



## Powered by intelligence

Integration of AI into business strategies can empower smaller industry players with personalisation capability for greater competitiveness

By Pamela Chow

Artificial intelligence (AI) took centre stage at yesterday's ITB Asia 2017 Opening Keynote presentation, with industry leaders urging smaller travel and tourism players to embrace the technology in their business strategies, a move which can put them on a level playing field with the big firms.

Carl Livadas, Sojern's vice president for data science, told *TTG Show Daily* that predictive data is a "normaliser" that can give smaller companies, such as boutique hotels, an edge over big chain competitors.

For example, AI can help a company determine and push out the most relevant products for existing and potential customers based on their location, trip-planning patterns and purchase histories.

When optimised, according to Livadas, such targeted marketing can be "non-intrusive", enhance the user experience and contribute to customer service. Marketers can even make use of real-time AI to reach out to travellers mid-trip and suggest new products on the go.

These "real-time" recommendations can, for example, be introduced through interactive chatbots, chimed in Zumata's CEO/co-founder, Josh Ziegler.



Young: AI as facilitator, not threat

"The older way of looking at things was (through a) purely data-driven (perspective). That's not the case now – every trip you take is different," said Ziegler. "Real-time, on-demand personalisation is where this is going."

With chatbots now in trend, IBM has launched a cognitive system, Watson, which serves as a personal assistant for companies to interact with their customers. The system not only collects and analyses data, but also learns from user behaviour to create a relevant experience.

Companies that have adopted Watson include Japan Airlines for its virtual assistant Manakachan and Pebble Beach Resorts for a California driving guide.

The use of data to enable such "hyper-personalisation" of travel

experiences gives providers the "opportunity to expand into new markets", said Mitchell Young, general manager – ASEAN, IBM.

At the Opening Keynote, Young shared that it is possible for AI to learn from data and even develop "emotional intelligence" and "infuse the mood of the customer... to create authentic interactions".

However, industry shapers have acknowledged that AI may be intimidating to smaller players, who often perceive the movement as opaque and even threatening.

"The term 'artificial intelligence' has a lot of negative connotations of it being 'man versus machine,'" observed Young. "(It's actually) about how systems can amplify human capabilities."

He asserted that, considering this, the industry is responsible for "continuing to reskill and train people to take advantage of AI and data science".

Rob Torres, managing director, Google Travel, agreed: "Everything cannot go completely robotic. (The human touch) is not ever going to go away."

He advised those with limited funding and resources to utilise open-source products – such as Google's general machine-learning software TensorFlow – in order to learn, test and evolve.

ITB ASIA IS NOW OPEN FOR BUSINESS! Photo by Fandy Razak

Heavyweight VIPs – (from left) Singapore Tourism Board's Lionel Yeo, Singapore senior minister of state, ministry of trade and industry, Sim Ann, Messe Berlin's Christian Göke and WTTC's Gloria Guevara – were all smiles when they officiated the opening of the ITB Asia 2017 show floor yesterday morning.



## Ctrip gets physical in China

By Caroline Boey

Ctrip, China's leading provider of travel services, has opened 5,500 physical stores in the lower-tier cities to better serve new travellers, complementing its online booking capabilities.

Half of Ctrip's 300 million users book online, according to Jane Jie Sun, CEO.

"The online penetration rate of the Chinese travel market is only about 15 per cent. While customers from first-tier cities are familiar with online travel booking, those in lower-tier cities are not. We see the need to educate and provide personalised service to this new customer base," she said. "Also when you compare China's 10 per cent passport-holder rate to that of the US at roughly 40 per cent, and China's population size, it is clear there is a huge untapped opportunity for outbound business."

Going forward, Sun said Ctrip wants outbound revenue, now contributing between 20 and 30 per cent, to grow to between one-third and half.

She revealed travellers from secondary cities are spending "as much, if not more than their first-tier counterparts". During this year's Labour Day Holiday, eight of the top 10 cities with the highest per capita travel spending were second-tier cities.

In 2Q2017, user traffic in second-tier cities rose 50 per cent year-on-year.

Ctrip continues to allocate more than 15 per cent of revenue to investing in the ABC of technology – AI, big data and cloud computing – to innovate and continue to deliver new product offerings and reliable, round-the-clock service capabilities to further promote outbound travel.



Sun: gold mine in secondary cities



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## News

# Booster shot drives start-ups

Backstreet Academy, Local Alike turn dreams into sustainable tourism reality

By Raini Hamdi

Two Asian start-ups which have received Booking.com's Booster grants as reported in yesterday's *TTG Show Daily* are driven to scale up their businesses by ramping up marketing and improving technology.

Singapore's Backstreet Academy, which pitched its case for a grant of 400,000 euros (US\$470,029) and got it, is finally able to open a headquarters in Yogyakarta. Its three founders have practically been living in the back streets of countries in South-east Asia for the past three years, although the upside to this is it gave them real insights "to empower those at the bottom of the pyramid" to earn a living by delivering unique experiences to tourists.

"These people have so little to live on and their passion for life is to do better.

(Left) Backstreet Academy Singapore's Jamon Mok and Local Alike Travel Thailand's Somsak Boonkam



A challenge for the industry is to see how the bottom of the pyramid is a huge opportunity that can be tapped, instead of seeing them as 'hand-outs', and how we can empower them to do their own business, not as suppliers but as real entrepreneurs," said Jamon Mok, founder & CEO of Backstreet Academy.

With the Booster fund, Mok plans to increase business through visual marketing and growing the offline channel.

"A lot of people are interested in, say, knife-making in Laos, but can't visualise the experience. So we'll be creating short films to showcase the experiences better," said Mok. "We will also be building up the offline channel with local hotels, travel agents, etc, so that more are aware of what we do and will book us.

"As well, we need to improve the technology, in areas such as booking directly through Line or WhatsApp and having a 24/7 communication channel – we have had an issue where customers were unable to locate their guide. We also want to expand to more remote areas in the region."

Local Alike, which has been focusing on Thailand for the past seven years, where it works with 70 villages across the kingdom to deliver authentic experiences to tourists while improving the livelihoods of communities, believes it is time for it to expand to outside Thailand.

Founder & CEO Somsak Boonkam said the company had started to invest in Vietnam with a local partner, currently working with five communities in Hoi An and Danang.

Somsak added the Booster fund

would enable Local Alike to expand its source markets to Europe, from just Thai and Asian customers currently.

"We also learnt a lot from Booking.com on the technology side. We need to redesign our system to make it friendlier.

"As well, we hold 13 workshops for the communities, imparting our knowledge on developing homestays or how to ensure the experience is up to standards. We would like to host this online. By doing this, we will free ourselves and this will enable us to scale far quicker," he said.

Somsak was particularly impressed by how the Booster programme was laid out. "It was over three weeks (of learning and mentoring in Amsterdam last June). Nobody did that kind of thing for us before, that is, invested so much in us.

"It's not just imparting the know-how, but they brought us together and we were able to build personal connections and become friends. In fact, Backstreet Academy has also become our partner. As our product is in sync with their philosophy, we will be using their platform for distribution," said Somsak, which added the partnership with Backstreet would go live soon.

Backstreet's Mok agreed it was "not easy for start-ups like us to tap into travel industry expertise".

"Booster gave us access to a lot of experience. We learnt more about marketing, positioning, technology – it was all so forthcoming," he said.

When asked if Booster would continue to be held in 2018, Marianne Gybels, Booking Cares manager, said an announcement would be made in December.

## NUMBERS THAT MATTER

**31%** of Chinese companies expect travel budgets to rise over the next twelve months, compared to only 17 per cent last year

**40%** report plans to expand travel budgets because of opportunities presented by the Belt and Road Initiative

**90%** indicate that more client-facing travel would likely increase revenue

**20%** of larger Chinese companies surveyed are likely to replace close to half of all internal meetings with video or teleconferencing within the next year

**43%** have an international travel programme

**30%** reported travel policy compliance below 75 per cent

\* based on the CITS American Express Global Business Travel's 2017 China Business Travel Survey

## Digital payments pave way for advancement

By Pamela Chow

Industry players specialising in digital transaction are urging travel companies to adopt digital payment solutions in order to remain competitive and to create inroads into other verticals and partnerships that can expand their business and customer base.

Rakuten Inc's executive officer, travel business, Takano Yoshiyuki, pointed out the importance of banking on digital currencies and "creating an ecosystem".

Recognised as Japan's second-largest travel agency, Rakuten now offers an "ecosystem" of more than 70 services and operates on a point-sharing system across its verticals, said Yoshiyuki. This system also enables Rakuten to become a "marketing tool" for hotels in Japan.

A viable payment solution can also open doors for a business to diversify and grow its customer pool. For example, India-based Paytm – which began as an

electronic-payment company – expanded into e-commerce and is now moving into financial services like insurance and wealth management.

Its vice president, travel, Abhishek Rajan, observed that the travel industry is fertile ground for business expansion.

He shared: "We have big plans (in the travel sphere) in the next couple of years. We didn't expect (travel) to be such a big part of our e-commerce offerings – we have seen tremendous response to categories like flights and trains in the last year."

Besides its ride-hiring and sharing service, Grab has been growing its payment and rewards verticals, and is exploring options in the travel industry, revealed Danny Koik, its lead of regional business development and partnerships.

Grab recently announced a partnership

with Singapore Airlines that includes the option of converting Grab points to KrisFlyer miles. Seeing the value of payment solutions, Grab is striving "to be a payment player", said Koik.

He explained: "We have an ambition to go open-loop, where the GrabPay wallet will be accepted at merchants, retail outlets and hawker centres. We hope to reach 1,000 merchants in Singapore by the end of the year."

There are also plans to scale the GrabPay wallet for offline purchases to the rest of Asia.

Amidst the industry's foray into technological solutions, travel companies must also help their suppliers, whose rate of technology adoption is traditionally slower, according to Rajan. "We help bring them further with technological solutions (to bridge them) with our customers," he remarked.



Koik: diving into the travel industry

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## IN BRIEF

### New revenue tool for hotels

At its first attendance at ITB Asia, OTA Insights, a provider of accommodation revenue management tools, is showcasing its latest solution, Revenue Insight. The company touts the tool's ability to provide up-to-the-minute, real-time updates to ensure hoteliers have visibility of both revenues and online channel shifts. OTA Insight is exhibiting at Booth C44.

### Vienna's homage Modernism

In 2018, Vienna will celebrate Modernism and four of the era's protagonists – Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, Otto Wagner and Koloman Moser – all of whom died a century ago in 1918. One event in the programme is Egon Schiele-Expression and Lyricism, running from late February to October 2018. It will for the first time present a collection of Schiele's work in a dialogue with handwritten poems and other objects from his life at the Leopold Museum.

### Live like a pilgrim in Shizouka

The 45-room Imaiso in Japan's Shizouka has launched a pilgrimage tour package. The package includes free rental of items used by pilgrims such as *haori* (a white coat) and *kongozue* (walking stick) as well as dinner and breakfast. Participants will also get a booklet used to collect stamps designated for the Edo-era Izu 88 Pilgrimage tradition.

### More return guests for Nongsa

Nongsa Resorts has seen a 26 per cent growth in returning guests over the past year, an increase that followed a year-round offer of lifestyle and cultural events. Pulling in the most guests (221 pax) is its Wonder Indonesia Nongsa Regatta 2017 (January 26-28) at Nongsa Point Marina & Resort.



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## News

# East Africa's quest for a lasting impression among Asians

Promotions and education necessary to grow visitor numbers from SE Asia

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

With South Africa seen as the typical choice for visitors to the Africa continent, destinations in East Africa are seeking to raise greater awareness about their offerings through their debut at ITB Asia this year.

Speaking to *TTG Show Daily*, Taher Adamji, general manager of Kenya-based African Quest Safaris said he has observed a "significant growth" coming from the South-east Asia market in the past year, thanks to new flight connections.

According to Adamji, China and India continue to be his top markets in Asia but new countries he intends to court are Hong Kong, Thailand and Vietnam.

He said: "There is still a lot of education that needs to be done to let the trade know what countries in the region, such as Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda, can offer tourists.

"These might not be the first destinations they think of when they come to Africa, but we want to change that. We also

want to attract repeat travellers," Adamji said.

Chris Modigell, a representative from Southern Cross Safaris in Kenya, said the destination appeals largely to the well-travelled tourists, and most of his clients come from Europe and the US.

Highlighting how there is untapped potential in South-east Asia, Modigell said: "Africa is seen as an exotic destination and many travellers here want something different, and Kenya is able to offer that."

Zaheer Moledina, director of ARP Travel Group in East Africa (which promotes Kenya and Tanzania), agreed: "There is a growing appetite for new and unique destinations and we fit right into this demand. We provide culture, wildlife and beaches which is an all-in-one package that many locations do not have."

When asked about the interest towards East Africa, Jasmin Tan, longhaul operations representative of CS Travel Singapore, who has been selling Africa for the past two years, said most groups opt for

better known cities like Cape Town and Johannesburg, both in South Africa.

"The whole continent is still a very new product, and we are learning which other cities can be promoted. Africa is new and unfamiliar, and travellers are concerned about safety there as well as whether they can get used to local food," Tan shared.

While Jocasta Quek, product & operations manager of Singapore-based Safe2Travel, agreed that East Africa is not the top-of-mind destination for her clients, she found that it appeals to the more experienced travellers.

She cited an example of a group of three who included Tanzania in their itinerary last month because "they wanted to see animal migration patterns and knew that would be the best place to see it".

While new flight connections are raising the appeal of these destinations, Quek highlighted that the overall high costs may be a deterrent.

She pointed out: "East Africa is usually viewed as a more luxurious and exclusive destination. Travellers to the region are usually discerning, and also have the means to visit."



Adamji: more buyer education

## Marina Bay Sands takes big step forward in food sustainability

By Pamela Chow

Marina Bay Sands (MBS) has entered a partnership with World Wide Fund for Nature in Singapore (WWF) to raise sustainability standards in the integrated resort, starting with ocean conservation.

Under this alliance, MBS will start by strengthening its business events programme over the next year, by updating the It's Easy Meeting Green package.

It will now also donate S\$1 (US\$0.73) per delegate to four aquaculture farms in Malaysia, whose responsible fishing efforts are supported by MBS under this new partnership.

The four aquaculture farms were selected for their commitment to greater sustainability, and three of them are expected to attain Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) certification by 2020.

In 2018, the integrated resort will launch a new Responsible Harvest Menu serving sustainable seafood options, made in collaboration with WWF.

By 2020, it aims to host more than 200 green events that adopt sustainable packages and offerings endorsed by WWF.

By 2018, MBS aims to have 70 per cent of its top 10 priority seafood species procured from sources certified by Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) and ASC, and to attain 100 per cent by 2020.

In the same year, it also aims to responsibly source 50 per cent of all its seafood by volume, amounting to an estimated two million kilogrammes of responsibly sourced seafood.

Asia consumes two-thirds of the global fish catch, with Singapore's per capita seafood consumption of 22 kg exceeding the global average of 20 kg, as reported by the FAO (2014) the State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture and WWF report (2016).

Ian Wilson, senior vice president, hotel operations, MBS, told *TTG Show Daily* in an interview: "By partnering with a conservation leader like WWF, we have a tremendous opportunity to drive change through our supply chain and reach a global audience.

As the largest hotel in Singapore, we operate at a scale like no other hospitality entity... we are now positively shaping the choices our consumers make."

He added that in the future, MBS plans to extend support beyond sustainable aquaculture to "different food groups including poultry, fruit and vegetables", with further aid of "the technical skill of WWF".

