



Leg up with data and human touch

Data is not just for targeted marketing. It also marries well with human expertise to enhance customer experience

By Pamela Chow

Instead of investing in a mobile app, travel agents, destination marketers and other travel providers should take advantage of big data and focus on targeted digital marketing, urged panelists at the Travolution Forum Asia yesterday.

Sojern, a company providing data-driven travel marketing for brands, registered 50 per cent of desktop bookings made by users who had seen related ads on a mobile device, said Katy Gallagher, its sales director, APAC.

She emphasised the importance of reaching out to customers with “high travel intent” – users who are ready to

book or searching for related products or destinations – rather than casting too general a net with, for example, print advertisements.

To help streamline their marketing campaigns, brands must focus on their core customers and know which platforms capture their eyeballs, said AppNexus managing director & vice president Sonal Patel.

For example, 47 per cent of Thai travellers engage in social media – such as Facebook and Instagram – while 41 per cent of Chinese travellers use WeChat while on a trip, revealed Amadeus vice president & general council Asia Pacific, Jackson Pek.

Gallagher added that for marketing across multiple media, a brand must “develop clear strategies that will work for each platform”.

This is where big data is important, as it will help companies build a profile of their customers. Patel opined that small- and medium-sized companies are in a better position to mine and analyse these “data nuggets” in order to craft customised digital ads.

Kenny Picken, president & group managing director of Traveltek, added that this is where travel agents’ experience is critical, as they can contribute “expert opinions” in their outreach that can enhance the customer experience.

This expert advice can be integrated into a “conversational user interface for more personalisation (that can help companies) take back ownership of customers”, said Saxon Booth, senior business development manager of Dragon Trail.

Some tour operators, however, feel an inertia in the industry that prevents them from adopting digital solutions. Aye Kyaw, managing director of Myanmar-based agency Rubyland Tourism Services, lamented that many small-, medium- and even micro-sized operators in his country are facing “a lot of problems surviving in the tech age”.

“It would help if we could get more education and training programmes, from both government and associations like PATA, to help us integrate technology into our businesses,” Kyaw told *TTG Show Daily*.

By taking the customisation aspect of the data and matching it with the appropriate travel consultant on a platform like WeChat or Facebook, (we are) allowing the travel industry to engage (the customer) on a more personal level... (Similar to how consumers) like to look at TripAdvisor reviews, they can also read about the travel agents’ expert opinion (on a social platform).

Kenny Picken, President & group managing director, Traveltek



Jacobs Media Group UK’s Duncan Horton, AppNexus Singapore’s Sonal Patel, Dragon Trail China’s Saxon Booth, Sojern Singapore’s Katy Gallagher and Traveltek UK’s Kenny Picken

IN BRIEF

Macau hungry for UNESCO glory in gastronomy

Macau is awaiting the result of its application to the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in the field of Gastronomy, expected to be revealed by the end of October, 2017.

If successful, Macau will gain a prestige that would lend a powerful strong force to its tourism diversification goals.

Macau is also enhancing its gastronomic appeal through a gastronomy website and promotional video, as well as the formation of a Gastronomy and Cultural Industries Promotion Taskforce (comprising 15 members) to advance the integration of cultural and creative activities with the city’s food scene. – Prudence Lui

Paint an elephant for goodness sake

The Elephant Parade, an international organisation that uses art to raise awareness of elephant welfare and conservation needs, offers group activities, sponsorship packages, corporate gifts and group visits to its factory in Chiang Mai.

Tour operators and business event planners can organise an activity anywhere in Bangkok where participants, placed in groups, will work together to paint a small elephant statue. All materials are provided.

The finished art works could be kept as souvenirs or arranged to be auctioned off, with sales proceeds going towards Elephant Parade’s nominated conservation projects. – Karen Yue

Personalised messages please

Marketers don’t need to be in all social channels in order to see high ROI, opined Sonal Patel, managing director and vice president, APAC of AppNexus, who spoke at PATA Travel Mart Forum: Travolution Forum Asia yesterday.

AppNexus is an independent real time advertising company.

Patel also pointed out that sending out generic messages on all social media channels will not bring the most ROI.

The trick is to personalise the message to the targeted segment, and to do so, one has to know the profile of the person – his likes and dislikes, how he or she connects on the Internet, what motivates them to make a purchase, and who or what influences their decisions to make a purchase, according to Patel.

She believes that marketers will become more targeted in the future as they place greater importance on collecting data and analysing it.

Personalisation will evolve further within the next five years, as marketers choose to become very targeted in their campaigns.

She said: “By then, companies would also have been able to address the issue of stitching data between mobile devices and desktops, something which is not easy to do now and is costly.”

Presently, it is difficult and costly to trace searches consumers make on their mobile devices and who then make the purchase on their desktop, a trend popular with the Gen X.

Sonia added: “This is usually the buying pattern of the older generation, as they feel that the

desktop is easier to work with – the keys being larger and that it is also more secure compared to a mobile device.”

She also believes that virtual reality content in marketing will intensify as the technology develops further, and that it will be a disruptive force.

And as for print advertising, she predicts that it will become almost obsolete. – S Puvaneswary



Snapshots

Warm smiles aplenty By Caleb Richard Lai



Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation India's Chandrashekhar Jaiswal, Serandib Travel Canada's Thiru Mahesan, Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation's Vijay Waghmare, Travelosthan India's Ankit Agrawal and Amandeep Singh Siddhu, and Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation India's Manasi Kothare



Banten West Java Tourism Development's Elsa Dewi Santika and Smartvel Spain's Ivan Cintado



Sabah Tourism Board's Josephine Chai, laughttraveleat Hong Kong's Nam Cheah and Sabah Tourism Board's Suzaini Datuk Sabdin Ghani



Asia Pacific Travel US's Walter Keats and Xandra Keats



illycaffe Asia Pacific's Fabrizio Aque and Andrea Casali



Guidepost Australia's Bob Daniel



Mystifyfy Singapore's Rajat Nagpal



Cox & Kings India's Sanjeet Joher, Soundar Rajan, Aman Mahajan and Priyanshu Priyadarshi



ifreegroup Hong Kong's Tony Smyth



Secure Trek Services India's Bimal Ramdas and Nise Leisure and Holidays India's Inderneel Mani



Best Western Grand Hotel Hong Kong's Kenneth Cheung



Mongolian Tourism Association's Barsbold Baatarsuren, Blackibex Mongolia's Oyunbaatar and Carpe Diem Entertainment Thailand's Tomislav Babic



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News

Trade in two minds over twin destination push

Two-way tourism strategy comes as Cambodia harvests fruits of single destination push

By Marissa Carruthers

In Cambodia, the tourism ministry's strategy to push destination twinning with Vietnam has given rise to a dilemma in the travel trade, where hard work put into positioning the kingdom as a standalone destination is just beginning to pay off.

At a recent meeting, the countries' tourism ministries agreed to work on improving two-way tourism and access between popular tourist hotspots in the two countries.

While welcoming the strategy, Miles Gravett, general manager of Khiri Travel Cambodia, admitted: "We are seeing more people spending more time in Cambodia as a result of us ag-

gressively marketing the country as a single destination."

Coralie Romano, EXO Cambodia product manager, echoed the dilemma, saying that the company has "been trying to promote Cambodia as a standalone destination".

However, she admitted that trips combining the two countries are currently EXO's best-sellers.

Meanwhile, Prem Veasna, manager of Golden Tours, said any move to improve access between the two countries would be welcomed.

Plans have been in the pipeline for some time now to build

a ferry service connecting Kampot in southern Cambodia with the Vietnamese island of Phu Quoc.

A highway linking Cambodia to Vietnam was recently completed, shortening overland journey between the two countries' capital cities.

These improved access will also boost Vietnam arrivals into Cambodia. In 2016, Vietnam was Cambodia's top source market, with 960,000 people travelling from the country.

However, Romano cautioned that this might not benefit the travel trade as many Vietnamese visitors do not use local services, inbound agencies, guides or transport companies.

We are seeing more people spending more time in Cambodia as a result of us aggressively marketing the country as a single destination.

Miles Gravett

General manager, Khiri Travel Cambodia

HOT LEADS

Tech buddy wanted for Myanmar DMC

Rubyland Tourism Services, a DMC and outbound tour operator based in Myanmar, is looking for collaborators to help integrate technology into its operations, as well as to train its staff in adopting advanced digital solutions.

Contact Aye Kyaw at rubyland.ayekyaw@gmail.com

Shroff Travel seeks DMC for HCMC/Bali incentive trip

Manila-based Shroff Travel managing director, Arjun P Shroff, is looking for a DMC to handle an incentive group travelling to either Bali or Ho Chi Minh City on the third week of January 2018.

The group from a Philippine incentive company will comprise 200-250 pax.

Contact shrofftravel@yahoo.com

SHR makes a move on Asian hotels

Asia has one of the fastest growing hotel markets in the world, but as the industry moves into the mobile space, the region's immense potential remains largely untapped.

"Half of all online travel is booked on mobile devices in China. But beyond China mobile penetration falls, with 80 per cent of travel still booked on laptops or desktops in India and 70 per cent in Japan," said Drew Rosser, SHR's vice president of sales.

Referencing a Phocuswright hospitality trend report, Rosser noted that Asia had one of the fastest-growing hotel markets in 2016, with a projected growth rate of seven to nine per cent over the next four years.

In South-east Asia, mobile bookings make up 62 per cent of hotel reservations by Indonesian travellers – the highest in the

region. Trailing behind are Thailand at 42 per cent and Malaysia at 23 per cent.

Spotting this trend, Rosser said SHR is making moves on Asia to open players in the region up to its mobile solutions. This includes Windsurfer, which will be the first CRS to interface with Protel HotelSoftware and include Protel's new Whisper Screen technology.

The newly forged alliance gives SHR access to Protel's 14,000 global hotel clients' transaction and preference data, enabling them to offer their hotel clients data insights pertaining to guest experience.

SHR is banking on Protel's network to roll out outreach and marketing efforts in Asia, including "joint webinars, roadshows, speaking engagements and press releases", shared Rosser.

More than 2,500 hotels in 81

countries currently use Windsurfer, and SHR hopes to grow this number by tailoring its products to Asian markets.

One example is through social media and messaging functions. Rosser added: "As we look at our product growth, we believe that it is the guest who should be at the centre, driving decisions for technology.

"One way of doing this is having a cross-context booking experience... Now with the adoption of messaging apps, hotels must once again meet the guest communication in the format in which they want to hear from them."

He described flexible communication between hoteliers and their guests through different booking stages; such as emails during the planning phase and SMS during the in-stay phase.

"With this in mind our portfolio growth will reflect this direction in the upcoming months and years," said Rosser. – **Pamela Chow**



Rosser: rest of Asia slow in mobile booking



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Entry by PATA Travel Mart delegate badge.

Panorama Destination sets out to conquer Thailand and Malaysia with JV partnerships

Panorama Destination, the inbound company of Indonesia's Panorama Leisure Group, has acquired Singapore-based Anemone Blue Investment to allow it to expand and become a destination specialist in South-east Asia.

Speaking to *TTG Show Daily*, Renato Domini, CEO of Panorama Destination Indonesia, said regional expansion was something that has always been on the company's agenda.

