



ATF 2019
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Ha Long Bay, Viet Nam



Build local, grow globally

In M'sia, eco and cultural experiences emerge as frontrunners on travel itineraries

By S Puvaneswary

A growing interest in immersive travel experiences among regional and longhaul travellers has resulted in stronger demand for more eco and cultural activities in Malaysia's rural and countryside, opening up opportunities for inbound sellers to pursue a greater diversity of tours and activities in the country while spreading tourist visitor footfalls to secondary and tertiary destinations.

Manfred Kurz, managing director of Diethelm Travel Malaysia, noted: "For the European market, we see beach stays getting shorter. Travellers want to go out to experience things and interact with the locals."

Nigel Wong, director, Urban Rhythms Tour Adventures and Travel, made similar observations: "People of all ages, not just millennials, are into experiential tourism. They want to mix with locals and experience a destination, rather than sit in a coach tour."

Wong added that the eco and cultural attractions segment is still largely an "untapped market". For tour operators who have made the effort to seek out new activities and experiences to promote, they have been rewarded with "a lot of branding opportunities" for these lesser-known

destinations.

In 4Q2018, Urban Rhythms introduced adventure videos featuring actual travellers on its consumer website, Big Blue Holidays. These videos spotlighted off-the-beaten track experiences such as trekking in the Sukau rainforest in Sabah, traversing the face of Mt Kinabalu on Via Ferrata, and going on a food trail in Penang's George Town.



Kurz: experiential travel over beaches

As a result, these videos have helped contribute to the 15 per cent year-to-date spike in bookings to Sabah and Penang for the company, Wong shared.

Adam Kamal, general manager, Tour East Malaysia reports similar booking patterns. He shared: "We see more Indian tourists asking for soft adventure packages such as birdwatching and trekking. Asians in general are (becoming) more health conscious, and we have received more enquiries about marathon packages, walking tours and whitewater rafting activities."

This growing trend has prompted Tour East Malaysia's product team to continually look out for and consider new destinations that lie within a two hours' drive from major cities as a day trip option.

Meanwhile, Diethelm Travel Malaysia

has also developed a series of new products under its Go Local brand, offering travellers the opportunities to watch a *mak yong* performance (a traditional form of dance-drama from northern Malaysia), see the production of shadow play puppets, or visit homestays to spend a day with the locals and experience their way of life, shared Kurz.

But offering tours and activities in rustic locations are not without their own set of challenges.

For instance, Kamal revealed that when developing eco tours, they had to deal with basic infrastructure such as public toilets that may not be up to international standards.

"(That is why) we work with local communities and improve conditions if need be. In smaller towns, it is also difficult to obtain gluten free or Indian food, so we pack the food and bring it along."

Kurz added: "One of our challenges in promoting ecotourism and countryside tours is we have to ensure the safety standards are up to par. We work with local operators in the villages by informing them of our requirements and they are very cooperative."

"Sometimes we need to touch up on the accommodation to ensure guests are comfortable."



TTG's PicStop lensmen are on the prowl for great photos. See this photo and more at our online gallery by scanning the code above.



Rise of Ha Long Bay

By Marissa Carruthers

The Vietnamese province of Quang Ninh – home to UNESCO-listed Ha Long Bay – is set to shine brighter as a tourist destination as it has been on the receiving end of recent huge investments.

In 4Q2018, air, sea and road connectivity to the north-eastern city was vastly improved, thanks to the opening of the Ha Noi-Hai Phong-Ha Long expressway, and the launch of the Hon Gai international port and Van Don International Airport.

Jeff Redl, managing director of Diethelm Viet Nam, said: "This opens up more opportunities for connections between Ho Chi Minh City and Ha Long and Van Don, where big projects are being proposed for development."

Armand Cheveux, director of marketing at Bhaya Group, expects the new products to stimulate further investment into the area and encourage visitors to spend more time exploring Ha Long's surroundings.

Cheveux said: "Yen Tu Mountain is an example of successful development as some hotels have been opened there to cater to (cruise travellers in Ha Long Bay). We believe more (of such developments) bound to happen in the future."

Oleg Shafranov, Khiri Viet Nam's general manager, said while these developments create new tourism opportunities, care needs to be taken to ensure that environmental impact is minimised.

"This rapid development also means a heavier load on the bay. However, with sound regulating measures, this can be averted," he said.

ASEAN NTOs start high-level meetings

By Yingyong Unanongrak



Intelligence

Asia's second-tier cities emerge as new go-to destinations

In the spotlight are Ha Long In Viet Nam, Oita in Japan and Daegu in South Korea



The traditional favourites of Bangkok, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur continue to dominate the list of Asia's top 10 tourist destinations, based on findings from the Mastercard Asia Pacific Destinations Index (APDI) 2018, but travellers are increasingly seeking new and more off-the-beaten track destinations such as Oita in Japan, Daegu in South Korea and Ha Long in Viet Nam.

In 2017, the 160 Asia-Pacific destinations analysed in the APDI grew by 5.6% in international overnight tourist arrivals over 2016 and generated 333 million in-

ternational overnight arrivals, with Bangkok retaining the top spot.

While these second-tier cities could become Asia's next tourist hubs, Mastercard advises that strategic investment in travel infrastructure made to achieving and sustaining the rapid growth in inbound tourism, including the strategic development of basic infrastructure such as airports to public transport, cleaning up public spaces and ensuring access to clean water.

Notably, China stood out as the only country where its secondary cities are growing at a much faster rate than its primary cities. The findings revealed that the compound annual growth rate of visitor arrivals from 2009 to 2017 was more than double in China's secondary cities (9.0%)

versus its primary cities (3.9%).

The index also showed that tourists are increasingly visiting secondary cities in China, with tourist arrivals in Shenzhen, Chengdu and Wuhan growing faster than in popular destinations such as Shanghai, Guangzhou and Beijing.

Interestingly, in the last eight years (2009 – 2017), the average daily expenditure across Asia-Pacific destinations has increased by approximately 10% from US\$135 to US\$148, while the average length of stay has decreased by approximately 11% from 5.94 to 5.35 days.

This means on average tourists are staying for a shorter period of time but spending more on their trips. Cities will be able to channel additional tourist dollars earned into infrastructure investment for growth and development, the report added.

Top 10 Asia-Pacific destinations ranked by international overnight arrivals in 2017:

ADPI 2018 Rank	Destination	Overnight Arrivals (in millions)	Average Days in Destination	Expenditure Per Day
1	Bangkok	20.1	4.7	\$173
2	Singapore	13.9	4.3	\$286
3	Kuala Lumpur	12.6	5.5	\$124
4	Tokyo	11.9	6.5	\$154
5	Seoul	9.5	4.2	\$181
6	Phuket	9.3	4.7	\$239
7	Hong Kong	9.0	3.5	\$185
8	Pattaya	8.7	4.0	\$157
9	Osaka	8.4	3.4	\$181
10	Bali	8.3	8.6	\$135

Viet Nam, South Korea rising stars for APAC travellers

While Japan remains the top choice for travellers in Asia-Pacific, South Korea and Viet Nam are rising fast as preferred destinations, according to Skyscanner data for eight of the region's markets.

Regional travel dominates, with London the only destination outside APAC to make Skyscanner's top 10 list.

Skyscanner's APAC Travel Trends report revealed that Tokyo, Osaka and Okinawa all made the top 10.

In South Korea and Viet Nam, the two fastest emerging destinations in the report's top 10 ranking, Busan, Jeju and Nha Trang show the most growth compared against the major hubs of Seoul and Ho Chi Minh City.

With the Korea Tourism Organisation (KTO) revealing that Japan, Viet Nam, and Thailand contribute the highest number of travellers to South Korea, Skyscanner said its data shows significant growth in flight searches from the same markets.

Viet Nam, on the other hand, attracts a different crowd. Skyscanner also observed a trend to The Vietnam Tourism Board figures that show the largest numbers of visitors hail from South Korea, China, Japan and Taiwan.

Meanwhile, APAC demand for business and premium economy seats saw growth

Top Destinations in 2017	Top Destinations in 2018	2018 Rank	Rank Movement
Japan	Japan	1	0
Thailand	Thailand	2	0
United States	United States	3	0
China	China	4	0
Taiwan	South Korea	5	2
Indonesia	Vietnam	6	2
South Korea	Taiwan	7	2
Vietnam	United Kingdom	8	1
United Kingdom	Indonesia	9	3
Philippines	Philippines	10	0

*Numbers shown on this table are ranked based on their respective search volume.

of up to 62% and 46% respectively with Skyscanner pointing out that reduced fares have encouraged travellers to book more comfortable seats and longhaul flights.

Skyscanner also observed mobile use increasing by up to 3.5%.

In APAC, five out of eight markets start their flight search earlier, while also making bookings closer to departure. With numerous travel sales, promotions and airline deals, decision making is becoming more complex for travellers, Skyscanner said.

The report looks at data from the period of October 2016 to September 2018 and covers eight APAC markets namely Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand.

Solo travel more popular among Thais: Visa

Over a quarter of Thais (28%) have travelled overseas solo in the past two years, ahead of the global (24%) and Asia-Pacific (23%) averages, according to Visa's Global Travel Intentions Study looking at international travel trends and behaviour of 17,500 global travellers from 27 countries including Thailand.

The study further identified those most likely to travel solo are the youngest group of travellers (18-24 years old) at 45%, and those combining business and leisure travel or bleisure travellers at 37%. Travellers aged between 25-35 years old and affluent travellers round out the group that is most likely to travel solo at 28% likelihood each.

On the flipside, travellers aged 36-44 years old are the most likely to travel with other people throughout the entire trip at 71%. When travelling with companions, bigger groups are common, and a group will typically comprise up to five people on average. Those travelling with others are most likely to be accompanied by their spouses/partners (49%) or friends/colleagues (42%).

Travellers aged 45 years old and above



Thais aged 18 to 24 years old most likely to travel solo, study finds

(72%) are more likely to travel with their family and friends throughout the whole trip.

When it comes to travel activities, travellers from Thailand differ from their Asia-Pacific counterparts. The top three activities for Thai travellers are tours and attractions (71%), food and dining (69%), and shopping (68%). When it comes to food and dining, Thai travellers opt for eating at local casual and small restaurants (39%) and tasting street food (30%).