This collaboration falls under MBS' ongoing global sustainability strategy Sands ECO360°, under which the integrated resort has ceased serving seafood from WWF's Seafood Guide's "Avoid" red list.

MBS struck shark's fin off the menu of all of its restaurants and business events in 2014, and currently procures all of its salmon, tilapia, prawns, mussels, lobsters and oysters from sustainable sources.



Wilson: shaping diners' choice

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From left: Grand Copthorne Waterfront's Gilbert Ong, TTG's Shirley Tan, Grand Copthorne Waterfront's Cheong Hai Poh, TTG's Ar-lene Lee, and Maison Du Whisky's Mauricio Allende



## Expedia investment fuels Traveloka's growth

By Mimi Hudoyo

Traveloka, Indonesia's leading travel booking app for domestic and international destinations, is channelling fresh funds from an Expedia investment into system and product development.

The five-year-old start-up was the recent recipient of a US\$350 million investment from Expedia, made in exchange for a minor share in Traveloka.

Henry Hendrawan, chief financial officer of Traveloka, said: "We would be hiring more engineers (and) developing centres of excellence in more parts of South-east Asia."

The company currently has offices in Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia, and intends to "increase the scale and quality of talents" in these operations as part of overall expansion.

In terms of product development,

Traveloka is looking at bringing alternative accommodation into its future offerings. This will follow its latest provision of tourist activities available in Indonesia as well as improving the app interface to allow customers to change their bookings with ease.

Henry said Expedia's involvement will also allow Traveloka to learn from the former's experience in global operations, and in selling products across different verticals.

On the other hand, Expedia gains from Traveloka the experience in working in a complex technology environment.

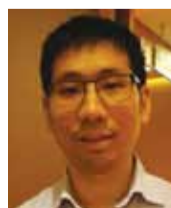
He explained: "Indonesia's Internet connection is not as fast and stable as her neighbours. The variety of handsets being used by consumers add to the complexity

of product design.

"Furthermore, our partners like hotels and airlines also use various systems, many of which are not up to date, making it difficult to provide a reliable connection. As well, payment systems are unstable and were not built for large-scale transactions."

He continued: "Being able to work with a platform that can target local consumers in South-east Asia's challenging ecosystem is tough, but that's where Traveloka's forte lies. Expedia could develop (a system to tackle this ecosystem) but it will need massive efforts and a long time.

"We, however, live in this ecosystem and we have invested in the technology and engineering power to solve these problems," Henry concluded.



Henry: mutually beneficial





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## News

# Longhaul confidence

German, French, Polish arrivals up for Malaysian agents who are pulling in demand on their own through sales calls, marketing

By S Puvaneswary

Inbound agents in Malaysia who handle longhaul markets from Europe and North America have seen a growth in business this year and have forecasted further growth in 2018, despite various setbacks.

Malaysia lost key connections to Europe when Malaysia Airlines ceased flights to Frankfurt, Amsterdam and Paris last year.

Diethelm Travel Malaysia's managing director, Manfred Kurz, said: "We saw a slight drop in the German market this year due to the suspension of Malaysia Airlines' flight to Frankfurt. However, business is looking better next year as we have secured new businesses from Eastern Europe."

He elaborated: "We are seeing an increase in travellers from Poland and the Czech Republic. That is why we will be putting more sales efforts into both markets next year. While the numbers are small, we feel it's a good start as we only began marketing there two years ago. In general, Eastern Europeans prefer beach, nature or sightseeing holidays."

For Emir Cherif, managing director of Asian Trails Malaysia, he did not see the lack of direct flights from France and Germany as a hindrance.

"Tourists (from that region) use Middle Eastern carriers, Turkish Airlines and KLM Royal Dutch Airlines to get to Malaysia. Leisure longhaul tourists always try to go on the cheapest flights, and Middle Eastern carriers are always cheaper than direct flights," he explained.

Emir further revealed that business from the German and French markets rose by 15 and 150 per cent year-on-year respectively. The increase in both markets was partly due to new accounts, as well as the weakened ringgit against the euro, which was an incentive for travellers to visit Malaysia.



Tourists enjoying a trishaw ride in Penang, Malaysia

However, Emir said it was a challenge scoring longhaul incentives and business events.

"Due to time constraints, event organisers always want direct flights. Hence, Langkawi is usually combined with Singapore for incentives. It is usually two or three nights in Singapore and four or five nights in Langkawi. Singapore is a more expensive destination, so the duration is usually shorter, but it is also the gateway," Emir shared.

He added that the newly implemented tourism tax of RM10 (US\$2.40) per room per night imposed on foreign tourists staying in licensed hotels was not a deterrent as such taxes were a normal practice in Europe.

While Asian Trails Malaysia is new to the Eastern European market, they have welcomed five Polish incentive groups this year averaging in sizes of 70 to 90. Two incentive groups have also been confirmed for 2018.

"Malaysia is a new destination for incentive groups that have already been to Thailand, Vietnam and Bali in Indonesia. A combination of Kuala Lumpur (capital city) and Langkawi (beach destination) have proven popular,"

said Emir.

Aside from the loss in flight connections, Tourism Malaysia also shut its two full-fledged US offices in New York and Los Angeles this year, three years after Malaysia Airlines withdrew from the North American market.

As such, agents feel that there is a lack of awareness about Malaysia in that market.

When asked what he was doing to get business from North America, Emir said he had made sales rounds in Los Angeles and Vancouver and had attended a recent event in Las Vegas to secure association meetings.

Diethelm Travel Malaysia is also taking it upon itself to engage the North American market, according to Kurz.

"We opened a sales office in Los Angeles this year to look after the North American market," he shared, adding that he is therefore certain that business from the US will "definitely increase" in 2018.

"While the volume is small, this is a market with high potential. US travellers are upmarket, they stay in five-star hotels, enjoy culture, history and getting in touch with the locals," he said.

## UNICEO picks Singapore as Asia headquarters, partners ITB Asia for boost

By Karen Yue

The United Networks of International Corporate Events Organizers (UNICEO) will establish its Asia headquarters in Singapore come 2018 and through it, expand its presence in the region it now regards as "the most strategic market in the next decade".

In an interview with *TTG Show Daily*, UNICEO's CEO Laurent Fuchs said Singapore "was a natural choice, taking into account that we already have UNICEO members here".

Fuchs shared that other Asian cities such as Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Shanghai and Hong Kong were also considered for the Asia headquarters. Although the decision was in favour of Singapore, these cities "might be future hubs in our development", he said.

Detailing plans for the Asia headquarters, Fuchs said: "First, we will start organising our Leaders Meeting periodically in Singapore and grow the network here as well as in Malaysia, with Kuala Lumpur being very easy to reach. We will also develop (our reach in) Thailand and China."

At present, UNICEO's membership is strongest in Europe,

with the region contributing more than 70 per cent of members. Asia-Pacific membership makes up only 10 per cent.

"Our decision to set up an Asia headquarters is a strategic and necessary move to grow our Asia-Pacific membership to 20 per cent," he remarked.

Fuchs elaborated on what that meant for UNICEO members: "Asia-Pacific is a booming

area in several aspects – growing population, economic development and technological innovations. UNICEO is running as a Community of Practice where members share (intelligence) to create better events. The combined experience and approaches of both Asia-Pacific and European members can only be profitable for the network."

He added that UNICEO would rely on local members' expertise to identify pockets of business growth that its members can take advantage of.

As part of UNICEO's move to go deeper into Asia-Pacific, the organisation has also inked its first-ever partnership with ITB Asia. A delegation of UNICEO leaders will be attending ITB Asia 2017 where they will conduct two masterclasses.



Fuchs: necessary move to grow APAC

### IN BRIEF

#### Skyline Luge's new thrills

Skyline Enterprises has pumped S\$14 million (US\$10.3 million) into its Skyline Luge attraction in Sentosa, Singapore, adding two new Luge tracks, and a new Skyride.

At the Imbiah Station starting point, riders can choose to ride the new 658m-long Expedition and 638m-long Kupu Kupu (Butterfly in Malay) trails, or the other two tracks.

Another addition is Skyride, which spans 315 metres, offering views of Sentosa, the city skyline

and South China Sea on a four-seater chairlift.

#### Wyndham grows portfolio

Wyndham Hotel Group has expanded its upscale offerings across Indonesia and Vietnam with five hotel signings under the Wyndham Hotels and Resorts and Wyndham Grand brands, adding 3,585 rooms to the company's portfolio.

The additions will be in Palembang and Bali in Indonesia, and Cam Ranh and Nha Trang in Vietnam.

## Beefing up guest experiences with robots and upgrades

In order to score more travellers, hotels must become accustomed to offering complimentary upgrades to loyal customers, and supplement guest relations with technologically innovative service.

This is what Lee Richards, vice president of operations, Singapore, Millennium Hotels and Resorts (MHR), told *TTG Show Daily*, adding that the hospitality industry can learn from travel players such as airlines.

"No domestic US airline today would allow first-class cabin seats to go empty," observed Richards. "These seats would always be offered to their loyal customers at no charge, in return for their loyalty."

He added that this strategy has the potential to "attract even the budget travellers" to more upscale properties.

Richards opined: "I think even a budget traveller can enjoy the (perks of staying in a) luxury hotel when hotels begin to realise that unoccupied premium rooms should not be left vacant."

MHR's loyalty guest programme My Millennium offers guests perks such as complimentary stays, exclusive member privileges, and dining and lifestyle treats. In addition to providing loyalty privileges, MHR has also adopted technology to en-

hance its guest services.

Richards revealed that M Social Singapore uses AURA (Automated Room-Service Associate), a delivery robot that brings bottled water, extra towels and amenities to guestrooms.

The first front-of-house autonomous service delivery robot in South-east Asia's hotel industry, AURA can also call for the elevator, contact guests on their room phone and give way to visitors.

MHR plans to introduce AURA to the rest of its Singapore hotels by 1Q2018, as



Richards: innovate for better service

well as the new AUSCA (Automated Service Chef Associate) – which can cook different types of eggs – by mid-2018.

Richards shared: "We are not replacing people with robots or technology. Instead, we want to use technology to further enhance our services."

He explained that AURA can also improve employee productivity by taking over "time-consuming and non-urgent tasks", while giving guests a memorable experience by delivering an "occasional surprise gift" to their doorstep.

"Technology and innovation is crucial for the future of hospitality," he concluded. – Pamela Chow



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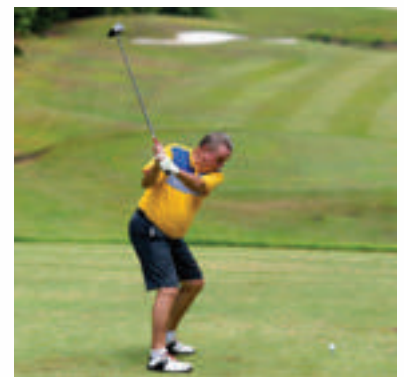
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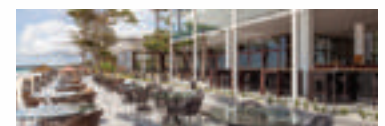
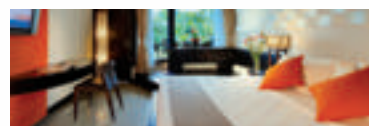
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## In the spotlight

# The real Muslim travel niche

Tourism suppliers should not write off Muslim millennial travellers. Raudha Zaini, who spearheads the Mastercard-CrescentRating research project launching at the Halal-In-Travel Summit during ITB Asia, tells Yixin Ng why



From left: Muslim girls enjoy a train ride from Thailand's Kanchanaburi train station; a lone female traveller explores Japan

### What would you say to travel suppliers who still regard the Muslim travel market as niche?

The Muslim Travel Market already represents around 10 per cent of the global travel market, (and hence) is not really a niche market. In fact, in terms of international visitor arrivals, it is as big as the Chinese outbound market.

Factors such as the growth of the overall population, the middle class and the younger demographics make it extremely important for travel suppliers to have a strategy to cater to them. It will be very difficult to ignore their needs as the market continues to grow.

### The spotlight is on Muslim millennials at this year's Halal in Travel Summit. What does focusing on a "segment within segment" say about the weight that Muslim millennials have in travel?

While the bulk of our research up until now has (chiefly) focused on the size of the overall Muslim market, over the years we have discovered the importance of understanding the different sub-segments of the market. The two main segments of the market are family travellers and the growing sub-segment of Muslim millennials.

More than 55 per cent of the Muslim population is under 30 years old and in the next few years, they will represent a considerable bulk of Muslim travellers.

And it is not just millennials, but increasingly even the Gen Z, who are becoming hugely influential as decision-makers during travel planning. In the past, first-generation parents of Muslim millennial travellers typically engaged travel agents to coordinate their travel plans. However, with the increase in accessibility to online information and ease of purchase, it is now their children who take on the role.

All considered, it is becoming very important for travel suppliers to understand and predict the travel behaviour of this sub-segment. The *Muslim Millennial Travel* report by Mastercard and HalalTrip

is the first such report looking at this sub-segment.

### What are some interesting findings from the report?

Some early findings reveal that Muslim millennials make travel plans one to six months in advance, and travel at least two to five times a year on average. The numbers illustrate that (even for younger Muslims), travel is not a luxury.

Also, we had initially anticipated that a significant section of Muslim millennials would opt for more affordable accommodation options such as apartments or shared housing, but surprisingly 63 per cent of the responses prefer hotels instead.

There is still much more to learn about this sub-segment and we will continue our research to better comprehend their behavioural patterns. In particular, given the preliminary findings, we have identified engagement at various stages of travel – from planning, booking and to when they are on holiday – as key focus areas. We would like to better understand what triggers Muslim millennials to travel – be it social media or friends or travel websites – and the (different) levels of motivations behind them.

We believe it is about (delving past) the surface to gain an in-depth understanding of how being a Muslim millennial fits into the overall travel experience.

### What destinations have been successful in appealing to novelty-seeking Muslim millennial travellers and why?

We think the obstacle (in the way of more unconventional destinations) is not in the lack of Muslim-friendly amenities but the lack of knowledge about the needs of the Muslim travel segment. More needs to be done to educate smaller businesses offering localised and exotic experiences.

(Take for example) the non-Muslim majority countries gaining popularity among Muslim millennials, namely Japan and South Korea. These destinations

have implemented strategies to cater to this market such as making available Halal food and prayer places at some attractions.

### How can hotels, travel agencies and destinations be more successful in winning over the Muslim travel market?

It often is not about creating new facilities but improving current ones. At the very basic level, it (comes down to) providing easy access to Halal food and prayer places, etc.

But it is also about getting discovered and having an online presence during the trip planning stages, (taking into account) Muslim millennials' penchant for direct online bookings for flights and transport.

For travel agencies, this signals a strong need to adapt to the digitisation of travel in order to cater to such prevalent travel trends. Traditional travel agents not only need to embrace technology wholeheartedly, but also equip their organisation with talents who can empathise with millennial (mindsets). With their finger on the pulse of Muslim millennials, they will be able to instantly react and adapt to the (constantly) evolving behavior and requirements of this segment.

One challenge is travel agencies are (keeping within traditional boundaries), even though we see in some of our early findings that Muslim millennials prefer FIT arrangements (70 per cent) as opposed to fully packaged tours (four per cent). Travel suppliers need to better understand the behaviour and travel planning process of various traveller profiles, including family travellers, young couples and Muslim millennials.

