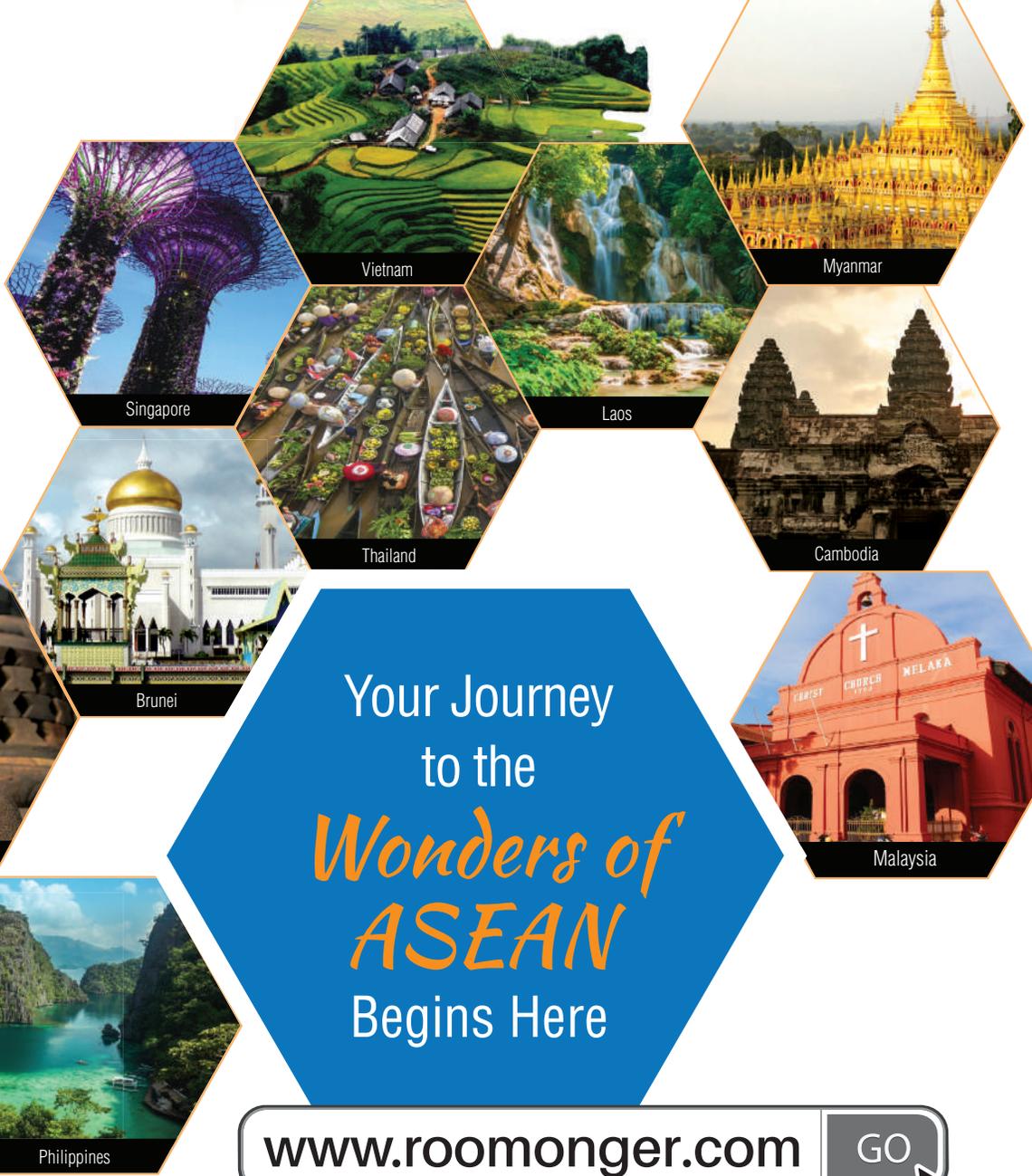




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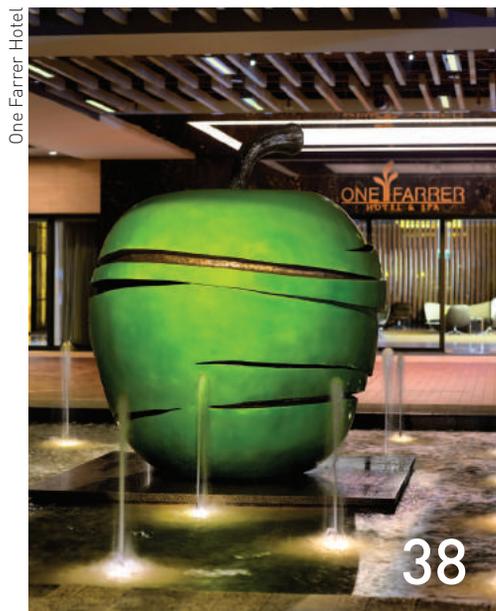
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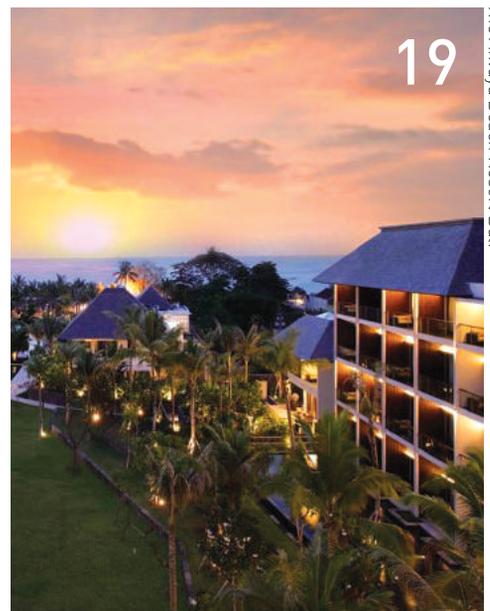
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Foreword



Dear Travel Trade Partners,

As another eventful year for our region's exciting travel industry draws to a close, it is our pleasure to move forward into 2019 with this 11th edition of the Asian Tourism Expert Guide (ATEG).

With so many tourism developments unfolding in Asia, how do you even begin to track what's happening? This is where we hope to help. Our award-winning editorial team has worked hard to bring you the key updates you need.

For this issue, we have rounded up 19 destinations across the region to present a succinct analysis of each. You can access tourism performance updates that are accompanied by interesting infographics, insightful perspectives of inbound players on 2019's business outlook, hot new products in the market, and the must-do, must-see and must-eat in each destination.

This annual guide has, for the past decade, helped our travel trade readers in their programming and business plans, and we hope it will be the same for you.

We welcome your feedback on what you liked best and how we can improve content to make the next edition even better. Meanwhile, happy reading!

Warmest regards

Darren Ng
Managing Director
TTG Asia Media



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KAWAH IJEN - EAST JAVA

Australia

By Adelaine Ng



Great Walks of Australia

The Arkaba Walk in outback South Australia

Australia's A\$125.9 (US\$89) billion tourism industry continues to see strong growth, welcoming a record 9.1 million international visitors for the year ending July 2018, up six per cent from the previous year.

In another first, China dethroned New Zealand as Australia's largest source of visitors as of February 2018. China alone accounted for 52 per cent of total growth in international visitor spend during the year.

While visitor numbers and spending went up, the average length of visitor stay has declined by four per cent for the year ending March 2018 to 32 days.

It is predicted that close to 12.8 million international tourists will visit Australia in 2023-24, with a huge proportion coming from China with 2.8 million visitors.

FIVE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- 1 Australia had a captive audience of hundreds of millions when it launched a new commercial during America's Superbowl in February 2018. As a result, the US version of the Tourism Australia website received record numbers of visitors and drove over 33,000 leads to Australian tourism businesses and key partners, which is likely to lead to more bookings in the coming year.
- 2 Australia and Vietnam signed a new strategic partnership in March, aimed at deepening ties in tourism among other things. Both countries agreed to encourage the opening of more direct air routes between the two major cities and to participate in the Vietnam-Australia Work and Holiday program, which allows citizens aged 18 to 40 to work and holiday in each other's country for up to a year.
- 3 Tourism Australia signed a strategic Chinese partnership in August 2018 with Mafengwo.com, a leading social travel platform in China and a key shaper of the Chinese FIT travel market. The agreement

will see a dedicated Australia travel page on Mafengwo's app. This will further help Tourism Australia with marketing insights for Chinese travellers, Australia's most important market.

4 Singapore Airlines and Tourism Australia signed an A\$11 million (US\$7.9 million) marketing deal in September 2018 to jointly fund tourism campaigns in Australia's top inbound markets over three years. These markets include Singapore, China, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia and the UK, considered key to Australia's tourism sector's growth and are expected to convert into bookings.

5 UnDiscover Australia was launched in September 2018 by Tourism Australia (TA) to attract repeat tourists from Asia, inviting them to explore sites away from popular city hotspots. The A\$10 million campaign targeting high value travellers in India, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia is the single largest, targeted campaign TA has ran in the region, promising to boost numbers to less visited spots.



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PROJECTIONS FOR 2019



Peter Shelley
Managing director
Australian Tourism
Export Council

“One of the positive shifts we are seeing in our inbound market is greater regional dispersal as more visitors, particularly from our bigger markets like China, look to explore Australia beyond the major cities. We will also see a steady growth from newer markets like India, which continues to be the one to watch.”



John O'Sullivan
Managing director
Tourism Australia

“Markets across Asia continue to be among our best performing ones and in the coming year we will be seeking to build on the success of recent campaigns in Greater China as well our recently launched UnDiscover Australia campaign for South and South-east Asia showcasing the country's unusual, unfamiliar and unexpected attractions and experiences.”



Kevin Xu
General manager
Grand City Tours

“I believe 2019 will be a challenging year for Australia's tourism market. An unfavourable global political environment and weak economy have seriously affected tourism consumption. On the other hand, the number of FIT tourists has increased substantially in 2018, with increasing demand for more fragmented local destination products for Chinese and Asian inbound tourists.”

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

774,400

The total visitor arrivals in the month of July 2018, up 3.8 percent compared to the same period in the previous year

275

The number of hotel projects underway as at September 2018, adding 48,128 rooms across the country, according to STR Global

80

The number of daily flights between Melbourne and Sydney, the most frequently travelled domestic route in Australia

101 million

The number of views on social media of the Dundee commercial that was first aired at America's Superbowl in February 2018

US\$30 billion

The amount in visitor spending in the year ending March 2018, a strong year-on-year increase of six per cent

THE EXPERT RECOMMENDS



Teresa Zamora
Senior travel manager
Exclusive Travel Group

MUST EAT

The lobster rolls in Supernormal in Melbourne's Flinders Lane because they simply melt in your mouth. Head over also to Porteno in Surry Hills, Sydney for their delicious ribs.

MUST SEE

Sydney Harbour because it is stunningly beautiful with the iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge and Sydney Opera House. If you are in Western Australia, then check out the Kimberley, well known for the rugged ranges and dramatic gorges.

MUST STAY

Saffire Freycinet, a luxury hotel in Tasmania, which offers unbelievable experiences such as eating freshly-shucked oysters while standing in knee-deep waters.

Below:
Sydney Harbour Bridge



ErnkSandstrom/Shutterstock.com

WHAT'S NEW

The Collectionist Hotel, Sydney, New South Wales

Hotels do not get much more interesting than this custom property in Sydney's inner-city precinct where no two rooms are alike. Created by seven designers and 13 artists, guests are invited to choose between 39 rooms based on the style, colour, texture and design before they even check in. The hotel's "choose your own experience" concept was inspired by the owner's car-hire experience in the US, which allowed close inspection and a high level of flexibility at the pick-up point.

Field of Light Albany, Western Australia

The illuminating installation that has been a tourism magnet in Uluru now also performs in Western Australia's southernmost city of Albany, atop Mount Clarence overlooking the city. Created by British artist Bruce Munro, the installation pays homage to the Anzacs who departed from Albany for the Great War. It will be exhibited until Anzac Day in April 2019, coinciding with WA's peak wildflower season and the conclusion of commemorations marking 100 years since the war.

Mount Mulligan Lodge, Queensland

Combining country and luxury, Mount Mulligan Lodge is built on 28,000 hectares of working cattle property that sits at the foothills of Atherton Tablelands, about a three-hour drive west of Cairns. Opening in January 2019, the lodge takes 24 guests in 12 luxury suites and features an infinity pool. Experiences on offer include four-wheel driving, cattle herding and bush walking. Each room comes with its own vehicle for exploring the rugged terrains.

Barangaroo House Sydney, New South Wales

Four years in the making, this striking three-level restaurant in Sydney is designed to look like wide bowls stacked on top of each other is the latest venture from celebrity chef Matt Moran. Each floor has its own unique character starting with the House Bar at the bottom, the restaurant Bea in the middle and Smoke, the cocktail bar sitting at the open top. Highlights include indigenous ingredients on many plates, a 400-strong wine list and breathtaking views to the harbour.

Spirits of the Red Sand, Queensland

Billed as Australia's newest and most spectacular Aboriginal live theatre and dinner experience, Spirits of the Red Sand has its guests literally moving through diverse sets of a 19th century village to learn the story of Jarrah and his brothers. There is also interactive time provided in an Aboriginal village to learn aspects of traditional Aboriginal life, including the opportunity to participate in fire lighting, spear throwing and painting a boomerang with an elder or guide. This venue is located halfway between Gold Coast and Brisbane, a 40-minute drive from either city.

Harry Potter and the Cursed Child, Melbourne, Victoria

Launching in January 2019, Melbourne will be the third city in the world to watch this highly acclaimed play, which won a record-breaking nine Olivier Awards. It is presented in two parts, designed to be seen in order on the same day (matinee and evening) or on two consecutive evenings. The plot reveals Harry Potter as an overworked employee of the Ministry of Magic, a husband and father of three school-age children, with the family dealing with darkness from unexpected places.



From top: The Collectionist Hotel, Sydney; Spirits of the Red Sand, Queensland; Harry Potter and the Cursed Child, Melbourne, Victoria

Matthew Murphy

SURPRISING THEME

Adventure in nature

Most tourists stay in the cities or drive along Australia's coastal destinations but the country also has much to offer those who fancy a walk. In fact, there are entire travel books dedicated to great walks in Australia. Landscapes include tropical rainforests, long beaches, rugged mountains and the dry but breathtaking middle country.

Just 90 minutes away from Sydney for example, find the Blue Mountains National Park where one of the walks will have you trekking down the side of a cliff while facing a stairway cut into the mountains. Australia even offers Swiss-like alpine scenery with Tasmania's Overland Track, situated in the Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park, widely acclaimed to be one of the world's best bushwalks.

Brunei

By S Puvaneswary



Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque & Yayasan Shopping Complex, Bandar Seri Begawan Brunei Darussalam

The total number of air arrivals to the Sultanate in 1Q2018 totalled 70,729, an increase of 4.1 per cent compared to the same period in 2017. The increase is mainly driven by China, Hong Kong, South Korea and Japan which contributed to a 40.5 per cent increase.

Two major international sporting events held in the destination, namely The Richard Mille Brunei Championship and Korea Ladies Professional Golf Association tournament, have been credited for drawing the spike in tourist arrivals.

