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ASIA

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Raini Hamdi asks Roshan Mendis, who heads Sabre Travel Network in Asia-Pacific, what has changed since acquiring Abacus International a year ago

+

Surf's up for shopping in Gold Coast

Whole sale of the bed banks sector

Family-friendly beach resorts

What Brexit means for Asia

Asian travel industry leaders ponder the implications on business and tourism following Britain's vote to leave the EU – and it's not entirely a dismal picture

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Sentosa
Singapore
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Brexit's lessons for ASEAN



Now is not the time for ASEAN to use the EU's current disarray to vindicate its gradualist approach, which often results in decision making and integration that move at snail's pace. ASEAN needs stronger cooperation and deeper collaboration more than ever...

Pakse, a small city nestled at the confluence of the Mekong and Xe Don Rivers in the southern Laos province of Champasak, was the staging ground for the first-ever ASEAN Ecotourism Forum (AEF) in June. For three days, tourism ministers and senior executives from the 10 member states came together for a historic ministerial roundtable to adopt the Pakse Declaration that will lead to an ASEAN roadmap for the strategic development of ecotourism clusters and tourism corridors.

While the success of the new declaration is still years away from realisation, the strides that ASEAN has made in working towards a common ecological and tourism goal bodes well for the region's sustainable development and conservation.

The Pakse Declaration, which got its inspirations from the European Green Belt – a pan-Europe ecological network that stretches along the former Iron Curtain – also comes at an especially poignant time as the UK had just voted in a referendum to leave the EU, long held up as a model of regional integration for ASEAN.

Brexit may mark the beginning of the EU's disintegration, but now is not the time for ASEAN to use the union's current disarray to vindicate its gradualist approach, which often results in decision making and integration that move at snail's pace. More than ever, ASEAN needs stronger cooperation and deeper collaboration for causes such as elimination of human trafficking, wildlife protection, human capital development, etc.

One area that certainly needs attention is intra-

region connectivity, a point that was driven home during the AEF. Without daily direct flight connections between Pakse and Bangkok (where I'm based), I had to first fly to Vientiane, board a domestic flight with a stopover at Sannavakhet, before finally arriving in Pakse, a journey that took six hours by air for two cities merely 700km apart; other ASEAN delegates based outside of Laos and Thailand took closer to 10 hours to reach Pakse.

Stronger intra-region connectivity will narrow the development and tourism opportunities gaps in South-east Asia, an echoing sentiment at AEF from many industry members who are keen to promote and sell under-visited destinations like southern Laos, an area home to coffee plantations, tumbling waterfalls and ancient temples.

Brexit also provides many learning points for ASEAN (see page 4 to read the implications Brexit has on the Asian travel industry), one of which is that a bloc must continue to accrue benefits for all its members. After all, people only want to be part of a club for as long as it offers meaning and benefits.

South-east Asia has much unfulfilled potential in many areas, tourism included; we just need stronger vision and leadership to realise ASEAN's aspirational goals of inclusive growth and benefits for all.

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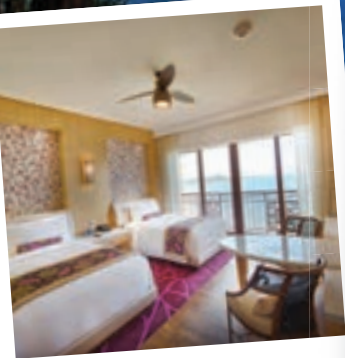
SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL South-east Asia's ecotourism sector is ripe for discovery as industry players push for better practices and strategies

LONGHAUL TRAVEL A look at what France, Switzerland and the US are doing to court Asian visitors to their shores

VIEW FROM THE TOP Thai minister of tourism & sports Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul (right) shares with *TTG Asia* the opportunities and challenges for tourism in the Land of Smiles

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Analysis

Asian travel industry leaders ponder the implications on tourism and business following Britain's vote to leave the EU – and it's not an entirely dismal picture

Shock and jitters were felt across the globe after the UK voted itself out of the EU ("Brexit") on June 23, sending the British pound plunging to a 30-year low and the market into turmoil.

The referendum outcome has also taken many travel industry leaders by surprise and they have yet to see the full-on effects on businesses, but for now a weaker British sterling pound and the uncertainty Brexit has triggered are the biggest challenges in the immediate wake of the seismic event.

Pall of uncertainty over Asia

"It's too early to tell how Britain's decision to leave the EU will affect global travel and, more specifically, incoming tourism to Asia; we need to wait for the dust to settle and see how things play out over the coming months," said Lisa Fitzell, group managing director at Diethelm Travel Group, who revealed that the Bangkok-based DMC will not be changing its strategy for the UK market.

Judy Lum, senior vice president sales & marketing international market at Tour East Singapore, has not seen signs of UK travellers holding back bookings at the moment, but reckons that "the plummeting pound will no doubt affect the spending of the British".

She added: "We should brace ourselves for a slowdown by the fourth quarter as the effects and reality of Brexit will kick in and this may last till 1Q2017 when the changes are more defined."

However, Singapore's leisure market is unlikely to take a big hit from a falling pound as the city is just a transit hub, opined Dominic Ong, general manager of Star Holiday Mart. But he has more reservations for the MICE market: "We foresee that local DMCs may face delays in payment."

Hideaki Furusawa, global sales department manager of The Yokohama Bay Sheraton Hotel and Towers, is bracing for "inevitable" effects in the next few months, as foreign visitors make up 45 per cent of the property's clientele; the hotel is also a corporate partner of Nissan Motor, which has its global headquarters nearby and significant business interests in Britain.

The uncertainty Brexit brings also threatens to undo the recent gains that the Philippine inbound sector has made for the UK market.

"The UK market has grown 25 per cent last year. New flights from London were launched, the EU lifted the ban on Philippine airlines and just two weeks ago we hosted top 10 UK agents," said Marjorie Aquino, senior sales and marketing manager, Blue Horizons Travel and Tours. "Then all of a sudden comes Brexit."

Meanwhile, Michael Wu, managing director at Gray Line Tours Hong Kong, is already reeling from Brexit, as the GBP's depreciation has translated to a 12-15 per cent rise in his tour fees.

"There is an immediate impact to our business because FIT bookings for October dropped obviously and even group traffic has slowed," he said. "I reckon my UK inbound traffic would fall 20-25 per cent due to Brexit."

Siggi Neuhaus, general manager of Caraka Travelindo Inbound based in

Makassar, South Sulawesi, told *TTG Asia* that UK buyers she met with at the recent Bali & Beyond Travel Fair had already received cancellations from their customers and they expect business to Indonesia to shrink by 20 per cent.

It isn't all gloom and doom though, as Asia's affordability could improve due to the sharp devaluation of the GBP.

While Hamish Keith, group managing director of Exo Travel, thinks that a "slowdown in bookings" from the UK is possible in the short term, he maintains a confident outlook for the market in the longer run.

"The UK traveller is historically and traditionally very resilient and we do not expect a significant drop in business from the UK," he said. "There is also a possibility that

"Over the longer term, we are still expecting more tourists, including Europeans, to visit Japan as the government is trying hard to promote Japan as a destination.

"We are still confident that more foreign visitors will want to come to Japan between now and the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo."

Aye to British tourism

The biggest winner could be the British inbound tourism sector, as a plummeting pound might drive stronger travel demand to the UK, long a favoured destination in Europe for Asians.

Ross Veitch, CEO and co-founder of Wego, commented: "The (pound slump) means a UK holiday is going to be cheaper for most foreign tourists than it has been for

Likewise, Aloke Bajpai, CEO and co-founder, ixigo.com, posits now is the best time to visit the UK. "We have seen an immediate (five to six per cent drop in airfares) on a few flight routes between India and the UK," he said. "Along with the favourable GBP fall and aviation fuel rate drop, the British summer is also expected to hold strong for another two months."

Still, Sedunia Travel Services' executive director Teoh Leng Lan is cautious in selling the UK despite the anticipated stimulus the depreciated pound will bring to FIT travel. "We don't know what the currency exchange rate will be like in two weeks, (let alone) one month, three months from now," she remarked.

"If the pound continues to fall, tour packages will become cheaper. But how will my tour fares stand against the competitors?" elaborated Teoh, who prefers to adopt a wait-and-see approach to avoid any over- or under-pricing of her packages in the market.

Desmond Lee, group managing director of Apple Vacations & Conventions, meanwhile, does not expect a weaker pound to boost travel demand for the UK as the destination is still pricey for Malaysians, who are also suffering from a weaker purchasing power amid ringgit woes.

That, together with the higher frequency that Malaysians are denied entry at UK immigrations compared with other European destinations, have led him to rethink his strategy and focus on France, Amsterdam, Brussels and Germany for Central Europe tours.

Ramifications in the longer run

Considerable uncertainty also shrouds the UK aviation market, one of the stand-out beneficiaries of the EU single-market framework.

Preliminary estimates by IATA suggest that the number of UK air passengers could fall three to five per cent by 2020, but a bigger issue lies in aviation regulation as the UK faces a trade-off between accessing the European Single Aviation Market and having the policy freedom to set its own regulations.

One of the trade-offs could be a hike in airfares for the UK's national carriers, suggested Wego's Veitch. "Accommodation costs however, could drop, as Britain fights to retain its large inbound visitor numbers from Europe who will no longer be able to travel freely into the country," he said in a media statement.

The full effects of Brexit will take years to play out, and even so no one can accurately predict how the scenario will turn out with so many variables. And making light of the unfolding drama is David Tarsh, managing director of Tarsh Consulting, a strategic communications firm with several clients in the travel industry. "Overnight, hotel rooms, taxis, restaurants and all visitor attractions in the UK are better value, and similarly my firm's services have become better value too."

Perhaps the best way the trade can cope with this uncertainty is to abide by the venerable English phrase: *Keep calm and carry on*.

Reporting by Paige Lee Pei Qi, S Puvaneswary, Xinyi Liang-Pholsena, Julian Ryall, Rohit Kaul, Rosa Ocampo, Mimi Hudoyo and Prudence Lui

What Brexit means for Asia

Asia business from the UK could increase as South-east Asia is particularly seen by UK travellers as a safe, good-value destination."

Yap Sook Ling, executive director, Asian Overland Services Tours & Travel, agreed: "If (the pound) deteriorates further, there is a possibility that those who plan vacations to South-east Asia may switch to Malaysia, as British travellers will want to stretch their pound. We will see the impact during the Christmas and New Year period."

Said Ikuko Hanano, of Nippon Travel Agency's inbound European division:

about 20 years...In-destination trip costs such as accommodation, dining, entertainment and shopping will allow significantly better value for the foreign traveller after currency conversions."

Karan Anand, head, relationships, Cox & Kings, agreed: "The UK is one of the most sought-after destinations for Indian travellers. Last year close to 422,000 Indians visited the UK and we expect the numbers to go up this year as well. We will aggressively promote packages to the UK as we see this as an opportunity to promote and attract more people to the destination."



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Analysis

The value of the GDS came into question after the formation of a pan-regional alliance by eight Asian LCCs. **Dannon Har** finds out if there is any merit to the naysaying

Is GDS still the ticket?



Surprise was felt across the travel sector after the announcement of the Value Alliance (VA) in May, not from the collective fleet size of 176 aircraft in Asia-Pacific or the total passenger load of 47 million (in 2015), but from the first-of-its-kind distribution technology adopted by the alliance.

The LCC alliance, comprising Cebu Pacific, Jeju Air, Nok Air, NokScoot, Scoot, Tigerair Singapore, Tigerair Australia and Vanilla Air, formed the partnership to enable interline ticket and ancillary sales among member airlines in one booking.

Unlike other airline pacts the likes of Oneworld or U-Fly Alliance, the technology VA uses – developed by Air Black Box – fundamentally changes the distribution game by allowing airlines to cross-sell and upsell across markets effectively without going through a GDS.

Having observed growing cooperation among budget carriers in the last couple of years, Damian Hickey, vice president Asia-Pacific and global sales strategy, air commerce at Travelport, deems the VA as “the next logical step” by LCCs to bring in other airlines within the periphery of their networks.

“The surprise is in the distribution model, but it is still an open question as it is still early days (for VA). Members like Tigerair, Scoot and Jeju Air are still distributing through Travelport.”

Hickey does not foresee LCCs dropping out of GDSs anytime soon though. He said: “LCCs have a bias to go direct but they still want to reach every possible customer, and they know they can’t do that if they only have a single distribution path. Even if it accounts for one per cent of

their sales, it’s still incremental.

“The industry has gotten to a point where you can’t say airlines want to sell direct to bypass travel agents or that GDSs don’t like airlines to sell on their own websites,” opined Hickey.

“Consumers want choice. There is realisation, from all sides, that we need to support that flexibility,” he added.

Reflecting similar sentiments, Hervé Couturier, Amadeus’ executive vice president of R&D, remarked: “What airlines want today is multichannel capability. They want to be able to distribute their products through the GDS, and also through mobile, websites, OTAs, metasearch engines, and they want (the content) to be consistent and personalised.”

But LCCs are not putting their best foot forward with GDSs, according to Bertrand Salliet, general manager South-east Asia at FCM Travel Solutions.

“LCCs are usually not well distributed on GDSs. We have some content but we can’t compare the fares because the budget carriers are giving GDSs their high fares while distributing low fares directly on their own website,” he explained. “We still need to make some bookings on the LCC’s website instead of the GDS.”

However, this does not mark the end of GDSs, assures Salliet. “If you see what happened in Europe with the LCCs created in the 1990s, such as Ryanair and EasyJet, those airlines have the same direct model to bypass GDSs and agencies.

