



View from the top

Sébastien Bazin, chairman & CEO of AccorHotels, tells **Raini Hamdi** how critical it is for the industry to get its act together and participate in the new economy



Many paths to travel career success

South-east Asia's new hotel brands

Boracay under threat of tourism



Will arrivals hold up in kingdom of tears?

The passing away of a beloved king has thrown Thailand into a sombre mood, but the tourism sector is likely to weather the mourning period if communication strategies are clear and there is stability. By Raini Hamdi

Contents & editorial

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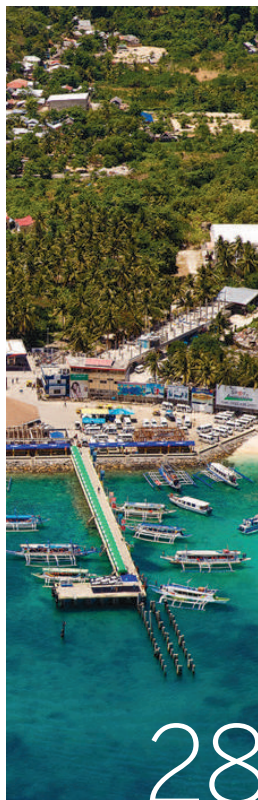
Report: Hotels



Report: Silver tourism



Destination: Thailand



Destination: Philippines



Destination: China

Following in his footsteps



The best way for the people to honour the king's exemplary life is to follow in his footsteps... A life goal of mine is to visit all the provinces in Thailand, tracing the king's travels in each province.

October 13 was a sad day for Thailand when King Bhumibol Adulyadej passed away at the age of 88. The beloved monarch reigned for 70 years with an almost legendary rectitude and devotion to his country. As a foreigner living in Thailand, I too felt the loss, and with my Thai family, mourn for the king's death with the rest of the country.

A highly talented man, King Bhumibol was an avid jazz player, accomplished sportsman, keen photographer and innovative scientist. Also known as the World's Development Monarch, he had undertaken many visits to rural areas throughout Thailand and initiated more than 3,000 projects in his lifelong support for opium elimination, poverty reduction and livelihood development.

Sumate Sudasna, managing director of CDM and president of Thailand Incentive and Convention Association (see page 4), in his projection of the days ahead for Thailand tourism, thinks that King Bhumibol's positive legacy and the many projects initiated and supported by the royal family will open up "a goldmine of attractions" for corporate travellers in their outreach programmes.

Not only that, I believe these royal projects can be sources of rewarding and educational experiences for general visitors to Thailand. While Thais are familiar with royal-associated attractions like Doi Tung and Doi Angkhang in the north or Doi Kham food products, to name just a few, not many foreign visitors are aware of these initiatives. Earlier efforts by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) to promote these projects were also more focused on the domestic market.

At the recent ITB Asia in Singapore, TAT revealed its latest plans to market the royal projects to the foreign audience. The greater publicity and promotion of the royal projects at the international level will definitely compel more foreign travellers to visit these sites, who through their visits will hopefully gain deeper insights into King Bhumibol's dedication to the people and better understand the roots of Thais' deep reverence for the late king.

Also worth mentioning is the Royal Park Ratchaphruek, a personal favourite of mine. First launched as a world-class horticultural expo from November 2006 to January 2007 to commemorate the king's 60th anniversary of his accession to the throne, the breathtaking array of flora and landscaping at this 80ha attraction in Chiang Mai captivated me so much during my visit a decade ago that I was inspired to find out more about the king's life. Today, this botanical gem is still as picturesque and alluring as ever.

That said, it will take time for Thailand to grief and recover from the loss of the nation's guiding light, but I believe the best way for the people to honour the king's exemplary life is to follow in his footsteps. And as I now call Thailand home, a life goal of mine is to visit all the provinces in the country, tracing the king's travels in each single province, all 77 of them.

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COMING UP



WORRY-FREE TRAVEL In a year fraught with concerns ranging from terrorism to Zika outbreaks, don't we just wish for worry-free travel? We've made this our theme of the year-end issue

BUSINESS DISRUPTION Travel agents share their biggest crisis that affected their operations and how they overcame it

PASSENGER SAFETY Airlines and cruises disclose the greatest threats and silliest things that passengers do onboard

TRAVEL FEARS & DREAMS Industry professionals spill the beans on their biggest fears and worries on the road, and share their wishes for a safer and stress-free travel



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Analysis

There are concerns of a tourism slowdown in Thailand following the king's death, prompting industry members to urge clear communication with travellers and clients. By **Raini Hamdi**

All eyes on Thailand tourism after Oct 13



Views from overseas

Corporate companies have cancelled meetings and events in Thailand but leisure bookings are mostly going ahead, according to industry players interviewed on the impact on tourism of the passing of Thailand's revered King Bhumibol Adulyadej on October 13.

While MICE cancellations were deemed by some as "inevitable", industry members are now watchful over "possible lost business", i.e. new bookings that may be postponed or diverted if clients misread a Thailand-in-mourning as 'Thailand is closed' or 'less amazing', or if they have some concerns about stability in the country, said industry members.

As it is, corporate companies debate whether or not to hold meetings not because of the 30-day mourning period but because of "the overall mood".

"They feel that it might not be conducive having a meeting in Thailand at this time as the overall mood isn't the same as always and the famous Thai smile might be in short supply, which in turn affects delegates and meeting outcome," said Peter Caprez, cluster general manager of three Marriott hotels in Bangkok and Samui.

For leisure, however, an outpouring of sympathy for Thais since the king's passing, especially on social media, and immediate factual updates by both public and private sectors on the ground situation, have helped a lot to assure tourists.

Industry members interviewed all said this effective communication must con-

Kumara Guru, executive director, Aaya Journeys India

We will probably stop selling Thailand for the time being, especially Bangkok, because things in general look a bit unsettled. I believe especially for those who are planning holidays in Thailand, they might change their minds and head to alternative destinations like Malaysia.

Desmond Lee, group managing director, Apple Vacations Group Malaysia

A 100-pax incentive group from the manufacturing sector had diverted from Bangkok to Ho Chi Minh City in mid-November due to uncertainty over Thailand's immediate situation. The client was unsure if Bangkok would remain peaceful and whether places of interest would be open during the mourning period.

tinue for, despite efforts, there were still incidences that showed they could never be enough.

David Kevan, director of Chic Locations UK, highlighted how the media in the UK had focused on the one-year mourning period – essentially for the royal family, government offices and, at their discretion, the Thai public – and less on the current one-month period observed by everyone, in which Thailand has a respectful, more sombre tone.

"It is important we all get the message

Anahita Avari, CEO, WWW Travel India

The sombre mood throughout Thailand for the next few weeks will not affect much of our bookings because I believe tourism will still carry on, especially for family travellers. The closure of night clubs will not affect family travellers anyway. Furthermore, it is not as if Thailand has closed all its attractions, so people will still have reasons to visit the country.

Antoine Noens, managing director, Easy Tours Belgium

We have a lot of group series leaving for Thailand each week and we did not receive any queries regarding the country's situation. The news coverage in Belgium on the Thai king's passing are not sensationalised, unlike some of the tabloid news in the UK which might have added to travellers' concerns.

across that Thailand is not closed for a year," Kevan said.

Bill Barnett, managing director of C9 Hotelworks in Phuket, said: "There's still (a misperception) among some people that beach-going is not being allowed."

Sumate Sudasna, managing director of CDM, added: "There have been cancellations of corporate meetings due to concerns it might not be appropriate to hold events in this 30-day mourning period. We need to clarify to clients about the government's (stand on) celebra-

tory events – only state-organised events are encouraged to postpone. My company's two events in November are proceeding, with just the observation of the mourning atmosphere; no concerns otherwise."

Laurent Kuenzle, CEO of Asian Trails Group, puts it in perspective for clients as to what the 30-day mourning period entails: "Life goes on as usual, albeit most people are in black. Some entertainment areas are closed. Music is tuned down or changed, and no one really minds. You want to see the famous Alcazar Cabaret in Pattaya? All shows are on except the late evening one. Cruises on the Chao Phraya River? All operating, but the music is tuned down. All attractions with the exception of the Grand Palace are open. It's still people in bikinis (at the beach). All restaurants and shops are opened... Cinemas operate as usual, shopping malls see the usual crowds and I could name another hundred venues where nothing has changed."

DMCs said they would continue to press on with effective communications. Richard Brouwer, CEO of Khiri Travel, said B2B DMCs are not seeing any impact to-date as they are communicating well with their overseas agents. "The impact is difficult to measure as there's possible lost business, comprising clients who aim to book their travel within the next four to six weeks and may postpone or book a different destination. But we're hopeful that this will not occur with clear and ongoing communication."

Barnett pointed out too that Thailand is on a shoulder month in October and the industry should now gear up for the critical Christmas/New Year season by ensuring a good flow of information and "speaking from a single voice".

Mingkwan Metmowlee, managing director of Image D' Asie SA, is not too worried about impacts on longhaul demand for this year-end as bookings for beach destinations are very positive. However, bookings for 1Q2017 has slowed down. "I hope bookings from longhaul markets will come at the last minute. We are communicating that the mourning period will finish in mid November," she said.

As for the longer term impact, it's too early to tell. Thomas Stirnimann, CEO of Hotelplan Group Switzerland, opined: "All depends on how peaceful the hand-over (of the throne) will be."

Thai industry members are optimistic all would be well. Said Sumate: "I would like to think that Thailand has an even more positive image, having been under an extraordinary rule for 70 years. This opens up a goldmine of attractions from projects initiated and supported by the royal family, which will be most suitable for corporate outreach programmes and activities." – **additional reporting by Chadamas Chinmaneevong**

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Analysis

Game-changing developments are opening up the tourism workforce to a greater mix of talents, but these have far from shrouded the better-trodden paths to the top. By **Yixin Ng**

Unlocking future potential



As the tourism workforce evolves with a changing milieu and new needs of the industry, some careers have deviated from tradition while others become more entrenched in known pathways.

“Technology has made the world our playground. But to grow, travel companies need talents. Technology does not replace people, in fact, it requires more people,” said Yeoh Siew Hoon, founder of Tern, a travel career event launched this year.

More potential entry-points

More diverse skill sets are becoming valued by travel businesses, creating many potential industry entry points for mid-career jobseekers without prior background in tourism. Soon-Hwa Wong, chairman of PATA’s Singapore Chapter, said there are new opportunities in big data analytics, tech platforms and the mobility space.

Digital marketing know-how is another attribute that is gaining currency as travel businesses respond to the changing ways in which travel consumers access information and make buying decisions.

Dave Chinwan, product manager APAC, accommodation & destinations at TUI Travel, said: “Online travel businesses such as Expedia rely a lot on advertising low rates to reach as many people as possible while traditional businesses like established hotels pay more attention to customer service to retain customers.”

By extension, Chinwan posited, traditional players are more likely to seek years of experience than non-traditional ones, as the latter tend more to value “what you can do rather than what you have done”.

But established hotel players too have been investing in digital marketing talents who may hold more promise than experience or qualifications. For instance, Jackson Sim, associate director of digital marketing – complex at The St Regis Sin-

gapore and W Singapore – Sentosa Cove, professed he had “no formal training in digital nor marketing”, having started his career working in a kitchen before becoming a food writer.

Sim explained: “For both The St Regis Singapore and W Singapore – Sentosa Cove, digital marketing plays a vital role – with more than a third of our revenue coming from web, through internal and external channels.”

And in corporate travel, demands for price comparison, along with smart reporting tools and intuitive online booking tool user experience, are constantly driving the need for analytics and programming capabilities, a discussion during the recent CTW Asia-Pacific revealed.

Apart from particular sets of expertise, an entrepreneurial spirit is increasingly viewed as a prized attribute in the industry, especially as recent technological disruptors cast the spotlight on innovation.

Said Janet Tan-Collis, president of the Singapore Association of Convention and Exhibition Organisers and Suppliers: “In our early days, we (relied) on the infrastructure in the hotel industry, but we have evolved over time. Now, (the conventions and exhibitions sector) is very much more cerebral – it’s no longer about brawn but also brains.”

“What the MICE industry needs (is) for young people to come in, know what the terrain is, then ask ‘can we make it better?’. But if they don’t understand what’s available, they will be led down a very straight and narrow path that’s a lot more task-driven rather than talent-driven.”

While Tan-Collis looks to expose young minds to real industry situations through the association’s partnership with the Singapore Institute of Technology, industry players elsewhere are channelling their efforts into creating environments that encourage entrepreneurial ideating.

Suraj Nair, co-founder of TravelSpends, which provides auditing services and technology solutions, told *TTG Asia* that the company recently signed an MoU with the MS Ramaiah Institute of Technology in Bengaluru to open a travel technology incubation lab for MTech students.

“We want to create our intellect to be powered by the new generation. Say they bring in 20 ideas, is it okay if only two or four eventually work? That’s okay. We got minds interested, and that’s a big thing.”

Traditional roles here to stay

Although transformative potentials and aspirations for the cutting-edge are rife in the industry’s workforce, good old-fashioned hospitality remains well and alive, along with well-trodden career paths in the hotel business.

Commenting on his role as a mentor in SHATEC’s Industry Mentorship Programme (see sidebar), Sunshine Wong, general manager (GM) of Crowne Plaza Changi Airport, alluded to the notion of there being a “right path” in hotel careers.

“(In some cases), it is about knocking some sense into (young entrants). Many have aspirations, but when (they’re new) and want to be GM in three years, (I would) share with them the right path... We mentors can be the living example to show the progression that one takes.”

Wong contended that though there is some room for graduates to fast-track their careers, hierarchies and advancement pathways remain relatively structured for good reason.

“Besides being technically and operationally sound, GMs today are expected to be well-versed in other functions including finance and revenue management, so cross-exposure is beneficial.”

