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A fair future?



An aerial view of NATAS Travel 2013

A declining footfall at the two main consumer travel fairs in Singapore, Travel and Holiday, over the past three years has thrown a question mark on the future of fairs.

Attendance at Travel 2013 and Holiday 2013, both organised by the National Association of Travel Agents Singapore (NATAS), saw their deepest drops in the last three years of 15 per cent and five

per cent respectively. Sales volumes at each show also declined by about S\$10 million (US\$7.9 million) in 2013, compared with 2012.

Tudor Coman, CEO of Floccations, a Singapore-based meta-search for travel packages, charged that the NATAS fairs are “no longer effective” and are not giving the ROI they used to. And while large players such as Chan

Brothers and Dynasty Travel can still afford to participate, the small- and medium-sized agencies “just don’t see the value” and are finding new channels to acquire customers, he said.

He asked: “Why would a consumer go through the headache of a travel fair when he can search the same deals online?”

Coman may have vested interest in expounding the view that fairs are doomed, but he may also have a point. Floccations showcases some 9,000 package deals from Singapore agencies, many of the firms SMEs, and Coman claimed the site gets the same traffic as a NATAS fair every day. This traffic neither needs to go to the exhibition centre for the show nor pay its entrance fees.

Vikram Malhi, Expedia’s general manager, South-east Asia, India and Greater China, Expedia echoed the sentiment: “With online travel agents, consumers have access to deals year-round instead of having to wait twice a year for travel fairs.”

— Read the full analysis on pages 2-3



No airs about her

Down-to-earth Marianne Hontiveros is possibly Asia’s only female CEO, president and shareholder of an airline.

But she’s also an activist, journalist, TV host and environmentalist, says **Rosa Ocampo** — see page 9

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Competing on fair gro

Will consumer travel fairs – an important source of cashflow and a key marketing tool for travel agencies – come undone by competition from online portals? Raini Hamdi, Paige Lee, Mimi Hudoyo and S Puvaneswary investigate

A regional director of an established outbound travel brand which targets a slightly more upmarket clientele said sales from travel fairs in Singapore are down, although the company's overall sales are up. As a result, the firm is evaluating whether it is worth participating. Over in Indonesia, however, the source noted that sales at fairs are thriving (see box below), but in Malaysia, its GSA makes more sales at the office than at the main fair organised by the Malaysian Association of Tour & Travel Agents (MATTA).

That however is just one agency's experience. Going by visitorship and booth numbers it provides, the twice-yearly MATTA Fair in Kuala Lumpur is still hugely popular. But the leading, eponymous Virtual Travel Fair (VTF) organised by Smart Online Travel Assistant (SOTA) and co-hosted by *The Star Online*, the digital unit of Star Publications, is making inroads into the market, thanks to growing awareness of the fair, consumer adoption of online technology and the introduction of mobile application for Android operating systems last year.

Like the MATTA Fair, VTF, which debuted in April 2011, runs twice-yearly, but unlike MATTA, SOTA does not charge members – hotels, licensed agencies and attractions – a fee to trade their deals during the fair to consumers, predominantly Malaysians but also Filipinos, Indonesians, Hong Kong residents and Middle Easterners, according to SOTA's chief marketing officer, Joanna Liao. VTFs in the past ran from six to 14 days. The first, in April 2011, saw 6,108 unique visitors; by the fourth VTF in September 2012, this rose to 63,381 visitors, and 70,113 in March 2013, SOTA claimed.

This is closing in on MATTA Fair's 100,000 visitors in March 2013, although VTF's seller participation is paltry at 70 agencies and 153 hotels, compared with MATTA Fair's 1,094 booths in March 2013.

Aside from being open 24/7 and hassle-free – going to Putrajaya for the MATTA Fair can be a nightmare because of heavy traffic – consumers are also offered gimmicks such as a Lowest Price Guarantee, online contests and e-auctions.




Nazarin Chik Abu Hassan, development manager, Honey Vacation Travel and Tours, said sales from MATTA Fair currently is much bigger, around RM500,000 (US\$152,625) to RM1 million, than

Fairs thrive in Indonesia

Indonesia has seen a growing number of fairs in the last five to seven years, organised by a consortium of tour companies, airlines or travel associations.

Shows such as Indonesia Travel and Holiday Fair (ITHF), ASTINDO Travel Fair, Garuda Indonesia Travel Fair and ASITA (Association of the Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies) Travel Fair came up in Jakarta in the last few years, some of them held annually, others twice-yearly.

In the early days, outbound travel fairs



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VTF’s RM50,000 to RM100,000. Consumers at MATTA Fair tend to buy full-board packages to medium and longhaul destinations, while VTF customers tend to be younger and have tighter budgets.

“Thus, we sell Europe, South Korea and Japan at MATTA Fair, and mainly domestic and regional tour packages at VTF.

“In future, we believe online fairs will catch on in Malaysia.”

Michael Low, assistant manager business development, AF Travel, also believed online travel fairs will gain momentum in the future. But now, “MATTA Fair brings in better sales, and a spectrum of shoppers from budget to high-end”, he said.

Not alarming

Consequently, the alarm bells aren’t ringing at either NATAS or MATTA.

National Association of Travel Agents Singapore (NATAS) COO, Anita Tan, said visitorship alone is not an accurate measure of a fair’s success. She said: “The travel fair dates may clash with the festive season or other consumer events that are happening during that period; an economic downturn may also cause consumers to be more prudent with their expenditure.

“Looking at sales volumes and visitor numbers, the average expenditure per visitor has grown over the years. This means that NATAS fairs are in fact attracting a growing number genuine buyers, and that consumers are spending more on their holidays to longhaul destinations.”

In a rebuttal to online players’ views that fairs are losing ground, Tan said: “They are assuming that our fairs are nothing more than deals and discounts. In fact travel consultants are on site to offer a great deal more services such as helping customers buy travel insurance and making recommendations on how to customise various aspects of a travel package.”

Hamzah Rahmat, president of MATTA, said MATTA Fair is like a carnival, where families enjoy performances and not just browse offerings and make purchases. At press time in February, there was a waiting list of 77 booths for the fair this month (March) due to space constraints. “For the September fair, we taking four halls at Putra World Trade Centre, instead of three as in the March fair,” said Hamzah.

MATTA is also looking to give participation priority to its members over non-members such as airlines and foreign national tourism organisations.

Anthony Chan, group managing direc-



The crowd at ASTINDO Travel Fair in Indonesia

tor, Chan Brothers Travel, Singapore said: “While an online medium is handy for offering basic travel products such as flight, accommodation or vehicle rental, more complex travel products require detailed and lengthy elaboration from dedicated face-to-face personnel.

“Many customers also still want the more personal touch, reassurance of physical customer service staff, payment security and support in an emergency or after-sales service.”

Besides, the divide between online and offline is gray. “Up to 40 per cent of transactions at our retail offices and travel fairs are generated from online enquiries, eventually being closed over-the-counter due to complexity of the products,” he said.

Sheryl Lim, regional director of Asia, Insight Vacations, said travel fairs and roadshows account for 15-20 per cent of the company’s revenue and provide an avenue to create branding and to connect face-to-face with their target audience.

For consumers, it’s “a great platform” to discover various travel offerings and ideas for the next vacation, all under one roof, particularly for those who prefer a personal touch, are less tech-savvy and are time-short.

“A travel consultant is not just a middleman. He offers his expertise in managing complex itineraries and assists with visa submissions, change of travel plans, refunds, cancellations and rebooking,” she reminded.

Agreeing, Richard Yip, director of tour sales and product development, S Travel, said: “The NATAS fair may have lost some ground in terms of the number of visitors

NATAS fairs (bi-annual)

	Visitors	Exhibitors	Sales volume (Estimate, in Singapore dollars)
Travel 2013	53,344	160	\$85 to 90 million
Travel 2012	62,871	158	\$100 million
Travel 2011	65,717	161	\$90 million
Travel 2010	62,190	165	\$63 million
Holiday 2013	62,744	160	\$95 to \$100 million
Holiday 2012	65,822	171	\$108 million
Holiday 2011	67,051	160	\$100 million
Holiday 2010	70,469	165	\$85 million

Source: National Association of Travel Agents Singapore



Coman (above) asserts fairs are dying. Tan and Chan said – rubbish.

but it remains the number one choice for consumers who want to seek the best deals all under one roof. Travel fairs are essential for us as they help us to enhance our company’s branding, showcase our travel products to all consumers and, so far, we have managed to canvass a good portion of our annual revenue through them.”

Nevertheless, to ensure travel fairs continue to have a firm foothold, more value-add must be provided for the visitors.

Insight Vacations’ Lim said: “Travel fairs can be more than a place just for

travel bargains; it can be a showcase of new destinations and new travel concepts. For instance, travel experts can be invited to the fairs to share their experiences and expertise.”

S Travel’s Yip added: “Prices (at travel fairs) must also be more transparent, showing customers the cancellation fees and service charges they incur.”

(Ed’s Note: This article was written before the NATAS Travel 2014. At press time, figures for the fair were not available.)

were designed to grab a bigger piece of the high season pie, but Indonesia’s economic instability in the late 1990s and early 2000s had inspired tour companies and airlines to come up with cheap low-season packages to attract travellers. This worked so well that now “there is a market for every season”, said RajaMICE CEO, Panca Sarungu.

Rising disposable incomes and the entry of financial institutions that allow travellers to pay by instalment with their credit cards further boost the business.

ASTINDO Travel Fair last year attracted 63,000 visitors with a total transaction of Rp73 billion (US\$5.3 million) over three days. Of the total sales, 70 per cent was outbound. This year, the fair’s organising committee chairman Anto Haditono targets 65,000

visitors and Rp85 billion in sales.

Garuda’s fair last year attracted some 60,000 visitors with a total transaction of Rp60 billion.

Panorama Group’s managing director, Rama Tirtawisata, said: “Travel fairs change travel behaviours. In the past travellers determine holiday dates and look for available packages, now they plan their holidays (especially short breaks) based on the best deals, which are usually found in travel fairs. In fact, they may not even plan to travel but the deal is so good they buy the package and work on a leave.”

Bernard Akili, vice president marketing and product development, Smiling Tour, said: “Indonesians love deals, so promotional packages, instalment payments with zero

interest from banks, plus cashback offers during the show really work.

“On top of that, BCA Bank now offers a zero interest instalment (plan) on overseas shopping to its credit card holders.” About 70 per cent of Smiling’s total sales last year were for the low season period.

Panorama Group’s own travel fair, World of Panorama, which primarily targets year-end holidays, last year contributed a third of group tour business for December last year, said Panorama Tours managing director of Leisure Travel Management, Meity Monica Lukito.

