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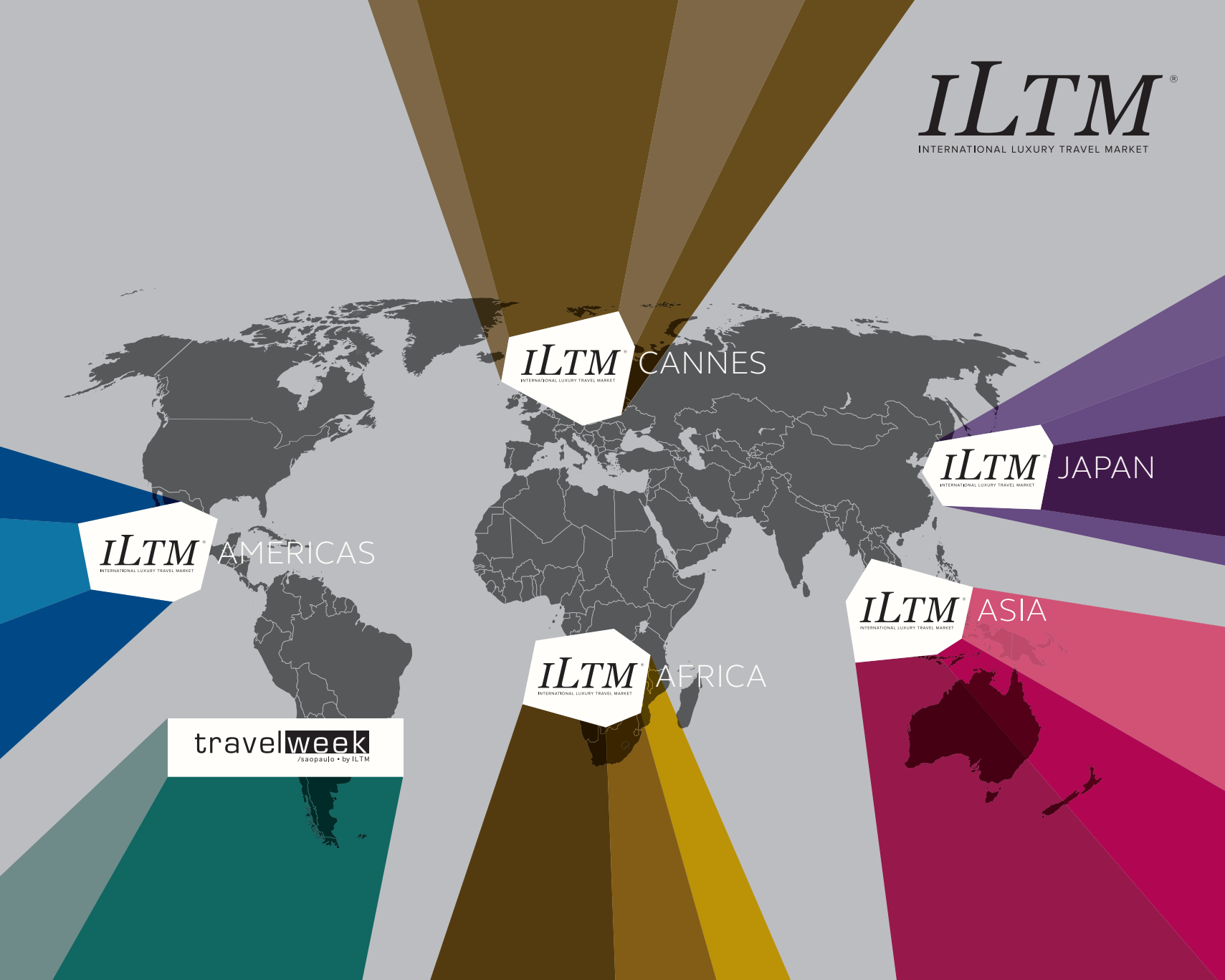
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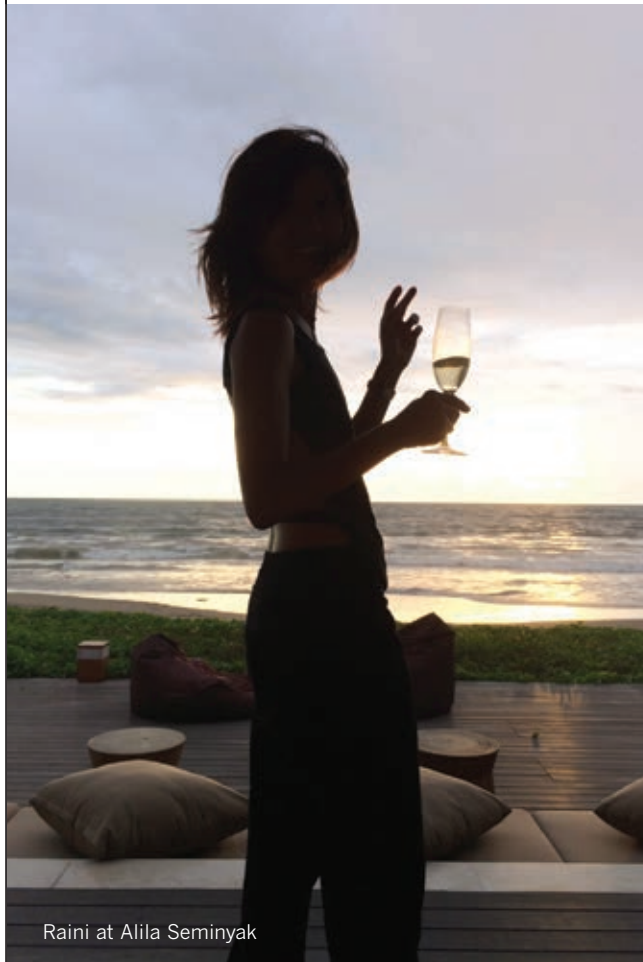
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Raini at Alila Seminyak

A common thread is running through luxury markets everywhere: a sense that we live in less ebullient times with uncertainties as the norm, from China's slower economic growth and the US Presidential elections, to the refugee crisis and increased terrorism, the list goes on.

All this puts to test the notion that luxury travel is resilient. Already, while we're seeing that the rich and the elite are continuing to traverse the world, there is an underlying change in that they are not as carefree about spending as before.

I think this is not just because they are feeling or are in fact poorer, but because sense and sensibility have set in. I hope this is so, as it means luxury

travel is becoming more meaningful and less flamboyant.

The industry has been tearing its hair out to cater to a deep-seated yearning by luxury travellers for more meaningful, experiential trips. But it takes two hands to clap. It's only when people start caring about what they are spending on, and start working on getting real value from their travel dollars, that they will be able to find meaning in their trips and cherish them for keeps.

Until now, they have just been splashing money around, because they can.

Raini Hamdi, Senior Editor

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Indulgence and restraint in tougher times

In the face of a lacklustre global economy, affluent jet-setters around the world have retained their taste for the finer things, but a section of luxury travellers are becoming more mindful about their holiday expenses,

Mimi Hudoyo reports

The luxury travel market is showing its resilience amid the global economic downturn, but some travellers in the market are becoming more price-conscious while others are forgoing parts of their old indulgent habits.

That's the overall sentiment of buyers and sellers interviewed at the recent ILTM Japan.

They said their clients continued to take their holidays last year and the trend is likely to continue this year.

Peter Huber, director of luxury travel company Bawa Tours & Travel, Germany, said: "We saw a very good increase, almost 25 per cent in 2015 compared to 2014, and this year again it looks like a record year."

Likewise, Nine Worlds, Iceland is "getting busier", according to Asta Olafsdottir, manager, sales and marketing. Nine Worlds is part of Iceland Travel, which specialises in custom luxury programmes.

"Currently, our major market is Europe, the UK in particular, but we have catered for clients from Singapore, Hong Kong and the Philippines, too," Olafsdottir added.

Farah Khan, global director of hotel programmes of Kiwi Collection, a Canadian luxury hotel collection that has a partnership with Visa International, said: "We are seeing the market grow. With the Visa Luxury Hotel Collection website translated into simplified Chinese, (we are receiving) more bookings (from Chinese luxury travellers)."

Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) in fact has just opened an office in Singapore to tap the South-east Asia markets, as well as in India, acknowledging the potential growth of these markets.

Winnie Chan, senior director of sales North Asia of NCL, said: "We have a new cruise ship launching on July 20. The *Seven Seas Explorer*, with capacity for 750 passengers, was fully booked within a few hours of us opening sales."

"They (luxury travellers) may have lost some money, but would still make time to travel with their family," she said.

However, with the effects of the global economic slowdown becoming palpable, some luxury travellers are more intent on getting their money's worth.

Reagan Lowery, marketing manager of Altour Hotel Collection, California said: "Our high-end travellers are more cautious in that they are trying to make their trip much more authentic, special and unique. If they are

Facing Luxury is well and alive, but in a quieter, more thoughtful way

going to spend their money, which they still are, they want to make sure that it is 100 per cent worth it.”

Nine World’s Olafsdottir said: “They are becoming more price-concerned. They used to say here is my card, charge it. Now, they want to meet us and go over the bill,” she said.

And there are others who have cut out expenses on certain familiar comforts.

“Learning from the 2008 crisis, the wealthy people from the US, for example, want to spend money but they spend it differently. They used to book transfers even when the restaurants were within walking distance. After the crisis they were willing to walk,” Olafsdottir noted.

Khan observed that travellers are more likely to cut back on airfare than to scrimp on their preferred hotels. “One thing we noticed, upon talking to the airlines as well, is that travellers do not care how they get there. They are saving money on airfares and transfers, no longer arriving in style as they used to. But the properties are still seeing their loyal clients coming back.”

Meanwhile, an increasing number of young holiday-makers are entering the upper crust, exerting a significant influence on the luxury travel scene.

NCL’s Chan said: “Since the past few years, most of the decision-makers are getting younger and younger. At the age of early 30s and 40s they (are already) holding important positions in the company. They know what luxury is.

“When travelling for business they stay in luxury hotels and the same applies to their leisure holidays.”

Agreeing, Khan said: “There is really going to be a big increase in the millennial luxury market (and this is a market) we are focused on.”

She added that younger travellers who have money are attending Art Basel and the whole city is booked out. In response, hotels have come up with facilities and services like ice-skating rinks in the premises, rooftop events and private tour programmes showing art in the city, among others.

Social media, she said, has contributed to the growth of the market, with some travellers sharing their experiences and influencing others to do the same.

Altour’s Lowery said: “Social media has such a big impact on the travel decision. People are paying more to go to unique destinations and staying in higher room category in luxury hotels because they are posting it and their friends are seeing what they are doing.”

“

They used to say here is my card, charge it. Now, they want to meet us and go over the bill.

Asta Olafsdottir, manager, sales and marketing, Nine Worlds, Iceland



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Above A happy Japanese tourist in the Jungfraubahn, Switzerland

In with the young and old

Along with Japan's 'new middle class', the growing number of wealthy retirees will likely drive outbound luxury in the years to come, reports **Mimi Hudoyo**

For years, Japan's ageing population has been a subject of concern, with the number of Japanese 66 years and above expected to grow by 434,000 annually until 2020 while the number of 36 to 55-year olds would decrease by 172,000 every year.

But far from slowing outbound tourism, Japan's changing demography is likely to contribute to its growth.

Retirees in Japan hold 70 per cent of the country's "high household net financial assets", according to Jesper Koll, CEO of WisdomTree Japan, and form an important part of the outbound market.

"(With the) decline of the young generation, you will see that wages, income and quality of jobs in Japan are actually improving," added Koll, who was speaking at this year's International Luxury Travel Market (ILTM) Japan in Tokyo.

Moreover, the younger generation, though shrinking, is contributing to what Koll referred to as "the new middle class".

For instance, 95 per cent of university graduates in Japan are finding full-time jobs.

Also contributing to this market are former part-timers who are increasing their spending power and getting access to credit and house mortgage by making the transition into full-time employment.

"Over the last 20 years, the number of part-time employees in Japan rose to 40 per cent (of available jobs). However, because the labour market is tight and there is no mass immigration, companies are beginning to re-hire them on full-time (basis)," Koll explained.

