



Keep data, rivals close

Data heavyweights are making inroads into travel, giving travel companies reason to turn old competitors into data-sharing allies

By Pamela Chow

Becoming a tech-smart travel company in today's fast-changing digital landscape is no mean feat, but the goal is becoming increasingly attainable.

Speakers at the Travolution Asia Forum 2018 yesterday shared that there is a growing pool of opportunities for small- and medium-sized players to tap on the immense amount of traveller data, which can empower them even in the face of competition from data giants like Google and Airbnb.

For example, Vietnam-based tour booking platform Triip has accrued a network of partners such as Dichungtaxi, TripRadius, Travelog and Keys China, representing a data ecosystem of more than 100 million users.

"All of these small companies decided to work together because if they don't, they would have to spend a lot on advertising. In fact, they had already wanted to work together, it's just that they did not know how to make the collaboration easier," explained Hai Ho, CEO of Triip.

Richard Harris, CEO, Intent Media, echoed the sentiment with insight that travel agencies should not discount working with their competitors in co-ops



Harris: working with old rivals

We cannot fight Facebook and Instagram (on data), but we can adjust to them and try to do something unique that isn't possible online.

Md Zahirul Alam Bhuiyan
CEO & founder of Bangladesh-based Discovery Tours & Logistic

to share data intelligence. This can even prevent precious data from being lost to bigger players like Facebook and Google.

He explained: "Data is power, so the relationship that you have with your customers is an incredibly important asset. You need to harness your data and make sure that your access to data is not taken away from you. Look at who you can partner with to take advantage of this asset."

"Think about models that involve some manner of cooperation with who you think is your arch-rival. This can hopefully disintermediate or prevent the platforms from taking your customer data," he added.

Another key consideration is

data security, which extends beyond privacy to reward. Ho advised that customers must also gain from sharing their data, and this can come in the form of free user services and an improved shopping experience.

While agents express an eagerness to harness and share data insights, they are still in the dark about how to do so.

Md Zahirul Alam Bhuiyan, CEO & founder of Bangladesh-based Discovery Tours & Logistic, lamented that information about inter-agency collaboration and data privacy and protection is scarce.

He added: "We cannot fight with Facebook and Instagram, but we can adjust to them and try to do something unique that isn't possible online, such as designing multi-destination products with our customers."

A break from beaches

By Marissa Carruthers

Ecotourism and wildlife offerings are holding more sway among European travellers as they start to tire of the traditional beach holidays in Asia.

Diana Lozanova, director of Sofia Luxury Travel in Bulgaria, said while Asia remains the most popular destination, she has seen a recent rising trend in clients wanting more than the usual popular Asian beach destinations that initially drew travellers to the region.

She said: "Bulgarians love the beach, but now they want to explore something new. They normally go to Phuket or Bali for the beach. They want wildlife and nature, so we are looking for destinations that can provide that."

Lozanova noted that interest in wildlife, adventure and trekking trips are on the rise, with Cambodia and Japan on their radar. She added: "Japan is a new market and is very different, but it has been hard to find a travel agent with reasonable prices."

Jana Oberreiterova, product manager of Fun Express in the Czech Republic, said while Asia remains the most popular long-haul destination with clients, they are searching for emerging destinations.

Said Oberreiterova: "They are no longer looking at Thailand and Indonesia and the beaches. (These beaches are) too touristy now and people looking for

somewhere else. They want wildlife and nature."

A strong economy in the Czech Republic is fuelling demand for longhaul travel, with 40 per cent of clients at travel agency Jedu interested in Asia. Project manager Martina Patova said while Bali is one of the top destinations, Czechs' desire for something different is shining through.



Lozanova: Japan rises on radar

She believes countries such as Laos and its wealth of nature and expanding ecotourism options as well as the Philippines will fit the bill.

Micheline Hardy of Toronto-based Club Voyages Mont-Tremblant, hopes to beef up his Asian offerings while catering to travellers' changing needs for more nature-based activities such as scuba diving, trekking and golfing.

"Travellers are looking for more exotic destinations where they haven't been before. They want to do more active travel."

They are no longer looking at Thailand and Indonesia and the beaches.

Jana Oberreiterova
Product manager, Fun Express, Czech Republic



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Gallery

Warm smiles aplenty By Yingyong Unanongrak



Nepal Airlines' Sirjana Shrestha (second from left), Rabindra Shrestha and Krishna Gopal Joshi (rightmost two) with guests



Morahols Travel Malaysia's Eric Sinnaya, Fun Express Czech Republic's Jana Oberreiterova and Going Nepal's Lila Dhar Bhandari



Nami Island Korea's Bobby Minn, Jae Woo Chung and Kyung Hyuk Minn



Palau Visitors Authority's Alessa Aguon, Bureau of Tourism Palau's Kevin Mesebeluu, Palau Visitors Authority's Yumie Morishita and Bureau of Tourism Palau's Fabian Iyar



Travel Press Korea's Michelle Sho and JP Sho



Travelers Brazil's Juliana Falavinha, Esprit D'Aventure Canada's Evelyne Theberge and Snap Productions Malaysia's Sasha Aru



Mega Travel Bulgaria's Lidiya Ivanova and Sol D'or Spain's Teresa Sans



Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority's Michael Goldsmith



Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board's Syed Yahya Syed Othman, Tropical Charters Malaysia's Alexander J, Lada Eco Tourism's Nor Ain Ahmad and Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board's Hishamuddin Mustafa



Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board's Mohmed Razip Hasan and Abdul Khani Daud

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News

Connectivity the weakest link

Malaysia is intent to not let darling markets slip away by pushing for better air access

By S Puvaneswary

Malaysia is working on improving tourist arrivals from its core markets, with air connectivity a major factor in Asia and marketing key to keeping its hold of visitors from the region.

Abdul Khani Daud, deputy director-general (promotion), Tourism Malaysia, said the organisation is working with Malaysia Airports to attract airlines from Thailand, the Philippines, India and Hong Kong, among others, to fly to secondary destinations in Malaysia, including Sabah and Sarawak.

Quezon City's Thousand Miles Travel general manager, Cassey Antoinette Ruiz, opined that air connectivity from the Philippines to secondary cities in Malaysia such as Langkawi, Sabah and Sarawak will make it easier to push the destinations, which are limited to Kuala Lumpur combination packages as there are no direct flights.

Abdul Khani shared that the government was also trying to attract India-based airlines as this was key to arrest year-on-year decline in arrivals from India since 2012. Currently, the India-Ma-

laysia route is served by Malaysia-based carriers, namely Malaysia Airlines, AirAsia and Malindo Air.

DoView Holidays India director, Srinivas Vemuri, said: "Indian airlines would improve air connectivity with B Class Cities such as Pune, Gujerat, Lucknow, places where there are currently no flights to Malaysia."

"Most Malaysia-based airline routes between Kuala Lumpur and India are to the main metro cities in India, making it inconvenient for Indians living outside these cities to travel to Malaysia. Also, there is a lack of awareness about the e-visa facility offered to Indians."

Meanwhile, Tourism Malaysia is sensing a greater urgency to intensify promo-

tions in the Middle East, as arrivals from traditional top performer Saudi Arabia fell nine per cent in the first four months of 2018.

Abdul Khani said: "The promotional budget for the (region) has been reduced while our competitors, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam and others are working to (gain) market share. We need to increase our promotional campaigns in the Middle East or risk losing share."

Ghaleb Hayek, branch manager at Sazat, based in Lebanon, said there is a general lack of awareness about the destination and that the capital, with its Pretronas Twin Towers, is too similar with more accessible Dubai. He commented: "Malaysia has to promote its unique cultures and heritage outside the city areas."



Abdul Khani: flights wanted

We need to increase our promotional campaigns in the Middle East or risk losing share.

Abdul Khani Daud
Deputy director-general (promotion), Tourism Malaysia



Crystal Yacht rolls onto shore

Charter cruise company Crystal Yacht Holidays is revving up its offerings with classic car chauffeuring for Langkawi's budding luxury scene.

Launched last month, Crystal Classic Cars is Langkawi's first chauffeur-driven service using a fleet of classic cars such as 1966 Volvo 122S and 1973 Rolls Royce Corniche Convertible.

Sales and marketing director Joseph Mong told the *Daily*: "There will be interest and demand in this service, from weddings to filming. It's a different experience that many will want to take photos of and share on social media."

Mong said that the business is attracting strong outbound markets, such as China and India, which are willing to spend on exclusive hospitality.

– Pamela Chow



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News

Selangor comes into its own

The state is becoming a bigger focus in combination programmes with Kuala Lumpur, but challenges remain

By S Puvaneswary

While Kuala Lumpur remains a firm favourite in Malaysia thanks to its mature branding and iconic structures, agents are seeing neighbouring Selangor fast rising in popularity among tourists, fuelling demand for twin-destination programmes.

Yap Sook Ling, managing director, Asian Overland Services Tours & Travel, said new products in Selangor are driving interest for family travel from India, China, Hong Kong and the Middle East.

Itineraries span attractions such as Selangor Fruits Valley, Sekinchan paddy fields, Sky Mirror in Kuala Selangor and Sunway Lagoon, the oldest and largest theme park in Selangor.

She added: "We have seen demand for Selangor rising over the last two years, some from repeat visitors to Kuala Lumpur, and others who have heard about Selangor and were keen to explore beyond Kuala Lumpur.

"Selangor appeals to special interest groups as well as families with children because of its ecotourism attractions and educational experiences such as rice planting and harvesting and mangrove ecosystem in Kuala

Selangor."

In the past, Selangor was offered as a day trip component, but combination packages now include overnight stays both in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, she shared.

Cherry Lee, executive director, World Express Tours, said: "Selangor's appeal lies in its greenery and there are a number of resort hotels with green landscaping and space, which appeals to the leisure segment, unlike Kuala Lumpur which has more business class hotels."