Travel fairs now do not only take place in Jakarta but in other big cities around the country, thanks to the growing middle-class society and improved accessibility to these places.

ITHF has branched out to cities such as Bandung and Makassar; Garuda’s fair is now held in nine cities including Sumatra, Java, Bali and Nusa Tenggara; and ASTINDO’s fair this year will be held in Jakarta and Surabaya.

ASITA Travel Fair, launched in Jakarta in 2012, was held in four cities last year. This year, it will be held in nine cities including Pekanbaru, Palembang, Semarang and Balikpapan. The events are organised by RajaMICE.

Said RajaMICE’s Sarungu: “People with buying power are no longer centralised in cities like Jakarta and Surabaya. More people in the various regions now can travel, thanks to improved accessibility in the country.” – Mimi Hudoyo



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Scams and traps

Rising tourist scams and accidents add woe to Thai travel trade.

By **Greg Lowe**

Thailand's image as a safe and secure destination for international visitors is being tarnished by an increase in reports of crime targeting foreign tourists and a spate of road, rail and boating accidents over the past year or so.

Travel operators said while the country has always had a poor transport safety record – it has the second highest incidence of road deaths per capita in the world – the rise in accidents involving tourists is a serious concern. More worrying is the spike in number of crimes targeting foreign visitors, which range from scams to violent robberies and even murder.

Traditionally, the travel trade prefers to stay quiet on the issue. As a senior executive at a regional DMC, speaking on condition of anonymity, said: "Most people in the industry won't want to talk about it because everyone wants to promote an image of Thailand as a safe, secure and welcoming destination."

That changed in November when several coach accidents involving Russian tourists happened over a couple of weeks, at least one of which was fatal. As a direct result, the Russian Union of the Travel Industry issued a letter to the director of Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)'s Moscow office, demanding that Thai authorities take immediate action to improve the safety of Russians visiting the kingdom or face cancellations from the association's 5,000-plus members.

According to people familiar with the Russian market, this unprecedented warning was met by inaction from TAT (which also did not respond to questions on the matter from *TTG Asia*) and the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, to which the letter was addressed.

Kubilay Atac, general manager of Pegas Touristik Thailand, the main player in the local Russian market and one of the largest inbound operators in the kingdom, would not comment directly on the issue. He did say, however, that general security of his clients was a prime concern.

Russian visitors are common targets of criminals and conmen in crime hotspots such as Phuket and Pattaya. In a recent case, local media reported in late January a jet-ski rental company acting in

Raini Handi



Above, the latest fad in Samui. In Pattaya, a recent scam saw a jet-ski rental company acting in collusion with municipal officers to extort money from Russian tourists

collusion with two municipal officers had extorted 113,000 baht (US\$3,473) from five Russians tourists in Pattaya for allegedly damaging the jet-skis they hired.

Kubilay said although the incident in question did not involve Pegas' customers, it was indicative of a general trend for tourists to be ripped off by scam artists operating with seeming impunity.

"When problems happen they are communicated instantly," he said. "If authorities do not address the issue it will have a huge effect on (Russian tourism) business in Thailand."

tourists visit the kingdom without having any significant problems, authorities are unlikely to tackle problems that do exist unless the travel trade collaborates and applies more pressure, said Andre van der Marck, general manager, Khiri Travel Thailand.

"We should make a difference by speaking out more on the subject," he said.

According to the UN World Health Organization's *Global Status Report on Road Safety 2013*, Thailand has the second worst road safety record in the world after Niue, an island in the South Pacific. That year the

"We can't make the problem go away completely, but we can normally help negotiate the 'fine' down (in the case of jet-ski scams)."

Kubilay Atac

General manager, Pegas Touristik Thailand



Pegas has put contingencies in place to protect its clients. "We tell them to call us on a special number if they have problems," said Kubilay. "We'll immediately send staff to help them. We can't make the problem go away completely, but we can normally help negotiate the 'fine' down from tens of thousands of baht to a couple of thousands (in the case of jet ski scams)."

Commentators put the general lack of response from police and other authorities down to corruption and complacency. But it has been shocking in some high-profile cases, such as the case of seven tourists who died after staying at The Downtown Inn in Chiang Mai in 2011. Some analysis blamed the use of pyrophorus, a pesticide, in the property, which was owned by a former city mayor. To date no one has been held responsible for the deaths and the property has been demolished.

While the vast majority of

kingdom had 13,365 reported fatal road traffic accidents from a global total of 1.2 million – equivalent to about 38.1 road deaths per 100,000 population.

It's not only the roads that seem risky. There were 13 train derailments on Thailand's northern tracks alone from January to September last year, according to *Bangkok Post*, and 114 accidents across the network within that period.

Pornthip Hirunkate, a vice president at the Tourism Council of Thailand, said all stakeholders, especially the authorities, have a responsibility to help improve the situation. "It is imperative that Thai authorities enforce all the relevant terms and conditions pertaining to the licensed operators," she said. "We would like to see frequent checks in order that everyone operates within the conditions set out by the licence/permits – which in turn ensures security and safety for all concerned."

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Tourism Data

Malaysia's tourism industry performed above expectations in 2013. Tourism receipts of RM65.4 billion (US\$19.9 billion) exceeded the initial target of RM65 billion, and grew 8.1 per cent from RM60.6 billion in 2012. Tourist arrivals also grew 2.7 per cent to 25.7 million compared to 25 million in 2012. According to Malaysia's minister of tourism and culture, Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz, average tourist spending per capita also rose from 2012's RM2,419.10 to RM2,544.90

Hot Deals

Hong Kong Tourism Board is offering passengers of *SuperStar Virgo* (below) discounts for eight tourist attractions, including Hong Kong Disneyland, Ocean Park and Ngong Ping 360, when it homeports there for six months from April; Bagan Lodge Myanmar's *Family Escape* for two adults and two kids offers a cultural experience, two nights in a Deluxe Room, breakfast and airport transfers. Package starts from US\$300 including taxes and service charge for stays from March 15 to October 14

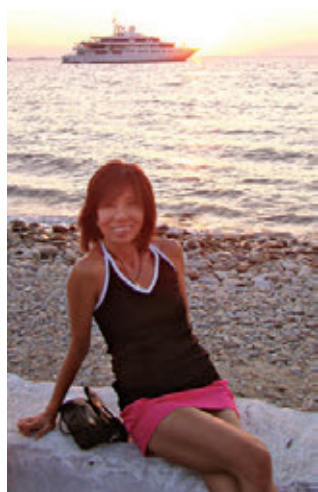


Hot Moves



Rudy Luminkewas has been appointed CEO of Lion Air; Anthony Ross (left) is Preferred Hotel's new executive vice president for APMEA; Guy Van der Schoot has been promoted to the role of group sales director of Exotissimo Travel; Simon Zhang is now CEO of Jin Jiang International Hotels

Fair chance to sell relevance



But consumer travel fairs need not reach saturation point – if they think up ways to enlarge the market by employing new tricks.

Raini Hamdi
Senior Editor

[Signature]

In a market like Singapore, consumer travel fairs may have reached saturation point, given that the market is small, mature, technologically savvy and sees a string of these shows organised throughout the year. Add to that new competition from online travel portals, whose last-minute deals, promotional packages and free-this-and-that gimmicks make them de facto travel fairs.

All this probably accounts for a consistent decline in visitorship at fairs in Singapore in the last few years, whereas in larger markets such as Indonesia, where there are swaths of first, second or third-time travellers throughout the archipelago, consumer fairs are thriving.

But consumer travel fairs in Singapore need not reach saturation point – if they think up ways to enlarge the market with new tricks. Just as a retail mall constantly must think up ways to draw existing and new visitors, so do travel fairs.

Good location, creative marketing, exciting programme, great performances, appealing booth design are just a few factors that come to my mind when I think how a show such as the bi-annual NATAS Travel Fair can go for the next lap. I'm sure organisers of fairs themselves know this – it's not rocket science after all – but are probably constrained by the wherewithals to effect real change.

Pricing – in the form of discounts and freebies – remains the overriding carrot used to attract visitors. The look, feel and content of the fair overall has not changed much over the years, even though the consumer has grown more sophisticated. And this, despite the fact that selling travel is such a happy thing! If you ask me what I'd rather sell – furniture?, electronics?, home appliances?

(dear lord), books?, cosmetics? etc – I'd pick travel because it has become an essential commodity for most people, it is invariably more interesting, exciting and alive than the other lifestyle options, visually it beats a washing machine hands down while its promise of a dream is more skin-deep than an elixir of youth contained in a cosmetic jar.

Yet, look at our booths, cramped with paper, and paperwork, luggages and passport holders to give away, and more photocopied flyers shouting discounts from where they are pasted on walls and hung from ceilings, where nobody could really read them.

Look at our programme – did we attempt to bring in dynamic travel personalities who might inspire the crowds with their anecdotes, experiences and tips/how-tos? Did we try to segment marketing by having sections that focus on new travel niches?

In the face of an onslaught from the Internet, a consumer travel fair is actually the very tool travel agencies and their associations can use to remind consumers why agencies are still relevant.

Travel firms do this by putting their best feet forward in winning over a client, not winning sales, being with him at the start of journey and helping him make the right holiday decision with expert advice and human interaction – something the Internet can never quite achieve.

Travel trade associations on the other hand can use these fairs as an opportunity to launch direct campaigns about how travel agencies today have evolved and outline the advantages of using them over buying travel online.

Sadly, I have never seen such a campaign at these fairs.

Most commented on www.ttgasia.com

Negative reports cause Germans to shun India

India has lost ground in the German market due to the rape cases which have tarnished its image, with some from the trade reporting a huge drop in outbound trips to the destination. However, Nageshwaran from India, said: "If the Germans want to boycott a destination, for absurd reasons, then they are free to do so. No amount of PR will whitewash certain realities that have existed in India. It is a universal problem that appears in

Don't remind me of your crisis

In the last issue of *TTG Asia*, senior editor, Raini Hamdi, questioned the need for daily situation updates during the Bangkok crisis. Destination Asia deputy CEO, Pornthip Hirunkate (Addie), responded: "During the peak of the unrest we were being contacted on a daily basis with regards to the situation and as to whether clients should curtail or defer their trips to Thailand, so being proactive and putting a positive spin on the situation really paid off for Destination Asia, which is reflected in the number of cancellations that we received from our main leisure markets which are virtually nil." CEO, James Reed, added that the DMC had also directly assisted Thailand in "projecting a positive worldwide message that the travel industry is handing the crisis in a professional, measured, calm and proactive way".

