



## Growth isn't the enemy

It's how tourist numbers are managed that counts

By Yixin Ng

As overtourism becomes a growing challenge in Asia's tourist hotspots, industry stakeholders are calling attention to the importance of tourism management.

"While it's right to understand 'overtourism' (literally), what it basically means is a lack of tourism management," said Willem Niemeijer, founder and CEO of Khiri Travel.

Promoting new destinations is one way to ease crowding, but it is far from the full solution.

Niemeijer said governments need to step in with measures to jump-start development in lesser-known destinations. "The Tourism Authority of Thailand's (TAT) 12 Hidden Gems campaign is great, but we still need to get international brands in (to attract travellers from around the world)... There should be tax holidays, investment incentives in (the secondary destinations) they want to promote."

Moreover, Carl Needham, general manager of Peak DMC's office in Thailand, pointed out: "TAT has done a good job making these new areas look attractive. Still, once people start (flocking to the next new place), there comes question of where's next, and (so on)."

Some DMCs the *Daily* interviewed shared that while more travellers are seeking new areas to visit, they typically still want to see icons. This highlights the

need for better regulation of traffic within tourist hotspots, something the private sector is already actively pushing for.

For example, Peak DMC, which just opened an Indonesia office, will include areas in Bali overlooked by tourists. "We are working on a community-based tourism projects that include Mount Batur. For now, lots of tourists merely pass by that area, and communities don't get to benefit. We're working with NGOs to open up some of these areas in Bali and beyond," said Needham.

One way crowds can be managed at tourist sites, Niemeijer said, is through a pre-booking system. "Taking the example of museums in New York, Amsterdam or Paris, you need to buy tickets ahead and there are time slots for bookings. Even though (key attractions are packed with) tonnes

of people, tourists don't feel that because the traffic is well regulated," Niemeijer remarked.

When scaled up however, the work of regulating visitor flow will require government involvement. "When (efforts are centred around) the destination, such as Phuket, it becomes a tougher situation.

"To think about issues like where people can build hotels, what public spaces need to stay free, etc, (requires) public sector work... but (as long as) the government allows people to build hotels anywhere they like, (overtourism) will happen," Niemeijer remarked.

There is currently a lack of public-private sector collaborations to better manage tourist flows, he stressed.

Likewise, Needham opined that to address crowding and build up new destinations and better distribute tourism benefits to local communities would require partnership between different parts of the tourism ecosystem.

On top of government collaboration, community-level partnerships are also key. "It's about looking at crowded tourist spots, identifying similar areas (whose communities can benefit from that boom) and expanding operational capabilities there by partnering local NGOs, which have great traction with communities," said Pravin Tamang, general manager, Peak DMC India.

There's a lot of growth still possible even for places at breaking point – it all comes down to managing that growth.

Willem Niemeijer  
Founder and CEO, Khiri Travel

## LET A GREAT SHOW BEGIN!

Malaysian minister of tourism, arts and culture Mohamad-din Ketapi (centre) led the ribbon-cutting ceremony yesterday morning with PATA chairman Chris Bottrill, marking the official opening of PATA Travel Mart 2018. With the show kicked off, business networking soon got into full swing.



## What lies beyond Bali?

By Pamela Chow and Yixin Ng

Indonesia's travel players are pushing out fine-tuned products that encourage travel to other parts of the country.

Peak DMC, which has just opened a new base in Indonesia, now offers Sumatra, Flores and Raja Ampat, on top of Bali, Lombok and Java, the main areas the DMC covered three years ago.

"Tourists are more aware – they don't just want the Bali experience. For us, we look at overcrowded areas, and think of how we can people beyond the main areas," said Carl Needham, general manager of Peak DMC in Thailand.

Bhara Tours' managing director, Herman Rukmanadi,

told the *Daily*: "All my customers come to me and ask me about Bali. I want to show them that there is so much more Indonesia has to offer, like the seventh century temples of West Java and Central Java's Borobodur. I suggest they visit these places, then end their journey in Bali."

Meanwhile, Agus Tabah Wardana, general manager of The Jayakarta Bali Beach Resort & Spa, suggested that Bali can be the launchpad from which to explore other islands like Lombok and Komodo.

"It'll take time for the message (of dispersal) to get to mainstream market. But we've got to break the ground by adding new destinations to itineraries that are already popular," said Needham.

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News/Gallery

# SE Asia new darling of Guam

Move over, Japan and South Korea. Guam is now turning on its charm offensive for new target markets in Singapore and Malaysia

**By Pamela Chow**

South-east Asia is emerging as the new darling of Guam, as the US island territory steps up promotion efforts in the region with hopes of attracting travellers from key markets like Singapore and Malaysia.

Guam Visitors Bureau's (GVB) marketing manager – North America & Pacific, Mark Manglona, told the *Daily*: "Our main tourist markets are Japan, South Korea, the US and Taiwan, so we're trying to diversify our visitor market profile. We hope to meet agents from Malaysia, Singapore and other parts of South-east Asia."

Travellers from Singapore have been on the rise, and the bureau has begun monitoring Malaysia's arrivals since January, he said.

Last week, its delegation held a presentation in Kuala Lumpur with Philippine Airlines and Ko-

rean Airlines to 15 local travel agents. In Singapore, the bureau has brought a product showcase to key travel agents, accompanied by Philippine Airlines (PAL), United Airlines and other US commercial travel services.



**Manglona: agent education key**

"Guam is still a relatively new destination to this part of the world. Ninety per cent of the people we met did not know that Guam is a US territory or that there is a visa waiver for Malaysian passport holders. It's going to take a lot of education and marketing efforts," said Manglona.

He added that GVB has been working closely with travel agents and airlines. For example, Kuala Lumpur-based Apple Vacation has been selling travel packages to Guam, and PAL is pushing out promotional prices for flights to Guam.

Agents will soon be invited on a familiarisation tour via Philip-

pine Airlines, shared Manglona. Concurrently, GVB is escalating its marketing efforts in traditional markets like South Korea and Japan, despite dipping arrival numbers from the latter.

"We get a lot of repeat visitors from Japan and a healthy number of arrivals year after year," Manglona remarked. "We have aggressive plans to revive the Japan market, and we also have airlines adding additional seats to Guam."

It's going to take a lot of education and marketing (to grow awareness of Guam).

**Mark Manglona**  
Marketing manager, North America & Pacific, Guam Visitors Bureau

# Pairing up for tourism success

**By Marissa Carruthers**

A new association has formed to develop tourism across the globe by pushing the development of twin cities.

Officially launching at PATA Travel Mart today, the Twin Cities World Tourism Forum Association (TCWTA) aims to build upon the success that exist between the already established 7,000 sister cities worldwide, while developing relationships between new cities.

Enrique Lepehne, TCWTA director of marketing and sales, said: "We want to use this platform to bring twin cities together, to get them communicating, and show them the tourism possibilities and new ways to explore tourism in the cities."

Initiatives include exchanges between senior travellers, educational exchanges and joint tourism marketing campaigns, Lepehne shared.

Thomas-Peter Binder, TCWTA president, said: "We want to encourage people to travel to the twin towns. While contact through social media is all well and good, it is no substitute for real, personal and direct interaction between people."

When establishing new twin

cities, Lepehne said they are looking for destinations that offer differing cultures, climates and landscapes, such as pairing up a beach destination with a city that is home to mountains.

Twin destinations need not be far away, added Hikmet Atilla, general manager of Raffinesse Travel in Turkey. This year his hometown of Didim in Turkey is twinned with the nearby Greek island of Kos.

He said: "We can combine Turkey and Greece as one holiday, which is helped by the twin city status."

In the coming months, Lepehne will visit cities across the globe to show them the potential the programme holds to maximise their twin city status.

