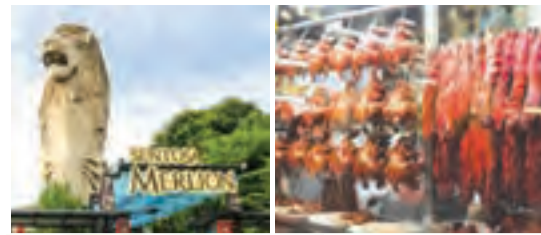


# TTG THE OFFICIAL Show Daily



**ITB**  
*Asia*

ITB Asia  
October 20, 2016  
Singapore

Issue

# 2

Borobudur Temple, Central Java • Indonesia



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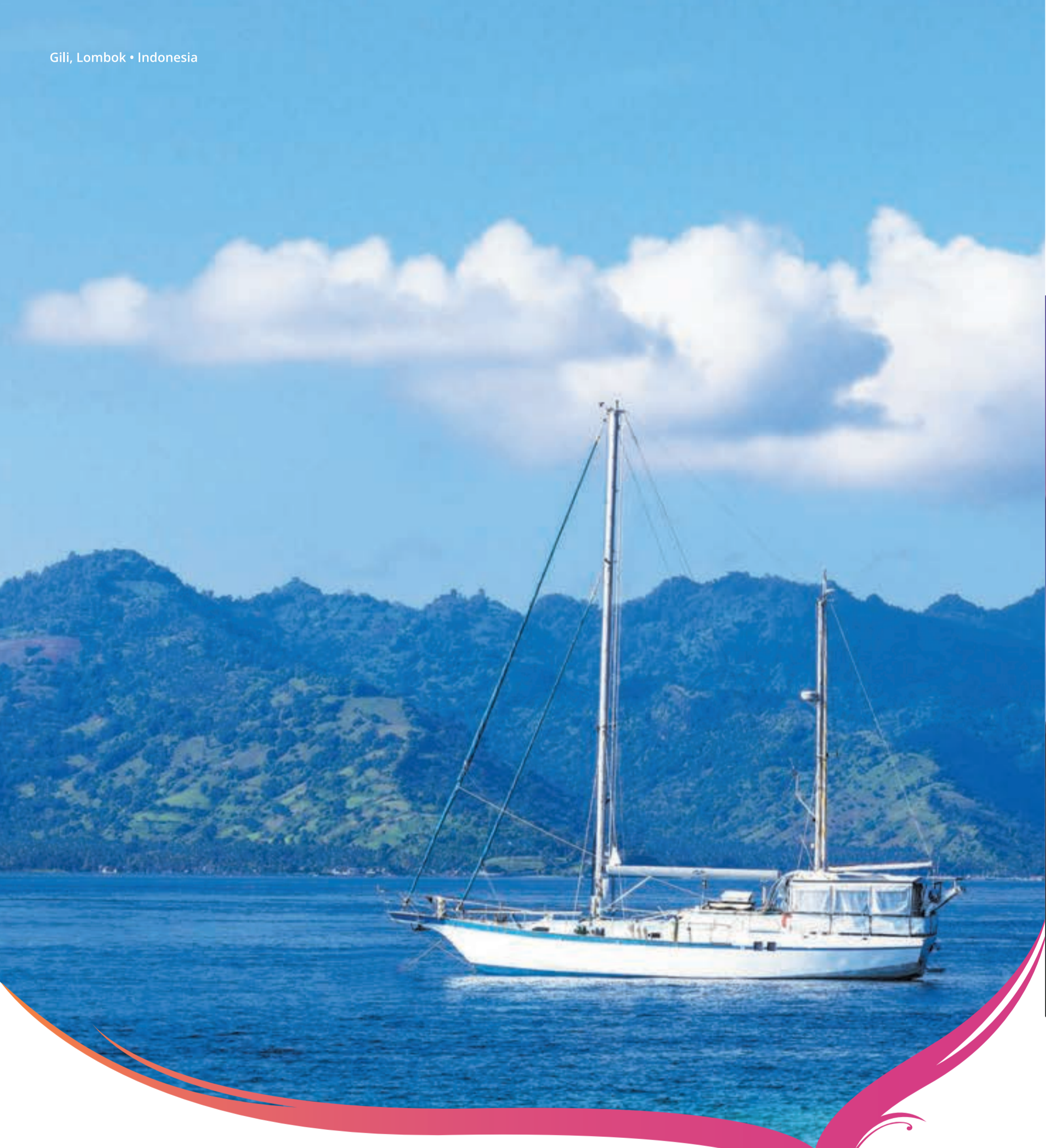
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**ITB Asia**  
October 20, 2016  
Singapore



## Europe's not out

Asian travellers shift interest to "less sensitive" European cities

By TTTG Asia reporters

Recent terror incidents in a number of popular European destinations, such as France, Belgium and Germany, have dented overall Asian interest in the region and created new favourites on travellers' wish list.

Ganesh Rao, general manager of Ascon Holidays in Hyderabad, said Europe bookings were down 40 per cent due to a mix of terror threats, a softer economy and visa issues. Demand has shifted to Australia and New Zealand where "the NTOs have been proactive (in supporting the trade)", he remarked.



Yap: people still want Europe

Demand for Europe slipped 20 per cent for Baywatch Chennai since six months ago.

A recent survey by the Japan Association of Travel Agents also found that outbound sales for Europe fell while Asia and Oceania numbers rose.

HIS Co's team leader of Kan-to regional sales, Atsushi Okamoto, said "sales are not good", while Nippon Express Travel spokesperson Kazuya Fujinaga observed a stronger client preference for nearby Asian destinations. Both declined to quantify the slip in bookings.

Also bemoaning "flatlined" business to Europe this year is Jonathan Tran, managing direc-

tor of Lac Hong Voyages in Vietnam. "I don't expect bookings to improve for 2017 unless airlines dish out huge discounts," he said.

For some Asian buyers at ITB Asia, Turkey has turned out to be the biggest European loser.

"Turkey was our best-selling destination but we had at least three groups cancelling their trips there this year after the terror attacks," said Fariyah Yaakub, Best Star Travel Malaysia's director of marketing and product development.

Ahmad Mahadzir Shaffirin, vice president of Malaysia's Konsortium Sepang, also reported many cancellations and postponements for Turkey this year, besides a "general weaker demand for Europe".

For Amaresh Tiwari, managing director of India's A T Seasons & Vacations, Turkey's location next to troubled Syria had unsettled his clients, although they had maintained their love for France and Belgium.

However, Asian travellers are not giving the whole of Europe a wide berth. Instead, demand has simply shifted away from trouble spots to cities that are perceived to be safer.

Baywatch CEO Manish Kriplani said: "Travellers are avoiding sensitive (destinations) and

are now picking Spain and Switzerland as well as cities such as Prague and Budapest."

The Balkans has gained favour among Fariyah's clients, while Rao noted that Paris and Swiss cities are still considered "a must" for his clients' incentive programmes and that interest in Greece is up.

The shift in choice destinations within the region has helped Dynasty Travel Singapore to avoid a downturn in Europe bookings. According to spokesperson Alicia Seah, Western Europe's loss was Northern and Eastern Europe's gain, and Europe is still the company's top destination with a 35 per cent share in overall sales revenue.

Chan Brothers Travel Singapore observed a 30 per cent YOY growth in UK booking in 1H2016, and keener demand for "less mainstream destinations like Iceland and Scandinavia", said spokesperson Joyce Tan.

Also offering a positive view on the situation, Robin Yap, Asia president, The Travel Corporation, said: "Travel to Europe is still growing from Asia, partly due to the attractive exchange rate and various airfare promotions. Following the incidents in Europe, our web searches returned to pre-attack levels very quickly. People still want to travel, but to different parts of Europe."



## Never change a winning team

ITB Asia 2016 opened yesterday morning at Marina Bay Sands, with Singapore minister for trade and industry (Industry) S Iswaran (centre) as the guest of honour, and brought with it some stellar news for the host city.

Messe Berlin, organisers of ITB Asia, has decided to stay put in Singapore for the next few years, said Martin Buck, the organisation's senior vice president. An MoU to affirm this commitment was signed between Messe Berlin and Singapore Tourism Board (STB) in the afternoon.

Buck elaborated: "We've enjoyed a constructive and fruitful cooperation with STB for almost a decade, and it's obvious we don't have a reason to leave the city." - Rachel AJ Lee

### WHERE YOU NEED TO BE TONIGHT

Tropical Singapore will welcome some wintry wonders tonight at an exclusive late night party at Marina Mandarin Singapore. Nordic wonders, including Santa Claus, an ice bar serving Finnish Napue gin and music by Helsinki-based acapella group FORK, are in store.

Organised by TTTG Travel Trade Publishing, Marina Mandarin Singapore, Finnair and Stopover Finland, the party also offers attendees a chance to score a four-day winter getaway to Finland, plus other amazing goodies.

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## News

# Tourism investment rises in SE Asia

But pace of hardware development in some destinations falls short of projected tourism demand growth: WTTC

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

Tourism will likely remain a bright spot for South-east Asia in the coming years, with forecast investment to total US\$782

billion, accounting for 7.4 per cent of total investment in the region in the next decade, said World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) president/CEO David Scowsill.

However, some South-east Asian countries are notably lagging in terms of infrastructure development to meet the needs of estimated tourism growth rates of 6.2

per cent per annum until 2026, he added.

Citing WTTC's latest *Travel & Tourism Investment in ASEAN* report, Thailand is classified as 'future focus critical', as investment spend has fallen significantly since its 2006-2007 peak while tourism demand has spiked in recent years.



Scowsill: not all ready for the future

Infrastructure is also constrained in Myanmar, Cambodia and the Philippines and forecast investment does not meet the needs of future demand. Vietnam and Laos, in comparison, are faring better with infrastructure improving in tandem with growth prospects.

On a more positive note, investment in Malaysia and Brunei are well balanced while Singapore and Indonesia stand out in being able to roll out infrastructure ahead of demand.

This varying performance of South-east Asian countries in future tourism and travel preparedness also reflects the fragmented pace of development that long characterises the region.

When asked if the current economic slowdown in parts of Asia would impede tourism growth, Scowsill remarked: "Technically we have been in recession for the past seven to eight years... Travelling has become part of people's psyche and they are unlikely to cut back on travels."

Also working in the region's favour, besides its strengths in culture diversity and price competitiveness, is the perception of South-east Asia as a "safe destination", especially when compared with Europe which suffered a string of terror attacks in the last 18 months, Scowsill pointed out.



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## IN BRIEF

### Travelport to launch B2B4C tool

Travelport, which acquired Mobile Travel Technologies (MTT) in 2014, will debut a B2B4C mobile app for mid-tier, regional TMCs in 1Q2017 to help them boost mobile capability, reinforce branding and improve customer loyalty, among other benefits. Jason Nash, GVP, global marketing product incubation, said "the aim is to build a frictionless, seamless experience for the end-user". – **Caroline Boey**

### The Murray identifies key markets

Scheduled to open in October 2017, The Murray, a Niccolo Hotel, Hong Kong has projected China and South-east Asia to provide the bulk of its business with 25-27 per cent of bookings, followed by the US and Europe with 10-12 per cent, and Australia 5-6 per cent. Managing director, Duncan Palmer, expects the hotel to have an AOR of 70 per cent in its first year of operations, growing to the low-80s in 2019/2020. – **Prudence Lui**

### Sunway Pyramid's new lease of life

The former Sunway Pyramid Hotel East will reopen progressively as Sunway Pyramid Hotel from November 3, following a massive renovation since this April. All 564 rooms – up from 549 before – will be operational by end-January 2017.

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## News

# Dragon's fire still strong

Long-term growth prospects continue to drive hotels' expansion plans in China

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

Despite the massive injection of hotel rooms across many Chinese cities in recent years, China remains an attractive market for international hospitality companies looking to intensify their reach in this vast market.

Pan Pacific Hotels Group (PPHG), for instance, will debut Pan Pacific Beijing in 1H2017 while Amara Hotels & Resorts will launch the Amara Signature Shanghai early next year.

Acknowledging China's saturated market, PPHG's CEO Bernold Schroeder chalked up the current oversupply in some cities to the building boom during the lead-up to mega events such as the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2010 Shanghai World Expo.

"Today, there are 2.4 million hotel rooms in China, just half of that in the US. However, China's population is four times larger than that of the US, and with robust growth projected in domestic and international travel, there is still room for expansion in the long run."

He added: "As a company however, we are investing for the long-term. China is a huge, emerging market which at the same time is fragmented, with global hotel brands being relatively lesser-known. This presents an opportunity for smaller hotel groups such as PPHG to strengthen our

brand presence in China."

"Brand recognition" is also an important factor driving Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts' development strategy in China, said Asia senior vice president Andrew Langdon.

As China is typically among the top five feeder markets for the group's resorts in Asia, the presence of Mövenpick properties in tier-one Chinese cities will influence Chinese outbound travellers' choice of stay abroad, he informed.

Amid slowing international arrivals and intense competition in China, Dawn Teo, director of strategic planning and corporate development of Amara Holdings, still sees China as "an attractive destination with great market potential".

"While China's (recent) growth story is muted, its GDP growth of over six per cent is still enviable compared to the rest of the world," said Teo. "The total demand from both international and domestic travellers will outpace the current supply. We expect China to be among the fastest-growing hotel sectors."

Meanwhile, the fierce competition in China's first-tier cities has also led hotel groups to shift their expansion focus to secondary and tertiary cities.

InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) has over 222 hotels in its China pipeline, of which more than 90 per cent will be located in second-, third- and fourth-tier cities, according to Kent Sun, chief development officer, IHG Greater China.

He said: "These cities still have vast available areas for developing new hotel projects. Many local governments and developers are looking to build landmark structures to boost their (respective) city's image and reputation which has provided good opportunities for us to expand our portfolio in China."

China's secondary and tertiary cities are also of "particular interest" to Hilton, Asia-Pacific president Martin Rinck told the *Daily*. "This is owing to the significant gap between existing hotel supply and the exponential increase in demand – particularly in popular leisure destinations such as Yunnan, Guangdong, Shaanxi and Sichuan," he added.

Likewise, resort destinations in second- and third-tier cities are attractive to IHG. Said Sun: "Their booming prospects are backed by favourable government policies including more public holidays, annual leave encouragement and a boost in domestic consumption."