Rising ITB costs bring ROI pressure

Ray Bigger from Singapore felt it was a timely opportunity to run an in-depth survey looking at the cost-effectiveness of participating in ITB Berlin and other tradeshow. He said: "The one question any (non-government) company has to ask is this: How many key people are we expecting to meet, the cost of meeting them at ITB versus the cost of quality one-on-one time in the client's backyard. If passing traffic/ad hoc business is small then that raises the cost. With mergers over the years there are far fewer big buyers. Finally, don't forget to look at the opportunity cost in your calculation."



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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)
- Hong Kong International Airport (2013)
- Raffles Hotel Singapore (2013)

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





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What's on the shelves

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

[HOTELS]

Shangri-La Hotel, Lhasa, Tibet	Yanqi Lake Kempinski Hotel Beijing, China	JW Marriott Dongdaemun Square Seoul, South Korea
 <p>Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts will open the Shangri-La Hotel, Lhasa in Tibet on April 17. The hotel is a 40-minute drive from Lhasa Gonggar Airport and a 10-minute drive from the railway station. It offers 289 guestrooms with complimentary Wi-Fi, a 1,215m² grand ballroom and other function spaces. F&B outlets include a tapas bar, lounge and two restaurants.</p>	 <p>Kempinski's largest property in China, Yanqi Lake Kempinski Hotel Beijing, will be unveiled in May. Offering views of Mutianyu Great Wall and Yanshan Mountain, the hotel has 595 rooms and 14,069m² of meeting space. Leisure facilities include a marina, an 18-hole golf course, a spa and a kids' club. Chinese and European fare can be found at its 14 F&B outlets.</p>	 <p>JW Marriott Hotels & Resorts welcomed guests at the JW Marriott Dongdaemun Square Seoul in South Korea in February. Apart from 170 guestrooms, F&B offerings include a steakhouse, a casual all-day dining restaurant, a lounge, a confectionery and a rooftop bar. Other facilities include 972m² of meeting space and a grand ballroom for up to 750 guests.</p>

[TECHNOLOGY]

Abacus to raise alarm with TripAlert Abacus has rolled out a new digital service – Abacus TripAlert – to give travel companies information and advice in the face of a crisis.

The service will align early warning data on natural disasters, health pandemics or terrorist attacks with bookings made via Abacus systems by monitoring participating travel agencies' passenger name records two days ahead of departure and for the duration of travel.

Users will then be offered a list of actionable insights and event summaries, among others, to share with clients and ensure traveller safety.

Abacus users can sign up for a trial period and monthly subscription, including a licence to repackage the technology as a service offering to contracted corporate accounts.

Wego's new Affiliate Network allows travel sites to customise search Wego has launched the Wego Affiliate Network (WAN.travel), a new platform and set of tools that will allow travel and tourism website publishers to integrate flight and hotel searches into their own sites.

WAN.travel provides affiliates with embeddable search boxes that can be customised through simple point-and-click interfaces, as well as a white-labelled version of Wego's metasearch product.

Travel publishers seeking more tailored products can use the Wego Flights and Hotels APIs.

Affiliates will also enjoy the support of a dedicated account manager to guide them throughout the integration and customisation process with ongoing optimisation assistance and recommendations.

[TRANSPORT]

Dragonair roars into Penang Hong Kong-based Dragonair will launch its second route to Malaysia on March 30 with the commencement of 10 weekly Penang flights. The new Hong Kong-Penang service will be operated with an Airbus A330-300 aircraft in a two-class configuration.

Etihad links Abu Dhabi and Phuket Etihad Airways will commence a daily service between Abu Dhabi and Phuket from October 26. The carrier will deploy a two-class Airbus A330-200 aircraft on the service, which is its second in Thailand after Bangkok.

Etihad currently also flies to Singapore, Manila, Kuala Lumpur, Ho Chi Minh City and Jakarta.

ExecuJet expands footprint in Asia ExecuJet Aviation Group will be opening a Singapore office to meet the growing appetite for business jets in the region. It currently has bases in Indonesia, China, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand offering fixed-based operations, aircraft maintenance and charter operations.

ExecuJet Australasia is also adding to the company's eight charter aircraft its first Gulfstream G650 to be based in Wellington, which can fly non-stop from Auckland to cities including Los Angeles, Beijing and Hong Kong.

Meanwhile, ExecuJet Indonesia is preparing to move from the temporary general aviation terminal at Bali airport to a new facility designed to handle all general aviation and business aircraft up to narrow-body aircraft, and provide VIP lounge access, groundhandling services and aircraft management.

Jetstar Asia introduces Fukuoka flights Jetstar Asia will begin flying daily from Singapore to Fukuoka via Bangkok on June 26, making the southern city the low-cost carrier's third Japanese destination.

The service will be operated with a 180-seat Airbus A320 and tickets have been available for purchase since February 19.

Fukuoka is Jetstar's third Japanese destination after Tokyo (Narita) and Osaka.

[ACTIVITIES]



Luxury tent stays at Khmer temples Khiri Travel has launched luxury tented accommodation alongside Cambodia's Banteay Chhmar temples, which are listed for potential inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

The custom-designed, high-quality tents include toilet facilities. There are two tents, each of which can accommodate two people. Meals are cooked on site by the villagers using as much local ingredients as possible.

Partnering with the local community who are involved in tent set-up, maintenance and hospitality provision, Khiri aims to build a sustainable business for them, helping them learn additional skills which bring much needed extra income. Training of the local community is ongoing.

Banteay Chhmar is a 3.5 hour drive from Siem Reap and Angkor Wat, and makes an ideal stopover on an overland journey from Bangkok or Khao Yai National Park in Thailand to Siem Reap, or vice versa.

Interested travel agencies can email sales.cam-bodia@khiri.com.

Putrajaya International Hot Air Balloon Fiesta 2014 Malaysia will once again host the Putrajaya International Hot Air Balloon Fiesta this year from March 27-30. The event will feature the attendance of more than 20 hot air balloons all over the world, including at least five special-shaped balloons.

For the adventurous, the Mountain Dew Extreme Zone boasts an array of outdoor fun activities, including water zorbing and rock climbing. F&B outlets are also aplenty, while a kids' play area offers amusement rides, colouring contests, and arts and crafts, among others.

Admission is free. Check out www.myballoonfiesta.com.



No airs about her

Marianne Hontiveros
CEO and president
AirAsia Philippines

Down-to-earth 'Maan' is possibly Asia's only female CEO, president and shareholder of an airline. But she's also an activist, journalist, TV host and environmentalist, says **Rosa Ocampo**

What made you join the airline?

I was doing a personal favour for a friend, AirAsia group CEO Tony Fernandes, who wanted to enter the Philippines. (He was managing director of Warner Music Malaysia while Maan was Warner Philippines' managing director). I helped negotiate for AirAsia Group to fly from Malaysia to Clark International Airport.

Philippine partners Antonio Cojuangco and Mikee Romero were very busy running their business empires so they were looking for additional partner. And they kind of decided that I was it.

How did you prepare for what is traditionally a man's field?

I did my homework. I read and studied civil aviation regulations, among other things.

I am not afraid to ask questions and to admit I don't know. I talk to experts. You would be surprised that people are so eager to teach you and share their knowledge.

Aviation is an exciting industry. I learn as fast as I could. It's not rocket science. The important thing, aside from the business basics, is safety – of passengers, staff, pilots, aircraft...you cannot have shortcuts where safety is concerned.

Is gender an issue in airline business?

I don't really think so. Every

one who is willing to learn and study hard can do it. And if you've got good mentors, you can learn...People have to see that you really are dedicated and committed.

How different is the music industry from aviation?

When Tony said he would build an airline, I laughed at him. What do you know about running an airline? He said: "Nothing yet but I can plan and study. If you can sell CDs, you can also sell airline seats."

There are many parallels between music and AirAsia. For example, promoting our routes is like promoting an artiste – the same basics of marketing, of getting your costs right, of getting the product on time and selling it off early.

Safety is very important, which makes aviation different from the music industry. In the music industry, the most that you can be accused of is sappy songs.

And in a LCC, you have to manage cost up to the last centavo without sacrificing quality.

How do your varied experiences influence your vision for the airline?

At the end of the day, we are building on Tony's dreams that everyone can fly. I believe in Tony's dream. Air travel has become affordable to overseas Filipino workers and their families.

We need to have corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes. AirAsia Foundation was formed a year ago, and supports projects in education and social entrepreneurship. It has five board members from all over ASEAN.

The environment is also very close to my heart. Airlines burn

a lot of fuel and we are conscious of that. We have to watch our footprints, and we try to lessen our carbon emissions and offset (them) by doing a lot of tree planting. We intend to monitor coral reefs so we have a Reef Check team, which (has participants) from Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines. This also facilitates teambuilding. The first team will finish their training this year.

You're flying to Tacloban this morning (Ed's note: This interview was conducted in December.) Is this part of CSR?

We're visiting our 25 staff there who are living in tents after super typhoon Haiyan destroyed their homes. We are bringing them food and organising temporary housing for them.

We're also running humanitarian flights to areas affected by Haiyan and beyond that, carrying relief workers and displaced people from the affected areas, and stranded tourists.

AirAsia launched *To Philippines with Love* to help the Haiyan victims. We're hoping to hit US\$1 million with the help of employees and passengers (Ed's note: This target was met.) We're also setting up a counterpart fund to rebuild schools, houses, hospitals, etc.

We're committed to providing assistance whenever calamities hit. Whenever it happens in Asia, AirAsia tries to respond and provide free cargo space to support the communities.

AirAsia Group pioneered low-cost travel in Asia. But in the Philippines, Cebu Pacific is dominant. How do you intend to compete?

We must be transparent in our fares. We started the peso base

fare and made sure that it clearly stated what the add-on costs were. Because at the end of the day, your passengers are smart and if you lose their confidence, they won't come back.

This whole idea of low cost and cost optimisation is being cascaded to all employees. Our pilots have very good practices in their SOP to ensure that fuel burns is managed to be low... But always, safety is of paramount importance.

We're on our way to having a paperless cockpit, subject to the approval of the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines. But we will be providing our pilots with tablets and laptops instead of the heavy cockpit manuals. It's not only cost management practice but also your commitment to the environment. That's where all the airlines are headed.

What you have is a table and chair in a corner, not an enclosed office.

We have a very flat organisation. We are not concerned with layers and titles. We have a very participative management organisation that bears fruits.

Everybody plays an important role. Our management meetings are huge and not just the top-level management but anybody belongs. People are kept informed and empowered, so they take accountability for their work. We have a very open management style and this is seen even in the office set-up – one open space, no layers.

Service to the people seems to be a big part of your corporate credo.

