

VIEW FROM THE TOP

Believe it or not, airlines still love travel agencies. That, in a nutshell, is what Conrad Clifford, who replaced retired Maunu von Lueders as IATA vice president Asia-Pacific in February 2014, tells [Raini Hamdi](#)



British Airways



PAYING FOR EXTRA COMFORT

The winds are changing for premium economy class, thanks to a more segmented corporate travel market and the emergence of sophisticated leisure travellers in Asia



SABRE-RATTLING?

An Abacus backed 100 per cent by Sabre is set to fire up the competition among GDSs in the region but how sabre-rattling it will be remains to be seen



LIFESTYLE AND DESIGN: AREN'T THEY SIMILAR?

Where do you draw the line between a 'lifestyle hotel' and a 'design hotel'? How can design hotels stay edgy as new brands keep entering?



KUALA LUMPUR AS HAVEN FOR FOODIES

Kuala Lumpur is striving to become the region's gastronomic hub, calling enthusiasts' attention to its first food festival and F&B standards rating



KHAO YAI UPSCALED

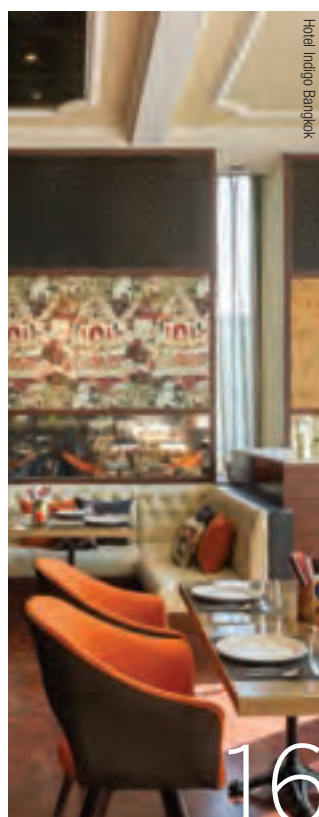
Nature is no longer Khao Yai's only draw as high-end accommodation and other offerings keep being added to the national park

Contents & editorial

Want to read us on the go?



Analysis	04
Intelligence	09
View from the top	10
Agency	11
Shop	13
Social	15
Connect	28



Roundtable:
Design hotels



Guide: Premium
economy



Destination:
Malaysia



Destination:
Thailand



Airlines are already starting to charge for ancillaries and premium economy may be a way to push that pedal harder, ie, charge for everything in economy that travellers might as well pay a little more to fly premium economy.

A PREMIUM ECONOMY RUSE?

Premium economy is seeing a second wave of sorts, with Singapore Airlines (SIA) being the latest to introduce the four-cabin configuration, which it had some time back, but later pulled out (see our guide to premium economy class on page 18).

Airlines are saying there is now a market for it in Asia, because for one, not all corporate travellers are equal – the market has become more segmentised – and secondly, they are seeing the emergence of more sophisticated leisure travellers in the region who do not mind paying more for extra comfort.

I do not think premium economy is ever a threat to business class. This is nonsense. If I ever get the same bed, F&B and plush service that I'm currently enjoying while writing this piece (on SQ's business class from Zurich to Singapore) in premium economy class, then that's the end of the business class. So forget the debate about premium economy cannibalising business class – airlines are not that stupid.

What I fear is that it will affect the way air fares in the cattle class are sold. Airlines are already starting to charge for ancillaries and premium economy may be a way to push that pedal harder, ie, charge for everything in economy class that travellers might as well pay a little more to fly premium economy.

Thus, premium economy ends up being just a little better than the economy class we are used to today, while the economy class goes on a fee-based structure (and pity

the low-cost traveller who takes a seat in the back row, pays a fee to watch the latest movie, pays for a meal, pays to go to the loo). So four products in one aircraft – in the hotel industry parlance, it's the five-star, four-star, economy and no-frills – which means the top end no longer has to subsidise the back end as much as before.

If I see it from the airlines' perspective, it is a smart move. As a consumer, it's sad. I still fly in economy mostly, and only on SIA if I can help it, because the crew still makes me feel human even if I'm at the back of the house. And now I'm being compelled to pay more for the extra comfort which I've actually largely been enjoying in economy. In other words, premium economy is not a threat to business class, but it may end up a threat to those of us who travel economy class.

I hope the airlines will prove me wrong. For premium economy to take off, there has to be a real gap between economy and premium economy, without the latter inching too close to business class, and effective pricing. That requires airline innovation – not just one extra prawn, two extra foot of legroom, three extra miles, four extra peanuts...

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COMING UP

NEXT ISSUE:
JULY 17, 2015

DUBAI After shouting the largest, tallest, biggest this and that, Dubai is now wearing a family-friendly cap

ADVENTURE/ECOTOURISM Who's disrupting the market and how?

INDEPENDENT HOTELS New players enter, old players restructure

WE LIKE



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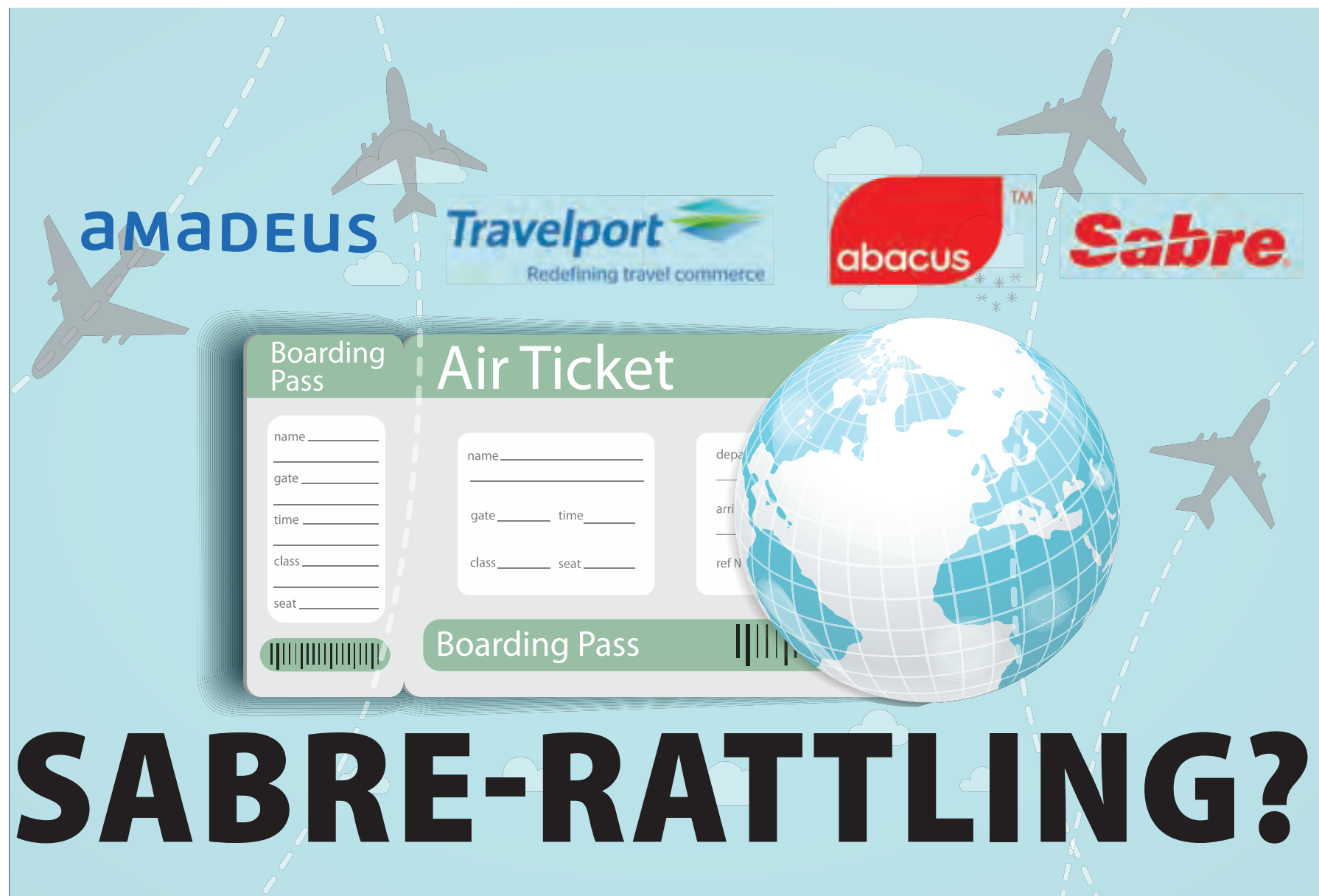


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Analysis



Travel agencies see Sabre Corporation's acquisition of Abacus International as a shot-in-the-arm for the GDS, which they say has been losing marketshare overall in the region to Amadeus and Travelport. The general consensus among travel industry CEOs interviewed across Asia is there could be three strong players eventually and, that, can only benefit agencies.

Agencies choose their GDS based on four criteria: first, back-end incentives which the GDS gives them, such as a sign-on bonus and year-end cash for having met targets; second, ease of use; third, content and availability of airline seats; and fourth, technical support.

Under the current ownership structure in which Sabre has a 35 per cent stake in Abacus and a consortium of 11 Asian airlines holds the rest, Amadeus and Travelport evidently have been able to muscle up on these criteria even though Abacus is the 'Asian' GDS and the first in many markets. It is no secret that Abacus loses out in particular with incentives, as it has to give its airline owners preferential rates, whereas Amadeus and Travelport charge airlines higher fees and are thus able to give higher incentives to agencies.

As well, airline owners are said to be unwilling to re-invest earnings to strengthen Abacus.

How much marketshare Abacus has varies from market to market. In the Philippines, agencies interviewed perceived Amadeus as the most user-friendly, and Galileo as the most generous and aggressive in giving incentives. Abacus is often



The Abacus system is already a good one and with the acquisition I believe there will be more good things in store in the future as Sabre will have full control in decision-making.

Adam Kamal
CEO
Rakyat Travel, Malaysia

I switched to Galileo a few years ago and incentives is just one of the reasons for the change...We renew our GDS contract once every three to five years, so we may reconsider by then.

Tommy Tam
Managing director
Arrow Travel, Hong Kong

used only for domestic ticketing because Philippine Airlines (PAL), one of its owners, gives it a complete inventory of seats in Abacus but only regular fares in Amadeus and Galileo, according to the trade. This means PAL tickets are cheaper when booked via Abacus. Which is why Adkins Travel, which switched to Amadeus this year – “for a change”, said owner and general manager Francisco Lim – still uses Abacus for domestic airline bookings. Some agencies, like Wow Philippines Travel Agency, which has been approached by Abacus and Amadeus, simply choose to book direct with local airlines like PAL and Cebu Pacific since as inbound operators, they mostly do domestic ticketing.

In Hong Kong, Jason Shum, executive director of Nan Hwa (Express) Travel Service, believed Abacus share had dropped from 80 per cent to 60 per cent and cited lower incentives than rivals as the reason. Shum added: “Abacus’ practice to have its GM seconded from Cathay Pacific means a change of personnel every few years so it’s not as stable as other GDS. My concern regarding the acquisition is, who’s going to be the successor (GM). Moreover, it really depends on Sabre if they are willing to invest and fight back to offer similar perks like its rivals.”

Abacus is widely believed to hold a marketshare of 50 to 60 per cent of the Asian market today, which means it remains the dominant player with scores of agencies that are loyal to it and that believe Sabre’s acquisition, expected to close in 3Q15, will strengthen the GDS.

One such fan is Dynasty Travel Singa-

An Abacus backed 100 per cent by Sabre is set to fire up the competition among GDSs in the region, but how sabre-rattling it will be remains to be seen. By **Raini Hamdi, S Puvaneswary, Rosa Ocampo, Prudence Lui and Sim Kok Chwee**

pore, which uses Abacus for all transactions on air tickets. “We believe that Abacus/Sabre will continue with the longterm business relationships it has with its former partners and try to gain new market-share with travel agencies throughout the region,” said Alicia Seah, director of marketing & communications.

“At the start, we believe the current vision of Sabre is to accelerate global growth by acquiring Abacus which is the leading GDS in Asia Pacific and will not ‘rock the boat’ with too many changes, instead build confidence and trust among the current Abacus travel agencies.”

Sabre has said it is entering into new “longterm” agreements with the 11 airlines although it would not comment on how these agreements might be different from before, or whether there were opportunities to increase fees charged to airlines and incentives to agencies, etc, either during an investor call conference or to questions from *TTG Asia*. Airlines including Singapore Airlines and Cathay responded to *TTG Asia*’s queries with a standard statement: “We strongly believe that Sabre, with its deep industry expertise, leading technology and customer focus, is ideally placed to invest the necessary resources and innovation to ensure Abacus’ future success. As a global airline based in Asia, we recognise the continued importance of

Abacus as a distribution partner and we remain highly supportive of the organisation and the travel agencies they serve. To that end we have entered into a long term distribution agreement, which we believe will substantially benefit Abacus subscribers as well as ourselves and Sabre.”

Abacus competitors are understood to be ready to pounce on any opportunity the acquisition can bring, for instance, the chance Abacus may lose the special status accorded to it by its airline owners, or the chance that the takeover by Sabre may cause staff layovers, disruptions to operations and market uncertainty. Travelport and Amadeus declined to comment what

the opportunities and threats might be. Mark Meehan, Travelport managing director, APAC, said: “We don’t comment or speculate on announcements made by our competitors; we remain fully focused on the delivery of our Travel Commerce Platform and the distribution of unrivalled air and hotel content to our global travel agency subscribers. We already have global distribution agreements with all of the 11 Asian carriers involved, many of which also rely on us for our industry-leading merchandising solutions which are unique in the marketplace.

“We are also continuing to redefine corporate travel and travel payments through

our unmatched adjacency businesses.”

Sabre president and CEO Tom Klein underscored the “deep local market expertise” of Abacus and the “global capabilities of Sabre” as “a powerful combination”.

“Together with Abacus, Sabre will provide customers and suppliers with improved and faster access to Sabre’s industry-leading innovations, including low-cost carrier content, ancillary capabilities, data analytics, and the latest in mobile solutions and personalisation services. Additionally, airlines and travel agencies will have more options for new and differentiated products and services

(Expect) improved and faster access to Sabre’s industry-leading innovations, including low-cost carrier content, ancillary capabilities, data analytics, and the latest in mobile solutions and personalisation services.

Tom Klein
President and CEO
Sabre



WELCOME TO THE “FROZEN” VILLAGE AT HONG KONG DISNEYLAND

This summer, Hong Kong Disneyland invites you and your guests to be the first to visit the enchanting “Frozen” Village! From June 11 to August 30, 2015, escape the heat of summer and be transported to a place where the breeze is always a welcome breath of fresh air.

Your “Frozen” adventure commences with a special musical performance featuring Queen Elsa, Princess Anna and Kristoff in the “Frozen” Festival Show. Enjoy your favorite songs from “Frozen” and become part of the stunning finale of “Let it Go”!

