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The Philippines has a vigorous artistic community influenced by vast cultural heritages – a driving force that makes the Philippines a favored destination for many.

Kalinga, located in the central part of the Cordillera Administrative Region of the Philippines, is a destination rich in culture and natural beauty. History accounts that it is a home of the great tribal warriors – for the fiercest men in the tribe, tattoos symbolize their bravery and courage; for women, tattoos portray beauty and elegance.

Apo Whang-Od, the oldest tattoo master from *Butbut Kalinga tribe*, is a living legend and a Philippine pride for bringing to greater attention the indigenous practice of tattooing as a form of cultural art. Her work as a traditional tattoo artist and her impact on the Filipino traditional arts scene have heightened awareness about the culture of the Kalinga community—their worldview, traditions and expressions.

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Rediscovering Thailand's mojo

Companies find Thailand a harder sell, as DIY travel gains favour among Europeans

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena and Yixin Ng

Long a top Asian destination for Europe's travellers, Thailand today is not the easy sell it once was for tour operators and travel agents, who are finding that they have to dig deep to have a shot at attracting repeat clients of the "been there, done that" mindset.

"The European numbers are stable for Thailand, however there's not much growth opportunities from the region's market," admitted Tobias Fischer, director of business development, Go Vacation Thailand.

It appears that the destination may have lost its lustre after many years in the spotlight, some buyers at ITB Berlin shared.

Tina Bach Thogersen, destination manager, Denmark's Viktors Farmor Worldwide Expeditions, said: "We sell (pretty much) all of Indochina. We offer one itinerary for Thailand, but it doesn't sell."

"Many Danes have been to Thailand. Today, many of us do it individually because we want to visit the beaches and the small islands. It's hard to gather groups of 20 people wanting to do the same beach holiday," she explained.

Moreover, with Thailand being a mature destination, she said it is "very easy to travel within Thailand on your own".

In an attempt to keep things fresh for repeaters while staying abreast to trends, DMCs like Go Vacation has been adding new components to itineraries, including local experiences and lesser-known desti-

nations.

"As DMCs, we make money from roundtrips. We still keep classic tours but develop new tours such as *klong* (canal) tours followed by lunch with a local family. For seat-in-coach tours, we always have to keep classic sites like Ayutthaya but try to add diversity into them," said Fischer.

Similarly, Laurent Kuenzle, CEO, Asian Trails, remarked: "Experiences is the buzzword, customers want to see main sites and new things."

Foodie tours are a hit, he shared, adding that it's about marketing the right product to the customer. "A dinner would be done differently for a German and a Spanish customer, for example."

But similar attempts have come to naught for Thogersen. "That is the kind of itinerary we do. We do all we can to get as close to the locals as possible. But still, no – they choose Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam instead."

In her experience selling travel to

Danes, "the last time group tours to Thailand were selling was around a decade ago". A previous company she was with stopped selling Thailand in 2010. Following that, it was a cycle of reintroducing Thailand before it would drop off again.

On the other hand, product manager for South-east Asia at Swiss agency Adgentes, Julien Rousseau, said Thailand has not lost its mojo in Switzerland, and continues to sell itself.

Thailand is a "big destination" at the agency, making up around 20 per cent of business. The country is followed in popularity by Vietnam and Indonesia.

"I was expecting many would book Thailand online. But (perhaps) they encountered problems before, and returned to agencies as they feel safer booking with us," he told the *Daily*.

He added: "For destinations like Cambodia and Vietnam, our clients tend to visit just once. But they choose Thailand often for the beaches."

Repeat travellers are choosing Thailand's less touristy beaches like Koh Kood and Koh Chang, according to Rousseau.

I was expecting many would book Thailand online. But (perhaps) they encountered problems before, and returned to agencies as they feel safer booking with us.

Julien Rousseau
Product manager, South-east Asia, Adgentes

Rising awareness of Japan sparks joy for Europeans

By Yixin Ng and Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

The perception of Japan as an insular nation no longer holds true as the country opens up to tourism in recent years. Furthermore, the immense influence of Japanese pop culture is turning out to its best ambassador in promoting the country in the European markets.

Japan is becoming "more accessible" for UK travellers, a trend fanned by Japanese pop culture figures such as Yayoi Kusama, whose recent exhibition were sold out in London, and Netflix sensation and tidying expert Marie Kondo, observed Natasha Rewrie, business development manager EU at Buffalo Tours.

The growing influence and consumption of Japanese pop culture is likely fuelling awareness and sparking travel interest to the Land of the Rising Sun, Rewrie suggested.

Japan tourism has also benefited from the greater media attention on the country as it gears up for major sporting events like Rugby World Cup 2019, said Johann Chabert, country manager, Buffalo Tours Japan.

"Japan is overall a growth market be-

cause the country is opening up, and we're seeing around 10-15 per cent growth from the Western markets to Japan," he said.

It's a similar story for Terrie Lloyd, CEO of JapanTravel.com who said his business was up millions of dollars over the last year, driven solely by German tourists' fast-growing demand for Japan.

He commented: "Japan is gaining popularity overall, and next year is the Olympics (which has spurred interest). Europe's usually the last place to hear about Asia, and up until very recently everyone here wanted to go to Thailand. But recently, Japanese food and culture are starting to get really well known. In the last two years, Japan suddenly took off."

Among the European markets, Geraint Holt, managing director of Japan specialist DMC, The J Team, first saw strongest underlying interest in Japan from France, then Germany, Spain and Italy.

The emergence of demand from Holland and Belgium operators has been the most notable change for the DMC in the

past six months. "Japan is now a destination they are offering, which we didn't see previously," he added.

For Western European travellers, Japan's biggest advantages as a destination is how unfamiliar and mystifying it is.

Added Holt: "Travellers arrive with little preconceived ideas and low expectations. But then end up having a great time, and want to tell everyone else about it."

This is a marked departure from in the past, when the destination welcomed mainly travellers with special interests in Japan. "That was the case when

Japan was still below 20 million (arrivals). The majority of visitors arriving had a prior interest, and were channelling that into a holiday. Now, Japan is coming to the top of the list of avid travellers who have been to many countries, he observed.

While the country is clearly becoming a "more mainstream" destination, Chabert contends Japan is not yet fully ready for Western tourists as English is rarely spoken beyond the key cities of Tokyo and Kyoto.



Holt: interest in the unfamiliar

Singapore hotels boast shiny appeal

A growing roster of luxury hotels in Singapore is drawing greater interest from European buyers.

Hollywood movie *Crazy Rich Asians* and the historic Trump-Kim summit in June last year delivered a promotional boost to Singapore, with icons like Marina Bay Sands, Capella Singapore and Raffles Singapore – due to relaunch in August this



Thies: wow factor in luxury hotels

year after an extensive restoration – coming under the spotlight as some of the city's luxury offerings.

Rica Thies, team assistant Asia, Art of Travel Germany, said: "The luxury hotels in Singapore are so impressive that they are able to provide an experience on their own already."

Thies said her clients, who typically stay between one to three nights in the city, would often prefer city-based five-star hotels with a view of the Singapore River.

Anticipating the reopening of the iconic Raffles Singapore, Thies said: "We have many requests for this hotel already because it combines a lot of history, elegance and luxury which we do not get in typical hotels."

Hasan Hakim, general manager, Beyond Oceans Travel Lebanon, agreed that the ready availability of quality and luxury hotels in Singapore is a winning factor. "It makes the destination's image feel secure when you know of all the big hotel names," he said.

Hakim, who is exploring Singapore as a new product, shared that he is looking at packaging the city with surrounding destinations like Indonesia and the Philippines. "I am looking for new ideas that can excite, and I think Singapore has many to offer," he said.

He added that Sentosa could be a potential key product for his clients as its resort island offering with luxury hotels and attractions in one spot is a novel and attractive one.

As for Karin Portzgen-Pruijssen, representative of Reisteam in Netherlands, Singapore is an "all-in-one city that has everything travellers need", with shopping as one of the top favourite activities among them.

Apart from luxury hotels, Singapore's reputation for quality hotels is a "very strong" drawcard for Portzgen-Pruijssen.

Earlier last month, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) unveiled plans to woo longhaul markets like the UK and Europe with a roster of Bicentennial-themed programmes and tour products.

STB has also launched the next phase of its *Passion Made Possible* global campaign in 16 markets worldwide, including Germany and the UK. – **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

News

Ecotourism puts Selangor on map

Tourism Selangor is leveraging the state's natural and heritage attractions to draw more tourists from Europe

By Paige Lee Pei Qi and S Puvaneswary

To capture a larger slice of the European market, Tourism Selangor is intensifying efforts to promote the abundance of ecotourism, culture and heritage offerings in Selangor.

