

Much ado or much abuzz?

Is blockchain as revolutionary as it's made out to be and can it solve travel industry's pain points, asks Yixin Ng

The splendid archipelago

Indonesia's homegrown hotels scale up, Bali's lessons from crises and why old is the new gold in Yogyakarta

Katerina Giannouka

Radisson's 'messy' image is a thing of the past, she tells Raini Hamdi



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THE PRESSURE IS ON

After years of pursuing growth by the numbers, the global travel industry is finally getting a grip of the problems that mass tourism brings. Industry leaders tell Xinyi Liang-Pholsena why the sector needs to act now



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Dirty thoughts of ASEAN

The region has to clean up its act, literally



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A panel at the recent Southeast Asia Hotel Investors' Summit said it loud and clear what I've been feeling: that we won't be hearing the last of the dirty word, cesspool.

I've suspected all along that there are other Boracays and cesspools in the making in ASEAN. A panelist mentioned Phu Quoc, which he warned had no solid waste management. And if taken in the bigger context of the mismanagement of a tourism asset – not just seawater pollution, usually sewage – a whole string of resorts in the region do qualify as cesspools, sadly.

What gets to me is, Boracay isn't the first ASEAN cesspool. That dubious honour goes to Pattaya in Thailand when a few decades ago it was hit with not just cesspool but sexpool perceptions. We've seen how long it has taken for Pattaya to recover its image and, even today, despite efforts to rebrand it as a family destination, I still have friends with young children who want to visit Pattaya expressing their hesitancy. And just look at TripAdvisor reviews (as I've done today, writing this on May 19) where concerns about water quality still dominate the forum.

What gets to me is, after all those years of discussing lessons from Pattaya, why, why, why hasn't the region learnt anything?

They do so at a greater peril than during Pattaya's time, because travellers are now more sophisticated while there's always the Internet and social media to spread the word quickly.

Boracay is a prime example. While its forced closure may be good news to the private sector, which can flag it to governments as an example that actions can and must be taken, it has also spotlighted the dirtiness of Asian beaches to foreign tourists, especially Europeans, a major ASEAN market.

Actually, in Europe, the European Environment Agency runs a regular *State of Bathing Water* report, usually released in time for the year's bathing season. It assesses the quality of bathing water in all 28 EU member states, and Albania and Switzerland, which are non-EU. Will it come to the day when health concerns related to bathing in cesspools will force tour operators to conduct their own assessments?

UK-based Chic Locations' director, David Kevan, told me: "I do fear that if some Europeans go down with

a sea-related illness, and operators are forced to conduct a serious assessment on the water quality, many areas might fail and the negative publicity now being seen on Boracay would be mild in the consequences for the total region."

Beyond water pollution, it's the sickening truth that there's a lot of short-term thinking, corruption and/or a lack of vision that sees many beautiful destinations in ASEAN going to waste. Why do we need stalls after stalls of shops selling fake bags, watches and T-shirts along Chaweng Beach in Samui? Why build 50-60-storey skyscrapers in Danang?

The private sector is no better. For example, when business is looking up, it expresses concerns about haphazard development and the need for more quality tourists. When it is down, a hotel will be the first to lower rates and take in anything that walks.

In an ideal world, a country should treat its tourism jewels with care, set the rules who can lease them, the parameters how they can be used, and make no bones that the loan carries with it duty of care. The private sector will have no choice but to follow.

Alas, after three or even four decades, not much has changed.



Will it come to the day when health concerns related to bathing in cesspools will force tour operators to conduct their own assessments?

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Coming Up

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Much ado or much abuzz?

Blockchain technology, while still in its infancy, is touted to shake up the travel industry. Yixin Ng takes a look at how travel businesses are using blockchain to resolve the industry's pain points, and whether this technology is as revolutionary as it's made out to be

Blockchain has the potential to become “the final evolution of the Internet”, and its applications in the travel industry bear great promise of more secure, cost-effective and frictionless systems.

While there's a great deal of uncertainty and scepticism surrounding the disruption, recent happenings in the travel industry and beyond make apparent that it is worthwhile to start taking the technology seriously early on, rather than broad-brush it as a myth perpetuated by anti-establishment crackpots or initial coin offering (ICO) scam artists.

Unpacking the jitters

The cryptocurrency market has seen extreme fluctuations that Morgan Stanley earlier in the year said mirrored movements preceding the dotcom crash, only 15 times faster. Bitcoin traded at an all-time high of nearly US\$20,000 per coin in December 2017, before tumbling to under US\$7,000 in February 2018. After it peaked, trade volumes rose almost 300 per cent, which analysts said was indicative not of investor activity but a rush to get out.

This year has also seen an ICO explosion with ponzi schemes in the mix, such as Onecoin, reported to have taken investors for millions. Governments such as China and Japan are stepping up scrutiny of digital-asset trading, prompting a flight of some of the world's major cryptocurrency operators out of Asia.

However, it is important to note that blockchain is not Onecoin, Bitcoin, or even the aggregate of all major digital currencies, but the technology that powers them and potentially a multitude of other functional systems and applications.

“The recent concerns about blockchain are really concerns about the launch of highly speculative cryptocurrencies traded as investment vehicles. Rezchain (launched by Webjet to eliminate invoicing disputes) is solving a business problem, and just happens to use blockchain as its underlying technology platform,” said Daryl Lee, CEO of WebBeds Asia Pacific.

Fabian Bartnick, TravelKoin's head of strategic partnerships, stressed that many digital tokens are being traded, but ones likely to prevail are those that address problems.

Though a subject of scepticism, blockchain was born out of a distrust of “traditional” financial institutions. It has its value anchored in the supposed transparency, traceability and autonomy of data recorded in a decentralised network.

“This is a system that is totally public, secure and irrefutable. To (alter data on the chain) you'd have to go to every computer and reverse the encryption, which will take forever,”



said Wong Toon King, a Singaporean Internet pioneer, chairman of Wegogo and managing partner of FarSight Capital.

Making ripples in travel

A look at more targeted applications of blockchain pulls the focus back onto the enabling aspects of the technology and the examples are numerous in the travel industry:

• Invoicing disputes

Invoicing disputes are a “significant issue” in the travel industry, WebBeds' Lee said, and the associated costs “inhibitive”, especially in the face of intensifying competition.

Webjet developed Rezchain to eliminate such disputes, with Lee noting a success rate of nearly 90 per cent since the technology rollout.

“In our experiences, payment disputes in our hotel distribution marketplace can be difficult to resolve as buyers and sellers rely on the data contained within their own systems which will usually only interact together at the time of booking. Any discrepancies or problems between the booking systems often won't surface until after the transaction has been fulfilled (i.e. the guest checks out of the hotel) which has a downstream impact to reservations and finance teams,” Lee shared.

With Rezchain, systems can pick up on disputes and alert the relevant company as the transaction occurs, allowing disputes to be dealt with instantly, Lee explained.

• Cross-border payments

“Travel is very right for blockchain because it is naturally cross-border and involves multiple currencies. If people can use digital currencies and stay on it, they can save a lot,” said Wegogo's Wong.

“(Currently) it takes three to five working days to do an interbank transfer. You go through 11 intermediaries and everyone is taking a cut to facilitate the transaction. Banks also take a foreign currency cut, which can be up to seven per cent.”

For DMCs, which deal with many payment layers, the siphoning effect is

even more severe, said Sandor Levai, CEO of ICS Travel Group, an early integration partner of TravelKoin.

Frictional costs also come into play. “(Some banks charge) a flat fee of US\$80-100 per transaction, so we have to wait until we (get bulk) so it makes more sense to pay the bank fee than to fly (to another country) to deliver payment,” Levai said.

Transactions can take up to five days to process, he added, unlike TravelKoin's near instant solution.

• Financial inclusion and rewarding small businesses

When it comes to certain countries, “sometimes payment doesn't arrive or gets blocked”, Levai remarked. Take for example Myanmar, “a politically incorrect country... for a lot of banks”, but in the travel industry represents a big emerging destination.

And for Wegogo, which aims to connect small activity providers often left out of large travel marketplaces, digital tokens can help do the job. Wegogo users earn WeGold, launched in an ICO last month after a trial run, in exchange for recommending travel activities in South-east Asian island destinations.

Activity providers that “strengthen partnerships within the Wegogo ecosystem, deliver aspirational services and promote the platform” are also rewarded with WeGold.

Transactions and incentives are captured on the Blockchain, allowing for a “fair-share” ecosystem that builds trust and confidence among users, Wegogo stated.

Trade uptake and the road ahead

Some experts see signs that blockchain is moving beyond the proof of concept era. The *Global Trade Review* highlighted the “widely-held view that 2018 will be the year blockchain takes root commercially” after numerous trade and non-trade programmes demonstrated the technology's functionality last year.

For Rezchain, this appears to be the case. It was piloted by Webjet with its internal hotel distribution brands in 2016, and in February 2018 was rolled out to four major travel

partners in Europe (Thomas Cook) and Asia (DidaTravel, MG Group and Far East Hospitality).

However, it remains to be seen if the initiatives that involve digital currency are met with the same enthusiasm. While acknowledging problems and inefficiencies with existing B2B payments, travel players interviewed are not swayed by digital currencies, with volatility still a big concern.

“We foresee some potential to possibly integrate (cryptocurrency), but not in the near future,” said Niels Steeman, group director marketing and e-commerce, Asian Trails, pointing to the variances and volatility cryptocurrencies bring. “It also depends on our B2B customers, whether they see the need to pay us in cryptocurrency, and this has not yet reached our company.”

With trepidation over digital currency fluctuations as well as technology inertia within the travel trade, many blockchain champions in travel remain in the proof-of-concept stage, TravelKoin's Bartnick admitted, while addressing anxiety through means such as stabilising mechanisms (which arguably are another concept to prove).

“Every startup has to get over a hump, but it's only as big as its limitations of value creation,” Bartnick said. If transacting in the digital currency requires a simple click of a button, and results in thousands in savings, “then the value creation is already bigger than the hump”.

Until digital travel tokens find enough takers for the benefits to be realised, good news for blockchain initiatives come in the form of trader-investors. “Traders love volatility. A lot of attention is going to be in crypto because they can make money,” Wong said.

Moreover, Wong expects volatility would taper off over time.

“When you're pouring water into an empty pail, it (is bound to) slosh. The whole market cap for alt coin is US\$450 billion. It's tiny – that's why there's this great volatility. But as different crypto tokens become used in the economy and the pail fills up, it'll solve this liquidity issue.”



Travel is very right for blockchain because it is naturally cross-border and involves multiple currencies. If people can use digital currencies and stay on it, they can save a lot.

– Wong Toon King, chairman, Wegogo



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The pressure is on

After years of pursuing growth by the numbers, the global travel industry is finally getting a grip of the problems that mass tourism brings. Industry leaders tell Xinyi Liang-Pholsena why the sector needs to act now

There are more tourists now than ever before, thanks to the explosive growth of the Chinese outbound market and the ever-growing middle class worldwide. International tourist arrivals grew by a remarkable seven per cent in 2017 to reach 1.3 billion, according to UNWTO, and is projected to reach 1.8 billion by 2030.

But with record visitor numbers many destinations and communities in Asia are starting to see the toll of tourism, and along with it resentment and backlash to the problems that unrestrained growth brings.

The forced six-month closure of Boracay after Philippine president Duterte labelled it a “cesspool” reflects the pressure South-east Asia’s once-idyllic islands are now under. Since last year, Thailand’s Phi Phi island will be temporarily closed for four months each summer to allow for rehabilitation, while the rising tide of plastic rubbish on Bali’s beaches has become a major concern for visitors and residents on the famed Indonesian island.

Japan, which received 28 million foreign tourists in 2017, is witnessing the impacts of surging tourism numbers on the quality of life for residents. “Kyoto and Mount Fuji are probably the best – or worst – examples suffering from overtourism,” remarked Masaru Takayama, president of Spirit of Japan Travel and founding chair of Asian Ecotourism Network (AEN).

“Kyoto, where I am born and raised, is suffering tremendously,” he lamented. “The chronic traffic jams, the locals especially the elderly can’t even ride the buses, graffiti, misbehaving tourists that taint our culture, throwing trash on the street, late-night parties at guesthouses despite the code of conduct stated by the community, and the list goes on.”

Clarion call for tourism planning

For too long, long-term planning and development was sorely lacking



Finally the world is waking up to the fact that we can’t put money only to promotion but into development and management.

– Randy Durband, CEO, Global Sustainable Tourism Council

People, people everywhere: popular sites in Asia such as (clockwise from top right) Kyoto’s Arashiyama Bamboo grove, Maya Beach in Thailand’s Koh Phi Phi and Angkor Wat in Siem Reap Cambodia are now overrun with tourists

in many destinations as governments were caught up in the aggressive pursuit of tourism growth and numbers, pointed out Randy Durband, CEO of Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC).

“A major trend in tourism has been that every government, every country in the world has been focused on demand and promotion. Tourism worldwide is mostly promotion, promotion, promotion, and in some cases nothing else,” Durband remarked.

