

TTG ASIA

[LUXURY]

for buyers of premium travel and luxury meetings

KWEK LENG BENG
MY WAY

12
NEW
LUXURY
HOTEL
BRANDS
TO WATCH

DESTINATIONS
Authenticity in the city

LONGHAUL
Not cold Turkey

GASP!
The audacity of luxury





Private dining room with sensational Macau views

A NEW LEVEL OF PRIVATE DINING

Grand Hyatt Macau's exclusive private dining experience

Grand Hyatt Macau at City of Dreams - which has been voted by TTG readers as the Best City Hotel in Macau for two consecutive years - knows how to host events designed to impress. However, its new 37th Floor Private Dining offers the ultimate high-rolling experience. The exclusive dinner for up to 12 guests is served in a private dining salon with top-of-the-city views, a multi-cuisine menu and tailor-made table settings.

Located in the penthouse of the Grand Club Tower, the four new ultra-private dining rooms have been designed to offer the next level of contemporary private dining for guests desiring a truly memorable occasion.

Wood-panelled walls and leather chesterfield sofas give the dining rooms a residential-style ambience. Floor-to-ceiling windows frame Macau's impressive skyline. Guests can further personalise the styling of their suite, including the design of the French tableware (there are five settings to choose from) and the floral setup.

The customisation continues to the menu, which offers more than 150 dishes. Diners can enjoy favourites from Grand Hyatt Macau's three restaurants, such as Traditional Beijing Style Duck prepared by Beijing Kitchen, fresh seafood and local Macanese delicacies such as African Chicken from mezza9 Macau - all in the same meal!

Other creative seasonal dishes are exclusive to the private dining rooms. Paul Kwok, General Manager of Grand Hyatt Macau and Stephen Au, Executive Sous Chef regularly travel around China's Guangdong province selecting premium ingredients that will appeal to the most discerning guests. For something truly unique, private dining guests may request a Seasonal Set Menu or Individual Hot Pot meal using the finest ingredients gathered from their travels.

"True luxury is in the details. We wanted to create an exquisite dining experience where every detail is carefully customised to each guest's preferences and to offer a level of personalised service that befits royalty," explains Paul Kwok.

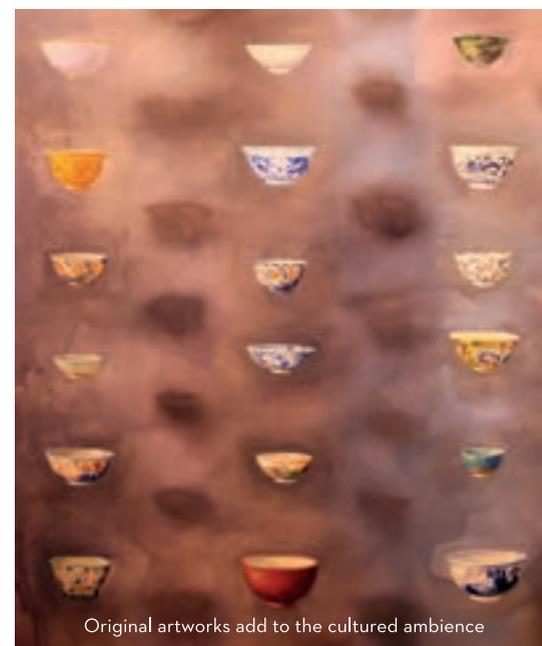
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Grand Hyatt Macau, City of Dreams, Estrada do Istmo, Cotai Macau



Original artworks add to the cultured ambience



Grand entrance to Private Dining Rooms



Designer table settings

editor's note

This issue, we're big on authenticity. It's the overriding theme throughout the magazine as, lately, it has been said so often that luxury travellers today are not content merely with expensive, quality hardware; they want to touch the intangibles: priceless memories from real sense-of-place encounters. So help us all!

I mean the exclamation. There are real challenges in providing 'the real thing' to the well-heeled, as our series of *Authenticity in the city* destination pieces in this issue shows. To begin with, is there much authenticity left in Asian cities that are progressing so rapidly towards modernity? How do DMCs get their well-heeled clients to places of significance, or to meet locals, without these guests being tired and wary even before they start, thanks to being stuck in bad traffic? How do they make the must-see icons of a destination an authentic experience that is above the reach of the masses?

Our guide to *12 new luxury hotel brands to watch* also shows the birth of groups that put individuality and authenticity as the key pillars of success.

No doubt about it, our industry is becoming less skin-deep in its customer approach.

To me, it's the best thing since slice bread.

Raini Hamdi, Senior Editor



Raini at The Datai, Langkawi

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EDITORIAL

Karen Yue

Group Editor
(karen.yue@ttgasia.com)

Gracia Chiang

Deputy Group Editor
(gracia.chiang@ttgasia.com)

Hannah Koh

Assistant Editor,
TTG Asia Online
(hannah.koh@ttgasia.com)

Paige Lee Pei Qi

Assistant Editor, Singapore
(lee.peiqi@ttgasia.com)

Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

Assistant Editor, Thailand/Indochina
(liang.xinyi@ttgasia.com)

Kathy Neo

Copy Editor
(kathy.neo@ttgasia.com)

Mimi Hudoyo

Editor, Indonesia
(idmfasia@cbn.net.id)

S Puvaneswary

Editor, Malaysia/Brunei
(puvanes@ttgasia.com)

Greg Lowe

Correspondent, Thailand
(ttg@thegreglowe.com)

Marianne Carandang,

Rosa Ocampo
Correspondents, The Philippines
(mcarandang@gmail.com,
rosa.ocampo@gmail.com)

Prudence Lui

Correspondent, Hong Kong
(prului@yahoo.com)

Shekhar Niyogi

Chief Correspondent, India
(shekhar.niyogi@ttgasia.com)

Feizal Samath

Correspondent,
Sri Lanka/Maldives
(feizalsam@gmail.com)

Redmond Sia, Tan Kok Yong

Goh Meng Yong
Creative Designers

Lina Tan

Editorial Assistant

SALES & MARKETING

Michael Chow

Group Publisher
(michael.chow@ttgasia.com)

Marisa Chen

Senior Business Manager
(marisa.chen@hk.china.com)

Shirley Tan

Senior Business Manager
(shirley.tan@ttgasia.com)

Karen Cheung

Business Manager
(karen.cheung@hk.china.com)

Mervin Lee

Business Manager
(mervin.lee@ttgasia.com)

Stephanie So

Business Manager
(stephanie.so@ttgasia.com)

Cheryl Tan

Corporate Marketing
Manager
(cheryl.tan@ttgasia.com)

Stephanie Toh

Marketing Executive
(stephanie.toh@ttgasia.com)

Cheryl Lim

Advertisement
Administration Manager
(cheryl.lim@ttgasia.com)

Carol Cheng

Assistant Manager
Administration and Marketing
(carol.cheng@ttgasia.com)

PUBLISHING SERVICES

Tony Yeo

Division Manager
(tony.yeo@ttgasia.com)

Haze Loh

Senior Creative Designer
(haze.loh@ttgasia.com)

Lynn Lim

Web Executive
(lynn.lim@ttgasia.com)

Carol Wong

Circulation Executive
(carol.wong@ttgasia.com)

TTG ASIA MEDIA

Darren Ng

Managing Director
(darren.ng@ttgasia.com)

Raini Hamdi

Senior Editor
(raini.hamdi@ttgasia.com)

OFFICES

SINGAPORE 1 Science Park
Road, #04-07 The Capricorn,
Singapore Science Park II
Singapore 117528
Tel: (65) 6395-7575
Fax: (65) 6536-0896
contact@ttgasia.com;
www.ttgasia.com

HONG KONG Unit 2011,
20/F Harbour Centre,
25 Harbour Road,
Wanchai, Hong Kong
Tel: (852) 2237-7252
Fax: (852) 2237-7227

TTG | Publishing | **Travel Trade**

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

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MY WAY



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TO WATCH**



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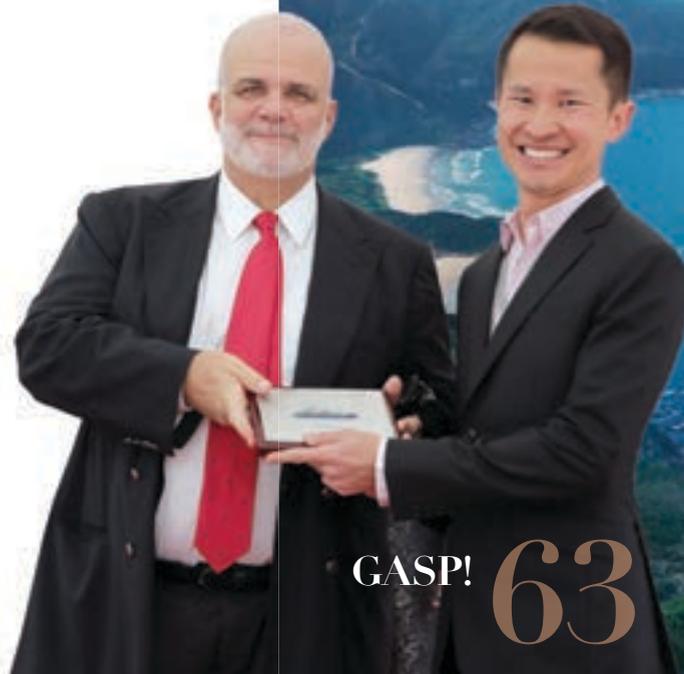


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12 NEW LUXURY HOTEL BRANDS

TO WATCH

RAINI HAMDI TAKES YOU ON A JOURNEY THROUGH 12 EXCITING LUXURY HOTEL BRANDS TO WATCH*. WHO WILL TRUMP IN THE QUEST TO WIN HEARTS AND DOLLARS OF A NEW GENERATION OF RICH TRAVELLERS?

** Featuring new Asian brands, renewed brands under new ownerships and brands that are new to Asia
With **Rosa Ocampo** reporting on Capella Hotels & Resorts and Nobu Hotels, and **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**
reporting on The Siam (Sukosol Hotels)*



Lounge at Ahn Luh Lanting

1 Ahn Luh Resorts and Residences

Who's driving it A joint venture comprising three partners: Beijing Tourism Group (BTG), a provincial level, Chinese state-owned tourism enterprise and one of China's largest tourism groups; General Hotel Management (GHM), the luxury hotel management company based in Singapore that was co-founded by Adrian Zecha and Hans Jenni; and Great Ocean Holdings, a Chinese private holding company with interests in real estate, high-end consumer sectors, arts and culture

Brand story According to Akira Moreno, Ahn Luh Resorts and Residences' CEO and GHM's vice president-development & pre-opening services, the current luxury hotel landscape in China is characterised by two common denominators: they are primarily situated in the core of the central business district of major cities, and they are predominantly Western chain-branded hotels offering a similar service and product proposition.

Ahn Luh Resorts and Residences aims to introduce a "China-centric" brand, which holistically embraces the most sophisticated essence of the Chinese culture and traditions, while breaking the mold of the existing hotel concept.

How Ahn Luh redefines luxury While China has benefited from the expertise in key hospitality competencies that global hospitality brands have brought, this expertise is still generally catered to



The Chinese are extremely proud of their heritage and this, coupled with the fact that younger and more affluent Chinese travellers are discerning about accommodations, restaurants and other services, means that Ahn Luh must go beyond the Chinese clichés for a deeper and more meaningful experience.

international travellers. On the other hand, local Chinese hotel brands have continued to grow a fair share of the domestic market but none have truly established themselves as peers with their Western counterparts, pointed out Moreno.

"Naturally, with more international leisure and business travellers wanting to experience more of the local culture, we anticipate growth in the demand for a brand that will effectively weave and encapsulate the best of both worlds. This is where we see Ahn Luh filling the gap as it balances the two scenarios mentioned above.

"The distinctive difference about Ahn Luh lies in how we present the essence of old world Chinese hospitality in today's context of contemporary elegance. It juxtaposes East and West, and meaningful traditions with modern conveniences. Ahn Luh goes back to the roots of Chinese culture so that guests can experience the intricacies of the culture in a setting that is unique to the destination."

In operation None

Under development 99-key Ahn Luh Lanting, Shaoxing, Zhejiang province, opening this fall; 35-villa Ahn Luh Zhujiajiao, Qingpu District, Shanghai, opening in early 2015; Dujiangyan, Sichuan province; Xunliao Bay, Guangdong province

Expansion plans In advanced talks with developers in the following destinations in China: Beijing; Dalian, Liaoning province; Fuzhou, Fujian province; Liyang, Jiangsu province; Sanya, Hainan province; Xi'an, Shaanxi province; Yichun, Heilongjiang province
International: Taipei, Taiwan; Bali, Indonesia



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Capella Singapore

2 Capella Hotels & Resorts

Who's driving it Horst Schulze, who conceptualised the luxury standards for The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, where he had a long tenure as co-founder, president and COO.

A week after retiring from Ritz-Carlton, however, he realised that retirement was not for him and, recognising that hotel brands were not serving the ultra luxury customer, he jumped at the opportunity to serve this rarefied market, forming his own company with a few former Ritz-Carlton executives. The West Paces Hotel Group was born in 2002. Riding on the success of its Capella brand, it changed its name to Capella Hotel Group in 2011.

The group also operates the five-star Solis Hotels and Resorts and Auriga Spas. **Brand story** Capella Hotels & Resorts was launched with the aim of taking luxury to another level: hotels and resorts that are boutique but boast services, facilities and amenities of large luxury hotels and offer personalised service which otherwise cannot be offered in big hotels.

How Capella redefines luxury "Capella Hotels and Resorts looks to fulfil the



HORST SCHULZE
founder,
chair and CEO,
Capella Hotels
& Resorts

No matter how big or how small, as long as it is ethical, moral and legal, Capella Hotels and Resorts' personal assistants will work to provide each guest with a memory that they will cherish for a lifetime.

individual guest experience through reliable, genuinely caring and timely service superior to our competition," said Schulze, who is also CEO of the brand.

"Our hotels are 100 rooms or less, allowing our staff to provide truly personalised service. Despite our small size, each hotel offers a variety of on-site amenities, from restaurants and spas to private libraries just for our in-house guests."

Guests are even provided with a personal assistant who, prior to arrival, contacts them to find out their requirements.

Said Schulze: "We recognise that each guest is looking for something unique. The personal assistant is able to customise the experience based on the guest's wishes, wants and needs. Everything from dietary restrictions to grand proposals, the personal assistant works to fulfil and exceed the guest's every desire."

In operation Capella Pedregal, Mexico; Capella Ixtapa, Mexico; Capella Washington DC, US; Capella Marigot Bay Resort and Marina, St. Lucia; Breidenbacher Hof, A Capella Hotel, Dusseldorf, Germany; Capella Singapore

Expansion plans To expand the brand in the US, Asia, Europe and the Middle East

3 Datai Hotels & Resorts

Who's driving it Destination Resorts and Hotels (DRH), established in 2010 by the Malaysian government's investment arm, Khazanah Nasional. DRH's mission is "to transform Malaysia's tourism landscape, by delivering commercially sustainable resort destinations which fulfil the needs and desires of an increasingly discerning global tourism market".

Brand story For two decades, The Datai, Langkawi has worked its magic on luxury clients, mostly from the UK but with the rise of Asian markets, its well-heeled clients now transcend colour, race, age and gender. The Datai, Langkawi simply bewitches everyone, thanks to its unique location in the midst of a 10 million-year-old rainforest (see Check-in, page 19), its enduring Kerry Hill architecture which cascades down to an exclusive bay and its General Hotel Management (GHM) service legacy.

GHM stopped managing The Datai, Langkawi in July 2011, following Khazanah's purchase of a 70 per cent equity in Teluk Datai Resorts, which owns the resort, the golf club and 605 hectares of land at Teluk Datai which it intends to develop.

DRH is opening two Datai properties, Datai Desaru and Anak Datai, as part



The Dining Room at The Datai, Langkawi



DARRELL METZGER
a director at DRH and chairman of its Executive Committee

It's always been clear in our strategic plan to expand the Datai brand beyond Malaysia and if the right opportunity presents itself, we will pursue it.

of its Desaru Coast integrated resort development in the southeastern tip of Johor.

Incidentally, joining the two Datai's in Desaru Coast will be another highly-respected name in the luxury circles, Amanresorts.

How Datai redefines luxury Service from the heart and a surreal sense of peace and tranquility are the hallmarks of the brand. Said Anthony Sebastian, senior vice president-hotel management of DRH, who is overseeing the expansion of the brand in Desaru Coast, said: "Datai's DNA is not difficult to transport. The Datai, Langkawi is not just about location. Its core value is the staff – they make the resort what it is today. I've seen this for myself and I've heard this feedback from every single guest. It's a question of transporting the service culture (to other Datai resorts) through having the right people and through training, so there is consistency.

"Of course Datai Desaru will not have the same setting as Datai Langkawi but clients will find the same peacefulness and tranquility and the same treatment by staff who know how to care for them and make them feel at home."

In operation The Datai, Langkawi
Under development Datai Desaru and Anak Datai Desaru (opening in 2017)

Expansion plans "Our priority right now is to ensure that we 'get it right' first with our expansion of the Datai in Desaru Coast as well as with The Datai, Langkawi's renovation," said Darrell Metzger, director at DRH and chairman of its Executive Committee.

The Datai, Langkawi is undergoing its most significant renovation since opening 20 years ago. Metzger said DRH is restoring the resort's original shine, not modernising it. So painstaking it is about it that DRH has gone back to Kerry Hill to be involved in the renovation.



One-bedroom beach villa at The Datai, Langkawi



Dower House at Coworth Park

4 Dorchester Collection

Who's driving it Christopher Cowdray, CEO of the London-based hotel management company since November 2007. No stranger to managing luxury properties, his previous roles included as general manager of The Dorchester, London, managing director of Claridge's, London, and general manager of the Al Bustan Palace Hotel, Oman.

Brand story Some say it's the real Luxury Collection, with enormous names in the house including Hôtel Plaza Athénée Paris and The Beverly Hills Hotel, US, in line with its mission to have an "impeccable" portfolio of the world's finest hotels, through acquisitions, management of wholly-owned and part-owned hotels, or management contracts in key city hotels.

In the collection currently are 10 hotels in Europe and North America, offering over 1,500 guestrooms, of which almost a third are suites. Cowdray's goal is to grow



CHRISTOPHER COWDRAY
CEO,
Dorchester
Collection

We have 10 Michelin stars in our 10 hotels and focus on innovative and authentic experiences that set our hotels apart.

the portfolio to 15 to 18 hotels by 2020, with Asia as a priority region.

How Dorchester redefines luxury "Our vision at Dorchester Collection is to be the ultimate hotel management company, with a passion for excellence and innovation, honouring the individuality and heritage of our iconic hotels," said Cowdray.

"We work with the very best partners in our restaurants, spas and designs to ensure our hotels remain 'the place to be and the place to be seen'."

In operation 10 properties, namely The Dorchester, London; 45 Park Lane, London; Coworth Park, Ascot, UK; Le Meurice, Paris; Hôtel Plaza Athénée, Paris; Le Richemond, Geneva; Hotel Principe di Savoia, Milan; Hotel Eden, Rome; The Beverly Hills Hotel, Beverly Hills and Hotel Bel-Air, Los Angeles

Expansion plans Actively looking for sites in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, Tokyo, Singapore, Sydney, New York, Chicago, Washington DC, Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Madrid, Barcelona, Munich, Venice, Amsterdam, Istanbul, Dubai, Doha and Abu Dhabi



Seeing stars – the Nobu team, including Robert De Niro

5 Nobu Hotels

Who's driving it The culinary genius Chef Nobuyuki 'Nobu' Matsuhisa, multi-award-winning actor Robert De Niro and Hollywood film producer Meir Teper. Their partnership dates back to 20 years ago when they opened their first venture, the restaurant Nobu Tribeca in New York.

Apart from providing artistic and creative direction to the brand, De Niro is also invaluable in drawing celebrities and international clientele to the properties.

Brand story From that first restaurant 20 years ago, Nobu has expanded to more than 25 chef-centric restaurants around the world, inspired by Chef Nobu's genius especially on fusion cuisine and his dedication to the highest quality and finest ingredients. Influenced by the owners' extensive travels and artistic careers, Nobu restaurants also become synonymous with theatre allure, style and fun luxury.

