



ATF 2019
January 17, 2019
Ha Long Bay, Viet Nam



Embrace digital storytelling

Harnessing technology will enable SE Asia to bring its diverse offerings to life

By Marissa Carruthers

South-east Asia is urged to collectively embrace technology to showcase the region's diverse cultural heritage and boost tourism across member states.

At the 'Connecting heritages for ASEAN tourism development in digital age' conference held yesterday, delegates heard the vital role digital technology plays in promoting tourism in the modern world.

Peter DeBrine, senior project officer, UNESCO World Heritage Nature, Sustainable Tourism and Outreach Unit, said: "Technology has become crucial for modernising the interpretation at cultural and natural sites, providing innovation in educational ways to enhance the visitor experience."

He added with 38 World Heritage sites across South-east Asia and each member country home to at least one, this is a prime opportunity for nations to work together to develop cross-cultural and cross-country trips. And technology is the best way to inspire and entice visitors.

Said DeBrine: "As much as UNESCO likes lists, we like storytelling even more. How we tell our stories is directly linked to digital technology – it's right in our hands with mobile phones. Digital and technology tools play a pivotal role in linking culture with sustainable tourism development."



How we tell our stories is directly linked to digital technology – it's right in our hands with mobile phones.

Peter DeBrine
Senior project officer, UNESCO World Heritage Nature, Sustainable Tourism and Outreach Unit

DeBrine said a joint initiative between UNESCO and National Geographic is an example of best practice in this area. Funded by the EU, the World Heritage

Journeys Europe online platform showcases the continent's unique cultural heritage while supporting sustainable tourism development.

Under different travel themes, Europe's 34 World Heritage sites are brought to life through more than 1,000 pages that feature powerful images, stories, videos and interactive maps.

Added DeBrine: "The goal is to use digital technology to change the way people travel and experience local culture, and gain deeper appreciation about world heritage and the destination as a whole. We want to try and encourage people to stay longer."

Con Apostolopoulos, senior vice-president National Geographic Partners, Asia Pacific and the Middle East, said this model could be transferred to South-east Asia, with curated journeys focusing on gastronomy, romance, heritage and art to create a range of compelling stories that encourage cross-country trips across South-east Asia.

However, he said the major challenge lies in member states working together.

"Where I see a significant opportunity for (South-east Asia) is by pooling their resources and do something of a huge scale. Each story is uniquely yours, because pooling your resources doesn't mean losing your identity."

Chinese, SE Asia focus for Laos

By Marissa Carruthers and Yixin Ng

Laos has set its sights on attracting one million Chinese visitors this year as part of the *Visit Laos-China 2019* campaign, with a series of events, fam trips and seminars lined up to grow this key source market.

Sounh Manivong, director general of tourism marketing department, Laos' Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism (MICT), said: "We want to collaborate with many countries in the future. China is a market with huge potential, so we will start with them and then expand to other nations."

The two countries have signed an agreement to push tourism in both destinations, starting with a launch event in Vientiane on January 25, followed by a Laos tourism promotion seminar for



Sounh: more air links wanted

Chinese business and tourism players.

Other activities include Laos hosting a large-scale promotional event in Beijing in April; a Laos festival in Hunan in July; a promotion seminar in Pakse in August; and a fam trip for Chinese media in southern Laos, before rounding out the year with a closing ceremony in Beijing in December.

With more than five daily flights connecting China and Laos, Sounh said work is underway to secure more direct flights with major Chinese cities this year.

Sounh added the government is working to secure more flights, including from Japan. Promotional activities will also be carried out in South Korea and Japan – two key target markets.

The country landed a recent coup in Scoot's thrice-weekly flights from Singapore to Luang Prabang and Vientiane, which will begin in April.

China aside, Laos is putting South-east Asia on its radar. "A few years ago, our target markets were Europeans and Americans. This year we are changing this by focusing on attracting South-east Asians and Chinese," said Somxay Chongheumoua from the tourism marketing research division of MICT's tourism marketing department.

The increased focus on South-east Asian travellers is coming as good news for some tourism businesses in Laos, although they continue to see Europe and the US as their core markets.

A Laotian tour operator who declined to be named told the Daily that compared to the Chinese and some Europeans, South-east Asian travellers are more inclined to spending on local businesses.

He observed: "Tourists from Thailand or even Viet Nam are different – they would rather use local services and consume local products. This is important to ensure locals get to benefit from tourism."

Spotlight on Buddhist tourism

By S Puvaneswary

Buddhist tourism has strong growth potentials in South-east Asia, but more needs to be done in order to develop this sector.

Home to an estimated 156 million Buddhists, South-east Asia is "replete with Buddhist religious activities, ceremonies and festivals", as well as "many cultural, architectural and historical monuments and relics", according to Victor Wee, secretary-general of ASEAN Tourism Research Association (ATRA), which comprises 16 public and private universities in South-east Asia.

However, Wee said that there has not been much attempt to consider how Buddhist sites and relics across the region could be used to develop and promote tourism centred on Buddhism.

These findings were part of an ongoing study on Buddhist tourism on eight countries in South-east Asia – with the exception of Brunei and the Philippines – which was presented by ATRA to South-east Asian NTOs yesterday. The complete findings are expected to be published later this year.

Wee elaborated: "(The study) examined the programmes, policies and infrastructure that could be developed in order to capitalise on their tangible and intangible heritage of Buddhism."

The study also examined destination management strategies at iconic sites to relieve congestion and improve sustainability in terms of tourism dispersal strategies; carrying capacity; and management of visitor impacts.

It also gave recommendations on what was needed for Buddhist tourism to gain traction in the region. This included the training of tourist guides to equip them with better and in-depth storytelling; development and improvement of infrastructure and amenities without causing negative impact to local communities and the environment; and sustainable development of tourism attractions, products and services.

Wee added that the study will form part of the UNWTO study on Buddhist tourism in Asia, adding to the growing religious tourism research the global tourism body has undertaken in the region.



Wee: untapped potential market



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.



News

New star for SE Asia's tourism market

With more air links and disposable income, Viet Nam's a market to watch for inbound players in the region

By Mimi Hudoyo and S Puvaneswary

Bolstered by growing intra-region connectivity and a strong economy, Viet Nam is emerging as a source market in South-east Asia, with regional NTOs and tour operators training their sights and developing strategies to woo more Vietnamese travellers to their shores.

The *MasterCard Future of Outbound Travel in Asia Pacific Report, 2016-2021* revealed that Viet Nam's CAGR growth in outbound travel is expected to reach 7.5 million trips by 2021.

Abdul Hadi Che Man, director of Tourism Malaysia in Viet Nam, told the *Daily*: "Viet Nam is a very fast-growing market for Malaysia. Until September 2017, arrivals grew by 54 per cent and daily expenditure increased 49 per cent from RM399 (US\$97) to RM594.

He added: "Last year set high expectations but we will push for continual growth this year. We will work closely with our travel agent partners to explore the possibility of working with OTAs to attract more FITs."

Trade players in Malaysia attribute the growing air connections from Viet Nam as a key factor to driving arrivals. Penang, for instance, is a key beneficiary of enhanced air links from Viet Nam.

AirAsia began four-times-weekly flights between Penang and Ha Noi from July 2018, in addition to stepping up frequencies between Ho Chi Minh City and Penang from four-times-weekly to daily since last March.

