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*Our cover features model Chanel de la Fuente who shows in a nutshell what being a SINK (Single Income No Kids) is about: FREEDOM! More Asian singles are living it up*

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I grew up in Singapore when, if you weren't married by age 30 years, you're considered over the hill. My government even played matchmaker, coming up with ridiculous ways to get young people to meet (there were no online dating sites in those days) and giving them incentives to marry and have babies. This may seem a century ago, but

we're talking just 20-30 years ago.

Today, singles in many Asian countries are less badgered by parents, aunts, uncles, cousins as to when they will marry, and when they did, when they are going to have babies.

To be single today is to be in an enviable position, when I think of the freedom and individual choices this affords. And reading Yixin Ng's excellent article in this issue on singles travel, *Alone and ready to splurge* (see page 4), it made me wonder: Are singles helping to create a new segment for travel & tourism, or is travel helping to create more singles in the world?

Singles are already feeding the travel industry. Just google single travel and see the proliferation of holidays and tips for travelling solo. Among them are rising career professionals or retired baby-boomers; single individuals going on special interest holidays (say yoga retreats or art tours), or single friends travelling together, to name some examples. With no familial duties, SINKs (there, I've just coined Single Income No Kids) have the world at their fingertips, can travel where they want and when, and don't have to consider a partner's needs or

how to keep the children entertained.

The world is their oyster. Travel can keep SINKs happy and may be a good reason now why people prefer to stay single, although the industry can also play cupid – imagine SINKs meeting other SINKs in a specialised tour, sharing common interests and ideals.

Given their higher disposable income and willingness to spoil themselves on trips, SINKs are an exciting prospect for the luxury travel sector. However, as our special feature points out, the industry has given short shrift to SINKs; a lot more attention has been given to the millennials market and other segments such as family travel. That's a pity.

Meanwhile, the inaugural Further East (see page 10) takes place this month. Now that's an exciting 'un'-traditional luxury travel tradeshow, held in Seminyak, Bali, which offers opportunities for solo travel. Great start to broaden the mind about the who, what, where, how of this growing segment.

Think SINKs – and you'll float.

**Raini Hamdi**, Senior Editor

## TTG ASIA [LUXURY] for buyers of premium travel and luxury meetings

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# Alone & ready to splurge

Gone are the days where single holidays are about drunken debauchery. Without familial responsibilities, high-flying singles have the means to enjoy holidays their way. And that includes splurging on higher-end resorts typically enjoyed by married couples and opting for more special interest products. By **Yixin Ng**

**L**uxury travel may be undergoing big changes today as a growing number of Asians say 'I do' to self-actualising pursuits rather than to a life partner.

In Asia, the mean age of marriage has risen over the past decades, with the trend particularly marked in affluent countries. It was in 2011 when *The Economist* reported that 21 per cent of 40-44 year-old women in Tokyo are unmarried, and among university graduates of that age in Singapore, the figure was 27 per cent. Since then, the factors believed to be driving the trend have not waned.

While delayed marriage presents heavy social implications, it is also a phenomenon that should not be ignored in travel. Individuals entering career primes without familial responsibility could mean significantly greater disposable income, a key driver of luxury consumption.

Above, clockwise from left The Middle House; Joali Maldives; Kudadoo villa



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# luxury feature singles

## Women a bigger part of the travel lexicon

For luxury travel buyers and sellers interviewed at ILTM Asia Pacific in May, the discussion of prolonged singlehood overwhelmingly centred on female leisure travellers.

"It's the same in Japan as in other parts of Asia. (More women) are choosing to not get married instead to focus on their careers. Many of these women become (avid) travellers. They enjoy life and pamper themselves through their travels. Women are definitely bigger travellers than men," Noriko Ogawa, president of Cox & Kings Japan, told *TTG Asia Luxury*.

Some travel suppliers shared that the growing segment of women travelling, whether solo or in small groups, is fuelling demand for safety, comfort and privacy value-adds more commonly found

in the luxury segment.

Women are willing to shell out extra – whether on location or more personalised service – to not have to worry about safety or movement while on holiday, according Adeline Quek, L Hotels & Resorts' director - brand management, sales and marketing.

"There is still a sense of vulnerability that female travellers bring with them, which makes them prioritise safety and privacy. (At L Hotel Seminyak), we see a lot of independent female travellers who take comfort in the security features, e.g. key cards are required to access each guestroom floor, or our butler service."

Meanwhile, the rise of female travel is also shaping luxury travel products, design and brand. Steven Phillips, general manager of the new Joali Maldives, remarked: "I can't

believe it's taken people this long to realise (the sway women have in travel). It's important to us that we continue targeting families and couples, but also ladies who travel here in small groups whether to (take time away from family life), or as singles or divorcees.

"(While getting the brand and property up) we've spent a lot of money with lovely (partners) who decided what (women have) known for years – not only do they work extremely hard and many have families to look after, but also they are the ones making the decisions when it comes to holidays."

## China and India

*The Economist* noted that China and India are exceptions to the trend of rising marriage ages in Asia, but predicted that the

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phenomenon would soon hit these fast developing economies.

Even with the concept of marriage well and alive in these countries, the changing attitudes of young couples or singles have presented new opportunities for luxury travel players.

In India, where couples are known to throw extravagant weddings, group travel and weddings continue to be key target segments at Yes Travels. At the same time, more couples “do not want to get married young, and would rather spend more quality time with each other before marriage”, which has made personalised itineraries another moneymaker at the agency, founder Rekha Chhabria told *TTG Asia Luxury*.

She continued: “Already, we are seeing Indians and their to-be-spouses choosing to settle down later and having more money to spend in their younger years (as a result). By 28-32, they already are demanding luxury, compared to in the past when the higher spenders tend to be (from older age brackets).”

These travellers want tailor-made itineraries that are highly personalised, she pointed out, adding that there is demand for both longhaul holidays and more frequent shorthaul trips in the year within this segment.

Meanwhile in China, spokespersons for the House Collective suggested that the persistent pressure to marry young, alongside greater freedoms unlocked by affluence, could have manifested in a stronger motivation to compensate through self-actualising pursuits, such as lifestyle consumption.

### **The convergence of prolonged singlehood and aspirational travel**

It is not just spending power that these career-driven single travellers

bring to luxury travel. Much has been said about travel becoming more individualistic, tied to aspirations for selves, and the trend could not be more stark than in a segment of single travellers free to do holidays their way.

Ogawa pointed out: “Preferences today have become more specific. Travellers know what they want with greater ease of access to information on the Internet. And without family, women are more free to make their own choices when it comes to holidays.” This has fed demand for special interest itineraries including cycling, art, architecture, “intellectual interests” and gastronomy, she shared.

Even in the honeymooners’ paradise of the Maldives, Bradley Calder, general manager of Hurawalhi Island Resort & Kudadoo Private Island, observed that more tourists are luxuriating with friends than before, adding that “our generation is definitely more self- than family-driven”.

“A lot of resorts are going after the family market. Being adults-only is our point of difference (because we recognise that) some guests (couples or singles) are there to get away from family, while others simply want to indulge in the things they want to do.”

### **Single is not a dirty word in luxury**

In the evolution of singlehood holidays are several archetypes. Whether it be the rowdy party people, solo eat-pray-love voyagers or cash-strapped backpackers, singles were hardly a segment that was of great relevance to luxury travel providers.

Even as the profile becomes more diverse and affluent, many suppliers catering to single travellers continue to market to escapade-seeking youths – who are, before anything else, ready to mingle. Whether it be hotels that

rely on “social, communal spaces” to reel in the “millennial-minded”, or “18-30/35” tour operators, the examples are plenty.

In May, Thomas Cook announced plans to wind down its “18-30” brand, which at its prime saw great success catering to hedonistic partygoers, admitting that the formula no longer works for today’s ego-travel, insta-obsessed generation. The Cook’s Club hotel brand took its place to entice millennials, advertising “an alternative kind of luxury at an affordable price”.

Between attempts to appeal to millennials with an affordable-luxury positioning, and higher-end travel providers continuing to market to executives and honeymooners, lie vast opportunities to capture the single independent traveller who is willing and able to pay a premium for travel goods and services.

The blended psyche of today’s singles could inform targeted marketing and help suppliers tap into the spending power of single travellers, and it is those willing to think outside traditional silos that will reap the rewards.

“

**I can't believe it's taken people this long to realise (the sway women have in travel).**

Steven Phillips,  
general manager,  
Joali Maldives



# *A richer offering by Australian home rentals*

Australia's luxury rental market is seeing rising demand for anything but the accommodation itself, and is providing everything in the rental, from swimming lessons to private tours. But it must be less laid-back about raising awareness about such complete rentals, **Adelaine Ng** reports



A home is empty without... the professional chef cooking in the customer's private kitchen. Above, two homes under Contemporary Hotels

Private butlers, chefs, nannies and swimming instructors are becoming part and parcel of Australia's luxury rental property market. We're not talking just for celebrities either. Across the demographic board, demand is growing for ultimate perks in accommodation that are anything but a hotel.

And things should get more interesting as Asian travellers start to discover this offering.

"Great accommodation is no longer enough," said Alexandra Ormerod, co-founder and managing director of Australian luxury holiday homes Luxico. "Guests are looking for the whole package and want to plan experiences in conjunction with booking, rather than add these as an after-thought."

As examples, Ormerod said popular requests include daily maid services, in-home dining experiences, sommelier-selected wine and pre-stocked grocery provisioning, while experiences may involve bespoke private tours and "behind-the-scenes local experiences that can't be found on TripAdvisor".

Growth in this niche sector is also confirmed by luxury accommodation specialists Contemporary Hotels and Southern Crossings. "It's definitely shifted away from hotels," said Charlotte Bonser, sales and acquisitions manager at Contemporary Hotels, which has some 145 properties in Australia. "People are looking at more tailored travel to have a more intimate experience of something that's local for them. We get a lot of expats from the US and UK who are keen to rent close to where they may have used to live, or are near where their family is currently situated."

Bonser also said while multi-generational bookings form a significant portion of their clientele, her company is seeing an influx

of younger travellers from pre-university age to those in their mid-30s. And sometimes they'll bring their own nannies, assistants and cleaners, requiring larger housing.

Unsurprisingly, the more money you have, the more particular you can be about your demands too. Speaking to *TTG Asia Luxury* at Luxperience, Australia's luxury trade event in September, general manager of Southern Crossings, Paul Groves-Berry, said these days factors like unique dietary needs can be a driving force in a client wanting a private villa over a hotel, while others seek convenience services including close access to a boat or helicopter landing pads to avoid dealing with traffic.

Luxury planners *TTG Asia Luxury* spoke with at Luxperience seem sold by the offering. "My clients who spend US\$10,000 or more on a vacation have typically requested Europe but Australia has always been an interest," said Shawn Graves, lead travel advisor for Centsible Travel & Vacations near Washington DC.

"I'm very impressed with what I've discovered and Australia may have more of an offering because the villas in Europe tend to be further out in the countryside and may be smaller in accommodation size. But the landscape (in

Australia) is appealing because you can be on the west side or the east overlooking the cliff and have that infinity pool right outside your living area or bedroom. My clients are going to want the cultural experiences, cooking lessons, the wine, shopping, yachting, paddle boarding and the whole gamut!"

Aria Zhang, a manager at Farers International in China, said Australia is a popular request for her luxury clients. But their priorities may come as a surprise to Australian suppliers, who are just starting to see rising interest out of Asia. "Our clients can spend a few months living overseas, and the most important thing for them is to be near a very good private school their kids can attend to learn the language," she noted. "But we're looking for the right partners as Chinese people are always in a rush and (some of our clients) find Australians too laid-back."

While this niche market's growth isn't meteoric, it is rising steadily. Chloe Chan, business development manager at Singapore's Chan Brothers Prestige, said her company is exploring software integration with Accor's Onefinestay which has "quite a few spectacular beachfront houses in Sydney".

But she agreed with other luxury travel agents interviewed at Luxperience that Australia could do more to market high-end accommodation rentals.

Which may just well happen as Asia gets on Australia's luxury accommodation radar.

"The Asian market in particular is driving growth into Australia," said Groves-Berry. "We're seeing more requests coming out of that region, mostly from Singapore and Hong Kong. They see us as a destination that's easy to get to, safe, has a whole range of different activities and it's a destination that they can do in a week, rather than be away from their business or home for too long."

“

**Australia may have more of an offering because the villas in Europe tend to be further out in the countryside and may be smaller in accommodation size.**

Shawn Graves,  
lead travel  
advisor, Centsible  
Travel & Vacations





Above Alila Seminyak

## *Ready to meet 'barefoot' and discuss luxury travel?*

It's all systems go for new luxury travel tradeshow, Further East, which asks buyers and sellers to 'shake off your shoes and your tradeshow perceptions' when they meet in Seminyak, Bali, this month. Anticipation is high, reports **Raini Hamdi**

If it wasn't for Serge Dive who is behind Further East, the notion of a 'barefoot' show might be dismissed as just a gimmick. Dive created ILTM Cannes, sold it to Reed Exhibitions, and later went on to launch his own shows Pure Life Experiences, LE Miami, We Are Africa, and now, Further East.

Buyers interviewed show he seems to

have built a cult following for being 'un' everything a traditional tradeshow is.

"We participated in the first Pure Life Experiences in Marrakech in 2009 and have attended every one since," said Hamish Keith, group managing director of Bangkok-based Exo Travel. "Serge's vision of an 'un-conference' and a different kind of tradeshow focused on

experiential travel coincides with Exo's vision of fusing active and experiential travel in exotic and emerging Asian destinations. I really like and respect that Pure remains focused on its principles and has not grown into a big mainstream tradeshow, and I trust Serge and his team to deliver another great event with Further East."

The new event will be held from November 12 to 15 in Seminyak, Bali's hip and happening upscale resort destination, at Alila Seminyak, Potato Head Beach Club, Katamama Hotel and W Bali-Seminyak next door.

So will the tradeshow be held on sand with barefoot buyers in bohemian wear strolling to their next appointment?

Dive, CEO of London-based Beyond Luxury Media, said it won't be on sand on the beach, but it would be the closest buyers and sellers could get to a barefoot luxury show. Appointments would be held in an indoor space at Alila, but bin the picture of a traditional mart in a convention hall, he said.

"I can't tell you how the space would be dressed up, but everything we do is custom-made, and people will get a

sense of the sea. When they go out to the networking area on the lawn facing the beach, we would encourage them to go barefoot," said Dive.

The conference component, Awaken, will be held outdoors at Potato Head Beach Club. "Forget awful coffee, cold air-conditioned room, boring speakers, death by Powerpoint. It'll be a mix of keynote, fast presentations, workshops, discussions. We want to create more conversations with the audience," he said.

Dive has a mission for every show he creates. We Are Africa, for instance, aims to rebrand Africa travel as modern, positive and contemporary. Further East aspires to be the guardian of Asian values, he said.