The restaurants are crowd drawers and many hotels crave to have a Nobu in their premises. It was then that the owners decided to develop their own Nobu hotels, starting off with Nobu Hotel Caesars Palace launched in Las Vegas late last year.

How Nobu redefines luxury All Nobu hotels are built on the same key principles as Nobu restaurants, said Travor Horwell, CEO, Nobu Hospitality.

"From the design to service, guests will experience Nobu's hospitality. From staff uniforms and unique in-room dining

to the scent of the room and the style of the design or room amenities, we offer a fun-luxury experience," he said.

Horwell added there is no preconceived formula – each Nobu Hotel is different. As well, "we are not creating a thematic experience, rather an authentic lifestyle experience based on the same core principles that have made us successful for the past 20 years around the world: great product, great offering and great service."

In operation Nobu Hotel Caesars Palace, Las Vegas

Under development Opening this year are Nobu Hotel City of Dreams, Manila and Nobu Hotel, Riyadh; opening in an unspecified date is Nobu Hotel Eden Roc Miami Beach



The celebrity status adds, but our brand delivers.



A mere standard room at Nobu



Artist's impression of The Patina, Capitol Singapore



MARC DARDENNE
CEO,
Patina Hotels
& Resorts

We are very excited about the hotel (the first Patina, in Singapore) and believe our guests will experience a new level of luxury.

6 Patina Hotels & Resorts

Who's driving it The new Asian hotel brand is the dream child of the Kwee family of Pontiac Land in Singapore that owns some of the finest hotels in the city including the Ritz-Carlton, Capella, Conrad and Regent.

They hired Marc Dardenne as CEO to drive the brand, a veteran hotelier who was instrumental in the launch of the world's first Armani Hotel in Dubai and the second in Milan, and The Address Hotels & Resorts in Dubai and At.mosphere, the world's highest restaurant, in the iconic Burj Khalifa. Dardenne also held key roles at The Ritz-Carlton in Dubai and Bali, and Grand Hyatt in Singapore.

Brand story Patina was conceived with the belief that travellers demand

more bespoke and distinctive hospitality experience.

All eyes are on the first project, The Patina, Capitol Singapore, which will represent that commitment. Housed in two of the finest conservation buildings in Singapore, Capitol Building and Stamford House, the hotel will be next to the historic Capitol Theatre and will carry some of the finest art.

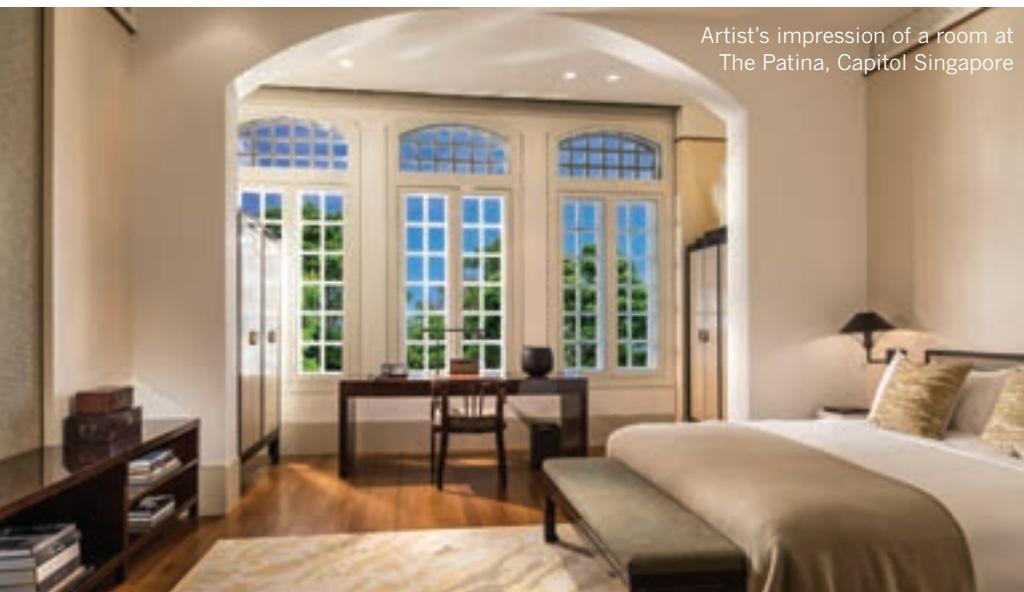
How Patina redefines luxury Patina Hotels & Resorts intends to create elegant masterpiece destinations, infused with service, art and architecture with a strong sense of place.

"Our aim is to create authentic, positive and unforgettable experiences. We are going to offer a 24/7 stay, where guests staying at The Patina, Capitol Singapore's Club and Suite rooms can enjoy a full 24-hour use of their room from the time they check in. Along with one-to-one anticipatory service, we will have our trademarked 360° Concierge, where each employee of the hotel is trained to be a host, assisting our guests with all their questions and needs. We will not have a front desk – instead, our guests will experience personalised and bespoke service by being whisked straight up to their rooms upon arrival. Our guestrooms also feature individual wine cabinets, a sophisticated sound system and freshly bottled oxygenated water," said Dardenne.

In operation None

Under development The Patina, Capitol Singapore, with 157 keys, opening in 1Q15

Expansion plans "We are working on projects in Bangkok, Phuket, the Maldives, Bali, Jakarta, Shanghai and Beijing," said Dardenne.



Artist's impression of a room at The Patina, Capitol Singapore



G&V Royal Mile Hotel Edinburgh

7 Quorvus Collection

Who's driving it Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group, which used to own the Regent brand, sold it to Steven Pan (see Regent on page 14), tried to re-establish a foothold in the luxury segment with the Missoni family but failed, and on February 18 this year announced the birth of Quorvus Collection which it billed as "a new generation of luxury hotels inspired by the lifestyle and sensibilities of the contemporary global traveller".

Brand story In case you, like us, are wondering why the name Quorvus, its classical origin is from a constellation that features five of the brightest stars that illuminate the southern sky, each with an interesting history, reason for being and a story to tell.

Thorsten Kirschke, the chain's president Asia-Pacific, explained: "For the contemporary traveller, the concept of luxury for hotels is more than the product or the specification. It depends upon a compelling and emotionally-driven experience for the guest.

"The hotels under this brand provide a product that fills the gap created by the unique needs of the young luxury guests



THORSTEN KIRSCHKE
president
Asia-Pacific,
Carlson Rezidor
Hotel Group

The Quorvus Collection is not defined by a universal style, it is not bound by a particular taste; it is a spirit, an energy and character that bring our people and properties together.

who are socially, culturally and creatively aware, and seek quality, authenticity and a real feeling of luxury."

How Quorvus redefines luxury By delivering a truly distinctive experience and offering expertly-curated luxury, in locations that are the pinnacle of a luxurious lifestyle, said Kirschke.

Each Quorvus hotel will be differentiated by its design, heritage, history and architecture. Each will reflect the distinctions of its location and culture, through the Quorvus 'Eidos', a celebration of belonging.

Six core lifestyle elements have been identified as its hallmarks: Wellness, Replenishment, Style, Inspiration, Entertainment and Connectivity.

In operation The first three member hotels in the collection are The May Fair Hotel London, the G&V Royal Mile Hotel Edinburgh and the Symphony Style Hotel Kuwait.

Expansion plans 20 hotels in the Quorvus Collection by 2020 in Asia-Pacific, Europe and the US. These will include historic landmark properties, contemporary residences, classic boutiques and urban retreats.



Taipan Lounge, Regent Taipei

8 Regent Hotels & Resorts

Who's driving it Steven Pan, who genuinely loves the brand and was one of the earliest owners to put up the Regent flag on their hotels (Pan owns the Regent Taipei).

Pan, chairman of FIH Regent Group, bought the Regent brand from Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group (see Quorvus, page 13) in 2010 with every intention to resuscitate it to its former glory. Since the acquisition, he has brought to the team several creators of awe-inspiring hotels: Ralf Ohletz (formerly General Hotel Management) as president, Mark Lettenbichler (formerly Ritz-Carlton) as CEO and Bob Burns himself, who created

the Regent brand with Adrian Zecha and George Rafael, as honorary chairman.

Brand story When it debuted in the 1970s, Regent broke new grounds in luxury hotels worldwide and made the industry sit up at the reality of new competition from Asian-based chains.

Regent was the first to introduce innovative concepts that have since become the standard in luxury hotels, such as a five-fixture bathroom and private pool in villas. The flagship, Regent Hong Kong (now InterContinental Hong Kong), was consistently voted the world's best hotel, and in its golden decades of the 1980s and 1990s, the Regent Group opened 17 hotels, including the celebrated Regent Beverly Wilshire.

But a few rounds of change of hands saw the brand wilting, with little expansion to boast. Now, once again headquartered in Asia under Pan, the 'new' Regent aims to set new benchmarks with pioneering concepts such as incorporating the mixed-use business model into its properties.

How Regent redefines luxury "Bespoke is the common theme moving forward," said Pan. "All new hotels will speak to the location. Each resort and hotel's décor, design, food, etc. will be built by partners that have an expertise that speaks to that region. Every experience will be made to order for that hotel; nothing will be plain



STEVEN PAN
chairman,
FIH Regent
Group

If you build a place that is timeless, it will still be relevant in 20 years.

or 'off the shelf'."

Added Lettenbichler: "The luxury experience has changed with time, from the once opulent grandeur to now more discreet and understated. Today, attentive service is intuitive and insightful, being almost invisible until you need it."

In operation Seven hotels in Bali, Beijing, Berlin, Turks & Caicos, Phuket, Singapore, Taipei

Under development Porto Montenegro (summer 2014)



Regent Porto Montenegro

9 Rosewood Hotels & Resorts

Who's driving it Sonia Cheng, the granddaughter of Cheng Yu-tung, founder of New World Development (NWD), one of Hong Kong's biggest property companies which opened one of the first international deluxe hotels in China. With great hotel visionaries as mentors, and her training in real estate transactions and equity investments and passion for the industry, Cheng got to work quickly in bringing back the dazzle factor to New World Hospitality, particularly with her acquisition of Rosewood Hotels & Resorts in 2011. NWH was renamed Rosewood Hotel Group in May 2013, with Cheng as the CEO.

Brand story The Rosewood brand originated in the US and is made famous by some of the world's most legendary hotels and resorts, including The Carlyle in New York and Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek in Dallas.

By buying it, Cheng instantly gained a portfolio of renowned properties and a platform to strategically strengthen the group's presence in the international luxury hospitality arena.

How Rosewood redefines luxury Cheng defines Rosewood guests as "affluent explorers".

"These are people who seek the luxury of simple pleasures, rather than ostentation or conformity. They want service that is engaging rather than simply efficient, and they prize the authentic and insightful," she said.

Rosewood's guiding principle, A Sense of Place, shapes its hotels to meet this demand. Last year, the brand completed a comprehensive relaunch to elevate and enhance this core philosophy further.

This encompasses a re-imagined website which features multimedia destination guides. Rosewood Curators was introduced, a highly-select group of tastemakers and high-profile personalities, including Condoleezza Rice and Piers Morgan who share their insider knowledge about Rosewood destinations.

In operation 18 properties in operation in nine countries, including six in the US, one in Canada, three in Mexico, one in the UK, three in the Caribbean/Atlantic, three in Saudi Arabia and one in the UAE
Expansion plans Rosewood will expand further in primary cities and exclusive resort destinations worldwide, with a particular focus in Asia and Europe. It expects to double its portfolio within five years with 11 new projects currently announced, two in China, two in Thailand, two in Indonesia, one in Cambodia, one in France, one in Saudi Arabia, one in the UAE and one in The Bahamas.

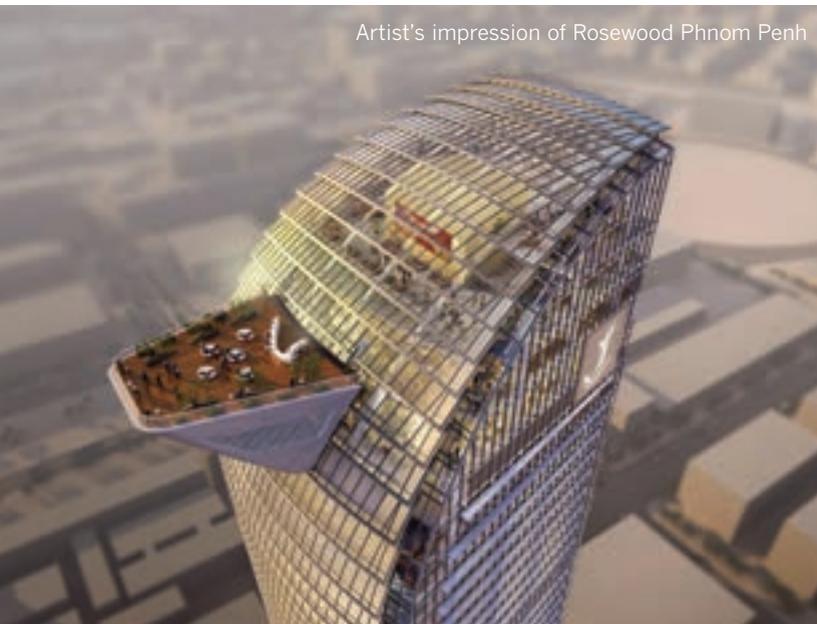


While continuing to nurture and celebrate what makes Rosewood so special and beloved, we hope to bring a fresh interpretation of its charm to exciting new locations.

Grand premier Suite bedroom at Rosewood London



Artist's impression of Rosewood Phnom Penh



10 The Siam

Who's driving it The inimitable songbird Kamala Sukosol is the driving force of Sukosol Hotels, along with her four children Marisa Sukosol Nunbhakdi, Daranee Sukosol Clapp, Sukie Clapp and Krissada Sukosol Clapp. Their proven track record in hospitality and musical talent (the family regularly puts on charming jazz performances at charity concerts) have earned them the title, "musical hoteliers".

Brand story Pattaya was where matriarch Kamala spearheaded the family's entry into hospitality with the launch of Siam Bayshore Resort & Spa in 1975, followed by the Siam Bayview Hotel eight years later and Siam City Hotel in Bangkok in 1990. Following a group-wide rebrand across the family



The Siam introduces an alternative perspective of Bangkok to luxury travellers. Old Bangkok is new and trendy again because of The Siam.



The Siam Pier

business empire in early 2012, the Sukosol Group's hospitality arm was renamed Sukosol Hotels from Siam Hotels & Resorts and its three properties were also rebranded.

The branding rejuvenation also saw the family transiting into a new generation of small, high-end projects, with the June 2012 debut of The Siam, a 39-key luxury urban retreat by the Chao Phraya River, and Wave, the 21-room Miami-style boutique hotel in Pattaya last year.

The Siam, a US\$50 million investment on a 1.2ha piece of family land, put Sukosol Hotels on the luxury map. Youngest son Krissada and acclaimed designer Bill Bensley were the creative brains behind the retreat, which is chockfull of antiques, many of them from the Sukosols' private collection, and features four traditional Thai teakwood houses built by the legendary Jim Thompson; a bona fide Muay Thai boxing ring and the cossetting Opium Spa.

How Sukosol redefines luxury Being an independent family hotel group has enabled the Sukosols to "adapt quickly to the changing needs and tastes of guests", said Marisa, the eldest of the Sukosol children, who is executive vice president at Sukosol Hotels.

Seeking to avoid an increasingly "commoditised" experience among hotels, Marisa said that "caring and heartfelt service" are the hallmarks of Sukosol properties.

"We strive to get back to an era of 'slow travel' when people took the time to get to know not only the destination but also the people in that destination. We strive to create authentic, deeper meaningful experiences for our guests and staff."

She added: "If you manage a hotel well and focus on the guest experience, the profitability will be there."

In operation Under The Siam brand, there is just The Siam Bangkok currently. 2015 will see the opening of The Siam Arun on the river bend across from Wat Arun (Temple of Dawn) and just next door to Wat Po and the Grand Palace

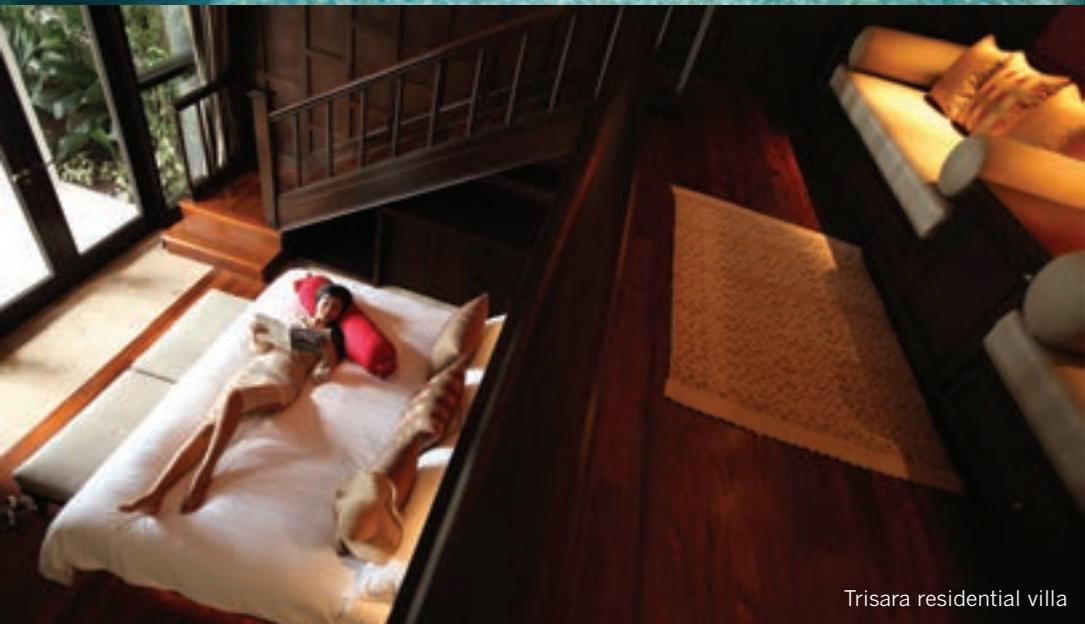
Expansion plans In the pipeline, is The Siam Plantation, an eco-hotel cum luxury plantation lodge in the Thai western province of Kanchanaburi, revealed Marisa.



A suite at The Siam, Bangkok



Trisara: Ocean view pool room



Trisara residential villa

11 Trisara

Who's driving it Trisara owner, Narong Pattamasavei, is a financier-turned-hotelier. The passion for creating something extraordinary led him to establish Montara Hospitality Group in 1999. The group cemented its reputation in the ultra-luxury hospitality segment with the opening of Trisara in Phuket in November 2004.

Narong is now committed to expanding the Trisara brand and spreading Thailand's renowned hospitality throughout South-east Asia by seeking management services and partnerships with like-minded owners. He has appointed veteran hotelier Bill Black as group president to contribute to this mission. Also on the management team is Anthony Lark, group vice president-business development, who co-developed and opened Trisara from day one, including the sale of villas to private owners from around the world.

Narong's son, Kittisak (Kitt)



NARONG PATTAMASAVEI
chairman,
Montara
Hospitality
Group

The Trisara brand revolves around a memorable architectural design that reflects the local environment and is driven by the landscape of the property.

Pattamasavei, has also been roped in into the group as vice president-sales and marketing.

Brand story When it opened, Trisara quickly established itself as an exclusive, intimate resort located over a private bay just 15 minutes from Phuket International Airport.

Under Montara's expansion concept, Trisara's properties will be designed according to the mixed-use model. The number of rooms will be limited to 60. Villas will also be sold to potential holidaymakers and investors.

To support the expansion of the Trisara brand, the group has established a hospitality learning institute, the Trisara Academy, in Phuket to train both Thais and other nationals on the fine art of service and all aspects related to the hospitality industry.

How Trisara redefines luxury Trisara's owners are the managers and driving force behind all design decisions. They are passionate about service, food and attention to detail: there's even a Trisara fast-track service at the immigrations in Phuket for guests arriving via international flights, while guests can seamlessly embark on yacht trips straight from the jetty at Trisara's own private beach and return directly to their villa for a private barbecue serviced by Trisara Seafood.