He elaborated: “Leadership competencies, from working collaboratively to driving results, are paramount to the suc-

Singapore Hotel and Tourism Education Centre (SHATEC) in August celebrated the one-year anniversary of its Industry Mentorship Programme (IMP) with a sharing of key takeaways and future goals.

Through the programme, the first batch of 21 mentees were given the opportunities to observe department meetings, understand how F&B outlets are run, attend networking sessions, etc, according to Tan Wee Wei Ling, director of SHATEC.

The larger hotel industry also stands to gain. Sunshine Wong, general manager of Crowne Plaza Changi Airport, said: “As we take them through the programme, we lay out opportunities in front of them. This will (prevent) manpower leakage, which is currently happening in a lot of our schools.”

Sharing his personal experience, Pek Chin Siong, vice president of hotel operations at Marina Bay Sands (MBS), added: “At one point I was on the verge of (exiting the industry) until I came across my mentor. It’s very important for us to do the same and groom the next generation of Singapore’s hotel workforce.”

But IMP was not without its hiccups. One graduating mentee told *TTG Asia* that his assigned mentor had to relocate for a new job, hence limiting the important face-to-face interactions.

In response, IMP representatives explained that a mechanism is already in place to allow students to appeal for a change of mentor or other programme-related support.

Beyond its early success, SHATEC aims to have more than 500 students benefiting from the programme by 2020.

The ultimate goal is to make hotels the choice employer, said Margaret Heng, SHATEC’s chief executive. The newly-forged relationships could also evolve into hotel internships, she added, which are currently undersubscribed in Singapore.

Pek is positive that IMP could be a springboard to more meaningful industry experience for young entrants. “I would like my mentee to work in MBS after the programme so I can expose him to the various (areas of work).”

“Currently, not many (interns) have the luxury of being exposed to many areas because we are obsessed with operations... Many get stuck in housekeeping, F&B or a single area and stay there forever,” he added.

cess of an individual. These competencies (are) worthless if they are not practised at different levels of the hierarchy.”

Regardless, one thing seems certain – far from taking the place of traditional hospitality, the emergence of online travel brokers has reinforced the need for trained service staff in the travel value chain.

In an attempt to recapture sales and differentiate themselves from OTAs, the very essence of hospitality is being reasserted and hotels are relying even more on customer service and personalisation to drive loyalty, explained TUI’s Chinwan.

Indeed, hospitality veteran Jessie Khoo-Gan, executive assistant manager, sales and marketing and rooms at One Farrer Hotel & Spa, said “people-orientedness” continues to be one key trait that she looks out for in potential candidates.

Likewise, Graeme Ham, vice president of talent & culture at AccorHotels, suggested that those who lack people skills are better off pursuing careers in other industries such as engineering.



Luxury Vacations Reimagined

Dream Cruises – the first-ever Asian luxury cruise line – is set to bring your luxury vacation dreams to life with the grand debut of its inaugural ship **Genting Dream** in Hong Kong and Guangzhou, China this November. Here are some of the inspiring experiences you can look forward to.

1 | Cruise in comfort

The stunning 151,300-ton **Genting Dream** offers 1,674 well-appointed staterooms, and is capable of serving 3,400 guests, with a leading crew-to-guest ratio of 1 to 1.7. Besides spacious comfort and luxurious amenities, over 70% of staterooms come with their own balconies, so you can wake up to an ocean sunrise. There are also over 100 connecting staterooms to accommodate the needs of extended families and larger groups.

2 | All-new experiences

Holiday-makers can look forward to sublime experiences across the 18 decks: party under the stars at the first-ever Zouk club at sea; immerse in whisky culture at the world's first Johnnie Walker House at sea; and enjoy lavish productions such as "China's Got Talent – The Dream Experience". Or explore the ocean depths in a luxury submersible, and be dazzled by fireworks displays* – the entertainment is non-stop!

* Subject to weather conditions



First-ever Zouk club at sea



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3 | Sheer rejuvenation

For those seeking pampering and energising moments, **Crystal Life** will surpass your every expectation. Featuring the largest Asian reflexology spa at sea, and 20 private rooms for Western spa and massage treatments, this is your destination for truly rejuvenating spa experiences. There's also a beauty salon, state-of-the-art fitness centre, and wellness cuisine to help you look and feel your best.



Over 35 restaurant and bar concepts

4 | Feast the world

Genting Dream is a gourmet's paradise at sea, serving up the finest Chinese regional, Asian and international cuisine. Indulge your palate at over 35 restaurant and bar concepts, including **Bistro by Mark Best** – the internationally-acclaimed Australian chef's first restaurant at sea. Many of these restaurants are located along the Boardwalk, a 610-metre wraparound promenade where you can dine al fresco to ocean views.

5 | Fun for families

Brace yourself for serious fun on **Genting Dream**. Take the plunge at the 6-slide **Waterslide Park**, master the ropes course, or scale the mountainous rock climbing wall. Young children will be immersed in an exciting range of activities and classes at **Little Pandas Club**. And with cinemas, bowling alley, video arcade and more – this is where memories are made.

6 | Dream Palace

The ultimate luxury cruising experience

Dream Palace is an exclusive enclave on **Genting Dream**, composed of its own suites and private facilities. Offering style and impeccable service at every turn, this is luxury cruising at its finest.



The 142 elegantly furnished suites provide the perfect setting for an incomparable experience at sea. They include two **Garden Penthouses** that are 224 square metres each – among the most spacious duplex suites at sea.

Dream Palace guests will also experience an exceptional level of hospitality from our dedicated European butler service, on call 24 hours a day to cater to your every comfort.



Dream Palace Privileges

- 24-hour personal European butler service
- Priority reservations for specialty restaurants, shows and spa treatments
- Exclusive access to **Genting Club**, with private lounges and complimentary dining
- Inclusive menu in a specialty restaurant each night
- Dedicated private outdoor deck and pool

View from the top

How far are you in changing the culture at Accor to fit current challenges?

If you compare Accor today with Accor 40 years ago, it's been a 180-degree change. There's a new way of thinking: more flexible, less dogmatic, more open-minded and there is a greater acceptance of risk.

But compared with where I want to go, I am still at number three out of 10 rungs on the ladder. Why? Because I believe the world is changing so fast that whatever we do today is not good enough.

It is my role to push people to take risks. We live in a world of recommendations. Whenever there is a new concept, people write about it and guests know about it. So guests want more and more surprises from the hospitality sector. And there is no reason a group of my size can't be as inspired as any citizenM of the world. It's not because we are heavy and big that we can't think the same way.

But that's the perception...

I know, I hate perceptions so I'm going to prove that it's a matter of mindset and leadership, of accepting autonomy within a big group. Jo&Joe (the new brand), for example, had full autonomy (in its creation and budget) in the last seven months. You have to accept that you need to give freedom to some of your executives, and that they actually ask for it. Seven out of 10 times it will work. The three times it didn't work do not matter.

Simplistically, legacy companies have been run and operated on a vertical manner. Top down. The boss decides and imposes, the people act. I'm thinking exactly the opposite. A company of our size should be horizontal, and a person who is 32 years old, even though he has less experience, should be able to make decisions without asking for permission.

You gave yourself three out of 10 on where you want to go. Where do you want to go?

I came on board three years ago to wake up a sleeping giant. And when you want to do that you need to be bold, a creative thinker and you have to be tough. You have to tell people that what you've done for 50 years is great, but now you have to shift the mindset and do things differently.

Accor and many other companies have been making decisions based on two things: new brand and new concept. We invented Ibis, Pullman, Sofitel; IHG (InterContinental Hotels Group) Holiday Inn and Crowne Plaza; then there's Hilton and Hampton Inn, and we all forgot the client. What matters in the next 40 years is the client. Of course you defend your brand, but before you invent a new concept, ask what do your clients want tomorrow which is different from yesterday?

This is why you see so many new concepts like citizenM, Mama Shelter, etc. They attract clients because they are different, less dogmatic, more surprising, have fewer norms and they think of how to personalise the service.

So I'm moving from brand and concept to client first.

You've said the industry has been a sitting duck on three waves – OTAs, meta, sharing economy. What is the fourth wave the industry should look out for?

Certainly it will be something related to data...companies like Facebook, Amazon, Google and eBay without you knowing collect your data, so they can reinvent the

Brazen Bazin



new business model of tomorrow.

It's actually scary when you look at the world today. Of the 500 large companies, 400 that existed 25 years ago – the IBM's, General Electric's and General Motors's of the world – are no longer on the list. You do the same ranking in 10 years and of the existing 500, 400 will not be on the list. Why?

It's mainly because all those new companies have five things in common. They are created by people below 35 years old. Ninety-five per cent of those new companies are created on a blank sheet of paper – no legacy. Ninety per cent are based on brand new technology – more efficient, more speed. Ninety per cent are addressing the world as their client base, not city, not country. And 90 per cent are organised in a horizontal manner, not vertical, so no status; if you have information, you share the information.

Our business model is inside to outside thinking. For the last 10 years, it's exactly the reverse, all the new business models

are outside thinking to inside producing. You first think of what clients want and you manage to invent what they want, as opposed to you invent something and decide to sell it. That is the shift of today's business model and it's all data-driven because you need to understand what people need and you only understand what they need if you have data access.

All the new players – distribution, private rental, concierge, etc – have been invented by non-hospitality companies. That has to stop. We too have to be at the forefront of new businesses.

You've acted by buying technology providers, providing technology to indies, buying sharing economy players, plugging cities where customers are going, plugging Accor's luxury gap, buying John Paul concierge service, etc. What's next – data companies perhaps?

We're shifting from being asset heavy to asset light as we may be disposing US\$5 billion worth of real estate and moving

into data. I'm more and more into data analytics. I don't know if we'll buy a data company but we are spending more and more time with software companies, which is what companies such as Visa and Mastercard are doing. And the additional thing I guess is to link data with social networks.

When hotel chains launch new brands, aren't they putting their old brands at risk since the new brands are being created for future travellers?

Yes, but if you don't, someone else will. We're not putting the old ones at risk, we are provoking them. We ask Ibis, Novotel, Pullman to think a bit every day about what they should be doing differently. Anybody who thinks his brand will still be valid in 10 years without rethinking will die.

As I mentioned, it's because clients will be more and more demanding. Due to the existence of social networks, people have more and more information, recommendations, knowledge. You aren't talking to a number, you are talking to a person. That person has aspirations. You want to understand what they are. The good news is, a person's aspirations don't change when he goes from Paris to Bangkok, so if you follow him, you can replicate what he wants in Paris in Bangkok or New York without the person asking again and again for it. That's data analytics.

Do you need to consolidate brands in your portfolio, now that you're bigger?

(Everything that we've bought) was not by accident. We decided with Michael (Issenberg, chairman/CEO Asia-Pacific) and team we had been too heavy on economy/budget hotels, which comprised 50 per cent of Accor, so we increased the diversification with Fairmont-Raffles and now 35 per cent of the portfolio is luxury/up-scale, up from 15 per cent before.

Same with OneFineStay. Clients who are fewer than three people and are staying for two nights continue to come to my hotels. But if they are seven to eight persons with kids, staying for a week, they will go to someone's private home if they can find a similar experience for cheaper. But they need service and assurance. So why can't Accor be the service provider for somebody else's home for the same client who will stay with me if it's two nights?

It's called retention. I don't want to lose my relationship with my clients.

The travel & hospitality sector in the world is also growing four to five per cent per annum, but hotel supply in the world is growing less than two per cent per annum. That's why Airbnb exists, because demand is greater than supply. The paradox is we are in a blessed industry.

How so?

Since it is blessed, growing, scaleable, it is one of the industries that is impacted the most by the new digital players, because they too want to benefit from this growth. Which is why you see Booking.com, Expedia, Kayak, Trivago, TripAdvisor, the Ubers of the world attack the industry, because the industry is so vast.

So for a company like ours, if we want to participate in the growth of the industry, we have to be more and more technologically-oriented and more and more savvy in creating new business. Which is why I said we should have invented Airbnb. And that is why we have created

Sébastien Bazin, chairman & CEO of AccorHotels and TTG Travel Personality of the Year 2016, tells **Raini Hamdi** how critical it is for the industry to get its act together and participate in the new economy

Jo&Joe, because we are not going to have the millennial space taken by others.

So, ours is a great industry but be careful. That industry is being attacked by new initiatives and players with more agility than we have.

Have you covered all the segments you want?

Did I believe three years ago we would launch Jo&Joe? No. I'd even be more honest: of what we have done in the last 12 months, all the acquisitions – Fairmont-Raffles, John Paul, OneFineStay, etc – no more than half of these were in my mind 12 months ago. That shows how fast you need to adapt.

Do we have what we need today? Yes, but I may invent another segment in three years because the market would have involved. The world is moving so fast. Accor is not moving fast enough, but we are moving much faster than my competition, that's for sure.

All the new players – distribution, private rental, concierge, etc – all of them have been invented by non-hospitality companies. That has to stop. We too have to be at the forefront of new businesses.

Which geographical markets should Accor focus on?

There are almost 1.4 billion people travelling in the world. The biggest travelling population is still the US, at 140 million people or 10 per cent of the number of people travelling in the world. Second, the Chinese, 130 million, but 90 per cent of Chinese stay in Asia-Pacific currently. In five years, they will probably number 200 million.

So we are spending more time to develop Accor brands in mainland China, in order to increase the visibility of our brands in China. We own 10 per cent of Huazhu (China Lodging Group)...you need to partner experts and think ahead in this market.

The other market we need to go deep into is India. It is going to take 10 years but India has the population size. We also need to grow big in Africa and Iran, where there will be a lot of appetite for travelling.

Do you think the wave of hotel chains consolidation over?

