

VIEW FROM THE TOP

Frustration with poor passenger experience at airports was what led Song Hoi-see, CEO & founder of Plaza Premium Group, to pioneer the world's first independent airport lounge business. Song speaks to [Xinyi Liang-Pholsena](#)



THE FAULT IN THE STARS

The Philippines' new star rating system for hotels has been marred by controversy, with the trade questioning the relevance and fairness of the assessment. By [Rosa Ocampo](#)



WHAT SLOWDOWN, ASK CHINESE TRAVELLERS

While the world frets about China's economic slowdown, Chinese travellers appear as optimistic as ever, write [Paige Lee Pei Qi](#) and [S Puvaneswary](#)



IN VOGUE: VILLAS IN THAILAND

Rising visitor numbers, plus the trend for experiential and generational travel, are turning villas into a growth market for Phuket, finds [Xinyi Liang-Pholsena](#)



APARTMENT MARKET HOLDS STEADY

Serviced residence operators believe they are a more resilient accommodation model that can withstand shocks, reports [Raini Hamdi](#)



A STORIED CHINESE CITY GOES LUXE

Better known as a historical destination, Xi'an has woken up to the potential of luxury travel thanks to a fresh crop of posh hotels in the city. By [Karen Yue](#)

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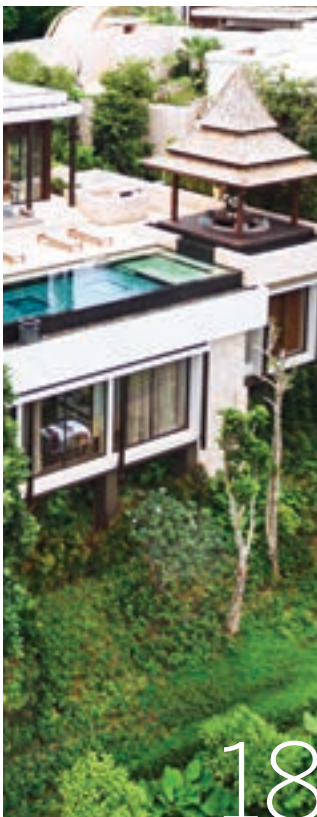
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WHAT TO DO IN BEARISH TIMES



When you lose half your money, even though it's just on paper, or when you don't know what to do anymore or where to go just for a teeny-weeny yield for your hard-earned dollars, it is demoralising.

What a start to the new year we're all having. It's all bad news. Let's see the flash points: Chinese economy, stock market rout, Saudi Arabia-Iran, Dear Leader, blasts in Turkey/Jakarta, oil prices, and add to these existing problems such as the migrant issue which polarises Europe and... I've had enough, haven't you?

What's clear is 2016 will be challenging, with George Soros even going as far to say it's starting to look like 2008.

Travel and tourism CEOs I've been speaking to about it aren't giving me the usual big spiel about the glass being half full, or that 'crisis' means threats and opportunities. This time, they admit there are just too many uncertainties.

At the time of writing this on January 19, it's hard not to worry about the psychological impact of losses made in the stock market on consumers. When you lose half your money, even though it's just on paper, or when you don't know what to do anymore or where to go just for a teeny-weeny yield for your hard-earned dollars, it is demoralising. When you don't feel so rich anymore or don't feel secure about money, it affects your mood to spend, including on travel.

So what to do in bearish times? Here are a few suggestions I hope will inspire you.

One, take stock and clean up your act. You're going to be fighting with your competitors for any customer who is still travelling, so if you haven't learnt about the art of personalised service or equipped your company and your people with the technol-

ogy and mindset to deliver what consumers want, there's no better time than now to start.

Make it the year you think about value add. For example, what grunt work can you outsource so that your travel specialists can deliver the real value-added knowledge to persuade the well-informed customer that he still needs a retail travel agency?

Give your business development people a lot of love and encouragement, or if you don't have them on your paycheck, please employ the best you can afford, even if it's just one person for now. Finding new market sources and new revenue streams are critical in bearish times.

Go even further and relook your entire business model. Are you able to discern a new niche that will ensure your longevity in the business in the years to come?

Lastly, do not be afraid. Let's all show Indonesia some solidarity and adopt *KamiTidakTakut* (We'reNotAfraid) as the mantra not just against terrorism but in times of uncertainties. I've been inspired and strengthened by that simple line – three spirited words that encapsulates energy, defiance and dare.

Now don't we just need these very qualities this year?

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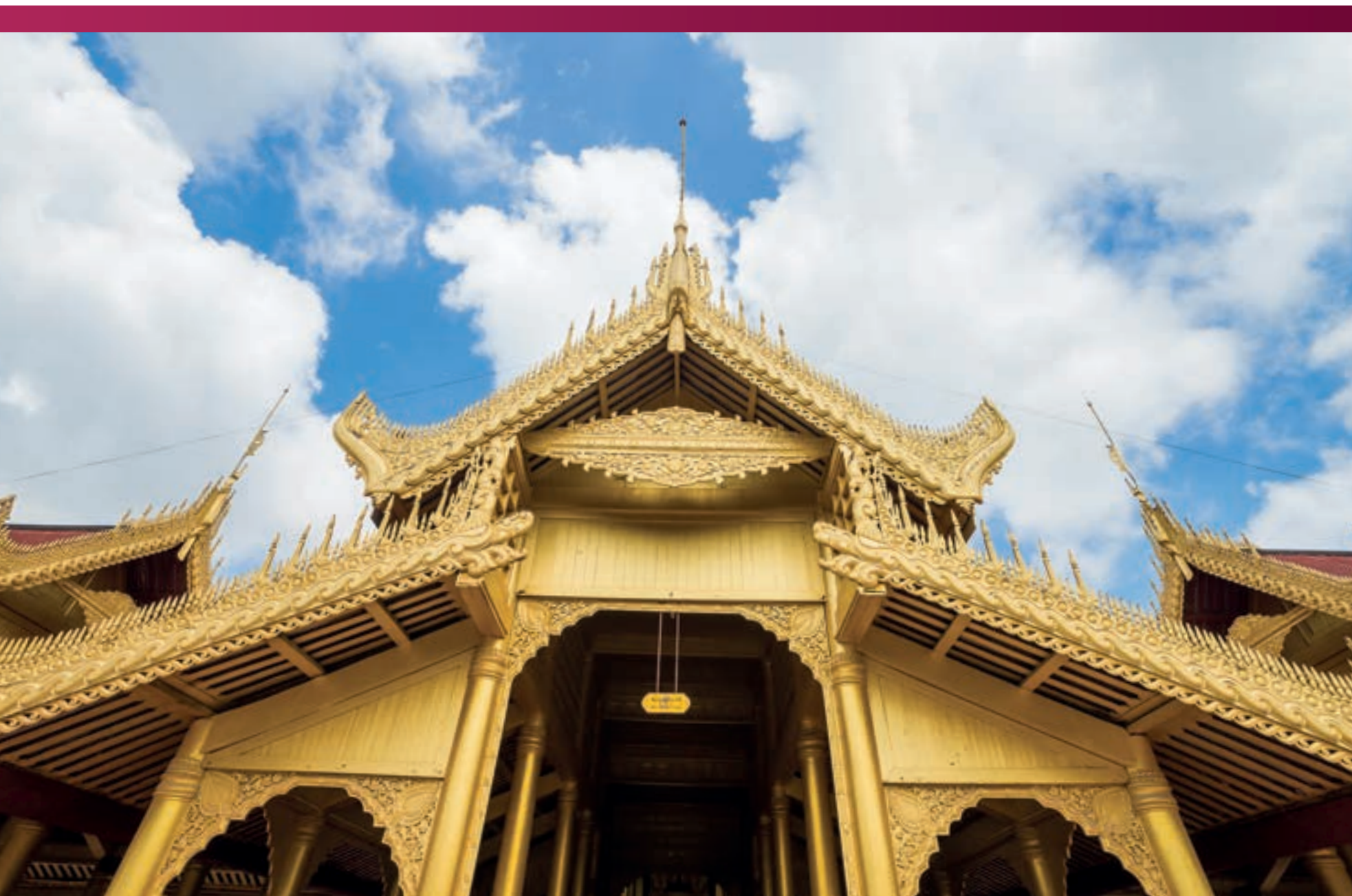


COMING UP

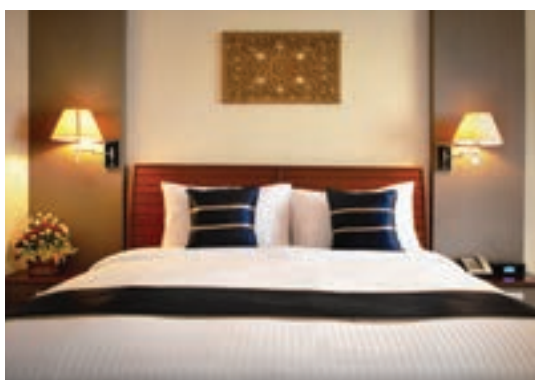
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ANALYSIS It was fun while it lasted, but the Philippines' marketing campaign failed to draw the targeted numbers
SINGAPORE Staycations are on the rise in the Lion City, while suburban hotels gain favour among foreign visitors
MEDICAL TOURISM A look at the state of health and medical tourism in four thriving markets of South-east Asia

INTEGRATED RESORTS As billion-dollar integrated resorts continue to sprout across Asia-Pacific, the trade reveals what's hot and what's not for each destination
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THE FAULT IN THE S

In an age where travellers heed user-generated online reviews and many travel agencies devise their own hotel rating schemes, are hotel star ratings still relevant or have they become obsolete? This is the bone of contention when the Philippine Department of Tourism (DoT) adopted a new star rating to replace its previous system, which classified hotels as economy, standard, first class or deluxe and resorts as A, AA or AAA. The DoT wants a more consistent rating system nationwide, as the previous system was often mistaken

as a judge of the quality of hotel rooms rather than the quality of the entire hotel. The new system is meant “to establish an official, transparent and more objective hotel classification system”, explained Philippine tourism secretary Ramon Jimenez Jr, so that “the travelling public can expect consistency in the standards of accommodation facilities and services throughout the country”. Before the star rating was conceived in 2012, “the Philippines was the only nation in Asia that did not use a similar star rat-

ing”, said Jimenez. “Star rating is an internationally accepted classification system,” he added. However, the lack of a uniform global star rating process means that the ranking criteria varies from one awarding organisation to another and from country to country, industry sources pointed out. DoT’s controversial auditing process and objectivity of its evaluators have since come under fire. There are two main areas a hotel is rated for. Firstly, the state of the physical property; and secondly, things not related to the construct such as food quality, service standard and linen type, which can be highly subjective. Questions too are being raised on the propriety of the DoT implementing a star rating programme for the private sector. Apart from the issue of relevance, it also boils down to “who implements what”, remarked Robert Lim Joseph, president of the Network of Independent Travel and Allied Services Philippines. Of over 6,000 properties in the Philippines, only about 700 have been audited for DoT’s new star rating. Of this, an undisclosed number have been downgraded and the ability of DoT’s star ratings to make or break a hotel remains a sore point for Philippine hoteliers. Cebu-based Plantation Bay Resort & Spa, which enjoyed one of the highest occupancy rates in the Philippines for the last two decades, fell from grace when it was downgraded from five stars. However, the downgrade came after the property had been elevated by TripAdvisor to its Hall of Fame for earning a certificate of excellence for five consecutive years. The downgrade has “cast doubt upon the consistent ratings of Plantation Bay from reputable independent travel agency sites” and “strongly implies that existing Filipino hotels like Plantation Bay are lacking in quality”, stated the resort’s founder

Emmanuel Gonzalez, who has filed corruption charges against the NTO and officials involved in the rating programme. The Philippine Congress has initiated a hearing, with at least two congressmen calling to abolish the star rating system and to investigate alleged corruption involving the use of the US\$7.1 million grant from the Canadian International Development Agency, which partially funded the star rating programme. Questioning DoT’s role in rating hotels, Gonzalez wrote in documents to the authorities that “Ireland is the only country in the world where the national government issues star ratings and participation is compulsory. In Asia, “only in India is there a national government rating scheme and it is purely voluntary,” he added. Gonzalez had in 2012 called the DoT’s attention to the “very subjective criteria and cumbersome checklist which would certainly lead to corruption”. He added: “Hotel rating systems in Canada, Europe, the US and other jurisdictions simply list objective requirements, (but DoT’s criteria) are highly subjective. “No hotel rating system anywhere in the world is given the authority to rate matters such as service, quality of food, condition of lobby furniture, and so forth,” Gonzalez elaborated. Bill Barnett, managing director of C9 Hotelworks, said: “With the rise of TripAdvisor and OTAs, the rating system has become self-governing. In the case of reporting bodies, while government tourism bodies traditionally handled the certification and inspections, given the broad growth of tourism, the public sector has often turned to the private sector to assist as a manner of practicality.” Barnett opined that hotel rating systems “over the past decades have become increasingly obsolete, and in many notable cases, international hotels do not par-



HOW OTHER SE ASIAN NATIONS HANDLE HOTEL RATINGS

 According to a Singapore Tourism Board (STB) spokesman, there is no hotel star rating in Singapore as the sector comprises mostly international and regional brands that are well-known for their service level and range of facilities. Visitors can also get a good sense of the quality of accommodation based on the range of room rates offered. For planning and analysis purposes however, STB has developed a hotel tiering system to provide hoteliers, investors and other tourism stakeholders with information on the performance of each hotel tier so as to facilitate their business decisions. This reference system categorises hotels based on several factors including average room rates, location and product type. There are four tiers in this hotel tiering system, namely luxury, upscale, mid-tier and economy. – **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

 Hotel rating in Indonesia is handled by the Tourism Business Certification Institutes, and divided into star (one to five) and non-star categories with certification valid for three years. Johnnie Sugiarto, vice chairman of the Indonesia Hotel and Restaurant Association, said: “The classification is set by the tourism authority based on international and ASEAN standards. A traveller can expect to get a similar three-star hotel standard in Jakarta, Singapore or Australia, for example.” Apart from the physical criteria to meet a certain star rating, staff qualification also plays an important part in the certification. According to Johnnie, the regulation stipulates that a minimum of 30 per cent of the staff – from the management to the frontliners – hold professional certificates while manpower performance weighs 40 per cent of the total assessment points. – **Mimi Hudoyo**

 The hotel star rating system in Malaysia is designed by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia, and properties are rated every three years. Ratings are based on six criteria, with points ranging from one to 10 in each criteria. A five-star hotel has to score a minimum of nine points for each criteria, while a four-star hotel will have to score a minimum of seven points. Three-star hotels have to score a minimum of five points for each criteria. The six criteria are qualitative and aesthetic requirements, common areas, bedroom requirements, services, safety standards and hygiene, and staff. Under qualitative and aesthetic requirements for instance, the property is checked on the use of space, colour schemes, design and ambiance, among others, while the staff criteria looks at qualification, language skills, staff facilities, etc. – **S Puvaneswary**

 Hotel ratings in Thailand are set by the Thai Hotel Standard Foundation which administers with support from other industry bodies, said Surapong Techaruvichit, vice president of the foundation and president of the Thai Hotels Association (THA). Inspections are conducted by the Thai Hotel Standard Foundation in conjunction with THA, Association of Thai Travel Agents, Tourism Authority of Thailand, Ministry of Tourism & Sports, and representatives from universities. Standards are fairly broad. One-star hotels are clean and basic while two-star hotels offers additional business services. Three-star properties see the consideration of style, comfort and services such as on-site dining, pools and conference rooms. Four-star hotels offer full amenities while five-star establishments stress luxury and high service standards. – **Michael Mackey**

The Philippines' new star rating system for hotels has been marred by controversy, with the trade questioning the relevance and fairness of the assessment. By **Rosa Ocampo**

TARS

ticipate. Many key segments like boutique hotels and luxury pool villa resorts are also not covered.

“At the end of the day, the travel sector in broad terms is seeing the rating system substantially diminish in terms of its authority and relevance,” he added.

Some industry players prefer their own hotel rating system. Said Marjorie Aquino, senior sales and marketing manager, Blue Horizons Travel & Tours: “We came up with our own star rating and our travel agents also have their own ratings. We do ocular inspection of hotels and we also consider travellers’ reviews of the hotels.”

On the other hand, Pedro Young, assistant vice president for business and product development at Uni-Orient Travel, favours the star rating system so travellers have an idea of hotel quality.

Young also believes that online reviews can be manipulated so “you have to be discerning whether the person making the review is sincere”.