Abdul Rashid Asari, Selangor state government chairman of standing committees for cultural and tourism, Malay tradition and heritage, believes that a new crop of hotels, infrastructure, ecotourism and cultural attractions will put the destination in good stead to attract the European market.

He said: "We have a lot to offer in the city that will appeal to the taste of the Europeans."

Key attractions include the Selangor Fruits Valley, Sekinchan paddy fields, Sky Mirror in Kuala Selangor and Sunway Lagoon, the oldest and largest theme park in Selangor, according to Abdul Rashid.

Having received some 300,000 tourists from Europe in 2018, Abdul Rashid hopes to grow the market by at least 10 to 20 per cent this year.

To raise awareness of the destination, he said Tourism Selangor has beefed up its online presence through social media channels and will be participating in more events and tradeshow this year.

European buyers at ITB Berlin are seeing potential in Selangor, which is gaining traction among the European travellers, most of whom were previously more familiar with destinations like Langkawi.

While Maren Spohr, junior product manager Asia, Art of Travel Germany, has yet to see any interest from her clients into

Selangor, she sees potential in the exotic offerings there.

Spohr said: "The luxury travellers are interested in exclusive resorts which offer unique experiences so it will be a good selling point if we can find such offerings."

Neil Gregory, representative from Vavoyage in the UK, said: "Selangor would appeal largely to the special interest groups which forms a smaller percentage of the mass market."

"It would be better if there are a lot of new mass market developments," he suggested.

Overall, awareness of Malaysia is visibly drummed up this year, with Tourism Malaysia being the official partner country at ITB Berlin this year.

"I believe Malaysia's cultural uniqueness is a big draw for the European market," commented Mohamaddin Bin Haji Ketapi, minister of tourism, arts and culture for Malaysia. "As such the highlight of our presence at ITB this year will be the cultural aspects that we bring to the show."

Malaysia's participation as ITB partner country is deemed an instrumental step leading up to the *Visit Malaysia 2020* campaign, as Malaysia targets 30 million tourist arrivals and tourist receipts of RM100 billion (US\$24 billion) by 2020.

Meanwhile, the move is also part of Tourism Malaysia's efforts to rebuild promotions in Europe since Malaysia Airlines suspended flights to key European cities, Frankfurt, Amsterdam and Paris, in 2015 and 2016, while working to collaborate further with foreign airlines and foreign tour operators to sell the destination.



Abdul Rashid: natural offerings

Attracting more Europeans through football, technology

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

Linking up secondary destinations and opening access to more beaches in Indochina remain focal points for Bangkok Airways as it seeks to entrench its Indochina market position, revealed Puttipong Prasarttong-oso, president of Bangkok Airways.

The airline continues to introduce new connections to beach destinations in South-east Asia, including new services from Bangkok to Danang, Phu Quoc and Cam Ranh, and linking up its secondary hub of Chiang Mai with Hanoi.

Coming up next will be two new routes from Chiang Mai to Krabi (end-March) and Luang Prabang (early April).

Such a strategy has worked especially well for the European market, for which beaches remain a top draw for South-east Asian holidays, Puttipong added.

And while Vietnam beaches have emerged as hot destinations in recent years, Puttipong revealed that the airline is also studying the feasibility of launching services to Myanmar's untouched beaches in the south although the country is currently hampered by the lack of adequate airport facilities.

Meanwhile, codeshare partnerships remain a vital strategy for Bangkok Airways in courting the European market.

"We now have codeshare partnerships with 27 airlines, with Philippines Airlines being the latest. We expect to sign with a few more carriers this year," said Puttipong.

To further penetrate into the European market, Bangkok Airways has in 2018 sealed a two-year marketing partnership with Borussia Dortmund, one of Europe's top football teams, to leverage branding cooperation of both companies to tap

into a larger market reach in Asia, said Puttipong.

"Dortmund has a big fan following from Germany, so we joined up with this football club to promote Bangkok Airways and make the airline better known across Asia and Europe."

At the same time, Bangkok Airways' adoption of IATA's New Distribution Capability (NDC) standard has opened new opportunities and even geographic source markets for the carrier, vice president - sales Varong Israsena told the *Daily*.

"We were not able to offer our products onto OTAs just 12 months ago. NDC has now enabled us to build another plug to bridge our products to our digital market. We can now sell on OTAs," he said.

He added: "We have seen bookings coming from South Africa and Pakistan, which are new markets that we have never seen or sold in before."

"NDC has performed exceptionally well for us, and we were surprised too. However, we're still in the infancy stage of our digital transformation."

Bangkok Airways has unveiled plans to transform itself into a "fully digital integrated airline", with one of the aims focusing on selling more tickets online.

Last year, the carrier also developed its systems to be able to connect to OTAs such as eDreams, Ctrip, Mystifly and MakeMyTrip.



Puttipong: Germany a top market

Mamma mia, what a show!

From the show floor to dance floor, Accor goes all out to impress



Accor's Graham Wilson (seated in centre) and his team

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Karen Yue Group Editor

Xinyi Liang-Pholsena Editor, TTG Asia

S Puvaneswary Editor, Malaysia/Brunei

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Pamela Chow Reporter, Singapore

Rachel AJ Lee, Yixin Ng Sub Editor

Caleb Richard Lai Photographer

Redmond Sia, Goh Meng Yong Creative Designers

Lina Tan Editorial Assistant

SPECIAL PROJECTS DIVISION

Paige Lee Pei Qi Assistant Editor

CONTRIBUTORS

Marissa Carruthers, Prudence Lui, Julian Ryall,

Rosa Ocampo, Chadamas Chinmaneevong,

Feizal Samath, Rohit Kaul

SALES & MARKETING

Pierre Quek Publisher and Head Integrated Solutions

Ar-lene Lee Senior Business Manager

Fiona Chan Senior Business Manager

Jonathan Yap Senior Business Manager

Shirley Tan Senior Business Manager

Chelsea Huang Marketing Executive

Delia Ng Digital Marketing Strategist

Cheryl Lim Advertisement Administration Manager

Carol Cheng Assistant Manager Administration and Marketing

PUBLISHING SERVICES

Jonathan Wan Head, Operational Support Services

Kun Swee Qi Publishing Services Executive

Nur Hazirah Web Executive

Katherine Leong Circulation Executive

TTG ASIA MEDIA

Darren Ng Managing Director

For sales & marketing enquires, please contact traveltradesales@ttgasia.com



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Gallery

All bright smiles at ITB

Photos by Richard Caleb Lai



Qatar Airways' Niali Duffy



Tourism Fiji's Jane West (second from left)



The Samaya Seminyak Bali's Uly Mardiani and the Anvaya Beach Resort Bali's Denny Ermansyah



Macao Government Tourism Office's Cheng Wai Tong (centre)



Sri Lanka's tourism development and Christian religious affairs minister S John A E Amaratunga (fourth from left)



Triptease's Livi Bickford-Smith and Anastasia Reshetnikova



Diethelm Travel's Manfred Kurz, Elumbus Travel's Sylwia Wildburg and Reiner Sieper



Dion Tours' Vlachopoulos Petros, Mövenpick Resorts & Spa Jimbaran Bali's Horst Walther-Jones and Sofitel Hotels and Resorts' Shelly Darcy



Nepal Tourism Board's Udaya Bhattarai and Lila Bahadur Baniya



Air New Zealand's Lee Watson and Teo Da Silva



Government of Odisha's Aditya Prasad Padhi (fourth from left)



Thai princess Ubolratana Rajakanya graces the Thailand booth



Santhiya Resorts and Spas' Charlee Keardkumsap, Danny K Sukomol, Eyselken Turizm Oyku Simsek and Baris Simsek



Tourism Australia's Eva Seller, Kiki Loukas and Viola Munzar

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Jl. Raya Senggigi - Melaka Pemenang
Lombok Utara - Nusa Tenggara Barat - Indonesia
Ph: (+62-21) 2700027 (Jakarta Sales Office)
Email: lombok@thekayana.com

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In the spotlight

Making strides into the Maldives

Oliver Kluth, senior vice president of sales & business development at Riu Hotels & Resorts, shares with Paige Lee Pei Qi why the country will make an important addition to the Spanish hotel chain's portfolio

What is Riu Hotels doing to court European buyers at ITB Berlin this year?