"We (often) receive enquiries from buyers about Thailand and other South-east Asian destinations when they meet us at overseas travel marts. As a result, we have decided to (deepen our reach in this region)," said Domini.

Supporting Panorama Destination's regional expansion will be an administration office in Singapore.

"We have chosen Singapore as the hub office because the country is ideally placed to facilitate expansion," he explained.

"We will soon announce offices in Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok, which will be joint-venture operations with local inbound operators.



Domini: more than just an Indonesia destination specialist

Following these openings, we are planning to enter Vietnam and Cambodia," he added.

When asked if the Singapore office will eventually have travel operations, Domini said: "We do have a plan to operate from Singapore, but the opportunities for us at this stage (are stronger in) Malaysia and Thailand."

Panorama Leisure Group used to have an operations office in Singapore that supported outbound traffic from Indonesia. This office was closed two years ago.

When asked how Panorama Destination will compete in South-east Asia with several big and established players, Domini said: "The key (to success) is for us to have a partner who is an inbound expert, especially one strong in markets Panorama Destination isn't."

He said adding that such an arrangement would benefit both parties by giving them access to new markets.

At press time, Domini said Memorandums of Understanding have been signed with partners in Thailand and Malaysia, but their identity would only be revealed after the necessary paperwork is done.

Panorama Destination Thailand is expected to start running by the end of this year, with Malaysia following in 2018. – **Mimi Hudoyo**

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Next stop: Future leaders

Engaging youths – the future stakeholders of the travel and tourism industry – requires dedicated and carefully-crafted efforts, and the Pacific Asia Travel Association has been ahead of its peers in this aspect, discovers [Karen Yue](#)



The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) has a long history of investing in developing human talents for the tourism industry, formerly through its education and training committee which was later transformed and renamed the PATA Human Capital Development (HCD) Committee.

Today, the PATA HCD Committee continues with its main objectives of raising PATA's reputation as an expert on HCD related issues in the region. It also engages PATA members, to facilitate dialogue on HCD issues, and to identify key advocacy issues and HCD data needs for enhanced quality and performance of tourism-related HCD in the region.

Parita Niemwongse, director

Parita: give the youths a voice and a part to play

The PATA Intern and Associate Programme offers valuable on-the-job learning opportunities for youths

– human capital development with PATA, told *TTG Show Daily* that the Committee also provides advice on themes, content and opportunities for PATA HCD programmes and services.

Detailing the Committee's activities, Parita said: "The PATA HCD Committee has been providing recommendations and support to many existing HCD initiatives. Activities include PATAcademy-HCD training workshops, which were initiated by the committee in response to the need for enhanced quality of human capital of this industry. We have now staged eight editions of PATAcademy-HCD, each focusing on relevant issues and challenges.

"Following the success of PATAcademy-HCD, we established the PATA Human Capacity Building programme which... is a tailor-made training workshop to fit the specific needs of each host. We have



completed two such programmes. The first was under the theme Exploring the Art of Storytelling in the Maldives on July 12 and 13, hosted by Maldives Association of Travel Agents and Tour Operators. The second took place in Huzhou, China on July 18 with the theme Rural Tourism.

"We also engage with the academic sector by connecting with universities and students through PATA Youth Symposiums which take place twice a year alongside the PATA Annual Summit in May and PATA Travel Mart in September. The PATA Youth Symposia are executed under the guidance of the PATA HCD Chairman, and supported by the members of the HCD Committee."

Emphasising the importance of the Committee's work, Parita said the travel and tourism industry has been challenged by a shortage of quality human resources. PATA's ability to address and advise on various HCD issues is made possible by its diverse membership.

"A unique aspect of PATA's position is that our members are from both the public and private sectors. The PATA HCD Committee also comprises representatives from both sectors. Members are from government agencies, universities, a broad cross section of the private sector and other associations. With the support and experience of the committee members we are able to identify various HCD issues, and provide recommendations on how best to tackle them," she explained.

Among the various Committee initiatives, Parita believes that one of the most successful programmes is the PATAcademy-HCD training workshop.

Launched in 2013, the event will hold its ninth edition this December. To date, it has welcomed nearly 200 rising stars from many countries as participants, and over 30 experts from a variety of disciplines as coaches and speakers. It has been expanded to the PATA Human Capacity Building Programme to cater to the needs of different destinations.

Another success story is the PATA Intern and Associate Programme, deemed one of the most attractive programmes among students and universities.

"We receive a great number of applications from students and universities worldwide. However, PATA can only accept a limited number of interns," revealed Parita.

When asked for the secret to successfully engage youths who may be keen on a travel and tourism career as well as the young players in the industry, Parita said it was all about involving them in PATA's activities and giving them a voice.

She said: "In line with the United Nations (UN) General Assembly's adoption of 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, PATA has a primary focus on Young Tourism Professional (YTP).

"We have appointed Jie Cheng Wong as the PATA Young Tourism Professional Ambassador, a role created as part of the association's continuing commitment to the development of young tourism professionals. To be able to successfully engage with youths, we need to bring them to our association events (and) provide them with platforms to speak and to share their ideas with an influential and knowledgeable audience. One of the most tangible and successful outcomes is that, at all PATA events worldwide, we host sessions involving 'tomorrow's tourism leaders' as speakers and panellists."

Industry's rising stars



JC Wong

Young Tourism Professional Ambassador, PATA

What does your role as PATA Young Tourism Professional (YTP) Ambassador entail?

To connect and give YTP students a voice in the travel and tourism industry. In my previous role, I connected with travel and tourism students to find out what were the main difficulties or issues they faced during their transition into the workforce after graduation. The majority indicated a lack of professional networks, and found it difficult to stay up-to-date in this industry, as their hurdles.

PATA is known for its broad network and growing resources, with over 800 member organisations, and I intend to convey this to the students and make the association's network and resources more accessible to them while helping our members address talent shortages.

It is predicted that the travel and tourism industry will support 347 million jobs globally by 2024, but over 14 million jobs globally are at risk due to the global talent shortage.

Since PATA announced its special focus on YTPs, we have launched various scholarships and sponsorships with our partners including Hong Kong PolyU, University of Hawaii at Manoa, and the International Gay Lesbian Travel Association. We have also increased the involvement of YTPs in this year's PATA Annual Summit (in Sri Lanka) and they have gone on to participate actively in PATA committee meetings.

We are now preparing to launch the PATA Careers Page (a job hunting platform) and a Mentorship Programme for PATA YTP students.

The majority of these initiatives fall under the PATA YTP Student Membership Programme, as well as the Human Capital Development Committee.

What do you enjoy most about your role as Ambassador?

My passion for youth development has continuously grown from my very first contact with PATA when I was chairperson of the PATA Malaysia Taylors Student Chapter.

This led to a career opportunity at PATA headquarters in Bangkok. Knowing that I was entrusted with the ability to empower the future generation of the travel and tourism industry, and that the association I work for shares my ideology of youth through its focus on YTPs, has made me enjoy every project so much more.

Connecting with people from various levels of the industry to discuss current issues and trends is exciting and insightful. My passion is to share the opportunities – that have impacted me – with other YTPs in order for them to have the same access to opportunities and experiences. PATA has the power to provide YTPs with amazing opportunities for them to better develop their careers while also building a strong foundation for the travel and tourism industry.

As a millennial, what do you think are the biggest misperceptions employers have of your generation?

Employers often see fresh graduates as arrogant when they ask too many questions, provide feedback or suggestions. As a YTP myself I can say that we are just curious and want to learn and understand so that we may develop and know how to contribute. We are less likely to respond to a 'command and control' style of management. Employers should be worried if we stop asking questions as we probably won't be staying for very long.

Rather than emphasising millennials, PATA is focused on creating opportunities and platforms for all generations to communicate without labels. In 2017, we managed to gather YTPs from the industry, postgraduate and undergraduate students on stage with current industry leaders to share their stories and views about the travel and tourism industry at events such as the PATA Annual Summit 2017, UNWTO/PATA Ministerial Debate, Youth Symposia and PATAcademy-HCD July 2017. This will continue in September at the PATA Global Insights Conference 2017 in Auckland.

What strengths do you see millennials possess which can benefit employers today?

Their innovative thinking and thirst for knowledge. Organisations will be able to utilise their strengths by getting them involved. Once they fully understand and are in-sync with their organisation's core values they will be your 24/7 living brand.

PATA, being the catalyst for responsible and sustainable development of travel and tourism in Asia-Pacific, is taking the lead by connecting and getting YTPs involved. In the new PATA YTP Student Membership Programme, we invited PATA Student Chapter Members and PATA Young Tourism Professional Student Members to participate in PATA Committee Meetings and conference discussions. This was an important opportunity for them to listen and contribute.

PATA understands that YTPs have limited capital. We will be looking into forging partnerships and sponsorship deals with our partners, international members and chapter members for upcoming events to get more of them involved.

What advice would you give to a young person hoping to develop a career in the travel and tourism industry?

Mark Zuckerberg's words during a Harvard University Commencement Address have remained in mind from the time that I first saw the video on social media. He said: "Ideas don't come out fully formed, they only become clear as you work on it. You just have to get started."

Therefore, grab every opportunity, grow your network and keep your doors open to venture. Last but not least, keep the spark in you.

Eunji Kim

Tourism Management, Kyunghee University, Seoul, South Korea

What did you do as an intern with PATA?

From April to June 2017, I worked for the membership department where my major responsibilities revolved around supporting the vital work of my colleagues, assisting in managing the membership database, creating new accounts for members, and overseeing members' access to PATAmPOWER – a real-time data platform.

What did you enjoy most about your internship?

I was very fortunate to have had such kind colleagues at PATA. Although it was my very first internship experience I thoroughly enjoyed my time, thanks to my welcoming colleagues and team members who are now great friends. With the assistance of the other interns and many PATA staff, I was able to explore Bangkok life as a local.

Did your experience shape new perspectives of a professional career in travel and tourism?

I learnt that tourism is not only for those interested in the industry but also for many other stakeholders, communities, charities, companies and organisations.

This broadened my view of the travel and tourism industry and its international importance, and demonstrated in particular the significance of the business events sector in connecting all members of the industry.

Christoph Wegener

International Tourism Management & Consultancy, NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands

What did you do as an intern with PATA?

I was with PATA's Sustainability & Social Responsibility Department from end-February till mid-July 2017.

During my internship, I tackled the important challenge of inspiring members to think differently about sustainability by developing and sharing content on a dedicated website, sustain.pata.org. I also conducted workshops and developed initiatives to improve PATA's internal waste management system. This enabled PATA to maintain its EarthCheck Silver Certification status for 2017. Some highlights of my experience include attending the WTTC Global Summit and conducting my own project to improve the general efficiency and visibility of sustain.pata.org.

What did you enjoy most about the experience?

I enjoyed the ability to work with the people



What's keeping you busy these days, and what internship experiences have proven most useful to your tasks today?

I am currently in the final semester of my tourism management course. I am planning to pursue a career in the travel and tourism industry, and I expect to utilise the skills and insights I have acquired during my internship at PATA – especially my ability to interact with a diverse group of clients in formal English.

What are the biggest obstacles to you and your peers in developing a career in the travel and tourism industry?