I am so passionate about it. Somehow you are put there, in a position, by God or by the universe, and you are able to utilise that for the good of the people.



Maan Hontiveros and Tony Fernandes (third from left) with AirAsia Philippines and Zest Airways' management and cabin crew. AirAsia Philippines acquired Zest last year, which is now operating independently as AirAsia Zest. The two airlines have been allowed to cross-sell flights



Maan Hontiveros at the launch of AirAsia Philippines in 2012. She is flanked by Clark International Airport Corporation's Victor Jose Luciano (left) and AirAsia Philippines partner Antonio Cojuangco



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IT&CM China 2014

www.itcmchina.com

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

Since 2007, IT&CM China has established itself as China's leading international Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) business, education and networking event, dedicated to "Promoting China to the World and the World to China". Bringing together Chinese and International MICE exhibitors and buyers in one dynamic marketplace, IT&CM China is the platform for international and leading Chinese players in the MICE industry to explore business opportunities on all fronts – inbound, outbound and domestic. Delegates to the 3-day event receive the best return on their investment in business, education and networking through structured business appointments, exhibition showcase, seminar sessions, official networking functions and tours. IT&CM China is part of the IT&CM Events series organised by TTG Events, a business group of TTG Asia Media. This event is co-organised by CITS International M.I.C.E. - a wholly-owned subsidiary of CITS (China International Travel Service), and MP International.

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www.ttgchina.com/ttg-awards

17 April 2014 | InterContinental Shanghai Puxi Hotel

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

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



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Playing good neighbours

Intra-ASEAN travel remains crucial for most countries in the 10-member alliance, but it's not growing as fast as visitors from other regions for some. **TTG Asia reporters** give a snapshot

» SINGAPORE

By Paige Lee Pei Qi



Singapore’s steady stream of new attractions has helped to keep its destination appeal fresh for ASEAN visitors. Based on the latest statistics from the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), the city-state welcomed 4.5 million visitors

from ASEAN countries from January to September 2013, a growth of 6.6 per cent year-on-year. Some 5.7 million visitors from ASEAN countries visited Singapore in 2012, increasing 6.8 per cent from 5.4 million in 2011. From January-September 2013, the top three ASEAN source countries were Indonesia with nearly 2.3 million arrivals (+9.3 per cent), Malaysia with 909,975 arrivals (+3.6 per cent) and the Philippines with 506,307 arrivals (+3.9 per cent) respectively. Said Leong Yue Kheong, STB’s assistant chief executive, international group: “Due to close proximity and ease of access, many ASEAN travellers are familiar with Singapore and a significant portion of visitors from the region are repeat visitors, seeking new and refreshed experiences.” Looking forward to adding new attractions like the Singapore Sports Hub into his outbound tour packages, Manfred Kurz, managing director of Diethelm Travel Malaysia, said: “This (sports hub) will definitely make a positive impact on creating awareness

for Singapore and because it caters for a larger crowd, it will help to boost hotel accommodation and the entertainment industry in Singapore. “However, it also depends on the attraction of the events – crowd-pulling events like tennis or football will do well,” he opined. Agreeing, Dennis Law, managing director of Star Holiday Mart, said: “New attractions like the sports hub will help make Singapore become a world-class sporting city as well.” He, too, felt high-profile sporting events would put Singapore in good stead to draw travellers from ASEAN and around the world. Highlighting the upcoming Women’s Tennis Association Championships, STB’s Leong believes that such new events have “kept up the momentum of Singapore as an ever-evolving destination” for new and repeat visitors alike. As for existing attractions, Min Liu, director of sales & destination marketing of Lex Travel, said the Marine Life Park (pictured on left), Universal Studios Singapore and Marina Bay Sands are

“must-see hotspots”. “(Travellers) especially want to see these new places that other parts of Asia do not have and they want to experience the latest things,” said Liu, whose bulk of ASEAN tourists come from Indonesia. Leong added: “The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) 2015 calls for a well-connected ASEAN region, where Singapore’s strong regional air connectivity will complement the AEC, and potentially boost intra-region travel within ASEAN.”

Numbers that matter

- 4.5 million visitor arrivals from ASEAN
- 38 per cent of total arrivals were from ASEAN
- 6.6 per cent year-on-year growth for ASEAN arrivals
- 2.3 million was the number of arrivals from Indonesia, Singapore’s top source country

Note: Above statistics apply to the January-September 2013 period

» MALAYSIA

By S Puvaneswary



ASEAN arrivals to Malaysia have dipped slightly in recent years, but the decline is “not significant” as regional inbound figures still make up more than 70 per cent of total international arrivals to Malaysia, said Syed Yahya Syed Othman, ASEAN director of Tourism Malaysia. Intra-ASEAN travel contributed 76.8

per cent of total arrivals to Malaysia in 2010, 76.4 per cent in 2011, 75.1 per cent in 2012 and 74.3 per cent in 2013. The top three arrival markets from ASEAN last year was led by Singapore, followed by Indonesia and Brunei respectively. Comparing last year’s arrival figures with 2012, ASEAN countries that posted year-on-year growth were Cambodia (+28.6 per cent), the Philippines (+9.5 per cent) and Vietnam (+11.7 per cent), while Thailand (-8.4 per cent), Brunei (-1.5 per cent) and Laos (-7 per cent) saw year-on-year declines. Increasing air connectivity within South-east Asia and beyond, the rise of LCCs and growing disposable incomes of regional travellers were cited by Syed Yahya as likely reasons for the slight declines in share of ASEAN arrivals to Malaysia. Furthermore, he said ASEAN outbound travellers are more compelled to visit other Asia-Pacific destinations like Japan, which has eased visa regulations

for Malaysian and Thai visitors. South Korea and Hong Kong have also been aggressive in their marketing campaigns to woo Muslim travellers. On the other hand, more direct air links from medium and longhaul destinations have led to growth in inbound traffic from destinations outside ASEAN to Malaysia. Last year saw the introduction of Malaysian services from airlines such as Air France, Turkish Airlines and Regent Airways, while Malaysia Airlines started its Kuala Lumpur-Dubai flights in August 2013 and Malindo Airlines also commenced flights from Mumbai and New Delhi early this year. Hamzah Rahmat, president, Malaysia Association of Tour & Travel Agents, pointed out that improvements in air connectivity had resulted in increased arrivals from China and India, both of which were also on Malaysia’s top 10 arrival source markets. The number of Chinese and Indian travellers visiting Malaysia compared with their population bases is still insignificant though, said Hamzah, hence there is still potential to tap both markets further to draw more big spenders. While ASEAN travellers stay for comparatively shorter periods than medium and longhaul travellers, shorthaul visitors are as important as they tend to make more frequent visits, said Hamzah.

Numbers that matter

- 19.1 million visitor arrivals from ASEAN
- 74.3 per cent of total arrivals were from ASEAN
- 8.4 per cent year-on-year decline in arrivals from Thailand
- 28.6 per cent year-on-year growth in arrivals from Cambodia

Note: Above statistics apply to full-year 2013

» MYANMAR

By Mimi Hudoyo

An influx of direct air connections in the last two years has paved the way for higher arrivals from South-east Asia to Myanmar. Based on arrival figures at Yangon International Airport – through which the majority of foreigners enter Myanmar from – Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia were the top ASEAN source markets for Myanmar in 2013, accounting for 192,796 arrivals to the country. The top source countries to Myanmar last year were Thailand (116,128), followed by Japan (66,772), South Korea (54,599) and China (54,325) respectively. Overall figures for the ASEAN mar-



ket were not available at press time, but Asian arrivals numbered 550,178, or 68.5 per cent of the total 900,161 international arrivals via the Yangon gateway last year. West Europe contributed 148,528 arrivals (18.5 per cent) and North America contributed 57,873 arrivals (7.2 per cent). “We are looking at balanced growth (between ASEAN and other countries)

as the regional market potential is big,” said Htay Aung, Myanmar’s union minister of Hotel & Tourism, who expects to achieve this as accessibility with neighbouring countries opens up. Accessibility remains a “key issue” for ASEAN countries without land borders with Myanmar, commented Aung Myat Kyaw, chairman of Union of Myanmar Travel Association. “The Philippines, for example, is quite far from us. There is no direct flight so it will take more time to attract travellers from this market, while there is a growing market from Singapore and Malaysia (which have direct links),” he said. Travellers from Thailand and Laos mostly come on pilgrimage tours, while

South Koreans and Japanese usually visit the country for leisure, business and MICE, Aung Myat Kyaw added.

Numbers that matter

- 900,161 international arrivals through Yangon International Airport
- 68.5 per cent of arrivals were Asian
- 116,128 arrivals from Thailand, Myanmar’s top source market
- 14.5 per cent of arrivals were from Thailand

Note: Above statistics apply to full-year 2013

REGIONAL TRAVEL

» THAILAND

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena



ASEAN visitors to Thailand are on the rise, although its share in overall arrivals has declined over the last few years. Thailand welcomed close to 7.4 million visitor arrivals from ASEAN countries in 2013, up 27.7 per cent from 2012, according to statistics from the Thai Ministry of Tourism and Sports. Malaysia topped the ASEAN list with close to three million arrivals (+17.3 per cent), followed by Laos with 1.1 million

arrivals (+13.3 per cent) and Singapore with 936,477 arrivals (+12.7 per cent) respectively. The remaining six countries too posted double-digit growth last year. Despite growing destination competition across Asia, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) governor Thawatchai Arunyik opined that attracting ASEAN visitors to Thailand is “becoming easier” due to improved connectivity from LCCs linking major cities in the region. TAT will focus its strategy on increasing revenue from first-time travellers, especially from secondary cities in Asian markets. In particular, the Asian Highway will be “one of the major factors in promoting intra-ASEAN connectivity” as the AEC takes effect in 2015, Thawatchai posited. Likewise, inbound tour operators remain confident that Thailand will stay a firm favourite among regional visitors. “We have seen very good performance from ASEAN over the last few years.

Last year we recorded about 20 per cent growth and expect a similar performance this year, although that depends on the situation in Bangkok,” said Wacharaporn Phiewkaow, managing director of Discovery Holidays. “Myanmar, in particular, has risen since last year. We are seeing a lot of incentive and seminar requests from Myanmar, whereas it’s regular group tours from the Philippines and Indonesia,” she shared. The Bangkok-based firm will sharpen its attention on Indonesia, the Philippines and Myanmar this year by attending more road shows and travel fairs in these emerging markets, especially as visitors from mature sources like Singapore and Malaysia tend to be FITs with increasingly less reliance on travel agencies, Wacharaporn shared. On the other hand, Loo Eng Wah, managing director of Phuket-based Pristina Tours, still sees potential in Malaysia. He said: “It used to be Malaysian Chinese visiting Thailand,

but now we’re seeing more Muslims from Malaysia too although the ratio is still low compared with the Chinese. “(Malaysian Muslims) mainly go to Hat Yai, but more are also visiting Bangkok,” he revealed. “We are also pushing Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai, which have sizable Muslim communities. But Malaysia currently lacks direct flights to these northern Thai cities.”