“They then realised that without travel agents they can’t access the corporate world. Agencies bring a lot of value for corporates in terms of payment facilities and data consolidation. Those airlines then decided to

create a portal for travel agents to book direct from them. But they realised they lose out when agents do fare comparisons on GDSs, hence they are now back to GDS distribution.

“In Asia, some LCCs are starting to see that and are distributing on GDSs to access corporate customers, who are high-yield because they tend to book better seat classes and more ancillaries,” Salliet said.

Whether the VA will head down that path remains to be seen, but budget carriers need to be able to sell more ancillaries as it accounts for a significant portion – one-fifth on average – of their revenue.

That explains why GDSs have in recent years gone all out to upgrade rich content and merchandising capabilities on their platforms, with the most recent instance being the Sabre Red Workspace 3.0, which enables suppliers to push rich-format ancillary products into the agent’s workflow.

The greatest value GDSs offer, explains Roshan Mendis, senior vice president, Sabre Travel Network Asia-Pacific, is the ability to provide the most relevant product at the right time to the right customer. And that is only possible, not just through behavioural data accrual, but smart usage of that data.

That remains the main selling point of GDSs, which, as far as the technology used by the VA is groundbreaking, does not address, nor does it need to.

Said Salliet: “The great thing about GDSs is that you can compare fares based on the availability of flights, which is still unique as there is no technology in the market now that can do the same thing.”



“The industry has gotten to a point where you can’t say airlines want to sell direct to bypass travel agents or that GDSs don’t like airlines to sell on their own websites.”

Damian Hickey

Vice president Asia-Pacific and global sales strategy, air commerce, Travelport

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Intelligence

The **Chinese Luxury Traveler Report** reveals how China's Gen Y approach travel – from what they seek in agents to their top hotels and destinations

China's new elite travellers

Personalised luxury, digital innovation and added value throughout the entire hospitality ecosystem are what young well-heeled travellers in China are now seeking, according to the inaugural *Chinese Luxury Traveler 2016* study by Marriott International and Hurun Research Institute.

The survey focuses on 525 high-net-worth Chinese travellers between 18 to 36 years old, with an average personal wealth of RMB38.8 million (US\$5.9 million) and an average of RMB420,000 in travel spending per household per year.

Average young luxury traveller



They are experienced travellers, having gone abroad 3.3 times in 2015 for an average of 25 days, of which leisure travel accounted for 69%.

The survey also revealed choice destinations among China's young and wealthy. France (40%) was the most popular international destination, while Japan (39%) and Australia (38%) ranked sec-

ond and third respectively. Japan was also the most visited destination over Chinese New Year 2016.

In addition, respondents have been on cruises an average of 2.4 times, and only 15% have never been on a cruise ship.

They are also seeking more diverse travel experiences, with global travel, adventure travel, polar exploration and road trips set to rise by 25%, 52%, 38% and 75% respectively over the next three years.

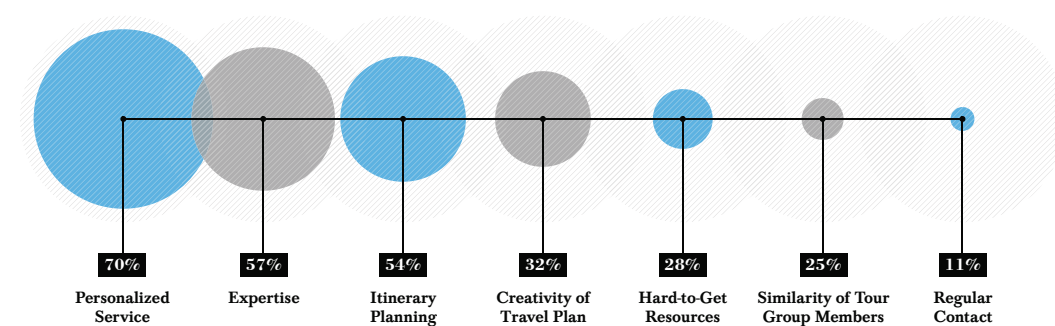
Young luxury travellers exercise flexibility to travel whenever it fits their schedule in the next year (55%), followed by National Day Golden Week as the second most popular period (36%). Family travel, meanwhile, peaked during Chinese New Year, with 56% going abroad last year over this period. Some 90% travelled with family or friends, in a party of four people on average, and stayed abroad for 8.5 days.

In their experience with travel agencies, young luxury travellers listed personalised travel services (70%), expertise (57%) and itinerary planning (54%) as the three most important factors. They also strongly prefer personalised travel services, with 73% saying they have tried personalised travel services offered by a travel agency.

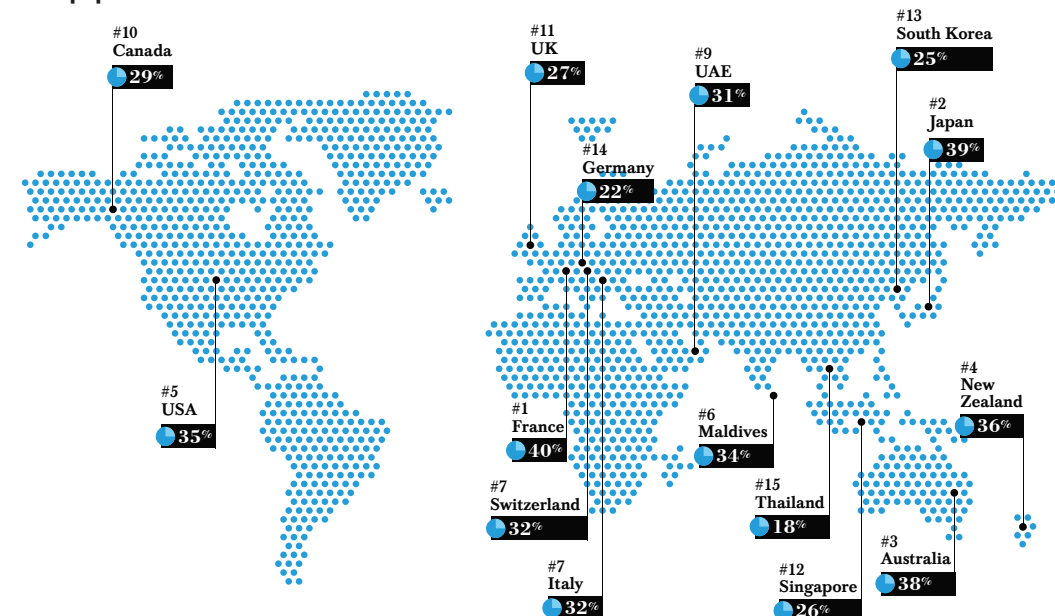
And when it comes to choosing hotels, the most important factor influencing their decision is the condition of the room, followed by friendliness of hotel staff (37%), the hotel's location (26%), high-tech facilities (22%), and the hotel's design and style (21%), the study showed.

The survey further found that Air China is the most subscribed (51%) frequent flyer programme, followed by China Southern Airlines and China Eastern Airlines. For international travel, Lufthansa is the top choice (19%) due to a diverse selection of European routes and convenient transit. In contrast, awareness of hotel loyalty programmes is low among young luxury travellers, with Shangri-La's being the most popular.

Reasons for favouring travel agencies



Most popular international travel destinations



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Nothing Beats the Freedom of a U.S. Self-Drive Holiday



Alamo Rent a Car wants to work more closely with the travel trade here and **Jerry Mosiello**, Vice President of International Business Development, explains why it's the right partner.

What are Alamo Rent A Car's plans as it expands here and how does it plan to reach out to the travel trade?
We are excited at the opportunity to build and strengthen our relationships with the travel trade to further develop the self-drive car rental market. We look forward to showcasing our customized products and services, which are available to travelers bound for the U.S.
We have selected BrandStory Inc as our new partner to reach out to the travel trade largely because of their expertise, strength and coverage throughout Asia. BrandStory Inc has solid relationships in the marketplace and shares the same commitment to provide quality products and services.

What types of travel trade loyalty programs does Alamo Rent a Car have in place and how are travel agencies rewarded?
Alamo has a long tradition of working closely with the travel trade in markets around the

world. In addition to earning very competitive commissions, our travel agent partners can take advantage of current promotions and various booking incentives that are launched on a market-by-market basis.
Throughout Asia, reward programs typically are extended on a regional basis and our local team in market will oversee the implementation, which will include a launch campaign.
As a Diamond Founding Member of Brand USA, we work closely with our partners on a number of initiatives to help develop the business and specifically, self-drive car rental.

What are some significant traveller trends for Alamo Rent A Car?
We continue to see significant growth in FIT travel and frequent and infrequent leisure travelers that are looking to explore new destinations. There is no better way to experience all that travel has to offer than in a rental car.

We continue to see significant growth in FIT travel and frequent and infrequent leisure travelers that are looking to explore new destinations. There is no better way to experience all that travel has to offer than in a rental car.



Cotton fields near Clarksdale, Mississippi.



A self-drive holiday will not only enhance a customer's travel experience but will help to build loyalty with clients.



JERRY MOSIELLO
Vice President of International Business Development, Enterprise Holdings Inc.

What is one message you want to convey to the travel trade here to promote self-drive holidays in the U.S.?
A self-drive holiday is what today's travelers are looking for and will not only enhance a customer's travel experience but will help to build loyalty with your clients.

What tips do you have for travelers interested in a self-drive holiday in the US?
Travelers should research where they would like to go and want to see and take advantage of the expertise that a travel agent or tour operator can offer in making the best decision for what they are looking for.
Utilize the technology that is available, like GPS and travel tablets to make the driving experience more convenient.

What kind of itinerary do you suggest for the first-time self-drive traveler?
Itineraries can vary greatly based on destination and traveler interests. It's important to tailor a self-drive itinerary that will satisfy your

clients. Similarly these same factors have to be taken into consideration for a repeat self-drive traveler.

What are three interesting facts the travel trade may not know about Alamo Rent A Car?
For one thing, Alamo is the largest car rental company for international leisure travelers traveling to the U.S. from around the world. Secondly, along with Enterprise and National, Alamo is one of the three brands that makes up Enterprise Holdings, the largest car rental company in the world as measured by fleet, locations and revenue. Last but not least, Alamo's global network includes over 70 countries throughout the world.

For more information, please go to VisitTheUSA.com



View from the top

It's been a year since Abacus International became Sabre Travel Network (STN). **Raini Hamdi** asks Roshan Mendis, who heads STN in Asia-Pacific, what has changed

Sabre – a year later

What has changed since Sabre gained full ownership of Abacus a year ago?

We have a new organisation, a new leadership team, doubled our investment in product and organised ourselves as part of Sabre global to ensure we get all the goodness of Sabre without losing our Asian heritage, culture and way of doing business that Abacus had been sensitive to.

An example of the more 'goodness'?

Before (Abacus) didn't have the ability to leverage much of Sabre global development or global innovation pipeline.

Now, for example, while we retain a product function in the region, we can work with the global development team to ensure that the Asian business gets the necessary investment on things that are important for the region.

When you came in a year ago, you told me you wanted to meet all the travel agencies and understand how business was changing for them (<http://bit.ly/1ZYvm7A>). What are your findings?

Firstly, the traditional agencies are feeling rapid competition from online entrants, both locally and internationally.

Secondly, they are feeling the pressure from customers demanding more of them, making it necessary for them to be better equipped and better informed about pricing, trends, destinations, etc.

Thirdly, our larger customers who were traditionally one-market customers are becoming regional if not global customers.

So we have been organising ourselves, in terms of our structure, product investment and service models, to better cater to those needs.

Examples?

In terms of the larger agencies becoming regional or global, as part of our reorganisation, we are developing two global customer service centres in Singapore and India (Sabre currently has these centres in Uruguay, Poland and the US), so these customers can access product or service specialists instantly.

It can be on something as tactical as a billing or pricing question to something more complex like 'how do I price and ticket this multi-stop, multi-airline, multi-class fare?'

I also talked about travel agents feeling the need to be better equipped and informed. We are launching later this year Sabre Red Workspace 3.0, the next-generation desktop that will empower travel consultants to deliver far more seamless and personalised travel experiences – not just itineraries – by combining data-driven insights with intuitive design.

And to enable traditional agencies to have an effective online presence, we are rolling out a number of products, including our next-generation WebStart later this year.

What's new with WebStart?

With the passing of time, things just get much more sophisticated and capable.

A defining feature of the next-generation WebStart is an online/offline interaction. A customer can shop online, make a reservation, then walk into a traditional store and have the agent pull out that reservation and fulfil it. Or vice versa: they can walk into a store, book a trip, go home and talk to their family about it, pull out the reservation online and confirm it.

We're also looking to equip agencies who are new to having an online presence with the basic level of e-commerce marketing, so not only will they have an online presence but effective marketing in channels new to them such as Google, Facebook and TripAdvisor.

You had B2C experience with Zuji and Travelocity. What new perspectives can you offer agents now that you're on the GDS side?

My observation from other parts of the world, even in online markets that are more mature, is that there is space for both online and offline players to grow their respective businesses – as long as they're innovating and continuing to bring value to their customer.

We pride ourselves in being strategic partners to our customers, so we often find ourselves in the room with our customers thinking 'what are the differentiating elements of our business? Which of those are sustainable?' together.

Through this process we learn what their needs are, then match our products with their needs. If we don't have a product that matches those needs, then we either build it or bring in a third party that can fulfil the role.

I can confirm that the traditional travel agency will continue to grow and thrive.

What are the differentiating elements of agencies today?

There are travel agencies that differentiate themselves on a very unique service level. There are agencies that differentiate themselves on running robust corporate travel programmes. There are those that differentiate themselves by just having ubiquitous presence.

There's no way travel agencies will die?

I can confirm that the traditional travel agency will continue to grow and thrive.

Why?

Because we have seen that in markets where the OTA business has grown, it's not necessarily at the expense of the traditional travel agencies, but by bringing new travellers into the market.

