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Issue

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ACCOR SUPPLEMENT

Raffles Singapore restoration inspires new luxury openings globally



A major restoration will soon be unveiled behind the doors of the luxurious Raffles Singapore

Famous for providing an oasis of tranquility, calm and charm for adventurous travellers for over 130 years, the luxury Raffles brand is undergoing a renaissance, with strong growth globally.

The legendary Raffles Singapore is finally getting ready to reveal a magnificent multi-million dollar restoration and its rebirth has inspired new openings in new

destinations. The grand dame of Singapore will return to its position at the epicentre of the city's social scene in August. New dining outlets will include La Dame de Pic, by 3-Michelin star Chef Anne-Sophie Pic; BBR by Alain Ducasse in the hotel's famous Bar & Billiard Room; and yi by Jereme Leung, a contemporary Chinese restaurant.

Raffles Shenzhen will open its doors in April, offering spectacular views over the city and all the way to Hong Kong from its lofty tower in the prestigious One Shenzhen Bay development. The new Raffles Shenzhen will bring the first Michelin-star chef to the city along with the most beautifully appointed rooms and suites, rooftop dining venues

and a helipad for the ultimate in luxury arrivals.

Meanwhile, Raffles Maldives Meradhoo will launch as the most exclusive resort in one of the most pristine atolls in the region.

In Cambodia, both the Raffles Hotel Le Royal Phnom Penh and Raffles Grand d'Angkor in Siem Reap are undergoing major refurbishments to their rooms

and public spaces to restore them to their original grandeur.

From grand historic palaces to contemporary towers, Raffles hotels are always landmark buildings in the world's most exciting destinations and deliver emotional luxury through exceptional service and personalisation.

Five of the best Maldives resorts for the ultimate getaway



Raffles Maldives Meradhoo offers the ultimate in seclusion and luxury

Since launching its first hotel in the Maldives, Accor has quickly grown its network to five stunning properties for every taste and budget. All offer magnificent views over the turquoise waters of the Indian

Ocean, powdery white sand, private pools, outstanding dining and water activities, but each has a distinctive offering.

The most exclusive is the Raffles Maldives Meradhoo, The Raffles has only 38 villas,

which means guests enjoy the ultimate in seclusion. Super-spacious overwater and beach villas boast their own private pools and come with a personal Marine Butler who can help guests explore the vibrant marine life below. A decadent Raffles spa, famous Long Bar and the legendary Raffles service will all make this resort stand apart from the rest.

Fairmont Maldives Sirru Fen Fushi features the region's longest swimming pool and a unique underwater sculpture museum. The resort offers the Maldives' only glamorous tented villas set within a tropical jungle for a truly different experience of the Maldives, as well as overwater and beach villas, each with their own private pools.

Mövenpick Maldives is nestled on a private island in Noonu Atoll and offers 33

beach pool villas surrounded by native trees and 72 overwater pool villas, all designed with a strong use of bamboo and coconut wood to blend beautifully into nature. True to the Mövenpick brand, guests can enjoy Chocolate Hour daily and facilities include a kids club, Sun Spa by Esthederm, a yoga pavilion and gym.

Mercure Maldives Kooddoo

is the perfect resort for those looking for a more affordable option, without sacrificing on luxury. It features 68 beach and overwater villas, 20 of which have private pools. True to the Mercure promise of an authentic experience, vivid colours and local designs are used throughout. They will soon be joined by the Pullman Maldives Maamutaa Resort.



The stunning bathrooms at Fairmont Maldives Sirru Fen Fushi



Orient Express Mahanakhon Bangkok will bring exquisite dining, luxuriously appointed rooms and world-class service to the city's tallest tower

World's first ultra-luxury Orient Express Hotel to open in Bangkok

Orient Express, one of the most legendary names in travel, will soon make its luxury hotel debut with the launch of the spectacular Orient Express Mahanakhon Bangkok. Located in the tallest tower in Bangkok, the hotel will provide the perfect link between West and East, past and future.

Orient Express redefined rail travel in the 1900s, introducing the first sleeper cars linking Occident to Orient and delivering unprecedented levels of comfort and dining.

Esteemed designer Tristan Auer will reimagine the Art Nouveau stylings and plant motifs of the original Orient Express carriages into a modern skyscraper in the heart of a bustling metropolis. The sumptuous bedrooms and exquisite bathrooms will bring new levels of style and luxury to Bangkok. The finest dining will be provided by David Thompson whose Nahm was named #5 Best Restaurant in Asia and Mott 32 who will bring an exceptional Chinese dining experience to the city. Also within the complex will be a Skywalk and Observatory on levels 47 and 78, while a flagship King Power Duty Free will occupy levels one to four.

Europeans flock to Japan ahead of 2019 Rugby World Cup

Europeans are flocking to Japan in the lead-up to the 2019 Rugby World Cup and 2020 Olympic Games, with Japan named amongst the hottest destinations in the world.

In time for the influx, Accor launched the Pullman Tokyo Tamachi as its 1000th hotel in Asia Pacific and will soon open the MGallery Kyoto Sanjo as well as the ibis Osaka Umeda,

offering visitors new hotels in the country's most coveted destinations.

With a perfect location atop Tamachi train station, the Pullman's rooms are spacious by Japanese standards and bold colours can be found throughout the hotel, inspired by Kabuki theatre and Japanese street art. KASA restaurant puts a fine dining spin on local dishes and cocktails have been created by award-winning mixologist Roman Foltan.

The MGallery Kyoto Sanjo will be a beautiful boutique hotel with a highly individualised personality infused with the spirit of Kyoto.

Japan National Tourist Office (JNTO) is heavily targeting Europeans with a new campaign that focuses on the 'golden route' of Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka highlighting nature and outdoor activities.



Newly refurbished Mercure Tokyo Ginza ready for the 2019 Rugby World Cup

Swissôtel leads Wellness Travel Trends



Swissôtel's Vitality Rooms take in-room wellness to new levels

The global wellness industry is worth US \$4.2 trillion and wellness tourism is experiencing 6.5% annual growth, so Accor is working with some of the best names in wellness across its brands to ensure that guests can stay fit and healthy during their stay.

Swissôtel is leading the charge with its revolutionary Vitality Rooms at Swissôtel Singapore Stamford. They feature a built-in wellbeing wall incorporating dumbbells, horizontal bars and cable-pull systems along with personal training videos. Features include circadian lighting to avoid jetlag, showers with different water pressure to either awaken or relax guests and adjustable desks so you can stand while working. Ensuring

a holistic approach to wellness, the Vitality program also offers healthy menus, energising drinks, jogging maps and even cocktails made with health-giving ingredients so even when you are being naughty you can be good.