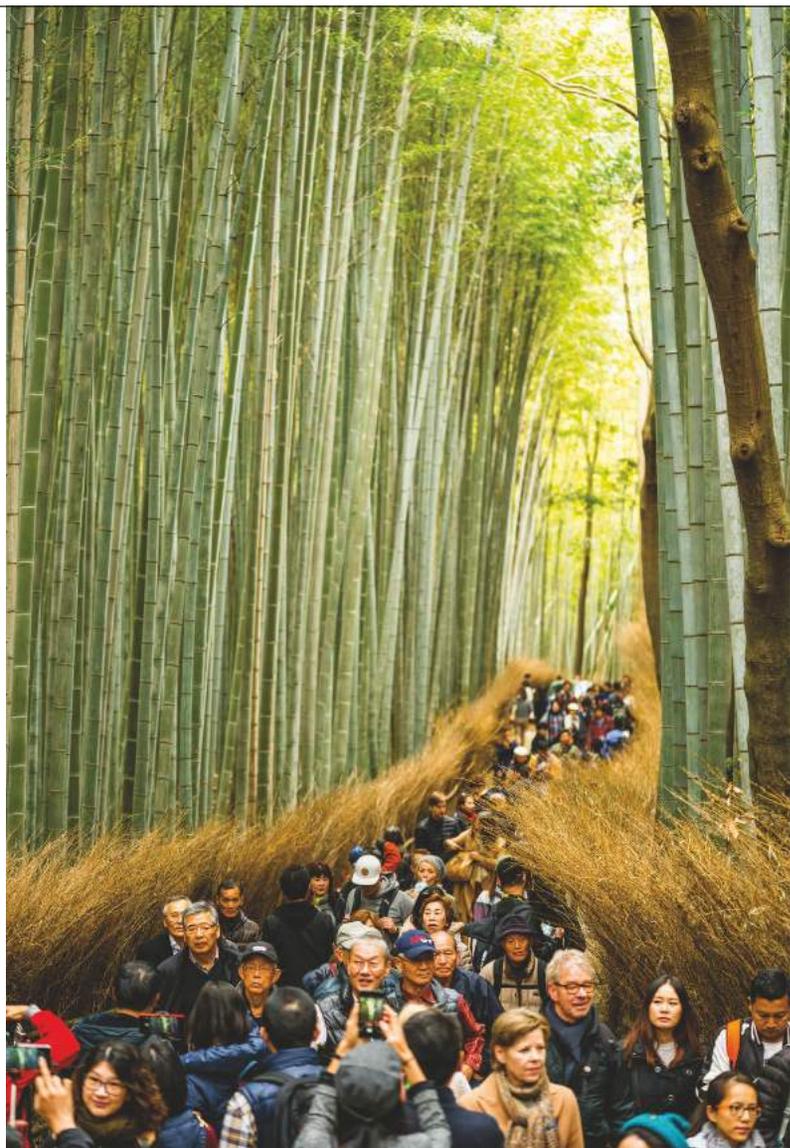
In the past 18 months, media attention on the problems surrounding mass tourism in such iconic destinations as Venice, Barcelona and Iceland has intensified worldwide, driving a greater awareness of overtourism and prompting calls to action in the global travel community.

“Finally the world is waking up to the fact that we can’t put money only to promotion but into development and management; we have to measure visitor satisfaction and also community satisfaction,” Durband said.

“I think governments were asleep, they didn’t see it coming. Governments typically put money into just promotion, anything into development were just small. Suddenly there’s an awareness as it hits them in the face as they realise they need to put resources into planning. And because they are all so late into the game, we’re going to see more pain for a while until they learn to manage better and disperse the visitors,” he added.

Takayama is heartened that there is “positive movement on the discussion level” for tourism to be more sustainable but concrete actions – and awareness – have yet to take root among the government sectors and mainstream tourism industry.

“(There are still) very little actions on the ground. In my personal opinion, the travel agents are probably the worst of all. The mainstream travel agencies’ top priority is to make busi-



nesses out of tourism and the benefits to the host destinations are often overlooked.”

It is with the aim to galvanise industry players into action that Takayama, together with six other agencies, founded the Japan Alliance of Responsible Travel Agencies last month to establish a platform comprising regional and local travel agencies and operators to maximise benefits to the host destinations and tourism stakeholders, including educating and training the industry players.

Takayama stated: “The voices of the locals need to be incorporated so that the tourism destinations first become a good place to live, way before making it a good place to visit.”

He added: “Sustainable development makes sense for every kind of tourism regardless of the size and scale. We all must be involved as there’s only one planet, so I’d highly encourage everyone to be in the game – the tourism sector has a lot of roles to play and industry players have the capacity to deliver them.”

The case of Thailand: what’s after 35 million arrivals?

One of Asia’s most popular destinations, Thailand will likely be the envy of many destination marketing bodies, going by traditional tourism performance markers.

With the exception of the coup year in 2014, Thailand’s inbound arrivals have been on an upward trajectory in the last decade, with the Chinese market a major driving force to push its annual tourist numbers to over 35 million in 2017, equivalent to half of the country’s population.

But Tanes Petchsuwan, Tourism Authority of Thailand’s (TAT) deputy governor for marketing communication, acknowledged that a different gameplan is now needed – and it’s no

longer about pursuing numbers.

When asked what Thailand’s 2018 tourism targets are, Tanes affirmed that tourism revenue will take precedence, unlike previous years. “TAT in the past has been counting numbers as KPI, but the present minister (Weerasak Kowsurat) set a different KPI, signifying a clear tourism direction for the country,” he said.

“Increasing visitors is not a challenge – we’re already very good at it,” Tanes remarked. “But the challenge now is how to balance 35 million for different markets, segments, etc, to ensure that they’re travelling at the right time, to the right places and delivering true benefits to communities,” he continued, emphasising that dispersal of tourists is critical.

Of the opinion that NTOs should give greater weight to social and environmental responsibility in their destination marketing, Tanes revealed that the TAT takes into account the carrying capacity as well as the market segment that each destination is suited for.

Jiraporn Prommaha, director of international affairs division, Ministry of Tourism and Sports Thailand, who together with Tanes were among the speakers at a panel discussion organised by AEN in Bangkok earlier this year, added: “We are trying to push for CBT to disperse tourists away from popular sites beyond Bangkok, Chiang Mai or the beaches to promote the ‘unseen Thailand’”

But when asked how Thailand could cope with the influx of visitors from China, which alone contributed one-quarter of Thailand’s inbound arrivals last year and is still a growing market, Tanes is confident the changing preferences of Chinese travellers as they evolve into FITs will soon put such concerns to rest.

“Mass tourism will become history in future,” Tanes stated.





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Katerina Giannouka

President Asia-Pacific, Radisson Hotel Group

When she joined then Carlson-Rezidor Hotel Group last September, she inherited what was largely seen as an unstable regional office while the whole chain was seen as lacking direction. Giannouka tells Raini Hamdi why that's old news

Are views of the chain as being, in a quick word, confusing, fair?

Our corporate rebranding (to Radisson Hotel Group) addresses exactly those things that were probably thought of as confusing. The rebranding wasn't just a name change but a whole restructuring to gain huge efficiencies from the power of the Radisson name, and it came with a five-year plan, Destination 2022, which is a clear and detailed road map on how we want to grow.

So for example, we now have eight brands that are well-defined and do not compete with any of our other brands. That came from us repositioning, for instance, the Radisson Red brand a few notches higher and making it a more lifestyle brand than before, and launching a new (soft) brand, Radisson Collection (previously the perplexing 'Quorvus').

Coming from a development background (Giannouka was Rosewood Hotel Group's head of development Asia-Pacific and China), I see it as a huge opportunity to start with the company under a new ownership (HNA) and almost a new blank sheet of paper. Much of the five-year plan is about growth and we are building the development team that is going to deliver the growth. We're planning to triple our portfolio in China and double the portfolio in Asia-Pacific, so going from today's 18,000 rooms and adding 20,000 rooms across the region. That requires the right team in place.

How are you rebuilding the development team?

I've been working on that since I joined. We have just named Ramzy Fenianos as new chief development



...we're living in an environment where brands matter.

officer Asia-Pacific, who I'm absolutely certain will help us execute the plan if not more.

We're also rebuilding our development team in China. To triple the portfolio there requires a very localised knowledge. There are lots of opportunities for us: Four of our eight brands sit squarely in the mid-scale and upper mid-scale, which is where the shift in Chinese travellers is to. It used to be luxury. People talk about the 127 million China outbound but in China there are the 5.1 billion domestic travellers. And Radisson has been in China for 20 years as a brand.

We also look forward to partnering more closely with our new owner whose network in China is strong. We've just signed the first deal with HNA where one of its subsidiaries is part of the owning entity of a hotel near the Phoenix airport, a new-build, 334-key hotel in soft-opening which we have rebranded Radisson (Hotel Phoenix Airport). We managed to win that contract in a competitive process. That's an example of how we can leverage our new owner's influence and network within China and the vast real estate they own and are developing. It sends a strong signal to the market about their commitment to us and us to them.

year plan. That plan is completely independent of any contribution or anything from the parent company. It is self-financed from Radisson Hotel Group and is based on organic growth.

So to answer how this influences us, actually we're self-financed. Financially we operate independently from the parent and the five-year plan was approved by both the boards of Radisson Hospitality and Radisson Hotel Group AB.

Having a single ownership however is what gave rise to a new leadership, which gave rise to our current transformation, which looked at what we needed to do better – sharpen our brand architecture, rebrand the loyalty programme, make a significant investment on an entirely new, customised, IT platform that is going to be cutting edge in the industry, to name a few. All of these wouldn't have happened had it not been for the new ownership. And then I joined at the right moment (laughs) when the company is going through the transformation it never had before. I'm really excited.

What is your sense of what owners in the region feel about industry consolidation and how is this an opportunity for Radisson?

We talk to our owners all the time. We constantly look out for what is it they need, where do they see the value and, ultimately, it's back to strong brands.

One of the reasons we decided to focus on our strongest brand Radisson – to build on the strength of that brand and within that sharpen our brand architecture – is because we're living in an environment where brands matter – what those brands deliver in terms of the recognition they have with owners, guests or talents. Our vision is to be among the top three top-of-mind operators in the world when a guest wants to stay in a hotel, when an investor thinks of a hotel company and when an employee wants to join the industry.

So to the question what owners are looking for, I think it's more about value. We've got to make sure our brands are sharpened to drive value into our hotels.

What is interesting is it's harder and harder for a single brand to survive in the ever-consolidating industry of ours. We have eight brands that really cover the spectrum, everything from prizeotel, which is in the lifestyle economy segment, all the way up to Radisson Collection, which is the luxury segment. So that's what we're focusing on, making sure our brands have scale, are well-defined, so the guests, owners and talents see their true value.

10 NEED TO KNOW'S ABOUT KATERINA GIANNOUKA

■ **Who's in your family?** My parents, brother and sister live in Greece. My Big Family (i.e. all my adopted siblings) are scattered across Hong Kong, Singapore, Saigon, London, New York City, San Francisco, Seattle and Montreal

■ **What do you do for fun?** Exercise and travel, a lot

■ **Your ideal vacation?** Different to the last one (Bali excepted)

■ **How do you book your own leisure trips?** I'm always on the lookout to go somewhere new, exciting and meaningful – last year leisure trips took me to Costa Rica, Mumbai, Key West, Blue Mountains, Sedona, Mongolia, Tulum, Vancouver and Mount Lushan in China, where my maternal grandmother was born

■ **What are you reading right now?** *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done* by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan, and *What Lies Between Us* by Nayomi Munaweera – I like to read something concrete and escapist simultaneously

■ **How do you stay healthy?** By spending time with people who inspire, grow and energise me, and doing physical activity every single day – even if it's riding home from work on a shared bicycle

■ **Favourite food?** Fish tacos, on a beach in Mexico

■ **A bad habit you cannot kick?** Going to bed well-past midnight – even when I'm getting up early for yoga (luckily the yoga studio is a one-minute walk from my flat!)

■ **Your pet peeve, something that never fails to annoy you?** A few years ago I decided to let go of complaining and noticing silly annoyances – life is a privilege and what I notice now is the abundance of people, experiences and opportunities that I am so grateful for

■ **Most people don't know that you...** learned how to ride a BMW WWII motorcycle when I was 12 years old – my Dad taught me



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When many travellers think of Switzerland, alpine adventures are often the first thing that come to mind. But the stunning country has so much more to offer, and Switzerland Tourism is eager to showcase these unique experiences to the Asian travel trade.

**It has been said:
“Travel is the only
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As a country that not only boasts dramatic snow-capped peaks and ski retreats during winter but also verdant valleys and cycling trails during summer, Switzerland’s year-round spectacular landscapes are perfect for making memories like no other.

Its urban attractions are also brimming with adventures waiting to be explored, from Basel’s art scene to the cultural appeal of Lausanne.

“One of the biggest trends of Asian guests coming to Europe is experience-driven travel. Instead of rushing from one place to the other, Switzerland is the ideal country to cater to this trend as everything is close by thanks to the

top-notch public transport,” said Ivan Breiter, Director of South East Asia for Switzerland Tourism.

While Switzerland is already a popular inclusion on Europe itineraries, Breiter shared that the aim is to encourage Asian travellers to spend a longer time exploring the country and expand the range of activities undertaken by them.

“Besides city tours, guests can mingle with locals who can show them local culinary treats and trendy shopping boutiques, or even go for a swim together in the crystal-clear river surrounding the country’s capital city,” he said.

With the growing popularity of FIT travel, Switzerland Tourism has part-

nered WebBeds Asia Pacific to allow travel agents to plan and book these one-of-a-kind Swiss experiences for guests in addition to hotel stays.

Available on WebBeds’ attraction booking portal, FIT Ruums, are activities such as a helicopter sightseeing flight over the famous Matterhorn, a journey to the top of Europe on the Jungfrau Railway and a visit to the Graubünden vineyards.

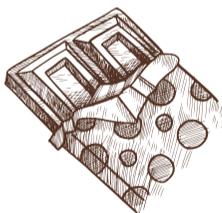
From now until October 2018, Asian travel agents also stand a chance to win special prizes when they book through WebBeds (see Get rewarded when you book Swiss holidays). All the more reason to start introducing the wonders of Switzerland to your clients!



Just a few exciting highlights bookable on FITRuums.com:

CHOCOLATE IN EVERY CORNER

Explore traditional confectionaries and artisan chocolatiers in this deliciously sweet walking tour around the charming Old Town of Basel. Learn to taste chocolate, get a glimpse of a chocolate factory and enjoy yummy specialties.



BEGINNERS' AARE COURSE

Try river swimming for the first time and discover interesting facts about the Aare and outdoor baths, all under the watchful eye of the Swiss Life Saving Association.