Interior designs are simple, spacious, with elegant finishing and materials. Luxury is further defined by privacy and exclusivity within natural settings, yet guests are connected with state-of-the-art technology.

In operation Trisara Phuket

Expansion plans To manage six-10 properties by 2017 including two properties under the Trisara brand and the remainder under white label brands. The new properties will be located in both local and regional markets. The firm will form joint ventures with local partners under the Trisara brand, with Montara holding a 30 per cent stake in each joint venture

Domestically, Samui, Phuket and Phang Nga are considered to have big potential for new openings, while overseas the Maldives and Indonesia look attractive.



Ivanka Trump (left) and Trump SoHo

12 Trump Hotel Collection

Who's driving it Trump Hotel Collection is presided over by Donald J. Trump and his three grown children, Donald Jr., Ivanka and Eric. Ivanka is personally involved from the concept stage of every project and directly oversees all aspects of development including construction, design, sales marketing and operations.

Brand story Launched in October 2007, Trump sees itself as the next generation of luxury hospitality, one that raises the bar in the top-tier travel experience with unrivalled customised service, style, sophistication and exclusivity. Its brand growth and presence strategy is simply to be in the best markets located in key gateway cities and resort destinations globally.

How Trump redefines luxury Said Jim Petrus, COO: "We have found that discerning travellers are looking for services and amenities that have been customised to them and to feel that their loyalty is being rewarded in a meaningful way."

The brand has devised a signature Trump Attache service to deliver



JIM PETRUS
COO,
Trump Hotel
Collection

We have found that discerning travellers are looking for services and amenities that have been customised to them and to feel that their loyalty is being rewarded in a meaningful way.

personalised attention without intrusion and a Trump Card Privileges Programme which meticulously records individual preferences in a private, secure guest history to be referenced before each visit to any of its luxury hotels.

"From pre-arrival requests to one-of-a-kind 'Live the Life' experiences, everything is tailored to a member's preferences and the privileges increase the more often a guest visits, including complimentary upgrades and nights."

Added Petrus: "One of the key differentiators of Trump is ownership of assets. Many luxury hotel brands are merely management companies. We often own, develop and operate the hotels in our portfolio, which allows us to be highly selective and set an unparalleled standard of excellence within the hospitality industry."

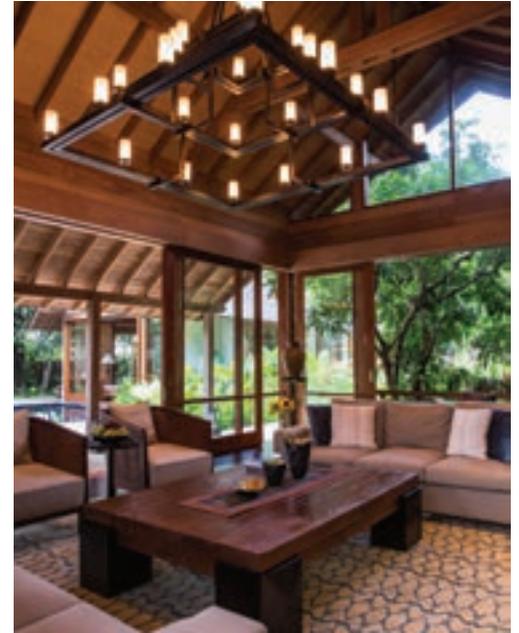
In operation Two in New York and one each in Chicago, Las Vegas, Waikiki, Toronto, Panama, Miami and Ireland

Under development Three properties opening in 2016 in Vancouver, Rio de Janeiro and Washington DC.

Expansion plans Portfolio to comprise 30 hotels by 2020 in domestic and international locations, including Asia.



The Datai, Langkawi



Left Two-bedroom beach villa at The Datai. **Above** Its living room

BACKGROUND The Datai, Langkawi is the ‘template’ for the expansion of Datai Hotels & Resorts (see page 9). Now that’s setting the bar really high.

Name The Datai, Langkawi
No. of new beach villas 14
Overall no. of rooms 124
Address Jalan Teluk Datai,
07000 Pulau Langkawi,
Kedah Darul Aman, Malaysia
Contact
Tel: (60-4) 9500 500
Email: reservationsdatai@langkawi@dataihotels.com
www.thedatai.com

WHY This is an acclaimed property, thanks to its one-of-a-kind setting in the heart of a lush rainforest, grand architecture and service-minded staff. On my recent stay, it is evident that the dust has settled on the resort’s manage-

ment change from General Hotel Management to Destination Resorts & Hotels. Its award-winning general manager, Anthony Sebastian, rallies his staff to deliver “the art of Malaysian hospitality” which, to him, is based on four pillars: graciousness, gracefulness, humanness and passion.

I personally experienced this isn’t just hotelspeak or mere slogan. Executive assistant manager Jaya Nazreen arranged for champagne risotto, cooked as the former executive chef did (for that, Jaya had to email the retired chef for the recipe), to be served to my partner upon learning it was his birthday and that was his favourite dish at The Datai. My partner was visibly moved by the surprise.

WHAT’S NEW Beach villa product – 14 seductive villas set right on the beach, thankfully in such a way they don’t destroy the beautiful bay, as these villas are camouflaged with greenery and have a good set back from the shoreline.

I stayed in a one-bedroom villa but if this sounds so normal and humble, let me assure you it’s anything but. At 218sqm (and 475sqm for the two-bedroom villas), it is a whole big house, comprising a

standalone living room pavilion, a bedroom unit, a bathroom area, an outdoor terrace, a 12m pool and a compound. Lots of floor-to-ceiling glass panes are used, so whether I was in the living room, bedroom or bathroom, there was always natural light and outdoor view. I particularly like the fact the villa’s design is in keeping with the rest of the accommodation at The Datai – sleek, modern, everlasting. So glad they did not meddle with the overall look and feel of The Datai.

Also new is the Ernie Els-designed Datai Bay Golf Course, which reopened last August.

The Gulai House has been moved to a new location but, frankly, they can move it to the moon for all I care – the curries remain utterly delicious and authentic. F&B still is a Datai strong suit.

VERDICT The more Datai’s, the merrier! – *Raini Hamdi*

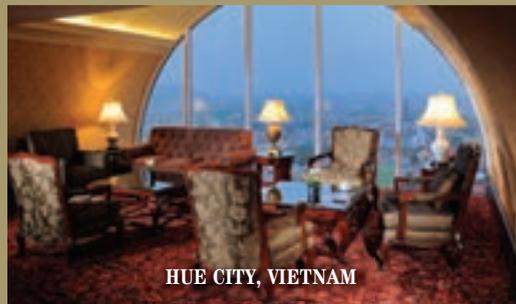
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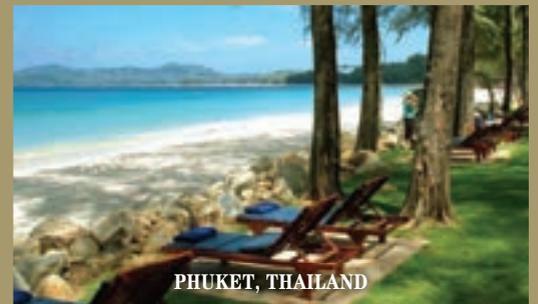
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MUSCAT, OMAN



HUE CITY, VIETNAM



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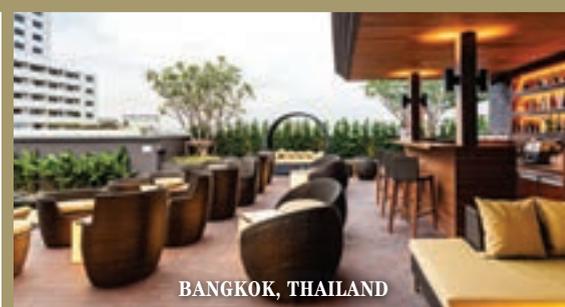
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Giving the real t



Above Tea ceremony, Hotel Chinzanso, Tokyo

Japan's pop culture and the commercialisation of its cultural heritage make the industry think harder on how to satisfy luxury customers' yen for the real thing in big cities such as Tokyo and Kyoto, writes **Hannah Koh**

Japan is a land that drips with cultural appeal. Tea-drinking samurais, dancing geishas, delicate cherry blossoms and other Japanese stereotypes come to mind without going too far. Age-old shinto shrines co-exist with towering skyscrapers, today's modern-day temples.

Yet, the prevalence of Japanese pop culture such as the latest *Wolverine* movie has deepened the traveller's yen – especially the well-travelled luxury client – for an authentic slice of Japan that has not been reduced by a celluloid image or the mass market.

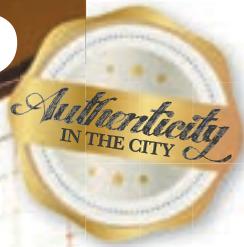
Summing up the dilemma, James Kent, sales and marketing manager of The J Team DMC,

said: "Luxury travellers ask us for unique, once-in-a-lifetime experiences. The challenge for this is striking a balance between providing personal, only-for-you experiences and giving the must-see experiences.

"For example there are many icons that everyone wants to see. Bonsai for instance can be found in many places and the famous gardens are well-publicised, but how do we make it personal and private?

"Another challenge is that most travellers look to Kyoto – quite rightly – as the capital of culture. Kyoto is keenly aware of this and culture has been quite commercialised, so are experiences with

hing



“

Luxury travellers ask us for unique, once-in-a-lifetime experiences. The challenge for this is striking a balance in providing personal, only-for-you experiences and giving the must-see experiences.

James Kent, sales & marketing manager, The J Team DMC



geiko and *maiko* really special? Yes, if presented correctly in the right environment.”

The J Team DMC does this by going out of its way to find out what clients want from Japan and arrange exclusive experiences. “A specific example with bonsai is taking our guests to off-the-beaten track private collectors of bonsai. This is true with art collections and geisha experiences as well...It is all about helping someone fulfil their dream. Secret ryokans are another good example of how to help the luxury traveller relax.”

Kent noted that luxury travellers are now looking farther off-the-beaten track, and home visits “seem to be a growth area”.

Japan’s luxury hotels are also beginning to roll out related services and products catering to this authenticity-hungry demographic.

Luxury hotel operator Hoshino Resorts, which has been ramping up promotions in South-east Asia, is one such player. Its flagship Hoshinoya brand, besides fusing a modern style with *omotenashi* or traditional Japanese hospitality, offers optional cultural experiences for guests. During the cherry blossom season in April, for instance, Hoshinoya Kyoto facilitates paid river cruises down Arashiyama Valley for a maximum of eight passengers each time. Guests have lunch on board while enjoying the sight of cherry blossom trees along the river in full bloom.

Even hotels in busy cities such as Tokyo are getting in the act of ensuring guests do not leave home without an impression of authentic Japan. Hotel Chinzanso Tokyo, for example, holds paid tea ceremonies in its traditional tea house that takes guests on the entire process of how to formally enter the tea house and how to drink the tea. Hotel Chinzanso can also arrange bonsai-making or Japanese language lessons or a garden tour of its historic grounds.

Five new luxe products to consider

New Hoshino resorts in Japan

Hoshino Resorts is set to open Hoshinoya Fuji (20 to 30 rooms) in 2015 in Yamanashi Prefecture and Hoshinoya Tokyo (80 rooms) in the Marunouchi district of the capital in 2016. It will also open two resorts under its traditional ryokan brand, Kai, in Tochigi Prefecture’s Nikko and Kawaji in 2Q14. Both properties are expected to have 30 rooms, each boasting a private hot spring. Additionally, the company is making its maiden overseas foray with Hoshinoya Bali, which is expected to be launched within the year.

Kyoto’s Nijo Castle opens for events

UNESCO World Heritage Site Nijo Castle in Kyoto has opened its gates to events in order to raise funds for its restoration. Twelve coordinators have been appointed to market and promote events at the venue. James Kent, sales and marketing manager, The J Team DMC, and the only DMC on the list of 12 coordinators, told *TTG Asia Luxury*: “Our bid included a wide range of ideas that covered teambuilding, reward and award,



workshops and training, as well as parties. I see potential for smaller, tailored events at the castle.”

The castle’s exterior space is available for gala dinners while an indoor area can be booked for about 200 guests. The primary concern is damage to the property so no catering is allowed within the castle building and proper marquee set-up is needed. In recent years the castle has functioned as a wedding destination.

Ritz-Carlton debuts in Kyoto

The Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto opened in February on the banks of the Kamogawa River as a peaceful sanctuary offering full views of the river and the Higashiyama Mountains. Situated in the heart of the city, the hotel is close to downtown areas Gion and Kawaramachidori. Architects and designers have preserved the aesthetics of a Meiji house and courtyard with its interiors featuring patterned motifs

by local artisans, Zen rock gardens and water features such as a four-storey waterfall that runs through the heart of the hotel.

The 134-room hotel comes with The Ritz-Carlton Spa, fine-dining establishments Japanese and Italian restaurants, four event spaces and a wedding showroom.

Seven Stars in Kyushu's refreshed offerings

Travellers can now explore the natural wonders of the southern Kyushu region in comfort and style on board the *Seven Stars in Kyushu* train, which began plying the landscape in October 2013. The train offers 12 suites and two deluxe suites for a maximum of 30 pax per trip.

The train now provides a butler for passengers in the deluxe suites and sells only all-inclusive fares that include alcoholic beverages. Fares now start from 180,000 yen (US\$1,735) per person for a twin-sharing suite on the 2D1N course. A 4D3N course is also available.

Two of the 12 suites per trip continue to be set aside for passengers not based in Japan.

The train takes passengers to the Aso area, the townscape of Yufuin and some of the most exclusive ryokans (for the 4D3N course). Itineraries are wildly oversubscribed so it is advisable to book as soon as the booking period commences.

Hugo Boss launches flagship store in Tokyo

Designer label Hugo Boss launched its flagship store in November last year on Tokyo’s stylish Omotesando district with celebrities turning up the star power at the event. Designed by Japanese architect Norihiko Dan, the store bears a resemblance to sister stores in Shanghai, Paris and New York. It houses the Boss and Hugo Menswear Collections.

Omotesando Keyaki Bldg. 5-1-3 Jingumae, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150-0001, Tel: +81 (0) 3 6418-9365

Left Nijo Castle
Above Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto

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So shiok



Above The view from Marina Bay Sands Singapore rooftop infinity pool

It's the local slang that denotes extreme pleasure and Singapore wants foreigners to get the *shiok* feeling too, reports **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

What is 'authentic' Singapore? The city has progressed so admirably over five decades, from a humble island village to a much-derided 'fine' city and now, a dazzling metropolis that draws the rich and famous the world over.

What draws them? To some inbound specialists, like Tour East group vice president sales & marketing, Judy Lum, snob appeal plays a part.

"Luxury travellers today want what others cannot easily afford," said Lum. "We have the right infra-

structure – a modern metropolis, amazing skyline, shopping enclaves with shopping malls full of high fashion and designer brands and also Michelin-starred and celebrity restaurants."

This is Singapore today and it is a huge reason why upmarket clients like it. Singapore is able to offer an "authentic luxury experience", as Rufus Tan, director at Quotient Travel Planner, put it. To some that may be quite different from delivering a luxurious authentic experience but for Tan, that is as real as it gets.

"Singapore does not have many natural attractions to speak of (but



Right Singapore offers the authentic luxury experience, planners said

“

(Beyond luxurious accommodations), they (luxury travellers) want personalised and unique experiences that stay with them long after their vacation or trip.

Courtenay Dundy,
director of sales &
marketing,
The Ritz-Carlton
Millenia Singapore



what Singapore is able to offer as an authentic luxury experience is a seamless combination of the world's finest accommodation, dining, transportation, city life and shopping," he said.

For the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), infusing as much authenticity as possible has become a priority under its mandate towards achieving more quality tourism.

One way is through championing and showcasing the Singapore way of life. The latest STB international marketing video, for example, is focused on 'Singapore shiok', depicting locals enjoying local food and attractions, such as spinning down the roller-coaster in Universal Studios Singapore and taking a dip in the infinity pool of Marina Bay Sands, and exclaiming "shiok" – a Singaporean expression denoting extreme pleasure or highest quality.

According to an STB spokesman, this local engagement initiative serves to instill pride in and engender conversations about Singapore as an authentic destination.

Marc Dardenne, CEO of Patina Hotels & Resorts, agreed. "High-end travellers are looking for 'heartware' during their stay in Singapore, ie, authentic bespoke service, combined with distinct positive travel

memories...They are looking for culture, location and provenance.

"It is important to offer exciting, memorable and indigenous cultural experiences to our guests and this can be anything from a bespoke cultural itinerary of the best art exhibitions and plays in town to arranging a visit to a Singaporean family's home in the suburbs," he said.

The hotel is responding by hiring employees who possess a high level of service delivery and have a passion or hobby that they are excited to share with guests.

"For example, if Johnny from the laundry department does tai chi or Chinese calligraphy, we will invite him to share these passions with our international guests," he said.

Courtenay Dundy, director of sales & marketing, The Ritz-Carlton Millenia Singapore, said: "Luxury travellers expect luxurious accommodations and state-of-the-art facilities. Beyond this however, they want personalised and unique experiences that stay with them long after their vacation or trip.

"We bring local flavours to them at the hotel through unique experiential food presentations and samplings such as the local beverage *teh tarik* (tea) and sweet authentic treats such as *kueh lapis* (layered cake)."



Four
new luxe
products to
consider

Jamie's Italian

Arguably one of the most famous British chefs in the world, Jamie Oliver has made his foray into Singapore with the debut of his eponymous casual Italian eatery in VivoCity.

In typical Jamie's Italian style, the restaurant – a first in Asia – exudes rustic charm and is furnished with bespoke furniture that are artistically handmade by local craftsmen. Jamie's Italian offers an extensive menu featuring antipasti, pasta and risotto dishes. Cocktails and wine are available.

A limited number of reservations are accepted each day.

Sail on the Royal Albatross

The *Royal Albatross*, hailed as the first luxury tall ship in Asia, has reached the shores of Singapore and will begin service from the middle of this year.

The four-mast ship, berthed at Resorts World Sentosa's waterfront, has five large cabins, two bars and spacious open decks which can hold maximum 200 passengers when docked and can be chartered for private and corporate events.

The ship is air-conditioned throughout and boasts state-of-the-art safety, navigation and communication fittings, with 60,000 LED lights for night illumination.



Get behind the beer

Experience Tiger Beer in a different way at the Asia Pacific Breweries plant – apart from guzzling down the beer. Discover the art of brewing beer and gain insights into the ingredients used through an exclusive 90-minute guided tour.

Get intimate with the beer by personally feeling and smelling the aroma of the malt at the ingredient kiosk. Not to be missed is beer sampling in the Tiger Tavern where guests get to try various brews and learn how to best enjoy beer.

Tamarind Hill Singapore

Perched atop the forested Labrador Nature Reserve, the restaurant is a perfect recollection of the original Tamarind Hill Kuala Lumpur, preserving the milieu of being in a standalone historic colonial bungalow amid vast green surroundings. The restaurant serves traditional and contemporary Thai cuisine within a rustic-luxe Asian ambience.

This sprawling 920m² colonial bungalow, located just a stone's throw from the city, has outdoor and indoor seating accommodating 180 diners.

Above Tamarind Hill Singapore
Below *Royal Albatross* anchors at Resorts World Sentosa





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BY MERITUS

Time to dream in



Above Sydney Harbour

Sydney, the state with Australia's largest Aboriginal population, is developing authentic indigenous tourism experiences, reports

Natasha Dragun

Australia's national and state tourism authorities have never shied away from highlighting the country's most authentic experiences. But the main challenge is delivering products and experiences in a way that appeals to both domestic and international travellers without seeming clichéd or tacky.

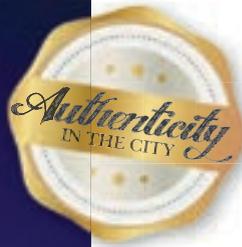
Thankfully, there are plenty of opportunities to develop new offerings and operators and tourism boards seem focused on pushing the country's artistic/cultural side and its indigenous history.