Step into the “Frozen” Village Square and be totally immersed in the wintery atmosphere of the “Frozen” Festival. Try something that you could never experience at home during summer, like playing in real snow, building your very own snowman and trying out the fun toboggan ride. One of the highlights will definitely be meeting our snowy celebrity – Olaf, the delightful live snowman who loves summer and is eagerly awaiting warm hugs from you.

During your stay, be sure to sample the local cuisine, admire the fashion or perhaps pick up a souvenir or two at Oaken’s Trading Post. Keep in mind to pack something warm along with your suntan lotion and sunglasses for this vacation - it’s going to be the coolest summer that you’ll never forget!

The journey doesn’t end here! Not mentioning the first-ever all LED “Disney Paint the Night” parade, there’s still so much more to explore at the 7 lands! Enjoy the expanded fun with advantages of the 2-Day Ticket to visit the Park twice within a 7-day period!

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Analysis

created specifically for customers in the Asia-Pacific market," he said.

That's sweet music to the ears of Abacus fans. When asked what outcome they hope to see from the acquisition, agencies across the region virtually voiced what Klein had promised.

"With Sabre's extensive network and

interactive platforms, we look forward to data-rich solutions that give us unique insights into operations as well as customer shopping and booking trends," said Seah.

Misa Travel Singapore's CEO Wee Hee Ling hopes for a faster transfer of the latest technology and solutions, "so that we can be more efficient and productive in

serving our clients". Equally important for her is for there to be continuity, the same level of helpdesk support and no drastic change in processes.

Over in Malaysia, Syed Mohd Razif Al Yahya, group managing director/group CEO, Sutra Group of Companies based in Kuala Lumpur, said: "In the past, I have

It is no secret that Abacus loses out in particular with incentives, as it has to give its airline owners preferential rates, whereas Amadeus and Travelport charge airlines higher fees and are thus able to give higher incentives to agencies.

used Abacus, Galileo and Amadeus, and last year I signed a five-year contract to use Abacus. Octraves Technology, a subsidiary of Sutra Travel Group of Companies, is developing a web service system which is B2B, B2C and B2Enterprise which will partly use Abacus technology.

"Personally, there is not much difference between the different global distribution systems. The main differentiator is the after-sales service. I am happy with Abacus because the team provides quick response when there are technical issues.

"Sabre, I believe, has the latest technology and this acquisition will further result in improvements in technology and new developments which, we as subscribers, will benefit from."

Abdul Rahman Mohamed, deputy general manager, channel management, Mayflower Acme Tours, agreed: "The acquisition simply means that Sabre is very serious about strengthening their presence in Asia-Pacific through Abacus. Abacus has a good system, in terms of Internet booking protocol, front office and back office technologies, which I personally think is more superior compared with its major competitors. With this new acquisition, Sabre is likely to inject more capital which will strengthen Abacus further and increase its marketshare in the region.

Adam Kamal, CEO, Rakyat Travel, said: "We are migrating to Abacus from a different GDS because Abacus provides more airline options and the system complies with the requirements of local corporate companies. For example, the back-end office complies with the reporting format of corporate companies, which makes our work to generate reports for our clients less tedious.

"The Abacus system is already a good one and with the new acquisition I believe there will be more good things in store in the future as Sabre will have full control in decision-making."

Other agencies are now finding Abacus interesting again. Tommy Tam, managing director, Arrow Travel, Hong Kong, which switched to Galileo a few years ago, said: "We renew our GDS contract every three to five years, so we may reconsider (Sabre) by then.

"With this new acquisition, the industry may end up with three strong players – Sabre, Galileo and Amadeus."

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Explore Magical Myanmar

A magical land of golden temples, lush green jungles and cultural treasures, Myanmar is fast becoming one of the world's most sought-after destinations.

Having been inaccessible for so many years, visitors are now returning to the country in ever increasing numbers, curious to experience the many wonders that once lay behind closed doors. Anticipating this growth, Best Western became one of the first international hotel groups to re-enter Myanmar following its reawakening, when its first hotel opened in Yangon in 2013. Since then, the company has expanded to a collection of three hotels, with many more still to come.

Yangon

Set in a quiet, leafy street in the heart of Yangon, **BEST WESTERN Green Hill Hotel** provides the perfect base from which to explore the city's many charms and treasures. Just a short walk from Kandawgyi Lake, this modern midscale hotel provides 187 rooms with large windows that overlook the glittering spires of the Shwedagon Pagoda.

And a short distance away in downtown Yangon, **BEST WESTERN Chinatown Hotel** provides another convenient location in the heart of the city. Having opened in 2015, this new hotel perfectly combines the high-tech amenities of an international hotel with the local charms of its vibrant neighborhood.

Mandalay

In the mystical city of Mandalay, **BEST WESTERN PREMIER Hotel Shwe Pyi Thar** truly captures the essence of local hospitality. This charming upscale hotel combines classical design with a range of modern facilities, including a spa and outdoor pool, allowing guests to get a real sense of the area's exquisite local culture.

As visitor arrivals to Myanmar continue to climb in the coming years, Best Western will continue to bring its timeless qualities of genuine hospitality and service excellence to even more destinations across this incredible country, including the capital city, Nay Pyi Taw.

So wherever guests choose to travel across this beautiful land, Best Western will have a hotel to suit their needs.



BEST WESTERN Green Hill Hotel, Yangon



BEST WESTERN Chinatown Hotel, Yangon



BEST WESTERN PREMIER Hotel Shwe Pyi Thar, Mandalay

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For hotel development opportunities, please contact asiadevelopment@bestwestern.com

Analysis

2015 Discover Thailand is going into to the annals of Thai tourism history as just an average campaign – at a time when Thailand badly needs an amazing one, **Greg Lowe** writes

JUST A SO-SO CAMPAIGN

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)'s 2015 Discover Thainess is an average campaign, when what is needed is something extraordinary, according to the trade.

The campaign was launched at the end of last year, after the imposition of martial law in May, nationwide curfews and a government comprising unelected men in green had damaged Brand Thailand. International arrivals suffered their greatest decline in recent memory, falling 6.6 per cent to 24.7 million by end-2015.

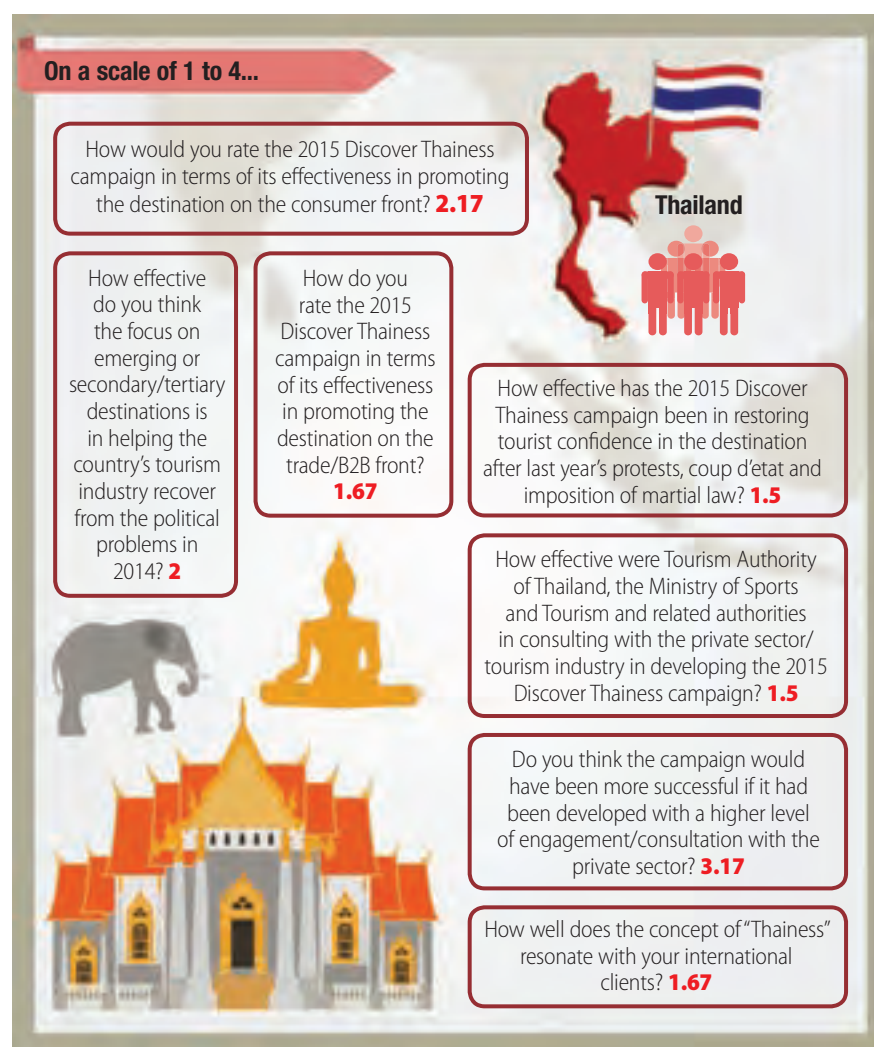
In that light, what many felt was needed to restore confidence was a dynamic initiative reminiscent of the highly successful Amazing Thailand, which made the kingdom a leading destination in the region. Thailand, after all, is the mastermind behind the Visit Year, which is imitated across the world even today. Alas, Discover Thainess has not brought such buzz.

'Thainess' is an obscure, politicised and hard to define concept in concrete terms let alone base a national tourism strategy on. It has been used repeatedly in the past, when it was also criticised for being vague and ephemeral. Thawatchai Arunyik, TAT governor, gave a more focused explanation at the campaign's launch when he said its aim was to showcase "the distinct character of the Thai people and our unique culture", and to attract 28 million visitors generating an estimated 1.35 trillion baht (US\$40 billion).

Many in the trade agree with the governor that the friendliness of Thais and the place itself are key reasons why people visit Thailand. The missed opportunity is over the messaging.

Ken Scott, managing director of Scott Asia Communications, which specialises in travel, said: "All 25 million visitors to Thailand have their own expectations and hopes of 'My Thailand'. The TAT should conduct a campaign from the perspective of the visitor, not about a visitor discovering a rather impersonal thing, 'Thainess'.

In a *TTG Asia* straw poll of seven senior executives at Thailand-based DMCs and operators, when asked how the con-



cept 'Thainess' resonated with their international clients (with 1 being "not at all" and 4 meaning "very well"), the result was 2.17. Similarly, questions on the effectiveness of the campaign promoting the destination on the consumer and trade fronts scored just 2.17 and 1.67, respectively.

Chote (Tony) Soorangura, associate managing director, NS Travel & Tours, who said business got worse after the coup and who is critical of the current government for lacking the "business mindset", feels the campaign lacks a much-needed contemporary message.

"When we communicate how good we are in terms of natural resources and culture we really miss out on telling people how modernised we are, or what our city life is like. Just recently agents from Japan and Norway told me how Thailand, especially Bangkok, is much more modern than they had thought.

"But some people still think coming to Thailand means they will see elephants on every street. This is because of the message we send to foreigners. We need to provide a bigger and more extensive picture (of what Thailand really is)."

To be fair the TAT has been in overdrive issuing a raft of press releases each day, many of which promote more dynamic tourism ideas, though a few unorthodox propositions have slipped through the net, such as one endorsing "martial law tourism" last October and a May release about "couple therapy" suggesting those in failing relationships come to rediscover each other in Thailand.

Beyond its focus on people and culture, a core initiative of Discover Thailand is to market the so-called "12 hidden gems", provinces that are not major tourism destinations but are renowned for their unique history, culture and lifestyle. This initiative has its firm supporters.

"The 2015 Discover Thainess campaign is essential after the challenges of 2014," said Debrah Pascoe, senior vice president sales and marketing of ONYX Hospitality Group. "With the campaign focusing on the lesser-known destinations in Thailand, it allows for visitors to rediscover Thailand outside of the beach and city destinations the country is already well-known for."

Hans van den Born, managing director of Diethelm Travel Thailand, said developing other destinations can also aid the industry's sustainable development. "Re-vamping existing destinations and highlighting the unique character is not a bad idea as such. The question is whether the tourism infrastructure is up to the standard of the ever increasing and demanding customers' expectation levels," he said.

Overall, Willem Niemeijer, CEO, Khiri Group, said the campaign is "quite good". "The TV spot drives it home. After all, tourists come here in large part because of the natural hospitality, quirkiness and charm of the Thais. However, I think 'Discover Thainess' is a little clumsy. The Thai language version is *Tee-ow Wittai Thai* or 'Travel the Thai Way' – that would connect better in English," he said.

And therein lies the rub: Thailand's febrile political situation leave little room for clumsiness. A more surefooted tourism strategy is needed.



River Palace
Hotel

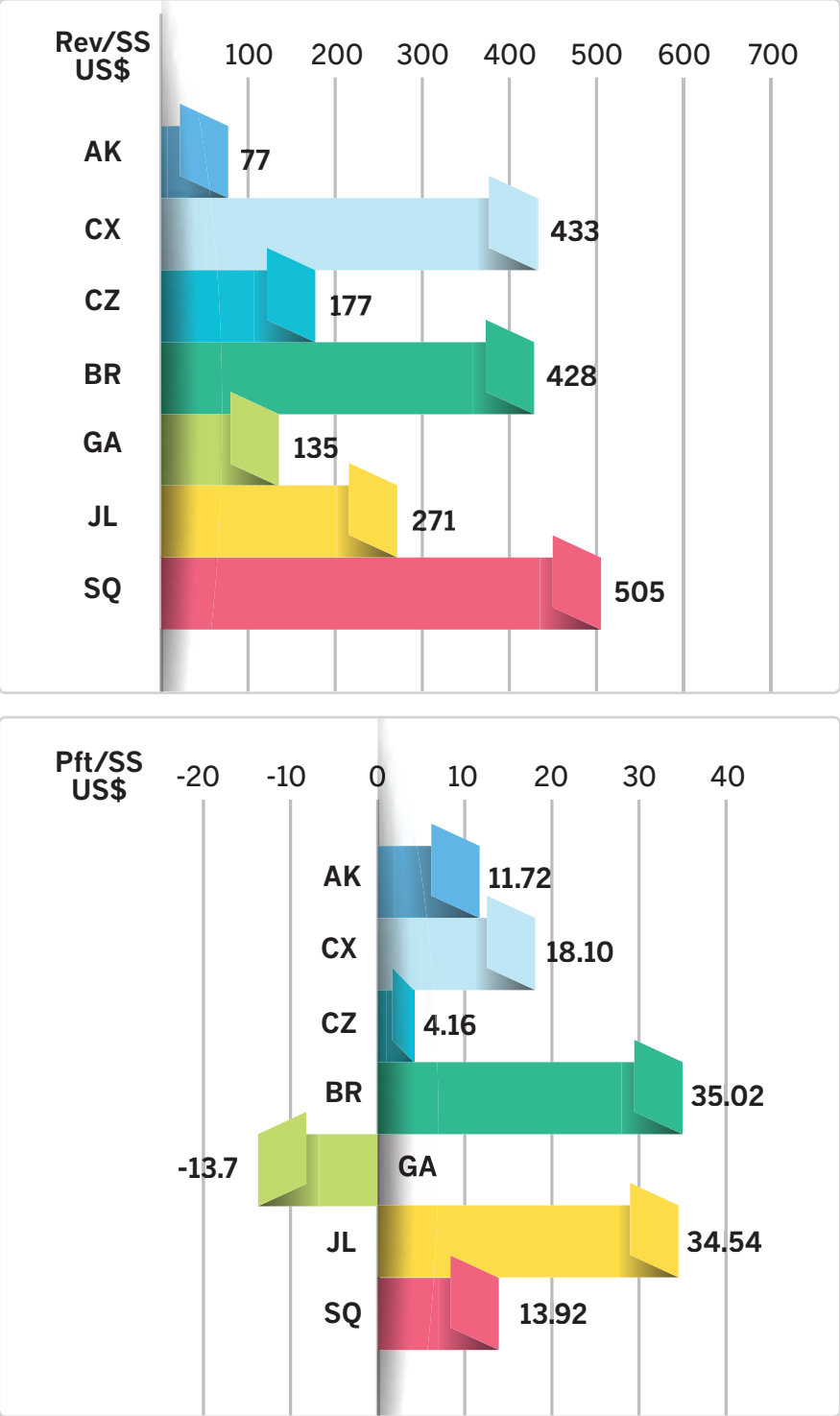
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EXPLORE PHNOM PENH
WITH BEST WESTERN

Winners and losers, per seat sold



Notes: Figures based on years to December 2014, except SQ (March 2015) and JL (March 2014). AK=AirAsia, BR=EvaAir, CX=CathayPacificAirways, CZ=ChinaSouthernAirlines, GA=Garuda Indonesia, JL=Japan Airlines, SQ=Singapore Airlines

Does Singapore Airlines (SIA) earn the most per passenger? By some measures the answer is yes, but as usual, there are more than one set of statistics.

