



ATF 2019
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Common vision, standards

After meeting rooms, ASEAN is pushing for exhibition venues to be certified next

By Mimi Hudoyo

Following the adoption of standards for hotel meeting rooms at ATF last year, the ASEAN committees on MICE competency standards are making further progress on certification with the focus now turned to exhibition venues at ATF 2019.

The standard for exhibition venues is part of the ASEAN MICE Venue Standards (AMVS), whose committee is led by Thailand to focus on hotel meeting rooms, exhibition and convention venues, and public areas (special events venue).

Supawan Teerarat, senior vice president strategic business development & innovation, Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) told the *Daily*: "This year we would like the ministers to adopt and endorse the standards for exhibition venues so that we can start the (implementation) of the category in the region."

"We've had the meeting for the second draft of the exhibition venue standard last November and the 10 countries have come to an agreement (following adjustments to make them suitable for application in ASEAN)," she shared.

Once the draft receives ministerial endorsement, regional NTOs will be invited to Thailand to receive auditor's training of the exhibition venues. The auditors would

then return to their respective countries to begin the auditing and certifying process, with the first exhibition venues expected to be certified in 2020, added Supawan.

Having certified venues based on common standards will be useful in courting international event organisers to the region, Supawan stressed.

"The difficulty for ASEAN at the moment is (to meet the needs of) organisers from Europe and the US looking for venues with high standards... Safety and security is number one (concern), as well as accessibility and facilities within the venue, while physical, technical and services (also need to be addressed)."

As well, ASEAN NTOs are developing



The difficulty for ASEAN at the moment is (to meet the needs of) organisers from Europe and the US looking for venues with high standards...

Supawan Teerarat, senior vice president strategic business development, TCEB

standards for MICE professionals, with the working group led by Indonesia.

Ani Insani, head of the delegations for the Indonesian NTO, said: "We have developed the competency standards for MICE and events professionals from front liners to managers, and the ASEAN Secretariat has published the full set of them."

The plan is to add the MICE and events professionals category to the ASEAN Common Competency Standards for Tourism Professionals (ACCSTP), which currently houses hotels, restaurants as well as tours and travel standards.

Ani said: "To add the MICE professional standard to the ACCSTP, we need to have all member countries' endorsements. The Indonesia Minister of Tourism has sent the letters to his counterparts in ASEAN member countries, with Myanmar, Singapore and Brunei signed so far."

FATA conceives digital platform

By S Puvaneswary

A digital platform complete with a booking engine for Federation of ASEAN Travel Associations (FATA) members, and their members, to sell tours, products and attractions from South-east Asia to the rest of the world is in the making.

FATA's executive director, Hamzah Rahmat said the idea for a B2B2C platform, agreed upon by the FATA board, will be presented to delegates at the upcoming FATA Convention 2019 this April in Putrajaya, Malaysia. About 200 delegates



Hamzah: FATA to conquer digital

are expected to attend the conference, which will be in its second year.

Mingkwan Netmowlee, president of FATA, said that the platform – called FATA Connect – will have its soft launch at the

World Travel Market later this year, before officially launching at ATF 2020 in Brunei.

She shared: "TripAdvisor contacted us at ITB Asia last year and they have indicated their interest in selling products on the portal. We have yet to agree."

FATA will manage FATA Connect, with details on which member association will take charge of the platform, as well as budget allocated for its development, to be revealed later.

Regional promotion boost for Indonesia

By Mimi Hudoyo

The Visit Indonesia Tourism Office (VITO) – the promotion arm of the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism – in Singapore has been upgraded to a Wonderful Indonesia Tourism Office (WITO) to become the first full tourism promotion office overseas since 1996, when the government closed the Indonesia Tourism Promotion Office in Singapore.

Sulaiman Shehdek, who has been appointed WITO Singapore country manager, has been handed a significant increase in budget to increase footfalls from Singapore. His team now comprises a marketing manager, marketing executive, as well as marketing and administration support.

Sulaiman shared that Singapore is both a "big market" for Indonesia, as well as an international hub, which is another important arrival source.

He shared: "The minister of tourism has deemed it important to have a full office to enable us to maximise Singapore's potential of both market segments."

Data from 2018 showed that arrivals from Singapore to Indonesia totalled 1.7 million, and the office's responsibility is to achieve four million arrivals, where half of it will come from maximising the hub.

For the Singapore market, the plan is to promote Riau Islands (Batam, Bintan, Tanjung Pinang and Tanjung Balai) and 14 destinations in Indonesia – such as Belitung, Pekanbaru and Bandung – that have direct flights from Singapore.

"Riau Islands continue to play an important role (for the Singaporean market). Arrival data from 2017 showed that 72 per cent of Singaporean arrivals to Indonesia

72 The percentage of Singapore arrivals to Indonesia that head to Riau Islands

was to Riau Islands. We will continue to promote this," he said.

New promotion initiatives include WITO Singapore working together with both local travel operators to sell Batam and Bintan, as well as hotels to create programmes.

Sulaiman lamented that some Singaporeans may not even know of other destinations in Indonesia beyond Riau Islands, Jakarta and Bali.

"Meanwhile, competition in the region is also high. There are many LCCs (that fly to and from) Singapore, and there are other destinations that offer cheap packages to Singaporeans. Therefore, we will hold more activities and events here this year (to increase awareness of other Indonesian destinations)," he said.

Among WITO Singapore's plans is bringing consumer sales programmes to the heartlands; working more closely with inbound tour operators as well as airlines to conduct joint marketing campaigns; organising travel fairs at malls; participating in NATAS fairs, and managing tactical campaigns for special airline fares.

Next, programmes to tap the international traveller market arriving in Singapore will include developing partnerships with tour operators to sell twin destination-itineraries.

"The Ministry of Tourism will work with (the trade and airlines) in the origin country of the travellers. Those who have been sending clients to Singapore will be invited to include a destination in Indonesia in their packages, for instance, the "Fly and Ferry" package to Bintan, where tourists travelling to Singapore can also enjoy a ferry ride to Bintan plus accommodation at a very special price," Sulaiman said.



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News

Viet Nam reaps fruits of labour

Tour operators are seeing greater interest in the country as a repeat destination

By Marissa Carruthers

Viet Nam is steadily rising as a repeat destination for international visitors, as positive developments in the country's tourism sector, and boost to its international image have increasingly placed it as a serious rival to regional tourism heavyweights.

A growing supply of international hotels; more diverse cultural, gourmet and luxury products; promotion of tertiary destinations; construction of new infrastructure; and the government's proactive stance in prioritising inbound tourism are all contributing factors.

ICS Travel Group's director of marketing, Scott Busch, pointed out the growing number of repeat visitors could be attributed to new flight routes and the relaxation of visa requirements. "We've seen our Viet Nam business grow by over 30 per cent over the past few years, and we expect this growth to continue," he said.

Asia DMC has also noted an increase in the number of returning longhaul guests, specifically from Europe. Managing director, Linh Le, shared: "They have already visited the highlights of Viet Nam, and want to delve into Vietnamese culture and off-the-beaten-track experiences."

A survey carried out by Vietnam National Administration of Tourism at the end of 2017 found that almost 60 per cent

of international arrivals were first-time visitors, a slight decrease from 67 per cent from a previous 2014 study.

