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Power in new Europe

Sellers are finding demand, opportunities from the continent's emerging markets

By S Puvaneswary and Yixin Ng

Buyers from emerging European destinations are seeing increasing demand for South-east Asia, as travellers in these markets are drawn by the exotic allure of the Far East and affordable ground costs.

Tomasz Brych, executive manager at Adventure Travel, Poland, shared: "Year-on-year, we saw a 25 per cent increase in demand for leisure and business events to South-east Asia. Seven-day incentive programmes or a one-week stay for leisure travellers to South-east Asia are popular."

Viktorila Buzova, CEO, Team Link, Ukraine is recording greater demand for corporate incentive travel and team-building activities, especially to Thailand, Viet Nam and Malaysia.

"In terms of pricing, the airfares (to South-east Asia) are higher than to Western Europe, but the ground costs, including hotels, meals and activities, are much lower. Overall, the total costs work out to be the same as having (programmes) in Western Europe," she said.

Picking up on the trend for "fancy" holidays in his market, Radek Madera,



Buzova: competitive costs in SE Asia

manager at Czech Republic's Arcadia Air, remarked that Asian destinations present opportunities for him to offer clients aspirational trips for the same budget.

"Travel preferences in the Czech market are changing every year. Our clients follow lifestyle and travel trends. It's now going towards fancy travel, fancy style and fancy luxury. Before, travellers opting for Asia were content with more rugged trips and ask for cheaper or regular hotels," said Madera.

"Now, they want more luxury and more expensive experiences – not only for hotels, but also services. With the same travel budget, in Asia, they can buy more things, opt for more luxurious hotels, and enjoy higher-end service."

Madera is also planning to incorporate more off-the-beaten-path destinations into itineraries. The launch of Hôtel de la Coupole - MGallery by Sofitel, the first international brand luxury hotel in Viet Nam's Sa Pa, presents an example of a destination that can fulfil his clients' preference for luxury and hidden gems, he said.

ATF sellers from South-east Asia have also registered keener interest from

emerging European destinations.

Henry Wong, executive director at Discovery Overland Holidays, shared that while business from Eastern Europe has increased, travellers are generally new to the offerings in this part of the world, and are more likely to seek out expertise of travel agents.

He said: "The FIT segment (from Europe's emerging markets) is not as adventurous as Western Europeans such as the UK and Germany who tend to design their own itineraries. Travellers from Eastern Europe are more comfortable buying a package from a reliable travel agent.

"Many are also first-timers to the destination. As such, everything is new to them and they are open to new experiences," said Wong.

"Traditional European markets on the other hand, tend to be repeat visitors and are more precise on what they want to see and do."

Elsewhere in the region, Bali-based Manumadi Travel is also starting to receive bookings from the Baltic states, a new market the company is targeting, shared Siggi Neuhaus, general manager of Caraka Travelindo (sister company of Manumadi Travel).



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.



Greater training support for Laos

By Pamela Chow

The Laos Hotel & Restaurant Association (LHRA) and Singapore Hotel Association Training & Educational Centre (SHATEC) signed a MoU at ATF on Wednesday, with the latter providing training services to Laos' hospitality workforce.

"The hospitality industry, and tourism arrivals into Laos, are both growing, so we need to increase the capacity and quality of our services," Oudet Souvannavong, president of LHRA, told the *Daily*.

Later this year, SHATEC's trainers will head to Vientiane to coach local staff over a period of three to six months, depending on each trainee's skill level.

The curriculum will include structured learning modules in hospitality English, service delivery and excellence, soft skills and MICE programmes. SHATEC will also offer consultancy services to LHRA's members.

Oudet elaborated: "In Laos, education for hospitality is not very well-developed. The government has a number of schools for hotels and tourism, but these institutes don't provide enough (training) to meet the growth rate of the hotels. Hoteliers are lacking staff and the turnover rate is very high – 40 to 50 per cent."

Ultimately, the partnership aims to empower the local workforce to pass the skills and knowledge acquired on to subsequent staff, ensuring a "sustainable" business model for the local industry, shared Margaret Heng, SHATEC's chief executive.

Intra-region travel acquires greater shine

By Yixin Ng

South-east Asia may once be perceived as a less sexy backyard for travel but perceptions are now changing, as agents point to signs of intra-region holidays becoming a growing trend as unique offerings and experiences become more readily available.

In Thailand, Express Holiday Center has begun to sell South-east Asian destinations like Viet Nam, after observing a spike in interest in regional travel among Thai travellers, said tour sales officer Prasert Iittipanuvat.

"Today, Thai travellers like to explore South-east Asia more than Europe. (Seasoned) Thai travellers have been to Europe and faraway places. They're finding great heritage in the region, with a lot to see and discover," he said. Combined with the ecotourism and soft adventure trend, this has enhanced the appeal of South-east Asian destinations such as Ha Long Bay.

"The outbound market is on an up-trend – we're seeing about 10 per cent annual increase in outbound leisure business. There's been a dramatic change in Thais' desire and ability to travel."

In the Philippines, Edmond Mayormita, president of Davao-based Travel Advantage, has seen demand for South-east

Asian cities grow steadily over the years.

He said: "It's more expensive to travel within the country than overseas. This year, we will have a second batch of tax increase, which will affect domestic flights, (coming) on top of Philippine Airlines' fuel surcharge. It's far cheaper to go to, say, Singapore than to Manila, or elsewhere domestically."

This was also the experience of Katarina Indrawati, EMFA Tours & Travel in Indonesia, who saw a surge in outbound bookings for the region since the LCC revolution.

On the other hand, the Philippines' Executive Resources may be

Today, Thai travellers like to explore South-east Asia more than Europe... They're finding great heritage in the region...

Prasert Iittipanuvat

Tour sales officer, Express Holiday Center, Thailand

seeing a slow increase in booking volumes for South-east Asia, but its focus is still on packages beyond the region, said manager Ayon Sanchez. "Majority of our packages – about 75 per cent – are not in South-east Asia. (This is because) for South-east Asia packages, we see a lot of clients doing it on their own."

The ease at which travellers can plan and book their own regional holidays is prompting agents like Sanchez to create more unique experiences in South-east Asia that clients are "not aware of" to fan their interest, Sanchez said.

"Today, our clients are moving away from cookie-cutter tours, towards something more authentic, whether in food or activities," he noted.

Shorthaul travel still shines for agents in South-east Asia's emerging economies like Myanmar. For example, Yangon-based Asian Tour in 2015 began pivoting from an inbound to an outbound-focused company.

"The desire to travel is definitely going up in Myanmar, but not the spending power. For now, we are selling mostly neighbouring countries like Thailand, Cambodia and Viet Nam," explained managing director Kyaw Pyay Oo.

News

Fresh appeal for sunny island

Sentosa's rejuvenation, new midscale hotels will draw more families from Europe

By Pamela Chow

Sentosa's upcoming developments – part of the Singapore government's plans to transform the entire island – are expected to better position the city-state as a destination for longhaul travellers, possibly enticing them to extend their stays in the country.

The first of these developments are three mid-tier range hotels operated by Far East Hospitality (FEH). Opening in April this year are Village Hotel at Sentosa, offering 606 rooms including family rooms, and the 193-key adults-only The Outpost Hotel. In 3Q2019, The Barracks Hotel will open with 40 rooms in a conserved colonial building.