JETBOAT INTERLAKEN

This adrenaline-pumping boat trip takes you to the majestic and famous Giessbach Waterfalls, which thunder 500m down over 14 cascades into the lake. Get ready for 360-degree spins and impressive scenery!

KITCHEN AROUND - GREETINGS FROM THE KITCHEN

Dine in the heart of every restaurant – the kitchen! While the food is sizzling, you'll have the opportunity to look over the head chef's shoulder and see how the restaurant runs. Enjoy a four-course menu in four different kitchens in Zermatt, inclusive of wine.



GLACIER 3000

Try your hand at winter sports at the only glacier ski area in the Bernese Oberland. Other possibilities here include crossing a peak-to-peak suspension bridge that offers spectacular views of the Alps, taking the Ice Express chairlift and doing the Glacier Walk.

COOK & CRUISE

Hop onboard a private cruise across Lake Lugano and alight at a waterfront terrace where a chef will be waiting to teach you how to create a typical Ticinese risotto.

Get rewarded when you book Swiss holidays

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From tourist to food tour boss

Whether it's offering durians or 'chopeing' seats in hawker centres, Wok 'n' Stroll's founder and CEO Karni Tomer, a finalist in Best Customer Service for Tourist Guiding in Singapore Tourism Awards 2018, tells Pamela Chow how she leaves a lasting impression on clients

What brought you to Singapore to conduct culinary tours?

I was a chef in Israel before coming to Singapore eight years ago to join my husband who was here for work. I'm a foodie and my passion is local markets and food, so when a Malay friend here took me to Tekka Market, I fell in love.

I remember having chicken *biryani* (spicy rice), served on a banana leaf with egg, mutton and cashew, and it was amazing. After three days of eating like this, my heart was in Singapore.

I wanted to share my passion with other visitors. Back (in 2010), there was no TripAdvisor, and I found it hard to find the local wet markets. When I started Wok 'n' Stroll, my company was one of the few players offering culinary tours.

What preparation did you have to do?

After my visit to Tekka Market, I bought books from Dr Leslie Tay (a prominent food blogger with a taste for hawker fare) and Makansutra (a local food guide and standard). I read blogs of people who miss Singapore food, like their grandmother's

popiah (vegetable wrap). I read up on every dish that I ate.

I wanted to share all of these by taking people out of the air-conditioned malls and off the beaten track. It took about two to three years to be licensed as a travel agent and create our first tours.

How do you ensure customers receive the best experience from your tours?

Manpower and guides are important. Our customers deserve to receive the best knowledge and service. Our guides are all professional – they know how to work with clients, be attentive, on time, tidy and give the best customer service.

But they also know how to be a passionate food explorer. They all have a background in food – from a blogger to a guy whose wife sells noodles in a canteen – so they can tell you about everything from the culture to the ingredients.

I tell my guides to take me as a tourist and be able to entertain me. I have to learn something interesting and surprising.

As guides, we are the ambassadors of Singapore for the three hours of our tour.



One of our challenges was learning how to *chope* (reserve) hawker centre seats for big groups of 40.



Tomer (centre) always offers durians to clients to end their Singapore food tour experience on a memorable note

Some clients have certain expectations about the tour and food, which can sound romantic to them, but sometimes they don't like what they're tasting.

For example, some customers find the *belacan* (chilli) too spicy and they want a beer, so I always tell our guides to just give them what they ask for. Let them enjoy it and go home happy.

I don't just show my customers to a trendy restaurant – I take them to tour the establishment. We try to do unique experiences that revolve around food.

And we always give our customers durian at the end of the tour! Even if they don't like it, they will still remember the good experience of Singapore.

As a non-Singaporean, how do you connect with the locals? What are the challenges and how do you overcome them?

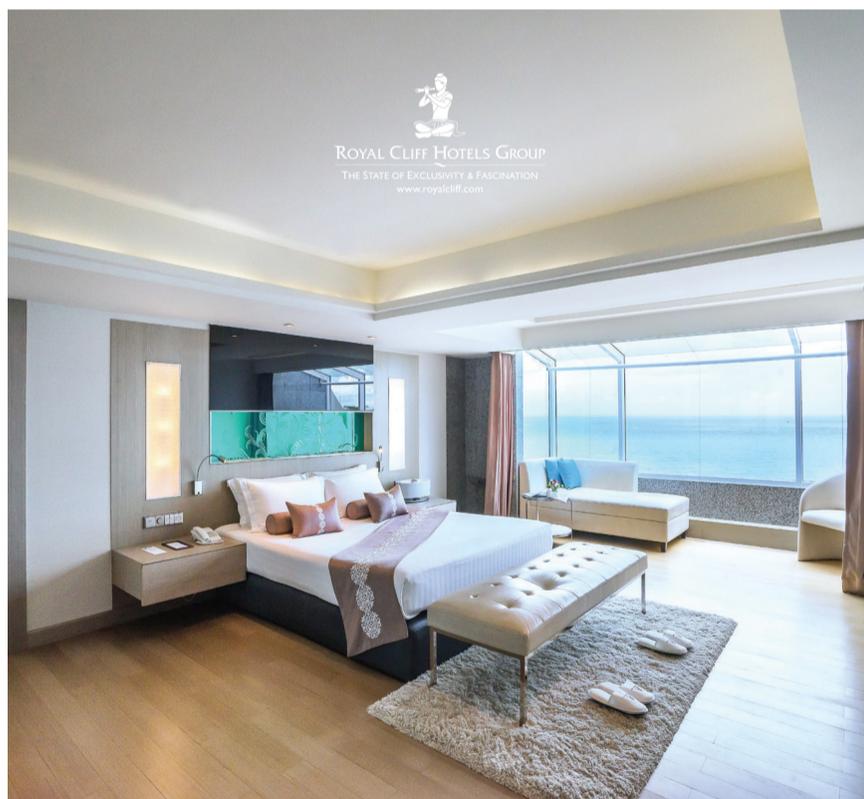
As a former chef, I know the hawkers' frustrations and appreciate the work that

they do. We try to keep a close relationship with the hawkers. Some of them are our friends – we give them Chinese New Year or Deepavali presents, and they greet us during the New Year. We engage them in activities as our partners, and we're even friends on Facebook.

One of our challenges was learning how to *chope* (reserve) hawker centre seats for big groups of 40. We have a food producer go to the market earlier to set up placemats and cutlery on the tables.

What is the next step for Wok 'n' Stroll?

We are working on technological developments that will take Wok 'n' Stroll to the next stage. I keep in touch with our clients to see what they're looking for and what the next trend is, e.g. we are exploring a "catch of the day" tour to the fishery ports. We are also looking into developing tours tailored for the Chinese market, which is starting to visit the local hawker centres.



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TROUBLESHOOTING

An unfortunate passing

While handling a high-end Indian family travelling to Bhutan recently, a 75-year-old man in the group suffered a cardiac arrest on the penultimate day of the trip, unfortunately resulting in his death. He passed away at 16.00 and the group had a flight out the next morning (08.00). The challenge was how to get the dead body released in the time we had. Generally, it takes 24-48 hours to go through all the legalities related in such cases.

However, we along with our Bhutan partner worked tirelessly, and with the support of the local hospital, police authority and the Indian High Commission in Bhutan, managed to secure the release of the body on time.

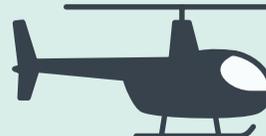
This bitter experience taught us the importance of a strong local partner. Without that, one can face a hell of a time. It was also a lesson on dealing with elderly clients in the future. The deceased had done all medical checkups before travelling and was in a good health. Even then such an unfortunate situation came our way.

Aditya Tyagi, founder, Luxe Escape

SAY THAT AGAIN

The sky's the limit

A US incentive operator with clients from an insurance company requested for a short orientation tour of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor but had only 2.5 hours to spare. As money was not an issue, we organised a helicopter ride for the small group of 10 people. Taking off and returning to Kelab Darul Ehsan golf club, the programme ended with high tea at Tamarind Springs and a cultural performance to showcase the diversity of cultures in Malaysia.



Arokia Das, director,
Luxury Tours Malaysia

Why speed matters

Limelight Networks' senior director Steve Miller Jones examines why it's vital that travel brands deliver a flawless online experience in today's speed-driven Internet environment

Making an online booking is often where most customers start their travel experience today. Amid stiff competition, brands need to cut through the clutter, ensuring that their target audience not only lands on their page, but completes the booking.

Ensuring reliability

Consumers want a fast and consistent experience each time they interact with brands online.

According to Limelight Network's State of User Experience survey, 84 per cent of respondents expect web performance consistency across devices; 43 per cent said they would abandon the current booking site in favour of a competitor's if the experience is slow.

Brands should look to integrate content delivery network (CDN) solutions, which can ensure this amid changing network conditions. Users

will gain fast content access without rebuffering, and ultimately have a positive experience.

Ensuring security

Beyond providing an interactive user experience, brands need to ensure that their site is secure. With 98 per cent of organisations experiencing cyberattacks since 2016, brands need to be adequately equipped, as cyberattacks ultimately undermine customer trust and relationships.

This can be safeguarded by automatically stopping bad bots and facilitating good bots through a trusted CDN, to maintain revenue-generating traffic. This will ensure the speed of customer experience, through ongoing monitoring that protects web applications without impacting performance.

Benefiting from an optimised user experience

When users enjoy a beneficial web



When users enjoy a beneficial web experience, brands ultimately gain profitability and trust.

experience, brands ultimately gain profitability and customer trust.

In the case of Cebu Pacific, an airline which receives 90 per cent of its user bookings online, they wanted to not only ensure web acceleration but security of revenue and routes by managing partner bots. By implementing a CDN, it saw a 61 per cent improvement in global delivery performance, successfully scaling with customer requirements.

As such, an optimised user experience is more crucial than ever. Brands should start by taking the first step, by identifying technology partners that can edge them closer to this goal.

Limelight Networks is a global CDN service provider that enables organisations to deliver faster websites, more responsive applications, highest-quality videos, and consistent game and software downloads to any device.

GREAT APPS



I use Koudai Daoyou (Pocket Travel Guide) quite often. It provides Chinese audio

guides of most tourist spots globally. It is useful when you're travelling by yourself or visiting places that you have not done any research on. I find it especially helpful when I visit museums that do not have Chinese audio guides. – **Wendy Wang, vice president, Madhouse**



Definitely WhatsApp. It allows me to send text messages with photos and videos, and even make phone calls. It allows me to communicate with my superiors, colleagues and loved ones. I get information from the group chats so I am aware of what's happening at work and home. It also allows connectivity in case there are urgent matters that needs my decision. – **Cheong Hai Poh, general manager, Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel**



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Located in the newly-fashionable district of North Point on Hong Kong Island, Hotel VIC boasts panoramic views of Victoria Harbour and direct access to a newly-created waterfront promenade. The twin-tower hotel offers 671 affordable luxury guestrooms and suites. Dining options include a sophisticated rooftop restaurant and bar, an all-day outlet and a deli shop, complemented by diverse eateries and superb shopping in the hotel's podium floors, as well as in an adjacent mall and the vibrant surrounding area. Links to Hong Kong's superb public transport network, including the MTR and ferries, are just steps away from the hotel.

Hotel VIC's hospitality extends to the high-tech world of super-connectivity. In addition to complimentary lightning-fast Wi-Fi available throughout the premises, the hotel features online check-in/out services, guestrooms equipped with flat-screen televisions featuring IPTV service; tailor-made smartphone app that puts such services in-room dining, table reservations, networking and multimedia entertainment at guests' fingertips.

Hotel VIC is due to open in Summer 2018.

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SCAN TO BOOK



Technology shaping tomorrow's travel

A look at the megatrends in travel technology and their potential to transform the industry

The travel industry is in the throes of unprecedented change, as technology make travel quicker, easier and more integrated than ever before. These new technologies are seeing swift uptake from consumers, driven by consumers' growing digital impatience and expectation for instant responses, answers and solutions to their queries and purchasing requests, Expedia noted in its recent *2018 Travel Tech Trends and Industry Opportunities* report.

Travel companies are likewise adopting various technologies at every stage of their journey to improve operational efficiencies and meet customers' expectations, according to data and analytics company GlobalData.

"Increasingly, people are coming to understand that the travel business is really a technology business," said Philip Likens, director of Sabre Labs. "Even the simplest journey generates huge amounts of data. Collecting, indexing and understanding that data – and how we apply that understanding to improve every traveller's experience – is what will drive real innovation across the entire travel ecosystem."

Here, *TTG Asia* takes a look at some key technologies shaping and transforming the travel industry.

“**Increasingly, people are coming to understand that the travel business is really a technology business. Even the simplest journey generates huge amounts of data...**

– Philip Likens, director, Sabre Labs

Artificial intelligence

Making rapid inroads into the travel and hospitality sectors is artificial intelligence (AI), which automates computer processes to understand and mimic human behaviour through natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning. NLP helps computers understand human speech or typing, while machine learning refers to computer programmes that learn from new information or data without having to be explicitly programmed. Together, they enable computers to respond to specific questions or requests, and improve the relevance of responses over time.

Some 62 per cent of global consumers are comfortable with AI applications responding to their queries, according to Expedia. Said Arthur Chapin, senior vice president – global product and design, Expedia Group: "By better knowing each customer and intuitively providing them with the information they want, we're freeing up time, and starting off their travel experience with right with frictionless discovery, search and booking process."

Chatbots, offshoots of AI, are becoming ubiquitous and are especially prevalent in customer service, programmed to resolve simple issues that previously required the mitiga-

tion of a real-time agent.

For example, Chan Brothers Travel's implementation of a Wechat system on its website has helped to relieve the load on its hotlines and is capable of holding up to 65 per cent of the conversation with customers before requiring human intervention, if at all.

Likewise, Air New Zealand's Oscar chatbot has reportedly enabled the airline to answer 75 per cent of questions in Australasia, freeing up its customer service agents to focus more on handling complex queries.