Jeff Redl, managing director of Diethelm Viet Nam, added the government's investment in the development of new tourist areas is paying off with the Western market, enabling the DMC "to offer off-the-beaten-track itineraries for repeat visitors".



Redl: tourism investment pays off

He noted a rise in longhaul visitors eschewing the classic north-to-south itinerary in favour of spending more time in the north in summer or combining the south with Cambodia during winter.

"They understand that visiting Viet Nam should be considered horizontally, not vertically, and needs several visits at the right period of the year supported by the expertise of local tour operators," Redl commented.

In addition, the Formula 1 Grand Prix taking place in Ha Noi in April 2020 is expected to further fuel visitors' appetite.

Kate Jones, Minor Hotels' spokesperson for Viet Nam, said: "This (upcoming event) puts Viet Nam firmly in mind, and it will attract a different type of visitor, who comes for a specific reason at a specific time of year and is more likely travel to other parts of the country."

Tour operators also believe the country

is emerging as a top pick for travellers who tire of traditionally popular destinations such as Thailand, and are seeking less-explored places in the region.

Redl said: "(Based on feedback) from our worldwide partners, clients have already done several trips to Thailand and they're looking for an alternative, and Viet Nam is at the top of their list of potential destinations."

Oleg Shafranov, general manager of Khiri Viet Nam, added: "Viet Nam is growing increasingly competitive versus Thailand as exciting domestic destinations emerge, and services and infrastructure continuously improve."

Huge investment has also been ploughed into the southern island of Phu Quoc and the coastal city of Da Nang in central Viet Nam. With careful management, stakeholders think these destinations have the potential to compete with the likes of Phuket and Bali in the future.

However, Asia DMC's Le stressed that care needs to be taken to ensure that development is sustainable and responsible tourism advocated, in order to avoid the pitfalls of mass tourism that plagues parts of Phuket and Bali.

Said Le: "Viet Nam's beach destinations can learn from past mistakes (of others) to develop tourism in a sustainable manner that is good for all, including commercial operators, local businesses and people, and the environment."

Bringing history alive

By Rosa Ocampo

In 2019, the Philippines' rich and storied history will receive greater attention as the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) lines up activities focusing on its underrated heritage.

Taking the spotlight is a two-year campaign entitled Philippines500, Celebration of Quincentennial Circumnavigation of the World. It will run till 2021, which will coincide with the 500th anniversary of Ferdinand Magellan's discovery of the Philippines.

TPB's 2019 work programme obtained by the *Daily* indicated that the campaign will target "global mainstream markets" including millennials, foodies and *balikbayans* (Filipinos residing abroad). The goal is to "boost awareness of the Philippines and entice other Spanish-speaking (tourists) to visit" the only Spanish-speaking nation in South-east Asia.

TPB will also showcase the 75th anniversary of American general Douglas MacArthur's landing in Leyte which saw the Allied forces winning the largest naval battle in history, ending the Japanese occupation of the Philippines during World War II (WWII), in October this year.

This marketing push given to Philippine's colonial history has been welcomed by the travel trade.

Rajah Travel's chairman and president Aileen Clemente said that historical milestones are also a source of tourist arrivals, and suggested "(identifying) significant events in the Philippines and (planning for) it several years down the road".

Rajah Travel is one of a handful of agencies that offer itineraries centred around WWII's events. Its Salute To Valor: WWII Tales of Courage tour – which started in 2015 – highlights the historical value of Palawan and its role in WWII. This year, the Calamian Islands including Coron whose Bay has 11 Japanese shipwrecks; the former leper colony of Culion; and wildlife sanctuary with African animals, Calauit, was added to the itinerary.

Celebrate TLC's managing director-operations Simon Ang said: "We need to make people realise that we are more than beaches, sun and sea." He added that Binondo (Manila's Chinatown), the oldest and biggest in the world, is another historic area that could highlighted.

One of the first to package tours to Binondo, Ivan Man Dy – founder of Old Manila Walks – will take things a step further by bringing tourists from Hong Kong and China this February on a tour that coincides with the Manila Art Deco Weekend.

We need to make people realise that we are more than beaches, sun and sea.

Simon Ang
Managing director operations, Celebrate TLC

Destination creation with events

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

Royal Cliff is harbouring strong ambitions of turning itself into a "destination" through the creation of its own lifestyle and sporting events, building on its core strength as a major resort and MICE venue in Pattaya with its PEACH convention centre on-site.

"We are creating our own events to target families and the luxury segments. Not only do we accept events but we also create them," Vitanart Vathanakul, CEO of Royal Cliff Hotels Group told the *Daily*.

"This could be another channel to help Royal Cliff stand out and become a destination. The idea is to make Royal Cliff more vibrant and entertaining. We are more than a resort or convention centre," he stated.

One key way the hotel group has been pursuing its lifestyle events strategy is through organising comedy festivals.

Vitanart revealed that Royal Cliff has brought UK comedian, Bill Bailey, to the resort for a one-night show in 2018, and is now looking at inviting regional acts such as Singapore's Jinx Yeo to "promote the Asian community to the Asian market".

Focus is also placed on staging sports tournaments and competitions such as the Bohemia REI and FITZ Club ITF Seniors Championship, which brought over 200 players to compete in the senior tennis tournament. "I even attended and competed in (the games) to get a feel of how to improve the tournament further from a player's perspective," said Vitanart.

Taking the events route to strengthen



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Royal Cliff Beach Hotel's lobby

its destination positioning strategy is a clear attempt by the Pattaya hospitality icon to keep its offerings fresh.

"Royal Cliff is more than 45 years old, so we want to relive memories for families (who have visited us since the 1970s) as well as their second generation, and millennials," said Vitanart.

The property in December 2018 emerged from a major makeover that was rolled out "to improve infrastructure of the hotel, as well as to drive up performance of the management and staff".

Costing a billion baht (US\$31.4 million), the makeover was led by prominent Thai architect Duangrit Bunnag, who gave a complete overhaul of the common areas, F&B and event spaces, sports clubs as well as rooms. The upgrades include Mini Suite, while the new Ocean Deluxe room was repainted and refurbished with new bathroom fixtures.

News

Mandatory insurance in works

Thailand's likely to make travel insurance compulsory for all foreign arrivals

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

Thailand's tourism officials are looking at introducing compulsory travel insurance for international visitors in the near future, especially as a recent spate of accidents involving tourists have cast the spotlight on the country's safety and security records.

Surging visitor numbers into Thailand has intensified the challenge of unpaid medical treatment fees racked up by foreign visitors while vacationing in the country, Thailand's minister of tourism and sports Weerasak Kowsurat shared in a recent interview with the *Daily*.

"I'm introducing a new legislation, probably within (this year or next), to require self insurance for all arrivals into Thailand – it will be one or two dollars more for each person," said Weerasak.

"This common pool of money will be used to buy one insurance policy (to cover all international visitors)," he added. "We are barred by the law to use our budget to buy insurance policies for international arrivals."

"If travellers want to get involved in more challenging activities, like climbing

mountains or diving in the sea, I'll put into law to make sure service operators stop them from entering into the activity unless they buy the second level of insurance. And if they're driving any vehicles, they will need another kind of insurance."

The proposed mandatory travel insurance policy has received positive reception from tour operators and agents, although it has opened up questions on how the requirement will be implemented.

