



ATF 2017
January 20, 2017
Singapore

THE PHILIPPINES IS THE PROUD HOST OF ASEAN 2017



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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 school of colorful fish. Behind her, a man in a red swimsuit is also holding a white helmet. The water is clear and blue, with many small, colorful fish swimming around. The bottom of the frame shows a sandy seabed with some coral and seaweed.

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GOLDEN CELEBRATION 2017

ASEAN's a 'raft' amid uncertainty

Singapore PM urges 10-nation bloc to further develop regional tourism, coordination

By Raini Hamdi

Beyond jointly marketing ASEAN through campaigns and promotions, Singapore's prime minister Lee Hsien Loong has underscored the need to do "the less glamorous behind-the-scenes hard work" and proposed three ways towards a vibrant ASEAN tourism industry, namely through strengthening air links, building up cruise tourism and developing tourism talent.

During his speech at ATF 2017 opening ceremony on Wednesday, he noted ASEAN's progress in growing air links, having more than doubled the annual air seat capacity of flights in the region while budget airlines have made travel affordable for the masses. All ASEAN members have ratified an open-skies agreement.

But there remains huge potential for tourist and air passenger numbers to grow further if ASEAN continues to strengthen its connectivity. "The more flights are available and the more affordable they are, the more tourists will come and the more tourism will prosper," said Lee.

"Second, we should build up cruise tourism which has immense potential for development. It is growing in popularity in North Asia and Australia, and ASEAN is well placed to promote cruise tourism. We have archipelagos in ASEAN to rival the Aegean, the Caribbean or the South Pacific. We have year-long



Singapore minister Lee Hsien Loong (centre), together with ASEAN secretary-general Le Luong Minh (next to Lee) and other ASEAN tourism heads, joined hands to pledge each member country's commitment to grow the region's tourism industry

tropical weather and calm waters; we have diverse and attractive destinations within short sailing distances.

"But developing cruise tourism is a multilateral effort. We need to develop port infrastructure to receive bigger and newer ships. We need to work with cruise providers to create attractive alternative itineraries with multiple stops for tourists. Singapore is happy to be the lead coordinator for the ASEAN Cruise Development Initiative. We need to work together closely to make this happen, and harness opportunities under the 'Cruise South-east Asia' brand," said Lee.

"Thirdly, we must develop our tourism talent. In ASEAN, we have the natural advantage of cultures that are warm, friendly and courteous, so visitors immediately feel comfortable and welcome. But our workers also

need specific skills to run hotels properly, manage inventories and logistics, supply guides and interpreters, so we can deliver the high standards international tourists are accustomed to," said Lee, adding that investing in workers also create opportunities and jobs for the locals.

As ASEAN marks its 50th year of founding this August, the Singapore leader also reminded delegates the importance of regional cooperation in today's isolationism climate. Last year saw Britain's vote for Brexit, the US elected a non-establishment candidate as its next president, and Europe distracted by corporate anxiety about jobs and immigrants, plus doubts about the whole European integration project.

"In this uncertain global environment, ASEAN is an important raft for all of us," said Lee.

While ASEAN has made regional cooperation a success in South-east Asia, there's a lot more work to be done, he said.

"We have to press on to deepen economic integration and boost connectivity among ASEAN countries, for example, through the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity. In security and counter-terrorism, we have to work more closely to share intelligence, counter extremist ideology and disrupt terrorism networks. In social and cultural areas, we have to continue to foster people-to-people ties.

"ASEAN's objectives are not quite as ambitious as the EU's but if ASEAN can build on what we have achieved, and deepen our cooperation across the board, all our peoples will benefit," said Lee.

Out to woo Xinjiang's Muslims

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

Eager to court the Muslim segment from the burgeoning Chinese outbound market, Indonesia is stepping up its promotion as a halal destination to China's Xinjiang, which is home to the Muslim Uigher minority.

Speaking to *TTG Show Daily*, Rizki Handayani, director of promotion for South-east Asia at the Indonesia Ministry of Tourism, said: "Halal food is very important to the Muslim travellers. We have the advantage of having well-equipped facilities and people to manage this expectation."

For Xinjiang's large Muslim Uighur population, the "recommended halal destinations" for them in Indonesia will be Lombok, West Sumatra and Aceh, Rizki pointed out.

As part of the NTO's promotion efforts, Rizki shared that there will be an upcoming familiarisation trip for Xinjiang-based travel agents to these three provinces to educate them about the halal products in these destinations.

Said Rizki: "We want to show that apart from Bali, there are good offerings for (Muslim travellers) in our other destinations as well."

The Chinese market accounted for the most foreign tourists arrivals in Indonesia between January and November last year, with 1.3 million Chinese tourists, up from 1.1 million over the same period in the previous year.

"There is still a lot of room for us to grow (in China)," she said, adding that most of the NTO's marketing budget in the new financial year will be going towards the Chinese market.

Rizki added that Indonesia received 10.4 million visitors from January to November 2016, and is now setting an even higher arrival target of 15 million in 2017. Apart from China, the other top source markets are Singapore, Australia, Malaysia and Japan.



Rizki: ready food, facilities options

It's Chiang Mai in 2018!

By Xinyi Liang-Pholensa and Yixin Ng

Come 2018, Chiang Mai will be an ATF host city for the first time, as part of a strategic decision in host country Thailand's ongoing push to develop the northern city as a MICE destination.

Pongpanu Svetarundra, permanent secretary at Thailand's Ministry of Tourism & Sports, said: "Chiang Mai is an established tourist destination and centre of Lanna culture, plus it's at the crossroads of Indochina with connections to Myanmar, Laos and Southern China."

TRAVEX will be organised at Chiang Mai International Exhi-

bition and Convention Centre, with meetings likely to be held in Shangri-La Chiang Mai, according to Pongpanu.

Held under the theme of ASEAN: *Sustainable Connectivity, Boundless Prosperity*, Tourism Authority of Thailand governor Yuthasak Supasorn believes that attendees will be shown a different side of Thailand when they visit "the rose of the north".

He said: "Chiang Mai has undergone considerable economic development in recent years but it still retains (manifestations of) its history and heritage."

Buyers at ATF are eager to see what the trade show's 37th edi-



Tourism Authority of Thailand's governor Yuthasak Supasorn (centre) and his team turn on the charm to welcome ATF 2018 delegates to Chiang Mai

tion will bring, with Meinhard Hiller, senior area manager, Asia, Australia & New Zealand of Germany's Windrose commenting that the choice of Chiang Mai is a "good balance of a less established destination with good connections".

Meanwhile, Gecko Inventives

& Events Germany's Henry Waltz sees in such secondary destination choice a chance for longhaul buyers like him to learn more about Chiang Mai, especially as the northern city is lower on the travel radar for German travellers to Thailand, as opposed to the more popular Krabi and Phuket.

News

Singapore gets a Dream ship

Dream Cruises to redeploy *Genting Dream* from North Asia to South-East Asia in December; offers North Asia a fresh cruise offering in the form of *World Dream*

By Raini Hamdi

With the delivery of its second ship *World Dream* this fall, Dream Cruises will be redeploying its first ship *Genting Dream* from its current base in Guangzhou to Singapore for year-round homeporting from December 3, reaffirming its positioning as Asia's first luxury cruise line not just for the China market but Asia and international markets.

The latest ship, *World Dream*, which is being built in Meyer Werft shipyard, will then be redeployed to North Asia, tipped to be Hong Kong.

When asked about the decision to base *Genting Dream* rather than *World Dream* in Singapore, Dream Cruises' president & CEO Thatcher Brown said the switch means the line could offer a new product to both the North Asian and South-east Asian markets.

Genting Dream, while known in the North Asian market, is a relatively new product in the South-east Asia market. *World Dream* on the other hand will be a fresh offering for the North Asian market; the deployment of *Genting Dream* to Singapore will also open new itineraries

for North Asians to cruise in South-east Asia with a product they are now familiar with, he said.

From Singapore, *Genting Dream* will offer two five-night itineraries, Kuala Lumpur/ Penang/Phuket and Surabaya/north Bali. It will also offer staycation cruises on weekends.

On choosing Singapore to homeport one of its two ships, Brown counted several factors, among them continued growth not only in the Singapore market but South-east Asia; proximity to South-east Asia and Asia which spurs fly-cruise va-

cations; a diversity of destination choices that appeal to the target audience; strong cruise infrastructure and its strong history in the region. Dream Cruises is owned by Genting Hong Kong, which also operates Star Cruises.

"Michael (Goh, senior vice president sales) and his team have a well-established network of sales distribution and have built a solid relationship with our partners here, a strength we will leverage, especially now that we can go to the market with a portfolio of cruise offerings (aside from *Star Dream*, this includes *Crystal Cruises*) to suit different clients," said Brown.

Goh added that year-round homeporting is important to help business partners drive sales. "Partners want us to be with them through all cycles of demand. They don't want to

be promoting a cruise for six months only to have it available only for three months. It shows our commitment to them. As well, we are delivering the newest product to partners which helps their selling efforts."

Genting Dream will be re-orientated to serve its new market in areas such as crew mix, F&B and onboard experiences that are more relevant for its expected new guest mix.

Currently, its market mix is Hong Kong/international, enhanced by China for its two-night cruise ex-Hong Kong, and China from the Pearl River Delta (PRD) area, enhanced by ex-pats in the PRD/international for its sailings from Guangzhou.

The ship, in operation since November, has 1,674 state-rooms and can accommodate 3,400 passengers. Its new sister, *World Dream*, will be similar.



Brown: familiar product in the region



Goh: commitment to partners year-round

Asian carriers help boost North American demand

By Yixin Ng

North American travel into South-east Asia is looking set to grow as Asian carriers open up more routes linking the regions.

Richard Brouwer, CEO of Khiri Travel, said: "All the American carriers still (provide connections to Asia). However, if you see what the Asian and Middle Eastern airlines have done to open up (routes from) America, it's amazing."

For example, Taiwan's Eva Air operates 80 flights per week between North America and Taiwan. From Taiwan, passengers can transit to Bangkok on the airline's 26 weekly connections on the Taipei-Bangkok route, recently increased from 17 flights a week.

Capitalising on this route, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) entered into an MoU this month with the airline, aimed at jointly promoting travel between North America and Bangkok.

Brouwer also pointed out that Singapore Airlines has plans to reinstate its direct flights to the US this year after its termination a few years ago.

A problem, however, is the lack of agent interest to sell certain routes, Brouwer said. "These days, only a few agents have contracts with airlines. The earnings from tickets are not that large

anymore... and passengers (now make decisions) based on miles – many tour operators don't want to deal with that.

Still, Brouwer is optimistic that demand for South-east Asia will grow in the US, where travellers are increasingly seeking authentic, cultural experiences.

Also observing growing demand for cultural and nature tours in South-east Asia is Kaushik Sen, president of World Travellers' Club, which specialises in custom itineraries for US FITs.

Meanwhile, sentiments about Canada are more varied. While TAT recently announced plans to set up an office in Canada, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) was less enthusiastic.

