



View from the top

Thatcher Brown, president of Genting Hong Kong's Dream Cruises, tells **Raini Hamdi** how he's making Asia's first luxury cruise line a dream come true



Airport experience of the future

Tourism at World Heritage Sites

A new Bintan takes shape



Tourism's Go-getters

Agile travel and hospitality players are capitalising on the global Pokémon Go craze in their marketing. Have they reaped tangible benefits from the game and will this hit app transform travel?

TTG Asia takes a closer look

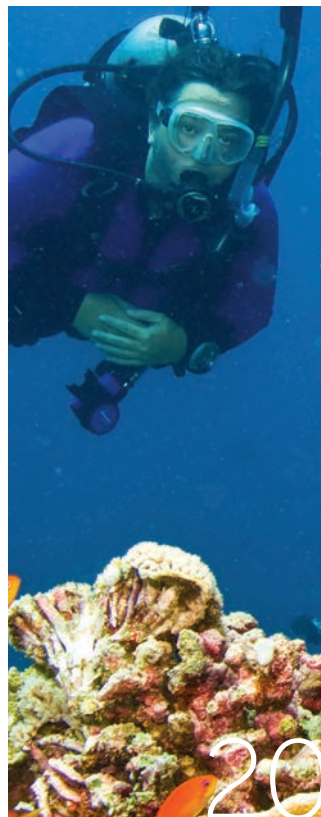


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World Heritage Sites



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Let's catch 'em all in tourism



And herein lies the beauty of Pokémon Go and its relevance to travel: whether you are a proponent or critic of this game, this hit mobile app also promotes wanderlust, getting players to move around and explore new places and routes.

Unless you live under a rock, it's almost impossible to miss the hype Pokémon Go has unleashed around the world in the last two months. Based on the 1990s game but levelled up with the latest technology, this augmented reality (AR) game has taken the world by storm since its release in more than 70 countries.

Thanks to its virality, there are now more people than usual walking around with their eyes locked on their phones, raking up Poké-related complaints of people walking into traffic, reckless driving and even causing stampedes. But the Pokémon Go craze has also spurred novel services such as private car/motorbike services to chauffeur Pokéholics to nab the elusive Snorlax or Dragonite.

Seeing the possibility of attracting existing and new visitors through the game, Singapore Wildlife Reserves promptly hatched Pokémon-related lures and prizes (see pages 8-9). While some people may visit the wildlife parks just to hunt for the animated characters, the management hopes that in the process of roaming the grounds players get to bond together and, of course, learn and appreciate the majestic real-life beasts standing in front of them.

In Thailand, the enterprising managing director of Phuket Holiday Tour, Yongyuth Chankul, himself a Pokémon Go player, reaped unexpected benefits from launching Pokémon hunting tours. He rolled out promotional material in Thai with the domestic clientele in mind, but several foreign travellers also signed up for the Pokémon tours.

At the end of the experience, these French and

German tourists told Yongyuth that they had fun catching the virtual monsters while visiting the major landmarks of Phuket. "Phuket has some unique Pokémon characters different from those back home," these travellers told Yongyuth.

And herein lies the beauty of Pokémon Go and its relevance to travel: whether you are a proponent or critic of this game, this hit mobile app promotes wanderlust, getting players to move around and explore new places and routes.

While earlier AR devices like Google Glass have faded following a much-lauded debut, will such a fate await Pokémon Go? And how will it compare with virtual reality, which has been adopted by several tourism pioneers in their marketing strategies too (see page 16)? Only time would tell, but this mobile hit has changed societal expectations of how information is presented and assessed, so there is a real chance of it influencing successors in the gaming and non-gaming fields alike.

Meanwhile, for travel industry players who are less enamoured with the game, they can consider branding themselves as no-Go zones, just as how some resorts have positioned themselves as adults-only getaways.

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COMING UP



SERVICED RESIDENCES Amid industry consolidation and competition from the sharing economy, how are serviced residences staying sharp in the pursuit of extended stays?

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MALAYSIA Penang (right) comes of age, boosted by stronger destination marketing and a growing roster of cultural events and festivals that put it on the international tourism map



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Analysis

Asian travellers no longer regard the UAE as just a transit stop or business travel location, enticed by an expansion in its mid-market hotel supply as well as new offerings. **TTG Asia** reports

The Middle East is seeing Asian travel markets grow in importance as destinations in the UAE, Qatar and Oman increasingly establish themselves as leisure spots.

“Asian travellers into the (Middle East) continue to increase year-on-year, with particularly strong interest from India and China,” said Rustom Vickers, vice-president for development, Dusit International.

Dusit’s expansion into the Middle East is driven by “the solid dynamics of the regional hotel industry, coupled with a young and increasingly affluent population that will support growth over the long term,” Vickers added.

Thirayuth Chirathivat, CEO of Centara Hotels & Resorts, added that the region’s draw lies partially in its geography.

“This ‘middle ground’ between east and west with hundreds of millions of potential customers within a very acceptable flying time (will) be a continued magnet,” he commented.

Malaysian outbound agents selling the Middle East said interest has steadily risen for Dubai and Abu Dhabi as holiday destinations over the last five years due to the growing number of attractions.

They sell tours combining Abu Dhabi and Dubai, and the main attractions include shopping, desert safaris and city tours featuring the architecture and iconic buildings such as Burj Al Arab Jumeirah and Burj Khalifa.

Karan Anand, relationships head at India’s Cox & Kings, agreed: “Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Qatar are no longer only transit destinations as they are visited by leisure tourists in large numbers.

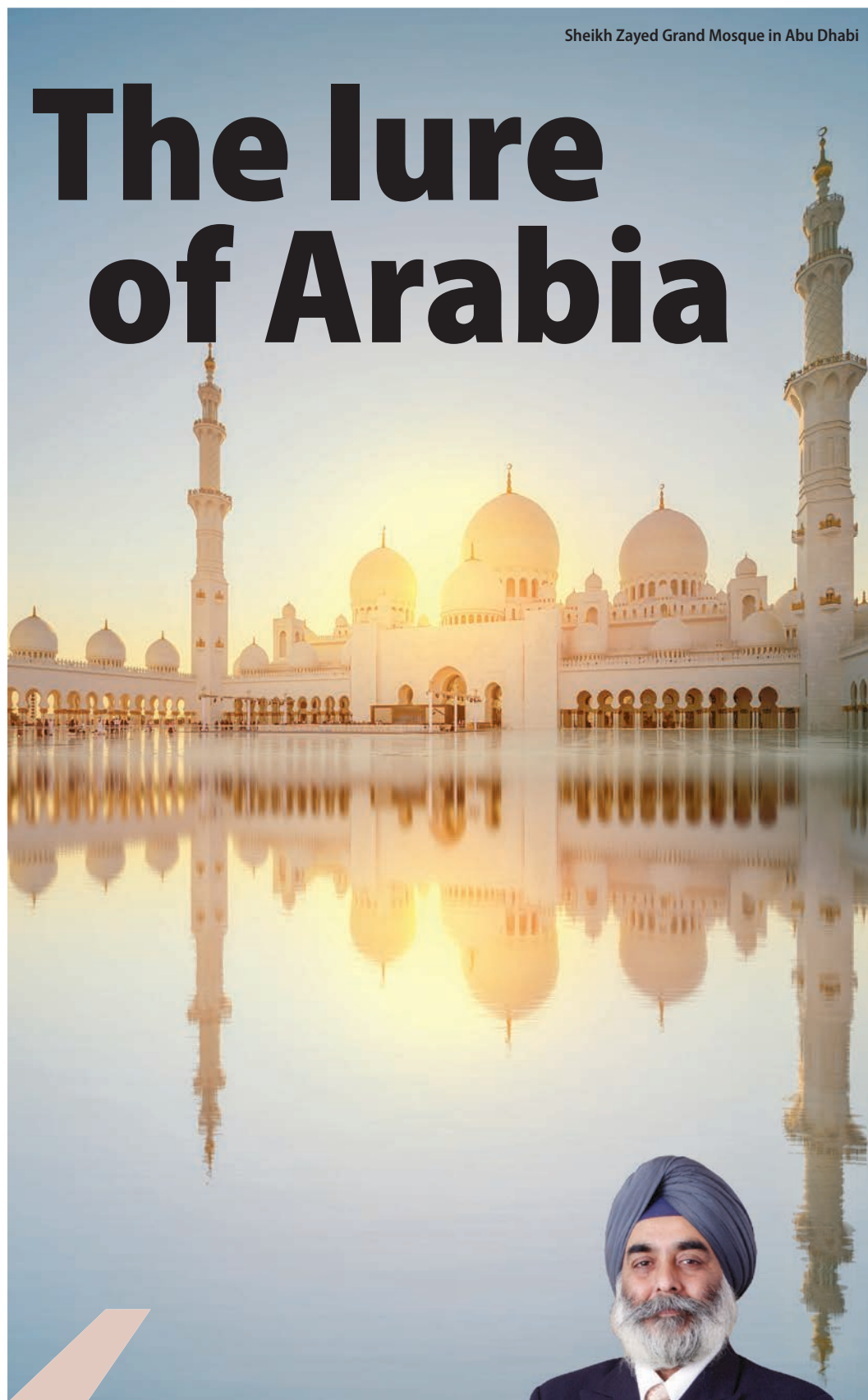
“The emirates have become an amalgamation of varied activities and experiences, thus breaking the stereotype of them being mostly visited for corporate trips,” he said, pointing to existing attractions like underwater aquariums in Dubai, kitesurfing and scuba diving in Qatar, falcon shows in Ras-Al-Khaimah and Islamic art in Abu Dhabi.

As well, theme parks such as Ferrari World Abu Dhabi and Bollywood Parks Dubai (opening in October) have captured interest from Indian travellers, outbound travel chiefs told *TTG Asia*.

Similarly for the Japanese market, “unique architecture and entertaining theme parks in Dubai and Abu Dhabi have really caught the eye of Japanese tourists,” according to Yoshio Mogi, president of Trans Global Tour.

Mogi said: “The Middle East has done a lot to improve its stereotypical image of being a ‘desert,’ which has enabled it to reach out to new target markets.”

Natsumi Suzuki, sales executive at Destination Consultants,



Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi

The lure of Arabia

The emirates have become an amalgamation of varied activities and experiences, thus breaking the stereotype of them being mostly visited for corporate trips.

Karan Anand
Head – relationships
Cox & Kings

shared that some Japanese clients are requesting transits in the hub cities of Dubai, Doha and Abu Dhabi for sightseeing. “With so many hotels and new attractions opening there each year, visitors can see something new every time they go.”

Australia’s Intrepid Travel, which specialises in small group adventure travel, also sees Dubai as a rising star. Said destination manager for the Middle East and Turkey, Daniella van Haltren: “Our Dubai

stopover has been the real surprise this year with growing sales, particularly for solo female travellers. Travellers are booking this trip as a standalone destination, reinforcing our belief that there’s more to Dubai than meets the eye.”

And as Dubai gears up to host the 2020 World Expo with more tourism-related infrastructure, agents are expecting that this high-profile event will garner greater worldwide interest for the city.

Greater affordability is another factor driving demand for holidays in the UAE.

Kerry Tam, general manager at Malaysia’s Parlo Tours, said the growing number of three- and four-star hotels has made the UAE more affordable, improving from five years ago when budget accommodation was scarcer.

Desmond Lee, group managing director of Apple Vacations & Conventions, added that regular promotions by Emirates and Etihad Airways have also made the destination more affordable to many middle-class Malaysians.

India is also enjoying greater airlift to Abu Dhabi and Dubai, in part due to “major airline alliance offering seamless connectivity from tier-one and -two Indian cities,” remarked Anand.

However, outbound agents in Singapore and Hong Kong do not see the same enthusiasm for the Middle East as a leisure travel destination.

“(Our most requested Middle Eastern destinations – Turkey, Egypt, Israel and Dubai) wax and wane in popularity among leisure travellers as security concerns remain one of the main factors determining travel demand to these destinations,” said Jane Chang, head of marketing communications at Singapore’s Chan Brothers Travel.

Dynasty Travel Singapore’s managing director, Clifford Neo, added: “Currently, the Middle East serves only as stopover to the European cities or Africa for leisure travellers. There are also some FITs and MICE groups to Dubai mainly, and some corporate MICE groups to Abu Dhabi.”

Neither is there much growth in the Hong Kong market to the Middle East, noted Charming Holidays, general manager, David Chau, due to “political factors and proximity to Egypt and Turkey.”

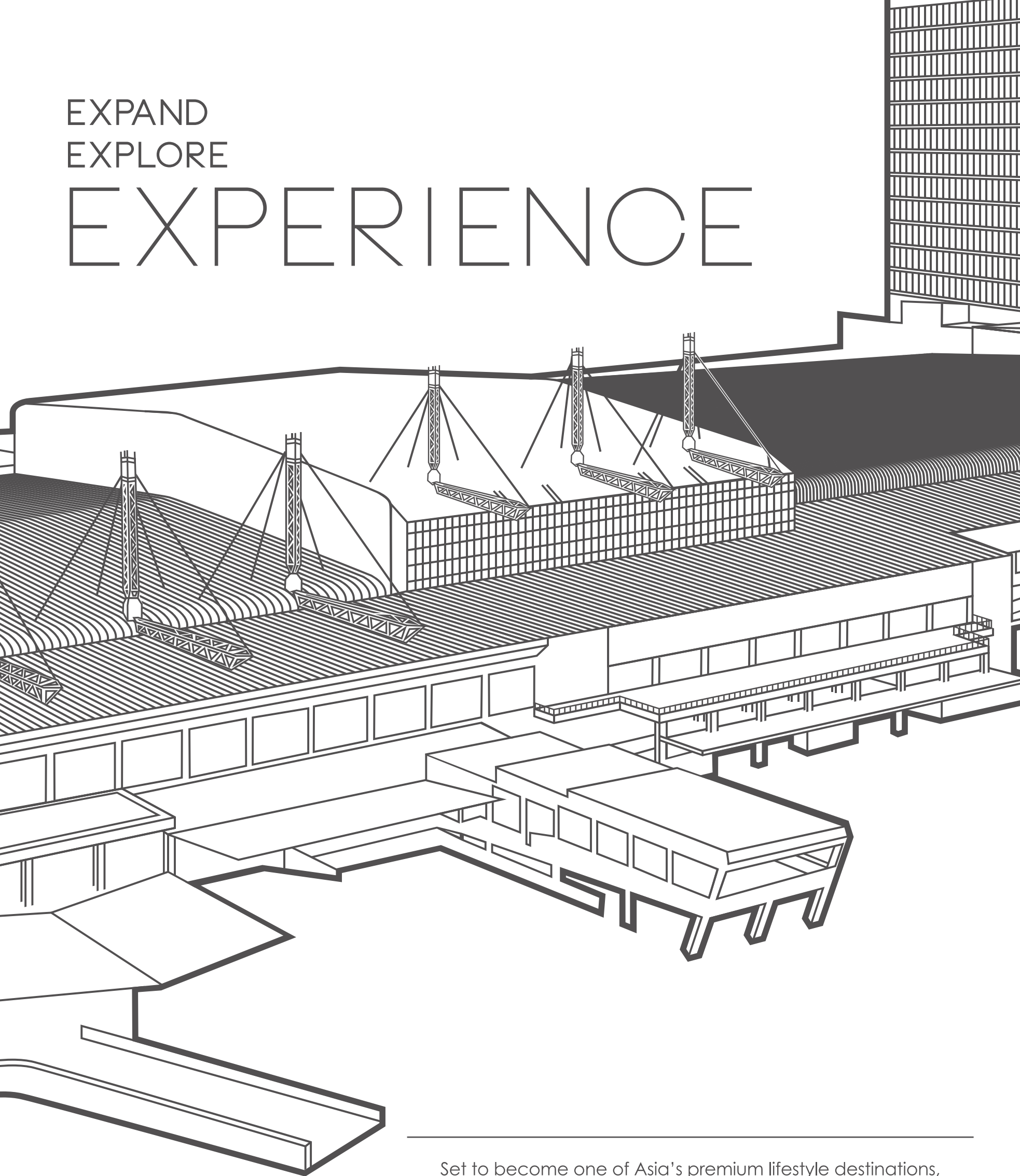
A spokesperson for Dubai’s Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing said a promotional campaign is underway in key Asian markets to encourage inbound tourism. In January 2016, Dubai Tourism also signed strategic partnerships with China’s Union Pay and Tuniu.