With improved air accessibility, Penang Global Tourism is working with AirAsia on joint tacticals to promote the state, and will also exhibit at the upcoming Viet Nam International Travel Mart in Ha Noi this March and the 15th International Travel Expo in Ho Chi Minh City, according to Ooi Chok Yan, CEO, Penang Global Tourism.

For Indonesia, the average 10 per cent growth posted for Viet Nam in recent years makes it a significant market for the archipelago, even as inbound numbers are still small at present.

Visitor arrivals from Viet Nam to Indonesia in 2017 totalled 77,466, and the number is expected to reach 100,000 in 2018 (full year statistics for 2018 not yet available at press time).

While Vietnamese outbound traffic to Malaysia has been aided by rising air links, Indonesia is hampered by the lack of direct connections. Currently, the only direct flight is operated by Vietnam Airlines between Ho Chi Minh City and Jakarta.

Heri Hermawan, head of marketing division - Indochina, Ministry of Tourism, Indonesia, said: "Viet Nam has the potential to become a primary market (in South-east Asia). Vietnamese interest in Indonesia is high, but so far it is still Bali. The lack of direct flights is an issue."

Viet Nam has emerged as a promising market in Singapore too. In 2017, Viet Nam broke into Singapore's top 10 source markets with a year-on-year increase of 13 per cent, reaching 531,000 arrivals and rivalling arrival volume from Thailand.

More recently, from January-November 2018, the market posted the highest year-on-year percentage growth of all South-east Asian nations in arrival numbers to Singapore. It

Viet Nam has the potential to become a primary market in South-east Asia.

Heri Hermawan

Head of marketing division - Indochina, Ministry of Tourism, Indonesia

registered a 12.4 per cent increase, seconded by Brunei at 11.8 per cent.

Several ATF sellers that the *Daily* spoke with are keen to woo this emerging market, which is still largely characterised by groups.

Irwan Raman, director of business development, Panorama Destination Indonesia, shared: "We have a marketing representative in Viet Nam who supports us to penetrate the market beyond Ho Chi Minh City and Ha Noi, such as to Da Nang, and introduce new destinations."

Adam Kamal, general manager, Tour East Malaysia, said: "While Kuala Lumpur and Penang are still main draws, this year we are trying to promote Johor Bahru with overland transfers to Singapore."

The Saujana Hotel Kuala Lumpur, senior director of sales & marketing, M Manimaran, said: "At this show, we hope to connect with Vietnamese outbound agents selling golfing tours as we have two, 18-hole championship golf courses within the resort.

"Our property is a five-minute drive to Ara Damansara Medical Centre, so medical tourism is another market we are exploring with our local travel partners."

— additional reporting by Marissa Caruthers and Pamela Chow

Buyer's take



Leona Meadows

Managing director
Select Incentive Group Travel,
South Africa

What Asian products and destinations are of interest?

I'm looking for DMCs in Asian countries like Bali and Viet Nam. We have been receiving a number of requests for Asia. Incentives' requests for new destinations in the region such as Viet Nam started coming in three to four months ago.

We (also just began) considering Bali as a potential option for yoga trips. (My clients) have been (to India) numerous times and want to try out new destinations. A client requested to do a wedding in Bali, so I thought this is the perfect time to look more into the destination (for yoga trips and weddings).

What challenges do you see in Asia?

These are still very new destinations, so I'm at ATF to find out more and identify

potential partners what flight routes and schedules, and five-star hotels are available, etc – these are some of my key considerations.

While there are five-star accommodations (in Ha Long Bay), some are more targeted at Chinese and Japanese travellers. I want to look out for hotels that are better suited for my clients.

I'm looking out for the better and more comfortable (ground transfer) options for my clients, who are used to five-star luxury and expect everything to run seamlessly.

It's a long way from South Africa to Asia. What about longhaul destinations that can justify this long and often pricey journey?

It's all about the products and price. The question becomes more about what you are offering that's unusual, and what they're not getting (closer to home).

My clients have a budget. But they'll wonder what they're getting out of it that is (out of the ordinary). And (while the flights may be pricier), once they are in the destination, everything – food, experiences, shopping and more – becomes more affordable compared to prices in destinations they're more used to travelling to.

What are your key considerations for incentive clients?

One of my biggest clients is tire-maker BFGoodrich, owned by Michelin. We visited Thailand, where they had a Grand Prix event (that Michelin supplied its tires to). We also added Michelin restaurants to the itinerary, given the novelty of the branding with BFGoodrich. (Elements of the company's work in the destination) is something that I look for. - Yixin Ng

Tackling Europe's dip with VOAs

By Pamela Chow

To recover from falling European arrival numbers, Myanmar's Ministry of Hotels and Tourism (MOHT) is looking into offering visas on arrival (VOA) to countries in the region.

Acting director general of the Directorate of Hotels and Tourism, MOHT, Khin Than Win, told the *Daily* that while overall tourism arrivals to Myanmar for 2018 rose by 3.2 per cent to 3.6 million, the European market posted a dip due to media coverage on the conflict in the Rakhine region.

The increase in overall arrivals were attributed to visa relaxations that were implemented across countries in Asia such as China, India, Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong.

Believing that visa relaxations would draw in more tourists from the longhaul markets, Khin shared: "We would like to extend this to European countries – Germany, Italy, Spain, France and more – because European visitors stay longer and spend more money than Asians."

As such, the minister of hotels and tourism Ohn Maung will attend the International Tourism Fair in Spain later

this month (January 23-27) and ITB Berlin in March to explore which European countries that visas on arrivals should be offered to.

In anticipation of further tourism growth thanks to a host of hotel signings, the ministry also plans to enhance its tourism facilities.

"We need to build more infrastructure such as roads, railroads, rest areas and clean toilets in tourist destinations. Our boutique hotels and signage boards also need to be improved.

"More airports and incoming flights to bring more tourists landing directly in (our secondary) destinations are also required," she elaborated.

She added that Myanmar's regional and state governments have been developing infrastructure in their territories, which has been "very supportive for tourism".

In 2019, the country will host a line-up of events such as roadshows and B2B fam trips, as well as participate in travel marts such as ATF, PATA, CITM and London World Travel Market, where the ministry will market its new tourism brand, *Myanmar: Be Enchanted*, launched in September last year.



Khin: VOAs to help arrest arrival drop

Generating awareness among Japan's young

The Japan Tourism Agency (JTA) has presented a cultural exchange project, My first overseas travel experience at 20, to South-east Asian NTOs at ATF 2019.

According to the proposal, South-east Asian host countries will sponsor the youth travellers.

The project is expected to take off in 2019, with a target of 200 travellers in its

inaugural run.

Jun Takashina, vice commissioner at JTA, said: "Through this project, we hope to encourage young people in Japan to travel to South-east Asia, and learn about the cultures in the region.

"(On the other hand), they will also be able to share Japanese culture with the host countries. – S Puvaneswary

News

IN BRIEF

Burasari Group opens Laos outpost

The five-star La Seine Hotel by Burasari has opened on Vientiane's river promenade with 37 rooms and suites, all of which come with an in-room espresso machine. The boutique property offers two F&B venues, a rooftop bar and The Red Rose Restaurant, and offers a happy hour special on selected wines.

Ylang to float into Lan Ha Bay

Heritage Line's new 10-suite vessel, *Ylang*, will make its maiden voyage on August 17, 2019, plying the waters of Lan Ha Bay. The 3D2N Senses of Lan Ha journey sails from a pier on Cat Hai near the city of Hai Phong.

