

TTG THE OFFICIAL Show Daily



Issue

3



ATF 2018
January 25, 2018
Chiang Mai, Thailand



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Jakarta Palembang 2018

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WONDERFUL EVENTS INDONESIA 2018



JANUARY

1. 19-21 FEST In Fest, DKI Jakarta

FEBRUARY

2. 14-18 Festival Pulau Penyengat, Kepulauan Riau
3. 20 Festival Bau Nyale Mandalika, Nusa Tenggara Barat

MARCH

4. 3 Cap Go Meh Singkawang, Kalimantan Barat
5. 5-10 Festival Komodo, Nusa Tenggara Timur
6. 16-16 Pekan Raya Sumatera Utara, Sumatera Utara
7. 24-25 Tour de Bintan, Kepulauan Riau
8. 29-12 Festival Tidore East-West World Monument
9. 28-13 Legu Gam, Keraton Ternate Maluku Utara

APRIL

10. 2-8 Bali Spirit Festival, Bali
11. 4-5 Coming Home Festival, Bangka Belitung
12. 5-6 Jakarta Fashion and Food Festival, DKI Jakarta
13. 9-11 Festival Tambora, Nusa Tenggara Barat
14. 23-27 Halo Sultra, Sulawesi Tenggara
15. 30 Exciting Banten Festival (Seba Badui), Banten

MAY

16. 3-5 Festival Teluk Jailolo
17. 4-6 Aceh Culinary Festival, Aceh
18. 4-4 Art Jog, DI Yogyakarta
19. 6-16 Tour de Flores, Nusa Tenggara Timur
20. 11-13 Bintan Triathlon, Kepulauan Riau
21. 13 Asia Africa Karnaval, Jawa Barat
22. 19-24 Festival Budaya "Isen Mulang" (FBIM), Kalimantan Tengah

JUNE

23. 5-15 Pekan Raya Jakarta, DKI Jakarta
24. 7-8 Festival Tenganan, Bali
25. 19-23 Festival Pesona Budaya Asmat, Papua
26. 28-30 Bakar Tongkang, Riau
27. 29-30 Yadnya Kasadha dan Bromo Exotica, Jawa Timur

JULY

28. 1-4 Biak Munara Wampasi, Papua Barat
29. 12-15 Aceh International Rapa'l Festival, Aceh
30. 14 Al Mizan Sufi Music Festival, Jawa Barat
31. 20-22 Festival Lima Gunung, Jawa Tengah
32. 21-29 Erau Adat Kutai and International Folk Art Festival, Kalimantan Timur
33. 21-22 Matasora World Music Festival
34. 26-27 Festival Pesona Bunaken, Sulawesi Utara
35. 29 Cheng Ho Festival Semarang, Jawa Tengah

AUGUST

36. 2-6 Festival Buleleng, Bali
37. 2-9 Parade Sandelwood dan Tenun Ikat Sumba, Nusa Tenggara Timur
38. 3-5 Dieng Culture Festival, Jawa Tengah
39. 6-12 Festival Pesona Lipuku, Sulawesi Tengah
40. 8-10 Tomohon Flower Festival, Sulawesi Utara
41. 8-10 Festival Lembah Baliem, Papua
42. 8-11 Pagar Alam Heritage Trail, Sumatera Selatan
43. 11-17 Sandeq Race Festival, Sulawesi Barat
44. 17 International Angklung Festival Kuningan, Jawa Barat
45. 17-20 Festival Teluk Ambon, Maluku
46. 18-16 Pesona Lombok - Sumbawa, Nusa Tenggara Barat
47. 22-27 Festival Sriwijaya, Sumatera Selatan
48. 24-26 Festival Pasar Terapung Banjarmasin, Kalimantan Selatan
49. 24-26 Festival Krakatau, Lampung
50. 29-1 Festival Pacu Jalur, Riau





SEPTEMBER

- 51. 5-14 Tour de Singkarak, Sumatera Barat
- 52. 6-8 Solo International Performing Arts (SIPA), Jawa Tengah
- 53. 6-10 Eight Festival (F8), Sulawesi Selatan
- 54. 9 Malang Flower Carnival, Jawa Timur
- 55. 10-8 Festival Moyo, Nusa Tenggara Barat
Okto
- 56. 10-20 Festival Tabut Bengkulu, Bengkulu
- 57. 12-19 Festival Tanjung Lesung, Banten
- 58. 13-16 Festival Phinisi
- 59. 15-23 Festival Bahari Kepri, Kepulauan Riau
- 60. 21-23 Festival Danau Limboto, Gorontalo
- 61. 23 Festival Batanghari, Jambi
- 62. 23-26 Internasional Tour de Banyuwangi Ijen, Jawa Timur
- 63. 27-29 Festival Kota Tua Malang
- 64. 27-27 Wonderful Food Culinary and Shopping, DKI Jakarta
Okto
- 65. 28 Geopark Ciletuh Festival, Jawa Barat
- 66. 28-30 Festival Palu Nomoni, Sulawesi Tengah

OCTOBER

- 67. 3-7 Festival Kerinci, Jambi
- 68. 6-7 Kustomfest
- 69. 12-21 Pasar seni Lukis Indonesia (Indonesia Art Mart),
Jawa Timur
- 70. 13-18 Festival Keraton Nusantara
- 71. 14-18 Gebyar Pesona Budaya Garut, Jawa Barat
- 72. 18-21 Festival Pesona Raja Ampat, Papua Barat
- 73. 19-21 Sawahlunto International Music Festival,
Sumatera Barat
- 74. 20 Gandrung Sewu, Jawa Timur
- 75. 25-3 Ubud Writer Festival, Bali
Nov
- 76. 26 Festival Budaya Irau Malinau, Kalimantan Utara
- 77. 26-28 Nusa Dua Fiesta, Bali
- 78. 27-28 Festival Likurai Timor, Nusa Tenggara Timur
- 79. 27-29 Festival Danau Sentarum, Kalimantan Barat
- 80. 28-29 Kemilau Madura, Jawa Timur
- 81. 28 Jakarta Marathon, DKI Jakarta

NOVEMBER

- 82. 2-4 Festival Mahakam, Kalimantan Timur
- 83. 2-4 Kenduri Seni Melayu
- 84. 4-11 Pesta Rakyat Banda, Maluku
- 85. 7-11 International Musi Triboatton, Sumatera Selatan
- 86. 10 Festival Tempoe Doeloe, DKI Jakarta
- 87. 11-13 Wakatobi Wonderful Festival and Expo WAVE
- 88. 12-15 Bono Surfing, Riau
- 89. 15-19 Festival Tanjung Kelayang, Bangka Belitung
- 90. 16-20 Ya'ahowu Nias Festival, Sumatera Utara
- 91. 17-18 Jogja International Heritage Walk, DI Yogyakarta
- 92. 20-25 Gorontalo Karnaval Karawo, Gorontalo
- 93. 21-28 Festival Budaya Cirebon, Jawa Barat
- 94. 23-25 Borobudur Writer and Culture Festival, Jawa Tengah
- 95. 29-2 Festival Pagaruyung, Sumatera Barat
Des

DECEMBER

- 96. 1-8 Jogja Netpac Asia Film Festival, DI Yogyakarta
- 97. 5-8 Festival Danau Toba, Sumatera Utara
- 98. 7-9 Festival Nusa Penida, Bali
- 99. 8-9 Batam International Culture Carnival,
Kepulauan Riau
- 100. 20-30 Lovely Desember, Sulsel



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ATF 2018
January 25, 2018
Chiang Mai, Thailand



Myanmar deliberates bed tax

Income will fund much-needed destination promotion, development

By Mimi Hudoyo

The Myanmar Ministry of Hotels & Tourism is hoping to fatten its limited destination promotion funds with income from a possible bed tax.

Tint Thwin, director general of hotels and tourism with the ministry, said the plan is to collect US\$1 per room per night from international travellers, and 1,000 kyats (US\$0.80) from domestic travellers staying in hotels.