Guy Allison, director of procurement, Tour East Holdings, believes that these new offerings are likely to enhance the island's appeal to Europeans and families, and possibly entice these segments to extend their stay in Singapore.

This comes from his observations of his European and UK clients, who are increasingly eschewed five-star luxury accommodation for three- to four-star bou-

tique hotels.

Moreover, longhaul travellers tend to spend only two to three nights in Singapore between neighbouring destinations, echoed UK-based travel agency Kuoni's product & purchasing executive, Nancy Verboom.

But with the timely entrance of FEH's more affordable accommodation options, Sentosa is expected to gain points with the European market, whose spending power has fallen in recent times.

Allison remarked: "Sentosa's becoming quite a family destination. It's starting to

attract people to stay in Singapore for not just one or two nights, but three or four – maybe even a week. With the

new developments, it might even become a destination in itself."

He also expressed assurance that while Singapore is costlier compared to its neighbours, the country is "becoming more value-for-money" and more affordable compared to five years ago.

What is needed now is more prominent and targeted marketing of unique offerings, suggested Verboom.

She elaborated: "Scuba diving and trekking are very popular (among my clients to South-east Asia). There's also a lot of interest in eco-friendly stuff too – like cities that grow food naturally.

"If Singapore's got anything unique or different that's come up, the local DMCs should shout about it, because sometimes we don't hear about these things until 18 months or two years later."

With the new developments, (Sentosa) might even become a destination in itself.

Guy Allison

Director of procurement, Tour East Holdings

Fresh connections a boon for Penang

By S Puvaneswary

Penang has intensified its efforts to attract more Chinese tourists in the medical and wedding segments this year, on the back of more air connections.

Shenzhen Airlines will commence a new direct service this summer, while China Southern Airlines will increase its flights from Guangzhou to Penang to 11 times weekly, up from daily flights, from January 20.



Ooi: keen on weddings, medical

agents, launch tactical campaigns and participate in B2B roadshows.

Ooi added: "New segments we are trying to attract from China are weddings and medical tourists. We've seen growing numbers of married Chinese couples travelling to Penang for fertility treatments such as in-vitro fertilisation."

To capture this market, Wilfred Yeo, senior group general manager, Sunway Hospitality, shared: "We've put in an investment of RM400 million (US\$97 million) to build a Sunway Medical Centre with 400 beds. To be launched in 4Q2020, it will be located next to Sunway Hotel Serang Jaya."

He observed: "Thanks to the increase in direct flights from China to Penang over the years, we have seen growing numbers of Chinese coming directly to Penang and then travelling south to Kuala Lumpur or Singapore. In the past, Kuala Lumpur was the main hub."

Pent-up demand to drive Lombok recovery

By Mimi Hudoyo

There is a clear pent-up demand for Lombok from the European market, even as buyers are waiting longer before they actualise bookings for the destination.

Travellers appear to be holding back their decisions, not just due to the Lombok earthquake and tsunami, but also because of the string of natural disasters that struck Indonesia in recent months, observed sellers at ATF.

Iwan Sitompul, sales consultant of Kura Kura Resort and Meno Mojo Beach Resort in Gili Meno, Lombok said: "The infrastructure in Lombok is ready, the fast boats between Bali and Lombok are back to normal, some has even added frequencies. Most of the affected hotels are up and running. In fact, Meno is newly opened.

"Since I arrived (at ATF), buyers have been asking me for updates on Lombok. This shows that the interest continues to be there, but somehow the bookings are very slow. In fact, Lombok is still close-sales for (some) UK buyers," said Iwan, suggesting the lack of updates to overseas markets as a possible reason.

While Robert Koni, sales and product

Since I arrived (at ATF), buyers have been asking me for updates on Lombok.

Iwan Sitompul

Sales consultant, Kura Kura Resort and Meno Mojo Beach Resort



The Kayana, Lombok

manager of Manumadi Tours & Travel, noted that bookings have been slower than usual, they are starting to come in.

He is hopeful that a Turkish Airlines fam trip for travel agents from Estonia to Bali and Lombok later this month, which Manumadi Tours is handling, will lead to more bookings afterwards.

Marika Gloeckler, executive manager product & consulting of Go Vacation Indonesia, said: "January-March are quiet months anyway, so it is normal not to see (European) travellers there yet. However, bookings from April onwards look good."

Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts is also upbeat about Lombok's future. The hotel group is opening an upmarket villa resort, the Kayana Lombok, a Royal Collection category in July 2019, just in time for the European summer peak.

Cita Dewantoro, general manager corporate sales and marketing of Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts, shared: "(Kayana Lombok) is targeted at the European market, especially the UK. The (European) market usually combines Bali and Lombok.

"We are confident that by this summer travellers will start flowing into Lombok again."

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Mekong cruising picks up steam

By Marissa Carruthers

A raft of new products, itineraries and activities, including more luxury options, is leading to greater interest in river cruises in the lower Mekong region.

Huynh Kim Bao, sales and marketing coordinator for Viet Princess Cruises, noted a year-on-year increase in bookings for Mekong River cruises, especially from the longhaul market, with the UK, Australia and the US strongest performing.

Nguyen Son Thuy, general manager of Indochina Unique Tourist, said demand is increasing in line with a shift towards experiential travel. He said: "People are looking for new ways to really experience countries, and cruising is one way."



Huynh: silver market power

Huynh said the longhaul silver market is a key source for Viet Princess, which is gearing up to launch an exclusive fine dining cruise in the next few months. "Most of our cruises are long luxury cruises, and retired people tend to have more time to travel, explore and enjoy life."

Cruise operators are rolling out new ways to attract clients, with north-to-south Viet Nam itineraries in the works for both Viet Princess Cruises and Heritage Cruises.

Said Heritage Cruises CEO and founder, Pham Ha: "(Cruising) demand is there. People are fed up with air travel and are looking for new experiences."

News

Reimagining loyalty

Loyal Guest goes after independent hotels in Asia

By Yixin Ng

A new startup that gives independent hotels access to a loyalty programme – sell-points that were traditionally seen as the domain of chains – is looking to grow its membership in Asia.

Loyal Guest, which launched in 3Q2018, says independent hotels can enjoy loyalty opportunities without having to forsake control over management or branding, said Chatuporn Ruttalaungsak, the company's Thailand general manager.

"So far, we don't see any others like us who offer a loyalty programme for independent hotels. Chain hotels have their own programmes (and a larger portfolio of participating hotels)... It is difficult for independent hotels without being part of a similar (programme to entice guests), she told the *Daily*.

"And we are not like hotel representation or management companies (in that) our members get to run things however they like, except they gain access a loyalty programme," she added.

The Singapore-registered company allows guests to earn and redeem points at member hotels.

From an independent hotel standpoint, loyalty opportunities may be considerable now given the size of Loyal Guest's cur-

rent portfolio, which spans 85 independent hotels in Thailand, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Viet Nam.

But as the startup grows, it remains to be seen if its value proposition to hotels would continue to be as strong.

Chatuporn told the *Daily* that the business model is not limited to hotel membership. It is currently also pursuing tie-ups with attractions and tours.

"We are not only for hotels but also for tourist attractions, car rentals, departmental stores or any business related to hospitality. We are looking for opportunities to tie up with tours and activities," shared Chatuporn.