Vu Nam, deputy director general, tourism marketing department of VNAT, said Canada is still "quite a small market". The country welcomed "only 100,000 visitors from Canada" – compared to about half a million from the US.

Vivek Khanna, president of Tourcan Vacations, an agency that handles Canadian outbound to Asia, said: "Numbers into Singapore have dropped over the years because of the lack of exposure. But Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia and Cambodia are doing well."



Brouwer: growth in US demand for SEA

Brunei unveils next moves on tourism chessboard

By Rachel AJ Lee

With oil prices on a decline, the oil-rich country of Brunei is tackling tourism business with renewed fervour to help support its GDP.

Salinah Salleh, head of marketing and promotion with Brunei's Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism, shared that efforts are being made since 2016 to improve the destination's product offerings.

As part of Brunei's Tourism Strategic Plan from 2016-2020, more chartered flights are being operated to the destination. A weekly service from Zhengzhou, China commenced in July 2016, a twice-weekly flight from Seoul was put in place in December,

and a weekly service from Xi'an, China takes off today.

Salinah said: "Chartered flights are a way to test the market. If demand grows, Royal Brunei Airlines will put in bigger planes. After that, we could get Korean Air to come in. It depends on the volume and how the market performs."

However, scheduled direct flights by foreign carriers to the country are few and far between. What Brunei has is Royal Brunei Airlines code-sharing on flights with Turkish Airlines, China Eastern Airlines and Hong Kong Airlines.

When asked about this, Salinah denies any protectionism of the country's air space.



Salinah: big plans for tourism growth

M'sia sellers find new lures for the Chinese

By S Puvaneswary

Malaysian sellers are bullish about the Chinese market, in light of Malaysia Airline's major expansion into China this year. The national carrier is introducing eight new destinations and 11 new routes with 35 added frequencies from its hubs in Kuala Lumpur, Kota Kinabalu and Penang.

The new services are from Kuala Lumpur to Haikou, Nan-

jing, Fuzhou, Wuhan, Chengdu and Chongqing. There will also be two new routes from Penang to Shenzhen and Shanghai, and a new route from Kota Kinabalu to Tianjin.

Sunway Lagoon's senior director of sales, K C Chew, said Sunway Theme Park will market its products and services in conjunction with the new routes.

She said: "In the past, our focus was only on getting Chinese FITs from Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. This year, our focus

"We have pushed for open skies (but) the Ministry of Communications that has to make that call," she explained, adding that the "ministry has its own limitations, policies and directives as to how they want to welcome (other) airlines".

Salinah, however, pointed out that the Ministry of Communications is collaborating with the NTO to help the country meet its arrival target of 451,000 by 2020.

As for tourism products, packages for Tutong and Belait will be launched in March and June/July, respectively. Temburong's attractions will be expanded to include homestays, local experiences and fishing come September.

Salinah also hopes for more cruise ships to call on Brunei.



will also be on promoting Sunway Hotels & Resorts and Sunway Pyramid Mall.

"Last year we organised a number of theme dinners for corporate incentive groups from China at our man-made surf beach area. This year, we hope to get (even) more."

As well, Adam Kamal, CEO of Olympik Holidays in Kuala Lumpur, said his company hopes to promote new destinations in Malaysia to the Chinese incentive travel market.

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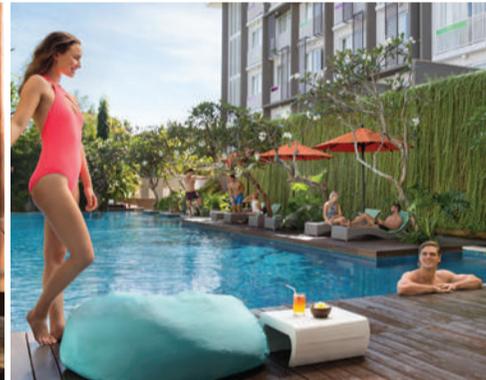
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News

Quality over quantity please, urges trade

NTOs are rolling out more efforts to entice high-end leisure, FIT markets from North Asia into the region

By Marissa Carruthers

Countries such as China, Japan and South Korea may already dominate the visitor tables of many South-east Asian countries, but the trade thinks more can still be done to attract high-end leisure travellers and nurture the FIT market coming into the region.

Sreat Mom Sophear, director of Sophiya Travel and Tours Cambodia, said while Chinese visitors are the country's second highest market, the European market, which lags, is of more value.

She said: "It's not just about numbers, it's about the value of each tourist. The North Asian

market tends to do more repeat visits and come more for shopping, whereas for the European market it will be a once-in-a-lifetime trip so they have a higher budget."

Dong Hoang Thinh, managing director of Dong Travel in Vietnam, echoes her sentiments, saying the FIT market in these countries needs to be targeted more on a national level.

Said Dong: "(China) is a particularly hard market to break. It is very competitive, there are communication barriers and they tend to use their own op-

erators, who organise specific hotels and tours."

Sokhom Thok, director of international cooperation and ASEAN at Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism, said efforts are being made to welcome higher spending Chinese tourists.

These include the signing of a tourism development agreement between the ministry and China's Shanghai Spring International Travel Service Group and the launch of the China Ready Centre to determine the demands of Chinese tourists, as well as train Cambodian tour-

ist operators' Chinese language and cultural skills.

It is also hoped that plans to host ASEAN travel forums in China, Japan and South Korea this year, showcasing the region's attractions, will lure more high-end travellers.

Cambodia is not alone in its quality visitor aim, with Vietnam also shifting its focus for the Chinese market. "China is one of the most important markets in Vietnam but now we need to focus on quality rather than volume," said Ha Van Sieu, vice chairman, Vietnam Administration of Tourism (VNAT).

China and Vietnam have just entered into an MoU last week

to foster visitor exchange, while VNAT will train more tour guides in Chinese and carry out marketing campaigns in China directed specifically at the segment.

As Myanmar's Ministry of Hotels and Tourism gears up to embrace tourism countrywide, union minister Ohn Maung says attracting "quality" tourists is top of the agenda but tour operators need to lead the way.

He said: "We are focusing on the Western market but will not neglect the East; however, we want quality. Tour operators can choose the rates and lead the market so we get this quality."



Sreat: repeat value in North Asian market

Tourism Malaysia reduces presence; trade nonchalant

By S Puvaneswary

Tourism Malaysia is in the midst of closing its offices in Los Angeles, New York, Stockholm and Johannesburg to consolidate its marketing activities into more effective markets where there are direct flights.

Minister of Tourism and Culture Malaysia, Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz said that it was difficult to promote Malaysia in these markets as there are no longer any direct flights. Due to losses, the flag carrier suspended services to Stockholm and New York in 2009, Johannesburg in 2012, and Los Angeles in 2014.

Emphasising that longhaul markets continue to be important because they contribute to the length of stay, Abdul Khani Daud, deputy director-general advertising and digital, Tourism Malaysia, said: "The travel trade in the affected markets will be supported by other overseas offices. Tourism Malaysia will also leverage on digital marketing and be present in key travel tradeshows such as ITB Berlin and Matka Nordic Travel Fair."

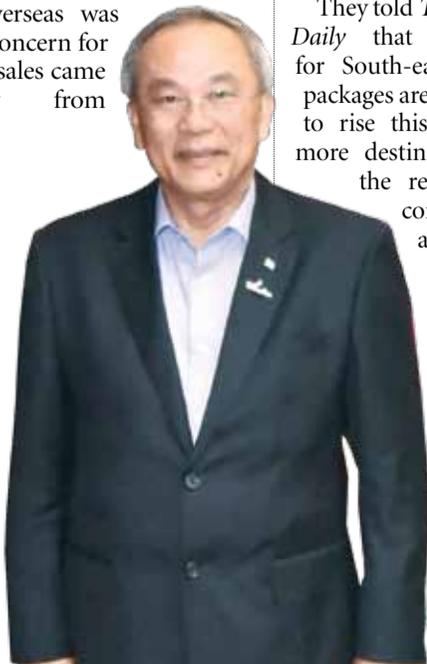
According to Mohamed Nazri, the savings of approximately

RM4.5 million (US\$1 million) in operational costs from the office closures will be used to open more offices in China and India. Both these markets produced some 2.3 million tourists to Malaysia in the first 10 months of 2016.

Hamzah Rahmat, president of the Malaysian Association of Tour And Travel Agents, said "the government has made the right move by putting its money where the return is good. China and India are two huge markets for Malaysia and there are a lot of direct flights".

Shirish N Trivedi, president at Travel Leaders Baltimore, US, said he was not alarmed by the closure as he is supported by his partners in Malaysia and does not depend on Tourism Malaysia's offices in the US.

Anne Neoh, director of sales, The Royale Bintang Penang, said the hotel's US market share is growing annually. Tourism Malaysia's restructuring overseas was not a concern for her as sales came mainly from OTAs.



...the government has made the right move by putting its money where the return is good.

Hamzah Rahmat
President, Malaysian Association of Tour And Travel Agents

VIEWPOINTS

Which South-east Asian destination will be your biggest sell this year?



K. Vijay Mohan, managing director, Holiday Worlds

Thailand, because there are many new destinations from the country that is being put forward, more so than other markets. The Thailand tourism board is also very proactive in India compared to other countries. They work much closer with tour operators and the industry, more so than other destinations, and bring a lot more awareness about the country and what there is to do there.

David Capaldi, founder and CEO, Blue World Journeys

Thailand is traditionally the number one destination for Asia in the US because it is a very safe destination. Americans scare very easily so emerging destinations, such as Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia, don't appeal. They are very different from the European market as they want to visit somewhere that is established, where many people have gone before them and they know they will not become a victim of crime.



Rosy business outlook as more Mid-Eastern carriers grow Asian network

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

Travel agents specialising in the Middle Eastern markets are upbeat about business at ATF 2017, all thanks to Middle Eastern carriers' continuous foray into Asia-Pacific.

They told *TTG Show Daily* that demand for South-east Asian packages are expected to rise this year, as more destinations in the region become easily accessible.

Ousama Al-Hosni, general manager of Kuwait-based Sham Tours & Travel, pointed to Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore as his star destinations, and

added that interest in the Philippines is on the rise due to improving air connectivity.

Carriers that offer direct connectivity between Kuwait and Manila include Kuwait Airways and Cebu Pacific, with the former launched last year.

Ousama says outbound to the Philippines from Kuwait will rise further as more travellers come to know about the destination's draws.

Manju Manchanda, director of Venture Planet in Sharjah, said her volume into Asia has "definitely grown" by at least 20 per cent over the past year as a result of new air links and availability of competitive fares.

Family groups and FIT travellers are especially fond of Asia, according to Manchanda who named Singapore and Malaysia

as top favourites for their Muslim-friendly facilities.

"(Being able to) accommodate the dietary requirements of Middle Eastern travellers...is a big thing," she said.

Manchanda intends to step up promotions of packages for Vietnam this year, leveraging Emirates' new flights to Hanoi which commenced in August 2016.