Lee added that hotels in Selangor are priced very competitively, with new hotels coming up in locations near shopping malls and theme parks. Sunway Clio Hotel, for example, is located within walking distance of Sunway Lagoon and Sunway Pyramid Mall, whereas New World Hotel in Petaling Jaya is adjacent to Paradigm Mall.

"We see growing demand for Selangor from the Middle East market, who in the past used to want to stay only in Kuala Lumpur and do day trips to Selangor," shared Lee.

"(Seeing the changing trends), we have asked hotels in Selangor to give us bigger allotments to

add into our distribution channels," she added.

For Abdul Rashid Asari, Selangor state government chairman of standing committees for cultural and tourism, Malay tradition and heritage, however, "travel agents unfortunately still tend to sell the same old tours emphasising Kuala Lumpur", despite the abundance of ecotourism, culture and heritage offerings in Selangor.

To change this, there are plans to step up product briefings and fam tours for travel agents from 4Q2018 onwards, showcasing offerings in and around the big cities of Petaling Jaya, Subang, Shah Alam and Klang, he told

the *Daily*.

A chief focus is to "develop the tourism infrastructure outside the main cities by building three- and four-star hotels in places such as Sabak Bernam, Sekinchan, Hulu Selangor and Kuala Selangor".

"This year, we also initiated the Selangor Community Host Programme to train local communities to be local guides in the areas they live," said Abdul Rashid.

Nazri Tashriq Rahmat, corporate communications manager, Tourism Selangor, said Selangor continues to be a day-trip option for many Asian tourists, but the state tourism board hopes to

increase this to a few nights' stay over time.

Another challenge lies in Selangor lacking recall as a geographically distinct destination. Said Nazri: "Many travellers doing Selangor-Kuala Lumpur combination tours are unaware that some (attractions they visited) are in Selangor, as the guides don't point this out. We are now educating inbound agents to (make the distinction clear)."

Selangor is a large state with a lot of ecotourism, culture and heritage products. Travel agents unfortunately still tend to sell the same old tours emphasising Kuala Lumpur.

Abdul Rashid Asari

Chairman of standing committees for cultural and tourism, Malay tradition and heritage, Selangor state government



Shared mobility shifts Avis' ride-sharing focus up a gear

In an age of collaborative consumption, the booming sharing economy is spurring car rental giant Avis Budget Group to navigate creative ways to grow the size and share of the travel pie through the inking of partnerships with multiple peer-to-peer car sharing players.

The latest to sign a multi-year deal with Avis is ride-hailing company Lyft. Under this partnership, Avis will contribute thousands of vehicles from its fleet of 600,000 to the Lyft Express Drive programme in cities across North America.

In Asia-Pacific, Avis has launched various strategic initiatives with popular local

ride-sharing players, including China's Didi Chuxing and Singapore's Grab. Avis Philippines – together with Avis Global and Metro Davao Taxi Association – also developed Hirna, a taxi-hailing app that aims to improve taxi services in key cities outside Manila.

Angeline Tang, Avis' regional director – leisure travel & partnerships, Asia told the *Daily*: "Ride-hailing companies are our allies, not competitors. The more opportunities consumers have for mobility that do not involve owning their own car, the more we benefit.

"As this decline in ownership continues, the future holds a greater need for more, and more flexible mobility options, which

explains why the pie is getting bigger, not shrinking or just being divided up differently."

On average, Avis reports mileage of some 724km over four rental days, or 177km per rental day. In comparison, on shorter-length rentals – lasting over one to two days – the mileage per day increases, described Tang.

Such cases, for which ride-hailing are not economical, are where car rentals come in, she said.

Avis also works with Luxury Retreats, acquired by Airbnb in February 2017, as the official mobility partner of the full-service premium villa rental company.

Further, in 2013, Avis acquired car-sharing network Zipcar, which has more than one million members across the world. This movement is poised to give Avis "a foothold in the rapidly growing world of collaborative consumption", explained Tang.

She added: "By working with ride-hailing players, we can address the growing demand for transportation in key markets, and further leverage our assets." – Pamela Chow

HOT LEADS

Malaysia in greater depth for UK buyer

David Kevan of UK-based Chic Locations is seeking new destination and products in South-east Asia, in particular Malaysia, where he sees potential for eco-based adventures with a touch of luxury. Contact david@chiclocations.com.

India OTA seeks new Asia content

Yogesh B Mehta, vice president - product at Via.com, is currently looking for new

tourism product suppliers in Asia such as South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand. Contact yogesh.mehta@via.com.

New destinations for ecotourism, honeymoon

China-based outbound travel planner Ling Xu from Ling Travel Club, which specialises in travel planning for entrepreneurs, is now looking for ecotourism and honeymoon destinations. Contact cmfgift@hotmail.com or Lingclubcn on WeChat.

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Ride-hailing companies are our allies, not competitors... The more opportunities consumers have for mobility that do not involve owning their own car, the more we benefit.

Angeline Tang

Regional director - leisure travel & partnerships, Asia, Avis

Marketplace



Thrilling adventures await at Umgawa Zipline Eco Adventures

Umgawa Legendary Adventures' eco-adventure treetop zipline tour is a fully guided and exhilarating way to experience Langkawi's rainforest and learn of the island's natural treasures. During the outing, views of the Telaga Tujuh Waterfall (Seven Wells), Andaman Sea, Machinchang Cambrian Geoforest can be had – and these can't be seen or experienced from anywhere else on the island.

There is also a chance to learn about and see flying primates called colugos, dusky monkeys, or even Langkawi's famous hornbills nesting and feeding its young, as well as the island's exotic flora during the tour. A portion of Umgawa's profits are donated to Umgawa Charities, which provides scholarships to Langkawi residents and other philanthropic causes.

Ezeego1 provides one-stop platform

Founded in 2006, Ezeego1 was started with the mission to provide global travellers and travel service providers a one-stop platform to service all their travel needs. Over the years, Ezeego1 has evolved into a trusted expert and powerhouse in the travel category. The company's flexible distribution options, which include the portal, API solutions, and white label and customised solutions, provide opportunities for partners to expand their offerings to their clients.



Cox & Kings opens the doors to South Asia

Cox & Kings Inbound is a destination management company in South Asia specialising in group holidays, FITs, incentives, charters, off-board cruise operations, exhibitions and trade fairs. Headquartered in India, the company is the leading holiday and education travel group with operations in 22 countries across continents.

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The case for sustainability

In this Q&A, PATA CEO Mario Hardy issues rallying call for responsible tourism, global action



In your role as PATA chief, what keeps you awake at night?

I am most concerned about how we can ensure the sustainable growth of travel and tourism, and make sure it has a positive impact on each destination.

What has been done to fix this concern?

Last year, PATA launched a series of training workshops, the PATA Human Capacity Building Programme, that were developed to be held in various destinations for local stakeholders in both the public and private sector. Our most recent programme was held in Nepal with the theme 'The Art of Storytelling', where we shared the importance of changing the narrative and promoting the local culture and heritage of the people of Nepal.

What is PATA's latest rallying call, and how successful has PATA been in calling for action from the industry?

Our most successful campaign is the one we are currently running on promoting the reduction of food waste, the BUFFET (Building an Understanding For Food Excess in Tourism) Initiative (see sidebar below).

The campaign, which was organised by PATA sustainability & social responsibility specialist Chi Lo, in collaboration with our intern associates, has provided greater global awareness of this issue.

Beyond creating awareness about the issue of food waste in tourism, we are also

providing a set of tools that hotels, resorts, convention centres and restaurants can use to make a difference in both their bottom line and the environment.

At the end of this campaign, we will publish a report that demonstrates the positive impact that food waste reduction can have on our sector.

What other new key initiatives can we expect from PATA in the near future?

The BUFFET Initiative will continue until May 2019, and we are now in the process of reviewing current issues in the industry that need to be addressed. Over the coming weeks and months, we will be talking to our members, however for any new key initiatives we must show a positive and measurable outcome.

What other efforts or plans are there in promoting sustainable travel among members and the industry at large?

More than three years ago, PATA initiated the discussion about the importance of dispersing tourists to secondary and lesser-known destinations to address the growing concern over the high concentration of tourists at popular destinations. This remains an important advocacy theme for the organisation and we will continue to address this issue at our events, in our research and publications and in our training programmes.

It is also a topic I often raise in private meetings with tourism ministers in the region. Several countries in Asia such as Thailand, Indonesia, India, Nepal and the Philippines have started to pay closer attention to this issue, and have designed campaigns to help promote new destinations within their country.

What's the state of sustainable tourism in Asia-Pacific? Are industry players paying enough attention to this issue?

There is certainly a greater awareness for the need for a responsible and sustainable travel and tourism industry in the Asia-Pacific region. We are seeing many enterprises taking initiatives that have a positive social and environmental impact in their

communities, such as the banning of single-use plastic at their properties and the use of renewable energy. However, I still think there is more the industry could do and truly lead by example.

Are growth and sustainability at odds with each other, especially in this region where popular destinations are increasingly coming under the threat of overtourism?

The tourism industry has experienced phenomenal growth in recent years. According to our recent PATA five-year forecasts, the growth momentum of Asia-Pacific will continue and by 2022 receive an aggregate inbound count of more than 808 million international visitor arrivals. As the region sees increased growth, there is a greater risk that communities will start voicing their concerns over the rising number of visitors affecting their daily lives.

Internally, how is PATA promoting sustainable tourism and travel within the organisation?

PATA employs a sustainability & social responsibility specialist, Chi Lo, who works closely with a group of intern associates in developing various sustainability toolkits

for our members which are made available on the PATA Sustainability website, www.sustain.pata.org.