SOUNDBITE

Harnessing the power of one

"When I think of (ATF's tagline) *Power of One*, I imagine a better-connected South-east Asia and more open borders for travel. A lot of work has already been done on highways and roads, and going from country to country is not as difficult as before. The next step could be to connect countries by express trains. Also, a single travel visa for South-east Asia (is needed). If ASEAN introduces a single visa like Europe, then it will be able to see the 'Power of One'." – **Ricky Poon, general manager, Silk Holidays, Canada**

Meeting and learning at destinations

By Mimi Hudoyo

The ASEAN Hotels and Restaurants Association (AHRA) will incorporate a "learning journey" for its board members at each destination where its meetings are held.

Eugene Yap, AHRA president and general manager of Bayview Park Hotel in Manila, said: "There are many hotel and restaurant developments in the region. When visiting such projects, we can learn about the new trends in technology, and new designs in the hotel and restaurant businesses. We can also visit restaurants, both new and old, to learn what they are doing to reflect the local culture and services."

Apart from broadening industry knowledge of AHRA members, the learn-

ing journey may provide inspiration for their business in their home countries.

As such, Yap revealed that this learning journey would be made "part of the procedure now".

Furthermore, the arrival of more international hotel brands into South-east Asia also brings along a wave of new trends that the region's industry players can learn from, said Yap.

At the meeting, AHRA also brought up issues the sector is facing, such as the application of employment standards, and hotel safety and security, which it would bring up at the ASEANTA meeting.

"Hospitality is an evolving industry, so we need to relook the standards all the time (in order to) evolve," he said.



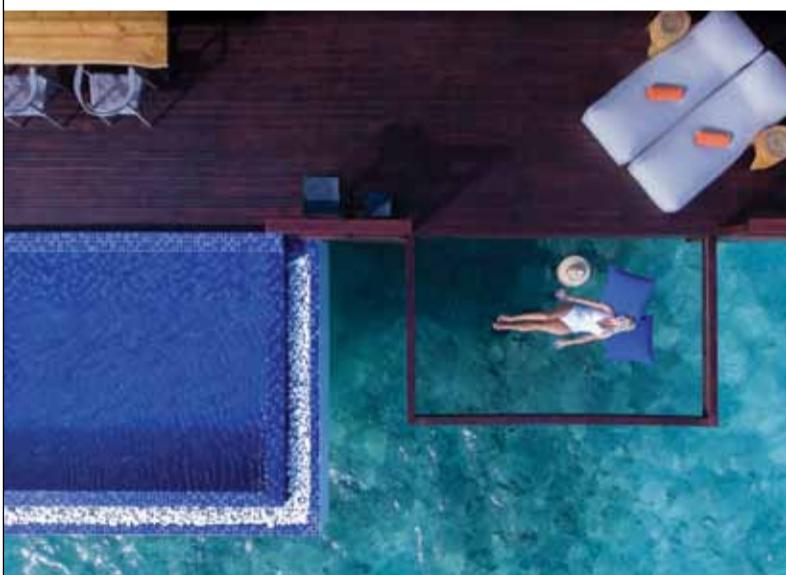
Yap: constantly evolving sector

HOT LEAD

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Starting the night with a bang

By Yingyong Unanongrak





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Tourism chief showcase

Finding value in authenticity

In this last of a four-part special, top tourism honchos in Thailand and the Philippines explain why they're placing a premium on sustainable travel, and put forth their ideas on promoting authentic experiences moving forward

Thailand

Weerasak Kowsurat

Minister of tourism and sports

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

I'd say two things. We have been very successful in convincing our visitors, both local and international, to pay more attention to sustainable tourism. We've received the full cooperation from everyone to ban the use of plastic and styrofoam in national and marine parks around the country, so this is the environment part.

The other part is on sustainability. Think again where your money goes – does it go directly to people who should receive these benefits? We are not talking just about community-based tourism but the entire supply chain, including hotels and restaurants. One of the major directions I have been (pushing for) in our national policies is that we do not look at tourism as a tool to make money only; we would like to see it address the income disparity issue in the country as well as disparities in other forms – culture, social behaviour, etc.

For example, tourism accessibility for all – people used to look at it as something for the physically disabled, but this dispara-

ity also includes ladies with high heels, parents who come with babies and toddlers, etc, so let's bring in ramps to make it more comfortable for everyone.

If we can overcome this disparity or at least address it correctly, we will not return to the conflicts (in Thailand) that we have been having for the past 10 years.



Sea of red lotus at sunrise in Udon Thani



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

We have identified at least 55 new provinces that are lesser visited in Thailand

but all of them are (grouped) in different divisions. If you put it in football terms, this will be first, second, third divisions and so forth, but every single one of them has hidden gems, so it's time to bring out

Philippines

Marie Venus Tan

COO, Tourism Promotions Board

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

We're about to launch a new marketing and promotions strategy anchored on the overarching pronouncements of tourism secretary Bernadette Romulo Puyat on responsible tourism and responsible stewardship.

We're branching out to a new direction that will really bring out what is uniquely ours. In the past, we looked at demographics – age, propensity to travel, income, where (visitors) come from, religion and so on. As global realities are already shaping travel and tourism, we're now going to start looking at psychographics. The paradigm has shifted so now people are looking at experiential travel, they're deeply into immersive travel. No longer are people just wanting to go to the hotel and relax on the beach.

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

Many. Samar, for example, is such a beautiful and raw destination. I am now discovering many aspects of the natural wonders of Samar and Leyte, and (these are areas) we should really look into.

We will look at empowering the communities through social tourism. We will look at communities as partners towards

El Nido, Palawan Province



As global realities are already shaping travel and tourism, we're now going to start looking at psychographics.

inclusive tourism growth and how they can benefit from it. We will look at the natural environment and communities up in the mountains that provide cultural immersion, artisans and works. We will look deep at their culture, tradition, history, even their food, and how they prepare them, as part of the value chain of tourism.

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

To look at (ASEAN members) not as competitors, but more as complementary partners – and in totality, a unifying force. Because (attracting) travellers to the region will (in turn) provide incentives for other travellers to see more of the region.

We tried One ASEAN before but it

their stories and let more people know (about them). Some areas may not offer good panoramic views because (the terrain is) flat, but the depth of knowledge and culture they have will touch the hearts of many. Those are still to be developed.

What we think is under-rated are the authentic experiences across the 55 provinces and we want to show more of them to the world. For the past 20-30 years, we have selling Thailand through pictures of views – beaches, islands, mountains – and we didn't pay much attention to the smiles on people's faces. But if we look at gastronomy now, it is not about going to super-star restaurants only, you can also go to anywhere local (to experience authenticity), say, a mother who is willing to open up her kitchen and shares the great recipes that she feeds her whole family with.

I started focusing on the authenticity of experiences only 11 months ago (when I became the minister). Even France and Spain are doing the same thing; they're trying to spread people out in what is an endless job. You want to make sure of the carrying capacity of each area is accounted for, and let the city stakeholders keep this in their mind.

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

Closer cooperation. In ASEAN, we all have difficulties getting through the barrier of language, whether it's international cooperation or budgetary (issues) to make those happen. We seem to be reaching out to each other, but more could be done.

But at the working level of governments... there are not enough people with the communication capabilities to work with those on the ground, or even

their own counterparts. Each country probably has less than 100 people working on handling one other, but to make sure this network covers all walks of lives in ASEAN we need to have many more (staff).

This is how I see bringing businesses and local communities to work together and think of what they want to do (is important) – it's not just what the government wants. – Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

What we think is underrated are the authentic experiences across the 55 provinces... Every single one of them has hidden gems, so it's time to bring out their stories and let more people (know about them).



didn't seem to take off. We should revisit it and look more at complementation than competition.

