



Towards Europe recovery

With the launch of flights from Doha straight into the state, Penang Global Tourism is working hard to keep up the momentum of rebounding European arrivals

By S Puvaneswary

Armed with a bigger promotional budget, Penang Global Tourism (PGT) is going after the longhaul markets from Europe, spurred in part by Qatar Airways' four-times-weekly Penang-Doha flights which commenced in February.

The launch of flights from Doha is a significant development given the limited route options from Europe. National flag carrier Malaysia Airlines started suspending its flights to Europe from 2015 as part of a route rationalisation exercise to curb losses, which subsequently resulted in a drop in European arrivals into Malaysia, Penang included.

Partly due to Qatar Airways flights to Penang, arrivals from Europe made up 10.2 per cent (23,633) of total air arrivals into the state, a significant jump from the 6.3 per cent for the same period in 2017. Besides Qatar Airways, European arrivals were also recorded from Singapore Airlines, Cathay Dragon, China Southern Airlines and China Airlines.

Ooi Chok Yan, CEO of PGT, said that based on statistics from the Immigration Department, arrivals into Penang from Eastern Europe had also grown more than 100 per cent in the first four months of 2018. A breakdown of arrivals from individual countries in Eastern Europe was not available.

Ooi shared that PGT had also worked closely with Qatar Airways to raise the destination's profile by organising fam trips for agents and the media from the UK, Spain, Norway, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden to promote

its various attractions including heritage, cuisine, nature and beaches.

He said: "We have enough products in Penang to cater for both the middle class and luxury tourists looking for unique, quality experiences. The average stay of European tourists to Penang is between four to seven days."

Ooi said the state tourism bureau also collaborates with outbound agents from Europe on joint marketing campaigns to promote Penang, as well as supporting them with promotional materials.

Besides attending World Travel Market and ITB Berlin, PGT will continue to monitor arrivals for the year and work with industry players to identify new shows to participate in the future to further grow the European market.

The new Middle Eastern connection has clearly benefited Penang's travel trade. Lex Lam, director of sales, Discovery Overland Holidays in Malaysia, said Qatar Airways' Doha-Penang flights have enabled the company to start their European programmes in Penang and end it in Kuala Lumpur.

He added: "We also promote Penang to Europeans as a better option to Singapore, in terms of cultural diversity, historical value and nature-based products. The joint fam programme between the airline and PGT should also include invitations to documentary and filmmakers as well as bloggers as they are powerful influencers. This will help raise Penang's profile further."

Another inbound agent, Cherry Lee, executive director of World Express Tours, said European demand for Penang and other destinations in Malaysia showed improvement for the summer, and the upcoming winter 2018 season thanks to the new flights.

She said: "(Additional capacity from Europe) has helped us sell itineraries starting from Penang and ending in Kuala Lumpur or Singapore, and vice versa."

She added the authorities should be mindful of keeping ground costs competitive, as the tourism tax of RM10 (US\$2.40) per room per night levied on foreign tourists already compromises price competitiveness compared to regional rivals.

Eastern European arrivals into Penang grew more than 100 per cent...

Ooi Chok Yan
CEO
Penang Global Tourism



Experience takes the wheel in India

By Pamela Chow

As experience-led tours gain traction in India, Cox & Kings has created a host of new thematic journeys on localised and unique activities.

Yusuf Poonawala, senior vice president, Cox & Kings, shared with the *Daily* that the company is promoting the 101 Xperiential Tours series



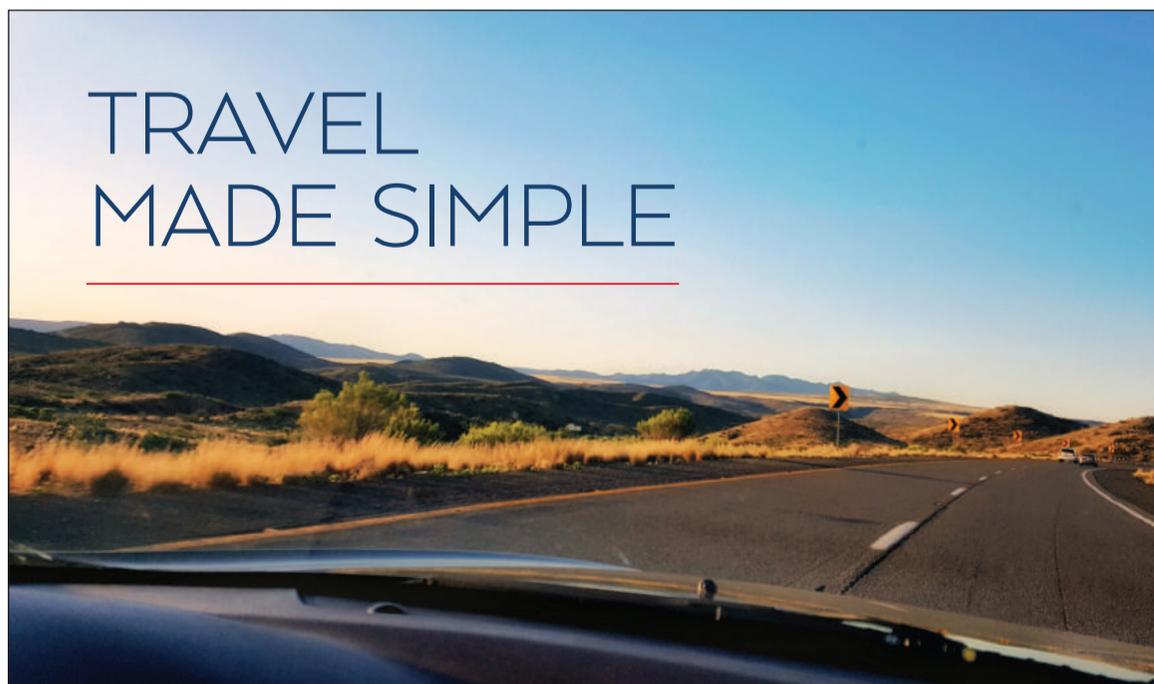
Yusuf: self-drive on the uptick

at PTM 2018, with itineraries centred on themes such as hotels, sightseeing and culinary offerings. Cox & Kings recently launched Self-Drive 365 for exotic road trips through India and the rest of the SAARC region. "Self-drive is picking up in India, especially among the younger generation aged between 25-35 years old. The India self-drive car rental market is growing at an impressive CAGR and is poised to reach Rs14 billion (US\$200 million) by 2020," said Yusuf.

He added that while perennial favourites like Delhi, Agra and Jaipur continue to be popular, demand for newer destinations are on the rise.

Yusuf observed: "Bekal and Kovalam in Kerala, Chikmagalur and Madikeri in Karnataka, Madurai and Rameshwaram in Tamil Nadu, as well as Sikkim and Guwahati in the north-east are (gaining popularity among) tourists from South-east Asia because of their landscapes, spiritual value and diverse cultures."

To fan out across the market, Cox & Kings also launched a sustainable adventure travel vertical Trip 360, and India's first accessible holiday specialist brand, Enable Travel.



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View from the top

Leading island

Azizan Noordin, CEO of Langkawi Development Authority (LADA), tells **S Puvaneswary** his vision for Langkawi's and Malaysia's immediate future, and what the organisation is doing to grow the island's tourism prospects

You served Tourism Malaysia for 38 years before joining the Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) end-2016 as CEO. How similar or different were these two roles?

The job scope as CEO of LADA is almost the same as my previous role as Tourism Malaysia's deputy director-general (promotion). The new challenge lies in the area of investment, where I have to look into how LADA can attract more investments and what the needs of investors are.

Langkawi has become more vibrant with many new tourism events added. Are events part of your tourism promotion strategy for Langkawi?

When I started with LADA, I observed we didn't have enough tourism events. I realised this was the low-hanging fruit that we needed to tap to attract more tourists.

We organised 33 tourism events in 2017, and attracted 3.7 million domestic and international tourists who travelled

to Langkawi to participate or watch these events in 2017. Some of these events have become a part of the annual tourism calendar, including the Royal Langkawi Classic Car Show, Royal Langkawi Bike Fest, Langkawi International Island Music Festival and Langkawi International Blues & Roots Aseana.

All these events are in addition to the world-class sporting events like Ironman 70.3 Langkawi, Oceanman Langkawi, Tuba Trail Run, and FIVB Beach Volleyball World Tour.

Langkawi scored a coup when it won the bid to host PATA Travel Mart 2018. What's the relationship between PATA and Langkawi and Malaysia in general?

PATA is a very important organisation in the global tourism industry, instrumental in promoting and supporting the growth of tourism all over the world.

In 1972, the first PATA event organised in Malaysia was the PATA Annual Confer-

ence. Then, the Tourism Development Corporation of Malaysia was established in August 1972, and this was followed by Malaysia Airlines in December 1972. In 1986, PATA Travel Mart and its annual conference was held in Kuala Lumpur. Subsequently, the Ministry of Culture, Arts & Tourism was established in 1987.

This shows the importance and significance of organising PATA events as they have direct impact on the growth of the tourism industry, especially in raising the image of destination. I hope PATA Travel Mart 2018 will boost Langkawi's (image) as a great tourism destination.

What do you think will be the legacy of this event?

The mart will definitely have a positive impact on Langkawi as the host destination. It will create interest among more outbound foreign agents to sell Langkawi in the coming years and this in turn will boost arrivals. It will also create interest in tourism investment opportunities. We are seeking investments in four- and five-star hotels, high-end restaurants, and attractions such as water theme parks, premium outlets, private hospitals and international schools for Langkawi's expatriate communities.

How will you use your role as PATA vice chairman to promote Langkawi?

My role as PATA vice chairman is to assist the present chairman in running PATA as an association and we have an agenda to follow. I always encourage Malaysian PATA chapter members to be more active in the international arena. My main aim is to create more awareness about the destination and attract more international business events to Langkawi and Malaysia as a whole.

