



View from the top

Telco veteran Suphajee Suthumpun, Dusit International's new group CEO, is someone to watch, says **Raini Hamdi**

+

Cruise ships made for Chinese

Agents cope with ringgit woes

The psychology behind the click

TTG Asia's probe into mid- and upscale hotel labels uncovers flaws with a seemingly arbitrary classification system – and why travel agents want the muddle taken out of such ratings

The confused world of hotel categorisation



Contents & editorial

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Report: Mid/Upscale hotels



Report: Cruises



Destination: Malaysia



Destination: Thailand

SHIPLOADS OF CHINESE GUESTS



Will I go onboard China-centric ships? No. Fortunately for cruise companies, there are millions of Chinese passengers and it is unlikely their ships will go empty. They will be full, but given the enormous capacity that is heading to China, the question is – at what price?

Back when international cruise lines were only beginning to show some interest in home-porting a ship in Asia either for a few months or year-round cruising, I remember expressing an opinion in *TTG Asia* how shortsighted they were to be deploying their older ships. The Asian leisure outbound market was already going places, its travellers quickly grasping a quality product from a musty one. The cruise companies had thought their older ships sent to Asia, as they took delivery of new ones, were good enough for the region.

How quickly they learn. Today no fewer than nine new ships are being built for Asians, in particular mainland Chinese travellers. Godmothers of ships were Western superstars; Chinese actress Fan Bingbing has broken that roster as godmother of Royal Caribbean International's *Ovation of the Seas* (discounting Michelle Kwan, godmother of *Oasis of the Seas*, who is Chinese-American).

You can imagine China-centric ships as having more family or interconnecting rooms as it is said that Chinese passengers are multigenerational. There will be Chinese and international entertainment, many more restaurants, KTV rooms, retail outlets, and so on.

Will I go onboard? No. One appealing aspect of cruising for me is to meet people of different nationalities; besides, with passengers being Mandarin-speaking, I will feel like fish out of water.

Hotels face the same issue today: Too much of any nationality is not good for business.

There will be Chinese travellers themselves who

will not go onboard these tailored-for-Chinese ships for the same reason that they'd rather enjoy an international atmosphere. Fortunately for cruise companies, there are millions of Chinese passengers and it is unlikely their ships will go empty. They will be full, but given the enormous capacity that is heading to China, the question is – at what price?

Currently, with the exception of Genting Hong Kong's Dream Cruises – Asian's first luxury cruise line which will debut in November and based in Guangzhou – many of the new China-specific ships look like they are designed for the mass market. While their entry should be welcomed as new products means more marketing, international cruise lines must approach the market with the loftier goal of trying to expand it. After all, the concept of cruising as a wonderful alternative vacation to land holidays is still a nascent one in China.

It is sad if cruise companies just 'pack them in' and make hay while the sun shines. With shiploads of Chinese passengers, cruise lines have the rare opportunity to win over a captive audience to cruising with excellent value, quality offerings and service.

Otherwise the real price we will be paying is an unrealised potential of the Chinese cruise market.

And that's as huge as these ships are.

Raini Hamdi

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COMING UP

NEXT ISSUE:
JULY 2016

AUSTRALIA A new dawn is rising for Gold Coast's tourism fortunes as the destination spruces up its offerings and infrastructure ahead of the 2018 Commonwealth Games

HONG KONG The city is training its sights on South-east Asian and longhaul markets to reduce its tourism reliance on China

BEACH RESORTS A look at what families want for beach resort vacations as multigenerational travel becomes more common

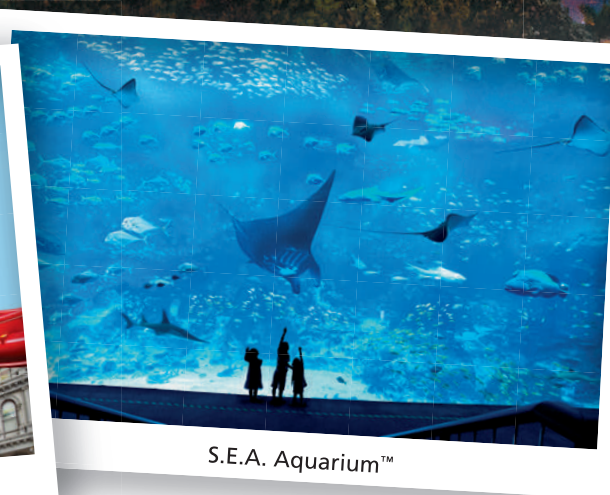
BEDBANKS As the bed bank sector undergoes consolidation to be dominated by big players like GTA and Hotelbeds, what are the prospects for the smaller players?



Paige Lee Pei Qi

Surfers Paradise, Gold Coast

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Analysis

Social enterprises are becoming a larger part of the sustainable tourism ecosystem but they too face competition and unique challenges, **Raini Hamdi** finds



Clockwise from left: Penti ceremony in the remote Indonesian village of Waerebo; income stream from tourism for Sapa's minority groups; Soksabike



Go deep, do good

With clients increasingly hankering for more meaningful travel, social enterprises are becoming an even bigger component of the sustainable tourism ecosystem.

Three Asian finalists of this year's Tourism for Tomorrow awards presented by the World Travel & Tourism Council show why these projects can easily endear themselves to today's travellers.

Founded in late 2009 by three long-term expats living in Battambang, Cambodia, Kinyei International promotes youth entrepreneurship through two interconnected businesses: Soksabike, an educational bike tour, and Kinyei Cafe; a training cafe.

The cafe gives travellers, expats and locals a space to exchange and develop ideas through various workshops, talks and lectures, aside from serving good coffee with beans procured from Cambodia, Laos and Thailand by its own baristas, all of whom are young locals from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Its other business, Soksabike, offers four bicycle tours of 30km to 50km in length taking guests to discover family-run cottage industries in the Battambang countryside.

To date, Kinyei has trained 50 local staff in coffee and food service, tour guiding, finance, IT and management skills. "Three years ago we handed over small business operations to the local team," said Katherine Hallaran, one of the founders.

The second of the three Asian finalists concerns the Sapa region in northern Vietnam. Defined by terraced rice paddies, Sapa is regularly voted one of the most picturesque regions in the world. But its climate and topography mean the Hmong, Dao and other minorities who live there can only bring in one harvest a year, thus living on subsistence levels.

Launched in 2007, SapaO'Chau offers community-run tours, operates its own boarding facility, supports 11 homestays and employs 30 trekking guides. In 2013,

it became Vietnam's first minority-owned tour operator to gain an international licence and remains the only one operating in Sapa.

The third social enterprise saves a community from oblivion. Waerebo is an idyllic mountain setting for seven traditional thatched Mbaru Niang houses that are home to 25 families who farm the surrounding fields for coffee. But its remoteness – four hours' walk to the nearest village with any access to motorised transport and from there, seven hours' drive to Bajoo, capital city of Flores – makes sustaining a livelihood a challenge. Only three of the houses are left standing. Local NGO Indonesia Ecotourism Network (Indecon) has helped preserve them and opened an income stream for the residents through community-based tourism.

These enterprises are proof that tourists today are willing to go to lengths in their search for authentic experiences. From only 155 tourists in 2008, Waerebo welcomed 2,100 guests in the first 10 months of 2014 from all over the world to enjoy trips such as A Journey of A Cup of Coffee. Meanwhile, over 15,000 guests have either passed through Kinyei Cafe or taken one of the bicycle tours.

Tour operators interviewed said they constantly sought such projects out but infrastructure was a key hurdle for the mainstream players among them.

Khiri Travel works with all three players and chairman of Yanna Ventures, which operates Khiri Travel, Willem Neimeijer, expects to do more as he expands the Ground division, which arranges educational trips and develops communities.

"Khiri Travel sent SapaO'Chau only a couple of bookings last year. They run fantastic programmes and Ground will have the type of clients for their more in-depth programmes around Sapa.

"Khiri Travel Cambodia works with Soksabike for clients in Battambang. Their strength, but at the same time limitation is their location, which is away from where most tourists go, so for mainstream tour operators this is a bit of a handicap. However, my advice to them is stick with the area. Cambodia can do with the visitor dispersion.

"Khiri Travel Indonesia has worked with Indecon for a very long time and Waerebo features in many of our programmes. Sustainable tourism is playing a key role in the conservation of nature and culture in Indonesia (but) infrastructure

remains a formidable obstacle and more investment in remote parts of Indonesia (so beyond Java and Bali) is needed."

Laurent Kuenzle, CEO of Asian Trails, said often smaller projects were the ones that made a bigger impact in people's lives because they were easier to manage, with less government red tape.

"My experience is that people who manage the smaller projects are more passionate and focused on actual results for the people and not PR for some kind of NGO or organisation," he said.

Kuenzle said there were many sustainability projects today and Asian Trails chose to support the ones that "bring local people on their own two feet so they can support themselves". The projects are integrated into its tours as much as possible so clients "get that feel of being close to nature and to people when they travel with us", said Kuenzle.

Melina Chan, founder and principal of Kinyei International, agreed there was more competition now, even with social enterprises.

"Although we were the first to market, it is always a challenge to remain competitive while prioritising social impact. One challenge we find is that the low barriers to entry combined with rapid economic growth in Battambang mean increased competition. We find that supply sometimes outstrips demand because we operate in a limited market. In this sense, to keep ahead, it is hard to remain ethical and sustainable.

"A second challenge we see is the issue of human capital. There is a lack of local technical expertise, which is valuable for our businesses. We are constantly needing to do internal development, grow and build our own expertise through in-house training. Of course this is also a huge and very exciting opportunity and part of why we love what we do. But, it remains difficult to engage specialist expertise and attract that talent internationally to a regional centre like Battambang."



"Although we were the first to market, it is always a challenge to remain competitive while prioritising social impact."

Melina Chan
Founder and principal,
Kinyei International

Analysis

With the Malaysian ringgit in a recent flux, **S Puvaneswary** finds out what measures travel companies are taking to ease the effects of currency volatility on their business



Malaysian travel agents are changing and adapting their business strategies in the face of a weak ringgit, as currency fluctuations since 4Q2015 weigh on their operations and earnings.

Desmond Lee, group managing director of Apple Vacations & Conventions, told *TTG Asia*: “The weakened ringgit has made Malaysians more cautious of their spending, and we had to change our strategy in selling Japan and Europe.”

“In the past, we used to focus on Tokyo and Osaka, but we now focus on Hokkaido, the eastern part of Honshu island and Mie Prefecture, where ground costs are cheaper by 30 per cent than Tokyo and Osaka,” he said. “In Europe, we focus on tours to Romania, Greece and Bulgaria as ground costs there are relatively cheaper than central Europe.”

The Kuala Lumpur-based firm now makes full payment in advance to ground suppliers overseas to lock prices at the current exchange rate. It has also allocated a bigger budget for advertising and marketing this year in order to close sales and settle advance payment with ground suppliers faster, added Lee.

Mayflower Acme Tours, meanwhile, monitors outbound package prices daily and marks up with a bigger buffer to prevent losses, deputy general manager – channel management Abdul Rahman Mohamed revealed.

Abdul said: “We also have a clause in contracts with customers and corporate clients that specify that the current rate quoted may be revised at the point of final payment, which may be made a month or two later when rates have changed.”

“While MNCs are understanding and will comply (by contractual agreements), SMEs try to take advantage of the currency fluctuations and bargain for a lower rate to gain savings,”

he lamented.

“The (ringgit) volatility has also made it necessary to hedge with foreign banks to purchase room inventory and ground transportation, something we didn’t have to do in the past when the ringgit was stable. However, we also see hedging as a means of making extra profit.”

Abdul indicated that hedging of currency risk is “especially necessary” with non-ASEAN partners as they do not want to trade in ringgit, unlike ASEAN agents who usually have a Malaysian bank account and will transfer the money to their currency when the ringgit appreciates.

The volatile ringgit has also unnerved inbound tour operators, with many opting to put a contracting clause with their overseas counterparts to protect themselves from foreign currency fluctuations.

Ally Bhoonee, executive director of World Avenues, said: “Inbound wholesalers like ourselves give credit to overseas wholesalers for FIT bookings two or three months in advance.”

“We only get paid 30 days after the guest checks in and at an exchange rate (usually in US dollars) that had been predetermined earlier. If the ringgit weakens, we make a loss. But if it strengthens, we gain.”

Bhoonee added that a larger buffer would safeguard the company against losses, but they risk losing customers to OTAs amid a competitive business climate. Conversely, if the margins are kept thin, the company has to shoulder the risks.

Similar contracting pains are observed at Olympik Holidays, said general manager Adam Kamal. “It is easy with ASEAN partners as bookings are usually a month in advance so the difference is not much. It is much more difficult to deal with European and Middle Eastern counterparts as they book six to 10 months in advance and they

want to adhere strictly to the contract.”

“We suffered a 15 per cent loss in 1Q2016 handling the European inbound market as we had to absorb the difference. Having been burnt, we thus concentrate on the ASEAN market.”

Olympik Holidays is currently developing an online booking engine for its B2B and B2C clients. Expected to be ready by early 2017, the booking engine will provide real-time updates on package prices.

Said Adam: “The booking engine will replace our traditional contracts with agents as they will be given a password and can book directly with us.”

Kingston Khoo, senior product development and contracting manager at Discovery Overland Holidays, said: “Ringgit fluctuation has been quite volatile since March and we have been sending out email announcements on foreign currency exchange rates to our partners every two weeks.”

“When the ringgit depreciates against major currencies, this means savings to our (overseas) agents. In April, the ringgit appreciated, and agents have been accepting of the new rates.”

On the other hand, the domestic tourism market has not been severely impacted by the ringgit fluctuations, a situation the Malaysian Inbound Tourism Association (MITA) has taken advantage of when it held its inaugural travel fair in January this year.

Uzaidi Udanis, vice president of MITA, said: “We wanted to encourage more Malaysians to travel within the country. We didn’t think that response would be so encouraging, with around 13,000 visitors and package sales estimated at RM2 million (US\$495,946).”

MITA wants to grow its fair next year by involving more industry players and organising it in the states of Kuala Lumpur, Kedah, Johor and Sarawak.