Tint Thwin explained that the bed tax is needed, as the ministry has “a very tight budget (allocation) for promotion from the government”.

Money collected from the proposed bed tax will go into financing Myanmar’s participation in travel tradeshow, production of destination promotion materials, development of human resources, online presence, and improvement of tourism infrastructure such as building public toilets, among other things.

Tint Thwin expects the country to collect between US\$4 million and US\$5 million a year in bed taxes, based on last year’s international arrival of 3.5 million people staying an average of one week, as well as five million domestic travellers.

However, the ministry’s decision is vexing local hoteliers, according to Aung Myo Min Din, chairman of the Myanmar Hotelier Association.

Aung Myo Min Din told *TTG Show Daily* that this was a bad time to impose the new bed tax as the country might be raising the minimum wage limit by 45 per cent this year, a move that would drive up costs and rooms rates. “We are afraid this will dampen travellers’ desire to visit Myanmar,” he said.

Aung Myo Min Din revealed that this concern was tabled at the recent AHRA meeting and Malaysian members had shared that inbound traffic had dipped when Malaysia imposed a similar tax. In comparison, arrivals into Indonesia grew when the

Indonesian government eased regulations on travellers.

At press time, private sector players and the government are in talks to find a better solution to growing the destination promotion fund.

Tint Thwin said: “I am sure the industry understands and agrees that more money is needed. We have a budget of only US\$300,000, and our participation in the tourism expo organised by the Japan Association of Travel Agents last year cost us US\$200,000.

“We also agree that tourism is one of the most important sectors (driving Myanmar’s national economy) but we are the least developed (in this aspect) among ASEAN members. We have the lowest arrivals of them all and yet our prices are higher than that of Laos, Cambodia and Thailand while our service standards are not as good. We need to improve.”

Tint Thwin hopes “the best solution to this” will be found in a couple of months.

NUMBERS THAT MATTER

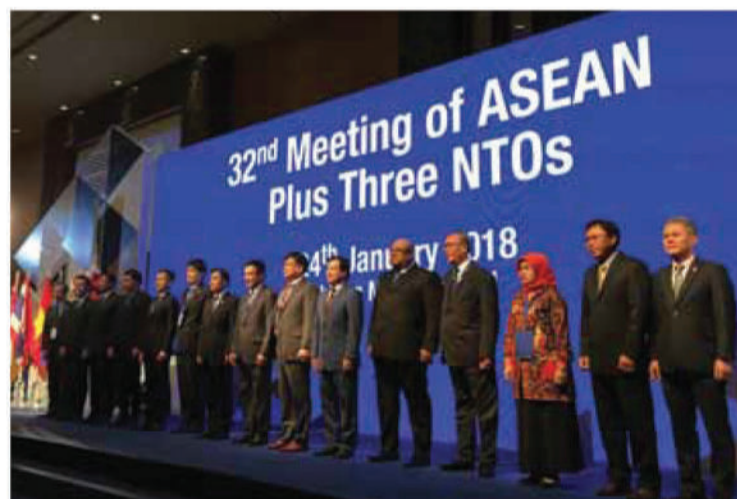
1.1 The total number of arrivals, in millions, at Myanmar’s Yangon International Airport in 2017, an increase of seven per cent year-on-year

35.3 Thailand welcomed more than 35.3 million international visitors and 2017, an increase of 8.8 per cent over 2016. This translated to 1.82 trillion baht (US\$57,421 million) in tourism revenue

62.2 The number of passenger movements Singapore’s Changi Airport handled in 2017 in millions, a record for the airport

27.3 The total seat capacity, in millions, into Indonesia’s 19 international airports in 2017

East Asia receives a ton of love from SEA travellers



By Pamela Chow

Tourism traffic between South-east Asian nations and East Asian countries South Korea, Japan and China has been on the rise, according to figures released at the 32nd Meeting of ASEAN, China, Japan and Republic of Korea NTOs yesterday.

In 2017, footfalls from South-east Asia into China spiked by 105 per cent YOY to 21.3 million, while Japan received three million South-east Asian visitors, up by 10.6 per cent in 2016. As well, South Korea saw 2.3 million South-east Asian arrivals in 2017, up from 2.2 million the previous year.

These numbers are a result of initiatives such as promotional outreaches to countries like Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia; visa exemptions and multiple-entry visas; as well as the opening of tourism office branches around the region.

Thailand proved to be a strong source market, ranking sixth – the highest of the South-east Asian countries – in inbound numbers for South Korea and Japan at 438,634 and one million arrivals respectively.

Tourism numbers into South-

east Asian countries have also increased. Almost 30 per cent more Chinese (27.8 million) visited the region, said Yaping Xue, director-general, marketing & international cooperation department, China National Tourism Administration.

As well, 6.2 million South Koreans travelled to South-east Asian countries between January and November 2017.

Hyo Sik Jeon, executive director, international tourism department of Korea Tourism Organisation (KTO), said: “If December is included in this (statistic), we estimate that (travel to South-east Asia) will make up about a quarter of total outbound traffic in 2017.”

Aided by more direct flights between South Korea and South-east Asia, Vietnam’s Hai Phong received 1,499 per cent more visitors from South Korea last year, while Bangkok and Danang ranked as regional top choices for leisure travellers and families respectively.

Jeon shared that going forward, KTO will focus on increasing traffic to and from tier two and three cities in Vietnam through promotions and fam tours.



We have a budget of only US\$300,000, and our participation in the tourism expo organised by the Japan Association of Travel Agents last year cost us US\$200,000.

Tint Thwin

Director general, hotels and tourism, Myanmar Ministry of Hotels & Tourism

Khon Kaen targets business events

By S Puvaneswary

The Khonkaen International Convention & Exhibition Centre (KICE) opens today, and riding on its coattails is the hope that more international business events will head to the north-eastern region of Thailand.

Channarong Buristrakul, co-founder of Khon Kaen Think Tank, said the 25,000m² centre opens up new opportunities for Khon Kaen, as conferences and exhibition spaces were previously limited to hotels and universities.

“The biggest (business) event in Khon Kaen to date is 5,000 pax, held about three years ago. But with the KICE, we can have

a conference for 10,000,” he said.

He added that although Khon Kaen lacks a convention bureau, the private sector, along with the support of 80 businesses, has raised enough funds to set up Khon Kaen MICE Management – a private sector initiative formed last year – to play the role of a local convention bureau. It is now looking at attracting regional business events from Laos and Vietnam.

He acknowledged that the destination has to work on its branding, and create more awareness of its business event

capabilities.

Channarong said: “We don’t have enough attractions (such as the) seaside, beaches and mountains. We also need to create more activities and attractions for pre- and post-tours. However, we are strong in agriculture, education and medical, and these are the sectors we want to attract.”

KICE, located 15 minutes from the local Khon Kaen airport, is the third largest convention and exhibition centre in Thailand. It is privately owned and managed by CP Land.



Channarong: much work to be done

News

ASEANTA plays problem-solver

Improved ATF buyer qualification, greater stakeholder inclusion among ideas

By Mimi Hudoyo

A stronger system to qualify ATF buyers and a membership expansion are among some proposed initiatives that have emerged from the ASEAN Tourism Association Board Meeting on Tuesday.

The initiatives aim to resolve persistent industry concerns.

Board members deliberated the possibility of establishing a database of quality international buyers to raise the standards of attendees at ATF's B2B meetings component, TRAVEX.

ASEANTA president Cheah Swee Hee said: "We have been studying the past few ATFs and we see some hosted buyers who are not really producing. ASEANTA must (find a solution for this)."

Cheah revealed that the proposal on the database was presented to NTO rep-

resentatives on Tuesday.

He said the database could contain buyers recommended by various industry stakeholders and screened by ASEANTA board members.



Cheah: more productive ideas

"If we want the database to be more detailed, we could employ artificial intelligence and use technology to match (buyer profile with destination product offerings)."

