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TAT outlines 2012 strategy

Renewed hope in post-election Thailand

By Sirima Eamtako
BANGKOK The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) will continue to market the country using the Amazing Thailand Always Amazes You branding for its next fiscal year, albeit with new market-specific messages and a more aggressive digital marketing strategy. It is currently seeking approval for a bigger budget from the Thai government, which will be undergoing a transition following this week's election results.

Commencing October, the NTO plans to reinforce the existing theme with two key messages – one highlighting culture and beaches for the US and European markets, and the other focusing on Thai hospitality, cuisine and shopping for Asian markets.

While key markets remain unchanged, TAT plans to zoom in on those with high growth potential, including Russia, India, China and Indonesia.

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Steve Kleinschmidt

For such an established brand with a namesake that symbolises exploration, Marco Polo Hotels has been mild. But all that is changing, its president tells **Raini Hamdi** – see page 6

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China FITs throng Taiwan

New chapter in cross-strait travel as relaxed visa rules kick in

By Prudence Lui

HONG KONG Agents on both sides are eager to tap the new market of individual travellers from mainland China to Taiwan, but have raised concerns of the island's ability to cope with the booming demand.

From June 28, Chinese tourists from Shanghai, Beijing and Xiamen can travel to Taiwan without needing to join a group. However, there is a quota of 500 arrivals per day and eligible travellers must apply through 33 designated agents.

Market leaders like Taiwan-based Lion Travel have established a B2B website, round-the-

clock hotline service and various itineraries such as everyday bus tours with a driver/guide. Xiamen C&D Travel has also come up with five itineraries ranging from four to six days. Its four-day Taipei package includes a direct flight and five-star hotel stay.

Industry players said the price tag of FIT travel could be between 20 and 100 per cent more compared to group tour rates.

Shanghai Airlines Tours International (Group) event management manager Tony Chen noted that the travel experience was not entirely a FIT one, as tourists still faced booking restrictions. However, this would help to keep

numbers under control.

Swire Travel Taiwan general manager Norman Meng added: "Even though FIT visas are currently only extended to three cities, this is still a large market share, and we need more hotels for future growth. The FIT market is expected to grow steadily and be extended to more cities."

Indeed, key cities like Guangzhou are likely to be next on the list. Guangzhou-based Dongfang International Travel Service marketing and sales centre director Joe Zhong said: "Our concern is accommodation, as the island is short of hotel rooms, from budget to luxury ones."

Sri Lanka's Asian arrivals offset decline in longhaul

By Feizal Samath

COLOMBO Rising numbers of tourists from Asia are making up for the soft demand from the West, with Sri Lanka registering a growth in overall arrivals in May despite a drop in travellers from the UK, the country's second largest market.

Hoteliers from upscale brands had expected a drop in arrivals in May but were surprised by the 39 per cent growth, which they later attributed to Indians staying in smaller hotels and homes.

Said John Keells Holdings executive vice president and head of destination management sector Vasantha Leelananda: "There is a huge trade and VFR (visiting friends and relatives) traffic from India. They don't come through the usual leisure travel package."

In May, Sri Lanka recorded a 0.4 per cent decline in UK arrivals, while Indian arrivals rose by 56 per cent. Up until last year, the UK was the country's biggest source market. By regions, Asian travellers totalled 143,367 against 126,367 from Western Europe for the first five months of this year.

Abbas Esufally, managing di-



Esufally: spike in room rates

rector, Hemas Hotels, said that while May and June were generally weak months for visitors from the West, escalating hotel rates have also become a dampener.

Leelananda explained that rates had skyrocketed under a minimum pricing scheme enforced by the government in April. Five-star hotel rates are now over US\$165 (inclusive of tax) per night compared to US\$60-US\$90 last year.

"Europe is still going through an economic crisis and longhaul travel has been affected by the fuel surcharge," he added.

Michael Elias, managing director, Walkers Tours, said longhaul airfares had also become more competitive, with those to Thailand being cheaper.

However, Jetwing Tours managing director Shiromal Cooray expects to see a pick-up in longhaul soon. "We see a rise in bookings from British visitors for July," she said.

Continued from page 1

Targets attainable, says Thai travel trade

Members of the travel trade were optimistic about TAT's road map, adding that the tourism industry was poised to grow further, barring any post-election drama.

Thaisinn Express president Anake Srishevachart said: "If the Thai political situation remains

calm, the tourism industry can expect to see the growth rate in the first six months continue to improve in the months ahead."

Phornsiri Manoharn, former TAT governor and now advisor to TAT's board, said: "I believe Thailand can achieve 19.5 mil-

lion visitors next year, as the new government is likely to introduce a pro-tourism policy."

The Pheu Thai Party won the majority of parliament seats in Sunday's closely-watched election and will likely form a new coalition government.

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Analysis of 2011 Event

- The overall exhibition space grew to 16,500 sqm from 12,000 sqm. the previous year.
- A total of 597 exhibitors exhibited an increase of 34.17% of exhibitors over the last year.
- A total of 6,403 buyers visited the event a rise of 17% over the previous year.
- Buyers were hosted from over 33 countries and 80 cities.

Highlights for 2012

- SATTE is India's leading and longest established event serving the domestic, outbound and inbound markets and is now in its 19th year.
- SATTE 2012 is going to be biggest ever, with over 600 exhibitors and a target to increase participation to over 50 countries, making SATTE by far the largest Travel & Tourism event in South Asia.
- SATTE 2012 will have more domestic, outbound and international buyers and sellers than ever before.
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Doubts on air link boost

Trade mixed on more flights between Indonesia and Australia

By Mimi Hudoyo

JAKARTA The 70 per cent increase in air passenger capacity between Indonesia and Australia, while generally well-received, has also raised some concerns. Both countries signed an MoU last month to increase capacity from the current 14,800 to 25,000 seats per week.

Ministry of Culture and Tourism director general of tourism marketing Sapta Nirwandar said: "We can expect to increase the number of Australian tourists visiting Bali and beyond – to Lombok, East Nusa Tenggara and North Sulawesi."

Meanwhile, Association of the Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies, West Nusa Tenggara chapter chairman, Awan Aswinabawa said: "Australia currently contributes about 20 per cent of arrivals to Lombok. We hope that with the Lombok International Airport opening at the end of this year, we will get flights to Lombok from Australia, be it through Bali or direct."

Garuda Indonesia senior general manager, Australia/Southwest Pacific, Bagus Y. Siregar, said

Passenger capacity

70

Percentage increase in seat allotment between Indonesia and Australia

the MoU would also help support its growth, as the carrier aims to provide Australians with greater access to key cities throughout Asia via its Jakarta hub.

Some remain cautious, however. Marintur executive director Ismail Ali said: "Australia's economy is strong and the relations between both countries are positive at the moment, but we need to be careful not to be overly dependent on one market. A dominance of one market may also drive away other markets."

Another issue is that much of the added capacity is likely to go

to Bali, which is seen as nearing its limit. A number of airlines are already intending to up their Australia-Bali frequencies.

The Seminyak, Bali director of sales and marketing Gufron explained that while Australian demand for the island was still growing, "the government needs to prepare infrastructure to enable tourists to disperse to areas other than South Bali".

Australia-based @Leisure Travel & Tours owner Jonathan Chadwick said: "I can't see any need (for such a big capacity increase). There is oversupply now. It must be at its peak capacity (between Perth and Bali). There are currently five airlines flying daily, and we only have a population of 1.75 million."

He added that Indonesia faced added competition in Perth, with the new non-stop flights to Kota Kinabalu and Phuket.

Said Chadwick: "Decision makers do not realise you have to fill the planes in both directions to make it viable. Another question that should be asked is: 'Are there enough Indonesians wanting to visit Australia each week?'"

Singapore outbound slows

By Linda Haden

SINGAPORE Natural disasters in New Zealand, Australia and Japan, coupled with unrest in the Middle East, have dampened outbound travel from Singapore in the first half of 2011. However, travel agents are positive about a comeback.

Agents reported a decline of 10 to 40 per cent in bookings for the first six months compared to the same period last year.

Stella Chow, manager, outbound tours, Hong Thai Travel Services, said: "Singaporeans were hit by an avalanche of uncertainty in the first six months of 2011, and as a result, many decided to scrap their travel plans."

"The earthquake in Japan occurred just before the peak March-April *sakura* season. It could not have come at a worst time. In the aftermath, outbound bookings to Japan came to a virtual standstill."

The drop in Japan bookings also had a domino effect on nearby destinations. Michael Chan, managing director, Global Holidays, said: "Singaporeans are a cautious lot, and once governments issued warnings about a risk of radiation leakage and poisoning, we saw dips not only

for Japan, but for South Korea, Taiwan and China as well."

Chow added that another reason for the decline could be the uncertainty of when Singapore's general election was to be held.

Business in April and May, traditionally busy months for the travel trade, was "sluggish and slow", according to Chan.

Alicia Seah, senior vice president (marketing & PR), CTC Travel, said: "Bookings for the June holiday period were a huge disappointment."

It is not all doom and gloom though. "We are seeing a remarkable surge in bookings out of Singapore to Europe because of the weakening euro," said Robin Yap, managing director, Insight Vacations, adding that the strengthening Singapore dollar was also stimulating travel to the US.

Goh Chay Huat, managing director, Seiki Travel, added that bookings were "sort of back to normal". He is noticing pockets of recovery, with Europe showing the most promise.