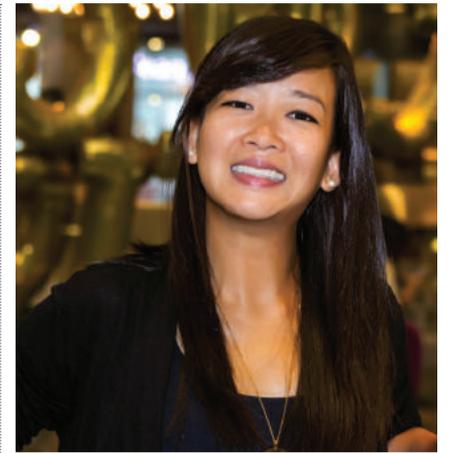
We also regularly publish social media posts that focus on various sustainability issues. Fur-

thermore, we regularly organise training workshops in partnership with Earth-Check, GSTC, Travelife and other organisations for our members and industry stakeholders.

In your second term as PATA chief, are there any changes in your positioning and management of the organisation since your appointment in 2014?

Since I first started as PATA CEO, the Association has made significant progress over the past few years and we are well on the path to financial sustainability. However, there is still much work to be done in transforming the organisation into a true thought leader that influences other leaders.

I still think there is more the industry could do and truly lead by example.



Do well by doing good

PATA's sustainability & social responsibility specialist Chi Lo shares why CSR is important and examples of travel companies doing it right

It is no longer a secret that corporate responsibility is good for business. A 2015 Cone Communications study found that:

- 91% of global consumers expect companies to do more than make a profit, but also operate responsibly to address social and environmental issues

- 84% of global consumers said they seek out responsible products whenever possible

- 90% of global consumers said they would boycott a company if they learned of irresponsible or deceptive business practices

- 71% of global consumers said they would be willing to pay more for a socially or environmentally responsible product

- 80% of global consumers would buy a product from an unknown brand if it had strong social or environmental commitments

These staggering statistics show that socially responsible businesses are desirable and successful. Consumers come to expect it: they will reward businesses that practice responsibility and punish those that don't.

As a business, practicing responsibility may be easier said than done. Here are some resources to help address the challenges you may encounter.

PATA goes on BUFFET diet to take bite out of food waste in tourism

PATA is rallying support for a campaign to raise awareness about food waste and challenge the travel industry, particularly the hospitality sector, to reduce food waste to landfill.

The main activities in the BUFFET (Building an Understanding For Food Excess in Tourism) initiative will include raising awareness of food waste and creating regional-based resources to help hospitality and tourism professionals drive change and ultimately reduce their waste to landfill.

The association is already working

with project partner Scholars of Sustainability (Thai-SOS) and knowledge partner Futouris to drive the campaign forward, but is seeking to engage further with hotels interested to reduce waste to landfill or those already implementing food waste solutions, sponsors, as well as those who would like to help in raising awareness.

While the initiative aims to impact the industry at large, it will also focus

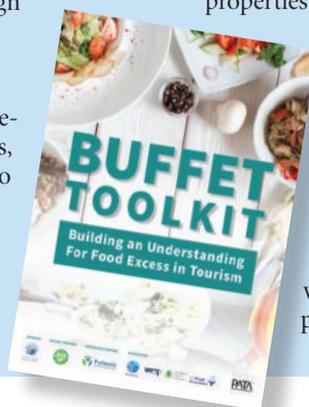
additional efforts on hotels and F&B providers in Asia, as well as specific hotel properties in Bangkok as part of the Bangkok Hotels Project, with the expertise of Thai-SOS.

The association shared that food waste is the third biggest contributor to climate change, while one-third of all foods produced in the world is wasted. Additional pressures also arise from

GHG emissions caused by food production and transportation.

The Travel Corporation (TTC), which recently joined PATA's BUFFET campaign as a sponsor, has committed to help raise awareness of food waste in the travel and tourism industry. It also intends to challenge other industry stakeholders to reduce food waste to landfill.

TTC will share best practice solutions that its various brands and partners have been implementing to reduce and prevent excess food waste in a PATA special report.



Misconceptions It is a common belief that going green and being socially responsible cost money. Indeed it can when you make an investment by buying solar panels, for example. But the return on the investment can be quick, with a lasting positive impact on your company's bottom line. Going green can also be a cost saver. By reducing waste in your office, you can save on disposal costs. By reducing the amount of water, electricity and paper used, you can save on monthly bills. By doing good, you give your company a competitive advantage. You can build your company's reputation as one that is socially responsible, and that is invaluable.

Lack of organisational buy-in This can be a big hurdle if you are attempting to implement long-term positive change. It helps to present a business case for sustainability to management, as well as some statistics (such as those above) showing why implementing CSR practices is imperative to your business. Be sure to have a dedicated individual who can be a champion for managing CSR in the organisation.

Where to start Choosing a place to start can often be the biggest, most overwhelming barrier to becoming greener. When it comes to environmental initiatives in your businesses, start by identifying your baseline for energy, water and waste. These are easily quantifiable and are areas where you will be able to see change the fastest once you implement greater environmentally-

friendly actions. Go for the low-hanging fruit first, such as simply reminding staff to turn off appliances when not in use, or making the switch to LED lighting. You will see a difference in your bottom line soon enough, and can build upon the momentum from that. Companies such as EarthCheck and Travelife for Tour Operators or Travelife for Hotels can help you along the way.

There is no secret formula to being "green" or "responsible". Indeed any change requires awareness and commitment to follow through. Focus on the small things that will make a big impact, do your best, and celebrate every win.

Check out the companies below for some inspiration:

The Travel Corporation (TTC) has adopted a social responsibility strategy to integrate best practices and reduce its operational environmental footprint.

Through The TreadRight Foundation, TTC also encourages its customers to travel in a positive and sustainable manner, including ways such as learning about local customs, traditions and social practices; encouraging guests to purchase locally and responsibly made souvenirs; respecting wildlife and their natural habitats; reducing water and energy usage; and guiding travellers on how to become ambassadors in their own life when they return home by sharing their knowledge and rewarding experiences.

Khiri Travel puts sustainability at the core of its practices, having implemented policies that put its commitment to social responsibility into practice.

Khiri is Travelife and STEP (Sustainable Travel International) certified and has received numerous awards recognising its good work in the industry. In addition, Khiri Travel covers all the overhead for its independent charity arm, Khiri Reach, which operates as a social platform where people and organisations can collaborate and create positive change across Asia.

Buffalo Tours places emphasis on educating its guests on being responsible travellers. It has made a commitment to making a lasting and positive impact in the communities in which it operates through initiatives such as job creation, patronising locally-owned businesses, and ensuring that ground transport is local and efficient. Buffalo has a very clear commitment to protecting children, animals, the environment and local culture.

Centara Hotels & Resorts has committed to a high degree of ethical, social and environmentally responsible standards and is EarthCheck certified.

Centara supports the local community, and works to preserve the environment through water and energy saving initiatives, food waste reduction initiatives, and various environmental campaigns and activities to educate staff about sustainability and their role in Centara's programme.

AccorHotels has its Planet 21 programme, which is based around four strategic priorities: work with its employees, involve its customers, innovate with its partners, and work with local communities.

Initiatives include using money saved from towel reuse programmes to plant trees; banning use of overfished species in its restaurants; utilising eco toiletries and cleaning products, and using products and furniture made from sustainably sourced, recycled or upcycled materials.

The Athenee Hotel Bangkok has achieved its successful second recertification of its ISO 20121 for Sustainability Event Management Systems accreditation for planning and delivering sustainable meetings and events, after being the world's first hotel to achieve ISO 20121 accreditation. The hotel is also currently undergoing a food waste reduction exercise with Scholars of Sustenance Thailand under PATA's BUFFET Campaign Bangkok Hotels Project.

Frangipani Langkawi Resort & Spa prides itself on its 300 green practices, including zero waste-water system, a 100 per cent all-natural filtration system that utilises aquatic plants to treat waste water, turning into Grade-A drinking water for landscaping use. These practices are shared with guests via a complimentary eco-walk. The hotel is a recipient of several acclaimed awards including a PATA Gold Award, the Prime Minister's Hibiscus Award and the ASEAN Green Hotel Award, among others.

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Issues and Trends

Raising Langkawi's profile

When it comes to luxury offerings, Langkawi checks many boxes. Yet the number of high-yield visitors is not at the level it can be, according to the Langkawi Development Authority, which is pulling out all the stops to change this. By **S Puvanewary**



On paper, Langkawi has the makings of a luxury destination, with offerings ranging from high-end hotels to helicopter rides and marinas for yachts.

The archipelago of 99 islands has the most number of high-end hotel brands compared to any other island destination in Malaysia, according to Eric Sinnaya, managing director of Morahols Travel, council member of the Malaysian Tourism Council, and Langkawi chairman for Malaysian Nature Society.

Beyond luxury hotels, the destination also boasts helicopter rides, gourmet restaurants, environmentally-friendly motor yachts and catamarans.

Yet, the Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) says the destination is not attracting enough foreign visitors.

The high yield segment makes up 15 per cent of total tourists to the island – a number the Langkawi Tourism Authority hopes to double by 2020.

There is room for growth in the five-star category, where occupancy levels average between 60 and 70 per cent, shared Azizan Noordin, CEO at LADA. He added that there are 1,952 rooms in the five-star category, the biggest island inventory of five-star properties in Malaysia.

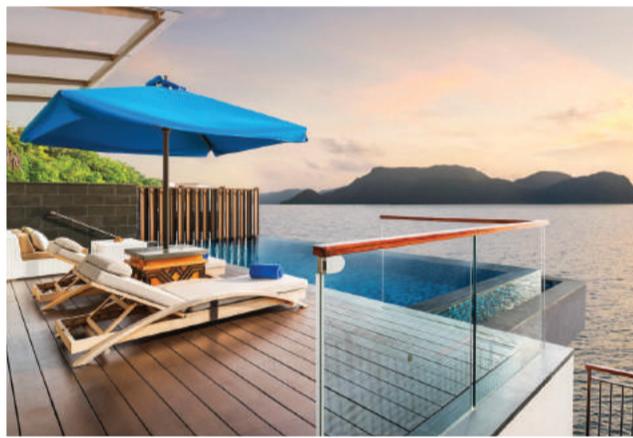
Azizan said: “We have luxury hotel brands. What we need to do more of is to create greater awareness about the destination and its offerings. We have the mass market, now we need to go after the high-end tourists.”