10 NEED TO KNOW'S ABOUT ROSHAN MENDIS

■ **Who's in your family?** Dineli (wife, not allowed to mention age), Navik (son, 10 years old), Lisara (daughter, eight years old) and Kolla (dog, 11 years old).

■ **What do you do for fun?** I love hanging out with my family, playing/watching sports with the kids, planning travel, travelling and working out.

■ **Your ideal vacation?** In the mountains (above 8,000 feet), being outdoors and not thinking about work!

■ **How do you book your own leisure trips?** I book vacations roughly 10-12 months in advance. And I do it all myself with hours of research on destination information and travel deals.

■ **What are you reading right now?** *Lawrence in Arabia*.

■ **How do you stay healthy?** I try to have a balanced diet, I work out three to four times a week and I make sure I get good sleep.

■ **Favourite food?** My wife's cooking, whatever it is. She is an awesome cook.

■ **A bad habit you cannot kick?** I bite my fingernails when I am deep in thought.

■ **Your pet peeve, something that never fails to annoy you?** Poor customer service.

■ **Most people don't know that you...** are a real softie, and that my kids take advantage of it!

What motivates you in the job?

I'm now coming to 20 years with Sabre, and in those 20 years I haven't had a job for longer than three years, so I got to do a lot of different and exciting things under the same organisation. That includes Zuji, Travelocity and now Abacus' integration into Sabre.

The industry is a fascinating business and I have had the benefit of being on the online side for a number of years and now coming back to the GDS side and having OTA customers. What motivates me also is the rapidly changing business and having constituents that have been around for as long as Sabre has been – in excess of 50 years – along with some brilliant young startups that are looking to disrupt the environment. There's never a dull moment!

In the past 12 months from the word go, we have rebranded ourselves, restructured ourselves and rightly skilling ourselves with the right people to achieve our goals and objectives (most recent was the appointment of Todd Arthur as vice president sales and market development, replacing Brett Henry).

And with the product investment that has gone into Asia-Pacific, I'm excited about how well poised we are for growth in this region.





Meliá Hotels International is one of the largest hotel companies in the world. With over 360 hotels and resorts in more than 35 countries, the passion and vision of the founding family continues to drive the company forward.

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HOTELS



SIX SENSES FIJI
Six Senses is set to open a Fijian outpost on Malolo Island, featuring 24 pool villas ranging from 74m² to 180m² in size, and 66 residential villas along a 650m private beach. There will also be a restaurant and bar, boasting sustainably-sourced ingredients, as well as the brand's signature wellness programmes.



THE SHELLSEA KRABI, THAILAND
Opening on Krabi's Shell Fossil Beach in November 2016, the beachfront resort offers 72 guestrooms, 12 villas and a grand villa, all boasting views of the Andaman Sea. Facilities include a lap pool, family pool, spa, restaurants, beachside bar, fitness centre and a selection of non-motorised recreational water sport equipment.



SHERATON OKINAWA SUNMARINA RESORT, JAPAN
Sheraton Hotels & Resorts has returned to Okinawa. The converted property is currently undergoing expansion works to add a new 46-key wing and more guestrooms to the 200-key resort by December. F&B options, a wellness centre, a ballroom and function rooms, totalling 260m², are available.



CONRAD MANILA, THE PHILIPPINES
The 347-key Conrad Manila has debuted in the Philippines, located in front of the Mall of Asia complex. A range of facilities are available, including an infinity pool, fitness centre, spa, six F&B outlets, two ballrooms and four event halls. An outdoor garden space, The Veranda, can also be booked for al fresco gatherings.

ACTIVITIES

STAR WARS TAKES OVER HONG KONG DISNEYLAND
The Star Wars: Tomorrowland Takeover has been completed at Hong Kong Disneyland since June 11. Guests can now experience Hyperspace Mountain (previously the classic Space Mountain ride) that has been given a Star Wars

makeover, along with new events such as Jedi Training: Trials of the Temple, and meet characters from the series. South-east Asian travellers will be able to enjoy offers such as a 1-Day Ticket with a HK\$50 (US\$6.44) merchandise gift voucher, or special upgrades to a 2-Day Ticket.



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GALLERY



STAR ALLIANCE CHIEFS MEET IN ZURICH
On June 4, 2016, chief executives of Star Alliance member airlines arrived in Zurich on Bombardier's new CS100 aircraft for their summer 2016 meeting. The Swiss International Air Lines flight brought them in from Dublin, Ireland, where they were gathered for IATA's AGM.



ROBERT GUY RECEIVES AWARD
Robert Guy (above), managing director Singapore and Malaysia at Destination Asia, was awarded the Rama Rebbapragada Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Cruise Industry during the Seatrade Cruise Asia Gala Dinner in Busan in May. This is a truly well deserved award for Guy, who has been steering the development of the Asian cruise industry since the early days.

CAPELLA HOTEL GROUP TO MANAGE HERITAGE LANDMARK
TTG Asia gets a preview of Capella Shanghai, the city's only all-villa urban resort in the last remaining cluster of the historical *shikumen* (stone warehouse gate), which was the landmark of 1930s Shanghai. The hotel will open in March 2017.

Pictured below are (from left) Capella Hotel Group's Joleena Seah, TTG Asia Media's Raini Hamdi, and Capella Hotel Group's Horst Schulze, Nicholas Clayton and Mei Ping.



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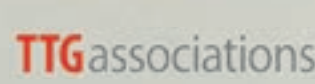
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CASE STUDY By Rohit Kaul

Making refunds a breeze

WHO Ashish Kashyap is the CEO and founder of Ibibo Group, which owns several online travel portals such as Goibibo.com, a hotel and air aggregator; redBus.in, an online bus ticketing platform; and ibibo Ryde, a car and cab sharing app.

Today, more than three million unique users transact in Ibibo's websites every month, making it one of the largest travel companies in India. In a recent report by Morgan Stanley, Goibibo.com is India's top OTA in terms of hotel booking volume.

For the October-December 2015 period, Goibibo grew its hotel bookings by 400 per cent year-on-year with roomnights crossing 1.6 million. Some 71 per cent of hotel bookings on Goibibo take place on its mobile app.

Prior to launching Ibibo Group in 2007, Kashyap was the country head of Google India, where he established the domestic business operations from ground up, and had also founded an e-commerce business at India-times.com.

WHAT In March 2016, Goibibo.com launched GoTime Guarantee, promising to deliver the fastest refunds in the country. The site guarantees refunds will be processed within two hours from the time a customer cancels his/her travel bookings with the portal. Goibibo also shares the exact time – in minutes and seconds – taken to process the refund with the customer.

If the company fails to meet the two-hour guarantee, the platform promises to credit Rs100 (US\$1.48) into the customer's GoCash wallet for every hour of delay.

GoCash is a virtual wallet on the portal which can be used to book travel services such as hotels and flights.

WHY According to Goibibo, more than 15 per cent of travellers make amendments to their trips, bringing about the need for refunds.

"We often see that refund is a big problem in India no matter the segment. By guaranteeing a specific time period to process the refund, we get more credibility and customers who can rely on Goibibo.com," says Kashyap.

During the first-week launch of GoTime Guarantee, Goibibo processed 99 per cent of applicable cases in 30 minutes.

TARGET Kashyap said that GoTime Guarantee is an industry first introduced after the company conducted research to understand the user psyche. Through this service, the OTA hopes to increase trust and reliability among its users and eventually offer this 'time guarantees' to customers for all processes.

We often see that refund is a big problem in India no matter the segment.

Ashish Kashyap, CEO and founder, IbiboGroup



WHO GETS THE BOOKING?

Seeking a short vacation in South-east Asia for himself, his wife and a friend, **Feizal Samath** emails two Sri Lankan travel agencies to enquire about packages in Thailand. He reveals which company he prefers



Ceylon Tours	Sparklink Travels
APPEARANCE The homepage opens with a picture of a leopard sleeping on a tree, an instant grab for travellers interested in visiting Sri Lanka. The website is more friendly towards inbound travellers while those seeking outbound packages have to trawl through many pages. For locals seeking an overseas holiday however, only few packages are offered – and only to Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia. A Glimpse of Maldives box on the homepage provides a few paragraphs of the destination but no packages are offered.	APPEARANCE I was surprised the company website did not work. When I keyed in the URL, I received a warning message: "This site may harm your computer." This was certainly not the best way to manage a DMC where a website is an important marketing tool in today's digital world.
PRODUCT I asked for a quotation for a 4D3N Thailand package tour for three that included places of interest and some shopping. The company offered a three-day itinerary inclusive of airfares, airport pickup, a city tour, temple visits and a theme park, but nothing extraordinary. Ceylon Tours also provided details on how to obtain a visa (a complicated problem for Sri Lankans visiting Thailand).	PRODUCT After calling up the company, an informative travel executive responded to my 4D3N Thailand package request by suggesting a whole range of temple tours, city tours and cultural shows. She also recommended a shopping by boat experience and a dinner cruise, providing options – and a response – that were far better than Ceylon Tours.
EASE OF BOOKING The total package rates were unavailable. I was also asked to furnish all three travellers' names – which I thought was unnecessary – for the agency to obtain hotel rates from Thailand, with the promise to pass me the information the next day.	EASE OF BOOKING I was told that SriLankan Airlines and Thai Airways had direct flights, with round-trip fares ranging from 36,000 (US\$248) to 38,000 Sri Lankan rupees per head but seat availability had to be checked. Accommodation in three-four star hotels and other costs would add up to another 30,000 Sri Lankan rupees per person. I found the process at this company more streamlined.
PRICE The price of the package was not given as it was based on hotel rates which were unavailable. I asked for an approximate figure but even this was unavailable.	PRICE An approximate total package cost of between 66,000 to 68,000 Sri Lankan rupees per head was given.

VERDICT In both cases, the promise of responding with a comprehensive tour schedule within 24 hours did not materialise, although Sparklink did get back within 36 hours. Service by Sparklink Travels was far superior and they offered more tour options in Thailand. While the failure to operate a working website may be a fundamental error for a travel company, in Sri Lanka there is no impulse buying unlike in many other markets. Customers usually plan their holidays well in advance and often like to walk into a store to book their holidays. Overall, Sparklink's service tips the agency in my favour.



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Great Expectations,

2016 marks Costa Cruises' 10th anniversary in Asia. Having ushered in the "home port era" and popularised cruise holidays in Asia, the company is well poised to power ahead with enhanced capacity, innovative itineraries and customer-focused, market-defining cruise experiences.



The elegant suite onboard Costa neoRomantica.

10 YEARS OF LEADERSHIP

Costa Cruises is celebrating its 10th anniversary in Asia this year. The story of the cruiseline's first decade in the region parallels the development of Asia's cruise industry. It also reflects the influence Costa wielded as it nurtured the growing interest in cruise holidays and the increasing sophistication of cruise itineraries in Asia.

Costa Cruises arrived in Asia as the first international cruise company to set up a full-functioning operation in China. It was also the first to earn a Wholly-owned Foreign Enterprise (WOFE) status in China.

Building on its position as the leading cruise company in Europe with proven expertise in multinational operations, new market development, intercontinental resource management and localisation of products, Costa Cruises was looking to introduce a new style of cruise holidays on a modern fleet to win over new customers in Asia. The region is today home to four of the 15

Costa branded ships with more scheduled in the coming years.

THE COSTA HERITAGE

Costa Cruises was established in 1948 in Genoa, Italy. Today, it is a leader and revered brand name in Europe's cruise industry.

Costa Group's parent company, Carnival Corporation & Plc, is the largest cruise company in the world with a 45% market share of the world's 22 million cruise guests.

INNOVATIVE PRODUCTS

One of the most successful brands in Asia's tourism industry, Costa Cruises is best known for its unique Italian touch based on Italy's finest concepts in hospitality, gastronomy, design, leisure and entertainment.

In 2015, it introduced the first 86-day round-the-world cruise customised for Chinese-speaking guests, setting a new milestone for Asia's tourism market. The much anticipated follow-up is a 46-day South Pacific Islands cruise departing from Tianjin to be launched this year.



"We are confident that China will become one of the most pre-eminent cruise markets. The two new ships that will be tailor-made for the Chinese market will further enhance our Asia fleet and provide Chinese travellers with a variety of vacation options and experiences to meet growing demand across all segments of the market".

Mr Buhdy Bok
President
Costa Group Asia



Making history: Costa Allegra and Costa Classica in Shanghai in 2009, when Costa Cruises Asia played a key role in the opening of the Shanghai Port International Cruise Terminal.

10 YEARS IN ASIA

Great Experiences

Not your usual cruise: A new brand of luxury onboard Costa neoRomantica, scheduled to begin service in Asia in 2017.