### What does the future look like for Muslim travel?

Muslim millennials will be the driving force in global Muslim travel. They will have a huge impact on how travel innovates and

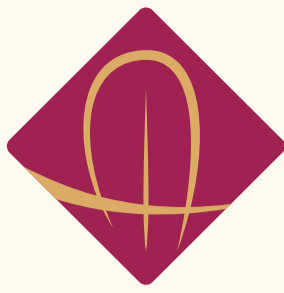
strategises to cater to them, which would benefit the broader industry. (To give an idea of innovation already at work), at HalalTrip, we have seen an interest in themed retreats, such as the Productive Muslim retreat we did last year. We are planning to launch a few such activities next year. We notice a lot of interest in our HalalTrip mobile app features, such as Inflight Prayer Times, Nearby Halal Food and Nearby tools.

Travel restrictions will not stop Muslims from exploring destinations where they feel safe and welcomed. It is key to educate travel stakeholders in the destination on the potential of the Muslim market and what their needs are. Once there is a good understanding, facilities and services catering to their needs will follow.



Raudha Zaini  
Marketing manager, Halal Trip





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## In the spotlight

# US extends a warm welcome

President Trump throws a spanner in the works for Brand USA, which has been promoting the US as a friendly destination. The task has become even more important, Brand USA head Chris Thompson, tells [Raini Hamdi](#)

**Given that this is the first administration change since Brand USA started operations in 2011, what does it mean for you?**

Every president contemplates changes in policies. President Trump is focusing on policies that in many ways could have an impact on travel and tourism but what we're dealing with is a perception issue.

**How so?**

There has been a lot of conversations by the president and the members of his administration on proposed changes. But the reality is everything that has made the US an aspirational destination all these years, (has not) changed. As a matter of fact, the brands that deliver the product – the hotels, retail attractions and experiences – are finding new ways to innovate themselves; the people who deliver the experiences, i.e. the US citizens, open their arms to visitors. None of that has changed.

**What is the impact?**

Based on indicators such as paid search, travel to the US has softened (since the election and new administration). Advanced bookings in some situations are down. Actual (figures) from the Department of Commerce are five to six months behind so until those actual numbers come in, what we have is anecdotal.

My colleagues were at ITB Berlin and many of the conversations they had with leading operators in Germany showed that they were holding par to the prior year or were having a record year. That's just one market, one indication.

We also hear from partners. Arne (Sorenson, CEO of Marriott International), who is on our board, said they have not yet seen actual effect.

But no matter how any market is reacting to the political sentiments, the thing that has most affected our ability to attract year over year numbers from a lot of markets is currency exchange. The strong dollar has had a major impact on many of our major markets.

**Is this one of your bigger campaigns, to address the perception vs reality issue?**

It was already in the works prior to election, not designed at all to address the election, rather it's our attempt to promote the nature of the destination, i.e. its diversity, the people who deliver the experiences and the US people as a whole. The whole foundation is a welcoming message.

That, and what we're doing in corporate communications, which is communicating accurate and timely policy changes to visa and entry policies, making sure people understand what has actually

changed vs what has been talked about or contemplated, are both going to help us.

**Is there a role for travel agent?**

Absolutely. The way we market is direct to consumer, such as this campaign. The second way is through the relationships we have with the travel trade. Even in mature markets like Japan, there's still a very active travel trade network that helps us facilitate travel to the US.

Many traditional visitors learn about the US through the travel trade and even though the Internet has enabled them to get first-hand information on their fingertips, a lot of them still use the travel trade.

The younger generation is probably slanting towards the Internet but many of them still use travel agents particularly if it's the first time they are visiting the US, to guarantee the quality of the visit. They might do their own research but call the agents to facilitate the travel.

So the travel trade still plays a critical role. We have 13 offices worldwide and it is those offices on the ground that help us facilitate the relationships with the trade.

**You talked about the friendly message. But the first impression people tend to get, i.e. at customs, is unfriendliness.**

Hospitality and security aren't mutually exclusive. How do you introduce hospital-

ity into a process-oriented (patrol)? We've had those conversations. I'd say though it's gotten better than five, 10 years ago.

**A wish for president Trump?**

Keep travel and tourism as a high priority, based on its contribution both economically and diplomatically. We know security is a real threat and the decisions they make are the ones we have to trust. And when policy is changed to protect our borders, it also makes for a more secure place for our visitors. But while we are against terrorism, we are all for legitimate travel too.

**Chris Thompson**  
President/CEO,  
Brand USA



# Worldly dreams are fulfilled

A hotel portfolio expansion in Asia-Pacific and beyond has enabled Pan Pacific Hotels Group's brands to gain prominence among travellers. [Karen Yue](#) hears the story from Cinn Tan, the company's new marketing chief

**How big is Pan Pacific Hotels Group (PPHG) coming into ITB Asia this year?**

PPHG has been participating in ITB Asia every year since 2012 and see it as one of the best platforms for us to meet top buyers from the region. This year, we are delighted to be a Preferred Hotel Partner, where we have an added opportunity to showcase our five hotels in Singapore.

**What is the one key message PPHG intends to convey to ITB Asia buyers?**

Strengthening our reputation as a Singapore-owned regional hospitality chain which is known for excellence. This drives everything that we do, and extends beyond our product to our service. Buyers can count on us as a trusted brand to deliver product quality and service excellence, as well as seamless efficiency and flexibility when it comes to serving their needs.

**Where does PPHG stand today in Asia-Pacific, in terms of properties?**

Of the 40 properties in our portfolio including those in the pipeline, 35 of them are in Asia-Pacific. Having set our sights on expanding our footprint in this region, we had debuted three properties here this year alone! Pan Pacific Beijing and Pan Pacific Melbourne were launched last quarter and we're opening Pan Pacific Yangon next month.

In December, we're unveiling a completely transformed Parkroyal Penang Resort, Malaysia. I'm also excited about the entry of our Pan Pacific

brand in Johor, Malaysia with Pan Pacific Serviced Suites Puteri Harbour next year.

**And beyond Asia-Pacific?**

I'm really looking forward to Pan Pacific London, which will mark our foray into the UK in 2020. Designed by a renowned hospitality architectural firm, Pan Pacific London will be our flagship hotel located in Bishopsgate, London's financial district, and also within walking distance to Liverpool Street train station. Pan Pacific London's 237 hotel and 160 luxury residence keys will be housed within a 43-storey premium mixed-use development complete with retail and lifestyle offerings.

**Which source markets will excel for PPHG in 2018, and why?**

The opening of Pan Pacific Melbourne has boosted our presence in Australia and made it one of our largest operating markets with five properties presently. More Australians are choosing to holiday at home and this has boosted domestic tourism, while the number of overseas arrivals to Australia has been climbing. In particular, tourist arrival numbers from China has more than doubled to 1.3 million trips in the last five years and will surpass that of New Zealand, the reigning feeder market, by 2020.

**Are there new source markets PPHG is looking to dive into?**

We have been intensifying efforts in key markets Hong Kong, (South) Korea and the UK. In fact, our Global Sales Office in Hong Kong has opened just this month!

We have seen a growth in awareness and interest for our brands in (South) Korea through the efforts of our Global Sales Office in Japan and dedicated platforms such as the annual Customer Connection Week, and will continue to build on that.

Last but not least, we will dive deeper into the UK by exploring ways to bolster our sales presence in the market, while the opening of Pan Pacific London will help our Pan Pacific brand gain more prominence.

**Will partnerships with travel agents be part of the plan?**

Travel agents are our customers as much as they are our partners, and their customer experience matters to us. To enhance that, we are exploring technology improvements such as automated processes which will make the booking flow more efficiently and seamlessly for our travel partners. They can also look forward to enhanced support from our Global Sales teams, as we continue to expand our reach into new markets.



**Cinn Tan**  
Chief sales & marketing officer, Pan  
Pacific Hotels Group





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## Analysis



# Big data with a personal touch

In the age of Internet of Things, is data the holy grail for travel companies to win the personalisation war? **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena** finds out where the industry stands in using data, its struggles and what the future might hold

**W**ith rapid advancement in digital and mobile technology, more travel companies are awakening to the massive potential of using data to unlock possibilities in providing seamless, personalised customer experience.

Those who are able to leverage millions of travel data points will possess a “huge competitive advantage”, Hotelbeds’ managing director Carlos Muñoz told *TTG Show Daily* in a one-on-one interview during its MarketHub Asia event in Bangkok in May. Having access to such information will allow companies to manipulate the “emotional” aspects of travellers by shaping their customer behaviour and maximising their spending potential, he noted.

Earlier at the WTTC Global Summit in Bangkok in April, AirAsia CEO Tony Fernandes also played up the importance of data in the travel and tourism sector.

“The data explosion will decrease cost and increase revenue, and gives fantastic opportunities for airlines. That excites me tremendously,” he enthused.

But for travel to be personalised down to the individual level, data insights have to go beyond their current use and adaptation.

Even for Hotelbeds, a global bedbank with more than 136,000 hotels worldwide, Muñoz still sees significant gaps in harnessing the sheer volume of data available.

“Our clients have given us huge amount of data,” he shared. “We are using only five per cent of this data so there is a lot of improvement.”

Albert Pozo, president, Amadeus Asia-Pacific, added: “Data on its own will mean very little. We’ll also need systems that are clever and agile enough to integrate them and make sense of them – turning them into immediate, actionable insights... I think we’re only at the early stages of what could be a fully interconnected industry.”

The ability of data to transform the travel industry cannot be understated, although Pozo stressed that “it is not data itself that is the holy grail – but the analytical capabilities and technology we layer on top of it, and how well it is integrated into business processes. The possibilities are endless”.

### Swimming in a sea of data

Bangkok-based DMC Asian Trails has also caught up in the data rip tide, having taken advantage of information on the behaviour of clients and consumers to form its marketing and business strategies.

E-commerce and marketing manager Niels Steeman told *TTG Show Daily*:

“Asian Trails regularly uses analytic sources on our digital marketing channels, Google Analytics and other online applications to seek out trends and our success rate online. I believe that the availability of such data becomes an even more crucial part of the travel business.”

He added: “Looking back barely a decade ago when statistics were hardly available, we are now able to see the response of those showing interest in our products and how they read this. This mainly has been a positive feat with the shift from off to online marketing channels and the ongoing development in the analytics part.”

The digital revolution, however, also brings with it an explosive surge in the variety and quantity of data available, so much so that Steeman dubbed data analysis “a time-consuming and a speciality field”.

He elaborated: “The amount of data available is simply overwhelming and one cannot go and invest into additional resources unless you have a clear image of what you’re after.”

Trying to make sense of data is hardly unique to Asian Trails; even large OTA players like Rakuten Travel, one of the biggest hotel reservation websites in Japan, also see hurdles in effective data utilisation.

Said Hirofumi Haraguchi, vice manager, business strategy group at the OTA’s international sales department: “Data is very important for Rakuten, as we have a huge e-commerce marketplace in Japan with over 80 businesses in our portfolio. However, customer demands are very diversified today so we need to use data better. We’re not maximising the use of data yet, and finding skilled personnel to manipulate data into meaningful insights is a challenge.”

Noel Swain, COO of Ezeego1, deemed data analytics a “learning process” for the India-based OTA, which has put in place associates across various departments instead of a specific team to build a more complete insights picture.

But “the overload of data is quite real” and the challenge lies in figuring which of the immense data Ezeego receives to use, added Swain, but he foresees the company will get better at parsing information into useful insights in future.

Some industry players also share that current data insights are better catered to the B2C travel market, as B2B players still grapple with gleaning meaning from the vast sea of information available.

For B2B OTA Aviation Services Mongolia, currently in the early stages of devel-

oping a data analytics strategy, the uphill task lies in getting information from its agents about their end-consumers, according to CEO Margad Byambajav.

If unstructured sources of customer data could be better leveraged for his portal, he foresees being able to help agents narrow down hotel choices in a destination to offer more targeted and personalised recommendations for their clients.

It’s a similar story for Asian Trails, as Steeman sees data analytics “remaining

It is not data itself that is the holy grail – but the analytical capabilities and technology we layer on top of it, and how well it is integrated into business processes. The possibilities are endless.

**Albert Pozo**  
President, Amadeus Asia-Pacific

very much focused on B2C/B2B2C channels than B2B channels”. Learning how to interpret available data and actively turn them into actionable insights and strategies may be the biggest challenges for DMCs, he opined.

### Not big but smart data

No one will be able to capture and analyse data from the future, but predictive analytics – i.e. applying the right statistical models to gain insights and find patterns in a vast amount of data – is getting the attention of more big data specialists and travel businesses alike.

Hotelbeds’ sales director Sam Turner spotlighted the accelerating pace of change in the digital world today. “By 2020 the world will produce 40 zettabytes, up from 0.1 zettabytes in 2001, a 400 times difference. It’s not the size (of data) but

what you do with it,” he said, adding that the effective data analytics can improve profitability for companies. “The analytics journey in the new world is going to be the prescriptive way, instead of descriptive.”

Echoing Turner’s view, Hotelbeds’ marketing & communications director Gareth Matthews added that predictive analytics has many potential applications in the travel industry, such as making airport delay predictions by combining weather, flight and traveller information.

But the current biggest hurdle to personalised service for companies lies in the lack of resources connecting different data sets, say, between a user’s frequent flyer programme and social media profile, pointed out Ming Foong, managing director Greater China & online business group, Asia-Pacific at Travelport.

Looking ahead, merging predictive analytics with artificial intelligence (AI) and matching learning capabilities appear to excite many trade players and industry watchers.

Amadeus’ Pozo elaborated: “Combined with AI, travel companies can use data analytics to create highly-tailored offers based on customers’ needs and preferences. Past behaviours can obviously feed AI computers to predict future purchase actions. But deep learning algorithms can help travel companies make the most out of their customer’s online activities... AI will also bring customised suggestions during the trip based on a traveller’s profile, location, time, and many other parameters and data that algorithms will process. This will take us into the future of ultra-personalisation.”

At the same time, Pozo insisted on maintaining a careful balance against rising privacy concerns in the pursuit of getting more information from travellers.

“Some boundaries must be maintained and at all times we must respect and protect personal data and the need for privacy. If we take this for granted we risk losing the trust of customers. And above and beyond adhering to legislation, travel players must also be able to articulate ‘what’s the value?’ for getting travellers to share their data,” he cautioned.

But Steve Saxon, partner, McKinsey & Company, reminded the industry not to lose sight of people – the critical factor that determines the success of data utilisation. “We need to think not just about data but how to embed data within the company culture,” he said.

“The power of the people is more important than the power of data,” Saxon concluded.



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## Feature Integrated resorts

# A wonderland for events

Event-friendly integrated resorts can take operational pressures off planners' back. *TTG Show Daily* sniffs out some of the region's best integrated resorts for business events and checks out their varied facilities



MGM Cotai (above); NagaWorld, Phnom Penh

### CAMBODIA

By Marissa Carruthers

#### NagaWorld, Phnom Penh

**STAY** Spanning almost 112,000m<sup>2</sup>, NagaWorld in the Cambodian capital city boasts more than 700 suites and deluxe rooms of eight room types.

**HOST** NagaWorld has a dedicated team of event experts as well as a collection of venues that are able to support all events. The Grand Ballroom, constructed by international designers based on global standards and best practices for business events, can accommodate more than 1,000 delegates. A smaller ballroom can take up to 500 guests while an additional five meeting rooms are ideal for 50 to 60 guests each. More spaces are offered in the form of NagaWorld Auditorium theatre and an exhibition hall. Inhouse event experts can also plan itineraries for groups, taking in some of the city's top activities and sights.