While not a dedicated tourism destination marketing organisation, LADA, as the governing authority for development, has outlined objectives that are aligned to giving Langkawi a higher-end image.

LADA's greater participation in trade-shows could help address the awareness gap. On top of PATA Travel Mart, which is taking place in Langkawi for the first time this year, LADA will also make a first appearance at ILTM Cannes in December.

The organisation also plans to attend future iterations of ILTM China in Shanghai, and ILTM Asia Pacific in Singapore.

In particular, LADA hopes to attract luxury yacht enthusiasts, as Langkawi has



Clockwise from above: Sunset Villa pool deck at St Regis Langkawi, a new luxury hotel on the island; Langkawi's Geopark status is still not well known globally; a full-service marina for yachts and sailboats

four marinas that can cater to yachts of up to 80 metres long.

It also wants to attract private jets. Azizan shared that LADA is working with the Department of Civil Aviation to open Langkawi International Airport – including aircraft refuelling and private catering facilities – round the clock from 4Q2018.

Beyond the luxury hotel sector, LADA is also seeking investments in international schools for the expatriate community living in Langkawi, private hospitals, more fine dining restaurants and a premium outlet on the island.

Changing mass perceptions

Some agents point out that it is not just product awareness, but also destination branding that needs more work.

Langkawi's luxury hotels are a relatively recent development, and the destination still has to work to change its mass market image that was formed over many years, they opined.

Ally Bhoonee, executive director of World Avenues, said: “The challenge is changing the perception of Langkawi as a high-end destination because all the while, Malaysia in general has been perceived as (a destination) attracting middle-income tourists. Only during the last two years, Langkawi has seen a spurt of growth in the high-end inventory with the opening of St Regis Langkawi and The Ritz-Carlton Langkawi.”

He added: “The authorities should not just concentrate on marketing Langkawi

as a high-end destination but also re-branding it, while at the same time, not losing the essence of what Langkawi stands for – preserving nature and its pristine beauty. The tagline, *Naturally Langkawi*, hints that it is an ecotourism destination, but nothing to suggest it also caters to the up-market tourist.”

For Sinnaya, even the more established tourism resources are not getting enough attention. “While there is sufficient information on Langkawi as a Geopark on the ground for visitors (already) in the destination, there is not enough awareness about its UNESCO Global Geopark status in overseas markets.”

Flight connectivity challenge

Another obvious challenge is connectivity. Currently, direct flights from international destinations are limited to Singapore, Guangzhou, Kunming and Guiyang.

Middle Eastern airlines are a key target as LADA trains its sights on high spenders. According to statistics from Tourism Malaysia, tourists from Kuwait, the UAE and Saudi Arabia spend more on the ground compared to visitors from other countries.

LADA is lobbying for more international airlines to begin direct flights to Langkawi, namely Qatar Airways, Emirates, Finnair, Thai Airways and Hainan

Airlines, which had postponed the commencement of new services twice.

Other high-yield markets such as China, India, Australia, New Zealand, Europe and the US are also being targeted by LADA through joint collaborations with Tourism Malaysia, Malaysia Airlines, Etihad Airways, Emirates, Qatar Airways and Singapore Airlines.

It is also in talks with Condor Air, a new airline that will commence services between Frankfurt and Kuala Lumpur from November.

The charter strategy

Azizan suggested that airlines start first with charter flights. LADA is ready to provide marketing support for the duration of the charter programme, while Malaysia Airports Holdings provides complimentary landing fees.

Anthony Wong, president of Langkawi Business Association as well as group managing director, Asian Overland Services Tourism & Hospitality Group, agreed that for a destination with limited direct flights from foreign destinations, getting charters is a good start. It allows the airline to gauge whether there is a market for the destination and whether it will be viable to commence scheduled flights later.

He added: “With charter services, there will always be a percentage of passengers who are well-to-do and will choose the best category of hotels to stay in. They are merely using the charter services as a means of getting to the destination because direct, scheduled flights might not be available.”

Meanwhile, TUI Group's Fly and Cruise programme is set to commence from December 20 until end-March 2019. The group will offer direct flights from the UK to Langkawi, and regional cruises sailing out of Langkawi.

With TUI Group's cruise ship home-porting in Langkawi, all passengers will spend at least one night in Langkawi before embarking on a 14-day cruise itinerary. The total potential capacity is expected to be about 7,200 passengers in the first year of operation.

We have the mass market, now we need to go after the high-end tourists.

Azizan Noordin
CEO, Langkawi Development Authority

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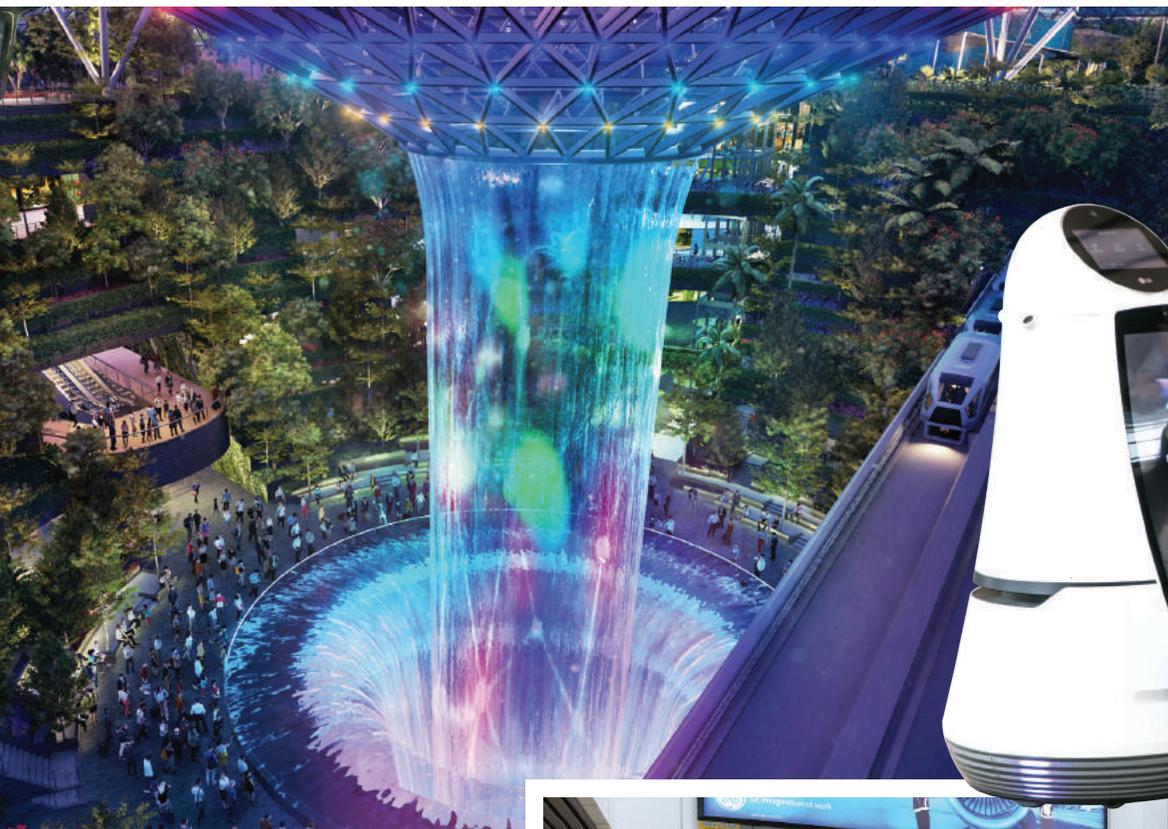
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Flying into the future

The era of robotics, biometric check-in and augmented reality has arrived in airports, promising to make the passenger travel experience more efficient and comfortable. Here's a look at the latest technologies and innovations in Asia-Pacific's air hubs



Clockwise from left: Singapore's Jewel Changi Airport will feature a giant rainbow waterfall; a boy interacts with Incheon International Airport's Chatbot; Kuala Lumpur International Airport is developing intelligent automation at its terminals



knows – and guide the traveller to their final destination,” he said.

A portable biometric security system was piloted at Incheon earlier this year, and this is expected to be rolled out throughout the airport by summer 2019, according to Jo.

“We are in the process of completing the research,” he said. “By using these fingerprint scanners, people will no longer need to bring paperwork or physical documents to the airport to check in. We believe this will make checking in quicker, easier and more convenient for passengers,” he added.

Earlier this year, remote check-in facilities at bus and train stations were rolled out in central Seoul and across South Korea. This new system enables passengers to check in their luggage and obtain their travel documents prior to their arrival at the airport, offering “a much simpler journey from home to the departure lounge”, Jo said.

“Passengers have been particularly pleased to be able to hand over their heavy suitcases and no longer worry about them all the way to their (final) destination.” – Julian Ryall

MALAYSIA

As part of its ‘Runway to Success 2020’ five-year business strategy, Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad (MAHB) has embarked on a digital transformation strategy that involves the use of big data analytics and the Internet of Things to improve the passenger experience and operational efficiency at the five international gateways, including Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), and 16 domestic airports it manages.

MAHB will team up with information management specialist OpenText to innovate KLIA and klia2 operations, including developing intelligent automation, predictive analytics and expanded digital services at both terminals.

