

TTCG THE OFFICIAL Show Daily



Issue

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ATF 2017
January 17, 2017
Singapore

THE PHILIPPINES IS THE PROUD HOST OF ASEAN 2017



Southeast Asia
feel the warmth

Visit Asean@50
GOLDEN CELEBRATION 2017

CESAR MONTANO IS THE NEW COO OF TOURISM PROMOTIONS BOARD

Cesar Montano has officially been appointed by Philippine President Rodrigo Roa Duterte as the new Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) Philippines. TPB is the marketing and promotions arm of the Department of Tourism (DOT), mandated to promote the Philippines domestically and internationally as a world-class tourism and MICE destination.



Montano is a multi-awarded film actor, director and a respected pillar in the entertainment industry for more than two decades, whose body of work is critically acclaimed both locally and internationally.

As an advocate of good governance, he also assumed key positions as part of Optical Media Board (OMB) and as UNESCO Commissioner and Special Envoy to the Arts.

"I have full faith in our President's vision and determination to see a better Philippines during the course of his term. My appointment comes at a very opportune time where our country enjoys one of the highest growths in GDP performance we have ever seen in recent memory. This means that our country is now at the center of action from the point of view of foreign direct investors who have given the Philippines the attention it deserves," says Montano.

As the new COO of TPB, Montano eyes to create a conspicuous and compelling communications campaign and promotions program for the agency, tapping influencers from tourism and entertainment industries locally and internationally to aggressively endorse the Philippines as a tourist destination.

Under his administration, he will focus on reinforcing current market strengths and tap new markets with vast tourism potentials and high spending power, such as China, Korea, Japan, US, Europe and neighboring countries in Asia, making the Philippines one of the world's top leisure and Meetings, Incentive Travel, Conventions, and Exhibitions/Events (MICE) destinations; Asia's top movie scene location destination; go-to place for island hopping adventure, and; as the center for sports and medical tourism in Asia.

Also, part of his program is the promotion of the country's unexplored frontiers, which he believes could surpass the world's most beautiful tourist destinations.

"The world knows Manila, Boracay, Palawan, Bohol and a few other spots; but they are just the tip of the iceberg. The Philippines is blessed with one of the most bio-diverse array of flora and fauna and more than 60% of our islands have yet to be developed for tourism purposes," says COO Montano.

With the new direction from Montano and his untiring commitment to promote the country globally, Philippine tourism is geared towards unstoppable growth and development.

Indeed, the Philippines is fast becoming one of the world's premier must-see destinations not only for travel and adventure but also for MICE, business, arts, culture, lifestyle and entertainment.

PHILIPPINES ASSUMES CHAIRMANSHIP OF ASEAN

The Philippines officially assumed the Chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN on 1 January 2017. The Philippine Chairmanship auspiciously coincides with a milestone as ASEAN is also celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.

The theme for the ASEAN Chairmanship is "Partnering for Change, Engaging the World". The theme was first unveiled by President Rodrigo Roa Duterte during the symbolic turnover of ASEAN Chairmanship to the Philippines in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 8 September 2016 at the closing ceremony of the 28th and 29th ASEAN Summits and Related Summits. It is reflective of the country's advocacy

to promote cooperation with and among our neighbors and ASEAN partner countries and invite them to become dynamic and vibrant partners in making a positive change in the lives of the peoples of ASEAN.

Serving as beacons for moving forward national interests and that of the region are the six thematic priorities that the PH chairmanship will pursue in 2017. These are: (1) A people-oriented and people-centered ASEAN; (2) Peace and stability in the region; (3) Maritime security and cooperation; (4) Inclusive innovation-led growth; (5) ASEAN's resiliency; and (6) ASEAN as a model of regionalism and a global player.

To effectively carry out its priorities and that of ASEAN, the Philippines will be hosting 117 meetings during the year, spread out to 12 select cities in the country. Included in the meetings are two Summits – the first in April and the second in November – as well as 15 Ministerial Meetings and 30 Senior Officials' Meetings.

With 2017 being the 50th anniversary of the founding of ASEAN, the Philippines will also organize commemorative activities to celebrate this milestone. Activities in support of the Philippine Chairmanship and the Golden Anniversary of ASEAN will also be undertaken by the Philippine embassies, missions and consulates.

The Philippines wants to bring ASEAN to the grassroots level and make ordinary citizens aware and become appreciative of ASEAN's positive contributions to their own lives.



The

PHILIPPINES

itsmorefuninthephilippines

Batad Rice Terraces, Banaue, Ifugao
www.tourism.gov.ph

An underwater scene featuring two helmet divers. A woman in a red one-piece swimsuit is in the foreground, holding a white helmet and reaching out towards a large school of colorful fish. A man in a red swimsuit is behind her, also holding a helmet. The water is clear blue, and the seabed is sandy with some coral. The text 'The PHILIPPINES' is centered in the upper half, with 'itsmorefuninthephilippines' below it.

The
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TTG Travel Trade Publishing Is Proud To Be The Official Trade Media Partner of **Visit Asean@50**
GOLDEN CELEBRATION 2017

Much to be done for Visit ASEAN@50

Operators urge 'neutrality', 'coordination' and 'cooperation'

By Raini Hamdi

TOUR operators believe ASEAN's 50th anniversary this year is a golden chance to increase business to South-east Asia, but stress the need for 'neutrality', 'coordination' and 'cooperation'.

The official launch of the *Visit ASEAN@50* campaign will be held this Wednesday evening at the by-invitation-only ATF opening gala, and 50 cross-border packages have been selected for the campaign, which aims to increase international arrivals to the region to 121 million by the end of this year, from 109 million in 2015.

Although the e-brochure of 50 packages is lauded as a good initiative to show off South-east Asia's diverse attractions and the various ways to do a multi-country holiday, it has also raised a question of neutrality.

"The key point for an ASEAN brochure done by governments (or an ASEAN office representing governments) is to remain neutral. It is obviously not, since packages are offered with booking ability to specific companies. Some are tour operators, others are DMCs, it's confusing. It should be neutral. The packages are standard and can be handled by any professional DMC, hence a direct consumer could contact his travel professional, or any travel professional could contact the company he works with (for

the packages)," said Laurent Kuenzle, CEO, Asian Trails Group.

When asked how the packages were selected, Wardi Haji Mohammad Ali, deputy permanent secretary, Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism, Brunei Darussalam, said each ASEAN NTO, and ASEANTA, was asked to choose "modern multi-country tour products that were indicative of the quality and variety that their destination offered". The NTOs must be proud to showcase the tour products, he added.

The majority is from tour operators, but most of the cruise products are new, he added.

The packages are meant for B2C. "However, if consumer-facing travel agents in overseas markets see a tour they could sell, we would encourage them to contact the tour provider. So, the brochure could have a viable B2B role too," he said.

While the e-brochure kickstarts the campaign, there will be other initiatives, including media fam trips showcasing South-east Asia's connectivity and multi-country travel routes; campaign promotion at key tradeshow; cooperative marketing programmes with travel, media and airline partners; advertising; social media campaigns; and addi-

tional publicity, trade marketing, international and sector marketing activities throughout 2017.

"It is a special opportunity, but the key question is, where will (consumers in source markets see the promotion)?" asked Darren Lancaster, director One World - Travel Sales & Marketing, UK. "Without a co-ordinated promotional campaign across the source markets aimed at increasing quality visitor numbers, much of the *Visit ASEAN@50* campaign work may go unseen."

David Kevan, director, Chic Locations UK, points to the role of the ASEAN private sector.

"I would like to see more involvement of national airlines to promote multi-centre regional travel, so cooperate rather than compete. For example, a combination of Singapore/Bali/Thailand with Thai Airways and Singapore Airlines offering one-way fares (55 per cent of the return inclusive tour fare) to encourage more regional travel. At the moment they are obsessed with low-cost return fares, in and out of the same point."

Addie Pornthip, managing director Thailand of Destination Asia, summed it up: "This a wonderful opportunity for all countries within the ASEAN community to work together for the benefit of all to help promote the cross-country experiences and opportunities."



Wardi: selection by NTOs and ASEANTA



Kevan: airlines should step up

Meet the new ASEANTA chief

Devinder Ohri, president of the National Association of Travel Agents Singapore, has assumed presidency of ASEANTA, taking the baton from Aileen C Clemente of the Philippines, who has helmed it since 2015.

The announcement came ahead of ASEAN Tourism Forum 2017 which officially opens in Singapore tomorrow.

With the appointment com-

ing at a momentous year for ASEAN, Ohri intends to move forward initiatives mooted by his predecessor to support the *Visit ASEAN@50* campaign.

Key initiatives to support the campaign include the ASEAN Sky Caravan, the ASEANTA Excellence Awards 2017, the ASEANTA Tourism Honourees project, and the launch of multiple ASEAN cities packages.



Shaping a future for tourism together



ASEAN heads of NTOs joined hands yesterday to reiterate each member country's commitment to better the region's tourism industry. Photo by Eugene Tang

Malaysians, Filipinos tour closer to home

By S Puvaneswary and Rosa Ocampo

Malaysians and Filipinos, whose buying powers are hurt by weak home currencies, are choosing to travel closer to home and to hold out for last minute hot deals.

The ringgit traded at RM4.48 against the US dollar in November 2016, down 23 per cent since the start of 2015. The Philippine peso, meanwhile, slid from 46.28 pesos to US\$1 in August 2016 to 50.01 in end-2016. Analysts expect it to reach 51 pesos this year.

With travel budgets battered, Malaysian are opting for regional holidays, observed travel agents in the country.

Olympik Holidays Malaysia's CEO, Adam Kamal, said secondary destinations are more popular than capital cities as packages are cheaper, aided in part by direct low-cost flight access.

Demand for Thailand and Indonesia is up, said Apple Vacations & Conventions Malaysia, group managing director, Desmond Lee, encouraged by easy AirAsia airlinks and currencies that are "weaker than the ringgit, which is good for shopping and dining".

Requests for North Asia have been down since 2016 for World Avenues Malaysia. Ally Bhoonee, its managing director, said value destinations within three hours' flight time are now preferred.

In the Philippines, agencies have noticed stronger interest in less common Asian destinations such as Cambodia and Vietnam among travellers who are already

familiar with the region.

Domestic holidays are also forsaken since the cost of travel to places like Boracay and Batanes is the same as or slightly lower than other Asian destinations, according to Lyn Galon, travel consultant, Scorpio Travel and Tours in the Philippines.

Purchase habits have changed too in both markets, with more consumers holding their breath for last minute offers and possible pick-up in currency strength.

Bhoonee said customers making last minute requests for the Chinese New Year period, in hopes that the ringgit would strengthen by then, presented a "challenge for us to get rooms and airline seats".

Tess Ege, ticketing and reservation officer, Frontline 8 Travel Philippines, said the growing trend now is to wait for the Philippine Travel Agencies Association's annual Travel Tour Expo (TTE) in February, where airlines and hotels offer steep discounts.

How outbound will pan out this year will depend on the outcome of the TTE, Ege said, underscoring the attraction of discounted trips amid a weak peso climate.

Mon Eusebio, travel and tours specialist, Velca Travel and Tours Philippines, also noted that travellers now wait for airline promotions like Cebu Pacific's one peso fare and discounts of up to 50 per cent to cut travel costs. He also noted that business travel has been impacted slightly.

News

Asian Trails plants new office to reap Phu Quoc's potential

Double-digit growth for the company, thanks to hotel boom and the destination's favourable geographic location

By Xinyi Liang-Pholensa

A RISING star in the regional beach destination circuit, Phu Quoc's fast-growing tourist potential has spurred Asian Trails Vietnam to launch a new office in Phu Quoc last month, adding to its country headquarters in Ho Chi Minh City as well as existing offices in Hanoi and Danang.