"We realise that Asia is becoming the place more people want to go, because it has everything that the Western world has lost – spirituality, not necessarily in the religious sense – balance, social responsibility, self-respect and respect for others, great respect for heritage while putting itself into the future.

"At the same time, Asian brands and products are at an interesting crossroads where they could be tempted to embrace much of the values of the Western world," said Dive.

Further East can be the guardian by bringing forth the uniqueness of Asia

through having the right cast of sellers – high-end, boutique, iconic, above all, uniquely Asian, he said. Once the casting is right, the discerning buyers would follow, he added.

"The problem with tradeshow is they mix Asian brands with European, African, etc, that there is no sense of context. Look at the story of trade fairs – they used to have everything. I was one of the first to separate luxury travel from normal travel (ILTM). Then we realised that within luxury travel, there's an experiential market so we created Pure, and we realised that Africa needed to be treated differently from Asia so we created We Are Africa. Further East is the same. The values of Asia, its DNA, need to be displayed and elevated, not diluted," Dive said.

That's also the reason why he picked Bali. "Obviously we could go to one of the amazing, efficient destinations of Asia but we've been obsessed from the start by the idea of a barefoot travel tradeshow and want to make sure this will be on the beach. Bali has a great sense of character and look how zen and peaceful Alila is while Potato Head Beach Club shows the millennial, hipster feel of Asia yet is so anchored on traditional Asia. (Ronald) Akili (founder of Potato Head Family) is totally obsessed with protecting the environment, culture and Asian values," said Dive.

Akili said: "As official hosts, we look forward to showcasing Potato Head Family's dedication to challenging the status quo by providing good times for our guests while also doing good in our local communities and the world."

The show targets 200 exhibitors who

would be matched with 210 buyers in 42 pre-scheduled appointments. Thirty-five per cent of buyers are expected from Asia, 27 per cent Europe, 18 per cent North America, 10 per cent Oceania, seven per cent Latin America and three per cent Africa/Middle East. It is predominantly a leisure show (93 per cent) with the rest comprising corporate and MICE business.

It remains to be seen whether Further East isn't built on sand. Dive's followers like David Song, founder & managing director of Beyond X Boundaries Singapore who attends Pure and We Are Africa, thinks it's going to be solid, saying Dive and team have "raised the bar in events management".

"They do it with style and flair, with a very relaxed atmosphere and a bohemian attitude to dress code," said Song, adding there were "meaningful engagements, new business developments" as exhibitors and buyers were carefully selected and screened to ensure quality.

Dive said he's able to create meaningful engagements because "the other tradeshow is in a dating business; we are in the falling-in-love business".

"We create a community people want to live in. When they come to our shows, they say, I realise I love what I'm doing. They may return with 80 business cards, but 40 will be friends forever, people they will do business with and whom they will protect.

"The Internet revolution is returning business to what it used to be: business based on trust, liking and knowing people well."

*"The other tradeshow is in a dating business; we are in the falling-in-love business."*

**Serge Dive**, CEO, Beyond Luxury Media, organisers of Further East





Above Katamama Hotel

## *An evolving Bali*

Bali, which hosts Further East, the ‘un’ everything a luxury tradeshow is, is itself dodging the conventional as a new set of luxury customers emerges. **Tiara Maharani Kusuma** reports how the island is casting a new spell on high-enders as investors commit dollars on different products

People might say Bali is crowded, the traffic is bad, but the island continues to attract the luxury market, not just the travellers but investors, who are confident that the charm of the destination to draw the have’s and the have more’s is everlasting.

Just look at the new upscale and upper upscale hotels, posh beach clubs and entertainment centres that are opening on the island. Brands including Kempinski, Shangri-La, Langham, Mandarin Oriental, Starwood’s Luxury Collection, Trump and Waldorf Astoria will all be opening hotels in Bali in the next couple of years.

Luxury hotels will dominate the new hotel supply until 2020, according to latest data from Colliers International. Under construction this year are at least 837 luxury rooms, followed by 342 rooms in

2019, and 170 rooms in 2020.

In contrast, there are only 269 midscale rooms under construction in 2019. Investment in three-star hotels in Bali will only occur in 2020, providing as little as 138 rooms.

Raymond Djani, founder of MG Holiday Group, said Indians, Chinese and domestic travellers are the markets that are driving luxury travel in Bali.

“These markets are strong economically and have buying power. Their population is large, and every year the number of rich people in these three countries increases,” Djani said.

Hotels also report that besides the traditional European market, China, India and the Indonesian markets are on the rise.

Millennials are another group that is influencing Bali’s luxury growth.

Millennials have grown up and their spending power has increased, said Djani. These new travellers are shaping the trends in Bali as their priorities and expectations are distinctly different from those of the previous generations.

“Bali is experiencing an exciting evolution to meet the changing tastes of consumers. As you will probably have noticed, a massive shift is happening on the island. It’s now becoming extremely hip, cool, trendy, whatever you want to call it,” he said.

Djani is optimistic the luxury market will grow up to 20 per cent the next year. Recognising the potential, MG Group has opened a new business unit, Lalalaway.com, an OTA that focuses on serving the upscale markets. Meanwhile, Wellness Resort, a luxury wellness retreat, has just opened in the Nusa Dua area, while The OMNIA Dayclub Bali, launched in February, has become a talk of the island. The Sarong Group of Restaurants by celebrity chef Will Meiryck has come up with a Balinese lifestyle tour combining cycling, cooking class, spa and wellness.

This all shows how Bali’s product offerings are evolving.

Compared to earlier establishments that are rich in traditional Balinese elements, the new generation of accommodations and facilities are modern in design,



**Above** Journey to the southern beaches in style with Alila

although they still embed Bali's heritage and culture in their offering, albeit in a modern interpretation. They also try to break the norm in Bali of what constitutes luxury.

Take the new Capella Ubud Bali, which offers the luxury tented camp experience.

Simon Dornan, general manager, Capella Ubud Bali, opined that the luxury that is available in the market has either become standardised, or located in a crowded place and becoming less personalised. "Today's luxury travellers seek undivided personalised service infused with curated experiences," said Dornan.

The hotel hopes to fulfil the needs of guests for adventure and memorable experiences, combined with personalised, individual service and the opportunity to connect with the nature and culture of the destination.

"The market is evolving and we have revisited luxury and dialled it right back to its beginnings. We then combine this with our unique DNA and enhance it with curated personalised experiences that put our guests at the centre of everything we do," said Dornan.

The Apurva Kempinski Bali is focusing on "bringing stories to life", said general manager Vincent Guironnet. With a grand architecture and distinctive interior design

concept, the hotel, which is opening in the first quarter of next year, positions itself as a "majestic open air theatre".

"We believe that our hotel tells the story of a place. The setting, unique facilities, people, culture and legacy will set us apart from the competition.

"For example, we adopt the King of Majapahit's food ritual when entertaining guests. Not only do we offer the same food, the way the waiters serve the guest will hark back to the past in how the king and his honourable guests were served. The presentation will be unique, at the same time bringing the experience or exclusivity of the service," Guironnet explained.

Marco Groten, general manager of Hotel Alila Villas Uluwatu, whose sister

Alila in Seminyak is hotel partner of the inaugural luxury tradeshow Further East happening this month, said nowadays travellers are not just looking for the experience of staying in luxurious hotels. They are looking for a place where they can be themselves; they love being acknowledged, he said.

Whereas in the past luxury was often generalised as one category for all, today it is all about privacy, space and personalisation, he added.

"This inspires high-end resorts to create experiences that are indigenous, less commercial, local and secluded. To fulfil these needs, we have Alila Experience, which offers guests an immersive destination experience – whether trekking in Ubud with a private picnic in the rice paddies, diving in the ocean off Bali's east coast, or visiting the Southern beaches by boat during sunset at Uluwatu," he said.

Since the movie adaptation of Elizabeth Gilbert's bestseller *Eat, Pray, Love* was released in 2010, Bali has become more popular as an exotic destination and has earned a trademark as a health and wellness retreat.

It has been crowned world's best destination and world's best island from various organisations, including TripAdvisor. The Indonesian resort destination has also seen a number of Hollywood stars spending time on the island. David Beckham, for example, claimed Bali as his family's favourite holiday destination, and returned to spend a summer vacation there. So did John Legend, Paris Hilton and Pink.

The gods seem to continue to smile upon the island. And its luxury investors.

*"...we adopt the King of Majapahit's food ritual when entertaining guests."*

**Vincent Guironnet**

General manager, Apurva Kempinski Bali



# luxury event further east



Clockwise from above REVIVO; COMO Uma Canggu Beach Club; Noku Beach House; Padma Resort Ubud purification

## Five luxé products

### REVIVO Bali

REVIVO Bali, which bills itself a holistic wellness resort, debuted in March in the Nusa Dua area, offering 16 Balinese-style suites (including two four-bedroom villas), scenic grounds, pools and a gourmet restaurant that serves healthy cuisine.

REVIVO offers programmes based on individual needs, with the goal of achieving holistic healing through mind-training and self-awareness, as opposed to treating a specific illness or injury.

The wellness concept revolves around three components: fitness, F&B and holistic spa. Each individual is catered for differently in the healing process with his own relaxation activities, spa and holistic medicine treatments and a personalised diet based on unique DNA and nutritional needs.

While each retreat can be tailor-made, there is a regular schedule of programmes including detoxification, sleeping well and anti-ageing, ranging in duration from three to 14 days.

### Purification at Padma Resort Ubud

Padma Resort Ubud offers guests a cleansing of the state of mind through a purification programme. It begins with a ride on a classic Volkswagen convertible safari along a Balinese village to enable guests take in scenic surroundings such as rice fields, temples and historic ruins.

This experience continues with a purification ceremony, traditionally referred to as *Melukat*, at Sebatu Temple, known as the most tranquil temple in Ubud's highlands. A Balinese priest will lead the whole ritual, making it a sacred ceremony.

The trip continues with a fun trek in the Tukad Cepung area to get to a sacred waterfall where guests can discover the joys of inner stillness.

In a fitting ending, guests are taken to Pura Kehen, the main temple of the Bangli Kingdom built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

### Manarai Beach House

The Ismaya Group has opened its first beachfront establishment, Manarai Beach House, in Nusa Dua.

Located in front of the Sofitel Bali Nusa Dua Beach Resort, Manarai Beach House offers a range of facilities including restaurants, an outdoor lounge and two swimming pools with many sunbeds and lounges for soaking under the sun.

Executive chef Stefan Poyet and corporate culinary expert Philip Mimbimi have crafted a menu of Western, Asian and Indonesian comfort foods, plenty of which will appeal to the health-conscious too. Guests can also enjoy Balinese *Jamu* (traditional herbal drinks) and Manarai's homemade popsicles – alcoholic options available.

### Noku Beach House

The six-room Noku Beach House in Seminyak has big open-plan living and dining spaces, lavish garden terraces and rooftop lounges. This Alex Zabotto-Bentley-designed residence combines ancient and modern elements to create a tropical oasis with views over the Indian Ocean and its sunsets.



Facilities include a 27m swimming pool, an oceanfront tennis court and a spa with plunge pool.

Bedrooms are positioned on the second floor to catch the ocean and ground views. Three oceanfront bedrooms have blue-water views and all six bedrooms are equipped with sound systems and Wi-Fi connectivity, plus tropical bathrooms.

### COMO Uma Canggu

COMO Uma Canggu is the newest addition to COMO Hotels and Resorts, located in Canggu on the southern coast of Bali.

The hotel has 119 rooms, some of which feature courtyards and outdoor showers.

With surfing as one of the major attractions, the resort has partnered Tropicsurf to provide surf lessons and guidance for novices and even surf pros, with a six-mile stretch of beach as training ground. Tropicsurf also offers day trips to nearby Medewi, a rocky cove with some of Bali's longest breaks, and Padang Padang, which has a left-hand barrel that draws some of the world's best surfers.

Wellness options are aplenty at the signature COMO Shambhala Retreat spa.





**Above** Ah the good life – in Marrakesh ‘disconnecting’ in order to re-connect with oneself

## China keeps growing and evolving

Upmarket Chinese are willing to disconnect in order to connect with local communities. **Caroline Boey** talks to ILTM China 2018 buyers on how the market keeps growing and changing

**Both** large and boutique luxury travel companies catering to the Chinese upmarket traveller are bullish about outbound prospects in 2019, and those willing to name a number say business growth next year could range between 20 per cent and 40 per cent, compared to 2018.

At press time, Bamboo Zhou, CEO and founder of 8 Continents Travel, reported business growth of 30 per cent in the first half of 2018 and expects demand to continue to be strong next year. Zhou forecasts an increase of 40 per cent increase in 2019.

The agency’s clients, of which 50 per cent are repeats, already have a good picture of their company results, Zhou commented.

The clientele – comprising 30 per cent top luxury travellers, 40 per cent luxury travellers and 30 per cent affordable luxury travellers

– rely on recommendations from friends on where to go.

8 Continents Travel then puts together a tailor-made itinerary based on the customer’s needs and recommends an all-inclusive trip or one that needs to incorporate free time for self-discovery.

Zhou observed: “While 70 per cent of our clients can do their own research, our top luxury clients prefer not to. They would rather spend the time with their families and friends. Most are also not price-sensitive.”

According to Sparkle Tour, a luxury brand under CYTS formed in 2014, its clients are high net worth individuals who holidayed with the parent company since its inception some 40 years ago.

To accommodate today’s luxury traveller, Sparkle Tour has formed a strategic partnership with National Geographic and is taking clients on African expeditions, discovery trips to places like Sri Lanka and other experiential holidays.

Aymeric Naudin, assistant general manager, said: “Apart from expeditions to Kenya, Zanzibar and Tanzania with expert guides, we also launched travel to South America this year.

“We are seeing a good mix of travellers and a growing number of three-generation family groups and two or three families travelling together, where the children are connected (perhaps studying in the same school),” he added.

Another trend is the early booking – a year in advance – of Sparkle Tour’s new products like rivers cruises in Budapest and Amsterdam.

Naudin said: “Our clients are well travelled and know exactly what they want. They want the best, unique experience – best views, best cabins, etc. They know they are competing with markets which book early like the US, on expeditions to the Arctic, Antarctica, Africa and South America.”

He observed that many clients, who are “very successful business people”, are proficient in English, but opt for language services as they are eager to have a deeper understanding of the local culture, and that philanthropy – and donating sums of US\$100,000 to help worthy causes – is not unheard of.

“Business in 2019 will increase for sure, but by how much I cannot say. Bookings for both our National Geographic expeditions and river cruise are already ‘above target’, and we will continue to innovate by introducing new destinations, brands and experiences.

“Skiing in Niseko in Japan, for example, is extremely popular and skiers are now travelling to Whistler in Canada, Switzerland and France. We have to offer different unique experiences – like ice golf in Megève, in south-eastern France – for those who do not ski.”