Meanwhile, a committee with an IT expert has been formed and it has started to look into antitrust and personal data protection laws that will impact the creation and management of this database. This effort will also give confidence to sources when they collect data, opined Cheah.

A second major initiative considered by the board is the inclusion of airports and tour companies in ASEANTA mem-

bership.

"Our ASEAN Airline members have been asking for the inclusion of airports so that there is better synergy, as the airports also play major roles in creating seamless travel for travellers," he explained.

Cheah added that having travel companies in the membership would facilitate the communication and execution of programmes developed by ASEANTA.

"As ASEANTA members, these travel companies will get first-hand information (on what we hope to achieve and can take action accordingly)," he said.

The ASEANTA board will regroup in April for its Annual General Meeting, and Cheah hopes that the constitution will be amended by then to incorporate the new membership guidelines and to also bring to market the other proposed initiatives.

New museum for maritime enthusiasts

After nine months of extensive overhaul, Resorts World Sentosa has opened the Maritime Experiential Museum, the only museum in Singapore dedicated to the iconic Maritime Silk Route.

The revamped space houses 15 unique galleries featuring visual projections, multimedia shows, interactive exhibits, olfactory experiences and photogenic displays. The anchor attraction is the immersive Typhoon Theatre, which simulates a sinking ship in a treacherous storm. Admission to this show is tagged with an additional fee of S\$3 (US\$2.30) per person.

Guests can also embark on a maritime adventure through the eyes of Marco Polo, explore the lower deck of a ship, escape from a simulated pirate attack and virtually don outfits from the past at an interactive photo corner. — Pamela Chow

IN BRIEF

Khiri ventures farther into Indonesia

Khiri Travel has launched an office in Makassar, Sulawesi, opening up itinerary options that include destinations from Kalimantan through Sulawesi, to the Moluccas and Papua.

Holiday Inn opens water park resort

Holiday Inn Vana Nava Hua Hin is the first water park resort in Asia. It offers 300 keys that include inter-connecting rooms and KidSuites — "secret" rooms decked out with bunk beds and play

areas. Children aged 12 and under can stay and eat for free, and all guests enjoy unlimited access to Vana Nava Hua Hin Water Jungle. Facilities include an infinity pool, spa, gym, a kids' club, three F&B venues, and 950m² of function space.

Philippines point travellers towards rural tourism

By S Puvaneswary

The Philippines government is placing a greater emphasis on countryside tourism and aims to increase a tourist's average length of stay beyond 10.5 days and raise per capita expenditure.

Currently, the Philippines Department of Tourism (DoT) is working closely with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Department of Interior and the local government to develop programmes, and with the travel trade on promotions.

Benito Bengzon Jr, undersecretary tourism development at the DoT, told *TTG Show Daily* on the sidelines of the ASEAN NTO meetings: "Emerging destinations for countryside tourism include Siargao, the northern part of Palawan and the Cordillera Administrative Region, besides known destinations such as Bohol and Boracay."

He added that countryside tourism has been well received by FITs aged between 20 and 30 from South-east Asia due to the strong presence of low-cost carriers which make travel more affordable.

It has also gained popularity with European tourists who visit the country in search of unique, authentic experiences such as replanting mangroves, creating artificial reefs and learning to weave.

This promotion is part of the government's 10-point socioeconomic agenda introduced in 2016, where rural tourism will help benefit the local communities.

Family fun, spa villas on the cards for Shangri-La Chiang Mai

New features targeting families and wellness aficionados are among the priorities for Shangri-La Hotel Chiang Mai, a conference venue for this year's ASEAN Tourism Forum.

Its general manager Gabriele Lombardo told *TTG Show Daily* that the hotel hopes to plug this gap in Chiang Mai's hospitality scene by developing a "strong focus on families".

He opined: "There's isn't a family-friendly hotel in Chiang Mai, so we believe there is an opportunity there."

Lombardo explained that the team has introduced a "protocol for kids" for in-room setups, which includes different-coloured beds, personalised activity invitation cards for children and a stuffed toy bear.



Lombardo: eyeing different segments

Children's entertainment, water activities by the pool, an upgraded garden playground and a revamped kids' corner are some other enhancements that will be made this year.

Additionally, the hotel will be spiffing up its spa village to include wellness stay-in villas as part of a "central self indulgence" campaign, said Lombardo. This pampering experience will include programmes such as morning yoga and facial treatments.

To position the hotel as a hotspot in town, Shangri-la Hotel Chiang Mai will also organise more in-house events. Lombardo revealed that the team is currently in talks to partner with Michelin-star chefs from Bangkok; the guide was just launched in the city last year. — Pamela Chow



One glorious night in Vietnam

Vietnam — next year's ATF host — invites all buyers and media to its official ATF hosted dinner tonight from 18.15 to 21.00 at the Khum Kham International Convention Complex.

Highlights include authentic local cuisine by Vietnamese chefs flown in just for the event, an ao dai fashion show by award-winning designer Minh Hanh, as well as cultural performances.

Shuttle buses will depart from the exhibition hall's main entrance at 18.00 and 18.15.

Attendance is strictly by invitation, for buyers and media only. To RSVP, please visit TTT booth N05.



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Features **NTO chief showcase**

A forward-looking vision

In this final ASEAN tourism leader instalment, **Marissa Carruthers** looks at Vietnam's wide-ranging efforts



VIETNAM

Vu Nam

Deputy director, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT)

How did VNAT leverage the ASEAN@50 celebrations to reel in more tourist arrivals, and what was the result so far?

We have taken part in a lot of overseas events and attended all of the big travel marts in the region and world, such as Japan Travel Mart, WTM in the UK and CITM in China with promotional materials for the campaign.

We also held the Vietnam International Travel Mart in Hanoi in April under the ASEAN@50 flag, and The International Travel Expo in Ho Chi Minh City in Sep-

tember. We have also hosted fam trips to show people the country, while promoting South-east Asia. We have seen positive results.

What new things will be done in 2018 to keep up the momentum VNAT has achieved?

We will increase our presence at major trade shows. European and other longhaul markets are important to us so we will have a big 500m² booth at ITB Berlin. We will also host a Visit Vietnam night at ATF, and hold Visit Vietnam Year (which will be hosted by) Ha Long, Quang Ninh.

What is the one thing you wish the ASEAN tourism community could collectively achieve in 2018?

For ASEAN to be promoted more as one destination to international travellers.



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Destination Laos

Innate charms aglow in Laos

The new *Visit Laos Year 2018* campaign will throw the spotlight on Laos' natural gifts of nature, people and ethnic diversity, and play up local festivals to offer travellers a truly unique experience, writes **Marissa Carruthers**

Laos' natural charm will remain its major selling point, and an aspect the country will push through its *Visit Laos Year 2018* campaign.

Launched to mark the official opening of the annual That Grand Stupa Festival in October, the Visit Laos Year 2018 aims to attract more than five million tourists to the country, generating US\$900 million in revenue.

The campaign will throw the spotlight on the country's natural beauty, which takes in Laos' nature, people, ethnic diversity and swathe of authentic experiences.

Deputy prime minister, Sonsay Siphandone, said 18 main activities will be held across the country to promote the many festivals that showcase the country's ethnic diversity and culture. These include the New Year Festival of the Khmu ethnic group in Oudomxay province, Kapok Flower Festival in Bokeo province and the Elephant Festival in Xayaboury province.

Caravan tours will take visitors through the country, while a host of other activities, such as off-road motorbike and car racing and mountain climbing events, aim to showcase natural Laos.

Jason Rolan, general manager at EXO Laos, told *TTG Show Daily*: "In the Visit Laos Year 2018, one aspect the government is really pushing is festivals. They have selected one festival per province to promote in a brochure. A broader aim of this is to boost domestic tourism."

He added that EXO plans to promote these festivals too, which enable visitors to fully immerse themselves in a local ex-

perience, in areas where clients normally travel. However, events in more remote provinces will be harder to sell due to the challenges of accessing them, he said.