In early June, MAHB introduced the MYairports mobile app, an airport travel guide, under its Airports 4.0 digital initiative supported with a RM30 million (US\$7.5 million) investment.

MYairports allows passengers to “plan their journey in the palm of their hand”, said MAHB’s managing director Badlisham Ghazali, providing users with real-time flight updates, shopping and dining promotions, while airport services such as self-check-in and self-bag drop facilities and passengers’ authenticity can be verified as well. Furthermore, passengers can



shop online through the “click and collect” service and have the products delivered to their boarding gate.

MAHB has also collaborated with the government of Saudi Arabia to introduce the world’s first proof of concept (POC) for pre-clearance of haj pilgrims at KLIA’s departure point. The POC process at KLIA takes around 30 minutes, compared with five to six hours of immigration processing in Saudi Arabia in the past. – S Puvanewary

SOUTH KOREA

Incheon International Airport’s new Terminal 2 was opened in January in time for the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics the following month, with a key focus on technology and innovation to enhance the passenger experience and stay ahead of

the competition in the airport sector.

Jo Soo-dong, senior manager of the Smart Airport Team, told the *Daily*: “We believe that by applying new smart technologies throughout the airport, we will be able to enhance passengers’ convenience and make Incheon to be known as a ‘high-tech airport.’”

The latest addition to Incheon’s tech repertoire in July was the Chatbot, which according to Jo is “a talking robot that interacts with passengers”, featuring a message programme that enables it to communicate information about the airport’s facilities to travellers.

A separate guide robot was introduced the following month, Jo revealed. “When you ask for directions, the android will first show you the shortest and quickest route – including all the shortcuts that it

JAPAN

In anticipation of the tourist surge that the Rugby World Cup 2019 and 2020 Tokyo Olympics will bring, cutting-edge technology and innovations will now play critical roles in enabling Tokyo’s Haneda International Airport to cope with increased arrivals while delivering seamless service for passengers.

“IATA is a strong advocate of the ‘fast travel’ concept and we are presently introducing eight fast travel features to provide our passengers with better services. These include the introduction of new technology at the check-in and security gates,” said Fumitake Tsukamoto, head of Tokyo International Air Terminal’s corporate planning division.

Haneda already allows passengers to check in and obtain their boarding passes through automated self-service counters, print and attach their own baggage tags, use dedicated bag-drop options, and self-scan their boarding passes at self-boarding gates, Tsukamoto said.

Meanwhile, robot technology is a firm favourite at Haneda, and a fleet of humanoid Pepper robots was sent out among passengers at the airport in February to cope with the surge of Chinese tourists arriving for the Spring Festival holidays, Tsukamoto said. The Pepper robots were

INNOVATIVE AIRPORT TECHNOLOGIES

Biometric recognition

At Brisbane Airport, SITA’s biometrics technology allows a passenger’s biometric details to be captured through a facial scan at the first touchpoint of their journey at the check-in kiosk. The biometric record is checked against the passenger’s travel documents and a secure single token is created. At subsequent steps in the journey – whether it is self-bag-drop, at the lounges, at border

control or aircraft boarding – passengers simply complete a facial scan without having to present their passport or boarding card.

Flight disruption prediction

SITA is working with several airlines and airports to build a community data hub with both traditional industry data sources and unstructured data (social media, news feeds, weather) which can help establish a visu-

alisation system to predict flight disruption. Imagine the benefit for the industry: airports can better manage ground crew and logistics, airlines can offer your clients accurate flight schedule and connections – all of which ultimately delivers a better travel experience.

Movable check-in kiosks

Hong Kong International Airport and Amadeus worked together to deploy the world’s first

hot-swappable battery powered movable check-in kiosks, called iCUSS, with both a self-service and full-service mode, reinventing the entire check-in experience. The versatile cloud-based mobile kiosks are powered by Amadeus’ common use technology and can be rapidly deployed and relocated for use by the traveller to check in themselves or by the airport staff to provide full-service operations.

programmed to communicate in English and Chinese, and to provide information on access to gates as well as dining facilities, retail outlets and public toilets.

Earlier, Haneda deployed another robot variant, the humanoid EMIEW3, to reply to questions from travellers as it roves the concourses on wheels. Perhaps most remarkably, it is able to interpret the movements of a human and his or her immediate environment – such as consulting a map of the airport facilities – an autonomously initiate an interaction, enquiring if the traveller requires assistance. – Julian Ryall

HONG KONG

From kerb to gate, innovation and technology are playing greater roles than ever in shaping the passenger travel experience at Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA).

The airport is seeking to “transform the passenger journey into a fully automated and self-serviced process” with the objective of making travel at HKIA “fast, easy and as simple as riding a bus”, said Chris Au Young, general manager for smart airport at Airport Authority Hong Kong.

Automation of processes are now underway at HKIA. The self-bag drop service was first introduced in 2016 to enable passengers to check in baggage by themselves and save on processing time. To date, 120 self-bag drop counters have been installed in the airport.

Since end-2017, HKIA has introduced iCUSS mobile check-in kiosks for travellers to complete their check-in procedures anywhere, from the airport terminals to external locations such as hotels, theme parks and conference centres. Together with the self-bag drop service, the entire check-in process is now more efficient for passengers.

As well, HKIA is set to roll out biometric technology services from late-2018 onwards. By showing their passports and having their faces scanned at check-in, travellers will soon get through security and immigration checkpoints for boarding without having to produce their passports repeatedly.

The HKG My Flight mobile app recently added an augmented reality (AR) navigation function, which guides passengers towards facilities at the airport with instructions overlaid in camera view and terminal signage in users’ own languages.

HKIA has also launched MyTAG, a smart luggage tag that notifies passengers on their smartphones when their checked bags arrive at the baggage reclaim carousel. – Prudence Lui

SINGAPORE

The opening of Terminal 4 (T4) in October last year marked the latest wave of innovation for Singapore Changi Airport. Most notably, the terminal debuted the airport’s Fast and Seamless Travel (FAST) system that offers end-to-end self-service options for passengers.

This includes automated check-in kiosks, baggage drop using facial recognition and Xbox Kinect-powered 3D modelling technology, as well as immigration and boarding gates that share facial and thumbprint biometric data.

This fully automated process is expected to yield some 20 per cent long-term manpower savings, and the terminal is poised to raise the total annual capacity of Changi Airport by 16 million passengers a year. As of February 8, it has handled more than 1.6 million passengers since its opening.

In April 2018, the airport handled 5.4 million passenger movements; a 5.1 per cent year-on-year increase from 2017.

Following in T4’s footsteps, Terminal 1’s (T1) departure, arrival and baggage claim halls are currently being upgraded to replace check-in counters and implement FAST, among other developments.

T1’s baggage handling system will also become fully automated with sorting capability to support automated check-in

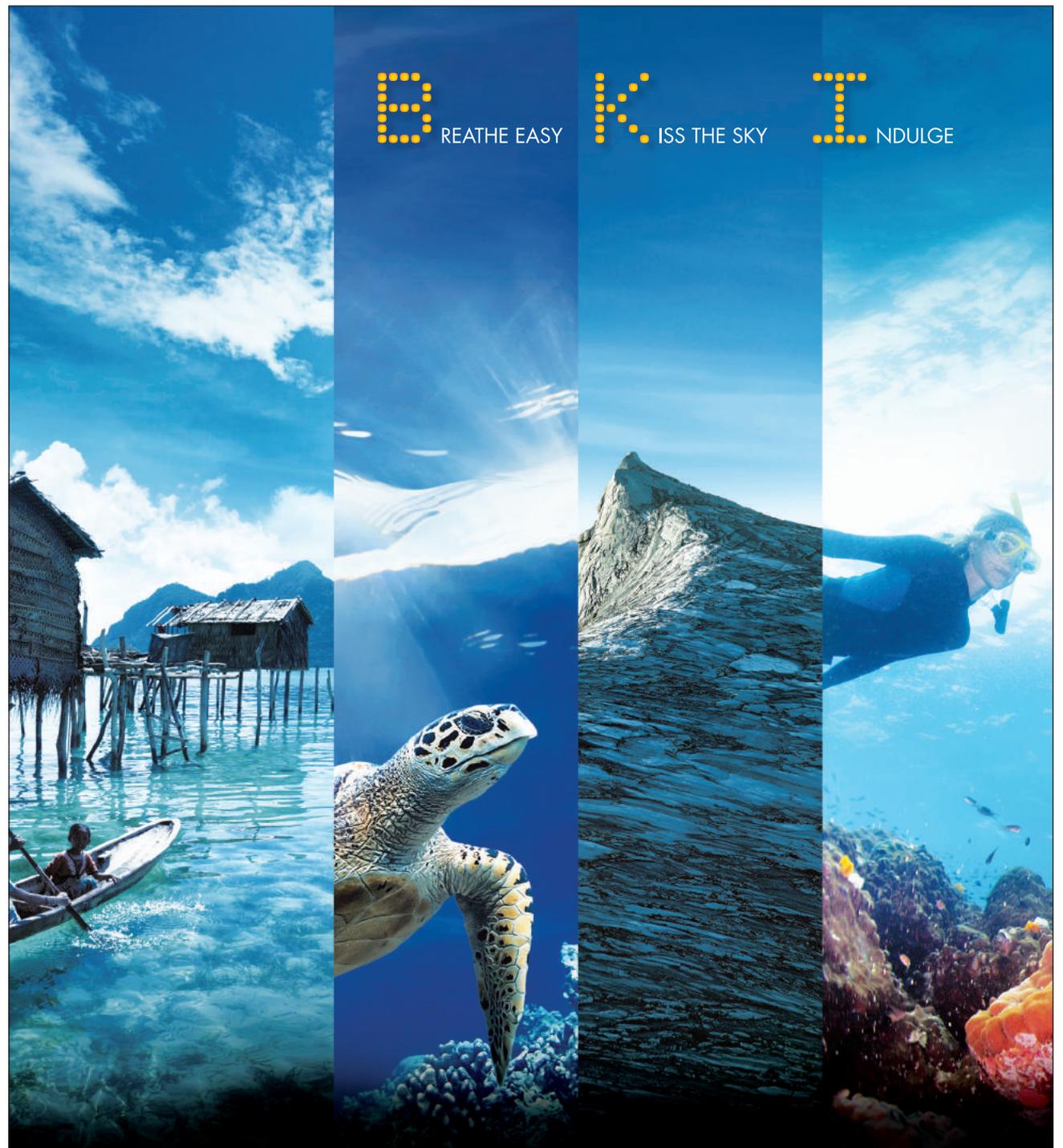
and automated bag-drop functions. An automated early baggage storage facility will also be implemented.

