

## VIEW FROM THE TOP

Ryoichi Matsuyama became president of Japan National Tourism Organization just after the Tohoku earthquake in 2011 and led Japan to become a top hit among Asians today. He is far from finished, [Raini Hamdi](#) discovers



# CLOSING THE LOOPHOLES

The recent spate of abrupt travel agency closures in Singapore has given the industry a bad name. [Paige Lee Pei Qi](#) examines why these agencies fail and what can be done to address the problem



## BE A LEGO, NOT A KODAK

In today's highly competitive market, [S Puvaneswary](#) explains why staying relevant and embracing change are the keys to profitability in the travel sector



## BATTLE OF THE THEME PARKS

Harry Potter, Hello Kitty and Mickey Mouse have found homes in Asia as the region's growing middle class fuels a boom in theme park attractions



## LONGING FOR ASIA'S TRAVELLERS

With Asia firmly planted on their radars, Paris and Israel are going all out to woo longhaul visitors from the region, write [Paige Lee Pei Qi](#) and [Rohit Kaul](#)



## IN PURSUIT OF HERITAGE TOURISM

Already a popular cultural destination in China, what else does Leshan need to attract the international high-end clientele? [Caroline Boey](#) finds out



# Contents & editorial

Want to read us on the go?



Analysis	04
Intelligence	07
Agency	08
View from the top	09
Social	10
Shop	12
Connect	26



Report:  
Longhaul Travel



Guide:  
Theme Parks



Destination:  
China



Destination:  
India

## NO SOUND OF MUSIC IN THE HILLS



Alas, if Switzerland is not able to find the solution to fill up the hotels in the mountains, its tourism industry will retreat as surely as the glaciers have and are continuing to.

**H**ello summer and by the time this issue is out, I would have romped through a couple of Swiss mountains. At the time of writing this, I am in Gstaad. Clearly, the impact of the de-pegging of the Swiss franc to the euro – coupled with the fact that Switzerland's traditional western European markets can no longer afford the high prices Swiss hotels and restaurants must charge due to their high operating costs – is having an impact. The fancy Gstaad promenade, lined with only the Louis Vuittons and Rolexes of this world, is not bustling with people.

Switzerland, along with Greece, France (see our Longhaul Travel report, page 14), Italy, Spain and the rest of them, need Asian and Middle Eastern visitors – any source market that has strong purchasing power – badly. But Switzerland is currently in a particularly difficult position. With the Swiss franc being almost on par with the euro today, it is attractive for Swiss themselves to holiday in neighbouring destinations rather than at home, while the neighbours find it awfully expensive to holiday in Switzerland. The weak euro, meanwhile, is a strong pull for Asians to travel to other European destinations than Switzerland. Forward bookings traced by ForwardKeys show Amsterdam, Milan (which is hosting the World Expo till October), Munich, Barcelona and Istanbul as among the top spots for longhaul leisure travel from Asia.

This is a pity, because the alpine country has so much to offer: hard-to-forget experiences at such high quality, comfort and security that every single franc paid for is worth it. For example, from Gstaad,

I went to Glacier 3000, the cable cabin taking me 3,000m up above sea level and there, on a sunny summer's day, I walked on the snow-covered glacier to a splendid monolith, a two-hour walk that did not feel long because of the uniqueness of the experience and the beauty of the surroundings (plus there is always a panoramic restaurant at the end of these walks that serves mouth-watering food and drinks). There are also other attractions such as a Peak Walk (walk on a suspension bridge between two peaks) and the world's highest alpine roller-coaster (with a starting elevation of 2,971m and length of 1,000m) which uses bobsled-like cars on its tracks, so you can control the speed.

That's just a day's outing and just one of the out-of-this-world places in Switzerland. Alas, if Switzerland is not able to find the solution to fill up the hotels in the mountains, its tourism industry will retreat as surely as the glaciers have and are continuing to.

One solution perhaps is for the Swiss at home and abroad to recognise the challenge the industry is facing and support it by holidaying in Switzerland.

And for Asian travel agencies to sell to their clients the idea that glaciers are not forever.

**Raini Hamdi**

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### COMING UP

**NEXT ISSUE:  
SEPTEMBER  
2015**

**ANALYSIS** Tourism is given a glorious boost in Kazakhstan as the Central Asian nation rolls out pro-tourist policies

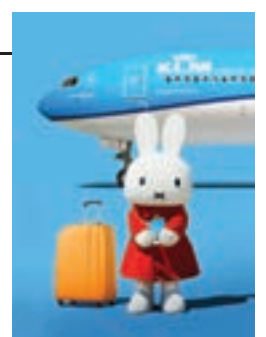
**INDONESIA** Toraja, in South Sulawesi, is waking up from its hibernation to pursue international visitors

**BEACH RESORTS** A look at Asian beach resorts' recent performance as well as their outlook and new attractions

### WE LIKE



First it was Kitty, now it's Miffy. KLM is the latest carrier to hop on the cutesy bandwagon by launching a one-time special Miffy flight KL810 on August 11, 2015 between Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta. In addition to the brand new KLM Economy Class cabin, the Boeing 777-200ER aircraft will feature the adorable white bunny, from the check-in counter to items onboard including a KLM- and Miffy-themed meal tray, head rest, pillow case and more.







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# Analysis

In today's competitive market, **S Puvaneswary** explains why staying relevant and embracing change are the keys to profitability in the travel business world

## BE A LEGO, NOT A KODAK

**B**lockbuster, Kodak and Atari have a common theme. From greatness they fell into oblivion simply because they had failed to keep up with market trends.

On the other hand, a brand like Lego, which started during the Great Depression in the mid-1930s, has constantly reinvented itself in the face of change and stayed powerfully relevant, pointed out Michael McQueen, bestselling author of *Winning the Battle for Relevance*.

In the 1980s, faced with competition from digital video games, Lego built its own branded video games. A few years later, it developed the hugely popular multiplayer online game called Lego Universe which allowed children from around the world to play with each other in a virtual Lego world. Even more recently, the company created smartphone apps that allowed users to build Lego shapes on their mobile device.

Lego's success story shows the importance of embracing change and staying relevant, an example that travel agencies can learn from to maintain profitability in the age of competition.

"There is no one big strategy, initiative or technology that gives successful retailers a competitive edge," said Amanda Stevens, keynote speaker at the Travelport Live Asia-Pacific conference held in Seoul in June.

Stevens, a retail marketing expert and author of *Retail Revival*, added: "It was the little things done over time, harnessed by cumulative effect. In other words, they focused on the little things that mattered to customers."

Concurred David Hassan, chief information officer of Sydney-based Helloworld: "Positive interaction with customers and building rapport is more important than hard sell."

He cited the example of how a travel consultant in his company sold a A\$50,000 (US\$38,553) honeymoon holiday and threw in travel insurance for free, a gesture that made the customer happy because it showed the consultant had gone the extra mile.

"Thus, the customer started marketing our company to her friends and you know how powerful word-of-mouth marketing can be," said Hassan.

He added: "We have rolled out a Hello You programme that stresses not on hard selling, but building relationships with consumers and having conversations with them to build commonality."

### Swift solutions for business travellers

Busy and time-poor corporate travellers look for quick solutions and an agency that has recognised the importance of agility in doing business is Future.Travel, an OTA based in Vietnam.

David Watson, general manager of Future.Travel, said: "Corporate travellers demand speed and the SMEs want to make their own bookings."

From August 1, Future.Travel will en-

able online login for its business clients where they can access agreed fares, hotel choices and car hires for their business trips. Clients' travel policies and customer profiles will be loaded into the system and the travel planner or the corporate travellers can make a booking themselves on the portal.

"If something goes wrong, we are there to assist because we monitor the bookings. Every time a booking is made, we are on top of it. The client does not have to talk to us, but we are monitoring and ready to assist 24/7," said Watson.

Future.Travel targets SMEs with 100 employees or less. Having gone live in February, it helps users save time as they can make comparisons of three different airline options by simply checking what they want, before this is presented on one page for easy review. Options can also be sent out via email.

### Adding warmth to a cold front

Meanwhile, Zuji Singapore has built its brand loyalty and customer base by focusing on customer engagement and personalisation.

Its CEO, Chua Hui Wan, said: "OTAs are traditionally seen to be very cold as there is no face-to-face contact with the client. However, we strive to engage our customers who cannot physically see us, and personalise our offerings through our four weekly EDMs."

The last three searches the customer made will appear in the EDM. If the customer has made flight bookings with Zuji Singapore, the OTA will then suggest hotels in that destination to the customer via the EDM.

The OTA has also built its brand image through CSR programmes. A programme currently running is the School Pocket Money Fund, where a donation of S\$0.50 is made for every Zuji Singapore Facebook page Like during the ongoing campaign period until November 1, 2015. Meanwhile, S\$2.50 is donated for every online booking made through MasterCard.

OTAs are traditionally seen to be very cold as there is no face-to-face contact with the client. However, we strive to engage our customers who cannot physically see us, and personalise our offerings through our four weekly EDMs.

**Chua Hui Wan**  
CEO  
Zuji Singapore






# 9 TRAITS

## OF TRAVELLERS FROM CHINA'S SECONDARY CITIES



China is now the largest outbound travel market both in volume and value in the world. Some 134 million Chinese are expected to travel outside the country by 2020. In addition, more people from second and third-tier metropolitan areas such as Tianjin, Qingdao, Dalian and Chongqing will venture abroad as disposable income in these cities grows.

As discussed at TravelRave 2014, here are nine things you need to know to compete for the Chinese secondary cities tourism market. Look out for more insights like these at this year's TravelRave, where ITB Asia will be partnering with the China Outbound Tourism Research Institute to discuss how to attract Chinese tourists.

<h3>1. SAVE ON TRAVEL, SPEND ON ARRIVAL</h3>  <p>Travellers from Chinese secondary cities tend to book lower-cost flights and budget hotels but will spend much more on restaurants, attractions, and shopping.</p>	<h3>2. BRING BACK GIFTS</h3>  <p>They love to shop – not for themselves but for souvenirs for family and friends at home.</p>	<h3>3. STAY A WHILE</h3>  <p>Most of them are first-time travellers who tend to stay for a longer duration to explore a destination more extensively.</p>
<h3>4. HELP PLEASE</h3>  <p>Being newbies to travel, most prefer some handholding when making reservations and tend to rely on travel agents.</p>	<h3>5. TALK TO ME</h3>  <p>They prefer destinations where Mandarin is spoken, underscoring the importance for destinations to have Mandarin content and Mandarin-speaking staff.</p>	<h3>6. FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD</h3>  <p>Whether it's fine dining or simpler fare, food is often a big focus of their travels.</p>
<h3>7. VALUE FOR MONEY</h3>  <p>Those looking for local experiences or seeking the prestige of travelling are especially price-sensitive. While they are keen to participate in these experiences, they are also mindful of the costs involved.</p>	<h3>8. CLOSER TO HOME</h3>  <p>They tend to flock to short-haul destinations, with Hong Kong and Macau topping the list. South Korea, Thailand, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Singapore are the next most popular spots.</p>	<h3>9. SEE THE SIGHTS</h3>  <p>Sightseeing is the main purpose of most trips. However, according to joint research by the Singapore Tourism Board and the China Tourism Academy, they choose places for reasons such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>28% the emotional importance of a family holiday</li><li>27% the experience of local culture</li><li>23% and the prestige of travelling</li></ul>

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TravelRave events





# Analysis

The recent spate of abrupt travel agency closures in Singapore has affected many travellers and given the industry a bad name. **Paige Lee Pei Qi** examines why these businesses fail and what should be done to address the root of the problem

## CLOSING THE LOOPHOLES

**A**s more travellers turn to the Internet to plan their own trips and the proliferation of OTAs continue to pose a strong threat, the heat has proven too much for a growing number of players in the traditional travel agency sector.