Revenue per seat sold (RPSS) for SIA, which includes Scoot, SilkAir and part of Tigerair, was US\$505 in the fiscal year ending March 2015.

This puts it ahead of regional rival Cathay Pacific Airways (and Dragonair) at US\$433* and also Taiwan's Eva Air at US\$428, the third highest RPSS in our list.

Fares and costs are higher in Japan but RPSS for All Nippon Airways and Japan Airlines (JAL) include domestic routes, which lowers averages to US\$263 and US\$271, based on data until March 2014. Chinese airlines were also held down by domestic travel. Air China's RPSS was US\$209 and China Southern Airlines' US\$177.

AirAsia is the only no-frills airline studied here and has an RPSS of US\$77 as of December 2014 for its Malaysia division.

But RPSS, calculated on AirAsia group's total seat sales, was down to US\$34.**

Profit per seat sold (PPSS) is another criteria, and sometimes shocking. Losers include Garuda Indonesia and Malaysia Airlines, losing US\$14 and US\$21 per seat sold respectively.

Big winners were EVA Air and JAL, both at US\$35 operating PPSS. Third was Cathay with US\$18. AirAsia came in with a commendable US\$12 on its seat-sales count, or an even more impressive US\$37 on our seat-sales counts.

*Figures are based on years to December 2014, unless mentioned otherwise.

**Data was taken from the airlines' latest-available reports. But the criteria do not always match. For instance, AirAsia reports 22 million seats sold – but that is just its Malaysia division. For some airlines, 'group' totals are included; in general other companies included in that 'group' total are also airlines, but in some cases they include related companies.

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HOTEL BAROMETER

A disappointing Lunar New Year overall

There's good news and bad news for February. Bangkok's occupancy rebounded by 45%, surpassing expectations. But in fact, 69% occupancy is not so good for a peak-season month, and the month of the Lunar New Year holiday at that. ARR grew 3% in US\$ but actually fell 3% in baht.

Lunar New Year proved disappointing as occupancy fell in four of six locations: Beijing, Hanoi, Hong Kong and Singapore.

In Asia-Pacific overall, occupancy was down fractionally to 75%, ARR in US\$ fell

4% to US\$149, causing a dip in RevPAR to US\$113. Other notable numbers: Melbourne notched the highest occupancy at 95%; ARR fell 12% in Singapore.

Notes/Caveats: Although rates are quoted in US\$, the data is supplied by hotels to TBA in local currencies, and thus changes in exchange rates can affect figures. Different categorisation of hotels across countries may also distort the rate comparison. For this reason, percentage changes of ARR within a city may be a surer comparison of market progress

Hotel operating results in selected centres, February 2015						
Location	Occupancy, %	Growth, %	ARR, US\$*	Growth, %	RevPAR, US\$*	Growth, %
Bangkok	69.1	45.2	111	3.4	77	50.2
Beijing	52.3	-8.2	87	0.5	45	-7.7
Hanoi	78.8	-8.6	87	-1.3	69	-9.8
Hong Kong	82.2	-6.0	223	-5.4	183	-11.1
Melbourne	94.9	1.2	196	-3.4	186	-2.2
Singapore	86.2	-3.2	178	-11.6	154	-14.4

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



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View from the top

Believe it or not, airlines still love travel agencies. That, in a nutshell, is what Conrad Clifford, who replaced retired Maunu von Lueders as IATA vice president Asia-Pacific in February 2014, tells [Raini Hamdi](#)



10 NEED TO KNOWS ABOUT CONRAD CLIFFORD

- **Who's in your family?** My elder son is a coffee trader based in London, my younger son is studying Chinese on an exchange programme with the Jiao Tong University Shanghai.
- **What do you do for fun?** I love travelling, which is just as well given my job!
- **Your ideal vacation?** This summer I will be cycling from Beijing to Shanghai with my younger son.
- **How do you book your own leisure trips?** Online. But if it's somewhere out of the way I prefer to use an agent.
- **What are you reading right now?** I just finished *Embers of War*, a classic about Vietnam by Fredrik Logevall.
- **How do you stay healthy?** I jog, cycle, play badminton.
- **Favourite food?** Wonton noodles for main, mango and black sticky rice for dessert.
- **A bad habit you cannot kick?** I like Sudoku...
- **Your pet peeve, something that never fails to annoy you?** Nothing much annoys me... sloppiness?
- **Most people don't know that you...** I am a 'Freeman' of the City of London in the Guild of Fishmongers. This is a medieval association which today runs fisheries in the North Sea and various charitable concerns. Back in the Middle Ages my family sold fish in Billingsgate!

BETTER PARTNERS NOW

As IATA regional vice president Asia-Pacific, how much time do you spend on the travel agency sector?

About a third of my time. It's huge and important because the sector brings a lot of revenue to our members – more than 50 per cent (of airline tickets sold).

Despite airlines going direct?

Yes. It would have been more before. It also depends on the market. Japan, for example, is still agency-driven; others are not so, partly due to ease of Internet payment. Also, it depends on segments – the corporate business still relies on agencies; people want to hand over their corporate travel for somebody to manage.

What is the difference between the sector here than in the US and Europe?

Things are changing. Asia-Pacific is becoming the largest market in the world and is evolving its own approaches to customers. You see customers in Asia-Pacific wanting a higher level of service and there are people who are prepared to provide that service. So we don't see in Asia-Pacific the big push to go direct and cut out the middleman as we do in the US.

Is that good for airlines though?

It is. What we also see in Asia-Pacific is an enormous percentage of first-time travellers. They need a lot of advice and assistance and if there is somebody who can do that for them effectively, it is the agencies.

But airlines want to reduce the distribution fee.

Yes, in the olden days, we had percentage commissions and now it is fee-based, the logic being the customer pays for what he gets, which is more efficient and does not burden the airlines with additional costs.

How would you describe the relation-

ship between IATA and the agency community in Asia-Pacific today?

It is good. We've done a lot of work with travel agency associations and have been able to reach agreements on key issues through a lot of consultation and discussion. So you don't have the kind of combative relationship that you might see in other markets.

What's an ongoing key issue?

For us, it's always the constant pressure to get the money for our members faster, so we've tended to reduce the days of the credit period, which has been in some cases a challenge for the agency community.

Airlines look at the payments they get from direct selling and it's pretty immediate, within 48 hours. Then they look at the typical agency system, where they get paid in 14 days and they say, 'I think I know which way I'm going to go.' Agencies need to be cognisant that airlines is always going to be looking at payment direct vs payment via agency and that ideally they want the same payment period.

As well, we have full service members and LCCs. The LCCs have a completely different model – if you are an agency that wants to transact with an LCC, you must put your money in advance and draw down against that. So the full service carriers look at that and say, 'why is it that with LCCs you pay in advance and with us you need credit?'

Why indeed?

It's just the way LCCs are set up and the way full service has been running. Force of habit. Making changes to an existing business model is much more difficult than embracing a completely new business.

Like commission cuts.

Exactly. It's fair to say airlines have been able to change that but it took a long while.

Do you think the day will come when airlines will succeed in reducing credit period to 48 hours?

I believe reduction of credit period will continue but whether there is an end target is a decision our members will need to make. Right now, we're not getting the pressure to reduce it in markets with shorter credit periods, but in some markets, like Japan, which is a big market, we are reducing the credit period, from 21 days currently to 15 days from October.

What's the average credit period now?

In Asia-Pacific, around 17 days.

We discussed one example of how the trade should be cognisant of how airlines think. How about the reverse?

I think airlines have to value all of the sources of business, that there still is a significant number of customers who do not want to deal direct. So recognising that and working together with the channel of distribution to make that the best experience for customers is the way to go.

This is why we (IATA) want to continue innovating and experimenting ways to support the travel trade better.

I supposed IATA's NDC (New Distribution Capability) is a good example?

Yes, it's big. The old-fashioned GDS distributes the very minimum, ie, seat and price, and what airlines want is to display more of their products – extra legroom, meals, other ancillaries – to consultants so they can give customers better informed decisions. NDC is about providing the system feasibility to drive that content through the GDS to the agency office.

That will improve the environment for travel consultants immensely. Today, they have to feed in a customer booking, go into another system to update his frequent flyer details, and they can't sell add-

ons because a lot of times they don't even know they are there, plus it's not linked to the back office accounting. NDC will make the agency look more professional and knowledgeable, all in one screen.

(IATA is also piloting Easy Pay in South Korea and exploring a global default insurance scheme which will lower the cost of insurance for agents, *TTG Asia e-Daily*, May 14, 2015.)

So how do you spend the other two-thirds of your time at work?

Safety is another important strand. And advocacy.

Yes, I read that you said many of the region's governments see aviation as critical to their economic strategies yet struggle to provide the foundation for the industry's success. Example?

Countries, such as Indonesia, realise aviation has huge value to their economies but to harness the value, you need to make it easier for airlines to operate, and to provide the infrastructure for them to do so in a safe and efficient way.

In Indonesia, there's high fuel taxation; the airports are inadequate – the regional airports' runways don't have enough lighting and in big hubs like Soekarno-Hatta in Jakarta, there aren't enough slots, for example.

What do governments tend to do?

They sort of try and catch up later (laughs). This is why the first thing we say to them is, 'let's have a masterplan'; let's consult members in the industry so that legislation is not made in a vacuum and results in unintended consequences; let's see if there are best practices that they can implement, say, a slot management best practice – if it has worked in 200 airports around the world, why wouldn't it work for them?

Agency

Take heed of tech-savvy agencies that have transformed their businesses and pick up new ideas on how to do better

INNOVATORS

TRAVEL AGENCY ON WHEELS

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

WHO Asiatravel.com is rolling out a mobile travel agency to deliver its services right to the travellers' doorstep.

The company started online hotel reservations in 1995 and has since evolved into a full travel online service. It introduced online travel packages in 2012 using an in-house packaging engine to incorporate flights, accommodation and different destination activities.

WHAT Calling the mobile agency the first of its kind in Asia, Fred Seow, vice president marketing of Asiatravel.com, said: "This pilot mobile vehicle will help us get directly into the heartlands and straight to suburban travellers who are likely to be the next big travel segment due to their better exposure, rising disposable income and a quest for new travel experiences."

The mobile office, converted from a 40-seat coach, will have at least three staff stationed in the vehicle and will be able to service at least 15 customers at any one time. Each Roadundee is equipped with computers offering products available world-wide and instant confirmation for bookings for optimal convenience.

WHY Seow said it is necessary to bring travel services to the doorstep of the people to "connect with more eyeballs". He added: "Also, we are not looking at the quantity of customers but about the quality of service we can deliver to them."

"The mobility of this service will allow us to offer our services and provide customers specialised consultation and customised itineraries that they cannot get online."

TARGET Seow said: "In Singapore's context, we want to reach more of the heartlanders and people who, by nature of their work or residence, remain in the outskirts most of their time."

While this pilot project consists of just one vehicle now, Seow said Asiatravel.com intends to have three Roadundees on the road in Singapore and bring them to neighbouring countries like Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam next year.

"We want to get in touch with the secondary audience in the outskirts of these big countries who may not have the benefit of accessibility and engagement with travel professionals like those in the cities," he added.



The moving travel agency. Above, the interior of the 'office'

ASK THE EXPERT

HOW TO CREATE A TRAINING PATH

The Greek philosopher of Ephesus, Heraclitus, once said, "The only thing constant is change".

Twenty years ago, planning an overseas vacation was a very complex matter. Today, anyone can book an air ticket and hotel room online in a matter of minutes – you just need to have your credit card.

Four out of five people I spoke to said doing their own research and planning their own travel itinerary is an experience itself. By doing that, they get to know more about the destination and the places they should visit. They would also book their air tickets and hotel rooms direct with suppliers or through OTAs. Many would also turn to TripAdvisor instead of a travel agency to validate the hotel of their choice through travellers' feedback before they book online. But one has to spend many hours and even days doing research to plan and book one's own travel, and yet remain unsure if the decision made is the right one. I will be happy to pay the travel consultant a service fee to do all these for me, provided I believe that I am getting the best advice and that there is

recourse for me should anything bad happen during my trip.

How should travel agencies cope with the changing demographics of travellers?

Product differentiation, going into areas of specialisation or creating a unique service culture, are some ideas that will set you apart from the competition. If you don't have a big budget to bring in the expertise, then you will have to rely on your people to create that branding for you. Hence it is important that the senior management, who crafted the company's direction, also look into developing their human capital in order to achieve the objectives set.

Training should also be linked to the company's mission, vision and business objectives so that your people are equipped with the skills, knowledge and competencies to make the difference.

However, not all companies have the luxury of having a HR or training manager. Therefore the onus will be on the management or head of department to recommend the types of staff training required. This can be done by setting performance appraisal to

be in line with the organisation's direction. Targets are set at the beginning of the year and managers stay close to the development of their staff through regular reviews to monitor their KPIs. In the process, capability gaps and areas for improvements can be identified; the learning and development programmes required to help the employee or company achieve the objective can be recommended.

However, the biggest challenge to having a training culture in a company is overcoming the perception that "employees get poached after they go for training". Below is a conversation between two C-Suite executives:

CFO to CEO: "What if we train an employee and he leaves?"

CEO to CFO: "What if we don't and he stays?"