These expansion works will increase T1’s handling capacity to 24 million passenger movements per annum. The terminal served some 3.2 million passengers in 1Q2018.

To further enhance the traveller experience, works are also currently underway for lifestyle complex Jewel Changi

Airport, which will house a range of play attractions, indoor garden trails and F&B outlets. Crowning this development is the 14,000m² Canopy Park that will feature attractions such as sky nets, hedge and mirror mazes, 1,400 trees and palms, as well as dining outlets.

Jewel is scheduled to open in early 2019, and its Level 1 will be directly connected to the T1 Arrival Hall. – Pamela Chow



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Appetite for foodie culture

The former gaming-reliant destination is shifting promotions towards food tourism, but is it still clinging on to an old taste for the glamorous and losing sight of preserving greying food trades? **Prudence Lui** reports



The new focus on gastrotourism could breathe new life into local eateries

No longer content with being a gaming haven, the ‘Las Vegas of Asia’ is now working towards transforming itself into a foodie destination after clinching recognition as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy last October.

At the annual marketing meeting held in June 2018, Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) revealed that gastronomy and festivals will be a key focus of its marketing plan going forward.

An MGTO spokesperson said: “Following Macau’s designation, the government unfolded a four-year action plan (2018-2021) which includes various initiatives in six categories, and (identified) the 2018 Macao Year of Gastronomy as one of the key highlights of the four-year action plan.

MGTO plans to promote Macau’s “cultural image”, as well as organise or support international events in line with the gastronomy theme.

The tourism body will work towards integrating gastronomy in existing events including the Parade for Celebration of Chinese New Year in February and the Macau Light Festival in December, the spokesperson shared.

In 2019, MGTO will organise the International Gastronomy Forum for the third year, while also pushing for the Asia’s 50 Best Restaurant Awards Ceremony to be hosted in Macau again in 2019.

Moreover, MGTO intends to continue to support local associations and private sector organisations, as well as work with other government departments on gastronomy-related festivals and events.

It’s vital for the government to incentivise the younger generation to pick up the cooking profession and preserve this traditional local neighbourhood food culture.

Manuel Wu
Managing director,
Macao Explorer Cultural Travel

Some examples include the Malaysian Food Festival 2018 (August 16-31) and the Southeast Asia Food Carnival (mid-August).

In various source markets, MGTO is carrying out different promotional activities through its representatives, which work with travel agencies to promote the destination’s travel products.

Meanwhile, Taipa Village Destination, associate director – head of marketing, Pamela Chan remarked: “Taipa Village is Macau’s leading gastronomic destination. With the territory’s growing recognition (among foodies), Taipa Village continues to receive an increasing number of visitors.”

The destination has been hosting regular tours for media, industry partners and teambuilding clients who are keen to explore the destination’s mix of art, cultural and dining experiences.

“Gastronomy is the main highlight. We once hosted a teambuilding company for a treasure hunt activity in Taipa Village, with eight spots assigned as check points. The treasure hunt concluded with a Macanese *Cha Gordo* (fat tea) at Macanese restaurant La Famiglia,” Chan continued.

While lauding MGTO’s new direction, Manuel Wu, managing director of Macao Explorer Cultural Travel, which runs gourmet/food tours, sees room in developing food tourism offerings in Macau beyond large-scale events.

Wu said: “I haven’t seen any surge of similar tours from other operators in the

market; what they offer mostly echo MGTO’s promotions like food festivals. This is really due to the limitation of the local infrastructure. Many family-run outlets, for instance, are small and simply can’t manage big groups.”

To develop Macau’s food tourism, Wu wants more to be done to help small food businesses survive. He said: “In the long run, it’d be helpful if the government could lend support to these small outlets because escalating rentals are driving the successors of ageing restaurant owners’ to close business and rent out the premises.”

Another issue, he pinpointed, is that many retired chefs can’t find successors to pass on their skills because of lack of interest among the younger generation.

“It’s vital for the government to incentivise the younger generation to pick up the cooking profession and preserve this traditional local neighbourhood food culture.”

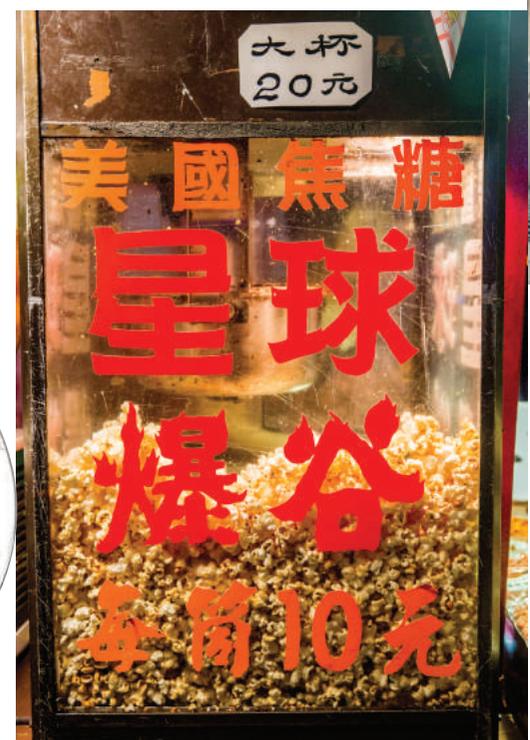
On top of cooking classes, Wu’s company offers tours that visit traditional family-run food outlets, some with over 50 years of history in old districts like the Inner Harbour of Macau Peninsula.

“So far, enquiries are mostly from South-east Asia agents asking if I can organise street food tours for groups to venture into very local market areas,” Wu said.

MGTO says it is taking steps to give visibility to food businesses on the ground.

It has been collecting information from local associations about eateries and restaurants along its eight recommended walking routes (Step Out, Experience Macao’s Communities - Walking Tour Routes), and plotting these food haunts along the routes.

“Currently, MGTO is compiling additional information including opening hours, type of cuisines and locations by district in order to fully promote the dining scene and attract visitors and residents to different districts,” the MGTO spokesperson shared.



All photos courtesy of MGTO

Hot and new

Unwind and dine in style

The Ritz-Carlton, Macau has launched the Revitalizing and Gourmet Journey programme. Guests can unwind in ESPA vitality pools, steam and sauna rooms, ice fountain and other amenities before the 50-minute aromatherapy treatment. This is then followed by a gastronomic journey at Lai Heen with a bottle of Perrier-Jouët Champagne.



From left: Zero Latency; The Ritz Carlton, Macau's spa room

Multiplayer VR experience

Zero Latency was rolled out in Broadway Macau in June to become Macau's first free-roam, multiplayer VR experience. The 200m² VR game arena features brings to life scenarios for up to eight players at a go.

Experiences include Engineerium, a puzzle game suitable for first-timers; Zombie Survival, a VR shooter game; and Singularity, a space-themed shooter game. The experiences are for participants 16 years and up.

Delve into art and culture

The day-long Art and Culture Journey, organised by CoForte Organisation Development, is a guided tour of Macau's attractions that also aims to celebrate the conservation of traditional trades. During the programme, participants will visit museums, exhibitions, galleries, historical buildings and a shipyard.

At the shipyard, docents will talk participants through how the shipyard and shipping industry have been kept over the years. Also included is a craftsmanship workshop, where participants will make their own wooden paddle and keychain with the wood from shipyards.

Tours are available by reservations at least one month in advance, for a minimum group size of 10 people.



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Destination Philippines

Unlocking the gridlock

The closure of Boracay has diverted visitor traffic to the up-and-coming Cebu, but the city's transport woes threatens to unravel the progress made, reports Rosa Ocampo



The unresolved traffic congestion in Cebu City, the second largest city in the Philippines, is taking a toll on its tourism sector

Just as Cebu's tourism development is picking up pace, the island province's worsening traffic congestion is beginning to take the shine off one of the most visited destinations in the Philippines.

Urbanisation, the lack of arterial roads and limited transport system combine to worsen Cebu's traffic gridlock – which some say is even worse than Manila's – over the last couple of years, forcing tourists to limit their activities and stay in one area than fully exploring the destination's rich offerings.

Congestion was even more acutely felt in recent months as Cebu became the top alternative destination for tourists who would have otherwise flocked to Boracay, were it not for the latter's temporary six-month closure from late April to October, said Margie Munsayac, vice president sales and marketing, Maribago Bluewater Resorts.

Travel Experts' inbound manager Girlie Malaran said the traffic jam is a big consideration for visitors to Cebu, to the

extent that properties on Mactan Island benefit from their nearer proximity to the Mactan Cebu International Airport (MCIA), whereas hotels farther from the airport in Cebu City are less favoured as transfers will be exacerbated by traffic jams.

Another travel agent shared that even for business events, they are forced to choose hotels near MCIA and confine their activities in the hotel to avoid the traffic rush.

Aware of the traffic problem, Colliers International's research manager Joey Bondoc said that property developers are replicating Manila's mixed-use developments in Cebu, which integrate offices, residential units, hospitals and shops, while providing transport as well from these developments to other destinations.