Schroeder: still room for expansion

Spot these headturners @ ITB Asia



HUNK OF THE DAY



BABE OF THE DAY

## NUMBERS THAT MATTER

**115%** The YOY decline in Thai outbound group tour bookings made on October 14, the first business day after the passing of King Bhumibol Adulyadej

**4.2%** The YTD decline in international arrivals into Europe this year, while arrivals into Asia-Pacific rose five per cent, the highest regional growth worldwide

**3** The maximum number of days Chinese travellers spent on average in South Korea during the recent Golden Week holidays from October 1 to 7. Chinese travellers favour the destination for weekend getaways

**1%** The YTD growth in international arrivals into Hong Kong in 2016, the lowest of any Asia-Pacific destinations

ForwardKeys' Jameson Wong at the TTG Asia Global Air Travel Trends Update



## TTGmice celebrates ASEAN's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary

ASEAN member nations are intensifying their courtship of business events as the economic bloc approaches its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday next year. *TTGmice ASEAN's 50th Anniversary Special Issue* takes a look at their achievements in MICE, and hears from trade experts how South-east Asia can benefit from being positioned as a single destination. Get your copy at the TTG Asia Media booth, number B55.



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## News

# All eyes on Thai tourism after Oct 13

Industry readies for 'potential loss business' in coming weeks, urges clear communication with travellers, clients

By Raini Hamdi

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

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

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

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

For leisure, however, an outpouring of sympathy for local Thais since last Thursday, especially on social media, and immediate factual updates by both public and private sectors on the ground situation, have helped a lot to assure tourists. Industry members interviewed all said this effective communication must continue for, despite efforts, there were still incidences that showed they could never be enough.

David Kevan, director of Chic Locations UK, highlighted how the media in the UK had focused on the one-year mourning period – essentially for the royal family, government offices and, at their discretion, the Thai public – and less on

## VIEWPOINTS



**Kumara Guru, executive director, Aaya Journeys India**

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

**Anahita Avari, CEO, WWW Travel India**

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

**Desmond Lee, group managing director, Apple Vacations Group Malaysia**

An incentive group of 100 high achievers from the manufacturing sector had changed destination from Bangkok to Ho Chi Minh City for its incentive trip in mid-November due to uncertainty over the immediate situation in Thailand. The client was unsure if Bangkok would remain peaceful and whether places of interest would be open during the period of mourning.



**Monas Tjahjono, managing director, Monas Tours & Travel Indonesia**

My company will place less focus on selling Thailand for the short-term due to the uncertain political situation at the moment.

the current one-month period observed by everyone, in which Thailand has a respectful, more sombre tone.

"It is important we all get the message across that Thailand is not closed for a year," Kevan said.

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

Sumate Sudasna, managing director of CDM, also added: "There have been cancellations of corporate meetings due to concerns it might not be appropriate to hold events in this 30-day mourning period. We need to clarify to clients about

the government's (stand on) celebratory events; only state-organised events are encouraged to postpone. My company's two events in November are proceeding, with just the observation of the mourning atmosphere; no concerns otherwise."

Laurent Kuenzle, CEO of Asian Trails Group, puts it in perspective for clients as to what the 30-day mourning period entails: "Life goes on as usual, albeit most people are in black. Some entertainment areas are closed. Music is tuned down or changed, and no one really minds. You want to see the famous Alcazar Cabaret in Pattaya? All shows are on except the late evening one. Cruises on the Chao

Phraya River? All operating, but the music is tuned down. All attractions with the exception of the Grand Palace are open. It's still people in bikinis (at the beach). All restaurants and shops are opened. Alcohol is served everywhere. There will be no full moon party in Koh Phangan this month and there are no major concerts, but cinemas operate as usual, shopping malls see the usual crowds and I could name another hundred venues where nothing has changed."

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

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

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

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

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## Analysis

# Taming a wild frontier

Ecotourism and responsible travel are now buzzwords in Asia as trade players recognise the under-explored potential – and benefits – that could be yielded from these fledgling sectors, discovers **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**



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Akha hill tribe villagers working in a tea plantation in northern Thailand

Recognising the high-yield, low-impact benefits of ecotourism, governments in South-east Asia are now putting serious efforts to develop this niche market by including principles of sustainable and responsible travel in national tourism planning frameworks and policies.

At the regional level, the first-ever ASEAN Ecotourism Forum (AEF) – which took place in Pakse, Laos in June – brought together tourism ministers and senior executives from the 10 ASEAN member countries plus China, Japan and South Korea to discuss regional cooperation regarding sustainable tourism development.

One clear manifestation of AEF is the adoption of the Pakse Declaration on ASEAN Roadmap for Strategic Development of Ecotourism Clusters and Tourism Corridors, which will be submitted to the heads of state for adoption during the 28<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit in Vientiane in September as one of the key deliverables under Laos' ASEAN chairmanship in 2016.

The Pakse Declaration takes its inspirations from the European Green Belt – a pan-Europe ecological network that stretches along the former Iron Curtain. It seeks to develop ecotourism clusters; tourism corridors; facilitate cross-border travel as well as travel into rural areas and nature reserves; unlock economic opportunities along overland and waterways; create employment opportunities; revitalise idle natural resources; and transform impoverished areas, announced the ASEAN tourism ministers in a joint media statement during AEF.

Bosengkham Vongdara, Laos' minister of information, culture and tourism, said during the forum's opening that it was "appropriate and timely for ASEAN to closely join hands in realising the new ASEAN Vision 2025 and ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan 2016-2025".

The Malaysia National Ecotourism Plan 2016-2025 will be using the cluster approach – i.e. grouping a critical mass of competitive and/or complementary tourism products in a geographical area – as a planning tool, informed Amran Hamzah, a professor in tourism planning and director of the Centre for Innovative Planning

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## Analysis



From above: Tad Fane Waterfall in Champhasak, Laos; snow-capped mountains in Putao, Myanmar

and Development at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM).

While he declined to reveal more details of the plan at press time as the strategy was still undergoing discussion, Amran said that it will seek to avoid earlier weak points in the National Ecotourism Plan 1996 such as the absence of “buy in” from the private sector.

Frans Teguh, director of infrastructure development & tourism ecosystem at Indonesian Ministry of Tourism, sees “big potential for marine tourism” and projects ecotourism to contribute to 10 per cent of the country’s tourism market within the next five years.

The Indonesian government will integrate ecotourism into the national masterplan this year, in addition to identifying destinations like Lake Toba, Labuan Bajo and Mandalika as priority areas for ecotourism development. As well, a special pavilion dedicated to sustainable tourism will debut at PATA Travel Mart this year, Frans said.

Myanmar, a late entrant to the ecotourism scene compared with its regional peers, has laid out the Ecotourism Policy and Management Strategy for Protected Areas last year, following the 2013 Tourism Master Plan, revealed Yee Mon, permanent secretary of Ministry of Hotels and Tourism.

### Ground-up efforts, public-private partnerships take root

On the ground, industry stakeholders are paying greater attention to public-private partnerships to drive the sector. Governments are recognising that local buy-in and community ownership will lead to better success of projects while private sector players also need the authorities to drive and enforce policies.

SB Chetry Win Tin, managing director of Journeys Adventure Travel and Myanmar Hill Lodges, posits that Myanmar is moving in the right path with a more open and democratic government in the helms, bolstered by funding from government and international development organisations like GIZ.

“We were left out from most of ASEAN’s regional planning in the past but we’re now back on the map and fully engaged,” he said.

However, the widespread perception of Myanmar as a cultural destination is perhaps the biggest bugbear in growing the adventure and ecotourism sectors, opined Chetry. Few visitors are even aware that South-east Asia’s highest peak is found in Myanmar’s north, for example, he added.

Suthep Keasang, director, Office of Community-Based Tourism at the Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA) – a government agency set up under the Office of the Prime Minister in Thailand to develop sustainable tourism in the designated areas – opines that ecotourism development in the country is progressively moving in the right direction with stronger support from the government.

“Getting coordination among all stakeholders is an all-time challenge,” Suthep admitted. “We must remember communities don’t live their lives for just tourism,” he added, emphasising the need for community involvement.

Likewise, Inthy Deuansavan, founder and owner of Green Discovery Laos, who is widely credited as a successful ecotourism entrepreneur in the country, stresses the importance of local involvement and livelihood building.

Using Tree Top Explorer at Jungle Hotel Paksong as an example, Inthy stated how



the zipline adventure project in southern Laos his company initiated has benefited local villages.

“Our staff strength grew from 24 to 100, and the village still has many young people unlike other Lao villages where youngsters move away to cities for work,” said Inthy. “Tourism income is now higher than coffee cultivation, which used to be the main livelihood in this village.”

Urging a “more conscious” approach to responsible tourism, Gregorio Rojas, programmer manager at Fairtrek, advocates suppliers to address all aspects of being a responsible travel provider.

“Many suppliers only offer ecotourism in one aspect but ignore other components such as garbage disposal,” he remarked. “Therefore we need vendors and suppliers to have access to information, while tour operators should educate their suppliers on ecotourism.”

Industry players are increasingly cognisant of the role suppliers play in the

sustainable development of ecotourism, with Bangkok-based DMCs like Khiri Travel and Exo Travel having successfully achieved Travelife certification, a leading international sustainability certification for the travel and hospitality industry.

“The Travelife assessment applies to our supply chain, internal operations and hotel assessments,” said Exo Travel’s sustainability coordinator Thuy Nguyen.

“We want a globally recognised standard but at the same time we also give feedback to Travelife, which has a working group in Bangkok, on the criteria to better cater to the local and regional differences,” she said.

Establishing ecotourism certification standards for Asia was one of the aims that drove Masaru Takayama, founder of Japan Ecotourism Association and responsible tour outfit Spirit of Japan, to spearhead the formation of the Asian Ecotourism Network last year. The network is located in Bangkok under the care of DASTA,

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## Analysis

with satellite offices in India, Indonesia, Japan and Malaysia.

Takayama remarked: "There are a lot of (sustainable tourism) standards but they are usually developed by the EU or the US. We want standards for Asia by Asians."

The network has entered into a partnership with Global Sustainable Tourism Council and set up as an internal committee to look at setting up global ecotourism standards for Asia by next year.

### Forging a path ahead

Ultimately, people remain the most vital link for Asia's ecotourism sector to flourish, a point that most trade players unanimously agree on.

"Public-private partnerships are definitely important but most critical is the correct people to lead the development," said Neeracha Wongmasa, managing director of Phunacome Resort and a committee member of Thai Ecotourism & Adventure Travel Association.

What also matters, Neeracha added, is "consistency in policy", which also leads to questions of sustainability, especially in Thailand which has seen frequent changes in the country's leadership in recent years.

She elaborated: "Authenticity is a dynamic concept, as it will change with time as a destination modifies, so what's more important is that the aims are clear and remain unchanged even if the people involved change."

Owing to the "high startup costs" in ecotourism ventures, Asian Development

Bank's senior portfolio management specialist of Lao PDR Resident Mission, Steven Schipani, urged governments to proactively identify viable tourism projects and provide stronger destination marketing in order to lend a helping hand for SME entrepreneurs in this niche sector.

Meanwhile, Xu Jing, regional director for Asia and the Pacific, would like to see more open visa policies. "Unless visa issues are facilitated and seriously taken up by governments, ecotourism benefits cannot be fully realised," he commented.

As well, accessibility remains a key issue, pointed out Asian Trails Laos' managing director Andreas Hofmann who said that better connectivity would enable tour operators and DMCs to better promote an ecotourism destination to time-starved travellers, echoing industry sentiments for more direct flights linking secondary destinations in South-east Asia.

To avoid limiting the sector potential, trade players also caution against boxing ecotourists into strict categories, as the definition of ecotourism runs the gamut from hard to soft and travellers may not be engaged in nature-based activities throughout their vacation.

"Urban ecotourism is no longer an oxymoron," UTM's Amran said, pointing to the many ecotourism types in Asia such as Singapore's Gardens by the Bay.

"There's no need for good walking shoes there," he quipped. "And will this be the trend for Asian tourists?"

## Managing river flows for tourism and development

As the popularity of Mekong River cruising continues to grow at a rapid pace, industry experts are urging drastic measures to be put in place to ease rising congestion and move the industry forward.

At this year's Mekong Tourism Forum in Sihanoukville, John Boyd, director of Pandaw Cruises, said: "The main concern is there are too many ships; it's almost out of control. We're not against competition but it gets so congested. Passengers are fed up of bumping into other boats."

Fears were raised that the market will be unable to sustain increased demand if operations and infrastructure are not upgraded along the Mekong. Naidah Yazdani, Asia director, CF Mekong River Cruises, said: "It's reaching a point now where unless we develop those facilities, we cannot take the industry to the next level."

Additional and improved docking facilities and allocating slot times for boats are necessary to avoid the "scrabble for the same dock" at destinations such as Phnom Penh, said Maarten Perdok, managing director, Heritage Line.

To ensure this happens, more cross-border communication needs to be carried out between authorities, with operators working closely with local communities to preserve the authentic Mekong experiences that travellers desire.

Yazdani said: "The Mekong is not about experiencing wines or seeing several capital cities; the Mekong is about visiting small villages. It's about experiencing the contrasts between the countries."

The Mekong, which spans six countries and diverse cultures, is ripe for ecotourism development. Walter Jamieson, Asian Development Bank consultant and professor at Thailand's Thammasat University, is helping to draft a tourism strategy with the UNWTO to develop ecotourism and authentic traveller experiences along the Mekong.

Jamieson proposes breaking the waterway down into seven "sizeable products, each with their unique theme" to introduce greater focus and coordination. "We must increase the quality and variety of river-based tourism activities on the Mekong," he added.

An example is Mekong Dawn Cruises, which offers intimate trips from Phnom Penh to Siem Reap, stopping at villages along the way so passengers can watch local craftsmen ware their goods, explore off-the-beaten-track pagodas and discover traditional floating villages.

Moreover, with river cruise passengers offering a different dynamic to the backpackers the region traditionally attracted, the river cruise market holds a lot of potential. "(River cruise passengers) tend to be older and have higher income," said Boyd. "This is a very special market for the region, and one that can truly be developed."

And with the majority of Mekong River cruises currently catering to Western travellers, the mass Chinese and Indian markets are yet to be targeted and offer a huge untapped potential, said trade players. However, this needs to be done such that further developments do not burden the waterway with more traffic and pollution.

"We need to be careful as this will be extremely difficult," said Yazdani.

– Marissa Carruthers



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Life along the Mekong River



## MICE feature

# Positive forces

Companies are increasingly incorporating opportunities for their meeting and incentive delegates to do good for the communities in the destination where their event is hosted. By [Karen Yue](#), with inputs from reporters



Here are some outright good news: the number of corporate meetings and incentive programmes that feature Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) objectives has spiked over the past few years, with corporate event specialists reporting increments ranging between 15 per cent and 100 per cent.