A bird's-eye view of Bangkok

King Power Mahanakhon has opened the Mahanakhon SkyWalk in the Thai capital. Visitors will be whizzed from the lobby to the indoor observation deck on the 74th floor in 50 seconds. On the 78th floor is the outdoor observation deck with a glass floor, as well as Thailand's highest rooftop bar.

Hot-air balloon rides over Loikaw

Balloons Over Bagan has launched a new hot-air balloon flight in Myanmar's Kayah State. Rides take off at sunrise on a daily basis year-round and carry up to eight passengers per flight. Flights cost US\$300 per person.

Dive into new wonders

As the host of next year's ATF, Brunei is eager to update the trade on its latest offerings for visitors

By S Puvaneswary

ATF 2020 will give Brunei a much-anticipated opportunity to showcase its offerings and the changes that have taken place in the decade since the country last hosted ATF in 2010.

Salinah Salleh, acting director tourism development department, Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism, said: "ATF offers Brunei an opportunity to raise its role and position in (terms of) regional tourism cooperation, and promote the country and its people to international visitors. The sultanate is relatively unfamiliar to many, even Asians."

In the last two years, the Tourism Development Department has created various tourist packages, ranging from river

cruising in Tutong and soft adventure tours in Temburong, to walking trails in Bandar Seri Begawan and cultural tours in Belait, shared Salinah.

"New packages will continue to be developed by tour operators to attract more visitors to the country," she added.

Diving, in particular, has been gaining traction among travellers interested in Brunei's underwater wreck sites and tropical waters.

Salinah said: "Dive operators are also aggressively marketing to and creating partnerships with agents from the UK, Europe and Asian markets such as Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and China."

The Tourism Development Department has also recently appointed a local marketing agency to better its digital marketing activities.



The sultanate is relatively unfamiliar to many, even Asians.

Salinah Salleh

Acting director tourism development department, Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism

Viet Nam's DMC readies for IPO

By Marissa Carruthers

The Lux Group in Viet Nam has revealed its ambitions of going public to raise funds for its growing portfolio of tourism products and services.

Pham Ha, Lux Group president, said: "(We want) to grow and expand our business in the different tourism fields that have a lot of potential in Viet Nam... An initial public offering, or IPO, can help our company to grow and attract new talents and more elite brains."



In May 2019, Lux Group will launch its third cruise service in Heritage Cruises, which will sail Cat Ba Island, Hai Phong, the Red River and Gulf of Tonkin, adding to its accommodation and real estate products.

He added the company is seeking investors interested in cruising and boutique hotels and resorts in Viet Nam.

"Our strategy of growth is to acquire and merge niche companies, and create small businesses to run and operate under the auspices of the Lux Group."

Pham said the time is right to move forward for the Lux Group, which has enjoyed double-digit year-on-year growth and will mark its 15th anniversary in 2020.

"The board of directors says now is the time to take (the company) to the next level," shared Pham.


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Gallery

Showfloor opens for business

By Yingyong Unanongrak



Park Hotel Group Singapore's Stephen Ho



Tourism Promotions Board Philippines' Arnold Gonzales, Marie Venus Tan and James Sy



Hotel Dela Coupole Sapa Viet Nam's Samuel Gacos and Vu Minh Thu, Van Don International Airport Viet Nam's Pham Hong Ha, Sunworld Holding Viet Nam's Ngan Nguyen and Chu Minh Duc



Royal Cliff Hotels Group Thailand's Malisa Lutzi and Andreas Grommeck



Viet Nam's Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism H.E. Nguyen Ngoc Thien takes a tour of the showfloor



Tourism Selangor's Nuzri Tashriq and Noorul Ashikin Mohd Din, State Government of Selangor's Abdul Rashid Asari and Tourism Selangor's Raja Hilmy Raja Idris



Viet Princess Cruises Viet Nam's Le Nguyen Khang, Giang Hoang Hai, Huynh Kim Bao and Do Vu Quynh Anh



Sunway Lost World Water Park Malaysia's Ng Wai Mun and Garry Loke



Millennium Hotels and Resorts Singapore's Edward Png, Orchard Hotel Singapore's Candy Phua, Millennium Hotels and Resorts Singapore's Andrew Tan, Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel Singapore's Apple Ghee and Studio M Hotel Singapore's Aston Chan



Vinpearl Joint Stock Company - Vingroup JSC Viet Nam's Nenden Rukasah (centre) and team



Ministry of Tourism Indonesia's Heri Hermawan (standing, fourth from right) and his team

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Tourism chief showcase

Sustainability in the making

In this third of a four-part special, the tourism ministers of Myanmar and Indonesia examine why developing secondary destinations is paramount, and how regional integration will benefit all member states of ASEAN

Myanmar

Ohn Maung

Minister of tourism and hotels

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

Myanmar possesses diverse cultural, natural and historic assets. However, international arrivals are still low compared with other ASEAN countries. For the sustainable development of tourism, we need to facilitate convenience for visitors from arrival to departure, including transport, professional hotel services, offering hygienic food at restaurants and the sustainability of tourist destinations.

We are collaborating with public and private agencies to fulfil these requirements. One important initiative pertains to visas relaxations and exemptions. We are anticipating an increase in visitors from these countries as a result.

In September, we launched a new slogan for tourism promotion, *Myanmar: Be Enchanted*.

ESB Professional/Shutterstock

Shwedagon Pagoda, Yangon



We have formed the National Tourism Development Central Committee to support tourism-related needs... Individual state and division tourism committees will promote new destinations in their areas.

Indonesia

Arief Yahya

Minister of tourism

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

Destination development: We have identified 10 New Bali's, or priority destinations for development. We are currently focusing on four destinations, namely Lake Toba (North Sumatra), Borobudur (Central Java), Mandalika (West Nusa Tenggara) and Komodo Labuan Bajo (East Nusa Tenggara). For each destination, we will establish a Board of Authority to manage the development. At present, two have been established – Lake Toba Authority and Borobudur Authority.

Millennial focus: The Ministry of Tourism is developing Indonesia as a digital destination as well as nomadic tourism destination. The digital destination strat-

egy targets domestic markets, driven by GenPI (Wonderful Indonesia Generation) to design a destination that is Instagramable or picturesque to meet young customers' (social media) needs.

The nomadic tourism strategy targets both domestic and foreign markets to fulfill millennial travellers' needs as they become more nomadic nowadays. There are three amenity products offered to the nomadic market: glamcamp (glamor camping), caravan (a car that can function as a hotel) and homepods (capsule hotel). Moreover, we also offer various accessibilities for this market: seaplanes and live-aboards sailing from island to island.

Marketing initiative: We have im-

plemented a digital marketing strategy through various initiatives: a digital marketplace called Indonesian Tourism Exchange; Competing Destination Model; Mobile Positioning Data as well as promotions through digital (channels) such as Google, Baidu, TripAdvisor, Ctrip, Expedia, Traveloka and others, which utilise Look Book Pay on one digital platform.

What's the most under-rated destination or niche segment in Indonesia, and how would you promote it in 2019?

Many destinations are classified as niche markets, especially in the national park areas. (Setting) the carrying capacity of each destination is a must, as it could be

a heavier price to pay to preserve the environment (at a later stage). In tourism, there is a saying, "The more you preserve, the more prosperity you get".