Numbers that matter

7.4 million visitor arrivals from ASEAN
27.7 per cent year-on-year growth in ASEAN arrivals
28 per cent of arrivals were from ASEAN
3 million was the number of arrivals from Malaysia, Thailand’s top ASEAN source market
Note: Above statistics apply to full-year 2013

» VIETNAM

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

Steady growth posted by regional markets to Vietnam has been eclipsed by the sharp surges in visitor arrivals from China and Russia in recent years. Based on statistics from the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, Cambodia topped the regional charts in 2013 with 342,347 arrivals (+3.1 per cent), followed by Malaysia with 339,510 arrivals (+13.5 per cent), Thailand with 268,968 arrivals (+19.1 per cent) and Singapore with 195,760 arrivals (-0.2 per cent) respectively. Despite the slight overall dip in figures from Singapore, Robert Tan, owner of Lac Hong Voyages, said it is still “a growing market, especially the younger segment as they usually book free and easy packages for the weekend, visiting the cities of Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City and staying in three-star hotels”. The rise of LCCs in South-east Asia has helped to attract younger travellers from the region to Vietnam, he added. Industry players also singled out Vietnam Airlines’ Ho Chi Minh City-Jakarta service launched in December

2012 as a significant driver of the emerging Muslim segment, leading to a 15.7 per cent year-on-year hike in visitor arrivals from Indonesia to 70,390 in 2013. For Peter Pham Tien Dung, director of GoldenTour & Convention, the Muslim market has grown by 10 per cent last year. “Muslim FITs from Malaysia in particular are growing fast, rising 30 per cent last year,” he added. “The halal market from Indonesia and Malaysia has grown 25 per cent last year compared with 2012,” said Pham Ha, founder and CEO of Luxury Travel Vietnam, which revamped its halal travel

Numbers that matter

7.6 million international visitor arrivals
342,347 arrivals from Cambodia, Vietnam’s top ASEAN source market
15.7 per cent growth in arrivals from Indonesia
0.2 per cent decline in arrivals from Singapore
Note: Above statistics apply to full-year 2013



website late last year. “We expect an increase of 30 per cent growth in 2014.” Although travellers from such longhaul markets as the Nordic and Middle East tend to be longer-staying and higher-yield, tour operators do not profess a preference for any market. GoldenTour’s Pham said: “The ASEAN markets helped to keep business going in 2010 when the financial crisis hit the longhaul markets. Furthermore, Asian markets will still visit Vietnam during

the low-season months between April and August, helping us to have business all year round.” However, Lac Hong’s Tan sees a need to increase the length of stay of ASEAN visitors. He said: “Tour operators should encourage shorthaul markets to stay longer by rolling out more creative programmes. For example, we try to promote multi-destination travel by combining visits to Dalat or central areas like Hue and Hoi An with a city itinerary.”

» INDONESIA

By Mimi Hudoyo

Improving air access in ASEAN has led to the emergence of new regional markets like Thailand and the Philippines for Indonesia. “ASEAN has always been the top (region) for Indonesia with neighbouring Singapore and Malaysia at the top of the list,” said Nia Niscaya, director of international promotions at the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy. “In the last couple of years we have also seen significant growth of arrivals from the Philippines and Thailand.” Arrivals from Singapore reached close to 1.4 million in 2013, up 8.5 per cent from some 1.3 million in 2012. Malaysia ranked second with over 1.2 million arrivals, 9.3 per cent higher than

1.1 million in 2012. The Philippines last year contributed 129,223 arrivals to Indonesia, a 13.7 per cent increase from 113,635 in 2012. Also chalking up double-digit growth was Thailand, hiking 13.7 per cent to 101,390 visitors last year from 89,142 in 2012. In 2013, ASEAN accounted for approximately 35 per cent of 8.8 million international arrivals and 58 per cent of 4.9 million Asian arrivals to the country. Meanwhile, once longhaul-focused inbound tour operators such as Pacto, Bhara Tours, Panorama Destination and Aneka Kartika Tours & Travel Services have been diversifying their markets to Asia and particularly ASEAN. Adjie Wahjono, operations manager, Aneka Kartika Tours & Travel Surabaya, said: “The regional market is too big to ignore, which was why we have been after (ASEAN travellers) in last few years. Singapore and Malaysia continue to

grow, but with the opening of flights from other ASEAN countries to Indonesia, markets like the Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand are also up. “Last year the composition of our markets was 70 per cent Europe and 30 per cent South-east Asia, this year we are looking at 60:40,” he added. Thanks to Indonesia’s huge middle class and LCC connections to second-tier cities, Indonesian outbound travel consultants also said that ASEAN countries, especially Singapore and Malaysia, will continue to be the most popular outbound destinations, particularly for first-time travellers and weekend vacationers. Outbound operators have also seen growing demand for midhaul destinations such as South Korea and Japan, whose NTOs have been more aggressive in engaging with Indonesian travel companies than their counterparts

from Singapore and Malaysia. Panorama Tours vice president leisure operations, Rery Sankyo, said: “For example, we have received up to six Japan fam trips for different prefectures in a year, (which) improve our knowledge of the destination and in turn enable us to introduce new products to clients.”

Numbers that matter

8.8 million international visitor arrivals
35 per cent of arrivals were from ASEAN
1.4 million arrivals from Singapore, Indonesia’s top source market
13.7 per cent growth in arrivals from both Thailand and the Philippines
Note: Above statistics apply to full-year 2013

» PHILIPPINES

By Paige Lee Pei Qi



Singapore consistently fuels the bulk of ASEAN visitor arrivals to the Philippines, comprising 40 per cent of regional inbound traffic with 100,334 arrivals from January through July 2013.

Clifford Neo, managing director of Dynasty Travel Singapore, sees the allure of Philippine destinations for Singaporean travellers, particularly Manila, Boracay, Cebu, Davao, Palawan and Bohol. He said: “The Philippines appeals especially to nature and beach lovers aged between 25 and 40.”

In the second spot after Singapore in the ASEAN arrival chart is Malaysia, which sent 82,893 visitors between January and July 2013. In the third and fourth spots are, respectively, Thailand and Indonesia.

Although total ASEAN arrivals reached 242,698 during the first seven months of 2013, the region accounted for just a 8.7 per cent market share, a sharp contrast from the East Asian market – including South Korea, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau and Taiwan – that chalked almost 50 per cent of international arrival

figures during the same period.

Meanwhile, the Philippine trade is eager to woo back regional travellers, especially in the aftermath of the twin disasters that struck the country last year.

Said Philippines-based Annset Holidays president, Serafina Joven, whose top ASEAN-performing countries include Singapore and Malaysia: “The Philippines is more than ready to welcome back travellers and the perception that tourist attractions are affected by the disasters is not true.”

“Very confident” of the destination making a comeback, Philippine Department of Tourism (DoT) assistant secretary for tourism development planning, Rolando Canizal, said the NTO is targeting 6.8 million international visitor arrivals this year, up from 4.2 million in 2013. In 2012, Philippines welcomed 4.3 million international visitors.

Earlier in January, the DoT declared 2015 as *Visit Philippines Year* to coincide with the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Leaders Summit next year. The country will also host the ASEAN Tourism Forum in 2016.

Numbers that matter

242,698 visitor arrivals from ASEAN

8.7 per cent of visitor arrivals were from ASEAN

49.2 per cent of visitor arrivals were from East Asia

100,334 visitor arrivals from Singapore, the Philippines’ top ASEAN source market

Note: Above statistics apply to the January-July 2013 period

» CAMBODIA

By S Puvaneswary

ASEAN is muscling up to become a major source market for international arrivals to Cambodia.

The market share of ASEAN arrivals to Cambodia climbed from 38.2 per cent in 2011 to 42.2 per cent in 2012, further increasing to 44.1 per cent from January to November 2013, based on latest statistics available from Tourism Cambodia at press time. Of the 3.8 million foreign arrivals to Cambodia during the first 11 months of 2013, ASEAN tourists accounted for nearly 1.7 million.

Among the ASEAN source countries, Laos registered the biggest surge in arrivals during the January-November 2013 period with year-on-year growth of 67.2 per cent (376,226 arrivals), followed by Indonesia at 25.9 per cent (25,395 arrivals) and the Philippines at 22.8 per cent (108,801 arrivals).

The average length of stay of ASEAN visitors to Cambodia varies from three to four days, compared with four to five days for China, South Korea and Japan, and seven to eight days for longhaul markets like Europe, the US and the Middle East, according to Lor Thoura, deputy director marketing and promotion department, Ministry of Tourism. All the above markets are equally important to Cambodia, he pointed out.

Om Pharin, managing director of Charming Cambodia Tours, agreed: “During the financial crisis in Europe, we survived because of the strong Asian market. This year, Europeans are starting to travel again, but the currencies of some ASEAN economies such as baht, rupiah and ringgit have depreciated and this will affect the disposable income of regional travellers.”

Thoura observed that there are more groups than FITs for ASEAN travellers to Cambodia, and most inbound tour operators do not sell Cambodia as a mono destination but combine it with neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Vietnam and Laos.

Numbers that matter

1.7 million visitor arrivals from ASEAN

44.1 per cent of visitor arrivals were from ASEAN

781,849 arrivals from Vietnam, Cambodia’s biggest source market

67.2 per cent year-on-year growth in arrivals from Laos, which registered the biggest surge in arrivals

Note: Above statistics apply to the January-November 2013 period

A 90-minute game-changer on track

All eyes are now cast upon the upcoming high-speed rail (HSR) link, which is expected to whiz passengers between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore in just 90 minutes.

The HSR, set for completion in 2020, will dramatically cut the journey time between the two cities. It currently takes up to eight hours by train, five hours by bus, and 45 minutes by flight excluding airport check-in and transfers.

Colin Stewart, director and global rail leader at international engineering consultancy Arup, expects this new link will “benefit both cities tremendously”.

“Think about the increased capacity on the train which can seat 1,000 passengers at any one time,” he said. “If you have one train running every three minutes, that would mean approximately 18,000 passengers every hour.”

Stewart also expects the HSR will be a preferred travel option over air in future. He commented: “For a train, you just have to turn up at the station 10 to 15 minutes earlier, but if you are flying you have to reach (the airport) up to two hours in advance for all those security measures.”