In addition, some of the key activities Thai travellers engage in are visits to cultural locales (52%), visits to theme parks and attractions (34%), and religious monuments (29%).

On the other hand, top activities for Asia-Pacific travellers are food and dining (73%), shopping (69%), and tours and attractions (64%).

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Tourism chief showcase

Achieving full potential

The first of a four-part special on ASEAN NTOs shines the spotlight on Viet Nam's diverse tourism offerings and strategies

Viet Nam

Nguyen Ngoc Thien
Minister for culture, sports and tourism

What is the most exciting development for Viet Nam tourism this year?

Viet Nam has diverse tourism attractions, with rich culture, beautiful nature, friendly and hospitable people, and interesting experiences.

What fascinates international tourists is Viet Nam's unique 1,000-year-old culture with dozens of tangible and intangible UNESCO-recognised heritage including the Complex of Hue Monuments, Hoi An Ancient Town and My Son Sanctuary.

The country's sea and island products

in Ha Long Bay, Da Nang, Khanh Hoa and Phu Quoc offer excellent sightseeing, leisure and entertainment opportunities.

Magnificent natural scenery mixed with indigenous lifestyles bring about unforgettable experiences to tourists keen to discover adventure and community-based tourism. Such experiences can be found at outstanding destinations including Son Doong Cave, Dong Van Rock Plateau, and the Mekong Delta.

What is the most under-rated destination or segment in Viet Nam, and how will you promote it in 2019?

Viet Nam will focus on developing and promoting MICE tourism in Ho Chi Minh City, Ha Noi, Da Nang, Nha Trang and other destinations where we see fit.

As a country endowed with diverse terrain and beautiful scenery, Viet Nam has a good platform to build up infrastructure and technical facilities for golf tourism. As well, medical and healthcare tourism, community-based tourism and adventure tourism will also be developed.

These tourism products will be promoted at prominent culture and tourism events such as Vietnamese Culture Week in foreign countries, Hue Festival, ITE HCMC and reputable international tourism fairs such as ITB Berlin and WTM.

Digital communications, press trips and fam trips will also be organised.

What is on your wishlist for ASEAN tourism in 2019?

As the host country of ATF 2019, which is taking place in Ha Long, Quang Ninh, I hope ATF Viet Nam 2019 goals will be successfully achieved by the active involvement of Viet Nam and all ASEAN members, international organisations and development partners.

By 2025, South-east Asia will be a quality destination offering diverse and unique experiences, and will be committed to re-

sponsible, sustainable, inclusive and balanced tourism development.

In 2019, the ASEAN community should strive to overcome challenges to raise competitiveness and develop tourism in a sustainable way.

The main challenges that I hope will be solved are ensuring the safety and security for tourists, easing (visa) procedures and reducing costs at border gates, decreasing traffic congestion and visitor overload at tourist spots, lowering the cost of tourist services in the region, increasing the involvement of local communities in the tourism value chains and raising their benefits, mitigating the negative impacts of climate change on heritage sites, and developing green and knowledge-based tourism. – Marissa Carruthers

In 2019, the ASEAN community should strive to overcome challenges to raise competitiveness and develop tourism in a sustainable way



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Marketplace



Furama Villas Danang offers unique central Viet Nam stay

Furama Villas Danang is part of the Ariyana Tourism Complex, which includes the 198-room Furama Resort, Furama Villas, the new Ariyana Beach Resort & Suites, as well as the Ariyana Convention Center.

The 108 two-to-four bedroom luxury villas at Furama Villas Danang comes with views of the pristine white sands of Da Nang Beach, offering a slice of peaceful haven just 15 minutes from the Da Nang International Airport.

The newly-opened Danaksara Restaurant, which features authentic flavours and unique local dishes from central Viet Nam, is the latest go-to gourmet destination for locals and visitors.

Furama Villas Danang was also the only project in Viet Nam to win the Luxury Beachfront Villa award at the recent World Luxury Hotel Awards.

Park Hotel Group plants first South Korea hotel in Seoul

Singapore-based Park Hotel Group has made its debut in South Korea with the opening of Park Hotel Yeongdeungpo in Seoul. Conveniently located next to the subway station and a 10-minute drive from Yeouido financial hub, the new upscale hotel features 140 stylish rooms with views of the city and Han River. Personalised services and amenities in the hotel include complimentary Wi-Fi Internet, 24-hour fitness room, meeting rooms, business centre and three dining outlets.



Royal Cliff unveils fresh look after extensive overhaul

Royal Cliff Hotels Group has unveiled a complete overhaul of its common areas, F&B and event spaces, as well as rooms and suites. Thai architect Duangrit Bunnag once again oversaw the construction and design of the new features at the 40-year-old landmark in Pattaya.

The upgrades include Mini Suites and the new Ocean Deluxe room, repainted and refurbished with new bathroom fixtures installed. The Panorama Pool View and Sea View restaurant has also been updated, in addition to a redesign of common areas such as the entrance and lobby, plus a new lobby bar and bakery. As well, the property, which boasts over 13,000m² of meeting space, now features a newly upgraded Royal Summit Chamber.

Santika Indonesia introduces Kampi brand for millennials



Santika Indonesia Hotels and Resorts has debuted a three-star brand named Kampi that is targeted at the country's growing population of millennial travellers.

Embodying a modern and energetic vibe, Kampi's contemporary nature is reflected in its service culture in a fun, friendly and casual way. Kampi hotels will boast F&B outlets serving fusion or modern cuisines, while its

attractive, 1980s-themed interiors will have plenty of photogenic corners to cater to the desire of millennial travellers to share their best snapshots on social media.

The first Kampi hotel has opened in Surabaya with 196 guestrooms, meeting rooms, a ballroom, restaurant and fitness centre. More Kampi hotels are in the pipeline, and they will be located in big cities.

With the addition of Kampi, Santika Hotels and Resorts now boasts a portfolio of seven brands including The Samaya, The Kayana, The Anvaya, Hotel Santika Premiere, Hotel Santika and Amaris Hotel. Altogether, the company operates 110 hotels across Indonesia.

New ecotourism delights at The Habitat Penang Hill

The Habitat Penang Hill is a world-class ecotourism facility located on the fringes of a 130-million-year-old virgin rainforest on Penang Hill.

The Habitat has recently launched its latest attraction, The Colugo Zip, an adventure course comprising five ziplines, one abseil and one rope bridge. This offers visitors a new way to marvel at the beauty of its rainforest from an aerial perspective as they glide from tree to tree through the rainforest.

Other key attractions in The Habitat Penang Hill include the iconic Curtis Crest treetop walk – which offers spectacular views from Penang's highest viewing platform – and the Langur Way canopy walk, the only canopy bridge in the world engineered using cement segments.



Sailing Viet Nam, Cambodia with Viet Princess Cruises

With its fleet of two ships, Ho Chi Minh City-based Viet Princess Cruises offers a five-star experience sailing on unique routes along the Saigon and Mekong rivers.

The *Saigon Princess*, which sails the Saigon River, can accommodate up to 250 guests for a seated dining experience or up to 300 guests for a standing reception. On board, its private dining rooms are ideal for parties of 30 to 40 guests, and each area features large windows affording spectacular views, making the ship a great product and venue for corporate dining, celebrations and special occasions.

The *Mekong Princess* is a newly-built luxury river vessel cruising on routes between Viet Nam and Cambodia. The ship features 12 spacious cabins, each boasting a floor-to-ceiling window and equipped with modern amenities, promising an ultra comfortable experience.

Host city

A trove of discoveries

From leisurely cruises around Ha Long Bay to trekking in Cat Ba National Park, Ha Long Bay and its surrounds offer a wide range of activities for the intrepid traveller. Marissa Carruthers recommends 10 must-dos

Cruise around Ha Long Bay

The UNESCO World Heritage site is home to a collection of 1,969 limestone islands that jut out of the ocean. Exploring them by boat is a must when in the area and there is no shortage of boats ready to take passengers on a day or multiple-day cruise. Bhaya Cruises offers a variety of options in the area, with Heritage Cruises sailing through the Cat Ba Archipelago in Gulf of Tonkin.

Visit the Sung Sot Cave

Ha Long Bay's iconic islands are home to a network of caves, with Sung Sot being the largest. Located on Bo Hon Island, the cave is reported to have first been discovered by the French in 1901. However, it didn't open to visitors until 1993, a year before Ha Long Bay was awarded UNESCO World Heritage status. The 10,000m² cave is home to two large caverns that are filled with stalactites and stalagmites that are the source of many local legends.

Eat fresh seafood

No visit to Ha Long Bay is complete without sampling the feast of fresh seafood on offer. The bustling Vuon Dao area of Ha Long City is dubbed the "paradise of fresh seafood", and is packed full of local restaurants and street food stalls serving delicious dishes. Must-try dishes include horseshoe crab, steamed clams and sticky rice with grilled squid, all washed down with a glass of Hoanh Bo-soaked rice wine.

Go on a leisurely paddle

Hitting the Ha Long Bay by kayak is a great way to explore the area. Guests can paddle past rocky islands and is-



From above: aerial view of Cat Ba Island and kayaking inside a cave in Lan Ha Bay

lets into hidden caves to visit lagoons and deserted beaches, before visiting the floating villages that dot the area. A majority of junk boats and cruisers carry kayakers. Alternatively, go on a dedicated kayaking tour led by a guide.

Trek to the peak of Ti Top Island

Located in the heart of the bay, Ti Top Island boasts sweeping vistas that take in the thousands of limestone karsts Ha Long is famous for. This means trekking to the summit – which sits about 100m above sea level – is a must. The island is also home to a small beach and a smattering of restaurants, bars, souvenir shops and hotels. A variety of activities can also be done on the island, including kayaking and beach games.