In Sydney, the next few years will be dedicated to the develop-

ment of the Barangaroo precinct in Darling Harbour. While the casino here has received the most attention, the area's design has been inspired by its Aboriginal history and, in addition to high-end boutiques and shops, there will be a number of arts offerings, including an amphitheatre and open spaces for performances. With a tidal shoreline being built from a boardwalk right down to the water, travellers can literally touch the harbour.

It's part of a broader campaign focused on growing authentic indigenous tourism experiences, launched in August last year by the Minister for Tourism and Major Events, George Souris, and Min-

n Sydney



ister for Aboriginal Affairs, Victor Dominello. To be rolled out over the next three years in partnership with Aboriginal businesses and tour operators, the programme will see new Aboriginal tourism products featured on websites sydney.com and visitnsw.com, both of which are frequently in the top 10 travel websites visited in Australia. “As the state with Australia’s largest Aboriginal population, NSW’s unique Aboriginal tourism experiences are something that international visitors will want to be part of, and can be a way to celebrate and share Aboriginal culture, as well as recognise the contemporary Aboriginal cultures of NSW,” said Dominello.

November 2013 saw the launch of Australia’s largest national indigenous festival, Corroboree, which will remain in Sydney for the next three years. In addition, Destination NSW CEO, Sandra Chipchase, said the government is working with Aboriginal tour operators to “increase the awareness of NSW as a destination where Aboriginal culture is strong, vibrant and diverse”.

This has seen the launch of a number of new initiatives focused on authentic tourism, including the First Hand Workshops and Markets at Bare Island in Botany Bay. The island, accessible by footbridge, is transformed into an Aboriginal arts festival on the first Sunday of every month, allowing visitors to partici-

pate in Djaadjawaan dance, create shell art or discover how to make a traditional spear. Also new, company Catch N Cook offers tours that cover indigenous bush-tucker, fishing and boomerang throwing as well as Dreamtime storytelling; another experience focuses on how Aboriginal culture is integrated into the natural environment and Aboriginal history past and present.

A particular challenge, according to tourism officials, is that visitors may think that all Aboriginal tourism experiences are the same and if they have already undertaken an Aboriginal tourism activity they may not seek another. As a result, the government is investing in assisting Aboriginal tourism businesses in their business planning and marketing, as well as helping provide access to funding and other support, including employment and training.

NSW has also doubled the number of participants in the 2013 Indigenous Tourism Champions Programme, a collaborative national plan that looks to build a reputation of reliability and consistent quality in indigenous tourism across Australia.

Sofitel Sydney Wentworth general manager, Erkin Aytekin, said many travellers are now looking for tailor-made tours. At the hotel level, Sofitel Sydney has introduced personalised trips to NSW’s Blue Mountains, inclusive of gourmet culinary experiences, as well as seaplane and helicopter day trips to exclusive destinations such as Palm Beach.

“We also offer Sydney Opera House backstage tours, and luxury sailing trips on Sydney Harbour,” Aytekin said, both guaranteeing a crowd-free experience.

“The biggest challenges,” Aytekin said, “are that many people want these at short notice. Short lead requests can be difficult to arrange.” The other issue is that Sydney is such a popular tourist destination that availability can be a challenge.



As the state with Australia’s largest Aboriginal population, NSW’s unique Aboriginal tourism experiences are something that international visitors will want to be part of...

Victor Dominello,
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs

Four
new luxe
products to
consider

Jet into remote areas

Luxury travel company Abercrombie & Kent has launched a private jet adventure into the remote reaches of Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Only 30 guests are on the trip, travelling in comfort and style over 13 days on a chartered Fokker F70LR aircraft, beginning in Perth and concluding in Darwin. Travelling with the group are two experts – a Top End resident and proud ambassador of the indigenous community, and a Melbourne specialist on Aboriginal art whose connections allow special access to invitation-only indigenous art centres. The tour includes privileged access to isolated Aboriginal communities, extraordinary natural landscapes, ancient rock art galleries, a tour of one of the country's biggest open cut iron ore mines and snorkelling and marine experiences at Ningaloo Reef. In the Kimberley there are four days in and around the Berkeley River wilderness region and three days in the pristine stretches of north-west Arnhem Land. Handpicked accommodation and all experiences plus all meals and drinks are included. The tour runs from August 26 to September 7.

www.abercrombiekent.com

One & Only Hayman Island

Iconic resort Hayman is undergoing a multi-million dollar renovation, set to be relaunched as One&Only Hayman Island on July 2. One&Only's first resort in Australia, the property will offer a number of unique guest



Above
One& Only
Hayman
Island

experiences, enhanced accommodations, new culinary options and signature One&Only service throughout. The Pool Wing will be redeveloped. New Hayman rooms and Hayman suites with ocean and lagoon views will be introduced with reimagined interiors and amenities. The pool will offer renewed life and energy, complete with cabanas and day beds. The resort will also house a One&Only Health Spa incorporating elements that are represented in the surrounding botanical gardens. In addition, a new adult-only pool and chillout lounge area will be introduced.

hayman.oneandonlyresorts.com

Ikara Safari Camp

A glamping option, Ikara Safari Camp, has opened at Wilpena Pound Resort in the Flinders Ranges in South Australia, just over 400km from Adelaide.

Offering 15 ensuite safari tents, the camp is set among river red gums and native pines and adjacent to the Pound. Each tent is made from insulated canvas with reverse air-conditioning to cope with both the outback summers and the cooler months.

Guests stay close to nature but

with a few of life's luxuries including king beds, quality linens and bedding and a minibar. Your clients can enjoy outback BBQ dinners and sundowners around a fire pit prior to evening meals, and guided walks and 4WD excursions into the amazing landscape. Air Wilpena also offers scenic flights over the Pound and as far as Lake Eyre.

www.ikarasafaricamp.com.au

No stopping the Press Club restaurant

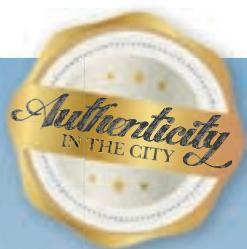
Celebrity chef George Calombaris has been on the dining scene for many years; his Press Club restaurant was an institution in Melbourne until it closed for a makeover last year.

Reopened recently, the restaurant in its new guise is all about fine dining. There is room for around 30 people in the slick space, and degustation meals are the only offering at dinner (at lunch, a la carte is also available).

Set meals have Greek overtones, nodding to Calombaris' heritage, but the restaurant's head chef puts a molecular spin on proceedings. For an even more exclusive experience, book the Press Club Projects – a kitchen-dining concept that sees chefs cook for eight pax, with many of the experimental dishes served here later used on the menu in the dining room.

www.thepressclub.com.au

Loving heritage again



Above Journeys of Peninsula

More luxury travellers want an authentic Hong Kong experience and the city is racing to provide it, reports **Prudence Lui**

The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) is continuing its New Tour Product Development Scheme launched for 2012/13 in 2014/15 to further encourage inbound operators to develop new themed tours.

Under the scheme, successful applicants receive funding for co-op marketing. Themed tours developed to-date cover luxury, heritage and arts & culture, noted an HKTB spokesman. Among them

are a Sham Shui Po Foodie Tour that takes visitors to sample food at six famous local eateries and explore the history and culture of the district along the way; a Wine Tasting & Tea Restaurant Tour for those who want to have F&B at Hong Kong-style cafés and local wine shops, and a Six Senses Heritage Experience where visitors discover six unexplored sides to Hong Kong, starting with a tai chi class. They then have an architecture tour of 1881 Heritage, cycle through the oldest walled villages in Hong Kong and savour the flavours of a traditional Big Bowl Feast.

But a big part of the Hong Kong luxury experience is the high-end hotel itself, along with superb dining options hotels and outside restaurants offer, observed Lightfoot Travel Hong Kong's head of Asia, Keira Fitzgerald.

"The city is renowned for its superb hotels, and where the client chooses to stay is often just as important as what they do. Top choices include the Mandarin Oriental, The Upper House, Landmark Mandarin Oriental and Four Seasons. Dining is of course another highly important part of many people's itineraries and the choices include high tea at The Peninsula, dim sum at Maxims in Hong Kong City Hall and dinners at Michelin-starred restaurants such as Amber in The Mandarin Oriental or Caprice at the Four Seasons.

"Hong Kong Disneyland is always attractive for families, and clients will often include either a day trip or an overnight in Macau to see the historical sites or try their hand in the casinos. Another popular activity is hiring a junk for a sail around the harbour during the warmer months."

Indeed, hotels play a pivotal role with authentic ideas. For instance, The Peninsula Hotel's Peninsula Academy has amazed

destination hong kong

guests, leisure and incentive clients alike, with Chinese cultural experiences such as dim sum making classes. There are also classes for the caviar connoisseur, the chocolate connoisseur and those who wish to appreciate the art of Chinese tea, conducted by the hotel's team of chefs. These classes are designed to foster an appreciation of gourmet dishes and their key ingredients, as well as the wines with which they are perfectly paired.

InterContinental Hong Kong's chief concierge, Louis Baleros, said experiential travel is becoming more popular. "Guests want to experience something more meaningful than just the usual tourist sights. They want to connect with the local people and culture of the destination. Generally they are leisure travellers, or business travellers who have limited free time and want to experience some local culture."

The hotel's In the Know experiences offer such exclusive activities as cooking with culinary stars, for example, a private dim sum class with executive chef Lau Yiu Fai at the one Michelin star Yan Toh Heen. Guests can also do a feng shui tour, visit the Wong Tai Sin Temple to have their fortunes told, go to the local market, board an authentic Chinese junk for a trip, spend the day or evening at the horse races, or learn about jade and pearls in a private session.

The only obstacle to experiencing the real Hong Kong is the at times "appalling" traffic, said Lightfoot Travel's Fitzgerald.

"Also, a lot of the things to do in Hong Kong are in the outdoors, yet the weather during certain months can be a hit or miss factor, with frequent rain in the spring and summer. Also, the pollution in the city is getting increasingly worse and the appeal of activities such as a walk around the peak becomes a lot less attractive when the harbour is shrouded in smog," she said.



Guests want to experience something more meaningful than just the usual tourist sights. They want to connect with the local people and culture of the destination.

Louis Baleros,
chief concierge,
InterContinental
Hong Kong

Three new luxe products to consider

Unforgettable journeys

The Journeys of Peninsula programme ensures your clients see Hong Kong in style. Guests board a twin-engine Aérospatiale Squirrel helicopter on the roof of The Peninsula Hong Kong. The flight offers dramatic mountains and breathtaking land- and seascapes en route to the beaches of Tai Long Wan in Sai Kung. A speedboat transfer on a luxury motor-cruising yacht follows, with Peninsula staff serving a luxurious beach banquet on an island. After journeying to the Star Ferry Pier at Tsim Sha Tsui, guests are escorted by the hotel's pageboys to a chauffeured Rolls-Royce which drives them back to the hotel. The programme is from 12:00 to 18:00 and is priced at HK\$46,000 (US\$5,930) per person for a minimum of two guests.

Mira Mira on the wall

Check out the Mira Hotel's MiraSpa, an 1,656m² urban retreat equipped with an infinity pool, a gym and beauty facilities. Its new Spa-rty packages are just the thing for brides-to-be or groups of friends craving for a private,



Above Let's spa-rty at Mira Hotel

lavish afternoon of pure indulgence. Priced at HK\$6,888 for six persons, the MiraSpa Girls Nite Out includes private use of the MiraSpa Nail Lounge for two hours, choice of luxury manicure or prestige pedicure, high tea bar with specially-created sweet and savoury canapés and smoothies served in the Nail Lounge, two bottles of house champagne plus six-day passes to the swimming pool and fitness centre.

Learn from the expert

Embark on a culinary tour with Michelin-star chef Pino Lavarra at the Ritz-Carlton, the city's tallest hotel. Born in Puglia, chef Pino is recognised as 'One of the best chefs in the world' by the American Academy of Hospitality Sciences.

During the class, guests will explore Southern Italian cuisine contemporary-style and gain insights into his innovative interpretation of the Italian cuisine. Only one class is scheduled per month till October. There are four different types of classes, including a pasta adventure to cooking with the chef advance level. It costs HK\$880 per guest for the cooking class, and HK\$1,500 including a three-course lunch.

Fixing the gridlocks



Snarling traffic and the annual flooding are getting in the way of visitors seeing the real Jakarta, but the city is trying to fix the gridlocks, reports

Mimi Hudoyo

Jakarta does not lack authentic attractions or the creativity to provide genuine experiences. However, traffic gridlocks jam efforts to give foreign visitors insights into the city that are beyond its modern façade and lifestyle.

Excursions to natural areas outside the city, cycling tours, cooking courses, etc, are all options, but bad traffic slows down such plans, said Asian Trails Indonesia managing director, André Seiler.

Pacto COO Inbound Umberto Cadamuro said his high-end travellers who want authentic experiences search for them “in other parts of Indonesia which have a lot to offer”.

Seiler added: “We never had the luxury leisure segment visiting Jakarta with the exception of some Dutch visitors, who frequent the city because of historical reasons.”

But Arie Budhiman, head of Jakarta Tourism and Culture Office, said the city has great options for upmarket travellers to sample an authentic Jakarta experience.

Traffic jam at Lebak Bulus-Jakarta

destination indonesia

He admitted bad traffic does hamper movements “but you can actually work around it by picking the (right) routes and times of the day.”

Traffic and flooding are problems the Jakarta City Government is working to fix. Plans include the construction of mass rapid transit, the clearing of riverbanks from slum housing and the cleaning up of rivers, although these projects will take time to see optimum results.

Currently there are no alternatives such as public transport or proper pedestrian facilities.

This makes it trying for clients to visit attractions such as the old town, Kota Tua, a 846-hectare area sprawled with heritage buildings, museums and historical sites.

The Jakarta History Museum is one of six museums in Kota Tua. The town also boasts the Jin De Yuan Chinese temple, the Santa Maria de Fatima Church, which has a Chinese architectural design, and old mosques.

Arie said: “Travellers to Kota Tua not only can enjoy the museums’ collections, but also centuries-old buildings.

“As well, there are activities such as puppet-making at the Wayang Museum and ceramic-making at the Ceramic Museum.”

Communities such as Sahabat Museum (Friends of the Museum), Jelajah Budaya (Cruising Culture) and Historia Community also organise tailor-made, thematic tours to the area.

The Jakarta City Government is also working on developing and revitalising a traditional *Betawi* village, Setu Babakan.

The *Betawi* ethnic group is said to be the first settlers in the city, its culture then influenced the many foreign settlers who follow in their footsteps in the later centuries.

Attractions at Setu Babakan include traditional houses, boating around the village, watching

Jakarta Tourism and Culture Office



Above Kali Besar and historical buildings

“

Jakarta has interesting landmarks and places of interests to offer our high-end guests.

Walid Birak, director of sales and marketing, Four Seasons Hotel Jakarta

children learning to dance and sampling traditional Betawi food.

Some hotels in Jakarta are bringing authenticity into the properties through offering local cuisines and special interest tours.

Hotel Gran Mahakam Jakarta highlights local cuisines in its buffet and banquet menus, and outside catering service, while The Ritz-Carlton Jakarta, Pacific Place provides the Indonesian *jamu* herbal drink and traditional desserts at its club lounge.

Samit Ganguly, Ritz-Carlton’s director of sales and marketing, added: “Guests can also experience the traditional art of batik painting under the supervision of an expert in the hotel.”

Other hotels offer special interest tours on a request basis, for example, a photography tour of Kota Tua, a private dinner in one of Jakarta landmarks, a theme party in one of the museums, or a private batik-painting class at the Textile Museum.

Walid Birak, Four Seasons Hotel Jakarta director of sales and marketing, said: “Jakarta has interesting landmarks and places of interests to offer our high-end

guests.

“Take the National Monument (Monas), for example. We take them there in our limousine and offer a guided tour of the monument and the park.

“There are many local eateries at Monas (Park), where guests may want to try local delicacies.”

Upon return, guests have a 60-minute Javanese massage at the spa and lunch or dinner at Seasons Café, which provides Indonesian delicacies such as *kerak telur* (egg and rice cake), *tahu gejrot* (tofu Cirebon-style), *rendang* Padang (beef stew Padang-style) and many other delicious dishes. The menu changes every day.

Birak acknowledged traffic can make things difficult. Therefore, all its fleet are equipped with iPads with unlimited wireless connection, enabling guests to while the hours away online and forget the jam. It also packs a breakfast or lunch box for them.

“Guests can also take a helicopter tour to Krakatau and view Jakarta and its surrounding areas, or take a yacht to the small islands in Kepulauan Seribu, north of the city,” he said.

Four new luxe products to consider

The 'in' place for Risjtafel

Tugu Kunstkring Paleis, a fine-dining restaurant, lounge and tea house, opened last year in Jakarta, serving Indonesian and Western cuisines presented in an elegant way.

The highlight is the Bewati Risjtafel, a lifestyle culinary experience that harks back to the Dutch colonial period. This is a grand meal comprising various Indonesian dishes, with a row of waiters dressed in old Betawi costume serving a dish each. The ceremonial dinner is accompanied by Betawi music.

The restaurant, which is managed by the Tugu Hotels & Restaurants Group, is in a century-old building that originally housed the

Fine Arts Circle of the Dutch East Indies (Nederlandsch-Indische Kunstkring of the Dutch East Indies).

This building itself stays faithful to its mission of promoting the arts. It has featured the masterpieces of Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Paul Gauguin and Marc Chagall. There is also a large event space with a capacity for up to 1,000 people.

Merapi volcano race

While off-road tours are run-of-the-mill in Bali, in Jogjakarta they are a novelty.

Hanindo Tour & Travel, Jogjakarta has launched a Merapi volcano race, an off-road jeep tour from Magelang following three river banks to Jurangjero, one of Mount Merapi's slopes on the east side.

Highlights include crossing rivers of scattered volcanic rocks and passing through challenging pine forests. Guests will also tour various plantations and taste the local *salak*, the snakeskin-like fruit of the area.

The jeep tour is navigated by professional jeep drivers and Eng-

lish, French and German-speaking guides. It ends at Jurangjero, with an opportunity to take a picture with the majestic Mount Merapi as the backdrop.

WakaSailing uplifted

Waka Hotels & Resorts, Bali has upgraded its WakaSailing product to a premium sailing experience.

The catamaran, which can accommodate up to 30 people, has undergone an overhaul, its two Steyr engines, marine safety installation and sails replaced. The onboard menu has been renewed and upgraded, so have the waiting lounge at the private marina in Benoa Harbour, the marina itself and coaches.

WakaSailing offers thrice-weekly day cruises from Bali's Benoa Harbour to Lembongan Island, where it has its own Beach Club. At the Beach Club, besides a new menu, new activity equipment such as snorkelling gears, table tennis rackets, a volleyball facility and bicycles have been added.

Apart from beach activities, guests can go reef-viewing in a glass-bottom boat or have a village tour that includes a visit to the seaweed farm.

WakaSailing also offers private charters for day cruises and wedding photography.

Sofitel Nusa Dua opens

The first Sofitel in Indonesia, Sofitel Nusa Dua Beach Resort, has opened with 415 rooms and suites. Facilities include three eclectic dining options, two bars, a club lounge and the signature So Fit and So Spa.

Meeting facilities include a Grand Ballroom with a capacity of 600 pax theatre-style, a Retreat Grand Room, four meeting rooms and one boardroom.

There is also a KidsClub which has an outdoor kids' pool, a reading room, a nap room and video game consoles. A host of activities from cooking classes and yoga for kids to various beach games are offered.

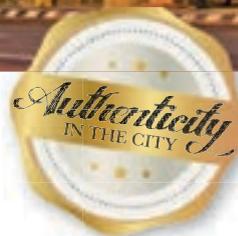
Below
WakaSailing
- wedding
memento



Another side to KL



Above Sultan Abdul Samad Building



Home to the world's tallest twin towers and other modern buildings that have changed its skyline, Kuala Lumpur can still pack a punch in delivering Malaysian heritage, writes

S Puvanewary

Over the past two decades, the Malaysian Government has invested heavily in capital city Kuala Lumpur with the aim of making it stand out as one of the most modern and sophisticated cities in the region.

A significant part of this investment has gone into the creation of iconic buildings. First came the Kuala Lumpur Tower, the world's sixth tallest telecommunications tower. It was followed by the Petronas Twin Towers (PTT), the world's tallest twin towers.