Asked how to reconcile DoT’s star rating system with that of user-generated

platforms like TripAdvisor, Jimenez said: “Through a star rating system, the travelling public can expect consistency in the standards of accommodation facilities and services throughout the country.

“TripAdvisor, on the other hand, is a more personal type of rating system. It is based on the client’s perception, influenced by their own experience of a particular service or facility. Although it is a good tool, this type of rating system can be biased and subjective, differing from one individual to another.”

Sarah Mathews, TripAdvisor’s head of destination marketing APAC, concurs that its bubble rating is completely different from the star ratings of local governments, and that they can complement but not substitute each other.

On its website, TripAdvisor distinguishes between the two, stating that its bubble rating is a summary of ratings from travellers displayed on a scale from one to five, where three is average and five is excellent. In contrast, a star rating is determined by a third party based on available facilities, staff and amenities.

Seasoned hotelier Arthur Lopez, president of Philippine Hotel Owners Association (PHOAI), also backed the star rating programme, citing the need for laws and regulation to protect consumers.

“When you say you’re five-star, you have

to be five-star. We have no problems with international brands because they have their criteria. But have you been to provinces and checked three-star hotels? It is important for laymen to understand and to know what they are paying for when they book hotels online,” he said.

We have no problems with international brands because they have their criteria. But have you been to provinces and checked three-star hotels?

Arthur Lopez
President
Philippine Hotel Owners Association

PHOAI has come up with solutions that the DoT has also agreed to during a meeting in October 2015. The minutes of that meeting prepared by the DoT noted

that “PHOAI suggested the creation of an adjudication board that would consist of DoT and seven respected retired general managers not related to any existing hotels within the jurisdiction of DoT to address controversial issues.”

Additionally, they will choose a chairman among them who will report to the board. The seven will render their independent and expert opinions, as well as recommendations based on international standards and practices. The board will also convene to look at complaints and issues concerning the star rating programme and fine-tune the criteria.

At press time, it is not yet clear whether the DoT will implement the solutions agreed to with PHOAI.

If implemented, Lopez said that flexibility in the system will be important. For instance, some resorts deliberately omit Wi-Fi, TV and other electrical gadgets so that guests can unplug and unwind, yet deserving properties can still be classified as five-star despite lacking such amenities.

As well, new-generation five-star hotels such as Grand Hyatt may have expansive 40-45m² rooms, but older properties with smaller rooms can still be classified as five-star if the other criteria are met.

Lopez also indicated that the board will attempt to include in the evaluation guest reviews and comments from OTAs.



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China's stock markets may have crashed dramatically twice in the first week of 2016 and its economy seeing a slowdown, but Chinese nationals are proving to be a resilient lot when it comes to travel consumption.

Wang Suqi, president of Total Travel International Travel Service in Beijing, said that the weakened Chinese yuan was hardly an issue. "I do not see any impact on travel because the Chinese are very rich. They will continue to travel and spend money," he said.

Tony Li, managing director of Beijing-based Deluxe MICE Tour and Luxury Travel, shares the same observation: "There are many first-time travellers in China and they are all eager to see the world. Their concern isn't about the cost because they can afford it, rather they are worried about the safety and security of the destination."

As a result, Singapore is a popular choice among Li's travellers.

According to Li, at least 50 per cent of his travellers favour South-east Asian destinations like Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines.

"One of the good things about these countries is the climate. The Chinese like to travel to warm countries, especially during winter," he said.

Ding Hai Yang, general manager of Suzhou CITS, has also noticed Chinese travellers' preference for Asia.

"Asia is considered safe and comfortable for the Chinese and its close proximity is attractive too," Ding reasoned.

"Chinese outbound (volume) has been growing so much and I foresee it will continue to rise even more," he said, brushing off any threats to travel demand posed by the depreciating Chinese yuan.

Maintaining the continued thirst for travel among the Chinese is a plethora of travel deals targeting the market, said Xu Jili, general manager of strategy development department of MICE projects with Silvermoon Advertising Beijing.

"In fact, if the Chinese were to travel within (China), it might be more expensive than going to a country in South-east Asia," Xu said.

According to both Wang and Xu, the liberalisation of tourist visas for the Chinese in recent years has been a huge contributing

Unscathed by a faltering economy, the Chinese outbound travel market remains as dynamic as ever, write **Paige Lee Pei Qi** and **S Puvaneswary**

THE CHINESE TRAVELLER



factor to the growing outbound volume as Chinese travellers value convenience.

Sellers interviewed at the recent ATF 2016 have also reported resilience in Chinese bookings and spending.

Hannah Paula Yulo, director of sales & marketing at Paradise Garden Resort Hotel and Convention Center in Boracay, the Philippines, told *TTG Asia*: "Our 292-room property is fully booked for the Chinese New Year holiday period, mostly by Chinese tourists. Still, we have inbound agents handling the Chinese market requesting for more rooms."

"The market is still healthy. We have forward bookings right up to September and we have not seen a drop in Chinese tourist spending."

Mint Leong, managing director of Sunflower Holidays, which specialises in the Chinese inbound market to Malaysia, has recorded a 30 per cent year-on-year increase in Chinese arrivals from 2014 to 2015.

She intends to intensify her marketing and promotional efforts to secondary Chinese destinations that have new air links deeper into Malaysia such as Langkawi and Kota Kinabalu.

New services include AirAsia's daily Kota Kinabalu-Wuhan flights that started on January 22 and Langkawi-Guangzhou two days after.

She said: "The Chinese economy may have slowed down, but the disposable income of middle and upper class travellers has not been impacted."

The market is still healthy. We have forward bookings right up to September and we have not seen a drop in Chinese tourist spending.

Hannah Paula Yulo
Director of sales & marketing,
Paradise Garden Resort Hotel and
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Compiled by traveller data intelligence company, *ForwardKeys*, this report – gleaned from travel agencies worldwide – analyses air passenger bookings for international arrivals into and departures from ASEAN for the year 2015

WHERE THE WIND BLOWS

ASEAN is the leading destination in 2015 with an increase in international air arrivals of 8.4% from January 1 to December 16, according to ForwardKeys, whose database contains air reservations handled by more than 200,000 online and offline travel agencies worldwide.

Under the same parameters, Asia-Pacific, the Americas and Europe enjoyed +4.8%, +3.6%, and +1.7%, respectively, while Africa & Middle East suffered a decline of 1.9%.

%Var. Of International Arrivals and Departures by Region. (Jan 1st to Dec 16th; 2015 vs 2014)				
The Americas	Europe	Africa & Middle East	Asia Pacific	ASEAN
Arrivals ▲ 3.6%	Arrivals ▲ 1.7%	Arrivals ▼ -1.9%	Arrivals ▲ 4.6%	Arrivals ▲ 8.4%
Departures ▲ 43%	Departures ▲ 0.7%	Departures ▲ 0.4%	Departures ▲ 4.8%	Departures ▲ 0.3%

Intra-ASEAN international arrivals accounted for 19% of the total arrivals in ASEAN destinations, while the rest of the Asia-Pacific region contributed 44%. The top 10 source countries were China, Hong Kong, the US, Australia, India, Japan, Singapore, Germany, the UK and Taiwan.

International Air Arrivals in ASEAN Countries 2015YTD	
	Int'l Air Arrival Performance (2015 Jan 1st to Dec 16th)
	%Var. vs. Prev. Year (ForwardKeys)
Brunei	-11.2%
Cambodia	10.9%
Indonesia	1.8%
Laos	9.2%
Malaysia	-6.2%
Myanmar	-3.7%
Philippines	5.2%
Singapore	0.8%
Thailand	22.7%
Vietnam	8.1%

ForwardKeys analysis is based on air reservations that staying at least 1 night at the destination, therefore excluding transits, day trips or one-way trips that does not contain length of stay at the destination. ForwardKeys database contains reservations handled by more than 200 000 online and offline travel agencies worldwide. Database updated as of 16th December 2015.

Thailand, ASEAN's leading destination, recorded a YTD growth of +22.7%, and has experienced a fast recovery in international air arrivals ever since December 2014. The bombing in Bangkok slowed down international bookings to Thailand, particularly among the neighbouring shorthaul source markets. Luckily, longhaul markets such as the US, the UK, and Scandinavian countries have kept up with forward bookings for arrivals in December 2015 and 1Q2016.

Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam have been winning Chinese tourists back. Both Malaysia and Singapore saw a 7% increase in Chinese arrivals 2015 year to date, though the recovery was clearly concentrated during the busy summer season (May to September). Vietnam was up 35% in Chinese arrivals when compared to 2014, which had a seven-month collapse staring June.

Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar are still catching up in international air arrivals due to their limited international connections. The only non-Asia direct routes in 2015 and 1H2016 are Phnom Penh to Doha and

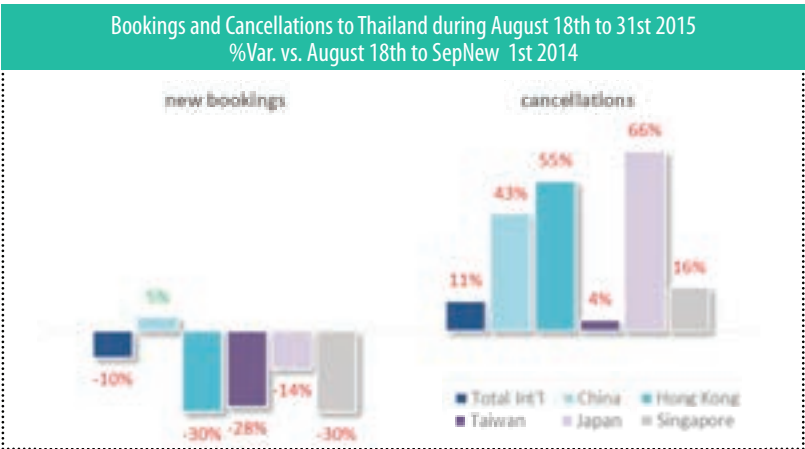
Yangon to Doha, operated by Qatar Airways. Laos is connected to only six countries by direct flights, including South Korea and China.

Olivier Jager, CEO of ForwardKeys, commented: "ASEAN destinations have had an overall fruitful 2015, although the bombings in Bangkok had an immediately detrimental impact on Thailand in August. Outlook for the first half of 2016 for each ASEAN destination, except Thailand, is following their respective 2015YTD performance; Thailand will enter a steady period with a smaller growth rate compared to 2015, which was a fast recovery year from the 2014 chaos."

Impact of Bangkok bombing on international air reservations to Thailand

International air reservations to Thailand had risen 42% since the beginning of 2015 until August 17 when the bombing occurred in Bangkok.

During the remaining two weeks in August, new bookings decreased 10% and cancellations increased 11% compared to previous year, directly resulting in the moderate air arrival performance in September (+3%) and October (-0.3%).



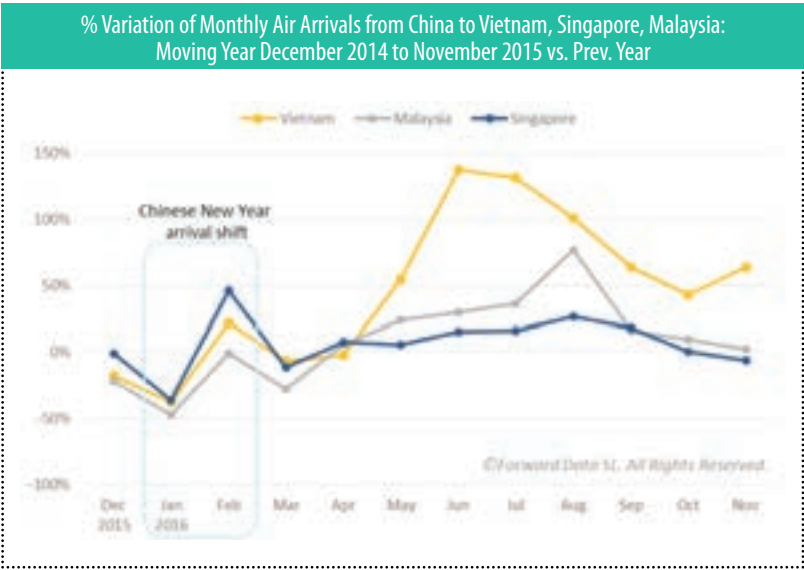
Hong Kong and Japan are extremely sensitive source markets, responding quickly to emergencies with more cancellations than average.

China still saw a growth of 5% in new bookings, the majority of which were for trips to Thailand in mid-September and later; however, these new bookings could not compensate for the sharp increase of cancellations for trips in August.

Vietnam welcoming Chinese back, while Malaysia and Singapore struggle

According to ForwardKeys air reservation data, Vietnam has recorded seven consecutive months of positive growth in monthly air arrivals from China, since May 2015. This is exactly one year since the anti-China protest happened in 2014.

Meanwhile, Malaysia and Singapore are seeing a calm-down in Chinese arrivals after the improved busy summer (May to September).



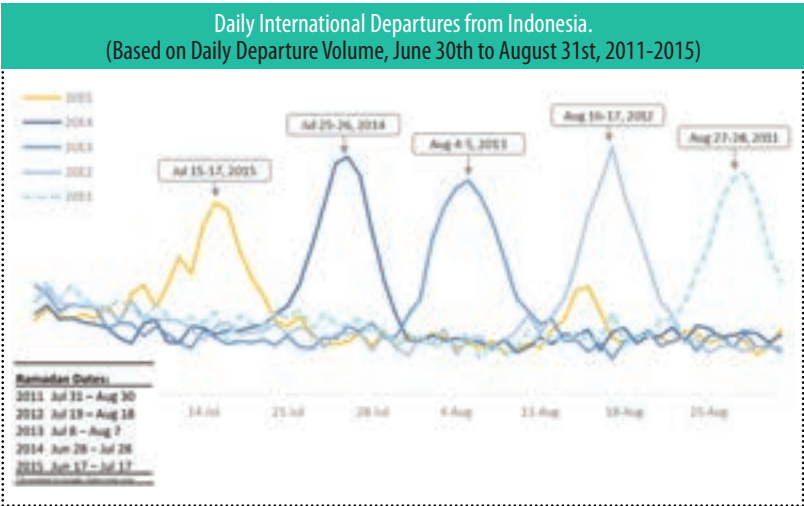
The ups and downs in Chinese air arrivals in Vietnam are directly related to air capacity development: the weekly air capacity from China to Vietnam was cut from over 19,000 seats in May 2014 to approximately 7,500 seats in June, and has only climbed back to 19,000 seats by July 2015. Total scheduled capacity for 1H2016 shows a 59% increase in total seats.

1H2016 scheduled total capacity from China to:		
	Total Seats (thousand)	Growth
Vietnam	704	59%
Singapore	18,000	8%
Malaysia	12,000	11%

Strong demand in holiday leisure international departures from ASEAN countries

Stronger demand was observed for all ASEAN countries during their respective important public holidays and school breaks. Departure crowds were seen during Songkran in Thailand, the Good Friday holiday in the Philippines, and Chinese New Year and Christmas in Malaysia.

Indonesia's biggest international departure wave happens for end-of-Ramadan travel every year. International air departures start picking up about one week before Ramadan ends, and the peak has appeared three days before the final date over the past five years.



While seasonality remains, the 2015 end-of-Ramadan season performed poorly. Total international departures by air was down 19% comparing July 11-17, 2015 to July 22-28, 2014, the last seven days of Ramadan.

View from the top

Frustration with the poor passenger experience at airports was what led Song Hoi-see, CEO & founder of Plaza Premium Group, to pioneer the world's first independent airport lounge business. Song speaks to [Xinyi Liang-Pholsena](#)

AIRPORT LOUNGE FOR THE MASSES

What inspired you to establish Plaza Premium Lounge?

Following my career in investment banking, I started my own business and spent considerable time at airports, struggling to work effectively while on the go. Flying economy class without the airport lounge privileges that I had previously enjoyed, I found that such travel experience was somewhat incomplete.

Driven by a heartfelt desire to do something for the majority, I wished that all travellers, regardless of airline and class of travel, could have access to airport lounges. I wanted to change the stereotype that airport lounges should be reserved for premium travellers only.

I identified an opportunity in this segment and seized an opportune moment to introduce the first Plaza Premium Lounge, the world's first independent airport lounge concept, at Hong Kong International Airport and Kuala Lumpur International Airport in 1998.

Plaza Premium Lounge has since evolved into Plaza Premium Group and expanded into airport hospitality. What drives the group's diversification strategy?