Bondoc added that major infrastructure projects planned over the next two to four years, including the Cebu-Cordova Link Expressway, Metro Cebu Expressway, Cebu-Negros Link Bridge, Cebu-Bohol

Link Bridge and Bus Rapid Transit System, should help to ease traffic in the province.

Such infrastructure projects "should spur the demand" for more hotels and resorts outside the metro Cebu corridor, comprising Cebu City, Lapu-Lapu in Mactan and Mandaue, and attract more tourists, Bondoc said.

Despite its ongoing traffic woes, Cebu

received 4.9 million foreign and domestic travellers last year, and is projected to enjoy a 10 to 15 per cent annual growth in visitor numbers over the next two or three years.

Its hotel occupancy rate, sustained at 78 per cent on average last year, should hover between 70 and 75 per cent over the next three years, according to a report by Colliers International.

The completion of MCIA's modern and efficient Terminal 2 for international flights paves the way for bullish tourism prospects for Cebu as it will triple the airport's annual handling capacity from 4.5 million to 12.5 million travellers.

It helps that GMR Megawide Cebu Airport Corp, operator of MCIA, is actively marketing and promoting Cebu.

Aines Librodo, head-airline marketing and tourism development, at GMR Megawide Cebu Airport Corp, said they and Cebu Pacific are also working on how to connect the airport with various destinations in Cebu, and neighbouring provinces by land and water.

Cebu Pacific, the largest carrier operating in MCIA, will increase flights to Cebu by 20 per cent next year to serve the growing tourism industry, according to Michelle de Guzman, the airline's overall in charge for marketing.

With these upcoming infrastructure developments, tourism prospects for Cebu are looking bright as it grows into a hub linking up different destinations within the Philippines, allowing visitors to bypass Manila, said Travel Experts' Malaran.

Travellers still visit Philippines despite Boracay's closure

The impact of Boracay's temporary closure is not as widespread as anticipated, with foreign arrivals to the Philippines still increasing and filling up other resort destinations in the country, according to tourism stakeholders interviewed.

Philippine tourism undersecretary Benito Bengzon Jr said that despite the island's closure in late April, foreign visitor arrivals into the country still grew slightly by 0.9 per cent in May and by 10.2 per cent to 3.2 million in January-May.

Notable bright spots lie in the 43.8 per cent uptick in arrivals from China – displacing the US as the country's second biggest market after South Korea – and the diversion of tourists to other destinations including Cebu, Bohol and Palawan, Bengzon stated in a presentation during the Hotel Sales and Marketing Association (HSMA) general membership meeting.

HSMA chair Margie Munsayac, who is also vice president of sales and marketing of Bluewater Resorts in Cebu and Bohol, said that while the South Koreans and Chinese were affected by Boracay's closure, many of them rebooked to other destinations like Cebu and Bohol which are currently "enjoying very good occupancy", including city hotels.

Amiable Intertours general manager Bernadette de Leon said that as a result of these rebookings, even smaller hotels in aforementioned destinations are "full" and "expensive". Some foreign tourists were also diverted to destinations in Luzon such as Batanes, Ilocos and Las Casas Filipinas de Acuzar in Bataan.

"Airswift Airlines' services to Batanes are fully booked. (It is) enjoying a good slice of the foreign market and (capturing



Tourists are opting for other Philippine destinations like Cebu, Palawan and Bohol. Sumilon Island beach near Oslob, Cebu pictured above

Hot and new

Chocolate from tree to table

Cebu's Casa de Cacao has concocted The Chocolate Tour with three ingredients: the educational chocolate journey about how cacao beans become pure chocolate tablets called tablea that has become an essential culinary component; a stop at The Chocolate Chamber boutique store; and high tea featuring savoury chocolate buffets.

Sardines run in Cebu

Be thrilled by Blue Horizons Travel and Tours' trip to Cebu's south-western coastline featuring the sardines run, where large schools of sardines have moved closer to shore. Just 20 to 30m from the shore, right at the reef drop off Panagsama Beach, one can already see the huge school of sardines creating different shapes and forms.

Skydiving over Bantayan

Blue Horizons Travel and Tours' Skydiving over Bantayan can be done solo for an experienced diver or in tandem for the less experienced ones. At some 3,200m above ground, jump off the plane and freefall for two minutes, before



Leider Yap/shutterstock

Spinner dolphins at play

the parachutes are released at around 1,500m from the ground. Hover in the air for a little longer before gradually landing on the beach. Photos and videos of the exhilarating dive will be captured with a handcam.

Spot rare dolphins in Bais

Watch spinner dolphins in Bais, Dumaguete – which can be approached from Cebu – perform acrobatics while this attraction and the pristine destination are both still unknown to mass tourists. Corporate International Travel and Tours' customised package can combine a stopover to a seven-kilometre strip of sand known as Manjuyod Sandbar.

Destination Thailand

Reinventing Pattaya

It's no secret that Pattaya is pushing to become a family-friendly destination, with changes now underway to shake off its sin city reputation, finds **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**



Jomtien Beach, south of Pattaya city, sees less crowds and quieter beaches

No stranger to transformation, Pattaya started out as a sleepy village which became a popular R'n'R destination for Vietnam War servicemen in the 1960s, then becoming a beach resort destination catering to Bangkok residents escaping from the Thai capital on weekends, although its fame – or notoriety – was largely founded on the back of sex tourism.

Its sleazy image is what the Thai authorities and tourism industry stakeholders are keen to change, as the city appears to metamorphosise into a family-friendly destination with a new swathe of five-star hotels, theme parks and lifestyle attractions in recent years.

Pattaya was given the spotlight as the host destination for Thailand Travel Mart Plus (TTM+) in June this year, with organiser Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) placing an emphasis on romance and luxury under the theme *Million Shades of Romance* at its annual tradeshow.

Commenting on the choice of Pattaya for TTM+ 2018, which was held at Ocean Marina Yacht Club, Tanes Petsuwan, dep-

uty governor for marketing communications, TAT, said: "After two years of positive response in Chiang Mai, we wanted to show the new image of Pattaya and overthrow old perceptions of the city. Pattaya has reinvented itself for upscale travellers, with the Ocean Marine Yacht Club, Cartoon Network Amazone, F&B venues, Ramayana Water Park, international golf courses, etc."

As well, Pattaya is expected to benefit from the Thai government's "multimillion infrastructure investment" currently underway as part of the Eastern Economic Corridor development plan, Tanes added.

Key projects include the high-speed railway connecting Suvarnabhumi, Don Mueang and U-Tapao airports and the upgrade of the Sattahip commercial port, all of which will help to position the city as a high-end travel destination, he said.

Pattaya is not just for vice-seeking tourists, the city's tourism players insisted. "They say, 'Good boys go to heaven, bad boys go to Pattaya'. That is no longer true," said NongNooch Garden & Resorts'

We cannot change the history of Pattaya but we can certainly change travellers' impression.

Pathira Nakngam Riley
Director of sales & marketing at InterContinental Pattaya Resort

Thanadit Chitaroon.

Nong Nooch Tropical Botanical Garden, a long-standing attraction in Pattaya that opened in 1980, is also pulling out the stops to enhance its appeal by adding villa accommodation, spas and restaurants in recent years.

The latest Dinosaur Valley exhibition, featuring life-size recreations of the prehistoric beasts, come on top of new facilities like a convention centre, boxing stadium, indoor theatre, dinosaur rally, cooking class with herbal garden, among others, Thanadit shared.

Meanwhile, a growing crop of inter-

national five-star hotels brand such as Hilton, Renaissance, InterContinental and Movenpick is also changing the face of Pattaya's hospitality sector, driven by the influx of Chinese, Indian and Russian tourists.

"Over the past few years, Pattaya has seen a significant shift towards becoming more family-friendly, and there are plenty of examples of this. Most of the branded hotels in the city now offer family facilities, including family rooms with bunk beds, children's pools and kids' clubs with a vast choice of activities," observed Oliver Berrivin, Best Western's managing director of international operations – Asia.

Best Western currently does not have any properties operating in Pattaya, but several have been signed and are on track to open in the city over the next couple of years. These include Best Western Premier BayPhere (opening early 2019), Best Western Plus Speech Pattaya Hotel (opening 4Q2019) and BluPhere Pattaya, BW Premier Collection by Best Western (opening 2020), informed Berrivin.

Likewise, prominent festivals and sporting events like the Wonderfruit festival, LPGA golf tournament and International Fireworks Festival are also helping "to change travellers' perceptions of Pattaya", remarked Jan Jeerapat, managing director of J Corp, which manages a trio of hotels in Pattaya.

However, responses were decidedly more mixed among international buyers, with opinions split as to whether they would market and sell the destination to their clients.

Philippe Roussel, tour operator at Asia Voyages France, opined that the greater array of hotels, restaurants and activities has made Pattaya a "better" destination choice that can be paired with other parts of eastern Thailand for tour programmes.

On the other hand, David Kevan, partner and product person at Chic Locations UK, thinks Pattaya's seedy reputation still lingers and its mass tourism appeal unlikely to find favour especially among Western high-end travellers.

Likewise, Asia DMC's managing director Thailand Andre van der Marck said that Pattaya is "for sure" not for families, a key market segment for his company.

Pathira Nakngam Riley, director of sales & marketing at InterContinental Pattaya Resort, urges the trade to give the city a chance. She said: "We cannot change the history of Pattaya but we can certainly change travellers' impression."

"Granted that the unsavoury part of Pattaya still exists, but most visitors won't see it unless they specifically go looking for it – just like in most cities in the world," she stated.

Hot and new

Snoop around Bangkok

Combine fun and sightseeing with this out-of-the-box game that gets travellers to explore Bangkok's hidden gems while picking up clues à la Sherlock Holmes along a specific route to unravel a mystery. Played in the Old Bangkok area, teams of two to six people will go around on foot with a real map to search for particular items and pick up clues that will enable them to solve the mystery.