The high-rise and unique skyline that has emerged around these buildings, especially in the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC) area where the PTT is located, has made the city a magnet for tourists, luxury or otherwise.

City authority Kuala Lumpur City Hall's head of tourism, Noraza Yusof, said: "In 2011 Kuala Lumpur received tourism arrivals of 13.3 million compared to 8.5 million arrivals in 2007, making us one of the top 10 city destinations in the world."

Yet, when it comes to providing authentic experiences amid all this

modernity, travel experts revert to culture, cuisine and nature.

Asian Overland Services (AOS) Tours & Travel director of sales, Andy Muniandy, said: "For cultural performances and authentic local cuisine, we suggest Saloma Theatre Restaurant, which is in an old colonial building and offers nightly dance performances showcasing the many ethnic dances of Malaysia."

"As Saloma is meant for the mass market, for those wishing for more privacy, we will suggest Bijan Bar & Restaurant. Depending on the size of the group and the budget, we tailor make the journey to the venue and make it a grand experience. Our group can travel by Harley Davidson motor bikes, luxury cars or luxury coaches," he added.

But luxury clients also want cultural experiences that are at the street level, not just within the confines of restaurants.

"Those in their 30s to 50s want to feel the pulse of the city. As a multi-cultural country, we choose to expose them to the different cultures in Malaysia. Thus, we take them on tours to Little India in Brickfields, Petaling Street (for Chinatown) and Kampung Datuk Keramat to see the lifestyle of the Malays. On request, we can arrange for a visit to an authentic Malaysian home in the city. We have seen an increasing number of Middle Eastern and European FITs looking for authentic local experiences while they are in Kuala Lumpur," Andy said.

Clients of Ganneesh Ramaa, manager, Luxury Tours Malaysia, also expressed interest in exploring the city.

"Our luxury guests like to have free time so they can explore the city by themselves or with a private tourist guide. For such clients, we will give them a map of the city with places of interest marked on it. They usually like to explore the heritage buildings and tourist attractions within the historical mile of Kuala Lumpur. Many also request

“

Our emphasis on cuisine is based on global research feedback which states Kuala Lumpur is viewed as a 'foodie' city.

Noraza Yusof,
head of tourism,
Kuala Lumpur City
Hall

for customised itineraries, customised services and to have more time to explore places of interest. They don't like to be rushed when they are visiting art galleries and museums.

"We treat them like VIPs, which means we give them quality service including a customised minibar in the vehicle during tours. Transfers and a personal concierge will be assigned during the whole stay. The role of the concierge is to assist guests in planning their sightseeing at their own pace as well as other needs."

Saini Vermeulen, head of international sales, Panorama Tours Malaysia, said the luxury market, especially those who are in Kuala Lumpur for meetings, incentives or conventions, are short of time and immediately go back after their event is over.

"Thus, KLCC's Cultural Showcase, which offers international delegates an insight into traditional arts and crafts which include batik painting, wood carving, *songket* weaving, pewter smithing, Chinese calligraphy and henna painting is a value-add and always appreciated.

You get to see so much of Malaysia's offerings within a short time, and all in one location," he added.

Cuisine is of growing importance. "There is increasing demand from Asians and Caucasians to bring home lasting memories and new-found knowledge such as learning to cook local dishes such as curry or satay, and learning to make local handicrafts. We usually do this in a lovely colonial building or in an upmarket restaurant with a nice ambience such as Samira by Asian Terrace at Sentul Park or Tamarind Springs in Ampang," Vermeulen said.

The skyline has been the trigger for Kuala Lumpur City Hall to create a product targeted at the luxury market called Sky Dining.

"Our emphasis on cuisine is based on global research feedback which states Kuala Lumpur is viewed as a 'foodie' city," Noraza said. "Sky Dining features restaurants and outlets at high elevations, such as Atmosphere 360, Marini's on 57 and Sky Bar in the KLCC area."

While Kuala Lumpur is primarily about urban sophistication, an

Below Petaling Street



destination malaysia

escape to a real rainforest within city limits offered by AOS is an experience few cities can match.

“Within the locality of Gombak in Kuala Lumpur, we provide a ‘Day in the Rainforest’ experience. This saves the need for a two-hour flight to Sabah or Sarawak or a three-day journey to Taman Negara just to experience the rainforest,” Andy said.

“Our guests are taken by an experienced nature guide through the rainforest to waterfalls and into fruit orchards where they get to eat the fruits. They love it. Should there be a request for a fancy meal to be served in this setting, we work with our five-star hotel partners to supply the meal,” he added.

While the KLCC offers the Cultural Showcase, other high-end properties are also doing their part to offer authentic experiences to guests.

The new Majestic Hotel Kuala Lumpur was restored and reopened in 2012 as a national heritage site. It resides on the same location as the original hotel which was considered the height of luxury when it opened in 1932.

Apart from playing nostalgic Malay songs from the past on its telephone intercom system, YTL Hotels spokesperson, Aja Ng, said the hotel’s suite wing offers a Hainanese breakfast of toast and soft boiled eggs.

“Our Colonial Café serves the old colonial Hainanese classics such as *mee hailan* and chicken chops,” she added.

Said Noraza: “We are pleased

that some leading hotels are providing local street food offerings in their luxurious settings, for which there is growing demand.”

Panorama’s Vermeulen wishes however that Kuala Lumpur has more unique venues to hold events. When the local government is involved, getting permission to hold an event in a venue takes a longer period of time, he said.

Luxury Tours’ Ganneesh expressed the need for more covered walkways in the city, while AOS’ Andy said there is a need for a high-quality cultural performances in classy venues.

In response, Noraza said: “Tour operators need to make their requests ahead of time because of availability issues. For example, Dataran Merdeka (Independence Square) is booked up to a year in advance. If the venue is available, we are always ready to consider the request. With regard to covered walkways, which already extend from KLCC to Bukit Bintang Road, they are being expanded phase by phase.”

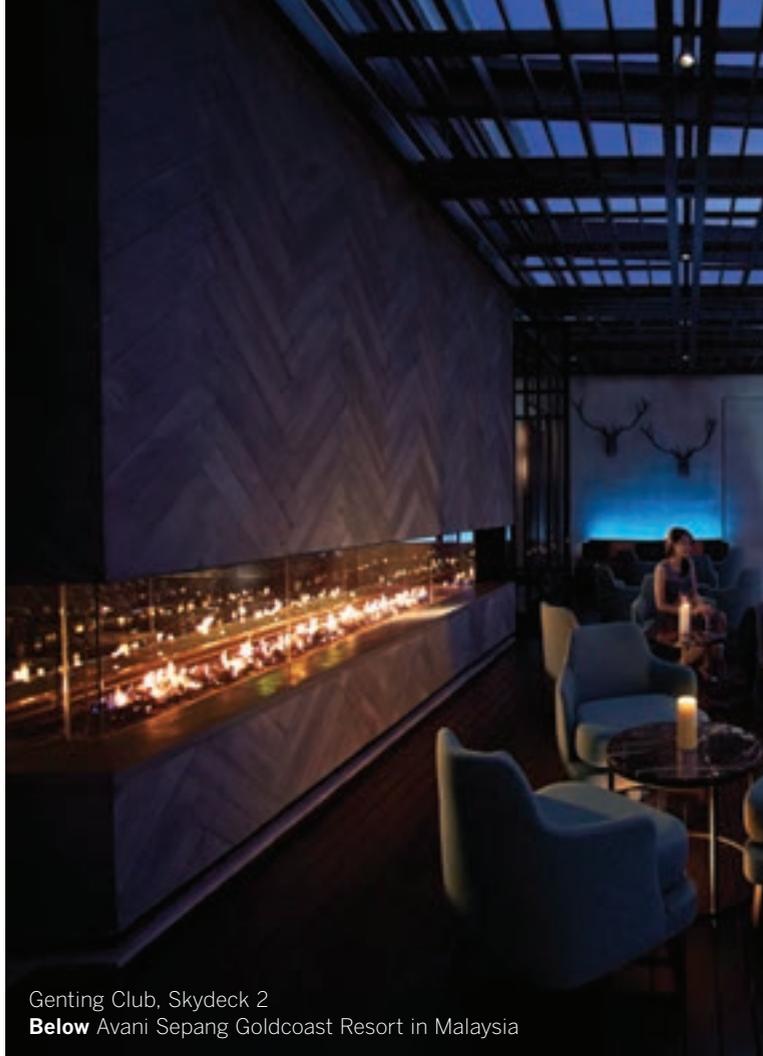
Noraza added that plans are well underway to launch late this year a grand theatre show, similar to that of the Siam Theatre Show in Bangkok and Water Puppet Show in Hanoi, which incorporates cultural and historical elements.

“It will be an ongoing, high quality production, in English, to be held twice a day at the City Hall Theatre in front of Dataran Merdeka,” she said.

Full details will be announced later this year.

“ **There is an increasing demand from Asians and Caucasians to bring home lasting memories and new-found knowledge such as learning to cook local dishes such as curry or satay, and learning to make local handicrafts.** ”

Saini Vermeulen, head of international sales, Panorama Tours Malaysia



Genting Club, Skydeck 2
Below Avani Sepang Goldcoast Resort in Malaysia





Five
new luxe
products to
consider

Genting Club

Genting Club at Resorts World Genting opened in September last year with over 2,760m² of space comprising a bar, lounge and restaurant (Latitude), which seamlessly flows over to a stage and live music area.

The restaurant blends the culinary essence of East and West, offering the finest produce from Japan such as premium sashimi cuts and Matsusaka beef.

The bar and lounge serves fine wines such as Chateau Cos D'Estournel 2005 Collection, Armand de Brignac Brut Gold Midas and Double Magnum wine. The tasting room stocks more than 400 bottles of premium liquor from regular-sized to a 30-litre Armand de Brignac champagne barrel.

Avani Sepang GoldCoast Resort

Avani Sepang GoldCoast Resort was launched in February after completing the first of two phases of a RM15 million (US\$4.6 million) refurbishment programme. It was the former Golden Palm Tree Iconic Resort & Spa.

The resort has a distinctive palm tree design. Set along a 22km shore, it has a mainland beachfront setting with lush gardens and a palm structure built on stilts which extends over warm shallow waters. The overwater palm features 392 contemporary Polynesian-inspired guestrooms and one, two and three-bedroom villas, all with a sea view.

Facilities include five restaurants and two bars, a spa, a vast selection of activities and an 840m² ballroom.

Macalister Mansion

This 100-year-old mansion in Penang turned boutique hotel has eight rooms and five restaurants and bars. Your clients will find numerous references to the historic figure, British Governor Colonel

Norman Macalister, and a host of specially commissioned installation art pieces throughout the grounds and spaces.

The Cellar stocks more than 300 labels of wines from all over the world. The Den is a place to relax and unwind with a glass of quality whisky or cigar. The Lawn offers space to relax or lounge by the pool and has an adjoining bar and seating area.

Gaya Island Resort

Gaya Island Resort is located just off the coast of Kota Kinabalu and set on the shores of Gaya Island, which is the largest island in the Tunku Abdul Rahman Park. Ancient rainforest and protected mangroves surround the 121 idyllic villas and suites set in the hills. Spacious, tactile and modern yet respectful of local Sabahan elements, the villas use local materials that blend harmoniously with the natural environment. Villa interiors are designed with a contemporary elegance and offer a variety of views including mangrove, canopy, tropical rainforest and the South China Sea. Each 47m² villa features a spacious bedroom, a writing desk, a safe box, a flat screen TV with satellite channels, Wi-Fi capabilities, a large open bathroom with an oversized bathtub and two vanity units, and an outdoor verandah with day beds.

St Regis KL to open in November

The St Regis Kuala Lumpur is scheduled to open this November. It is located in the prestigious Kuala Lumpur Sentral Precinct, minutes from the National Museum, Lake Gardens and the Bukit Bintang shopping paradise. The property will comprise 208 rooms and 160 residences, four F&B outlets, professional meeting facilities and Remède Spa.



Up close and perso



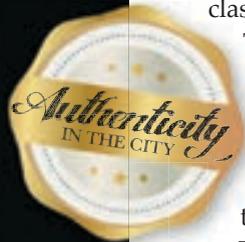
Above Night scene in Ho Chi Minh City

Tourism suppliers in Vietnam are stepping up their game to offer varied and experiential travel opportunities to entice an ever-more sophisticated clientele to Ho Chi Minh City, writes **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

Contrary to popular perceptions that richer cultural experiences are offered in the capital city of Hanoi, the bustling Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) in the south has no lack of authentic experiences, luxury travel specialists affirmed. “Saigon is as real as it gets,” said Alexander Leven, product manager at HG Travel, referring to HCMC by its other name. “The USP of Saigon is not the traditional culture like Hanoi, the excellent

shopping of Bangkok, the nightlife of Jakarta or the modern entertainment in Singapore and Hong Kong. Saigon stands for what Westerners think of a typical big Asian city that is full of life and chaos.” “Based on this USP, Saigon can offer special encounters and human interaction experiences like no other. Memories are about people and situation more than places and things – and Saigon has plenty of these!” he added. Affluent holidaymakers are placing more emphasis on experiential

onal



ences, like food tasting in a local market, discovering medicinal herbal shops or private cooking classes with a local family.

Therefore the travellers will feel that they are sharing something special with the locals and avoiding the classic excursions made for touristy markets."

Exotissimo Vietnam taps into HCMC's lesser-explored facets by offering walking tours in off-the-beaten-track neighbourhoods and Vespa sightseeing tours for clients seeking authentic experiences, according to general manager, George Ehrlich-Adam. "Seeing life in the slow and small lanes brings interesting contrast in this buzzing city and creates perspectives (for travellers)," he shared. "But the challenge is to find quiet corners and unknown experiences to surprise clients."

At the same time, small boutique-style hotels with authentic atmosphere, such as An Lam Saigon River Private Residence and Villa Song Saigon, are coming to the fore in HCMC, observed Springer. "The main issue is to find the right suppliers and explain the needs of luxury travellers. It takes time to find the correct supplier and to test/adapt the product. That's why we are always in search of new suppliers to update our offers," he said.

Springer also sees potential in river tourism being "a key selling point of Saigon", but urges the Vietnamese government to build and renovate wharves to enhance the development of river cruises between Saigon, Cu Chin, Can Gio and other destinations.

At the same time, Leven is seeing growing requests from luxury travellers to mix "rough-it-out" with "pampering" experiences in their quest for authenticity. "We're seeing an interesting mix of luxury and authenticity, such as the combination of experiencing the life

travel than on the mere physical trappings of luxury, observed Pham Ha, founder and CEO of Luxury Travel Vietnam.

"The key thing sophisticated travellers want today is personal service and the opportunity to have unique encounters with a destination's culture, history and people – something they can't google."

Khiri Travel Vietnam sales and marketing manager, Hugues Springer, concurred: "Luxury travellers want (interaction) with the locals and enjoy unique experi-



Above Villa Song Saigon

of a fisherman in the Mekong Delta by staying with a local family in a remote village one day, then coming back to the Park Hyatt Saigon for a massage and afterwards going to the A O Show the next day," he said.

"They understand that authentic destinations don't have luxury hotels, so they are willing to take hardships for a limited period of time. They are getting dirty for a day and back to pampering the next day," Leven added.

Luxury Travel's Pham summed it up: "When it comes to luxury tours, the sky's truly the limit."



Affluent holidaymakers are placing more emphasis on experiential travel than on the mere physical trappings of luxury.

Pham Ha, founder and CEO, Luxury Travel Vietnam





Six
new luxe
products to
consider

New Pullman ups the game

The recently opened Pullman Saigon Center is designed to be flexible in its service execution from the outset, especially as “the mix between leisure and business is becoming more blurred”, said general manager Zayne Boon.

To stay attuned to the needs of increasingly wired guests who want to be “accessible to their loved ones and their business at the same time”, the property features a 40-inch LED IPTV across its 306 rooms and suites. Boon said: “A transgression between a smartphone, tablet and TV, the (IPTV) concept is to let business travellers display their favourite TV shows on their smartphones or tablets, catch up on social media, watch TV, skype, stream videos and not be bound by the choices

available on TV.”

On the dining front, the hotel has also conjured up new ways to satiate guests’ appetite for novelty as well as healthier living, from chefs whipping up liquid nitrogen ice cream in front of guests to creating dining packages highlighting fresh produce and the stories behind them.

La Maison 1888

For some serious French haute cuisine in central Vietnam, head for La Maison 1888 at the InterContinental Danang, helmed by three Michelin-starred chef Michel Roux.

Under the creative force of Bill Bensley, La Maison 1888 is styled after a grand French mansion with various private dining rooms paying homage to the different eras of colonial Vietnam, such as La Boudour de Madame and Buffalo Bar.

To witness the legendary Roux in action in the kitchen or partake in his master cooking class, interested visitors should contact the restaurant to find out the residency dates of the chef, who is committed to at least four visits a year. Email lamaison1888@icdanang.com for more information.

Cruise eat spa

Luxury cruise line Aqua Expeditions is set to chart new waters in South-east Asia with the debut of river cruises on its *Aqua Mekong* this September. The 62m-long boat will boast 20 suites, each measuring 30m² and with panoramic windows, while four sets of two interconnecting suites are suitable for families or passengers seeking greater luxury. Other amenities include a lobby lounge, a screening room, a fitness centre, an outdoor plunge pool with cabanas and two spa treatment rooms.

Celebrity chef David Thompson (of the *Nahm* fame in London and Bangkok) has been appointed as executive chef of Aqua Expeditions. Passengers can expect South-east Asian flavours and fresh ingredients such as Kampot pepper, Mekong River prawns and grilled Battambang snake incorporated into an exclusive menu.

www.aquaexpeditions.com

Villa Song Saigon reopens

Villa Song Saigon has won hearts and rave reviews following its reopening in January after extensive renovations. Tucked along

Left La Maison
Above Aqua
Mekong

the banks of Saigon River in Thao Dien, the small and intimate property is housed in a French colonial-style building, offering old-world charm for those who want to experience the sights and sounds of a bustling city from a tranquil location.

The 23 luxuriously appointed rooms and suites are each outfitted with objets d'art alongside modern amenities like Apple TVs. Within the verdant compound also lie a 30m-long swimming pool, a spa and Bistro Song Vie featuring delicious fusion food and an extensive wine list. A free shuttle boat is provided to take guests from/to the downtown area.

www.villasong.com

Par excellence

The Bluffs Ho Tram Strip on Vietnam's south-central coast

has opened for preview play. Designed by Greg Norman, The Bluffs Ho Tram Strip is an 18-hole, par-71 championship links-style course perched on coastal sand dune topography with significant elevation changes ranging between five and 50m above sea level. The 4th hole is one of the most spectacular spots in the course, presenting players with 360-degree views of the surrounding forest and coastline.

When fully opened later in the year as part of The Grand Ho Tram Strip integrated resort development, the course will include a 2,300m² clubhouse featuring an array of F&B outlets and a PGA-staffed driving range with more than 3,000m² of training facilities. Email bookings@the-bluffshotram.com or visit www.thebluffshotram.com.

Stargazing

Vietnam's first private celestial viewing centre has been established in Six Senses Con Dao in the country's southernmost region. Conceived by celebrity astronomer Parag Mahajani, the project features a Maksutov-Cassegrainian 127mm telescope that allows guests to view the celestial highlights of South Vietnam's sky, including Saturn, Venus, Jupiter and the moon. The activity is available on a complimentary basis to all resort guests twice a week from 21.00 to 22.30, with a maximum of 30 guests during each evening session; a nominal fee applies for private sessions. Parag will visit Six Senses Con Dao several times a year to lead stargazing sessions and host exclusive zodiac dinners, while the resort's excursions director George F Erhard will conduct the sessions other times.