The Pullman brand, meanwhile, works with renowned wellness expert Sarah Hoey to create menus, in-room fitness programs and yoga workouts. Checking-in at Pullman resorts, guests are offered a choice of four healthy juices: Age Defence, Energy-Boost, Detox, or Balance, which can be combined with a corresponding work out. These tailored workouts for beginner, intermediate or advanced are 7 minutes long so anyone can fit them in.

Accor now Australia's largest Hotel Operator



The luxurious Sofitel Sydney Darling Harbour

Following its acquisition of the Mantra, Art Series, Peppers and Breakfree brands last year, Accor now dominates the Australian accommodation scene and is on target to reach 350 hotels and resorts.

The acquisition means that Accor now offers the perfect accommodation across every state and territory, from luxury retreats and coastal resorts to serviced apartments in CBD and key leisure destinations.

Newly launched properties include the Fantauzzo Hotel at Howard Smith Wharves in Brisbane, which is part of the Art Series collection of hotels dedicated to local artists. Named after acclaimed Australian painter, Vincent

Fantauzzo, the hotel is carved into the cliff under Story Bridge and features 166 rooms featuring both original artworks and up to 500 reproductions of Fantauzzo's most recognised works. Facilities include four restaurants and bars, an impressive rooftop pool, gym and conference rooms.

Meanwhile, Shadow Play by Peppers is set to open in April in Melbourne's vibrant Southbank arts and entertainment precinct.

The landmark hotel will feature a heated pool, gymnasium, sauna and steam room, and an enclosed garden space on the 46th floor, complete with a freestanding fireplace, two private dining rooms, a lavish guest lounge and library with commanding bayside views. Edwin Wine Bar & Cellar

will boast an extensive wine list selected by the restaurant's resident sommelier.

Meanwhile, as the largest operator of hotels in Australia's 'Red Centre', Accor is thrilled to see that the incredible Field of Light art installation has been extended until 31 December 2020, giving more visitors the

opportunity to experience Bruce Munro's fantasy garden of light sculptures which brings the Uluru desert to life under a star-studded Outback sky. Accor has five hotels and resorts in Ayers Rock from which to enjoy this immersive art installation which continues to draw visitors from around the world.



Field of Lights Uluru has been extended to the end of 2020

SO/ brings bold new design to New Zealand



SO/ Auckland is the city’s boldest new hotel located in the former Reserve Bank building

International luxury lifestyle hotel brand SO/ has opened its first hotel in Auckland with renowned Kiwi fashion innovators WORLD the signature design partner. Each SO/ hotel is brought to life by celebrated names from the world of fashion and design. In Mauritius, there is Kenzo Takada; in Bangkok, Monsieur

Christian Lacroix; renowned duo Viktor&Rolf in Berlin; and in Singapore, Karl Lagerfeld. In New Zealand, WORLD will bring the same spirit of extravagance and boldness to what promises to be one of New Zealand’s most exciting hotels. The HI SO rooftop bar provides stunning vistas over Rangitoto and the city of sails, while

Harbour Society Restaurant on the 15th floor will be helmed by French chef Marc de Passorio, former owner of Michelin-starred restaurant, L’Esprit de la Violette. Guests will have access to the exclusive Club Signature lounge, a heated pool and a SO/ signature spa and fitness centre, situated in the old bank vault.

Glamorous sbe brands to launch in Asia

The sbe lifestyle brands including SLS, Delano, Mondrian, Hyde and The House of Originals – a collection of independent properties including St Martin’s Lane, Sanderson in London and Shore Club South Beach Miami – are now part of the Accor group. Sam Nazarian, founder of sbe, has built a reputation for redefining lifestyle experiences through bold design, personality, style and service, with luxury hotels and lounges that attract celebrities

wherever they open. sbe currently operates 25 stylish hotels and 17- award-winning restaurants and entertainment venues including Katsuya, Sky Bar and Umami Burger, the latter of which launched to huge acclaim in Tokyo in 2017. Now Accor is looking to bring more sbe brands into Asia Pacific with Sydney, Hong Kong, Bangkok and Shanghai identified as very attractive markets for these exciting brands.



The lobby in the Phillippe Starck - designed Mondrian Hotel Park Avenue New York



Fairmont Jaipur provides a royal setting for indulgence

Fairmont Jaipur adds touch of royal romance to the Pink City

The luxurious Fairmont Jaipur, long a favourite retreat for celebrities, has become the hottest hotel for romance following a recent spate of weddings by Bollywood stars. An ode to the ‘Pink City’ with its majestic architecture and décor

inspired by the Mughal Dynasty, the Fairmont instantly transports guests to the glorious era of the Royal Rajputs of yore. Behind its expansive lawns and palace-like exterior, the inside of the Fairmont is spectacular with the walls and ceilings hand-

painted with intricate Rajasthani frescoes, arched doorways and decorated alcoves. Service is regal and attentive and the team can help arrange incredible tours including elephant picnics, hot air ballooning or visits to authentic Indian villages.

New Pullman Hotels for Fiji, New Zealand and Myanmar



Pullman’s hotel signature is the vibrant Junction Lobby concept – Pullman Bangkok King Power, Thailand

Pullman is one of the fastest-growing brands in the Accor portfolio across Asia Pacific, having hit the perfect note with discerning travellers looking for quality accommodation, stylish design and the latest technology. This year will see several landmark openings including

the Pullman Nadi Bay Resort & Spa, located in an idyllic position next to the 18-hole Nadi Golf Course and just ten from Port Denarau. There will be 236 beautifully appointed rooms and suites, five restaurants and bars, and a ballroom for up to 400 people theatre-style. Wellness by Pullman will be provided by

a day spa featuring six inspired treatment rooms, a gym, two pools, a yoga room and tennis courts plus a dedicated club for kids and teens. A new five-star Pullman hotel will open in Rotorua in early 2019. The 130-room hotel will boast panoramic views of the

city and lake area and feature a sophisticated Executive Lounge, chill-out lounge, restaurant and bar, gym and car parking as well as five meeting rooms catering for conferences and events. Meanwhile, the Pullman Mandalay Mingalar will open in the heart of Mandalay’s new

commercial, shopping and entertainment hub. With its interior design inspired by the city’s Royal history, facilities will include 358 rooms and suites, several dining options, a Whisky and Cigar bar, meeting facilities for up to 800 people, a Fit Lounge and Pullman Spa.



Pullman Nadi Bay Resort & Spa will feature local design elements and an idyllic beachfront setting



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Clean breaks from crowded beaches

Vietnam now rivals Thailand as a beach destination, as interest grows for low-key spots like Quy Nhon, Con Dao

By Marissa Carruthers and Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

As overtourism takes a toll on South-east Asia's popular beaches, travellers are increasingly eschewing popular beach hot-spots for less crowded ones, especially as improving air access in the region is making it easier to do so.