“The trains will be able to bring passengers into the heart of the cities and they can save additional time transporting from the respective airports. Not only will this appeal to business travellers who are pressed for time, it will also appeal to leisure travellers who may only have a weekend or even just a day to spare – but

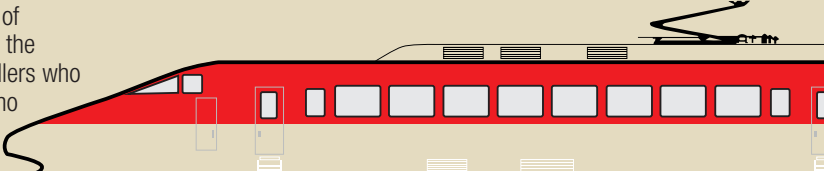
of course the train fares must be on par with flight fares,” he added.

While modern HSR systems can operate up to 400km per hour, the optimal speed for the 330km Kuala Lumpur-Singapore route is 250km per hour, taking into consideration the terrain and geography between the two destinations, according to Stewart.

Drawing parallels between the Kuala Lumpur-Singapore link and the 142km Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) – Arup is handling the preliminary design for the XRL’s Hong Kong tunnel section – Stewart said: “Both projects are looking to connect two densely populated countries together and the key consideration of such projects is that the design must be of a consistent, single standard design despite different countries.”

The HSR system design for such inter-country connections must also take into account the immigration clearance entry and exit points, which can be more complicated, he added.

The tender process for this project is expected to begin in 2H2014, and Stewart is “hopeful” of Arup winning given its extensive experience with similar HSR projects worldwide. – Paige Lee Pei Qi



Best Western Targets Asia’s Emerging South

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

Best Western is looking south, as it continues its Asian expansion. We have identified the South Asian nations of Sri Lanka and Bangladesh as key growth markets, and already have a pipeline of five new properties in the two countries. In Sri Lanka, Best Western has announced plans to launch its first hotel in the country - a 60-room BEST WESTERN midscale hotel in Colombo, which is expected to open in the next few months.

In Bangladesh meanwhile, Best Western already operates the 51-room BEST WESTERN La Vinci Hotel in Dhaka. But we are now planning a major, multi-brand expansion across the country. First to open will be two BEST WESTERN PLUS hotels - the 232-room hotel in Cox’s Bazar and 56-room hotel at Dhaka Airport. Then potentially in 2015, we will launch a 448-room BEST WESTERN hotel and 720-room BEST WESTERN PREMIER hotel in Cox’s Bazar



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Transacting B2B online

More tour operators are awakening to the potential of having their own booking engines, while early movers are working on upgrades, *TTG Asia* reporters profile some

	<div>Destination Asia, Thailand</div> <div>Victoria Sertic, group business development director</div> <div></div>	<div>Luxury Tours Malaysia</div> <div>Ganneesh Ramaa, manager</div> <div></div>	<div>Tradewinds Tours & Travel, Singapore</div> <div>Chua Kian Hwa, general manager</div> <div></div>	<div>Travel Designer Group, India</div> <div>Jaal Shah, founder and group managing director</div> <div></div>
Background	<p>Established in 1996, Destination Asia Group is a Bangkok-based DMC with 11 operating offices across Asia, including Thailand, Vietnam, China, Japan, Hong Kong, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Singapore, Malaysia and Laos.</p> <p>In April 2013, Destination Asia launched eDA, a new multi-country B2B online booking engine. Early this year in January, the Destination Asia Events website was also created as a one-stop resource tool for events planners. A third platform, Cruise Asia, is due to launch in early March 2014.</p>	<p>Luxury Tours Malaysia was registered as an inbound tour operator in June 2011. Our target market was initially South Asia, but this was later expanded to Europe and Asia-Pacific.</p> <p>We are developing a B2B booking engine in order to reduce manual work and speed up the process of converting enquiries into confirmed bookings. This will also help the company stay lean on staffing. The site is in the final testing process and, at press time, is scheduled to go live by the first week of March.</p> <p>The cost of the booking engine is RM1 million (US\$299,267) and it is being developed by a Singapore-based company, Designersoft.</p>	<p>As the travel arm of the Singapore Airlines (SIA) Group, we manage the Singapore Stopover Holiday and SIA/SilkAir Holidays programmes for our parent airlines.</p> <p>For over two years now, we have offered our SIA & SilkAir stations and overseas agencies the use of a B2B booking platform we call Tour Management System (TMS). It has helped us to expand our distributional reach not just geographically but across a 24/7 timescale. This will be upgraded in April with assistance from software developer 11Infotech.</p>	<p>Travel Designer Group was founded in Ahmedabad in 1999 as an outbound tour operator offering shorthaul destinations. In 2001, we started our first outbound consolidation business offering the Middle East and South-east Asia as core destinations. RezLive.com was launched in 2008, becoming the first non-air B2B global reservation system. Aside from offering hotels, sightseeing tours and transfers in over 900 locations, apartments were also added last year, allowing travel consultants to make bookings up to one year in advance. We now have offices in over 11 countries.</p>
Content	<p>With hotel fact sheets and touring itineraries available, users can book rooms, tours and transfers around the clock, and confirm a reservation instantaneously. The system also enables users to make additions and changes to itineraries. For clients working offline, these rates will be mirrored online.</p> <p>Both offline and online rates aim to be the same, but the technology of online systems enables clients to find out special offers easier and quicker.</p>	<p>Inbound tour packages, hotel rooms, transportation and entrance to attractions based in Malaysia.</p> <p>The system will allow prices to be segmented based on markets. Generally, Asian markets will get more competitive prices because suppliers, especially hoteliers, offer cheaper rates to Asians compared with Europeans. However, for land content, such as ground transportation and entrance to attractions, the same price is offered across the board.</p>	<p>We will be able to offer more unique content because the system allows for an increase in connections to suppliers. It will also be speedier, giving us quicker access to content and allowing us to provide instant confirmation wherever possible.</p> <p>The new TMS will draw content from a wide range of sources, including our own contracted suppliers and via online wholesalers providing diverse products such as hotels, transfers, car rentals, tours, attractions, etc., through XML connections.</p>	<p>RezLive.com is dynamically connected with leading hotels chains, which allows seamless connections to their global CRS. Besides providing access to the direct inventories of multiple suppliers, our own contracting also comes with price comparison filters, offering users best possible rates with instant confirmation.</p>
How it works	<p>Clients can request a login or contact the international sales office located in their country. eDA is fully secure and protected by a personal password. There is also a dedicated online support team located in Bangkok handling only eDA bookings, product loading and allocation maintenance.</p> <p>Clients can complete multi-country bookings within a single PNR, and all paid in one currency to Destination Asia's central bank with one transaction and invoice. The engine also boasts XML capability.</p>	<p>Existing partners will be given complimentary access with a user ID and password. New clients will be vetted first to ensure they are genuine buyers before access is permitted.</p> <p>Currently, most of the business is done with overseas wholesalers. With this, we will be able to reach out to overseas retailers who can make online bookings and receive instant confirmation.</p>	<p>Access to our B2B system is given to our appointed agents and overseas stations. Each of them will be given a master account from which they can self-administer and appoint local users of the system.</p> <p>Stations and agencies are currently able to book hotel accommodation, transfers, tours and other services directly online without having to send requests to our reservations department.</p>	<p>Travel consultants can register for free on the RezLive website. We also distribute inventory over XML/API connectivity, which means travel websites and corporate booking tools can sell our products with their own branding.</p> <p>Multiple-currency options and payment channels help us to reach out to every segment and scale of travel companies.</p>
Future	<p>eDA has been very well received, but we have ambitious targets for usage in our emerging markets. Our new websites are merely a tool designed to support our clients and attract new opportunities in markets we are focusing on growing.</p> <p>Destination Asia will also be launching within 1H2014 a tactical booking engine to support offline partners, but details will only be revealed at a later stage. – Xinyi Liang-Pholsena</p>	<p>We hope all our overseas business partners will use the system by next year. We will also look into establishing a B2C portal in the near future. – S Puvaneswary</p>	<p>The system cutover has been smooth so far. We are tracking the number of bookings and have a sales target, but figures are confidential. We certainly hope to grow our online bookings with the new system. – Paige Lee Pei Qi</p>	<p>We grew 50 per cent year-on-year in 2013. Our airline tool is in the final stage of launching in 2Q2014, which will make RezLive.com a complete B2B system offering air, hotel and ground services. We also intend to launch a 24/7 call centre and online support system.</p> <p>We plan to increase our global footprint by expanding in Egypt, Morocco and Turkey shortly. – Shekhar Niyogi</p>



Causeway Bay remains a popular shopping haven for tourists

Hong Kong Tourism Board

Resource constraints

The NTO is targeting higher-yield leisure, business and MICE segments. By Prudence Lui

Arrivals Total visitor arrivals jumped 11.7 per cent to 54.3 million in 2013, another record-breaking year for Hong Kong. Overall, longhaul and shorthaul traffic dropped 3.3 per cent and 0.8 per cent respectively.

Within that, visitors from China registered growth of 16.7 per cent to 40.7 million. Other than China, Japan was the only market with double-digit growth of 15.7 per cent, rising to become the fourth source market after China, Taiwan and South Korea. Meanwhile, the city's emerging markets demonstrated eight per cent increase, out of which Russia led with growth of 20 per cent, followed by Vietnam (14.4 per cent) and the GCC markets (13.4 per cent).

Looking ahead, Holiday World Tours managing director, Paul Leung, is not optimistic about South-east Asian markets. He said: "Although Indonesian and Indian visitors have flooded Hong Kong instead of going to Thailand, the row between Hong Kong and the Philippines over the hostage crisis are dampening Filipino arrivals. The Singapore market is also a bit quiet."

NTO The government completed a comprehensive assessment last December of the city's capacity to receive visitors and projected over 70 million visitor arrivals in 2017. The Commerce and Economic Development Bureau secretary, Gregory So, said that Hong Kong would generally be able to receive the above projected number of visitor arrivals in 2017, but pointed out that hotel rooms would continue to be in tight supply.

"Given that Hong Kong is small and densely populated, we cannot afford to put all our precious land resources into developing tourism facilities. We will therefore make the best use of our (available) resources to attract visitors from the high value-added segments, including the achievers and mid-career (professionals) among overnight vacationers as well as overnight business and MICE visitors."

Meanwhile, to alleviate the impact of overwhelming inbound traffic from China, the 2014 Policy Address announced the Central Government's agreement to temporarily freeze the number of pilot cities for the Individual Visit Scheme and scope



"Arrivals from (South) Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia and India are increasing. We will continue to work with major inbound agencies and explore ways to boost business from the on-line segment."