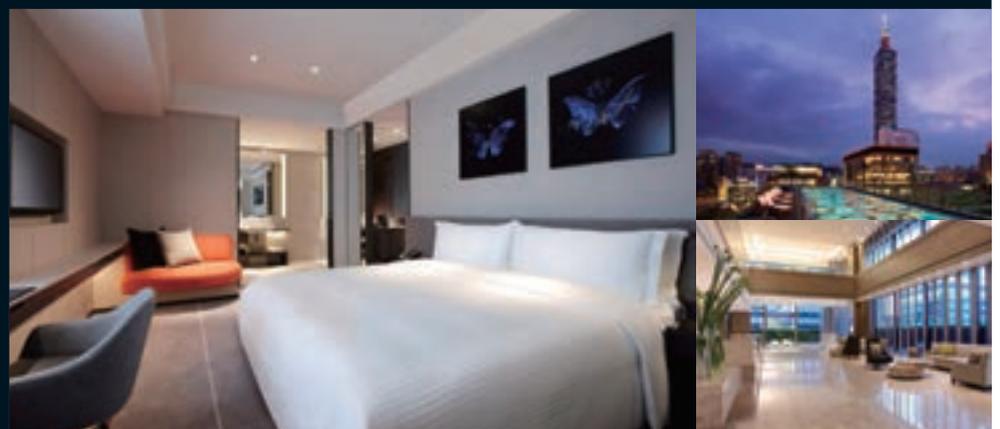
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Conveniently situated in the heart of Taipei. Contemporary art works from international artists are found in all corners of our hotel to illustrate the depth of the aesthetics of our hotel. Employing the modern aesthetics, all our spacious and crisp-lined 235 guest rooms have a commanding view of the city. Free high speed internet access is available in all our guestrooms and public areas of the hotel that allows our guests easy access to on-line information anywhere and anytime.

Not plain vanilla IV



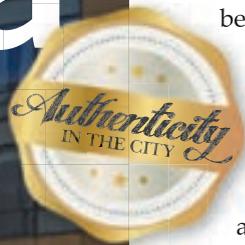
Above Fairmont Makati

Philippine travel experts show how they can give upmarket travellers authentic city insights in just two days of sightseeing and amid ultra comfort with a dash of style. By **Rosa Ocampo**

Manila, a sprawling metropolis shaped by urbanisation and modernisation, does pack an authentic experience for the unsuspecting traveller.

Manila's authenticity wafts from its heritage. "If you talk of Manila, you talk of the proliferation of malls, restaurants, casinos, etc. But they don't take away the Filipino culture. History and culture are the gist of Manila," said John Paul

Manila



of our economy, the international recognition of Philippine talent in the arts and sports and even in beauty," said Tamesis.

"The Department of Tourism also has a distinct *It's More Fun* in the Philippines campaign which I believe describes what differentiates us from our neighbouring countries," Tamesis added.

Beyond the destination – and the obligatory sightseeing – an authentic travel experience is about connecting and interacting with the people. "It's the people that make the Philippines fun. We are the happiest people, we like fiestas, we like to sing and dance. We are friendly, we are hospitable," said Domingo Enerio III, COO of the Tourism Promotions Board.

Manila however is not a standalone leisure experience, except maybe for business travellers. For many tourists, the metro is not the final destination but a gateway to Palawan, Bohol or Cebu.

Guy Louis Roger, president of small luxury travel designer Asiana Pearl Vision, said most of his clients would stay in Manila for only a night or two before going to their final destination.

So, how can an authentic travel experience be realised on such a short visit? For Roger, it is about organising a bespoke tour itinerary for the traveller "to discover the centres of interest of the old and new city".

Bespoke, personalised, customised, tailored – these adjectives lend authenticity to the travel experience. And this experience need not be the opposite of luxury travel. Luxury travel can in fact enhance an authentic travel experience.

Explained Tamesis: "Luxe travellers expect international standards of accommodation and service. However, they are hungry for the country's culture, which can be immediately depicted through

art, cuisine and traditions.

"The only hindrance to this is by thinking that both cannot be combined. The Raffles and Fairmont Makati are global luxury brands having all the comforts and service expected by the more discriminating and refined traveller. However, both hotels also provide authentic local experiences for their guests in a luxurious environment."

Marjorie S. Aquino, inbound sales and marketing manager in charge of Islas Philippines luxury travel brand of Blue Horizons Travel and Tours, said it uses only the best quality.

"For airport transfer, we only use luxury cars like Mercedes Benz. We recommend only the best five-star hotels. We use only the finest tour guides. We do offer high-end leisure tours like helicopter tours."

The security aspect is also important, said Aquino, who has worked with VIPs, including royal families.

Sef Lam, Filipina owner of Via Vai Travel in Hong Kong, said hiring experts to lead specialised tours lends authenticity to the experience. Lam hires a historian or renowned history professor for a heritage tour, an architect for a tour of historical buildings and chefs for a gastronomy tour.

The Museum Foundation of the Philippines also hires experts for its specialised tours.

Cencorp's Cabalza uses air-conditioned jeepneys for authenticity with a dash of luxury. Ditto calesa (local carriage) when touring the Walled City of Intramuros. Filipiniana-themed meals, performances,

“

It is about organising a bespoke tour itinerary for the traveller to discover the centres of interest of the old and new city.

Guy Louis Roger,
president, Asiana
Pearl Vision



Cabalza, managing director, Cencorp Travel and Tours.

"We have many historical sites and cultural traditions still abound," said Cabalza.

Eugene Tamesis, director of sales and marketing, Raffles and Fairmont Makati, agreed. "Despite Manila becoming more and more global in its lifestyle and popular culture, I see a resurgence of Philippine culture.

"I guess this is because of Filipino pride in the improvement

destination philippines



Left
The doorman at Raffles Makati. The hotel features local talent

even shopping activities add to the experience.

Part of an authentic experience is having a “sense of place” when travellers arrive. That’s how service at hotels such as Manila Peninsula became known as the hallmark of Filipino hospitality. Apart from service, Manila Peninsula relives the city of yore by having an orchestra serenade lobby guests every afternoon till early evening.

Hotels also add a dash of Filipiniana in guestrooms through design, use of local materials and amenities. But at Heritage Hotel, Filipiniana is showcased not in its interiors but in adopting the local traditions. Guests are received warmly and given drinks or snacks as they would in any Filipino home.

Historic Manila Hotel has preserved its century-old colonial building, is armed with a memorabilia of its glorious past and has preserved the suite where Douglas MacArthur, military advisor to the Commonwealth government, and his family stayed.

At Raffles Makati, the doorman wears a modernised *barong* (formal Filipino attire for men) with a stylised *salakot* (native weave hat). Raffles is a veritable museum of Filipino talent with over 1,600 commissioned artwork by local artists. Fairmont Makati also supports local art, literature, fashion and music through special projects throughout the year.

Unlike in the past when they

looked to other countries for inspiration, a growing number of spa and wellness centres in hotels and outside use local massage techniques, including *ventosa* and *hilot*, and local herbs for their wellness products.

For the palate, hotels serve Filipino food with a twist, cocktail concoctions using local ingredients and *merienda* or afternoon snacks Filipino-style.

Filipino cooking lessons, local languages lessons, visits to fashion ateliers and the like are also available to travellers.

But the attractions that define Manila’s authenticity need sprucing up. There are ambitious plans to improve Manila as a tourist destination but it’s a question of funding and implementation.

Part of this plan is the rehabilitation of Intramuros, which is already being done in stages, including building a promenade bustling with activities, similar to Clarke Quay in Singapore.

Roxas Boulevard that stretches from the Airport Road at Naia to the heart of the city at Bonifacio Drive is having a makeover starting this year, including streetscape improvements, planting of greeneries and the construction of pedestrian walkways and bicycle lanes.

Long after the photos are forgotten, the traveller will remember his authentic travel experiences in Manila.





Dedon Island
Above Huma Island Resort & Spa

Five new luxe products to consider

Island idyll

Newly-opened Huma Island Resort & Spa in Busuanga, Palawan tops the luxury scale with 81 over-water and beach villas. There's a butler 24/7 for every villa.

Must try is the spa with glass-bottom flooring, and Moroccan ritual steambath in the Hammam room. Other facilities include seven dining outlets, a kids room, library and fitness centre.

A number of marine-based activities awaits the luxe traveller. The resort has seaplane transfer from Manila to its own airport strip on the island.

Barefoot luxury

Siargao is a world-renowned surfers' paradise due to its countless surf breaks, including the legendary Cloud 9 barreling wave. Now there's another reason for Siargao's pull: Dedon Island, where design and architecture blend seamlessly with the surrounding ancient mangrove forests, white sands and crystal waters.

Irresistible: the iconic Nestrest hammock (left) and all the locally-crafted furniture and fixtures.

There are lots to do indoors. But for a bit of outdoor action, there's surfing, kayaking, island-hopping, waterskiing and more.

No money used, no cheques

signed. All F&B, activities and services are covered by a single rate.

A tony address

Raffles Makati, the newest tony address in the CBD, combines the timeless quality of old-world charm with new-world sophistication in its 32 suites that have wooden flooring, Oriental carpets, state-of-the-art technology and stylish design.

The boutique hotel brings to Makati the understated elegance and refined luxury that Raffles hotels are noted for. Within the high rise are Raffles Residence and Fairmont Makati, which opened last year along with Raffles.

Marco Polo goes to Manila

Newly-minted Marco Polo Ortigas, Manila has extensive facilities for business and leisure travellers.

Located at the Ortigas commercial business district minutes away from Makati, the hotel has 316 keys, two Continental Club floors, a wellness zone with fitness centre, a spa and an indoor infinity pool.

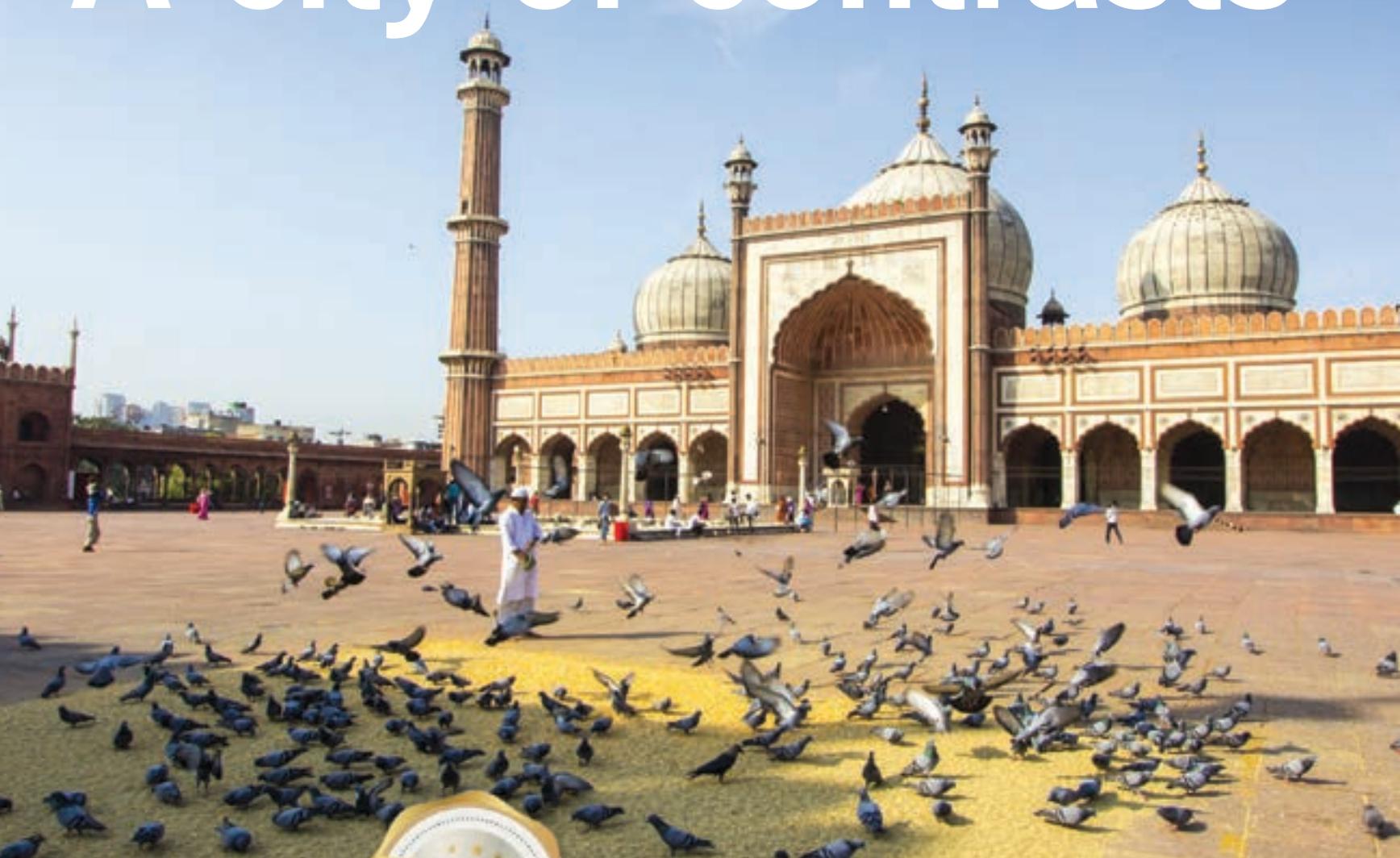
For corporate travellers, the hotel has a round-the-clock business services concierge department and the Connect Lounge, a gallery with an integrated business centre for a modern work and social space.

Retail therapy

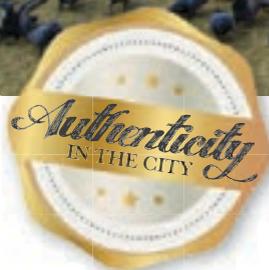
Shopping and lifestyle hub Shangri-La Plaza, just across the EDSA Shangri-La Hotel in Shaw Boulevard, is the best bet for retail therapy and dining out.

It's not crowded and its new East Wing with cutting-edge architecture heaves with upscale brands like Saint Laurent, Herve Leger, Rolex, Omega and Gucci. Many of Manila's best casual dining and novel restaurant concepts are also found here.

A city of contrasts



Above The famous Jama Masjid Mosque in Old Delhi



From developing heritage circuits to enlisting residents' help, New Delhi is further pumping up its muscle to provide authentic experiences,

Rohit Kaul reports

The capital city of India, New Delhi, is a captivating blend of old and new. The city, amid all its cosmopolitan chaos, does offer spectacular glimpses of rich history, culture, architecture and gastronomic delights. Street walks in urban villages like Shahpur Jaat or Haus Khas, historical tours around architectural attractions like the Red Fort, Jama Masjid and Qutub Minar, or tucking in street food and traditionally popular Mughlai food in Chandni Chowk are just a few attractions that can satisfy the luxury traveller hungry for authentic experiences.

"Luxury is no longer about first-class travel or five-star accommodation. Luxury travellers show great interest in the heritage of Delhi, so visits to places like Chandni Chowk (Old Delhi) have become a must-do. Hopping on the Delhi metro, shopping in local bazaars, visiting an Indian family over a meal are some of the activities that offer them a truly authentic experience," said Surinder Singh Sodhi, senior vice president and head, leisure travel-inbound, Thomas Cook India.

Said Mohit Gupta, chief business officer-holidays, MakeMyTrip: "Luxury travellers are opting for

destinations that offer more than just scenic beauty and are exploring places that provide rich experiences. Delhi offers a wide range of attractions, from awe-inspiring historical monuments to modern architecture marvels, bustling traditional bazaars to luxury lifestyle shopping malls, and luxury hotels as well as spiritual centres. Being part of the famed Golden Triangle circuit which includes Agra and Jaipur, many travellers can make excursions to these heritage cities too."

Delhi Tourism & Transport Development Corporation (DTTDC) is looking to develop seven heritage circuits in the city by 2016. These circuits will be developed around popular heritage sites like Qutub Minar, Shahjahanabad, Lodhi Road, Tughlakabad, Hauz Khas Village, Mutiny Memorial and the Central Vista comprising Lutyens' Delhi.

Tour companies dealing in the segment are also engaging local people. "Luxury travellers, like all travellers, do want to experience the local flavour of the destination. They want to see the local life as it is. So most major travel companies have enlisted the expertise of residents to show such travellers around," said Karan Anand, head-relationships, Cox & Kings.

"It is important to encourage local residents to be a part of a tour that provides an authentic experience as otherwise luxury travellers will find the activity more commercial than authentic," said Ravi Gusain, managing director, Erco Travels.

A section of luxury travellers also looks for engaging personal experiences. "Requests from luxury travellers range anything from helicopter rides from Delhi to Jaipur, limousine transfer services and private dinners in the middle of a lake, to exclusive sessions with a yoga guru," said Sharat Dhall, president, Yatra.com.

New Delhi's luxurious hotels only add to the authentic experience. "Hotels like The Oberoi Maidens, The Imperial and The Claridges have a colonial ambience. New hotels have also opened in New Delhi, like The Leela Palace in Chanakyapuri, which has created a heritage palace ambience for luxury travellers," said Subhash Goyal, chairman, STIC Travel Group.

High-end hotels in the city bank on a host of services to attract the luxury clientele. "Just consider what we offer at our 24/7 dining restaurant NYC. We do a unique cuisine everyday (Spanish, Mexican, Californian, etc). Basically if a guest is staying with us for five days or even 14 days he can experience a new cuisine every day! Other superlative dining experiences include The Great Kabab Factory, a must-do Delhi experience, while the Neung Roi showcases unexplored Thai cuisine from Isan, Lanna, central and southern regions of Thailand," said Vishvapreet Singh Cheema, general manager, Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi.

JW Marriott New Delhi Aerocity is another property that hinges on innovative and theme-based designed restaurants to draw the

high-end crowd, including a "food theatre" concept and a state-of-the-art entertainment centre.

But several tour operators share that there are a number of challenges associated with luxury travel in New Delhi. These include the menace of beggars, a lack of nightlife entertainment, and safety and security of travellers. "Except for the *Kingdom of Dreams* show and the sound and light show at the Red Fort, there are no other places luxury travellers could go to for entertainment in the late evening. There is a need to introduce a night bazaar either in Old Delhi or in Connaught Place so that tourists can walk around and enjoy the sights. Safety and security is also a concern among these travellers," said Goyal.

Said Sodhi: "Safety and security continues to be a very real challenge, as well as hygiene and the much-feared 'Delhi belly', fleeing by touts and the chaos of public transportation. Today our standard processes include ensuring that approved guides are provided, our drivers and reps are screened (ie, background checks made), restaurants are as per our approved list and transportation vendors go through regular checks and audits with our teams."



Hotels like The Oberoi Maidens, The Imperial and The Claridges have a colonial ambience.

Subhash Goyal, chairman, STIC Travel Group

Below
A touch of history and colonial architecture



Six
new luxe
products to
consider

Amour Bistro

Located in the heart of the diplomatic enclave, Malcha Marg in New Delhi, Amour Bistro offers guests a fun dining option. The bistro's menu, which is contemporary and eclectic, spans the range of the Mediterranean, from Europe to the Middle East. Rustic tones, European furniture, a musical trio of street-style artistes along with an installation of antique chandeliers make for the perfect setting for your client's next meal. Each element of Amour Bistro, be it the food, interiors, tableware or music, will transport you to the heart of Europe in a jiffy.

Mandara Spa

The 1,840m² Mandara Spa at the Radisson Blu Alibaug, 32km from Mumbai, has the distinction of being one of the largest spa properties in Asia. Surrounded by beautifully-landscaped gardens and water bodies, the facility is a perfect getaway to unwind. Treatments include a variety of massage styles, seaweed, mud or herbal body wraps, facials, salt scrubs, aromatherapy, reflexology and a selection of freshwater baths. The spa also offers a full-service beauty salon.

Maritime by San Lorenzo

Located at Taj Lands End in Mumbai, this new restaurant serves hearty Italian specialities, drawing inspiration from Lorenzo Berni's family recipes served at the West London restaurant. Paying homage to true Italian gastronomy, the



Above
Amour Bistro

menu at Maritime by San Lorenzo comprises San Lorenzo's signature dishes like tagliata of chicken breast with balsamic sauce. The wine list features 64 Italian wine labels. For those seeking a tasty tittle, the Prosecco Bar serves a variety of cocktails.

S Pangaea

If your clients want to party with who's who of the city, this is the place to be. S Pangaea is the newly-opened nightclub at Ashok Hotel in New Delhi. It accommodates up to 400 guests and offers 20 VIP tables. Thanks to its grandeur feel and world-class art collection, S Pangaea has redefined standards of clubbing in the city. The rich man's club offers exclusive corner tables for a whopping Rs4 lakh (US\$ 6,570.40) a night, where guests can enjoy exclusive stewards and personalised guards.