Singapore-based Discovery Holidays, managing director, Rodney Yew, who specialises in the Middle Eastern market and whose company is arguably the city-state's largest Iranian handler, said he draws many repeat travellers who favour Singapore's easy access and range of attractions that is always being kept fresh.

According to Yew, the typical Middle Eastern traveller would pair Singapore with either Malaysia or Indonesia.



Manchanda: easy, cheaper air access



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News

No more dilly-dallying in hotel booking game

New opaque booking model wants to fill rooms, up RevPAR for hotels

By Xinyi Liang-Pholensa

Competition in the online booking space just got stiffer with the entry of new hotel distribution channel Staydilly, which touts to improve hotels' RevPAR while offering travellers access to premium hotels at lower prices.

Launched in mid-October 2016, Staydilly is an opaque distribution channel that offers rooms from three- to five-star hotels at heavily discounted prices, by providing actual property photos, general location and facilities description. The hotel name, however, will only be revealed and made known to the traveller upon confirmation of booking.

CEO Song Eu Jin sees Staydilly as a channel to enhance hotels' occupancy rates and fill

up rooms that would otherwise be left vacant. "We help hotels to sell a portion of their projected idle inventory and enable hoteliers to avoid price compression," he told *TTG Show Daily*.

And by not revealing the property name until the booking is confirmed, hotels will be able to protect its branding efforts, Song remarked. Rates on Staydilly are also 30-40 per cent cheaper than the popular OTAs in the region, he added.

Song thinks what Staydilly is bringing to the table will benefit the industry as a whole, as the "mystery shopping model" offers an incremental solution to overcome the perennial RevPAR issue that's afflicting many oversupplied cities in Asia.

"Increase in hotel rates need to come from increase in occu-

pancy first," he remarked, urging hoteliers to take back more control over their rates.

"Hotel rates currently work inversely to airfares, which is counter intuitive in my opinion. Shouldn't hotels be charging top dollar (nearer the date of travel)?" he questioned.

When asked if Staydilly, as an alternative booking channel, will counter against hotels' direct booking mission, Song stated: "We are not going after the same customers.

"Our target will be brand-agnostic customers who are less brand loyal but yet still seeking value and quality in their hotel stays," he added. "I foresee us being a bigger challenge to last-minute booking apps instead."

Staydilly is already "seeing good traction" with over 200 hotels signed up in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. The company has just signed on its first hotel in Myanmar and is venturing into Vietnam next. Its target is to be present across all South-east Asian countries by the end of 2017.

However, Song also readily admits that cities like Singapore and Hong Kong, which have the region's highest room rates, will pose the biggest challenge to Staydilly's penetration in these markets.

Singapore to paint brighter picture of design festivals

By Barathi Narayan

Singapore's art and design festivals are gaining the support of Singapore Tourism Board (STB), which is hoping to position the city-state as Asia's design capital given its location and accessibility in the region.

Joint efforts to promote key events during the Singapore Design Week (SDW), from March 3 to 12, to the global audience are underway between STB and organisers Design Singapore Council.

Andrew Phua, director of exhibitions and conferences with STB, said: "STB promotes the SDW through our regional offices, as well as our key partners which include design-related trade media, associations and travel agents, as part of our overseas marketing and promotional efforts to profile Singapore as a business events and leisure destination."

At SingaPlural, SDW's anchor event, tourists make up 15 to 20 per cent of the total 28,000 visitors.

The event's chairman, Mark Yong, said that the "power of design tourism is something that we have to ride on, as design festivals are becoming important tourist events", with more tourists in the recent years not only travelling to see the sights but for events and festivals as well.

Now in its sixth edition, Sin-

gaPlural has developed into a holistic festival with more global names like Uniqlo and Studio Architetto Egidio Panzera among its participants.

Yong believes the presence of internationally renowned partners will help to grow foreign attendance. "International part-

ners have their own social media outreach programmes, their own ways of marketing (and) their own fans. With Uniqlo coming onboard this year, the (global reach) will be tremendous," Yong said.

While Singapore has an array of year-round art and design events, and is a UNESCO Creative City of Design – a title it earned in 2015 – few travel specialists at ATF 2017 are aware of these unique selling points. They urge the NTO to intensify efforts in promoting these options.

Philippine-based Shroff Travel's spokesperson, Kristine Shroff, opined that creating tour packages catered to design festivals or having conventions to educate and connect with travel agents could have a huge impact on drawing the design-savvy crowd from the region.

M Zaki, president of RZ Travels in California, who has not seen promotions of design festivals outside of Singapore, believes that event organisers and STB should invest more on above-the-line advertising.



Yong: design festivals are hotting up

Hotel rates currently work inversely to airfares, which is counter intuitive in my opinion. Shouldn't hotels be charging top dollar (nearer the date of travel)?

Song Eu Jin
CEO, Staydilly



Activity-based itineraries take priority in TAT plans

By Yixin Ng

In line with its strategy to boost tourism revenue by courting higher-spending tourists, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) plans to promote

activity-based itineraries rather than those focused on attractions. "Without much budget from the government, we have to change the way we do our marketing," said TAT governor Yuthasak Supasorn.

The new approach will stand the TAT in good stead to hit Thailand's 2017 target of US\$50 billion in tourism revenue, up 10 per cent from the amount raked in last year, he added.

TAT hopes to promote gastro-activities featuring local food, community-based tourism and shopping.

Meanwhile, following the crackdown on zero-dollar tours that led arrivals from its top

source market to plummet, Yuthasak said TAT wants to retain its appeal to well-heeled travellers from China.

"(There's a) visa fee exemption measure that will end in February, and it is possible for the Thai government to extend this by another three or six months to bring more quality Chinese tourists back to Thailand," he shared.

Longhaul markets are also on TAT's radar. Germany, Thailand's second largest European feeder market after the UK, is seen as a source of "quality tourists".

To lure Germans and encourage them to continue shelling out money in the destination, Yuthasak said: "We want to offer new products that they cannot find (elsewhere), like stays in Thai boxing gyms with (opportunities to train with) Thai boxers, and village stays."



Yuthasak: wiser use of budget

ATF 2017'S RED HOT WELCOME



Red, the colour of passion and prosperity, dominates the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the opening of TRAVEX 2017 yesterday morning, bearing an appropriate representation of the hopes and dreams of South-east Asian tourism players who celebrate 50 years of developing the region as a single, exciting destination for travel.

Gracing the ceremony were (from left) Singapore Hotel Association's Margaret Heng and Albert Teo, Ministry of Trade and Industry and Ministry of Education's Low Yen Ling, National Association of Travel Agents Singapore's Devinder Ohri and Singapore Tourism Board's Chang Chee Pey. **Photo by Eugene Tang**



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Marketplace



The Kayana dining The Daun Restaurant

Santika builds a strong network in Indonesia

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

The first property was Hotel Santika Bandung and the company has since planted footprints in strategic cities across Indonesia, including Jakarta, Semarang, Cirebon, Surabaya, Jogjakarta, Pontianak, Bali, Manado and Makassar.

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

Today, Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts manages 99 hotels in 38 locations throughout Indonesia and one in Singapore.

It has been carving a distinctive image and pioneering its way as a preferred brand in Indonesia, particularly among business and leisure travellers from the middle and upper segments.

Establishing properties in strategic city locations has always been the aim of Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts, and today the company takes pride in being able to claim that all of its properties are in excellent tourism and business cities.

Visit www.santika.com/contact-us/

Create thrilling memories in Bali

Bali Adventure Tours is an established tour operator in Bali that offers world-class activities such as white water rafting, river kayaking, jungle treks, mountain biking and helicopter tours as well as quality facilities

such as the Ubud Adventure Centre, the Elephant Safari Park and the luxurious Elephant Safari Park Lodge and Wellness Spa. Visit www.baliadventuretours.com

Royal Plaza on Scott – an easy leap to shopping paradise

Royal Plaza on Scotts, a 100% smoke-free deluxe business hotel, nestled along the iconic shopping belt, Orchard Road. Guests can take delight in complimentary unlimited high-speed Wi-Fi/wired Internet for multiple devices, daily-replenished minibar and Nes-

presso gourmet coffee from the comfort of their room, and an extensive buffet line-up at the award-winning Carousel restaurant.

The hotel is a mere three-minute walk to Orchard MRT station.

Visit www.royalplaza.com.sg



Executive suite bedroom, Royal Plaza on Scotts

Meritus welcomes travellers with Asian hospitality

Meritus Hotels & Resorts is a Singapore-based hotel management company under the Hospitality Division of Overseas Union Enterprise, a Singapore Exchange-listed fully integrated developer with a diversified portfolio of prime assets across the retail, commercial, residential, and hospitality sectors primarily in Singapore.

Meritus is long established as an icon of world-class Asian hospitality in Singapore. The brand founded its roots from its flagship Mandarin Orchard Singapore – then The Mandarin Singapore, the first hotel of its scale and calibre to be built on Orchard Road in the late 1960s.

Inspired by the virtues and richness of its Asian heritage, Meritus has evolved into an award-winning hospitality brand, providing

guests its signature Asian grace, warmth, and care for over 40 years. With properties located in gateway cities and idyllic destinations in Singapore and Malaysia, Meritus aims to extend its footprint around the region.

The Meritus portfolio in Singapore includes Mandarin Orchard Singapore and Marina Mandarin Singapore. Both properties enjoy a prime location that places guests in easy access to both leisure and business districts.

The Meritus portfolio in Malaysia includes Meritus Pelangi Beach Resort & Spa in Langkawi. The property sits along a 1.5km white sandy beach and is designed in the style of a traditional Malay village, with 355 guestrooms and suites standing in clusters of single- and double-storey wooden chalets built on stilts.

Contact: (65) 6235 7788



Mandarin Orchard Singapore executive suite

Explore the Land of Smiles with Marwin

Marwin Tours (Asia) provides a wide range of integrated travel and tourism services, making it one of the leading travel agents in Thailand. Its services include sightseeing tours, soft adventure programmes, incentives, conventions, hotel reservations, airline ticketing and overland packages with guaranteed weekly departures.

Visit www.marwintours.com

AccorHotels enjoys strong SE-Asia presence, expands in India

AccorHotels, which operates in 95 countries, has reached 45 hotels and resorts in India.

The recent openings of Hotel Formule1 in Nashik and Chennai marked the establishment of a widespread segment of hotels operating in 18 cities with the portfolio depth ranging from luxury and midscale to in-demand economy brand segments.

Ten of AccorHotels globally acclaimed brands have a presence in India, with ibis Styles making its debut earlier in 2016 with the opening of a 197-rooms hotel in Goa. AccorHotels will continue to accelerate its robust development pipeline in place for 2017 which will see an additional 10 hotels bringing its network growth to over 55 properties.