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Intelligence

The **Global Muslim Travel Index** reveals the world's most popular halal-friendly destinations, while **IATA** assesses the health of the aviation sector in the first quarter

Asia reigns for Muslim travel

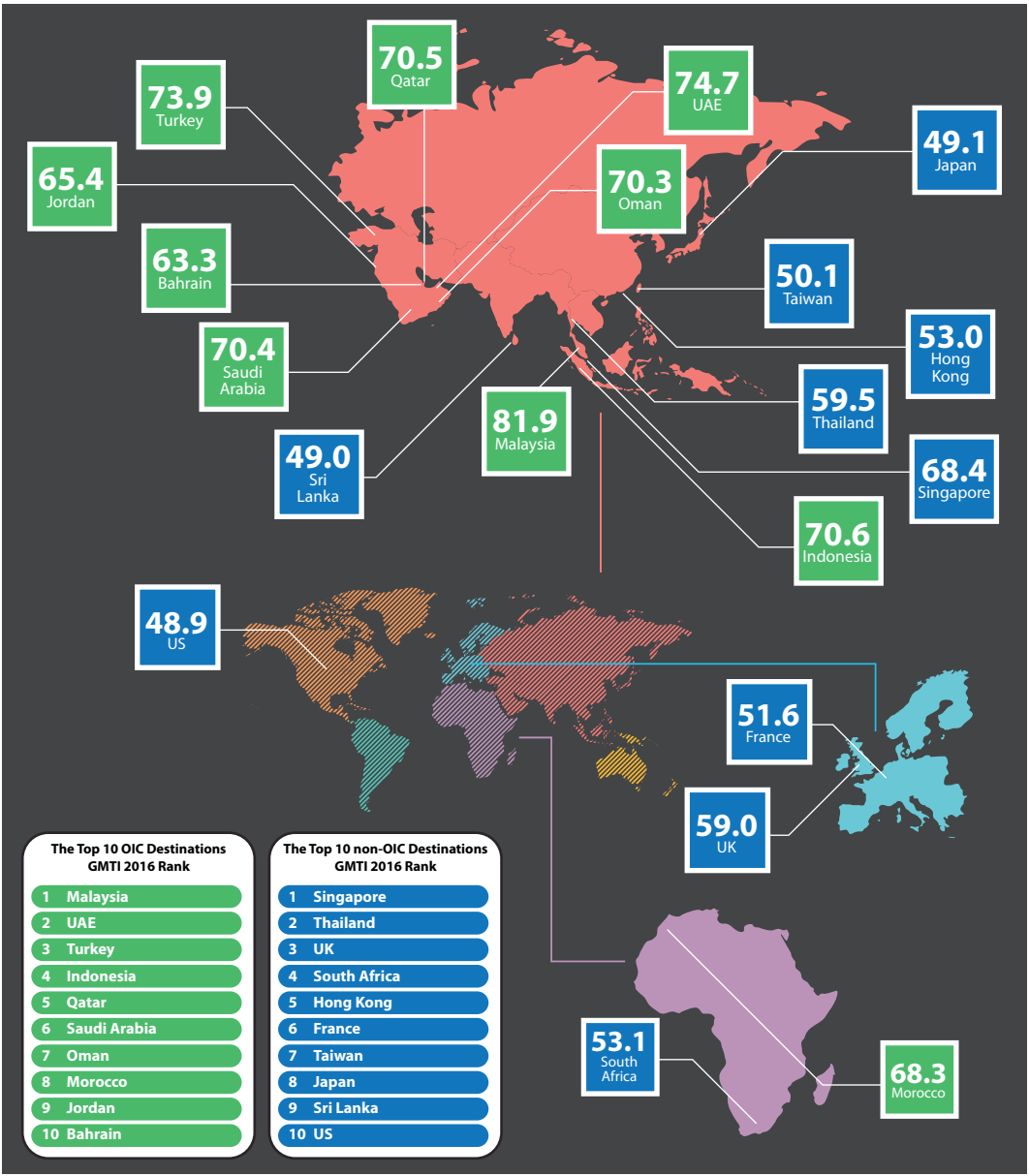
Malaysia and Singapore take up top spots in the 2016 MasterCard-CrescentRating Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI), which looks at in-depth data covering 130 destinations to create an overall index to benchmark how destinations are catering to the Muslim travel market.

Among the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) countries, the UAE has overtaken Turkey to take second spot, while Indonesia has moved up to fourth place. Singapore retained top position among the non-OIC countries, followed by Thailand, the UK, South Africa and Hong Kong.

Although OIC destinations have a clear advantage, more non-OIC destinations are adapting their services to Muslim travellers and are moving up the ranking at a faster pace.

Asia and Europe are the two leading regions attracting Muslim visitors, accounting for 87% of the entire Muslim travel market.

In 2015, there was an estimated 117 million Muslim visitor arrivals globally, representing close to 10% of the entire travel market. This is forecasted to grow to 168 million visitors and 11% of the market segment by 2020.



Declining airline trajectories

Global airline share prices dipped 6.9% between March and April, erasing the gains seen in previous months, according to IATA's Airlines Financial Monitor report.

Airfares fell around 4% in constant exchange rate terms in early 2016. However, with oil prices up 65% since their January low, the biggest stimulus to demand from lower airfares now appears to be over.

The global air passenger market grew by 7% year-on-year during Q1, bolstered, in part, by the leap year. Passenger load factors came in unchanged in year-on-year terms in 1Q2016, but have slipped in recent months.



US\$47

Price of a barrel of Brent crude oil in April 2016, up 65% since their January low



4%

Fall in airfares in early 2016



5.6%

Share of premium international passenger traffic in the first two months of 2016, down from 6% in 2015



8%

Decline in airline share price from the start of the year

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There's No Place Like Las Vegas

Find out from **Michael Goldsmith**, Vice President of International Marketing, Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, how the Entertainment Capital of the World shows visitors a good time.

What factors make your destination appealing to travelers?

Las Vegas has been recognized as the Entertainment Capital of the World for more than half a century. Today, visitors can enjoy great entertainment including luxury hotels, award-winning restaurants by celebrated chefs, shows and performances, first-class shopping featuring the world's most luxurious brands, innovative, high-end spas and world-renowned golf courses.

These are just a few of the options that have transformed Las Vegas into one of the world's premier luxury and wedding/honeymoon destinations. In 2015, Las Vegas reached a historic milestone, exceeding 42 million visitors!

What are some significant traveler trends?

Las Vegas is a diversified destination, almost all visitors stay overnight and their average length of stay is 3.4 nights. They come here for a vacation getaway, for business meetings and trade shows, for culinary delights, outdoor adventure, shopping – there are many other reasons to come to Vegas!

Virtual reality is the future of vacation planning and the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority has launched a virtual reality companion app – Vegas Virtual Reality (VR) – to help visitors explore the city and plan their trip. Vegas VR is available for iOS and

Android platforms and is free to download at <http://VRTv.Vegas>.

What attractions and what kind of itinerary do you suggest for the first-time visitor? How about repeat visitors?

For first-time visitors, exploring the Strip is a must. It's home to 17 of the 20 biggest hotels in the U.S. Other must-see experiences include the



Left: The Grand Canyon Skywalk is 2,000 feet above ground.

Below: Getting married in Las Vegas.



experience, book a helicopter tour to the Grand Canyon in the day or a helicopter tour over the Strip at night!

Away from the strip,

The amount and variety of accommodations and amenities offered has something for every taste, including visitors seeking a luxurious experience, both in and out of resorts. In the last several years, Las Vegas has established itself as one of the most exciting destinations in the world. Learn more on the Vegas VR app.



MICHAEL GOLDSMITH
Vice President of International Marketing, Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority

Downtown Las Vegas offers a SlotZilla ride at the Fremont Street Experience, the Mob Museum and Neon Museum. Downtown is also home to The Smith Center for the Performing Arts, bringing a new world of performance entertainment to Las Vegas. The 2,050-seat main hall is home to the Las Vegas Philharmonic and the Nevada Ballet Theatre as well as touring Broadway shows.

Gourmets can enjoy meals by legendary chefs including Joël Robuchon at MGM Grand, Restaurant Guy Savoy at Caesars Palace, Rivea by Alain Ducasse at Delano, CUT By Wolfgang Puck at the Palazzo, BARDOT Brasserie by Michael Mina at Aria or Andrea's at Encore, and much more.

Night owls and party animals can choose from a vast selection of high-end clubs with captivating night views to ultra

lounges with celebrity guests. In the summer, there are also pool parties which feature world-renown DJs, special events and outdoor concerts in the day.

There is so much that Las Vegas offers that the repeat visitor can enjoy something completely different each time.

What other outdoor and family-friendly activities can visitors enjoy?

Las Vegas is the gateway to the South-west and a perfect adventure starting point offering easy access to several National Parks. Travelers can take a short drive to the picturesque Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, the Valley of Fire or even fly by helicopter to the Grand Canyon.

For more information, please go to VisitTheUSA.com



VisitTheUSA.com

View from the top

Having made her mark as CEO of Thaicom Plc, Suphajea Suthumpun, the new group CEO of Dusit International, is someone to watch in this industry, says **Raini Hamdi**

Dusit's power lady

Why did you decide to leave Thaicom and join the hotel industry and Dusit?

Originally, I felt I had completed my mission in bringing Thaicom to the world. I was ready to retire from full-time work, and wanted to create more impact by supporting organisations and universities, and by doing executive coaching (she had attended an intensive bootcamp for established leaders at Berkeley Executive Coaching Institute).

I joined Dusit as board member last October and discovered that its passion and vision are exactly the same as mine, i.e. bringing a Thai brand to the world, and developing hospitality education, both of which are impactful. I'm happy and honoured to join that mission, so I accepted the role as group CEO on January 1.

You brought the Thai satellite operator from nowhere to eighth in the world and increased its market capitalisation five to six times in the four-plus years you ran the company. Can we expect that kind of growth at Dusit?

I'm not looking at just number of hotels, more schools to open or to increase the size of company. My goal is first, for each of our 4,000 employees – and this will grow to 12,000 as we open more hotels in the next few years – to be proud of being a part of Dusit and to believe in our mission. Ultimately, for Dusit to be seen as the home-

grown asset of the country which all Thais can be proud of.

You're the third CEO in the company's 67-year history and the first from outside the founding family. Do you mark a new era for Dusit?

I'd say a new chapter, not new era – that's too big; I'm not that significant. I'm joining the company when it is already in a tremendous growth phase with both its lines of businesses – hotels and hospitality education – and so my priority will be to strengthen its foundation to support this growth.

Some say founding lady Thanpuying Chanut Piyaoui still 'controls' Dusit as advisor to the board. Is Dusit still more family-run than corporate even with your appointment?

We're public-listed and governed by a board of directors. The former CEO (Chanin Donavanik) has (retired, but is chairman of the executive committee) and now has me as a professional to run the business. They (mother and son) are still part of the board but there is no family intervention. Khun Chanin has been kind, open and respectful of my team

people who have more knowledge than you. My managing director of education has more than 20 years of experience. Such people bring in the content. You have to understand the context and make use of it wisely.

In fact, coming from a different industry is an advantage. You look at things with fresh eyes; you don't have paradigms.

You're leading Dusit at a time of huge growth and I notice hotels are opening from Asia to Africa.

Yes, we need to ensure we can support this growth at the quality level. We operate 29 properties and in the pipeline are over 40 signed contracts that will be operational in the next three to five years. A majority are new-builds and, yes, they are across Asia, the Middle East and Africa. This year, we are targeting to sign another 20 hotels.

How will you strengthen Dusit's foundation to support this much growth?

For quality growth, I'm looking at five areas: people, process, property & branding, technology and financial capability.

First, people. As our staff size will grow from 4,000 to 12,000 in the next three to five years, we must ensure we have the

I'm not looking at just number of hotels or more schools to open (but) for Dusit to be seen as the homegrown asset of the country which all Thais can be proud of.

and I. Besides, their vision is the same as mine; it's ingrained in the whole company: We would like to bring Thai hospitality to the world and help strengthen the education system not just for us, but the whole industry.

What challenges does being a woman and coming from outside the industry pose?

At Thaicom, and at IBM, there were no women (at the top)!

Gender is not an issue. When you get to a certain level, it's gender neutral. It's about your professionalism in approaching challenges, how you respect individuals, share your vision and objectives, and so on.

The obstacle many women have is a doubt in themselves.

As for coming from a different industry, I also believe that at this level, content is less important than context. You have to hire capable

right competencies and organisation structure to support this growth. We also need to build a strong culture and career paths for our people. While we keep our legacy and core values, we need to adapt to the current environment and ensure that we remain relevant to the new generation.

People are the heart of everything and this is why we must have the right foundation for it.

Second, we need efficient and consistent processes. If I were to pick two or three, it would be to tighten up our customer relations (owners & guests) processes, and our internal and external communications processes.

Third, property & branding. As hotel owners, we need to look at each of our property. For example, do we have the facilities for the market we're after? Our asset in Phuket is targeting MICE; we need to invest in a conference hall to support the drive.

It's not only about renovations but how to optimise the value of the property. We have a big land next to our property in Hua Hin, should we invest in a mixed-used or residential development?

We're also starting a branding exercise to look at our four brands (Dusit Thani,

DONAVANIK ON FINDING THE RIGHT SUCCESSOR

Former CEO Chanin Donavanik shares with Raini Hamdi how Suphajea Suthumpun became his successor

Was it easy to find a new CEO? No, as it was a question of timing and finding the person who has the same passion and belief as my mother and I have.

Why did you decide to retire? I was not sure about 'retiring' actually, but I knew the company needed some changes with almost 50 hotels soon and our push into education – we now have eight projects in six countries. So the company has to be managed and led differently.

I don't think I have the energy to do detailed works anymore. I also think technology will be important if the company were to do well and I am not good with that. And when she said yes, I felt comfortable to retire as I have someone who has the passion and reputation to look after Dusit, the company I love as my mother had founded it.

How did you get her to accept the role? Originally, I was talking to her about something else, as I did not believe she would be interested in

Dusit as we're a smaller operation than what she used to do. But her passion was similar to my mother's: she believes that a Thai brand can do well on the world stage, and she has a passion for education. What she would like to do really fits with Dusit's vision. So after over six months of talking to one another, I asked her to join us as group CEO, and I am very happy that she accepted.



Dusit D2, Dusit Deverana and Princess). and evaluate if each brand promise is clear.

Fourth is technology, which is closest to my heart. How can we use technology to strengthen our processes, also to increase direct bookings to our website while providing convenient and relevant information to customers?

Last but not least, financial capabilities. To do all of the above, we need financial capabilities. Our group will eventually hire a chief investment officer, which it has never done before, to explore the various investment instruments to support our plans.

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On the radar

Learn from the experts, take heed of technology currently shaping the travel landscape and pick up new ideas on how to do business better

TRAVEL TECHNOLOGY

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

The psychology behind the click

To better understand how and why people pick vacations, Expedia gets into the head of its potential travellers – literally.

Utilising eye-tracking and facial-movement sensors, a team of researchers at Expedia's Innovation Lab in Bellevue, Washington, hope to find out what makes a person happy or upset while browsing the Expedia website. These sensitive sensors, placed on the faces of volunteers, will detect any changes in their facial expressions that hint at feelings of happiness, frustration or anxiety.

During the 45-minute test, volunteers navigate through the Expedia website just like how a typical traveller would, trawling through hotels, flights or tour packages.

Meanwhile, researchers will be standing behind a two-way mirror and closely monitoring the data to evaluate a user's Expedia online experience.

Scott Jones, Expedia's vice president, global product design and user experience, said: "We want to understand the emotional pieces behind their experience. It is like a lie detector test for emotions.

"When we combine electromyography with eye-tracking technology, it is really powerful because we can identify what the users are looking at and also see what they are emotionally experiencing."

Since starting the study three years ago, Expedia would make changes to the website based on the findings.

For instance, Jones said that they have learnt that travellers particularly liked having high-resolution images because volunteers smiled more when viewing hotel pictures. Hence, they shared this feedback with the hotels, and requested for a wider selection of quality images.

On the contrary, travellers became frustrated when they were presented with multiple price options for the same hotel room during the booking process. Such frustration and anxiety levels could be detected from their frowning.

He explained: "It could be that the hotel room and booking conditions for having to pay more or less are not stated clearly."

As such, Jones said they would take this knowledge into consideration accordingly when designing the website.

While current tests are conducted based on the US market, Expedia has not forgotten about its Asian audience. According to Jones, Expedia will soon be introducing this sophisticated technology to Singapore, when they open another Innovator Lab in end-2016.