When MCI conducted its *2015 Annual Client Sustainability Survey*, it found that 95 per cent of its clients make sustainability a key consideration when planning their events, up from 25 per cent in 2011. 90 per cent of clients have their own sustainability programmes (up from 15 per cent in 2011) while 68 per cent evaluate the sustainability of their supply chain (up from 25 per cent in 2011).

At Fcm Travel Solutions Singapore, client requests for CSR activities have doubled over the past three years, according to Theresa Lee, head of MICE. Six out of 10 meetings and incentives it organises today feature CSR components.

Lee said: "We have received frequent requests (from our clients) to incorporate CSR activities into their meetings and incentive trips in an effort to build care and concern for people, planet and profit. That translates to a sustainable business and the environment they operate in."

The numbers have also risen for Intas Destination Management in the Philippines – seven out of 10 meetings and incentive programmes today include a CSR activity compared to just three years ago, said Kevin Jemel Hinahon, marketing and MICE manager of the agency.

Hinahon said many of his clients today take the initiative to make that request, and the change is a welcome one.

He said: "This is a win-win situation. (CSR activities) make the trip memorable and meaningful. The trip will not only help individuals, it also inspires the participants and bolsters their spirit of volunteerism."

Destination Asia Japan, which was established five years ago, has seen CSR in-

clusions blossom from "being very rare then to accounting for one in four today", revealed its managing director, Jared Stenhouse, who added that "it is becoming standard for us to include a CSR component (in our response to) an RFP for an incentive project".

Some event specialists said international firms with vast experience in organising business events are the main drivers of this growing interest in CSR achievements as part of business events.

Takayuki Kawahara, general manager of MICE sales division, Tobu Top Tours Co in Japan, observed that large companies, especially international pharmaceutical firms, were putting in the most requests for CSR activities, while Hinahon said his foreign clients were the most active champions.

## What drives the desire?

There are various reasons, from an altruistic desire to leverage corporate power

and a strong headcount during business gatherings to help the less fortunate in the destination hosting the event, to a more pragmatic need to appear as a responsible corporate citizen under public scrutiny.

Lee believes that the expanding millennial workforce is particularly driving the altruistic push.

She said: "The millennial generation grew up with the Internet and is well informed of global issues, especially those facing the underprivileged and the environment. They are always looking for ways to contribute to the betterment of their local communities and to society."

And companies seeking to win loyalty from the millennials and retain talent are discovering that they need to be socially responsible too.

"A strong CSR policy is a strategic tool used to attract and retain talent for the business. By providing the employee with the opportunity for individual contribution towards the greater good of a cause, the community or the environment, the

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## MICE feature



Many CSR activities can also be effective teambuilding exercises, so companies can achieve two aims with one event. They can also serve as positive publicity for companies.

**Takayuki Kawahara**  
General manager, MICE sales division,  
Tobu Top Tours Co, Japan

company helps the employee to foster a sense of belonging and a feel-good factor about themselves and the employer," she added.

Talan Miller, managing director of Sabre Corporate Development, Australia, said: "The millennials – be they staff or customers – certainly seem to demand more community-minded values from

the big brands. In reality, while some may have genuinely grown in altruism, I think that global connectedness and social media are actually holding some big brands far more accountable to their negative actions in some markets these days. So some seek to add some community credibility and charm to their brands or assuage some guilt after a certain major image crisis."

Whatever the reason is for the CSR inclusion, Miller offers one invaluable advice to companies: ensure a balance in the contribution to charity and the cost of staging the event.

He elaborated: "We once saw a client donate approximately A\$2,000 (US\$1,468) worth of bikes, then with the charity representative still in the room, they gave about A\$6,000 worth of fashion sunglasses as prizes to the winning teams from the team challenge linked to the donation. This looked a little shallow and hypocritical to external observers."

### Adding quality flesh to the bone

The growing implementation of CSR activities as part of a business programme is also simply to better engage an increasingly discerning audience.

Max Jantasuan, group managing director of Events Travel Asia, Thailand, said: "Corporate clients are now looking at different ways to reward their staff and promote work-life balance. Incorporating CSR in meetings and incentive programmes rewards participants in a spiritual way and engages the team to look at life differently and appreciate what they have achieved."

Stu Robertson, managing director of Team Up Events in New Zealand, agrees.

He said: "For a lot of (clients), creating

a memorable experience for their participants and linking that with the community in the destination (and the organisational values is key). Incorporating a sense of giving can help create that memorable experience."

Stenhouse added that business event participants "are looking for more ways to get involved in the destination they are visiting".

He said: "They don't want to just sit on the coach and watch things pass by; they want hands-on experiences."

Furthermore, with corporate budgets for incentives being tightened these days, CSR activities are all the more attractive because they can add substance to a reward programme without being seen as a cost, Stenhouse reasoned.

### What works?

CSR programmes that benefit children and youths, and those that come with immediate and obvious results appear to be a hit, according to event specialists that spoke to the *Daily*.

Brett Hollis, owner of Big Stick Adventures, Australia, found that activities that have an impact on other people and can provide an immediate visual, educational and emotional result are more popular with corporate clients, in particular those that reach out to disadvantaged and disabled youths and transparent organisations with a blue ribbon vision (in support of child abuse prevention) and cause.

Robertson found that CSR activities that "deliver the biggest impact... and create the biggest smiles" and whose beneficiaries are included in the business event at some stage, are preferred.

Hinahon said activities that empowered local communities to make a sustainable

livelihood are also popular, while Tokyo-based Event Services, Inc's Lucky Morimoto said clients desired programmes that allowed their staff to interact with the locals as that will form part of the training or education.

Swire Travel Hong Kong's senior manager, Eva Lai, said tree-planting in China is preferred by her clients in Hong Kong as "it is easy to handle and can accommodate groups of all sizes", but added that they generally prefer to implement CSR activities on homeground.

Miller opined that while hands-on activities and visits to charity organisations might be great, companies should first consider how useful the donation or activity would be to the beneficiary.

He said: "The thing most charity projects actually need is cash to spend. It is just harder to make cash appear warm and fuzzy for those (incorporating a CSR element) with a pure event focus."

"A nice example was a global engineering firm that ran an A\$2,500 teambuilding event to link to an A\$12,000 donation to charity. There wasn't a big song and dance over the donation, as it was just done because the senior leadership had a genuine desire to make a difference."

Lee also advised care when selecting a local organisation to work with.

"We do our due diligence and conduct background checks on the selected organisations to make sure their books are in order and that they are not linked to any known scams or human trafficking/child labour issues," she said.

"Corporations may also want to pay attention to the emotional impact of certain CSR activities on their staff," suggested Brian Kock, senior manager – destinations & events management, Swire Travel Hong Kong.

# Leading by good example

From cooking for impoverished children in Auckland to saving a protected bear species in Laos, event specialists show that there are many ways to do good while meeting for business

### Spreading the love to brother bear

A Singapore-based investment company – a client of FCm Travel Solutions Singapore – wanted to introduce a CSR experience for the first time to its corporate retreat. The experience involved a fundraising campaign within the different teams in the company, and part of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of the investment teams went towards this company-wide initiative.

Luang Prabang was the chosen destina-

tion. FCm Travel Solutions Singapore worked with its local vendor, EXO Travels, to propose the Free the Bears programme.

The group visited the Bear Rescue Centre at Nam Kan natural protected area, home to the largest community of protected Moon Bears (also known as Asian Black Bears) in Laos. Participants were given a project overview before being taken on a behind-the-scenes tour of the sanctuary. They also learnt how the bears were taken into care after their rescue, heard the stories of how each bear came to live at this sanctuary, what they were being hunted for and how Bear Rescue Centre continues its mission to protect, preserve and enrich the lives of bears in six countries – Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam.

Donations raised through the Free the Bears programme went towards food, medical and care for the bears.

### A contribution to green education

MCI Asia Pacific helped client Symantec sponsor and co-organise a Plant-for-the-Planet Academy (an official UN education project) for a group of children as part of the company's Vision Symposium.

During the Academy, professionals educated the children about environmental issues and inspired them to become Climate Justice Ambassadors by equipping them with the skills to educate their own friends and family about the importance of the environment.

As a result, the achievements saw US\$10,000 donated by Symantec to sponsor the Academy, and 43 children between the ages of eight and 14 became Climate Justice Ambassadors.

Also, 19,228 pledges to plant trees were collected and US\$15,000 was donated by Symantec to plant trees in Campeche, Mexico.

### A talent for fund-raising

The Nu Skin Got Talent Show was a single-night event during the 2014 Nu Skin Greater China Regional Convention, where the global wellness company arranged for its distributors to form teams and put up a talent showcase, effectively marrying entertainment, team-bonding opportunities and charity. To vote for their favourite team, the audience had to purchase voting tickets and sales proceeds were channelled to the Nu Skin Force for Good Foundation which supports humanitarian projects in more than 50 countries.

Various charity sales booths were also set up at the convention, to raise additional funds for the Foundation.

According to Avis Chau, vice president of Nu Skin Greater China Success Inspirations and general manager of Nu Skin Hong Kong and Macau, both the Nu Skin Got Talent Show and charity booths raised HK\$2 million (US\$257,625). This amount went into supporting charity projects in Greater China including the Nu Skin Greater China Children Heart Fund.

### Helping nature along

A group of 100 delegates from a Malaysian education sector held a two-day CSR programme in the Setiu Wetlands in Terengganu this January. Put together by local DMC Ping Anchorage Travel & Tours in partnership with local non-profit organisation Sahabat Setiu, the programme saw the delegates learn about the importance of the mangrove ecosystem and take part in activities such as releasing terrapins into the river, planting 500 mangrove seedlings and clearing rubbish in the Setiu Wetlands area.

Alex Lee, CEO of Ping Anchorage Travel & Tours, said: "(The programme) also benefitted the local community in Setiu as (its people)



were paid for helping with the tree-planting, and for demonstrating how mats and baskets are made using plants from the wetlands."



### Experimenting with tea leaves

A group of 50 German delegates who were in China for a meeting and incentive sought out a CSR activity that



“Once, we proposed a visit to some soldiers (who were maimed in battle) but that was rejected because it was too impactful on the delegates.”

**Destination considerations**

As business events have corporate objectives to fulfil, destination choices will not be influenced by the availability of CSR opportunities, as rightly pointed out by Sumate Sudasna, managing director of CDM – Conference & Destination Management, Thailand, who remarked that “(event delegates) do not travel to save the world”.

However, Sabre’s Miller said: “It does compel them to look deeper at what stark contrasts might exist between their five-star resort and the poor local villages. When it crosses their minds that just 25 per cent of their gala dinner’s bar bill might save lives, provide safe housing or

train several teachers, it can be a sobering experience. When carefully planned, these feelings can help lead to increased awareness and advocacy of local CSR issues.”

Hollis believes that every destination offers worthy causes for corporations to fight for and it is up to the client to decide which best fits their corporate CSR ambitions and culture.

Even Japan, a first-world country, can offer up impactful CSR opportunities, said Stenhouse.

“We had some projects in Fukushima and Tohoku which were badly hit by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami. We brought groups to the temporary housing units for survivors and ran some English language classes. Even just bringing tourism business into these areas is a big help,” he said.

Kawahara added that event delegates visiting Japan are also able to volunteer at sports events and take part in tree-planting activities.

Max said the growing demand for CSR inclusions within business events has made it necessary for event specialists like himself “to be more creative in tailoring CSR programmes that cater to the client’s corporate identity” while using available resources.

Diethelm Travel Group, which has strong local networks in the Asia destinations it operates in, is able to “provide all our clients with CSR activities wherever the destination our client chooses, be it Cambodia, Laos, Thailand or Myanmar”, said Jeremie Descelles, sales and account director (MICE, France, Africa and Asia).

Expecting the demand for CSR activities to rise further, Kawahara concluded that event specialists “need to be ready for that”.

CSR activities encourage teambuilding, promote environmental awareness and offer delegates up-close and personal experiences with the local communities.

**Jeremie Descelles**

Sales and account director (MICE, France, Africa and Asia), Diethelm Travel Group, Thailand

promotes sustainable tourism.

The handling agent, Germany-based Globalevents, organised a tea plantation activity that gave delegates an understanding of cultural preservation and sustainable agriculture. The highlight of the day was the hands-on tea-growing experience during which a specialist detailed the different methods of the tea-growing process. The group got to learn how to choose and pluck tea leaves, and at the end of it, brewed their own tea using the leaves they had plucked.

According to Frauke Melchert, senior sales manager MICE with Globalevents, the delegates were all very pleased as the experience was unique and they could try the fruits of their labour.

**A tale of green commitment**

When a major Japanese finance company took 400 employees to New York for a week-long incentive trip, it obtained permission from the authorities to plant a tree sapling in Central Park. According to Japan’s Event Services, Inc, president Lucky Morimoto, the client was keen to promote a message of environmental responsibility as well as lasting friendship between the US and Japan. Planting a tree was seen to satisfy both.

Furthermore, the project was warmly welcomed by the company as it could be revisited by employees for many years.

**A vision for a happy world**

In April 2016, Sabre Corporate Development handled a group of 100 global leaders and their partners from a major international software company and helped delivered a CSR event in Gold Coast, Australia.