Another reason to believe that Japan's outbound luxury market will be buoyant is the fact that 45 per cent of Japanese aged over 20 years are not holding on to any

debt, he pointed out.

Where the luxury travel market in Japan is concerned, changes are not merely demographic – travel preferences are also evolving.

Speaking at the opening forum of the ILTM Japan, Yashimi Nakajima, vice president of proprietary card services Japan, American Express (AMEX) International, said: "Being expensive and (providing) high quality comfort are no longer enough.

"(Luxury travellers) want their trip to be handled by professionals and a point of contact who they can trust and who will give them all the relevant information about the product or experience."

She said 85 per cent of travellers want personalised itineraries and eight out of 10 of them want authentic interactions with the locals in the destinations more than ever before, with 93 per cent of the respondents saying that the human touch is irreplaceable.

Witnessing similar trends is Caucasus Luxury Travel, Georgia, which has been serving the Japanese market since the 1990s. Saba Kiknadze, CEO and partner, said Japanese travellers enjoy "pre-historic sites, monuments and nature – filled with experiences and mementos".

"They like meeting with people in the villages, trying black caviar produced in Azerbaijan and enjoying the music bar," he added.

Florian Piper, senior international sales manager of Oceanwide Expeditions, said: "Japan is a market you need to treat a little bit differently. The Japanese need more attention; it has to do with building trust. You need to find the right partner, but once you find your partner you can consolidate the good relations."

Preferences that have persisted among Japanese luxury travellers include longhaul honeymoon destinations and cruise holidays.

KIA Travel, for example, last

The Japanese high-end traveller...

- ✦ is not about to disappear as Japan's population ages
- ✦ can also be from Japan's new middle class
- ✦ appreciates human contact in customer service and interaction with locals



Another reason to believe that Japan's outbound luxury market will be buoyant is the fact that 45 per cent of Japanese aged over 20 years are not holding on to any debt.

Jesper Koll, CEO, WisdomTree Japan

year catered for 960 couples, which made up 65 per cent of its market; 80 per cent of these couples chose the US – particularly Hawaii – Europe and Africa. N-1Tour handled 4,000 couples who travelled last year and half of them were to Hawaii.

Yasumitsu Muto, CEO of N-1Tour, said: "We continue to see growing demand for longhaul honeymoon travel and Hawaii is still (one of the more coveted) destinations," adding that this is an indication of a strong financial situation in Japan.

Winnie Chan, senior director of sales North Asia of Norwegian Cruise Line, said: "Japan is our big market. Japanese like cruising and the market has potential to grow. In fact we recently opened our office in Tokyo to tap the market further."

"After they calculate the total land costs such as for transport, accommodation and meals, cruising is more affordable. With us, it is all-inclusive, including the fine dining," she said.



Above A young Singapore couple enjoying quiet moments in Boracay

Still insane about travel

GDP growth is expected to be smaller this year but Singapore's rich are thinking bigger when it comes to travel, reports **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

Knight Frank's Wealth Report 2016 shows that the number of ultra-rich individuals in Singapore – those with US\$30 million in assets or more – has dropped due to the country's economic slowdown.

Last year there was a total of 2,360 ultra HNIs (high net worth individuals) in Singapore, a decline of eight per cent from 2014, although the Lion City still emerged sixth on a list of top 20 cities by wealth distribution.

Those less ultra-rich must also be feeling poorer, what with the rocky start to the year at the stock exchange and lower economic growth forecasts that have been announced.

But according to luxury travel planners, the innate sense of wanderlust within the Singapore luxury traveller displays no sign of waning. In fact, the insatiable appetite of rich Singaporeans for travel is growing larger and these seasoned visitors are continuing to seek out exotic destinations and exclusive experiences as bragging rights when they return home.

Urbane Nomads' founder Hajar Ali said there is no visible impact on her bookings from weaker economic sentiments this year.

Likewise, Country Holidays Singapore general manager, Jess Yap, said there is unlikely to be any huge impact on travel for this group of travellers.

"These luxury outbound travellers will still travel to places they to go. Of course, if these places become cheaper that would be a bonus," Yap said, adding Country Holidays is targeting for an eight per cent growth in business

The Singapore high-end traveller...

- ❖ is continuing to travel despite economic headwinds
- ❖ is not cutting back on budget but is more value conscious
- ❖ still wants bragging rights to unique experiences or destinations

this year.

But Nico Heath, Singapore director and co-founder of Lightfoot Travel, foresees that the weaker economy will change travel patterns.

“Those accustomed to taking longer vacations in destinations farther afield will prefer to take slightly shorter holidays closer to home so as to maximise their time on the ground.

“An alternative would be that travellers prefer to spoil themselves with one big holiday during the year and stay in the country throughout the rest of the year,” he added.

Budget remains a secondary concern for the Singaporean luxury traveller, who is always prepared to splurge on authentic and unique local experiences, planners believed.

Asked what's unique, Lim Hui-Juan, co-founder and director of Quotient TravelPlanner, said: “There are only that many places in the world to see Africa's Big Five, hunt with



Paige Lee Pei Qi

Above Two Singapore ladies having the time of their life in Italy

a Maori, witness the mark of ancient civilisations, drink cava, or be coached by former sports champions.

“Affluent travellers are likely to continue to embrace special or world-famous events and enjoy VIP access with the accompanying services and perks such as post-event parties.”

Agreeing, Lightfoot Travel's Heath said these travellers are “all about unique experiences”, adding there has been increased interest in luxury safari holidays and expeditions to remote places such as the Galapagos Islands and the Antarctica.

While Europe remains popular, Heath said Singaporeans

“

Rather than just leaving everything to the experts, they will be more involved in the holiday decision-making process.

Lim Hui-Juan, co-founder and director, Quotient TravelPlanner

are keen to explore places that are not on everyone's radar such as Croatia, Iceland and Scandinavia.

Nevertheless, while consumption patterns or levels of spending of luxury travellers are unlikely to change, Quotient's Lim expects them to be more “judicious” about spending and more conscious of the value they are seeking and getting.

“Rather than just leaving everything to the experts, they will be more involved in the holiday decision-making process, stating upfront their requirements and expectations,” she explained.

The luxury of choice

The notion of blind extravagance might be a thing of the past for wealthy Philippine travellers who, with their growing savvy, are realising that money can go far in an expensive holiday, **Rosa Ocampo** finds out



The Philippines upmarket traveller...

- ❖ is becoming more cost-conscious in order to maximise the holiday experience
- ❖ is choosing private cruise holidays over mass-market ones
- ❖ continues to see coveted holidays as essential to their lifestyle

The strong Philippine economy – one of Asia’s fastest growing – enables more travellers to go on luxury trips, but travellers are increasingly exercising their discretion when making travel purchases, contributing to greater heterogeneity in spending behaviour within the luxury travel segment.

For instance, wealthy travellers are becoming more cost-conscious and practical in some areas of their travel spending.

“(When it comes to) longhaul travel, they prefer a restricted business class over first class (and use the funds saved) for other needs like private guided tours in a luxury van,” said Bernadette de Leon, general manager, Amiable Intertours.

Concurring, Rea Gumapac, retail team leader of Adventure International Tours, said that travellers first compare the cost and benefits of business and first-class seats before choosing one, unlike about

five years ago when a longhaul trip automatically meant first-class travel.

De Leon pointed out that luxury travellers were willing to “downgrade from five-star hotels to four-star hotels (and at the very least) a boutique hotel with suite rooms”, adding that some are even shortening their stay.

As well, luxury outbound travellers are becoming more open-minded and experiential in their choices.

“Food (will not) be an issue for them – they can dine in any restaurant or choose street food for the experience of it. They welcome the idea that everything should be tried rather than to be sorry later,” de Leon explained.

Aileen Clemente, president, Rajah Travel Corp, likewise noted experiential longings within the segment to “go everywhere” and “try everything” under the sun.

Simon Ang, managing director, Let’s Celebrate Life TLC, said: “I



Above Filipino luxury travellers are 'practical' about travel spending

have a lot going on this year, families mainly, going to Peru, Africa, Japan, Russia and hopefully a small group to Antarctica."

Jennifer Alivio, general manager of Sun and Moon Travel & Tours, said Filipino travellers are discovering the pleasure of luxury cruising in smaller and more private cruiseships like Oceania Cruises.

She said once Filipinos get the hang of cruising in nearby destinations in Asia, they tend to graduate to trans-Pacific cruises, lengthening their stay from five to seven days up to 36 days.

These are not direct cruises but fly cruises that spend a certain amount of time overland before the next cruise, Alivio said, adding it is preferred by families that invite friends or several families from other countries to cruise together in destinations as varied as Alaska, Venice-Rome and Scandinavia.

Yet, amid the pluralising travel habits in the luxury market, one

thing remains constant: the wealthy folks in the Philippines continue to value their travels and are not ready to scrimp on their desired holidays.

"No matter how slow the economy is, luxury travellers will go to their dream destinations as long as they believe that they will get their money's worth," said de Leon.

"The luxury Filipino traveller considers overseas trips as personal investment and life's incentive, much like life insurance, a brand new car and valuable jewelry," she added.

But ultimately, what distinguishes luxury travellers is not simply their wallet but also their mindset towards big-ticket spending.

One luxury traveller may not think of Europe as expensive, but another would have that view. One luxury traveller may request for a European programme, another may be having a debate with

him/herself about the price before caving in.

However, such boundaries are blurring, as more vacationers make the transition into the luxury travel market.

"We're not yet in that level of real luxury travel but we're getting there and the new entrants to luxury travel are becoming polished," said Ang.

And then there's a new group which Ang termed "semi-luxe" travellers, mainly millennials who no longer go for budget travel throughout the journey but mix it with some posh elements, such as travelling on coach or staying in midmarket hotels while opting for upscale dining experiences.

While Google-aided travel solutions, thousands of travel websites and buying engines are anybody's game, meticulous clients with an eye for perfection still consult travel specialists, said both de Leon and Ang.

“

The luxury Filipino traveller considers overseas trips as personal investment and life's incentive, much like life insurance, a brand new car and valuable jewelry.

Bernadette de Leon, general manager, Amiable Intertours



Above Just loving Japan

More flash, less splash

The wealthy in Indonesia see luxurious holidays as essential to their lifestyle, but this does not mean they will accept anything on a silver platter or let a good deal slide by. **Mimi Hudoyo** reports on Indonesia's holiday go-getters

Indonesia's affluent travellers are beginning to be more selective in their approach to travel expenses, destinations or programmes.

Even though the upper echelons of Indonesian society can afford extravagant trips, the luxury travel market is becoming more price-sensitive, in part due to a growing group of "newly rich" in the country, industry players told *TTG Asia Luxury*.

Rudiana, director of sales and marketing of WITA Tour, said: "According to one data, around two per cent of the Indonesian population belongs in the wealthy category, and that percentage translates to around 4.8 million people.

"They are the ones who are not affected by the economic slowdown."

For these travellers, travelling is part of their lifestyle. They do

not only take long holidays, but also the time to have long weekend getaways by travelling domestically or to neighbouring countries.

Travel patterns, however, have evolved. Three to five years ago it was common for travellers to purchase packages at any price as long as the products meet their standards. Some of them would even take the babysitter of their kid along.

Ketut Wijaya, head of promotion and communications of BCA Bank, said: "Indonesian travellers, be it middle-class or luxury, are more selective in picking their holidays now.

"They would not sacrifice the luxury components, but will look for the best offers available (in terms of prices, add-ons and bonuses)."

Rudiana said that even privileged travellers are now taking advantage of the best prices and perks available at travel fairs.

"At a recent travel fair, (we saw that wealthy travellers were) buying business-class tickets at discounted prices and enjoying the cash-back and other perks.

"Some even asked if we were giving away travel bags, which I am sure they would not use.

"When we asked why they wanted all the perks when the tickets were already very cheap, they said the perks were part of the offers and (they were entitled to) them."

Rudiana saw this trend especial-

ly among the younger generation of travellers.

He said: "The luxury travellers are divided into two (groups). The established ones and the newly rich, among whom are young Indonesians; some are below 40 years old, who have stepped up from middle class to wealthy."