SALES LEAD

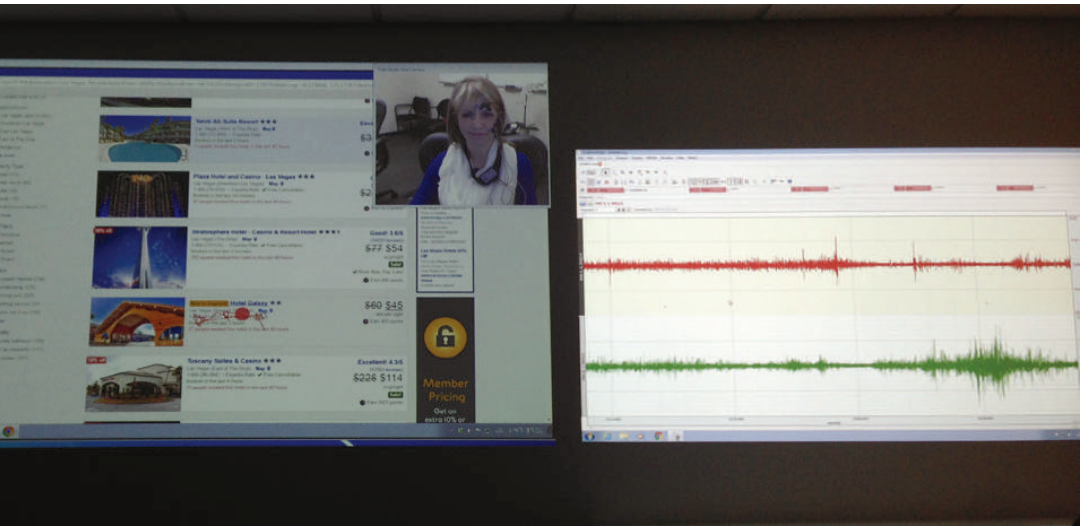


Andre van der Marck
Managing director,
HG Travel Thailand

HG Travel Thailand is keen to grow the European markets this year and expand to other new markets such as the US, China and India. These markets will provide a healthy balance between (high-end) tailor-made, group (series) and off- the-beaten-track programmes.

We are looking at several new and exciting ways to promote HG Travel, and are in the midst of ramping up our PR efforts and implementing a new corporate identity. We still believe in attending tradeshowes around the globe, as well as making personalised and tailor-made sales calls in the different markets.

Contact: andre@hgtravel.com.



Tapping into the minds of potential travellers as they navigate the Expedia website



HOTEL NEW OTANI TOKYO, "THE MAIN"



EAST, BEIJING

CASE STUDY

By S Puvaneswary

A portal to Muslim travel

WHO Faez Fadhilillah is the CEO and co-founder of Tripfez, a relaunch of Lagisatu.com which went live in 2013 as a travel metasearch site for Muslim-friendly hotels. He founded the travel portal together with Juergen Gallistl, after they both graduated from the University of Sydney.

In 2013, Faez was awarded the NEF Awani Young Technopreneur Award by The Malaysian Association of Bumiputera ICT Industry & Entrepreneurs, and was most recently featured on Forbes' list of 30 under 30 in the retail & e-commerce space.

He is also the vice president for research and technology with the Malaysia Association of Tours and Travel Agents.

WHAT Lagisatu.com was reintroduced as Tripfez in March 2016 to expand the portal's offerings beyond its metasearch beginnings, while keeping its focus on Muslim travel.

"(Lagisatu) was the right positioning at that time because it differentiated us from other metasearches. We then saw the full potential of the Muslim travel market and realised we could be more than that," said Faez.

"Given the expertise we had built up in the market, we could expand into reviews and experiences... Over time, we will migrate Lagisatu into Tripfez fully," he added.

Tripfez allows guests to book thousands of halal-friendly

hotels globally, as well as Muslim-friendly tours and activities for selected destinations in South-east Asia. The portal offers information that is specific to Muslim travellers, providing reviews of hotels with halal food options, prayer mats and the Koran.

At the same time, participating hotels also get a set of tools to increase their service level for Muslim guests, such as providing a printout of prayer times as well as the prayer direction.

WHY "We aim to complement existing information on big travel portals by offering reviews and products that are relevant to the Muslim segment of the world population," said Faez. "We want (Tripfez) to be like the TripAdvisor or Viator for Muslim travellers."

"We believe hotels and accommodation providers that offer Muslim-friendly products will be ahead of the competition, and they will be well rewarded by a significant rise in the number of nights by Muslim guests."

A booming global Muslim tourism market is driving the "very high demand" for Muslim-friendly hotels on Tripfez, according to Faez, citing a recent *Thomson Reuters* report that estimates the world halal market will grow in value to US\$233 billion by 2020, up from US\$142 billion in 2014.

Halal partnership:
Faez Fadhilillah (right)
and Juergen Gallistl



We want (Tripfez) to be like the TripAdvisor or Viator for Muslim travellers.

Faez Fadhilillah, CEO and co-founder, Tripfez

TARGET Tripfez aims to broaden its horizons and offer listings of halal restaurants by end-2016 and grow its Muslim-friendly inventory to a high five-digit number by 2018.

As well, the founders hope to offer at least one hotel with Muslim facilities in every capital city in the world, in their quest to ensure a great travel experience and a blessed journey for Muslim travellers wherever they go.

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From now till December 31, 2016, employees across designated travel trade industry sectors are welcome to enjoy exclusive discount up to 40% off* at Hong Kong Disneyland Hotel and Disney's Hollywood Hotel. There's also a 10% off on the published price of 1-Day or 2-Day Tickets from now till December 31, 2016.

Please email reservations@hongkongdisneyland.com for enquiries and room reservations.

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ACTIVITIES

THROUGH THE GLASS KAYAK
Vietnam-based Emperor Cruises recently launched its transparent sea kayak tours in Nha Trang. These glass-bottomed sea kayaks

are part of the company's all-inclusive full-day cruises that take travellers around the area's 19 pristine islets. From the seat of the kayak, guests can view the corals of Bai Cau Beach and the natural marine reserve of Hon Mun Island without getting wet. Other activities include trekking and visiting fishing villages.

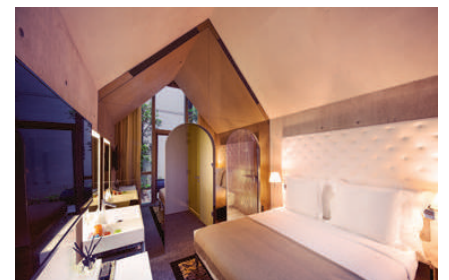


HOTELS



ALILA ANJI, CHINA

Alila Hotels and Resorts' first China property opened on June 1 in Zhejiang Province's Anji, the country's first national ecological county. The 74-key private resort is designed to resemble a traditional Chinese village, with facilities including the Conference Centre, comprising meeting rooms, a ballroom and a VIP lounge; two restaurants and the Spa Alila.



M SOCIAL SINGAPORE

Situated in Robertson Quay and featuring interior designs by Philippe Starck is millennial-minded M Social Singapore. The 239-key hotel will open in mid-June to offer a mix of duplex-style lofts and terraced rooms. Amenities include a lobby with self check-in kiosks, and restaurant-bar Beast & Butterflies.



FOUR SEASONS HOTEL KYOTO, JAPAN

Offering 123 rooms and suites, as well as 57 private residences, the new hotel at the foot of Higashiyama Mountain will open this fall with reservations accepted from October 15. Besides an in-house chapel, the hotel will boast an edo-style sushi restaurant, a garden teahouse, a spa and an indoor swimming pool.



SONEVA JANI, THE MALDIVES

Slated to open in October on the Maldivian island of Medhufaru, Soneva Jani will have 24 water villas and one island villa, all featuring private pools and retractable roofs for stargazing. Amenities at the luxury resort include a spa, a dive centre, an observatory, an organic garden and five F&B outlets.



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ME
BY MELIA

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INTERNATIONAL

Report **Mid/Upscale hotels**

TTG Asia's probe into mid- and upscale hotel labels uncovers flaws with a seemingly arbitrary classification system – and why travel agents want the muddle taken out of such ratings

The confused world of hotel categorisation



SINGAPORE

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

Judy Lum, group vice president for sales and marketing, Tour East Group
Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands

- Midscale: S\$200 (US\$145.70)-S\$250; Orchard Hotel, Hotel Rendezvous and Swissotel Merchant Court.
- Upscale: S\$300-S\$400; Grand Hyatt, Pan Pacific Singapore and Fairmont Singapore.

Current demand Companies undergoing corporate cut backs tend to move from upscale to midscale hotels, which will be seen as a prudent move while (retaining) a presentable image for the company.

C-level executives are (downgrading) from suites in signature and iconic hotels to upscale hotels, which still have strong branding but do not cost an arm and a leg.

Current supply We have good supply of hotels overall but it does not hurt to have more. Singapore is a top destination for business and MICE events so rooms will be filled. A bigger supply will not exert downward pressure but will stabilise rates and make the destination more attractive.

Areas for improvement There's an increasing number of hotels changing their check-in to 14.00 or even 15.00 and check-out to 11.00. It used to be 12.00 for both check-in and -outs.

Clarification or confusion? In Singapore, I feel that the mid- and upscale labels are being used by some hotels to blindsight the industry and consumers alike to accept a certain price point when their hotel cannot meet the desired star-rating criteria. Hence, it is best to use star ratings or associate the standard or category with a known brand.

Michael Chong, manager of global business, Star Holiday Mart

Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands

- Midscale: S\$120-S\$160; applies to boutique hotels in general.
- Upscale: S\$180-S\$300, for four stars and above rated hotels.

Current demand There's a stronger demand for newer hotels. Price and location are the main deciding factors for both categories.

Current supply More midscale hotels are entering the market and the category seems to be oversupplied. With lesser new supply and stiff competition, upscale hotels are lowering rates to a similar level as midscale hotels.



Areas for improvement There should be clearer definitions of category and facilities, and rate stability.

Clarification or confusion? The differentiation line is very thin and blurred, as different hotels have varying classifications. Hotels should work on clearer updates and differentiation factors.



THAILAND

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

Victor Mogilev, general manager, Diethelm Travel Thailand

Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands

- Midscale: 4,000 baht (US\$112.30)-7,000 baht; Amari, Centara and Avani.
- Upscale: 7,000 baht and above; Banyan Tree, Aman Group and Six Senses.

Current demand With the current uncertain world economy, more people are looking to spend (more wisely) while still wanting personalised services. There is hence a higher demand for midscale hotels, which also see opportunities to attract new clientele beyond their usual segments.

Current supply We expect further development of midscale properties with a focus on quality, personalisation and efficiency,

while upscale properties will have to work to retain occupancy and rates.

Areas for improvement Midscale hotels should look into delivering personalised service and consistent standards for both guests and industry partners.

Upscale hotels should make sure products and services are on the bespoke level as guests paying top money have become more demanding than ever.

Clarification or confusion? The main issue is the difference in individual perceptions. For some guests and markets, a room priced at 4,000 baht per night is considered an upscale product while for others even a room at 8,000 baht will be taken as an average product.

Kim Martin Rasmussen, product manager, Exo Travel Thailand

Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands We rely on star ratings and our hotel classification system instead of these terms.

Current demand Midscale hotels are emerging for new growth markets where price is still a factor for travel to Thailand; these hotels are also widely used in our SIC programmes. We always have a demand for upscale hotels due to (our predominantly high-end clientele).

Current supply Small boutique hotels in the midscale category can be in shortage

during peak seasons, so more boutique midscale hotels would be nice. Upscale hotels appear to be in demand year-round and run out of supply during peak seasons.

Areas for improvement More boutique hotels and better service in the midscale range would be good in key destinations. Upscale hotels can benefit from more options and inventory, clear separation of rates for agents and direct clients, and extra benefits when booked through agents.

Clarification or confusion? We do not use these terms. The confusion comes more from boutique vs luxury distinctions.



MALAYSIA

By S Puvaneswary

Manfred Kurz, managing director, Diethelm Travel Malaysia

Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands

- Midscale: RM400 (US\$103)-RM500 in Kuala Lumpur and RM500-RM800 in Langkawi and Sabah; Four Points by Sheraton, Dorsett and Holiday Villa.
- Upscale: RM600 and above in Kuala Lumpur, and RM800 and above in Langkawi and Sabah; for St Regis, Mandarin Oriental and Grand Hyatt.

Current demand The favourable exchange rate has contributed to demand. As well, demand for beach hotels is higher during the Malaysia and Singapore school holidays. City hotels do well on weekdays because of corporate and meetings demand.

Current supply Kuala Lumpur has an oversupply of mid- and upscale hotels. In Sabah, there is an undersupply during the May-October peak season. In Langkawi, the supply is just right.

Areas for improvement Service levels must be improved on for both categories.

Clarification or confusion? A midscale five-star property could operate like a four-star brand, so guests' expectations are not (always) met.

Ally Bhoonee, executive director, World Avenues

Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands

- Midscale: US\$70-US\$80; four-star hotels like Holiday Inn, Furama and Melia.
- Upscale: US\$110-US\$250; five-star hotels like Westin, JW Marriott and Ritz-Carlton.

Current demand There is greater demand for upscale hotels due to the ringgit depreciation, which makes up-



The seat of American power and government lays out a warm welcome to visitors who can visit its historic monuments and institutions of knowledge for FREE. **Elliott L. Ferguson II**, President & CEO, Destination DC, tells us more.

What factors make your destination appealing to travelers?
Washington, DC is one of most visited cities in the U.S. among travelers from South-east Asia. The U.S. capital offers many activities for visitors to participate in. Visiting attractions like the monuments and memorials as well as the 17 Smithsonian institutions is a popular activity and entry is free. Among the most popular attractions are the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, the National Museum of American History and the National Zoo. Visiting the U.S. Capitol and the White House are other must-dos in Washington, DC.

What are some significant traveler trends?
The Philippines is among Washington, DC's top 25 overseas markets. South-east Asia is still a fairly new market for Washington, DC and we are still familiarizing ourselves with traveler trends from the region. We do know, however, Singaporeans tend to travel with family and stay longer in

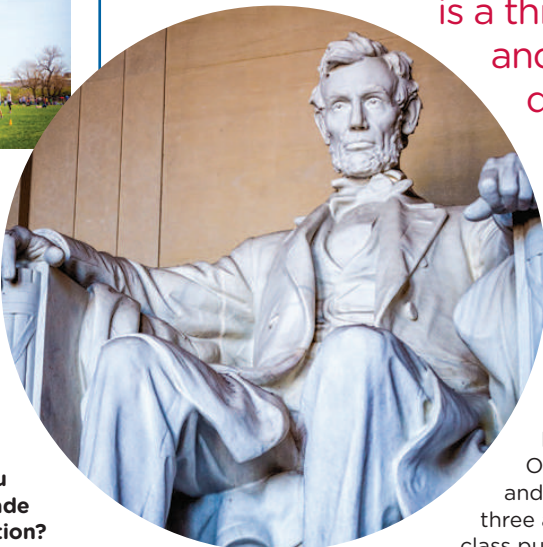


The Washington Monument.

a destination. We have also found that travelers from Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines are very interested in the destination's cultural activities.

What is one message you want to convey to the trade to promote your destination?
There is more to the United States than the Hollywood you

There is more to the United States than the Hollywood you often see on TV. The heart of the history and culture of the U.S. is in Washington, DC. Beyond the historic White House and the iconic U.S. Capitol Building, Washington, DC is a thriving leisure and business destination.



The Lincoln Memorial.

often see on TV. The heart of the history and culture of the U.S. is in Washington, DC. Beyond the historic White House and the iconic U.S. Capitol Building, Washington, DC is a thriving leisure and business destination. Offering easy access and navigation through three airports and a world-class public transportation system, Washington, DC has been successful in attracting international tourism. In addition to its world-class museums and art galleries, Washington, DC offers a robust dining and nightlife scene, high-end designer retail venues and a large theatre community.