**PLAY** NagaWorld offers an array of entertainment highlights, including top international clubs, a karaoke lounge and rooftop pool bar with amazing views of the Mekong River. Entertainment options range from traditional Khmer cultural performances and local and international live bands to customised lineups catering to planners' requirements.

**FEAST** There are 18 world-class restaurants serving a variety of international cuisines. Personalised menus can also be done.

**DO GOOD** CSR is deeply rooted in NagaWorld's culture, with programmes made available to corporate groups. The focus on education, environmental, social welfare and sports development and awareness. Green actions include city clean-up days, tree planting activities, waste collec-



tion management and Reduce, Reuse and Recycle programmes with the schools in provincial areas.

Watch this space NagaWorld is finalising its expansion project, which is slated for completion in 4Q2017. The expansion will double the hotel capacity and add a host of new facilities, such as F&B outlets, a luxury spa and business event facilities with a 2,000-plus theatre seating capacity. NagaCity Walk, an underground retail walkway connecting NagaWorld to the new property, offers duty-free shopping and is Phnom Penh's first underground shopping mall.

### MACAU

By Prudence Lui

#### MGM Cotai

**STAY** Opening in 4Q2017, MGM Cotai presents 1,390 rooms and suites. The ultra-luxurious Skylofts and Mansion Villas are new room categories MGM will bring to Asia.

**HOST** All meeting rooms promise beautiful views and natural light. The Spectacle's undulating glass ceiling lets in maximum daylight and comes with climate control,

ensuring a comfortable event rain or shine. In addition, planners may have an opportunity to book an exclusive event in the Mansion courtyard which replicates a Moroccan private garden.

**PLAY** MGM Cotai will house Asia's first dynamic theatre which can take more than 10 different seat configurations with just a push of a button. While it will have a resident show in the evening, the theatre is open for private hire in the day and can accommodate up to 2,000 people.

**FEAST** The property entices with nine restaurants and bars that cater to all price points. In the collection are restaurants helmed by well-known names such as Mauro Colagreco, Mitsuharu Tsumura, Graham Elliot and Janice Wong. Planners may also host their events by buying out celebrity chef-run restaurants and have exclusive menus tailored for their group.

### MALAYSIA

By S Puvaneswary

#### Resorts World Genting

**STAY** Resorts World Genting has 10,000 rooms ranging from budget to five-star. Maxims Hotel and Genting Grand are

five-star properties, while Resort Hotel, Awana Genting and Hotel On The Park take four stars. The three-star First World Hotel is the biggest hotel in the complex and in the world with 7,315 keys.

**HOST** Genting International Convention Centre boasts the largest column-free hall in Malaysia for up to 3,500 delegates in theatre style. There are also 18 meeting rooms which can accommodate up to 800 people. Arena of Stars, which can seat 5,200 people in theatre style, makes a great venue for an opening gala.

**PLAY** The five-storey Sky Avenue mall is heaven for shopaholics. More retail therapy options will come when Genting Highlands Premium Outlets opens in 2Q2017 opposite Awana Resort & Golf Course. It will house around 150 designer and brand name stores.

**FEAST** Private dining with entertainment provided by Resorts World Genting as well as themed dinners can be arranged in a variety of venues, including those within Genting International Convention Centre and the hotels. For unique dining events, planners can pick Chin Swee Caves Temple and a natural rainforest setting at Awana Genting. As well, the new Sky Avenue Mall offers more than 100 F&B outlets, which makes interesting dine-arounds possible.

**WATCH THIS SPACE** The world's first Twentieth Century Fox World theme park is scheduled to open by end-2017.

### PHILIPPINES

By Rosa Ocampo

#### City of Dreams Manila

**STAY** City of Dreams Manila offers 937 keys across Crown Towers, which features only suites and villas with exclusive butler service; Nobu Hotel, which is celebrity-inspired and fun; and the modern, restful Hyatt City of Dreams Manila.

**HOST** The Grand Ballroom seats up to 600 for banquets and 900 for theatre-style events. There are also two boardrooms with built-in screens and other fixtures. Complimentary Internet connection and standard meeting requirements are offered, as well as the services of a designated Meeting Butler.

**PLAY** City of Dreams Manila continues its vision and reputation in delivering spectacular Asia-inspired entertainment by featuring four distinctive entertainment venues: DreamPlay by DreamWorks, the world's first DreamWorks-inspired interactive play space; CenterPlay, a contemporary entertainment bar on the gaming floor, with live performances from top local artists; Chaos, a unique night club situated in the Fortune Egg dome-like structure; and KTV at Chaos at the upper level of Chaos, designed for singing parties of 10 to 30 pax.

Each of the three hotels feature cutting edge fitness centres.

Shops at The Boulevard is home to some of the world's most sought-after brands for indulgent retail therapy.

**FEAST** More than 20 restaurants come together to guarantee exquisite gastronomic experiences, including Crystal Dragon for premium Cantonese and regional Chinese specialities; Nobu for new



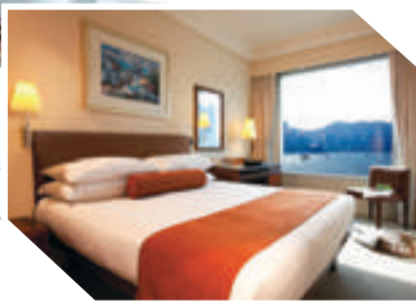
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## Feature Integrated resorts

style Japanese-South American fusion flavours; and Hide Yamamoto for fresh seafood right from Tokyo's Tsukiji market and quality Japanese Wagyu beef.

**DO GOOD** Corporate groups can join City of Dreams Manila employees in volunteering their time and services in charitable and civic institutions. Among these are building homes and rehabilitation for indigent communities; tree planting, coastal cleanup and other environmental activities; Red Cross blood donation drive; and visit to orphanages, homes for the elderly and nursing homes

**WATCH THIS SPACE** Ayala Mall will open across the street from City of Dreams in about two years' time, and will be connected to the integrated resort by an indoor pedestrian bridge.



From left: City of Dreams Manila; Resorts World Sentosa

### SINGAPORE

By Karen Yue

#### Marina Bay Sands

**STAY** Marina Bay Sands takes in 2,561 guestrooms across three towers.

**HOST** The 120,000m<sup>2</sup> Marina Sands EXPO and Convention Centre takes in exhibition halls across basement two and level one, and ballrooms and meeting rooms across levels three through five. The Sands Grand Ballroom on level five can accommodate a 9,225-pax reception.

**PLAY** Marina Bay Sands' MasterCard Theatres is a reputable destination where world-class performances are staged. The architecturally stunning ArtScience Museum showcases an ever-changing line-up of fascinating exhibitions. Other attractions here include Spectra, a new light and water show at the Event Plaza along the promenade; the SkyPark Observation Deck; an indoor ice-skating rink; and sampan rides down the artificial river that flows through The Shoppes where strings of high-end boutiques can be found.

**FEAST** There are nine speciality restaurants under one roof, seven of which are helmed by the world's finest celebrity chefs. More affordable dining options are also aplenty at Marina Bay Sands, including the hugely popular Rasapura Masters food centre where a dazzling array of eth-

nic Asian flavours are served up.

**DO GOOD** Marina Bay Sands actively helps event planners introduce CSR activities into their programmes. This support is derived from the resort's own successful CSR programme, Sands for Singapore, which sees it contributing to underserved communities in various ways. This is matched by the award-winning Sands ECO360° sustainability programme and Marina Bay Sands' dedication to helping clients push the envelope of their green meetings and set higher environmental standards for their events.

**WATCH THIS SPACE** Continuous refreshments are made to hardware. Guests can look forward to refreshed guestrooms in Towers 1 and 2 by end of 2017. New entertainment venues are also being lined up, such as Lavo, a multi-concept restaurant, lounge bar and night club that will bring a taste of New York nightlife to Singapore.

#### Resorts World Sentosa

**STAY** Within the massive complex stands six hotels with more than 1,500 keys – Festive Hotel, Hard Rock Hotel Singapore (refurbished in December 2016), Hotel Michael, Equarius Hotel, Crockfords Tower and Beach Villas.

**HOST** The Resort World Ballroom can

accommodate up to 6,500 people theatre-style. It is supported by 21 function rooms with capacity for more than 4,300 people. Elsewhere, Hard Rock Hotel and Equarius Hotel offer five and seven function rooms respectively.

**PLAY** Perfect as a one-stop destination for solemn meetings and fun pre/post programmes, Resorts World Sentosa dangles Universal Studios Singapore (which has park buyout options), S.E.A. Aquarium, Adventure Cove Waterpark, Dolphin Island, The Maritime Experiential Museum, Trick Eye Museum and the Royal Albatross sunset cruise.

**FEAST** Three feasting grounds have recently made their debut: Hard Rock Hotel Singapore's Sessions, a three-in-one dining destination; Fratelli Italian restaurant helmed by celebrity chef brothers Enrico and Roberto Cerea from three-Michelin-star Da Vittorio in Lombardy, Italy; and Curate, led by Munich-born Benjamin Halat who blends classic and avant garde culinary techniques with Japanese ingredients. Four other Michelin-star finds also call Resorts World Sentosa home.

**DO GOOD** The integrated resort has been actively supporting clients' charity functions by way of sponsorship.

**WATCH THIS SPACE** Resorts World Convention Centre is undergoing a facelift which includes lighting upgrades, carpet replacement and new fabric for its partition walls.

### THAILAND

By Karen Yue

#### Laguna Phuket

**STAY** Laguna Phuket is home to seven hotels and resorts, including owner Banyan Tree Group's very own brands Banyan Tree, Angsana and Cassia.

**HOST** Planners can use the 1,000-seater Latitude Marquee, in addition to function rooms across the seven hotels and resorts as well as more than 405 hectares of tropical parklands that can also be utilised for corporate events. There is also a team-building grounds with activities provided by Quest Laguna Phuket Adventure.

**PLAY** The award-winning Banyan Tree Phuket Spa Sanctuary can provide welcome retreats for top winners, while the more active event participants may find joy at the 18-hole, par-71 Laguna Golf Phuket. Laguna Phuket also organises its own tours around the destination.

**FEAST** The hotels each boast their own unique collection of F&B outlets, which provide diverse dining experiences for event groups staying on complex.

**DO GOOD** The resort recently launched the Happy Friday – Stay For Good initiative as part of its 30th anniversary celebration this year. A variety of do-good and feel-good activities can be organised for delegates every Friday morning with the resort's Fully Booked! Mobile Learning Centre, a mobile library and classroom. Delegates can also volunteer at Laguna Phuket Kindergarten.

**WATCH THIS SPACE** Dusit Thani Laguna Phuket's South Wing is undergoing a major renovation, while construction of Cassia Phuket is underway. The latter will add almost 200 rooms to the integrated resort's total room inventory. There are also plans to enhance the Canal Shopping Village, one of the centrally-located venues favoured for medium-sized events.

### VIETNAM

By Marissa Carruthers

#### The Grand Ho Tram Strip

**STAY** As the first of a string of planned five-star resorts, The Grand Ho Tram Strip, which opened in 2013, boasts 541 rooms.

**HOST** The convention centre spans 2,200m<sup>2</sup> and comprises the Grand Ballroom, which at 1,296m<sup>2</sup> is one of southern Vietnam's largest pillarless ballrooms. The Grand Ballroom can accommodate up to 1,794 people for a cocktail reception or 900 for a banquet, and is available in a variety of configurations and features state-of-the-art audiovisual equipment. More intimate spaces are available at restaurants, on the beach and by the pool. Additionally, The Bluff Golf Course's indoor banquet hall with a large outdoor patio takes group bookings.

**PLAY** The Bluffs' link-style championship golf course comes with a restaurant, banquet facilities, pro shop and PGA Golf Instruction, while the Grand Premium Outlet boasts a wide range of international high-end brands. Guests can also show off their golden vocals at Jukebox Karaoke.

**FEAST** There are 11 F&B options, ranging from Cantonese and Vietnamese to Western steaks and seafood.

**WATCH THIS SPACE** The Ho Tram Strip will see a series of integrated resorts and residential developments across 400 acres of land. Construction is well underway on The Grand's second tower, which will increase rooms to 1,100 and add a host of new entertainment and activities, including a 2,000-seat amphitheatre, waterpark, numerous F&B outlets and a sky-top lounge. It is slated for completion by end-2017.



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## Intelligence

# Mobile to drive APAC's under-tapped online travel market



Asia-Pacific is one of the fastest-growing online travel markets in 2017, with China a significant growth contributor

particularly on mobile, according to Expedia Affiliate Network (EAN) and Phocuswright's 2017 *Phocus Forward: The Year Ahead in Digital Travel* report.

The research further makes a surprising prediction that in markets like India, Indonesia and Brazil – where desktop habits are less entrenched – it's likely

mobile will overtake desktop bookings more quickly than in the world's most mature online travel markets such as Europe and the US.

Based on report findings, global online travel bookings this year should reach US\$567 billion, up from US\$513 billion in 2016. By 2020, Asia-Pacific is expected to have the largest share of online and overall travel demand, at 37 per cent and 42 per cent respectively.

Much of the region's online travel growth will be led by mobile bookings, particularly in China. More than half (53 per cent) of online travel bookings in China are already made on mobile, based on 2016 data, versus 21 per cent in the US and 25 per cent in the UK.

The surge in mobile bookings are spurred by steep discounts for app-based hotel bookings in a hypercompetitive OTA environment, according to the report.

Now the second-largest individual travel market in the world, China is expected to become the region's most highly penetrated online market this year.

Ariane Gorin, senior vice president and general manager, EAN brand, said: "For travel providers, this research underlines that it's crucial to be present on mobile in Asia-Pacific, and particularly in China, from the early stages of the booking process – this is where young travellers will be inspired, do their research and most likely plan and book their trips.

"Messaging, voice search and artificial intelligence will drive a new wave of mobile innovation which could result in big mobile gains for those businesses which can tap into traveller mobile trends."

Meanwhile, the report revealed that Asia-Pacific is underpenetrated for online air bookings, but it is making fast gains – half of air bookings in the region is projected to be made online by 2020.

As well, in-destination activities are a huge untapped opportunity and the long-tail of providers is finding its way into the global digital travel ecosystem and becoming a priority for travel's biggest players. The value of travel activities in 2016 was US\$46 billion in Asia-Pacific.

## Asian cruise market sails to stronger growth in 2017: CLIA

In 2017, Asia's booming cruise industry saw 10,196 operating days scheduled, a 137 per cent increase from 2013, effectively tripling the total passengers carried from 1.5 million in 2013 to 4.2 million, according to newly released figures from Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA).

Sixty-six cruise ships are being deployed in Asian waters for the year, including five mega ships (more than 3,500 passenger capacity), 13 large (2,000-3,500 passengers), 26 mid-size, 17 seasonal small ships and five seasonal expedition ships. This marks a 53 per cent growth from the 43 ships cruising Asia in 2013.

The report found that Asian travellers predominantly take cruises within the region. Out of the 2,086 sailings scheduled for Asian waters in 2017, 1,992 cruises (95.4 per cent) will remain within Asia, while an additional 94 voyages are scheduled to pass through the region. Total sailings in and through Asia has increased 142 per cent, from 861 cruises and voyages in 2013 to 2,086 in 2017.