World Vision Annual Report

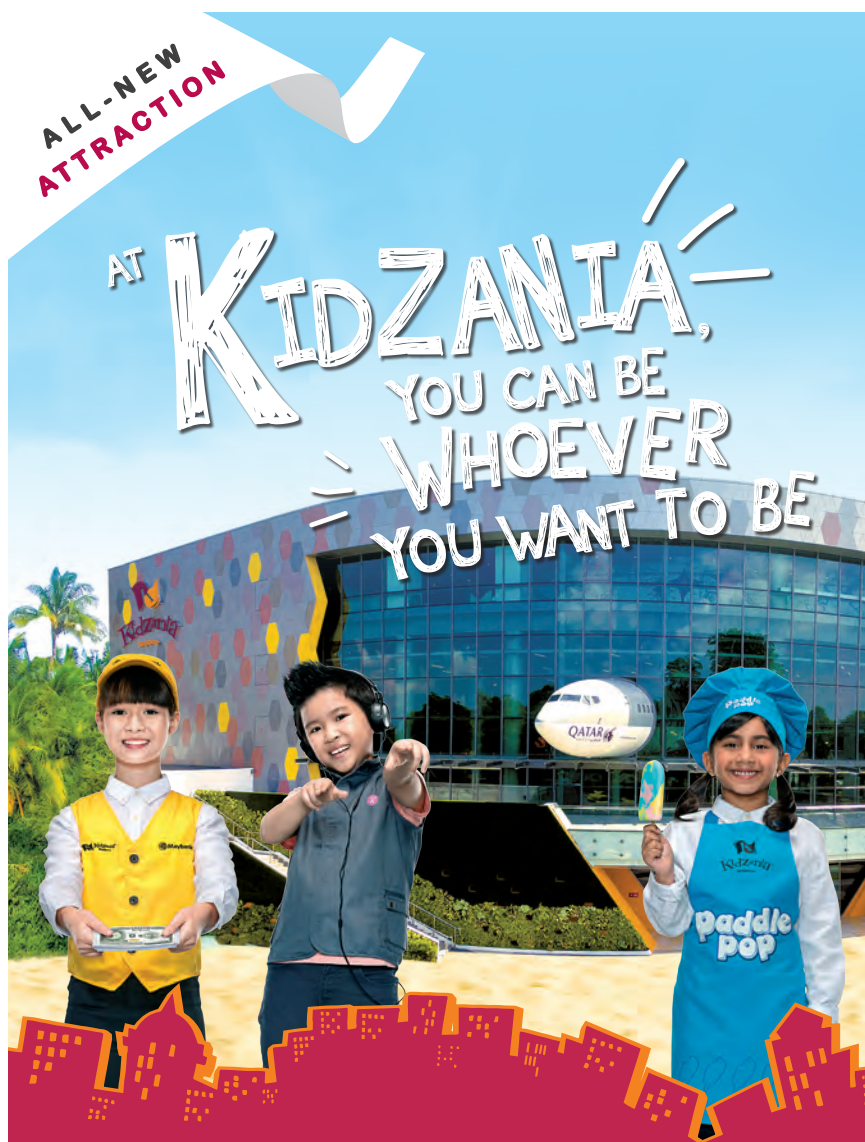
As the client had global operations, it requested a programme that would deliver equally far-reaching results. As such, Sabre used World Vision, an international humanitarian aid organisation, and its Smiles programme as the medium.

Following a three-hour conference and teambuilding activity, the group chalked up dozens of education packages, vaccinations, water projects, livestock animals, solar lights, seeds and other items that were eventually donated globally via World Vision.

**Satiating a need to feed**

Some 25 participants from Tonkin and Taylor, a multinational engineering company, visited a low socio-economic school in Auckland to participate in a Feed the Need programme. Their challenge was to prepare, cook and serve lunch for 75 school kids.

A Tonkin and Taylor representative said: “We got way more out of the programme than we ever expected – it was a great feeling and we came away a little awed by the kids’ talent and were hugely impressed with all the organisation that had happened behind the scenes.”



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## MICE feature

# Unique venues

A change of scenery can go a long way to invigorate corporate or association gatherings. And with the range of bookable unique venues available across Asia-Pacific, we round up some inspiring crowd-pleasers



From left: The Queensland Art Gallery – Gallery of Modern Art; Asia Society Hong Kong Center

## AUSTRALIA

### Opera Point Marquee, Sydney

**Selling points** You will not find a better view of the city's spectacular harbour and Sydney Harbour Bridge than at this purpose-built event venue nestled at the base of the Sydney Opera House, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. And if that isn't enough, it's catered by ARIA Catering, the brainchild of Matt Moran, one of the nation's most revered chefs.

**For events** Given its grand location and ability to seat up to 250 guests with the inclusion of a dance floor, Opera Point Marquee lends itself perfectly to black tie gala dinners. Its capacity doubles for cocktail functions and the space is a blank canvas, making it such that theming is limited only by your imagination.

### Rainforestation Nature Park, Kuranda

**Selling points** Located in the serene Kuranda National Park, Rainforestation Nature Park is a one-stop-shop Aussie experience. Tropical fruit orchards, a wildlife park with roaming kangaroos and a 650kg croc, and not to mention an opportunity to learn about Aboriginal culture are just a taste of what's on offer.

**For events** Rainforestation Nature Park is the ultimate venue for a networking event, particularly if you're entertaining international guests. The park is available for exclusive hire and can cater for up to 2,000 delegates. Jazz up your event with themed food stalls, live music, wildlife interaction and cultural performances for a true festival atmosphere.

### The Queensland Art Gallery – Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA), Brisbane

**Selling points** From just 38 pictures at its opening in 1895, QAGOMA's collection now boasts 16,000 works of historical, modern and contemporary art across two

adjacent riverside buildings on Brisbane's South Bank.

What's more, it's the only Australian art gallery with purpose-built facilities dedicated to film and was the venue of choice for several events during the G20 Leaders' Summit in 2014.

**For events** Two cinemas, a roof terrace and a river lounge and balcony are just the start of what's on offer, with maximum capacity of 1,200 cocktail-style and 250 for a banquet in The Long Gallery. It is a fitting venue for film screenings that lead on to fruitful discussions, a unique and stimulating way to move the association's agenda forward.

## HONG KONG

### sky100 Hong Kong Observation Deck

**Selling points** Looking out to the Victoria Harbour and the CBD skyline from 393m above sea level, sky100 is branded as Hong Kong's highest indoor event venue. To top this off, the 1,486m<sup>2</sup> scalable space is located in the International Commerce Centre (ICC) of West Kowloon, adjacent to first-class shopping, dining, luxury accommodation and entertainment.

**For events** The venue's soaring ceiling height and pillar-free setup provides a flexible canvas for creating multiple event zones, lending it well to events that involve the concurrent running of activities in different setups – namely gala dinners, exhibitions and conferences.

The space also accommodates events of various scales, with its capacity ranging from 50 (for an intimate dinner) to 1,000 (for a cocktail party).

### Kai Tak Cruise Terminal

**Selling points** On top of being the longest structure on the Victoria Harbour, this iconic landmark also provides a vantage

point for views of Hong Kong Island on one side and Kowloon Peninsula on the other.

**For events** With a combined area for up to 3,000 guests, the venue is suitable for large-scale events like symposiums, exhibitions, cocktail parties and concerts. The 25,000m<sup>2</sup> outdoor area is big enough for sports events and banquets.

### Asia Society Hong Kong Center

**Selling points** The architectural excellence and historical significance of the centre easily sets it apart from other event venues. Located on the former Explosives Magazine compound of the old Victoria Barracks in Admiralty, years of work had gone into preserving and revitalising the site before its doors opened to the public in 2012.

**For events** Situated in an over-100-year-old heritage building, the Lee Quo Wei Room makes an inspiring space for meetings and discussions. And for more laid-back activities to ease delegates into networking, the Joseph Lau and Josephine Lau Roof Garden provides an open rooftop venue and an expansive view of the glittering city at night.

## INDONESIA

### Bali Theatre in the Park at Bali Safari & Marine Park

**Selling points** Bali Theatre in the Park – a stop in the Bali Safari not to be missed – boasts the largest indoor stage in Southeast Asia, advanced multimedia technology and state-of-art sound and lighting systems. It is also the venue where the grand Bali Agung Show is staged with an extensive cast of 180 Balinese dancers and musicians.

**For events** Bali Theatre in the Park's gold-standard stage can be put to good use for

forums, seminars, panel sessions and performing arts events. The theatre foyer also provides an appropriate outdoor setting for a range of events including cocktail receptions.

### Taman Bhagawan Bali

**Selling points** A garden sitting on the front of a white sandy beach, Taman Bhagawan showcases Indonesian heritage, culture and craftsmanship. One of its unique features is the 100-year-old Joglo Agung, a teak structure hand-carved by craftsmen who observe a ritual of fasting before they carry out their prized craft. The property also boasts an impressive capacity for up to 2,000 seated and 4,500 standing.

**For events** The venue is conveniently located on the door step of most major hotels and convention facilities in Nusa Dua. Invite your guests to have cocktails with their feet in the beach's soft white sand followed by dinner on the Rama Shinta Lawn.

## JAPAN

### Southeast Botanical Garden, Okinawa

**Selling points** The spacious green gardens, dense foliage and ponds with lotus and lily pads make the Southeast Botanical Garden a tranquil and welcoming venue on a perfect Okinawa evening.

**For events** Invite your guests for open-air evening receptions beneath the clear, tropical skies of Okinawa. With a capacity for 1,500 standing, stage performances can also be held here.

### Red Brick Warehouse, Yokohama

**Selling points** Standing right on the Yokohama bay, the Red Brick Warehouse's old-world charm perfectly complements its picturesque surroundings. A variety of boutique retail and dining options, including the Chano-ma, famous for its breakfast, are on offer. In winter, a skating rink lights up in brilliant colours outside the Red Brick Warehouse.

**For events** Smaller, more intimate events fit cosily into the reconditioned warehouse's spaces. One event space on offer is the 300-seater auditorium, a comfortable setting for fruitful forum events and seminars.

### Fukuoka Yafuoku! Dome

**Selling points** For anyone who is a fan of baseball, the chance to stand on the pitcher's mound – even if you're not actually pitching – may be too good to miss. Also, the stadium features Japan's very first retractable stadium roof so you won't have to bet on good weather to have a successful event.

**For events** The venue is suitable for events that require flexible spaces, ranging from small meeting rooms to larger exhibition spaces. State-of-the-art lighting and sound equipment also make the venue ideal for large-scale conventions and performing arts events.

## MACAU

### Macpro Gallery

**Selling points** Conveniently located in the heart of the commercial district in the Macau peninsula and just a few steps away



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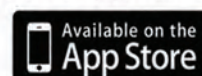
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## MICE feature

from the Historic Center of Macao, the 465m<sup>2</sup> Macpro Gallery features an array of contemporary art and large windows overlooking the surrounding greenery.

**For events** Still a well-kept secret in town, the venue offers delegates an inspiring venue and a feeling of novelty and exclusivity for a variety of purposes, including exhibitions, seminars and brainstorming sessions. The venue can be sectioned out or booked as a whole for a range of event scales.

## MALAYSIA

### Sarawak Cultural Village, Kuching

**Selling points** Regarded as a living museum, the Sarawak Cultural Village offers live demonstrations of time-honoured crafts unique to the state's diverse tribes, such as the production of sago and handicrafts. Traditional performances and local cuisine are other enriching cultural activities on offer.

**For events** The village's longhouses provide a communal atmosphere that can encourage guests to loosen up and engage in conversation, making a great choice for ice-breakers and meetings. Cocktail parties and outdoor gala dinners can also be arranged.

### Aquaria KLCC, Kuala Lumpur

**Selling points** The venue's key attraction is a gigantic aquarium that showcases a myriad of marine life from Malaysia and around the world. There will be no lack of wow-factor with the mesmerising aquatic display as your event's backdrop.

**For events** The venue is an obvious choice for associations dealing with water, sea or marine life. But it can also work well for planners who would like to have easy conversation-starters on display, or for delegates who are also attending events in the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre and its vicinity.

### Glasshouse at Seputeh, Kuala Lumpur

**Selling points** The architecture of Glasshouse at Seputeh in Kuala Lumpur brings nature into the backdrop of any function and ceremony – all within the comfort of a fully air-conditioned venue. The Lawn is the focal point of the space, boasting floor-to-ceiling glass panelling, an elevated stage and a hardwood walkway.

**For events** The venue checks many boxes for garden-themed events. In the day, the glasshouse offers sweeping views of hilltop surroundings, shelter from bad weather – something typical outdoor venues cannot guarantee – and natural light to foolproof event photography.

### Five Bedroom Villa by The Westin Langkawi Resort & Spa

**Selling points** The luxurious villa's prime location on a private beach promises guests a captivating view of the Andaman sea. A spacious dining room, two living areas on separate floors and a separate room boasting a grand piano are some of the superlative luxuries that the villa has to offer.

**For events** The villa's patio provides a scenic setting that is sure to put a unique spin on run-of-the-mill barbecue dinners and wellness workshops. Inside, the villa space is simultaneously spacious and intimate,



Red Brick Warehouse in Yokohama

which perfectly facilitates interaction during social gatherings.

## PHILIPPINES

### Fort San Pedro, Cebu City

**Selling points** A well-maintained heritage site, Fort San Pedro is the oldest military fort in the Philippines dating back to the Spanish colonial period. It offers a perfect combination of history and heritage with a vantage view of the sea and the city.

**For events** Enjoy cocktails on the second floor for the best view of sea, stars and the city lights, and dine in the courtyard leading to well-manicured gardens. Event planners can opt for the Spanish colonial theme, which can come complete with security guards dressed as soldiers, servers dressed in full Spanish regalia, Flamenco dance performances and food catered from *Hola Espana*.

### DreamPlay by DreamWorks, City of Dreams Manila

**Selling points** Just a year old, this is the most high-tech and interactive educational theme park for children – and adults – in the Philippines. It doesn't hurt that this is the world's first DreamWorks-inspired theme park.

**For events** Eight of the park's attractions can be booked – a home run for associations looking to bring fun, imagination and creativity to their events.

Larger-scale gatherings can also be held in the function rooms, which can accommodate up to 1,200 participants.

### Subic Bay Yacht Club, Zambales

**Selling points** Subic Bay Yacht Club has four luxury yachts for rent, each having a capacity for 20 persons. Meals can be served while the yacht sails around Grande Island and beyond.

**For events** A relaxing sail off the coasts provides a coveted setting for informal meetings and gatherings. What's more, delegates can be treated to the club's facilities, including a spa that appears to belong to the old Roman Empire.

cape the confines of conventional meeting rooms. With 6,000m<sup>2</sup> of space for special events, the individual museum galleries allow event planners to be as innovative as they want – from hosting cocktail receptions, to after-parties and private product showcases. The museum is also well equipped with in-class audiovisual capabilities and technical expertise.

### Gardens by the Bay

**Selling points** This sprawling garden in the city provides mesmerising waterfront views across three gardens, spanning over 101ha of reclaimed land. The gardens provide an unorthodox setting amid of nature, something few conventional MICE spaces can offer.

**For events** Its various venues are versatile for all types of events – from gala dinners to product launches. Many associations have made Gardens by the Bay their choice venue for networking events as its scenic views naturally eases the delegates into networking mode.

Let your guests dine under a rainbow of lights at the indoor Flower Field Hall, surrounded by a Mediterranean garden, which accommodates 1,100 pax for standing cocktails, 800 pax in theatre seating, and 700 pax for sit-down dinners.

### Singapore Zoological Gardens

**Selling points** Play host against a rainforest backdrop as delegates get to break free from the concrete jungle and literally into the wild in the award-winning zoological gardens.