However, with growing automation, human intuition and engagement skills are expected to become even more valuable. In contrast with algorithms which rely on access to extensive personal data to customise recommendations, human staff can be trained to provide excellent, personalised service without needing much prior context.

Internet of things

The Internet of Things (IoT) is the network of physical devices connected by electronics in conversation, and the travel industry has emerged as the frontrunner in IoT spending.

Airlines are using IoT to improve all aspects of the passenger experience, from baggage handling to safety monitoring and checking the

efficiency of the planes themselves. Lufthansa is using IoT to enable passengers to track their baggage via a link found on their mobile boarding pass in the Lufthansa app.

Travel pundits are also expecting to see the IoT take off in the hospitality landscape, enabling hotels to completely personalise the guest experience through in-room smart devices to a network of controls.

Through the innovative use of several sensing and data processing strategies, Singapore-based Drop Positioning Systems has created an all-encompassing Smart Hotel Eco-System to simplify the process of storing and locating guests' luggage, manage inventory and even tracking of lost & found items, enabling hotels to save on manpower while boosting workflow efficiency at the same time.

Augmented and virtual reality

Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies have an easy fit with the travel and tourism sector.

VR, which makes users feel as though they are physically present in a digitally created environment, has seen progressive adoption in the travel and tourism industry, with VR headsets becoming a mainstream consumer product in recent years.

VR applications in the travel industry are numerous. Travel companies such as Thomas Cook, Flight Centre and Virgin Holidays are already experimenting with VR in-store to give potential customers



tours of the destinations they're selling.

Shangri-La Hotels was an early adopter of VR in its marketing efforts, rolling out in 2015 Samsung Gear VR headsets across all its global sales offices and produced 360-degree VR tours for its properties worldwide.

Immersive VR experiences are now touted in Asia's theme parks, may it be dungeon crawling amongst the undead at The Rift in Midvalley, Kuala Lumpur, or battling dragons, living alongside aliens and visiting different planets – all in one place – at Oriental Sci-Fi Valley in Guiyang city in China's Guizhou province, said to be the world's biggest VR sci-fi theme park in the world.

These technologies, while unlikely to replace tourism completely, have potential to improve and inspire travel experiences. Pokemon Go, an AR game promoted by Niantic to get people moving, was used by many tourism authorities to promote their destinations at the height of its popularity.

Travel suppliers are constantly thinking up novel ways to enhance the travel experience. A case in point is Asiatravel, which through its B2B division TAcenre, is linking arms with Yaturu 5800 Israel to bring "Hollywood theatrics" to tourism with the launch of Israel tours staged using AR technology and scripted audio-dramas of the destinations' history. After Israel, Asiatravel and Yaturu will jointly develop similar AR tours in major tourism destinations in Asia, with the first Asian tour to be ready by this year-end.

Voice technology

A relatively newer concept on the market, voice-enabled devices are expected to see significant uptake in an increasingly time-sensitive world. What Siri started doing for iPhone users several years back has evolved into an entire industry, with the mainstream success of devices such as Amazon Echo and Alexa.

Developing markets are also driving the next wave of voice-powered technology. While North America accounted for 95 per cent of Alexa and Google Assistant users in end-2016, Traveport projects that over 47 per cent of device users will be in Asia and Ocean by 2021. Furthermore, recent Traveport research has found that 72 per cent of Chinese travellers use voice search compared to just 33 per cent in the UK.

Voice search currently presents the greatest opportunity in hotels. According to Traveport Digital Mobile Travel Trends Survey 2017, 31 per cent of travel brands intend to invest in voice technology in 2018.

Blockchain

The value underlying blockchain technology has often been overshadowed by headlines on the huge volatility in the price of cryptocurrencies, according to Sabre Labs in its latest *Emerging Technology in Travel 2018 Report*, as the global technology provider sees blockchain as among the technology trends that will define the future of travel.

Sabre recommends travel agencies to

start learning about blockchain so that they could understand and strategise how business can benefit from data that should be scarce, shared and permanent.

"Blockchain isn't magic, it's just a new tool to put in the toolbox of transaction and data storage solutions," the report stated. "That said, as a tool, it's distinct from other tools, so it makes new kinds of solutions possible."

While other industries have been quick

to adopt cryptocurrencies, the travel industry isn't far behind as a growing number of companies and businesses is now accepting digital cash as a form of payment (see page 4).

Bangkok-based luxury adventure specialist Smiling Albino has started accepting bitcoin payments for all its trips to Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam to "improve clients' experience and utilise innovative ideas".

Airlines such as Singapore Airlines has opened the door for cryptocurrencies, with plans to launch a digital wallet for its frequent flyer KrisFlyer programme that will be powered by a private blockchain.

Meanwhile, Brisbane airport became the world's first aviation hub to accept Bitcoin as well as a selection of virtual currencies – Dash, Steem, Litecoin and Ethereum – following an agreement with TravelbyBit Australia.

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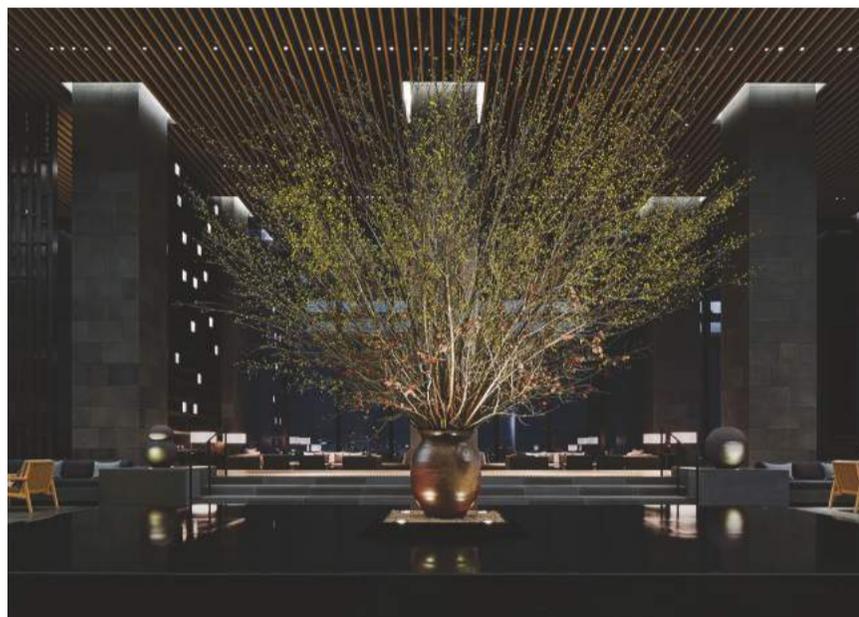
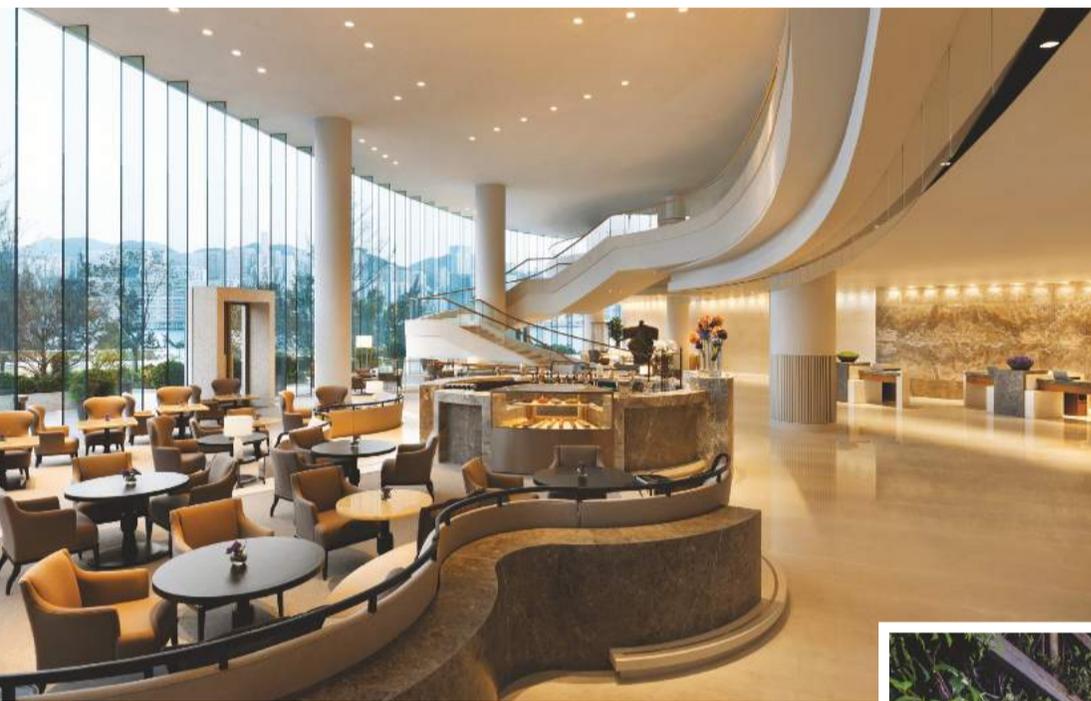
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Havens in the city

Despite their city settings, urban resorts offer both an escape from, and a connection to, the surroundings. Agents share what make a great urban resort and their top picks



In Asia, where cities are often characterised by high-rises and a dense population, resort-like hotels offer a convenient option for locals and foreign visitors alike a respite from the urban bustle. Urban resorts also play well to the growing bleisure trend, as modern travellers are combining work and leisure more than ever.

“Urban resorts sell well to those who visit the city and don’t have time to travel to a beach destination or a jungle resort. It does well with honeymooners, couples, business travellers and expatriates looking for a restful weekend,” Ally Bhoonee, executive director, World Avenues, told *TTG Asia*.

“Customers, especially families, love urban resorts as it makes them feel they are on holiday and at ease. The rustic décor, water elements, landscaping and interior design creates that atmosphere. At the same time, they are not too far away from the city,” he added.

Among foreign visitors to Asian cities, the European market shows a stronger preference for resort-type properties. “It is a trend for Europeans on holiday to get away from concrete blocks. They enjoy staying in smaller boutique properties that can offer a more relaxed environment such as Villa Samadhi Kuala Lumpur,” said Manfred Kurz, managing director, Diethelm Travel Malaysia.

Sharing Kruz’s observation, Kim Martin Rasmussen, product & contracting manager at Exo Travel Thailand, also sees the Western market placing a higher premium on resort stays in Bangkok. “The UK market especially likes Ariyasom Villa and Anantara Riverside, whereas all our French clients like this kind of resort-style (hotels), as they are not used to high-rise buildings in France, so they always like it small and boutique.”

In the city, but an escape from it
Prime examples of urban resorts, in

the eyes of travel agents in the region, are the Aman Tokyo, Kerry Hong Kong, and The Siam in Bangkok.

A shared feature is the strong sense of retreat, and despite their urban setting flaunt a connection to nature, may it be in the ample indoor/outdoor spaces, extensive natural light or abundant greenery. These urban sanctuaries are also destinations unto themselves, combining unique design with a strong suite of health and wellness amenities.

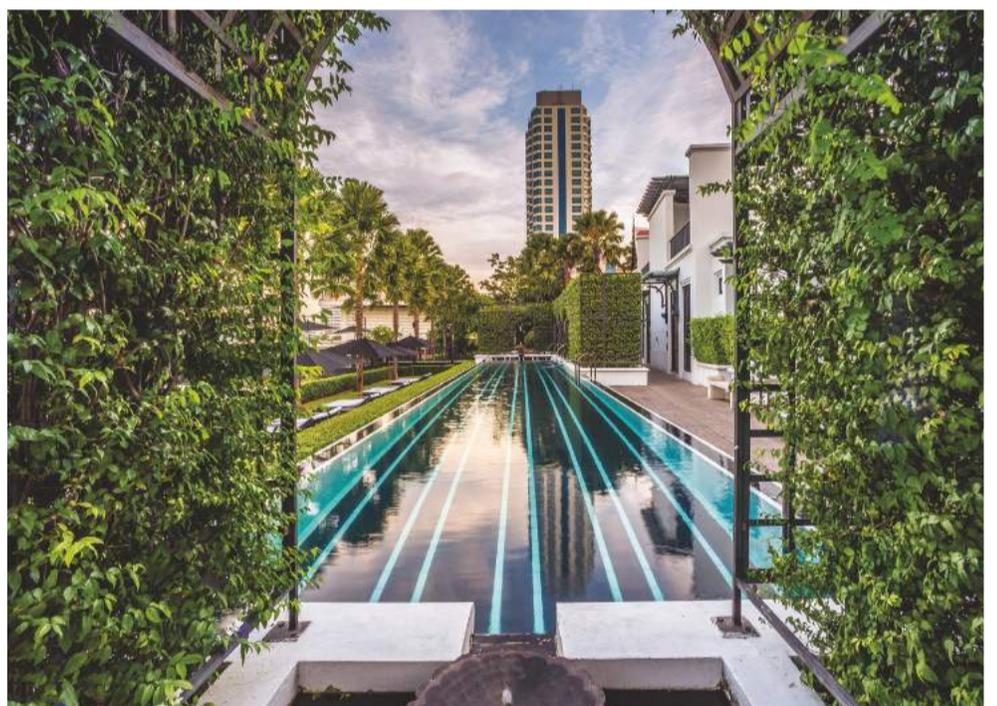
In the Malaysian capital, The Saujana Hotel Kuala Lumpur makes a good urban resort example, Bhoonee suggested, as it offers ample greenery and space, an expansive lobby and rustic look that reinforces the “resort feel”. Easy access to the Saujana Golf & Country Club, with its two 18-hole golf courses, further elevates the resort experience.