Every development including where niche markets are concerned is related to the principle of sustainable tourism development. Our local values already incorporate sustainability principles, and we have also put them in formal regulation (i.e. Tourism Minister Regulation No. 14/2016), with reference to UNWTO's Sustainable Development Indicators for Tourism Destination and adopting the criteria for Global Sustainable Tourism by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

Now, we have developed five Sustain-

Ethan Daniels/Shutterstock



Raja Ampat islands, West Papua

We have identified 10 New Bali's, or priority destinations for development... including Lake Toba, Borobudur, Mandalika and Komodo Labuan Bajo.

What's the most under-rated destination or segment in Myanmar, and how would you promote it in 2019?

Kayin State is under-rated, even though it is easily accessed by road. In two years, it will be well known for tourism. It is a mountainous region with limestone caves and offers many scenic spots comprising hills, rivers, farmland and interesting traditions. Tourist destinations are located

in states and regions, and we have formed the National Tourism Development Central Committee to support tourism-related needs, such as tourism infrastructure development and cross-border tourism. Individual state and division tourism committees will promote new destinations in their areas. In 2019, we will participate in international travel fairs and exhibitions, as well as digital marketing in targeted market countries.

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

Myanmar offers a variety of experiences as it has tangible and intangible culture heritage sites inherent to each region. Myanmar also has beautiful beaches, ecotourism sites and over 800 pristine islands in Myeik Archipelago. Myanmar is bordered by China, Laos, Thailand, the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal, and Bangladesh and India.

In terms of tourism, Myanmar is linked closely with China and Thailand and strongly cooperates with these countries with the initiatives of ASEAN and GMS tourism-related programmes. Myanmar is happy to cooperate with ASEAN members in implementing ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan 2016-2025 with its capacity to achieve competitive, sustainable, inclusive and balanced tourism development. – **Marissa Carruthers**



able Tourism Observatories (STO), and they have been submitted to UNWTO's International STO Network. Currently we are preparing 11 STOs in 11 destinations.

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

First, positioning Singapore as a connection hub to Indonesia. This would help fulfill the required seat capacity to reach 20 million arrivals into the country in 2019 as building new airports takes time. From Singapore, there are connections to many destinations in Indonesia, such as Bali, Jakarta, Manado, Jogjakarta, Surabaya, Makassar and others.

Apart from Singapore, we've also identified Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur as connecting hubs for tourists from India and China. Indian and Chinese markets have great potential – in 2017 there were 458,000 tourists from India to Indonesia, despite there being no direct flights between the two countries. Thanks to Garuda Indonesia, we now have direct flights from Mumbai to Denpasar. We continue to support Indonesian airlines to launch non-stop connections while at the same time also leveraging neighbouring countries as tourism hubs.

Second, hot deals. The *More for Less* programme has been successful in Riau Islands, Batam and Bintan, attracting tourists who are visiting or residing in Singapore. In other words, we call it fishing in our neighbour's ponds.

Third, the ASEAN as a single destination programme can be revived. This initiative was rolled out during ASEAN's 50th anniversary with the launch of a VisitAsean@50 package. Regional potentials must be built to compete with other regions such as the EU, which can be explored with a one visa policy. – **Tiara Maharani**


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ASEAN destinations

Agents' 2019 picks for SE Asia

Inbound travel agents from the 10 ASEAN member countries highlight the hottest adventure, nature and culinary attractions that are on their radar this year. Compiled by the *Daily's* reporters



Chongshi/Chalengkam/Shutterstock
ports and tourism. With some efforts being put into marine conservation, diving in Cambodia is also getting better. Additionally, kayaking down the Mekong River is a magical once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Andy Brouwer

Production and research consultant, Hanuman Travel

NATURE There is a new elephant experience at Phnom Tamao with Wildlife Alliance. Entitled Elephant Keeper for a Day, participants get to work with elephant keepers and learn about elephant care.

Steve Lidgley

General manager, Travel Asia a la Carte

CULINARY Cambodian cuisine is becoming more popular. Many restaurants, such as the recently opened Pou Kitchen & Café in Siem Reap, provide new interpretations of authentic Khmer cuisine.

Laos

By Marissa Carruthers

Stefan Scheerer

General manager, Khiri Travel Laos

ADVENTURE Khammouane Province is opening up for adventure, with activities such as kayaking through cave formations, while the Bolaven Plateau is suitable for trekking, waterfalls and Jeep safaris.

Linh Le

Group managing director, Asia DMC

NATURE In the Bolaven Plateau, we offer a jeep tour integrated with kayaking in 4,000 Islands. Guests will be able to enjoy the year-round beautiful vegetation in Southern Laos.

Virginie Kury

General manager, Asian Trails Laos

CULINARY Paste is a new restaurant in Luang Prabang. It is owned by a Michelin-star chef from Bangkok, Bee Satongun, and her husband Jason Bailey.

Malaysia

By S Puvaneswary

Ken Lau

CEO and founder, Adventoro

ADVENTURE Kedah in (Peninsular Malaysia's) north-west is a new adventure destination thanks to improved air links as well as the upgraded facilities at Langkawi airport. Among Kedah's offerings we are promoting to adrenaline junkies and millennials is paragliding on Mount Jerai. It offers scenic views of paddy fields, and a birds'-eye view of the Straits of Melaka and its offshore islands.

Manfred Kurz

Managing director, Diethelm Travel Malaysia

NATURE Samadhi Belum, set within the Royal Belum Rainforest in Perak, will offer 55 luxury tents when it opens in late 2019. I'm looking forward to the opening as it will offer Malaysia's first luxury tented



Brunei

By S Puvaneswary

Chang Ming Vui

Managing director, BruVacation

ADVENTURE Diving is a new activity promoted by Brunei Tourism. We work closely with dive operators to promote diving off the Brunei-Muara, Tutong and Belait districts, which are all home to a number of shipwrecks and a healthy fish population, which makes for beautiful underwater scenery. These dive sites are not crowded, hence appealing to tourists from Asia and Europe.

Sugumaran Nair

Inbound manager, Freme Travel Services

NATURE Visitors who like sea sports should try stand-up paddleboarding (SUP) on Lugu Lake with SUP Surfari, the only SUP provider in Brunei. The 80-minute session, with lesson and eco tour components, is led by a professional SUP instructor, and is safe and suitable even for non-swimmers. Tourists will get a full safety briefing and learn about SUP's history, equipment, and different strokes for kneeling and standing. You might also be able to spot hornbills, monkeys and jungle creatures in a serene environment.

Cambodia

By Marissa Carruthers

Miles Gravett

General manager, Khiri Travel Cambodia

ADVENTURE What's happening at Cardamom Tented Camp in Koh Kong is exciting for nature lovers. It's a perfect balance of badly needed conservation ef-



From top: Tad Kamud waterfall in the Bolaven Plateau, Laos; explore Brunei's waters with dive company Oceanic Quest; a traditional Cambodian dish called fish amok



From left: Stand-up paddleboarding by SUP Surfari in Brunei; Plane in the City dining experience in Kuala Lumpur

camp experience set within a 130-million-year-old rainforest, which is also a protected area. Our clients are mainly Europeans and Americans, and they will love the concept of being close to nature, while not sacrificing on comfort.

Arokia Das Anthony

Director, Luxury Tours Malaysia

CULINARY Plane in the City is a new product introduced by TwoSpicy Entertainment Live. The 90-minute fine dining experience revolves around a Boeing B737 aircraft, and allows guests to take pictures and selfies in the cockpit, or walk on the wing of the plane. The Western-style cui-

sine served is prepared by Le Méridien Kuala Lumpur and guests can choose between a three- or four-course meal.