A PIONEER IN ASIA

- 2006 - Costa's first Asia-based ship **Costa Allegra** (28,500 gross tonnage; 1,000 passengers) began sailing from Hong Kong on April 30 after a 12-million-Euro revamp. Shanghai became its first homeport on July 3, offering cruise itineraries to Korea and Japan.
- 2006 - **Costa Allegra** became the first international cruise ship to introduce regular cruise itineraries from a home port in China, ushering in the "home port era" for Asia's cruise industry.
- 2008 - **Costa Allegra** celebrated its 100th cruise in Asia. Its arrival in Shanghai was timed to coincide with the opening of the new Shanghai Port International Cruise Terminal.
- 2009 - A second ship, **Costa Classica** (53,000 gross tonnage; 1,680 passengers), was deployed to Asia. This raised Costa's capacity to 85,000 berths with departures from Singapore, Shanghai, Tianjin and Hong Kong.
- 2010 - **Costa Romantica** (53,000 gross tonnage; 1,680 passengers) replaced the Costa Allegra and joined her sister ship Costa Classica in Asia, and together brought more than 50,000 additional tourists to the region.
- 2012 - **Costa Victoria** (76,000 gross tonnage; 2,394 passengers) deployed to Asia, boosting passenger capacity by 40%. It replaced Costa Classica, offering departures from Singapore, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Tianjin.
- 2013 - **Costa Atlantica** (85,700 gross tonnage; 2,680 passengers) joined Costa's Asia fleet, boosting passenger capacity by 90%, offering departures from Singapore and Shanghai.
- 2015 - Costa Atlantica began its first 86-day, **around-the-world cruise** from Asia on March 1, 2015, customised for Chinese-speaking guests.
- 2015 - **Costa Serena** (114,500 gross tonnage; 3,780 passengers) arrived in Asia in April, boosting overall capacity by 70%.
- 2016 - **Costa Fortuna** (103,000 gross tonnage; 3,470 passengers) arrived in Asia in April, boosting overall capacity by 38%. It was the fourth ship in Costa's Asia fleet.
- 2016 - The launch of Costa's 46-day **South Pacific Islands** cruise departing from Tianjin.
- 2016 - Costa Group announced **two new ships** to be built for the Chinese market.
- 2017 - **Costa neoRomantica** (56,800 gross tonnage; 1,800 passengers) to join Asia fleet.

The Costa brand identity

Costa Cruises in Asia are designed to be "Italy at Sea", offering guests a holiday experience enriched by the best of Italy in terms of hospitality, gastronomy, art, music, design, entertainment and leisure activities.



Executives from Costa Cruises as well as parent company Carnival Corporation, including Michael Thamm, CEO Costa Group (fourth from left) at Italian shipbuilder Fincantieri to announce Costa Cruises' order of new ships.

EYE ON THE FUTURE

Costa neoRomantica, the fifth ship to join Costa's Asia fleet, is scheduled to arrive in April 2017. It will be refurbished while in Shanghai to enhance its "Italy at Sea" appeal.

2019 and 2020 will see the arrival of **two new ships customised for the Asian market**, the Costa Group announced in April 2016. Italian shipbuilder Fincantieri will be building these two new ships at the company's shipyards in Manfalcone and Marghera. The ships are both 135,500 in gross tonnage and have a capacity for 4,200 passengers and represent an investment of more than 6 billion Euros.

Michael Thamm, CEO of the Costa Group, said the new order will help the company build the Chinese cruise market, which will become the second largest in the world by 2020.

THE ASIA FLEET

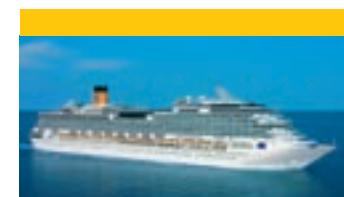
Each of Costa Cruises' ships features a different theme, giving guests many ways to immerse in Italy's rich culture and history.



■ **Costa Victoria** is Asia's first "Fashion Cruise", where style and elegance is the focus. Guests will discover Italian creativity and artistry in everything from the design of their cabins to the spa.



■ **Costa Atlantica** is "Venice at Sea" and spotlights the great city of Venice through art and activities such as the Carnival of Venice party and Venetian mask painting workshops.



■ **Costa Serena's** "Ancient Rome at Sea" theme highlights Olympian Gods and Roman mythology with its sumptuous spaces, exceptional Italian cuisine and wines, along with high-tech entertainment such as 4D cinema.



■ The newly arrived **Costa Fortuna** is a "Museum at Sea", complete with 4,860 artworks, antiques and artefacts that honour Italy's seafaring history.



■ **Costa neoRomantica** will be the 5th ship added to its Asia fleet in 2017. The ship underwent a 90-million-Euro transformation that resulted in her relaunch in 2012. The renovation added a Samsara Spa, new categories of spa accommodations, Wine & Cheese Bar, Coffee & Chocolate Bar, more staterooms and suites balconies.

A whole sale of the market

The hotel wholesale business, which has been unravelled by on-line technology, is ripe for yet another round of consolidation as big players become more acquisitive while small and/or traditional players struggle to make it in a highly competitive industry.

The latest trigger is the sale of Hotelbeds (<http://bit.ly/261FLD1>) to UK private equity firm Cinven Capital Management and Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, and that of Kuoni Group – which owns GTA – to Swedish private equity firm EQT (<http://bit.ly/1UyCROe>).

With new ownership flushed with funds, both Hotelbeds and GTA have made no bones of their intention to expand market share through further investment in IT, tapping growth in Asia and other markets, and consolidation in the wholesale accommodation sector.

The accommodation industry itself, on the other hand, is being rocked by the consolidation of global hotel chains, the dominance of the sharing economy and the increasing size of Priceline and Expedia, all of which promise a good round of marry-making in both the hotel and intermediary sectors in the months to come.



The wholesale accommodation market is ripe for another round of consolidation. **Raini Hamdi, Paige Lee Pei Qi, S Puvaneswary** and **Mimi Hudoyo** explain why

Marry-making

So how will the hotel wholesale business be further remade?

Once upon a time, hotels worked with specialist wholesalers who gave them access to markets they cannot reach directly. Wholesaler contracts also enabled hotels to forecast occupancy patterns and generate volume business, especially for those with high inventory.

However, this system has been challenged by both B2B online distribution channels with cheaper cloud-based technology and B2C digital platforms. The former include the likes of Hotelbeds, GTA, Bedsonline, Travco, MetGlobal and JacTravel, while the usual suspects in the latter include Agoda, Expedia, Hotels.com, Trivago, Booking.com and, for good measure, throw in sharing economy giant such as Airbnb and B2B2C players like Asiatravel.com, which has added transfers and sightseeing into its offerings.

As a result, the market has splintered in many directions.

B2B platforms have spun off many new white-label online wholesale or online retail operators – for example, MetGlobal powers HotelsPro.

Some of the new players are started by people in technology, not travel, in the hope of being acquired in three to five years after operation, observed Judy Lum, group vice president sales & marketing of Tour East.

“Their objective to start a travel distribution channel is different from people who want to provide enjoyable holiday experiences; nevertheless, they seem successful,” she said.

Some traditional wholesalers have blurred the lines by building their own bedbanks, creating another variant in the sector.

For example, within Indonesia’s Antavaya Group is the Antavaya Hotel Reservation System, a bedbank for its retail agent partners and corporate clients. It is for “convenience”, said director Bagus Priatna, as clients have their own login and password to book a hotel from their own office. It is also attractive as they have credit terms instead of instant payments when booking through an OTA.

Other traditional wholesalers remain indigenous and compete by packaging more complicated products comprising flights, accommodation, transfers and day tours. These are usually small players with loyal clients.

Niklas Andreen, Travelport’s senior vice president & managing director for hospitality, car and partner marketing, observed: “Their historic model of allotments and prepaid dedicated inventory is becoming replaced by models such as dynamic discounts of BAR. Many of them are becoming specialists or consolidating to have global coverage by plugging in other companies. In summary, they now compete in a new bedbank landscape.”

But fragmentation is not necessarily as negative as the word connotes. Said Lee Choon Loong, president and CEO of DiscoveryMICE, Malaysia: “The wholesale market is indeed fragmented but in a positive way, as each wholesaler finds its own specialisation in reaching out to and integrating with tour operators.

“There are online wholesalers who of-

fer a large inventory of hotels worldwide with instant confirmation; wholesalers with XML connection to partner hotels inventory to which tour operators can access last-minute distressed inventory and discounted dynamic rates; and last but not least, traditional wholesalers with room allotments who package hotels usually with airport transfers.

“The market is equally (splintered). The wholesale industry merely seeks to deploy different strategies and approaches in meeting tour operators’ requirements,” said Lee.

Yet, it is this very shaken-and-stirred market that opens opportunities for consolidation.

Ivan Walter, CEO, GTA, told *TTG Asia*: “The market is so huge. There are a lot of small players out there that are involved in intermediary accommodation and destination services distribution. They can be small bedbanks or DMCs that have no differentiated value proposition – purely selling hotel rooms, which we think is not sustainable.

“So the market today is not dominated by a couple of bedbanks. In fact, it is very fragmented and is in the hands of hundreds if not thousands of small individual players. Thus, there are lots of opportunities for consolidation.”

Why consolidate?

Said Walter: “It’s crucial today for any B2B or B2C player to have relevance, and that relevance has to do with a certain size, negotiating power with suppliers and clients, global footprint and scale.”

There are also other forces at play. Observed Manuel Ferrer, chairman & founder of Olea Consultancy Asia, who previously headed Hotelbeds in the region: “What is really changing in this industry is the growth and size of Priceline and Expedia. They are already entering the B2B business and I have no doubt they will grab a part of the business of current B2B players.”

Ferrer also foresees a transformation of the hospitality sector. “This industry has changed minimally over the past decades, much less than any other industries. But now it will change fundamentally because many clients want products that they don’t offer and, whether fair or not, the competition from the likes of Airbnb or Zizaike.com is forcing them to change,” said Ferrer.

Chains too, have stepped up efforts to get more direct bookings of late, while M&As in the sector, such as Marriott International buying Starwood Hotels & Resorts, are being done partly to fend off dominance of OTAs and to harness more direct bookings from loyal guests.

“Towards this end, the large hotel chains backed by strong management companies will continue to sell direct to end-consumers. This will ultimately result in stagnant growth of the B2B market segment,” pointed out John Chan, business development director of Kris International Traveltours, Malaysia.

DiscoveryMICE’s Lee added: “While the total number of tourist arrivals have exceeded over one billion worldwide, the number of OTAs has not increased (proportionately). In the future, I envision that large hotels chains with similar brand character would consolidate than compete.”

There’s a place for everyone, say hoteliers

Andy Khen, executive director, L Hotels & Resorts and The Shanti Collection Bali

My discussions with conventional wholesalers showed they were feeling the pressure from online players. However, hotels like us still deal with both conventional wholesalers and bedbanks. We need offline wholesalers to boost occupancy as online booking is usually last-minute – three days or even less lead time.

There are so many channels of distribution. Each has its own strength and we need to be in many channels to capture the business.

To compete with regional and global players, homegrown bedbanks must not only grow their inventory, but invest in the latest technology all the time, do a lot of promotions and also invest in people: dedicated account managers that work (with the hotels to find ways to) generate roomnights.



Bernold Schroeder, CEO, Pan Pacific Hotels Group

We work with many different business partners from corporate travel agents and MICE businesses with large incentive houses to OTAs and bedbanks. As a hotelier, I don’t just depend on one segment, as I have to manage my risks.



Vivi Herlambang, director – sales marketing and business development, Sahid International

The conventional hotel wholesalers still survive despite the competition from bedbanks and OTAs. Each offers a different business proposition that we need, besides our own brand website. We cannot rely only on one or the other. That is how fragmented the market is.

One of the reasons we still deal with traditional wholesalers is because the rooms are bought in advance. This gives us certainty on room sales at a flat rate. The online players, on the other hand, gives us the liberty to make changes on room allotments and prices according to the dynamism of the market at any given time.



Patrick Fiat, general manager, Royal Plaza on Scotts, Singapore

Traditional hotel wholesalers are still in business and they have expanded their business to keep up with the competition by focusing on online distribution channels with dynamic systems.

The distribution landscape is ever-changing, thus there is no hard and fast rule as it is largely dependent on the strategies of the brands. The key for hotels is to gain an in-depth understanding in order to use these booking funnels to influence conversions.



Report Beach resorts

Sun, sea and sand for all

THAILAND

By Nicholas Yong

Pornthip Hirunkate

Deputy CEO and managing director, Thailand, Destination Asia

Common family travel configurations Beach resorts used to be favoured by and newlyweds and couples, but are now popular among families as well.

Accommodation preferences Families with younger children typically prefer adjoining rooms; family suites and villas are not a popular option.

Length of stay Six nights on average for European families, who typically stay in the same hotel. Asian travellers usually stay two nights over a weekend or long public holiday.

Top activities Island-hopping tours rank high, being readily available for purchase at resorts or in the vicinity.

Adults opt for spas and Thai massages whereas the younger ones enjoy more adventurous activities such as kayaking, diving, ziplining and ATV riding.

Most valued amenities The swimming pool – many families decide on accommodation based on the availability of one.

Top beach resort spots Phuket still reigns for its diverse resort types and prices. Samui is also popular while Hua Hin attracts Europeans, especially Scandinavians.

On the radar More remote beaches such as Khao Lak and Koh Lanta.

Watcharaporn Phiewkaow

Managing director, Discovery Holidays

Common family travel configurations We most frequently see couples with few children. Newlyweds, honeymooners and couples celebrating their wedding anniversaries are also significant segments.

Accommodation preferences Common requests are for adjoining rooms or two-bedroom suites, but private luxury villas are generally not popular with families.

Length of stay Europeans stay at least 10 days as they like to relax in the resort and enjoy the facilities, compared with Asians who usually stay three to five days.

Top activities Banana boat rides and snorkelling are a hit while diving is more common for families with older kids. Teenagers love more adventurous activities such as parachuting or kayaking.

Most valued amenities Swimming pools rank high as they allow parents and children to spend time together.

Nanny service and activities offered at kids' clubs are important since parents, especially European ones, want to be able to have quiet moments at the pool or spa.

Top beach resort spots Phuket continues to top the list. Travellers who prefer destinations closer to Bangkok tend to choose Hua Hin. And for newlyweds and higher-yield families, Samui is the top choice.

On the radar Ecotourism is an emerging choice among families and more married couples are seeking meditation retreats. They tend to choose less commercial areas like Khao Lak and Ranong.

MALAYSIA

By S Puvaneswary

Uzaidi Udanis

General manager, Vacasia Tours & Travel

Common family travel configurations We see smaller families from longhaul markets. Asian and domestic travellers are more likely to include extended family, in group sizes of eight to 10 pax.