Gloria Slethaug, managing director, Connexus Travel Hong Kong, remarked: “There is a limited number of hotels in Hong Kong that are considered as urban resorts. In fact, urban resorts can be thematic, e.g. The Landmark Mandarin Oriental Landmark, with its Oriental Spa concept, or Kerry Hotel, with an outdoor infinity pool.”

She added: “However, some clients may not consider a city hotel with a large outdoor pool as a resort. In my view, an urban resort is about providing an oasis from the hustle and bustle of a cosmopolitan city. The PuLi Hotel and Spa in Shanghai is a great example of an urban oasis, as are Aman hotels, which have the capability to create such ambience.”

In Bangkok, Ariyasom Villa and The Siam are urban resort standouts in the eyes of Soontarut Wattanahongsiri, founder of Blackrice Travel.

“Their architectural style, ambience, facilities and most importantly personalised service make (clients) feel more relaxed amidst Bangkok’s chaos. They don’t make guests feel like they’re in Bangkok,” she said.



Clockwise, from top left: Kerry Hotel, Hong Kong; Aman Tokyo; and The Siam, Bangkok are agents’ top urban resort picks in Asia

“These two properties are both my personal favourites as well.”

For Exo’s Rasmussen, other urban resort contenders in Bangkok include heritage properties like Chakrabongse Villa, which combines history and outstanding design by the riverside; Anantara Riverside, a riverside property in a resort-style setting; and The Sukhothai Bangkok and Siam Kempinski, both retreats from their surrounding bustle in the city’s downtown.

Still room to grow

Unlike other Asian cities, Manila, on the other hand, has few properties that can be considered urban resorts, according to Philippine agents Benjie Bernal, tour operations manager at Sharp Travel Service and Mike Hain, groups manager at Corporate International Travel and Tours.

Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila, according to both, is the closest to what an urban resort is, but the luxury property enjoys greater popularity among local staycationers than international visitors, in part due to Manila’s transit hub status as inbound visitors rather head elsewhere in the

country for resort stays.

Even for a highly urbanised market like Hong Kong, where the likes of Kerry Hotel and East Hong Kong make compelling urban retreats, most clients are still not aware of such offerings in the city and would head to neighbouring Macau for weekend resort stays, shared TLX Travel’s director and general manager Eliza Ma.

There is room to grow the awareness for urban resorts as staycation venues when Hong Kong Ocean Park Marriott Hotel launches in June, she admitted.

It’s a similar story for Japanese travellers, observed Shota Shinura, president and CEO of Tokyo-based Benefit Plus, who said the Kerry’s and Aman’s appear to have developed a firm following among other nationalities except the Japanese.

“If Japanese want a city holiday, they go to Bangkok or Taipei or wherever for that destination; if they want a beach, they go to Hawaii or Bali,” he explained.

Reporting by Xinyi Liang-Pholsena, S Puvaneswary, Prudence Lui and Julian Ryall



An urban resort is about providing an oasis from the hustle and bustle of a cosmopolitan city.

– Gloria Slethaug, managing director, Connexus Travel Hong Kong



Indonesia bumper report

The splendid archipelago

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Destination

Lessons from Agung

Mt Agung's eruption may have shaken travel confidence in Bali, but from this seismic event the tourism sector also discovers fertile ground for lessons on crisis management and market diversification, reports Mimi Hudoyo



Above: Mount Agung, Bali's highest peak, remains a powerful tourist magnet despite its recent eruption

As Bali's tourism moves past the aftermath of last year's Mount Agung eruption and the bombings in Surabaya last month, the travel trade has also been left to ponder the important questions of how to better manage crises and risks in a world constantly fraught with insecurity and change.

Lifting hopes for restored tourism confidence is the 2018 Annual Meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank Group taking place in Bali come October. The high-profile meetings are said to be the largest event the island has hosted, with an estimated attendance of more than 15,000 delegates from 189 countries.

Lenny Willyana, director of sales and marketing, Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel, said: "We would like to have more international events in Bali so that more travellers (would gain the) confidence to travel here and consider Bali as a (top choice for both leisure and business events)."

Travel confidence is especially important to Indonesia now, as the destination is just beginning to recover from the impact of Mount Agung's



"The Chinese is not the only market to Bali. You have the Australians, Europeans, Japanese, Singaporeans, and let's not forget the Indonesian domestic market."

– Garth Simmons, COO, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, AccorHotels

eruption in October 2017, which led to airport closures in Bali and Lombok and travel advisories from a number of countries.

Massive cancellations to Bali ensued, and the island's top origin market of China also took the largest hit. "(Average) hotel occupancy in Bali was between 50-70 per cent before the eruption, but went down to 10 per cent after the eruption according to reports from some hotels," Willyana revealed.

Based on the 1Q2018 data from the Bali Statistics Office, arrivals from China were down by 24 per cent year-on-year, Australia six per cent and Singapore four per cent. Total arrivals to Bali in that period was 1.3 million, down 2.7 per cent.

Sudarsana, corporate general manager business development and marketing communications, Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts, said: "By March things were back on track and we saw full recovery by May."

But just as Bali's tourism recovery picks up momentum after a slower 1Q, a string of terror attacks hit Surabaya last month, prompting worries that recovery efforts would be negated.

Fortunately, tour players such as I Ketut Ardana, chairman of ASITA Bali Chapter, said the immediate impact of the Surabaya attacks on bookings was insignificant.

The recent terrorism incident did not appear to weigh on concerns of outbound agents in Southeast Asia, and Ardana is confident that Bali bookings for the coming summer peak season would remain intact.

With the volcanic eruption and Surabaya incident now moving to the rear view mirror, these recent crises however offer valuable lessons for Bali's tourism stakeholders.

Yazid Sidik, director of sales and marketing of Best Western Kamala Jimbaran, said: "China was our main international market, so the eruption affected us quite a bit. We are increasing our focus on other markets like India, while keeping the China market (strong)."

On the other hand, Eddy Sunyoto, director of Terimakasih Indonesia Tours & Travel, said: "We also learnt that the Chinese market bounces back very fast."

Similarly, I Gde Pitana, deputy minister for tourism marketing de-

velopment I, Ministry of Tourism, said: "The Chinese are obedient citizens who follow (government advice), hence the cancellations. However as soon as the advisory was reversed, the market returned quite fast too."

Quick crisis response on the international level is also important. In the case of Bali, tourism minister Arief Yahya met with diplomatic missions in Indonesia and authorities in China.

"The result was the lifting of the travel warning and we immediately started to see traffic returning," said Bambang Sugiono, director of Gajah Bali Tour.

On whether the government was relying too heavily on the China market, Nia Niscaya, deputy minister of tourism marketing development II, whose portfolio includes China, said: "China is the biggest outbound market in the world now. Aiming at a tiny percentage of this market means big in the actual number."

But the Chinese are also valued travellers for other reasons, she explained, as this market makes relatively quick travel purchasing decisions and also likes exploring a destination instead of just staying in the hotel.

Still, the ministry is also continuing to focus on other growth markets such as India and the Middle East, alongside a diversification of its marketing promotion efforts on destinations beyond Bali in Indonesia, Niscaya said.

Lauding the government's efforts in market diversification and infrastructural development across the country as part of its 10 New Bali's initiative, Garth Simmons, AccorHotels' COO for Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, thinks more could still be done.

"The Chinese is not the only market to Bali. You have the Australians, Europeans, Japanese, Singaporeans, and let's not forget the Indonesian domestic market," he opined.

Addressing the possibility of Mount Agung as an active volcano erupting again, the tourism minister said contingency plans are ready to be activated, including having airports in neighbouring destinations like Lombok, Surabaya and Banyuwangi ready for aircraft diversion and evacuation; plus land-and-sea evacuation mechanism via Gilimanuk ferry terminal connecting Ketapang in East Java and fast-boat service to Banyuwangi.

The Bali Tourism Hospitality Task Force was also set up as a permanent unit to tackle issues potentially affecting the stability of Bali's tourism.

Destination

When old is gold

Mimi Hudoyo discovers how tradition and culture form the tourism fabric in fast-developing Yogyakarta

Yogyakarta may be a big city in the making, with hotels and shopping malls mushrooming across the city and the latest car models making runs on the roads, but this city remains a stronghold of Javanese culture and heritage.

For Fadli Fahmi Ali, founder and director of Werkudara Travel Management, there is no question Yogyakarta's cultural identity is well and alive and will continue to be so.

"Culture and heritage are at the heart of the city. Despite the developments, it is culture and art that keeps our business and leisure clients interested," he stated.

Archaeological sites like Borobudur Buddhist Temple and Prambanan Hindu Temple, and Kraton (Yogyakarta's Palace) are key attractions.

However, the fact is that Yogyakarta sees a high rate of repeat visitors. How then do travel companies keep tourists coming after they have crossed out these must-sees?

For Fadli, it comes down to enhancing the overall experience. He said: "There are several other small temples around Prambanan which we take travellers to. And to add to the experience, instead of sitting on a bus, travellers can take a bike, or hop on *andong*s (horse carts) or *becaks* (trishaws)."

A temple tour can also be combined with a nearby village, where tourists visit home industries producing tofu, brown sugar, or a local artist's workshop demonstrating crafts such as wayang leather shadow puppet and wooden masks.

Barama Intercity Tour also com-

bines a sunrise tour to Punthuk Setumbu hill overlooking the Borobudur Temple, followed by a guided tour of the temple and buffet breakfast at Manohara Hotel.

Hasan Prayogo, founder of Omah Kecebong guesthouse, believes local communities need to be an active part of tourism to set the city apart from other destinations.

He said: "I started the project in 2015 with cultural preservation in mind. We created a place for those who have an interest in local culture, while empowering the village and surrounding villages."

Activities in Omah Kecebong include batik painting and gamelan music class run by local artists.

He also works together with ox-cart owners to who take travellers on tours of the village.

Above: A Hindu ceremony at Yogyakarta's Prambanan temple to mark the Day of Silence



Bambang Witayer/shutterstock

Such traditional activities appear to be of interest to Indonesian and international travellers. Between 2,500 and 3,000 guests visit Omah Kecebong every month, even with minimum promotional efforts.

Having witnessed strong retention of culture in the city despite growth in the last two decades, Alain Rigodin, general manager of Yogyakarta Marriott Hotel, however expects a new airport (opening in the next two years) may accelerate change.

"The new airport will be the game changer. When it opens, a larger number of tourists will (pour in) and change will take place," said Rigodin.

"Nevertheless, I hope Yogyakarta will maintain its cultural identity, because (only then can it) differentiate itself from other destinations like Jakarta or Surabaya."

Jambuluwuk Oceano Seminyak Hotel, Bali

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Hotels

A flourishing scene

Indonesia's hospitality market is brimming with homegrown brands and activity. Mimi Hudoyo finds out what's driving this sector

The hospitality industry in Indonesia is flourishing on the back of the country's brisk tourism sector. Not only are more global hotel companies coming in and growing their presence beyond the major destinations, homegrown hotel brands too have been hard at work.

Larger homegrown groups like Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts, Archipelago International and Tauzia Hotel Management have consistently been growing their portfolio,

while smaller players, such as Sahid International Hotel Management and Consultant, have been steadily scaling up in recent years.

New names such as Jambuluwuk Hotels & Resorts, Dafam Hotel Management, Artotel Group and Sudamala Resorts have also entered the hospitality space in the last decade to grab a piece of the huge domestic travel pie and the growing international market.

Launched in 2011, Artotel Group currently operates five properties



Our aim is to have a hotel in every city in the country, whether (through new-builds) where we get involved from scratch or taking over existing hotels.

- Vivi Heelambang, director of sales, marketing and business development, Sahid International Hotel Management & Consultant

with five more to open this year and six next year, the majority of which will be under its midscale Artotel brand. The group also has an upscale (Curated Collection) and economy brand (Bobotel).

"We are collaborating with rising young talented artists and art galleries. Artotel strives to enhance guest experience while promoting local contemporary art to the world," said Erastus Radjimin, CEO of Artotel Group.

Meanwhile, Jambuluwuk Hotels & Resorts' properties combine traditional elements with a modern touch. The group currently owns and operates five properties in Yogyakarta, Bali, Puncak, Batu and Gili Trawangan, and is reaching out to international wholesalers as well.

Mella Purwanaika, Jambuluwuk's vice president marketing, commented: "We have surveyed some of the governments 10 New Bali's such as Morotai. We find (the locations) beautiful but it would probably be some time before we enter these markets, as we want to concentrate on destinations that are more ready (to welcome tourists)."

Jambuluwuk's owning company Arcs House is hence planning to open outposts in Labuan Bajo, Ubud and Bandung, tourist destinations that are growing in popularity. The group is also seeking to expand its management service into existing and new hotels.

Family-owned Sudamala Resorts launched its first property, Sudamala Suites & Villas, in Bali's Sanur

in 2015, and now has properties in Lombok and Labuan Bajo (Komodo), with another one coming soon in East Bali.

Sudamala's owning company, Griya Usaha, is committed to developing bespoke boutique resorts with strong local cultural characters.

Emily Subrata, director of Griya Usaha, told *TTG Asia*: "My father is a great art collector so there are many artistic masterpieces adorning our properties. Each suite has its own unique interior design, and we are careful to make our properties blend in with the environment, particularly its local culture."

Sahid International Hotel Management & Consultant, which for many years was content with maintaining its existing properties, has now adopted an aggressive strategy to plant its brands around Indonesia.