To us, attending this show is an opportunity to present the group's news to the industry. This year we have seven openings scheduled in the Maldives, Madrid, Mallorca, Morocco and Bulgaria, and we have plans to renovate and extend seven of our hotels, including the Riu Palace Zanzibar.

We will be holding the great Riu party at Riu Plaza Berlin, which is now in its fourth edition and has become a tradition that brings together all of our partners and the top political leaders of the key destinations where we operate.

What's the one key message that Riu Hotels want to convey to ITB Berlin buyers?

One of the most important and exciting points for Riu this year is that we are opening our first two hotels in the Maldives: the four-star Riu Atoll with 264 rooms in May, and the five-star Riu Palace Maldivas with 176 rooms, which will open a few weeks later.

We have high hopes for these imminent openings with the unique nature of the destination, which is so different from everything else we offer at the moment.

We are also reopening the Riu Palace

Zanzibar, Tanzania, in June, following its renovation and extension to 200 rooms. This new destination, which we added recently to our portfolio, reinforces our commitment to destinations in the Indian Ocean, and our focus on new markets that differ from the chain's traditional ones.

Which new property or brand will appeal to the European market?

Our upcoming flagship in the European market is the Riu Plaza España, which is located in Spain's capital city, Madrid. This hotel represents the company's first steps in this city, and it is the first in the Riu Plaza category in Spain. For this hotel, the Spanish national market will make up at least 40 per cent of the hotel occupancy.

Which source markets from Europe are expected to do well for the group in 2019, and why?

The principal European markets are very important to Riu across all our destinations and they will continue to be so for the upcoming openings in Zanzibar and the Maldives. The UK, Germany and Benelux represent over 40 per cent of our global turnover and they are largely responsible for the success of our hotels in



We have high hopes for the imminent openings of our two hotels in Maldives with the unique nature of the destination, which is so different from everything else we offer at the moment.

Sri Lanka and Mauritius.

However, the main focus of our work in 2019 will be in China, India and other Asian countries, which will be key in marketing the new hotels in the Indian Ocean.

Which new markets/segments in Europe does Riu Hotels have on the radar?

All of our markets are important, both in Europe and other destinations. Currently, it is very important for us to maintain our position in Europe, and much more so if we consider the great response to our ho-

tels in Germany, Bulgaria, Spain, Ireland and Portugal, which we will be extending over the next year with the opening in London – our first hotel in the UK.

What is Riu Hotels doing to stand out amid strong market competition?

The most important thing is the quality of our services. It is a maxim for us, and we take it as our duty to our guests to offer the highest possible quality, and to always maintain our level of service across all of our hotels and destinations.

Remaking an island destination

Lynette Ang, chief marketing officer of Sentosa Development Corporation, tells Paige Lee Pei Qi how a trio of new hotels will transform the accommodation scene for Singapore's holiday island

What is Sentosa doing to court the European market?

Sentosa's presence at ITB Berlin is part of our continuous effort to extend our popularity beyond traditional regional markets, and welcome more guests from longhaul markets such as Europe, America and Oceania.

Europe is a market that we have not fully tapped, and we see the growth potential for both the leisure and MICE markets. Thus, as we look to grow our global visitorship, Sentosa Development Corporation (SDC) has increased our focus on courting the MICE segment, as well as our presence in global trade shows.

Participating at ITB Berlin will enable us to reach a global audience and raise top-of-mind awareness of Sentosa in longhaul markets, while also allowing us to establish strategic alliances with key partners in Europe.

Which were the top performing markets from Europe in 2018?

Germany is our top performing market, followed by France. With the traction that we have gained so far among visitors from these countries, we are continuing our focus on these markets within Europe.

Which key European markets is Sentosa targeting for 2019?

We also see great potential in the Eastern European market. Looking at tourism

figures to Singapore in its entirety, Europe was the third fastest-growing market for Singapore, with the strongest growth numbers coming from Eastern Europe countries. As such, we also have our sights on Eastern Europe, from where we are beginning to see small MICE groups travelling to Singapore.

What new offerings on Sentosa will appeal to the European market?

We have observed that European guests tend to spend more time on Sentosa, with many of them staying over for a night. With up to 18 hotels, we have accommodation that caters to different needs and budgets.

Most notably, three new hotels under the Far East Hospitality umbrella will be opening their doors to guests from April this year. They bring to the island an additional 839 rooms across three hotels – Village Hotel at Sentosa, The Outpost Hotel and The Barracks Hotel – adding to the existing 3,500-plus rooms in Sentosa.

On the leisure front, this boosts our appeal as Singapore's holiday island. In addition, the four-star Village Hotel at Sentosa creates more options for the mid-tier market with its value-for-money accommodation.

The addition of more rooms and the new Events Centre also gives us greater capabilities in accommodating larger MICE groups and conferences, therefore allow-

ing us to host more corporate clients as well as Sentosa-only or Sentosa-led itineraries.

What about the attractions?

Our nature trails, while not necessarily new to Sentosa, also appeal to European travellers and their preference for new experiences, activities and nature when travelling.

With this in mind, we're currently exploring working with the Singapore Environment Council to develop new nature trail experiences and learning journeys in Sentosa – an experience that will appeal to not just European guests, but tourists from other markets and locals as well.

Europe is a market that we have not fully tapped, and we see the growth potential for both the leisure and MICE markets.

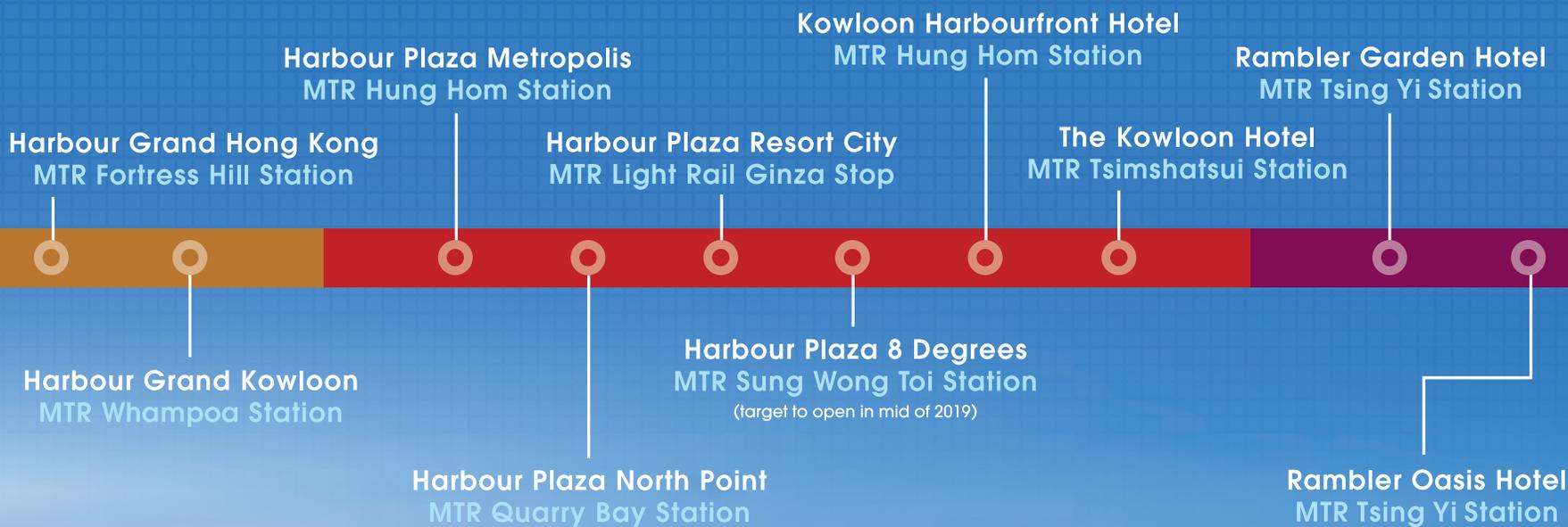


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Report Beach resorts

Coastal escapes

A look at beach resort destinations that are making waves in South-east Asia's tourism development scene

Koh Yao Noi, Phuket

PHUKET: NOT PURELY BEACHES

Phuket has largely built its stature as a beach holiday island, but it is increasingly transforming into an urbanised holiday destination, shaped by the forces of growing airlift, surging visitor numbers and changing source markets.

"A definite shift in geographic markets over the past 10 years", with China, Russia and Australia making up bigger market shares than before, has led to "rising demand for non-beach centric activities", according to a recent report by C9 Hotelworks.