AccorHotels is well positioned across all segments with a presence across India's

leading business hubs and leisure destinations. The group now has an 8,000 room inventory across its ten brands, which include Fairmont, Sofitel, Pullman, Swissôtel, Grand Mercure, Novotel, Mercure, ibis, ibis Styles and Formule1. AccorHotels growth strategy in India is led by its focus on the midscale segment with the Novotel brand which celebrated its tenth-year anniversary presence in India this year and the popular in-demand economy brand, ibis. There are currently 28 hotels operating under the Novotel and Ibis brands across various key cities in India.

Within the South-east Asia region, AccorHotels properties are present in nine ASEAN countries, except Brunei.

Contact: www.accorhotels.com/gb/support/contact.shtml



Sofitel Singapore City Centre

Trails to Asian experiences

Founded in 1999, the Asian Trails Group has been on the forefront of operating cutting-edge travel proposals to seamless operational standards that is second to none in Asia. Headquartered in Bangkok, the group continues to provide client-focused destination management services in all of its destinations in East and South-east Asia.

With a continuous stream of innovative product delivery, Asian Trails never sits on its laurels; it latest ventures cover an exciting new line of products that follow the market demands. Its well-established Explore label says it all – Out of the Ordinary Tours for Everyone: it delivers that additional add-on or turns around that new corner that no one else even thought of.

Asian Trails' latest feat will see a further diversification of themed programmes that suit niche travel segments. These new Trails programmes continue to set a benchmark of cutting-edge ideas within the Asian DMC industry.

Contact: marketing@asiantrails.org

Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore – a sanctuary in the bustling city

Set amid 15 acres of lush greenery, Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore, a place like no other. Consistently voted as one of the best hotels in the world, Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore offers luxurious guestrooms and suites in three distinctive wings – Valley Wing, Tower Wing and Garden Wing – and serviced apartments and residences in four-storey villas.

Guests can luxuriate in the acres of wonderfully landscaped gardens, relax by the poolside, pamper themselves at CHI, The Spa at Shangri-La, dine at The Waterfall, The Line, Nadaman Japanese Restaurant or Shang Palace, and end the night over a tippie in the Lobby Court.

Today, the Tower Wing is undergoing a two-phase rejuvenation programme that involves the Tower Wing rooms, Horizon Club, meeting rooms on the mezzanine floor, Tower Wing lobby, The Rose Veranda, Nadaman, BLU bar and BLU restaurant. Works are due to complete in 1Q2017. New Tower Wing rooms and suites, as well as new specialty restaurants and event spaces can be expected.

Contact: sls@shangri-la.com



Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore

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Footsteps Indochina Travel is a young and dynamic tour operator that strives to provide authentic, luxurious and responsible travel services in South-east Asia. Its team works hard to create innovative tailor-made and soft-adventure itineraries for small groups and independent travellers throughout the region. It also offers a number of ready, featured tours in Vietnam and Laos.

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Report Integrated resorts

Integrated wonderland

Integrated resorts have a role to play in South-east Asia's growing appeal among MICE buyers. **TTG Show Daily** reporters find out what's new at these massive complexes

INDONESIA

Laguna Bintan

One of the three Laguna integrated resorts in South-east Asia under Banyan Tree Group, Laguna Bintan comprises the 64-villa Banyan Tree Bintan, the 113-key Angsana Bintan and Laguna Bintan Golf Club.

Banyan Tree Bintan on Tanjung Said Bay is an elegant property with a wide selection of recreational activities and is loved for its award-winning spa and memorable dining experiences in unique settings. In 2013, the resort's villas were refurbished and new relaxation pools were added.

Angsana Bintan, the younger sister of Banyan Tree, has a more active character, armed with a 1.5km stretch of private beach and a Marine Centre that makes watersports available to guests. It also runs activities for everyone in the family, including nature tours.

Both welcome MICE. Banyan Tree Bintan's meeting room can take 32 people while Angsana Bintan has two for 132 pax.

In July 2016, Laguna Bintan Golf Club reopened after a complete redesign and renovation. The 18-hole, par-72 golf course now covers 60 hectares and affords sweeping views of the South China Sea.

Also new is Cassia Phuket, Banyan Tree Group's third hotel brand. The property offers one- and two-bedroom apartments, and an easy dining concept that includes a signature Tiffin Continental Breakfast set, a fully equipped kitchen where guests can whip up their own meals, and a delivery service from recommended restaurants.

MALAYSIA

Resorts World Genting

Located in the cool climes of Titiwangsa Mountains northeast of Kuala Lumpur, Resorts World Genting (RWG) has long drawn domestic and international travellers alike since the 60s. Today, the integrated resort comprises the Genting International Convention Centre which houses 13,935m² of function space with built-in high-tech features, six hotel options to suit various budgets, a casino, and a variety of entertainment and dining outlets.

RWG's room inventory has recently grown, following the completion of First World Hotel's renovations and expansion in June 2015. The hotel added 1,286 rooms and now boasts a place in the Guinness Book of Records as the world's largest hotel with 7,351 keys. In all, RWG offers more than 10,000 keys.

Clockwise from right: Laguna Bintan Golf Club, City of Dreams Manila, Resorts World Genting



Also new is a speedy cable car system which opened in August 2016. It comprises 99 gondolas and covers 2.8km in 11 minutes, offering great views of the mountainside as well as the soon-to-open Twentieth Century Fox Theme Park. Ten of these gondolas come with glass floors and are an attraction themselves.

More shopping, dining and entertainment options were also presented in August with the opening of Sky Avenue Mall, while Genting Premium Outlet made its debut at the end of 2016.

PHILIPPINES

Resorts World Manila

Resorts World Manila (RWM) was the first integrated resort in Metro Manila when it soft-launched in 2009. Today it draws travellers with a selection of hotels and a combined guestroom inventory of 1,707 rooms as well as a casino, a plethora of restaurants and bars, and the four-storey Newport Mall.

It endeared itself to planners with the opening of the 10,000m² Marriott Grand Ballroom in 2015, a facility which has been touted as the most spacious and modern in the country.

The 480-key Belmont Hotel Manila

also opened in the same year.

The expansion continued in 2016, with the debut of Japanese concept restaurant Ichiba, modelled after the market alleys of Osaka and Kyoto. RWM's Marriott Manila added another 228 keys by the end of 2016, while construction of Hilton Manila and Sheraton Manila is ongoing. All three hotels will raise RWM's hotel capacity to 4,200 keys from the existing 1,226 keys.

Solaire Resort and Casino

Opened in 2013, Solaire Resort & Casino in Manila's Entertainment City offers 800 luxurious resort-style guestrooms in two towers – Sky Tower and Bay Tower – and a collection of dining, entertainment and retail opportunities for its guests.

For business events, Solaire has more than 5,000m² of event space, including a ballroom for 1,300 guests.

New at Solaire is the Sky Range Shooting Club and the 1,760-seat The Theatre which is said to be the most advanced in the country and the only venue in the Philippines equipped with Meyer Sound Constellation acoustic system.

City of Dreams Manila

City of Dreams Manila, soft-opened in December 2014, is a luxury complex comprising of three hotels – Crown Towers, Nobu and Hyatt – along with casinos, shops, entertainment for all ages, and a collection of restaurants including the famed Nobu.

In addition to the various event spaces within the integrated resort, City of Dreams has recently made available its two night clubs – Chaos and Pangaea – for private hire. They can be hired during the day and early evening on weekdays.

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DISCOVERY 

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Report Integrated resorts



Clockwise from left: Marina Bay Sands Singapore; Universal Studios Singapore; Banyan Tree Lang Co Vietnam; Banyan Tree Phuket's pool villa



SINGAPORE

Resorts World Sentosa

Spanning 49 hectares on Singapore's Sentosa island, Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) is a collection of six hotels each with a distinct theme, the Resorts World Convention Centre, a casino, several celebrity chef restaurants and specialty retail outlets, and a number of renowned attractions including Universal Studios theme park, S.E.A. Aquarium and Adventure Cove Waterpark.

Resorts World Convention Centre features a variety of indoor and outdoor spaces that suit intimate incentive programmes for 10 people to massive conventions with up to 6,000 delegates.

RWS recently enhanced the lighting at Adventure Cove Waterpark which transformed the attraction into an ideal outdoor venue for evening events. Coming up, S.E.A. Aquarium's three-tiered Ocean Gallery will soon be equipped with more state-of-the-art mood lighting and audiovisual capabilities which will enhance the venue's potential for hosting evening cocktail functions.

RWS' 6,000-seat ballroom is due for a face lift in 2017.

Marina Bay Sands

Opened in 2010, Marina Bay Sands (MBS) is home to 2,561 guestrooms, the 120,000m² Marina Bay Sands EXPO and Convention Centre, a casino, the ArtScience Museum, the MasterCard Theatres, and some 300 retail and F&B outlets.

In 2015 MBS reconfigured two ballrooms on level four to better serve the needs of clients. The combined Roselle-Simpson main ballrooms can now accommodate up to 2,000 delegates.



Two high-resolution video walls – a 100m², 10mm screen for outdoor events and a 50m², 2.8mm screen for indoor events – have also been installed to allow planners to enjoy greater brand visibility at their events.

THAILAND

Laguna Phuket

Said to be Asia's first integrated resort, Laguna Phuket is a massive complex that houses eight hotels and resorts, the Banyan Tree Phuket Spa Sanctuary, the 18-hole, par-71 Laguna Golf Phuket, a teambuilding grounds and activities provided by Quest Laguna Phuket Adventure, and more than 404.6 hectares of tropical parklands that can be utilised for corporate events.

For planners, Laguna Phuket offers the 1,000-seat Latitude Marquee, which is perfect for themed events, in addition

to function rooms available across the eight hotels and resorts.

Planners with mega-sized events on hand appreciate the accessibility of these facilities in a single location and the convenience of a single master bill, and this is reflected in the success Laguna Phuket is enjoying in being the destination of choice among companies like Amway China (16,000, 2012) and Nu Skin Greater China (4,000 pax, 2013).

Latest developments here is the rebranding of Outrigger Laguna Phuket Resort and Villas to Angsana Villas Resort Phuket.

VIETNAM

Laguna Lang Co

Laguna Lang Co occupies 280 hectares of Phu Loc's pristine coastal land, nestled between the cities of Danang and

Hue in Central Vietnam.

Pushed up against the resort's 30km private beach are two Banyan Tree properties – the 229-key Angsana Lang Co and Banyan Tree Lang Co with 60 pool villas.

Hotel guests can get around the compound on buggies and shuttle boats to enjoy a host of on-site facilities, including an 18-hole championship golf course, spas, retail outlets and an organic garden, which lend well to incentive and teambuilding purposes.

Angsana Lang Co has four meeting rooms while Banyan Tree Lang Co has four boardrooms.

There is more to come. With room for six more properties on the compound, Laguna is looking for potential investors to complement its existing offerings and enhance the resort as a whole, informed Khiet Le, senior manager, marketing and communications at Banyan Tree Lang Co.





our park

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Mulu National Park - A World Heritage Site

Report Sustainable travel

Taming a wild frontier



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

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

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

One clear manifestation of AEF is the adoption of the Pakse Declaration on ASEAN Roadmap for Strategic Development of Ecotourism Clusters and Tourism Corridors, which was submitted to the heads of state for adoption during the 28th ASEAN Summit in Vientiane in September as one of the key deliverables

under Laos' ASEAN chairmanship in 2016.