In the tourism industry in South Korea, the capacity for industry development is considered limited due to factors such as a perceived lack of tourist attraction resources. The major issue is that the government does not view tourism as a priority. This problem will be one to overcome as I develop my career in the industry.

What solutions would you like to see?

Our generation must help the government to raise the awareness of the tourism industry, and show its importance. The older generation tend to focus on the manufacturing industry, considering it to be more profitable than others.

at PATA. Being engaged with a diverse management team and meeting other interns from around the world was inspiring and a great opportunity to expand my professional network. I was able to work actively on projects with others as well as independently, allowing me to develop skills which will help me during my university studies and beyond.

Did your experience shape new perspectives of a professional career in travel and tourism?

I was exposed to the wing-span of the tourism sector. My experience at PATA helped me to understand the uncertain future of our world, and the importance of acting responsibly. I have been inspired by the potential for leadership in the movement to reduce climate change initiated by our industry.

What's keeping you busy these days, and what internship experiences have proven most useful to your tasks today?

I am now endeavouring to complete my post-graduate studies in Environmental Science and Sustainability and to further my education in tourism.

Being surrounded by travel industry professionals allowed me to understand the importance of finding alternative ways to promote sustainable development in the sector. Organising staff events together with other stakeholders has helped me to understand that sustainable practices need to be part of every department in an organisation. I was motivated to think creatively, and I was fortunate to meet industry leaders who set positive examples.



APAC's healthy mid-term prognosis

TTG Show Daily spotlights the key findings of PATA's *Asia-Pacific Visitor Forecasts 2017-2021* and finds that a strong growth momentum will define the region's tourism performance in the next five years

According to the UNWTO, international tourist arrivals (ITAs; at least 24 hours in destination) reached a record 1.2 billion in 2016 – a net gain of around 46 million tourist arrivals over 2015 – and close to US\$1.3 trillion in tourism receipts, excluding the costs of international travel.

Collectively, the Asia-Pacific regions added around 21.5 million additional tourist arrivals to the global count in 2016 – around 43% of the total aggregate increase in that year. That gives the Asia-Pacific region as defined by PATA, a relative share of 42% of total ITAs in 2016 – a gain of almost five percentage points over the last decade since 2005.

Inbound IVAs to Asia-Pacific

International visitor arrivals (IVAs; all foreign inbound border crossings, irrespective of duration of stay) to the 39 Asia-Pacific destinations covered in this report (as distinct from ITAs), are estimated to have reached a volume of more than 595 million in 2016. That equates to an annual growth of 3.4% year-on-year and an incremental gain of around more than 19.6 million additional arrivals over that of 2015.

By 2021, the Asia-Pacific region is expected to receive close to 747 million arrivals annually, with annual growth rates climbing from the 3.4% achieved in 2016 to a high of 6.0% in 2017 before gradually easing back to around 4.6% in both 2020 and 2021.

Between 2016 and 2021, Asia will see the greatest addition of absolute numbers to its foreign inbound count as well, receiving 86% of the 162.7 million additional foreign arrivals into Asia-Pacific. In addition, Asia has the strongest regional annual average growth rate (AAGR) over the next five years (5.8%) with that metric even higher for some destination sub-regions.

| Origin Region | IVAs, mns | | Period Growth 2016 to 2021 | | Change, 2016 to 2021 | | |
|---------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------------|------------|----------------------|------------|----------------|
| | 2012 | 2016 | 2021 | AAGR, % | Volume, mns | AAGR, % | Volume, mns |
| Africa | 2,577 | 2,931 | 3,582 | 3.3 | 0.354 | 4.1 | 0.651 |
| Americas | 88,922 | 104,035 | 116,336 | 4.0 | 15,113 | 2.3 | 12,301 |
| Asia | 307,846 | 382,098 | 514,710 | 5.6 | 74,252 | 6.1 | 132,612 |
| Europe | 64,728 | 65,412 | 76,192 | 0.3 | 0.684 | 3.1 | 10,780 |
| Pacific | 12,924 | 15,034 | 18,010 | 3.9 | 2,110 | 3.7 | 2,976 |
| Others | 18,043 | 25,581 | 28,987 | 9.1 | 7,538 | 2.5 | 3,406 |
| Total | 495,040 | 595,091 | 757,817 | 4.7 | 100,051 | 5.0 | 162,726 |

IVAs into Asia-Pacific destinations by origin region, 2012, 2016 and 2021

Asia has been – and will continue to be – a dominant supplier of foreign arrivals into Asia-Pacific as well as a receiver. The significant increase in relative share of Asia between 2012 and 2016 (+2.0 percentage points) is projected to continue even further over the forecast period, increasing by another +3.7 percentage points between 2016 and 2021, to give it a share of 67.9% relative to the other origin regions.

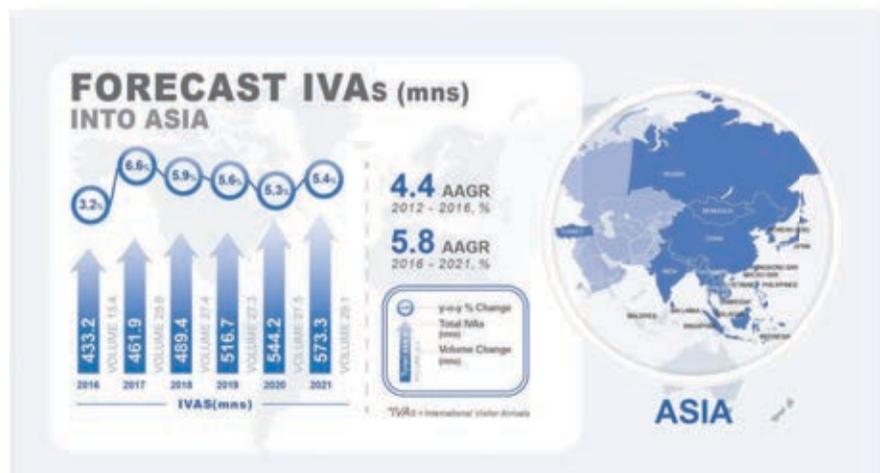
The bulk of the travel volume into Asia-Pacific arises from North-east and South-east Asia. Together, these two source sub-regions generated more than 57% of the IVAs into Asia-Pacific in 2015, almost 59% in 2016 and collectively they are expected to account for 62% of total IVAs into Asia-Pacific by 2021.

Both the Americas and Europe will still contribute positively to the Asia-Pacific inbound mix, but will gradually lose share to Asia; by 2021 their combined IVAs will make up just over one-quarter of the total foreign inbound total.

Intra-regional flows are a significant feature of international arrivals into the Asia-Pacific region, reaching almost 94% for Asia-to-Asia flows in 2021. The Pacific, however, goes against the intra-regional dominance, as most foreign arrivals into that sub-region arise from Asia and that proportion is increasing in significance to 2021.

Asia overview

Comprising the sub-regions of North-east, South-east, South and West Asia, Asia is expected to see continued growth in foreign inbound arrivals to 2021 by which the aggregate volume of IVAs will exceed 573 million annually.



Growth of IVAs into Asia, 2012 to 2021

The AAGR over the first period of this series (2012 to 2016) averaged 4.4% per annum and this is expected to increase between 2016 and 2021 to around 5.8% per annum, highlighting an increase in growth momentum over the next five years to 2021. The average volume increment will rise from an average of around 17 million per annum between 2012 and 2016 to around 25.6 million per annum between 2016 and 2021.

| Destination | IVAs, mns | | Annual Change 2016 to 2017 | | IVAs, mns | Period Change 2016 to 2021 | |
|-------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------------------|----------------|
| | 2016 | 2017 | & Volume, mns | % | | 2021 | AAGR, % |
| Northeast Asia | 277.915 | 295.566 | 6.4 | 17.651 | 363.862 | 5.5 | 85.947 |
| South Asia | 12.230 | 13.233 | 8.2 | 1.002 | 17.542 | 7.5 | 5.312 |
| Southeast Asia | 115.740 | 124.829 | 7.9 | 9.089 | 159.595 | 6.6 | 43.856 |
| West Asia | 27.373 | 28.316 | 3.4 | 0.943 | 32.384 | 3.4 | 5.011 |
| Total Asia | 433.258 | 461.944 | 6.6 | 28.686 | 573.383 | 5.8 | 140.125 |

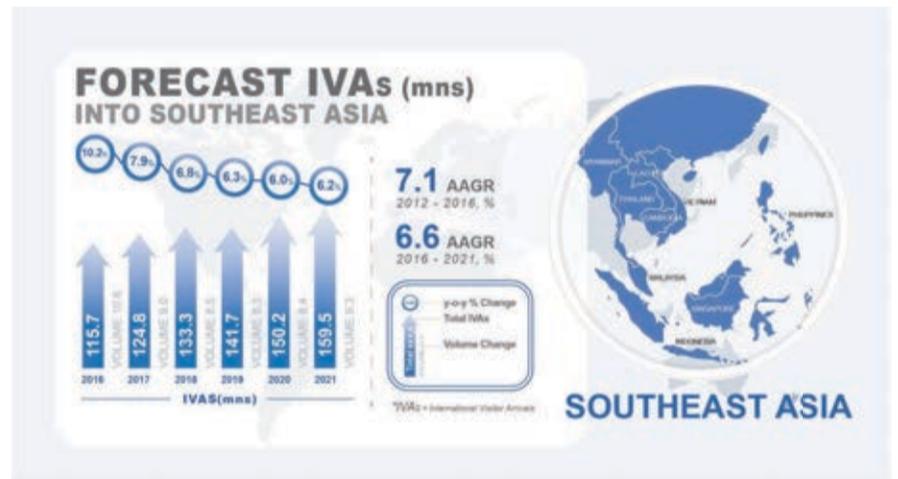
IVAs into Asia by destinations by sub-region, 2016, 2017 and 2021

North-east and South-east Asia will receive the bulk of the additional IVAs into Asia, with increases of almost 86 million and 44 million respectively between the years of 2016 and 2021.

Even while this growth is occurring, North-east Asia is losing relative market share to 2021 – but only marginally – down to 63.5%. South-east Asia, on the other hand, will improve its relative share of IVAs into Asia to reach 27.8% by 2021. Similarly, South Asia is growing its relative share position slowly but consistently nonetheless.

South-east Asia

South-east Asia has generally been growing strongly over recent years, with the exception of 2014, which saw growth drop to under two per cent year-on-year but remain positive nevertheless.



Growth of IVAs into South-east Asia, 2012 to 2021

Calendar year 2016 showed a return to a strong growth rate and this prevails to 2021, at which point the sub-region can be expected to host very close to 160 million IVAs annually. While the AAGR between 2016 and 2021 is slightly lower than that achieved in the previous period (2012 to 2016), it is still well above that of the global international average.