In 2016, a total of 3.1 million Asians took cruises, 55 per cent more than in 2015. Of these, 68 per cent or 2.1 million

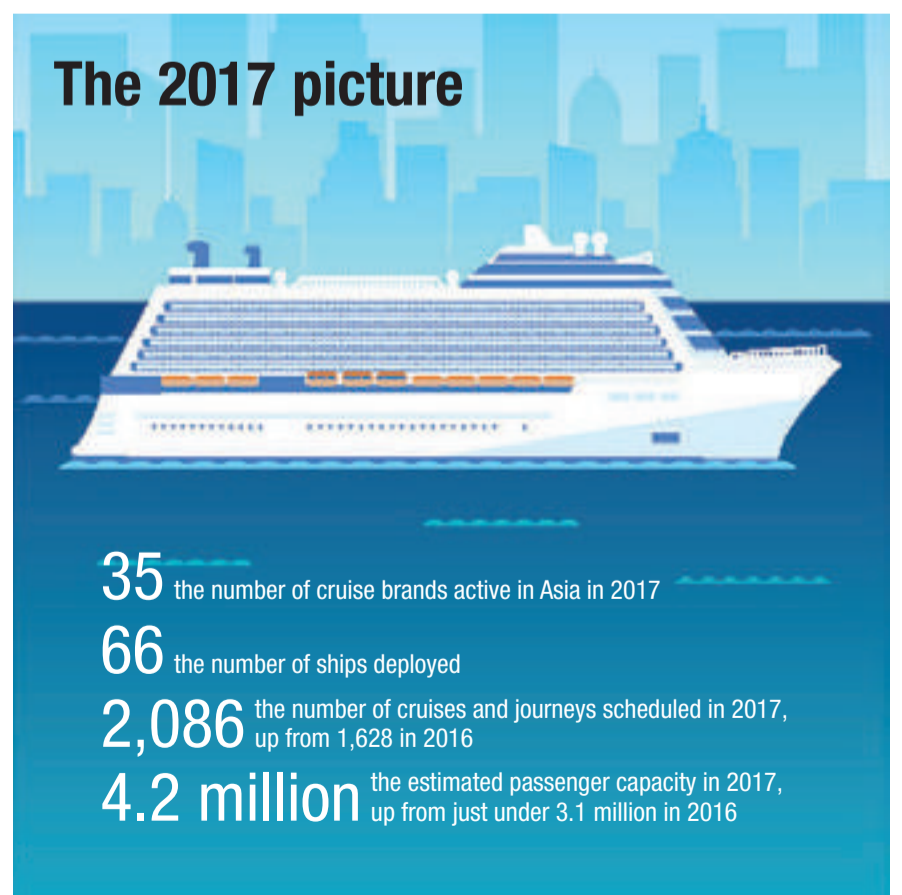
were from China, a market which grew by 99 per cent last year and at a four-year CAGR of 76 per cent, making the country the world's fastest-growing major source of passengers.

Meanwhile, the direct economic contribution of cruise tourism across North Asia last year consisted of US\$3.2 billion in direct expenditures, US\$1.5 billion in value-added goods and services, and 23,697 full- and part-time jobs paying US\$754.5 million in employee compensation.

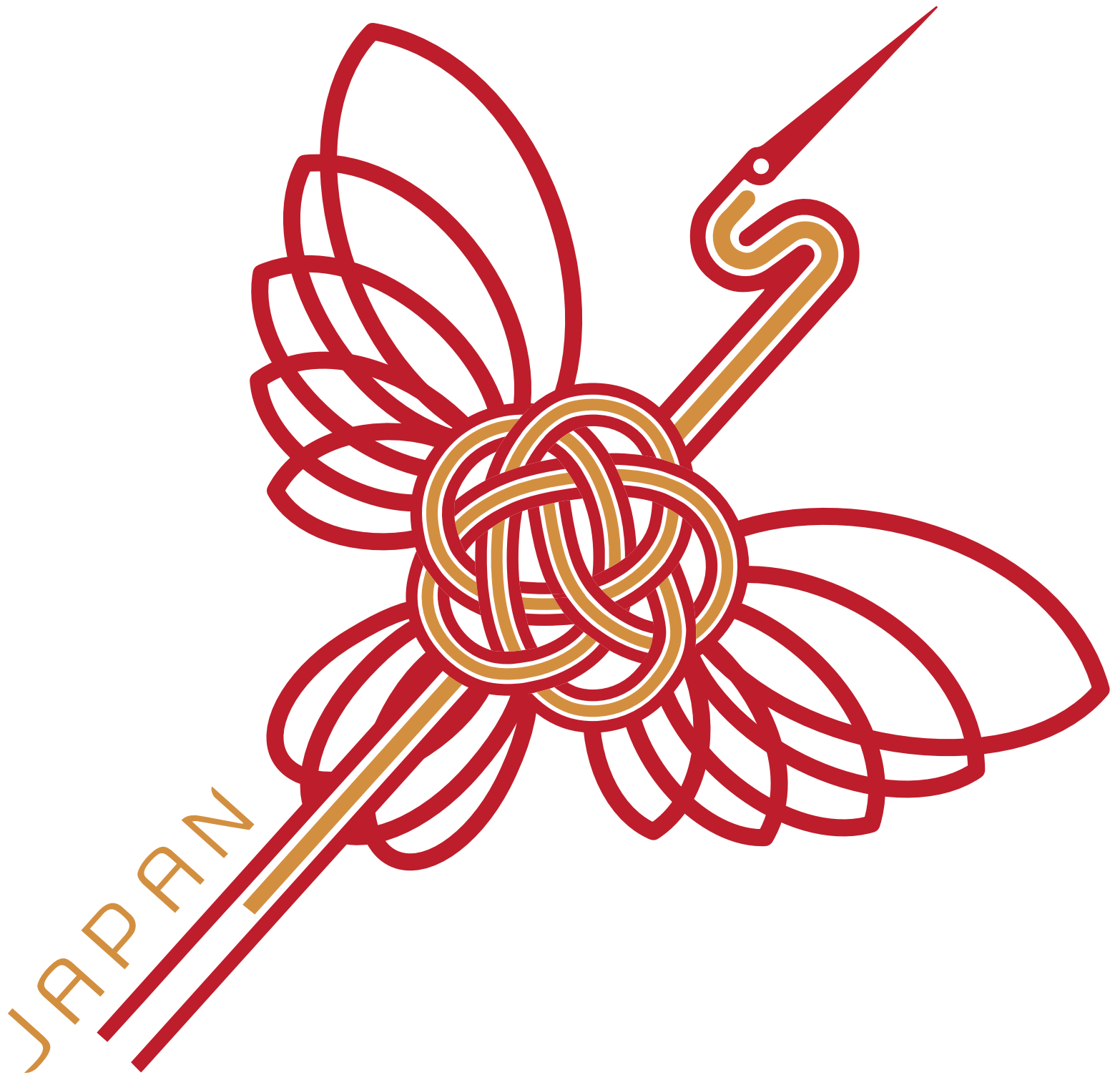
Combining the direct, indirect and induced contributions, the total economic contribution of cruise tourism in the three North Asia economies of China, Japan and South Korea amounted to US\$7.2 billion in output, US\$3.2 billion in value-added goods and services, and 51,631 full- and part-time jobs paying US\$1.5 billion in employee compensation.

Commented Joel Katz, executive director, CLIA: "While the Asian cruise market has grown tremendously within the past four years – it has the potential to capture a much larger percentage of the Asian population, which could catapult Asia's capacity share ahead of competing markets."

### The 2017 picture







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## Destination South Korea

# Planting seeds of health

South Korea has turned to wellness tourism to drive footfalls deeper into the provinces, reports [Pamela Chow](#)



South Korean wellness retreats will be promoted; Resom Forest Have9 Healing Spa above

**R**iding on the 2018 Winter Olympics and Paralympics in Pyeongchang, Korea is preparing off-beat locales for tourism volume, with wellness attractions taking centre stage.

The Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) has launched a list of 25 Top Wellness Attractions in the country, spanning from city areas such as Seoul, Daegu and Jeju to provinces like Busan, Chungcheongbuk-do and Jeollanam-do.

These established attractions were recommended by provincial governments, evaluated by more than 50 profession-

als and experts and categorised into four types: Beauty & Spa, Traditional Korean Medicine, Nature & Forest and Healing & Meditation.

Yoon Seung Hwan, director, Korea Tourism Organisation Singapore office, said KTO started looking into the field of wellness in 2016 and hopes to grow inbound medical tourism with this new focus.

In 2016, tourism receipts from medical tourism reached 860 billion Korean won (US\$758 million), a 29 per cent increase from 2015.

“We expanded our marketing partners

from hospitals and medical tourism facilitators to wellness service providers, travel agents and local governments,” he added. “We will be promoting the selected 25 attractions throughout 2018 and there are also plans to further expand the list every year.”

To market this campaign, KTO plans to have offline and online events, media and trade familiarisation trips, wellness tourism features in TV programmes and trade networking sessions.

Local operators, however, are concerned about the readiness of South Korea’s provincial areas to receive large volumes of international visitors.

Yeom Eunyup, assistant manager, exhibition team, Korea World Travel Fair, cautioned that tourists may find it “nearly impossible” to navigate the countryside without knowledge of its language.

She said: “Wellness attractions mostly exist outside of Seoul, in places that can be difficult for tourists to get to. The owners and villagers there don’t speak English as well as the people in Seoul, there are no tourist-friendly signages and the transportation system can be unclear.

“If wellness tourism is to be promoted, I think the Korean government needs to work on tourism structures and the language barrier in areas other than the city.”

According to Yoon, half of the 25 wellness attractions are ready to receive international visitors, and KTO is currently working with the attractions to develop brochures, sign boards and visual materials in English, Japanese and Chinese.

June Kim, president of inbound agency Creven, noted: “A lot of provinces are improving their services to receive both local and international visitors... KTO is trying their best, and I think it’ll take a bit more time for us to have stable advertising.”

Kim shared that Korea’s provinces – such as Nami and Jeju Islands – are cur-

### Destination in numbers

## 70.6%

The year-on-year growth in visitor arrivals from Cambodia in July 2017, reaching 3,000 and making it South Korea’s most improved source market

## US\$7,487,700

South Korea’s total tourism receipts collected between January and July 2017, a dip of 25.6 per cent from the same period last year

## 860 billion won

Equivalent to US\$758 million, this is the tourist receipts South Korea made from medical tourism in 2016, a 29 per cent increase from 2015

rently promoting independently.

This comes as the country prepares to host the 17-day 2018 Winter Olympics from February 9-25 and the Winter Paralympics from March 8-18 in Pyeongchang, Gangwon Province.

The period after this event will be crucial for marketing South Korea as a destination, opined Kim.

He explained: “South Korea is surrounded by gigantic and successful destinations like China, Japan and Taiwan. If we start (advertising) now, we would face way too much competition.

“Instead, we can concentrate on the Pyeongchang games while (our competitors) race against each other... After this event, I think KTO is going to put more effort into advertising and, hopefully, a country-wide tourism campaign.”

### Hot stuff

#### Lotte World Tower & Mall, Seoul

Standing at 123 floors and 555m tall, the Lotte World Tower & Mall in Seoul is the fifth-tallest building in the world. Here, visitors can enjoy art galleries, cafés, a seven-star hotel, as well as a skywalk and an observation deck. The Lotte World Tower Firework Festival is held annually with a dazzling display of musical fireworks and an accompanying Korean-pop concert.

#### Howard Johnson Jeju Hotel Yeondong

This 464-room hotel is Jeju’s second Howard Johnson hotel, after the May opening of Howard Johnson Jeju Seogwipo Harbor. Guestrooms afford views of mountains, the ocean or the city, and the hotel provides access to Sammu Park metro station for easy travel to downtown Yeondong. Onsite facilities include a restaurant, a business centre, meeting rooms and a ballroom.

#### Busan Air Cruise

After 29 years, Songdo Marine Cable Car in Busan has reopened in June under the



From left: Lotte World Tower & Mall; Busan Air Cruise

new name Busan Air Cruise. It will now have a total of 39 cabins ferrying visitors over 1.62km, from Busan Songdo Beach’s eastern Songnim Park to the beach’s western Annam Park. Of its fleet, 13 Crystal Cabins feature transparent floors. Nearby attractions include South Korea’s first cable

car museum, the Science Museum and a virtual flying trapeze simulator, VR Sky Swing.

#### Daegu Shinsegae

Shinsegae Corporation opened Daegu Shinsegae in December 2016, giving



Daegu city a shopping and entertainment complex connected to a transportation hub – Dongdaegu Station and Express Bus Terminal. The mega mall spans more than 103,000m<sup>2</sup> and includes a rooftop aquarium, indoor and outdoor mini-theme parks, an art gallery and a concert hall.



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# Indonesia gets innovative

Cash incentives for airlines that launch chartered services into Indonesia and attractive tour bundles promoting Bintan and Batam will take Indonesia closer to its 15 million arrival target quicker, writes [Mimi Hudoyo](#)

Visitor arrivals to Indonesia have been growing at a good pace. In the first seven months of 2017, numbers hit 7.8 million, the half-way mark of the targeted 15 million by the end of the year. This represented a 24 per cent year-on-year growth.

The July peak season alone recorded an increase of 31 per cent in arrivals, compared to that of July 2016.

I Gde Pitana, deputy minister for international marketing development, Ministry of Tourism, said: “The January-July achievement was seven per cent higher than our target. This is something we are happy about, but we still need to work very hard to reach the 15-million mark by the end of 2017.”

However, with the second half of the year usually busier for inbound tourism, Indonesia is likely to make a smooth home run.

Apart from the routine destination marketing efforts such as attending major travel marts and conducting sales missions, the Indonesian government is making some breakthroughs.

Pitana revealed: “For the first time ever,

the Ministry of Finance has issued a new policy, allowing the Ministry of Tourism to give cash incentives to (the private sector).”

Before this, government agencies are only allowed to support the private sector through programmes.

“The (cash) incentives of between US\$10 and US\$25 per pax are given to charter airlines for opening new routes in the country,” he said, adding that passengers must stay a minimum stay of four nights in Indonesia.

Inspired by sharing economy transport suppliers Uber and Grab, whose business concept looks at maximising capacity, the ministry is applying a similar approach to tourism suppliers to boost arrivals.

A pilot project was launched in August, offering Bintan-Batam ‘hot deal’ packages to travellers from Singapore and Malaysia.

Pitana explained: “For example, ferry services between Singapore and Bintan run full during weekends but only see around 50 per cent load between Monday and Thursday. Similarly, hotels, golf courses and spa facilities in the destinations run (lower) occupancy (on weekdays) too.”

To spread demand, the tourism ministry gathered tourism stakeholders in Batam and Bintan and had everyone develop packages for travellers. The ministry itself provided promotional support.

Christine Besinga, director of EN-CPRO and the coordinator of the cooperation, told *TTG Show Daily* that 54 businesses are involved, from restaurants, golf courses and spas to hotels and travel companies. Altogether 232 packages have been developed, with everyone of them being a bundling of ferry services and various tourism and lifestyle suppliers.

These packages are valid until end-December, and the ministry is aiming to sell 105,000 of them.

Pitana said the packages have drawn interests from female and corporate travellers.

Christine said: “We are not only targeting Malaysians and Singaporeans but also travellers visiting Singapore. For example, we have offered a Korean travel company with business to Singapore to (sell our) packages as optional tours. We are also working with Cebu Pacific (to target trav-

ellers going to Singapore) with spa offers (in Batam and Bintan).”

Encouraged by the positive response to the pilot programme, Pitana is likely to expand the programme to feature other Indonesian destinations.

Meanwhile, the tourism ministry has also been hard at work with the transport ministry and regional governments to bring about direct air services to new destinations in the country.