That's why I start with bringing out the best of the Philippines' unique selling propositions so that we can start matching (with other ASEAN countries) because there are connections to (other) cultures in the region....When we look at ASEAN, the closest country to us would be Indonesia. (The languages we speak are similar); our cuisine and cultural practices have traces of Indonesia; and even the way we look, the closest would be Indonesians.

There are many ways to bring ASEAN together; it's really about complementing each other. We have our strengths but we should also try to sell the strengths of our neighbours. – Rosa Ocampo



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Business outlook



New year, new outlook

Inbound players from across South-east Asia talk business in 2019. What tour products are trending, what headwinds await and what strategies have they added to their arsenal? The *Daily* reporters find out

SINGAPORE

By Pamela Chow

As Singapore's *Passion Made Possible* campaign launches globally at full force, inbound operators are taking advantage of the international reach to develop more intimate, authentic and innovative tours.

Daniel Tan, founder, Let's Go Tour Singapore, said: "Passion Made Possible has given us a lot of exposure and leverage. We've been able to reach operators overseas and brand ourselves."

"Given the popularity of our Historical Singapore tour, we will be expanding on themed tours. We are curating a tour that looks at Singapore through the eyes of an early immigrant – for example, from China in the 1920s – to show visitors the contrast with modern-day Singapore."

Meanwhile, Singapore's burgeoning culinary scene is spurring greater creativity in food-themed tours activities. In 2019, the country will become the first Asian host of the World's 50 Best Restaurants Awards, and will see more conversations on its nomination for inscription into UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

This activity has sparked culinary tour company Wok 'n' Stroll to plan more programmes and tours with hawkers and restaurateurs, while other agencies like Let's Go Tour Singapore and A+B Edu Tours and Travel have been rolling out increasingly in-depth experiences such as fresh market shopping and behind-the-scenes coffee roaster visits.

The growing awareness of Singapore's gastronomy scene has cul-



Singapore's kopi culture

tivated interest in not just consumption, but also the production of local cuisine, observed Angie Lau, deputy director inbound, A+B Edu Tours and Travel.

"We bring people inside bakeries and let them try their hand at making their own curry puffs. We now also go to traditional coffee roasters and look behind the scenes at how Singaporean coffee is made at our coffee shops. We had foreign Starbucks employees who learnt to appreciate our Singapore kopi," said Lau.

2019 BUZZWORDS Themed tours, gastronomy, local cuisine

MALAYSIA

By S Puvaneswary

Inbound agents handling regional and North Asian markets, which collectively contribute a majority of arrivals into the country, see an increased interest in nature and soft adventure packages, and

Cambodia who visit Malaysia for English language courses.

Uzaidi Udanis, managing director, Eyes Holidays, observes a growing interest among millennials seeking Instagrammable destinations and experiences to share with friends.

He will scour Instagram and other social media platforms to see what activities and destinations are appealing before considering the viability of incorporating them into packages. Among the trending places he has identified are Sky Mirror, Batu Caves, Sipadan Island and Seven Wells Waterfall Langkawi.

He added that popular activities among millennial tourists from South-east Asia include white water rafting, ATV riding, as well as deep sea fishing, snorkelling and diving.

Thus, in 2019, Udanis will develop more homestay products and soft adventure activity-based tours in Selangor, Perak, Pahang and Terengganu, as well as more tours in the Kuala Lumpur gateway.

Meanwhile, European tourists are placing more emphasis on experiential tours and local interaction, and less on beach holidays, shared Manfred Kurz, managing director, Diethelm Travel Malaysia.

He said: "(Rather than sightseeing from a tour bus), they are more keen to interact with locals and learn about the local culture. Homestay programmes have become increasingly popular because it gives tourists a chance to mingle with locals, see how they live and experience the local cuisine. We will develop more of such programmes in 2019 in both East and West Malaysia, in addition to walking and cycling tours."

2019 BUZZWORDS Experiential tours, local interaction, picturesque experiences



Navaratnaa: gearing up for soft adventure



Tan: rolling out a new tour to look at Singapore through the eyes of early immigrants



"Rather than sightseeing from a tour bus, (European travellers) are more keen to interact with locals and learning about the local culture.

Manfred Kurz
Managing director,
Diethelm Travel Malaysia

VIET NAM

By Marissa Carruthers

Viet Nam is expected to attract more longhaul and luxury travellers as emerging destinations make their mark in the international travel community and new products open up.

Viet Nam's tertiary destinations are expected to come under the spotlight, as more longhaul travellers request new ex-

periences.

Alexander Leven, general manager of Asian Trails Vietnam, said experienced tour operators are increasingly shifting their focus to the country's far north in search of unspoilt destinations, as the majority of secondary destinations are now overrun by regional tourists.

Said Leven: "Asian Trails is offering alternatives to sophisticated clients seeking tranquillity and non-touristy places."

This is also a trend that Jeff Redl, man-

aging director of Diethelm Travel Vietnam, predicts will grow within the Western market.

"Western travellers are looking at avoiding crowded areas with too many tourists," he said. "By developing new areas with better infrastructure, the country is able to offer off-the-beaten-track itineraries for curious travellers."

He noted a shift in demand from the classic north to south itinerary, with more visitors spending more time in the north

during the summer months, or combining south Viet Nam with Cambodia in winter.

Added Redl: "They are understanding Viet Nam should be considered horizontally not vertically, and needs several visits (across different) times of the year, and should be supported by the expertise of local tour operators."

Another segment set to flourish in 2019 is the luxury market, according to Pham Ha, CEO of Luxury Travel Viet Nam. Contributing factors include new boutique cruises, experiences, hotels and

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Business outlook



Redl: off-the-beaten-track experiences on the up



Ma Pi Leng Pass, in Vietnam's Ha Giang Province

tours. Improved infrastructure is also expected to attract attention from this market segment.

Said Ha: "(There is) a fast-growing list of modern luxury and spa destinations and recently-opened golf courses, and the launch of sea planes, helicopters, luxury yacht and river cruise services ensure stress-free journeys away from busy roads."

Luxury Travel will actively target this market by launching new luxury cruises, expanding to five languages, opening more sales offices in target markets and attending more tradeshows.

2019 BUZZWORDS Luxury travel, tertiary destinations, in-depth experiences

PHILIPPINES

By Rosa Ocampo

Beaches will remain the Philippines' main attraction in 2019, especially with the reopening of a cleaner Boracay.

El Nido, as well as various beaches in Cebu and Negros, are expected to continue holding sway over South Koreans, Chinese and Americans. More high-end travellers from Israel are also choosing beach holidays in the Philippines.

New beach destinations are also being discovered, according to Jojo Clemente, president of Rajah Tours, including those in the Visayas and the Bicol region.

Sharing similar sentiments, Amiable Intertours owner Bernadette de Leon foresees that Sumilon, Badian and Mactan in Cebu would retain their popularity, especially with the new international airport terminal, as well as Panglao in Bohol, and



Tanto: 'quality tourism'

"Niihawatu and Komodo Island are two destinations that (most) interest international travellers"

Abed Frans

Chairman, Association of the Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies East Nusa Tenggara Chapter

Coron and El Nido in Palawan.