Destination Asia Thailand, general manager, Philip Wigglesworth, said: "(Travel insurance) should be compulsory for each visitor so as not to be a burden on the visiting country. We all have to be responsible visitors and most reputable travel insurance suppliers already offer basic cover for low-risk activities."

"However, for what we would consider extreme sports, there should be a travel insurance supplement to ensure that the traveller is fully covered for all risks."

Sharing similar sentiments, David Kevan, partner and product person at UK-based Chic Locations, expects most UK clients arriving into Thailand to have

comprehensive insurance including medical. Most of these policies would exclude activities like rock climbing, sea and sky diving, and ziplining, and therefore he suggested that the mandatory insurance to be included within the activity prices.

He said: "(The Thai authorities should) make it mandatory for all arriving clients to have comprehensive insurance; if not, (visitors) have to buy a local policy upon arrival – it becomes a condition of entry."

Although Kevan expects possible "short-term" issues in implementation, the policy roll-out will likely to be "seamless" once clients become fully aware of the stipulation.

"Alternatively, increase the departure tax from Thailand to pay for the insurance for incoming clients, (similar to what Japan has done)," he suggested. "(The funds collected) will all end up in the same pot."

Trade members are also urging for better transport safety in the country. Said Addie Hirunkate, managing director, Destination Asia Thailand: "I believe self-insurance is a good move overall, though I'd like to also see the Thai authorities place more focus on transportation standards. The regulation of boats, vans and coaches needs to be enforced to a higher degree."

Khmer food gets spotlight in new fair

By Marissa Carruthers

Determined to shift perception and raise Khmer gastronomy profile, Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism is preparing to host the country's first gastronomy fair in May.

Thong Rathasak, director general of product development, international cooperation and ASEAN, said: "We want to raise the profile of Cambodian food. You go to Thailand and have *pad Thai*, in Viet Nam you have *pho*. We want to raise Cambodia's food identity."

"Gastronomy is now a popular travel theme. We want to create a story, and ideas and concepts around Cambodian cuisine," said Thong.

The fair dates are yet to be confirmed but the ministry will work with partners to develop a range of menus and tasters, as well as a host of food-related activities.

The country's inaugural domestic travel fair will run alongside the gastronomy event in Phnom Penh, with the aim to stimulate domestic tourism.

Noting the desires of Cambodians who like to stay in the country's growing legion of high-end hotels, the ministry will partner with industry players to provide green season offers for domestic travellers during the traditionally quieter months.

"The idea is to give them a chance to stay in these hotels," Thong said.



Weerasak: two-tier insurance policy



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In the spotlight

Alone and ready to splurge

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

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

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

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

Women a bigger part of the travel lexicon

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

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

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



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

Steven Phillips
General manager, Joali Maldives

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

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

Meanwhile, the rise of female travel is also shaping luxury travel products, design and brand.

Steven Phillips, general manager of the new Joali Maldives, remarked: "I can't believe it's taken people this long to realise (the sway women have in travel). It's important to us that we continue targeting families and couples, but also ladies who travel here in small groups whether to (take time away from family life), or as singles or divorcees.

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

China and India

The Economist noted that China and India are exceptions to the trend of rising marriage ages in Asia, but predicted that the phenomenon would soon hit these fast developing economies.

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

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

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

These travellers want tailor-made itineraries that are highly personalised, she pointed out, adding that there is demand for both longhaul holidays and more fre-

quent shorthaul trips in the year within this segment.

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

The convergence of prolonged singlehood and aspirational travel

It is not just spending power that these career-driven single travellers bring to luxury travel. Much has been said about travel becoming more individualistic, tied to aspirations for selves, and the trend could not be more stark than in a segment of single travellers free to do holidays their way.

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

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

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

Single is not a dirty word in luxury

In the evolution of singlehood holidays are several archetypes. Whether it be the



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Tourism chief showcase

Enduring tourism appeal

In the second of a four-part special, top tourism executives in Singapore and Malaysia pick some of the most notable developments coming up in their destinations in 2019, and their plans to promote the country

Singapore

Keith Tan Kean Loong

Chief executive
Singapore Tourism Board

What's the most exciting development for tourism in Singapore this year?

In 2019, our nation commemorates the 200th year since the founding of modern Singapore with the Singapore Bicentennial, which is a series of events (showcasing) the nation's storied history including the largest edition of i-Light Singapore.

The anticipated Jewel at Changi Airport will open this year, as well as Design Orchard. This space along Orchard Road will enable and showcase the work and products of Singapore designers, and will add new energy and local flavour to the iconic shopping street.

In 2019, Singapore will be the first city in Asia to host The World's 50 Best Restaurant awards, and The World's 50 Best Bars awards in 2021. In line with ASEAN's Joint Declaration on Gastronomy Tourism, these will further enliven the local culinary and nightlife scene.

ArtScience Museum is lit up during the i-Light Marina Bay event



Malaysia

Mohmed Razip Hasan

Deputy director general (promotion),
Tourism Malaysia

What's the most exciting development for tourism in Malaysia this year?

We're excited to promote Desaru Coast with its water theme park, as well as MCM Studio, an indoor theme park for families; both are located in Johor. Sky Mirror in Sekinchan, Selangor, is also a new tourism product that easily appeals to many markets.

A trending hospitality concept in Malaysia is "glamping". It involves camping activities that feature accommodation and facilities more luxurious than those associated with traditional camping. Tiarasa Escapes Glamping Resort in Janda Baik, Pahang, and Boulder Valley Glamping Resort in Penang are examples of new glamping products that will give Malaysia a fresh appeal.

In addition, the east coast of Sabah has potential to grow further. Besides offering some of the best diving spots in the world, there are destinations like Tower of Heaven and Danum Valley with great appeal.

What are the most under-rated destinations or segments in your country, and how would you promote it in 2019?

Niche packages such as edu-tourism and agrotourism are under-rated and would benefit from a boost in promotions. Tourism Malaysia will continue to work hand in hand with tour operators to align the promotion of this niche product and tailor make it to suit the target market.

What's on your wishlist for ASEAN tourism in 2019?

I have a long wishlist. I would like to see more international hotel chains especially five-



star brands operating in Malaysia, while encouraging more local chains to capitalise on the potential of the tourism industry. This would drive more international airlines from South-east Asia and long-haul markets to make Malaysia a preferred destination. Although we have Malaysia

Airlines, AirAsia and Malindo Air, having more airlines flying to the country would help make Malaysia an international aviation hub, and benefit international and local travellers.

I would also like to see a higher level of customer service in the hospitality industry and tourism sector that is on par with international destinations. I would like to encourage them to invest in regular training programmes for staff at all levels, especially front-liners who have direct interactions with tourists.

I believe our hospitality industry can be friendlier and display the warm Malaysian hospitality that we have at heart.

We find that tourists are conscious of (sustainable tourism) issues, want to travel responsibly, and spend their tourist dollars on entities aligned with these issues.





What are the most under-rated destinations or segments in your country, and how would you promote it in 2019?

Singapore's visual arts scene is on the rise and carving out its own identity, bolstered by the presence of the National Gallery Singapore and Gillman Barracks, which showcase diverse art from South-east Asia and beyond. In addition, there has been a surge in the number of local artists who have made a name for themselves on the global stage.