Sharjah Tourism’s campaigns and roadshows in China and India have reaped dividends, according to a spokesperson from the NTO.

In 1Q2016, over 71,000 visitors from Asia visited Sharjah and contributed to a 16 per cent hike in Asian guest numbers for the emirate’s hotels.

Hotels like Shangri-La Dubai are also pitching in the efforts to court Asian feeder markets, with strategic activities including agent fam trips planned in several Asian countries in the coming months, the hotel’s director of sales and marketing Dharmendra Sharma revealed.

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Analysis

Rediscovering Persia

Freed from the baggage of sanctions, Iran is coming onto the radar of curious travellers but faces the uphill task of attracting mainstream tourists, finds **TTG Asia**

After economic sanctions on Iran were lifted in January 2016, tour operators are seeing pent-up demand among intrepid travellers for the once-isolated country, although opinions are split whether the destination will see greater footfall from Asia in the near future.

Yoshio Mogi, president of Trans Global Tour Japan, opined that the recent move is casting Iran in a more positive light as a destination steeped in history, culture and world heritage sites.

Among growth signs is AirAsia X re-launching thrice-weekly flights to Tehran from Kuala Lumpur since June, opening up new destinations for Malaysian outbound tour operators.

Said Kerry Tam, general manager of Parlo Tours, which will begin group tours to Tehran in 4Q2016: “We are targeting young people between the ages of 25 and 40 looking for exotic destinations. Iran is a new destination for Malaysia, and we think demand will be for full-board tours.”

Safuan Travel & Holidays is also looking to start full-board group tours to Iran in October, according to general manager Azizi Borhan.

Down Under, the buzz for Iran among Australian agencies is more palpable.

Louisa Virgato, product manager at Abercrombie & Kent Australia, said: “Iran is one of the hottest emerging destinations and has become so popular that most tourism services are fully booked in the country for the peak travel period between September and November this year.

“In terms of sales, Iran is our strongest performing destination in 1H2016, with 28 per cent more bookings than the same time last year,” added Virgato.

Daniella van Haltren, destination manager for Middle East and Turkey for Australia’s Intrepid Group, noted: “Iran definitely appeals, especially to more experienced travellers who have been there, done that and are looking for the next exciting destination to explore.



Vakil Bazaar in Shiraz, Iran

“In the last 12 months we have seen sales on Intrepid Travel’s Iran Adventure trip more than double and we have had to create extra departures to match the demand,” she elaborated.

Elsewhere in Asia, demand for Iran is sizeable but limited to niche segments.

Hong Kong’s Blue Sky Travel, managing director, Angela Ng, told *TTG Asia*: “Clients are mostly sophisticated travellers who have travelled around the world and can afford this kind of trip. As it’s difficult to reach the minimum capacity for group tour departures, some clients come to me for tailor-made FIT programmes.”

Although Destination Consultants in Japan has been arranging visits to Iran for the past six years, sales executive Natsumi Suzuki has not seen a significant uptick in the number of Japanese visitors wanting to visit Iran as they are still concerned about US visa restrictions on people who have visited Iran.

There appears to be little change in de-

mand from Singapore as well, with Vivian Yeo, director, content marketing at Quotient TravelPlanner, stating: “Our clients in general do not have much appetite for Iran and we have not observed any change with the lifting of sanctions.”

Despite its potential, there are still lingering concerns of Iran as an unsafe destination, travel chiefs pointed out.

Mayflower Acme Tours deputy general manager, channel management, Abdul Rahman Mohamed, urged: “The Iranian NTO has to work hard to change negative perception about the country that it is unsafe. In order to do this, it has to work with outbound tour operators and the media to organise fam trips.”

Rajji Rai, chairman, Uniglobe Swift-ravels India, added: “It will take time and marketing efforts to project Iran as a destination in the minds of leisure tourists.”

Reporting by Rohit Kaul, S Puvaneswary, Julian Ryall, Paige Lee Pei Qi, Rebecca Elliot, Feizal Samath and Prudence Lui



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It's game on for tourism players

The arrival of Pokémon Go has taken the world by storm and since its global release in over 70 countries in the last two months, the augmented reality (AR) game has captured the attention of savvy marketers and tour operators as it creates a new tourist class and opportunities to sell travel.

A GPS-based exploration game, Pokémon Go mixes AR with real-world locations, allowing players to view and hunt for the brightly coloured creatures through their smartphones, collect bonus items at designated points called Pokéstops and send their Pokémons into battle at gyms (also real locations where players train the characters).

Pokémon Go's focus on the users physically visiting and interacting with actual places also gels well with travel, as some commentators think the game will encourage players to leave their comfort zone and discover new locales.

Aussie tour operator Gecko Adventures was one of the first to jump onto the craze

by launching a 45-day global Pokémon Go tour to Peru, Galapagos Islands, Egypt and South-east Asia, including stops in Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand.

James Thornton, managing director, Gecko Adventures, said: "All this exploring creates an appetite for adventure and getting behind the scenes of a destination – so a whole new generation has been bitten by the travel bug and wants to get out there and explore the world."

Since launching the tour at the end of July, the tour company has seen a 10 per cent increase in bookings.

An enterprising Thai tour operator has also created Pokémon hunting tours.

Said Phuket Tour Holiday managing director Yongyuth Chankul, a Pokémon Go player himself: "We already have existing Phuket city tours that cover the island's landmarks, many of which are also Pokéstops, so I created tours highlighting sites where monsters are in abundance."

Interestingly, for a tour operator whose main clientele is the domestic sector, the



Pokémon tours have helped to nab foreign tourists too. "All my Pokémon tours marketing is done in Thai, so I was pleasantly surprised to receive enquiries and interest from German and French travellers too," he added.

In the wake of the recent bomb attacks at resort towns, Thailand's Ministry of Tourism and Sports has indicated interest to work with local telecom provider True Corporation to add Pokéstops and gyms to various tourist destinations in the kingdom to promote tourism.

Other Asian attractions and destinations, too, have been quick to explore the marketing benefits of Pokémon Go, seeding their sites with virtual creatures and "lure modules" as a means to draw potential new customers.

Vivian Lee, executive director of sales and marketing at Ocean Park Hong Kong, said: "We noticed over 50 Pokéstops scattered across the park. We (would) release lure modules at these Pokéstops every Friday in August from 16.00 to 20.00 to provide non-stop luring of Pokémons."

Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) has similarly unleashed lures at its two popular attractions – S.E.A. Aquarium and Universal Studios Singapore – for visitors to play the game and get admission discounts.

According to a RWS spokesman, these lures had brought "increased visitorship" to both attractions, with players prolonging their stay and patronising the resort's retail outlets and restaurants.

For Wildlife Reserves Singapore, which manages Singapore Zoo and Night Safari, Pokémon Go presented an opportunity to reach an untapped youth market, chief marketing officer Isabel Cheng shared.

She said: "Of course, real-life animals remain our main draw, but with these initiatives we hope that these youths will come to our parks for Pokémon but stay for the animals."

While Cheng admitted that it is difficult to assess if the game has succeeded in attracting more footfall to the wildlife parks over the weekend when over 500 lures were released, many visitors were observed to be playing Pokémon Go in between checking out the animals, with a number of them doing that as a family.

By offering a 40 per cent discount off its admission fees for the first 100 visitors sporting the colour of the day – red, blue or yellow – each day, Sunway Lagoon in Selangor hopes to attract more than 100 players a day and some 2,700 additional visitors over the six-week campaign period, informed the park's director of marketing Michelle Sonia Gregory.

Likewise, hotels have been quick to ride the fad. Hong Kong's Ovolo Southside has its sights firmly on the millennials when it rolled out a six-week luring campaign, charging zones, and a range of themed cocktails, incentives and prizes, all of which are designed to align with the tech-savvy Gen Y users.

"So far, (the Pokémon Go campaign)

Of course real-life animals remain our main draw, but with these initiatives we hope that these youths will come to our parks for Pokemon but stay for the animals.

Isabel Cheng
Chief marketing officer
Wildlife Reserves Singapore

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Group Director of Sales

Job Role

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- Be knowledgeable of market and industry trends, competitors, and leading customer strategies, both locally and regionally
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Agile travel and hospitality players are capitalising on the Pokémon Go craze in their marketing. Have they reaped tangible benefits from the game and will this mobile hit transform future travel?

in public areas,” he suggested. “Properties can request that their property be removed from the game (as Pokéstops or gyms).”

While it may well be a major passing fad, Pokémon Go’s engagement potential has proven to be immense and it’s likely to spawn more useful apps that allow travellers to explore and interact with the world.

Sentosa Development Corporation’s

branding & communications director Tay Cheng Cheng sums it up: “The popularity of this app comes amid the convergence of technologies with location-based entertainment, and illustrates the direction in which visitor experience is headed.

“This provides valuable learning points to the industry as we look for further ways to innovate and enhance guest experi-

ence, and to leverage digital technologies for self-guided learning and discovery,” she said.

Reporting by Xinyi Liang-Pholsena, Paige Lee Pei Qi, Marissa Carruthers, Prudence Lui and S Puvaneswary

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has provided direct sales to room bookings as well as visits to the hotel’s restaurants. We have also seen a number of new enquiries to the hotel and a strong uptick in search and visitors to our website,” said a hotel spokesperson.

Other hotels like Four Points by Sheraton Puchong in Kuala Lumpur and Kokotel Surawong in Bangkok, given their fortuitous proximity to Pokéstops, are dropping lures and blasting on social media for reasons to visit or book a stay.

However, in Cambodia, the game has been marred by negative publicity after tourists descended on the capital’s S-21 – Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum – where more than 12,000 people were brutally killed during the Khmer Rouge regime. It was host to two Pokémon gyms, four Pokéstops and a series of wild Pokémon.

Museum director, Chhay Visoth, said: “We do not welcome this crazy game because this place is not the place to play a game.” Players were immediately banned from the site.

The game has earned the ire of Malaysia’s Islamic authorities, who declared Pokémon Go a no-go for Muslims in the country, citing concerns of addiction, intrusion into personal privacy and craving for power, among others.

Safety remains a top concern for Patrick Fiat, general manager of Royal Plaza on Scotts, one of the Pokéstops in Singapore’s Orchard area.

“We hope that Poké trainers keep themselves aware of their surroundings and exercise vigilance when playing the game,” he remarked. “We would hate to see any mishap taking place at our Pokéstop.”

Tim Russell, co-founder & chief marketing officer, Representasia, thinks there is “a huge market” for Pokémon Go abstinence too, especially for destinations and attractions frustrated with their unauthorised appearance within the viral game.

“In this case, hotels should advertise themselves as Pokémon-free zones and request that guests refrain from playing





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View from the top

His role is as large as a ship: making Asia's first luxury cruise line a dream come true. Thatcher Brown, president of Genting Hong Kong's Dream Cruises, tells **Raini Hamdi** about it as the first ship, *Genting Dream*, gets set to sail this November

Dream come true

Is Guangzhou the right place to base the first ship of the first Asian luxury cruise line?

You could argue the same thing if you were launching a ship a long time ago. There's always a conversation about who's going to be the first. 'You're launching in Fort Lauderdale, that's crazy!', etc.

Guangzhou and the Pearl River Delta are extremely well-developed in terms of infrastructure, and the demographics indicate to us there is a lot of interest in cruising. We feel confident that the area is ready for us. Part of that confidence stems from us having the benefit of a pathfinder ship there in the *SuperStar Virgo*. Southern China is as much a home turf for us as South-east Asia. This is where people recognise us and understand Genting, where our partners have worked with us over the years with Star Cruises.

And if you look at the cruise distribution in China, so much of it has been focused on the east, in Shanghai and Tianjin. I'd say 70 per cent of the homeporting is out of those two cities. So in fact, there is a natural evolution in the market where people are asking, 'Where do we go next?'

But the Guangzhou base may cause people to misconstrue Dream Cruises as being China-centric rather than Asian-centric. What is the ideal market mix for the first ship, *Genting Dream*?

It will vary based on seasonality. Often, the vacation patterns of our source markets don't overlap.

The perfect mix is having affluent Asian travellers onboard the ship, who want to have a quick two-night getaway or a five-night extended vacation. In summer and peak holiday periods, that mix is going to look 65-75 per cent Chinese and the rest pan-Asian. So part of our offering is to be able to manage that mix carefully.

You aren't worried it will become mainly Chinese at any one time, that too much of any nationality has its disadvantages?

I don't have a worry about that. We are targeting affluent Asian travellers who tend to be more sophisticated, more educated, more knowledgeable about standards – I am more sensitive about being successful in catering to their different luxury needs. Some affluent people want to be discreet, others want to be seen. There is always going to be differences in interests as well. Imagine if you are in Latin America and catering to Brazilians and Argentinians; one parties all night, the other likes going to the spa. So how can we cater to the diverse needs of wealthy multi-Asians?

For us to be able to manage that is critically important. So we need to be able to offer different products to manage a different Asian mix. Our Dream Mansion product (a ship-within-a-ship concept with two floors of exclusive suites, villas and private facilities) on *Genting Dream*, for instance, allows us to cater to different levels of luxury. And as we get more capacity (a second ship, *Genting World*, will debut in November 2017), we can probably offer different products that have dif-

ferent appeal (to different Asians).

What's important is, it's not us who define the brand but the guests, that as the brand builds its personality, the management listens to its target audience, then modifies and organically evolves the brand to suit the needs of the target audience. We have to be adaptable and respond quickly to guests' needs. If you look at the excess of information today, your brand will be left behind if you are not in a constant dialogue with the guest and respond quickly to trends.

What are the challenges of being the first Asian luxury cruise line?

The challenge of recruitment is one. I see supply coming into the market grabbing for resources and, for us, the software is the most important aspect. We want to be the best in the industry and in order to do that, we have to create a process and a culture that embrace development, recognition, reward, etc. And that takes time.

Another challenge is infrastructure related. Port development needs to catch up with capacity development, although many destinations are investing a lot and accelerating their build-up plans, which is terrific. We encourage that, and we're happy to work with the destinations to do that.

porate company to fill a ship is important and we do appreciate large group business, but in general there is this tension between taking the risk and controlling your destiny. We want to keep a healthy, balanced approach.

So we are careful about our partnerships in terms of sales distribution. We



So we are careful about our partnerships in terms of sales distribution. We want partners who are committed to us for the long term and who respect the price integrity and the positioning of our brand.

Dream Cruises is debuting at at time when there are at least nine new-builds coming into the market.

Yes, a lot of capacity is coming in and another of our challenges is how quickly can we educate consumers – for us in the affluent market – on this wonderful cruise alternative.