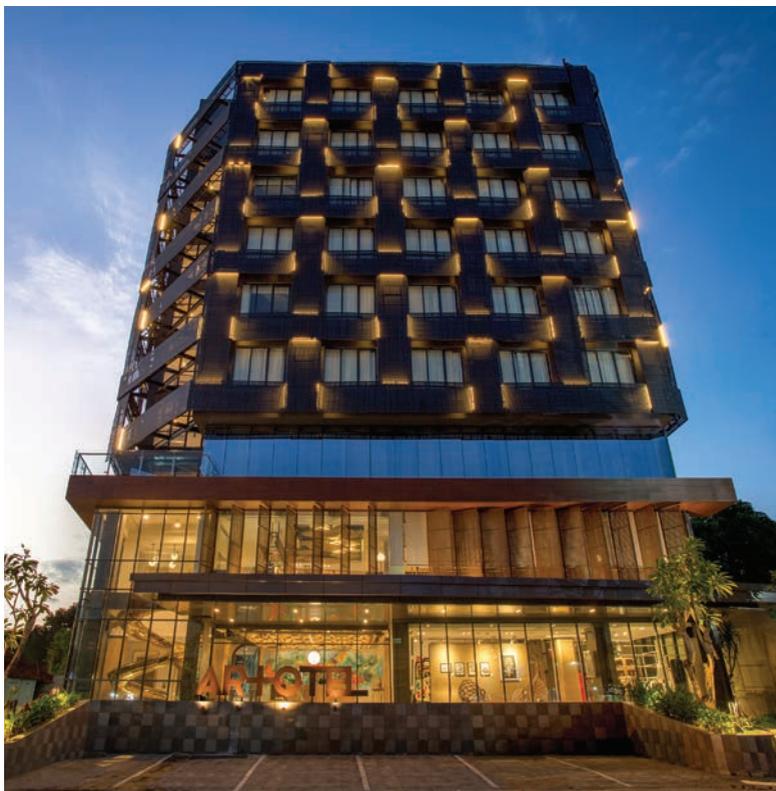
Said Sahid's director of sales, marketing and business development, Vivi Heelambang: "Our aim is to have a hotel in every city in the country, whether (through new-builds) where we get involved from scratch or taking over existing hotels."

In the last couple of years, Sahid Hotels has acquired management of existing properties in Maumere, Kupang, Wakatobi and Banyuwangi, while new hotels will be opening on Bangka Island, Gili Trawangan, Serpong and Bandung. In the pipeline are properties in Pangandaran, Timika and Yogyakarta.

"There are nice hotels with good locations in exotic destinations managed by individual owners, which have not been very successful in operations. We take over the management of such hotels that we believe have the potential; most of them did not perform merely because of the lack of management skills," Vivi elaborated.

Most of the hotels, within months of the takeover, have seen their occupancy and revenue increased by 200-300 per cent, according to Vivi.

"Some hotels needed renovations, while others needed additional amenities and our sales marketing channels to make them visible to markets," she added.



Left: Artotel Yogyakarta brings local art to the hotel experience

NEW HOTELS

Santika Premiere Ambon

Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts's latest property is located in Ambon, Maluku. The 143-room Santika Premiere Ambon on Jalan Surdirman overlooks the harbour and Merah Putih Bridge, and amenities include a ballroom, restaurant, lobby lounge, swimming pool and gym.

Yello Hotel Paskal Bandung

Yello Hotel Paskal – an economy brand under Tauzia Hotel Management – has opened in the Paskal Hypersquare mixed-use development. The 150-room hotel has three meeting rooms, plus recreational facilities such as a gaming station, infinity pool and the Wok 'N' Tok restaurant.

HA-KA Hotel Semarang

Semarang, the capital of Central Java, has a new budget property in the city centre. Managed by Parador Hotels & Resorts, the 90-key HA-KA Hotel Semarang boasts The HAngry Restaurant, four meeting rooms, in-room spa and massage facility, airport transfers service, as well as a bike rental service.

Sahid Osing Kemiren Banyuwangi

Sahid Hotels & Resorts has entered Banyuwangi, an up-and-coming tourist destination in East Java, with the opening of Sahid Osing Kemiren Banyuwangi, the group's first boutique resort. The resort stands on an area of 7,600m² within the Kemiren Tourism Village and

features 10 villas and 16 rooms, a restaurant and meeting room.

Yogyakarta Marriott Hotel

The city's first Marriott-branded hotel opened with 347 guestrooms and suites. Facilities include the largest club lounge in Yogyakarta, a spa, gym, swimming pool, all-day dining Yogyakarta Kitchen, Taman Sari Bar & Grill and a lobby lounge.

Meetings and events facilities include a pillarless ballroom, which at 1,870m² is the largest in town, a boardroom and seven meeting rooms.

Wyndham Opi Hotel Palembang

Located in the Jakabaring precinct next to the OPI Mall, the first Wyndham in Palembang offers 257 rooms. Amenities

Below: Yogyakarta Marriott Hotel's lobby lounge

on-site include all-day dining restaurant 9 Rivers, the Lotus Lounge, a spa, infinity pool and gym. The property is also home to the city's largest convention facility comprising two ballrooms – the larger ballroom being able to seat up to 2,500 delegates – and six meeting rooms totalling 2,260m².



Tried & Tested Jambuluwuk Oceano Seminyak Hotel Bali

Indonesian hotel chain Jambuluwuk Hotels and Resorts has rolled out its first outpost on the Island of the Gods. Mimi Hudoyo checks out the homegrown brand

LOCATION The six-storey, 138-key hotel is located on Jalan Petitenget, an area lined with some of Bali's most famous restaurants and bars, spas and chic boutiques.

ROOMS There are six room catego-

ries. I stayed in a 40m² Deluxe Premier room, which was one of the few in its category with direct pool access.

The room's layout – with a mini living room and working corner – made me feel at home. There are also two TV sets, and guests can enjoy screentime from the sofa or in bed.

The full-length glass windows and doors leading to the swimming pool area afforded a full view of the hotel's garden and waterfall as well.

The artistic décor offer guests a sense of place that they are in Bali.

F&B The Clubhouse is located on the hotel's rooftop, and offers both a breakfast buffet, and a la carte menu for lunch and dinner. The Clubhouse also serves artisan coffee featuring local brews from Aceh, Toraja, Bali and Sumatra.

The breakfast spread has a good mix of Indonesian and international dishes. The beef *soto* – flavourful beef vermicelli soup served piping hot – was my favourite among the Indonesian dishes.

During lunch, I tried Jambuluwuk's signature *Sego Luwuk*, a set dish comprising coconut rice, beef rendang, and sautéed papaya leaves and clams in sambal sauce. Small in package but big in taste, this scrumptious dish filled me up.

Besides The Clubhouse, the hotel has two other F&B venues. In the lobby is the Croustille Artisan Bakery selling cupcakes, croissants and Danish pastries.

Next door is Fresto & Bar. The restaurant's menu is international, and focuses on organic products from local farms. My dinner of coffee wood smoked quail was delicious. I could taste the smoky flavour at first bite, and the stuffing was so savoury and juicy at the same time.

FACILITIES Besides the swimming pool on the ground floor, the hotel has another pool on the rooftop with a deck and sunbathing area. Also on the rooftop is a gym and spa. Other facilities include a lounge, kid's club, and two meeting spaces which can hold up to 120 pax theatre-style.

SERVICE Generally great. My check-in process was speedy, and the hotel staff are friendly and efficient.

When I had a problem with my TV set, the technician came very quickly to fix the remote. When I needed to dress a small cut, housekeeping brought me a band aid, Betadine, and cotton in a blitz.

I also enjoyed the spa service, where I indulged in a head and shoulder massage, as well as a manicure and pedicure.

VERDICT A cosy and well designed hotel, with a great location and facilities to boot.

No. of rooms 138

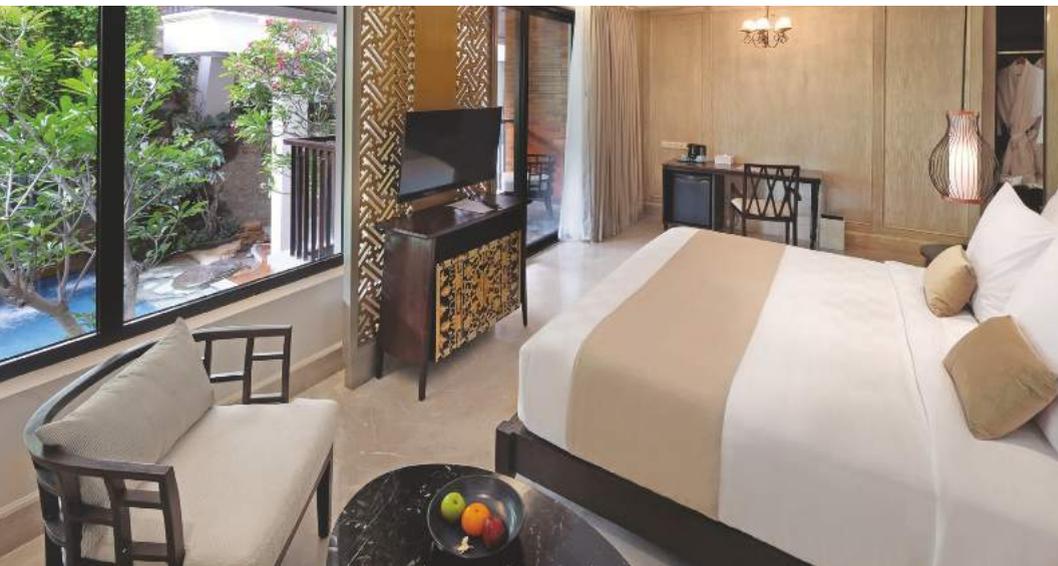
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BBTF showcase

Tourism in Bali and Beyond

The Bali & Beyond Travel Fair is back this year in its fifth edition, keeping attendees abreast of tourism developments in the country. Here are some highlights

5th BBTF casts spotlight on digital trends, eco and nomadic tourism

Themed *the Colors of Indonesia*, the fifth edition of the Bali & Beyond Travel Fair (BBTF) takes place from June 26-30 at the Nusa Dua Convention Center in Bali.

BBTF 2018 will bring together 266 buyers from 48 countries, 230 sellers including three new countries – Thailand, Vietnam and the UAE – occupying the pavilion hosted by Badung regency, 33 members of the international media and 21 national media delegates. BBTF 2018 will also host speakers addressing opportunities, trends and insights as well as highlight the diversity of Indonesia's cultural and heritage assets.

The show is organised by the Association of the Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies, Bali chapter, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism Indonesia, and co-hosted by Badung regency. It will hence be in line with the ministry's three main focus areas, namely digital tourism, developing a "tourist village homestay programme" and creating greater air travel accessibility. The ministry is also aiming to promote of "nomadic tourism and ecotourism" in four Indonesian destinations as well as to continue to push the 10 New Bali's to par with Bali.

With "weak links" to be addressed between tourism stakeholders (businesses, public administration, residents, knowledge sector and capital), tourism minister Arief Yahya sees BBTF as a way of reinforcing the "penta-helix" model the ministry is working on.

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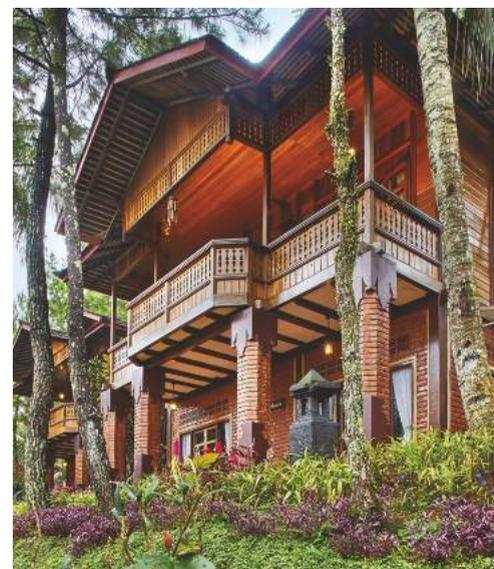
Jambuluwuk Hotels and Resorts

Starting out with just one home-stay property in 2004, the homegrown hospitality company has since grown to a portfolio of five hotels in Indonesia.

Its most recent opening is the Jambuluwuk Oceano Seminyak Hotel in Bali, which joins another island resort, the Jambuluwuk Oceano Resort Gili Trawangan (see page 21), nestled on a private two-hectare beachfront location in northern Gili Trawangan.

In West Java, there is the Jambuluwuk Ciawi Puncak Convention Hall and Resort (right), while Jambuluwuk Batu Village Resort and Convention Hall is perched 1,100m above sea level on the hillside between Batu regency and Pujon city in East Java.

The fifth property, Jambuluwuk Malioboro Boutique Hotel, is located in the thick of street life, while being mere steps away from the Royal Palace of Yogyakarta.



Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel

The Discovery Kartika Plaza Hotel (below), located next to the Discovery Shopping Mall on a private stretch of beach in Bali's South Kuta, has upgraded its six beachfront villas. With direct access to Kuta Beach, each of the butler-serviced villas features two bedrooms with an ensuite bathroom with tub, a living room and pantry, a private garden with outdoor balcony and a private plunge pool. In total the property offers 316 keys, a combination of villas, rooms and suites.



Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts

Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts manages 108 hotels across three brands – the four-star Santika Premiere Hotel, three-star Santika Hotel and Amaris Hotel in the budget category – in addition to three luxury boutique villas in 38 locations across Indonesia.

Its boutique properties, The Samaya and The Kayana (below), are respectively located at a quiet end of Seminyak Beach and in Ubud, amid the rice fields and verdant hillside of Bali's Ayung River.

The company also has an Amaris smart hotel in Singapore.



The Jayakarta Bali, Legian Street

Catering for leisure travellers, families, business events and weddings, The Jayakarta Bali at Legian Street (below) offers 278 rooms and 66 apartment units, with categories including executive suite and penthouse, as well as facilities such as three swimming pools and a kids' pool. The hotel also provides direct access to Legian Beach, within walking distance of shopping and entertainment areas.

Jayakarta Hotels & Resorts currently manages nine hotels and one residential condominium, all in Indonesia.



Tjendana Resorts Management

In addition to seven villas in Bali, Tjendana Resorts Management also manages the Lembongan Beach Club & Resort in Nusa Lembongan (below), a 30-minute speed-boat ride from the mainland. The resort offers 42 villas and 49 rooms, with categories including deluxe room, one-bedroom garden villa, one-bedroom private pool villa, one-bedroom premiere private pool villa, two-bedroom premiere private pool villa and one-bedroom grand premiere private pool villa.