Agustinus Pake Seko, director of Bayu Buana Travel Services, has seen travellers make the most of loyalty programmes issued by airlines, hotels and banks through their credit cards.

"Suppliers are competing to give the best offers to travellers in order to win the business," Agustinus said.

Bayu Buana has reached out to upmarket clients by working with credit card companies. One example was when it arranged for free airport transfers for premium cardholders of an international bank operating in Indonesia.

Discounted fares, instalment payments for packages and overseas spending are other common offers.

On destination choices and the type of holidays, travel experts said affluent holidaygoers were no longer passively choosing traditional packaged holidays from sales catalogues. Instead, they are becoming inspired to take their dream holidays after discovering destinations on television, magazines and emerging technological platforms.

"New places and attractions



Suppliers are competing to give the best offers to travellers in order to win the business.

Agustinus Pake Seko, director, Bayu Buana Travel Services

keep appearing everywhere and this helps stimulate people to continue travelling," BCA's Ketut said.

For example, destinations like Raja Ampat in Papua and Derawan in North Kalimantan, which are gaining popularity among international travellers, have also enticed Indonesians to visit.

Rudiana said that wealthy customers who are relatively more well-travelled would pick a destination they saw on a TV travel channel or read in a magazine and request for planners to create a programme based on that.

"For example, a client read in a magazine about the Aurora Borealis (happening) in Iceland (later this year) and wanted us to arrange for the trip. I told them we could not guarantee such natural phenomena, but he (was willing to) take the chance anyway," he shared.

Sellers from various countries are acknowledging the opportunities that the Indonesia market holds for them and are stepping up promotional efforts through B2B shows.

Speaking to *TTG Asia Luxury* during TTC Travel Mart (a B2B event) in Jakarta in March, Anuj Kumar, managing director of Magadh Travels & Tours India, said Indonesian travellers were starting to visit places like Bhutan and Nepal.

TTC had organised a fam trip for 29 Indonesian planners in 2012 to Nepal and Bhutan. It was an eye opener for the travel consultants to start promoting (Nepal and Bhutan) to the Indonesians," he said.

Crown Tours, Maldives is also trying to expand its market into Indonesia. Ally Ahmed, director of sales and marketing of Crown Tours, Maldives, who was at his very first B2B travel mart in Indonesia, said: "We see the potential of this market as Indonesia has a huge middle class and premium society."

The
Indonesia
high-end
traveller...

- ❖ is more cost-conscious than before
- ❖ responds to deals, discounts and loyalty programme perks
- ❖ is looking beyond sales catalogues for travel inspiration



Above Malaysians experiencing the Trans-Siberian Railway organised by Apple Vacations & Conventions

Signs of market going south

Domestic economic blues coupled with safety concerns abroad are putting paid to the notion that the luxury market will always stay resilient.

Certainly not Malaysia, writes **S Puvaneswary**



The Malaysian upmarket traveller...

- ❖ is sensitive to currency movements
- ❖ is delaying trips abroad due to concerns over job security
- ❖ opting for regional destinations over longhaul ones

“

Even people in senior managerial positions in the private sector are facing uncertainties as some multinational corporations and banks have started to lay off employees.

Syed Razif Al-Yahya, managing director, Sri Sutra Travel

The Malaysian outbound luxury market is showing signs of stagnating or going on a downward course this year, with industry players pointing to uncertainties gripping the domestic economy, a weakening ringgit and global security concerns as the key reasons.

Macroeconomic indicators do not appear favourable for the market: the country's economic growth is predicted to slow down to 4.5 per cent, corporate earnings are on the decline, companies have trimmed their operating and capital expenditures and the local stock market is erratic.

Another setback has been the depreciation of the Malaysian ringgit to RM4.20 (US\$1.07) against the US dollar in February, from RM3.65 in the same month last year, making overseas trips more expensive for Malaysian holiday-makers.

Amid these conditions, it appears that even the luxury travel segment, usually regarded as the most resilient outbound segment, is losing steam.

Sri Sutra Travel's managing director, Syed Razif Al-Yahya, expects the high-end outbound business to shrink by at least 30 per cent this year due to weakening sentiments.

He explained: "Even people in senior managerial positions in the private sector are facing uncertainties as some multinational corporations and banks have started to lay off employees. With an unpredictable future, many people have delayed their holiday trips abroad."

Many of his more affluent

clients have opted for regional destinations for holidays such as Indonesia, Thailand and South Korea, rather than longhaul destinations.

Also feeling the pinch is Barbara Sette, managing director of Sette Repts, who said: "Luxury holidays to Europe have decreased due to the impact of the weakening ringgit and some clients have postponed their holiday plans to the second half of the year."

Sette also pointed to global security concerns for the luxury segment's lacklustre demand.

"For safety reasons, people are also avoiding places like Paris and Istanbul for fear of terrorist attacks. It will be a slow 2016, not a bright year."

Yet, not all top-end travel planners in Malaysia are losing sleep over the down trend.

Desmond Lee Ee Hoe, managing director of Apple Vacations Group of Companies and a veteran player in the upmarket travel industry, projects an optimistic 20 per cent year-on-year growth for the luxury segment.

He said: "I am optimistic that the economic situation will improve this year, especially (as Malaysia has) signed the Tran-Pacific Partnership trade agreement.

"Rich Malaysians still have the purchasing power and continue to travel to exotic places like Central America and Scandinavian countries and are booking trans-Siberian holidays."

He opined that affluent travellers would continue vacationing since it has become a lifestyle, and they can only do so when business is down, when they have the luxury of time.



deymos/123RF.COM

Above Enjoying the view from the London Eye

Travelling royally

Brunei's affluent travellers sashay through the Asian stockmarket slump with sights set on superlative service standards and itineraries, reports **S Puvaneswary**

An oil rich country with a small population of 417,400 people, Brunei ranks among countries with high standards of living, its citizens enjoying minimal taxation and a low inflation rate of 0.81 per cent in 2015.

Affluent Bruneians are living it up in still more ways outside the kingdom's borders, a number of travel planners revealed.

According to the players interviewed, Brunei's luxury travellers are maintaining their penchant for

exclusive and exceptional holiday experiences, with many not prepared to trim their budgets even in the face of a slump in the Asian stock market and a collapse in oil prices.

Observing the sustained spending patterns of Brunei luxury travellers, CP Foo, general manager at Century Travel Centre, said: "It is still pretty much the norm (for wealthier travellers) to pay upwards of US\$250 per room night."

"Rich Bruneians go on holidays to be pampered with good food, good shopping, spa and wellness," said Anthony Lim, managing director of Anthony Tours & Travel Agency.

Michael Lee, managing director of Freme (formerly Freme Travel), said seasoned travellers, being well-informed about destinations, know exactly what they want and expect planners to provide detailed information of their itinerary, including where they

The Brunei upmarket traveller...

- ❖ expects exclusive service from planners and guides
- ❖ seeks unique itineraries and authentic experiences
- ❖ enjoys beach holidays in the region when time-strapped

will be dining and what room type they will be staying in, before departure.

They require “heavy-duty care”, according to Lee, referring to their need for personalised service and to be “pampered”.

“Paying attention to details is very important when handling the luxury market. We offer them knowledgeable tourist guides and make sure they have a very good time during their stay,” Lee added.

Khurul Zainie, managing director of MegaBorneo Tour Planner, concurred that luxury travellers were maintaining their exacting standards on holidays.

“They have high expectations of service. Parents who usually pay for their children, who have not yet joined the workforce, are happy when their children have a good time. The average spend on the ground is around US\$12,000 per person on a six-day trip. This has not changed despite a slowdown in the Asian and global economies,” he said.

Beyond customer service, Brunei’s luxury travellers also seek exclusivity in their itineraries.

Answering the demand for more unique itineraries, MegaBorneo Tour Planner recently introduced custom itineraries, or what Khurul termed as private à la carte trips limited to group sizes not exceeding 10 people. Clients have 20 destinations to choose from, including more exotic ones such as Kenya and Ethiopia.

Lee, likewise, noted their taste for special, non-mass market experiences, saying: “Wealthy travellers look for authentic experiences

in the destinations they visit. Some favour destinations that are exclusive and uncommon to the Brunei outbound mass market.”

Brunei’s luxury travellers are also driven by new needs, which have given rise to emerging trends and travel patterns.

“Over the last year and even this year, we have seen a growing interest for Asian destinations such as Bali in Indonesia, and Hua Hin and Phuket in Thailand. These are popular with travellers who are time-starved and have only a few days to indulge in a holiday,” Century Travel’s Foo pointed out.

Meanwhile, Anthony Tours & Travel’s Lim said he had seen an upswing in trips to Australia,

London and Paris, which remain the most popular longhaul choices with stays from seven days. A contributing factor, he surmised, was that more parents are visiting their children studying abroad and incorporating a holiday after their visit.

“

The average spend on the ground is around US\$12,000 per person on a six-day trip. This has not changed despite a slowdown in the Asian and global economies.”

Khurul Zainie, managing director, MegaBorneo Tour Planner

Twelve Apostles, a landmark along the Great Ocean Road, Australia:
The hunger of rich Brunei travellers to go places remains insatiable despite plunge in oil prices



timhester/123RF.COM



From top, left Disneyland to open in June, Louis Vuitton Store in the IFC Mall, Florence Paget, Shanghai skyline, The Bund, Todd Anthony Tyler, Long Bar at Waldorf Astoria Shanghai

The decadent Paris of the East

Celebrities and industry members in Shanghai share their secrets of the most luxurious places to be seen at and the newest openings in the cosmopolitan city



JOANNE TANG

Managing director, Infinite Luxury, which represents luxury hotels/resorts worldwide

Q: What is your idea of a decadent outing in Shanghai?

A: Having a meal at Da Dong or Mercato. Celebrity chef Dong Zhengxiang has established a restaurant chain Da Dong as the go-to Peking duck restaurant in the city. Queues are long but when you do get to your table and the golden-brown duck is carved and served in front of you, it is clear that the wait has been worth it. Another good place is Mercato by chef Jean-Georges. It features an Italian menu – inspired by his popular ABC Kitchen in New York – and a rustic chic interior by Neri & Hu.

For a spot of shopping, check out Dong Liang Studio and OOAK Concept Boutique. The cutting-edge Dong Liang Studio on Fumin Lu is a boutique with unique products like Uma Wang coats and delicate jumpers from Cashmere Crush. Strangely-titled concept store OOAK (One Of A Kind)

on Taiyuan Lu focuses on up-and-coming brands from all over the globe. There you can find Brit label Alex Monroe and the edgy work of New York-based Joomi Lim. There's also a café on the top floor of the building.

Q: Which new attraction in Shanghai will wow visitors the most?

A: The Shanghai Natural History Museum. This new building has six storeys with 44,517m² of space, housing more than 10,000 artefacts from all over the globe.

There is a 4-D movie theatre, an outdoor exhibit garden and numerous exhibit spaces that are dedicated to events like the Big Bang theory. There is also a lifelike recreation of a busy African savannah, and scale models of early Chinese agricultural communities.

The stunning 'bioclimatic' building was designed by internationally-renowned architecture practice Perkins + Will, with an 'intelligent building skin' to maximise daylight. Its four external walls emulate natural elements, such as a vertical garden on the east wall, and a northern stone wall inspired by shifting tectonic plates and canyon walls eroded by rivers. The overall design is inspired by the geometry of the nautilus shell – a white, spiral structure that curves down towards traditional Chinese garden-style terraces.



FLORENCE PAGET

Owner of Twist of Parti Pris, which specialises in luxury events for the Chinese market

Q: What is your idea of a decadent outing in Shanghai?

A: Ultraviolet is an avant garde dining concept by resident molecular madman Paul Pairet. Ten diners arrive at Mr & Mrs Bund for an aperitif before they are spirited away to an undisclosed location. There, they are taken to a single table in a white room that is tricked out with lights, speakers, a projector and a state-of-the-art fragrance diffusion contraption. What ensues is a 20-course degustation menu, each one accompanied by unique sights, sounds, and, at times, scents.