TCWTA will also attend a series of exhibitions and marts and will host its own gathering on January 18 in Zurich.

The association board will comprise 14 members, including 13 mayors from countries worldwide while Hüseyin Baraner, the only non-mayor member, will be appointed general secretary.

The board is expected meet once a year in the city of the president to exchange ideas, concepts and plans.

# A naturally charming destination

Malaysia shines effortlessly as the country host of PTM 2018, delivering a delightful evening of great food, entertainment and networking for delegates. By **Yingyong Unanongrak**



## News

# Adrenaline rush for India

Sporting events, marts will spark further interest in adventure travel

**By S Puvaneswary**

Adventure tourism in India is showing good potential, with both the public and private sectors pumping in efforts to develop this niche sector, in addition to the declaration of 2018 as *The Year of Adventure Travel* by the Indian government.

K Pandian, director of Trichy-based Cholan Tours, lauded the positive efforts the Indian Ministry of Tourism has done in this area, including rolling out new guidelines for adventure tourism in the country.

Key industry events that will further shine a spotlight on this emerging niche segment include The Adventure Travel Trade Association's first AdventureNext event in Asia in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh from December 3 to 5 this year, and PATA Adventure Travel and Responsible Tourism Conference and Mart (ATRTCM), taking place in Ri-

shikesh, Uttarakhand in February 2019.

Ahead of ATRTCM, Pradeep Singh Negi, publicity officer, Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board, said: "We are here (at PATA Travel Mart) to promote adventure products such as white water rafting, rock climbing and skiing to the Asian markets, where awareness of our destination products has to be raised. There is more awareness of our adventure products in the US, Poland and Israel."

Rick Carassai, product manager, Bamba Experience US, whose company has been selling India for more than a decade to English-speaking countries, said demand for hard adventure in India remains small as compared to culture and wellness packages.

However, he sees a growing trend for packages showcasing local experiences combined

with adventure options such as cycling or biking off the beaten tracks of New Delhi.

Yadvender Mankotia, director of Wildland Quests – organiser of Extremathon, a duathlon involving cycling and running for 1,000 km – is now looking at opening the competition to foreigners and promoting the event to the US, Scandinavia, New Zealand and Australia.

Yadvender, who is also the director at Indian Legends, will also explore business opportunities from Asian source markets like South Korea, while keeping its focus on core Western markets.

Alexander Bocharov, general director of Moscow-based Intellectual Fund, said special interest tours such as mountain biking, cycling, hiking and white water rafting had been growing year-on-year by eight to 10 per cent over the last five years.

He said: "We are now looking at combination hiking tours to Nepal and India which are 15 days long."



**Carassai: strides in adventure interest**

## Avis sounds Beep for agents

Avis Budget Group in Asia has rolled out its one-stop training platform, Beep, for travel trade professionals.

Beep provides an overview of the company's brands, Avis Car Rental and Budget Car Rental, featuring training modules, booking tools, destination and driving guides.

The Avis platform includes products from its 5,500 locations in approximately 170 countries, while the Budget platform will have approximately 3,500 locations in more than 120 countries.

Both the Avis and the Budget platforms will be rolled out simultaneously, which is expected

to make it easier for travel agents to offer products and services from the two brands to their customers.

All bookings made through the platform are commissionable, and Avis Budget Group will progressively launch incentives and competitions as the platform is introduced in different countries across Asia.

The platforms will initially be offered in English, with plans to gradually update languages to include simplified Chinese, traditional Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Thai.

To sign up on Beep, travel agents should register on [www.abgbeep.com/asia](http://www.abgbeep.com/asia).

## New Langkawi website live

Travelindex and Snap Productions have joined forces to launch a new website, [www.VisitLangkawi.net](http://www.VisitLangkawi.net), at the PATA Travel Mart 2018.

The website seeks to provide travellers with comprehensive and accurate information on Langkawi for visitors.

Leveraging Travelindex's content marketing ecosystem of

over 80 travel-related websites, the new Langkawi portal integrates hotels, restaurants and tour options under one roof, complete with direct contact details, photos and videos.

The network is expected to reach over 11 million travellers and decision-makers in the tourism industry monthly, according to Travelindex.

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## News

# Smaller, but rising fast

SE Asia's growing outbound market should not be underestimated

By Yixin Ng and  
Marissa Carruthers

Much attention has been given to Asia markets with huge population bases like China and India, but Thailand and the Philippines are proving to be formidable forces in travel.

In South Korea, Vietnam is now the top market for Nami Island, a destination popular Thais, Vietnamese and Indonesians, according to marketing manager Kim Kyu Han. While the attraction's initial claim to fame came from popular Korean TV series *Winter Sonata* over a decade ago, it has in recent years also received film crews from Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia.

At the 280-key Flamingo Hotel in Penang, Thai travellers make up 15-20 per cent of total guests, compared to European guests, who add up to less than two per cent, according to Ronnie Ng, senior sales manager.

He said developing South-east Asian travel markets should not be underestimated or ignored, given their growing appetite for travel and rising affluence.

Agreeing, Bernard Gene Luna, operations manager at U-Travel Services in the Philippines, said

leisure travel has become a larger part of life for many Filipinos in the past decade.

"Compared to previous generations, millennials are more willing to (dip into their savings) to travel. Travel is becoming such an aspirational part of their lives," said Luna.

The most popular destinations at the Philippine agency are Japan and South Korea, where the visa application process is

process is no issue."

While China remains the strongest source market for longhaul buyers the *Daily* spoke to, many are upping efforts to target South-east Asia's expanding travelling class.

Sellers also note a rise in Asians looking for alternative European destinations to the traditionally popular hotspots of London and Paris.

Ralf Ostendorf, Visit Berlin market manager for Asia, said China is firmly the country's top Asian source market, however, an increasing number of direct flight connections has spurred growing interest in Europe from other parts of South-east Asia.

Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines are the strongest Southeast Asian source markets, with Malaysia slowly picking up.

Hikmet Atilla, general manager of Raffinesse Travel, has also noticed more interest from South-east Asia for Turkey, with Istanbul being the main attraction.

Thailand, Japan and South Korea are the main markets after China, with the emerging outbound destinations of Myanmar and Cambodia starting to gain momentum.

There is also a growing number of seasoned Filipinos travellers.

**Bernard Gene Luna**  
Operations manager, U-Travel  
Services Philippines

less of a hassle, he pointed out, while Taiwan is also rising quickly due to a recent visa-free facility for Philippine passport holders.

"There is also a growing number of seasoned Filipinos travellers. They tend to travel longer haul to France, Italy and the UK. For them, the visa application

# Spreading Korean influence

By Marissa Carruthers

South Korea is looking further afield to boost its inbound tourism figures. In the first seven months of 2018, the country welcomed 5.7 million foreign visitors. China topped the table with nearly 2.6 million arrivals, followed by Japan with 1.5 million arrivals.

With these two source markets representing more than 50 per cent of arrivals and China's growth slowing – a 1.8 per cent year-on-year increase – due to geopolitical tensions with Beijing, the industry is stepping up efforts to woo other markets.

Jang You Hyun, director of Korea Tourism Organization, said: "We need to diversify our source markets. The Chinese market is becoming smaller and smaller. The Japanese market may be growing, but we are still hungry."

Jang said huge investment is being ploughed into attracting visitors from alternative long-haul markets, especially from Europe. He added: "Markets such as these have huge potential. We need to target them more."

Large-scale marketing campaigns are currently being launched in Europe – mainly the

UK and Germany. "We have to hugely invest in advertisement in these inbound markets," said Jang.



Jang: hungry for more visitors

Soy An, operator manager of Us Travel, said her company regularly attends travel marts worldwide to stimulate interest in South Korea.

She added: "Many longhaul markets don't have much interest in South Korea yet, but that's because they don't know much. We need to change that."