"Asian Trails Vietnam has seen a surge in demand for Phu Quoc as a new beach destination," Thuy Tien, managing director, Asian Trails Vietnam, told *TTG Show Daily*, adding that the island is already chalking up double-digit growth for

the company in the 2016/2017 season.

Industry veteran Cao Thi Mai Loan has been appointed to lead the new branch office, giving the DMC the autonomy to handle its own transfers and excursions without subcontracting and to develop its own unique products on the island, the company said in a statement.

The upcoming developments in Phu Quoc have also drawn the interest of foreign tour operators, particularly those from Europe, in taking

up more properties in their offers, according to Thuy. "(Phu Quoc's) geographical location is favourable for winter travel, the peak inbound tourism season in Vietnam," she said.

A robust supply pipeline of 64 hotel projects and 10,000 rooms in the next few years, plus favourable government incentives in the form of free taxation for business enterprises in their first few years of operation, are some key factors luring an investment influx into Phu Quoc, Thuy pointed out.

Meanwhile, JW Marriott Phu Quoc Emerald Bay Resort and Spa will debut on January 25 to become the island's first international luxury hotel brand.

But for a destination that still lacks direct international air connections, charter services will remain a strong conduit of tourism traffic into Phu Quoc, opined Thuy.

The destination currently has charter flights from Russia and Scandinavia, with China reportedly planning to roll out charters for the 2017-2018 travel season.



Thuy: hot escape for cold Europeans



Cao: at the helm of new Phu Quoc office



JW Marriott Phu Quoc Emerald Bay Resort and Spa

Cruise plan to steer Philippines into new era

By Rosa Ocampo

A NEW strategy to attract more cruises to the Philippines is underway, focused on adding and improving port facilities, easing entry procedures, creating exciting tour packages and offering new destinations.

This comes on the heels of Star Cruises' 2,400-pax *Superstar Virgo* making Manila its homeport – the first cruise ship to do so – from March to May. It will sail on 6D5N journeys to Laoag in Ilocos Norte, Hong Kong, and Kaohsiung in Taiwan.

Tourism undersecretary Benito Bengzon Jr., who also heads the Cruise Tourism Development Committee of the Philippines, said a key element of the strategy is to build new dedicated cruise facilities, especially in Manila.

"A superior cruise port and terminal in the capital, with its extensive airlift and ground facilities, will create a compelling reason for large ships to (dock at) the Philippines," explained Bengzon.

Commissioned by the United States Agency for International Development and the Philippine Department of Tourism (DoT), the draft cruise strategy presented by Chart Management Consulting also identified developments in the Turquoise Triangle linking Manila, Boracay and

Puerto Princesa in Palawan.

A potential cruise destination in the north of Luzon, where ships departing East Asian hubs can arrive after one day at sea, was also pinpointed in the strategy.

Arnie Bayag, Travelexperts' consultant, welcomes the plan and called for the prioritisation of port upgrades, including those in the Turquoise Triangle.

Bayag further pointed out that Romblon in the Visayas has a deep harbour but no proper cruise facilities, something that the Philippine Port Authority should begin paying attention to.

Meanwhile, with *Superstar Virgo* making 15 voyages from Manila, the DoT expects a growth in port calls in the Philippines this year to at least 105 with 86,000 pax, up from 72 port calls with 72,350 pax last year.

Travel consultants also expressed optimism about demand for *Superstar Virgo's* Golden Triangle Journey itinerary.

Marlene Insigne, manager, tours division, Southeast Travel Corp., expects there will even be clients from the US who would fly to Manila to join the cruise.

She told *TTG Show Daily*: "I'm very positive this will be a great start for Philippine cruise tourism (as we open up to larger ships)."



Bengzon: ports gearing up for cruises

Asia wins with Singapore's seven long weekends in 2017

By Barathi Narayan

WITH seven long weekends in 2017, travel agents have noticed that Singaporeans are planning their trips in advance, especially for Asian destinations.

Communications director for TripAdvisor, Asia Pacific, Janice Lee Fang, revealed the top destination searches by Singaporeans for the upcoming long weekends.

"(They) are keen on hubs like Bangkok, Hong Kong, Taipei and Seoul. They love shopping and eating, and these cities offer plenty of both, whether they are on a budget or if they want a more premium experience,"

commented Lee.

Not wanting to miss out, travel agents are doing their part to encourage advanced bookings.

Fayyaz Travels has partnered with credit card companies to offer discounts and free gifts, while Chan Brothers Travel introduced semi tours last year and are planning to include more destinations in the series to appeal to economical customers.

Fayyaz Travels' managing director, Muhammad Fayyaz Butt, said his company has seen 30 per cent more bookings and enquiries for the long weekends as compared to normal weekends.

"The demand has been quite high with most people already planning their trips for the second and third long weekends (Chinese New Year in February, and Good Friday in April) of the year. I think the extra day with the weekend is the difference between people travelling overseas and staying in Singapore," he told *TTG Show Daily*.

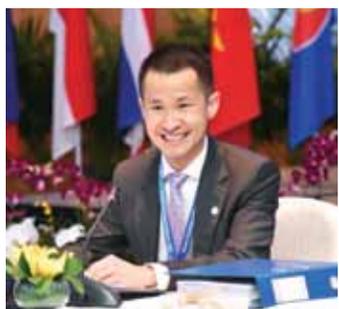
According to Chan Brothers Travel's spokesperson Joyce Tan, long weekends routinely see at least 50 per cent more travellers than regular weekends, with bookings for the 2017 Good Friday weekend flooding in since

last September.

Lee added that while the dismal economy might have an effect on travel decisions, Singaporeans are usually adaptable and are "spoilt for choice when it comes to destinations they have access to, and some of these can be visited at very little cost relative to the Singapore dollar".

Similarly, Muhammad is optimistic that the demand for regional travels over the long weekends will counter the lacklustre economy. He expects a 10 to 15 per cent increase in total bookings for his company compared to 2016.

www.ttgasia.com



Log on to the above website to view more photographs of ATF 2017

IN BRIEF

Bookings made seamless

Destination Asia has just relaunched its online booking system with a new interface that allows multi-country bookings under a single PNR, making it quicker for agents to confirm bookings. Details regarding transfers, hotel and programme requirements are no longer required by email/phone. As well, its events website was also revamped to provide 360-degree virtual tours and programme overviews.



SPOT THAT SLEEK BEAUTY

TTG Show Daily's editorial team is having a bout of car envy over the transportation option for ATF 2017's ministerial delegates. With BMW as ATF 2017's Premium Mobility Partner, who's who of the region's tourism industry get to zip around town in style this week.

TTG Publishing Travel Trade

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

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ASEAN @ 50

The bloc's driving forces

Tourism chiefs in South-east Asia reveal their activities for ASEAN's Golden Jubilee in the first of this three-part special.

By **TTG Show Daily** reporters

Brunei



Ali Apeng
Minister of Primary Resources and Tourism

Is your country ready for Visit ASEAN@50 campaign?

Yes, we are ready. The *Visit ASEAN@50* campaign's objectives are to commemorate the 50th anniversary of ASEAN, and embrace the ASEAN region as both a united and beautifully diverse destination.

To be in line with the campaign objectives, the Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism will focus primarily on developing tourism products, as well as upgrading and improving existing tourism packages.

In this regard, we have identified three categories – the primary, emerging and activity-based tourism products. Primary products are Ulu Temburong National Park and its surroundings, Kampong Ayer, and places of interest around Bandar Seri Begawan. These products are already well-recognised as a main attraction to tourists.

Emerging products are beaches, forest recreational parks such as Pantai Serasa, Berakas Forest Reserve Recreational Park, and Tasek Merimbun. Both the ministry and other relevant agencies are currently examining the potential of these tourism products which can be upgraded and eventually developed into a primary product.

Activity-based products are activities such as diving, bird-watching, and tourism that is centered around themes such as Islamic, medical, cruise, education, MICE, adventure and community-based.

What is being done?

The Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism will be highlighting and promoting Brunei as an excellent holiday destination within the ASEAN region through social media channels, the Brunei tourism website, and tourism stakeholder websites.

We are also working closely with Royal Brunei Airlines to implement several joint marketing programmes such as fam tours for overseas travel agents and media, roadshows, and exhibitions targeted at Royal Brunei's direct routes, such as to ASEAN countries, Australia, China, and the UK.

As well, we are also working with Royal Brunei Airlines on their tour packages to incorporate some of the primary and emerging products that were mentioned earlier.

How significant is Visit ASEAN@50 campaign to your country and what do you hope to achieve from it?

The *Visit ASEAN@50* campaign is very significant as it is committed to ensuring that the tourism services sector becomes one of the significant contributors to the development and growth of the country's economy, particularly in the non-oil and gas sector.

With the launch of the campaign, the ministry will continue to further develop our tourism industry in collaboration with tourism stakeholders to achieve our targeted tourist arrivals of 450,000 by 2020. As the ASEAN city of culture, Bandar Seri Begawan will showcase its arts, culture and history to all visitors.

Cambodia



Thong Khon
Minister of Tourism

Is your country ready for Visit ASEAN@50 campaign?

Yes. We have been working with other member states for the campaign and sent representatives to its launch at ITB. This is a good opportunity to show the beauty of Cambodia to the world.

What is being done?

We have promoted the best tour packages of Cambodia for this special campaign through e-brochures and www.visitasean50.com. Throughout 2017, we will be promoting the campaign at tourism events and roadshows we attend.

How significant is Visit ASEAN@50 campaign to your country and what do you hope to achieve from it?

This is a very important year, and we hope the campaign will bring more tourists to Cambodia and ASEAN. The campaign is targeting a total of 121 million visitors to arrive in ASEAN by 2017 (up from 108.9 million visitors in 2015).

With a lot of cross border promotions, the campaign can help to increase the average length of stay and show more people the beauty of Cambodia. This in turn will help both the economy, people's livelihoods, and the country as a whole.

Indonesia



Arief Yahya
Minister of Tourism

Is your country ready for Visit ASEAN@50 campaign?

The fact that President Joko Widodo himself attended and joined the other ASEAN member heads, when they launched *Visit ASEAN@50*, shows that Indonesia is ready to promote the campaign.

The president believes that the campaign plays a great role in driving the growth of ASEAN tourism. This is especially so for Indonesia, which is currently making a lot of effort to accelerate the development of tourism over a five year period.

The aims are to increase tourism contribution to the country's GDP from nine per cent in 2014 to 15 per cent by 2019; increasing tourism receipts of 120 trillion rupiah (US\$8.9 billion) in 2014 to 280 trillion rupiah; and a boost of 11 million jobs to 13 million.

The campaign is important for Indonesia which is targeting to achieve 15 million arrivals in 2017, a number which requires a lot of effort, joint promotions and campaigning. Hence, as an ASEAN member, Indonesia is for sure ready to support the campaign.

What is being done?

The ministry has done things such as placing the *Visit ASEAN@50* logo at every international travel mart, and at various fairs and events both in ASEAN countries and at home. The ministry is also planning to organise fam trips for both bloggers and journalists from ASEAN member states, and the Plus Three countries (China, Japan, and South Korea).

Indonesia is also ready to promote all its potentials: nature, culture and man-made. This year, Indonesia will organise more than 100 festivals as part of our efforts to achieve the target of 15 million arrivals.

Under the ASEAN Spirit and Single Destination, we are open to creating joint packages with two or three other member states with thematic themes such as UNESCO World Heritage sites, homestays, nature, culture, or MICE.

How significant is Visit ASEAN@50 campaign to your country and what do you hope to achieve from it?