Thailand topped the regional rankings in terms of IVAs in 2016 and is forecast to consolidate that position out to 2021 when the foreign inbound count is expected to reach close to 50 million annually. That is equivalent to an average increase of around four million additional IVAs each year between 2016 and 2021 and points to the need for strong visitor management practices for the kingdom as it moves into the next decade of this millennium.

| Destination | IVAs, mns | | Annual Change 2016 to 2017 | | IVAs, mns | Period Change 2016 to 2021 | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------------|--------------|----------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| | 2016 | 2017 | & Volume, mns | % | | 2021 | AAGR, % |
| Cambodia | 4,879 | 5,068 | 3.9 | 0.189 | 5,984 | 4.2 | 1,105 |
| Indonesia | 11,121 | 11,961 | 7.5 | 0.839 | 15,059 | 6.3 | 3,938 |
| Lao PDR | 4,424 | 5,205 | 17.7 | 0.781 | 7,364 | 10.7 | 2,940 |
| Malaysia | 27,375 | 28,727 | 4.9 | 1,352 | 31,253 | 2.7 | 3,878 |
| Myanmar | 1,304 | 1,409 | 8.1 | 0.105 | 1,827 | 7.0 | 0,524 |
| Philippines | 6,087 | 7,070 | 16.2 | 0.983 | 9,728 | 9.8 | 3,641 |
| Singapore | 16,511 | 17,527 | 6.2 | 1,016 | 19,879 | 3.8 | 3,368 |
| Thailand | 34,134 | 36,989 | 8.4 | 2,855 | 55,065 | 10.0 | 20,931 |
| Vietnam | 9,904 | 10,872 | 9.8 | 0.968 | 13,435 | 6.3 | 3,531 |
| Total Southeast Asia | 115.740 | 124.829 | 7.9 | 9.089 | 159.595 | 6.6 | 43.856 |

IVAs into South-east Asia by destinations, 2016, 2017 and 2021

Thailand is not alone in that regard either – latest figures for Cambodia indicate that the destination is actually performing better than the baseline forecast predicted for 2016, passing the five million foreign inbound number for the first time. This is still within the forecast range for Cambodia however, as the interval forecasts indicated a possible ceiling of more than 5.1 million IVAs in 2016.

Furthermore, Cambodia is forecast to receive in excess of 6.3 million IVAs by 2021. Even so, and despite strong performances by most of the South-east Asia destinations, Thailand remains the dominant destination within the sub-region. Over one-third of the relative share of foreign arrivals will accrue to Thailand by 2021, an increase of 9.1 percentage points of share since 2012 and five percentage points over that of 2016.

The five-year period between 2016 and 2021 is expected to produce a consolidation of the Asian relative position as driver of growth into South-east Asia with the relative proportion increasing marginally to reach over 76% by 2021.

This Asian ratio varies decidedly across the South-east Asia destinations however, ranging from a low of 55.8% to a high of over 93%. Europe remains important as well, with an overall share of inbound arrivals of close to 12% which in turn translates into an expected arrivals count of almost 19 million.

Between 2016 and 2021, South-east Asia is predicted to gain an additional 43.9 million IVAs to reach a total inbound volume in 2021 of very close to 160 million.

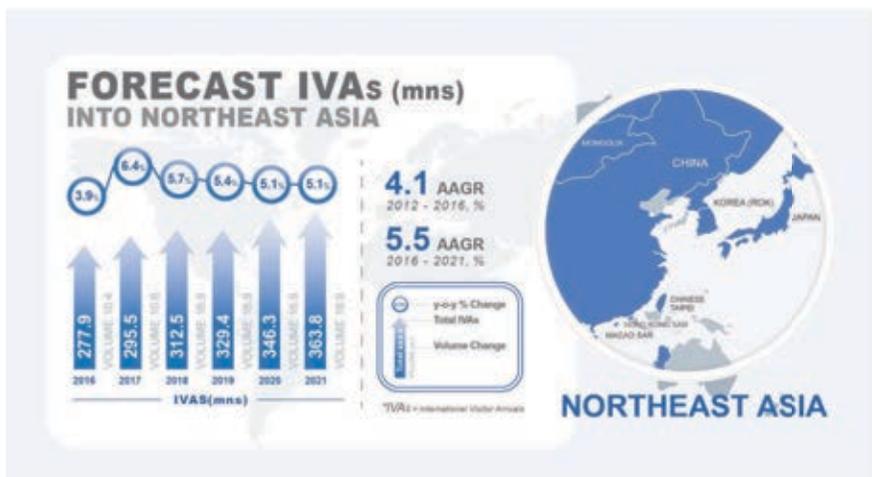
By 2021, close to 38% of the total IVAs in the top 10 origin-destination pairs list – by incremental volume over that period – will come from South-east Asian origin markets while one-third will come from China alone. Russia will also contribute substantially by adding 4.3 million arrivals into Thailand between 2016 and 2021.

Origin-destination pairs highlights for South-east Asia

- Russia into Thailand: 5.4 million IVAs in 2021, +36.4% in AAGR (2016-2021)
- China into Philippines: 3.4 million IVAs in 2021, +29.1% in AAGR (2016-2021)
- India into Cambodia: 99,000 IVAs in 2021, +15.8% in AAGR (2016-2021)

North-east Asia

As a sub-region, North-east Asia has shown considerable collective growth over the five years since 2012, adding more than 41.6 million additional IVAs between 2012 and 2016. That level of growth is expected to increase significantly over the next five years with an expected aggregate gain of almost 86 million additional IVAs between 2016 and 2021.



Growth of IVAs into North-east Asia, 2012 to 2021

This is also evidenced by the AAGR which picks up pace between 2016 and 2021, increasing the average annual gain by 1.4 percentage points over that achieved between 2012 and 2016.

It is expected that the North-east Asia destinations will together add an average of around 17 million additional IVAs to the aggregate inbound count each year between 2016 and 2021.

Mainland China dominates the growth picture with expectations for it to add more than 7.2 million additional IVAs between 2016 and 2017, and almost 43.5 million between 2016 and 2021. Similarly, Hong Kong is forecast to see an incremental increase in foreign arrivals of 5.7 million between 2016 and 2017, and more than 24 million between 2016 and 2021.

In addition, Japan, South Korea and Macau will each add between four million and seven million additional IVAs between 2016 and 2021, with South Korea expected to show the largest gain in IVAs of 7.137 million.

Taiwan is predicted to have a sluggish growth year in 2017, but will rebound during the forecast period to add more than 2.2 million additional foreign arrivals to its inbound count between 2016 and 2021.

| Destination | IVAs, mns | | Annual Change 2016 to 2017 | | IVAs, mns | | Period Change 2016 to 2021 | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------------|---------------|----------------|------------|----------------------------|--|
| | 2016 | 2017 | & Volume, mns | | 2021 | AAGR, % | Volume, mns | |
| China | 137.606 | 144.853 | 5.3 | 7.247 | 181.071 | 5.6 | 43.465 | |
| Chinese Taipei | 10.480 | 10.393 | -0.8 | -0.087 | 12.805 | 4.1 | 2.235 | |
| Hong Kong SAR | 56.226 | 61.936 | 10.2 | 5.710 | 80.246 | 7.4 | 24.020 | |
| Japan | 24.568 | 26.203 | 6.7 | 1.634 | 29.385 | 3.6 | 4.816 | |
| Korea (ROK) | 17.301 | 19.159 | 10.7 | 1.858 | 24.437 | 7.2 | 7.137 | |
| Macao SAR | 31.149 | 32.391 | 4.0 | 1.243 | 35.145 | 2.4 | 3.997 | |
| Mongolia | 0.586 | 0.032 | 7.8 | 0.046 | 0.773 | 5.7 | 0.187 | |
| Total Northeast Asia | 277.915 | 295.566 | 6.4 | 17.651 | 363.862 | 5.5 | 85.947 | |

IVAs into North-east Asia by destinations, 2016, 2017 and 2021

China will continue to dominate the North-east Asia destination mix of IVAs, but with a slow relative decline to account for just under 50% of total IVAs into the sub-region in 2021. This is a loss of 6.2 percentage points since 2012 even as its inbound count is expected to rise by almost 49 million additional IVAs over the same period.

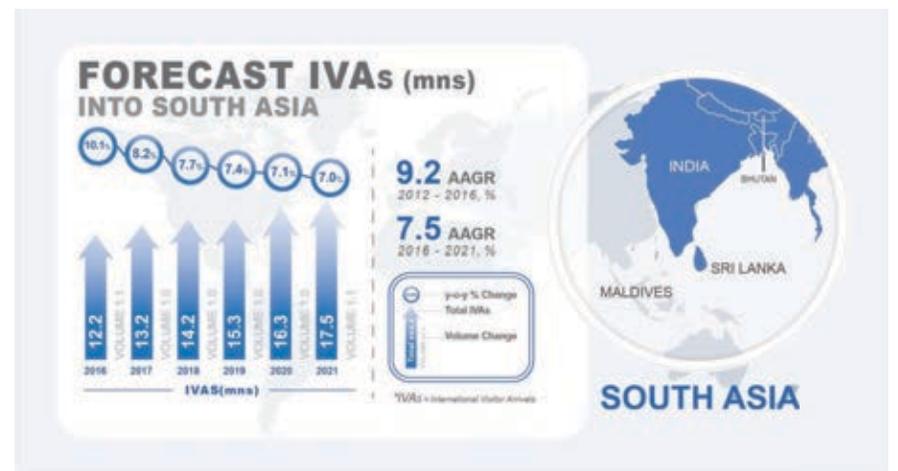
Japan has seen its relative share of IVAs into the sub-region more than double between 2012 and 2016, and that is expected to rise to 2017 after which it will fall back slightly in 2021.

Origin-destination pairs highlights for North-east Asia

- Thailand into Japan: 1.6 million IVAs in 2021, +36.9% in AAGR (2016-2021)
- Indonesia into South Korea: 391,000 IVAs in 2021, +23.4% in AAGR (2016-2021)
- Hong Kong into South Korea: 786,000 IVAs in 2021, +22.4% in AAGR (2016-2021)

South Asia

The destinations of South Asia have collectively experienced very strong growth rates between 2012 and 2016 at an average rate of 9.2% per annum. This is well above the global average and the momentum shown in the first half of this period (2012 to 2016) is expected to drop only marginally to an average of 7.5% per annum between 2016 and 2021.



Growth of IVAs into South Asia, 2012 to 2021

After a slight lessening of the annual growth rate in 2015 – following a very strong performance in 2014 – arrivals climbed back to 10% in 2016 before falling back to an expected 8.2% in 2017 and then down to seven per cent by 2021. This is consistent with strong demand and growth where the collective volume of arrivals increases each successive year.

Sri Lanka is expected to grow at a rate substantially higher than the South Asia average both in 2017 and right throughout the forecast period to 2021. Given that Sri Lanka now has more than two million arrivals annually, it stands second behind India, in terms of the volume of arrivals into South Asia.

| Destination | IVAs, mns | | Annual Change 2016 to 2017 | | IVAs, mns | | Period Change 2016 to 2021 | |
|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------------------|--------------|---------------|------------|----------------------------|--|
| | 2016 | 2017 | & Volume, mns | | 2021 | AAGR, % | Volume, mns | |
| Bhutan | 0.052 | 0.057 | 8.7 | 0.005 | 0.078 | 8.2 | 0.025# | |
| India | 8.690 | 9.291 | 6.9 | 0.601 | 11.903 | 6.5 | 3.213 | |
| Maldives | 1.297 | 1.401 | 8.1 | 0.105 | 1.869 | 7.6 | 0.573 | |
| Sri Lanka | 2.191 | 2.484 | 13.4 | 0.293 | 3.692 | 11.0 | 1.501 | |
| Total South Asia | 12.230 | 13.233 | 8.2 | 1.002 | 17.542 | 7.5 | 5.312 | |

IVAs into South Asia by destinations, 2016, 2017 and 2021

India is forecast to add the largest volume of incremental IVAs between 2016 and 2021 (3.2 million) but Sri Lanka is no laggard either, adding 1.5 million additional IVAs to its foreign inbound count over that period.