Bintan Lagoon Resort

Bintan Lagoon Resort (BLR) has introduced new event and F&B offerings that capture the kampong spirit, adding to its MICE- and wedding-friendly features.

Sitting on 300ha of verdant greenery with a 1.5km beach fronting the South China Sea, BLR offers 450 accommodation units and 14 dining/entertainment options spanning Indonesia, Japanese, Chinese, other Asian and Western cuisines.

Now, pop-up stalls serving Indonesian treats will line the beachfront lawn on weekends with traditional dance performances and rural life on showcase. Adding to the nostalgia, Satay Club recently opened on the resort, serving skewered meats at the outdoor area of Fiesta Restaurant.

The resort's outdoor dining spots, beach and golf course have been popular for corporate groups and weddings. Among its MICE facilities are a conference centre for up to 1,300 guests, nine function rooms and the Adventure Training Centre for team-building activities.



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WHAT'S HOT

Tours & Activities Five novel ways to experience tradition

Music to ears at Lokananta

Established in 1956, Lokananta is one of Indonesia's oldest record labels. The record company has a collection of 5,200 master tapes and 30,000 LPs, including historical ones such as sub-master tapes of the Independence Day Proclamation and folk songs.

Visitors on the two-hour tour will be escorted to different rooms, starting in the collections room. Groups also get a chance to listen to songs from the collections in the vinyl room and record their own track with a minus-one in the recording studio. *lokantant-asolo.pnri@gmail.com*

Off-road village expedition

In this offroad expedition offered by Werkudara Travel Management, drive 90 minutes east of Yogyakarta to Gunung Kidul and take an off-road expedition on

a 4WD jeep through Bejiharjo village to the ancient Sokoliman site, then continue with cave tubing at Goa Pindul. *www.werkudaratravel.com*

Temple trail in Solo

Rise early and follow Alila Solo's leisure concierge guides on a temple trail, starting from the city centre and onward to Candi Cetho, located on the remote western slopes of Mount Lawu.

Perched 1,500m above sea level, the ancient temple was built during the 15th century Majapahit Kingdom. Candi Cetho remains a place of worship for Hindus and followers of the Javanese ancestral religion of Kejawen.

Learn about colonial architecture

Djawa Trails' Architectural Exploration by Herman Thomas



Alila Solo

From left: Candi Cetho in Solo; Lokananta's vintage records; making flower offerings

Karsten programme offers a deeper look at how colonial and eastern architecture come together in Indonesia.

The programme includes a documentary about Karsten – a Dutch engineer who contributed to architecture and town planning in Indonesia during colonial rule – plus visits to traditional markets, mosques and a rail station in Solo. *www.djawatrails.com*



Handmade Balinese offerings

Mandapa, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, Bali is inviting guests to discover their inner artist through the making of *gebogan*, or colourful Balinese offerings.

Guests will be guided through the crafting of this flower tower using locally-grown flowers and coconut leaves, which will be arranged on *dulang*, a traditional Balinese wooden plate.

Tried & Tested Kraton Yogyakarta and Water Castle Tour

This tour of a palace, an 18th century water castle and a 'Cyber Village' left Mimi Hudoyo inspired by how tradition and modernity intertwine in the Javanese city of Yogyakarta

WHY The Yogyakarta Kraton is one of the few palaces in Indonesia functioning as a seat of a reigning king, in this case Sultan Hamengku Buwono X, who is also governor of the provincial city.

Below: Taman Sari Water Castle



Mantol International | Kumudhi Widodo

It's always interesting to see how culture and tradition are maintained amid the fierce force of modern living.

WHAT The tour bus took us to the Ngabean Parking Park where *andong* (horse carts) were waiting for us.

Upon arrival at Kraton, a member of the palace's staff took us on a tour of the palace, which was well preserved and guarded by the princely tradition still practised to date.

Nearing 11.00, we proceeded to the Bangsal Srimanganti hall to watch the royal dances, which at the time of writing were open to public every Sunday.

The tour continued to the nearby Taman Sari, an 18th century water castle built during the reign of Sultan Hamengkubuwono I. The site used to have a large artificial lake with islands and pavilions. The bathing complex has been preserved, while

other areas have largely been turned into a village.

Another part of Taman Sari which can still be visited is part of an underground mosque and passages, believed to have led to the South Sea.

The tour also took us to Kampung Wisata Taman, also known as Kampung Cyber or Cyber village, where all inhabitants are Internet literate. In today's world, this may not sound unusual; but when it was launched in 2008, having an Internet connection was considered a luxury. Even to this day, many local villages have not caught up in Internet use.

This even caught the attention of Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, who himself visited the village once.

HOW Big buses are not allowed entry around the Kraton premises, but mini bus transfers are available between Ngabean Parking and Kraton. Alternatively, traditional transport modes like *andong* (horse carts) and

becaks (trishaws) are available for hire.

In Kraton, visitors may also get the chance to watch dance practices if they come at the right time. I was told only families related to royalty can learn and practise dance there.

The rear door of Kraton leads to the Bale Raos Restaurant, with a royal menu blending Javanese and European influences. Barama Intercity Tour's full package includes lunch here. Some recipes are centuries-old, created by the earlier Sultans.

VERDICT An inspiring tour which showcases how the ancient royal culture and traditions can live and intertwine with modernity.

Name Kraton Yogyakarta and Taman Sari Tour
Price: Undisclosed
Contact
Barama Intercity Tour
Website: *www.barama.co.id*

WHAT'S NEW

Airlines

Qantas to launch Melbourne-Bali service

Qantas will commence daily flights between Melbourne and Denpasar from June 23, 2018.

Operated with a Boeing 737-800 aircraft, flight QF45 leaves Melbourne at 16.50, reaching Denpasar at 21.10. QF46 leaves at 22.10, for arrival in Melbourne at 05.55 the next morning.

AirAsia X begins flights from Tokyo to Bali

AirAsia X Indonesia began flying between Denpasar and Tokyo Narita Airport on May 24. The four-times weekly flights are operated on Airbus A330-300 aircraft with 377 seats including 12 Premium Flatbeds.

Garuda opens Denpasar-Mumbai route

Garuda Indonesia launched twice-weekly services between

Denpasar and Mumbai on April 23.

Operated on Airbus A330-200, the Mumbai-bound flight leaves Denpasar every Monday and Thursday at 15.40 and arrives at Mumbai at 20.25. The return flight leaves Mumbai at 21.50 and arrives in Bali at 07.55 the next morning.

Wings Air flies to Malacca

Wings Air has launched daily Medan-Malacca flights. Using an



Above: Garuda Indonesia

ATR 72-500/600 with capacity for 72 passengers, flight IW1132 leaves Kualanamu airport at 15.30, arriving in Batu Berendam Airport in Malacca at 18.55. The return IW1137 leaves Malacca at 18.25 and arrives in Medan at 18.55

Destination

Bridging the connectivity gap

Prudence Lui finds out how a new bridge connecting cities in the Pearl River Delta is giving Macau's tourism sector greater hope for more FIT arrivals and longer-staying visitors



Left: The Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge, a new connection as well as an attraction in itself

The 42km Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge (HZMB) is promising to open the floodgates to new source markets and travel segments when it kicks off later this year, linking three of the most prosperous centres in the South China region.

A Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) spokesman said: "The new competitive advantage (HZMB) provides lies in its ability to offer visitors a new option for travelling to Macau from neighbouring mainland cities and Hong Kong.

"This will be strongly bolstered in terms of connectivity with many international flights operating from the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA), where the constraint of having a single mode of transportation to HKIA by sea would soon become liberated."

The new bridge will present an additional option linking Hong Kong and Macau. "Some visitors find the existing ferry connection complicated so we're hoping the bridge will offer greater convenience," said Manuel Wu, managing director of Macau Explorer Cultural Travel.

Besides further integrating the three regions physically, the bridge is also expected to change visitor profiles, travel patterns and average length of stay in Macau and Zhuhai.

The Macao Tourism Industry Development Master Plan projects that by the year 2025 the average stays of visitors will be 2.3 days, compared with only 1.2 days in 2017.

Wu said: "I am sure it will stir up demand for lengthier visits here. The bridge may also help divert the traffic from China which currently jams up the existing cross-border gates.

"Also it may further intensify and promote the established multi-destination travel concept across the Pearl River Delta."

He believes the bridge will also bring more FITs and day-tripper traffic, especially for longhaul travellers arriving at HKIA.

"In the past, they treated Hong Kong as the main destination while Macau was only a getaway escape. Hopefully, the fact that the Hong Kong side of the bridge is adjacent to HKIA will change this perception."

Beyond improving access, the bridge will also be treated as an attraction in itself.

MGTO is looking into working with partner travel agencies and airlines to develop commemorative and themed tours incorporating the bridge as a novel component in their Macau and multi-destination tour

packages.

In addition to repackaging the "Hong Kong and Macau twin cities" tour products, Wu has also observed more frequent requests to charter a boat and tour around the mega-project, which is deemed an engineering marvel.

The launch of the bridge is likely to enhance Macau as a business events destination as well.

Wu added: "While both (Hong Kong and Macau) prove capable of hosting mega groups, Macau's transportation services remain a stumbling block owing to limited international air connections, as well as flight and ferry capacity. This makes it difficult to mobilise big groups and drives event planners to choose (Macau over) other destinations."

However, Sands China, marketing and brand management, senior vice president, Ruth Boston believes it's probably too early to tell the full scope of how the bridge will affect travel to Macau. Still, she acknowledged that convenience of travel is a primary motivating factor for people booking holidays, and the new bridge which links up several key Chinese cities in Guangdong will substantially reduce overall travel time.

Meanwhile, Macau's air connections keep improving. In July 2017, Beijing Capital Airlines inaugurated flights between Lisbon in Portugal and Macau via Beijing. Last November, AirAsia commenced the first Malaysian connection to Macau from Johor Bahru, which was followed by Thai AirAsia's Phuket-Macau service in January 2018.



In the past, they treated Hong Kong as the main destination while Macau was only a getaway escape. Hopefully, the fact that the Hong Kong side of the bridge is adjacent to HKIA will change this perception.

– Manuel Wu, managing director, Macau Explorer Cultural Travel

WHAT'S HOT

Tours & Activities High-octane fun outside casino doors

The different inclinations of Macau

A new walking trail between Jardim do Lago and Taipa Houses was launched last October. The 800m-long pedestrian circuit includes an inclined elevator along the Taipa Grande Hill, connected to an observation deck, promising visitors sights of Macau from different angles.

Savour Portuguese food

Complete your visit to the heritage-steeped Taipa Village with an authentic Portuguese meal. The 60-seater Tapas de Portugal, run by award-winning

Portuguese chef Antonio Coelho, occupies the whole block of a three-storey traditional villa. Guests are spoilt for choice with 50 tapas dishes and up to 20 Portuguese mains on the menu. About 90 per cent of the food and ingredients are imported from Portugal.

Curtain up on new theatre experience

MGM Cotai has rolled out the red carpet for the 2,000-seat MGM Theater, which boasts Asia's first dynamic theatre equipped with over 10 configurations. It also utilises a 900m² 4K LED screen,



Above: MGM Cotai Theater

the world's largest permanent indoor LED screen. The venue will be home to three resident shows with two launching first. The Spectacle, another space comprising the world's largest

area of permanent indoor LED screens, will showcase digital art from around the globe.

World's highest bungy jump

At 233m high, the AJ Hackett Macau Tower Bungy Jump holds the Guinness World Record for the highest commercial bungy jump.

Adrenaline seekers will leap off from the iconic Macau Tower, secured with what AJ and his team refers to as the "second generation bungy cord" – which allows even weight dispersion over the length of the cord when jumping from such heights.

Hotels

A reversal of fortunes



Above: Constant fresh offerings at Mandarin Oriental, Macau

After a challenging few years, hotel occupancy has risen back to 2014 heyday levels, reports Prudence Lui

The plunge in mainland Chinese arrivals to Macau, coupled with the addition of 5,000 hotel rooms since 2015, created a challenging period for the territory's hoteliers.

However, the industry is seeing the light at the end of the tunnel as average occupancy rates rose to 86.9 per cent in 2017 to match the 2014 heyday levels, based on figures from MGTO, with both integrated resorts and non-gaming hotels benefiting from the business rebound.

Jill Goh, general manager of The Mandarin Oriental Macau, said: "Since the downturn, various new initiatives have been introduced by the city and hospitality sector. Many attractive world-class resorts and hotels were opened in the last two years with diversified offerings that cater not just to (the gaming crowd), but also to families and meetings.

"We enjoyed a positive start to business this year, and I expect continued growth with the opening of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge," added Goh, who has brought in wellness consultants, up-and-coming chefs and bartenders over the past two years to add to the hotel's offerings.

Two years ago, Best Western Hotel Sun Sun readjusted its business strategy by reducing the target ratio of Mainland Chinese visitors to 60 per cent from 90 per cent, and has been refining its offers in the hopes of drawing more international traffic from South-east Asia, COO Charles Huang told *TTG Asia*.

After the successful debut of the Macau Street Art Festival last November, which brought the Praça de Ponte e Horta neighbourhood to life with artists, DJs, rappers and artwork, Huang intends to make it an annual event.

"Business started picking up in early 2017 and our occupancy hit 93 per cent on average," he said. "Looking ahead, a full makeover in 2019 will give us a brand-new image and competitive products."

Artyzen Hospitality Group's area vice president, Macau operations Rutger Verschuren said: "After the challenging years of 2015-16, the overall hotel performance is living up to the sector's expectations again. We look forward to good years ahead."

Grand Coloane Resort, whose target markets are families and corporate travellers from nearby cities and South-east Asia, will roll out more outdoor activities to enhance its staycation and activity packages. "We need to show the other side of Macau besides gaming, luxury and bling," Verschuren said.