The growth of tourism in the region will provide a positive impact on Indonesian tourism. Because Indonesia can offer travellers more varieties of products, travellers will be more interested in visiting South-east Asia and in turn, Indonesia. This will help us achieve 15 million arrivals this year and 20 million in 2020.





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NTO powwow By Eugene Tang



Tourism Malaysia's Syed Yahya Syed Othman and Sharma Daisey Sundram



Tourism Promotions Board Philippines' Baby de Luna-Landan, Alain Quesa and Jem Micaiah Turla



Ministry of Tourism Cambodia's Sokhom Thok



Singapore Tourism Board's John Gregory Conceicao and Lawrence Leong, Pan Pacific Hotels Group Singapore's Gino Tan, Singapore Tourism Board's Lionel Yeo and Association of Southeast Asian Nations Indonesia's Eddy Krismeidi Soemawilaga



Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism Laos' Sengsoda Vanthanouvong, Khom Douangchantha, Bounma Phetsavong, Phouthone Dalalom, Alounny Panhasith and Phonemany Soukhathamavong



The 45th Meeting of ASEAN National Tourism Organisation was held yesterday at the Pan-Pacific Singapore



A gathering of great minds By Eugene Tang



FATA members got together yesterday for their board meeting and annual general meeting



Representatives from South-east Asian airlines meeting with NATAS' Devinder Ohri (fourth from left)



Indonesia AirAsia's Audrey Prokastama Petriny and Garuda Indonesia's Sentot Mujiono



Brunei Association of Hotels' Abdul Rani Siteh and Hotel & Restaurant Association of the Philippines' Eugene Yap



Right: Wide smiles from the members of the ASEAN Hotel and Restaurant Association



Left: Sunny Smiles Portal Malaysia's Stephen Ho and Cindy Chong



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The power of one region

Can ASEAN as a single trade bloc also find success in positioning the region as a single MICE destination? Four industry veterans share their views with **Karen Yue**



Rajeev Kohli (RK)
President, SITE



Gary Grimmer (GG)
CEO, GainingEdge



Lisa Fitzell (LF)
Group Managing Director
Diethelm Travel Group



Belinda Doery (BD)
Regional director, ASEAN, American
Express Meetings & Events

TTG The competition for business events is so hot globally and within South-east Asia. Is positioning South-east Asia as a single MICE destination a viable concept?

RK The key to surviving and sustaining growth in a competitive landscape is to forge greater intra-regional cooperation between countries and MICE institutions. To achieve this, regional standards of quality, safety/security and infrastructure must be developed, adopted and practiced by all cooperative ASEAN markets.

A good example is the recent launch of the Thailand MICE Venue Standard as the model for the improvement of MICE venue standards in South-east Asia.

GG The answer varies according to the market segment. For international conventions, regions are considered in relation to rotation patterns. Increasingly, global conventions will be coming to Asia every three or four years, and they will rotate between three parts of Asia – East Asia, South-east Asia and either South or West Asia. South-east Asia will get its share so I don't see how regional promotions will affect that.

For incentive trips, planners are very destination focused and (choice) is driven more by product and location.

Corporate meetings are more driven by

priority markets where companies have offices, product demand or supply chains. Again, I'm not convinced that (joint) South-east Asian promotions will be effective (in luring corporate meetings).

For exhibitions, China is now the focus in Asia and when you bring the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) into the picture, Asia becomes a formidable economic region. In this case, it will be wise to do more promotions to raise awareness (of the benefits of the AEC).

LF Competition for business events is intense and Destination Marketing Organisations around the globe are using every opportunity to leverage the assets they have to differentiate themselves and attract international business events.

As an example, for large association events, it is no longer just about the size of the convention centre or the number of hotel rooms in a city. Association event owners increasingly look at the human and intellectual capital in a region to choose where to go. They want to leverage the expertise of local specialists in creating content, attracting delegates and expanding their footprint in a region.

Positioning South-East Asia as a single MICE destination by using this regional intellectual capital will be very attractive to association event owners.

Multi-destination incentive pro-

grammes can deliver a more exciting multicultural experience.

BD From a marketing perspective, endeavours to increase awareness of the region to international meeting planners can deliver benefits to many countries.

Beyond high-level awareness campaigns however, the MICE sector needs to collaborate to address more practical issues like geographical disparity, travel costs, passport control and immigration/visa logistics. From an experience perspective, considerable differences between cultures and activities as well as varying levels of perceptions around safety and security, pose both a threat and an opportunity when positioning a MICE offering for the entire region.

TTG How can ASEAN members benefit from being marketed as a single destination for MICE?

LF It is a crowded marketplace, and pulling together key highlights and messages will help the region stand out. Working together on event and venue standards can help organisers feel comfortable that their event is in good hands and that they will receive the level of services they are used to. Engaging important stakeholders with a single voice will ensure that the MICE industry in South-east Asia gets attention.

Working together by sharing data and insight can attract high quality hosted buyers and delegates to industry trade shows.

BD Regional collaboration is more likely to attract large international events into the region. Larger nations with a more mature MICE sector are likely to benefit the most due to the variety of experiences available and better safety perceptions.

TTG How popular are multi-destination itineraries now and in the future?

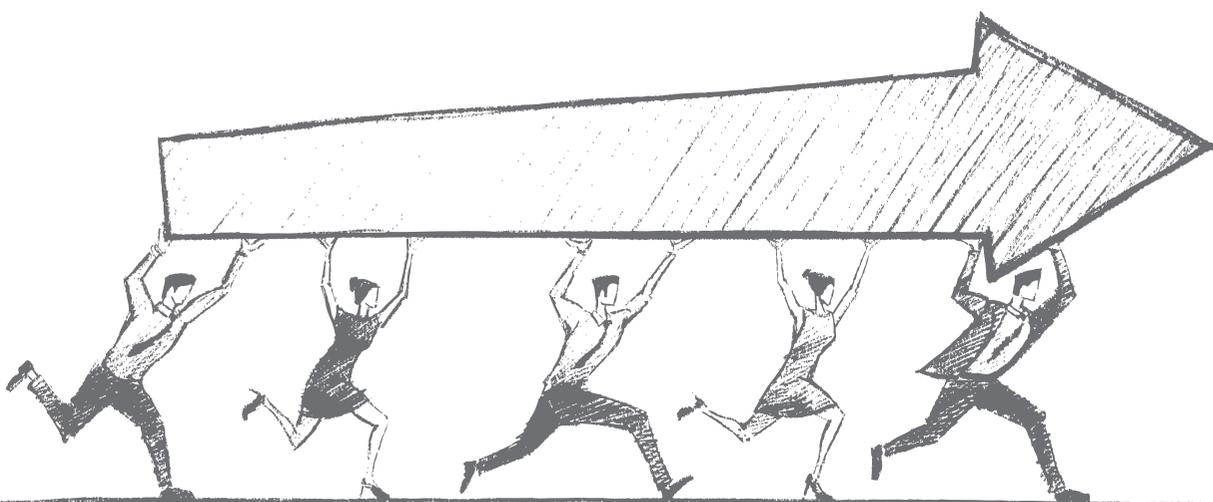
RK There is an increased interest in multi-destination programmes to regions of the world that can offer extraordinary experiences in culture, gastronomy and geography while at the same time providing good value for the investment. Emerging and non-conventional destinations are often best able to deliver something different, exciting and unusual.

GG I don't see multi-destination events as being the wave of the future. If anything, meeting and convention programmes are getting shorter. Logistical challenges and time needed to do more than one destination are prohibitive.

Exhibitions could be an exception as show producers may be motivated to stage "tandem-shows" – same events held in two different cities or parts of Asia. There could be economies of scale there, plus enhanced exhibitor numbers depending on the circumstances.

LF The number is starting from a relatively low base, but we are seeing a small number of requests for multi-destination programmes coming through, particularly for corporate incentives. We think this will continue to grow as event owners look to deliver high quality experiences.

BD Multi-destination itineraries for business events do not tend to be as popular in South-East Asia as other parts of the world. We typically see such incentive programmes being executed in regions like



Europe where moving between countries is cheaper and requires less time.

Also, interestingly, we have noticed fewer delegates extending their business trips to include a leisure component, which also reduces the scope for multi-destination travel. I believe this is partly due to many delegates feeling that business trips provide sufficient leisure opportunities. For some industries, like the highly regulated pharmaceutical industry, trip extensions are becoming very rare.

TTG What are the critical requirements for ASEAN members to succeed in being seen as a single destination for business events?

RK Emerging destinations in the ASEAN region need to position themselves in an eco-system that desires something different but wants it delivered in the same way that they are used to.

Changing perceptions about a destination requires significant effort and cooperation by member nations to create an image and positioning statement that can be presented by all stakeholders. Talking points, marketing collaterals and more must be created and provided to organisations that sell the destination.

To consistently build and communicate a destination's brand, all stakeholders must speak the same language.

Fam trips and events are very effective ways to showcase the ASEAN region and create goodwill ambassadors.

GG Branding is all about delivery and the question that needs to be asked is, do all ASEAN members deliver well? If not, the regional brand suffers and everyone will feel the impact. So, to build MICE business in South-east Asia, I would see regional capacity building as being far more important than promotion.

The one exception is that there's a shared interest in promoting the economic power of the AEC because that's about global perceptions, awareness and the need to balance the world's current infatuation with China.

LF Creating a marketing and sales infrastructure that treats the business events industry as a B2B industry. For example, a willingness to share lead data, using modern CRM tools which will ensure efficient tracking of event opportunities.

Creating and delivering strong MICE trade shows within the region, and delivering brilliant experiences at trade shows in other regions.

Ensuring the marketing message is tailored to the type of event and ensuring it resonates with decision makers and attendees.

BD The three key elements which South-East Asia must fulfil and promote in order to attract international planners are: offer a unique experience; be cost-effective; and address any safety/security concerns.

As the world gets smaller, people are becoming more open to travelling farther, which enables South-East Asia to offer a unique experience. In terms of cost-effectiveness, it's not uncommon to see a better ROI in South-East Asia compared to more mature regions and cities. Promoting the region as being safe is also critical to attracting new events and visitors.

TTG What major obstacles are there today to prevent ASEAN members from achieving this united front?