Another place is Xixi Bistro, a fusion restaurant situated in the former French Concession. Housed in a 1930s villa, it has been refurbished to look like a contemporary Asian bistro. On the first floor is the restaurant, while the second floor houses a cocktail and whisky bar. The whole concept revolves around Xixi, a fictional character that lived during the colonisation of Shanghai, where she came into contact with numerous foreign friends and overseas food items. Popular dishes include the spinach and mozzarella dumplings, rose-jam glazed pork ribs, crispy herbs chicken and pesto fried rice.

Q: Which new attraction in Shanghai will wow visitors the most?

A: Prada has been renovating the former residence of Yung Tsoon-King – known as the Flour King of China. It is one of the most well-preserved garden villas in Shanghai and works are scheduled to be completed (in May as this issue goes to print).

luxury focus shanghai



TODD ANTHONY TYLER

Resident photographer on TV programme
Asia's Next Top Model

Q: What is your idea of a decadent outing in Shanghai?

A: For me, it usually starts with a drink at the rooftop bar The Roosevelt followed by dinner at Hakkasan or Soma.

After dinner, we could have another drink at Speak Low, or if we are going to have a cigar, I would head to the Long Bar at Waldorf Astoria Shanghai on the Bund. If my friends and I were in the mood for some dancing, I would end the evening at Le Baron.

Q: Which new attraction in Shanghai will wow visitors the most?

A: Shanghai Disneyland Resort (opens June 16). It is said that there will be castles and a fantastic private function space for rent to throw the most lavish parties in town.

“After dinner, we could have another drink at Speak Low, or if we are going to have a cigar, I would head to the Long Bar at Waldorf Astoria Shanghai on the Bund.”

– Todd Anthony Tyler



JULIAN PEH

CEO & group founder,
WhiteWave Media Group

Q: What is your idea of a decadent outing in Shanghai?

A: In the daytime, indulge in a Sunday champagne brunch at Jade on 36 at Shangri-La Pudong Hotel or Hyatt on the Bund's VUE Restaurant. There is free flow of champagne, coupled with really high-

quality food and some of the best views of Shanghai. At night, White Horse KTV has hot male models that serve and wait on female guests.

There is also The Nest, a chic and trendy bar on the Bund with good food and drinks. For crafted cocktails, head to Candor, a trendy burlesque-themed bar. There's also a new Hawaiian restaurant, Alan Wong's Shanghai, apparently one of President Obama's favourites.

Q: Which new attraction in Shanghai will wow visitors the most?

A: Disneyland – probably what everyone is waiting for.

Above Jade on 36 Restaurant Wine Gallery, Grand Tower, Shangri-La Pudong Hotel



LEWIS ZHU

Director of F&B,
Greater China & Mongolia,
Hilton Hotel Management
(Shanghai)

Q: What is your idea of a decadent outing in Shanghai?

A: A private cruise along Suzhou Creek would be a fantastic and relaxing way to discover Shanghai in a different light. There are a number of distinctive bridges, and conserved buildings like the Sihang

Warehouse, Shanghai General Post Office and Suzhou Creek Art District (also known as M50). I recommend disembarking at certain docks for a peaceful stroll on the banks to further savour its cultural ambience.

Q: Which new attraction in Shanghai will wow visitors the most?

A: Guangfulin Heritage Park. Guangfulin is an archaeological site near Shanghai and it is thought to be where the earliest inhabitants of the area resided. The city is estimated to be over 5,000 years old.

The future park is currently being constructed above the central heritage site. It will have a Pottery Museum, a preserved farmland above the main heritage site, and a Kiln Museum. There will also be interactive activities, such as pottery demonstrations and other performances, that visitors can enjoy.



JOSEPH CHONG

General manager
& managing director,
The Peninsula Shanghai Complex

Q: What is your idea of a decadent outing in Shanghai?

A: Taking a stroll along the Bund and capturing the breathtaking views from the observatory deck of the 100-storey World Trade Centre, followed by an exquisite dinner at a reputable restaurant, has been widely accepted as the experience for getting to know Shanghai.

For a different view of the city, take *The Peninsula Shanghai Princess 54*, a private yacht, to view The Bund, the Huangpu River and the dazzling night view of Pudong. The yacht, decorated in the hotel's livery, is powered by twin Volvo D12-800 engines. It features a teak transom platform and a U-shaped sofa with a table on the starboard side. Enjoy an evening river cruise with a dinner menu created by The Peninsula Shanghai's chefs. The best time to do this is from 18.00 to 20.00 from May to July.

Q: Which new attraction in Shanghai will wow visitors the most?

A: The newest attraction will be the opening of Shanghai Disneyland Resort on June 16. Guests of all ages will have the chance to immerse themselves in one of the most spectacular and innovative Disney theme parks in history.

Nothing can beat a sneak preview of this milestone project available for an exclusive group of guests, or better still, a private reception or dinner to be held inside the park after opening hours. But this feasible idea, of course, is subject to the approval of the Disney group.



The night is still young and there's plenty to do on the Bund

luxury focus shanghai



BUHDY BOK

President,
Costa Group Asia

Q: What is your idea of a decadent outing in Shanghai?

A: I would recommend travellers to go on a day trip to The French Concession and Qibao Old Street to experience the local cultural heritage, as well as learn about the colonial history of the city.

The French Concession was one of the centres for Catholicism in China and is the premier residential and retail district of the city. The traditional architecture, which is a fusion of French and Chinese, is beautiful. Qibao is a well-preserved ancient town in

Shanghai and Qibao Old Street has one of the city's most popular food streets. The picturesque town in Shanghai's south-western region also boasts narrow alleys filled with traditional shops and restaurants.

Q: Which new attraction in Shanghai will wow visitors the most?

A: *Costa Fortuna – The Museum at Sea* – which arrived in Shanghai in April. The ship features some 5,000 world masterpieces and antiques that depict Italian seafaring tradition. It brings an 'Italy at Sea' atmosphere to a ship that has local-language speaking crew members, Asian cuisines and customised entertainment activities.

There is also the Shanghai Disneyland Resort which is opening in June. This will have features that are specifically designed with the Chinese culture in mind. I am looking forward to see how the different parts of the resort will create a magical world for all ages.

Below Qibao water village



SAM BRAYBON

Bespoke ambassador
to Shanghai,
Bespoke Shanghai

Q: Which new attraction in Shanghai will wow visitors the most?

A: Bespoke's three-hour signature Shanghai Cocktail Experience. One will be taken by the doyenne of Shanghai's nightlife scene – the former food and drink editor at *Time Out Shanghai* – to three of the city's hidden gem bars for an exclusive, one-on-one access to the three best bartenders in the city. Each bartender lines up 15 of your favourite ingredients then crafts a completely bespoke cocktail based on your favourite spirits and flavours.

Q: What is the latest attraction in Shanghai will wow visitors the most?

A: On the F&B front, there is a lot of excitement about the opening of L'Atelier Joël Robuchon at Bund 18 and we expect that to make a splash in Shanghai.

There will also be Le Salon De Thé de Joël Robuchon inside the high-end luxury shopping IAPM Mall.



“(Disneyland) will have features that are specifically designed with the Chinese culture in mind. I am looking forward to see...” – *Budhy Bok*

A lesser gamble

Jovanni@123RF.com



Above The skyline of Macau grows fancier

Diversification is the name of the game as Macau's luxury scene evolves beyond the gaming industry to include a new array of indulgent resort and F&B offerings, **Prudence Lui** reports

With mainland China's softening economy and a dwindling number of high-rollers, Macau's tourism diversification is proving a safe bet.

A new wave of luxury properties in the territory is competing to bring in a larger cross-section of the luxury market, a much-needed ace for the glitzy destination.

Following last year's luxury resort openings that included high-end brands such as Ritz-Carlton, JW Marriott and St Regis, more up-market properties are expected to spring up across the once gaming-

dominated landscape in the next six to 18 months.

"After 10 years of rapid development, the Cotai Strip has elevated its status to a world-class tourism destination. The second phase of the Cotai Strip will offer a much more diversified experience for a new generation of luxury travellers," said Daniella Tonetto, general manager, sales and marketing for both the Sheraton Grand Macao Hotel, Cotai Central and St Regis Macao.

"I do think it would benefit this city to open more luxury properties...Competition will boost quality," she added.

Tonetto said that the wider appeal

of luxury resorts is likely to provide a strong buffer against economic movements in the immediate region.

"I think (we) will be able to withstand the challenges because we have not put all of our eggs in one basket. We attract business not only from mainland China, but from other regions around the world looking to host MICE events at our hotel or for a luxurious getaway."

And mainland China business is continuing to be a staple. Tonetto pointed out the Lunar New Year holiday period proved to be strong with all hotels on the Cotai Strip enjoying high levels of occupancy.

Irene Wong, vice president of sales, public and community relations of MCM Cotai, which is slated to open in 1Q2017, agreed that the diversification of Macau's offerings will bring benefits.

She said: "We are all working towards striking a balance between gaming and non-gaming offerings; hence, new luxury resorts with more family-oriented amenities, entertainment and even MICE facilities are all important. This will all contribute to grooming Macau as a global tourism and leisure hub."

She added that there is room for Macau's tourism to grow, with a substantial portion of the Chinese market being "seasoned travellers who are going after more special and unique experiences", and with South-east Asia offering a big market that has for the most part been untapped.

Also noting the unfulfilled demand is Rauf Malik, vice president of operations for JW Marriott Macao and Ritz-Carlton Macao, who said: "In order to drive the luxury resort market, dining specifically is an increasingly important part of the hospitality offering in Macau."

He outlined the topflight products that the Ritz-Carlton

offers to drive the market, including the hotel's Lai Heen restaurant which is helmed by Michelin-starred head chef, Bill Fu.

Managing director of DOC DMC Macau, Bruno Simões, believes the activities introduced by the new resorts have raised the bar for luxury providers in Macau.

"These new players have tried to do everything to differentiate themselves. As far as I know, Wynn Palace (scheduled for opening in the second half of this year) is going to be very upscale and will help draw luxury travellers as well."

Yet, not all players are not convinced these differentiators will make a difference. Air Cruise's executive director, Eric Chang, pointed out that while the new supply helps drive more demand for luxury traffic, Macau's ultimate clientele remains the Mainland Chinese visitors for whom gaming "remains the priority".



The second phase of the Cotai Strip will offer a much more diversified experience for a new generation of luxury travellers.

Daniella Tonetto, general manager, sales and marketing, Sheraton Grand Macao Hotel, Cotai Central and St Regis Macao

Three luxe products

The 13 to open soon

The 13, a 200-villa "ultra-luxury" hotel by Louis XII Holdings, is expected to open in late summer.

The opulent, baroque-style property will feature villas ranging from 185m² to 2,787m² in size, each averaging an estimated US\$7 million to create.

Guests will enjoy complimentary transfer to and from Macau transportation hubs on check-in and check-out via The 13's fleet of 30 Rolls-Royce Phantoms.



New spin on St Regis classic

Indulge in a selection of fine wines and spirits in an elegant setting at the St Regis Bar. The bar features the hotel's twist on the legendary Bloody Mary cocktail, which was first created at the brand's flagship hotel in New York in the early 1900s.

Pierre Hermé enters

Pierre Hermé Paris, a pastry boutique famed for the exquisite creations of Pierre Hermé, makes its foray into Macau with a boutique at the Boulevard at Studio City. Iconic macaron flavour combinations such as "Mogador" and "Ispahan" as well as seasonal creations, confectionery treats and cakes are available.

Japan's journey to the west



Luciano Mortua/123RF.com

Above Autumn colours at Kiyomizu-dera Temple in Kyoto

JNTO's focus is shifting to markets in the Western world in order to keep growing the luxury market and increasing tourist footfalls, however this won't be at the expense of the Asian market, writes

Mimi Hudoyo

Having reaped rewards in courting the Asian market in the last few years, Japan's tourism authority is now focusing on the US, Europe and Australia to continue growing the country's luxury travel market.

Yuri Furusawa, vice commissioner of Japan Tourism Agency (JTA), said at ILTM Japan 2016: "We are going to focus our promotions on the US, Europe and Australia as travellers from these countries enjoy Japanese culture and tradition, and their spending is high."