Michael Ayling, general manager of Blue Tree Phuket – a US\$40 million water park and lagoon destination opening in early 2019 – thinks the attractions sector is still underserved in Phuket, as the island has comparatively fewer water parks than Pattaya and Hua Hin.

Besides Blue Tree Phuket, other upcoming themed tourism attractions include Vana Nava Water Park, Entertainment Park, and Aquaria at the new Central Festival mall extension.

The arrival of more theme parks will enable Phuket to have a stronger year-round appeal, said Ayling, as the focus of tourist activities can turn inland during the monsoon months from May to October.

At the same time, the arrival of Middle Eastern airlines bringing more direct air connections to Phuket is already turning the island into a year-round destination, attracting not just the regional market but European visitors too.

Matthew Hindmarch, director of hotels and resorts, Aksara Collection, noted: "The Scandinavians are coming year-round now thanks to growing air connectivity. A traditional high season market like Denmark is starting to travel year-round."

Following the recent expansion of the Phuket International Airport, the Airports of Thailand has announced a US\$1.8 billion second airport in Phang Nga, just over the Sarasin Bridge. C9 expects Phuket's improving infrastructure to create a broader Greater Phuket Tourism Triangle that includes Phang Nga to add diversity and refresh Phuket's maturing global appeal.

However, industry players warn of room oversupply in Phuket, which is already showing strains of overdevelopment, especially in Patong Beach.

"It's getting difficult to sell Phuket," said Richard Brouwer, CEO of Khiri Travel, as the deluge of hotel development and visitors have made Phuket into "a prime beach destination for the volume market".

David Kevan, partner and product person of UK-based Chic Locations, agreed: "Phuket doesn't need any more hotels – it has enough."

According to C9, Phuket has a total of 1,774 tourist accommodation establishments with 84,427 keys as of 1Q2018, including registered and unregistered properties.

Meanwhile, the popular holiday island sees no sign of abatement in its still-expanding hotel supply, including a Mandarin Oriental coming in 2022. – **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

CEBU: OVERTOURISM RISK AMID GROWING POPULARITY

More hotels and resorts will dot Cebu's Mactan Island over the next several years, with investors and visitors lured by the destination's growing popularity and better accessibility.

Already boasting the biggest cluster of upmarket hotels and resorts including a Shangri-La, Movenpick, Plantation Bay and Maribago, Cebu will soon welcome the 271-key Dusit Thani Mactan Cebu and the 250-key Sheraton Mactan Resort in 2019, plus upmarket local hospitality brands like Aruga, Grafix, Ayala Land's Seagrove in the pipeline.

Mactan, already known as a luxury beach destination, will undoubtedly draw more tourists with the July opening of Mactan-Cebu International Airport's (MCIA) resort-themed Terminal 2.

With better airport infrastructure and an array of properties that other destinations lack, Cebu was the top alternative destination in lieu of Boracay, which was closed for a six-month rehabilitation in 2018.

Indeed, Margie Munsayac, vice president – sales and marketing, Bluewater Resorts, confirmed that rooms in Mactan are difficult to secure in Mactan during the period of Boracay's closure.

Mactan attracts mainly Asians, specifically North Asians, for stays of three to four nights.

Jid Velasco, director of sales and marketing, Plantation Bay Resort and Spa in Mactan, shared that there's almost no distinction between the high and low seasons for the property due to the steady stream of guests year-round.

But with hotel and resort developments centred in Mactan's Puerto Engano area, the destination's "carrying capacity is becoming a real concern for the industry", said Jojo Clemente, president of Tourism Congress of the Philippines (TCP), who also urged a study to address the possibility of overcapacity and overdevelopment

in Mactan.

Clemente, who became an advocate for establishing the carrying capacity of tourist destinations in the Philippines following Boracay's closure, opined that Mactan can still accommodate "a few more resorts" to maintain its current arrivals but certainly "not too much" to avoid strains on the island's resources. – **Rosa Ocampo**

BINTAN: LUXURY SHEEN GROWING

Bintan has long been a weekend getaway for city slickers from Singapore, but few would associate the Indonesian island as a real luxury destination because of a perceived lack of infrastructure to cater to the upper upscale market, and little by way of a concerted and coordinated effort among its players to market it as one.

This is steadily changing as more high-end accommodation and facilities open on the island, their own marketing and promotions helping to lift the island's high-end image to a global audience and, perhaps eventually, creating a critical mass needed to trumpet Bintan jointly and consistently as a glamorous getaway.

The presence of fresh company could be good news for Banyan Tree Holdings, the swashbuckler which led the way in the luxury market by opening Banyan Tree Bintan in 1994 in Lagoi, an area that boasts pristine coastline, tropical jungles and unspoiled natural landscapes.

Then came The Sanchaya, which entered Bintan in December 2014 and paved the way for a new era of uber luxury on the island as an exclusive beachfront estate featuring 29 villas and suites. Its four-bedroom Vanda Villa is said to be Bintan's only US\$10,000-a-night villa.

The question is, beyond more luxury accommodations, what is actually luxurious about Bintan?

Just as Banyan Tree Bintan peddled the idea of a world-class retreat when it opened – which obviously sells as the resort is still standing after 24 years – The Sanchaya's estate manager Magnus Olovson too believes in "restorative" luxury.

Said Olovson: "New York has its Hamptons, Sydney the Blue Mountains and Rome its Naples (for weekend escapes)... In Singapore, Bintan has emerged as such a retreat, proving to be a major drawing card for the well heeled. Bintan is also an ideal go-to retreat for those wishing to temporarily escape bustling Jakarta.

Bintan Resorts International spokesperson Iris Kok also pointed out that the island has more than just luxury accommodation to cater to luxe travellers. Citing Treasure Bay Bintan as an example, she said: "Treasure Bay Bintan has gotten so

much social media attention and is infamous for the appealing shade of blue of its 6.3ha Crystal Lagoon, South-east Asia's first and largest recreational sea-water lagoon."

The newest luxury kid on the block in Bintan is Cenizaro Hotels & Resorts, a Singapore-based group which owns The Sheraton Towers Singapore, and owns and operates its own upmarket hotel brand, The Residence, with properties in Tunisia, Mauritius, Zanzibar and Maldives.

Cenizaro shows its confidence in Bintan as an upmarket destination not only by fielding the latest Residence there, but in a greenfield site in the east of the island, far away from Lagoi which is in the north.

Andy Xie, executive director of The Residence Bintan, commented: "Bintan has grown a lot in terms of visibility with (government) initiatives such as the Batam-Bintan Crossborder (an event to develop the Singapore and Malaysian markets for Batam and Bintan) last year.

"We believe there will be many forthcoming initiatives that will further put Bintan on the map, which is why we have also chosen to open a property there." – **Mimi Hudoyo**

PHU QUOC: A NEW STAR ARISES

Vietnam's emerging island of Phu Quoc is welcoming a crop of luxury properties, attracting a new tier of traveller to its shores.

Phu Quoc has planted itself on the global tourist radar and is gearing up to be a major player in the country's tourism stakes, welcoming an increasing number of visitors and development.

According to the latest figures from Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, in 2017 the island received nearly two million visitors, a 35 percent year-on-year increase. This figure is expected to rise, with Phu Quoc International Airport undergoing an upgrade to handle five million visitors annually by 2020 and seven million by 2030.

The latest wave in Phu Quoc's rise has seen a swathe of luxury resorts land on the island, transforming it from a relatively unknown spot on the South-east Asia backpacker trail to a sought-after destination.

The opening of the 459-room Phu Quoc Long Beach Resort in June is among the latest of international brands launching on Phu Quoc.

JW Marriott Phu Quoc Emerald Bay opened in 4Q2017, while Novotel Phu



JW Marriott Phu Quoc

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HSIPAW

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Report Beach resorts

Quoc opened in 2016 as part of five-star Sonasea Villas & Resorts tourism complex, Vinpearl Phu Quoc complex, comprising a five-star hotel and villas, amusement park, golf course and a wildlife safari.

In the luxury pipeline is BIM Group's Regent Residences Phu Quoc, which will be the island's first six-star resort when it opens in 2020.

While the raft of luxury properties plug the current shortage of availability during peak months, Linh Le, group managing director of Asia DMC, expresses fears of Phu Quoc losing its natural charm.

"Once built, the developments will establish Phu Quoc as an international destination," he said. "However, natural beach landscapes will be replaced with manicured beach landscapes belonging privately to resorts and dedicated to resort guests."