Chow believes there will be double-digit growth in bookings in the second half of 2011. "There is definitely a lot of pent-up demand for agents to capitalise upon."

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Hot Moves

Richard Hartman steps down as Millennium & Copthorne CEO; Business Events Sydney appoints Lyn Lewis-Smith as acting CEO

EU over-reaches its authority, jurisdiction



Andrew Herdman, director general, Association of Asia Pacific Airlines, based in Kuala Lumpur,

says the European Union (EU) has 'over-reached' its authority with its planned inclusion of international airline emissions within the EU Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) from 2012

The scheme has provoked strong objections from international airlines and foreign governments (TTG Asia, June 10, 2011). In the eyes of many foreign governments, the EU, in taking such unilateral action, is over-reaching its authority and jurisdiction, in contravention of international treaties and bilateral aviation agreements.

Such arguments form the basis of ongoing legal challenges, including a test case being brought by a number of US carriers that was heard by the European Court of Justice on July 5.

Some foreign governments are also considering retaliatory trade measures targeting European interests.

As an industry, we are commit-

ted to ambitious environmental goals. We also believe there is a role for economic measures, including carbon markets.

However, in order to be effective in mitigating emissions from international aviation, such measures need to be globally

"The last thing we need is a trade war. Tit-for-tat measures would only add to the burden on the airline industry and the travelling public, without achieving any environmental benefit."

coordinated, by governments working together, preferably on a multilateral basis through the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

The last thing we need is a trade war. Tit-for-tat measures would only add to the burden on

the airline industry and the travelling public, without achieving any environmental benefit.

The EU has responded to foreign criticism of its self-appointed role as the world's tax collector-in-chief by offering to consider partial exemptions from the EU ETS if other governments introduce 'equivalent measures'.

However, there has been no indication as to how such equivalence might be determined or the processes involved.

In any case, there is a danger that the potential proliferation of a variety of national measures would only add further complexity, without being environmentally effective.

The EU has over-reached and underestimated the political price it will have to pay if it insists on pressing ahead with this scheme in its current form.

It needs to fundamentally rethink its whole approach. Simply put, the EU should modify its plans for the EU ETS by limiting its application to only cover flights within Europe.

This might at least mollify international opinion and hopefully avoid the inevitable damage which would result from continued legal challenges and retaliatory trade measures.

Most commented on
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Spain's savvy online focus

OUR story on June 23, about the Tourism Office of Spain launching several online initiatives as part of its I Need Spain marketing campaign, had our readers applauding the NTO's web-based drive to attract overseas visitors.

Bali-based Ketut Sedanartha said: "It is time to minimise costs as far as we can manage. Congratulations to Spain!"

Value triumphs over pricing

IN OUR Ask the Expert column on what hotels and travel agents can do to avoid price wars, Manila's John Eric Mendoza pointed out that the problem was not only "with the price wars of rates", but having to deal with online booking engines.

Pudong Shangri-La, Shanghai director of revenue management Ofelia Blanco replied: "Yes, price wars are also fought in this arena, but they are transitory. The value of your product in the minds of those who have stayed with you – this remains. People who post positive comments on the web about your product help to influence buyers' behaviour. Not all buyers look at the price alone in their decisions as many would have you believe. Quality rates high on the list too."

Numbers that matter

19.5 The visitor arrival figure in millions that the Tourism Authority of Thailand is targeting in 2012, through its Amazing Thailand Always Amazes You marketing campaign. The NTO's 2012 revenue target is 760 billion baht (US\$25 billion).

42 The number of Sheraton-branded properties that Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide is hoping to have in its China portfolio by year-end, an increase of seven hotels.

10 The cost in US dollars of the seven-day visa for visitors to Batam, Bintan, Karimun and Tanjung Pinang in Indonesia. As of July 1, it will be made available to all travellers.

200 AirAsia stunned the airline industry at the Paris Air Show with the announcement of an order for 200 new Airbus A320neo aircraft, making it the biggest airline customer for the Airbus single aisle product line worldwide.

TTG Asia's memories of founder Mike Annetts

SINGAPORE TTG Asia Media mourns the demise of Mike Annetts, its founder and former managing director.

Annetts passed away from a heart attack last month in Gold Coast, Australia. He was 72.

Former TTG Asia editor Yeoh Siew Hoon said: "Mike was the man who brought TTG Asia to the region and gave me my break in travel journalism, the one who gave me that first job back in Kuala Lumpur as correspondent for TTG Asia."

"I don't think Mike got the



credit he ought to for bringing an English travel trade newspaper out to Asia in those days, when the travel industry was just developing, and Asia was an infinitely foreign market," she added.

Darren Ng, managing director, TTG Asia Media, remembers Annetts as "a very focused, hands-on person when it came to editorials".

"But we remember him more as a polished gentleman who had a presence, a lot of gravitas about him and one who certainly enjoyed a tippie every Friday," Ng said.

TTG Asia Media's general manager, exhibitions/events, Ooi Peng Ee, added: "Mike was a quiet man, but whatever few words of wisdom he shared with you, you could be sure of its lasting impact. His guiding principles still serve as my compass as I navigate the challenges of the business. He will be missed."



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Travel Hall of Fame

The Travel Hall of Fame, displayed in the Raffles Hotel Museum on the third level of Raffles Hotel Singapore, showcases accolades, artefacts and memorabilia of the region's most exceptional travel organisations.

Since 2002, luminaries who have won the prestigious TTG Travel Award at least 10 times have been conferred the title of Travel Hall of Fame Honorary.

Singapore Airlines and Singapore Changi Airport are the Travel Hall of Fame's pioneering honorees, having been voted by Asia-Pacific's travel trade as Best Airline of the Year and Best Airport of the Year respectively, for more than a decade. Hertz Asia-Pacific joined this elite family in 2005. Recently inducted were Star Cruises, Royal Cliff Beach Resort Pattaya, Abacus International and SilkAir.





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BEST WESTERN WELCOMES ASIAN TRAVELERS

By David Kong, President & CEO of Best Western International

As the World's Largest Hotel Chain®, Best Western International must keep a close watch on global travel trends. One of the biggest and most positive travel trends in the last few years has been the increased impact of Asian travelers.

I grew up in Asia – Hong Kong – so I know what a large and diverse continent this is. To give you a sense of its scale and potential, consider this: the United States and Canada are among the world's largest countries in terms of land mass. Yet between the two countries, only 13 cities have more than 1 million residents. China alone has well over 100 cities with populations topping 1 million.

It's no surprise that the United States Department of Commerce predicts that the U.S. will see an 82 % visitor increase from Asia between 2010 and 2016. Much of this growth is fueled by the region's growing middle class, especially China's. Many will be traveling for the first time.

As a hotel chain that operates in 90 countries, Best Western understands that expectations for travel are set at the brand level. All Best Western hotels, whether in Thailand or Tanzania, the United Arab Emirates or the United States, must adhere to a set of basic global standards to ensure our guests have a comfortable stay. These standards are backed by a global quality assurance program where inspectors confirm that every Best Western hotel delivers on our brand promise of quality, service and value.

The other key to tapping into the Asian travel market is to ensure that the process for visiting our countries is without burden. This is a real issue for the United States as visitors from some countries must wait as long as 100 days for U.S. visas. This is unacceptable. For years, we have been advocating for reform to the visa-granting process. President Obama and his administration are committed to improving the visa policy, which is good news for all of us.



THE WORLD'S LARGEST HOTEL CHAIN®

Steve Kleinschmidt President Marco Polo Hotels

For such an established brand with a namesake that symbolises exploration, Marco Polo Hotels has been mild. But all that is changing, Kleinschmidt tells **Raini Hamdi**

Exploring again

The brand's history goes back to the '60s, yet it hasn't grown aggressively, why?

Yes, it has been very quiet. There was not too much going on in the mid-'90s; obviously the financial crisis, SARS, etc, slowed things down. But the company was profitable with strong hotels in key markets and there wasn't a tremendous amount of pressure to grow beyond that. But with the new pipeline (11 hotels, all in China except one each in Manila, the Philippines, and Mission Beach Australia), we see there is potential to be more aggressive in growing the brand. It's the reason why I came onboard (in October 2007).

What's your growth strategy?

To focus on gateway cities in Asia-Pacific. We're not interested in jumping to Europe and the US. Most of our growth has been in China and the Philippines. China will continue to be important but we must be in South-east Asia, Singapore in particular, as it's a huge feeder market of both corporate and leisure travel for us for Hong Kong and China, and vice versa. Our brand is very known in China and China is an important market for Singapore, so if we have a hotel here or in any of the South-east Asian cities, the brand familiarity will work wonders for us.

So we're looking at existing hotels to re-flag that would be consistent with the new Marco Polo.

Describe the 'new' Marco Polo.

All of our new hotels owned by us (i.e. parent Wharf Holdings, Hong Kong) in China are five-star-plus, three of them with sky lobbies and super-towers, with guestrooms 45m² in size. They are very upmarket, so we have to be careful somewhat that what we flag is consistent with these.

We would love to have an opportunity where the hotel is part of a broader mixed-use development, where there is significant amount of luxury retail at the podium level, as that's our sweet spot.

Historically, we know pretty well how to leverage the relationship between luxury retail and hotel accommodation with Wharf as landlord, our chairman Peter Woo and some of the private investments controlling some of the luxury brands, and a subsidiary that is an expert in leasing and securing retail brands.



"We are seeing the vulnerability of multinational brands."

Wharf's reputation and expertise in the area is certainly a reason why owners talk to us.