So we've spoken about the challenges of getting the right people, about port infrastructure development, about the need for us to manage and evolve our brand. One other challenge is how we control our sales distribution, because one of the things I see happening is brands losing control of their identity and integrity through distribution mechanisms like charters, which result in price dumping – and that's not going to help the market to evolve. Of course getting a charter from a large cor-

want partners who are committed to us for the long term and who respect the price integrity and the positioning of our brand.

What is the difference in price positioning between Dream Cruises and Crystal Cruises which Genting had bought?

I consider Crystal to be uber luxury, a lifestyle brand with international clientele and a higher price point. The revenue model is different – the fare is much higher, the cruise length is longer, the onboard spending is different, there are probably more shore excursion opportunities and pre-/post-cruising is important for these guests.

For us, we're kind of entering the luxury market from an Asian perspective if you like. The seasonality of the Asian market makes it a rollercoaster in some ways on

pricing – there's a lot of price volatility. So we hope to come into the market, establish ourselves above the contemporary pack and create stability in our pricing.

Which brings me back to your first question on homeporting in Guangzhou. A lot of the capacity you've just mentioned are homeporting in Shanghai and Tianjin, whereas we see an opportunity and a pioneering advantage in the Pearl River Delta. We also see a luxury positioning as strategic, because it gives us some key advantages.

How sort of ROI is Genting expecting from this investment and how soon?

Well, going by industry standards, the expected ROI is 10 per cent at least, and within six to eight years. Our goal is to accelerate that for our company.

10 NEED TO KNOW'S ABOUT THATCHER BROWN

■ **Who's in your family?** My wife Jenny and I have two daughters aged 14 and 12 who live with us in Hong Kong.

■ **What do you do for fun?** Cooking with my family on weekends. We take turns picking recipes, then go to the local market to buy the ingredients. Then we play our favourite music and prepare the feast together – good times!

■ **What's your ideal vacation?** Besides a Dream Cruise vacation?! My ideal vacation would be taking my whole family to a resort where we could ski in the morning and golf in the afternoon.

■ **How do you book your leisure trips?** My wife represents a high-end adventure travel company called GeoEx so she is the expert in planning our trips.

■ **What are you reading right now?** I am re-reading *Setting the Table* by the renowned restaurateur Danny Meyer.

■ **Favourite food?** Dim sum!

■ **How do you stay healthy?** I have a daily workout routine that I try to follow with discipline. The fact that my wife is a vegetarian, a yoga instructor and makes me drink cold-pressed juices for lunch keeps me healthy.

■ **What's a bad habit you cannot kick?** Dark chocolate, 80 per cent cacao. A guilty pleasure!

■ **A pet peeve, something that never fails to annoy you.** People having conversations on their mobile phones at the table in restaurants.

■ **Most people don't know you...**sang in the Professional Children's Chorus at the Metropolitan and city operas in New York City when I was 12 years old.

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A **Visa** study reveals what Asia-Pacific’s outbound travel will look like in the next decade, while the **Medical Tourism Index** foresees a medical tourism boom in the region

Travelling abroad a norm in APAC by 2025

According to Visa’s recent *Mapping the Future of Global Travel and Tourism* study, some 109 million Asia-Pacific households are expected to go on an international trip once a year by 2025, up 65 per cent from 2015. The report, which forecasts travel and tourism trends over the next decade (2015 to 2025), also found that the average annual spending by households during an overseas trip is likely to rise 8% to US\$5,320.

Key drivers influencing global travel include a growing middle class, greater Internet connectivity, improved transportation infrastructure and an ageing global population.

In Asia-Pacific, households in China (US\$255 billion), Hong Kong (US\$47.4 billion) and Singapore (US\$44.9 billion) are likely to have the largest outbound travel spend by 2025. Meanwhile, emerging markets Indonesia (211%), Vietnam (132%) and India (101%) are likely to see the sharpest increases in spending.

Travel spend among top five APAC markets

Rank	Market	2015	2025	% increase
1	China	US\$137	US\$255.40	86%
2	Hong Kong	US\$26.70	US\$47.40	78%
3	Singapore	US\$22.50	US\$44.90	99%
4	South Korea	US\$21.10	US\$34.30	63%
5	Australia	US\$22.70	US\$30.30	34%
Asia-Pacific total		US\$319.60	US\$568.20	78%

Growing income levels around the world are also contributing to a new global travelling class, with households that make at least US\$20,000 per year accounting for more than 90% of the spending on international travel today. By 2025, it is estimated that nearly half of all global households (945 million) will be within this income range, driving greater international travel and spending, particularly those from emerging markets.

By 2025, travellers aged 65 and above will more than double their international travel to an estimated 180 million trips. These older travellers are able to afford longer trips that provide greater comfort at higher prices. This segment is also most likely to travel for medical purposes.

Top five APAC markets with highest number of international trips by 65+ years old

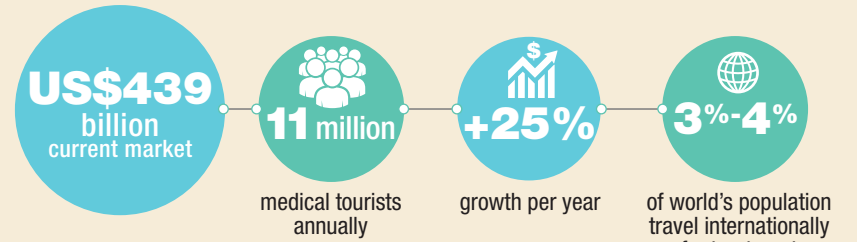
Rank	Market	2015 (thousands)	2025 (thousands)	% increase
1	China	1,862	7,077	280%
2	Singapore	852	3,451	305%
3	Japan	1,318	2,930	122%
4	Australia	1,073	1,931	80%
5	Taiwan	460	1,599	247%

Furthermore, rapid globalisation and technology are driving increased connectivity. More than 340 new airports are expected to be constructed over the next decade, which will create new routes and open up destinations, making international travel more convenient. As well, the prevalence of the Internet and mobile devices are fostering greater spontaneity in travel, and spurring a broader array of personalised travel and tourism options.

Asia emerges a thriving hotspot for medical tourism

Currently, the medical tourism industry is valued at a staggering US\$439 billion, with a projected growth rate of up to 25% year-on-year for the next 10 years to be worth an astronomical US\$3 trillion by 2025 as an estimated 3% to 4% of the world’s population is set to travel internationally for healthcare.

Medical Tourism Index (MTI) has also released its 2016 report, where it lists the top destinations for those seeking high-quality healthcare across the globe. Currently, the US leads in terms of market share when it comes to healthcare travel spending, but in Asia, Thailand, Singapore and South Korea continue to thrive. Both Visa and MTI’s findings also predict that China will overtake US in the top spot due to former’s demand for high-quality healthcare.



2016 MTI overall ranking

1	Canada	76.62	16	Dubai	67.54
2	UK	74.87	17	Jamaica	67.17
3	Israel	73.91	18	Thailand	66.60
4	Singapore	73.56	19	Philippines	66.40
5	India	72.10	20	Taiwan	66.28
6	Germany	71.90	21	Argentina	65.37
7	France	71.22	22	Brazil	65.22
8	South Korea	70.16	23	China	64.78
9	Italy	69.50	24	Poland	63.79
10	Colombia	69.48	25	Abu Dhabi	63.65
11	Spain	68.29	26	Malta	62.97
12	Japan	68.00	27	South Africa	62.20
13	Panama	67.93	28	Egypt	60.92
14	Costa Rica	67.67	29	Mexico	60.70
15	Dominican Republic	67.58	30	Qatar	60.07



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HOTELS



SANCTUM INLE RESORT, MYANMAR

This 94-room property on the shores of the famed Inle Lake will open on October 1. The upscale hotel features an Olympic-sized swimming pool, a 150m² presidential Sanctuary Suite, and F&B establishments The Refectory and Cloister Bar. Other amenities include a 170m² spa complex and recreational room Chapter House for events.



CITADINES HAN RIVER SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

Ascott has debuted its Citadines brand in Seoul with a 149-unit serviced residence. Located near Seonyudo metro station, the building has studio units in three sizes, all of which come with fully-equipped kitchens. Guests can also choose from a menu of services such as laundry and dry-cleaning.



MERCURE SINGAPORE BUGIS

AccorHotels has opened a 395-room hotel near Singapore's Bugis MRT station, offering standard rooms, lofts and suites designed to reflect the country's heritage. Facilities include rooftop bar Sky Deck, western-local fusion restaurant Sauces, an infinity lap pool, three function rooms and an outdoor terrace for events.



DUSITD2 KHAO YAI, THAILAND

The 79-key property, situated at the fringe of UNESCO-listed Khao Yai National Park, is the latest addition to the brand's D2 collection. Aside from facilities like a pool and gym, F&B options include international restaurant Musi Grill and the unique treetop dining pod Cocoon – which boasts a bird's-eye view of the resort and surrounding mountain range.

TECHNOLOGY

TACENTRE.COM VENTURES INTO CHINA'S B2B TRAVEL SCENE

TAcenre.com, the travel wholesale arm of Asiatravel.com, has made its foray into China. Established in South-east Asia since October 2012, the B2B platform has offices opening in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Chengdu, with more offices in second- and

third-tier cities in the pipeline.

Agents can access the Chinese platform (Huidingwang) via TAcenre.cn, which carries the same inventory as the international site with over 500 airlines, 200,000 hotels, and a multitude of activities, packages and car rentals worldwide. Payment options such as WeChat, Alipay and UnionPay are available.

TRANSPORTATION

SCOOT LAUNCHES SINGAPORE-ATHENS SERVICE

LCC Scoot will launch its first nonstop service from Singapore to Europe on June 20, 2017, to the Greek capital of Athens. This is the longest flight operation of any budget carrier with a journey time of 11 hours and flight distance exceeding 10,000km.

Four-weekly flights operated by a Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner will depart from Changi International Airport on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays at 02.00 and arrive at Athens International Airport at 08.30.

Return flights leave Athens on the same days at 12.00 and arrive in Singapore at 04.25 the next day.

APPOINTMENTS



Amber Wilson



Olivier Chavy



Jean-Gabriel Pérès



Steven Greenway



Arved von zur Muehlen



Graham Kiy



Rhys Challenger



Pradtana Tubprayoon

AMBER WILSON

NOW General manager for Asia-Pacific, Silversea Cruises

THEN General manager, sales & marketing, CruiseCo

OLIVIER CHAVY

NOW CEO, Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts

THEN President and CEO, Wilson Associates

JEAN-GABRIEL PÉRÈS

NOW President and CEO, Kerzner International Holdings

THEN CEO, Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts

THOMAS SCHWALL

NOW General manager, The St Regis Langkawi

THEN General manager, Sheraton Deva Golf & Spa

STEVEN GREENWAY

NOW Deputy CEO, U-Fly Alliance

THEN Head of commercial, Scoot

ARVED VON ZUR MUEHLEN

NOW Chief commercial officer, Malaysia Airlines

THEN Senior vice president of commercial network operations, Qatar Airways

GRAHAM KIY

NOW Regional vice president, Greater China, Jumeirah Group and general manager, Jumeirah Nanjing

THEN General manager, Jumeirah Vittavelli

RHYS CHALLENGER

NOW General manager, Mercure Singapore Bugis

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NOW Hotel manager, Manathai Surin Phuket

THEN Resort manager, Furama Hotel Thailand



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TRAVEL TECHNOLOGY By Dannon Har

Virtual selling power

With virtual reality (VR) technology changing fast and devices like the Oculus Rift and Samsung VR Headset becoming commonplace, it is no wonder that the gaming, entertainment and medical training fields have been revolutionised.

The technology is also poised to transform travel. Many tourism players have begun offering VR as part of their business strategy, incorporating the technology as a regular sales and marketing tool to stir up interest and drive engagement with clients.

In October 2015, Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts was one of the first in the hospitality sector to deploy VR-enabled headsets at its global sales office, and has since expanded the VR availability worldwide and rolled out 360-degree video content for devices.

"Agents tell me that they like VR (as it helps them) get a better sense of the hotel. For example, if a hotel claims to be on the beach, it really helps them understand the reality of what that means, and they can better articulate it to their clients, enabling them to sell more," said Sam McDiarmid, director of business development, agency

sales, Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts.

As well, Tourism Australia has made good use of VR to make sights and sounds more palpable by incorporating the technology in its 2016 campaign. According to the NTO, VR helps as an inspirational tool to nudge potential travellers into making a booking decision.

Travel agencies have also embraced VR, with Flight Centre Singapore being the first in South-east Asia to do so in November 2015. The introduction of VR is part of the TMC's plan to provide customers with an end-to-end travel experience that begins in-store, explained its marketing manager Liat Peled.

She said: "We are currently utilising VR to educate, excite and inspire customers to travel, sometimes to a destination they may never have considered before. The idea is to bring our customers closer to the decision making and booking stage, while assuring them of the destination."

More recently, Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group unveiled the first phase of its VR offering in April this year. Besides seeking to build up its content base to cover all the hotel brands



under its umbrella, the group also sees great potential in the corporate and MICE segment, for instance, by providing visualisations of a wedding set-up in their ballroom on VR.

Ariel Talbi, Asia-Pacific managing director of VR production company Takanto Virtual Reality, whose clients include airlines, NTOs and agencies, opines that the tourism sector is seeing a proliferation of VR adopters due to its "natural fit".

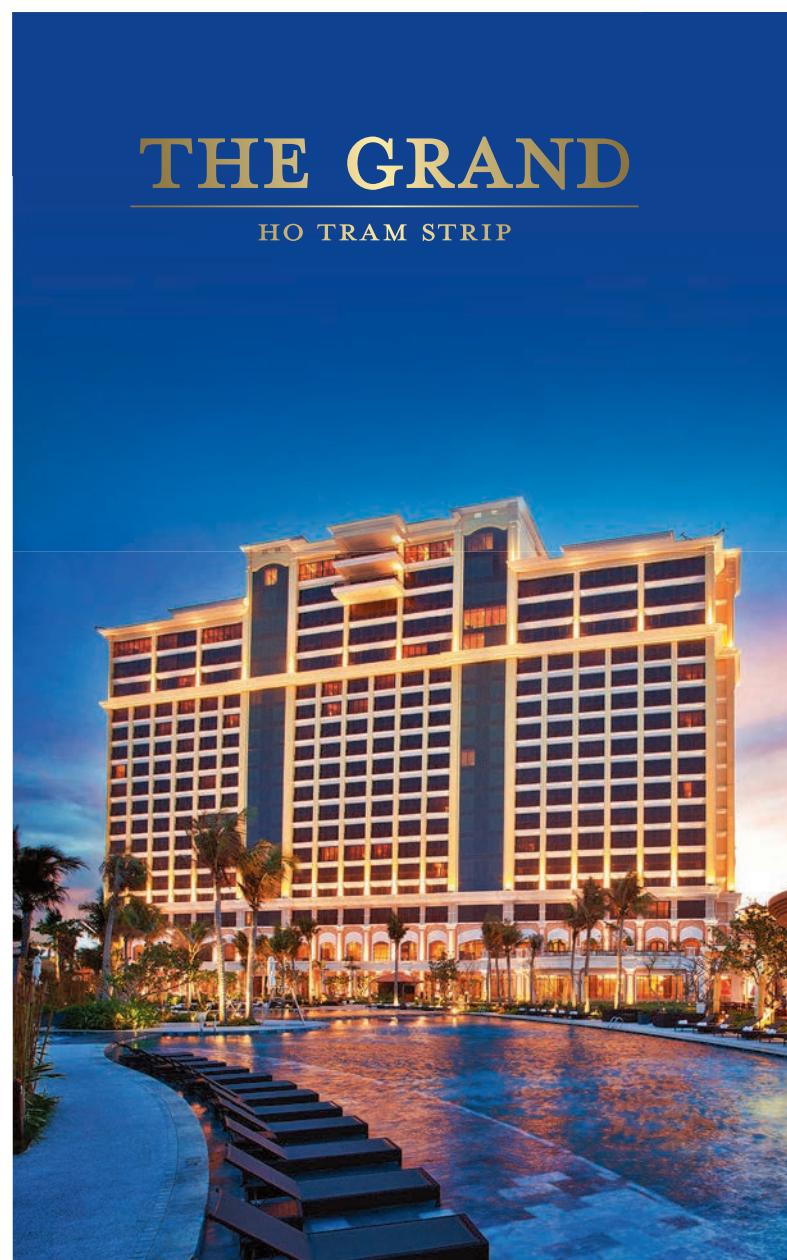
He said: "Travel and tourism have the greatest potential to leverage VR technology as an actual business tool. (For example), VR has introduced a new angle and a unique way to differentiate itself as an advertising platform by offering a sense of 'presence' that classic pictures or videos cannot do."