I don't think it is over. Marriott/Starwood is proof that scale and size matters today. There are seven or eight large hotel chains; it's only the beginning. But Accor has one

big advantage: it is a world leader in terms of size if you exclude only China and the US. In Europe, Asia-Pacific, Australia, many places in Eastern Europe, etc, Accor is number one. We don't have any need to participate in consolidation because we already are a leader in many of the markets we operate.

Bazin receiving the Outstanding Achievement Award as TTG Travel Personality of the Year 2016 in Bangkok last month from TTG editors (from left) Karen Yue, Raini Hamdi and Xinyi Liang-Pholsena






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*All of the above information is correct at time of print, subject to availability and change without prior notice. Other terms apply. Kung Fu Panda and all related characters and properties © 2015 Dreamworks Animation LLC.

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HOTELS



HOTEL RIU SRI LANKA
Located in Ahungalla, south-west Sri Lanka, Riu Hotels & Resorts' Asian debut is a 501-room beachside property offering all-inclusive service. In addition to three swimming pools, a children's pool, kids' club, sunbathing terraces, Jacuzzi, gym and a Renova Spa wellness centre, there are also two buffet restaurants and four bars, and the Pacha nightclub for guests to party till late.



NOVOTEL SUITES HANOI, VIETNAM
AccorHotels has opened its first Novotel Suites in Asia-Pacific in Hanoi's Cau Giay District. The property offers 87 studios and 64 one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments that come with fully-equipped kitchenettes. Facilities include an all-day dining restaurant, a rooftop bar terrace, fitness centre, heated outdoor pool, kids' playground and three meeting rooms.



BEST WESTERN PREMIER GENTING ION DELEMEN, MALAYSIA
Currently in the soft-opening phase, this new-build property in Genting Highlands offers 500 keys. Views of the Titiwangsa Range can be had once guests check-in at the Sky Lobby. Other facilities include a Sky Café and Garden, an infinity pool, spa, fitness centre, sauna, multipurpose events hall, restaurant and children's playground.



RADISSON BLU RESORT HUA HIN, THAILAND
This beachfront property opened its doors on October 28 to boast 118 keys, including 22 Deluxe Pool Access rooms. Amenities include two restaurants, a fitness centre and three swimming pools. For meetings and events, the largest 200m² Aqua Ballroom can hold up to 240 guests cocktail-style, plus three other function rooms.

ACTIVITIES

SEAPLANE TOURS IN HIROSHIMA
Setouchi Seaplanes has launched commercial seaplane operation to areas around the Seto Inland Sea – the body of water between Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu that is home to 3,000 islands.

The company, located on the southern coast of Hiroshima Prefecture, is currently offering a 50-minute sightseeing flight over the Geiyo Islands, an area renowned for its scenic beauty. Alternatively, customers can customise their tours through special or

chartered flights.
The fleet comprises Kodiak 100 amphibious planes produced by US-based Quest Aircraft. For an adult, prices range from 32,000 yen (US\$310) on weekdays to 42,000 yen during holidays.

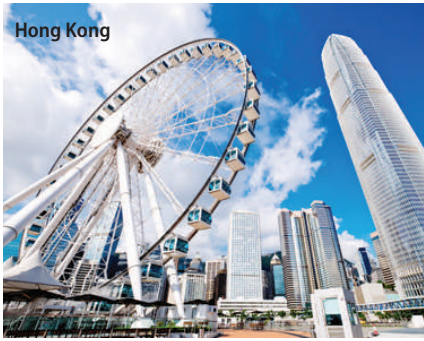


TRANSPORTATION

FINNAIR ADDS CAPACITY ON TOKYO AND HONG KONG ROUTES
Finnair will step up flight frequencies from Helsinki to Tokyo and Hong Kong in the 2017 summer season.

Four weekly flights will be added using an A350 to its service to Narita International Airport, which currently operates daily on a A330. The increased frequencies will be available between June 5 and October 27. With these additions, Finnair and partner Japan Airlines will offer 18 weekly connections from Helsinki to Narita. The additional Tokyo frequencies will be operated as a joint business operation with Japan Airlines, British Airways and Iberia.

Finnair will also add A350 frequencies to its Hong Kong route with three additional weekly flights between June 6 and October 28. Currently, Finnair flies to Hong Kong daily using an A350, departing Helsinki and Hong Kong around midnight. The new flights offer the added option of an afternoon flight from Helsinki and a morning flight from Hong Kong.



SIA INTRODUCES SINGAPORE-JAKARTA-SYDNEY ROUTE
From November 23, 2016, Singapore Airlines will launch fifth freedom flights linking Jakarta and Sydney while also increasing its Singapore-Jakarta flight frequency. The new services, subject to regulatory approval, will be operated on Boeing 777 aircraft.

The thrice-weekly Singapore-Jakarta-Sydney route will be on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Flights will depart Singapore at 20.15 and arrive in Jakarta at 21.00, and onward flights from Jakarta will depart at 22.25 and arrive in Sydney at 09.30 the next day. Meanwhile, return flights from Sydney will operate on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Flights will depart Sydney at 11.00 and arrive in Jakarta at 14.35, and depart Jakarta at 15.35 and arrive in Singapore at 18.10.

Eight new weekly flights are also being added between Singapore and Jakarta. Four will depart Singapore at 13.50 and arrive in Jakarta at 14.35, on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays, with return flights departing Jakarta at 15.35 and arriving in Singapore at 18.10. The four other flights will depart Singapore at 20.15 and arrive in Jakarta at 21.00, on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays, with return flights departing Jakarta at 22.25 and arriving in Singapore at 01.10 the following day.



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C9 Hotelworks takes a look at two popular resort destinations – Koh Samui in Thailand and Gili Islands in Indonesia – and finds reasons for cheer in both

Samui sunny from more airlift

Fuelled by expanded airlift from key Asian feeder markets, Samui is seeing steady tourism recovery especially in occupancy while room rates are expected to be propped up by the high-spending segment of Western Europeans.

Occupancy rose at a much faster pace than ADR, coherent with the 24% uptick in total arrivals in 1H2016 compared with the same period last year.

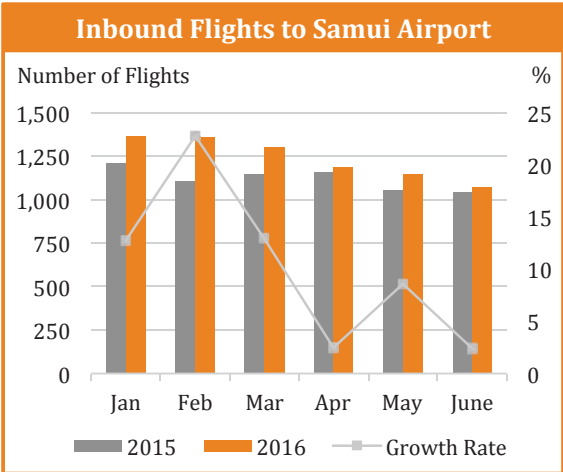
The wave of new passengers has been driven by additional flights from Singapore, Malaysia and within Thailand, with a combined year-on-year increase of 10% in year-to-date figures as of June.

Last year, the number of accommodation guests increased by 8% to over 2.1 million, with Thais accounting for 16% and foreigners 84%.

Still, the overall market mix of hotel guests remain slanted towards Western Europeans, who represent 36% of total hotel stays last year. The higher spending profile of the market has allowed hotels to leverage premium room rates when compared to other beach-centric destinations in Thailand. Room rates are hence expected to remain buoyant.

That said, with Bangkok Airway's plan to extend its coverage within Mainland China by end 2016, including Guangzhou and Chongqing (charter), to accommodate demand in tour series, C9 Hotelworks forecasts a growing supply share of lower-tier hotels, which are already becoming more visible in the pipeline projects.

In 1H2016, mainland Chinese arriving in Samui via international flights grew 26% year-on-year, followed by Australians at 21%.



Source: Samui Airport Property Fund and C9 Hotelworks Market Research

Gili Islands shed boutique sheen

Hotels on Indonesia's Gili Islands achieved a compound annual growth of 14% in total guests from 2011 to 2015, bolstered by broader access from Bali and Lombok.

The islands are also gaining popularity among Indonesian travellers, with domestic hotel guests more than doubled from 24,826 in 2011 to 60,124 in 2015.

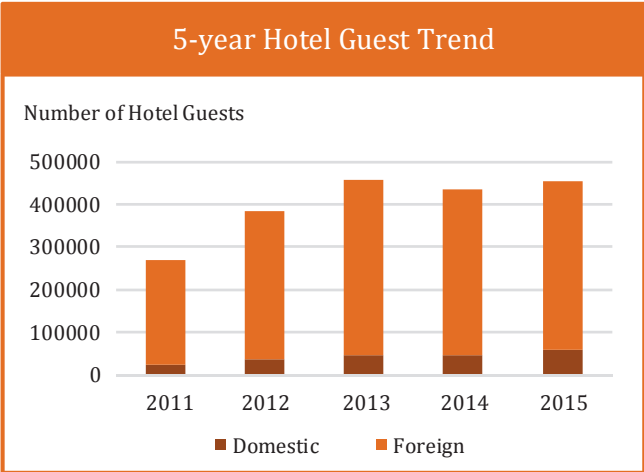
The destination is further benefiting from travellers who are increasingly looking to venture beyond Bali. While the average length of stay in Gili Islands has stayed consistent at three days, more visitors are shortening their stays in Bali and spending more time in Lombok and the Gilis.

Traditionally, demand for the Gilis was highly seasonal with July to August and December through January being peak periods, while demand is low for the remainder of the year.

However, with growing diversity in source markets, occupancy levels for the February to May period saw a 34% compound annual growth from 2011 to 2015.

Existing hotel owners are extending their presence across the islands to capitalise on the favourable supply and demand conditions.

Currently, there are 1,078 registered accommodation properties. C9 Hotelworks sees the future inflow of pipeline projects featuring hotels of larger scale and high standards of designs, will attract a broader market and propel the islands into the next stage of development.



Source: North Lombok Regency and C9 Hotelworks Market Research



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GALLERY

A NIGHT IN HONOUR OF MALAYSIA'S TRAVEL INDUSTRY

Old friends and colleagues in the travel and hospitality industry came together for a wonderful dinner and reunion at The Federal Kuala Lumpur on September 29. Organised by Global Holidays' managing director Boris Chang (rightmost), the "What an Honour" event was attended by 160 people in recognition of contributions made to the industry.



TRADE CALENDAR



JOINING HANDS FOR ASEAN'S GOLDEN JUBILEE GAMEPLAN

TTG Asia Media's managing director Darren Ng (rightmost) joins strategic partners including AirAsia, Mastercard, Go ASEAN, ASEANTA, and the ASEAN Centres in China, Japan and South Korea to pledge support for the year-long *Visit ASEAN@50* campaign, which will be launched at the ASEAN Tourism Forum in Singapore in January 2017.

TRADE CALENDAR SEE YOU AT...



ASEAN Tourism Forum January 16-20, 2017, Singapore

Themed *Shaping Our Tourism Journey Together*, the 36th edition of ATF will host meetings of ASEAN tourism ministers, NTOs, airlines and ASEANTA's AGM. TRAVEX targets 500 exhibitors and 1,600 delegates.



FITUR January 18-22, 2017, Madrid

Sustainability themes will be featured at FITUR, the designated stage for kicking off UNWTO's *International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development*. The last FITUR show welcomed a record 231,872 visitors.



SATTE February 15-17, 2017, New Delhi

The 24th edition of this South Asian travel show will bring together NTOs, DMCs, tech companies and MICE players, among others. The 2016 event saw over 750 participants from 28 Indian states and 35 countries.

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Report Hotels

Brands are being launched faster than you can open the door to a hotel room. Here's a look at 10 new brands in South-east Asia

New hotel brands in ASEAN

TIN HOTELS

Since its founding in 1992, Singapore-based GHM Hotels has catered to people who don't want to be seen – those who value the discreet, private, serene and elegant style of its hotels.

The chain is breaking this mould by going into the mid-tier segment with a new brand, Tin Hotels, which targets people who want to be seen – today's dominant population comprising the large middle class and millennials who are social-conscious and for whom elegance is whether or not the technology works.

The first hotels are expected to be opened in Dubai and Oman in the next few years, with a target of 35 properties in 2022.

Why the name Tin? Explained Hans R Jenni, co-founder and president of GHM: "We had initially played with the conceptual idea to do a one-off artistic hotel built out of shipping containers or a modular building structure, hence 'Tin'.

"Starting with this initial idea, we re-

alised there was a real opportunity in the market for a lifestyle hotel positioned in the mid-market segment. As we evolved the concept, we fell in love with the name 'Tin Hotels'. It is unusual and easy to pronounce in just about every language, whether Chinese, English or German."

Tin Hotels will be stylish and created as design icons, but not serene, he said. F&B will be an important part of the experience, featuring social spaces with interesting food outlets and a rooftop Tin Bar by the pool with music officiated by a DJ.

The entire ground floor will be a bustling café-centric space offering excellent coffees, cakes and casual food. This sets the scene for a 24/7 venue where one can have a quick meal, a coffee meeting or just be the in-spot for the local community to gather, Jenni said.

Asked if GHM's upmarket image might be compromised by the move into mid-tier, Jenni said: "On the contrary, we want to import those same attributes – superla-

tive design, exceptional guest experience, etc – that have served us so successfully at the luxury segment these last 25 years and create another *Style to Remember* (GHM's tagline) in a new segment."

"Launching Tin Hotels will not take anything away from GHM Hotels," he added. "Whether it's our own core brands Chedi and Chedi Club or Ahn Luh, the

same steadfastly-held corporate philosophy continues to ring true.