**For events** A range of unique indoor and outdoor venues are available. The indoor Forest Lodge can host 300 pax in a standing cocktail reception, while the outdoor Pavilion by the Lake with the Reservoir Picnic Site as well as the Palm Park can host 800 pax each in a standing reception.

Enhance your social gathering with the instant photography services – a hit with business event groups – that allow delegates to come up close and personal with the mighty elephants and orang utans, among other animals, for an unforgettable experience.

## THAILAND

### Jim Thompson House, Bangkok

**Selling points** The rustic property in Bangkok was once the living quarters of a well-known American silk entrepreneur who mysteriously disappeared. Today, a catering service, among other activities, operate out of the complex of wooden houses set in serene surroundings. It was relaunched as a site for business events in April 2016.

**For events** Guests can be treated to the charm of the property's historical grounds whether they gather in the Thompson Bar (with a capacity for 50) or attend cocktail functions, luncheons and dinners in the larger Ayara Hall (with a capacity for 150).



Clockwise from left: Macpro Gallery in Macau; Jim Thompson House in Bangkok; Glasshouse at Seputeh in Kuala Lumpur





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# A magnet for adventurers

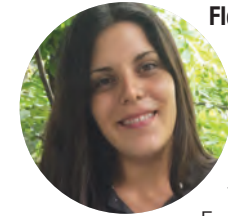
More travellers are drawn to Vietnam's gritty, alternative offerings and cuisine. [Marissa Carruthers](#) reports



Tourists travelling in boats along the Ngo Dong River at the Tam Coc portion, Ninh Binh Province, Vietnam

## VIEWPOINTS

Which source markets will perform best for you this year and why?



**Florencia Allo Moreno,**  
country manager,  
**Khiri Travel**

Europe and the US will definitely do well this year. One of the main reasons for Europe to boom is the extension of visa exemption, which will allow five more countries from Europe to visit Vietnam for free without having to arrange for a visa. We saw a growth in arrivals from these countries compared to last year, and are expecting visitorship from Europe to continue growing.

Ethel/Shutterstock

**F**ood and easy access to off-the-beaten-track trips and adventure products have gotten tourists talking about Vietnam.

Vietnam's wealth of traditional dishes have become a popular selling point for travellers, with visitors flocking to the country to try pho, bánh mì, and Vietnamese coffee, all gaining popularity globally. This was given a boost this year, when US President Barack Obama was pictured sitting with American celebrity chef, Anthony Bourdain, eating bún cha in a streetside restaurant during his visit in May.

Anita Ngai, general manager at Viator Asia Pacific, said: "People are starting to recognise how good Vietnamese food is. There is a real opportunity for the industry and tourism department to work together to create tours and activities that let visitors access more authentic and hard-to-find restaurants and stalls to experience the food, as well as hands-on cooking lessons."

This year has seen Viator enjoy a rise in guests opting for food-related tours, such as Hanoi Street Food Walking Tour.

"There is a global awareness about Vietnam and its food offerings," added

Robert Tan, business development director and cofounder of Lac Hong Voyages, who believes developing food tourism in the country will be the next trend.

Vietnam's natural variety and increasing accessibility to off-the-beaten-track destinations, such as Sapa, Mui Ne and Quy Nhon, has also seen a spike in tourists seeking an insight into local life.

Florencia Allo Moreno, country manager of Khiri Travel, said: "Over the last year and half we have seen many partners and clients (becoming more and more) interested in the off-the-beaten-track destinations, and avoiding crowds seems a number one priority."

Vietnam has also recently witnessed a surge in visitors seeking adventure sports programmes. Kayaking in Ha Long Bay, kite surfing in Mui Ne, snorkeling in Phu Quoc and biking across Hai Van mountain pass are some activities Noel Cameron, Vietnam general manager of Minor Hotels, observed are popular among guests.

Business travel is another rapidly growing sector, with the government keen to increase MICE tourism. A string of new hotels are tapping into this burgeoning market by providing state-of-the-art facilities, such as Eastin Duten Ha Resort

in Cam Ranh, which is slated to open in 1Q2017, and Crowne Plaza Phu Quoc Starbay, also set to open next year. The Grand Ho Tram Strip is gearing up to increase its offerings after receiving US\$75 million investment to expand the luxury, integrated complex to host 1,100 rooms, doubling capacity.

The latest figures from Vietnam's General Statistics Office show 4.7 million people visited the country in 1H2016 – a 21.3 percent increase on last year's figures, generating more than US\$9 billion. Friendlier visa regulations, including exemptions for 22 countries and a year-long visa waiver extension for five European countries, new direct flights and an international push by the National Board of Tourism (NBT) have helped boost figures.

In 2015, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs funded a *Welcome to Vietnam* project. The video campaign was deployed in nine languages and aims to portray Vietnam's diverse beauty while positioning it as a peaceful nation with time-honoured culture and beautiful topographies. The NBT also recently launched an e-commerce department to increase competitiveness on a global scale.

**Robert Tan, business development director/ cofounder, Lac Hong Voyages**



As far as the market is concerned, the Asian market stands out for us, with more tourists from China, India, South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong. In terms of other markets, most of Europe has stood still due to the economic woes that continue there. America is doing alright, as are France and Germany when considering Europe.

However, more work is needed to continue to drive the industry forward. Said Cameron: "Local people need a tourism department and government organisation to train them about services, foreign languages and how to create diverse tourism products. Furthermore, the government should work hand-in-hand with both non-profit and hospitality organisations to raise public awareness, preserve traditional culture and protect the environment for sustainable development in hospitality."



Bamboo Train, Battambang, Cambodia

Cristina Stoian/Shutterstock

## DESTINATION TO WATCH

### Quy Nhon: original charms

As one of Vietnam's least exploited beach destinations, Quy Nhon is on the brink of a tourism boom – and it's easy to see why. Situated on a mountain-fringed bay overlooking the South China Sea, with a smattering of islands off the shore, Quy Nhon's quiet golden sands and crystal clear waters slip under the majority of travellers' radars.

Sitting on a stretch of the south central coast, about 280km north of Nha Trang and 320km south of Da Nang, Quy Nhon offers an authentic slice of Vietnam that is, for now, pretty much unchanged by tourism. The laid-back port town is a mecca for seafood fans searching for the finest crab, prawns and scallops, which pass through the town daily before being distributed across the country, while bustling Dam Market, which is full of fresh produce, offers a glimpse into local life.

There is also a historical draw here, as Binh Dinh province – of which Quy Nhon is the capital – was the base of the lost Cham civilisation. Relics, such as Thap Doi, pepper the hillsides and valleys, making a trip into the countryside a must on any itinerary.



## Destination in numbers

**8.5**

The number of foreign visitors, in millions, Vietnam hopes to attract in 2016. They are expected to generate more than US\$16.8 billion in revenue

**697,200**

The increase in arrivals from Italy, Spain, the UK, France and Germany in the first five months of 2016, equating to 13.9 per cent after the introduction of visa waivers

**1.2**

The millions of Chinese tourists visiting Vietnam in the first six months of 2016, a 47.5 per cent growth. This accounts for a quarter of international visitors

## PRODUCTS

### 1 Sheraton Saigon Hotel & Towers

Sheraton Saigon Hotel & Towers has unveiled its revamped Grand Ballroom. The three-month renovation brings with it a 2,500m<sup>2</sup> meeting space, including the 1,080m<sup>2</sup> Grand Ballroom and pre-function area for up to 1,200 people.

### 2 Bhaya Group

Halong Bay cruise operator Bhaya Group has unveiled upgraded rooms and facilities on its two luxury-level vessels, collectively known as The Au Co. The redesign of the ships' 64 cabins is complemented by a revamp of onboard facilities, including a new reception area, spa, restaurant, cocktail bar, library and private cinema. The boats are now fully-equipped to take travellers on 3D2N itineraries encompassing activities such as mountain biking on Cat Ba Island and luxury dinners in Virgin Cave. Previously, The Au Co was able to visit the more remote parts of Halong Bay for one-day excursions only.

### 3 Ha Long Ocean Park

The US\$267 million Ha Long Ocean Park, when open, will reflect the history and mythology of Ha Long Bay. With layout based on the Disneyland model, it will include a 115m giant wheel, a water park, resort, private beach, commercial buildings and the world's longest free span double-decker cable car. Covering 195ha in Hong Gai and Bai Chay Wards, the park will open in two phases. The first, which includes the cable car, ferris wheel, private beach and a portion of the entertainment park, will open by the end of 2016, with the remainder wrapping up by 2019.

### 4 Fansipan Sapa Cable Car

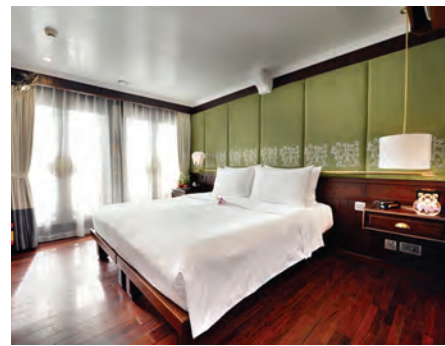
In February, a cable car system opened in Lào Cai, Sapa, taking visitors from Muong Hoa Valley to the 3,143m-high peak of Fansipan Mountain – Indochina's highest summit. The climb takes 15 minutes, compared to two days sans cable car. It is

expected to boost visitors to Sapa by 30 to 40 per cent year-on-year, hitting three million by 2020.

### 5 Royal Lotus Danang

Opened in April 2016, Royal Lotus Danang is helping to position the area as a MICE hub – a focus that local government pledged to strive for in June. Situ-

ated a three-minute stroll from the beach, the 192-room hotel boasts Danang's largest conference hall, which can accommodate more than 1,000 people. A fine dining restaurant, sky bar offering 360-degree views of the city and ocean, fitness centre and spa with an outdoor swimming pool are also featured at H&K Hospitality's flagship hotel.

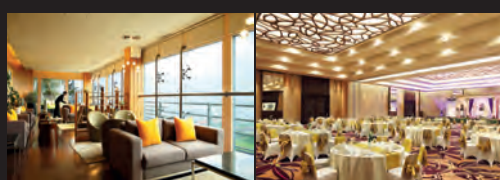


From left: upgraded room onboard Bhaya Group's revamped vessel; Royal Lotus Danang



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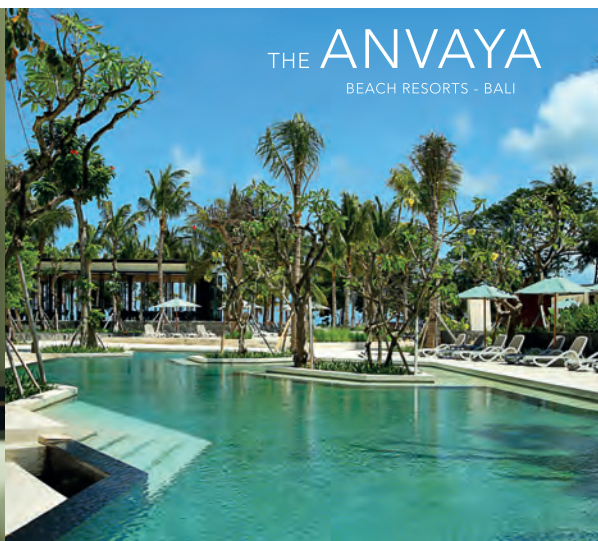
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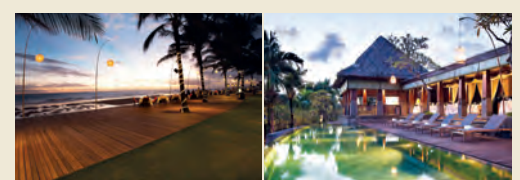
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## Destination Philippines



Boats at the cave entrance of Puerto Princesa subterranean underground river

# Investments for the future

Strengthening hardware and developing secondary destinations may provide some relief to the overloaded gateway in Manila as international arrivals are projected to rise in the years forward. By [Rosa Ocampo](#)

Industry players in the Philippines are eager to find out how the industry would cope with the increase in tourist traffic, just as Wanda Tulfo Teo, a seasoned travel agent plucked by new Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, takes helm at the Department of Tourism (DoT).

Growth in foreign arrivals was certain this year and the next, Domingo Ramon Enerio III, the former COO of DoT's marketing arm, Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) told *TTG Show Daily* in an earlier interview. He departed the organisation on August 22 for an early retirement.

Enerio believed arrivals would total 5.9 million to 6 million, up from 5.4 million in 2015. Numbers next year would likely to be boosted by the country's hosting of the year-long ASEAN Summit and the Miss Universe pageant in January, he said.

This leaves trade players with a nagging question on their minds: Where will these foreign tourists pass – not counting the over 55 million domestic travellers – when the country's major gateway of Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) is heaving from its congested single runway and four passenger terminals?

During the tourism stakeholders' meeting with the DoT a few months ago, Rajah Tours president Jose Clemente III said: "Ten million (arrivals) is achievable if we have the capacity in place", echoing the industry's wish for adequate infrastructure.

Tourism undersecretary Benito Bengzon Jr said six airports are either being built or improved in Cagayan de Oro and Davao in Mindanao; Puerto Princesa in Palawan; Bohol and Bacolod in the Visayas. Inroads are also being made in attracting airlines to fly to secondary destinations outside of Manila.

The strategy of developing secondary

### VIEWPOINTS

Which source markets will perform best for you this year and why?



**Felise Cruze, marketing and operations manager, Trips Travel**

From what I see now, Europe in general is picking up. An upcoming market is the younger-set backpacking crowd from all over the world. The Middle East is also growing due to halal tourism – many hotels are starting to cater to them. They are also becoming increasingly aware of the country, with destinations like Palawan getting popular.



**Sylvia Tupasi-Gomez, director of sales and marketing, Corporate International Travel and Tours**

Our inbound business is getting stronger. We decided to focus more on European markets and are also getting some groups from emerging regions like the Baltic. We receive enquiries from groups in Poland as well. Inbound from South-east Asian markets like Singapore and Malaysia is growing. In the past they didn't think of coming here. It's interesting that tourists from Malaysia and Indonesia are now visiting although we share the same attractions such as beaches.

destinations to relief the strain on NAIA is also evident in efforts to improve market access, infrastructure and connectivity to new destinations, including the tourism enterprise zone planned for San Vicente in Palawan, Bengazon told *TTG Show Daily*.

Travel consultants are also whispering about the dearth of new developed destinations. While Manila, Boracay, Palawan, Cebu and Bohol are among the most popular tourist haunts, tourists are expecting a wider range and variety of developed destinations, they explained.

A further sign of tourism capacity adjusting to growing arrivals, domestic and foreign investments are being poured into hotels, integrated resorts, theme parks and other tourist attractions country-wide.