Discover way of life in floating villages

Ha Long Bay is dotted with floating villages that house Vietnamese families who live their lives on the sea. Join a tour to visit the villages and soak up the way of life for these

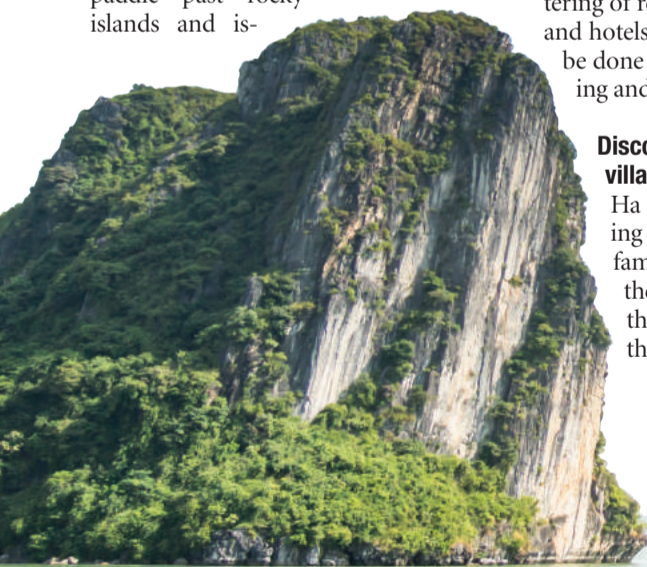


fishing communities. Boats anchor near to floating markets and villages, so guests can explore them. Vung Vieng Village, Cua Van Village and Ba Hang Village are the most popular.

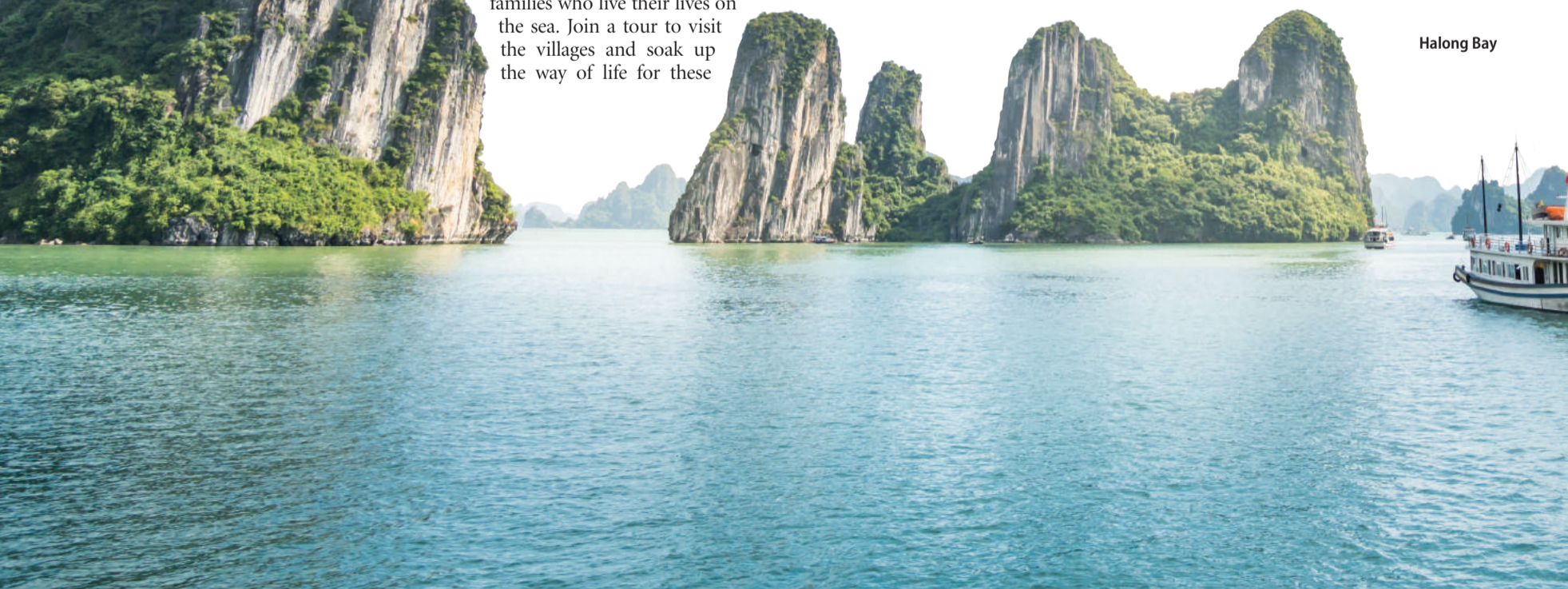
Explore Cat Ba Island

Cat Ba Island is the largest of the 367 islands that make up Cat Ba Archipelago

on the south-eastern edge of Lan Ha Bay. Home to Cat Ba National Park, the 354km² island is a great for trekking and presents opportunities to soak up the surrounding flora and fauna. The area is filled with pristine beaches, waterfalls, lakes and caves. There are also plenty of F&B outlets and accommodation for those wanting to spend the night there.



Ha Long Bay





Santika Indonesia

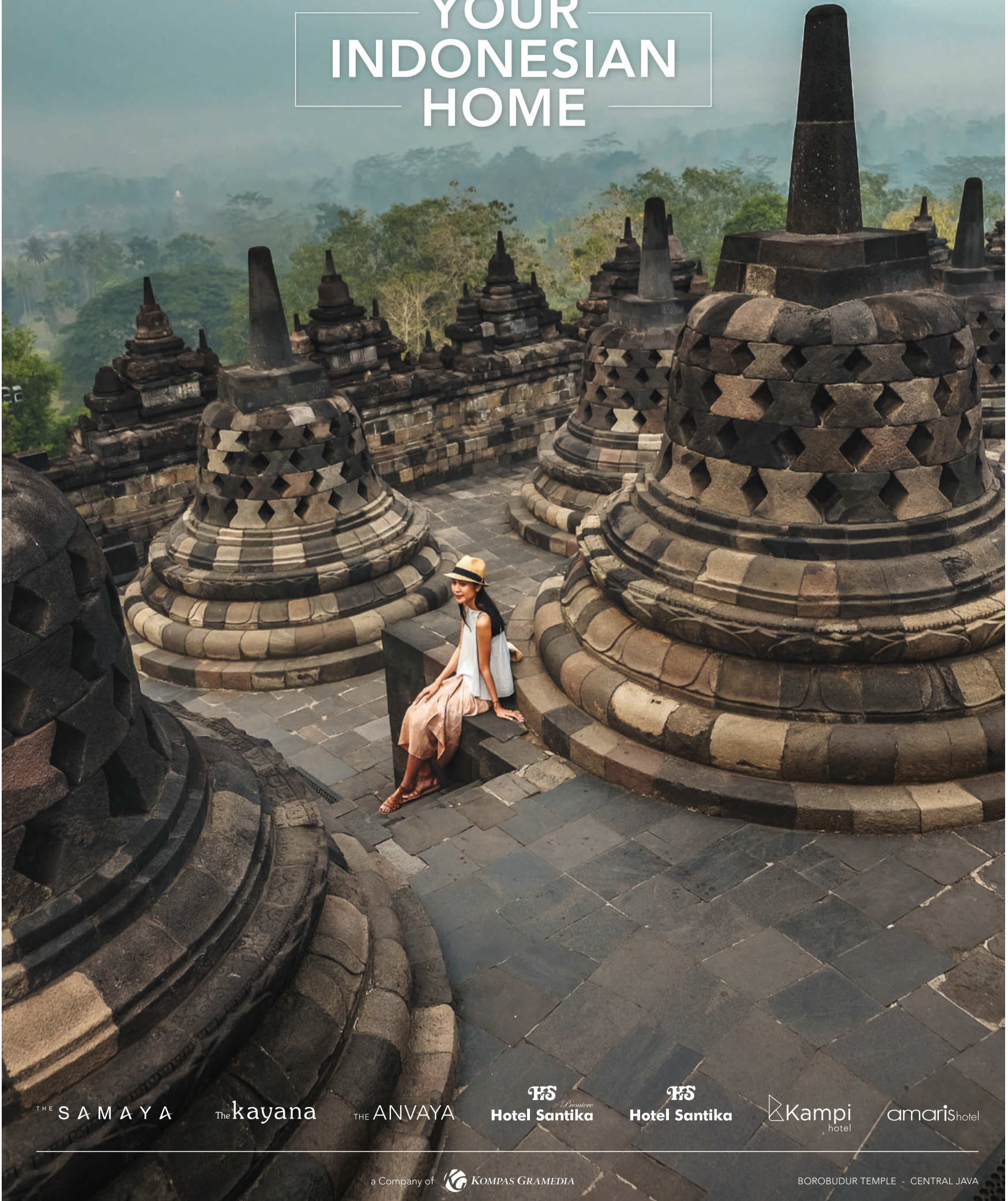
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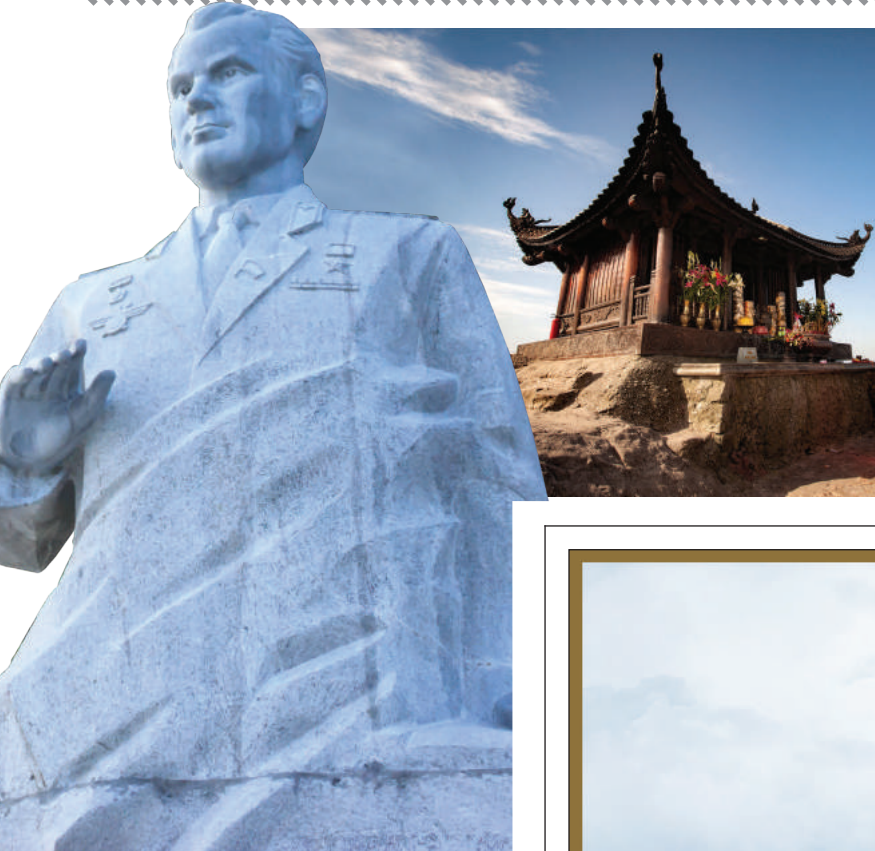
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BOROBUDUR TEMPLE - CENTRAL JAVA



