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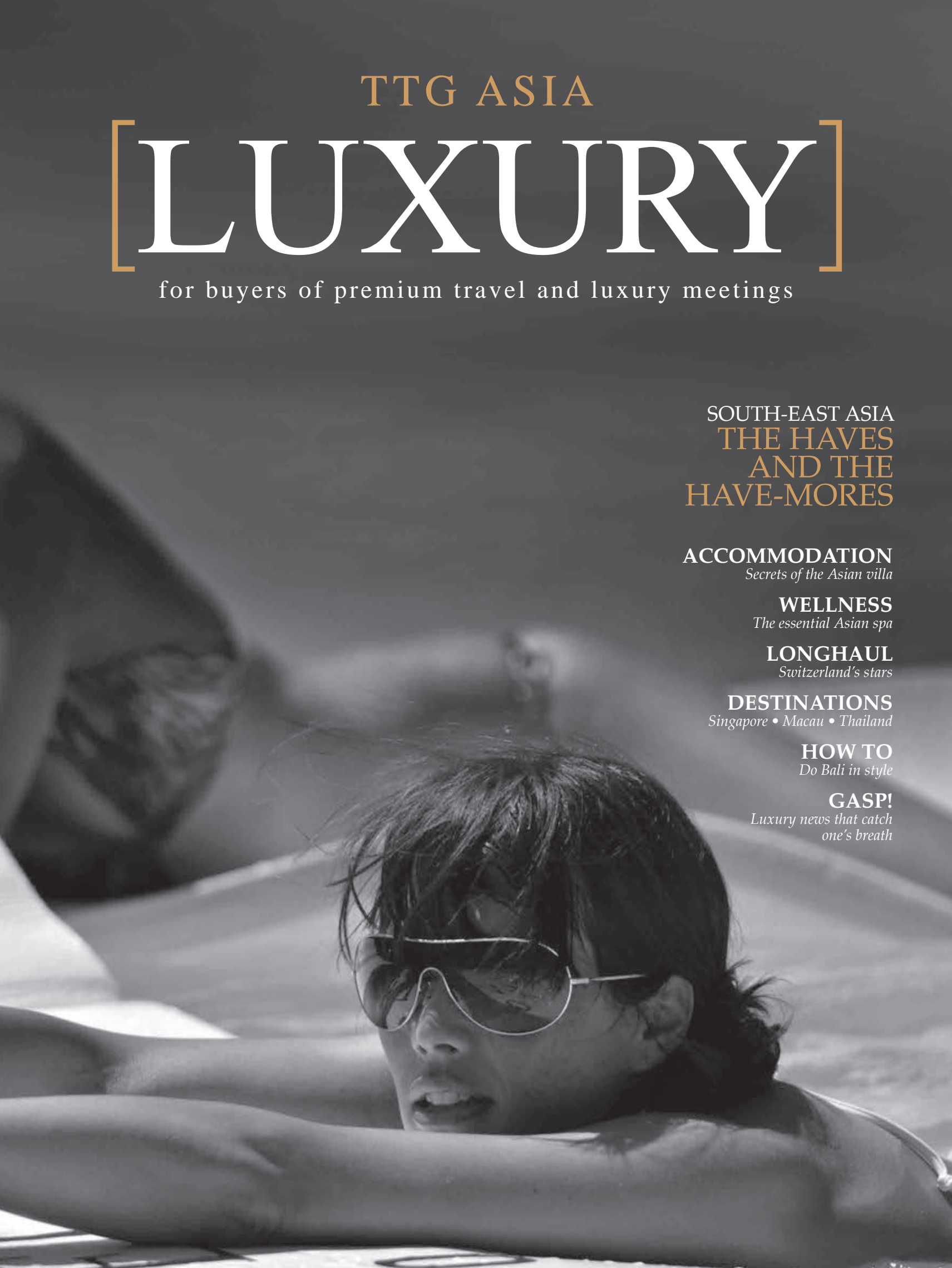
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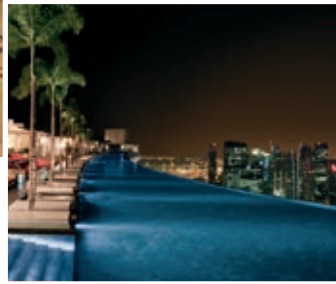
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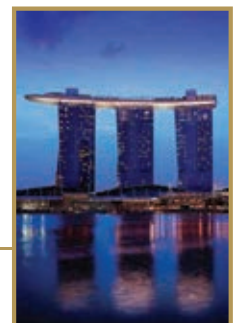
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editor's note

While putting this issue together, I looked for the meaning of luxury. It was not easy! For a while, I was even desperate; déjà vu crept up on me as I went through one deluxe offering after another, all of which pleased me well, but did not move me.

Until I met a remarkable couple, Georges and Andrea Wenger, who in 1981 turned an old restaurant – it looked like it was still in 1904 – into one of the grand tables of Switzerland (see Longhaul Switzerland, pages 52-54).

I did not expect to see the Wengers when I visited their establishment in Noirmont, in the Swiss Jura. By now, three decades after their toil-and-struggle story of making it big, the Wengers have earned their stripes to let their name and an entourage of workers do the talking. He, after all, is a celebrated chef with two Michelin stars, and a grand chef of Relais & Châteaux. Rich city folks and CEOs don't mind travelling two hours from Zurich, Bern, Basel, Geneva, etc, just to eat at Georges Wenger.

But there was Andrea Wenger herself, welcoming me personally. Throughout the seven-course dinner, she *never* left the dining room, standing three to four hours in doing the rounds from table to table to chat with guests, as perfect hosts do. Georges Wenger, needless to say, was in the kitchen preparing dinner himself, and he wasn't too grand to come out and serve some plates. I peered into the face of a chef turning 60 years next year, the lines showing all the hard work, yet there was fire in the eyes and when he spoke, you knew there's still a lot of fire in the belly and humility in the heart, despite the long hours and the long years.

The Wengers are authentic to themselves first. They bring meaning to luxury by understanding what they do best and loving what they do, which is what guests will feel and enjoy ultimately.

In contrast, in our competitive industry, many lose the plot by doing what they think others love or will love, which is a good recipe to leave guests cold – and longing for meaning.

Raini Hamdi, Senior Editor



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for buyers of premium travel and luxury meetings

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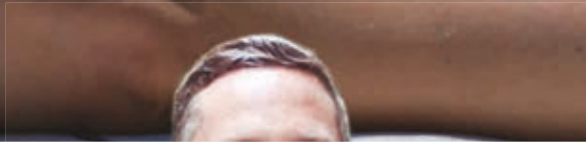
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TTG Travel Trade Publishing is a
business group of TTG Asia Media



This page, from top: Oh, blissful luxury!; Dusit Thani Maldives; Simon Mayle and Michael Luible





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[LUXURY]

for buyers of premium travel and luxury meetings

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THE HAVES AND THE HAVE- MORES

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The number of millionaires and ultra high net worth individuals keeps rising in South-east Asia, making the region a rich hunting ground for those seeking to make a fortune by providing travel services to its haves and have-mores. *TTG Asia Luxury* guides you through six of the 10 luxury markets in the region



Affluent Indonesian travellers are showing a rising penchant for exotic destinations such as Iceland

Luxuriating in a hot economy

Wealthy Indonesians are known to be generous spenders. The good news is their numbers are set to triple by 2015.

Mimi Hudoyo reports

Home to the world's fourth biggest population and a wealth of natural resources, Indonesia has been steadily growing its economy in the last few years. The archipelago country is now the 16th largest economy in the world and is set to become the seventh largest by 2030, according to a McKinsey Global Institute report released last year.

The Indonesian government itself has set a target for the country to become the 10th largest economy by 2020. Last year, Indonesia's GDP grew 6.3 per cent and the country is likely to achieve a 6.4 per cent growth this year.

Much emphasis has been placed on Indonesia's rapidly expanding middle class, which currently numbers around 45 million and is expected to rise to 135 million in 2030, according to the McKinsey

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luxury markets indonesia

report, but figures on the growth of Indonesia's high net worth individuals – defined as those with at least US\$1 million investible assets – are equally eye-popping.

At the Indonesia Hospitality & Tourism Investment Conference in Jakarta in May, Rajawali Property Group's senior vice president-investments, Shirley Tan, quoted from a 2012 Julius Baer Wealth Report that the number of Indonesia's high net worth individuals would triple, from 33,000 people in 2010 to 100,000 people by 2015, surpassing China's expected growth rate of 2.5 times over the same period. By 2015, the combined wealth of Indonesian high net worth individuals will reach US\$487 billion.

At the same conference, then chairman of Indonesia Investment Coordinating Board and now minister of finance Chatib Basri said that Indonesia's upper class (those spending an average of US\$200 or more per day) grew from one per cent to two per cent of the total population between 2003 and 2010, or nearly 4.8 million people today.

Bank Danamon American Express (AMEX), which has around 2,000 AMEX Platinum Card members (including supplementary) in Indonesia, has seen its members' spending rising by up to 20 per cent in the last couple of years.

Said Dessy Masri, executive vice president, card business head, Bank Danamon AMEX: "The AMEX Platinum Card membership is by invitation only. Our cardmembers

“

Some clients do not hesitate to rent Richard Branson's private island to spend their holiday with their families. Their idea of travel and shopping is an exclusive, tailor-made experience.

Dessy Masri, executive vice president, card business head, Bank Danamon American Express

are the crème de la crème, the millionaires and conglomerates who really spend and pay an annual fee of Rp10 million (US\$1,040). The average spending is up to Rp100 million per month per person."

While Bank Danamon AMEX does not have data on how much cardmembers are spending on leisure travel, Dessy revealed that about 65 per cent of their spending was conducted overseas. Activities include chartering a private jet, buying collector art pieces and participating in antique auctions, which enable them to boost their self-esteem, she said.

"When travelling for a holiday, they fly business or first class and spend a lot of money on accommodation and shopping. Some clients do not hesitate to rent Richard Branson's private island to spend their holiday with their families. Their idea of travel and shopping is an exclusive, tailor-made experience," she said, further citing an example of a Chanel boutique overseas hosting a private session for this high-end group of travellers.

Other such exclusive experiences included a tour organised by Bank Danamon AMEX together with lifestyle travel consultant John B Sutherland for members to watch Andrea Bocelli's concert in Tuscany a couple of years ago, according to Masri. The bank is currently in the midst of inviting

members to participate in John B Sutherland's space travel programme.

Meanwhile, Indonesian outbound travel companies handling high-end travellers have also seen a growth in the upper segment.

"Europe is the number one destination for this market and shopping is the biggest attraction," said Rudiana, director of sales and marketing of Wita Tour. "However, tours are getting more exotic as more people buy expensive packages. Tours to Brazil, Scandinavia and Alaska are selling quite well, while Iceland is our bestseller."

When the 12-day Iceland tour was launched two years ago, Wita Tour handled just four groups, but this year the Jakarta-based firm had 12 groups booked for Iceland during the Lebaran holiday season in August.

"The basic price for the Iceland tour is US\$7,000 per person on an economy class seat, but a lot of customers ended up paying double for accommodation and flight upgrades," Rudiana remarked. "These travellers do not only go with families; sometimes they bring the nanny along."

When asked about their high-end clients' spending patterns outside the package, Rudiana shared: "During a recent trip to the US with a group of 12 people, I accompanied them for shopping, and within three to four hours they spent a total of Rp1.7 billion on branded goods."



The affluent Indonesian traveller

- ❖ loves exclusivity
- ❖ loves shopping
- ❖ loves Europe, but increasingly prefers more exotic destinations
- ❖ can really splurge on big-ticket items



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Rich hunting ground

To look for millionaires in South-east Asia, Singapore is the best place to start.

Lee Pei Qi shows you why – and how



It may be tiny, with unbearable humidity, but that has not stopped Singapore from producing a lot of very rich folk. What is probably a worthy 'did you know?' to many, Singapore has the highest proportion of millionaire households compared to other countries in the world.

Worldwide, the US of course has the most number of millionaires – some 5.1 million households in the US have at least US\$1 million of investible assets, as of 2011. But this translates to less than five per cent of total households in the US. In contrast, 17.1 per cent of all households in Singapore are millionaire households, the highest proportion in the world, a title the city-state has held for two years running, according to the 2012 Global Wealth Report from the Boston Consulting Group (BCG).

According to BCG, Singapore boasted 188,000 millionaire households in 2011, which means that one in every six Singapore households has disposable private wealth exceeding US\$1 million, excluding property, businesses and luxury goods.

Singapore's uber-wealthy population has also grown, with 10 in every 100,000 households now classified as 'ultra high net worth' (more than US\$100 million in private financial

Millionaire households

		Number of millionaire households (thousands)		Proportion of millionaire households (%)	
		2010	2011	2011	
1	US	5,263	5,134	Singapore	17.1
2	Japan	1,640	1,587	Qatar	14.3
3	China	1,239	1,432	Kuwait	11.8
4	UK	411	411	Switzerland	9.5
5	Germany	320	345	Hong Kong	8.8
6	Switzerland	317	322	UAE	5.0
7	Italy	274	270	US	4.3
8	Taiwan	247	246	Israel	3.6
9	Hong Kong	209	212	Taiwan	3.2
10	France	199	200	Bahrain	3.2
11	Singapore	165	188	Japan	2.9
12	Canada	175	185	Belgium	2.9
13	India	134	162	Oman	2.5
14	Netherlands	157	152	Ireland	2.2
15	Spain	147	139	Netherlands	2.1

Source: BCG Global Wealth Market-Sizing Database, 2012

wealth), a concentration of have-mores that is second only to Switzerland.

What's more, in the Wealth Report 2012 published by Knight Frank and Citi Private Bank, Singapore's GDP per capita – already the highest in the world at almost US\$56,532 in 2010 – is expected to more than double to about US\$137,710 in 2050.

As the pool of wealthy Singaporeans enlarges, so has the market for

luxury travel, observed industry insiders.

Porush Singh, MasterCard senior vice president-core products, global products & solutions for Asia-Pacific, Middle East and Africa, said: "The luxury market in Singapore has transformed over the last two years, with a growing array of international luxury brands entering our local retail landscape as well as the develop-



Singapore's well-heeled seek sophisticated food and travel experiences
Above Dining at Joël Robuchon restaurant in Resorts World Sentosa



“

There is increasing interest among them to stay in boutique or design hotels, and some of their favourite activities are fine dining and shopping.

Yoshimi Nakajima,
 Singapore country manager, American Express

ment of high-end property projects and entertainment facilities catering to the well-heeled.”

“The strength and growth of the luxury market in Singapore reflects the country’s growing affluent population and their appetite for luxury,” he added.

Travel is the second largest discretionary consumption expenditure for households classified as elite, wealthy and mass affluent, after private vehicles, based on MasterCard’s latest survey results for 2012.

Yoshimi Nakajima, Singapore country manager of American Express, agreed that travel ranks as a high priority among Singapore cardmembers. Sharing their travel spending habits, Nakajima said: “Our seasoned travellers usually travel on business or first class, and stay at five-star luxury hotels at travel destinations. These affluent travellers are often seeking unique variations in their travels.

“Our cardmembers are passionate about travel...There is increasing interest among them to stay in boutique or design hotels, and some of their favourite activities are fine dining and shopping,” she added.

Nakajima said travel planners are “especially essential” for these affluent travellers.

She said: “Given these travellers’ tight schedules, they appreciate the service of professionals using their expertise and knowledge to put together a stimulating travel plan while balancing the traveller’s needs.”

Singapore-based lifestyle travel consultant John B Sutherland agreed that luxury clients tend to turn to the professionals to “add value to their experience”.

Clients can spend between US\$1,000 and US\$10,000 per day, and designer watches are a popular shopping item among his high net worth clients, he revealed.

Janet Tan-Collis, chief executive of East West Executive Planners, whose clientele comprises 85 per cent luxury travellers, said that each luxury traveller spends approximately US\$1,500 to US\$2,500 daily just on dining expenses alone.

Tan-Collis said: “These clients are

not stingy by any means and they know what they can expect in fine dining restaurants – from the quality food to the service.”

MasterCard’s Singh said that 26 per cent of Singaporeans buy luxury goods when travelling overseas. He explained: “More Singaporeans are purchasing luxury goods overseas because they are less expensive compared to at home and also because of the wider selection they get to choose from.”

And based on MasterCard’s recent survey on consumer purchasing priorities, the penchant for luxury goods among wealthy travellers does not seem to change any time soon, Singh added, as each Singaporean planned to spend, on average, close to US\$3,000 on luxury goods in the next year – with jewellery, designer clothes and luxury watches listed as top items.

The affluent Singaporean traveller

- ❖ not stingy to spend on F&B
- ❖ rates travel highly, just after automobile
- ❖ buys luxury goods overseas

More Thais in the elite club

More Thais are getting richer and spreading their wings farther when travelling, a trend which analysts expect to build up over the next few years.

Greg Lowe reports



“

'New sophisticates' and 'young guns' play a strong role within the high net worth individuals segment in Thailand.

Chart Chirathivat,
managing director,
Central Embassy

A detailed analysis of

Thailand's top earners is partly obscured by the fact they amass personal wealth of magnitude beyond the dreams of ordinary Thais.

Visa International puts the collective wealth of Thai high net worth individuals at US\$55 billion. The collective wealth of the 40 richest Thais surged by 20 per cent for the second year in a row – a rate three times faster than the country's economic growth – according to Forbes' annual research published last August.

According to the annual Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report published last October, the kingdom has 20,000 US dollar millionaires, up 3,000 on the previous year. But this is a traditional wealth measurement that is 15 times higher than that used by companies such as MasterCard in Thailand or bodies like the Thai Marketing Research Society.

MasterCard defines as 'wealthy' households in Thailand those combining an income of only between US\$21,000 and US\$65,000 annually, and 'elite' households as those earning more than US\$65,000 annually. It estimates 209,158 elite households and 1.8 million wealthy households.

But it is the former that is growing faster.

"We see a pattern where the elite one per cent households are growing faster (23.3 per cent in 2014 and 37.1 per cent in 2015) than wealthy households (17.5 per cent in 2014 and 26.9 per cent in 2015)," said a spokesman.

The strength of the Thai currency has recently seen US dollar valuations of wealth grow at a faster rate than their baht equivalent. Somboon Krobteeranon, Visa country manager, Myanmar and Thailand, said the strong economy and thriving international tourism are also key drivers of growth in Thailand's



Ushering the new year at the high-end Mandarin Oriental Bangkok

ence over younger generations as trendsetters, he said. Young guns are 20- to 40-year-olds earning at least 200 per cent more than the national per capita income.