Despite this, she noted a growing increase in interest from Europe, thanks to Korean popular culture influence trickling into Europe. For example, French travellers are being inspired by the popularity of K-pop, encouraging them to explore South Korea.

Another event that is set to be a global game-changer for South Korea's tourism was the recent 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang. The company has put together a post-Olympic itinerary, which is proving popular with Europeans.

Said An: "The Winter Olympics is great marketing and we believe it will lead to many more tourists from Europe wanting to explore South Korea."

# Plenty amid the mountains

By Marissa Carruthers

The Himalayan nation of Nepal, home to eight of the 10 tallest mountains in the world, has its sights set on attracting two million visitors through its *Visit Nepal 2020* campaign.

The initiative will see a series of new destinations promoted, aggressive marketing campaigns rolled out and a swathe of incentives introduced to attract new and repeat visitors.

Running under the slogan, *Lifetime Experiences*, the campaign also aims to highlight Nepal's diverse offerings away from trekking.

As part of the campaign, tour operators will be offering reduced rates, complimentary add-ons and other incentives to attract more visitors to the country.

Sudhan Subedi, senior officer for public relations and publicity at Nepal Tourism Board, said: "We have one prime product that is pushed again and again. We have so much more than that. We want people to realise Nepal's potential and show it's more than mountains."

Colleen Renner, travel consultant at Playful Spirits Travel US, plans on building golf and wellness itineraries in Nepal for her clients.

She said: "People don't traditionally associate Nepal with golfing or wellness, but it has great offerings... and that is what we are looking for, places people don't think of."

In 2017, Nepal welcomed nearly one million international visitors, with 2018 predicted to attract up to 1.2 million.

Subedi acknowledges that hitting the two million target by 2020 will be a challenge, but remains confident as more industry efforts go underway to draw visitors.



Subedi: more than mountains in Nepal

National carrier Nepal Airlines is currently in talks to operate direct flights to Japan and South Korea next year, with hopes high that a non-stop connection to Europe – most likely London – will follow.

While Stratis Voursoukis, group director of sales and marketing at Argo Travel in Greece, said the lack of direct flights

from Europe to Nepal was a setback, he sees growing interest in Nepal and said that the destination's nature and adventure travel make it ideal for unique incentive trips.

People don't traditionally associate Nepal with golfing or wellness, but it has great offerings... and that is what we're looking for - places people don't think of.

**Colleen Renner**  
Travel consultant, Playful Spirits Travel US

# Connecting agents on the go

Travel technology suppliers are rolling out mobile Wi-Fi solutions targeting travel agents amid surging demand for on-tour connectivity.

"The first thing our customers want when they arrive for a tour is Wi-Fi or data connection, and it can be a hassle to purchase SIM cards," shared Jarvis Fong, founder & director of Tripneasy.

While youths make up most of his groups, Fong explained that elderly tourists are also shunning SIM cards because of the difficulties in communicating with local telecommunication shops.

"As tour agents, having a Wi-Fi egg is giving them a level of convenience and customer service," he told the *Daily*.

Exhibiting at PATA Travel Mart are two mobile Wi-Fi providers: GlocalMe and iFree Group. Both players offer SIM card-free devices for 4G networks that can support multiple device connections.

iFree has been working with Malaysian travel agents and aviation partners – such as Hong Kong airlines, Tigerair, Thai Airways and China Airlines – to push its mobile Wi-Fi product. Its most recent office has opened in Jakarta.

Under its promotional campaign, iFree is distributing reusable SIM cards to its partners for their travellers. Partners can earn five per cent of the value topped up into each SIM card. – **Pamela Chow**

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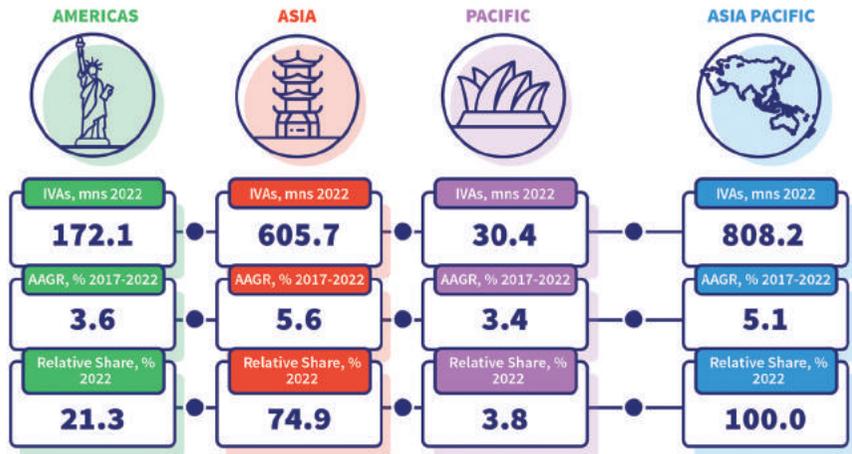
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Intelligence

# Charting a bullish course

The annual growth momentum in international visitor arrivals to Asia-Pacific is likely to sustain, reaching upwards of 800 million arrivals in 2022

The aggregate annual growth rate for international visitors into Asia-Pacific is predicted to be around 6.7% in 2018, and generate an inbound volume of more than 670 million arrivals for the year – around 42 million more than in 2017.



Notes: IVAs = international visitor arrivals  
AAGR = average annual growth rate, expressed as a percentage

According to PATA's *Asia Pacific Visitor Forecasts 2018-2022*, 40 destinations within Asia-Pacific will collectively show an average growth rate of just over 5% per annum from 2017 onward, to host around 808 million foreign visitor arrivals by 2022.

Asia will continue its strong growth momentum with an average growth rate for foreign visitor arrivals of 5.6% per annum between 2017 and 2022, while the Americas and the Pacific follow with average growth rates of 3.6% and 3.4% per annum respectively over the same period.

West Asia – represented by Turkey – will maintain its solid recovery of international visitor arrivals and show the strongest average annual growth rate of all the subregions covered in this report (8.8% per annum). Similarly, South Asia will expand by an average of 8.4% per annum between 2017 and 2022.

Driven by a strong average annual growth rate, Asia will receive the bulk of the foreign arrivals between 2017 and 2022. After capturing a relative share of 73% of these arrivals in 2017, the proportion of foreign arrivals into Asia is expected to increase to almost 75% by the end of the forecast period (2022). The impact on the Americas and the Pacific is a slight contraction in their respective relative shares from 22.9% to 21.3% for the former and from 4.1% to 3.8% for the latter, even as their respective numbers of foreign arrivals increase.

The inbound growth rates of each origin region continue to show wide variability. All origin regions show a moderating in their respective growth rates from 2018/2017 to between 2017 and 2022, with Asia supplanting Europe with the strongest growth rates from the former period to the latter one.