China digital marketing company Dragon Trail Interactive, in a recent ski report on the Chinese market, said ski destinations and companies should include information on what other things there are to see and do in the area, including sightseeing, local food and other special experiences, such as spas.

Naudin continued: “Luxury travel is no longer about a RMB5,000 (US\$728) a night hotel stay. The Chinese upmarket traveller is keen on a ‘rustic’ experience if it is genuine and unique. Yes they can be unhappy if there is no Wi-Fi. But based on the destination and experience – like being on safari in the middle of nowhere – and if they are prepared and know what to expect, they are happy to disconnect to connect.

“Our clients are also more food adventurous and demand to try the local cuisine,” he said, “and equally enjoy a Michelin-star restaurant experience and will travel to the Raffles Hotel in Singapore, for

## The Chinese upmarket traveller...

- ❖ wants to connect with local communities, artisans and experts for an “authentic” experience
- ❖ can be “unhappy” if Wi-Fi is not available, but is willing to ‘disconnect’ in order to “connect”
- ❖ travels with family members and other families during China’s major holidays to regional destinations and in markets like the US

example, just to experience the new dining offerings.”

Shanghai-based multiple media platform company China i2i Group, which uses WeChat and Weibo heavily to connect luxury consumers and sellers, said its research suggests shopping is the primary goal of why the Chinese upmarket traveller travels.

According to CEO, Alexander Glos, respondents list competitive pricing as the most important, but he believes it is the “real” luxury shopping experience in London, Milan or Paris or at Tiffany in New York.

Glos added: “It is also about the ability to explore a large number of luxury products of brands they favour and receiving top service and bespoke experiences like being picked up and concierge assistance for delivery, insurance and shipping.

“Many high net worth individuals want to visit the watch workshop or go to the village where the watchmaker is based and enjoy a personalised sales process,” he observed.

According to Fanny Liao, director of boutique travel agency Letravels, set up in 2015, trips of 10 days to two weeks are common, and some Chinese upmarket travellers now want to spend up to almost a month in one destination.

Liao said the trip in question – to Egypt and costing more than RMB50,000 before factoring in business class air travel – was requested by a couple who wanted a “relaxing trip”.

“Apart from safety and security issues, our clientele is not affected by economic and political uncertainty. Our outlook for 2019 is definitely positive and we are forecasting growth of about 20 per cent as demand for new experiences is strong.

“For example, a new product we launched in 2018 was North Korea, which has been in the news and our customers are wanting to experience the celebrations and festivals there.

“More of our customers are also curious to travel to places on the Belt and Road Initiative. For them luxury travel is not just about the hardware. What is important is the experience and good quality guide service.”

*2019 dates for ILTM Asia Pacific in Singapore and ILTM China in Shanghai are, respectively, May 27-30 and October 30 to November 1*

“

**“While 70 per cent of our clients can do their own research, our top luxury clients prefer not to.**

Bamboo Zhou,  
CEO and founder,  
8 Continents Travel





World Explorer

**Above** Taking a ride on frozen Lake Baikal in Russia

## Thai high-end travel heats up

With a travelling middle class that is flowing into the high-end market, Thailand's luxury travel market is being wooed left, right and centre by outbound travel planners, reports **Chadamas Chinmaneevong**

**Increasing** income and the growing importance of travel to lifestyles are prompting Thailand's middle class to start to look for products that are of higher quality and more luxurious.

Outbound trips are not only a fashionable status marker for Thai travellers, but also a reward for their hard work. Therefore, they are willing to splurge on holidays, understands Krungthai Card, a leading credit card service provider in Thailand.

Tourism-related spending has been increasing every year especially in the high-end and middle-class markets, executive vice president of Krungthai Card, Pittaya Vorapanyasakul, told *TTG Asia Luxury*.

"I have talked to many air ticket agents. They said air tickets for business-

## The Thai upmarket traveller...

- ❖ sees travel as a status marker, thus is willing to splurge
- ❖ has limited vacation leave, thus seeks new destinations, valuable experiences
- ❖ comprises small groups of travellers who are highly flexible

class seats are always sold out very quickly while economy-class tickets need promotions. This shows the potential growth of the high-end segment," said Pittaya.

Shedding light on how luxury travel providers can reach into the middle class at this liminal stage, she pointed out that economic slowdown, international conflict, or even natural disasters do not deter Thai high-end travel.

Vacation leave periods are the only limitation, with vacation periods capped at 15 days per year compared with 30 days in Europe.

Thai vacationers hence seek tour packages that make their days count. Rather than just shopping and sightseeing, Thai travellers are looking out for new destinations, excitement, valuable experiences and special services, Pittaya shared.

In the past, outbound Thai travellers were mainly the well-to-do's of working or mid-life ages. Today overseas travel is accessible even to students.

Promotions by other countries have also sparked demand for outbound trips, Pittaya said. As time goes by, the first-time travellers become more financial stable and evolve from FITs to travellers seeking experiences, knowledge and personal fulfillment in their holidays.

Consequently, the segment of quality, high-end travel is growing, Pittaya pointed out.

"Many of the travellers have upgraded their trips from short to longhaul destinations. They prefer five-star hotels and luxury tour packages. Besides, tour packages

of personal interest have become popular. They include cycling and marathon tour packages."

Thanapol Cheewarattanaporn, president of the Thai Travel Agents Association (TTAA), said the number of outbound Thai tourists is expected to reach 10 million this year, up from 6.4 million in 2014, although a single-digit growth rate is expected in 2019 following intensified promotions for domestic tours.

While outbound growth has come mainly from the low-and mid-range markets due to price competition among tour companies and LCCs, going into 2019, TTAA expects that the high-end market will see better growth.

A part of the middle class market would enter the high-end market.

He foresees mid-range tour prices will likely disappear from the market soon, with competition from LCCs pressuring tour operators to dump prices to survive. This, along with changes

in Thailand's middle class, leads him to speculate that "tour companies that target the small high-end market are increasingly reaching the middle class".

"This picture will be clear next year," Thanapol said.

Meanwhile, the high-end market's search for new destinations have had positive impacts on tour companies as travellers in this segment rely on experienced guides and facilitation in places that require personal connections, Thanapol said.

Wikanda Wiwitted, CEO of 14-year-old outbound tour company World Explorer, said the Thai high-end market gathers small groups of travellers who are highly flexible and like to visit the places that are unexplored by the masses. Besides, they love to visit countries with difficult access, to experience cultures and to participate in activities that are in line with their personal interests, she said.

Each luxury trip must have a clear theme and include exclusive activities such as a ride on the frozen Lake Baikal in Russia, and tour guides must be knowledgeable, Wikanda said.

For this year and next year destinations popular in the luxury market in Thailand are Colombia, Cuba, Egypt, northern Italy, Madagascar, Peru, Russia and Uzbekistan, she said.

**Below** Italy is a hot destination for Thai luxury travellers



World Explorer

destination south korea

# Leaping into luxury



South Korea is upping its luxury quotient amid greater DMZ interest, marketing efforts and a wave of new luxury properties. **Yixin Ng** and **Pamela Chow** report

**A**s South Korea forays into the luxury travel market, the Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) says intensified marketing efforts and special interest tour potential emerging out of North-South diplomacy could help it surmount the challenge of being seen as a mass market destination.

South Korea is “still a beginner” in luxury tourism, according to Yoon Seung Hwan, director of KTO’s Singapore office, but its potential is vast. There are many international high-end brands already in Seoul and increasingly

so in Jeju, he remarked. Coupled with the luxurious *hanoks* available amid a cultural and gourmand playground, the destination stands in good stead to satisfy the desire for immersive local experiences among the well-travelled.

To realise its luxury tourism potential, KTO has released an updated version of its luxury travel guide, which features an expanded list of products, including traditional craft experiences and Michelin-star restaurants.

It is also banking on presence at tradeshows, such as the recent ILTM Asia Pacific in Singapore, to help raise awareness of the quality offerings available in South Korea.



A buyer at ILTM, Donna Kranas, travel designer at The Cruise Centre in Australia, shared that while Japan has for years been a popular North Asian pick, South Korea represents a fresh and appealing destination for her luxury cruise clients.

Moreover, Amy Park, general manager at Arisu Tour in South Korea, pointed out that more high-spenders are emerging from non-traditional outbound markets including Vietnam.

Meanwhile, warming relations between North and South Korea could provide a welcome spark for special interest holidays.

Yoon said interest in DMZ tours

is picking up, adding that “the Joint Security Area, where the Inter-Korea Summit was held and where the historical peace declaration was reached, is becoming something of a tourist hotspot”.

He also expects cross-border rail cruises to eventually be launched, with both countries now committed to connecting and modernising the Donghae and Gyeongui railways, the latter of which used to run across the border before it was divided in the 1940s.

While peace and improved economic cooperation are still playing out, Yoon said: “(The peace declaration) has given Korea’s tourism much to hope for. The (historical and geopolitical) significance tied to border sites is something exceptional that tourists cannot experience elsewhere, hence forming one (promising) component of our luxury travel offering.”

A wave of new luxury properties is another boon. In April last year, Lotte Hotels & Resorts launched Signiel Seoul, the country’s first luxury landmark hotel located between 76 and 101 floors of Lotte World Tower. This was followed in October last year by the country’s first “lifestyle hotelplex”, Seoul Dragon City, which offers a whopping 1,700 rooms across four AccorHotels brands.

In June this year, RYSE, Autograph Collection, opened in the neighbourhood of Hongdae. In

August, JW Marriott Seoul reopened after an extensive makeover and in September, an Executive Tower opened at Lotte Hotel Seoul. In 2019, an Andaz will open in Gangnam and in 2020, a Fairmont Ambassador Seoul.

The initial driver of these openings was domestic demand for “hohance” – a portmanteau of ‘hotel’ and ‘vacation’ and Korean slang for staycation – which has become popular among “young families, couples, or friends who prefer to stay in luxury hotels in Seoul to relax and have special experiences”, said Bruce Lee, president & general manager, Grand Ambassador Seoul associated with Pullman.

Now, hospitality players are moving to elevate the country’s finer offerings for incoming travellers as well.

For Signiel Seoul, business comes from big spenders around Asia, Russia and Europe, shared Morten Andersen, its general manager. “A lot of Russian and Middle Eastern clientele come for shopping and medical treatments. South Korea is getting very popular (with these markets), and we are also seeing visitors from China and Japan. With the Michelin Guide now in its second year, a lot of gourmands are coming, especially wealthy Europeans.”

Demand is also spurred by shopping and sightseeing, observed Sandy Park, cluster director of sales for Novotel

**Facing**  
Signiel Seoul  
**Above**  
Seoul Dragon City Exterior



# destination south korea

Ambassador Seoul Yongsan. Districts such as Hongdae, Dongdaemun, Myeongdong, Itaewon and Yeouido have become “representative” of Seoul’s retail fame, said Park, in turn drawing the bulk of the city’s luxury accommodations.

Developers, however, have already set eyes on the hinterland. Lotte is scheduling another Signiel in Busan, South Korea’s second-largest city, for an end-2019 opening. “We expect Busan to be the next city that is ready to host luxury travellers. Busan is known as South Korea’s best beach getaway, with beautiful scenery, culture and cuisine,” said Lotte’s spokesperson Jiho Min.

But as South Korea warms up to luxury, gaps in hospitality standards have emerged, with common concerns being hitting the right note for service, facilities and other offerings.

This is a prime motivator for the new wing for Lotte Hotel Seoul, said Min. “Providing a global standard of training in customer service for employees is an important factor to attract luxury travellers.”



“

**Staycations, popular among young families, couples, or friends who prefer to stay in luxury hotels in Seoul to relax and have special experiences, were the initial driver of luxury hotel openings.**

Bruce Lee, president & general manager, Grand Ambassador Seoul associated with Pullman



## Five luxé products

### **RYSE to the occasion**

New to the vibrant and youthful district of Hongdae is the city’s second RYSE property under Marriott’s Autograph Collection.

Opened in June, RYSE, Autograph Collection, boasts 272 guestrooms including 14 suites, each designed to highlight an art piece from an exclusive collection for the hotel. For instance, the 217m<sup>2</sup> Executive Producer Suite on the 20<sup>th</sup> floor features handpicked artworks and a graphic wall by renowned Korean graphic designer Na Kim.

The hotel also features four F&B options, a fitness centre and a 500m<sup>2</sup> retail store.

### **Marvel at Jeju from a hot-air balloon**

Enjoy an unparalleled view of Jeju Island and its dense peaks from an unobstructed vantage point of



a hot-air balloon, 150m above the northeastern region. The 45- to 60-minute tour takes flight at sunrise, when the winds are calmest, and it pampers guests with champagne, drinks and a simple breakfast. Each balloon can support up to 12 passengers, and groups with fewer than four pre-registered passengers will be cancelled.

### **JW Marriott Seoul completes nip and tuck**

Following a total rejuvenation project, JW Marriott Seoul reopened in August to reveal a host of transformations. All 379 guestrooms have been renewed to marry Korean traditional aesthetics and modernity. The Presidential and Ambassador penthouses feature two-floor designs connected by private elevators, with a luxurious atmosphere enhanced by

details such as picturesque views through large, full-glass windows, Bang & Olufsen speakers and artworks by renowned artists. The Executive Lounge has doubled in size, and new haute cuisine is served at The Margaux Grill, MOBO Bar, Tamayura and Flavors.