Managing the bottom line of businesses while keeping pace with the dynamism of the rapidly evolving customer needs is a constant challenge in a mature travel market like Singapore, opined Jane Chang, head of marketing communications, Chan Brothers Travel.

Chang said: "We are constantly at the mercy of health epidemics, natural calamities and political unrest, among a whole host of possible travel disruptions that can wipe out months of sales collection."

CTC vice president of marketing and PR, Sylvia Tan, commented: "While there is still demand for traditional travel agencies from the more mature age group, there is a lot of competition today with more choices and options available for travellers via different distribution platforms with travel offerings directly

from suppliers to consumers."

A total of 86 travel agencies have shuttered in the first five months of 2015 according to the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), and this number looks set to exceed the 114 that ceased operations last year. There are currently 1,195 travel agencies in operation in Singapore as of end-May this year.

Major player Asia-Euro Holidays surprised the trade and consumers alike with its sudden closure in May, leaving hundreds of customers in the lurch. Likewise, Five Stars Tours, another well-known travel agency, went bankrupt in January last year and affected thousands of travellers.

NATAS spokesman Gregory Tan attribute the high operation costs, a sluggish economic outlook and poor business planning or management as some of the factors driving agencies to fold up.

Michael Chiam, senior tourism lecturer at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, agreed: "Agencies who are prone to failure include those small agencies with limited capital and those who compete purely based on price.



Competition is becoming more intense and that may lead to price cutting and low margins for the agencies."

These abrupt closures have resulted in industry experts rallying for tighter regulations on travel consultancies to prevent more of such shutdowns that cast the industry in poor light.

According to STB's director, travel agents and tourist guides, Ong Ling Lee, all travel consultants operating in Singapore are licensed by the board under the Travel Agent (TA) Act & related regulations.

"The intent of the legislation is to weed out fly-by-night TAs and provide safeguards for the public against malpractices," explained Ong.

"When applying for, renewing their licences or at all times during their operation, TAs have to fulfil certain requirements, such as maintaining a minimum of S\$100,000 (US\$74,000) in paid-up capital and net worth, or minimally S\$100,000 cash for sole proprietors or partnerships."

The barrier to entry is not enough though, remarked Alicia Seah, director of marketing communications at Dynasty Travel. She said: "We can increase the paid-up capital to at least S\$500,000 or even up to S\$1 million so that the owners will be more committed and not set up a "pop-up" store.

"This will show that these TAs are making a serious commitment and they have the capacity to last in the industry."

Seah added that STB, in addition to its annual audits of TA licensees, should perform stringent checks on the background and qualifications of owners or directors before issuance of the TA licence.

Likewise, Chan Brother Travel's Chang proposed a minimum capital amount of S\$1 million as well as stricter financial audits to "flush out those without financial strength or with financial woes to continue their businesses".

Ngee Ann Polytechnic's Chiam suggested for STB to also assess applicants based on their prior experience and business model – on top of the capital amount – before issuing them with a TA licence, although he added that it is not STB's duty to monitor the travel agencies' operational cash flow to ensure that they will not go into the red.

To protect travellers in the meantime, all licensed travel consultants in Singapore must now ask outbound leisure customers if they would like to purchase travel insurance covering travel consultant insolvency.

This new licensing condition, which has been introduced since July 15, requires travel consultants to offer their customers travel insurance against the company's insolvency and to record their customers' final decision.

It is applicable on a per person basis whenever a consumer makes a deposit or payment of S\$500 or above, or purchases a travel package costing S\$1,000 or more.

According to STB, the new rule "serves to educate consumers of the measures they can take to protect their interests when they make travel bookings", and was launched following STB's discussions with the trade assessing consumer protection measures over the past year.

STB, assistant chief executive, Yap Chin Siang, said: "With the implementation of the new licensing condition, consumers will now be better informed on steps that they can take to protect themselves against unforeseen circumstances including travel consultant insolvency."

Yap said STB will assist industry stakeholders with implementation of the new condition and will "layer on with continued consumer education efforts".

However, Dynasty Travel's Seah said the insurance does not provide 100 per cent coverage hence more has to be done to address the "root of the problem" and the financial health of travel consultants.

In response to whether new measures will be rolled out to protect outbound travellers, STB's Ong said: "As the tourism landscape is constantly evolving, STB keeps a close watch on industry trends and developments. We are already engaging our industry stakeholders on this and will share more details when ready."

- Number of travel agencies in operation in Singapore: 1,195
- Number of travel agency closures in 2014: 114
- Number of travel agencies closures in the first five months of 2015: 86

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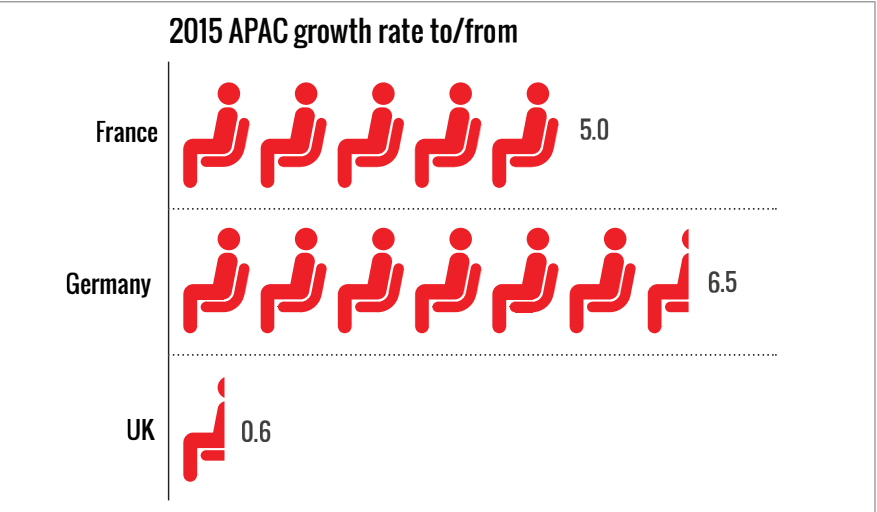
Healthy air traffic flow from Europe to APAC

**France**  
China – the biggest country pair (CP) with France – is growing at 10%, while the India CP sees an impressive 25% growth. A 13% fall is recorded for the Singapore CP, possibly due to falling passenger numbers on the route as well as diversion of traffic onto the Gulf carriers. A surprise is the 8% fall on the Malaysia CP, as the traffic loss from the 2014 Malaysia Airlines’ tragedies should have started to recover and Air France has relaunched flights into Malaysia in 2013.

**Germany**  
The Germany-China CP is the biggest with 10% growth. The India CP has overtaken both the Japan and Thailand CPs to become the region’s second top.

The Japan CP is growing strongly at 8%. The 2% growth for the Thailand CP, though disappointing, is still better than the 1% average annual fall since 2000. The Hong Kong CP slips further as German travellers increasingly see Hong Kong part of China while Singapore took some business traffic from Hong Kong.

**UK**  
The India CP is the largest – almost double that of the Hong Kong CP, which itself is 25% bigger than Singapore (third biggest). The China CP ranks fourth. The 6% fall for leading CP, India, is big for its market size – 55,000 fewer seats sold – a marked change from the fast +7% annual average since 2000. Hong Kong, in second place, has the strongest growth of 15%.

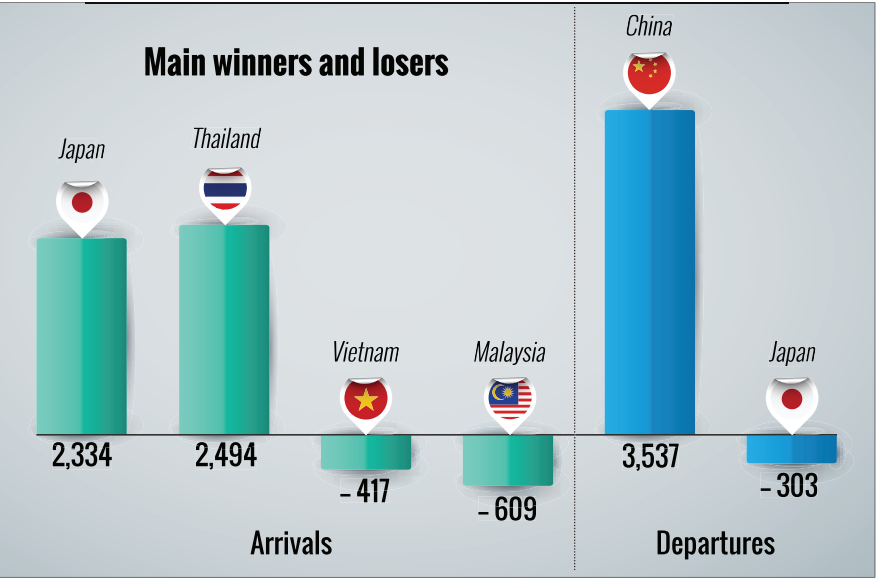


Outbound grows faster than inbound in APAC

Early figures indicate growth in visitor arrivals in Asia-Pacific is around 4% and outbound travel around 9%.

**Arrivals**  
The fastest growth was for Japan at 45%, most of which came from the 105% growth in visitors from China. Next was Thailand at +25%, partly due to recovery from weak results the year before and rapid growth (+97%) from the China market. South Korea shows a year-to-date total growth of just under 1% – but that hides a 41% fall in June caused by the scare over the MERS outbreak in the destination. The biggest fall in percentage terms was Malaysia’s -9% for 1Q. Singapore was also still falling sizeably at -5%.

**Departures**  
China’s growth is slowing to +10% through April, compared with +16% for the same period in 2014, based on TBA estimates. In actual numbers, China is still by far the largest – with an additional 3.5 million more travellers. If South Korea’s inbound business is hurting, its outbound travel is still growing fast at +20% year-to-date. South Korea is already a much bigger outbound market than Japan (third place). Outbound from Japan has been falling nearly 5% this year while we estimate that India has been growing 11%. If those estimates are confirmed (they are for different periods), then India has overtaken Japan to become the region’s fourth largest.



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HOTEL BAROMETER

April: a lacklustre month for Asia’s hotels

In Asia-Pacific overall, occupancy in April was down four percentage points to 75%; average room rate – in US dollars – was down 12% to US\$135, pushing revPAR in US dollars down 16% to US\$107. Bangkok’s occupancy continues its fast recovery. Shanghai also shows good growth in occupancy although the resulting 71% is still below the regional average. The Maldives results – driven by the fall in occupancy – may fall further, based on negative sentiments following internecine political fighting. There was a 3% fall in arrivals in April, the second time this year, and also a fall in the length of stay. A drop of 0.3 days to 5.9 days might seem small, but that is a fall of almost 5%. A surprise is the occupancy dip in Hong Kong, which is usually steady. Linking Hong Kong arrivals with hotel results is complex, as China – which represents 75% of total visitors – has an oversized effect on the city’s occupancy. It is understood that a smaller share of visitors from China stay in ‘mainstream’ hotels – 75% for all visitors, 68% for those from China.

Hotel operating results in selected centres, April 2015

Location	Occupancy, %	Growth, %	ARR, US\$*	Growth, %	RevPAR, US\$*	Growth, %
Bangkok	60.8	18.8	95	-3.7	58	14.4
Hanoi	81.7	2.2	91	-2.8	74	-0.7
Hong Kong	79.7	-6.6	218	-8.7	173	-14.7
Maldives	71.9	-4.8	746	1.3	537	-3.6
Shanghai	71.1	12.3	110	5.7	78	18.7
Sydney	88.3	-0.6	179	-15.8	158	-16.4

Notes: Compared with same month in 2014. RevPAR = revenue per available room. \*Calculated at exchange rate for specific month to US\$. Source: hotels to TBA

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# Agency

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## ASK THE EXPERT

# HOW PLACES CAN BECOME SUSTAINABLE

**M**uch is being said and written about “sustainable travel” and “responsible tourism”. The focus has been mostly on the role of travel companies in providing products and services that are deemed sustainable. But destination managers increasingly see imperatives to ensure that travellers and travel providers act in ways that sustain the places visited and to address the growing demand for travel that is “responsible”.