So is Marco Polo Wuhan your flagship?

Only in terms of the prototype we're developing, not in terms of location. It's just won China's Most Competitive Business Hotel Award and is the number one RevPAR performer, a position it attained within five months of opening. In fact, we are the market leader in many markets where we're surrounded by multinational brands.

How did you beat them to it?

Right hotel, right price, right location, right time. Coming out of the (2008) financial crisis, our hotels in Wuhan and Shenzhen were able to exploit their location by being price competitive in relation to the market. The multi-

national brands were relying on corporate travel particularly out of Europe and the US when it was not palatable to be staying in five-star-plus hotels. We were able to move in and secure international market share.

There seems to be a resurgence of regional brands – Regent being resuscitated by Steven Pan, Rosewood bought by Sonia Cheng, Marco Polo being aggressive again. What do you think is happening?

With our company and other regional brands, particularly those that own hotel assets, we are seeing the vulnerability of the multinational brands. They have had a tremendous opportunity to grow, particularly in places like China, and the pace of development in these companies in some cases has spread them thinly. It is difficult to maintain a tight supervision and control

when you are adding a significant number of properties on an annual basis. I would say in some cases, properties were added to the portfolio that did not meet brand standards.

We think regional companies like us, with upwards of 30 hotels, 50 per cent of which we own, can maintain consistency. We can manage our size without curtailing growth and that's an advantage. We don't have high staff turnover the way other large companies may have.

I also think regional brands, not unlike the independent boutiques, have a greater ability to establish rapport and intimacy with guests. Developing that loyalty can be easier. We're unique with our individual design whereas with the large multinational brands, the hotels start to look pretty similar. This can be an advantage if the customer base wants consistency but customer preferences are changing: people want something unique and they want to be recognised.

That's easy to say when you're still at 10 hotels in operation, but as you grow bigger, won't you too suffer the same 'vulnerability'?

There are multinational brands that have been able (to avoid the pitfall) – my compliments to a brand such as Hyatt, which has retained its identity in the face of excellent growth. It has clear segmentation and 'Hyatt' is always an integral part of the brand name, with the exception of Andaz. But overall, they have done an effective job of managing growth and identity.

So the biggest mistakes the multinationals are making are...

Too many brands that overlap each other in terms of quality level, unclear segmentation and questionable location. As a result, the consumer market is confused.

What's your growth target?

When I came onboard, we set a target of 30 hotels by 2016 – and that includes both opened and in the pipeline – and we're well ahead of this target. At the end of this process, we'll likely be 50 per cent owned and 50 per cent management contract. That's the balance we want to maintain. We think we have a competitive advantage when we sit in front of an owner and say we also own hotels, not just manage. It enables us to see both sides of the fence.

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PLUS PREMIER

From FIT to groups

Agency involves tour wholesalers in retail to give product advice

HONG KONG Travel Expert, one of the city's fastest-growing agents, has taken a significant step beyond its usual area of FIT expertise to pioneer what it refers to as a 'store-in-store' concept, with the aim of growing its tour business.

To better cater to groups, the agency is dedicating tour desks at its retail outlets that are managed by staff from its wholesale partners Jetour Holiday (China) and Charming Holidays.

Managing director Iras Ko said: "All their travel consultants have hands-on information, owing to their roles as tour guide experts. Thus, their knowledge and skills ensure that clients' queries are answered instantly and professionally."

The 'store-in-store' concept has already swung into action at Travel Expert's Mongkok flagship store, with Jetour Holiday (China) and Charming Holiday each providing one staff member. Its Sha Tin and Sheung Shui locations are also scheduled to have group tour travel desks soon.



Ko: store-in-store retail concept

These desks focus on longhaul tours to Europe and the US, as well as some countries in South-east Asia.

Said Ko: "This concept is a new marketing idea for the industry. We had first discussed it with our partners way back in 2003. The idea was shelved after the SARS (epidemic), but we had always hoped to bring this concept into our stores. We want to be able to provide a one-stop shop (service), similar to a department store."

"I am confident this concept will work because even before implementing the 'store-in-store' idea, we observed a stable rise in demand for group tour packages in the last decade."

She said while the company had done well for shorthaul FIT packages, locals preferred to join tours for longhaul trips.

"With our expertise in FIT packages, some clients do come to us for group tour travel, mostly for longhaul trips," added Ko.

Celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, Travel Expert has the largest network in Hong Kong, with 51 branches spread across various locations, in shopping arcades, business areas, MTR stations and residential estates. It is expected to open nine more branches by year-end.

The agency is aiming to create an accessible network, similar to the business model of convenience stores, explained Ko.

Travel Expert has also started to pursue the cruise segment, and recently opened its second Cruise Centre. – **Prudence Lui**

Spain's online campaign

MUMBAI After launching a promotional website last month targeting tourists as part of its I Need Spain marketing campaign, the destination's NTO is now planning to start a dedicated website for the trade.

Tourism Office of Spain, Mumbai director Miguel Nieto-Sandoval, said: "The Spain Ad-dicts website is a kind of private network for Spain supporters. We will launch a new website in August for the trade. Travel trade members can log on using their password to access detailed information of the destination."

The NTO also launched a dedicated Facebook page targeting the India market on June 2.

Sandoval said: "India is an emerging market for Spain, the third most important in Asia, after Japan and China."

"We felt the need (for the page), as more and more people here are using social networking sites to communicate. It will also help build brand awareness and educate people about Spain."

The Spain in India Facebook

page offers regular updates on events, festivals, music, trade fairs, food and other interesting information on Spain, and will also run regular contests for its visitors.

Meanwhile, the Tourism Office of Spain is planning to work closely with the Indian travel trade over the next months.

Sandoval said: "We'll have personalised visits to individual offices in Mumbai and Delhi, and conduct training for staff. Bengaluru and Chennai might also be included for this."

The NTO has also engaged in joint marketing activities with the upcoming Bollywood film, *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara*, due for release on July 15.

According to Sandoval: "The plot was Spain-related and it was filmed entirely in Spain over two months. It connects with the destination."

Spain saw an almost 50 per cent increase in traffic from India for the first half of 2011, according to IATA statistics. – **Anand and Madhura Katti**



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Reliance Travel's flagship store at a popular Kuala Lumpur mall exceeds expectations



PRESENCE Reliance Travel has a good location – next to the escalator on the third floor of Sungei Wang Plaza. It is brightly lit, clean and inviting.

As you enter, there is a travel library to the right, where the agency keeps its best-selling outbound brochures. On the other end of the room, there are three small TV screens on the walls, each showing videos of different destinations.

Posters and buntings highlighting the latest promotions are strategically placed to ensure maximum visibility. The agency's signage is also clearly displayed.

APPEARANCE Travel consultants are smartly dressed in uniforms. The men wear long-sleeved white shirts adorned with light blue pattern in front and dark blue pants. The women are similarly outfitted in long-sleeved white blouses, also with the same light blue pattern, and dark blue skirts. It is obvious that the staff's personal appearance has been well thought of.

The consultants appear cheerful



behind their large, white island service counters, each of which are equipped with a telephone and a computer.

EASE The waiting area is comfortable, with plush cushioned chairs and a thick carpet. It can accommodate around 15 people at a time. The chairs are arranged in a horseshoe position, making it easy for customers to interact. A table in the middle is also stacked with brochures. There are seven large island counters with a few chairs each. This is good for groups who may want to discuss their travel plans.

SUGGESTIONS Coming up with ways to improve this retailfront is challenging, as it seems to have everything in place. The only recommendation I can think of is for its management to reach out more to shoppers who flock to Sungei Wang Plaza daily, with cheap weekend promotions to nearby destinations. This can be done through window displays.

Since it has a spacious outlet, the company could also consider introducing its own brand of travel-related merchandise such as watches, luggage tags and travel pillows for additional revenue. – **S Puvaneswary**

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Four major players respond to **Raini Hamdi** on their brand, growth in Asia-Pacific and increasing agent contribution

Paul Kerr
CEO
Small Luxury Hotels of the World (SLH)



527 members in more than 70 countries

** SLH is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. It had 70 hotels in 12 countries when it started in 1991*

We do not have any sub-brands; we do exactly what we say on the tin – our hotels are all small, with an average of 50 rooms.
One of our strengths is the diversity of hotels in our portfolio: we have everything from luxury safari tents, to cutting-edge design hotels, to stately homes, chateaux and working sheep farms.
Nearly 40 per cent of our properties are city-centre sanctuaries. Just over one-third are resorts and 30 per cent are country houses.

- Asia-Pacific – 118 hotels
- Europe/Middle East/Africa – 316 hotels
- Americas – 93 hotels

Sixty-seven per cent of our bookings (year-to-date 2011) are made through the GDS. Although we have seen a small decrease over the past five years, this figure has remained steady and travel agents are invaluable to the success of our business.
The Internet is also an increasingly important booking channel for us now, and we have invested heavily in our website, slh.com. Travel agents can also make bookings through our website.

We appointed a sales representative agency in India at the beginning of the year and we are about to appoint a representative in China. We are focusing on China and India this year, both in terms of targeting domestic and outbound travellers and also growing our portfolio of properties.
We attended SATTE in New Delhi in January and ILTM Asia in June. We have a dedicated travel agents' website and our hotels often offer extremely favourable commission deals.
To help our industry partners plan their clients' travels, we have just launched a series of custom-made itineraries, as well as regional promotions including advance purchase offers, complimentary nights and low-season promotions. We have just launched a whole new range of seasonal tactical offers, including Summer Savings by SLH.