Five to six years after starting our airport lounge business, we realised more products could be added into the lounges and the demands (of travellers) kept increasing, so we spun out independent operations such as wellness salon, food, meet-and-greet services, and then we integrated all services into one to offer a seamless service.

In 2015, we introduced Aerotel, our airport transit hotel brand, and Allways, our airport meet-and-greet service brand, to our existing airport lounge and airport dining portfolio, consolidating the group's evolving businesses into four core pillars to complement travellers' overall airport experience.

Now we are flourishing worldwide, covering five continents with more than 130 outlets and 35 international airports. Why we expand from airport lounge to other business is not by chance, but by virtue of our understanding of what the passengers require and their needs in the airport. We try to fill up the inefficiency gaps in the airports by developing other services to provide a seamless service (for passengers). A lot of people doing similar business (in airport hospitality) wait for Tarzan to see them, but we go into the jungle to look for Tarzan (laughs).

For my independent lounge business I'm only seeing the tip of the iceberg because a lot of people don't know that they can use a lounge when they travel economy class. I want to change the perception that the airport lounge is only a privilege available to certain people and we're happy to change travel patterns and behaviour.

What's game-changing about the first Aerotel in Singapore?

Most people don't have high expectations of transit hotels because they think it's a place where they sleep for just a few hours. But we have a different view. As travellers become more affluent and demanding, they want better quality of service. We do not want to just satisfy customers' basic demands; we want to give them more than that.

Singapore is a major transit hub, and when passengers spend six, 10 or even 12 hours at the airport what do you expect them to do? We create recreational products to (complement) transit hours. They can spend a few hours sleeping, therefore we sell our hotel in six-hour blocks, unlike other transit hotels which are booked for 24 hours.

Aerotel Singapore is the first transit hotel with an outdoor swimming pool, poolside bar, jacuzzi, massage services, gym and library facilities, alongside 70 premium rooms. Another special characteristic at Aerotel is our pillow menu. Our quality is value for money – you get five-star hardware at three-star prices.

Our lounges started by taking care of people not taken care of by airlines, i.e. the remaining 85 per cent flying on coach...However, a lot of airports ignore this 85 per cent.

Why did you choose to launch Aerotel in Singapore over other hub airports?

Singapore is the best airport in the world, and when you want to showcase the best of what you can do in aviation, obviously you go to the best airport to showcase this. We're very glad that Changi recognises our services. We were lucky that when Changi renewed the concessions we bid and won the tenders.

The first Aerotel landed in Singapore Changi Airport in October 2015, with subsequent openings in Abu Dhabi International Airport and London Heathrow Airport scheduled for 2016/17.

How do you differentiate your lounges from that of airlines?

A lot of people ask if we are competing with airlines. Our lounges started by taking care of people not taken care of by airlines, i.e. the remaining 85 per cent flying

on coach. But does it mean that a few per cent of this 85 per cent do not require this service just because they do not want to play double or triple the price of an economy class ticket? However, a lot of airports ignore this 85 per cent.

Airlines do not want to operate lounges. For example, Singapore Airlines does not operate their lounges, they outsource it; likewise for Cathay Pacific. A lot of premium airlines do not want to touch the lounge (area) because it's not their forte.

We have been here for the last 17 years, and in the last 10 years airlines started recognising us, so we have been managing airline lounges for Singapore Airlines, Cathay Pacific, Lufthansa, Thai Airways, United Airlines, etc. We take care of the HR, F&B, cleaning, everything.

Except for the front desk where (airlines) have their own people, the rest is taken care of by us.

10 NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT SONG HOI-SEE

■ **Who's in your family?** My wife Linda and I have a daughter and son.

■ **What do you do for fun?** I enjoy reading and travelling where I can learn more about the world. Golf is my favourite sport.

■ **Your ideal vacation?** Driving around Spain and spending quality time with family and friends. The weather in summer and food there are great and the locals are very friendly.

■ **How do you book your own leisure trips?** Mostly online or through agents.

■ **What are you reading right now?** *The Everything Store: Jeff Bezos and the Age of Amazon* by Brad Stone. I enjoy reading the biographies of successful business leaders and politicians, as these can bring some inspirational ideas into my life and business.

■ **How do you stay healthy?** Be compassionate, empathetic, stay happy and keep smiling at all times. Obviously, be careful of food intake too.

■ **Favourite food?** I like Cantonese cuisine, especially steamed food, which is why I also invest in The Terrace and Flight Club restaurants to share healthy dining concepts with travellers on the go.

■ **A bad habit you cannot kick?** I love keeping myself busy and packing a tight schedule from morning till evening, even during business trips. I guess this is my fear of missing out phobia!

■ **Your pet peeve, something that never fails to annoy you?** Nothing I can think of.

■ **Most people don't know that you...** were cheeky and would get friends into trouble with my antics during my younger days. I can also be a good party-goer when I have a group of companions.

What's your expansion plans for Premium Lounges?

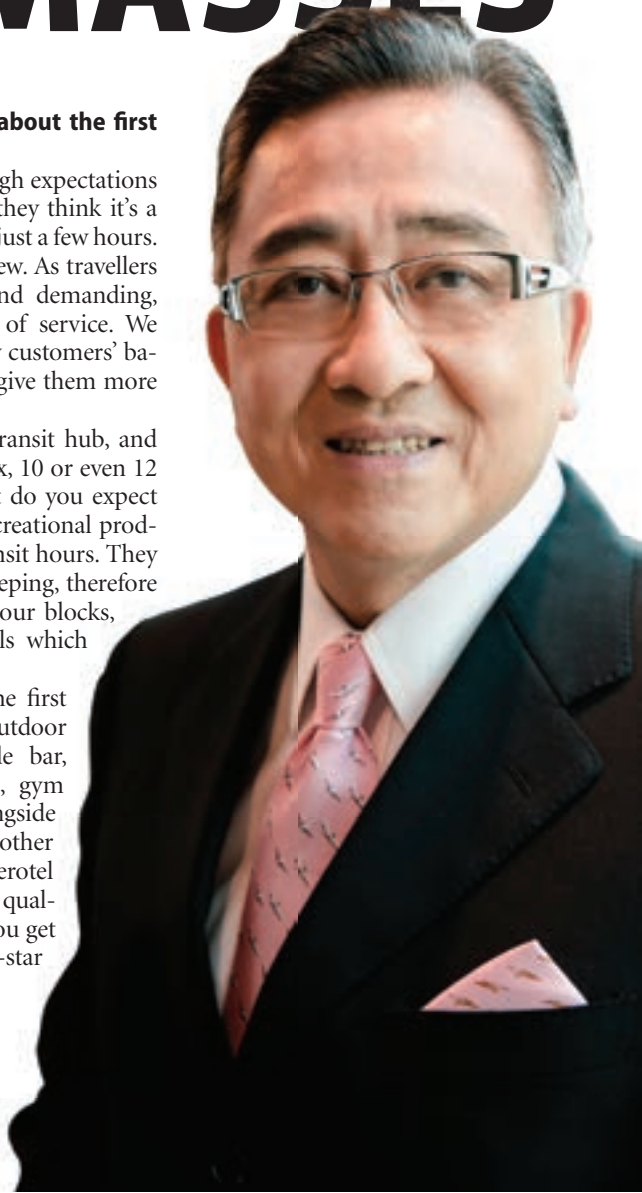
The latest ones opened in Singapore, Phnom Penh and Salalah – which is the second one we're opening in Oman after Muscat – with Siem Reap and Brisbane expected to open in the next few months. We will open in Taiwan Taoyuan and Rio de Janeiro by April before the Olympics.

Our plan by 2018 is to launch 200 outlets and we have allocated over US\$100 million for our (overall) expansion, with US\$56 million budgeted for Premium Lounges, up from US\$40 million.

Who do you think will be interested in your meet-and-greet services Allways?

A lot (of people). For example, when corporations have an important guest arriving, we can meet them at the gate and bring them out to you. Or imagine an old mother coming to Hong Kong or Singapore while you are travelling overseas and you are worried if she can go through the airport on her own, contact us. Others like lovers can use our service as a surprise.

This service is available at Toronto Pearson International Airport and New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport, as well as Singapore, Macau, Kuala Lumpur, Muscat and London Heathrow.



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HOTELS



TRU BY HILTON, US
Hilton Worldwide's 13th brand, Tru, is a mid-scale, lifestyle hotel brand. The first Tru will open in the US by end-2016, with a total of 120 hotels already signed. Concept features include shared-space lobbies, live social media feed walls at the front desk and a DIY breakfast station while rooms boast platform beds, 55-inch TVs, complimentary Wi-Fi and access by digital keys.



NEQTA HOTELS, CHINA
The first property of FRHI Hotels & Resorts' latest brand will debut at Shanghai's Xuhui district, close to the World Expo site, with a second hotel expected to soon open in Nan-jing. Targeting the upper-midscale Chinese market, Neqta-branded hotels will have room sizes varying between 28m² and 32m² and feature modern amenities, meeting facilities and multifunctional public spaces.



AMARI GALLE SRI LANKA
The upmarket property, set to open in late-2016, will mark the introduction of the Amari brand in Sri Lanka. Located on a beachfront approximately a 90-minute drive from Colombo, facilities at the 172-key property includes a multi-tiered pool deck with direct beach access, Amari's signature Breeze Spa, two restaurants, banquet facilities and a fitness centre.



DORSETT PUTRAJAYA, MALAYSIA
The 218-key property located at Precinct 3 in Putrajaya has soft launched this month with 43 rooms first available, while the remaining rooms are set to open progressively until full operation in early-May. For meeting spaces, its ballroom seats up to 300 pax while smaller groups can fit into its five function rooms. Other amenities include the city's first rooftop infinity pool and rooftop gym.

ACTIVITIES



SHANGHAI DISNEY RESORT TO WELCOME GUESTS IN JUNE

Shanghai Disney Resort is set to open its doors to guests come June 16. Sited in the Pudong District of Shanghai, this opening will mark Disney's first destination resort in mainland China.
On opening day, Shanghai Disney Resort will feature six themed lands, namely Adventure Isle, Gardens of Imagination, Mickey Avenue, Tomorrowland, Treasure Cove and Fantasyland, all centred around the Enchanted Storybook Castle, which is poised to be the largest and tallest castle of all Disney theme parks.
Outside the theme park, guests can also shop and dine at Disneytown, located adjacent to the entrance, or take a leisurely stroll at the 40-hectare Wishing Star Park.
Accommodation is also available at the Shanghai Disneyland Hotel and Toy Story Hotel, both located nearby.

TRANSPORTATION



FIRST PLAZA PREMIUM AIRPORT LOUNGE IN CAMBODIA OPENS

Phnom Penh International Airport is now home to Cambodia's first Plaza Premium Lounge. The new lounge measures over 1,393m², holds close to 300 seats and is located on the Mezzanine floor of the International Departures level.
The contemporary airport lounge also houses a 10-seater private VIP room with three shower rooms attached, a wellness spa, as well as a variety of F&B options including a bar. Complimentary Wi-Fi, electrical outlets for tablets, laptops and mobile phones are available too.
An option for pre-booking of the lounge for two- or five-hour packages (US\$35-US\$50) can be made on its website. Plaza Premium Lounge will also be opening an outlet at Siem Reap International Airport this year.

UNITED AIRLINES FLIES DIRECT BETWEEN SINGAPORE, SAN FRANCISCO

United Airlines (UA) will launch daily direct flights from Singapore to San Francisco in June. The inaugural flight will take off on June 1 from San Francisco International Airport and the return flight will depart from Singapore Changi Airport on June 3.
Utilising a 252-seat Boeing 787-900 Dreamliner with a two-class configuration, flights leave Singapore at 08.45 and land in San Francisco at 09.15. Return flights will depart from San Francisco at 23.25 and arrive in Singapore at 06.45.
Flight times now total to 16 hours and 20 minutes westbound, and 15 hours and 30 minutes eastbound, roughly four hours less travel time required compared with UA's existing service with a transfer at Japan's Narita Airport. Following the launch, UA will cease its service between Singapore and Tokyo from June 2.

FLY FROM THAILAND TO GERMANY FOR UNDER US\$300

Low-cost direct flights from Bangkok and Phuket to Cologne were made available by Eurowings since December 2015, with the lowest ticket prices starting from below 10,000 baht (US\$279), the cheapest fare to any part of Europe from Thailand to date. Thailand is the only Asian destination that Eurowings flies internationally.
The airline is operating the routes using two 310-seat Airbus A330-200s with two scheduled flights per week each from Don Mueang International Airport and Phuket International Airport.



TECHNOLOGY

SLH UNVEILS REDESIGNED MOBILE APP

In response to the surge in its mobile site visits and mobile reservations in 2015, Small Luxury Hotels of the World (SLH) has released a redesigned smartphone app.
Currently available on the Apple App Store, and on Android devices come March 2016, key features of the new app include the ability to search over 520 hotels by name, destination, proximity or experience using Google maps.
Detailed information about each hotel, accompanied by photo galleries, is also available. As well, the app features an instant booking button, a button to call a local SLH reservations agent, as well as email and social media sharing functions.

MARRIOTT DISTRIBUTES INVENTORY ON RAKUTEN TRAVEL

Marriott International has signed an agreement with Rakuten Travel to distribute all its hotel inventory on the online travel platform.
The agreement, to commence sometime in 1Q2016, will enable Japanese travellers to check room inventory and rates, as well as make bookings at more than 4,300 Marriott hotels worldwide via any digital device.

CORRECTION
We made a spelling mistake in our January issue of TTG Asia, missing out an alphabet in our naming of Shenzhen Marriott Hotel Nanshan. We sincerely apologise for the error.

Guide Serviced residences



OUTLOOK 2016



Lisa Rauch,
director of sales,
Asia-Pacific, Oak-
wood Worldwide

Demand For serviced apartments, demand is driven not merely by economic growth but globalisation and the need for talent, which lead to the movement of people. For example, over the past decade demand for serviced apartments across Asia-Pacific grew 25 per cent despite the global economic recession.

Therefore, in spite of projected lower economic growth for Asia-Pacific, demand will continue to grow; however, the lower economic growth will alter patterns.

Assignees will be looking for increased flexibility and value in their accommodation solutions as organisations issue more short-term contracts when looking to plug skills gaps and contain costs. PWC's *Talent and Mobility: 2020 and Beyond* report shows 20 per cent of assignments now last less than 12 months, compared with 10 per cent in 2002. The options for short- and long-term stays make serviced apartments a desirable model for assignments of varying durations.

We foresee that the strongest growth in this region will be seen in China, India and Indonesia.

India, as an example, is experiencing the highest growth rate in business travel in the entire world. This is further supported by GBTA's *Annual Global Report and Forecast*, which shows India had US\$26 billion in business travel spending in 2014, which will grow by a compound annual growth rate of 11.5 per cent through 2019 to US\$45 billion.

Product What will be most in demand is expertise: an accommodation solutions partner that has access to a broad portfolio of accommodations, both for short- and long-term stays and that has the experience to deliver cost-effective solutions with a 24/7 team on the ground.

So over the past 12 months Oakwood

Worldwide has, for example, introduced a hotel desk and partnered Abacus Hotel and Abacus RoomDeal to access real-time room availability, rates and instant booking confirmation. Alongside that, we continued to grow our network of supply chain partners in Asia-Pacific, so that we can provide additional accommodation solutions in Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities where demand for serviced apartments often outstrip supply.

This increase provides access to more than 400 properties across Asia-Pacific, 28 of which are Oakwood Worldwide-branded properties in key destinations throughout the region, offering 3,800 units in total.

Expansion Oakwood Worldwide plans to double its branded portfolio of 28 properties over the next three to five years. We have a pipeline of 14 properties in Asia-Pacific currently. And with our joint venture with Mapletree, we expect additional acquisition and development deals.



Choe Peng Sum,
CEO, Frasers
Hospitality

Demand Despite lower economic growth projections, we expect a sustained demand for serviced apartments as they offer a good value proposition for all types of travellers, whether for business or leisure, individuals, couples or families. The sector has proven to be resilient and it is against a backdrop of austerity measures when the advantages of serviced apartments really come to the fore.

Curbs on extravagant spending have actually created demand, which offer the win-win situation of flexible leases and are equipped with everything necessary to help residents and their families settle in.

We expect Australia to still do very well, given that the lower Australian dollar will attract more tourists to visit the country.

While China's GDP is slowing down, the absolute growth of six to seven per cent is still significant. Besides, the China story lies with increasing domestic demand, aspirations and rising consumption.