How helpful has the UNESCO Global Geopark status, accorded in 2007, been in Langkawi's international tourism promotion?

The UNESCO Global Geopark status has really helped to create awareness of Langkawi as a unique island with important geological sites dating back more than 550 million years. With this branding, we hope to attract more tourists who are nature and ecotourism lovers, and can appreciate the unique rock formations and rich heritage we have.



News

Easier landing in M'sia

MAHB dangles incentives for airlines to lure more flights

By **S Puvaneswary**

Malaysia Airports Holdings (MAHB) has rolled out a slew of incentives for airlines that begin new routes or expand their existing services in the country, a move that is expected to bolster the tourism sector for local destinations.

Mohamed Sallauddin Mat Sah, general manager, airline marketing at MAHB, shared: "Our Joint International Tourism Development Programme with Tourism Malaysia introduced this year has a total combined funding of RM15 million (US\$3.7 million), which is used to assist local

and foreign carriers promote Malaysia in overseas markets through tactical campaigns.

"(The programme) has been well received with campaigns being run by various airlines in Taiwan, Iran, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, South Korea, India, Greater China and Australia, among others. For some campaigns, the airlines also worked with travel agent consortiums to promote Malaysia as a holiday destination," he added. Half of the funds will be used to finance the cost of the airline campaign while the airline concerned finances the remainder.

To further improve international air accessibility to Langkawi, Melaka and Labuan, the trio of secondary destinations where the Malaysian government is pushing for tourism development,

MAHB continues to provide support to airlines in the form of a passenger rebate incentive for the first two years of an airline's operation in the destination.

This comes on top of a landing fee waiver of one year for new airlines and existing airlines which have either increased their frequency or launched a new route. This five-year airline incentive for Langkawi will end in 2020 and in 2021 for Melaka and Labuan.

Another new incentive introduced this year for a three-year period to assist airlines for adding frequency or capacity is a two-year annual financial marketing support, starting from RM50,000 depending on the geographical location, to further grow their capacity and frequencies. It also provides two-year financial support to airlines flying new international routes.

Mohamed Sallauddin said: "We see airlines as valuable partners, and we wish to assist them to grow their business, as ultimately it will also benefit Malaysia and result in increased inbound arrivals and tourism receipts."

Mohamed Sallauddin: valuable allies in airlines

Ezeego1's global ambitions begin in Asia

After Australia, India-based B2B online travel marketplace Ezeego1 is keen to strike up partnerships with more tourism stakeholders in the Asia-Pacific region as part of its global expansion ambitions.

"With the success we've had in (India and Australia) and the fact that B2B market needs technology solutions and global content, we have decided to extend globally and are currently focusing on rolling out across other regions," revealed Neelu Singh, CEO & director, Ezeego1.

The company is eyeing development in key markets across Asia-Pacific, namely Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Taiwan and Malaysia, explained Singh, with clients "who need global content for travel products" such as flights, accommodation, activities, transfers, car rentals and cruises.

She said: "In today's competitive landscape, not all agencies can invest



Singh: Asia expansion

in technology and manage the pace in which the market is moving, hence there is a need for global and economical solutions. That's what Ezeego1 is focusing on. We provide technology, content and back-end support so that (our partners) can focus on their core skills (like) sales and distribution."

Singh added that while destinations like Europe and South-east Asia are perennial favourites of the Australian market, demand for travel to India is "definitely on the rise". — **Pamela Chow**

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A third validation will be carried out by UNESCO next year. What actions are being taken to ensure its success?

After the last validation in 2015, LADA started upgrading the information and signage pertaining to Langkawi as a UNESCO Global Geopark, preserving the mangroves and maintaining ecotourism sites in preparation for the third validation in 2019. The community in Langkawi plays an important role in getting the validation. We have to show how the authorities work closely with communities; they are the most important stakeholders.

Direct air access from foreign destinations has always been a challenge. What is being done to address this?

We have 242 flights weekly to Langkawi, both domestic and international routes.

For international routes, currently we have direct flights from Singapore and China which includes Guangzhou, Kunming and Guiyang. Periodically we also receive chartered flights from other cities in China such as Chengdu, Guiyang, Kunming, Ningbo, Xi'an, Hangzhou and Chongqing.

In order to get more international tourists to visit Langkawi, we need to get more international flights. We are trying to convince foreign airlines that fly to Kuala Lumpur – such as Qatar Airways, Thai Airways, Emirates and Condor – to also consider flying to Langkawi. They could start on a trial basis and offer charter flights to see if the demand is there.

To help with their consideration, we will provide promotional packages and incentives for the airline's marketing and promotional activities in their home country, while Malaysia Airports Holdings (see News below) will provide the complimentary landing fee.

Besides that, LADA will organise seminars and B2B sessions with industry players of the destination. We recently brought 20 members of the Langkawi tourism industry to Guangzhou and Shenzhen to attend a B2B networking session with agents there, in collaboration with AirAsia.

We are looking for opportunities to work with any airline, so we participate in international tradeshows and connect with national carriers of a particular destination/country of origin. For example, we held talks with Finnair during Langkawi's participation in the MATKA Nordic Travel Fair in Finland, as well as various Indian airlines during SATTE in New Delhi. We also met with Qatar and Emirates during the Arabian Travel Mart in Dubai.

With a new government in place, how do you think Langkawi's future tourism outlook will be?

The new chief minister of Kedah has emphasised the importance of the state's

tourism industry, and he looks forward to more development in the sector especially in Sungai Batu and at the Bujang Valley archaeological sites. LADA has been given a special task to promote the state of Kedah by establishing Langkawi as the gateway to the northern region.

We have a new minister and deputy minister of tourism, arts and culture, and both are knowledgeable individuals. I firmly believe that the Malaysian tourism industry will continue to prosper.

TUI Group is initiating a new Fly & Cruise programme from December 20, 2018 until March 29, 2019, which is expected to attract some 7,200 tourists from the UK and Europe. With TUI Group's cruise ship homeporting in Langkawi, all passengers will spend at least one

night in Langkawi before embarking on a 14-day cruise itinerary.

As well, Langkawi on average receives between 10-15 cruise ships monthly, carrying an average of between 1,500 to 3000 passengers per ship.

We see that Langkawi has the potential to become a homeport as it is ideally situated on the cruise routes between Phuket and Singapore, Manila or Hong Kong. It will be ideal if we can find investors to build a passenger terminal in Langkawi.

In 4Q2018, LADA will collaborate with

the Department of Civil Aviation to open Langkawi International Airport 24/7 and attract private jets to fly to Langkawi. The airport is equipped with facilities such as refuelling and private catering.

The first Langkawi Tourism Blueprint (2011 to 2015) which emphasised ecotourism was very successful. For the next blueprint, I hope that the federal government will further consider the values of Langkawi as a UNESCO Global Geopark destination, and support the tourism products and activities that will make it a high-end tourism destination without sacrificing the development of high-end hotels. LADA is also on the lookout for investors to build more tourism attractions.

What more should be done to take Malaysia's tourism to the next level?

We have gone through many cycles such as the four *Visit Malaysia Year* campaigns and the tourism masterplan.

As we move towards 2020, we have to sit down and evaluate what practices we can continue, and what new things we can adopt to bring the Malaysia's tourism industry to the next decade, especially with advancements in social media, new technologies, green technology, and the evolution of the transportation system.

We will need to work harder and faster to take Malaysia to the next level, but without sacrificing our core inherent values and traditions. In my view, the Malaysia Truly Asia brand is still strong and we should continue with the branding.

(Events were) the low-hanging fruit that we needed to tap to attract more tourists.

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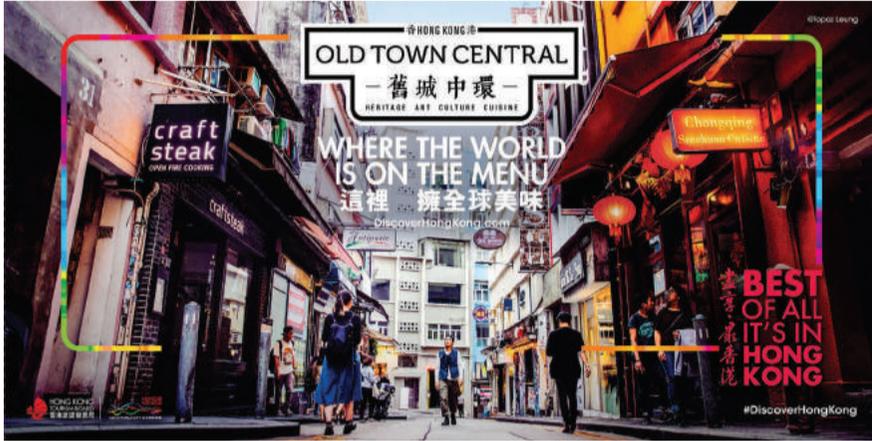
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Special feature

The epitome of excellence

The PATA Grand and Gold Awards – supported and sponsored by the Macao Government Tourism Office – is a recognition of exceptional achievements in the areas of education and training, marketing, culture and heritage, ecotourism and more in Asia-Pacific’s travel industry. Here’s a look at some of the winning projects and initiatives in 2018



MARKETING

Hong Kong Neighbourhoods: Old Town Central
Hong Kong Tourism Board

Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB)’s *Hong Kong Neighbourhoods: Old Town Central* campaign raised awareness of the dynamic district and encouraged visitors to explore the area. The HKTB repackaged the Central and Sheung Wan area into Old Town Central (OTC), which melds the worlds of art, culture, heritage and cuisine. Instead of creating an advertising campaign about OTC, HKTB created an immersive experience by featuring the characteristics of the area and developed a strategic model that invited travellers to learn more about the district and gain new knowledge about Hong Kong.



ENVIRONMENT

Elephant Hills Luxury Tented Camps, Thailand

Elephant Hills is Thailand’s first luxury tented jungle camps, offering two-, three- or four-day soft adventure nature tours in and around Khao Sok National Park – one of the world’s oldest evergreen rainforests.

