

Our outlook on Asian tourism

Travel companies in the region share their projections



No. 1670/January 17 – February 20, 2014



Singapore

Inbound

The political uncertainties looming over the upcoming elections in India and Thailand are casting a shadow on inbound business.

Luxury Tours & Travel Singapore's director, Michael Lee, foresees a slowdown for inbound traffic in Singapore for 1Q2014. He said: "(Arrivals) from these two countries (India and Thailand) will likely slow down as they may be less likely to travel but it will pick up later in the year."

For Samson Tan, CEO of GTMC Travel, factors like the European economic crisis and political unrest in Thailand have already adversely impacted inbound travel to Singapore in 2013. In 2014, he intends to grow his number of bookings by 50 per cent, focusing on the online business.

"We want to concentrate on our website and increase our spending on search engine marketing," Tan said. "The benefits of going online is we are available 24/7 with instant confirmation and we can reach out to more markets."

Meanwhile, the launch of more midscale hotels this year will spell an opportunity for Luxury Tours to market Singapore as a less pricey destination. He said: "It is not new that Singapore is an expensive place so hopefully the cheaper accommodation costs can fight this."

Outbound

Singaporeans' penchant for overseas travel will continue to stay strong this year, buoying the business outlook for outbound firms.

"We have also quite successfully increased traveller yield year-on-year by about four to seven per cent," said Chan Brothers Travel's group managing director, Anthony Chan, who forecasts 10 per cent year-on-year growth for the company this year.

"We constantly seek to move consumers up the value chain and reap higher-yield travellers through continual product innovation and service differentiation," he added.

As Singapore is a mature travel market, Chan admitted that a key challenge is keeping pace with customer demands. He said: "Our focus for 2014 will be on business process reengineering, which will see a fundamental rethink of workflow and processes to dramatically improve customer service and operating efficiency." – **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

Malaysia

Inbound

The Malaysian travel trade is adopting a cautious outlook this year as business costs surge in the country.

Yap Sook Ling, managing director of Asian Overland Services Tours & Travel (AOS), said: "Business volume and yield are anticipated to be the same as 2013 or even less. Our profit margins are squeezed due to rising petrol, toll and electricity rates, and increasing staff salaries to make up for inflation."

On the other hand, Luxury Tours

Malaysia's senior manager, Arokia Das, projects an increase of 35-40 per cent in business volume and 18 per cent in yield, driven by traditional markets such as India and the Philippines while Eastern Europe is a growing market.

Both Arokia and Yap see *Visit Malaysia Year 2014* as a good platform to generate greater awareness of Malaysia and boost business from non-traditional markets like South Africa and CIS countries.

Luxury Tours – a strong player in the Indian inbound market – also foresees the Malaysian government's impending move to introduce visa on arrival facility for Indian nationals visiting Malaysia through a third country (namely Singapore and Thailand)



will help to create interest among Indian tourists.

Rising air connectivity between Malaysia and India brings further opportunities too, especially as Malindo Air's new daily Kuala Lumpur-New Delhi services and upcoming daily Kuala Lumpur-Mumbai services (commencing February 15) will raise seat capacity and provide a low-cost alternative to Malaysia Airlines, said Arokia.

However, the lack of direct flights still limits access to secondary destinations such as Langkawi, Penang, Kuching and Johor Bahru, he pointed out.

This year, Luxury Tours will launch a booking engine with dynamic packaging on its website to enable direct bookings for both

B2B and B2C clients, explained Arokia.

AOS will also roll out improved packaged tours as part of its new initiatives this year. Yap said: "We will create more unique overland packages so overseas (consultants) cannot compare our offerings with that of other tour operators and will be willing to pay a premium for our unique tour packages."

Outbound

Higher living costs are curbing Malaysians' spending, said Panorama Tours Malaysia managing director, Richard Vuilleumier.

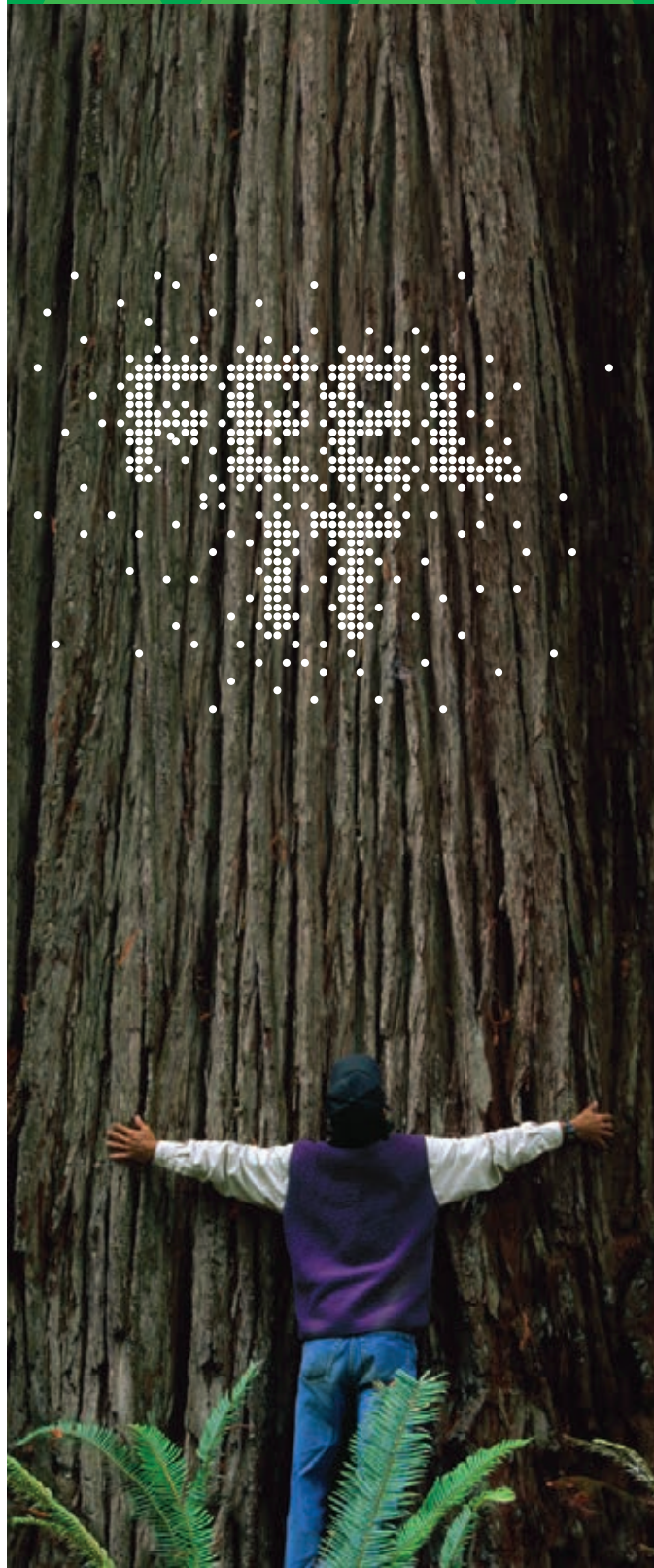
He explained: "Prices have risen as the government has cut back on subsidies for sugar, petrol, electricity and toll, which in turn have an effect on outbound. As costs rise, Malaysians have less spending power and so may cut down on their holidays abroad. Natural calamities and unstable political situations abroad will also affect travel."

"The challenge will be to entice Malaysians to spend on travel, especially longhaul, as the ringgit has dipped against the US and European currencies," he added.

Panorama Tours Malaysia is working towards branding itself as an ecotourism adventure specialist, with plans to introduce niche packages in four-wheel drive, cycling, biking and rock climbing tours.

The company is also keen to sell ground packages to coincide with airline promotions during low periods to entice Malaysians to travel overseas. "Another opportunity for us is to become a cruise specialist as consumer awareness about sea cruises are growing and (travellers) are willing to pay for all-inclusive cruises." – **S Puvaneswary**

Continued on page 2



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OUTLOOK

Continued from page 1



Thailand

Inbound

Inbound operators are hopeful for a stronger performance in 2014, barring any greater fallout from the political unrest in Thailand. “It’s hard to predict the performance for 1Q2014, especially with the current protests and upcoming elections (in February),” said Hans van den Born, managing director of Diethelm Travel (Thailand). “However, my outlook is not negative at all. Thailand’s inbound market looks set to be steady, based on past experience. We have invested a

Indonesia

Inbound

The Indonesian inbound trade is stepping up efforts to woo more visitors from ASEAN. “The launch of direct flights from Singapore to Makassar, Jogjakarta, Semarang, Surabaya and Bandung, plus the improved domestic flight network have opened up new product opportunities. For example, passengers can arrive in Jogjakarta, do overland to Surabaya and Bromo, then fly from Surabaya to Makassar to do the Toraja tour and fly out to Singapore,”

said Adjie Wahjono, operations manager, Aneka Kartika Tours & Travel Services. The Surabaya-based operator expects revenue to increase by eight per cent this year. “Singapore and Malaysia continue to grow, but (business from) the Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand are also up,” said Adjie, who projects a revenue increase between seven and 10 per cent for the South-east Asian market this year. “Last year, the European versus South-east Asian market composition was 70:30; this year we are looking at 60:40.” Likewise, Panorama Destination will also step up focus on regional markets like Malaysia, Vietnam and

lot in mature markets, which have been quite steady for inbound (demand).” This year also brings higher expectations for business volume and profits, said van den Born, as Diethelm will sharpen its focus on the high-end segment, invest more sales efforts in existing consultants worldwide and maximise revenue from mature markets such as Germany, France and Australia. “We expect 10-15 per cent growth for 2014, which is a challenging but realistic goal for us,” he added. Destination Asia’s Thailand managing director, Addie Hirunkate, also painted a rosy outlook for 2014. She commented: “We are projecting more market share and

revenue this year. We will continue to expand market share in our historic markets – Australia, the UK/Europe, the US/Canada – as well as South Africa, Scandinavia/ Nordic and Latin America, which are potential growth markets.” Since opening its doors, neighbouring Myanmar is offering a trove of opportunities for Destination Asia, which is currently developing numerous multi-country itineraries combining Thailand and Myanmar as well as Indochina, Addie pointed out. But with greater regional integration also



Hong Kong

Inbound

Hong Kong’s inbound tourism players have a mixed outlook for the market this year. China Travel Services (Hong Kong), general manager for sales centre – Hong Kong and Macau, Ng Hi-on, said: “It’ll be a better year for shorthaul markets, especially South-east Asia, but longhaul markets like Europe and the US are still not good. Last year, Indonesia performed well with more than 10 per cent growth and this trend will continue in 2014.

“With additional new hotel supply and a more flexible rate strategy adopted by hoteliers due to diminishing Chinese group business, we are able to tap more (inbound) traffic so volume will be up by more than 10 per cent while yield is estimated at a single-digit growth,” Ng added. Holiday World Tours, managing director, Paul Leung, was less optimistic. He said: “I don’t expect a good year for 2014 as a couple of my key markets like Thailand and the Philippines are suffering from political issues. Indonesia is the only one doing okay. “Rattled by years of fierce competition, I hardly see the

India

Inbound

With growing air connections into second- and third-tier cities, inbound operators are seeing opportunities in lesser-known destinations and experiential travel. “Visitors are moving towards experiential holidays, since many have done the New Delhi-Agra-Jaipur route. Kerala, Goa and new destinations in south India are emerging, which are likely to yield higher revenues for us,” said Koushik Goswami, general manager of Travelcorp. “We have received enquiries from new markets like

South America and greater interest from Australia and Turkey.” For Survottam Travels, which expects 10 per cent growth in revenue this year, business models must be built on special interest groups, said managing director, Rajendra Churiwala. “We also expect MICE events to increase as a result of more international flights into the country, and pre- and post-event tours can be a sizable market to lean on.” The Kolkata-based operator is crafting special programmes in high-yield niche segments such as

wildlife, Buddhist, LGBT, medical and women-only tours, Churiwala revealed. Similarly, Travelcorp has created Ayurveda healing and Muziris heritage packages in Kerala, tea tourism packages in Darjeeling hills, cultural packages in former colonial destinations like Kolkata and Puducherry, plus wine and gastronomy tours, according to Goswami. While emerging cities may “give higher yield”, the less-developed infrastructure and lack of skilled human resources in these destinations could result in “higher costs to put a good package together”, he added. Churiwala urges airlines to



India, said COO, Achmad Sufyani, as European markets have yet to return to pre-crisis levels.

Said Achmad: "In 2013, the volume from Europe was down by 25-30 per cent from 2012, but our revenue was up fairly thanks to currency exchange. This year, we expect to maintain our performance in the Netherlands, and will put more efforts in Eastern Europe such as in Romania and Serbia, and the Scandinavian countries."

Sharing similar observations, Adjie remarked: "We have seen (European) group series booked for summer, but FIT bookings for April onward are still slow. This year, we are looking at increasing

revenue by introducing upmarket packages."

However, the upcoming World Cup in Brazil, which falls during the summer peak season, may prove a more attractive destination than Indonesia for European travellers, opined Achmad.

➔ Outbound

"Tremendous growth" is expected for the Indonesian outbound market, according to projections by Al Mulenga, director of G2 Travel.