Travel-savvy and adventurous millennials are fuelling demand for new activities in emerging tourism hotspots. They translate to volume, have the means to travel in style or on backpack, and are spirited enough to try something new in off-beaten tracks.

As well, curious travellers are hungry for food, drinks and nightlife experiences in metro Manila including Poblacion in Makati, Bonifacio Global City in Taguig, The Commons in Pasig, and other hubs that have become destinations in themselves.

Flip Trip Travels, which operates the online platform Tripkada, is seeing an increasing number of millennial clients on the quest for inclusive, sustainable and new tourism destinations. They join trips organised by fellow travellers and split the bill, and sometimes make themselves helpful through volunteering.

Sharp Travel tour operations manager Benjie Bernal expects more cruise ships to dock in Philippine ports next year. His agency is the groundhandler for a growing number of expedition ships – smaller ships carrying 150-200 pax – that stay longer in the country, moving from one port to another, including La Union, Batanes, Palau Island, Kalanggaman in Leyte, and Calaguas in Camarines Norte.

Surprisingly for Bernal, there are classic cruise ships – bigger ones with over 1,000 pax – scheduled to visit the Philippines next year, with itineraries including Boracay, Manila, Palawan and more.

2019 BUZZWORDS Beaches, millennials, cruises

INDONESIA

By Ade Siregar

Bali will continue to be travellers' best-loved Indonesian destination in 2019, according to the country's inbound tour operators, although they are increasingly seeing the old favourite as a springboard

into other parts of the country.

Umberto Cadamuro, COO, inbound at Pacto, said: "One thing we have earned from an eventful 2018 (international conferences, sporting events and natural disasters) is that the destination branding is as strong as ever."

Abed Frans, chairman of Association of the Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies (ASITA) East Nusa Tenggara Chapter, remarked that the popularity of emerging destinations are growing with Bali as its hub.

"Niihawatu, which has been named the best beach (resort) in the world, and Komodo Island are two destinations that (most) interest international travellers," said Abed.

Meanwhile in Bali, tour operators expect China and India to still be high on the list in terms of arrivals, apart from the traditional Australia and Europe markets.

Abed said the agents needed to step up their bargaining power to keep pace with an enthusiastic and fast-growing Chinese market. "We have to be firm in setting the price. (Many of) these travellers ask for very low prices."

Tanto Ruwiyyadi, a board member of the ASITA Bali Chapter, cited the association's data that this mass market came in groups and stayed in Bali for an average of 5D4N, spending US\$2,000-3,000 per visit.

Tanto, who is also managing director of Look Asia Holidays Bali, added that the demand for culture and nature are mostly coming from Europe, the US and Australia. "They come in small groups or FIT, stay an average of 14-21 days and spend between US\$7,500-10,000," said Tanto.

With some tourism players expecting Bali to still face issues that come with being overrun with tourists, agents are pinning hopes on quality over quantity when it comes to target segments.

Tanto said: "I can understand that volume is still needed to boost arrivals to other parts of the country, but we need to (start) concentrating on quality tourism for Bali."

"My dream is that we can apply a regulation like Bhutan, where travellers are required to spend a minimum of US\$500-600 per day with certain minimum length of stay. This way the people of Bali can better enjoy the benefits of tourism," said Tanto.

Indonesian inbound agents are also observing the rise of a new breed of "3.0 travellers". Said

Pacto's Umberto: "Mobile devices in the hands of travellers will be the single greatest influence impacting the travel experience since travel arrangements and accommodation can be booked at any time."

Umberto added that the "I can do everything" approach is no longer viable in view of the Internet competition. Specific expertise is the answer," added Umberto.

2019 BUZZWORDS Bali as a springboard for emerging destinations, balancing growth versus quality



Vichit: sports, medical and MICE markets are areas of growth

THAILAND

By Chadamas Chinmaneevong

As tourism becomes a bigger economic force globally, Thailand's tour business sector are benefiting from the industry growth, but they are also facing headwinds as travellers are now able to book air tickets, accommodation, and even activities online.

Against this backdrop, Thai tour operators will also have to work on differentiating themselves to win quality clients, in addition to developing online strategies as well as closer collaboration with OTAs, trade members opined.

"Tourists' behaviours change so fast. Therefore, our products must cover all potential markets," said Vichit Prakobgosol, president of CCT Group, citing sports, medical and MICE markets as areas of growth.

Pornthip Hirunkate, managing director of Destination Asia Thailand, said amid booming online travel businesses, travel agents must create different and attractive tour programmes which clients cannot find and buy online.

"We must offer more than visits to beautiful places and impressive services. New and interesting experiences are key because the majority of Thailand's inbound tourists are repeat visitors," Pornthip said.

She added that many agents are working with business partners in neighbouring countries as travellers want to visit more than one country.

Besides, Pornthip cautioned operators not to put all their eggs in one basket. "Everyone should (work towards) reducing risks because nobody knows what will happen in the future", she said.

For example, many tour companies in Phuket are out of business after the number of Chinese arrivals plunged following the boat accident last July.

2019 BUZZWORDS

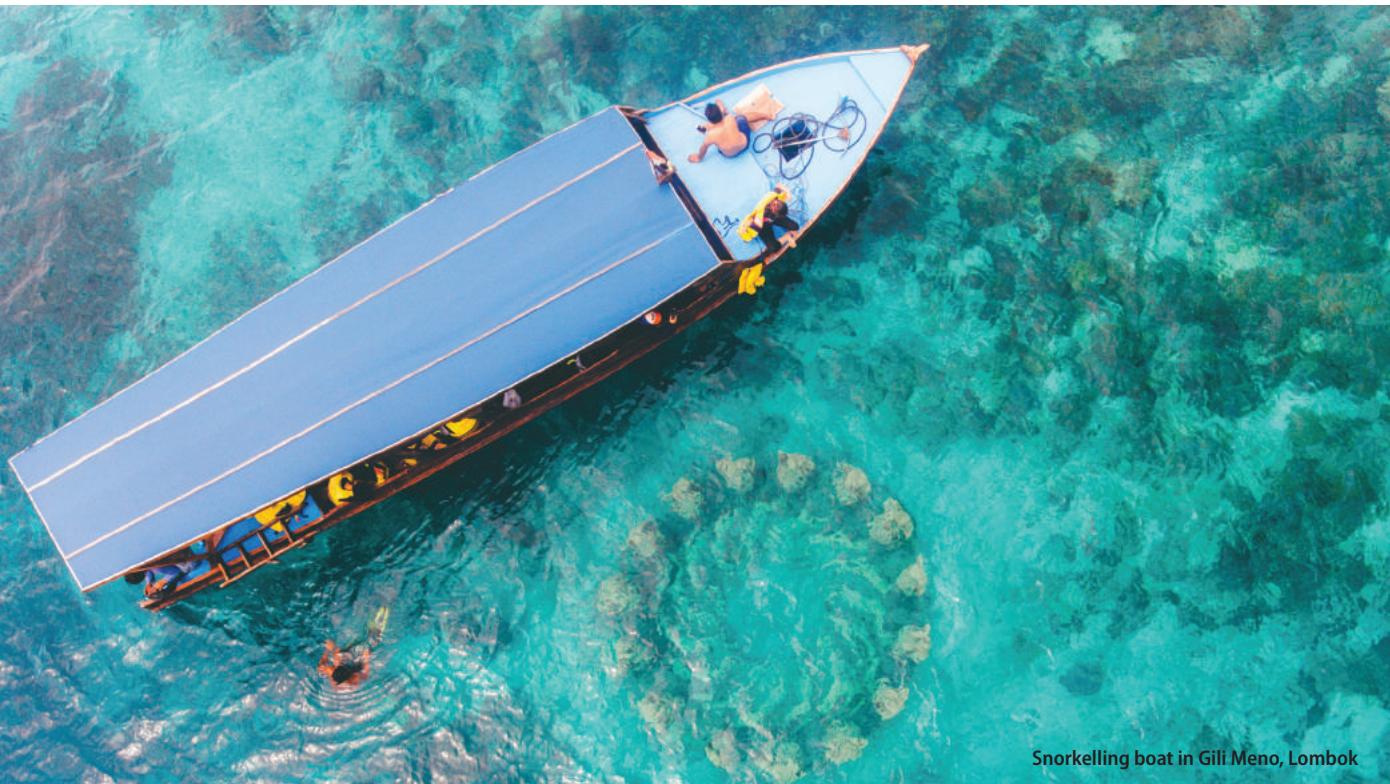
Creative tours, online bookings, market diversification