The top three subregions by volume of arrivals received in 2022, are forecast



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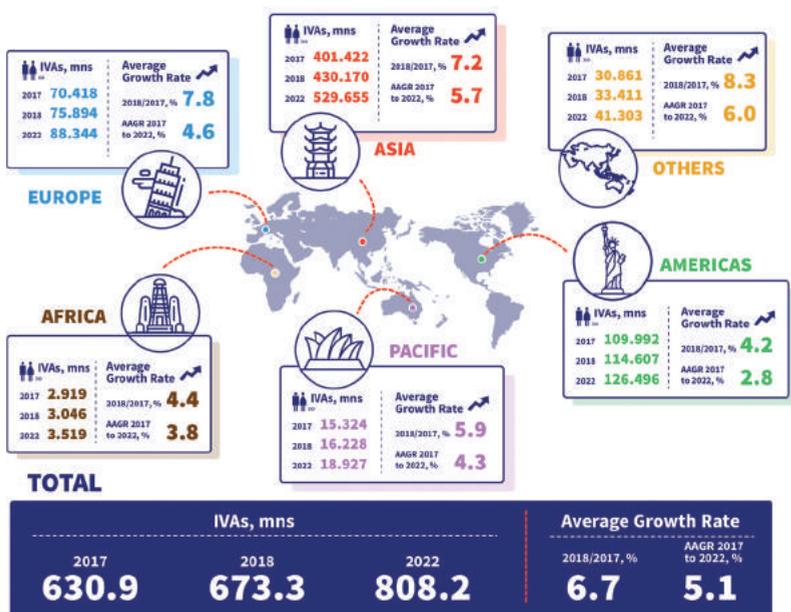
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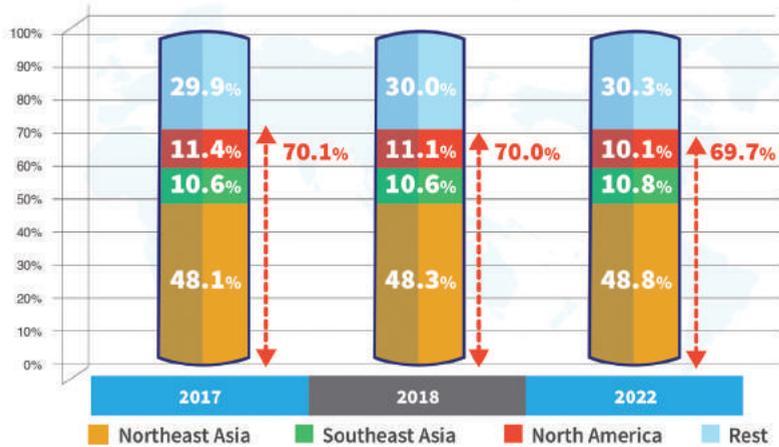


Note: AAGR = average annual growth rate, expressed as a percentage

to be North-east Asia, South-east Asia and North America. That ranking remains constant over the forecast period to 2022, when together these three subregions are expected to capture just over 80% of all foreign visitor arrivals into Asia-Pacific.

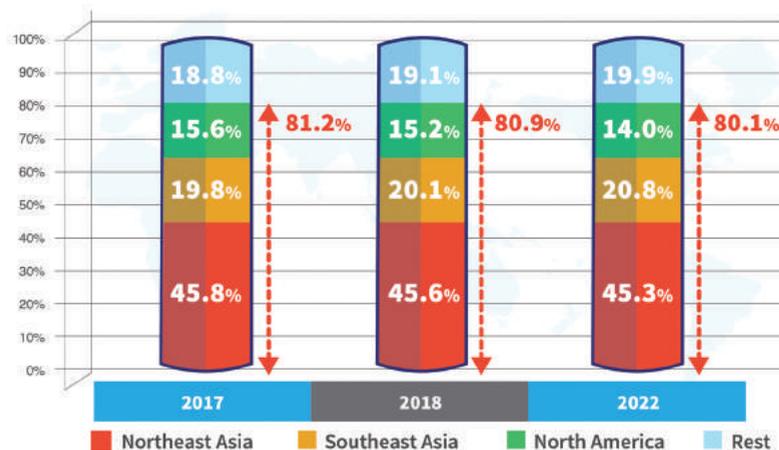
North-east Asia is well ahead of the other two destination subregions however, and while on a slightly reducing trajectory to 2022, will still account for over 45% of all foreign arrivals into Asia-Pacific by 2022.

## Relative share of IVAs by origin sub-region, %



These same three subregions also rank as the top three generators of foreign arrivals into Asia Pacific over the forecast period. North-east Asia leads as the top generating subregion and this remains the case to 2022. South-east Asia and North America are the next two strongest generators of foreign arrivals, with South-east Asia moving up from third position in 2017 and 2018 to second in 2022, displacing North America in the process.

## Relative share of IVAs by destination subregion, %



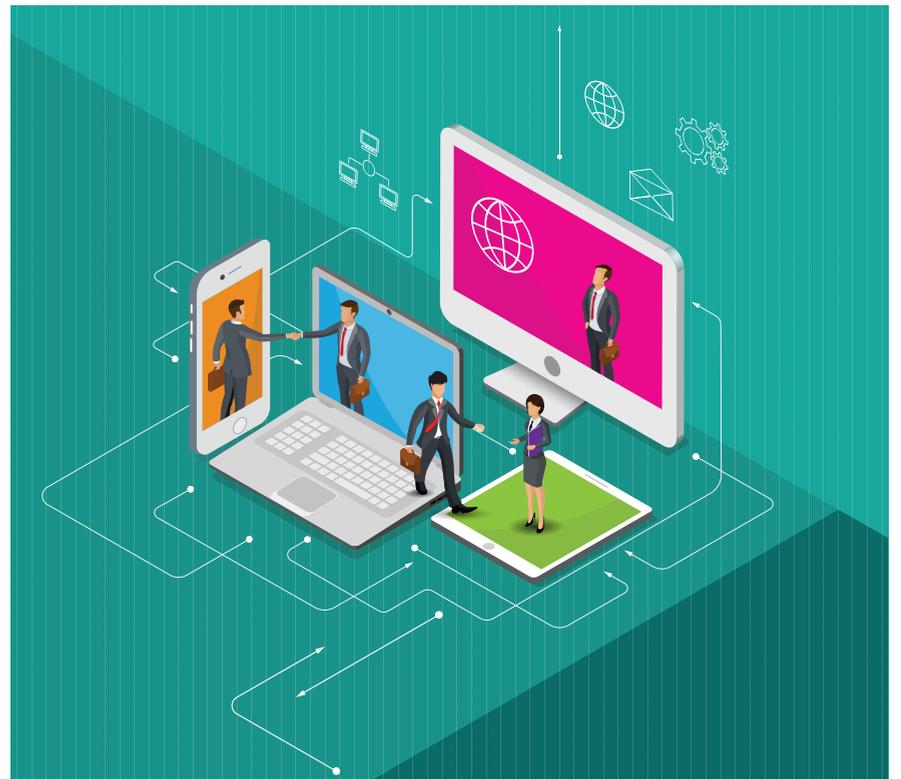
Together, these three origin subregions generate an average of 70% of all foreign arrivals into Asia-Pacific between 2017 and 2018. It is North-east Asia alone however, that dominates, accounting for an increasing share of foreign arrivals, approaching almost half by 2022.

Mario Hardy, PATA's CEO, said: "The numbers once again remain bullish for Asia-Pacific over the next five years. This does not mean that we can relax any commitment to delivering a continually improving service to these visitors. Competition – both within Asia-Pacific and external – remains fierce, and the distribution of these visitor numbers will depend very much on the delivery of a first-class experience.

"At the same time, our industry needs to ensure that the positive and real benefits of sustainable tourism accrue equally to both the visitors to Asia-Pacific and to those who live, work and play within the region", Hardy concluded.

# A digital future

The economic benefits of going digital and embracing data-driven solutions in the tourism sector are clear, spurring the creation of some nine million jobs in APAC



Over nine million new jobs can be created within Asia-Pacific destinations over the next five years by fully embracing digital platforms and data-driven innovation in the tourism sector, according to the *Data & Digital Platforms: Driving Tourism Growth in Asia Pacific*, a new research report published by PATA and Tourism Economics, an Oxford Economics company.