"In 2014, we will grow our core business organically and take on more employees. This year, G2 will open offices in Beijing and Tel Aviv,"

said Al. "We see huge potential for business into the Middle East. Our partnerships in Dubai and Amman will lead to growth into Dubai, Jordan and the Holy Land."

He added: "Overall, we are looking to grow our revenue by 100 per cent compared with 2013, when our total sales grew by 150 per cent."

However, the rupiah depreciation may erode Indonesians' spending power, causing travellers to opt for domestic or shorthaul travel and shorter holidays instead.

"The industry will have to come up with innovative products that are affordable in 2014," he commented. – **Mimi Hudoyo**

comes more competition. Said van den Born: "Many DMCs and (consultants) just want to capture market share by competing on price, pushing down prices which may compromise the quality of service. Margins are already low in Thailand compared with neighbouring countries; quality of service remains my top concern."

➔ Outbound

Neither the political crisis nor a weakened Thai baht in recent months will dampen Thais' desire for overseas travel, said Thanapol Cheewarattanaporn, managing director of Quality Express.

He said: "This year, we are

projecting an overall 20 per cent increase for outbound travel to South-east Asian countries, with growing media coverage prompting greater travel interest among Thais as the AEC 2015 approaches."

"Within the region, Myanmar is netting the strongest attention among Thai travellers – a growth of 20 per cent for this market is likely this year," he added.

Thailand's political turmoil aside, rising competition poses a key challenge. Said Thanapol: "Our business volume is likely to grow this year, but we do not expect a huge jump in profits; instead we project a revenue growth of between five and seven per cent."

– **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**



chance to grow yield. Operations costs keep escalating as our suppliers raise their prices."

However, new infrastructure such as Hong Kong's Kai Tak Cruise Terminal and the Xiamen-Shenzhen high-speed railway could spur more inbound traffic, especially in the FIT segment. Leung said: "We may be able to pick up some business from overseas travellers flying into Hong Kong to board the cruises."

China Travel Services also hopes to make stronger waves among Chinese cruise travellers, having entered talks with Hong Kong's MTR Corporation to roll out a cruise package that includes Guangzhou-Kowloon through-train tickets.

"We'll invest more resources in regular online promotional offers and additional FIT packages through partnerships with Chinese travel consultants," Ng added.

➔ Outbound

Hong Kongers' interest in regional destinations will likely stay robust, said Jason Wong, general manager of Hong Thai Travel Services.

"In 2013, we recorded eight per cent growth in volume, with turnover up 15 per cent. Overall, growth in 2014 may not be the same as last year owing to an uncertain global economy," he said. "Still, consumers continue to spend

more, especially for Japan, which has recovered while the yen has depreciated."

Wong expects the new Xiamen-Shenzhen high-speed railway to boost outbound traffic to China, while the debut of Chimelong Group's latest theme park on Hengqin Island in January 2014 is a potential new hotspot.

He added: "In 2014, we will reinforce our online platform with more in-depth products and tour options. Since launching our first flagship retail store in Shenzhen last November, we are able to market Hong Thai's outbound products to mainland Chinese (travellers)." – **Prudence Lui**



reinroduce commissions to boost domestic revenues for inbound agencies. "IndiGo has already confirmed two per cent commission for (consultants). We expect other airlines to follow suit as trade representations are being made by IATA Agents Association of India."

➔ Outbound

Gainwell Travel & Leisure's general manager, Seema Ahmed, is projecting a stronger business outlook on the premise of greater political stability in India following the upcoming elections this year.

"Based on conservative estimates, 2014 should yield 20 per cent growth in real volume and

nett yield with rationalised airfares and more competition in the (Indian) skies," he said.

Gainwell will promote more cruise offerings and roll out more multi-country tours. "We will focus on more customised tours for small- and mid-size groups, honeymoons and weddings. Other niche segments like 25th wedding anniversaries and 50th birthday celebrations are emerging as lucrative business," Ahmed added.

On the other hand, the expected withdrawal of AirAsia's flights from Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok this March and the current turmoil in Thailand may crimp Indians' desire to travel overseas, he shared.

– **Shekhar Nigoyi**



JOIN IN THE EXPANDED FUN AT HONG KONG DISNEYLAND

Hong Kong Disneyland is celebrating its eighth anniversary – and there is more than ever to see and enjoy as the Resort has been adding new attractions as part of a major expansion. The bigger footprint now incorporates three fantastic new lands: Mystic Point and Grizzly Gulch, both exclusive to Hong Kong Disneyland, and the Asia-exclusive Toy Story Land.

Mystic Point is the most recent addition, designed to appeal in particular to all fans of the mysterious and the magical. The mystical journey takes guests through Mystic Manor, the stately Victorian mansion belonging to the eccentric explorer Lord Henry Mystic, in search of his private treasures; they can also jump on the Mystic Magneto-Electric Carriage for a series of thrilling encounters thanks to Music Dust. The highlight of Grizzly Gulch is the exhilarating Big Grizzly Mountain Runaway Mine Cars, complete with grizzly bears waiting to send guests on detours. There's also exuberant water play at Geyser Gulch as well as country & western-style musical entertainment. Toy Story Land is packed with fun, from Andy's speediest toy car RC Racer to the exciting Toy Soldier Parachute Drop and the mellower Slinky Dog Spin.

Alongside the new attractions of the expanded Resort are the original favorites of Tomorrowland, Fantasyland, Adventureland and Main Street, U.S.A. The 2-Day Ticket is perfect for guests to enjoy endless moments of happiness in all of the seven themed lands, as well as the wonderful atmosphere created during the Chinese New Year. Recommend your guests to celebrate the festive season during The Happiest Chinese New Year Celebration from January 23 to February 16, Mickey Mouse and all his friends sport bright and colorful Chinese New Year outfits, while special seasonal treats appear on the menus of Hong Kong Disneyland's cafes and restaurants.

For more details on creating the most magical experience for your guests, please visit www.hkdtravelagents.com.



Trapped in a deadlock

With no obvious near-term resolution to the political crisis in Thailand, the outlook for the country's tourism industry looks increasingly grim, **Greg Lowe** reports from a messy Bangkok

At press time on Tuesday (January 14), anti-government protesters went ahead with their plans to block a string of major intersections, including the popular tourist belt area of Rajprasong, in a bid to paralyse the caretaker government's ability to run Thailand and foil the impending February 2 general election.

This followed protests which started in Bangkok in October. The initially peaceful rallies had little impact on arrivals, according to DMCs who reported few if any cancellations at the time. That changed when protesters overran various ministries and government agencies, and fought with police and pro-government groups in a number of violent clashes that left more than 100 injured and several dead. Correspondingly the number of countries issuing travel advisories for Bangkok and Thailand increased from a handful to almost 40.

To stem cancellations, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and many DMCs have been issuing regular updates on Thailand's latest political crisis, with some doing so daily. Up until recently many firms, such as Diethelm Travel, said travel around Bangkok was largely unaffected by the rallies save for a few detours to avoid protest sites. Itineraries for clients on multi-destination tours that include some time in Bangkok could be easily adjusted to minimise days spent in the capital.

More caution

But the Bangkok 'shutdown', starting on January 13, has led to more caution among travel companies.

"As a precaution we cancelled our entire range of excursions for January 13 and 14 for guests staying in Bangkok," said Go Vacation Thailand's director of business development, Tobias Fischer.

"We've prepared contingency plans for hotels and routings, and also accommodate company representatives from January onwards in our main hotels and city areas so they can be with guests if needed."

Be that as it may, the wider effects of the protests have already started to spread beyond Bangkok.

Bundarik Kusolvitya, president, Thai Hotels Association Eastern chapter, said international visitors to Bangkok and Pattaya at the end of December were down by 300,000 on the previous year. Forecasts for the rest of January and February remain pessimistic, especially for Pattaya, which is

a key destination for the massive but cautious Russian and Chinese markets.

Russia is one of the source markets most affected by the political instability, according to Kubilay Atac, general manager of Pegas Touristik (Thailand), who said 30 to 35 per cent of flights from the country to Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi International Airport have been cancelled as a result.

"The loss is more than anybody can



From top, Atac: Many Russian flights to Suvarnabhumi have been cancelled, Lynden-Bell: Losing MICE quotes to Malaysia

cover," he said, adding matters are likely to get worse given the seemingly irresolvable impasse. "I am afraid investors are going to lose their trust and hope in Thailand."

Pessimism sets in

DMCs are also reporting more cancellations, with those dealing with the highly sensitive MICE market being on the sharp end of the downturn. While firms can sometimes relocate existing groups to other venues within Thailand or neighbouring countries, the deadlock is taking a toll on new business.

"Companies are not willing to risk bringing their staff and clients into a country that is perceived unstable or dangerous," said Michael Lynden-Bell, general manager of Exotissimo Travel Thailand. "We have lost a lot of (MICE) quotes to Malaysia recently. I expect that trend to continue following these protests."

It is also possible the worse is yet to



Can Thailand remain amazing?

"TAT's quality versus quantity surge is out the window once recovery comes at the expense of rates."

Bill Barnett

Managing director of C9 Hotelworks



come for some operators. Fischer, whose business is predominantly with longhaul markets where customers book well in advance and tend not to cancel, said: "We haven't had many cancellations so far. However, we have fewer new bookings for the winter season compared to last year."

"If the situation turns violent then we all will see our (next) high-season bookings cancelled."

Hotels are also in for an increasingly tough ride as the toxic political reality affects other destinations such as Phuket,

according to Bill Barnett, managing director of C9 Hotelworks.

"Business was holding in the resort markets mainly due to the peak Christmas and New Year bookings, but the cracks are showing now and the January 13 issue escalated (the travel advisory) warnings. There are cancellations and it's a mounting problem."

Hoteliers will have to work hard and offer detrimental margin-eroding offers if the new round of protests are prolonged or become violent. "Rates are hit hard and Thailand has to buy back business so the cost is to bottom-line yields and reputation," he said. "TAT's quality versus quantity surge is out the window once recovery comes at the expense of rates."

Such gloomy forecasts are leading many travel specialists and economic and political analysts to ask whether the kingdom, which has long enjoyed a reputation for repeatedly bouncing back from significant natural disasters and political crises, can survive yet another major disruption.

As Go Vacation's Fischer said: "One wonders how much more Thailand can push its luck."

– Next issue: Disaster recovery: What best to do?

BACKGROUND TO THE DEADLOCK

Initial rallies opposed two controversial bills tabled by Yingluck Shinawatra's ruling Pheu Thai party, before escalating into a broader anti-government movement capable of mobilising up to 300,000 people.

The predominantly 'yellow shirt' demonstrators want to rid the country of the 'Shinawatra clan's influence'. Yingluck's older brother and former Prime Minister Thaksin was deposed in a coup in 2006 and lives in self-imposed exile to escape

a prison term for corruption, yet many believe he continues to pull the strings of power.

Yingluck's dissolution of parliament to pave way for a February 2 general election did nothing to appease the anti-government movement, which is backed by the opposition Democrat Party, which is refusing to contest the poll. It has little chance of winning a national vote against Pheu Thai, which remains wildly popular in the North and Northeast of the country.

Instead it is demanding a suspension of democracy in favour of a royally appointed government of "good people".

Such a development would only serve to anger the 15 million people who voted Pheu Thai into power and would certainly bring the party's hardcore 'red shirt' supporters onto the streets to defend their rights. More violence would be inescapable in such a situation and the army has said it has not "closed the door" on staging a coup as a result.

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Here's what you've missed

Tourism Data

China's outbound tourism had a spectacular run in 2013, having sent 97 million Chinese travellers overseas last year, according to official statistics from China's National Tourism Administration. The figure is up 14 million from the previous year and a far cry from the 29 million of 2004.

Hot Deals

Hilton Worldwide is holding a 72-hour time sale offering 50 per cent off room rates at beach resorts in Bali, Hua Hin (below), Koh Samui, Phuket and the Maldives. Reservations must be placed between January 21, 00.00 and January 23, 23.59 for stays from January 21 to March 31, all in Singapore time. Visit en.hiltonhoteldeals.com/72hrssale



Wake-up call for agencies



The shocking demise of Five Stars Tours shows how vulnerable just anyone could be, and is a timely reminder of the need to innovate.

Gracia Chiang
Deputy Group Editor and
TTG Asia Editor

Barely a week into the year and we're greeted by the news of a travel agency going belly up. What's eerie about the Five Stars Tours' case is that the well-known Singaporean company was still selling coach departures for the Lunar New Year Holidays this month before it decided to abruptly shutter its outlets, leaving thousands of travellers and hundreds of employees in the lurch. Clearly it was either very deep in denial or trying to make a last-ditch attempt to turn around its fortunes.

What could have gone wrong?

According to Konsortium Express and Tours' executive director, Joe Lim, the coach business is still thriving, although last year's bookings have dipped slightly.

"The coach business depends mainly on the Singapore-Malaysia route, and it is still a good business with constant demand," he told *TTG Asia e-Daily*, January 10, 2014.

Nonetheless, threats to coach operators loom, catalysing the need for change. The high-speed rail system that will connect Singapore and Kuala Lumpur in 90 minutes come 2020 is one.

The shocking demise of one of the country's longstanding travel companies shows how vulnerable just anyone could be, and is a timely reminder of the pressing need to innovate in order to stay ahead of the curve.