For 2019, visitors can expect new art fair S.E.A. Focus, and thought leadership events under the STB-Frieze partnership, as part of the annual Singapore Art Week in January. Art enthusiasts can also look forward to Singapore Biennale 2019 later in the year.

What's on your wishlist for ASEAN tourism in 2019?

Firstly, I would like to thank ASEAN member states for their support and commitment to cruise tourism via the ASEAN Declaration on Cruise Tourism endorsed at ATF 2018.

As ASEAN's lead coordinator for cruise development, we are keen to follow up on the Declaration's several endeavours in 2019 to further drive cruise development in the region. These include greater clarity and alignment in cruise-related policies and regulations, and capacity building.

Beyond this, STB aims to continue collaboration with the ASEAN tourism community to develop and enhance cruise infrastructure, and attract visitors to cruise in our beautiful region. – Pamela Chow

Singapore's visual arts scene is on the rise and carving out its own identity... There has been a surge in the number of local artists who have made a name for themselves on the global stage.



Kota Belud, Sabah

I would also like to encourage more private sector companies in this industry to practise sustainable tourism, apply for eco or green certifications and be more mindful of their impact on the environment. We find that tourists are conscious of these issues, want to travel responsibly, and spend their tourist dollars on entities aligned with these issues.

Finally, my wishlist is to see Malaysia become a preferred cruise destination within South-east Asia in 2019, and I urge relevant port authorities to expand and improve the port facilities to cater to bigger international cruise lines. – S Puvaneswary



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Hottest Destinations

Travel hotspots in 2019

From Khao Yai to Phu Quoc, here's a look at destinations that make Asian travel experts' wow list this year



Winter in Lapland, Finland

INBOUND

Renato Domini, CEO, Panorama Destination Indonesia

A destination to watch would be Labuan Bajo on Flores island. We are seeing a significant growth in interest for the destination, largely due to the wealth of amazing landscapes, spectacular scenery, unique cultures, otherworldly wildlife and beautiful beaches to be found on the surrounding islands, not least the natural wonders of nearby Komodo National Park.

Kevin Hinahon, marketing and sales manager, Travel Experts, Philippines

Boracay. The island has always been the country's most sought-after destination and next year won't be any different. It has tickled the curiosity of both foreign and local tourists as to what improvements took place during its six-month rehabilitation. The hubbub of complex issues, although unintentional, proved to be an excellent publicity stunt, especially prior to Boracay's October 26 reopening, as evidenced by the crowd and demand curve.

Ally Bhoonee, executive director, World Avenues, Malaysia

Langkawi sees strong demand for tour-

ists looking for beach stays. Adding to its allure is the availability of all categories of hotels, lovely beaches, and abundance of sea and land-based attractions for families such as cable car ride, crocodile farm, buffalo farm and ziplining through the rainforest. Payar Island in Langkawi is also very popular for snorkelling and diving.

Pirach Hansrisuk, CEO, 5H Tour, Thailand

Khao Yai will be a hot destination next year, especially among South-east Asian tourists. A two-hour drive from Bangkok, Khao Yai features beautiful landscapes particularly in the rainy season, and tourism booms during winter. Local hotels, attractions and tourism-related activities have been well developed and are ready to welcome foreign visitors.

Edwin Briels, managing director, Khiri Travel Myanmar

Southern Rakhine state will become more popular with the Arakan Nature Lodge's recent opening, especially as Ngapali Beach is already offering one of the best beach experiences in South-east Asia. The opening of Wa Ale Resort in October 2018 and the upcoming launch of Awei Pila ensure Mergui Archipelago now offers top luxury accommodation.

Joseph Sze, senior project director, Siam Express Singapore

Tiong Bahru is getting popular with the Chinese market, as Chinese FITs and families have been researching places to eat and explore in Singapore. Tiong Bahru fits in with Singapore Tourism Board's *Passion Made Possible* brand, which has also helped translate and present the neighbourhood's story to visitors.

Arun Anand, managing director, Midtown Travels, India

Kerala. The state has bounced back from the floods in terms of restoration of the connectivity, infrastructure and tourism experiences. The state government, and the local tourism and hospitality stakeholders, are aggressively promoting the destination. Through these efforts, we are expecting a healthy number of enquiries from our foreign tour operator partners for Kerala in 2019.

Ronni Dalhoff, managing director of Diethelm Travel (Cambodia)

The riverside town of Kampot and nearby coastal resort of Kep are becoming tourism hotspots as interest shifts from Sihanoukville. Many places in these destinations are now seeing high occupancy so we would like to see more four-star and mid-range accommodation in these areas to be able to offer a more rounded package.

Ronald Wu, director of sales and marketing, Gray Line Tours of Hong Kong

The world's longest bridge-cum-tunnel sea-crossing, the 55km Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge linking northern Lantau to the western shore of Pearl River Estuary is an architectural wonder and attraction. Apart from driving across the mega structure, visitors can also view it from a boat.

Amber Halleday, mobile travel advisor, Mobile Travel Agents, Australia

Only 25 minutes by ferry from Townsville, North Queensland, lies the Magnetic Island. It has secluded beaches, crystal clear waters, abundant wildlife and easy access to the Great Barrier Reef. Two-thirds of the island is the national park, housing nearly 25km of amazing walking trails. The island comprises everything from

luxury self-contained accommodation to backpacker hostels, plus many activities ranging from boat trips and guided tours to golf, diving and horse riding.

Devindre Senaratne, managing director Journey Scapes Travel, Sri Lanka

Sigiriya, where the famous rock fortress built by an ancient king is located, is gaining prominence over other locations in Sri Lanka. It is where you can see the largest land mammal (elephant) at a wildlife park, and the largest mammal (blue whale) on the shores off the eastern town of Trincomalee.

Avi Lugasi, owner and managing director, Windows to Japan

We are expecting a very busy 2019 thanks to the Rugby World Cup, even though Kyoto – where we are based – is not hosting any matches. We are very close to Osaka and fans will inevitably want to come here on days when there are no games.

OUTBOUND

Abdul Rahman Mohamed, general manager, Mayflower Holidays, Malaysia

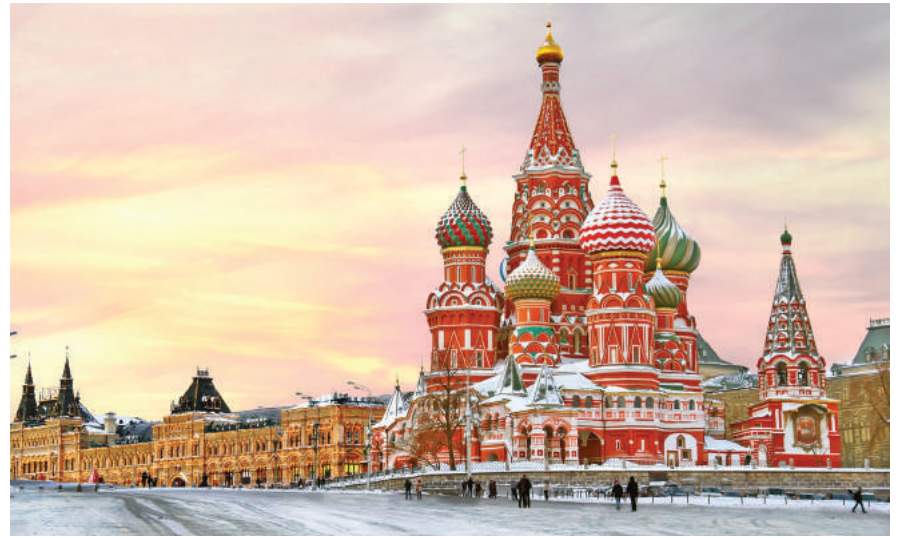
Phu Quoc has seen a spike in demand since AirAsia commenced new services from Kuala Lumpur on November 2. The destination has unspoilt beaches, and makes a great weekend getaway for Malaysian travellers.