Companies that have a structured training and development programme for their employees will have less staff turnover given that employees are valuing career development higher in their list of priorities. Training is not a one-time event but an ongoing

and lifelong learning process. As such, companies should always allocate a budget for training every year. Employees must also know that constant upgrading of their knowledge and skills is crucial in helping the company stay relevant and on top of change.

At the Tourism Management Institute of Singapore (TMIS), we conduct short courses as well as certificate and diploma programmes for travel agency staff, hotels and attractions. TMIS also has a team of qualified trainers who can develop and deliver highly customised training programmes for all levels of staff to meet the company's current and future business needs.

In Singapore, Singaporeans/Singapore PRs can enjoy up to 90 per cent course fee grant from the Singapore Workforce Development Agency when they are certified competent. Companies who sponsor their local employees for training can also claim for absentee payroll as well as a Productivity and Innovation Credit grant. The Singapore Tourism Board also has a grant that supports tourism companies in employee upgrad-



Patricia Auyeong, CEO, Tourism Management Institute of Singapore (TMIS)

ing and talent and leadership development.

With so many funding schemes available from our government in supporting lifelong learning, there is every reason for companies to have a training plan to ensure that their employees are equipped with the required skills and capability to meet the future growth of the company.



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HOTELS



SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, QINHUANGDAO, CHINA

Located 35 minutes away from Qinhuangdao Shanhaiguan Airport, the 330-key hotel has wellness facilities comprising an indoor pool, gym, jacuzzi and spa, while meetings facilities include 11 function rooms and a 1,658m² Grand Ballroom.



VIBE HOTEL MARYSVILLE, AUSTRALIA

Launched in April, the 101-room hotel is 90 minutes from Melbourne in the Yarra Valley. On site are a wellness centre, outdoor pool, conference centre with capacity for 300 pax, five meeting rooms and the Radius Bar & Grill restaurant.



BEST WESTERN PREMIER HOTEL SHWE PYI THAR, MYANMAR

The existing Hotel Shwe Pyi Thar will be repositioned by Best Western and expanded to include a new wing and 200 more rooms by 4Q16. It will comprise a restaurant, pool and fitness centre, while events can be held in the 660m² ballroom or 4,200m² lawn.



AROMA GARDEN SERVICED SUITES BY LANSON PLACE, CHINA

Located on Shanghai's prominent Huaihai Road, the new 79-key property offers one- to three-bedroom suites, each fully furnished with a kitchen and home theatre system. Other facilities comprise a gym, barbeque terrace and residents' lounge for events.

ACTIVITIES

HONG KONG USHERS IN SUMMER WITH EVENTS

Hong Kong is ushering in summer with major events, including the 26th Hong Kong Book Fair from July 15-21, Hong Kong Fashion Week for Spring/Summer from July 6-9 and HKTDC (Hong Kong Trade Development Council) Food Expo from August 13-17.

The trade can hitch on the events to entice clients to visit. The Book Fair, for instance, will field renowned authors including Simon Sebag Montefiore and Leo Lee. It will feature over 500 events, including various seminars, author-sharing sessions, cultural performances and workshops at the Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre and venues across the city.

TECHNOLOGY

ABACUS PACKS IN ACTIVITIES, EVENTS FOR CONTENTPLUS

Travel consultants can now benefit from Abacus ContentPlus, a retail platform equipped with a host of travel experiences provided by City Discovery.

Released in May, the B2B2C platform integrates 8,000 concerts, activities, attractions and tours from over 700 destinations, allowing travel consultants to either sell City Discovery products separately or bundle them into itineraries alongside flights, accommodation, car rentals and transfers. Purchases and bookings are instantly confirmed for sporting and entertainment events, while priority access is also given for a range of attractions.



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Voting is now underway in the annual TTG Travel Industry Awards and we're seeking your vote to be recognized as the Best GDS in Asia Pacific for an amazing seven years in a row.

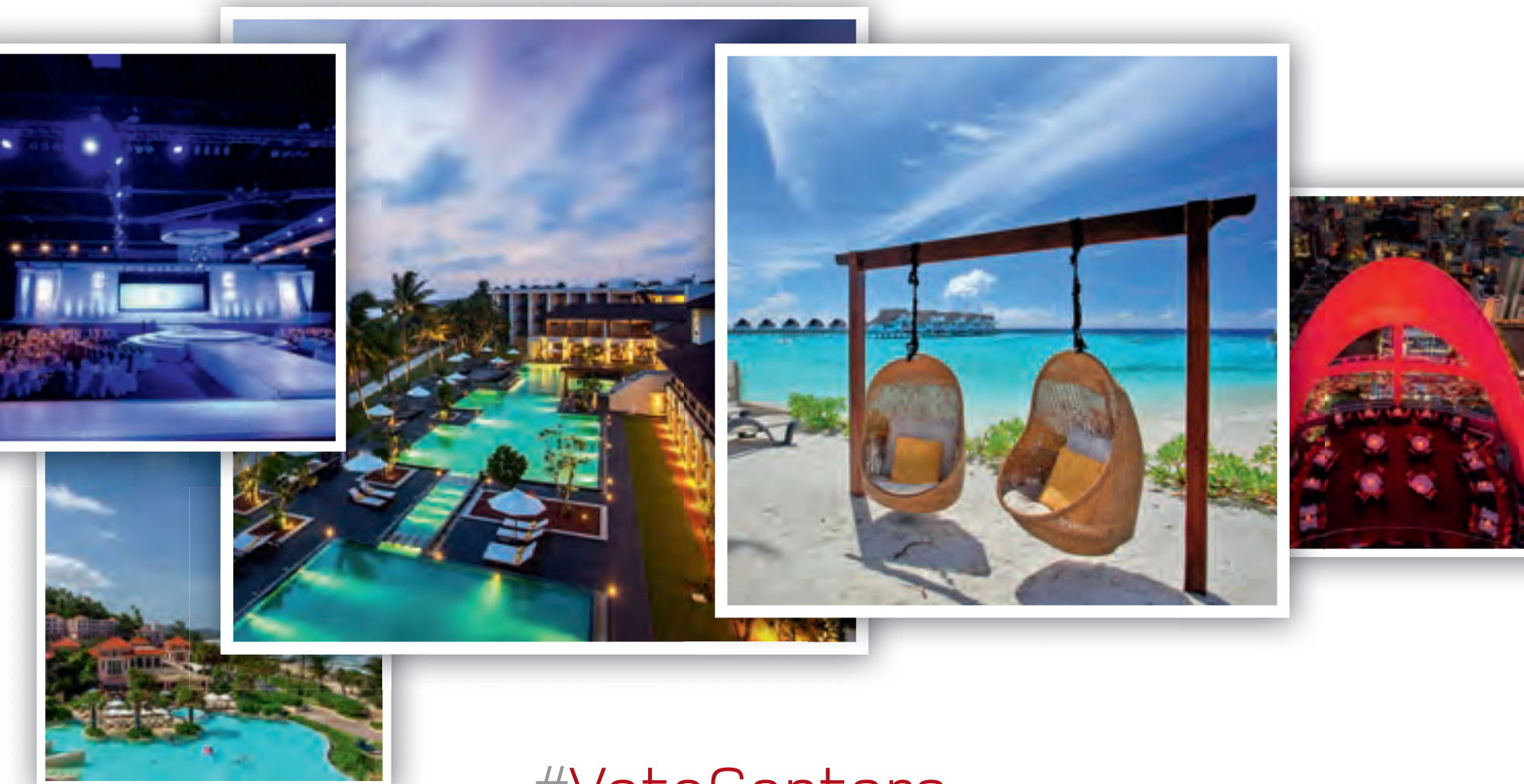
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Social

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

GALLERY



LAGOI BAY OPENS WITH A BANG
Jusuf Kalla, vice president of Indonesia, speaks at the grand opening of Lagoi Bay at Bintan. Bintan Resorts officially opened the new resorts area on May 31, in a celebration that saw the launch of The Sanchaya and Swiss-Belhotel Grand Lagoi, and a host of MoUs being signed for the further development of the area.

CABIN PLEASURE ABOARD QATAR AIRWAYS
Qatar Airways' chief commercial officer, Marwan Koleilat (left), and Changi Airport Group's executive vice president for air hub & development, Yam Kum Weng (centre), enjoy a tour of the airline's new Airbus A350 WXB, which landed in Singapore on May 11. It is the first airline to operate the world's newest aircraft in Asia-Pacific.



TRADE CALENDAR *SEE YOU AT...*



Beijing International Tourism Expo
June 26-28, Beijing
Now in its 12th edition, the three-day mega tourism event will be held at China National Convention Centre this month.



GBTA Convention 2015
July 25-29, Orlando
Featuring more than 400 exhibitors, GBTA 2015 is all about *#sharing*. Golden Globe-winning actor, Kevin Bacon, will be one of the speakers at the convention.



IT&CMA and CTW Asia-Pacific 2015
September 29 - October 1, Bangkok
The double bill event is expected to attract 400 buyers and more than 300 sellers this year.

EXCEPTIONAL MEETING EXPERIENCE

Langham Place, Guangzhou is setting a new benchmark for event organising in China's southern manufacturing powerhouse. Combining a prime location in the heart of the new central business district of Pazhou Island, the hotel offers vibrant, flexible and high-tech function spaces extending over 5,000 square metres for meetings, banquets and events.

THE LARGEST PILLARLESS BALLROOM IN THE CITY
Spanning 2,800 square metres on Floor 3 and equipped with high-tech facilities, Great Hall, the vast pillarless ballroom with an eight-metre-high ceiling and dazzling crystal chandeliers blends modern art and a fashionable layout. The venue can accommodate luxurious banquets of up to 1,700 persons—or splits into six separate halls for intimate events. Floor-to-ceiling windows fill



the space with natural light, making it ideal for pre-function cocktail parties and wedding receptions. In addition, with a lift truck transporting cars directly into the hall, Great Hall can be converted into a showroom for automobile press conferences and events.

ASSORTED FUNCTION FACILITIES
Another ballroom—measuring 760 square metres—on the same floor accommodates dinners for up to 320 persons, with the flexibility to split into seven smaller rooms for various events. Five conference rooms on Floor 5 are equipped with the latest high-tech facilities for business meetings or corporate gatherings.

RICH OUTDOOR VENUES
Meeting and social planners will appreciate the hotel's outdoor promenade, which is surrounded by lush greenery and flowers, and lined with marbled paths and water features. With the Pearl River and the vibrant city view as a backdrop, it makes a perfect venue for outdoor events.

ADJACENT RENOWNED EXHIBITION CENTRES
Adding to these impressive spaces is a 20,000-square-metre venue spanning three floors, the Nanfung International Conference and Exhibition Centre which is directly connected to the hotel. Moreover, the hotel is located near the Guangzhou International Convention and Exhibition Centre, home to the world-famous Canton Fair. These facilities reinforce Langham Place, Guangzhou's unsurpassed status as a comprehensive venue for MICE events.

LANGHAM PLACE GUANGZHOU

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Roundtable Design hotels

New 'lifestyle' brands such as Radisson Red, Venu, Vib and Jen are joining earlier entries such as W Hotels, CitizenM and Indigo to attract Millennial-minded customers. They look and feel like design hotels. In this roundtable, designers and design hotels discuss with **Raini Hamdi** the future of design hotels amid new concepts such as 'lifestyle' hotels:

Design-oriented, technology-savvy and culturally-attuned, aren't 'lifestyle' hotels competition for design hotels?

NERI Professing is different from reality. We obviously have to see the result before making an opinion.

SCHWALIE The guest profile is constantly evolving, so hotels and brands need to adapt their strategies to meet societal and lifestyle trends. This new crop of lifestyle brands is doing just that, targeting the customer who has an eye on technology, who wants to be among like-minded people through networking spaces, etc. We at Design Hotels have always had our pulse on trends right from the beginning. Design is not a superficial marketing tool, and it is an element that breathes and grows with its environment.

AICHER Having realised modern travellers' yearning for a point of differentiation and unique hotel stay experience, it has become a strong trend among established, big hotel chains to create brand clusters which exude a lifestyle feel, or are design-oriented. We believe that while each brand has a potential to succeed, being an individual hotel property which constantly reinvents its service promise, seeks groundbreaking service propositions – handy smartphones, electric eco-friendly limousine transfers, creative thematic coffee breaks – keeps us at the forefront of the competition.

NAGATA Unfortunately these new brands do not represent competition for design hotels. Design hotels will always be design-focused while lifestyle brands have been created to capture segments of the market that chains are unable to attract with their more traditional brands.

BECK Definitely there are more 'lifestyle' choices available than a few years back... We're quite excited to see how other brands interpret this concept and how they will distinguish themselves from the current players. Competition, yes for sure, but isn't that what makes the design world exciting and pushes quality?

How do design hotels stay ahead of the new 'lifestyle' breed?

SCHWALIE They push the boundaries of design, experience and technology. For example, the growing movement in beacon and other mobile technology allows them to customise a guest visit. Knowing in advance what the guest's preferences are allows for a more intelligent and personalised service. In terms of the experience,

Design is not a superficial marketing tool, and it is an element that breathes and grows with its environment.

Design hotels will always be design-focused while lifestyle brands have been created to capture segments of the market that chains are unable to attract with their more traditional brands.

In some cases, we put design above everything; we forget what it's all about originally. As lifestyles change, we must constantly reflect on who we're designing for.



Arno Schwalie
Chief operating officer
Design Hotels

Clint Nagata
Founder and senior creative director
BLINK Design Group

Sabine Beck
Lead designer
Hirsch Bedner Associates

LIFESTYLE AND AREN'T THEY THE

authenticity is the key. Whether for business or pleasure, lifestyle travellers seek places where the architecture, design and ambience reflect the local environment and offer an authentic experience. The challenge is proving that you have a vision, that there is some substance behind the glossy marketing, that differentiates your hotel from the copycats. It is all about individuality, personalisation, recognition, self-education and sustainability.

One of our new member hotels in Umbria, Eremito, is encouraging travellers to make time for themselves and truly get

away from it all. With single rooms that evoke the cells of monasteries and an atmosphere that encourages contemplation and soul-searching, they are pushing the boundaries of solo travel. They have silent dinners in the restaurant; there is no Wi-Fi, TV or phone – the experience is truly about digital detox and self-discovery.

Hotels have also started to immerse their properties within a village environment. Examples include Hotel Hotel in Canberra and Ham Yard Hotel in London. A guest is only a few steps away from

the local community and activities, from a haircut, cinemas and theatres to flower shops, a bowling alley or library.

AICHER Both individual travellers and meeting organisers expect certain services to be included in their stay. The Mira Hong Kong has been offering free Wi-Fi since its opening in 2009 – imagine, there are still hotels out there charging you for Wi-Fi or limiting the number of devices you can connect! We listen to our guests and we regularly meet up with department heads to discuss their needs. It's

Where do you draw the line between a 'lifestyle hotel' and a 'design hotel'? How can design hotels stay edgy as new brands keep entering? Raini Hamdi asks designers and design hotels

So many similar hotels. The challenge is to go beyond the buzz and the opening hype.

We believe that the most successful design hotels keep guests not only comfortable during their stay, but in a constant state of awe with the hotel designer's creative vision.