Vietnam, in particular, is shining as a favoured destination among European visitors for beach stays.

Pham Ha, CEO of Luxury Travel Vietnam, said: "Originally, Vietnam established itself as a cultural destination for European travellers, but we are now seeing a trend where people choose Vietnam as a beach holiday or a combination of a week of touring and a week on the beach before flying home."

He noted a rise in the last couple of years in repeat bookings from Spain, France, Germany and the UK.

David Kevan of UK-based Chic Locations, noted: "Vietnam is a hot destination at the moment. To many it might be seen as the new Thailand, and without a doubt it ticks all the boxes on exotic culture, cuisine and excitement."

"But to think Vietnam's beach resorts are less developed than Thailand's shows an incredible lack of product knowledge. Danang and Phu Quoc are just as busy as Phuket and Samui, if not more so. They might be new to UK travellers, but the Russians and Chinese have been there in huge numbers for sev-

eral years."

As Danang, Nha Trang and Phu Quoc are no longer fledgling holiday spots, Linh Le, managing director of Asia DMC, said emerging beach destinations in the country appeal more to repeat longhaul visitors who prefer to "see and experience the untouched".

He predicts Quy Nhon will be a popular spot with the European market, while Con Dao has seen increased interest from Europeans seeking nature-based tourism.

Laurent Lerognon, sales manager at Diethelm Travel Vietnam, also flagged up Quy Nhon and Con Dao as destinations to watch with longhaul markets.

"Quy Nhon and Con Dao are classic tropical beach destinations but pleasantly unspoiled. (They) are certainly a long way off the overdevelopment that has

completely ruined areas of other popular holiday spots, meaning now is the time to visit," said Lerognon.

According to Ha, other emerging beach destinations seeing an increase in interest from longhaul markets include Van Don, Cat Ba, Phu Yen, Lang Co in Hue and Ho Tram in Vung Tau, where a swathe of new properties is opening and access is easier, thanks to new products, cruises, helicopter transfers and regional flights.

Said Ha: "We are keen to see a new wave of repeat holidaymakers to Vietnam, especially now that visas are no longer required for many countries. Travel experts should now position Vietnam as a (beach) holiday destination rather than just a cultural destination."

The desire to seek out hidden beaches among Europe's experienced travellers is also clearly played out in Thailand.

Observed Kevan: "Phuket and Samui are perceived as overdeveloped and lacking aspiration. Both are increasingly transit points for onward travel to Khao Lak and Koh Yao Noi, and Koh Phangan and Koh Tao (respectively), showing that clients are willing to travel a little more to find something less commercialised."

"(Tour operators) can still benefit from the improved infrastructure and increased flights that mass tourism has (brought), but use the gateways to move (clients) to somewhere easily accessible but much more exclusive 80 minutes' drive away."



Travel experts should now present Vietnam as a (beach) holiday destination rather than just a cultural destination.

Pham Ha
CEO, Luxury Travel Vietnam

High hopes for new Turkish connection

The Indonesian trade is looking forward to the launch of Turkish Airlines' thrice-weekly Istanbul-Bali service in July 2019, with expectations high that the new connection will improve the country's accessibility from longhaul markets, particularly secondary cities in Europe.



Cadamuro: accessibility a key link

Umberto Cadamuro, COO inbound of Pacto, said: "Given its large number of hubs in Europe, Turkish Airlines' service to Bali will multiply opportunities (for the travel sector) as our business is all about accessibility at the end of the day."

While the new service opens up access to Turkey and its travel market, Go Vacation Indonesia executive manager product & contracting Marika Gloekler sees greater opportunity in the carrier's extensive network through Europe.

"Turkish Airlines is not only flying from big cities, but also the secondary cities in Germany and other European countries, and with a short stop in Istanbul, travellers can fly to Bali."

She added: "Travellers previously needed to travel by train to Frankfurt, Berlin or Dusseldorf to catch their flights, but now they can fly from the secondary cities (where Turkish Airlines flights are available), especially from rich cities such as Stuttgart where Mercedes-Benz is."

Tour operators also hope that the new service will bring a breath of fresh air for Indonesia, as the country has been working to woo the international market back following the recent string of natural disasters.

"When the volcano eruption in Bali took place (in September 2017), the bounce back of travellers was quite fast. Recovery after the recent earthquakes and tsunami were a little bit (tougher). (European bookings) in 1Q2019 have been very slow but we see a big climb from April onwards. This means that travellers are not cancelling but they are just postponing their trips," said Gloekler.

Trade members are also optimistic that the new connection will also bring along greater promotion and support from Turkish Airlines for industry initiatives like sales missions and fam trips.

HPL Hotels & Resorts, with the support of the Indonesia Ministry of Tourism and Turkish Airlines, has teamed up with 17 hotels and travel agents in Bali to conduct a roadshow to Munich, Prague and Budapest ahead of ITB Berlin this year. — **Mimi Hudoyo**

Pairing gems of Indian Ocean

By Feizal Samath

With Sri Lanka and the Maldives in close proximity to each other, just 50 minutes apart by flight time, tour operators are now seeing greater potential and value in promoting packages combining both countries.

The two markets complement rather than compete with each other, with the Maldives' strongest asset being its beaches affording privacy while Sri Lanka is favoured as a destination for its diverse cultural attractions and wildlife parks, said Tracy Neureuther, director of Mosaic Tourism Consulting.

Echoing similar observations of Champika de Silva, cluster director of sales at Anantara Resorts Sri Lanka, said: "During my recent visit to Spain, almost all the tour operators and travel agents I

met booked Sri Lanka using the Maldives for the beach stay."

However, de Silva has yet to see the combo trend pick up for the German, French and Benelux markets to Sri Lanka, possibly "due to price" issues, although a small number of high-end British visitors are already booking Anantara's Sri Lanka resorts for beach stays at the end of a round-trip destination with the Maldives.

Nevertheless, hoteliers like Sanath Ukwatte, president of the Hotels Association of Sri Lanka, whose Colombo-based Mount Lavinia Hotels group owns a 75-villa resort in the Maldives, now sees "huge potential in promoting joint packages" of both destinations.

While joint packages form just 10-15 per cent of its business, Maldives-based Coco Collection Hotels & Resorts/Sun-

land Hotels' chief commercial officer Andrew Ashmore, likewise, sees a lot of potential in pairing up both destinations.

"(Demand) has grown of late as Sri Lanka is becoming a huge emerging (destination) for Europe. We see interest from mainly the UK and Germany. Generally it's six (nights) and four (nights), or five and five, or seven and three," he shared.