Why should a destination become more “sustainable”?

There are many compelling reasons. Sustainability is about ensuring that the tourism assets that attract the visitors continue to attract visitors. It's about engaging the community in tourism such that residents welcome and support the visitors. It's about reducing costs through more efficient use of energy for transport and accommodations. It's about keeping the quality of residents' life and the visitor experience positive by avoiding traffic congestion, foul air, noise pollution

and much more. It's about addressing the growing demand for responsible products, which today comes mostly from Europe but is growing among all source markets. Plus, we can never forget that the destination and its private-sector players must be sustainable financially as well.

But how can a destination become more sustainable?

The best way to start or improve sustainable practices and policies is to follow the guidelines provided by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), known as the GSTC Criteria.

Known for years for its Hotel and Tour Operator Criteria, the GSTC launched in 2013 its Destination Criteria. Both guidelines were created by a highly inclusive, global set of experts drawn from the private and public sectors, academia and NGOs. They provided more than 4,500 submissions that were condensed to a manageable set of 41 criteria that define sustain-

ability in travel and tourism.

The criteria guide destinations on positive actions to improve upon and negative actions to avoid. Each criterion has multiple “indicators” providing a specific direction. The criteria were developed in English but have been translated into most Asian languages and are available free on [www.gstcouncil.org](http://www.gstcouncil.org).

Gaining familiarity with the criteria by decision-makers and stakeholders involved in tourism is the perfect way to start. This shouldn't be limited to the ministries of tourism and trade associations, but should include policymakers from various realms that influence planning and financing in the community, such as transport, finance, infrastructure development, education, labour and others, depending on local conditions.

GSTC offers training programmes of one to five days on how to apply the criteria. This training sets the team on its journey towards sustainability. Destination certification by a GSTC-approved certification body (GSTC itself does not provide certification) can be useful in setting goals and providing the discipline needed to make meaningful progress.

India took a big step forward in 2014 by developing national standards based largely on the GSTC Criteria, and other Asian countries are studying the idea.

Sustainability cannot wait, as destinations and the planet are in peril, which is why UNWTO secretary-general Taleb Rifai has said: “The UNWTO wholeheartedly supports the work of the GSTC and its sustainability criteria.”

Sustainability cannot wait, as destinations and the planet are in peril...



**Randy Durband**  
CEO, Global Sustainable Tourism Council

Note: PATA and GSTC are hosting a three-day intensive sustainable tourism training at the PATA Engagement Hub in Bangkok from September 15-17. GSTC lead trainer, Guy Chester, who has developed tourism master plans in China and Fiji, and undertaken training in Indonesia and India, will be on hand to share best practices.

## INNOVATORS

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

# A SHARING ECONOMY ON TRIPS

**WHO** CEO and co-founder of Triip.me, Ha Lam, spent over eight years in the travel industry and used to be the tour guide for many international friends visiting Ho Chi Minh City.

Ha said: “I enjoy bringing joy and happiness to every single friend I meet and that is one of the reasons why I founded Triip in 2013 – to bring happiness to travellers and local experts whenever and wherever we travel.”

**WHAT** According to Ha, Triip is a pioneer in the tour sector that makes use of the sharing economy space.

On the Triip.me portal, any ordinary person can turn into an amateur tour guide overnight, as they are given the liberty to create a tourism package, subjected to review first, then sell it to tourists directly on the website. Once the tourist has successfully booked the trip, he or she can arrange a meeting or pick-up directly with the creator of the itinerary – anywhere that both can agree on.

Once a tour is paid for, Triip distributes 90 per cent of the earnings to the tour guide and retains 10 per cent to support its own operations.

Ha said the portal is not about making money, but about connecting people, sharing experiences, localising travel and preserving culture.

**WHY** Explaining the challenges travellers often face in their search for authentic experiences, Ha said: “The locals are actually the ones that know best, so Triip.me not only promotes local entrepreneurship but also forms friendships and fosters greater cultural awareness.”

By tapping on the locals' knowledge and expertise, Ha said the website aims to boost the local economy by allowing locals to profit from the innovation, while sharing authentic tourism experiences with the rest of the world.

She said: “These locals know their cities inside out, and are full of unique stories that cannot be heard elsewhere. Some can show you their exciting city life, while others may be passionate about the local traditions and customs and can share a ‘do what the locals do’ experience.”

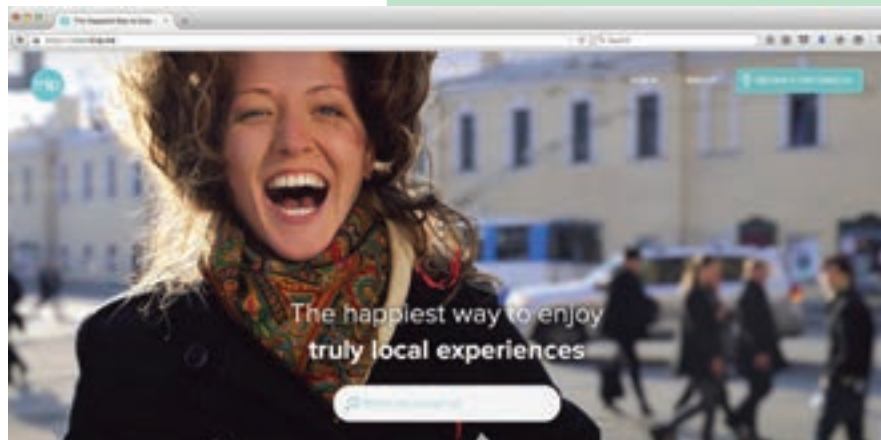
**TARGET** According to Ha, there are currently 3,314 tours offered on Triip.me, with the most coming from countries like Vietnam, the Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Australia, Peru, Germany and Spain.

With her sights set on the international audience, Ha said: “Thirty per cent of travellers today belong to the FIT segment and this innovation has been growing steadily since we started over the past few years.”

“With the popularity of the sharing economy space today, this is a trend that will catch on very quickly across the world,” Ha added.



Ha Lam (above) is the CEO and co-founder of Triip.me, a travel portal that leverages the sharing economy space





## View from the top

He became president of Japan National Tourism Organization just after the Tohoku earthquake in 2011 and led Japan to become a top hit among Asians today. Ryoichi Matsuyama is far from finished, **Raini Hamdi** discovers

# TOURISM'S SAMURAI

### You joined in October 2011, just after the tsunami. Was that the biggest challenge of your illustrious career?

It was one of the most difficult challenges. I have been in the private sector for some time now and there have been so many ups and downs (laughs). But the tsunami was very serious, because of the number of lives lost and the nuclear radiation fears. Even when we had said Japan was safe to visit, no one believed us. But we kept giving only the facts and we invited 1,000 journalists and travel agency people to see Japan for themselves. As well, celebrities like Lady Gaga – she loves Japan – was spreading the good message for us.

Eventually we were able to restore the confidence of visitors, including those from countries such as Singapore and Germany who were sensitive (about safety). Arrivals went up drastically and we hit 10 million in 2013. We had 8.6 million in 2010, 6.2 million in 2011 (disaster year), 8.3 million in 2012, 10 million in 2013 and 13.4 million in 2014.

### Was visa easing the main reason why Japan rose to such prominence in the last couple of years?

It was a combination of factors, including our effort to restore the confidence of people to visit Japan; Abenomics, which saw the devaluation of the yen and made Japan cheaper for people to visit; a growing middle class in Asia; visa facilitation on our part of course. But I believe a major driving force was that the private sector – airlines, hotels, meetings sector, etc – was eager to collaborate with one another to bring back arrivals. In the past they operated more on an individual basis; the disaster brought them closer together.

### Regarding the visa easing, was that a government initiative or did you have to push for it?

We assess the different visa requirements for different countries and try to streamline them. But of course we always have to work with other government departments and approach visa facilitation with the perspective of having a balance: ease visa on the one hand but maintain law and order on the other, making sure the 'right' people are coming in and they don't stay longer than they should.

Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia now enjoy visa-free status and we are now seriously working to try and get this facility for Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines – but it will take time. India and China now have multiple-entry visa status, from single entry previously.

We are also trying to speed up visa processing and are studying to implement electronic visas but again, this will take time.

### So now your task is to double the 10 million to 20 million by 2020.

Yes, as you know, Japan is hosting the Olympic Games in Tokyo in 2020. We have also successfully bid for the 2019 Rugby World Cup (which will be held in 12 venues across Japan) and, in 2021, we will host the World Masters Games (in

Kansai – the event is an international multi-sport athletic competition which gives the middle-aged and older generation the opportunity to participate).

With the Olympics you can draw some 10 million visitors. With the World Masters, 26 million, sometimes even more.

So there is a chain of mega events and everyone can take this opportunity to visit Japan. We also believe these events will expand and strengthen the image of Japan as a place for meetings.

### How so?

Actually right after we won the bid to host the Olympics, in September 2013, Japan secured four big events with more than 6,000 delegates, outbidding strong countries including Singapore.

I think such events demonstrate to planners our capability to host and organise meetings. For example, we took over the IMF/World Bank meet-

## 10 NEED TO KNOWS ABOUT RYOICHI MATSUYAMA

- **Who's in your family?** My daughter is an interior designer. My elder son is working for a leasing company, living in Jakarta. My younger son is an IT engineer.
- **What do you do for fun?** I like trekking and mountain climbing. I love going to an onsen after that.
- **Your ideal vacation?** Staying in the suburb area of Firenze for a long while and enjoying Italian culture and food.
- **How do you book your own leisure trips?** Mostly online.
- **What are you reading right now?** I just finished reading *Mediterranean* by Fernand Braudel.
- **How do you stay healthy?** Walking, exercising in the gym.
- **Favourite food?** Love Japanese food, especially sushi.
- **A bad habit you cannot kick?** Often lose things, especially camera.
- **Your pet peeve, something that never fails to annoy you?** Nothing really.
- **Most people don't know that you...** love shopping and often buy worthless things, so I'm scolded by my wife.

ings in 2012 when they had to move from Cairo. Such meetings are huge and complicated; normally it takes four years of preparation but we did it in two years.

So track record and the ability to perform are important for MICE.

### Studies have shown it isn't necessary that host countries of mega events actually benefit from them.

Yes, there is an argument that they require lots of investment in the construction of the necessary infrastructure, that afterwards the economy drops. Sometimes that happens, especially to emerging countries, but in the case of Japan, we hosted the Olympics in 1964 and there is some legacy remaining. Then, we had invested heavily in building freeways, bullet trains, stadiums, hotels, so for the Tokyo Olympics we will try to use the existing facilities as much as possible. Our Olympics investment isn't huge, estimated at 340 billion yen (US\$2.5 billion), compared with more than US\$13 billion for the London Olympics.

There are lessons from the past which we can learn from. For example, when Nagano

hosted the Winter Olympics (in 1998), it built huge facilities and faced serious financial trouble afterwards. Mega events create a good impact but the key is to pay attention to what happens after the event – how do we persuade people to come back as repeat visitors?

This is what we are now seriously discussing with VisitBritain, with which we signed an MoU. London, which successfully hosted the Olympics in 2012, is also a mature city like Tokyo and there is much we can learn from it. London used the Olympics as a means to change the image of Great Britain as a friendlier destination. Los Angeles was so commercial, with lots of sponsorships. Barcelona used it to build a new city. We are at the stage of discussing with the many stakeholders in Japan what legacy we want the Tokyo Olympics to leave behind. One is perhaps as the most handicapped-friendly Olympics; another is as a model of how a mature city can successfully host the games without the normal heavy investments that come with them, and one that is able to sustain the benefits after the event. 2020 is a milestone, it's not the end.