Packages include accommodation, activities, meals, fully trained and licensed guides, as well as two-way transfers to and from all major beach destinations in Southern Thailand.

The unique Elephant Experience is included in tours, providing guests with a chance to interact with the endangered Asian elephant, but sans riding, at the chain-free Elephant Park.



Don't miss

The 2018 PATA Gold Awards lunch and award presentation ceremony will be held at MIEC’s Ballroom this Friday, September 14, 12.40-14.10



HERITAGE

India Heritage Walk Festival
Sahapedia, India

India Heritage Walk Festival 2018 was a month-long festival conducted in the month of February.

Led by Sahapedia – an online interactive encyclopedia on India – the festival explored the cultural diversity in the Indian subcontinent. There were heritage walks, events, talks about culture, and a heritage film festival, where themes covered included food, handicrafts, nature, art and architecture.

With support from Yes Arts & Culture, Sahapedia hoped to highlight several issues. First, the organisation aimed to encourage and increase the different forms of engagement with interesting and important heritage spaces; ensured the accessibility of these spaces to various audience groups; and made these heritage spaces more compelling and inclusive.

COMMUNITY BASED TOURISM

Local Alike, Thailand

Local Alike is a social enterprise in Thailand that aims to inject the idea of sustainable development into the core of community-based tourism (CBT) practice, working with villagers around the country to impart CBT practices and knowledge. Armed with knowledge, these communities in Thailand will become more self-sustaining and empowered to gain a positive impact from tourism. At this same time, visitors will also enjoy authentic travel experiences at these villages.



MARKETING MEDIA - TRAVEL POSTER
Live Inspired Campaign
Kerala Tourism, India

ENVIRONMENT - CORPORATE ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME

The Essence of Our Being
Jetwing Hotels, Sri Lanka

Located in close proximity to the historic Dambulla Cave Temple and surrounded by unspoilt natural beauty, Jetwing Lake Dambulla Hotel blends contemporary, stylish design with a steadfast commitment to sustainability and the environment.

Built from ground up with the intention of conserving energy and resources, reusing and recycling, and minimising impact on the environment, 40 per cent of the hotel’s electricity requirement is generated via a solar PV system; entire air-conditioning requirement is met by renewable energy sources; and 100 per cent wastewater and organic waste is treated and recycled for use on-site.





MARKETING – HOSPITALITY
Studio City's Dinosaur Hunt
Melco Resorts and Entertainment, Macau

Dinosaur Hunt was an exhibition that ran in Studio City Macau from January to May 2018, where 24 life-size dinosaurs were recreated using state-of-the-art augmented reality and virtual reality technologies. The installations provided guests with an interactive and immersive prehistoric world experience.

In the lead-up to the event, the marketing campaign featured a multi-platform strategy that included eye-catching 3-D dinosaur displays at Hong Kong's subway stations and Macau airport alongside print media collaterals, videos, and a digital and social media campaign that involved news reports warning the public of dinosaurs on the loose. The campaign reached a global audience totalling 410 million people from Macau, mainland China and Hong Kong.



MARKETING – INDUSTRY
Mekong Moments
Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office, Thailand

Mekong Moments is an online platform that targets travellers using inspirational visual content from social media platforms to build the brand of the region through shared experiences.

For instance, participating businesses such as hotels and restaurants will encourage travellers to contribute their experiences by adding certain hashtags to their social media posts so that it can be picked up by the platform.

An important feature of Mekong Moments is to serve as a capacity-building tool, which it does by providing participating tourism businesses with an advanced and visually appealing platform to reach potential visitors.

The platform aims to help small-businesses, which often have little in-house resources for digital marketing.



TRAVEL JOURNALISM - TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPH
Cruising Through The Cave
Tourism Authority of Thailand

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE
Empowering Women Through Inclusive Work
Peak DMC, India

Changing the status quo for women in tourism in India is no easy task but Peak DMC is tackling this issue one female tour leader at a time.

Awarded for their proactive approach to recruiting, training and developing female leaders, Peak DMC has successfully challenged the view that tour leading is an "unsuitable" job for women in India.

The company currently has 20 female tour leaders, and has set an ambitious goal to achieve a 50:50 ratio of female to male tour leaders by 2020.



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The technology experience

From immersive videos to virtual reality product experiences, there's plenty today's technology can do to enhance the delegate experience at business events. Yet, adoption is not as extensive as events specialists would like. Karen Yue finds out why.



While in conversation with four event industry specialists on the application of technology in engaging the audience, one constant refrain to emerge was that these are now exciting times to be in for event players.

Evie Loo, senior vice president and managing director, China for Jack Morton Worldwide, told *TTGmice*: “Almost every event experience that we create and work with clients on these days includes some form of technology.”

Offering an example, Loo said Jack Morton Worldwide helped to develop and create a virtual reality Google Tilt Brush experience at the recent China Porsche Dealer Conference. Event participants got to don virtual reality goggles and create their own 3D image in a virtual world surrounding the new Porsche Panamera Turbo. The 3D image is also available for download to the participant's mobile phone as a GIF.

She said: “Different auto brands have used a lot of artificial intelligence to enhance their events experiences – with robots deployed to sign guests in at the reception, and to brew and pour coffee in the lounge.

“We have worked with 3D printed models on-site to (produce personalised parting gifts) for guests.”

Oni Chukwu, president & CEO at etouches, a global company specialising cloud event management software and sourcing solutions, said: “Immersive technology is advancing well and its applications in business events are many. Augmented reality, virtual reality, immersive videos (also known as 360-degree videos) and (transmitter devices like) iBeacon are all common these days.

“In fact, technology is woven deeper into meeting and events, to a point now that attendees and organisers both realise that without using fairly immersive technology, meetings are not as successful. In my opinion, this is an exciting time to be in the meetings and events industry.”

According to Qixin Liow, account manager with Pacific World Singapore, some of the big-

ger business events handled by the company had utilised a 270-degree projection as an immersive experience for delegates, virtual reality masks as entertainment during themed dinners, and QR codes in delegate registration and attendance tracking.

“We are now exploring possibilities of using Xylobands – wristbands with LED bulbs that light up according to action or music,” added Liow.

Differing rate of adoption

However, the extent of technology being used to engage event attendees is varied.

Pacific World Singapore's Liow said: “We are only skimming the surface of the possibilities for technology at events because a lot of companies are still wary and hesitant to try out new (ideas).”

The scene is different over in China, according to Jack Morton Worldwide's Loo.

“Events here are adopting technology much quicker than the rest of the world. Everything here can be scanned and is interactive. Every event is looking to out-do the one before with different technology,” she said.

“However, you do find that people here use technology (just to check off a box). Virtual reality is used in most events, but unless the content is on point and relevant – and this takes a lot of time and budget to perfect, it doesn't convey the correct corporate message,” she added.

Clients' hesitancy around technology usage in audience engagement stems from several reasons – costs, lack of knowledge and insufficient time to clearly define objectives.

Liow said new event technology “comes with a much heftier price tag compared to your usual manual and old school ways”.

While Chukwu agrees that cost is prohibitive for most, he is seeing changes. He explained: “It is true that there has not been much application of augmented reality at meetings and events because that is fairly expensive to work. But think about driverless cars. A year or two ago, people said it wasn't possible to implement and was too costly. Yet it is happening now. Today, the cost

of augmented reality usage is starting to come down.

“For now, immersive videos are much more within reach because they are affordable, and are being used at events today. It can cost a few thousands of dollars to produce (marketing materials in the form of immersive videos), depending on how elaborate the content is, how you want to engage your delegates, and how many delegates you want to engage.”

Loo opined that the problem is “mainly a knowledge issue”.

She said: “Many people are unaware of what's available and what's new. Clients get cold feet if it is technology they haven't used before, but in order to engage new technology you have to take a leap of faith.

“We often get the brief to do something that is super creative and never done before, but in the end the client would want an example of it from a previous event!”

“Clients get cold feet if it is technology they haven't used before, but in order to engage new technology you have to take a leap of faith.”

Evie Loo
Senior vice president and managing director, China, Jack Morton Worldwide



Partly this is down to not having trusted partners – many new ideas come from small start-ups; big corporations are sometimes scared of investing in technology from a start-up agency they haven't worked with before. It's a risk for them, which holds them back."

Pacific World Singapore's senior account manager, Andrea Teo, also suggested that time was another obstacle.

She elaborated: "There needs to be sufficient time invested into a project to have clear objectives, which is often the most challenging, and to decide on the right technology solutions/products to deliver that experience. Time is also needed for User Acceptance Tests to ensure that the (user interface and experience) do not end up marring the event."

Teo believes that the business events industry could see better and more sophisticated adoption of technology in audience engagement. "It's time to move beyond online registration (which is now a given) and look into enhanced interactivity and more experience-personalisation, through the harvest of data and analytics to create tailored event experiences for that top-of-mind recall," she urged.

Examples of available technology that can help "create a better attendee experience", according to Liow, include an emotion tracker that allows organisers to read how attendees are feeling – perhaps too cold or bored with the content on stage – and to implement solutions immediately.

Age, IoT as catalysts

Industry players agree that both an increasingly younger workforce and a wider application of Internet of Things in daily routine will drive

corporations to utilise more technology in their event delivery.

Chukwu said: "People don't use one level of technology at home and a different one at work; they expect the same level of technology and convenience in both environments. Look at the way the Internet of Things has crept into our homes – we can control the functions of our refrigerators or TVs remotely. So, this is familiar to people and they expect the same level of technology when they are at work and at events."

Teo sees millennials as the driving force. She said: "Gen Y-ers were at the forefront of the tech-



Technology is woven deeper into meeting and events, to a point now that attendees and organisers both realise that without using fairly immersive technology, meetings are not as successful.

Oni Chukwu
President and CEO, etouches

nology boom and they have grown accustomed to having technology as an integral part of life. Now that they are stepping into the workforce, automation and technology is all the more (essential)."