While pairing these two destinations may be a new segment for some players, Nalin Jayasundera, managing director of Aitken Spence Travels which owns the Adaaran chain of resorts in Sri Lanka and the Maldives, has been promoting joint tours for some time.

"At one time when there were no direct flights the Maldives, the Chinese used to visit Colombo en route to the Maldives and do combined tours; now there are direct flights to the Maldives," he said, adding that there is potential to drive joint promotions for the European markets.

In the spotlight

A tourism hub and destination

Nond Kalinta, Thai Airways' (THAI) vice president of sales tells **Paige Lee Pei Qi** how the group is leveraging Bangkok as its strategic hub to drive the European market to explore secondary cities in the country

What is THAI doing to court the European market?

Fortunately for us, Thailand is a popular destination among Europeans as the country is rich in both culture and history, (offering) sandy beaches, beautiful temples and delicious food. These factors, combined with Bangkok's geographic location as a hub for onward connections to Thailand, Asia and the Pacific, make Bangkok a prime Asian destination.

One benefit we offer our passengers is our non-stop flights from Europe to Bangkok, where they can enjoy an uninterrupted journey.

Which are the latest connections that appeal to the European market?

Being situated in the heart of South-east Asia, Bangkok is a hub for both business and leisure travellers. THAI, together with our regional carrier, Thai Smile, offer our passengers onward connections to over 50 destinations in domestic Thailand, Asia and Australasia. We cover some of the European market's most popular (outbound travel) destinations from Vietnam to Cambodia to Indonesia, Japan and Australia.

THAI also offers great connectivity onwards to Asia's key business destinations, allowing our passengers to arrive in good timing for meetings and conferences.

What new destinations are on THAI's network expansion radar?

We are constantly performing route studies to offer the best connections and destinations to our passengers. Most new frequencies and destinations will come about once we receive our new fleet starting in 2021.

What are the key challenges in attracting the European market, and how is THAI overcoming that?

The biggest challenge for us, and all airlines, remains the increasingly aggressive

competition in the market. Not only is the pressure from our competitors at its highest in decades, but we must also take into account the new destinations that are popping up in Europe, Africa, and North and South America.

Again, the charm of Thailand and South-east Asia remains our major strength and something we work very hard to promote.

We work closely with the Tourism Authority of Thailand to promote not only our mainstream destinations, but also secondary cities throughout Thailand that

have yet to be fully discovered.

We also work tirelessly to promote our prime connections and frequencies beyond Bangkok and Thailand – whether it is on THAI, Thai Smile or our partner airlines.



We work closely with the Tourism Authority of Thailand to promote not only our mainstream destinations, but also secondary cities throughout Thailand that have yet to be fully discovered.

Showcasing diversity

Marchella Purwanaika, director of Jambuluwuk Hotels & Resorts, tells **Paige Lee Pei Qi** how Indonesia's cultural richness can be discovered through its properties

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

Indonesia has so much to offer other than Bali. The islands in Java and Gili Trawangan are also very appealing, with the combination of beautiful nature, culture and historical activities.

What's coming up next in your expansion pipeline?

Currently the group owns and operates five hotels in Indonesia: Jakarta, Jogjakarta, Batu Maling, Seminyak Bali and Gili Trawangan. We will be adding a boutique hotel in the heart of Jakarta's business cen-

tre in Thamrin city by summer 2019. This will be perfect for city travellers who are seeking convenience, comfort and style.

We will also be opening boutique resorts in beachfront Lombok's Mandalika and Bromo in East Java by 2020.

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

Our targets are the UK, French and German markets for Gili Trawangan resort because this destination is now making a comeback after the (Lombok) earthquake. It has recovered and its appeal is now rising for tourists.

What new markets/segments in Europe does Jambuluwuk have on its radar?

We are aiming to reach the

Mediterranean market as they seem interested to explore more of Seminyak and Gili Trawangan.

As a homegrown hotel group, how does Jambuluwuk stand out amid greater competition and grow your European market share?

We bring out the culture and local tradition in all areas of our hotel. Our guests will enjoy modern comforts blended with Indonesian tradition while learning more about Indonesia at the same time.

Our targets are the UK, French, and German market for Gili Trawangan resort because this destination is now making a comeback after the (Lombok) earthquake.



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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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In the spotlight

Linking Mauritius to the world

Codesharing and trade collaboration are key strategies for Air Mauritius in maintaining a competitive edge, the airline's vice president communications and corporate affairs, Prem Sewpaul, tells [Paige Lee Pei Qi](#)

What is Air Mauritius doing to court the European market?

We offer longhaul direct flights which have helped Air Mauritius to stay competitive over the years. We currently operate two daily direct flights to our Paris Charles de Gaulle hub with our partner Air France, from where we offer 40 code-share destinations. We also operate multiple frequencies to Amsterdam, our second hub in Europe, which connects to 50 codeshare destinations.

Additionally we have maintained a presence in London Heathrow and Geneva. Air Mauritius offers its best product in the European market, which is mainly served by the Airbus A350-900 equipped with state-of-the-art facilities.

Which are the latest connections that will appeal to the European market?

Air Mauritius flies to 22 direct destinations in Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and the Indian Ocean.

These include hubs at key locations that we operate in collaboration with airline partners. Our partner at Paris Charles de Gaulle and Amsterdam is the Air France-KLM group. In addition to the codeshare

destinations, we have comprehensive interline agreements with several European carriers to offer an even broader range of options.

What new connections are on Air Mauritius' network expansion radar?

We are planning seasonal operations to Milan and Seoul in November 2019.

What are the key challenges in attracting the European market, and how is Air Mauritius overcoming that?

Demand has been under pressure in key markets in Europe over the last two decades. There has been economic volatility, and Mauritius has had to face competition from destinations that are cheaper and nearer to Europe. The European markets are also highly seasonal.

To overcome the challenges, we offer competitive prices. We have also deployed an improved product with our new generation aircraft. The service offering on ground and inflight has also improved. Air Mauritius works in close collaboration with trade partners for more ef-

fective sales and distribution.

These initiatives complement our own efforts to enhance our presence in emerging sales channels like the digital media. We also maintain close partnerships with local partners including the tourism office to improve market reach and exposure.



Demand has been under pressure in key markets in Europe over the last two decades. There has been economic volatility, and Mauritius had to face competition from destinations that are cheaper and nearer to Europe.

A millennial approach

Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts' general manager of corporate business development and marketing communication, L Sudarsana, tells [Paige Lee Pei Qi](#) why the group's new hospitality concept will appeal to a new generation of travellers

What new product from Santika will appeal to the European market?