Andy So
General manager
Pentahotel Hong Kong, Kowloon

of the multiple-entry permit arrangement.

Aviation New international destinations with scheduled services launched in the winter of 2013 were Irkutsk (Russia), Wuyishan (China) and Zhanjiang (China), according to the Civil Aviation Department.

Flight frequencies for passenger services increased during the first week of winter 2013 compared with the first week of summer 2013, with Bangkok up by 23 flights, and nine for both Chiang Mai and Male.

Meanwhile, the application from American Airlines to commence new services to/from Dallas in June has been approved.

Homegrown low-cost carrier HK Express Airways also announced Seoul as its next destination, with a daily service starting March 30.

Deputy CEO, Andrew Cowen, said: "To fuel our future growth from eight to 25 destinations, we will grow our fleet from five to 11 aircraft by year-end. New logos and aircraft design are being rolled out to establish a new identity."

Meanwhile, Virgin Atlantic

will end its Hong Kong-Sydney service from May 5 due to rising operations costs.

Products Converted from a public housing block built in the 1950s, YHA Mei Ho House Youth Hostel officially opened in Sham Shui Po last December. It houses a museum showcasing life at the grassroots level in the old days. The gallery's two floors are a throwback to the Shek Kip Mei resettlement estate with diverse exhibits including historical photographs as well as the original layout of early dwelling units and public hygiene facilities, among others. Free guided tours are available Tuesday through to Sunday.

Meanwhile, Ngong Ping 360 on Lantau Island will complete the revamp of its Monkey's Tale Theatre in Q2 and launch new programmes this year such as its Dining in Silence and Aerial Wire Experience. The Motion 360 theatre will now feature 3D movies while Stage 360 will offer live theatre performances with classic Hong Kong action movie themes as well as special effects makeup workshops and movie stunt demonstrations.

Keeping history alive in Hong Kong

Some tours featuring heritage elements have been introduced but it's still early days, writes **Prudence Lui**

1 How ready is Hong Kong for heritage tourism? Last December, the 129-room YHA Mei Ho House Youth Hostel was officially opened under the Development Bureau's Historic Buildings Revitalization Scheme. Located in Sham Shui Po in Kowloon, it was converted from Hong Kong's first and only remaining resettlement estate block built in the 1950s. Its two-storey museum also highlights the history of the Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area.

Hostel general manager, Damian Flynn, said: "We have tried to preserve the building's original look. The museum is particularly special to local people because we formed an alumni network to trace and collect stories."

The University of Hong Kong's Architectural Conservation Programme director, Lee Ho-yin, said the city is heading towards the right direction, although more needs to be done. "Hong Kong will be ready for heritage tourism when it reaches a critical mass in heritage tourism destinations. In the past, be-

cause of a lack of understanding of heritage tourism, destinations were limited to museums and monuments, and the usual shopping and dining in tourist-oriented 'reconstructed' old places (such as Murray House).

"Today, more people are beginning to realise that to achieve heritage tourism, destinations have to have legitimate local character and identity. This could mean that these destinations are designed primarily for use by the local people and not specifically for tourists."

2 Has heritage tourism caught on with the trade? Launched in 2012, Hong Kong Tourism Board's (HKTb) New Tour Product Development Scheme, which subsidises travel operators, has seen 12 tours introduced so far. These include the Six Senses Heritage Experience, which features a cycling tour in Yuen Long and a 'big bowl feast' in the walled village.

Mountainbikingasia.com managing director, Tim Obendorf, has also started to incorpo-



YHA Mei Ho House Youth Hostel in Sham Shui Po preserves the memory of Hong Kong's historic public housing estates

rate heritage landmarks on his bike tours. He said: "I found the most interesting heritage sites and the quietest and safest cycling routes are in the north-west of the New Territories around Kam Tin Valley and Yuen Long."

"Our clients come from predominantly Australia, the UK, Hong Kong and Singapore. We also have a good number of Americans, French, Chinese and Dutch... We are also working

with a Japan-focused agency to create a heritage tour more specific to the market's tastes."

Gray Line Tours managing director, Michael Wu, is taking a different approach. He said: "We are trying to inject heritage elements such as Chinese opera culture into our tours rather than rolling out a pure heritage tour as a mono product. We also weave in some modern elements such as a ride on the Ngong Ping 360

cable car that gives a panoramic aerial view of Tung Chung New Town. This tends to be more acceptable to tourists."

3 What's stopping more operators from introducing heritage packages? Heritage tours appeal mainly to non-Chinese tourists who look for in-depth local experiences, said the trade.

Holiday World Tours managing director, Paul Leung, said: "It's a very small and niche segment. We don't do much because of the low returns given the immense effort and resources."

Via Vai Travel managing director, Sef Lam, said demand for such packages comes from repeat visitors. "It is usually at their subsequent visits that they begin to have more interest in historical aspects of Hong Kong," she said, adding that besides the lack of expert guides, awareness among tourists is low. "Most tourists are able to check for regular docent guided tours in museums, but I do not know if there is a central website where one can find various local heritage tours on offer."

Checking in



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Pentahotel Hong Kong, Kowloon



Prudence Lui checks out the upbeat premises of this first international hotel brand in Kai Tak

LOCATION Situated in the industrial area of San Po Kong near Kai Tak Cruise Terminal and close to a residential district, a strong neighbourhood concept is emphasised here. The nearest MTR station is Diamond Hill, which is a five- to 10-minute walk away.

ROOMS I stayed in the Pentaplus room, which occupies about 22m² on the 23rd floor. It is not big but its tech-savvy amenities such as a smartphone dock make me happy. The dedicated area inside the wardrobe for hand luggage is space saving. I also found it easy to adjust the lighting at night for the lamp hanging overhead. Instead of an in-room minibar, vending machines offer drinks and snacks.

What makes it different from the standard Penta room is the provision of bathrobes and its location on a higher floor with an unobstructed city view.

FACILITIES There is never a dull moment indeed. A large snooker table faces the front desk on the first floor, while two games rooms offer a round of Wii, pool

and foosball tables, and two Internet terminals. Other facilities include a swimming pool and a 24-hour gym with generous space.

Though not branded as a business hotel, the whole of the fourth floor is allocated to meeting facilities that cater to small and medium-size groups. Designed with timeout zones, these come with popcorn machines, foosball machines and local snacks like peanut candy.

During my stay, I commuted between San Po Kong and Tsim Sha Tsui on the hotel's free hourly shuttle bus services. It took me about 15-20 minutes to reach K11 Art Mall in the heart of Tsim Sha Tsui.

F&B Although there are only two dining outlets, guests need not fret because nearby malls are accessible. Inspired by the neighbourhood concept, eatstreet@pentaplace's menu features local delicacies that are not usually found in a hotel, e.g. milk tea, egg waffles, and cart noodles with curry fish balls, pork rind and white turnip. I liked the casual eating concept. If you are in hurry, the pizzabar also offers phone-in takeaway services with choices of fresh salad, pizza slices or whole pizzas.

SERVICE Checking in was paperless as it was digitised. Housekeeping was efficient; I called to ask for an iPhone charging cable and it arrived within five minutes.

VERDICT A casual hotel experience that's a lot of fun.



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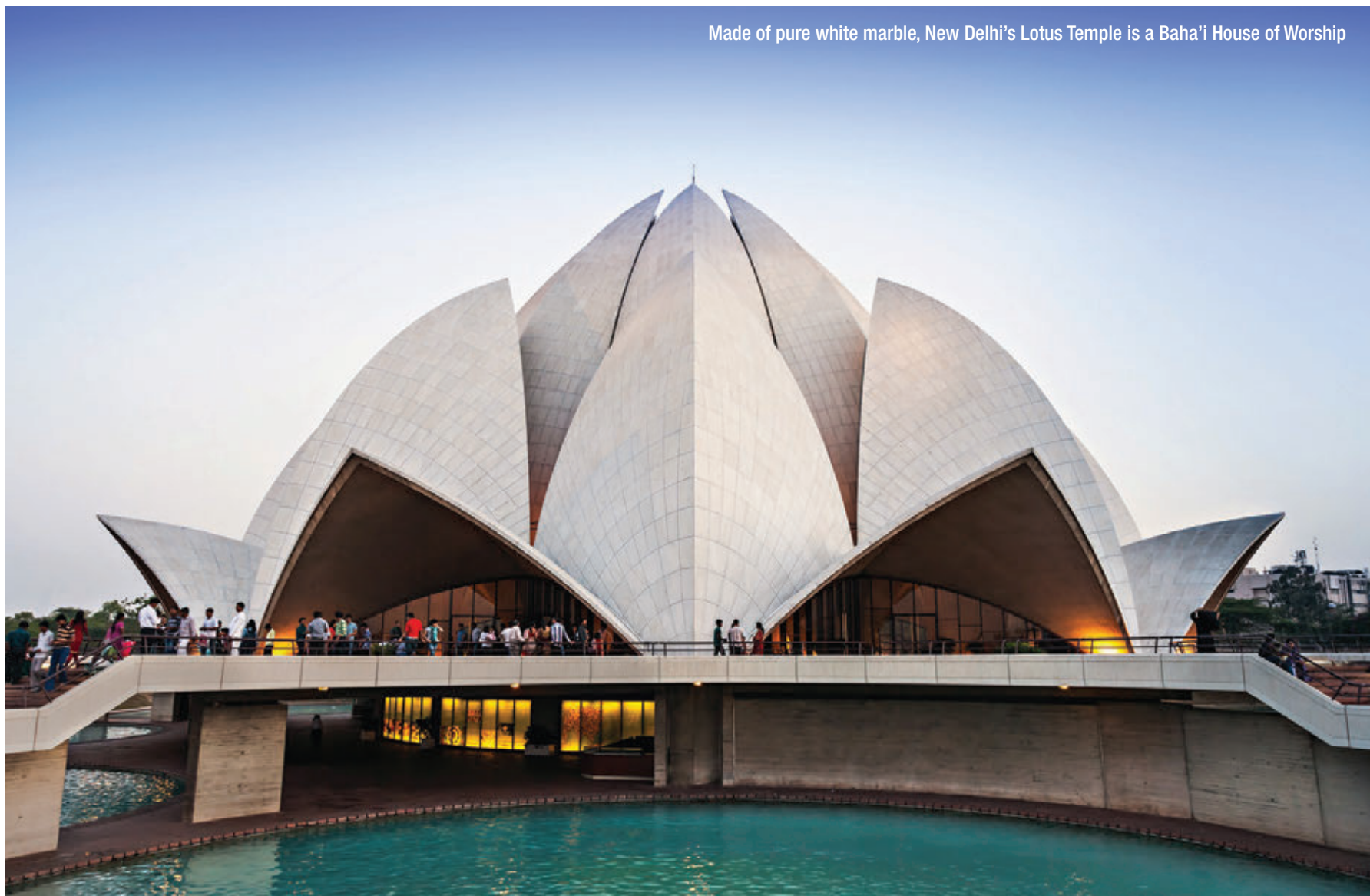




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Made of pure white marble, New Delhi's Lotus Temple is a Baha'i House of Worship



Challenging conditions

New Delhi hotels are facing rate pressures, while tourist arrivals growth is slow. By **Rohit Kaul**

Arrivals According to the Bureau of Immigration India, the National Capital Territory of Delhi received 2.3 million foreign tourists in 2012, a 8.6 per cent year-on-year rise, making it the third state in terms of country-wide arrivals. Delhi welcomed about 1.5 million tourists in 1H2013.