As costs escalate and profit margins thin, 2014 looks set to be another challenging year. In case you missed what some agencies in the region are doing (pages 1-3), here's a snapshot.

• Don't compete on price. Dropping your pants is not the way to go. Whether it's rock climbing tours or gastronomy trails, if you don't want to be com-

pared to competitors, differentiate with unique offerings.

• Explore new markets. Longhaul's uncertain? Consider tapping shorthaul. Online's a great way to expand reach. Increasingly, more tour operators are breaking out from the confines of B2B to court B2C clients as well, made possible by their new booking engines. Think regional for client sources and go beyond the local market.

We're heartened by another Singapore-based agency that also made headlines earlier this month. Citystate Travel, which focuses mainly on regional sailings, has acquired ACE Cruise Holidays, a luxury cruise specialist strong in international cruises, with the aim to grow its cruise division both in Singapore as well as in Asian markets.

• Invest in operations. Many companies have seriously started to look at CRM, while others are overhauling workflow. With the manpower crunch and rising salaries, increasing productivity through some automation is an attractive solution.

A last point I would like to make is one that is perhaps often overlooked. While competition exists across markets, travel and tourism businesses sometimes forget that at the end of the day, they are vying for the same wallets of consumers who have no lack of non-holiday options from the latest iPhone to Michelin-star restaurants.

So fight all you want with Agency XYZ, but remember that there is a common cause that the industry needs to advance: sell the dream of travel.

Do you know more case studies of travel agencies diversifying or making smart business moves? Share them with us!

TTG Intelligence

Analysis by Murray Bailey

Hong Kong and Singapore airports play catch-up

The region's top two airports in terms of international passengers – Hong Kong and Singapore – are facing a challenge.

Until now the two have been the clear leaders – 40 million and 35 million – over January-August 2013. But both have been growing below the regional average last year and since 2000.

The closest challengers, Bangkok (31 million) and Seoul (30 million), have been growing faster since 2000.

Airport traffic is one area where China is not dominating – partly because it does not do so well as other regional airports in attracting transiting travellers.

International passengers at main Asia airports, Jan-Aug 2013

Airport	No.,mn	% Growth	% AAGR
Bangkok*	31.16	18.5	6.2
Beijing	10.82	3.7	8.1
Chennai	2.98	0.4	8.9
Colombo	4.89	3.4	11.2
New Delhi	8.17	17.5	11.2
Guangzhou	5.75	14.5	6.9
Hong Kong	39.51	6.0	4.5
Jakarta	8.51	8.2	NA
Kuala Lumpur	21.05	17.2	16.0
Manila	10.16	5.5	5.6
Mumbai	6.66	2.3	6.0

Airport	No.,mn	% Growth	% AAGR
Osaka	7.82	2.9	-0.7
Phuket	4.26	28.9	13.7
Seoul*	29.95	5.6	6.9
Shanghai*	12.72	7.2	8.0
Singapore	34.73	5.9	4.9
Taipei	18.87	8.7	3.7
Tokyo Haneda	5.24	-1.0	NA
Tokyo Narita	20.34	2.0	0.3

Notes: AAGR = average annual growth rate, 2000-13. *Two airports.
Source: Airports Council International.

Shanghai's two airports (13 million) are now bigger than Beijing (11 million), but airports in both cities are still much smaller

than the region's leaders. And Guangzhou is even less significant – neighbouring Hong Kong is almost seven times larger.

China takes lion's share of Asia-Pacific online travel bookings, will grow further

PhoCusWright (PCW) puts China level with Japan in 2012 in terms of total Asia-Pacific travel bookings (each 29% share). But the research company forecasts that by 2015 China will have 32%, taking share from most other regional markets.

The exceptions are India (up

from 6% to 7%) and Indonesia (3% to 4%).

PCW puts the total market at US\$326 billion in 2012, and forecasts US\$407 billion for 2015.

Online is forecast to take a greater share – from 24% in 2012 to 31% in 2015, representing US\$127 billion.

Travel bookings in main Asia-Pacific markets



Notes: *Macau, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan. Source: PhoCusWright.



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

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

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

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Melvyn Yap, Regional Director – Asia

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The Tollmans, from left: Gavin, Stanley, Brett and Michael

Family matters

He built a travel empire from a hotel business, but the biggest achievement of **Stanley Tollman, founder/ chairman of The Travel Corporation**, may well be in keeping the family in business together. As Asian families start to hand over to sons and daughters, **Raini Hamdi** asks Tollman (*second from left above*) how he does it

How did you manage to get your children and nephews to be in the business?

I had always hoped the business would grow and develop into something that Brett (son, now president/CEO of The Travel Corporation) could take over. At the time, we were running a hotel and restaurant business. From a little boy, he's shown an aptitude for the hotel business. So we sent him to Cornell (University).

In the mid of my career, in the late 60s, I bought Trafalgar Tours and, through different life times and places, the business grew organically: retail travel, wholesale travel, bus companies, river cruising, all the various aspects.

We bought Contiki 20-odd years ago, needed a captain for it and offered Michael (nephew, now executive chairman, Cullinan Holding, which owns Thompson Gateway Africa) the job. He had just graduated. Then Gavin (nephew, now president, Trafalgar) came in when his father retired and we offered him Trafalgar. My wife (Beatrice Tollman) developed a hotel company, Red Carnation Hotels. It just happened. As I grew older, I didn't even contemplate succession. You think you live forever.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of having family members holding all the top jobs?

I suppose the advantage is total commitment. It's not a job; it's a lifestyle, a passion. One has an attitude that it's your life and soul, it's everything you breathe, it's everything you do. Nothing is too much trouble – if you walk into a restaurant and see a dirty cup, you pick it.

The next generation, generally, if they come from a successful base, they become more 'ivory tower'. But the service business is hands-on.

Brett, Gavin and Mike also grew up seeing my wife and I washing plates, waiting on tables, cooking. They all showed the attitude that no job is too big for them or too small.

I think our business is in better hands. They've taken it to different levels. They've had more education than we had, they've applied it better in a now technocrat world – social media, IT, all these things.

What are the disadvantages?

You have to tread softly, not hurt feelings. In normal business, you say what you want to say.

When things go wrong – sib-

ling rivalry and all that – they can go on awfully and destroy business. We're fortunate our business is big enough that everyone has lots of space. Our two daughters are also in the business, one's doing design, the other sales & marketing, but they all work together and do their own thing.

When I talk to all of them, I would give the example of a box of matches. Put matches together and try and break them. They

"The next generation, generally, if they come from a successful base, they become more 'ivory tower'. But the service business is hands-on."

won't. But if you separate them, each is easily broken. The biggest thing is when the founder passes on, families have to learn that the most important thing is sticking together and not allowing feelings to destroy the business.

The children's attitude of nothing is too small or too big for them – how much of that is nature, how much of it is nurture?

All of them had a kind of an upbringing that nothing was given to them. I don't think any of them were over-spoilt. They grew up watching us work. So all of them grew up with strong work ethics.

I don't think you can teach them. What you can do is to be a strong 'steering committee', show them the pitfalls, set the rules, create well-rounded people that have a sense of responsibility. Part of our business is dedication to foundation (conservation, charity) and our family motto is the pursuit of excellence.

How hard is it to let go? How much are you still involved in business?

I haven't let go. Everyone said to me they're surprised. It's gratifying that everyone comes to me all the time for ideas. I still am involved in any purchase. Because we are in so many countries and we're always building or acquiring new companies, there is just so much to do. So I'm fully employed, but no longer in the day to day.

But it is not hard at all, because I've been teaching Brett, Michael and Gavin over 20-25 years and in that long process, I've made them all do more and more.

How do you get together as a family?

We all get together three to four times a year, because Brett lives in the US, we live in three to four places, Gavin is in Geneva, Michael in Cape Town. And the joke always is, let's try and have a

meal and talk about other things than business. But the business is so intertwined with our lives!

But we also make business fun. If I look back on 60 years in business, besides the normal things – application, dedication, devotion to your business – the most important ingredient is enjoying what you do. I remember the first restaurant my wife and I opened when we were married. I was in the front, she in the kitchen, and the wonderful thing about the service industry is this pure enjoyment in making things happen. I've always said, our business is pure theatre. If you create the stage for what you doing, you will create a great play.

Some said the industry, which has grown so much, is not a lot of fun.

Yes, good point. Everything is all mechanised now, everything is a system, that it destroys an awful lot of entrepreneurial spirit and individuality.

Look at the airline business, since deregulation, there's no airline service. Getting on a plane used to be an adventure.

That's why we stick to niche businesses, not regimented ones, where we can still be creative. Customers are a lot more demanding, but it's a lot easier to deal with smart people because they understand effort you are making.

There was a period when inclusive tours were disappearing. Everyone came up with the idea you buy an airline ticket, hire a car, find a room and off you go. Now they are coming back all over to inclusive, because the world became insecure after 9/11. Inclusive is security and it's gone to a much higher level now; it's not about eating rubbish for seven nights but taking people to different restaurants and trying to bring the adventure back to travel. That requires us to be innovative and creative. That's where the fun is.

With travel being a mobile activity, the travel trade has been investing in mobile concierge services and increasingly utilising mobile devices as a key sales and customer service channel.

In order to maximise this platform and convey messages to their target audience, travel marketers need to have the right social media strategy in place. Doing so can bring their businesses to life and help create dialogues with stakeholders and communities that matter, which will ultimately drive business outcomes.

In fact, in 2012 alone, about 42 per cent of stories shared on Facebook by consumers were travel-related, illustrating the immense reach and potential of social media.

Mobile-first strategy

Social media marketing is central to the 2014 marketing plans of many travel companies. With more than one billion smartphones globally and a mobile penetration rate of 148.9 per cent in Singapore according to a white paper published by Black-box in 2012, having a mobile content strategy is more impor-



Nailing social media marketing

Simrat Sawhney, client partner, global marketing solutions at Facebook illustrates how social media can be a fundamental tool in a travel marketer’s kit

tant than before. The foundation to a great social media approach is to develop a robust content strategy. Travel marketers should take note of the following points.

Start by acquiring fans both organically and by utilising easily accessible social media tools to reach out to specific target audience groups. Accurate targeting will allow you to reach people likely to be planning to travel, people in your existing customer database or people who have visited your website.

Next, tell the brand’s story by exploring various types of

visual and multimedia content. This could include encouraging participation, sharing news and exclusive content with fans and rewarding them for interacting with the brand. Build awareness and consideration so that your brand is top of mind as customers plan their next vacation.



Social media can also help you build customer loyalty. Marketers should drive word of mouth by providing incentives to fans for sharing messages. Social media can also be utilised as a CRM platform that enables you

to match your database and publish updates to your loyalty and rewards programme members.

Today, we see social media being more than just a platform for building engagement – it is a performance marketing channel. Starwood Hotels & Resorts recently shared at a travel conference in Singapore that they recorded an increase in room bookings totalling US\$2 million revenue. By placing targeted ads and then tracking buyers directed from its Facebook page, Starwood successfully saw its ROI grow by over 35 times.

Metrics for measuring success

There are three primary measures that brands have always cared about.

The first metric is reach – how many people saw your message, who they are and how often.

The second metric is resonance or the ability to measure brand recall, awareness and purchase consideration. People are more likely to remember messages relayed from friends – for instance, ads with a social element generate a 50 per cent increase in ad recall.

The third and final metric is reaction, where measurement of sales and ROI come into play.

What do all these mean for travel marketers?

Driving success with impactful engagement on social media and exploring unique solutions for varying needs will be more important than before. For instance, marketers can employ solutions such as custom audience targeting, retargeting and mobile ads. It is also important to note that there is not just one metric for evaluating success – it varies with campaign objectives.

What’s on the shelves

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

[HOTELS]

<p>Copthorne Hotel Cameron Highlands</p>  <p>Rebranded from the former Equatorial Cameron Highlands, Copthorne Hotel Cameron Highlands is a Tudor-style resort offering 141 low-rise apartments plus 268 rooms and suites, in addition to a restaurant, a bar, a ballroom and an indoor heated pool.</p>	<p>Best Western Green Hill Hotel, Yangon</p>  <p>The 189-key midscale hotel is located in the heart of Yangon with views of Shwedagon Pagoda. The hotel offers a restaurant serving Asian and international cuisine, three meeting rooms providing over 200m² of function space and free in-room Wi-Fi.</p>
<p>Tokyo Marriott Hotel</p>  <p>Nestled on a hilltop location in Tokyo’s Shinagawa, the 249-room hotel is home to two Japanese restaurants, one all-day dining restaurant, nine meeting rooms and a fitness salon. A garden tea house and two chapels are set to debut later this year.</p>	<p>Hyatt Regency Phuket Resort</p>  <p>Overlooking Kamala Cove in Phuket, the property boasts 199 spacious rooms, each with its own balcony, 40-inch TV and high-speed Wi-Fi. Resort facilities include three F&B outlets, 400m² of meeting space, a swimming pool and an eight-suite spa.</p>

[ACTIVITIES]

1 See Tokyo on two wheels
Available to guests staying one night or more at Shangri-La Hotel, Tokyo, the Tokyo on Two Wheels package features a six-hour sightseeing tour of the city’s hidden spots and eateries with an English-speaking guide and local bicycle specialists. A bento lunch, a T-shirt, late check-out until 18.00 and transfers between the hotel and the meeting point in Shinkawa are also included. Priced from ¥68,000 (US\$648), the package is available till June 30, 2014.