Myanmar

By Marissa Carruthers

Sammy Samuels

Founder, Myanmar Shalom Travels

ADVENTURE Caving adventures in Hpa-An and hiking or trekking in Chin State are becoming popular. Trekking around Hsipaw and Keng Tung are places to watch out for in 2019 and beyond.

Min Than Htut

Founder, Pro Niti Travel

NATURE For nature, there are exciting things happening in southern Myanmar. In particular, the coastal towns of Myeik, Kawthaung and Dawei, which are also great gateways to the many untouched islands in the south.

Edwin Briels

General manager, Khiri Travel Myanmar

CULINARY Cooking classes, food tastings and discovering the flavours of tribal food in Kachin, Wa, Shan and Rakhine. The first episode of *Myanmar Masterchef*

was a huge success and has led to an increased awareness in Myanmar food.

Singapore

By Pamela Chow

Daniel Tan

Founder, Let's Go Tour Singapore

ADVENTURE Sentosa's upcoming developments will be interesting. We have been having discussions with the companies operating some attractions there, as we've realised that tourists who choose bicycle tours usually also want to try something



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ASEAN destinations



Clockwise from above: A boat ride in Khao Sok National Park in Thailand; the Saigon Rose craft beer from a microbrewery in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; the reclining Buddha statue inside Kawgun Cave in Hpa An, Myanmar; a Market To Table cooking class in Singapore



different. We might have synergy and are looking into cross-promoting.

Jane Goh

Xperience director,
Xperience Singapore Events & Travel

NATURE 2019 will see the opening of Floral Fantasy at Gardens by the Bay, which will have four themed garden landscapes, plus a 4D multi-sensorial ride. It should be interesting to see another part of the gardens transformed. In the National Orchid Garden, the Tan Hoon Siang Mist House, Yuen Peng McNeice Bromeliad Collection enclosure and the Cool House will be reopened in 2019 after major redevelopments. This will enhance the visitor experience to the Botanic Gardens.

Fadz Abdhan

General manager for Singapore and Malaysia,
Lotus Asia Tours

CULINARY With World's 50 Best Restaurants Awards coming to Singapore, we won't just look at bringing guests to these restaurants. We can take famous chefs out of their restaurants and bring them closer to our guests in any location of their choice – be it Gardens by the Bay or the Singapore Flyer – and have a cooking class or multi-course meal.

Thailand

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

Matt Blench

Adventure director, Exo Travel

ADVENTURE One of the recent trends we have been seeing is a growing demand for family adventures in Thailand, espe-

cially in Mae Wang district, central Chiang Mai. Whether it's deep in nature such as cooking a delicious meal in the jungle, or cultural interactions in homestays, there is a wide variety of activities suitable for any family.

Christian Sutton

Director of product & contracting,
Diethelm Travel Thailand

NATURE Khao Sok National Park is without doubt one of the most stunning parts of Thailand. Our full day excursion is full of community interaction, and is an intimate affair for just six visitors twice-daily. During the tour, we meet Somboon the elephant, who was rescued from a nearby camp. Guests feed and bathe him, and also learn about the job of *mahout*.

For the second half of the day, guests cross a picturesque bridge and visit a small village. Here they meet a local community and are given a tour of the fruit orchards before settling down to eat a tasty southern Thai lunch. The excursion can be booked from Khao Lak, or added to a tailor-made overnight itinerary which includes trekking, kayaking and also a night on a floating bungalow on beautiful Cheow Lan Lake.

Soontarut Wattanahongsiri

Founder, Blackrice Travel

CULINARY I think the farm-to-table concept will be the new culinary programme for 2019, as people wish to learn more about the whole supply chain. This includes learning about the origin of food from the source of the ingredients, engaging in local culture including eating and learning about the local traditions, and the cooking process.

Viet Nam

By Marissa Carruthers

Tanya Trang

Marketing manager, Luxury Travel Vietnam

ADVENTURE Cruising is a key attraction. The discovery of the Ha Long Bay region, which extends up to Bai Tu Long Bay and Cat Ba Archipelago by Emperor Cruises delivers a sophisticated yet stylish adventure.

Ken Lau

CEO, Adventoro

NATURE The Muong Hoa Valley – Sa Pa Rice Terraces Adventure tour is a great way to explore Sa Pa's natural beauty, taking in rice terraces, the valleys of Muong Hoa and meeting local tribes.

Sandor Leinwand recte Rein

General manager, Exo Travel Vietnam

CULINARY Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) now boasts an impressive line-up of local, craft beer specialists. The craft beer culture is thriving, giving the Exo food discovery tours a nice extra twist.

Philippines

By Rosa Ocampo

Gia Fortun

Marketing director, Fiesta Tours and Travel

ADVENTURE Masungi Georeserve in Rizal is popular among millennials due to its panoramic views and easy access from Manila.

Millennials are also into mountain climbing on Mounts Macolod and Pulag, as well as surfing in Siargao, La Union and

Zambales. Adventure travel also encompasses the Visayas and Palawan.

Jordan Mamaril

Tours and PR manager,
Regent Travel Philippines

NATURE Ecotourism is the next big thing as travellers look for new destinations, and the government gets serious about developing sustainable and responsible tourism. We're looking at Quirino Province in the north. It's raw, with vast natural offerings like nature parks, caves, mountains and rapids. The local government is also keen on promoting it for nature tourism.

Other destinations to look out for are the untapped nature resort of Dakak in Dapitan; Isla de Gigantes, a pristine island in Iloilo; as well as Dumaguete which is the jumping-off point to several destinations in Negros and Siquijor.

JP Cabalza

Inbound manager,
Corporate International Travel and Tours

CULINARY Quality restaurants – from the private dining halls of Bale Dutung and Denlim's Kitchen to the carinderia-style Mila's eatery – sprouting in Pampanga lend credence to the province's sobriquet as the Philippines' culinary capital.

Pampanga has also crafted exotic dishes including *sisig* or sizzling pork cheeks, ears and brain served with liver sauce; crab fat; fermented rice with fish or shrimp paste; and deep fried farm-raised frogs. And we haven't included to-die-for desserts in the list.

To satisfy the increasing demand, we offer standalone culinary tours or, for tourists to Bataan or Subic, we combine it with a meal in one of Pampanga's restaurants.

Market forces come together

An increase in direct air connections and greater visibility at key global tradeshows will bode well for Malaysia's heightened efforts to court inbound arrivals from markets farther afield, reports S Puvaneswary

Twenty-eight was a good year for Malaysia tourism as the industry recorded one of its best performance in recent years, with the positive momentum gained expected to continue into 2019.

For the first eight months of 2018, the country's core inbound markets – China, India, South-east Asia and the Middle East – contributed 80.4 per cent of total tourist arrivals, which stood at 17.3 million.

During this period, arrivals from China surged 35.4 per cent, growing on the back of improved air connectivity between secondary Chinese cities with destinations such as Penang, Langkawi and Kota Kinabalu.

The Indian market, which has been on a decline since 2012, finally posted a positive year-on-year growth of 11.5 per cent.

The resurgence of the Indian market was in part driven by a joint marketing and promotional campaign between Tourism Malaysia and India-based DMC Akqua Sun Group. The six-month-long campaign, which ended in June, included not just print and online advertising, but also saw the two partners conducting roadshows to meet with travel agents, participating in consumer and trade tourism fairs, workshops and product briefings on Malaysia, and organising fam trips.

Furthermore, connectivity with India was boosted by India-based LCC IndiGo's commencement of daily services from New Delhi and Bengaluru to Kuala Lumpur in November 2018.