And brands hoping to connect with the tech-savvy consumer of today must take heed, opined Loo.

"(This is especially true) in China as everyone is stuck to their mobile phone screen 24 hours a day, so creating interactions via the phone is vital," she said.

"However, it's interesting to note that luxury brands that are using technology for engagement through WeChat are moving away from that at events. Instead, personalised items that are crafted, that participants can touch, feel and see are definitely in vogue for luxury brands. That personal human touch, craftsmen and professional age-old experience is a growing trend in luxury events here, and it seems to be a backlash against the over-reliance on technology."

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Marketplace

A rejuvenated Desaru Coast

One of Malaysia's most anticipated premium integrated resorts, Desaru Coast will feature international hotels, an adventure waterpark, riverside dining, a conference centre, and 27-hole and 18-hole golf courses. Located in south-eastern Johor, Desaru Coast will span over 1,600 hectares along a pristine 17km beachfront facing the South China Sea.

Among the new hotels include the 275-room The Westin Desaru Coast Resort, the luxury family-oriented Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas with 123 rooms, and the 365-room stylish Hard Rock Hotel Desaru Coast.

Desaru Coast Adventure Waterpark, which is touted as one of the world's biggest waterparks, features the largest wave pool in South-east Asia and the first water coaster in the region. The conference centre will be able to accommodate up to 1,000 delegates, and golf aficionados are promised a finest golf experience in The Els Club Desaru Coast which comprises two golf courses with 45 holes in all.



Lexis Hotel Group in full bloom

As an established name in the Malaysian hospitality scene, the Lexis Hotel Group currently manages four properties, namely Lexis, Grand Lexis and Lexis Hibiscus, all located in Port Dickson, as well as Lexis Suites Penang.

The Lexis Hibiscus Port Dickson, which is shaped in a hibiscus, boasts 639 sea-facing pool villas, each with its own pool and steam room. The brand is also the recipient of two Guinness World Records for the "Most swimming pools in a resort" and "Most overwater villas at a single resort".

Meanwhile, the Grand Lexis Port Dickson, which is an hour's drive from Kuala Lumpur International Airport, features 317 Balinese-inspired villas, each with its own private pool. Next to it is Lexis Port Dickson, a charming resort with 272 villas designed with a tropical Balinese touch that combines elegance and comfort.

As for Lexis Suites Penang, it stands out as the only hotel on the island which offers guests the luxury of an individual private pool and steam room in each of its 222 suites. Located in the idyllic Teluk Kumbar town, Lexis Suites Penang is about 10 minutes' drive from Penang International Airport.

A walk through nature at The Habitat Penang Hill

Hailed as the new star attraction of Penang, this ecotourism site features well-constructed trails and activities among the wonders of flora and fauna that will appeal to nature lovers. This spot makes a good pre/post-tour option for groups attending conferences and meetings in town, as it is only a 20-minute drive from George Town to Bukit Bendera station, where visitors will then take a five to eight-minute funicular train ride.

The Habitat Canopy Walk and the Treetop Walk offer spectacular views, and will help delegates get away from the hustle and bustle of city life. The new Canopy Discovery Tour also makes for a perfect teambuilding activity, where participants conquer low and high ropes, and get to climb trees.



Avis Budget Group launches one-stop portal in Asia

Avis Budget Group (ABG) has launched a new training platform, ABGbeep (beep), a one-stop portal for travel trade professionals in Asia. The platform provides an overview of Avis Car Rental and Budget Car Rental and features training modules, booking tools, destination and driving guides.

Beep makes it easier for the travel professionals to offer Avis and Budget products and services to their customers. It aims to make the booking process simpler, more efficient and rewarding for travel trade partners as bookings made through Beep are commissionable.

The platform has launched in English, and will also be gradually offered in Simplified Chinese, traditional Chinese, Thai, Korean and Japanese. Travel agents can sign up at www.abgbeep.com/asia.



Unlimited car rental potential

Mixed development Tropicana Cenang to complete by 2023

Cenang Resort, a Malaysia property developer and investor established in 2012, has entered into a strategic partnership with Wanda Hotels & Resorts to manage the 350-room Wanda Realm Resort Langkawi in Tropicana Cenang, an upcoming resort-themed development located on a 2.1ha tract of land at Pantai Cenang.

This mixed development, which overlooks the Andaman Sea, consists of two 40-storey residential towers with commercial elements, as well as the 350-room Wanda Realm Resort Langkawi. Tropicana Cenang is expected to be completed by 2023 with Sino Great Wall, Cenang Resort's strategic partner supervising the development as the main contractor.



Tropical paradise in Guam



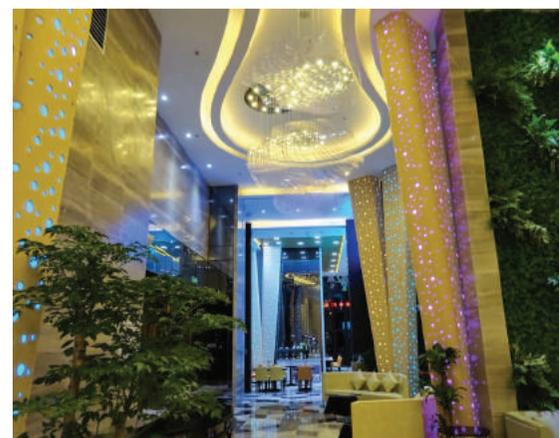
Blessed with swimsuit weather all year-round, Guam is an idyllic, friendly paradise that is home to some of the region's most beautiful beaches, reefs, and landscapes. Guam is the perfect tropical holiday destination for everyone, where visitors will find something to enjoy, new tastes to savor, memorable experiences, and not forgetting the warm hospitality from the locals.

Connectivity is enhanced with direct, nonstop flights from a number of cities in Asia. Hop onto one and get ready to have fun under the sun with unique culture and experiences for an unforgettable holiday.

Malaysia's Holiday Villa expands into Shanghai

Holiday Villa Hotel & Residence Shanghai Jiading opened its doors in July this year. The 141-room hotel is located 30 minutes from the Shanghai International Circuit and an hour's train ride to Disneyland Shanghai.

This marks the Malaysia-based group's fourth Holiday Villa hotel in China after Guangzhou, Chenzhou and Sanya. Holiday Villa Hotels & Resorts operates in eight countries including Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, China, Qatar, Sudan, Saudi Arabia and the UK.





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New dimensions of fun



Above: Zaha Hadid-designed Morpheus hotel in Macau
Right: Resorts World Genting's SkySymphony attraction

Asia's integrated resorts are not just casinos with auxiliary facilities attached, but destinations offering seamless leisure and entertainment attractions. Here's a look at how they continually reinvent the wheel to stay ahead of the curve



MACAU

A flurry of luxury hotel openings

Despite a raft of luxury hotel openings in Macau, tourism players believe there is still room for more integrated resorts (IRs) in the territory.

The US\$3.4 billion MGM Cotai – the company's second property in Macau – officially opened in February this year, offering 1,390 rooms and suites, plus a wide array of retail and F&B offerings in a 35-storey, multi-hued exterior that resembles stacked jewellery boxes.

The centrepiece of MGM Cotai's entertainment attractions is the Spectacle, a 2,000-seat theatre with the world's largest permanent indoor LED screens.

Two unique luxurious hotel types, Skyloft and the Mansion, are expected to be ready later this year, both featuring a hotel-within-a-hotel concept first introduced at MGM Grand Las Vegas.

Melco Resorts' US\$1.1 billion Morpheus, which opened on June 15, marked a cornerstone of City of Dreams' Phase III development. Designed by the late Zaha Hadid, the luxury hotel has been dubbed an architectural icon for Macau with 770 rooms, suites and villas wrapped in a free-form exoskeleton-bound structure.

Morpheus also makes a clear play for the premium market through its dining and leisure amenities – including an entire floor dedicated to two Ducasse restaurants and a bar; the Pierre Hermé Lounge, the first collaboration between Maison Pierre Hermé Paris and a hotel in Greater China; Morpheus Spa, featuring an in-house spa butler concept and a snow garden installation; plus a sky-high pool perched 40 stories above the ground.

Melco Resorts & Entertainment's CEO Lawrence Ho said: "A decade ago, nobody believed Macau needed 30,000 to 40,000 hotel rooms. Today, the city is home to almost 40,000 rooms, with occupancy rate well above 90 per cent. I believe there is still capacity for IR growth in the future."

The recent boost in Macau's hotel supply has not exerted a downward pressure

on room rates, asserted Gray Line Tours' managing director Andy Wu.

Wu said: "Average occupancy hit over 80 per cent, even with a length of stay of less than two days. If tourists stay longer, there will not be enough rooms, so additional IRs are needed."

"However, it would be healthy to have more three- to four-star hotels since over 50 per cent of Macau's 40,000 rooms fall into the luxury five-star grade."

Given Macau's proximity to China, a huge market source, Ho believes that Macau will remain "the number one IR destination". Furthermore, Macau is set to "benefit immensely" when the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge opens this year, he stated. – **Prudence Lui**

SINGAPORE

Established icons keep innovating

Eight years since they began operations, Singapore's two major IRs, Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) and Marina Bay Sands (MBS), are pulling out all the stops to stay ahead of the game.

RWS' key attractions, Universal Studios Singapore (USS) and S.E.A. Aquarium, have rolled out thematic marquee events to boost repeat visitor volumes. For USS, these feature intellectual property such as TrollsTopia, Jurassic World: Explore & Roar, as well as *Stranger Things* content in the upcoming Halloween Horror Nights.

Meanwhile, S.E.A. Aquarium this year ran the month-long Ocean Fest!, a marketplace showcasing ocean-friendly products, immersive art installations, underwater performances and upcycling workshops to promote ocean conservation.

Outside of these key attractions, RWS has maintained a calendar of events to keep visitors hooked, including Football Fever 2018 that screened live World Cup matches, as well as food festivals RWS Street Eats and the GREAT Food Festival. In total, the IR sees more than 20 million visitors annually.