He added: "There are also the third-generation offspring of financially influential families of between 18 and 21 years old who are not only young, with high income, but possess a strong sense of personal identity and adventure, preferring to travel alone."

This group relies heavily on social media for comparing destinations and planning and purchasing trips, Chart remarked.

Patrick Basset, senior vice president of Accor Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and the Philippines, said wealthy Thais are one of the fastest-growing markets at the group's top-end properties. He said: "We are seeing a significant increase of Thais staying in our Sofitel, Pullman and MGallery brand hotels throughout the region and in Europe."

"When travelling outbound, the norm for high net worth Thais has always been independent travel with self-planned itinerary. From previous business traveller surveys we've conducted, there is a tendency for these upscale Thai travellers to tie in business visits with their leisure trips."

Research from Global Blue shows tax-free shopping by Thais leapt 38 per cent in the first quarter of the year, making them the sixth largest global shopping nationality.

luxury market.

Travel, meanwhile, is the fifth highest discretionary spending category (5.8 per cent) among the top 20 per cent of households in Thailand, according to MasterCard, which said the demographic accounted for more than three-quarters of total travel expenditure in Thailand.

Affluent Thai travellers are on the rise, according to Visa's Global Travel Intentions Survey 2013. Much of this increased travel among affluent Thais is expected to take place within Asia-Pacific, where 80 per cent of these travellers have chosen to take trips in the last two years, the Visa survey revealed.

Moreover, more luxury Thai travellers are visiting destinations such as the US and the UK, showing an increase in longhaul travel.

"These travellers are expecting not only to travel more but to spend more, at least double what they had spent on their previous trip," said

Somboon, adding that upscale Thai travellers prefer luxury flights and accommodation while travelling.

Playing a strong role within the high net worth individuals segment are emerging demographic groups such as the so-called "new sophisticates" and "young guns", according to Chart Chirathivat, managing director of the super-luxury Central Embassy mall due to open in Bangkok later this year.

New sophisticates are a small group of well-educated, individualist thinkers who exert high influ-

The affluent Thai traveller

- ✦ is spending more on travel and shopping
- ✦ includes the 'new sophisticates', 'young guns' and third-generation offspring of influential families

Moneyed M'sians ready to spend

Per capita income has risen and Malaysians intend to splurge more in the next 12 months, reports **S Puvaneswary**

Buoyed by a vibrant

export sector and the Economic Transformation Programme launched by the Malaysian government to make the country a high-income nation by 2020, Malaysia's GDP grew 6.4 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2012, consolidating a 13-quarter spell of economic expansion since the fourth quarter of 2009, according to a Bank Negara Malaysia report.

Malaysia's sustained GDP growth has led to an increase in per capita income, from US\$7,900 in 2010 to US\$9,656 in 2012, according to the World Bank. Meanwhile, the number of millionaires in the country is projected to surge by a whopping 86 per cent, from 36,000 in 2012 to 67,000 in 2017, based on estimates from the Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report.

Rising personal wealth is fueling the luxury travel market. "In the coming 12 months, Malaysians intend to shop more for luxury goods and travel more to both local and international destinations. On average, they intend to spend US\$2,190 per person on luxury goods," said Jim Cheah, vice president & senior country manager, Malaysia & Brunei, MasterCard Worldwide, based on the latest MasterCard Consumer Purchasing Priorities survey findings in

Malaysia.

Melody Keung, Cathay Pacific Airways' country manager for Malaysia and Brunei, observed that customers are opting for better comfort during travels as the ability to afford high-end experiences rise. She said: "There is indeed a demand for front-end leisure travel. Our front-end revenue (including first and business class travel) from points-of-sales in Malaysia had double-digit growth from January to April, compared to same period in 2012."

Moneyed clients are turning to specialists to plan their travel needs, noted Desmond Lee, managing director of Apple Vacations & Conventions, which recorded a 20 per cent year-on-year growth in the luxury segment over the last two years.

"The luxury traveller usually takes up to three holidays a year, each holiday not exceeding 10 days," said Lee. "Accommodation is their top priority. They prefer small, luxury boutique hotels rather than just a normal five-star hotel with a few hundred rooms. They will not mind spending RM6,000 (US\$1,906) per person per day on accommodation, food and tours."

"Luxury travellers are looking for in-depth, experiential tours. Usually the client will choose the

“

There is indeed a demand for front-end leisure travel. Our front-end revenue (including first and business class travel) from points-of-sales in Malaysia had double-digit growth from January to April, compared to same period in 2012.

Melody Keung,
country manager
for Malaysia and
Brunei, Cathay
Pacific Airways





destination and give us a budget to work with. We will then plan a customised itinerary and purchase the air tickets for them – they will not buy tickets off the Internet.”

Abdul Rahman Mohamed, deputy general manager, channel management, Mayflower Acme Tours, said: “Most (luxury clients) opt for customised tours with arrangements handled by their private secretary, so we get our senior staff to handle their needs as they want to be briefed in advance on how the actual tour will be like. The drivers and tour guides that we get to handle this segment have to be experienced and sociable.”

“For the luxury market, travellers normally take a vacation of up to seven days. Popular regional destinations include Bali and Vietnam, while longhaul destinations include Mauritius, the Maldives and South Africa,” said Abdul Rahman, whose company has seen between 10 and 15 per cent growth in the luxury segment since 2010 and expects similar growth in the next two years.

Meanwhile, cautiously projecting a small increase for the luxury segment this year is Discovery-MICE CEO, Lee Choon Loong. He said: “We’ve seen increasing interest for European luxury cruises. This caters well for affluent senior

citizens as cruises offer almost all-inclusive itineraries with varying levels of luxury services and comfort.

“The top luxury segment is still very niche, with some top corporate executives willing to pay up to RM15,000 per person on ground costs for a four-day family holiday to iconic destinations like the Maldives or Venice,” Lee added.

“This segment expects luxury all the way, from travelling first class and in private chauffeured limousines to having personal chefs and top luxury residences or large villas with magnificent views. Their programmes are pretty laid-back with plenty of quality family time.”

The affluent Malaysian traveller

- ✦ intends to spend more in the next 12 months
- ✦ shuns normal five-star hotels
- ✦ is family-oriented

Luxury cruises in Europe see emerging interest from mature, high-income Malaysian travellers



We’ve seen increasing interest for European luxury cruises. This caters well for affluent senior citizens as cruises offer almost all-inclusive itineraries with varying levels of luxury services and comfort.

Lee Choon Loong, CEO, DiscoveryMICE

An oil-rich country with a population of just over 400,000, Brunei boasts one of the highest standards of living in the world. Added to that is the sultanate's continued economic expansion, as GDP grew 2.7 per cent in 2012 from 2.2 per cent the previous year, based on the 2013 CIA World Factbook.

While an estimate of the number of millionaires in the country is not available, Brunei has a GDP per capita income of US\$50,500 in 2012, making it the fifth richest country in the world and second wealthiest in South-east Asia after Singapore, according to International Monetary Fund data.

The outbound luxury travel market has reaped the benefits of Brunei's oil and wealth abundance, having shown healthy growth in the past two years. The segment is dominated by high-income executives aged mid-30s onwards, according to travel experts.

Despite making up less than 20 per cent of Century Travel Centre's total business volume, the luxury segment has risen 10 per cent year-

on-year over the last two years. The company expects similar growth in the next two years, according to general manager, CP Foo.

He said: "This segment comprises mainly honeymooners and businessmen who take a couple of weeks off work to spend time with their families."

It is common for luxury clients to spend a minimum of B\$4,000 (US\$3,185) per person on ground arrangements (hotel, tours and transfers) for a five- to seven-day break, usually twice a year, Foo added. Popular destinations include Bali, Phuket and the Maldives.

Most clients in this segment expect end-to-end service for flight and accommodation booking although they prefer to book sightseeing tours on arrival at their holiday destination, he revealed.

Foo said: "From the requests we get for tailor-made tours, our clients like their itineraries to be relaxed and not packed to the fullest. Many want a spa therapy session included in their itineraries."

Similar trends were observed by

A well-oiled luxury market

Travel specialists are expecting another 10 per cent rise in the luxury travel market.

S Puvaneswary reports why





Michael Song, business development manager of Pan Bright Travel Service, which recorded a year-on-year growth of 10 per cent over the last two years, with comparable growth expected this year.

“Our luxury customers expect us to handle their flights and transfers, but seldom book tours with us.

“This niche segment also pays mainly in cash, not credit card,” said Song, whose luxury clients are usually in their late 40s travelling with their families.

“They will not mind paying B\$1,000 a night for hotel accommodation. Most couples will travel with their children, usually teenagers, and will get two rooms. When they go to Europe, mainly to London or Paris, they tend to stay in an apartment with cooking facilities as trips tend to be between 10 and 15 days.”

Asian destinations Tokyo, Seoul and Bangkok also feature highly, with these regional trips usually lasting three days over the weekend, said Song. He added: “We expect Japan will do well this year-end due to the sliding yen. The Korean pop culture is strong in Brunei, so South Korea is another destination which I foresee will do well.”

For Anthony Tours & Travel Agency, a high number of luxury clientele are in their 40s and 50s who favour destinations within

South-east Asia and the UK, said Jefferson Lim, sales and marketing director.

Albeit still a small segment, Lim foresees a 10 per cent growth for the luxury sector. “Our clients are not too demanding. All they require is luxury accommodation in a five-star property within walking distance to good shopping areas as shopping is a priority. Customised itineraries have to be relaxed as our clients want more free time.”

However, this segment still needs “education” on the services provided by travel companies, according to Lim. “Most (upmarket travellers) assume that travel experts only sell airline tickets. They are not aware that we also sell hotels and customise tours,” he pointed out.

Double-digit growth was registered by Cathay Pacific Airways for its first and business class segments out of Brunei from January to April, said the airline’s country manager for Malaysia and Brunei, Melody Keung. Rising competition is likely to sustain and foster the growth of the luxury air travel market, Keung added. “The airline industry is very competitive nowadays, which drives fares down and provides more choices to passengers. As front-end travel becomes more affordable, more people can afford the high-end experience and opt for better comfort.”



This segment (Brunei’s luxury travel market) comprises mainly honeymooners and businessmen who take a couple of weeks off work to spend time with their families.

CP Foo, general manager, Century Travel Centre

The affluent Bruneian traveller

- ❖ young (mid-30s onwards)
- ❖ loves plush hotels
- ❖ is leisurely – not hurried and not fussy

More fun with the new rich

No longer the sick man of Asia, wealth is spreading beyond the old rich in the Philippines to other social strata. By **Marianne Carandang**



The Philippine economy emerged relatively unscathed from the 2008 global financial crisis, and president Benigno Aquino III – who came to power in 2010 – has since overcome initial skepticism to stabilise a sputtering economy. From a humdrum 3.9 per cent in 2011, the Philippines' GDP leapt 6.6 per cent in 2012, further rising to 7.8 per cent in 1Q2013, outpacing the larger Asian economies.

And the growth is here to stay, according to Knight Frank and Citi Private Bank, whose 2012 Wealth Report forecasted the Philippines to be the sixth fastest-growing economy in the world with a projected GDP growth of 7.3 per cent year-on-year between 2010 and 2050.

In its inaugural wealth report released in 2011, Swiss private banking group Julius Baer estimated the Philippines to be home to 38,000 millionaires by 2015. Meanwhile,



Most luxury travellers have been everywhere, so our company thinks of something new and intriguing every year.

Allan Sze,
managing director,
Goldlink Travel and
Tours

Wealth-X's World Ultra Wealth Report 2012-2013 put the number of ultra high net worth individuals in the Philippines at 550 with a total worth of US\$100 billion in 2011; the number expanded to 580 in 2012, although their total worth declined 15 per cent to US\$85 billion.

The Philippines' buoyant economic outlook drives demand for outbound travel, with luxury tour operators expecting their services to stay firm among the country's affluent travellers.

Jaison Yang, general manager of Travel Warehouse, said: "The (luxury) market is growing. If we were just selling 10 Maldives packages two years ago, last year we doubled that. And this year, we started very well, making half of what we made last year (in just over a quarter)."

According to luxury tour operators interviewed, a portion

of Philippine luxury travellers rely on current trends or TV, which lead them to destinations like Bhutan, Nepal and the Maldives, while others look for "frontier" destinations such as Iceland, Greenland, safaris in Africa, Eastern Europe countries like Latvia and Estonia or resort havens in the Seychelles.

For affluent clients with lifestyles on the go, business trips spur leisure travel too, pointed out Yang, whose luxury clients often visit a destination for work, then returning to it for leisure.

Goldlink Travel and Tours managing director, Allan Sze, said: "Most luxury travellers have been everywhere, so our company thinks of something new and intriguing every year." This year, Goldlink will offer North Korea, while Mongolia is in the pipeline, Sze added.

Luxury travellers also want the least amount of inconvenience,



No shortage of upmarket products for rich Filipino travellers in the Philippines itself
Above left The Farm's Narra pool villa **Right** Living it up in Shangri-La's Boracay Resort & Spa

said Sze. "Most luxury travellers go to an agency; they like to have everything arranged and are assured of the service... You present a programme, and they don't have to think about booking anything or making calls; everything is pre-arranged."

Private transfers are also high up on their list. Sze said: "Some clients want special VIP airport welcome, which includes escorting them all the way through immigration."

Meanwhile, the 'old rich' – often agro-industrialists and landowners in the provinces, or established Filipino clans – is another lucrative segment that stays loyal to travel agencies, remarked Dino Molina, head of value chain & sales, Rajah Travel Corp.

Cost is of no concern to this segment, as "what they want to do is treat themselves or celebrate a milestone", said Molina, who revealed that his luxury clients

typically spend anywhere between US\$2,000 and US\$11,000 a day during overseas trips.

Pilgrimage tours to Europe and the Middle East are also a niche that yields regular business for travel firms specialising in the luxury segment, said Nette Oseo, product specialist at Rajah Travel. "About 20 per cent of our luxury business comes from pilgrimage tours, with the rest coming from cruises, tours in Asia and ticketing."

She revealed that such niche travellers do no concern themselves with cost, whether it's hiring a priest to accompany their tours or ensuring that a religious destination is included in their multi-city itineraries in Europe. Rajah Travel has joined hands with the Spain Tourism Board to promote the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela until December 2013.

The affluent Filipino traveller

- ❖ likes everything to be arranged for them, which is great for luxury travel agencies
- ❖ comprises those who go for frontier destinations; the 'old rich' who treat themselves or celebrate milestones; and those who ensure a religious destination is included in a multi-city itinerary

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SECRETS OF THE ASIAN VILLA

What makes the Asian villa so sexy, seductive and sensational? *Raini Hamdi* finds out

Amanjiwo, Jogjakarta, Indonesia



***M**y first Asian villa experience was a benchmark-setter and, 12 years and multiple villa stays later, it remains my one true love of them all.*

The property in question is Amanjiwo in Jogjakarta, Central Java and, as I write this, memories flood back of that dreamy hotel landscape, where design/architecture pays homage to the nearby 9th century Borobudur temple, in manner so perfect I understood for the first time the powerful role a hotel can play in enhancing a destination, not merely taking from it. It also showed me the genius of imagination, which could visualise a beautiful location where previously there was none. I could still smell the aroma of freshly brewed coffee and warm croissants that were being served in the wee hours of the morning, so genteelly by a kebaya-clad local staff, before our walk to the Borobudur, which is best seen at dawn.



guide accommodation

Design and architecture, location, service and unique experiences are what make the Asian villa product more sexy, seductive and sensational, dare I say, than its counterpart in other continents of the world.

On this, I have the backing of luxury travel planners. In our survey – conducted online, through direct mail and print among readers in our database and buyers of the luxury travel show Luxperience – these were the factors that received the highest scores when buyers were asked to select five attributes they believe this accommodation-type is best at (see chart on page 30).

Service is the Asian villa's top suit, garnering 78.4 per cent votes. Its second strongest attribute is a tie between location, and design and architecture (72.1 per cent votes), while third is the Asian villa's ability to provide unique experiences to guests (64 per cent).

Where this product is weakest at are in employing technology, embracing CSR, using guest recognition programme to provide even more personalised service, and branding.

The impact of clients' preference today for a genuine local experience with more community contact and less environmental footprint is being particularly felt. This, as well as modern comforts afforded by new technology, are the areas which buyers surveyed think Asian villas should concentrate on in order to improve themselves.

As for new innovations, an analysis of responses shows that the areas where Asian villas are best at – service, location, design and architecture, and unique experiences – are the ones they should continue to innovate, with much more infusion of local experiences and guest comfort (security, lighting, modern gadgets, etc).

Whereas villa stays, especially in the early days, conjure holidays for romantic couples and retired seniors whose kids have flown the coop, an emerging trend appears to be the family-oriented villa travel, with increased demand for three to five-bedroom villas and bedrooms that are attuned to kids' needs.

A total of 111 valid responses were used (i.e., only bonafide luxury travel buyers). Augmenting the survey is a series of interviews with Asian luxury travel buyers conducted by *TTG Asia Luxury* reporters, which yielded similar findings.

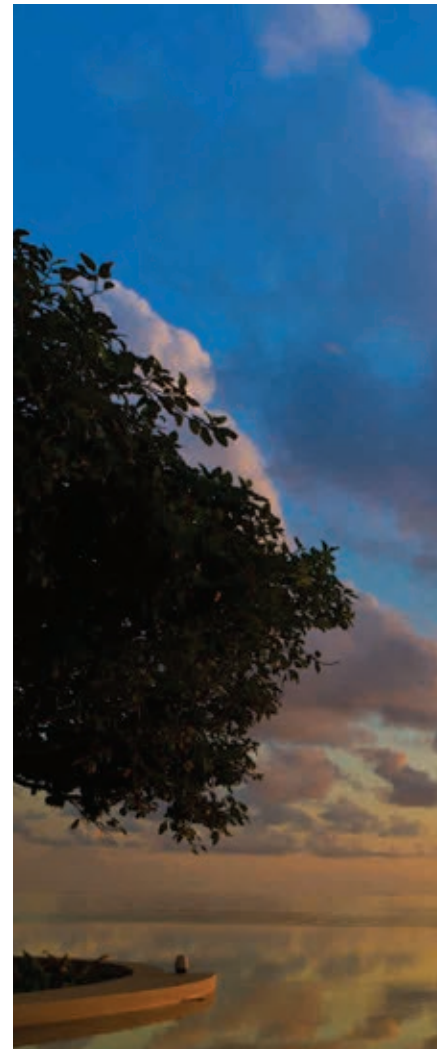
Asked to pick the five areas they feel the Asian villa product is best at, unique experi-



The Residence Maldives



The Nam Hai, Hoi An, Vietnam



Alila Villas Soori, Bali, Indonesia

Dusit Thani Maldives



ences, location, design/architecture, service and guest facilities/services commonly showed up.