But investing in VR on a business level is an expensive endeavour, a move that only larger companies can afford for now.

Like other VR adopters, Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group's Asia-Pacific president, Thorsten Kirschke, hopes to get a "positive ROI" out of the company's VR initiative, but acknowledges that can only be achieved in the long-term.

"(By using VR), we remain nimble and flexible in our drive to stay ahead of changing guest expectations and capture new audiences to ensure stronger returns for owners and investors," said Kirschke.

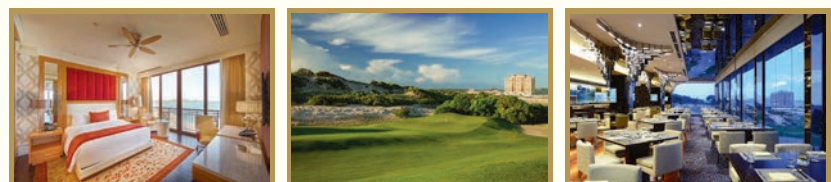
"All signals are strongly indicative that VR is here to stay in the hospitality and travel market."



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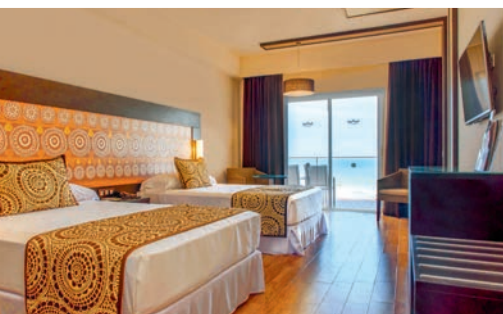
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The resort's impressive lobby is modelled after the Grand Stairway of Opéra National de Paris.

1 Eiffel Tower

At The Parisian Macao, a world of wonder awaits, where some of Paris' most memorable landmarks will create a holiday experience unlike any other. The most striking and most photogenic is none other than the Eiffel Tower. A half-size replica of the original, the Eiffel Tower of The Parisian Macao offers breathtaking views of Cotai Strip from Level 7 and Level 37.

2 Arrive at the Rotunda

Entering The Parisian Macao's lobby, guests will be impressed by the Rotunda beneath a 25-metre dome as well as the replica of the Grand Stairway of the Opéra National de Paris. Inspired by the famous Fontaines de la Concorde, the fountain at the centre of the lobby reflects sunlight and warmth. The opulent ambience at the Rotunda is an inspiration for a guest to explore the rest of The Parisian Macao.

3 Shop in Parisian Style

Shopping gets a glamorous French-style makeover at Shoppes at Parisian, a full-service, duty-free shopping mall designed to replicate the charming streetscapes of five fashionable districts in Paris: Avenue des Champs-Élysées, Galerie Vivienne, Rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré, Avenue Montaigne and Place Vendôme. The 150 boutiques at Shoppes at Parisian are part of the 850 duty-free shops throughout Sands Resorts that are all connected through covered linkways.

4 Delicious Bites

The best of French cuisine comes alive at The Parisian Macao, alongside an equally impressive array of international fare, so that guests get to experience exquisite French gastronomy as well as family treats and traditional delicacies. At Le Buffet, a European marketplace-style dining space with live cooking

demonstrations and mouthwatering displays of fresh ingredients. For a genuine French treat, head over to Brasserie to enjoy classic French dishes and typical French café favourites. The Lotus Palace is the resort's signature Chinese Restaurant where guests have a fantastic selection ranging from Cantonese to provincial Chinese and seafood to dim sum. The 24-hour Market Bistro is a cheerful Asian night-market-style noodle shop featuring freshly prepared, tasty and affordable Hong Kong dishes.

5 The Best Shows

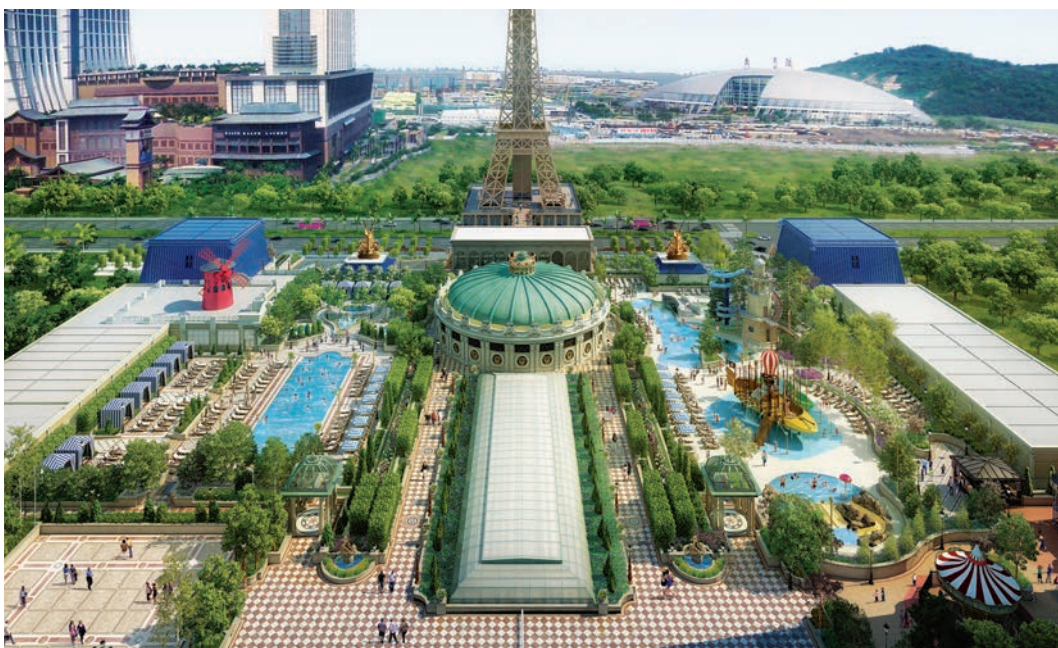
The best in entertainment can be found at the 1,200-seat The Parisian Theatre where the globally acclaimed Thriller Live show is set to bring the King of Pop Michael Jackson's music to life. Premiering in September, it's a blockbuster show not to be missed!

6 Kid's Paradise

Much to the delight of parents and children alike, kids will have their own playground at Qube Kingdom Kid's Play Zone, a 1,803 sqm space featuring a colourful array of indoor and outdoor play amenities to unleash their imagination and spirit of adventure. If that's not enough, thrill-seekers will find the pool deck area and Aqua World an especially enticing option. Overlooking the spectacular Cotai Strip, Aqua World features three separate pool areas and its three attractions — the Kids Slide, Jules Verne Airship and Marie Antoinette Tower — are suitable for all ages.



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Report World Heritage Sites

Living the glory days



>> Singapore Botanic Gardens Blossoming into maturity

Established in 1859, Singapore Botanic Gardens was inscribed a UNESCO World Heritage Site in July 2015, marking a first for the city-state.

Highlights at this tropical garden paradise include the National Orchid Garden, home to the world's largest orchid display with over 60,000 plants and orchids.

Nigel Taylor, group director at Singapore Botanic Gardens and National Parks Board (NParks), said: "Following its inscription, NParks is committed to sustaining Singapore's green legacy through the gardens' site management plan. Measures

such as the protection of the gardens' centuries-old trees have been set in place."

There are also plans to add more orchid varieties to the National Orchid Garden, introduce a new Learning Forest and extend the Jacob Ballas Children's Garden, he shared.

As well, the gardens in April announced it will develop a new Ethnobotany Garden to allow visitors to learn about plants used by indigenous cultures of South-east Asia.

Taylor added: "This will enhance the gardens' role as an educational provider, which is in line with UNESCO's mission."

And since its UNESCO inscription last year, the gardens has recorded an increase

in footfall, said Taylor, and now attracts more than 4.7 million visitors annually.

However, the garden does not rank top among Singapore's must-sees, Ajambar Basmet, director of Chariot Travels noted, urging strong marketing to raise awareness of and leverage the gardens' new UNESCO status.

Likewise, Samson Tan, CEO of GTMC Travel, wants more marketing to promote the gardens, especially at the ground level.

He said: "The venue management needs to sit down with the NATAS in-bound committee to brainstorm new marketing (activities) and get the industry to roll out (the initiatives in a concerted way)." – **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

>> Great Barrier Reef, Australia Wounded coast still a star

The world's largest coral reef, which stretches over 2,000km along the Queensland coastline, continues to be a tourist magnet despite facing a current mass bleaching crisis.

Alex de Waal, CEO of Tourism Tropical North Queensland, said half of the visitors to the site are domestic but the number of international tourists is growing rapidly. Top source market China supplied approximately 200,000 visitors last year, followed by the US and Japan at about 130,000 and 100,000 respectively.

In recent months, the reef has reportedly

been plagued with one of the worst coral bleaching crises in history with at least 35 per cent of corals in the northern and central areas killed.

Professor Terry Hughes, director of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies at James Cook University, stated: "This year is the third time in 18 years that the Great Barrier Reef has experienced mass bleaching due to global warming. The current event is much more extreme than we've measured before."

Nevertheless, Waal emphasised that this environmental issue has "minimal impact on the tourist".

"This doesn't mean the death of the reef. It's like having a sun tan, you get

burnt but don't die. Visitors are still able to see the beautiful colours of the reef."

Caitlin Williams, a spokesperson from the Capta Group, agreed: "We still have huge numbers of people wanting to visit the reef and there is no change in any of the sites that they visit."

Williams added that the reef remains a top "must-do" for any visitor to Queensland.

Likewise, Andy Indra, senior sales manager of Experience Tour Australia, said the reef is still a popular destination and with its identity as renowned UNESCO World Heritage Sites clearly cemented, there is no lack of awareness of this spectacular site. – **Paige Lee Pei Qi**



>> George Town, Malaysia A market for festivals

Penang's George Town has undergone tremendous transformation from its 18th century beginnings as the first British Straits Settlement to become UNESCO listed in 2008 and globally recognised for its vibrant arts and culture scene.

In honour of the UNESCO designation, the George Town Festival was inaugurated in 2010. Every year, the month-long event transforms the city into a stage showcasing local and international acts. The festival attracts some 250,000 visitors annually, both domestic and international.

In addition to the George Town Festival, Penang island also boasts a trio of cultural festivals in the last quarter of the year – the George Town Literary Festival, In-Between Arts Festival and Penang Island Jazz Festival.

Its growing array of festivals aside, George Town's UNESCO status is also deemed advantageous for tour operators.

"The branding is important as travellers will trust an internationally recognised brand more than they would a tour operator. It makes it easier for operators to promote," Manfred Kurz, managing director, Diethelm Travel Malaysia, said.

Henry Ong, head of business development, Holiday Tours, agreed: "The brand-

ing is an endorsement by a world body and it is important for the Caucasian markets such as Australia and Europe since they are travelling from afar to come here."

On what more can be done, Kurz said: "Most of our Penang programmes are based around its heritage. The local government should train more special guides to conduct heritage tours and special interest tours in George Town. There is also room for improvement on the maintenance of the old site."

In 2015, Penang saw a 4.7 per cent increase in arrivals to 683,897 tourists, a feat considering the 6.3 per cent decrease in overall arrivals into Malaysia in 2015. – **S Puvaneswary**

>> Khao Yai, Thailand Lush tourism potential

Located in Thailand's north-east is the country's oldest national park, Khao Yai, which was proclaimed a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005.

Covering more than 2,000km² of forest and grassland, the park teems with natural life and features such as the Haew Narok Waterfall (left) where Leonardo Dicaprio's famed jump in *The Beach* was filmed.

Travel operators interviewed see value in the park's UNESCO status.

Pornthip Hirunkate, managing director – Thailand, Destination Asia, said: "The UNESCO brand is a useful selling

tool in bringing the right kind of exposure – it is also attractive as people aspire to visit renowned destinations."

Samuel Desmier, Abercrombie & Kent's regional managing director for South-east Asia, commented: "It is always a huge draw for travellers planning their vacations in South-east Asia. It's a stamp of approval from the foremost authority on culture and natural beauty, and travellers commonly believe that a UNESCO Site shouldn't be missed."

Khao Yai's developments over the last 10 years have made it a destination "of potential" for the luxury tour operator.

Added Desmier: "If the vineyards in Khao Yai continue to develop, the area has

the potential to become the Napa Valley of South-east Asia. (Together with) its UNESCO status and the small collection of boutique five-star properties such as Kirimaya and Muti Maya, we expect the area to shine in the next five years."

But illegal land encroachment has become an issue for Khao Yai as it grows as a hillside resort location, with the Thai government recently clamping down on properties built in the national reserve.

Pornthip remarked: "Khao Yai is a unique destination in Thailand – currently the state of tourism in and around the park needs to be controlled for the ecological future of the park and its inhabitants."

– **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**



TTG Asia finds out why destinations should not rest on UNESCO laurels as industry players share how the coveted status interplays with tourism in the region

>> Angkor Wat Archaeological Park, Cambodia
A push for conservation

Angkor Wat is undoubtedly Cambodia's largest tourist attraction, drawing more than 2.1 million visitors to explore the ancient temple complex in 2015.

Spanning over 40,000ha, the archaeological park in Siem Reap is home to hundreds of temples dating from the 9th to 15th century, including the iconic Angkor Wat, Bayon and Ta Prohm.

Agents say Angkor is Cambodia's biggest selling point, with its World Heritage badge offering no additional incentive to travellers. "Angkor sells itself," says Exo Travel's Cambodia general manager, Pierre-André Romano, adding that 80 per cent of clients include Angkor in their itineraries. "The challenge is always to sell other elements of Cambodia."

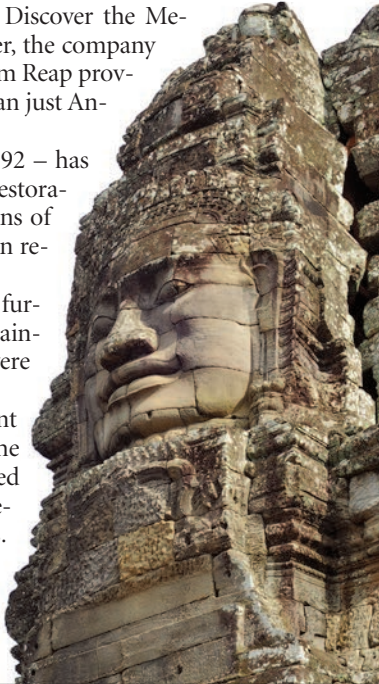
Likewise, Angkor also forms the centrepiece of Discover the Me-kong's itineraries, said CEO Kimhean Pich. However, the company has created tours that showcase the wider area of Siem Reap province to travellers. "We need to show there is more than just Angkor Wat," he added.