In South-east Asia, the 10 countries continued to receive growing numbers of Chinese travellers in 2015, but the big story was the growth in intra-ASEAN travel. ASEAN collectively is home to more than 600 million people with significant combined GDP. Countries with stronger economies at the moment, including Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines, registered strong economic growth last year, and their growing middle classes were using their rising disposable income for domestic or regional travel at previously unseen levels. Frontier markets including Myanmar, Laos and especially Cambodia continue to join the regional tourism landscape with the opening of new roads, airports and hotels. Furthermore, the launch of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), removing barriers on the flow of people, goods and capital across the block, will boost business and demand.

Product The future product has to be more than just a luxury apartment. Millennials and e-generation travellers are expected to grow in force. They don't just look for the traditional hardware (rooms, furniture, fit-outs, etc) or the traditional software (services, butler, concierge, etc), but value e-check-ins, e-concierge and unique lifestyle experiences. Herein lies the opportunity to bridge the gap between hotels and serviced apartments and provide unconventional lifestyle offerings such as our Spin & Play integrated laundrette games rooms and personalised cycling tours with the general manager at Capri by Fraser, Changi City Singapore.

Expansion 2015 was exciting for us. We grew across several key areas, adding more than 3,500 units to our global portfolio, which stands at 136 properties (including pipeline) with over 22,000 units worldwide. Highlights last year included new market entries (Capri by Fraser in Barce-

lona and Frankfurt) and the acquisition of the Malmaison Hotel du Vin group, which doubled our Europe portfolio.

2016 will continue to be a year of expansion, particularly in China – both in emerging and key cities where we already have a presence – and Europe, particularly in high-growth cities with strong foreign direct investment (FDI) potential. We are capitalising on a window of opportunity now as prices would naturally increase as the economy picks up.

Our objective is to expand our global presence, be it through owned or managed properties. Our goal is 30,000 units by 2019.



Lee Chee Koon,
CEO, The Ascott

Demand We foresee a strong demand for quality serviced residences in key global gateway cities and regional cities in Singapore, China, Australia, capital cities in South-east Asia, Seoul, Tokyo, Paris, London and key cities in Germany and the US.

Domestic demand for serviced residences is rising in China. This is driven by the fast growing number of corporate and leisure travellers, and rapid urbanisation of Chinese cities. We are accelerating our expansion across Tier 1 and 2 cities, increase our business development in the growth cities of central and west China, and reach out to a wider group of travellers by creating O2O (offline-to-online and online-to-offline) experience for our guests through various partnerships.

Last year, we invested in Tujia.com, China's largest and fastest-growing online apartment sharing platform, allowing us to expand our reach to more customers online. Since August last year, we have also listed our China properties on Alibaba's online travel service platform, Alitrip, to tap on the more than 100 million Chinese travellers it serves.

South-east Asia is also one of the most vibrant markets, with a young population driving domestic demand, growing export figures and various economic policies in place to attract foreign capital. The AEC will boost its competitiveness and connectivity, increase business activities and FDIs, driving demand for serviced residences.

Japan has been an equally attractive destination for corporate and leisure travellers given the weak Japanese yen, eased visa requirements and the proliferation of LCCs, coupled with the implementation of pro-business policies and designation of special economic zones.

Product As travellers are increasingly tech-savvy and connected, the customer experience must evolve with their lifestyles. Last year, we forged an exclusive partnership with Samsung Asia to develop smart solutions customised for serviced residences. Guests will be able to use their mobile or wearable devices to control devices such as washing machines, refrigerators and smart TVs. We aim to testbed the technologies at selected Ascott serviced residences by the first half of this year, with plans to roll out to our properties globally in phases.

Serviced residence operators believe they are a more resilient accommodation model that can withstand shocks, reports **Raini Hamdi**

Ascott will continue to focus on providing personalised services. We launched the Ascott Lifestyle programme last year, offering guests bespoke cultural, gastronomic, local and wellness experiences. To help guests settle in a new city, there are local language classes and guided tours of the local market. Guests can stay fit by exploring the area with our customised jogging routes. There are also cultural programmes such as batik making workshops and personal cooking sessions in their apartment.

Expansion We added 37 properties (over 6,500 units) last year, reaching our global target of 40,000 units ahead of schedule. We are well on track to reach 80,000 units by 2020. We will continue to grow through management contracts, investments, strategic alliances and franchises.

Last year, we opened in cities such as Hong Kong, Macau, Shanghai and Wuxi in China; Surabaya in Indonesia; Tokyo in Japan, Busan in South Korea; Cyberjaya and Nusajaya in Malaysia; Si Racha in Thailand; Hai Phong in Vietnam and Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. This year, we plan to open over 20 properties with more than 4,500 units, the bulk of which is in China, and the rest in South Korea, Indonesia, India, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

Ascott's US\$600 million serviced residence global fund with Qatar Investment Authority, which will focus on Asia-Pacific and Europe initially, will provide Ascott with the financial boost for acquisitions. In November 2015, tapping on this fund, we acquired two prime properties in Paris and Tokyo.



Marc Hediger,
CEO, Lanson Place
Hospitality Management

Demand Despite the regional economic growth softening during the past six months, there remains a strong demand for serviced apartments in certain individual cities, particularly within the Tier 1.5 and 2 cities in China (Shenzhen, Chengdu, Dalian, Hangzhou, Suzhou) and for some key South-east Asian destinations such as Singapore, Bangkok, Jakarta and Manila.

But within these markets trends are changing. Tenancies are being shortened, with middle management being posted on more temporary assignments and MNCs relocating their administrative offices to cheaper decentralised CBD locations. Yet certain cities also suffer badly from congestion, so high net worth individuals seek a mid-week solution for a second home within their own domestic markets, where serviced apartments have been the ideal choice to cater for this, predominantly in mixed-use developments providing for every requirement.

We have also seen a shift in the resident demographics throughout all the properties in Asia-Pacific. With advanced technology, the millennials are signing shorter-term tenancies, wanting to do business faster and more efficiently. We see baby boomers and gen-X residing without families or younger families seeking smaller and more versatile units.

More significantly, residents who have

been educated abroad are coming back to their own countries and relocating from within Asia-Pacific. In China, corporates are expanding their companies to Tier 2 and 3 cities yet still seek a comfortable but affordable lifestyle for their employees.

Product We've introduced a third business model, Serviced Suites by Lanson Place, to address the changing trends and needs of corporates relocating. This lean, efficient and contemporary serviced apartment style not only provides a higher ROI for developers but most importantly offers residents a 'niche lifestyle', no matter the location or purpose of their residency.

Smaller units are creatively designed with unique combined open living and working spaces; public areas are the extension of their homes offering seamless connectivity throughout the entire development; 'grab n go' F&B concepts and resident activities all promote well-being and more energising activities.

Expansion This year, the majority of our pipeline is for the upscale Serviced Suites by Lanson Place, within either secondary locations in key gateway cities or Tier 1.5 cities within China and South-east Asia. There will be a further two properties opening this year in Shanghai, alongside another three new properties within Asia-Pacific in the pipeline.

With Japan and Australia favoured not only due to currency investment, but also Chinese travellers where Lanson Place hold a strong reputable market position, there are a lot of opportunities now. Additionally, markets such as Jakarta, Bangkok, Singapore and Hong Kong remain a strategic focus for Lanson Place to enter. Here, we also see opportunity to expand our boutique hotel model.

With predictions of a more cautious 2016 ahead for speculative investments and distressed properties, developers are seeking alternative solutions to hold on to their real estate assets until the time is right for them to sell, considering this slowdown could be longer than anticipated. Investment funds and arms also seem to be able to capitalise in these circumstances. Introducing a serviced apartment component to developments within this environment will help establish marketing the property as an exciting destination while in the meantime, taking in some return until the economy strengthens.



Bernold Schroeder,
CEO, Pan Pacific
Hotels Group

Demand Softer demand is expected in South-east Asia, especially in developed cities like Singapore, due to an increase in supply and a decline in corporate travel as companies cut back on relocation and accommodation expenses. We also cannot underestimate alternative accommodation providers such as Airbnb, which are competing for a slice of the long-stay pie.

Demand in markets such as China and India is expected to be more stable due to slightly higher barriers to entry and a lack of alternative accommodation. In China, Pan Pacific enjoys a strong brand presence and familiarity with our properties in the

key cities of Tianjin, Xiamen and Ningbo, and we are expecting moderately strong growth in these cities. The co-existence of a hotel in the vicinity of the serviced suites allows us to offer additional services and comforts which allows us to sustain a longer stay at the latter.

Product The compact apartment, such as the one-bedroom, will be most in demand. But while the units may have shrunk in size, traveller expectations have not; they continue to look for serviced suites with facilities such as a well-equipped gym and other conveniences. More corporate travellers and businessmen are travelling without their family while on work assignments (which are also getting shorter due to tighter budgets). Socio-economic trends such as the rise in dual-income families where both spouses are working are contributing factors to more travellers embarking on work trips without their family.

Expansion The hybrid model of hotels and serviced apartments we are operating under our Pan Pacific brand in China has given us a good niche and the opportunity to convert hotel to long-term stays at our serviced suites, which helps us grow organically.

At the same time, we are constantly on the look-out for new opportunities and projects. In 2015, we renovated Parkroyal Yangon and converted a number of hotel rooms into serviced suites to meet demand. Also in the same year, we announced the planned opening of Pan Pacific Serviced Suites Puteri Harbour in Johor, Malaysia, which will be ready by 2018. Located in Iskandar, it will be the first serviced suites we are operating under the Pan Pacific brand in Malaysia, and is strategically close to medical and healthcare services, educational institutions and entertainment facilities.



Arthur Kiong, CEO,
Far East Hospitality,
Singapore

Demand We expect occupancy and rate to be flat. This year, Singapore is expecting modest economic growth of between two and 2.5 per cent. As a developed economy, this is the new normal. The issue we're looking at is really new supply. Direct competition from new entrants as well as indirect competition from Airbnb will also affect supply.

Demand for serviced apartments has grown in the last 10 years, and has reached a matured level. In Singapore, serviced apartment occupancy has exceeded that of hotels from 2010 to 2012. This trend can also be seen in Hong Kong, Sydney and London.

But even with the projected lower economic growth for the region, serviced apartments continue to appeal to the savvy corporate and leisure travellers, who see the value in serviced apartments as a viable alternative to hotels or renting private apartments.

Serviced apartments demand is closely linked to industries that rely on foreign talent who require mid to long-term accommodation due to the nature of the projects they are involved in. These industries include financial services, engineering and IT-related projects.

Product With a moderate business outlook, companies will be more likely to curb spending in relocation and employee mobility, increasing the trend of shorter home search durations as opposed to relocating an entire family. We thus foresee the demand for smaller-sized apartments such as studios and one-bedrooms to grow.

Within the serviced apartment segment, Far East Hospitality will continue to leverage our advantage in prime locations, for example, in Orchard district with Orchard Parksuites, Orchard Scotts Residence, as well as in Clarke Quay and Robertson Quay with the Village brand. This market segment is complementary to our hotels.

Expansion We recently announced that Oasia would be expanding locally and abroad. Three strategically located hotels and serviced residences will open in Singapore and Malaysia next year, adding over 700 rooms to our growing portfolio.

The expansion of Oasia comes at an opportune time as the region continues to mature and we believe the brand's clear focus on health and well-being will resonate with our business and leisure guests.

Specifically to the serviced residence offering, we will be opening the Oasia Residence, Singapore in 4Q2016. Located in the West Coast of Singapore, and within close proximity to the business parks and education institutions in the area, Oasia Residence, Singapore will be well-suited to capture the growing business traveller market and meet the rising demand for serviced residences in the west, where the current supply is relatively low.



Guide Serviced residences



**Peter Henley, CEO,
Onyx Hospitality
Group**

Demand Across our regional portfolio of 37 properties, 17 are either serviced residences or residential-style properties. We do not anticipate a softening in demand. On the contrary, we are seeing a noticeable shift from more corporate-heavy demand to an increasingly growing leisure clientele choosing to stay with us. Benefits like additional space, residence-like feel and enhanced in-room facilities appeal to guests, particularly families and couples travelling on holidays. And because many of our properties also offer the added flexibility of full hotel services, the draw becomes even stronger.

Product Our residential-style properties tend to perform well, and we are confident there will be growth in the year ahead. This is the reason why eight properties out of our 21-strong pipeline are either serviced residences or hotels with residential facilities. From our pipeline, China holds the strongest potential, both in primary and secondary cities. We also see strong investor interest in Malaysia and India.

Expansion Over the next three years, we have eight residential-style properties scheduled to open across the region. These include Amari Residences Pattaya, Shama Daqing Heilongjiang, Shama Pazhou Guangzhou this year; Amari

Residences GIFT City in Ahmedabad and Shama Caojiadu Shanghai in 2017; and Shama Medini in Johor Bahru, Shama Tianfu Chengdu and Shama Yangling Beijing in 2018.



**John M Flood,
president & CEO,
Archipelago International**

Demand This will definitely soften in the long-stay serviced apartments market due to the economic slowdown, and in particular, the slowdown in the oil and gas business.

However this slowdown was predicted by most people in the industry several years ago, so new projects been designed and fitted out with more of the short-stay market in mind. This market views serviced apartments as a great alternative to a standard hotel room. In most cases guests can get a room or unit the same size as a large hotel suite but for the price of a hotel room. With several bedrooms sometimes included in units, many families or groups of friends prefer to share an apartment rather than several hotel rooms so they have a larger common space that they can gather in.

We expect a five to 10 per cent growth in business this year mostly due to the demand from short stays. The Middle East market continues to grow especially during the hot season when many want to get away to somewhere cooler and less humid.

Product Smaller one-bedroom units with a living room (a typical hotel suite) will continue to be most in demand due to the extra space it gives guests.

Expansion On average in Indonesia we open about one new hotel every two weeks. About 10 per cent of these hotels are geared towards the serviced apartment market especially in areas where expats need them for long stays, such as Jakarta or Balikpapan, or places in demand by families such as Bali.

Many condotels are larger units as this helps the real estate sales to individual investors. Therefore many of these then become more serviced apartment type developments. Due to the high bank interest rates in Indonesia, condotels are a much cheaper way of financing a development and moving real estate – something that's obviously attractive to the bigger developers in the region.

We will continue to open about one hotel every two weeks for the next three years and after that we will see a slowdown as the market in many areas becomes saturated and we reach a level of hotels similar to Malaysia or the Philippines. – **Mimi Hudoyo**



**Kem Siew, vice
president sales &
marketing, Swiss-
Garden International**

Demand 2015 was a challenging year. We experienced a 20

per cent year-on-year decline in demand compared with 2014. We expect demand in 2016 to be similar with 2015, with bookings coming mainly from Asia.

The strongest markets will be corporate clientele from Asia and leisure, family clientele from Singapore, Indonesia, the Middle East and India. Weak demand can be expected from the oil and gas sectors as well as corporate clientele from medium and longhaul destinations.

Product Two-bedroom serviced apartments for leisure clients and one-bedroom or studio apartments for corporate clients will be in most in demand. Leisure tourists will prefer serviced apartments located within the city centre and close to shopping malls. Corporate clients will look for serviced apartments which are close to their workplace.

Expansion Swiss-Garden International Hotels, Resorts & Inns managed three new serviced apartments which opened in 2015. Swiss-Garden Resort Residences Kuantan (179 units) and Swiss-Garden Hotel & Residences Malacca (790 units) both opened in January 2015. D'Majestic by Swiss-Garden, Kuala Lumpur opened on July 1 with 188 units.

We opened the 205-key Swiss Inn Johor Bahru on January 16. We are looking at opening a serviced residence in Cameron Highlands and another at Genting Highlands within the next five years. – **S Puvaneswary**

TRIED & TESTED

klapsons The River Residences Bangkok

Dramatic views and warm service take centre stage at this riverfront residence, finds **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

LOCATION klapsons sits on prime riverfront property, rising from the banks of the Chao Phraya River just next to the Taksin Bridge and calling such hospitality icons as The Peninsula, Shangri-La and Mandarin Oriental its neighbours. A stone's throw away is the upcoming Icon Siam, a mega mixed development project set to roll into town come 2017.

ROOMS The 69 residences are located between the 23rd and 31st floors of The River Condominium's North Tower. My one-bedroom Premier Deluxe, which measures an expansive 65m², offers ceiling-to-floor bay windows and a balcony which open into panoramic vistas of the bustling river. The views were even more arresting at night, and I could make out glided Thai temples against a skyscraper-dotted skyline. All rooms afford river views, but certain residences – like the 232m² klapsons Suite (pictured) which I

had a peek at – take the views up a notch.