In the same month, Condor – the leisure airline of Thomas Cook – also began thrice-weekly flights between Frankfurt and Kuala Lumpur, becoming the only airline to operate this route.

Malaysia's tourism, arts and culture minister Mohamaddin Ketapi revealed that Tourism Malaysia and Malaysia Airports Holdings are currently looking to improve air accessibility into the country from various markets, with special incentives rolled out to foster the development



Growth in air connectivity for Penang has led to a surge in Chinese arrivals

of airline partnerships as well as scheduled and chartered flights.

This year, Malaysia's aggressive efforts to court the European market will receive a further boost when the country becomes the partner country for ITB Berlin 2019, stressed Mohamaddin,

Already, German travel and tourism company TUI Group was awarded a license in October 2018 to set up an office in Malaysia.

South-east Asia, meanwhile, remains a key market for many players on the ground.

Kelly Leong Wai Keong, regional senior general manager, hospitality division, Sun-

way Hotels & Resorts, sees more opportunities to draw conferences, forums and meetings from the region now that Sunway Resort Hotel & Spa has completed the renovation of its ballroom and functions rooms in November 2017.

She added: "To capture more business from South-east Asia, the group will continually expand its visibility in key cities within the region through roadshows and tradeshow participation. It will also work closely with regional key opinion leaders to increase the hotel brand's exposure, and create engagements via social media."

According to Prem Joseph, director of

sales & marketing at Renaissance Kuala Lumpur Hotel, the property will keep up its promotion outreach efforts in South-east Asian countries, after experiencing year-on-year increase from regional markets.

However, Adam Kamal, general manager, Tour East Malaysia, does not anticipate much change in business from the South-east Asian market. He said: "While the trend for FIT travel is growing from South-east Asia, we saw only a slight increase in business from Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand as travellers are booking hotels and tours directly."

Destination in numbers

33.1 million

The visitor arrival target in 2018, up from 25.9 million in 2017

RM83.1 billion

Domestic tourist spending in 2017, equivalent to US\$19.9 billion, up from the RM74.8 billion recorded in 2016

5.8

The average number of nights tourists from South-east Asian countries stay

RM1,070

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

Projections for 2019



Abdul Rashid Asari
Chairman,

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

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



Sandro Nania
Sales manager,
Happy Trails! Asia

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



Eric R Sinnaya
Managing director,
Morahols Travel

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

What's new

The Rift

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

Star Wars: Secrets of the Empire

Resorts World Genting and The Void, in collaboration with ILMxLAB, have come together to introduce the first-of-its-kind hyper-reality experience in Asia.

Star Wars: Secrets of the Empire will immerse guests into an alternate universe, allowing them to walk freely and untethered on an interactive stage. Reality and imagination mix to deliver fully immersive experiences that evoke all the senses, where guests will feel the impact of blaster bolts, smell the smoke from the surrounding environment, and push buttons to solve an interactive puzzle to escape enemies.

Camar Resort Langkawi

Located on Pantai Tengah, Camar Resort Langkawi is a new beachfront boutique property, offering 90 rooms overlooking the Andaman Sea. Facilities include a 75m-long pool, the longest pool of its kind in Langkawi.

The Rainbow Skywalk at The Top

From its vantage point atop The Top in Komtar, the tallest building in George Town, The Rainbow Skywalk offers stunning seamless views of Penang's capital. Perched 249m above ground on level 68, the glass-bottomed walkway offers visitors the thrilling experience of walking on air and looking down on the rooftops and the roads below.



Sky Mirror

Named after its mirror-like reflection of the sky, this is one mystery island that will emerge for several days each month before being submerged underwater for the remaining days. This spot only surfaces twice each month – during the 1st and 15th of lunar month, and four days before and after the dates, where the sea levels are low. Located in Kuala Selangor, Sky Mirror is also home to a multitude of marine life.

Cessna Caravan Ex flight

Hop onto an aircraft for a bird's eye-view of the exotic sights and colours of the 99 islands of Langkawi, mangrove forests, sandy beaches, limestone hills and waterfalls. The Cessna Caravan Ex aircraft can accommodate up to 10 people, and it departs from Langkawi International Airport at 14.00 every day. The half-hour flight costs between RM330 (US\$79) per person for 10 guests per flight to RM660 per person for four guests per flight.

Travelodge Bukit Bintang

The new 13-storey, 168-room hotel in Kuala Lumpur's Golden Triangle offers a variety of room types; Antipodean Bukit Bintang, a local cafe chain serving all-day breakfast, a 24-hour gym, self-service laundry room and on-site parking.

From above: Sky Mirror in Kuala Selangor; Rainbow Skywalk at The Top in Penang



Surprising theme

Fishing adventures

Malaysia is well known for its snorkelling and dive sites, with Sipadan Island topping the list as one of the world's best scuba diving spots.

However, not many would associate the country with angling. Some of the best places to go for deep-sea angling include Port Dickson, Penang, Langkawi, Terengganu, Tioman Island, Sabah and Sarawak.

For land-based angling in Malaysia, there are also estuaries, mangroves and lakes with a variety of fish species. Angling spots include Shah Alam National Botanical Garden, Keniam River in Pahang, as well as the Rajang and Kinabatangan rivers in East Malaysia.



Fishing boat in Tioman

The expert recommends



Datai Langkawi



Arokia Das Anthony
Director
Luxury Tours Malaysia

MUST EAT

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

MUST SEE

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

MUST STAY

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

EXPLORE

Sea, hills and jungle adventure – Penang's beautiful green spaces are a contrast between its bustling commercial and heritage sites.

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Learning from past experiences

Boracay's closure thankfully did not put a dent on tourist arrivals into the country. And it turned out to be a silver lining, as agents sought to promote lesser-known beach destinations, writes Rosa Ocampo



Boracay's closure led to the diversion of tourists to other Philippine beach destinations like Cebu (pictured)

The six-month closure and rehabilitation of Boracay was undoubtedly the biggest story in the Philippine tourism industry in 2018, attracting worldwide attention while sparking intense discussions within the local travel trade about how sustainable tourism practices could be better planned and implemented.

However controversial the forced closure may be, the Boracay experience – with the island's upgrade still ongoing until end-2019 – will hopefully impart precious lessons to guide the implementation of sustainable tourism initiatives and regulations in other destinations in the country.

Next on the government's agenda is the cleanup of El Nido and Coron in Palawan, but without the closure of the entire islands. Instead, there will only be padlocking of hotels and other establishments that violate existing rules and regulations, according to Bernadette Romulo Puyat, Philippines' tourism secretary.

Puyat, who was appointed to the role just when Boracay was closed, said she is committed to creating a culture of sustainable tourism by establishing a tourist capacity in top destinations – beginning with Boracay – and enforcing local tourism laws and ordinances.

Boracay's top source markets are Europe, China, South Korea among others, having received 800,000 foreign visitors in 2017. Initial apprehension that its closure will have negative impact on the number of foreign tourists into the country proved unfounded.

Although foreign arrivals to Boracay were reduced drastically (numbers not available at press time) for 2018, total arrivals in the Philippines from January to

August 2018 grew by 8.5 per cent to 4.9 million, driven mainly by strong inbound numbers from China.

Nourished by strong Sino-Philippine political ties, arrivals from China soared 35.7 per cent to 870,177 from January to August 2018, making it the country's second largest source of tourists, displacing the US and accounting for 17.9 per cent of total arrivals.