Angkor's World Heritage status – awarded in 1992 – has brought with it benefits, such as conservation and restoration efforts. During the last decade, decaying sections of Angkor Wat, Bayon Temple and Ta Prohm have been restored to their former glory, with work ongoing.

In June, the Cambodian government requested further help from UNESCO to assist with restoration training, claiming erosion, tourist traffic and pollution were creating a greater need.

In response to fears raised over whether the ancient structures can cope with heavy visitor volumes, the governing Apsara Authority has installed designated walkways and wooden steps to protect vulnerable areas and promoted the use of bicycles and electric bikes.

In May, all traffic was banned from the front of Angkor Wat to cut down on congestion. – **Marissa Carruthers**



Asia's newly inscribed sites in 2016

Newly inscribed UNESCO World Heritage Sites this year include gems from India and China. Here's a summary:

Nalanda Mahavihara, Bihar, India
The Nalanda Mahavihara (Nalanda University) stands out as the most ancient university in the Indian subcontinent, engaged in the transfer of knowledge for an interrupted 800 years. The site comprises its archaeological remains dating from the 3rd century BCE to the 13th century CE and includes stupas, shrines, viharas (residential and educational buildings) and important artwork in stucco, stone and metal.

Le Corbusier, transnational, including India and Japan
This comprises the work of Swiss-French architect and urban planner Le Corbusier, comprising 17 sites spread over seven countries – Argentina, Belgium, France, Germany, India, Japan and Switzerland – which are a testament to modern architecture. Built over a period of a half-century, the sites include the Complexe du Capitole in Chandigarh (India), the National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo (Japan), the House of Dr Curutchet in La Plata (Argentina) and the Unité d'habitation in Marseille (France). These masterpieces also attest to the internationalisation of architectural practice.

Zuojiang Huashan, China
This comprises 38 sites of rock art on steep cliffs in the border regions of

south-west China that illustrate the life and rituals of the Luoyue people. They date from around the 5th century BCE to the 2nd century CE. In a surrounding landscape of karst, rivers and plateaux, they depict ceremonies that have been interpreted as portraying the bronze drum culture once prevalent across southern China. This landscape is the only remains of this culture today.

Hubei Shennongjia, China
The site in Hubei province comprises both Shennongding/Badong to the west and Laojunshan to the east, which protect the largest primary forests remaining in Central China. It is also a habitat for rare animal species such as the Chinese giant salamander, golden or Sichuan snub-nosed monkey, clouded leopard, common leopard and the Asian black bear.

Khangchendzonga National Park, Sikkim, India
The park includes a unique diversity of plains, valleys, lakes, glaciers and spectacular, snow-capped mountains covered with ancient forests. It is also home to the world's third highest peak, Mount Khangchendzonga. Mythological stories are associated with this mountain and with a great number of caves, rivers, lakes, etc, that are the object of worship by the indigenous people of Sikkim. The sacred meanings of these stories and practices have been integrated with Buddhist beliefs and constitute the basis for Sikkimese identity.

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Report World Heritage Sites



>> Luang Prabang, Laos Keeping development in check

Dubbed the best-preserved city in South-east Asia, Luang Prabang was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995, but the status has not been particularly important in marketing the town.

“(The UNESCO status) is a plus and nice to have,” said Laurent Granier, co-founder and general manager of Laos Mood Travel. “But I have not noticed any agency and clients telling me they come to Luang Prabang because it is listed.”

Jon Bourbaud, Laos general manager

at Apple Tree Group added: “The label is more important to ensure that future development does not happen too fast (and) bring negative impacts to Luang Prabang.”

Luang Prabang’s World Heritage Site status has helped to protect its rich architectural heritage, as regulations are placed on hotel sizes and buildings, remarked Bourbaud. He shared that Apple Tree Group’s new Parasol Blanc hotel, for example, cannot have a swimming pool due to its location is in a wetland area surrounded by natural ponds.

Granier believes the UNESCO label has helped attract newer markets like China

and South Korea, especially with Lao Airlines launching new air routes to China.

But Luang Prabang’s pre-eminent status as a World Heritage site tends to overshadow other destinations in Laos.

Added Granier: “Luang Prabang has so much ‘charm’ that visiting anywhere after it is somehow challenging to propose. Sadly, Vientiane and other provinces do not have the matching profiles to be featured confidently.

“(That said), Luang Prabang is still too often the object of an extension from Bangkok or Hanoi,” he elaborated. – **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

>> Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park, the Philippines Ebb and flow of a famed site

Home to the world’s longest underground river, the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park does not draw the resounding praise from tourists and agents that one might expect.

The site has had its UNESCO badge since 1999 but it only found fame in 2012 when it was recognised under a separate accolade, the New Seven Wonders of Nature.

Tourists started arriving in droves, leading the city government to limit visitation

to 800 pax a day or half the daily demand.

Still, this left some concerned about the environmental impacts of tourism and whether the UNESCO committee’s recommendations are being followed.

Although the use of audio guides in place of local boatmen has helped to minimise noise in the cave, Felise Cruz, marketing and operations manager of Trips Travel, opined that tours now are less interactive and do not offer the touch of local humour.

Cruz explained that Asians, in contrast to Europeans, are less awed by the attraction since neighbouring countries such as

Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam share similar geography with the Philippines.

Wilson Techico, vice president for business and product development, Uni-Orient Travel, would like to see more activities introduced in the area so tourists can spend more time there.

It takes two hours to get from Puerto Princesa to the river but the river tour alone only takes about 45 minutes.

Techico said a programme packed with more activities can make the experience more memorable, adding that the few restaurants in the area serve just “basic” food.

– **Rosa Ocampo**



>> Sundarbans National Park, India No roaring reception

Inbound operators acknowledge that this UNESCO World Heritage site has far from met its full tourism potential.

“Until now Sundarbans has been projected (mostly) as the home of the royal Bengal tiger. The challenge is to reposition it in the international market as a magical world of mangrove, rivers, flora and fauna and a site for (ecotourism),” said Surajit Bose, joint director, tourism, government of West Bengal.

Trade sources shared that roughly 5,500

foreign tourists visited the park during last year’s inbound season.

Rajib Banerjee, director, East Wind Holidays, said international demand is weak due to inadequate marketing.

“Despite being a UNESCO site, Sundarbans received less traction compared to some other sanctuaries because of the lack of infrastructure and regional connectivity,” explained Dipak Deva – managing director, Travel Corporation, India.

“A lack of forest lodges, boats and improper safety measures make it difficult to sell to foreign tourists,” added Ravi Gosain, director, Erco Travels.

Compounding the challenge is the lack of guides who speak foreign languages, both Amaresh Tiwari, managing director, AT Seasons & Vacations Travel and Arun Anand, managing director, Midtown Travels pointed out.

Nevertheless, the park’s UNESCO title brings a glimmer of hope. Tiwari remarked: “We always highlight (the UNESCO badge) in our brochures and marketing material to sell the destination.”

Also optimistic, Anand added: “There is a segment of international tourists who always keep in mind to visit such sites.”

– **Rohit Kaul**

>> Himeji Castle, Japan Location matters

Among the most popular of Japan’s 18 UNESCO World Heritage Sites is the ancient Himeji Castle, also known as the White Heron castle.

A record number of over 2.8 million people visited the castle in the town of Himeji, Hyogo Prefecture in the financial year ending March 31, 2015, of which 306,348 were from overseas, nearly four times the figure of the previous year. The previous record of over 1.7 million visitors was set in 1964.

The UNESCO tag carries great weight for visitors to Japan. Shigeki Misawa of the sales division of inbound specialists Freeplus said: “In our experience, virtually all tourists coming to Japan on a package tour will go to at least one UNESCO site.”

However, agents expressed that there are other important factors such as location and proximity to other attractions.

“Himeji Castle is very popular with overseas groups because it is convenient to reach, while somewhere like Shiretoko is much harder to get to,” said Hayashi Nori, director of sales of Tokyo Asean Service.

He added: “Places like Shiretoko or the

Iwami Ginzan Silver Mine in Shimane Prefecture have relatively few other attractions... Groups will not be happy to travel for three hours just to see one thing.”

Nori opined there are ways to better capitalise on the appeal of UNESCO sites. “The national government and local authorities need to do more, such as providing information on how to get to the more remote sites or details on accommodation,” he said.

“It would (also) be helpful if local governments hold workshops for agents to inform us of additional attractions in their regions.” – **Julian Ryall**



>> Kandy, Sri Lanka Paving the way

Widely seen as Sri Lanka’s cultural capital, the pre-colonial kingdom is one of eight UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the country.

Famous for the 17th century Sacred Temple of the Tooth, the city is also home to the Kandy Esala Perahera, a 10-day Buddhist ceremony replete with elephants in ceremonial gear, dancers, drummers and stilt-walkers that parade the streets.

Rodney Armstrong, past president of the Kandy Hoteliers’ Association and resi-

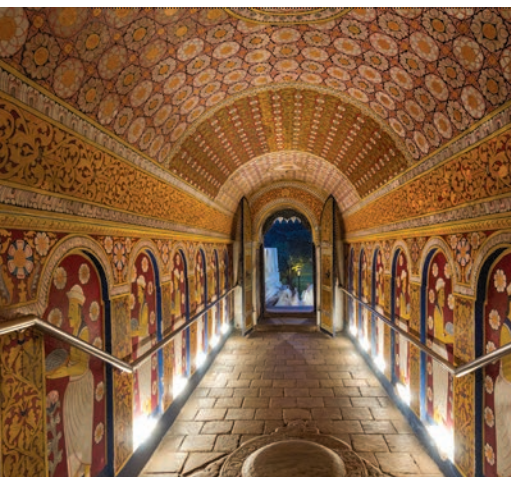
dent manager at Mahaweli Reach Hotel – Kandy, said the city, 115km north of Colombo, has great potential of serving as a hub and destination for three-night stays if roads are widened and traffic congestion is alleviated. Currently, single-night itineraries are more typical of visits to the city.

Similarly, traffic poses the biggest problem in growing Kandy’s tourism for Colombo-based inbound agents like Mahen Kariyawasam, managing director of Andrews Travels, who added that the authorities have plans to build tunnels to help road users bypass the busy city centre.

Government plans include the widening of entry roads. A new four-lane highway from Colombo is on the cards, aimed at shaving the trip time from at least 180 minutes to 60-80 minutes.

Both Mahen and Armstrong also see value in adding a dance theatre to the city, which they suggested could be the cultural centre of the city where authentic Kandyan dances and other cultural events are showcased.

At least 80 per cent of foreign visitors to Sri Lanka visited Kandy last year, according to Sri Lankan Tourism. – **Feizal Samath**



Report Airports

Transport architect **Mark Wolfe** explains how the modern airport is evolving and why airports of the future will resemble a multi-nodal city. Plus, a look at travel agents' favourite airports

Airports of the future

The modern airport is no longer just a place to catch a plane, but also a destination in its own right and a catalyst for future economic competitiveness.

Functionally, very little has changed. Processes of dealing with passengers and bags remain largely the same but have become automated as technology has developed. However, I suspect that newer technologies will see some of these processes disappear completely in the next five to 10 years.

Airports are becoming more diverse and activated by other non-aviation uses, and the future airport will likely become a new transport-oriented precinct of a modern multi-nodal city.

For example, Frankfurt's ambitious Airport City vision involved the development of the inter-modal property, The Squaire. In 2012, international financial services giant KPMG moved its European headquarters into a 40,000m² space at The Squaire. KPMG already had an existing office in the UK near to London City Airport and a big office in the Netherlands close to Amsterdam Schiphol Airport.

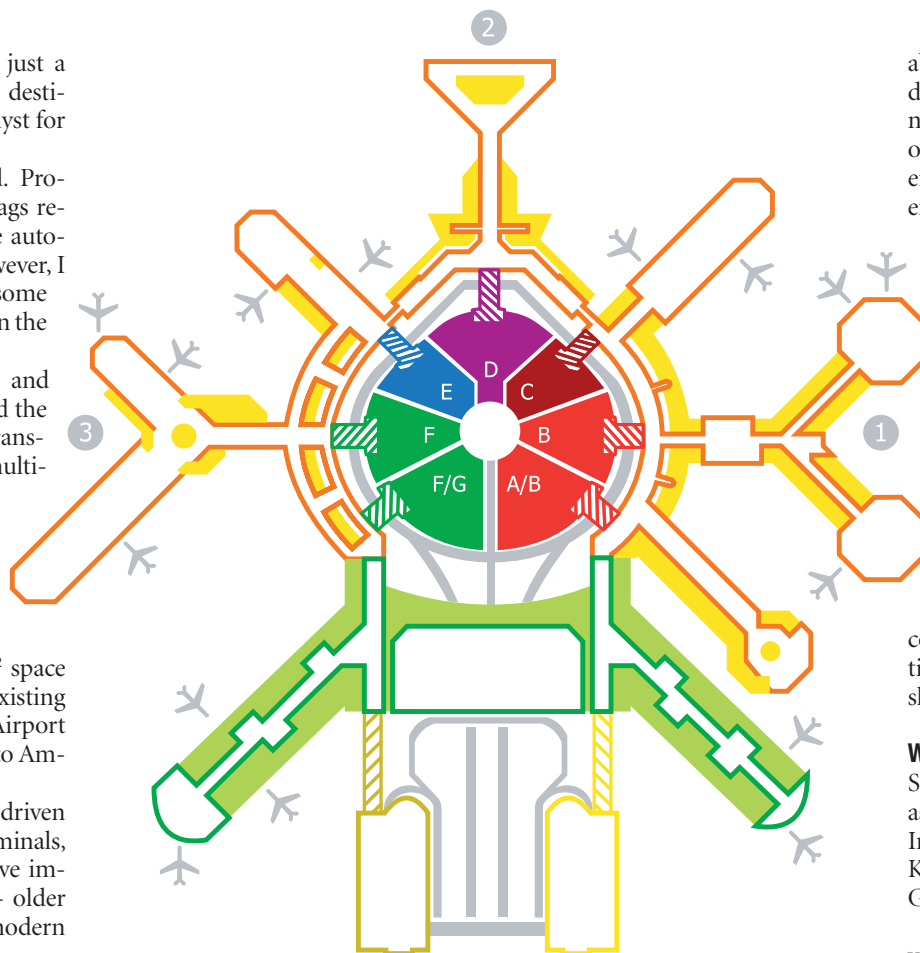
The other obvious difference today is driven by security. In existing airports and terminals, more onerous security requirements have impacted operations and physical space – older terminals didn't have to consider modern screening technologies.

It's clear that consideration of the passenger experience has resulted in a different design approach, not just in the terminal. For the Terminal 4 project at Melbourne Airport, one of the key drivers was passenger safety, so we designed a pedestrianised precinct that eliminated vehicles, and ground transport was dealt with in the lower levels of the multilevel car park.

Why change is necessary

Change is necessary because the aviation business is a dynamic one. It is a marginal business that can be impacted by a range of factors from the price of oil to climatic events such as ash clouds. As such, there has been continuous pressure from airlines for airports to reduce charges and those airports have also needed to investigate other non-aeronautical revenue opportunities.

Originally, airports were purely and simply



Airports are becoming more diverse and activated by other non-aviation uses, and the future airport will likely become a new transport-oriented precinct of a modern multi-nodal city.