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MOST COMMENTED



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What's left of Swiss hotel chains when Movenpick goes to Accor?

Raini Hamdi's piece, questioning if there's space for Swiss branding in the hospitality sector with AccorHotels soon acquiring Mövenpick on top of its earlier purchase of Swisshotel, ignited a robust discussion:

Henri Kennedie, CEO & president, Swiss International Hotels & Resorts: Swiss International is a Swiss hotel company since the early 1980's. Although the company is 100 per cent Swiss registered, the operations are led from Ras Al Khaimah in the UAE. Currently our main activities are focussed on the Middle East, Africa and South Asia, but we are also looking at opportunities in Switzerland, Germany and the Benelux. Also, South-east Asia is on the radar.

Raini: Dear Henri, thanks for writing. I did think about Swiss International, founded by the late Dominik Betschart. It was a fraternity of hotels when he founded it, then it was sold. Few people know about Swiss International. I also think a true Swiss company must have some flagship presence in Switzerland. Maybe the time has come for Swiss International to step up.



Swiss branding is not as important as (it was) 20 years ago. People are more open today, have other quality check instruments..
 – **Thomas Stirnimann, CEO, Hotelplan Group**

Above: Industry players fear that Phu Quoc will soon go down the path of rampant construction – and destruction

Henri Kennedie: We fully agree with you that we need hotels in Switzerland. Today from our portfolio of 18 hotels open, 14 are management agreements and four franchise. We don't do the representation model any more. We have a pipeline of 40 hotels, all management. The fraternity business model is dead.

Thomas Stirnimann, CEO, Hotelplan Group: Swiss branding is not as important as (it was) 20 years ago. People are more open today, have other quality check instruments and are also open to new experiences. What we need are good hotels who truly appreciate their trade partners within their distribution channels.

Gindo Sianturi: Though not verbally said or tagged and based in Asia, perhaps GHM suits the title to be a Swiss hotel chain? It's a luxury product and have a property (finally) in Andermatt. Hans Jenni as founder is a Swiss too.

Kevin Hall, managing director, Questus Hospitality Consultants: Good story. What I would have added is that these consolidations take a human toll. Lives and careers are being altered and these days hoteliers contemplating corporate office positions should take heed.

Vietnam's 'crazy' growth keeps hotel investors guessing

With an imminent 43 per cent increase in room keys, Vietnam's burgeoning hospitality sector is putting many industry watchers at unease, who fear that unchecked growth will jeopardise the country's tourism:

Paul: The truth is Danang/Hoi An, Nha Trang, Halong Bay and Sapa are already ruined. The development is unplanned and, for the most part, ugly; some resorts are gorgeous but the architectural aesthetic gets lost in a haze of haphazard construction all around. Phu Quoc won't be salvaged in time I fear as there is far too much aggressive development going on and unlikely to be retracted before its too late.

Vietnam, on the whole, has gone down the path of mass tourism and is changing rapidly because of it. Its wonderful people and cultural attractions, whilst endearing and worthy of great interest, are not enough to carry itself through as a tourism destination if rampant destruction and unplanned construction is the order of the day.

David Kevan, director, Chic Locations UK: Will rival destinations see Boracay as a wake-up call or simply an opportunity to grow their own numbers?

There are increasing concerns amongst European tour operators and consumers that much of South-east Asia has become tourism on steroids; there's so much unregulated growth without seemingly a thought to even the most basic infrastructure improvements. Most tourist boards – and not just in the region – are judged only by numbers, not how they handle tourism. Most have a myopic short-term approach, paying only lip service to what might be left for the future.

WE LIKE

Japan agencies band together for responsible tourism

Increasingly fed up with how the welfare of local communities are often being overlooked in the pursuit of tourism growth, seven travel agencies have come together to establish the Japan Alliance of Responsible Travel Agencies (JARTA) last month.

The aim of the alliance, according to founding board member Masaru Takayama, also owner of

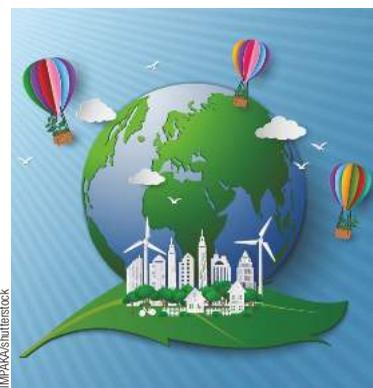
Kyoto-based Spirit of Japan and chair of Asian Ecotourism Network, is to establish "a platform comprising regional and local travel agencies and operators to maximise benefits to the host destinations and tourism stakeholders".

JARTA also seeks to be an authority to help educate and train the tourism sector, particularly among the travel agencies and tour operators,



"The main-stream travel agencies' top priority is to make business out of tourism and the benefits to the host destinations are often overlooked.

– **Masaru Takayama, founding board member, JARTA**



PIMPAC/istock

the ways of practising responsible and sustainable tourism in compliance with the UN's Global Sustainable Tourism Council criteria.



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TTG Asia Media is pleased to announce that it has set up a virtual TTG Travel Hall of Fame (www.ttgtravelfhof.com), which will enable us to showcase the accolades, artefacts and memorabilia of the region's most exceptional travel organisations in a far more effective way and to a global audience.



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1. Travel Agency Awards

Winners in this category are decided by votes from industry suppliers.

- Best Travel Agency – Chinese Taipei
- Best Travel Agency – Hong Kong
- Best Travel Agency – India
- Best Travel Agency – Indonesia
- Best Travel Agency – Japan
- Best Travel Agency – Malaysia
- Best Travel Agency – Singapore
- Best Travel Agency – South Korea
- Best Travel Agency – Thailand
- Best Travel Agency – The Philippines
- Best Travel Agency – Vietnam
- Best Corporate Travel Agency
- Best Online Travel Agency

2. Travel Supplier Awards

Winners in this category are decided by votes from travel consultants and experts.

Airline Awards

- Best Full Service Carrier **NEW**
- Best Airline - Business Class
- Best Inflight Service **NEW**
- Best Boutique Airline **NEW**
- Best Airline Connectivity **NEW**
- Best Low-Cost Carrier

Hotels, Resorts, Serviced Residences Awards

HOTEL Chains

- Best Global Hotel Chain
- Best Regional Hotel Chain
- Best Local Hotel Chain
- Best Hotel Representation Company
- Best Luxury Hotel Brand
- Best Mid-range Hotel Brand
- Best Budget Hotel Brand

HOTELS – Individual Property

- Best Luxury Hotel
- Best Mid-range Hotel
- Best Budget Hotel
- Best Independent Hotel
- Best Boutique Hotel
- Best City Hotel – Bangkok
- Best City Hotel – Hanoi/Ho Chi Minh City
- Best City Hotel – Hong Kong
- Best City Hotel – Jakarta
- Best City Hotel – Kuala Lumpur
- Best City Hotel – Macau
- Best City Hotel – Manila
- Best City Hotel – Seoul
- Best City Hotel – Singapore
- Best City Hotel – Taipei
- Best New City Hotel
- Best Airport Hotel

RESORTS – Individual Property & Serviced Residences

- Best Beach Resort
- Best Integrated Resort
- Best Serviced Residence Operator
- Best Serviced Residence (Property Level) **NEW**

BT-MICE Awards

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- Best Meetings & Conventions Hotel
- Best BT-MICE City
- Best Convention & Exhibition Centre
- Best Convention & Exhibition Bureau

Travel Services Awards

- Best Airport
- Best GDS
- Best Theme Attraction
- Best NTO
- Best Cruise Operator
- Best Luxury Cruise Operator **NEW**
- Best Tour Operator **NEW**
- Best Car Rental Company **NEW**
- Best Airport Lounge Operator **NEW**
- Best Travel Insurance Company **NEW**

3. Outstanding Achievement Awards

The winners in this category are decided by the TTG editorial team.

- Travel Personality of the Year
- Destination of the Year
- Travel Entrepreneur of the Year
- Best Travel Marketing Effort

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- Banyan Tree Spa (2015)
- Qatar Airways (2016)
- Thai Airways International Public Company Limited (2016)
- Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (2016)
- Royal Plaza on Scotts (2018)
- Royal Caribbean International (2018)

VOTING INSTRUCTIONS AND GUIDELINES

For Travel Agency and Travel Supplier Awards

1. Please use the correct voting form.

Voting Form A: Travel Agency Awards

For voting by hoteliers, airline staff, car rental companies, cruise operators, national tourism organisations, GDS companies and all other travel professionals (except travel consultants, tour operators and destination management companies).

Voting Form B: Travel Supplier Awards

For voting by travel consultants, tour operators and destination management companies only.

Online Voting Forms

You can also opt to vote using our online form at awards.ttgasia.com

2. Voting Criteria

Please refer to the voting criteria for each category and title to ensure that all judging is done on an equal basis.

3. 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 selected TTG Travel Trade Publishing print titles and issues and are also available online at awards.ttgasia.com

- 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 2018 are final and no correspondence will be entertained.
- Voting forms will be tabulated and evaluated by an independent auditor in Singapore.
- Voting Closes 13 June 2018.

4. Voting Form Submission

Completed voting forms are to be returned to:

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Delia Ng (TTG Travel Awards 2018)
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HONG KONG

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TTG Asia Media
8/F, E168, 166-168 Des Voeux Road Central,
Sheung Wan, Hong Kong
Tel: (852) 2237-7272 Fax: (852) 2237 7227

VOTING FORM A: TRAVEL AGENCY AWARDS

For voting by • Hoteliers • Airlines • Car rental companies • Cruise operators • National Tourism Organisations • GDS companies • All other travel professionals (except travel consultants, tour operators and destination management companies)

VOTE ONLINE AT
awards.ttgasia.com

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 towards improving efficiency and effectiveness in services provided to client.

1. Best Travel Agency– **Chinese Taipei**

2. Best Travel Agency – **Hong Kong**

3. Best Travel Agency – **India**

4. Best Travel Agency– **Indonesia**

5. Best Travel Agency – **Japan**

6. Best Travel Agency – **Malaysia**

7. Best Travel Agency – **Singapore**

8. Best Travel Agency – **South Korea**

9. Best Travel Agency – **Thailand**

10. Best Travel Agency – **The Philippines**

11. Best Travel Agency – **Vietnam**

12. Best **Corporate** Travel Agency

13. Best **Online** Travel Agency

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Name:	<input type="text"/>	
Job title:	<input type="text"/>	Company: <input type="text"/>
Address:	<input type="text"/>	
Country:	<input type="text"/>	
Telephone no.:	<input type="text"/>	Fax no.: <input type="text"/>
Email:	<input type="text"/>	Signature: <input type="text"/>

Please refer to the next page for
VOTING FORM B:
TRAVEL SUPPLIER AWARDS

VOTING CLOSES
13 JUNE 2018

VOTING FORM B: TRAVEL SUPPLIER AWARDS

For voting by • Travel Consultants • Tour Operators • Destination Management Companies

Airline Awards

Criteria

Best airline in its respective category in terms of:

- Best product, services and facilities.
- Most consistent and reliable network and schedules.
- Most agent-friendly in terms of reservations, commissions, incentives, ancillary opportunities and servicing.
- Best agency outreach programmes, including trade promotions and marketing, training and relationship-building.

14. Best **Full Service Carrier**

15. Best Airline - **Business Class**

16. Best **Inflight Service**

17. Best **Boutique Airline**

18. Best Airline **Connectivity**

19. Best **Low Cost-Carrier**

Hotels, Resorts and Serviced Residences Awards

Criteria

Best Hotel Chain in its respective category in terms of:

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

Best Hotel/Resort/Serviced Residence in its respective category in terms of:

- Best services and facilities.
- Best range of value-added benefits.
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

HOTEL CHAINS

20. Best **Global** Hotel Chain

21. Best **Regional** Hotel Chain

22. Best **Local** Hotel Chain

23. Best Hotel **Representation Company**

24. Best **Luxury** Hotel Brand

25. Best **Mid-range** Hotel Brand

26. Best **Budget** Hotel Brand

HOTELS – Individual Property

27. Best **Luxury** Hotel

28. Best **Mid-range** Hotel

29. Best **Budget** Hotel

30. Best **Independent** Hotel

31. Best **Boutique** Hotel

32. Best **City** Hotel – Bangkok

33. Best **City** Hotel – Hanoi/Ho Chi Minh City

34. Best **City** Hotel – Hong Kong

35. Best **City** Hotel – Jakarta

36. Best **City** Hotel – Kuala Lumpur

37. Best **City** Hotel – Macau

38. Best **City** Hotel – Manila

39. Best **City** Hotel – Seoul

40. Best **City** Hotel – Singapore

41. Best **City** Hotel – Taipei

42. Best **New City** Hotel

43. Best **Airport** Hotel

RESORTS – Individual Property

44. Best **Beach** Resort

45. Best **Integrated** Resort

SERVICED RESIDENCES

46. Best **Serviced Residence Operator**

47. Best **Serviced Residence (Property Level)**

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.

48. Best **Business** Hotel

49. Best **Meetings & Conventions** Hotel

50. Best **BT-MICE** City

51. Best **Convention & Exhibition Centre**

52. Best **Convention & Exhibition Bureau**

Travel Services Awards

Criteria

- Best product, services and facilities.
- Most consistent and reliable in delivery.
- Most innovative offerings.
- Most agent-friendly in terms of ease of booking, commissions, incentives and servicing.
- Best agency outreach programmes, including trade promotions and marketing, training and relationship-building.

53. Best **Airport**

54. Best **GDS (Global Distribution System)**

55. Best **Theme Attraction**

56. Best **NTO (National Tourism Organisation)**

57. Best **Cruise Operator**

58. Best **Luxury Cruise Operator**

59. Best **Tour Operator**

60. Best **Car Rental Company**

61. Best **Airport Lounge Operator**

62. Best **Travel Insurance Company**

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