Amol Punni, managing director, Welcome Travels, Australia

Kerala. Although the destination suffered severe flooding in 2018, wellness tourism and beach destinations will bounce back and there will be a surge in tourist footfalls. Not only does it have a number of world-renowned Ayurveda and yoga resorts, Kerala's natural beauty is unmatched. The Malabar Coast is adorned with palm-lined beaches, canal network, lush lands, house boats and wildlife sanctuaries.



From left: Padar Island, Komodo National Park; Khao Yai National Park in Thailand



From left: cruising through Kerala's backwaters; Saint Basil's Cathedral in Moscow

Mike Hain, group sales, Corporate International Travel & Tours, Philippines

Lapland. It's the buzzword for Filipinos who've been there, done that and want to experience unique winter activities such as visiting Santa Claus' home near the Arctic Circle, seeing the Northern Lights, staying in an igloo, and husky-sled, snowmobile and reindeer sleigh rides. Lapland can be combined with other Nordic countries and Tallinn in Estonia is just a ferry ride away.

Andy Wu, managing director, Gray Line Tours Macau

Japan will continue to be the hottest destination owing to its culture and food. As FITs occupy a larger ratio of visitors, I foresee the traffic will venture beyond the key cities. With the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge now operational, there will

be more options for Macanese to fly to Japan via Hong Kong International Airport.

Wong Yew Hoong, EU Holidays Singapore

There has been an increase in travellers signing up for tour packages to Uzbekistan as compared to five years ago, heralding the trend of travel to exotic and unique destinations in 2019. This is also evident in more than 100 travellers booking tickets for EU Holidays' mass-chartered flight to Uzbekistan in December 2018.

Bui Nhan, director, Ecosea Travel, Viet Nam

For 2019, I expect more Vietnamese will visit European countries, with Paris, Italy and Sweden the most popular destinations. New destinations are emerging. South Africa is one country that will start

to see more Vietnamese travellers because it is new and exciting.

Surawat Akaraworamat, managing director, KTK Tour Enterprise, Thailand

An emerging outbound market of Thailand is Taiwan. Travellers need not apply for visas and it takes only about four hours to fly there with many airline choices available. The values of Taiwanese and Thai currencies are close. It is clean, well regulated, with convenient transport facilities. Taiwanese people are friendly and their food is compatible with Thais' tastes.

Sinan Thourn, CEO and founder, B2B Cambodia

Interest in Tokyo and Taipei will continue to grow as popular destinations with Cambodians in 2019. These cities are still seen as new destinations and with direct

flights to both, they are quick and easy for tourists to spend a few days for some sightseeing and shopping.

Shun Tsuzawa, supervisor of outbound marketing and strategy division, JTB

Hawaii. For many Japanese, Hawaii is still paradise and our largest customer segment is families, followed by couples on their honeymoons.

Johnny So, general manager, Sunflower Travel Service, Hong Kong

Eastern Europe like Russia. Numbers have been going up over the last few years as many travellers have been to Western and Southern Europe. Hotels and coaches were in shortage earlier, but post-World Cup Russia has seen more resources added, lowering costs and make the destination more affordable.

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Destination Myanmar

Regional markets prop up tourism

The growth of Myanmar's tourism sector hit the brakes in 2018 amid a significant decrease in European arrivals, but it was saved from decline with still-expanding Asian markets, reports Marissa Carruthers



Early morning hot air balloon flight over the temples of Bagan

In a year marred by plummeting arrivals from Europe, the growth seen from Asian markets has been the saving grace that has kept overall visitor numbers in Myanmar from declining.

According to figures from the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism (MoHT), as of September 2018, Myanmar welcomed 960,720 foreign visitors, a marginal 0.7 per cent year-on-year increase. The European market, on the other hand, plunged 26.1 per cent to 122,262 arrivals.

Meanwhile, arrivals from Asian markets increased by 10.1 per cent in the first nine months of 2018. China was the strongest source market, with 49,894 arrivals to post a 33.6 per cent rise. Thailand followed in second spot, with an 11.2 per cent increase to 21,299 visitors.

Edwin Briels, general manager of Khiri Travel Myanmar, said: "Chinese, Thai and many other Asian markets have been growing, often with double-digit numbers, as has the domestic market. The number of tourists from Western countries has been low compared to 2017."

Hla Aye, managing director of Shan Yoma Travel and Tours, said 2018 has been tough for Myanmar's tourism sector. Rising inflation rates throughout the year has led to a slowdown in outbound bookings, as well as many cancellations – the Burmese kyat rose from 1,300 to more than 1,600 against US\$1.

Said Hla Aye: "2018 has been a hard year for those involved in the tourism industry. I am more hopeful for 2019, if Myanmar's economy recovers and the Asian markets continue to grow."

Neo Soon Hup, senior vice-president of operations for Pan Pacific Hotels Group, pointed out that MoHT's efforts to capture more of the regional market is paying off. A swathe of relaxed visa requirements were put in place since October for visitors

from Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Macau, China, as well as India.

Said Neo: "We are also seeing more interest from neighbouring countries in the leisure segment due to multiple factors. The recent tourism drive by the government, an increase in LCC routes and the easing of visa requirements for travel to the region."

To help bolster arrivals, Yangon International Airport is working with the ministry to develop sister airport connectivity across Asia and establish new routes. It also plans to partner with MICE organisers to stimulate this sector.

Ho Chee Tong, CEO of Yangon Aerodrome Company, which operates the airport, said: "Beyond launching more routes and taking steps to improve our facilities and operations, we plan to work with global airlines and tourism boards to drive growth for Myanmar's leading airport."

Meanwhile, Neo shared that Parkroyal Yangon and Pan Pacific Yangon have bucked the trend of weakening European markets, receiving a steady number of guests from Western Europe in the last three years.

"Against a backdrop of declining numbers from Western Europe to Myanmar as a whole, our hotels are actually getting a larger slice of the Western Europe pie."

Other stakeholders are for the recovery of Western markets, with Hla predicting that the slumping European and North American arrivals will bounce back within the next one to two years.

Khri's Briels added that he is already seeing signs of recovery, receiving last-minute bookings from Europe, Australia and the US. "(This is) a sign that Western tourists are rediscovering how much Myanmar has to offer," remarked Briels. "I think 2019 will see more Western tourists book a trip to Myanmar."

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 private time in a kayak exploring the stilted villages and secluded spots. To truly get away from it all and enjoy a pristine tropical island experience, head to Mergui Archipelago in the south and check into one of the luxury properties on the islands.



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 is the all-day-dining concept, the lobby bar and Poolside Pavilion serve light bites and drinks, and Bungkus is an upscale deli. Event spaces include a 256m² ballroom, while other facilities include a swimming pool, fitness centre and spa. Complimentary bike rentals are available for guests as well.