What impressed Lee Choon Loong, president/CEO, DiscoveryMICE in Malaysia, the most about Asian villas is their “cultural innovation”, where culture is incorporated into the physical environment not just through architecture or furnishings, but through the experience, in such a way the five senses are stimulated – “for example, the smell of incense, the taste of lemon grass tea, the touch of teak and the sight of paddy fields from the room”, he said.

Added Lee: “Services that include running errands to the morning markets to get the freshest local produce or your favourite local fruits may be trivial, but they are especially heart-warming for guests as they were bought from the local communities.”

Said Rakesh Ramnani, director sales - Leisure, Vensimal World Travel, Kolkata, India: “I think Asian villas rank higher than those in Europe or South Africa in terms of size, individuality of design, quality of service, personal space and the sheer opulence of being close to nature.

“True luxury is being able to do anything with your time. Most importantly – nothing. Asian villas provide plenty of room for that.”

Added Simon Ang, managing director-operations of Celebrate Life Travel & Leisure, Philippines: “Impeccable service is what really sets the Asian villas apart from the rest. Advocacy and social responsibility are also a big turn-on now – a lot of properties are really getting themselves involved with these.”

John Sutherland, lifestyle travel consultant, based in Jakarta, agrees. “Their exceptional service is no doubt the big factor that makes a difference. They are so personalised it is hard to forget them. This is something that truly matters and will keep clients coming back. Their staff are used to high net worth groups so you can count on their great service.

“In my opinion, Asian villas have already set a very high standard in the high-end luxury market.”

While Sutherland is hard put to come up with any new innovation for Asian villas, exclaiming “the product is good enough for me already!”, others venture a few suggestions for improvements.

For Koushik Goswami, general manager-

guide accommodation

outbound, Travelcorp, India, Asian villas can be too minimalist. “Sometimes, Asian villas, in their attempt to be close to nature, surrender the desired worldly comforts expected of such a luxury product by being more minimalist than expected. The balance must be maintained.

“Asian villas must also think of client preferences from all over the world, not just well-heeled Asian clients, in designing their offerings. That will ensure higher levels of basic minimum luxury, no matter what the design-type or ethos of the resort may be.”

Lucy Jackson, director & co-founder of Lightfoot Travel Hong Kong, said: “I believe the personalised service that clients appreciate in these villas is hard to replicate in hotels. So, for Lightfoot, any further innovation in service levels, say, a personalised phone app enabling villa managers to preempt any request – wet towels, fresh coconuts or G&T’s (gin & tonic) in the evening – is a must! Usually this is about knowing what the clients want before they know it themselves, which is often aided by having a pre-arrival questionnaire on pillow types, activities they are interested in, etc.”

With guest facilities such as pools, jacuzzis and spas becoming *de rigueur*, one big opportunity for Asian villas to differentiate themselves is by offering even more unique experiences, added Jackson.

“It’s all about carving out the identity of a destination, not through the destination itself, but by having the right characters, locals and guides to introduce the place through fresh eyes.”

Said Celebrate Life’s Ang: “They could create or stylise their unique experiences such that these experiences become a trademark for that particular property (that cannot be replicated by others).”

Mayflower Acme Tours Malaysia deputy general manager, Abdul Rahman Mohamed, suggested Asian villas could have guest engagement programmes which could customise unique travel experiences for guests, providing memorable experiences that would keep them coming back for more.

“The opportunity to enjoy unique travel experiences provided by a well-trained team that knows how to provide top-notch service, worry-free travel and trip of a lifetime that the luxury traveller dreams about is very important.



Service is Asian villas' strongest suit, along with unique experiences



“Asian villas can innovate the product by using technology to drive costs down and increase service levels,” he said.

A couple of other luxury travel planners also voiced the need for Asian villas to look at pricing innovation, finding ways to make luxury more affordable without sacrificing standards or sense of exclusivity.

For DiscoveryMICE’s Lee, an area Asian villas could differentiate themselves is by having their own niche, “for example Couples Only, LBGT, Privacy, etc, rather than the generic leisure perception of ‘Asian villa product’”.



Asia has seen an explosion of the villa product in the past decade. Since that first experience I had with Amanjiwo, I’ve been to beach villas, urban villas, pool villas, spa pool villas, tented-camp villas, overwater villas, underwater villas, treetop villas, jungle villas, eco-friendly villas – you name it, Asia has it.

While it may not be a novelty anymore, the Asian villa product remains a favourite among luxury clients, driving the companies behind them to continuously reinvent the accommodation-type in order to stay compelling, relevant, aspirational and, indeed, novel again. – Raini Hamdi

Select five of the following factors you feel the Asian villa product is best at

Source: TTG Asia Luxury/Luxperience survey

	Response percentage	Response count
Vision	35.1%	39
Location	72.1%	80
Pricing	38.7%	43
Service	78.4%	87
Design/architecture	72.1%	80
Room design	48.6%	54
Branding	18.9%	21
Unique experiences	64%	71
Guest facilities/services	53.2%	59
Guest recognition programme	8.1%	9
Technology	5.4%	6
CSR	5.4%	6

What new innovations do you want to see in the Asian villa product?

Asian villas may take inspiration from this selection of thoughts from luxury travel planners surveyed by TTG Asia Luxury/Luxperience on the future innovations they should be making:

“luxury quality product yet blending into the location environment and culture naturally”

“honouring guests like kings and generously work towards CSR benefiting the locals and with the least negative impact on the environment”

“go green – provide guests with iPad to catch up with news and do away with newspapers”

“more community contact”

“more unique experiences”

“package room with activities linked to local festivals and celebrations”

“better accessibility, i.e., less carbon footprint to get there”

“incorporate choice of luxury activities outside the resort”

“free VOIP calls worldwide from your villa telephone”

“online service pre-customisation”

“mobile app on villa’s products & services”

“technology enhancement in room – WebTV, entertainment docking, etc”

“better Wi-Fi connections”

“faster wireless Internet”

“three- to five-bedroom pool villas”

“innovation should be on the pricing side”

“pricing should be made more affordable but remain exclusive”

“two- or three-bedroom villas tailored to family needs, e.g. kids-friendly room, Wii or Xbox in-room. A standard form could be mailed to guests a week before arrival to ensure all amenities are catered for”

“more new Asian villas”

“more villas in other Asian destinations”

“more unique and exciting locations”

“updated lighting”

“more F&B choices”

“unexpected personal services”

“any new things that we cannot imagine”

“they have thought of everything!”



Banyan Tree Ringha Hotel, Yunnan, China

15 hot favourites

Luxury travel buyers share their personal favourite Asian villa, along with additional selections based on most-frequently named Asian villas in a survey conducted by *TTG Asia Luxury* and *Luxperience*

Compiled, researched and written by **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena** with interviews by **Lee Pei Qi**, **S Puvaneswary**, **Prudence Lui**, **Greg Lowe** and **Shekhar Niyogi**

Amanpulo, Pamalican Island, the Philippines

The exclusive island-resort Amanpulo on the secluded Pamalican Island in Palawan raises the standards of the Philippine hospitality scene by several notches. The deserted island setting evokes a Robinson Crusoe feel, but with chartered turbo-prop plane access and uber-luxurious amenities, it is anything but.

Ample thought has gone into the layout and architecture of this sybaritic Philippine resort, which comprises 40 casitas set beside the beach, among the treetops or on the hillside overlooking the turquoise Sulu Sea. Each casita is designed to resemble traditional Filipino *bahay kubo* huts, but the interiors are bedecked with wood flooring, rattan furnishings and a marble-floor bathroom, with wooden sundecks for relaxation and private pools in the larger villas. Private electric buggies are provided for guests to explore the island at leisure.

Fringed by feathery white sands and crystal-line waters teeming with marine life in all directions, this bow-shaped island offers plenty of activities – diving, snorkeling, fishing, etc – but those seeking a slower pace can always seek out a pampering spa treatment or lounge in the library. The resort has a restaurant and bar, a 30m pool and tennis courts.

Tel: (63-2) 976-5200; www.amanresorts.com

Andara Resort & Villas, Phuket, Thailand

Breathtaking vistas of the Andaman Sea, impeccable service standards and warm Thai hospitality all come together to make Andara Resort & Villas an impressive stay. Set on a gentle hill overlooking Kamala Bay, on Phuket's west coast, the 63-key resort is the brainchild of the Paradise Group, which is part of Allan Zeman's Lan Kwai Fong Group.

An abundance of space is the order of the

day, with the smallest one-bedroom suite a generous 153m² while villas – with configurations of between three and six bedrooms – are nestled in free-standing buildings with their own private pools, chefs and butlers.

The brown-and-beige interiors are kitted out in Thai-style teakwood furnishings, Jim Thompson silk fabrics and indigenous artwork, accompanied by modern comforts such as Bose audio systems and LCD TVs. This villa is “really great for someone who wants to be a chef during vacations”, said Francesca Lo, manager of Hip Holiday Hong Kong, as the spacious kitchen is fully-equipped with a shiny array of cooking appliances.

Elsewhere within this sumptuous getaway, there's a poolside restaurant, Silk, serving Thai fare, a full-service spa, a well-equipped gym, a black-bottom infinity pool and a beach club. For island-hopping, navigate the emerald waters around the famed Phi Phi Islands, Similan Islands and Phang Nga Bay on Andara's two private yachts (28m and 35m).

Tel: (66-76) 338-777; www.andaraphuket.com

Baan Cheep Chang, Chiang Mai, Thailand

This six-bedroom luxury villa was named Baan Cheep Chang (elephant dreams) to pay homage to the old house's provenance as a teak-logging station during the days of the Lanna kingdom. While the once-ubiquitous pachyderms no longer roam the area, the all-teak villa offers a taste of northern Thai living amid the laid-back charm of Chiang Mai.

Set beside the idyllic Ping River in the leafy Hang Dong outskirts, the property is spread across three main buildings amid landscaped greenery and ornamental waterfalls of over 3,200m². The entire villa features six bedrooms, three lounges, a swimming pool, a furnished sala and a gym, ideal for gatherings with fami-

guide accommodation

lies and friends of up to 12. A stay at this rustic yet elegant quarter is akin to a cultural journey into the region's Lanna heritage, with intricate woodcarvings, paintings and Oriental objet d'art filling every corner of the gallery-like interiors.

Beyond the leafy confines of this villa, a plethora of spired temples, handicraft villages and lush trekking trails await discovery.

A resident manager and his team services the villa. Also included in the villa rental are the use of a Honda CRV with a driver and free Wi-Fi throughout the property.

www.baancheepchang.com

Banyan Tree Ringha Hotel, Yunnan, China

Perched on a grassy plateau some 3,200m above the Tibetan Valley in the heart of Yunnan's Shangrila county, Banyan Tree Ringha melds exotic isolation with indulgent comforts. The resort's 15 one-bedroom suites, 11 two-bedroom lodges and six spa suites are set within traditional Tibetan farmhouses that have been meticulously preserved and transferred log by log.

Each guest outpost embodies the height of contemporary luxury, adorned with woolen carpets, exquisite Tibetan *thankas* and handcrafted wooden bathtubs set against rich hues of red and maroon, in addition to a fireplace centrepiece for cold winter nights and a private wooden balcony that opens to majestic vistas of the snow-capped mountains and gorging rivers.

As Jane Cuyegkeng, general manager of Pioneer Tours Corp Philippines, summed it up, Banyan Tree Ringha charms with its "authentic but luxurious experience", with its farm location surrounded by livestock and the use of local aesthetics and furniture. This rugged-meets-luxe resort features Tibetan highland living at its best, whether it's a trek through the yak-dotted valley, a hot-pot meal of tantalising Tibetan specialties or a rejuvenating spa treatment.

Tel: (86-887) 828-8822; www.banyantree.com

Banyan Tree Samui, Thailand

On a famed Thai island where luxe properties are aplenty, Banyan Tree Samui defines the perfect villa getaway for Koushik Goswami, general manager - outbound of Travelcorp India. Set among cascading rock terraces on a private hill cove in Koh Samui's south-eastern coast, each of the resort's 78 Thai-style villas is assured of its own private pool (one of the island's largest) as well as sweeping vistas of the Lamai Bay.

"Banyan Tree's eye for detail to ensure everything is user-friendly and comfortable for the guest is overwhelmingly present, but understated, as true luxury should be," Goswami remarked, singling out the 169m², two-bedroom Sanctuary Pool Villa as his favourite among the resort's accommodation offerings. Creature

comforts abound within the cliff-hugging villas, from mosaic-tiled showers and pillow-strewn beds to outdoor jacuzzis and sundecks with wraparound views. But what really sets the resort apart is still its top-notch service, said Goswami. "The villa host is a good concept in personalised hospitality, attentive but not overtly intrusive."

A hydrotherapy spa offering holistic therapies, a gym, three dining outlets – Saffron, The Edge and Sands – and a gallery highlighting indigenous handicrafts make up the public spaces while the calm, crystalline waters fringing the resort's private bay recapture the unspoiled charm of Samui.

Tel: (66-77) 915-333; www.banyantree.com

Villa Chan Grajang, Phuket, Thailand

Among Phuket's impressive portfolio of luxury beach resorts, Villa Chan Grajang's unbeatable hilltop location, elegant architecture and highly personalised service are what bowled Singapore-based lifestyle travel consultant John Sutherland over. Spread across some 4,000m² of land on Surin Hill, the northwest-facing property offers commanding vistas of Surin and Bangtao bays below and sunsets over the Indian Ocean.

Villa Chan Grajang is home to just two villas, one with four double bedrooms and the other two double bedrooms but each featuring its own swimming pool, covers a total space of over 2,200m² and sleeps up to 12 people. The lofty interiors and crisp contemporary furnishings are the work of Angela Hall, who clads the rustic-luxe hideaway with meticulous design touches such as driftwood sculptures and cowhide rugs juxtaposed against plush white sofas. The two-tiered terraces boast truly generous space, with Sutherland teak chairs and Dedon daybeds to ensconce guests in total comfort.

Whether for families, honeymoon getaways or business gatherings, there are ample amenities on-site to keep everyone occupied, from the fully-equipped snooker room to the entertainment room with a 50-inch plasma TV to a 30m all-weather golf putting area. Furthermore, "great service" can be expected from a highly experienced staff used to high net worth groups, said Sutherland.

www.villachangrajang.com

Como Shambhala Estate, Bali, Indonesia

Surrounded by quaint village temples and verdant rice paddies, the 9.3ha wellness retreat has a sublime setting on the steep slopes of the Ayung River. The 22 rooms and suites are arranged in five distinctive Residences (each featuring its own infinity pools, lounge areas and pavilions) as well as nine one- to three-bedroom villas, which come with their own private



Villa Chan Grajang, Phuket, Thailand

pool and steam room. Each villa embodies Como's signature East-meets-West design aesthetics, with alang-alang roofs and lofty interiors embellished with handcrafted Balinese furniture and Chinese antiques, and wide living spaces framed by lush tropical foliage and exceptional vistas.

Resident experts such as a yoga teacher, an Ayurvedic doctor and a nutritionist are always on hand to weave an indulgent yet healthy stay for guests. The all-rounded approach also includes nutritionally-balanced meals at its two restaurants, Glow and Kudus House, a daily schedule of guided walks and yoga classes, a state-of-the-art gym, plus a diverse array of massage therapies and beauty treatments.

At this sumptuous wellness retreat, where healthy living, extravagant indulgences and calming nature meet, guests leave the estate de-stressed, revitalised and blissful.

Tel: (62-361) 978-888; www.comohotels.com/comoshambhalaestate

Emeralda Ninh Binh, Vietnam

In the Red River Delta just a 90-minute drive from bustling Hanoi, a luxury resort has risen to high acclaim in the ancient royal capital of Ninh Binh – a place that's largely untouched by mass tourism. Located on the edge of the Van Long Reserve amid a magnificent backdrop of rice paddies and karst limestone topography, the all-villa Emeralda Ninh Binh melds the historical flavour of the former royal capital with the astounding natural surroundings to immerse guests in an authentic Vietnamese experience.

The 172 spacious villas – superior, deluxe and duplex – are arranged in five clusters



Banyan Tree Samui, Thailand

(Thuong, Ha, Trung, Doai and Dong) and four gardens (bamboo, areca, banana and jackfruit) designed to resemble a Tonkinese village. The lofty interiors are fitted with wooden beams, matched with neutral palettes of beige and brown tones, exposed brick walls and terracotta tiles. Facilities include two restaurants highlighting local organic produce, a wine bar, La Cochinchine spa, a fitness centre, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, mini golf and two conference halls.

Abdul Rahman Mohamed, deputy general manager, Mayflower Acme Tours Malaysia, praised Emerald's well-trained team for their highly personalised service as well as customised itineraries to suit guests' interests during

excursions that allow his clients to enjoy the uniqueness of the resort to the utmost. And as the property is situated in the former capital of Hoa Lu, cultural excursions are aplenty as are natural excursions, but notable attractions include the Trang An Grottos and Dinh Tien Hoang temple.

Tel: (84-303) 658-333; www.emeraldaresort.com

The Istana, Bali, Indonesia

Nestled on the south-western tip of Uluwatu in Bali, The Istana clinches the deal for Lee Choon Loong, president & CEO, DiscoveryMICE Malaysia, who deemed it "the ultimate for pri-

vacy and luxury" for its "strategic 60m cliff-top location offering spectacular views of the ocean and mesmerising sunsets". But it's not just the unparalleled location that has elevated this five-suite villa, which sleeps up to 10 guests, into one of Bali's most sought-after addresses.

French architect Fredo Taffin was the creative force behind the sleek Balinese icon, putting touches of sophistication and grandeur to all aspects of this palatial estate, from the expansive timbered interiors and the pair of shimmering swimming pools, to the 92-inch projection screen in the AV room. There are also a spa, bars, a glass-enclosed dining room and even a games and children's wing to keep young guests entertained with Wii, PS3

guide accommodation

machines and the like. The large bale (Balinese pavilion), perched right by the cliff's edge with a bar and a sunken horigotatsu-style table, makes an impressive spot to revel in barbeques and sundowners over jaw-dropping vistas of the sun setting on the Indian Ocean.