From above: statue of cosmonaut Gherman Titov on Ti Top Island; pagoda on Yen Tu Mountain; and Sung Sot Cave on Bo Hon Island

Climb up Yen Tu Mountain

Located about 60km from Ha Long City, the sacred site is famous for the 11 pagodas dating back to the 13th and 14th centuries. Because of the pagodas, the mountain has been named “The Cradle of Buddhism in Vietnam”. Dong Pagoda is the highest, sitting at more than 1,000m above sea level. Climb the many steps to reach the peak and be rewarded with stunning views.


Dine at 1958 Restaurant

Named after the year president Ho Chi Minh first visited Tuan Chau Island on September 13, 1958, 158 Restaurant serves up a range of traditional northern Vietnamese dishes specialising in seafood. Located close to the beach at Ngoc Chau on Tuan Chau Island, the cosy eatery is a popular choice with visitors and a short drive from Ha Long City.

Rest at Paradise Suites Hotel

For a good night’s sleep after exploring, check in to Paradise Suites Hotel on Tuan Chau Island. The modern four-star hotel sits right on the shores of Ha Long Bay and features a restaurant The Whiskey Gallery – which serves local and international food – a spa and outdoor swimming pool. A free shuttle service runs throughout the day to take guests to the beach.






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CEO outlook

What's on the minds of CEOs in 2019?

Digital disruption, trade wars and political elections are some of the core issues seated front and centre in the minds of Asia's travel business chiefs in the new year. The *Daily* rounds up the topmost concerns these industry leaders are watching out for



ANGIE STEPHEN
Managing director for Asia-Pacific,
Royal Caribbean International

ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2019

Port development opportunities in Southeast Asia for creation of more destinations and more berthing space for larger ships, as our 4,900-guest Quantum Class ships are making more calls in the region.

We will also continue to focus on our travel agent training in view of our new offerings on the global and regional cruising scene, notably *Ovation of the Seas*' first Alaskan season and *Oasis of the Seas*' Mediterranean cruises lined up next year.



MARK MEEHAN
Managing director Asia Pacific, Middle East and Africa, Travelport

ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2019

1. The trade disagreements and tariffs be-

tween the US and China will have an impact on trade and travel between the regions. I foresee potential opportunities as well as investments moving to other developing markets in the near term.

2. Some of these investments will certainly be for the fast growth in ASEAN's travel sector, creating interesting opportunities as travel brands and companies rush to invest in this region. Strong Chinese brands such as Ctrip as well as major Western brands like Expedia and Booking are investing and expanding in the region.
3. Ensuring we have the right resources in the right markets at the right time. The wider geographical region I now manage offers great opportunities to align teams and technology around developing and fast-growing markets.



GLORIA GUEVARA MANZO
President & CEO,
World Travel & Tourism Council

ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2019

The issue of capacity growth. As of 2017, there were four billion air travellers worldwide and it will double to 7.8 billion by 2036, according to IATA. However, that doesn't mean the same growth in airports, so more efficient processing of passengers is needed.

The solution is biometrics technology, which is addressed by our Seamless Traveller Journey initiative to pilot biometric

data use throughout the passenger journey, from airport, cruise, hotels, car rental... to everything.

The second issue is crisis management. The next disaster is just a matter of when and where, be it an earthquake, tsunami or disease outbreak. We need to be prepared and manage (disasters) better. We work with governments to provide a protocol and be more engaged.

The third issue is about sustainable growth, which covers the future of jobs, social responsibility, human trafficking, illegal wildlife trade, and destination stewardship to reduce overcrowding and climate change.



QUEK SWEE KUAN
CEO, Sentosa Development Corporation

ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2019

T2019 will be an exciting milestone for Sentosa Development Corporation, as we will see several initiatives coming together to propel The State of Fun into the next stage of growth. Playing a crucial role in shaping Sentosa's future will be our masterplan, which will build on our strengths as a holiday island-in-the-city offering an array of day-to-night leisure experiences in one place.

We will soon share more details of our plans, including efforts to strengthen leisure experiences through the curation of new attractions, improvement of transport connectivity and enhancement of our popular beaches, while ensuring ef-

The two major (issues) are economics and politics as they are linked to investment decisions, and some projects are being delayed until investors see more stability in the markets.

Olivier Berrivin
Managing director,
international operations, Asia,
Best Western International

ficient land usage and environmental sustainability.

In 2019, we will also deepen our engagement with locals and tourists. We will collaborate with well-known brands to bring in unique and exciting offerings, like we did with Disney for the 2018 edition of Sentosa Sandstation. We will also strengthen our engagement with the international MICE and leisure markets, and leverage technology and data such as through our refreshed MySentosa app. Stay tuned!



ARTHUR KIONG
CEO, Far East Hospitality

ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2019

In 2019, we will be launching three new hotels on Sentosa Island. That's a total of 839 new room inventory, increasing the island's supply by 27 per cent.

Obviously it is incumbent on us to create new demand – business travel/MICE, mid-tier travellers and niche markets – to feed the new supply and not cannibalise the existing business.

The vast majority of hotels on Sentosa is in the luxury and upscale tiers. We wish to complement existing hotels by addressing underserved segments.

We will be synchronising efforts (to attract new sources of customers) with various stakeholders including the Sentosa Development Corporation, Sentosa Harbourfront Business Association and Singapore Tourism Board.



ANGELINE TANG
Regional director - leisure travel & partnerships, Asia Avis Budget Group

ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2019

More Asians are travelling overseas for their holidays, opting for more free-and-easy holidays over group, sit-in-coach or packaged tours.

Self-drive vacations are getting more popular among Asians, allowing travellers to move at their own pace and customise their own itineraries, while still enjoying hassle-free bookings through travel agencies.

As travellers today become more adventurous, we will continue to engage with

Crisis management - the next disaster is just a matter of when and where...

Gloria Guevara Manzo
President & CEO,
World Travel & Tourism Council

travel agents to help them better understand self-drive holidays, car rental booking processes and terminologies, plan self-drive itineraries for their customers and of course, to have their customers drive with Avis and Budget!

We will continue to grow our leisure outbound business actively through our local outbound teams and GSAs in key source markets within Asia. We will run more campaigns, promotions, events to engage the travel trade on the B2B2C segment.

To assist the travel trade to sell self-drive holidays, Avis Budget Group has recently launched beep, our one-stop portal for both the Avis and Budget brands. There are training modules, destination and driving guides, booking tools, making it easier for travel trade professionals to offer products and services for their customers. Rates are also commissionable and at the end of the training, travel

trade professionals are also rewarded with a certificate of completion of the training modules.



YUTHASAK SUPASORN
Governor, Tourism Authority of Thailand

ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2019

For 2019 and beyond, Thai tourism will emphasise on the promotion of responsible tourism. As a result of our unique geographical location, at the crossroads of Asia and within a few hours flying distance of some of Asia's most populous cities, we see no shortage of numbers in the years ahead. The key will be to manage those numbers.

Hence, we are striving to reduce tourist congestion in the main hubs by promoting 55 secondary provincial destinations,

upgrade the standards of safety and security, and inculcate a higher level of environmental consciousness across the entire industry.

Overall, we are aligning the future path of our industry in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Thailand is known all over the world for its superb tourism products and services as well as the friendliness and hospitality of its people. We now have to better balance quantity versus quality and marketing versus management. This will be our agenda for going forward.



TAMAS HANYI
General manager Asia-Pacific, Finnair

ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2019

Finnair is undergoing the fastest growth phase in our 95-year history. We have a

clear strategy to focus on Asia-Europe traffic with increased capacity, new services and strong ambitions.

Finnair now serves 19 destinations in Asia and over 100 destinations in Europe, and we can connect these cities by flying the shortest route via Helsinki.

During this growth we have managed to improve our fuel efficiency by flying new A350 aircraft, however the rise in fuel prices is something we all need to be watching in 2019.



OLIVIER BERRIVIN
Managing director, international operations, Asia, Best Western International

ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2019

Among the many elements that might affect our development growth, the two major ones are economics and politics as

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A01-02

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ASIA

CEO outlook

they are linked to investment decisions, and some projects are being delayed until investors see more stability in the markets.

Thailand is among our top three markets – the other being Viet Nam and Japan – and with the general elections scheduled in early 2019 we hope the new government will keep developing infrastructures and promote tourism to a wider range of markets for the country to remain a top destination.

Other factors, like general safety, are also impacting tourism flows. The perfect example is the current drop of Chinese tourists, attributed mainly to the boat sinking incident in Phuket a few months ago.

Last but not least, an increasing number of new brands and soft brands are introduced by our main competitors and targeting the midscale segment, where we traditionally develop half of our new projects so it makes things a bit more challenging.

In addition, we are launching two new brands this year – Sadie and Aiden – and they will allow us to increase our footprint further by bringing quality projects to the markets in line with clients' expectations.