WWII tours

Specialist WWII battlefield tour operator Battle of Imphal Tours has expanded its tour options beyond Imphal, where it is based, and Kohima in North-east India, with the launch of itineraries in neighbouring Myanmar. Through these tours, the company hopes to give tourists a fuller picture of the decisive Burma Campaign which started the downfall of Japanese imperial ambitions in Asia. Battle of Imphal Tours has linked up with Khiri Travel Myanmar, which

will handle the logistics, transport and hotels often in remote areas of the country.

Yangon Excelsior Hotel

Located in a prime spot in downtown Yangon, the 74-room Yangon Excelsior evokes the city's historic past. Converted from a 19th century heritage building, the hotel has an executive floor featuring 16 rooms, The Newsroom, an 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). Nestled on a 600m stretch of beach, the resort features a swimming pool, restaurant and bar.



Yangon Excelsior Hotel

Destination Vietnam

Strong support at hand

Active marketing, a growing presence of international hotel brands and more air links have led to Da Nang's fast ascent on the regional tourism scene. By Marissa Carruthers



The Golden Bridge in Ba Na Hills, Da Nang

Da Nang is rapidly rising as a choice destination in Viet Nam, as tourism-related investment continues to pour in while the coastal city gets connected with more links from within the region.

According to figures from the Da Nang Tourism Department (DTD), arrivals have grown exponentially in recent years, from 1.2 million in 2008 to 6.5 million as of September 2018, representing an annual growth rate of about 27.7 per cent. Visitors from South Korea were the main international source market, making up half of the 2.4 million foreign arrivals.

As of September, Viet Nam welcomed a total of 11.6 million foreign arrivals, a 22.9 per cent rise year-on-year.

Linh Le, Asia DMC group manager, said: "Da Nang has become a popular destination for domestic and foreign tourists in recent years. Its central position, stunning beaches and friendly people, along with the city's promotional activities through international events, has yielded favourable outcomes."

Contributing to Da Nang's rise is the plethora of international brands arriving in the city, with more in the pipeline. This includes JW Marriott Da Nang, Möven-

pick Hotel & Residences Han River, and Courtyard Da Nang Han River.

Frank Bochman, general manager of Sheraton Grand Da Nang Resort, said proactive marketing campaigns from DTD and the hosting of annual international events, such as Da Nang Firework Festival and Da Nang Kite Festival, add to the destination's appeal.

New tourism products are also luring more visitors. In June, the Golden Bridge opened at SunWorld Ba Na Hills resort as a novel piece of architecture that sits more than 1,400m above sea level, attracting scores of international visitors.

Tanya Trang, marketing manager at Luxury Travel Viet Nam, said: "The inauguration of the iconic Golden Bridge has become one of the latest driving forces of (Da Nang's) tourism, while adding more value to the city on the global platform."

The opening of a new international terminal at Da Nang International Airport in April 2017 has also helped drive tourism, increasing capacity from 13 million to 28 million and adding more routes.

In October, Viet Nam Airlines launched the first direct route connecting Da Nang and Japan, operating daily return flights to Osaka. Nguyen Duc Quynh, Furama

Resort Da Nang deputy general director, said Japan makes up 10 per cent of international arrivals.

The volume of flights from South Korea has cemented it as Da Nang's top source market. The airport welcomes more than 100 weekly flights from the destination, with Korean Air having launched daily flights between Busan and Da Nang in October.

In December, Qatar Airways also commenced four-times-weekly connections with Doha. Matilda Otsuki, director of sales and marketing at Novotel Da Nang Premier Han River, said: "This allows not only leisure guests but corporates from Europe and the Middle East to consider holding meetings, events or incentive trips in Central Viet Nam."

Despite enjoying growth, Le said extra steps need to be taken to push the industry. He said: "The city needs to focus on improving service standards and workforce training, diversifying tourism products and ensuring sustainable development."

Bochman added securing more long-haul direct routes is key. "Accessibility is the biggest challenge at the moment. In the long term, we want more visitors from Australia, New Zealand and Europe."

Surprising theme

Family fun

Enjoy a fun-packed day at Dam Sen Water Park in Ho Chi Minh City, where there is something for all ages. Take a step back in time and tour the streets of Old Ha Noi by rickshaw before watching a traditional Vietnamese water puppet show. Then visit The Duck Stop in Phong Nha for a fun rural experience. Meet the local family who run the farm, sample their produce and feed the ducks before riding a water buffalo and enjoying local food. Also snap memorable photos at Art in Paradise Danang, an interactive three-dimensional world.



Destination in numbers

62.1%

The year-on-year growth of visitors entering Viet Nam by land, as of September 2018, thanks to the relaxation of visa requirements and reduced fees

49.6%

The increase in visitors from South Korea in the first nine months of 2018 – Viet Nam's fastest growing source market – driven by an increase in overseas marketing

9.4 million

The number of visitors arriving by air, as of September 2018, up 17.4 per cent from the same period in the previous year

27.2%

The year-on-year increase in the number of Asian arrivals in the first nine months of 2018, following intensified marketing campaigns throughout the region

1.5 million

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

Projections for 2019



Jeff Redl

Managing director,
Diethelm Travel Vietnam

"Viet Nam will continue to attract more visitors with the increasing ease of obtaining visas at reduced costs, improved infrastructure and more destinations to explore such as Phu Quoc and Quy 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 performed strong in European markets last year. 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. The increase in number of 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



From top: InterContinental Long Beach Phu Quoc; SpiceRoads Cycling

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. An on-site spa offers a range of treatments, with activities including yoga, pilates and water sports. Indoor event venues include the Grand and Junior ballrooms, meeting rooms and board rooms. The hotel also boasts the island's only theatre for up to 130 delegates for concerts, film screenings and private shows.

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, Viet Nam'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 Buoi 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, 258-room beachside property is situated on the white sands of Da Nang City's Non Nuoc Beach. Set on seven hectares of landscaped tropical grounds, the resort is located 20 minutes from Da Nang International Airport and Hoi An. 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

SpiceRoads Cycling has introduced e-bikes to its Viet Nam programmes, which will enable 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. Viet Nam tours feature special bikes that use "pedal assist" technology to engage the bike's motor once the rider begins to pedal.

Angelina Restaurant and Lounge

Sofitel Legend Metropole Hanoi has unveiled Angelina, its new bar-lounge-restaurant. The two-storey space boasts an eight-metre-high floor-to-ceiling bar and seats up to 120 guests. A whisky lounge sits on the ground floor, while the second floor is an intimate dining area. A new chef, Aurélien Houguet, is now heading up the kitchen, which serves lunch and dinner, and bar snacks after 22.00.

The Reverie Saigon Residential Suites

The Reverie Saigon has rebranded eight floors of its luxury serviced apartments. 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.

Boutique cruise in Cat Ba Archipelago

The Lux Group has launched Viet Nam's first



Angelina Restaurant and Lounge

The expert recommends



Tra Su Indigo Forest in An Giang province



Nicholas Wade
Assistant general manager,
Khiri Vietnam

MUST EAT

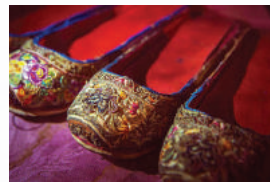
The local *banh xeo* (seafood pancake), with variations across the country. You can try one everywhere you go. Street food in Viet Nam is a must.