2 Muay Thai Live kicks off in Bangkok
The curtain has risen on Bangkok’s newest show, *Muay Thai Live – The Legend Lives*, which has been running daily at 20.00 at The Stage at Asiatique The Riverfront since January 15. Created and directed by Ekachai Uekrongtham, the extravaganza showcases Thailand’s ancient martial arts through a combination of Muay Thai fights, breathtaking stunts and sweeping drama. Tickets are priced from 1,200 baht (US\$36).

[TRANSPORT]



Garuda enhances frequent flyer programme

Garuda Indonesia has expanded its passenger rewards programme – Garuda Frequent Flyer (GFF) – to enable passengers to buy miles, extend the expiry of miles and maintain their GFF tier when flying with the airline and its partner airlines, hotels and tour operators.

The Indonesian flag carrier has also launched a new frequent traveller programme with Swiss-Belhotel and inked new codeshare agreements with All Nippon Airways and Jet Airways. Following the airline’s recent co-operation with Air France and KLM, programme members will now be able to earn GFF mileage when flying with the two European airlines.

SilkAir commences flights to Kalibo and Mandalay

Later this year, Singapore-based carrier SilkAir will launch thrice-weekly services to Kalibo in the Philippines through circular-routing flights with Cebu from May 27, and thrice-weekly circular flights between Mandalay and Yangon from June 10. Both services will be operated on Airbus A319 and A320 aircraft, featuring both business and economy class cabins.

Thai AirAsia rolls out more international flights

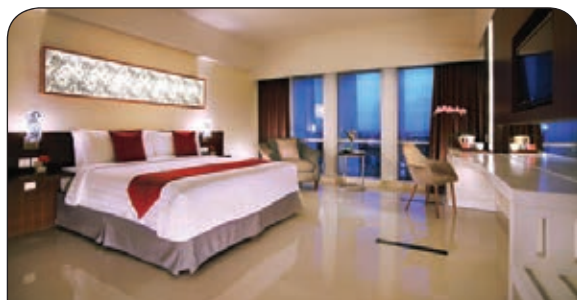
Thai AirAsia is ramping up flight frequencies on its Bangkok (Don Mueang)-Yangon route to 28 services weekly from January 24 and Bangkok (Don Mueang)-Siem Reap route to 14 services weekly from January 27.

The Thai LCC is also strengthening its network from Chiang Mai, having recently launched a daily flight to Hong Kong on January 7, with a daily service to Hangzhou starting on February 21.

Affordable luxury rooms

The space between economy and luxury is hotting up as a string of new mid/upscale hotel brands hits the region and jostles to be the most relevant to value-minded Asians. By **Raini Hamdi**

**Additional reporting by Mimi Hudoyo, Rohit Kaul and Rosa Ocampo*



Brand name ATRIA HOTEL & CONFERENCE

By Parador Hotels & Resorts, Indonesia

Positioning Four star

Competitive set Other four star brands with MICE facilities, such as Mercure, Santika Premier, Novotel, Aston and Harris Hotels

Rate Atria Hotel & Conference Gading Serpong, Tangerang (off Jakarta) from US\$100

Why it is needed According to the Central Statistics Agency, Indonesians undertook about 236 million domestic trips in 2011 and this number will continue to rise with the promising middle class market. The increasing number of budget airlines will certainly increase the number of domestic travellers in the country. Therefore, our future development focus will be on midscale brands such as Atria or our three-star Ara Hotels.

How it reinvents mid/upscale A conference hotel focusing on MICE. We accommodate individual business traveller needs by providing value such as free WiFi connection of up to 10 Mbps.

We aim to become a leading conference hotel in the region, and have dedicated staff to achieve this with a 'warmth & comfort' service philosophy.

How many in operation Four in Tangerang (off Jakarta), Magelang (Central Java) and Malang (East Java)

Expansion plans Five more hotels to open in stages up to 2019



Ricky Theodores

Vice president
Parador Hotels & Resorts, Indonesia



Brand name AVANI HOTELS & RESORTS

By Minor Hotel Group, Thailand

Positioning 4.5 star

Competitive set Includes Aloft, Angsana, Pullman, Andaz and Hotel Indigo

Rate Lead in price in Sri Lanka tends to be about US\$150++ and Vietnam US\$100++

Why it is needed Launched in 2011 to complement the five-star Anantara brand. Avani offers relaxed comfort and contemporary style in city and resort locations to guests who value details that matter.

How it reinvents mid/upscale The name stems from the Sanskrit word, 'earth', which Avani expresses through a grounded personality and simple sense of style. Each resort exhibits a passion for design, an emphasis on tailoring details to deliver complete satisfaction, and service that is genuine and spontaneous.

How many in operation Three resorts, two in Sri Lanka and one in Vietnam

Expansion plans 2014 will see new additions to the brand in Malaysia (Sepang), Vietnam (Hai Phong), Thailand (rebranding of Amari Atrium Bangkok) and Seychelles Barbarons.

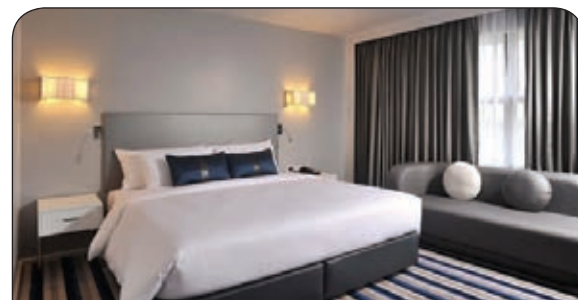
In the pipeline are Avani properties in Bali, Amalangoda (Sri Lanka) and a second property in Bangkok. We expect to shortly make an announcement on developments on the African continent.

We plan to grow the brand across Asia, Africa and the Indian Ocean and in the Middle East.



Dillip Rajakarier

CEO
Minor Hotel Group, Thailand



Brand name BEST WESTERN PLUS

By Best Western International, US

Positioning Four star

Competitive set Novotel

Rate On average US\$90

Why it is needed Best Western has traditionally offered customers hotels based on the core values of comfort, value for money and excellent service. But as we expand into new markets, especially in Asia and the Middle East, there is a need to cater for customers who want these qualities, but also that little extra. Best Western Plus offers more upscale amenities and facilities such as a fitness centre, business centre, spacious in-room work areas and a range of products tailored to the needs of each market.

How it reinvents mid/upscale Many international hotel companies operating today start in the upscale sector, then try to expand into other segments. Best Western, on the other hand, has a proud 66-year history in the midscale segment and understands the needs of the everyday hotel customer.

How many in operation 11 in Asia and the Middle East, with just over 1,200 rooms. Thailand and India are our biggest markets for the brand (three hotels each); two in the Philippines and two in Saudi Arabia.

Expansion plans 10 more are set to open in Asia and the Middle East, adding a further 1,700 rooms. Indonesia and Malaysia will see three new Best Western Plus hotels. Firm plans for two hotels in Bangladesh.



Glenn de Souza

Best Western International's vice president, International Operations Asia & Middle East, Thailand



Brand name COUNTRY COMFORT

By SilverNeedle Hospitality, Singapore

Positioning 3.5 star

Competitive set Best Western Plus, Country Inn & Suites, Hampton Inn, Holiday Inn Express, Premier Inn, Travelodge (Australia), Wyndham Garden Hotel

Rate A\$100 (US\$89) to A\$150 in Australia and New Zealand under the existing brand

Why it is needed Country Comfort, a well-known brand in Australia and New Zealand, was recently rebranded and updated with a fresh identity and look. The 28-year-old brand will spearhead new franchising business in its existing ANZ markets and the broader Asia-Pacific region. The target market

comprises travelling sales people, small business owners and mid-level managers that spend more than half their time on business on a limited per diem budget. The refreshed brand promises convenience, quality and value.

How it reinvents mid/upscale By delivering what road warriors need the most and removing what they don't, so they avoid unnecessary expenses. Guests will still enjoy an excellent stay, including the best-in-category sleep experience with superior amenities including a high-quality bed, an invigorating shower experience and a nutritious breakfast. Apart from competitive rates, a Fair Value Promise includes free Wi-Fi, local calls and mini-bar items priced 30 per cent above local convenience stores. Laundry and dry cleaning will also be just 20 per cent above street pricing.

How many in operation None under the refreshed Country Comfort brand; 23 under the existing brand

Expansion plans Aggressive expansion planned for the next five years. Actively pursuing opportunities to manage, lease or franchise Country Comfort in South-east Asia, North Asia, South Asia and Australia/New Zealand.



Brand name NEXT HOTELS

By SilverNeedle Hospitality, Singapore

Positioning 4.5 star

Competitive set Aloft, Crowne Plaza, East, Pan Pacific, Radisson Blu, Traders

Rate From A\$230 (US\$205) at Next Hotel Brisbane

Why it is needed Next Hotels is a game-changing concept created specifically for the modern business traveller. Guests demand full control over their time, particularly when they are travelling in unfamiliar cities, often on a budget and busy schedules. At Next Hotels, that control rests with guests as cutting-edge technology puts them in charge of everything they do, from reservations to check out. Using the Next Hotels mobile app, guests can check in before arriving through an encrypted

code and access their rooms, bypassing the reception desk.

How it reinvents mid/upscale By committing fully to the core concept of having services work according to the guests' wants, needs and more importantly, schedule. Along with the technology aforementioned, Next Hotels will also feature smart spaces and intuitive service. The Club Lounge, another innovation, is an exclusive space designed to work around each guest's schedule. It features the 'in transit zone' comprising full shower facilities, luggage storage lockers and recliners. Guests can relax during early check in, use free Wi-Fi, or freshen up for late flights after check-out without disrupting their plans.

How many in operation The first Next will open in Brisbane in mid-2014

Expansion plans The second will be in Colombo in a mixed-use lifestyle centre that includes a lifestyle mall and high-rise residential tower.



Iqbal Jumabhoy

MD/group CEO, SilverNeedle Hospitality, Singapore

MID/UPSCALE HOTELS



Brand name DORSETT; SILKA HOTELS
By Dorsett Hospitality International, Hong Kong
Positioning Dorsett (four star); Silka Hotels (three star)
Competitive set Dorsett: Novotel, Traders; Silka: Ibis
Rate Dorsett's ADR Jan-Nov 2013: HK\$900 (US\$116); Silka HK\$600
Why it is needed The market is dominated by international hotel chains from outside Asia and this is where we make a difference. Being a true Asian-based company, we have a better understanding of the needs of our Asian travellers, in particular, with regards to hospitality and service.
How it reinvents mid/upscale Dorsett are contemporary midscale hotels in carefully chosen urban locations, providing business and leisure travellers with instant, easy access to city centres and business centres.

Anchored in Asian traditions of hospitality with flashes of eclectic British touches, these hotels are energetic, innovative, dynamic destinations designed to create a more energised business and leisure travel experience.
Silka Hotels Designed with the value-savvy and smart traveller in mind, Silka Hotels offer the best in convenience and comfort, providing hassle-free hospitality essentials.
Quick, easy and efficient, Silka targets customers who are looking for the basics done right, with great service and value.
How many in operation Seven Dorsett hotels (two in China, three Hong Kong and one each in Singapore and Malaysia)
Five Silka Hotels (three in Hong Kong and two in Malaysia)
Expansion plans Eight Dorsett and one Silka are in the pipeline. The group has a strong appetite to grow all its brands, which also include Dorsett Grand and a boutique brand d.Collection, in South-east Asia, with an eye on Australia, more in the UK and Continental Europe.



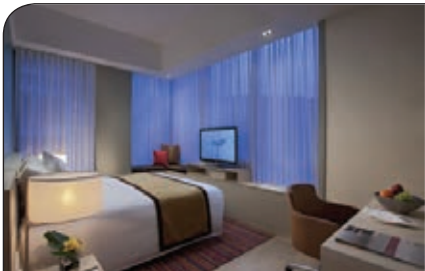
Philip Schaetz
Senior vice president sales & marketing,
Dorsett Hospitality International, Hong Kong



Brand name LEISURE INN
By StayWell Hospitality Group, Australia
Positioning 3.5 star
Competitive set Includes brands like Country Inns & Suites by Carlson
Rate US\$48-US\$80 in the Indian market
Why it is needed There is a growing middle class in the country that is looking for quality world-class budget accommodation. We believe that even corporate travellers would prefer to stay in a product like ours that offers all the services at a competitive price.
Our product is fresh and young with a focus on F&B. The existing hotels in this segment in India don't con-

centrate on F&B. We will be having speciality restaurants in all of our Leisure Inn properties in India.
How it reinvents mid/upscale We emphasise on location, extensive facilities, well-appointed rooms and international standard services, which properties operating in this bracket don't offer.
In our properties a guest will get facilities like 24-hour service, multiple restaurants, coffee shop and banquet space, which are generally expected in a four or five star property. Even though we have international expertise, we focus on local experience. So in our properties, local people are hired to run the hotel, as they understand the needs of that particular market.
How many in operation One in Jaipur, Rajasthan
Expansion plans The group is looking to open Leisure Inn properties in cities like Hyderabad, Greater Noida, Raipur, Chennai, New Delhi, Thane and Bengaluru in 2014.
Internationally, it is looking to come up with properties in China, Abu Dhabi, Qatar and the UK. The group has a target of more than 100 hotels within the next three years across Australia, South-east Asia, India, China and Europe.