Lyndon Neri
Founding partner
Neri&Hu Design and Research Office
* MAISON&OBJET ASIA Designer of the Year 2015

Gerhard Aicher
General manager
The Mira, Hong Kong

DESIGN: THE SAME?

not always easy to predict what the next step is, but in most cases it's about the basics.

Who are the current trendsetters in design hotels?

NERI We think André Balazs is always pushing the boundary especially with the Chiltern Firehouse. He has the notion of a winter garden, so he placed a bar in the middle of a space that is usually given to a lounge area. His rooms are large and eclectic.

Also, the Soho (House club) and its

community of creative individuals. Edition by Ian Schrager is also interesting. In Asia, Alila as a group is bringing a lot of sophisticated products and The Unlisted Collection has an eclectic mix.

SCHWALIE Eremito, as mentioned above, is right in the heart of the trend towards digital detox and self-discovery. The Firmdale Hotels is also the group to watch.

Georgia is becoming a popular destination and we have two new member properties there, Rooms Hotel Kazbegi

and Rooms Hotel Tbilisi. A new opening that is on everyone's radar this year is Les Bains in Paris, a hybrid development encompassing a club, performance space, a restaurant and bar, and 39 luxury rooms and suites.

BECK The Indigo brand has been successful and is one of the first design hotels in Asia. We're thrilled that HBA recently completed Indigo Bangkok Wireless Road, the first Indigo in South-east Asia. The vibrancy and bright colours of Bangkok really suit the concept of Indigo and we found lots of inspiration around its energetic neighbourhood to integrate into the design. We are looking forward to more Indigo hotels opening in Asia, but it will also be interesting to see how other brands, for instance, CitizenM, adapt to the local style.

But it seems there are more trendsetters outside Asia.

NAGATA The current trendsetters are primarily in the US. But brands like Ace Hotels, CitizenM and Thompson Hotels are all looking to expand into Asia where there is huge demand. While we see many Millennial-focused restaurants like Potato Head, no one has successfully created a Millennial-focused design hotel.

SCHWALIE Europe continues to be our strongest market, both for new hotels in the pipeline and (as market source).

Overall we are targeting a 10 to 15 per cent growth this year for Design Hotels. In 2014, room revenue into our hotels closed at 189 million euros (US\$208 million) compared with 160 million euros in 2013, both through distribution performance and a portfolio net growth of 20 hotels. For 2015, we expect room revenue to surpass 220 million euros and for us to reach a portfolio of over 300 hotels.

What trends are design hotels embracing and why?

NERI A strong social agenda. You see it in Ace Hotel in New York, the Camper hotels in Berlin and Barcelona, Amanpuri in Phuket, Eet Heim in Stockholm, Chiltern Firehouse in London, etc.

Amanpuri, for example, creates a courtyard surrounding the pool and all activities are held in this courtyard. With Eet Heim, the domesticity of the hotel makes interaction easier.

NAGATA Creating new experiences and locally relevant interiors. As hotel guests are inundated with so many experiences, it is becoming harder to curate unique experiences. Fairmont Sanur, for example, has outdoor living rooms and a submersed spa to create such new experiences.

The other trend is to create spaces as if they were born out of the land through the innovative use of local materials and textures. The floor of the guestroom at Fairmont Sanur, for example, is laid out in a handmade grayish green ceramic tile. The colour and texture of the tile, along with the local sandstone walls, help in cre-

ating a design respectful of its location.

BECK The lobbies are undergoing the biggest change, from large halls that people just pass through, to smaller, intimate spaces that invite people to stay, lounge, work and socialise. The traditional set-up of people working from their office desk is shifting; people want other spaces to work where they can order a coffee, sit on a comfortable lounge chair and socialise with other travellers while working on a laptop or tablet. The traditional reception desk will soon be merely a part of the lobby, especially with the introduction of self check-in stations and mobile check-in.

Rooms are also changing. Guests like to get the most flexibility out of the room, to be able to work not only from their desk but various locations. They love to have a comfortable bed but would not want to pay for unnecessary things. As a result, some brands omit the bathtub for a more spacious, luxurious shower, for example.

What is the biggest challenge facing design hotels?

NERI So many similar hotels. The challenge is to go beyond the buzz and the opening hype.

NAGATA Brand recognition. In today's society, where we have so many choices, the recognition of design hotels as a strong brand versus the international chains is often a challenge.

BECK Initially, design hotels were created out of a desire to change the way the hotel industry works. To not follow one design scheme where all hotels look and feel alike, but to create identities, to rethink what hotels need to be, how to respond better to guests' evolving needs and build a product that's based on the people using it. The 21st century guest was the main focus and the concept of the hotel included design, but also technology and service. The challenge will be not to forget that.

Great design does not only look good but is practical and comfortable, making guests feel good when they are using it. Technology should be user-friendly with switches and power sockets in the right place and is easy to understand.

In some cases, we put design above everything; we forget what it's all about originally. As lifestyles change, we must constantly reflect on who we're designing for.

AICHER We believe that the most successful design hotels keep guests not only comfortable during their stay, but in a constant state of awe with the hotel designer's creative vision. And so, style, comfort and functionality are all important factors which need to be fitted in perfect proportions into the overall concept. Being intuitive and user-friendly cannot be forsaken. This often boils down to simple things like light controls, connectivity, etc. As a hospitality service provider we love delighting customers, we are passionate about design and we connect like-minded people in fond memories.

Guide Premium economy

PAYING FOR EXTRA COMFORT



Before, air travel was just two classes, first and economy. A move by KLM in 1976 to provide a cabin for economy class passengers who bought full fare tickets evolved into what is today's business class. In 1991, EVA Air, a little known two-year-old airline then, made the bold move to introduce premium economy (PEY), which it marketed as Elite Class. Virgin Atlantic Airways followed suit a year later. For more than a decade, PEY plodded along but failed to gain the acceptance of flyers and airlines.

Abacus International's vice president airline distribution, Ho Hoong Mau, recalled: "It was a tough sell for the early

trailblazers as not many members of the trade and public bought into the idea of paying more for better economy class."

In the last decade, however, more airlines had jumped on the bandwagon while PEY is seeing a resurgence today, with Singapore Airlines (SIA) and Lufthansa as the latest carriers to offer the product. They join other airlines in Asia-Pacific that offer PEY, including Cathay Pacific, Japan Airlines, All Nippon Airways, China Airlines, China Southern, Philippine Airlines, Air New Zealand and Qantas Airways.

It's not difficult to see why. Said Ho: "From our figures last year, the extra personal space at a higher price was already accounting for seven per cent of the ticket

volumes...The full service airlines are now telling us these seats are a sell-out."

Shukor Yusof, founder of Endau Analytics, added: "More people are able to fly now than 25 years ago due to the advent of LCCs. And more people have the purchasing power today than in the 90s."

Price premiums for PEY depend on the route, flight timing and demand, and can cost 30-90 per cent more – and even higher. A flight from Singapore to Los Angeles costs about S\$2,100 (US\$1,565) in economy but will cost about S\$2,800 to S\$3,200 in PEY (33 per cent to 52 per cent more). To London, it costs about S\$1,600 in economy and about S\$3,100 in PEY (93 per cent more). Test bookings made by *TTG Asia* on Cathay's and SIA's websites showed significant price premium variations. A return flight between Hong Kong and London in October is HK\$7,920 (US\$1,022) in economy vs HK\$16,720 in PEY (111 per cent more). SIA's flexi economy fare from Singapore to Sydney return in October is S\$1,541 and its PEY fare is S\$1,890 (22.6 per cent more).

The need to clearly differentiate PEY from business class and the concern it may cannibalise the client base in business class have made the bean-counters at many airlines think twice about offering the service. Nicholas Ionides, SIA's vice president public affairs, said SIA had studied premium economy several times over the years and determined it was the right time to have it now.

SIA's executive vice president commercial, Mak Swee Wah, explained: "The time is now right and the risk of cannibalisation of the business class is lower. The market is now more segmented; the corporate travel segment is no longer homogenous and there is the emergence of a premium leisure travel segment."

SIA briefly offered PEY onboard its Airbus A340-500 ultra-longhaul nonstop service to Los Angeles and New York between 2004 and 2008. This ended when the airline converted these airplanes into an all-business class configuration.

Starting August 9, SIA will operate a service to Sydney using a Boeing B777-300ER and, as more aircraft are re-configured, PEY will be rolled out across its network to include Auckland, Beijing, Delhi, Dubai, Hong Kong, Frankfurt, London, Manchester, Mumbai, Munich,

New York, Paris, San Francisco, Seoul, Shanghai, Tokyo and Zurich (see box on the right).

Another PEY newcomer, Lufthansa, initially offered the service onboard its newly delivered fleet of B747-8 Intercontinental to various destinations including Bengaluru, Beijing, Hong Kong, Seoul and Tokyo. In January, reconfigured A340-600s were deployed to Hong Kong, Shanghai, Seoul and Tokyo and in mid-April, the first batch of A380s that had been similarly reconfigured were deployed to Delhi, Shanghai and Singapore.

The travel trade is bullish about the viability of PEY and dispelled notions that business class bookings could be cannibalised. Dynasty Travel's director of marketing & communications, Alicia Seah, said: "Leisure travellers nowadays do not mind paying slightly more to enjoy the extra privileges and comfort."

Wee Hee Ling, CEO of MISA Travel, added: "Most of the corporate clients are supportive of the introduction of PEY. Most business class travellers would not downgrade their cabins when on business trips. We should expect more companies to move their executives from economy to PEY. Leisure travellers may also choose to fly on PEY which offers more space, comfort and convenience."

Abacus' Ho said PEY does soften the blow for executives whose companies have downgraded travel policies to save on the cost of business class travel. "However, we've also got lots of examples of economy class corporate travellers who are now enjoying the better premium economy option," he pointed out.

"There is a lot more to PEY than just adding legroom and improving the food. It is all in the execution. With a total PEY proposition (space, seat pitch, touch-screen TV, power, even lounge access at a price – see chart), the comfort experienced by travellers is very clear and easy for them to appreciate," he said.

Travel agencies are identifying their target markets for PEY.

Said Wee: "Executives and managers travelling in economy class are prime targets for upselling to PEY. Select leisure travellers who are willing to pay 10 to 20 per cent more for premium check-in, customised seats with more legroom, extra baggage allowance and premium meals are also potential targets."

Seah identifies two distinct segments, older travellers aged 55 years and above who want extra leg room, and younger couples who are willing to splurge a lit-

The winds are changing for premium economy class, thanks to a more segmented corporate travel market and the emergence of sophisticated leisure travellers in Asia, reports [Sim Kok Chwee](#)



Left: SIA reveals its PEY seat. Above, from left: Cathay's PEY product, service onboard Qantas' PEY cabin and SIA's meal setting in PEY class

Premium Economy Product Comparison

	All Nippon Airways	Cathay Pacific Airways	Lufthansa	Qantas Airways	Singapore Airlines
Seat width (inches)	18 - 19.3	17.8 - 19.5	18 - 19	19 - 19.5	18.5 - 19.5
Seat pitch (inches)	38	38	38	38 - 42	38
Seat recline (inches)	8	8	8	8	8
Other in-seat features	Foot rest and leg rest	Foot rest (every seat) and leg rest (front row only)	Foot rest (every seat) and leg rest (front row only)	Foot rest	Calf and foot rests
In-seat power supply	Available in every seat except on one version of B777-300ER where there is no in-seat power supply	Available in every seat	Available in every seat	Available in every seat	Available in every seat
USB ports	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Two for every seat
IFE monitor (inches)	10.6	10.6	11 - 12	8.27	13.3 (full HD)
Headphones	Noise-cancelling	Noise-cancelling	Noise-cancelling	Noise-cancelling	Noise-cancelling
Priority check-in	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Baggage allowance (kg)	23kg with priority handling	25kg	Up to two bags each weighing 23kg	40kg	35kg with priority handling
Meal service	Economy class meal with sparkling wine and business class dessert	Three meal choices	Regular economy class meal	Neil Perry menu with option to order online at Q-Eat	Three choices with option to Book the Cook
Lounge access	Yes	No	For a fee	No	No
Aircraft types	B777-200ER, B777-300ER, B787	A330, A340, B747-400, B777-300ER	A330, A340-600, A380, B747-400, B747-8I	A380, B747-400	B777-300ER, A380, A350
Additional storage space	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

After two years in the making, SIA launched its PEY product recently and, at a cost of US\$80 million, is guaranteed to make earlier PEY players sit up. Entering the arena 24 years after PEY was first introduced by EVA Air, SIA had the opportunity to study its competitors' product and address the needs of its customers based on feedback collated. The 13.3 inch inflight entertainment screen is the largest in its class. Like its competitors, priority check-in and baggage handling are offered but SIA has increased its baggage allowance to 35kg. Unsurprisingly, it is

in the meal service where SIA has upped the ante in PEY class. Onboard, passengers can choose from three entrees. But if done online and at least 24 hours prior to their flights, they can choose from up to nine Asian and international entrees using the Premium Economy Book the Cook service. Champagne throughout the flight and curated wines complete the dining experience. A bigger pillow and softer blanket along with an amenity pouch (of two special designs marking Singapore's 50th year of independence) are added touches. The first aircraft, a B777-300ER, is being retrofitted and the maiden PEY flight will take off on August 9 to Sydney. This

will shortly be followed by London and Hong Kong. SIA's executive vice president commercial, Mak Swee Wah, said Sydney and London were logical first choices as the PEY product is optimised for longhaul travel. All 19 of SIA's A380s will be re-configured by 1Q16 and its B777-300ER fleet will be reconfigured by the end of 2016. SIA's PEY cabin onboard the A380 will have 36 seats where there were previously 66 economy class seats. With this additional class, the seat density onboard its A380s will be reduced to 441 (and 379 for the A380s with an exclusive business class upper deck).

On the B777-300ERs, the new four-class cabin will have only four seats in first class, 48 in business, 28 in PEY and 184 in economy. The 28 PEY seats replace 48 economy class seats. From January 2016, the first of 20 four-class A350-900 XWBs being delivered to SIA will also have a PEY cabin and Mak disclosed that depending on the demand, subsequent aircraft in SIA's order for 77 A350s could have an expanded or reduced PEY seat count. SIA invited travel consultants from Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam for the launch.

tle more to enjoy the extra privileges. While both agree that corporate travel offers tremendous scope for upselling, Wee cautioned that "there are definite risks as the company's travel policy governs the travel entitlement which may cause either downgrading of cabin type from business to PEY or upgrading of economy to PEY class cabins." She noted that many companies' travel policies allow for business class when the flight is longer than four hours and believes this will not change. "But they

may instead consider offering premium class for shorter routes to their personnel." This may prove to be money well spent as many executives are time-constrained and need to arrive at the destination ready to dive straight into work and meetings. Shukor added that tall or bigger passengers travelling longhaul will also find PEY more attractive. He said: "Mid-level business executives who seek more comfort and prefer to do some work during flight are also likely customers."