On the other hand, travellers from South-east Asia, Australia, New Zealand and longhaul markets declined in numbers.

The top five source markets which registered the highest arrival numbers during 1Q2018 are Malaysia, China, Indonesia, Philippines and Singapore. These five countries contributed 70 per cent share of total arrivals.

WHAT'S NEW

Mulia Hotel

This four-star property with 145 guest rooms, began operating in January 2018. It features an outdoor pool, full-service male-only spa, a 24-hour fitness center and two restaurants. Its grand ballroom can seat 600 people for a banquet. It is a short drive from Brunei International Airport and within close proximity to the International Convention Centre.

The Capital Residence Suites

This property which offers both hotel rooms and service residence has expanded with a new block of 42 hotel rooms this year. Also new are a swimming pool and a restaurant. The expansion brings the total number of hotel rooms to 58 while the number of service residence units remain at six. The Capital Residence Suites is a 15-minute drive from Brunei International Airport. Services include complimentary airport transfer upon arrival and departure, complimentary shuttle service to a few tourist attractions in the city and butler service for hotel guests.

Taman Mahkota Jubli Emas

Celebrated as a new park in the

capital, this 12-hectare riverfront park is equipped with walkways, exercise equipment and a children's playground. Located behind Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque, the park lights up at night.

SURPRISING THEME

An underwater adventure

The Sultanate offers shallow coral dives which are perfect for inexperienced divers as well as more challenging reef and wreck dives. Due to little fishing done in Brunei waters, many diving sites are still in pristine condition. It is also very easy to get to the dive sites as Brunei is a compact country. From Bandar Seri Begawan, it is about 30 minutes to the beach, and about a 30-minute boat ride to the dive area. Dive sites include Abana Reef, 15 minutes by boat out of Muara Harbour; Pelong Island, 20 minutes by boat out of Muara Harbour; an oil rig wreck, 30 minutes by boat out of Muara Harbour.

Cambodia

By Marissa Carruthers



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Bayon Castle at Angkor in Siem Reap, Cambodia

Cambodia welcomed more than three million international visitors in the first six months of 2018, with China leading the pack, registering a year-on-year increase of 12.7 per cent, according to the latest figures from the Ministry of Tourism.

China remained the top source market, with 931,763 visitors from the country making up 31 per cent of total foreign arrivals. The Chinese inbound market saw a year-on-year hike of 75.8 per cent.

Although visitors from Vietnam dropped by 1.5 per cent in the first half of 2018, it remained Cambodia's second largest source market with a total of 386,614 tourists during this period.

America was the top performing Western market, with 133,634 tourist arrivals – a 1.2 per cent dip. France followed, with 85,906 visitors, representing a three per cent year-on-year increase.

The Ministry of Tourism is targeting for 6.2 million foreign visitors in 2018, and aims to surpass the seven-million mark by 2020.

FIVE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- 1 Sihanouk International Airport opened its refurbished passenger terminal in June under the first phase of a five-year development programme as the airport welcomes more passengers. In 2017, it reported 115 per cent year-on-year growth. The building has increased its capacity by 80 per cent, including a revamped check-in area and boarding lounge.
- 2 The government issued a directive in June to regulate the use of service fees in the bid to increase transparency between tourism businesses and customers. Hotels, guesthouses and restaurants that charge service fees must have a valid business license and certificate of quality from the Ministry of Tourism.
- 3 In March, Siem Reap and Macau signed a memorandum of understanding to form a sister city partnership to promote tourism and trade. It is hoped that the relationship will lure more tourists to temple town, with Siem Reap already holding 23 sister city titles with Chinese cities and provinces.
- 4 The construction of a seaport in Kampot province started in August. Slated for completion by the end of 2019, the port aims to serve tourists wanting to connect with destinations in Vietnam and Thailand, which in turn drives tourism into the country. In 2017, the coast welcomed 20 per cent more visitors than in 2016.
- 5 In June, the Ministry of Tourism unveiled plans for a loan scheme to help finance tourism students studying at universities and vocational centres. The programme aims to fill the skills shortage gap the country's tourism industry faces. To keep up with demand, Cambodia needs to train at least 50,000 professionals annually.

PROJECTIONS FOR 2019



Steve Lidgley
General manager
Travel Asia a la Carte

“I think 2019 will be a good year for Cambodia. We are seeing more MICE requests.

The leisure market book later nowadays but forward bookings from all markets are encouraging. The Western market should climb a little with visitors looking for longer stays and visiting secondary and tertiary destinations. And the luxury market has excellent prospects with new properties from Alila Hotels and Resorts, Six Senses Hotels Resorts and Shinta Mani Hotels.”



Ronni Dalhoff
Managing director
Diethelm Travel

“There are now four-star resorts being developed on the islands, where previously there has been a huge gap. Luxury tented accommodation Shinta Mani Wild will put Cambodia on the map and together with other properties in the Cardamon Mountains will raise the destination’s profile.”

Harold de Martimprey
General manager
EXO Travel

“Tourism will continue rising in 2019. There are many internationally recognised brands entering Cambodia and other high-end developments that help us compete with our neighbours. Improved infrastructure and more products mean there are now more opportunities to visit other areas, such as Mondulkiri and Kratie provinces. These all help make Cambodia an ideal standalone destination.”

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

386,614

The number of Vietnamese visiting Cambodia, as of July 2018, making it the second strongest source market after China

12.7

The year-on-year percentage increase in international arrivals to Cambodia, as of July 2018, as the country opens up to new markets

24.2

The year-on-year percentage increase in arrivals by air, as of July 2018, thanks to an increase in flights to Phnom Penh and Siem Reap

85,906

The number of French visitors to Cambodia, as of July 2018, representing a three per cent year-on-year increase which makes France the top serving European source market

75.8

The year-on-year percentage increase in Chinese visitors to Cambodia, as of July 2018, thanks to a marketing drive

THE EXPERT RECOMMENDS



Miles Gravett
General manager
Khiri Travel Cambodia

Below: Entrance of Preah Khan temple

MUST EAT

Any local beer garden barbecue, which offer a glimpse into local life, and the duck breast tournedos with green pepper sauce at Le Malraux in Siem Reap.

MUST SEE

The 12th century Preah Khan temples in the northeast of Angkor Thom at Angkor Wat Archaeological Park and secluded Saracen Bay on Koh Rong Samloem.

MUST STAY

At the leafy Jaya House River Park in Siem Reap, or go glamping at The Cardamom Tented Camp in the jungle and relax at the exclusive Song Saa Private Island.



Aleksandar-Todorovic/Shutterstock.com

WHAT'S NEW

Memoir Palace Resort & Spa

Bringing a new concept in accommodation to Siem Reap, this luxury resort blends Khmer and French architecture and design, with a series of colonial villas surrounding a gargantuan lagoon pool. Comprising 88 designer suites, including eight royal suites with separate living area and private plunge pool, the hotel offers a butler service, a range of meeting rooms and ballroom, as well as three F&B outlets. There is also an inhouse spa with a sauna and steam room and kids' club.

Shinta Mani Wild – The Bensley Collection

This resort adds a slice of the high life to the Cardamom Mountains. Elevating the glamping concept, the private nature sanctuary nestled in the heart of the jungle sees 15 safari-style tents dotted along a 1.5km stretch of river. Activities include trekking through the jungle, wildlife spotting and accompanying the rangers who protect the forest from poachers and illegal loggers on their rounds. The Landing Zone Bar and Waterfall Restaurant serve locally-inspired food, and the Boulders Spa offers a range of treatments.

Six Senses Krabey Island

Located on the island of Krabey, off the coast of Sihanoukville, the resort comprises 40 villas, each with a private plunge pool, set around the naturally landscaped 30-acre island. The exclusive Retreat and Reserve villas boast mini wine cellars. Six Senses Krabi Island also boasts an elevated sunset bar that offers pristine views at dusk, two restaurants, an ice cream parlour, outdoor fitness circuit, open air cinema and sky observatory. Water activities, island hopping tours and boat trips are also available.

The Heritage Walk

Siem Reap welcomed its largest mall and lifestyle complex this year in the form of The Heritage Walk. Set on a one-hectare site, the multi-storey mall and entertainment centre provides 40,000m² of covered and open-air retail space for about 100 units, including restaurants, coffee shops and a cinema. A string of international and local brands are housed in the stylishly designed mall, which aims to entice visitors to the city to extend their stay beyond the usual few days.

Hanchey Bamboo Resort

Aiming to plant the sleepy town of Kampong Cham on the tourist map, Hanchey Bamboo Resort is an eco-resort that is handcrafted mainly from bamboo. The resort, which sits atop Hanchey Hill about 20km from Kampong Cham town, boasts 10 bungalows, four dorms for six people, a meditation centre, restaurant, large swimming pool with a bar, and a massage house. Nestled in the heart of the Cambodian countryside, activities include bike rides and visits to nearby temples, waterfalls and islands.

Alila Villas Koh Russey

This game-changer is set on the secluded island of Koh Russey, off the coast of Sihanoukville. Dubbed an ecological escape, Alila Villas Koh Russey boasts 63 minimalist-designed pavilions and villas, all complete with private pools, dotted across the tropical island. A large swimming pool overlooks the ocean, a gym is equipped with a swathe of equipment and an onsite spa serves up a range of treatments, with food served from the exclusive restaurant.

From top right: Memoir Palace Resort & Spa; Shinta Mani Wild; Alila Villas Koh Russey



SURPRISING THEME



Adventure in nature

Accompany Wildlife Alliance rangers as they patrol through the jungle, spotting endangered species, such as Sunda pangolin and clouded leopards

– if you are lucky – along the way at Bensley Collection – Shinta Mani Wild or The Cardamom Tented Camp. Go kayaking and get lost in the network of tributaries in Kampot or get involved with communities and help replant mangroves in nearby Kep. Enjoy a day learning more about the tireless efforts ploughed into rehabilitating Cambodia's endangered animals that are rescued from the illegal trafficking trade at Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Centre, also home to Free the Bears and its saved sun bears.

China

By Caroline Boey



Nikolaas Koenig

The view from the rooftop of the Shanghai Edition hotel

According to China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the country is expecting inbound tourism to generate 142 million trips in 2018, an increase of 1.4 per cent over 2017; while inbound tourism revenue is expected to reach US\$127.3 billion, a year-on-year increase of 2.5 per cent.

Domestic tourism in 2018 is projected to reach 5.5 billion trips, an increase of 10.8 per cent; while domestic tourism revenue is expected to be US\$738 trillion, an increase of 13 per cent.

According to a report by Statistica, the direct contribution of China's travel and tourism industry to GDP in 2018 will increase by 6.9 per cent compared to the previous year.

Based on the ministry's figures, China's 1H2018 figures show inbound tourism achieved 69.23 million trips, similar to the same period a year ago.

As for domestic tourism in 1H2018, 2.8 billion trips were recorded, earning revenue of US\$245 billion, up 11.4 per cent and 12.5 per cent respectively over the same period in 2017.

WHAT'S NEW

The Shanghai Edition

Billed as "Chinese heritage meets the new generation of luxury" the Shanghai Edition hotel – the second Edition in China after Sanya – soft opened on July 2018.

Housed in the former Art Deco headquarters of the Shanghai Power Company on the Bund in Nanjing Road – and a new tower – are a magnificent lobby, Michelin-starred chef Jason Atherton's Shanghai Tavern, 145 rooms and suites, and meeting and event areas. Other F&B and entertainment facilities include Japanese restaurant HIYA, also by Atherton, Punch Room, ROOF, a garden rooftop bar with 360-degree views of Shanghai, Canton Disco, a traditional Cantonese restaurant, The Club Room and Electric Circus.

Bingjiao Café, Beijing

This subterranean café is tucked away in a corner of Cining Gong (the Forbidden City's west wing), and was the former ice storage rooms built in the Qing Dynasty to store the royal family's food in summer.

The former giant refrigerator – with its original 300-year-old, two-metre-thick stonewalls – has been converted into a stylish restaurant with tables and pillars that resemble blocks of ice and icicle-like chandeliers.

Expect to pay more for the experience and try its *zhajiangmian* spicy noodles, imperial-themed snacks and ice popsicles.

Little Big City Beijing

This new attraction is a miniature version of the city with landmarks such as the

Great Wall and a showcase of the city's history and culture since the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368).

Owned by UK-based Merlin Entertainments and located on historic Qianmen Street, visitors will find 3D-models, projection mappings, holograms, and more than 6,000 miniature mannequins with vivid facial expressions.

SURPRISING THEME

Road adventures

Self-drive convoy holidays offer car enthusiasts the thrill of driving to off-the-beaten exotic locales in China's western provinces where stunning vistas and rich cultural experiences await.

For example, the road from Chengdu in Sichuan to Shangri-la in Yunnan can include Rilong, Danba, Tagong, Litang and Daocheng; a journey that covers mostly mountainous terrain and gorgeous valleys.

In the vast Xinjiang autonomous region, long road trips between scenic spots now offer more service stops and camps to cater to those on self-driving holidays. The local tourism authorities have also created a number of detailed routes in Xinjiang for holiday-makers to follow while exploring the region at their own pace.

Hong Kong

By Prudence Lui



Tai Hang fire dragon dance during the mid-autumn festival in Hong Kong

The total visitor arrivals in the first seven months of 2018 maintained an impressive year-on-year growth of 9.4 per cent, according to the Hong Kong Tourism Board. Mainland China continued to be a major contributor market with over 28 million people crossing the border during the period, of which 11 million were overnight visitors.

Hong Kong's top ten visitor source markets in 2017 in the order of arrival numbers were Mainland China, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, the US, Macau, the Philippines, Singapore, Australia and Thailand. Altogether they accounted for over 92 per cent of the total visitor arrivals. To attract more high-spending overnight visitors, the board is striving to bring more MICE events to Hong Kong and strengthen Hong Kong's image as Asia's cruise hub. In 2017, overnight MICE arrivals grew further by 1.9 per cent to the all-time high of 1.9 million, while total cruise passengers throughput increased strongly by 33.4 per cent to 0.9 million, alongside a 28.3 per cent increase in total ship calls to 245.

FIVE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- 1 Hong Kong has launched its first-ever high-speed railway - the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong High Speed Rail (Hong Kong Section) - which is a game changer for the tourism development of Hong Kong and neighbouring regions. The 26km rail link directly connects Hong Kong to Mainland China's own high-speed rail network, which is currently the world's most extensive. Travellers now have the option to ride from Hong Kong to 44 destinations in Mainland China without even having to change trains.
- 2 The new Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge will offer groundbreaking convenience and synergy to Hong Kong and the entire Pearl River Delta region. The bridge will facilitate multi-destination travel and brings tourism attractions in Guangdong to Hong Kong's doorstep.
- 3 The Sham Shui Po Neighbourhood Programme is second in a series of neighbourhood programmes launched by the Hong Kong Tourism Board. Going in line with the government's development plan for the area to inject various design and creative elements, this programme will turn the neighbourhood into one of Hong Kong's key attractions for the young and the creative.
- 4 The new e-channel service for passport holders from Thailand enables Thai visitors to use the automatic channel easily when passing through immigration control in Hong Kong. This saves their waiting time and improves their overall travel experience.
- 5 The opening of the new Hong Kong Ocean Park Marriott Hotel makes the destination even more compelling for families. This 471-room hotel brings a fresh approach to hospitality and makes an attractive accommodation choice for visitors. Highlights include the 16m high aquarium in the main lobby, inviting lagoons and its wide selection of dining experiences.