We have 118 properties in the Asia-Pacific region, with another 10 targeted to join the brand in the next 12 months. There is still a huge potential for us in this region, including some key gateway cities we are targeting. However, we only accept five per cent of hotels that apply to join the brand because we believe in quality over quantity.
The growth in the number of boutique hotels will continue because many hotel owners are looking for a way to maintain their independence while enjoying the benefits of scale and global reach of being part of a brand like SLH.

Roland Jegge
Vice president, Asia-Pacific
Worldhotels



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- The US – approximately 70 members
- Europe – more than 250 members

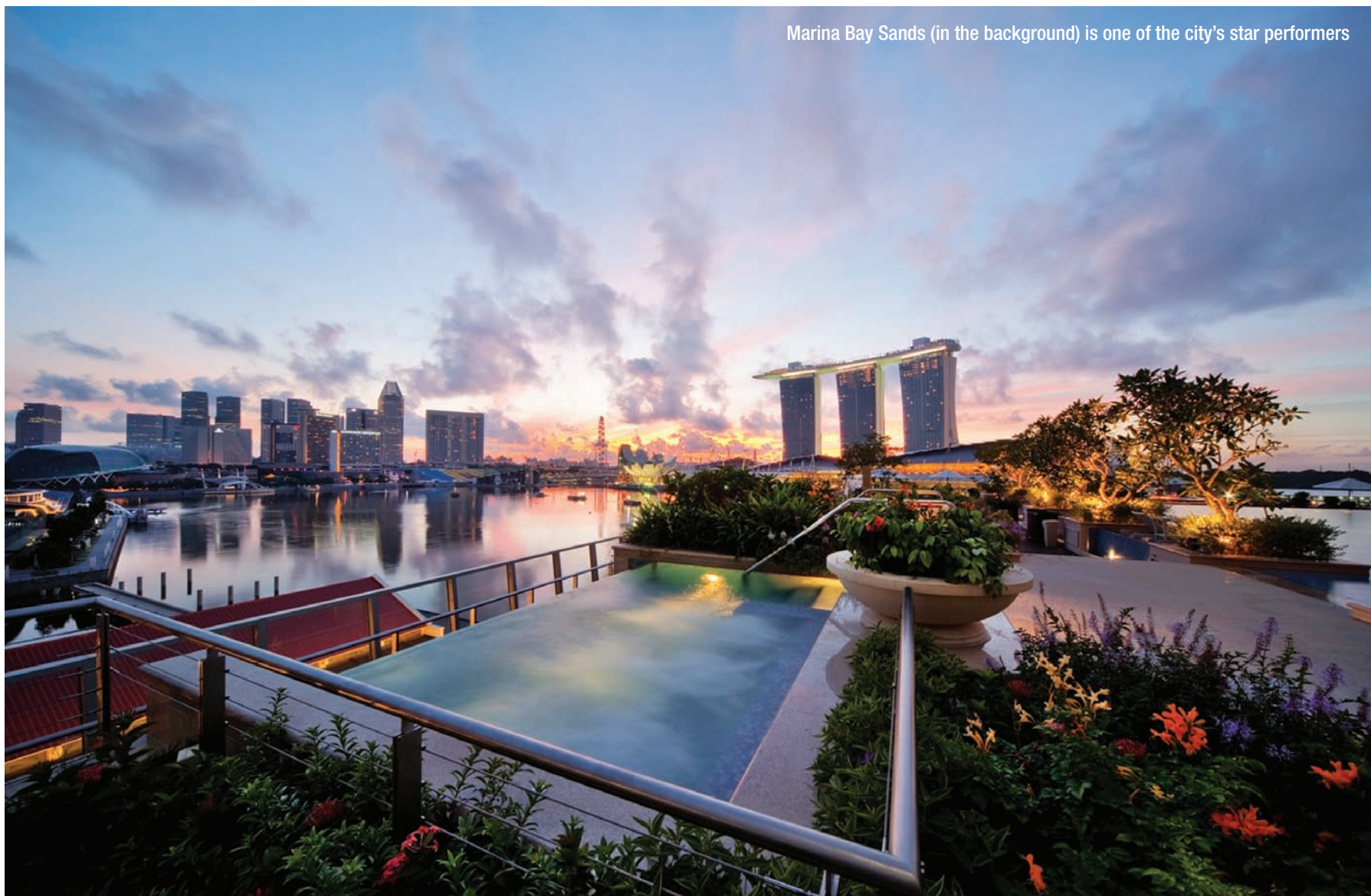
Worldhotels works closely with travel agents for both corporate and transient business; they form 65 per cent of our total business. Last year saw a 15 per cent growth in their contribution. This year, we are projecting a 20 per cent growth.

Asian markets are the fastest-growing across the global regions. Our streamlined operations allow us to initiate timely responses to the market.
We have established a strong sales presence through our Shanghai office. In addition, we recently opened an office in New Delhi, which allows us to springboard more activities and initiatives.
We have rolled out a number of strategies including Spider, a state-of-the-art SEO and SEM platform.
A close collaboration with our affiliates further enhances reach and opportunity as we engage our clients with our proposition which includes stellar properties, attractive value-adds, special agent rates, increased commissions, fams to experience our properties first-hand and enhanced communication through newsletters/social media.

More hotel owners want to break away from the chains and create unique and creative concepts for their properties. More customers want a genuine and authentic experience.
But the industry, while dynamic, is also highly demanding, and agencies are faced with not only a shortage of staff, but high staff turnover. So constant education is required to ensure they are updated.
In addition, as we break into traditional markets, there is the issue of changing mindsets and migrating them from the traditional voucher-driven channels to electronic platforms where the opportunity exists.
Asia-Pacific, while having the highest growth potential, is still fragmented with markets growing and adopting changes at differing paces. Then again, its potential is great and unrivalled.

“As we break into traditional markets, there is the issue of changing mindsets and migrating them (agents) from the traditional voucher-driven channels to electronic platforms where the opportunity exists.”

Roland Jegge
Vice president, Asia-Pacific
Worldhotels



Marina Bay Sands (in the background) is one of the city's star performers

Courtesy of The Fullerton Bay Hotel Singapore

Setting its sights high

With growth in the bag, buzzwords in the city are luxury and boutique, says **Linda Haden**

Arrivals

Singapore is on a roll, judging from recent statistics published by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB). Between January and April, the island-nation welcomed 3.1 million visitors, up 15.7 per cent year-on-year. Revenue gains were just as impressive, increasing by 35.7 per cent to S\$5 billion (US\$4 billion).

Asia generated the bulk of visitors, accounting for 74.5 per cent of total arrivals. North Asia was the best performer, with a notable 26 per cent increase, fuelled chiefly by an influx of visitors from Hong Kong and China.

Robert Khoo, CEO, National Association of Travel Agents Singapore, noted that numbers from emerging ASEAN markets – Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar – were also on the rise.

Confidence is high, and the general sentiment is that STB's 2011 objective of S\$22-24 billion in tourism receipts and 12-13 million in visitor arrivals will be comfortably met.

Client mix

Agents have reported seeing a jump in the number of customers with

high-end requests, and many have revitalised their luxury product lines.

In April, Traveller DMC added new offerings to its Premium Choice collection. The line-up now includes celebrity restaurants and Segway eco-adventure tours. Executive director Yvonne Low said response had been favourable, with clients coming from Hong Kong, India, the Middle East and South-east Asia.

City DMC marketing manager Isabella Hon also noticed a spike in the number of discerning Chinese customers. "The Chinese have definitely upped their tastes – they now desire more upmarket leisure activities and are willing to fork out for customised experiences," she said.

NTO

Digital has been at the heart of STB's YourSingapore marketing campaign since its launch last year, and the NTO is continuing to beef up its arsenal of online marketing tools.

The interactive YourSingapore website now has a sister mobile app. Introduced in May, it offers city information and allows users to share their holiday experience through social media channels. Trade partners can provide rel-



"There has to be a balance. We cannot rely on just a single segment (high-yield tourists) to drive the tourism industry."

Robert Khoo

CEO
National Association of
Travel Agents Singapore

evant content, offer privileges or have their own apps integrated onto the platform.

The Singapore government also announced last month it would set aside S\$15 million for the development of apps for the hotels and attractions, retail and F&B sectors. STB will be framing how mobile solutions can help the industry, evaluating proposals and providing support through funding.

Hotels

According to STB, ARR continued to soar, climbing to S\$228 in the first four months, a 12.9 per cent increase on the previous year. Average occupancy rate has remained stable at around 85 per cent.

Robert McIntosh, executive director, CBRE Hotels Asia Pacific, expects ARR to increase by between 10 and 15 per cent this year, despite the anticipated increase in hotel supply. Singapore's room inventory is set to grow from 41,000 in 2010 to 42,500 by year-end.

He added that boutique hotels were likely to enlarge their presence here, as smaller land parcels continue to be released for hotel development.

Hoteliers were unfazed by the

intensifying competition. The Scarlet general manager Henry Maillet said: "Singapore's renewed vibrancy as a destination will continue to draw travellers in droves, and this will benefit hotels across all categories."

Aviation

Low-cost carriers (LCCs) are continuing to expand. In May, Singapore Changi Airport's LCC passenger traffic grew by 24.6 per cent compared to the same month last year, contributing 28 per cent of the airport's total.