"Yes, a Tin hotel may have smaller room sizes or have lower price entry points, but each will still wow with its design and lifestyle experiences. Just as we have done with GHM hotels, Tin Hotels will set new benchmarks across this mid-tier segment." – **Raini Hamdi**



Artist's impression of a Tin Hotels room



Ronald Akili

POTATO HEAD

He made a statement when he opened Potato Head Beach Club, Bali in 2010. That sexy, cutting-edge design beachfront attraction comprising three restaurants, two bars, an infinity pool and a 500m² lawn draws on average 2,500 people daily.

This year, Ronald Akili, CEO of PTT Family, branched into hotels with the opening of Katamama Bali, which aims to attract travellers who appreciate artisanal design and want to experience understated luxury and Indonesian culture in a contemporary context. Every aspect of the 58-suite hotel is the work of Indonesia's finest craftsmen, he said.

"We spent a lot of time researching the techniques and the craftsmanship that best represent Indonesia, on everything from traditional architecture to fabrics, amenities to art, and we chose

the best practices and partners," said Akili.

"For example, our more than one million hand-pressed bricks were created using a technique traditionally used in the building of Balinese temples and we worked with our long-time collaborator, Indonesian architect Andra Martin, to create the modern exterior of the hotel."

Now, Akili is set to spin off Potato Head as a hotel brand with two new projects under construction in Seminyak and Canggu, Bali. The former is in collaboration with world-renowned architecture practice OMA headed by Rem Koolhaas, while the latter will be designed by Marcio Kogan of Studio MK27.

Born in Jakarta in 1981, Akili lived in Hawaii from the age of 13 and did a Master's Degree in Entrepreneurial Studies

at the Hawaii Pacific University before returning to Indonesia at the age of 22. His passion is "creating unique hospitality concepts", nurtured by his parents who own one of Indonesia's most recognised travel agencies, Smiling Tour.

"Coming from a family who has ties to the travel industry, being a hotelier has long been my childhood dream. Growing up, I frequently traversed the globe and was always interested in seeing how hotels operate," he said.

Akili plans to expand into global locations, including Tokyo and Australia, with owned and managed hotels that follow the brand's guideline – "dedication to craftsmanship and creativity, artisanal design, while capturing the warmth and intimacy of a private home", he said. – **Raini Hamdi**

BATIQA HOTELS

Batiqa Hotels was launched in March by Surya Internusa Group, which has decades of experience in hospitality industry investment as owner of Gran Melia Hotel Jakarta, Melia Bali Hotel and Banyan Tree Ungasan Resort, Bali.

The company decided to enter the hotel management business by setting up Batiqa Hotel Manajemen in 2013, specialising in three-star properties.

Matthew Lim, director of operations at Batiqa Hotels, said: "With more than

60 million productive Indonesian citizens in the middle class and 10 million international tourist arrivals per year (2015), three-star properties could capture a wider market in Indonesia.

"Batiqa sees the opportunity to deliver a four-star experience and service at three-star pricing and construction cost."

The name Batiqa is derived from the famous Indonesian cloth, *batik*, and Grade A quality, he said. Batik represents Indonesian hospitality, brand and culture,

while Grade A quality represents consistent, world-class service.

The first property, Batiqa Hotel & Apartments Karawang, 52km east of Jakarta, opened in 2014. Today Batiqa operates six hotels with more than 700 keys, and has two hotels under construction.

"We plan to have 10 more hotels by the end of 2017; Jakarta and Surabaya will be the part of this expansion plan," Lim said. – **Mimi Hudoyo**



Batiqa Hotel Cirebon



Dhawa's Cocoon room

DHAWA

Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts' newest brand Dhawa is aimed at technology and design-savvy millennials, the fourth after its Angsana, Banyan Tree and Cassia (get the alphabetical order?) that cater to different market segments.

Dhawa properties will also be strategically sited in culturally-rich destinations. The first – Dhawa Cayo Santa Maria – for example, will be in Cuba, and is scheduled to open in January 2017.

With a tagline *No room for the ordinary*, Dhawa's ambitions extend next to China, the first being in Bo'ao in Hainan province.

The hotel will have 516 keys, five restaurants and four bars, two swimming pools, a spa and fitness centre, kids club and a theatre with daily live entertainment. There is a 500m stretch of white sandy beach and a wide array of water sport activities. – **Dannon Har**

Report Hotels

KOKOTEL

As a father of two, Singapore-based Japanese Rei Matsuda, CEO of Kokotel (Thailand), often found himself dissatisfied with the accommodation options whenever his family of four travel within South-east Asia. The conventional room layouts designed for two often meant that his children had to stay in separate rooms, which could be a hassle especially when the entire family travelled on a single suitcase.

Envisioning a clean, affordable and child-friendly property that allows more of the family travel budget to be spent on food, souvenirs and experiences instead, the Cornell Hotel School graduate and former management consultant and investor conceived the idea of a “bed and café” hotel concept.

Backed with a 100 million baht (US\$2.9 million) investment from Japanese entrepreneur Shuhei Morofuji, CEO of venture-building company REAPRA, Matsuda established Newlegacy Hospitality in May 2015 in Bangkok. In February, the 40-room Kokotel Surawong (right) debuted with guestrooms that can accommodate up to four pax, plus a cosy café and kids’ play area – sans lobby – in the ground-floor public area.

Besides focusing on the niche markets of families and females travellers, the Kokotel brand is conceived to “fill the gap between unhappy owners and unhappy travellers”, Matsuda told *TTG Asia*. To keep costs down and optimise revenues for small property owners, many of whom lack expertise in running hotels, Kokotel



Kokotel Surawong

will leverage a “centralised operation concept” with leasing or management contract options.

“We operate many small hotels like one big hotel. Many functions are centralised at the headquarters to allow only a small number of people working at the property level,” he elaborated. “This model allows owners to enjoy higher gross operating profit ratio while Kokotel as an operator

will enjoy economy of scale.”

Kokotel is currently actively pursuing both leasing and management contracts in Bangkok and other major Thai cities including Chiang Mai and Krabi. Matsuda aims to expand the management contracts to other parts of South-east Asia and South Asia, with an aim to roll out 80 properties by 2012 and 1,000 properties by 2026. – **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

137 PILLARS HOTELS & RESORTS

From its first hotel, 137 Pillars House Chiang Mai which opened in December

2011, Thailand’s Wongphanlert family has created a new luxury boutique hotel management company, 137 Pillars Hotels & Resorts.

The group is now building two more hotels, 137 Pillars Suites Bangkok (left), scheduled to open in February 2017 with 34 suites and 179 private residences, and 137 Pillars Estate, scheduled to open in early 2019 on Phuket’s Kata Beach with 62 suites and villas.

Heading the new management company is COO Christopher E Stafford, who has put in place executive team members including five group directors overseeing projects and technical services, sales and

marketing, culinary, F&B and finance. Stafford moved into the COO role from working with the family as vice president hotel operations of SilverNeedle Hospitality, which will continue to manage the 137 Pillars House Chiang Mai until this December.

Stafford said there’s a window to create a branded luxury boutique hotel company.

“I’m aiming for 20 hotels in the next five years, their size not more than 60 keys ideally and only all suites or all villas.

“There is going to be demand for this,” Stafford said, explaining that by remaining small, the brand would be able to re-

tain “real hospitality”.

He agreed that competition exists as the number of Asian hotel management companies focusing on luxury boutique keeps growing.

“Our advantage is our owners have land banks. I also believe that to expand, I need to look outside the shell of Thailand. The real opportunity today is in places like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam,” he said.

Aside from the Bangkok and Phuket developments, Stafford revealed “we’ve also acquired land in Phang Nga for development”. It is also eyeing management contracts. – **Raini Hamdi**



137 Pillars Suites Bangkok

OASIA

Far East Hospitality (FEH), Singapore’s largest operator of hotels and serviced residences, is looking to expand its Oasia brand across Singapore and Malaysia. The brand debuted in Singapore with the opening of the 428-room Oasia Hotel Novena in 2011.

Arthur Kiong, CEO of FEH, said Oasia “is a departure from the traditional star-rating system, and we believe that the brand’s clear focus on health and well-being will resonate with our business and leisure guests”.

Elaborating on how Oasia hotels focus on wellness, Kiong said: “Be it business or leisure, the Oasia brand is created to provide a restorative respite in the city that inspires and empowers guests to refresh, refuel and recharge.”

For instance, at the new 314-key Oasia Hotel Downtown which opened in April, guests who wait to check in at the reception can get comfy on the armchairs and plush sofas, which help inject a resort vibe into otherwise another typical city hotel, he said.

Kiong said: “Given the changing time zones, travel delays and meetings, business travel often leave travellers with little opportunity for wellness.”

FEH is also set to open the 140-unit serviced residence, Oasia Residence in Singapore, within this year. Across the border, it debuted its first hotel in Malaysia, the 247-room Oasia Suites Kuala Lumpur. With these new properties, the Oasia brand will have injected an additional 700 rooms to FEH’s portfolio this year. – **Paige Lee Pei Qi**



Arthur Kiong

INTHIRA HOTELS

Inthira Hotels evolved from Inthy Deuansawan’s Lao tourism empire. It started in 1998 at Khop Chai Deu restaurant in Vientiane. Deuansawan talked to tourists and discovered most agents only offered classic tours.

“I like adventure. I wanted to provide something different,” he said, so he founded Green Discovery Laos in 2004 and set up shop around Laos.

He realised his restaurant and tour portfolio was missing hotels. The launch

of Inthira Thakaek in 2008 marked the start of the chain. Inthira Van Vieng and Inthira Champasak followed soon after.

“Inthira targets guests who expect a stylish and comfortable room with a view. Hotels are centrally located in a historical

setting, and Inthira looks to refurbish historic buildings,” he said.

Inthira plans to open two more properties in 2018: a centrally located hotel in Vientiane and a Luang Prabang riverside resort. – **Bernie Rosenbloom**

NOKU ROXY

Roxy-Pacific Holdings Singapore, which owns the 500-room Grand Mercure Roxy Hotel Singapore, has launched its own upscale boutique brand, Noku Roxy, with one hotel in operation in Kyoto and two others being developed in Phuket and the Maldives.

Noku-Roxy Phuket will have 90 rooms and five villas and will open in 2018. In the Maldives, it is re-working an existing property with 50 villas, 45 minutes away from Male, into another Noku Roxy.

The brand is the brainchild of Roxy-Pacific’s executive director and managing director Chris Teo, whose stints with Aman-

resorts and Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group before helming Roxy-Pacific’s hotel ownership business shape his vision for a brand that offers deep local insights and personalised service at affordable prices.

To do that, Teo keeps Noku Roxy hotels small in room count, sited in strategic locations, featuring artisanal yet modern design and offering personal recommendations on the hidden gems of the place.

The 81-room Noku Kyoto, for example, features handpicked art unique to each room. It is located directly across the Kyoto Imperial Palace and has its own map of the Kyoto city centre that recommends fa-

vourite local haunts and restaurants, access into exclusive artisanal houses and the best sightseeing spots, many of which Teo has himself tried and tested. Guests can also reserve personalised walking tours with in-house guides and receive itineraries or day-trip recommendations from Noku Kyoto’s staff.

Rates start from 20,000 yen (US\$192).

“I always have in mind the upper-scale four-star boutique hotels as I believe there is still a lot of room in Asia for a product that offers the local character and personalised service, but at non-luxury prices,” said Teo. – **Raini Hamdi**



Chris Teo

M SOCIAL

Singapore’s most famous hotel investor Kwek Leng Beng had the idea for M Social some six to seven years ago, when millennial-minded hotels weren’t yet the rage.

The first M Social hotel (right), designed by Philippe Stark, opened in Singapore in June. Millennium & Copthorne aims to plant M Social hotels in other cities such as Auckland, Silicon Valley in California and Seoul.

While design is a key element, success also rests on how well the hotels can ‘speak the language’ of this customer set, observed Millennium Hotels & Resorts president-Asia, Cetin Sekercioglu. A lot of time was thus spent getting the right staff and building the M Social culture, he said.

For its mass hiring, for example, M Social Singapore held an ‘open house’ pool-side party at one of sister properties in

Singapore. An ad in the local papers said it was looking for “superheroes to save the world”, not the usual posts such as captains and waiters. There were colourful floats in the pool and attendees were free to take a dip or help themselves to a BBQ. The more sociable ones with personality and people interaction skills were earmarked for potential hires.

The 293-room hotel has only 100 staff. “The old staff-to-room ratios no longer apply with the changing customer, who wants to enjoy the hotel facilities without going through the usual hassle of having to check in, get their key at the counter, etc (the hotel is the first in Singapore to implement self check-in and check-out kiosks in the lobby),” Sekercioglu pointed out.

“Thus, when we looked at the concept of the guest experience, we had to re-

design the SOP to be multi-tasking and come up with new training materials and programmes. We spent a lot of time on creating the tasks and jobs which could be performed by many people rather than by specific people.”

As the hotel chain is eyeing global expansion for the brand, the first baby is important, he said.

“It is about how do you create the perception of difference, from the customer’s point of view, on both the hardware and software. It’s also about their perception of value – is the value proposition acceptable for the market you’re going after?”

“We are confident this brand will be successful in Singapore and, having seen what we offer, more developers will be interested – we are already in talks for a few projects,” said Sekercioglu. – **Raini Hamdi**



M Social Singapore



The Warehouse Hotel

LO & BEHOLD

Having made its name in F&B in Singapore with several cutting-edge concepts, The Lo & Behold Group is foraying into hotels with its first, The Warehouse Hotel, Singapore, a 37-room luxury boutique establishment opening by end-2016 in a, well, warehouse of course, or what locals call ‘godown’. It hopes to fill a niche “somewhere between the big brands and

the small boutiques”, said Wee Teng Wen, managing partner at Lo & Behold.

“The market was missing a portal to local culture with depth and soul that would still over-deliver on comfort and the basics,” added Wee, who described hotels as “one long extended meal that runs 24 hours instead of three.”