### There are not enough rooms as it is in Tokyo. What are you doing about it?

We are persuading hotel developers to come in and build more hotels, especially more four-star hotels. We don't give incentives; we present the facts and they can see for themselves how attractive it is to build. Price increase is a worry but presently Tokyo hotels are two-thirds of London prices, so they are fairly cheap.

We are persuading hotel developers to come in and build more hotels, especially more four-star hotels.





## GALLERY



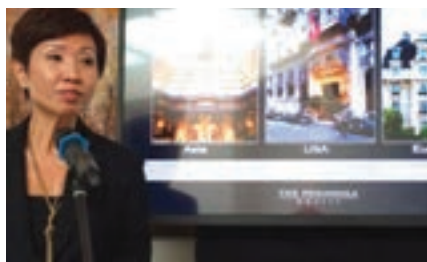
### ACADEMICS GET ANIMATED AT TOURISM CONFERENCE

Tourism industry experts joined the stage with academics last June at the 2015 Global Hospitality, Tourism Marketing & Management Conference held in Bangkok, where a lively panel discussion about tourism ensued. Pictured above (left to right): Scott Smith, S Gehrels, Norman Allin and Andrew Wood.

### TURBULENCE IN THE SKIES

IATA's director-general and CEO Tony Tyler (below left) and vice president Asia-Pacific Conrad Clifford recently held a media roundtable in Singapore.

Developments in the Greek debt crisis and fluctuations in the Chinese stock market may derail the airline industry's performance this year, Tyler said, though China may be the bigger issue for this region.



### CHARTING NEW TERRITORIES

Rainy Chan (left), regional vice president and general manager of The Peninsula Hong Kong, spoke at a media luncheon in Singapore about the group's expansion to Yangon and London.

Currently in the design phase, the Yangon property is the former headquarters of the Burma Railway Building, while the London hotel will sit opposite the gardens of Buckingham Palace. Meanwhile, India sits high on the group's wishlist.

## APPOINTMENTS

### ROSHAN MENDIS

**NOW** Senior vice president, Sabre Travel Network Asia-Pacific  
**THEN** President of the Americas, Travelocity

### ALISON TAYLOR

**NOW** Senior vice president of sales organisation, Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide  
**THEN** The group's vice president sales, digital marketing and revenue management

### PHILIPPE ARNAUD

**NOW** General manager, Sanctum Inle Resort, Inle Lake, Myanmar  
**THEN** Corporate operations manager, Valotel France

### KELLVIN ONG

**NOW** General manager, Hotel Re! @ Pearl's Hill, Singapore  
**THEN** Project director, South Beach Hotel & Club, The South Beach, Singapore

### EDWARD E SNOEKS

**NOW** Regional general manager-Thailand and general manager, The Okura Prestige Bangkok  
**THEN** Vice president of hotel operations, Hong Kong Parkview Hotel Services

TTG/Travelave Focus

# Asian cruise sails to record-breaking year

ASIA'S cruise industry continues to grow exponentially and is set for a "record-breaking year" this year, driven by booming demand from the Chinese travellers.

The number of Asians taking cruise trips has grown at a compound annual rate of 34 per cent since 2012, reaching 1.4 million last year, based on the latest figures released by Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) this year.

From 2012 to 2014, the number of Chinese passengers grew 79 per cent per year. In 2014, 697,000 passengers were from China, close to the passenger figures from all other Asian markets combined, according to CLIA.

The study also reveals that intra-region itineraries are the most popular among Asian cruisers. More than nine out of 10 Asian passengers cruised within Asia, while the remaining nine per cent flew to cruise destinations outside the region, primarily in Europe, followed by Alaska and the

Caribbean.

Cruise veterans see strong prospects in the Asian cruise industry.

Adam M Goldstein, global chairman, CLIA, said: "The cruise industry is responding by offering more cruises with experiences tailored to Asian travellers as well as enticing international travellers with an easy way to visit Asia's array of fascinating destinations."

Taleb Rifai, UNWTO secretary-general, said: "With more than 20,000 islands scattered around the Pacific and Indian Oceans and South China Sea, some of the world's best beaches, as well as historic cities and a tropical climate favorable for year-round cruising, South-east Asia's full potential for cruise tourism has yet to be unlocked."

"The South-east Asia region enjoys further advantage and potential for growth as one of the most open regions in terms of visa requirements," added Rifai.

"In response, destinations must continue to reach out to these important source markets and offer tailor-made cruise experiences, such as short cruise packages catering to Asian travellers

with shorter vacation days."

Royal Caribbean Cruises managing director, Singapore and South-east Asia, Sean Treacy, agreed: "With a huge population, rising affluence and still very low rate of penetration of cruising in the region, there is enormous potential for our sector to grow in South-east Asia."

Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand are the top three cruise destinations in South-east Asia, shared industry experts.

Star Cruises senior vice president of sales, Michael Goh, commented: "We continue to observe a double-digit upward growth in Southeast-Asia for the last five years, and we are optimistic of this steady growth."

"However, as cruise vacations become a reality in developing markets, it is crucial that the general public and travel (consultants) are educated about cruise products and that infrastructure development and improvement is taking place to accommodate projected cruise growth," he added.

Likewise, Treacy sees an urgent need to develop more adequate ports and cruise infrastructures throughout South-east Asia to accommodate bigger ships.

He said: "The lack of these infrastructure for ships that can accommodate over 3,800 pax in many parts of the region today continues to limit the variety of cruise itineraries and deployment of larger cruise ships."

"For ships of any size, better road and transport infrastructure and more new tourism attractions nearer to the port areas need to be developed in a number of ports in South-east Asia, and all the more for those ports which are located far away from the main city attractions," Treacy added. -- **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

This column is brought to you by TravelRave, Asia's premier travel and tourism week offering a dynamic platform for business leaders and industry professionals to convene and share insights on pertinent issues and key trends in the travel industry. The events, co-located in Singapore under the auspices of the Singapore Tourism Board (which also organises the Asia Travel Leaders Summit), will be held from October 19-23.





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

## TRADE CALENDAR *SEE YOU AT...*



Edward E Snoeks



Roshan Mendis



Kellvin Ong



Wiswin Pitikulsathit

### SEAN MOSHER

**NOW** Resort manager, Four Seasons Resort Bali at Sayan  
**THEN** Resort manager, Four Seasons Resort Langkawi

### TYSON BAE

**NOW** General manager, Shanghai Marriott Hotel Pudong East  
**THEN** General manager, Shanghai Marriott Hotel Hongqiao

### LEAH MATTERS

**NOW** Resort manager, Outrigger Laguna Phuket Beach Resort  
**THEN** General manager, Outrigger Twin Towns Resort, Queensland

### WISWIN PITIKULSATHIT

**NOW** Vice president, Kata Group Resorts, Thailand  
**THEN** The group's assistant vice president for asset management

### GREG KOCSIS

**NOW** Resort manager, Six Senses Zighy Bay, Oman  
**THEN** Executive assistant manager, Taj Exotica Resort and Spa, Maldives

### HAYDEE CRUZ

**NOW** Director of sales and marketing, Outrigger Laguna Phuket Beach Resort  
**THEN** Director of sales and marketing, Sun Hotels & Resorts



### GSTC-PATA Training

September 15-17, Bangkok

Tourism professionals are invited to join the three-day intensive training course about global best practices in practical and achievable sustainable tourism, jointly hosted by PATA and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) – see also page 8.



### IT&CMA 2015

September 29 - October 1, Bangkok

New European and Middle Eastern exhibitors are debuting at the double-bill event this year, which is also welcoming over 90 per cent of returning destinations.



### ITB Asia 2015

October 21-23, Singapore

Now in its eighth year in Singapore, ITB Asia will take place at Marina Bay Sands and feature about 750 exhibitor organisations. The full spectrum of tourism will be represented, from destinations and booking systems to airlines and youth travel.



Hotel Shwe Pyi Thar

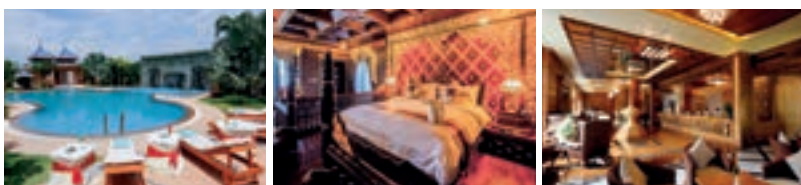


Set in the charming city of Mandalay,

### *BEST WESTERN PREMIER Hotel Shwe Pyi Thar*

is a place where local charm, cultural heritage and scenic beauty blend seamlessly with modern hospitality. Exuding elegance, this upscale hotel is adorned with traditional teak furniture and classical touches, while also offering a range of facilities.

Its unique position, overlooking the hazy Shan Mountains yet just five minutes from Mandalay city center, makes BEST WESTERN PREMIER Shwe Pyi Thar Hotel the perfect option for all types of guests.



BEST WESTERN LOCATIONS IN MYANMAR: Mandalay | Yangon

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## ACTIVITIES

### GTA OFFERS SPECIAL TRADE DEALS FOR ROOM UPGRADES

Travel consultants will receive room upgrades for trips from now till September 30 when they book with GTA. In this global campaign, travel consultants can take advantage of free upgrades, stay-4-pay-3 deals and up to 50 per cent savings in premium category rooms and executive rooms. Five hundred offers are available at three- to five-star hotels in more than 30 locations, including Amsterdam, Bangkok and Tokyo. The promotion can be accessed through GTA's online booking sites: Travel Bound, Travel-Cube and GTA wholesale.

### EMBARK ON ADVENTURES ALONG THE MEKONG

Aqua Expeditions has launched a collection of new experiences for guests to enjoy aboard the *Aqua Mekong*.



To learn more about the Vietnamese and Cambodian cultures, guests can join excursions to Binh Thanh, a mat weaving village in Vietnam, or the vibrant markets of Sa Dec, before getting to know the river dwellers in a local Mekong village. On the Cambodian leg of the journey, guests can undergo a Buddhist water blessing ceremony.

For the foodies on board, a tour of Chau Market with the chef is available to learn about the local ingredients used in the dishes cooked throughout their stay, such as Khmer Kampot Pepper and Mekong River prawns.

Adventurous guests can climb aboard *Aqua Mekong's* private skiffs and paddle through floating markets, then continue their explorations on land by bicycle or rickshaw.

### OUTRIGGER KONOTTA MALDIVES RESORT PRESENTS SPECIAL RATES

Visitors who book rooms at the new Outrigger Konotta Maldives Resort will receive promotional opening rates from now until October 31. Special net rates are: Beach Pool Villas, US\$516; Ocean Pool Villa, US\$726; and Two-Bedroom Beach Pool Villa, US\$898.

Guests who stay a minimum of four nights are entitled to daily breakfast, three excursions, US\$100 credit per person for use in activities at the dive and activity centre, and a 20-minute spa treatment.



### EXPERIENCE FROZEN MAGIC FOR A COOL US\$29,000

For the first time in forever, families with little *Frozen* fanatics can let it go and enjoy a luxury 4D3N Orlando itinerary, put together by lifestyle consultant John B Sutherland. The highlight of the package is a half-day private experience of the Kingdom of Arendelle, the magical kingdom of princess Anna and Elsa in *Frozen*, including a performance by the princesses, a *Frozen*-themed breakfast, face-painting activities and a *Frozen* game to round off the morning.

Families will also enjoy a six-hour VIP experience in Walt Disney World Resort and three nights' accommodation in Four Seasons Resort Orlando. Prices start at US\$28,900 for two adults and two children, including all taxes, fees and ticket prices. The package can be customised to suit bigger families and groups and, upon request, more characters can be added to the *Frozen* experience. For more information, visit [www.johnbsutherland.com](http://www.johnbsutherland.com).