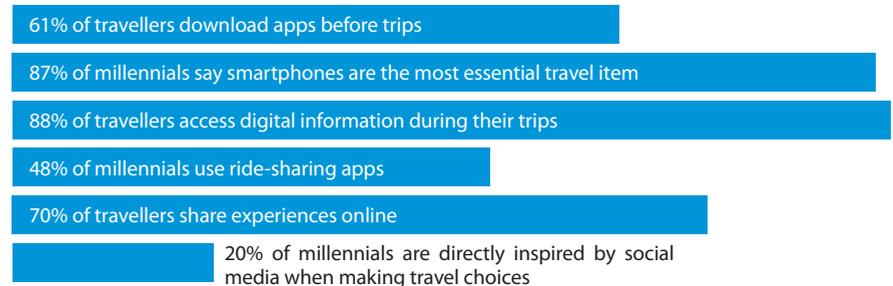
Travellers across the region are increasingly using online platforms before, during and after trips, and 80% of travel is now organised online across the region. Digital platforms provide essential resources for travellers to better understand new destinations before investing in trips. Travellers are better informed than ever before thanks to online trip planning.

Success in travel organised online within Asia-Pacific are somewhat surprising given that Internet penetration is lower than in the rest of the world on average. For example, in both India and Indonesia, only 22% of households have access to reliable Internet. Mobile Internet coverage is also lower in the region, while connection speeds are well below average in some countries.

The near ubiquity of mobile Internet and apps, especially among the growing millennial generation, means that digital platforms are a crucial resource during trips as well as during the planning and booking process. Surveys show that 87% of millennials say smartphones are the most essential travel item.

Travellers are turning to platforms to record and share experiences, using social media, which, in turn, inspires other travellers in their decision making. One-fifth of millennials are directly inspired in making travel choices by what their friends posted on social media.

## Digital interactions are widespread during trips



Source: Visa Global Travel Intentions Study 2018; PATA Youth Travel Report: Stepping Out of the Crowd, 2016

The economic benefits are clear for businesses and destinations, as well as for travellers. Over the past five years, arrivals are 5% higher than would otherwise be the case due to digital interactions as businesses are better equipped to connect with potential travellers. The impact is higher in countries which have embraced digital travel interactions.

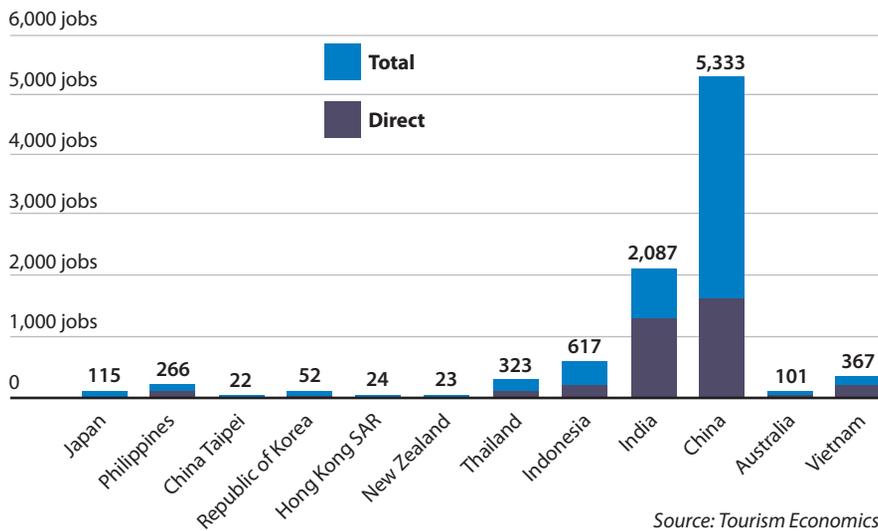
Online interactions generate data which successful businesses and destinations have used to understand customers and their preferences. Data analytics builds a clear understanding of different types of travellers and their preferences. New products and services can be offered to groups of travellers.

Airbnb's success, in the region and worldwide, is related to an improving understanding of the potential market and an ability to provide targeted products. Other companies, highlighted in the new report, have registered higher sales conversion and faster booking rates following data innovation.

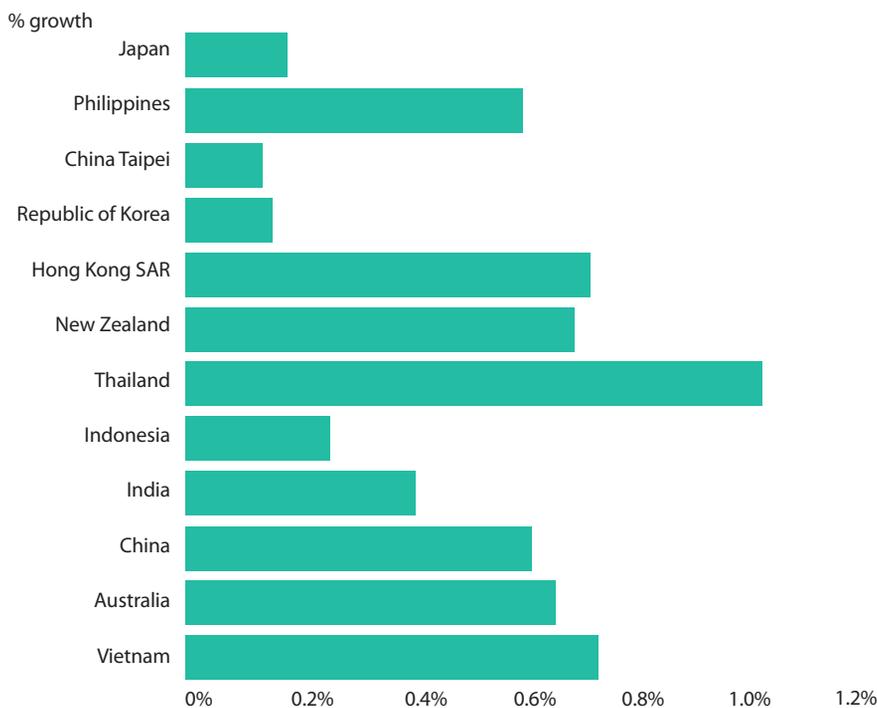
Businesses that are able to analyse digital data effectively and act on the findings enjoy 5-10% faster growth on average than their competitors. However, around half of businesses are currently unable to fully track their customers. While the growth opportunity exists across the economy it is particularly clear for the tourism sector due to its size in the region, as well as the importance of international interactions.

Destinations and policymakers should be aware of these benefits and act to support the digital ecosystem. In order to maximise the growth opportunity, busi-

### Incremental digital tourism opportunity



### GDP growth opportunity



nesses and destinations must continue to invest in digital infrastructure to improve competitiveness; encourage widespread use of digital platforms, and promote data driven innovation; ensure skills shortages are addressed; address digital use and skills in SMEs to ensure competitiveness in international markets; and avoid restrictive policy, such as data localisation policies.

By taking these steps, there is potential for countries within the Asia-Pacific region to grow the GDP by up to one per cent, generating over nine million new jobs over the next five years.

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## Report Urban resorts



Kerry Hotel, Hong Kong (clockwise from top left); Aman Tokyo; and The Siam, Bangkok are agents' top urban resort picks in Asia

# Oasis in the city

Despite their city settings, urban resorts offer both an escape from, and a connection to, the surroundings. The *Daily* looks at what make a great urban resort and agents' top picks

In Asia, where cities are often characterised by high-rises and a dense population, resort-like hotels offer a convenient option for locals and foreign visitors alike a respite from the urban bustle.

Urban resorts also play well to the growing bleisure trend, as modern travellers are combining work and leisure more than ever.

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

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

Among foreign visitors to Asian cities, the European market shows a stronger preference for resort-type properties.

"It is a trend for Europeans on holiday to get away from concrete blocks. They enjoy staying in smaller boutique properties that can offer a more relaxed environment such as Villa Samadhi Kuala Lumpur," said Manfred Kurz, managing director, Diethelm Travel Malaysia.

Sharing Kruz's observation, Kim Martin Rasmussen, product & contracting manager at Exo Travel Thailand, also sees the Western market placing a higher premium on resort stays in Bangkok.