Southern Spice

The iconic South Indian speciality restaurant at Taj Coromandel, Chennai, was relaunched after a renovation in April 2012. Authentic ingredients, traditional flavours and homemade recipes come

together to ensure your clients are served the most exotic fare that is truly traditional yet enhanced with a touch of modernity. Southern Spice reinvents tradition with the liberal use of premium ingredients such as asparagus, soft shell crabs and scallops. Unusual to the south Indian palate, these imported ingredients are cooked in authentic south Indian spices to give the meal an interesting twist. Adding an international touch, the menu has been expertly paired with wines and spirits that best complement the meal.

Pintxo

Located at Galleria market in Gurgaon, Pintxo offers a perfect setting for relaxed, enjoyable evenings. The restaurant features authentic and innovative gastronomic delights from southern coastal Europe as well as the rich culinary heritage of the Mediterranean. Signature dishes include prawns with garlic, basa and shrimp with asparagus and trout fish in almond sauce. Spectacularly decorated with a mixture of contemporary theme and exotic art crafts, the restaurant takes you on a stroll through Spain.



Above
The hustle and bustle in Istanbul

Not cold Turkey

Is Turkey for luxury travellers? **Raini Hamdi** says it will appeal to a certain breed of upmarket clients

Turkey stands tall for its awe-inspiring man-made and natural monuments. The historical palaces, mosques and cisterns in Istanbul and the eye-popping rock erections and cave churches in Cappadocia draw tourists by the millions – 37.8 million last year to be exact, a growth of six per cent over 2012, according to UNWTO figures.

It's the sixth most-visited destination in the world in UNWTO's 2012 ranking and, with its own population of 76.5 million, things can get pretty crowded in many places (just look out the aircraft window when the plane descends). And nerve-racking (a taxi ride in Istanbul is not for the faint-hearted). Attitudes vary: at immigration, the officer literally throws the passport back at you. Yet, at all major attractions, entrance fees are waived for the media without a flinch, and with a big smile, signalling Turkey wants you to write about it; it wants more foreigners to visit.

In Istanbul, designer cafés, wine bars, open-air rooftop restaurants and cool boutique hotels coexist with fresh mussels served on ice by the roadside and age-old bazaars whose inventory range and quantity would put Alibaba.com to shame. Ancient bazaars jostle for sales with new-age ones, such as the up-and-coming Zorlu Centre. The muezzin's call to prayer fills the streets five times a day, a recording which does not Pied Piper people into mosques and bring commerce to a standstill. Revered museums with jaw-dropping collections of masterpieces and sarcophagi give nod to a new generation of artists in contemporary galleries – the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, Turkey's first private museum to stage modern art exhibitions, was founded in 2004 on the shores of the Bosphorus, and in 2012 the contemporary art space Salt opened. Last year a number of Istanbul art galleries attended Frieze London, as well as Art Basel in Basel and Hong Kong.

In nature wonderland Cappadocia, just when you think you're able to let the body rest for a while from the excesses of eating and drinking in Istanbul, a restaurant called Muti by Prokopia will not let you. How is it that a restaurant in a place called Urgup in Cappadocia can run circles around its counterparts in a world city like Istanbul in its ambience, design and culinary might? How is it that a cave hotel called Esbelli Cave Evi in Urgup can beat even an Amanresort in personalisation, its matron, Mrs Yasmin, never failing to be there to greet you and ensure you are well each time you leave the house or return to it?

Turkey today truly signifies its 'caught-in-between' enigma: one foot in the West, one foot in Asia. One foot in the EU, one foot out. One foot arrived, one foot not there yet. Saffron and mustard, young and old, modern and ancient, religious and secular. That's its charm. And it is as safe as any city in the world, which surely counts for a lot to every visitor today.

For luxury travellers seeking conformity, utmost quality at every corner and the luxe lifestyle – of beautiful locals and foreigners sipping champagne and wine while watching the sun go down, of Pretty Woman armed with branded shopping bags and a wide smile strolling down

Raimi Hamdi



Above Rock formations at Cappadocia **Right** Medieval stone tower Galata Tower, Istanbul

Beverly Hills – this is not the place. That’s too typical.

Turkey is anything but typical. It is for the more adventurous, less uptight well-heeled, who are able to set aside for a moment their prejudices and notions of luxury travel and just soak in a world which for once does not render the word ‘exotic’ cheap and overused. Turkey is the real exotica.

These clients will be richly rewarded with unexpected memories, not just of wondrous sights, but of wonderful people.

The right partner in Turkey that understands the fundamentals of catering to luxury travellers is essential. A company such as the eight-year old TravelAtelier lives up to its name in delivering itineraries that are crafted to suit each client’s needs, habits and preferences. Owner Y Murat Ozguc even personally calls his client daily to ensure all is going well (as this editor experienced).

“Itineraries can be easily copied. At the end of the day, I can’t change the history of Istanbul or Cappadocia or anything, but I believe I can change the experience of your visit,” said Murat.

TravelAtelier handles around 1,400 FITs a year, and also handles incentives, corporate meetings and weddings. Murat said his market mix has changed. “North America used to comprise 80 per cent of our business, now it’s 60-65 per cent, as new markets South America and Asia,

including India, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan and Singapore, rise for us. It’s amazing as we didn’t do any marketing, it’s all word-of-mouth.

“Our company is not run like a traditional commercial entity, rather it is run on emotions, feelings of friendship and feeding those feelings. Communicating with guests about what they wish for before they arrive already makes you feel you know them. When they are here, we’d come and sit and talk to them, and have an experience with them. We enjoy what we do. We are not a big company, only a team of 10 full-time staff, so all we have to offer is the personal touch.”

In the world of the rich, few probably can remember the last time someone made them cry for a service that came truly from the heart.

In Turkey, that could happen not just once but twice and thrice.

“Itineraries can be easily copied. At the end of the day, I can’t change the history of Istanbul or Cappadocia or anything, but I believe I can change the experience of your visit.”

Y Murat Ozguc,
Owner, TravelAtelier



Did you know?

World’s largest airport

Construction of the third airport in Istanbul has broken ground. Astonishingly, it aims to rival Dubai’s Al Maktoum International Airport as the world’s largest airport, capable of handling 150 million passengers a year when it is fully operational in 2018. The first stage is set for completion on October 29, 2017, the 94th anniversary of the founding of modern Turkey.

Luxury FRHI expands in Turkey

One international chain which is growing in Turkey is FRHI Hotels & Resorts. Aside from Raffles Istanbul, opening this summer (see below), it will open a Fairmont in Istanbul in late 2015/early 2016. With an already established Swissotel Bosphorus, this means all the three brands of FHRH are represented in the city.

Said Aiden McAuley, FHRH’s senior vice president-operations Europe, based in Zurich: “Istanbul is a huge city and is becoming even more important as a business centre.”

FHRH is also opening two other properties in Bodrum this year.

Raffles Istanbul opens this summer

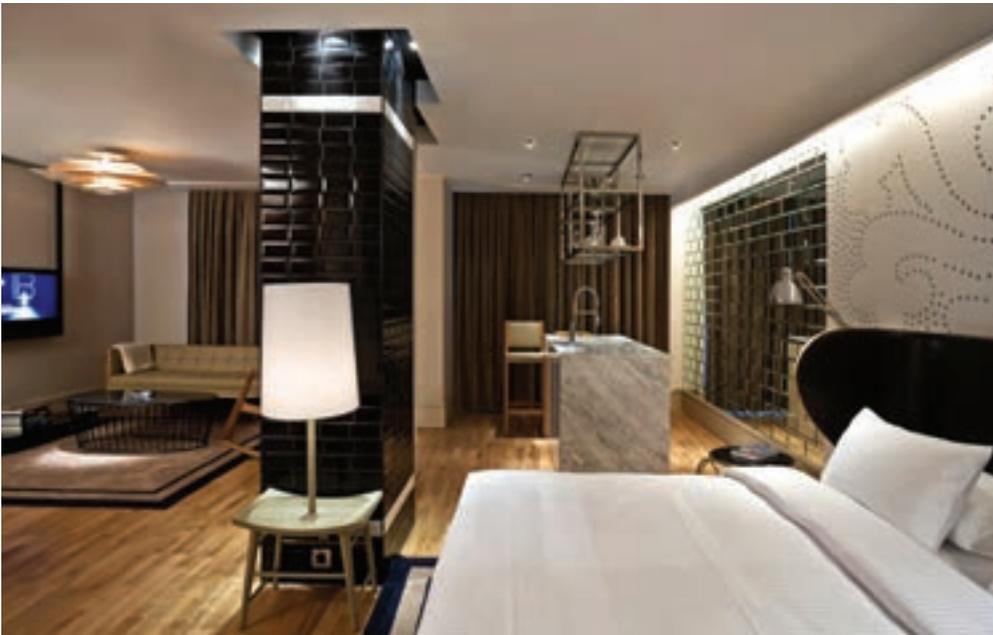
Raffles Istanbul, opening in August/September, aims to embody the “new face” of Istanbul as cutting-edge, eclectic and energetic. The hotel is at the heart of Zorlu Centre, a new hub for fashion, food and the arts on the European shore in Besiktas, overlooking the Bosphorus, the Princess Islands and the historic peninsula.

Like sister Le Royal Monceau, Raffles Paris, the sleek modern interiors at Raffles Istanbul will be embellished with an impressive collection of artwork, specially commissioned from local artists. And as in Paris, it will have an Art Concierge to steer clients through the city’s exciting new art scene.

Rates start from 600 euros (US\$811.50) per night for a Raffles Room.



Witt Istanbul Hotel



Left Grand king room Above Wall graffiti of 'Mr Witt' in the lift

LOCATION Perfect, especially after a hair-raising taxi ride. Suddenly, it's all calm and quiet in residential Cihangir, away from the crowds yet within walking distance to Istiklal, the city's major

shopping/entertainment district, and to the MTR which goes direct to must-see attractions.

AMBIENCE I don't know why the hotel is called Witt but how ideal, for it brims with wit and charm. When

I got into the lift, a wall graffiti of 'Mr Witt' and his transparent thought, "Why don't you use the stairs?", made me laugh out loud.

ROOM As my eyes swivel around my grand king room, again I cannot help liking Witt instantly. It feels like I've stepped into a luxuri-

ous, stylish bachelor pad that is modern yet retro, in keeping with the playful spirit of Witt. Yet, it's not 'crazy' by any means as some design hotels have become. Here, everything comes together correctly – there is nothing that suggests it is trying too hard to be a design hotel.

I love the open-plan layout that comfortably fits a living room, a plush king bed and a kitchenette equipped with classy glassware, crockery and utensils. I also love the unique furniture and furnishings, all hand-picked by top Turkish interior designer, Autoban. The lighting pieces are beautiful, while the shower head, from Ross Lovegrove, is the funkiest I've ever seen – five or six fat aubergine-size shower heads fixed together, raining down one of the best drizzles I had in a long while. Witt is not just about great design but great functionality.

Room 31 however does not have a view to speak of and the apartment across is rather close by. But there are rooms that have views of Galata Tower and the Beyoglu area.

FACILITIES A cosy, well-designed breakfast-cum-reading room.

SERVICE The receptionists that man the counter daily rival the best staff at the best-name hotels any day. Such wonderful people who are extremely polite, courteous, helpful and trained to handle guests. They call a taxi for me, go out of the hotel to meet the cab when it arrives to make sure it'll take me where I want to go, ensure I have a bottle of water with me – they are the first and last impressions people have of Witt and what lovely memories they give.

VERDICT You won't lose your wits here – the hotel is a delight.

Name Witt Istanbul Hotel
No. of rooms 17
Address Defterdar Yukusu No. 26, Cihangir 34433 Beyoglu, Istanbul
Contact
Tel: (90-212) 293-1500
Website: wittistanbul.com
A member of Design Hotels
www.designhotels.com/hotels/turkey/istanbul/witt-istanbul

My way

Singapore tycoon Kwek Leng Beng, executive chairman of City Developments Limited, tells **Raini Hamdi** what drives him to build his 'City', now comprising some of the world's luxury hotels, including a new project, South Beach, which will open in Singapore in 1Q15

Are you a connoisseur of luxury hotels?

I once asked my late father, 'Why don't we position ourselves as a deluxe developer?' He said, 'Why be so silly? You should do whatever that can make money – deluxe, middle, lower end – cast your net wider.'

This is the right strategy. Some people focus on luxury only because they want to create a statement for themselves. But the trick is, a three-star makes more money than a four-star, a four-star more than a five-star, a five-star more than a six-star. Pick your choice. I choose to cast my net wider so I have better profits and spread my risk.

So you're not keen to build your own luxury brand, even with your South Beach project (see box, right) in Singapore?

What's the objective? To make money or to create a statement? I don't need to create a statement. I think I'm already known in the hotel world, maybe better known in the hotel world than in the real estate world. When I bought The Plaza New York, people said, 'Who's this Singaporean in New York buying The Plaza?'

Why did you tender for South Beach about five years ago?

Initially, I was not interested. One day, I went to the DTZ office at Shaw Towers along Beach Road,

from where I could see the new developments in the city's financial district. I had unobstructed views. Location and the priceless views were the deciding factors. South Beach is just across the road from the convention centre, Suntec Singapore.

That's why several international chains have knocked on our doors to manage South Beach. But we haven't made a decision on who will manage South Beach.

What's your vision for South Beach? And why Philippe Starck?

I want to create a hotel that is not a cookie cutter. Something that is both lifestyle and luxurious, that will make you go 'waaah' when you see the lobby and, by the time you reach your room, your mind is no longer so jumpy; you just want to relax.

So we thought of Philippe Starck. His design is more down-to-earth now. Previously, his concepts at times were edgy, like Alice in Wonderland (jokes).

People don't like cookie-cutter products. When I built my Studio M, the first loft hotel in Singapore, people loved it. Singaporeans do staycations at the hotel. It attracts the hip crowd, who party there over the weekends. The occupancy and rates have been high from day one.

I understand you're creating another M – M Social.

I'm trying to create another lifestyle category, this time for young people who want to socialise and interact with one another, use technology, want to see and be seen.



I do not spend money carelessly. I used to enjoy super cars. I like to stay in nice hotels, not necessarily six-star but ones that make me feel good, comfortable and, most importantly, happy.

Is there any other gap left?

One day I would like to build a two-star hotel, but one that will have a strong talking point.

Growing up, did you tell yourself, 'I'm going to be the second richest man in Singapore?'

(Laughs) First, I want to make a correction. Nobody actually knows how rich a person is. One can only speculate. Do you think *Forbes* is accurate? *Forbes* gives you a rough idea of the wealth of a person in its publications. Most times, they take into account the market capitalisation in the person's equities portfolio, which may not be the true or full figure. A lot of Asians are private people. Why should they want to reveal their assets? It's not like we want to be subjected to probity checks.

Do you like such rankings?

It's fun to read.

What does 'rich' mean to you?

I've always said, someone worth \$100 million may have a higher standard of living than a person worth \$1 billion.

I do not spend money carelessly. I used to enjoy super cars. I like to stay in nice hotels, not necessarily six-star but ones that make me feel good, comfortable and, most importantly, happy.

What motivates you now?

It has always been, and still is, about being passionate about

what I do. If you're not, at best you will be a mediocre performer. And what a waste, if you have the knowledge and experience, not to contribute or pass that on to others.

I learn years ago that by working, you keep your mind active. It's like driving a car – you don't want to apply the brakes, which make the car falter, you keep going till it's over.

So retirement is not on the cards?

I don't think about it. I feel young at heart. I feel I can contribute to the business and society. I've seen friends retire at 35 and are bored after two years of going round the world.

When your late father handed the reins to you and your brother, he said: "I hope the young will emulate the older generation in their indefatigable energy for hard work, spirit and tenacity." What would you say when it's time to hand over?

That philosophy is correct. But it's up to the individual – some accede to that philosophy, for others, it matters not. I would say, at end of the day, you must ask, have I done anything useful to my business? How much more can I contribute to my business? Am I happy to do so?

Don't you wish to see your legacy continue?

Every father wishes that. But one can only try.

KWEK'S SOUTH BEACH AT A GLANCE

- A mixed-use contemporary/ecological development comprising over 46,000sqm of Grade A office space; 190 residential units; a 654-room hotel designed by Philippe Starck; a retail concept; and a private membership club
- Developed by City Developments Limited (CDL) Singapore and IOI Corporation Berhad
- Located opposite Raffles Hotel Singapore on the Beach Road side and is directly connected to Suntec Singapore via an overhead bridge on the Nicoll Highway side
- A heritage site formerly comprising three army blocks and the NCO Club, a favourite haunt for army, naval and air force offices famed for its Olympic-sized swimming pool
- Architecture by Foster + Partners and Aedas



Flying in private

More Asians own business jets today or use them for business, holidays and shopping trips, writes **Caroline Boey**



The business jet market in Asia has doubled, according to Zurich-based ExecuJet Aviation Group, and the company is expanding to cope with the increase in demand.

Graeme Duckworth, managing director, ExecuJet Asia, said the company is looking to grow its diverse range of services that include aircraft management, charters, maintenance and fixed-base operation (FBO). ExecuJet, which started in 1991, took part in the Singapore Air Show for the first time this year.

With bases in Indonesia, China, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand, ExecuJet counts casino high-rollers, investors, property developers and board members among Asian customers that make use of its various services.

Describing business jet activity in the region as “very buoyant”, Duckworth said: “The Chinese are still looking for natural resources and are doing business around the world. In Malaysia we are seeing demand for travel to Russia, South America and Africa.

“The rapidly growing number of business jets in Asia has also created the need for greater management and maintenance support in the region,” he added.

ExecuJet Australasia announced at the Singapore Air Show it is expanding its charter fleet with the addition of its first Gulfstream G650. The aircraft, based in Wellington, is the first G650 available for charter in the region. It can fly non-stop from Auckland to cities such as Los Angeles, Beijing and Hong Kong.

The company now has eight charter aircraft, comprising three Bombardier Globals, three Challenger 604s, a Gulfstream G650 and a Gulfstream IV-SP, located in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Wellington and Kuala Lumpur.

Commenting on the travel patterns among its Asian customers, Darren McGoldrick, managing director, ExecuJet Australia, said: “Traffic between Australia and South-east Asia is strong. We see many mainland Chinese flying into Hong Kong, and there are also



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“Traffic between Australia and South-east Asia is strong. We see many mainland Chinese flying into Hong Kong, and there are also some international charters from Australia and Asia to the US and Europe.”

Darren McGoldrick, managing director, ExecuJet Australia

some international charters from Australia and Asia to the US and Europe.”

McGoldrick added the FBO in Sydney was ramped up during the Lunar New Year holiday this year to cater to a dozen aircraft flying passengers from China and other parts of Asia, and similarly for Bali.

PT ExecuJet Indonesia, a joint venture between ExecuJet Aviation Group and majority owner PT Dimetri Utama Abadi, has moved from its temporary general aviation (GA) terminal at Bali International Airport to a new facility, which Duckworth said was designed to handle all GA and business jets up to narrow-body aircraft, and would provide VIP lounge access, groundhandling services and aircraft management.

In Thailand, Bangkok-based VIP-Jets, a boutique private jet operator that works primarily with European insurance companies to operate medical evacuations, took off a year ago. VIPJets is also available for luxury travel charters.

Director, Luzi Matzig, who has a pilot’s licence, said VIPJets operates a



ExecuJet's G650 interior

Cessna Citation Mustang – typically configured for one or two pilots and four to five passengers – and its business is split 70:30 for medical evacuations and flying luxury travellers on holiday in Asia.

Hourly charter rates range between US\$2,500 and US\$3,500 per flight per hour plus local charges such as handling fees, overflight permits, landing fees, baggage handling, air navigation, immigration and customs, security, medical equipment, etc.

Matzig said: “A single landing in a Chinese city can cost up to US\$10,000, while it could be as low as US\$300 in Thailand or Malaysia.”

VIPJets, he added, works with upmarket tour operators such as Abercrombie and Kent and Kuoni International to offer private jet a la carte holiday programmes to affluent travellers – mainly Americans, British, and Chinese – all over Asia.