The Warehouse Hotel aims to deliver

an authentic Singaporean experience for guests, from its F&B offerings to architectural tours of the surrounding Robertson Quay area where it is located. It won’t feature the usual amenities like gym or spa, due to space restrictions, but will leverage its F&B acumen to offer a chic lobby bar and a 50-seat restaurant featuring local classics. – **Dannon Har**

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Four lucky guests walked away with amazing prizes including a winter getaway to Finland and weekend escape at Singapore’s Marina Mandarin Hotel. With nordic snacks, drinks and entertainment, the night was enjoyable for all as they let their hair down and showed that harmonising work and play are part of their DNA.

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The party’s co-hosts: Pierre Quek and Karen Yue of TTG Asia Media, Mikko Turtiainen of Finnair, Paavo Virkkunen of Stopover Finland, Melvin Lim of Marina Mandarin, Darren Ng of TTG Asia Media, Heli Mende of Stopover Finland and Michael Chow of TTG Asia Media

Rose-Marie Taube of Företagsresor and Sue Gan of Marina Mandarin Singapore

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Levin M...



Stopover Finland, Finnair and TTG Travel Trade Publishing ready to enchant with Santa and Anssi Partanen (next to Santa) as emcee for the evening



El V. Gregorio, Danny Corpuz, James A. SY, Daniel A. Zarate, Ramon S. De Veyra and Andy U. Secretary of Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) Philippines



Patrick Fiat of Royal Plaza on Scotts, Shirley Tan of TTG Asia Media, Stella Koh and Angelica Diloy of SA Hotel Management, Ingrid Chung of TTG Asia Media and Shabeer Ahmed of SA Hotel Management



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Representative of Visit Helsinki, Ann-Karin Koskinen of Visit Finland, Maija Palosaari and Enna Paavola of Visit Finland Oy



Tarja Manninen of Inari-Saariselkä, Joti Nalluri of Kakslauttanen Arctic Resort and Satu Näsärö of City Hotel



Highlights of the night (from top to bottom): Finnish Napue gin bar by Kyrö Distillery, Helsinki acapella group FORK and the night's grand lucky draw winner

Report Silver tourism

Asia's lifelong voyagers

China's affordability and scenic landscapes make it a popular destination for many Asian senior tourists



SINGAPORE

Paige Lee Pei Qi

Singapore has one of the fastest-ageing populations in Asia, and the outbound silver tourist segment is becoming increasingly valued by local agents.

Chan Brothers Travel's head of marketing communications, Jane Chang, said the company observed a continuous increase in demand from silver travellers, who constitute 40 per cent of bookings to Europe and Asia, and about 60 per cent of bookings to China with a fairly consistent year-on-year growth of about 10 per cent.

Some 35 per cent of Dynasty Travel's leisure travel segment now belong to the "silver category" of travellers aged 50 and above, according to director of marketing communications Alicia Seah.

And this segment is proving a stable and valuable one too. Said Seah: "They are lesser risks takers (and) will rely on travel agents' expertise to provide the travel packages – whether group tours or customised travel."

She also observed a greater willingness among this segment to "pay more to get value for money tours, stay at quality hotels and (sample) the best of local cuisines".

Seah explained: "With a satisfactory disposable income, less home responsibilities, more time to travel and relatively good health, (seniors) are expected to spend more than all other age groups on their travels."

Chan Brothers has likewise witnessed "an increasingly strong co-relating trend

of higher spending and frequency of purchases" in the senior segments than other age groups, said Chang.

As for preferred destinations, Seah said this group has the appetite to visit lesser explored destinations like Namibia, Tanzania, Iceland, Greenland and Eastern Europe.

MALAYSIA

S Puvaneswary

In Malaysia, changing travel motivations have pegged senior tourists as a significant segment of leisure travellers with desire for particular itineraries and destinations.

"In the past, senior travellers (tended to go) abroad for a (given) reason, such as to visit friends and relatives or attend their children's convocation. But the trend has started to change with more seniors travelling simply to enjoy the destination and what it has to offer," noted John Chan, business development director at Kris International Traveltours.

Abdul Rahman Mohamed, deputy general manager, channel management at Mayflower Acme Tours, said: "Many of them are well-travelled, so they like to visit (fresh) destinations such as Latin America, Scandinavian countries and the Balkans. In ASEAN, Myanmar and Laos are popular with this segment as both are relatively new destinations."

Chan further observed in the segment a returning preference for North Asian destinations in the past two years over traditional favourites like Australia, Europe and the US due to a weak ringgit.



Longhaul destinations are typically preferred given the time and money (senior) travellers have, but they are not adventurous enough to go on their own.

Cindy Young
Managing director, Sunflower Travel Service Hong Kong

He explained: "China, South Korea and Japan are popular destinations due to the aggressive marketing efforts of the respective NTOs and the travel documentaries on TV about these destinations. With LCCs flying into secondary destinations, many are also venturing beyond capital cities to secondary cities (in North Asia)."

Abdul added: "They also like to be engaged in activities while travelling, so we throw in items such as cooking classes, art appreciation workshops or introductory wine tasting workshops."

Meanwhile, Desmond Lee, group managing director at Apple Vacations & Conventions, sees an uptick in demand for cruise holidays among senior citizens in recent years. He shared: "This is due to more cruises coming to Singapore, more awareness created by the cruise operators, and more travel agents selling cruises."

Specifically, cruises appeal to seniors for their all-inclusive packages and offer "a convenient way of visiting destinations without having to move hotels", said Lee.

HONG KONG

Prudence Lui

With 1.2 million residents above the age of 65, Hong Kong has an active market of silver tourists.

For CTS International Science-Technology & Culture Exchange, the segment makes up half of group tours and 30 per cent of FIT business, according to director Ng Hi-on.

As populations grey in Asia, senior tourists are making up a growing proportion of leisure travellers to become a business goldmine for travel agencies. **TTG Asia** uncovers the unique preferences of this segment

For Sunflower Travel Service, participants over 50 years old comprise “one third of (its) departing tours”, according to managing director Cindy Young. And unlike young travellers who favour OTAs, silver tourists rely heavily on agents as they treasure their time and don’t bother to shop around on Internet.

She added: “We have been (catering to) this segment for years and regularly roll out some unique itineraries (for them). This segment is characterised by higher spending power and medium to high-end travel products.”

Young added: “(Being) mature and sophisticated travellers, they seek something different such as Inner Mongolia and Africa. Longhaul destinations are typically preferred given the time and money these travellers have, but they are not adventurous enough to go on their own.”

Indeed, more agents are eyeing this segment. Two years ago, Morning Star Travel Services launched a series specially catering for mature travellers.

Director of marketing director, Wilson Yeung, said: “We are approached by associations with senior members to arrange tailor-made private group travel. They choose shorthaul destinations like China and mostly depart on weekdays. Our role is to ensure smooth transportation (and comfortable itineraries involving) wine and dine.”

JAPAN

Kathryn Wortley

Japan’s large segment of silver tourists are increasingly choosing Asian destinations over the traditional European favourites, agents observed.

Europe has historically been a choice destination, but the Japan Association of Travel Agents reported that European tour sales at major agencies in March 2016 fell 4.8 per cent “due to the negative influence of the simultaneous terrorist attacks in Paris and devaluation of the yen.”

According to a representative at the association, a top priority of Japanese silver tourists when choosing a destination is safety and security.

Jumbo Tours in Okinawa Prefecture has seen their European sales fall since last year. “As a result of IS terrorism in Europe, older people are worried about going there,” said Miyuki Kinjo of the company’s outbound division.

Now, Asian destinations are most popular with customers, with Taiwan in top place, followed by Shanghai. “Many seniors are going there on sightseeing tours with their partner or friends, staying an average of two or three nights,” shared Kinjo.

The US is another popular option. “Japanese baby boomers like to visit the US because they absorbed American cul-



Australian silver travellers are showing a stronger appetite for immersive experiences overseas

ture in the 1970s when they were young,” observed Hiroshi Kurosu of JTB Research and Consulting.

Many see retirement as a chance to make travelling to their dream destinations a wish come true, he explained.

Meanwhile, a study by Japan Tourism Marketing shows that, from age 50, Japanese people tend to find planning for trips troublesome, prompting travel agencies to offer greater support.

The research also shows that seniors primarily choose destinations that will boost their health and well-being.

AUSTRALIA

Rebecca Elliott

Aussies are known for their sense of adventure and propensity to travel to far-flung locations, and this desire seems to grow with age, said Australia’s leading outbound agents.

A recent survey by Peregrine found that older travellers are more interested in getting off the beaten track (30 per cent) than Gen Y (25 per cent).

“We have seen an increase in sales to

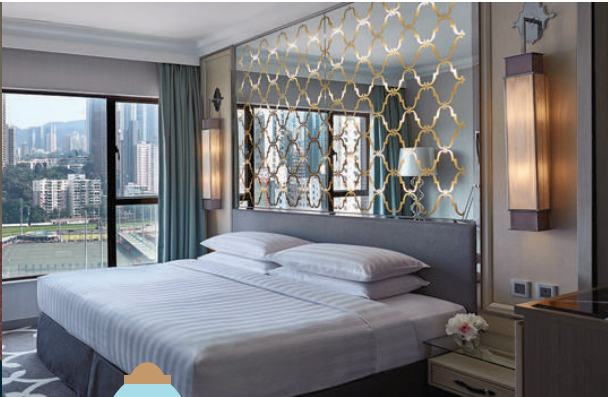
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Report Silver tourism

adventurous destinations,” said James Thornton, managing director, Intrepid Group, whose top-selling Eastern European trip for passengers above 50 is Russia, adding that sales to Cuba for this segment is up 158 per cent from last year.

Similarly, Marty Byrne, national travel manager, National Seniors Travel, said travellers aged between 50 and 65 had overtaken younger travellers as the most adventurous group.

He added: “They tend to have a mix of organised travel, such as a cruise or tour, as well as free and independent travel. They are after an authentic experience, choosing to plunge themselves into the destination to learn, not simply sightsee.”

Haydn Long, Flight Centre Travel Group’s global media and investor relations manager, commented: “Customers of all ages are benefiting from (greater affordability), but particularly retirees because they have the flexibility to travel outside peak seasons when fares tend to be at their cheapest.”

Sujata Raman, managing director, Abercrombie & Kent Australia, said travellers over 55 were outperforming all other sectors and that multi-generational travel was a major trend for Aussie seniors.

“We are finding that grandparents are increasingly driving travel decisions for the whole family,” she said. “The purpose is often to commemorate a milestone event or simply to spend quality time together as a family.”

THAILAND

Michael Sanderson

Thai retirees are increasingly independent and app-happy travellers in familiar Asian countries, but tend to rely on tour operators when venturing farther afield.

MD Tours operations officer Wasuma Sivapiroonthep said Thailand’s baby boomer generation is becoming more tech savvy when travelling aboard but they are not necessarily more adventurous.

Wasuma said Europe, Japan and the US were top destinations, similar to the broader outbound trends from Thailand, although South Korea and South-east Asia were a higher priority for younger travellers. “In Europe they tend to buy tours and go in groups,” Wasuma said.

On the other hand, those visiting Japan tend to opt for independent travel. “With

Google, even in Japan they can see everything, from train schedules to hotels. They can Google and book through Agoda,” Wasuma added.

While Wasuma was unable to provide the proportion of MD Tours’ clients in the baby boomer age bracket, she said they prefer relaxing activities like sightseeing and walking tours.

Thai Mice’s Jim Kullapat said while the majority of his company’s outbound customers were business-focused, there had been a recent spike in the number of older travellers arranging trips to Myanmar as it had been off-limits for so long and the country’s temples are top draws for seniors keen to see other cultures practising Buddhism.

Meanwhile, the Thai government’s push for domestic tourism and its attempt to cope with the ageing population by allowing civil servants to delay retirement until 65 may hamper outbound travel from the retiree market in the years ahead.

INDONESIA

Mimi Hudoyo

Unique needs and preferences are surfacing among Indonesian senior travellers, a segment that often travel as part of multi-generational families and within like-minded communities.

Travelling with the extended family is seen as an important activity for bonding. The preferred time to do it is during Lebaran (Muslim end of fasting month) holiday, where offices and schools are closed, usually for one week.

Such travel configurations require special efforts by agents to make sure needs of the different age groups are taken care of.

Putu Ayu Aristyadewi, vice president marketing & communications, Smiling Tour, said: “The elderly travellers may not be able to follow all the programmes that their children and grandkids like, such as climbing the Great Wall. We (arrange for a guide) to stay with silver travellers while their family enjoy the Great Wall.”

Meanwhile, most senior travellers opt for tours specially tailored for the family. Willy Sihombing, owner of Sedona Holidays, Medan, said such tours are usually designed to leave out strenuous physical activities, on top of having itineraries which are less packed with activities.

Another group of silver travellers are

Cruise holidays are picking up steam among senior travellers



those who travel with communities of fellow seniors, which could include friends, prayer groups, sports groups or those who share similar interests.

Adi Pratama, assistant vice president product & market development of Panorama Tours, shared that cruising holidays are becoming popular among these senior communities.

“We see such groups taking cruise holidays together. As they are retirees,

they can spend up to a month cruising.

“This is quite a new development. In the past, travellers think that cruising is boring. They started with a short cruise (before progressing to) longer cruise trips,” he added.

Willy remarked: “Not all silver travellers are weak. We have catered a group who were healthy and strong. They took a hiking tour of a tea plantation. The members are 65 years old and above.”

(Senior travellers) tend to have a mix of organised travel as well as free and independent travel. They are after an authentic experience, choosing to plunge themselves into the destination to learn, not simply sightsee.

Marty Byrne

National travel manager, National Seniors Travel Australia

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To dazzling new heights

A new suite of luxury hotels and growing airlift to destinations such as Krabi and Samui are helping Thailand gear itself towards high-end travellers as ASEAN neighbours snap at its heels.