PROJECTIONS FOR 2019



Pierre Barthes
General manager and area vice president of operations
Mandarin Oriental
Hong Kong

“Hong Kong’s tourism outlook for next year will depend on a number of factors, in particular the US-China trade tensions but we expect growth to continue albeit at a more moderate pace. If these tensions escalate, Hong Kong’s economic outlook will be hit and this will impact several sectors including corporate and MICE.”



Central waterfront



Vandana Sachdeva
Director
Simple Travel
Services

“With the opening of new bridge and high speed rails, there is great potential for Hong Kong’s tourism in 2019. With new hotels coming up as well, tourism demand will be well taken care of and we can expect more business.”



Gerhard Aicher
General manager
Holiday Inn
Golden Mile
Hong Kong

“Hong Kong had a good year in 2018 with stable market conditions and rising Mainland Chinese tourist numbers. Generally I have a mixed outlook for 2019 with the looming trade war between the US and China as well as the declining Chinese yuan.”

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

14.2

The year-on-year percentage increase in tourism expenditure for the first six months of 2018

91

The average hotel room occupancy rate in August 2018, a year-on-year increase of three per cent

42

The total visitor arrivals in millions from January to August 2018, an increase of 10.4 per cent from the same period in 2017 due to additional new air connections between Hong Kong and Europe

859,981

The total cruise passenger throughput for 1H2018, a 14.4 per cent year-on-year growth

285

The number of hotels in Hong Kong as of June 2018, providing a total of 79,944 rooms

THE EXPERT RECOMMENDS



Gloria Slethaug
Managing director
Connexus Travel

MUST EAT

Eat like a local! Start the day with a cup of Hong Kong style milk tea and an authentic buttered pineapple bun, then venture to Gough Street to try the beef noodles at Kau Kee noodle shop before you head out to try other local delicacies.

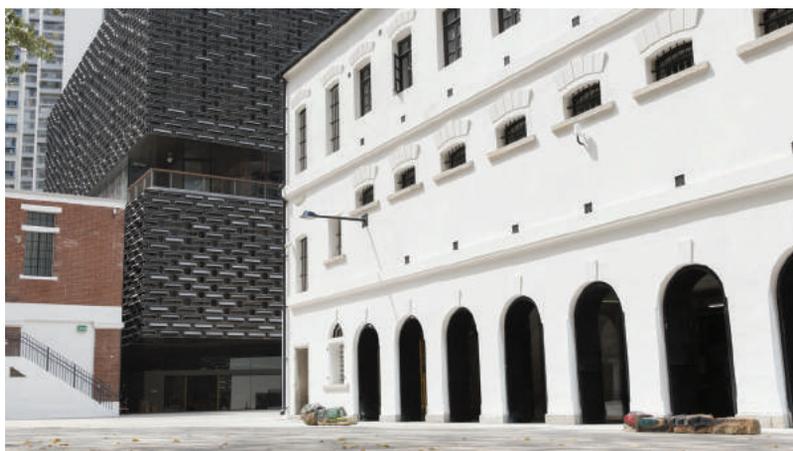
MUST SEE

The heritage site Tai Kwun is the best place for inspiration. It is the city’s largest restoration project, turning the former Central Police Station and Victoria Prison into a hub of contemporary arts.

MUST STAY

The Upper House - a contemporary luxury hotel in elegant modern style in the heart of the city. It also boasts a great view of Hong Kong from the top floor restaurant and bar.

Below:
Tai Kwun prison yard



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WHAT'S NEW

Tai Kwun: Centre for Heritage and Arts

Comprising 16 historic buildings and outdoor spaces on a 13,600m² site in the heart of Central, Tai Kwun debuted in May 2018 and has already welcomed over one million visitors. Tai Kwun presents a wide range of heritage, contemporary art, performing arts and lifestyle experiences in the restored and revitalised Central Police Station compound, which comprises three Declared Monuments, the former Central Police Station, the Central Magistracy and Victoria Prison.

Currently, 16 heritage buildings and several outdoor spaces are being restored for adaptive reuse, while two new buildings have been added to the site to house an art gallery space and auditorium.

Moana in Hong Kong Disneyland

Moana will sail to Hong Kong Disneyland and appear in an all-new atmosphere stage show. Jam-packed with inspirational music, dancing, puppetry and storytelling.

“Moana: A Homecoming Celebration,” was launched in May 2018, and is held at Adventureland’s Jungle Junction. During the 20-minute show, guests can interact with the voyager as she recalls the tales of her ocean adventures with music, dance, and puppets. They can also take photos and share hugs with Moana herself.

Temple Street Night Foodie Tour

Newly launched in 2018, this marks Hong Kong Foodie Tasting Tour’s first evening tour. On this three-hour Foodie Tour, participants will taste some iconic Hong Kong street food and finish at a seafood restaurant in Yau Ma Tei. The journey covers selected food and drink tasting at six locations and tours are available on Mondays or Thursday nights. The maximum capacity for this tour is 12 guests.

Hotel Vic

Located in the fashionable district of North Point on Hong Kong Island, the brand new Hotel Vic on the Harbour boasts spectacular panoramic views of Victoria Harbour and direct access to a newly-created waterfront promenade, and is steps away from an MTR station, ferry pier, and other public transport. The hotel offers 671 luxury guestrooms and suites. Dining options include an all-day dining outlet, a sophisticated rooftop bar and restaurant, and a deli shop cum coffee bar.

The Murray, Hong Kong

Converted from a government office block built in 1969, the Murray was transformed into an upscale hotel by reputable architectural firm Foster + Partner. This stand-alone building with 336 rooms is situated in the CBD and is next to key tourism attractions like Hong Kong Park, Peak Tram Station and St John’s Cathedral.



Wang Sing/Shutterstock.com



From top: Indoor spiral staircase in Tai Kwun, the former Central Police Station; Moana in Hong Kong Disneyland; Hotel Vic

SURPRISING THEME

Fun on the beach

Beaches are probably not the first thing that comes into mind when we think about Hong Kong. However there are aplenty options to have fun in the sand and sea in this vibrant city. With the alluring offer of more than 700km of coastline, 100 beaches, and 260 outlying islands, Hong Kong is a dream beach destination. Within 30 minutes, travellers can reach Hong Kong Island’s south side to surf at Big Wave Bay, Repulse Bay Beach and South Bay Beach. Meanwhile, the far-flung coastlines and clear waters of Tai Long Wan Bay, Hap Mun Beach, and Tung Ping Chau island will also be a hotspot for the snorkelers.



The Murray, Hong Kong’s Popinjays rooftop restaurant

Indonesia

By Mimi Hudoyo



Bena traditional village in Flores Island, Indonesia

The earthquakes in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, have taken a serious toll on tourism, as arrivals to the island plummeted 69 per cent in August 2018, according to data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS). The number of tourists visiting Lombok dropped from 13,980 in July to only 4,306 in August, and the average hotel occupancy slipped from 60.4 per cent in July to a heartbreaking 28.2 per cent in August.

Nationwide, tourism arrivals in August were down 1.9 per cent from the previous month. However, the BPS revealed that tourist arrivals were still up on the year, rising 8.4 per cent from 1.4 million in August 2017 to 1.5 million in August 2018.

Tourist arrivals from January to August 2018 reached 10.6 million, a 12.3 per cent year-on-year increase.

Indonesia targets to welcome 17 million tourists in 2018 and 20 million in 2019.

FIVE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

❶ Indonesian financial institutions are ramping up support for the country's tourism development as the sector is expected to accelerate foreign exchange earnings and in turn lower the current account deficit. The Indonesian Financial Services Authority (OJK) recently announced its funding programme for small and medium-sized industries in 10 new destinations. OJK will also issue a regulation on micro credit programmes for tourism businesses as well as lending procedures, while Bank Indonesia will intensify its digital payment system services in all tourist destinations.

❷ Bali has a new strategy. The goal is to improve and increase tourism, but to approach it from a different angle. Instead of acting in isolation, the island's new administration wants to create a mindset of One Island - One Management whereby culture, budgets and power will all be united.

❸ Indonesia hosted three international events in 2018: the 2018 IMF-World Bank Meeting in Bali, Asian Games 2018 in Jakarta and Palembang, and the Asian Para Games 2018. These successful events are expected to attract more large-scale gatherings to the country. In fact,

Indonesia is planning to bid for the 2032 Olympic Games.

❹ Badung Regency in Bali has kicked off its efforts to become a smart city. Since October 2018, visitors to the Badung area have been able to stay connected with free Wi-Fi. The smart city project will include other aspects such as education and health. This will allow travellers to stay connected and have all information at their fingertips. For now, this project is limited to Badung Regency, the fastest growing tourist and most visited region, but it is expected to expand to the rest of the island in the long run.

❺ The Ministry of Tourism has come up with various strategies to achieve visitor arrival targets. The ministry and tourism associations in Indonesia, for example, have launched the Visit Wonderful Indonesia campaign to promote events in the country. The government has introduced incentive schemes to attract airlines to open new chartered service routes to Indonesia. The ministry has also signed a memorandum of understanding with 16 Indonesian and regional airlines to work together in promoting traffic to Indonesia.

PROJECTIONS FOR 2019



Umberto Cadamuro
Chief operating officer inbound PACTO

“The future prospects for the travel industry in Bali could not be brighter. With the additional air connections, we can expect to see greater renewed interest in the destination. Other than the airlift, the media exposure which resulted from the IMF-World Bank meeting means additional publicity and interest for Bali.”

Renato Domini
CEO
Panorama
Destination

“Assuming we do not have any more natural disasters such as earthquakes or volcanic eruptions, the outlook for Indonesia’s inbound tourism for 2019 looks very promising. The current administration is committed to increasing arrival figures, which is indicative of the tourism industry’s role as a significant contributor to Indonesia’s GDP.”

NG Sebastian
Owner
INCITO Vacations,
South Sulawesi

“We are optimistic about next year. The natural disaster in Lombok has been taken care of and rehabilitation is progressing well. As long as the market is well informed about the current situation and accurate information is available, I am confident travellers will continue to come.”

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

25

The long-term target of international arrivals in millions to Indonesia by 2025, with US\$28 billion in tourism receipts

47.5

The percentage growth of Jakarta hotel RevPAR during the Asian Games 2018, a welcomed turnaround for the city that has seen weak hotel performance due to rising supply but limited demand over the past three years

US\$34 billion

The total investment needed between 2019 and 2024 to develop new projects needed to achieve tourism targets in Indonesia

US\$5.1 billion

The Ministry of Transportation’s budget for developing a railroad network in Sumatra to improve accessibility on the island in 2019

US\$3.3 million

The estimated yield from hosting the 2018 IMF-World Bank Annual Meeting in Bali last October

THE EXPERT RECOMMENDS



Leonardus Nyoman
Founder
Flores Exotic Tours

Below:
Manulalu Villa

MUST EAT

I would recommend the red snapper in coconut milk soup sold in local restaurants in East Nusa Tenggara along the Blue Stone Beach in Ende.

MUST SEE

Visit the Bena Village, a megalithic village on top of a hill facing the Inerie Mountain, where one can see the locals’ traditional way of life.

MUST STAY

Manulalu Villa, a bed-and-breakfast accommodation on the slopes of Manulalu hill. It offers a stunning view of Mount Inerie.



WHAT'S NEW

Artotel Haniman-Ubud

A breath of fresh air in the heart of Ubud, Artotel Haniman-Ubud comprises of twenty-two spacious handcrafted boutique studios in three different categories. It stands in contrast to its lush surroundings, thanks to its chic design. The hotel also houses the Full Circle Restaurant by Expat Coffee & Roastery, a swimming pool and a day spa.

Manarai Beach House Bali

One of Indonesia's biggest lifestyle, F&B and events groups, Ismaya is adding a new social scene in Bali with its first beachfront establishment in Nusa Dua. The Manarai Beach House boasts a beachfront location as well as a blend of traditional Balinese craftsmanship and contemporary styling. It has two swimming pools, offers music and entertainment, and a selection of international and local dishes at its F&B outlets.

Como Uma Canguu

The new Como Uma Canguu is situated on Bali's south coast — a beachfront destination offering panoramic views of the soft volcanic sand and rolling waves. Como Uma Canguu has 119 rooms, some of which feature courtyards and outdoor showers. With surfing being one of the major attractions in the location, the resort dangles surf lessons for novices to get them started.

Revivo Bali

Holistic wellness resort Revivo Bali is made up of 16 Balinese-style suites including two four-bedroom villas, scenic grounds, pools and a gourmet restaurant that serves up a selection of healthy cuisine. Revivo Bali offers programmes based on individual guest's needs, with the goal of achieving holistic healing through mind training and self-awareness, as opposed to treating specific illness or injuries.

Ayana Komodo Resort

Ayana Komodo Resort has opened in Labuan Bajo, Flores, the gateway to the Komodo Marine National Park. The 205-key property is the first luxury accommodation in the area. It has seven F&B outlets serving Indonesian, Asian, Japanese and international cuisines. Public facilities include spa, gym, swimming pools, kids club, private beach and jetty. The hotel also has a ballroom and meeting spaces. Equally appealing is the resort's own luxury ship and boats that cater to guests' recreational needs.

Swiss-Belhotel Pangkalpinang

Swiss-Belhotel International has opened an upscale property on Bangka Island. The new-build, contemporary hotel houses 145 rooms and suites, a Swiss-Café Restaurant, lobby lounge, wine bar, fitness centre, spa and an outdoor swimming pool. In addition, it features three meeting rooms and a ballroom to host a variety of events which can accommodate up to 875 guests.



From top: Artotel Hanuman; Revivo bali; Ayana Komodo Resort

SURPRISING THEME



Gourmet lures

When visiting Yogyakarta, sample authentic home cooking at Cengkir Heritage Resto & Coffee. The rustic restaurant offers a casual buffet line packed with dishes loved by the locals as well as nostalgic home-favourites that have now rarely found. A highly-recommended dish is the banana

blossom in spicy coconut soup and sautéed taro leaf.

For a posh dining experience, visit Bale Raos Kraton where the kitchen dishes out royal cuisine commonly found in Indonesian palaces.

India

By Rohit Kaul



Dzerkach Viktar/Shutterstock.com

Ocean view from Light House Beach in Kovalam

According to the statistics of India's Bureau of Immigration, visitor arrivals to India for the first six months of 2018 were 5.2 million, a growth of 7.9 per cent over the same period in 2017. India registered 10 million foreign tourist arrivals in 2017, a growth of 14 per cent over the previous year. Major international source markets include Bangladesh, the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Russia and Germany.

Between January and July 2018, a total of 1,268,077 tourists arrived on e-Tourist Visa as compared to 835,738 over the same period in 2017, registering a growth of 51.7 per cent. This proved the growing popularity and effectiveness of the e-Tourist Visa facility.