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

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

The Malaysia National Ecotourism

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

Amran said the plans will seek to avoid earlier weak points in the National Ecotourism Plan 1996 such as the absence of "buy in" from the private sector.

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

The Indonesian government is integrating ecotourism into the national masterplan, in addition to identifying destinations like Lake Toba, Labuan Bajo and

Mandalika as priority areas for ecotourism development. As well, a special pavilion dedicated to sustainable tourism was put up at PATA Travel Mart 2016.

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

Ground-up efforts, public-private partnerships take root

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



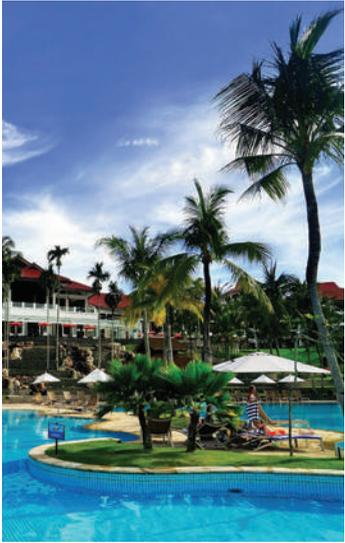
From left: Akha hill tribe villagers working in a tea plantation in northern Thailand; snow-capped mountains in Putao, Myanmar

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- 2 championship 18 hole golf courses - Jack Nicklaus Sea View Course and Ian Baker Finch Woodland Course.
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- Practice Putting Greens
- Golf Buggies & Caddies



BLR IS THE PLACE TO MEET

- Corporate Meetings & Conferences
- 10 Meeting Rooms
- Largest Convention Centre in Bintan - The Great Hall
- Team Building Activities including BLR Amazing Race
- Outdoor Adventure Training Centre



BLR IS THE PLACE TO PARTY

- Home to Bintans favourite nightclub SILK Nightclub & KTV
- Karaoke Lounge & Bar
- Themed Beach & Villa Parties
- Private parties
- Unique Wedding Concepts
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Report Sustainable travel

plorer at Jungle Hotel Paksong as an example, Inthy stated how the zipline adventure project in southern Laos his company initiated has benefited local villages.

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

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

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

Industry players are increasingly cognisant of the role suppliers play in the sustainable development of ecotourism, with Bangkok-based DMCs like Khiri Travel and Exo Travel having successfully achieved Travelife certification, a leading international sustainability certification for the travel and hospitality industry.

“The Travelife assessment applies to our supply chain, internal operations and hotel assessments,” said Exo Travel’s sustainability coordinator Thuy Nguyen. “We want a globally recognised standard but at the same time we also give feedback to Travelife, which has a working group in Bangkok, on the criteria to better cater to the local and regional differences.”

Establishing ecotourism certification standards for Asia was one of the aims that drove Masaru Takayama, founder of Japan Ecolodge Association and responsible tour outfit Spirit of Japan, to spearhead the formation of the Asian Ecotourism Network in 2015. The network is located in Bangkok under the care of DASTA, with satellite offices in India, Indonesia, Japan and Malaysia.

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

The network has entered into a partnership with Global Sustainable Tourism Council and an internal committee will set up global ecotourism standards for Asia in 2017.

Forging a path ahead

Ultimately, people remain the most vital

link for Asia’s ecotourism sector to flourish, a point that most trade players unanimously agree on.

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

What also matters, Neeracha added, is “consistency in policy”, which also leads to questions of sustainability, especially in Thailand which has seen frequent changes in the country’s leadership in recent years. She elaborated: “Authenticity is a dynamic concept, as it will change with time as a destination modifies, so what’s more important is that the aims are clear and remain unchanged even if the people involved change.”

Owing to the “high startup costs” in ecotourism ventures, Asian Development Bank’s senior portfolio management specialist of Lao PDR Resident Mission, Steven Schipani, urged governments to proactively identify viable tourism projects and provide stronger destination marketing in order to lend a helping hand for SME entrepreneurs in this niche sector.

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

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

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

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

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



Managing river flows for tourism and development

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

At Mekong Tourism Forum 2016 in Sihanoukville, John Boyd, director of Pandaw Cruises, said: “The main concern is there are too many ships; it’s almost out of control. We’re not against competition but it gets so congested. Passengers are fed up of bumping into other boats.”

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

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

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

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

The Mekong, which spans six countries and diverse cultures, is ripe for ecotourism development.

Walter Jamieson, Asian Development Bank consultant and professor at Thailand’s Thammasat University, is helping to draft a tourism strategy with the UNWTO to develop ecotourism and authentic traveller experiences along the Mekong.

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

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

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

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

“We need to be careful as this will be extremely difficult,” said Yazdani. – **Marissa Carruthers**



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The versatile mix of water sports and outdoor activities offered at the resort is complemented by wellness and rejuvenation facilities that include a state-of-the-art fitness centre and *Pelangi Spa*, where guests can enjoy signature offerings of holistic beauty and massage therapies in a Zen-inspired setting.

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Eye on sustainable growth

Arrival figures are up again but work still needs to be done to spread tourist demand beyond hit locations and to make Myanmar a year-round destination for quality tourists, urge trade players. By **Marissa Carruthers**



From left: Golden stupas at dusk at The Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon; fishermen ending their day at Inle lake

Myanmar's tourism industry has surged since the country opened but is showing signs of slowing.

According to official figures from the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, international arrivals soared from 800,000 in 2011 to 4.68 million in 2015. Growth continued into 2016, with a four per cent increase in arrivals in 1H2016.

Six million visitors are expected for 2016, with the forecast rising to 7.5 mil-

lion by 2020.

However, almost two-thirds of these recorded arrivals were day-trippers from neighbouring countries, which would not be counted under most international standards.

Tour operators told *TTG Show Daily* ticket sales at popular attractions, such as Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon, and hit tourist destinations like Bagan give a clearer reflection of true tourism performance.

More than 517,000 foreigners visited Shwedagon Pagoda in 2015.

Between January and August 2016, Bagan welcomed 160,000 visitors – an eight per cent increase. A total of 300,000 arrivals are expected by the end of 2016, compared with about 250,000 in 2015.

Lee Sheridan, general manager of PEAK DMC Myanmar, also revealed that business visitor numbers, estimated at one million, was plateauing.

The November 2015 elections, expensive accommodation and poor infrastructure were blamed for the slowing figures.

Jean Marc Poli, general manager of Parkroyal Yangon, said: "2015 wasn't a very good year; there was a bit of hesitation. In 2016, we saw some positive signs of growth in terms of leisure and corporate travel after the elections, especially after April, when the new government was established."

However, hopes remain high that tourism will grow strongly into the future.

Sandor Leinwand recte Rein, general manager of Exo Travel Myanmar, said:

Viewpoints

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

Sven Gevers,
Managing director,
Belmond Governor's
Residence



The improvement of infrastructures and facilities including road conditions, public transportation, Internet connection, hospitals, public toilets, as well as the traffic problem in Yangon. (There) should also (be) more direct flights from the region to secondary cities (in Myanmar), for example Bagan, Inle Lake in Shan State or Ngapali, to attract repeat visitors.

"We are in a transition period now but I am very optimistic about the future."

Sven Gevers, managing director at Belmond Governor's Residence in Yangon, said traditionally Myanmar has been a popular destination for Europe and the US, with numbers soaring from these markets since 2011.

In 2016, he noted an increase in visitors from Thailand, Japan and China, while "inbound travel from traditional markets has dropped".

Myanmar tourism players acknowledge challenges in the road ahead, and

Lee Sheridan,
General manager,
Peak DMC



There needs to be lower prices during our six-month low season to attract more people. Marketing and more products need to be developed outside Yangon, Bagan, Magalay and Inle Lake. Most people don't know about the beautiful beaches so (they) don't (consider Myanmar) a beach destination. (They are also unaware of) the Himalayas and the ethnic groups so (they) don't consider trekking here.

urge promoting areas away from popular spots, as well as stronger international marketing and investments in making Myanmar a year-round destination.

In doing so, Edwin Briels, general manager of Khiri Myanmar, believes that the destination can "easily double the number of tourists".

Gevers added: "With very limit support from the government, private sectors should work collaboratively to promote the destination by aiming to reach quality tourists rather than entering into price wars (to acquire) quantity."

Destination in numbers

US\$171

The average amount spent a day by tourists in 2016 – US\$1 more than in 2015

1.69 million

The officially reported number of tourists visiting Myanmar between January and August 2016 – a four per cent year-on-year increase

US\$2.1 billion

The amount that tourism generated in 2015, accounting for 4.8 per cent of Myanmar's total GDP – a 19 per cent increase on the previous year

Inspiring themes



From left: Dig into a feast fit for a king with Khiri's Bagan Food Tour; take a lover's retreat to Belmond Governor's Residence, Yangon; strap on sturdy boots and explore the mountains in Shan State

Adventure in nature

Having only recently opened up, Myanmar is home to a swathe of unspoiled nature. While infrastructure remains in its infancy and many of the places still remote, the country is opening up and presenting more opportunities for trekking and exploration.

A straightforward trek through paddy fields and among ancient monuments can be done in Inwa, or around the Chin Hills, northwest Myanmar. Serious adventurers can explore the mountain villages in Shan State, in the northeast of the country.

The steady trickle of tourists has led to a series of community-based tourism projects being developed.

Romantic moments

Myanmar may not conjure up images of romance but with it being home to a host of pristine places, it's awash with romantic spots for weddings and honeymoons.

The unknown Myeik Islands in the south are waiting to be discovered by couples wanting to enjoy pure white sands and shimmering turquoise seas alone. Ngapali Beach is another untouched haven that is starting to welcome a stream of upmarket hotels catering to the growing pool of tourists wanting to experience the country in style.

For lovers desiring a luxurious sojourn, the colonial-style Belmond Governor's Residence is a lovely option.

Gourmet lures

Famous for its diverse range of food, eating in Myanmar is always a pleasure. Drawing influences from neighbouring China, Thailand and India as well as its own signature dishes, such as mohinga, a rice noodle and fish soup, and tea leaf salad, food features heavily in the lives of locals.

Khiri's Bagan Food Tour presents traditional food fit for a king, taking guests to Myinkaba market before cooking up a banquet of 30 dishes favoured by the former king of Bagan.

Backyard Travel's 8D/7N culinary journey through Myanmar features cooking classes with local chefs, village visits to sample local treats, and many other experiences.

Products to watch



Sheraton Yangon Hotel

Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc. will make its market debut in Myanmar come July 2017 with the opening of Sheraton Yangon Hotel in the Tamwe Township, near Kandawgyi Lake. The 375-room hotel will feature a spa, three restaurants, a swimming pool, gym and 1,880m² of meeting space.