## HOTELS



### PARK HOTEL ALEXANDRA, SINGAPORE

Located on the fringe of Singapore's CBD, the 443-key hotel is just 10 minutes away from the Orchard Road shopping district. Its Crystal Club Lounge commands stunning views of the city skyline and gives suite and club guests access to exclusive privileges such as personalised check-in and check-out services.



### MANATHAI KOH SAMUI, THAILAND

The new colonial-themed resort offers 148 rooms, out of which six are Family Suites that include bunk beds and amenities for children. The resort also offers meeting spaces seating a maximum of 60 people, and couples can also hold their weddings on the beach with the help of expert event planners.



### LANGHAM PLACE, HAINING, CHINA

Opened in June, the 263-room hotel is the first in the city offering a Ladies Floor. Guests can dine at its three F&B outlets and access its six private spa rooms, fitness centre and indoor pool. It also features generous meeting facilities, such as a 1,100m<sup>2</sup> pillarless ballroom and eight function rooms.



### APRICOT HOTEL, VIETNAM

With Hanoi's Old Quarter at its doorstep, this new five-star hotel features 123 neoclassical rooms, two restaurants, rooftop bar and pool, meeting facilities, and spa and fitness centre. Steeped in French colonial history, the building also houses more than 600 original artworks by Vietnam's most popular painters.

## TECHNOLOGY

### AMADEUS JOINS HANDS WITH SWISS TO LAUNCH FARE FAMILIES

SWISS International Air Lines (SWISS) is the first in the Lufthansa Group to launch the company's branded fares across all channels using Amadeus' Fare Families solution to maximise exposure. Amadeus Fare Families deploys SWISS' new Light, Classic and Flex fares on direct and indirect channels to provide a consistent offer to both intermediaries and travellers. SWISS will be able to show the full value of each fare family, offering greater transparency on product characteristics and terms and conditions. Amadeus Fare Families is fully integrated with travel agency mid- and back-office systems to facilitate reporting and customer servicing. It also allows travel consultants to better advise their customers as well as upsell from one fare family to the next based on individual preferences.

## TRANSPORTATION

### SILVERSEA CRUISES' NEW SILVER MUSE TO INSPIRE TRAVEL

Cruise operator Silversea Cruises has unveiled its new flagship, the *Silver Muse*, which will begin sailing the seas in April 2017. Built by Italian shipbuilding company Fincantieri, the 40,000-tonne ultra-luxury ship will accommodate 596 guests in spacious all-suite cabins. The addition of the *Silver Muse* will expand Silversea's fleet to nine ships strong. Additional details of the new ship will be announced in the near future.

### NEW CABLE CAR LINE UNVEILED IN SINGAPORE'S SENTOSA ISLAND

A new Sentosa Line, an extension of the existing Mount Faber cable car line, has been launched to improve connectivity and accessibility on the island. "(The new cable car ride) offers a serene ride over our beautiful island, while also greatly improving access between Merlion Plaza, Mount Imbiah and Siloso Point," said Mike Barclay, CEO of SDC. Guests can buy a Cable Car Sky Pass with an option to top up for unlimited rides. The new Sentosa Line will be included in the new Standard Sky Pass with no increase from the current price of S\$29 (US\$21.20).



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## Report Longhaul travel

Paris still stands out among Asian travellers for the romantic image it evokes

# SEEING PARIS IN A NEW LIGHT

With an eye on grooming the small but high-potential market of South-east Asia, Paris is now casting its sights beyond traditional markets in the region on the Philippines and Vietnam.

The Paris Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) held its third annual sales mission in Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia in March this year, with a new stop included in the Philippines for the first time. From next year, Vietnam will be added into the sales mission route as well.

Patricia Barthelemy, marketing manager of Paris CVB, said: "These two new markets (the Philippines and Vietnam) have tremendous untapped potential and it is important to promote ourselves to them because there are definitely rising numbers of travellers (from) there."

According to Barthelemy, Paris welcomed 30 million visitors in 2014, up from 29 million in 2013, and business and MICE travellers made up 40 per cent of the destination's arrivals.

She added that there were approximately 600,000 visitors from South-east

(The Philippines and Vietnam) have tremendous untapped potential and it is important to promote ourselves to them...

**Patricia Barthelemy**

Marketing manager, Paris Convention & Visitors Bureau

## Holy Land calls to Asians

The Israel Ministry of Tourism is keen to attract outbound tourists from Asian markets, with India and China at the centre of this strategy. Current source markets for Israel include the US, Germany and Russia.

"India and China are the two main Asian markets Israel's Ministry of Tourism focuses on. There are also marketing activities in South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Japan. From 2016, there will be more focus on Japan as well," said Amir Halevi, director general, Israel Ministry

of Tourism. Israel recorded about 13,000 Japanese tourists in 2014.

"We are focusing on a number of initiatives in each Asian destination through joint marketing agreements, holding seminars for leading local (consultants), hosting journalists and opinion leaders, and participating in travel exhibitions to increase tourist arrivals," he added.

Currently, the Israel Ministry of Tourism focuses on leisure, FIT and group travel in the Asian markets, with plans to expand to MICE and corporate travel in

the future, Halevi revealed.

Through our trade and consumer marketing initiatives, we want to showcase our diverse products from the green north of Israel to the desert in the south; wineries and unique resorts near the Dead Sea; and Tel Aviv, the capital of culture and night life," said Hassan Madah, director - India, Israel Ministry of Tourism.

A major potential market, India sent about 36,000 visitors to Israel in 2014. Israel is expecting 50,000 Indian arrivals this year and 100,000 arrivals by 2017. The Israeli Ministry of Tourism has launched an online training programme to educate Indian travel consultants about Israel.

The NTO is now looking to ease visa process for Indian travellers. "At the moment, visas to Chinese citizens are given within five working days. The same is planned to be implemented for Indians," added Halevi. At present, it takes about 10 days for an Indian tourist to obtain a visa.

For the Chinese market, the NTO is encouraging more hotels in Israel to offer Chinese cuisine, one of the challenges restricting the growth of that market. It is also looking to offer tourist information

India and China are the two main Asian markets Israel's Ministry of Tourism focuses on.

**Amir Halevi**

Director general, Israel's Ministry of Tourism



Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, is revered as a holy city for Christians, Muslims and Jews

in Mandarin besides training more guides in the language. The NTO is also pressing for more direct connectivity between the two countries. In 2014, Israel received 33,021 Chinese tourists, up 29 per cent from the previous year.

"Chinese tourists are mainly from the business segment though there are some leisure tourists. We are seeing an increase in demand from the Chinese incentive group as well," said Ronit Ezra, incoming sales manager, Mamilla Hotel.

"We are utilising online marketing besides participating in trade shows and organising seminars and fam trips for





From the vast markets of China and India to emerging sources like Vietnam and the Philippines, Asia is firmly planted on both Paris and Israel's tourist radars. **Paige Lee Pei Qi** and **Rohit Kaul** report

Asia last year, a three-fold increase from 200,000 in 2013, credits to the CVB's increased efforts to raise awareness about the destination over the past three years.

While there are currently about 30,000 visitors from the Philippines and Vietnam each year, Barthelemy said the CVB is targeting to pump this number up to 100,000 each in five to eight years time.

Apart from increasing arrivals, Barthelemy said the CVB aims to attract visitors with new and revitalised products.

"What we need to do now is to get in touch with our South-east Asian key counterparts and get them acquainted with the destination so they will know what to promote," she said.

Lido de Paris, for example, launched a new cabaret show in April, and the Baroque-style Chateau de Vaux-le-Vicomte will recreate France in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with candlelit dinners and themed events.

Apart from such sales mission trips, the CVB has also organised fam trips for this market.

"Paris is popular because the name of the city itself stands out... there is this sense of romanticism and culture that attracts people to the city," she said.

Christophe Floch, director of Paris-based DMC KTS France, said: "We know how important it is especially for the Asians to leave their guests impressed, so we need to do more marketing because there is never a shortage of something to impress them in Paris."

With a growing number of client requests coming from Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia, Floch said: "It is clear that there is greater spending power in these countries because we see a rise in demand of about 10 per cent from them, (along) with new expectations too."

"For instance they will not go for anything less than a four-star hotel and it has to be centrally located," he added.

Vice president of Indonesia-based

AntaVaya Leisure, Alex Djunisap, suggested that a visa-on-arrival policy will boost interest in the city. While the number of tour groups heading to Paris has increased by at least 10 per cent for his firm over the past two years, he is optimistic that it can grow further with the elimination of visas.

He said: "Paperwork is always one of the most tiring procedures, especially for big groups. If we can have visas on arrival, I am very sure the numbers into Paris will increase enormously."

Stella Loh, manager of MICE, Golden Tourworld Travel in Malaysia, said: "Ma-

laysians are a very well-travelled bunch and Europe will always be one of their top priorities. Right now, we are looking to explore deeper into France, like unusual places to host them in the mountainous regions beyond the usual sights, because everyone knows about the typical Paris."



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##### Singapore Departures:

2015 Nov 12, 16, 23, 30, Dec 17  
2016 Jan 11, 18, Feb 5, 22, 29

**Ports-of-call:** Kuala Lumpur (Port Klang),  
Langkawi, Phuket

#### 5/7-NIGHT SPICE OF SOUTHEAST ASIA CRUISE

##### Singapore Departures:

2015 Oct 22<sup>^</sup>, Nov 5<sup>^</sup>, Dec 7, 12, 24, 29  
2016 Jan 3, 22<sup>^</sup>, Feb 9, 14

**Ports-of-call:** Kuala Lumpur (Port Klang),  
Penang, Langkawi, Phuket

#### 7-NIGHT THAILAND AND VIETNAM CRUISE

##### Singapore Departures:

2015 Oct 29, 2016 Jan 29

**Ports-of-call:** Bangkok (Laem Chabang,  
Overnight), Ho Chi Minh City (Phu My)

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travel consultants to create awareness about our tourism products in China. We are also looking to increase our marketing budget for the Chinese market, which at present is about US\$600,000 and we expect it to grow to US\$2-3 million in three to four years," said Oren Drori, deputy director general and head of marketing administration, Israel Ministry of Tourism.

The tourism ministry has tied up with Thomas Cook and Cox & Kings for a joint advertisement campaign that is currently running on travel channels like National Geographic and Discovery. It also has launched a coffee table book, in association with Thomas Cook, highlighting MICE facilities in Israel.



# Guide Theme parks

Cartoon Network  
Amazon Waterpark,  
Pattaya

## MAGIC CARPET OR ROLLERCOASTER RIDE?

**SINGAPORE** By Paige Lee Pei Qi

Often a highlight in travel itineraries for Singaporeans, theme parks appeal to all age groups and families in particular, as they bring out the inner child in everyone and offer the experience of escaping into another world.

Moreover, the fun atmosphere in theme parks is itself a source of entertainment. The plethora of ride options also cater accordingly to an individual's appetite for adventure, offering something for everyone.

Travel consultants will often design theme parks within the programmes, especially in destinations with Disneyland or Universal Studios like Japan and Hong Kong.

The upcoming theme parks in Asia are expected to help consultants provide more variety in their itineraries and further boost interest into the destination.

Singaporean travellers typically do not mind paying the admission fees for theme parks, which is just a small additional charge compared with the cost of the entire holiday.

Theme parks across the world are constantly reinventing themselves by rolling out new attractions and capitalising on current trends to draw new and repeat travellers.

An example is the Frozen Ever After ride, which will debut at Walt Disney World in Orlando in 2016. Leverag-

ing the popular animation film *Frozen*, this new attraction will feature a snow-filled boat ride that will take visitors straight into a winter wonderland.

*The following people were interviewed for this article: Marshall Ooi, director, Nam Ho Travel; Clifford Neo, managing director, Dynasty Travel; Anthony Chan, group managing director, Chan Brothers Travel Singapore; Shannon Hee, marketing and communications manager, ASA Holidays; and Sylvia Tan, vice-president of marketing and public relations, CTC Travel*

**MALAYSIA** By S Puvaneswary

As competition intensify in Asia, the use of iconic figures and movies such as *Harry Potter*, *Transformers* and *Shrek* in theme parks appeal to Malaysian travellers as they are able to identify with these characters.