Mark Wolfe
Principal, Hassell



about catching a plane. Retail was then introduced as another revenue stream. As the aeronautical business remains fairly stable, airport owners and operators are looking for new revenue streams. The airport as a transport oriented precinct of a modern multi-nodal city is the logical next step in the evolution of the airport.

While airports traditionally had to consider only people moving from the carpark or train to the terminal, in a more diverse precinct that might contain commercial offices. For instance, we need to think about an employee going from the carpark via the crèche to the office, to a nearby gym at lunch time and maybe even to the terminal to do some shopping.

That translates into the need to think outside traditional car-based journeys and consider a variety of movement and connection systems that include walking and cycle sharing, for instance.

Who stands out today?

Some of the larger airport hubs in Asia such as Singapore's Changi (see below), Hong Kong International Airport and Incheon in South Korea stand out, as do Frankfurt airport in Germany and Schiphol in the Netherlands.

The key points are connectivity and a diverse range of facilities – everything from retail outlets and restaurants to cinemas, gardens, recreation facilities and playgrounds. And they are really pushing for the idea of the airport as a destination in its own right. In Singapore, many locals will spend time at Changi even if they are not boarding a flight.

I think our design for the new Terminal 4 at Melbourne is also a good example of a terminal designed to suit the industry at this point in time. It is not an architectural statement but a modest, flexible terminal building with 100 per cent self-service check-in concourse and a diverse retail, food and beverage offers that showcase a range of local brands.

Mark Wolfe is principal at Hassell, a global design practice with a strong portfolio of projects in the travel and tourism industry, including airports, convention centres, hotels and transforming precincts.

Changi's prized Jewel

Come early 2019, the debut of the Jewel Changi Airport will see the launch of an impressive steel-and-glass architecture integrating airport facilities, retail and leisure outlets, and a hotel, further cementing Changi's reputation as one of the world's best aviation hubs and positioning itself as a key player amid intensifying global competition.

The glass-and-steel complex will feature five storeys above ground and five basement levels, with a 134,000m² gross floor area that will be used for retail, airport operations, attractions and a hotel. Centrepiece attractions will be a 40m-high waterfall within a lush five-storey indoor garden.

Philip Yim, CEO of Jewel Changi Airport Development, is confident that Jewel's distinctive dome-shaped facade will make it an "iconic landmark and signature destination", drawing international travellers to visit Changi Airport and Singapore, and boosting Singapore's appeal as a stopover point for travellers.

"The concept for Jewel's design stems from an extension of Singapore's reputation as a City in a Garden. It is also a juxtaposition where a park and a marketplace are situated side by side," said Yim.

When completed, Jewel will connect the three existing terminals and Changi Airport MRT. There will be facilities dedicated to the fly-cruise and fly-coach passenger segments to smoothen the travel experience.

Meanwhile, the new Terminal 4 will be completed in 2017 while Terminal 1 will also be expanded to allow more space for the arrival hall, baggage claim areas and taxi bays. – **Paige Lee Pei Qi**



Report Airports

Which are agents' favourite airports?



Hong Kong International Airport

Tom Walley, head of leisure travel, Flight Centre

Standout airports Singapore's Changi Airport is consistently named the world's best airport. The number of innovative amenities there is hard to beat and it's clear that transit passengers are at the forefront of each new development. When a long stopover is looming, Changi is the airport you want to be in.

Another standout is Hong Kong International Airport. It is one of the busiest in the world and keeps travellers in mind.
What's still needed We have seen the beginnings of some great innovations, but capacity and efficiency issues need to be addressed. Improvements to check-in, security, boarding and immigration processes are needed to keep pace with the increase in passenger numbers over the coming years. – *Rebecca Elliott*

Alicia Seah, director of marketing communications, Dynasty Travel

Standout airport No other airport can beat Changi Airport – which comes out top for shopping, eating, relaxation and entertainment. It is extremely efficient and has indulgent layover facilities like a spa, gym, sauna, shower facilities, movie theatre and city tours to keep travellers occupied.
What's still needed Using technology to enhance baggage and check-in services is the way of the future. Despite airlines having sophisticated systems to tag, track and move baggage around their networks, baggage still get misplaced or delayed. Further technological advancements could bring this down to zero. – *Paige Lee Pei Qi*

Hiroyasu Shima, director of sales, Triangle Japan

Standout airports My favourite airport in Asia is Changi, which has lots of F&B options and food standards are high. It's also clean and the signage are clear and easy to understand, which is important for travellers whose first language is not English.
For small airports, I would choose Vienna as it's only 15 minutes from the city centre.
What's still needed The government is talking about expanding Tokyo's Narita and Haneda airports, but we need to be able to get into the city faster and more easily.
It's strange that Haneda operates 24 hours, yet the monorail closes at midnight. The only option for people who arrive on a 02.00 flight is to get a taxi – which is expensive – into the city.
Both airports need to have better 24-hour access and the whole of Tokyo should have public transport that operates around the clock, especially since the city is hosting the 2020 Olympic Games. – *Julian Ryall*

Desmond Lee, group managing director, Apple Vacations & Conventions

Standout airport Changi for having clear

signage, which makes it easy for transiting passengers to navigate. Access from one terminal building to another is quick and easy, without the need to go through security checks. Toilets are always clean, there are plenty of retail and food outlets, staff are friendly and the taxi system is efficient.
What's still needed With better technology, I hope there will be improvements at security check points to minimise long queues. I look forward to the day when it is no longer necessary to remove belts, shoes and electronic devices when passing through these checks. – *S Puvaneswary*

Julie Maballo, operations manager, New Era Travel and Tours

Standout airport Singapore Changi Airport for its cleanliness, traveller-friendly layout and design. Additionally, immigration checks are strict yet efficient.
What's still needed The recent terrorist attack in Istanbul emphasises the need to find the best way to make airports safe and secure. It's not only in terms of technology but also in ensuring there's no connivance with airport staff and that those manning scanners and X-ray machines are attentive.
There is also a need to ensure there are enough immigration staff for arrivals at ungodly hours. – *Rosa Ocampo*



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TRIED AND TESTED

Aerotel Singapore

Aerotel’s plush rooms plus Changi’s plethora of offerings have **Dannon Har** wishing he was in perpetual transit

LOCATION Those with long transits at Changi Airport now have more to look forward to. Aerotel Singapore, located on level three of Terminal 1 above gate D41, officially opened its doors earlier this year and offers a standard of luxury not often associated with transit hotels.

Its location, foremost, is enviably sited in an airport consistently ranked best in the world. This means front-door access to some of the best airport facilities, including complimentary movie screenings, extensive duty-free shopping options, a wide range of F&B outlets and tastings of premium wines and spirits thanks to DFS Group’s collaboration with alcohol distributors the likes of Diageo and Pernod Ricard.

One can easily get lost in transit (in a

good way), as I have, in Changi with its dizzying array of amusements.

ROOM Aerotel Singapore’s rooms range from budget 10m² single-bedders with shared bathroom facilities to 32m² fully-equipped family rooms for up to five pax. I stayed in a 25m² standard twin room that boasted unobstructed views of the airport runway. All rooms seemed equally furnished and come with amenities you would expect from a city hotel of the same category.

I was surprised to find zero noise pollution from the non-stop take-offs and landings. According to Aerotel staff, this is thanks to the extensive sound-proofing done on room walls and windows.



Rooms feature wall-mounted hangers instead of wardrobes. This is done not only to maximise living space, but also to ensure that guests do not store and forget to retrieve belongings in a haste to catch their flight, explained Aerotel Singapore’s country manager Francis Tan.

FACILITIES An unlikely but much-welcome facility that Aerotel Singapore has is a swimming pool – the first to be located within the transit area of an airport. After I noted how busy the pool was, Tan told me many visitors using the pool were non-hotel guests who had opted to pay S\$17 (US\$12.50) for a three-hour use of the pool and shower facilities. The pool sets Aerotel apart from competitor Ambassador, which operates transit hotels in Terminals 2 and 3.

Other amenities include a communal area called the Library Lounge, a poolside bar, free Wi-Fi, 24-hour front desk service and a small fitness area.

SERVICE Transit hotels see a high volume of walk-in guests, often lethargic from a long flight and in need of that ex-

tra care and attention, which I thought Aerotel succeeded in providing. Even past midnight, front desk staff greeted walk-in guests warmly, assuring them their rooms would be ready as soon as possible.

Do note that many transit hotels, Aerotel included, do not have room service. Still, my request for ice cubes was quickly attended to – I only had to pick them up from the front desk. It helps that rooms are all located nearby and the entire hotel is tucked in its own alcove away from the gaze of the general public.

VERDICT A traveller often needs a place to feel safe and comfortable when in transit miles away from home. Aerotel Singapore not only delivers that in spades but at a reasonable price with plenty of bells and whistles included. There is no reason not to stay here when the situation calls for it.

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Destination Macau

Good tailwinds expected

Still reeling from the flight of Chinese visitors, Macau's tourism sector is finding hope in new air links and infrastructural development, writes **Prudence Lui**

Destination in numbers

31.2%

The year-on-year percentage fall in visitors arriving in Macau on package tours in 1H2016, bringing the number down to 3.4 million

0.1%

The marginal increase in total visitor arrivals in 1H2016. Average length of stay went up by 0.2 day to 1.2 days

MOP\$1,547

The per-capita visitor spending in 1Q2016, equivalent to US\$194, down 14.1% year-on-year. The total spending (excluding gaming expenses) of visitors declined 13.6% year-on-year

New air links into Macau and the construction of mega-infrastructure like the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge are promising to boost Macau's accessibility and brighten its tourism prospects, alongside a flurry of new integrated resorts opening in the destination.

Launched in March 2016, Air Macau's Macau-Fukuoka service became the third air link between Macau and Japan, in addition to the Tokyo and Osaka routes. The national carrier will increase its flight frequency from four to five times weekly from October 30 onwards.

A Macau Government Tourist Office (MGTO) spokesman commented: "The regular air service will help (us) further tap the Japanese market, one of Macau's top international visitor source markets."

In May, Royal Flight airline also commenced a twice-weekly charter service between Macau and Moscow. According to Macau International Airport's (MIA) website, the Russian charter airline stepped up frequency for this service to

thrice-weekly in July 2016.

"The new connection with Russia will definitely help open up a new market. Russians love travelling to Hong Kong and Macau in winter. Therefore, we'd start preparing for this market and (target) the mid-tier group tour and upscale FIT markets," China International Travel Services, manager, Cooper Zhang said.

"Given there's only a handful of Russian-speaking tour guides in town, we have managed to track down some and booked them in advance."

Also interested to capitalise on the new route is Hong Kong-based HS Travel, which operates a branch office in Macau.

Said executive director, Hazen Tang: "We may ride on this new connection to push more high-end Russian incentives, but there isn't any enquiry from Russia yet and I reckon it's owing to the depreciation of the ruble."

Despite the suspension of services from both Thai Smile Airways (since August 30) and TransAsia Airways (October 30), MIA has attracted four new carriers in 1H2016,

namely VietJet, Lion Air, Royal Flight and Nok Air. Lion Air also launched Macau-Manado (Indonesia) charter services on July 4, 2016, providing three flights every two weeks.

"The cessation of routes may result in inconvenience and change of airfares due to lower seat supply and time slots, but I'm sure other carriers would take up the time slots. In fact, traffic from Thailand remains stable and I heard that Air Macau has just opened an office in Bangkok so we expect more happenings," Zhang shared.

Tang also downplayed the effect of the suspended services: "The suspension affects us but visitors can easily (connect to Macau via) Hong Kong."

Infrastructure wise, MIA's new four-storey north extension will cover approximately 14,000m² in total floor space and house facilities like an arrival hall, a departure lounge, commercial area, offices, a nursery, conference rooms and an emergency operations centre. The entire project is expected to be completed in 2Q2017.

Daniella Tonetto, general manager,

sales & marketing for Sheraton Grand Macao Hotel, Cotai Central and The St Regis Macao, Cotai Central, added: "We look forward to the new Hong Kong-Macau-Zhuhai bridge and the opening of the Taipa Ferry Terminal. Both will rapidly accelerate the flow of travel into Macau and make travel more seamless and efficient, which is paramount for meeting and convention visitors."

She continued: "Macau has always been fortunate to be within just a five-hour flight radius of many major cities. For those who choose to fly into neighbouring Hong Kong, which offers more connections, the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) provides ferry services directly to Macau. Upon arrival in Hong Kong, travellers (can bypass) immigration, go straight to the Sky Pier and take the one-hour ferry into Macau."

Tonetto also favoured an increase in ferry frequencies between Macau and HKIA, as these would be beneficial for MICE travellers by reducing waiting time at the airport.



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Software-wise, the group's global online planning platform, **MeetingsImagined.com**, offers a curated bank of inspirational images and articles to help meeting planners conceptualise their event and materialise their vision. Additionally, the JW Marriott's meeting app **JW Event Concierge** lets meeting professionals adjust their meeting requests real-time during their meetings via various mobile digital devices.

To benefit MICE planners, the hotel currently offers a new **Residential Meeting Package** priced from HKD/MOP1,750 + 5% tax and 10% service charge per room per night, including

one daily buffet breakfast, one full-day meeting package with one buffet lunch and two coffee breaks. There will be two upgrades to the next room category (maximum 8 rooms daily) and one complimentary room (maximum 4 rooms daily) for every 25 materialised rooms daily, as well as complimentary Wi-Fi Internet access in guestrooms and function rooms. Double points will be awarded for the Marriott Rewarding Events Program. Guests can also enjoy water attraction and shopping at Galaxy Macau's Grand Resort Deck and The Promenade respectively, among many other entertainment facilities.

To learn more about this special offer, email JW Marriott Hotel Macau's friendly MICE sales associates at mhr.s.mfmjw.mice@marriotthotels.com



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Wedding bells sound well and loud at The Ritz-Carlton, Macau, which occupies the top floors of the Galaxy Macau™.

In addition to over 230 suites breathtakingly overlooking Cotai Macau, The Ritz-Carlton, Macau features a 750m² pillarless **Grand Ballroom** with convenient ground-level access and elegant décor. Couples tying the knot get **complimentary access to the adjoining bridal room** during the banquet. Pay attention to this: the entrance to the bridal room showcases a wall-length pearlescent and luminescent mosaic design featuring a pair of magpies – a symbol of blissful marriage, joyful children and happy family in traditional Chinese culture.

The **Ballroom Foyer** is suitable for a relaxing cocktail reception features a subtly patterned blue carpet with cream-coloured wall coverings that are a continuation of the elegant palette used throughout the hotel. Ebony-stained dark brown double wooden doors opening into the ballroom, where three large hand-blown crystal glass chandeliers suspend from the six-metre high ceiling, directs the grand entrance and wedding march of the couple.

And what's on the menu, you ask? The hotel's experienced **Catering and Banquet Services team** will serve up an unsurpassed culinary journey, taking care of and managing the entire process for wedding guests. Couples can create their own wedding banquet menu, choosing from an array of authentic Cantonese Chinese favourites. Personalized menu is also made possible by the hotel's two renowned chefs – Bill Fu, the Executive Sous Chef for the contemporary Cantonese restaurant Lai Heen on the 51st floor; and Raphaël Kinimo, the Chef De Cuisine for the French brasserie The Ritz-Carlton Café – who will curate a memorable gastronomic experience of a lifetime for couples and their esteemed guests.

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Destination Macau

Issue of the day



Doorman at Grand Lisboa Hotel, Macau

in August and The Parisian Macao this month have added over 4,700 keys.

However, Macau's manpower shortage has played out unevenly on the sector, with hotels generally faring better than travel agencies, according to industry players interviewed by *TTG Asia*.