### **Michelin dining in the clouds**

One-Michelin-star Korean cuisine restaurant Bicena has moved into Signiel Seoul, bringing contemporary Korean fine dining to guests of the luxurious six-star property. The restaurant is operated by Kwangjuyo Group with the sentiment of spreading knowledge and appreciation of Korean cultural gems, such as ceramics, food, liquor and architecture. Rated one star in the Michelin Guide Seoul 2017, Bicena

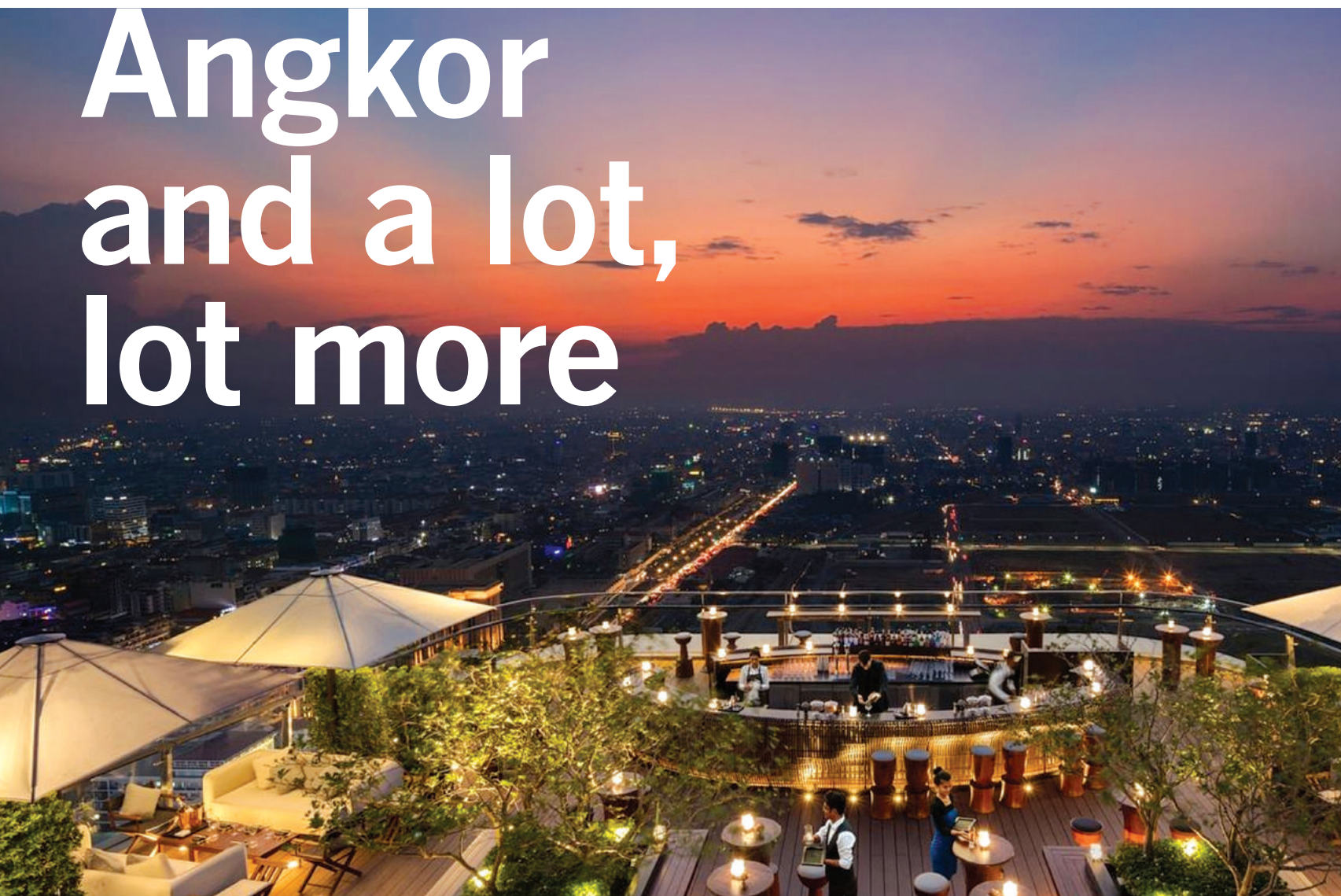
**Above, from left**  
Bicena; JW  
Marriott Seoul

in Seoul also features five private rooms with seating for four to 12 pax.

### **A temple retreat in deep in the mountains**

Tucked deep in Odaesan Mountain in Gangwon Province is the Woljeongsa Temple, which offers a serene temple stay particularly special, due to the neighbouring thousand-year-old fir tree forest and peaceful nine-kilometre Seonjaegil Trail. On Saturdays, a guide leads guests on a tour of the forest. Visitors with less time can participate in the temple life programme featuring activities such as making Buddhist prayer beads, sampling Buddhist snacks with monks and making lotus lanterns. Interpretation in English, Mandarin and Japanese is available.

# Angkor and a lot, lot more



Above Rosewood Phnom Penh

Home to the spectacular  
Angkor temples,  
Cambodia is becoming  
even more interesting  
for upmarket travellers.

**Marissa Carruthers**  
reports why

**L**uxury tourism in Cambodia is on the rise, thanks to the opening of a string of high-end accommodations and experiences that are steering travellers away from the temples of Angkor into lesser-explored parts of the country.

According to the latest figures from the country's Ministry of Tourism at press time, Cambodia welcomed about three million international visitors in the first half of 2018. This accounts for a 13 per cent year-on-year rise. The ministry predicts 6.4 million foreign visitors will travel to Cambodia in 2018, representing a 12 per cent year-on-year increase.

And the country is rapidly shaking off its image as a budget destination, with high-end offerings swelling. "Cambodia's hurdle to attract luxury travellers was the lack of luxury properties," said Diethelm Travel Cambodia branch manager Coralie Romano. "Today, as the country is developing quickly, this gap is being filled. We now have real options, whether it be in accommodation, transportation or dining."

Romano added that while this year has seen a slower increase in arrivals than expected due to July's national elections and the World Cup, the luxury market has remained stable. And she predicts it will grow fast in the future as the



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**While millennials are on the rise, baby-boomers are the most travelled generation to-date and have more disposable income to be able to travel.**

Indra Budiman,  
general manager,  
Shinta Mani Hotels

luxury offerings keep on coming.

At the start of 2018, The Bale and Rosewood Phnom Penh beefed up the capital's luxe accommodation offerings, bringing the total number of five-star properties up to four. The five-star Royal Sands Koh Rong opened in December on the island of Koh Rong. In the same month, Bensley Collection - Shinta Mani Angkor unveiled its collection of 10 luxurious villas in Siem Reap.

Alila Villas Koh Russey and Six Senses Krabey Island are slated to open their private island retreats by the end of the year, with Bensley Collection - Shinta Mani Wild launching its luxury glamping experiences in the heart of the Cardamom Mountains this month.

A bonus to these high-end products is that they are diversifying the high-end experiences available in Cambodia away from just the temples, according to Steve Lidgey, general manager at Travel Asia a la carte.

He said: "Arguably, Song Saa Private Island lit the flame that ignited high-end tourism when it launched in 2012, and others have followed as the destination slowly matures and is known for more than the temples.

"The international big players are now bringing their game to the table. (There are) no temples in sight for any of those hotels."

Cambodia's abundance of authentic travel experiences and rich culture also makes the kingdom an increasingly attractive choice for modern-day high-end travellers, according to Indra Budiman, general manager of Shinta Mani Hotels.

"Travellers today often look for experiences, whether it be an authentic local experience, an adventure or even the opportunity to make a difference at the destination," he said.

"In the next five to 10 years, this group will become the industry's core customer base."

He added that millennials spending on business flights is expected to account for 50 per cent of global travel by 2020 and to maintain that share for the subsequent 15 years. "While millennials are on the rise, baby-boomers are the most travelled generation to-date and have more disposable income to be able to travel," said Budiman. "Creating a strong value proposition for this group will be key to attracting them in the next decade."

Romano believes it is Cambodia's ability to offer relatively affordable high-end intimacy in a small country with strong cultural roots that makes it an attractive destination to the luxury market. She cited Song Saa, Amansara and Bensley Collection - Shinta Mani Wild as examples.

Despite the growing market, challenges remain. Romano noted a slump in the US luxury market since 2017's high season, putting this down to a deterioration in diplomatic relations between the two countries, as well as warnings posted by the US Embassy in Cambodia on its website.

Added Lidgey: "While we are getting a good range of products to offer clients in Cambodia, from luxury cruises such as *Aqua Mekong*, to jungle retreats and fantastic beach islands, there is still plenty to do."

Environmental issues, such as pollution and waste that is rife across the country, need to be addressed, as well as improvements to the infrastructure.

"Traffic jams from the airport to the city, and average to poor quality roads between towns leave luxury clients wondering if they have made the right choice before they get to the comfort of the hotels," he said.

"Environmentally, the country needs to increase efforts to reduce plastic waste and pollution. People are talking about this but it needs more carrot and more stick to force through a change that will make international luxury clients feel relaxed about travelling to what is undoubtedly a beautiful destination."

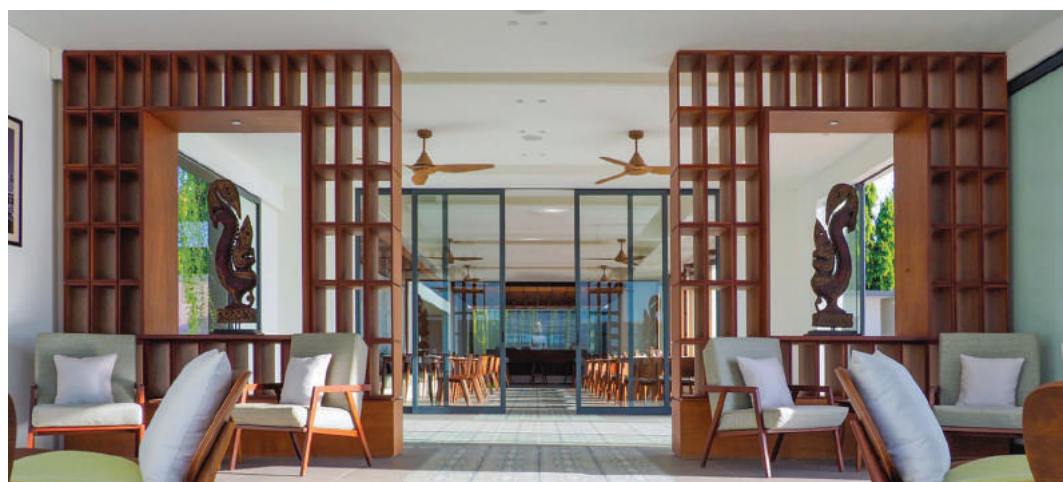
Four  
luxé  
products

## Bensley Collection - Shinta Mani Wild

Bensley Collection - Shinta Mani Wild is slated to open on November 1. Comprising 15 customised luxury tents set in a private sanctuary in South Cardamom National Park, guests can indulge in a range of activities, including kayaking, trekking through the jungle with rangers who protect the wildlife and enjoying locally-sourced food.

## Alila Villas Koh Russey

Set on the island of Koh Russey, off the coast of Sihanoukville, Alila Villas Koh Russey has 63 villas, all complete with private pools, dotted



across the tropical island. An on-site spa offers a range of treatments, with food served from the exclusive restaurant.

## Six Senses Krabey Island

Located on the island of Krabey, the resort comprises 40 villas, each with a private plunge pool, set around the naturally landscaped 12ha island. Retreat and Reserve villas offer mini wine cellars. A restaurant serves food throughout the day,

with an elevated bar offering pristine views.

## The Balé Phnom Penh

Located about 10km outside the capital, The Balé Phnom Penh is a high-end collection of 18 private suites, showcasing the best of modern Asian architecture and design and gourmet cuisine. It sits on the banks of the Mekong River, with an infinity pool looking out across the water.

**Above** The Balé Phnom Penh  
**Below** Alila Villas Koh Russey





The Executive Villa at Shinta Mani Angkor



# Shinta Mani Angkor

*By Marissa Carruthers*

## LOCATION

Siem Reap's compact size means sitting on the outskirts of the city brings heaps of rewards. Still close enough to walk to all the main attractions, such as the Old Market, Siem Reap River and the French Corner, the property's slightly out-of-town location brings with it peace and quiet. It is also a 10-minute tuk tuk ride to Angkor Wat.

## AMBIENCE

Designed by Bill Bensley, each of the 10 villas features chic contemporary design, blended with hints of Khmer architecture. The result is a stunning collection of stylish villas, each featuring a nine-metre private plunge pool, tropical gardens and a luxurious two-storey

accommodation that gives a nod to the New Khmer Architecture movement of the 1950s and 60s.

## ROOM

Bill Bensley has taken exquisite luxury in Siem Reap to a new

level. Upon entering the villa, his bold vision and attention to detail are evident. An impressive nine-metre plunge pool and private deck, featuring striking black and white detail, was there to greet me.

A set of stairs took me up to the upper deck, a large open air space home to table and chairs and a lounging bed – a spot that proved perfect to enjoy sunset looking out across the canopy of surrounding trees.

Taking in a total of 156m<sup>2</sup> spread across two pavilions, the villa is split into a bedroom, with a good night's sleep guaranteed thanks to the plush pillows and duvet. A floor-to-ceiling door opens up onto the swimming pool – offering the ultimate wake-up call, diving straight into the water.

A small path winds through a tropical garden to the bathroom area, where a large dressing room, double sinks and an outdoor bath tub and rain shower await. Privacy is ensured by the creative high walled façade that features a three-dimensional carving portraying the "hands of meditation".

Six of the villas can be combined into three 312m<sup>2</sup>, two-bedroom villas to accommodate a family or friends travelling together.

## FACILITIES

Guests have access to the facilities at Shinta Mani Angkor and Shinta Mani Angkor Shack over the road. This includes the swimming pools, a spa and restaurants. Kroya restaurant serves a blend of Khmer and Western dishes, with the Bensley Bar serving a selection of tapas and drinks. An in-room menu is also served. A cookery class and other tours can be arranged.

## SERVICE

With my own private butler on hand to help, from organising activities and transport, to bringing me breakfast each morning, my every need was catered for with the signature Cambodian smile.

## VERDICT

Bensley Collection - Shinta Mani Angkor serves up unpretentious luxury in sumptuous surroundings. The service is fantastic, and the hotel is able to curate unforgettable memories for me.

**No. of rooms** 10

**Address** Junction of Oum Khun Street, Siem Reap, Cambodia

**Contact**

Tel: (855) 63 964 234

Email: [book@shintamani.com](mailto:book@shintamani.com)

Website: [www.shintamani.com](http://www.shintamani.com)

# High life in the highlands

Cool-weather Genting Highlands is becoming a hot destination for discerning travellers thanks to the opening of new luxury products and attractions, reports **S Puvaneswary**

**N**ew luxury products and attractions that have opened over the past 18 months are making it easier for Resorts World Genting, which has always appealed to the Asian middle-income earner, to grab a share of high-end travellers.

Late last year saw the opening of Crockfords Hotel, the latest five-star property that adds 140 rooms and suites to the luxury hotel inventory in the hilltop destination, providing further luxury validation to Genting Highlands, where the weather averages 19°C to 21°C year-round compared with the capital city

Kuala Lumpur and other major Asian cities where the weather is between 27°C and 33°C.

Crockfords boosts Resorts World Genting's upper-upscale brands, Genting Grand Hotel and Maxims, all of which provide billion-dollar views of a stunning natural landscape of rolling hills and rose-tinted clouds of mountain sunrise. All three hotels come with a 24-hour butler service to assist guests with their every whim and fancy. Should they crave to drop the opulence of their surroundings for the chance to taste local food at Gohtong Jaya, a 20-minute drive downhill, that too will be gladly taken care of.

Edward Holloway, Resorts World Genting's senior vice president of hotel relations, proudly shared that butler training was provided by UK trainers from the Magnum Butlers Academy prior to the launch of the service. Besides learning about etiquette and protocol, the butlers were also trained to respond to the emotional needs and requests of their clients, and to anticipate their needs and ensure personalised services, he said.

He said the luxury hotels are experiencing high average occupancies. A "robust" Customer Relationship Management system that enables service staff to tailor make experiences based on guest preferences, has resulted in a high number of repeaters, according to Holloway.