"The UK market especially likes Ariyasom Villa and Anantara Riverside, whereas all our French clients like this kind of resort-style (hotels), as they are not used to high-rise buildings in France, so they always like it small and boutique."

### In the city, but an escape from it

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

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

In the Malaysian capital, The Saujana Hotel Kuala Lumpur makes a good urban resort example, Bhoonee suggested, as it offers ample greenery and space, an

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

**Gloria Slethaug**  
Managing director  
Connexus Travel Hong Kong

expansive lobby and rustic look that reinforces the "resort feel". Easy access to the Saujana Golf & Country Club, with its two 18-hole golf courses, further elevates the resort experience.

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

She added: "However, some clients may not consider a city hotel with a large outdoor pool as a resort. In my view, an urban resort is about providing an oasis from the hustle and bustle of a cosmopolitan city."

"The PuLi Hotel and Spa in Shanghai is a great example of an urban oasis, as are Aman hotels, which have the capability to create such ambience."

In Bangkok, Ariyasom Villa and The Siam are urban resort standouts in the

eyes of Soontarut Wattanahongsiri, founder of Blackrice Travel.

"Their architectural style, ambience, facilities and most importantly personalised service make (clients) feel more relaxed amidst Bangkok's chaos. They don't make guests feel like they're in Bangkok," she said. "These two properties are both my personal favourites as well."

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

### Still room to grow

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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2. Sekinchan-Agrotourism
3. Sungai Dusun Wildlife Conservation Centre
4. White Water Rafting - Sungai Selangor
5. Kuala Selangor Nature Park
6. Kampung Kuantan Fireflies Park
7. Malawati Hill
8. Sky Mirror
9. Kanching Eco-Forrest Park
10. FRIM - Forest Research Institute Malaysia
11. Batu Caves
12. National Zoo
13. Chongkak Park & Resort
14. Gabai River Waterfall
15. Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Mosque
16. Sunway Lagoon & Nickelodeon Lost Lagoon
17. Royal Klang Town Heritage Walk
18. Raja Mahadi Fort
19. Pulau Ketam
20. Mah Meri Cultural Village
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# How technology shapes the future of travel

From AI to cryptocurrency, here's a look at how these technologies will change the global travel industry



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

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

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

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

## Artificial intelligence

Making rapid inroads into the travel and hospitality sectors is artificial intelligence (AI), which automates computer processes to understand and mimic human behaviour through natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning. NLP helps computers understand human speech or typing, while machine learning

refers to computer programmes that learn from new information or data without having to be explicitly programmed. Together, they enable computers to respond to specific questions or requests, and improve the relevance of responses over time.

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

Chatbots, offshoots of AI, are becoming ubiquitous and are especially prevalent in customer service, programmed to resolve simple issues that previously required the mitigation of a real-time agent.

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

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

However, with growing automation, human intuition and engagement skills are expected to become even more valuable. In contrast with algorithms which rely on access to extensive personal data to

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

**Philip Likens**  
Director, Sabre Labs

customise recommendations, human staff can be trained to provide excellent, personalised service without needing much prior context.

## Internet of things

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

Airlines are using IoT to improve all aspects of the passenger experience, from baggage handling to safety monitoring and checking the efficiency of the planes themselves. Lufthansa is using IoT to enable passengers to track their baggage via a link found on their mobile boarding pass in the Lufthansa app.

Travel pundits are also expecting to

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

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

## Augmented and virtual reality

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

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

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

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

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



said to be the world's biggest VR sci-fi theme park in the world.

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

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

**Voice technology**

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

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

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

**Blockchain**

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

Sabre recommends travel agencies to

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

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

While other industries have been quick

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

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

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

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

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# Forging bonds beyond borders

Resolute in efforts to reverse the decline of European markets, Malaysia looks outwards for partners that can help the country rebuild air connectivity and gain exposure among European agents, reports **S Puvaneswary**



Getting the country onto the radar of European tourists is now a key agenda for Malaysia

After the national flag carrier Malaysia Airlines axed most of its routes to Europe, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts & Culture and Tourism Malaysia is eager to rebuild its European feeder markets by working with overseas partners.

European arrivals to Malaysia took a hit when Malaysia Airlines pulled the plug of its Frankfurt route in April 2015, followed by Amsterdam and Paris in January 2016. European carriers Air France and Lufthansa had also cancelled services to Kuala Lumpur in October 2015 and February 2016 respectively.

With hubs that service both Europe and Malaysia, Thai Airways, Singapore Airlines, Turkish Airlines, Emirates, Qatar Airways and KLM Royal Dutch Airlines are coming onto Tourism Malaysia's radar as choice partners to grow arrivals from Europe in the long term, noted Tourism Malaysia's director-general, Mirza Mohammad Taiyab.

Mirza shared that Tourism Malaysia and Malaysia Airports Holdings have set up a joint fund to attract more European airlines to fly to Malaysia.

Currently, airlines offering connections from Europe to Malaysia are KLM Royal Dutch Airlines and Turkish Airlines. Condor, the leisure airline of Thomas Cook AG, will commence new flights between Frankfurt and Kuala Lumpur from November 5.

While Tourism Malaysia works towards rebuilding connectivity as a long-term solution, in the shorter term it is focused on building awareness about the country's offerings among European travel agents.

This year, Tourism Malaysia is targeting 1.5 million tourists from Europe, up from 1.1 million arrivals in 2017.

It recently signed an MoU with the European Travel Agents and Tour Operators Association (ECTAA) to become the association's preferred destination partner for the year.

The partnership led to ECTAA organising its semi-annual meeting in Kuala Lumpur, the first to be held outside of Europe, which hosted 46 delegates from 25 tourism associations in Europe.

Delegates, some visiting Malaysia for the first time, were given the option of attending four-day post tours covering Sel-

Exposure at ITB Berlin will get the country in front of many key decision makers in Europe and keep the destination top of mind. We support all initiatives that knock on doors of agents in Europe

**Fiona Hagan**  
General manager,  
Shangri-La's Rasa Ria Resort & Spa

angor, Langkawi and Sabah.

At the meeting, delegates were also given an overview on what the country has to offer for leisure and business visitors by Tourism Malaysia and Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau.

Through the MoU, ECTAA will highlight diverse travel and tourism prod-

ucts in Malaysia to its members across European countries, shared Mirza.

In another strategic partnership to step up promotions in Europe, Malaysia has been named the official partner country of ITB Berlin 2019.

Mirza said: "Malaysia's official partner country title at ITB 2019 will entail publicity opportunities globally as well as the potential to reach out to key decision makers and top industry players."

Travel suppliers in Malaysia welcome the NTO's intensified efforts in Europe, while also rolling out marketing activities of their own to attract outbound travellers from the continent.

Fiona Hagan, general manager at Shangri-La's Rasa Ria Resort & Spa, said: "Exposure at ITB Berlin will get the country in front of many key decision makers in Europe and keep the destination top of mind. We support all initiatives that knock on doors of agents in Europe."

Hanley Chew, CEO of Berjaya Hotels & Resorts, said: "We are confident that with promotions by Tourism Malaysia, there will be an increase in European arrivals to Malaysia."

"In 2017, guests from Europe only (made up) seven per cent of room nights at our property, a three per cent decrease compared with 2016. For this year, we are targeting a 10 per cent increase over 2017 for total room nights contributed by European guests."

The hotel is also participating in trade-shows, performing sales calls and continuing direct contracting with travel agents in Europe through its London sales office.

Jai Kishan, general manager, New World Petaling Jaya, opined that further destination awareness of Malaysia in Europe could be created by going to the ground and reaching out to consumers directly such as through social media campaigns and by inviting media and film crew on fam trips to Malaysia.

He said: "Malaysia is not lacking in (business and leisure) offerings when compared to our neighbouring countries."