Belitung Airport was recently designated an international gateway while Silangit near Lake Toba will follow suit in October, all made possible by inter-government cooperation.

Pitana said Jetstar is planning to connect Australia with Lombok while Lion Group is planning to fly to four cities in India from Bali.

“Korean Air has started a charter service between Seoul and Lombok, thanks to the West Nusa Tenggara regional government (which had offered an incentive on landing fees, among other support),” Pitana said, adding that Sriwijaya Air has just started its service between Singapore and Belitung.

While Umberto Cadamuro, COO in-bound of PACTO, applauded these government efforts as being “successful”, he noted that human resources are not keeping pace with destination developments.

“This can lead to a less satisfying experience for the (traveller),” he remarked. To tackle this, PACTO is continuing its investment in “360-degree training in every single aspect of our operation”.

Cadamuro expects tourism business to be “extremely promising” in 2018 and hopes that Indonesia will succeed in “maintaining a healthy proportion of high-end and long-staying guests”.

### Destination in numbers

**24**

The year-on-year percentage increase in international arrivals to Indonesia between January and July 2017

**19**

The number of weekly flights from various cities in China to Manado alone. Aided by the good air access, Manado has been growing in popularity among tourists from China since 2016

**72**

The average hotel occupancy in Bali – the highest across Indonesian hotels – recorded in July by Statistics Indonesia. The lowest average hotel occupancy of the month was found in West Sulawesi, with only 34 per cent



Left: Tourists camping along the lake at the foot of Rinjani volcano in Lombok



**Hot stuff**

**Swiss-Belinn Airport Surabaya**

Swiss-Belhotel International launched its three-star property in Indonesia, the Swiss-Belinn Airport Surabaya, on September 9.

The hotel features 120 deluxe rooms, nine grand deluxe rooms and four suites. Ranging from 24m<sup>2</sup> to 48m<sup>2</sup> in size, each guestroom and suite comes with Wi-Fi access, laptop-sized in-room safes, mini refrigerators and 40" LCD TV with cable channels.

Facilities include an all-day restaurant and lounge in the lobby, a BBQ area, seven meeting rooms, a swimming pool and gym. Guests will also appreciate the convenience of an in-room massage service.



From left: Ulu Cliffhouse in Bali; Henshin's rooftop bar in The Westin Jakarta

**Ulu Cliffhouse**

Ulu Cliffhouse debuted in Uluwatu, Bali on September 23 to offer 15,240m<sup>2</sup> of stylish relaxation, perfect for the creative crowd. The venue boasts a 25-metre infinity pool, a music recording studio, an art space, an open-air restaurant and a cliff-side rock bar hanging provocatively over the waves.

The restaurant and the bar, with a capacity of 80 and 100 respectively, house timber and rattan pavilions overlooking the Indian Ocean. The kitchen is helmed by world-renowned Peruvian chef Diego Muñoz, who led Astrid & Gaston to 14<sup>th</sup> spot in *The World's 50 Best Restaurants List*. Menus will feature dishes influenced by Muñoz's travels around the world as well as Bali's local environment.

**Henshin**

Jakarta's dining scene has welcomed Henshin at the rooftop of The Westin Jakarta. The fine-dining restaurant specialises in Nikkei cuisine – Japanese-Peruvian fusion – and is helmed by chef Hajime Kasuga.

Spread across three levels, the 67<sup>th</sup> floor houses an alfresco bar and lounge that can seat 90 people. On the 68<sup>th</sup> and 69<sup>th</sup> floors are an open-kitchen dining area. Two private rooms are located on the 69<sup>th</sup> floor, one accommodating 20 guests and the other 12.

**JimBARan Living Room**

The JimBARan Living Room is a new social space within the atrium lounge of Ayana

Midplaza Jakarta, perfect for business lunches and dinners or casual catch-ups over a personalised afternoon tea.

It is divided into semi-private living spaces and boasts a bar, with the entire venue seating up to 94 guests or accommodating up to 150 pax for standing parties. Larger gatherings can utilise the JimBARan Lounge and Garden, and stretch capacity to 300 people.

JimBARan Living Room is available for private event hire.

**Vasa Hotel Surabaya**

Indonesian hotel management company Tanly Hospitality has launched Vasa Hotel Surabaya, a 384-room luxury hotel located in

a prestigious area of Surabaya.

It features eight F&B venues, a swimming pool, a spa, eight function and meeting facilities that can accommodate up to 2,000 people in all, a VIP holding room and an exclusive helipad.

**Teras Bromo**

Plataran Indonesia's latest restaurant is Teras Bromo, just 5 km from Mount Bromo in East Java and in an agricultural area. Leveraging its location, Teras Bromo specialises in Indonesian-Asian dishes made with local produce. Furthermore, its location on the Plataran Hill Sunset Point means sunset views in the lush garden are an experience not to be missed.




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## Destination Thailand

# A scrumptious affair

The Tourism Authority of Thailand and travel trade are keen to take a bite of the country's vibrant gastronomy scene, a viable tourism niche that has found greater sizzle in recent times. By [Xinyi Liang-Pholsena](#)

For a country renowned for its fiery cuisine, making gastronomy tourism one of its key focus areas seems like a natural progression for the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), which has spearheaded several initiatives to beef up this niche sector.

Besides rolling out the *Amazing Thai*

*Taste* campaign in 2016, TAT also appointed renowned American chef of Thai cuisine as its first Amazing Thailand Culinary Ambassador to assist the organisation in a variety of marketing and publicity initiatives, including taking a small group of influencers on an off-the-beaten-path culinary trip in Thailand to experience Thai

cuisine first-hand.

This year, even more food-led moves were placed onto TAT's marketing plate. Following months of speculation, TAT finally confirmed that it has entered into a partnership with Michelin Travel Partner to publish the Michelin Guide Bangkok by end-2017. Come May 2018, Thailand

will also host the UNWTO Conference on Gastronomy Tourism in Bangkok.

TAT governor Yuthasak Supasorn told the *Daily* that the NTO has taken up the strategic approach of spicing up Thailand's tourism appeal by incorporating gastronomy tourism with agriculture – another bedrock economic sector for the



Wat Arun, Bangkok, Thailand

### Hot stuff

#### Supanniga Cruise

One of Bangkok's hottest tables, Supanniga Eating Room, is now offering its delectable cuisine aboard its 40-seat dinner cruise along Chao Phraya River. The six-course programme will feature the restaurant's popular dishes such as *moo cha muang* (stewed pork with local leaves) and *hor mok puu* (steamed crab curry paste in banana leaf), in addition to drinks and cocktails from Vesper's bartender team plus Taittinger champagne. Shorter cocktail and evening champagne cruises are also available.

#### Bangkok's Wat Arun restored

One of Bangkok's most prominent temples, Wat Arun – also known as Temple of Dawn – will soon complete its most extensive restoration that started over three years ago. The completion of renovations will be commemorated in a 10-day long celebration from December 27, 2017 to January 5, 2018. The festivities will include a tribute to King Taksin, who ordered the previously mentioned restoration of the temple during his reign,

along with Thai dance performances and an exhibition on the temple's history.

#### Thailand Creative & Design Center

Heralded as a great showcase of Thai innovation, Thailand Creative & Design Center (TCDC) has moved from its previous location at Emporium to its current address at the 80-year-old Grand Postal Building on Charoenkrung Road. Spread across five floors and 9,000m<sup>2</sup>, the new TCDC is home to a well-stocked design library, exhibition space, co-working space, rooftop garden, among others. Still can't get enough of Thai art and design? Charoenkrung Road, Bangkok's oldest road, is fast turning into a creative hub with recent cool bars and galleries like Warehouse 30, Soy Sauce Factory and Speedy Grandma. More information here: [www.tcdc.or.th](http://www.tcdc.or.th)

#### New-gen Thai cuisine

Armed with experience honed in world-class restaurants overseas and bellies full of passion, a new generation of young Thai chefs are making seismic changes to Bangkok's dining



From left: Little Beast; Thailand Creative & Design Center

scene with their culinary ventures. Earlier entrant Bo.Lan has already made its mark in the city, but now there's Le Du, where Thitid Tassanakajohn focuses on French-influenced dishes made from seasonal Thai ingredients while Rangsimabun Bunyasanand roars with her playful French-American interpretations of comfort food and drinks at Little Beast.





country. "Since tourism and agriculture are critical components of our Thailand 4.0 national development policy over the next 20 years, linking tourism and agriculture makes perfect sense," he stated.

"One relatively new strategic direction is the forging of stronger linkage with the agriculture sector. Both are great job creators and income generators. It also gives us the chance to promote activities such as agrotourism where visitors can reconnect with nature, come into contact with local communities and contribute to the distribution of income nationwide."

The governor elaborated: "The TAT's food promotion story has not actually changed over the years. We are just telling the story more vigorously than we did in the past... In addition to Thai cuisine, the promotion of the country's dining scene has expanded to fusion and international flavours. We believe this will promote Thailand to be a truly world-class gastronomy destination."

Indeed, Bangkok's increasingly sophisticated dining scene – the Thai capital scored the most number of entries in Asia's 50 Best Restaurants awards in 2017 – is now becoming the icing on the cake for a destination famed for its street eats,

tour operators noted.

"We make sure to inform our agents and clients about what's happening (in Bangkok) if we know that their visit coincides with, say, the World Gourmet Festival, and help them to secure bookings. With the launch of the Michelin Guide, Bangkok and Thailand will surely get more interest from abroad for the accredited restaurants," said Kim Martin Rasmussen, Thailand product & contracting

manager at Exo Travel.

The brewing interest in culinary travel worldwide, alongside a burgeoning number of local food tour companies, will also lend a hand in cultivating Thailand's push into gastronomy tourism, noted Simon Philipp, founder and chief explorer of Ex-pique. "It is now an industry in itself and once people do a food tour in one country they may well do a food tour in another country. (This global trend) will continue

to grow and create opportunities for us."

The hunger for local experiences is also expected to grow in tandem with culinary travel, said Philipp. "Another trend is for experiences with locals, not licensed tour guides. Eating is something that people want to do with a local friend, something I foresee increasing. To some extent this will pose a challenge for licensed tour companies but also an opportunity (for them) to reinvent," he commented.

### Destination in numbers

**20.4 million**

The number of visitors Thailand welcomed from January to July 2017, a year-on-year increase of 4.5 per cent

**5.7 million**

The number of tourists from Russia and the UK that is expected in Thailand by the end of 2017

**8.5%**

The market share of South-east Asian arrivals to Thailand, as of August 31, according to the Association of Thai Travel Agents



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## Destination **Switzerland**



Icy winters in Switzerland draw ski enthusiasts

# Switzerland on “record streak” with SE-Asian markets

Repeat travel, FIT and incentive group numbers from South-east Asia are on an upward trend, fitting perfectly well with Switzerland’s positioning as a quality, premium destination. [Raini Hamdi](#) reports

South-east Asian arrivals to Switzerland are looking healthy year-to-date compared to the mixed-bag performance last year which saw Singapore and Malaysia dropping 12 per cent and 7.7 per cent respectively, while Thailand grew 21.3 per cent, the Philippines 10.8 per cent and Indonesia, barely at 0.1 per cent.

Switzerland Tourism’s director-South-east Asia based in Singapore, Ivan Breiter, described the region’s performance so far this year as being “on a record streak”.

He expects all-time high arrivals from Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, which are growing in double digits, while Singapore and Malaysia are showing five to six per cent increases – respectable when viewed against the declines last year.

Thailand is Switzerland’s largest South-east Asian market with 117,777 arrivals last year, followed by Singapore (64,664), Indonesia (43,347), Malaysia (33,378) and the Philippines (13,270). All arrivals data are at point of accommodation, i.e. real overnights and exclude the day visits of low-yield tour group series taking the traditional Italy over Switzerland to France route.

Breiter noted a trend towards repeat travellers, younger travellers who are more independent, FITs and incentive groups from South-east Asia. This fits well with

the destination’s quality and premium positioning, he said.

It translates to higher earnings and, more importantly, tourism is being distributed to more places in Switzerland than the usual Lucerne and Interlaken.

Using arrivals from Thailand as an example, Breiter said: “When we started our operation in South-east Asia in 2012, only a dozen Swiss destinations received more than 1,000 overnights per annum from Thailand. Within five years, we have doubled the number of Swiss destinations that gets more than 1,000 overnights from Thailand.”

He believes that luxury longhaul travel from South-east Asia will grow “over-proportionately” in the coming years and that Switzerland is well-positioned to take advantage of it.

“Switzerland is the cradle of hospitality and the ideal luxury hideaway. Guests are younger and travelling more individually, and with our public transport system being almost perfect it’s a breeze to travel around Switzerland,” said Breiter.

Sales of the Swiss Travel Pass, which gives visitors unlimited travel on rail, bus, boat and tram in the Swiss Travel System network, have tripled in the last five years, he pointed out.

Added Breiter: “Travellers are looking for more engaging activities, be they op-

delling classes, snow-shoeing, wildlife-watching, watch-making, skiing, paragliding, sledging, etc. and Switzerland can offer the right activities to suit their personal desires. Incentive trips have also become more and more popular. We have MICE specialists in the (South-east Asian) markets and in Switzerland to help them achieve the perfect trip.”

Given the trends, Switzerland Tourism is stepping up efforts to be the perfect “match-makers”, i.e. ensuring that customers get their “ideal” products. That starts with training of sales staff and frontliners in the South-east Asian industry, said Breiter.

“With our online education tool, Swiss Travel Academy, travel agents can learn the basics about the country, then specialise their knowledge for their specific customer base. They can become Switzerland experts for family travel, outdoor enthusiasts, luxury travellers, and so on.

“We also help travel planners to learn how to get the best deals, say, by planning their mountain stays during mid-week and city stays during the weekends,” he said.

The one thing he wishes for is to see many more South-east Asian travellers take advantage of Switzerland’s pristine landscape for outdoor activities.

“That’s why we have created specific

### Destination in numbers

**117,777**

The number of Thai arrivals at point of accommodation in Switzerland last year, making Thailand Switzerland’s largest South-east Asian market

**48**

The number of peaks in Switzerland that are higher than 4,000m – more than any other nation in Europe

**12**

The number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Switzerland

**3**

Sales of Swiss Travel Pass have tripled in the last five years.

products like the First Ski Experience (see Hot Stuff) that makes sliding on our winter slopes more accessible to customers who are not yet familiar with snow sports,” he concluded.



Hot stuff

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Hotel Eiger, Mürren

Jungfrauoch, the highest train station in Europe, and Schilthorn Piz Gloria, a James Bond film location, remain highlights of a Swiss trip. Hotel Eiger in Mürren is in the middle of it all. Four generations of the Stähli family have been managing the hotel, so guests can expect an authentic swiss quality hospitality.

Mürren enjoys the unspoiled nature, clean air and fantastic view of the Alps with old, sun-burned wooden chalets in the narrow streets. Do not miss the Skywalk at Birg half way up the Schilthorn.

Abbey Library

The best-known and most-loved building in the Abbey Precinct in St. Gallen is the Abbey Library. Every year thousands of visitors



From left: Hotel Eiger in Mürren; precious sightings through Enjoy Wildlife Watching

shuffle reverentially in slippers over the wooden floor of the former scriptorium of the Benedictine monks. Here, in one of Switzerland's finest Rococo halls, visitors can marvel at 170,000 printed books and – in a varying exhibition – unique examples of the 2,000 medieval hand-written originals.

Other special sights include a 16<sup>th</sup> century globe measuring over 2m high and the Egyptian mummy Schepenese (650 to 610 BC) and her sarcophagus, which the library has owned since 1836.