What attractions and what kind of itinerary do you suggest for the first-time visitor? How about repeat visitors?
We suggest visiting the iconic monuments and memorials as well as a visit to the White House and U.S. Capitol. With longer stays and repeat visitors, we suggest visiting one of DC's many trendy neighbourhoods



ELLIOTT L. FERGUSON II
President & CEO,
Destination DC

including Georgetown, Dupont Circle, Adams Morgan, Shaw and Logan Circle to get a sense of the vibrant city outside of the National Mall.

What other outdoor and family-friendly activities can visitors enjoy?
There are many iconic outdoor experiences in Washington, DC as well as in our neighbouring states of Maryland and Virginia. A few suggestions that will appeal to active visitors include cycling or jogging on the National Mall; hiking at Rock Creek Park in Washington, DC or the Shenandoah National Park in Virginia; kayaking on the Potomac River or Maryland's Assateague State Park; and cycling along the Virginia Capital Trail.



The National Mall and Tidal Basin in Washington, DC.



Adams Morgan neighborhood.

For more information, please go to **VisitTheUSA.com**



Report Mid/upscale hotels

scale hotels good value for money as it costs a third of a similar brand in Europe.

Current supply There's an oversupply in the capital city right now and Kuala Lumpur City Hall has temporarily stopped issuing new licenses for all hotel

types. In secondary destinations such as Penang, Johor and Kuching, there is room for more investments in upscale hotels.

Areas for improvement I would like for hotels to improve service and for owners to upkeep their properties.

Clarification or confusion? Some define midscale as a four-star and upscale as a five-star property, while others refer to a five-star deluxe hotel as midscale and a five-star super deluxe hotel as an upscale one. Such (varying) definitions are confusing to travellers who tend to recognise

hotels by their brands and star ratings only.



By Julian Ryall

Tetsuya Takeda, general manager of inbound division, Nippon Travel Agency
Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands

- Midscale: The Keio Plaza, The Royal Park and The Shinagawa Prince.
 - Upscale: The Mandarin Oriental, The Ritz-Carlton and The Peninsula.
- For an agent, it is too sensitive for us to put a price on hotel rooms.

Current demand We are seeing demand for midscale properties because they tend to cater to larger groups of foreign tourists, while luxury hotels are more geared towards VIP travellers. Demand is extremely high now and continues to rise (with the surge in foreign tourists to Japan).

Current supply Japan has a room shortage and the situation particularly acute in Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto. It does not seem feasible that new hotels can be built fast enough for Japan to accommodate 40 million visitors for the 2020 Olympics. We are trying to alleviate the problem by encouraging visitors to stay outside the big cities or come at different times of the year.

Areas for improvement Besides a bigger room supply, we need to ensure that new properties have adequate parking spaces for tour buses. Many city-centre hotels do not and guests often need to walk some distance to their hotel. The government should give out tax breaks for hotels that include parking facilities.

Clarification or confusion? Tour groups usually follow the advice of their agents when it comes to hotels, but there may be some confusion among independent travellers. American tourists, for example, generally want bigger rooms but Europeans are more focused on the hotel location, so the demands and expectations of what is upscale or midscale are different.

Hiroyasu Shima, director of sales, Triangle Japan
Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands

- Midscale: from US\$300; Hotel Metropolitan Tokyo Ikebukuro, The Tokyo Dome Hotel and The Shinagawa Prince.
- Upscale: US\$700 and above; The Shangri-La Hotel, The Conrad and The Peninsula.

Current demand There is huge demand for hotel rooms across all price brackets in the major cities. Agents are now bringing a lot of tourists from South-east Asia, and they are filling up the midscale hotels.

Current supply Five years ago, it was easy to get rooms pretty much any time of the year as most visitors tended to be wealthy and stayed at five-star hotels. Now we are facing a shortage of rooms across all price brackets and the consequent price increase gets passed on to the customer.



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Areas for improvement The average Japanese hotel (used to) focus on the needs of domestic travellers because only around 10 per cent of guests were from overseas. That figure is now above 30 per cent in most places but most operators have not added new services or facilities such as providing halal meals. We have to go beyond building new hotels to meet demand.

Clarification or confusion? There is some confusion among foreign visitors, primarily over price and service levels. Prices are rising due to the room shortage and travellers from other parts of Asia are surprised at the amount they have to pay for seemingly basic rooms and services.



By Prudence Lui

Jenny May, managing director, The Destination Management Company
Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands

- Midscale: HK\$1,500 (US\$193.22)-HK\$2,350; Sheraton, Marco Polo and Hyatt Regency
- Upscale: HK\$2,400-HK\$3,400; Shangri-La, Grand Hyatt and InterContinental.

Current demand Despite the current downturn in tourism, demand for both categories is still quite high. With most hotels now offering special rates, it's possible to book an upscale hotel at midscale rates, which is beneficial for MICE agents as clients can reduce their hotel costs and spend more on ground programmes.

Current supply There is enough midscale hotels but the city could do with a few more upscale hotels – a few brands have not entered into Hong Kong yet. It amuses me that a few lower-scale hotels are classifying themselves as midscale and trying to charge midscale rates even during this dire tourism season.

Areas for improvement Standards in Hong Kong are already exceptional.

Clarification or confusion? These terms are ambiguous and confusing. The star-rating system is much better.



Ivy Sung, CEO, Faces of Hong Kong
Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands

- Midscale: HK\$1200-HK\$1300; W, Sheraton and New World Millennium Hong Kong.
- Upscale: HK\$2000-HK\$3000; The Peninsula, Four Seasons and Shangri-La.

insula, Four Seasons and Shangri-La.

Current demand (Looking at corporate travel trends), industries like pharmaceuticals are opting for midscale over upscale accommodation (as they are limited by their compliance policies amid existing

economic conditions.

Current supply The supply seems enough for both categories unless inbound traffic, especially from China, recovers.

Areas for improvement Service standards

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Report Mid/Upscale hotels

have dropped (relative to) other Asian cities. The immediate cause is higher labour cost and manpower shortage. Greater work pressure also leaves staff less time to mingle and interact with customers.

Clarification or confusion? Some five-star hotels are beyond five-star standards so the grading cannot reflect the reality. Also, some suppliers are not clear on the difference between four- and five-star premises.



By Caroline Boey

Sam Lay, director, Greater China, BCD Meetings & Events

Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands

- Midscale: RMB500 (US\$77)-RMB1,000; Renaissance, Pullman and Novotel.
- Upscale: RMB1,000-RMB2,500; JW Marriott, Shangri-La and Ritz-Carlton.

Current demand The large domestic market continues to drive demand for all categories. In particular, we are seeing strong demand for midscale hotels, driven by growing corporate meetings especially from a policy compliance perspective.

Current supply For the tier-one cities of Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, there is a good mix already present or in the pipeline for both hotel categories. Supply growth should be focused on tier-two and -three cities like Xi'an and Chengdu with good MICE traffic.

Areas for improvement The overall offerings of mid- and upscale hotels are generally satisfactory, but China still has room for improvement in the service touch-points.

Clarification or confusion? There is a lot of ongoing debate regarding the two terms and definitions. It is key for meeting planners to understand the client's requirements, and to deliver value by recommending the right hotel.

Violet Wang, destination manager, Pacific World China

Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands

- Midscale: RMB1,000-RMB1,600; Langham, Fairmont and Westin.
- Upscale: above RMB1,600; Peninsula, Waldorf Astoria and Banyan Tree.

Current demand There is good demand in both categories in China. The strict compliance policies for the pharmaceutical industry and government events, where accommodation is capped at midscale hotels, is contributing to high demand for mid-range meeting hotels.

Current supply More hotel groups are now debuting their high-end brands into China, as Chinese customers become better educated and seek out luxury brands.

Areas for improvement Midscale hotels should not lower their service levels even if they decide to reduce their rates amid stronger competition. Upscale hotels need to stretch their capabilities to accommodate larger groups for outside catering and offer distinctive programmes such as cultural lectures, specialised cooking classes and Chinese opera.

Clarification or confusion? In some Chinese cities, brands such as Sheraton and Aloft are both considered mid- and upscale. Customers also still depend on the hotel's star rating to determine if it is midscale or upscale.

To a (lay) customer, any five-star hotel is (considered) upscale but our standard is to follow the automotive and luxury industry's definition.



By Rohit Kaul

Subhash Goyal, chairman, STIC Travel Group

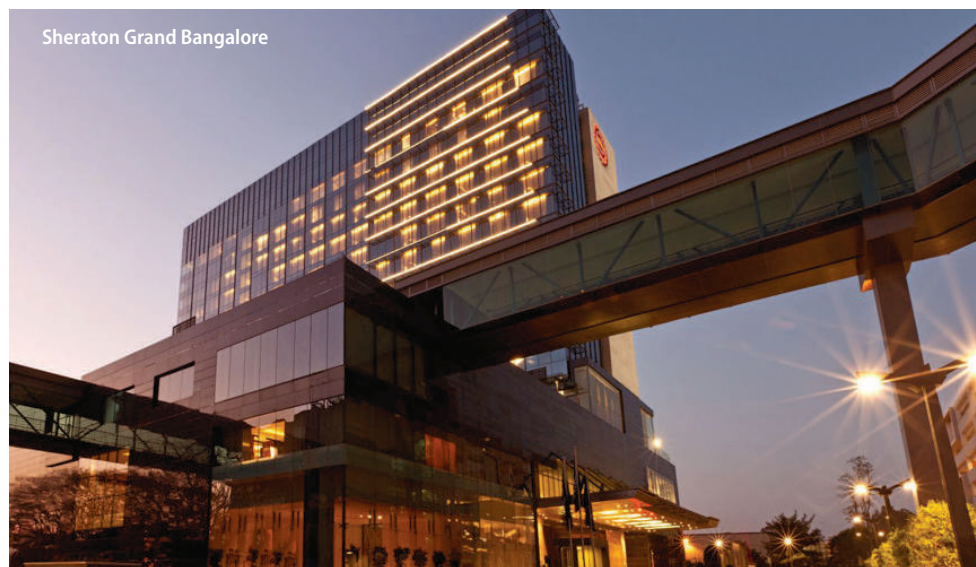
Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands

- Midscale: Rs2,500 (US\$37.34)-Rs5,000; Choice Hotels, ibis Hotels and Sarovar Park Hotels.
- Upscale: Rs10,000 and above; Hyatt, Sheraton and Leela.

Current demand There's strong demand for both categories but most are being diverted to the New Delhi Capital Region (NCR) as there is 15 per cent luxury tax on the published tariff in New Delhi, versus 10 per cent on the actual tariff in NCR.

Current supply New Delhi has a shortage of midscale hotels but an oversupply of upscale hotels after (multiple openings) in Aerocity near the international airport.

Areas for improvement Hotels in both categories need to offer free Wi-Fi and



provide the same rates to travel agents and tour operators as given on the Internet.

Clarification or confusion? The difference is clearly understood by the travel agents, tour operators and consumers alike.

Ayappa Somaiah, vice president, Splendour Holidays

Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands

- Midscale: Rs3,500-Rs4,000; Quality Inn, ibis and Fortune.
- Upscale: Rs5,000-Rs6,000; Vivanta, Marriott and Sheraton.

Current demand For the average foreign and domestic leisure travellers, midscale is preferred for its rates and value-for-money features. Corporate and high-end leisure travellers prefer upscale hotels for the comfort, facilities and full services.

By and large upscale hotels in major Indian cities are in demand, while in the secondary cities midscale hotels fuel growth.

Current supply Professionally-managed midscale hotels are not evenly distributed. For example, in Bengaluru there are adequate upscale hotels but a shortage of midscale hotels. Currently, we see more upscale hotels entering the big cities.

Areas for improvement Upscale hotels generally conform to international product and service standards but it is not the case for midscale hotels that do not belong to reputed chains.

There is a shortage of well-trained staff across both segments but we, as an inbound tour operator, receive most complaints on midscale hotels.

Clarification or confusion? This confusion is mainly with foreign travellers, as sometimes our upscale hotels do not conform to standards (they are familiar with, due to varying definitions across the world). But this scenario is changing with many international brands now coming up.



By Feizal Samath

Nilmin Nanayakkara, managing director, NKAR Travels & Tours

Current demand Current country-wide demand is for the three- and four-star

range. Europeans are looking more at the three- or four-star range, probably due to the economic recession, while new markets like China tend to opt for four- and five-star hotels.

Current supply There has been an increase in room supply reflecting the national growth in tourism. However, there is a shortage of three-star hotels if going by the ratings of the hotels themselves.

Areas for improvement It is necessary for the authorities to impose a proper star rating system without allowing the hotels to decide on their own ratings.

Clarification or confusion? Some OTAs allow (arbitrary) star ratings to be attached to hotels. Lots of three-star quality products are sold as four-star ones, diluting the four-star recognition.

Also, some four-star quality products are found in the five-star category due to the minimum rates policy between city hotels. This confuses the end buyer and creates a bad image for the destination.

Anura Lokuhetty, chairman, Asian Council on Tourism

Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands

Upscale refers to hotels five star and above while midscale tend to be three- to four-star properties.

Current demand There is more demand for the midscale sector, with the industry driven by affordability.

Current supply After the end of the civil war, most old hotels have gotten a facelift while the newer ones are mostly in a higher category. In terms of product (mix) we are on the right track.

Areas for improvement The huge informal sector – which in the past five years has mostly evolved in the mid-to-lower – needs to be regulated.

Pricing is also a sensitive issue and we need to ensure our rates are competitive with other destinations in the region. We need to be careful in accelerating development in order to retain this beauty and authenticity of Sri Lanka.

Clarification or confusion? The NTO has its own star rating system, while most operators have their own classification. We may tag a property five star but some operators will refer it to as three to four stars.

Banyan Tree Hangzhou



Chiang Mai promises unique, different and distinctive TTM+

Thailand's largest B2B travel mart shakes things up in 2016 with new venue and products

This year's Thailand Travel Mart Plus (TTM+) Amazing Gateway to the Greater Mekong Subregion is set to be "Unique, different and distinctive" as it unfolds with a new destination, new focus and new buyers and sellers.

For the first time in 15 years, Chiang Mai sets the stage for Thailand's largest B2B tourism and travel trade event between June 8 and 10.

The historic northern city, as the closest Thai city, is the perfect springboard for businesspeople looking for an inroad into the Greater Mekong Subregion, while the new state-of-the-art Chiang Mai International Exhibition and Convention Centre and wide range of hotel choices for travellers are ready to welcome delegates from all over the world.

According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), some 570 buyers from 62 countries have registered to come for TTM+ 2016 with more than half attending for the very first time. India will send the

largest contingent of buyers but also expected is a strong turnout from the UK, China, Australia, Italy, the US and emerging markets such as Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova and Ukraine.

On the other hand, the tradeshow is drawing 343 sellers including hotels and resorts, tour operators and travel agencies, NTOs and companies prominent within the Greater Mekong Subregion.

Mr. Yuthasak Supasorn, governor, TAT, said: "This year's event promises to be unique, different and distinctive from anything we have done in the past. We have carefully analysed all the feedback we have got over the past few years and done our best to act upon many of the valuable recommendations.

"The enormous interest we have received from the buyers is certainly very encouraging. We believe this year's TTM+ will go a long way towards facilitating business opportunities and meeting our national development priorities," he added.

Women travellers will take the

spotlight this year at TTM+ 2016 as Thailand unveils a brand new slate of products especially designed with them in mind. Divided into five categories - Beautiful Look, Beautiful Shape, Beautiful Retreat, Beautiful Mind, and Beautiful Experience - these experiences offer female travellers the chance to enjoy Thai massages or a cooking demonstration from local leading culinary institutes.

Meanwhile Thailand will continue pushing its niche segments including unique wedding and honeymoon packages, golfing, green tourism, luxury travel and the return of the 12 Hidden Gems Plus, this time with a focus on 'folklore tourism' - 12 secondary destinations, each a site of local myth and legend, will be paired with the 12 Hidden Gems of Thailand that were unveiled last year to complement the original 12 Hidden Gems.