We have introduced Kampi Hotels in 2018, a new hospitality concept targeting young and dynamic souls with a crafted hospitality experience. We are also keen to showcase our newest property under The Royal Collection, The Kayana in Lombok, which offers 32 villas with magnificent views of Malimbu Beach.

Which source markets from Europe are expected to do well for Santika in 2019?

Mostly Germany, Poland and Holland. We are targeting European millennials.

As a homegrown hotel group from Indonesia, how does Santika stand out amid greater competition and grow your European market share?

It is a challenge for us as a local brand to stand out from

international chains. However, we are confident that we will be seen as one of the best choices for accommodation as we are very committed to introducing an authentic Indonesian touch and value to our guests.

We have introduced Kampi Hotels, a new hospitality concept targeting young and dynamic souls with a crafted hospitality experience.



Building up a new haven



Pramana Experience's director, I Nyoman Sudirga Yusa, shines light on the hotel management company's latest

luxury retreat in Bali. By [Paige Lee Pei Qi](#)

What is Pramana Experience doing to court the European market?

We have been joining travel shows in Europe over the last five years. This helps us a lot as we are able to showcase our brand and also enter into the European market.

Which new products from Pramana will appeal to the European market?

Our newly launched five-star resort, The Kayon Jungle Resort, will highly appeal to the Europeans. It is located at Bresela Village, which is approximately 25

minutes away from Ubud. The resort is designed for travellers who are looking for a luxurious nature retreat. One of the resort's key highlights is the three-level terraced swimming pool that resembles the famous Tegalalang rice terrace.

What are the key challenges in attracting the European market, and how is Pramana overcoming that?

As a new property brand, it can be hard to showcase our brand. That is why we are participating in such travel shows to raise awareness about the company.

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BOROBUDUR TEMPLE - CENTRAL JAVA

Feature **Market outlook**

Travel trends for 2019

As travellers seek authentic experiences more than ever, what key trends are Asia's leading inbound agents keeping an eye on for 2019, what are the opportunity areas, and what challenges lie ahead? The Daily reporters find out

**AUSTRALIA** by *Adelaine Ng*

Asian travellers to Australia are rapidly moving away from group travel to FIT and arrive already confident about what they want to see and do, presenting new challenges as well as new opportunities for travel agents who can adapt.

"There's been a big change in the market segmentations coming out of Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia," said AOT Inbound's general manager of global sales, Gary Paterson. "The rising middle class is driving (the FIT trend and) the awareness of what's on offer in Australia is (high)."

Paterson says travel agents who have relied on group tours are feeling the pinch. The Chinese market alone has seen a 30 per cent drop in bookings over the past year. But opportunities exist for agents willing to explore new areas of demand and change the way they do business.

"In Asia, they don't know how to sell FITs yet," said Paterson. "It's (also) one of the biggest challenges in China now because the market has turned its nose against travelling in tour groups (but) have no one to turn to with experience on putting an FIT programme together."

As a result, many FITs are turning to technology to help their decisions. But this is where agents ahead of the game can benefit, said Flors Fluitsma, owner of boutique travel agency Orange Journeys. "Australian agents can learn from their overseas counterparts and create online platforms that link travellers looking to develop their itinerary directly with an operator in the destination," he said.

Paterson confirms technology will be key for the FIT market, especially from China. "We work with people like Ctrip in China and 20 per cent of their business is made within 48 hours of arrival," he noted.

With the market evolving quickly, CEO of Australian Federation of Travel Agents, Jayson Westbury, advises local travel agents to diversify their options by looking at markets outside Asia. "The US market is one to watch," he said. "Australia

is spending more (tourism) money in the US and there is so much capacity between the two countries... it could be a surprise pocket for 2019."

2019 Buzzwords FITs, technology, market diversification

HONG KONG by *Prudence Lui*

Two new major infrastructure developments – the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge and the Hong Kong link to China's High Speed Rail (HSR) – are spurring rail, cruise and multi-destination travel in Hong Kong.

According to Gray Line Tours, director of sales, Ronald Wu, there has been a surge in visitors arrivals and enquiries from all markets and ages since these developments last year.

"The opportunities will be in developing multi-city tours covering Hong Kong, Macau and western China such as Zhuhai and Zhongshan using the bridge, or shorthaul destinations using the train. So far, over 50 per cent of our overseas enquires request or prefer to visit Macau by the bridge, or travel to China by train rather than ferry or flight. They come from as far as Africa."

Cruise travel is also expected to be a key drawcard in 2019 with the HSR link creating new opportunities in rail-cruise travel.

With the *World Dream* ship currently homeported in Kai Tak Cruise Terminal, rolling out rail-cruise products and incentives, more visitors from China's inner cities like Chengdu started arriving in Hong Kong on rail and spending two nights in the city on a weekend cruise.

Simple Travel Services, director, Vandana Sachdeva added that the Indian market too is warming up to cruises in Hong Kong.

In summary, she predicted tourism to benefit from "the new modes of transport

– especially the train to Shenzhen – and the opening of hotels like Ocean Park Marriott Hotel, passenger flow from India to Hong Kong, Macau and Shenzhen."

2019 Buzzwords Cruises, multi-city travel, rail-cruise

JAPAN by *Julian Ryall*

The message that Japan has much to offer beyond the well-worn Golden Route appears to have reached visitors planning their trips in 2019.

"We are getting a large number of enquiries from trade partners about trips that combine activities such as cycling, hiking and sea kayaking," said Kathie Calum, agent sales manager for Oku Japan KK.

"Cycling vacations, in particular, are taking off. We have just launched our first self-guided cycling tour for next year and there has been a lot of interest," she told *TTG Asia*.

She added: "Even first-timers to Japan wanting to visit Kyoto and Tokyo are telling us that they also want to get off the beaten track and see the 'real' Japan."

Oku Japan has noticed a "significant uptick" in bookings from travellers from Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong and a more gradual increase in longhaul bookings from the US and Europe.

"Even visitors coming from regional source markets are looking more for experiences than they did in the past," Calum said. "They come from urban areas so they want to find space and (experience culture, cuisine and more) in the countryside."

Yoko Ogata, manager of the inbound travel division of Nippon Travel Agency, foresees that more Chinese would arrive in Japan this year in the absence of political disputes between Tokyo and Beijing.

"About 80 per cent of our clients are from other parts of Asia. China is strong, but so are Taiwan and South Korea," she added.

Moreover, inbound agents expect to see greater demand from non-traditional source markets. "We are also anticipating a positive impact from visitors from rugby-playing nations in 2019 because a number of Japanese cities will be hosting matches in the Rugby World Cup," Ogata said.