According to the Asian Development Bank, Laos is the greenest country in the world, with forest covering 92.1 per cent of the country. This has led to a series of sustainable and innovative tourism projects, mainly run by foreign non-governmental organisations and private companies, that show visitors the country's unspoiled natural beauty, wildlife and diverse ways of living.

These take in kayaking, trekking, night safaris, zip-lining and rock climbing.

Christopher Gramsch, Khiri Laos general manager, said the company works to promote projects that fit into this sector, such as the Night Safari in Nam Et Phou Leuy and the ECC in Xayabouly. But he added Luang Prabang, which was the most visited province in the county in 2016, remains the main draw.

"Most people come to see Luang Prabang and do tours around that area, although there are many trekking or adventure options all over Laos," he said.

Philippe Conod, managing director of AsianTrails Laos, said this is also an area AsianTrails is promoting hard. It is pushing two original programmes it recently launched. The first covers northern Laos, starting from Luang Prabang and ending at the recently-opened deluxe resort Nam Kat Yor Lapa, which is set in protected forest along the Nam Kat River in Oudomxay province. The second takes in southern



From above: A novice monk shares his inner-thoughts with Buddha statues; Patuxai war monument in Vientiane; panoramic view of Luang Prabang

Laos, combining the Boloven Plateau, the Vat Phou site, 4,000 Islands and a day spent at a fishing village, immersing in daily life.

Gramsch said: "I think travellers see Laos as an adventure destination where you can have authentic travel experiences, such as home-stays. In the end, it's all about the people whom are very unique compared to neighbouring countries, as tourism doesn't have the long tradition as in Cambodia, Thailand or Vietnam."



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Destination Laos

Destination in numbers

643,319

The number of visitors to 2016's most visited province, Luang Prabang. The destination saw a 5.9 per cent growth in tourist arrivals

10

The year-on-year percentage decrease in arrivals to Laos in 2016. The country welcomed 4.2 million international visitors that year

221,952

The number of visitors from Europe in 2016, representing a two per cent year-on-year increase

Viewpoints

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

Jason Rolan
General manager
EXO, Laos



If the government wants to bring in a great influx of tourists, they should abolish visa-on-arrival fees for 2018, or offer a limited-stay visa that is free for maybe 15 days (as an incentive for people) to come to Laos. It would cause quite a stir and draw some attention in the travel world should Laos do this.

Christopher Gramsch
General manager
Khiri, Laos



Build less dams. They just announced that boat trips on the Nam Ou are not possible anymore between Muang Khua and Muang Ngoi. It was one of the last scenic boat cruises we could offer clients. Infrastructure with better roads, more good hotels out of the tourist spots and investment in HR, as well as more competitive rates for private transportation would be helpful.

Surprising theme



Local delights in buzzing food stalls

GOURMET LURES

Lao cuisine is too often likened to Thai or Vietnamese food. However, it has its own distinct flavours and influences, spanning soups, noodles, rice dishes and salads. Learn how to rustle up some traditional dishes at Tamarind's Lakeside Cooking School in Luang Prabang. Delve into the street food scene head first with Tuk Tuk Safari's tours in Vientiane, which vary from dinner with the locals to the hungry tuk tuk tour, which stops off at local restaurants, street food vendors, markets and outdoor kitchens.

Hot stuff

Crowne Plaza Vientiane

In April, Laos welcomed its first international five-star hotel in the form of Crowne Plaza Vientiane. Situated in the heart of the capital, the 197-room hotel is ideal for meetings and events, as well as a convenient base from where travellers can explore the city. It boasts modern amenities, stylish restaurants, lounge bar, beer garden, infinity pool, 24-hour fitness centre and spa.

Mekong Kingdoms

In September, Mekong Kingdoms unveiled a new fleet of five cruise ships. They take

in flagship sailing between Luang Prabang and Chiang Khong/Chiang Rai to a "floating lounge" available for charter.

The fleet's flagship, the 13-suite Bohème, accommodates up to 26 pax on two- and three-night cruises. The ship features a royal suite and 12 deluxe suites boasting air-con, en-suite bathroom and private balcony, a sundeck, lounge, wine cellar and spa.

Villa Opera

In February, Villa Opera opened after a seven-month refurbishment on a derelict French colonial villa in the heart of the capital,

Vientiane. The sophisticated modern diner offers some of the freshest homemade pasta in Laos, as well as a range of anti-pasti and appetisers and mains that take in Kobe steak, soups and pizzas.

Azerai Luang Prabang

Aman founder Adrian Zecha has debuted his Azerai brand with a 53-room hotel in Luang Prabang. The joint venture between Zecha, former Amantaka general manager Gary Tyson and Ben Faker, an alumnus of Sydney fine-diner The Bridge Room, has a pool, spa, bistro and bar. Open-plan ac-

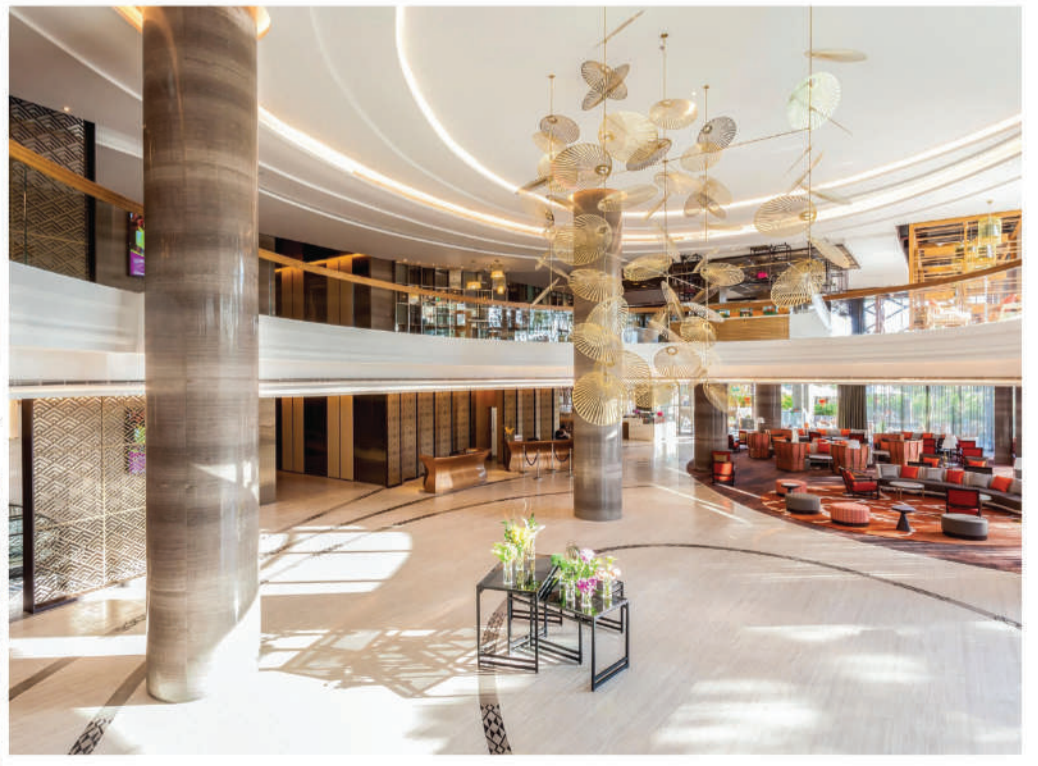
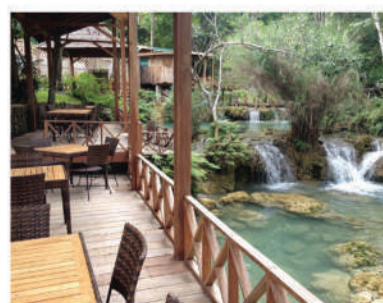
commodation ranges from 35m² standard rooms to 85m² Azerai rooms, with private courtyards or balconies.