"In this poor economic condition, hotels do not need to compete directly with other industries for staff as people find hotel pay more attractive," said Patrick Lo, Institute for Tourism Studies, Macao, lecturer and member of IFT Tourism Research Centre.

He further added that some unsuccessful entrepreneurs in the F&B industry have been reabsorbed into the hospitality sector, lured by better remuneration packages in hotels.

The brunt of the industry's manpower crunch hence falls disproportionately on SMEs, noted Bruno Simões, CEO of Smallworld Experience.

"Of course agents and SMEs are suffering with the opening of new properties. Labour is very scarce and expensive. Large properties pay better, have more appealing fringe benefits, and offer better career and promotion prospects."

China Travel Service (Macao), travel department sales and marketing manager, Pun Cheng Man, agreed: "For sure, hotels are better off (while) we agents face severe manpower problems owing to long and irregular working hours. Moreover, our pay can't compare to generous hotel pay."

Eric Tam, Macau general manager at Westminster Travel, has a different view. While acknowledging that "new graduates are easily lured by the hotel industry given their better working environment

and perks", he opined that agencies are not entirely in competition with them "as the nature of hotel and travel agent (jobs) are different".

He added: "Travel agencies owned by casino junket operators have either downsized or closed due to (the sharp decline in) Chinese visitors. This has generated some manpower supply (for other agencies)."

Amid such tepid climate, travel agency bosses have undertaken measures to surmount labour market challenges.

"To retain talent, we maintain good team morale and stress close communication with staff. Our team in Macau is small but the most effective way is to incentivise them," Tam said.

He continued: "In the long run, I hope to see more internship opportunities for students and widen their perspectives by putting them in various job positions in travel industry."

Smallworld's Simões shared: "To compete with (bigger employers), we offer benefits that the young generation appreciates – flexibility with holidays and working schedule, informal atmosphere, empowerment and independence in their projects.

"We minimise the impact (of labour shortage) by opening an office in Zhuhai to support Macau operations. Like many other companies in Macau, we also expanded operations to other markets such as Hong Kong, China and Vietnam.

Urging a liberalisation of the work force in Macau, he remarked: "Protectionism is an old-fashioned policy. Singapore is a good example. It's a country that welcomes talent in a competent and swift way."

Labour market woes

Macau's lingering manpower shortfall is affecting travel agencies more than hotels. **Prudence Lui** inspects

A surge in Macau's hotel supply is heightening the demand for skilled demand, compounding a labour crunch issue that has afflicted the industry for ages.

According to Macau's Land, Public Works and Transport Bureau, a total of

17 hotels under construction in 1Q2016 would bring online some 10,774 rooms while 34 other hotels in the construction planning phase are expected to supply a further 8,884 rooms.

Most recently, the debut of luxury integrated resorts like The Wynn Palace

MY WAY



Rauf Malik

Vice president of operations,
JW Marriott Hotel Macau
and The Ritz-Carlton, Macau

What are the current challenges in Macau's hotel industry?

The overall dynamics of the market are changing, guests are demanding diversity, authenticity and exclusivity in their experience. With new hotels constantly opening in Macau, international hotel chains here need to innovate to stay on top of the changing needs of travellers.

If I had my way to improve things, I would ... showcase a whole new form



of elevated luxury against the backdrop of Macau's cultural uniqueness.

Macau has always been likened to Asia's Las Vegas, but we want our hotels to lead the way in setting a new benchmark for luxury and showing how the city can offer diverse experiences for discerning guests.

To keep our offerings relevant, we are constantly refreshing our themes so that

we can provide personalised experiences to exceed guests' expectations.

But how does one differentiate a hotel in Macau from another in Hong Kong under the same brand? By introducing local elements, we not only maintain the same high standard of service but also make sure we stand out from other hotels around the globe.

Viewpoints

What should Macau do to improve its accessibility?



Daniella
Tonetto,
general
manager,
sales &
marketing,
Sheraton
Grand Macao
Hotel, Cotai

Central and The St Regis Macao,
Cotai Central

For travel within Macau, we hope the Light Rail Transit system will soon open to help alleviate traffic and usher visitors into the Cotai Strip. We also hope tourists will be able to find taxis more easily around town and that taxi drivers can offer friendlier service, as this impacts Macau's image as a tourism destination.

Pun Cheng Man, travel department
sales and marketing manager, China
Travel Service (Macao)

Not much can be improved in the short term, given limited resources like land shortage. However, I believe the completion of the Hongkong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge will offer (greater) convenience to travellers.

NEWS IN A MINUTE

1 Kid's I-library

Macau International Airport added an entertainment library for children in May 2016. Located in the kids zone near boarding gate 1/2, it features iPad mini tablets and child-friendly design elements such as a merry-go-round table and horse saddle chairs. All iPads come pre-loaded with kids' game apps, movies and books, plus Wi-Fi access.

2 Wynn Palace

Opened in August, the 1,700-key resort has raised the luxury game in Macau, ferrying guests on aerial cable cars across the Performance Lake before arriving at the hotel lobby.

Facilities at this resort include a spa, beauty salon, fitness centre, the 18,581m² Wynn Esplanade housing luxury brands, as well as a wide range of restaurants with options from casual to fine dining.

3 Parisian Macao

Barely weeks after Wynn Palace's debut, the 3,000-key Parisian Macao will open on September 13 to feature

a half-scale recreation of the Eiffel Tower as its centrepiece.

Guests can enjoy panoramic views from the observation decks on levels seven and 37 of the Eiffel Tower replica, which will be lit up every evening.

Facilities span convention and meeting spaces, international restaurants, spa, a kids' club, a health club, the Aqua World theme park, a 1,200-seat theatre and the Shoppes at Parisian mall.

4 Planet J

Dubbed the world's first live-action role play theme park, Planet J opened in February in Sands Cotai Central with six zones, while the remaining two will be ready later this year.

At this 9,290m² park, players can physically act out the actions of fantasy characters, pursue goals and interact with other adventurers in realistic and virtual settings.

The Magic Scroll mobile device links players and connects to over 200 games. Players can also save their progress and continue the game when they next return.



5 T Galleria by DFS

City of Dreams is expanding its retail offerings, with the revamped T Galleria by DFS opening in phases from June to December.

Connected to F&B, casinos, shops, entertainment and hotels within the integrated resort, the improved T Galleria will boast new features such as a two-storey shoe salon and a multi-brand lifestyle shopping area dedicated to men's fashion and grooming.

6 Cotai Connection

In June, a joint shuttle bus route – Cotai Connection – was launched between Sands China's Galaxy Entertainment Group, Melco Crown Entertainment and Venetian Macau.

The service operates daily from 11.30 to 22.30 as part of a three-month trial, passing Galaxy Macau, Broadway Macau, Studio City, City of Dreams, The Venetian Macao and Sands Cotai Central.

GTEF roadshow visits five Asian cities

The organiser of Macao's Global Tourism Economy Forum brings a message of tourism cooperation to Beijing, Shanghai, Taipei, Guangzhou and Seoul in the run-up to the event's fifth anniversary edition this October

The Global Tourism Economy Forum (GTEF) – an influential high-level event promoting sustainable development in the global tourism industry with a focus on China – had kicked off its five-city roadshow on July 18, 2016 in Beijing.

The fifth anniversary edition of GTEF will take place at Studio City Macao from October 15-16, 2016 under the theme 'The Growing Consumer Class, Rethinking and Reshaping the Future Tourism Landscape'.

The world's tourism thought leaders, industry captains, government officers and policy makers are set to come together to consider the evolving influence of the growing consumer class, particularly that in China and Asia. The world has seen the rise of independent-minded, resourceful and tech-savvy travellers, whose preferences are re-shaping tourism policies and investments globally.

The networking luncheon in Beijing saw the attendance of some of China's largest public and private sector tourism players such as China National Tourism Administration, World Tourism Cities Federation, and China Chamber of Tourism. Mr. Peter Wong, Vice Chairman of GTEF and Executive Chairman of China Chamber of Tourism said, "GTEF is committed to fostering tourism



In Beijing: (Left, from left) Mr. Peter Wong, Vice Chairman of GTEF and Executive Chairman of China Chamber of Tourism; Mr. Li Baochun, Deputy Secretary-General of World Tourism Cities Federation; Mr. Wu Kefeng, Deputy Director General of Hong Kong, Macao & Taiwan Affairs Department of China National Tourism Administration; Ms. Wang Ping, Vice Chairman of GTEF and Chairman of China Chamber of Tourism; and Mr. Jason Wang, Chief Operating Officer of GTEF.

In Seoul: (Below, from left) Mr. JP Sho, Publisher of Travel Press & PATA Life time member; Mr. James Conlin, Korea Country Manager of Cathay Pacific Airline; Ms. Kim Jong Sook, Director of Korea Tourism Organization MICE Promotion Team; Mr. Kim Hee Cheol, Deputy General Manager of Air Macau Seoul Office; Mr. Lew Hwan Kyu, Representative of MGTG Korea office; Mr. Peter Wong, Vice Chairman of GTEF and Executive Chairman of China Chamber of Tourism; Mr. Kwaak Young Hoon, Chairman of WCO; Mr. Choi Yong Hun, Deputy Director of Seoul Metropolitan Government Tourism Policy Division; and Mr. Li Baochun, Manager of China National Tourist Administration Seoul Office.

development and cooperation between overseas tourism peers and Chinese provinces and municipalities, and we are confident that together we will do great things for the global tourism industry."

After Beijing, the roadshow continued on to Shanghai, Taipei, Guangzhou and Seoul respectively, bringing together about 60 leaders of tourism at each city.

The GTEF roadshow highlighted how the upcoming edition, with the attendance and support of key decision makers, is the region's best platform to initiate forward-looking discussions on public and private sector tourism investment and cooperation.



GTEF 2016 Roadshow

Beijing July 29

Shanghai August 1

Taipei August 5

Guangzhou August 9

Seoul August 11

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All hail the new Bintan

There was a time when Bintan was better known as a recreational add-on to concrete-jungle Singapore, but the progressive developments of two integrated resorts – Lagoi Bay and Treasure Bay – have expanded the attractions and accommodation selection, raising the island's allure as a standalone destination.

Treasure Bay's centrepiece, the Crystal Lagoon is South-east Asia's first and largest recreational seawater body equivalent in size to 50 Olympic swimming pools. At this man-made lagoon, thrill seekers can swim, wakeboard, kayak and fly nine metres up in the air on a hydro-powered Jetovator, among other activities.

Bintan's evolving landscape can also be appreciated from the comfort of an ultralight seaplane that takes a scenic route along the northern coast. Operated by the Air Adventures Flying Club, the experience has already earned a strong following among travellers.

The destination's rich culture and heritage are also being spotlighted through Bintan Resorts Cakrawala Tours' three new tours – Trail of the Sea Gypsies, Gods & Dragons and Islands of the Kings – led by experienced guides to help visitors understand the destination better.

Bintan Resorts International, which has been marketing these "new discoveries", has plans to develop even more eye-opening island tours, according to director of marketing Asad Shiraz.

He said: "Very few destinations can stand only on their appeal of having good

beaches and golf courses. Bali is not just famous for its beaches, neither is Phuket. Their appeal is strengthened by their 'localness', their people, history, and culture.

"Bintan, too, has historical stories to tell. It has religious, cultural and natural features that are unique, significant and attractive. The new tours are designed to showcase these and encourage visitors to explore the rest of Bintan."

Besides dangling more fun lures, Bintan's two upcoming integrated resorts also comprise new properties to satisfy different budgets and accommodation desires.

The four-star, 130-key Swiss-Belhotel Lagoi Bay is currently completing its second hotel tower, which will add 27 one- and two-bedroom apartment-style guestrooms and more restaurants to its inventory. The two-year-old hotel recently rolled out an entertainment centre with a 30-seat movie theatre, a games area, a fishing facility on the edge of Lake Lagoi, and a new fleet of jetskis and banana boats.

The Sanchaya, an ultra-luxe colonial estate which has almost single-handedly put Bintan on the global luxury travel map, presents 21 villas and nine suites across 9.6ha of land.

The property has been attracting "a lot of attention" from Russians, the British and Australians, revealed Fay Gauna Lague, director of sales at The Sanchaya.

"We have had many international celebrities staying with us, as well as a Middle Eastern royal family and its entourage that took our Vanda Villa presidential suite," she added.

Also, The Canopi features 41 safari tent-suites lining the massive Crystal Lagoon, making it a hit with families, youth travellers and corporate event planners looking for fun in the sun.

Completing the current round-up of new accommodation on the island is Lagoi Bay Villas, which opened in May to feature five one- or two-bedroom villas with plunge pools. Its full inventory of 25 villas will be ready over the next two years.

The upcoming developments have, meanwhile, spurred existing hospitality players on Bintan into revamping their own offerings for a better fight.

Bintan Lagoon Resort has been undergoing an intensive renovation since 2015, starting with a rebranding in July and upgrading its Silk nightclub and Terrace Sports Bar. It also opened the Powerhouse Gym, Jungle Gym for kids and the 650-seat Fiesta housing three micro-restaurants within.

"These works have positioned the resort as a trendsetter in Bintan," said Gerald Hendrick, vice president, business development and hotel operations, Bintan Lagoon Resort.

The 20-year-old Nirwana Gardens complex has also refreshed rooms in Nirwana Resort Hotel's west wing in 2015 and opened the new PADI-certified Max's Dive Centre in November.

Further renovations will be made to the east wing, Banyu Biru Villas, Indra Maya Pool Villas and Mayang Sari Beach Resort.

Recreational offerings will be enhanced too, with new and upgraded sports equip-

ment coming online including the guided sunset and sunrise tours on ATVs and Ninebots.

Despite intensifying competition, existing resort chiefs agree that fresh products will help to raise awareness of Bintan. "(They) create a buzz for Bintan and boost tourist arrivals," remarked Hendrick.

Alpha Eldiansyah, general manager of Banyan Tree Bintan, expects the new attractions to drive weekend arrivals to the island, as well as more repeat visitors and longer stays at his property and Angsana Bintan.

Eldiansyah said Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts will add a third hotel to its collection in Bintan. Cassia Bintan is a residence-styled hotel with one- and two-bedroom apartments that come with a fully equipped kitchen and living room.

Destination in numbers

4.4 million

The number of arrivals to Indonesia from January to May 2016, 7.5% higher than the same period in 2015

46%

The percentage growth of arrivals from China to Indonesia from January to May 2016. China has overtaken Australia as the country's top foreign market source

31.5 million

The number of domestic air flights between January and May 2016, an 18 per cent increase over the same period last year

A spruce-up of Bintan Lagoon Resort has made the property more attractive to travellers



Issue of the day



Tourists at a beach bar along Seminyak beach, Bali

When easier access begets trade violations

Visa-free travel into Indonesia has increased tourist footfalls alongside illegal tour guiding. By **Mimi Hudoyo**

A year since Indonesia expanded its visa-free policy to 169 countries, the move has brought a mixed bag of results for the country, drawing an increase of foreign visitors as well as a spike in illegal tour guiding at the same time.

Publishing figures on the outcome of the visa-free policy, Indonesia Directo-

rate General of Immigration revealed that the country received nearly seven million international arrivals between June 2015 and June 2016.

Of these, 15 countries – including ASEAN member countries which have had visa-free entry into Indonesia for many years – remain the biggest contributor to the country by far, accounting for 4.1 mil-

lion arrivals. The 144 new countries that received the visa-free facility contributed just 2.9 million arrivals, while 10 countries did not contribute any arrival.

As well, visitor arrivals from China to Indonesia hiked 24.4 per cent in 1H2016 to reach 685,074. Bali, in particular, has been at the receiving end of the Chinese influx.