While popular tourist magnets, theme parks are not the sole attraction for holidaymakers when picking a destination. Trade players believe that a destination's overall offerings is more important than the theme park and that a new park built in an out-of-the way location without supporting tourism infrastructure will not attract Malaysians.

Outbound travel consultants in Malaysia also urge theme park operators overseas to provide training and marketing support for them to better promote and divert traffic to theme parks. To capture the interest of the

Muslim market, consultants also need to know if there are halal-certified food outlets within the theme park.

As well, the consultants also agreed that the weak ringgit is currently putting a damper on outbound travel demand. Some industry members expect travel demand and visits to theme parks to continue falling until the ringgit strengthens.

On the other hand, as theme parks are still a draw for families with children below 15, such packages continue to sell well during school holidays.

*The following people were interviewed for the article: Hamzah Rahmat, director, Bestar Travel Centre; Cooper Huang, CEO, Malaysian Harmony Tours & Travel Adam Kamal, CEO, Rakyat Travel; Abdul Rahman Mohamed,*

*deputy general manager – channel management, Mayflower Acme Tours; and John Chan, business consultant, Kris International Traveltours*



**INDONESIA** By Mimi Hudoyo

Theme parks are a big draw for Indonesian holidaymakers, especially among families with young children and teenagers. During school holidays, up to 90 per cent of travellers are families and the majority of them take up holiday packages inclusive of theme parks.

Many parents prioritise the interests of their children to visit theme parks during holidays; however, a theme park session is just one of the many activities in the travel package, which also include culinary experiences, shopping and sightseeing.

While entry fees to theme parks may be high, Indonesians are willing to pay for the experience, attracted by the rides, well-known characters and technology which offer

them different experiences.

Furthermore, new theme parks in a destination or new attractions in an existing park offer the opportunity to attract travellers, both first-timers and repeats.

An example would be Universal Studio Japan's The Wizarding World of Harry Potter – many Indonesian families are flocking to the park even though they may have visited the destination before, therefore highlighting the need for existing theme parks to constantly come up with new attractions.

Theme parks also have the potential to attract new travellers to a destination. Legoland in Johor Bahru, for example, has become a popular destination not only for

travellers from Jakarta, but also other Indonesian cities like Surabaya, Bandung and Medan.

Likewise, Indonesian travel companies have started including Pattaya in family packages since the opening of Cartoon Network Amazone Waterpark in the city.

*The following people were interviewed for the article: Yongky Yanwintarko, managing director, Sun Tour Surabaya; Rery Sankyo, vice president leisure operations, Panorama Tours Indonesia; Dharmawan Rahardja, owner, Genta Tour Jakarta; Yento Chen, CEO, Destination Tour; and Yekti Suradji, president director, Kencana Tour*



## THE PHILIPPINES *By Rosa Ocampo*

A growing number of travellers are also opting for activities like adventure travel and destinations off the beaten track during their holidays.



*Express Transnational; Arwin De Castro, outbound supervisor, Mango Tours; Arvill Masalta, assistant supervisor, Rajah Travel; and Kristine Mariano, sales and marketing supervisor, Amkor Travel and Tours*

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# Guide Theme parks



Planet J, Macau

## ASIA'S NEW WONDERLANDS

### Planet J, Macau

By Raini Hamdi

**Opening date & location** Opening this summer, Planet J is located in Sands Cotai Central, Macau.

**Target Asian markets** China, Taiwan and South-east Asia.

**USPs** Ever imagined playing a RPG online game physically? Planet J is the world's first player-centric Live-Action-Role-Play theme park.

"At Planet J you won't find a roller coaster, but out-of-the-world role-playing games, where players can physically act out the actions of fantasy characters, pursue goals and interact with other adventurers between realistic and virtual settings," explained a spokesperson.

Connecting the players with the park is a mobile device called Magic Scroll, a personalised mobile gear that connects to over 200 whimsical games. Blending state-of-the-art technology and experiential storytelling, it will take players into a total immersive experience, from exhilarating quests for individuals to dazzling group challenges.

**Pricing strategy** Price packages range from HK\$500 (US\$65) to HK\$1,000, depending on the number of people sharing one magic scroll. Packages include individual passes – i.e. one person entering the park with a magic scroll – or group passes, e.g. two to three players come as a team and share a scroll.

### Shanghai Disney Resort

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

**Opening date & location** Opening in spring 2016 in Pudong, Shanghai.

**Target Asian markets** China in particular, plus Asia.

**USPs** Shanghai Disney Resort will be a world-class family vacation destination that combines classic Disney characters and storytelling with the uniqueness and beauty

of China.

The resort's vision is to build an "authentically Disney and distinctly Chinese" destination with unique architectural features. It also targets to provide unique content and experience to mainland Chinese visitors and international guests by introducing Chinese elements in various aspects like festivities, dining and entertainment.

**Pricing strategy** To be confirmed.

### Movie Animation Park Studios, Perak

By S Puvaneswary

**Opening date & location** Opening mid-2016 in Perak, Malaysia, Movie Animation Park Studios (MAPS) will be located along the North-South Expressway and a 20-minute drive from Ipoh city.

**Target Asian markets** Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, China and India.

**USPs** Poised to be Asia's first animation theme park, MAPS will be one of the most unique and exciting projects underway in the leisure tourism landscape in Malaysia, according to Darren McLean, co-founder and CEO of MAPS.

There will be more than 40 attractions in six themed zones. Highlights include a car and bike live stunt show, DreamWorks Animation Adventure Zone featuring themed attractions such as *Mr Peabody & Sherman*, *The Croods* and *Casper The Friendly Ghost*; South-east Asia's first *Smurfs* live animation attraction; and the world's first *BoBoiBoy* animation attraction.

**Pricing strategy** To be revealed by end 2015.

### 20th Century Fox World, Malaysia

By S Puvaneswary

**Opening date & location** Opening by end-2016 as part of Resorts World Genting.

**Target Asian markets** South-east Asia, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and India.

**USPs** Chow Wei Heng, vice president of marketing, Resorts World Genting, said: "This will be the world's first 20th Century Fox World theme park. We are bringing the rich heritage of 20th Century Fox movies and television from the screen to be experienced on the ground.

"We cover a wide range of entertainment of family-themed attractions like *Ice Age*, sci-fi films such as *Alien vs Predator* and global blockbusters like *Night at the Museum*."

**Pricing strategy** To be confirmed.

### Shanghai Haichang Polar Ocean Park

By Prudence Lui

**Opening date & location** Scheduled to commence operation in 2017, it will be situated on the north-western side of Dishui Lake in Shanghai. The park is a 30-minute drive from Pudong International Airport and an hour's drive from downtown Shanghai.

**Target Asian markets** East Asia.

**USPs** Haichang Holdings aims to create a world-class marine park with the largest number of marine species on exhibition. It also seeks to display the animals innovatively while providing entertainment through marine animal shows, in addition to having a diverse range of science-themed educational programmes.

**Pricing strategy** To be confirmed.

### IMG Worlds of Adventure, Dubai

By Feizal Samath

**Opening date & location** Opening end-2015 on Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Road.

**Target Asian markets** The Asian market as a whole, in line with the Dubai Corporation of Tourism and Commerce Marketing's global strategy.

**USPs** According to Lennard Otto, general manager, IMG Worlds of Adventure: "As the world's largest indoor temperature-controlled theme park at 140,000m<sup>2</sup>, we will offer guests a year-round attraction that is insulated from the Gulf's typically very hot and humid summer months.

"Partnerships with globally renowned brands such as Marvel and Cartoon Network will result in a unique mix of exciting themed rides and attractions catering to a wide range of ages and nationalities."

**Pricing strategy** Prices will be revealed closer to the opening date.

### Dubai Parks & Resorts

By Feizal Samath

**Opening date & location** October 2016. The 232ha destination is located on Sheikh Zayed Road close to the Palm Jebel Ali.

**Target Asian markets** China, Hong Kong, India and South-east Asia.

**USPs** Vinit Shah, chief destination management officer, said: "Dubai Parks & Resorts will comprise three separate theme parks: Motiongate Dubai, a Hollywood-inspired theme park concept; Legoland Dubai, the first Legoland theme park in the Middle East; and Bollywood Parks Dubai, a first-of-its-kind entertainment destination that will showcase the Bollywood movie experience."

The multi-themed complex will also feature Lapita Hotel, a Polynesian-themed hotel operated by the Marriott Group, and Riverland Dubai, a waterfront entertainment, retail and dining destination connecting the theme parks.

**Pricing strategy** The theme parks will adopt an entrance-fee approach where the majority of the rides and attractions will be free. Entrance to Riverland Dubai will be free of charge.



20th Century Fox World, Malaysia



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# Destination China

Leshan Giant Buddha, carved out of a cliff face, sees flocks of domestic travellers on weekends and national holidays

## IN PURSUIT OF HIGH-END TOURISM

As Sichuan and its provincial capital Chengdu become increasingly popular destinations on the international travel circuit, the Chinese trade is also observing a marked interest in Leshan, a city located about a two-hour drive from Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport.

Close to Leshan are the UNESCO World Heritage Cultural and Natural Sites of Mount Emei Scenic Area, which includes the 3,099m Mount Emei and the 8<sup>th</sup> century Leshan Giant Buddha Scenic Area, as well as Mount Qingcheng.

Last year marked a turning point in Leshan's tourism development with the opening of the Anantara Emei Resort & Spa in April and the launch of the inaugural Sichuan International Travel Expo in September. The city also hosted the PATA Annual Summit in April this year.

More buzz will be created for the region with the entry of Six Senses Qing Cheng Mountain, which soft-opened in mid-June and will officially open in September. It is one hour away from Chengdu and two hours away from Leshan.

Access to Leshan is easy as Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport is served by domestic carriers as well as international airlines like AirAsia, All Nippon Airways, Asiana Airlines, Cathay Pacific, Etihad

Airways, KLM, SilkAir and Thai Airways International.

In addition, a high-speed train takes travellers from the Chengdu airport to Leshan in under an hour.

Bo Wu, PATA regional director - Greater China, said the availability of natural and man-made attractions in Leshan is a boon to developing high-end heritage and culture in the destination.

More work on the software is needed though, remarked several industry members.

Linda Wang, managing director, Destination Asia (China), said: "Sichuan is up-and-coming and Leshan definitely has the potential with Anantara Emei Resort & Spa and Six Senses Qing Cheng Mountain.

"There are good products for high-end heritage and culture tourism, and the infrastructure is in place. But when we propose a high-end programme, we have to send a tour director from Beijing or Chengdu who is fluent in English."

Kris Van Goethem, Asian Trails China managing director, pointed out that Mount Emei is "busy with domestic tourists", driven by a huge domestic demand for Leshan from Chengdu on weekends and during the national holidays.

However, Mount Emei is not a priority for Asian Trails China's upmarket clientele. So far, the DMC has been promoting Leshan as a day trip from Chengdu for a 500-pax UK group series that contributes about 20 to 40 people per group.

The availability of better operational options will therefore make Leshan more appealing to high-end tourists from abroad, he said.

"Good buses are limited and the boats on the river to view the Giant Buddha in its entirety are old, while the entrance fee to Mount Emei – RMB300 (US\$48) – and staying at Anantara are not cheap.

"Mount Emei and Leshan are significant (destinations) in China's domestic tourism but still in the shadow as far as international visitors are concerned," Van Goethem observed.

"To sell to high-end international tourists, we can plan a three-day programme with accommodation at Anantara or Hongzhu Shan Hotel, and take them hiking in the less crowded middle part of Mount Emei and visit Bifengxia Panda Center in Ya'an."