Rohit Vig
Managing director, StayWell Hospitality, India



Brand name OASIA HOTELS & RESIDENCES
By Far East Hospitality, Singapore
Positioning 4.5 star
Competitive set In Singapore, Sheraton Towers and Royal Plaza on Scotts
Rate From S\$200 (US\$158)++
Why it is needed Oasia is our differentiated offer to business travellers who desire comfort without excess, aesthetics without ostentation, attention without pretension, relevance with elegance. We take into consideration business travellers' focus on their work and ensure every component of our service and design complements their mission. Rooms at 25m² are modestly sized and designed to optimise comfort whether they choose to work or rest. The hotel's unique club

lounge that extends into a lap pool also provides another option for them to unwind after a hectic day.
How it reinvents mid/upscale We bring first-class experience to this segment but still maintain exceptionally reasonable prices for our guests. The high standards of guest experience that we provide are possible because we constantly reinvent the benchmarks that are typically associated with hotels under this category. We believe in adopting efficient designs and deployment of manpower, and this allows our guests to enjoy benefits that rival those of luxury hotels. This includes Oasia's central location, comfortable rooms, well-equipped gym, unique club lounge and easy access to other facilities in a mall connected to the hotel.
How many in operation One in Singapore
Expansion plans Three planned



Arthur Kiong
CEO, Far East Hospitality Management, Singapore

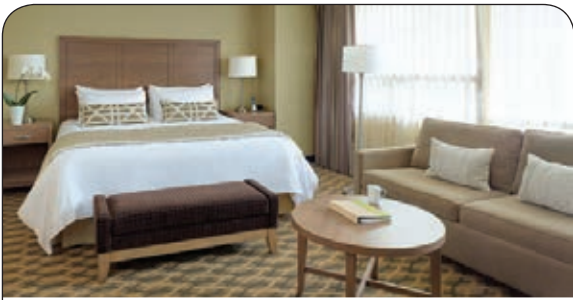


Brand name OZO
By Onyx Hospitality Group, Thailand
Positioning 3.5 star
Competitive set Includes Ibis, Ramada Encore, Park Inn, Marriott Courtyard, Centra Hotels and Resorts
Rate The lead-in rate for Ozo Wesley Hong Kong is HK\$1,300 (US\$170). In Ozo Samui, launching early this year, it will be from 3,000 baht (US\$91)
Why it is needed Guests are becoming more savvy and are looking for quality services, connectivity and comfort at a reasonable price. We recognise that this segment is becoming increasingly popular, especially as both business and leisure travellers are looking to reduce costs and maximise their value for money. Ozo is a refreshing alternative to

other select service brands. There is no compromise on the quality of product, from the comfortable bed, to bathroom amenities, technology and connectivity.
How it reinvents mid/upscale Ozo aims to surprise guests with the room product and service culture. Staff are trained to offer useful and intuitive assistance on the local area; in fact, each has his own specialist subject. Ozo understands that today's traveller is short on time, so the rooms are cleverly designed, making sure no time is wasted looking for switches or trying to figure out the shower. Even checking in is fast and paperless via a tablet.
How many in operation The first Ozo in Hong Kong opened in May 2013
Expansion plans Six under development, two due to open this quarter in Colombo and Koh Samui. They will be joined by Ozo hotels in Pattaya, Kandy, Galle and Penang soon after.



Duncan Webb
Chief commercial officer, Onyx Hospitality Group, Thailand



Brand name EATON
By Langham Hospitality Group, Hong Kong
Positioning 4.5 star
Competitive set Our aspirational competitive set (based on design) includes Ace Hotel, Nolitan, Casa Camper and Mama Shelter. Actual depends on location
Rate From US\$150
Why it is needed Eaton hotels are for the cosmopolitan, adventurous, culturally savvy traveller interested in a lifestyle, fun and affordable stay. This brand bridges the gap between a four-star and five-star.
We understand that different travellers have different needs. So we came up with options like the Smart Room and Family Room, in addition to conventional rooms and suites, all within a reasonable price range and done with great style and design, together with great service and eco-chic hospitality solutions.

Eaton hotels are located in the heart of the city and local experiences. For example, in Eaton Hong Kong, guests can explore the local culture by participating in a series of free hotel activities such as local tours to the nearby tourist spots and daily tai-chi classes.
How it reinvents mid/upscale 'Cool living' with style and sustainability is what Eaton is about. Guests get great value in well-designed, functional rooms with all the essentials, and honest, reliable, dynamic service. Our Social Hub brings people together to work and play. Eaton's Affordable Art programme is our way to help new artists to showcase their art using our public spaces as an open gallery. There is a trendy bar with fantastic cocktails and remarkable DJs.
Our design-led rooms are created for guests seeking a more flexible option of a guestroom. These open-plan rooms are suitable for guests travelling alone for leisure or business.
How many in operation Five (Hong Kong, Toronto, New Delhi and two in Shanghai)
Expansion plans We are looking at expanding and increasing our Eaton hotel footprint globally at the right location, with the right partner and opportunity.



Simon Manning
Vice president, sales and marketing, Langham Hospitality Group, Hong Kong



Brand name PARK INN BY RADISSON

By Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group, US

Positioning 3.5 star

Competitive set International midscale brands

Rate US\$80-US\$120

Why it is needed The emergence of the middle class in India, China, the Philippines and Indonesia, together with the increase in infrastructure investment, will spur not only domestic travel but an increase in travel within Asia-Pacific. India's rapidly growing middle class is expected to have 583 million people by 2025. The Chinese government's investment of RMB10.7 trillion (US\$1.8 trillion) in infrastructure over the last five years will fuel domestic travel. This increase in travel will result in a growing requirement for midscale hotels in key locations, especially in tier II cities

that can meet the demands of these new savvy travellers. These travellers seek consistently clean, friendly and affordable accommodation when they travel for business or leisure.

How it reinvents mid/upscale Designed for the Gen Y traveller, the Park Inn by Radisson is a friendly, fresh, vibrant and uncomplicated midscale brand with a 26-year track record of delivering a quality guest experience. Newly launched in Asia-Pacific, the new generation Park Inn by Radisson focuses on providing the modern essentials of a great hotel stay that resonates with today's business and leisure travellers.

Park Inn by Radisson delivers a great night's sleep in a flexible and connected room. The hotel's lively, colourful design will appeal to Gen Y traveller while its 'Adding Colours to Life' philosophy enables the brand to deliver a quality experience that takes into account local cultures and preferences. Its restaurant and bar as well as meetings and leisure facilities are deliberately geared at the traveller of tomorrow. Guests enjoy free Internet access.

How many in operation 128 globally, four in Asia-Pacific

Expansion plans Globally there are 67 hotels in the pipeline, seven scheduled to open in Asia-Pacific.



Simon Barlow

President Asia-Pacific, Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group, Singapore



Brand name PENTAHOTELS

By Rosewood Hotel Group, Hong Kong

Positioning NA

Competitive set Aloft, Hotel Indigo, and Ace Hotel internationally

Rate In Hong Kong, over US\$100; in Shanghai, US\$75-US\$100

Why it is needed Pentahotels guests are road warriors, local digital nomads and independent-minded travellers who are looking for affordable yet stylish accommodation, with add-ons like free Wi-Fi, plus a cool communal space where they can relax during downtime.

Pentahotels' mix of fun with functionality, comfort with creativity and style with simplicity, has established its appeal in Europe and is set to take off in Asia among travellers with the same mind set and needs. It's a 'neighbourhood lifestyle' approach, with a cool, hip

vibe.

How it reinvents mid/upscale Pentahotels pushes the design envelope in a direction that's not typically taken in Asia. The signature Pentalounge – an upbeat combination reception, lobby, bar and café – is a new 'third place', an extension of one's lifestyle and a gathering place for both guests and neighbours. The hotel eliminates unnecessary frills in favour of fuss-free efficiency and uncomplicated comfort, while New York loft-style guestrooms, contemporary rustic décor, quirky, local cultural references, and fun and friendly service create a singular hospitality experience.

How many in operation 18 (three in Greater China – Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai; 11 in Germany, one in Austria, two in the UK and one in the Czech Republic)

Expansion plans Pentahotels will open in urban centres and tourism hubs in China and key Asian gateways, in locations ranging from downtown areas, airport and railway complexes, to resort and beachfront locations. Projects already announced include three hotels in China (Shenyang, Guiyang and Luohe), four hotels in the UK and five hotels in Belgium, with a target of 80 Pentahotels in operation or under development by 2020.



Sonia Cheng

CEO, Rosewood Hotel Group, Hong Kong



Brand name SEDA

By Ayala Land Hotels and Resorts, Philippines

Positioning Just above four star

Competitive set Undisclosed

Rate Examples, Seda Fort Bonifacio Global City, from 6,000 pesos (US\$135)+++; Seda Abreeza in Davao City, from 4,200 pesos +++

Why it is needed There is a tremendous opportunity in the country's flourishing foreign and domestic tourism industry. Our Seda hotel line is well-positioned to capture more than its fair share across various regions with our superior product and strategic location within Ayala Land's mixed developments.

How it reinvents mid/upscale Seda offers a new concept in hospitality: urban lifestyle hotel. It offers a fluid hospitality experience with modern accommodation, state-of-the-art technology and exceptional service – all supporting the excellent value-for-money proposition.

Seda is Filipino for 'silk', a distinct fabric that represents the brand's commitment to providing a seamless accommodation experience.

As each Seda hotel is easily accessi-

ble to an Ayala mall and office spaces, it offers the convenience and security of a high-energy, central location, combined with warm, efficient service and global best practices. It is designed as an ideal environment where relaxation, play and work can mix.

With Ayala Land as developer and operator of the brand, Seda can respond to market needs faster and exercise more flexibility in giving its clients better value.

How many in operation Three, in Metro Manila, Cagayan de Oro City and Davao City. Seda Nuvali Laguna will open in the first quarter

Expansion plans In development are Seda Vertis, Quezon City and Seda Circuit, Makati, both targeted to open within the next two to three years. Further expansion is in the works as Seda hotels are intended to be an integral part of Ayala Land's mixed-use development projects in key cities of the Philippines.



Andrea Mastellone

Group general manager, Seda Hotels, Philippines



A TASTE OF TROPICAL LUXURY ON THE MAGICAL ISLAND OF BALI

BOASTING MAGNIFICENT VIEWS OF THE SHIMMERING SEA, SOFITEL BALI NUSA DUA BEACH RESORT'S SPACIOUS ROOMS AND SUITES OFFER SOPHISTICATED STYLE AND EXQUISITE COMFORT. REVEL IN A WORLD OF REJUVENATION WITH A SAVANT MIX OF WORLD-CLASS FACILITIES, FRENCH COSMETOLOGY AND TRANQUIL SURROUNDS. DISCOVER ALL OUR MAGNIFIQUE ADDRESSES ON WWW.SOFITEL.COM

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Creating smooth passage



Singapore Cruise Centre

As a flood of passengers begins to descend on the region's shores, there is a greater urgency to address operational challenges. How robust is Asia's cruise ecosystem? **Paige Lee Pei Qi, Mimi Hudoyo, S Puvaneswary, Rosa Ocampo, Prudence Lui and Greg Lowe** report

As a destination, Asia is rising in fame among cruise lines. Just in the first three months of this year, the region will welcome 247 cruises, marking a 22 per cent increase, according to the Asia Cruise Association's (ACA) recent White Paper.

The same study found that some 1.5 million passengers cruised in Asia last year, representing passenger revenue of roughly US\$2 billion. This is a result of 21 international cruise lines operating a total of 43 ships, logging 762 cruises (within Asia) and 58 voyages (starting or ending outside of Asia).

ACA general manager, Kevin Leong, said: "With the projected growth in deployment, berth capacity may soon become constrained and the infrastructure is unlikely to keep pace with industry needs."

Bob Guy, managing director of Destination Asia (Singapore & Malaysia), agreed that the growing cruise business could lead to a bottleneck situation in countries like Singapore, which is one of the region's key hubs for large ships.

"When cruise liners come and put 2,000 passengers at the terminals and out into Singapore, it can be a big problem logistically if not managed well," he explained.

Recognising this, Singapore Tourism Board's (STB) deputy director, cruise, Annie Chang, said: "It is essential for Singapore to build up ancillary services to be well-equipped for the business expansion that may come in the following years."

She pointed out that each player in the ecosystem – comprising cruise lines, terminal operators, cruise suppliers, travel consultants, attractions, airlines, groundhandlers, hoteliers as well

as the dining and retail sectors – would have to play a part.

World Express Singapore's managing director, Darren Tan, added: "We do see that the destination is top priority, especially for the longhaul market. The destination is the product as they will explore the country when the ship calls here."

In April 2013, STB launched the Passenger Experience Committee (PEC), a platform for cruise-related stakeholders to address service and experience-related issues across the value chain, from disembarkation at the cruise terminals to land tours in Singapore.

According to Chang, one area that the PEC is currently looking into is increasing transport connectivity near the cruise terminals.