Cooking among flowers

The Market Experience, the cooking school and workshop of Bangkok-based tour operator Expique, offers culinary challenges right in the

riverside Yodpiman Flower Market. Ranging from short 20-minute activities to four-hour team challenges, participants will visit the market to pick fresh ingredients and learn to prepare a Thai feast while surrounded by the flower trade in full swing. For bigger groups the programme can be customised to include cultural activities or turned into a fun day or racing around Bangkok.

Self-drive tuk tuk adventures

Diethelm Travel Group has launched tuk tuk self-drive tours in northern Thailand, allowing travellers to discover the beauty of the mountainous region including Doi Inthanon, Mae Sariang, Mae Hong Son and Pai.

The 11-day Northern Thailand Self-Drive Tuk Tuk Adventure programme takes travellers on the three-seater rickshaws through the heart of northern Thailand's jungle-covered hills and rice fields, with stops in rural villages and an ethical elephant sanctuary, a traditional Thai lunch and bamboo river rafting.

Drivers are required to be 18 years old or older and hold a valid manual driving licence from their home country, as well as attend a safety briefing and tuk tuk driving lesson.

Right, from top: a GoSnoop game goes underway; self-drive tuk tuk tour in Chiang Mai



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THE TECHNOLOGY EXPERIENCE

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.



Gallery

Youthful steps into the future

It was a sprightly start to PATA Travel Mart 2018 as leaders of today took the stage to inspire industry professionals of tomorrow at the PATA Youth Symposium. By [Yingyong Unanongrak](#)



Travel changemakers, ahoy!

The industry has been buzzing with talk on data, machine learning and the evolution of product bundling, but so much more can be gleaned, speakers at the Travolution Asia Forum share. By [Yingyong Unanongrak](#)



News

A hot Bali spared effects of Lombok quake

The recent disasters that hit nearby Lombok has not taken the shine off Bali for buyers at PATA Travel Mart

By Yixin Ng

The string of devastating earthquakes that struck Lombok recently have not dented travel confidence to the neighbouring tourist hotspot of Bali, although some buyers at PATA Travel Mart 2018 have seen a shift in demand to other beach destinations.

In the wake of the August 5 earthquake, travel intelligence analyst ForwardKeys – in a study released on August 28 – estimated a 42.9 per cent plunge in bookings for Bali.

India, which recently entered the top five source markets for Indonesia, has shown relative

greater resilience to the quakes compared to other regional markets like Singapore and China, according to the report.

Sanjay Mehta, chief executive of India's Trans Globe Travels, said: "Direct flights from Mumbai to Bali (have spurred demand for Bali). In fact after getting news of the Lombok quakes, more of our customers are requesting Bali."

News reports and an overall availability of information have kept travellers informed and up-to-date on the situation, hence offering assurance that Bali is generally safe to travel to, ex-

plained Mehta.

"They know how far Lombok is from Bali. Nowadays travellers are smart; they know where the place (most affected is) and feel they have nothing to worry about," he said.

"(Moreover), we refer to travel advisories from the Indonesian tourism ministry that have kept us updated on the situation. This is something the tourism board is doing fantastically (to buffer travel confidence)."

At Agent Holiday from Australia, a key feeder market for Bali, travel to the island destination likewise has "not at all" been affected, spokesperson Debby Hunter shared.

Bali has been a traditional favourite among Australians holidaymakers, Hunter said. "People understand that (disasters) happen, and that it is not likely to happen while they're in Bali."

Another reason why some buyers are not seeing major im-

pact is that the disaster struck outside of high season, according to Boris Kolokolov, managing director of Russia's Luxe Travel, and Igo Cruz, Travbest Travel & Tours in the Philippines.

"Russians mostly travel to Bali in the high season, which is around the New Year period. For now it is low season because it is rainy. The traffic comes in December and January," Kolokolov remarked.

However, T Tamil Selvam, CEO at Chennai-based World Travel Club, said demand for Bali from Indian honeymooners had dropped by more than 50 per cent due to the Lombok earthquakes, and they are opting instead for the Seychelles, Mauritius and the Maldives.

While forward bookings for 4Q2018 were returning, they are "nothing like what we saw in the past", said Selvam. – **Additional reporting by S Puvaneswary**



Selvam: forward bookings pick up

New Istanbul link lies in waiting

A new service connecting Turkey with Bali is slated to launch next year, bolstering travel between Europe and Indonesia.

Turkish Airlines said it is working on opening the new route in the first half of next year, following the successful launch of the Istanbul-Phuket service in April 2018.

Stephanie Step Stephen, marketing representative, said Turkish Airlines currently codeshares with Malindo Air to access Bali. She added: "We have seen a huge increase in demand for (Bali) so are launching a direct flight."

She added this will increase access to Indonesia from Europe and vice versa, with Istanbul serving as a major European transit hub. "Bali is the perfect destination for Turkey, and the route will be popular with the European market," said Stephen. – **Marissa Carruthers**

Direct flights from Mumbai to Bali (have spurred demand for Bali). In fact after getting news of the Lombok quakes, more of our customers are requesting for Bali.

Sanjay Mehta

Chief executive, Trans Globe Travels India

M'sia loses lustre in India

Despite growing arrivals from India, Malaysia could be losing its lustre for segments of Indian travellers due to pricing issues and the lack of new products.

Raveesh Khullar, manager – international product at Yatra, said Langkawi as a honeymoon destination is less attractive as Bali and Mauritius, which offer more high-end products and at more competitive prices.

While airfares are similar from Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru to Langkawi or Mauritius, the hotel component in Langkawi is more expensive.

For example, a five-star property in Langkawi can cost around US\$400 for six days on a twin-share basis with breakfast, but in Mauritius travellers can enjoy a half board for the same price.

Another buyer, T Tamil Selvam, CEO of Chennai-based World Travel Club, said: "We don't get much leisure demand for Kuala Lumpur as there are not many new attractions. Interest in Genting has also gone down since the theme park closed in 2013 and construction is ongoing (in the destination). In the past, Genting used to be in the itinerary with Kuala Lumpur."

And while the agency is getting some requests from families to visit theme parks in Johor, demand has been more for twin destinations combining Johor with Singapore, he continued.

However, Sanjay Mehta, chief execu-

tive at Trans Globe Travels, shared that demand for Malaysia has picked up at the agency amid a shift from domestic to regional travel. This, he said, is in light of Air Asia's affordable fares alongside high airfares on some domestic routes.

The *Daily* understands that Indian travellers are likely to be even more budget conscious as the Indian rupee depreciated by more than eight per cent over the past six months.

Arrivals from India to Malaysia was on the decline from 2012 to 2017. This took a turn in the first four months of 2018, which saw a 21.2 per cent increase, attributable to a destination promotional campaign by Tourism Malaysia in Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities.

Abdul Khani Daud, deputy director-general (promotion), Tourism Malaysia, said the government was trying to attract Indian airlines to fly to Malaysia. Currently, the India-Malaysia route is served by Malaysia-based carriers, namely Malaysia Airlines, AirAsia and Malindo Air.

K Thangavelu, managing director of Grandlotus Travel Agency in Malaysia, said attracting Indian-based airlines to Malaysia would boost arrivals from beyond the main cities. "Most Malaysia based airlines fly to the main cities. Indian citizens from smaller cities will have to travel to the main cities in order to travel to Malaysia." – **S Puvaneswary**

New disruptors in making

Startups aiming to shape the tourism industry with their innovative ideas battled it out to be crowned winner at the World Tourism Forum Lucerne Start-Up Innovation Camp yesterday.

The competition, now in its third year, attracted 220 applicants from 56 countries. They were whittled down to 15, who have been pitching their innovative technology solutions at PTM 2018.

Split into three categories – transactions, hospitality and destination – each was given five minutes to sell their start-up to a panel of investors.

The diverse business models put before the judges include Irhal, a UAE-based platform that provides comprehensive city guides aimed at Muslim travellers. With 120 million Muslims travelling annually and spending US\$150 billion, Irhal provides information on halal restaurants, places of worship, prayer timings and other points of interest. It currently operates in the Middle East, with plans to roll it out across Asia.

Cuseum is another business that wants to overhaul the museum and attraction

experience for visitors. Instead of using leaflets, booklets and clunky audio headsets, the app provides information on the destination, informative notifications and other interactive options.

TripClub is another innovative idea that aims to make life easier for hyper-travellers – those who travel more than three times a month. Aimed at business travellers, the platform enables companies to manage trip bookings in one place, with discounted rates for more than 500,000 hotels and 900 airlines. It also has a 24-hour travel concierge to help curate itineraries and amendments to itineraries.

Wingly, which has been dubbed the "Uber of the skies", is a flight-sharing website that connects private pilots with the public to share flights, go on aerial sightseeing tours or accompany a pilot on his journey.

The winner of each category will scoop US\$15,000, a two-year coaching programme and five minutes to pitch to a high-ranking audience. – **Marissa Carruthers**



World Tourism Forum Lucerne's Martin Barth, The Startup Coach's Jasper Mutsaerts, The Travel Corporation's Verma Gunjan and Bongo Jatra's Shafique Saiful Mohammad

IN BRIEF

Air Italy takes off for Bangkok

Air Italy has launched Milan (Malpensa)-Bangkok flights. The service now departs on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, but there are plans to add an additional fifth weekly flight on Saturday starting October 28.

Peak DMC opens Bali base

Peak DMC is expanding in South-east Asia with the opening of Peak DMC Indonesia, in addition to operations in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. The Sanur office in Bali has nine local office staff, plus over 20 group leaders.

The image shows the interior of the Ajanta Caves, featuring a large, ornate stupa in the center. The stupa is surrounded by numerous pillars and intricate carvings. The lighting is warm and dramatic, highlighting the textures and details of the ancient architecture.

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