Data from Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO) shows that arrivals to Japan in 2015 to-

talled 19,740,000, where 80 per cent was from Asia and 20 per cent was from Western countries.

In her presentation during the show's opening forum, Miwako Date, president of MORI Trust Hotels & Resorts – which owns upper upscale and luxury hotel brands such as Conrad, Marriott, Westin and Suiran, a Luxury Collection in Japan – emphasised the importance for Japan to entice the longhaul luxury markets.

She quoted JTA data that showed Asians spent nearly half of their travel budgets on shopping, followed by accommodation (22.4 per cent) and F&B (17.6 per cent).

While Date opined that there was nothing wrong with shopping,

Japan has living traditional culture and history that would appeal to Western travellers, she said.

Moreover, travellers from these countries tend to have higher expenditures, even though their arrival numbers are small.

Japan has not attracted visitors from countries where the travellers spend a lot on tourism, she pointed out.

Citing data from UNWTO, she said the average spending of Australians is US\$1,223 per person, but Australia only contributes 2.3 per cent of total arrivals to Japan. As well, visitors from Germany contributes one per cent in volume, but their average spending is US\$1,063. The 1.4 per cent of Canadians who visited Japan spent US\$1,002 per person.

Hence, Date stressed that tapping these markets is the way to move forward.

In response, Shuichi Kameyama, JNTO's executive director inbound promotion department, said that apart from history and culture, Japan will also promote winter holidays in the UK and Canadian markets.

According to longhaul buyers *TTG Asia Luxury* spoke to, the market from the US to Japan has been growing lately.

Roxana Lewis, specialist at California-based Backroads Italy & Zen Japan of Protravel, said: "The demand for Japan has been up in the last couple of years for us; from (a ratio of) 80 per cent Italy and 20 per cent Japan, it is now 60:40. Almost every second call I get now is asking for Japan, which is unusual for Americans, but I guess it has a lot to do with the 2020 Olympics."

Lewis said that California's JNTO has increased its efforts, especially in the luxury market, to promote the country since the announcement of the Olympics.

"JNTO publishes monthly ads in the magazines of *Virtuoso*, a consortium of luxury travel companies



Japan has not attracted visitors from countries where the travellers spend a lot on tourism.

Miwako Date,
president, MORI
Trust Hotels &
Resorts

in the US. That in-the-face publicity is creating a lot more interest in this country," she said.

Lewis added that Japan is also attracting many millennials. They are well-travelled, as many were educated abroad and usually "look for exotic frontiers".

Forest Travel in Florida has also seen a growth in honeymooners from South America and Mexico heading to Japan as part of their travels around Asia.

Liora Manilof, Forest Travel's director of leisure sales and marketing, said: "Our clients are well travelled and have been to Europe many times. They are getting tired of going to the same place and are looking for something different."

"It started with our clients going on anniversary trips to Japan and Asia last year. This year we are seeing honeymooners. They hear about the Asia trip from friends and follow them," she said.

Over in Germany, a spokesperson from BAWA Tours & Travel Germany said that while Japan is not the biggest market in terms of numbers for them, it is one of the biggest in revenue because the country is an exotic destination. The average spending of its customers range from 6,000 euros (US\$6,800) to 50,000 euros per person.

The spokesperson explained: "Each bespoke tour we create for Japan is between 10 and 14 days, and we add a lot of special elements, (hence) it is very detailed."

Despite Japan's move to focus on longhaul markets, inbound operators feel that it will not affect the growth of the Asian markets.

Ryo Watanuki, concierge of Royal Road Ginza Global Lounge, JTB Tokyo Metropolitan Corporation, said: "There has been much focus on Asia in the last few years. It is about time that (longhaul) destinations should be tapped more to balance the market share for Japan."

Watanuki does not worry that the switch in focus will affect the Asian market, which contributes to 50 per cent of his current business, mainly Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Hong Kong.

"The Asian market will continue to grow in numbers. The visa facilities, the available seat capacity from Asian countries to Japan and the many products available to suit the different markets will continue to attract travellers from the region," he said.

In the meantime, he expects the longhaul promotions to increase the number of arrivals from that part of the world will contribute to JNTO's target of 30 million visitors by 2020.

The Ryokan Collection is also expecting to see the Asian market grow alongside its repeat Asian customers.

Hiroki Fukunaga, founder and CEO of The Ryokan Collection, said: "Asian customers are new to us. Some 80 per cent of our clients are from the US and 20 per cent are from Asia. However, we get repeat customers coming from Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, thanks to the shorter distance (compared to the US) and the improved access from these countries to Japan."

Interviewed separately in Jakarta, Shuichi Sakano, director, Jakarta office of JNTO, said that marketing and promotion efforts in Indonesia will not slow down despite the head office's switch in focus.

"Our budget for the fiscal year starting April has increased and our target of arrivals has also been increased by 25 per cent," he said.

Sakano added that the focus for 2016 is to tap into the luxury, FIT and Muslim segments in Indonesia.

Hasiyanna Ashadi Koestoer, Jakarta chapter chairman of the Association of the Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies, said: "I do not see any sign of their promotions slowing down. In fact, we have representatives from different prefectures coming to see us, in addition to JNTO."

Four luxe products

Amanemu, Four Seasons among new luxury openings

New openings in the country this year include the second Amanemu hotel in Mie Prefecture's Ise Shima National Park. The property features 24 suites and four two-bedroom villas, each with its own onsen.

Over in Tokyo, Hoshinoya Tokyo is all set to open a ryokan-style hotel in the centre of the Otemachi financial district, while The Prince Gallery Tokyo Kioicho will add 250 rooms in the city. Both are slated to open in July.

Meanwhile in Kyoto, Four Seasons Hotel Kyoto will open in autumn 2016 with 124 rooms. It will be located in the historic Higashiyama-ku district, close to the Kyoto National Museum and heritage sites such as the Toyokuni Shrine and Kiyomizu Temple.

New luxury trains

Come spring 2017, Japan will have two new luxury trains.

Twilight Express Mizukaze is a new sleeper train with a capacity of up to 30 people in three different classes. Trips will include one-way 2D/1N trips in Sanyo or Sanin, and a tour around both areas that will last 3D/2N. Each trip has one sightseeing stop per day. The other, *Train Suite Shiki-Shima*, is an all-suite luxury train with two deluxe suite rooms and 15 suites. Routes have not yet been announced.

Facilities onboard both trains include an observation area, a lounge and a restaurant.

Ryokan Collection gives more

The Ryokan Collection, the first marketing consortium of Japanese ryokan and small luxury Japanese hotels, has launched three new initiatives.

It will reward guests with a free one-night stay after 10 nights' stay in member properties within two years, provide discounts on purchases made with participating partners such as sake breweries and art galleries, and offer VVIP privileges such as exclusive access to private galleries, a personalised tour of a sake brewery, or a kaiseki meal in a temple. Over 30 of such experiences are available.

Adrenaline coursing through your veins

Motorheads travelling to Shizuoka Prefecture can now strap themselves up for a ride in the passenger seat of an original Kuruma racing car at the Fuji Speedway. For a greater thrill, daredevils can also take the wheel after a lesson from a pro driver.

The Kuruma is an obscure Japanese sports car from the Inter Proto Series. Many parts of the vehicle were designed and developed completely from scratch.

The product was offered by Tavinna Shizuoka Travel at ILTM Japan recently. Prices start at ¥3 million (US\$27,700) for a one-hour race.

Top Amanemu suite **Below** Four Seasons Kyoto



Planting seeds of luxury



Emerging upscale hotels, fresh attractions and a new focus on local history and culture are coming together to reposition Bintan as a luxury destination, reports **Karen Yue**

A new colonial estate, part of a larger development in Lagoi Bay, has put the island of Bintan in the spotlight, bringing renewed attention among well-heeled travelers to the destination that has for so long fielded only two elite accommodation options – Banyan Tree Bintan and Angsana Bintan Resort.

Since opening in December 2014, The Sanchaya has placed itself on the hot list.

Built over 9.6ha of land yet offering only 21 villas and nine suites, guests at The Sanchaya are promised the luxury of space and serenity, and prompt yet non-intrusive attention from its service staff.

“We have had many international celebrities staying with us, as well as a Middle Eastern royal family and its entourage that took our Vanda Villa presidential suite,” said Fay Gauna Lugue, director of sales with The Sanchaya.

The property has been attracting “a lot of attention” from Russians,



Left Bintan's Luohan Temple is home to more than 500 statues of arhats, each bearing a distinct facial expression and physical features

the British and Australians, she added.

"Our guests appreciate that the experience begins from the time they arrive in Bintan. Our VIP arrival lounge (at Bandar Bentan Telani Ferry Terminal) is another unique selling point for us; it is luxurious and exclusive and our guests feel like they have arrived at a different place," she said.

More than just providing a fancy venue to receive guests, The Sanchaya also helps guests clear immigration and baggage checks.

Guests can choose to go straight to the resort and begin their vacation, and have their documents and bags sent to them later.

David Teo, owner of Singapore-based Fascinating Holidays, an agency specialising in bespoke vacations, said The Sanchaya allows Bintan to speak the language of the new generation of luxury travellers who prefer minimalist architecture.

"Young wealthy travellers tend to prefer luxurious hotels and resorts that do not have a pronounced local or ancient flavour, favouring instead those that are modern and elegant. The Sanchaya is exactly such a property," Teo explained, adding that his partners in China have also echoed the observation.

Bintan's transformation into a destination for the well-heeled is not limited to just The Sanchaya. New attractions that will charm this segment of travellers include scenic flights and serious flying lessons conducted by Air Adventures Flying Club in Lagoi Bay, and watersports offered at the beautiful Crystal Lagoon in Treasure Bay (see *Five luxe products*).

Andri Tan, managing director of Bintan Pratama Tour & Travel, noted that the new infrastructure has "attracted a wider variety of travellers, especially the high-class ones".

However, as The Sanchaya is a small property with limited rooms, Tan said the improvement in volume of luxury travellers has been slight.

In time to come though, Bintan will have many more luxury properties to give wealthy travellers a good night's rest. They include Cassia Bintan, a residence-styled hotel with one- and two-bedroom apartments by the Banyan Tree Group; the seaside Pantai Indah estate with one-, two- and four-bedroom pool villas; an Alila resort; and a 100-room heritage hotel remodeled from a century-old ship.

Alpha Eldiansyah, general manager of Banyan Tree Bintan, brushed off talks of heightened competition, saying both Banyan Tree Bintan and Angsana Bintan Resort will "continue to be the top hotels under the luxury category in Bintan", thanks to their stellar location on the beach and lush rainforest surroundings, award-winning spas, and a commitment to continuously innovate the stay experience through activities such as romantic dinners with intimate settings and educational activities for young families.

He believes that the new and upcoming developments will raise the appeal of Bintan and lead to stronger arrivals and more repeat visitors.

"We are anticipating an increase in arrivals from countries other than Singapore," Eldiansyah remarked. "Occupancies will be higher over the weekend (and we) look forward to welcoming long-staying guests who may be keen to experience all the new developments."

Meanwhile, the group's Laguna Bintan Golf Club is undergoing a major renovation, revealed Eldiansyah.

Besides fielding new hardware, Bintan is also promoting three island tours launched last year by Bintan Resorts Cakrawala (BRC) Tours.

The *Trail of the Sea Gypsies*, *Gods & Dragons* and *Islands of the Kings* all seek to help visitors understand Bintan better by showcasing its cultural and historical sides.

Bintan Resorts International (BRI), which has been marketing these "new discoveries" to both travellers and DMCs, has plans to develop even more eye-opening island tours.

Asad Shiraz, BRI's director of marketing, said: "Very few destinations can stand only on their appeal of having good beaches and golf courses. Bali is not just famous for

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Very few destinations can stand only on their appeal of having good beaches and golf courses. Bali is not just famous for its beaches, neither is Phuket. Their appeal is strengthened by their 'localness', their people, their history, their culture.

Asad Shiraz, director of marketing, Bintan Resorts International

destination bintan

its beaches, neither is Phuket. Their appeal is strengthened by their 'localness', their people, their history, their culture.