PUTTIPONG PRASARTTONG-OSOTH
President, Bangkok Airways

ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2019

Bangkok Airways is not only an airline business. Our aviation business synchronises airline, airports, airport-related business and strategic investments. Key growth strategies can be defined by each business:

- Airline: The key strategy is to be a regional airline with 70-plus airline partners in order to serve tourist destinations especially in South-east Asia with untried and unfound destinations. In 2019, the company is planning to sign codeshare agreement with two or three leading airlines as well as to deliberately select aircraft fleets to match with our route network with cost efficiency.
- Airport: As we own three airports in Thailand in Samui, Sukhothai and Trat, our airport business strategy is to expand and improve service facilities and infrastructures in order to accommodate more demand in the future.
- We are looking to build and manage additional airports both in Thailand and in the region; explore duty-free business partners to expand the airport business; set up an aviation training school to serve demand of airline industry; and explore aircraft refuelling business – BAFS in order to fulfil our airline and airport business
- Airport-related business: The company is expanding the business to various key airports in Thailand to facilitate direct flights about in-flight meal serv-

ings such as Bangkok Air Catering in Chiang Mai, which will start to operate by end of 2018.

- Other business expansions: The company also has plan to build maintenance, repair and operating supplies (MRO). The MRO will be built at Sukhothai airport to serve customer target in the region.



JOHANES WIDJAJA
President director, Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts

ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2019

The presidential and legislative elections in Indonesia. Whoever is elected president will have the power to pass new regulations into law that could have an impact on the hotel industry.

Another issue is growth of digital technology, which has given rise to increased competition from OTAs and a new breed of "invisible" competitors which are not in direct competition with us but still have a major impact on our hotel business.

Lastly, the hotel industry is experiencing rapid sales growth, driven by the boom in digital platforms as well as the more traditional offline sector. In order to embrace both (platforms), we have improved our loyalty membership system, My Value, by introducing a new app earlier this year and we are working to perfect the app by next year.



SIEW KUM HONG
Regional director, Asia-Pacific, Airbnb

ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2019

We see sustained growth in the region's embrace of home sharing by both hosts and guests, and we will continue building out our product to better serve our community. Earlier this year, we launched Airbnb Plus, a selection of homes verified for quality and comfort. With around 3,000 listings around the world from Bali to Shanghai today, Airbnb Plus is part of our strategy to create an Airbnb for everyone, catering to the needs of every type of traveller.

In the corporate travel space, nearly 700,000 companies have signed up with Airbnb for Work to provide corporate

Tourist destinations need to... ensure that domestic (election) does not affect public trust in the country abroad, especially among tourists.

Arief Yahya

Minister of tourism, Indonesia

road warriors the option of staying in a work-friendly home. Our latest expansion into teambuilding experiences and homes for offsites, meetings and relocations strengthened our corporate offerings. This brings the best of Airbnb to the professional world to help foster a sense of belonging, even at work.

Driven by a new experience-led economy where greater value is placed on experiences over ownership, Airbnb Experiences are growing rapidly in Asia-Pacific. We now have over 2,700 experiences in more than 200 markets in the region, creating a new wave of hospitality entrepreneurs who are sharing their passions with travellers seeking authentic travel experiences.



CHANG THENG HWEE
CEO, Scott Dunn Asia

ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2019

Having just merged with Scott Dunn and switching to the Scott Dunn brand, it is of utmost importance that we ensure existing Country Holidays clients continue to book with us and have excellent relations with Scott Dunn. We will have to monitor that closely, as we execute our ambitious expansion plan in Asia as part of our two-pronged approach to build up bigger teams in Singapore and Hong Kong and reach out to new markets.

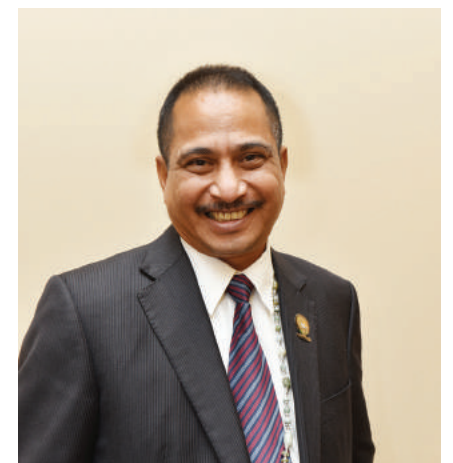


ERIC GNOCK FAH
COO & co-founder, Klook

ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2019

Rolling into 2019, the few issues and opportunities we have been watching closely are:

- Change of travellers' preferences for things to do. As travellers worldwide are developing a more sophisticated selection of preferred activities during their travels, we strive to diversify our offerings in a variety of ways. This includes adding more off-the-beaten-path activities in popular destinations, as well as cities that are less-touristy or off the radar. This is in line with our global expansion into the US and Europe, which aims to further widen our offerings on the platform.
- Travellers are currently also interested in one-off and seasonal events in-destination. According to a Klook survey across 12 user countries, 54 per cent of travellers have planned their trips around seasonal activities or one-off events, then booked flights and hotels to round out the itinerary. In response to the trend, Klook has already curated a selection of seasonal activities, including ones that highlight the fall foliage in Japan and South Korea, Oktoberfest in Munich, and the Yee Peng Festival in Chiang Mai. We will continue to curate similar offerings in 2019 to fulfil the demand for this market.



ARIEF YAHYA
Minister of tourism, Indonesia

ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2019

First, disaster issues. In September 2017, Mount Agung erupted, followed by an earthquake in Lombok, then a tsunami in Donggala Palu. Travel advice from many countries were issued in the wake of these disasters, bringing serious impacts on Indonesia tourism. Tourists became hesitant to travel to destinations that were exposed to force majeure and disasters.

Second, political issues. 2019 is an election year in Indonesia. Tourist destinations need to ensure that domestic competition does not affect public trust of the country abroad, especially among tourists.

Third, zero-dollar tours, an issue we need to seriously control. This has happened in Thailand and Malaysia, and now it could also happen in Indonesia, especially in Bali, as some errant travel agents practise zero dollar tours.

Tempered growth expectations

With the impact of last year's high-profile incidents on Thailand's core feeder not letting up, the destination now has a renewed focus on courting regional and domestic markets, reports Chadamas Chinmaneevong



Night view of Bangkok's Chao Phraya River

Unexpected incidents in 2018, most notably the tragic boat accident off Phuket, set off a continuous decline in the Chinese market, with no sign of a significant rebound even in the final quarter of 2018.

In 3Q2018, tourist arrivals in Thailand grew only 2.7 per cent year-on-year to 9.1 million visitors while tourism revenue increased by four per cent year-on-year to 47.5 billion baht (US\$1.4 billion), compared to double-digit growth seen in the first and second quarters of the year.

Following the July boat accident off Phuket that killed 47 Chinese tourists, arrivals from China dropped to 929,771 (-0.9 per cent year-on-year) in the same month.

The decline in Chinese visitors continued in subsequent months, with arrivals down by 12 per cent year-on-year to

867,461 in August, and by 15 per cent to 647,664 visitors in September.

Other incidents that affected arrivals from China include a dengue fever outbreak among Chinese travellers, and a Chinese tourist hurt by a Don Mueang airport security guard.

Travel trade players noted that the events of the year led Chinese tourists to pick competing destinations in the region, especially Vietnam.

Vichit Prakobgosol, president of the Association of Thai Travel Agents (ATTA), said the decline of the China market – a third of the total inbound market – has seriously affected the overall tourism industry.

He added that impact persisted longer than expected and was likely to continue into 4Q2018 and 1Q2019.

“Regarding the tourism performance in September, it is difficult for the business to fully bounce back in the last quarter of 2018. We are facing not only the declining Chinese market but also others such as un-

certainty in the global economy,” said Supawan Tanomkieatipum, president, Thai Hotels Association.

Before the year closed, Supawan projected the average occupancy rate for 2018 would grow by around eight per cent year-on-year to 70 per cent, down from the 15 per cent growth previously projected.

In a bid to boost arrivals, the government launched a visa-on-arrival exemption from December 1, 2018 to January 31, 2019.

Industry players pointed out that the move was too late to bring relief to Thailand's tourism in 2018, with most travel agents booking flights a few months in advance, although Vichit said this could yield results in 1Q2019.

Having adjusted its arrivals expectations for 2018 down from 40 million to 37 million, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) is confident of achieving its inbound tourism revenue target of two trillion baht and 38 million visitors this year, thanks to the good performance

in 1H2018.

In the first 10 months of 2018, Thailand's Ministry of Tourism and Sports reported that arrivals grew by 8.7 per cent year-on-year to 28.5 million visitors.

The top five source markets were China (8.4 million visitors), Malaysia (2.9 million visitors), South Korea (1.3 million visitors), Laos (1.3 million visitors), and Japan (1.2 million visitors).

Tourism revenue increased by 10 per cent year-on-year to 1.5 trillion baht.

The top revenue generating markets were China (460 billion baht), followed by Russia (80 billion baht), Malaysia (79 billion baht), South Korea (60 billion baht) and the US (60 billion baht).

“Although we (would) achieve the 2018 target, unpredictable incidents like the boat accident off Phuket may impact businesses in the long term. Therefore, TAT seriously focuses on the domestic market to reduce risks from much dependence on the inbound market, said TAT governor Yuthasak Supasorn.

Destination in numbers

28.5 million

The total foreign arrivals in the first 10 months of 2018, a 8.7 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

75%

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

168 billion baht

The tourism receipts, equivalent to US\$5.1 billion, generated in August 2018, up 2.7 per cent year-on-year

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 to markets in South-east Asia should raise tourism income by 11.5 per cent year-on-year to 3.3 trillion baht.”



Adith Chairattananon
Secretary-general,
Association of Thai Travel Agents

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



Supawan Tanomkieatipum
President,
Thai Hotels Association

“2019 will 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.”

What's new



Clockwise from top left: Central Phuket; Baan Huay Tom Village; Cape Fahn

Central Phuket

A retail complex has opened in Phuket, believed to be the largest in the province at 400,000m².

Central Phuket will host international events throughout the year, such as the Phuket International Music Festival and Phuket International Countdown 2019. It is also home to a huge number of eateries and restaurants offering a vast array of cuisines. In addition, Central Phuket features several tourist attractions, including 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; and Aquaria – Thailand's newest aquarium format featuring more than 25,000 ocean and river creatures, which will open in 1Q2019.