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 Chau Doc, Victoria Niu Sam has incredible views across rice fields with its majestic and impressive rooftop views of the city.



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Destination Cambodia

Growing opportunities in variety

Tourists are staying longer in Cambodia as more destination and product options open up, reports Marissa Carruthers



Independence Monument, Phnom Penh

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, making France the top European source market

75.8%

The year-on-year percentage increase in Chinese visitors to Cambodia, as of July 2018, the top source market

Tourists are choosing to spend more nights in Cambodia, driven by improved infrastructure, the development of new tourism products and accommodation, as well as increased promotion of secondary destinations.

According to figures from Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism, in 2017 the average length of stay was 6.6 days, up from 6.3 days the previous year.

Agents predict this is set to grow further in 2018 and remain optimistic the trend will continue as Cambodia's tourism offerings swell.

Key additions to the market include a crop of luxury products, with many opening away from the traditional tourist hotspot of Siem Reap. The industry is confident this will drive tourists to emerging destinations, further increasing their length of stay in Cambodia.

For example, Shinta Mani Wild – Bensley Collection brings a five-star jungle experience to remote Koh Kong, while Six Senses and Alila add to the coast's appeal with exclusive private island resorts.

Adrien Pons, director of sales and marketing at Rosewood Phnom Penh, which opened in the capital in early 2018, said: "This helps high-end holidaymakers and tourists consider Cambodia as a destination, not necessarily coupled with Vietnam and Thailand."

Road upgrades, infrastructure improvements and the opening of products in outlying areas have also led to an increase in interest in secondary and emerging destinations, such as Kep, Kampot, Mondulkiri

and Battambang. This is a trend Steve Lidgley, general manager of Travel Asia a la Carte, believes will remain strong with the Western leisure market in 2019.

He said: "(Arrivals from) the Western market should climb a little (in 2019), with visitors looking for longer stays and visiting secondary and tertiary destinations."

According to the latest figures from the Ministry of Tourism, in the first eight months of 2018 the country welcomed more than 3.9 million international arrivals, marking an 11.7 per cent year-on-year increase.

China led the pack, with more than 1.2 million arrivals representing a 72 per cent year-on-year increase. Vietnam, Laos, South Korea and Thailand followed. Added Lidgley: "The Chinese market will inevitably grow with (the continued increase in) flights in and out of Cambodia."

Officials aim to attract 6.2 million visitors in 2018, up from 5.6 million in 2017.

Despite the industry remaining optimistic for 2019, hurdles are to be overcome for Cambodia to reach its full potential. Pons said more marketing needs to be carried out to showcase Cambodia as a whole destination.

"People may know Siem Reap because of Angkor Wat but Cambodia is beyond that, especially Phnom Penh, which used to be known as the 'Pearl of Asia'"

Chhay Sivlin, president of Cambodia Association of Travel Agents (CATA) and founder of CSL Travel & Tours, added that a lack of skilled labour, unlicensed tour guides and zero-dollar tours remain

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 books 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 was a huge gap. Luxury tented accommodation Shinta Mani Wild will put Cambodia on the map, and together with other properties in the Cardamon Mountains, it will raise the destination's profile."

Harold de Martimprey
General manager,
Exo Travel Cambodia

"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 greater opportunities to visit other areas, such as Mondulkiri and Kratie provinces. These all help make Cambodia an ideal standalone destination."

industry challenges that are being actively tackled to help the sector grow.

Said Chhay: "CATA and the Ministry of Tourism has been working very closely together in various forms, such as providing training, workshops and identifying any issues from our members so we can resolve the problem immediately."

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 colonial villas surrounding a gargantuan lagoon pool. The property offers 88 suites, including eight royal suites with separate living area and private plunge pool, butler service, a range of meeting rooms and ballroom, three F&B outlets, an in-house spa with a sauna and steam room, as well as a 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 houses 15 safari-style tents dotted along a 1.5km stretch of river. Activities include jungle treks, wildlife spotting and accompanying rangers who protect the forest from poachers and illegal loggers on their grounds. 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 12ha island. Besides the exclusive Retreat and Reserve villas with its own 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 multistorey 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 mall, which aims to entice visitors to the city to extend their stay beyond the usual few days.

Alila Villas Koh Russey

The brand's first resort in Cambodia, occupies its own private island in the Koh Rong archipelago with 50 pavilions and 13 villas. There are two restaurants on-site: Horizon and Beach Shack, as well as other facilities like the beachfront Spa Alila, infinity pool, fitness centre with private yoga room – where complimentary yoga and Tai Chi classes are held daily.

Hanchey Bamboo Resort

Aiming to plant the sleepy town of Kampong Cham on the tourist map, Hanchey Bamboo Resort is an eco-resort with its facade 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.

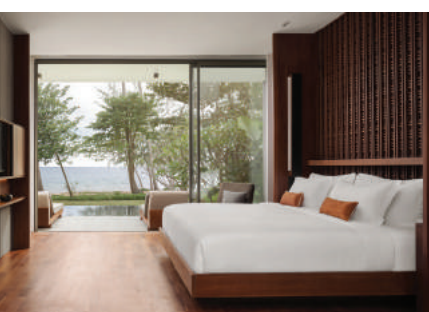


From left: Memoir Palace Resort & Spa; Shinta Mani Wild – The Bensley Collection

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Alila Villas Koh Russey

Analysis

Catalysing growth beyond Bali

Infrastructure development and investment have to go hand in hand in order for Indonesia's '10 New Balis' to take off, finds Mimi Hudoyo as she looks at the tourism progress in a few emerging destinations

The Indonesian government's '10 New Balis' directive is poised to open up myriad tourism opportunities across the country, but investors, hotels and tour operators are seeing varying levels of readiness on the ground that are as distinct as the destinations themselves.

Dadang Rizki Rahman, deputy minister for destination and industry development, Indonesia Ministry of Tourism, said: "Based on our experience in the last three years, there is a strong correlation between investment and the growth of arrivals. The more arrivals a destination gets, the bigger the investment poured into it.

"That explains why Bali, Jakarta and Riau Islands (the top three destinations in the country) continue to attract investments and the number of hotel rooms keeps growing."

Belitung, an island east of Sumatra, is a clear illustration of this. The destination rose to fame among Indonesian travellers after Belitung novelist Andre Hirata's *Laskar Pelangi* (The Rainbow Troops) trilogy became a bestseller and movie hit.

The close proximity of Belitung to Jakarta (an hour's flight away) facilitated its growth as a tourist destination, attracting hotel brands like Golden Tulip, Fairfield by Marriott and Santika Premiere.

Adjie Wahjono, operation manager of Aneka Kartika Tours & Travel Services said: "It was the domestic market that fostered the growth of the island's tourism, attracting investors to open hotels to meet demand."

The government's strong promotion of the 10 New Balis, which Belitung is part of, has helped to draw interest of both travellers and operators to the destination.

Indonesia's Sriwijaya Air launched a charter service from Singapore between December 2017 and January 2018, while Garuda Indonesia is planning a daily charter service between Belitung and Bali in October using CRJ aircraft with 100 seat capacity.