The strong rise of Sri Lanka as a South Asia destination can be clearly seen from the relative mix of IVAs for the sub-region. From a share of just under 12% in 2012, Sri Lanka has continued to become a major force in the sub-region's foreign arrivals count, increasing that share to almost 18% in 2016, with expectations for it to reach 21% by 2021.

From 2016 to 2021, the European origin markets will remain significant for South Asia, however that is beginning to soften as the Asian source markets become increasingly dominant to account well over half of the combined IVAs into the sub-region by 2021. This is consistent across each of the individual destinations, ranging from a relative share of 53.2% for India to 63.3% for Bhutan.

The loss in relative share by the European origin markets is consistent across all the South Asian destinations especially in Sri Lanka and the Maldives. A similar relative share loss is seen in the origin markets from the Americas particularly into Bhutan and India.

Europe and the Americas still remain significant however, generating more than four million and two million IVAs into South Asia respectively, in 2021.

Origin-destination pairs highlights for South Asia

- China into Sri Lanka: 987,000 IVAs in 2021, +28.6% in AAGR (2016-2021)
- Philippines into India, 142,000 IVAs in 2021, +18.3% in AAGR (2016-2021)
- Australia into Sri Lanka: 228,000 in 2021, +20.9% in AAGR (2016-2021)

Destination Macau

Macau more magnificent than ever

Macau's diversification of tourist offerings is paying off, with international arrivals and spend on the rise, writes Prudence Lui



Tourist offerings in Macau are more diverse now, resulting in an increase in non-gaming footfalls

Macau's intensified marketing efforts are paying dividends as international arrival numbers achieved double-digit improvement in the first five months of the year.

International arrivals rose 10.6 per cent year-on-year to reach 1.3 million visitors. In the same period, arrivals from Greater China numbered at 11.8 million visitors, up 5.8 per cent.

Macao Government Tourist Office (MGTO), director, Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, remarked that the destination had seen a "good start of the year, with several key statistics showing significant growth compared to the same period last year".

Besides overall visitor arrival growth, hotels are seeing double-digit increase in number of guests and visitor expenditure has risen, she noted.

"We still have the summer peak holiday season ahead and a considerable number of large-scale events are slated for

2H2017. We have strong reason to expect a good harvest for the tourism industry this year," she added.

De Senna Fernandes credits the strong tourism performance to the work of MGTO and Macau tourism stakeholders.

"We are fulfilling the vision of transforming Macau into a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure, with diverse visitor source markets and tourism products, events and packages to lure more visitors from farther afield for longer stays," she told *TTG Show Daily*.

Tourism suppliers are reporting good business themselves too.

Galaxy Macau, Broadway Macau and StarWorld Macau, properties under Galaxy Entertainment Group, are consistently enjoying occupancy of above 98 per cent. Their average daily rate is rising, particularly for the summer months.

Kevin Clayton, CMO of Galaxy Entertainment Group, said: "Overnight tourists are becoming increasingly discerning and are demanding with product quality

Destination in numbers

US\$2.1 billion

Macau's visitor expenditure (excluding gaming) in 1Q2017, up 20.9 per cent year-on-year

1.3 million

The number of international visitors to Macau in the first five months of 2017, up 10.6 per cent year-on-year

13.7%

The percentage year-on-year increase in overnight visitors in Macau in the first five months of 2017, triggering a higher average occupancy rate at hotels in the destination – up 5.4 percentage points in 1Q2017

Viewpoints

What is needed for Macau to reach its full potential in tourism?

Rutger Verschuren
COO,
Hospitality Division,
Shun Tak Holdings



When the various new connections to, from and within Macau are in place, Macau will blossom as the centre of the Pearl River Delta. Macau has potential to be the hottest all-round destination in Asia. Local and regional authorities must allow Macau to develop into a true Greater Macau area by fully utilising the bordering territories such as Hengqin and Zhuhai.

Cooper Zhang
International department
manager, CITS Macau



I hope more new attractions, shows and entertainment will emerge, as they are needed to enhance the appeal of Macau and lengthen visitors' stay. So far, many of our visitors are here for a day visit. I'd also like to see hotel rates be adjusted downward as rooms are very expensive.

Hot and new

Tapas de Portugal

The new Tapas de Portugal in Taipa Village, helmed by renowned Portuguese chef Antonio Coelho, boasts a diverse food menu complemented by an equally impressive drink list comprising Portuguese wines, beers and cocktails. It takes in a bar on the ground level, a dining hall on the second

floor, and a rooftop terrace on the third. Signature dishes include wet lobster rice and roasted suckling pig with homemade potato chips.

The Parisian Macao

The French-themed Parisian Macao hotel has opened, bringing with it a smaller-scale

replica of the iconic Eiffel Tower. The structure houses observation decks on levels 37, where visitors can take in views of the city and the hotel. A spectacular light show is conducted daily from 18.15 to midnight, at every 15-minute interval.

Educational Restaurant

The Educational Restaurant of the Institute for Tourism Studies has reopened on August 28 following extensive renovations, and now welcomes diners with a new menu. The new three-course set lunch format allows diners to pick an item each from three starters, three main courses and two desserts. A vegetarian option is also available now. Quality food is guaranteed as Educational Restaurant is featured in *Michelin Guide Hong Kong and Macau 2017*.

Four Seasons Hotel Macao

Four Seasons Hotel Macao on the Cotai

Strip is due to complete its renovations this month, after almost a year of extensive works to breathe a refreshed experience throughout the hotel. All rooms and suites will feature updated modern comforts, such as a coffee-making machine, 55-inch LED television, functional activity table and enhanced high-speed Internet.

Cinematheque Passion

Opened in March, the three-storey Cinematheque Passion is a multifunctional building that facilitates film screenings, local video storage, as well as film journals and book reading services under the auspices of the Cultural Affairs Bureau. It conducts thematic film festivals and programmes regularly, and has a series of activities including workshops and seminars planned for October to December. Cinematheque Passion sits in a great location, being adjacent to the iconic the Ruins of St. Paul's.



From left: Tapas de Portugal; Four Seasons Hotel Macao

Destination Brunei

Strength in neighbours

Interest in Muslim-friendly and experiential tours are most in demand, reports **S Puvaneswary**



Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque

As most air connections Brunei has are with Asia, it is no surprise that many inbound tour players have built their business around markets served by direct flight.

Currently, Royal Brunei Airlines has a small network, focused mainly on Asian cities. It flies direct to Shanghai, Hong Kong, Ho Chi Minh City, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Kota Kinabalu, Manila, Singapore, Jakarta, Surabaya and Bali.

Beyond Asia, the flag carrier also runs direct services to Melbourne, Dubai, Jeddah and London.

Freme Travel's managing director, Michael Lee, said the best performing leisure markets for the company were Thailand,

Vietnam, the Philippines and China. "Credit is due to the agents we work closely with," he said, adding that Freme conducts destination briefings for them.

The country's visa-on-arrival facility for Chinese nationals, introduced in 2015, also helped encourage travellers planning a trip to eastern Malaysia to explore Brunei too, according to Lee.

He revealed that Freme has been "aggressively pursuing" online bookings through B2B and B2C platforms in the past one year, and efforts have borne fruit. "More FITs and family travellers are booking online," he said.

Chang Ming Vui, managing director, Bru Vacation, said Hong Kong and China arrivals rose by 20 per cent in the first seven months of this year over the same period in 2016, following joint promotions by the company and Royal Brunei Airlines which positioned the Sultanate as a transit point to Bali and Melbourne.

Chang said experiences popular among families included mangrove tours along the Brunei River, visits to Kampong Ayer and the Seria Oil field, and homestays.

He has noticed a growing trend for experiential tours where visitors could learn about the local culture and interact with the locals. The company offers visits to

Kampong Ayer where tea is served in a local house as well as visits to cottage industries such as a fish ball factory to see how the popular snack is produced.

Chang projects slower forward bookings for 4Q2017 and 1Q2018 as the Chinese yuan strengthens, allowing more travellers to afford longhaul destinations.

C P Foo, general manager of Century Travel Centre, said demand for homestays – coming from the student market in Singapore, youths from Hong Kong and western expatriates – should be stable, barring calamities in the region.

Khurul Zainie, managing director of MegaBorneo Tour Planner, said the Philippines and Malaysia were his top performers. The latter grew 10 per cent year-on-year as a result of Muslim-friendly packages being offered and the engagement of a sales representative based in Kuala Lumpur. The Philippines market grew 13 per cent year-to-date, mainly due to sales and marketing efforts in Manila and Davao last year and this year.

In the areas of marketing and promotion, the Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism continues to make efforts to highlight Brunei as an excellent holiday destination within South-east Asia.

Hot and new

The Capital Residence Suite

The Capital Residence Suite is expanding its hotel inventory with a new block come January 2018. New facilities include 42 hotel rooms, a swimming pool and a restaurant. With this expansion, The Capital Residence Suite will offer 58 hotel rooms and six service residence units.

Jerudong Park

Jerudong Park has upgraded its SupaKart circuit and now offers new custom-made go-karts. Enthusiasts can go on the single-seat Bandit on the F1 circuit or the two-seat Le Mans on the F2 track.

Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Islamic Exhibition Gallery

The Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Islamic Exhibition Gallery is expected to open in September 2017. It will house over 1,000 Islamic manuscripts and artefacts owned by the Sultan of Brunei. There will also be research facilities in the building.



The Capital Residence Suite

*Experience Spiritualism,
Experience Nepal...*

nepal

Boudhanath Stupa, A UNESCO World Heritage Site

Destination Japan

Japan's strong hike to the top

Pro-tourism policies, increased international flights, intensive destination promotions, among reasons for success. By **Julian Ryall**



International arrivals continue to rise in Japan; Fushimi Inari Shrine in Kyoto pictured here

Destination in numbers

24 million

The number of overseas visitors to Japan in 2016, up 21.8 per cent on the previous year

3.4 million

The number of South Korean arrivals to Japan in 1H2017, up 42.5 per cent year-on-year

40 million

The number of tourist arrivals Japan has set its sights on in 2020

Japan's travel sector is upbeat as foreign visitors continue to pour into the country. More than 13.75 million foreign visitors arrived in Japan in the first six months of 2017, a year-on-year increase of 17 per cent and a record high for the January-June period. That puts the travel sector on course to shatter its full-year record for a fifth consecutive year.

"Arrivals are up for a number of reasons, including increasing interest in Japan as a destination and a range of government initiatives, such as exemption or relaxation of visa requirements, the expanded tax-free programme, improved immigration procedures and continuous promotion efforts," said Maki Akashi, director of the Japan National Tourism Organization's General Administration Department.

An increase in flight and cruise net-

works has also helped, along with the growing middle- and high-income classes in Asian countries, she said.

Industry players believe that, barring disasters, the outlook for the next few years is equally positive as Japan gears up to host the Rugby World Cup in 2019 and the Tokyo Olympic Games in 2020.