South Africa, New Zealand, Argentina and several other rugby nations are not regular visitors to Japan, Ogata said, but the sporting events will be a good opportunity to showcase the nation's attractions to them.

2019 Buzzwords Cycling tours, sporting events, tours beyond Golden Route

INDIA by *Rohit Kaul*

The inbound sector is seeing the ascent of new segments including LGBT and adventure travellers.

Notably, India's Supreme Court ruling decriminalising homosexuality is expected to spur interest in the destination among LGBT travellers.

According to Indian tour operators, the new ruling has given India a more welcoming image among LGBT tourists, and will go a long way to encourage them to travel more freely across the country.

"I expect 2019 will be an important year in the growth of inbound LGBT tourist in India. We expect good demand from markets like the US and Europe," said Ravi Gosain, managing director, Erco Travels.

He stressed that many LGBT tourists choose destinations that are not only rich in culture and history, but also welcoming.

"India is now well positioned to cater to this segment. If the private and public sectors work together and market India as a preferred destination for LGBT travel, we will see a substantial number of such travellers visiting India in 2019," he added.

As well, efforts to market the destina-

Malaysian operators are rolling out experiences spotlighting local crafts like kite making



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Feature Market outlook

tion to adventure seekers in 2018 as part of India's Year of Adventure Tourism is expected to continue to pay off in 2019.

"India is generally known as a tourist destination for its rich culture and heritage. But we expect adventure tourism to be an important segment in 2019 with many state tourism boards apart from India's Ministry of Tourism looking to showcase their products and experiences in adventure travel," said Arun Anand, managing director, Midtown Travels.

"Madhya Pradesh hosted AdventureNext – an international event specialised in adventure travel in December 2018. It was the first time that the event took place in Asia and was attended by about 200 delegates including global buyers. We expect such efforts will reap benefits in 2019."

2019 Buzzwords LGBT, adventure travel

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 is growing with Bali as its hub.

"Nihiwatu, 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.

Commenting on the Chinese market, Abed said: "We have to be firm in setting price. (Many of) these travellers ask for very low prices."

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

Meanwhile, travellers from Europe, the

US and Australia "come in small groups or as FITs, stay an average of 14-21 days and spend between US\$7,500-10,000", Tanto said.

With some tourism players expecting Bali to still face issues that come with mass tourism, 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."

Indonesian inbound agents are also observing the rise 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."

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

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

MALAYSIA by S Puvaneswary

Inbound agents handling regional markets are seeing increased interest in nature and soft adventure.

Raaj Navaratnaa, general manager, New Asia Holiday Tours & Travel, shared: "Five years ago, we typically served travellers in their 50s and seniors who enjoyed city tours and shopping. Now, our clients are in their 30s and 40s on average, and their interest is in nature and soft adventure activities such as birding, mountain biking, and farm or orchard visits."

Travellers from large cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, Seoul and Tokyo are interested in visiting rustic destinations off the beaten track and getting closer to the locals, he added.

In 2019, the agency will promote tours to Carey Island in Selangor and Kukup Island in Johor, as well as the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia to showcase local craftsmanship such as in the making of boats and *wau* kites.

Navaratnaa, seeing great growth potential in the education tourism sector, will develop short tours in Kuala Lumpur, Malacca and Johor for the student market from Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia.

Uzaidi Udanis, managing director, Eyes Holidays – who observes a growing interest among millennials seeking social media-worthy destinations and experiences – intends to 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 up-and-coming destinations he has identified are Sky Mirror and Batu Caves in Selangor, Sipadan Island, and Seven Wells Waterfall in Langkawi.

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

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

Meanwhile, European tourists are plac-



Visitors to Japan are increasingly keen to venture into the countryside

ing 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 more popular... We will develop more of such programmes in 2019 in both East and West Malaysia, in addition to walking and cycling tours."

2019 Buzzwords Soft adventure, local interaction, social media-worthy experiences

PHILIPPINES by Rosa Ocampo

Beaches will remain the Philippines' main attraction in 2019.

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, including those in the Visayas and the Bicol region, according to Jojo Clemente, president of Rajah Tours.

Amiable Intertours owner Bernadette de Leon foresees that Sumilon, Badian and Mactan in Cebu would retain their popularity, especially with Cebu's new international airport terminal, as well as Panglao in Bohol, and Coron and El Nido in Palawan.

Travel-savvy millennials are fuelling demand for 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.

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 online platform Tripkada, is seeing more 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 participate in do-gooding.

Sharp Travel tour operations manager Benjie Bernal expects more cruise ships to dock in Philippine ports in 2019.

His agency is the groundhandler for a growing number of small expedition ships carrying 150-200 pax, moving from one port to another, including La Union, Batanes, Palaui Island, Kalanggaman in

The opportunities will be in developing multi-city tours covering Hong Kong, Macau and western China using the bridge, or shorthaul destinations using the train..

Ronald Wu
Director of sales, Gray Line Tours

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, cruises, sustainable tourism

SINGAPORE by Pamela Chow

As Singapore's *Passion Made Possible* campaign launches globally, inbound operators are taking advantage of the international drive 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."

Meanwhile, Singapore's burgeoning culinary scene is spurring greater creativity in food-themed tours. 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 has encouraged 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 more in-depth experiences such as fresh market



Mobile devices in the hands of travellers will be the single greatest influence impacting the travel experience.

Umberto Cadamuro
COO, inbound, Pacto

Beyond the classics: 9 ENCHANTING DISCOVERIES

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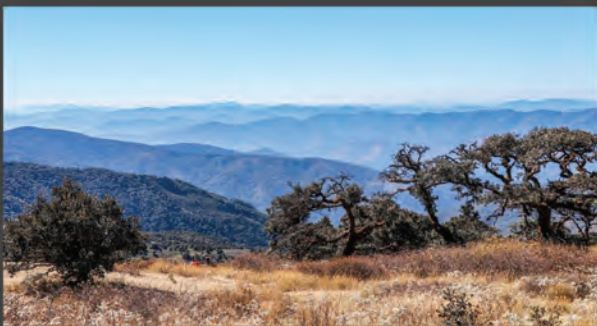
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PUTAO

Putao is a picturesque town in the Himalayan foothills. The city surrounded with snow peaked mountains and nearest town to Mt. Khakhaborazi, the highest mountain in Myanmar and in Southeast Asia.



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Feature Market outlook

shopping and behind-the-scenes coffee roaster visits.

The growing awareness of Singapore's gastronomy scene has cultivated 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 also go to traditional coffee roasters and look behind the scenes at how Singaporean coffee is made at our coffee shops," said Lau.

2019 Buzzwords Themed tours, gastronomy, local cuisine

THAILAND by Chadamas Chinmaneevong

With travellers now able to book air tickets, accommodation and activities online, Thai tour operators will 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.