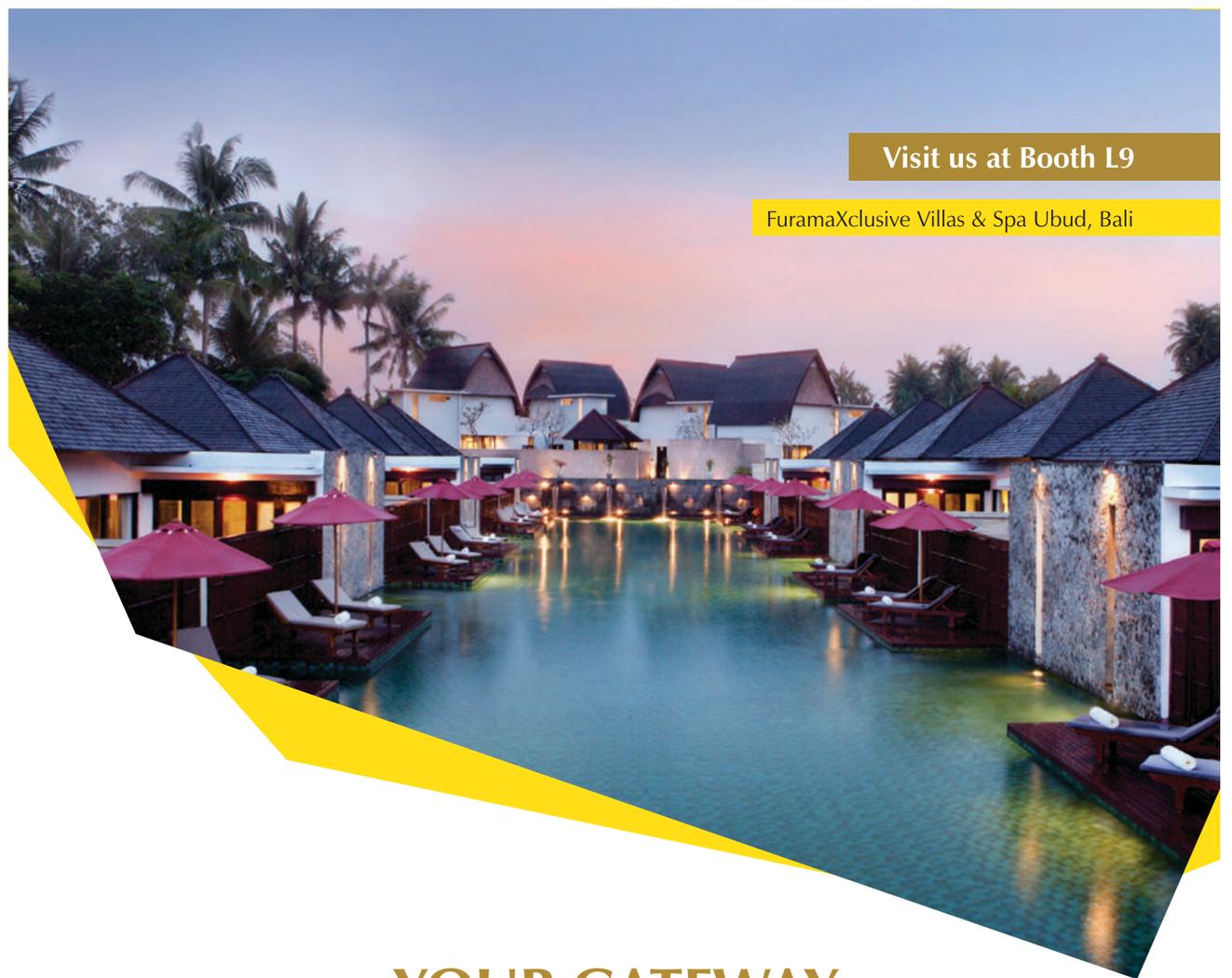
RK It is easy for destinations to fall in love with their own story and lose sight of what the customer wants. Destinations that can adapt their marketing to different cultures will be most successful.

GG I think that "coopetition" isn't well developed in South-east Asia, and the current reality is that the AEC isn't really a common market but rather a system of relatively loose albeit beneficial and posi-

tive trade arrangements.

South-east Asia's MICE industry is not unlike those in other parts of the world. It has limited regional platforms for developing regional strategies and a current void of leadership that is committed to making that happen. But if governments and the business communities there were to appreciate the power of coopetition, then ASEAN as one would thrive.

BD Given the varied cultures and experiences on offer within South-East Asia, it's likely that there will be differing appetites for collaboration and varying resources to invest in such an endeavour. A global marketing campaign to promote the region may bring greater benefit to larger countries, especially considering existing flight routes, and some may feel that their current efforts to promote their own country to international events planners are sufficient.



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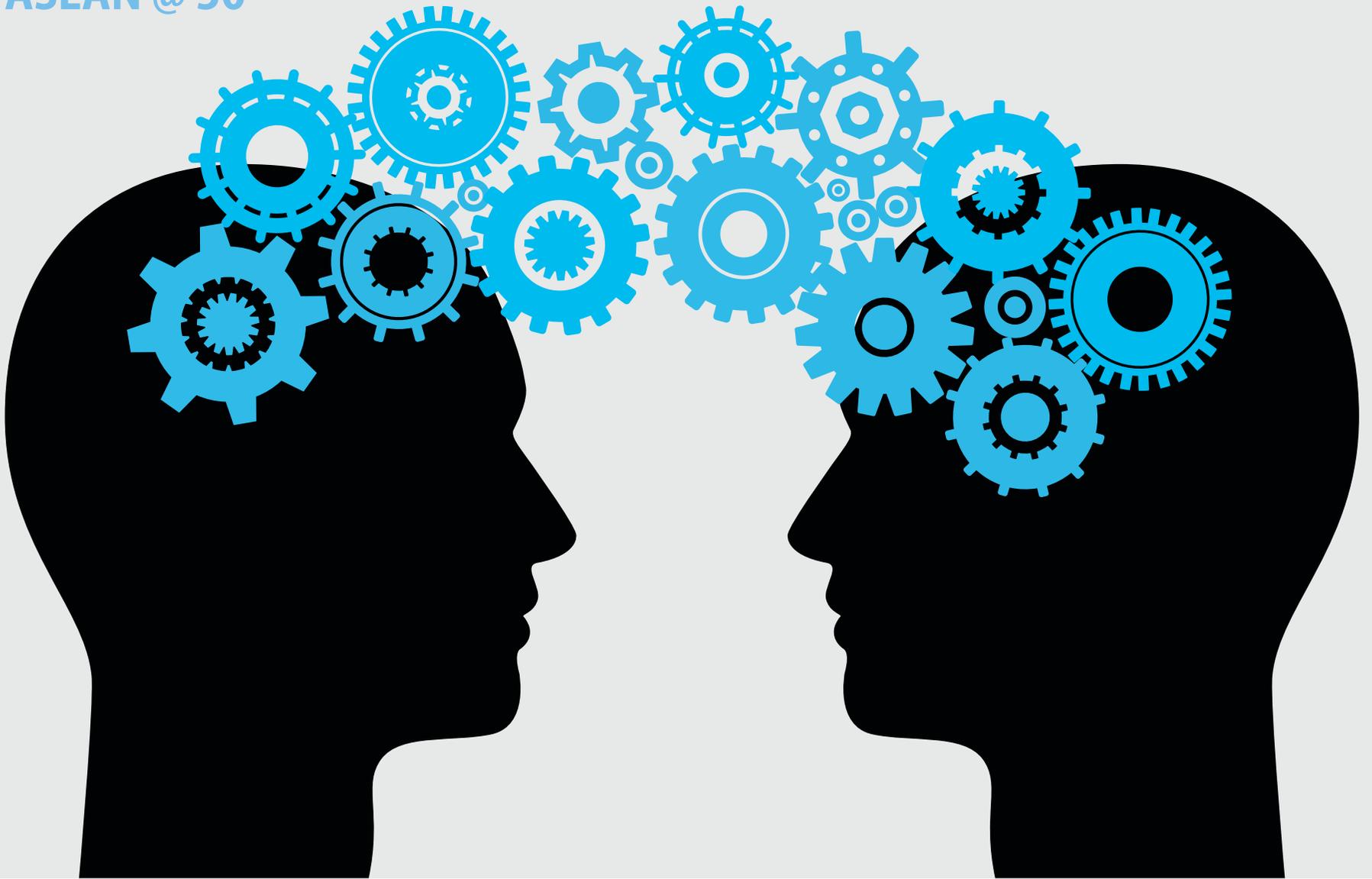


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ASEAN @ 50



Getting to know the machine

ASEAN's tourism sector is represented by various divisions, each with its own important role to play. **S Puvaneswary** profiles three of them

ASEAN Tourism Association (ASEANTA)

Known commonly among the trade as ASEANTA, this organisation was established on March 27, 1971, with the aim of providing a common body to facilitate interaction between tourism players in the private sector and the government bodies in South-east Asia with the intention of expanding the growth of tourism in this region. Its other objective is to provide a common platform for South-east Asian tourism players to have a voice.

From its humble beginnings, ASEANTA is well established today and have members from both the public and private tourism sectors across all 10 ASEAN

member countries. Members include NTOs, national travel and tourism associations, national hotel associations and airlines based in the region.

ASEANTA initiatives include fostering closer working relationships with all its members, partners and travel related government agencies, with ASEANTA as a platform for bridging communications and collaborating efforts in sustainable growth and development; encouraging efforts to develop and grow tourism in the region, offering support and assistance when required; playing an active role in the shaping of tourism policies within the region that will safeguard the interests of its members – through feedback, recommendations and having dialogues with relevant government departments and agencies; creating synergistic alliances among ASEANTA members to enhance the growth of tourism in the region;

stressing the need for improving and providing reasonable quality service to travellers and tourists by monitoring standards of service and professionalism; providing assistance to any government, statutory or international body in connection with tourism matters; setting a platform for the South-east Asian tourism fraternity to interact; and opening of opportunities to ensure the sustainability of the integrated ASEAN Economic Community (AEC).

ASEANTA president, Aileen Clemente, said: "The biggest achievement in marketing ASEAN is the fact that the private sector is putting itself at the forefront alongside the NTOs. You will see more of that happening in the succeeding months."

Among recent milestones include ASEANTA reorganising itself in 2014. That year also saw it kicked off a strong campaign among ASEAN NTOs to remember the partnership and its membership in ASEANTA, and that the private sector was an important component in ensuring the success of ASEAN integration as it pertains to tourism, especially in campaigning ASEAN as a single destination.

In November 2015, ASEANTA was re-registered as an association with the Registrar of Societies Malaysia including amendments in its by-laws to include membership of other sectors such as education institutions with tourism curriculum and the meetings and events sector, among others. That same year, ASEANTA was invited to participate in the ASEAN Business Council as its research partner for tourism.

Plans coming up soon to market the South-east Asia region include supporting activities around the *Visit ASEAN@50-Golden Celebration* campaign, such as *Visit ASEAN@50* tour packages, ASEANTA Excellence Awards for the travel and tourism industry, a photo contest and a food trail.

Federation of ASEAN Travel Agents Associations (FATA)

FATA was established in early 1990s, a few years after the first ASEAN Tourism Forum was held in 1991. FATA's role is to bring into greater focus the issues and challenges faced by travel associations.

FATA's aims are: to contribute significantly to the growth and development of the travel industry in ASEAN; to provide effective advocacy in industry and government affairs, training, education and communication initiatives as well as marketing opportunities; to strive towards the attainment of the highest standards of services and facilities for travellers and tourists; to uphold the dignity and ethics of the tour and travel business and to strive towards its professionalism.

On FATA's biggest achievements,

"The biggest achievement in marketing ASEAN is the fact that the private sector is putting itself at the forefront alongside the NTOs."

Aileen Clemente
President, ASEANTA



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DISCOVERY
Guest Loyalty
Programme

ASEAN @ 50

Hamzah Rahmat, president of FATA, said: "We have embarked on *Domestic ASEAN* which promotes intra-ASEAN travel. In all travel fairs held in our member countries, ASEAN as a destination has been given great prominence. Arrivals at each South-east Asian country from others in the region are also on the rise. This speaks volumes of the result achieved thus far."

He added: "When we create a buzz among member countries to visit South-east Asia, the message will catch on in markets outside of the region and travellers there will be curious and want to discover what we have."

Hamzah said new and young visitors from longhaul markets should be targeted, as they regard ASEAN in the same way as Europe.

"This is where ASEAN is appealing as a multi-destination and cultural holiday region," he said.

In March 2016, FATA joined the World Travel Agents Associations Alliance (WTAAA).

"Joining WTAAA has allowed for exchange of information and promotions, and an opportunity to reach a wider market. All information and promotional messages of ASEAN are channelled to

WTAAA, which in turn shares it with its members. When the world economy recovers in a couple of years, we will reap the fruits of our labour today," Hamzah said.

ASEAN Hotel & Restaurant Association (AHRA)

One of the key reasons for the establishment of AHRA in 1971 was to create a platform for the national associations of hotels and restaurants in ASEAN member countries to come together to share trends and best practices.