Pornthip: quality as differentiator

Moving forward after disasters

Following the natural calamities of 2018 that took a toll on the tourism sector, stakeholders are hitting the ground running, with special measures by the tourism ministry to drive recovery. By Mimi Hudoyo



Snorkelling boat in Gili Meno, Lombok

Projections for 2019



Umberto Cadamuro
COO, inbound
PACTO

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



Renato Domini
CEO,
Panorama Destination

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

Ng Sebastian
Owner,
INCITO Vacations

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

With a series of mishaps in 2018 dealing a blow to Indonesia's tourism, "extraordinary measures" have been taken, focused on major feeders such as India, to hold up international arrivals.

Among the unfortunate events that hit Indonesia last year were the earthquake in Lombok in August, and the tsunami in Palu-Donggala in October.

Last year also saw Surabaya hit by terror attacks. While the security force managed to curb and contain the attack from spreading, the incident had some impact on tourism as some foreign countries issued travel advisories.

At press time, the Indonesia Ministry of Tourism projected that total arrivals to the country in 2018 would be around a million below the targeted 17 million arrivals.

Before the year closed, Arief Yahya, Indonesia's tourism minister, told the *Daily* that the incident that shook Indonesia most was the August disaster in Lombok, with "the impact being more significant because it took place during peak season".

The disaster did not only impact Lombok but also neighbouring Bali.

Anak Agung Gede Yuniartha Putra, head of Bali Tourism Office, said: "News on natural disaster often scares away travellers. They can easily postpone their trips to Bali."

From this event alone, the minister pro-

jected a loss of around 500,000 potential arrivals.

While arrivals between January and September 2018 rose by 11.8 per cent over the same period last year, the total arrivals in the first nine months was 11.9 million, or 70 per cent of the targeted 17 million.

Adjie Wahjono, operations manager of Aneka Kartika Tours & Travel Services, said his company's performance in 2018 was five per cent below that of 2017.

"The immediate impact was not much. We were kept very busy redirecting travellers who planned to visit Lombok and kept cancellations minimum. However, new bookings (were slow to come in)."

He said that while existing European tour operator partners continued selling Indonesia and came up with flash sales and other promotions to entice travellers, new operators had the tendency to postpone launching their Indonesia programmes.

Not all markets are slowing down. Aneka Kartika's Philippine market, for example, whose main destination of choice in Indonesia is Bali, grew 10 per cent over the previous year.

To drive tourism recovery, the Ministry of Tourism has taken "extraordinary measures" such as making Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand as hubs to boost the Indian market, and continued promotions in China.

The former strategy is believed to have helped prop up arrivals from India, an in-

creasingly important source market for the destination.

Arrivals from India to Indonesia in the first nine month was 500,000 with the target of reaching 700,000 by end-2018.

Growth was likewise seen by travel trade players in the country such as RD Tours, Bali. Bambang Sugiono, director of marketing and overseas promotions of RD Tours, said: "Last year, we handled between 250 and 1,000 pax from India per month, and in 2018 the number grew to an average of 750 and 1,500 pax per month, with a combination of leisure, honeymooners and MICE groups."

He said the increase was made possible with the availability of access through neighbouring countries, as well as the aggressive marketing and promotion efforts by the Ministry of Tourism together with the private sector.

"The fact that SilkAir has flights to many cities in India really helped connect the (second-tier) cities in India and Bali via Singapore," he said adding that travellers like to stay for between four and six nights and Bali was still the favourite destination.

Apart from Singapore, Bambang also leveraged Bangkok as a hub for traffic, not only from India but also neighbouring Nepal and Sri Lanka.

"We have seen growing number of holidaymakers from these markets to Bali, thanks to the connections by Thai Airways," he said.

Destination in numbers

25 million

Indonesia's 2025 target for international arrivals, with an estimated US\$28 billion in tourism receipts

47.5%

The percentage growth of Jakarta hotel RevPAR during the Asian Games 2018, a welcome turnaround for the city's hotel sector, which has seen weak performance due to supply rising faster than demand over the past three years

US\$34 billion

The estimated investment value of projects needed between 2019 and 2024 to achieve Indonesia's tourism targets

US\$5.1 billion

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

US\$3.3 million

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

What's new

Artotel Haniman Ubud

A breath of fresh air in the heart of Ubud, Artotel Haniman-Ubud comprises 22 boutique studios spanning three different categories. The hotel also houses the Full Circle Restaurant by Expat Coffee & Roastery, a swimming pool and day spa.

Manarai Beach House Bali

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

Como Uma Canggu

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

Revivo Bali

Holistic wellness resort Revivo Bali is made

up of 16 Balinese-style suites including two four-bedroom villas, spa, pool, a 8,000m² hybrid fitness area, and a gourmet restaurant that serves up a selection of healthy cuisine. Revivo Bali offers programmes based on individual guest's needs, with the goal of achieving holistic healing, as opposed to treating specific ailments.

Ayana Komodo Resort

Ayana Komodo Resort has opened in Labuan Bajo, Flores, the gateway to the Komodo Marine National Park.

The 205-key property is the first luxury accommodation in the area. It has seven F&B outlets serving Indonesian, Asian, Japanese and international cuisines. Facilities include spa, gym, swimming pools, kids club, private beach and jetty. The hotel also has a ballroom and meeting spaces. Equally appealing is the resort's own luxury *phinisi* ship and boats that cater to guests' recreational needs.

Swiss-Belhotel Pangkalpinang

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



From top: Artotel Haniman Ubud; Ayana Komodo Resort

Surprising theme

Gourmet lures

In Yogyakarta, sample authentic home-cooked dishes at Cengkir Heritage Resto & Coffee. The rustic restaurant offers a casual buffet line packed with well-loved local dishes, as well as nostalgic home favourites that are now rarely found. A highly-recommended dish is the banana blossom in spicy coconut soup and sautéed taro leaf. For a posh dining experience, visit Bale Raos Kraton where the kitchen dishes out royal cuisine commonly found in Indonesian palaces.



Bale Raos Kraton

The expert recommends

MUST EAT

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

MUST SEE

Visit the Bena Village, a megalithic village on a hilltop facing the Inerie Mountain, to discover the traditional way of life.