Overall tourism receipts from January to March 2018 came up to US\$8.2 billion, up 20.4 per cent from US\$6.8 billion over the same period in 2017.

WHAT'S NEW

WelcomHeritage Ashdale, Nainital

Nestled amid towering hills, dense forests and a shimmering lake, Ashdale, part of the WelcomHeritage group of hotels, features 24 well-appointed rooms with balconies and verandas overlooking greenery. The galleries are adorned with pictures that tell different tales of history while the furniture reflects the gracious lifestyle of yesteryears. Dining options at Ashdale include The Green Oak, the hotel's all-day diner that serves Indian, Continental and Chinese fare.

Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa

Located along the scenic East Coast Road of Tamil Nadu, overlooking the pristine Bay of Bengal, the property is spread over four hectares of land that includes beautiful, landscaped gardens. The interiors pay homage to the sun, sea, sand and its location in south India. The hotel features 125 guestrooms including a premium sleep experience. Dining options consist of two distinctive restaurants and a lounge bar.

Fairfield by Marriott Bengaluru Whitefield

This new hotel, which is located within close proximity to several corporate parks, boasts of 104 guestrooms. The property offers complimentary high-

speed Wi-Fi access and a 24-hour fully equipped fitness centre. Fairfield by Marriott Bengaluru Whitefield also features 173m² of dedicated meeting spaces. Planners can utilise meeting rooms that come with natural light, a pre-function area and column-free spaces, all ideal for conferences, weddings and social gatherings of all sizes.

SURPRISING THEME

Romantic moments

Although India is known for its cultural tours, there are many options for tourists looking for romantic moments. Escape with your beloved to Kovalam, located in the Indian southern state of Kerala. Also known as a beach town, couples can soak in the pristine beauty of Kovalam while staying in cottages that promise mountain views. Hotels in the region offer couples an option to enjoy a curated menu in a romantic candle-lit setting while soaking in the beauty of the place. Couples can also go down a spice trail or take off on a mountain trek, once they are done with the beautiful beaches.

Japan

By Julian Ryall



Yasufumi Nishi/JNTO

The vibrant business district in Marunouchi, Tokyo

For the first seven months of 2018, Japan was firmly on course to comfortably eclipse the total number of foreign arrivals for a full year, set in 2017. That seemingly inexorable climb in the nation's tourism industry took a serious knock in the space of three days in September, however, when the most powerful typhoon in 25 years came ashore in central Japan and paralysed Kansai International Airport, followed by a major earthquake in Hokkaido.

Kansai Airport fully reopened 17 days after the typhoon, while facilities in Hokkaido were also swiftly back in operation. Tourism authorities have been working hard to reassure visitors that Japan is safe to visit and that services are functioning as normal – although foreign travellers remain jittery and bookings for the affected areas fell sharply.

The nation is looking ahead to two events which will thrust Japan into the international spotlight - the Rugby World Cup from September to November 2019 and the Tokyo Olympic Games in 2020. Barring any unforeseen circumstances, the number of arrivals should hit the 40 million target that the government has set for 2020.

FIVE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- 1 Japan will host the 2019 Rugby World Cup between September and November 2018. The nation has successfully staged major sporting events in the past, including jointly hosting the 2002 Fifa World Cup, but this will test the nation's ability to accommodate, transport and entertain hundreds of thousands of rugby fans from around the world.
- 2 Another sporting event will test the nation as Tokyo prepares to take centre stage for the 2020 Olympic Games. There will be slightly more than eight months after the Rugby World Cup for the organisers of the biggest and most complicated sporting spectacle in the world to learn the lessons of the Rugby World Cup and then put them into practice.
- 3 The Japanese government will put in place an online system for accepting tourist visa applications, starting with Chinese traveling in groups in 2020, ahead of the Tokyo Olympics. Representatives of Chinese tour groups will be able to submit information on the members of the group electronically and the aim is to make the visa process easier and quicker.
- 4 A series of natural disasters in Japan in 2018 – torrential rain and landslides in southern Japan in July, a major typhoon affecting the same part of the country in early September and a magnitude 6.8 earthquake in Hokkaido just days later – have caused concern among international visitors, with arrivals falling notably in the weeks after those events. The national and local governments are acting to provide more information in foreign languages about what to do in the event of a disaster and are reassuring travellers that infrastructure is built to withstand such anomalies.
- 5 There is a growing tension between large numbers of foreign tourists who are not always aware of Japanese etiquette and local people who are increasingly angered by the noise, congestion and boisterousness of outsiders. This tension is noticeably palpable in vacationers' must-see cities, like Kyoto, although tourism authorities there have been proactive in encouraging both sides to respect different cultures and be more understanding. Given that tourist numbers are expected to continue to grow, however, the problem of "tourism pollution" is not going to go away any time soon. As a result, more needs to be done to ensure that disgruntlement does not fester and worsen, affecting the locals living in these cities.

PROJECTIONS FOR 2019



Noboru Shibahara
Head
Ise Shima Toba Inbound
Tourism Organisation

“Future tourism growth looks positive with more tour agencies and travellers looking for somewhere new to explore. There are lots of wonderful natural locations and delicious food in the Ise-Shima area, but access from large hub cities is still insufficient. Our goal is to create a welcoming destination for individual FIT customers and high-end, luxury travellers looking for undiscovered destinations which are rich in history.”



Riki Inamura
Founder
Riki's Tours Japan

“There are now a lot more people who want to have a different experience from the typical Japan. If you can do that as a seller, then business will be good and that is also why I am introducing a number of new tours this year. I have had a busy year so far in 2018 and looking at 2019, I'm already 80 per cent booked through November so it is looking good.”

Pankaj Pradhan
Managing director
Beauty of Japan

“We have had a rocky few weeks because of the typhoon and earthquake, but people around the world know that Japan bounces back from these situations very quickly. 2019 is looking promising for all destination management companies here. There are still some challenges like hotel availability and the quality of guides but if we can meet clients' needs and budgets and offer a complete experience of Japan, then the outlook is fantastic.”

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

20,000,000

The number of foreign visitors to Japan as of August 2018, breaking the 20 million barrier one month earlier than in 2017

30,000,000

The target number of foreign visitors to Japan in 2018, up from 28.7 million the year before

8,783,482

The number of outbound Japanese tourists in the first six months of 2018, up from 8,422,702 in the same period in 2017

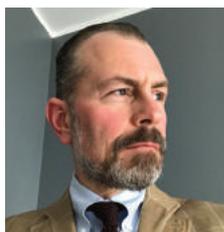
634

The height, in metres, of The Tokyo SkyTree, the world's tallest free-standing tower and one of the city's most popular attractions

70

The number of years that Hato Bus Co has been taking visitors around Tokyo on its distinctive yellow sightseeing buses

THE EXPERT RECOMMENDS



Ashley Harvey
Chief operating officer
Go Central Japan

MUST EAT

The fresh seafood prepared by the famous ama female divers in their hut on the beach at Osatsu, Mie Prefecture, before joining in the singing and dancing after the meal.

MUST SEE

Lake Biwa by cycling around Japan's largest lake, just north of Kyoto, while taking in the rustic charm of the surroundings and the breathtaking view of Hikone Castle.

MUST STAY

The recently renovated Oyatsu guest house in the rural town of Yatsuo, Toyama Prefecture is the place to stay as it offers easy access to the town's wealth of arts and crafts outlets.

Below: Sightseeing along Lake Biwa in Kyoto, Japan



Sean Hsu/Shutterstock.com

WHAT'S NEW

The Peanuts Hotel

This iconic hotel opened its doors in Kobe in August, letting fans of Snoopy, Charlie Brown and the rest of the gang from Charles Schultz's much-loved comic strip stretch out in rooms themed on the characters' adventures. Located near Sannomiya Station, in the heart of the city's entertainment district, the boutique hotel has 18 uniquely decorated rooms, including one depicting Snoopy on the moon and another in Yosemite National Park. The room on level six has an open terrace with landscaped gardens.

Narita Premier Lounge

A luxury lounge that includes a traditional Japanese tea room has opened at Terminal 1 of Tokyo's Narita Airport, targeting business-class passengers. The 930m² Narita Premier Lounge can accommodate 148 people. It offers F&B, including halal meals, and has shower facilities. The operator expects around 60,000 people to use the lounge each year.

Tax-free shopping simplified

The Japanese government is to simplify tax-free shopping by foreign visitors by digitising all required paperwork. Tourists who want to avoid paying the local consumption tax presently need to have proof-of-purchase of an item stapled to their passport to show to customs officials when they leave Japan. By April 2020, special terminals will be installed at customs that will match information from retailers with the National Tax Agency and customs.

Luggage-free travel service

The JTB travel agency has teamed up with Panasonic and Yamato Transport to launch the Luggage-Free Travel service. The aim is to take the stress and strain out of a trip to Japan, particularly among independent travellers, by enabling visitors to entrust their suitcases to Yamato Transport to be delivered to their next destination. Anyone can sign up for the service through its website, which also takes reservations and issues e-mail messages to inform users when their luggage has been delivered.

Teamlab Planets museum

Tokyo's museum and sensory art scenes have been enhanced with the opening of the Teamlab Planets museum in the Odaiba waterfront district. Visitors are asked to remove their shoes and socks at the entrance because some of the exhibits are knee-deep in water. The museum makes clever use of light and dark spaces, mirrors and sounds, all of which serve to invigorate the senses.

The Okura Tokyo

The much anticipated reopening of The Okura Tokyo is set for early September 2019. There was an outcry when the operator of the Tokyo landmark announced that the original art deco building was to be torn down for a new glass-and-steel skyscraper, but the new building will reprise the hotel's famed traditional Japanese beauty and elegance. The property will have 508 rooms in two buildings, restaurants, bars, a room for the tea ceremony as well as lush gardens and facilities for meetings, conferences and exhibitions.



From top: Shopping in a local boutique shop; Teamlab Planets museum; The Okura Tokyo

SURPRISING THEME

Local flavour in homestays



Japanese homes are typically small and rarely used for entertaining outsiders, which means that it has until now been difficult for foreigners to get a genuine insight into life inside an everyday Japanese family. That is changing, however, as an increasing

number of communities that lack a landmark that can be used to attract foreign tourists start to provide homestays. The Ishii family, for example, has an old-fashioned farm in the village of Ohtawara, in a little-visited part of Tochigi Prefecture, and welcome work with a local travel company to attract foreign visitors, who can help out on the farm by gathering crops, helping to prepare the evening meal and wind down by relaxing on the tatami mats.

Laos

By Marissa Carruthers



The new luxury resort Rosewood Luang Prabang in Laos

Laos is unlikely to hit its target of attracting five million foreign visitors by the end of 2018.

While the country's Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism has not yet compiled any official statistics for 2018, officials revealed the first six months of 2018 saw less than two million international arrivals.

Despite the ministry running a series of programmes for the Visit Laos 2018 campaign, arrivals have been stalled by reports of severe flooding and the devastating impact of the dam bursting in July.

In 2017, tourism slumped by 8.7 per cent, from 3.9 million compared with 4.2 million in 2016. However, visitors stayed in the country for longer, extending their stay from an average of 4.8 days in 2016 to 5.2 days in 2017.

Thailand led arrivals in 2017, with 1,797,803 visitors marking an 11 per cent year-on-year decrease. China was the second strongest performing source market, with 639,185 annual visitors, representing a 17 per cent increase.

WHAT'S NEW

Pullman Luang Prabang

In July, Pullman made its Laotian debut in Luang Prabang. The resort features 123 guestrooms, suites and a villa, infinity pools and watercourses. Accommodation ranges from deluxe rooms to two-bedroom villas, with separate living and dining areas. F&B options are L'Atelier, The Junctions and H2O pool bar. For recreation, there is a gym. Events are welcomed at the hotel with a conference centre for up to 300 pax as well as garden and pool spaces for up to 50 cocktail party guests or a 12-pax dinner.

Le Grand Pakbeng Resort

The five-star Le Grand Pakbeng Resort has unveiled 45 villas and suites on the banks of the Mekong River in Pakbeng, a traditional overnight stop on the Luang Prabang-Houayxay cruise. F&B comes in the form of an Indochine restaurant, which boasts an outside terrace, Le Bistro Lounge and a pool bar. Guests can also enjoy the Banyan Spa and Le Grand Sauna. The resort has a luxury boat that delivers four cruise options, including tours of Pakbeng that take in cycling.

Rosewood Luang Prabang

Rosewood Luang Prabang presents an ultra-luxurious escape, a 10-minute drive from Luang Prabang. The 23-guestroom

resort is nestled within a hilltop forest and is the country's first tented villa. Each of the accommodation is centred around a waterfall and river, or elevated among the treetops, and features balconies. A tented spa villa offers a range of local and Western treatments, and F&B outlets include the Great House restaurant and The Elephant Bridge Bar. There is also a swimming pool which is located onsite.

SURPRISING THEME

Gourmet lures

Delve into the traditional tastes of Laos with a food tour in Vientiane. Sample snacks at a local market, drink local coffee and pastries, and watch rice noodles being crafted by hand. Stroll through Pakse's coffee plantations and pick coffee beans with farmers or take a farm tour in Luang Prabang and learn more about innovative organic growing techniques.

Alternatively, learn how to cook up a handful of local dishes at one of many cookery classes that operate in Luang Prabang and Vientiane and which include visits to local markets to buy fresh ingredients.

Macau

By Prudence Lui



Macau presents a unique blend of Chinese and Portuguese cultures through its brilliant sights

The total visitor arrivals to Macau reached 23.2 million from January to August 2018, registering an increase of 8.9 per cent compared with the same period in 2017. Among these, 52.5 per cent of the total visitors stayed overnight in Macau, an 8.4 per cent year-on-year increase. The average length of stay of visitors stood at 1.2 days, same as that in the previous year.

The shorthaul markets recorded a year-on-year decrease of 2.2 per cent, mainly influenced by the drop in the markets of Hong Kong (-2.4 per cent), South Korea (-5.8 per cent), Japan (-1.0 per cent), Philippines (-1.0 per cent), Indonesia (-6.8 per cent) and Thailand (-11.5 per cent). For longhaul markets, the overall performance in terms of visitor arrivals increased by 3.2 per cent over the same period in 2017, with the markets of Russia (+15.1 per cent), Spain (+14.5 per cent) and South Africa (+12.7 per cent) recording double-digit growth.

As a result, the hotel occupancy rate from January to August 2018 reached 90.8 per cent, up by 4.5 per cent when compared to the same period in 2017.

FIVE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- 1 The opening of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge marks another milestone in cross-border integration as it improves the accessibility to Macau from China and Hong Kong, pushing forward the promotion of multi-destination tourism in the Bay Area. The bridge itself is an attraction in its own right as visitors are drawn towards the world's longest sea bridge.
- 2 The government is holding a series of events enabling the people of Macau to celebrate with the authorities the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR). A slew of special events and celebrations will be rolled out in 2019 which will help to bring more attention to Macau, giving greater reason for visitors to step into the destination.
- 3 While Macau is no stranger to new hotels, two hotels that look set to steal the show will be designed by acclaimed fashion designers Donatella Versace and Karl Lagerfeld. These two new hotels – to be opened by end of 2018 – form part of the US\$4.6 billion Grand Lisboa Palace which will house three hotel towers.
- 4 Macau's City of Gastronomy designation continues to be a major focus area to draw visitors towards exploring the city's gastronomy in lesser-known districts with initiatives like the gastronomy map and culinary events. Meanwhile, tour operators have also created their own food tours to attract more visitors.
- 5 The government granted Macau the administration of the 85km² of waters surrounding the SAR in July 2018. This has in turn allowed for new water-based tourism products such as scheduled sightseeing cruises to raise greater interest among repeat tourists.