The two broad aims of AHRA are to promote international, regional and domestic tourism and to advance the business of hotels and restaurants within the South-east Asia region.

Cheah Swee Hee, president of AHRA, said: "I believe our biggest achievement in marketing ASEAN is our strong working relationship with NTOs, airlines, travel,

"When we create a buzz among member countries to visit South-east Asia, the message will catch on in markets outside of the region and travellers there will be curious and want to discover what we have."

Hamzah Rahmat
President, FATA



tour and transport operators, hotels and restaurants in the region through ASE-ANTA. This strong bond shared by all stakeholders strategically promotes our region's rich and diverse offerings, and ASEAN as a single destination.

"My hope is for AHRA to continue to grow in stature so as to be an even more effective platform to increase business and raise standards for hotels and restaurants in the region."

Cheah added that AHRA members are working with their respective NTOs to put together special packages to commemorate ASEAN's 50th anniversary in 2017 and beyond.

Meanwhile, AHRA will continue to promote multiple destination events and cultures in ASEAN member countries through two soon-to-be-launched websites – smileasean.com and smileasean.travel.

Mutual cooperation for the greater good

What can the private sector in South-east Asia do better in marketing the region as a whole?



The private sector should definitely work closer with the governments to offer new products and marketing. We had the Visit ASEAN campaign in 2002, and ASEANTA launched the ASEAN Circle Pass and ASEAN Hip-Hop Pass (for one or two countries). We should promote more of such cross-country packages with ASEAN for longhaul markets and identify target segments such as youth travel. (For example), many Thai youths don't know much about ASEAN and look towards Japan, South Korea and London as travel destinations. We always create packages for working adults but we should look at kids and youth too.

We can also look at ladies to "soften" the image of ASEAN and make it more inviting by tailoring programmes for ladies such as spa packages, fruit carvings and local dessert classes. Tourism Authority of Thailand's (TAT) Women's Journey Thailand campaign is one good example.

Phornsiri Manoharn,
Former TAT governor (2007-2009)



In hindsight, associations are not the best vehicle to implement a successful commercial undertaking. Marketing is promoting and selling products or services, including market research and advertising. Promoting is just one aspect, while selling is the fulfilment of the effort of promoting.

In my opinion, the private sector should enlist a private organisation to promote and sell to the public. A dynamic packaging tool is also needed so that it can pull together the various components (air travel, hotel accommodation and ground services) by a commercial entity and marketed online.

Tunku Iskandar Tunku Abdullah
Former secretary-general of ASEANTA (2003-2005)



There must be total commitment in the industry followed by appropriate resource allocation. Halfway measures to achieve success will not work. The products being promoted must be up to the expectations of potential clients the private sector are trying to woo.

Datuk Abdullah Jonid
Former director-general of Tourism Malaysia (1999-2004)



We need to contribute in creating the ASEAN packages. It should be done by a reputable and experienced company, but every tour operator in ASEAN should be able to sell it.

Elly Hutabarat
Former president of ASEANTA (2006-2007)



Every ASEAN tourism stakeholder must use the spirit of ASEAN – we are one in diversity – as the basic principle of marketing. Then, the business integration among ASEAN stakeholders will be easy.

I Gede Ardika
Former Indonesia Minister of Culture and Tourism (2000-2004)





our park

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Mulu National Park - A World Heritage Site

Host city

City of variety

From specially curated art exhibitions and Michelin-star hawker grub to bird watching in a sustainable park, Singapore has different ways to enchant its overseas visitors. **Paige Lee Pei Qi** and **Karen Yue** identifies a few choice picks



MUST SEE

Artsience Museum

While the facility isn't spanking new, the exhibitions within are always fresh and exciting. On the calendar are: *Journey to Infinity: Escher's World of Wonder*, a major retrospective of artworks by graphic artist and master of mathematical representations M C Escher, which will end its run on February 26, 2017; and *NASA - A Human Adventure*, a space-flight exhibition with more than 200 artefacts and machines which will be on show until March 19, 2017. Track the museum's website for upcoming presentations.

Website: www.marinabaysands.com/museum.html

Chinatown Heritage Centre

Revamped and relaunched a year ago, the Chinatown Heritage Centre offers visitors an easy and interesting peek into the lives of Singapore's early pioneers. Located within three beautifully-restored shophouses on Pagoda Street, the unique museum recreates the cramped living conditions of Singapore's early pioneers and have their stories told through a handheld multimedia device.

Website: www.chinatownheritagecentre.com.sg

National Gallery Singapore

The latest jewel in Singapore's art crown, the National Gallery Singapore is a new visual arts institution that houses an unparalleled collection of modern Singapore and South-east Asian art. A variety of programmes including guided tours, artist talks and conversations with curators to gain deeper insights into the exhibition are available.

Website: nationalgallery.sg

Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum

Singapore's newest museum, Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, is home to over a million plant and animal specimens. The main gallery showcases the history and biodiversity of plants and animals, while the heritage gallery presents Singapore's natural history and treasures. There are more than 2,000 specimens spread across 15 zones for visitors to explore.

Website: lkcnhm.nus.edu.sg

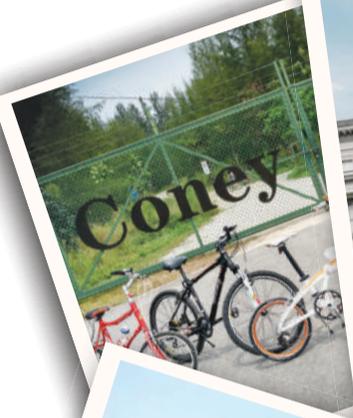
Fort Siloso Skywalk

Sentosa has launched a new Skywalk that leads to Fort Siloso. The 11-storey high Skywalk functions as an elevated bridge which guides visitors on a trail through the treetops, providing a memorable aerial view of Sentosa. The free attraction also offers information on the fort's history and the surrounding area.

Website: sentosa.com.sg/Explore/Attractions/Fort-Siloso-Skywalk



National Gallery Singapore



Coney



Fort Siloso Skywalk

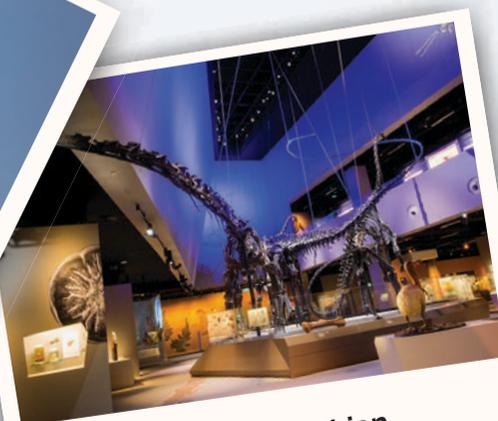


Chinatown Heritage Centre

Photo by Chinatown Heritage Centre Pte Ltd



Artsience Museum



Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum

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Zouk



Coney Island



MUST DO

Zouk

Singapore's longest established dance and music institution, Zouk, has relocated from Jiak Kim Street to Clarke Quay's Cannery Block. Signature dance stages Zouk and Phuture are here to stay, and fans can look forward to new unique concepts at the two-storey complex. Red Tail restaurant and bar serves up tasty bar bites, craft cocktails and fine wines and beers to fuel up visitors before a big night.

Website: www.zouclub.com

Coney Island Park

A new haven for nature in built-up Singapore, Coney Island Park opened to the public late last year. This 50-hectare ecologically sustainable park has since attracted nature enthusiasts who are drawn to activities held there, such as bird watching and nature photography. Guided walks are available.

Contact: (65) 1800 471 7300

The Rink

Fancy some ice skating in tropical Singapore? That's possible at The Rink, Singapore's first Olympic-size ice rink, located within JCube shopping mall. Newbies to the sport are welcome and skating lessons are available. Corporate bookings for teambuilding activities are welcome too. Stay through the night for a chance to catch an exhilarating ice hockey match.

Website: therink.sg

Monumental Walking Tours

Monumental Walking Tours offers 90-minute thematic tours created and led by heritage enthusiasts who are passionate about sharing their knowledge in the history and architectural features of Singapore's national monuments. Join a night tour to discover the secrets held within the walls of the 128-year-old National Museum.

Contact: NHB_NationalMonuments@nhb.gov.sg



MUST EAT

Liao Fan Hong Kong Soya Sauce Chicken Rice & Noodle

Liao Fan Hong Kong Soya Sauce Chicken Rice & Noodle at 78 Smith Street is one of two Singapore hawker stalls to bag a Michelin star in 2016. Since then, the Liao Fan has pulled in massive crowds of diners who are willing to queue for up to two hours just to get a taste of its signature soya sauce chicken dish. Its *charsiu* (honey roasted pork) is also a surprise crowd-pleaser.

Contact: (65) 6304 9053

hawker bars – beer bars stocked with a variety of imported brews in casual hawker centres – and they are the perfect companion for any local-food-loving traveller. One of the pioneers of hawker bars is The Good Beer Company at level two of Chinatown Complex. It serves craft and mainstream beers from all over the world.

Contact: (65) 9430 2750

National Kitchen by Violet Oon

Violet Oon is one of Singapore's earliest local celebrity chef and she's known for her exquisite Peranakan dishes. Her latest project is the National Kitchen by Violet Oon at the National Gallery. Its interior is as beautiful as her food and pays equal tribute to the Peranakan culture through the use of intricate mosaic tiles over floors and walls. On the menu are well-loved dishes like fish head curry, satay, dry *laksa* and *kueh pie tee*.

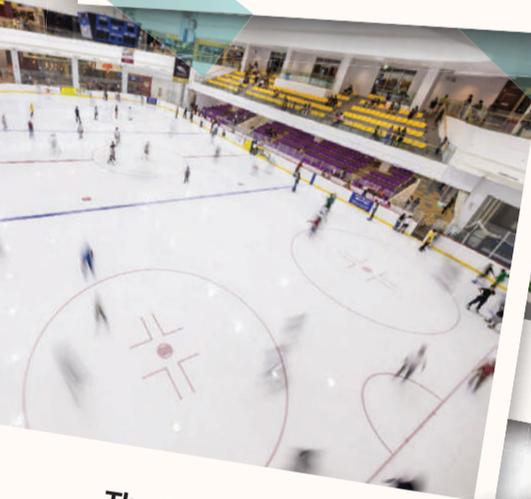
Contact: (65) 9834 9935

The Good Beer Company

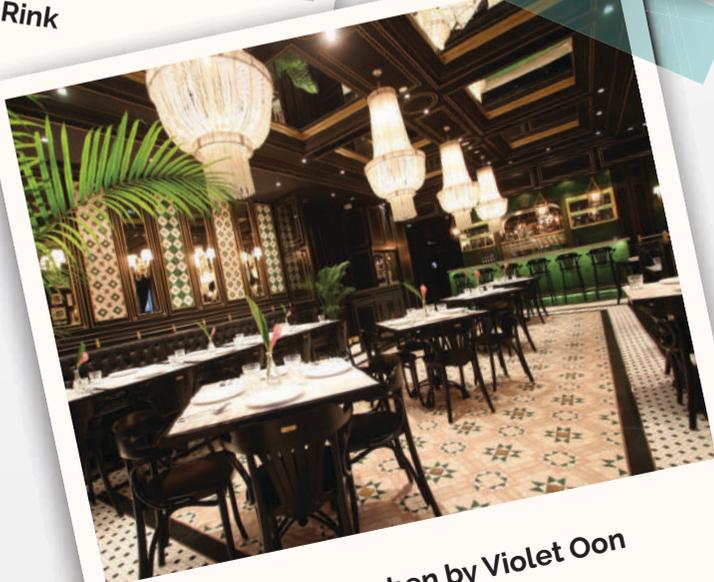
Singapore has been hit by a recent wave of



The Good Beer Company



The Rink



National Kitchen by Violet Oon



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Jog along Singapore's bay area



INSIDER'S PICK

TTG Asia's editorial team in Singapore reveals how best to experience the soul of the Lion City

Escape the heat at free water parks



Karen Yue
Group Editor
Singapore's sweltering heat can make you rather uncomfortable when you are out exploring some of the city-state's best outdoor attractions.