Van Goethem said self-drive holidays are big with the domestic market and the influx of domestic incentives and meeting business is expected to be the next development for Leshan.

### Destination in numbers

**33.4 million**

The number of domestic visitors to Leshan in 2014, compared with 29.8 million in 2013

**126,100**

The number of international visitors to Leshan in 2014, compared with 108,200 in 2013

**RMB323.30**

Leshan and Emei's average room rate in 2014, equivalent to US\$52, based on 50 hotels and motels polled, versus RMB322.20 in 2013.

**53.93 per cent**

Leshan and Emei's average occupancy rate in 2014, compared with 53.17 per cent in 2013



Already a popular destination among domestic travellers attracted to its cultural heritage sites and scenic spots, what else does Leshan need to attract the international high-end clientele? **Caroline Boey** finds out



**How to sell**

**DO** Despite the crowds, allocate half a day for Mount Emei and take the cable car to Jinding, the Golden Summit at 3,099m.

On a clear day, visitors will be rewarded with magnificent views of the dazzling 660-tonne, 48m Samantabhadra bodhisattva with multiple faces, looking in 10 directions and perched on four elephants.

It is the tallest gold statue in the world and the peak complex comprises viewing platforms, temples and halls for meditation.

**EAT** Sichuanese cuisine and Leshan's local specialities will appeal to those who like their food fiery. Restaurants can adjust the level of heat and *mala* – cooking pork, chicken, beef, fish and other ingredients with chilli and Sichuan peppercorns – is typical.

Visitors can try hotpot with ox tripe, sliced fish in chilli oil, mapo tofu, chilled spicy bean jelly salad, noodles and dumplings.

**SEE** The majesty of the 71m Leshan Giant Buddha, the world's largest sitting Buddha carved out of a cliff, is best viewed from a boat on the river in the middle of Lingyun Mountain.

Dating back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century Tang Dynasty, the statue's 4.7m head is dotted with 1,051 stone "buns"; the ears are seven metres long and the shoulders 24m wide.

**STAY** Leshan's 600-room Hongzhu Shan Hotel is a local five-star property comprising standalone buildings sprawled across 100,000m<sup>2</sup> of forests and lakes.

Building 7, with trendy rooms, is next to Hongzhu Lake; the more business-like Building 5 is nestled in Hongzhu Shan Cove; while rooms nestled in the mountain in Building 8 are modern in design, alongside a number of premium villas.

The hotel spa features 36 forest spa pools shaded by pine and cypress trees.

**Viewpoints**

What must Leshan do to become a high-end heritage and culture tourism destination?



**Luzi Matzig, chairman, Asian Trails**

For foreign tourists there is basically only one hotel choice, the Anantara Emei Resort and Spa, as many of their staff understand and speak English. This is a basic requirement, which is almost totally absent in other hotels in town.

Leshan must organise media fam trips and tour operator fam trips from abroad, attend major trade shows and negotiate deals with airlines flying into Chengdu.

**Linda Wang, managing director, Destination Asia (China)**

Leshan has the attractions and tourism infrastructure, but tour guides fluent in English and trained to anticipate and meet the needs of high-end travellers still have to be deployed from Beijing or Chengdu.

Although staff are driven, they have not been properly trained to meet high-end expectations and the management may not have the necessary business mindset.

For example, international travellers will be disappointed to find the hotel bar or teahouse closed at 7pm when they return from sightseeing and want a place to relax in.



**MY WAY**

**Why is Leshan an appealing destination?**

I am originally from Malaysia, and during my time in Leshan and Anantara Emei since October last year, I have found that the slow, relaxed lifestyle of the area is extremely enjoyable. Everyone in the area is also very friendly and honest.

**What can hotel guests look forward to doing in Leshan?**

Guests can also explore Exiu Lake. Just two kilometres away from Anantara Emei, Exiu Lake spans 700m<sup>2</sup> and is a picturesque place for walking, jogging and fishing, as well as simply relaxing and enjoying the beautiful natural surrounds.

Developed over the last two years, this new attraction is popular among the locals in the evenings and during the weekends.

**What must visitors not miss when they visit Leshan?**

Not only is it home to Mount Emei and the Leshan Giant Buddha, there are also delicious food, traditional tea culture and other amazing local treasures to discover.

The region has the most delicious food in Sichuan and is also home to some of the best places for authentic tea experiences.

Visitors must try Sichuanese food such as the local barbecue, tofu soup and stick hotpot – food skewered on sticks and cooked in spicy soup in a hotpot.

**Where is a good place to sample local food?**

Located in downtown Emei, Haochi Street, meaning "delicious street" in Mandarin, offers a variety of traditional snacks.



**Sunny Ng**  
General manager,  
Anantara Emei Resort & Spa

**What do you enjoy doing in your free time?**

I love reading and travelling. I also enjoy learning about the local lifestyle and the indigenous culture, exploring Mount Emei and the Leshan Giant Buddha.

There are many new projects and events that will help promote Leshan as a culture tourism destination. For example, a new theatre will host cultural performances and notable local festivals such as Buddha's birthday. Many local museums will also be upgraded.

Upcoming new projects in the Exiu Lake International Resort area include five-star hotels, a sports park, commercial areas and residences.

The Golden Summit on Mount Emei





# Destination China

## NEWS IN A MINUTE

### 1 Six Senses Qing Cheng Mountain

Soft-opened in June and officially opening on September 1, the new luxury resort is an hour by road from Chengdu and two hours from Leshan.

Using only organic produce, the resort will feature local Sichuan, Thai and international cuisine. Six Senses Spa offers wellness-focused activities and guests can trek and enjoy the views of Qing Cheng Mountain, play golf at Sichuan Qingcheng Golf Club, visit a fish farm with a culinary expert, learn about tea and calligraphy, and attend cooking classes.

The resort is offering opening packages that range from RMB1,915 (US\$308) for a suite in the shoulder season to RMB17,779 for a two-bedroom courtyard pool villa during peak season.

### 2 Anantara Emei Resort & Spa

The new property, located at the foot of Mount Emei, is Leshan's first international luxury address offering 150 deluxe rooms, pavilion- and villa-style accommodation.

Guests can enjoy facilities such as an outdoor lakeside pool, the Anantara Spa, a tennis court, five F&B options including a fine-dining Chi-

nese restaurant serving Sichuanese and Cantonese cuisine.

### 3 Titanic replica in Daying

Romandisea Seven Star International Cultural Tourism Resort in Daying, located two hours by road from Chengdu, is expected to open in 2016.

A replica of the *Titanic* and a man-made beach are two key attractions of the Mediterranean-themed resort that is currently being developed by a Shanghai-based energy company. Construction of the RMB16 billion (US\$257 million) *Titanic* replica, located on land, will feature a simula-

tion of an iceberg collision.

The resort will also feature a Venetian church, European castles, Turkish baths and a "6-D" cinema.

### 4 Xinxing Century Hotel

Opened in 2014, the 194-room boutique hotel in Qianwei is located near Qianwei Confucian Temple, and is 38km from the city centre and 70km from Mount Emei.

Amenities include a full-service spa, a Chinese restaurant, a cafe offering an international buffet selection, conference and meeting facilities. Disabled access rooms are available on request.



## TRIED & TESTED

# Aboard the Jiayang Small Train

Caroline Boey chugs back in time to the Cultural Revolution era in a steam locomotive

**WHY** The Jiayang Small Train is a one-of-its-kind narrow-gauge steam locomotive that gives visitors a rare look into China's early industrialisation and the Jiayang Coal Mine.

Founded in 1938 in Bajiaogou, the Jiayang Coal Mine was the first Sino-British joint venture in Sichuan.

The railway, built in the 1950s and running between Bajiaogou and Shixi, is still the only way in and out of the valley. It is a national icon and Jiayang is recognised as an industrial heritage site.

**WHAT** Visitors travel from Leshan to Qianwei, 38km away, to board the sky-blue passenger carriages of the Jiayang Small Train at Yuejin Station.

Its no-frills carriages are much smaller than normal but are well ventilated and come with comfortable wooden seats. For special charters, seven mini passenger carriages with 18 seats each can be hired.

The bellowing smoke and screaming

whistle are reminiscent of *Thomas the Tank Engine* cartoon character.

Along the way, visitors can climb up a hill to watch the train give a spectacular "steam show", dine at a farmer's inn and visit the Jiayang Mining Museum before exploring Bajiaogou village.

For the train's regular schedule, "special passengers" – pigs, goats, cows and other livestock – are assigned a "private compartment" with separating steel bars in the No. 23 carriage.

**HOW** Taking the train incorporates a history lesson and a travel-back-in-time experience as visitors can also dress up as coal miners and explore a coal mine for a taste of industrial life in 1950s China.

Bajiaogou's Soviet- and British-style village houses make the location and its small train popular backdrops for nostalgic film shoots and visitors have plenty of photo opportunities.

**VERDICT** It is a gem not many people know about, perhaps not even among train spotters outside China. Like the others on the tour, I was charmed by the area's scenic beauty, Bajiaogou's village folk and the chance to see a premodern China that has not been completely bulldozed in the name of progress.

**Name** Jiayang Small Train

**Capacity** 126 pax

**Contact details**

**Emails:**

1797341447@qq.com

1404527714@qq.com

**Website:** lsqwly.com





# Destination India

India's new online visa facility has won plaudits from tourists, but the trade wants the scheme to be further refined and properly marketed to achieve greater results, writes **Rohit Kaul**



The Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi is among the airports in India to be implemented with the e-Tourist Visa facility

## OPENING DOORS WIDER

**I**ndia's new e-Tourist Visa (eTV) facility, which enables visitors to arrive at nine Indian airports after applying for the visa online, has fallen short of the expectations to raise international tourist arrivals to the country.

Launched on November 27 last year for citizens of 43 countries – including the US, Germany, Australia, Japan and Singapore – the eTV scheme was recently extended to China, Macau and Hong Kong, widening the programme to 76 countries.

"We could have recorded significant international tourist arrivals if the facility was extended to major traffic generating countries like the UK, Italy, Spain and Sweden," said Subhash Goyal, president, Indian Association of Tour Operators.

"Also, the eTV is valid with one entry, this facility does not provide double- or multi-entry visa. Most tourists who visit India like to add neighbouring countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bhutan to the itinerary; they do not take India-only holiday packages. We have been pleading since its introduction to have a double-entry visa," he added.

Added Simone Wan, CEO and manag-

ing director, StayWell Hospitality Group: "Traditionally, getting a business visa for India is a difficult process but the Indian government has taken a step in the right direction with the eTV. However, there is a need to educate travellers and overseas tour operators that such a scheme exists."

Arun Anand, managing director of Midtown Travels, agreed: "It is also important that the ministry of tourism creates awareness in countries which have been extended the scheme, instead of just adding more countries."

According to India's ministry of tourism, a total of 110,657 tourists arrived on the eTV from January to May 2015, up 1,024.4 per cent from 9,841 during the same period last year. However, this growth may be attributed to the introduction of the eTV for 76 countries, compared with the visa-on-arrival scheme that was extended to 12 countries.

Anand said: "The best way to gauge the success of the eTV is to compare total tourist arrivals from the markets that have been provided with the facility to the number of tourists arriving from these markets on eTVs."

About 2.8 million foreign tourists

visited India between January and April 2015, a mere increase of 2.7 per cent from the previous year, according to statistics from India's Ministry of Tourism (MOT). Foreign tourist arrivals in May 2015 was about 500,000, a growth of 9.2 per cent year-on-year.

"Since the facility was launched at the end of the last year, we have to give it some time before its success can be measured," urged Lalit Panwar, secretary of MOT.

Despite the lukewarm response from the trade, some tour operators have seen a spike in growth since the facility was introduced last year, enabling them to tap segments like luxury and weekend travellers.

"The eTV has allowed for spontaneous travel decisions. The difficult visa regime in the past resulted in many international tourists opting for other destinations," said Amal Purandare, head India operations, Arzoo.com. "Its real success can only be gauged in the coming years when there is a significant increase in international tourist arrivals."