Furthermore, the villa boasts a huge entourage of 25 staff, making it ideal for small executive meetings, A-list wedding parties and uber-chic get-togethers. International jetsetters and celebrities are known to frequent this very private villa. And should guests tire of the sprawling grounds, the highly revered Uluwatu temple is just a stone's throw away.

Tel: (62-361) 737-498; www.theistana.com

Kahanda Kanda, Galle, Sri Lanka

Kahanda Kanda stands out from Sri Lanka's fast-emerging villa scene with its high levels of privacy, service, food and management by British owner and designer George Cooper, according to Lucy Jackson, Hong Kong-based director & co-founder of Lightfoot Travel. Perched atop a ridge in Angulugaha, near Galle, the chic

boutique hotel overlooks the Koggala Lake, a palm-fringed jungle and the surrounding 4.9ha tea plantations.

The villa's eight suites brim with colonial elegance, each housed in individual buildings and featuring a different theme but all tastefully outfitted with Sri Lankan and Asian touches like four-poster beds lined with mosquito-netting, cushion-strewn rattan couches and blue-and-white porcelain pieces. Stunning views can be expected at every turn in the property, from the 20m infinity pool to open-air dining pavilions, to lush gardens filled with colourful birdlife – peacock and parakeet sightings are common. The chefs satiate gourmands with contemporary Sri Lankan and Thai-inspired dishes such as pan-fried mahimahi with wasabi mash and crabmeat curry with saffron rice whipped up from homegrown fruits, vegetables and herbs.

This property also offers ample opportunities to pick up new skills, whether it's learning to cook a mean curry or meeting the tea pluckers to learn about the tea-picking process. Its location allows easy ventures to the ancient Fort Galle nearby. At KK – as the property is

fondly known as – a stay is intended to feel like a rejuvenating sojourn at an old friend's inviting abode.

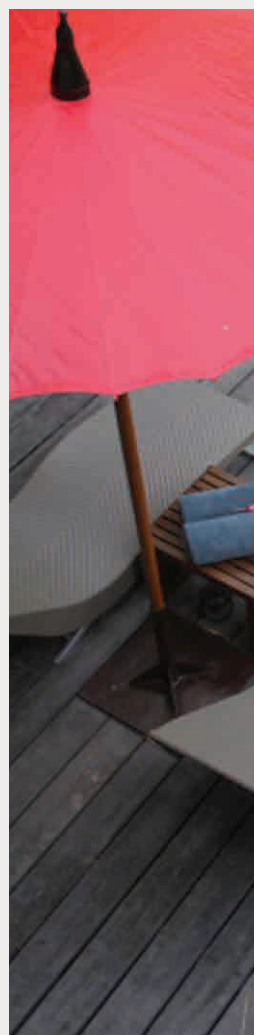
Tel: (94-91) 494-3700; www.kahandakanda.com

The Pavilions, Bali, Indonesia

Located just steps from a coral-fringed lagoon in Bali's eastern shoreline of Sanur, this all-villa boutique retreat spirits guests into a realm of flourishing nature. Seclusion and intimacy are the order of the day at this charming sanctuary, designed with bamboo pathways and traditional Balinese flair, which makes it especially ideal for couples and honeymooners. Each of its 24 individual traditional-style villas features 120m² of indoor and outdoor living spaces, flanked by walled gardens, sundeck and access via its own Balinese entrance; most villas boast their own private pool while honeymoon villas are duplex.

Jahe Restaurant presents a journey of regional Indonesian cuisine while the Poolside Café and Bar offers a charming little corner for sipping cocktails at sunset. Rejuvenation also takes centre stage at this tranquil hideaway, where a spa renders a full suite of treatments

Song Saa Private Island, Koh Rong, Cambodia



and therapies to soothe weary bodies and minds based on Balinese traditions and ingredients. With its non-flashy ethos and highly hospitable service, this bliss-inducing retreat will get travellers to see a different side of Bali, and makes a compelling stay for those who value personality over extensive facilities, relaxation over activities.

Tel: (62-361) 288-381; www.thepavilionsresorts.com

Song Saa Private Island, Koh Rong, Cambodia

For sophisticated travellers who desire to get away from it all, there's no better choice than Song Saa Private Island, which – located in the Koh Rong Archipelago, a 35-minute speedboat ride away from the nearest Sihanoukville port – is unlike "many European villas (situated) too close to civilisation in the modern sense", opined Rakesh Ramnani, director sales-leisure at Vensimal World Travel India.

Indeed, guests at this all-inclusive resort are privy to not just a private villa but two pristine isles – Koh Ouen and Koh Bong – which are

known locally as The Sweethearts. Furthermore, each of the 27 villas is a luxurious sanctuary in itself. Some are set amid the rainforest canopy, others are nestled by the water's edge or perched over the water, but all boast their own infinity pools, cabana-fringed sun decks and kitchens. Idle the days away by kayaking through Koh Rong's thriving mangroves, stretching limbs with a sunrise yoga class or simply indulging in scrumptious in-villa breakfasts.

Song Saa, which has helped put Cambodia on the region's luxury travel map since its debut in 2012, was born out of Australian owners Rory and Melita Hunter's desire to create a luxury resort built on sustainable ethos, having incorporated driftwood and used timber into the construction of the eco-luxe getaway, developed a series of programmes to properly manage waste, train local personnel and conduct research of Cambodia's marine environment. Unadulterated luxury has never been so glamorous or green.

Tel: (855-236) 860-360; <http://songsaa.com>

Space at Bali, Indonesia

Space at Bali cocoons luxury travellers in a stylish abode in the midst of Seminyak's action with its enviable location, tucked in a small lane just minutes from Jalan Laksmana and the beach. Home to a boutique collection of five one-bedroom and six two-bedroom pool villas – all interlinked by Javanese wooden doors which can be opened up and connected to accommodate larger groups – the 11-villa hideaway is an oasis of tranquility and architectural elegance right in the heart of Seminyak's hustle and bustle.

Within each villa, the spacious rooms, living quarters and outdoor spaces are seamlessly blended and designed to maximise the island's sea breezes, with high roof lines topped with alang alang and a large private pool surrounded by red canopied daybeds and verdant tropical foliage. The beige-hue interiors feature an attractive fusion of Balinese and Moroccan influences, with eye-catching details such as rattan ceiling fans, Moorish lattice windows, keyhole-shaped doors and Balinese batik fabrics.

Every villa comes with its own private butler, and the fully-equipped kitchen and expansive living and dining areas are specially kitted out to entertain guests. The villa manager ensures that all requests, from in-villa massages and yoga to hearty breakfasts, are available at the drop of a hat. However it is highly recommended that guests venture out from the comfy spot to explore the lively shopping and dining scene of Seminyak.

Tel: (62-361) 731-100; www.spaceatbali.com

The Tamarind, Chonburi, Thailand

Near Pattaya in the Khao Krating foothills of Bang Saray lies The Tamarind, a nine-bedroom villa that has garnered the nod of Exotissimo

Travel Thailand's general manager, Michael Lynden-Bell, who takes delight in the property's design aesthetics, low-key but attentive service and thoughtful amenities.

Situated less than two hours from Bangkok, The Tamarind is ideal for corporate retreats or large family and friends getaways. The secluded compound sleeps up to 20 guests within its nine bedrooms – the adjacent six-bedroom Villa Buraran can accommodate another 12 guests upon request – each decked out in a different theme to journey guests to the distant lands of Africa, Japan and Bali.

A 12-person team ensures that all requests, whether it's for Thai homecooked meals, in-villa barbeques or day trips to the nearby attractions of Sai Kaew Beach, golf courses, polo fields and vineyards, are all met. The sprawling 1.2ha estate is also home to a cinema room with a 62-inch TV, three tennis courts, a full-size petanque pit, a lake-facing massage sala, a gym and a 22m swimming pool equipped with a cooling system (a welcomed respite during Thailand's hot season), which more than makes up for its non-beachfront location.

Tel: (66-8) 5275-4099; www.thetamarindthailand.com

Tree of Life Resort & Spa, Jaipur, India

Amid the undulating Aravalli Range sits The Tree of Life Resort & Spa, an expansive 2.8ha estate that shines like a pink gem in the arid landscape of Rajasthan. The property gives a nod to the magnificent history of Rajasthan with the extensive use of sandstone and lime, rose-hued walls, marble floors and golden cupolas. No expanse is spared in the design of the 14 villas; hemmed in by verdant gardens, each features a four-poster bed, plush sofa, a domed bathroom stocked with twin vanities, a large shower area and Ayurvedic Karama toiletries, as well as modern comforts such as flatscreen TV and Lavazza coffeemaker. For the utmost privacy, opt for the pool villa.

A spa, a bar and a library comprise the recreational facilities, while the large bell-shaped infinity pool is thoughtfully sited between two ridges to offer the best views of the countryside. The chef has no qualms whipping up India's varied cuisines from the organic gardens. The ridge top provides a lofty view of the entire valley; cushioned seats afford a charming spot to lounge with a book or enjoy live musical performances, and make an especially cosy spot for romantic cuddles during the winter season. Beyond this palatial estate, there are plenty of activities to keep culturally curious travellers occupied in the legendary Pink City, from elephant treks through the hills, to jeep rides into local villages and jaunts through bustling bazaars.

Tel: (91-960) 209-1000; www.treeofliferesorts.com



The Pavilions, Bali, Indonesia

Wow power,



Above Ion Orchard, a shopping option for those with deep pockets

Singapore is set to transcend the mere physical to meet increasing demand for distinct, 'deeper' experiences, reports

Lee Pei Qi

Integrated resorts, world-class restaurants, luxury boutiques, purpose-built attractions, you name it, Singapore most likely already has it – just like any other city touted as a luxury destination.

Well-equipped with the glamour hardware, the city has been welcoming big spenders, with the deepest pockets coming from the region. Singapore's top source markets of Indonesia, China, India and Malaysia last year accounted

for slightly over 40 per cent of tourism receipts and close to half of total visitor arrivals, according to Singapore Tourism Board's (STB) chief executive, Lionel Yeo.

Both Indonesia and China have steadily emerged as Singapore's biggest spenders since 2010. Statistics from January to September 2012 showed that Indonesia, which made up 19.4 per cent of Singapore's total visitor arrivals, contributed S\$2.9 billion (US\$2.3 billion) or 16.9 per cent worth of tourism

now



receipts. China came in second, contributing S\$2.1 billion or 12.5 per cent of tourism receipts.

Lifestyle travel consultant, John Sutherland, is not surprised that Indonesians and Chinese are the top-spending travellers in Singapore. He said the city is a “comfortable destination” for these visitors since they know the country and languages spoken locally.

“Singapore is already known as a luxury destination. It is expensive in general and has a glitz about it, so attracting even the richest individuals is not a problem,” he added.

Janet Tan-Collis, chief executive of East West Executive Planners, whose clientele is 85 per cent luxury travellers, agreed: “Many of these high net worth individuals from Asia are people with discerning tastes and know what they want.

“With the growing number of attractions and fine dining options over the past few years, Singapore is getting even better suited to meet premium tastes and demands.”

Tan-Collis pointed out, for instance, how there are now celebrity chefs whipping up quality cuisines in world-class restaurants, an offering which was once unheard of in Singapore. She cited Marina

Bay Sands’ (MBS) Sky on 57 as an example of a popular dining option for guests who are looking for a sophisticated dining experience.

The entry of MBS, agreed both Sutherland and Tan-Collis, has especially pushed Singapore’s position as a luxury destination up a notch.

MBS president and CEO, George Tanasijevich, said: “Singapore has been consistently cited as one of the most important cities in the world to the wealthy within Asia and throughout the world.

“Our strategic location and luxury offerings in MBS have placed us in the best position to leverage rising opportunities in the region, as well as capture growth opportunities in luxury travel,” he said. The bulk of MBS’ tourists come from Australia, China, Indonesia and Japan.

According to Ritz-Carlton Millennium Singapore’s general manager, Peter Mainguy, the top three countries where the hotel’s guests are from are Indonesia, China and India, paralleling STB’s arrivals statistics.

“Hotels in Singapore are extremely well-positioned to attract top-end luxury travellers. Apart from her easily accessible location in Asia, Singapore has the advantage of first-class attractions, events and infrastructure as well,” said Mainguy.

The vibrant hospitality scene will welcome new luxury chain Patina Hotels & Resorts, conceptualised by the Pontiac Land Group,

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Singapore has been consistently cited as one of the most important cities in the world to the wealthy within Asia and throughout the world.

George Tanasijevich,
president & CEO,
Marina Bay Sands

destinations singapore

with the launch of a six-star flagship hotel by the end of 2014.

However, despite high-end rooms aplenty and a continued upward march in visitor numbers and tourism receipts, growth dropped to single digit in 2012. It seems the city needs a new dimension for its luxury sector; that a certain ingredient is somewhat lacking.

Tan-Collis said: "Singapore's physical infrastructure is definitely well-equipped to position the country as a luxury destination, but it can be distracting with many new developments happening together. Sometimes, what you need is just one big wow factor to sell yourself as an exclusive destination, especially to the luxury market."

To the STB, the critical factor in securing high-yield visitors is the capacity to create a pipeline of unique and innovative content, now one of the priorities set for Singapore's tourism industry. The country is seeking to sharpen its leisure and business event offerings in pursuit of quality growth.

STB's Yeo said: "The target audience is not necessarily the richest individuals in a market, but rather, travellers who have greater propensity and means to visit Singapore."

Speaking at the annual Tourism Industry Conference in April, Singapore's second minister for trade & industry, S Iswaran, said that in order to differentiate Singapore in the midst of keen regional competition, it was imperative to develop "distinct content and programming".

Yeo said this would entail the NTO working with travel consultants to "create more itineraries that are catered to discerning travellers", meaning less of the mass-market, single-day tours but those that offer a "deeper immersion".

Sutherland agrees with this approach: "The high-end market in Singapore is here to stay but as a destination Singapore needs to keep reinventing itself so as to provide more reasons for travellers to visit again and again."



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Sometimes, what you need is just one big wow factor to sell yourself as an exclusive destination, especially to the luxury market.

Janet Tan-Collis,
chief executive,
East West
Executive Planners

Five new
luxe
products to
consider

River Safari

The river-themed wildlife park River Safari soft-opened in April.

This 12-hectare park features more than 150 plant species and 300 animal species. It is said to be Asia's first and only river-themed wildlife park.

The park brings visitors through eight iconic river habitats, including the Mississippi, Nile and Amazon.

Among the featured aquatic and terrestrial animals are the giant salamander, Mekong giant catfish and the world's largest otter, the giant river otter, which can grow up to 1.8m long.

River Safari opens daily from 09.00 to 18.00. Entrance fees during this soft-opening phase are S\$25 (US\$20) for adults, S\$16 for a child between three and 12 years old, and S\$12.50 for senior citizens above 60 years old. These fees are valid until the end of the year at least.





Above River Safari

Left Wow – World of Whisky

Patina Hotels & Resorts

Patina Hotels & Resorts, a new luxury-lifestyle hotel chain conceptualised by the Pontiac Land Group, will open end-2014.

This 157-key six-star hotel in the heart of Singapore's downtown civic and cultural district is part of the ambitious US\$750 million redevelopment of the Capitol heritage site, located at the junction of Stamford Road and North Bridge Road.

Patina's signature customer-focused, 24-hour stay programme will see every member of the hotel's staff functioning as a personal concierge to provide guests personalised service round the clock.

The Capitol, which is an upmarket mixed-use development built by Capitol Investment Holdings, will also welcome a 39-unit residential tower, a four-storey shopping mall featuring mainly luxury brands, as well as a new Capitol theatre that will be used as a cinema and hub for performance arts.

New attractions at Botanic Gardens

The Singapore Botanic Gardens will feature two new attractions, a Heritage Museum and the country's first zero-energy Green Gallery, by this November.

Located in the existing Holtum Hall, the 240m² museum will showcase interactive and multimedia exhibits and panels that detail the Gardens' rich heritage. This will include rare historical finds such as books and paintings that date back to as early as the 19th century.

The eco-friendly gallery will sit on Holtum Lawn and feature eco-friendly walls clad with butterfly-attracting plants, a roof planted with drought-resistant plant

species to reduce heat inside the gallery, as well as LED lights and energy-efficient cooling systems.

The Heritage Museum will help support the Gardens' nomination bid as Singapore's first UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Wow – World of Whisky

Wow – World of Whisky by Waldhaus am See St Moritz is Mövenpick Heritage Hotel Sentosa's swanky new whisky bar and cigar lounge which seeks to redefine Singapore's whisky culture.

Housed in the newly revamped Heritage Wing, Wow, which opened last December, allows one to step back in time in the bar's plush and opulent interior while enjoying over 250 choices of fine single-malt whiskies.

Directly affiliated to Waldhaus am See St Moritz, the Guinness World Record holder for having the world's largest whisky collection – over 3,500 varieties – Wow boasts an equally impressive collection of whiskies from different regions in Scotland.

Gillman Barracks

Gillman Barracks, which opened last year, is Singapore's new contemporary art destination. The former barracks dates from the 1930s and sits among tropical greenery, on a 6.4-hectare site that houses a cluster of art galleries.

This refurbished colonial-era structure features diverse and ever-changing contemporary art exhibitions. It also bolsters the region's visual arts landscape through its international artist residency, research and exhibition programmes. It is open to the public from Tuesday to Sunday. Entrance is free.

Beyond borde



Above A-ma Cultural Village on Coloane island

Partnering with neighbours for joint itineraries is Macau's way to counter limitations, writes

Prudence Lui

The Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China is a unique destination where luxury now abounds, boasting designer shopping, grand hotels, signature spas and fine wine and dine venues. The city also plays host to some of the biggest names in music, entertainment, sports and festival events, pointed out Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, director of Macau Government Tourist

Office (MGTO).

It comes as no surprise that the SAR's top source of high-spending visitors is its own backyard, China. Overall, the per capita spending of visitors (excluding gaming expenses) last year was MOP\$1,864 (US\$233), but that of mainland visitors was highest at MOP\$2,385, a year-on-year 16.5 per cent increase, according to the Visitor Expenditure Survey conducted by the Macau Statistics and Census

ers



Service. The per capita spending of mainland visitors who stayed overnight was MOP\$4,202, an 18.5 per cent increase.

MGTO is focusing on high-yield and long-stay markets. “We have opened representative offices for the major emerging markets of India and Russia, and we may also look at the Middle East in the future due to the spending potential of its travellers. To tap these markets, we need to promote and build international awareness of Macau among travel consultants and hoteliers,” said Fernandes.