Rajah Tours' president Jojo Clemente said that at the rate that arrivals are growing, the Philippines is likely to meet its 7.4 million target for foreign arrivals in 2018 and, barring natural disasters like earthquake and typhoons, the 2019 target too.

Christine Urbano-Ibarreta, director of sales and marketing of Chinese-owned Golden Phoenix Hotel in Manila, noted that the unprecedented surge in Chinese arrivals is driving the launch of new mid-range hotels. Jin Jiang Hotels and other Chinese hotel brands are benefiting from the surge, and the industry has been adapting to the market's preferred booking channels, services and facilities.

Urbano-Ibarreta added that it's not only leisure travel that's booming, but also business travel as Chinese construction, technical, telecommunications and online gaming companies enter the Philippine market.

Meanwhile, South Korea remains the country's top tourism market source, comprising 21.8 per cent of total arrivals or 1.1 million pax in the first eight months of 2018.

During Boracay's closure, tourists trooped mainly to other beach destinations such as Cebu and Bohol, and to some extent, Palawan. But the island's closure

was also an opportunity for the industry to introduce lesser-known beach destinations such as Siquijor, Iloilo and Siargao, said Rajah Tours' Clemente.

While popular destinations in the Visayas and Luzon including Manila will continue to attract their fair share of tourists, it will be more challenging for areas like Davao, Cagayan de Oro and General Santos due to travel advisories and security concerns arising from the ongoing martial law in the entire Mindanao region, which is likely to be extended from December 2018 into 2019.

Mindanao's image problem continues to stall plans by travel agencies to promote and launch destinations there like Lake Sebu in Cotabato, and areas around the province of Davao.

Thanks to the growth in tourism arrivals – supported by major infrastructure like the newly opened Terminal 2 of the Mactan Cebu International Airport, and an ongoing expansion of Clark International Airport – international hotel brands are also growing fast in the country.

These include Hilton which returned to the Philippines with the recent opening of Hilton Manila, as well as another Hilton currently being built in Clark, according to the group's vice president operations in South-east Asia, Paul Hutton.

Hilton Manila will soon have Sheraton and Okura for its neighbours, as well as several local hotel brands. Meanwhile, Dusit Hotels & Resorts is expanding in Cebu, Davao and Bonifacio Global City; while Marriott now has a Courtyard in Iloilo and a Marriott in Clark. Holiday Inn is also set to take over management of a mid-range hotel in Resorts World Manila.

Destination in numbers

7.4 million

The number of foreign tourists targeted in 2018, up from 6.6 million in 2017, which will most likely be achieved on the back of more air services and surge in Chinese tourists

9.4 nights

The average number of nights foreign tourists stay, a significant improvement from just three to four days several years ago

US\$126

The average daily spend of tourists in the Philippines, the biggest chunk of which goes into F&B

2,800

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

65%

The average occupancy rate for Manila hotels in 2018

Projections for 2019



Marjorie Aquino

Senior sales and marketing manager, Blue Horizons Travel and Tours

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



Jojo Clemente

President, Rajah Tours

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

What's new

The Garage

Families will be delighted with The Garage in the City of Dreams Manila, which combines virtual reality entertainment with well-curated food and drinks. This virtual reality attraction features three zone experiences – Mario Kart VR, Ski Rodeo and Hospital Escape Terror.

Go around Manila

This new programme connects existing tours in old Manila using the Light Rail Transit Line One, with options for guided or unguided tours where tourists can choose to either get off or stay in the train. Tourists can stop at different stations for a tour of old churches decked in various architectural styles, shopping, dining, and visiting museums and public parks.

The Retreat Spa

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

San Vicente

A remote destination in Palawan known for its unspoilt stretches of fine white sand and clear waters, San Vicente is seeing greater accessibility with the launch of Philippine Airlines' daily flight from Clark in December. San Vicente is also known as the next Boracay – minus the crowds.

Hilton Manila

Hilton Manila has opened its doors within Resorts World Manila, heralding the entry of the brand's flagship in the Philippines. The hotel offers 357 guestrooms furnished with the Serenity bed, and the "direct-to-room" Digital Key technology.

The property's dining outlets include New York-inspired Madison Lounge & Bar; Hua Ting, a Shanghainese restaurant; all-day dining Kusina; and Port Bar. Recreational amenities include a lagoon pool, 24-hour fitness centre. There are also six meeting venues such as the 545m² ballroom which can hold up to 600 pax for receptions.



Above: The Garage's main dining area; below: Hilton Manila



Surprising theme

Wildlife adventure

There is more to the Philippines than sand and sea in its 7,100 islands. An undiscovered paradise for bird-watchers, the destination has one of the world's highest density of endemic bird species, and also boasts a number of rare and threatened species scattered around the islands. Home to about 200 endemic birds, the Philippines is also a key migration spot for birds from other countries looking for a warm place for winter.



Philippine eagle

Edwin Torres/Shutterstock.com

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Thank you to all our readers for their invaluable support and we look forward to bringing you more exciting, insightful content in 2019!

Analysis

Take two on film tourism's impact

History has shown that box office hits can bring big tourism business to filming locations, but also the ugly effects of overtourism. Marissa Carruthers reports



One of the latest blockbuster hits to make waves on the international big screen, *Crazy Rich Asians*, sparked a rush in the travel industry. While Singapore's tourism players cash in on the predicted surge in visitors inspired by the set, in Asia's broader tourism sector in Asia, some are shifting the spotlight to the detrimental effects of film tourism.

Tour operators put together *Crazy Rich Asians* tours of the city, while Singapore Tourism Board teamed up with Warner Brothers to launch a series of marketing campaigns across the US, Australia, South-east Asia and Japan.

Local guide Phil Choo, who has been running *Crazy Rich Asians*-themed tours since 2014 after reading the book the film is based on, has noted a rise in interest in his tours since the film premiered. He predicts this will continue, with more people wanting to follow in the footsteps of the movie's stars.

Choo said: "The film is like a love letter to Singapore and showcases some of the best of our country. It can only be positive, generating greater interest in the country and attracting more visitors. It is free advertisement for Singapore."

Film tourism can bring with it huge benefits, with countries enjoying a boom in visitors of between 25 and 300 per cent after featuring in a film, according to data from Champion Traveler.

Its research showed visitors to Wallace Monument in Scotland increased by 300 per cent after the release of *Braveheart*. *The Beach* led to a 22 per cent increase to Thailand, *Mission Impossible II* saw 200 per cent more people visit Sydney National Park, and all filming locations featured in the Harry Potter series welcomed 50 per cent more tourists.

"(Film tourism) brings huge public re-

lations value and marketing for a country if a movie features a certain destination," said Edwin Briels, managing director of Khiri Travel Myanmar. In October 2017, Briels attended LocationEXPO, a Hollywood tradeshow for producers scouting for locations, with the aim of planting Myanmar on the map as a potential destination for filmmakers.

"I am sure tourism in Myanmar could benefit from having a feature movie or any reality show or documentary shot in Myanmar," he added.

Cambodia is a country that has been able to cash in on the film industry, with Ta Prohm – one of the three main temples at Angkor Archaeological Park – providing the famous tree-riddled temple backdrop to the 2001 film starring Angelina Jolie, *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*.

Nick Ray, location manager, producer and director of Hanuman Films and advisor of Hanuman Travel, said: "(The film) has had a powerful imprint on Angkor

and has become part of Angkor's story. Ta Prohm is now nicknamed as much the Tomb Raider temple as the jungle temple."