Moreover, according to Bengzon, a DoT and Department of Public Works and Highways partnership is resulting in the construction of "2,947km of roads all over the country leading to tourism sites".

He added the DoT are developing emerging markets such as dive, medical tourism and farm tourism. Cruise market initiatives are also being strengthened.

JP Cabalza, managing director of Centcorp Travel, said he and other travel consultants have formed the Asia Premium Travel Mart, now on its second year, to assist the TPB in attracting premium buyers, not just from the usual source countries but also from emerging ones including Israel, Iran, the Baltic and Poland.

"It's an eye opener for hotels, resorts

### Destination in numbers

**9.9**

The average number of nights tourists spend in the Philippines

**13.5**

The percentage increase in arrivals to over 2.4 million in January-May 2016, from 2.1 million in the same period last year, prompting the DoT to retain the *It's More Fun in the Philippines* campaign

**53.4**

The percentage share of Asia to the top 12 biggest inbound markets in the Philippines as of January-May 2016, leading the country to promoting to top Asian markets such as South Korea and Japan

and destinations to improve their products and facilities if they see many buyers and tourists arriving," said Fe Ablang-Yu, general manager of Arfel Travel and Tours who is also part of APTM.

Amid such developments to open up new tourism frontiers, some agents in the country anticipate challenges. Felise Cruze, marketing and operations manager at Trips Travel, said: "The problem we face is the difficulty negotiating with smaller properties in provincial areas. For example, sometimes tours are no longer available but we don't get informed of this. We're ready to market smaller destinations, but are (the players there) ready?"

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QATAR

# Destination Philippines



Panorama of Cebu city

## DESTINATION TO WATCH

# Cebu: province muscles up

The Mactan-Cebu International Airport (MCIA), which is the gateway to the Visayas and alternative gateway for domestic and international flights given the congestion at Manila's international airport, has undergone a makeover to give it a more convenient layout, a faster Wi-Fi network, more shops and food outlets, and a more orderly transportation stand at arrival and departure halls, among other things.

As well, MCIA CEO Andrew Harrison said the ongoing construction of the second passenger terminal, which will boast a resort feel similar to that of Singapore Changi Airport, will enable Cebu to diversify its mainly Asian source markets by attracting more services from Europe, the US and Dubai.

"We already have an increasing number of arrivals but the new tourism investments in the airport, hotels and convention centre" are certainly a further boost, commented Mary Grace Paulino, tourism officer with the Cebu Provincial Government.

SMX Convention Center will rise in Cebu in 2018 with a hotel component. Dusit International will have a presence in Cebu a few years from now, raising the bar for the destination's accommodation sector which is dominated by smaller hotel groups.

The travel trade welcomes the hotel boom as accommodation can be a problem during Sinulog, the country's most popular annual festival honouring the Child Jesus.

Marjorie Aquino, senior sales and marketing manager, Blue Horizons Travel and Tours, said Sinulog is part of her agency's product catalogue and more hotels opening will ease the accommodation crunch that typically accompanies the popular festival.

Aquino is confident that these new and improved infrastructure will help Cebu better market its wide array of attractions: from white beaches and marine-based activities to adrenaline-packed adventure stunts and special tours showcasing Cebu's products and manufacturing pride for dried fruits, marine products, guitars, furniture, etc.

## PRODUCTS

### 1 Okada Manila

To be launched in November, the 44ha Okada Manila integrated resort will be the third in Manila's Entertainment City. Facilities include three luxe hotels adding a total of 993 keys; an indoor night club and beach club enclosed in a glass dome for up to 4,500 guests, touted to be the biggest in South-east Asia; more than 50 premier and luxury brands in a massive glass corridor; and 21 restaurants.

### 2 Discovery Primea Hotel

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

Hotel facilities include a chapel, an ambulance on standby and a 20m heated infinity pool overlooking Makati's skyline. Rooms have PressReader – digital access to newspapers and magazines worldwide – high speed internet access for multiple devices, iPod/iPad docks, pil-

low menu, a Nespresso machine, among others.

### 3 Midori Clark Hotel & Casino

Located in the Clark Freeport Zone in Pampanga province, the new Midori Clark Hotel & Casino is regarded as the first five-star hotel and casino in the Central Luzon region.

The property is generous with space, charming guests with an expansive lobby, spacious hallways, high ceilings and vast gardens. Its architecture celebrates nature, with floor-to-ceiling glass windows that frame views of the sky, mountains and forests, and a Zen chic interior that features an abundant use of wood and earthy colours.

Guestrooms are equally spacious, with the smallest Superior Room being 43.4m<sup>2</sup>.

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

### 4 Coast Boracay

Opening late this year, Coast Boracay, located in station two of Boracay, will feature 77 guestrooms, a 19m swimming pool, two functions rooms and four F&B outlets. Several metres from Coast Boracay is its sister property, Blue Marina, which houses 12 bungalows.

### 5 Halal tourism

Now a byword in the Philippines, halal tourism is getting more adherents as a growing number of tour operators, hotels and restaurants are joining forces to offer halal food, mosque visits and other Muslim-friendly products.

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

### 6 Surfing

Surfing is set to become a major tourism product as the Department of Tourism



Midori Clark Hotel &amp; Casino

plans a partnership with an Australian company to certify surf instructors in Baler, Aurora, Zambales, Mati in Davao Oriental and other surf destinations.

Also in the pipeline is a national criteria for certifying, classifying and accrediting resorts, surf camps and training facilities, apart from requiring them to have the essential teaching equipment and gear as well as emergency rescue and crisis response capabilities.



From left: Conrad Manila Hotel; Coast Boracay





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## Destination South Korea



Nami Island is featured in almost all Asian travellers' itinerary

Galaxy photographer/shutterstock

# Star power fuels tourism interest

Popular Korean dramas, old and new, continue to lure eager K-pop fans to the destination. **Julian Ryall** discovers

**S**outh Korea is invoking the pulling power of one of its most famous movie stars to reel in a new generation of foreign visitors.

Actor Song Joong-ki, who plays the lead role of military captain Yoo Si-jin in the internationally acclaimed drama, *Descendants of the Sun*, has been signed on to serve as the Korean Tourism Honorary Ambassador for 2016. Since July, the actor has lent his face to a high-profile destination marketing campaign that included television advertisements that feature many of the locations used in the series, as well as print advertising.

*Descendants of the Sun* has been sold to 32 countries, including Japan, Germany and New Zealand but it has been most successful in China, where the show has attracted a remarkable 2.4 billion views on the IQiyi.com video streaming website since it was first aired in late February.

The South Korean tourist industry's utilisation of the nation's booming K-

Pop sector has proven an effective tactic in previous years, with last year's *Korea. Your Story* tourism campaign, starring actor Lee Min-ho, being watched 37 million times, the highest ever for a tourism promotion ad anywhere in the world.

And even though *Winter Sonata* first aired in 2002, seven per cent of all foreign visitors to South Korea are still flocking to Nami Island, where part of the series was filmed. More than 30 per cent of visitors from South-east Asia had Nami Island on their itineraries last year.

"For visitors from places where these TV series have been aired, the (film) locations are must-see sites during their visits to (South) Korea," said Joseph Kang, executive director of Seoul-based Kim's Travel. "Right now, this industry is seeing a lot of inbound tourists from other parts of Asia, but by far the majority are from China."

Some 6.1 million Chinese visited South Korea in 2015, accounting for 46.1 per cent of all foreign arrivals.

In the first six months of 2016, more than eight million tourists set foot on South Korea, up 21 per cent on the same period last year, according to the Korea Tourism Organisation. Chinese visitors alone were up 27 per cent.

The figures put the nation on track to hitting its annual target of 16.5 million arrivals for the full year.

"The industry is definitely picking up,"

said Eric Funtowicz, director of sales and marketing for AccorHotels Korea. "The early part of 2015 was difficult because of MERS, but we got back to growth in October. Since then we have seen our growth increasing between 10 and 15 per cent."

Around 70 per cent of AccorHotels' guests are domestic travellers – the industry has seen a surge in people who live in Seoul booking into a high-end city centre hotel for a weekend break – but the majority of the company's foreign guests are from China, Funtowicz said.

"The Korean wave has been good for (tourism), but I'm hoping that South Korea can broaden its appeal in the coming year, particularly as it will be hosting the FIFA Under-20 World Cup from May next year and then the 2018 Winter Olympic Games in Pyeongchang," he added.

Others in the industry are calling for efforts to promote destinations away from Seoul.

"There are lots of hidden treasures off the beaten track and sectors such as ecotourism are growing rapidly, particularly in the south," said Seo Tae-won, director of Suhyun Tour.

But there are hurdles that need to be overcome before many of these areas are ready to welcome visitors from overseas, he warned, such as upgrading accommodation to standards that international tourists expect.

### VIEWPOINT

Which source markets will perform best for you this year and why?



**Oh Dong-hee, sales executive, The Koreana Hotel, Seoul**

The Chinese market is without a doubt the most important. I would say that

75 per cent of our guests this year will be from China, with the Japanese accounting for the second-largest number of overseas guests. The Chinese have money and they're very keen to travel.

### Destination in numbers

## 2.1

The average amount, in million won (US\$1,874), spent by each Chinese visitor to Seoul, making the Chinese the biggest spenders in South Korea

## 724,000

The number of foreigners who arrived in South Korea on cruise ships between January and June, up 88 per cent from the same period last year

## 13.3

The number of arrivals, in millions, to South Korea in 2015, down 6.3 per cent on the previous year, primarily due to the outbreak of MERS during the peak summer months

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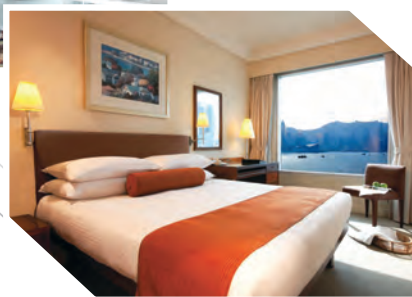


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# Destination South Korea



Geoje's verdant forests and crystal blue waters

## DESTINATION TO WATCH

### Geoje: serene southern island

One of the dozens of islands off the southern coast of the Korean peninsula, Geoje is just over four hours by limousine bus from Seoul and less than an hour from the port city of Busan.

A good part of the island's southern coast is preserved as the Hallyeohaesang National Park, along with four large neighbouring islands and several smaller islets. The best place to admire the view is from the Sinseonda Observatory. The islands are green and heavily forested; the surrounding waters are sheltered and the deepest of blues.

Geoje is famous for camellia flowers that bloom in winter and hydrangeas that provide colour in the summer, with a seaside park and a botanical gardens the best places to see the flowers. The Jangsado Sea Park has an outdoor theatre and a bonsai garden – and is something of a favourite with fans of Korean dramas since it was featured in the 2013 pan-Asian hit, *My Love From the Star*.

The island is joined to the mainland by two bridges, the western one leading into the town of Tongyeong which has been described as the Naples of Korea and is famous for freshly caught local seafood.

Several tourist hotels are available for travellers who prefer to spend a few days there.

## PRODUCTS

### 1 K-Style Hub

Opened since April, this education and experience centre near Myeongdong district offers a range of hands-on programmes that showcase different aspects of South Korean culture. Within sits the Korean Culinary Centre which occupies the entire top floor of the hub. Guests can sign up for lesson on preparing local cuisine. Up to 40 participants can be accommodated at any one time for sessions ranging from 100 minutes to two hours, depending on the type of food being prepared.

### 2 Air Seoul

South Korea's newest low-cost carrier took to the skies in mid-July, with its first service flying between Seoul's Gimpo Airport and the southern island of Jeju. Affiliated with Asiana Airlines, the airline intends to begin international flights from October, with routes to China, Japan and Malaysia planned.

### 3 Hanbok perks in Jongno

The Jongno district in central Seoul has introduced a system that gives out 10 to 20 per cent discount at several restaurants, to anyone who dons a traditional *hanbok*. Some of the city's most famous sites are in Jongno, including Gyeongbokgung, the Bukchon Hanok Village and the Insadong shopping area. Tourism authorities aim to steadily increase the number of restaur-

rants participating in the campaign over the coming months.

### 4 L7 Myeongdong

This new lifestyle hotel sits close some of the major shopping destinations in Seoul, such as Lotte Duty-free Shops, as well as key tourist attractions such as Gyeongbokgung Palace and Namsan Mountain. Targetting young and trendy travellers, the interior of the hotel features bold designs while facilities are also built with the hip folks in mind. Guestrooms are bright and chic, and the suites comes with delightful splashes of colour. The hotel offers Long Day Foot Spa on the rooftop on the 21<sup>st</sup> storey where views of Namsan Mountain can be enjoyed, Floating rooftop bar, Charlotte restaurant, and even a K-Pop memorabilia vending machine.

### 5 Nodeul Island

The government has announced plans to turn the unused island in the middle of the Han River, which flows through central Seoul, into a destination for live music and arts festivals. Nodeul island will have indoor and outdoor theatres, parks, farmers' markets, cafes and ecology centres. The city had previously planned to build an opera house on the island, but that fell through due to a shortage of funds. This time, however, the city has committed to covering the total 43.6 billion won cost of the project.



Artee Riders Club Co

### 6 SM Duty Free

Insadong welcomed this brand new seven-storey shopping complex in February this year. Run jointly by 11 small and medium enterprises, SM Duty Free tantalises shoppers with both foreign and local brands that cover a variety of products, from beauty and fashion to electronics and toys.

### 7 Walkerhill's capsule hotel

SK Network's Walkerhill is opening a 67-room capsule hotel at Incheon International Airport before end-2016. The capsules, which will each have a private shower and toilet, will cost just 8,000 won (US\$7) per hour.

### 8 Artee Riders Club Co

Artee Riders Club Co, one of the winners of Korea Tourism Organization's Tourism Venture Contest which seeks to encourage tourism entrepreneurship and incubate exciting and viable concepts, is

the first pedi-cab tour company in South Korea. Now recognised as the largest of its kind in the country, Artee has a fleet of 20 pedi-cabs that are operated by a team of 45 young and multilingual riders. The hour-long pedi-cab tours take passengers to museums in Seoul and through old alleys in and around Bukchon Hanok Village. For extra fun, passengers may ride on the pedi-cabs in hanbok too.

### 9 Ramada Gangwon Sokcho

Ramada Gangwon Sokcho, opened in August to offer 556 keys, an all-day dining restaurant, a spa and sauna, a fitness centre and a banquet hall. It sits across Daepo Port, providing guests with easy access to Daepo fish market, a popular haunt among locals and tourists for fresh seafood. Sokcho, in Gangwon province, is a gateway to the DMZ and Seoraksan National Park, and is also favoured for its natural hot springs.