Park Hyatt Bangkok is opening 1Q2017, while recent openings and renovations in Chiang Mai and Phuket have ramped up the country's tourism focus firmly on the high-end segment.

Exo Travel Group assistant marketing manager Amy Mayhew said the DMC was trying to push the Park Hyatt property, which will open above the upmarket Central Embassy mall in Bangkok's downtown, with 222 rooms including 30 premier suites, in addition to three restaurants, four bars and a ballroom.

Another property on Exo's radar is the 25-key River Arun on Bangkok's Rattanakosin Island, the historic heart of the city. The ornate property sits in a neighbourhood of cafes and galleries near Wat Pho, Wat Arun and the Grand Palace.

Exo is also highlighting Chiang Mai's Akya Manor, Phuket's Nai Harn and Keemala, and the Hloyo mud house in Mae Salong as part of its commitment to a sustainable future.

Meanwhile, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) is looking to reframe its marketing position from value-for-money to value-for-experience as it seeks to

become a quality leisure destination.

Mayhew lauded TAT's successful use of themed marketing campaigns in recent years, with the Bangkok-based Exo having participated in a project to develop marketing material to appeal to luxury travellers.

"This included shooting both a short- and long-length video at particular participating hotels and places," she said. "The campaign was successful and it worked well for Exo Travel's target on the high-end market. The luxury campaign also enabled Exo Travel to gain more exposure with luxury tour agents globally."

Meanwhile, Asian Trails e-commerce and marketing manager Niels Steeman said it was important for the company to adapt to customers' requirements.

"Overall, we see a movement towards more niche products for our core markets, and tours and excursions that fit the wishes of the customers, mainly (for) themed excursions like culinary, honeymoon, up-market and/or wellness programmes."

SI Tours founder and owner Sophida Tohsofee said Thailand could shoot for the same market Dubai was appealing to, but where the Middle Eastern megastructures might be a once-in-a-lifetime trip, the Land of Smiles benefitted from repeat business.

"I think our tourism is still the best in the world," she opined. "In Thailand, we

have the land, we have the food, we have everything."

Bill Barnett, managing director of hospitality consultancy C9 Hotelworks, pointed to the resurgence of business travellers and the MICE sector after "some dark days in 2014" as a sign of the country's strong position.

Barnett said resorts had rebounded, with improvements from the Eastern European and Russian markets. Phuket, in particular, recorded a growth rate in domestic and international passenger arrivals on par with Bali and well ahead of Hong Kong.

"It pushes back the message of how reliant we are on the China market, and that continues to be a fact," Barnett said. "I looked at the Phuket figures and it wasn't just the Chinese that were growing this year; we saw proportionate growth against all the markets of 19 per cent. So it's not just a China story."

As well, luxury destinations Samui and Krabi both recorded increased hotel occupancy as a result of greater airlift, according to C9 Hotelworks reports.

However, Barnett expects more low-tier hotels to emerge in Samui in the coming years and warned that Krabi could be betting too heavily on mass tourism.

"As nearby Phuket is learning, bigger is not necessarily better in the long run," he remarked.

While tourism stakeholders anticipate more luxury tourists in Thailand's future, neighbouring destinations are also competing for leisure travellers arriving in South-east Asia.

The competition could be getting stiffer as more flights now connect to Cambodia and Vietnam.

Barnett added: "We saw Vietnam bottom out a few years ago, but we're seeing it rising now and becoming more of a competitive force to Thailand's traditional leisure market."

Destination in numbers

US\$5.7 billion

The budget for the expansion of Thailand's six largest airports in the next 15 years to cope with the rising air traffic and tourist growth

29.2%

The year-on-year percentage increase in the number of passengers flying between Bangkok-Suvarnabhumi and Hong Kong airports, according to the World Air Transport Statistics, with three million making the trip in 2015

16.7 million

The number of tourist arrivals in 1H2016, up 13% on last year, putting Thailand on track to pass 30 million for the year

Park Hyatt Bangkok



Issue of the day

Short-term pain for long-term gain?

As a crackdown on zero-dollar tours in Thailand dents arrivals from China, some insist this is a worthwhile tradeoff for lasting gains. By **Chadamas Chinmaneevong**



Maya Bay, Phi Phi Leh island

Thailand will miss its 2016 Chinese inbound tourism target because of a crackdown on zero-dollar tour operators, but the trade is embracing the move as a big step towards rebranding Thailand as a quality destination.

As part of a tourism reform under junta rule, prime minister Prayuth Chan-ocha had ordered tourism authorities to put down mafia-type parties as well as zero-dollar tourism businesses to reposition the destination and let local communities share in tourism-related income.

This order led to the closure of four big nominee tour companies and arrivals from China have since dropped.

In the last week of September, the number of incoming Chinese tourists grew only 2.8 per cent, compared with 35 per cent growth in the first week. The three destinations experiencing the most

severe impacts were Bangkok, Pattaya and Phuket, according to the Department of Tourism (DoT).

The DoT forecasted that tourist arrivals from China to Thailand will stand around 9.4 million visitors this year, lower than the previous estimation of more than 10 million visitors.

And according to Ronnarong Cheewinsiriamnuai, president of Thailand-China Tourism Association, the number of Chinese tour groups started declining in September and plunged after China's peak outbound season during the Golden Week in early October. In Bangkok, numbers fell to around 50 groups per day, down from 300 groups in the past.

Still, local tourism stakeholders are generally voicing support for the clampdown, which Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) governor Yuthasak Supasorn said is a step forward in the country's am-

bitions to court high-end tourists.

Association of Thai Travel Agents (ATTA), vice president Surawat Akaraworamat, added: "We must consider natural resources and national benefits. Many tourism sites have become rotten as they have been overloaded by tourists. Is it worth it?"

Both TAT and ATTA expect that the impact on Chinese arrivals would be relieved by this year-end, although Ronnarong projects that the negative sentiment will drag till December.

There are some encouraging signs though, with the strongest one being support from the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA), which expressly encouraged Thailand to proceed with the crackdown.

Support is also evident in an MoU between the Thai Ministry of Tourism and Sports and CNTA to improve skills of Thai tour guides and develop pricing standards for Chinese tourists.

Meanwhile, TAT revealed that the price of a China-to-Thailand package now exceeds RMB3,000 (US\$450), close to the price of a package from China to Japan, which starts at around RMB4,000.

Concerned by the rising prices, Ronnarong said: "If package prices to Thailand are equal to those in Japan, I have no idea how to compete. Japan and South Korea will benefit while Thailand loses."

Viewpoints

What do you think of Thailand's efforts to attract luxury tourists?



Jumpol Chadavath, managing director, Regale International Travel

The government does not leave gaps in the market empty. When one sector becomes overwhelmed, they would diversify. If they want to shift to the high-end, they can do it but it's not easy. The demand keeps going because of the old base, but we have to build a new base.

Suwart Jitjornongmate, CEO, SI Tours

We see hotels, for example, featuring quality products and focusing on niche destinations. We are not experts on FITs but have gotten requests from those on the top end looking for handlers (in Thailand). We are talking 15,000 (US\$428.70) to 20,000 baht a night. The potential is (certainly) there.



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MY WAY



Peter Henley
President & CEO,
Onyx Hospitality Group

What are the current challenges? At the top of our list is the ability to attract, retain, train, develop and promote people. We have to navigate the generational mix, in particular millennials, as they differ from the previous generations in their expectations, priorities and

career ambitions. Our challenge is about meeting these expectations, and about making the jobs and the work environment relevant to them, while minimising the generational gap.

If I had my way to improve things, I would... meet millennials' expectations through our Career Lattice programme, which identifies all the roles within our corporate offices and hotels. This transparent approach allows our team members to play an active role in their career goals. As well, given the importance of the natural environment for Thailand's tourism, ensuring environmental sustainability should be a greater priority. To remain competitive we should think in the long term and ensure that we are conserving the country's valuable resources. – **Chadamas Chinmaneevong**

NEWS IN A MINUTE

- 1 Amara Bangkok**
The Singapore luxury hotel brand's foray into Bangkok rises in the Surawong neighbourhood in the business district with 250 rooms and suites, a restaurant, a rooftop bar on the 26th floor and an infinity pool. The hotel also features two ballrooms and function rooms, an executive club floor and lounge, plus a 24-hour boutique minibar offering F&B at convenience store prices.
- 2 Away Chiang Mai**
This resort opened in March, close to a jungle, a national park and caves. With 34 rooms and a 100m-long swimming pool, Away also offers shuttle services to the airport, a 30-minute drive away, and the San Kamphaeng hot springs. Managed by Bespoke Hospitality Management Asia, the hotel is one of five resorts under the Away brand in Thailand.
- 3 Boxel**
Located within Suvarnabhumi Airport, Boxel offers solo travellers soundproof, non-smoking, air-conditioned rooms, each just 4m² in size. Each room comes with an adjustable work station and free Wi-Fi. A wake-up service is available to ensure flights are not missed, but guests are required to use the airport's toilet facilities. Four-hour stays start from 1,250 baht (US\$35.80).
- 4 The Nai Harn**
After 18 months of renovations, the Royal Phuket Yacht Club has transformed into The Nai Harn luxury resort in Phuket, the only



hotel directly on the Nai Harn beach. All 130 rooms and suites have Andaman Sea views while the 50m-wide rooftop can be used for weddings or other events. While there are two meeting rooms and flexible outdoor space, a sense of luxury comes from the beachside butler service, private transport (limousine, helicopter or motor-yacht) and spa therapies.

5 Phuket Marriott Resort and Spa Nai Yang Beach
Set on a secluded beach in Phuket's north-west near the airport, this new Marriott resort features 180 guestrooms that range from 46m² garden view suites to two-bedroom villas on the beachfront. There are four restaurant and bar options, including one on the beach highlighting seafood, plus fitness, children's and spa facilities.

TRIED AND TESTED

Well Hotel Bangkok Sukhumvit 20

This urban wellness retreat in the popular Asok district offers **Paige Lee Pei Qi** access to modern comforts while also pampering her mind, body and soul

LOCATION Situated on the bustling Sukhumvit Road, Well Hotel Bangkok is a seven-minute walk from the BTS Skytrain (Asok Station) and MRT Subway (Sukhumvit Station). There is a complimentary tuk-tuk option to these two nearby BTS stations. Fresh to this neighbourhood, I found it easy to navigate to the many nearby malls like The Em-Quartier and Terminal 21 Mall.

ROOM The hotel prides itself as a wellness destination, so much so there was an exercise bike (you heard me right) in my Executive Suite. No more excuses for missing a workout during my travels!

My room, an extravagant 50m² in size, comprised a living room, two 46-inch TVs, microwave, complimentary Wi-Fi, and a printer upon request. The bathroom had a rain shower and a separate bathtub. The gentle palette of colours – white, gold, marble and grey – exuded effortless class.

F&B The highlight of the Eat Well Café is the food therapy menu which helps ease symptoms commonly found in urban dwellers. Culinary treats for the soul include Thai pomelo pomegranate and chicken salad, and clear mush-



room soup with ginkgo and goji berry. The service staff remarked that ingredients were carefully selected for their anti-inflammatory properties – literally following the doctor's orders.

Those with more traditional tastebuds can take heart in the Twist Bar & Bistro, located adjacent to the café, offering western dishes ranging from small plate co-mestibles to burgers and pastas.

FACILITIES What would a wellness hotel be without a spa, gym or pool? Well Hotel provides all three, with the rooftop pool overlooking the city's hustle and bustle.

Recommended treatments at the spa include stress relief and jetlag remedy. And as stationary bikes and treadmills tend to bore me, I appreciated special classes like yoga at the gym.

Function facilities are also available for smaller meetings, such as the Maple Room which seats 40 pax in banquet setting.

SERVICE Impeccable. The friendly staff went out of their way to make me feel at home. They were ever-ready to help me with questions about the neighbourhood, and even insisted on sending me to the BTS station on a tuk-tuk when they saw



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me heading out in the sweltering heat.

VERDICT Perfect for fitness and wellness junkies. This urban retreat seemingly transported me away from the chaotic city despite being in the midst of it.

ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE 2016/2017



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Destination **Philippines**

Hotel development and surging arrivals are weighing on Boracay's natural environment, and actions have to be quickly taken to save the island from losing itself to mass tourism, writes **Rosa Ocampo**

Aerial view of Boracay Island

Paradise found and lost?

Photo: Eleni Saitiridou

As Boracay becomes such a popular leisure destination that it no longer has any low season, signs of mass tourism taking its toll on the island are becoming apparent, from dirty streets and flooding after rains to pollution from tricycle fumes and strained infrastructure from the higher arrival numbers.

These issues are forcing industry players to grapple with questions if Boracay could cope with tourism growth without causing further damage to the natural environment, the very reason attracting tourists to flock to the island, and how the island resort could better harness its potential as a growing destination.

Randy Salvador, general manager of the recently-opened Coast Boracay, thinks that Boracay can sustain its growth in tourist arrivals.

"I believe Boracay has yet to achieve its peak compared with other beach destinations like Bali, Hua Hin or the Maldives", he said.

Salvador expects Boracay, which is already renowned as one of the world's premier islands, to become even more popular following the normalisation of

Destination in numbers

1.7 million

The 2016 target for tourist arrivals in Boracay

472,814

The total number of foreign arrivals in Boracay in 1H2016, an increase of 32.3 per cent year-on-year

Philippine relations with China – its second biggest market after South Korea.

The ongoing expansion of Caticlan Airport would bring with it "more air and foot traffic", said Salvador. He added that more flights utilising bigger aircraft, resulting in cheaper airfare, would also follow.

Likewise, Joyce Jocson, Nexus Travel operations manager, also posited that the island resort can cope with increasing tourist numbers.