Atilla Mesut Erda, chief operating officer at Fusion Resort Phu Quoc, which opened in mid-2017, added it is vital the island's natural appeal is preserved by developers.

She said: "The local community and stakeholders need to ensure Phu Quoc does not lose its traditional charm, clean environment, pristine beaches, and the friendly spirit of the locals." – **Marissa Carruthers**

DESARU: SUNNY DAYS AHEAD FOR AN INTEGRATED DESTINATION

Desaru Coast is fast shaping up as a tourism hotspot in Malaysia, as the integrated destination in South-eastern Johor welcomes a host of developments and attractions.

Developed by Desaru Development Holdings One, Desaru Coast is home to four hotels and resorts, two world-class golf courses, a themed water park, a retail village as well as a conference centre.

The destination recently welcomed the 365-room Hard Rock Desaru Coast, which will be followed in 2019 by The Westin Desaru Coast Resort, Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas and One&Only Desaru Coast, which will offer 42 suites, two luxury suites and an exclusive four-bedroom villa.

Desaru Coast Adventure Waterpark, which opened in July, is also an anchor attraction, offering unique rides such as the first-ever water coaster in the region and one of the largest wave pools in the world.

Golfing is a key recreational attraction in the destination. The Els Club Desaru Coast comprises two manicured golf courses that feature 45 holes in total; Ocean Course, a 27-hole golf course designed by four-time major winner Ernie Els; and Valley Course, an 18-hole golf course designed by Els in collaboration with major champion, Vijay Singh.

Roslina Arbak, CEO, Desaru Development Holdings One, said key foreign markets targeted are Singaporeans as well as tourists travelling to Malaysia via Singapore, Indonesia, China, Hong Kong and India.

She added: "While our primary focus is to attract holidaymakers, we are also mindful that Malaysia is growing to be one of the most preferred business events destinations for foreign delegates."

"Further, we believe Desaru Coast, with its integrated destination offerings, situated along a pristine 17km beachfront, is well placed to capture the growing "bleisure" market, benefiting from its unique mix of corporate and leisure facilities and strategic location," said Arbak.

– **S Puvaneswary**



Desaru Coast



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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

All-out efforts for a good show

Inbound players are optimistic that Malaysia's increased exposure will deliver more opportunities. By S Puvaneswary



Wayang kulit, a traditional shadow puppet show in Malaysia

With Malaysia being the partner country for ITB Berlin 2019, the launch of a new marketing campaign and a bigger-than-usual seller contingent, expectations are high that the destination will benefit from the greater exposure at this year's show.

Zulkafli Yahya, senior director, international promotion division (Americas/Europe/Oceania) with Tourism Malaysia, said: "We hope our participation as ITB's

partner country will generate further tourist interest in Malaysia from Europe, especially Germany and its surrounding countries."

As well, Tourism Malaysia will launch the new *Visit Malaysia 2020* campaign for the Europe market at ITB Berlin, as part of its strategy to "hard-sell" the country this year rather than "creating awareness" of the destination, shared Zulkafli.

Having generated sales and contracts value of about RM138.2 million (US\$33.5

million) at ITB Berlin 2017, Zulkafli revealed that Tourism Malaysia is now targeting a higher ROI of RM325 million from this year's edition.

In a show of support, the Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (MATTA) will be participating in ITB Berlin with Tourism Malaysia. There will be 30 inbound agents attending, up from 20 last year.

"More participating agents mean more products and new packages – ranging

from ecotourism, culture, heritage and rural tourism – will be showcased," said KL Tan, president, MATTA.

The "greater exposure" expected from the combined efforts of Malaysia being the partner country of ITB Berlin and a large Malaysian presence at this show is what led Urban Rhythms Tours, Adventure and Travel to participate in ITB Berlin 2019, the company's director Nigel Wong told the *Daily*.

Manfred Kurz, managing director, Diethelm Travel Malaysia, opined that being the partner country of ITB Berlin 2019 will help Malaysia generate more awareness among Europe's key decision-makers attending the show.

"Post ITB, the government has to keep the momentum going by organising fam trips for agents and media, and get the local private sector to assist," he urged.

Meanwhile, positive developments in the industry are boding well for Malaysia's strengthening appeal among European travellers.

Kurz pointed out that the thrice-weekly Frankfurt-Kuala Lumpur service launched by Condor Air in November 2018 has gained traction, being the only direct connection from Germany.

"With this new air connection, we started offering new packages and products for the middle-class market from Europe, in addition to (packages for) the higher-income brackets which include more three and four-star accommodation," he said.

A rising trend among German-speaking markets in recent years, noted Kurz, is the growing demand for CSR programmes, which have traditionally appealed more to European MICE groups.

"In order to cater to the growing interest in CSR programmes from the FIT segment, we will work with established tour operators in Germany to promote more (programmes that revolve around)

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.

The Rainbow Skywalk at The Top

Perched 249m above ground on The Top in Komtar, the tallest building in George Town, The Rainbow Skywalk offers panoramic views of Penang's capital while a 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 mystery island will emerge for sev-

eral days each month before being submerged underwater for the remaining days. This spot only surfaces twice each month – during the first and 15th of lunar month, and four days before and after the dates, when sea levels are low. Located in Kuala Selangor, Sky Mirror is also home to a multitude of marine life.

Cessna Caravan Ex flight

This aircraft offers a bird's eye-view of the exotic sights and colours of the 99 islands of Langkawi. The Cessna Caravan Ex aircraft can accommodate up to 10 people, and 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.

W Kuala Lumpur

The first W hotel in Malaysia features 150 guest rooms and suites, including two Wow suites and the Extreme Wow Suite, measuring



The Rainbow Skywalk at The Top

over 520m². F&B concepts include contemporary Cantonese restaurant Yen; all-day dining restaurant Flock; Woobar; and the Wet Deck pool bar.

Mövenpick Hotel & Convention Centre KLIA

Located just a few minutes from KLIA and KLIA2, this hotel features 333

Market trends for 2019



Kingston Khoo

Director of sales and marketing,
Mutiara Taman Negara

FIT travellers are getting younger compared with five years ago. They are mainly in their 30s and 40s now compared with the average age of 50 a few years back. Travellers these days are constantly on the look out for Instagrammable scenery and moments which they can share.



KL Tan

Director,
Borneo Trails Tours & Travel, Sabah

There is growing interest in conservation. We see an increasing demand for tree-planting projects and local conservation work. These European tourists are willing to stay in basic accommodation in rural areas to participate in CSR projects and give meaning to their holidays.

volunteer tourism in Sabah and Sarawak," shared Kurz.

Another bright spot, according to Saini Vermeulen, executive director, Within Earth Holidays, lies in Desaru Coast in Johor.

"I met with some German outbound agents in December and they were keen to learn more about what Desaru Coast had to offer. It is a very new beach destination which has garnered a lot of interest. We think it works well when combined with Singapore," Vermeulen noted.

rooms and suites, and leisure offerings including five F&B venues, separate male and female swimming pools, fitness centres and spa facilities that include outdoor spa pods.

The property boasts extensive meetings and event facilities as well.

Star Wars: Secrets of the Empire

Developed by Resorts World Genting and The Void in collaboration with ILMx-LAB, the first-of-its-kind hyper-reality experience immerses guests into an alternate universe, allowing them to walk free 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.

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.

Mohamad Zaidi Photography/istock



Fishing boat in Tioman

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Destination Cambodia

Tourism scene shapes up

With more diverse offerings, Cambodia is gaining ground as a high-end, mono-destination. By Marissa Carruthers



BlueOrange Studio/Shutterstock

European visitors are increasingly opting for Koh Rong (pictured) over a crowded Sihanoukville

The swelling range of tourism products in Cambodia could spark a bounce-back in German-speaking arrivals, but challenges in the country's supply of tour guides are threatening to hamper growth potentials.

According to the latest figures from Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism, German visitors took a 18.8 per cent year-on-year (YOY) tumble to 86,975 arrivals, as of October 2018. Germany stood as Cambodia's third strongest European source market.

During the same time, overall arrivals from Europe declined 5.9 per cent YOY. In contrast, Chinese visitors boomed and remained Cambodia's top source market, as

overall arrivals increased by 11.1 per cent to over 5.4 million in the first 11 months of 2018.

Despite the fall in figures in 2018 – a year that saw Cambodia hold elections in July – industry players are hopeful about the performance of European markets this year, with new products in the destination potentially stimulating growth.

Miles Gravett, general manager of Khiri Cambodia, said: "We are generally very optimistic about the German market, (which is one) with a large wealthy population of travel lovers."