In March, MGTO, in conjunction with the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB), launched a luxury itinerary for the Russian market. The itinerary combines a range of high-end products from both the two SARs. The NTO is also developing the Middle East market through participation in the Arabian Travel Market in Dubai, cooperation with major international airlines and arrangement of fam trips to Macau.

However, being only 29.9km² in size, Macau has its constraints. Fernandes explained: “If we want visitors to stay longer, we need to work with (destinations in) the region. In the long term, we will work on (developing) new markets and promoting joint itineraries with neighbouring cities such as Hong Kong and Guangzhou.

“We aim to expand the international visitor source market. Apart from developing direct air links, we will encourage local tourism operators to enter the international markets through other channels. For places without direct flights, we can cooperate with other destinations such as Hong Kong, which has been a good partner.”

The NTO has also cooperated closely with local stakeholders to build awareness of tourism in Macau, raise the quality of the industry and create new events together. To meet the needs of the high-end market, various training programmes are organised to boost service quality and enhance the image of Macau as a quality tourism destination.

Fernandes added: “We have also been working with travel consultants around the world, who continue to play a vital role. We hope to cooperate more with the industry to conduct training sessions and tours, and to create packages with new and diversified components.”

Galaxy Macau, which opened in 2011, caters to high-end travellers from China and Taiwan. Assistant vice president of hotel and events sales, Samson Woo, observed: “Their demand remains strong and keeps increasing. They spend a lot on accommodation and F&B, followed by luxury goods, transporta-



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If we want visitors to stay longer, we need to work with (destinations in) the region, such as Hong Kong and Guangzhou.

Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes,
director, Macau Government Tourist Office

destinations macau

tion and entertainment.

“With strong overall demand – growth of 18 per cent is expected in 2013 and 15 per cent in 2014 – as well as limited supply (no new casinos before 3Q2015), we expect the VIP segment to grow 15 per cent in 2013, and earnings 20 per cent over the next two years.”

For Grand Hyatt Macau, part of the City of Dreams integrated resort, visitors from China are its top spenders. However, going forward, general manager, Paul Kwok, feels that infrastructure development will remain crucial for Macau.

“Despite the recent increased (flight) frequencies to more cities in China, there is still room for development. For instance, increased frequencies in the region will certainly help (expand luxury market sources for Macau). Limited talent and the labour quota, too, continue to be challenges, especially when personalised services have become fundamental to pleasing big spenders.”

Hong Kong-based Destination Management Company sends traffic to Macau regularly and its conference and incentive travel manager, Adrienne Lynch, agrees

that Macau is well-positioned for the luxury segment given its Michelin-starred restaurants, helicopter transfers, stretch limos and high-end boutiques. However, Lynch, too, feels there is room for improvement, such as less manpower and immigration restrictions, and improved traffic flow on the roads.

She added: “While teaching taxi drivers to speak English is great, Cantonese would be a better start. The drivers have also come across as rude, which is a bad reflection on the destination.”

Still, the future looks promising as more hotels are expected to enter the scene, including Macao Studio City, Parisian, MGM and Wynn. Lynch said: “Cotai Strip will become the real centre (of activity) due to improved access when construction of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge is completed. By then, the drive between Hong Kong and Macau by limousine is estimated to be only 30-40 minutes.

“Not to be overlooked are the Hengqin Island developments (in Zhuhai), which will complement Macau.”

“

Increased (flight) frequencies in the region will certainly help cater to the needs of the luxury segment.

Paul Kwok,
general manager,
Grand Hyatt Macau

Clockwise from left
China Rouge, Four
Seasons Hotel Macao's
Walk on Water, Taboo

Five new
luxe
products to
consider

Grand Hyatt Macau's Grand Club

Occupying the 37th floor of Grand Hyatt Macau's Grand Club Tower, the newly-opened Grand Club offers guests private dining and meeting rooms, plus other exclusive privileges. The lounge has a contemporary design and offers breakfast, all-day refreshments and evening cocktails. The floor-to-ceiling windows allow spectacular views of Cotai. There is a spacious terrace for al fresco lounging and dining. The club is also one of the few in Asia to feature its own interactive open kitchen within the lounge, where chefs whip up fresh, wholesome Asian and international cuisines.

Enjoy one hour's free use of the meeting room per stay.

Taboo

The show of secret fantasies, *Taboo*,





returned to Club Cubic of City of Dreams in April. Created by Franco Dragone, the mastermind behind *The House of Dancing Water*, it is the first and only cabaret experience in Asia performed by an international cast of top-notch performers. Special hotel and table packages are available, as well as VIP rooms and exclusive charter packages for groups and private function organisers to enjoy the show by the balcony overlooking the main performing stage. All-new and alluring, this exciting show is on Tuesday through to Saturday until the end of this year.

China Rouge

Branded as an ultra-exclusive private club, China Rouge, situated in Galaxy Macau, is a chic venue offering live band music and cabaret-style shows. The setting is seductive and magical – a con-

temporary take on chinoiserie. It's an ideal place for guests to relax, entertain and be part of Macau's most exclusive nightclub.

The design concept of this performance lounge recalls Shanghai's golden era, the 1930s. So far, it is the most sought-after private membership club in town.

New treatments at MGM's Six Senses Spa

The Six Senses Spa at MGM Macau has launched new products inspired by local traditions. Chinese cupping therapy involves placing heated glass cups on acupressure points to encourage blood, lymphatic and energy flow to problem areas. This therapy is ideal for relieving neck and back pains, sore muscles and fatigue. Meanwhile, the unique facial Mukha Chikitsa includes cleansing and exfoliation, followed by a facial scrub and

marma massage.

Guests can also choose from a new range of signature massages – Energiser, Holistic, Detox and Oriental – to relieve tension, reduce stress, soothe tired muscles and feel ultra-relaxed post-treatment.

Four Seasons Hotel Macao's Walk on Water

Four Seasons has a new and unique outdoor venue for grand events. Transparent 1m² acrylic blocks ordered from the US are laid over the hotel's central pool on the lobby level, so that guests walking on them feel a sense of walking on water. With the hotel's elegant façade as a natural backdrop, special lighting and features such as a waterfall, the sparkling pool is transformed into a dramatic stage for weddings, fashion shows, car displays and other luxury product launches.

The right balance



Above CentralWorld in Bangkok, one of the world's largest shopping complexes

Thailand is seeking a balance between mass and quality tourism. The answer, says the trade, lies in a clear and enforceable strategy, reports

Greg Lowe

Thailand has yet another reason to smile – it continues to be a hot luxury choice for many.

Last year, visitors from India and the Arab states topped the list of tourists who spent the most per day while staying in the country, followed closely by those from Hong Kong and South Africa.

The UAE was in pole position with an average daily spend

nce



Centara Grand at CentralWorld

of US\$183.10, followed by Saudi Arabia (US\$171.50), India (US\$170), Hong Kong (US\$167) and South Africa (US\$167). The next five biggest spenders were from Kuwait (US\$166.60), Singapore (US\$164.20), Australia (\$163.70), Brunei (US\$158.40) and Sri Lanka (US\$158.10).

"We are not surprised (by the figures) at all and have been a fortunate beneficiary (of the trend)," said Jason Friedman, general man-

ager of The Siam.

Manit Boonchim, executive director for Europe, Africa and the Middle East, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), said: "It's not surprising (that tourists from the UAE and Saudi Arabia are the biggest spenders). Many of them come for medical tourism. Healthcare costs are more expensive than other services, so their spending is higher than other countries.

"Last year we also had a lot of wedding groups from India. This was helped by increased flights from Phuket.

"People from Hong Kong and Singapore tend to come for the shopping."

While there may be some jostling for the top position this year, the travel trade expects the overall trend to continue, with wealthy visitors from the Middle East and India generating the biggest receipts, followed by well-heeled shopaholics from Singapore and Hong Kong.

Ease of travel, solid infrastructure, the friendliness and service-mindedness of Thais, and to a lesser extent the fact that Bangkok has established Arab and Indian communities and districts, are key reasons why Thailand is drawing an ever-increasing number of big-ticket tourists, said Tim Russell, director of sales and marketing-Asia-Pacific, Remote Lands.

"Thailand is as good as it gets (for luxury travel), certainly in South-east Asia," he said. "When you look at the difference in terms of infrastructure and service between Bangkok and places such as Hanoi or Phnom Penh, it's absolutely massive.

"For luxury travellers who want the Asian edges smoothed off a little bit and want a fairly easy, unchallenging destination, I think Thailand is a very good introduction to Asia. There's certainly less of a culture shock than having Vietnam or China as your first stop."

Travel specialists say, in reality, Thailand has two luxury markets: Bangkok and the rest of the country.

While the capital is well positioned as a regional shopping and entertainment destination for high-spending tourists, it has also earned a reputation for value when it comes to luxury accommodation. Many see this as a double-edged sword that attracts the right customers but dampens earnings.

"Bangkok, even for the top-class traveller, is unbeatable price-wise," said Robert Maurer-Loeffler, general manager of Centara Grand at CentralWorld. "You can get hotel accommodation here of the top international brands at a rate where you cannot get a standard room in Singapore. It's incredible.

"This is really something the hotel association has to work through. They (hoteliers) could easily double their rates and still have the same occupancy... Once you go to Phuket and Chiang Mai people pay US\$1,000-\$2,000 a night. That's the nature of the resort market. People are prepared to pay for it."

TAT's Manit sees Bangkok's value proposition as positive, as it continues to draw a greater

“

Thailand should be developing its tourism strategy to focus on fewer but higher-value tourists.

Jason Friedman,
general manager,
The Siam



number of high-end tourists to the kingdom.

As part of its strategy to tap the lucrative market, the authority takes about 30 local suppliers to the International Luxury Travel Market in France each year, each of whom meets with 45 buyers. TAT is also calling for luxury suppliers to use more sophisticated targeted marketing techniques and CRM to leverage their luxury offerings.

However, TAT's own efforts have been criticised for lacking innovation given that it recently revamped its luxury strategy with a renewed focus on Thai-ness, a traditional concept that is also driving its mass market initiatives.

Despite the brickbats, culture still plays an important part in packaging luxury, said Michael Lynden-Bell, general manager Thailand, Exotissimo Travel.

"We still aim to make the experience interactive and cultural," he said. "There is a demand for that in the market and you can give people a taste of Thailand in a luxurious way by enhancing different elements, using luxury vehicles, better quality guides and so on."

Thailand's luxury market should continue to grow steadily, according to travel specialists. However, a more sophisticated, segmented strategy would accelerate future growth and deliver greater benefits to the local economy, said The Siam's Friedman.

"Thailand needs to have a clear and enforceable strategy for tourism development," added Friedman.

"Thailand should be developing its tourism strategy to focus on fewer, but higher-value tourists, as Botswana and Bhutan have done. The luxury leisure traveller wants to have an authentic experience that is not impacted by long lines, tour buses and big groups of people wandering around. The luxury tourist is willing to pay a premium for this option."



You can give people a taste of Thailand in a luxurious way by enhancing different elements, using luxury vehicles, better-quality guides and so on.

Michael Lynden-Bell, general manager Thailand, Exotissimo Travel

Seven new luxe products to consider

Rolls-Royce's boutique

Luxury motoring received a shot in the arm with the May opening of Rolls-Royce's first-ever boutique in Thailand. The Rolls-Royce Motor Cars Bangkok Boutique at Siam Paragon is the brand's first touchpoint in a luxury mall, and the iconic carmaker is willing to work with high-end travel specialists on a case-by-case basis to use the space for bespoke events such as champagne brunches, jewellery showcases and fashion shows.

Central Embassy

This December will mark the opening of Central Embassy, a 10-billion-baht luxury retail development in the heart of Bangkok's shopping district. Built on 144,000m² of the most expensive real estate ever sold in the country – part of the British Embassy's former grounds – the 37-storey development comprises an eight-storey retail space (including the basement) and a 30-storey hotel. Expect the mall to feature boutiques from leading design houses, including Gucci, Hermès, Ralph Lauren, Giuseppe Zanotti and Vivienne Westwood. The hotel will



Above Central Embassy

be branded Park Hyatt, the brand's debut in Thailand.

Maggie Choo's

Experience a subterranean 1930s Shanghai at Maggie Choo's, the latest venture from Ash Sutton who has pioneered several high-concept cocktail bars and dining venues around Bangkok. Located under the Novotel Fenix Silom, the Thai-Chinese restaurant connects to a converted 19th century East India Company depot, now a cocktail bar, where the far out Far East vibe is complemented by Victorian décor and live jazz. As with all of Sutton's projects, Maggie Choo's boasts a highly imaginative bar complete with unpretentious cuisine and killer cocktails. The bar draws a crowd of well-heeled hipsters, fashionistas and high-society movers and shakers, and makes the perfect place to round off a night's activities. Bookings advised.

Opposite Mess Hall

Art meets cuisine at Opposite Mess Hall, an imaginative new dining space that offers "ordinary pleasures with unordinary care". Chef Jess Barnes experiments with vari-

ous cuisines and culinary twists to create a unique dining experience where the focus is on the food, sharing dishes Asian-style, and enjoying each other's company in laid-back surroundings. The venue fits about 40 people and features a long bar, an open kitchen and outdoor smoking lounge. It can be hired for private parties and bespoke pop-up events. It also doubles as an art gallery, profiling the work of local and international contemporary artists.

Point Yamu by Como

Point Yamu, Como Hotels and Resorts' second property in Thailand, will target the wellness-focused luxury market when it opens this November on Phuket's north-east coast.

The 106-room resort will feature 27 private villas, a 100m swimming pool, a Como Shambala Retreat with eight treatment rooms and a yoga studio, as well as Italian and Thai restaurants. The Paola Navone-designed property affords views of the Andaman Sea and overlooks the staggering limestone karsts of the nearby Phang Nga Bay.

Vana Belle, Koh Samui

Relax in idyllic surroundings at Vana Belle, an 80-room villa property on the popular island getaway of Koh Samui. The resort, which opened in February, features pool villas and suites ranging from 86m² to 211m², and marks the Luxury Collection's third property in Thailand. Beyond providing guests with panoramic vistas of the Gulf of Thailand and plenty of outdoor spaces, privacy is offered by the jungle that envelops the property located on the island's south coast.

Promenada

Chiang Mai welcomed its first high-end retail mall in June with the opening of Promenada, a 92,000m² development located a 15-minute drive from the airport. The 2.9-billion-baht development is designed with a 'close-to-nature' ideal, combining air-conditioned low-rise shopping areas with open spaces, a large-scale water feature, terraces and a tropical park. The cinema hosted the 2013 European Union Film Festival in June.



Above Opposite Mess Hall

How to do Bali

Bali over-developed? **Mimi Hudoyo** finds out how to do it in style – and away from the madding crowd

Indonesian travel specialists pooh-poo the idea that Bali has become overdeveloped, laughing at suggestions that the Island of Gods is trampled by tourism, considering its sheer space and endless array of attractions.

For those who want to do Bali in style and away from the madding crowd, there is a multitude of options: mountain-biking, walking through a village and lush paddy fields, sipping afternoon tea in



SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Asian Trails Bali **Cook with a Michelin chef at Mozaic Restaurant (4 hours)**

The workshop is conducted for groups or individuals in a unique culinary school and lifestyle venue. Courses range from basic cooking techniques to cutting-edge technology such as sous-vide cooking. There are also professional technical trainings and short specialist

courses conducted by guest chefs and wine experts. Maximum 12 guests.

Asian Trails Bali **Perfume-making experience (3 hours)**

L'Atelier Parfums et Créations is where your clients can create their own perfume in a perfumery studio and discover Indonesia

through its finest essences.

Clients are taken from island to island and region to region to explore first-hand all the exciting and unique fragrances that the country has to offer. This gives them the inspiration to create their personal perfume.

Right L'Atelier Parfums et Créations



li in style



Breakfast on top of Mount Batur

Asia World Indonesia

a private luxury tent, partying away on a yacht, having breakfast on a mountaintop, taking a scenic helicopter tour to the neighbouring islands – the list goes on.

The key to satisfy discerning clients, according to travel experts, is to tailor the programme to their desires and having one helluva good guide.

Asian Trails Bali does not take its clients, who hail from Europe and North America, to areas with busloads of tourists such as Kuta and Legian, but that does not mean it avoids Bali's mainstay – and often crowded – attractions such as Kintamani, Besakih and Tanah Lot.

Managing director, Andre Seiler, said: "We take them to wherever there are luxurious properties, including in areas such as Bukit, Jimbaran, Seminyak, Nusa Dua and Ubud.

"The key is to have a good guide. A good guide knows

the less crowded places within popular sightseeing areas. He knows the good restaurants. Our duty therefore is to assign correctly trained guides to our high-end clients," Seiler said.

For Pacto, whose high-end travellers include retired Americans, Korean honeymooners, Indonesian socialites, middle-aged UK citizens and Japanese professionals, what is crucial is the ability to grasp what each client wants and cater to those needs to the hilt. Even crowded places would work, if they appeal to the client, he said.

"Make no mistake that 'upmarket' and 'unspoilt' don't always go together," said Pacto's COO-inbound, Umberto Cadamuro. "An area like secluded Ungasan is not particularly interesting for the upscale European traveller, but it is definitely tops for the Asian traveller.



"Make no mistake that 'upmarket' and 'unspoilt' don't always go together... the word 'overcrowded' is relative."

Umberto Cadamuro, COO-inbound, Pacto

The lifestyle of Seminyak appeals to both South Europeans and Indonesians, while the centre and north of the island, with its mixture of art, culture and wellness, appeal to the North European market."

Cadamuro said the word 'overcrowded' is relative: what's 'overcrowded' for a Chinese upmarket traveller may be bustling and thumping to an Australian.



The programme includes a 90-minute training and presentation of the different essences, a gourmand coffee break and a 90-minute perfume creation workshop with the finest essences used. Guests bring home a 30ml bottle of their marvellous creation. Maximum eight people.

Asia World Indonesia Semana High Tea (half a day)

There is more to this idea than just high tea. A tent for a high tea picnic

is set up in Semana in the rural outskirts of Ubud. Along the way to Semana, clients pass through handicraft villages Batubulan and Singapadu where stops can be made for silver or gold workshops.

A short scenic trek from Semana village takes clients to the picnic spot on the Ayung riverbank, where a footbath and 60-minute Balinese massage await. After which, they can enjoy a picnic in their tent with a lavish choice of drinks and canapés. As the sun goes down, a small tradi-

tional dance will be performed by local kids from the nearby village. Maximum four people.