For the well-heeled traveller, there is a spread of high-end retail, fine-dining restaurants and chic al

**Above** All smiles at Burger & Lobster

fresco restaurants to choose from throughout the integrated resort. Nightlife in the form of pubs, live music, dance floors and karaoke outlets is also aplenty. This is a far cry from three years ago, when there was hardly any form of entertainment for adults at night.

Rocky Too, Resorts World Genting's senior vice president sales & marketing, shared: "These developments are part of the Genting Integrated Tourism Plan announced end-2013, featuring a capital investment of RM10.38 billion (US\$2.53 billion) to develop new attractions, and enhance and refurbish existing products so that we will stay trendy and relevant to all segments of holidaymakers and business events tourists.

"In the past, our focus was on the mass, middle-income market. But now, we have enough products to market the destination to luxury travellers, and to be a destination for meetings, incentive travel, conventions as well as a pre- and post- destination for business events out of Kuala Lumpur."

Besides the domestic market, Resorts World Genting aims to tap luxury travellers from China, India and other regional markets. Too added that once the Twentieth Century Fox World Malaysia Theme Park opens next year, it will also attract new markets such as Europe and "other parts of the world".

Too started discussions in August with several outbound luxury agents and OTAs from the main target markets to create exclusive luxury packages for 2019. These packages could include private jet transfers from a guest's country of origin as well as private limousine transfers from Singapore, or from Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

Resorts World Genting also exhibited at ILTM China in

October last month and is planning to participate in ILTM Asia Pacific in 2019 in order to generate more awareness about its upmarket products and services.

It also intends to increase its share of C-level meetings, high-end incentives and pre- and post-tours from the capital by working closely with Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB), local destination management companies and foreign meeting planners from its core target markets. The integrated resort showcased its business events capability to the local travel trade by hosting the fourth edition of MyCEB's Business Events Week in August, the first venue outside Kuala Lumpur to host this annual event.

Too said: "We have many unique venues that can be cordoned off and used for exclusive events, such as Park Avenue Lounge, La Fiesta, High Line and e18hteen, just to name a few other than the Grand Ballroom. Once the Twentieth Century Fox World Malaysia Theme Park opens, we can also host events inside the park after normal operation hours. Planners just have to tell us their wildest, craziest ideas and, provided there is no red tape involved in getting permits, we will create high impact, memorable events. This includes inviting foreign entertainers and flying delegates to our resort in private jets, or ferrying them from the airport in our limousine."

Ally Bhoonee, executive director, World Avenues, said: "It is high time Resorts World Genting rebrands itself as an upmarket destination. Its efforts will also help us market (Genting Highlands) to our clients as a luxury destination.

"In the past, we had difficulties attracting high-end travellers as it did not have many high-end products. Its cool weather and outdoor theme park appealed only to middle income families on holidays. Once the Twentieth



**Resorts World Genting used to appeal to casino-goers mainly and we had difficulties selling the destination to upmarket leisure travellers from Singapore, India and Indonesia as there was nothing much to do at night. But that has changed...**

Raaj Navaratnaa,  
general manager,  
New Asia Holidays  
Tours & Travel

Century Fox World Malaysia Theme Park opens, it will add value to the destination and make it easier for us to market it internationally."

Arokia Das Anthony, director, Luxury Tours Malaysia, said attractions, products and services that meet high-end customers' expectations will help increase the length of stay and expenditure in Malaysia. He noticed a "significant" growth in demand for Resorts World Genting from the Indian and Indonesian high-end holidaymakers this year as more retail tenants have moved into SkyAvenue mall and new entertainment attractions have opened.

"We see the potential of promoting Resorts World Genting as a meeting and incentive destination after the Twentieth Century Fox World Malaysia Theme Park opens. That will be the main pull factor," he said.

"It will also appeal to South Africa and Mauritius as an incentive destination. Both markets stay a minimum of five nights in Malaysia, and we will develop luxury packages combining Kuala Lumpur and Resorts World Genting next year, once the theme park opens."

Raaj Navaratnaa, general manager, New Asia Holidays Tours & Travel, said: "Resorts World Genting used to appeal to casino-goers mainly and we had difficulties selling the destination to upmarket leisure travellers from Singapore, India and Indonesia as there was nothing much to do at night. But that has changed since a year ago as there is a 'happening' nightlife, and a wide choice of F&B outlets, entertainment and shopping to meet all interest groups. The hotel services are also top notch. Year to-date we have seen an 18 per cent growth from the luxury segment from these three markets."

## Five luxé products

### Zouk

Zouk Atrium on the ground floor of SkyAvenue comprises the newly-opened Zouk Genting, RedTail Bar by Zouk, RedTail Karaoke and Empire Club, a dance club focusing on urban lifestyle and fashion.

Sometime in 2019, the first Zouk Restaurant in the world will open at Resorts World Genting, featuring an Asian dining concept and providing a totally immersive dinner and live entertainment experience to guests. At press time, no name has been given to this outlet. Zouk RedTail BBQ is also set to open sometime in 2019 and will be located outside Zouk Atrium.

There are two private VIP rooms at Zouk Genting which organisers can use for private functions. Outside its regular operating hours that start at 23.00, Zouk Genting is suitable for events such as press conferences, product launches and private dinners, as it is equipped with high-tech audio-visual equipment. The spaces at RedTail Bar by Zouk and RedTail Karaoke can be adapted to the needs of private organisers.

### Level 2 SkyAvenue

SkyAvenue is the latest lifestyle mall at Resorts World Genting offering retail, entertainment and dining choices to patrons. Level 2 is for shoppers looking for high-end branded products including jewelry, cosmetics, clothing, watches, bags and shoes. Brands include Dior, NARS Cosmetics, Omega, Rolex, Chow Tai Fook and TSL jewellers, Michael Kors, Tumi, Longines, Jo Malone, Montblanc and Plaza a Dufry Store.



### La Fiesta Restaurant

An open kitchen greets guests who walk into this cosy Spanish restaurant, designed in traditional Catalan eatery style, with tiled arches, an earthy palette and muted lighting. La Fiesta offers both gourmet and rustic variants of paella – the Spanish rice dish – with Canadian lobster, squid ink and seafood, pork, chicken as well as a vegetarian option. The restaurant also has a wide range of cocktails, an extensive gin list, sangrias, cava and specialty coffee. It is located on Level 1, SkyAvenue.

### Grand Imperial London Duck Restaurant

This new fine-dining Chinese restaurant serves Cantonese cuisine. Its speciality is the London Duck, baked in rich Chinese herbs and spices. It is also known for its dim sum, Cantonese-style noodles and pork spare ribs baked in red wine.

The main banquet hall can seat up to 250 people. It is equipped with a mobile stage which is handy for private functions. There are

also four classy private rooms with chandeliers, the largest of which can fit up to 30 people. Each private room is equipped with a karaoke system and a private washroom. Menus can be customised for private dining events. It is located on Level 1, First World Plaza.

**Above**  
La Fiesta  
Restaurant

### Secrets of the Empire come alive

The VOID is a hyper-reality *Star Wars: Secrets of the Empire* created in collaboration with ILMxLAB and billed as the first in Asia.

It will take guests through a breathtaking journey into the Star Wars universe, allowing them to walk freely and untethered on an interactive stage. Reality and imagination mix to deliver fully immersive experiences that evoke all the senses. Guests will feel the impact of blaster bolts, smell smoke from the surrounding environment and can push buttons to solve an interactive puzzle to escape enemies, all while coordinating directly with their unit in real time through the blended virtual and physical world.



# Crockfords Hotel Genting

By S Puvaneswary

## LOCATION

What makes all the hotels at Resorts World Genting special are their location on top of the Ulu Kali mountain, 2,000m above sea level.

Crockfords is strategically located within walking distance of SkyAvenue lifestyle mall and Genting International Convention Centre, which makes it the perfect location for both leisure and business travellers.

## AMBIENCE

The luxury hotel opened in November last year and is the latest luxury property at Resorts World Genting.

Guests can immediately feel a sense of beauty and grandeur from the moment they step into the lobby. They are visually greeted by a bespoke art installation by Rebecca Louise Law, an installation artist based in East London, featuring air-dried flowers reminiscent of the four seasons in Europe.



Lobby at Crockfords Hotel

## ROOMS

I stayed on level 5, the highest floor at Crockfords, my bed facing large floor-to-ceiling windows that offered majestic views of the misty rainforest and

rolling clouds. I can only describe my room as opulent, with chandeliers in the living room and bathroom, marble restroom fixtures and one-touch room control system. I was also spoilt with a 55-inch high definition television, and a complimentary bottle of Pinot Grigio as part of the turndown service.

Additional luxuries included branded bathroom toiletries from The White Company, in-room steam sauna and a Simmons king-sized mattress which

was exclusively made for Crockfords and was very plush to lie on.

I also had a 24/7 butler service at my beck-and-call to tend to all my needs, including indulgences such as ordering local *bak kut teh* from Gohtong Jaya, which is a 15-minute drive downhill to the local town, and to carry my shopping bags from SkyAvenue back to my room.

This hotel truly knows how to pamper its guests.

## FACILITIES

The executive lounge is where everyone has breakfast. It is open 24/7 and offers a great culinary experience. Their signature breakfast main course, *Nasi Lemak with Lobster Rendang*, a humble local dish made luxurious with the spicy lobster stew, was amazingly delicious.

There are three private rooms with television and daybeds for relaxation upon early arrival or late departure. I thought the concept was similar to a first class airline lounge – just more exclusive and luxurious.

While there is no spa at Crockfords, in-room treatment was available and offered by M-Spa. For

gym-goers, there's complimentary access to a fully-equipped gym at the M-Spa at Genting Grand hotel or at First World Hotel.

## SERVICE

I experienced truly exceptional service. For example, I was dismayed that I had not brought my phone charger with me and the next thing I knew, the housekeeping staff lent me a Samsung charger, even without me asking.

I was impressed by the high level of service and the ability of staff to respond to my needs even before I asked for assistance. When I returned to my room after a long day, I noticed that my laptop charger was perfectly coiled and secured. Again, I was impressed by the thoughtfulness of the staff.

## VERDICT

Crockfords possesses all the state-of-the-art facilities one would expect from a luxury property, but more importantly, it is the high level of intuitive service and personalisation by the staff that made my stay truly memorable.

**No of rooms** 140 rooms/suites  
**Address** Resorts World Genting, 69000 Genting Highlands, Pahang, Malaysia  
**Contact**  
Tel: 6 03 2718 1118  
Email: [customer@rwgenting.com](mailto:customer@rwgenting.com)  
Website: [www.rwgenting.com](http://www.rwgenting.com)

# *It's not about the money money money*



While St Moritz remains the magnet of the Engadin valley in eastern Switzerland, Asian luxury travellers are recognising that there's more to the region than just champagne and fur. By **Raini Hamdi**

**Think** Engadin St Moritz and a whiff of St Moritz, one of its 13 towns, immediately wafts through the air. The scent of this glamorous destination has drawn well-heeled travellers from Europe and North America to its embrace. Soon after the newly-rich Russians arrived and now, Asian jet-setters.

But travellers are discovering that the image of St Moritz as extravagant and decadent is only part of the legend of the region, once home to, or hub of, famous artists and poets including Alberto Giacometti, Giovanni Segantini and Hermann Hesse. Asians too are

starting to realise that the whole Engadin St Moritz region is rich in ways that money can't buy.

The region, also referred to as Upper Engadin, is a 57km valley situated 1,800m above sea level. Picture this long valley dotted with 13 picturesque towns that keep to their traditional architecture, heritage and culture, yet is not backward or sleepy. Definitely not the dining scene, which surprises with, say, the unassuming Restaurant Murtarol in Maloja, probably known by half of the rich world as one of the places go for the best seafood; or the proportion



swiss-image.ch

these sights at the top. Over 100 hotels offer guests staying more than one night a mountain pass for up to 13 mountain railways, cable cars, chairlifts and aerial tramways. This represents huge savings, especially for families, whether for sightseeing or hiking in summer.

The 13 towns also jointly support a packed calendar bursting with events, such as the 26<sup>th</sup> St Moritz's Gourmet Festival and the 14<sup>th</sup> Out of the Blues Festival in Samedan, both coming up again in January, and famous attractions such as the *Bernina Express* rail excursion. For most of its journey, the train, operated by Rhaetian Railway, runs along the Albula/Bernina landscapes, which are a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Engadin St Moritz Tourismus has been actively pursuing the China market since 2009, and India since 2011, its CEO Gerhard Walter pleased with the "continuous progress" the region is making in raising awareness of its total offerings among Asian travellers.

"We've got a unique USP with the 'extravagant' St Moritz itself as a world-famous heritage and the inspiring nature in Engadin," he said.

The tourism body even created a St Moritz logo for the China market (St Moritz=圣莫里茨) with the additional slogan 'The Alpine Legend'. There is also a dedicated Chinese website (<https://bit.ly/2OoRVCN>).

Lately, efforts have been placed on attracting more Chinese skiers. It hosted the Chinese national ski team in Diavolezza, introduced Chinese-speaking ski instructors in the winter season of 2014/2015 and participated in the World Winter Sport Expo Beijing in 2017, where it also signed an MoU with the Yanqing District in north-west Beijing to promote winter sports and tourism.

The Chinese ski market is said to comprise some 15 million skiers

**Facing St Moritz**, a famous name among jet-setters in the Western world – and now Asians too

in 2016. Switzerland Tourism's data shows the Jungfrau region (Grindelwald and Wengen) is by far the most successful in attracting Chinese visitors in winter, with the number of hotel overnights by Chinese in the season totalling 54,388 in 2015/2016, followed by Zermatt (6,948), Engelberg (4,329), and Engadin St Moritz (3,592).

Likewise, the tourism body is aiming to attract more Indians to the region in winter. For the first time this year, India's homegrown dairy giant, Amul, collaborated with the St Moritz Ice Cricket Tournament, held in February on a pitch comprising an artificial turf carpet laid out on a snowfield. Supported by the tourism body, the event saw famous cricket stars from across the globe participating in the event, the biggest icon being Indian cricket idol Virender Sehwag.

While ice cricket has been played in St Moritz for 25 years, this was the first time the event had garnered renowned cricketers as participants. The matches, held over two days, were broadcast in 25 countries.

"With this event, we reached

“

**"With this event, we reached over 40 million viewers in 160 countries (including India and Pakistan)."**

Gerhard Walter  
CEO, Engadin St Moritz Tourismus



of Gault Millau restaurants in Pontresina to its population of just over 2,000 residents.

Blessed with plenty of sunny days and a pleasant climate, this long valley is the base from which to enjoy gratitude-inducing sights of the bluest lakes and marvellous mountain landscapes that include the Bernina Glacier – the only 'four-thousander' (4,049m) in the eastern Alps – along with other peaks including Corvatsch, Corviglia and Diavolezza. Its tourism marketer, Engadin St Moritz Tourismus, and the region's tourist-friendly players make it easy for visitors to enjoy

# beyond asia switzerland

over 40 million viewers in 160 countries (including India and Pakistan)," said Walter. "In addition, we also had a successful collaboration with Bollywood star Ranveer Singh who visited St Moritz in winter 2017."