Italian designer William Sawaya kitted out the open-plan residence with neon-coloured furnishings (think food tray and TV console), which add a contemporary, whimsical edge to the interiors. The full-fledged kitchen comes with an oven, sink, chopping board, cutlery and plates, etc, while a washing machine concealed in the build-in cabinet round up the amenities.

FACILITIES klapsons has five swimming pools designed around lush greenery, offering pockets of privacy for guests and condominium residents alike. Views at the river-facing outdoor infinity pool in the late afternoon are particularly arresting, whereas an indoor lap pool on the 23rd floor ensures dips on rainy days. There is also a gym, children's playground, free Wi-Fi and parking spaces available.

Scheduled service on a private ferry link guests to the Saphan Taksin BTS station on the opposite bank, where access to town or Asiatique The Riverfront mall further downstream is just minutes away.



F&B klapsons does not operate any F&B outlet, although a café on the fifth floor in The River condominium provides coffee and light bites. The community mall next door on Charoen Nakhon Road has several dining options too.

What it lacks in the food department however, klapsons makes up with its discounted dining partnerships with Millennium Hilton and The Peninsula for guests.

SERVICE Eager and warm attention that was doled out to my family and my eight-month-old baby in equal measures. As

my stay coincided with my birthday, the thoughtful concierge, Thanawit, even led the staff to surprise me with a cake.

VERDICT A welcoming serviced residence that deserves all the claps.

No. of rooms 69

Rates From 88,000 baht (US\$2,427) for a minimum one-month/30-day stay

Contact details

Tel: (66) 2-803-8100

Email: reservations_theriverbkk@klapsons.com

Website: www.bangkok.klapsons.com

Destination **China**

Better known as a historical destination, Xi'an has woken up to the potential of luxury travel thanks to a fresh crop of posh hotels in the city, finds **Karen Yue**

A STORIED CITY GOES LUXE

Destination in numbers

10.3 million

The total number of international and domestic visitors to Xi'an in 2014, up 27 per cent from 2013

121

The number of star-rated hotels in the city as of end-March 2013 – including nine five-star, 27 four-star, 76 three-star and nine two-star – providing a total of 23,199 guestrooms

2,700

The number of international branded hotel rooms under construction from 2013 to 2016

More direct and full-service international air links are needed to make Xi'an a more attractive destination for high-end travellers

The growing presence of international luxury hotels has added a glamorous tone to Xi'an in China's Shaanxi Province, which for decades has been drawing history buffs since the 1974 discovery of the terracotta army that forms part of the mausoleum of China's first emperor.

Li Shuyan, MICE and general manager of Xi'an-based China Travel Service Head Office Northwest, has seen the changing face of Xi'an in the last 15 years. "Back then, foreign tourists who came to see the terracotta army stayed in the city centre where most hotels were. They had to wake up very early to make the long journey to Lintong where the terracotta pits are. Their main concerns were a clean bed and food that would not give them diarrhoea," he recalled.

"But ever since international hotel chains like Shangri-La, AccorHotels and Starwood entered the market with their five-star products, the demographic of travellers has changed. Xi'an not only received more foreign tourists, it also welcomed wealthier ones."

Today, numerous prominent hotels dot the city's map, some in the commercial centre and others close to key tourist landmarks.

Agreeing that Xi'an is "increasingly on the radar of the luxury traveller", Hajar Ali, founder of luxury travel company Urbane Nomads, said: "There is a correlation between the opening of luxury hotels and a destination becoming popular with the well-heeled. Xi'an has its history going for it but with the opening of new luxury

hotels, it has become an easier choice for high-end travellers."

Hajar observed that longhaul travellers tended to go for longer stays and relax at luxury hotels and resorts in Xi'an at the end of a lengthy trip to "pace the itinerary", while shorthaul visitors from Hong Kong and Singapore favoured Xi'an as a stopover en route to Tibet.

Tourism players noted that the city's luxury market is dominated by corporate travellers and special interest leisure groups.

Steven Wang, director of sales and marketing at The Westin Xian revealed that 85 per cent of the hotel's guests are corporate and the rest leisure.

"Business travellers and meeting delegates have bigger budgets," said Wang, adding that individual travellers and small-size groups on tailored programmes that focus on history, food or nature made up the majority of his leisure clientele.

Li opined that Xi'an's booming industries, fuelled by Chinese president Xi Jinping's commitment to developing cities on the Silk Road trading belt for international commerce, is luring wealthy businessmen to the destination. These travellers would extend their trips for pleasure, requesting for special activities such as a session with a local archaeology professor who can explain the history behind historical finds.

Diethelm Travel (China) is hence rolling out "extraordinary programmes" to differentiate itself from the market, said the company's general manager, Julia Shi, general manager of Diethelm Travel (China).

The DMC can take visitors into ar-

reas that are off-limits to regular tourists, such as the reconstruction site within the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor, where archaeologists fix broken terracotta statues, as well as special vaults in the Shaanxi History Museum and Xi'an Museum. They also can offer unique activities such as archaeological digging experience at The Yangling Mausoleum of the Han Dynasty or a visit to Fei Yuan Private Museum, which carries a large collection of porcelain and rubbings of stone tablets done by famous Chinese calligraphers.

However, Jean Philippe Jacopin, general manager of Shangri-La Hotel, Xian cautioned against over-reliance on Xi'an's heritage to lure travellers. He said: "These tourists usually stay for only a few days and they rarely return. Xi'an needs to cooperate with other (attractions) to improve product diversity which will then entice travellers to book longer stays (and return)."

Jacopin suggested that more eco tours, spa experiences and golf games should be promoted to enhance travellers' experience, and urged trade players to join forces in destination marketing.

The good news is that fresh products are emerging in and around Xi'an. One of Singapore's leading outbound agencies, Dynasty Travel, has observed stronger interest in Xi'an over the last five years due to new attractions such as the Tang Dynasty Music and Dance Show at the Shaanxi Song and Dance Theatre, and natural wonders like Hukou Waterfall and Mount Hua.

The sleepy district of Lintong, about 50

minutes by car from Xi'an, is also stirring with recent tourism developments including the year-old Angsana Xi'an Lintong and its adjoining Angsana Hot Spring Xi'an Lintong, art museums, a park and an outlet mall for big fashion labels.

Jerry Mong, Angsana Xi'an Lintong's general manager, believes that his property is key to advancing Xi'an's luxury appeal.

He said: "We are changing travellers' mindsets by reminding them that Lintong used to be a favourite retreat of Tang Emperor Xuanzong and his consort Yang Gui Fei. They used to luxuriate in Lintong's hot springs, and we are offering travellers the chance to do the same at our hotel."

Angsana Xi'an Lintong has been attracting ladies of leisure from other Chinese cities and Taiwan, who would come as a group of friends for spa retreats.

Meanwhile, tourism players have agreed that air access improvement is top priority for Xi'an.

"Xi'an has fewer direct international flights compared with first-tier cities, which makes it less convenient for international travellers to visit," said Wang.

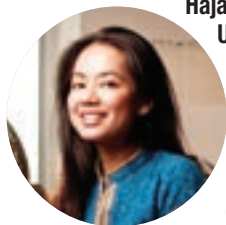
While Dynasty Travel has seen a two-fold increase in bookings to Xi'an from 2014 to 2015, thanks to new flights by Tigerair (Singapore-Xi'an, launched in May 2014) and Xiamen Air (Singapore-Hangzhou-Xi'an, launched in March 2015), its spokesperson Alicia Seah noted that they were for package tours.

"New LCC links have little impact on luxury demand. High-end travellers prefer flying by full-service carriers even if it requires a transit in another city," she said.

Destination China

Viewpoints

What can Xi'an do better to grow international arrivals?



Hajar Ali, founder, Urbane Nomads

The best way to raise a destination's profile is to court a luxury hotelier to open a property there. This has

worked wonders for various destinations – Bhutan comes to mind with the Como Group and Aman Resorts. Nihiwatu Resort on Indonesia's Sumba Island is another example of a luxury hotel that has raised the profile of a virtually unknown destination.



Jean Philippe Jacopin, general manager, Shangri-La Hotel, Xi'an

Xi'an should promote itself using modern technology, such as by applying information technology

to provide digital content to mobile users, upgrade the destination's main tourism website to improve user's experience, and allow search engine optimisation.

How to sell

DO Pomegranates are widely available in restaurants and fruit stalls in Xi'an during autumn. Try your hand at **plucking fresh pomegranates** from a local farm. Any reputable ground handler will be able to arrange a visit to a good pomegranate farm.

SEE Watch the tragic love story of Tang Dynasty's Emperor Xuanzong and his concubine Yang Guifei unfold in a spectacular live performance of song, dance and pyrotechnics. The **Song of Everlasting Sorrow** show at Huaqing Pool, a complex of hot springs at the foot of Mount Li, is performed by a massive troupe of talented dancers and stuntmen, all decked out in elaborate ancient garb. A haunting tune accompanies the show.

EAT Shaanxi cuisine is dominated by salty, sour and spicy flavours, borrowed from the intense cooking styles of Shanxi and Sichuan provinces.

In Lintong, tuck into enormous bowls of spicy noodles, served in hot soup or drenched in a chilled sauce, stir-fried meats and stewed tofu – also in fiery



From above: The *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* show, Guan Zhong Lao Wan

sauce – at **Guan Zhong Lao Wan**, a double-storey shophouse on Huichang Road.

STAY Opened in 2014, the **Sofitel Legend Peoples Grand Hotel Xian** from the French hotel chain's ultra-luxe Legend Collection occupies a grand building that opened in 1953 as a State Guesthouse.

All 71 rooms and suites feature lofty ceilings and Hermès toiletries. Additional facilities include butler service, an extensive garden setting, a private health club, a swimming pool and spa, an authentic Italian restaurant, an exclusive top-floor Louis XIII Bar and a private museum. The property is located a short walk to the Forest of Steles and the lively Muslim Quarters.

NEWS IN A MINUTE

1 Regent Place Xi'an

Regent Place Xi'an will debut in Xi'an by 2H2016. The 156-key property's interiors will feature ceramic art pieces depicting Xi'an's famed terracotta warriors as well as intricate metalwork recalling the elaborate regal headpieces worn in ancient times. The hotel also boasts four restaurants, a grand ballroom, five multifunctional spaces, a business centre, a gym, spa, swimming pool and sauna.

2 Angsana Hot Spring Xi'an Lintong

The new Angsana Hot Spring Xi'an Lintong, which sits next to Angsana Xi'an Lintong hotel, is a sprawling facility at the foot of Mount Li. It features an indoor pool and 25 outdoor pools in serene surroundings, some of which offer waters infused with herbs like lavender and eucalyptus.

Spa visitors who desire more privacy can hire a cabana which comes with a spacious living room and a landscaped outdoor hot spring pool.

A highlight at the indoor complex

is the Spring Forest By Angsana, a hydrothermal facility with 14 features including an aromatic steam chamber with lemongrass scent, a tropical rain shower, hot and cold plunge pools and a brine cavern.

3 Sean Outlets

Sean Outlets, an outlet shopping strip in Lintong district of Xi'an, China, opened 40 per cent of its facilities on November 7, 2015, with more to come in 2016.

Its branded tenants include international brands like Givenchy, Giorgio Armani, Gap and Nike as well as cafes and restaurants. When completed, Sean Outlets will offer more than 230 shops.

4 Jia Pingwa Culture and Arts Museum

Literary works by famed Chinese novelist and chairman of the Writers' Association of Shaanxi Province, Jia Pingwa, and memorabilia celebrating his life will be put on display at the new Jia Pingwa Culture and Arts Museum in Lintong district.

The first storey houses exhibits that tell Jia's life story and literary pursuits, while the second floor displays a collection of treasured pottery and art pieces.

5 Finnair

The first direct route between Xi'an and Europe was launched in 2013 by Finnair, which offers thrice-weekly via Helsinki to many major cities in Europe on the A330-300 aircraft.

This summer seasonal flight will be available from March 30 to October 28, 2016.

TRIED & TESTED

Angsana Xi'an Lintong

Built to resemble a Tang Dynasty court, the hotel offers guests an equally regal treatment, discovers **Karen Yue**

LOCATION Located in Lintong district, home of the famed Terracotta Army and the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor, the luxury hotel is 40 minutes by car from Xi'an city centre and the airport.

While its location places it at a disadvantage among business travellers seeking quick access to the city's business district, Angsana Xi'an Lintong's close proximity to the historical sites and serene surroundings will surely score points with leisure travellers who like to be removed from the downtown buzz.

ROOMS The 400 guestrooms promise views of the hotel's sprawling gardens, hot springs, or Mount Li (known among the locals as Li Shan). Room sizes are generous, starting from 60m².

My Royal Room – the lead-in category – looked out to Mount Li and the hotel's courtyard in the foreground. It is as comfortably and luxuriously furnished as one can expect of a five-star international hotel, especially one that carries the Angsana brand.

But it was the circular bath that stole my heart. It would be filled with warm water and plump red rose petals every evening when I returned from a long day of meetings, seductively beckoning me to

slide in and unwind. That I did on both nights of my stay, and the bath was a welcome prelude to a restful sleep.

F&B Hotel guests are spoiled for choice, as there are three restaurants and two bars, as well as another restaurant – Waterlight – in the hot springs annex. I had the opportunity to dine at all three restaurants.

Angsana Cafe is the hotel's all-day dining outlet, a spacious venue with a lively marketplace vibe. I found the breakfast spread extensive and it carried my comfort foods: congee and soya milk with fried dough sticks, as well as yogurt, toasts and cheese.

The Silk Road-themed restaurant, Silk Route, showcases dishes from countries along the ancient trade route. For dinner, I had a simple salad with vinaigrette, an array of Mongolian-inspired barbecued meats and seafood on metal skewers stuck into a pineapple, and a curry rice dish.

But the restaurant that will truly impress guests is the Mandarin Palace, which is set among lush greenery and comes with 18 private dining rooms, some of which are spacious villas furnished with oversized sofas and local art pieces. The largest private dining villa can seat 20 pax.

My dinner here featured some of the most luxurious ingredients favoured by





MY WAY

How do you usually spend your weekend in Xi'an?

When time permits, I will usually spend time at the Bird Market located near Sofitel Xian on Renmin Square. The market was established during the Qing Dynasty and today it still maintains the ancient tradition of opening on Thursdays and Sundays.

What is the one place in Xi'an that you think deserves more attention?

I feel Ma Wei Yi Cultural Village lacks the attention when tourists visit the city. The village was where Yang Yuhuan, a renowned beauty of the Tang Dynasty and the wife of the Emperor Ming, was prosecuted, and today it is a well-known cultural market in Shaanxi. The ancient architecture and heritage as well as its authentic food and traditional art scene can also be found within the village.

Where in Xi'an should one go for the best local food?

Chang'an City was laid out like a chess-board in the Tang Dynasty, divided into 109 blocks and 25 streets. The buildings were built during the Ming and Qing dynasties, featuring steel-grey bricks, purplish red-gold posts and window frames, delicate brick carvings and an ancient theatre with gates shaped like a moon.

Yong Xing Fang Block – one of the blocks situated in Shuncheng Lane within Zhongshan Gate – flourished under Xi'an's implementation of the imperial city reconstruction project. This part of the building block was transformed into a special food street where visitors can experience the charming food culture of Shaanxi.

The best way to see the hidden side of Xi'an is... on bicycles. There are many things you can see within the walls of the Ming Dynasty city in Xi'an. It's a place where the modern city meets the ancient civilisation, and where rich historical sites are hidden in the modern architecture.



Rudy Rodas
Area general manager, Sofitel Central China and general manager, Sofitel Xian on Renmin Square

When is the best time to visit Xi'an?
Any time of the year, really. But I prefer visiting the city during spring and summer where the city brings the best out of its culture, tradition and city life.

Chinese diners, such as abalone and sea cucumber, and they were all done and presented wonderfully.

FACILITIES For recreation, the hotel offers six karaoke rooms, seven mah-jong rooms, a Kids Club, a massive swimming pool, a gym, a yoga studio and the signature Angsana Spa where pampering treatments unique to the property are offered.

I luxuriated in Gui Fei's Secret, a treatment inspired by the beauty rituals of Tang Dynasty concubine Yang Guifei, one of ancient China's four greatest beauties. For 150 minutes, I had my body scrubbed and moisturised using a fragrant mix of peony, almond and black rice, a thorough head-to-toe massage and a hot soak in a mulberry bath.