Junction City, Yangon

Located in the CBD, Junction City is one of Yangon's largest urban projects and is set to change the city's rapidly developing landscape. The 6.5-acre site comprises Grade A offices, a retail and entertainment centre with multiplex cinema, and the largest parking facility with 1,500 spaces. It is also home to the five-star, 348-room Pan Pacific Hotel, which is slated for a soft opening in 3Q2017.

AccorHotels developments

AccorHotels is building five new properties in Myanmar by 2019. The 356-room Pullman Mandalay Mingalar is slated to open mid-2017, followed by the 100-room MGallery Inle Lake Myat Min in 3Q. Come 2018, the



Ibis Styles Mandalay Centre will open with 268 rooms along with the 200-room Ibis Styles Muse. The 300-room Pullman Yangon Myat Min is slated to open in 2019. These hotels join the 108-key Ibis Styles Yangon Stadium which is AccorHotel's newest kid on the block in Myanmar, having opened in late-2016.

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Destination Thailand

Keeping the momentum

Thailand's largest in-bound market suffered in 4Q2016 due to the zero-dollar tour crackdown, but arrivals should eventually recover. By **Chadamas Chinmaneevong**

Despite 2016 being considered another tough year in Thailand's tourism – given a steep decline in the big Chinese market due to the zero-dollar tour crackdown and poor tourism sentiment for the passing of King Bhumibol Adulyadej – its tourism income is expected to surpass its target of 2.41 trillion baht (US\$67.3 billion).

As of December 14, 2016, TAT reported that the number of arrivals in Thailand grew by 9.4 per cent to 30.7 million visitors. International arrivals via Suvarnabhumi Airport was estimated to be around 80,000 to 90,000 passengers per day. As such, the total arrivals would reach at least 32 million visitors, an increase of seven per cent year-on-year. Tourism income is expected to reach 2.5 trillion baht, an increase of 11.3 per cent year-on-year.

“Despite the tourism slowdown in the last quarter, the overall tourism industry in 2016 was satisfactory,” Tourism Authority of Thailand's (TAT) governor Yuthasak Supasorn said.

Yuthasak added that for 2016, tourism revenue from the international market would have increased by 13.4 per cent to 1.65 trillion baht, and spending would have risen from 48,000 baht in 2015 to 50,000 baht per trip per head.

In the first nine months of 2016, the number of foreign travellers in Thailand increased by 12 per cent to 24.8 million, surpassing the total arrivals for the whole of 2013.

However in October, arrival numbers suffered due to the impact of the zero-dollar tour crackdown. The suppression caused Thailand's biggest inbound market source, China, to shrink by 16 per cent to 474,335 Chinese visitors that month.

The situation worsened in November as Chinese arrivals plunged 30 per cent year-on-year to 432,466 visitors because Chinese travel agents stopped selling package tours to Thailand.

The unexpected decline prompted Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and Thai tour operators to organise roadshows in four Chinese cities – Beijing, Chengdu, Chongqing, and Guangzhou – to create understanding among travel agents there.

If business remains poor after the Chinese New Year, Yuthasak has indicated that they will continue to organise roadshows and expand them to Kunming and Shanghai.

As well, a fee visa waiver and halved visa-on-arrival fees from 2,000 baht for travellers from selected nations between December 2016 and February 2017 would help attract tourists and decrease package prices from China to Thailand, said Yuthasak.



Clockwise from top: The Grand Palace and Wat Phra Kaew in Bangkok; boats in Krabi; the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market in Bangkok, girl in a Chiang Mai green tea field



Viewpoints

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

Adith Chairattananon, executive, Golden Discovery Express



Uncertainty in global economies and the impact of the zero-dollar tour crackdown remain key concerns among travellers and tour operators.

Therefore, the government should extend the fee visa waiver and discount for visa-on-arrival charges from February to September for 19 nations. Three months is too short to see any significant effect. If the government extends the measure, tour operators can compete with rivals in the region.

Mingwan Metmowlee, managing director, Image D'Asie S.A.



If Thailand wants to upgrade itself to be a quality destination and attract more quality tourists, authorities should increasingly promote the details of quality products they have. All tourism levels should have their own standard, be they high- or low-end levels. It is good to focus on the quality and high-end segment, but the middle and mass markets are also important to the overall tourism industry.

Besides, the measure to deduct up to 30,000 baht from taxable income on tour packages and hotel accommodations is expected to boost domestic tourism. TAT has also projected that the domestic tourism income would grow 7.8 per cent to 866 billion baht with a total of 145 million domestic trips, an increase of 4.3 per cent.

Supawan Tanomkieatipume, president of the Thai Hotels Association (THA), said hotel business in main tourism destinations had run well especially in Chiang

Mai – THA expects the occupancy rate to be around 90 per cent on average in 2016, up from 75 per cent in 2015.

As for Bangkok, occupancy rate will be at 80 per cent, up from 65 to 70 per cent in 2015. Meanwhile, Pattaya and Phuket should maintain their 70 per cent and 80 per cent rates respectively.

Supawan also predicts that Chinese arrivals will rebound soon, while the THA expects that the Chinese market will recover in 2Q2017 due to FITs.



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Destination Thailand

Products to watch



A bird's-eye view of the Ratchaphracha Dam in Khao Sok National Park, Surat Thani Province; The Ritz-Carlton, Koh Samui overlooks the tranquil beaches and pristine waters of Plai Laem beach

The Bangkok Edition

The MahaNakhon – a luxury mixed-use skyscraper in Bangkok – opened with fanfare and a light show last year, but the finishing touches are still being applied to the 159-key The Bangkok Edition hotel located within.

A collaboration between the pioneering Ian Schrager and Marriott International, the hotel will be the brand's first in South-east Asia and fifth worldwide.

Wild Encounters in Thailand Adventure tour

World Expeditions is teaming up with international non-profit World Animal Protection to introduce a 12-day Wild Encounters in Thailand Adventure, designed to take the guesswork out of ethical environmental tourism.

The tour will take in the national parks of Kaeng Krachan, Khao Yai, Kui Buri, Khao Sok

and Chiew Larn Lake, which are home to some of the most diverse and fascinating wildlife on earth. Think populations of wild elephants, jaguars, tigers, gibbons, langurs, macaques, deer, flying foxes, as well as a plethora of birdlife.

In the wake of scandals at Thai animal attractions, World Expeditions promises a responsible and animal-friendly tour that has been crafted by experts.

The Ritz-Carlton, Koh Samui

Due to open in late 2017, the Ritz-Carlton, Koh Samui overlooks Plai Laem beach on the island's northern tip, known for being a luxurious wellbeing and leisure destination. Offering 175 suites and pool villas, most with panoramic views of the Gulf of Thailand, the hotel will be home to a top-of-the-line spa village – which includes a yoga pavilion, cabanas and a health bar – and several restaurants.

Destination in numbers

9.2 million

The number of passengers who went through Chiang Mai Airport in 2016. Its director, Wisut Chanthana, expects the airport to reach its full capacity of 12 million annual passengers in five years

1,360

The number of rooms and suites in the renovated and rebranded Bangkok Marriott Marquis Queen's Park, Thailand's largest hotel and the brand's biggest in Asia-Pacific. It reopened in December 2016

200

The number of guides the Thai Department of Tourism has retrained to conduct tours of the Grand Palace and Wat Phra Kaew, as there are new routes and protocols during the mourning period for the late king

US\$61 million

The amount of money that conglomerate Charoen Pokphand Group plans to invest in nine provincial hotels – in places such as Rayong, Buriram, Loei, Nakhon Ratchasima – in 2017/18

Inspiring themes



From left: Tour responsibly with EXO Travel Thailand's animal-friendly programmes; whizz through Chiang Mai's lush jungle at Pongyang Zipline & Jungle Coaster; fall in love again at the Belmond Napasai

Responsible travel

The treatment of animals in Thai attractions has been a source of controversy, and elephants are no exception. It is becoming widely accepted that riding the animals bareback is better than carrying tourists in a seat.

EXO Travel Thailand, which earned its Travelife certification in early 2016 for responsible tourism and animal welfare policies, has made a point of ensuring the majority of bookings comprise bareback elephant experiences, or attractions where guests do not ride the pachyderms at all.

Adventure in nature

Those who fancy zipping through the canopy and seeing eye to eye with rare wildlife are spoiled for choice in Chiang Mai. Eco tours have proliferated, coinciding with a push to make the northern capital a year-round destination.

Flight of the Gibbon boasts the highest, longest and fastest ziplines while contributing to conservation of their namesake, while newcomer Pongyang Zipline & Jungle Coaster features lines up to 800m long plus a jungle coaster that has quickly become popular with all ages.

Romantic moments

Samui is Thailand's second-largest island but is much less populated than Phuket, allowing a greater chance for seclusion and intimacy. As a honeymoon destination, Samui is only growing in popularity.

The Belmond Napasai is located on a stretch of pure beach along the island's north, and features 45 villas, 24 suites and private pool residences designed with romance in mind. The hotel works closely with Asian Trails to offer excursions to mainstream attractions or the island's hidden secrets.

Destination **Vietnam**

Vietnam's warmer welcome



Scenic Eo Gio coastal straits in Quy Nhon city

Friendlier visa policies and improved air links have resulted in double-digit growth for Vietnam's international arrivals in 2016, reports

Marissa Carruthers

Tourism in Vietnam is on the rise as the country reaps the rewards of extending a visa exemption scheme.

The latest official figures show almost 8.1 million international arrivals between January and October 2016, a year-on-year increase of 25.4 per cent.

China remained the strongest source market, with 2.2 million arrivals, followed by South Korea (1.2 million) and Japan (611,400).

Vietnam hopes to welcome 9.7 million foreign visitors by the end of 2016, generating US\$17.94 billion.

In July, a visa exemption was extended by a year for tourists from five European countries – UK, France, Germany, Italy and Spain. The move has seen Italian

Destination in numbers

34%

The year-on-year percentage increase in South Korean arrivals between January and October 2016, thanks to a 15-day visa-free offer

72.5%

The year-on-year percentage increase in visitors from Hong Kong between January and October 2016, a result of the introduction of direct flights. It was the market which showed the most growth

53 million

The number of domestic tourists in Vietnam during the first 10 months of the year as a result of improved infrastructure and increased air connectivity

tourists surge by 31 per cent, Spanish visitors by 27.6 per cent, arrivals from the UK by 22.8 per cent, Germany 17.7 per cent, and France 13.4 per cent.



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Destination Vietnam

Viewpoints

Anita Ngai, general manager of Viator Asia-Pacific, told *TTG Show Daily*: “The move really pushed up demand. Anything along the same lines will no doubt help increase international visitorship.”

She expects to see continued growth in arrivals from these countries into 2017.

However, in late-August 2016, the government made a controversial decision to have American citizens obtain a one-year multiple entry visa costing US\$135 instead of the usual, cheaper tourist visa which is priced at US\$25. The decision was eventually reversed after strong objections from the tourism industry.