From left: L7 Myeongdong; Hanbok traditional costumes





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## Destination Macau

# Partnership approach

Tourism authorities are working with travel agents to create unique experiences and products. Prudence Lui reports

A challenging macro environment has led Macau to see a slight decline in international arrivals. Numbers fell 0.8 per cent between January and May this year, with Chinese arrivals taking a downward trend. Fortunately, growth is seen in other major source markets – Thailand (33.2 per cent), Japan (10.3 per cent), Vietnam (10.3 per cent) and Taiwan (10.2 per cent).

To keep international visitors coming, the Macao SAR Government will continue to cooperate with the travel trade, offering tourist packages alongside festivities to unleash a synergetic effect between tourism, culture, sports and events.

Differentiated destination promotions have been created for China, Asia and longhaul markets this year, and activities include conducting travel fairs and roadshows, product presentations and familiarisation trips.

A spokesman with the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) told the *Show Daily* that it will support travel agencies by launching themed packages with value-added products such as romantic 3D mapping tours and culinary tours.

“We will also continue to arrange for local performances at various tourist sites to showcase Macau’s culture. For instance, we will debut the Macao Light Festival in December to enrich tourists’ night-time agenda. Also new this year is the 1<sup>st</sup> Inter-



national Film Festival & Awards Macao.”

The MGTO spokesman added that “a number of outstanding new hardware coming up in the next six to 12 months, including revitalised heritage venues and integrated resorts, will continue to expand the list of attractions in Macau and offer more reasons for visitors to come and to extend their length of stay in the city”.

Heritage venues that will get a new lease of life include the Maritime Workshops near A-Ma Temple, which will be conserved and transformed into a contemporary art centre for the display of outstanding visual art works. It will also function as an experimental theatre and a visual arts education venue.

Restoration is also ongoing at the 120-year-old Chong Sai Pharmacy which is a residential building typical of its time, with the lower floor used for business and the upper floor for living. It is due to reopen to the public this year.

The Patane Library, a row of seven ancient low-rises in Rua da Ribeira do Patane, is the last of the three current restoration projects in Macau. It will reopen as a new library space.

The destination is further growing its collection of integrated resorts, with Wynn Palace and The Parisian Macao having opened in August and September respectively. MGM Cotai and the luxurious The 13 hotel are also on the horizon.

For Maggie Mak, operations manager for group and FIT with Goldfield Travel Services, the new integrated resorts do not bear much appeal for her dominant family travel segment.

“There aren’t enough non-gaming options for family groups in Macau that can keep encourage them to stay on longer. While Hong Kong has a lot to offer like the countryside and summer camps for kids, Macau hardly has the same draws,” Mak lamented.

### Destination in numbers

## 1.2

The average length of stay in days from January to May 2016, up 0.3 day compared to the same period in 2015

## 14.1

The year-on-year percentage decline in per capita spending of visitors during 1Q2016, arriving at MOP1,547. Overnight visitor spending suffered the biggest loss, tumbling 21.8 per cent year-on-year to MOP2,525. Same-day visitor spending slipped 3.9 per cent to MOP679

## 33.6

The year-on-year percentage decline (to 2,833,000 people) in package tour arrivals from China to Macau during the first five months of 2016. Interest in group tours has given way to independent travel preferences

## 12.4

The total visitor arrivals, in millions, to Macau in the first five months of 2016, down by a slight 0.8 per cent year-on-year. Visitor arrivals by land and by air rose 3.8 per cent and 9.3 per cent respectively, while those arriving by sea fell 14.1 per cent

## PRODUCTS

### 1 Banyan Tree Macau

Fancy picking up some Thai culinary skills while in Macau? Banyan Tree Macau is now offering a fun course that teaches participants how to whip up Thai favourites such as *yum ruam mit talay* (spicy seafood salad), *tom yum goong* (spicy and sour soup with prawn) and *gaeng kiew wan gai* (braised chicken with green curry). Each class accepts 10 to 30 people, and a customised cooking competition for groups can be arranged with three days’ advance notice.

### 2 Anim’Arte Nam Van

Launched in June, this new leisure area at

the Nam Van Lake combines sports, arts and culture to keep visitors busy.

The site features novelty shops, a weekend craft market, cultural performances and activities, and swan-shaped pedal boats for a fun ride on the lake. And when a rest is required, head to the café run by the Institute for Tourism Studies.

### 3 Planet J, Sands Cotai Central

Dubbed the world’s first live-action role play theme park, Planet J opened in February in Sands Cotai Central, designed to house eight gaming zones.

At this 9,290m<sup>2</sup> facility, players can play the role of fantasy characters, pursuing goals and interacting 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.

### 4 T Galleria by DFS, City of Dreams

City of Dreams is expanding its retail attraction, with openings phased across June to December.

The new and improved T Galleria by DFS will be connected to F&B, casinos, shops, entertainment and hotels within the integrated resort complex. Shopaholics can look forward to the first-ever shoe



The new and improved T Galleria by DFS

salon as well as a multi-brand lifestyle shopping area dedicated to men’s fashion and grooming.

### 5 Royal Flight

Royal Flight, based in Abakan, Russia, began operating chartered flights between Moscow and Macau in May twice a week. The 10-hour flight is the airline’s first route into Greater China.

### 6 El Cielo

This new outdoor lounge is Pacha Macau’s latest gem. The venue has six cabanas with approximately 120 seats and offers access to the pool area of Studio City hotel, making it the perfect party central for holiday-makers as well as event planners.

## VIEWPOINTS

Which source markets will perform best for you this year and why?



Cooper Zhang, manager, CITS Macau

So far, India has been our best source market, putting in good traffic this summer. Most of

them are family travellers and I reckon the government’s promotion in India is paying dividends. Another possible contributing factor is hotel rates, which have not been as high as before given the existing economic condition.

### Johnny Choi, director of sales, Estoril Tours



Thailand has been the best performer in terms of growth rate. It will do better than last year. New air connections between Thailand and Macau, new integrated resorts and affordable tour packages being promoted in Thailand are helping to grow this market. It also helps that the Macau government has been subsidising agents’ advertising expenses in destination promotions, which in turn gives group tour business a big boost this year.

Banyan Tree Macau’s Thai cooking class





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# Walking on the wilder side



An artist's impression of the new Rainforest Park at Mandai

Mandai Safari Park Holdings

## Destination in numbers

**700**

The amount in millions of Singapore dollars (US\$523 million) injected by the government into a new five-year Tourism Development Fund

**5.5**

The total number, in million, of international visitors from January to April 2016, a 14.1 YOY increase

**242.40**

The average hotel room rate in Singapore dollars, equivalent to US\$176.30, from January to March 2016, compared to S\$244.60 throughout 2015

The Mandai precinct is poised to undergo a massive makeover to become an ecotourism hub with five wildlife parks and eco-lodges, writes [Paige Lee Pei Qi](#)

**S**ingapore will soon be home to a 126ha wildlife and nature precinct dedicated to eco-tourism come 2023.

The area currently houses the Singapore Zoo, River Safari and Night Safari. But from 2020 onwards, they will be joined by two new attractions – the Bird Park, which will be relocated from Jurong, and the all-new Rainforest Park.

Mike Barclay, group chief executive of Mandai Safari Park Holdings (MSPH), said: “We want to give visitors a nature and wildlife destination that they can call their own. Visitors have asked for more novel, engaging and immersive experiences. We hope the new Mandai nature precinct will provide all that and more.”

He added: “Our vision is to create an integrated nature and wildlife destination, nestled within our bustling city for all Singaporeans and tourists to enjoy. Generations of Singaporeans have grown up with Jurong Bird Park and the (existing) wildlife parks in Mandai. This project provides

## VIEWPOINTS

Which source markets do you think will perform best this year?



**Dominic Ong, general manager, Star Holiday Mart**

At present, India is growing stronger for us. Indian travellers are staying even longer with an average of four nights (thanks to the availability of direct flight connections). The basic packages they enjoy are those that include Sentosa Island, Universal Studios and Night Safari.

**Daniel Goh, manager, Siam Express**

I am confident in the Chinese market, especially the high-end FIT travellers. This will be a strong performing market because of the Chinese yuan which is slightly stronger (this year) as compared to the previous year.



an opportunity for renewal, and to deepen our collective affinity with the nature and wildlife of our region.”

When completed, visitors will be able to stroll on aerial walkways at the 12.5ha Rainforest Park, or relax in pods and

watch birds take flight in nine aviaries that feature different landscapes – such as a wetland or bamboo forest – at the 17ha Bird Park. The Bird Park will also hold a breeding and research facility, which aims to increase the populations of criti-

cally endangered species such as the Bali mynah, black-winged starling and blue-crowned laughing thrush.

Also, Mandai nature precinct’s surrounds will also boast nature trails, boardwalks, gardens, waterways and playgrounds.

According to MSPH, the hub is being designed to be in harmony with nature. The two new parks will be developed on previously occupied land and measures will be taken to minimise impact on the flora and fauna in the area.

Meanwhile, the main hub area will feature an indoor nature-themed education centre and hold exhibitions aimed at raising awareness and appreciation for the region’s biodiversity and natural heritage.

Moreover, an eco-link bridge spanning Mandai Lake Road will also be built. This bridge will allow animals to move between the central and northern reaches of the Central Catchment Nature Reserve.

Sleeping under the stars could become viable for visitors who intend to spend a night or two in Mandai, as eco-friendly accommodation options such as tents, camps and family rooms are being considered.

Applauding the new eco-tourism hub, GTMC Travel’s CEO Samson Tan, said: “This new hub will help capture tourists because it become a one-stop wildlife attraction hub. It will help tourists stay for a full day or (even spend a) night there.”

According to Judy Lum, Tour East’s senior vice president sales & marketing international market, family groups are usually the segment that is most attracted to wildlife attractions, and the Night Safari is a big draw especially for visitors from India, China and Japan.

“I am excited about this impending project. It will be a wonderful place for visitors to explore and cultivate care for nature, and it is educational for both children and adults alike,” Lum enthused.

Currently, MSPH is also exploring a range of options with the Singapore government to improve accessibility to Mandai. These include introducing shuttle buses from the upcoming Spring-leaf MRT station and direct bus services from areas that are not well-connected to Mandai.

## PRODUCTS

### 1 KidZania Singapore

KidZania Singapore, an interactive indoor edutainment centre, has opened at Palawan Beach on Sentosa Island. The 7,600m<sup>2</sup> facility features 80 role-playing activities suitable for children between the ages of four and 14. They will be exposed to real-life situations and learn about how a society functions in the process. Some of the activities on offer include piloting an aeroplane, putting out fires and working as a CSI agent.

### 2 Aerotel Singapore

Aerotel Singapore opened earlier this year at Singapore Changi Airport Terminal 1, just above gate D41 on the third floor. It

offers a standard of luxury not often associated with transit hotels. Guestrooms range from budget 10m<sup>2</sup> single-bedders with shared bathroom facilities to 32m<sup>2</sup> fully-equipped family rooms for up to five pax. Facilities in the hotel include a swimming pool which is open to non-hotel guests for a fee, a poolside bar, the Library Lounge and a small fitness area. Wi-Fi access comes free.

### 3 AJ Hackett Sentosa

Bungy operator AJ Hackett International is building a 50m-tall bungy tower on Sentosa Island, the first of its kind for Singapore. The custom-built tower will feature several experiences such as the

Double Bungy, a 47m-high jump deck; Duo Giant Swings, the world's first double swings where two groups of participants race each other to the ground; and a Vertical Skywalk where guests can walk 44m down the centre tower shaft. There is also a 40m-long vertical Skybridge that will allow participants of all ages to walk along an open-air platform to take in the sights and watch jumpers take the leap. The tower will be completed by end-2016.

### 4 M Social Singapore

Millennium Hotels and Resorts has launched a new lifestyle hotel brand in the country with the opening of M Social Singapore in Robertson Quay. Featur-

ing a Philippe Starck-designed interior, the 239-key has a mix of duplex-style lofts and terraced rooms. Facilities include a lobby with self check-in kiosks, a swimming pool, fitness centre, and Beast & Butterflies restaurant-bar.

### 5 Singapore Airlines' Singapore-San Francisco direct flight

Singapore Airlines will launch a non-stop service between Singapore and San Francisco from October 23, 2016 using an Airbus A350-900 aircraft. Flight time for the new services will be between 14 hours 35 minutes and 17 hours 45 minutes, depending on the direction and time of year.



From left: KidZania Singapore; Aerotel Singapore



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## Destination Indonesia

# Acing accessibility

Investments are pumped in to make more destinations in Indonesia more accessible than ever for tourism in the next few years, reports [Mimi Hudoyo](#)

**A**irport developments are leading the way in Indonesia's infrastructure development – the number one priority in president Joko Widodo's tourism development programme – as more than 90 per cent of arrivals into the country are by air.

Recently in August, Jakarta opened its new Terminal 3 in Soekarno-Hatta International Airport. Earlier in July, Sultan Thaha Jambi Airport in Jambi City opened its new terminal, increasing its

capacity from 700,000 passengers a year to 1.5 million.

This is good news for the tourism industry as the lack of infrastructure has been identified as a major hurdle in developing the country's tourism sector, which is targeting 20 million arrivals and a revenue of 240 trillion rupiah (US\$18.3 million) by 2019.

Airport development is not limited to major cities; they are spreading to secondary cities too. As well, 15 new airports in

third-tier cities have started construction, and are expected to open in 2019.

At the opening Sultan Thaha Airport, president Joko Widodo remarked that airports like these should be built "before they are over the capacity like Soekarno-Hatta International Airport." He added that the congested airport caused many delays due to overcapacity, and should have been expanded a long time ago.

Apart from airports, the government

is also focusing on the development of 10 tourism destinations beyond Bali.

The 10 destinations are Lake Toba (North Sumatra), Tanjung Kelayang (Belitung), Tanjung Lesung (Banten), Kepulauan Seribu (Jakarta), Borobudur (Central Java), Bromo-Tengger-Semeru (East Java), Mandalika (Lombok), Labuan Bajo (Komodo), Wakatobi (Sulawesi), and Morotai (Maluku).

I Gde Pitana, deputy minister for international marketing development, Ministry of Tourism, said: "Currently, 40 per cent of arrivals into Indonesia are through Bali. We need to develop new destinations to disperse travellers. These 10 destinations are rich in nature and culture, but are less popular due partly to the lack of infrastructure."