Notably, Cambodia's growing luxury scene is expected to capture high-end European arrivals, predicts Steve Lidgley,

general manager at Travel Asia a la Carte.

He believes more of this segment will start opting for Cambodia over Thailand and Vietnam, while increasing their length of stay.

New openings – promising to entice high-end European travellers to stay longer in Cambodia and consider the country as a mono-destination – include Shinta Mani Wild – The Bensley Collection in the Koh Kong jungle, as well as Six Senses Krabey and Alila Koh Russey private islands off Sihanoukville, said Adrien Pons, director of sales and marketing at Rosewood Phnom Penh.

Meanwhile, such new products could also help Cambodia's emerging destinations absorb the shift in European traffic away from Sihanoukville.

Andrew Brouwer, product and communications manager at Hanuman Travel, shared that the mass Chinese development in Sihanoukville has led to a "crash" in European visitors to the coastal town in the last two years.

However, many have shifted to surrounding islands like Koh Rong, which has seen an expansion in the mid- to top-range accommodation options.

He added that upgrading and expansion work at Sihanoukville and Siem Reap international airports, and increase in flight connections between the two, also makes Cambodia more appealing to the European market as a single destination.

In spite of these developments, the country's shortage of German-speaking tour guides is posing as an impediment to growth. Brouwer said German-speaking guides are already at a premium in Siem Reap.

He explained: "They are usually booked up months in advance. There's not enough so they can pick and choose their bookings and go where they know the tips are bigger."

To unlock growth potentials in Ger-

Market trends for 2019



Steve Lidgley

General manager, Travel Asia a la Carte

German clients like immersive tours and are not afraid to get off the beaten track. It's very important to offer experiential travel (for this market), which can mean simple stops at the roadside to see local life where our tour guides can interact and translate, up to exclusive private destination dinners.

Miles Garrett

General manager, Khiri Cambodia

I find most German-speaking clients to be more adventurous and willing to go with the flow (compared to) many other European travellers. I think the opening up of the islands for mainstream travellers who want more comfortable accommodation, ecotourism in natural destinations, and the sustainability focus, are helpful in developing the German-speaking market.

man-speaking markets, Khiri has taken proactive steps such as employing better German-speaking guides, increasing sales outreach in Germany and gaining more understanding of the market.

An optimistic Gravett remarked: "Internal changes are driving positive changes in the German-speaking market."

What's new

Memoir Palace Resort & Spa

Bringing a new concept in accommodation to Siem Reap, this luxury resort blends Khmer and French architecture and design, with colonial villas surrounding a gargantuan lagoon pool.

The property offers 88 suites, including eight royal suites with a separate living area and private plunge pool, butler service, a range of meeting rooms and ballroom, three F&B outlets, an in-house spa with a sauna and steam room, as well as a kids' club.

Six Senses Krabey Island

Located on the island of Krabey, off the coast of Sihanoukville, the resort comprises 40 villas, each with a private plunge pool, set around the naturally landscaped 12ha island.

Besides the exclusive Retreat and Reserve villas with its own mini wine cellars, Six Senses Krabey Island also boasts an elevated sunset bar that offers pristine views at dusk, two restaurants, an ice cream parlour, outdoor fitness circuit, open air cinema and sky observatory. Water activities, island hopping tours and boat trips are also available.



From left: Alila Villas Koh Russey; Shinta Mani Wild – The Bensley Collection

Shinta Mani Wild – The Bensley Collection

This resort adds a slice of the high life to the Cardamom Mountains. Elevating the glamping concept, the private nature sanctuary nestled in the heart of the jungle houses 15 safari-style tents dotted along a 1.5km river stretch.

Activities include jungle treks, wildlife spotting and accompanying rangers who protect the forest from poachers and illegal loggers on their grounds. The Landing Zone Bar and Waterfall Restaurant serve locally-inspired



food, while the Boulders Spa offers a range of treatments.

Hanchey Bamboo Resort

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

The resort, which sits atop Hanchey Hill about 20km from Kampong Cham town, boasts 10 bungalows, four dorms for six people, a meditation centre, restaurant, large

swimming pool with a bar, and a massage house. Nestled in the heart of the Cambodian countryside, activities include bike rides and visits to nearby temples, waterfalls and islands.

The Heritage Walk

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

Alila Villas Koh Russey

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

Destination **Maldives**

From exclusivity to inclusivity

As the destination opens up to more segments, traditional ones are not weaning. By Feizal Samath



A seaplane flies above a Maldivian island

Arrivals from Germany to the Maldives look set to keep its growth momentum, as the market's traditional preferences hold steady while more affordable accommodation options open the destination up to new segments.

Overall, the German-speaking market of Germany, Austria and Switzerland have seen slow but positive growth every year. While its growth is modest relative to other source markets, Germany represents one of the most resilient feeders for the Maldives.

Germany is the Maldives' second largest source market after China. Arrivals from Germany grew by 3.5 per cent year-on-year to reach 106,660 in the January-November 2018 period.

It seems demand could be further stimulated as the Maldives welcomes more big hotel chains and mid-market options.

"This makes a holiday in the Maldives affordable, especially for young couples, (but also for) friends or young families.

The winners are the three- and four-star hotels, while five- and six-star ones are having a hard time," according to Stéphanie Appenzeller, senior sales manager, Europe at the The Small Maldives Island, which has two properties in the Maldives.

Even as more affordable options open up, some maintain that five-star accommodation remain popular among Germans. Thomas Meier, senior vice president-operations Asia for Minor Hotels, said: "Our five hotels have each seen an increase in guests from these markets during 2018, especially Anantara Kihavah with an increase of 22 per cent versus 2017, and Anantara Veli of 55 per cent year-on-year."

While new resort categories are appealing to Germans, Andrew Ashmore, CCO at Coco Collection Hotels & Resorts/Sunland Hotels, said the German market remains "very traditional, brochurised and seek the peaceful style".

At Coco's Maldives resorts, which range from affordable to five-star, German guests have been steadily coming in,

What's new

Conrad Maldives Rangali Island

The Conrad Maldives Rangali Island, home to the world's first underwater restaurant, now allows travellers to sleep beneath the sea.

Dubbed The Muraka (which means coral), the underwater residence stretches over two levels and can accommodate nine guests.

John Jacob Astor Estate

Spanning 1,540m², The John Jacob Astor Estate at the St Regis Maldives Vommuli is the largest water villa in the Maldives.

The two-story villa with three bedrooms has a cinema, a living and dining room, spa treatment rooms, an Olympic-sized infinity swimming pool, a gym, a kitchen, and multiple decks. Opening onto the terrace, the palatial living room is distinguished by its lofty ceilings and floor-to-ceiling glass doors.

Beach Bubble tent

The Finolhu resort on Baa Atoll has unveiled a visually captivating Beach Bubble



From top: Conrad Maldives Rangali Island; Finolhu resort's Beach Bubble tent

tent – the first of its kind in the country.

Located in a secluded spot along a beach, the Beach Bubble is available only for one-night experiences under the stars, from sunset to sunrise. The interiors feature custom-fitted wooden floors and bespoke furnishings, and a separate adjoining bathroom.

The Dream Eclipse experience costs US\$600++ per couple, including one night in the Beach Bubble, a private beach barbecue, and breakfast, by the beach.

and stay for 10 to 14 nights, the longest among its feeder markets, Ashmore told the *Daily*.

Tracy Neureuther, director, Mosaic Tourism Consulting, said: "For Coco Collection, which we represent, the German-speaking market remains a very strong feeder with all key tour operators (recording) increasing figures."

She added: "In general, positives speaking for the increase are airlift into the destination – with a good choice of direct connections from key cities, as well as the excellent coverage via Emirates."

Meanwhile, Minor's Meier pointed to an emerging preference for half-board accommodation among the German market. "Luxury clients do not want full board or all-inclusive. Half board ensures they retain the freedom to choose while on their holiday (while still) helping with budget planning at the time of booking."

This contrasts with the observations of Howard Brohier, general manager of Diethelm Travel Maldives, who noted a growing popularity of resorts offering all-inclusive meal plans, complete with dine-around options and mini-bar inclusions.

Said Brohier: "In the past, all-inclusive

Market trends for 2019



Suresh Dissanayake

Assistant vice president – sales & marketing, Heritance Aarah, Adaaran Resorts

Young travellers are looking for experiences, spend fewer nights compared to the older generation, and prefer to combine their holiday with another destination.