Steve Dewire, general manager, Grand Hyatt, Tokyo, said: "Although numbers for most markets are consistent, we have noticed an increase in South Korean, American and French travellers and a slight decrease in arrivals from the UK and Singapore so far this year."

"There seems to have been a high percentage of international travellers who returned to Japan this year after the decrease last year – which was possibly due to the earthquakes in Kyushu in April – while another reason could be the increased flight routes to and from Japan," Dewire added.

He expects the hotel to see a higher ratio of foreign tourists – currently comprising 75 per cent of all guests – with the approach of the Tokyo Olympic Games.

Yasuhiro Tsuboi, a director of domestic travel giant JTB Corp. and general manager of the firm's Inbound Business Department, told *TTG Show Daily* that business has been "improving steadily" so far this year, with online sales growing significantly compared to last year.

"Our online sales from collaborations with other companies have increased, although offline sales with major travel agencies in China and Taiwan have declined," he said.

"We believe this is because more bookings are being made online than in the past."

JTB has seen a sharp increase in Indonesian nationals visiting Japan, for example, with arrivals up 35.9 per cent in the January-May period on last year, thanks in large part to the company's collaboration with Panorama JTB Tours.

"Japan is sure to attract interest from around the world by hosting (two sports events)," he added.

Viewpoints

What is needed for Japan to reach its full potential in tourism?

Bjorn Courage,
General manager, ANA
Intercontinental Manza
Beach Resort, Okinawa



Okinawa has made tremendous progress in developing from a domestic resort destination to an international one. It is crucial to remain an authentic Okinawan/Japanese beach destination which clearly differentiates itself from other experiences. Okinawa competes easily with any resort destination, but to continue to grow infrastructure, airlift, overseas promotion and so on need to be strengthened.

Masanao Oei
Head of the overseas
division, Kyushu Tourism
Promotion Organization



I believe that the implementation of more direct flight routes between Kyushu and other locations will allow the region to reach its full potential in attracting international tourists. Direct flights are currently few and far between.

"We anticipate a large number of tourists arriving for these events and we plan to cooperate with JNTO to increase promotion efforts and prepare for the influx of tourists.

"In the absence of large external influences, I believe the market will continue on its current trend of growth and we could see the full year's arrival figures reach 120 per cent of the same period last year," he added.

Hot and new

Henn Na Hotel, Gamagori

A third Henn Na Hotel – which translates as 'strange hotel' – has opened on August 1 alongside the Lagunasia theme park in Gamagori, Aichi prefecture. The hotel is operated by HIS Group travel agency and the two previous properties have attracted attention because they are staffed mainly by robots. The new hotel has 100 keys, with each room boasting its own robot that responds to human instructions. The lobby has a seven-metre long Tyrannosaurus Rex, whose "wife" and "child" handle customer check-ins.

KAI Alps, Hakuba

Hoshino Resorts is reopening its KAI Alps property on December 21 after nine months of renovation which has also given the hot springs *ryokan* a range of new features. Three hours north of Tokyo, KAI Alps sits close to the ski slopes of Hakuba and the gateway to the Northern Alps. The property offers a contem-

porary take on the traditional Japanese inn and the recent upgrade covered two buildings with 48 rooms. The property's new concept encourages guests to enjoy the healing and rejuvenating hot springs of the countryside.

Shibuya VR Land, Tokyo

The latest addition to Japan's already extensive selection of theme parks is Shibuya VR Land, an indoor amusement park in the Shibuya Modi shopping complex that utilises virtual reality. Five attractions are on offer, including Ultra Reverse Bungee, which uses headsets and moving seats to give the sensation of being shot into outer space by a giant catapult. Other games include a battle against hordes of enemies with a weapon of your choice and a quest to escape from a haunted hospital. Entrance costs 2,200 yen.

Osaka-Tottori highway bus

The municipal government of Tottori City has



From left: Shouun Sanso Garden, Agano; Tottori Sand Dunes

introduced a cut-price highway bus service linking Osaka with the prefecture for just 1,000 yen (US\$9). Tottori is famous for a number of attractions, including the Tottori Sand Dunes, the scenic Uradome coastline, the largest flower park in Japan and numerous hot springs – but has failed so far to attract significant numbers of international visitors due to its relative remoteness. Previously, the cost of a one-way trip between Osaka and Tottori was 3,700 yen.



Niigata's new tourist route

Travel authorities in Niigata Prefecture have unveiled a new 140-km tourist route through the prefecture that takes in a number of its most famous gardens, temples, shrines and samurai residences. The route generally follows National Highway Route 290 between the towns of Murakami and Uonuma, threading through the Echigo Plains. Other attractions on the route include hot springs in Shibata and Agano.

Destination Vietnam

Great tourist expectations

Interest in Vietnam has grown exponentially, with tourist numbers set to increase over the next two years. By **Marissa Carruthers**



Hoi An Ancient Town, an example of a South-east Asian trading port from the 15th to the 19th century

Vietnam is on track to hit its 2017 target of 13 million international arrivals as the country strives to make tourism a major economic pillar.

Figures from Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) reveal 6.2 million foreign tourists visited the country in 1H2017 – a 30.2 per cent increase from the previous year.

The top markets were China, South Korea and Japan, with the US leading the non-Asian market, followed by Russia.

The increase has been aided by a huge push from the government to turn tourism into one of the country's main economic powers. In June, the National Assembly approved a revised Law on Tourism, pledging to develop tourism across the country.

Marc Emmanuel, general manager of Pan Pacific Hanoi, said: "2017 is on track to becoming Vietnam's best performing year for tourism."

He said this has been underpinned by major events, including APEC Vietnam 2017 and the year-long hosting of Asia-

Pacific Economic Cooperation meetings, which will culminate with the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in Danang in November.

Asian Trails has also seen growth this year, with general manager Jose Gregorio Manzo putting this down to a global marketing and advertising push.

Manzo expects growth to continue into 2018, and has noted an increase in interest from Latin America and South Africa. He expects the business events market to do well also.

The visa exemption to several European countries, which was extended for another year in June, has also helped boost figures, with operators reporting a rise in visitors from those countries. Another beneficial move saw the government adopt online visas for citizens from 40 markets in February.

Emmanuel said the easier visa process has "pulled in more visitors from feeder markets in Asia and Europe, particularly South Korea, New Zealand and Russia, which are the fastest growing markets for Vietnam".

He also applauded VNAT's increased promotional efforts, a move that is expected to drive tourism into 2018. "VNAT has been actively driving leisure tourism and making inroads in source markets (worldwide). Next year looks as bright as 2017, if not even brighter," he said.

However, if the country is to reach its full potential more efforts are needed. Dinh Ngoc Duc, director general of VNAT's tourism marketing department and CEO of Vietnam PATA, said: "More investment in hotels, resorts and entertainment complexes would be a big help."

Viewpoints

What is needed for Vietnam to reach its full potential in tourism?

Jeff Redl
Managing director,
Diethelm Vietnam



We urgently need more international flights to major cities around the world. When compared to Thailand, Hong Kong and Singapore, Vietnam still does not have enough connections worldwide. All players should work hand in hand to promote the destination. For example, airlines, authorities, hotels and DMCs should come together to organise campaigns and fam trips.

Jose Gregorio Manzo
General manager,
Asian Trails



I would like to see a better respect for environment sustainability through the development of eco-sustainable products and responsible tours.

Destination in numbers

10 million

The number of international tourist arrivals recorded in Vietnam in 2016, an increase of 26 per cent YOY

1.9 million

The number of Chinese tourists to Vietnam between January and June 2017, the top performing source

16,500

The number of keys in Ho Chi Minh City, a seven per cent increase YOY

Hot and new



L'Alyana Ninh Van Bay

L'Alyana Ninh Van Bay

Located on an island near Nha Trang is the L'Alyana Ninh Van Bay resort, a revival of the former An Lam Villas. The property offers 33 villas, all of which come with private plunge pools, private verandas and terraces. Facilities on-site include a spa, meeting room, restaurant, bar and an infinity pool.

Orchid Cruises

Offering a unique route through Halong Bay, the boarding point for Orchid Cruises

is 1.5 hours from Hanoi rather than the usual four-hour drive. The boat offers 18 cabins across four configurations. The itinerary takes in spots such as Bai Tu Long and Lan Ha Bay, which is less crowded than Halong and offers great kayaking opportunities, as well as a mountain home to endangered macaques.

Poulo Condor Boutique Resort and Spa, Con Son

Located on the island of Con Son, the largest and only inhabited of the Con Dao archipelago, Poulo Condor Boutique Resort and Spa boasts 16 suites and 20 villas. Amenities include a 750m-long private beach, reading room, three F&B venues, an infinity pool, and a spa with four treatment rooms.

Helvetas Vietnam

Helvetas Vietnam and its in-country offshoot, CRED, are developing tour packages and activities in the northern provinces of Ha Giang and Cao Bang. Six ethnic minority villages have been trained to provide quality services to visitors as part of community-based tourism activities.

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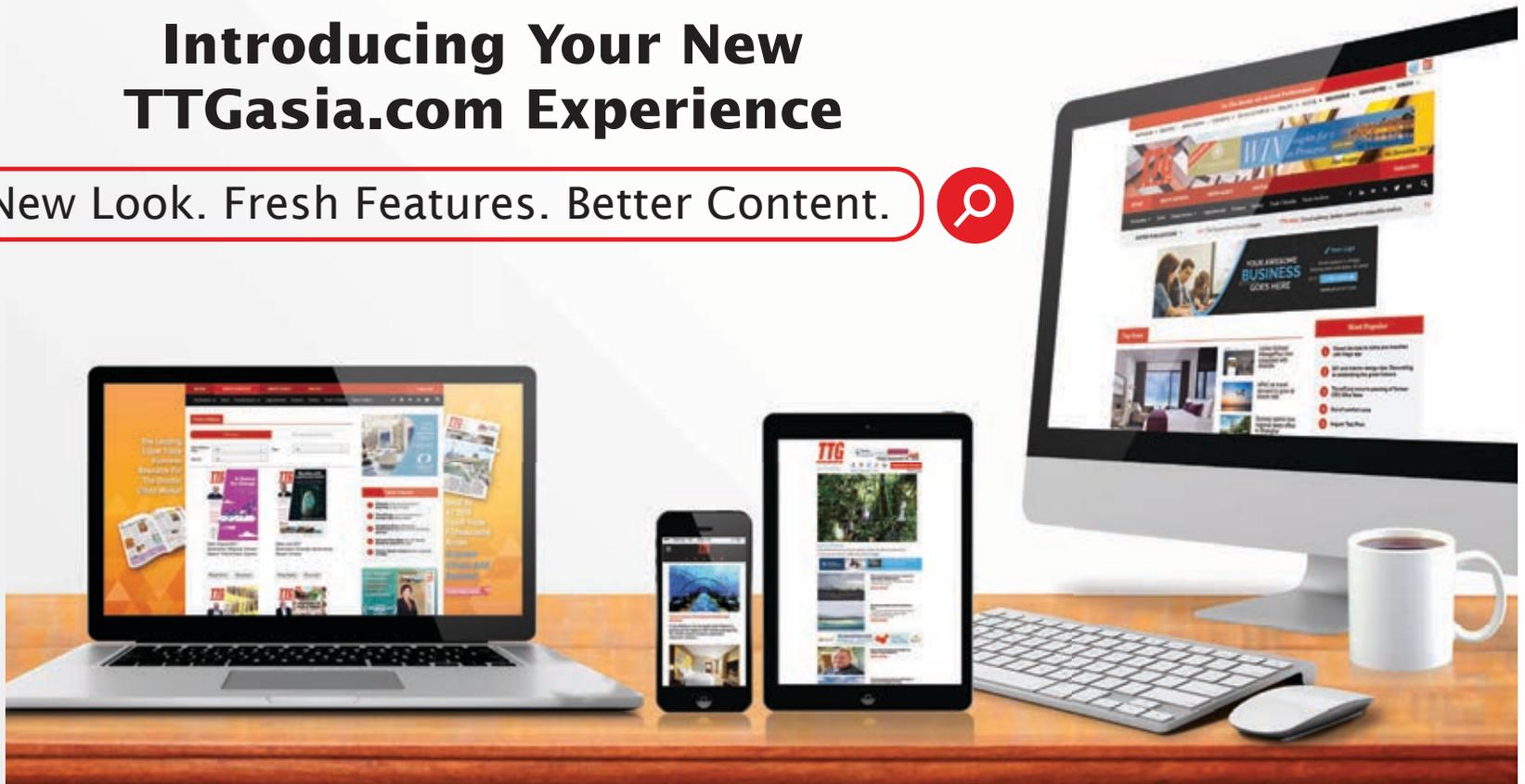
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Destination Malaysia