Australia's Jetstar Asia added a number of new routes from Singapore in the last six months, including Auckland, Melbourne and Hangzhou. Meanwhile, Indian LCC IndiGo will start offering flights between Singapore and New Delhi from September 15. Singapore Airlines (SIA) will also soon join the fray, having announced its intention to introduce a no-frills, medium- and longhaul carrier in 2012.

Brendan Sobie, chief representative-South-east Asia, Centre for Asia Pacific Aviation, said: "There is a lot of growth in the low-cost arena, as the appetite for cheaper fares in the ASEAN region grows."

Cruise sector plots steady course

New infrastructure and greater regional cooperation augur well for Singapore. **Sim Kok Chwee** examines

Captains of Singapore's cruise industry unanimously agree that the country is on track to achieving its regional hub ambition.

Between 2005 and 2010, Singapore's cruise passenger throughput grew 10 per cent annually to hit one million in 2010.

As a further indication that the industry is in the pink of health, the International Passenger Terminal (IPT) at HarbourFront is already exceeding all its designed performance indicators and the new International Cruise Terminal (ICT) at Marina South that can accommodate ships of up to 360m long is slated to be operational by 2012.

Singapore will also be welcoming new ships soon, including Orion Expedition Cruises' Orion II, which will arrive in August to be based here, and Royal Caribbean International's Voyager of the Seas, which will make Singapore its first Asian homeport in May 2012. Seabourn's Seabourn Quest and Compagnie du Ponant's L'Austral will also be sailing in next February and April respectively.



Artist's impression of the new cruise terminal

Singapore Tourism Board deputy director (cruise), Remy Choo, said: "As cruise lines increase Asia and Australia deployments year-round, there is a distinct possibility for seasonality to even out, especially with greater development of cruise facilities and the introduction of more interesting and diverse itineraries in the region."

Examples of neighbouring infrastructure developments include Indonesia's Tanah Ampo Port in Bali, Hong Kong's Kai Tak Cruise Terminal and Chinese cruise terminals in Shanghai, Tianjin and Xiamen.

Industry players observed that Indonesia and Cambodia were underserved by cruise

lines, a trend that STB is hoping to change. The NTO is actively collaborating with its ASEAN counterparts to jointly promote regional cruising, with efforts such as the co-location of booths at Cruise Shipping Miami 2011 earlier this year under the Cruise South-east Asia banner.

"Singapore is well-positioned as a homeport of choice for major cruise lines and to help Asia realise its potential as the next major cruise destination," said Choo.

In terms of profile, Singaporeans currently form the bulk of cruise passengers here, followed by Indonesians, Indians and Australians. The country, however, is aiming to tap all Asian markets.

Singapore Cruise Centre (SCC), CEO, Christina Siaw, said: "Singapore is quite unique because although we have a relatively small population, we have superior air connectivity and well-developed infrastructure, both in terms of tourism as well as shipping. This means we can attract a source market and cruise lines will homeport here."

SCC is bidding to be the operator of the new ICT in order to have a total of four berths at its disposal. One of the constraints faced by its current IPT is the limitation on ships' length, height and draught. Ships exceeding these limits are berthed at the Port of Singapore Authority's wharves – where berthing fees are higher and the surroundings are deemed unattractive.

"Operating the new cruise terminal will mean we can ensure that all cruise tourists have the best possible transit experience in Singapore. Furthermore, with four berths, we will be able to homeport more cruise ships in Singapore," said Siaw.

Calling the relationship be-

tween cruise operators, hotels, airlines, ground agents and attractions symbiotic, Choo said: "The cruise passenger experience is enhanced by the value-adds provided through the products and services of these industry players during shore excursions and pre- and post-cruise programmes."

World Express managing director Darren Tan reiterated that no stones are left unturned when it comes to itinerary planning, as everything is scrutinised, "from the number of steps at each attraction or facility to the quality of the washrooms".

However, Intercruises Shore-side and Port Services, regional director, Asia, Laura Vlad, felt there was a need to develop greater understanding of the special requirements of the cruise industry among the trade here.

She said: "Tour booking or cancellation deadlines are difficult to adhere to in the cruise industry, with passengers often only booking a tour once aboard the ship, possibly just a few days before arriving in Singapore."



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When a Gray Taiwanese Cow Stretched

Test drive Singapore Arts Festival



With eyes peeled and ears cocked, **Brian Higgs** takes in the Lion City's annual theatre, dance and music showcase

WHY Started by the National Arts Council in 1977, the event functions as a global connector in the international festival

circuit, a champion of the Singapore arts scene and an opportunity to experience performances from around the world. The festival is also a platform for fostering arts and culture in the region. This year's edition had a record 18 commissions, of which 13 works were from Singapore. Of the 81 artists and arts companies featured, 64 (80 per cent) were Asian, 49 (60 per cent) of which were Singaporean.

WHAT I had the opportunity to catch two performances over the three-week festival: *When a Gray Taiwanese Cow Stretched* by Japanese theatre group Ishinha and *Inhabitants* by Barcelona-based theatre company Teatro de los Sentidos. Staged outdoors and timed precisely to incorporate the transition from day to night, the avant-garde *When a Gray Taiwanese Cow Stretched* told an engaging tale of a 'sea road' linking the histories of people from islands along the Pacific Rim. A performance highlight was the Jan Jan Opera lingo, a form of Osakan street rap. *Inhabitants* was a mind-blowing participatory experience in surrealistic surroundings. Audience members were encouraged to fire up their sense of curiosity, sight, smell and hearing, to recognise po-

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Silver spoon Martin No. 38



Gracia Chiang discovers a new hideaway in the heart of town, with a trio of dining experiences to suit one's mood and taste

MENU Whether you're hankering for classic Thai, contemporary Western or simply American coffee to go, side-by-side Kha, Graze and Provisions can offer a table with a pleasant atmosphere to boot. At all-day restaurant Graze, the emphasis is on fresh, full-flavoured cuisine with Down Under influences. For starters, my favourite was 'prawns 3 ways', which presented the crustacean in battered, grilled and poached forms, pleasantly accompanied by a coconut sorbet. Who knew desert could go so well with seafood? When the mains arrived, I found myself actually liking the duck confit, served with maple pan juice. Not being a big fan of duck, perhaps it was the hint of sweetness that won me over. For the adventurous, I recommend the barramundi with orange and beet salad, which leaves a tangy aftertaste. Whichever you choose, just remember to end your meal with the pavlova. While I did not get to sample the food from Kha, I was told that its traditional Thai dishes with a twist have gained quite a following since the restaurant's Hort-Park days. Provisions, on the other hand, is a cafe-cum-gourmet food retail store, where you can pick up organic produce or grab a Graffeo coffee. **AMBIENCE** Graze and Provisions are high on casual, while Kha plays up the drama. Despite its former warehouse location, the vibe is decidedly homely in all three. Graze has two exclusive dining areas that can host 20-plus guests each, while Kha has a smaller 10-pax room. Both



etic and ludic moments of their own existence, and in the process, find personal motivation for their journey.

HOW The 2012 edition will be held in May at the Esplanade Park, with a continued emphasis on Asian art. More information on ticket prices, group bookings and concessions will be released at a later date.


VERDICT A great opportunity to experience high-quality regional arts, culture and performances.

Name Singapore Arts Festival
Rate Tickets at this year's festival ranged from S\$12 to S\$180 (US\$9.50 to US\$145)
When From May 18, 2012
Contact details
www.singaporeartsfest.com

venues can be booked for private events.

SERVICE Prompt and helpful, but I would have loved more interaction.

PRICING Reasonable, with mains roughly in the S\$20-30 (US\$16-24) range.

Name Martin No. 38
Number of seats Around 100 for Graze, 52 for Kha and 24 for Provisions
Contact details
Tel: (65) 6509-1680 (Graze and Provisions)
(65) 6476-9000 (Kha)
Verdict 

Checking in

Hotel Fort Canning



Is this eight-month-old little hotel on the hill the one-of-a-kind gem it claims to be? **Raini Hamdi** checks in

LOCATION Fort Canning Park, 60m high and a historic area. Majapahit kings and colonial governors alike have lived here. The hotel building itself was a restoration of a 1926 Administration Building of the British Far East Command HQ.

The hotel is near everywhere important – the CBD, Orchard Road, Civic District, Clarke Quay, etc – yet isn't so near these places because of its hill-top location. Taxis are hard to come by (then again, taxis are hard to come by anywhere these days), but the hotel runs an efficient taxi call service and provides twice-daily shuttles to Orchard Road and the CBD. The Dhoby Ghaut MRT station is within walking distance, but you must be fit, especially as it is a bit of a climb when returning to the hotel. I'm fit, and I love nature, peace and quiet, so the location is a plus for me.

ROOMS No two rooms are alike. The only thing they have in common is their



wonderful high ceilings, thanks to the building's colonial heritage. My room is a deluxe, about 30m² in size, and if colonial can be chic and comfortable, this is it. The amenities are first-class: super-fast Internet access, Nespresso/TWG service in-room and the Zeppelin Mini by B&W iPod docking station, to name a few.

The bathroom takes pride of place in the area with the most view (where hotels would normally put their living room or bedroom). Ladies rejoice, for there is a lot of natural light for doing make-up. Voyeurs and exhibitionists rejoice too, for at the time of stay, the greenery in the planters had not yet grown high or dense enough, so I couldn't use the toilet in peace!

Overall, however, a classy room with verdant views.