Cape Fahn

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

Iconsiam

Iconsiam's opening in Bangkok on November 9 marks the arrival of a mega mixed development. Offering 750,000m² in gross floor area, the US\$1.6 billion waterfront project is



expected to inject a buzz into Bangkok's retail and attractions scene, housing South-east Asia's longest multimedia water feature, SookSiam, the region's first Mandarin Oriental branded residences, plus a convention hall and museum opening mid-2019.

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 invites 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 an authentic slice of local life along with opportunities to connect with nature. Visitors can follow a nature trail, go bird-watching and camp near the Ping River. They may also experience agrotourism at the Huay Tom Royal Project site where there are gardens of vegetables such as eggplants and kale, as well as orchards of tropical fruits.

The expert recommends



Pornthip Hirunkate
Managing director,
Destination Asia Thailand

MUST EAT

Head to one of the most famous small stalls in Bangkok's Chinatown for an authentic local experience and a taste of *kuay jab nai huan* – clear pepper soup with crispy pork belly.

MUST SEE

A boat trip along Bangkok Noi Canal, which showcases the authentic aspects of local culture juxtaposed against modern influences.

MUST STAY

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



A long-tailed boat khlong (canal) tour in Bangkok Noi

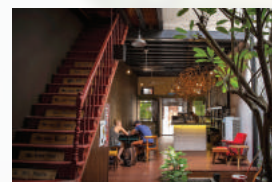
Surprising theme

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*.



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Putting Brunei on the map

Royal Brunei Airlines' lead in international destination marketing of the country and promotion of Borneo as a multi-city holiday destination has found favour among tourism stakeholders, discovers S Puvanewary

Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque, Bandar Seri Begawan

The national carrier, Royal Brunei Airlines (RBA), is taking the lead to front the latest destination campaign of Brunei, working alongside Brunei Tourism and industry stakeholders to attract foreign visitors to the sultanate.

In late September 2018, RBA rolled out a B\$5 million (US\$3.6 million) destination marketing campaign, as part of a fresh strategy to boost inbound arrivals to the sultanate and drive yield and load for the airline.

In this newest marketing campaign, RBA is adopting a multi-destination approach of promoting Brunei alongside the East Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah, revealed the airline's CEO Karam Chand.

The campaign is led by James Millett, who joined the airline as head of digital and marketing in August. He was previously director of marketing, digital and brand at EasyJet.

Karam added: "We are running a 100 per cent digital campaign for at least two years. We have engaged M&C Saatchi Singapore to be the advertising agency and drive the initiatives forward... We are also targeting millennials through digital marketing campaigns."

While RBA has taken the lead in marketing Brunei internationally, Karam stressed that the airline is still working closely with Brunei Tourism, with the DMO overseeing the training of tourist guides, licensing matters and setting of standards for the industry.

On its end, RBA will organise travel trade missions in targeted markets, alongside relevant private sector stakeholders, shared Karam.

Meanwhile, RBA's recent resumption of services to Kuching on December 28, 2018 is expected to give a boost to its new Borneo strategy, as the sector also targets long-haul leisure travellers transiting in Bandar Seri Begawan on its London-Melbourne route. The Kuching service was suspended in 2011.

As well, RBA in end-October 2018 started non-stop flights between London Heathrow and Bandar Seri Begawan, reducing flight time by 3.5 hours in each direction as it no longer stops in Dubai.

Chang Ming Vui, managing director of BruVacation, said RBA's approach to destination marketing by promoting Borneo island as a whole to longhaul markets was a good move, as longhaul travellers usu-

ally visit more than one destination during their trip.

The national carrier's digital-focused marketing strategy will not only stretch the promotion dollars for Brunei but also appeal to millennial and first-time travellers at the same time, especially as the sultanate has been overshadowed by other destinations in the region with greater marketing budgets and efforts, opined Chang.

BruVacation has recorded nearly 20 per cent year-on-year growth in business from China and Hong Kong in 2018, which Chang attributes to new partner agents as well as improved air connections between China and Brunei through RBA's twice-weekly services to both Kunming and Nanning launched in April last year.

Aside from China, Chang also reported a 10 per cent growth from the Malaysian market with clients mainly from West Malaysia, attracted to Brunei's serenity, local food and nature-based attractions.

Local hospitality players like Mulia Hotel has also been working closely with RBA on the airline's stopover programmes. The hotel is keen to attract Umrah groups transiting in Bandar Seri Begawan on their return journeys to Surabaya in Indonesia or Kota Kinabalu in East Malaysia.

Other markets the hotel is targeting include China, Malaysia and Indonesia. In 2019, Mulia Hotel plans to intensify its promotions to attract more group and business travellers from these key markets, revealed Mohd Iswandi, the hotel's director of operations.

Hotel facilities such as the gym, business lounge, and meeting rooms are currently being upgraded, and renovations are slated for completion by end-January 2019.

We are running a 100 per cent digital campaign for at least two years... We are also targeting millennials through digital marketing campaigns.

Karam Chand
CEO, Royal Brunei Airlines

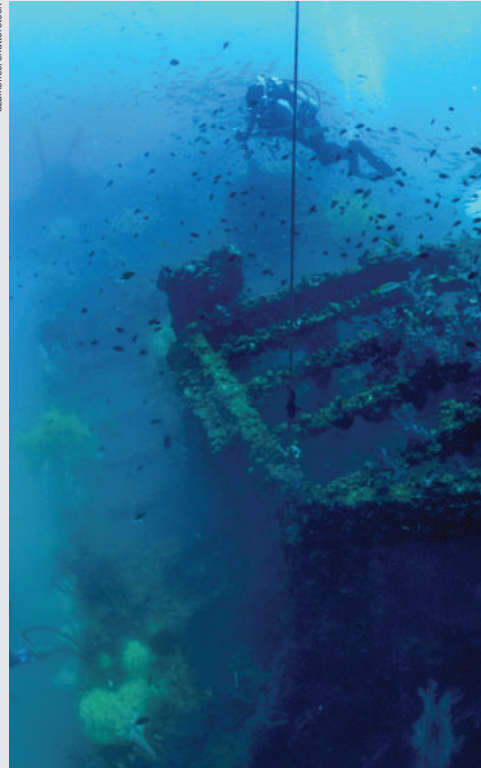
Surprising theme

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 activities in Brunei's waters, many diving sites are still in pristine condition.

It is also very easy to get to the dive sites

© ian/istock/shutterstock



Karam/istock/shutterstock

What's new

Mulia Hotel

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

takes off from Haikou at 03.00 every Tuesday and Friday for Bandar Seri Begawan.

Taman Mahkota Jubli Emas

This new 12ha 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.



Mulia Hotel's lobby

The Capital Residence Suites

This property, which offers both hotel rooms and service residences, has expanded with a new 42-room hotel block, 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.

RBA's new Haikou connection

Royal Brunei Airlines (RBA) has begun direct twice-weekly services to Haikou, the capital of China's Hainan province, since November 22, 2018, adding to its existing launched Nanning and Hangzhou routes. The Haikou-bound flight departs Bandar Seri Begawan every Monday and Thursday at 22.40, while the return leg



The Capital Residence Suites

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.



Shipwreck diving in Brunei

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Destination Laos

Slowly and steadily getting there

Even though Laos is expected to fall short of its 2018 visitor target, 2019 will bring greater hopes as plans for the Laos-China Year gets underway and more mid-tier hotels open their doors in the country, finds Marissa Carruthers



Alms giving is a longstanding tradition in Laos Buddhist culture

Laos is on track to welcome more visitors in 2018 but is likely to fall short of its target of attracting five million visitors.

No official statistics have yet been released by the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism for 2018, however, officials revealed less than two million international visitors arrived in the country in 1H2018.

In 2017, international arrivals fell by 8.7 per cent to 3.9 million. Despite seeing an 11 per cent year-on-year slump, Thailand was the strongest market with 1.8 million visitors. China followed with 639,185 arrivals, marking a 17 per cent increase.

Despite the figures, the industry reported an increase in tourists for 2018. Linh Le, group managing director of Asia DMC, said 1Q and 3Q saw a rise in bookings. Australia and North American visitors increased, while numbers from the UK and Europe fell.

But the DMC saw a slight decline in regional bookings, which Le attributed to less direct flights. He also noted greater demand in Chinese and Vietnamese corporate travel, which will be segments that he will focus on in 2019.

Meanwhile, Amantaka in Luang Prabang also reported growth. Its general manager Tom Rutherford shared the

North America was the property's top performing 2018 market, a trend he predicts will continue into 2019. He added the Chinese market has also grown, and there are plans in place to capture more of that market throughout 2019.

A spokesperson from Avani+ Luang Prabang said 2018 saw huge growth for Korea, with Taiwan and Hong Kong starting to pick up. For the longhaul market, interest from Germany, Switzerland and Australia has grown.

To reach their target, Laos' authorities have also turned their eyes to China in hopes of attracting one million visitors from the country by 2020. Prelimi-

Surprising theme

Gourmet lures

Discover the traditional flavours 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. Alternatively, stroll through Pakse's coffee plantations and pick coffee beans with farmers, or go on a farm tour in Luang Prabang and learn more about innovative organic growing techniques. Foodie travellers may also learn how to cook a handful of local dishes at one of many cooking classes that operate in Luang Prabang and Vientiane, and which include visits to local markets to buy fresh ingredients.



nary plans for the Laos-China Year 2019 programme were being discussed at press time, and is set to include tourism fairs and promotional activities in major cities in both countries.

But the lack of direct flights remains the country's greatest hurdle.

Andrew Jansson, general manager of Avani+ Luang Prabang, believes that direct flights would help drive tourism in Luang Prabang. Provincial figures show that in the first eight months of 2018, the destination received 540,542 tourists, a 20.3 per cent year-on-year increase. Of those, 408,700 were foreign.

Lamented Jansson: "Connectivity and infrastructure are key aspects that need to be further developed. More direct flights from key Asian hubs would benefit the city.

"With (more direct connections), I'm sure local authorities would follow suit and improve the existing airport and look into the road network in and out of the city. Access is currently rather restricted," he elaborated.

The opening of more mid-tier hotels and sustainable tourism projects, including NamKhan Project – an integrated eco-farm in Luang Prabang, are also predicted to drive tourism through 2019.