Carpe Diem

Surrounded by tropical greenery, Carpe Diem opened in June in Luang Prabang. Overlooking Kuang Si waterfalls, it offers stunning views. In keeping with its natural surroundings, the restaurant's décor draws on the environment, with local materials used where possible. The menu also puts emphasis on local produce, working with local farmers to source ingredients.



Clockwise from above: Azerai Luang Prabang; Crowne Plaza Vientiane; Carpe Diem, Luang Prabang; Villa Opera, Vientiane



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Destination Myanmar

Watch this outlying space

The opening up of Myanmar and the easing of travel restrictions in recent years has led to a tourism boom. But to keep tourists interested, varied experiences away from tourist hotspots must be marketed. By **Marissa Carruthers**

Myanmar is pushing its off-the-beaten track destinations, which it hopes will add to its allure to travellers in 2018.

Currently, the country's Ministry of Hotels and Tourism (MoHT) said the cultural centres of Yangon, Bagan, Mandalay and Inle remain the most popular attractions for tourists. A MoHT spokeswoman said: "For the majority of international visitors, Myanmar is well-known for its cultural tourism in these areas."

As a result, the government has pledged to continue to promote the country's outlying areas, such as the islands in the south and northern states' unspoilt natural beauty.

To help stimulate growth in what is predicted to be a challenging year for the country after the Rohingya refugee crisis, the MoHT will be pushing the country's

unique destinations at a series of international travel shows throughout 2018.

It will continue to showcase Myanmar as a country that offers much more than the usual attractions, including swimming with manta rays and walking along pristine beaches in the Mergui Archipelago in the south, as well as trekking through remote villages and from peak to peak in the mountains of Shan Plateau.

The spokeswoman added: "By participating in these events and promoting our destinations and colourful cultural traditions all around the world, we (hope to receive) more interest and inquiries from international visitors."

Edwin Briels, managing director of Khiri Myanmar, said this is an area he expects to see trending in 2018, with the country welcoming more "flashpackers" to its shores.

He said: "I expect to see a continuous

growth of flashpackers – travellers arranging their trip on their own, or locally, but with the funds to do so in upmarket style. They look for unique experiences and will support growth in off-the-beaten-track destinations, such as in the Northern Shan, Mon, Kayin, Kayah, and Chin states."

To support this push, Khiri has started offering several short – two to three days – extensions from the hotspots of Yangon, Bagan and Inle Lake.

Briels said: "We aim to show more of the country, without the need to travel really far. These packages include experiences that are focused on countryside and rural villages. They include staying overnight in characteristic accommodation in places like Salay, Yandabo, Yenangaung, Samkar and Moe Yun Gyi."

Whin Eindray Wint Wah, director general of Pan Thu Kha Travels and Tours,

said the company promotes Myanmar's lesser-known destinations and is working on delivering a series of packages to cater to this growing trend throughout 2018.

Wah said: "Myanmar is a beautiful country with a lot of natural beauty that tourists will love to discover. As more products and activities open, it makes it easier for us to sell the country. The ministry has been carrying out a lot of promotions, and we have been promoting (lesser-known destinations) as well at tradeshows and other events."

Briels added that Khiri promotes Myanmar through its network of tour operators across the world.

He shared: "All marketing and PR activities from the ministry, private and public, as well as domestic and international non-governmental organisations and international media (are helping) the tourism industry in Myanmar grow."



Clockwise from above: A temple in the ancient city of Bagan at dusk; Kyaiktiyo Pagoda is a well-known Buddhist pilgrimage site in Mon State; a fisherman on Inle Lake; a tourist buying ripe mangoes from a Burmese fruit seller



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Destination Myanmar

Viewpoints

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

Thomas Carnevale
Managing director,
Asian Trails



Further investment in the country's infrastructure is vital. We also need to see the continuous development of human capital in the various touristic areas of the country. As the tourism industry continues to grow, qualified and well-trained employees are necessary for Myanmar to reach its potential.

Edwin Briels
General manager,
Khiri Travel Myanmar



I hope foreign media will be more positive. Since "the opening" about six years ago, a lot of people were overly enthusiastic (about Myanmar) and there was a media hype that almost made people believe in fairy tales. Lately, there has been a lot of negative press, which I don't think is fair or balanced (and is the result of) having too high expectations.

Destination in numbers

562,821

The number of international arrivals at Yangon airport between January and June 2017, an increase of 10 per cent year-on-year

1.02 million

The number of foreign visitors that landed at Yangon International Airport in the first 11 months of 2017, a seven per cent increase year-on-year

7 million

The total number of international arrivals the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism is targeting by 2020

Surprising theme



See a different side of Bagan while in a hot air balloon

Romantic moments

Stroll hand-in-hand along unspoiled Ngapali beach, which boasts a stunning three-kilometre stretch of powdery white sands flanked by coconut trees and crystal waters. Indulge in a feast of freshly-caught seafood at one restaurants on the beach and take in the sunset. As well, historic Bagan is also a top destination for travellers. Go on a relaxing cruise along the Irrawaddy River or, for a truly memorable romantic moment, hop on board a hot air balloon and admire Bagan's more than 2,000 temples from high above.

Hot stuff

Junction City Yangon

Located in the Central Business District, Junction City comprises Grade A offices, a state-of-the-art retail and entertainment centre with multiplex cinema, and multiple drinking and dining options. It is also home to the five-star, 348-room Pan Pacific Hotel, which opened in November 2017.

Lotte Yangon

The Lotte Yangon its doors in September 2017, close to Inya Lake in Myanmar's Hlaing Township district. The property features two

buildings – a 15-storey hotel with 343 rooms and a 29-floor serviced apartment block with 315 units. Shared facilities include six F&B options, gym, outdoor swimming pool, a business centre, two ballrooms and nine meeting rooms.

ibis Styles Yangon Stadium

The 108-room ibis Styles Yangon Stadium hotel opened in 4Q2016, and boasts facilities such as a rooftop restaurant and bar, and six function rooms. Five other AccorHotels properties are set to open in Myanmar over the

next few years – 356-key Pullman Mandalay Mingalar, 100-key MGallery Inle Lake Myat Min, 268-key Ibis Styles Mandalay Centre, 200-key Ibis Styles Muse, and 300-key Pullman Yangon Myat Min.

Emirates' Dubai-Yangon flight

On July 1, Emirates launched its Dubai-Yangon flight. From Asia, the route starts in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, flying to Yangon before landing in Dubai. The daily flight also marks the first time Cambodia and Myanmar have been connected by direct air link.

Hidden Oases

Launched in May 2017, Khiri Travel Myanmar's Hidden Oases programme offers an alternative view of Myanmar to visitors.

The route from Yangon to Bagan takes in rural towns, heritage sites and interactions with locals. Stretching more than 600km, the adventure lets guests discover off-the-beaten track experiences by train, boat, car and motorbike, and takes in 11th century temples, the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Pyay, fishing villages, the sleepy town of Salay, and a homestay in the rural village of Magyikan.



From left: ibis Styles Yangon Stadium; go on a tour with Hidden Oases to explore Myanmar off-the-beaten track

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Spend your day exploring the Wildlife Park and get close to exotic animals or give your lungs a workout at the Scream Park, with a unique immersive horror experience. Fans of adrenaline-pumping activities will love the Extreme Park with bungee jumping, catapult launching, and other outdoor sports while there's something for everyone at the Amusement Park featuring classic rides like gravity-defying pirate galleon and roller coaster.

So, come with your friends or family to Sunway Lagoon and let your best day ever begin.

It's non-stop fun from morning to night at Sunway Lost World Of Tambun, the ultimate family getaway in Ipoh. Featuring the longest Adventure River in Malaysia to the thrilling Tiger Valley where you can see Siberian tigers run, jump and feed, it's a day of memorable sights and unforgettable experiences. Kids will love the Petting Zoo, where they can interact with a large variety of adorable animals in their natural habitats or gambol around the Amusement Park, full of kid-friendly attractions like the Adventure Express, a train ride through the wilderness and Lupe's Adventure, the first roller coaster in the state.