Accommodation preferences Travellers from the US and Europe choose boutique, upscale resorts in secluded areas whereas

Asians and Malaysians favour accessible, busy locations with nearby food options.

Requests for adjoining rooms are common except when it comes to domestic travellers, who tend to squeeze as many people in a single room as possible and request for extra beds.

Length of stay Six nights for longhaul travellers; two to three for Asian travellers.

Top activities Food is a priority for locals and Asians; Singaporeans and Indonesians in particular will do their research online on restaurants to visit. Relaxing by the beach or pool and trekking are more common among European families.

Most valued amenities Longhaul travellers enjoy resort facilities and utilise kids clubs more so than Asians and locals. Children's pools, snorkelling and island visits are important across markets.

Top beach resort spots Langkawi is most popular among longhaul travellers as it is easily accessible from Kuala Lumpur. Redang, Tioman and Sipadan are popular among those who dive and snorkel.

On the radar Tanjong Jara Resort, an authentically Malay beach resort in Terengganu, is comfortable, luxurious and offers excellent service.

Arokia Das

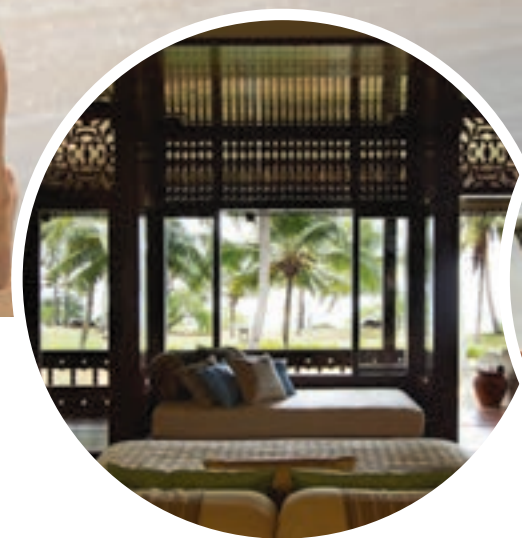
Senior manager, Luxury Tours Malaysia

Common family travel configurations Asians tend more to travel with extended families of six to eight pax, versus small families of two to three pax for Europeans.

Accommodation preferences Adjoining rooms are favoured across markets.

Length of stay Malaysians prefer short weekend trips, while Asians stay an average of three nights and longhaul travellers at least five nights.

Top activities Longhaul visitors usually take a half-day tour and explore on their own the rest of the time or relax by beach-



Clockwise from above: Tanjong Jara Resort in Terengganu; Hyatt Regency Hua Hin; Capella Singapore

es and pools. For locals and Asians, shopping and sightseeing are top priorities.

Most valued amenities Separate pools for kids and adults are appreciated. Kids clubs are also welcome, likewise for bicycle, snorkelling and kayak rentals.

Top beach resort spots Langkawi, due to its accessibility and aggressive promotions. Kota Kinabalu is popular with longhaul, South Korean and Japanese tourists.

On the radar The new St Regis Langkawi is a luxurious property with great service.

INDONESIA

By Mimi Hudoyo

Hasiyanna Ashadi Koestoer

Managing director, Marintur Indonesia

Common family travel configurations Families from South-east Asia and the Middle East usually come with their extended families, including grandparents, cousins, parents' siblings and their families. Middle Eastern families may include a family head with two wives and their kids and sometimes the kids' nannies come along too.

Accommodation preferences These range from three- to four-star properties, and even up to five-star ones or villas for Middle Eastern travellers.

Length of stay Between four and 10 days.

Top activities When not with their children at the swimming pools and play-

With multi-generational family vacations on the rise, beach resorts that cater to a wider variety of guests, ages and interests are becoming more valued than ever, travel agents tell **TTG Asia**

grounds, parents are usually at the spa or out shopping. In Bali, families will visit places such as safari park, monkey forest and temples together.

Most valued amenities Kids club, multiple pools and a location close to the beach and places of interest. Many families require child-care services.

Top beach resort spots Bali is still top and by far the most family friendly.

Ratna Subrata

*External relations manager,
Happy Trails Indonesia*

Common family travel configurations

The family market for us comes from Germany and the Netherlands, usually comprising parents with two or three kids.



Accommodation preferences Families with kids 10 years or younger prefer family rooms or connecting rooms.

Length of stay European families usually visit during their summer holidays, with Bali as part of the 21-day Java overland package. The length of stay in Bali is between two to three nights.

Top activities Cooking, kite making and Balinese offering making classes are popular. Some families opt for soft treks and tree-top adventures. Day cruises to Lem-bongan are also popular.

Most valued amenities Kids' pools are important to many families. Playgrounds are a plus point but not mandatory.

Top beach resort spots Bali.

On the radar Lombok and Gili Islands have the potential to become family travel destinations. Gili Trawangan, for example, attracts families with teenagers.

PHILIPPINES

By Rosa Ocampo

JP Cabalza

*Managing director,
Cencorp Travel and Tours*

Common family travel configurations Family travel is no longer confined to immediate family members and it is now common for family friends to tag along.

Accommodation preferences Many choose adjoining hotel rooms. Villas are preferred for newlyweds seeking privacy.

Length of stay An average of five days for families from Asia, and at least eight for

those from Europe, the US, the Middle East and Russia.

Top activities For kids, water activities like banana boat and kids' pools are a hit. Wi-Fi is now a must for both adults and kids.

Most valued amenities Resorts should be self-contained – with pools for kids and adults, a good blend of local and international cuisine, and tours offered by both the property and tour operators.

Top beach resort spots Boracay and the Cebu/Bohol combination are most sought after. Palawan is also popular, with Puerto Princesa, Honda Bay, El Nido and Coron being main attractions.

On the radar Siargao and Aurora are becoming buzzwords for surfers, while Bicol and Bohol are destinations to watch owing to their other offerings in addition to beach activities.

Two Seasons Coron Island Resort and Spa and Huma Island Resort, both in Palawan, are family-friendly properties with extensive facilities.

Fe Abling-Yu

General manager, Arfel Travel and Tours

Common family travel configurations

Family travel is no longer confined to a couple and their children but expanded to the so-called "affinity group", comprising extended family of grandparents, friends and even domestic helpers. The affinity group is increasingly common for weddings of other nationalities.

Accommodation preferences Adjoining or adjacent rooms are common preferences. Villas normally appeal more to honeymooners.

Length of stay A minimum of one week.

Top activities Kids enjoy water sports. On-site resort offerings such as cooking lessons keep the adults busy.

Most valued amenities Multiple pools, beach activities and entertainment.

Top beach resort spots Boracay is top. As well, Cebu combined with Bohol is affordable, whereas Davao sells due to its food plus the Samal Island and Eden Nature Park.

On the radar The all-inclusive Henann Resort Alona Beach in Panglao, Bohol is very family-friendly with several swimming pools and a combination of villa and resort rooms.

SINGAPORE

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

Jaclyn Yeoh

Managing director, Siam Express

Common family travel configurations Multi-generational family travel is becoming common, but more typical is small families (a husband, wife and children) or two couples.

Accommodation preferences Deluxe room, suite and villas.

Length of stay Two or three days – the typical duration for a stay in Singapore.

Top activities Spas for couples and sea

sports for adventurous children.

Most valued amenities Swimming pools and beaches for family activities.

Top beach resort spots Capella Singapore and W Singapore Sentosa Cove.

Ram Samtani

General manager, Ramesh Travel Service

Common family travel configurations

We see (various) combinations – parents with children as well as multi-generational families, especially given the trend of families celebrating milestone birthdays or anniversaries together.

Accommodation preferences There's now a higher demand for villas to fit families altogether.

Length of stay Three nights are the norm.

Top activities Families with kids look to relax over beach activities. For three-generational groups, food is very important and they seek cultural excursions too.

Most valued amenities Kids clubs and swimming pools.

Top beach resort spots Sentosa.

VIETNAM

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

Tran Gia Bach

*Regional general manager,
Buffalo Tours Vietnam*

Common family travel configurations

Small families taking advantage of public and summer holidays are common.

Accommodation preferences Younger families travelling with children prefer connecting rooms. Multi-bedroom villas with private pools are popular with multi-generational families.

Length of stay Local families tend to take multiple short vacations, so a typical stay might be 4D3N, just enough time to unwind but short enough to not disrupt their routines. Foreigners (do not necessarily stay much longer at a single resort)

as they often visit multiple cities at a go.

Top activities The all-inclusive concept hasn't caught on in Vietnam; travellers like the freedom of going off-property to explore the surrounding areas.

Most valued amenities Swimming pools are always a big hit.

Top beach resort spots Nha Trang has long been Vietnam's top beach destination. Danang is also popular, with its own international airport and a spot on TripAdvisor's 2015 list of must-go places. Halong Bay, Phan Thiet, Phu Quoc and Con Dao are also popular.

On the radar Victoria Hoi An and Victoria Phan Thiet are consistently among the top rated. New luxury resorts to watch are Amanoi, Fusion Maia and Naman Retreat, etc.

AUSTRALIA

By Rebecca Elliott

Robyn Eddy-Ellis

Travel consultant, Flight Centre Brisbane

Common family travel configurations

The traditional family unit of parents and kids is most common, but there is a big trend towards multi-generational holidays, which see families travelling with grandparents, relatives as well as other groups of friends and their families too.

Accommodation preferences I frequently book two-bedroom apartments for families as this guarantees they are in the same area while also affording privacy.

There is strong demand for adjoining rooms, but we're not always able to guarantee availability. Villas, holiday homes or self-catering apartments are popular for the space and luxury aspect.

Length of stay Week-long holidays are most popular, but five days are common for shorter trips to Cairns or Hamilton Island.

Top activities Water sports are key as they allow older kids to have fun while spending time with their parents. Half-day tours are popular for families with younger children.

Most valued amenities Kids clubs are high on the priority list, and some parents decide on which resort to book based on



Kids' amenities at Angsana Velavaru

Report Beach resorts

the starting age accepted at the clubs; likewise for nanny services.

Many parents also seek adult-only areas. Plenty of my clients choose resorts based on whether it has a kid-free pool so that they can enjoy some separate time.

Top beach resort spots Cairns and the Whitsunday are great as they are af-

fordable and a manageable flight away. Hamilton Island is particularly popular as it offers stay-pay and kids-eat-free promotions, and the destination caters to the whole family with a diverse range of activities and accommodation options.

Of course, the Gold Coast is also a great spot for families as it's affordable with cheap flights and a good range of

self-catered, apartment-style accommodation.

On the radar The Reef View Hotel Hamilton Island caters to multiple ages, has a good selection of room types and offers water sports. The Hamilton Island Holiday Homes are also great as they can accommodate large groups and provide

golf buggies for getting around the island.

MALDIVES

By Feizal Samath

Shafraz Fazley

Managing director, Viluxor Holidays

Common family travel configurations

Families from the longhaul market comprise parents and kids, and occasionally also grandparents or close relatives. Asian families travel with one child or the couple would bring their parents along.

Accommodation preferences All-inclusive resorts that include speedboat transfers are the most booked. Longhaul families prefer interconnecting rooms while Asians tend to book single-bedroom accommodation.

Length of stay Seven days for longhaul visitors and about four for Asian visitors.

Top activities For longhaul markets, parents usually enjoy diving and spas while their children partake in activities run by the resort's kids clubs. Asians like to enjoy activities as a family, with fishing and banana boat rides as favourites.

Most valued amenities Families value kids clubs, pools and kids menus, while babysitting services are requested by longhaul travellers in particular.

On the radar Soneva Fushi Resort, Hideaway Beach Resort & Spa, Lux* South Ari Atoll, Four Season Landaa Giraavaru, Taj Exotica Resort and Spa, to name a few.

Shausha Aan Shafeeq

Director, sales & marketing,
Maldives Holiday Collections

Common family travel configurations

Asian families comprise parents, kids and occasionally grandparents while longhaul families travel with friends as well.

Accommodation preferences Most prefer family suites and all-inclusive resorts.

Length of stay Asians, especially Chinese, spend at least four nights while longhaul travellers stay seven to 10 nights.

Top activities Skiing, banana boating, diving and snorkelling as well as special activities for children like those offered in kids clubs and kids' cooking classes.

Most valued amenities Families enjoy hotel facilities while couples prefer their private space and rooms.

Top beach resort spots Per Aquum Niy-



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Pangulasian Island, an eco-luxury island resort in El Nido, the Philippines

ama Maldives, Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru, Baros Maldives, Coco Palm Dhuni Kolhu, JA Manafaru, Angsana Velavaru and W Maldives.

CHINA

By Caroline Boey

Kris Van Goethem
Inbound and MICE director,
Thomas Cook China

Common family travel configurations
In general, the international demand for China as a family beach resort destination is not high; this type of travel is more popular for the domestic market. Our main longhaul markets – the UK, France, Italy, Spain and Germany – visit China mainly for the culture and some may stay at a beach resort at the end of a tour.

Accommodation preferences Our clients prefer luxury accommodation.

Length of stay Between three to five nights and a bit longer in summer.

Top activities Relaxing in the resort and enjoying its facilities.

Most valued amenities Good F&B with international options and good service.

Top beach resort spots Hainan and Sanya have good demand, though access is still weak for the Western markets due to the (lack of) direct flights.

On the radar Perhaps Qingdao and Xiamen, but again access is an issue.

Joy Liao
Sales director, inbound and MICE center,
Century Holiday International Travel Group

Common family travel configurations
Family travel is a small market for us as most customers visit China for its culture and natural scenery. Family clients we handle usually travel with grandparents and other relatives.