"From guest feedback, we found that visitors are drawn to lifestyle events that

are immersive, engaging and offering experiences unique to Asia. RWS continues to reinvent our offerings and develop more unique and exciting programmes so we can differentiate ourselves from the competition," said a spokesperson.

Likewise, MBS has kept a schedule of constant innovations. Following the refurbishment of its 2,561 rooms and suites, the IR has been leaning on a suite of technological enhancements with new multimedia attractions such as the Digital Light Canvas and Spectra.

Mike Lee, its vice president, sales, shared that "refreshing the diverse programming" has been a key investment for MBS. For example, the ArtScience Museum has been hosting "blockbuster exhibitions" featuring popular franchises like Marvel.

The Lavo Italian Restaurant and Rooftop Bar opened in January, and 2019 will see MBS launching the Marquee nightclub, which will span three floors and feature a full-sized indoor Ferris Wheel.

Maunik Thacker, senior vice president – marketing, shared that to reach out to guests, particularly the millennials, MBS has "shifted (its) marketing efforts to focus on more digital advertising".

To cater to "price-sensitive" audiences in China, Thacker explained that MBS "teamed up with WeChat to roll out (its) marketing messages and promotions via the app". – **Pamela Chow**

PHILIPPINES

Still more rooms coming up

Resorts World Manila (RWM) will swamp the market with 900 new rooms with the opening of three hotels – on top of the existing four within the IR compound – in the coming months, but industry observers believe the additional inventory can be absorbed by the growing number of business and leisure travellers to the metro.

The 357-key Hilton Manila is scheduled to open in November 2018, followed by a 191-key Okura, and a 350-key Sheraton, adding to four existing hotels including

a Maxim (to be rebranded Ritz-Carlton next year), Remington (to be rebranded Holiday Inn Express), Marriott which added 227 rooms in late 2016, and home-grown brand Belmont.

Kevin Tan, executive director of Alliance Global Group, Genting Group's partner in RWM, said in a *CNBC* interview earlier this year that the new openings will be part of RWM's phase three expansion, which also includes a new casino set to "almost double the current gaming capacity we have right now".

Colliers International research manager Joey Bondoc said RWM's new hotels are in keeping with his recommendation for operators to continue developing four- and five-star accommodations in key business districts, as he foresaw continued arrivals from major visitor source markets thanks to the improvement of the country's infrastructure and aggressive tourism marketing.

Bondoc also said RWM's new hotels will be "propelled by expanding activities in key business districts" in Manila, including the growing number of business process outsourcing offices, and an ideal complement to RWM's gaming and retail shops.

Mike Hain, groups manager of Corporate International Travel and Tours, said RWM's new hotels are ultimately good for the market, where "hotels dictate the price" due to the limited choices. That's why "if you compare hotels here with those in Asia, even for the same hotel brand, we're more expensive," he remarked.

Hilton Manila general manager Simon McGrath said that apart from the corporate sector, the leisure market including staycationers and tour groups will be drawn to the area's proximity to airports, high-end shopping, F&B options, and what he says is the hotel's unique selling point – a huge swimming pool and large jacuzzi that will be shared by Hilton and Sheraton. – **Rosa Ocampo**

MALAYSIA

Massive remake of RWG underway

Since the launch of the Genting Integrated Tourism Plan in December 2013, Resorts World Genting (RWG) has undertaken major expansion and refurbishment efforts throughout the IR.

As part of the capital investment of RM10.4 billion (US\$2.6 billion), upcoming attractions include the Skytropolis Indoor Park and Twentieth Century Fox World Malaysia Theme Park. No opening dates were given for these two much-anticipated offerings but *the Daily* understands that both would "open soon".

The Skytropolis Indoor Park will boast 24 rides and attractions, while the Twentieth Century Fox World Malaysia Theme Park will feature rides and attractions based on movies such as *Ice Age*, *Rio* and *Night at the Museum*.

Several developments have already been launched, such as the SkyAvenue mall of-

fering diverse shopping and dining options as well as SkySymphony, an orchestra of audio, visual and motion graphics using 1,001 winch balls suspended from a four-storey-high ceiling.

Other attractions include the Awana SkyWay cable car system with 99 gondolas that ply along a 2.8km-long track to allow visitors a bird's-eye view of the 130-million-year-old rainforest.

In terms of accommodation, RWG currently has seven hotels totalling over 10,000 rooms. The five-star Crockfords opened in early 2018 with 140 keys, adding to existing hotels Awana, Genting Grand, Maxims, Resort Hotel, Theme Park Hotel and First World Hotel.

Rocky Too, senior vice president of sales & marketing at RWG, told *the Daily*: "Our target is to attract more people to come see the new RWG. Last year, we had over 23 million visitors. We believe that when the new theme parks open, there will be more tourists coming from India, China and neighbouring countries."

Too further shared that RWG is working closely with key markets and travel agents to keep them updated on the resort's offerings, and will be participating in tradeshows and travel fairs in target markets like China and India when the attractions are almost ready.

"As FITs and daytrippers are our priority market segments, we will also be working with OTAs and considering partnering with some hotels in Kuala Lumpur to offer room plus theme park tickets packages," he added.

Inbound tour operators like Ally Bhoonee, executive director at World Avenues, believes that a "more exciting" RWG will "add value to the destination and make it easier for us to market internationally". – **S Puvaneswary**

VIETNAM
Playing catch-up in the IR game

The IR market is gaining momentum in Vietnam, as the country welcomes a swathe of developments to cater to growing demand from the domestic and regional markets – most notably China, South Korea and Japan.

Jeff Redl, managing director of Diethelm Travel Vietnam, said the success of IRs in destinations such as Dubai and Singapore has fuelled the market's growth in Vietnam.

He added: "The success of IRs in various locations has proven this particular model is pertinent and profitable. It has already found its clientele in certain markets and with the growth of Asian travellers, demand will surely increase. Vietnam has understood the needs for offering such IRs."

Vinpearl is one of the country's major players with resorts in Nha Trang and Phu Quoc – two destinations where IR development is prominent. Other areas include Danang and Hoi An, Nha Trang and Cam Ranh, and between Hoi An and Tam Ky.

Another game-changer in the country's IR market came in 2017 when the government lifted a long-time ban on Vietnamese nationals allowing them to gamble in two casinos on Phu Quoc, and at Van Don Special Economic Zone in Quang Ninh province. Both casinos are currently under construction.

In April, Laguna Lang Co beach resort near Hue was also awarded a casino license and is expected to welcome both foreign and domestic players by 2022.

Said Redl: "Gaming companies are interested in the casino business in Vietnam because the industry is still new, there's

little competition and those that arrive here first can easily dominate the market and maximise their profits."

A study by academic Augustine Ha Ton Vinh, who extensively researched Vietnam's gaming industry in late 2017, revealed Vietnamese spend an estimated US\$800 million each year gambling abroad in places such as Macau, Singapore and across the border in Cambodia, making it a lucrative business.

Anton Jurgens, general manager of Exo Travel Vietnam, predicts that if gambling is fully legalised in Vietnam, there would be a huge growth in IRs with casinos in the country.

Oleg Shafranov, general manager of Khiri Vietnam, commented: "This (lifting of the ban) will contribute to increasing the role, so far insignificant, of IRs for the domestic market," she said. – **Marissa Carruthers**



Aerial view of Vinpearl Resort



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Cultivating potential

The recent Darjeeling unrest had taken a toll on inbound tourism but a bigger challenge lies in the lack of awareness of West Bengal's rich offerings, finds **Rohit Kaul**



West Bengal hasn't been able to realise its true potential because there is a lack of awareness about its diverse tourism products that range from river cruises to Sunderbans National Park.

Arun Anand
Managing director
Midtown Travels



Famed for its tea plantations, Darjeeling's recent unrest affected inbound arrivals

West Bengal has yet to realise its full potential in tourism, said industry stakeholders in West Bengal, owing to a lack of awareness about the state's rich array of products and experiences.

Furthermore, separatist agitations lasting for 104 days in Darjeeling last year forced a shutdown of the holiday hill town, taking a hit on inbound visitor arrivals. The movement has since been called off.

Debjit Dutta, CEO of Impression Tourism Services, who is also chairman, Indian Association of Tour Operators, West Bengal Chapter, said: "Last year's inbound season was hit very badly because of the agitation, as Darjeeling is one of the most visited destinations in the state. About 70 per cent of the tourist traffic in West Bengal visits Darjeeling. About 80-85 per cent of my company's business took a hit."

West Bengal recorded about 1.5 million foreign tourist arrivals in 2016, according to statistics from India's tourism ministry. While 2017's statistics are not yet available at press time, the trade expects a major decline in international tourist arrivals overall.

"I travelled to six cities in the US as part of a PATA India roadshow. Tour operators there had no idea about the tourism products available in West Bengal and were very excited after learning about them.

"However, post the stalemate we were unable to reap the benefits of our marketing efforts. We were flooded with questions on the situation there, but we didn't have answers," lamented Dutta.

He added that a major US-based tour

operator – who had planned about 130 groups for last year – had to cancel all its groups due to the Darjeeling unrest.

Europe, the US and Australia were key international source markets that posted significant declines for Dutta's company.

Arun Anand, managing director, Midtown Travels, added: "West Bengal hasn't been able to realise its true potential due to a lack of awareness about its diverse tourism products that range from river cruises to Sunderbans National Park.

"Unfortunately last year's unrest not only affected business in 2017, but also his year's international tourist arrivals as March-June is the period when foreign tour operators plan their brochures, and they are apprehensive whether the situation will remain peaceful in Darjeeling this year."

Earlier this year, the tourism department of West Bengal organised a Destination East event that saw participation from about 100 buyers from overseas markets like the US, the UK, Russia and Australia.

"Such events will go a long way in broadcasting the message to domestic and international markets that the situation is normal in Darjeeling," said Dutta.