"Bintan, too, has deep historical stories to tell. It has religious, cultural and natural features that are unique, significant and attractive. These new tours are designed to showcase these valuable assets and encourage visitors to explore the rest of Bintan."

Fascinating Holidays' Teo opined that Bintan's cultural attractions and authentic villages will appeal to well-travelled luxury clients who often want to experience the real side of the destination.

However, for Bintan to truly shine as a tourist destination, trade players said improved accessibility through direct global flights must happen.

Bintan Pratama's Tan said: "It is very important to have a convenient transportation mode into Bintan, specifically direct flights from metro cities like Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, Bangkok, etc."

Seconding that, Dennis Torio, executive, sales & operations, business development with BRC Tours, said: "We hope the Bintan International Airport will help."

The airport is presently being built and will become operational in end-2017/early-2018.

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Tanjung Pinang's old town, the mangrove tours and the cultural sites will fascinate high-end travellers, especially those from Asia who need to keep busy and learn something even while on holiday.

David Teo,
managing director,
Fascinating
Holidays Singapore

Below The Sanchaya has welcomed many royalties and celebrities



Five lux products

A view from above

Enjoy Bintan's landscape from the comfort of an ultralight amphibious seaplane that takes a scenic route along the northern coast of the island. Operated by seasoned instructors from the Air Adventures Flying Club in the Lagoi Bay district, the experience has already earned a strong following among travellers of all ages. The open cockpit aircraft can take one passenger at a time and a 20-minute flight costs S\$120 (US\$85) per person.

Dine in a different world

Leveraging its location on a secluded bay on the northwestern tip of Bintan, the five-star Banyan Tree

Bintan resort has created a series of memorable Destination Dining experiences for its guests.

Its newest option is *Kelong Dinner*. The experience begins with guests taking a ride in a local pompong boat to arrive at a little house on stilts. With the South China Sea providing a dramatic backdrop and lanterns to light the intimate party, guests will feast on a three-course meal prepared by a private chef.

Kelong Dinner can accommodate a party of two to 12 guests. Prices are from 1,779,000 rupiah (US\$133) per person for a 12-pax party to 3,558,000 rupiah per person for a dinner for two.

Crystal clear adventures

Regarded as the centrepiece of the Treasure Bay integrated resort, the sprawling Crystal Lagoon is where water babies come to have fun. Thrill seekers can indulge in cable-skiing, water-ZOVing (water-walking in an inflated ball) and flying nine metres up in the air on a hydro-powered Jetovator, among many





Clockwise from left See Bintan onboard an aircraft with Air Adventures Flying Club, take a ride on a Jetovator at Crystal Lagoon, cast your eyes on Gunung Bintan, and go back in time on Penyengat Island

other activities. For folks who prefer to spend their day at a slower pace, the sparkling blue lagoon is also an ideal place for a skin-friendly soak. Crystal Lagoon employs a unique eco-friendly technology to purify seawater, which uses 100 times fewer chemical products than conventional swimming pools.

A zero gravity foot massage

The Spa at The Sanchaya takes the benefits of a humble foot rub up a notch by offering the treatment on a zero gravity massage bed. Designed to suit the body's natural contour and to reduce pressure on the spinal column and back muscles, the bed induces a more restful sleep as well as reduces swelling in the legs after a long day of activity.

A foot reflexology at The Spa costs 945,000 rupiah, excluding taxes.

Hunt down Bintan's storied past

Bintan is not all golf courses and resorts. Bintan Resorts Cakrawala

Tours operates three specially curated tours that take visitors deep into Bintan's past and tell mesmerising stories of the island's culture and history.

The Trail of the Sea Gypsies explores the largest sea gypsy village in Bintan and Grotto Santa Maria, and calls on traditional boat builders in fishing villages.

Gods & Dragons focuses on the lives of Bintan's Chinese community by spotlighting the 300-year-old Banyan Tree temple; the bargain

wonderland that is Tanjung Pinang; and Vihara Avalokitesvara Graha, home to the tallest Goddess of Mercy statue in South-east Asia.

Islands of the Kings, which tells the story of Bintan's regal past, takes travellers to Penyengat Island where numerous attractions are pending listing as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

These tours are led by experienced guides with in-depth knowledge of the island, its people and culture.

Right
Indulge in a unique dining experience at Banyan Tree Bintan's *Kelong Dinner*



Buying into Bali



Above Newly-opened Alila Seminyak

Despite an oversaturated market, the island of the Gods continues to be a hotbed for upper upscale and luxury hotels, reports

Mimi Hudoyo

Bali continues to be a destination that investors of upper upscale and luxury accommodation are keen to inject their money into despite excessive hotel development on the island.

In January, there were four more upper upscale hotels in the pipeline with some 695 rooms that will enter the market over the next couple of years.

STR Global data shows that in 2015, there were 147 upper upscale properties with 12,281 rooms and 193 luxury properties with 9,220 rooms.

Matt Gebbie, director Pacific Asia of Horwath HTL, said: “Bali is the regional king of multi-dimensional upscale tourism, drawing leisure and MICE demand like no other resort market in South-east Asia.

“This is driven by both the very broad range of high-end accommodations available, and the vast array of cultural and water-based attractions offered. The possibilities are endless for the high-end traveller.”

Umberto Cadamuro, COO of PACTO, agreed: “The opportunities (for Bali to attract the luxury travellers) are plenty, thanks to the



unrivalled standard of services that the island has to offer," he said.

While Bali has seen the growth of Chinese and Indian upmarket travellers lately, the destination still continues to attract high-end travellers from Europe, the US, South America and Australia.

Horwath HTL reports, however, show that RevPAR performance in the luxury segment fell slightly in 2015, after maintaining positive growth for many years.

Gebbie explained: "This was due to occupancy pressures, rather than the rate pressure – with average daily rates up more than 10 per cent in rupiah."

In the meantime, upper upscale hotels ended the year with RevPAR down by five per cent.

According to Gebbie, the good news is that the first month of 2016 was very encouraging for upper upscale hotels as RevPAR was up by more than 15 per cent year-on-year.

However, the RevPar of luxury hotels was down by five per cent in comparison to January 2015.

Moreover, Bali is not just a single place with various attractions and facilities. In fact, each area exudes its own charm, and this in turn attracts different types of market segments.

Cadamuro explained: "The over-developed and congested south Bali is facing many challenges to attract luxury travellers, with the exception of the Ungasan area, where the limited development of luxury properties has paid off and it is quickly becoming an icon for luxury travel in the Asian market.

"The rest of Bali is still faring quite well, especially all the properties along the Ayung River that are suitable for basically any market."

The various attractions in different areas have enticed travellers to move around the island.

Renato Domini, CEO of Panorama Destination, said: "Our longhaul premium travellers do not stay in one luxury hotel for 10 nights in Bali. They stay a couple of nights in the mountains, move to a hotel near the beach, and so on."

How then, are the different areas faring?

Gebbie quoted Horwath HTL's January 2016 data and said that Jimbaran and Legian/Seminyak were the biggest winners in January 2016 with RevPAR gains of around 20 per cent.

In the meantime, Ubud was the only submarket that took a hit, with RevPAR down nearly 20 per cent year-on-year.

Alasdair Davidson, general manager of Alila Ubud, said:



While there has been an increase in luxury products, the price range of these products – particularly yachts and luxury car rental – is definitely not competitive when compared to those in other luxury destinations."

Umberto Cadamuro, COO, PACTO

"There have been many hotel openings in the last two-and-a-half years. I have been talking to hotel general managers and everyone is saying that the average room rate is dropping. It has come to the point where there is a price competition now.

"It is good for the customers, as they are getting very good products at US\$20-US\$30 less as compared to last year. For the hotels, however, I am afraid that this will affect the staff and product improvements," he said.

As an example, he pointed out that the minimum wage set by the government increased by 27 per cent in 2014, but hotel revenue did not go up by 27 per cent. As such, it is hard for hotels to do product improvements, he said.

Cadamuro added that the growth of luxury properties in Bali should be supported by products that will attract more travellers.

Cadamuro said: "While there has been an increase in luxury products, the price range of these products – particularly yachts and luxury car rental – is definitely not competitive when compared to those in other luxury destinations."

Other challenges the island faces are traffic congestion and waste management.

"Without good longterm plan-





Above
A Rijstaffel dinner at Four Seasons Sayan in Ubud

ning, its regional king title is at risk, and upper upscale and luxury tourists will leave first as they have a world of destination options to explore. Bali must speed up efforts to improve infrastructure and the environment to ensure that tourism growth is sustainable," said Gebbie.

Similarly, Domini pointed out that it is necessary to develop infrastructure to support tourism growth on the island, and to develop other areas in the country.

He said: "We are pushing to clients other destinations like Sumba. For example, we are offering a package of a three-night stay in Ubud before flying them to Sumba to stay at the Nihiwatu (resort) for five nights before coming back to Bali's Seminyak to enjoy the nightlife and shopping before going home."

Other options include combining Bali and Yogyakarta, with a stay in Amanjiwo near the Borobudur Temple or at the Mesa Stila Resort in Magelang, where travellers can enjoy wellness programmes and the surrounding mountains, gardens and plantations.



Six luxé products

Massage those worries away

The Ritz-Carlton, Bali has opened its signature spa. Featuring 14 treatment rooms, the Ritz-Carlton Spa, Bali blends indigenous natural ingredients from the Indian Ocean with ancient Balinese methods and modern techniques.

In Bali, the sea is revered for its transformative powers, and is regarded as a powerful source of energy, healing and rejuvenation. Inspired by this credence, the spa's signature treatments use two of

the Indian Ocean's natural products: seaweed and pearl. Rich in vitamins and minerals, seaweed is prized for its rejuvenating properties and is used as a strengthening agent and exfoliator for the skin, while pearl was traditionally used as a cosmetic by royal families in Asia to improve the skin's radiance.

A new shopping haven

Seminyak Village has opened in the heart of Seminyak. The new shopping mall features 48 shops and restaurants, and has more than 5,500m² of retail space on two levels. The building also sports a landscaped rooftop terrace that offers a view of the surrounding area.

Developed by Melium Nusantara, a property development company affiliated with Malaysia's luxury fashion purveyor, The Melium Group, Seminyak Village aims to be a crucial part of the island's



overall development as an international tourist hub, said Dimitri Pantazaras, managing director, Melium Nusantara.

Light a fire

Four Seasons Bali at Jimbaran Bay has launched a Night Fire Yoga programme at its new Nirvana Shanti Yoga Bale (hall).

In keeping with the resort's Balinese village design concept, the new open-air wellness venue embraces the natural environment – hence its thatch-roofing and coconut wood pillars.

Perched on the edge of the Indian Ocean, the octagonal-shaped space can accommodate up to 16 people, and will hold daily yoga and meditation sessions ranging from sunrise and hatha yoga to meditation and – we highly recommend – the internationally-certified AntiGravity or 'flying' yoga.

Tulips ready to bloom

A new upper upscale retreat in central Bali, the 3.2ha Royal Tulip Saranam Resort & Spa, is slated to open this July. Surrounded by paddy fields and organic gardens, the resort will feature 89 rooms and villas. Facilities include a spa, three breakout rooms and two ballrooms that can accommodate up to 1,000 guests.

Chauffeured around in style

Garuda Indonesia is now offering a limousine service for its first-class passengers on flights between Jakarta and Amsterdam, London and Jeddah. Its 'First Class Flying Experience' service is a tie-up between the airline and Grandauto Dinamika (GAD), the Indonesian sole agent and brand holder of Jaguar Land Rover. Under the cooperation, GAD will provide the Jaguar

Clockwise from left Ritz-Carlton Spa, Bali, Karma Lounge open-air restaurant setting by the pool and a Jaguar Land Rover

XJ and Range Rover as the models for the airport shuttle service for these passengers.