The hotel also sits next to Angsana Hot Spring (see News in a minute on the previous page), making it the only international branded hotel in Lintong to boast its own hot springs.

A taichi master offers free hour-long lessons in the hotel's courtyard every morning.

SERVICE It was almost 03.00 when I arrived at the hotel. Starving and exhausted, I was grateful for the club sandwich and hot milk that lay waiting for me on the work desk, thanks to the attentive hotel staff who knew I would probably not have dined well on my LCC flight in.

For the rest of my stay, I found the staff to be very patient in rendering assistance and in providing information about the property and its surroundings.

VERDICT This is a perfect stay for travellers who appreciate fine hotels as an attraction in itself. I love it particularly for its wide spaces and serene surroundings.

Name Angsana Xi'an Lintong
Rates From RMB600 (US\$91)
No. of rooms 400
Contact details
Tel: (86) 029 8387 8888
Email: reservations-xianlintong@angsana.com
Website: www.angsana.com/en/cn-china-xian-lintong



ADVERTORIAL

ATM gives responsible tourism green light



Responsible tourism will headline several seminar theatre sessions at Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2016 as government legislation, increased focus on the traveller footprint and the impact of natural disasters on country economies put the spotlight on the importance of effective sustainable travel strategies.

In 2015, ATM welcomed over 50 exhibitors with a responsible tourism focus, and the number is set to grow this year. Exhibitors including The Ministry of Tourism of Indonesia, Namibia Tourism Board, Gray Line and FHRI Hotels & Resorts join other hotel groups, tour operators, airlines and other industry sub-sectors are focusing additional resources on exploring new opportunities in responsible tourism.

According to certain industry commentators, responsible travel trends for 2016 include seeking out locally sourced food, traveller interest in the preservation of local culture and authentic experiences, 'voluntourism', pro-environmental hotel development and a significant focus on energy saving by operators as well as guests.

The line-up of responsible tourism seminars taking place at this year's Arabian Travel Market includes two afternoon sessions on Tuesday 26th April, entitled 'Coping with success, the sustainability challenge in the region' and 'Environmental leadership in the Middle East'; followed by a special master class on using responsible tourism for market advantage and to drive increased revenues.



“More and more companies are re-evaluating their business model to incorporate responsible tourism products and programmes, and are using this as a tool to attract ethically and environmentally minded guests and clients as well as to support local government efforts or in response to legislative change.”

Nadege Noblet-Segers, Exhibition Manager, Arabian Travel Mart

For more information on Arabian Travel Market 2016, please go to:
www.arabiantravelmarket.com

Destination Thailand

Residences at Anantara Layan Phuket Resort

VILLAS IN VOGUE

While Phuket has long been an established destination in Thailand, the unrelenting wave of tourist arrivals continues to drive the island's ever-growing hospitality scene. One bright spot has been holiday villa rentals, a market whose popularity has soared on the back of rising visitor numbers as well as the increased demand for villas as getaways for couples, families and groups of friends.

The flexibility to tailor-make one's accommodation services without being tied to hotel timings and space is the biggest drawcard for guests opting to stay in villas, observed Exo Travel Thailand product manager Kim Martin Rasmussen, who sees strongest demand for Phuket's villas coming from luxury agents from the US, Australia and Europe.

"There is a clear trend towards individuality in travelling, with tourists preferring to stay in their own villa or share it with a small group of friends or family members," said Tobias Fischer, director of business development, Go Vacation Thailand.

"When broken down into the price per person, staying in a villa is often even cheaper, yet more luxurious and exclusive than staying in a hotel," he added.

Recognising the potential of the villa rental market, which is commonly associated with privacy, exclusivity and bespoke concierge service, Go Vacation Thailand has joined hands with local serviced villa rental company, Thailand Holiday Homes, to roll out a new service featuring villas across major tourist destinations in Thailand. Guests can choose between self-catering or fully serviced options including the hire of cleaning staff and cooks.

Meanwhile, Diethelm Travel Group launched a Spotlight on Villas e-brochure in September last year for its overseas business partners.

Said the group's Thailand managing director, Hans van den Born: "The market and demand for luxury villas in Phuket and other destinations within Thailand has been growing over the past few years and I do not see that it is saturated at all. Now Phuket has a great variety of villas to offer, not only for the ultra high-end but also more for the mid-range budgets."

In his latest *Phuket Luxury Villa Rental Market* report, Bill Barnett, managing director of C9 Hotelworks, wrote that Phuket's luxury holiday villas have broadly seen upward trading during the low season in 2015 from the corresponding period in 2014, with a shift from the longhaul to regional markets.

"In the past, Asians favoured smaller unit sizes more, while bigger unit configurations were predominantly occupied by European guests," said Barnett. "A surge in shorthaul multigenerational travel and combination of friends and family is seeing the regional rental market gradually shifting toward larger unit types ranging from five- to eight-bedroom villas."

Sharing similar observations, Thomas Kaercher, international channel agent at Thailand Holiday Homes, remarked that villa holiday rentals are "an upcoming market in Asia" but few Asian travellers are aware that serviced pool villas are available for rent in Thailand.

He remarked: "For Phuket and the other islands, I foresee the overseas markets (Europe, Australia, the US) will be the strongest for beach holidays longer than eight nights. For Pattaya, it's the Asian, Chinese, Korean, Japanese as well as the

Russian markets, which spend between two to eight nights."

Many resort companies have swiftly added villas and residences to their portfolio. The opulent Iniala Beach House is home to three villas and 10 bedrooms, joining the top echelons of Phuket's villa market when it debuted in 2014. Banyan Tree Phuket recently marked its 21st year milestone with its revamp into an all-pool villa resort. In nearby Phang Nga, Aleenta Phuket Resort & Spa has launched the five-bedroom Grand Villa Noi residence.

Keemala Phuket, which opened its doors in December 2015, features 38 keys across four villa types ranging in size between 126m² to 185m². While the island's hospitality scene is becoming "saturated" with "many more projects in the pipeline",

acknowledged the property's director of sales and marketing Nurat Atibaedya, an increasing array of stylish and diverse offerings the likes of Keemala provides opportunities to woo the luxury travel market in particular.

Last November, Anantara Layan Phuket Resort added 15 sea-facing, three- to five-bedroom pool residences varying from 1,700m² to 2,200m² to its inventory of 30 rooms and suites and 47 pool villas.

"These residences are ideal for global leisure family travellers, or couples looking for a different vacation option away from the hustle and bustle," said Sascha Hemmann, general manager at Anantara Layan Phuket Resort. "We see both domestic and international demand, notably from Hong Kong and the UK."

Viewpoints

What are the factors driving the demand for villas in Thailand?



Pornthip Hirunkate, managing director, Destination Asia Thailand

We are seeing a surge of interest in top-end villas and residences that offer full services. The main driving factors for this trend are generational and group travel, which is becoming increasingly popular among families and friends. The main source markets for these villa getaways are from the US and northern Europe, which are a little more mature in their needs and wants from villas/residence holidays.

Hans van den Born, managing director Thailand, Diethelm Travel Group

It has to do with a need for more privacy, intimacy and quality time for families on holidays or couples and friends travelling together and enjoying double- or three-bedroom pool villas. The increasing trend for spa vacations has also helped this growing demand. Showing an increase in demand are our main European and high-end Russian markets as well as our South American guests.



Increasing visitor numbers to the island, combined with the trends of experiential and generational travel, are turning villas and residences into a growth market for Phuket. By **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**



Destination in numbers

4.7 days

The average length of stay at Phuket's luxury villas in 2015, according to C9 Hotelworks

29.9 million

The number of international tourist arrivals to Thailand in 2015, exceeding the target of 28.8 million

2.2 trillion baht

The tourism revenue for Thailand in 2015, equivalent to US\$60.7 billion, of which 1.4 trillion came from foreign tourists

MY WAY

PB Valley Khao Yai Winery

If you have time for sightseeing in Thailand, how do you spend it?

Heading an hour and a half west from Bangkok is the Amphawa Floating Market, a local market with throngs of people over the weekend. From Amphawa, Wat Khai Bang Kung, a temple completely enclosed by the roots of a huge banyan tree, is 30 minutes away.

Two-and-a-half hours north-east from Bangkok is Khao Yai, a plateau with mountains that is also the entrance to Isaan. Here the temperatures are cooler with less humidity, and there are national parks, European-looking landscapes, theme parks, etc.

This area has also birthed several wineries such as GranMonte, Village Farm & Winery and PB Valley. My favourite is the GrandMonte winery, as it has great wines that are 100 per cent Thai owned and operated. The estate also has guestrooms and a nice restaurant.

Where do you go for your favourite dish?

The Central Plains (Bangkok and surrounds) food is my favourite cuisine. I love the many versions of *yam* (salad), whether it's a pomelo, winged bean or a catfish salad. I often go to Na Aroon of Ariyasom Villas on Sukhumvit Soi 1 as it offers great Thai food and vegetarian dishes in a lovely setting.

Where would you take first-time visitors in Bangkok that are a bit out of the usual itinerary?

I would rent a longtail boat from Tak-sin Bridge to visit a few *klongs* (canals) before going to Wat Arun and Wat Rakang, followed by lunch at a local restaurant before taking the ferry to the Maharaj landing, where there are many old shops, the National Museum and the Grand Palace in the vicinity.

Perhaps I would do another river trip

Eric Hallin
General manager
Rembrandt Hotel Bangkok

to the Chakrabongse Villas for an evening cocktail before going back to the Tak-sin pier, where one can continue to Asiatique or enjoy the beautiful views from the rooftop bar at Le Bua State Tower before finishing at the Bamboo Bar at the Mandarin Oriental, a short walk away.

What's the best souvenir from Thailand in your eyes?

In one word it is memories, but saying that there are many wonderful products from Thai silk to Thai-grown coffee.

Tell us something that few people know about Thailand.

Bangkok had its tramline built by the Danes before the Danes had their own in Copenhagen! – Raini Hamdi

TRIED & TESTED

Savelberg Thailand

How extremely fortunate Thailand is to have Michelin-star chef Savelberg, says **Raini Hamdi**

LOCATION Within the Oriental Residence Bangkok on Wireless Road near the American Embassy.

AMBIENCE The ambience is beautiful in its simplicity, elegance, comfort and intimacy (only 60 seats and thanks also to good lighting). My eyes are more drawn towards that long *mise-en-place* table where my food will be prepared and plated before my very eyes. It's like the stage is set for a performance, whetting my appetite and raising my expectations.

I thought I would not see much of chef Henk Savelberg, if at all. In several Michelin-star restaurants I've been to, the celebrities are conspicuous by their absence. To my surprise and delight, in he comes – and welcomes every guest warmly. He's just got into Bangkok from Macau, he said. Who would have thought that this mild-mannered, humble Dutch man, with such a kind countenance, has the distinction of being awarded a Michelin star in four different restaurants across the Netherlands? He also does not look the daredevil type, yet, he closed all those restaurants to start up in Asia. Europe's in a recession, and Asia's the place to be, he said, when I asked him what drove him to take such a risk.

MENU Savelberg serves up modern French fare where only top ingredients are sourced and allowed to shine. The Savelberg Experience is a tantalising menu comprising eight courses (4,500 baht, US\$124) but guests can choose to go with four (3,000 baht) or six (3,700 baht) courses. Even nicer, guests can order any of the above to share and if it's not enough, add a main course from an à la carte menu (main course prices range from 1,300 baht to 3,900 baht). Such flexibility and affordable pricing is rare for a Michelin-star restaurant. Considering the food indeed is a taste of heaven – I think it's simply brilliant.

Let me gush about the food please, because this chef really deserves it. The lobster with pomelo, papaya, caviar and yuzu dressing is an innovative combination and a real taste thriller which at once makes me understand why Savelberg is a virtuoso, one who dares to experiment and who attempts to adapt to local ingredients and tastes. And that's only the first course.

Pan-seared scallops follows and it's with piccalilli, which piques my interest. Turns out it's an English interpretation of



Indian relish of chopped vegetables, herbs and spices – yet is delicate in taste and enhances the scallops.

Next, raw oysters hand-picked from Ireland, served with beetroot and apple, followed by grilled North Sea sole, broccoli, balsamic gel, old Dutch cheese, pistachio and lemon dressing. I don't see too much such high quality, expensive ingredients being used these days, and, more importantly, being handled by expert hands (thank goodness). Chef Savelberg prepares every single one of my dishes.

SERVICE The manager, his assistant and service staff are confident, able, friendly and earnest-about-food people, a joy to interact with. The wine pairing is also excellent.

VERDICT It's been just over a year since Savelberg opened in Bangkok. I've tried several of the city's big names – L'Atelier de Joel Robuchon, Zuma, the former Ku-De-Ta, etc – but the Savelberg experience fills me up completely and touches my heart.

Chef Savelberg gave up everything he had in the Netherlands to be here – I can only hope he will open more Savelbergs in Asia, including my home town Singapore. Right now, Bangkok is so fortunate!

Location 110 Wireless Road, Lumpini, Pathum Wan

Opening hours 12.00-14.30, and 18.00-22.00 daily except Sunday

Contact details

Tel: (66) 2 252 8001

Website: www.savelbergth.com

Destination Thailand

TRIED & TESTED

Ozo Chaweng Samui

Ozo Chaweng Samui defines well the DNA of the new select service brand of Onyx Hospitality Group, says **Raini Hamdi** after a stay

LOCATION Just a 15 minutes' drive from Samui International Airport and I'm at the resort in Chaweng. I love the long coastline here along with its powdery sand, which makes for a good walk or jog each day.

ROOMS There are 208 rooms in three categories. I love my room, 3120. Located on the ground floor, it looks out to a garden (which I much prefer – I don't need a sea view) and is convenient, being just a few steps away to the hotel's large swimming pool, the beach and the gym.

The room lives up to Ozo's promise as a brand for travellers who shun unnecessary extravagances. Its clever use of space, cheerful, modern design and full amenities make it a competitive mid-range product. It gets all the important things

right for this segment – I'm sold the moment I feel the quality bed and bed linen. Wi-Fi is free and speedy (throughout hotel), and I appreciate the IPTV, coffee/tea-making facilities and in-room safe.

The only issues I have in the room are that the toilet roll installation is on the left rather than on the right (I realise now how inconvenient this can be for us right-handed people!) and that the lighting is a tad too economical at night.

FACILITIES The hotel's pool area and beach area (the resort is fortunate to have such a long beachfront) are where everyone congregates and no wonder, as they are perfect places to sunbathe or relax with a book. What I like is the abundance of sun loungers, so no one really needs to fight for them, and the choice of shady ar-



eas for those of us who don't want too much sun yet don't want to stay indoors.

F&B Breakfast is served till, listen to this, 11.00, at all-day dining restaurant Eat. This is blissful, as most guests in a resort are on holiday, not business, thus can indulge in staying in bed a little longer without worrying about missing breakfast by 10.00.

The breakfast buffet is generous for a select-service brand; even getting good coffee is a breeze as there are two machines that dispense cappuccino, latte, etc, in mug if you like or a smaller cup.

There's also Stacked restaurant, which 'surfs' up something new in Samui: hearty American comfort food, prepared by Californian chef Matthew Rubin, stacked up to a tower, like the Greek Tower Salad, or

any of its 12 gourmet burgers.

Fresh fruit juice at the Pool Bar and Chardonnay at the Beach Bar each day are a staple for me during my stay.

SERVICE Youthful and fun, befitting the brand. The more senior people are always around – general manager Ingo Domaschke, Jack, Benjamin, Leroy, Chris – and they always find something to pick up and clear away, setting a good example for the staff.

VERDICT Lives up to the brand promise.

No. of rooms 208

Rates From 3,300 baht (US\$91)

Contact details

Tel: (66) 77 915 200

Email: reservations.chaweng@ozohotels.com

Website: www.ozohotels.com

NEWS IN A MINUTE



Amatara Resort & Wellness

1 Mövenpick Siam Hotel Pattaya Mövenpick Siam Hotel Pattaya, located at Na Jomtien, 15km south of Pattaya City and 20 minutes away from U-Tapao Rayong-Pattaya International Airport, opened its doors on December 15.

The 262-room resort has three dining outlets, function spaces, banquet facilities, an outdoor lagoon pool, a water sports area and a fully-equipped fitness centre. The resort also provides various services including golf concierge, island cruises, deep sea fishing tours and a kids' club.