When nearer seems to be better

Forward bookings from China and a few SE Asian countries look healthier as compared to longhaul segment. By **S Puvaneswary**



Gurney Drive, a popular seafront promenade in George Town, Penang

Chinese inbound tourists to Malaysia totalled 2.1 million last year, exceeding the Malaysian government's target of attracting two million tourists. In 1Q2017, arrivals from China remained strong and was a 7.5 per cent increase year-on-year.

The increase in Chinese interest in Malaysia can be attributed to the visa-free

entry for Chinese tourists that started in March 2016, as well as improved direct air accessibility between secondary cities in China and Malaysia.

For Abdul Rahman Mohamed, general manager of Mayflower Holidays, his company saw a 15 per cent year to date increase in business from China.

He expects forward bookings to remain healthy due to the strengthening of the renminbi, and new products such as the recently-opened Movie Animation Park Studios in Perak, and Resort World Genting's 20th Century Fox World Malaysia theme park (slated to open end-2017).

When asked about what trends he saw recently, Abdul said: "Self-drive tours have grown in popularity with the Chinese market. They rent cars from us with GPS programmed in Mandarin, and follow an itinerary we provide. The most popular route is from Kuala Lumpur to Penang, with stops in towns along the way such as Taiping and Kuala Sepetang. Penang is popular destination because the island is known as a food haven."

"Design Village, an outlet mall in Penang selling international and homegrown brands, adds to the attractiveness as Chinese tourists also love shopping," he

pointed out.

Meanwhile, arrivals from South-east Asia contributed 75.81 per cent of total arrivals in 1Q2017.

Inbound agent Adam Kamal, CEO of Olympik Holidays, said his company saw a year-to-date double digit growth from Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam. He also expects forward bookings to remain strong due to the opening of new shopping attractions such as Genting Highlands Premium Outlets, Penang's Design Village, as well as Malaysia's year-end annual shopping sale.

In addition, Adam pointed out that he has seen a trend in regional visitors being more accepting of local-branded, independent, as well as heritage hotels.

"This is due to the availability of information online which makes it easier for us to recommend (the properties). In the past, visitors used to opt for popular international chains because of the trust they had in the brand," he shared.

For longhaul markets, Kingston Khoo, senior product development/contracting manager at Discovery Overland Holidays, said business from the company's traditional market, UK, had dipped by 10 per cent. This could be attributed to uncertainties in the UK, which resulted in lesser demand for long holidays. In addition, the UK has issued a travel advisory – against all but essential travel to all islands off the coast of eastern Sabah – to its citizens.

Khoo lamented: "Foreign broadcast reports on television on the ongoing fighting between government forces and Islamic militants in Marawi, Philippines, is not helping."

However, Khoo indicated that inbound business from the US had picked up by 15 per cent over the past year due to the strengthening of the US economy. He believes this is likely to continue despite the closure of Tourism Malaysia offices in Los Angeles and New York earlier this year.

Overall, arrivals in 1Q2017 decreased by 0.5 per cent, with total arrivals dipping to 6.6 million.

Viewpoints

What is needed for Malaysia to reach its full potential in tourism?

Andy Yow

Director of sales & marketing, Vivanta by Taj - Rebek Island Langkawi



Tourism Malaysia should increase their advertising and promotional funding especially to markets that show potential for further growth and improvement in arrivals such as China, India, Japan and Vietnam.

The government should also incentivise our local airlines to fly to secondary cities in these markets. The government and private sector should also jointly explore ways to make the travel experience – from their arrival to their accommodation – seamless and hassle free for tourists.

Ally Bhoonee

Executive director, World Avenues



Malaysia must play on its natural beauty, such as beaches, rainforest, mountains, while developing more signature events that will attract more international tourists.

Tourism Malaysia must also be more aggressive in marketing the destination overseas, and informing agents overseas of all the new products available in the country. When Tourism Malaysia organises fam trips for overseas travel agents to visit Malaysia, they must ensure that only decision makers attend the trip and not junior staff.

Destination in numbers

26.8 million

The total number of tourists who visited Malaysia in 2016

5.9 nights

The average length of stay of tourists who visited Malaysia in 2016

RM26 billion

The total tourist expenditure, equivalent to US\$6.1 billion, on shopping in Malaysia in 2016

Hot and new

Hotel Jen Puteri Harbour, Johor

Hotel Jen Puteri Harbour in Johor has launched 12 Hello Kitty-themed rooms. Designed in partnership with Sanrio, the design revolves around three themes – the swash-buckling Sailor, the romantic Pink Series and the magical Oz Chapter.

The rooms are available in two room categories, deluxe and premier; where premier rooms are suites equipped with bunk beds and adjoining a master bedroom.

V E Hotel & Residence, Kuala Lumpur

The four-star V E Hotel & Residence Bangsar South is located strategically in the commercial and lifestyle hub of Kuala Lumpur, Bangsar South City.

The property features 432 hotel rooms and serviced residences, and has recreational facilities such as an infinity pool, a sauna, children's wading pool, sauna, spa and sun deck. Other facilities include an all-day dining

restaurant, poolside cafe, al fresco bar and lounge, as well as four function rooms which can host 14 to 80 people for meetings and events.

Movie Animation Park Studios, Ipoh

Movie Animation Park Studios, Asia's first animation theme park located in Ipoh, Perak opened in June. Sprawled over 21ha of land,



Hotel Jen Puteri Harbour

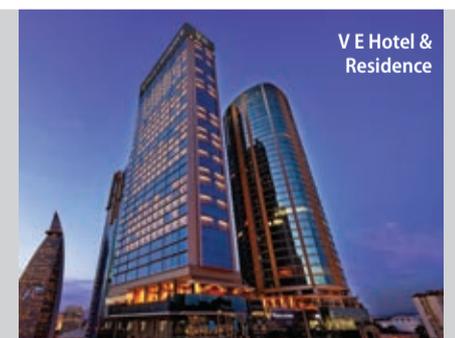
it features 23 interactive attractions and 15 rides in six themed zones.

The park houses both international and homegrown Intellectual Properties including DreamWorks characters, *The Smurfs* and *The Home of BoBoiBoy*. Attractions include South-east Asia's first car and bike stunt show, themed dining restaurants and Malaysia's biggest drop tower. Operating hours are 10.00 to 18.00 daily.

Setia SPICE Convention Centre, Penang

Opened to the tune of RM350 million (US\$78.78 million), the convention centre features event facilities such as a 4,546m² pillarless ballroom that can hold 8,000 pax in theatre-style (which can be sectioned into four smaller halls), two VIP serviced rooms, and 13 smaller function rooms.

It is the first solar hybrid convention centre in the world, and it also features a 2.8ha-



V E Hotel & Residence

outdoor space on its rooftop – capable of hosting outdoor events – that is home to a spice garden and children playground.

Design Village, Penang

This outlet mall in Penang is spread over 10 hectares and feature a mix of international and homegrown brands. There are a total of 150 shops in this single-storey open-air mall. Other offerings include rest and children's play areas, safety wristlet for children, escorts for female shoppers and F&B outlets.

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Order for Siem Reap

Illegal vendors, rowdy Pub Street, lack of toilets to be sorted out

By Marissa Carruthers

Heritage city Siem Reap has been ordered to clean up its act as part of a beautification sweep to make the destination more tourist friendly.

As part of the initiative, Siem Reap governor Khim Bunsong has ordered all street vendors who clutter the centre's pavements and pedestrian paths to remove their stalls by early October.

Businesses have also been told to remove all illegal signs, while illegal parking places will also be targeted. The governor also flagged Pub Street, a popular drinking spot with tourists that is pedestrianised after 17.00, saying it needed "better public order".

There will also be more public toilets installed, parks and green zones added, and waste management improvements.

Miles Gravett, Khiri Travel Cambodia general manager, said: "I hate to see the vendors lose their livelihoods but...I support attempts to clean the city, improve sanitation and add more green space."

Coralie Romano, EXO Cambodia product manager, said illegal signs and street vendors form part of local culture and are not a main priority. However, she said clearing up Pub Street is essential.

She said: "It's more about the illegal



services tourists are offered while walking in the Pub Street area. This is becoming a serious issue and a priority."

Kimhok Prem, who runs tourism-related operations in the city, also welcomed the move to target Pub Street, claiming the stretch of bars, restaurants and clubs that stay open until the early hours are becoming "out of control".

He said: "It is getting more and more rowdy with many drunk people. This can be off-putting to many tourists who visit Siem Reap and is not the image we want to show."

Figures from the Ministry of Tourism show 3.78 million tourists visited Siem Reap in the first seven months of 2017. This represents a 12 per cent year-on-year increase.

Guiddoo helps smaller Indian travel agencies automate

With technology still a pinpoint especially for mom-and-pop agencies in India, Guiddoo, a B2B platform offering tours, dining and shopping options for Indian travellers, has rolled out two new solutions targeted at smaller players.

Despite the predominance of smartphones, many travel formalities such as reservation confirmations, directions, and itineraries are still a hassle and largely paper-based, Guiddoo said.

Its Trip Assistant allows agents to keep in touch with their customers during a trip with itinerary sharing, live updates (e.g. pickup details) and in-app communication through chat and call.

For tour operators and DMCs, Guiddoo's CRM is introducing a customisable interface that integrates lead management, query handling, finance and post sales management into operations. This allows tour operators to manage bookings from the point of sales until customers return from their trip.

Biswajeet Karmakar, director of sales, Guiddoo, who leads the B2B technology distribution, commented: "With the correct use of technology we can automate the whole process resulting in minimal error and help (smaller players) compete effectively with the bigger technology-driven travel companies."

Indotrek buys Kingfisher Ecolodge Laos, deepens adventure offering

South-east Asian adventure travel DMC, Indotrek, now has a hand in property management, through its recent purchase of Kingfisher Ecolodge in Laos' Champasak province.