TTM+ 2016's rejuvenation comes as international visitor arrivals continue to hit new highs. Between January and February this year, tourist numbers surged to a record 6.1 million or 15.5 per cent higher than during the same period in 2015.

TTM+ 2016
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Thailand Travel Mart Plus (TTM+) 2016

8 - 10 June 2016 | Chiang Mai, Thailand
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For more information, please visit www.thailandtravelmartplus.com



MALAYSIA:

RICH IN CULTURE AND ADVENTURE



MALAYSIA TRULY ASIA

Ask any traveller exploring through Malaysia, what is it that sets Malaysia apart from other countries? Why would you go there? What is there to see? You'd most likely get a shrug, a smile, and the words, "Well... Malaysia, Truly Asia."

Indeed, the slogan that's made the country famous worldwide aptly describes one of its strongest selling points – its cultural diversity. The shared history among the Malays, Chinese, Indians, and local natives in the country has led to a harmonious amalgam of cultures, now an irresistible tourist attraction worldwide.

Nowhere else can a visitor enjoy a wide variety of authentic cuisines, exquisite dances, and festive celebrations that feature so prominently in one place. From the hypnotic Sumazau dance in Sabah, to the famous Char Koay Teow in Penang and the festive Hari Raya Aidilfitri celebration nationwide – Malaysia is simply an endless cultural trove that's waiting to be explored.

ENDLESS ADVENTURE

Those who have watched Disney's 2016 edition of "The Jungle Book" would be interested to know that the beautiful scenes from the movie was partly inspired by the Bornean jungles in Malaysia. Indeed, much of the country's million year old rainforests are still carefully preserved today, in conservation parks such as the Taman Negara National Park and the Mount Kinabalu National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Taman Negara.



Mount Kinabalu.



Sipadan Island.

Meanwhile, Sipadan is still one of the most sought after diving sites in the world, with over 3,000 species of marine life and hundreds of coral species classified in the ecosystem. Divers line up annually to get a chance to explore this underwater wonder which undersea explorer Jacques Costeau once claimed as "an untouched piece of art."

Indeed, added with its pristine beaches and islands, few contenders can match Malaysia's natural attractions, which is a haven for nature and its wonders.

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Report Cruises

A fleet of new ships built specifically for Chinese cruise passengers is starting to come out of the docks and sail to their new homeports in China. **Raini Hamdi** looks at how they are different



Clockwise from top: *Genting Dream*; *Ovation of the Seas*' godmother Fan Bingbing; *Norwegian Joy*; *MSC Lirica*

Made for Chinese

MSC LIRICA Debut: May 2016

"China is a market that many different cruise lines are looking at and investing in. We expect to see continued double-digit growth in the market over the coming years."

— **Achille Staiano**, head of commercial services, **MSC Cruises**

MSC Cruises' first ship reconfigured for the China market, *MSC Lirica*, set sail for her maiden voyage on May 1 with predominantly domestic Chinese guests and a cruise itinerary around China, South Korea and Japan.

A majority of the cruises are three to four nights in duration, however longer voyages of up to nine nights will start in January next year.

"For a number of years we have been gathering insights into the Chinese cruise market and working with partners on the ground to fully understand the specific needs of Chinese guests. Using these insights, we have completely overhauled one of our ships, *MSC Lirica*, to meet the needs of the Chinese home market," said Achille Staiano, head of commercial services, MSC Cruises.

"Paying particular attention to the dif-

ferences in cultures and values, we modified a number of aspects of ship life to ensure that every guest receives our best-in-class service and a memorable experience."

Three examples include:

- altering the dining options on board, tailoring them for Chinese tastebuds, including the introduction of a partnership with world-renowned chef Jereme Leung.

"This means that we are able to bring an excellent mix of cuisines to guests, including traditional Asian experiences, as well as a range of refined international dining opportunities," said Staiano.

- introducing its first-ever cruise ambassador scheme on board, where staff have been trained by native service providers in order to pass on specific Chinese service customs.

"We recruited local staff specifically for *MSC Lirica*," said Staiano. "Over 80 per cent of staff on board are Mandarin-speaking, offering specific and expert advice to guests in their native language."

- changing the shopping experience on-board, reflecting the popularity of European brands with Chinese guests.

"China is a market which is of great interest to us. We already work with partners that cater to Chinese guests wishing to experience our offerings in the Mediterranean, Europe and the Americas. We are very excited to have launched, in partnership with CAISSA Touristic, our China-dedicated product which made its maiden voyage at the beginning of this month," said Staiano.

GENTING DREAM Debut: November 2016



"The number of Chinese and Asian cruise vacationers has grown substantially over the past few years and these passengers have developed a more sophisticated understanding of cruise products; they are better able to appreciate the value of a luxury brand such as Dream Cruises."

— **Thatcher Brown**, president, **Dream Cruises**

The first ship under Genting Hong Kong's new cruise brand, Dream Cruises, will set sail on November 13, offering two-, five- and seven-night coastal China and Vietnam cruises from Guangzhou. With a capacity of around 3,400 passengers, the 150,000-ton *Genting Dream* marks a new chapter in Asian cruising.

Dream Cruises' president, Thatcher Brown, explained: "Currently, the majority of ships with homeports in China are mainly targeting the mass-market consumers with the occasional seasonal premium ship deployment in this region. With Dream Cruises, we are proud and excited to be the first-ever Asian luxury cruise line that specifically caters to the large and rapidly-growing premium market in China and Asia with a purpose-built new ship, exclusively for this market and that is homeported in Asia."

When asked why Dream Cruises won't be on a collision course with sisters Crystal Cruises and Star Cruises, Brown said they were all positioned differently – Crystal for the international luxury market, Dream for the Asian luxury market and Star for the contemporary segment.

"Star Cruises currently services the region with a well-established fleet of contemporary ships and we felt that it was time to create a completely new and distinct brand with a singular vision to cater to the Asian luxury segment to service the burgeoning middle and affluent classes in China and the region," he said.

Agents can expect Dream to combine the history and expertise of the six-star

COSTA CRUISES



Costa expands Asian fleet with planned deliveries up to 2020

The newly arrived Costa Fortuna boosts Costa Cruises’ Asian fleet to four, but its capacity will be further enhanced by Costa neoRomantica in 2017 and the delivery of two new ships custom-built for the Asian market in 2019 and 2020

ASIA’S CRUISE PIONEER

Costa Cruises is the first international cruise line to enter Asia-Pacific and China, and has played a key role in the development of region’s cruise business having operated homeport cruises in the region since 2006.

In 2012 and 2013, Costa Victoria (75,000 gross tonnage; 2,394 total guests) and Costa Atlantica (86,000 gross tonnage; 2,680 total guests) were successfully deployed to Asia, with its unique “Italy at Sea” style of cruise experience gaining favour quickly among holidaymakers.

With the arrival of Costa Serena (114,500 gross tonnage; 3,780 total guests) and Costa Fortuna (103,000 gross tonnage; 3,470 total guests) in 2015 and 2016, Costa’s fleet capacity in Asia has more than doubled.

Costa Cruises’ plans for a strong Asian presence will continue with the arrival of Costa neoRomantica (56,800 gross tonnage; 1,800 total guests) in 2017 and two

additional new ships in 2019 and 2020, both custom-built for the Asian market.

‘ITALY AT SEA’

Costa’s “Italy at Sea” cruise concept offers guests an experience rich with Italian art and culture in all aspects of hospitality. Guests enjoy not only Italian cuisine, entertainment, art and shopping but also parties and leisure activities with a distinct Italian flavour.

ASIAN CONSIDERATIONS

In Asia, Costa Cruises are operated with the comfort and convenience of local guests in mind. Signs and notices are made available in local languages. Menus feature items familiar to local palates. There is also an abundance of leisure programmes for guests holidaying with family and friends so that everyone will be able to enjoy their holiday-at-sea.

A THEME FOR EACH SHIP

Each of Costa Cruises’ ships



Costa Fortuna — Leonardo Da Vinci 1960 Lounge.

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 their cabins to the spa and designer boutiques.

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 and Grand Prix Simulator.

The newly arrived **Costa Fortuna** is a “Museum at Sea”, replete with 4,860 artworks, antiques and artefacts that pay tribute to

Italy’s seafaring history.

Next April, **Costa neoRomantica** is set to arrive in Shanghai after a positioning cruise from Mauritius. It will be refurbished to suit its new Asian guests with an enhanced “Italy at Sea” appeal before setting sail in April 2017.

With steady investments in the pipeline, Costa Cruises will be able to offer guests in Asia a multifaceted variety of cruise experiences.



Costa Victoria



Costa Atlantica



Costa Serena



Costa neoRomantica - The Suite Cabin.

About Costa Cruises Costa Cruises is Europe’s leading cruise operator. It is part of Carnival Corporation & Plc, the largest cruise company in the world with a 45% market share of the world’s 22 million cruise guests and 69 embarkation points throughout the world. At present, four of Costa’s 15 ships are based in Asia: Costa Victoria, Costa Atlantica, Costa Serena and Costa Fortuna. Next year, Costa neoRomantica will join the Asian fleet. Two additional ships dedicated to the Asian market are scheduled to enter service in 2019 and 2020. www.costacruisesasia.com

Report Cruises

Costa Fortuna



Crystal and the Asian hospitality of Star, he added. There will also be the right balance between international elements with the product customisation for the China and Asian market.

Highlights of *Genting Dream* include a VIP-only Dream Mansion with 142 suites and access to a private sundeck with pools, Jacuzzi, a private gym and a private dining room.

The ship also boasts 100 connecting rooms for family and larger group vacations, 35 restaurant and bar concepts, a 610m-wraparound promenade for dramatic seaside dining and lounging, and a plethora of recreational features including six water slides, a rock-climbing wall, mahjong room and mini-golf.

MAJESTIC PRINCESS

Debut: Summer 2017



"We believe there is a strong demand for a locally-based premium cruise product that is offered by an international cruise line, with experiences custom-designed for travellers from China."

— **Tony Kaufman, executive vice president international operations, Princess Cruises**

Princess Cruises' first ship built and designed specifically for the China market, *Majestic Princess*, will set sail on her maiden season voyage in summer 2017 from her homeport in Shanghai for year-round cruising to Japan and South Korea.

For China's international travellers, Princess Cruises would continue to tailor itinerary lengths to their needs, explore new ports and take these travellers on fly-cruise voyages in Alaska, Australia, New Zealand and Europe, said the line's executive vice president international operations, Tony Kaufman.

When asked how different *Majestic Princess* would be from other ships, Kaufman said it would have many of the well-received features of her sister ships, *Royal Princess* and *Regal Princess*, including a dramatic multistorey atrium serving as the social hub; an over-the-ocean Sea-Walk, a top-deck glass-bottomed walkway extending eight metres beyond the edge of the ship; and a special Chef's Table Lumiere, a private dining experience that surrounds diners in a curtain of light.

However, while it caters to Chinese travellers' desire for international experiences – flavours from around the world, warm and gracious service, entertainers sourced from Hollywood, etc – there will be "a number of new onboard venues and experiences designed specifically to satisfy what's important to Chinese travellers, the details of which will be revealed in the coming months", said Kaufman.

The ship will debut a new livery featuring Princess' logo that will be rolled out fleet wide.

Befitting her dedication to the Chinese market, the ship will carry a Chinese name on the hull that suggests 'grand world' or 'grand spirit'.

The 143,000-ton vessel has a capacity for 3,560 guests. It reached a construction milestone when it was 'floated out' of its building dock at the Fincantieri shipyard in Monfalcone, Italy, and met ocean water for the first time.

As for the competition with sister Costa Cruises, which is also fielding purpose-built ships for China, Kaufman said there was a market for both.

"The products on Costa and Princess are very different. Princess is a premium international brand focused on bringing its experience of providing cruise vacations throughout the world to the Chinese passengers, allowing them to enjoy food, service and entertainment from all over the world and making them feel special. Costa is an Italian brand and brings its authentic Italy at Sea product to its passengers. Chinese travellers are seeking differentiated services and unique experiences," he explained.

NORWEGIAN JOY

Debut: 2H2017



"Cruise passengers, whether (they are) from North America, Europe or Australia, have their own unique preferences. China is no different."

— **David Herrera, president, Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings China**

Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) will debut its China-centric ship, *Norwegian Joy*, in 2H2017. It will be homeported in Shanghai year-round and, following a short season in Tianjin in August and September, sailings will be predominantly four- and five-night cruises to Japanese and South Korean ports with some three- and six-night cruises as well.

The ship has a capacity of 4,200 passengers and is the second of NCL's Breakaway Plus class ships.

When asked how it's custom-designed for Chinese passengers, David Herrera, president, NCL China, gave the following examples: "Chinese guests travel more often in multi-generational family groups than (Americans), therefore we have added new family cabins with multiple sleeping areas and a shared common area so families can travel together while still having some privacy.

"Clearly the dining options and venues have been made with the Chinese passengers in mind as well as the multiple new entertainment shows. Other key differences on *Norwegian Joy* will include Mandarin-speaking crew in all passenger-facing roles, and signage predominantly

in Chinese characters. This ship is being made for our highly valued guests to know we did not simply modify an existing vessel, but designed it especially for the Chinese market. We wanted our first entrant into China to be the ship that Chinese VIPs deserve."

He added that the line's goal was to make every ship a little bit better than the previous one.

"In the same way that *Norwegian Escape* took the best aspects of the *Getaway* and *Breakaway* before her and improved the experience for our guests, *Norwegian Joy* continues this trend," said Herrera.

The launch of *Norwegian Joy* is key to NCL's return to Asia this year after a 13-year hiatus.

"We think that by giving Chinese cruise passengers the ability to experience our premium product from a ship homeported in Shanghai or Tianjin, it will make a repeat customer interested in cruising with NCL again," said Herrera, adding that NCL has designed programmes specifically for Chinese guests on its ships in Europe, Alaska and Hawaii that include special pricing, language skills and menu options.

"We are excited about both homeport and fly-cruise China business potential," he said.

COSTA ASIA

Debut: 2019/2020

"The new order will allow us to continue to significantly build the Chinese cruise market, which will become the second largest in the world at the end of the decade."

— **Michael Thamm, CEO, Costa Group**

Costa Asia did not reply to *TTG Asia's* queries by press time about its vision and strategies for China purpose-built ships, but a press release issued on April 6 announced an order for two new ships specifically-designed for the Chinese market to be built by Italian shipbuilder Fincantieri. Operated by Costa Asia, they represent an investment of more than six billion euros (US\$6.8 million).

The ships, each with 135,500 gross tons and carrying 4,200 guests, will be delivered in 2019 and 2020. The order is part of contracts signed by parent Carnival Corporation with Fincantieri to build five new ships by 2020 at the company's shipyards in Monfalcone and Marghera, both in Italy, providing jobs for many Italians.

Costa Asia ships feature an innovative Italian design in line with its concept of Italy at Sea, offering an authentic Italian and European experience for Chinese guests, with high-quality hospitality, style, cuisine and entertainment.

The Costa Group said it was the first cruise company to enter the Chinese market back in 2006. Four Costa ships are currently deployed in China and Asia year-round: *Costa Atlantica*, *Costa Victoria*, *Costa Serena* and most recently *Costa Fortuna*.

RCI: No need for purpose-built China ships

Swimming against the current, Royal Caribbean International (RCI) president China and North Asia Pacific, Zinan Liu, said “we do not do purpose-build (ships) for the China market and we never said any ship was built for China”.