Stefan Scheerer, general manager of Khiri Travel Laos, said southern Laos will emerge as the place to visit in Laos in 2019.

"Formerly known as a backpacker paradise where one could relax and unwind for a few days, the destination now offers stylish boutique hotels, trendy bistros and authentic cultural and adventure experiences," he said.

In addition, new border crossings between Myanmar and Laos will open up new opportunities for the industry.

What's new



From left: NamKhan Project; Rosewood Luang Prabang



NamKhan Project

Stretching along the Nam Khan River, this project 15 minutes from the centre of Luang Prabang is an integrated concept featuring a permaculture eco farm, agricultural education center with public gardens and a river beach club. The NamKhan Gardens has opened to the public since October 1, while visitors can join farm tours, classes or workshops. Organic vegetables, fruits and herbs grown in the farm are also available for sale. A waterfall, pool and spa area, and outdoor exercise area will soon be added to the project.

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 offers four cruise options, including tours of Pakbeng that incorporate 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 offers the country's first tented villa. Each accommodation is centred around a waterfall and river, or elevated among the treetops, and features balconies. A 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 located on-site.

Airlines

Going for the long haul

From launching a longhaul LCC to pushing the limits of ultra-longhaul flights, Asia's full-service airlines are now riding the new generation of fuel-efficient aircraft and robust passenger demand to fly longer and farther than ever before



Los Angeles is on the radar for a number of Asian carriers, including Philippine Airlines and Garuda Indonesia.

SINGAPORE

Singapore Airlines (SIA) has embarked on a three-year transformation programme, with a strong focus on scaling up its digital capabilities and capacity amid stiff competition.

A significant step in its transformation is the upcoming integration of SilkAir into SIA, after the regional arm undergoes significant upgrades of more than S\$100 million (US\$73 million) to its cabins, including new lie-flat seats in business class and the installation of seat-back in-flight entertainment systems in both business class and economy class.

These upgrades are expected to start in 2020, which will ensure greater product and service consistency across SIA Group's full-service network.

SIA plans to open up ultra-long-range (ULR) services with its upcoming fleet of A350-900ULR aircraft, starting with non-stop flights between Singapore and Los Angeles on November 2.

Meanwhile, the Los Angeles service via Seoul has ceased after November 30, but the daily service to Los Angeles via Tokyo remains. Los Angeles will be served 17 times per week by the airline.

SIA has also launched the world's longest non-stop flights between Singapore and New York on October 11, 2018. The thrice-weekly service will take almost 19 hours on the new A350-900ULR, which will have no economy class seating.

In addition, SIA has also increased its existing daily non-stop Singapore-San Francisco services to 10 flights per week from November 28. Its route to San Francisco via Hong Kong will remain in opera-

tion.

These new developments will raise SIA's number of weekly non-stop flights between Singapore and the US to 27 by end-2018.

The latest destinations added to SIA's longhaul network from Singapore include non-stop services to San Francisco, Dusseldorf and Stockholm via Moscow. On the medium-haul, SIA now serves Canberra and Wellington. – **Pamela Chow**

THAILAND

Recent years have proven to be rather tumultuous for Thai Airways International, as the carrier continues its plan launched in April 2015 as part of cost restructuring effort while battling Thailand's aviation downgrades that limited its expansion plans.

Things started looking up for Thai Airways with ICAO's removal of Thailand's red flag status in October 2017, giving the carrier "more flexibility on route planning for both long-haul and regional routes", commented the airline's executive vice president, commercial, Wiwat Piyawiroj.

Thai Airways expects the US Federal Aviation Administration to upgrade Thailand to Category 1 soon, which would pave the way for the launch of US routes. The airline has not operated services to the US since suspending its Bangkok-Los Ange-

les service in October 2015.

"Our plans for the US market are to enhance codeshare cooperation with our Star Alliance partners in order to offer an expanded network for customers," said Wiwat.

Thai Airways passengers currently can fly to 14 destinations in North America through the airline's codeshare agreements.

Europe, a key market for Thai Airways, is meanwhile showing improved performance as the European economy picks up growth.

"European travellers visiting Thailand in 2018 already showed an increase of 7.5 per cent while in 2017 it was at 5.4 per cent," Wiwat shared. "Our European routes performed very well for the first five months this year, especially to Germany for both Frankfurt and Munich, and to the three Scandinavian destinations as well as Zurich."

He added: "No new destinations (in Europe) are planned at the moment, as we do not have sufficient aircraft for expansion. Our strategy for now is to grow the

non-daily flights to daily for routes such as Brussels, Vienna and the two Italian destinations – Milan and Rome."

Thai Airways' longhaul fleet number will be maintained for now, as its aircraft acquisition plan is pending government approval, Wiwat told *TTG Asia*. THAI took delivery of seven aircraft in 2017, comprising five Airbus A350-900s and two Boeing 787-9 Dreamliners.

In September 2018, the Thai flag carrier has proposed a revised turnaround plan to the State Enterprises Policy Commission. – **Xinyi Liang-Pholensa**

PHILIPPINES

Philippine Airlines' (PAL) longhaul network – comprising only six destinations across the US, Canada and the UK – is getting a much-needed boost with its current fleet modernisation.

The carrier has six firm orders for Airbus A350-900 XWB, four of which are up for delivery starting June last year and two in mid-2019, with options for an additional six.

The A350-900s will be deployed on the new non-stop flight from Manila to JFK Airport in New York beginning October and on the daily Manila-London (Heathrow) service by end-October this year.

The US is one of the Philippines' biggest inbound markets served by PAL through non-stop flights from Manila to Los Angeles, San Francisco and soon New York.

The nonstop flight from Cebu to Los Angeles, which was temporarily shelved due to the lack of bigger aircraft, is expected to be resumed with the delivery of the A350-900s.

PAL president and COO Jaime Bautista said that "services to other points in North America and/or Europe are expected to follow as more aircraft join the fleet over the next 12 months, including possible routes to Seattle, Chicago and a point in western Europe".

The refueling with "more innovations and product refinements" is aligned with (PAL's) goal to be rated five-star on Skytrax from the current four-star, Bautista said.

Bautista said that PAL "will take in 27 new aircraft" starting with the new A350-900s and the six A321neos for delivery this year until next, two of which have already arrived in Manila.

The A321neo is now in use for the Manila-Brisbane service launched in May and has increased its weekly services from three to five since July.

P A L

Singapore Airlines has begun its Los Angeles service in November using A350-900ULR aircraft.



Airlines

has also configured its A330-343 aircraft to increase the overall capacity by 22 per cent to stimulate leisure and business travel. The 414 seats were reduced to 309 for wider legroom and fewer seats on each row, and cabin amenities enhanced.

Since June, the thrice-weekly Manila-Auckland service is using the tri-class A330-343 with 18 business class, 24 premium economy and 267 economy seats. Other medium-haul destinations using the reconfigured A330 include Honolulu, Sydney and Melbourne. – **Rosa Ocampo**

INDONESIA

Following the lifting of the EU's ban on Indonesian airlines in June 2018, Europe is now coming into greater focus for Garuda Indonesia as the carrier plots its longhaul expansion strategy.

The airline has started to assess several destinations in Europe, with the Jakarta-Paris route scheduled for launch in winter 2019, while it will increase the Jakarta-Amsterdam service from six-times weekly to daily in November 2018.

Sigit Muhartono, director of international cargo & commerce at Garuda Indonesia, said Paris is chosen for its hub status in Europe.

"The market potential in France is the highest among others (in Europe), for both business and leisure markets," he explained.

Sigit added that France is Indonesia's biggest source market in Europe. Data from the Visit Indonesia Tourism Office in France show that 162,288 Parisians visited Bali in 2017, rising 10.1 per cent from 147,413 visitors in 2016.

He added: "We also look at the patterns of Indonesians travelling to Europe. Most of them start from Amsterdam, then travel around Europe by land and end the journey in Paris and fly out from there."

At press time, Garuda Indonesia is also in the midst of signing a codeshare agreement with Air France to offer customers daily connections between Jakarta and Paris, adding to the carrier's codeshare partnership with KLM to fly in 19 destinations.

"We are also working on a codeshare agreement with Aeroflot, (not only for the Russian market but) for East Europe in general, (as part of our) focus to strengthen our network in Europe," said Sigit.

Next on Garuda's radar is to add Turkey onto its flight network to position it as a hub for both East Europe and the Middle East.

Sigit added: "Turkey is very strategic, close to Eastern Europe (and Aeroflot has many flights here). We want to connect Indonesia with Eastern Europe this way."

Meanwhile, Garuda is looking connect to Los Angeles via Tokyo. Said Sigit: "We are still waiting for the route permission from the government of Japan to enable the service to transit in Tokyo. Once this is done, we will fly the Jakarta-Los Angeles route." – **Tiara Maharani**

HONG KONG

Barely two years since the airline began its transformation campaign, Cathay Pacific (CX) has launched non-stop routes to a slew of longhaul destinations served by the Airbus A350 fleet, including Barcelona, Brussels, Christchurch, Copenhagen, London-Gatwick, Tel Aviv, and, most recently, Dublin.

Frequencies on several of the airline's most popular routes, including Barcelona and Tel Aviv, were also boosted in 2018.

A spokesperson said: "One of the goals of (CX's) transformation is to find new sources of revenue by flying to destinations that people want to visit and connecting Hong Kong directly to new places for the first time. Examples include Tel Aviv, Barcelona, Christchurch, Brussels, Copenhagen, Washington DC, Cape Town, Nanning and Jinan, Medan and Davao, etc.

"We are opening a record nine new destinations this year. In addition to the destinations already launched so far this year, i.e. Brussels (March), Copenhagen (May) and Dublin (June), we will be commencing flights to Washington DC (September) and Cape Town (November) this year."

As of June 2018, CX and Cathay Dragon have a combined fleet of 195 aircraft. Of the 78 new aircraft expected to be delivered by 2024, the airline received its first A350-1000 aircraft in June, with a total of eight A350-1000s set for delivery in 2018.