Garuda Indonesia, director of cargo and international commercial, Sigit Muhartono, said: "We will start with a chartered service to create demand and support the government's efforts to open up new tourist destinations."

Sigit said it is part of Garuda's network development strategy to connect the "New Balis" with the world, and Singapore's hub status will also be tapped to drive traffic into these emerging destinations.

The Indonesian carrier has launched four-times weekly service between Singapore and Belitung in October 2018.

And with Belitung queries from overseas partners now on the uptick, Adjie sees the need for more attractions and activities suitable for international travellers to be launched, in order for the island to continue down its tourism growth trajectory.

Similarly, Komodo is seeing pent-up demand for the destination since the tourism authority started promoting the island intensely since the late 2000s, but infrastructure and facilities still lag behind.

With Komodo Airport's passenger traf-



Robert Claudiu Vasile/shutterstock



Wahsanudin/istockphoto



Clockwise from above: Belitung Island; Ayana Lako di'a, a phinisi sailing ship in Komodo; Batak houses in Samosir Island, Lake Toba

fic growing at 30 per cent annually, the authorities are expanding the runway of the airport from 2,250m to 3,200m to accommodate wide-body aircraft, coming on top of the new and bigger passenger terminal opened in 2015.

More hotels are opening in Labuan Bajo, the gateway to Komodo, and mid- and upmarket cruises are entering the market to offer day and live-aboard cruises around Komodo National Park.

The five-star, 205-key Ayana Komodo Resort opened its doors in September 2018, followed by the October launch of *Ayana Lako di'a*, a specially built *phinisi* ship for cruising around Komodo Islands.

Amid the visitor surge, Komodo needs better management to prevent visitor congestion and strains on the infrastructure, cautioned Ng Sebastian, managing director of Incito Vacations.

"Management needs to be stepped up. For example, the pier (at Rinca Island) can

be overcrowded with boats at times. There needs to be a queue management system or schedule for boats."

However, infrastructure development alone does not always immediately convince investors to put their money into a destination.

Lake Toba has been improving its infrastructure in recent years, with the Silangit International Airport now in operation with direct flight connections from Singapore and the Kuala Tanjung harbour built.

The Lake Toba Tourism Authority has reportedly received domestic and foreign investment interest, but is yet to announce any materialised hotels or projects.

It's a similar story for the Mandalika Mega Project in Lombok, which took a long time to take off. For more than a decade the government has undertaken numerous ways to attract investment, but despite the growth of arrivals to the destination, the flow of investment in facilities did not pour in as expected.

Hospitality investors and operators the *Daily* interviewed over the years were often quick to paint Lombok as an up-and-coming destination with a bright future, but in reality they would adopt a wait-and-see stand when it comes to actual investment on the ground.

Seeing this, Indonesia Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC), which spearheaded Mandalika's development in 2015, took the initiative to invest in hotels by working together with state-owned developers Wijaya Karya and Pembangunan Perumahan, as well as international operators Accor (for the Pullman brand) and Club Med. Both hotels are now under construction with a targeted opening in 2020.

Henri Giscard d'Estaing, CEO of Club Med, said in a statement regarding the Lombok property: "We foresee Club Med Lombok to receive a high volume of in-

ternational attention and clients, and raise global awareness for Lombok as a premium holiday destination."

Abdulbar Mansoer, president director of ITDC, said: "By investing in these hotels, we expect international travellers, hotel operators and investors to develop properties in Mandalika."

ITDC's hotel investment strategy, which comes on top of the government's incentives for investors – like providing land title for up to 80 years and one-stop licencing office on site – appears to have built up the confidence of hospitality investors and operators.

Edwin Darmasetiawan, director of ITDC said: "Today, we have 2,500 hotel rooms in the pipeline within the next five years, attracting international investors (among others) from the US, South Korea and France."

Other hotels coming up in the pipeline include Royal Tulip, Aloft, Mysk by Shaza and Shaza hotels.

Overseas tour operators have different views on how these developments would work for them.

Karine Hosan, owner and manager of Travel Truck France, opined that tourism stakeholders in Indonesia needed to promote these new destinations extensively to create international awareness, even at this stage when the developments were still under progress.

"Clients look for new destinations and we believe Indonesia has a lot to offer, but we need to be informed of these destinations," she said.

Ram Samtani, general manager of Singapore-based Ramesh Travel Service, said: "There needs to be the right (supporting) infrastructure in the destinations. There is no need for an (international) airport if airlines do not see it feasible to fly to a destination, for example." – **additional report by Tiara Maharani**

It was the domestic market that fostered the growth of (Belitung's) tourism, attracting investors to open hotels to meet demand.

Adjie Wahjono
Operation manager,
Aneka Kartika Tours & Travel

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Ministry of Tourism Indonesia's Edy Wardoyo, Ministry of Hotels and Tourism Myanmar's Khin Than Win, Hla Myint and Ei Ei Khin



Vietnam National Administration of Tourism's Nguyen Trung Khanh



Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism Brunei's Kamalrudzaman Mohd Ishak



Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau's Supawan Teerarat trying her hand at a traditional instrument



Department of Tourism Thailand's Anan Wongbenjarat



Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau's Ubonrat Wiriyakul, Supawan Teerarat and Khunnawat Teeranawattanakun



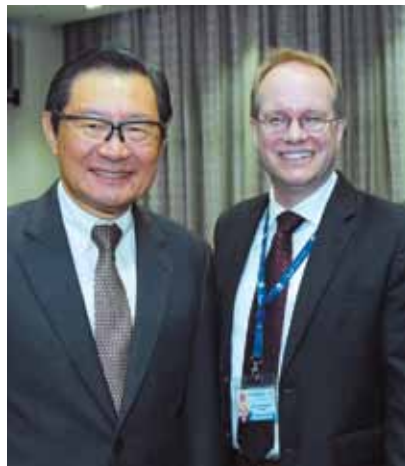
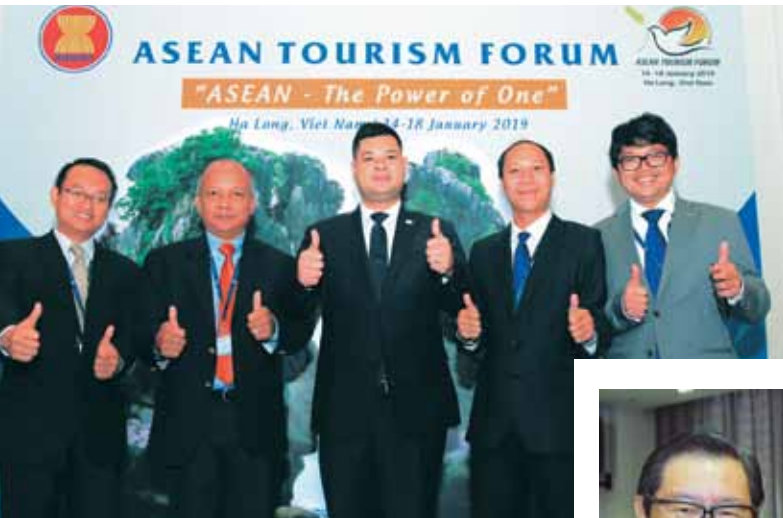
Vietnam National Administration of Tourism's Nguyen Trung Khanh and Ha Van Sieu



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