Pornthip Hirunkate, managing director of Destination Asia Thailand, said amid booming online travel businesses, travel agents must create tour programmes that 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, diversification

VIETNAM by Marissa Carruthers

Vietnam is expected to attract more long-haul and luxury travellers as more destinations and products emerge in the country.

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.

This is also a trend that Jeff Redl, managing 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 Vietnam with Cambodia in winter.

Added Redl: "They are understanding Vietnam 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 expected to flourish in 2019 is the luxury market, according to Pham Ha, CEO of Luxury Travel Vietnam. Contributing factors include the addition of new boutique cruises, hotels and tours.

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 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



Strong interest in Singapore's local cuisine





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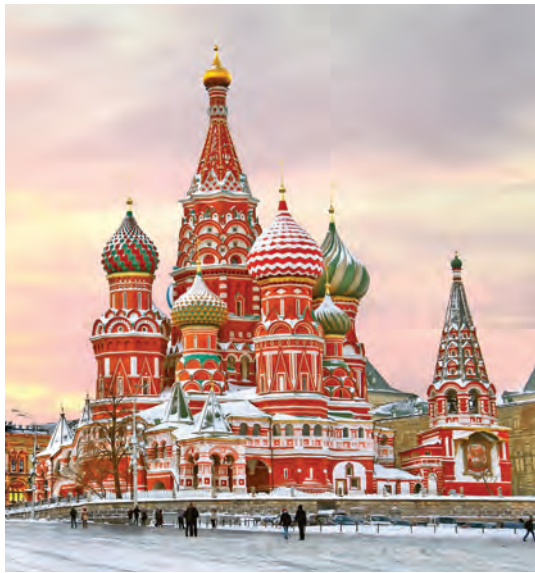
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Hotspots to watch

A look at destinations that make Asian travel experts' wow list for 2019



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

to the Great Barrier Reef. Two-thirds of the island is the national park, housing nearly 25km of amazing walking trails. The island comprises everything from luxury self-contained accommodation to backpacker hostels, plus many activities ranging from boat trips and guided tours to golf, diving and horse riding.

INBOUND

Renato Domini, CEO, Panorama Destination Indonesia

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

Ally Bhoonee, executive director, World Avenues, Malaysia

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

Pirach Hansrisuk, CEO, 5H Tour, Thailand

Khao Yai will be a hot destination next year, especially among South-east Asian tourists. A two-hour drive from Bangkok, Khao Yai features beautiful landscapes particularly in the rainy season, and tourism booms during winter. Local hotels,

attractions and tourism-related activities have been well developed and are ready to welcome foreign visitors.

Edwin Briels, managing director, Khiri Travel Myanmar

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

Joseph Sze, senior project director, Siam Express Singapore

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

Arun Anand, managing director, Midtown Travels, India

Kerala. The state has bounced back from the floods in terms of restoration of the connectivity, infrastructure and tourism experiences. The state government, and the local tourism and hospitality stake-

holders, are aggressively promoting the destination. Through these efforts, we are expecting a healthy number of enquiries from our foreign tour operator partners for Kerala in 2019.

Ronni Dalhoff, managing director of Diethelm Travel (Cambodia)

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

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

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

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

Only 25 minutes by ferry from Townsville, North Queensland, lies the Magnetic Island. It has secluded beaches, crystal clear waters, abundant wildlife and easy access

Devindre Senaratne, managing director Journey Scapes Travel, Sri Lanka

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

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

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

Avi Lugasi, owner and managing director, Windows to Japan

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



From left: Komodo Island, Indonesia; locals in Uzbekistan; Khao Yai National Park in Thailand

OUTBOUND

Abdul Rahman Mohamed, general manager, Mayflower Holidays, Malaysia

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

Amol Punni, managing director, Welcome Travels, Australia

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

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

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

Wong Yew Hoong, EU Holidays Singapore

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

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

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

Andy Wu, managing director, Gray Line Tours Macau

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

Bui Nhan, director, Ecosea Travel, Vietnam

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

Surawat Akaraworamat, managing director, KTK Tour Enterprise, Thailand

An emerging outbound market of Thailand is Taiwan. Travellers need not apply for visas and it takes only about four hours to fly there with many airline choices available. The values of Taiwanese

and Thai currencies are close. It is clean, well regulated, with convenient transport facilities. Taiwanese people are friendly and their food is compatible with Thais' tastes.

Sinan Thourn, CEO and founder, B2B Cambodia

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

seen as new destinations and with direct flights to both, they are quick and easy for tourists to spend a few days for some sightseeing and shopping.

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

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



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Flying for the long haul

The Airbus A350-900 is among the newest planes on Thai Airways' longhaul fleet



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

SINGAPORE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Coming up on SIA's longhaul network is Seattle, due to be launched on September 3, 2019 on the Airbus A350-900, which will increase the carrier's total US frequency from 53 to 57 flights per week.

Other latest destinations added to SIA's longhaul network include non-stop services from Singapore to San Francisco, Dusseldorf and Stockholm via Moscow. — **Pamela Chow**

THAILAND

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

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

Thai Airways expects the US Federal Aviation Administration to upgrade Thailand to Category 1 in the near future, which would pave the way for relaunch of US routes for the carrier. The airline has not operated services to the US since suspending its Bangkok-Los Angeles service in October 2015.

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

Thai Airways passengers currently can fly to 14 destinations in North America

through the airline's codeshare agreements.

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

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

He added: "No new destinations (in Europe) are planned at the moment, as we do not have sufficient aircraft for expansion. Our strategy for now is to grow the non-daily flights to daily for routes such as Brussels, Vienna and the two Italian destinations – Milan and Rome."

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

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

PHILIPPINES

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

The carrier has six firm orders for Airbus A350-900 XWB, four of which have been up for delivery starting June 2017 and two in mid-2019, with options for an additional six.

The A350-900s are deployed on the new non-stop flight from Manila to New York's JFK Airport launched in October and on the daily Manila-London (Heathrow) service launched in October 2018.

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

The resumption of the nonstop flight from Cebu to Los Angeles, which was temporarily shelved due to the lack of bigger aircraft, is being considered.

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

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

Bautista said that PAL "will take in 27 new aircraft" starting with the new A350-900s and the six A321neos for delivery until 2019, two of which have already arrived in Manila.

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

PAL is targeting an April 2019 four times weekly nonstop flight between Manila and Delhi using its A321neo aircraft.