"What's lacking is awareness of our offerings in the European markets and with Tourism Malaysia's efforts, it is just a matter of time before this changes."

## Hot and new

### Hidden culinary gems in KL

Adventoro has devised a food trail along the Sungei Buloh-Kajang MRT line in Kuala Lumpur, guiding guests to an average of six food stops serving local fare such as banana fritters, *chendol*, *asam laksa*, *nasi lemak* and *satay*. The tour price is inclusive of an English speaking guide, MRT tickets and food and drinks.

### On the nature trail in Sabah

Borneo Trails Tours & Travel offers a 12- to 14-day programme for nature lovers. The tour starts in Kota Kinabalu, and moves on to Lahad Datu, Sandakan, Danum Valley and Sukau. During the



From left: Satay stall along the Sungei Buloh-Kajang MRT line; a hornbill in Sabah; and the Orang Asli in Malaysia

cruise on Kinabatangan River, the nature guide will help guests spot animals such as crocodiles, macaques, proboscis monkeys, and the Bornean crested fireback.



### A day with the Orang Asli

Happy Trails! Asia's itinerary includes a visit to the Orang Asli (indigenous people) Museum in Gombak and an Orang Asli village. The village chief will



show guests to local activities such as farming, carving and smoking a wild pig hunted the night before. The tour ends with a visit to Batu Caves before heading back to the city.

# Long-awaited luxury

Kuala Lumpur is seeing back-to-back openings in the luxury hotel sector, a welcome development for tourism players wanting to benefit from a better value proposition for high-yield visitors. By **S Puvaneswary**

two to three years.

“It is now possible to hire a Ferrari car or a stretch limousine for clients, which we could not do four years back. (These developments have made it) so much easier to sell the city to the luxury segment, which for us, has seen a growth from the Indian and European markets.”

Manfred Kurz, managing director at Diethelm Travel Malaysia, further pointed out that the new inventory could ease the

bottlenecks the city experiences when hosting big conventions or exhibitions.

Tom Roelens, general manager, Four Seasons Hotel Kuala Lumpur, agreed: “When there are large conferences and events, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre is always in need of additional supply of rooms and hotels of different tiers.”

Roelens further remarked that the new luxury brands could help attract higher-quality events coming to Kuala Lumpur.



W Kuala Lumpur is among the newest luxury entrants to the Malaysian capital city

**T**hree new luxury properties have opened in Kuala Lumpur to add 441 rooms in recent months, but surplus in the luxury tier is not a concern for tourism stakeholders.

The new properties, Banyan Tree Kuala Lumpur, Four Seasons Hotel Kuala Lumpur and W Kuala Lumpur join existing international luxury brands such as The St Regis Kuala Lumpur, Mandarin Oriental Kuala Lumpur, The Ritz-Carlton Kuala Lumpur, Grand Hyatt Kuala Lumpur and InterContinental Kuala Lumpur.

InterContinental Kuala Lumpur area director of sales & marketing, Peter Turner-Smith, said: “There may be some short-term pressure on occupancy and rates with the increased availability, but in the long term these new hotels will help to stimulate demand for the city as well as raise the hospitality standards of Malaysia, which is good for everyone.”

Likewise, Aariana Hospitality International president & CEO, Reginald Pereira, said: “The additional inventory enhances the image of the destination and (shows) that investors are confident of the destination.”

“This is long overdue. We need these international brands to attract more high-yield tourists to the city.”

Moreover, the new openings are in tandem with developments in Kuala Lumpur’s overall luxury scene.

Arokiya Das, director, Luxury Tours Malaysia, said new high-end brands also serve to complement the new product developments the city has seen over the past





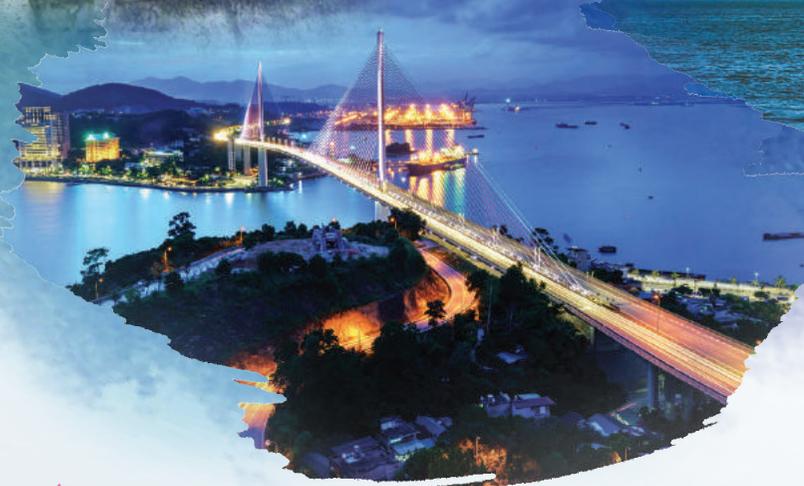
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## Destination Myanmar

# Saunter off the beaten path

Myanmar's classic destinations are still must-visits for tourists, but attractions are emerging beyond the established paths. **Marissa Carruthers** discovers how these new locales are helping to sustain and possibly increase visitor interest

**M**yanmar's diversity of attractions is promising to sustain tourism interest and keep visitors returning to explore beyond the "classic four" of Yangon, Bagan, Mandalay and Inle Lake.

Minister of hotels and tourism, Ohn Maung, said: "People are getting tired of seeing the same thing and we are seeing more (return visitors), so it is necessary to develop new destinations and attractions."

He added that this year the ministry is focusing on promoting the emerging destinations of Mergui Archipelago in the south – which is predicted to rise in popularity from October, when the first of six approved hotel projects opens – and Kayin State. The ministry will also push Kyaikto and Ngapali Beach.

May Myat Mon Win, Myanmar Tourism Marketing's (MTM) chairperson, said the organisation is carrying out campaigns to highlight new attractions at international trade shows and through social media.

This year has also seen MTM invite international journalists, bloggers and influencers for fam trips to experience new destinations. She said: "We are trying to diversify the products available and experiences for visitors to Myanmar."

Tour operators are also developing a series of alternative itineraries in the form of trekking tours in Shan State, mountain bike trips and eco-adventures and community-based initiatives in other areas such as Kayin and Kayah States, including



Ta Fook Island (pictured above) is one of the 800 unspoilt and isolated islands in the Mergui Archipelago

mountain bike tours, kayaking, stand-up paddle boarding and nature-related trips.

Phyoe Wai Yar Zar, managing director of Diethelm Travel Myanmar, said: "We can't rely on run-of-the-mill products. Part of Myanmar's (appeal) are opportunities for local interaction and the best way to (highlight) that is by telling stories. That's easy to do in Myanmar. We create products that our clients can participate in, such as biking through villages and trekking."

Su Su Tin, Exo Travel Myanmar's managing director, commented: "These destinations have existed for many years. However, they are now being promoted and have more facilities. Accessibility is better, there are more restaurants and hotels, and tour operators are promoting them."

Edwin Briels, managing director of Khiri Travel Myanmar, said destinations opening up away from the classic four of Yangon, Bagan, Mandalay and Inle Lake has meant tour operators can expand their itineraries, creating more options.

He said: "We want to create new products that aren't just temples, and see where we can go off the beaten track and what we can do there."

However, when looking for new destinations, Khiri tries not to stray too far off well-trodden paths, curating travels that take in authentic experiences with locals that are accessible from one of the major four.

"We want to avoid people having to fly or drive for too many hours," said Bri-

els, acknowledging first-time visitors want to visit some of the classics. "Myanmar is huge so it's best to (visit) part of the country. If it's your first time, then you may want to do Bagan and Inle Lake, and then try to include one more off-the-beaten-track area."