PROJECTIONS FOR 2019



Johnny Choi
Director of sales
Estoril Tours

“The new Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge will be the major selling point to draw more visitors. However, the China-US trade war has just started and its adverse impact on tourism may outweigh the benefits of the bridge. Also, we worry that the situation will worsen next year with corporates cutting their business event and travel budget.”



EQRoy: Hitman H/Shutterstock.com

The Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge

“I am not optimistic as numerous external factors like the falling Chinese currency and the uncertainty of China’s economy may affect Chinese visitors’ appetite of traveling abroad (thus impacting Macau’s arrivals).”

Cooper Zhang
Director
Inbound department
of CITS (Macao)

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

15.1

The percentage growth of the Russia market in the first eight months of 2018 thanks to the launch of a new-scheduled weekly flight service between Macau and Moscow

93.3

The average hotel occupancy rate in August 2018, a record high, which represented a 6.5 per cent year-on-year increase

3.4

The total visitor arrivals in million in August 2018, a 18.7 per cent year-on-year increase

52.5

The proportion of visitors in percentage who stayed overnight in Macau, up by 8.4 per cent from the same period in the previous year

3.2

The year-on-year percentage increase for visitor arrivals from the longhaul markets from January to August 2018

THE EXPERT RECOMMENDS



Manuel Wu
Managing director
Macau Explorer
Cultural Travel

MUST EAT

The family-run Cafe Litoral in Taipa Village that features authentic, quality Portuguese recipes.

MUST SEE

The Guia Fortress which is a 17th-century colonial military fort, chapel and lighthouse complex. The complex is part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site Historic Centre of Macau.

MUST STAY

Banyan Tree Macau to experience unparalleled luxury matched by outstanding service that goes beyond five-star standards.



cozyta/Shutterstock.com

Guia Lighthouse, a fortress and chapel

WHAT'S NEW

Macau *QiPao* and *MaQua* experience

The *QiPao* and the *MaQua* is a traditional piece of clothing which comes in a variety of colors and intricate designs. With this service, individuals can opt to rent a *QiPao*, along with a traditional handbag, fan, and hair accessories, and then head out to Macau's streets to experience the city in an authentic way. They may add on a special photoshoot package to make their Macau experience memorable and receive professionally edited photos at the end of the journey.

Macau Junk – Saturday Sunset Cruises

This Saturday sunset cruises organised by Macau Sailing takes place every weekend, covering the Inner Harbour and the city's waterfront. Operated by a traditional sailing junk, it can accommodate up to 45 guests. The vessel was built in Macau's Coloane shipyards half a century ago and is dubbed as the last existing traditional junk in Macau and one of the few – and among the oldest – still in operation in the Pearl River Delta region.

Zero Latency

Celebrated as Macau's first free-roam multi-player virtual reality gaming experience, Zero Latency was rolled out in 2018. This 200m² arena features heart-racing zombie attacks, galaxy space missions and family fun adventures for up to eight players at one time. Experiences include Engineerium which is a puzzle game that is perfect for first-timers; Zombie Survival which is an intense, medium-intensity shooter game while Singularity is characterised by an immersive space-themed shooter game.

A tour of art and culture

Explore the traditional Macau with CoForte Organisation Development as they take visitors on a tour to learn the historical, cultural and social significance of the conservation of the traditional industry. The one-day tour will bring participants to museums, exhibitions, galleries, historical buildings and shipyards. The docents will introduce how the shipyard and the industry are conserved. They will also attend the craftsmanship workshops to make their own wooden paddles and keychains with the wood from shipyards which was used to build the ship.

Morpheus Macau

Macau has welcomed yet another hotel when Morpheus opened in June 2018. The hotel, located at City of Dreams, is Melco Resorts & Entertainment's new flagship luxury hotel. The hotel boasts around 770 rooms, including three pool villas and six duplex villas. It was designed by the legendary architect Zaha Hadid who was noted for her love for sweeping curves and strong aesthetics. Highlights of the hotel include a 35m high atrium, which boasts strong, architectural lines. Located within the atrium are 12 lifts which offer guests a panoramic view of Macau as they ride up and down the hotel.

MGM Theatre

MGM Cotai introduces to Macau the first-of-its-kind entertainment experiences with MGM Theatre - Asia's first dynamic theatre. One of the key highlights is its ability to provide more than 10 different configurations that can accommodate up to 2,000 guests. Utilising a giant 900m² LED screen, it takes live entertainment a step closer to the world of mass virtual reality. The Spectacle, located in the heart of the resort, holds the world's largest area of permanent indoor LED screens, showcasing an exclusive array of digital art collected by MGM in cooperation with some of the world's most renowned artists.



From top: Zero Latency gaming experience; Morpheus Macau's lobby; MGM Theatre

SURPRISING THEME

Adventure in nature

Nature may not come as top-of-mind in Macau, but it definitely has some note-worthy green spots that make a refreshing alternative to its casinos and urbanised areas.

Macau has 13 hiking trails and nature paths that present an alternative break away from the city for visitors to discover a more scenic side of the destination. Most of these trails are on the south of Coloane Island which is also known as the Green Lung for its rolling hills and sylvan forests. The 8km Coloane Hiking Trail, one of the more popular paths, guides hikers to the summit of Alto de Coloane, where they can bask in panoramic views across the South China Sea.

Malaysia

By S Puvaneswary



Freddy plus/Shutterstock.com

Chin Swee Temple at Genting Highlands in Malaysia

Tourist arrivals for the first four months of 2018 totalled 8.5 million, a decrease of 3.4 per cent over the previous year. The Iranian market showed the largest growth with a 132.8 per cent year-on-year increase with 31,360 arrivals followed by Kazakhstan which grew by 44.7 per cent with 5,642 arrivals.

Singapore, Malaysia's largest inbound market, saw arrivals dip by 18.3 per cent to 3.4 million. On the other hand, China which is the largest medium-haul market to Malaysia, grew by 37.2 per cent to one million tourists. India, the second largest medium-haul market also saw an increase of 21.2 per cent to 186,247 arrivals. Tourists from Saudi Arabia who constitute the biggest spenders in Malaysia among all major markets, also saw a decline of 9 per cent, to 26,768 tourists.

The top five arrival markets for Malaysia from January to April 2018 are Singapore, Indonesia, China, Thailand and Brunei.

FIVE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- 1 The 20th Century Fox World Malaysia Theme Park is scheduled to open in Resorts World Genting in 2019 to provide a world-class entertainment experience with rides and attractions based on movies such as Ice Age, Rio and Night at the Museum. Once it opens, Resorts World Genting will be a major draw for tourists to visit Malaysia.
- 2 The international media publicity combined with new interest shown by international buyers who attended PATA Travel Mart in Langkawi in September 2018 is expected to further boost tourist arrivals to Malaysia in 2019.
- 3 Armed with a bigger promotional budget, Penang Global Tourism is going after the longhaul markets from Europe, driven partly by Qatar Airways' new direct Doha-Penang flights which commenced

in February 2018. Efforts in the past had been hampered by air connectivity.

4 Malaysia Airports has collaborated with Tourism Malaysia and created a Joint International Tourism Development Programme with a total combined funding of RM15 million (US\$3,626,850). This programme will see the airport and tourism body match the investments made by the airlines, trade and business partners, in marketing campaigns that drive inbound tourism.

5 In order to attract more European tourists, Malaysia will be the partner country of ITB Berlin 2019. As the official partner country, Tourism Malaysia is banking on the global publicity opportunities as well as the potential of reaching out to key decision markets and top industry players.

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

33.1

The number of visitor arrivals in millions targeted in 2018, up from 25.9 million in 2017

RM83.1 billion

The amount spent by domestic tourists in 2017, going up against the RM74.8 billion recorded in 2016

5.8

The average number of nights tourists from ASEAN countries stay while visiting the destination

67

The number of Malaysian sellers who participated at PATA Travel Mart 2018 in Langkawi. This is the largest representation of Malaysian sellers to date

RM 1,070

The average daily expenditure of tourists from Saudi Arabia who are the highest spenders in Malaysia

THE EXPERT RECOMMENDS



Arokia Das Anthony
Director
Luxury Tours Malaysia

MUST EAT

Assam laksa which is sold in most Chinese hawker centres in Malaysia, for an authentic local experience. This dish comprises rice noodles served in sour tamarind broth peppered with mackerel and vegetable garnishing.

MUST SEE

The Rafflesia Flower which grows in Sabah and Sarawak. It is considered to be one of the rarest in the world not only for its gigantic petals but also for the putrid smell it emits to attract pollinators and prey.

MUST STAY

The Datai Langkawi because it has excellent rooms, exquisite food and brilliant service.

Below:
Datai Langkawi



PROJECTIONS FOR 2019



Abdul Rashid Asari

Chairman
Standing Committees for
Cultural and Tourism,
Malay Tradition and Heritage
Selangor State Government

“2019 will be a good year for Malaysian tourism with Tourism Malaysia leading the charge. In Selangor, we will intensify our promotions to the travel trade so that they will include Selangor as part of their tour itineraries. We will also continue to develop tourism infrastructure in Selangor as well as embark on community based tourism projects that empower local communities.”



Sandro Nania
Sales manager
Happy Trails! Asia

“Malaysia’s destination prospects look very good as air connectivity to Malaysia had improved in 2018, with airlines adding new routes and increased frequencies from some existing carriers. Our business also looks good as we had secured new accounts from Germany and Netherlands. The US is a new market for us and we recently appointed a sales representative there to grow the market further.”



Eric R Sinnaya
Managing director
Morahols Travel

“2019 will be a fantastic year for Malaysia with Malaysia having a bigger presence at ITB Berlin as we are the official partner country. Hosting PATA Travel Mart 2018 in Langkawi will result in more foreign agents interested in selling Malaysia and Langkawi. This will translate in bigger overall tourism arrivals in 2019.”

WHAT'S NEW

The Rift, Kuala Lumpur

The Rift is touted to be the first and largest augmented reality and virtual reality adventure park in South-east Asia. Covering 3,700m² in Mid Valley Megamall in Kuala Lumpur, The Rift showcases more than a dozen attractions and boasts a total of 25 virtual worlds along with augmented reality and physical activity attractions. It is ideal for families, with attractions for both children and adults.

Star Wars: Secrets of the Empire, Pahang

Resorts World Genting and The Void has introduced the first-of-its-kind hyper-reality experience: *Star Wars: Secrets of the Empire* created in collaboration with ILMxLAB as the first in Asia. *Star Wars: Secrets of the Empire* will take guests through a breathtaking journey into the alternate 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, where guests will feel the impact of blaster bolts, smell the smoke from the surrounding environment, 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.

Cessna Caravan Ex, Langkawi

Hop onto an aircraft to catch an eagle’s eye-view of the exotic sights and colours of the 99 islands of Langkawi, mangrove forests, sandy beaches, limestone hills and waterfalls. The Cessna Caravan Ex aircraft can accommodate up to 10 people and it departs from Langkawi International Airport at 2pm every day. The half hour flight costs between RM330 per person for 10 guests per flight to RM660 per person for four guests per flight.

Camar Resort Langkawi

Located on Pantai Tengah, Camar Resort Langkawi is a new beachfront boutique property, offering 90 rooms overlooking the Andaman Sea. Facilities include a 75m-long pool, the longest pool of its kind in Langkawi. The lounge offers signature cocktails and live entertainment in the evenings.

The Rainbow Skywalk at The Top, Penang

The Rainbow Skywalk at The Top in Komtar offers stunning seamless views of Penang’s capital, George Town. The open air Rainbow Skywalk is at Level 68, on the rooftop of Komtar tower, George Town’s highest point. The glass bottomed walkway offers visitors the thrilling experience of walking on air, 249m above ground and the ability to look through the glass at the rooftops and the roads below.

Sky Mirror, Kuala Selangor

Sky Mirror is named after its mirror-like reflection of the sky. It is a mystery island that will emerge for several days every month before it gets submerged below the sea surface. Located in Kuala Selangor, Sky Mirror is also home to a multitude of marine life. This spot is opened only twice each month – during the 1st and 15th of lunar month, and four days before and after the dates, where the sea levels are low.



From top: Rainbow Skywalk at The Top, Penang; Sky Mirror, Kuala Selangor

SURPRISING THEME

Water adventures

Malaysia is well known for its snorkelling and dive sites with Sipadan Island topping the list as one of the best places in the world for scuba diving. However, not many will associate angling activities with the destination. Some of the best places to go for deep sea angling is Port Dickson, Penang, Langkawi, Terengganu, Tioman Island, Sabah and Sarawak.



Rajang and Kinabatangan rivers in East Malaysia.

For land based angling, apart from the many rivers that are quite fertile, due to the lack of angling pressure, there are also estuaries, mangroves and lakes in Malaysia that hold a variety of fish species. Angling spots include Shah Alam National Botanical Garden, Keniam River in Pahang as well as the

Maldives

By Feizal Samath



John Jacob Astor Estate, the largest water villa in the Maldives

Notwithstanding a minor blip in February 2018 when the Chinese visitors cancelled travel plans owing to the imposition of a state of emergency, the Maldives has recovered and is set to grow its arrivals this year by around five per cent.

As at end August 2018, arrivals rose by nine per cent to 972, 839, defying critics who feared a drop in arrivals due to the political crisis.

While China remains as the destination's top market source, with about 30 per cent of the total visitor arrivals every year, it has seen a steady drop in arrivals since it peaked in 2015. By August 2018, this has dropped to 20 per cent share with lower arrivals blamed on a recession, and competitive markets among other reasons. The Maldives is also battling an oversupply of luxury rooms with resorts under pressure to cut prices to stay competitive. There are 10 new high-end resorts slated to open from 2018 to 2019.

WHAT'S NEW

Conrad Maldives Rangali Island

Widely acclaimed as the world's first underwater residence, the Conrad Maldives Rangali Island which is also home to the world's first underwater restaurant, can now allow travellers to sleep beneath the sea, fully immersed within the natural beauty of the Indian Ocean. Dubbed The Muraka (which means coral), the under-the-sea residence will accommodate nine guests, stretching over two levels and will boast exclusive views of the surrounding sea life, while guests enjoy an unprecedented holiday experience.

John Jacob Astor Estate

The John Jacob Astor Estate at the St. Regis Maldives Vommuli which stretches across an astonishing 1540m², is the largest water villa in the Maldives. The two-story villa with three bedrooms has a cinema, a living and dining room, spa treatment rooms, an Olympic-sized infinity swimming pool, gym, kitchen, and multiple decks. Opening onto the terrace, the palatial living room is distinguished by its lofty ceilings and floor-to-ceiling glass doors.