The livewire actor, named Indian ambassador for Switzerland Tourism in 2016, was in charge of promoting the tourist board's campaign for 2017, *Nature wants you back!*

Apart from building a winter market from China and India, Walter said the target is to attract more FITs – singles, DINKS (Double Incomes No Kids), families, honeymooners – to the region between April and October.

Towns like Pontresina look up to St Moritz as a tourism barometer rather than a flashy competitor with which to envy. "There's a saying here: If the Palace (Badrutt Palace, the famed hotel in St Moritz) is running good, we will all be doing good," said Anne-Rose Walther of the family-run Hotel Walther in Pontresina (see page 37).

"Palace is like the motor of Engadin for us as it hosts so many events and media, which helps to raise awareness of the region and bring in more visitors."

But Pontresina too can be proud of itself in its own way, she said, explaining that the whole village is collaborating to be a "fine, stylish place" without any touch of snobbery. "There are interesting restaurants and great accommodation, from five-star to camping sites. Many people have moved here and we all want the place to be beautiful – clean, neat, nice, interesting. Tourists will find an authentic place which shows the typical lifestyle of Pontresina. I think even St Moritz is working hard to give people the impression that it is not just about champagne and fur," said Walther.

There aren't too many Asian guests yet at the hotel, she



“

**Palace is like the motor of Engadin for us as it hosts so many events and media, which helps to raise awareness of the region and bring in more visitors.**

Anne-Rose Walther of the family-run Hotel Walther in Pontresina



admitted, aside from the mature Japan traffic. She's more excited about an increase in the North American market, which now comprises 10 per cent of the guests at Hotel Walther.

But with hotels in St Moritz saying they are indeed seeing more Asian guests, it will be a matter of time before there will be a trickle effect to other towns, going by the theory that St Moritz is the barometer.

Said Konstantin Zeuke, general

manager of Kempinski Grand Hotel des Bains in St Moritz: "We do see an increase in the number of guests from Asia in the Engadin, as well as in our hotel."

"In summer, a large percentage of Asian guests seems to prefer to travel in groups and stay with us for about one to two nights during their discovery of Switzerland and Europe. In winter, we are starting to see more and more families travelling to St Moritz."

Looking at overall arrivals in

**From top** Hotel Walther's reception; Anne-Rose and Thomas Walther



swiss-image.ch/Daniel Meuli

the Engadin in 2018, guests from Japan, Taiwan, India, China and South-east Asia are among the top 10 markets, “especially China, with an 80.9 per cent increase in arrivals in 2018 (to date), showing that the Asian market is steadily increasing and becoming a rising market for us in the future”, said Zeuke.

Given Kempinski Hotels’ Asian distribution and association with the Global Hotel Alliance, he said the hotel is poised to grow its share of the Asian market.

“We strongly believe in the growth of Asian arrivals in our hotel and see this as an important element of our business development. As part of Kempinski Hotels, we leverage the experience and close relations in the Asian market. Our sister hotels in China, Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar and Singapore, as well as the global sales office in China and India, are only a phone call away and are always happy to support us with their advice and recommendations,” he said.

At press time, the hotel is translating its hotel website into

Chinese and employing Mandarin-speaking employees “to make guests feel even more welcome and taken care of”, said Zeuke. Its kitchen team also comprises an Asian chef and an Indian chef.

Roughly 10 per cent of the hotel’s guests are already from Asia, with Japan as the number one Asian market, followed closely by Hong Kong, Taiwan and China.

“Our goal for the future is to sustain the growth of visitors from Asia and to keep raising the awareness of our hotel in the Asian market with a focus on India and China,” shared Zeuke.

Another hotel which has a close association with Asia, Nira Alpina in Silvaplana-Surlej, a municipality of Maloja and located close by St Moritz, is pleasantly surprised that it is seeing more Asian guests in winter on top of growth in the market in summer. The hotel was the brainchild of a veteran Asian hotelier, MPS Puri, who had previously worked with Raffles Hotel Singapore and Fullerton Hotel Singapore.

Said Nira Alpina’s general

manager, Claudia Pronk: “In the summer months we have, since our opening, always seen quite some Asian travellers, which now makes up 30 per cent of our business. However, it is remarkable that we are also seeing the number of Asian travellers increasing in the winter period. And that our Asian guests in winter are really into skiing.

“We would like to grow this market slightly. The challenge is that within Switzerland, other regions are more well-known than ours and it would be great if, with the help of Switzerland Tourism and Engadin St Moritz Tourismus, we can increase the exposure of our region to attract more Asian visitors in winter.

“We have strengthened our relationship with tour operators in Asia by actively meeting them during trade shows and contacting them directly. We also try to maximise awareness and exposure via our sales persons at other hotels in our group, wherever they are in the world, and we are seeing more leads coming and now have to convert them.”

**Above left** Nira Alpina: it’s snowing and guess who’s coming in winter? Asians

**Above right** Kempinski Grand Hotel des Bains: Asians already comprise 10 per cent of guests at the hotel



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**Small Luxury Hotels of The World**  
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(TTG Show Daily: ATF 2018)

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### CONTENT MARKETING

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(TTG Asia 2017 and 2018, TTG Show Daily: ITB Asia 2017,  
TTG Asia e-Daily 2017 and 2018, www.ttgasia.com 2017 and  
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**Centara Hotels & Resorts**  
(TTG Asia 2018, TTGmice 2017, TTG Show Daily: IT&CMA  
and CTW Asia-Pacific 2017 and 2018, www.ttgasia.com  
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**Philippine Tourism Promotion Board**  
(TTGassociations 2018, TTG Show Daily: ATF 2018, TTG  
Show Daily: ITB Berlin 2018, TTG Asia e-Daily 2018)

**Resorts World At Sentosa**  
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Supplement, TTG Asia e-Daily 2018, www.ttgasia.com 2018)

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## Hotel Walther, Pontresina



Bar by Rolf Sach; Rotunde Grand Restaurant

*By Raini Hamdi*

### LOCATION

Eight-minute walk from Surovas train station and nine-kilometre drive from St Moritz, a perfect location to discover the huge offerings of Engadin, be it the glamour of St Moritz, abundance of nature in the valley, or charming Pontresina town itself.

**No. of rooms** 70

**Address** Via Maistra 215,  
CH-7504, Pontresina

**Tel** 41 (81) 839 3636

**Email** [info@hotelwalther.ch](mailto:info@hotelwalther.ch)

**Website** [www.hotelwalther.ch](http://www.hotelwalther.ch)

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[www.relaischateaux.com](http://www.relaischateaux.com)

### AMBIENCE

The building is typical of Swiss historic hotels but for Hotel Walther, whose lineage goes back to 1907 when it opened as Hotel Palace, the transition from a classic establishment to

a warm, family-run and trendy hotel with a sense of fun is evident from the start. An aged lady reads quietly in a shadowed corner of the garden; turns out it's a clever art piece. The third-generation owners, Thomas & Anne-Marie Walther, come out of their office to greet me – those traditional values don't change.

But what a change they have made to the interiors. In celebrating the hotel's 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year,

they undertook a huge refurbishment that has revived old spaces into more open, airy and modern places with bold art and old treasures melding well together – a rare feat that this does not look kitschy. Look at the splendid lobby lounge or that unusual light installation in the designer bar by artist Rolf Sachs.

If the makeover is driven by the need to secure the hotel for future travellers while ensuring the old clientele is at ease, the job is done.

### ROOM

I can't help smiling when I see my Engadin Suite. Though it is large (around 62m<sup>2</sup>) with a living room, bedroom and bathroom, it is cosy and chic, a Heidi of our times. I can smell its alpine wood and, on the wide terrace of my suite, the fresh air while my eyes roam the mountain views. Furnishings, toiletries, amenities are plush, and the room is fitted with modern comforts such as free, strong Wi-Fi and flat-screen TV.

### FACILITIES

Though it now has cutting-edge hardware, the hotel tries harder. Every afternoon, I can help myself to

trays of cakes on a white linen-covered table in a corner of the lobby lounge, without charge, and enjoy the treats while a pianist plays.

The bar is full at night with guests enjoying themselves listening to a two-man band, with a couple even swinging on the dance floor. This has changed my idea that Swiss luxury hotels are staid. It also reinforces that hardware alone is not enough to draw guests; you need to find ways to entice them further.

In another nod to today's guest preference of wanting to eat out, the hotel does not make it compulsory for guests to have half pension. But I find myself wanting to stay in because the dinner, comprising a generous buffet of seafood starters and heavenly cheeses, and a full course menu, is simply great value for money and delicious.

The hotel also has a fondue restaurant, and a new Italian will have opened by the time you read this.

### SERVICE

Most of the staff have served the hotel for a long time and are evidently 'family'. Requests are met efficiently and with a smile; the room maid even changes the twin beds in my suite to a king-size bed at my request. I do feel the warmth of a family-run hotel, save for one impersonal service which makes me think perhaps that particular staff has been too long at the hotel.

### VERDICT

A five-star at four-star price, a family-run 'palace', a historic hotel managed with heart and love, old yet new, great location – this, truly is a smart choice for the modern luxury traveller.



# *Island dreams of Asian market*

A destination traditionally enjoyed by Europeans, Mauritius is now training its sights on affluent Asians to further drive growth in its tourism sector, reports **Yixin Ng**

**I**n its 50th year of independence, Mauritius has seen tourism climb to the third largest component of GDP, with the sector expected to continue growing as tourism players cast sights beyond traditional visitor sources and into Asia's fast expanding affluent travelling class.

A spokesperson of the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA) said: "Mauritius has come a long way since its independence and... has achieved a remarkable performance from (its sugarcane monoculture days) to become a strong and diversified economy."

Tourism now represents the third economic pillar, making

up a sizeable 7.5 per cent of GDP, after sugar production (19 per cent of foreign exchange earnings) and textiles (8.7 per cent of GDP).

Tourism stakeholders in Mauritius, traditionally reliant on European markets, have in recent years begun taking an interest in Asia's booming visitor markets.

Of the over 1.3 million tourists who visited Mauritius in 2017 (up 5.2 per cent over 2016) Europeans made up 58 per cent and Asians 15.8 per cent.

"Two main markets emerge from Asia, namely India and China, which have seen significant growth. Last year the number of arrivals culminated to 86,294 for India and 72,951 for China," said the MTPA



**Above** Lux Grand Gaube, Mauritius

“

**Plans are to increase visibility of the destination in the Asian market.**

Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority spokesperson

spokesperson.

Still, growth from the region remained modest at 1.5 per cent in 2017, according to figures provided by MTPA. Tourism players such as Daniel Fortuno, quality manager at Kreola DMC, attributed the slow growth from Asian markets to a lack of awareness about the destination in the region.

For many in Asia, the Indian Ocean destination continues to lie in the shadow of the Maldives, despite being unmistakably in a league of its own.

“Mauritius has an island vibe like the Maldives, but you are not locked into one hotel or archipelago – you can venture out and enjoy land-based activities as well,” said

Lexi Shuttleworth, group marketing manager of Lightfoot Travels, which has been selling the destination for the past nine years.

On top of beach activities – from catamarans to underwater scooters – Shuttleworth said the island also offers ATV rides through national parks and greens for keen golfers.

“You can also go on a safari afterwards and enjoy a two-centre holiday in either Kenya or South Africa,” she said.

As air connectivity from Asia improves, tourism players are making a stronger push for the destination’s visibility in the region. “Plans are to increase visibility of the destination in the Asian market. Direct flights from Hong

Kong, Singapore/Kuala Lumpur and mainland China (Shanghai & Chengdu) offer potentials,” said the MTPA spokesperson.

Air Mauritius inaugurated flights from Singapore after the government of Mauritius and Singapore’s Changi Airport Group partnered to launch the Air Corridor project in 2015. The initiative is focused on developing air traffic in four key areas: Mauritius-Singapore; other Asian markets to Mauritius via Singapore; Africa/Indian Ocean to Singapore via Mauritius; and two-centre holiday traffic from Asia to Africa/Indian Ocean destinations.

“Much like Dubai is the transit hub between Europe and Mauritius, Singapore would play the same role to bring travellers from South-east Asia and North Asia into Mauritius and onward to Africa,” said Air Mauritius’ regional manager, North-east & South-east Asia, Shiri Prakash Rai.

MTPA pointed out that the destination saw a 13.7 per cent year-on-year increase in arrivals from Singapore in 2017, stronger growth than was seen in 2016.

In recent months, the partners behind the Air Corridor project in 2H2018 ran a series of roadshows in South Korea, Japan and Taiwan. As a further sign of its commitment to growing Asian feeders, Mauritius was also present at ITB Asia for the first time this year.

“Several actions have taken place in Asia to promote this concept. Air Mauritius, Changi Airport and the MTPA have conducted a few workshops for the travel trade throughout Asia (China, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore/Malaysia),” the spokesperson said.

With greater promotional efforts and the Air Corridor charged up, Air Mauritius’ Shiri expects traffic from China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand to surge in the coming years.



**Yixin Ng**  
visits  
Mauritius  
and discovers  
an array of  
offerings that  
makes the  
destination a  
complete stay

## The luxury of choice

Mauritius is an island of surprises. If like me you're imagining picturesque beaches and water activities, the good news is Mauritius will surely deliver. However, there is so much more that the island springs on a first-time visitor: a mature hospitality infrastructure, international gourmet concepts, soft adventure and wildlife, and a unique cultural tapestry.

It is this combination of tourism assets, all easily explorable from coast to coast, that sets Mauritius apart from the Maldives, where the appeal is largely in unpopulated hideaway islands.

Despite being a relatively young nation, Mauritius has a rich history. A visit to The Sugar Museum traced the country's history back to Dutch, French and British rule, accompanied by the arrival of slave labour, before the abolishment of slavery in 1835.

The people of Mauritius now celebrate the emancipatory victory in February every year, and the UNESCO-recognised Le Morne Mountain on the island's south-

west, once a place of refuge for slaves, stands as a reminder of the struggles that took place on the island pre-independence.

Tourists have the option to experience the local character and do activities – while still taking comfort in knowing that their retreat back into the dreamy resort bubble is never too far away on this small island.

Ten minutes from the local Grand Baie village on the island's north coast is the Lux Grand Gaube. Here, the brand of luxury was breezy and relaxed, while being uncompromising on design, service and guest satisfaction. You can stroll out to the beach, pick up a snack from the ice-cream stand or burger truck along the way, or choose from the main restaurants and bars, which offer ample space for water-side lounging. On top of having an adults' only area with its own lagoon, the resort is also the first on the island to offer a nail bar for women and a barbershop for men.