Khiri has a lot of repeat visitors, who return to explore more outlying areas, Briels added.

Bertie Lawson, managing director of Sampan Travel, said even when visiting the classic four, it is imperative tour operators seek out the many undiscovered or overlooked sites that exist nearby.

Said Lawson: "Tourism isn't spread out here yet. People still want to go to Bagan and Mandalay. They think it's going to be very quiet but, for example, when they visit Mandalay they go where everyone goes and join hundreds of people. This is bad for tourism, bad for tourists and bad for Mandalay. Tour operators need to be clever and take people to other places that are just as beautiful."

People are getting tired of seeing the same thing and we are seeing more (return visitors), so it is necessary to develop new destinations and attractions.

**Ohn Maung**  
Minister of hotels and tourism, Myanmar



### Hot and new

#### Tailor-made programmes

Sampan Travel can curate bespoke tours for guests to get exactly what they want out of their visit to Myanmar.

Itineraries can be created referencing a range of suggested journeys, from Myanmar classics to rugged emerging destinations, such as the 15-day Smugglers and SeaGypsies tour of the southern islands, nine-day Over the Chin Hills and 12-day Tribes of Kayah trip. Alternatively, travellers can work with a Sampan holiday planner to design a trip from scratch.

#### Pyin Oo Lwin coffee plantation tour

Diethelm Travel's three-day trip takes visitors from Mandalay about 67km east to the scenic hill town of Pyin Oo Lwin. Famous for its coffee plantations, flower and vegetable

gardens, and strawberry and pineapple orchards, the town is a charming introduction to untouched Myanmar. The itinerary includes a guided tour of Sithar Coffee Farm and hiking through coffee fields to discover how coffee plants are grown and harvested.

#### A restorative journey

This 13D/12N tour by Exo Travel takes visitors on a spiritual journey through Myanmar. The itinerary includes learning the art of still and walking meditation from a Burmese monk, visits to the ancient temples of Bagan, a yoga retreat and encounters with elephants in Kalaw, rounded off with a few days on the beach in Ngapali.

#### Famous royal foods of Bagan

In this tour, Khiri Travel spotlights Myanmar's rich diversity of food. With the king of Bagan famous for his huge appetite, demanding each

meal be filled with 300 dishes, this experience gives guests the chance to sample food while learning about the country's traditions. The tour includes a visit to Myinkaba market and a monastery to learn about Burmese flavours, ending with lunch fit for a king, with some 30 dishes served up.

#### Trekking in Kengtung

Pro Niti Travel has developed a range of trekking trips based out of Kengtung in Shan State, which is home to many indigenous people including the Lahu, Lahushi, Akha, Akhu and Shan hill tribes. Trekking options range from two to five hours and take in villages, terraced rice fields, rolling hills, lunch with locals and stops at lakes.

Right: Vegetable sellers in a market in Kengtung



## Issues and trends



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

# Tackling overtourism

As tourism reaches an all-time high and more places become overcrowded, industry leaders tell Xinyi Liang-Pholsena why the sector needs to fix the problems that mass tourism brings before it's too late

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

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

The forced six-month closure of Boracay after Philippine president Duterte labelled it a "cesspool" reflects the pressure South-east Asia's once-idyllic islands

are now under. Since last year, Thailand's Phi Phi island will be temporarily closed for four months each summer to allow for rehabilitation, while the rising tide of plastic rubbish on Bali's beaches has become a major concern for visitors and residents on the famed Indonesian island.

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

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

### Clarion call for tourism planning

For too long, long-term planning and development was sorely lacking in many destinations as governments were caught up in the aggressive pursuit of tourism

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

**Randy Durband**  
CEO, Global Sustainable Tourism Council

growth and numbers, pointed out Randy Durband, CEO of Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC).

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

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

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

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

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

"(There are still) very little actions on the ground. In my personal opinion, the travel agents are probably the worst of all. The mainstream travel agencies' top priority is to make businesses out of tourism and the benefits to the host destinations are often overlooked."

It is with the aim to galvanise industry

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

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

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

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

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

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

But Tanes Petchsuwan, Tourism Authority of Thailand's (TAT) deputy governor for marketing communication, acknowledged that a different game plan is now needed – and it's no longer about pursuing numbers.

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

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

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

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

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

"Mass tourism will become history in future," Tanes stated.



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# New business, new friendship



Penang Global Tourism's Lim Yee Harn, Ooi Chok Yan and Yoon Pauline



JedKorea's Jessica Shin, Korea Tourism Organization's Amalia and Jang You Hyun, and Langkawi Tour's Yang Il Dong



Nepal Tourism Board's Sudhan Subedi



Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) Philippines' Nerissa Del Fierro-Juan, Philippine Department of Tourism's (DoT) Cynthia Ompoc Monzon, Philippine DoT's Melissa Ong, TPB Philippines' Monica May Sta Ana and Philippine Airlines' Gene Pauline Banzon



Sunway Lost World of Tambun Malaysia's May Tan



Guam Visitors Bureau's Mark Manglona and Colleen Cabedo



Taiwan Tourism Bureau/Taiwan Visitors Association Singapore's Trust HJ Lin (fourth from left) and Fuller Express Corporation Taiwan's Stephen Chang (centre)



Ezeego One Travel & Tours India's Norman Chew, Jabir Hamid and Jayshree Naidu



Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board's Norshamshida Abdul Rahman, Sarawak Tourism Board's Benedict Jimbau, Abdul Wahab Bin Aziz, Sharzede Datu Salleh Askor and Gustavo Basuan



Twin Cities World Tourism Association Switzerland's Enrique Lepehne and Thomas-Peter Binder



DoView Holidays India's Srinivas Vemuri, The Residency Hotels India's Ankit Kumar Gupta and Daiwik Hotels India's Abhijit Sarkar



Macao Government Tourism Office's (MGTO) Sammie Tam, and MGTO Malaysia's Cherry Lee and Tunku Iskandar (middle three)

# s hit the floor

By **Yingyong Unanongrak**



Tourism Selangor's Khuzaimah Binti Jamaluddin, Selangor State Government's Abdul Rashid Bin Asari, Tourism Selangor's Renuga Devi A/P Sivamoorthy and Jumiah Binti Jonid



Malaysia Airports' Azrul Izham Abdul Jamil, Mohd Shaffreen Nooranee, Noor Izzati Izni Ahmad, Mohamed Sallauddin Hj Mat Sah, Giriya Nair and Mohd Hyziereza Daud



TTG Asia Media Singapore's Darren Ng and Fuller Express Corporation Taiwan's Stephen Chang



Department of Tourism India's K Mahesh, Government of Telangana's K Ramesh and Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation's Dinesh Kamble



Cox & Kings India's Aman Mahajan, Sandeep Dayal, Manoj Sharma, Soundar Rajan and Nagender Panwar



Tourism Authority of Thailand's Dullapah Jaroenjitt and Malinee Nitikasetsunthorn (centre)



ISPIM UK's Iain Bitran, Orientours US' Joebert Opulencia, Pacific Golf Adventure US' Joey Escobar and Discover Holidays (Asia) Singapore's Rodney Yew



Berjaya Langkawi Malaysia's Yukie Then, Berjaya Tioman Malaysia's George Wong, Berjaya Times Square Kuala Lumpur's Mondri Mecja, Berjaya Langkawi Resort's Pravir Mishra, Berjaya Hotels & Resorts Hanley Chew and Ireen Chew, Colmar Tropicale Malaysia's Syikin Aziz, Berjaya Langkawi Resort's Zaharudin Jalil and Berjaya Waterfront Johor Bahru's Raymond Ng



Avis Budget Group Singapore's Angeline Tang and DRB-Hicom Ez-Drive Malaysia's Andrew Ng



Government of Uttarakhand India's Satpal Maharaj (centre with hat)

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