Fortunately, at both the Singapore Zoo and Gardens by the Bay, a welcome reprieve from the heat can be found at the Rainforest Kidzworld and the Children's Garden by Far East Organization respectively. And, hurrah, they are free for everyone!

Both water parks feature elaborate and thoroughly fun water play features as well as plenty of space to run about and splash around. They are perfect even for toddlers. They come with spacious changing and shower facilities, so when you and your young ones are done, simply wash up and head to the next big draw in Singapore.

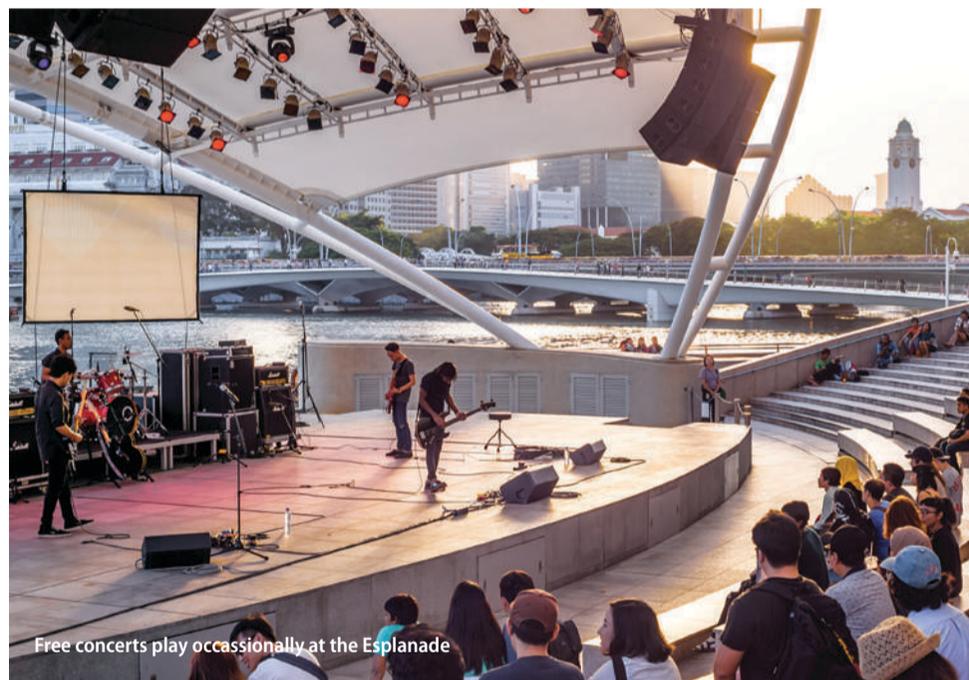
Connect with Singapore's parks



Raini Hamdi
Senior Editor
Every time I return to my home country, I try and check out what the city calls a 'park connector'.

Hop on a bike, put on your rollerblades or stroll/jog your way along car-free routes, picturesque rivers and canals that link you to the major parks in Singapore. Most recently, I tried the Alexandra Park Connector and how wonderful it was to see fellow Singaporeans relaxing or exercising after a hard day's work, and a stunning skyline of local buildings and condominiums with fantastic architectural details.

If you're staying at Marina Bay Sands, it's perfect: run by the river pass Grand Copthorne Waterfront and just go on as the route will lead you to Zion Road. The connector will then take you along Alexandra Canal and Tanglin Road. It's easy and it gives you a real taste of Singapore.



Free concerts play occasionally at the Esplanade

Visit a wet market



Xinyi Liang-Pholensa
Deputy Editor,
TTG Asia & TTG India
Wet markets, as fresh markets are called in Singapore, are a microcosm of the country's diverse cultures and wide-ranging taste in food.

Swing by in the morning, when markets are at their busiest and you will find a cacophony of colours, smells and sounds. Stalls are stacked with fresh vegetables and seafood, butchers carving their meat and market-goers haggling with the vendors for the best cut or prices. Besides, these markets are great spots to stock up on cooking advice and local food souvenirs – fresh curry powder, anyone?

For visitors to recreate their favourite Singaporean dishes back home. Check out fresh markets in more central locations like Tekka (in Little India), Chinatown or Tiong Bahru.

Enjoy free concerts at the Esplanade



Paige Lee Pei Qi
Assistant Editor, Singapore
Did you know that the iconic Esplanade is a prime spot for free concerts? These are quality performances by home-grown music talents, and are held regularly at

the indoor concourse area or the outdoor theatre by the bay.

I like how this arrangement spotlights promising artists in Singapore and encourages people to appreciate local talents.

And if you feel peckish after the performance, just pop into one of the many restaurants or cafes within Esplanade's three-storey mall.

Eat ice-cream by the roadside



Rachel AJ Lee
Sub Editor

A part of every Singaporean's childhood is visiting the ice-cream truck! Here in the Lion City, you can find these ice-cream vendors – look out for a giant beach umbrella attached to a motorbike – along Orchard Road or in the town centre of residential estates.

Skip the usual chocolate and vanilla flavours and dive right into local favourites such as yam, durian and red bean. You can choose to have your ice-cream in a cup, or cut into a thick rectangular slab that comes sandwiched between slices of colourful bread or two crunchy wafers. Prices start at S\$1.20 (US\$0.88) for one.

Catch an alternative film



Yixin Ng
Sub Editor

Film and an easy, unpretentious vibe are what make The Projector one of my favourite haunts in Singapore. Although carrying the label of an “independent cinema”, it (thankfully) does not exclusively screen the art-house genre – film festival lineups, old classics or even mainstream box office flicks are also commonly featured here.

Occupying a refurbished old cinema in the decrepit Golden Mile Tower, the space has a lived-in quality that is almost seductive. The Projector creates an iconic “third place” and alternative cinema (it's one of the only cinemas in the city that sells beers at the door),

and in the process, pulls guests into its spirited celebration of storytelling and inclusivity.

Feast on a Peranakan meal



Redmond Sla
Creative Designer

I am always craving for food and what I love most is Peranakan cuisine. An amazing ingredient iconic in Peranakan cooking is the *buah keluak* nut from Indonesia which has naturally-occurring cyanide. What a challenge! But it is safe to eat of course, as *buah keluak* is detoxified before it is cooked. The content of the nut is smooth and buttery, and used along with a tangy, spicy gravy and chicken or pork to create the popular *ayam* or *babi buah keluak* dish. This tastes absolutely heavenly!

Learn about natural history



Goh Meng Yong
Creative Designer

I highly recommend the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum. Located in the quiet Kent Ridge Road area towards the south of Singapore, away from town, the museum is a little out of the way. But a trip there is worth it, as visitors can see all sorts of interesting things from nature, from a Narwhal horn twice the size of a man to a bird's egg as large as the fingernail on your pinkie.

It is not the biggest museum in Singapore, but it has enough draws to keep children interested.

Take time to smell the flowers



Lina Tan
Editorial Assistant

If peace is what you seek, Gardens by the Bay is where you should go. The attraction celebrates the different seasons and festivals of the year with spe-

cial themed displays of flowers, and as I love all kinds of flowers, Gardens by the Bay is my little heaven on earth.

My personal favourite area in Gardens by the Bay is the Flower Dome, where the air always bears a fresh floral fragrance and displays are always spectacular.

There are many other areas to explore and I can easily spend a whole day there.

The perfect finale is a meal of *satay* and other local delicacies at Satay By The Bay next door.



Above: local ice-cream sandwich
Left: Ayam buah keluak,

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Report World Heritage Sites



From left: The majestic Haew Narok Waterfall within Khao Yai National Park, Thailand; Singapore Botanic Garden provides a lush escape

Living the glory days

TTG Show Daily gains insight from industry players on how UNESCO laurels interplay with tourism in the region

>> Singapore Botanic Gardens Blossoming into maturity

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

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

Nigel Taylor, group director at Singapore Botanic Gardens and National Parks Board (NParks), said: "Following its inscription, NParks is committed to sustaining Singapore's green legacy through the gardens' site management plan. Measures such as the protection of the gardens' centuries-old trees have been set in place."

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

As well, the gardens will develop a new Ethnobotany Garden to a low visitors to

learn about plants used by indigenous cultures of South-east Asia.

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

And since its UNESCO inscription in 2015, the gardens has recorded an increase in footfall, said Taylor, and now attracts more than 4.7 million visitors annually.

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

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

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

>> George Town, Malaysia

A market for festivals

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

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

In addition to the George Town Festival, Penang island also boasts a trio of

cultural festivals in the last quarter of the year – the George Town Literary Festival, In-Between Arts Festival and Penang Island Jazz Festival.

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

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

Henry Ong, head of business development, Holiday Tours, agreed: "The branding is an endorsement by a world body and it is important for the Caucasian markets such as Australia and Europe since they are travelling from afar to come here."

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

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

– **S Puvaneswary**

>> Khao Yai, Thailand

Lush tourism potential

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

Covering more than 2,000km² of forest and grassland, the park teems with natural life and features such as the Haew Narok



One of many famed murals around George Town, Penang, Malaysia



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Report World Heritage Sites

Waterfall (left) where Leonardo DiCaprio's famed jump in *The Beach* was filmed.

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

Pornthip Hirunkate, managing director – Thailand, Destination Asia, said: “The UNESCO brand is a useful selling tool in bringing the right kind of exposure – it is also attractive as people aspire to visit renowned destinations.”

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

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

Added Desmier: “If the vineyards in Khao Yai continue to develop, the area has the potential to become the Napa Valley of South-east Asia. (Together with) its UNESCO status and the small collection of boutique five-star properties such as Kirimaya and Muti Maya, we expect the area to shine in the next five years.”

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

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

– **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

>> Angkor Wat Archaeological Park, Cambodia

A push for conservation

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

Spanning over 40,000ha, the archaeological park in Siem Reap is home to hundreds of temples dating from the 9th to 15th century, including the iconic Angkor Wat, Bayon Temple and Ta Prohm have been restored to their former glory, with work ongoing.

In mid-2016, the Cambodian government requested further help from UNESCO to assist with restoration training, claiming erosion, tourist traffic and pollution were creating a greater need.