Chocolarium Maestrani

Founded in 1852 by Aquilino Maestrani, the chocolate of Maestrani still makes people happy. On April 1, it opened a new visitors centre Chocolarium where guests can enjoy an interactive tour, watch chocolate produc-

tion in action, sample the resulting treats and even make their own chocolate. There are courses and events available for groups.

Säntispark

Discover eight new waterslides in the Säntispark waterworld, amounting to over 1,000m of exhilarating sliding adventure. Some of the new slides are unique in Switzerland, such as a newly-created mountain/cave world with special light and sound effects. Ideal for families and friends.

Enjoy Wildlife Watching

Clients who love nature will appreciate the project Enjoy Wildlife Watching which brings them up close to wildlife such as the ibex, chamois, deer, marmot, beaver, golden eagle and bearded vulture. Check out the offers

which are done by a professional guide and include necessary equipment, with the guarantee of a high chance to see wildlife.

To make the experience more sustainable and responsible, group sizes are kept moderate. Visit [www.myswitzerland.com/en-cha/wildlife-watching.html](http://www.myswitzerland.com/en-cha/wildlife-watching.html).

Textilland Explorer Tour

St. Gallen is world-famous as a textile city. Major designers such as Chanel, Christian Dior and Giorgio Armani work with embroidery from St. Gallen. All this textile history of Eastern Switzerland can be explored independently by car on the Textilland Explorer Tour. Two half-day tours feature local handmade textiles as well as regional delicacies. Guests can stay at selected textile hotel rooms in St. Gallen. Visit [www.st.gallen-bodensee.ch](http://www.st.gallen-bodensee.ch).

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# A feel for luxury travel



For richer for poorer, for better for worse, there's always the Asian luxury traveller to have and to hold. **TTG Show Daily** reporters assess the travel appetites of four Asian markets and discover that they are quite different

## **CHINA: Feeling richer** But higher spending power does equate higher travel spend

By Yixin Ng

As the effects of China's 2013 anti-corruption measures ease, the purchasing power of China's wealthy evidently has returned, although it does not translate to travel extravagance.

Hurun's 2017 *Chinese Luxury Traveler Report* shows spending power surged 57 per cent from RMB14 million (US\$2.1 million) per capita in 2015 to RMB22 million in 2016. Overall luxury spend returned to pre-2013 levels after increasing 20 per cent in 2016 over the previous year; however, the average per household travel expenditure, for example, remained relatively unchanged at RMB380,000 in 2016.

Signs that leisure travel expenditure is not moving in tandem with higher spending power are consistent with the experience of most buyers interviewed at this year's ILTM Asia.

Some, like Wang Ze Lin, outbound director of Resort Saloon, actually noted a fall in travel spend in the past year.

In 2014 and 2015, the agency's bookings for resort destinations such as the Maldives, Mauritius, Fiji and Tahiti were typically for five- or five-star-plus properties. In 2016, however, preferences took a sharp turn towards four-star properties and the trend has persisted into 2017, said Wang.

Wang attributed the change to the effects of China's slowing economic growth. The country last year saw its slowest growth in GDP since 1990, according to media reports.

Aymeric Naudin, assistant general manager of CYTS Sparkle Tour (Beijing), however, opined that for a country as large as China, any growth at all could be considered "a good trend".

"Even a small increase is big because the base is huge," he said.

Hurun Report surmised: "Enthusiasm for overseas travel shows no signs of abating, with the proportion of time spent

overseas for tourism purposes among luxury travellers rising five percentage points to 70 per cent of the total. The economic (growth) slowdown in 2016 led to luxury travellers spending more time at work, but this did little to reduce their appetite for travel, making them determined to make the most of their time abroad to go travelling."

And unlike Resort Saloon's experience, last year saw "the highest average willingness to spend extravagantly on accommodation", according to Rupert Hoogewerf, chairman and chief researcher of Hurun Report, with 60 per cent of wealthy Chinese travellers spending at least US\$500 per night on rooms.

As well, despite many observing a shift in Chinese luxury travellers' preferences away from shopping in recent years, the Hurun Report revealed that respondents in 2016 spent an average of RMB220,000 on shopping during their travels, up nearly 57 per cent year-on-year. Almost half (48 per cent) made purchases to the value of RMB50,000-RMB200,000, and five per cent of them spent more than RMB500,000.

It also noted that while per capita spending among average Chinese tourists fell by RMB40,000 year-on-year, the high-end of the market continues to flourish in comparison.

Moreover, senior trip consultant at Deep Blue Trip, Eric Lee, shared that clients have been splashing out more money on travel as they develop a taste for smaller groups, personal vehicle and guide, and better quality services.

Meanwhile, it remains to be seen if Chinese high-rollers are trickling back into Macau. Although there was chatter in 1H2017 that this was the case – the mainstream media reported figures from Macau's Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau showing a 34.8 per cent rise in gross gaming revenue from VIP baccarat rooms to US\$4.46 billion in the April to June period – more caution ensued in 2H2017.

Serena Chin, spokesperson for Wynn

Palace and Wynn Macau, said: "I don't know if China will loosen controls, but as of now, we have been seeing in the news that senior government officials are visiting Macau quite frequently, and it's a sign of support."

When it comes to choice of destinations, Europe and South-east Asia led by a considerable margin in 2016. Hurun stated that Europe has long been the destination of choice among affluent Chinese travellers, while South-east Asia is up-and-coming, having surpassed the Americas over the past two years. The latter finds particular favour among the millennial generation, with 34 per cent of respondents choosing it as their top pick, propelling it from the fourth place to first.

For the more elite of luxury travellers, however, Naudin observed that South-east Asia has passed its prime as an aspirational destination. "Six years ago guests wanted to visit South-east Asia. Now, they want extremely niche destinations that most Chinese have never heard of before."

"The kind of guests we have take very long holidays, travelling to farther ends of the globe, with some even opting for 88-day pole-to-pole cruises."

In the next three years, Hurun predicts round-the-world travel, polar exploration and adventure travel will be popular. Younger respondents who aspire to visit Africa and polar regions soared to 36 per cent in 2016 (+23 per cent in 2015) and 32 per cent (+17 per cent in 2015).

A key challenge going into 2018 is the stiff competition from OTAs, which according to Li Changsong, managing director at Deluxe MICE Tour & Luxury Travel, control 70-80 per cent market share. "Offline agencies like us don't have the (reach) or power that they have," he said.

Online players Ctrip, HHTravel and Zhanadu are among the 10 most popular companies for luxury travellers in a ranking by ILTM.

But consoling himself, Li said: "OTAs are always chasing consumers with low prices. But they don't tell consumers

what's good. They offer relatively standardised products and (a smaller degree) of personalisation. But the market is headed for tailor-made itineraries, (which means) offline agencies like us still have opportunities to grab."

## **MALAYSIA: Feeling poorer** Lots of reasons to tighten the belt

By S Puvaneswary

Malaysia's luxury travel market is soft, with forward bookings showing no signs of improvement, according to planners.

Currency is a major factor. The ringgit has been steadily declining, which makes going on holiday more expensive compared to a year or two ago.

And while it may appear that the economy is finally on the road to a slow recovery after a two-year downturn, Central Bank of Malaysia governor Muhammad Ibrahim has highlighted the main challenges for this year, which include higher inflation, volatile capital flows and lingering uncertainties in the global economic and financial environment.

Nevertheless, if all goes well, a rebound in oil prices on the back of a production cut agreement between the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and some non-OPEC producers, as well as higher commodity prices, should see the economy growing slightly over last year at a range of between 4.3 per cent and 4.8 per cent, compared with 4.2 per cent in 2016, projects the Central Bank.

Still, business owners who form a part of the luxury sector will have to contend with higher costs of doing business due to an increase in the minimum wage policy and the minimum retirement age act. All these additional costs will eat into profits. As these financial considerations become more pronounced, coupled with a weak ringgit, many well-heeled travellers are becoming even more prudent about their overseas holidays.

Corporate Information Travel business development manager, Foo Sze Zhaun, said: "Revenue from premium travel has been on a decline over the last two years as clients are more careful on spending. They are either shortening the length of their trips or choosing destinations that are more affordable."

Citing an example, he said: "Prior to 2015, we saw a healthy movement to Western European destinations such as Germany, Switzerland and Scandinavia. Now Central and Eastern Europe has gained popularity due to lower ground costs."

Barbara Sette, managing director of Sette Repts, the sales representative office in Asia for local operators in Eastern Europe, Balkans and Russia, also noticed a pick up in demand to these places whereas demand for Central Europe is on a year-on-year decline.

Said Sette: "People are more concerned about the package costs and are also more careful about their spending. They check prices and compare offers. In the past, they were not checking as much. They were less concerned about prices."

As market share has shrunk, competition among operators these days is huge. "To remain relevant, we have to be innovative while offering good value for money," said Sette.

Adam Kamal, CEO at Olympik Holidays, saw airline and hotel bookings decline over the last two years. The luxury traveller used to expect end-to-end services in the past, however, this is changing,





Six years ago (Chinese) guests wanted to visit South-east Asia.

**Aymeric Naudin**  
Assistant general manager  
CYTS Sparkle Tour (Beijing)

partly due to technology advancements and partly because of more awareness about the convenience and discounts available when they make purchases online.

Adam said: "We see a growing trend of luxury travellers doing their own hotel bookings through their hotel loyalty membership. They are using hotel VIP Concierge services to book restaurants and shows. From time to time, credit card companies offer buy-one-get-one-free air ticket for business class passengers. Airbnb has also become a popular choice where the high-end segment can book luxury vacation homes and yachts for their vacations.

"To remain relevant, we have to keep offering new, exotic destinations such as seeing the Northern Lights in Iceland or cruising in Antarctica. Clients are less likely to be as adventurous when the destination is new."

This is also the route that Apple Vacations & Conventions has taken. Its group managing director, Desmond Lee, said to keep interest high, the company sells "in-depth" tours to destinations which no other Malaysian agent is selling, such as Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia.

Apple Vacations has seen a year-on-year decline of some 15 to 20 per cent in the volume of the luxury travel market. He said those travelling are also trading down on hotel types and more are opting for premium economy rather than business class seats.

## INDONESIA: Looking healthy But it's not all rosy for luxury travel planners

By Mimi Hudoyo

There are good reasons why Indonesia's luxury travel market is glowing.

The country began 2017 on a strong footing, according to World Bank's 2017 Indonesia Economic Quarterly published in June (latest available data at press time), its real GDP growth projected to increase from 5.2 per cent this year to 5.3 per cent next year.

Real GDP growth strengthened to five per cent year-on-year in 1Q2017, compared to 4.9 per cent in the previous quarter, driven by a rebound in government consumption and surging exports, according to the report.

The Indonesian rupiah exchange rate against the US dollar is also stable at around 13,000 rupiah to US\$1.

In Indonesia, financial institutions play an important role in boosting outbound traffic through facilities and services they offer to their premium credit card holders.

MasterCard, for example, last year launched a special programme for its World Elite cardholders, giving them privileges and rewards such as access to passenger lounges at 750 airports, concierge services and exclusive dining options.

Recognising the role financial institutions play, NTOs such as Tourism Australia have in the last couple of years developed links with banks as part of their

strategy with the industry in Indonesia to boost arrivals.

Brent Anderson, Tourism Australia's manager-Singapore and Indonesia, said: "(Working with banks) is unique to Indonesia. We have a direct partnership with BCA Bank which gives us access to the middle- and upper middle-class in Indonesia, and with Bank Danamon, which is the publisher of American Express cards in Indonesia for the luxury market."

In December 2016 alone, the number of arrivals from Indonesia to Australia rose 43.8 per cent year-on-year to 26,600. For the year ending September 2016, Indonesians spent A\$0.7 billion (US\$565 million) in Australia, an increase of 19 per cent year-on-year.

A healthy economy, stable currency and hungry banks have given outbound travel companies with luxury travel divisions reasons to be optimistic that the market can grow 15 to 20 per cent this year.

But it's not all rosy. Some travel companies were surprised at minimum growth during the recent Lebaran (end of fasting month), Indonesia's biggest holiday season which this year coincided with the school holidays, compared to last year's Lebaran.

WITA Tour, for example, came up with new programmes to destinations such as Brazil and Cuba in order to bait high-end travellers who usually want novel places.

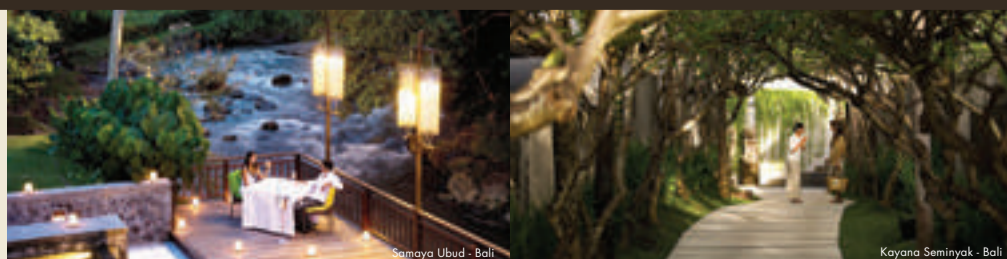
"The result was not what we expected. There were packages where we expected to get three groups but only one materi-

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## Feature **Luxury travel**

alised,” revealed director of sales Rudiana.

Rudiana believed the political situation in the country following the Jakarta governor election and the imprisonment of the former Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama had a psychological impact on some people.

“Many luxury travellers are from the Indonesian Chinese families and it is apparent the case has impacted their appetite to travel,” he said.

A multitude of travel fairs held by different international airlines operating in Indonesia has also brought changes in travellers’ buying behaviours, Rudiana said.

“There are too many travel fairs. Each airline holds its own travel fair, offering attractive discounted fares. Clients thus take the opportunity to buy tickets at bargain prices. In the past, travellers decide on a destination first, then seek air tickets and packages. Now they hold the tickets first and plan the trip later,” he said.

There is also a tendency towards free and easy packages, especially among families who are asking travel planners to book just the hotels, restaurants and car rental for them.

“They even ask us to find a local guide in the destination who speaks Bahasa Indonesia, instead of taking a tour leader from here, which is naturally more expensive!” sighed Rudiana.

Like WITA Tour, Destination Travel Indonesia which claimed that 20 per cent of its total market is the premium segment, also experienced minimum growth in the first half of the year. The bright spot was, spending continued to be high.

“Some of my clients travel abroad twice a year and Europe continues to be their top destination,” said Yento Chen, CEO of Destination Travel Indonesia. “They are continuing to spend, but with more choices of airlines, they are no longer loyal to one brand, but choose first class or business class based on the best price, even if that involves one transit.”

More travellers today are travelling with the extended family, or friends with common interests. “That way, they can have us create programmes which suit them,” said Chen.

Smiling Tours and Travel Management Company shows it is up to agencies to swing with the pendulum. Putu Ayu Aristyademi, vice president marketing and communications, said the company

saw the trend of passengers buying air tickets first, thanks to the growing number of travel fairs, so it offered a ‘book-fly-play’ programme tailored to their needs.

“We realise that these travellers do not like to travel with people they do not know. So we switched the approach with a ‘book-fly-play’ programme and dedicate special staff to cater to this premium segment,” she said.

The company also came up with programmes for small families or group of friends travelling together in response of the growing demand for such travel, whereby the travellers know one another and have similar interests. The package as a result becomes more affordable without losing its exclusivity.

Also, in line with its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the company launched a Smiling Platinum membership last year for loyal up-market travellers.