F&B The Glass House is a two-level new structure added to the building. True to its name, it has floor-to-ceiling glass walls that bring the outdoors into indoors marvellously. It offers Asian delights such as fried vermicelli with Boston lobster. There

Name Hotel Fort Canning, Singapore
No. of rooms 86
Rate From S\$300 (US\$243)
Contact details
Tel: (65) 6559-6770
Fax: (65) 6334-7873
Email: contact@hfcingsingapore.com

is also an Italian. Instead of a club lounge, all in-house guests are offered free flow of wine, fresh fruit juices, tea, coffee and snacks each evening at The Lobby Lounge, a generous gesture which enhances the feel of the property as a homely, welcoming residence rather than a hotel.

FACILITIES Of note is its more than 1,000m² of meeting, conference and banquet space, two non-chlorinated pools, TechnoGym equipment and THANN Sanctuary spa.

SERVICE Warm and friendly.

VERDICT Neat urban retreat with lots of privacy and a touch of history.



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Bali



Furama Silom
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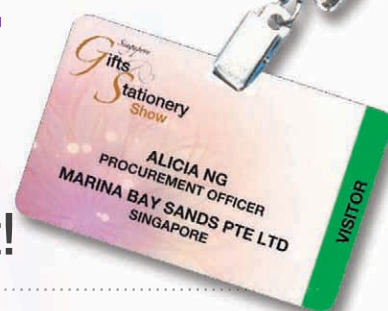
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The city will turn on its royal charm this October; the Grand Palace is pictured here

Bangkok springs back

Visitor figures to the capital are climbing again, but rates stay soft. By **Sirima Eamtako**

Arrivals Bangkok appears to be getting back into the swing of things following last year's political crisis. Between January and May, international arrivals at Suvarnabhumi Airport were 5.3 million, or up 24.5 per cent, over the same period last year.

East Asia constituted the biggest market share at 42.8 per cent, amounting to 2.3 million tourists, with the top five markets being South-east Asia, China, Japan and South Korea.

Europe remained the second biggest market, contributing 1.8 million visitors, up 16.4 per cent. Topping the list was Russia – which has become one of the fastest-growing markets for Thailand – with 315,297 arrivals, up 48.8 per cent. This was followed by the UK, Germany, France and Sweden.

India has also become a primary market for the destination, with arrivals up 28.9 per cent to 329,299, while Australia grew 19.6 per cent to 191,822 visitors.

NTO Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) spokesperson Prakrit Piriyaiket said the NTO would continue to promote

Bangkok under its global Amazing Thailand, Always Amazes You campaign.

TAT is also employing various strategies to maintain the growth rate in the coming months. This includes highlighting upcoming events.

The Amazing Thailand Grand Sale, from June 15 to August 15, features discounts of up to 80 per cent in more than 15,000 establishments. The World Sport Destination Expo, scheduled from September 29 to October 2, is also expected to attract 1,200 foreign participants. Likewise, the Royal Barge Procession, to mark His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej's seventh cycle, or 84th, birthday for mid-October, is anticipated to bring in droves of international spectators.

Transit guests are also on TAT's radar. The NTO collaborated with MasterCard to launch the Stopover Bangkok campaign last month, encouraging transit passengers to stay for one or two nights during the summer season.

Ongoing until October 31, the campaign offers airline discounts with EVA Airways, Thai Airways International, Emirates, Etihad Airways and Qantas, and deals at more than 50 service providers.



"Our cost is going up because of the rising power and commodity prices, but we have to wait 24 to 36 months to see if supply in Bangkok becomes more stable before we can discuss rates."

Paul Stevens

Director for Thailand operations
Accor

TAT aims to attract about five per cent of the 1.5 million annual transit passengers, especially those from Europe en route to cities in Asia, Australia and New Zealand.

Hotels Bangkok has about 700 hotels with 103,000 rooms, running at an average occupancy rate of just above 50 per cent, according to the Thai Hotels Association (THA).

Despite the oversupply, the capital continues to receive additional inventory. Following last year's openings of 13 properties and 2,500 rooms, more than 20 hotels and 4,000 rooms are slated to open this year (see box on page 19). Next year will see at least 15 hotels and an estimated 3,500 rooms being added.

Rates The ADR of Bangkok hotels is the lowest in Asia at just above US\$100, according to THA president Prakrit Chinamouphong. He explained that the crises faced by Bangkok in the last three years had put pressure on hotels to offer discounts when negotiating contract rates at previous international trade shows such as ITB Berlin and

WTM London.

Upscale hotels were especially affected by the increased competition, which led to a 15 per cent year-on-year decrease on ADR to 5,789 baht (US\$188) and a nine per cent drop on RevPAR to 3,685 baht in the first quarter of this year, according to a recent report by CB Richard Ellis on the Bangkok luxury hotel market.

Aviation Bangkok Airways ventured into South Asia by launching a six-weekly Bangkok-Mumbai service and a daily Bangkok-Dhaka flight in March. It is eyeing new services to New Delhi, Chennai and Kolkata later in the year, when it will welcome a new Airbus A319 or A320 to its fleet of 17 aircraft.

In addition, Air Austral launched a direct twice-weekly flight between Bangkok and its headquarters on France's Réunion Island in April.

According to Airports of Thailand, international aircraft movement at Suvarnabhumi Airport during the first five months increased 13.1 per cent year-on-year. International passengers, on the other hand, rose 16.6 per cent to 16 million, including 612,755 transit passengers.



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Mixed bag for hotels post-crisis

Room glut continues to pose a challenge, especially among the upscale crowd, reports **Sirima Eamtako**

1 **Has Bangkok recovered after last year's political crisis?** According to Tourism Authority of Thailand spokesperson Prakrit Piriyakiet, Bangkok has been seeing a gradual return of confidence since August 2010. International arrivals at Suvarnabhumi Airport started to register a positive change from last July over the corresponding month in 2009, with the trend steadily continuing this year. Percentage change of arrivals in May 2011 over May 2010 was the highest at 91.6 per cent. Hotels, however, faced a different scenario, as their bottom-lines continue to be affected by a larger inventory (see box).

2 **How did hotels in Bangkok perform?** CB Richard Ellis' Bangkok luxury hotel market view for the first quarter cited the nine per cent year-on-year growth in international arrivals at Suvarnabhumi Airport as helping to boost occupancy to 65 per cent from 59 per cent during the same period of 2010. However, the report also

stated that increased competition from new hotels continued to push down rates. In the first three months, ADR of selected upscale Bangkok hotels was US\$191, down nine per cent, and in Thai currency was 5,789 baht (US\$188), down 15 per cent. RevPAR was US\$122, down three per cent, and in local currency was 3,685 baht, a nine per cent decrease. In May, Bangkok hotels ran at 60 per cent occupancy overall, up from 30 per cent in the same month last year, said Thai Hotels Association (THA) president Prakrit Chinamourphong. "But this is incomparable, as more than 20 hotels were forced to close for weeks in April and May last year," he said.

3 **What about new hotels?** Opened in April, the 224-room St. Regis was at 34 per cent occupancy in its first month and is on course to finish this year with 46 per cent, said James Ramage, sales and marketing regional director for Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia, Starwood

New hotels in Bangkok

- New openings in 1H2011**
- All Seasons Bangkok Victory Monument, 162 rooms
 - Amari Residences Sukhumvit, 144 rooms
 - Best Western Bangkok Hiptique, 50 rooms
 - Best Western Plus @20 Sukhumvit, 78 rooms
 - Novotel Bangkok IMPACT, 380 rooms
 - Novotel Bangkok Fenix Ploenchit, 370 rooms
 - Park Plaza Sukhumvit Soi 18, 125 rooms
 - Ramada Encore Bangkok, 188 rooms
 - Sivatel Bangkok, 75 rooms
 - The St. Regis Bangkok, 224 rooms

- Intended openings in 2H2011**
- Aloft Bangkok, 297 rooms
 - Hotel Muse, MGallery Collection, 166 rooms
 - Novotel Bangkok Platinum, 283 rooms
 - The Siam, 39 suites
 - Four Points by Sheraton Bangkok, Sathorn, 421 rooms
 - Golden Tulip Mandison Suites, 120 rooms
 - Eastin Grand Hotel Sathorn, 390 rooms

Hotels and Resorts. The chain is still eyeing an ADR of 7,000 baht for the hotel this year.

The 370-room Novotel Bangkok Fenix Ploenchit, which opened in February, recorded 40 per cent occupancy in April and 50 per cent in May. Accor director of Thailand operations Paul Stevens said the hotel's rates ranged from 2,100-2,300 baht.

4 **What's driving the building craze?** Investors remain confident about Bangkok's capacity for more hotels. IMPACT Exhibition Management, which opened the 380-room Novotel Bangkok IMPACT in April, plans to open two more hotels. Managing director Paul Kanjanapas said the company recognised demand for different category hotels from clients attending some 900 events annually at IMPACT Muang Thong Thani.

Siam@Siam managing director Kla Kitchakarn said there was still room for unique hotel concepts in the city centre. The 200-room Mode Sathorn Hotel, to open April next year un-

der Siam@Siam's management, would run at around 50 per cent occupancy and fetch an ADR of 3,600 baht due to its trendy design and location, said Kla.

Starwood's Ramage said Bangkok was still a green destination for hotel developers and management chains, and would always be an evergreen destination for meetings and conferences.

5 **How does the future look like?** Hotels are taking a wait-and-see approach, anticipating that supply will stabilise in a few years. According to Accor's Stevens, the majority of new hotel developments are slated for completion within the next 24 to 36 months.