Once the sun sets, Sunway Lost World Of Tambun vibrates with a different sensation of fun. The biggest draw is the Hot Springs and Spa, where you can soak in 100% natural mineral hot springs sourced from deep caverns underground or pamper yourself at the Crystal Spa, featuring a menu of invigorating therapies. Or simply take in the carnival atmosphere with the Flaming Percussion, featuring fire eaters, jugglers and other photo-worthy performances. Take in the beauty of the enchanting Luminous Forest, a new and exciting attraction opening soon. So, book your holiday now to Sunway Lost World Of Tambun, always more than just a theme park.

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Destination Philippines

A sunny tourism appeal

The Philippines' formidable trio of sun, sand and sea continues to lure travellers from around the world, and inbound agents are using it to drive demand for culture, heritage and culinary programmes, reports **Rosa Ocampo**



Clockwise from above: Boracay island, Philippine; shopping delight at D'Mall in Boracay; a colourful jeepney; a snorkeller shares the underwater world with a large whale shark



The sun-sea-beach trio remains the frontliner of the Philippines' global marketing push as it is the perennial bestseller for all source markets, from Asia and North America to Europe and emerging new markets.

Topbilled by Boracay and Palawan, which are always on the premier list of the world's best islands and beaches, also on the country's beach allures are Cebu, Bohol, Siargao, Siquijor, the list is limitless. The Philippines after all is home to 7,100 islands, many just waiting to be discovered.

Endless beaches and common demand for them make it convenient for the Department of Tourism (DoT) and the private sector to sync their marketing efforts in giving what foreign tourists want, be

it in attending travel trade shows, doing their regular roadshows, print and online media promotions or creating tour packages.

Conveniently, the sun-sea-beach trio can be combined with other destinations and attractions such as cultural, heritage, culinary for an all-around Philippine experience, according to travel agents.

The mainly European clients of Blue Horizons Travel and Tours still opt for the fine white sands of Boracay and Palawan especially El Nido, along with Cebu and Bohol, said its senior sales and marketing manager, Marjorie Aquino.

Mainland Chinese who are coming in droves and Russians who are returning to the Philippines as their economy improves have not dimmed their preference for Bo-

racay, Cebu and other beach destinations, said Luxus Travel general manager Mary Ann Ong. Ditto tourists from South Korea, the US, Canada and India.

Capitalising on the Philippines' rich concentration of marine wildlife and its location at the apex of the Coral Triangle which is the centre of marine biodiversity in the world, the country is also gaining fame as a marine playground, said tourism secretary Wanda Teo.

One of related promotions, Teo said, is the Dive Resort Travel (DRT) Philippine Show in Manila, now entering its fourth year (2018). DRT offers a B2B session with international buyers as well as exhibitions and talks, attracting diving aficionados, marine conservationists and environmentalists. Regular marine-based festivals and competitions are also hosted by Boracay and Siargao, for instance.

Foreign tourists are also taking a shine to marine-based activities such as interaction with whalesharks in Donsol, Sorsogon and interaction with dolphins in certain parts of Bohol and Palawan, underwater photography and snorkeling in Batangas, surfing in Cloud 9 of Siargao, and many more in Negros and other islands in the Visayas.

While the Philippines has a bankable treasure trove of island and beach offerings, Teo said it is also bringing variety by tapping new and emerging destinations including those in Mindanao (areas in Davao, Camiguin, the unusual pink beach of Greater Santa Cruz Island in Zamboanga), Visayas (Romblon, Biliran, Negros Oriental and Negros Occidental), and Luzon (Mindoro, Marinduque, other parts of Palawan outside of El Nido, Coron and Puerto Princes like San Vicente and Bala-bac).

It came as no surprise then that in the 2013 list of upcoming destinations by Isla Lipana & Co., six are sea and beach destinations that are now gaining popularity: the concealed white beach of Calaguas Island in Camarines Norte; Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park in Palawan, a World Heritage Site; Caramoan island in Camarines Sur; Danjugan Island in Negros Occidental; Panglao in Bohol; and Apo Island, the first successful marine sanctuary in Negros Oriental.

Isla Lipana director Raoul Villegas said the Philippines remains at the top of the list for visitors who are looking to enjoy the sand, and beach tourism is "not likely to change".

International cruise ships are also discovering the country's marine bounties, with Boracay and Palawan among the most popular, said tourism undersecretary Benito Bengzon Jr. who continues to market the country in cruise shows and roadshows.

Cruise tourism is paying off for the Philippines. Luxury cruise ship *World Dream* will make its maiden cruise down Hong Kong, Manila, Boracay from November 2017 to March 2018. Other destinations visited by international cruise ships included the Kalanggaman island in Leyte, Hundred Islands in Pangasinan, La Union in northern Luzon, etc.

About 191 ship calls in major ports of the country are projected for 2018, up from an expected 105 port calls in 2017 even as efforts are directed towards building dedicated cruise ship facilities in these destinations.

Building infrastructure is also the need of the other beach and island destinations to make their marketing and promotions even more effective.



Night view of Makati, the business district of Metro Manila



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A large, golden Buddha statue is the central focus of the image. The statue is shown from a low angle, emphasizing its massive scale. A woman in a pink long-sleeved shirt and patterned skirt is standing at the bottom right, reaching up to touch the base of the statue. The background is a soft, hazy sky with warm tones, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall mood is serene and majestic.

Open to The New Shades

New Shades Of Thai Temples

Thai temples are not only open to everyone but they are also open to a diversity of culture, beliefs and architectural styles. You will encounter Buddhist temples with Hindu influences, temples in caves, an all-white temple or, here at Wat Muang, a temple with the biggest Buddha statue in the world.

There are a million shades of Thailand waiting for you to discover. We are open, are you?

amazing
THAILAND

The logo for Amazing Thailand, featuring the word "amazing" in a smaller font above "THAILAND" in a larger, bold font, with a white curved line underneath.

Destination Philippines

Hot stuff

Marriott Manila Hotel

Marriott Manila Hotel has added 228 keys with the opening of its West Wing. With the smallest room at 48m², these newly minted rooms are bigger than the standard size of 36m² of the 570 rooms in the main hotel building.

Valero Grand Suites, Manila

Swiss-Belhotel International has returned to the Philippines with the launch of deluxe Valero Grand Suites in the financial and business hub of Makati. The property features 271 well-appointed rooms and suites, function rooms, gym and spa, restaurants and coffee shops, rooftop swimming pool, and complimentary Wi-Fi.

Rizal Park Hotel, Manila

Rizal Park Hotel now stands in the restored 1898 colonial building that used to be the Manila Army and Navy Club, overlooking Manila Bay. The upmarket boutique hotel has 76 keys, a sky bar and a coffee bar. Coming up in its phase two opening are an infinity pool and gym.

Crimson Resort & Spa Boracay

The 192-key Crimson Resort & Spa Boracay has opened, offering 22 villas with private pools, one-bedroom suites and deluxe rooms as well as the brand's signature Azure Beach Club, Aum Spa, Crimzone Kids Entertainment, three swimming pools, a grand ballroom, events pavilion and meeting rooms.

Seda Atria Hotel, Iloilo City

The 150-key Seda Atria Hotel in Iloilo City boasts deluxe, premier and presidential accommodation. The modern lifestyle hotel is located near the airport, convention centre, Iloilo Business Park, shops and downtown area, making it ideal

for both business and leisure travellers. Facilities include restaurants, e-lounge, gym and function rooms. Free Wi-Fi is offered.

Air Asia

Mindanao in southern Philippines has become more accessible with Air Asia expanding its services from Davao City to other domestic destinations including two daily flights to Cebu, daily flights to Boracay, three weekly flights to Palawan, and four weekly flights to Clark while maintaining its three daily flights to Manila.