Chinese travellers do not like purely Chinese products, said Liu. Rather, they like international products with some Asian or Chinese elements.

Royal Caribbean has been successfully tapping Chinese cruise passengers by homeporting in China and Asia since 2008 – without custom-made Chinese ships. Many Chinese guests are not seeking fly-cruise vacations, and homeports in the region with their friendly visa policies make them attractive to this group of people, he pointed out.

“Chinese consumers enjoy a three-year multi-entry visa to Singapore while ports of call such as Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam offer convenient visa processing for cruise travellers. Australia also has friendly visa procedures for the Chinese. Plus, when China enters its winter season, Australia and Singapore are suitable for cruising,” he said.

Recounting its China milestones, Liu said it first tested the waters with *Rhapsody of the Seas* in 2008. In 2009, *Legend of the Seas* drew attention to cruising among consumers and the trade, and also hosted one of the most successful corporate charters in China.

In 2012, *Voyager of the Seas* arrived and “was referred to as the ship that brought China into the Super Boat era.”

“In 2013, with the arrival of *Mariner of the Seas* in China, we celebrated the fourth year in a row where there was a 100 per cent increase of passenger capacity in this region. Finally in 2015, the arrival of *Quantum of the Seas*, the most technologically advanced ship in the world, moved us from the Super Boat era to the Quantum era,” he said.

Even with the strong Royal Caribbean development in China, the penetration rate of cruising is far behind the rate of the North American market, thus great potential still awaits.

“The market is becoming mature and guests now are focusing more on the ship itself instead of the port-of-call destinations,” said Liu. – **Raini Hamdi**



Liu: Making a quantum leap in China without tailoring ships to Chinese passengers



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2017 Jan 2, 9, 27, 31,
Feb 9, 13, 20, 27, Mar 13, 20

Ports-of-call:

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Langkawi, Phuket

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Singapore Departures:

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Hospitality players and tour operators in Kuala Lumpur are priming the city with a renewed sheen of luxury, keeping pace with efforts by the tourism bureau to court visitors from the high-end segment, writes **S Puvaneswary**

Kuala Lumpur's Petronas Twin Towers, surrounded by luxury hotels and shopping malls



Race to the top

Kuala Lumpur Tourism Bureau (KLTB), set up in November 2015, aims to make the city an attractive luxury travel destination as the city's supporting infrastructure takes shape.

The bureau, which oversees the implementation of the Kuala Lumpur Tourism Masterplan 2015-2025 among other objectives, has rolled out strategies to attract more high-yield tourists.

Since the beginning of this year, KLTB has been conducting hospitality seminars for taxi drivers and has groomed 80 tourism ambassadors in the city.

Noraza Yusof, general manager at KLTB, said: "In the second half of the year, we will publish a luxury tourism product directory and introduce luxury packages.

"We also wish to attract the rich by positioning the city as the gastronomic hub of Asia. One of the initiatives is weekly cooking classes for international tourists and spouses of MICE delegates."

KLTB is also promoting sky dining experience which feature restaurants such as Atmosphere 360, Marini's on 57, Nobu and Heli Lounge Bar, all of which are located in the city centre.

Manfred Kurz, managing director, Diethelm Travel Malaysia, said: "Sky dining options cost relatively more but West-

ern tourists are willing to pay for the unique dining experience and great bird's-eye views of the city."

Luxury Tours Malaysia saw Asian luxury FIT bookings doubling this year from the monthly average of three to four requests in 2014, an improvement that senior manager Arokia Das attributes in part to Tourism Malaysia's overseas promotional efforts.

He added: "It becomes easier to attract high-end tourists when you have supporting infrastructure also in place, such as high-end restaurants with scenic views, chartered helicopter rides to see the city skyline and high-end accommodation."

St Regis Kuala Lumpur, which soft-opened in May this year, stands out for having the largest standard guestrooms in the city at 63m² and a grand ballroom with a 270-degree LED digital canvas skirting the venue.

With more international luxury brands the likes of W and Four Seasons debuting in the city over the next few years, existing hotels are finding the impetus to revamp amid growing competition.

For instance, the 19-year-old Ritz-Carlton Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, recently underwent its first major renovation to "keep up with the times and to make the property memorable to guests", the ho-

Destination in numbers

12 million

Targeted international arrivals to Kuala Lumpur in 2016

3.1 nights

Average length of stay of foreign tourists in Kuala Lumpur

48

Number of foreign airlines flying into Kuala Lumpur International Airport

image of the city and make it easier to promote the city as an upmarket destination," he added.

Tourism players are also strategically packaging complementary products in the state of Selangor – which surrounds the Malaysian capital geographically – to further enhance Kuala Lumpur's luxury appeal.

Arokia said: "Luxury tourists are not content staying in high-end accommodation and being surrounded by tall buildings – they want to have local experiences as well.

"Thus we take them on chauffeur-driven vehicles to visit the Mah Meri aborigines on Carey Island, an hour's drive from the city."

Another attraction that fits the bill, he said, is the Royal Selangor Visitor Centre, where tourists can view pewter craft or create their own souvenirs.

Diethelm's Kurz added: "High-end Europeans to Malaysia love nature. Yet, they would rather not spend a whole day jungle trekking in a real forest."

He pointed out that the sweet spot lies in arranging day trips to the Forest Reserve Institute Malaysia, where clients can go on treks and canopy walks, before returning to the city's comforts in the evening.

tel's director of sales and marketing Yan-nick Mauchle told *TTG Asia*.

Commenting on the city's transformation, Ally Bhoonee, executive director of World Avenues, said: "In the past, Kuala Lumpur was not perceived as an upmarket destination as it had limited products. It was also difficult to market the destination to high-end tourists from the Middle East who would rather go to Europe.

"But with these new brands coming into the marketplace, it will improve the

Issue of the day**Viewpoints**

What more needs to be done to attract high-yield tourists to Kuala Lumpur?



Anthony Wong, group managing director, Asian Overland Services Tours & Travel

One way is to organise fam trips for select international media and outbound agents catering to the high-end segment. A quality ground handler should be engaged to take care of the group. The organisers must also put in the work to ensure personal interests of the media are met.



Susan Yap, director of sales & marketing, The Westin Kuala Lumpur

We will need to enhance the destination offerings and the city's image by improving national security, and political and economic stability. Room inventories in the capital should also be controlled for quality. There should also be more world-class attractions and air connections by full-service airlines so we can be more competitive in attracting high-yield tourists.

Airline fee hike hits turbulence

Malaysia's civil aviation regulator will stagger airline fee hikes following stiff resistance from local carriers, writes **S Puvaneswary**

After its proposed 10-fold fee hikes on airlines operating out of Malaysia was met with overwhelming opposition from the carriers, Malaysia's Department of Civil Aviation (DCA) will scale back and double the air navigation facility charges (ANFC) instead.

Surprised at the steepness of the initial proposed hike and the short one-week notice given before its intended implementation on April 15, seven major carriers banded together to form the new Association of Malaysian Air Carriers (AMAC) to leverage their bargaining power against the DCA.

The Malaysian Ministry of Transport then called a meeting with the airlines,

which eventuated in the decision that DCA would bring down the ANFC and implement the hike in stages to allow airlines time to "plan their budget".

Other fees subject to changes include those levied on use of air space, air traffic facilities and pilot licences.

Transport minister, Liow Tiong Lai, said: "We promise better services that will reduce (airline) costs. This includes upgrading air traffic control equipment, reducing waiting time in the skies and allowing airlines to choose their routes, which will result in fuel savings."

Malaysia Airlines COO, Peter Bellew, said the adjusted increase is fair since fees will be reinvested.

He added: "Earlier, our main concern

was if airline fees and charges increased substantially and kept going up, we (would) not be able to sustain the business."

Justifying the need for a hike, Liow explained that DCA is seeking to gain status as a national aviation authority and would be audited in May.

He elaborated: "To set up a civil aviation authority, (DCA) has to show ICAO that (it is) self-sustainable and (would be) able to handle the transformation process."

At present, DCA appears to lag behind these criteria, outstripping its annual income of RM50 million (US\$12.4 million) with a spending of RM250 million. It relies on funds from the transport ministry to meet operational costs.



Kuala Lumpur International Airport 2 in Sepang



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Destination Malaysia

NEWS IN A MINUTE



1 Malaysia Airlines

Malaysia Airlines will complete its business class cabin refurbishments in 15 Airbus A330 aircraft by September 2016. This aircraft model is used on flights between Kuala Lumpur and Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, China and India.

The 44-inch seat pitch, which measures 20 inches in width and 76 inches in length, comes with increased working space – as 90 per cent of all seats have direct aisle access due to the 1-2-1 and 1-2-2 seat layout – and extra stowage space.



2 Legoland Malaysia Resort

The theme park introduced a new attraction in February, The Lego Movie 4D: A New Adventure. The show plays several times a day at the Lego Studio, with effects such as wind, water and fog to bring the action to life for the audience.

Fans can look forward to finding out what happened after blockbuster *The Lego Movie*, when Emmet,

Wyldstyle, Unikitty, MetalBeard and Benny reunite at the invitation of a shady new character, Risky Business, who plans to open a theme park bearing a suspicious resemblance to Legoland.

3 Sunway Pyramid Hotel West

The hotel opened on February 15, featuring 401 superior and superior executive rooms, with some providing unobstructed views of Sunway Lagoon theme park in Sunway Resort City.

Other facilities include a restaur-

rant, five meeting rooms with capacity varying between 20 to 150 pax, a gym and a swimming pool.

Meanwhile, Sunway Pyramid Hotel East will be closed until 1Q2017 for a RM125 million (US\$31 million) refurbishment that will increase its inventory from 549 to 564 rooms.

4 VietJet Air

The Vietnamese LCC has started daily services between Kuala Lumpur and Ho Chi Minh City from June 1, using Airbus A320 aircraft with a seating capacity of 180. Halal food is also available onboard this route. VietJet Air has engaged Reliance Travel as its GSA in Malaysia.

5 Oakwood Hotel & Residence Kuala Lumpur

Serviced residence operator Oakwood Asia Pacific is set to enter the Malaysian market in September 2016 when the 252-unit Oakwood Hotel & Residence Kuala Lumpur opens in the capital's Ampang district.

Facilities include a swimming pool, children's wading pool, gym, restaurant, various meeting rooms and a grand ballroom. High-speed internet connection and 24-hour concierge and front desk services will also be available.

The new Oakwood property will take over the space formerly occupied by The Nomad Sucasa Kuala Lumpur.

MY WAY



John Chan

Business development director,
Kris International Traveltours

If I had my way to improve Malaysia's tourism landscape, I would highlight Malaysia's multi-ethnicity... by engaging various ethnic groups to promote the beauty of their religious, cultural and multilingual diversity.

Malaysia has long been known as a ethnic melting pot, but it still lacks a solid 'pull' from an attraction that

showcases the daily lives of different communities, such as the performance of prayers, consumption of daily meals, religious and cultural festivals, and events depicting the journey from 'cradle to grave'.

It will be good that such a single-purpose facility be set up by the Ministry of Tourism & Culture with the involvement of stakeholders. Satellite facilities on a smaller scale can also be set up in each Malaysian state.

If I had my way to position Malaysia as a sports tourism hub, I would...

work with the Ministry of Youth and Sports to set up a sports museum to showcase Malaysia's famous sports, such as badminton, *sepak takraw*, football, gymnastics, kayaking, shooting, tenpin bowling, platform diving, cycling and bodybuilding, among others. The achievements of Malaysia's past and reigning champions can be displayed alongside their trophies, medals and prizes (on loan, of course!).

Additionally, inbound tour operators could be encouraged to develop more packages and undertake aggressive promotions of international sporting events held in the country such as



the Malaysia Grand Prix and Le Tour De Langkawi with cross subsidies from the Ministry of Tourism & Culture.

The current problem agents face is the lack of information from organisers or information (coming in) too late for us to promote to our partners overseas. Hence, we lose out on a potential revenue stream.

If I had my way to address Kuala Lumpur's temporary suspension of new hotel licenses due to oversupply, I would... call for a dialogue among all tourism stakeholders in the city including the authorities to brainstorm ideas on what new (world-class) events can

be introduced in the capital city to attract tourists.

Inbound tour operators will have the opportunity to create innovative packages to increase visitors' length of stay, while the hospitality sector can benefit from a more stable room rate regime by overcoming price undercutting, leading to higher revenues and increased margins for agents and tour operators.

Another benefit will be the ability to command higher room rates to close the gap with neighbouring countries, where the price of a night's stay is almost equivalent to two nights in Malaysia (on a dollar-to-dollar basis).

TRIED AND TESTED

The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur

The newly revamped Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur, ticks all the right boxes for **S Puvaneswary**, matching its plush, ultra-luxe look with equally impeccable service

LOCATION The centrally located hotel is nestled a short walk from Bukit Bintang Road, famous for its shopping and nightlife. A link bridge on level one connects the hotel to the adjoining luxury shopping mall, Starhill Gallery, providing easy access even on a rainy day. Another luxury shopping mall, The Pavilion Kuala Lumpur, lies just across the road.

ROOM I stayed in the 68m² One Bedroom Suite, which featured a large living room with built-in toilet, a dining table set and a lounge area for watching TV. The flat-panel TV, with its humongous 60-inch HD screen, provided an immersive experience akin to watching movies

at a cinema.

The dining and TV area is separated from the bedroom by a wall and door, which keeps light and sound out when someone's trying to sleep while others are using the living room space.

What I loved most was the butler service provided for all guests, regardless of the room category.

My butler, Malcolm Sing, was very professional and courteous. He helped me with ironing, set up my mobile to access the complimentary Wi-Fi and showed me around the hotel so I could get my bearings. He also arranged a two-hour itinerary that involved shopping and dining in the city.



FACILITIES The Spa Village comes highly recommended. I thoroughly enjoyed the one-hour foot steaming therapy, which was leagues above run-of-the-mill sessions in shopping malls.

The Ritz-Carlton version involved rubbing oils from the soles of my feet up to my knees before soaking them in a huge, wooden tub and giving them a 15-minute steam treatment. Meanwhile, the therapist gave me a head, shoulder and back massage. This was followed by a foot massage ending with the therapist pounding my feet in a continuous motion with a hammer-like tool. The entire one-hour session felt really good.

The Jacuzzi was another memorable experience as the water was warm and the jets powerful, just the way I love it.

Of the five F&B outlets, my favourites are Cantonese restaurant Li Yen, which serves delicious pork dishes, and The Lobby Lounge for its afternoon tea.

In fact, The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala

Lumpur is well-known for its daily afternoon tea which comes with three-tiered pastry stands decked with sandwiches, cakes and pastries, and served with freshly brewed tea. My favourite choice of tea is the aromatic Irish Whisky.

SERVICE This is an area The Ritz-Carlton excels in and which made my stay a delightful one. The staff are warm, friendly and always concerned whether I was having a pleasant time. Plus, the butler service was a true indulgence.

VERDICT A long-standing brand that pays equal attention to its aesthetics and hospitality levels, making any stay here a truly memorable one.

No. of rooms 364

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Destination Thailand

Asian arrivals are filling up rooms in Bangkok, but while occupancy is strong, room rate growth isn't because of the changing market mix, writes **Raini Hamdi**

Rate quandary

Destination in numbers

31%

The percentage increase of Chinese tourist arrivals in 1Q2016 over the same period last year

32 million

The number of arrivals Thailand could get by end-2016, following a 15.5 per cent increase in arrivals to more than nine million in 1Q2016 over 1Q2015

73.4%

The average hotel occupancy rate across Thailand in 2015, an increase of 13.6 per cent over 2014 as a result of nearly 30 million arrivals last year

Executive lounge of Amari Watergate Bangkok: the city pulsates with more Asian arrivals

Thailand has risen from a quagmire in 2014 to “beyond recovery” as the “new leader” in South-east Asia, according to Jesper Palmqvist, area director Asia-Pacific, STR Global. From a slump of 6.4 per cent in 2014, thanks to the military coup in May that year, arrivals rose to nearly 30 million last year, a 20 per cent rise.