"Accommodation is usually the problem but in Boracay's case, it has a growing number of accommodations, from the most economical to the most expensive," she explained.

Meanwhile, the island continues to bask in the investment boom as more hotels and resorts are being built, an impressive number of which are upmarket and global brands. In addition, several international hotels are tabled for opening in the next year.

However, there seems to be not enough environmental planning and zoning, as many of these new developments are concentrated in the crowded White Beach area while other parts of Boracay remained underdeveloped.

The White Beach area – which has the best white sandy beach in Boracay – has done away with the division of Station 1 (luxury resorts), Station 2 (mid-market) and Station 3 (backpackers, mass market) – as new hotels and resorts blur the imaginary divisions that define the quality of accommodations in this patch of white beach.

And as the island swells in popularity, travel consultants are starting to wonder if Boracay is now becoming a victim of its

own success.

Simon Ang, managing director-operations of Celebrate Life TLC, has "intentionally stopped selling" Boracay because it has been spoilt by mass tourism.

Jessica Kuan, travel consultant at Mobilair Travel, shared that Boracay now appears less inviting to tourists who perceive it as overcrowded and less pristine than before. "We have clients who prefer going to Palawan, especially El Nido, instead of Boracay," she said.

Jeanie Ramos, inbound officer, Travel Warehouse, also observed client preferences changing from Boracay to Palawan, Davao and Bohol. She also lamented that "not much attention" has been given to the road systems in Boracay because authorities are focused on the White Beach.

Still, Ramos acknowledged that there are visible efforts to keep Boracay in good shape such as through the presence of tourist police and the overall maintenance of the island as a clean destination.

Currently, the local authorities are working towards building and improving infrastructure such as port operation facilities, widening of roads and proper sewage treatment.

Viewpoints

How can Boracay balance tourism development and environmental protection?

Hannah Paula Yulo, director of sales and marketing, Paradise Garden Resort Hotel & Convention Center Boracay

Hotels and resorts are concentrated along the White Beach stretch and the beachfront is becoming narrower. Development should instead be spread around the island such as near Puka Beach, and the Fairways and Bluewater Newcoast Boracay, to ensure a balanced development.

The local government and the private sector should also work closely to build the necessary infrastructure and attend to issues such as road congestion and flooding.

Marjorie Aquino, senior sales and marketing manager, Blue Horizons Travel and Tours

Boracay is becoming overcrowded and polluted. Responsible tourism isn't just for tourists; hotels and resorts should also be involved. They should be acting as one community whose main goal is to preserve the destination. They are generating income from Boracay so they should also give back to the destination.

(For example, Shangri-La Boracay has stopped using plastic water bottles for reusable ones.



Issue of the day



Putting an end to 'endo' labour

Philippines authorities are clamping down on the contractualisation of labour practices, putting some tourism and hospitality companies in a bind. **Rosa Ocampo** investigates

The Philippine government's aggressive drive against the "endo" (end of contract) scheme has led to some confusion and misunderstanding among tourism and hospitality employers on legitimate hiring practices under contractualisation.

Endo refers to the hiring practice that companies engage in to prevent a contractual employee from becoming regularised by terminating him prior to the sixth month of service. After a short layoff, he will be rehired to assume the same role and perform the same functions. Such

practices enable companies to save on pay and employee benefits for their contractual staff.

With the no-contractualisation policy starting next year, hotels, restaurants and other businesses in the hospitality industry will have to increase the headcount for their regular staff, according to the director of distribution and analytics at a Manila-based luxury hotel group, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Reacting to industry fears that the end of contractualisation might "spell the death of smaller hotels and those outside

of major tourist destinations", the director explained that those hotels "can hire under the legitimate contracting, but this is subject to evaluation after the end of the contract term and outsourcing which can be done for positions not in line with a hotel's business like security personnel".

For large hotel groups that rely on contractors to supply their staff, they are not covered by endo "if they supply manpower services under the 'outsourcing' contract, such as for housekeeping attendants during high occupancy periods and waiters for functions", the director pointed out.

But they are covered by endo "if they assign housekeeping room attendants or waiters in hotels for a straight five-month period and terminate their services only to rehire them after a short layoff for another straight five-month period".

She said the impact of endo is that hotels will then have to review their headcount as to how many regular staff are really required in a department regardless of seasonality or occupancy levels.

"If the position is required on a full-time basis, then hotels will have to replace (contract staff) with a regular staff. Contractual staff can still be done by hotels based on occupancy levels, and ad hoc functions or events, (but not for) augmenting the regular staff because of the surge in business levels," she said.

At press time, the Cagayan de Oro Hotel and Restaurant Association is seeking the consensus from its 43 members regarding endo, according to executive secretary Nollie Arguelles.

Carol Valdez, director of sales and marketing at Seda Centrio Hotel in Cagayan de Oro, said the property will comply with the rules but highlighted the difficulty of getting permanent staff due to the lack of skills and training in the provinces.

While Angel Ramos Bognot, president and managing director, Afro Asian Travel and Tours, is not aware of contractualisation in the travel agency sector, she does however contract staff like usherettes for conferences and tour guides on a per tour/project basis in line with the Department of Tourism regulations.

MY WAY



Jerome de la Fuente
General manager
Limketkai Luxe Hotel,
Cagayan de Oro

If I had my way to improve destination marketing, I would... work with OTAs in the leisure segment and with agencies handling corporate travel to promote the Philippines as there's not enough marketing and promotions from the Department of Tourism.

I would urge OTAs, travel agents and tour operators to offer special promotions to entice tourists to the Philippines. This may not necessarily mean reducing rates, but offering extra benefits such as a 30-minute massage extension.

I would ask agencies handling corporate travel to look for business meetings especially by companies requesting for proposals, as corporate travellers now want hotels which they will book for the whole year.

If I had my way to improve infrastructure, I would... push for the building of new airports and the improvement of existing ones. Airports are the visitors' first and last impressions of the destination.

For instance, Manila needs a new

airport. Nothing more could be done to improve the structure of Ninoy Aquino International Airport – any improvement is merely cosmetic.

Meanwhile, the domestic airport at Cagayan de Oro's airport should be improved to tap into the foreign market. Also, when an aircraft lands, it's quite far from the arrival area so passengers have to walk a distance and use an umbrella should it rain.

Moreover, we have many untouched destinations that would appeal to tourists, such as the Mountain Province, but it's difficult to go there because of difficult road conditions and the lack of accommodation. Hence, tourism infrastructure needs to be built and improved on.

If I had my way to improve image of the Philippines, I would... address safety and security issues as it is a concern in some provincial areas. Travellers have to be assured of their safety so that countries will not issue travel advisories against the Philippines.

Destination Philippines

NEWS IN A MINUTE

1 Okada Manila

This 44ha integrated resort in Manila's Entertainment City boasts three luxury hotels with a total of 993 keys. Amenities include an indoor night club and beach club enclosed in a glass dome for up to 4,500 guests, touted to be the biggest in South-east Asia, a massive glass corridor housing more than 50 luxury brands and 21 restaurants.

2 Discovery Primea Hotel

A member of the Preferred Hotels and Resorts LVX Collection, Discovery Primea has 141 rooms, with half of the suites fully-equipped with kitchen and laundry facilities meant for longer-staying guests.

Hotel facilities include a beauty salon and a 20m-heated infinity pool. Rooms have PressReader – digital access to newspapers and magazines worldwide – high-speed Internet access, iPod/iPad docks, a pillow menu, and Nespresso machine.

3 Midori Clark Hotel & Casino

Located in the Clark Freeport Zone in Pampanga province, the new 111-

room Midori Clark Hotel & Casino is the first five-star hotel in the Central Luzon region.

Facilities include five F&B options, a gym, a spa and an event hall for 450 pax on the second floor of the Midori Entertainment Mall.

4 Coast Boracay

The 71-room Coast Boracay, located at station two, features a 19m-long swimming pool, two function rooms and four F&B outlets. Several metres from Coast Boracay is its sister property, Blue Marina, which is home to 12 bungalows.

5 Surfing

Surfing is set to become a major tourism product as the Department of Tourism plans a partnership with an Australian company to certify surf instructors in Baler, Aurora, Zambales, Mati in Davao Oriental and other surf destinations.

Also in the pipeline is a national criteria for certifying, classifying and accrediting resorts, surf camps and training facilities, apart from requiring them to have the essential

teaching equipment and gear as well as emergency rescue and crisis response capabilities.

6 Halal tourism

A growing number of tour operators, hotels and restaurants in the Philippines are joining forces to offer halal food, mosque visits and other Muslim-friendly products.

Products to watch out for include a dedicated Muslim Visitor Guide by the Department of Tourism in partnership with Singapore-based CrescentRating and sister brand HalalTrip.

7 TCP's tourism programme

The Tourism Congress of the Philip-

ines (TCP) will build a database of prospective employees that hotels, travel agents and hospitality industry employers can access.

The database will be created from the resumes submitted during the annual jobs fair – held on October 14 in Luzon, and November 28 in the Visayas and Mindanao – launched by the TCP this year, where qualified job seekers will be matched with potential employees.

TCP will also work with the Commission on Higher Education and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority to see how tourism-related subjects can be integrated into the curriculum in schools and provide skills training to all towns.



TRIED AND TESTED

Cebgo's ATR 72-600

Rosa Ocampo takes a seat onboard Cebgo's newest ATR 72-600 turboprop aircraft on the Manila-Boracay route and enjoys a flight that exceeds her expectations in terms of comfort and convenience

WHAT After taking delivery of its first ATR 72-600 in mid-October, Cebu Pacific (CEB) has 15 more orders for delivery over the next four years. These ATR 72-600s will progressively replace its subsidiary Cebgo's current fleet of eight ATR 72-500s, with an option to order 10 more.

Of the Philippines' 100-plus airports, only 30 of them can accommodate bigger aircraft such as the Airbus. Smaller aircraft like the ATR 72-600 will enable Cebgo to grow its inter-island ambitions to serve emerging destinations like Marinduque, Roxas City, Calbayog, Ormoc and Masbate from its Cebu hub.

WHY The new turboprop's value to Cebgo is apparent, but what about for passengers like me? The answer lies in its Armoria cabin.

The ATR 72-600 is the same size as the ATR 72-500 (which is configured at 72 seats), but has a bigger passenger capacity at 78 seats. The ATR 72-600 also boasts more efficient operations with 50 per cent less fuel consumption than bigger aircraft and a small size that enables it to land almost anywhere.

Seats in the ATR 72-600 are in the 2-2 configuration. I notice the seats are wider to offer more legroom and comfort. It is also interesting that the back of each seat



has been tweaked so that the magazine rack now sits on top rather than at the bottom, which added legroom.

The overhead cabin is also 10 per cent larger, so passengers can stash their roller bags in the bin instead of checking them in, a feature especially welcomed for short-haul flights to save time and hassle from waiting at the carousel for checked bags upon landing.

The ceiling is high enough for people

over 1.8m in height to move around comfortably, although they have to bend to take their seats. But I do not see that as an issue for a short-haul flight.

HOW Cebgo's 80-minute flight from Manila to Caticlan and return trip were both comfortable. The experience was no different to flying in a larger airplane, and I never once felt I was on a much smaller aircraft.



When I asked a companion, an aviation writer, on the noise level inside the aircraft, he said it was "pretty quiet". Apparently, the ATR has reinforced the fuselage to reduce vibration from the engine and synced both the propellers so that it would be quieter and cause less vibration.

The ATR 72-600 is a time saver and extremely convenient. We landed in Caticlan Airport, located just a few minutes away from the jetty for the boat ride to Boracay Island. Had we flown in a bigger aircraft, we would have to land at Kalibo Airport and take another two-hour bus ride to the jetty.

VERDICT Turboprops are sometimes associated with old aircraft and generally suffered a worse image in terms of comfort and noise. However, my experience onboard Cebgo's Manila-Caticlan-Manila flight debunked all that misconceptions. I'll be happy to fly in an ATR 72-600 again.

Destination China

Not wanting to be perceived as merely a cultural destination, the Chinese capital is diversifying its products to attract wider tourist segments, writes **Prudence Lui**



Beijing's 798 Art District

Old capital, new ways

With a history that goes back more than 3,000 years and such iconic landmarks as the Great Wall and Forbidden City, Beijing has long been regarded as a cultural capital on the global tourism stage but industry players are increasingly eager to cast the destination in a new light.

Song Yu, the chairman of Beijing Municipal Commission of Tourism Development, believes it's high time to override the perception of the Chinese capital as just a cultural destination.

He said: "Beijing has much more to offer visitors than historic sites. We have created new segments like wellness travel and introduced art performances to provide a taste of the local culture."

Seeking a more diverse and innovative

product portfolio for Beijing beyond its "traditional cultural drawcards" is Arthur Liu Hui-yuan, China International Travel Service's (CITS) deputy general manager, head office, inbound tour headquarters. Although Beijing once reigned as the top choice for international visitors to China, he has observed a 15-20 per cent drop in both international group sizes and numbers in recent years.

Liu elaborated: "(Visitors) have reduced interest in China as it is mainly promoted as a sightseeing destination with an emphasis on culture, as compared to a leisure destination like Bali. Travellers today are showing a greater interest in leisure holidays filled with activities."

CITS in 2015 established a destination promotion office in Beijing to drive new

products such as the Grand Canal boat tour that starts in Beijing and ends in Hangzhou.

By revamping products to emphasise leisure sightseeing and enjoyment and of shorter duration, Liu hopes to rekindle interest in Beijing from the European and American markets.

He added: "We have also created a guided walking tour within the Forbidden City, targeting FITs with lower prices. From an agent's perspective, we should also be open-minded to new travel trends such as hiking and trekking."

On a positive note, Beijing's expanding infrastructure has enabled tour operators to offer a wider variety of tours encompassing the city and its surroundings. Elaine Zeng, Century Holiday International Travel Beijing's general manager, lauded the improved MTR subway connectivity in helping to move travellers – especially FITs – beyond Beijing.