THA, however, continues to take a more aggressive stand, lobbying the government to address hotel licensing and zoning issues to curb oversupply. Currently, only 63,879 out of the 102,483 available rooms have the licence to operate. THA's Prakrit hopes the new government resulting from the July 3 election will do more to help the hotel industry.

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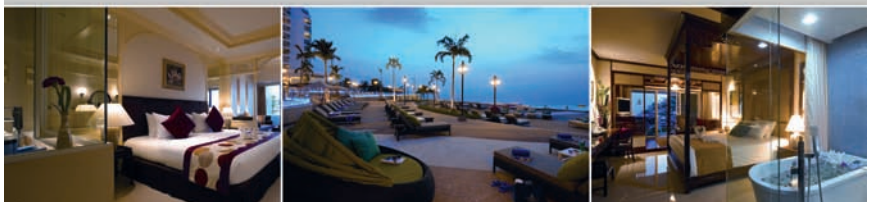



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Test drive

Madame Tussauds Bangkok



Sirima Eamtako rubs shoulders with celebs at Merlin Entertainment's first wax museum in South-east Asia

WHY I visited Madame Tussauds Bangkok twice because I enjoyed it! The museum gives visitors a chance to get up-close with wax versions of Hollywood superstars, sports legends, world leaders and other celebrities.

WHAT The 500-million baht (US\$16 million) attraction is located on the sixth floor of Siam Discovery shopping complex in Bangkok. It features 10 rooms of about 70 to 80 wax figures. About



30 per cent of the wax figures are Thai personalities.

I compared biceps with Serena Williams and danced with Beyoncé. What I enjoyed the most, though, was the chance to tell Oprah my life story. I also hope to return again to meet newcomer Captain Jack Sparrow.

However, not all wax figures resemble their real-life counterparts. The wax Beyoncé, for example, does not look anything like the lady herself.

HOW Bring a camera and a friend or two so you can take turns snapping pictures. Have fun and try to use the costumes and accessories provided.

VERDICT A surreal experience with the wax incarnations of celebrities past and present.

Name Madame Tussauds Bangkok

Rate Adults: 800 baht (US\$26);

Children below aged 12: 600 baht

When 10.00 to 21.00 daily

Contact details

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Fax: (66-2) 658-0056

Checking in



Best Western Plus @20 Sukhumvit



Best Western Plus' inaugural hotel in Asia-Pacific has its comfortable moments, as

Sirima Eamtako discovers

LOCATION The hotel, at Bangkok's city centre, is an easy walk to BTS SkyTrain Asoke and MRT Subway Sukhumvit. It is near offices and shopping malls and is 45 minutes away from Suvarnabhumi Airport.

ROOMS I first noticed the trendy interiors of this eight-storey hotel. I subsequently noticed how cosy the room was upon further inspection.

The superior and deluxe rooms at 27m² and one-bedroom suite at 59m² may initially seem small. But the blue-and-grey colour scheme, use of leather, gloss and silver elements, as well as floor-to-ceiling windows lend a relaxing feel to the room.

Guests can expect amenities for both leisure and business travellers, including a work desk, large safe, an iron, DVD player, 32-inch LCD TV, an iPod docking station and free Wi-Fi.

The suite comes with a living room, walk-in closet, bathtub, separate shower room and double sinks.

F&B The hotel has two F&B outlets. Rooftop TropiKool offers

Name Best Western Plus

@20 Sukhumvit

No. of rooms 78

Rate US\$76 for superior and deluxe rooms and US\$150 for suites when booked through the Internet

Contact details

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indoor and outdoor seating, and serves international dishes at affordable prices. I liked their Australian rib-eye steak, which was priced at 350 baht (US\$11).

Rewind Eatery and Bar on the lower lobby floor had some good cocktails, with a choice of air-conditioned or al fresco seating.

FACILITIES Limited to a rooftop jacuzzi and a business centre at the lobby floor.

SERVICE Best Western International defines Best Western as a warm hotel with comfortable surroundings and Best Western Premier as offering a refined level of comfort. Best Western Plus is positioned as a hotel that offers a little something extra.

I think among the something extra was the attentive service I received from the friendly staff during my one-night stay.

VERDICT A cosy hotel with friendly service.

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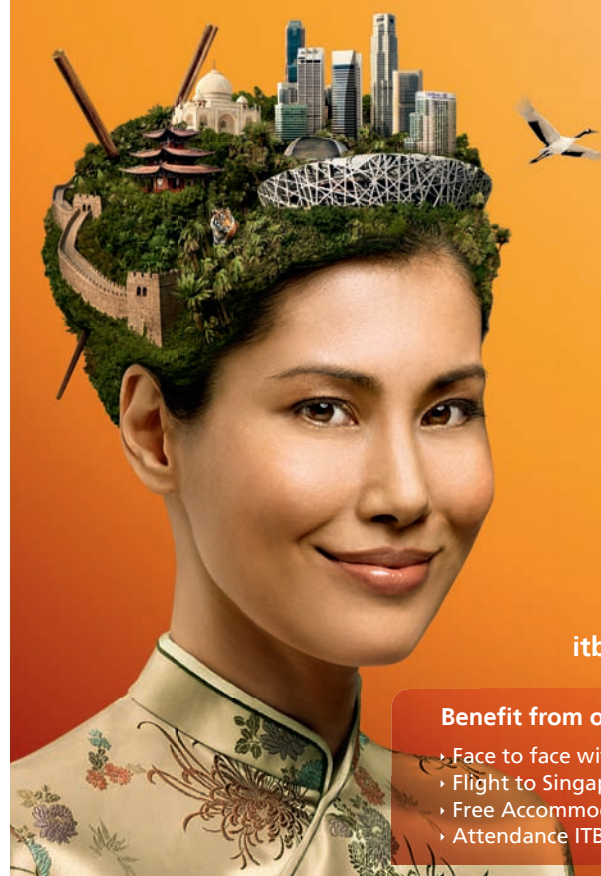


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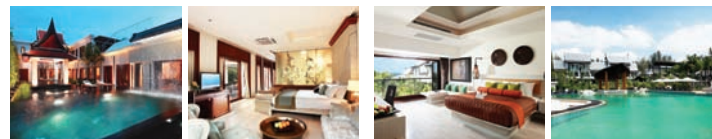
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- Travel Services Awards

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Under this category, TTG's editorial team determines the winners in these awards:

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- Destination of the Year
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The Travel Hall of Fame honours organisations that have won at least 10 times at previous TTG Travel Awards. Although they will not be voted for again, these special award winners will be recognised at every TTG annual awards presentation ceremony.

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- Singapore Changi Airport (2002)
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- Abacus International (2009)
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Instructions and Guidelines

VOTE ON PAPER

(Please use the correct voting form)

There are two voting categories and accompanying forms

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CRITERIA

To ensure that nominees are judged on an equal basis, each category has its own set of criteria. Please use them as a guide when casting your votes.

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TRAVEL SUPPLIER AWARDS

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Criteria

Best **airline** in its respective category in terms of:

- Providing the best service, network and schedules.
- Most agent-friendly in terms of reservations, confirmations and commission payments.
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas, incentive programmes and servicing.

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2. Best **European** Airline
Best airline based in Europe operating Asia-Pacific routes.
3. Best **Middle Eastern** Airline
Best airline based in Middle East operating Asia-Pacific routes.
4. Best **South Asian** Airline
Best airline based in the Indian subcontinent operating Asia-Pacific routes.
5. Best **South-east** Asian Airline
Best airline based in Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, The Philippines, Singapore, Thailand or Vietnam operating Asia-Pacific routes.
6. Best **North Asian** Airline
Best airline based in South Korea, Japan, Chinese Taipei, Macau or Hong Kong operating Asia-Pacific routes.
7. Best **China** Airline
Best airline based in China operating Asia-Pacific routes.
8. Best **Pacific** Airline
Best airline based in the Pacific operating Asia-Pacific routes.
9. Best **Regional** Airline
Best airline based regionally operating Asia-Pacific routes.
10. Best **Asian Low-cost Carrier**
Best airline based in Asia-Pacific that operates on a low-cost strategy.

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Criteria

Best **Hotel Chain** in its respective category in terms of:

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- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas, incentive programmes and servicing.

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Best hotel chain operating a network of properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.
14. Best Hotel **Representation Company**
Best company providing the most agent-friendly products and services and showing the best marketing effort in generating sales for member hotels via agents.
15. Best **Luxury** Hotel Brand
Best hotel chain operating a network of luxurious properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.
16. Best **Mid-range** Hotel Brand
Best hotel chain operating a network of mid-range properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.
17. Best **Budget** Hotel Brand
Best hotel chain operating a network of economical properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.

HOTELS – Individual Property

18. Best **Luxury** Hotel
Best hotel catering to the upmarket traveller. This hotel must also boast the best visual appeal and ambience reflecting upmarket status.
19. Best **Mid-range** Hotel
Best mid-range hotel catering to the traveller who seeks three- to four-star quality and comfort.
20. Best **Budget** Hotel
Best hotel catering to the budget traveller.
21. Best **Independent** Hotel
Best non-chain (ie not part of a network of properties) hotel.
22. Best **Boutique** Hotel
Best small, fashionable and unique hotel.
23. Best **City** Hotel – **Bangkok**
24. Best **City** Hotel – **Delhi**
25. Best **City** Hotel – **Hanoi/Ho Chi Minh City**
26. Best **City** Hotel – **Jakarta**
27. Best **City** Hotel – **Kuala Lumpur**
28. Best **City** Hotel – **Manila**
29. Best **City** Hotel – **Seoul**
30. Best **City** Hotel – **Singapore**
31. Best **City** Hotel – **Taipei**
32. Best **City** Hotel – **Tokyo**
33. Best **New City** Hotel
Best city hotel that opened in 2009/2010.
34. Best **Airport** Hotel
Best hotel – located within the vicinity of an airport – that caters to travellers in transit.