MUST STAY

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



Leonardus Nyoman
Founder,
Flores Exotic Tours



Manulalu Villa



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New developments come ashore

The long-standing destination of Sentosa is set for a major transformation, with redevelopment plans now underway as well as a new crop of mid-scale hotels opening soon on the island. By Pamela Chow



The AJ Hackett bungee jump attraction at Sentosa

Just months after the Trump-Kim Summit thrust Sentosa into the global limelight as the hosting venue for the high-profile meeting, a major rejuvenation plan encompassing the nearby Pulau Brani and Tanjong Pagar waterfront has been unveiled for the island destination.

The entire island of Sentosa will soon be reshaped and transformed, announced Singapore's senior minister of state for

trade and industry Chee Hong Tat in October last year.

In this blueprint, Pulau Brani will be "transformed" as part of Sentosa, "retaining the island charm with new attractions and nature zones", Sentosa Development Corporation's (SDC) assistant chief executive and chief financial officer, Chin Sak Hin, told the *Daily*.

"This (transformation) will bring (Sentosa) to another level. We are working

closely with the other government agencies on planning this whole area, and we are now at the masterplanning stage," said Chin. SDC is also currently developing the Sentosa 2030 masterplan.

Hardware overhaul on Sentosa has already begun. By 2021, the island's main north-south pedestrian thoroughfare will complete its refurbishment, and in April this year, the Palawan area of Sentosa will see the opening of two new Far East Hospitality (FEH) hotels.

These are the 606-room Village Hotel at Sentosa, which targets families, as well as the 193-key Outpost Hotel, a new millennial- and couple-focused brand featuring a stylish adults-only colonial island concept.

The third quarter will see the opening of the old-school, luxury-style Barracks Hotel to accompany its sister properties along Artillery Avenue, bringing 40 rooms within a conserved colonial building. The three mid-range properties will raise Sentosa's total room count to 4,200.

FEH's CEO, Arthur Kiong, said: "Sentosa is a driver of business and is very popular, but it's interesting that 90 per cent of its 3,200 rooms are in the luxury class. (Our new cluster) caters to families, groups, MICE and niche segments. Visitors may be encouraged to extend their stay in Singapore and Sentosa from one to two days."

FEH is "working on establishing key partnerships with attractions on Sentosa", he added.

Down the shore on Siloso Beach, Shangri-la Rasa Sentosa & Spa will soon unveil a family-friendly outdoor adventure area, "completing an engaging and family-friendly lifestyle concept for visitors to Siloso Beach", revealed the property's director of sales and marketing Jennifer Yong.

Destination in numbers

4.3 million

The volume of South-east Asian arrivals from January to August 2018, with Indonesia bringing in the largest number at over two million

80

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

51%

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

22%

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

Projections for 2019



Judy Lum
General manager,
Diethelm Travel (Singapore)

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



Jane Goh
Director,
Xperience Singapore Events & Travel

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

Arron Goh

Founder, The Inside Access

"With the premiere of *Crazy Rich Asians*, there will probably be a surge in travellers interested to check out luxury experiences in Singapore. However, I think there is more to Singapore than the high life – I would want to show these travellers how multifaceted Singapore is, whether in terms of our urban landscape or our dining scene."

Sentosa has also welcomed a new crop of attractions in recent years. Following the debut of AJ Hackett Sentosa in 2017 with a 50m bungee jump tower and a 40m skybridge, in late 2018 Resorts World Sentosa also welcomed the addition of the Head-Rock VR theme park and table65, helmed by Dutch celebrity chef Richard van Oostenbrugge.

Trade agents believe that this overhaul will revive Sentosa's standing in the global tourism scene. Joseph Sze, senior director of Siam Express, opined that Sentosa would fare better among both international and domestic visitors if presented as "a whole integrated island".

Steps have since been taken to market Sentosa as a holistic destination. SDC has also been rolling out a year-round calendar of diverse and "relevant" events to attract visitors, said Chin.

On top of recent programmes such as Sentosa Sandsation: Marvel Edition and Sentosa GrillFest, the destination also launched night light-up event, Island Lights, featuring the first Pikachu Night Parade outside of Japan.

Chin said that SDC is marketing these programmes according to themes, such as beach, music, food, sports and festivals, to help visitors gain stronger awareness of the island's suite of offerings.

The tides of change are also rolling in beyond Sentosa. Chee also announced plans to develop the 1,000ha waterfront area along Tanjong Pagar. This area, which Chee said is "as large as Sentosa Island itself", will be branded the Southern Gateway of Asia.

This development is set to be "the harbinger of very, very exciting developments for Sentosa as well as the rest of the precinct", commented Kiong.

What's new

Behind the scenes of Teochew opera

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

30 Bencoolen

Singapore welcomes its first hotel with a smart in-room solutions system, 30 Bencoolen. Formerly known as Bayview Hotel Singapore, the centrally located property has emerged from a S\$20 million (US\$14.6 million) transformation with smart room control units that proactively monitor and "communicate" every room's status and any defects to operations.

Explore Little India's back lanes

Take a walk down the back lanes of Little India at night, and learn more about the rich history of this cultural precinct through immersive activities like learning to tie a turban and feasting on traditional Mughlai dishes in a North Indian restaurant. The new tour, Down to the Bare Walls, is operated by A+B Edu Tours and Travel.

Amara Heritage Trail

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

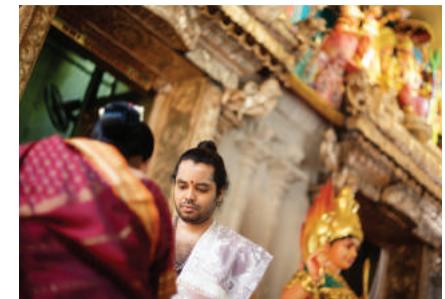
Six Senses Maxwell

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

Orchard Rendezvous Hotel

Far East Hospitality has rebranded and refurbished the iconic Orchard Parade Hotel to Orchard Rendezvous Hotel, drawing inspiration from the neighbouring Botanical

Gardens to offer guests a garden-like retreat. The 388-room Orchard Rendezvous Hotel is the second property under the Rendezvous brand in Singapore. Accompanying the hotel rebranding is a refresh of the Rendezvous brand, symbolised by a revamped logo, which Orchard Rendezvous Hotel is the first to adopt.



From left: 30 Bencoolen; tour of Little India with Down to the Bare Walls

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Six Senses Duxton

Analysis

From Asia, with pride

Positive winds of change are blowing into the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) travel sector, which has grown from a niche segment into a major part of the global tourism business in the last decade amid ongoing changes in the social and political climate.

The total global value of LGBTQ travel is reported at US\$200 billion, growing at an average of eight per cent year-on-year when mainstream travel grows at just 3.8 per cent, according to Uwern Jong, editor-in-chief of gay-targeted OutThere magazine and LGBT+ luxury travel ambassador for Thailand Authority of Thailand (TAT) NYC.

"Demographically they own 22 per cent more than their straight counterparts and on average they spend 55 per cent more on travel, so it's easy to see that the LGBTQ sector makes a dynamic and influential contribution to the global economy," shared Jong during the LGBT+ Travel Symposium: Thailand in Bangkok in June 2018.

Notably, the tourism sector is currently undergoing a paradigm shift, evidenced in the growing body of industry research on LGBTQ travel, said Peter Jordan, head of insights at Toposophy and consultant of Gen C Traveller, another speaker at the symposium.

The second edition of the UNWTO Global Report on LGBT Tourism, developed in cooperation with the International Gay & Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA), was released in 2017. This was followed by European Travel Commission's (ETC) launch of the Handbook on the LGBTQ Travel Segment in July last year.

