), DoubleTree by Hilton Ho-



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# Spreading out tourist footfalls

**1 What is the Bangkok and Beyond strategy and why was it launched?** Bangkok and Beyond is the Tourism Authority of Thailand's (TAT) new strategy targeting visitors from Asia and South Pacific. The campaign seeks to encourage travellers to explore a number of culturally and ecologically significant destinations outside of Bangkok, all of which can be reached within a few hours' drive from the capital. The five routes are: Nakhon Nayok-Korat (Khao Yai), Ayutthaya-Ang Thong-Suphan Buri, Nakhon Pathom-Kanchanaburi, Amphawa-Hua Hin and Chanthaburi-Koh Chang. The main reasons are to alleviate overcrowding in Bangkok, to encourage Asian tourists to lengthen their stay by exploring destinations within easy reach of the capital and to re-energise the tourism markets along the promoted routes, which are popular weekend getaways for Bangkokians but see little business during weekdays.

**2 What is being done to promote these destinations?** The strategy was piloted

in November 2012 when TAT organised a familiarisation trip for some 200 international travel consultants to test the Khao Yai route. TAT deputy governor for international marketing Asia and South Pacific, Sansern Ngaurungsri, said: "We received very positive responses from the (consultants) and are now promoting the Khao Yai route throughout the Asian market, along with the rest of the routes." He added: "Khao Yai's a very popular (weekend) destination for Thais, but during the week we have plenty of rooms and facilities, first-class hotels and very good shopping. The route also has beautiful scenery and a pristine environment." Bangkok and Beyond was promoted during Thailand Travel Mart Plus (TTM+) 2013 earlier this month, however, there were delays in completing the sales kit for consultants, which according to TAT would be available in July. The NTO will also target travel consumers via social media campaigns but its budget is not big enough to cover advertising. However, some overseas TAT of-



Tourism Authority of Thailand

Khao Yai National Park

**Nakhon Nayok-Korat** Khao Yai National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is well-known for its abundant flora and fauna, in particular as a key nesting site for great hornbills. Other attractions include Farm Chokchai, a working dairy farm with restaurants, accommodation and agro tours, as well as PB Valley Khao Yai Winery, part of a 320-hectare plantation offering wine-tasting tours with stunning views.

**Ayutthaya-Ang Thong-Suphan Buri** The ancient capital of Siam until it was sacked by the Burmese in 1767, Ayutthaya is one of Thailand's five World Heritage Sites, home to impressive ruins and temples. Travellers can stop at Wat Muang in Ang Thong and make merit at the tallest Buddha image in Thailand, which stands at 92m. The Dragon Descendants Museum in Suphan Buri showcases the history of China and the role played by the Thai-Chinese community in the country.

**Nakhon Pathom-Kanchanaburi** After stopping off at Phrapathom

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Checking in

## Four Points by Sheraton Bangkok

Aside from its strategic location, the hotel appeals to *Xinyi Liang-Pholsena* with its upbeat design, well-appointed rooms and specialty beer bar

**LOCATION** Tucked away in a soi about 100m from the buzzing Sukhumvit Road, Four Points by Sheraton Bangkok, Sukhumvit 15 is conveniently located a five-minute walk from the Asok skytrain station and Sukhumvit subway station. Shopping malls like Terminal 21 and Robinsons are located in the immediate neighbourhood, while just a five-minute walk away are Bangkok's Korea town, Nana's (Sukhumvit Soi 11) myriad nightspots and bars, and ample cafes and restaurants. The Queen Sirikit Park and National Convention Centre is situated less than 10 minutes away, while Suvarnabhumi airport is a 40-minute drive away.

**ROOMS** A soothing palette of beiges and brownS greeted me when I entered my allocated Comfort Room, measuring an expansive 32m<sup>2</sup>, which also came with a spacious bathroom.

Framed black and white portraits of Bangkok's skyline and northern Thai hill-tribes add local flavour to the contemporarily designed quarter. A 32-inch smart LCD TV featuring both Internet and cable TV stations allows road warriors to alternate between entertainment and work. The spacious work station has a plush armchair that allows one to sit comfortably or even take a short nap. I had a good night's sleep on the cosy bed with down pillows.

**F&B** The Eatery, the all-day dining restaurant on the ground floor, offers a cheery start to the day when one tucks into the breakfast buffet spread. The glass-clad, high-ceiling interior affords an airy feel while the open kitchen, where the cooking team bustles, serves up various aromas and a convivial vibe.

Facing the soi, the Wrapped deli-style café is an ideal spot from which to observe street happenings while enjoying coffee and light dishes like gourmet paninis.