Zeng added: "For the past two years, the city sees hardly any major new attractions, but the surrounding areas abound with new attractions such as the Gubei Water Town and the upcoming Universal Studios at Tongzhu."

Depicting life during the Qing Dynasty, the 9km² Gubei Water Town has restaurants, hotels, guesthouses and retail shops, in addition to martial arts performances and activities such as paper-cutting and kite-making. Available during March and October is also a night tour that takes visitors to climb the Simatai Great Wall. An express bus service was launched in September, connecting Dongzhimen to the water town within two hours.

Destination in numbers

3.1 million

The total number of international visitors to Beijing in the first nine months of 2016, 0.6 per cent less than the same period last year

11.1%

The negative growth recorded in the France market in the first nine months of 2016

1.3 million

The number of international arrivals staying in star-graded hotels from January to September 2016, up 1.8 per cent year-on-year

Viewpoints

What are the challenges in promoting Beijing?



Elaine Zeng,
general manager,
Century Holiday
International
Travel Beijing

We would like to open up to the Indian market but visa and a lack of direct air links

are challenges. Moreover, the appreciating yuan has driven up the cost of travel in China, so travellers might prefer to travel to Europe or South-east Asia instead. Last but not the least, the worsening air pollution also affects arrivals.



Alex Lee, general
manager, Miramar
Travel, Hong
Kong

The currency undermines Beijing's competitiveness as neighbouring destinations like

Thailand offer better prices. Moreover, we've been promoting Beijing since the 1980s as a destination for older travellers. But the Beijing Tourism Bureau has started marketing the city's gourmet and dining culture so it may be able to lure younger travellers there.

Come 2019, Tongzhou, also in the outskirts of Beijing, will be home to the country's first Universal Studios theme park.

As well, Beijing itself is starting to see a more vibrant product landscape, noted The Peninsula Beijing's general manager, Joseph Sampermans. "Beijing is much more than a historical site – little museums are now starting to spring up along with interesting tours of historic *hutongs*. The government also promoted tourism in the Wangfujing tourist area by organising and supporting musicals and branded festivals. Moreover, ski resorts in Beijing's surrounding area is easily accessed by bullet train," he remarked.

However, too much of a good thing would dilute the branding of Beijing too. Sampermans concluded: "Tourism diversity could be confusing if we do too much of it. It would be best (for agents) to focus on what they know best, and shortlist about six key ideas (in Beijing)."

Destination China

Issue of the day



Entrance fees are still required for some street toilets

Sanitation strategies from the bottom up

Fetid lavatories have been an area of concern for many tourists to China. **Prudence Lui** reports on the revolution that is sweeping through the country's public toilets

It is estimated that China has spent no less than RMB 12.5 billion (US\$1.9 million) on improving the state of public toilets around the country for both visitors and locals.

In a costly nationwide exercise that started last year, Chinese authorities are trying to make its public lavatories more hygienic and cleaner. The aim is to build or upgrade the 57,000 public restrooms nationwide to achieve A-level standards by 2017.

According to the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA), the investment is part of an ongoing three-phase programme that is aimed at building odourless, clean, free and effectively-managed restrooms for travellers and locals alike.

This covers all toilets at popular tourist attractions, transport hubs, rural scenic spots, restaurants and entertainment centres.

In 2015, a total of 22,009 toilets were built across the country, which exceeded last year's target by 4.67 per cent.

Meanwhile, the 2016 target is to build 17,000 new restrooms, and expand or renovate another 8,000.

CTS International Science-Technology & Culture Exchange, director, Ng Hi-on, added: "Toilets are a key concern for visitors, especially for ladies. Over the last

decade, China has been improving both facilities and environment. Standards of management vary; they usually depend on local authorities. It's not guaranteed that toilets will be well operated in first-tier cities and vice versa in village areas."

Exo Travel China's managing director Olivier Marchesin shared similar observations: "Before China hosted the Olympic Games 2008, a big national drive was launched to improve the facilities, at least in the big cities. A star-rating programme of the toilets was created, and it had some effect. (However), in the country's smaller cities and at some stops on the road, I think not much progress has been made."

Marchesin added: "I think that the ongoing upgrade is a good thing, but much needs to be done in terms of facilities to make restrooms cleaner. The campaign will be useless unless an educational programme is introduced to teach users to leave the place clean after they use the facilities. Such hygienic behaviour should be something natural."

Ng concluded: "There are definitely less fee-based toilets now and I think CNTA needs to educate tourists (to let them know) what has been done so far so that visitors know what to expect."

MY WAY



Joseph Sampermans

General manager, The Peninsula Beijing

What are your current challenges? Beijing as a market has not fully recovered after the heavy pollution in 2013. Rates are still under pressure even though occupancy has picked up over the last year, while corporate business declined altogether due to the economic slowdown.

There is also a continued increase in hotel room inventory in the five-star segment. From 12 five-star hotels in 2007, this number has grown to almost 40. Opening next year will be a Bulgari and Mandarin, along with three other five-star hotels in the pipeline.

Another challenge – which is not new or specific to the hotel business – but perhaps more pressing in Beijing is qualified staff. With low unemployment levels and until recently a one-child policy, the service industry is not a first choice of work for many of the younger generation. Even if they are interested, motivation levels are not high, which results in high turnover rates. These people are usually between 20-30 years old and have only worked for two years.

But we expect things to improve. Firstly, as China changes from an export to a service economy, we

will have a larger talent pool due to reduction of labour in other industries.

Secondly, the infrastructure is improving. There are more metro lines, more bullet train lines (to ski resorts) and a new airport (Terminal 4 has a capacity of approximately 100-120 million passengers annually). In addition, the biggest Universal Studios will open in Beijing and the Winter Olympics is coming in 2022.

If I had my way to improve things, I would... put a cap on future hotel development until occupancies pick up. I would also work with learning and development institutions to set up a vocational 'dual' hotel school system, where students can learn and work so that they will enter the workforce more qualified and motivated.

Moreover, I would work with private and government parties to find ways to increase the promotion of the things Beijing has to offer to a larger audience. Besides the many heritage sites and cultural offerings, the city has developed a vibrant entertainment scene, with very good restaurants, bars and a Blue Note jazz club.

TRIED AND TESTED

China World Hotel, Beijing

This Shangri-La property updated its hardware recently and its higher level of comfort makes **Prudence Lui** feel that it is well-deserving of its five-star accolade

LOCATION The hotel scores highly on its convenient location. The towering property – perched atop the China World Trade Centre complex in Beijing’s CBD – affords direct access to the Jianguomen Station underneath it.

It took me less than five minutes to walk from the hotel lobby, through the China World Mall, and reach the station’s underground entrance without being exposed to the elements outside.

ROOMS The redesigned guestrooms and suites were relaunched in April 2016, while the Horizon Club Rooms will be renovated in late 2016.

I was impressed by the fresh and contemporary layout of my spacious 44m² Premier Room the moment I stepped inside.

Compared with my last stay here seven years ago, the room is comparatively brighter and more stylish after the revamp. There is also a variety of lighting options to change the ambience of the room in accordance with my mood.

I liked the oversized work desk that came with multiple USB plugs, and its design provided ample space for business travellers’ needs. Also worth a mention are the all-marble bathrooms that came with deep-soaking tubs and power showers which helped me to relax after a long day.

Moreover, there was a Honeywell air purification unit installed, featuring the latest PM2.5 air filtration technology to ensure fresh, clean air for guests to



breathe no matter the air quality outside.

FACILITIES Horizon Club Lounge – also the city’s largest executive lounge – has been relocated to the third floor to reside in the space formerly occupied by a Japanese restaurant.

The 756m² lounge can seat 130, with a library and a dining room. There is also a 500m² function area that comprises six meeting rooms, and is suitable

for groups of six to 16 pax. Moreover, the lounge is connected to an exclusive driveway separate from the hotel’s main entrance, offering private access for guests.

For MICE facilities, the Conference Hall boasts new carpeting and lighting and can hold 2,000 pax.

SERVICE The well-trained and attentive staff were readily on hand to assist guests. Check-in was smooth too.

VERDICT The brand speaks for itself, and the staff paid attention to details and guests’ needs. I also liked the new club lounge for its tranquil and contemporary ambience.

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NEWS IN A MINUTE

1 Hainan Airlines
Hainan Airlines will launch the first-ever Las Vegas-Beijing route on December 2, 2016. This thrice-weekly service will initially operate Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays on Boeing B787 Dreamliner.

The carrier also started Beijing-Manchester in June 2016. Earlier this year, the carrier introduced routes such as Beijing-Tel Aviv and Beijing-Calgary.

2 The Peninsula Beijing
After a US\$123 million makeover, The Peninsula Beijing now features only 230 suite-style rooms instead of the original 525 rooms. Room sizes now start at 65m² and are one of the largest in town.

The property is also the first in China to offer a 24-hour check-in and check-out service to all guests without extra cost, with the process managed in the guestrooms instead of the reception to save time and hassle for guests.

3 Hotel Jen Upper East Beijing
Hotel Jen Upper East Beijing has completed a RMB1 million (US\$238,346) panel installation of Jen’s Space, adding a full-glass facade to the 430m², eight metre-high pillar-less ballroom on the lobby floor.
Overlooking tropical landscaped gardens and water features,

the ballroom can accommodate 180 guests for banquets or 250 pax for cocktails. There is also an outdoor space that can seat 100 people.

4 Malaysia Airlines
Malaysia Airlines has been progressively outfitting its 15 Airbus A330-300 aircraft with new business class seats since March 2016.
Based on the delivery schedule, three aircraft flying between Kuala Lumpur and Beijing/Shanghai will be equipped with the new seats from August 28, 2016. These newly configured A330s will have 27 business class seats and 263 in economy.

Apart from the 20-inch wide seat being able to transform into a fully flat 76-inch bed, other features include direct aisle access for 90 per cent of the seats and a 16-inch touchscreen for inflight entertainment.

5 Kempinski Hotel Beijing Lufthansa Center
The 488-room Kempinski Hotel Beijing Lufthansa Center has just started its grand refurbishment in September. The guestrooms, all-day dining restaurant, a Japanese restaurant, as well as two existing presidential suites will undergo a makeover, which is expected to last from about a year to 18 months.



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GOOGLE'S TRAVEL PUSH FORCES CHANGE IN ONLINE SPACE

As the Internet giant expands its ever-increasing suite of travel products, online travel players, especially those in metasearch, are being forced to react to the looming threat. Observers and studies conducted point to the rise of the 'mega meta-OTAs' as a result. Meanwhile, Google states on record their intention to never become an OTA themselves.



THAILAND SETS RECORD STRAIGHT FOR MOURNING PERIOD

The Tourism Authority of Thailand has made clear the appropriate measures needed to be taken during the period of mourning being observed in Thailand in the wake of King Bhumibol Adulyadej's passing. This comes as confusing and even conflicting reports surface on what the right behaviour is expected of foreign tourists.



ASIAN TRAVELLERS SHIFT INTEREST TO 'LESS SENSITIVE' EUROPEAN CITIES

Recent terror incidents in a number of popular European destinations, such as France, Belgium and Germany, have dented overall Asian interest in the region and created new favourites on travellers' wishlists. Emergent winners include Australia, New Zealand, Spain, Switzerland as well as cities such as Prague and Budapest.

WHO'S SAYING WHAT

Instagram



Team TTTG Asia toasting to another successful production of ITB Asia's Show Daily held at Singapore's Sands Expo and Convention Centre. [#TTGAsia2016](https://twitter.com/TTGAsia2016)

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



TRAVEL CORP LAUNCHES VOLUNTOURISM PARTNERSHIP WITH ME TO WE

All seven brands under The Travel Corporation, including names such as Trafalgar, Contiki Holidays and Insight Vacations, alongside the company's non-profit arm TreadRight Foundation, are partnering with social enterprise Me to We to launch volunteer trip extension options for travellers heading to India, the Ecuadorian Amazon and Kenya. Interested parties can book the tours operated by Me to We through Travel Corp agents.



NEW CLASS OF ROYAL CARIBBEAN SHIPS GO GREEN

Royal Caribbean Cruises has signed a MoU with shipbuilder Meyer Turku for a new class of ships under the project name "Icon", with two ships expected to be delivered in 2022 and 2024. These Icon ships will be powered by liquefied natural gas and will introduce the use of environmentally-friendly fuel cell technology to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions.



INDIGO'S CHILD-FREE ZONES TAKE OFF AMID CONTROVERSY

Indian LCC IndiGo has introduced child-free Quiet Zones (rows 1-4 and 11-14) onboard their flights, flying into controversial territory with regard to whether such policies are discriminatory. According to the budget airline, children under the age of 12 are forbidden from these premium seats that are catered to business travellers who need a quiet environment to do work. A similar scheme was introduced by both LCCs Scoot and AirAsia X earlier.



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TTG Travel Trade Publishing is a business group of TTTG Asia Media

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BPA TTTG Asia is a product by TTTG Travel Trade Publishing, a business group of TTTG Asia Media. It is mailed free on written request to readers who meet predetermined criteria. Paid subscriptions are available to those who do not meet the criteria. Annual airmail subscriptions are US\$180 to Asia and US\$199 elsewhere. Cover price US\$5.
MCI (P) 098/09/2014 • PPS 619/02/2013(022926)

Printed by Times Printers Pte Ltd
16 Tuas Avenue 5, Singapore 639340

Travel Hall of Fame

Since 2002, TTTG Asia Media has honoured luminaries that have won the prestigious TTTG 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)
- Qatar Airways (2016)
- Thai Airways International Public Company Limited (2016)
- Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (2016)

TTG Asia Media is pleased to announce that it has set up a virtual TTTG 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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