From top: Seda Atria Hotel, Iloilo City; Rizal Park Hotel, Manila

Destination in numbers

10.6

The percentage increase in arrivals into the Philippines between January and August 2017 to 4.5 million from 4 million over the same period in 2016

62

In percentage, Asia's market share to total arrivals into the Philippines as a result of brisk inbound demand from China

67.4

The average hotel occupancy in the Philippines for October 2017, a 3.1 percentage point increase as tourism remains resilient in spite of safety and security incidents last year

Surprising theme



Engage in farming activities

Responsible travel

Voluntourism opportunities abound in the Philippines, from social enterprises like the Enchanted Farm in Bulacan and AGREA in Marinduque to reaching out to marginalised communities in mountain regions and other remote areas. Want to be part of it? Just ask the integrated resorts, hotels and resorts, tour operators and domestic airlines which usually have their own CSR activities.

Viewpoints

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

Frank Reichenbach

General manager,
Marco Polo Ortigas



Connecting destinations through better accessibility is important in enabling tourists get around different regions, in a faster and more efficient way. This gives utmost convenience to tourists who would like to explore the country, from capitals to the more exotic locations. These infrastructures are a long term investment that greatly affects the country positively.

Vilma De Claro Mendoza

President, Mart Evers
Travel and Tours



There are two urgent aspects. One, the transportation system which is in a dismal state, beginning with our gateways where our airports lack runways. Also, we need an efficient, inexpensive, safe and people-friendly way of transporting tourists (around). Two, our local governments and national agencies are notorious for overexploiting our natural attractions, such as the indiscriminately developed Puerto Galera and Boracay. The attractions' pristine beauty is killed by too many unnecessary structures built right where the best natural features are, effectively destroying the goose that lays the golden egg.

Features **Airlines**

Malaysia, Philippines get connected

Both full-service and budget carriers push out new and improved routes in 2017 to connect Malaysia and the Philippines with more parts of the world. [S Puvanewary](#) and [Rosa Ocampo](#) compile some of the most crucial updates

**Qatar Airways, Doha-Penang**

Qatar Airways will introduce three weekly flights to Penang beginning February 6, 2018, using the B787 Dreamliner, which features 22 seats in Business Class and 232 seats in Economy Class. It is said to be the first airline to operate a longhaul service to a secondary destination in Malaysia. The new service bodes well for the island which is working hard to boost its business events capabilities.

AirAsia, Johor Bahru-Kolkata

Malaysia's budget carrier AirAsia introduced its first service to India from its southern hub, Johor, on November 28 last year. The five-weekly service flies between Johor Bahru and West Bengal's capital, Kolkata. This is regarded as an important route for Malaysia, as it allows Indian travellers to twin Johor with their ultimate destination, Singapore.

AirAsia, Johor Bahru-Macau

AirAsia commenced direct daily flights between Johor Bahru and Macau on November 28 last year, allowing Macau residents to enjoy Malaysia's southern region without having to go through Kuala Lumpur or Singapore, thus cutting travelling time as well as costs.

AirAsia, Kuching-Langkawi

AirAsia's four-weekly direct flights between Kuching and Langkawi, which commenced on August 9 last year, is a boon to travel agents hoping to promote dual-destination packages. Sarawak (with Kuching as capital city and main gateway)

and Langkawi are especially appealing to Europeans who favour nature and culture. Sarawak boasts two UNESCO World Heritage Sites – Mulu National Park and the Niah National Park – while Langkawi is a UNESCO Global Geopark.

Malindo Air, Kuala Lumpur-Phnom Penh

Malindo Air commenced daily flights between Kuala Lumpur and Phnom Penh on August 1, 2017, providing more seats and timings on this route which is also serviced by AirAsia (thrice daily), Malaysia Airlines (twice daily) and JC International Air (twice weekly). More competition benefits travellers as it will ensure competitive airfares.

AirAsia X, Kuala Lumpur-Honolulu

Malaysia's longhaul budget airline AirAsia X got Malaysian inbound agents excited with the launch of its four-weekly flights to Honolulu, US via Kansai International Airport, on June 28. It gave them new hopes of rebuilding the US arrival market. In 2014 Malaysia Airlines withdrew from the US and Tourism Malaysia followed in early-2017 with the closure of two offices in the US, namely in New York and Los Angeles.

AirAsia, Langkawi-Shenzhen

AirAsia added a second Chinese destination from its hub in Langkawi on June 16 with thrice weekly flights to Shenzhen. The new service proved a hit, especially during the Chinese Golden Week when Chinese consumers flock overseas to spend their lengthy holidays. Chinese travellers were able to travel direct to Langkawi, without having to stop in Kuala Lumpur. The new service is also being leveraged by co-hosts of PATA Travel Mart 2018, Langkawi De-

velopment Authority and Tourism Malaysia, in their promotion of the show to Chinese trade buyers.

AirAsia, Kuching-Pontianak

This new direct daily service from Kuching to Pontianak, Indonesia comes as a timely support for Sarawak's aspirations to attract more medical tourists from Indonesia, its primary market for medical tourism which is also a new niche the NTO has started promoting in 2017. Sarawak Tourism Board sees improved air accessibility as an opportunity to promote medical tourism to those residing in Pontianak. The route was previously monopolised by Indonesia's Xpress Air, which operates daily flights.

AirAsia, Kuala Lumpur-Bhubaneswar

Operating four times a week, this direct flight between Kuala Lumpur and Bhubaneswar became the first international carrier to fly into the capital city of Odisha

state, India. Prior to the opening of this route, travellers from Bhubaneswar and the surrounding areas would have to take flights from Chennai, Mumbai or Kolkata to travel to Malaysia.

**Cebu Pacific, Zamboanga City-Sandakan**

Cebu Pacific pioneered the Zamboanga City-Sandakan route in October, the first Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East Asia Growth Area air service after many years.

AirAsia Philippines, Davao-Kuala Lumpur

AirAsia Philippines made Davao its hub for international flights in Mindanao with the launch of its Davao-Kuala Lumpur flight on December 21. It plans to tap the rest of the Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East Asia Growth Area.

Philippine Airlines, Bangkok and Beijing

Flag carrier Philippine Airlines mounted two nonstop services from Cebu to Bangkok, Thailand (December) and Beijing, China (November), thereby opening the Central Visayas to important Asian markets and saving travellers time and effort by allowing them to skip Manila altogether.

Philippine Airlines, Manila-Kuala Lumpur

After a three-year absence, Philippine Airlines resumed its daily Manila-Kuala Lumpur services on June 8 as the carrier and Malaysia Airlines expanded their code-share arrangement on 12 domestic Malaysian destinations and nine domestic Philippine destinations.

Jetstar Asia, Clark-Singapore

Jetstar Asia is the latest foreign airline to fly from Clark International Airport, mounting a thrice-weekly flight to Singapore on November 28. Meanwhile, another newbie, China Eastern Airlines, started flying from Clark to Shanghai on October 18.





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Analysis

Stretched beyond limits

TAT and Thailand's congested airports are racing against time to cope with soaring tourist arrivals

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

Tourism may be a bright spot for Thailand's economy but the rising tourist arrivals – the country welcomed a record 35 million visitors in 2017 – is putting tremendous pressure on its already-congested airports.

The country's overcrowded airports have long been a bone of contention for travellers and the trade alike.

"We have been talking about Thailand's airport congestion for the past 20 years – and it's not getting better," said Laurent Kuenzle, CEO of Asian Trails.

Flight delays, overcrowding and long immigration queues are common occurrences at Bangkok's main gateways of Suvarnabhumi and Don Mueang international airports, as well as Phuket in the south.

Janejira Vewatanawarangkun, general manager of Diethelm Travel Thailand, commented: "The congestion at both of Bangkok's airports affects nearly every passenger during peak hours or times when the full official workforce is not deployed and scheduled flights unexpect-

edly arrive at the same time, causing long lines at immigration checkpoints."

Airports of Thailand (AoT), which operates six airports and handles about 90 per cent of the air traffic in the country, has pumped 55 billion baht (US\$1.7 billion) into a three-phase expansion at Suvarnabhumi International Airport.