Good Karma

One of the best-kept dining secrets in Jimbaran is Karma Lounge restaurant. It has not only the best international wine list in the area but a passionate executive chef and sommelier Benjamin who susses out your likings then, with a twinkle in his eyes, brings out the perfect red or white and such tasty dishes that leave you immediately content. But there's more: there's a good singer/guitarist while the restaurant setting is warm and relaxed, amid tropical palms and frangipani trees with a candlelit pool. One feels transported to a place the heart has been yearning for. Good Karma. Just go, especially if you've been bad; it's a place that will soothe the conscience.

AS
TRUE
AS
EVER

Four Seasons Resort Bali at
Jimbaran Bay

The first major rooms renovation at Four Seasons Jimbaran Bay since the resort opened in 1993 is a study in how to refurbish without wiping out the essence of a place, says **Raini Hamdi**





You can copy a plunge pool, or a design element, but you can't copy a feeling, and you certainly cannot copy the Four Seasons Resort Bali at Jimbaran Bay.

While the industry bemoans the loss of authenticity due to overdevelopment and the pressure to be different, this resort has nothing to worry about. The Bali feeling here is palpable.

The whole property itself is tailored after a typical Bali village, its 147 private villas nestling among 14 hectares of oceanfront tropical gardens that cascade down a hill. There are more shrines here than the chain has hotels – over 100 little shrines with a story of their own. One can go on a shrine tour, a temple tour, a garden tour or an art and cultural tour and experience Bali without having to step out of the resort.

It's this remarkable authenticity that the hotel is



mindful to preserve while embarking on its first major renovation since opening in 1993. Loyal clients can rest easy; a recent visit shows the refurbishment is doing its job. There are now three new products, Deluxe Villas, Premier Ocean Villas and Family Premier Villas. Highlights of all three new villa categories:

- 50 per cent bigger bedroom and a new indoor living room with double sliding doors to the garden and pool, offering guests both air-conditioned and outdoor living spaces.
- A 32 per cent increase in plunge pool size (except for Deluxe Villas, where the pool size remains).
- Redesigned exteriors to maximise the lofty ocean and sunset views, including a new thatch-roof poolside bale with direct access to the infinity-edge pool.
- All new interiors throughout the bedroom, living area and bathroom, including roofing, furniture, flooring, fittings and soft furnishings.
- Warmer, softer aesthetics using natural materials and traditional building forms to reflect Balinese architecture.
- An extra Children's Room in the Family Premier.
- All new electronics including 55-inch TV, Bluetooth sound bar and bedside media hub.

In short, better villas – with twice the feeling.

Above A new Premier Ocean Villa – larger, finer, plusher without losing the Balinese touch; **Left** An old Premier Ocean Villa; **Facing** Some things must remain, like this gorgeous handmade bathtub imported for all the villas when the hotel opened in 1993

LUXURIOUSLY HEALTHY



Six Senses Spas: Integrated Wellness

WHERE TO SEND STRESSED-OUT CLIENTS



After two years of work with doctors and wellness professionals such as Mehmet Oz, Michael Breus and Steven Gundry, Six Senses Spas has introduced a programme that aims to address common problems faced by ultra-stressed individuals.

The Six Senses Integrated Wellness approach allows experts to measure and analyse key physiological biomarkers in order to provide customers with lifestyle and nutritional advice. They then receive a personalised suite of spa treatments as well as fitness and

wellness activities designed specifically for them.

According to Six Senses, the foundation of the concept includes balanced nutrition, sleep optimisation, variation of movements in high and low intensity exercises, alternative therapies, holistic spa treatments, yoga, meditation and mindfulness of the nervous system.

The programme is now available at Six Senses Zighy Bay, Six Senses Laamu, Six Senses Yao Noi and Six Senses Douro Valley as well as partner Six Senses spas at Puente Romano Resort & Spa in Marbella, Al Bustan Palace in Oman, Soneva Kiri in Thailand and Soneva Fushi in the Maldives.



Chiva-Som stays young and fresh with facelift

Chiva-Som in Hua Hin, Thailand, turns 21 this year and looks fresh new refurbished Ocean Rooms, designed by American architect Ed Tuttle, that emphasise on comfort and blending in with the resort's surrounding nature.

The property now boast 37 Ocean Rooms and Suites, as well as 17 Thai Pavilions, each boasting views over the Gulf of Thailand. The new Ocean Rooms also feature separate dressing rooms, five different mood lighting, full-length windows, spacious terraces and a separate toilet and bathroom.

Sheila McCann, general manager of Chiva-Som, said: "The new decor is simple and elegant and these new rooms will allow us to provide the highest standard of services and comfort in a tailor-made environment."



Detox in style and comfort

The Kempinski Grand Hotel des Bains in St Moritz has launched a detox programme which combines nutrition, sports and wellness – three magic words it said are key to regaining vitality (although we think just staying at this renovated grand hotel will do the trick).

Your clients will enjoy delicious, carefully-formulated and beautifully-presented raw vegan cuisine and fruit- and vegetable-based smoothies. In addition, an individually-tailored sports and spa plan is provided, consisting of sunrise yoga, tai-chi, personal training and detox spa treatments such as purging body wraps, scrubs

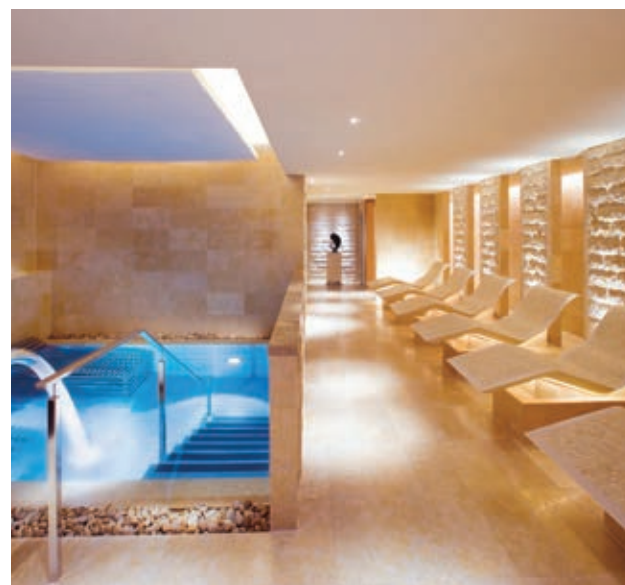
and massages. Rest and recreation in the fresh and clear mountain air and the mineral-rich spring water from the Mauritius source, the birthplace of St Moritz, complete it all. "It's time out and a great opportunity, especially for top managers, to relax and to get power for new projects and goals," said general manager Reto Stöckenius, himself a sports lover.

The detox programme is bookable now with a minimum stay of six nights in the period June 17 to October 16 from CHF4,940 (US\$5,181) all-inclusive for two people. Tel: +41-81-838-3838; Email: info.stmoritz@kempinski.com. Website: www.kempinski.com/stmoritz

First hotel spa in Asia to offer Dior Skincare

The Oriental Spa at The Landmark Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong is the first hotel spa in Asia to offer Dior Skincare. According to a statement, The Dior Prestige Treatment delivers a double regenerative and perfecting action on all layers of the skin, thanks to the anti-ageing technology of the new Dior Prestige Le Nectar and La Crème. "The skin is replenished with the power of the exceptional Dior Rose de Granville. Guests will discover... refined and smooth texture, plump bounce, delicate radiance and harmonious contours," it said.

The 90-minute treatment costs HK\$1,180 (US\$152), excluding 10 per cent service charge.



Family wellness

Ultra-luxurious Cheval Blanc Randheli Maldives has introduced family-focused Wellness Journey packages available from one day to five days.

The three tailored wellness journey packages start from US\$390 and typically include up to four daily activities: a one-hour spa treatment, a privately-coached fitness activity, an active sport session and specially curated food menus each day.

The journeys are available all year-round.

BOUTIQUE CRUISES



SONEVA USHERS IN GREEN YACHT

In keeping with its 'intelligent luxury' mantra, Soneva has launched an ultra-luxurious yacht which at the same time is environment-minded.

The *Soneva in Aqua* is ready to take to the ocean from its base at the flagship hotel, Soneva Fushi, in the Maldives. Measuring 19.25m in length and 6.4m in width, it can host four adults and two children. The onboard crew comprises a captain, chef, masseuse, private butler, astronomer and diving instructor.

All equipment, including the engines and generators, are built to be fuel efficient. Though it is supported by

engine power, the yacht relies on its three crisp white sails and nature to provide it with momentum and energy. The design also features natural materials such as rich brown leathers, woods and organic cottons.

"To stay true to our sustainable philosophy, we use a solar panel on the wheelhouse and engine-recycled heat to warm the water on board. In addition, Solar PvE panels recharge the batteries, while a specially designed and installed food waster and food dryer reduces the volume of waste onboard by 90 per cent," said Soneva founder and CEO, Sonu Shivdasani.

Charter the whole *Aqua Mekong*

Mekong River cruise operator Aqua Expeditions said there is a surge in demand for full charter services and is offering affordable charter buyout rates for the *Aqua Mekong*.

The 20-suite boat consists of two residential decks, both with floor-to-ceiling windows to take in views of the Mekong River. The ship also has a multimedia room, a function room and is equipped with Wi-Fi.

Other facilities onboard include a spa, a movie screening room, an infinity plunge pool, and four launch boats for shore excursions such as kayaking or biking.

Aqua Mekong cruises depart weekly from either Ho Chi Minh City, Siem Reap or Phnom Penh and itineraries are available for three, four or seven nights. Gross charter rates for 30 pax for three nights cost US\$91,530, and US\$213,570 for seven nights. For 40 pax, a three-night itinerary amounts to US\$108,000 while seven nights will cost US\$253,000.

The charter rates include transfers to and from boat, twice-daily excursions, all meals from menus created by chef David Thompson, as well as selected alcoholic beverages.



Second wind for Vietnam's *Bhaya Classic*

Luxury cruise operator *Bhaya Classic* has unveiled a refurbished fleet after five months of upgrading works.

All four *Bhaya Classic* boats, which boast traditional Vietnamese designs, have undergone a major makeover with the interior design of all cabins completely changed, featuring new wooden floors, panels, bedding and room decoration.

Last year, *Bhaya Classic* also introduced a new Premium Balcony Cabin option in three of its new boats (V, VI and VII) to offer passengers a more comfortable and private cruising experience in Halong Bay, where it operates.

Launched in 2007, *Bhaya Classic* now has a fleet of seven ships with a total of 93 cabins.

Paradise tries a hand at affordable luxury

In Halong Bay, high-end cruise provider Paradise Cruises is trying its hand in the four-star sector by assuming management of La Vela Cruises.

In operation since 2008, La Vela Cruises tours the bay with two steel boats of similar size but different style – the 28-cabin *La Vela Classic* and the 21-cabin *La Vela Premium*.

While *La Vela Classic* evokes the sophistication of the roaring 20's, *La Vela Premium* embraces contemporary trends exemplified by sleek bedding and mod furnishings.

Under Paradise, the look of each vessel won't change, but how they are run will. "Our goal is to take La Vela to the next level," said Edgar Cayanan, Paradise Hotels & Cruises' general manager. "We plan to do that by bolstering quality across the board, and delivering on the kind of customer care that has become synonymous with the Paradise brand."

As with all of Paradise's cruises, La Vela will offer one- and two-night itineraries that begin at a private pontoon on Tuan Chau Harbor. Destinations include the massive Sung Sot Cave, scenic Cua Van Floating Village and storied Titov Island, named after former Russian astronaut Gherman Titov.

From atop the island, travellers are presented with a sweeping view of the bay, a UNESCO World Heritage site four hours east of Hanoi that is home to more than 2,000 spectacular limestone karst.

Between excursions, guests will be treated to Vietnamese cooking demonstrations, morning tai-chi sessions and exquisite buffet lunches, said Paradise. Clients may also have spa treatments and a selection of fine wine and spirits served at the open-air bar located on each ship's sundeck.

Other distinguishing aspects of the fleet include jacuzzis in the highest room categories and connecting rooms – "a rarity on cruise ships," Cayanan said, adding that would appeal to families. Cabin sizes range from 18m² to 25m².



BANGKOK'S GRAND DAME TURNS 140 YEARS WITH SPARKLING OFFERINGS

Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok turns 140 years with revitalised Authors' and Garden Wings – the historic heart of the property. The major renovation has resulted in the birth of a Grand Royal Suite in the Authors' Wing and 12 suites with balconies in the Garden Wing.