Accommodation preferences Usually twin and double rooms, and occasionally family or interconnecting rooms.

Length of stay Asians visiting Sanya spend six to seven days. Longhaul travellers who go to Qingdao stay up to 10 days.

Top activities Most just like to experience the resort's facilities, spend time on the beach and do some sightseeing nearby.

Most valued amenities Restaurants are valued by both Asian and longhaul guests.

Top beach resort spots Sanya, in Hainan.

On the radar Qingdao, which hosted sailing events during the 2008 Beijing Olympics, may appeal to longhaul travellers seeking natural beauty.



Soneva Fushi Resort in the Maldives



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Destination Hong Kong

With Hong Kong's inbound tourism having hit a few major bumps in recent years, stakeholders are taking a hard look at ways to propel the city ahead of the competition and latch onto the minds of visitors far and wide.

In the face of dwindling arrivals from its top source market China, and rising global competition, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) now seeks to pursue a more balanced portfolio of visitorship by allocating a bigger portion of its marketing budget to international markets.

Boosted by additional government funding of over HK\$200 million (US\$25.8 million) in the 2016/17 Budget, HKTB will launch a new phase of the *My Time for Hong Kong* global campaign in the second half of this year.

The NTO hopes to maximise the exposure of Hong Kong through international and regional broadcasters and digital platforms. As well, international events such as Hong Kong Wine & Dine Festival, and Hong Kong Cyclothon will be scaled up.

HKTB executive director, Anthony Lau, said: "For shorthaul markets including South-east Asia, we will collaborate with local trade partners, hotels, and tourist attractions to roll out *Family Fun* and *Getaway to Hong Kong* campaigns, targeting the family and youth segments respectively."

Various special packages will be introduced as part of the *Family Fun* campaign – first launched in South-east Asia in March/April – to leverage school holidays and weekends in individual markets.

Added Lau: "Hong Kong is still a popular and preferred stopover destination (for longhaul travellers). HKTB will continue



A residential apartment block in Hong Kong's Quarry Bay

Issue of the day

Visitors kept at bay

Greater access to Sai Kung is needed for agents to better promote this hidden gem in Hong Kong. By **Prudence Lui**



Hong Kong UNESCO Global Geopark

It appears the Hong Kong UNESCO Global Geopark, despite being known in the scientific circles since 2009, will remain one of the city's best kept secrets and lay in wait off the beaten track.

A ferry and a bus service were recently made available to the park – located in the Sai Kung East Country Park in the East and North East New Territories – but at present they operate only on Sundays and public holidays, placing limits on opportunities for more to discover the park.

Since starting operations in January, the 160-seat Kaito Ferry Service has been plying from Ma Liu Shui in Shatin to Lai Chi Wo, a manageable walk to the geopark. The ferry leaves Ma Liu Shui at 09.00 and returns from Lai Chi Wo at 15.30.

The 26-seat shuttle bus tour service was launched by the Sai Kung District Community Centre in May 2016, taking just 40 minutes to travel from its terminus in Sai Kung Town to the East Dam of High Island Geo-area.

Despite receiving "only a handful of enquiries" about the geopark, Cary Chiu, general manager of PC Tours and Travel, is certain the interest will grow.

"The new services are better than nothing, (but) what worries me is the availability of seats. If the bus is packed it would be a long wait for the next departure. If there isn't regular public transport, travellers may not consider going."

Chiu played down the suggestion that the present situation would encourage FITs to bypass agents to visit the park on their own.

"Clients may approach us for a tour guide to accompany them and we can even arrange transport from downtown to Sai Kung... There is still a way for agents to survive," he emphasised.

ATI Travel managing director, Richard Woss, commented: "I will combine (the geopark attraction) with our hiking tours to enhance the itinerary. Frankly, such nature themed tours (interest) a very small market but the (improved) access is better than nothing."

Meanwhile, developments are underway in the Sai Kung area, with the Volcano Discovery Centre opening in Sai Kung Waterfront Park in 2014, and the High Island Geo-trail enhanced with visitor facilities including a boardwalk and information panels.

After suffering a fall in regional arrivals among other setbacks in recent years, Hong Kong's inbound tourism is stepping up on destination promotion efforts in international markets, writes **Prudence Lui**

its partnership with destinations in Pearl River Delta and also explore opportunities brought about by China's *One Belt, One Road* initiative to boost arrivals from long-haul markets."

General manager of Tour East Hong Kong, Daniel Tam, welcomed the NTO's stronger focus on the international markets.

"Fee waivers extended to (more) overseas trade shows organised by the HKTB this year (has translated to) bigger delegations and collective efforts from the trade to promote Hong Kong (against stronger

and a six per cent increase from Japan, South Korea, Singapore and other South-east Asian countries, general manager Christina Cheng told *TTG Asia*.

She said: "Guests from longhaul markets mostly prefer multi-destination packages combining travel to major cities in China, Macau and other South-east

Asian countries."

The hotel has its sights trained on the international market by increasing the number of triple and quad rooms to meet growing demand from the family and student segments, in addition to introducing a halal menu for Muslim guests.

But to better tackle dipping tourist

numbers, HATA's Willis opines that more attractions are still needed for Hong Kong.

He said: "Many (regional travellers) comment that it's better to stay away from touristy areas like Stanley. They want to experience unusual events, (which means) we can promote weekend markets in Kam Tin and Quarry Bay."

wide

marketing efforts from neighbouring destinations like Macau)," he said.

Hong Kong Association of Travel Agents (HATA) vice chairman Richard Willis would like the HKTB, apart from fee waivers at trade shows, to subsidise airfares and accommodation for agents too.

Said Willis: "(Some HATA members) argue that the industry is facing stiff competition and high trade show expenses... Singapore and Macau are already offering agents free hotel nights and cash subsidies."

Providing a snapshot of how international visitorship has been performing, Harbour Plaza 8 Degree Hotel recorded a 30 per cent growth in terms of roomnights from major longhaul markets such as the US, Canada, Australia, the UK and France,

Viewpoints

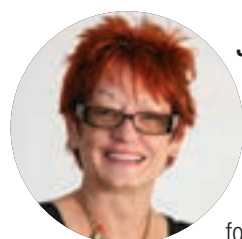
What's your outlook for inbound business in the next 12 months?



Cary Chiu, general manager, PC Tours & Travel

We specialise in the longhaul market and this year's outlook is pretty bleak.

Hopefully, this would not last beyond another 12 months. Leveraging HKTB's fee waiver for overseas events, we took part in IMEX and a travel mission to Australia.



Jenny May, managing director, The Destination Management Company

I am not optimistic for the rest of 2016 and 2017 is not looking

good either. I think the decline has a lot to do with the worldwide coverage of the riots, the disappearing booksellers and a government that can't seem to make decisions.

The government and HKTB should have spent a lot more of their budgets on developing new attractions for the Western market instead of (focusing) on the mainland market which comes only to shop. Look at what Singapore has done and how their tourism has boomed!



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Destination Hong Kong

NEWS IN A MINUTE

1 Hotel Stage

The 97-room Hotel Stage debuted in Yau Ma Tei early this year, featuring stylish rooms with large windows, high-speed multimedia devices and deluxe amenities.

Facilities include an all-day Italian restaurant, a creative hideout and social space Muse, plus meeting and function facilities for up to 150 people. Club and Suite guests can enjoy 24-hour exclusive access to the Library Lounge.



1

2 Peninsula Academy

A new family-oriented activity at The Peninsula Hong Kong's Academy programmes is the paper lantern-making workshop with a master craftsman, who will introduce the art of paper-lantern making and share stories from his childhood. Guests will then be taken on a tour of a paper craft and joss paper shop, before learning how to make their own personalised lantern in the shape of a Peninsula pageboy hat.

5

Suitable for groups of four to eight pax, the workshop takes four hours and must be booked at least three weeks in advance.

3 Kai Tak Ferry Pier

Located at the former Kai Tak Airport fire station, the Kai Tak Ferry Pier was launched in March 2016 to provide an additional option for cruise passengers and visitors seeking shore excursions via ferry.

Regular scheduled ferry services between Kai Tak and Kwun Tong Public Pier have also commenced, operating from 09.30 to 18.15 on weekends and public holidays. Fares are HK\$7 (US\$0.90) for adults, and free for children under five.

4 The Pier Business Class Lounge

Cathay Pacific's new business class lounge has reopened at The Pier in Hong Kong International Airport last month. Located adjacent to Gate

65 in the airport's north-west concourse, the new 3,306m² lounge is 1,000m² larger than before, and offers seating for 550 people.

The lounge also provides 14 shower suites and a relaxation room, plus F&B outlets including The Food Hall, The Noodle Bar and the brand-new Tea House.

5 Rhombus International Hotels Group

Rhombus International Hotels Group has rolled out mobile handy smartphones for complimentary guest use. It affords guests unlimited local and international calls (to Canada, China, Singapore, South Korea and the US), unlimited 3G mobile internet access and other features.

The new service is available at Hotel Panorama by Rhombus in Tsim Sha Tsui, Hotel LKF by Rhombus in Central, Hotel Bonaparte by Rhombus in Wanchai and Hotel Pennington by Rhombus in Causeway Bay.

Destination in numbers

10.9%

The percentage fall in total arrivals in 1Q2016 to 13.7 million, with the China market suffering the biggest drop (15.1%)

markets saw single-digit growth, with highest growth from Vietnam (28.4%), the GCC (24.6%) and the Philippines (24.2%) respectively

86%

The average occupancy rate of hotels for 1Q2016, 3% lower than the same period in 2015. Average room rate declined 9.1% to HK\$1,292 (US\$166)

6.2 million

Overnight visitor arrivals in 1Q2016, marking a fall of 5.8%. Non-mainland

MY WAY



Luke Lovegrove
Commercial director,
HK Express

If I had my way to improve things, I would... find ways to efficiently deliver more capacity in our airport. Given the time taken to get the third runway operational, Hong Kong will lose out to airports like Shenzhen, Guangzhou, and others in the Pearl River Delta region.

Hong Kong must ensure that the airport here is competitive and remains the number one choice for the 80 million people who reside within two hours' drive from it.

Capitalising on the travel needs of this enviable catchment is key to Hong Kong's long-term sustainable future. Aviation contributes over HK\$100 billion (US\$12.9 billion) each year to Hong Kong's economy – this is simply too high to ignore.

We are working with ferry and land transport providers to offer a seamless connection from locations in the Pearl River Delta directly onto our flights. We hope that this service will be available from late summer or early autumn. The airport is helping us a lot with this as they also see the potential and grow the traffic going through their sky pier terminal.

Working together across different industries and creating collaborative ventures with partners around the region are hence instrumental in overcoming the issues we face.

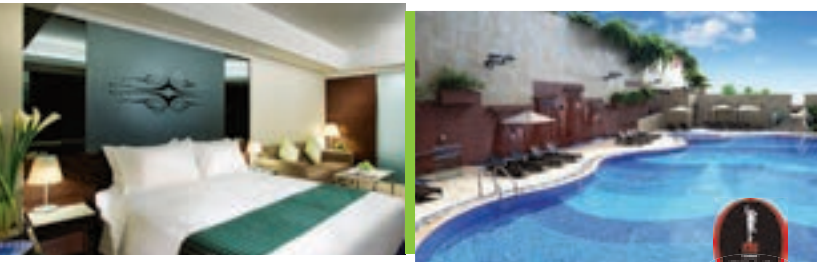
What are the current challenges in Hong Kong's aviation landscape?

The greatest challenge is the lack of slots at Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA). It is essential for us to improve aircraft utilisation so that we can make the most efficient use of our aircraft fleet. This will help to keep costs down on a per seat kilometre basis and in turn ensure we can offer low fares.

But in order to keep this fine balance, we must have sufficient slots to match our fleet growth. We are working closely with HKIA and Civil Aviation Department to ensure we can continue our growth to meet the demand from travellers.



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Destination **Australia**

Major malls in the Gold Coast are undergoing extensive renovations to show tourists that the destination offers more than just the sun, sand and sea. By **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

Not just a surfer's paradise

The Gold Coast is busy sprucing up its retail infrastructure as it works towards become a shopping paradise; Spit beach in Surfers Paradise pictured



© Daniel S. Suterbox

Destination in numbers

A\$1.2 billion

The total international visitor expenditure (equivalent to US\$910 million) in the Gold Coast in 2015, up 20.6% from 2014

72.5%

The average hotel occupancy rate on the Gold Coast in 2015, up two per cent from the previous year

A\$13 billion

The estimated potential worth of the Chinese tourism market to Australia by 2020

Already renowned as a holiday haven with sandy beaches, the Gold Coast now wants to establish itself as Australia's biggest shopping mecca with extensive upgrading and redevelopment of major malls, which will place the destination in good stead in its pursuit of Asian travellers.

Pacific Fair Shopping Centre is set to become the fourth largest shopping centre in the country when its A\$670 million (US\$482 million) expansion is completed this year. The expansion will also transform the property from a regular shopping mall into a designer destination debuting brands like Givenchy, Gucci, Hermes, Louis Vuitton and Prada.

Meanwhile, this year, the Australia Fair Shopping Centre will brandish a fresh look after a A\$15 million revitalisation, while Robina Town Centre's A\$160 million expansion is expected to complete by the end this year.

Harbour Town Gold Coast, which is Australia's largest outlet shopping centre with more than 220 stores, is also currently undergoing a A\$20 million expansion. New stores include brands like Coach, Hugo Boss, Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren, and Australia's first Victoria's Secret Outlet store.

Commenting on the rejuvenation of the Gold Coast's retail landscape, Tourism

Australia's managing director, John O'Sullivan, said: "The unique thing about the Gold Coast is that you've got an amazing beachfront and coastline and good (shopping) products. The important thing is that the Gold Coast can now provide a concentrated premium shopping experience."