Meanwhile, the bleisure trend had brought smiles to many inbound players in 2016. Noel Cameron, general manager, Minor Hotels, Vietnam, said: “This is a growing trend in the business world and Vietnam, as one of the leading MICE destinations in Asia, is picking up many businesses from this emerging travel.”

He noted that many guests extended work trips for mini breaks in Mui Ne, Quy Nhon and Hoi An.

An increase in airline services and flight frequency, both domestically and internationally, since 2015 has also helped boost tourism.

In a recent move, the Vietnam National Board of Tourism launched an e-commerce department to increase Vietnam's competitiveness in the world travel scene. A two-year e-visa scheme is being piloted in 2017 and 2018.

Vietnam National Board of Tourism's *Welcome to Vietnam* campaign, which debuted in late 2015, is also believed to have boosted international arrivals. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs-funded video campaign is available in nine languages, and it portrays the destination as a peaceful nation rich in culture and home to beautiful topographies.

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

Jeff Redl,
Managing director,
Diethelm Vietnam

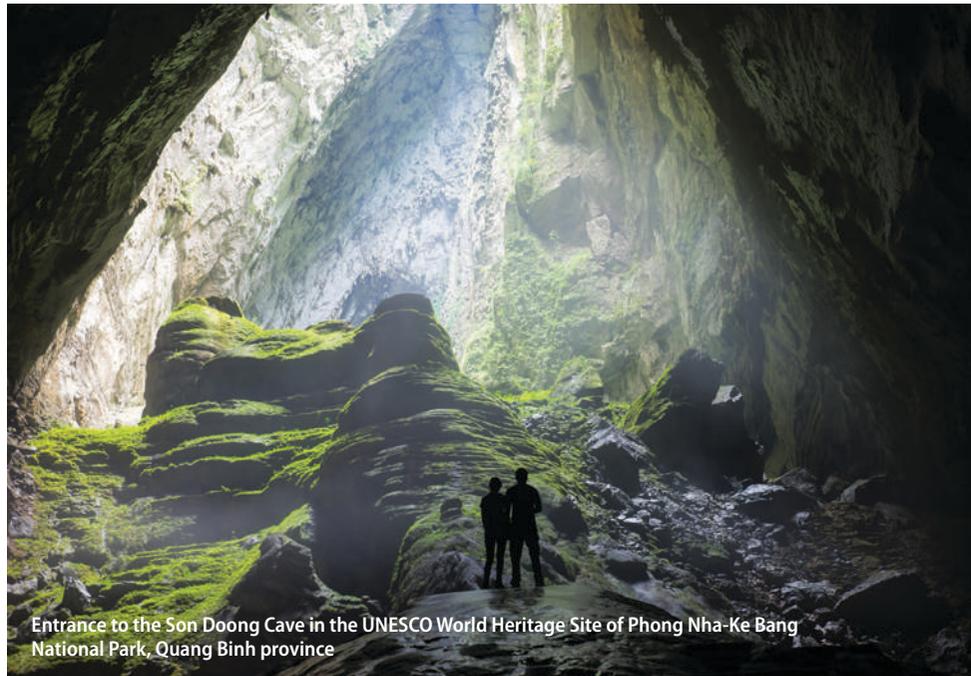


More international flights to major cities in Vietnam please. Compared to Thailand, Hong Kong and Singapore, Vietnam still does not have enough worldwide connections. Also, all players should work hand-in-hand to promote the destination. For example, the authorities, airlines, hotels and DMCS should organise a series of fam trips for travel (buyers) and make it an important campaign for at least the next five years.

Noel Cameron,
Area general manager,
Minor Hotels Vietnam



There are still many areas where the government can give more support. Locals need training in service, foreign language and the creation of diverse tourism products. The government should also work with both non-profit and hospitality organisations to raise public awareness, preserve traditional culture and protect the environment for a sustainable tourism development.



Entrance to the Son Doong Cave in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, Quang Binh province

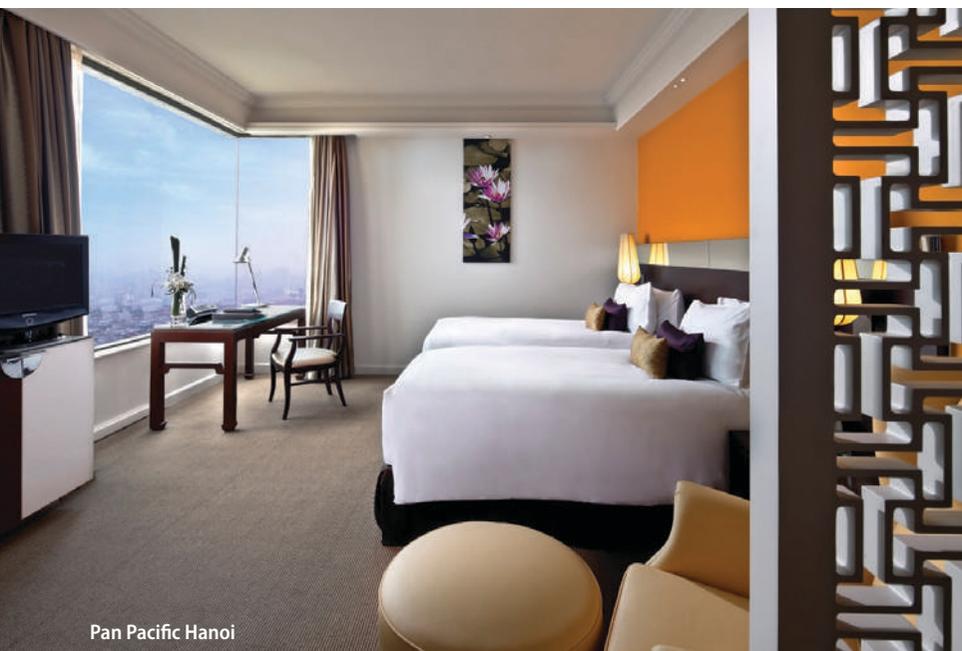


Colorful vegetables for sale at Hoi An's Central Market

Products to watch



Grand Ho Tram Strip



Pan Pacific Hanoi

Crowne Plaza Phu Quoc Starbay

Slated to open this year within the new Star Bay/Green Hill development, the 300-room Crowne Plaza Phu Quoc Starbay will feature a wedding chapel, 240-seater ballroom, all-day dining restaurant, beachside specialty restaurant, pool bar, fully equipped fitness centre, outdoor pool, spa and kid's club.

Mövenpick Resort Phu Quoc

Said to be Vietnam's first integrated destination resort, Mövenpick Resort Phu Quoc will take in a range of facilities, including 250 hotel rooms, 100 residences and 50 luxury pool villas. A themed retail village, water park, lagoon-style pool, spa, beachside wedding and special events 'sala', 1,000m² of convention area, amphitheatre, cooking school, beach club, kids club, water sports centre, fitness centre, and adventure and teambuilding activity course will also be included.

X2 Vibe Hoi An

Scheduled to debut in 2Q2017, the X2 Vibe Hoi An forms part of the New Hoi An City development. This seafront hotel will feature 218 one-, two- and three-bedroom residences as well as 12 luxury villas. The resort incorporates The Food and Lifestyle Village, featuring an extensive selection of shops, restaurants, supermarkets, luxury spa retreats and beach clubs.

Grand Ho Tram Strip

The integrated resort in Vung Tau has been growing its hardware since its opening

in July 2013, with the latest additions emerging in January 2016. New facilities include a 3D cinema, karaoke lounges, retail outlets and the Central Park, a one-hectare attraction that houses an 18-hole miniature golf course, a basketball court, a pétanque court and more. The resort will expand further in 2017, with plans for a second tower, a residential condotel, a vacation home and a luxury villa on the golf course. Later phases will see additional resorts, including one with an international standard casino.

Pan Pacific Hanoi

Pan Pacific Hotels Group has taken over the former Sofitel Plaza Hanoi and given it a new brand – Pan Pacific Hanoi – along with refurbishments to various public spaces. Featuring 273 guestrooms and 56 serviced suites, the hotel is close to the historic Old Quarter and offers views across the West Lake and Red River. It also offers guests easy access to the business district.

Novotel Suites Hanoi

Novotel Suites Hanoi in Cau Giay District offers 87 studios and 64 one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments, ranging in size from 48m² to 104m². All suites come with fully-equipped kitchenettes, walk-in closets and a separate living room with an Internet TV. Facilities include an all-day dining restaurant, a rooftop bar terrace, a fitness centre, a heated outdoor pool, a kids' playground and three meeting rooms.

Inspiring themes



From left: Happily discover Vietnam through your belly; seek romantic moments at AVANI Quy Nhon Resort; trek through Vietnam's Central Highlands under the guidance of Khiri Vietnam

Gourmet lures

Vietnamese food is famous the world over for its freshness, variety and balance of flavours. From the world-famous pho and goi cuon to banh mi and banh xeo, its cuisine is tantalising the tastebuds of tourists. From fine dining restaurants to streetside joints, and everything in between, Vietnam is a foodie's heaven. Street Foodies Saigon offers a fun exploration into the city's best street food spots. Saigon Cooking

Class gives hands on experience to those wanting to learn how to create the dishes back home.

Romantic moments

Quy Nhon's location on a mountain-fringed bay overlooking the South China Sea with several islands strewn off the shore, makes it an idyllic paradise. The fact that it remains fairly untouched, with quiet golden sands and crystal clear

waters, means it slips under the majority of travellers' radars and is the perfect spot to celebrate a honeymoon or anniversary. AVANI Quy Nhon Resort boasts a vast infinity pool and private, kilometre-long stretch of pristine beach, as well as open air bar and restaurant.

Adventure in nature

The lush green hills of Vietnam's Central Highlands are a great place to get off the

beaten track and get lost in nature while discovering the country's diverse culture. Khiri Vietnam offers a special tour taking in the refreshing waterfalls as well as twisting trekking paths that cut through the villages of the ethnic minorities of the Jarai and Bahnar people, who will happily entertain guests with dance and traditional instruments. The Central Highlands is traversed by the famous Ho Chi Minh Trail.

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Outlook

Predictions from the experts

TTG Show Daily reporters speak to inbound agents across South-east Asia to find out about their outlook for the year



Indonesia seems to be well positioned in 2017 for a further increase in arrivals, given the stable growth of nearly every sizable market like Australia, China, India and Europe. Upgraded infrastructure over the past few years, coupled with the expectation of further developments, gives us confidence in sustainable growth. However, having achieved (good performance) in terms of arrivals, Indonesia should start tapping more markets with higher yield as opposed to those with large growth potential. This would minimise the environmental impact while optimising opportunities, especially in the less developed and fascinating areas.

Umberto Cadamuro
COO, inbound, PACTO, Indonesia

There was a slight recovery in 2016 compared to a disastrous 2015. Hopefully 2017 will see further improvement in tourism performance. The weak ringgit will make Malaysia an affordable destination and tourists might even stay on longer. Asian markets, particularly China and India, will dominate this growth.