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

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

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

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

>> Luang Prabang, Laos

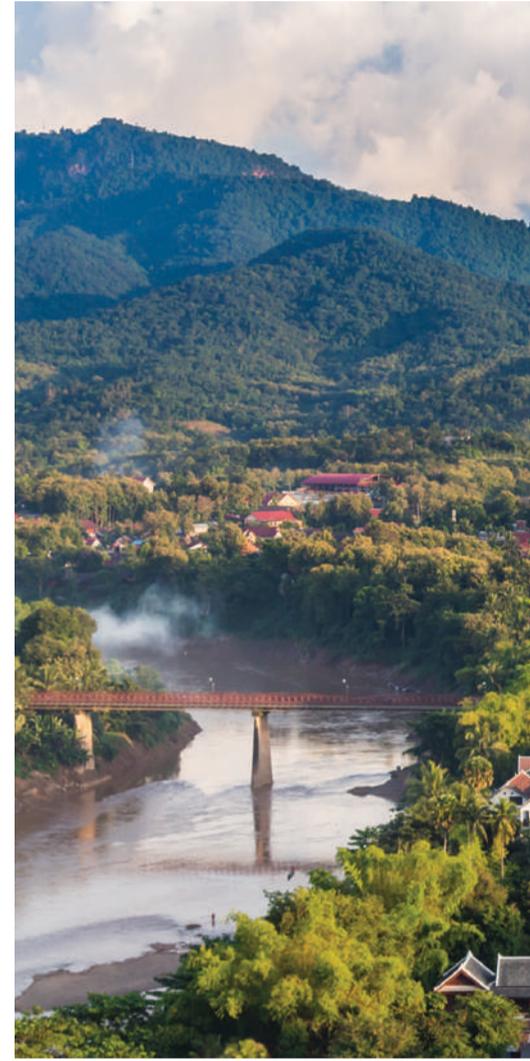
Keeping development in check

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

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

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

Luang Prabang's World Heritage Site status has helped to protect its rich architectural heritage, as regulations



Bayon temple in the Angkor Wat Archaeological Park, Siem Reap Cambodia



Left and bottom: It's a different world in Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park, the Philippines





Laos' Luang Prabang is regarded as a well-preserved heritage city

Totoo/Sutterstock

are placed on hotel sizes and buildings, remarked Bourbaud. He shared that Apple Tree Group's new Parasol Blanc hotel, for example, cannot have a swimming pool due to its location is in a wetland area surrounded by natural ponds.

Granier believes the UNESCO label has helped attract newer markets like China and South Korea, especially with Lao Airlines launching new air routes to China.

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

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

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

>> Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park, the Philippines

Ebb and flow of a famed site

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

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

Tourists started arriving in droves, leading the city government to limit visitation to 800 pax a day or half the daily demand.

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

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

Cruz explained that Asians, in contrast to Europeans, are less awed by the attraction since neighbouring countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam share similar geography with the Philippines.

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

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

Techico said a programme packed with more activities can make the experience more memorable, adding that the few restaurants in the area serve just "basic" food. **– Rosa Ocampo**

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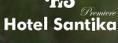
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Sun, sea and sand for all

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



INDONESIA

Hasiyanna Ashadi Koestoer
Managing director, Marintur Indonesia

Common family travel configurations

South-east Asian and Middle Eastern families usually come with grandparents, cousins, parents' siblings and their families. Middle Eastern families may include a family head with two wives and their kids and sometimes the kids' nannies too.

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

Length of stay Between four and 10 days.

Top activities When not with their children at the swimming pools and playgrounds, parents are usually at the spa or out shopping. In Bali, families will visit places such as safari park, monkey forest and temples together.

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

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

Ratna Subrata
External relations manager,
Happy Trails Indonesia

Common family travel configurations

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

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

Length of stay European families usually visit during their summer holidays, with Bali as part of the 21-day Java overland

package. The length of stay in Bali is between two to three nights.

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

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

Top beach resort spots Bali.

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

MALAYSIA

Uzaidi Udanis
General manager, Vacasia Tours & Travel

Common family travel configurations

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

Accommodation preferences Travellers from the US and Europe choose boutique, upscale resorts in secluded areas whereas Asians and Malaysians favour accessible, busy locations with nearby food options.

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

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

Top activities Food is a priority for locals and Asians. Relaxing by the beach or pool and trekking are more common among European families.

Most valued amenities Longhaul travel-

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

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

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

Arokia Das
Senior manager, Luxury Tours Malaysia

Common family travel configurations

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

Accommodation preferences Adjoining rooms are favoured across markets.

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

Top activities Longhaul visitors usually take a half-day tour and explore on their own the rest of the time or relax by beaches and pools. For locals and Asians, shopping and sightseeing are top priorities.

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

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

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

PHILIPPINES

JP Cabalza
Managing director, Cencorp Travel and Tours

Common family travel configurations

It is now common for family friends to tag along on family trips.

Accommodation preferences Adjoining hotel rooms for families and villas for newlyweds.

Length of stay An average of five days for Asian families, and at least eight for those from Europe, the US, the Middle East and Russia.

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

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

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

On the radar Siargao and Aurora are be-

coming buzzwords for surfers, while Bicol and Bohol are destinations to watch owing to their other offerings in addition to beach activities.

Fe Abling-Yu
General manager, Arfel Travel and Tours

Common family travel configurations

Family travel has expanded to the so-called "affinity group", comprising extended family of grandparents, friends and even domestic helpers. The affinity group is increasingly common for weddings of other nationalities.

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

Length of stay At least one week.

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

Most valued amenities Multiple pools, beach activities and entertainment.

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

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

SINGAPORE

Jaclyn Yeoh
Managing director, Siam Express

Common family travel configurations

Multi-generational family travel is becoming common, but more typical is small (nuclear) families or two couples.

Accommodation preferences Deluxe room, suite and villa.

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

Top activities Spas for couples and sea sports for adventurous children.

Most valued amenities Swimming pools and beaches.

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

Ram Samtani
General manager, Ramesh Travel Service

Common family travel configurations

We see (various family) combinations, especially given the trend of families celebrating milestone birthdays or anniversaries together.

Accommodation preferences Rising demand for villas to fit families altogether.

Length of stay Three nights are the norm.

Top activities Families with kids look to relax over beach activities. For three-generational groups, food and cultural excursions are crucial.

Most valued amenities Kids clubs and swimming pools.

Top beach resort spots Sentosa.

THAILAND

Pornthip Hirunkate

Deputy CEO and managing director,
Thailand, Destination Asia

Common family travel configurations

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

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

Length of stay Six nights on average for European families; two nights over a weekend or long public holiday for Asians.

Top activities Island-hopping tours rank high, being readily available for purchase at resorts or in the vicinity. Adults opt for spas and Thai massages whereas the younger ones enjoy more adventurous activities such as kayaking and ATV riding.

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

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

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

Watcharaporn Phiewkaow

Managing director, Discovery Holidays

Common family travel configurations

Mostly couples with few children. Newlyweds, honeymooners and couples celebrating their wedding anniversaries are also significant segments.

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

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

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

Most valued amenities Swimming pools rank high as they allow parents and children to spend time together. Nanny service and activities offered at kids' clubs are important since parents, especially European ones, want to be able to have quiet moments at the pool or spa.

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

On the radar Ecotourism is an emerging choice among families and more married couples are seeking meditation retreats.



Capella Singapore

VIETNAM

Tran Gia Bach

Regional general manager,
Buffalo Tours Vietnam

Common family travel configurations

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

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

Length of stay Local families tend to take multiple short vacations, so a typical stay might be 4D3N. Foreigners (do not neces-

sarily stay much longer at a single resort) as they often visit multiple cities at a go.

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

Most valued amenities Swimming pools are always a big hit.

Top beach resort spots Nha Trang, Da-nang, Halong Bay, Phan Thiet, Phu Quoc and Con Dao are popular.

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

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Destination Brunei

Sharpening its focus



Clockwise from left: The centrepiece of Brunei's capital Bandar Seri Begawan is Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque; the Kampong Ayer river village in Bandar Seri Begawan; The Royal Regalia Museum



To entice more footfalls, the tiny nation on the island of Borneo is emphasising on nature packages as well as making the visa process easier, reports **S Puvaneswary**

Fuelled by the government's move on May 1, 2016, when they introduced the single entry visa-on-arrival for up to a maximum stay of 14 days for Chinese visitors, arrivals from China into Brunei are expected to grow further in 2H2016. This is also an attempt to get Chinese tourists to stay longer in the Sultanate.

Peter Chieng, managing director of PJ Majestic Tours, said: "The visa-on-arrival helps as it removes the time consuming process and hassle of applying for one. Also, it makes it easier for wholesalers to sell Brunei and receive last minute bookings just before departure.

"The Chinese are spoilt for destinations as there are so many countries trying to woo them. This new initiative makes it easier to promote, but at the same time, it is also very challenging as we face destination competition from our neighbours," he added.

Chieng also said the Chinese market was particularly interested in the Brunei

Royalty, hence he would take them to visit the palace and the Royal Regalia Museum. Also, Chinese tourists prefer soft adventure and nature, hence he would "promote nature tours to see the proboscis monkey along the Brunei River and visits to Ulu Temburong National Park".

Meanwhile, the top five arrival countries into Brunei – save for China – for 1H2016 were mostly from ASEAN, with Malaysia leading the pack at 25.3 per cent, followed by Indonesia, China, the Philippines, and Singapore. In total, these five countries represented 67.2 per cent of total tourist arrivals.

In 1H2016, the total number of tourist arrivals by air was 108,723, a drop of 4,962 tourists when compared with the corresponding period in 2015.

Chieng elaborated: "Most of the tourists who visit Brunei, be it from China or other nationalities are usually in their 40s and above, curious about the destination, and want to find out what it has to offer."

On regional markets, Sugumaran Nair,

Manager, Inbound & MICE Division, Freme Travel Services, said: "Inbound business from Vietnam and Thailand saw a slight increase in the first eight months of 2016, as compared with the same period in 2015."

This increase was buoyed by Royal Brunei Airlines when the company relaunched flights from Bandar Seri Begawan to Ho Chi Minh City in October 2014, two years after cancelling the route.

"Business was slow in 2015 as outbound agents in Vietnam were unsure whether Royal Brunei Airlines would pull out again. But this year business has picked up," explained Sugumaran.

In addition, the Minister of Primary Resources and Tourism, Ali Apong, believes that Brunei's eco-tourism products at Temburong have the potential to rival destinations such as Langkawi, Phuket and Bali.

In September, eight packages to promote Temburong as a tourist destination were introduced and these were marketed to locals and foreigners for the year-end

Destination in numbers

B\$145

The estimated spend per person, equivalent to US\$100, of Asian tourists to Brunei

2.2 days

The average length of stay of foreign tourists in Brunei

450,000

The Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism's target tourist arrivals by air in 2020. This is double the number of air arrivals in 2015 which totalled 218,000

school holidays. These packages, which feature activities such as kayaking and nature walks, were a joint collaboration between the Tourism Development Department, Temburong District Office, and tour operators.



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Sumbiling Eco Village

Sumbiling Eco Village will add another six glamping tents by the end of 2017 bringing the total number of glamping tents to 10.

The new tents come in two sizes, family tents that can fit up to four people and smaller tents that can comfortably fit two persons. The custom-built tents will be equipped with beds, electricity, and an attached toilet.

Jules Place

This boutique hotel located on Jalan Pemancha in the country's capital, Bandar Seri Begawan, will open in February 2017 with 29 rooms.

Targeted at FIT travellers and backpackers, facilities will include a café and Wi-Fi throughout. The accommodation is a short drive from tourist attractions such as Kampong Ayer, a tourist attraction in Brunei.

D'Anggerek Service

Service apartment, D'Anggerek at Kg Anggerek Desa, will have a new F&B outlet in February 2017 to complement the current offerings of Yum-A-Cha by Misato.

The property is located within a 10-minute drive from Brunei International Airport and close to shopping centres, sports complex and the International Convention Centre. It is also a short drive to government ministries and departments. All 42 rooms and function spaces were refurbished in 2016.

Viewpoints

What is needed immediately to support Brunei's tourism growth?

Mohd Iswandi Ma'aruf, Director of operations, Orchid Garden Hotel



There must be more collaboration between the government and private sector to enhance tourism products, and to make sure the entire end-to-end experience is a meaningful one for tourists.

Government support is crucial in boosting arrivals through tourist-friendly policies such as introducing visa-on-arrival, better public transportation and infrastructure development at tourism sites. The government should also incentivise more airlines to fly to Brunei.

Sugumaran Nair, Manager, inbound & MICE division, Freme Travel Services



More international marketing and promotions need to be done by Brunei Tourism and tourism stakeholders, especially in destinations where Royal Brunei Airlines flies to. This will help create more awareness about the destination and its offerings.