The six-bedroom, 600m² Grand Royal Suite occupying the entire first floor of the Authors' Wing (the original Oriental Hotel built in 1876) has private elevator access and comprises the one-bedroom 315m² Royal Suite, the adjoining two-bedroom 165m² Ambassador Suite and three other guestrooms.

There are also ample stately meeting and hosting spaces, including a spacious formal lounge and a dining room for 12 guests with a fully-equipped kitchen. A light-filled Victorian-inspired glass conservatory offers further dining for six guests and relaxed lounge seating.

The Authors' Lounge located within the wing has also been restored to its late 19th century design and extended to connect to the hotel's riverside terrace and gardens via four salon spaces.

Said general manager Amanda Hyndman: "The Authors' and Garden Wings are the heart and soul of this historic property, and this comprehensive renovation has extended Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok's unique urban resort environment, allowing guests to enjoy the extensive river frontage to its fullest."

The 12 new 80m² suites in the Garden Wing, some with split-level layouts, all boast full-length windows, colonial design and are equipped with a lounge, dining room, powder room and balcony. Other additions to the Garden Wing include four new spa studios.

Besides rooms, the hotel's Le Normandie French fine-dining restaurant has been renovated with new features such as handcrafted chandeliers, a wine cellar boasting old and new world wines, and a customised dessert trolley to accompany the restaurant's famed tableside service.

IL LIDO GOES TO BALI

ilLido, one of Singapore's most iconic Italian fine-dining restaurants, has spread its wings to trendy Seminyak.

When it opened in Singapore on Sentosa island 10 years ago, ilLido was a pioneer in destination dining and sealed entrepreneur Beppe De Vito's reputation as innovator. With Bali, De Vito aims to set a new benchmark in town by combining the best of Balinese hospitality with relaxed Italian atmosphere, authentic cuisine and value-for-money prices.

"We want to be the first real Italian restaurant in town (through) an insistence on the quality of F&B selection, and non-snobish service and atmosphere," said De Vito.

ilLido Bali took over the iconic location of Kafe Warisan and revamped the space into a 200-seat restaurant and bar reminiscent of an idyllic summertime in Italy. The courtyard, surrounded by trees and a spacious portico with terracotta flooring, is ideal for chic alfresco dining. A 24-seat pergola, entangled with vines and flowers, is an intimate alfresco area for dining under the Bali skies.

The adjoining bar features an extensive selection of sharing appetisers,

world-class old and new world wines, fine spirits and cocktails which are original creations of ilLido Singapore's mixologist Jody Adler. Must-haves include the Balini, which combines prosecco and guava.

The restaurant and bar also cater to private parties and events of up to 300 guests, as well as catering at external venues for special occasions.

ilLido Bali's cuisine takes inspiration from hearty meals that are the trademark of Italians' big heart. There are lots of sharing portions to keep friends and families occupied for hours on end (try the pumpkin gnocchi gratin or the grilled octopus with Nduja). All pastas on the menu are homemade daily, including the ricotta cheese tortelli paired with an authentic, home-style Amatriciana sauce.

All appetisers, served sharing-style, are available all day from 11.30am with main courses served only for lunch and dinner. Additionally, a three-course set menu is available daily for lunch at 180,000 rupiah (US\$14) per person. il Lido is open daily.

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Doyle refurbishes, starting with Kensington



The Kensington townhouse hotel, London, comprising four traditional Victorian townhouses, has reopened after extensive renovations.

The renovation is part of a multimillion dollar investment programme across The Doyle Collection's portfolio of eight properties in the UK, Ireland and Washington.

The Kensington is the first of the hotels to unveil a complete new look and style. All 126 rooms and 14 suites have been redesigned with custom furnishings to suit the hotel's period architecture.

The hotel's Town House restaurant, comprising three adjoining rooms, has also been refurbished, now boasting its own street entrance. Chef Steve Gibbs, who trained under Jason Atherton and Mark Hix, offers diners at Town House a selection of seasonal, locally-sourced dishes, served alongside an exhaustive cocktail and wine list.



Most decadent deal

Badrutt's Palace Hotel in St Moritz is celebrating its 120th birthday on July 29 and your clients can join in the grand festivities, from the simple leisure pursuit of having its classic Afternoon Tea, to splurging on a CHF120,000 (US\$125,848) package which comes with a 1.2 Carat Cocktail created in collaboration with Graff Diamonds.

The Afternoon Tea, as it was served 120 years ago, is offered in traditional British style with teas and an assortment of dishes created by a specially invited pastry chef from London's The Goring Hotel.

Meanwhile, the specially-created CHF120,000 package, is available

for bookings for the summer season. Included in the package is a private two-way jet transfer from Zurich or Milan to St Moritz, a stay in one of the Beau Rivage suites and a 120-minute helicopter tour around the landscape of Alpine peaks. The crowning glory is a 12-course gourmet dinner during which the 1.2 Carat Cocktail, which contains an actual 1.2 carat Graff diamond, is served.

The hotel, opened by Caspar Badrutt in 1896, has welcomed the likes of Marlene Dietrich, Gunter Sachs, Audrey Hepburn and Alfred Hitchcock, charming guests with its customary style, glitz and glamour.



Q&A WHY PRIVATE AVIATION WILL THRIVE IN ASIA

Jetcraft Asia CEO David Dixon answers

What role will luxury private aviation play in the growth of high-end tourism in Asia?

The very nature of business aviation is to ease and add flexibility to travel. It means that a high net worth individual can plan side trips directly to major tourist centres which otherwise may not be possible due to a lack of commercial routes or schedules that work. This will only increase over the years. Business aviation gives greater flexibility for this type of owner to experience the excellent attractions in the region.

Who uses private aviation?

One major sector which invests in business aviation is the casino industry, which uses business aviation to expand its reach and market of high net worth individuals. One casino quoted to me that 0.25 per cent of guests brought in by its aircraft generates 25 per cent of revenue.

The secondary effect of business aviation is the access it gives the region's hotspots which otherwise may not have been accessible in the time available.

What can private aviation offer that regular commercial aircraft cannot?

The previous example from the casinos is a good one on how business aviation can help the travel industry. And, we are seeing high net worth individuals who have holiday or second homes in places like Bali, Phuket, Samui or Hamilton Island in Australia and use their aircraft to escape from the routine of office life.

The use of business aircraft is part of the quality of life.

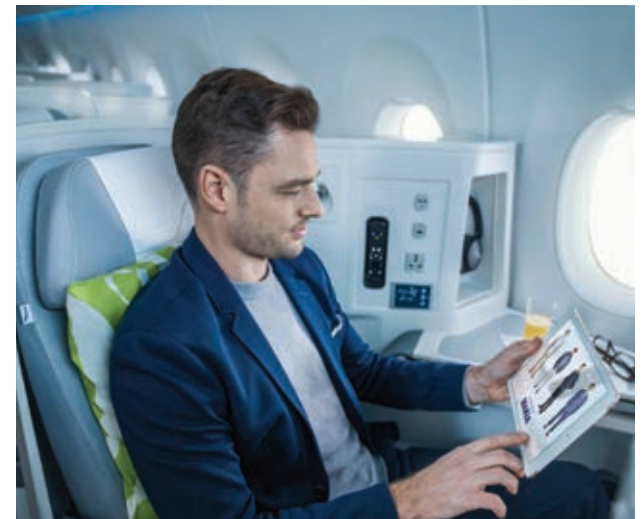
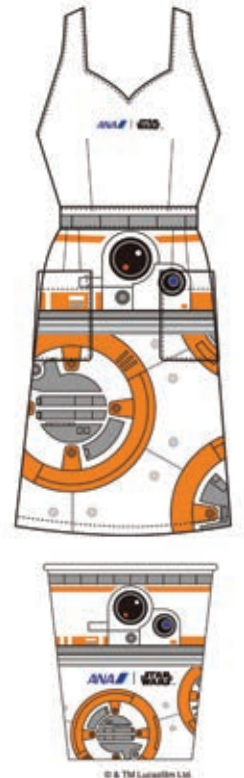


ANA rolls out BB-8 themed aircraft

The third and final Star Wars-themed aircraft by ANA was launched on March 27, featuring a livery designed with movie Star Wars: The Force Awakens' character BB-8.

The plane took its inaugural flight from Osaka's Itami Airport to Tokyo Haneda, before departing to Los Angeles on March 29, marking the first of various international routes linking Japan to several US destinations such as New York, Chicago, Washington and Houston.

Passengers can expect special BB-8 paper cups, headrest covers and cabin crew donning BB-8 aprons on the flight.



Makia collection now available on Finnair flights

Your clients aboard Finnair's A350 aircraft can now shop for Finnish clothing brand Makia's line of durable men and women wear while high up in the skies.

Makia's Spring/Summer 2016 collection is accessible on the Nordic Sky Wi-Fi portal via any of the passengers' own connected device onboard. Shopping via the portal carries no other cost other than the retail price while connection is also free.

The Nordic Sky Wi-Fi portal can additionally be used to order taxis at the destination airport as well as book travel services such as tours, dinner cruises and concert tickets via Viator Destination Services. Finnair has plans to expand the Wi-Fi service to the rest of its Airbus fleet.



Todd Eberle

THE WORLD'S PRICIEST PENTHOUSE, ANYONE?

New York's landmark hotel The Mark has unveiled the Grand Penthouse, 1,115m² of pure opulence spread across the top two floors of the property and priced at US\$75,000 per night.

The self-proclaimed five-bedroom 'Castle in the Sky' has its own private conservatory, library lounge, 24-seat dining room, two wet bars and a living room with 8m-high ceilings that can be transformed into a full-sized ballroom.

A private elevator allows guests access to the upper level, which features a sky-lit pavilion and a 232m² rooftop terrace with panoramic views of the city, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Central Park.

The Grand Penthouse is also furnished with bespoke furniture designed by Jacques Grange that carries his signature old grandeur colours and seductive yet comforting styles.

New Japanese DMC Zenses taps luxe market



The Ryokan Collection

JAPAN's H.I.S. and R Project have joined forces to form a new luxury DMC named Zenses: Japan Ultimate Experience, targeting sophisticated upscale travellers from around the world.

H.I.S. is one of the largest integrated travel agencies in Japan with 514 sales offices worldwide, while R Project specialises in luxury travel marketing and operates high-end Japanese inn consortium The Ryokan Collection.

The combined Zenses will feature tailor-made itineraries, specialised guides, luxury transportation services, private admission to famous temples, shrines and gardens, dinners and parties at heritage sites, private meetings with noteworthy artists and craftsmen, and admission to special galleries.

Shuichi Tezuka, general manager new business promotion at H.I.S., said: "I think the business potential of this market is huge. By utilising the know-how, manpower and marketing strength of H.I.S., combined with The Ryokan Collection's domestic expertise, we aim to quickly establish the most exclusive DMC service in Japan."

Concurring, Hiroki Fukunaga, founder and CEO, The Ryokan Collection, said: "This kind of DMC service – focusing on exclusivity, specialising in individuals, and with the ability to satisfy discerning travellers – is not so common in Japan yet. Our partnership with H.I.S. creates a travel agency with a high sense of value." – **Mimi Hudoyo**

Potato Head Beach Club goes into hotel business

PTT Family, the group behind the well-known Potato Head Beach Club in Seminyak, Bali, marked its entry into the hotel space with the opening of Katamama (pictured below) in Bali in March.

The all-suite hotel, also located in Seminyak, features design elements created by local craftsmen and finished with materials such as Balinese bricks, teak and hand-made tiles from Java.

All of Katamama's 58 suites boast outdoor spaces such as

balconies, gardens, or pools, while the two-storey Rooftop Suites, measuring 268m², include additional luxuries such as ocean views, spa baths, rain showers, dining and lounge areas, and a bar.

The hotel also has two F&B establishments.

Two more hotels under the PTT Family banner will open in Bali in 2018 and 2019, the former in collaboration with world-renowned architecture practice OMA headed by Rem Koolhaas.





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THE IMPERIAL NEW DELHI

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