Manfred Kurz
Managing director, Diethelm Travel Malaysia



Right now, Boracay remains one of the most stable destinations for the Philippines, (joining others) like

Cebu, Bohol and Palawan. In Palawan, Puerto Princesa is experiencing a downtrend as more tourists opt for El Nido and Coron in north Palawan. In terms of upcoming destinations, Davao is becoming more popular due to its connection to Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte (who was mayor of Davao for many years) but might be offset by recent events (like the Davao bombings in early September 2016).

Jojo Clemente
President, Rajah Tours, Philippines

It won't be better than 2016 as there are no major new attractions, (although) the visa-free arrangement for the Myanmar market may contribute to an increase in arrivals.

Jaclyn Yeoh
Director, Siam Express, Singapore



With the planned opening of the new Changi Airport Terminal 4 in 2017, the additional S\$700 million (US\$488.5 million) allocated to the Tourism Development Fund from 2016-2020, and the government's efforts to enhance the tourism appeal of lifestyle attractions, local developments and heritage areas, we expect 2017 to be a more promising year.

Choe Peng Sum
CEO, Frasers Hospitality, Singapore

We expect (business will) pick up again from 2017. We saw a climb in arrivals in the year before the elections, which slumped after. But the hotel industry, especially in Yangon, is growing and many more areas are opening up so (arrivals) will grow quickly.

Sandor Leinwand recte Rein
General manager, Exo Travel Myanmar

Regional demand will continue to be strong with the projected opening of Movie Animation Park Studios in December 2016 and 20th Century Fox World Malaysia at Resorts World Genting in 2017. The Middle East is an important market for Malaysia but arrivals in 2017 will largely depend on stability in the Middle East.

Ally Bhoonee
Executive director, World Avenue, Malaysia

With Malaysia becoming one of the top destinations in Asia-Pacific for (business) events, we are expecting a significant growth in international conferences coming to the destination in 2017.

Mandy Wong
Country manager – Malaysia, Asiatravel.com Holdings, Malaysia

Given the popularity of Cambodia as a destination and the relative ease of travel from Australia, the Australian market will continue to be a key market for us. Nevertheless for our short-break programmes and Urban Adventures, which run for one to three days, there is a growth in the number of guests from surrounding countries including Singapore, India, China and Hong Kong.

Jo Crisp
General manager, Peak Cambodia



With consistent growth and increasing investments into the travel industry in the Philippines, there is no doubt

that we will maintain our positive growth going into 2017. The market we capture goes beyond the middle-age range to include the young ones who prefer budget adventures and the seniors who have spending power for luxurious trips. The Philippines has the capability to offer (a range of) options.

Nicolas J Rocha
Executive vice president for Philippines, Thailand and Hong Kong, Asiatravel.com Holdings, Philippines



With the introduction of several (international) flights by Emirates, Korean Air, Dragonair, Qatar Airways and

Singapore Airlines in recent years, Myanmar has become one of the most interesting (and accessible) destinations. Hotel chains such as Shangri-la, AccorHotels and Meliá have also entered the marketplace, preparing for strong tourist arrivals.

Thi Thi Aung
Sales, Aviareps, Myanmar

2017 will be a tough year as many industries are failing and people are losing their jobs, plus the effects of Brexit will be setting in. The air of cautiousness may affect holidaymakers' travel decisions. Nevertheless, the tourism industry is (resilient) and we have survived some of the most adverse situations before.

Judy Lum
Senior vice president sales & marketing international market, Tour East Singapore

Thailand's future looks bright with most Asian markets continuing to chalk up large increases in arrivals to the kingdom, and most European markets seeing an upward trend. This is no wonder, considering what Thailand has to offer to tourists. There is no better value for money anywhere else in Asia, and service standards are top-notch.

Laurent Kuenzle
CEO, Asian Trails, Thailand



Vietnam welcomed more

than seven million tourists in the first three quarters of 2016, a 25 per cent increase on arrivals year-on-year. We are expecting this growth to continue given the recent partnership of Vietnam Airlines and All Nippon Airways as well as new routes from Taipei to Hanoi and Kaohsiung to Ho Chi Minh City. These additional flights give tourists from North Asia and China more options for their travel to Vietnam.

Dang Tran Dinh
Country manager – Vietnam, Asiatravel.com Holdings, Vietnam



Brunei's tourism industry will advance

because of many reasons: continued regional traffic; Bandar Seri Begawan's recognition as the ASEAN City of Culture for 2016-2017, which will attract overseas markets; and a weekly chartered flight from Zhengzhou, China using Royal Brunei Airlines since July 2016, which will encourage Chinese interest in Brunei.

CP Foo
General manager, Century Travel Centre, Brunei





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TTG Show Daily pictorial special

Catch the ATF 2017 opening gala highlights and showfloor buzz in this three-page spread snapped by *TTG Show Daily's Eugene Tang*





The Face Suites Malaysia's Sunny Tan and Hanim Damanhuri

Left: Tourism Promotion Board Philippines' Cesar Montano (centre, in white) and team



Clockwise from top left: Amaris Hotel by Santika, Bugis-Singapore's Rozlan Samadi, The Anvaya Beach Resort Bali's Dewi Sibarani, and Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts' Johanes Widjaja and Cita Dewantoro



Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board's Syed Yahya Syed Othman (second from left) and Abdul Khani Daud (third from left)



Furama Hotels International Management Singapore's (FHI) Gerard Lim, FuramaXclusive Ocean Beach, Seminyak's Paulina Bangunsari, FHI's Shirlena Tan, FuramaXclusive Villas & Spa, Ubud's Ayu Sukawati, Furama Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur's Shim Chee Hong and Furama Silom, Bangkok's Sararut Laocharoen



Lost World of Tambun Malaysia's May Tan and Sunway Lagoon Malaysia's K C Chew



Mövenpick Hotel Sukhumvit 15 Bangkok's Kullapranee Sawareephol, Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts (Asia) Vivian Wong and Mövenpick Siam Hotel Pattaya's Nattapun Runyasewa



Gran Meliá Hotel Jakarta's Ruth Abellan (fifth from right) and team



Park Hotel Group Singapore's Anne Tan (centre) and team

TTG Show Daily pictorial special



Accor Hotels Indonesia's Alivia Gracianti and team flanking Accor Hotels Thailand's Peter Williams and FRHI Hotels & Resorts Singapore's Terence Tan



Bintan Lagoon Resort Singapore's Gerald Hendrick and Agnes Tan



Sarawak Tourism Board's Gustino Basuan, and Daniella Lupi Balan, and Merdeka Palace Hotel & Suites Malaysia's Mohamad Arshad Hasseri



All smiles from Ministry of Tourism and Sports Thailand's Juthaporn Rerngronasa and Kobkam Wattanavrangkul, and Tourism Authority of Thailand's Srisuda Wanapinyosak



(left) Ministry of Tourism, Republic of Indonesia's Rizki Handayani and team



One Farrer Hotel & Spa Singapore's Maggie Chooi and Jessie Khoo-Gan



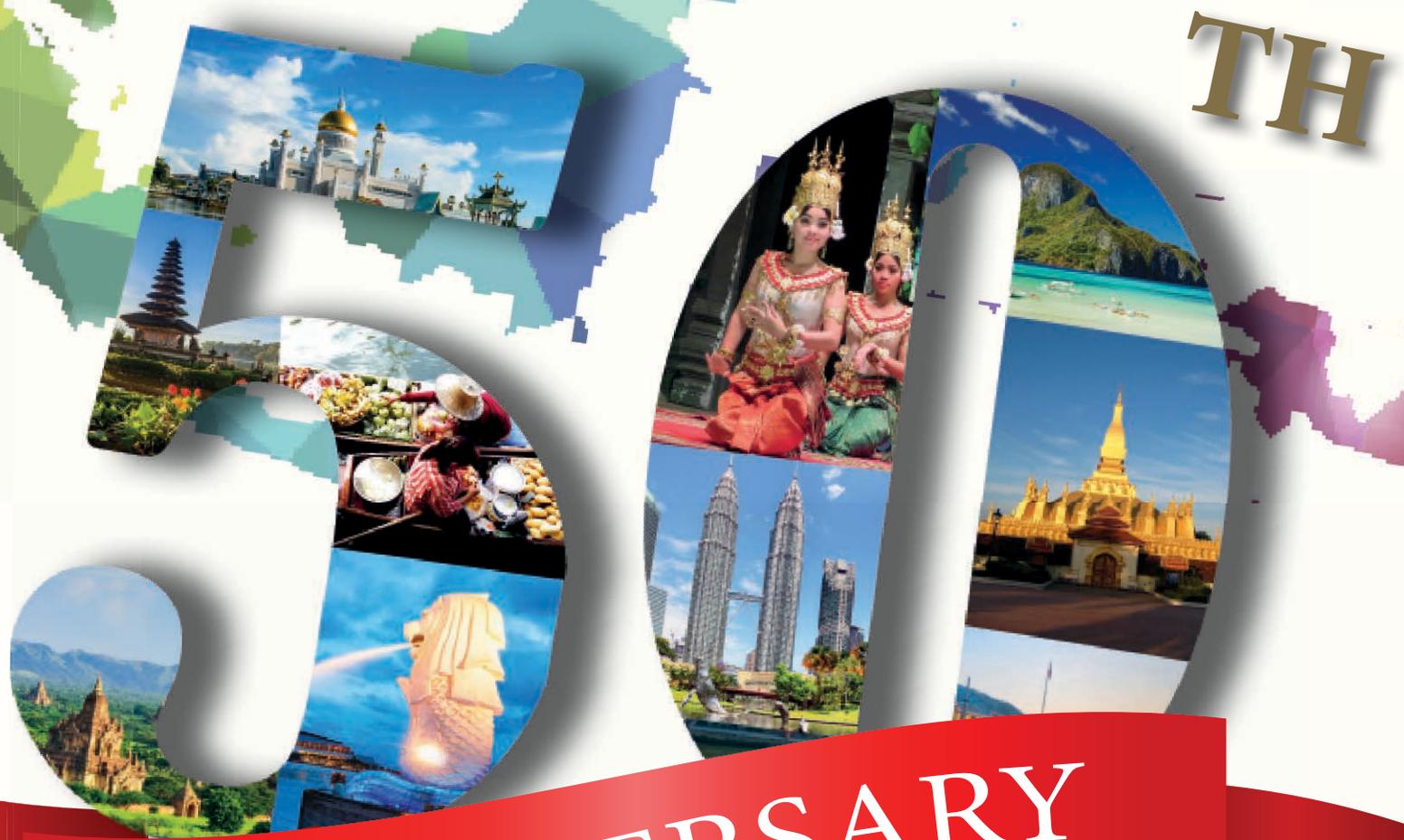
The Strand Thailand's Jared Green, GCPH (Thailand)'s Marc Bichet and Hotel G Singapore's James Koh

Meritus Hotels & Resorts Singapore's Josephine Png leading her fun team



Pan Pacific Hotels Group Singapore's Karen Tan, Parkroyal on Kitchener Road Singapore's Benny Chung and David Donald and team having a delightful time

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