Smiling claimed it is enjoying a 30 per cent growth in the premium market this year, thanks to the new initiatives and revised strategies.

Anthony Akili, group president and CEO of Smiling Tours and Travel, noted the growing popularity of domestic destinations such as Labuan Bajo (Komodo) and Raja Ampat (West Papua), while overseas, destinations like Niseko and Sapporo in Hokkaido, Japan, Russia and Scandinavia are selling well.

Travellers are also becoming more active during their holidays. “Activities like skiing and cycling are popular. They also like to try the culinary delights of the destinations,” he said.

Chen concurred with the new trend of high-end travellers being eager to visit destinations beyond Bali in Indonesia.

“They are more adventurous now. They go to places like Belitung, Komodo and Raja Ampat, so long there are comfortable accommodation and the trip is exclusively tailored for them. For example, in Raja Ampat, we hire our own boat for the group,” he said.

James McBride, managing partner of Nihiwatu, Sumba Island, said: “We have seen a growing number of Indonesian premium travellers in our resort. They see us in social media and hear people talking about Sumba; they want to visit,” he said.

### **CAMBODIA: Looking solid But visa pains block potential**

*By Marissa Carruthers*

Cambodia’s luxury travellers are looking beyond Asia, but strict visa policies and lengthy processes are holding them back.

A record number of Cambodians are travelling abroad, with outbound trips hitting 700,027 for the first five months of

**(Cambodians) will allocate money to a vacation, which they wouldn’t five years ago.**

**Sreat Mom Sophear**  
CEO, Sophiya Travel & Tours



2017, according to figures from the Ministry of Tourism. This represents an 18.8 per cent rise on the same period the previous year.

In 2016, outbound tourism grew 20 per cent to 1.4 million, from 1.2 million the previous year, with Cambodians spending about US\$600 million abroad.

This comes with the travel industry noting a rise in demand for luxury travel.

Sinan Thourn, chairman of Cambodia PATA Chapter and CEO of B2B Cambodia, said while Cambodia’s economy has shown a relatively poor year, with outbound travel remaining pretty static, the luxury market is one area that has continued to grow.

He noted Buddhist travel is increasing within the luxury market, with a rising number of requests for destinations such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, India and Myanmar. Private tours across Asia are also popular, with medical tourism a major reason for the country’s big spenders to head to Singapore, Bangkok, Malaysia, China and France for treatment. They will often be accompanied by their families and will extend their stay for shopping and leisure activities.

Asian countries currently remain at the top of desired destinations, with Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau and South Korea topping the list. Shopping for designer labels and casinos are sought-after activities.

Domestic luxury travel is another area that is growing in leaps and bounds as more high-end products enter the market in the coastal areas of Sihanoukville and Kep, as well as the country’s rapidly developing islands.

While the industry notes a rise in Cambodians seeking high-end products, Sreat Mom Sophear, CEO of Sophiya Travel & Tours, said there remains a huge untapped potential as Cambodians become more curious to explore abroad and broaden their horizons.

This comes coupled with a shift in attitudes and lifestyle, she noted. “We can see today people in Cambodia are putting more value on lifestyle,” said Sreat. “People will allocate money to a vacation, which they wouldn’t five years ago. Today, they want to upgrade from a three-star hotel to a five-star one. They want to go to new destinations and see new places.”

While the country’s GDP is growing – it increased by seven per cent last year, causing the World Bank to revise Cambodia’s economic standing, pushing it from a low-income to middle-income economy – Sreat said Cambodia’s affluent segment has always had the cash to splash abroad, but it is only now that they spend it on vacations.

She said: “My parents’ generation had a lot of money but they kept it under the mattress, not even in the bank. They wouldn’t travel at all as they think it is a waste of money and don’t see the benefit of travelling. Now my generation, and younger generations, have different thinking and they will travel.”

This increased thirst for travel has led to more Cambodians looking outside Asia, with the US, Europe and Canada proving popular longhaul destinations.

Sok Sopheaktra, general manager of 2World Travel Cambodia, has seen a spike in bookings to Europe, rising from 100 last year to more than 300 for 2017.

He added many are luxury tourists seeking a “change in destination for their holidays”. Italy, Switzerland, France and Germany are proving the most popular.

Emirates launching its direct link from Phnom Penh to Dubai, taking in Yangon, is also expected to stimulate growth in luxury longhaul travel. However, a major challenge for Cambodians is access to visas, said Sinan, citing lengthy interview processes and masses of paperwork as a turn-off for many.

He said: “There isn’t the huge rise in interest for the US or Europe as we’d expect, and it’s not about distance or cost. It’s about the visas. This is a big mistake from other countries. It’s not that Cambodians don’t have money to travel, it’s this issue, the way we are treated at embassies, the interviews and paperwork.”

Sreat agreed, saying it is often “very hard to get visas”. She added: “It’s difficult for Cambodians travelling to these countries because of the visa issue. Nowadays, they have more budget, there is more information on how to get abroad and the market is more open but this remains a major problem.”

Her travel agency has established strong ties with embassies and consulates throughout Cambodia to try and make the process easier and quicker for clients.

“This is where the challenge is for travel companies and tour operators in Cambodia,” she said, noting that despite the hurdles she has seen a rise in demand for luxury travel to the US, Canada, New Zealand and Europe, mostly England, for the remainder of 2017.

“This is largely to do with the direct Emirates flight,” she said. “This is a very good sign for the luxury market and if we can secure more direct flights, a good economy and stable politics, then I can see the luxury market increasing rapidly. There is a huge amount of potential.”

**(Luxury travellers) are no longer loyal to one brand...**

**Yento Chen**  
CEO, Destination Travel Indonesia







*More than  
Meets the Eye*

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# A MIDNIGHT SUN PARTY

AN OFFICIAL LATE NIGHT FUNCTION  
FOR ITB ASIA 2017 DELEGATES

On Thursday October 26th, TTG Travel Trade Publishing, Millennium Hotels and Resorts, Visit Finland, Finnair and Helsinki Airport invite you to join 'A Midnight Sun Party'.

Join us to celebrate Finland's 100 years of independence with the magical summer night setting and the coolest music from Finland by DJ Orkidea and Marianna.

Stand a chance to win amazing prizes from Millennium Hotels and Resorts and a trip to Finland to experience the nightless night.

Venue: **Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel, Waterfront Ballroom, Level 2**

Time: **9:30pm – 12:30am**

Date: **26 October 2017, Thursday**

Dress Code: **Smart Casual**

**Entry by delegate badge or invitation card only**

Transport will be provided from Marina Bay Sands at 8.45pm and 9pm. Pick-up location: Sands Expo Level 1 Driveway in front of Halls A/B/C. Visit TTG booth E63 for details.

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# TTG Show Daily pictorial special

Take a closer look at all the show's happenings in this three-page spread photographed by *TTG Show Daily's* lensmen, [Fandy Razak](#) and [Eugene Tang](#)





# Gallery

# Buzzing showfloor

Photos by Fandy Razak



Sentosa Development Corporation Singapore's Jacqueline Low (fifth from right) and Nix Tang



Tourism Authority of Thailand's Kulpramote Wannalert, Walailak Noypayak, Santi Chudintra, Tanes Petsuwan and Kajornet Apichatrakul



Royal Caribbean International's Clem Galindo and Royal Caribbean Cruises (Asia)'s Bryant Tan Tiong Soon



Harbour Plaza Metropolis Hong Kong's Vivian Wong and Jessica Mo, and Hospitality Representative Specialist Singapore's Lai Chee Wai



Singapore Airlines' Terence Lim, Stanley Lim, Betsy Tan and Sabariyah Abd Hamid



Santika Indonesia's Cita Dewantoro (third from right), Hotel Santika Premiere Slipi Jakarta's Guido Andriano and Hotel Santika Premiere Hayam Wuruk Jakarta's Dhaniel Prabowo



Inset: Sarawak Tourism Board's Benedict Jimbau and Gustino Basuan

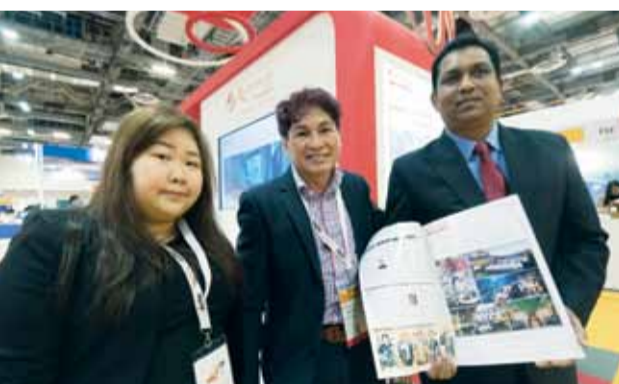
Below: Bintan Lagoon Resort Singapore's Rohaya Hassan, Nah Li Ping, Gerald Hendrick and Agnes Tan



Japan National Tourism Organization Singapore's Masatoshi Miyake and Susan Maria Ong, Japan National Tourism Organization's Sakiyo Takahashi and Mariko Tatsumi



Fifth from Left: Pan Pacific Xiamen's Nelson Tan



Resorts World Sentosa Singapore's Samantha Leung, Raymond Leong and Asogan Jaganathan



Millennium Hotels and Resorts Singapore's Lim Mia Kwang, Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel Singapore's Elaine Kum, Flight Centre Australia's Yvonne Chapple and Orchard Hotel Singapore's Candy Phua



Middle two: Blacklane Singapore's Lo Li-Wen and Blacklane Berlin's Jens Wohltorf



Garuda Indonesia Singapore's Uun Setiawan, Ministry of Tourism Indonesia's Rizki Handayani, Asita Jakarta Chapter's Hasiyanna Ashadi and Ministry of Tourism Indonesia's Nurdiansyah



Finnair Singapore's Nick Naung Naung, Visit Finland's Kaisa Kosonen and Heli Mende, Finavia Finland's Katja Siberg and Visit Finland's Paavo Virkkunen



# The art of first impressions Photos by Eugene Tang



Baclayon Travel & Tours Philippines' Roche Casenas



Travel Centre Indonesia's Rudy Techrisna Satyadi



Pleasure Tours Hong Kong's Carmen Hong



Suzhou CITS China's Ding Hai Yang



Skywin Int'l Travel Agency Philippines' Frances Danica Go, Golden Sky Travel and Tours Philippines' Christian Santos, and SA Tours Philippines' Anna Manzano



Hotel Santika Slipi Indonesia's Guido Andriano, Santika Indonesia's Cita Dewan-toro, and Hotel Santika Hayam Wuruk Indonesia's Dhanial Prabowo



PT Prudential Life Assurance Indonesia's Ayu Lestari



Flag Travel Services India's Vinay Arora and Aeronet Travtour India's Sandeep Bhardwaj



Merit Innovation Travel Thailand's Punika Sawet-mahakul and Chuenjit Boonyaganjana



Suarti Boutique Village Indonesia's Iwan Sitom-pul and Arya Primanda Wibisana



Paula & Co DMC (Thailand)'s Paula Wongjunpen



China National Travel Service Group Corporation Hong Kong's George Kai



United Spirits India's Jani Jermans



Asfalea Travel The Netherlands's S H Oei

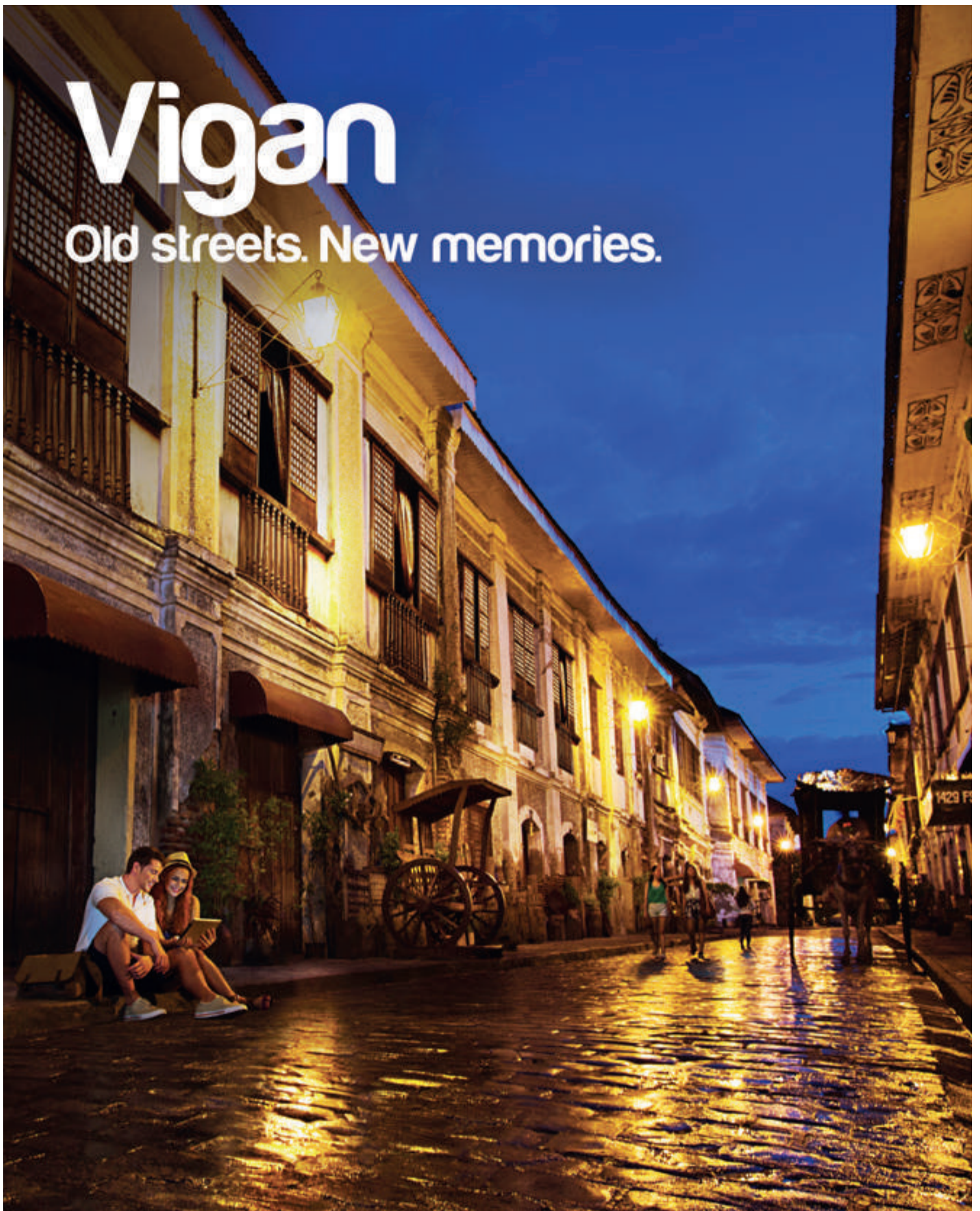



Restel Hotels Spain's Sandra Calvo





# Vigan

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 **Getting There:** Accessible via land from Laoag (two hours) and Manila (seven to eight hours). Laoag is accessible via air from Manila (one hour)

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- Enjoy the local breakfast favorite of Vigan longganisa (garlicky sausage)
- Relive the country's colonial past at different heritage museums and mansions.
- Ride a kalesa (horse-drawn carriage) down Calle Crisologo.
- Learn how to make a burnay (traditional clay jar).
- Enjoy the merienda (afternoon snack) buffet of Filipino specialties at Hotel Luna's Chula Bar.

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