In the north-east, the 89-key Constance Prince Maurice is a

decidedly more ornate option. It houses the only floating restaurant in all of Mauritius, a spectacular five-deck, over-water venue named Le Barachois. During my stay, I experienced a private wine and food pairing session in the resort's wine cellar, offered as part of the My Constance Moments collection. Bringing sommelier expertise from table-side to cellar did wonders to prime me for an in-depth introduction to fine wine and cuisine. The cellar, with over 20,000 bottles of wine, is a highlight in itself.

Splitting your time in Mauritius between different resorts is an option if you wish to throw different holiday styles in the mix. The variety of culinary concepts on property and activity options across the island offer more reason to resort hop. For example, Lux Grand Gaube features Inti, the first Peruvian-Argentinian restaurant in the Indian Ocean, while Michelin-star chef Vineet Bhatia, hailed one of the world's best Indian chefs, brought the Amari by Vineet concept to Lux Belle Mare.

**From left**  
Le Barachois at  
Constance Prince  
Maurice; Lux  
Grand Gaube



# A next-gen who 'gets' top-end travel

Her parents named the agency after her and now Charlotte Harris is working side by side veteran mum Jackie Harris to make further strides into Hong Kong's luxury travel market. **Raini Hamdi** finds out how



## **Has it always been the idea that you'd join the company one day?**

Not at all. I studied international development, did a master's in anthropology, and one day as I was doing my job in risk management consulting in Hong Kong I thought, 'this is boring'.

Travel has always been in me. My mum took me in a pram around Amandari (Bali) when it was a construction site. Even while I was doing risk management consulting, I would sneak in a suitcase at the office to travel during the weekends without telling anyone and scout out new cool places. My friends asked me for all the travel recommendations and I thought, 'wow, there is a business in this and it's my mother's'.

So one summer's day (about four years ago), I asked my mum if there was an

opening and she actually discouraged me. I think it's reverse psychology; she said, 'don't do it, it's a lot of hours, you get blamed for everything, the money is not what you'd get if you were in banking or law, go marry someone good' (laughs).

We talked about it and eventually she asked me to write a cover letter, update my CV and come up with a three-year business plan. Two weeks later after dinner she brought up a very thick business plan, while I had only a two-page, written back-to-back, business plan. Somehow we integrated the two. We've now completed 98 per cent of the plan.

## **What's the core aspect?**

Focus on the absolutely top-end clients. Then we joined Virtuoso and we became preferred partners of hotel groups. We

realised what we were doing was right. Our clients are not necessarily price-sensitive, they want the experience, they want to know they are VIPs.

Repeat guests of ours and of the hotels want to walk into the room and be welcomed by the term, 'Welcome back'. The word 'back' could mean the next booking into that hotel.

## **I'm sure you have staff that have been with the company for over a decade and did not handle luxury. How did you pivot?**

It wasn't instant. We were doing a lot of training. We had some system changes and, yes, it did require a switch of the mindset. But we brought staff to shows like this (ILTM Asia Pacific in Singapore last May) and Virtuoso Travel Week, have luxury hotel partners come to the office and explain this

# luxury personality charlotte harris



Charlotte Harris & mum Jackie Harris

new concept to the team, getting them to stay at these hotels, and so on. Then they start to understand it's not just about booking one room category but the next one. How can we upsell, encourage clients to stay in suite because, for an additional \$120 a night, they will get all those amenities and benefits like the Club Lounge and it enhances their experience.

## **What revenue growth as a result, or has there been a substantial rise in revenue per client?**

We have grown a lot. I can tell that you our room bookings are no longer entry-level category, and the experiences clients get are not just handpicked from a brochure. We're really encouraging a dialogue between our team and clients to understand what their likes are and how we can surprise them during their trip.

We've had double-digit growths year-on-year in the last four years. Last year it was about 16 per cent. It's never gotten below 12 per cent in the last 17 years.

## **Are all your clients from Hong Kong?**

Hong Kong and a bit of mainland China. We group the Hong Kong market into

**“**  
**She (mum) is very reputable; she works well with clients and gets them what they want...I come in with no clients, but with a new perspective on how we can reshape the industry.**

two, Hong Kong locals and Hong Kong internationals. Hong Kong locals are multi-generational travellers who would go to, say, Africa once. Hong Kong internationals are people like me and my friends, maybe they attended an international school, were born elsewhere but Hong Kong is their home. For them, getting on a plane is like getting on a bus. (They) always want to travel (and do) a lot of short stays.

We split the market because the language and mentality are different. That's where the master in anthropology comes in handy! It's about matching the client to the right advisor as well. Language, culture and having the same lingo all create a comfort level, which builds trust and relationship.

## **You mentioned 98 per cent of the business plan is completed. What's the two per cent?**

We wanted to change and enhance the branding, but midway through we decided we didn't want to change it too much for cost reasons and historical reasons. We realised we could lose the identity with clients, having built the name for 17 years.

The name Charlotte Travel, to be honest, was the one thing I questioned. The heart and soul of the company is Jackie my mum and I didn't want to overshadow her and for Charlotte Travel to be the name.

## **She named it after you, her only child!**

I had no say, I was at school!

## **So are you running the company now?**

My mum and I work really well together. A lot of people ask how I work with my mum because lots of mums drive their kids mad. At points she does but we work well together. My mum has built a very successful career. She's very reputable; she works well with clients and gets them what they want. I come in with building relationships with partners (and with sales & marketing drive).

## **How are you different from your mum?**

I try to look outside the box. Mum's very focused on operations, on getting the clients what they want, making sure they are happy. I come in with no clients, but with a new perspective on how we can reshape the industry. There are over 1,000 agents in Hong Kong itself. In Hong Kong everyone is comparing with online players, Ctrip or any OTAs, retail agencies, and even though I say our clients are not price-sensitive, they still compare prices. Everyone, even if you are a luxury traveller, wants a great deal.

I come in with the thought of building a really structured training programme for new staff, and not only hiring from within the industry but outside, people who just get luxury travel and are able to translate that to clients, people who show empathy but are switched on enough to close a sale.

## **Any regrets?**

No. I was born to do this.

## CRAZY RICH ASIANS PAVES WAY FOR RICH LOCAL EXPERIENCES



The cast at the Singapore premiere for *Crazy Rich Asians*

The premiere of the movie, *Crazy Rich Asians*, adapted from the satirical novel by Singapore-American author Kevin Kwan about the upper echelons of Singapore society, has sparked a boost in tourism promotions for the country.

The movie features an all-Asian cast and portrays scenes in Singapore's luxurious spaces, aside from down-to-earth neighbourhoods.

It serves "to get the conversation going about the real Singapore and pique interest in visiting the country", said Lynette Pang, assistant chief

executive, marketing group, Singapore Tourism Board (STB).

Arron Goh, founder of The Inside Access, opined: "With the premiere of *Crazy Rich Asians*, there will probably be a surge in travellers interested to check out what sort of luxury experiences there are in Singapore. That would be good for The Inside Access as what we offer will appeal to those looking to experience something different."

But rather than limiting themselves to

Singapore's luxe offerings, trade players such as Goh see an opportunity to promote "rich" local experiences.

"There is more to Singapore than the high life – it is too one-dimensional. I would want to show these travellers how multi-faceted Singapore is, whether it is in terms of our urban landscape or our dining scene, rather than just focusing on what luxury experiences Singapore can offer," continued Goh.

Pang concurred, remarking: "(It) is not just about the opulence and luxury showcased in the film, but Singapore's actual richness in terms of our diversity, as well as the depth and breadth of experiences for both locals and visitors."

Tours that have sprung up from this movie include a 12-day Crazy Rich Singapore Culture & Thailand Beaches itinerary by Indus Travel, which spends four days touring the city's historic sights, traditional cuisines and natural wonders.

Wok 'n' Stroll has launched a Crazy Rich Asians Behind the Scenes Food Tour that treats its participants to food mentioned in the novel and movie – carrot cake (the local version), *roti prata* and Malay *kuehs* at venues such as Newton Hawker Centre and Joo Chiat – as well as more upscale ones like Michelin Bib Gourmand restaurant New Ubin Seafood at CHIJMES and a bar on Keong Saik Road.

"When I first read the book, I knew that we must have a food tour about *Crazy Rich Asians*. Now it's a 3D experience – there's the book, the movie and the tour," said Wok 'n' Stroll founder and CEO Karni Tomer.

"Singapore looks so attractive and sexy in the movie. We want to give the audience the experience of being a crazy-rich Asian for one evening," she said. – **Pamela Chow**

## Private gastronomic parties with celebrity chefs

Singapore-based The Inside Access is offering Insider Experiences, a menu of exclusive events ranging from yacht sailings to closed-door parties graced by Michelin chefs.

With its close relationships to culinary pundits in the region, the company said it can bring its restaurant partners to any venue – on land, at sea, or in the comfort of a residence – and notch up the gastronomic experience.

A recent addition is its Chef On Board series, featuring a sundowner cruise with *hors d'oeuvres* prepared by a culinary team or an executive chef from a notable restaurant, including names such as Bistro du Vin, Salted and Hung, Jinzakaya, Sushi Jin and Esquina. The Inside Access also provides a team of in-house bartenders creating bespoke cocktails on site.

On land, its Chef's Tables programme treats esteemed clients to raved creations by renowned chefs.

Recently organised events include a 26-course dinner for 12 guests prepared by André Chang before the closure of Restaurant André Singapore, a Christmas dinner in collaboration with two-Michelin-starred Les Amis, and wine-and-dine at The House on Sathorn – an iconic 128-year-old mansion in Bangkok – led by chef Fatih Tutak.

It also offers 'Unparalleled' meals in booked-out restaurants, 'Uncover' food tours that explore hidden street food gems and 'Priority Access' that provides exclusive dining experiences in places behind closed doors, such as Odette's kitchens. – **Pamela Chow**



# RAFFLES HOTEL SINGAPORE TO REOPEN WITH THREE CELEBRITY CHEF RESTAURANTS



Creations by (from left) Jereme Leung, Alain Ducasse and Anne-Sophie Pic

Ahead of its scheduled reopening scheduled in 1Q2019, Raffles Hotel Singapore has unveiled new dining concepts, including three helmed by celebrity chefs.

Where the 122-year-old Bar & Billiard Room once stood, chef Alain Ducasse will present his first Mediterranean sharing and grill concept in the world, BBR by Alain Ducasse.

Paying homage to the restaurant's glory days as a club during British colonial rule, dining will also be accompanied by a lively bar scene. Serving sharing plates and regular-sized dishes, the new concept will feature an open kitchen with charcoal grills and wood-fired pizza ovens.

Three-Michelin-star chef Anne-Sophie Pic will debut her entry into Asia with the opening

of La Dame de Pic in the hotel's dining room in the Main Building. The restaurant will boast "an elaborate and diverse collection of pairings", using wines, cocktails, whisky, sake, tea, coffee, dashi, broth and consommés.

Marking celebrity MasterChef Jereme Leung's return to Singapore, 藝 yi by Jereme Leung will open on Level 3 of the newly restored Raffles Arcade. The restaurant will use single sourced and seasonal ingredients and "create authentic taste profiles enhanced by modern culinary techniques", Leung said.

The refreshed Raffles Arcade will welcome the Butcher's Block, which will focus on fine cuts of single sourced meats. The restaurant will feature communal tables and a wine library housing more than 100 different wine labels.

The hotel will also bring back signature concepts with some enhancements.

For example, Tiffin Room, part of Raffles Hotel Singapore's history since 1892, will return with a refreshed semi-buffet lunch and a la carte dinner, specialties served in tiffin boxes, tableside service by chefs, and a restored decor.

Home of the Singapore Sling for over a hundred years, the Long Bar's plantation-inspired décor will be refreshed, and the famous Long Bar counter restored.

Established as a tribute to famous writers that have come through the doors of Raffles Hotel Singapore over the years, Writers Bar will be expanded to a full bar with bespoke craft cocktails, wines and spirits.

## How to survive the world's longest commercial flight

Singapore Airlines (SIA) has partnered US wellness brand Canyon Ranch to introduce a new level of comfort and relaxation to ultra-longhaul travel.

The programme was rolled out on SIA's Singapore-New York service, which took off on October 11 as the world's longest commercial flight with a duration of 18 hours 45 minutes.

The partnership also extends to nonstop services from Singapore to Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Given the longer flight duration and reduced body movement, SIA teamed up with



Canyon Ranch experts and nutritionists, who develop cuisine that focuses on nutrition and hydration. These are offered in addition to SIA's own meal selections.

Sleep strategies and specific light settings are also used to help customers in all cabin classes improve the duration and quality of rest. Guided stretching exercises, led by Canyon Ranch exercise physiologists, are accessible via personal seat-back entertainment systems.

This is the first time Canyon Ranch is taking its wellness methods to the air, after having serviced guests on land and at sea, according to CEO of Canyon Ranch, Susan Docherty.

The Canyon Ranch team of experts are from integrative medicine, exercise, nutrition and other disciplines, collectively known as Canyon Ranch Wellness Architects, and includes the 17th US surgeon general.



## DESARU COAST ANCHORS PREMIUM AIM ON ONE&ONLY

A second One&Only resort in Asia in 13 years will open in Desaru Coast, which aims to be a premium integrated destination resort.

Located in Malaysia's south-eastern region in the state of Johor, Desaru Coast spans over 1,578ha along a 17km unspoiled beachfront. To date, the fledgling destination has also secured a Hard Rock Hotel, a Westin and an Anantara which, along with a Desaru Coast Conference Centre, are expected to open from the fourth quarter.

What has opened in Desaru Coast since 2016 are a 27-hole and an 18-hole championship course designed by golf luminaries Ernie Els and Vijay Singh, a 9.3ha waterfront retail village and, just last month, an adventure waterpark.

At press time, the opening date for One&Only Desaru Coast has not been announced. Originally to be managed by Aman, the property will offer 42 suites, two luxury suites and a four-bedroom villa, and 50 One&Only Private Homes available for purchase.

News that One&Only is going to be in Desaru – a name that conjures wholesome fun, good value and a down-to-earth vibe rather than glamour and impeccability – draws some gasps from luxury travel planners. One said it was “like Four Seasons coming to Legoland”, while others eschew the improbability for the hope it will make Desaru Coast a more interesting destination for high-end travellers.

The residential sale component is certainly a pull factor for One&Only. In an interview during ILTM Asia Pacific in Singapore in May, Philippe Zuber, president & COO of One&Only, who is leading the brand to extend its beach resorts offering into three other offerings,

namely, private homes, nature resorts and urban resorts, told *TTG Asia Luxury* that any new property One&Only operates would have private homes for sale as part of the project. The recent renovation of One&Only Le Saint Geran in Mauritius included the development of these residences; there are also private homes in upcoming properties One&Only Mandarin, Mexico, One&Only Kea Island, Greece, and One&Only Portonovi, Montenegro.

“We are starting to sell some of these units now, and will go to market in September or October. We believe in this model and will continuously look for sites where we can accommodate this development,” said Zuber.