Ho advised: "Carriers and corporate travel agencies should educate companies more on the benefits of PEY to get the new class written into more corporate travel policies." On its part, Abacus ensures that the PEY service of partner carriers is distributed across all its platforms. It also organises joint education seminars during new route launches and pushes the new PEY products through its proprietary media channels. Airlines are proactive in engaging travel

consultants in PEY familiarisation conducting in-house training on upselling from economy class. Seah said many agencies and travellers are aware of EVA Air's PEY product "but for the other carriers, there is still a learning journey for most of us". For those still wondering if business class travellers might downgrade to PEY, Ho has the last word: "Premium economy is economy plus, not business class minus."

Destination Malaysia



Kuala Lumpur's famous food street, Jalan Alor, will start a one-year facelift in July

KUALA LUMPUR AS HAVEN FOR FOODIES

Think food, think Kuala Lumpur! That's the message Kuala Lumpur City Hall's tourism unit and the mayor of Kuala Lumpur hope to drive across to tourists, with intensified efforts to position the Malaysian capital into a gastronomic haven of South-east Asia and to develop a comprehensive standards framework, as outlined in the Tourism Master Plan 2015-2025.

Many initiatives were thus introduced in 1H2015. The tourism unit organised Malaysia's first-ever gourmet food festival, Kuala Lumpur Big Kitchen Festival 2015, in the city from May 29 to 31 at Dataran Merdeka (Independence Square). Food trucks and stalls served all kinds of local, fusion and gourmet items, offering visitors plenty to sample. A hotel dining section satisfied those seeking a finer dining experience.

Kuala Lumpur's food ambassador, Norman Musa – who is also the executive chef and co-founder of Ning restaurant in Manchester, UK – as well as other local celebrity chefs conducted cooking workshops and demonstrations to 'educate' attendees on the variety of Malaysian dishes. One of the highlights was the KL Big Kitchen, Big Race, in which 12 pairs

of participants raced between Merdeka Square and Chow Kit wet market to retrieve ingredients missing from recipes, drawing on clues provided at different legs of the race.

In fact, in conjunction with ITB Berlin in early March, Norman had given a cooking demonstration to the travel trade and international media at Berlin's Kochatelier. That was part of his 2015 European tour covering also Paris, Amsterdam and London to demonstrate the art of Malaysian cooking and promote the city's gourmet scene through a series of hands-on cooking ateliers.

Kuala Lumpur City Hall's tourism unit has also recently produced a Food Trails map in association with popular lifestyle publication, *TimeOut Kuala Lumpur*, for FIT travellers and tour operators to include in their itineraries.

"The map is a great way for travellers to navigate their way through the food streets of the city," said Noraza Yusof, head of tourism, Kuala Lumpur City Hall.

The idea is to give exposure to and highlight the culinary attractions in five areas, namely Kampong Bharu, Old Kuala Lumpur, Jalan Alor, Jalan Pudu and Brickfields, covering cuisines of the city's main

ethnic communities of Malays, Chinese and Indians.

The *Kuala Lumpur Food & Beverage Quality Assurance* rating programme, introduced in February, was part of the tourism unit's efforts to develop a comprehensive standards framework for dine-in establishments. It is also intended to allay food hygiene concerns among foreign tourists. Food outlets that have been rated will sport 'Quality Assured Restaurant Kuala Lumpur' stickers.

Ahmad Phesal Talib, mayor of Kuala Lumpur, said: "This new initiative is meant to raise the standard of F&B establishments and facilitate service excellence. Food outlets are audited based on global industry standards and accreditation is valid for two years and renewable."

Targeted at dine-in establishments such as fine dining restaurants, café, bistros and fast food chains, the audit covers areas such as hygiene, cleanliness, facilities and amenities, customer service, food variety and presentation, as well as safety and security.

Ahmad Phesal added: "Those who have not yet met the minimum standards required will be provided with a report identifying areas of improvement, in order for

them to upgrade themselves to reach the minimum score for accreditation."

Chaine des Rôtisseurs Malaysia Chapter president, Jagjit Singh Sambhi, suggests that City Hall also provides a listing of accredited restaurants to make it easy for locals and tourists to identify them.

Meanwhile, the city's iconic street food paradise of Jalan Alor is set to get a major facelift for a more pleasant ambience. City Hall will invest RM12 million (US\$3.4 million) to upgrade the food street through improvements in the drainage system, landscaping and cleanliness. The project is expected to commence in July and be completed within a year.

Luxury Tours Malaysia senior manager, Arokia Das, opined: "It is great that City Hall is taking efforts to improve Jalan Alor, which is so well known among Singaporeans and Thais. Every kind of local food can be found there to suit all palates."

"Food is very important for tourism. Asians and Westerners love to try the local cuisine, and this is one great way of promoting the city – through people's stomachs. This initiative should have been carried out a long time ago, and it is great that City Hall is putting so much passion into it!"

Kuala Lumpur is striving to become the region's gastronomic hub, calling enthusiasts' attention to its first food festival and F&B standards rating system, among other initiatives. By **S Puvaneswary**

Destination in numbers

5.5 nights

Targeted average stay per tourist in Kuala Lumpur in 2025, from 3.1 nights presently

RM900 (US\$252)

Targeted average tourist spend per day in Kuala Lumpur in 2025, from RM682 presently

29.4 million

Targeted tourist arrivals to Malaysia in 2015, 7.2 per cent higher than in 2014

Viewpoints

What can Kuala Lumpur do to attract culinary tourists?



Saini Vermeulen,
executive director, **Within Earth Holidays**

There must be trained local guides to explain the different cuisines available and most importantly, they must be able to make recommendations, based on guests' preferences for certain types of food and their budget.



Manfred Kurz,
managing director, **Diethelm Travel Malaysia**

Culinary tourists will not come just for the food. Travel consultants have to package cooking classes with other attractions in the city and get Tourism Malaysia and Kuala Lumpur City Hall's tourism unit to assist them in marketing. Cooking classes for culinary tourists should start with a trip to the wet market as they will appreciate seeing what the local ingredients look like and can buy them to take home and try.

How to sell

DO For good bargains and sampling of local street food, head out to Petaling Street, also fondly known as Chinatown. Shoppers on a budget will be able to find watches, clothing and souvenirs at the street bazaars, where prices can be pressed down further through some hard bargaining.

SEE Take in the historical part of Kuala Lumpur around Dataran Merdeka (Independence Square) in an open-air horse carriage drawn by Friesian horses. The route takes tourists past some of the most iconic buildings in one of the oldest parts of the city. The ride begins and ends at KL City Gallery. The coach driver also acts as a guide who will share interesting facts on the heritage buildings as the carriage passes by.



EAT

Opium KL is named so as the décor is made to resemble a Chinese opium den in the old days. The bar-cum-restaurant opened in July 2014 and is located on Changkat Bukit Bintang. It serves fusion cuisine such as tuna sashimi

pizza, wagyu beef *rendang* (spicy dry curry) and prawn curry spaghetti. The restaurant can fit up to 100 pax and opens from noon to 1.00 from Sundays to Thursdays and from noon to 2.00 on Fridays and Saturdays.

STAY

Le Méridien Kuala Lumpur is easily accessible through integrated rail connections. The hotel is 28 minutes away from the Kuala Lumpur International Airport via the KLIA Express Rail Link, while the low-cost terminal, klia2, is 33 minutes away. It is also within walking distance to Nu Sentral Mall, a new mall that opened in 2014. Guests will have the opportunity to enjoy retail therapy before commuting to the airport. Other large shopping malls within close proximity are Mid Valley Megamall and The Gardens. All 420 guestrooms are equipped with broadband dataport, two IDD phone lines with voicemail and flatscreen television with DVD player.

TRIED & TESTED

Mud: Our Story of Kuala Lumpur

S Puvaneswary was so enlightened by this musical about the history of the city that she just couldn't get enough of it.

WHY This hour-long live musical performance in English is highly recommended to visitors to the capital city as it portrays the rich history of Kuala Lumpur, depicting the hard lives of the early settlers in the city in the 1800s when the city was made up of just three roads, and tin mining was the main activity.

I felt for the characters in the show when the Great Fire of Kuala Lumpur broke out in 1881 and robbed them of their dwellings and possessions. The Great Flood in December of the same year added fuel to fire. However, instead of leaving the town, the pioneers decided to stay on and rebuild it.

But why the name Mud, you ask. Kuala Lumpur in Malay stands for muddy estuary, which is representative of the early days.

WHAT This is the longest-running musical in Kuala Lumpur which began last year and will run up to 2017. It is performed twice daily.

While the characters are fictitious, the story is based on historical accounts during the tin mining boom in the 1850s, which attracted an influx of pioneers from Asia to the muddy junction of the Lumpur River (now known as Gombak River) and Kelang River.

It is also fitting that the tale of Kuala Lumpur is staged at Panggung Bandaraya, which was built in 1901. Panggung Bandaraya is located at Merdeka Square, part of a heritage area of Kuala Lumpur

where buildings are more than a century old.

HOW What makes this show very special is that it encourages audience participation.

Instead of passively watching events unfold themselves, I became part of the live action, getting out of my seat to join a long line that helped pass pails (without actually containing water) to 'put out' the raging fire projected on the LED screen. It was of course my imagination when I felt the 'heat' from the fire, even though I was in an air-conditioned room.

VERDICT

Watching *Mud: Our Story of Kuala Lumpur* triggered in me a deep sense of pride and belonging as a true-born KL-ite. I seldom like to watch the same show twice, but I made an exception for this one. In fact, I don't mind catching it again.

Name *Mud: Our Story of Kuala Lumpur*

Venue Panggung Bandaraya

Dataran Merdeka, 50350 Kuala Lumpur

Rate Price: RM60 (US\$17) per ticket for foreigners, RM45 for Malaysians

Show time: 15.00; 20.30 daily. Closed on the second and fourth Monday of every month

Contact details

Tel: (6-03) 2602-3335

Website: www.mudkl.com



Destination Malaysia

MY WAY

What is your interest and where do you go to pursue it?

I love snorkelling. Regretfully, it is a hobby I do not have much time to indulge in. When I do go snorkelling, it is usually with family and friends to Langkawi or somewhere off the islands of Sabah, such as Sipadan.

Where can you get authentic local food that you like most?

I usually visit Jalan Alor at night for local hawker food. There is a wide

selection to choose from and my personal favourites are *wonton mee* (noodles with dumplings), *ikan bakar* (grilled fish) and fried *kuey teow* (flat noodles).

I also recommend Wan Tan Mee Sg Besi Restaurant on Jalan Sg Besi and Kak Jat's Medan Ikan Bakar on Jalan Bellamy, close to the National Palace.

For day trips in Kuala Lumpur, where would you recommend?

Perdana Botanical Garden Kuala

Lumpur (formerly known as Lake Gardens Kuala Lumpur) is a must-visit, especially for photography enthusiasts, as it has a large park with lush greenery and attractions such as KL Bird Park and Orchid Garden within. Central Market is ideal for local handicraft and souvenirs, while Petaling Street offers a range of items at a great bargain.

For first-time visitors to Malaysia, which are the places you

would take them to, and why?

I will definitely recommend Malacca and Penang due to their rich history, food and culture. Those travelling to Penang by road should stop in Ipoh on their way to or from Penang to sample the local food there.



Eric Tan
General manager,
Pullman Kuala
Lumpur Bangsar



NEWS IN A MINUTE

1 Tourism Malaysia ups the ante to attract cyclists

Tourism Malaysia rolled out 74 new cycling tourism packages last December in collaboration with 32 local tour agencies. The *Discover Malaysia by Bicycle Guidebook* has also been published, targeting mainly cycling enthusiasts from Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia.

Through the new packages, domestic and international tourists will be able to explore more destinations in Malaysia through cycling. Packages include the 3D2N classic Kuching city ride, 4D3N Taman Negara cycling package, and 3D2N Kota Bharu cycling tour.

2 New packages greet Visit Selangor Year

Tourism Selangor unveiled a series of tour packages in March, showcasing the state's cultural, heritage, sports and ecotourism products in conjunction with the *Visit Selangor Year* campaign that rides on the national *Malaysia Year of Festivals 2015*.

Travel consultants selling the packages aimed at domestic and international markets will be able to earn commissions.

Attractions in Selangor include Kampung Kuantan, Forest Research Institute of Malaysia, Shah Alam Botanical Gardens, Batu Caves and Sunway Pyramid Shopping Mall.

3 Special booklet gives visitors information, discounts

A travel guide cum discount booklet, *Super Pass*, was launched in April for visitors to Malaysia.

The booklet highlights Kuala



Lumpur's tourist attractions, night-life, restaurants and shopping malls, and at the same time, act as a discount voucher book with savings of up to 70 per cent on retail, F&B and attractions in the country.

Overseas visitors can better plan their holidays in Malaysia with the booklet, which can be purchased via a link provided in *MyFest 2015* website. Upon arrival in Malaysia, the booklet can be collected at designated counters in the airport and at 7-Eleven outlets.

4 Fraser Residence adds to Kuala Lumpur's room inventory

The 445-unit Fraser Residence Kuala Lumpur had a grand opening in March. It is located at the city centre, within walking distance of the Petronas Twin Towers.

The property offers a range of spacious, fully furnished apartments ranging from studios to four-bedroom penthouses, each featuring floor-to-ceiling windows; defined



living, dining, kitchen, work and bedroom areas; and comprehensive home entertainment systems.

Leisure facilities include a fully equipped Sky Gym and Yoga Suite, a landscaped outdoor swimming pool, kids play zone, Club Lounge & Bar with indoor and alfresco seating, and all-day dining restaurant.

Business facilities include boardrooms, meeting facilities for up to 80 people, and pre-function guest reception areas.

5 New helicopter tours lift off from Kuala Lumpur, Langkawi

AsiaHeli.com in January launched luxury helicopter tours for Kuala Lumpur and Langkawi Island, together with exclusive chartered flights to several popular tourist destinations around Malaysia.

The tours include narration from the pilots. In Kuala Lumpur, customers may choose from 30-, 45- or 60-minute tours, with prices starting from RM1,097 (US\$299) per person

for a 30-minute flight.

In Langkawi, options of six-, 15-, 20- or 30-minute tours are available, with a six-minute flight costing RM185 per person.

AsiaHeli.com partners with travel consultants and will discuss the commission structure upon enquiry.

6 Weil Hotel opens in Ipoh

Weil Hotel opened in Ipoh last December in the city's heritage town, and close to historic and natural attractions.

The hotel features 313 guestrooms and suites, a rooftop infinity pool, gym, spa and dining outlets serving Cantonese cuisine, tea, and gastro bar food respectively.

The property's total function space consists of the Weil Ballroom for up to 900 pax, a foyer and terrace space, and three meeting rooms on the sixth floor. The second floor houses the Weil Conference Centre, which can take up to 600 pax in two meeting rooms.

Who's tasting global success?

Congratulations to the winners of the 2015 Tourism for Tomorrow Awards.

Acknowledged as one of the world's highest accolades in the Travel & Tourism sector, the World Travel & Tourism Council Tourism for Tomorrow Awards provide worldwide recognition to those advocates of responsible business practice in sustainable tourism.

We proudly celebrate the 2015 winners, who are leading the way to ensure a better tomorrow that will benefit us all.