2 Amatara Resort & Wellness The former Regent Phuket Cape Panwa was rebranded as the Amatara Resort & Wellness in October 2015.

Following the rebrand, the 105-room resort will focus on developing itself as a wellness destination, where the 2,000m² Amatara Spa will be extended to include Thai Hamam therapies, a salt relaxation room, as well as Rhassoul clay treatments. Located on Cape Panwa on Phuket's south-eastern coast, the property also offers six F&B outlets.

3 Nok Air

Following the launch of services to Ho Chi Minh City earlier last year, Nok Air has commenced services from Bangkok-Don Mueang to Hanoi since December 1, 2015. The four-times weekly service will be operated on a Boeing 737-800 aircraft with a capacity of 189 seats.

NokScoot has also started flying between Bangkok-Don Mueang and Taipei-Taoyuan from October 25 with four flights a week. The flights are operated by a Boeing 777-200, which can accommodate up to 415 passengers.

4 Multiple Entry Tourist Visa

On November 13, 2015, Thailand introduced the new Multiple Entry Tourist Visa (METV) for travellers. The six-month METV costs 5,000 baht (US\$139), and will grant travellers unlimited border crossings for up to 60 days per stay within the visa validity. It can be obtained from Thai embassies and consulates worldwide.

5 The Chiang Mai Riverside

A new luxury retreat by the Ping River, The Chiang Mai Riverside offers 14 Lanna-inspired suites, 24-hour butler service, Apple digital entertainment systems and a Local Knowledge concierge offering insider access to the Rose of the North.

The design of the all-suite property echoes the heritage of the Lanna kingdom, which come to life in luxurious one- and two-bedroom suites. On top of customised menus and private dinners, amenities include a swimming pool, a fitness centre and a health sanctuary.

How to sell

DO Known as Chao Lay in Thai, the Sea Gypsies used to roam the waters of Andaman Sea but many of them have since settled down on land. Visit the **Sea Gypsy Village** located at the eastern end of Rawai Beach to see and experience the lifestyles of this fishing community who live in stilt houses, believe in animism and have their own language.

SEE Each December, **The King's Cup Regatta** (below) takes place on the azure waters of the Andaman Sea, attracting some of the world's best skippers and yachtsmen to Phuket to vie for the coveted trophy. During the week-long event, the sheer number of keel boats, multi-hulls and traditional craft on the waters of Kata Beach creates a spectacular sight in the process and makes for great photo opportunities.

EAT The relaunch of the iconic Nai Harn resort brings

along Kevin Jean Fawkes as the culinary director, who will helm the **Rock Salt** to showcase dishes from the Asia-Pacific region. At lunch, the casual restaurant spotlights Thai modern classics and international favourites; by evening, the beachside space will transition into a chill-out destination highlighting Eastern Mediterranean and North African cuisine.

STAY One of the hottest openings in 2015, **Keemala Phuket** is a boutique retreat with 38 pool villas set amid a lush rainforest overlooking the Andaman Sea. Designed to represent the island's mythical early settlers, the property features a swimming pool, a spa and three dining outlets connected by jungle walkways.



4TH GLOBAL TOURISM ECONOMY FORUM • MACAU 2015

CONCLUDES WITH RECORD-BREAKING SUCCESS

Cultural Tourism for Economic Growth Championed in Parallel with the Belt & Road Initiative



The Global Tourism Economy Forum • Macau 2015 has concluded with flying colours in October, breaking its own record over the past three years by gathering nearly 60 ministerial officials, globally renowned private sector leaders, experts and scholars worldwide to share their insightful perspectives. Over 1200 delegates from different countries and cities came together to engage in thought-provoking discussions on the Belt and Road Initiative and the symbiotic relationship between culture and tourism, with over 200 local, Mainland and overseas media representatives present to cover the event. The Forum has marked an accumulated growth of 94% and 54% in delegate and media attendance respectively since its first edition in 2012.

The Forum has just garnered the Brand Convention Award at the 2015 Macao Convention and Exhibition Commendation Awards – a testimony of the Forum’s stature as an exemplar of Macao’s MICE industry and its contribution to Macao’s undertaking to become a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure.

The Global Tourism Economy Forum (the “GTEF” or “Forum”) was hosted by the Secretariat for Social Affairs and Culture of the Macao Special Administrative Region Government, initiated and co-organized by the China Chamber of Tourism under the authorization of All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce (ACFIC), coordinated by the Global Tourism Economy Research Centre (GTERC) and in collaboration with the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The event was also supported by China National Tourism Administration (CNTA), World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) and Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA).



A visionary and pragmatic platform, GTEF was the first to initiate a dialogue on the 21st century Maritime Silk Road and its impact on global tourism industry and economic development. The Forum also took the lead in starting a high-level discussion on how the Belt and Road Initiative could play a role in catalyzing the transformation of cultural heritage into tourism resources, and at the same time in helping to strike a sustainable balance between preservation and innovation.

Themed as “Belt and Road Initiative: Unleashing the New Dynamics of Cultural Tourism”, GTEF 2015 was designed to embrace the magnificent vision of the Belt and Road Initiative, stimulate discussions on the opportunities for cultural tourism brought by the Belt and Road Initiative, and explore new possibilities for multi-national and multi-regional cooperation.



In the opening ceremony, Mr. Ho Hau Wah, Forum Chairman of GTEF, emphasized that under the Belt and Road Initiative, development of economic cooperation and partnerships has extended beyond countries along the ancient Maritime Silk Road; the Initiative has also brought mutual political trust, economic integration, cultural inclusiveness and other mutual benefits to a broader region.

Mr. Chui Sai On, Chief Executive of Macao SAR, underlined in his welcome remarks that Macao, included in the Country’s Belt and Road Initiative, can give play to its focal effect and become a part of regional collaboration. He believed that the Forum, with its forward-thinking perspective, can offer a clear direction and practical advices to Macao and the world to steer their tourism industry and economy towards sustainability.

Ms. Pansy Ho, Vice Chairman and Secretary General of GTEF, pointed out the tremendous economic impact of the Belt and Road Initiative and the important role Macao plays in the Initiative. She highlighted Zhejiang Province and Tianjin, two economically strong and culturally rich regions that have exploited the Belt and Road initiative to advance their own tourism development. She also underscored the Pacific Alliance – a powerful link between Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru – that shares similar visions of development and free trade, including tourism.



A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between UNWTO and the Macao Special Administrative Region Government to establish a Global Centre for Tourism Education and Training in Macao, aiming at strengthening the city’s competitiveness as a world tourism destination and improving the overall quality of human resources for tourism in Macao.

UNWTO presented the UNWTO/GTERC Annual Report 2015 on Asia Tourism Trends, the second edition of a joint project that provides cutting-edge research and analyses to the global audience.



Panelists in GTEF’s signature session “Face to Face, Ministers and Private Sector CEOs” deliberated on the topic “Abridging our Distances through Connectivity”.

This year’s programme also included comprehensive discussions on topics such as “Exploring the Full Dimension of Cultural Tourism – Cultural Heritage and Creative Living Culture”, “Understanding Chinese Consumers Behaviour”, “Driving Cultural Awareness through Social Media” and “Expert Series – Understanding Global Investment”.

This Forum edition also offered a variety of special features such as Partner Chinese Province Presentation by Zhejiang, Picturesque Zhejiang exhibition, and performance of Zhejiang Symphony Orchestra; Partner Chinese City Presentation by Tianjin; FONATUR Presentation on Investment Opportunity in Mexico; Vibrant Macau presentation by Macao Government Tourism Office; networking reception by Macao Trade and Investment

Promotion Institute; and finale social program Erhu & Symphony Orchestra: The Butterfly Lovers Concert.

This year, GTEF’s Exhibition for international exchange and Business Matching session successfully showcased the tourism resources and investment opportunities of the participating countries and regions, and encouraged collaborations.

Macao, situated at its strategic geographic and historic location, stands ready to offer multi-dimensional, multi-faceted and multi-cultural offerings that will give its visitors and residents lasting collective experience and memories by capitalizing on the Belt and Road Initiative, and create a virtuous cycle of positive and enriching influence from the visitors to the residents, and vice versa.

Dr. Alexis Tam, Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture of the Macao SAR Government and Executive Chairman of GTEF, addressed in his closing remarks that the lively dialogue among GTEF speakers on a partnership between culture and tourism has successfully opened up a valuable path for forging more far-reaching regional collaboration.

With its fifth edition in the year ahead, the Forum will continue its efforts and exploit its invaluable experience from the first four editions to inject more innovations into its programme and format in 2016. More than that, GTEF will take the tourism economy development stories to a new level through Macao’s new role in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Bay Area, an economic and transportation hub in Southern China. GTEF 2016 is prepared to receive delegates in Macao from around the world and make greater contributions to the global tourism industry.



OUR HEARTFELT APPRECIATION TO OUR GUESTS OF HONOUR AND SPEAKERS

Guests of Honour:

Chui Sai On, Chief Executive, Macao Special Administrative Region
Hun Sen, Prime Minister, The Kingdom of Cambodia
Ho Hau Wah, Vice Chairman, The National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference; Forum Chairman, Global Tourism Economy Forum
Bun Rany Hun Sen, Spouse of Samdech Techo Prime Minister, The Kingdom of Cambodia
Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General, World Tourism Organization (UNWTO); Honorary Chairman, Global Tourism Economy Forum
Sok An, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister in Charge of the Office of the Council of Minister, The Kingdom of Cambodia
Li Jinzao, Chairman, China National Tourism Administration (CNTA); Honorary Chairman, Global Tourism Economy Forum
Zang Xianfu, Chairman, Tianjin Municipal Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference
Wang Huizhong, Deputy Secretary, CPC Zhejiang Provincial Committee
Thong Khon, Minister of Tourism, The Kingdom of Cambodia
Sandra Howard Taylor, Vice Minister of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, Colombia
Chen Yixing, Vice Chairman, Fujian Provincial Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference
Yao Jian, Deputy Director, Liaison Office of the Central People’s Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region
Ci Siping, Deputy Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China in the Macao Special Administrative Region
Alexis Tam, Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture of the Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region; Executive Chairman, Global Tourism Economy Forum

Du Jiang, Vice Chairman, China National Tourism Administration (CNTA); Honorary Vice Chairman, Global Tourism Economy Forum
Wang Shangkan, Director of the Department of Publicity and Education, All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce (ACFIC)
Alejandro Schiavi, Undersecretary of Coordination, Ministry of Tourism, Argentina
Pansy Ho, Vice Chairman and Secretary-General, Global Tourism Economy Forum
Xu Jing, Executive Secretary, World Tourism Organization General Assembly and Executive Council; Director, World Tourism Organization Regional Programme for Asia and the Pacific; Honorary Vice Chairman, Global Tourism Economy Forum
David P Scowhill, President & Chief Executive Officer, World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC); Honorary Chairman, Global Tourism Economy Forum
Isaac Lai, Chief of Office, Office of the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture of the Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region
Kevin Murphy, Chairman, Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA); Honorary Vice Chairman, Global Tourism Economy Forum
Cedrián López-Bosch, Director for International Organizations, Ministry of Tourism, Mexico (SECTUR)
María Soledad Acosta Torrelly, Director of Tourism Promotion, Peru (PROMPERU)
Mario Hardy, Chief Executive Officer, Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA)
Wang Ping, Chairman, China Chamber of Tourism; Curator, China Ethnic Museum; Vice Chairman, Global Tourism Economy Forum
Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, Director, Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO); Vice Chairman, Global Tourism Economy Forum
Jackson Chang, President, Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute
Song Yu, Secretary General, World Tourism Cities Federation
Peter Wong, Executive Chairman, China Chamber of Tourism; Chairman, The MK Corporation Ltd.; Vice Chairman, Global Tourism Economy Forum

Jean-Claude Baumgarten, Vice Chairman, Global Tourism Economy Forum; Former President & Chief Executive Officer, World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC)

Speakers:

(Arranged in alphabetical order by surname)

Bai Changhong, Dean, Professor of College of Tourism and Service Management, Nankai University
Desirée Bollier, Chief Executive Officer, Value Retail Management
Winnie Chiu, President and Executive Director, Dorsett Hospitality International
Dai Bin, President, China Tourism Academy
Ding Zuohong, President, China Furniture and Decoration Chamber of Commerce; Chairman of the board, Yuexing Group
Helena Egan, Director of Industry Relations, TripAdvisor
Peter Greenberg, Travel Editor, CBS News
Sergio Holguín, Director of Strategic Management and Institutional Linkages, FONATUR
Duncan Horton, Chief Executive Officer, Travel Weekly Group
Ji Xiaodong, Vice President and Secretary-General, China Chamber of Tourism; Senior Researcher, China Tour and Culture Development Research Institute
Johnson Jia Yunfeng, Chief Executive Officer, D&J Global Communications
John Kester, Director of the Tourism Market Trends Programme, World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)
Gerald Lawless, President and Group Chief Executive Officer, Jumeirah Group
Li Baochun, Deputy Secretary-General, World Tourism Cities Federation

Liao Chunrong, Chairman, New Insight Holdings Group Limited
Liu Ting, Chairman, China Women’s Chamber of Commerce; Chairman, Asia Link Group
Liu Yang, Chairman, Atlantis Investment Management Group
Rodolfo López Negrete Coppel, Chief Executive Officer, Mexico Tourism Board
Rachel Lu, Senior Director of International Business Development, Qunar
Alfonso Martinez Cearra, Director General, Bilbao Metropoli-30
Peter Meier, Chief Executive Officer, Kuoni Group
Anita Mendiratta, Founder and Managing Director, CACHET Consulting
Billy Ng, Managing Director, Head of Asia Gaming, Lodging and Leisure, Global Research, Bank of America Merrill Lynch
Qian Jiannong, Vice President, Fosun Group
Pablo Javier Retamal, Brand and Market manager - Asia and Oceania, Turismo Chile
Francisco Silva Silva, Chairman of the Board, Grupo Security
Song Lei, Deputy-Director General, Asia-Pacific Business Department in China Development Bank Corporation
Alexander Wan, Senior Advisor, China Daily Asia Pacific
Wang Wenjuan, Secretary, CPC Committee of Tourism Bureau of Zhejiang Province
Wu Zhaolan, Vice Chairman, China Chamber of Tourism; Vice President, Suning Universal Group
Yang Shihao, Director-General, Tianjin Municipal Tourism Administration
Zhang Ling, Chairman, HNA Tourism Group Co. Ltd.

澳門特別行政區政府社會文化司
SECRETARIA PARA OS ASSUNTOS SOCIAIS E CULTURA
GOVERNOR DA REGIÃO ADMINISTRATIVA ESPECIAL DE MACAU
SECRETARIAT FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE
GOVERNMENT OF THE MACAO SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGION

聯合世界旅遊組織
WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION

中國全聯旅遊業商會
China Chamber of Tourism

GLOBAL TOURISM ECONOMY RESEARCH CENTRE
世界旅遊經濟研究中心

ALL-CHINA FEDERATION OF INDUSTRY & COMMERCE

LIAISON OFFICE OF THE CENTRAL PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENT IN THE MACAO SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGION

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA IN THE MACAO SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGION

NATIONAL TOURISM ADMINISTRATION OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

PATA
PACIFIC AREA TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

ACFIC
ALL-CHINA FEDERATION OF INDUSTRY & COMMERCE

VENETIAN MACAO

銀河娛樂集團
Galaxy Entertainment Group

Meco Crown Entertainment
美高美娛樂集團

SJM HOLDINGS LIMITED

Wynn MACAO

Bank of America Merrill Lynch

SUNING UNIVERSAL GROUP

AIR MACAU
澳門航空

TURBOJET

MEDIA PARTNERS

ITG

International New York Times

Destination Taiwan



The mid-tier amba Zhongshan positions itself as a creative and design-driven property

Destination in numbers

31,000

The average daily visitor arrivals to Taiwan in November 2015

8.5 million

The total number of arrivals to Taiwan from January-October 2015, representing a 4.7 per cent growth year-on-year

26

The number of international branded hotels in Taipei in November 2015, offering 8,653 rooms

81.5 per cent

The occupancy rate for international branded hotels in Taipei in November 2015

its established branding to attract tourists from around the world.

Targeted at leisure and FIT travellers, the 88-room Aloft Taipei Zhongshan also opened its doors last December, while the city's second Aloft is scheduled to open in Beitou in October 2016.

Hotel manager of Aloft Taipei Zhongshan, Tiffany Lin, said: "Although we won't be able to accommodate large tour groups, we will explore opportunities to work closely with travel agents to reach our target market.