Open from 15.00 to midnight, the BeerVault stocks over 100 international beer labels (97 bottled beers, six beers on tap and several handcrafted beer cocktails) making it a great venue for post-din-



Tourism Authority of Thailand has rolled out a new strategy to boost travel beyond Bangkok, but stronger marketing is still needed to raise awareness among the trade and foreign visitors alike. By **Greg Lowe**



Amphawa Floating Market



Koh Chang

Chedi, the world's tallest stupa at 127m, in Nakhon Pathom, travellers can journey on to Kanchanaburi, made famous by the film classic *Bridge on the River Kwai*. The Kanchanaburi War Cemetery and nearby Thailand-Burma Railway Museum are must-visits for those interested in World War II history, while Erawan National Park will interest nature lovers.

**Amphawa-Hua Hin** Amphawa Floating Market is best explored early in the morning, however, people wanting to make a day of it should stay for the firefly tours that operate in the early evenings.

Before arriving in Hua Hin, where families can enjoy a day at the Black Mountain Water Park, be sure to stop at Maruekhatayawan Palace, a seaside teak residence built for King Rama VI in 1923.

**Chanthaburi-Koh Chang** Chanthaburi is popular for tours of local gem mines and fruit farms. It also boasts Thailand's largest cathedral, a rare example of gothic architecture in the country built by the local Vietnamese-Christian community. A visit to Koh Chang, Thailand's second largest island, would not be complete without a trip to the 650km<sup>2</sup> marine national park.

fices may run their own above-the-line promotions.

**3 What does the trade think of the new strategy?** No travel operator or consultant that *TTG Asia* spoke to during TTM+2013 had heard of the strategy; further enquiries post-show also revealed a similar story.

Industry leaders like Sisdivachr Cheewarattanporn, president of the Association of Thai Travel Agents, and Suthipong Pheunphiphop, president of the Thai Travel Agents Association, were both unaware of the Bangkok and Beyond strategy.

The strategy has also received mixed reviews among travel specialists. Franz Dobersberger, managing director of A&F Tour Travel, an inbound tour operator dealing with the Asian market, did not think the campaign would be particularly popular with Asian tourists.

"Only a limited amount of clients are interested in Amphawa. Kanchanaburi already has a lot of day trippers. Ayutthaya is already popular for day tours," he remarked. "Koh Chang could be

interesting for people looking for a quiet beach getaway. Hua Hin might be interesting for families or people who do not want to see all the bars and nightlife Pattaya offers."

Dobersberger thought the

**"(Hong Kongers) like to get to the destination on the same day and don't want to spend too much time on the road."**

**Samson Pang**  
Managing director,  
Sun N Sea Holidays

idea of educating the Asian market about other Thai destinations was a good strategy, and added that trade familiarisation trips would be the best approach to reach out to tour operators.

Samson Pang, managing director of Hong Kong-based Sun N Sea Holidays, which runs tours to Thailand, shared simi-

lar views. "For most Hong Kong people, trips to Thailand mainly focus on a short break. They're not really into culture," he said.

"Personally, I like to explore but our guests are not so adventurous. They like to get to their destination on the same day and don't want to spend much time on the road. That's Hong Kong style."

**4 What other marketing efforts are there?** Hoteliers are aware of Bangkok and Beyond, according to Surapong Techaruvichit, president of the Thai Hotels Association.

He said: "We have been working closely with TAT to help promote these destinations outside of Bangkok.

"It's very important that we encourage tourists to go outside of Bangkok, especially Chinese groups. The city is getting very crowded and our members have a lot of great products upcountry that we are confident will be attractive (to Asian visitors)."

Surapong said that member hotels would be developing new promotions but did not give specific details.

# kok, Sukhumvit 15



ner drinks or business discussions.

For cocktails, head to the poolside am-Bar on the eighth floor – the laid-back atmosphere, specialty cocktails and 360-degree views more than make up for the venue's lack of height in a city dotted with rooftop bars.

**FACILITIES** A business centre with Apple computers is located in the lobby, while complimentary Wi-Fi Internet is available throughout public areas. Despite its whimsical name, Pinwheel on the ground floor is a function room with ample natural lighting and a divisible 207m<sup>2</sup> space.

Nestled on the eighth-floor rooftop of the Garden Wing is Breeze, an air-conditioned, glass-enclosed indoor space with a retractable roof that opens to the Garden Terrace. The combined 472m<sup>2</sup> area can hold up to 400 people, and is suitable for product launches, cocktail receptions and even BBQ parties. The 24-hour gym is located just beside Breeze on the same floor.

**Name** Four Points by Sheraton Bangkok, Sukhumvit 15  
**No. of rooms** 249 rooms and 19 suites  
**Rate** 3,200++ baht (US\$103) per night for a Comfort Room, including breakfast for one and Internet  
**Contact details**  
Tel: (66-2) 309-3000  
Email: sales.sukhumvit15@fourpoints.com  
Website: www.fourpointsbangkoksukhumvit.com

Come early evenings, the rooftop pool with its iconic red-light structure is an enjoyable spot to chill out, whether for swimming laps or idle poolside lounging.

The hotel's six-seater tuk tuk offers shuttles to the train stations – a lifesaver on rainy days – and corporate offices in the vicinity.

**VERDICT**  
A hotel that punches well above its mid-range price tag.

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