RESORTS – Individual Property

35. Best **Beach** Resort
Best resort located by a beach. This resort must also boast the best visual appeal and ambience reflecting local flavour.
36. Best **Resort** Hotel (Non-Beach)
Best resort not located by a beach. This resort must also boast the best visual appeal and ambience reflecting local flavour.
37. Best **New Beach** Resort
Best beach resort that opened in 2009/2010.
38. Best **Integrated** Resort

Best hotel offering comprehensive accommodation, shopping, dining, entertainment and sports.

SERVICED RESIDENCES

39. Best **Serviced Residence** Operator
Best serviced property catering to mid- and long-term staying guests.

SPAS

40. Best **Spa** Operator
Best managed and operated spa or network of spas in the region.

BT-MICE Awards

Criteria

- Best services and facilities catering specifically to the BT-MICE market.
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing the BT-MICE market.
- Most desirable and attractive incentives and value added services to business travellers and MICE planners.

41. Best **Airline – Business Class**
Best business class airline across the board.
Refer to Airline Criteria.
42. Best **Business** Hotel
Best hotel catering to the business traveller.
Refer to Hotel Criteria.
43. Best **Meetings & Conventions** Hotel
Best hotel catering to meeting and convention needs.
Refer to Hotel Criteria.
44. Best **BT-MICE City**
The city most friendly and desirable to business travellers and for MICE planners to host their events.
45. Best **Convention & Exhibition** Centre
 - Best facilities.
 - Best value for money.
 - Most flexible in catering to MICE planners.
 - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.
46. Best **Convention & Exhibition Bureau**
 - Most efficient, flexible and friendly in terms of response to enquiries and information.
 - Most effective in raising awareness of MICE at government and community levels.
 - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

Travel Services Awards

Criteria

- Best product, services and facilities
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing

47. Best **Airport**
 - Best facilities.
 - Most user-friendly, efficient and hassle-free immigration.
 - Most organised baggage claim.
 - Best planned floor layout, with easy ground access.
48. Best **GDS (Global Distribution System)**
 - Most comprehensive network offering ease of operation and user friendliness.
 - Most efficient and reliable system.
49. Best **Cruise Operator**
 - Best product in terms of service, routes and schedules.
 - Best onboard programme and facilities.
 - Most agent-friendly in terms of reservations, confirmations and commission payments.
 - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas, incentive programmes and servicing.
50. Best **NTO**
 - Most efficient, flexible and friendly in terms of response to enquiries and information.
 - Most effective in raising awareness of tourism at government and community levels.
 - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.
51. Best **Theme Attraction**
 - Best ambience.
 - Best facilities and services.
 - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

TRAVEL AGENT AWARDS

Criteria

Best **Travel Agency** in its respective category in terms of:

- Professionalism and excellence in staff.
- Best value-added services to client
- Best use of computer technology applications to help improve efficiency and effectiveness in services provided to client.

52. Best Travel Agency – **Australia**
53. Best Travel Agency – **China**
54. Best Travel Agency – **Chinese Taipei**
55. Best Travel Agency – **Hong Kong**
56. Best Travel Agency – **India**
57. Best Travel Agency – **Indochina (Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam)**
58. Best Travel Agency – **Indonesia**
59. Best Travel Agency – **Japan**
60. Best Travel Agency – **Malaysia**
61. Best Travel Agency – **Singapore**
62. Best Travel Agency – **South Korea**
63. Best Travel Agency – **Thailand**
64. Best Travel Agency – **The Philippines**
65. Best **Corporate** Travel Agency
Best travel agency specialising in serving the needs of corporate travellers.
66. Best **Online** Travel Agent
Best online-based travel agent offering the most user-friendly and effective interface to meet client needs. This online travel agent must also boast the best sales and marketing network in terms of service innovation.

OR VOTE ONLINE!

www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards

12th August 2011

VOTING FORM A: TRAVEL SUPPLIER AWARDS

For voting by • Travel agents • Tour operators • Destination Management Companies You Can Also Vote Online Now @ www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards

Do refer to the voting criteria on the facing page when casting your vote

Voting Rules

- Only one voting entry per person is allowed – using the voting form or online voting.
- All votes are confidential.
- Voting forms are published in TTG print titles and are available online at www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards.
- No responsibility will be accepted by the organisers for voting forms lost, delayed or damaged in the post.
- There are no pre-nominated contenders for any voting awards.
- The results for TTG Travel Awards 2011 are final and no correspondence will be entertained.
- Voting forms will be independently tabulated and evaluated by an independent auditor in Singapore.
- The closing date is **12th August 2011**

Submission

Completed voting forms are to be returned to:

SINGAPORE
Ms Lina Tan
TTG Travel Awards 2011
TTG Asia Media Pte Ltd
1 Science Park Road #04-07 The Capricorn
Singapore Science Park II Singapore 117528
Tel: (65) 6395-7575
Fax: (65) 6536-2972

HONG KONG
Ms Carol Cheng
TTG Travel Awards 2011
TTG Asia Media Pte Ltd
China.com Inc
11/F ING Tower No. 308 Des Voeux Road
Central Hong Kong
Tel: (852) 2237-7272
Fax: (852) 2806-0646

Organisation / Country		Organisation / Country	
Airlines			
1. Best North American Airline		28. Best City Hotel – Manila	
2. Best European Airline		29. Best City Hotel – Seoul	
3. Best Middle Eastern Airline		30. Best City Hotel – Singapore	
4. Best South Asian Airline		31. Best City Hotel – Taipei	
5. Best South-east Asian Airline		32. Best City Hotel – Tokyo	
6. Best North Asian Airline		33. Best New City Hotel	
7. Best China Airline		34. Best Airport Hotel	
8. Best Pacific Airline		RESORTS – Individual Property	
9. Best Regional Airline		35. Best Beach Resort	
10. Best Asian Low-Cost Carrier		36. Best Resort Hotel (Non-Beach)	
		37. Best New Beach Resort	
		38. Best Integrated Resort	
		SERVICED RESIDENCES	
		39. Best Serviced Residence Operator	
		SPAS	
		40. Best Spa Operator	
		BT-MICE	
		41. Best Airline – Business Class	
		42. Best Business Hotel	
		43. Best Meetings & Conventions Hotel	
		44. Best BT-MICE City	
		45. Best Convention & Exhibition Centre	
		46. Best Convention & Exhibition Bureau	
		TRAVEL SERVICES	
		47. Best Airport	
		48. Best GDS	
		49. Best Cruise Operator	
		50. Best NTO	
		51. Best Theme Attraction	

VOTER INFORMATION

Name:

Passport no.:

Job title:

Company:

Address:

Country:

Telephone no.:

Fax no.:

Email:

Signature:

Closing Date: 12th August 2011

VOTING FORM B: TRAVEL AGENT AWARDS

For voting by • Hoteliers • Airline staff • Car rental companies • Cruise operators • National Tourism Organisations • GDS companies • All other travel professionals (except Travel agents, Tour operators and Destination Management Companies) You Can Also Vote Online Now @ www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards

Do refer to the voting criteria on the facing page when casting your vote

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59. Best Travel Agency – Japan	
60. Best Travel Agency – Malaysia	
61. Best Travel Agency – Singapore	
62. Best Travel Agency – South Korea	
63. Best Travel Agency – Thailand	
64. Best Travel Agency – The Philippines	
65. Best Corporate Travel Agency	
66. Best Online Travel Agent	

VOTER INFORMATION

Name:

Passport no.:

Job title:

Company:

Address:

Country:

Telephone no.:

Fax no.:

Email:

Signature:

Closing Date: 12th August 2011



TRAVEL AWARDS 2011 Vote Now!

TRAVEL SUPPLIER AWARDS

Airline Awards

1. Best North American Airline
2. Best European Airline
3. Best Middle Eastern Airline
4. Best South Asian Airline
5. Best South-east Asian Airline
6. Best North Asian Airline
7. Best China Airline
8. Best Pacific Airline
9. Best Regional Airline
10. Best Asian Low-Cost Carrier

Hotels • Resorts • Serviced Residences • Spa Awards

HOTEL Chains

11. Best Global Hotel Chain
12. Best Regional Hotel Chain
13. Best Local Hotel Chain
14. Best Hotel Representation Company
15. Best Luxury Hotel Brand
16. Best Mid-range Hotel Brand
17. Best Budget Hotel Brand

HOTELS – Individual Property

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24. Best City Hotel – Delhi
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26. Best City Hotel – Jakarta
27. Best City Hotel – Kuala Lumpur
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Travel Services Awards

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48. Best GDS
49. Best Cruise Operator
50. Best NTO
51. Best Theme Attraction

TRAVEL AGENT AWARDS

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57. Best Travel Agency – Indochina
(Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam)
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61. Best Travel Agency – Singapore
62. Best Travel Agency – South Korea
63. Best Travel Agency – Thailand
64. Best Travel Agency – The Philippines
65. Best Corporate Travel Agency
66. Best Online Travel Agent

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