“Word-of-mouth recommendations are very important. We are pretty satisfied with our success so far and we have not had to attend trade shows or advertise,” he noted.

US\$55mil

Not small change

The cost to own a business jet. Add another US\$3.5 million a year to run the aircraft

US\$9,000

Smart luxury

The cost, per hour, to charter a business jet that seats eight to 19 pax

Source: ExecuJet Aviation Group

The CEO of a travel company agreed word-of-mouth recommendation is important. The Singapore-based company started going after the luxury travel segment seven years ago and she said recommendations would come from a small group of players in the luxury travel club.

Members of the Virtuoso luxury

travel network of advisers provide leads and referrals, and recommendations can come from private bankers, the American Express Platinum Card Concierge service, or Quintessentially Travel, which creates bespoke luxury holidays and unique experiences.

“The total booking, depending on the number of people, the number of days, the type of services required, etc, can range anywhere from US\$21,000 up to US\$150,000 or more, and you are looking at a commission that can range from five to 15 per cent,” the CEO said.

“These travellers come and go as and when it suits them and expect a highly personalised service, privacy and service providers to be totally discreet.

“Last-minute changes in the arrangements are common, and service providers have to be ready 24/7 to accommodate them. You must be prepared to handle the stress.”

International film stars, powerful businessmen and famous personalities from Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia are some of the travellers she and her team have had to take care of.

“Sometimes we work with a travel arranger or a handler and we don’t know who the traveller is, or travellers are. We must give the handlers or arrangers the answers they need quickly and reply to emails 24/7. Not only must we be reliable, we must also have all the connections to carry out the arrangements,” she noted.

“

A single landing in a Chinese city can cost up to US\$10,000, while it could be as low as US\$300 in Thailand or Malaysia.

Luzi Matzig, director, VIPJets





HOTEL SUITE IN THE SKY

Aiming to alter luxury air travellers' expectations forever, Etihad Airways, the flag carrier of the UAE, will debut The Residence by Etihad – the world's first private multi-room cabin on a commercial passenger aircraft featuring a living room, double bedroom, separate en-suite shower room and, a first for the airline industry, a dedicated butler trained at the Savoy Butler Academy in London. A dedicated VIP travel concierge team also ensures ground transport, cuisine and amenities are tailored.

The Residence will debut in January 2015 from Abu Dhabi-London and will subsequently expand to further routes by end 2015. The cost for a return flight is about US\$40,000. Since the announcement was made on May 4, it has been booked out on most flights for the first two months of service, according to the carrier's spokesman.

Only one (single or double occupancy) is available only on the airline's A380 aircraft, in the forward upper-deck cabin. Each of Etihad's A380s will offer a boutique version of The Residence with different colour palettes, table marquetry and custom carpets.

Etihad's design vision is to bring the individuality and exclusivity of a luxury boutique hotel experience to the sky in a way that embraces Arabian modernism.



Designing One&Only in luxury-laden Sanya

Construction has started on the first One&Only resort in China (right, artist's impression) on Haitang Bay, Hainan, with an expected opening in mid-2015.

Jean Michel Gathy, principal, Denniston International Architects, who was part of the team that developed the One&Only Reethi Rah in the Maldives, is working with Kerzner's development and design team lead by Sol Kerzner, chairman, Kerzner International and Alan Leibman, CEO, on the design of the One&Only Sanya. Bensley Design Studios is working on the landscape architecture, highlighting the local flora and fauna found on Hainan.

Featuring 192 guestrooms, suites and villas, One&Only Sanya will command enviable views from over 380m of private coastline and over 11ha of coconut palms set amid dramatic water gardens throughout the resort.





For clients who can part with US\$150,000 a night

Laucala Island, Fiji (above), a resort developed by Red Bull magnate Dietrich Mateschitz, can now be booked in its entirety for private groups and events.

The price for the 'buyout': US\$150,000 a night (excluding 15 per cent VAT and five per cent service tax). It can accommodate up to 72 in all 24 tropical pool villas and is available only for a minimum of five nights.

All meals and drinks including champagne, house wines, spirits and soft drinks are included at the island's five restaurants and bars.

Each guest is treated to 90 minutes of complimentary spa. Guests can also golf on an 18-hole championship course designed by Scotsman David McLay Kidd, enjoy watersports, tennis and horse riding.

Not to be missed are tours of the island's extensive organic farm with hydroponic vegetable and herb gardens, fruit orchards and livestock, providing a behind-the-scenes insight into how the Red Bull billionaire envisages self-sufficiency for most food produce.

All laundry and dry-cleaning are included. Laucala's most exclusive residence, the Hilltop Villa, is not included in the price – but may be requested for an additional fee.

Counting sheep is passé

Who has the world's most extensive pillow menu? The honour goes to ... Conrad Hotels & Resorts.

Your clients can look to 75 different ways to slip into slumber. Among signature pillows that caught our eye:

- Organic buckwheat pillow – Great for green guests. Available at Conrad Tokyo, this eco-friendly bedtime experience has been used throughout Asia for centuries. The pillow hulls mould to the head's shape and allows natural air circulation, believed to help relieve migraines, tension and muscle spasms.
- Porcelain pillow – Offered at Conrad Centennial Singapore, this was the most widely used pillow in ancient China when pillows were also made of natural stone, wood, jade and bronze. Porcelain pillows first appeared in the Sui Dynasty (581-618) and were created to support the neck and protect hairstyles from being crushed.
- Shogun pillow – Offered at Conrad Bangkok, this is a traditional Asian tatami pillow that has existed for over 1,000 years and was enjoyed by emperors and noblemen. The woven tatami rush or *igusa* creates many small breathing holes that moderate temperature, absorb humidity and heat, and keep air fresh, while the aroma of the *igusa* is believed to stimulate blood circulation to minimise aches and pains, a perfect antidote to a longhaul flight.

First Solís opens in China

Han Yue Lou Hotel Nanjing, a Solís-managed hotel, opened on March 22 offering 319 rooms of which 124 are suites, a diverse selection of dining and entertainment concepts, a world-class spa, a fitness centre that features an indoor heated lap pool and 2,322m² of ultra-modern meetings and events space. The hotel is connected to the Yurun International Plaza complex, which offers dining, entertainment, retail outlets and luxury serviced apartments. It marks the entry of the brand into China.

Located in the heart of the central business district area of Jianye District, the interior design is by award-winning firm Bamo of San Francisco, complemented by restaurant designs by Spin from Japan.

Solís Hotels and Resort is the brainchild of Horst Schulze, chairman and CEO of Capella Hotel Group.

Guests requiring personalised services, such as itinerary creation and pre-arrival services, can consult the hotel's private concierge personnel 24/7. A multilingual concierge team is able to handle the needs of a diverse international clientele.



TTG's 40tude

We're 40 this year and, thus far, have marked the occasion with the launch of a new title, *TTGassociations*, and a bold revamp of the flagship title, *TTG Asia*.

The 40-year-old *TTG Asia* now sports an all-new look with an exciting cover and a host of new sections to help travel agency CEOs and travel consultants to stay sharp and smart. The print title is more in-depth than ever before, focusing on trends/issues, case studies, intelligence, destination ideas and incisive commentaries. It complements the online news portal www.ttgasia.com and email bulletin *TTG Asia e-Daily*, which delivers original, breaking news stories written by the largest dedicated network of reporters across the region. A revamp of the portal and email bulletin is also underway.

TTGassociations, a quarterly, reaches out to association buyers in the region, its launch complementing sister title *TTGmice*, which has been championing the growth of the Asian MICE industry for two decades.

More initiatives are being rolled out, including Roomonger, a B2B e-commerce portal, an industry fun run at Gardens by the Bay on July 25 and a commemorative *TTG Asia Special Edition* on August 8.



Pranburi perks up

Pranburi, a sleepy seaside town three hours from Bangkok and 30km south of Hua Hin, is heating up as a sybaritic playground in Thailand with a flurry of luxury boutique resort openings in recent months. Having made its mark in Bangkok and Samui, Hansar Hotels & Resorts has picked this tranquil beach location to stage its latest outpost, the 17-key Hansar Pranburi, which opened its doors in mid-April on Nom Sao Beach with the jagged limestone peaks of Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park as backdrop (see above).

The retreat boasts nine rooms in the beachfront estate and eight rooms in two-storey bungalows; the top floor of the villa houses the honeymoon suite with an outdoor Jacuzzi and open views of the sea, while upper-storey bungalow rooms have private sky terraces.

Husband-and-wife duo Etienne Vetillart and Suzanne Vetillart Chayavichitsilp – both from the owning family of Hansar Hotels & Resorts – flaunt their design and architectural talent by kitting out 31-60m² rooms in sleek natural woods, textile furnishings and hues of blue, white and brown.

A 20m infinity edge swimming pool is strategically placed to overlook the Gulf of Thailand, while spa services are available in-room or on the beach. The Bay Restaurant serves salads, pastas, fresh seafood and Thai classics while the Monkey Bar is the ideal spot for sipping concoctions adapted from Bangkok and Samui. For those in favour of more active options, boat tours of the nearby islands, hikes up to the Phraya Nakhon Cave or gourmet picnics on a private beach can be had. – **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

Woong Asians to the wild side

Cheli & Peacock, which operates and/or markets seven luxury safari camps in Kenya, aims to get more Asians to answer the call of nature.

Several fam trips for Asian media will be arranged this year, while founder and managing director Stefano Cheli will make a sales trip to Asia in September, calling on Cheli & Peacock's travel agency partners in Hong Kong and Singapore and holding presentations, training sessions and press events.

"We did one of these trips in 2011, after which the interest for Kenya from the region started growing, so we feel confident that yet another trip will bring lots more business in 2014 and 2015," said marketing manager Julia Mut.

The number of Asian visitors to Cheli & Peacock's properties has soared dramatically, albeit on a small base: between 2010 and 2013, Australasian visitor numbers leapt 400 per cent from 75 to 308 while revenue grew six-fold.

Cheli & Peacock luxury safaris camps are small, mostly offering no more than 20 rooms each. Elephant Pepper Camp and Cottar's 1920s Safari Camp in Masai Mara, and Tortilis Camp in Amboseli, are popular among Asians as these have been the most widely promoted in Asia.

Cheli & Peacock's camps are environment-friendly and located in conservancies or national reserves. It supports local communities through bed night levies, leasing agreements and education initiatives. – **Hannah Koh**

Mandarin Oriental Taipei opens

Mandarin Oriental, Taipei has opened, offering 303 luxurious rooms and suites, which it says are the most spacious in the city. Facilities include six restaurants and bars, a spa and diverse meeting and event spaces, including a spectacular wedding chapel.

At the ribbon-cutting ceremony (below), from left, Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group's top honchos Richard Baker and Edouard Ettedgui, Taipei mayor Long-Bi Hau, Taiwanese actress Brigitte Lin, vice premier of the executive yuan Chi-kuo Mao, Mandarin Oriental Taipei owner Ming-Chun Lin and the hotel's general manager, Paul Jones.



Sail on, Catherine

Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection has set sail the *S.S. Catherine*, named after famous French actress Catherine Deneuve (above), who inaugurated the launch.

The ship offers 80 staterooms, five suites and one Royal Presidential Suite.

Original commissioned and antique artwork, as well as exquisite details, adorn the ship. A unique Murano chandelier decorates the lobby, alongside a glass elevator which features a waterfall cascading down one side. Facilities include a signature Bar du Leopard, cinema, Van Gogh Lounge, Cézanne Restaurant, cozy bistro, coffee and tea bar, swimming pool, Serenity River Spa, fireplace and fitness centre.

Uniworld ships promise high-quality cuisine made from the finest ingredients. Daily visits to the local farmers' markets are made.

Guy Young, president of Uniworld, said the ship would allow the company to offer more capacity to support its popular Burgundy and Provence and Grand France itineraries.

Uniworld will be launching another ship in spring 2015, the *S.S. Maria Theresa*, named after the archduchess of Austria and queen of Hungary and Bohemia who reigned from 1740 to 1780.

The *S.S. Maria Theresa* sails this very region on Uniworld's *European Jewels* from Budapest to Amsterdam. She will also sail on *Tulips & Windmills*, *European Holiday Markets* and *Grand Christmas & New Year's Cruise*.

Rediscover Silver Discoverer

The Silversea Expeditions fleet now includes a third expedition ship, the *Silver Discoverer*, which embarked on her maiden voyage from Broome to Darwin on April 2, exploring Australia's spectacular Kimberley Coast, and cruises the remote regions of the Pacific.

Fresh from a major refurbishment, the 5,218-ton *Silver Discoverer* accommodates up to 120 guests in 62 all ocean-view suites, each outfitted with reupholstered furniture, new flat screen TVs and new mattresses topped with luxurious Pratesi bedlinens. Some of the suites also feature private balconies.

Public areas include a restaurant, main lounge/lecture room, The Discoverer Lounge (with seating for breakfast and lunch), The Grill (for outdoor dining), an outside bar and a swimming pool. An all-new sun deck area has also been added, along with a gym, beauty salon and spa. All public areas have been luxuriously refitted.

Zodiac excursions and interactive walks ashore led by experts – marine biologists, ornithologists, geologists, botanists, historians and anthropologists – are a feature of Silversea Expeditions.



Silversea's Manfredi Lefebvre d'Ovidio (left) with Singapore Tourism Board's Lionel Yeo at the ship's christening ceremony



So, it's opened in Singapore

Sofitel So Singapore has opened, flaunting its design cred which includes a small lounge adjacent to the hotel lobby reminiscent of Parisian bookstores with a book selection by acclaimed fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld, who designed the hotel's emblem and staff uniforms.

Highlights include the gold-tiled pool and Xperience gastrobar that features a rotation of Michelin-starred chef every two months. The hotel's 100m² flexible space The Box is big enough to fit 30 people, but the bulk of MICE business will be directed to the Sofitel Singapore Sentosa Resort & Spa, which is also owned by Sofitel So Singapore owners, the Royal Group.

Each Sofitel So is different, said general manager Tony Chisholm. "Everything that's created for So is totally different from one hotel to the next."

He pointed out that Sofitel So is the only Accor brand that has its own scent. The bespoke scent at Sofitel So Singapore is meant to reflect Singapore's history as a trading post on the spice route.

Intra-Asia travellers from source market such as Thailand, Indonesia, Hong Kong, China, Malaysia, Japan and South Korea are expected to provide a strong customer base. Chisholm has also seen interest from the Australian market.

"Singapore as a market is already strong with 86 per cent (occupancy on average). With our location (on Robinson Road), we are confident of opening with strong occupancies." – **Hannah Koh**

Jermyn Street – in Singapore

Inspired by the rich grooming heritage of Jermyn Street in London, an upscale barbershop, Jermyn Street, has opened – in Amoy Street in Singapore.

The concept is encapsulated by the line 'Grooming gentlemen for centuries'.

The 167m² barbershop has six workstations with a rotation of seven barbers on-site. In-house master barber Luke Strickland hails from London, and is fully qualified in the art of straight razor shaving, and handling a straight blade.

Jermyn Street also houses a stage for musical entertainment, a private room for meetings and a large bar area.

Keith Power, founder and CEO, said there is a growing trend for "masculine grooming" and seizes the chance to create something new based on the heritage and influence of Jermyn Street.

Constance joins Kiwi

Constance Hotels and Resorts is now part of Kiwi Collection, which has over 2,500 members. Kiwi provides expert guidance on the best luxury hotels to book for a range of tastes and budgets, gives free perks and guarantees the best rates. Additional perks are available to Visa Premium cardholders worldwide.

Constance operates two sub-brands, Unique Resorts and Ultimate Hotels.

Something fresh in an unsung location

The Chedi Sakala marked its grand opening end February.

General manager Evan Pavlakis believes the less frequented location of Tanjung Benoa Beach in Nusa Dua is an enticing new lure. The province of fishing boats and downscale accommodation has its own compelling charm, unrivalled access to water-sports activities and is close to Bali's oldest Chinese temple.

The 2.5ha lushly landscaped oceanfront property is a draw in itself, described as "the most expansive yet" in the General Hotel Management stable and the first in the portfolio which is able to accommodate larger meetings and incentives.

It has a 630m² ballroom which can accommodate up to 400 people. The beach can be set up for a service for up to 200 guests, while the immediate poolside area can entertain 350 pax for a buffet reception. One of two sprawling skydecks which overlook the pool and ocean can be booked for a rooftop party.



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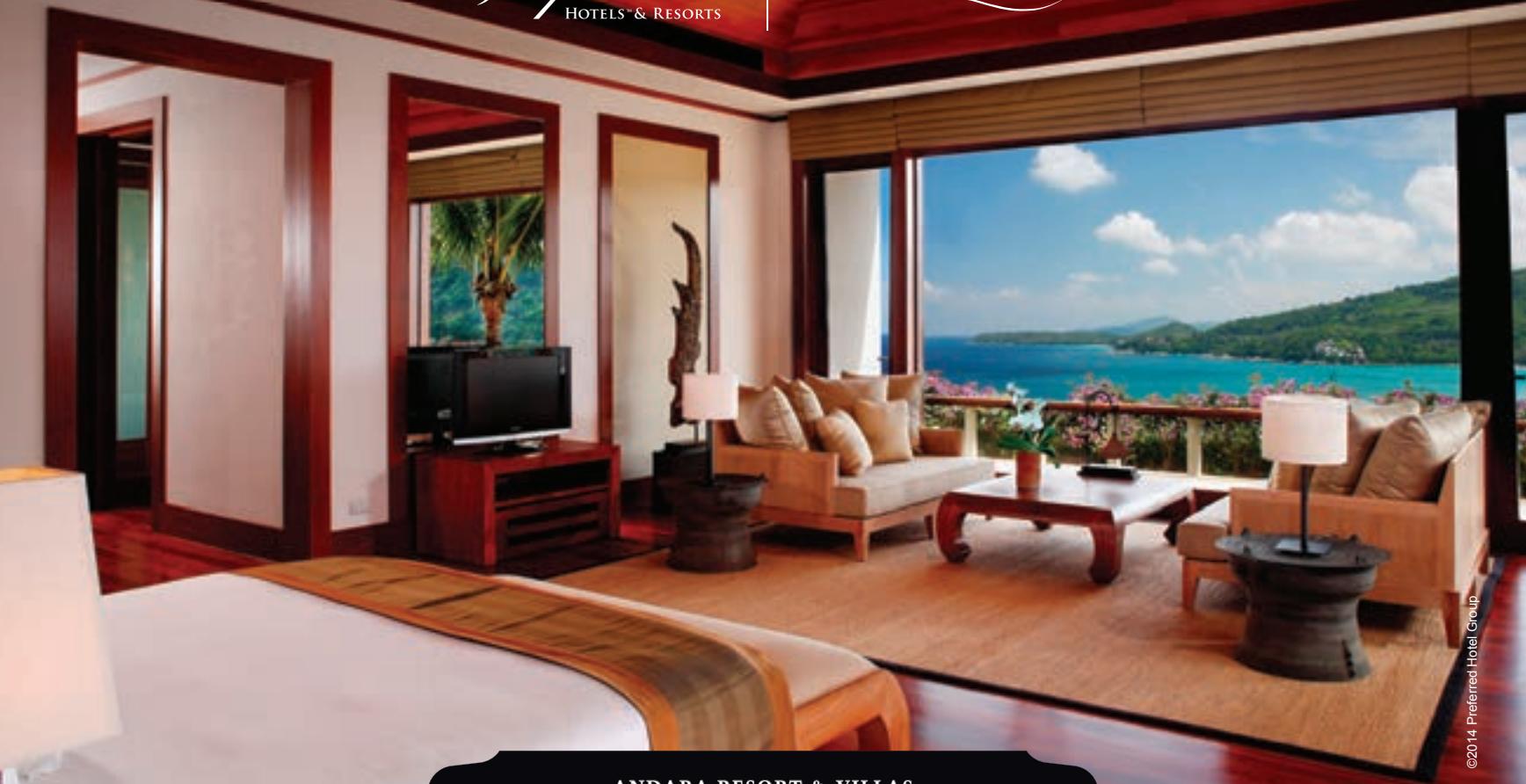


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DUSIT DEVARANA NEW DELHI
New Delhi, India



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