Other industry players, on the other hand, have reported a marginal increase in international business despite the Darjeeling unrest.

"We were not hit by the situation in Darjeeling as river (tourism) is a different journey. We recorded growth of about seven per cent in our inbound business," said Sushila Ramamoorthy, executive director, Vivada Cruises.

The German market has been a major contributor to Vivada Cruises' business

while increase in demand from the US, Australia and Canada was also recorded.

Sushila pointed out that river cruises has more potential to grow if the Ministry of Tourism had "a holistic and separate campaign for this niche product".

The state tourism department is currently looking into this, and promoting other niche tourism products aside from cruises, such as adventure, wellness and medical tourism, to draw international visitors. A new state tourism policy will be introduced later this year to provide impetus to these verticals.

"We are now looking to support theme-based tourism products and will encourage private investment in such areas. We

will also ensure world-class service standards in (both the) tourism and hospitality sectors through skill development," said West Bengal's tourism minister Gautam Deb.

"(For instance), a hotel management institute has opened in Durgapur in July, while a food raft institute is on the anvil at Gajoldoba."

The state is also looking into promoting houseboats as a tourist attraction. Eight houseboats fitted with luxurious modcons are being built in Kolkata as a pilot project, with meeting facilities offered on two houseboats. These houseboats will be available on Hooghly, Sunderbans and Gajoldoba rivers.

Still room for MICE in Kolkata

The Indian government's push for better connectivity and infrastructure in the eastern regions under its *Look East* policy has benefited Kolkata, which has steadily grown in stature as a leisure and business destination in recent years. This has led to positive sentiments among trade players that the surge in business events will enable them to overcome challenges arising from the influx of new room inventory.

According to the annual *Trends & Opportunities Report for 2017* on India's hotel industry by HVS India, approximately 2,200 rooms will be added to Kolkata's inventory over the next five years, of which 64 per cent are under active development.

Sarbendra Sarkar, founder & managing director, Cygnett Hotels Group, shared: "After Noida (a suburban city of Delhi just across the state line in Uttar Pradesh),

Kolkata is anticipated to have the highest increase (around 119 per cent) of future hotel room supply among major Indian cities in the coming years."

While the increase in room inventory is "challenging", the "surge in MICE segment has offered a ray of hope to the city's hospitality players", Sandeep Johri, Novotel Kolkata Hotel and Residences' general manager remarked.

Sudesh Poddar, president, Hotels & Restaurant Association of Eastern India, added: "In recent years, MICE and corporate tourists in Kolkata have been growing by leaps and bounds. For instance, the Bengal Global Business Summit (earlier this year) saw a large number of international MICE delegates."

Furthermore, Kolkata has also seen improvement in its MICE offerings with last year's opening of the Biswa Bangla Con-

Hot and new

JW Marriott Hotel Kolkata

Marriott International's first hotel in Kolkata and eastern India, JW Marriott Hotel Kolkata towers over JBS Haldane Avenue in the heart of the city, minutes from the old CBD. The property features 281 rooms, four F&B options, a spa, a fitness centre and an infinity pool. There is also more than 3,700m² of indoor and outdoor event spaces, which includes five studios and a Grand Ballroom for up to 2,000 pax banquet-style.



From left: JW Marriott Kolkata; guests boarding the *Orient Pandaw*



Radisson Kolkata Ballygunge

Park Plaza Kolkata Ballygunge was recently rebranded to Radisson Kolkata Ballygunge. Located in an upscale South Kolkata neighbourhood, the hotel has been revitalised with a new look in several areas and features upgraded amenities. There are 92 rooms across several categories: superior, business class, junior and executive suites.

Grand Hyatt Kochi Bolgatty

The five-star waterfront hotel on Kochi's Bolgatty Island features 264 luxurious guestrooms including 38 suites and four private villas with plunge pools. Aside from complimentary Wi-Fi and four F&B venues, recreational facilities include a spa, kid's play area, 24-hour fitness centre, tennis courts and three swimming pools. The property's 3,000m² of function space comprises a waterside amphitheatre and yoga lawn.

Vistara's first robot

Using artificial intelligence technology, Vistara has created a unique robot named RADA to assist customers, address their queries and entertain them. RADA is currently placed at Vistara's Signature Lounge at Delhi Airport's Terminal 3 from July 5, 2018 to assist customers using the lounge before they board their flights. The robot can scan boarding passes and provide information on the terminal, departure gates, real-time flight status, among others.

Orient Pandaw

Pandaw will from later this year deploy the *Orient Pandaw* on an expedition along the Lower Ganges, its first cruise in India. From December 23 to the end of April 2019, the *Orient Pandaw* will sail weekly from Kolkata to Farakka and back on a seven-night itinerary. It will re-commence the itinerary in July 2019 through to April 2020. The *Orient Pandaw* features 30 veranda staterooms on two decks, indoor dining, a deck bar, a movie and lecture theatre and a spa.

vention Centre (BBCC), one of the largest convention centres in South Asia. BBCC features a main hall with 3,200 seats, six breakout areas and a 2,323m² exhibition hall, plus a 100-key hotel on site.

Sudesh opined: "Going forward, as connectivity to and within the city improves, and developments like the new international convention centre establish itself, we anticipate the city to achieve some balance between demand and supply. That being said, short-to-medium term pressure on occupancy is likely."

According to the HVS report, Kolkata exhibited a 5.2 per cent RevPAR growth in 2016/17, its first positive RevPAR growth in four years following the industry up-cycle. Despite an 8.4 per cent increase in supply, the city registered an occupancy of 70.2 per cent and an average rate of Rs5,818 (US\$87). – Rohit Kaul


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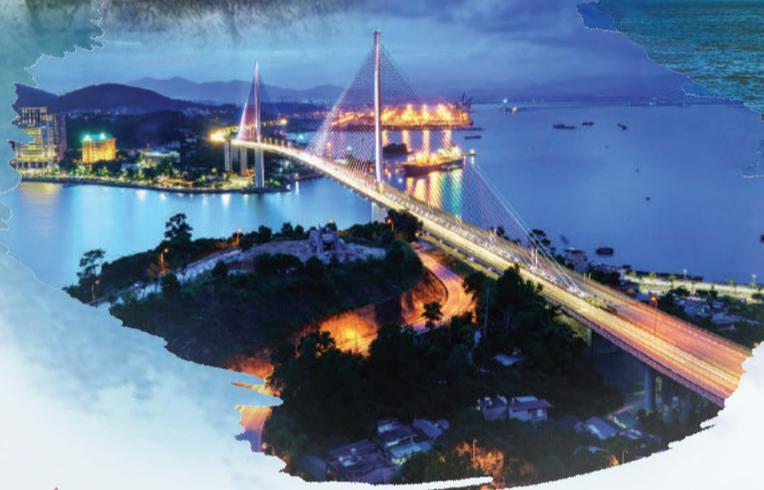
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Destination China

Make China great again

Why are inbound tourism numbers into China, a country steeped in culture and heritage, lagging behind its booming outbound sector? **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena** examines the reasons



Home to architectural marvels like the Great Wall, China – with its myriad attractions – should attract more inbound tourists

China may be the world's largest tourist source but the country is punching below its weight as a global travel destination. Despite its splendid history, culture and culinary traditions, the number of international arrivals to China has yet to surpass 30 million, a meagre figure compared to the 122 million Chinese outbound travellers in 2016.

The vast "inbound tourism trade deficit" was an issue that Ctrip co-founder and chairman James Liang sought to highlight during his keynote address at the ITB China conference in Shanghai earlier this year.

To put things into perspective, Liang compared China's 29.2 million inbound travellers (excluding Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan) with the US (75.1 million), Japan (28.7 million), the UK (37.6 million), India (14.6 million) and Turkey (39.9 million).

"China received just 30 million in actual figures for arrivals, which have not changed in years," Liang remarked, a far cry from its booming outbound sector.

Visa policy a hindrance

To get a handle of vast discrepancy between China's inbound and outbound figures, the Ctrip top honcho compared the country's visa policy with that of others.

China has just 14 countries on its visa-exemption list, significantly less than the US (38), Japan (68), the UK (56) and Turkey (78). Only India, with a similar population size as China, allows fewer countries visa-free entry (three), although it also has an e-visa system in place, Liang noted.

Of the opinion that China's restrictive visa policy is standing in its way to attract more international arrivals, Liang added that according to UNWTO, there are only five other countries in the world with stricter inbound visa restrictions than China, namely Nigeria, Gabon, Pakistan, Angola and Saudi Arabia.

China Tourism Academy's head of in-

ternational tourism research Yiyi Jiang agrees that restrictive visa policy poses a hindrance to visitors, but also argues that the Chinese inbound sector is more developed than the outbound sector, which only took off after 2000.

"China's inbound tourism market has been opened since the country's economic reform (in 1978), so the market can't grow forever. It's already a mature sector," she posited.

As well, the Chinese economy has grown by leaps and bounds in the intervening years, pushing up living costs and salaries. What hasn't changed as fast though are visitor perceptions, with potential travellers still viewing China as the world's factory and a destination with cheap prices, Exo Travel China's managing director Olivier Marchesin asserted.

"Real estate today in the big Chinese cities is much more expensive than in their European and American counterparts, so this impacts everything in the market, from salary to food," he shared.

"When we send China quotations, (clients) are surprised by the prices. They often give up (on visiting China) when they see the rates."

Rolling out the welcome mat

The easiest way to get around China's shortfall in inbound tourism trade and foreign currency income is adopting a more welcoming approach in its visa regulations, Liang opined.

While foreign countries have adapted visa regulations to attract Chinese outbound tourists, he said China should likewise improve its tourist attractiveness through a less restrictive visa policy, even if the move is not reciprocated.

"If other countries want to restrict this flow of tourism (through visa policies), we shouldn't reciprocate. Why hurt ourselves?" questioned Liang.