Ray, who worked as location manager on the film, adds that *Tomb Raider's* effect on attracting tourists to the site has taken time to trickle down due to Cambodia building peace after decades of war.

"You have to remember when it came out in summer 2001, Cambodia was only just emerging from a long civil war," said Ray. "It wasn't long since the fall of Anlong Veng so it was all still quite raw. When you look at what's happened since, and how important *Tomb Raider* has become in tour guides' talks, you realise its impact and power."

Ray regularly visits Ta Prohm on location scouts or accompanying high-end tour groups. At the "Tomb Raider tree", he always hears guides talking about its appearance in the film. Said Ray: "This shows the power of film and film locations."



(Film tourism) brings huge public relations value and marketing for a country if a movie features a certain destination.

Edwin Briels
Managing director, Khiri Travel Myanmar

In spite of the potential films have to attract tourists to a destination, movie tourism comes coupled with issues.

"Overtourism and crowding can be an issue, especially in fragile or remote areas," said Sue Beeton, a senior lecturer in tourism at La Trobe University in Australia, who has been studying film tourism for more than 25 years.

A prime example is 2000 Hollywood hit *The Beach*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio. 20th Century Fox Pictures was sued by environmental activists for moving palm trees and damaging the pristine island's natural beauty during shooting. And the hoards who flocked to the destination for a slice of the hidden tropical paradise portrayed in the film have caused devastating environmental damage.

In June 2018, drastic measures were taken to prevent Maya Beach, on Phi Phi Leh, from being environmentally devastated. Up until its four-month closure, it welcomed about 3,800 visitors daily, bringing damage.

Beeton added: "Other negative effects are when the film attracts a different market to that of the existing tourists, which can create friction."

Chinese film *Lost in Thailand*, released in December 2012, triggered an influx of Chinese tourists visiting the campus of Chiang Mai University, which featured in the film. The university reported up to 500 tourists a day causing chaos at the university by wandering into classrooms, taking photos of teachers and even renting school uniforms and sneaking into classrooms. To curb the behaviour, the university started charging for short tours.

"There's the sort of the Hollywood kiss of death," remarked Ray, adding it is vital lessons be learnt from Thailand and Boracay, which was closed for six months in April as part of environmental rehabilitation efforts. He suggests measures be put in place, such as controlling numbers or charging entry fees.

"The issue of mass tourism in general is a massive one and films may help trigger it," he said. "Tour operators can help by informing the government and coming up with their own suggestions and plans, but it takes political will to trade-off between quality versus quantity. Do we want one million tourists or one thousand tourists spending the same amount?"

Beeton adds it is important that proper planning and research are carried out by tourism stakeholders to understand what the potential in filming may be.

The Cambodian government is also pinning hopes on the film industry to help the country hit its target of attracting two million Chinese visitors to Cambodia by 2020, up from 1.2 million in 2017.

In September, shooting started on *Love in Cambodia*, a collaboration between the ministries of Tourism, and Culture and Fine Arts, that aims to showcase the country to tourists, particularly Chinese. It will feature Phnom Penh, Angkor Archaeological Park, Koh Rong and Bokor Mountain in Kampot.

"There's Hollywood, Bollywood, China and a lot of other film industries that are big," said Ray. "If you get one or two production companies to peel off and they can see what's on offer, suddenly you'll have a wave of people coming over."

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In the spotlight

A developing palate

Singapore's tourism and hospitality players are serving up a rich menu of culinary offerings, driven by a publicity blitz from global events, writes Pamela Chow

Food and hawker fare have long been a selling point for Singapore, but tourism and hospitality players are now cooking up a storm of elevated gastronomic experiences to entice visitors to the city.

Singapore in recent years has seen a brimming culinary calendar populated with the likes of the Michelin chef series, Singapore Food Festival and Sentosa GrillFest, Beerfest Asia, Whisky Live, World Gourmet Summit, Singapore Restaurant Week and Oktoberfest, with scores of celebrity restaurants and F&B pop-ups thrown into the mix.

For example, F&B distributor Mead – which supplies premium Japanese imports to restaurants such as Tippling Club and Cut by Wolfgang Puck – has taken to introducing special sake pairing and food tasting sessions with its restaurant partners.

Andre Chalon, managing director of Mead, shared: “Events like this round out the Singapore culinary legend. It's all about storytelling, our story as a nation of food aficionados. To truly live up to that reputation, we must continue to embrace all food cultures and hold events like this, to give communities access to new culinary delights.”

Additionally, hoisted by high-profile events such as the Trump-Kim summit in June, as well as the popularity of book-turned-movie *Crazy Rich Asians* and TV series *Masterchef Singapore*, more players are raising the bar even higher for culinary experiences.

Arron Lim, founder of The Inside Access, commented: “With the premiere of *Crazy Rich Asians*, there will probably be a surge in travellers interested to check out what sort of luxury experiences there are in Singapore.”

The Singapore-based curator launched Insider Experiences last year, a menu of bespoke private events that brings renowned chefs and restau-

rant partners to any venue, including on a yacht with its Chef On Board series.

Lim added that exposure on the golden screen can also open up opportunities for attractions beyond traditional luxury, from Singapore's “urban landscape to (its) dining scene”.

The movie, for example, inspired food tour company Wok 'n' Stroll to launch a Crazy Rich Asians – “Behind the Scenes” Food Tour in August last year. Its itinerary treats participants to local food mentioned in the novel and movie, such as carrot cake, *roti prata* and Malay cakes at venues like Newton Hawker Centre and Joo Chiat; as well as more upscale venues like Michelin Bib Gourmand restaurant New Ubin Seafood at CHIJMES and LeVeL33 Craft-Brewery Restaurant & Lounge.

“Singapore looks so attractive and sexy in the movie. We wanted to give the audience the experience of being a crazy-rich Asian for one evening,” shared Wok 'n' Stroll founder and CEO Karni Tomer.

For hospitality giant AccorHotels, Singapore's burgeoning identity as a culinary destination has become an opportunity to enhance the group's F&B strategy.

Amir Nahai, CEO food & beverage and lifestyle, AccorHotels, said: “Our F&B (offer) was not where it needed to be. There were a lot of opportunities to improve it for our guests. We've embarked on a big transformation.”

Part of this transformation was the acquisition of hotel groups such as Fairmont, Raffles and Swissôtel over the past three years, which has brought AccorHotels “an element of luxury to its F&B”, said Nigel Moore, director of F&B, Fairmont Singapore & Swissôtel The Stamford.

He added: “What we've set out to do is position our restaurants as standalone restaurants. In the past, hotel restaurants had bad lighting, bad drinks and unsociable spaces, where you only went because you were a hotel guest and didn't know where else to go.

“Now, in our luxury (properties), we don't cookie-cut. So you won't find the same restaurant in a Fairmont in Mumbai, Singapore or New York. People come to our restaurants because they like the atmosphere and the food.”

Exemplary of this is the highly anticipated reopening of Raffles Hotel Singapore this year, which will launch 10 culinary spaces, including four new concepts BBR by Alain Ducasse; La Dame de Pic by three-Michelin-star chef Anne-Sophie Pic; yi by Singapore MasterChef Jereme Leung; and Butcher's Block.



It's all about storytelling, our story as a nation of food aficionados.

Andre Chalon
Managing director, Mead



The Inside Access offers bespoke dining and private events (above and right); a Taste of Japan event by Mead (below)



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