Inspiring themes



Clockwise from above: Tasek Merimbun Heritage Park offers boat rides, jungle treks and more; chance upon playful children at Ulu Temburong National Park; tuck into an Ambuyat meal

Family fun

Brunei has a plethora of attractions that will suit visitors of all ages, but for the time-strapped family, an all-in-one attraction can be found in the form of Tasek Merimbun Heritage Park.

Regarded as the only South-east Asian heritage park in Brunei, visitors can take a boat ride on Brunei's largest black water lake, enjoy a leisurely picnic by the lake, visit the museum or the Butterfly Garden, and go on a jungle trek.

Gourmet lures

Bruneians are very family-oriented and love to gather around an *ambuyat* meal, which is a local speciality. The staple is sago paste, which is served with a choice of side dishes

and dipping sauce.

Experience an *ambuyat* special course – which includes a variety of meat and vegetable dishes – at Aminah Arif Restaurant on the ground floor of Bangunan Haji Abdul Rahman Building in Kiulap.

Adventure in nature

With more than 70 per cent of the country under tropical rainforest cover, Brunei is a nature lover's paradise. It offers a variety of green adventures and marine activities.

For a nature adventure, visit Ulu Temburong National Park, the crown jewel of Brunei's prized green spaces. There are many experiences to savour, from watching gibbons forage along the river, to tackling the rapids on the Temburong River.



Destination **Cambodia**

Sharpening an Asian focus



Cambodia is rolling out the red carpet for Chinese travellers, while additional flights and friendlier visa processes for Japanese and Korean tourists will help boost numbers. By **Marissa Carruthers**

Cambodia has set its sights firmly on the Asian market as it unveils a string of incentives to attract more Chinese, Korean and Japanese visitors.

The latest figures from the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) show the country is on its way to attracting 7.5 million international visitors by 2020, after enjoying a 4.8 per cent rise between January and September 2016.

A total of 3,508,415 international travellers visited the country during this time, compared to 3,346,870 the previous year.

Vietnam led supply markets with 695,672 visits, but recorded a wee increment of 0.1 per cent. Chinese visitor numbers on the other hand rose by 12.5 per cent to 577,283.

Cambodia also welcomed 263,882 South Koreans, 255,647 Thais and 229,906 people from Laos.

Keen on seeing greater Chinese arrivals, the MoT unveiled its China Ready plan in June, outlining measures to attract two million Chinese tourists – with an estimated spend of US\$420 billion – to the Kingdom by 2020. This includes having more Chinese speaking hospitality staff, signage and tour guides, and improving facilities and infrastructure.

A China Ready Centre has been established to improve the skills of tourism operators working with Chinese clients and businesses are encouraged to accept Chinese currency.

The Asian courtship was also stepped up with three-year multiple-entry visas for Chinese, South Korean and Japanese visitors from May 2016, and an increase in flights from the region – the first direct flight between Phnom Penh and Tokyo in September and Cambodia Angkor Air launching flights between Siem Reap and Beijing in December.

Several tourism suppliers in Cambodia are delighted with the MoT's China Ready plan. At The Aviary Hotel in Siem Reap, the Chinese inbound market makes up about 25 per cent of total guests, with the majority booking coming from online channels.

Destination in numbers**14.1%**

The percentage increase in sea arrivals between January and September 2016, thanks to an increase in cruises to the Cambodian coast

62,865

The number of Chinese arrivals in September, a 22.1 per cent increase, thanks to the launch of Cambodia's China Ready plan to boost tourism business from the massive market

According to general manager Joffrey Thin-Gris, the hotel intends to focus on growing the Chinese market in 2017.

He explained: "Economically it has the right impact as the Chinese FIT market spends much more than the Western market."

Anantara Angkor Resort in Siem Reap is also eyeing the Chinese market, with general manager Anthony Borantin, referring to the top tier of Chinese travellers who "value indigenous and curated activities with personalised attention over cheap rates" as the hotel's "most aggressive" target for 2017.

He said: "We see China as the strongest feeder market and believe that carries throughout Cambodia. There's a broad spectrum of what Chinese travellers seek, and as Cambodia diversifies its offerings across all price points, it (creates) even more inbound opportunity from China."

Pierre-Andre Romano, general manager of EXO Cambodia, observed that Asian arrivals in general had grown for his business in 2016, and that most preferred short stays. As such, "travel professionals, airline companies and airports are working on (developing and promoting) short stays, such as weekend breaks, for these markets", he said.



Clockwise from above: Phnom Penh's iconic Independence Monument at twilight; traditional Cambodian cuisine; elaborately dressed Apsara dancers in Siem Reap

Destination Cambodia

Products to watch

Six Senses Krabey Island

Six Senses is gearing up to make its Cambodian debut in July 2017 with Six Senses Krabey Island. Set on a 30-acre private island off the coast of Sihanoukville, the resort comprises of 40 villas. Outdoor showers, private plunge pools and spa with a meditation cave and outdoor yoga sala are just a handful of the treats that will be on offer.

Courtyard by Marriott

Marriott has announced its first foray in Cambodia with the opening of its Courtyard by Marriott brand in Phnom Penh in 3Q2017. The upper midscale hotel, which is currently under construction, will have 189 rooms, an all-day dining restaurant, a lobby cafe and a sky bar. The hotel will sit close to the CBD.

Alila Villas Koh Russey

Alila Villas Koh Russey, due to open in 2Q2017, will be located on the unspoilt Koh Russey island, less than 5km off the coast of southern Cambodia. Promising magnificent views of its surroundings, the five-star eco resort makes a good option for families, thanks to a kids' club and villas with private terraces, pools and gardens.

Viewpoints

What is needed immediately to support Cambodia's tourism growth?

Jo Crisp, general manager, PEAK DMC Cambodia



Cambodia's tourism future depends on protecting the environment, preserving culture and ethnic diversity, and conserving historical sites. The challenge is for the government and private sector to unite to provide opportunities to share the tourism wealth while protecting what's special about Cambodia. Nobody treks in the jungle to see tree stumps, try food from home, or see defaced or looted temples.

Chin Meanhung, owner, Cambodian Experiences



We need more qualified human resources and hospitality and management training centres to provide professional and high quality staff across Cambodia. The stability of the country and the region is critical as that determines whether tourists come to Cambodia. There also needs to be much more international marketing by the government and the private sector.

Six Senses Krabey Island



Courtyard by Marriott



Alila Villas Koh Russey



Inspiring themes

Responsible travel

In a country where poverty is rife, responsible travel has a huge role to play in Cambodia, with many operators urging visitors not to indulge in the often detrimental voluntourism and orphanage tours on offer. Ayana Journeys specialises in educational travel, offering a range of responsible alternatives, such as Learn from the Locals day trips. These range from meaningful connections with farmers to learn about rice farming and exploring Animist beliefs and superstitions from storytellers.

Gourmet lures

Cambodian cuisine is often overshadowed by that of its neighbours Vietnam and Thailand, but the country is home to a host of delicacies too, such as fish *amok* and beef *lok lak*. Siem Reap Food Tours, run by two food lovers, offers an insight into local street food, market life and an opportunity to cook a few dishes of your own. There are also many authentic restaurants to sample. Malis, owned by Cambodian celebrity chef Luu Meng, in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap cannot be missed.

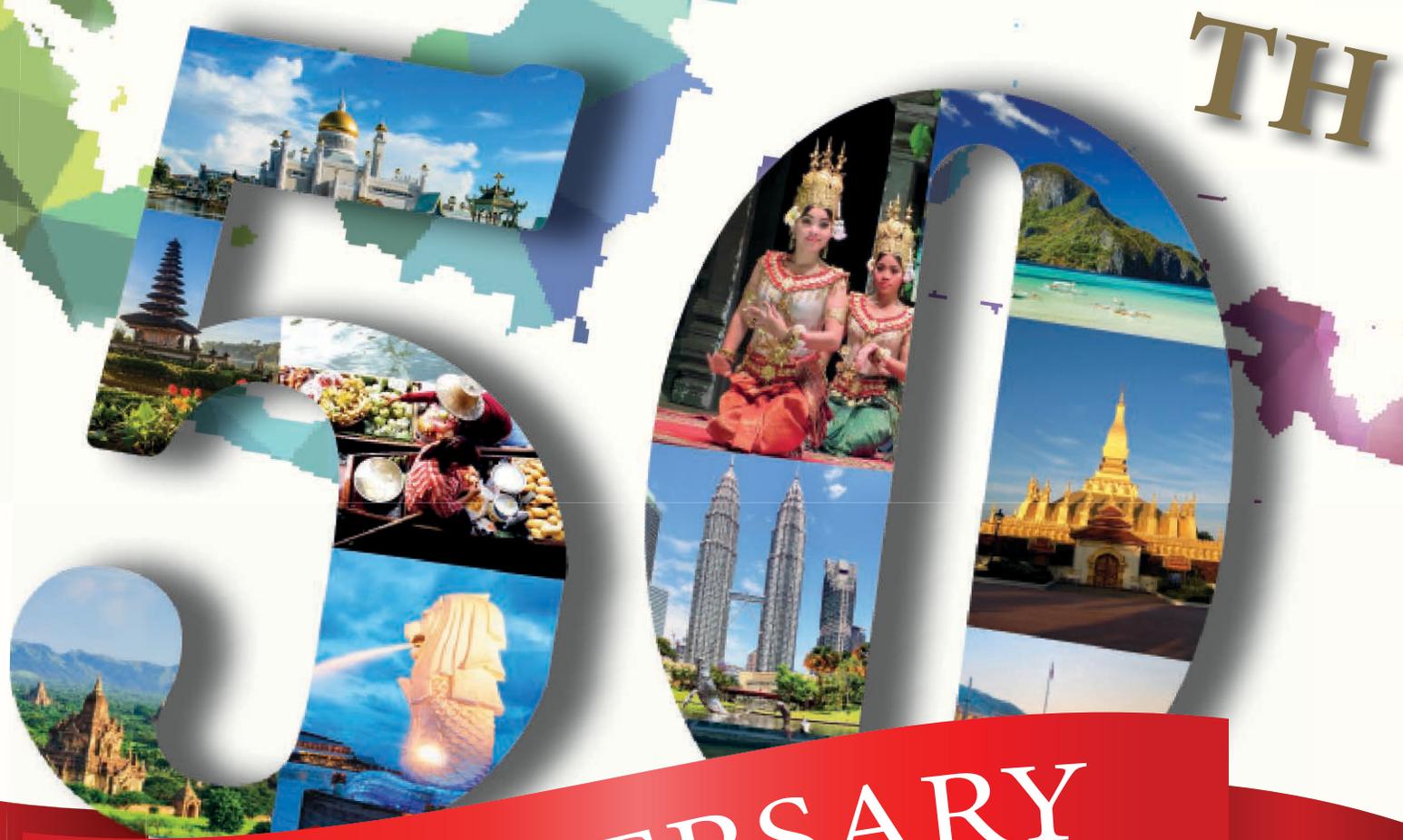
Romantic moments

From its untouched islands through to the rural countryside, Cambodia is home to a host of stunning and isolated spots that make the perfect place for high-end romance. Song Saa Private Island sits off the coast and boasts a range of sumptuous facilities to fan the flames of passion. Another seductive option is Phum Baitang which opened in Siem Reap in late 2015. Set amid lush gardens and paddy fields, the resort boasts a cocoon of understated luxury in Temple Town's surrounding countryside.



Clockwise from above left: Make meaningful connections through Ayana Journeys' Learn from the Locals day trip; discover local favourites at Malis restaurant; go on a romantic retreat at Phum Baitang Hotel, Siem Reap

Congratulations **ASEAN** on your Golden Jubilee



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