To this end, some improvements have been made at Marina Bay Cruise Centre Singapore (MBCCS) since its opening in 2012. For example, it released a mobile phone app that provides cab drivers with a cruise arrival and departure schedule and a push-notification service to alert them when there are a significant number of passengers who need a taxi.

"We have also changed the location of the cab stand and pick-up bays to improve accessibility for both passengers and cab drivers

alike," an MBCCS spokesman added.

Accessibility is also a key concern in other ports across Asia.

Commenting on Thailand, Royal Caribbean Cruises (Asia), Singapore and Southeast Asia, managing director, Jennifer Yap, said: "Ports such as Laem Chabang are located too far away from the main city attractions in Bangkok, for instance, and the inadequate road and transport infrastructure at these ports also add to the challenge."

The heavy traffic in some cities such as Manila is also making shore excursions in an already very tight window longer than necessary.

Pearl Brion, travel specialist at Rajah Travel Corp, said that to beat congestion, authorities are informed even before a ship docks, so that roads can be unclogged.

Over in Hong Kong, the new Kai Tak Cruise Terminal is continuing to grow its transportation options. In addition to regular minibus and Sunday/holiday double-decker bus services, free shuttle bus rides to nearby MTR stations are also offered.

Meanwhile, in Malaysia's Langkawi port, Panorama Tours Malaysia managing director, Richard Vuilleumier, said: "There is a huge shortage of vehicles, so we have to sub-hire vehicles way

in advance as it is not cost effective to drive the vehicles from Kuala Lumpur."

"The solution is for Langkawi to develop its tourism, so it becomes justifiable for tourism players to invest and have their coaches stationed there."

Finding the necessary manpower on the ground is also a problem.

Laura Vlad, regional director Asia, Intercoastal Shoreside & Port Services, said: "There is a shortage of guides when multiple or larger ships are in port or during peak season. It is also difficult to source for guides to work on weekends or public holidays."

She added that local guides in Asia often lack the required language proficiency to communicate with foreign guests, especially for those of Spanish, Italian and German descent.

Port quality – a crucial factor

Despite the efforts made to ensure passengers get a great experience in the city, the biggest pain point in many destinations is the port itself.

Criticised for its substandard facilities for international cruise ships, travel consultants said that the Port of Manila's sorry state may be one of the reasons why cruise ships stick around for only a short period in the Philippine capital.

"At the passenger terminal, there are not enough seats and F&B outlets, and sometimes the lights are turned off, lending a gloomy rather than a welcoming feel," said one interviewee who wanted to remain anonymous.

Likewise, Imam Syafii, director of Costa Cruises' preferred sales agent in Indonesia, said the missing link in the country's cruise ecosystem is port infrastructure and services.

"Ports of call need to upgrade their facilities and infrastructure to meet international standards, and their staff needs to be well-trained to handle cruise passengers," he explained.

The Travel Advisers Hong Kong, director of outbound department, Kitty Lee, added: "The immigration procedure at the new Kai Tak Cruise Terminal is supposed to be simple, but its design has complicated the flow."

Royal Caribbean Cruises' Yap, hoped for more CIQ and terminal operator support, especially for ships that carry a higher proportion of international guests.

She said: "More manpower and flexibility are needed for faster and seamless immigration clearance, especially for the port-of-call guests to avoid diminishing the quality of guest experience."

Dickson Chin, managing director Indo-China, Wallem Ship Agencies, added: "Immigration procedures do form a very integral part of the entire cruise experience, which vary across countries and often causes delay."

"In transit calls, when we have passengers that are already sailing, they already have pre-arrival manifests so a brief clearance will be ideal in order to maximise the shore time."

"We must understand that immigration formalities are of-



Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal in Penang

Continued on page 17

New ports, new sights

Some countries in Asia have heeded the call to establish new ports of call or make existing ones more attractive to keep a steady flow of cruises.

Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, for example, is identifying potential ports of call in the country and encouraging stakeholders to come up with new land excursions.

Rizki Handayani, the ministry's director of MICE and special interest marketing, said: "We are working on developing Madura as a new point for cruise calls to add to Surabaya and Bali in eastern Indonesia, as well as Padang for western Indonesia... The idea is to connect cruise ships from Langkawi with Sabang, Nias and Padang."

In Madura, *Karapan Sapi*, or its traditional bull race, will be the highlight. And in Semarang, Central Java, excursions now feature not only the Borobudur Temple but also the old town, handicraft centres and cottage industries.

Last year, Malaysia's Port Klang Cruise Centre (PKCC) also created excursion programmes to Carey Island. In addition, souvenir stalls selling handicraft items made by

the Mah Meri tribe have been set up at PKCC.

Operations manager, Syed Jaffar Mohamed, said: "Cruise visitors want to see Malaysia, not the port. Through this tour, we wish to give them a glimpse of the lifestyle of the indigenous people of Carey Island and surrounding areas."

In the Philippines, Jenica Ferrer, sales and operations officer of groundhandler Travel People, said her company has also received a lot of support from upcoming destinations such as Puerto Princesa in Palawan, where the local government has come forward to assist with entertainment, security and F&B, among others. "They are very active and welcoming because they want tourists," she explained.

Meanwhile, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTb) has successfully encouraged the development of many new tours in Hong Kong, which includes visits to walled villages and beaches as well as country park hikes.

Tailor-made programmes have also been created by traditional attractions. Vivian Lee, executive director, sales & marketing, Ocean Park, said: "We understand that most cruise passengers are in



From left: Puerto Princesa, Borobudur Temple



Mimi Hudoyo

town on tight schedules therefore we have designed a range of packages to cater to the interests and preferences of different target segments to maximise their time." Examples include a family-friendly animal lover programme and another for those who love thrilling rides.

Even as countries are rallying resources at home, greater cooperation among Asian ports of call has also been urged.

HKTb general manager, MICE and cruise, Kenneth Wong said: "As the cruise market in Asia is still at a developing stage, it is crucial that destinations in the region work together to grow Asia's cruise market as a whole. The

HKTb is actively exploring cooperation/partnership with destinations such as Taiwan, Hainan, Japan, Vietnam to develop regional cruise itineraries and products."

With the upcoming Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau bridge and West Kowloon's high speed train station connecting the SAR to China, Worldwide Cruise Terminals (Hong Kong) managing director, Jeff Bent, said Kai Tak Cruise Terminal would facilitate shore excursions to Macau and even Kaiping's Cannon Towers in Guangdong province.

Chattaphat Boonyawon, inbound manager of SEA Tours Thailand, was also optimistic about the development of the Dawei deep sea

port in Myanmar, which would be a boost to cruising in the region.

"New (cruise liners) like SeaDream, The World, MSC, TUI, among others, will call on Thai ports during their maiden voyages (to Asia)," he said. "In terms of their regional series, they are repositioning cruises by using Thailand as their way and turnaround ports for their vessels' calls en route to Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong."

Summing up the need of the hour, Asia Cruise Association's recent White Paper said: "Unlike other leisure travel where nearby destinations and nations compete for the tourist dollar, in cruise they must work together for mutual benefit."



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Continued from page 14

ten the first and last touch point for passengers, and therefore largely impact how they remember the cruise experience.”

ACA's Leong went as far as to suggest a single, transit-style visa for Asian cruises.

Change is in the winds

Most hearteningly, steps are being taken to spruce up ports in the region.

In Indonesia, a new terminal is being built at Tanjung Perak Harbour, Surabaya, which will boast modern touches, including cafés and Wi-Fi service, while Benoa's passenger terminal is seeing improvements made to immigration, security and recreation facilities, among others.

A recent update given by Indonesia's Directorate General

of Sea Transportation showed dredging work in 14 locations in 2013, including Belawan and Benoa in Bali and Tanjung Emas in Semarang, which will continue this year.

Over in the Philippines, the Department of Tourism recently commissioned a cruise study with the aim of further improvement to “infrastructure like cruise terminals, navigation systems, port-of-call jetties, and waste management and land-based facilities”.

Since 2012, Singapore's MBCCS has increased the number of immigration counters and cut immigration time to an average of 15 minutes. Singapore Cruise Centre (SCC) also underwent a renovation in 2012, emerging with a 26 per cent increase in passenger operations space.

Hardware aside, SCC CEO,

Christina Siaw, has also sent staff for Bahasa Indonesia language courses to accommodate the growing number of Indonesian cruise passengers. They have also attended hospitality and tourism courses.

Meanwhile, Malaysia's six primary ports have set up sub-task force committees to efficiently address port-specific issues. They report to the Malaysia Cruise Council, also formed in 2012 to chart the direction for the country's cruise industry.

However, ACA's White Paper notes that there still remains too few transit ports of call in Asia.

It said: “There is still much that can be done in establishing new ports of call especially in South-east Asia where ships are well-served by homeports, but where there are few destinations within range of them on short cruises.

“Just as the markets in Asia are as yet largely unfamiliar with cruising, so too are many of their governments and authorities. Until the benefits of cruising to local and national economies are demonstrated and understood, and until the practicalities of the global cruise business are appreciated and taken on board, support for the industry is likely to be half-hearted.”

820 The number of cruises in Asia last year, including those that start and end outside of Asia, providing the opportunity for 1.5 million passengers to cruise. Passenger revenue is roughly US\$2 billion. This was made possible by 21 international cruise lines serving the region, operating 43 ships.

117 The number of separate destinations in Asia that received or hosted cruise ships in 2013. Of these, 19 ports handled 589 turnarounds, with six having more than 20 turnarounds each. Some 114 ports saw 1,947 transit calls, of which 11 had over 50 transits and 16 had 20 or more.

22 The percentage increase in the number of cruises in Asia in the first three months of the year, rising to 247 cruises. This represents a 14 per cent increase in passenger days. More capacity additions are expected through the year.

1.3 million The 12 primary Asian source markets are estimated to have delivered this number of passengers in 2012, amounting to 0.4 per cent of their combined populations. China is estimated to be the largest at 471,000, with a penetration of 0.04 per cent.

3.8 million Future projections suggest a potential Asian source market of this size by 2020, representing a compound annual growth of 14.3 per cent and a total penetration of 0.1 per cent. China is forecast to reach 1.6 million and Japan at 766,000, becoming the top two. To carry that many passengers would require 15 *Voyager of the Seas*-size ships deployed year-round on short cruises.

Source: Asia Cruise Association's *The Cruise Industry in Asia 2013 and Beyond* White Paper

FITUR 2014

THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION, WHICH WITNESSED THE LARGEST INCREASE IN TOURIST ARRIVALS IN 2012 WITH A GROWTH OF 7%, WILL PROMOTE ITS MAIN TOURIST ATTRACTIONS AT FITUR 2014

The International Tourism Trade Fair, an event organised by IFEMA, will turn FERIA DE MADRID into a world showcase for the industry from 22 to 26 January 2014.



The Asia-Pacific region, which witnessed the largest increase in foreign tourist arrivals in 2012 with growth of 7%, will present its natural heritage and marvellous tourist sites at FITUR 2014. Furthermore, visitors will be able to gain insights into the landscapes and cultures of countries such as China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and India.

According to the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), Asia-Pacific witnessed an increase of 15 million in tourist arrivals, with its share of the world tourism market rose to 23% in 2012. The region has generated \$324,000 million from tourism, which represented some 30% of the total world revenue generated from tourism. Southeast Asia has achieved the highest growth amongst the different regions of Asia with a figure of 9%. Cambodia and Vietnam enjoyed 24% and 14% growth respectively in 2012. Boosted by Japan's recovery, Northeast Asia enjoyed a growth of 6%. In terms of tourism arrivals, Taiwan achieved an increase of 20% while the Republic of Korea enjoyed a growth of 14%. Hong Kong, with a growth-rate of 7%, performed well too.

In 2012, Southern Asia enjoyed a growth of 4% with

Sri Lanka and Bhutan recording the highest increases in tourist arrivals with both witnessing figures of more than 17%. India, the largest destination in the region, enjoyed a 5% growth too.

As one of the leading events for the tourist industry, the International Tourism Trade Fair, an event organised by IFEMA, will turn FERIA DE MADRID into a world showcase for the industry between 22nd and 26th January 2014 next.

This trade show, which marks the beginning of the international calendar of events for the industry, will be offering professionals the means to implement their marketing strategies through an extensive exhibition of destinations, not to mention the different tools and forums proposed by FITUR. Participants will also be able to learn about the latest technologies to help them boost their operations and the challenges of a constantly evolving world market. Meetings such as FITUR Know-How & Export, Fiturtech, Fiturgreen, Investour Africa, Fitur B2B, Receptivo España (Inbound Spain) and Fitur LGBT, not to mention the meetings organised by the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO)

and the Exceltur and Cimet Forums, among others, will help to shape a business event of the first order, where the leading players within the travel industry can strengthen their relations and gain access to new marketing, management and promotional channels for their products and destinations.

Attractions in Asia

FITUR 2014 will be presenting the main attractions offered by Asia-Pacific, which allows visitors to discover the natural and cultural delights of countries such as China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and India. They will gain a closer insight into cities such as Beijing, including its Tiananmen Square, its Ancient Palace and the Great Wall. Neither will visitors want to miss the attractions of India, including Delhi, the capital, Agra and its famous Taj Mahal and Jaipur, the Pink City of Rajasthan.