Visa relaxation aside, Liang also wants airport development in China to be improved, as departure and landing fees in China's airports are one of the world's

highest while high population cities like Suzhou, for instance, still has no airport.

He also sees ample opportunities in rail travel, which will place destinations further afield within one hour of hubs like Shanghai and Beijing.

In the march for progress, China needs to pay attention to retaining the charms

of old living quarters like the Beijing *hutong* and Shanghai *longtang*, according to Marchesin. "Giving better living conditions for the residents in such places is understandable, but closing all small restaurants and the likes will push the tourists away," he stated.

The ability to tell "a good story of China", according to Jiang, is hence key to promoting the country on the global travel stage, focusing on its modern achievements and present way of living to match its tourism appeal with its economic development and world influence.

Believing that inbound tourism development is closely tied to a country's progress, Jiang is certain that China's One Belt, One Road foreign and economic policy will improve China's image overseas and create new charm for the country as a travel destination.

Marchesin concurred: "Chinese history is amazing, but Chinese development is also exciting sometimes. My guests are really amazed with the new China, which they never expected before their visits."

Amid the strong competition for tourist dollar in Asia-Pacific, China should invest more in tourism marketing overseas, urged Hemant Kaushik of Exotic Holidays, an Auckland-based travel firm specialising in Asia.

"China is not investing enough in tourism marketing, unlike Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore which are supportive of trade and also give strong marketing support to agents," he said.

PATA TRAVEL MART 2018 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PATA is sincerely grateful to our hosts, Tourism Malaysia and the Langkawi Development Authority, for their enthusiastic administration and hosting of PATA Travel Mart 2018 in Langkawi, Malaysia. PATA would like to sincerely thank them and the people of Langkawi for their warm hospitality and kind generosity.

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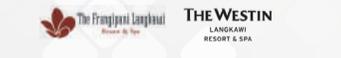
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If other countries want to restrict this flow of tourism (through visa policies), we shouldn't reciprocate. Why hurt ourselves?

James Liang, Ctrip co-founder and chairman

Destination South Korea

Ablaze with Olympic fire

The recent Pyeongchang Winter Olympics and improving relations with North Korea have ignited a host of developments for the once-secluded province of Gangwon, reports **Pamela Chow**

The Pyeongchang Winter Olympics and recent international affairs have launched the Gangwon province into a momentum of growth, with tourism stakeholders rolling out programmes and infrastructure expansion for the region.

Most notably, the games brought the high-speed rail (KTX) to the quiet seaside city of Gangneung. Travellers can now commute to and from Seoul in just 1.5 hours, compared to the previous 4.5 hours.

Chung Man Ho, vice governor of the Gangwon Provincial Government, told the *Daily* that transportation accessibility for the province has “improved dramatically”.

Some 2.4 trillion won (US\$2.1 billion) was spent for the Pyeongchang Olympics, and of that 1.5 trillion won went towards social overhaul – including the construction of highways and cleaning up of streets – which “had a huge benefit for Gangwon as a whole”, he described.

The area has also seen a slate of hospitality developments, among them Ramada Gangwon Sokcho by Wyndham Hotel Group, Lakai Sandpine Resort, St John’s Hotel and Gangneung Tourist Hotel.



Ramada Sokcho saw 100 per cent occupancy during the Olympic Games, and now reports an average of over 80 or 90 per cent.

Michael Kim
Director franchise operations, South Korea, Wyndham Hotel Asia-Pacific



Nami island, in Chuncheon, Gangwon-do, is where some scenes of Korean drama series *Winter Sonata* was filmed

Michael Kim, director franchise operations, South Korea, Wyndham Hotel Asia-Pacific, shared: “Sokcho and the whole of Gangwon have received huge benefits from the Olympic Games. Ramada Sokcho saw 100 per cent occupancy during the Olympic Games, and now reports an average of over 80 or 90 per cent. Tourism is booming in the Gangneung area too, so

we have opened properties... such as in Chuncheon.”

More is still to come. Leanne Harwood, InterContinental Hotel Group’s vice president operations, South-east Asia and Korea, hinted that the group is eyeing developments that can “cater to guests (such as) winter sports enthusiasts” visiting Alpensia Pyeongchang.

Beyond the Winter Olympics, stakeholders believe that the improving North-South political climate has also instilled confidence in tourism to Gangwon, which lies along the border with North Korea.

Yoon Seung Hwan, Korean Tourism Organization’s (KTO) director of Singapore office, said the impression of North Korea as a safe destination is “getting better”, and that KTO is working to incorporate the Korean Demilitarized Zone into more tour itineraries.

He added that KTO is also promoting Gangwon as an outdoor destination through “complementary activities to skiing and more experiences using the new facilities”.

To support an anticipated visitor influx, Gangwon is working on expanding tourism infrastructure, said Chung. This includes facilities in the mountainous regions, a marine tourist complex on the east coast and Legoland Korea in Chuncheon.

Of the 100 million visitors to Gangwon annually, three million are foreigners. The province hopes to grow this to four million this year, and five million by 2020.

With the help of the upcoming international events, Chung is confident that arrival numbers will grow “beyond expectations”.

Hot and new

Le Méridien Seoul

In November last year, Le Méridien Hotels & Resorts made its South Korea debut with a 336-key hotel in Bongeunsa-ro, one of Gangnam’s major thoroughfares. Le Méridien Seoul brings 109 club rooms and 29 suites, and offers a range of facilities from spa and indoor golf range to three F&B options.

Seoul Dragon City

Korea received its first “hotel-plex” (hotel complex) in the Yongsan district in October 2017. Seoul Dragon City features four AccorHotels brands that bring 1,700 rooms, 11 restaurants and bars, 17 meeting rooms, two multifunction grand ballrooms and four floors of entertainment in a Sky Bridge suspended between two towers.

The four AccorHotels brands, ranging from luxury to economy, are Grand Mercure Ambassador Seoul Yongsan serviced residences, Novotel Suites Ambassador Seoul

Yongsan for long-stay guests, Novotel Ambassador Seoul Yongsan and ibis Styles Ambassador Seoul Yongsan.

Ryse, Autograph Collection

Autograph Collection Hotels in June launched Ryse in the Hongdae neighbourhood, the collection’s second hotel in Seoul. Designed by Michaelis Boyd, Ryse boasts 272 guestrooms including 14 suites, each designed to highlight an art piece from an exclusive collection for the hotel.

For instance, the 217m² Executive Producer Suite, located on the 20th floor, features a graphic wall by renowned Korean graphic designer Na Kim. The property also features four F&B options, a fitness centre and a 500m² retail store.

Four Points by Sheraton Seoul, Gangnam

The second Four Points in Seoul has opened in the Gangnam district. It features 199 rooms and two penthouse suites. Each room is furnished with a



From left: Grand Mercure Ambassador Seoul Yongsan; Signiel Seoul

49-inch ultra HDTV, complimentary Wi-Fi and an egg chair. Facilities include a gym, sauna, the all-day dining restaurant Evolution and The Lounge & Bar, which boasts the brand’s signature craft beer programme. Over 106m² of meeting and event spaces are available on the second floor.

Signiel Seoul

Signiel Seoul – a portmanteau of “signature” and “Lotte” – opened in South Korea’s tallest building,



Lotte World Tower. The hotel is located on the 76th to 101st floors and boasts 235 individually designed guestrooms with panoramic views of Han River and the capital.

Besides Stay restaurant managed by three-star Michelin chef Yannick Alléno and one-star Michelin restaurant Bicena, Signiel Seoul also offers private butler services, a lounge for hotel guests, premium Rolls Royce or helicopter transfers, personal shoppers and more.

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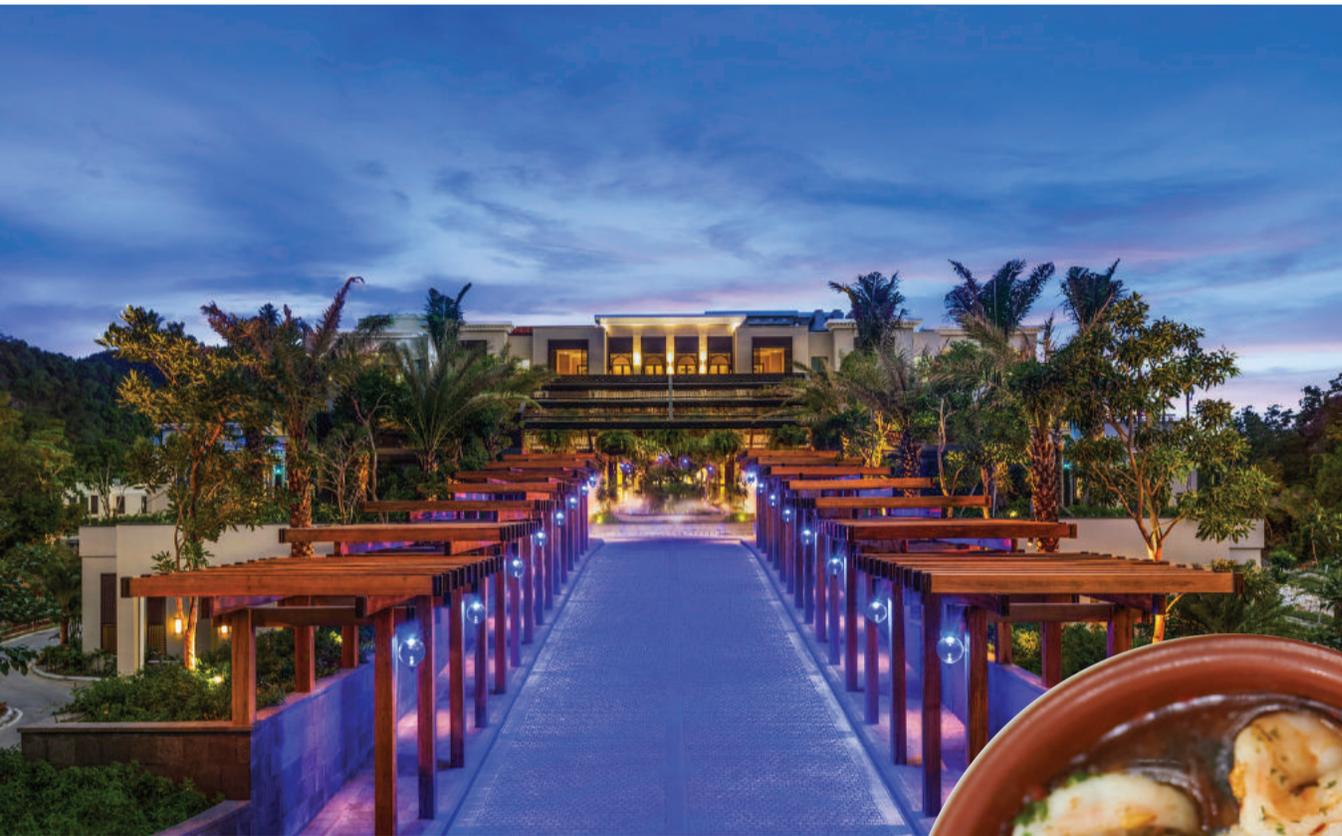
The article The Technology Experience in TTGmice June 2017 by Karen Yue has been awarded a PATA Gold Award 2018 in Travel Journalism - Business Article category.