Moreover, Singapore has become a key Asian market for One&Only, apart from Japan and, increasingly, China. Desaru Coast is just next-door to the Lion City, with Desaru Development Holdings' CEO, Roslina Arbak, confirming that a ferry terminal linking Desaru Coast to Singapore's Tanah Merah Ferry Terminal, which is close to Singapore Changi International, is going on as planned. Desaru Development Holdings is a subsidiary of Desaru Development Corporation, a joint venture among the Johor state government, prominent Malaysian architect/planner Esa Mohamed, and Themed Attractions Resorts & Hotels, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Khazanah Nasional.

While some may view a One&Only in Desaru as fish out of the water, Zuber shows it is actually in keeping with the brand's DNA. “We don't want to be in mainstream destinations; we want to surprise our clients,” he said, when asked how One&Only picks ‘unique’ locations. “No one expected us to go to Rwanda

(One&Only Nyungwe House, opening end of this year, and One&Only Gorilla's Nest, opening 1Q2019, its first new nature resorts offerings after Emirates One&Only Wolgan Valley in Australia). We are going where others are not. Of course, the site must be spectacular, the project must respect the environment and we want it to be long term, so we want to have the guarantee as well that it's something to last.”

One&Only Desaru Coast is the brand's first expansion in Asia since One&Only Reethi Rah Maldives opened nearly 13 years ago. Zuber said he has a long wishlist in Asia and this includes Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia and Thailand.

On Malaysia, he said: “We believe Malaysia lately has become a very interesting destination. It has a lot to offer and is not mainstream. Many people have not been to Malaysia and we know our clients want to discover it.”

Said David Song, founder & managing director of luxury travel company Beyond X Boundaries Singapore: “I'm not surprised One&Only has decided to penetrate Asia given the newfound wealth of the Far East with emerging markets like Thailand, Indonesia and India.”

Another luxury buyer, Justin Moxley, CEO of Lufhoric Malaysia, said Desaru Coast could possibly be “a destination resort with nice golf or a nice place for people to escape from Singapore for the weekend”.

“I know some HNWIs (high net worth individuals) that go up there for events but I haven't heard of someone going there for a luxury holiday specifically. If a resort like One&Only sets up there and more of that stature develops there, with the right support, it could be an interesting destination. You can stay at the resort, then head into Singapore for shopping and dining and return the same day,” said Moxley. – **Raini Hamdi**

## Anantara's private jet experience takes flight



Anantara Hotels, Resorts & Spas, in partnership with MJets, has launched private jet experiences taking guests from Bangkok to Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

The new offering combines private jet transportation with stays at the Anantara Kihavah Maldives Villas and Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle Resort in Sri Lanka.

Larger groups will cruise in the Gulfstream V jet, with a three-zone cabin environment for working, dining, entertaining and resting. Amenities include shower facilities, fully reclining beds and entertainment systems. Service is provided by two flight attendants.

Cessna Citation X, which carries up to eight passengers, features fully reclining body club seats, entertainment systems and one flight attendant.

Upon touching down at Colombo International airport, guests are transported via private limousine to an ocean-view villa at Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle on Sri Lanka's southernmost shore.

From here, guests have the option to jet off to the Maldives. At Anantara Kihavah Maldives Villas, they will stay in overwater villas. The Anantara Private Jet Experience can be tailored to suit each guest or scaled to accommodate larger groups.

## Westin Maldives opens

The Westin Maldives Miriandhoo Resort opened last month.

Located in the Baa Atoll, a designated UNESCO Biosphere Reserve site, the resort features 70 villas and suites, 41 on island and 29 overwater. Poised over the sea on stilts and with an area of almost 200 m<sup>2</sup> each, the overwater suites are among the largest a resort has to offer in the Baa Atoll region. Assembled by award-winning Milan-based architects PEIA Associati, the resort's design takes inspiration from the ocean with a visionary approach towards environmental sustainability.



## POPINJAYS DESCENDS ON THE MURRAY, HONG KONG

The Murray, Hong Kong in July unveiled its "crowning glory", a rooftop restaurant and bar housed within a glass pavilion on the hotel's 25<sup>th</sup> floor.

Joining four other dining concepts at the new hotel, Popinjays offers European cuisine and creative cocktails, views of the Central skyline – and a swanky venue for city slickers to see and be seen.

"The name Popinjays references the resident cockatoos in the neighbourhood and their sociable nature, symbolising the venue as a gathering place for guests who want to see and be seen...Popinjays is fast becoming a favourite among the city's movers and shakers," said Maxine Howe, the hotel's director of sales and marketing.

The restaurant is helmed by head chef Didier Quennouelle, whose cuisine pays homage to European gastronomy and time-honoured French techniques. Weekly seasonal degustation menus are also available.

And at the bar, head mixologist Manuel Saavedra-Ramirez's signature drinks list, *The Aviary Collection*, is inspired by flight and showcases refreshing flavour combinations.

For private events and celebratory social occasions, The Aviary is an exclusive private dining room that can host up to 14 guests.

Facilities at the hotel have been opening in stages since January. Among the more recent additions are an indoor lap pool and vitality pool at Wellness at The Murray, which were launched in August.

The 17m-long pool features a biophilic design, while the vitality pool is equipped with air and water jet features, and is heated to 38°C for a restorative experience.

The new five-star hotel, which occupies a former government building, is also polishing its service offerings to place itself at the forefront of change in the luxury accommodation space.

"While The Murray, Hong Kong is a new hotel, we are well-recognised for the hotel's design and heritage pedigree as well as our personalised approach to service, which are attributes central to the brand," Howe remarked.

"Our Niccolo City Insiders are a new breed of concierge and the team is happy to impart personal tips to help guests discover Hong Kong's hidden gems."

At the same time, retail experiences continue to be an important part of the travel experience for high net worth individuals, Howe pointed out, citing Bain & Company's Luxury Goods Worldwide Market Study, Spring 2018, which showed that China is expected to continue driving the demand for luxury goods, with a growth of over 20 per cent seen in the segment versus the rest of Asia (11 per cent).

Recognising this, the hotel also offers exclusive VIP access and personalised service at Lane Crawford and Joyce Boutiques as part of its signature offerings to bring the city's coveted lifestyle experiences to guests. – Yixin Ng

# WALDORF ASTORIA PUSHES INTO BANGKOK'S LUXURY HOTEL SPACE

Waldorf Astoria Bangkok officially opened its doors in August, the latest in a growing swathe of luxury hotels that have launched or are launching soon in the Thai capital.

The first Waldorf Astoria in South-east Asia and fourth in Asia-Pacific after Shanghai, Beijing and Chengdu in China, the hotel is Hilton's partnership with Magnolia Quality Development Corporation (MQDC), which is the property development arm of Thailand's Charoen Pokphand conglomerate.

"We have been looking for flagships in South-east Asia for some time," commented Alan Watts, Asia-Pacific president of Hilton. "Bangkok is one of the most competitive markets in Asia, and Waldorf Astoria will redefine luxury not only for Bangkok but also South-east Asia."

But Waldorf Astoria is not the only luxury hotel brand that has come knocking on Bangkok's doors. Even within its prominent Ratchadamri location, Waldorf Astoria Bangkok already calls The St Regis Bangkok its immediate neighbour, while the recently opened Park Hyatt Bangkok and Rosewood Bangkok (opening 2019) – both of which stand less than a kilometre away – are a constant reminder of the level of competition crowding Bangkok's luxury hotel market, not to mention upcoming hotels like Capella Bangkok (opening 4Q2018) and Four Seasons Bangkok at Chao Phraya River (opening 2019).

Hilton is, however, maintaining "an extremely bullish outlook" on Thailand, including the luxury segment, vice president, operations, luxury and lifestyle Asia-Pacific Daniel Welk said. "Look at the number of arrivals coming into Bangkok, which hits 35 million last year and is expected to reach 38 to 39 million this year," he said. "The city itself is dynamic

and offers amazing products, and the infrastructure is improving."

And if there's anything that growing competition has brought, it's greater clarity for Hilton's hotel brands, Welk stated. "The swim lanes are more defined now," he said.

After Bangkok, Hilton has another three additional Waldorf Astoria hotels in the pipeline for Asia – the Maldives (opening February 2019), Bali and Jakarta (both opening 2020).

Asia overall is a region of strong growth for Hilton's luxury brands, said Martin Rinck, global head, luxury & lifestyle group. There are some 35 Conrad properties worldwide, and 12 out of 18 currently under development are located in Asia.

Canopy, the new lifestyle brand launched in 2017, is now Hilton's "fastest-growing brand" with 30 under development and Chengdu will be the first city in Asia to welcome the brand this year, Rinck added.

A new luxury brand, LXR, will debut this year-end as Hilton's collection of independently established properties with their own identities.

Waldorf Astoria Bangkok has 171 rooms and suites housed between levels six and 15 in Magnolia Ratchadamri Boulevard, a 60-storey, mixed-use luxury complex that sits on a prime strip of land on Ratchadamri Road next to Grand Hyatt Erawan, overlooking the Royal Bangkok Sports Club.

Renowned architect André Fu is responsible for the design of its interiors, while New York-based AvroKO is the creative force behind the trio of distinctive dining outlets perched at the hotel's top three floors from levels 55 to 57.

Beyond the topmost floors, the hotel also features another three restaurant concepts.

Room rates start from 13,000 baht (US\$397), plus applicable government taxes and service charges. – **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**



## Caravelle Saigon to unveil new look

A heritage icon in Ho Chi Minh City, Caravelle Saigon, is undergoing an extensive renovation, the first of its redesigned spaces scheduled to be unveiled in the first quarter of 2019.

All 303 rooms in the hotel's Opera Wing, together with its ballrooms, meeting rooms and function areas, are being refreshed. Guestrooms will be "significantly upgraded" and refurbished with expanded bathrooms, as well as plush interiors.

The previous major enhancement on the property was in 1998, when a 24-storey tower was built to complement the original 10-storey building and accommodate more guests.

Caravelle Saigon, a WorldHotels' affiliate hotel, holds decades of history, having once housed the Australian Embassy, the New Zealand Embassy, and the Saigon bureaus of NBC, ABC and CBS during the 1960s, which made it a notable communications hub in the Vietnam War.

## Mandarin Oriental to check into Phuket

Come 2022, Mandarin Oriental, Phuket will open, located on one of the few undeveloped beachfront sites left along Millionaire's Mile's winding coastline, the hotel company announced in a statement.

Occupying 9.5ha of land in Laem Singh Bay, all the hotel's 105 rooms, including 37 pool villas, will provide views of the Andaman Sea.

The site encloses a white sand beach with rocky outcrops, providing access for snorkelling and swimming.

Mandarin Oriental, Phuket will also offer an all-day dining venue, speciality restaurant, sunset bar, beach club, spa, fitness centre, kids' club, two outdoor swimming pools, as well as flexible function facilities.



The people behind Bangkok Astoria Bangkok (from left): AvroKO's William Harris, Hilton's Martin Rinck, MQDC's Visit Malaisirirat, Hilton's Alan Watts and AFSO's André Fu



## SLEEPING UNDER THE SEA AT THE MURAKA

The Muraka at Conrad Maldives Rangali Island, believed to be the world's first undersea residence, is now open to the privileged few who can afford it.

The two-level residence is a step ahead of other such accommodations – say Atlantis The Palm in Dubai, which is an aquarium-style underwater room, or The Manta Resort in Zanzibar, which features just a double-bed in the undersea level – in that its undersea area is a 105m<sup>2</sup> suite featuring a king-size bedroom, living area, bathroom and spiral staircase that leads to the upper level.

The upper level, which is above-sea, features two additional bedrooms and bathrooms, powder room, gym, butler's quarter, private security quarters, integrated living room, kitchen, bar and dining, and an infinity pool. The entire two-level residence is 650m<sup>2</sup> in area and can accommodate nine guests. It costs US\$15 million to develop.

Hilton Asia-Pacific vice president operations-luxury and lifestyle, Daniel Welk, would not disclose a rate although there were reports of a night costing as deep – we mean steep – as US\$50,000. "It's about personalisation and hyper exclusivity, not about price but an experience that cannot be replicated. The rate really depends on the depth of the personalisation," said Welk, in an interview at ILTM Asia Pacific in Singapore where The Muraka was introduced to Asia-Pacific buyers.

He added: "We've been humbled by the

reaction to The Muraka. We're seeing a lot of enquiries from the resort's repeat guests and, outside of that, from people all around the world who love the Maldives and return year after year. For them, especially the millennials and instagramers, it's something new, kind of bragging rights but I believe this isn't a gimmick. The thought of sleeping under the sea is quite revolutionary. This isn't an aquarium. You're fully submersed in the ocean, with 180-degree panoramic views of the ocean."

The villa is about 650m offshore and seven metres deep, where visibility "is typically good", he said.

Architect and designer Ahmed Saleem, director of Crown Company, a local Maldivian firm that owns the hotel, envisioned The Muraka 13 years ago when he built Ithaa Undersea Restaurant at Conrad Rangali, according to Welk. "We're fortunate to have an owner who is as pioneering as Crown, whom we've worked with for 20 years. We were the first international brand to enter the Maldives, first as Hilton Rangali, which became Conrad Rangali, the first hotel to build overwater on stilts, and the first to launch the undersea restaurant 13 years ago," he said.

"Ithaa did wonders for the Maldives as a destination and we're continuing the spirit of revolutionising the travel experience with The Muraka." – Raini Hamdi

## Doing all-inclusive in style at new Kudadoo Maldives

Kudadoo Maldives Private Island opens its doors this month on a private island next to sister property Hulawahi, introducing an all-inclusive offer and new eco-conscious standards such as solar panels capable of fully powering the island.

Its all-inclusive offer further sets it apart from high-end competition, said Bradley Calder, general manager of both resorts. "We are going up against the big boys but guests won't have to worry about being price-gouged on the extras."

For Kudadoo, being all-inclusive does not mean scrimping on the extras. Guests can enjoy a broad range of activities from wellness meditation and treatments in the Himalayan salt room to private excursions, snorkelling trips, diving, kitesurfing, and more, he said.

The resort is designed by Japanese architect Yuji Yamasaki, and features 13 one-bedroom and two two-bedroom villas, each complete with 44m<sup>2</sup> lap pools and overwater decks.

Another highlight is its unscripted dining concept, where "there are no menus, only suggestions". Guests get to dictate what they want to eat, how they would like the food prepared, and where they wish to dine, whether on a private sandbank or at The Retreat.

Months ahead of its scheduled opening, Calder told *TTG Asia Luxury* during ILTM Asia Pacific that the property had already received an island buyout request for a corporate CEO retreat.

A big draw for corporates, he said, are 10 additional overwater rooms specially for support staff servicing buyouts.

When not occupied by support staff, these rooms are used to house additional guests. "If you have a third person, we assign you an overwater room instead of wheeling in a separate bed," he said. – Yixin Ng



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