The Gold Coast trade is also positive that the city's improved shopping offers will make the destination more attractive to international visitors, particularly those from China.

The latest statistics from the Gold Coast Tourism Corporation showed that China was key to international growth in recent years, with the number of Chinese travellers reaching 242,000 in 2015, a 20 per cent increase from the previous year.

Last year, China was the Gold Coast's largest inbound market for visitor arrivals, and also Australia's largest market for total spend and visitor nights.

George Liu, general manager of Gold Coast-based Conrad Travel, said: "Asian travellers, and the Chinese especially, like to have at least one free and easy day for shopping because they are always looking to bring something home (from their travels)."

"The Gold Coast has never been known as a shopping destination. But with these new shopping malls it will be possible for

us to include them as new products for free and easy days in our itineraries," Liu added.

Similarly, Adeline Yeo, operation manager of Perfect Tours Australia, said the revamped shopping malls would attract Asians.

"Previously, shopping in the Gold Coast was more about the factory outlets. But with premium brands entering the market, we will be able to get a good mix of budget and luxury shopping," Yeo said.

She added: "The main complaint that tourists give is the limited shopping hours, since late-night shopping is only available on Thursdays."

Apart from shiny new malls, Jupiters Hotel and Casino is also transforming under a A\$345 million refurbishment. One of Gold Coast's most significant hotel refurbishments, the property will soon welcome a new six-star 700-key hotel tower rising 17 storeys in front of its existing 592-key hotel. The new tower is touted to feature some of Australia's most luxurious accommodations, and is slated to be completed ahead of the 2018 Commonwealth Games.

Meanwhile, the ongoing A\$1.4 billion Ruby development – an integrated residential and resort precinct in Surfers Paradise – has also been hailed as another game changer on the coastline. It will also be ready to welcome guests in 2018.

Andy Indra, senior sales manager of Experience Tours Australia, commented: "These new infrastructure and shopping attractions show that the destination is doing a lot to improve itself and these will definitely make it more attractive for us to promote the Gold Coast beyond its sand and sea."

Destination Australia

Issue of the day

Strawberry planting at a farm in Wamuran, Queensland

No backing for backpacker tax

The tourism industry is concerned that the controversial tax will discourage working holidaymakers to visit Australia when implemented. By **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

The Australian tourism trade is worried that backpackers will shun Down Under as a travel destination and place the country at a distinct disadvantage to competing working holiday destinations like New Zealand if a proposed backpacker tax kicks in.

This new income tax on working holidaymakers – which taxes backpackers about A\$0.33 (US\$0.24) for every dollar

earned – was due to start in July this year and boost government coffers by an estimated A\$540 million.

However, following widespread criticism and opposition by farmers and the tourism industry, the controversial tax has been suspended for six months until January 2017, pending a ministerial review.

Presently, like other workers, working holidaymakers do not have to submit taxes unless their annual income is over

A\$18,200.

The National Farmers' Federation welcomed the delay of the tax and called for a permanent solution.

Said the federation's president, Brent Finlay: "Backpackers are an integral part of the Australian agricultural workforce. We must make sure they have every reason to come here to work, and to spend valuable tourism dollars in our regional communities."

According to Tourism Australia's managing director John O'Sullivan, the country sees about 185,000 backpackers of the 7.4 million total international visitor arrivals every year.

When asked about the significance of backpacker tourism to Australia, O'Sullivan said: "This (backpacker) group is quite a small group but they stay for a long time in the country and are valuable in (terms of) expenditure. Also, they are very important to the workforce as they work in various tourism industries like hospitality."

He added: "The government is aware of industry concerns and is working on it."

Meanwhile, Australian Tourism Export Council's managing director, Peter Shelley, said in a statement: "We welcome the postponement of this tax and the willingness of the government to look at ways to improve Australia's backpacker offering, but remain concerned by the continuing uncertainty created by the delay."

"With a review scheduled for early 2017, it leaves backpackers considering an Australian (working) holiday unsure of what to expect and this will only further encourage them to consider an alternative such as New Zealand or an Asian destination."

Shelley also urged the government to go beyond addressing labour needs in its review of the tax.

"It must also look at the tourism industry and the negative message we are sending to the international visitor market," he added.

NEWS IN A MINUTE



1 Gold Coast Airport

The Gold Coast Airport has embarked on a A\$300 million (US\$222 million) upgrade, which will see the construction of a new three-storey international terminal and four aerobridges ready by the 2018 Commonwealth Games.

Subsequent stages of the project are slated to be completed in late 2018 and late 2020 respectively, and include further enhancements to the existing terminal building and the addition of three wide-bodied aircraft parking stands.

2 Jewel

Jewel will be the first beachfront mixed-use development on the Gold Coast in over 30 years. Constructed to the tune of A\$970 million, the three-tower property will have 512 apartments, a six-star hotel with 171 rooms and several luxury retail precincts when completed in 2018.



3 China Eastern Airlines

From December 16, 2016, China Eastern Airlines will introduce daily flights on an Airbus A330 aircraft between Brisbane and Shanghai, a boost to the originally planned thrice-weekly service that was due to launch in November 2016 between Queensland and China.

Currently, the airline only operates a seasonal service between Shanghai and Cairns.

4 Kurrawa Terrace

Gold Coast's first permanent beachfront venue, Kurrawa Terrace, is now available to host outdoor events.

The A\$1 million project, funded by the City of Gold Coast and the State Government as a Commonwealth Games Legacy Project, can accommodate 150 seated guests or 350 cocktail-style, with additional space available at the adjacent beach area.

5 Multiple-entry visas for Indians

Australia has announced plans to introduce a new three-year multiple-entry visa for Indian travellers. Scheduled to be rolled out on a trial basis by July 2016, this new visa will allow Indian holidaymakers to enter Australia multiple times on the

same visa, with each stay valid for up to three months. This trial applies to eligible applicants visiting Australia for tourism and business.

6 HRS

Corporate hotel booking platform HRS has expanded its global portfolio by investing in The Lido Group, an Australian business travel specialist.

This marks the OTA's first foray into the Australian market, the seventh largest corporate accommodations market in the world.

The Lido Group is a corporate and government accommodation aggregator and provider of integrated payment solutions. It has about 6,700 Australian hotels in its portfolio and its network includes both large cities and more remote locations.

Viewpoints

What else does the Gold Coast need to do to promote tourism?



Andy Indra, senior sales manager, Experience Tours Australia
We should increase awareness of the self-drive programmes available to attract

repeat visitors to (venture) beyond the usual attractions. (I believe) the city outskirts city will be very appealing (to this demographic).



George Liu, general manager, Conrad Travel
There can be more destination promotion on Asian TV programmes because

it will capture the interest of potential travellers and attract them to the Gold Coast.

MY WAY



Jane Kingston

Director of sales & marketing,
Watermark Hotel Group

What are your current challenges?

As the Gold Coast is a popular transient destination for youthful workers, skilled personnel can be rare. As such,

employers face continual challenges to maintain the standard and consistency of service that many discerning travellers expect.

Consumers' expectations are also changing, some having extraordinarily high expectations for a low price.

Accompanied by social media channels that support a voice that once would not have been heard, the hospitality world is consistently under the microscope. This may be a good thing, provided the platform that the consumer uses (conveys his/her honest feedback and reviews).

If I had my way to improve things, I would... continually maintain (hotel) properties to the standard that hoteliers would like to present and feel proud of.

However, some owners do not wish to reinvest money without a significant return on investment, thus properties often look tired and are left until a ma-



Gold Coast's coastline

major refurbishment is required.

Also, compared with other destinations, we lack the true definition of a luxury hotel on the Gold Coast. While some facades can be appealing, the in-

frastructure to meet the expectations of the consumer and delivering consistent service excellence is often impacted by high labour costs, transient personnel and the lack of experience.

TRIED AND TESTED

Hot Air Balloon Gold Coast



Paige Lee Pei Qi is captivated by the sweeping bird's-eye view of Queensland's hinterland as she soars high above ground in a hot-air balloon

WHAT A hot-air balloon ride in the Gold Coast has been hailed as the best way to view Queensland's picturesque hinterland, where one would soar up to an altitude of 3,000 feet (914m) and float against the unbeatable backdrop of the rising sun.

WHY I learnt that hot-air balloon flights are usually timed at dawn because it provides the optimum weather condition for launching balloons. As well, the ballooning industry in Queensland is known for its reliable hot-air balloon departures.

HOW With our eyes barely open, we groggily left the hotel located in Surfers

Paradise at an ungodly time of 04.00. It took us approximately 90 minutes to reach Beaudesert, a town in the Scenic Rim Region, where half-inflated hot-air balloons were waiting for us.

As the massive balloons started to fill up – the balloon's peak was about 10 storeys high – we clumsily climbed into the basket. It was then reality hit me: we were going to float in the sky!

I was intrigued by the manoeuvring techniques of the hot-air balloon. There was no steering wheel or engines involved as we gently drifted upwards from the ground. The pilot explained to me that warmer air rises in cooler air, hence he

had to fire the burner at regular intervals throughout the flight to ensure that the balloon remained stable. The direction the balloon takes, however, was dependent on the wind conditions.

As we gradually lifted into the skies, the stunning landscape unfolded before my eyes. The view was made even more dramatic as the golden rays of the sun spilled out from behind the fluffy clouds. In a mere 15 minutes, we had already soared to a height of 3,000 feet.

The majestic view of the hinterlands from above was simply breathtaking. I wish that time could come to a standstill as I allowed my eyes and mind to soak

in the tranquillity of the panorama that unfolded before me.

VERDICT I would gladly wake up at 04.00 to do this all over again in a heartbeat. Thirty-five minutes in the air was just too short.

Rates From AU\$280 (US\$208) per adult (including breakfast and champagne at O'Reillys Vineyard)

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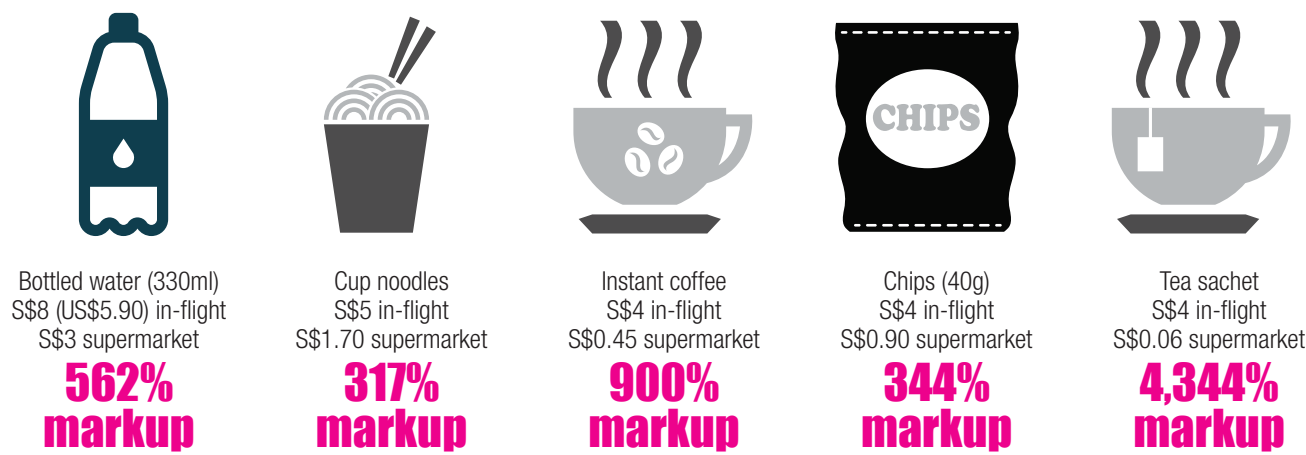
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ICYMI: Tune in to what's been going on at ttgasia.com and the social media space

TOURISM DATA

Budget carriers are known to charge a premium for in-flight food and drink items, but by how much more? These numbers may astonish you



Data provided by Kayak.sg reflects average prices charged by Tigerair, Jetstar Asia, Scoot and AirAsia in comparison to prices of the same products found in supermarkets. AirAsia prices were found to be significantly lower than the three other LCCs.

WHO'S SAYING WHAT

Instagram



Thailand's tourism minister Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul and TTG Asia deputy editor Xinyi-Liang Pholsena at Thailand Travel Mart Plus 2016. [#ChiangMai](#) [#tradeshows](#)



ASEAN tourism ministers and top executives linking hands at the opening ceremony of the very-first ASEAN Ecotourism Forum, held in Pakse, Laos. [#ASEAN](#) [#ecotourism](#)



Singapore agents being awarded by Royal Caribbean aboard the *Ovation of the Seas* for helping make the ship's inaugural itinerary a sold-out affair. [#OvationoftheSeas](#)

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



JAPAN AIRLINES SERVES HALAL FOOD

Beginning last month, Japan Airlines (JAL) has begun serving halal meals aboard all outbound international flights from Japan. The carrier had been serving halal certified meals as special requests but will now provide them regularly after recently receiving approval from the Japan Islamic Trust for the whole processing of Muslim meal menus. All JAL flights from Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta will also offer halal cuisine.

WORKING IN HOTEL-LIKE COMFORT

Those in the travel industry will feel right at home working from a new hospitality-themed coworking space co-founded by hotel developer Jaelle Ang. Located in downtown Singapore, the place, simply named The Great Room, comprises nearly 1400m² of space including a common lounge area, a number of private offices and hot desking seats. Like any good hotel, creature comforts are also well taken care of with



plush leather sofas, hidden breakaway areas, massage services, mid-week drink sessions and a breakfast spread provided every Monday to take care of those blues.