Host City

A taste of island living

S Puvaneswary takes a look at the myriad attractions that Langkawi, the Jewel of Kedah, offers



EAT

Tulsi Garden Restaurant & Bar

This Indian restaurant on Pantai Tengah offers reasonably-priced north and south Indian cuisine. Offering both indoor and outdoor seating, the restaurant can accommodate groups of up to 120 people. Signature dishes include the lamb *varuval*, Tulsi garden lobster and chicken *biryani*. The restaurant also features a traditional tandoor oven that churns out delicious naans, breads, tandoori chicken and grilled meats, plus an extensive range of vegetarian options. tulsi_garden@yahoo.com; (60) 4955 3011

Red Tomato Restaurant & Lounge

Located on Pantai Cenang opposite Underwater World, this popular eatery serves up a range of Western dishes. The 60-seater space can also cater to the requirements of vegans, lactose intolerant and gluten-free customers upon request. Notable dishes include tomato soup, shrimp and garlic, eggs benedict, farmer's choice and tarte flambee. Red Tomato is also well-known for its rich and fruity shakes. redtomatorestaurant.com.my

Charlie's Bar & Grill

This waterfront restaurant offers views of the Kuah Bass Harbour, Dayang Bunting Island, as well as the Royal Langkawi Yacht Club. Outdoor seating allows guests to enjoy sea breezes and sunset views while enjoying their drinks and meals. This place serves a combination of local and Western dishes such as claypot noodles, pizzas, fish & chips, beef burger, grilled Cajun salmon, Caesar salad and oxtail curry. The venue seats 100 people comfortably. thivagar.hugos@trinidadholdings.com; (60) 4961 1396

The Cliff Langkawi Restaurant & Bar

Evenings make the best time to dine at The Cliff Langkawi Restaurant & Bar, located at the end of Pantai Cenang, for its expansive views of the

Andaman Sea as the sun sets over the horizon. Seafood, done in local or Western style, features strongly on the menu. Signature dishes include the seafood platter, honey-grilled salmon, beef rendang and *layaran senja* (deep fried fish with tamarind sauce). The restaurant seats 120 people while the bar can accommodate up to 30. theclifflangkawi.com

DO

Pular Payar

Just off Langkawi is Payar Island, a marine park with four uninhabited isles spread over two nautical miles. It is an ideal spot for snorkelling, diving and swimming. One of its best features is the Coral Garden, an area covered with brightly coloured soft corals. Facilities on the island include picnic tables, gazebos and public toilets. Visitors can get to Pulau Payar from Kuah Jetty by catamaran or speedboat.

Langkawi Scenic Flight

Obtain a bird's-eye of the exotic sights and colours of Langkawi's 99 islands, mangrove forests, sandy beaches, limestone hills and waterfalls by flying over it all. A Cessna Caravan Ex aircraft departs from Langkawi International Airport at 14.00 every day, and each flight can accommodate up to 10 people. The half-hour ride costs between RM330 nett (US\$82) per person for 10 guests per flight, to RM660 per person for a four-person flight. enquiry@cityconnectiontravel.com

Tropical Charters Langkawi

This company offers three-hour sunset cruises, departing from Resorts World Langkawi's marina at 17.00 daily. As part of the experience, a net will be let down from the boat for guests to take a dip in the Andaman Sea while sipping on

Clockwise from top left: The St Regis Langkawi; Tropical Charters sunset cruise; Crocodile Adventureland Langkawi; (inset) Red Tomato's shrimps and garlic dish

drinks. The package also includes a barbecue dinner spread and a free flowing bar. info@tropicalcharters.com.my

Umgawa Langkawi Zipline Adventure

The only zipline eco-canopy tour in Langkawi is located deep inside the Geopark. Two safety rangers lead groups of nine to 17 across platforms situated high in the treetops. The adventure tour allows guests to experience soaring over Seven Wells Waterfalls and through the canopy

on 12 ziplines of varying lengths. There are also suspended bridges to cross, offering spectacular views of the Andaman Sea, while guides share facts about the surrounding flora and fauna. ziplinelangkawi.com

SEE

Galeria Perdana

This gallery showcases a collection of more than 2,500 state gifts and awards presented to Malaysia's longest-serving prime minister Mahathir Mohamad and his wife by world leaders and statesmen. Exhibits on display include crystalware and gifts fashioned out of wood, leather, silver, copper, pewter, ceramics and glass. There is also a line-up of automobiles. The gallery is open 08.30 to 17.30, and the admission fee is RM10 (US\$2.50) for adults. www.jmm.gov.my/en/museum/galeria-perdana

Langkawi Geopark Interpretive Centre

In 2007, Langkawi's Geopark was inducted into the Global UNESCO Network of Geoparks. Discover more about the north-western corner of peninsular Malaysia at this centre, which includes exhibits about the different rock types found on the island. It is open from 09.00 to 17.00 daily. langkawigeopark.com.my

Oriental Village

Overlooking Bura Bay at the foothills of Mt Machincang is Oriental Village, a unique shopping and culinary destination in Langkawi. Activities at Oriental Village include cable car rides, motor-cross bike or ATV rides, and Segway-guided tours. While the village is accessible 24-7, most outlets open from 10.00 to 19.00 daily. orientalvillage.my

Crocodile Adventureland Langkawi

Located a 20-minute drive from the airport, this is eight-hectare attraction is home to some 4,000 crocodiles, the largest crocodile farm in Malaysia. Private tours with trained guides can be arranged, where visitors are taken through the park to learn more about crocodiles, such as their diet and behaviour. There are also daily crocodile shows and feeding sessions. crocodileadventureland.com

Underwater World Langkawi

One of Langkawi's best-loved attractions, Malaysia's largest aquarium houses over 4,000 fish and marine creatures, with a 15m-long tunnel showcasing the exotic marine life through the glass walls. Apart from fish, there are also sections dedicated to seashells, penguins, reptiles, coral reefs, as well as an area featuring poison and venom. Catch the animal feeding times: seals at 14.30, African penguins at 11.00 and 14.30, Rockhopper penguins at 11.15 and 14.45, and fishes in the tunnel tank at 15.30. The attraction opens from 10.00 to 18.00 daily. underwaterworldlangkawi.my

Mahsuri's Tomb & Cultural Center

Legend has it that Mahsuri was a beautiful lady in Langkawi who was wrongfully accused of adultery and put to death in 1819. Before she died, she put a curse on the island that there would be no peace and prosperity on the island for seven generations. After her death, Langkawi did undergo a period of hardship, from the Siamese invasion to a series of droughts and floods, prompting the local belief. The cultural centre comprises a large gallery with paintings and models depicting Mahsuri's life story, her tomb, and a wooden house built in the style of the 18th and 19th centuries. (60) 4955 6055



Above: Umgawa Langkawi Zipline Adventure

STAY

The Ritz-Carlton, Langkawi

This oceanfront resort, which opened its doors in September 2017, is nestled amid the Malaysian island's lush rainforest. Aside from the 70 rooms, 15 suites and 29 villas on offer, the property also has Villa Mutiara that can accommodate up to eight pax and comes with two pools and access to a private beach. Facilities include four dining venues, a Ritz Kids club, outdoor tennis court, fully-equipped gym, infinity pool, spa and indoor/outdoor yoga space. ritzcarlton.com/en/hotels/malaysia/langkawi

The St Regis Langkawi

The five-star luxury property located on the southern tip of the island offers four private overwater villas and 85 suites. All guestrooms offer expansive, unobstructed views of the sea from spacious terraces, and are decorated with paintings by local artists. Amenities on-site include an infinity pool, the Iridium Spa, six F&B venues, a fitness centre, and a 600m-long private white sand beach overlooking a 100,000m² natural-salt water swimmable lagoon. stregislangkawi.com

Camar Resort Langkawi

Located on Pantai Tengah, Camar Resort Langkawi is a new boutique beachfront property that opened in March this year. The property features two wings containing 90 rooms, as well as facilities like four F&B venues, and a 75m-long saltwater pool – the longest pool of its kind in Langkawi. camarlangkawi.com

Dash Resort, Langkawi

Recently opened in April, Dash Resort, Langkawi offers 108 rooms and one private villa, all of which come furnished with complimentary Wi-Fi and LED TVs with satellite channels. The hotel features two restaurants, a poolside bar, an outdoor pool, a fitness centre and spa. For functions, the property also has a grand ballroom and two meeting rooms. Meanwhile, the Dash Beach Club offers entertainment by international DJs and fusion cuisine. dash-hotels.com/langkawi-malaysia



Left: Galeria Perdana
Below: Payar Island



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