The launch of these LGBTQ travel reports marks "a real milestone as it really demonstrates recognition of the LGBTQ market at the highest level for tourism policymaking," stated Jordan, who researched and wrote both reports.

Greater inclusivity, more visibility

The travel industry is now entering a new era of inclusiveness, as more tourism businesses as well as industry leaders pledge their support for the LGBTQ community.

Said Jordan: "In the latest edition (of the UNWTO report), we took a big step forward with the inclusion of an important quote from recent secretary-general



As the LGBTQ movement gains momentum in Asia, the tourism sector is realising the financial and social sense in standing up for this increasingly visible segment. By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

Taleb Rifai, who made a clear invitation to all tourism leaders, no matter which country they are in, to provide a supportive environment for LGBTQ travellers."

The LGBTQ sector is also of interest to PATA, which had entered into an organisational partnership with IGLTA since 2015, explained the organisation's chief executive Mario Hardy.

Increased LGBTQ visibility across the globe will certainly drive the process of acceptance and engagement.

Jordan added: "It's the emerging markets which are going to offer the biggest potential for growth, where more and more (LGBTQ) people are increasingly visible.

"We must remember that many of these emerging markets are often quite socially conservative countries themselves so travel offers the opportunity for them to be open, to be (themselves) and perhaps to

have the freedom that (they) can't have at home," he remarked.

But despite a significant shift in societal attitudes towards greater acceptance of LGBTQ people in the last decade, Hardy recognises that this remains "a sensitive topic" and is even taboo in some parts of Asia. "There is still a lot of work to be done (in this sector)," he reminded.

While still a long way to go, LGBTQ rights are being advanced in Asia, offering glints of progress.

India, in an historic judgement in September 2018, has just done away with the archaic 157-year-old British empire law against homosexuality.

In May 2017, Taiwan's top court ruled that same-sex marriage is a constitutional right, while momentum is gathering in Thailand to legalise civil partnerships. Viet Nam has allowed same-sex weddings since January 1, 2015.

Hong Kong now recognises same-sex couples in visa applications, coming on top of its host destination status for the 2022 Gay Games.

Industry players in Asia are hopeful that the relaxation of stance towards the LGBTQ community will attract traveller interest and revenue to the region.

Hannah Wilson, business development executive of UK-based tailor-made luxury LGBTQ travel specialist Out of Office, is already seeing an uptick in interest in Asia from her clients – a majority of whom hail from the UK and the US.

"Interest in India has risen (rapidly). Since the legalisation of gay sex (last September), we've had an influx in enquiries and expect (India) to become more popular," she told the *Daily*.

Thailand flies the flag for diversity

Among Asia's most progressive coun-

tries regarding LGBTQ rights, Thailand has benefited from this growing tourism niche that has largely been ignored by its neighbours.

However, it was only last year that TAT, which has already rolled out the LGBTQ-friendly *Go Thai, Be Free* campaign several years back, truly 'came out of the closet' to go all out to target this segment.

"This segment was and still is a strong priority of TAT; we have since been watching the segment with great interest over the last decade," said Srisuda Wanapinyosak, TAT's deputy governor for international marketing Europe, Africa, Middle East and Americas.

"Thailand has been regarded by the LGBTQ community as a safe, respectful and welcoming destination. We see an opportunity to present Thailand as a forward-thinking destination. Our kingdom is open to every possible shade of the rainbow," said Srisuda, a reference to the TAT's latest *Open to the New Shades* marketing campaign, which encourages travellers to discover the diversity of experiences Thailand offers.

The Thai NTO was the presenting LGBT partner at ITB Berlin 2018, and also spearheaded the first LGBT+ Travel Symposium: Thailand in Bangkok, which brought more than 30 global LGBTQ buyers and media into the capital for the event.

In fact, Thailand's efforts in the LGBTQ sphere is catalysing efforts elsewhere in the region.

Inspired by the TAT's LGBT+ Travel Symposium in Bangkok in June last year, Lax Junnel Mendoza, concurrent president of the Association of Travel and Tour Agencies in the Philippines' Calabarzon region, also launched a similar event in Malvar, Batangas in October 2018.

The event attracted some 300 participants from the local travel trade, government units and the academe, and Mendoza is now eyeing an "exchange" programme with TAT for travellers between Thailand and the Philippines.

In the pipeline are plans to create a training programme to make local properties and their services gay-friendly and tackle issues like the proper address for these travellers, providing gender-equal toilets, health and safety, and wellness, shared Mendoza.

Seeing the significant potential of the Philippines as a pink economy source market, TAT had also kicked off its LGBTQ-targeted efforts in the country since last October by being the exclusive destination partner for the LGBT+ symposium in Batangas, said Singapore and the Philippines director Kajorndet Apichatrakul.

He said: "The Philippines is the most ready market in Asia for outbound LGBTQ travel, coming on top of rising outbound travel and spending from this market."

The strategy in the Philippines, Kajorndet told the *Daily*, is not solely focused on this segment but to also leverage LGBTQ travellers as "influencers" in their social groups, and along with it stimulate demand from the luxury end of the market to travel to Thailand.

Srisuda commented: "Our goal is to see exponential growth in the popularity of Thailand as a destination for the LGBTQ traveller. We remain committed, with the help of our private sector partners to develop what we hope will be a model of success for this segment." – additional reporting from Rosa Ocampo and Marissa Carruthers



It's the emerging markets which are going to offer the biggest potential for growth, where more and more (LGBT) people are increasingly visible.

Peter Jordan
Head of insights, Toposophy

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Hyatt Hotel's (starting from fourth from left) Noemie Payumo, Lin Sari, Jennifer Chong, Francis David, Jaclyn Yong and Phong Nguyen, with colleagues



Penang Global Tourism's Ooi Chok Yan



Bangkok Airways' Komkrit Ngamwongwirot (second from left) and team

Hotel Santika Slipi
Jakarta's Guido Andriano, Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts Indonesia's Cita K Dewantoro, The Anvaya Beach Resort Bali's Endah Proborini, The Samaya Seminyak Bali's Uly Mardiani, Hotel Santika Beach Resort Belitung's Agus Suyatna and Santika Indonesia's Bayu Putera



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J Hotel by Jayakarta Indonesia's I Wayan Waras and The Jayakarta Suites Indonesia's Reynes Sahadoen



Sunway International Hotels & Resorts Malaysia's Wilfred Yeo (third from right) and team



Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism Laos' Somxay Chongheumoua and Phouvanh Xaysena



Dusit Thani Krabi Beach Resort's Kodchakorn Chakreyarat, Dusit Thani Pattaya's On-anong Keawngamdee, Dusit Thani Laguna Phuket's Chissanucha Pansiri, Dusit Thani Mactan Cebu Resort's David Anthony Baldwin, dusitD2 Chiang Mai's Kriyatorn KadSongkram, Dusit Princess Moonrise Beach Resort Phu Quoc's Patrice Landrein, dusitD2 Ao Nang Krabi's Sivaporn Sanguansub, Dusit Thani Hua Hin's Nunnapat Wongpinit and Dusit Hotels & Resorts Thailand's Edwardo Iswandi



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Singapore Tourism Board (STB) Viet Nam's Jolene Goh, Khanh Phuong Nguyen and Sherleen Seah, and STB Malaysia's Dawn Ng Huijun



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