IATA COMMITS TO TACKLING TERRORISM

During the association's 72nd Annual General Meeting, IATA member airlines unanimously adopted a resolution that denounces terrorism and calls for intensified cooperation between governments and the aviation industry to keep flying secure. Part of the push calls for the increased sharing of information among agencies and the employing of smart security measures at airports.



UNRULY BEHAVIOUR AT SHANGHAI DISNEYLAND

China's first Disneyland theme park opened to much fanfare last month, but the uncivilised behaviour of many of the park's first visitors left much to be desired. Local media reported vandalism of park property, garbage strewn on the floor and queue-cutting as some of the atrocities. The Shanghai government has issued an etiquette guide advising guests against unwanted behaviour at the park.



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- Star Cruises (2008)
- Sabre Travel Network Asia-Pacific (2009)
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- Lotte Tour (2011)
- Hong Kong International Airport (2013)
- Raffles Hotel Singapore (2013)
- Regal Airport Hotel (2015)
- Banyan Tree Spa (2015)

TTT Asia Media is pleased to announce that it has set up a virtual TTT Travel Hall of Fame (www.ttgtravelfhof.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.





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PT. Multi Holiday, Indonesia

Rudy Techrisna Satyadi, Managing Director

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吴立辉, 会议文化交流中心主管

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Daimaru Matsuzakaya Department Store, Japan

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上海宝华万豪酒店, 中国

Johnnie Chen, 驻店经理



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First Choice in Aviation: Lufthansa Group



Lufthansa has been awarded a 5-Star ranking for its First Class product and service package since 2013. On the ground, the award-winning First Class terminal in Frankfurt provides private services from Personal Assistants for HONs and First Class customers, from greeting on arrival through to check-in and until departure. The dedicated terminal has comfortable armchairs, sofas and other amenities like quiet rooms with daybeds. Furthermore, a separate cigar lounge, spacious bathrooms offering high-quality toiletries as well as an extensive choice of hot or cold meals, cocktails and fine wines contributed to Skytrax's top-tier ranking.

But the German carrier didn't stop there. Currently available on the Lufthansa fleets, passengers can experience an exclusive atmosphere with only eight seats in the First Class cabin. The seat can be con-

verted into a full-flat bed – 80 cm wide and 208 cm long. The seat construction was developed and designed with external ergonomic experts, where it suits every sitting and lying position. Additionally, one of the inflight highlights is the air humidification system – the first of its kind on commercial aircraft – and the lighting concept, which adjusts according to time of the day, also contributing towards passengers' well-being onboard.

A 17" monitor specially designed for Lufthansa First Class and individual headphones from Bose with Active Noise Cancelling function promise a relaxing but entertaining flight. Passengers flying long-haul with Lufthansa enjoy all the freedom the Internet offers for unrestricted communications – with FlyNet®, Lufthansa's powerful broadband Internet service comparable to hotspot on the ground.

Experience the brand new SWISS Lounges

In January, SWISS' new First, Senator and Business lounges were officially opened in Zurich airport's Terminal E. Extending over 3,300 sqm, the new lounges offer both comfort and convenience for SWISS' premium guests. There are open areas to simply sit and enjoy the stay; secluded workspaces and comfortable rest zones offering complete relaxation.

Highlights include the 'front cooking' areas where chefs prepare fresh meals right before the guests' eyes; while the Senator Lounge boasts an exclusive Whisky Bar offering over 120 different whiskies. And the First Lounge features a 5-Star restaurant: guests can select meals of their choice from an extensive menu anytime or savor fondue or raclette. All three lounges have a terrace with panorama views of the Swiss Alps and the airport.



SWISS brings its flagship to Asia

Since April, SWISS has deployed its new flagship Boeing 777-300ER to Hong Kong. This new addition to the SWISS family will also operate to Bangkok starting in July and to Singapore in September this year. With the flagship addition to their fleet, SWISS offers more privacy, comfort, space and entertainment to their customers such as the highest quality of product and services.

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Lufthansa apps on your smartphone or tablet
Experience a new kind of travel with the Lufthansa apps to search and book flights, check in on the go, save your boarding passes or access information relating to your flight. The apps provide comprehensive services that you can use conveniently via your smartphone or tablet.



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Thanks to the Today Widget you always have your boarding card at your fingertips and don't need to unlock your iPhone anymore – a simple wipe from top to bottom is sufficient. The new inbox for messages automatically saves all app notifications in a functional overview.

Lufthansa now on Apple Watch
Use your watch as a boarding card and have your essential flight information displayed on your wrist – Lufthansa is now offering this innovation to its guests with an app developed especially for Apple Watch. It serves as an ideal travel companion, providing passengers with all their essential flight information, which they can access from 24 hours before their journey with Lufthansa.

“We take pride in the highest quality of products and services.”

Interview with Regional Director Mr. Heiko Brix about Lufthansa Group in Asia Pacific.



Mr. Heiko Brix, Regional Director for Lufthansa Group Airlines Southeast Asia was appointed Regional Director on 1 February this year. Based in Singapore, he oversees the commercial activities for Lufthansa Group's passenger business in Southeast Asia and Pacific.

More and more airlines have or are considering pulling out from First Class concept, will Lufthansa Group join this trend too?

Heiko Brix: At Lufthansa Group, we have every intention to keep operating fleets with our 5-star First Class products, to meet the current demands of our frequent flyers and high-end travellers. Not only that, we are always seeking opportunities to improve our services throughout a customer's journey with us – from preflight, midflight to post flight. One of the unique features, which most people might not recognize is the air humidification system in our First Class cabins. Our colleagues from Lufthansa Technik introduced the air humidification on our First Class to increase 15 – 25% of onboard humidity. With this, food tastes better, passenger sleep better and in general, there is a greater sense of well-being.

What is your strategy in this region to deal with the competitive Asian markets?

Heiko Brix: No doubt that Asia Pacific is one of the most, if not the most, dynamic regions. For us, we take pride in the highest quality of products and services. Since 2011, we have invested an average of EUR 1m per day in refitting and upgrading all fleets with the newest cabin products. As of late 2015, we completed the largest retrofit programme in our company's history. The total investment comes to approximately EUR1.5 bn. Now, it doesn't matter whether our customers are

traveling from Singapore to Europe or from Bangkok to Europe; without betting on luck, one can always get the newest cabin products in all aircraft, all classes – and not some old, some new as many competitors do. We also offer a massive network to and from our various European hubs. Customers traveling with us will benefit from seamless connection to another European city. I think these qualities make us different.

How is the joint venture with Singapore Airlines coming along? What can you share with us at this stage?

Heiko Brix: This JV is something we look forward to very much. It strengthens the current relationship we already have with Singapore Airlines. With this partnership, we will greatly expand the level of codeshares in and out of our hubs and this helps customers with easier connections between LHG and Singapore Airlines flights. This is especially adding convenience to our customers from Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia and Malaysia. Lufthansa Group and Singapore Airlines Passengers will profit from a greater choice of flight options, schedule combinability's and price opportunities within this joint venture.

There are mixed opinions about Lufthansa Group's low cost subsidiary, Eurowings. What is your take about this?

Heiko Brix: I think Eurowings completes our portfolio by offering tailored products for private travellers, who want to select individual product and service components. Eurowings has a completely different business model compared to other airlines in our Group. It serves price-conscious leisure travellers, bringing them from point-to-point. And the two routes in Thailand – Bangkok and Phuket – have so far proven to be very successful.

Thank you for the interview.

Flights per week from:

-  **Austrian Airlines**
-  **Brussels Airlines**
-  **Eurowings**
-  **Lufthansa** (incl. Air Dolomiti)
-  **Swiss** (incl. Edelweiss Air)



The Lufthansa Express rail and bus connections can easily be booked together with your flight on LH.com.



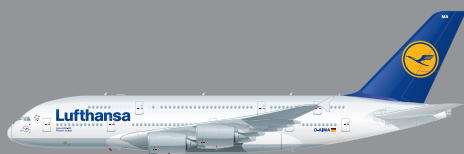
A320neo



Boeing 747-8



A350



A380

A flight attendant in a Lufthansa uniform is serving a meal to a smiling elderly passenger on an airplane. The attendant is holding a plate of food and looking at the passenger. The passenger is looking up at the attendant. In the background, other passengers are seated, and a Lufthansa logo is visible on the wall.

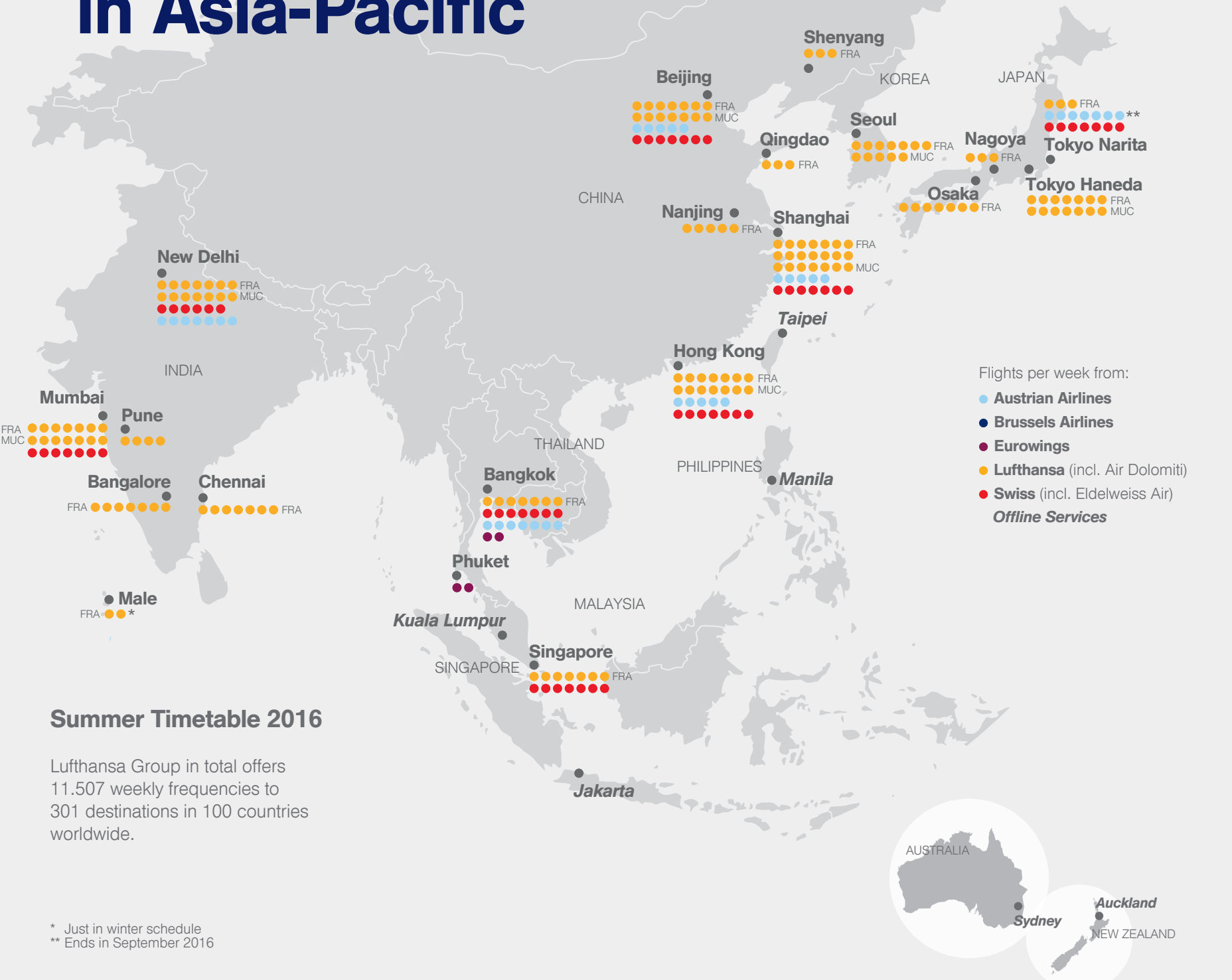
In order to provide the highest standard of care and services to passengers onboard, Lufthansa introduced a customized courteous inflight service, “the Business Class Signature Service”, for travellers in this class.

As one of the initiatives to improve the airline's onboard service based on customer feedback, the Signature Service is the most comprehensive change to Lufthansa's Business Class inflight service in the last few years. This is aimed at enabling cabin crew to devote more personal attention to each passenger and respond to their individual wishes.

Passengers will experience greatest personal attention from the moment they board until end of their flight. Culinary highlights will be served by hand on carefully laid tables – a service usually one would expect from First Class – and each flight attendant looks after a manageable number of passengers assigned to them during the flight, whom then the personal flight attendant responds readily to all requests.

This has already been rolled out on all Lufthansa intercontinental flights to/from Europe from 1st of March this year.

Lufthansa Group Destinations in Asia-Pacific



Premium Economy Class



Lufthansa Premium Economy offering is ideal for leisure travelers with higher budget and for business travelers with constrained budgets. This means greater travel choice and more comfort. It comes with great on-board as well as on-ground benefits including 50% extra space as compared to the Economy Class. Also the free baggage allowance is double of what is allowed for a passenger traveling in the Economy. After a welcome

drink, passengers will find an upmarket amenity kit with useful accessories, a water bottle and a power socket at their seat in the cabin. Meals will be presented in menus and served on china tableware. In addition, an extensive inflight entertainment program for passengers to view on a large monitor fitted on the backrest of the seat in front. Passengers traveling Premium Economy will also be able to access Lufthansa Business Lounges before take-off with a small fee.

What it offers:

-  Comfortable seat
-  Extra legroom
-  Two pieces of baggage at 23 kg
-  Extensive inflight entertainment
-  Power socket at the seat
-  Meal menus
-  China tableware