The dramatic growth shows that the aggressive marketing and promotions targeted at the China market, together with visa-free access, have been effective.

However, along with the gain in Chinese visitor arrivals is an increase in violation of the visa-free policy too, invoking industry members' concern especially of visitors overstaying or engaging in illegal guiding activities.

Eddy Sunyoto, managing director of Terimakasih Indonesia Tours and Travel, and head of international promotion of the Association of the Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies (ASITA), said: "There are a number of cases in Bali where we found 'freelance' Chinese guides offering services at the airport or the hotels."

"Our ASITA member lost a group of Chinese tourists to an unofficial guide who approached them to offer his service during breakfast. The hotel informed our member that the so-called guide was also a guest at the hotel."

But 'freelance' guides are not a new phenomenon. Rudiana, WITA Tour's director of sales and marketing, said: "Even before the visa-free access was granted to the Chinese, we had already experienced losing group tour members (several times)."

"I understand the government's efforts to make it easy for travellers to come, but for the China market I would suggest that visa-free facility be revoked," he commented, echoing member of parliament Charles Honoris' call to review the visa-free facility for selected countries.

Rudiana suggested an alternative: "I think online visa is quite convenient for travellers and the immigration office will have a record of them."

On the other hand, Eddy does not see merit in revoking the facility to Chinese visitors: "We cannot just lift a facility that we have just given. Where is our dignity?"

"When Indonesia decided to afford 169 countries visa-free facilities, we should have had taken all the precautions to eliminate negative impacts. Now, the immigration office must work harder," he remarked.

Arief Yahya, Indonesian minister of tourism, has played down the concerns over illegal guiding.

He said: "We do not need to worry about the visa-free policy. Malaysia and Thailand have given the facilities to more than 150 countries before we did and (no one made a fuss). (Instead) they have enjoyed the healthy growth of travel arrivals."

Viewpoints

What is imperative for Bintan's true growth as a destination?



Andri Tan, managing director, Bintan Pratama Tour & Travel

It is very important to have a convenient transportation mode into Bintan, specifically direct

flights from metropolitan cities like Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing and Bangkok.



Walid Birak, general manager, Nirwana Resort Hotel

To truly grow our business, we need an international airport. The current domestic

airport operates only three domestic flights a day.

MY WAY



Xavier Droin

COO, Tauzia Hotel Management

What are your current challenges?

My challenge is the oversupply of rooms. It does not mean that we should stop opening hotels, but we need to

be more picky about the locations we open in. I am not worried about the Jakarta city centre, but I am more concerned about places like Bali where many hotels are yet to open.

If I had a way to change Indonesia's tourism landscape, I would... increase and focus promotions of Indonesia in Europe, the US and even in its main feeder markets (South-east Asia, Australia and China), as international promotion is poor, especially in longhaul destinations.

In terms of tourist attractions, UNESCO sites, diversity of landscapes, culture, food and friendliness of people, Indonesia has them all. However, the country attracts far less foreign tourists compared with Thailand and Malaysia.

Secondly, I would like to improve public transportation in the country, starting with the capital city by increasing the number of highways and improving bus route connectivity.

Back in the 1990s, Jakarta and Bangkok started their plans for public

transport almost at the same time. It's amazing to see how Bangkok has progressed, while Jakarta is still stuck with endless construction works.

Good public transportation would definitely help increase the number of international tourism and business travellers.



Traffic jams are commonplace in Jakarta

Destination Indonesia

NEWS IN A MINUTE

1 Soekarno-Hatta International Airport's Terminal 3 Ultimate

In the final stage of development, Terminal 3 Ultimate at Jakarta's Soekarno-Hatta International Airport is expected to be fully operational by this year-end. It will boast an annual handling capacity of 25 million passengers when completed.

A third runway also in the works, and construction is due to be completed by 2019.

2 Artotel Sanur Bali

Home-grown design hotel operator Artotel Indonesia has opened its third property, Artotel Sanur Bali, which boasts a mixture of modern architecture and local design.

Each of the 89 rooms features a 49-inch flatscreen TV, Dolce Gusto coffee machine and complimentary Wi-Fi. Amenities include an all-day dining restaurant, a rooftop bar and pool, the Artspace gallery, and a meeting room for up to 100 people.

3 Garuda Indonesia

In June this year, Garuda Indonesia

restarted Singapore-Medan daily services after it was suspended in 2002, opening up access for travellers to Medan and North Sumatra. The route is operated on a Boeing 737-800 with 156 seats.

4 Rumah Luwih

The beachfront Rumah Luwih has opened in Gianyar, Bali. Designed by prominent Indonesian architect Hendra Hadiprana, the resort's architecture is inspired by the Ujung Water Palace in Karangasem, a historical site known for its meld of Balinese and European architecture.

The resort has 75 luxurious rooms – including three suites – that range from 40m² to 200m², and they come with private balconies. F&B facilities include the all-day dining Andrawina Restaurant, The Living Room for light meals and refreshments, and the Beach Pavilion.

5 Meliá Makassar

Meliá Hotels International has opened Meliá Makassar in South



Sulawesi's capital. The four-star hotel features 135 rooms, several meeting rooms, a pool, spa, restaurants, and Society, a rooftop bar.

The hotel is located a 25-minute drive from the Sultan Hasanuddin International Airport and a five-minute walk from the main shopping and business areas.

6 Four Seasons Jakarta

On June 28, the 125-suite Four Sea-

sons Jakarta opened on Jalan Gatot Subroto within the city's CBD.

The property boasts four F&B outlets, a spa, a 24-hour fitness centre, an outdoor pool on the fifth floor and 1,850m² of flexible function space.

Meeting facilities include the Grand Ballroom that can accommodate up to 350 people, two salons, three meeting rooms and a pool terrace.

TRIED AND TESTED



The Canopi

Fancy Indiana Jones-esque tents set on emerald grass next to a sparkling lagoon make this Bintan property a picturesque sojourn, discovers **Karen Yue**

LOCATION One of the few properties to be completed at the work-in-progress Treasure Bay integrated resort development, The Canopi features 41 Safari tent-suites lined one side of the sparkling blue 6.3ha saltwater Crystal Lagoon. Altogether, this picture gives one the impression that a community of chic nomads have come to settle on the resort island.

ROOM Every tent-suite comes with modern comforts and conveniences, such

as a poster bed, a day bed, an LCD TV, a mini fridge, air-conditioning and free Wi-Fi. The décor is aligned with the safari theme, with beige and white being the dominant colours. There's also a textured sisal carpet under my feet and old-world oversized suitcases being used as cupboards.

Instagram addicts will love the ensuite bathroom which opens up into the backyard, with tall shrubs providing sufficient privacy. Antique-looking brass fixtures and a sparkly vanity make this a hip space.

It is lovely in the day but gets too dark for my liking after the sun sets.

Swings, bar stools and barbecue pits are scattered around the open spaces between the tent-suites, which is a great way to encourage guests to hang out together.

FACILITIES The all-day dining Patio Bar & Restaurant offers quick bites for guests, while the function room is good for 70 pax in a classroom setting.

The jewel in its crown is the picture-perfect Crystal Lagoon, where guests can partake in a plethora of water sports or simply get a tan on one of the many sun loungers. The in-house activity centre can also coordinate a variety of recreational activities for guests such as ATV rides and Segway tours.

SERVICE The Patio Bar & Restaurant was understaffed when I was there, with only two servers attending to guests, clear-

ing tables and refilling food on the buffet line. They were as attentive and quick as they could be, but I had to be more patient than usual to get some attention.

Overall, the service team at The Canopi were a cheerful lot and they made me feel like I was in the company of friends.

VERDICT This property gets extra points for its many Instagrammable sights and direct access to the Crystal Lagoon, but it should look into improving the quality of its mattress, installing more lights in the bathroom and increasing its service headcount.

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TRIED AND TESTED

Padma Resort Ubud

At this upscale property ensconced within a serene valley in Bali’s cultural enclave, **Mimi Hudoyo** feels completely rejuvenated following a relaxing stay

LOCATION Nestled atop a hilly area, Padma Resort Ubud overlooks the bamboo forest of Payangan in Bali’s cultural heart. The second outpost of Padma Hotels is a 11ha property located in the quiet Puhu Village, about 45km from Denpasar and 63km from Ngurah Rai International Airport.

ROOM I was given a Premier Club Room, located on the same floor as the lobby and the lounge. It was a corner room and the balcony afforded stunning views of both the infinity pool and lush valley below.

The 59m² room had a tea and espresso maker, alarm clock with iPod/iPhone docking, complimentary Wi-Fi and a 48-inch TV. Meanwhile, the spacious bathroom had a free standing bathtub, rain shower, double marble vanity, full-length mirror and sizable dressing area.

F&B Staying in a Premier Club Room entitled me to have breakfast in-room, but why would I want to stay in my room when The Puhu Restaurant & Lounge meant offer a greater variety of dishes for breakfast, plus spectacular 180-degree views of nature to boot?

My F&B experiences at other Padma Hotel properties have always been satisfying and it is no different here. At Puhu, the warm bread was crispy outside and soft inside, while the ginger-infused steamed fish and eggs Benedict were delicious. The cooks were too heavy-handed with the salt however, and it would help if the salt content in the dishes was reduced.

I also had lunch at the Pool Café & Bar and drinks at the Sunken Pool Bar in between dips in the infinity pool, followed by a glass of wine at the Wine Lounge while watching the sun set.



FACILITIES The resort boasts an 89m-long infinity swimming pool, the longest in the Ubud area, with water temperature that is adjusted according to the weather. The pool deck also offers comfortable sun loungers and umbrellas for relaxing.

Other facilities include a spa, kids club and games centre. There’s also a fitness centre, but guests preferring the outdoors can also jog or bike down to the river and back for exercise.

SERVICE Staff are young, friendly and enthusiastic. The butler will show guests around the room and facilities, pointing out unique selling points.

The only complaint I have was that the

drink I ordered during the evening cocktail at the Wine Lounge took awhile to arrive and the waiter was a bit slow in taking my dinner order. However, I admit it was peak season and the resort was quite busy that evening.

VERDICT My kind of place where I can shut myself off the world and have a tranquil and peaceful getaway.

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- 50 Most Established Travel Agencies in ASEAN:** A look at the 50 most enduring travel companies in ASEAN and the next-gen agencies/travel tech start-ups to watch
- 50 ASEAN Home-grown Hotel Brands:** Discover 50 native brands stories and their expansion in the region and beyond, and why ASEAN is favoured by international chains
- 50 Best ASEAN Travel Experiences:** Industry experts’ guide to the best ASEAN travel experiences



Spotlight

50 Movers and Shakers in ASEAN: Spotlight on the outstanding individuals who have made a mark in the region and/or have contributed immensely to the growth of ASEAN tourism



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

MOST READ

THAILAND TO DOUBLE VISA-ON-ARRIVAL FEES

The doubling of visa-on-arrival fees for visitors to Thailand from nations such as China, India and Taiwan starting September 27 startled those in the trade. The hike in fees was sudden and came just after Thailand got hit by several bomb attacks nationwide.

Inbound agents interviewed however said that the move can in fact be beneficial in the long term, as fees for advance visas are now on par or cheaper. This could translate to shorter immigration lines at some of Thailand's busiest airports.

MOUNTING THREATS PUT SOUTH KOREAN TRAVELLERS OFF EUROPE, TURKEY

South Korean tourists are turning their backs on Europe this year, frightened off by terrorist attacks in major cities and the attempted coup in Turkey. Travel to Turkey – traditionally a popular destination for South Koreans – has been hard hit by the attempted coup in July.

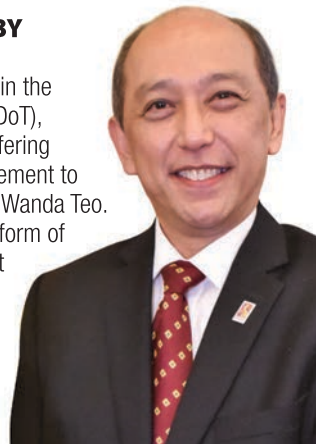
Outbound travel agents are reporting declines of as much as 20 per cent in group bookings, with one research pinning the number at a massive 81.2 per cent drop in travel to Turkey.

Both Korean Air and Asiana Airlines reduced their flights between Incheon and Istanbul shortly after the bloodshed, with both carriers cutting their flights from five-times weekly to three.

PHILIPPINE DOT ROCKED BY MAJOR STAFF SHAKE-UP

A big shake-up is taking place within the Philippine Department of Tourism (DoT), with many senior staff members offering their letters of resignation and retirement to newly-appointed tourism secretary Wanda Teo. This is apparently being done as a form of courtesy to allow Teo a free hand at deciding her desired team.

Domingo Ramon Enerio III (right) COO of DoT's marketing arm, the Tourism Promotions Board, was the latest to announce an early retirement.



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



OLYMPIC FEVER IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

"Blown away" by ASEAN's performance at the 2016 Rio Olympics, AirAsia Group CEO Tony Fernandes has announced that all ASEAN athletes who won a medal would be duly rewarded by the airline. All gold medallists will get free AirAsia flights for life, while silver and bronze medallists get free flights for five and two years respectively.

In addition to a champion's send off at the Rio airport, Singapore Airlines has also presented Joseph Schooling – Singapore's first Olympic gold medallist who beat the legendary Michael Phelps in the 100m butterfly in record timing at Rio – with his own KrisFlyer Elite Gold card with one million KrisFlyer miles. When he landed in Singapore, the King of Butterfly was greeted by Changi Airport Group CEO Lee Seow Hiang, who presented a memento of the airport's congratulatory messages to the 21-year-old swimmer.



EASIER ACCESS TO DISABLED-FRIENDLY ACCOMMODATION IN ASIA-PACIFIC

Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group has linked arms with Accomable to distribute its room inventory on the online platform. Launched last year, Accomable provides specialised information and listings on assisted travel, adapted hotels and vacation rentals for disabled and elderly people. Users can now view and book over 100 of Carlson Rezidor's hotels in the Asia-Pacific that are equipped with accessible guest-rooms and facilities via Accomable's website.



EARTHQUAKE RATTLES MYANMAR

Following the magnitude 6.8 earthquake that struck central Myanmar on August 24, at least three people were killed and some 185 brick pagodas were damaged. The majority of the bricks that fell off were the new bricks added during the renovations over the last decades, industry members told *TTG Asia*, underscoring the need for proper repair and restoration of Bagan's ancient architecture to ensure its sustainable development.

TOURIST SPOTS TARGETED IN THAILAND

A series of bomb attacks took place in several Thai beach towns over the August 11-12 weekend. While casualties and injuries were minimal, the blasts occurred in resort locations such as Hua Hin, Surat Thani and Phuket, especially worrying for the travel community.

WHO'S SAYING WHAT



Instagram



Our proud Malaysia/Brunei editor S Puvaneswary receiving an award from the Sarawak Convention Bureau for Business Events Journalism Excellence. #ttgasia



Newly-opened Hotel Indigo Singapore Katong features Peranakan-themed rooms, a mural depicting life around the local Katong enclave and a cool carrom board. #hotelindigo



The colourful Japan booths drew the most crowd and attention at this year's second Travel Revolution travel fair in Singapore. #travelrevolution2016

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MCI (P) 098/09/2014 • PPS 619/02/2013(022926)

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

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- Lotte Tour (2011)
- Hong Kong International Airport (2013)
- Raffles Hotel Singapore (2013)
- Regal Airport Hotel (2015)
- Banyan Tree Spa (2015)

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