Beach Bubble tent

The Finolhu resort on Baa Atoll has unveiled a stunning and luxurious Beach Bubble tent - the first of its kind in the Maldives.

Located in a secluded spot along its beach, the Beach Bubble is available exclusively for romantic, one-night-only experiences under the stars, from sunset

to sunrise.

The interiors feature custom-fitted wooden floors and bespoke furnishings, and a separate adjoining bathroom. The 'Dream Eclipse' experience costs US\$600++ per couple, including one night in the Beach Bubble, a private beach barbecue and breakfast on the water's edge of the beach.

SURPRISING THEME

Underwater wrecks

While the Maldives lures romantics and couples to its white sandy beaches and unspoilt one-island-one-resort getaways, another attraction gaining traction is underwater wrecks.

According to dive clubs spread across resorts in the Maldives, diving – and diving to view shipwrecks in particular – is winning fans.

Wreck diving is a great opportunity to see how marine life has adapted to the relics of sunken boats and ships. Take the Maldives Victory for example, located 15m to 35m below the North Male Atoll. It was a Singaporean cargo ship carrying goods which sank in 1981. At present, several items like cigarettes, bottles, and mosaic tiles are still found around the ship. Other underwater wrecks in Maldives include Kuda Giri in the South Male Atoll, Fesdu Wreck near Fesdu Resort Island, and British Loyalty in the Addu Atoll.

Myanmar

By Marissa Carruthers



anek soowannaphoom / Shutterstock.com

Sunrise at U Bein Bridge, set against a hot air balloon field in Mandalay, Myanmar

Myanmar’s overall international arrivals has remained relatively unchanged, with a rise in Asian visitors making up for the falling Western demand.

According to the latest figures from the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, between January and August 2018, a total of 725,809 foreign tourists visited the destination. This compares with 722,786 for the same period in 2017.

However, overall arrivals from Western Europe slumped by 25 per cent, North America by 16 per cent and Australia by 17 per cent. Meanwhile arrivals from Asia swelled by nine per cent, driving the primary demand for Myanmar.

China saw the largest hike in numbers, with arrivals rising to 120,978 representing a 37 per cent year-on-year increase.

Neighbour Thailand was the country’s top performing source market, with 164,814 visitor arrivals during the first eight months of 2018, marking a 13 per cent rise.

The UK remained the strongest Western market, despite seeing a 23 per cent slump to 25,940 arrivals.

WHAT’S NEW

Hilton Mandalay

Set amid manicured gardens, the 213-key Hilton Mandalay features a range of rooms with balconies or expansive terraces. Café Mandalay serves dining throughout the day, with the lobby bar and Poolside Pavilion serving light bites and drinks. Bungkus is an upscale deli. Flexible event spaces includes a 256m² ballroom, with other amenities including a swimming pool, fitness centre and a spa, slated to open at the end of 2018.

Yangon Excelsior Hotel

Located in a prime spot in downtown Yangon, the 74-room Yangon Excelsior evokes the city’s historic past. Set in a 19th century heritage building converted into a stylish hotel, the hotel also has an executive floor featuring 16 rooms. F&B offerings are offered in The Newsroom, a graceful all-day dining café deli and The Steel Brothers Wine & Grill, a stylish and contemporary restaurant.

Awei Pila

Memories Group’s 26-room beachfront eco resort, Awei Pila, has opened as the only property on the virgin Pila Island in Mergui Archipelago. The small island offers a slice of tropical paradise island life, with the only other inhabitants being a village of Moken fishermen (sea

gypsies). The luxury resort is nestled on a 600m stretch of beach, with the natural design ensuring the property is in keeping with its surroundings. A swimming pool, restaurant and bar is also onsite for guests.

SURPRISING THEME



Romantic moments

Hire a hot air balloon and watch the sunrise while floating above Bagan for the ultimate romantic experience. While at Inle Lake, couples can spend some solo time in a kayak exploring the stilted villages and plenty of secluded spots. To truly get away from it all and enjoy some romance on a pristine deserted tropical island, head to Mergui Archipelago in the south and check into one of the luxury properties coming up on the islands.

Philippines

By Rosa Ocampo



Jeepneys waiting for passengers on the street in front of Manila City Hall

Artyoaran/Shutterstock.com

Despite the closure of the world-famous Boracay Island, the Philippines’ overall tourism performance has exceeded expectations.

Fuelled largely by strong arrivals from China, total visitorship rose by 8.5 per cent to 4.9 million from January to August 2018 compared to the same period in the previous year. South Korea ranks as the country’s top source market followed by China, the US, Japan, and Australia.

As the Philippines’ fastest-growing market, China made up 17.8 per cent of total arrivals, with 870,177 visitors from January to August 2018, registering a 35.7 per cent year-on-year increase. It will be hardly surprising to see China knocking South Korea off from the top position, where the latter currently contributes 21.8 per cent to the overall arrivals.

As one of the key drivers of the economy, the tourism sector employed about 5.3 million in 2017, which is approximately 13 per cent of the country’s total employment.

SIX KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- 1 The famous Boracay island was closed for six months from April to October 2018 as part of the government’s efforts at the island’s environmental rehabilitation. This serves as a litmus test that will determine whether it is ready for sustainable tourism and whether such a strategy is practical for other destinations which may be confronting similar challenges.
- 2 The opening of the Mactan-Cebu International Airport Terminal 2 (MCIA-T2) has lifted Philippine airport standards in terms of both look and convenience. This airport almost triples the airport’s annual capacity from 4.5 million to 12.5 million passengers, attracting more non-stop flights abroad instead of having to pass through Manila, making Cebu the new gateway city.
- 3 The local currency’s continued depreciation against the US dollar – as of press time down by eight per cent to its lowest level of 54.3 pesos to US\$1 in 13 years – makes travelling to the destination even more affordable.
- 4 The two-day closure of Manila’s international airport and voluminous flight cancellations and delays when Xiamen Airlines overshot the runway highlighted the urgency of having a bigger airport in the metro and the need for readiness in responding to contingencies.
- 5 As an offshoot of Boracay’s temporary closure, new destinations and attractions were opened, luring tourists to the islands of Camiguin, Siquijor, Gigantes, and others in Negros and Cebu.
- 6 The retention of the “It’s More Fun in the Philippines” branding is a decision applauded by the travel trade in comparison to other questionable marketing campaigns that did not do well for the brand.

PROJECTIONS FOR 2019



Marjorie Aquino
Senior sales and marketing manager
Blue Horizons Travel and Tours

“Greater accessibility due to the opening of new airports and terminals in Mactan, Cebu, Puerto Princesa and San Vicente, and the upcoming Panglao International Airport in Bohol bodes well for 2019.”

Jojo Clemente
President
Rajah Tours

“Travel experts are bullish on prospects in 2019, expecting the numbers to grow further. Boracay’s temporary closure led to new destinations being developed including Iloilo, Dumaguete and Siquijor.”



Iloilo, Philippines - Molo Church

Andrei Goncharov/Shutterstock.com

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

7.4 million

The number of foreign tourists targeted in 2018, from 6.6 million posted in 2017, which is likely to be achieved due to more air services and surge in Chinese tourists

9.4

The average number of nights foreign tourists stay in the destination, which is commendable compared with just three to four days several years ago

US \$126

The average daily spend of tourists in the Philippines, the biggest chunk of which goes to food and beverage

2,800

The number of new hotel rooms expected to be added to Manila’s 2018 supply, of which 60 per cent are in the four- to five-star categories

65

The average occupancy rate for hotels in Manila in 2018

THE EXPERT RECOMMENDS



AA Yaptinchay
General manager
Kirschner Travel Manila

MUST EAT

Guerrera Rice Paddy Restaurant set among the rice paddies of Camiguin for an unforgettable dining experience.

MUST SEE

Mantigue Island to snorkel and enjoy the white sand beach. It is a must to dip in one of the healing hot spring pools.

MUST STAY

Head to the Nypa Style Resort, which is nestled in a lush garden, for a dose of greenery and peace.



Aerial view of the tropical island Mantigue

Alexpunker/Shutterstock.com

WHAT'S NEW

Hilton Manila

The Hilton brand returns to the Philippines with the new Hilton Manila in Newport City in Pasay. The hotel offers a total of 357 guestrooms and suites. The smallest room covers 40m² while the largest — called the two-bedroom governor suite — spans 160m². Each room will feature Hilton's signature Serenity bed, a pillow menu that allows guests to choose from different variants of pillows, bathroom with separate bathtub and shower, a 55-inch smart TV, and WiFi access.

Go around Manila

This new tour called "Go Around Manila" connects established tours in old Manila by taking the Light Rail Transit Line One with options for guided and unguided tours where they can choose to either get off or stay in the train. Tourists can stop at different tracks for a tour of old churches decked in various architectural styles, shopping and dining areas or museums and public parks.

The Retreat Spa

Okada Manila's The Retreat Spa is the city's newest — and perhaps grandest — centre for relaxation. Check out its plethora of therapies, from signature massage to body-mind healing using natural and organic products in its well-appointed treatment rooms. For something out of the ordinary, try the deep-tissue rubdown based on a traditional Filipino massage that targets specific aches to restore body balance.

The Garage

Families will be delighted with The Garage in the City of Dreams Manila which combines virtual reality entertainment with well-curated food and drinks. This is South-east Asia's first virtual reality zone and will feature three zone experiences, Mario Kart VR, Ski Rodeo and Hospital Escape Terror.

San Vicente

San Vicente in Palawan, noted for its unspoiled long stretches of fine white sand and clear waters, ended its isolation when Philippine Airlines launched a daily flight from Clark. Often called the next Boracay without the crowds, San Vicente boasts the country's longest white beach sand with a 14.7km coastline, a tranquil and bucolic atmosphere with few inhabitants and still few tourists.

SURPRISING THEME

Wildlife adventure

There is more to the Philippines than sand and sea in its 7,100 islands.

An undiscovered paradise for bird-watchers, the destination has one of the world's highest density of endemic bird species and also boasts quite a number of rare and threatened species scattered around the islands. Home to about 200 endemic birds, the Philippines is also a key migration spot for birds from other countries looking for a warm place for winter.



From top: Hilton Manila; The Garage main dining area; The Garage VR Zone

Singapore

By Pamela Chow



The vibrant and colourful streets of Little India in Singapore

iViewfinder/Shutterstock.com

International visitor arrivals to Singapore from January to August 2018 rose by 7.5 per cent year-on-year, reaching more than 12.6 million visitors. Paralleling this growth is an 8.5 per cent year-on-year increase in gazetted hotel room revenue for 1Q2018, hitting S\$1 billion (US\$0.73 billion).

Of the largest growing markets from January to August 2018, Italy registered a notable percentage growth at 30.4 per cent, reaching 22,943. China remained the top source market for this period at almost 2.5 million.

Overall tourism receipts in 1Q2018 show a slight 0.5 per cent year-on-year dip, with the largest percentage drop shown in F&B spending at 16 per cent.

Arrival figures are expected to rise further thanks to Singapore's global publicity from the likes of the Trump-Kim Summit in June, as well as the premieres of *Crazy Rich Asians* and *Masterchef Singapore*.

FIVE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- 1 For three months from October 2018, the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) is trialling an electronic arrival card for foreign visitors that will eventually replace the paper-based disembarkation/embarkation card. By electronically submitting personal information and trip details before arrival, travellers will only need to produce their passports for immigration clearance.
- 2 The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) launched the second wave of its *Passion Made Possible* global campaign in August 2018, adding three interest-themed "Passion Tribes" – Culture Shaper, Socialiser and Action Seeker – to form a total of seven under the brand. The new global campaign will be marketed in 16 overseas markets until December 2018.
- 3 To promote Singapore and South-east Asia as a cruise destination, Costa Cruises has inked its second tripartite partnership with STB and Changi Airport Group. The three-year partnership will launch joint-marketing initiatives and packages in countries worldwide where Costa operates, and is expected to bring in over 100,000 international fly-cruise visitors to Singapore over three years.
- 4 The Singapore Rugby Union and JTB have inked a 12-month partnership to promote rugby tourism to Japan and Singapore. This includes encouraging travel from Japan to Singapore for the HSBC Singapore Rugby Sevens next year. The union will tap on JTB's strong network to expand its outreach.
- 5 Riding the popularity of *Crazy Rich Asians*, STB worked with Warner Bros and other partners to roll out marketing initiatives in markets such as the United States (US), Australia, Japan and South-east Asia. These included private movie screenings and consumer contests, as well as a "Crazy Rich Singapore Week" in the United States. STB has also partnered with travel company Travelzoo to further promote Singapore and its tours through targeted web content.

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

4,329,478

The total volume of South-east Asian arrivals from January to August 2018, with Indonesia bringing in the largest number at 2,024,012

80

The number of local talents featured in STB's *Passion Made Possible* campaign and marketing activities

30.1

The year-on-year percentage decrease in arrival numbers from Iran from January to August 2018, reaching 118,167

51

The percentage of tourism receipts from China spent on shopping, out of a total of S\$1 billion expenditure by Chinese visitors

22

The year-on-year percentage growth in the number of visitors from India in 1Q2018, which reached 295,000

THE EXPERT RECOMMENDS



Joseph Sze
Senior project director
Siam Express

MUST EAT

The quintessential local dishes in Singapore: the iconic chilli crab and Hainanese chicken rice.

MUST SEE

The enduring spectacle of Gardens by the Bay and its nightly light bonanzas.

MUST STAY

One of Singapore's new generation of boutique hotels that give an exclusive ambience with its unique designs.



Night view of Supertree Grove at Gardens by the Bay

PROJECTIONS FOR 2019



Judy Lum
General manager
Diethelm Travel
(Singapore)

"Singapore has grown exponentially in the arts, food culture and our love for nature. I am noticing an increase in requests for itineraries incorporating elements of the arts, architecture, local cuisine and the Southern Ridges."



Wok 'n' Stroll - Street Art Food Tour



Jane Goh
Director
Xperience
Singapore Events
& Travel

"There are many other things we can do to sell the country as a destination, but they are not being done yet. There is a lot of focus on man-made attractions, but the soft (experience) is not there yet. I want to show another side of Singapore that a lot of travellers and incentive visitors have not seen."

Arron Goh
Founder
The Inside Access

"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. However, I think there is more to Singapore than the high life - 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."

Ng Wu Gang

Palo oW/Shutterstock.com

WHAT'S NEW

The Art of Chinese Teochew Opera by Xperience Singapore

Visitors can now peek behind the curtain of traditional Chinese Opera performances and meet third-generation performers from one of Singapore's last remaining Teochew Opera & Puppetry troupes. Get a glimpse of how performers apply their expressive makeup and wear their costumes, learn the meanings behind the costumes and choreography, and even don a costume and perform a skit under guidance of the masters.

30 Bencoolen

Singapore welcomes its first hotel with a smart in-room solutions system, 30 Bencoolen. Formerly known as Bayview Hotel Singapore, the centrally located property has emerged from a S\$20 million transformation with Smart Room Control Units that proactively monitor and "communicate" every room's status and any defects to operations.