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Indigenous communities such as the Ibans, who are famed for their blowpipe traditions, are a strong tourism drawcard for Sarawak

Shooting for visibility

With ATF 2014 and new air links, the time is ripe to grow arrivals to Sarawak. By **S Puvaneswary**

Arrivals Sarawak is targeting 4.5 million tourist arrivals this year, higher than the 4.2 million goal set for 2013.

According to statistics from the Immigration Department of Sarawak, the state received more than 3.1 million tourists in the first nine months of 2013, a slight increase from the 2.9 million tourists recorded during the same period in 2012.

Last year, Sarawak's top 10 visitor source markets were Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, China, India, the UK, Thailand, Europe (Germany and Benelux) and Japan respectively.

NTO Sarawak Tourism Board's (STB) CEO, Rashid Khan, said the board will leverage the presence of international buyers and wholesalers at ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) to showcase the destination through post tours and networking events.

He said: "We have also developed customised product brochures to showcase new and existing products for international buyers attending ATF."

STB will continue direct consumer engagements with its key

focus markets – i.e. the top 10 arrival markets – through advertising, promotional efforts in traditional and social media, as well as participating in consumer travel fairs. The board will continue to invite travel journalists and bloggers on media fam trips to experience the destination.

Rashid added: "In the year ahead, social media marketing will play a more important role in destination marketing as we want to reach out to our IT-savvy audience through Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter to create the interest and desire to visit Sarawak."

Airlines Regional services to Sarawak are limited to direct flights from Singapore, Manila and Pontianak (in West Kalimantan).

Indonesian carrier Xpress Air started thrice-weekly flights between Pontianak and Kuching in October 2013, adding to MASwings' daily services on the Kuching-Pontianak route.

Accessibility to Miri, Sarawak's second largest city, improved when AirAsia Zest commenced four-times weekly flights from Manila on December 7. This link presents new business opportu-



"ASEAN Tourism Forum is our golden opportunity to showcase the destination to the trade. The economic spin-offs from ATF will be seen for at least three years."

Rashid Khan
CEO
Sarawak Tourism Board

nities for inbound tour operators.

Saini Vermeulen, head of international sales, Panorama Tours Malaysia, said the new connection would entice soft adventure tourists from the Philippines or longhaul tourists wishing to twin Manila and Miri.

He explained: "We are looking at a very different profile of travellers (from the Philippines) from those who travel to Kuala Lumpur and visit Resorts World Genting or those who travel to Singapore and make a day or an overnight trip to Johor to experience the theme park attractions."

"For this new route, we are targeting those in their 20s and 40s who love nature and soft adventure," he added.

James Wan, executive director of Miri-based Planet Borneo Tours & Travel Services, said: "We will work with (consultants in Manila specialising in the European markets) to offer extensions to Miri. We believe eco-tourism products such as diving off Miri, caving and trekking will appeal to the European market."

Planet Borneo will promote culinary tours for incentive groups, and soft adventure, shopping and city tours for the leisure segment, Wan revealed.

Hotels According to the Ministry of Tourism Malaysia Sarawak licensing unit, Sarawak has 12,771 hotel rooms as of end-October 2013, with 5,378 rooms in the state capital of Kuching. The average room rate of a five-star hotel in Kuching is RM230 (US\$71) and a four-star hotel is RM180, according to industry sources.

Citadines Uplands Kuching opened early last year on Jalan Simpang Tiga with 215 units, ranging from studio to two bedroom layouts.

Sarawak Economic Development Corporation will build Riverside Majestic Hotel 2 near the existing Riverside Majestic Hotel. Scheduled for completion in 2015, the new hotel will have a twin tower concept with 288 rooms.

Kuching's UCSI University is building the first training hotel in Sarawak for undergraduates at its School of Hospitality & Tourism Management. Named UCSI Hotel Kuching, the 168-room hotel is set to open to the public in late 2015. It will be located on Kuching Isthmus, a five-minute drive from Borneo Convention Centre Kuching. The hotel will be managed by UCSI Group.

Best Western Partners Sphinx for Major Qatar Expansion

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

Best Western International has signed a major new agreement for the development of several new hotels in Qatar. Last month, we held a signing ceremony for an 'Area Development Agreement' with Sphinx Hotels & Resorts - a Qatari hotel development company - that will lead to a significant expansion of Best Western's footprint in this fast-emerging Gulf nation.

Initially, the agreement will include a new-build 75-room property in Doha, to be operated under our midscale BEST WESTERN product. But the agreement also paves the way for future developments, which could lead to Best Western becoming one of the biggest international hotel operators in Qatar. We are delighted to be partnering with Sphinx Hotels & Resorts, who share our vision and ambition. This agreement will secure Best Western's position as a leading hotel company in Qatar, which is set to become one of the world's most exciting markets in the coming years.



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MALAYSIA: BRIEFING/INSIDER

Catching the momentum

Visit Malaysia Year provides a springboard for marketing lesser-known sights. By S Puvaneswary

1 What are the objectives of Visit Malaysia Year (VMY) 2014? The VMY campaign was conceived to attract more visitors to Malaysia in 2014, with a focus to grow tourist yield rather than just arrivals.

This year, Tourism Malaysia aims to raise visitor arrivals to 28 million and tourism receipts to RM76 billion (US\$23.3 billion). By 2020, the government has set a target of 36 million for visitor arrivals and RM168 billion for tourist receipts, more than twice the 2012 figure of RM60.6 billion.

Malaysian minister of tourism and culture, Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz, said: "The campaign is also aimed at introducing tourists to lesser-known destinations beyond Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Langkawi, Malacca, Kota Kinabalu and Kuching. It will promote islands and beach getaways, nature, culture, heritage and wellness experiences."

The Malaysian government has allocated a RM1.2 billion budget over a two-year period starting from last year to implement VMY 2014 programmes, advertising and promotions.

2 How can the trade benefit from VMY 2014? Adam Kamal, deputy president of Malaysian Inbound Tourism Association, believed international promotions done for VMY will create more destination awareness and indirectly assist travel



Kuching will benefit from greater trade exposure during ATF 2014

consultants - both local and overseas - in selling Malaysia. He said: "(Agencies) should think out of the box and take the opportunity to combine VMY programmes as part of new packages."

Likewise, Desmond Alosious, senior sales manager of UAE-based Explore The Wonders, opined that the VMY campaign, with the myriad events planned and the additional NTO push, will give Malaysia an edge over Singapore and Thailand, also popular destinations with the Middle Eastern market.

"We will choose events that can be sold and promoted as add-on packages," he said. "Tourism Malaysia's efforts to promote lesser-known destinations such as Port Dickson and

Johor Bahru to Middle Eastern travellers and to keep (agencies) informed with product updates will also help us in promoting these destinations to repeat clients looking for new experiences in Malaysia."

3 Will the ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) enhance the VMY campaign too? Mohamed Nazri said: "This will be a great opportunity to showcase the destination as many international buyers will take time to see new tourism products in Sarawak as well as join post tours."

"We hope that by giving international travel (consultants) first-hand experience of visiting the destination, they will come up with exciting and attractive holiday packages for their

respective markets, and they will be able to promote and sell Malaysia, either as a mono destination or in combination with neighbouring countries, with more confidence," he added.

Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents vice-president (inbound), KL Tan, agreed: "(ATF) will provide the best platform for Malaysia to showcase our tourism products and hospitality. Since last year, Tourism Malaysia has been promoting VMY in all its overseas markets, creating awareness and high expectations of special events and programmes lined up this year."

Over 1,600 delegates are expected to attend ATF 2014, including some 150 ASEAN tourism ministers and officials, 500 ASEAN exhibitors, 500 international buyers, 100 international and local media as well as 100 tourism trade visitors.

4 What are the event highlights? Over 200 events are lined up throughout the year in conjunction with VMY 2014, of which 50 have been identified as major highlights. They include Formula 1 Petronas Malaysia Grand Prix (March 28-30) in Sepang; Malaysia Water Festival (April 25-27) in Labuan; Colours of 1Malaysia (May 22-24) in Kuala Lumpur; 1Malaysia International Tourism Night Floral Parade (June 12-15) in Putrajaya; and Sarawak Regatta (September 12-14) in Kuching.

Greater quest for meaningful travel

The Malaysian travel trade has observed a steadily growing interest in voluntourism among inbound visitors in recent years.

Ping Anchorage CEO, Alex Lee, has seen a 50 per cent year-on-year growth in voluntourism, having handled six incentive and special interest groups in 2013. Forward bookings and enquiries for 2014 are also strong and a further 50 per cent growth is anticipated this year, he added.

Masama JS Adventure Tours business development manager, Marco Wunsch, said: "Year-on-year, we've seen an incremental increase for our turtle conservation programme at Talang Talang Besar Island."

Diethelm Travel Malaysia managing director, Manfred Kurz, has recorded a 10 per cent growth in this segment, mainly driven by international schools from the region, FITs and group travellers from Europe, and incentive groups seeking short CSR programmes.

Half- and one-day volunteer programmes are sold as optionals, ranging from orphanage vis-

its to longhouse stays in Sarawak to offering assistance at animal shelters, Kurz revealed.

Similarly, Ping Anchorage has created voluntourism programmes to suit clients' interests. For instance, the company offers programmes such as helping with repairs of places of worship and cleaning of cemeteries on Bidong Island - a former refugee camp for the Vietnamese boat people - to Vietnamese and travellers of Vietnamese descent.

Voluntourism programmes focusing on the revival of traditional arts like gamelan, *mak yong* and *menora* on the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia also appeal strongly to European travellers involved in the arts in their home countries, Lee shared.

For Wunsch, demand for turtle conservation programmes comes mainly from special interest groups and FIT travellers from the Netherlands and Australia; many read about the initiative in travel publications and through promotional efforts from Tourism Malaysia.

Creating voluntourism pro-

grammes for an overseas clientele is not without challenges though, as most tourists hail from a different cultural background, noted Kurz. "Briefing sessions on what to expect, and the dos and don'ts are thus very important, so as not to offend the local cultures," he said.

"Another challenge is identifying new programmes that will appeal to our core European market and where they can contribute to the local community," Kurz added.

Lee concurred: "It is (about) finding deserving locals who are dedicated to the arts or to their causes so that the voluntourism projects will make a win-win

situation for both the local community and the tourists who volunteer their time and money."

Although there have been requests for shorter one-day programmes instead of the typical four-day, three-night itineraries, Masama JS Adventure Tours will not accommodate such requests as visitors cannot learn about the conservation efforts in such a short period, said Wunsch.

Tourism Malaysia rolled out a dedicated brochure late last year to promote voluntourism projects by local tour operators. The first initiative of its kind, the brochure will be freely distributed at Tourism Malaysia's overseas offices. - S Puvaneswary



Volunteer programmes in Sarawak include longhouse stays

Silver spoon

Nawab Authentic Moghul Restaurant



Under new management, food quality here has climbed a few notches, finds **S Puvaneswary**

MENU/PRICING I was invited for lunch with Naveen Khera, group chairman of Nawab Group in India, who introduced me to all the house specialities.

The menu is extensive, with 108 items to choose from. For starters, we had a tandoori platter comprising chicken malai tikka, mutton seekh kebab, tandoori chicken and fish tikka. Served with mint sauce, all these meats were slightly spicy and deliciously tender. The mutton melted in my mouth, and I later learnt was cooked in a charcoal tandoor.

Other signature dishes like butter chicken, mutton rogan josh and dal makhani are highly recommended. I ate these with paratha and naan bread, topped with melted butter. The breads were crunchy, with serving sizes twice that of other Indian restaurants I have been to.

For dessert, I opted for kulfi, an Indian ice-cream made from milk cooked over a slow fire until a thick consistency is achieved. A rare treat even for Indian restaurants in Malaysia, I ate the ice cream slowly to savour every delicious mouthful.

Set lunches are priced at RM12 (US\$3.70); expect to spend about RM70 for an à la carte lunch for two.

AMBIENCE The restaurant exuded a warm and friendly atmosphere, with interiors adorned with Indian paintings and handicrafts.

SERVICE Exceptional. I returned to the restaurant a few days later to get my kulfi fix, and the service was great even though it was packed with the lunch crowd.

TRADE APPLICATION Group rates are available for local inbound operators with a minimum of 15 guests. Buses can park in the open-air car park behind the shop. The entire venue can be booked for private functions. The restaurant seats 180 pax, but can accommodate up to 250 pax.

Name Nawab Authentic Moghul Restaurant

Location No. 2 Chulan Square, Jalan Raja Chulan, Kuala Lumpur

Opening times From 11.30 to 23.30 daily

Contact details

Tel: (60-3) 2143-2828

Email: nawab@nawabrestoran.com



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Checking in

The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur



S Puvaneswary is pampered from top to toe at the capital's most sought-after address

LOCATION Dating back to 1932, this is the only luxury hotel located on Kuala Lumpur's historical mile. From my living room window, I could see iconic colonial buildings such as the Moorish-style Kuala Lumpur Railway Station and the Malayan Railway Administration building juxtaposed against a modern city backdrop.

ROOMS I enjoyed a two-room Governor Suite, which was very spacious and welcoming. There was no iron in the room, but who needs one when there are butler services? A personal driver and car were also at my disposal. That's the privilege of staying in the Majestic Wing – I got to enjoy butler services throughout my stay.