Suvarnabhumi, which began services in 2006, was designed for 45 million people but is already operating past full capacity with 59 million passengers passing through in the 2017 fiscal year. It is finally undergoing a long-delayed expansion, which includes construction of a third runway and a second passenger terminal, to raise its capacity to 90 million passengers by 2021.

Likewise, Don Mueang airport is also bursting at the seams with 34.7 million passengers versus its designed capacity of 30 million. It will undergo another expansion to push up its annual handling capacity to 40 million, but not before 2022.

Phuket airport – the third busiest in Thailand – processed 14.7 million pas-



Supasorn: steps taken to speed up immigration lines



A crowded waiting area at the Suvarnabhumi International Airport

sengers despite its eight million handling capacity. Following the addition of a new international terminal in 2016, a second phase expansion is due for completion this June.

However, the absence of a larger airport in Phuket will remain the single biggest issue for southern Thailand in the next decade, opined C9 Hotelworks' managing director Bill Barnett. The capacity constraints can be overcome either by relocating the existing Phuket airport to a bigger facility or developing a third Andaman gateway in addition to the Phuket and Krabi airports, he urged.

"Currently Khao Lak feeds off the Phuket airport and the growing province (of Phang Nga) needs its own airport," said Barnett, urging "a longer-term vision" from the authorities to cope with the tourist surge into the popular Andaman destinations. "Growth is inevitable and has to be planned for," he added.

Until – and if – Thailand's airports keep up with its soaring arrival numbers, industry stakeholders want antidotes in the

meantime to ease the current bottlenecks.

Automating processes, deploying more immigration officers and exempting visitors from filling out immigration forms are some possible measures to relieve overcrowding, suggested Kuenzle.

Tourism Authority of Thailand's governor Yuthasak Supasorn told *TTG Show Daily* that the Thai Immigration Department has coordinated with related agencies to ease the situation by mobilising staff to open more inbound channels for visa-on-arrival (VoA) passengers, and with the airport authorities to better manage aircraft landing slots. It has also requested support from AoT staff to provide advice and assistance to VoA applicants.

"We would also like to (encourage) all travel agents, tour operators and everyone else handling the travel arrangements of VoA eligible citizens... to get a visa in advance from the Thai diplomatic mission in their country," added Yuthasak.

"It will be well worth the extra time and effort. At least, their visit to Thailand will get off to a smooth start."

News

India's helping hand

Training facilities to welcome ASEAN tourism staff

By Marissa Carruthers

India is offering her extensive network of hospitality and tourism training to South-east Asian nations, in an effort to help the region's tourism workers brush up their skills.

At an ASEAN NTO meeting on Tuesday, D Venkatesan, deputy director general of India's Ministry of Tourism, said: "India has offered to carry out human resource development training for ASEAN, where the countries send people to us to use our extensive network of established hotel management and tourism schools, covering many sectors, as well as our wealth of experience."

He cited the Indian Institute of Skiing and Mountaineering, the Indian Institute of Tourism and Management Training, and the Indian Himalayan Centre for Adventure and Eco-tourism as examples.

Added Venkatesan: "There is a lot of

scope to collaborate."

India is currently hammering out the final plans with Laos, which will be the first country from the ASEAN group to send staff to study. It is hoped this will take place this year, with other countries following suit.

Venkatesan told *TTG Show Daily*: "The finer details need to be worked out, such as how many people from each country and which category of people, and then we can get started."

India is also pushing hard to establish direct flights with South-east Asian countries. He shared that Vietnam has submitted a proposal for a flight connecting Ho Chi Minh City with Delhi, with hopes it will launch this year.

Venkatesan added: "South-east Asia is a big market for India for Buddhist pilgrimages so more flights connecting us to Buddhist countries would be very welcome."



Venkatesan: keen on more air links with SE Asia too

Industry veteran forms hospitality services agency

By S Puvaneswary

Ally Bhoonee, founder of tour specialist World Avenues Malaysia, has expanded his portfolio to include hotel and resort management services through the establishment of a new company, WA Hospitality Management in Kuala Lumpur, of which he is the company director.

WA will provide services such as market study and impact analysis, strategy development, hotel positioning, financial planning and cash flow projections, marketing planning, pre-opening scheduling and procurement.

Some of the first clients are Langkasuri and DYKS Holdings. With Langkasuri, WA has signed a three-year contract to manage Camar Resort in Langkawi, a 90-key, four-star business class beach hotel which will begin operations in March 2018.

With DYKS Holdings, WA will manage the 150-room, four-star Kensington Hotel Kuala Lumpur, and the four-star casino Morow Hotel in Siem Reap. Both properties are scheduled to open in 2020.

Ally, who has been in the travel and tourism industry for more than three decades, said: "Expanding the business into hospitality is a natural progression. The travel industry is saturated with small profit margins and massive competition from online travel agents. On the other hand, South-east Asia's hotel industry is booming."

He hopes to grow the company's hotel

management services in the region, and is closely watching Vietnam and Myanmar for opportunities to manage hotels there.

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TTG Show Daily pictorial special

Take an in-depth look at ATF's comings and goings in this three-page spread by *TTG Show Daily's* lensmen, *Yingyong Unanongrak*



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Ministry of Tourism Government of India's D Venkatesan



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Sabah Convention Bureau's Gordon Yapp and Sabah Tourism Board's Normegawati Sapian



Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic Indonesia's Wibanarto Eugenius



The Royal Thai Customs' Arpapannee Sangmukda



Thailand delegation with Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau's Wiparat Tharateerapab (fourth from left)



Kyushu Sangyo University Japan's Ryoji Maeshima, Gyeongju Convention & Visitors Bureau's Yung-ho Park, BestCities US' Paul Vallee, Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau's Supawan Teerarat, Sarawak Convention Bureau's Amelia Roziman, Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau's Wiparat Tharateerapab and Index Creative Village Thailand's Kreingkrai Kanjanapokin



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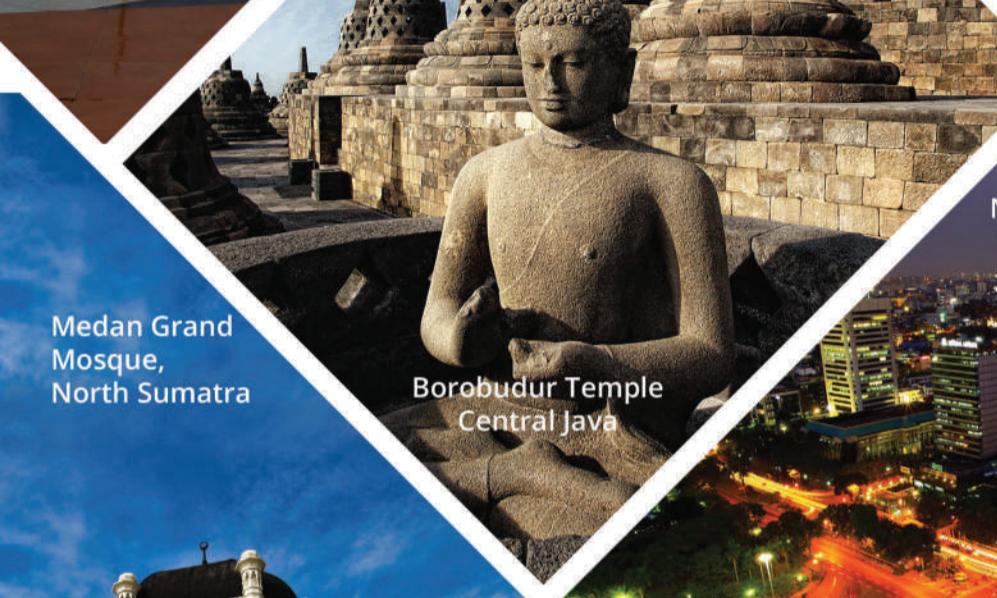
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