Prashant Narayan, COO and head leisure travel inbound business, Thomas Cook India, said: "With the new government's pro-tourism intent and introduc-

### Destination in numbers

## 3.3 million

Foreign tourist arrivals from January to May 2015, increasing 3.6 per cent from 3.2 million during the same period last year

## 15,659

Number of tourists that arrived on the e-Tourist Visa in May 2015, a growth of 754.3 per cent from 1,833 in May 2014

## US\$2.1 billion

Foreign exchange earnings in December 2014, compared with US\$1.9 billion in December 2013

tion of eTV, India has been placed on the tourist radar for both the leisure and MICE segments. (We) have seen 10 to 12 per cent year-on-year growth in booking for inbound tourism."



# Destination India

## Viewpoints

Do you expect the e-Tourist Visa facility to lead to a significant increase in international tourist arrivals in the coming tourist season?



**Sarabjit Singh,**  
senior vice president, Indian Association of Tour Operators

The government of India added France to the e-Tourist Visa list in May this year. If this facility is extended to more markets before the inbound tourist season in October, I expect international tourist arrivals to witness double-digit growth.

**Ranjan Kumar Mishra,** managing director, Eastern Voyage



There can be a significant increase only if the scheme is extended to more important international markets like the UK before the end of August this year. Moreover, the facility should be extended to all the international airports in the country.

## MY WAY

### Which is your favourite Indian cuisine and where do you go for the most authentic version?

Indian cuisine is so vast and varied from the north to the south, hence it is difficult to choose a favourite. However, I would pick the cuisine from Kerala where they use mutton and chicken extensively. It is spicy and the variety of flavours is amazing. Dakshin in New Delhi is my favourite haunt for Kerala cuisine.

### What are your hobbies?

Travelling is in my blood, although I must admit that I now travel mostly for work to set up our new hotels across northern India. I also enjoy listening to music from the '70s or '80s, and reading.

### Where do you go to relax and meet friends?

Considering the traffic snarls, I avoid going out at nights. My favourites are Sunday brunches at any of the pan-Asian restaurants with open-air seat-



A bowl of fried Kerala chicken (left); Old Delhi (above)

ing before catching up with friends at home.

### What tips can you give to visitors to New Delhi?

Delhi is India's unexplored capital – it's not just about Connaught Place, Qutab Minar and Chandni Chowk. There are amazing stepwells to be visited. Walk around Dilli Haat for attractive buys, leave your car and do the food walk in Old Delhi. Then head over to Cyber Hub, Gurgaon for the best array of restaurants while listening to bands play over the weekends, and walk

around Hauz Khas Village for the art galleries.

### Which lesser-known place have you visited in India?

Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary is about a nine hours' drive from Delhi. Situated at an altitude of 2,130m, it is the perfect place to lose yourself to nature. Still relatively undiscovered, it is an ideal getaway in summer or winter – the snow is more or less guaranteed!

**Himmat Anand**  
Founder & CEO, Tree of Life Resorts



## NEWS IN A MINUTE

### 1 Holiday Inn Chandigarh Panchkula

InterContinental Hotels Group has opened its first hotel in Chandigarh and 10<sup>th</sup> Holiday Inn property in India.

The 127-room Holiday Inn Chandigarh Panchkula is set at the foot of the Morni Hills, an area known for its views of the Himalayas. The property also boasts a well-equipped fitness centre, spa and an outdoor swimming pool.

The hotel offers easy access to

attractions such as Sukhna Lake, Rock Garden and the famous Sector 17 market. It is located near the IT Park, Mohali and Zirakpur, with both the Chandigarh Airport and Railway Station about a 20 minutes' drive away.

### 2 Lufthansa rolls out Premium Economy Class on Delhi-Frankfurt route

Lufthansa has introduced the Premium Economy Class on its Delhi-Frankfurt route on April 23, follow-

ing the launch of this new class on its Frankfurt-Bangalore route last year.

With a pitch of 38 inches, the Premium Economy Class seat is offering 50 per cent more legroom space and baggage allowance than the Economy Class. Premium Economy Class passengers will also be greeted with a welcome drink, an amenity kit and a water bottle.

### 3 Jet Airways, Air Seychelles codeshare flights

Jet Airways and Air Seychelles have

entered into a codeshare partnership in May.

Jet Airways now places its 9W code on Air Seychelles' four-times weekly flights between Mumbai and Mahé as well as on the latter's flights to Abu Dhabi and Johannesburg.

Air Seychelles will place its HM code on Jet Airways' domestic services from Mumbai to Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram, plus the Indian carrier's international services between Abu Dhabi and Mumbai.





TRIED & TESTED

# Park Inn by Radisson New Delhi IP Extension

A centrally located, mid-market hotel in New Delhi provides a value-for-money experience for Rohit Kaul

**LOCATION** For business travellers, the hotel is conveniently located on the national highway surrounded by the corporate hubs of Noida and Patparganj.

Tourists can explore the breathtaking Akshardham temple, along with historical places like India Gate, Raj Ghat, Red Fort and Chandni Chowk. All are within a 15km radius of the hotel. Shopping places like East Delhi Mall and Great India Place are also located nearby.

**ROOMS** This is the first next-generation Park Inn by Radisson hotel in the Indian capital. The 76-room hotel has three categories – Standard, Superior and Studio.

The Superior room I stayed in was filled with natural light and featured amenities like a work desk, TV, tea/coffee maker and complimentary Wi-Fi.

**F&B** RBG (Restaurant, Bar & Grill) is currently the only operational restaurant and serves all-day meals. The menu features curries, charcoal-grilled meats and fish. The dish which impressed me the most was *rogan josh* – a delicacy from the northern Indian state of Kashmir.

Nautica, another restaurant currently in the pipeline, will serve cocktails, kebabs, curries and breads but will only be open for dinner.

**FACILITIES** The property offers 250m<sup>2</sup> of high-tech conference facility. The divisible banquet hall is suitable for 50-250 pax while the 56m<sup>2</sup> Reunir can host meetings of 35-40 pax.

Apart from a fitness centre, the property boasts a rooftop swimming pool with an unobstructed view of the Delhi skyline.

**SERVICE** The service was exceptional – from check-in to departure, the staff ensured that my stay was comfortable and hassle-free. The young and energetic team was forthcoming whenever I had a query regarding the hotel or nearby attractions. Moreover, when I called up housekeeping in the early hours of the morning to check on the air conditioning, the staff was there in five minutes to address my concern.

**VERDICT** The hotel lived up to my expectations in terms of service and facilities. Mid-segment travellers will find the property value for money.

**Name** Park Inn by Radisson New Delhi IP Extension

**Rates** US\$63

**No. of rooms** 76

**Contact details**

Tel: (91-11) 6633-6000

Email: [reservations@pidelhi.in](mailto:reservations@pidelhi.in)

Website: [www.parkinn.com/hotelextension-newdelhi](http://www.parkinn.com/hotelextension-newdelhi)



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**Bangalore, India**

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All registered Trade Visitors enjoy complimentary entry to two high-level half day conferences. The PATA Technology Forum on September 6, presented in association with Phocuswright and Connecting Travel, will unravel the travel trends and the latest research data to help you to build your business and also features an interview with MakeMyTrip co-founder Rajesh Magow. The PATA Investment Forum on September 7 is organised jointly with hospitality consulting company Horwath HTL.

- ✓ Register now and save US\$30 on the admission price
- ✓ Pre-registration also guarantees you free admission to the PATA Technology Forum and PATA Investment Forum
- ✓ Please note that pre-registration for Trade Visitors gives you access to PATA Travel Mart trade hall only on Tuesday, September 8

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## WHO'S SAYING WHAT

### Instagram



Minion spotted at Travel Revolution 2015! Tag us if you are here and manage to spot it too :) [#travelrevolution2015](https://www.instagram.com/travelrevolution2015)



The farewell meal to celebrate our intern's last day [@ttgasia](https://www.instagram.com/ttgasia). Yes we treat our own well.



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### Most popular



On Facebook [@ttgasia](https://www.facebook.com/ttgasia): Singaporeans are among world's most demanding hotel guests: Agoda

A recent Travel Smarts survey conducted by Agoda.com has revealed that Russians are the most generous when giving positive hotel reviews, while travellers from the UAE are the most demanding, often giving the most negative reviews.

Conducted in July 2015, the study analysed over seven million Agoda.com hotel reviews from travellers around the world to see which nationalities tend to rate hotels higher or lower than average.

According to the survey, Russian travellers tend to give hotel scores 0.56 points higher than the global average. Irish, Polish and Egyptian travellers also give notably higher scores.

Read the full story on [www.ttgasia.com](http://www.ttgasia.com)

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## TRAVEL PURSUITS

**LETALITE**

A light-hearted section where we take a word, alter it by adding, cutting or changing just one letter to give it a new definition:

**Gerald Flawless** New highly skilled head of Gulf-based hotel group

**Christoph Fueller** New head of South-east Asian airline discovers how to get the airline restarted

**Adrian Mecha** Regional resort developer announces plans for city in Saudi Arabia

**Stefan Picher** New head of airline Germany presents his strategy

**Mario Hardy** A surprise appointment at a regional travel association

### QUIZ

1. Which big hotel in Hong Kong has just been sold?
2. Singapore's counts three times more visitors than its population; Hong Kong eight times. True or false?
3. Which is the odd one out among the airlines: Emirates, Etihad Airways, Qatar Airways?
4. History: The Tata group is part owner of two new airlines in India – AirAsia India and Vistara. What other airline did it establish?
5. Outside Asia: Which airline group is buying Ireland's Aer Lingus?

**Answer: (1)** The InterContinental Hong Kong Hotel. Bought from InterContinental Hotel Group (IHG) by Caw Capital/Pioneer Global for US\$938 million. It will remain under IHG management. IHG bought what was then the Hong Kong Regent for US\$346 million in 2001. (2) True and False. In 2014, Singapore population 5.4 million; 15.1 million visitors. Hong Kong: population 7.2 million; 60 million visitors including China (14 million, if excluding). (3) Datar Airways. It is based in and owned by Datar. Both Emirates and Etihad Airways are based in the UAE – Emirates is based in Dubai; Etihad is based in Abu Dhabi. (4) **(b)** Air India. Founded by the founder of the Tata group, J R D Tata, as Tata Airlines (TA) in 1930. TA became Air India in 1946, and the government became an owner two years later. (5) **(s)** Iberia and Vueling.

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- Abacus International (2009)
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- Lotte Tour (2011)
- Hong Kong International Airport (2013)
- Raffles Hotel Singapore (2013)
- Regal Airport Hotel (2015)
- Banyan Tree Spa (2015)

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TTG

## MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

# WORKSHOP

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Sands Convention Centre, Basement 2 Hall D-F

### HIGHLIGHTS

In the last few months alone, Asia has seen its share of disasters. The Nepal earthquake, the Sabah earthquake and MERS are already a fading memory. The Mount Raung eruption which forced Indonesian airports to close will also be a fading memory. The next headline-grabbing disaster is just around the corner.

**This workshop will have no long, boring speeches or panel sessions that go off the track.** We've lined up a row of speakers from the industry and the media, each of whom will impart a few key salient points on **how to cope with disasters**. What's a destination to do? How to handle the media? What do media members think the industry should do? Is the industry showing its best side when disasters hit? Plus get the latest updates from recent crisis-hit destinations.

The rapid-fire sessions will be followed by an interactive Q&A where the audience can share their own experiences or ask questions of the speakers.

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Stewart Hunter  
Director (Asia-Pacific)



**HRS**

Todd W. Arthur  
Managing Director  
(Asia-Pacific)



**Travel Impact  
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**Tiger Mountain  
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- **Scott Asia**, Ken Scott
- **Storm**, Kannan Chandran

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