For example, Lake Toba is the largest volcanic lake in the world, but lacks tourist traffic due to its inaccessibility.

As such, development in the area will include highway development between Medan and Parapat (116km), Medan-Kuala Namu-Tebing Tinggi (62km) and Lake Toba's outer ring road. Silangit Airport near Lake Toba is also currently undergoing expansion.

Meanwhile in Lombok, more than 1,100 hectares have been set aside for an ecotourism development, where 51 per cent of the tourism-related mixed use development will be dedicated green space. This plan includes 10,532 hotel rooms, 1,586 residential units, and facilities such as a theme park and business event venues.

Ricky Baheramsjah, head of investment & marketing division, Indonesia Tourism Development Corporation, said: "This year and next we will witness the groundbreaking of five hotels, and have a total of 1,500 rooms opening in the next two to three years. Other facilities include the Mandalika Kuta Beachwalk, a hospital and a mosque with a 1,500 capacity."

The efforts of these developing destinations have received support from the travel industry.

For instance, an MOU has been signed between Emirates Airlines and the local authority to direct traffic to Lombok.

In March, Garuda Indonesia started flights from Jakarta to Silangit, allowing travellers to fly to Lake Toba in about three hours. Garuda also plans to connect Silangit to other cities in Sumatra like Medan, Sibolga, Dumai and Pekanbaru.

The recently launched chartered flights, a joint effort between Rainbow Tours Poland and Panorama Destination Indonesia, have helped to promote other destinations like Java, Flores, Tanjung Puting, Toraja and Papua.

Szymon Chojnacki, director of product at Rainbow Tours, said that over the last few years there has been a high number of travellers from Poland who want to visit Indonesia, and the chartered service was meant to direct more traffic to other parts of the country aside from Bali.

Renato Domini, CEO of Panorama Destination, said: "The strategy – to bring tourists by chartered flights – has two benefits. It is easier for tourists to visit, and helps direct them to other parts of Indonesia."

Tourists appreciating the ancient Borobudur temples in Yogyakarta



Vassanor Anandikaasari/shutterstock

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# Destination Indonesia

## Destination in numbers

### 4.1

The number of arrivals, in millions, from the 15 countries which have a visa reciprocal agreement (mostly ASEAN) with Indonesia. The 144 countries that received visa free facilities last year contributed 2.9 million arrivals between June 2015 and June 2016

### 37.7

The total number of domestic visitors, in millions, between January 2016 and June 2016, an increase of 16.6 per cent year on year

### 5.3

The total number of arrivals, in millions, to Indonesia between January 2016 and June 2016, an increase of 5.9 per cent year on year

## VIEWPOINTS

Which source markets will perform best for you this year and why?



**Leonardus Nyoman,**  
managing director,  
**Flores Exotic  
Tours**

The European market will continue to perform best for us. We are seeing

international tour agencies sell Flores and East Nusa Tenggara more than before. (It helps that there is a) focus on development in Labuan Bajo and Flores such as the airport expansion and Garuda's flights between Bali and Labuan Bajo.

**Ng Sebastian,**  
managing director,  
**Incito Travel**

The Europeans are still the main market for us. Although the performance is not great compared to last year, it is still the biggest. South Sulawesi has been promoting in the Asian market but we have yet to see any result. The lack of direct flights to Makassar could be a reason.



## PRODUCTS

### 1 Four Seasons Jakarta

On June 28, the 125-suite Four Seasons 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 1,850m<sup>2</sup> 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.

### 2 Meliá Makassar

Meliá Hotels International has opened Meliá Makassar in South Sulawesi's capital. 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. The four-star hotel features 135 rooms, several meeting rooms, a pool, spa, restaurants, and Society, a rooftop bar.

### 3 Artotel Sanur Bali

Artotel Indonesia, a home-grown art inspired design hotel operator, has opened its third property, the Artotel Sanur Bali.

The property is located a 25-minute drive from the Ngurah Rai International Airport and a five-minute walk from the beach. The design of the hotel is a mixture of modern architecture and local design that reflects traditional Balinese kites.



Meliá Makassar

The 89 rooms each feature 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.

### 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 combination of Balinese and European architecture.

The resort has 75 luxurious rooms – including three suites – that range from 40m<sup>2</sup> to 200m<sup>2</sup>, 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 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 served with a Boeing 737-800 and has a capacity of 156 seats.

## DESTINATION TO WATCH

# Lake Toba: getting ready to welcome the world



Lake Toba and its lush surroundings

Lake Toba in North Sumatra is renowned for being the largest volcanic lake in the world and the second largest lake in the world after Victoria Lake in Africa. It is so large that in its centre sits an island – Samosir Island – the size of Singapore.

What is lesser known to international markets is Lake Toba's rich offering of tourist attractions, from water sports and fishing to golfing, cultural activities and culinary delights. Accessibility challenges are to be blamed for hampering tourism growth for the destination, despite it being the icon of North Sumatra.

However, this is about to change. Until recently, Lake Toba was only accessible by road from Medan, between five and seven hours. Now, Lake Toba is one of the 10 destinations Indonesia's central government is committed to develop for tourism. Investments are being made to develop a highway between Medan and Parapat (116 km), Medan-Kuala Namu-Tebing Tinggi (62km) and Lake Toba outer ring road, and to improve air accessibility with the new Silangit Airport near Lake Toba (opened this March).

Offering even better news to tourism specialists selling Lake Toba, president Joko Widodo announced that Silangit Airport's runway will be extended from 2,400m to 2,650m, allowing it to accommodate larger Boeing 737-800 aircraft.

Accessibility by sea will get a boost too, with a number of piers in the pipeline.

But infrastructure is not the only issue the destination faces. Being managed by various government agencies presents another hurdle for Lake Toba's development. To overcome this problem, the national government has set up a single tourism authority to oversee the development and management of Lake Toba.

Arief Yahya, Indonesia Minister of Tourism, said: "The tourism authority will be tasked with developing infrastructure such as road and airport in the area of Lake Toba. These developments has been (delayed) because of the overlapping authorities among seven government agencies in the area."



## Marketplace

### Furama Hotels International

Singapore-based hotel management company, Furama Hotels International, manages more than 60 hotels, villas and resorts, availing over 7,500 rooms with an increasing inventory as the company continues to expand. Its properties are located in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, China, Taiwan and Australia.

As an award-winning chain of mid-range hotels in Asia-Pacific, Furama Hotels International caters to leisure and business travellers alike.

Its commitment to green initiatives also ensures that the refreshing sojourn away from home is supported by eco-friendly and sustainable practices where guests can relax and luxuriate in the best possible environment.

Its most recent opening is the FuramaXclusive Farmers Boutique, Koh Samui, in Thailand. The property, nestled in a paddy field, offers 45 private villas and is geared towards solo travellers, couples and families.

Contact: (65) 6739 6470



FuramaXclusive Farmers Boutique, Koh Samui



Niccolo Chengdu

### Niccolo Hotels

Marco Polo Hotels debuted its luxury label, Niccolo by Marco Polo, in July 2014 and opened the brand's first property in Chengdu's CBD the following year.

Marco Polo Hotels describes the Niccolo by Marco Polo brand as a collection of contemporary urban chic hotels and the company's response to rising demand for upscale travel experiences.

Hallmarks of the brand include the City Insiders concierge who will play host to guests

and impart personal insider tips to enjoying what the destination has to offer, retail partnerships with fashion brands exclusive only to hotel guests, and the Niccolo Lecture Series to introduce guests to the pioneering explorers and stories of this generation.

Besides Niccolo Chengdu, the company will be opening Niccolo Chongqing in 2Q2017 and The Murray, a Niccolo Hotel, Hong Kong in 4Q2017.

Contact: corporate@niccolohotels.com

### Sunway Hotel Georgetown, Penang

Nestled amid the vibrant city life and heritage charms of George Town, Penang, the 250-key, four-star Sunway Hotel Georgetown is well catered to business and leisure travellers.

Guestrooms are bright and well-appointed, and guests can enjoy complimentary Wi-Fi access. Suites and Club rooms offer guests exclusive access to the club floor where complimentary breakfast, high-tea and evening

drinks and canapés are served. An on-site meeting room is also available at no charge for Suite and Club room guests.

Other facilities at Sunway Hotel Georgetown include the all-day-dining Sun Café and various function rooms.

The hotel is also within easy reach of all major commercial hubs, shopping malls and hawkers centres which Penang is famous for.

Contact: enquiryshg@sunwayhotels.com



The Kayana Villas Bali

### Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts

Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts was birthed in 1981 when Kompas-Gramedia Group, the largest media company in Indonesia, diversified into the hospitality sector. Grahawita Santika was established as the owning and management company of Santika Indonesia Hotels and Resorts.

Its first property was the Hotel Santika Bandung and the company has since planted footprints in strategic cities across Indonesia,

including Jakarta, Semarang, Cirebon, Surabaya, Jogjakarta, Pontianak, Bali, Manado and Makassar.

Its many brands include The Anvaya, the four-star Hotel Santika Premiere, the three-star business Hotel Santika, the budget Amaris Hotel, and boutique villas The Kayana and The Samaya which fall under The Royal Collection.

Contact: www.santika.com/contact-us

### Harbour Plaza Hotels and Resorts

Harbour Plaza Hotels and Resorts is a major player in the Asian hospitality industry, managing nine full service hotels. These are the 828-room Harbour Grand Hong Kong, the 555-room Harbour Grand Kowloon, the 821-room Harbour Plaza Metropolis, the 669-room Harbour Plaza North Point, the 1,102-room Harbour Plaza Resort City, the 704-room Harbour Plaza 8 Degrees, the 736-room The Kowloon Hotel in Hong Kong, and the 389-room Harbour Plaza Chongqing over in mainland China.

The latest addition is the all-suite Kowloon Harbourfront Hotel at Hung Hom Bay in Hong Kong which commenced operations in July 2015 with 240 units.

In addition, the company manages the 800-room Rambler Garden Hotel and the 822-room Rambler Oasis Hotel in Hong Kong.

Outside of Greater China, the hotel group manages the 1,271-room Grand Lucayan on Grand Bahama Island.

Contact: sales@harbour-plaza.com

### Best Western Hotels & Resorts

US-based Best Western Hotels & Resorts, is a privately held hotel brand with a global network of more than 4,000 hotels in more than 100 countries and territories worldwide.

It has a collection of seven hotel brands: Best Western, Best Western Plus, Vib, Best Western Premier, GLo, Best Western Plus Executive Residency and BW Premier Collection. The newest brands are Vib & GLo.

Vib is positioned as a chic, hip, urban boutique hotel focused on style, technology and guest engagement. The first property under this label debuted in Chicago, with more to come in various US cities as well as in Asia such as Seoul and Vientiane.

GLo is a broad-midscale brand that offers a hip, boutique-style experience for savvy travellers who expect the best in value, design and comfort.

The latest Best Western Hotels & Resorts property in Asia-Pacific is the Best Western Rembrandt Hotel Tokyo Machida, launched on April 28 this year.

Contact: internationaldevelopment@bestwestern.com



Best Western Rembrandt Hotel Tokyo Machida



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# TTG Asia pictorial special

Catch all the action at ITB Asia 2016 in this three-page spread snapped by *TTG Asia Daily's* photographers, [Eugene Tang](#) and [Caleb Richard Lai](#)



# TTG Asia pictorial special



Thumbs up for a good deal with Park Hotel Group Singapore's Anne Tan and Mohd Rafin (front row, third and fourth respectively)



Furama International Singapore's Shirlena Tan (centre) snaps into action with her team



Kidzania Singapore's Tizane Low and Keisia Sim



Finnair's Anssi, Pauline and Piriina



Themed Attractions Resorts & Hotels Malaysia's Olivia Ooi Li Yeng, Edward Chin and Kristine Lim



Philippine Department of Tourism Singapore's Charles Leong and Embassy of the Philippines Singapore's Mersole Mellejor (top row, fifth and sixth from left respectively) stand together with a fun contingent



The Jayakarta Suites Komodo Flores' Agus Tabah Wardana, The Jayakarta Bali's I Ketut Martin and Explore the Wonders UAE's Desmond Alosius

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Singapore's Kajorn-det Apichartrakul and TAT's Srisuda Wanapinyosak and Kulpramote Wannalert



Plaza Premium Group Hong Kong's Pauline Cheung (centre) and team having a delightful time



Pan Pacific Hotels Group Singapore's Karen Tan (centre) pulls it all together



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## *New Destinations in South Korea and Malaysia*

Park Hotel Group has expanded its brand presence into South Korea and Malaysia with **PARK HOTEL YEONGDEUNGPO, SEOUL** and **PARK HOTEL MELAKA**. Scheduled to open in early 2017, Park Hotel Yeongdeungpo, Seoul is near the scenic Hangang River and 45 minutes from Incheon International Airport. Just outside the Seonyudo subway station, the 150-room new build hotel offers easy connectivity to the Yeouido financial hub. It also has three dining outlets, a gymnasium and function rooms.

Immerse in the wealth of history that Melaka - a UNESCO world heritage site has to offer with Park Hotel Melaka. Located in the heart of Kota Laksamana's entertainment and business district, the 245-key hotel is near to the vibrant Jonker Walk and many famous attractions. When it opens in 2019, the hotel would also feature two dining outlets, an infinity pool, a sauna, gymnasium, business centre and meeting rooms.

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**PARK HOTEL GROUP**

# TTG Asia pictorial special



All smiles from Ministry of Tourism Indonesia's I Gde Pitana (second from left) and Indonesian Embassy Singapore's Ngurah Swajaya (third from left)



Resorts World Sentosa Singapore's Kimberly Vodopich, Alan Lee and Lenny Surjati



Tourism Malaysia Singapore's Fiona Estrop, Best Western Premier Genting Ion Delemen's Pugeneswary Mudukasan, Christopher Yong and Lily Han, and Tourism Malaysia Singapore's Rubiah Tul'Adiwiyah Hj Md Yusof



The Face Suites Malaysia's Hanim Damanhuri and Sunny Tan



Tourism Selangor's Noorul Ashikin Bt Mohd Din (second from left) with her team



Gulf Adventures Qatar's Tarek Helmy, Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA) Singapore's Denise Quek, Arabian Adventures Qatar's Hassan Mohd Hijji and QTA Singapore's Jennifer Beggs



The Samaya Seminyak-Bali's Virgi, Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts' Yenny Susanty, The Samaya Bali's Ray Clark and The Anvaya Beach Resorts Bali's Dewi Sibarani



Sentosa Leisure Management Singapore's Lim Suat Jien (back row, fourth from left) having fun with her team

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