Asia World Indonesia Inspiring Central Bali (full day)

This tour takes guests to the central highland, passing through Kapal village, known as the centre of shrine production. Stops are made at Tabanan market for a glimpse of Balinese life, at Gedung Mario, a monument dedicated to the traditional dance maestro, at

resorts bali

For Pacto, Asians are generally interested in fine-dining and shopping for top-quality local goods. US travellers, Europeans and Australians want to interact with locals, be it through learning how to cook local food or perform a traditional dance. They are also interested in bird-watching, trekking, understanding traditional medicine and CSR programmes.

“A weak point for one market is therefore a strength for another,” Cadamuro said, adding that herein lies the beauty of Bali: it is able to cater to every need.

Asia World Indonesia managing director, Renato Domini, said it is only areas such as Kuta, Legian and, at times, Seminyak that are “busy”.

“As soon as you travel to Ubud, Manggis, Lovina and other areas, Bali is actually very calm and rural,” he said.

“All our programmes are highly personalised. Destinations and activities depend very much on guests’ preferences. However, we would usually include some signature experiences such as a private and exclusive lunch

in the middle of a rice field – prepared by our butler in front of the guests – exclusive access to a village temple or private reading by a Balinese royal.”

Asia World’s upmarket clients hail from Europe, the US and Australia, and are aged between 40 and 70 years old. Their programme typically combines cultural exploration, sightseeing as well as some relaxation in the highlands of Ubud and beach resorts in areas such as Jimbaran, Manggis and Seminyak.

Bali specialists are optimistic the island will continue to attract upmarket travellers from all over the world in the future, especially in light of infrastructure expansion that includes the extension of the airport and the toll road between Nusa Dua-Ngurah Rai-Benoa Harbour.

Said Asian Trails’ Seiler: “There are good cars available, very good restaurants in most areas and nice yachts to rent.”

Added Seiler: “Bali Air, the helicopter company, has just opened its own helicopter airport near the Benoa

Harbour. The harbour is easily accessible through the new (road) from the airport. Bali Air flies from there to hotels in Ubud or North Bali. Of late, a few five-star hotels in Bali have helipads.

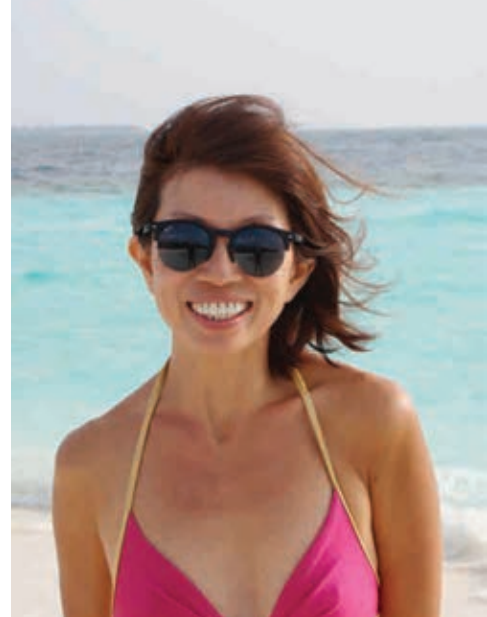
“Additionally Bali Air operates flights to Java and Lombok, and of course, sightseeing flights over Bali.”

There are, however, a few wishes that the operators have in order for Bali to serve the luxury market better.

Domini said: “There are many new luxury villas and resorts on the island but many of them don’t offer a unique experience, or some may have excellent hardware but lack the software.

“I would love to see, for instance, a property featuring a tented camp with butler service similar to the ones we see in Africa but with a Balinese touch.”

Cadamuro said: “The only thing I feel is missing and needed is a separate airport for small private jets. That would definitely give us an option to cater to the very top end of the luxury market.”



MY CHOICE



Seminyak

Bali can be proud that it has this great strip of hip restaurants and trendy boutiques in Seminyak.

Joining old but hot favourites KuDeTa, Metis and Sarong is Mamasan, a kitchen-bar-lounge that pops with its contemporary design, cheerful service and good Asian food, not to mention its name. For luxury clients, Seminyak would be fun. Pick a hotel like The Legian Bali and it would be seriously fun.

Though just minutes to Seminyak, once at the hotel’s doorstep, one really cannot complain that Bali is overcrowded, even in commercial meccas such as Seminyak.

The Legian has just undergone its biggest facelift since opening in 1996. A new 30m infinity lap pool has been

the butterfly park in Batukaru and at Pura Luhur Batukaru.

This is followed by a drive to Jatiluwih to see the UNESCO-listed manmade marvel of rice terraces stretching as far as the eyes can see. Lunch is served in a private venue amid ricefields. The drive back includes a stop at Taman Ayun royal temple to enjoy a sunset cocktail overlooking the Tanah Lot temple. Maximum four people.

Right Semana High Tea



Bali my way

Raini Hamdi picks Seminyak, Ubud and Tabanan. Verdict: so *not* overcrowded and still unique



Above from left The Legian Bali, Maya Ubud Resort & Spa, Alila Villas Soori

added to its two infinity pools, making a picture-perfect cascade of three pools by the ocean. Guests can laze around on a new beachfront sun deck, sip champagne in a new semi-open lounge by the sea and feast their eyes on freshly-landscaped gardens and ocean views (particularly at sunset) from the private balcony of their suite.

Guest comfort is the name of the facelift, and it appears in details such as an absence of air-con draft in the room, more natural light in the bathroom and first-class amenities and in-suite services.

Even the GM is new. And Kevin Abramowicz watches over the hotel like a hawk. I was impressed at how he was always supervising every corner of the property and finding time to talk to guests.

Ubud

Ubud was the 'real' Bali for me a decade ago. I have to agree it now has too many shops, too few real art and even fewer paddy fields. Nevertheless, it does have resorts that 'keep it real' and offer a generous piece of Bali's soulful and peaceful surroundings.

For example, once ensconced in Maya Ubud Resort & Spa in the Petanu River valley, the eyes rest only on the lush greenery of the forest and verdant rice fields. It would take a hardened mind not to feel recharged. The hotel's contemporary design with artistic Balinese touches, and the Balinese service honed for years by general manager Paul Blake, along with the restful surroundings, will ensure complaints about Ubud being 'un-Bali' are rubbish.

Stay in pool villa 503 – I love the infinity pool-in-the-tropical jungle and the expansive outdoor terrace. Plus Maya's fitness centre overlooking the golf putting green I used on a trip this year for its new equipment, modern two-level design and views.

Tabanan

The drive from Ngurah Rai is over an hour but, coming into the Tabanan regency, the sight of verdant rice terraces, volcanic mountains and Balinese traditional homes with their temples will bring the oohs and aahs.

More oohs and aahs when you get to Alila Villas Soori, the only hotel on a beachfront along the south-west coast of Bali. The 48-villa property feels more like a residence

than a hotel, is eco-friendly and is beautifully-designed by award-winning architect Soo K Chan. Once you're in it, you won't want to go out. The spa is a must, and there are so many places you just want to lounge around in including the library, the main pool, your own pool and pool deck.

What got me out eventually were Journeys by Alila, creative and exclusive tours that show off the destination's hidden beauty. I took the Journey of Arcadia, where I hiked breathtaking rice paddies and forest gardens with a guide from the village who astounded me with his knowledge of nature's glorious and surprising secrets. There are 12 eye-opening excursions to choose from, their exclusive and private nature being the real luxury.

HIGH-ALTITUDE GASTRONOMY



Always a playground for the rich and famous, from markets such as the US, the UK, Germany, France and, before they went broke, Spain and Greece, Switzerland now also wants more wealthy Asians to play in the country.

Efforts to tap South-east Asia, which started in 2008, are paying off. The region is now on track to generate some 500,000 overnights in Switzerland by 2016, from 350,000 now. SWISS' direct Singapore-Zurich service from May 13 also reflects growing demand from the region.

South-east Asian visitors spend more than visitors from China, said Switzerland Tourism's executive vice president-markets & meetings, Urs Eberhard. He discerns a segment who will part with even more Swiss francs – if only planners dangle more experiential products, tap niches such as honeymoon, gourmet, adventure travel, etc, and go beyond the same old attractions such as the Jungfrau, Titlis, Lucern and Interlaken.

As a gourmet travel destination, Switzerland has the total package: top quality produce, highly skilled chefs, professional service, idyllic settings with fresh clean air, easy accessibility to these areas and appetite-lifting attractions, be they beautiful hiking trails and ski runs, unique museums and historical places or high-end shopping places, to name a few.

Relais & Châteaux, a definitive guide to eating and living well, lists 28 members in Switzerland, nine of which achieved its restaurant grand chef status.

Raini Hamdi follows the smell of good food to two destinations that are relatively new to most Asian visitors: Jura in the north-west of Switzerland and Lenk in the Simmental in the south of the Bernese Oberland, central Switzerland.





Georges Wenger Restaurant & Hotel



Above from left Georges Wenger Restaurant, the maestro at work

LOCATION In canton Jura, cradle of the Swiss watch-making industry. Your clients love the watches, now get them to visit the watch museum in La Chaux-de-Fonds, a UNESCO World Heritage town just

a few kilometres from the hotel. They will be enthralled by the unbeatable collection and fascinating history of time. I bet they will buy more Swiss watches after their visit!

HOTEL A chateau on a nondescript street – but Georges Wenger could be on the most characterless street in Switzerland and gourmands would still make their way there.

Inside, it's anything but drab. Owners Andrea and Georges Wenger (see Editor's Note, page 1) have been ploughing every dollar

back to transform the building into a gorgeous five-star establishment. I stayed a night in a junior suite that has the sleekest of sleek interiors, plush amenities with the luxurious Relais & Châteaux insignia on them and refreshing views of undulating green fields and forests on the horizon.

F&B The main event is to eat at the hotel's 60-seat restaurant, where the Wengers, despite their celebrity status in the Swiss culinary world, still attend to every guest in a manner – I can vouch – that is wonderfully warm and caring. This is a huge part of their success – i.e. they don't just lend their name to a restaurant, they are actually hands-on and do it with love.

To start, freshly baked breads were served, along with a bowl of, huh, *tomato puree*? But I discovered soon enough this was no ordinary tomato dip – it's pure tomato with

30 spices and herbs, so light and flavourful I could not stop eating it.

That's another secret of Georges Wenger's success: he works only with local farmers and growers to select – indeed, *produce* – the best organic ingredients and invents one-of-a-kind dishes with them.

Light, flavourful and satisfying proved the essence of the whole dinner that followed. The seasonal menu, like the tomato puree at the start, looked deceptively simple: a tomato tart, consomme, chicken with chanterelles, cheese and desserts. But I wasn't fooled twice. And true enough, the simplicity belied the exquisite taste, presentation and portion of each course.

VERDICT Georges Wenger is to gastronomy what Patek Philippe is to watch-making: skilful, artful, loved and coveted. It's a reason to visit Jura, which is waiting to be discovered (www.juratourisme.ch).

Name Georges Wenger Restaurant & Hotel
No. of rooms 5
Address Rue de la Gare 2, CH-2340 Le Noirmont (Jura)
Contact
Tel: (41-0) 32-957-6633
Two Michelin stars; 18/20 GaultMillau; Grand chef, Relais & Châteaux (www.relaischateaux.com); email: rc-asia@relaischateaux.com



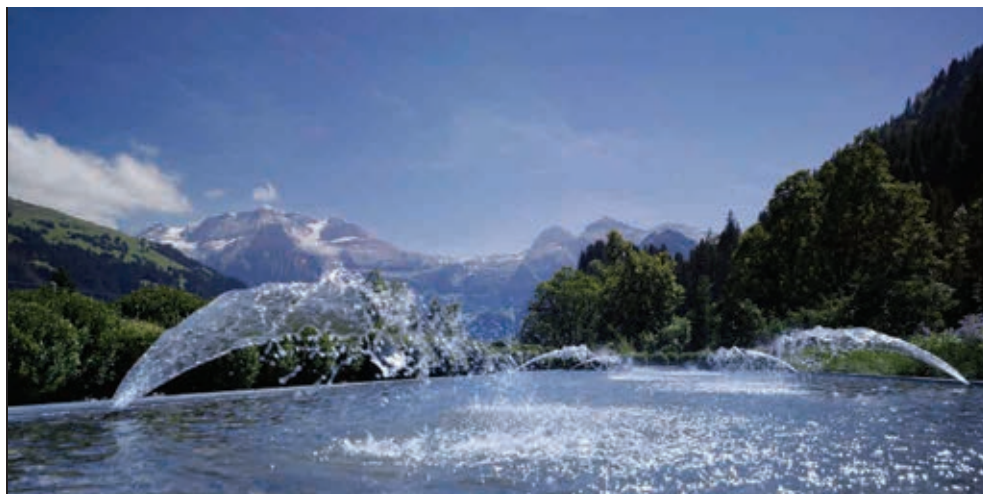
Lenkerhof Gourmet Spa Resort

LOCATION Lenk in the Simmental, the word ‘Simmental’ equals the best Swiss beef. And no wonder, even I want to be a cow here! The pasture is deliciously green, the mountain scenery impressive. For mere humans, there is plenty to do, or nothing. Walk, hike, cycle, river raft, hang glide, have an adventure in the park – nature provides endless amusements for individuals and MICE groups (try the rope course in the mighty trees or squeeze C-level brains to build a ‘boat’ then race it on the lake).

HOTEL This is a destination in itself, a five-star resort to frolic in for a few days. It’s a place to relax in style, enjoy gourmet dining and get beautiful at its ‘7 sources beauty and spa’.

Nestled amid unspoiled nature, mountains and springs, the original building is 17th century, but expansion and renovation have transformed it into a chic, youthful property with all the luxurious modern trappings in-suite and full facilities – three superbly-designed restaurants (one just for kids), two great pools, the spa, sleek meeting rooms, etc. It lacks nothing and keeps guests content without stepping out, while the outdoors will provide even more attractions, with the hotel having a full list of enticing ideas of what to do for both FITs and groups.

F&B An integral part of the resort



experience and included in the half-board package.

I was so looking forward to dinner at its gourmet restaurant Spettacolo, having heard about its grand setting and food.

Maître d’hôtel Christian Muller welcomed me warmly and explained how the menu works:

choose from 15 dishes, from starters to desserts, or if I like, have all 15 or twice, thrice, etc of anything.

I picked a starter, scampo with caviar and peas; a soup, essence of wild mushrooms;

a main course, fresh fish from the market; and two desserts, Nyangbo couverture with biscuit and mascapone and passionfruit crème brûlée.

Scampo is singular of scampi, as I soon found out when the starter arrived with one tiny prawn on it. But it was real art on a plate; my stomach was full just admiring it. I had to suppress a giggle when I



Top View from the resort’s heated open-air pool **Above** Eye-candy gastronomy at its main restaurant, Spettacolo

heard the guest behind me teasing the waiter, “Where’s the chicken?”, when he was being served the starter chicken with sweet corn and watercress.

No one will leave hungry however. The food tastes as good as it looks and guests have all night to enjoy whatever they want, which is a real luxury. There’s a bit of waiting in between courses, but it’s food worth waiting for.

VERDICT Eat well, live well and dream well in this resort which is located in an area that has much to offer (www.lenk-simmental.ch).

Name Lenkerhof Gourmet Spa Resort
No. of rooms and suites 80
Address Badstrasse 20, CH-3775 Lenk im Simmental (Bernese Oberland)
Contact
 Tel: (41-0) 33-736-3636
 Member, Relais & Châteaux (www.relaischateaux.com);
 email: rc-asia@relaischateaux.com

Allia Villas Soori, Bali, Indonesia



By Rosa Ocampo and Raini Hamdi

THE ESSENTIAL ASIAN SPA

No luxury travel to Asia would be complete without a spa journey.

Professional therapy rooted in ancient traditions and wisdom, service bar none, architecture that makes you feel well just stepping into the building and destination location that takes the breath away – all these factors set the Asian spa apart from its Western counterpart.

A trend to combine business with pleasure or leisure – bleisure or bleisure – also makes the Asian spa increasingly relevant for luxury meeting planners, many of whom are enhancing their meeting or incentive by including a spa component, be it mini massages during coffee breaks or a group spa session.

Here's *TTG Asia Luxury's* guide to the essential Asian spa.



The Aman Spa at Summer Palace, Beijing, China

1. SPA ALILA AT ALILA VILLAS SOORI (BALI, INDONESIA)

Why it is great Luxe therapy and treatment in an eco-chic hideaway that merges contemporary Asian architecture with an unspoilt beachfront. Premium privacy and heart-warming service by locals from the area. The spa's architecture itself (see cover page of this section) is a wow. Delightful treats: Alila's own top-of-the-line skincare and spa products can be tried while waiting for treatment. Delightful: Posh His & Hers bathroom amenities sumptuously arrayed in a box and generously refilled.