Kingfisher Ecolodge is situated adjacent to the RAMSAR protected wetlands of Ban Kiet Ngong, just a short transfer from Pakse airport. Each of the authentic wooden bungalows presents a beautiful view overlooking the wetlands, with the Bolaven Plateau forming the backdrop.

Richard Casswell, brand manager of Indotrek, told *TTG Show Daily*: "In order to expand and grow the Indotrek brand, we felt that (we needed) unique properties in key destinations we wish to develop. This allows us to have a solid base where we can host our guests."

Casswell remarked that Kingfisher Ecolodge is perfectly aligned with the desires of Indotrek's adventure-seeking clientele. The company specialises in adventure trips across the region, with many of its guests preferring to leave tourist trails in search of unique experiences.

"We feel that Kingfisher Ecolodge offers a great location for guests to experience the natural environment of the southern Laos region," he said.

Indotrek can offer trekking options from the lodge and into the Xi Pan National Park, led by skilled local guides who can provide guests with valuable insights into the various uses of plants in the forest. The trek routes will pass the historical site of Phu Asa Mountain.

He added: "We also have our own bicycles and can offer cycling tours through the local villages and along the trails bordering the RAMSAR protected wetlands. In the dry season, bird-watching is possible and guests can use the 'hide' to observe the local wildlife."

Another new option is a private candlelit dinner in a *sala* – a traditional open pavilion – by the wetlands.

Kingfisher Ecolodge is undergoing renovation and maintenance, and will reopen on October 1 with refreshed guestrooms, an updated restaurant and a new breakfast terrace. There are also plans to add larger bungalows in the coming year.

Casswell assures all agent and DMC partners that existing contracts with Kingfisher Ecolodge will be honoured.

Meanwhile, Indotrek is developing new tours in southern Laos to complement activities at Kingfisher Ecolodge.

"The new products include a sunset experience on a private island in the Mekong river plus boat transfer, and a private picnic at an ancient temple after a Mekong river boat ride.

"We will also be expanding our touring capacity in the south and introduce a new cycling tour to the (UNESCO World Heritage Site) Wat Phu (or Vat Phou). Overnight glamping on a private island is also an unforgettable experience that we are in the process of developing," he shared. – Mimi Hudoyo

Eco-tourism must not lose business impetus: Khiri

With Myanmar's tourism chiefs pledging to push eco-tourism and as more of the country's unspoiled sites open up to tourists, tourism stakeholders are urging a more calculated and sustainable approach.

The Ministry of Hotels and Tourism has flagged 22 destinations deemed to have potential to be developed into eco-tourism sites. These include Oaktwin and Pauk Khaung, in Bago Yoma forest.

May Myat Mon Win, Myanmar Tourism Marketing chairwoman, said the country's main eco-tourism offering is currently Indawgyi Lake in Kachin State, the largest freshwater lake in the country and third in South-east Asia. In June, the lake was designated a UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserve.

And with the Myeik archipelago – comprising islands off the country's south coast – having recently opened up, marine tourism and other sustainable initiatives are starting to develop in the area.

Thomas Carnevale, managing director of Asian Trails Tour, shared: "Currently the focus is on southern Myanmar and Myeik, and community-based tourism products in various parts of the country."

However, developing the segment

comes with challenges, such as access to the more remote areas, site maintenance and providing visitor information.

Said Edwin Briels, managing director of Khiri Travel Myanmar: "Too often we have seen an organisation make a big initial investment (only) to find out that visitors are not finding their way to the site, and the infrastructure is not maintained (due to lack of funds) and starts crumbling after a few years."



Briels: sustaining income streams

Creating proper centres for visitor education such as Minzontaung Wildlife Sanctuary between Mandalay and Bagan, which Khiri recently helped set up to protect the Burmese star tortoise, is also key to generating income and keeping green initiatives sustainable.

If properly implemented, Briels opined that eco-tourism has the potential to contribute a steady income to protected sites, and in turn benefit from their longevity.

Other eco-tourism sites include National Kandawgyi Garden, Inle Lake Sanctuary, Moeyungyi Wetland Wildlife Sanctuary, Shwettaw Wildlife Sanctuary, Myaing Hay Wun Elephant Camp and Pho Kyar Forest Resort. – Marissa Carruthers

IN BRIEF

Korea rolls out shopping fest

Taking place from September 28 to October 31, the Korea Sale FESTA will feature cultural festivals, customised events and shopping discounts offered by participating merchants. The annual affair will coincide with the country's Chuseok Holiday.

Changi on board with Alipay

As part of a five-year partnership deal, the Alipay mobile payment solution is set to be rolled on a wider scale at Singapore Changi Airport. The payment mode has been progressively offered by airport tenants since May 2017, and is now available at more than 78 retail and dining outlets.

Kingfisher Ecolodge



Snapshots

Faces of PATA Forum By Caleb Richard Lai



Oriental Travels India's Mukesh Goel



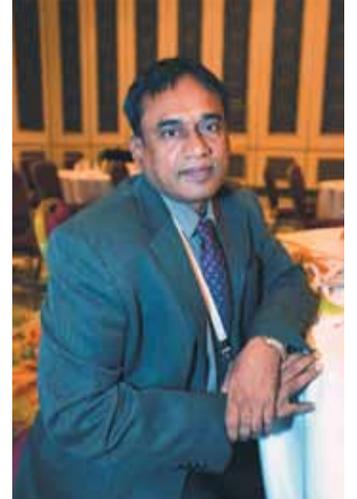
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Fishtail Tours & Travels Hong Kong's Krishna Pandey



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PATA Thailand's Paul Pruangkarn, Uptthink Hong Kong's Matt Gibson and Professional Hobo's Nora Dunn

News

Amadeus study rates tour operators poorly

Travel agents challenge claims that tour operators are less likely to exceed traveller expectations than other suppliers

By Mimi Hudoyo

Travel agents who attended Amadeus' presentation yesterday at the PATA Travel Mart Travolution Forum Asia are refuting the organisation's Journey of Me Insights findings.

Respondents of the research, conducted earlier this year on what Asia-Pacific travellers want, have graded tour operators lowly in terms of them exceeding travel expectations.

Fourteen per cent of respondents claimed that tour operators have never exceeded their expectations, while 11 per cent said tour operators are least likely to exceed their expectations.

On the other hand, the respondents say hotels (24 per cent) and booking sites (23 per cent) are most likely to exceed their expectations.

Elaborating on the findings,

Jackson Pek, vice president and general counsel, Asia Pacific managing director, Bangkok Regional Office of Amadeus, said: "When we surveyed people and asked them out of the following, which are the ones that have exceeded your expectations, travel agents were the ones getting the fewest checks.

"Perhaps (the respondents are thinking) holistically. For example a traveller who booked a suite at a Sheraton hotel could be surprised by the massive size of the room. A tour operator, however, have fewer chances of surprising a traveller because their services are fixed."

In reaction to the survey findings, Mukesh Goel, director of Oriental Travels, India said: "This cannot be true. I attended

a lecture by a professor from the UK who spoke about the good and bad of (online travel booking). While the Internet offers convenience such as instant confirmation, it lacks the human touch. In India, customers highly value personal advice and personal attention especially when there is a problem in their travel plans."

Goel added that despite the high Internet penetration in India compared to other countries, Indian consumers are still "reliant on travel consultants".

Rajat Nagpal, vice president of online airfare marketplace Mystifly Singapore, was also unconvinced. During the session, he asked

Pek how then could tour operators exceed the expectations of travellers.

Pek, however, offered no clear solution.

He said: "No two travellers are the same, no two journeys are the same and because of that it is hard to determine how you will exceed any expectations."

He added: "One of the things we are seeing now is (the rise of) artificial intelligence. Through artificial intelligence, we will be able to (achieve) individual profiles (that can detail specifics) like this particular traveller enjoys a banana for breakfast. With this we can determine what it is that a particular traveller wants. (But) I think (such a solution) is still a few years out (of our reach)."



Goel: Indians value human touch



Pek: fewer surprise from tour operators

In India, customers highly value personal advice and personal attention especially when there is a problem in their travel plans.

Mukesh Goel
Director, Oriental Travels, India



PICKING THE BRAINS OF TRAVEL INFLUENCERS

Matt Gibson (extreme left), outbound president of Professional Bloggers Association, sat down with four travel influencers yesterday afternoon at PATA Influence Marketing Forum to discuss how the travel trade can better work with influencers.

The four panellists discussed what the biggest advantage were in working with influencers; how to make influencer campaigns stand out; common mistakes brands make working with influencers; and recommendations for best practices.

Delegates interested in speaking to travel bloggers can head to the Bloggers Lounge. These bloggers are members of the Professional Bloggers Association.

JAL, TripAdvisor join hands to disperse tourists across Japan

Japan Air Lines (JAL) and TripAdvisor are launching a multimedia portal to support the country's efforts to disperse inbound tourism across Japan.

This is the first time TripAdvisor is working with a partner in Japan to create a multimedia portal. It usually works with many tourism partners in Japan to promote inbound travel to the country.

The portal, Untold Stories of Japan, attempts to highlight what locals love beyond the obvious. It also hopes to drive sustainable tourism and increase repeat visits.

To be launched in October, it will feature the Tohoku, Kyushu and Okinawa regions, and cities in the vicinity of Kan-to region. The portal will reside within TripAdvisor's domain, where visitors to the website will reach it through traffic drivers on the site.

Untold Stories of Japan will be available to travellers on across desktop, tablet and mobile, and in various languages. For a start, it will target 13 markets across Asia-Pacific, such as China, India, Australia, Malaysia and New Zealand.

Said Yoshiharu Ueki, president of JAL: "We are fully committed to not only supporting the government's ef-

orts to grow foreign visitor arrivals by 40 million by 2020, but also to encourage these visitors to keep visiting Japan.

"What we will create together is a powerful platform that can help drive a revitalisation of rural Japan by getting travellers to go further and stay longer, local businesses can capitalise this inbound interest to grow the economy in the long term."

In addition, Japan Airlines and TripAdvisor will also collaborate with local governments, corporations and tourist facilities to further enhance the content and viewership of the portal. — Rachel AJ Lee



SE Asia's tallest observation tower to rise in Thai capital city

The banks of Bangkok's Chao Phraya is set to get what's said to be the sixth tallest observation tower in the world and tallest in South-east Asia in 2019, which tourism stakeholders believe will mark a turning point for tourism along the river and the rest of Bangkok.

The Bangkok Observation Tower, which is being built at

a cost of US\$138 million, is undertaken by the Bangkok Observation Tower Foundation and the National Identity Foundation, and funded by over 50 private sector organisations. It will sport a candle-like design inspired by the tradition of lighting candles on the birthday of the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

Drawing parallels with the Tokyo Skytree and Shanghai's Canton Tower, Ittirit Kinglake, president, Tourism Council of Thailand, expects the tower would serve as a powerful tourism driver for Bangkok.

Parinya Ruckwatin, chairman of the Chao Phraya River Tourism Association, is optimistic the tower will reignite

interest in the river district.

He said: "With the arrival of the tower, businesses stretching for 10km along the length of the river will benefit, including boat operators, restaurants, hotels, retailers and convention organisers. We can also expect improvements of more than 10 piers along the river to make them safer and easier to use."



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