(There is reason to be optimistic in 2019) with tourism bodies in the Maldives having planned a series of activities, starting with participation at ITB Berlin, in order to create more visibility in German-speaking markets.

meal packages lacked certain inclusions and were not offered by many five-star properties. However, as resorts add more value, we see the popularity of such resorts growing immensely."



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Destination Indonesia

Support drummed up

Bookings from Germany have taken a hit due to recent disasters, but optimism is high that Indonesia will soon recover from the doldrums. By Mimi Hudoyo



Sasak musicians perform the traditional *gendang beleq* (big drum) dance in Lombok

The recent string of natural disasters that have hit Indonesia has likely dealt a blow to forward bookings from Germany, which are unusually slow for 1Q2019, but the Indonesian trade is hopeful that business will pick up over the course of the year.

Adjie Wahjono, operations manager of Aneka Kartika Tours & Travel Services, said: “We are seeing a slow start to the year, especially for FIT bookings. Usually, bookings for summer start coming in November and December, but (as of January) we have yet to see any surge in bookings.”

To stimulate bookings, Adjie said some

of the agency’s partners have thrown in early-bird discounts.

Marika Gloekler, executive manager product & contracting of Go Vacation Indonesia, also saw a slow first quarter, attributing this to the lack of booking confidence due to recent natural disasters.

On the other hand, she is seeing “a big climb (in bookings) for travel in April onwards”. She added: “This could mean that travellers are not cancelling but merely postponing their trips (to Indonesia).”

Moreover, improving infrastructure and new products in the country are expected to attract the interest of German-speaking markets.

Umberto Cadamuro, COO inbound of Pacto, said: “The new Ayana Komodo Resort is capable of generating renewed interest (in Komodo), and we look forward the opening of the new airport for Yogyakarta, a destination that shows signs of enormous growth especially from Europe”

New Yogyakarta International Airport (NYIA), currently under construction to replace the existing Adisutjipto International Airport, is targeted to be fully operational by the end of 2019 with an annual handling capacity of 15 million passengers.

With a runway 3,250m long and 45m wide, as well as four jet bridges and parking stands with 23 slots, NYIA will be able to receive aircraft such as Boeing 777, Boeing 787, Airbus A330 and Airbus A350.

Overland travel in Indonesia is improving, with Java now connected by toll roads from the east to west end, cutting down overland travel time significantly.

Adjie shared: “Tour operator partners have also been monitoring the development of road constructions. One partner has been continuously checking on the progress of (toll roads) across Java.”

While Herman Rukmanadi, managing director of Bhara Tours and Travel, noted “increasing enquiries and demand for East Indonesia, unfortunately connectivity is still an issue in some places”.

Currency movements and value-for-money products and services are also lifting optimism of longhaul bookings picking up.

Umberto said: “The key (draw) for German-speaking countries is the exceptional value for money that we have been able to provide throughout 2018 given

the great accommodation options available for any market segment, as well as the very favourable euro exchange rate against the rupiah that made us stand positively against other countries in South-east Asia.”

Upbeat about bookings from German speaking countries, Umberto said: “While it has been a great surprise to see that Austria is showing a renewed interest in Indonesia as a holiday destination, the lion’s share is as usual going to Germany with a nearly 26 per cent increase in 2018 (compared to 2017).

“For 2019 we already record a +22 per cent on the books for Germany, so it looks like we will have another great year ahead.”

Market trends for 2019



Leonardus Nyoman
Director, Flores Exotic Tours

For Flores and Komodo, culture and adventure travel continue to be hit – but travellers are (becoming more interested in) sustainable tourism. They want to use refillable bottles instead of plastic ones, for example. They are paying more attention to supporting the local economy through local empowerment.

Siggi Neuhaus
General manager, Caraka Travelindo

For Sulawesi, where our company is based, we have seen growth in demand for tailor-made, special interest tours such as adventure and bird watching. So while arrivals may be less, the high-yielding, niche markets are up for Sulawesi.

What's new

Ayana Komodo Resort

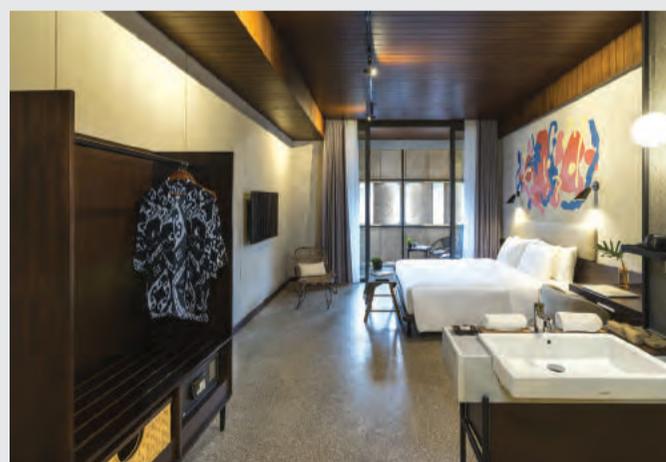
Ayana Komodo Resort has opened in Labuan Bajo, Flores, the gateway to the Komodo Marine National Park. The 205-key luxury property has seven F&B outlets serving Indonesian, Asian, Japanese and international cuisines. Facilities include spa, gym, swimming pools, kids club, private beach and jetty. The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

Artotel Haniman Ubud

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

Manarai Beach House Bali

Indonesian 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 offers two swimming pools, music and entertainment, and a selection of international and local dishes at its F&B outlets.



From left: Artotel Haniman Ubud; Ayana Komodo Resort

Como Uma Canggu

The new Como Uma Canggu is situated on Bali’s southern coast – a beachfront destination offering 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 a key attraction in the location, the resort dangles surf lessons for novices to get 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.

Swiss-Belhotel Pangkalpinang

Swiss-Belhotel International has opened an upscale property on Bangka Island. The new-build 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 which can accommodate up to 875 guests.





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Report: Hotel chains

New lifestyle in making

Lifestyle hotel brands are an emerging trend in Asia's hospitality sector, as hospitality operators big and small and even players from outside the field roll out new brands to accommodate the changing preferences of millennials and Gen Z. Xinyi Liang-Pholsena checks in on the new trend



From left: Muji Hotel Beijing's book lounge; a room in Hotel Koe

The rise of a millennial generation and Airbnb have unleashed many changes in the global hospitality sector, with hospitality players recognising the need to offer more than just a hotel room but a lifestyle experience for today's travellers.

Enter lifestyle hotels, a trend that is gaining popularity among global travellers and the hospitality sector alike, with most major hotel companies having jumped onto the bandwagon to launch new brands that are ostensibly targeted at the millennial demographic.

A CBRE report defines a lifestyle hotel as one that has many of the characteristics of a boutique hotel, with a strong emphasis on being creative and innovative, in addition to having the potential to be replicated and rolled out across the globe.

Starwood Hotels & Resorts' W Hotels was widely accepted among industry practitioners as the first mainstream lifestyle hotel when the brand was launched in New York in 1998. Similar brands and concepts have since popped up in the US and Europe, and Asia is now beginning to see the proliferation of lifestyle hotel brands too.

"Most international hotel operators have started rolling out their lifestyle concepts in a significant way", said Sashi Rajan, senior vice president - strategic advisory and asset management, Asia at JLL Hotels & Hospitality Group, attracted by Asia's large millennial base which are expected to make up a strong potential market for lifestyle hotels.

Marriott's Aloft, Hyatt's Andaz and InterContinental Hotels Group's Indigo are clear examples of hospitality giants' foray into Asia's lifestyle hotel space, noted Rajan, while international boutique brands like The Standard, SBE, Dream Hotels and ACE have either expanded or announced their intentions to venture into the region.

What comes after W

But lifestyle hotels are not an entirely new

phenomenon for Asia, industry watchers pointed out.

"You can call it LAW or Life after W," Bill Barnett, founder and managing director of Phuket-based C9 Hotelworks said. "W was a game changer, but in Asia groups here already know hospitality so the development of groups like Alila, Upper House, etc, have cut the institutional mold," opined Barnett.

"In Thailand, 137 Pillars, Sala and Burasari are all expanding their non-standardised approach to good success. Indonesia is another exciting space – Artotel is one and Potato Head with Katama and other new offerings in the works."

Barnett added: "Design and lifestyle hotels are now across most Asian markets and strong performers but it's not so much a standalone trend but a reflection of changes in travel taste. Be it in technology, design, food, fashion or social media, it's now about getting out of the box."