But recovery has many facets. Underpinning the growth are low-yield series group tours from markets such as China and South Korea. The high-yield MICE business, especially large congresses, has never fully recovered from the political problems and coup in 2014; this market works on long lead times and there are issues – for instance, many US corporates and associations shy away from holding a large event in country with a non-elected, military government, said a source.

“Tourism to Thailand is growing but it is ever more dependent on Asia,” said David Cumming, Onyx Hospitality Group’s vice president & area general manager Bangkok and chairman of the British Chamber of Commerce Tourism Committee.

“Things need to be done to make the city a real MICE hub once again as, even though the medium MICE market is good, the large world congress events are not coming here.”

First quarter arrivals data show continued swarms of Chinese tourists – a staggering 31 per cent increase to 2.6 million over 1Q2015. Total arrivals rose 15.5 per cent to more than nine million.

Highlighting the challenge this poses, Bill Barnett, managing director, C9 Hotelworks, said: “Forward booking win-

dows in this (China) market are increasingly getting shorter and hotels often throw down rates instead of focusing on demand and yield management. This inevitably results in a domino effect across the market and rate growth is muted.”

Peter Caprez, cluster general manager at JW Marriott Hotel Bangkok, said managing the business mix with the right price at the right time has become important.

“Rate yielding is necessary to drive higher average rate especially on peak dates,” he said.

But that’s easier said than done. Richard Chapman, general manager of Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit, said: “Rates are being heavily affected not only by supply and demand, but by the change in booking behaviour. The booking lead time has gotten shorter and shorter. Many online channels have launched special offers for same-day bookings. While the initiative was designed to support the sale of unsold rooms at the last minute, it has become more of a trend to wait for last-minute deals. With Bangkok having a substantial increase in the number of inbound flights and with over 1,000 hotels to choose from, guests feel comfortable in always finding a room. This further reduces the booking window and causes discounted pricing.”

With the changing market mix, luxury hotels have had to be flexible with rates to maximise revenues as a result of a drop in demand by the original five-star guests but a significant increase in demand for lower category of hotels, he said.

Hotels with large room inventories are

also feeling the challenge. One such property is Avani Atrium Bangkok, which has 568 keys.

“We are dependent on series and other contracted business which enjoy many choices and discounts due to their desirable large volumes. We find ourselves in a price war often to secure our share of this necessary segment,” said general manager Clinton Lovell.

The newly renovated hotel also has to focus on repositioning to meet new ARR targets. So far, by driving retail sales channels, it has been able to meet its targets, said Lovell.

When asked how he drives performance of Amari Watergate, Bangkok, which has 569 rooms, Cumming agreed on the need to address rate strategies. “The key is to drive online business to both OTAs and brand site as the yields are far better (than group tour series). Over a year ago, we had 100 rooms of aircrew which we removed and refilled all of them online, at a better rate.”

Lim Boon Kwee, COO of Dusit International, when asked about Dusit Thani Bangkok’s strategy, said: “While OTAs remain our best chance to reach out to new customers, direct bookings are still our primary focus. On the bright side, the emergence of social media and digital marketing has allowed us to be on the same platform as the major players. The challenge is getting the right talents recruited to drive this. With successful digital marketing, it will definitely drive more revenue to the property.”

– Next page: *The quest for high-yield clientele*

Viewpoints

What markets are you watching out for in the coming months?



David Cumming,
vice president
and area general manager
Bangkok, Onyx
Hospitality Group

The Singapore market is not so buoyant due to slower economic growth. Visitor numbers are sharply down from the UAE although Qatar has remained stable. Some Middle East governments are reducing the subsidies they give for medical treatment. I know UAE visitors to Bangkok Hospital is down about 12 per cent, for instance. Then later this year, business will slow when there is the US election.



Bill Barnett,
managing director, C9
Hotelworks

One market we’re watching is Australia, which registered a four per cent decline in arrivals in the first quarter year-on-year. Currency depreciation which results in lower bang for the buck for Aussies seems the key driver here.

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Destination Thailand

Issue of the day



Newly renovated Le Normandie, at Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok

The quest for high-yield clientele

While TAT says it wants to focus on quality, a planned, coordinated approach is needed. By **Raini Hamdi**

With slower growth from Europe due to economic reasons and recent terrorism incidents, and a surge in arrivals from Asia driven in part by an increased number of budget carriers, Bangkok lands itself in a situation where too many upscale and luxury hotels are chasing too few high-yield clients.

The quest for better-paying guests has become critical, even as more than 2,200 luxury hotel rooms are opening along Sukhumvit Road over the next 18-24 months, and more new hotels will sprout along the Chao Phraya River and in the Ratchadamri area, observed Richard Chapman, general manager of Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) said it is “fundamentally changing” its marketing plan to focus on quality experience than arrival numbers growth. At a recent GTA meet, deputy governor Juthaporn Rerngronasa said as part of the plan there would be increased focus on digital media and content marketing and a move to target high-yield niches including luxury travel, cruise market, health/wellness, honeymoons, golf and commu-

nity tourism.

The meeting also sealed a strategic partnership programme among TAT, GTA and 64 premium hotels in Thailand to drive higher-spending tourists.

But industry players want to see more done. In a string of interviews, a common wish is getting back the MICE business.

Saying that having more international MICE events would help to increase arrivals and yield in Bangkok, Lim Boon Kwee, CEO of Dusit International, also believes that Thailand would do well to encourage investments.

“While promotional activities seem predominantly on the leisure sector, encouraging investments into the country will help increase the number of business travellers which will provide a higher yield,” Lim reasoned.

“Thailand is still an extremely competitive and cost-effective location for business investments compared to many other countries.”

Industry members also believe that with sophisticated travellers and competition from other destinations, Thailand needs to create or pull in world-class events year-round and deliver unique ex-

periences.

Chapman summed up these sentiments: “Apart from staying in luxury hotels and dining in quality restaurants, the luxury traveller is looking for high-end activities. Palatial shopping malls with global known brands we have. But what we lack is quality entertainment year-round in the form of an opera house, international theatre productions, etc, as found in Hong Kong or Singapore.

“TAT, supported by sponsorship from private companies, should establish some top-end sporting events. Local tour operators must improve the quality of their tours both in terms of properly trained guides, but also curating interesting and educational experiences, rather than that dreadful one day tour to Damnoen Saduak floating market.”

David Cumming, Onyx Hospitality Group’s vice president area general manager Bangkok, said while TAT claimed a shift to high-yield visitors, a clear strategy was needed.

“A working party with TAT, wholesalers, airlines and hotels to put a concrete plan in place with a strong drive from TAT is required,” he said.

GTA’s strategic partnership programme may be a testbed. Daryl Lee, GTA regional vice president of sales and marketing AMEA, said the plan would be led and coordinated by GTA and would involve a series of marketing activities and promotions in key source markets across Asia-Pacific and the Middle East.

There would be education workshops and seminars to update the trade on the latest must see, do and experience in Thailand. Frontline retail travel agents would also be armed with tools and knowledge to better promote Thailand as a luxury destination. As well, GTA is working with TAT to bring more travel trade professionals to Thailand to experience some of the luxury holiday experiences.

“The partner hotels are an integral part of the programme and each will work closely with GTA to offer travellers a luxury experience when they visit Thailand,” Lee said.

When asked how he planned to drive a higher ADR, he said: “ADR is really a basic component of supply and demand. For example, if we can better showcase the higher category rooms (such as suites and villas), more people will choose to stay in them the next time they visit Thailand. We also want to encourage people to stay longer when they visit by developing new and interesting experiences, showcasing the hidden gems of Thailand.”

Lee pointed out that Thailand was so successful for its outstanding value for money that travellers often overlook that the country has a lot more to offer.

“For example, a yacht charter to cruise the Andaman Sea is just as enjoyable but will cost far less compared to hiring a yacht in Europe or the US. And so, it will take some time for tourists to realise the potential of Thailand as a luxury destination.”

GTA aims to realise that by showcasing the latest happenings, the outstanding value and quality Thailand offers.

“Last year, our ADR for Thailand rose 12 per cent year-on-year and we are looking to double that growth in 2016, driven by the strategic partnership programme,” Lee said.

TRIED AND TESTED

Italics

Farm to fork, Bangkok’s Italics focuses on local produce to serve hearty Italian dishes. By **Raini Hamdi**

LOCATION Opened about a year ago, Italics is located in Ruamrudee Grove, a refurbished house on Soi Ruamrudee that is also home to Balvenie Bar, a whisky and cigar lounge offering one of the biggest selections of single malts in South-east Asia.

AMBIENCE Gorgeous pictures of the restaurant and food on its website whet my appetite. They depict Italics as fashionable, modern and classy, while descriptions of the “chef extraordinaire” who “deconstructs and reimagines Italian classics”

and “takes Italian back to the future” fills me with great anticipation.

In reality, Italics is way humbler – but nonetheless enjoyable.

A small and cosy dining room with a deli-catessen, Italics is ideal for a casual night out with friends or family. Indeed, the two other tables that are occupied that evening are friends relaxing and enjoying Italian dishes and Italian wines.

F&B Italics promises the best ingredients from local suppliers. For example, salami and parma ham are from Joe Sloan in Chiang Mai, while eggs come from Golden Lay Eggs in Pranburi, where the chickens are said to range over 400 rai (64ha) of pasture. A friendly and earnest chef who wants to spoil me creates a good impression for the restaurant and explains



that the burrata in the caprese salad is “Thai, made by an Italian company”.

When my food arrives – the caprese salad and half roast chicken – I realise why Italics easily appeals to groups of friends or families. The portions are fairly large and the menu offers a good selection of Insalata, Primi, Signature Pizzas (from an eucalyptus wood oven, mind you), Family Recipes, Secondi and Desserts.

My half roast chicken is white due to a different method of cooking, but it turns out tasty.

Prices are reasonable, 690 baht



Location 63/3 Soi Ruamrudee, Bangkok

Opening hours 12.00 to 22.00

Contact details

Tel: (66) 2 253 2410

Website: www.italicsrestaurant.com

(US\$19.65) for the chicken, which is for two people.

SERVICE Relaxed and friendly.

VERDICT I’m all for supporting local, sustainable produce and I love this aspect of Italics the most.



NEWS IN A MINUTE

By **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

1 RamaYana Water Park

The 16ha RamaYana Water Park, which opened its doors in May in Pattaya, features 50 attractions spanning the likes of water slides, two dedicated kids' zones, a wave pool, lazy river and a floating market.

As an opening special until October 31, visitors can enter for a full day for 990 baht (US\$28) for adults or 790 baht for children. Kids below 90cm enter free.

2 Nida Rooms

New hotel reservation player Nida Rooms, which claims to be the "largest virtual hotel chain" in South-east Asia, entered into Thailand in February by partnering hotels in three-star categories or lower and sell their unsold rooms at deep discounts online.

Rooms that have met the company's standards – i.e. clean room, comfortable bed, complimentary Wi-Fi, hot showers and air conditioning – will be branded and serviced under Nida Rooms. Guests will also receive a personalised amenity kit when they check in.

Currently boasting 1,400 hotels and over 7,500 rooms in Thailand, Nida Rooms hopes to scale up to 3,000 hotels across the country by this year-end.

3 Thai AirAsia

THAI AirAsia (TAA) will commence daily flights between Bangkok and Vientiane on July 1, 2016, making it the first budget airline to connect

Thailand to the capital of Laos.

The new service will leave Bangkok's Don Mueang International Airport at 12.05 daily, arriving at Wattay International Airport in Vientiane at 13.25. The return flight will depart Vientiane at 14.15 and arrive at Bangkok at 15.35.

4 Days Inn Patong Beach Phuket

Rebranded from the former Aloha Villa Phuket, the new 122-room Days Inn Patong Beach is set in the heart of Phuket's entertainment district, a short walk away from the lively Patong Beach.

The economy hotel consists of 36 double rooms, 80 twin rooms and six triple rooms, all furnished with mini bars and satellite TVs. The hotel also includes two restaurants, a rooftop pool and an Internet centre.

5 Dinosaur Planet

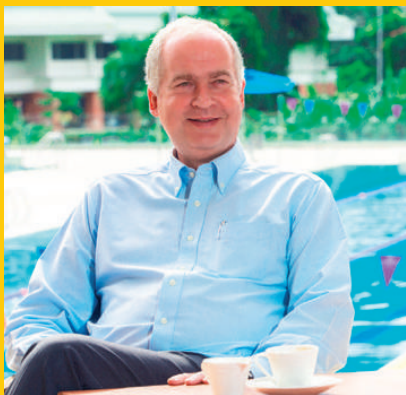
Dedicated to prehistoric beasts that once roamed the earth, Dinosaur Planet is located at the EmSphere, near Phrom Phong BTS Skytrain Station.

Highlights at the 12,000m², 500 million baht edutainment centre include the Dino Eye, a 50m-tall ferris wheel; a 4D virtual reality simulator; a volcano-themed light and sound show; Dino Farm, where young visitors can play out paleontologist roles and excavate T-rex fossils.

Admission charges are 600 baht for adults and 400 baht for children under 140cm. Entrance is free for kids under 140cm.



MY WAY



Philipp Graf von Hardenberg
CEO, Thanyapura Phuket

What are your current challenges?

One is the lack of English language skills among the Thai populace. Thailand is a beautiful, culturally rich and diverse country, and it also depends on international tourism. International tourists, visitors and patients need to be able to be understood by locals.

Thailand is increasingly becoming a mass tourism destination, with bigger airports and an increasing number of

tourists coming to Thailand. However, with the exception of a few nations, visitors want to feel that they are special and genuinely being taken care of.

Immigration procedures also cause challenges for HR and recruitment. It seems to be more and more difficult to receive work permits for foreign experts in the tourism sector and, if you get them, you are faced with many administrative barriers.

If I had my way to change Thailand's tourism landscape... I would improve the education of English teachers in universities, make four English lessons per week from kindergarten to high school mandatory, and encourage native speakers to volunteer time to read and talk to primary school children.

Thailand needs to focus more on niche travel segments like sport or medical tourism, but for these sectors to be more successful, experts like international doctors need to be able to work here.

It should be easier for industry experts to get a work permit and visa, which should be valid for up to four years. This way, they are able to enter the country and stay and not have to go abroad again before the visa expires.