You'll find 2015's success stories at:
www.wttc.org/tourism-for-tomorrow-awards



COMMUNITY AWARD
WINNER – REALITY TOURS
& TRAVEL, INDIA



INNOVATION AWARD
WINNER – TRIPADVISOR
GREENLEADERS, USA



ENVIRONMENT AWARD
WINNER – SONEVA GROUP,
MALDIVES & THAILAND



DESTINATION AWARD
WINNER – LJUBLJANA,
SLOVENIA



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Destination **Thailand**

Nature is no longer Khao Yai's only draw as high-end accommodation and other offerings keep being added to the national park, reports **Greg Lowe**

KHAO YAI UPSCALED

A tourist snaps a shot of an Asian elephant at Khao Yai National Park



banon/123RF.com

High-end hotel openings and new attractions are drawing more Asian travellers to Khao Yai, as well as helping put the destination on the radar of those with big budgets. However, travel consultants say most longhaul tourists continue to be drawn to the area by the abundant nature and treks that can be experienced in and around the national park.

Dong Phrayayen-Khao Yai Forest Complex, in which the park is located, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site which spans 230km east of the Thai-Cambodia border and is home to some 800 species of birds, mammals and reptiles, including a number of endangered animals. This, and its proximity to the capital – about a two-hour drive on a good day – makes Khao Yai a popular extension to a Bangkok trip or longer tour of the country.

Andre van der Marck, vice president of Khiri Group, said recent hotel openings have helped the destination move upscale.

“The recent development of five-star properties has helped us sell the destination to upper-market clients who were not interested in the destination before due to the lack of five-star accommodation,” he said, adding that most of Khiri’s clients who opt for Khao Yai are nature enthusiasts, active tourists and repeat visitors focused on the environment and are not overly bothered about staying at high-end resorts.

“(A key reason) why we like to include Khao Yai in packages, apart from its ideal location, is the variety of hikes and treks and levels of difficulty. There are dozens of varied jungle trails that can be offered to hikers from first-timers to experienced trekkers. (Our) treks are always conducted by a local ranger from the national park.”

Khiri offers a number of one- to four-day packages in Khao Yai, and van der Marck said the destination can also be incorporated with a trip to Ayudhaya or to the company’s tented camp in Banteay Chhmar in nearby Cambodia.

Beyond the national park and surrounding area, Khao Yai’s longstanding attractions include Farm Chockchai, which runs educational tours, as well as a number of wineries and golf courses dotting the hills. A diverse range of smaller-scale products have also entered the market, such as Secret Art Garden and Khao Yai Art Museum. More recently, educational farm and equestrian centre, Farm Mor Por, as well as integrated amusement park, water park and mall, Scenical World, have come online.

The destination has also become increasingly popular with the domestic market, in particular Millennials from Bangkok. This has fuelled the groundswell of design-focused hotels and contemporary restaurants which have opened along Thanarat Road in Pak Chong district.

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has also been more actively promoting Khao Yai over the past two years, both to support the local industry currently suffering from low occupancy during the week and to relieve the pressure on Bang-

Destination in numbers

359,953

The number of foreign visitors to Khao Yai in 2014; Thai visitors hit 3,808,476

184

The number of accommodation establishments totalling 7,024 rooms in Pak Chong, Nakhon Ratchasima as at end-2014

kok from the influx of arrivals from China and Russia.

TAT said its efforts have netted significant results. “Over the last two years, Khao Yai has attracted an increasing number of foreign visitors, including golfers from South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia and Indonesia,” said a spokesman from TAT’s Nakhon Ratchasima office, which is responsible for the area.

“The tourism promotion of Khao Yai focuses on positioning the area as a single destination, but with an option of onward travel to Phimai Historical Park or vice versa. The length of stay is about two days/one night or three days/two nights.”

While travel companies specialising in the longhaul markets told *TTG Asia* they know little or nothing of TAT’s promotional efforts in the area, hoteliers are telling a different story. “TAT is doing an amazing job at promoting the area and we see that the campaign is gaining some traction,” said Christopher Cribbs, general manager of Botanica Khao Yai, a luxury property which opened last year. “However, word of mouth from experiencing the destination and social media seem to be the strongest PR. So combining TAT’s strong push for the destination and social media channels, we see tourism picking up.”

He too, said the addition of new hotels has also provided a boon for business.

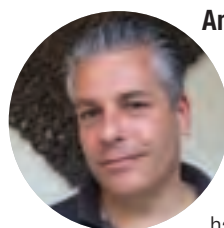
However, the upswing in domestic tourism and groups from China and Russia is not without challenges, opined van der Marck. “Loads of local tourists can be quite disturbing for our clients, who usually travel as couples or in very small groups. They are not prepared to see so many people at the park entrance. But once inside under the lead of the ranger, expectations are always exceeded.”

Khao Yai also has to compete with more established Thai destinations such as Chiang Mai in the north and Khao Sok in the south. Tobias Fischer, business development director of Go Vacation Thailand, said while the park has long been part of its tour programme, most of his European clients still prefer Kanchanaburi “because of the border to Myanmar, the history, the Mon hilltribes and the river”.

He added: “But Khao Yai National Park is closer to Bangkok. It’s also the perfect gateway to Isaan. With a growing offer of activities, hotels and golf courses, we see growing demand mainly from our repeat clients.”

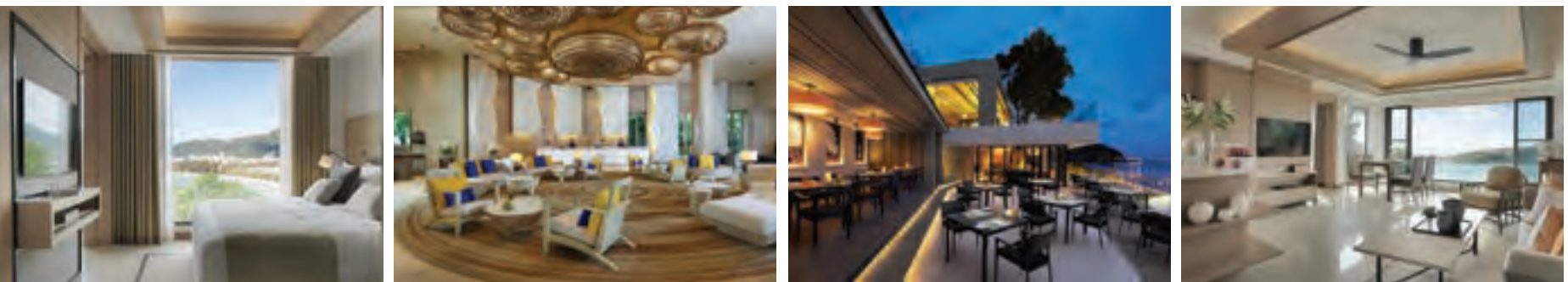
Viewpoint

What challenges does the trade face in promoting Khao Yai and what can be done to ensure it is developed sustainably?



Andre van der Marck, vice president, Khiri Group

“The increasing number of visitors undoubtedly affects the natural habitat of animals and vegetation. Visiting a protected national park is itself a challenge in terms of sustainability. You need people to visit it to generate income that needs to be allocated to the park infrastructure and staff who maintain the sites. More visitors means more trails/treks needed, which means disturbing natural habitat. It’s hard to find the right balance. And let’s not forget the illegal encroaching that has been going on.”



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Destination Thailand

How to sell



Farm Mor Por

DO Educational tractor tours and one-and-a-half hour horseback trail rides are just some of the activities on offer at **Farm Mor Por** (www.farmmorpor.com), a working equestrian farm focused on family fun. Rustic farm-stay accommodation is also available.

SEE Watch birds and animals from observation towers at **Nong Pak Chee** or **Mo Sing inside Khao Yai National Park**. The area is well known as a home for hornbills, gibbon, gaurs and elephants. Dawn and dusk are the best times to watch and clients will get much more out of their experience with an expert guide.

EAT Despite the name, **The Chocolate Factory** (www.facebook.com/thechocolatefactorythailand) is not only for gourmands with a sweet tooth. The venue, a contemporary glass atrium, serves progressive Italian cuisine as well as local dishes to complement its staggering range of mouthwatering chocolate dishes and pastries.

STAY For a boutique experience, stay at **Sala Khao Yai** (www.salaresorts.com/khaoyai), a property which offers just seven rooms and pool villas carved into the mountainside. The resort also features a hilltop bar and restaurant, both of which offer unique panoramas of the surrounding area.



The Chocolate Factory

MY WAY

How do you spend your free time in Khao Yai?

My free time is quite limited as I commute to Bangkok frequently for meetings, but on the odd occasion that I take a day off for myself, I would head out on my Harley Davidson and enjoy a relaxing ride through the Khao Yai area, Pak Chong, Muang Lek, sometimes venturing towards Korat. Other times, I meet up with friends for coffee or lunch.

Where do you go to eat, both for great local food and something more high end?

Local food is everywhere and to be honest, I have not found one bad local restaurant – just look for a local place with a large number of cars parked outside. I tend to slip by Ribs Mannn (www.facebook.com/ribsmannn) as they offer a wide variety of beef – including smoked ribs – making me feel like I am back home in the US.



What's the best way to explore Khao Yai and what are the best times of year?

Having a vehicle at your disposal is the best way to get out and about to take in the sights and points of interest. Organised tours into the national park are doable – and having a guide will give you a more structured and organised view of the park, saving you a good amount of time.

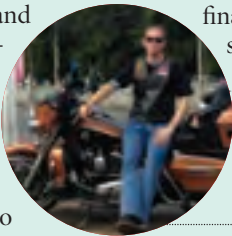
If you do not have a vehicle, tour operators have vehicles to show you around. Local transportation is also available, but it's not the most efficient way to

spend your time taking in Khao Yai.

Best times of year: all year-round. Although summer is very hot, we do have occasional rain as well as rainy season. Winter is considerably cooler; last December the temperature dropped to six degree Celsius.

Are there any hidden gems that people often miss when they come to Khao Yai?

The Elephant Conservation Reserve is a must-see. Hiding in plain sight, many people pass by, plan on visiting but tend to run short of time. Elephants are majestic creatures and this is a great chance to be up close with them and help them financially by making small donations.



Christopher Cribbs
general manager,
Botanica Khao Yai

NEWS IN A MINUTE



1 Scenical World

The area's biggest attraction Scenical World comprises Splash World, a water park; Life Park, an amusement park; and Greenery Shopping Mall.

Splash World features 12 water slides, a wave pool and a number of other water features.

Life Park at Khao Yai is an amusement park with 20 rides and activities, both opened in April.

Greenery Park Mall, a low-rise development based on Gold Rush-era Sacramento, is nearing completion and due to open.

2 New hotel openings

The past year has seen a number of contemporary boutique hotels and luxury resorts open in Khao Yai.

Botanica Khao Yai and Greenery Khao Yai opened near the new Khao Yai Exhibition Centre. The Private Pool Villas at Civilai Hill opened last

December, offering five villas each with more than 200m² combined indoor and outdoor space, complete with a private pool and views of the local mountains, as well as a private butler service.

Last year saw Thames Valley Khao Yai, an English-style village resort complete with castle-type function room, enter the market. While the eclectic design is unlikely to attract visitors from the US and Europe, it is proving successful with Asia guests.

3 Trouble brewing for properties encroaching on parkland

Some resorts in Khao Yai are facing challenges that go well beyond the increased competition from new properties entering the market.

A recent government crackdown on properties that have encroached on national park land, or have failed to produce the required permits or



title deeds, is set to claim a few scalps.

According to media reports, Bonanza Resort Khao Yai, which features a golf course and country club, is at risk of being demolished by the authorities for building on parkland without permission.

Kirimaya is one of the other properties feeling the heat from the ongoing probe into land grabs.

4 Midwinter Green restaurant

It's hard to miss the new Midwinter Green with its sheer size and faux castle design.

The restaurant opened last year in place of its predecessor, The Smokehouse. It seats hundreds and features both indoor and al fresco dining.

The venue serves up a range of Thai and international dishes, an extensive variety of grilled and barbecued meats, and a sizeable range of cakes and pastries.

TRIED & TESTED Stacked



Stacked attempts a new dining concept in Samui's diverse F&B scene. **Raini Hamdi** drops by

LOCATION Ozo Chaweng Samui on North Chaweng Beach Road

AMBIENCE Stacked exudes the Millennial feel, a lifestyle steeped in effortless casualness, connectivity, design and 'in your neighbourhood' location. From its outdoor terrace raised 2m above street level, I enjoy front row seats to the lively on-goings along Chaweng Beach Road, where spas and seafood stalls jostle for customers from their locations next to each other. If your clients prefer to be in air-conditioned comfort, an indoor area which seats 75 pax (compared to 110 outdoors) looks fun and inviting, thanks to its open kitchen concept and two HD projectors showing live international sports.

MENU A new concept to Samui, Stacked 'surfs' up hearty American comfort food prepared by Californian chef Matthew Rubin. I realised why it's called Stacked – food is stacked up to a tower, like the Greek Tower Salad, or any of its gourmet burgers (12 signature ones and if that ain't good enough, you can build your own). Now this place is great to go with friends or family to share food, because the portions are big and the plating is playful. It's not for nothing that there are dishes on the menu like the Wagyu Tomahawk, a killer 800g Australian long bone rib-eye, or the Red Hot, a Thai-inspired pork burger sandwiched in a chilli-lime bun.

I'm a small eater and just looking at the menu makes me full. Thankfully, there are lighter choices like Black Cod and Ahi Tuna, and salads.

The bar at Stacked offers creative signature cocktails, a selection of wines, and local and imported beers.

SERVICE The restaurant employs Filipino service staff and their cheery greetings, bubbly friendliness and easy confidence complete Stacked's concept as an upscale American beach diner. I'm impressed that the hotel general manager, Ingo Domaschke, and his assistants drop by at Stacked regularly to say hello to guests and to look around that everything is well.

VERDICT An excellent addition to Samui's dining scene, especially the F&B offering at Chaweng which, though brimming with variety, often lacks the sophistication and quality a trusted name like Ozo, sister of the Amari brand, brings.