FACILITIES I experienced a two-hour English Afternoon Tea spa experience, starting with a foot scrub and head massage, followed by a body scrub and Swedish massage before ending with a facial.

The air-conditioned screening room was a comfortable spot to watch movies, and the treadmill in the gym had a small TV screen, which allowed me to watch



The Hunger Games while I exercised. Other facilities include two swimming pools, a gentlemen's lounge and a reading room.

F&B Colonial Café serves colonial cuisine made famous by the Hainanese chefs of yesteryear. The Bar and The Tea Lounge are both located in the Colonial Café, with the latter a popular hangout for English tea. Contango has open show kitchens featuring Asian and Western cuisine.

SERVICE Service was very personalised; hotel staff greeted me by name and room service was prompt. I felt simply spoilt.

VERDICT Bring your clients here if you want to pamper them silly.

Name The Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur

No. of rooms 47 suites in The Majestic Wing and 253 rooms in Tower Wing

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Apart from sightseeing and leisure facilities, Tamsui Fisherman's Wharf also functions as a harbour for fishing boats



Redmond Sia

Connections on the rise

LCCs flock to Taiwan, offering opportunities to further cultivate the FIT market. By **Prudence Lui**

Arrivals

Taiwan reached its 2013 target of 7.7 million arrivals as of December, with 70 per cent of the traffic comprising leisure visitors. China contributed 2.6 million visitors for the first 11 months and the figure was expected to exceed 2.8 million by end-2013 because of the increase in quota for FITs to 3,000 per day since December. Second-largest source market Japan started picking up from September, thanks to Taiwan Tourism Bureau's aggressive promotion in 2H2013. Estimated total Japanese visitors for the year was 1.4 million. Both Hong Kong and Macau also performed well with a total of over a million visitors as of November, possibly hitting 1.1 million for the whole year.

NTO

The tourism bureau is casting a wider net in recent years, with FITs and Muslim travellers being prioritised. Taiwan's granting of the FIT visa for Chinese visitors since 2011 has resulted in robust growth for this segment. Statistics showed 350,000 arrivals for the first nine months of 2013, a year-on-year rise of 210.8 per cent.

CT Su, chairman of the organising committee for the recent Taipei International Travel Fair organised by Taiwan Visitors Association, said: "We will maintain the growth of our mature markets like Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and China, while continuing to explore new and emerging ones like Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines. We have been pursuing this strategy for the last two to three years, but the stumbling block is visas. We can only hope for additional measures to ease the application procedure."

Hotels

Government statistics showed 182,912 rooms in Taiwan. The first nine months saw 69 per cent average occupancy rate (AOR) with an average room rate (ARR) of NT\$3,823 (US\$128). In Taipei, AOR hit 72.7 per cent and ARR, NT\$4,669. New supply for 2014 includes the 199-room Taipei Chingcheng-Howard Hotel and 311-room Four Points by Sheraton on Penghu, opening late 2014 and early 2015 respectively.

W Hotel Taipei general manager, Cary Gray, said: "The performance in 2013 exceeded our expectations in all key indica-



"We won't expect any upsurge of traffic due to the uncertain global economy. If our arrivals could maintain similar growth this year like in 2013, we'd be pleased."

CT Su

Chairman
Taipei International Travel Fair
Organising Committee

tors. In 2014, we are cautiously optimistic and though supply will grow with the entry of new hotels, we expect some growth in demand."

Aviation

The island has become a hotspot for low-cost carriers (LCCs). Following TransAsia's decision to set up the country's first LCC in 2015, China Airlines joined hands with Tigerair last December to start Tigerair Taiwan. This LCC is expected to commence operations end-2014 covering destinations in North-east and South-east Asia, such as Hong Kong, Macau, and China.

Additionally, Shanghai-based Spring Airlines started its first cross-strait, thrice-weekly flight to Kaohsiung last October, followed by a five-weekly service to Taipei, while Shanghai's Juneyao Airlines also began flying to both destinations with same frequencies. Elsewhere, Japan-based Vanilla Airlines kicked off Taipei-Tokyo (Narita) in December, while Scoot started Taipei-Seoul in June and Perth-Singapore-Taipei in October. The latter's Singapore-Taipei frequency also rose from seven to 10 flights a week.

This year, Taipei will be better connected with the Middle East when Emirates inaugurates six non-stop Dubai-Taipei services weekly in February.

Andy Yu, vice president for special interest travel, Lion Travel, believes there will be an impact on air ticket prices due to the airline's low fuel surcharges and excellent network.

MICE

Kaohsiung Meeting & Event Promotion Office director, Alice Chou, said: "Besides Taipei and Kaohsiung, Taichung, Hsinchu and Tainan are becoming aggressive in the MICE industry. According to ICCA and UFI, Taipei ranks first in Taiwan. But Kaohsiung will receive a boost after the (revamped) International Convention Center Kaohsiung and (new) Kaohsiung Exhibition Center begin business (this year).

"This year, Kaohsiung is expecting over 41 cruises to bring in 60,000 foreign visitors. More corporate meetings are also expected to come by cruises."

The Meet Taiwan website has been revamped, and includes the introduction of corporate members to enhance the database and foster more collaboration.

No favouritism, only diversification

Taiwan customises itineraries for a variety of markets, including the Middle East, reports **Prudence Lui**

1 Are Taiwan's tourism stakeholders looking beyond China/East Asia? Both tour operators and the NTO are working towards a diversified portfolio.

A Taiwan Tourism Bureau (TTB) spokesman highlighted that the latest *Time for Taiwan* campaign eyes a variety of markets from the world over.

She said: "We are actively exploring potential high spenders from emerging markets such as India, as well as Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam...The bureau has been pushing overseas promotions to enhance (Taiwan's) international reputation."

Lion Travel inbound department manager, Ronnie Chang, said the bureau makes a concerted effort to connect Taiwan's tourism stakeholders with travel consultants from across the world through roadshows, exhibitions, partnerships and marketing sponsorships.

"They also leverage the latest technology to enhance foreign visitors' experience via mobile apps, wireless access, QR codes

and so on."

In 2013, market leaders like Lion Travel noticed an increase in travellers from Singapore and Malaysia. Other countries on the rise include Vietnam, Myanmar, Indonesia, the Philippines and surprisingly, Eastern Europe (Poland, Belarus, etc). South Korea benefited from currency appreciation and an increased number of flights, making it the best performer last year.

2 How did South-east Asian markets perform in 2013? Between January and October, about 962,000 South-east Asians visited Taiwan, a year-on-year increase of 12 per cent.

TTB reported that despite being hampered by insufficient air seats, Singapore and Malaysia FIT travel did well with an estimated 10 per cent growth.

The four rising stars of Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam are still hindered by stringent visa policies, although statistics showed a collective rise of 6.8 per cent and further room for growth.

"The increase in the number of flights has helped traffic from South-east Asian markets. This has made Taiwan much easier to access, and promotes more frequent trips and repeat business," said Edison Tours' deputy gen-

Asians love Taiwan

12

Year-on-year percentage increase in the number of South-east Asian visitors to Taiwan from January to October 2013

eral manager, Paul Hsieh, who is keen on tapping Muslim travellers from Indonesia.

Lion Travel's Chang added: "Our customer demographic

is influenced by many factors, like economic ties and air accessibility...Travellers are becoming increasingly sophisticated and more are starting to deviate from low-cost group tours to customised private tours. We are customising itineraries to match their specific needs. Nowadays, consumers are willing to pay a premium not only for better service, but better overall travel experience."

3 Has there been support for the FIT segment? Robust growth in the number of FIT travellers visiting Taiwan prompted sellers at the Taipei International Travel Fair (ITF) 2013 to refine their products, while the ITF forum also looked at FIT trends and how best Taiwan can cater for this segment.

There have been other transport developments last year, such as an enhanced version of the joint rail pass offered by Taiwan High Speed Rail and Taiwan Railways, as well as the taxi association rolling out rental services for tourists.

4 What other markets are of interest? Sheraton Grande Taipei general manager, Will Chen, said: "With Emirates and Qatar Airways planning to fly direct to Taipei, the Middle East is a new market for us. More halal restaurants are also available in the city now and the government is working closely with restaurants in getting halal certification."

Kathy Yuan, section chief of the internal affairs division of tourism bureau, Ministry of Transportation and Communications of Taiwan, said: "After certifying restaurants this year, we'll target attractions in 2014 due to rising demand."

"Currently, our bureau has designed two Muslim itineraries – Taipei-Hualien and Taipei-Kaohsiung. Travel consultants follow our concept and sell these to clients. In future, there will be themed travel concepts, e.g. family travel with theme park visits."

She added that it was vital for tour guides to undergo training to overcome the language barrier and understand travellers' needs.

Products

Camp in the wild, soak in plenty of art and culture

Yilan's All-season Camping

Yilan's county government rolled out a new *All-season Camping* campaign recently. Leveraging the rich natural resources on the north-east coast of Taiwan, it is cooperating with Yilan Leisure Farming Development Association to promote camping in the wild together with adventure activities like leisure farm visits, tree climbing, high rope courses and river rafting. Suitable for all ages with minimum group size of 20.

Contact

Website: <http://camp.e-land.gov.tw>

Humble House Taipei

Launched last November, the 235-room Humble House Taipei is the first property of the Humble House Group in Taiwan. It is also owned by the Tsai family, who have other assets such as Sheraton Taipei and Le Meridien Taipei. Located in the financial district of Xinyi in Taipei, the hotel features an Italian restaurant, La Farfalla, and a bar, The Terrace. Its unconventional design concept blends art, culture and living. It is a 40 minutes' ride from Taoyuan International Airport and just 15 minutes from Taipei Songshan Airport.

Contact

Tel: (886-2) 6631-8000

Website: <http://humblehousehotels.com>

Taipei New Horizon

The newly opened 1.2-hectare, 14-storey Taipei New Horizon building on the north-east side of Song Shan Park promotes art and culture. The reputable Eslite Group's Spectrum Songyan Store occupies four levels within, incorporating its usual bookstore and fashion market, exhibitions, dining as well as its first movie theatre and performance space. The group also has plans to open a hotel in the building.

Song Shan Park offers a historical ambience with the Songshan Tobacco Factory historic site, which consists of an administrative building and three factory buildings. It added Red Dot Design Museum to its premises last August.

Contact

Website: www.taipeinewhorizon.com.tw

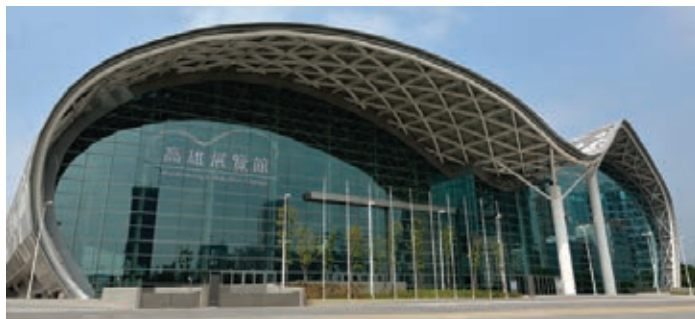
Shangri-La's Far Eastern Plaza Hotel Taipei gets an upgrade

Shangri-La's Far Eastern Plaza Hotel Taipei has embarked on a revamp to celebrate its 20th anniversary. The renovation covers all 420 guestrooms in two phases.

The first phase commenced



Clockwise from top: Camping in the wild in Yilan, Humble House Taipei, Kaohsiung Exhibition Center



in October 2013 and will complete in March for 240 rooms and corridors from levels nine to 23. From April, the second phase will commence with the remaining rooms and corridors, including the Presidential and Specialty Suites, as well as the exclusive Horizon Lounge on level 36. The hotel lobby, lounge Lobby Court and restaurant The Cake Shop will also don a new look from June. The entire pro-

ject is expected to be complete end-September.

Meanwhile, check out the Japanese restaurant on level seven, which was rebranded from Ibuki to Ibuki by Takagi Kazuo last year. This has transformed the restaurant into the first and only in Taiwan operating with a Michelin-starred approach, featuring two-starred chef Takagi Kazuo who leads the culinary team.

Contact

Tel: (886-2) 2378-8888
Fax: (886-2) 2377-7777

Kaohsiung Exhibition Center

At the hub of the Kaohsiung Asian New Bay Zone, Kaohsiung Exhibition Center (KEC) is the newest part of this commercial hub. Among its chief attractions are the Pier-2 Art Center, Maritime Cultural and Pop Music Center, Kaohsiung Public Library, Kaohsiung Port Terminal and a yacht dock.

KEC is slated to open in April and will host its first exhibition, Taiwan International Fastener Show, in the same month, followed by the Taiwan International Boat Show in May.

The only waterfront exhibition venue in Taiwan has a conference room for 800 pax overlooking the ocean. It also claims to be the first 'smart' convention centre with features like a lightweight steel frame and undulating glass panels.

Taipei is only one-and-a-half-hours away via high-speed rail while Kaohsiung International Airport is only a 15 minutes' drive away.

Contact

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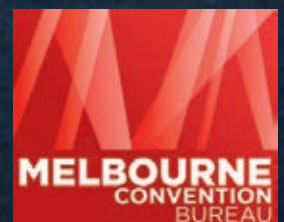


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