Down to the Bare Walls by A+B Edu Tours and Travel

Take discovery into the dark with Down to the Bare Walls by A+B Edu Tours and Travel, a new tour curated into *Passion Made Possible*. Guests will explore the back lanes of Little India at night, and learn more about the rich history of the cultural precinct through immersive activities like learning to tie a turban and feasting on traditional Mughlai dishes in a North Indian restaurant.

Amara Heritage Trail

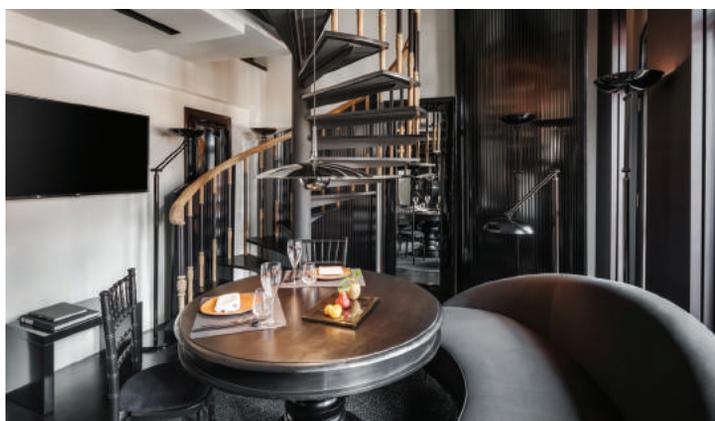
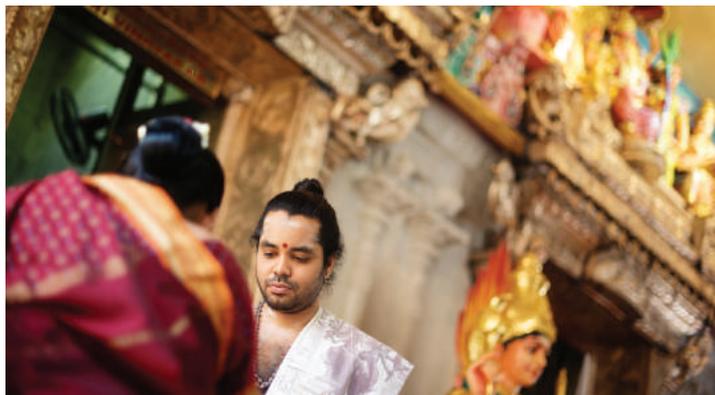
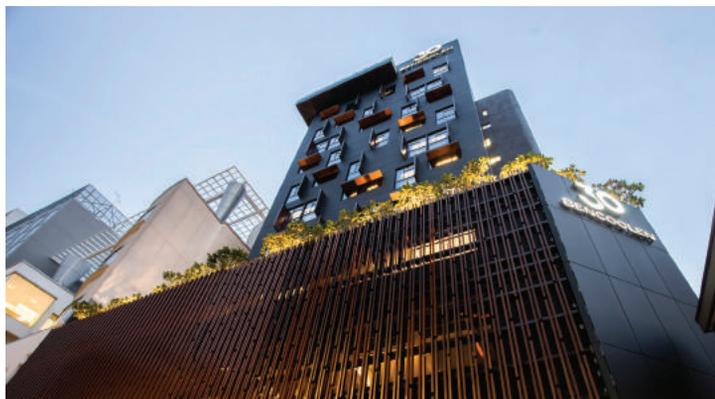
Amara Sanctuary Resort Sentosa, home to the old soldier quarters and the last World War II air raid shelters on Sentosa Island, has launched the Amara Heritage Trail that tours its restored colonial-style architecture and grounds. The tour uncovers the nature, conservation and history hidden within the resort through World War II-related sites and stories, providing a glimpse of the lives of British soldiers during the colonial era.

Six Senses Maxwell

Opened in December 2018, Six Senses Maxwell is set to complete the brand's footprint in Singapore alongside sister property Six Senses Duxton. Five minutes' walking distance away, Six Senses Maxwell presents 120 keys in a property designed by internationally acclaimed French architect and designer Jacques Garcia, offering an alternative aesthetic that marries tradition and modernity. Six Senses Maxwell is housed in a colonial-style 19th century heritage building that has received the Urban Redevelopment Authority Architectural Heritage Award.

Orchard Rendezvous Hotel

Far East Hospitality has rebranded and refurbished the iconic Orchard Parade Hotel to Orchard Rendezvous Hotel, drawing inspiration from the neighbouring Botanical Gardens to offer guests a garden-like retreat. The 388-room Orchard Rendezvous Hotel is the second property under the Rendezvous brand in Singapore. Accompanying the hotel rebranding is a refresh of the Rendezvous brand, symbolised by a revamped logo, which Orchard Rendezvous Hotel is the first to adopt.



From top: 3D Bencoolen; A tour with Down to the Bare Walls; Six Senses Duxton

SURPRISING THEME



Sports tourism

Travel and tourism players are looking beyond the races to promote sports tourism in Singapore. The Singapore Rugby Union and JTB have joined hands in a 12-month partnership to build demand

for tourism during and around the Rugby Sevens seasons, such as the HSBC Singapore Rugby Sevens next year. The union will tap on JTB's strong network to promote to travellers in Asia.

Meanwhile, Millennium Hotels and Resorts (MHR) has entered a three-year partnership with Chelsea Football Club. As part of this partnership, MHR's Singapore properties will soon roll out promotional ticket offers and packages for fans in Singapore and across the region, host 'live' screenings of Chelsea FC matches, as well as launch exclusive co-branded football merchandise.

South Korea

By Julian Ryall



Gyeongbokgung Palace glows at night

South Korea's tourism industry has bounced back in the first half of 2018, thanks primarily to a reduction in geopolitical tensions with China which has in turn rejuvenated Chinese tour group interest in the destination.

The Chinese government had earlier banned its citizens from buying tours to South Korea in early 2017 following a political row with Seoul over the deployment of Thaad missiles in the South.

The total visitor arrivals in the first seven months of the calendar year came to 16.8 million, up from 15 million in the same period one year earlier, according to the Korea Tourism Organisation.

Chinese arrivals were up nearly 46 per cent in July 2018 compared to the same month in the previous year, and 49 per cent increase from the month before. While the total number of Chinese arrivals is still below the record 4.7 million set in 2016, the tourism industry is hopeful that it can recover its previous highs.

Japan remains South Korea's second most important market, with Japanese arrivals up more than 20 per cent in the first seven months of 2018 and spiking more than 35 per cent in July alone.

WHAT'S NEW

Gyeongbokgung Palace

This former royal palace has started night tours that include a full meal, re-enactments and a visit to the Gyeonghoe Pavilion, a venue for royal banquets that normally requires an appointment to enter. The tours are only available to 60 visitors per night and a place with the group costs KRW50,000 (US\$44).

Lotte Hotel Seoul

This hotel has opened its Executive Tower in early September after a year of renovation work and with the aim of establishing the property as the premium luxury hotel in northern Seoul. The number of rooms in the tower has been reduced from 373 to 278 – comprising 225 deluxe rooms and 53 suites - in order to make the rooms larger and enhance the facilities. The Royal Suite is the largest of its kind in South Korea and is equipped with Beautyrest Black, the largest bed available in the country.

Daegu city

The city of Daegu has teamed up with Seoul to encourage more visitors to the capital to venture further afield. The local authorities have introduced a two-day bus tour exclusively for foreign visitors to seven cities across

the country, including Incheon and Changwon, stopping at major tourist spots on the way. Highlights of the trips include foot baths and relaxing herbal treatments. The packages include four-star hotel accommodation, meals, the services of a guide and admission fees to sights.

SURPRISING THEME

Blooming flowers

Japan usually gets all the attention when it comes to cherry blossoms, but there are plenty of places in South Korea that can rival her neighbour's blooms. The town of Hwagae, in Gyeongsang province in the south-east of the peninsula, holds a cherry blossom festival every April that includes traditional wrestling competitions and exhibitions of local artisan products. The most popular attraction for the brief duration of the blossom is the 4km path in Cherry Blossom Road, where legend claims that couples who walk its length hand-in-hand will marry and live happily ever after.

Sri Lanka

By Feizal Samath



Melinda Nagy/Shutterstock.com

A train ride from Nuwara Eliya to Kandy will bring visitors across tea plantations in the highlands of Sri Lanka

WHAT'S NEW

Chinese tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka grew by 3.5 per cent in September with the arrival of 19,600 tourists, compared to the 18,900 tourists who arrived during the same month last year, according to the latest statistics from Sri Lanka's Tourism Ministry.

China is Sri Lanka's second top performing market. The other key market sources are India, Britain, Germany and Australia.

The total tourism arrivals to Sri Lanka in September grew by 2.8 per cent with the arrival of 149,087 tourists. Sri Lanka welcomed over 1.7 million tourists from January to September 2018, a 11.6 per cent growth compared to the same period in the year before.

Out of these, Chinese arrivals comprised more than 209,000, the ministry said. It is predicted that tourist arrivals from China will grow significantly following steps taken to promote Sri Lanka as a holiday destination in Chinese provinces.

Tourist-friendly tuk tuks

Sri Lanka introduced a scheme of tourist-friendly tuk tuks in July 2018 – with tourist-friendly stickers - which has become especially popular in Colombo. This tourist-friendly transport is undertaken by 300 three-wheel drivers in Colombo who followed a two-day training programme where they picked up social etiquette and communication skills to understand customers and historical facts of tourist attractions.

The scheme has been implemented in Negombo (West), Bentota and Matara (South) and Ella (Central). Tourism authorities are targeting a total of 10,000 such tuk tuks.

Cé La Vi

Singaporean dining and nightlife brand Cé La Vi has partnered The Kingsbury, a five-star luxury hotel in Colombo, to launch its newest restaurant and lounge concept. Known for its rooftop locations, Cé La Vi has built a presence in some of the greatest nightlife capitals of the world, including Singapore, Hong Kong and St Tropez. Perched on the rooftop of The Kingsbury, Cé La Vi Colombo features a restaurant serving Japanese cuisine with modern Asian flair, as well as an indoor/outdoor lounge.

Airbnb Experiences

Airbnb and the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), the national tourism ministry, have entered into a partnership to launch Airbnb Experiences in Sri Lanka and drive local, authentic and

sustainable tourism across the country. Through this partnership, Airbnb and SLTDA will work together to welcome onboard local experience hosts onto the Airbnb platform and help local people from across Sri Lanka share their passions and interests with travellers from around the world. Travellers can now choose from more than 40 Airbnb Experiences in Sri Lanka designed and led by local experts.

SURPRISING THEME

Adventure in the skies

Take flight on a three-seater Cessna and fly up over 200m to watch blue whales, dolphins and other sea creatures from a low-flying small aircraft off Sri Lanka's picturesque southern coast.

The once-weekly flights by F-airways Ltd, the only one operating whale watching from the air, has become so popular that the airline will be operating five flights daily during the current October-March winter season.

Priced at US\$150 per passenger, the 30-minute flight takes you over the southern coastline off the town of Galle during which time you see plenty of whales and other creatures and also temples, lakes, resorts and mountain ranges. The airline also operates a five-seater Cessna 205 which provides other sightseeing tours across Sri Lanka.

Thailand

By Chadamas Chinmaneevong



Meinert/Shutterstock.com

At the gate of the Marble Temple, known also as Wat Benchamabopit Dusitvanaram in Bangkok, Thailand

According to the Thailand's Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 3,228,595 foreign tourists visited Thailand in August, which marked a three per cent year-on-year increase. During this period, tourism receipts reached 168 billion baht (US\$5 billion), which indicated a 2.8 per cent year-on-year increase.

Chinese tourists to Thailand dropped 11.8 per cent to 867,461 in August 2018 compared with the same month in the previous year, according to the ministry. The Chinese contributed 52 billion baht to the country, a 7.2 per cent year-on-year dip.

While the number of Chinese tourist arrivals was on an uptick after May 2017, it started to dip after the death of 47 Chinese tourists in a boat accident in July 2017.

For the first eight months of 2018, some 25 million foreign tourists visited Thailand and contributed 1.35 trillion baht to the Kingdom. Some 7.7 million Chinese tourists visited Thailand for the first eight months of this year, marking a year-on-year increase of 16.5 per cent. They contributed 423 billion baht to Thailand, a year-on-year increase of 22.2 per cent.

FIVE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- 1 There are now new Norwegian flights which will go direct to Krabi from Copenhagen, Stockholm and Oslo during the winter season. From each of the three Scandinavian capitals, the carrier will fly twice a week. Bangkok remains a full-year route for Norwegian, while Krabi is a winter-only route.
- 2 Michelin is expanding its presence in Thailand. The second-ever Michelin guide to Thailand will include Phuket and Phang Nga in addition to Bangkok, which got its first Michelin-starred restaurants late 2017. This guide presents the best dining and lodging experiences to travelers looking for the world-class scenes of Thai gastronomy and hospitality.
- 3 The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) opened its 28th overseas office in Toronto in April to target the Canadian market which showcases high potential. TAT expects tourism revenues from Canada to increase 8.5 per cent to 21.9 billion baht in 2019 and the number of Canadian visitors will reach 500,000 in three years from 235,000 in 2017.
- 4 Thai Lion Air has launched four new routes from Bangkok to Dhaka (Bangladesh), Zhengzhou (China), Shenzhen (China), and Kathamandu (Nepal). The airline also plans to start services from Bangkok to the following Japanese cities: Narita, Nagoya, Fukuoka and Osaka within the first quarter of 2019.
- 5 Airports of Thailand is investing 400 million baht in a new application to better serve passengers at Suvarnabhumi, Don Mueang and Phuket airports. To be launched in 1H2019, it will cover services like VAT refund information, taxi services and duty-free shopping promotions.

PROJECTIONS FOR 2019



Yuthasak Supasorn
Governor
Tourism Authority of
Thailand

“High competition would continue in 2019 and the trade war between China and the US would be closely monitored. However, effective marketing campaigns and risk management by promoting Thailand’s tourism products in potential markets such as South-Asia should raise tourism income by 11.5 per cent year-on-year to 3.34 trillion baht.”



Adith Chairattananon
Secretary-general
Association of Thai
Travel Agents

“The number of visitors would hit 40 million in 2019, thanks to the growth of low-cost airlines and a strong Asian economy. Arrivals from Asian nations would steadily increase while visitors from longhaul markets would rise slightly. Natural disasters would pose risks to inbound tourism.”



Supawan Tanomkieatipum
President
Thai Hotels
Association

“2019 would be a challenging year due to high competition in the tourism sector. If the election can be organised peacefully without subsequent violence and conflict, the number of foreign visitors could hit 40 million and the national tourism income would reach three trillion baht in 2019.”

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

25.8 million

The cumulative foreign arrivals for the first eight months of 2018, a 9.9 per cent year-on-year increase

7.7 million

The number of Chinese tourists as of August 2018, accounting for one-third of total visitors in Thailand

3.2 million

The number of tourist arrivals in Thailand in August 2018, a year-on-year increase of 3.3 per cent

75

The average hotel occupancy rate the Thai Hotels Association (THA) is predicting for 2018 – the highest in three years

168

The tourism receipts in billion baht generated in August 2018, up 2.7 per cent year-on-year

THE EXPERT RECOMMENDS



Pornthip Hirunkate
Managing director
Destination Asia Thailand

MUST EAT

Head to one of the most famous small stalls on Chinatown in Bangkok for an authentic local experience and good taste of pepper clear soup and crispy pork belly called *Kuay Jab Nai Huan*.