– **By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

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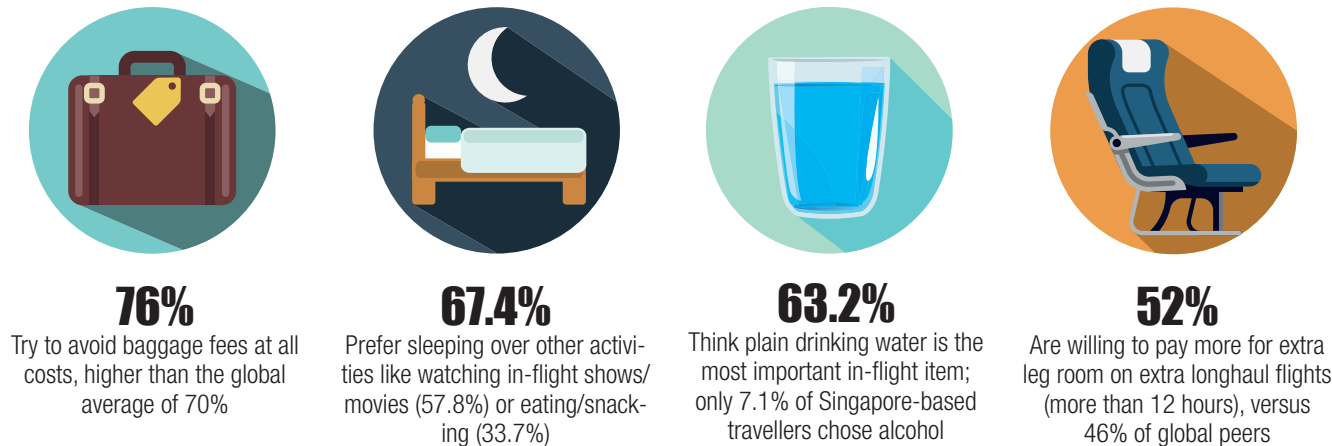
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ICYMI: Tune in to what's been going on at ttgasia.com and the social media space

TOURISM DATA

According to Expedia's Sky Conduct Report, Singapore-based travellers fly significantly more than their counterparts from other South-east Asian countries, and value the basics most when it comes to creature comforts. Here's the breakdown:



WHO'S SAYING WHAT

Instagram



Tourism Australia ambassador Chris Hemsworth makes a surprise appearance at the Australian Tourism Exchange 2016 opening dinner. [#ATE2016](#)



CEOs and stewardesses from eight Asia-Pacific budget carriers pose during the announcement of the Value Alliance, the world's largest LCC alliance. [#ValueAlliance](#)



Travelport LIVE APAC Customer Conference 2016 kicked off in Studio City Macau with more than 300 industry members taking part, its largest attendance yet. [#Travelport](#)

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



BYE BYE JET LAG

Start-up Intel-clinic has invented a device that promises to help travellers beat the lethargy of jet lag often experienced after longhaul flights. Called the Neuroon, the wearable device provides light therapy that, according to a recent study at Stanford University, is able to minimise sleep problems associated with rapid time zone changes by exposing a person to short flashes of light during sleep. We're not sure if wearing the odd-looking mask will be a comfortable decision aboard a plane, but if it does what it says it does, it might well be worth it.



TRAVEL FOR PEACE

World Expeditions has become a founding member of the International Institute of Peace Through Tourism (IIPT) Travel for Peace Campaign, which encourages travel agents, tour operators, hotel companies, airlines, cruise lines and travel publications to advocate travelling for a better world. The IIPT campaign is part of the non-profit's goal to foster travel and tourism initiatives that contribute to better international understanding and cooperation, an improved quality of environment, the preservation of heritage and poverty reduction.

PROPS FOR MALAYSIA AIRLINES

Starting August, Malaysia Airlines in a joint venture with Aircraft

Propeller Service (APS), will be offering overhaul and repair service of turboprop propellers used on ATR aircraft at Kuala Lumpur International Airport, the first of its kind in the Asia-Pacific.

This means that airlines no longer need to contact maintenance services for ATR aircraft only located in Europe and the US before now, thereby saving time and cost. With 370 ATR aircraft currently in operation in the region, the new business will likely flourish and improve the turnaround of the beleaguered Malaysian national carrier.



WHERE IS EGYPTAIR FLIGHT MS804?

Once again, the world was waiting with bated breath regarding the outcome of the missing EgyptAir airplane that vanished from radar tracking systems on May 19. While investigators are now certain that the plane had crashed into the Mediterranean sea en route from Paris to Cairo, its wreckage, black box and 66 passengers are still nowhere to be found, save for a few small dismembered body parts. No one has yet claimed responsibility for the plane's demise and the search continues for clues of its fate.



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Travel Hall of Fame

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

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

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

TTG Asia Media is pleased to announce that it has set up a virtual TTG Travel Hall of Fame (www.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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[TWITTER.COM/TTG_ASIA](https://twitter.com/ttg_asia)

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TTG TRAVEL AWARDS 2016



Cast Your Vote Now!

You Determine
Who Clinches
The Top Honour
In The Industry

TTG Travel Awards, Asia-Pacific travel trade's most celebrated event, is back for its 27th year to honor the industry's crème de la crème. Tell us which company has made exemplary achievements and contributions that have raised the bar of excellence and taken the industry to greater heights.

Vote now and help your favorite travel suppliers and agencies bring home the title of being the best in the travel industry.

www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards

Closing Date: 15 July 2016

An event by:



Organised by:



Supported by:



Award Categories

1. Travel Agency Awards

Winners in this category are decided by votes from industry suppliers.

• Best Travel Agency

• Best Travel Agency

• Best Travel Agency

• Best Travel Agency

• Best Travel Agency

• Best Travel Agency

• Best Travel Agency

• Best Travel Agency

• Best Travel Agency

• Best Travel Agency

• Best Travel Agency

• Best Travel Agency

• Best Travel Agency

• Best Travel Agency

• Best Corporate Travel Agency

• Best Online Travel Agency

– Australia

– China

– Chinese Taipei

– Hong Kong

– India

– Indochina (Cambodia, Laos)

– Indonesia

– Japan

– Malaysia

– Singapore

– South Korea

– Thailand

– The Philippines

– Vietnam
2. Travel Supplier Awards

Winners in this category are decided by votes from travel consultants and experts.

Airline Awards

• Best North American Airline

• Best European Airline

• Best Middle Eastern Airline

• Best South-east Asian Airline

• Best North Asian Airline

• Best China Airline

• Best Pacific Airline

• Best Regional Airline

• Best Asian Low-Cost Carrier

Hotels, Resorts, Serviced Residences & Spa Awards

HOTEL Chains

• Best Global Hotel Chain

• Best Regional Hotel Chain

• Best Local Hotel Chain

• Best Hotel Representation Company

• Best Luxury Hotel Brand

• Best Mid-range Hotel Brand

• Best Budget Hotel Brand

HOTELS – Individual Property

• Best Luxury Hotel

• Best Mid-range Hotel

• Best Budget Hotel

• Best Independent Hotel

• Best Boutique Hotel

• Best City Hotel – Bangkok

• Best City Hotel – Delhi

• Best City Hotel – Hanoi/Ho Chi Minh City

• Best City Hotel – Jakarta

• Best City Hotel – Hong Kong

• Best City Hotel – Kuala Lumpur

• Best City Hotel – Macau

• Best City Hotel – Manila

• Best City Hotel – Seoul

• Best City Hotel – Singapore

• Best City Hotel – Taipei

• Best City Hotel – Tokyo

• Best New City Hotel

• Best Airport Hotel

RESORTS – Individual Property

• Best Beach Resort

• Best Resort Hotel (Non-Beach)

• Best New Beach Resort

• Best Integrated Resort

SERVICED RESIDENCES

• Best Serviced Residence Operator

SPAS

• Best Spa Operator

BT-MICE Awards

• Best Airline – Business Class

• Best Business Hotel

• Best Meetings & Conventions Hotel

• Best BT-MICE City

• Best Convention & Exhibition Centre

• Best Convention & Exhibition Bureau

Travel Services Awards

• Best Airport

• Best GDS

• Best Cruise Operator

• Best NTO

• Best Theme Attraction
3. Outstanding Achievement Awards

The winners in this category are decided by the TTG Asia editorial team.

• Travel Personality of the Year

• Destination of the Year

• Best Travel Entrepreneur

• Best Marketing & Relationship Effort

• Best Trade Supporter
4. Travel Hall of Fame

Honoring organisations that have won at least 10 consecutive years at the awards.

These special award winners will be recognised at every TTG annual awards presentation ceremony. Votes for them will not be counted.

Inducted Travel Hall of Fame honoraries are:

• Singapore Changi Airport (2002)

• Singapore Airlines (2002)

• Hertz Asia-Pacific (2005)

• Royal Cliff Hotels Group (2006)

• Star Cruises (2008)

• Abacus International (2009)

• Silkair (2010)

• Lotte Tour (2011)

• Hong Kong International Airport (2013)

• Raffles Hotel Singapore (2013)

• Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts (2015)

• Regal Airport Hotel (2015)

• Qatar Airways (2016)

• Thai Airways (2016)

• Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (2016)

VOTING INSTRUCTIONS AND GUIDELINES

For Travel Agency and Travel Supplier Awards

1. Please use the correct voting form.

Voting Form A: Travel Agency Awards

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

Voting Form B: Travel Supplier Awards

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

Online Voting Forms

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

2. Voting Criteria

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

3. Voting Rules

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

- iv. No responsibility will be accepted by the organisers for voting forms lost, delayed or damaged in the post.
- v. There are no pre-nominated contenders for any voting awards.
- vi. The results for TTG Travel Awards 2016 are final and no correspondence will be entertained.
- vii. Voting forms will be tabulated and evaluated by an independent auditor in Singapore.
- viii. Voting Closes 15 July 2016.

4. Voting Form Submission

Completed voting forms are to be returned to:

SINGAPORE

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(TTG Travel Awards 2016)

TTG Asia Media

1 Science Park Road #04-07 The Capricorn

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Singapore 117528

Tel: (65) 6395-7575 Fax: (65) 6536-0896

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(TTG Travel Awards 2016)

TTG Asia Media

8/F, E168, 166-168 Des Voeux Road Central,

Sheung Wan, Hong Kong

Tel: (852) 2237-7272 Fax: (852) 2237 7227

VOTING FORM A: TRAVEL AGENCY AWARDS

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

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

Criteria

Best Travel Agency in its respective category in terms of:

• Professionalism and excellence in staff.

• Best value-added services to client.

• Best use of computer technology applications to help improve efficiency and effectiveness in services provided to client.

1. Best Travel Agency – Australia

2. Best Travel Agency – China

3. Best Travel Agency – Chinese Taipei

4. Best Travel Agency – Hong Kong

5. Best Travel Agency – India

6. Best Travel Agency – Indochina (Cambodia, Laos)

7. Best Travel Agency – Indonesia

8. Best Travel Agency – Japan

9. Best Travel Agency – Malaysia

10. Best Travel Agency – Singapore

11. Best Travel Agency – South Korea

12. Best Travel Agency – Thailand

13. Best Travel Agency – The Philippines

14. Best Travel Agency – Vietnam

15. Best Corporate Travel Agency

Best travel agency specialising in serving the needs of corporate travellers.

16. Best Online Travel Agency

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

VOTER INFORMATION

Name:

Passport no.:

Job title:

Company:

Address:

Country:

Telephone no.:

Fax no.:

Email:

Signature:

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

VOTING CLOSES
15 JULY 2016

VOTING FORM B: TRAVEL SUPPLIER AWARDS

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

Airline Awards

Criteria

Best airline in its respective category in terms of:

- Providing the best service, network and schedules.
- Most agent-friendly in terms of reservations, confirmations and commission payments.
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas, incentive programmes and servicing.

17. Best North American Airline

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

18. Best European Airline

Best airline based in Europe operating Asia-Pacific routes.

19. Best Middle Eastern Airline

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

20. Best South-east Asian Airline

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

21. Best North Asian Airline

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

22. Best China Airline

Best airline based in China operating Asia-Pacific routes.

23. Best Pacific Airline

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

24. Best Regional Airline

Best airline based regionally operating Asia-Pacific routes.

25. Best Asian Low-cost Carrier

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

Hotels, Resorts, Serviced Residences & Spa Awards

Criteria

Best Hotel Chain in its respective category in terms of:

- Most consistent in products and services.
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas, incentive programmes and servicing.

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

- Best services and facilities.
- Best range of value-added benefits.
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

HOTEL CHAINS

26. Best Global Hotel Chain

Best hotel chain operating a network of properties globally.

27. Best Regional Hotel Chain

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

28. Best Local Hotel Chain

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

29. Best Hotel Representation Company

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

30. Best Luxury Hotel Brand

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

31. Best Mid-range Hotel Brand

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

32. Best Budget Hotel Brand

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

HOTELS – Individual Property

33. Best Luxury Hotel

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

34. Best Mid-range Hotel

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

35. Best Budget Hotel

Best hotel catering to the budget traveller.

36. Best Independent Hotel

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

37. Best Boutique Hotel

Best small, fashionable and unique hotel.

38. Best City Hotel – Bangkok

39. Best City Hotel – Delhi

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

41. Best City Hotel – Jakarta

42. Best City Hotel – Hong Kong

43. Best City Hotel – Kuala Lumpur

44. Best City Hotel – Macau

45. Best City Hotel – Manila

46. Best City Hotel – Seoul

47. Best City Hotel – Singapore

48. Best City Hotel – Taipei

49. Best City Hotel – Tokyo

50. Best New City Hotel

Best city hotel that opened in 2015/2016

51. Best Airport Hotel

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

RESORTS – Individual Property

52. Best Beach Resort

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

53. Best Resort Hotel (Non-Beach)

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

54. Best New Beach Resort

Best beach resort that opened in 2015/2016

55. Best Integrated Resort

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

SERVICED RESIDENCES

56. Best Serviced Residence Operator

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

SPAS

57. Best Spa Operator

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

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

BT-MICE Awards

Criteria

- Best services and facilities catering specifically to the BT-MICE market.
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing the BT-MICE market.
- Most desirable and attractive incentives and value added services to business travellers and MICE planners.

58. Best Airline – Business Class

Best business class airline across the board.
Refer to Airline Criteria.

59. Best Business Hotel

Best hotel catering to the business traveller.
Refer to Hotel Criteria.

60. Best Meetings & Conventions Hotel

Best hotel catering to meeting and convention needs.
Refer to Hotel Criteria.

61. Best BT-MICE City

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

62. Best Convention & Exhibition Centre

- Best facilities.
- Best value for money.
- Most flexible in catering to MICE planners.
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

63. Best Convention & Exhibition Bureau

- Most efficient, flexible and friendly in terms of response to enquiries and information.
- Most effective in raising awareness of MICE at government and community levels.
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

64. Best Airport

- Best facilities.
- Most user-friendly, efficient and hassle-free immigration.
- Most organised baggage claim.
- Best planned floor layout, with easy ground access.

65. Best GDS (Global Distribution System)

- Most comprehensive network offering ease of operation and user friendliness.
- Most efficient and reliable system.

66. Best Cruise Operator

- Best product in terms of service, routes and schedules.
- Best onboard programme and facilities.
- Most agent-friendly in terms of reservations, confirmations and commission payments.
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas, incentive programmes and servicing.

67. Best NTO (National Tourism Organisation)

- Most efficient, flexible and friendly in terms of response to enquiries and information.
- Most effective in raising awareness of tourism at government and community levels.
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

68. Best Theme Attraction

- Best ambience.
- Best facilities and services.
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

VOTER INFORMATION

Name:

Passport no.:

Job title:

Company:

Address:

Country:

Telephone no.:

Fax no.:

Email:

Signature:

VOTING CLOSES
15 JULY 2016



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- * Asia Pacific Hotel Awards 2013 & 2014, *Best Hotel - Singapore*
- * Asia Pacific Hotel Awards 2013 & 2014, *Best Hotel - Asia Pacific*
- * TTG Travel Awards 2010, 2013, 2014 & 2015, *Best City Hotel - Singapore*

MARINA MANDARIN SINGAPORE

- * World Luxury Hotel Awards 2013, 2014 & 2015, *Country Winner (Singapore) - Luxury Business Hotel*
- * TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence 2013, 2014 & 2015, *Hall of Fame*
- * NOW Travel Asia Awards 2014, *Asia's Top Family Hotel*

MERITUS PELANGI BEACH RESORT & SPA, LANGKAWI

- * TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Hotel Awards 2013
- * TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence 2013 & 2014