"Lately we have seen an increasing number of FITs from Hong Kong, Macau and China. We hope (that with our positioning as) a US brand, we will attract guests who have been using hotels in this (Zhongshan) area and are willing to experience new hotels, as well as those who are aware of our brand. Taiwan still needs more mid-range or luxury properties to fuel future tourism."

The mid-range trend is not confined to global hospitality players only. Home-grown companies like Ambassador Hotel Group celebrated its 50th anniversary with a new brand – amba Hotels. Unlike the full-service Ambassador hotels, amba stresses fun and creative elements. So far, both the 90-key amba Zhongshan and 160-key amba Ximending are now operational, with the 190-key Songshan and Kenting slated to open in 2016 and 2017 respectively.

Welcoming a more diversified hotel scene in Taipei, Swire International Travel's general manager, Norman Meng, said: "Taiwan has been less popular in the tourist market until recent years. These international hotel brands not only enhance Taiwan's brand exposure but also create more hotel choices for burgeoning FIT travellers from China, Hong Kong and South-east Asia."

Suki Sin, director of Hongkong-based Muse Travel, opined: "International mid-tier hotels may offer a choice as *minsu* homestays are mostly scattered in the countryside and not available in the city. However, Hong Kong travellers prefer to stay in local boutique style hotels due to their special design."

MID-MARKET BUZZ BUILDS UP

With yearly visitor arrivals already hitting the 10 million mark a few years ago, Taiwan is fast becoming a hotspot for Asian FITs, especially independent travellers from China.

Since Taiwan opened its doors to Chinese independent tourists in 2011, the number of Chinese FITs arrivals into Taiwan rose from 191,148 in 2012 to 522,443 in 2014, reaching nearly 1.3 million from January to November 2015, according to figures from the National Immigration Agency. Last September, Taiwan further raised the daily quota of Chinese FITs from 4,000 to 5,000, way more than group tours which is limited to 2,500 per day.

The surge in visitor numbers also call

for more mid-market hotels. According to figures from CBRE and Taiwan Tourism Bureau, the mid-tier hotel is the only segment to display a robust growth, from 353 properties in 2012 to 458 properties in November 2015. Furthermore, 135 new hotels are scheduled to be completed over the next two years.

In December 2015, the 465-room Courtyard by Marriott Taipei launched on the 7th to 30th floors above CityLink Mall, which is connected to the Nangang Station serving the Taipei Metro and Taiwan Railway.

Owned and operated by the local Leofoo Tourism Group, the property has revealed its interest in attracting business traffic as it resides close to the Nangang

Exhibition Center and Nangang Software Park as well as a host of technology companies in the Nangang district.

Even as the popularity of budget hotels has grown on the back of a Chinese visitor influx, higher-price international branded hotels the likes of Courtyard by Marriott still have "great potential" in Taiwan's hospitality market, remarked a Leofoo Tourism Group spokeswoman.

"Although the number of hotels in Taipei continues to increase, international branded hotels have not expanded as much in recent years. Therefore, the future development of tourism business market in Taiwan should not be limited to the Chinese market," she said, adding that Courtyard by Marriott Taipei will rely on

Taipei's hotel supply is making progress in the mid-market segment as developers bet on the rising wave of Asian FITs, writes **Prudence Lui**

Viewpoints

Which hotel category is still lacking in Taipei?



Kitty Wong,
president, **K&A International**
Aside from Grand Hyatt Taipei, W Taipei, Shangri-La's Far Eastern Plaza Hotel Taipei and Mandarin

Oriental which are managed by the international chains, the rest of the hotels are franchised. We need more international hotels in order to (raise) the service quality to accommodate more exhibitions and conventions.

Tony Wang, general manager, The Landis Taipei

With more mainland Chinese coming to Taiwan, three- to four-star properties will be the mainstream in terms of new hotel development. This explains why our group plans to roll out a mid-tier brand called the Landis Inn this year.



MY WAY

What are your hobbies?

I like hiking and reading. Hiking connects me to nature and helps me see another facet of Taiwan.

Meanwhile, reading connects me with the world. One of the things that make me very proud of Taiwan is that we have many people who enjoy reading.

Where would you take your friends to for an authentic Taiwanese meal?

It depends who they are. For Europeans, Hong Kongers and Singaporeans, I will take them to Shi-Yang Culture Restaurant or Tua. Sometimes, I take western friends, like Australians, to a restaurant called In Between at Eslite Hotel or a sushi bar called Sushi Jubei.



Shi-Yang Culture Restaurant

What's your favourite attraction in Taiwan?

I love Taiwan's nature and indigenous culture. Taipei is well-placed and it is very easy to access nature from the city. There are hiking paths or national parks located less than one hour away.

As for Taiwan's indigenous culture, it is one of the very unique key features of our country as we have such a diversified cultural spectrum.

How do you de-stress after a busy day?

Walking in Daan Forest Park in the city or enjoying a coffee on a street corner. There are many boutique coffee shops around the city.

I also love exploring bookstores for the latest read, as well as listening to Arthur Rubinstein playing Chopin.

Tell us about a hidden gem that tourists should know about.

There are so many things that visitors can see in Taiwan, but it's vital for them to track down an expert guide to help them discover the local culture, unique restaurants, adventure and outdoor activities, and cultural festivals all over the country.



Jason Yeh
CEO
GIS Group

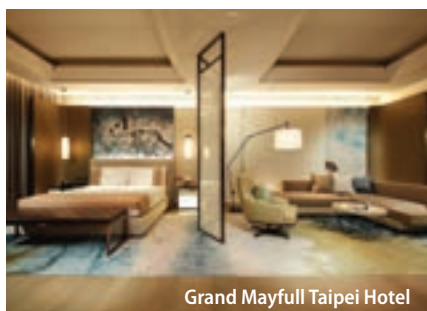
How to sell

DO Republic of Chocolate in Taoyuan County boasts Asia's first chocolate museum. Aside from providing information on the culture, knowledge and history of chocolate, it also organises 40-minute basic chocolate classes.

EAT The city's food scene has undergone a huge explosion in recent years with many fabulous new restaurants such as **Raw**, **Mume**, **Bing**, **Origines** and **Mr. Meat**.

SEE Just opened in December 2015, **Zhudong Animation and Comic Creative Park** in Hsinchu boasts the world's first Pokémon station as well as a robot-themed coffee shop.

STAY The 146-room **Grand Mayfull Taipei Hotel** opened on January 9, 2016. Situated near the Dazhi riverbank, the 25-storey property's facilities include five restaurants, a pillarless grand ballroom, a sauna and a heated outdoor swimming pool.



Grand Mayfull Taipei Hotel

NEWS IN A MINUTE

1 National Palace Museum Southern Branch

The National Palace Museum opened its southern branch in Chiayi in south-western Taiwan, on December 28, 2015. This three-storey complex has 10 galleries that will feature Asia-themed exhibitions.

Free admission is currently offered to all visitors until March 2016, but online reservations must be made. Groups of 10 or more can opt to join a group tour. There are also audio guides – that come in 10 languages ranging from English to Vietnamese – available for rental at NT\$100 (US\$3) per set.

2 Regent Taipei

Regent Taipei has renovated its Brasserie buffet restaurant to the tune of US\$3 million. New features include a signature all-in-one gourmet station, an upsized dessert counter and a brand-new Gourmet Corner featuring dishes from internationally renowned guest chefs.

3 China Airlines

Taiwan's flag carrier China Airlines has been expanding aggressively. In September 2015, it launched a weekly Kaohsiung-Changzhou route, followed by thrice-weekly services for the Taipei-Melbourne-Christchurch route on October 25. This makes the



1

carrier the only airline in Taiwan that offers direct flights to Melbourne.

4 Taiwan High Speed Rail

In November 2015, Taiwan High Speed Rail added three new stops – Changhua, Yulin and Miaoli – along the existing Taipei-Zuoying route, shortening journeys from Taipei to these locations to 63 minutes, 73 minutes and 44 minutes respectively.

Moreover, the long-awaited metro line connecting Taoyuan and Taipei will launch in March 2016. This 51km route consists of 22 stations

and travel time from downtown Taipei Station to Taoyuan International Airport will take 35 minutes.

5 VAT refunds

Taiwan hopes to encourage more tourist spending by lowering the threshold for foreign tourists to claim value-added tax (VAT) refunds. From May 1, 2016, the VAT refund threshold will be reduced from NT\$3,000 to NT\$2,000 for purchases made by foreign visitors on the same day from eligible retail outlets.

Congratulations to The Philippines on a successful 35th ATF 2016!



Close to 70 official sessions

including ministerial & NTO meetings, and TRAVEX activities

- Pre-show Manila Heritage city tours
- ASEAN travel suppliers exhibition showcase
- Business appointments
- ASEAN Tourism Conference
- Media briefings
- Sponsored luncheons, cocktails & dinners
- Late night functions
- 10 exciting post-show tour destinations

2,620 delegates with 500 hosted

- 1000 exhibitors • 457 buyers from 64 countries
- 175 international media from 36 countries

467 ASEAN exhibiting booths

from 401 companies and properties

“The event was **great, well-organised** and ensured **good business opportunities** and networking relationships with **new partners**. ”

Buyer | Delta Travel Group, Hungary
Bence Tuske, Director

“Great platform to **reach our target buyers**. ATF has successfully helped us to **position our destination** as a new tourist attraction. ”

Exhibitor | Municipality of Anda
Province of Bohol, Philippines
Arvin D. Rubillos, Tourist Receptionist

TTG Asia Media is Proud To Be A Partner of ATF 2016

- TTG Events as TRAVEX Secretariat
- Live Daily Coverage with 4-issue TTG Show Daily from 19 to 22 January
- Pre-Show Friendly Golf Game at Villamor Country Club on 19 January
- Late Night Function Host at CHAOS, City of Dreams on 20 January
- TRAVEX Luncheon Host for Sellers and Media on 21 January
- Show Diary and Cybercafe Sponsor

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

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

- Singapore Airlines (2002)
- Singapore Changi Airport (2002)
- Hertz Asia Pacific (2005)
- Royal Cliff Hotels Group (2006)
- Star Cruises (2008)
- Sabre Travel Network Asia-Pacific (2009)
- SilkAir (2010)
- Lotte Tour (2011)
- Hong Kong International Airport (2013)
- Raffles Hotel Singapore (2013)
- Regal Airport Hotel (2015)
- Banyan Tree Spa (2015)

TTG Asia Media is pleased to announce that it has set up a virtual TTG Travel Hall of Fame (www.ttgtravelfof.com), 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.



WHO'S SAYING WHAT



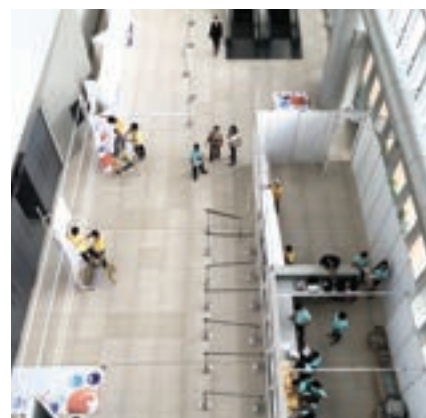
Instagram



Basket of good tidings from our dear friends from Fairmont. #cny2016



Mandatory shot by our TTG Asia logo for all visiting guests. #costacruiises



Event organisers and contractors busy as bees bringing ASEAN Tourism Forum 2016 to life. #atf2016 #ttgasia



Most commented

MULTIPLE NEW AIR LINKS TO LIFT CEBU'S TOURISM BUSINESS

It is good to know that there will be more future international flights to the Philippines. Citizens of countries with winter seasons are possible tourists to the Philippine Islands. The number of tourists to Cebu will increase faster before the new international flights and airport are realised.

One of the problems at Ninoy Aquino International Airport and Clark is the handling of luggage for tourists coming from Europe, the Middle East and the US. The luggage bags arriving at the Philippines should be checked-out at the final destination. For example, a tourist arrives in Manila but the final destination is Cebu or Bohol. The tourist has to check out the luggage at Ninoy Aquino International Airport, then check-in again to head to the desired final destination. The checking in and out of luggage twice is very tedious. Considering also the change in temperature, jet lag and inconvenience of transportation, tourists will lose interest in the

Philippines. They will not come back or recommend it. The above problems can be easily solved by the airlines and the Philippine Department of Tourism. — Aurora Abude-Schaefer

Very valid points indeed. Most LCCs in the Philippines and elsewhere hide under the cloak of responsibility by saying that their service is point-to-point, meaning they won't care about your connecting domestic flight even if booked on the same airline. If you're left behind because of a delay with your incoming flight, it's a paddle-your-own-canoe situation.

LCCs in the Philippines also use contractual employees to save on costs, resulting in fast staff turnover and staff without the dedication to ground service. The government can address these irregularities and circumvention of labour laws but it is too busy with politics and elections in 2016. — Larry Uytiepo

WE LIKE Snippets of happenings good and bad surrounding the travel trade



ROYAL CARIBBEAN GOES GREEN

A green thumbs up for Royal Caribbean Cruises and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) for embarking together on a five-year long initiative to cut down greenhouse gas emissions by the cruise line by 35 per cent. By 2020, Royal Caribbean also intends to source a large majority of its seafood from sustainable fisheries and farms.

FARRER PARK COMPANY GETS ARTSY

The Farrer Park Company just launched a 240-page book detailing the process of building the massive art collection at One Farrer Hotel & Spa Singapore and the rest of the complex.

We learnt about the importance of vision in such an undertaking, so that more than 700 original artworks by over 60 well-known and emerging artists in Greater Asia have a pride of place in the complex and help create *Art, Lifestyle, Environment* – the title of the book and the hotel mission.

Best of all, the permanent, not-for-sale collection is for the enjoyment of all, not just One Farrer guests. Free guided tours are given daily, while private tours with at least six pax can be arranged.

NO MORE ANGKOR ANTICS

Cambodia's Apsara Authority, who is responsible for the management of Angkor Archaeological Park in Siem Reap, has formulated a new Visitor Code of Conduct for tourists visiting the world-renowned attraction. Although not stating the obvious fact that nudity, with or without photography, is prohibited, it does inform tourists of rules against smoking, touching monuments, entering restricted areas and wearing revealing clothing at the temples.



TERROR STRIKES JAKARTA

The year barely started when terrorists attacked again, this time in the heart of South-east Asia in the capital city of Indonesia on January 14.

While fear rippled through the region the moment news came out, the panic dissipated quickly as local authorities took down the assailants within hours and as Indonesia president Joko Widodo took to the air to calm the nation on live television.

The travel industry remained resilient, as always, with agents and suppliers interviewed in our many reports saying their business is hardly affected by the attack. Kudos to that.

MALAYSIA AIRLINES' BAGGAGE FIASCO

As if Malaysia Airlines doesn't have enough problems on its plate, the beleaguered carrier created its own PR disaster on January 5 by having all check-in luggage on its Europe-bound flights departing from Malaysia arrive on a separate, later plane.

They then retracted their statement the following day, after much commotion in the social sphere, resulting in passengers scratching their heads in confusion about the inane situation.

The reason Malaysia Airlines gave for the unprecedented decision was because of "unreasonably strong headwinds", thereby limiting the amount of cargo they could carry.

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PHILIPPINES 2016

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FACES OF ATF 2016

January 18-22, 2016, Manila, the Philippines



#1

Ministerial and NTO meetings



#2

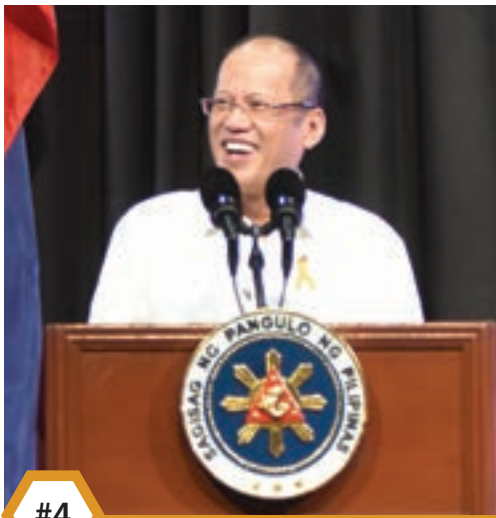
TRAVEX registration



#3

Pre-show city tours





#4

Opening ceremony



#5

Luncheons & dinners



#8

Late night functions



#6

Media briefings



#9

TRAVEX business appointments and exhibition



#7

Friendly golf

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