When it opened 2009

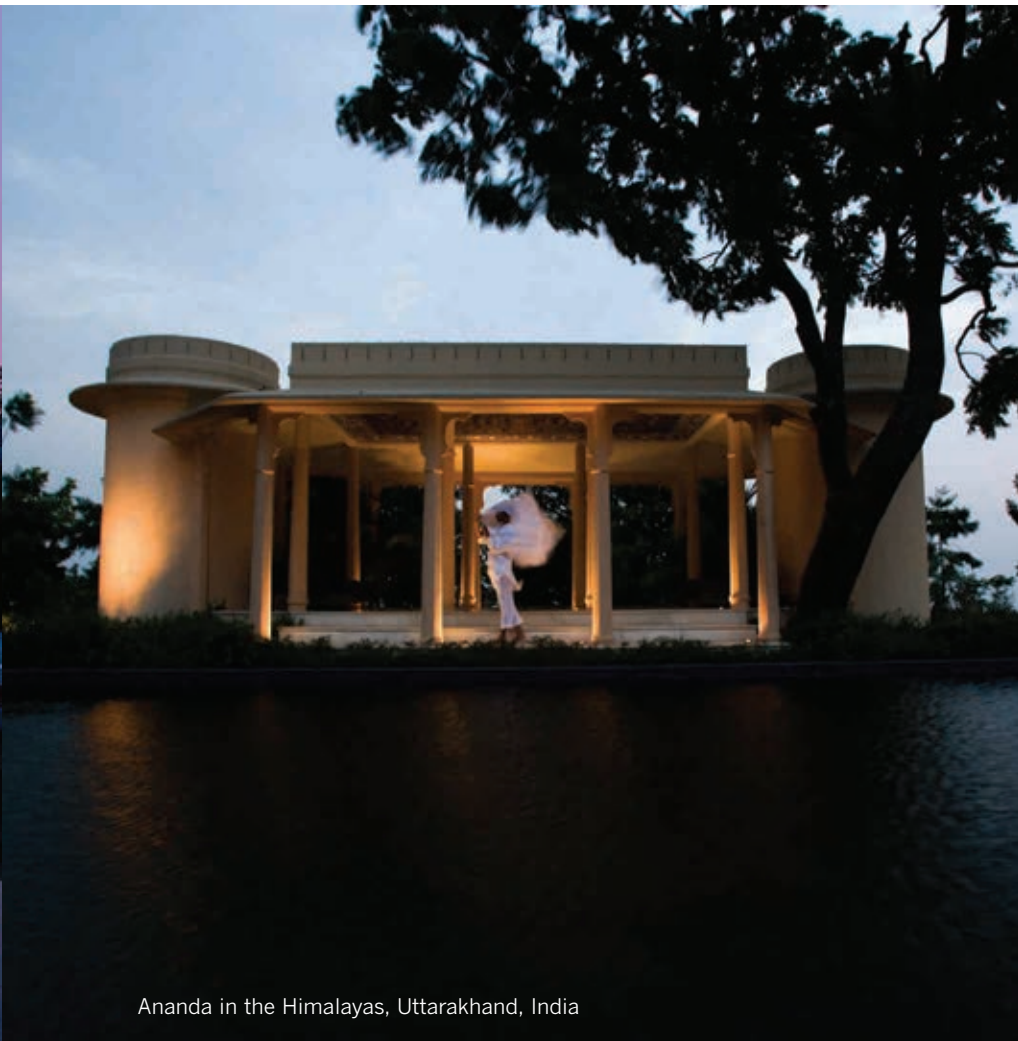
Location in destination Tucked in Tabanan, which is one of the most fertile, non-commercialised and picturesque places in Bali's southwestern coast, within walking distance to verdant rice terraces and 20 minutes to the famed Tanah Lot temple.

2. THE AMAN SPA AT SUMMER PALACE (BEIJING, CHINA)

Why it is great Invigorating blend of modern wellness and Imperial Chinese treatments in an escape-from-urban-landscape hideaway that exudes beauty, Oriental grandeur and history. The resort comprises a series of pavilions dating back over a century. Expert therapists, top-notch service, well-appointed facilities are all to be expected. Big bonus: The resort's private entrance to the Summer Palace next door gives guests unparalleled access to the attraction from morn till dusk.

When it opened October 2008

Location in destination Next to the Summer Palace with access to the Fragrant Hills woods and temples, Panjiayuan antique and heirloom markets, Dazhalan Lu and Luilichang streets peddling time-honoured brands of traditional medicines, snuff bottles, scrolls, paintings and other things Chinese, and a slew of historical and cultural sites around the big city.



Ananda in the Himalayas, Uttarakhand, India

3. ANANDA IN THE HIMALAYAS (UTTARAKHAND, INDIA)

Why it is great Redefines lifestyle with exceptionally good treatments from highly skilled therapists. Combines the traditional Indian wellness concepts of Ayurveda, yoga and Vedanta with international wellness regimes. Classic architecture, healthy food, privacy and hospitable service complete the luxe experience.

When it opened 2000

Location in destination In the Himalayan foothills in the town of Narendranagar in the state of Uttarakhand, close to the cities of Haridwar and Rishikesh. Accessible by helicopter from various points in India.

4. AURIGA SPA AT CAPELLA SENTOSA (SINGAPORE)

Why it is great Wellness philosophy based on phases of the moon and signature treatments using 100 per cent natural and organic products that reflect the varying energies of the lunar cycle. Other pluses: eclectic design mixing vintage with modern architecture; natural setting on a knoll surrounded by rolling hills and a rainforest; utmost privacy; and personalised service.

When it opened 2009

Location in destination The Knolls in Sentosa Island, 10 minutes' drive from the CBD. It is also close to the neighbouring Sentosa Golf Club and, for nautical enthusiasts, the One^o15 Marina Club.



The Banjaran Hotsprings and Retreat, Ipoh, Malaysia

5. THE BANJARAN HOTSPRINGS AND RETREAT (IPOH, MALAYSIA)

Why it is great Luxurious hideaway ensconced in a vast valley surrounded by million-year-old limestone hills, geothermal hotsprings, waterfalls and jungles. Extensive menu of wellness programmes based on the natural healing power of the mineral-laden hotsprings. Bonuses: 24-hour hotspring jacuzzi, plunge pools, dipping pools, thermal steam bath, crystal cave. Tip: the Banjaran signature massage is a must.

When it opened 2010

Location in destination In Tambun, 15-minute drive from Ipoh, the capital of Perak, 1.5 hours drive from Penang and two hours from Kuala Lumpur. Within The Banjaran are natural attractions such as a jungle walk, mini zoo, thermal and crystal caves, mountain lakes and gardens. Beyond it are the Perak Golf Club, Lost World of Tambun theme park, Sam Poh Tong Buddhist temple, Geological Museum, Japanese Garden and Keh Lok Teng Temple.



Banyan Tree Spa at Marina Bay Sands, Singapore

6. BANYAN TREE RINGHA (YUNNAN, CHINA)

Why it is great Spa with altitude: 3,200m above sea level in what is officially designated as Shangri-La – historically and culturally a part of Greater Tibet in China's Yunnan province. Beckons with a rejuvenating selection of Himalayan treatments in a resort built from real Tibetan farmhouses and bedecked with furnishings and artifacts in vibrant hues of reds.

When it opened 2005

Location in destination In Yunnan, 40 minutes' drive from Diqing Airport. Good vantage point for exploring the surrounding Hongpo Village, getting to know the various tribes in the area, visiting the Songzanlin and Dabao monasteries, and trekking the snow mountain peaks, ridges, canyons, valleys and streams around Yunnan.

7. BANYAN TREE SPA AT MARINA BAY SANDS (SINGAPORE)

Why it is great Banyan Tree Spas' first venture in its headquarters in Singapore celebrates the homecoming with a "high-touch, low-tech" approach coupled with exotic therapies inspired by Asian traditions and the use of natural herbs, spices and aromatic oils. All therapists are trained by the Banyan Tree Spa Academy in Thailand and China, ensuring a consistently high standard of spa experience. The tropical garden concept and the holistic focus on spiritual, mental and physical harmony, make this an exclusive retreat for renewal right in the heart of action in the city.

When it opened July 2011

Location in destination The waterfront Marina Bay Sands is accessible from all points of the citystate, with the CBD right across the water and shopping centres and golf courses being just nearby. Changi International Airport is about 10 minutes' ride away.

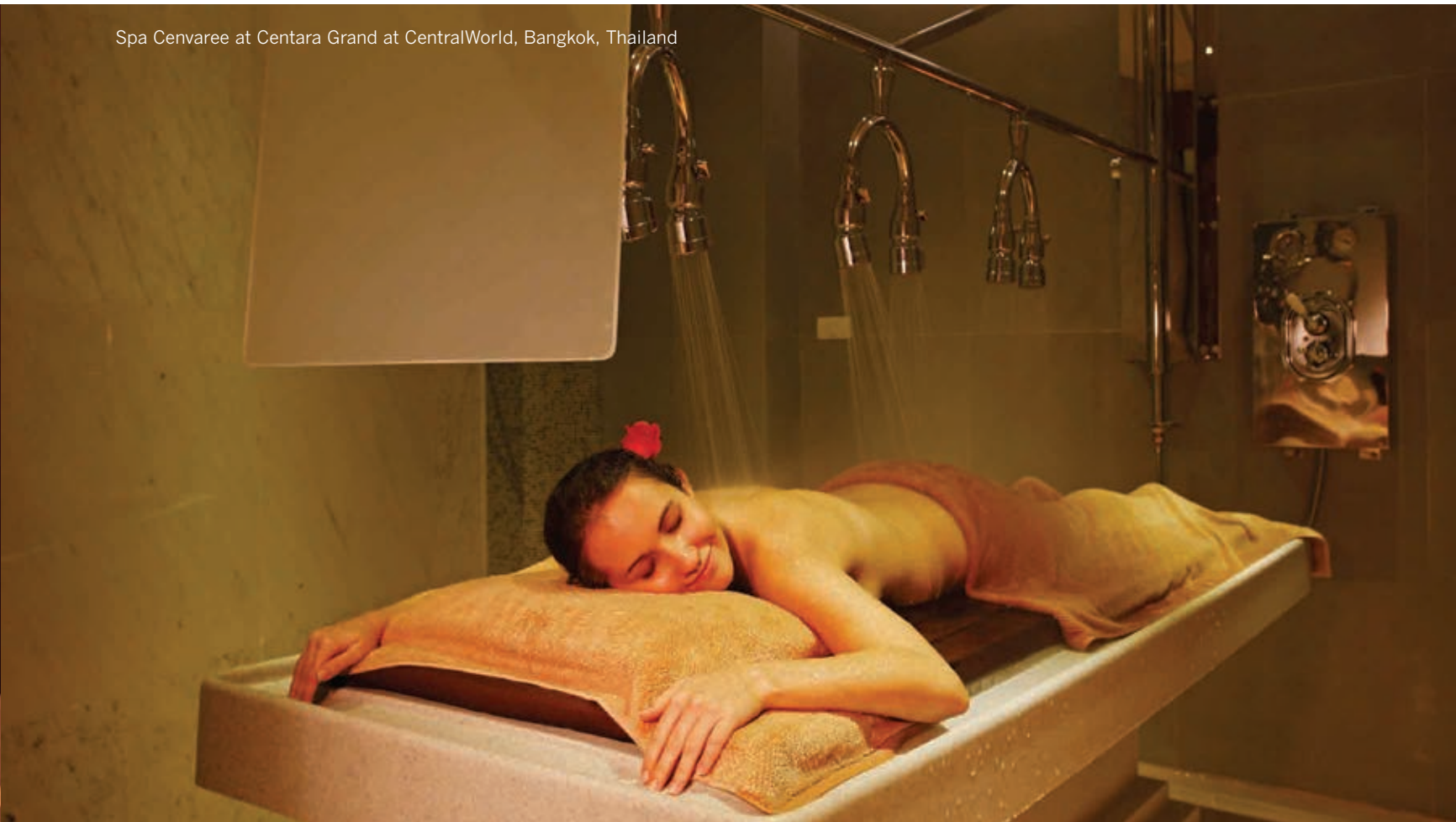
8. SPA CENVAREE AT CENTARA GRAND AT CENTRALWORLD (BANGKOK, THAILAND)

Why it is great City sanctuary noted for exceptional treatments and bespoke age-old therapies for body, mind and soul balance, blending the finest elements of native herbs with traditional Thai rituals. Must not miss: Seasonal treatments from the hydro experience menu, using ingredients carefully chosen for their cooling energies during hot and dry season, and warming energies during cooler and rainy season.

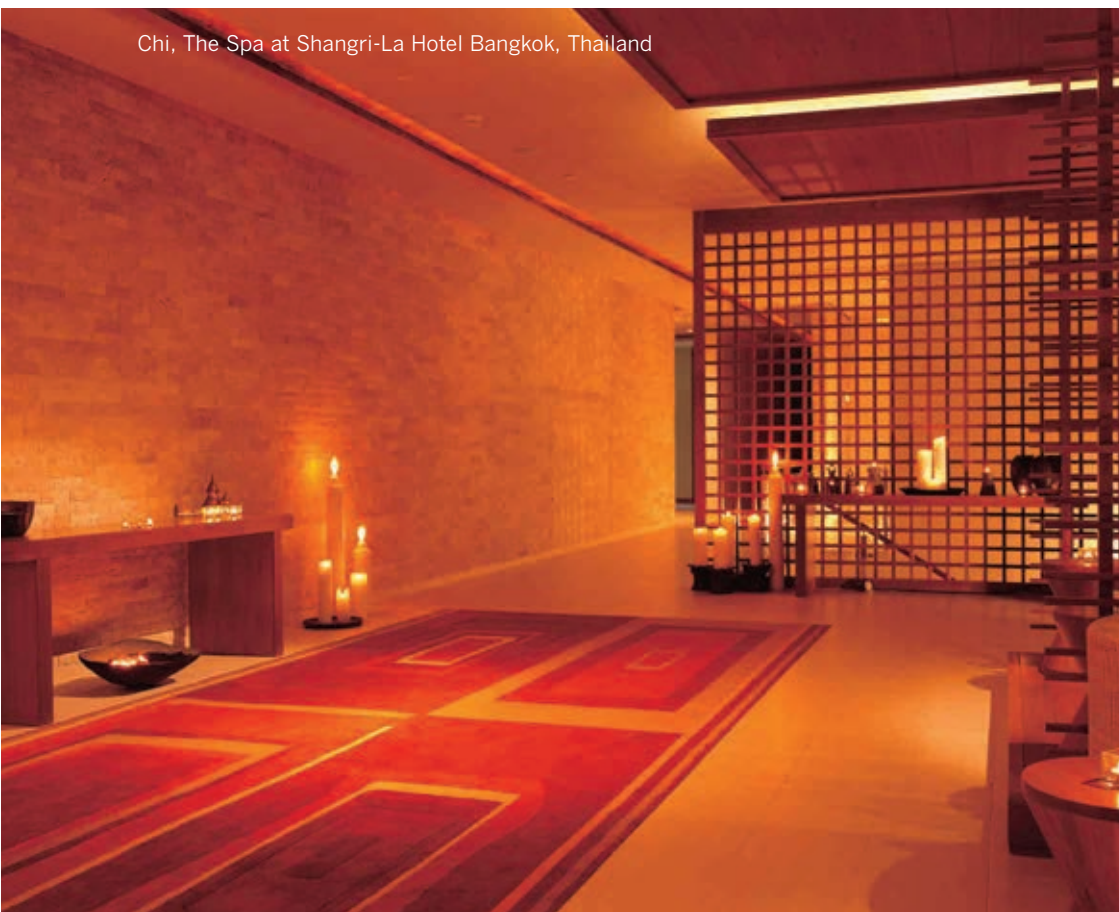
When it opened 2008

Location in destination Centrally located in Ratchaprasong near Bangkok's CBD, food and entertainment centres, and a stone's throw to shopping meccas including Siam Paragon. It is connected to Asia's largest lifestyle shopping mall, CentralWorld. Beats the traffic jam with its proximity to the BTS sky train.

Spa Cenvaree at Centara Grand at CentralWorld, Bangkok, Thailand



Chi, The Spa at Shangri-La Hotel Bangkok, Thailand



9. CHI, THE SPA AT SHANGRI-LA HOTEL BANGKOK (THAILAND)

Why it is great Gain back your *chi* with Asian and Thai treatments using pressure points. Commodious suites with high ceilings, eclectic décor, relaxing lights, soothing music and a heavenly scent make this a true city oasis. A must-do is the Signature Chi balance full-body massage using acupressure and long kneading strokes that many attest is the best way to relax.

When it opened 2004

Location in destination Next to the Chao Phraya River and just off New Road in the midst of the banking, business and shopping districts. It faces the Saphan Taksin skytrain station, providing rapid travel to all parts of the city. Bangkok's major historical areas, important temples and museums can be easily reached by boat or car from the hotel.



Chiva-Som Resort & Spa, Hua Hin, Thailand



10. CHIVA-SOM RESORT & SPA (HUA HIN, THAILAND)

Why it is great All-encompassing personalised treatments and an extensive spa menu monitored by a full suite of estheticians, medical doctors, nutritionists and other professional staff. Complemented by a deluxe locale, utmost privacy, personal care and healthy yet tasty cuisine from its own organic gardens.

When it opened 1998

Location in destination Well ensconced near Hua Hin's beach and market village, Hua Hin Railway, Royal Hua Hin golf course and Khao Takiab or Chopsticks Hill. Other areas of interest: Several golf clubs and resorts in the vicinity, elephant riding at several locations in Hua Hin, Phraya Nakorn Cave, the tiered waterfall of Nam Tok Pa-La-U, Petchaburi Summer Palace and Maruekkhathayawan Palace.

11. THE SPA BY CLARINS AT THE RESIDENCE MALDIVES (MALDIVES)

Why it is great Overwater spa that juts 230m out to sea, surrounded by endless sunny skies, crystal clear lagoon, colourful coral reefs and nothing much beside. Rejuvenate in style: signature holistic treatments made of active ingredients from plant origins, Maldivian architecture with customised furnishings and artifacts, classy interiors, huge open deck for meditation and yoga. The only Clarins spa in the Maldives. Surprise: an inimitable mini welcome treatment by the affable spa manager, guaranteed to bring a big smile to the face.

When it opened 2012

Location in destination On the island of Falhumaafushi in the Gaafu Alifu atoll, part of Huvadhoo, one of the largest and deepest atolls in the Maldives, accessible via a 55-minute flight to Koodoo airport and a seven-minute speedboat transfer. Gateway to some of the best coral reefs, untouched marine world and unexplored dive sites like Vilingili Kanduu, Ekkau Thia and Nilandu Kanduu, sited between five minutes and an hour from the hotel.

12. COMO SHAMBHALA ESTATE, BALI (INDONESIA)

Why it is great Authentic sanctuary for holistic wellness where many of the bespoke treatments are water-based, from the estate's natural spring which is locally revered for its healing properties. The residential feel and sense of community give it added charm. Every aspect – from architecture, uncomplicated design and top-notch facilities, to specialist staff, quality service and cuisine – are meant to help guests improve their physical, mental and spiritual health.

When it opened 2005

Location in destination 15 minutes' drive from the inland town of Ubud, surrounded by villages, temples, rice paddies and jungle gorges great for hiking and biking. Activities can be arranged around the area: museum, temple and gallery visits, outdoor rock-climbing, canyoning and marine-based activities including snorkelling, scuba-diving, surfing, stand-up paddling and whitewater rafting.



Espa at Resorts World Sentosa, Singapore

13. DEVARANA SPA AT DUSIT THANI MALDIVES (MALDIVES)

Why it is great Outstanding holistic journey and premium treatments on an island paradise. Reconnects to nature with luxurious treatment pods hanging on trees. Must-try is the Mudhdhoo body bliss using the indigenous plant ingredients of the eponymous island.

When it opened 2012

Location in destination Boasts prime spot in the country's first UNESCO biosphere reserve on Mudhdhoo Island 35 minutes from Malé by seaplane and 10 minutes by speedboat from the new domestic airport in Baa Atoll.