Delhi Tourism and Transportation Development Corporation's (DTTDC) chairman, Manish Chatrath, revealed that the city's international markets including the US, UK, Canada, Germany, France, Japan and Australia are expanding, and that the NTO is seeing good demand from the CIS countries as well.

NTO DTTDC wants to promote the state as a popular destination for film shoots. It is looking to set up a film commission to facilitate single-window clearance for foreign and Indian producers' proposals to shoot feature films in New Delhi.

Meanwhile, an ambitious project of DTTDC is the signature bridge being built at Wazirabad in East Delhi, modelled on the London Bridge. It is ex-

pected to be open by end-2014. A recreational park with water sports facilities and restaurants is also being developed in the adjoining area.

Chatrath said the NTO is hopeful of completing a major infrastructure project named Dilli Haat in Janakpuri area, to which financial support of US\$40.6 million has been provided by the Delhi government. Additionally, the upgrading of tourist facilities at lakes, where leisure boating activities are offered, will be looked into.

The NTO's budget for 2013/2014 is US\$11.4 million and US\$9.7 million for tourism promotion and infrastructure development respectively, revealed Chatrath. Year-on-year growth in tourism revenue of around 10 per cent is predicted for this year.

When asked what DTTDC is doing to grow the number of international arrivals, Chatrath said: "We are participating in major tradeshows such as WTM and ITB Berlin. Our focus is to make New Delhi an environment-friendly tourism and cultural destination.

"We are looking to promote our calendar of events and festivals to international tourists."



"Air fares have often been a dampener and stringent visa norms are one of the major concerns for tour operators and MICE specialists."

Surinder Singh Sodhi
Senior vice president and head
Leisure travel (inbound)
Thomas Cook (India)

Hotels End-2013 saw JW Marriott becoming the first property to open in New Delhi Aerocity, followed by Lemon Tree Hotels. The Aerocity project will add 5,000 rooms to the region.

"After Aerocity, there is not much supply coming up in New Delhi. Once the supply is absorbed by the market in the next two to three years, we can expect rates to rise," said Rahul Pandit, president and executive director, Lemon Tree Hotels.

However, Manav Thadani, managing director, HVS India, observed: "With the entry of the Aerocity hotels, occupancy and rate pressures over the next two to three years remain imminent."

New Delhi (excluding Gurgaon, Noida and Greater Noida) had around 11,500 rooms in 2012/13, the second-largest hotel market in the country after Mumbai, according to HVS. Around 60-65 per cent was in the luxury and upscale space.

According to STR Global, New Delhi hotels have suffered from inadequate preparation for the shift of business to Gurgaon and Noida. Market-wide RevPAR has declined 31 per cent since 2010, while ARR dropped 19 per cent

between 2010 and 2013 because of low demand. Chain-affiliated hotel supply has trebled since 2006, with the number of mid-segment hotels rising from five to 18 per cent and upscale hotels from 21 to 27 per cent.

Cushman & Wakefield also found that luxury hotels in New Delhi experienced a year-on-year one to two per cent drop in ARR in 2013.

Access Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport now has capacity for 34 million passengers, and traffic is expected to hit 46 million a year by 2015. A fourth terminal is also expected to open by 2016. IGI registered the most number of foreign arrivals in India (35.7 per cent), followed by Mumbai airport (19.2 per cent) in 2012.

Last year, THAI Smile commenced direct Phuket-New Delhi flights in April, Air India started daily New Delhi-Sydney flights in August and Malindo Air kickstarted daily Kuala Lumpur-Delhi flights in December. Air India also signed a code-share with Slovenia-based Adria Airways in November to launch daily Delhi-Ljubljana flights with stopovers in Frankfurt.

My choices

New Delhi

Compiled by Rohit Kaul



Rohit Vig
Managing director-India
StayWell Hospitality Group



Subhash Goyal
President
Indian Association of Tour Operators



Arun Anand
Managing director
Midtown Travels

What is your biggest challenge?

The biggest challenge is the opening of hotels in the New Delhi Aerocity, which will add a large number of rooms to the existing inventory and cause average occupancy to drop further.

The biggest challenge is to restore the confidence of international travellers in the city's safety and good civic governance. Another challenge is (for the authorities) to reduce the luxury tax on hotels and to rationalise general taxation policies.

The biggest challenge is to create confidence among travellers that the city is safe and has good civic governance. Travellers also need assurance that the city has good infrastructure in place and a clean, hygienic environment.

What must be done?

It is important for hotels to raise their service standard. I think there is enough demand but hotels need to deliver world-class products. The efforts have to come from both the top management and the team on the ground.

There is an immediate need to beef up security measures, especially for the safety of women travellers, and to improve civic governance. Taxes need to be reduced for the city to compete with other destinations.

The government needs to look into the above-mentioned issues and enforce rules and regulations for the safety of tourists. The perception that the city is unsafe has to be changed immediately. Additionally, the existing infrastructure needs upgrading.

What do you need from...

the government? There has been infrastructure development in the National Capital Territory of Delhi but it is not enough and more needs to be done. New Delhi lags behind cities like Beijing in this respect. We need to cut short travelling time for tourists and create a sense of security among them.

the hotels? We need hotels to offer competitive rates, accommodation that caters to all types of travellers and efficient services.

the airlines? The airlines need to improve connectivity and have a liberal baggage policy. Airlines that have reduced free baggage allowance on domestic flights from 20kg to 15kg should reconsider the move. Airlines should also adhere to their schedules to avoid inconveniencing travellers.

What are the prospects for 2014?

Business is bound to grow. Whoever offers a fresh product and has the right sales and marketing strategy is going to generate business.

New Delhi, being the main gateway to India, will have good prospects in 2014 if it improves its tourist infrastructure.

Prospects appear to be quite good but much depends on how the problems are taken care of. We suffered a bad image in 2013 because of certain untoward incidents (i.e. sexual assaults on foreign women travellers). We need to create a positive image by tightening our safety and security measures.

Products

Dining, clubbing, conking out at an upscale hotel

S Pangaea

S Pangaea is the newly opened night club at the Ashok Hotel in New Delhi. It can accommodate up to 400 guests and offers 20 VIP tables. The place offers an atmosphere of grandeur, thanks to its world-class art collection, and has redefined standards of clubbing in New Delhi. If you want to party with who's who of the city, this is the place to be.

Contact

Tel: (91- 97) 1113-3138
Website: www.pangaea-lounge.com

Monkey Bar

Pegged as India's first gastro-pub brand, Monkey Bar offers the essence of a pub, backed by excellent food and service, at accessible prices. Guests get to savour innovative food in a soulful ambience, along with trendy and fabulous cocktails. The bar is a perfect option when one is looking for a great evening out with friends.

Contact

Tel: (91-11) 4109-5155
Website: www.mobar.in

Lemon Tree Premier

Located at New Delhi Aerocity, Lemon Tree Premier offers 287 rooms and suites.

The upscale hotel features eye-catching interiors and inspiring artwork that gives it a contemporary and trendy feel. It also offers a unique section for ladies, where tighter security is provided along with an exclusive range of in-room amenities designed for them. F&B outlets include Citrus Cafe – a 24/7 coffee shop; Slounge – a hip recreation bar; and Republic of Noodles – the pan-Asian restaurant.

Contact

Tel: (91-11) 4605-0101
Website: www.lemontreehotels.com

The California Boulevard

The restaurant named after the iconic American landmark offers a multi-cuisine menu along with a collection of the finest wines. It has a posh decor with designer furniture and serving ware. The western

music and aroma of luxurious perfumes add to the ambience. The restaurant even boasts a wooden pizza oven, a testimony to the attention paid to details when it comes to an authentic multi-cuisine experience.

Contact

Tel: (91-99) 7110-8561
Website: www.facebook.com/the-california-boulevard



From left: S Pangaea, Monkey Bar

VISIT MALAYSIA YEAR 2014: EVENT HIGHLIGHTS: CHECK OUT THE 5!

Over 200 events and festivals have been lined up for Visit Malaysia Year 2014, ranging from cultural events, food festivals, sports and adventure to music and arts festivals, and shopping. 5 not-to-be-missed events are:

- **National Open Houses** - Chinese New Year, Hari Raya, Deepavali, Christmas, Gawai Festival and Tadau Kaamatan festivals. As a multi-ethnic nation, Malaysians are great hosts to tourists. This is a perfect time for tourists to visit and experience Malaysia's gracious hospitality and sample traditional cuisines.

- **Colours of 1Malaysia** is the biggest cultural extravaganza in the country, showcasing Malaysia's multi-ethnic communities and their colourful cultures. Feast your senses to visually captivating parades and processions and a myriad of cultural shows and exciting programmes.

- **World-class sports and adventures** like the Formula 1 Petronas Malaysia Grand Prix, Malaysian Motorcycle Grand Prix, Sarawak Regatta, Malaysian Open Kuala Lumpur ATP World Tour, CIMB Classic PGA Tour and many more. With state-of-the-art sports facilities and wide experiences in hosting international sporting events, Malaysia is all geared up to be the perfect host to these events.

- **Mega sale events** include the 1Malaysia GP Sale, 1Malaysia Mega Sale Carnival and the 1Malaysia Year-End Sale. As the world's fourth best shopping destination, Kuala Lumpur offers the world shopping convenience, great values, affordability, variety

and friendly services.

- **Magic of the Night** will transform the Putrajaya Lake into a magical fairyland with brightly-lit and beautifully decorated floats from Malaysia

and many other countries crusing along the lake. With a dazzling display of fireworks and colourful cultural performances, the nights will be more than just magical – it's going to

be memorable!

For more information or enquiries, please contact Visit Malaysia Year 2014 Secretariat, at 1300 88 5050 or log on to www.vmy2014.com



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