MUST SEE

A boat trip along Bangkok Noi Canal which shows how the city preserves the authentic lifestyle with modern civilisation.

MUST STAY

Ariyasom Villa, Bangkok, a small luxury boutique hotel and spa in the heart of Bangkok, located just off Sukhumvit Road, which boasts of an authentic Thai environment and healthy cuisine.

Below: Cruising through Watkhulasawan temples along the Bangkok canal



asam3dv/Shutterstock.com

WHAT'S NEW

Central Phuket

Phuket has its new and biggest shopping centre named Central Phuket. This landmark covers 400,000m². It will host international events throughout the year, such as the Phuket International Music Festival and Phuket International Countdown 2019, and is home to a huge number of eateries and restaurants together offering a vast array of cuisines. In addition, Central Phuket also features several exclusive attractions for tourists: Tales of Thailand – the country's largest indoor market reflecting "Thainess lifestyle" from the four regions of Thailand; Tribhum – a 3D virtual adventure fantasy walkthrough, to officially open in November; and Aquaria – Thailand's newest format of aquarium featuring more than 25,000 ocean and river creatures, which will open in the first quarter of 2019.

Cape Fahn

Cape and Kantary Hotels has opened its new property, Cape Fahn, on a private island close to Koh Samui. The property is home to 22 pool villas, varying between one and two bedrooms with sizes ranging from 220m² to 570m². There are two restaurants available and activities offered include water sports, cooking classes and day trips.

The Legend Siam Pattaya

The Legend Siam Pattaya is set to become the new landmark of Pattaya, where visitors can experience Thai culture and lifestyle in three aspects: Siam Vilize showcases civilisation of Siam, Araya Thai presents Thai traditions and culture, and Bhumi Pan Din wisdom portrays the pride of Thailand. It is a cultural destination that brings together Thai arts, culture and shopping altogether in one place.

The Marvel Experience Thailand

South-east Asia's first Marvel Experience branded attraction has launched at Bangkok's Mega Bangna mall. This themed entertainment attraction consists of two main zones. The Reception Building includes the ticket office, Avengers Cafe, Super Hero Snack Bar, and Marvel Adventure Zone for kids. The Attraction Zone is for visitors to join a two-hour battle alongside Marvel Heros in a combination of immersive hyperreality, interactive and multimedia technology games, and augmented and virtual reality simulations.

Baan Huay Tom Village

This village in Lamphun province presents the ethnic lifestyle of locals. It suits the people who love nature, wildlife and vegetarian food. Visitors can follow a nature trail, watch birds and camp near the Ping River. Tourists can also experience agro-tourism at the Huay Tom Royal Project site where there are gardens of vegetables including eggplants and kales as well as orchards of tropical fruits.

SURPRISING THEME

Adventure in nature

Head away from the city's hustle and bustle and step into Khao Yai National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, an oasis brimming with wildlife and primeval jungles. There are more than 50km of hiking and biking trails which wind through the long-standing nature preserve, and its many waterfalls include the majestic Haew Narok and Haew Suwat, immortalised in the famous Danny Boyle film *The Beach*.



From top: Central Phuket; Cape Fahn; The Legend Siam Pattaya; Baan Huay Tom Village

Vietnam

By Marissa Carruthers



Quang nguyen vinh/Shutterstock.com

The Golden Bridge is lifted by two giant hands in the tourist resort on Ba Na Hill in Danang, Vietnam

Vietnam’s impressive 22.9 per cent growth in international arrivals as of September 2018, was driven by the swelling Chinese market.

A total of 11,616,490 foreigners visited Vietnam from January to September 2018, according to latest figures from the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT).

Asian markets dominated the arrivals, with more than nine million people visiting Vietnam during this time.

China remained the lead source market, with more than 3.8 million Chinese venturing into the country – a 29.7 per cent year-on-year rise.

South Korea ranked second, with 2.6 million arrivals. This marks a 49.6 per cent year-on-year increase, making the country Vietnam’s largest growing market.

The US ranked as Vietnam’s strongest Western market – a key source that is being actively targeted by VNAT. A total of 528,634 visitors from the US – 14.1 per cent year-on-year rise – arrived in the country in the first eight months of 2018.

Russia followed with 454,986 arrivals, representing an 8.2 per cent year-on-year increase.

FIVE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- 1 In June, Vietnam extended its successful visa waiver scheme for five European countries to June 30, 2021. Visitors from the UK, France, Germany, Spain and Italy now receive a free 14-day visa on arrival. Arrivals from these markets have risen by 10.1 per cent since the waiver was introduced in mid-2015.
- 2 Vietnam has unveiled eight additional national intangible cultural heritages. These include papermaking by the Dao Do ethnic people in Bac Quang district, Ha Giang province; Dum singing in Thuy Nguyen district, the northern port city of Hai Phong. It is hoped that this title will encourage more visitors to head to the outlying areas.
- 3 Air New Zealand will axe its seasonal flights to Vietnam in 2019. It has been flying to the country since 2016 and has already slashed the frequency of flights from three times a week to two. It cited “unexpected disruptions” as the reason.
- 4 In October, VNAT announced the launch of a programme to rank Vietnamese tour guides. This is the first time the organisation has such a programme, with guides ranked from three- to five-stars based on capacity, knowledge and skills. It aims to enhance the quality of guides.
- 5 Vietnam Airlines will be suspending plans to operate direct flights between Ho Chi Minh City and the West coast of the US until 2020. This two-year delay will impact the increase in tourists the connection is expected to attract.

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

62.1

The year-on-year percentage increase of visitors entering Vietnam by land, as of September 2018, thanks to the ease in visa restrictions and reduced fees

49.6

The percentage increase of visitors from South Korea in the first nine months of 2018 – Vietnam’s fastest growing source market, prompted by an increase in overseas marketing

9,407,391

The number of visitors arriving by air, as of September 2018, a 17.4 per cent hike from the same period in the previous year, spurred by an increase in flights

27.2

The year-on-year percentage increase in the number of Asian arrivals in the first nine months of 2018 after increased marketing campaigns throughout the region

1,531,201

The number of visitors from Europe, as of September 2018, which represents a stalled 9.8 per cent growth

THE EXPERT RECOMMENDS



Nicholas Wade
Assistant general manager
Khiri Vietnam

MUST EAT

The *local bánh xèo* (seafood pancake), with variations across the country. You can try one everywhere you go and street food are a must.

MUST SEE

The incredible green river of Tra Su in rainy season. Watch out for the changing colours of the northern rice terraces as harvest season approaches and do not miss the awe-inspiring Son Doong Caves.

MUST STAY

Hotel Des Arts in Saigon centre. Set on a hillside outside Châu Đốc, Victoria Niu Sam has incredible views across rice fields with its majestic and impressive rooftop views of the city.

Below:
Tra Su forest which is fringed by mangrove forests



jindown/Shutterstock.com

PROJECTIONS FOR 2019



Jeff Redl
Managing director
Diethelm Travel Vietnam

“Vietnam will continue to attract more visitors because of the increasing ease of obtaining visas at reduced costs, improved infrastructure and more destinations to experience such as Phu Quoc and Qui Nhon. The product offering has also been enlarged, with more resorts and hotels throughout the country, and new conventions centres and venues for business event groups.”



Lin Le
Group managing director
Asia DMC

“Since becoming recognised as Asia’s leading destination in September 2018 by the World Travel Awards, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism has invested in showcasing the destination in key markets of Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Asia DMC’s year has been significantly strong with arrivals from Europe. South-east Asian countries are on the rise for leisure and MICE groups. We hope this continues in 2019.”



Alexander Leven
General manager
Asian Trails Vietnam

“As external factors are favourable, I expect the trend of steady arrival growth to continue. China and South Korea will remain at the forefront with more charters arriving at destinations. Increase in hotels in Phu Quoc are further evidence, although infrastructure like transport and entertainment are lagging. Due to new infrastructure and multiple hotel openings, Sapa might shift towards mass market.”

WHAT'S NEW

Angelina Restaurant and Lounge

Sofitel Legend Metropole Hanoi has a new place to dine as it unveiled its new bespoke bar-lounge-restaurant, marking a new chapter for the city's entertainment and culinary scene. The two-storey space named Angelina now boasts an eight-metre high floor-to-ceiling bar and seats up to 120 guests. A whisky lounge sits on the ground floor, with the second floor home to an intimate dining area. A new chef, Aurélien Houguet, is now heading up the kitchen, which serves lunch and dinner, and a selection of bar snacks after 10pm.

The Reverie Saigon Residential Suites

The Reverie Saigon has rebranded eight floors of its luxury-serviced apartments as alternatives for leisure and business travellers seeking home comforts. Under its new Suite Dream package, guests are handed a daily credit of US\$250 to spend on airport transfers, butler service, spa treatments, dining or accessing the lounge. Business travellers can use the living and dining spaces for meetings, with the butler-manned kitchen on call for refreshments while leisure travellers can use the property's facilities and enjoy the experience.

First boutique cruise

The Lux Group has launched Vietnam's first boutique cruise through the Cat Ba Archipelago in the Gulf of Tonkin. Amenities include a luxury spa, film under the stars, indoor and outdoor lounges, Vietnam's first floating infinity swimming pool, a pool bar and 20 suites offering river and ocean views. The three-deck ship also boasts two restaurants and private cabanas, the Bach Thai Buo Library for reading and relaxation, the White Lotus Spa, a fitness centre and games room, as well as an art gallery and auction centre.

Sheraton Grand Danang Resort

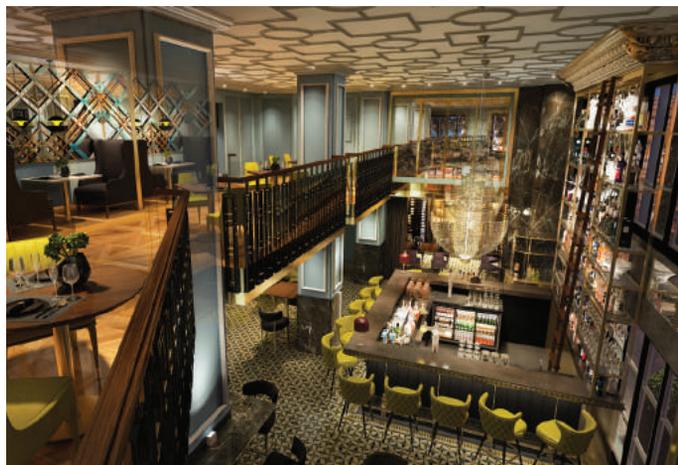
This five-star beachside property is situated on the white sands of Danang City's Non Nuoc Beach. Set on 17.3 acres of landscaped tropical grounds, the resort is conveniently located 20 minutes from Danang International Airport and Hoi An. The 258 rooms include guestrooms and suites, featuring Sheraton Signature Sleep Experience. A total of six F&B outlets take in a range of cuisines, with a total of 3,300m² of flexible function and pre-function space for meetings and events.

SpiceRoads Cycling

Cycling tours in Vietnam received a boost with the announcement that SpiceRoads Cycling will introduce e-bikes to Vietnam. The move enables cyclists with more varied experiences and fitness levels to enjoy biking trips in the country. The e-bikes can be hired per tour as an alternative to mountain, road or carbon bikes. Vietnam tours feature special bikes that use "pedal assist" technology to engage the bike's motor once the rider begins to pedal.

InterContinental Long Beach Phu Quoc

The five-star resort situated on the island's long beach features 459 rooms, suites and villas, as well as six F&B outlets. A spa is onsite offering a range of treatments, with activities including yoga, pilates and water sports. The resort is also home aplenty indoor event venues that include the Grand and Junior ballrooms, meeting rooms and board rooms. It also boasts the island's only theatre for up to 130 delegates for intimate concerts, film screenings and private shows.



From top: Angelina Restaurant and Lounge; SpiceRoads Cycling; InterContinental Long Beach Phu Quoc

SURPRISING THEME

Family fun

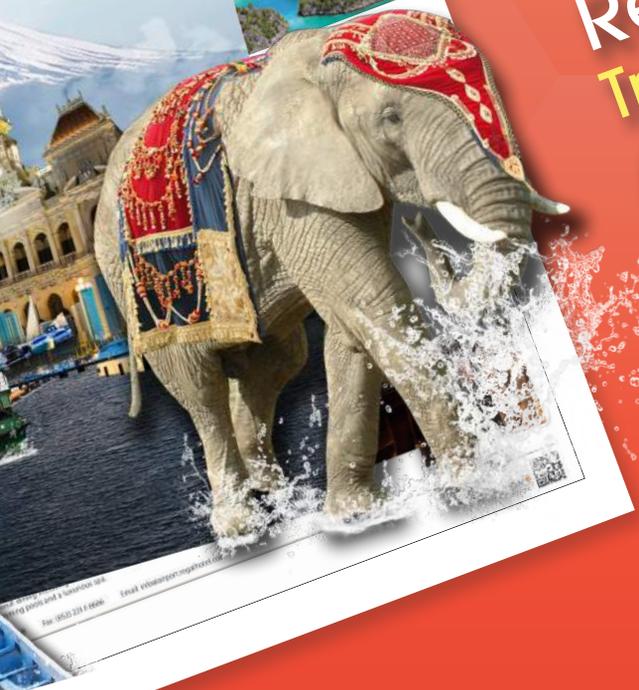
Enjoy a fun-packed day at Dam Sen Waterpark in Ho Chi Minh City, where there is something to do regardless of age. Take a step back in time and tour the streets of Old Hanoi by cycle rickshaw before watching a traditional Vietnamese water puppet show. Visit The Duck Stop in Phnong Nha for a fun rural experience. Meet the local family who run the farm, sample some of their produce and feed the ducks before riding a water buffalo and enjoying the local food. Snap memorable photos at Art in Paradise Danang, an interactive three-dimensional world.

FIXING CONUNDRUM

Amid a tightening labour market, Singapore's hotels are striving to balance booming business with manpower shortage



HEAT
As the summer months begin, cruise ports are in the works in the rising middle class at Asia is driving the region's cruise market



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VIEW FROM THE TOP

Kuoni Travel Holding CEO, Peter Meier, tells **Raini Hamdi** that 'focus is the key to triumph in a fast-changing environment, which is why the group is lopping off its tour operating division and concentrating on two other core divisions

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A high-action photograph of a surfer riding a barrel wave. The surfer is positioned in the center-left of the frame, crouching on a white surfboard. The wave is a deep, translucent blue, curling over the surfer and creating a tunnel effect. The background shows a clear blue sky and a hint of a tropical coastline with palm trees on the right side.

SIARGAO: THE BEST ISLAND IN ASIA

Located in the south of the Philippines, Siargao is a teardrop-shaped island known for its waves that attract surfers from all over the world. The country's surfing capital, having one of the best reef-breaks, is perfect not only for professionals but also for newbies. Siargao grabbed the top spot as the best island in Asia in the Condé Nast Traveler's 2018 Readers' Choice Award.

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