Major hospitality companies in Thailand have also joined the lifestyle fray. Onyx Hospitality Group entered into a partnership with UK-based Yoo Hotels & Resorts to grow its footprint into the lifestyle hotels segment, with the first two Yoo Asia hotels expected to open in Phuket and Bali in 2019.

Dusit International has unveiled Asai, its "millennial minded" brand which has already found management contracts inked for properties in Bangkok, Cebu and Yangon.

Singapore has been a hotbed of activity for lifestyle hotel brands in recent years, including M Social, whose eclectic and playful style was the brainchild of famed designer Philippe Starck; and Yotel, a capsule-style hotel which appeals to tech and design fans with its guest service robots and futuristic Tron-like aesthetics.

Coming up next in mid-2020 will be The Clan – a 324-room property targeting millennials and tech-savvy travellers – which is touted as Far East Hospitality's (FEH) answer to the "new demand for

hotels that offer an optimal combination of value for money, quality hospitality service, stylish design, and a strong sense of place", said Arthur Kiong, CEO of FEH.

"Guests will be treated like a member of an exclusive club that is reflected through the hotel's highly customised services. These include special privileges at popular lifestyle establishments, staff members recognising guests by names and being served traditional Chinese tea upon check-in," described Kiong.

Non-sector players make a beeline

Even non-traditional players are foraying into the lifestyle hotel segment, with notable examples being Japanese lifestyle giant Muji extending its minimalist lifestyle ethos to its hotel ventures in Japan and China, and toymaker Hasbro's plans to launch a Monopoly-themed hotel in Kuala Lumpur (see sidebar below).

Another Japanese retail brand, Koe, has launched its flagship store-and-hotel complex in Tokyo's Shibuya district in February 2018 to bring "stay, fashion, music and food" together, Naomi Shinonaga, the brand's creative director, shared.

Its "new basic for new culture" philosophy is also reflected in the hotel decor, which abstains from the use of leather, fur or other materials from real animals. Rooms, like Koe clothing, are divided into four sizes – S, M, L and XL.

Meanwhile, Macau is the staging ground for acclaimed fashion designers to showcase their forays into lifestyle hotels.

Legendary late designer Karl Lagerfeld's creative and modern take on mixing Sino-Western styles will be demonstrated in every single detail of the first-ever Karl Lagerfeld Hotel, creating a completely new definition of east-meets-west luxury while echoing Grand Lisboa Palace's design theme.

The Palazzo Versace Macau, under the creative direction of the renowned designer Donatella Versace, will feature classical style interiors, such as traditional mosaic

and terrazzo flooring, with all furnishings and amenities supplied by or following Versace's stylistic and artistic direction.

Singapore may also soon be home to a development tagged to nightlife brand Zouk. Andrew Li, CEO, Zouk Group, revealed to TTG Asia that the group is "exploring opportunities that will hopefully come into fruition within 2019".

He shared: "Since the acquisition (by Genting), the focus for us is to grow Zouk beyond the realm of nightlife, expanding its offerings into the lifestyle realm. The primary audience we are targeting is the millennials. We see Zouk's move into lifestyle as a natural progression of growing the brand by expanding to different verticals, such as F&B, merchandise and more to come. This fits into Genting Hong Kong's vision of cultivating holistic lifestyle spaces for millennials to wine, dine and play."

Hotel analysts expect such cross-over brands to proliferate and bloom.

Barnett commented: "Owning the customer is key, as you can see from Accor's investment into other brands they want to be in front of consumers' faces at all time, or Sansiri's investments in The Standard Hotels and Monocle magazine, and (for) JustCo co-working (scaling) the vertical is key."

Rajan added: "We are seeing several bold entrants who believe they can innovate and further disrupt the already disrupted traditional hotel experience. We have seen restaurateurs go into hotels like Nobu, fashion accessory specialist Shinola opening their first hotel and more recently Alibaba with FlyZoo (embracing AI technology in collaboration with Marriott International).

"Travellers today are always on the lookout for something different so I believe there's enough room for everyone to make their mark. To stand out however, lifestyle hotels have to ensure that they have clear brand identity, service differentiator and value proposition in their micro-market," he summarised. – **Additional reporting from Pamela Chow, Julian Ryall and Prudence Lui**

News

Overturning perceptions of Nha Trang

This coastal city in southern Vietnam, once favoured as a charter destination, is now keen to attract Europeans

By Yixin Ng

Nha Trang may be on the cusp of change as international flights arrive at the new Cam Ranh airport and Vietnam grows in popularity among Western Europeans, but the coastal city remains bogged down by negative perceptions within the travel trade.

Before the airport opened, the destination was traditionally reliant on Chinese and Russian groups arriving on charter flights. Now, some resorts are turning their attention to new international markets.

For example, Ingo Rauber, general manager at Sunrise Nha Trang Beach Hotel & Spa decided to move the resort's focus away from Russian and Chinese groups "because we didn't see the revenue coming in for incidentals for hotels", and are targeting Western European markets instead.

Since the resort changed its marketing, business from its two traditional feeders went down 50 per cent, while Western European guest volume grew by about 25 per cent.

With the opening of Cam Ranh international airport last year, travellers no longer have to go through Hanoi or Ho

Chi Minh City to arrive in Nha Trang.

"However we are still missing western European tourists because flights coming in are mostly through Bangkok, and travellers arriving in Bangkok in the morning will miss the day's connection to Cam Ranh. Leaving Nha Trang you need to wait six to seven hours at the airport in Bangkok to catch the flight back home. That's the biggest problem right now," said Rauber.

Moreover, Nha Trang remains encumbered by its reputation within the travel trade and a perceived lack of suitable hotels for the Europeans.

"Nha Trang is still not yet popular with the western European market... It might be because of the reputation among tour operators, not so much consumers. There are two disadvantages: first of all, while Cam Ranh is changing, in Nha Trang most hotels don't have direct beach access. There are some on islands off the coast, but guests in many hotels have to cross the street to get to the beach," said Frank Wiegand, director of team sales Europe, Focus Asia.

Additionally, German travellers usu-

ally like three- or four-star, "small, local" resorts, which are lacking in Nha Trang, Wiegand pointed out.

"I'm not too fond of Nha Trang as it can be quite crowded and there are too many hotels," said Moreten Westergaard, sales and production manager at Voya Travel in Denmark, which is adding Asian beach destinations to its Indian Ocean and Latin America core.

While some industry players liken Nha Trang to Phuket, trade buyers maintained that the Vietnamese beach city still lags behind its Thai counterpart.

Thailand beaches remain top choice for beach extensions in Indochina round-trips, said Alberto Maffizzoli from Tui Italia's planning department, with Phuket most popular for the winter season and Samui for the summer season.

In comparison, Vietnam is known just "a little bit" for its beaches. "In Vietnam, Phu Quoc is (the top choice). I've been trying to develop Nha Trang, but at the moment it remains a new destination as it is not known on the market yet," Maffizzoli said. "Everyone wants to go where everybody else is going."

Similarly, Westergaard prefers beaches in Thailand for the availability of quieter, more "barefoot luxury" resort options, citing the example of the 9 Hornbills Tented Camp and Koyao Island Resort in Koh Yao Noi, near Phuket.

There are, however glimmers of hope for Nha Trang.

"I see an enormous increase in interest for Vietnam, and there's always a beach extension in itineraries. We are around 125,000 Dutch going to Vietnam last year. Three years ago it was 65,000," said Frank Schretlen, sales director, the Netherlands, Vietnamtourism - Hanoi JSC.

He added: "People have been to Thailand and they want something else of South-east Asia".

While some buyers point out that Russian and Chinese groups have made the beach less appealing to travellers from other markets, Schretlen pointed out that there are spaces in Nha Trang that are more popular with Europeans.

Wiegand added: "It's a pity that Nha Trang is such a hard sell in Europe. Personally, it is a really nice place. If I go to the beach I still prefer to have restaurants and bars, and Nha Trang is the only city beach in Vietnam."



Schretlen: Dutch interest growing

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Marco Polo Hotels Hong Kong's Vanessa Kong and Wharf Hotels UK's Emma Cashmore



Centara Hotels and Resorts' Markland Blaiklock and Thirayuth Chirathivat



Bangkok Airways' Puttipong Prasarttong-Osoth, Tourism Authority of Thailand's Yuthasak Supasorn and Borussia Dortmund's Jörg Heinrich



Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority's Arvind Bundhun and Mauritius tourism minister Anil Kumarsingh Gayan



RSO Europe's Adrian Croft, and Far East Hospitality Management Singapore's Fion Zhuo and Audrey Chung



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