14. ESPA AT RESORTS WORLD SENTOSA (SINGAPORE)

Why it is great At 10,000m², it is the biggest spa in Singapore and ESPA's flagship spa in Asia. Full range of personalised programmes consisting of Espa's signature treatments, dished out by a specialist team of naturopaths, therapists and personal trainers. More wow factors for that ultra luxe lifestyle retreat: state-of-the-art facilities including the only authentic hamman in Singapore; posh interiors; majestic seaview from cliff-top location; gourmet delights; and sprawling grounds.

When it opened July 2012

Location in destination At the western tip of Resorts World Sentosa, with easy access to Singapore's CBD and shopping districts and Sentosa island's attractions including the Underwater World, Universal Studios and an 18-hole championship golf course.

15. THE FARM AT SAN BENITO (BATANGAS, PHILIPPINES)

Why it is great Integrated medical and wellness resort with a team of on-site doctors, licensed therapists, movement consultants and chefs in a luxurious yet natural environment. Lush grounds spanning 48 hectares, bucolic scenery, fresh air and total communion with nature make for a life-affirming experience.

When it opened 2001

Location in destination In the foothills of Mount Malarayat in Batangas, a 90-minute drive south of Manila, usually the starting point for exploring the natural tourist attractions in the nearby provinces of Laguna, Batangas, Cavite, including Tagaytay and Quezon.



Maya Ubud Resort & Spa, Bali, Indonesia

Devarana Spa at Dusit Thani Maldives

16. I.SAWAN RESIDENTIAL SPA & CLUB AT GRAND HYATT ERAWAN BANGKOK (THAILAND)

Why it is great Overnight stays and treatments in resort-style spa cottages smack in the urban landscape. Pluses: fine cuisine and mix of relaxation, pampering and fitness. Recommended for well-being and equilibrium: the signature massage that works deeper on the tissues to speed up the detox process, enhance circulation and boost muscle flexibility and movement.

When it opened November 2005

Location in destination In the commercial and diplomatic district of Ratchaprasong in Bangkok, minutes away from Sukhumvit and Silom and steps away from the Erawan Shrine, shopping malls including the CentralWorld Department Store, and Chidlom and Rajdamri BTS Skytrain stations.

17. MAYA UBUD RESORT & SPA (BALI, INDONESIA)

Why it is great Highly relaxing spa Eden overhanging by the river, flanked by jungle, rice fields and lush gardens. Lavish facilities, personalised but unobtrusive service, private and relaxing ambience with only the sounds of nature. Must not miss: signature Maya massage to soothe tired muscles and balm aching sinews.

When it opened 2001

Location in destination Between the Petanu River valley and the rice fields of Peliatan in Ubud, within walking distance of the rainforest. Various activities can be arranged, including trekking to the village, rice paddies and the nature path that runs along the river.

18. MEERA SPA AT GILI LANKANFUSHI MALDIVES (MALDIVES)

Why it is great Extra-sensory spa in an eco-luxe resort with a choice of over-water treatment rooms having glass floor panels for a view of the ocean below, or an open-air spa surrounded by nature. Spa Suites with couples' treatment room and other swanky amenities are available. Cap the experience with the signature massage using bamboo with warmed aromatic oils.

When it opened July 1, 2012

Location in destination Lankanfushi is a private coral island on the Male Atoll, 20 minutes by boat from the international airport. Spa immersion is great after enjoying leisure activities within the self-contained island, including various watersports, yoga and tai chi, jogging around the island, jungle cinema, etc.



The Peninsula Spa at The Peninsula Hong Kong



Willow Stream Spa at Fairmont Makati, Philippines

19. THE MEKONG SPA AT LA RÉSIDENCE PHOU VAU (LUANG PRABANG, LAOS)

Why it is great A full range of effective bespoke treatments based on traditional Laotian herbal remedies. The property oozes with old-world appeal yet has modern facilities and amenities. Tiptop service from professional staff. Relaxing sounds of nature, pleasing scents and aromas.

When it opened 2006

Location in destination On Phou Vao Hill 4km east of Luang Prabang International Airport and only 2km from the charming old town of Luang Prabang. Ideal starting point to experience the countryside, including the Mekong and Nam Kam rivers, Hmong Village, Kung Si Waterfalls and the Elephant Village.

20. THE PENINSULA SPA, THE PENINSULA HONG KONG (HONG KONG)

Why it is great: Spa with a view in a hotel well-loved for its outstanding and consistently excellent spa treatments, bespoke yet unobtrusive service, and luxurious yet functional facilities. Electronically operated treatment beds with nearly limitless bed positioning, aromatherapy 'experience showers', spa elevator with water curtains and 'breathing wall' of water scenes to experience transitional space. All these come with a breathtaking view of Hong Kong.

When it opened May 2006

Location in destination At the end of Nathan Road in Tsim Sha Tsui where one can walk everywhere – to Hong Kong Harbour promenade for cultural immersion, various points of Kowloon for some retail therapy, to the Star Ferry for going to Hong Kong Island, and to the MTR to various points in Hong Kong.

21. SONEVA FUSHI (MALDIVES)

Why it is great Spa products are paraben-free and organic. Offers a delightful mix of indoor and outdoor treatment rooms, in the jungle and on the beach. This is a back-to-nature island getaway. Eco-delights: 'no news no shoes' policy; 'intelligent luxury' which protects the environment in every form; and a wellness calendar capped by visits of high-profile master practitioners.

Enjoy full privacy, great service, the luxury of having a personal assistant 24/7 and divine F&B.

When it opened 1995

Location in destination At the Baa Atoll (north of Male), 35 minutes by seaplane or domestic flight and 10 minutes by speedboat ride.



Thermes Marins Bali Spa at Ayana Resort and Spa, Bali, Indonesia

22. THE SPA AT THE NAM HAI (HOI AN, VIETNAM)

Why it is great Consistently good therapies and treatments in a modern-minimalist resort by the sea whose luxuriously designed compounds simply take the breath away. Understated elegance, spacious grounds and villas, open-air design and trademark Vietnamese hospitality all combine to create the much-sought aura of serenity and tranquility.

When it opened December 2006

Location in destination Steps from the palm-fringed Hoi An beach just outside Danang and a mere 15 minutes from the picturesque ancient trading port of Hoi An for bits of culinary adventure, retail therapy and sightseeing.

23. THERMES MARINS BALI SPA AT AYANA RESORT AND SPA (BALI, INDONESIA)

Why it is great Signature treatments using some of the most exclusive products. Houses the world's largest Aquatonic Seawater Therapy Pools. Posh pampering top to toe using diamonds, silk, pearls, champagne, petals of 500 red roses. And more: majestic spa setting atop limestone cliffs overlooking the ocean. Resort offers maximum seclusion in lavish Balinese villas, personal butler on call 24/7 and non-intrusive service.

When it opened 1996 (as The Ritz-Carlton Bali, Resort & Spa, as the property was then known)

Location in destination In Jimbaran Bay on the south-western coast of Bali, 30 minutes from Ngurah Rai International Airport. A good base for basking in the white sand beach and exploring the island's many other wonders.

24. WILLOW STREAM SPA AT FAIRMONT MAKATI (PHILIPPINES)

Why it is great Understated plush retreat in the heart of the city inviting one to slow down, catch the breath and recharge. Skilled therapists who know the treatments that one wants and needs. Attention to little details (check the spa bed – it's equipped with heater and covered with rich feather top beds in 100 per cent cotton linens). Small touches (just the right volume of soothing music, subtle aromatherapy, unobtrusive service) make a whole difference.

When it opened 2013

Location in destination In Makati's business, entertainment and shopping district, near the Ayala Centre, Greenbelt and Glorietta shopping malls and the Asian Institute of Management. Also within walking distance to the Philippine Stock Exchange, the embassy row and corporate offices.

gasp!

Latest reason to holiday in Vietnam: Amano'i

It is the latest opening by Amanresorts and, true to form, the location is spectacular: on the dramatic coastline of Nui Chua National Park, one of the country's largest natural conservation sites which protects an area of more than 29,000 hectares of pristine coastal and marine habitats in the Ninh Thuan province.

After a scenic drive through the national park, your clients climb a broad bank of stairs to the resort's central pavilion and are rewarded by an unforgettable sight of the sea and coastline.

Guest accommodation includes 31 pavilions, a number with private pools, and five Aman villas, all with impressive views. As with all Amanresorts, it's hard to leave the oasis but there is plenty to do outside. The province is home to Cham, a key ethnic group in Vietnam; guests can explore Vinh Hy Bay and the East Sea by kayak or Hobie Cat; snorkel and marvel at delicate stag horn corals and curtains of tropical fish; trek or explore the park where at least 1,500 plant species, 160 bird species and 60 species of mammals have been recorded.



The \$318,000 package

Fairmont Singapore created a S\$318,000 (US\$253,571) mid-autumn festival package whose opulent perks included a private charter to Shanghai for 10 pax, 1x4N stay at the presidential suite of the historic Fairmont Peace Hotel Shanghai (picture on the right depicts the famous Fairmont Peace Hotel Shanghai Afternoon Tea Dance), 4x4N stay at the signature river view suite of the hotel, exclusive gala dinner at the legendary Dragon Phoenix Restaurant with premium champagne, after-dinner cocktails at the Jazz Bar, premium charter boat ride on Huang Pu River with wine and mooncakes, limousine transfers throughout and 10x exclusive boxes of baked or snowskin mooncakes.

At press time on September 24, alas, no one went over the moon. The hotel reported a few enquiries but no takers.



Listen to the music, buy the piano

Steinway Gallery Singapore, Asia's first Steinway & Sons boutique, has spearheaded the creation of a premium travel package for classical music lovers in the region to enjoy world-class music in a unique way.

The Steinway Classic Weekend Tour offers music lovers in the Philippines, Brunei, Myanmar and Laos airfare and a 4D3N stay in Singapore with quality performances and the coveted opportunity to participate in a masterclass with a Steinway Artist at Steinway Gallery Singapore.

The next tour, slated for November 28 to December 1, features classical megastar Lang Lang. Your clients have the once-in-a-lifetime chance to buy a Steinway piano that he has played on. They can also attend an exclusive Secrets of Steinway presentation and learn about Steinway & Sons' quality craftsmanship and artistry. Travel free or get full reimbursement for the entire trip with the purchase of a Steinway grand piano (conditions apply).

gasp!

Why men love to shoppe in Singapore

When packaging luxe Singapore, be sure to include more time for clients to spend at The Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands (MBS) Singapore, where Prada has gone a notch higher by expanding its current duplex into an extraordinary three-level boutique. This first standalone men's store of Prada in Singapore also sees the debut of the brand's limited edition Oltremare Millennium Crocodile briefcase and clutch bags in South-east Asia, with the store carrying six pieces of these coveted accessory.

John Postle, MBS' vice president of retail, said: "Discerning male shoppers are forming a growing portion of fashion and accessories shoppers today. They are now able to access high quality, ready-to-wear fashion conveniently – all under one roof in the heart of Singapore's Central Business District. The Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands is well positioned to capture the rising demand of well-heeled male shoppers and business travelers with our in-depth collection of luxury men's labels and bespoke services."

Ermenegildo Zegna has also unveiled its newest outpost in Singapore, its fourth in the city, at The Shoppes, while Parmigiani Fleurier and Mikimoto have joined the current collection of over 50 watch and jewellery boutiques by opening their flagship stores in South-east Asia there.

Hugo Boss has a new interior and an additional women's ready-to-wear and accessory line curated by New York-based fashion designer Jason Wu.

In all, The Shoppes features a fleet of 300 retail outlets.



A not-to-be-missed golf event

Luxe planners with golf-loving clients can head straight to the Dragon Lake Golf Club in Guangzhou, China, which is hosting The Royal Trophy-Europe vs Asia Golf Championship from December 20 to 22. And what a line-up of players is in store.

The Asian team, led by captain YE Yang, includes Chinese golf legends Zhang Lianwei and Liang Wen-chong (pictured), and Korean match-play maestro KT Kim.

The Royal Trophy is played over three days in a highly-competitive team match-play format featuring 16 foursomes, four-ball and singles matches. Each continent is represented by eight players.

The only official golf championship pitting Asia and Europe, it was created in concert with the vision of the late five-time Major winner Seve Ballesteros. The trophy is a 16kg solid silver, donated by His Majesty the King of Thailand.

China is hosting the event, now the seventh, for the first time. "The first hosting of the Royal Trophy in China is a historic event. The Royal Trophy Players' Committee is looking forward to a magnificent competition between Europe and Asia and a great showcase of continental team match-play golf," said Royal Trophy Players' Committee Member and six-time Major winner Sir Nick Faldo.



Where Pink had a 'life-changing' holiday

Here's where pop star Pink and her husband Carey Hart enjoyed a 'life-changing' holiday in Indonesia ahead of her Australian tour last June.

BEST-KEPT SECRET: NIHWATU (right)

WHERE: SUMBA (55-minute charter flight east of Bali)





Constance craving

Constance Hotels and Resorts, a Mauritian entity with seven luxurious resorts across the Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles and Madagascar, is keen on tapping well-heeled Asians from South-east Asia and North Asia.

The group forayed into India last year, for example, and held a second roadshow there in May this year to raise awareness among planners of its "unique and ultimate" offerings for the golf, family, wedding, honeymoon and exclusive meetings markets.

While the first year focused on trade development from the metro cities, this year sees the group targeting tier two cities such as Ahmedabad, Chandigarh, Chennai and Jaipur.

It has also set up representation in key Asian markets such as Hong Kong.

The Constance brand promise encompasses "exclusivity, emotion and excellence". This manifests in outcomes such as being sited in extraordinary locations, customising holidays for kids and adding more smiles to adult faces with ultimate pampering, be it through the Culinary Spirit of Constance or the Spa de Constance.

Starchitect Tadao Ando on hotel design today:



"I believe people are too caught up in the world of luxury – the tallest, the newest, the largest, the first, etc.

Just because expensive materials and brand name furniture are used to furnish a hotel's interior does not necessarily mean it is an ultimate luxury hotel. I suppose it is a great way to enjoy them. However, architecturally, to create a hotel, such luxury items are not necessarily needed for an enriching, memorable and comfortable one-and-only experience. I am not saying that they are bad; they are all great in their own way, but this seems overly done and endlessly repetitious.

"Hotel owners and developers are chasing after similar goals, similar brand names, similar images and trying to out-do each other one way or the other. I wish people competed by redefining the true meaning of a hotel. What is luxury? What is comfort? What is a good, memorable experience?"

For most people, a hotel is a home away from home. It makes them feel relaxed physically and mentally or makes them feel special and important. I hope to maintain this image of hotels but in a new interpretation no one has thought of before – yet, it is something so obvious, which has always existed."

(The Pritzker Prize architect's notable projects include the Tokyo Skytree, Omotesando Hills and Capella Niseko Resort & Residences, in which Pontiac Land Singapore has a stake in.)



Where to get the royal treatment

Answer: Royal Cliff Hotels Group Thailand's newly renovated Royal Wing (www.royalwingsuites.com).

What's new: an exclusive entrance and a refreshed pool and surrounding landscape. Presidential suites and salas have been redesigned into three- and two-bedroom accommodations, their accompanying salas oozing Thai-style beachside relaxation and luxury (above, the Presidential Platinum Suite's dining room). Clients can also absorb panoramic views of the Gulf of Thailand in brand new jacuzzis. The Royal Wing Suites & Spa has also been refurbished.



Best read

TTGmice (sister publication of *TTG Asia Luxury*)

Why: insightful cover stories are one reason. The magazine has just won another PATA Gold Award Travel Journalism-Business Article Award for its July 2012 cover story, *A Brighter Shade of Green*. Written by group editor Karen Yue with reports from our team of reporters in the region, the article studies the Asia-Pacific MICE industry's reception of environment-friendly facilities and practices, spotlighting notable green venues.

TTGmice was also previously awarded the PATA Gold Award in 2011 and 2009 for, respectively, its November 2010 cover story *Rebuilding the team* and September 2008 cover story *DMCs defined: The real knights of creativity*.



Viva el Vive!

Two former hoteliers of world-renowned hotel brands, Michael Luible (above) and Stephan Gnagi, have launched Vive Hospitality, a company that provides white-label hospitality solutions to independent hotel owners with distinctive assets in South-east Asia.

Right now, they are busy with their first project: conceptualising, managing and operating a 271-room hip four-star hotel in Kuala Lumpur's affluent district Damansara. To be named Qliq Hotel, it is part of a mixed-use development that includes residential and commercial areas and a performing arts centre.

Luible, Vive's executive director, opened and repositioned One&Only Reethi Rah in the Maldives and Capella in Singapore. He was also involved in rebranding and upscaling One&Only Kanuhura, Maldives, and was regional director of One&Only Resorts. Luible also served as general manager of Le Touessrok Mauritius and Raffles Hotel Singapore, and was managing director of Karma Resorts before setting up the new venture.

Gnagi, Vive's managing director, held senior management positions with The Savoy Group, Hilton Hotels, One&Only, Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group and Raffles International.

Also on Vive's board of directors are investment banker Tatang Tabrani; Linda Wong, who specialises in M&As, real estate and commercial transactions; and Susie Cheah-Gnagi, specialist in sales and marketing and the development/distribution of wellness products.

Why are there six ILTMs?

Simon Mayle (left), head of marketing, International Luxury Travel Market (ILTM), explains:



The global umbrella ILTM each December in Cannes is now in its 12th year – proof that it is the definitive marketplace for buyers from across the world to view, meet and build business with suppliers from all four corners of the world.

The buyers who attend our key regional events, ILTM Asia and ILTM Americas, represent culturally different, emerging high net worth clients. By bringing luxury suppliers from over 70 countries together in one place, these buyers are able to develop dedicated itineraries with these very different audiences in mind.

ILTM Japan and ILTM Africa invite international trade from key source markets specialising in these destinations. ILTM Spa mirrors this model, focusing on the increasingly popular global spa and wellness industry.

Seventy-four per cent of buyers and planners attending ILTM Americas 2012 had never been to an ILTM before and 90 per cent of those would not go to another ILTM event that year. Thirty-seven per cent of those attending ILTM Africa had never attended an ILTM event before. This means that our exhibitors will always identify the new rising stars of luxury travel at each ILTM, the *raison d'être* of all ILTM events.

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Horse Painting
by Xu Chengxiang,
the famous Royal Court
painter in Qing dynasty.
Length: 165cm Width: 287.5cm
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The Stone for riding horse
from Qing Dynasty
Existing in Kuanzhai Alley, Chengdu

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