Name Stacked

Location Ozo Chaweng Samui

Opening hours 12 noon to 00.00 daily

Contact details

Tel: (66) 77-915-222

Website: www.stacked-samui.com

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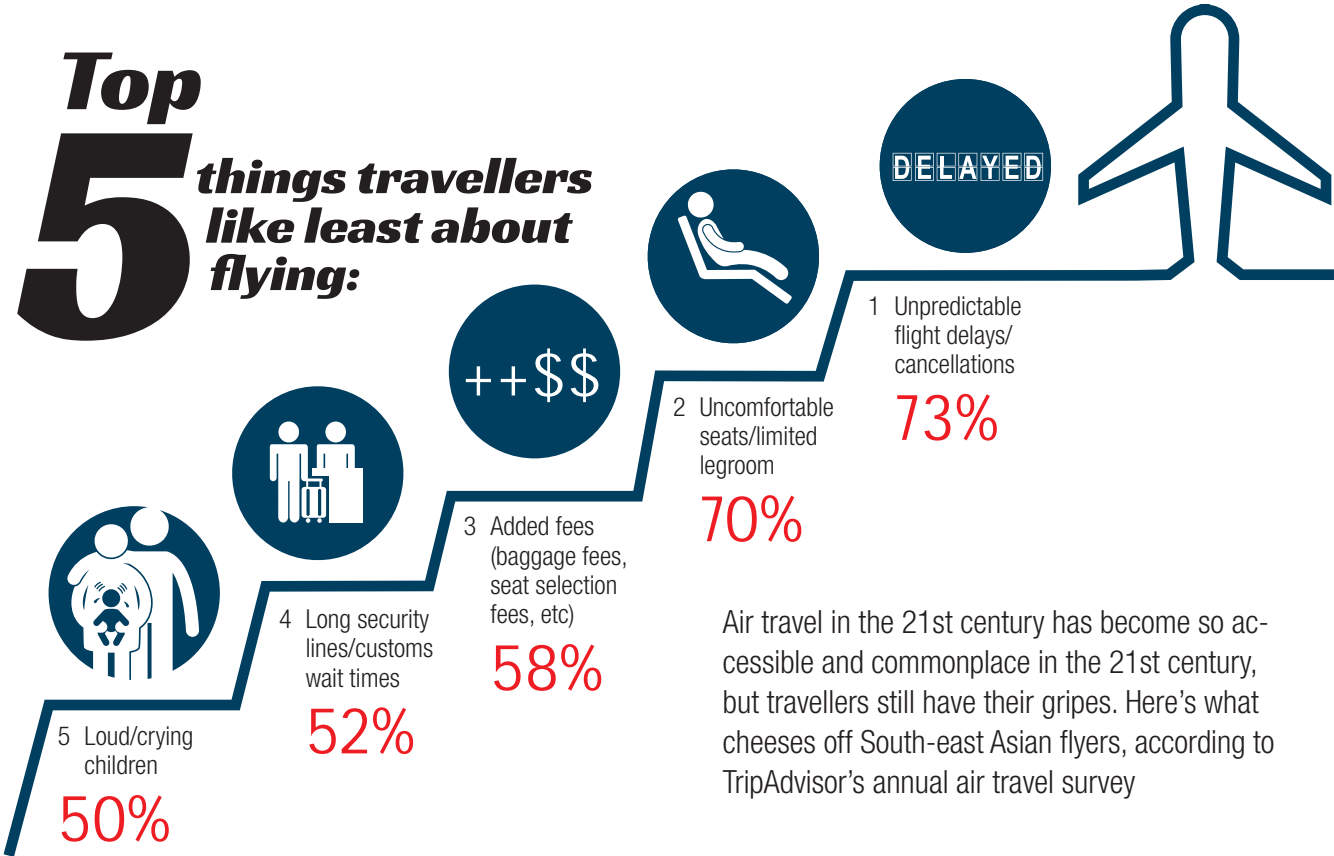
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TOURISM DATA



*The air travel survey was conducted with 2,566 travellers from Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand, from April 14 to May 7, 2015

WHO'S SAYING WHAT

Instagram



A "wedding" happened under the stars at iFly Singapore's new rooftop venue, Sky Garden



No game of smoke and mirrors at W Singapore Sentosa Cove's #MICE showcase tonight #miceatwsg



It's 7.30 and the club is jumpin', jumpin' - goodbye Ku De Ta, hello Cé La Vi at Marina Bay Sands, Singapore

Most commented

MERS IN SOUTH KOREA RAISES CONCERNS BUT NOT CANCELLATIONS

I was booked to travel to South Korea to attend the Cityscape summit. The organiser (had) cancelled the event at the last moment; according to them it was advised by South Korean authorities. – K P Singh

MALAYSIA HOTELS GO FOR BROKE COURTING MIDDLE EAST BIG-SPENDERS

Hmm..thought the "Middle East season" or "Arab season" (is) already irrelevant, especially in Kuala Lumpur. – Eric Ong

VISA-FREE ENTRY TO THE PHILIPPINES FOR INDIANS WITH AJACS-SUK VISAS

And what about ordinary Indian citizens who don't have any of the given countries' permanent residency visas? India has been giving visas on arrival to Filipinos without any conditions! – hrishi88

TRAVEL PURSUITS

Compiled by The Fox

QUIZ

1. What is the longest sector of the round-world flight of the solar-powered *Solar Impulse*?
2. True or false: Outbound travellers from China spent US\$165 billion in 2014
3. Pick the odd one out: Cebu Pacific Air, Jetstar Asia or Thai AirAsia?
4. History: HKTA, STPB, TOT are acronyms for the previous names of which destination marketing organisations?
5. Outside Asia: When and where is the world's biggest hotel due to open?

LETALITE

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

Daccor Good-enough French hotel group (d'accord = okay)

Lncheon Airport restaurant in South Korea that opens only for midday meals

Holiday Finn Brand name for hotel group in Nordic country

Holiday Pinn Social media website where you post your vacation pictures

Answer: (1) Nanjing, China to Hawaii, 8,000km, taking six days and five nights, flying at an average 60kph. (2) True! 28 per cent growth, and world's biggest. Number two US was US\$112 billion. However, China's total includes Hong Kong and Macau. (3) Cebu Pacific Air. The other two are divisions of an airline group. (4) Hong Kong Tourist Association, Singapore Tourist Organisation of Thailand (5) In Mecca The 45-floor, 10,000-room, Abra

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- SilkAir (2010)
- Lotte Tour (2011)
- Hong Kong International Airport (2013)
- Raffles Hotel Singapore (2013)

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

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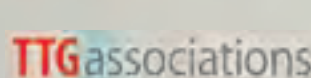
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Award Categories

1. Travel Agency Awards
Winners in this category are decided by votes from industry suppliers.

- Best Travel Agency – Australia
- Best Travel Agency – China
- Best Travel Agency – Chinese Taipei
- Best Travel Agency – Hong Kong
- Best Travel Agency – India
- Best Travel Agency – Indochina (Cambodia, Laos)
- Best Travel Agency – Indonesia
- Best Travel Agency – Japan
- Best Travel Agency – Malaysia
- Best Travel Agency – Singapore
- Best Travel Agency – South Korea
- Best Travel Agency – Thailand
- Best Travel Agency – The Philippines
- Best Travel Agency – Vietnam
- Best Corporate Travel Agency
- Best Online Travel Agency

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

Airline Awards

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

Hotels, Resorts, Serviced Residences & Spa Awards
HOTEL Chains

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

HOTELS – Individual Property

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

RESORTS – Individual Property

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

SERVICED RESIDENCES

- Best Serviced Residence Operator

SPAS

- Best Spa Operator

BT-MICE Awards

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

Travel Services Awards

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

3. Outstanding Achievement Awards
The winners in this category are decided by the TTG Asia team.

- Travel Personality of the Year
- Destination of the Year
- Most Entrepreneurial Travel Company
- Best Marketing & Development Effort

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

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- Singapore Airlines (2002)
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- 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)
- Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts (2015)
- Regal Airport Hotel (2015)

VOTING INSTRUCTIONS AND GUIDELINES

For Travel Agency and Travel Supplier Awards

1. Please use the correct voting form.

Voting Form A: Travel Agency Awards

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

Voting Form B: Travel Supplier Awards

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

Online Voting Forms

You can also opt to vote using our online form www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards.

2. Voting Criteria

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

3. Voting Rules

- i. Only one voting entry per person is allowed – using the voting form or online voting.
- ii. All votes are confidential.
- iii. Voting forms are published in selected TTG Travel Trade Publishing print titles and issues and are also available online at www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards

- iv. No responsibility will be accepted by the organisers for voting forms lost, delayed or damaged in the post.
- v. There are no pre-nominated contenders for any voting awards.
- vi. The results for TTG Travel Awards 2015 are final and no correspondence will be entertained.
- vii. Voting forms will be tabulated and evaluated by an independent auditor in Singapore.
- viii. The closing date is 3 July 2015.

4. Voting Form Submission

Completed voting forms are to be returned to:

SINGAPORE

Ms Lina Tan (TTG Travel Awards 2015)
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VOTING FORM A: TRAVEL AGENCY AWARDS

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

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

Criteria

Best Travel Agency in its respective category in terms of:

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

- 1. Best Travel Agency – Australia
- 2. Best Travel Agency – China
- 3. Best Travel Agency – Chinese Taipei
- 4. Best Travel Agency – Hong Kong
- 5. Best Travel Agency – India
- 6. Best Travel Agency – Indochina (Cambodia, Laos)
- 7. Best Travel Agency – Indonesia
- 8. Best Travel Agency – Japan
- 9. Best Travel Agency – Malaysia
- 10. Best Travel Agency – Singapore
- 11. Best Travel Agency – South Korea
- 12. Best Travel Agency – Thailand
- 13. Best Travel Agency – The Philippines
- 14. Best Travel Agency – Vietnam

- 15. Best Corporate Travel Agency
Best travel agency specialising in serving the needs of corporate travellers.

- 16. Best Online Travel Agency
Best online-based travel agency offering the most user-friendly and effective interface to meet client needs. This online travel agency must also boast the best sales and marketing network in terms of service innovation.

VOTER INFORMATION

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

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

VOTING CLOSES
3 JULY 2015

VOTING FORM B: TRAVEL SUPPLIER AWARDS

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

Airline Awards

Criteria

Best airline in its respective category in terms of:

• Providing the best service, network and schedules.

• Most agent-friendly in terms of reservations, confirmations and commission payments.

• Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas, incentive programmes and servicing.

17. Best North American Airline

Best airline based in North America operating Asia-Pacific routes.

18. Best European Airline

Best airline based in Europe operating Asia-Pacific routes.

19. Best Middle Eastern Airline

Best airline based in Middle East operating Asia-Pacific routes.

20. Best South-east Asian Airline

Best airline based in Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, The Philippines, Singapore, Thailand or Vietnam operating Asia-Pacific routes.

21. Best North Asian Airline

Best airline based in South Korea, Japan, Chinese Taipei, Macau or Hong Kong operating Asia-Pacific routes.

22. Best China Airline

Best airline based in China operating Asia-Pacific routes.

23. Best Pacific Airline

Best airline based in the Pacific operating Asia-Pacific routes.

24. Best Regional Airline

Best airline based regionally operating Asia-Pacific routes.

25. Best Asian Low-cost Carrier

Best airline based in Asia-Pacific that operates on a low-cost strategy.

Hotels, Resorts, Serviced Residences & Spa Awards

Criteria

Best Hotel Chain in its respective category in terms of:

• Most consistent in products and services.

• Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas, incentive programmes and servicing.

Best Hotel/Resort/Serviced Residence/Spa in its respective category in terms of:

• Best services and facilities.

• Best range of value-added benefits.

• Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

HOTEL CHAINS

26. Best Global Hotel Chain

Best hotel chain operating a network of properties globally.

27. Best Regional Hotel Chain

Best hotel chain operating a network of properties in the region.

28. Best Local Hotel Chain

Best hotel chain operating a network of properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.

29. Best Hotel Representation Company

Best company providing the most agent-friendly products and services and showing the best marketing effort in generating sales for member hotels via agents.

30. Best Luxury Hotel Brand

Best hotel chain operating a network of luxurious properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.

31. Best Mid-range Hotel Brand

Best hotel chain operating a network of mid-range properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.

32. Best Budget Hotel Brand

Best hotel chain operating a network of economical properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.

HOTELS – Individual Property

33. Best Luxury Hotel

Best hotel catering to the upmarket traveller. This hotel must also boast the best visual appeal and ambience reflecting upmarket status.

34. Best Mid-range Hotel

Best mid-range hotel catering to the traveller who seeks three- to four-star quality and comfort.

35. Best Budget Hotel

Best hotel catering to the budget traveller.

36. Best Independent Hotel

Best non-chain (ie not part of a network of properties) hotel.

37. Best Boutique Hotel

Best small, fashionable and unique hotel.

38. Best City Hotel – Bangkok

39. Best City Hotel – Delhi

40. Best City Hotel – Hanoi/Ho Chi Minh City

41. Best City Hotel – Jakarta

42. Best City Hotel – Hong Kong

43. Best City Hotel – Kuala Lumpur

44. Best City Hotel – Macau

45. Best City Hotel – Manila

46. Best City Hotel – Seoul

47. Best City Hotel – Singapore

48. Best City Hotel – Taipei

49. Best City Hotel – Tokyo

50. Best New City Hotel

Best city hotel that opened in 2014/2015

51. Best Airport Hotel

Best hotel – located within the vicinity of an airport – that caters to travellers in transit.

RESORTS – Individual Property

52. Best Beach Resort

Best resort located by a beach. This resort must also boast the best visual appeal and ambience reflecting local flavour.

53. Best Resort Hotel (Non-Beach)

Best resort not located by a beach. This resort must also boast the best visual appeal and ambience reflecting local flavour.

54. Best New Beach Resort

Best beach resort that opened in 2014/2015

55. Best Integrated Resort

Best hotel offering comprehensive accommodation, shopping, dining, entertainment and sports.

SERVICED RESIDENCES

56. Best Serviced Residence Operator

Best serviced property catering to mid- and long-term staying guests.

SPAS

57. Best Spa Operator

Best managed and operated spa or network of spas in the region.

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BT-MICE Awards

Criteria

• Best services and facilities catering specifically to the BT-MICE market.

• Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing the BT-MICE market.

• Most desirable and attractive incentives and value added services to business travellers and MICE planners.

58. Best Airline – Business Class

Best business class airline across the board.

Refer to Airline Criteria.

59. Best Business Hotel

Best hotel catering to the business traveller.

Refer to Hotel Criteria.

60. Best Meetings & Conventions Hotel

Best hotel catering to meeting and convention needs.

Refer to Hotel Criteria.

61. Best BT-MICE City

The city most friendly and desirable to business travellers and for MICE planners to host their events.

62. Best Convention & Exhibition Centre

• Best facilities.

• Best value for money.

• Most flexible in catering to MICE planners.

• Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

63. Best Convention & Exhibition Bureau

• Most efficient, flexible and friendly in terms of response to enquiries and information.

• Most effective in raising awareness of MICE at government and community levels.

• Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

Travel Services Awards

Criteria

• Best product, services and facilities

• Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

64. Best Airport

• Best facilities.

• Most user-friendly, efficient and hassle-free immigration.

• Most organised baggage claim.

• Best planned floor layout, with easy ground access.

65. Best GDS (Global Distribution System)

• Most comprehensive network offering ease of operation and user friendliness.

• Most efficient and reliable system.

66. Best Cruise Operator

• Best product in terms of service, routes and schedules.

• Best onboard programme and facilities.

• Most agent-friendly in terms of reservations, confirmations and commission payments.

• Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas, incentive programmes and servicing.

67. Best NTO (National Tourism Organisation)

• Most efficient, flexible and friendly in terms of response to enquiries and information.

• Most effective in raising awareness of tourism at government and community levels.

• Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

68. Best Theme Attraction

• Best ambience.

• Best facilities and services.

• Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

VOTER INFORMATION

Name:

Passport no.:

Job title:

Company:

Address:

Country:

Telephone no.:

Fax no.:

Email:

Signature:

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