CX chief customer and commercial officer, Paul Loo, said: "We already have one of the youngest longhaul fleets in the sky, and with the arrival of the Airbus A350-1000, our fleet is only going to get young-

er. The aircraft follows the successful entry of the -900 variant which has enabled us to expand our longhaul network at a near unprecedented rate, providing our customers with a wider range of non-stop travel choices."

The remaining 12 A350-1000 order will arrive by 2021. After initial rounds of regional services, starting with Taipei on July 1, 2018, the new Washington DC service will be launched on September 25 on the A350-1000, which at 8,153 miles (13,121km) makes it the longest on the airline's network.

This aircraft will also serve Madrid, Tel Aviv, Amsterdam, Manchester and Zurich from the coming winter. – **Prudence Lui**

JAPAN

Japan Airlines (JAL), the nation's flag carrier, has announced a dramatic departure from its long-held aversion to operating a LCC and will commence commercial operations with a new budget airline from Tokyo's Narita International Airport from summer 2020, ultimately targeting longhaul travellers.

"The company decided to establish a new carrier to accommodate a new generation of visitors who are expected to visit Japan heading into 2020 and beyond," Tetuya Onuki, managing executive officer of JAL's international route marketing division, told *TTG Asia*.

"JAL currently has a LCC investment in Jetstar Japan, which is an airline built on a business plan featuring shorthaul routes," said Onuki. "On the other hand, the new LCC business will focus on medium- to longhaul international routes.

The as yet unnamed airline will initially operate Boeing 787-8 aircraft in order to rival similar LCCs on regional routes before spreading its wings into Europe and the Americas, Onuki added.

During this summer season, JAL is operating 140 flights a week between the Americas and Japan, as well as 42 from European destinations and a further 14 from Australasian cities, giving a total of 392 round-trips per week between Japan and longhaul destinations.

The latest addition to the company's longhaul repertoire was the September 2017 launch of daily flights to Melbourne, a result of growing demand on the route thanks to the Japan-Australia Economic

Partnership Agreement of 2015.

In FY2019, JAL will seasonally increase flights between Tokyo (Narita) and Chicago (O'Hare) from June 8 to September 3, 2019, featuring 11 flights per week.

On flights between Osaka (Kansai) and Los Angeles, JAL will now feature full-flat seats in business class, in addition to the introduction of premium economy class service with the JAL Sky Suite 787-9 aircraft.

On its existing longhaul routes, JAL operates the Boeing 777-300ER, 777-200ER, 787-8 or 787-9 aircraft for the "technical advantages" available on the aircraft.

The carrier began rolling out the JAL Sky Suite in 2013 to enhance the passenger experience, featuring top-of-the-range options including wider seats in economy class. – **Julian Ryall**

MALAYSIA

Amid concerns of escalating fuel prices, Malaysia Airlines does not have plans to introduce any new longhaul routes or add capacity on existing routes, but will instead focus on marketing the premium segment to cushion the airline from rising costs, *TTG Asia* understands.

On January 15, 2018, the airline replaced its Airbus A380 operations with the more fuel-efficient A350-900 on the twice-daily Kuala Lumpur-London sector.

The 486-seat A380 was deemed too large for optimal efficiency on the London route and hence the airline made a decision to reduce capacity by over 40 per cent with the smaller A350-900 aircraft fitted with 286 seats.

London is currently the only destination in Europe the airline flies to, while it depends on the Oneworld alliance airlines to connect to the rest of Europe and North America.

The airline had suspended flights to Los Angeles since April 2014 as part of a route rationalisation exercise to stem losses.

Malaysia Airlines has relaunched four-times weekly flights from Kuala Lumpur to Brisbane on June 1. This route had previously been axed from the network in 2015 amid a network rationalisation exercise.

Loads since the reinstatement has been described by Malaysia Airlines as "encouraging" in an email reply end-June. – **S Puvaneswary**

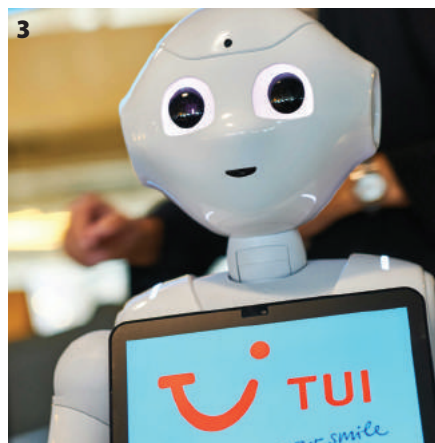
From left: Economy class in Cathay Pacific; the Airbus A350-900 is among the newest planes on Thai Airways' longhaul fleet



Products

Cool travel innovations

With a craft beer airline, air taxis and floating hotel pods emerging in the marketplace, needless to say, the spirit of innovation is flourishing in the travel industry. The *Daily* brings you some of our favourites



1. FLOATING SPHERE-SHAPED ROOMS

The Huis Ten Bosch theme park in Nagasaki, Japan has unveiled spherical hotel rooms floating on the bay off the bay. Each pod is arranged over two floors, with the upper level containing a bed and the lower level a lounge area. The self-contained units also has its own bath and toilet facilities. Guests can choose to moor offshore while they are asleep or to be in gentle motion between the park and an uninhabited island nearby.

2. AIR TAXI TRIALS GET GREEN LIGHT

German company Volocopter has developed air taxis for inner-city transport, with these “flying cars” already approved for trials in Singapore next year. Each electrically powered drone aircraft (Volocopter) can fly two people for distances of less than 30km, and can be manoeuvred by a pilot or remote control. The trials will test the feasibility of Volocopters and their flight modes in Singapore’s environment.

3. TUI’S ROBOT HIRE

A humanoid robot named Pepper 2E in August joined TUI Nordic’s new Data Analytics and Machine Learning team in the Stockholm office. This semi-humanoid robot understands and speaks in numerous languages and can understand human emotions. Pepper’s touch screen increases his capacity to interact and enables him to enhance communication by providing visual information.

4. MORPHEUS DESCENDS IN MACAU

Named after the god of dreams in Greek mythology, Morpheus hotel debuted in Macau on June 15 as the world’s first free-form exoskeleton high-rise architectural

structure, designed by the late architect Zaha Hadid. Apart from 770 guestrooms, suites and villas, the architectural marvel is home to Alain Ducasse at Morpheus, chef Alain Ducasse’s first restaurant in Macau.

5. THE ‘RUBIK’S CUBE’ WINERY

Taking the immersive winery experience to the next level is the d’Arenberg Cube in McLaren Vale, South Australia. Inspired by a Rubik’s Cube, the five-storey building ‘floats’ among the Mourvèdre vines and features an entrance door said to spin and fold open like origami. Its five levels are designed for the senses with features including a virtual fermenter, a 360-degree video room, a wine fog room, and a flower and fruit room with puffers you can inhale of one of the 72 wines they produce.

6. ‘CRAFT BEER AIRLINE’ NOW BOARDING

Scottish craft beer brewer BrewDog is chartering a “bespoke BrewDog Boeing 767” to cruise from London Stansted to Columbus Ohio in February 2019. On board, passengers will be treated to a new beer created to taste better at altitude. In Ohio, they will be taken on a behind-the-scenes tour of BrewDog Columbus, a walking tour to discover bars in the city and a day trip to Cincinnati breweries. Tickets are for the flight are on sale now, but are available only for “Equity Punks”, or those who invested in the company during its crowdfunding round.

7. AR BAGGAGE MEASUREMENT TOOL

Kayak’s augmented reality (AR) baggage measurement tool was created to help travellers determine whether or not their luggage will fit in the overhead bins of an airline before arriving at the airport.

Available via the Kayak app on all iOS devices running iOS 11.3 and up, the tool also compares baggage fee policies for all Kayak tracked airlines.

8. PAGING FOR HOME-BASED AGENTS

Singapore-based Chan Brothers Group has launched the ten Travel Envoy platform (ten stands for “travel entrepreneur network”) to recruit travel agent “envoys”. Besides getting destination and product training, Envoys can earn five per cent commission per package sold. Those who wish to plan and customise FIT packages for their customers will be charged to use a premium platform from the second year. Not only does this system help Chan Brothers distribute its packages to a wider market, it also serves as an alternative to recruit travel agents, an increasingly challenging task today.

9. VR DEEP-DIVE INTO THE PHILIPPINES

The Philippine Department of Tourism this year turned to virtual reality (VR) technology to promote dive tourism, a step up from mere photographs of the country’s underwater attractions including Tubbataha Reef, Anilao in Batangas, Malapascua and Bantayan Island in Cebu. VR goggles were made available during European sorties and international dive shows, with scenes curated by Studio H20 Philippines whose staff are all experienced scuba divers and professional underwater videographers and photographers.

10. CREATIVE NEIGHBOURHOOD SPOTLIGHT

Following the 2017 launch of the Old Town Central programme, Hong Kong Tourism Board picked Sham Shui Po to

spotlight in its latest neighbourhood campaign this year. It turns the neighbourhood into a playground for the young and creative to discover authentic local flavours, such as by allowing visitors to scan QR codes to access information at various points of interests. A Sham Shui Po Self-guided Walks guide was also created, featuring walking routes recommended by local personalities and 65 thematic points of interest.

11. UNDISCOVER AUSTRALIA

The challenge of attracting repeat tourists was taken head on with a new campaign inviting visitors to *UnDiscover Australia*. Launched in September, the A\$10 million (US\$7.3 million) campaign aims to challenge perceptions of Australia which is known for koalas, kangaroos, the outback and iconic landmarks, and instead showcases unusual and unexpected attractions on offer. These include climbing the roof of the Adelaide Oval to enjoy 60-degree views of the city skyline at sunset or swimming with sharks.

12. UPGRADING THE LONGHAUL EXPERIENCE

What can an airline do to bump up the comfort level on the world’s longest air route? Well, remove economy class and put in a bevy of entertainment and meal options. That’s what Singapore Airlines did when its daily Singapore-New York service took off in October. The new Airbus A350-900ULR used to operate the ultra-longhaul flight features only premium economy and business class seats, and serves up wellness cuisine curated by chefs and nutritionists from luxury spa company Canyon Ranch.

Gebogan, Tanah Lot, Bali • Indonesia



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