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

Since June 2018, the thrice-weekly Manila-Auckland service is using the tri-class A330-343 with 18 business class, 24 premium economy and 267 economy seats. Other medium-haul destinations using the reconfigured A330 include Honolulu, Sydney and Melbourne. — **Rosa Ocampo**

INDONESIA

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

The airline has started to assess several



London is a key destination in Europe that many Asian carriers fly to

destinations in Europe, with the Jakarta-Paris route scheduled for launch in winter 2019, while it has increased the Jakarta-Amsterdam service from six-times weekly to daily in November 2018.

Garuda Indonesia has restarted its Jakarta-London Heathrow direct services on December 13, after suspending the service on October 29. The thrice-weekly flights will utilise the Boeing 777-300ER, and will offer two classes.

Ari Askhara, president director of Garuda Indonesia, said in a statement that the reopening of the route was made possible following the company's cost structure management.

"The reopening of the service is also part of Garuda's move to develop the international route network, especially when the Indonesia to UK traffic is growing in line with the UK market to Indonesia," Ari said.

Garuda Indonesia has introduced two new options in the economy class for passengers "to rest more comfortably" during their longhaul flights – the Economy Sleeping Comfort (ESCom) and Premium Seats – available on its London-Denpasar and Jakarta-London routes.

ESCom seats allow passengers to lie down during the longhaul flight on one economy row, with a mattress, pillow, duvet and blanket provided. Other benefits in the ticket class include free baggage allowance of up to 40kg, business class meal and amenity kit, priority baggage handling, Wi-Fi voucher worth US\$5 and mileage accrual at 200 per cent.

Meanwhile, premium economy passengers will enjoy more seat space as one adjacent seat would be cleared. A duvet, free baggage allowance of up to 40kg, business class meal and amenity kit, priority baggage handling, Wi-Fi voucher worth US\$5, and mileage accrual at 150 per cent will also be included.

JAPAN

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

"The company decided to establish a new carrier to accommodate a new generation of visitors who are expected to visit Japan heading into 2020 and beyond," Tet-suya Onuki, managing executive officer of

JAL's international route marketing division, told the *Daily*.

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

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

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

The latest addition to the company's longhaul repertoire was the September 2017 launch of daily flights to Melbourne, a result of growing demand on the route thanks to the Japan-Australia Economic Partnership Agreement of 2015.

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

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

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

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

HONG KONG

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

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

A spokesperson said: "One of the goals of (CX's) transformation is to find new



Premium economy seats on board Singapore Airlines' aircraft

sources of revenue by flying to destinations that people want to visit and connecting Hong Kong directly to new places for the first time. Examples include Tel Aviv, Barcelona, Christchurch, Brussels, Copenhagen, Washington DC, Cape Town, Nanning and Jinan, Medan and Davao, etc.

According to the airline's spokesperson, CX opened a record nine new destinations in 2018. In addition to the destinations already launched so far last year, i.e. Brussels (March), Copenhagen (May) and Dublin (June), the airline has also commenced flights to Washington DC and Cape Town in September and November respectively last year.

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

CX chief customer and commercial officer, Paul Loo, said: "We already have one of the youngest longhaul fleets in the sky, and with the arrival of the Airbus A350-1000, our fleet is only going to get younger. The aircraft follows the successful entry of the -900 variant which has enabled us to expand our longhaul network at an unprecedented rate, providing our customers with a wider range of non-stop travel choices."

The remaining 12 A350-1000 order will arrive by 2021. After initial rounds of regional services, starting with Taipei on July 1, 2018, the new Washington DC service has been launched on September 25 on the A350-1000, which at 8,153 miles

(13,121km) makes it the longest on the airline's network. – **Prudence Lui**

MALAYSIA

Amid concerns of volatile fuel prices and unfavourable foreign exchange movements, Malaysia Airlines does not have plans to introduce any new longhaul routes or add capacity on existing routes. It will instead focus on marketing the premium segment, maintain a strong focus on cost management and invest in improving customer experience that deliver a competitive edge.

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

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

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

The airline had suspended flights to Los Angeles in April 2014, Frankfurt in April 2015, Amsterdam and Paris in January 2016, as part of a route rationalisation exercise to stem losses.

Malaysia Airlines has relaunched four-times weekly flights from Kuala Lumpur to Brisbane on June 1, 2018. This route had previously been axed from the network in 2015 amid a network rationalisation exercise. – **S Puvaneswary**



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Destination Vietnam

Trendy and shaping up

Growing air connections and emerging beaches are proving strong drawcards for German and European markets into Vietnam, writes Marissa Carruthers

As Vietnam catches on in the German travel market, developments – both within and beyond the country's primary tourism cities – are pointing towards greater readiness to welcome visitors.

According to the latest figures from Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT), 213,986 arrivals were recorded from Germany in 2018. This represents a 7.1 per cent year-on-year (YOY) increase and placed the country as the fourth highest-performing European market.

In total, Vietnam welcomed over two million European visitors in 2018 – an 8.1 per cent YOY rise. Russia led the pack with 606,637 arrivals, followed by 298,114 from the UK and 279,659 from France.

Efforts carried out in 2018 to stimulate more growth from Europe are expected to pay off in the future. In early 2018, VNAT – in collaboration with relevant parties – put together a programme to present tourism products in Zurich, Munich, Vienna, Budapest and Prague. In September and October, VNAT organised roadshows in Paris, Madrid, Milan and Hamburg.

In Danang, the industry is collaborating with Goethe Institute in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to train more German-speaking tour guides.

Trung Tran, Asia DMC's German market business development manager, said: "The German-speaking market is considered significant and the Vietnamese tourism sector has launched some major marketing and promotion programmes to lure more German tourists."

He noted a rise in the number of repeat visitors from Germany seeking off-the-beaten track experiences.

Other factors driving the expected growth include aggressive marketing campaigns from wholesalers, such as TUI and Thomas Cook for Phu Quoc island, as well as Vietnam receiving international recognition, including being ranked as one of the world's top 10 fastest-growing



More international connections have opened up for Phu Quoc

tourist destinations by the UNWTO.

Jeff Redl, managing director of Diethelm Vietnam, said Vietnam remains a "trendy" destination with the German-speaking market. He predicts political issues in the Middle East and Myanmar, coupled with Vietnam's two-year extension on visa-free entry for several European countries including Germany, and heavy investment in infrastructure spanning hotels, highways, several airports and ports, will encourage further growth.

He added: "There's a huge investment emphasis on Vietnam's coastline. Danang, Nha Trang, Phan Thiet and Phu Quoc are expected to see a surge in new develop-

ment projects over the next one to two years, which will add to its appeal."

Katie Jones, Minor Hotels' spokesperson for Vietnam, noted that while the German-speaking market remains steady in terms of arrivals, the number of hotel room nights – particularly at Anantara Hoi An – increased in 2018 compared with the previous year.

Said Jones: "The infrastructure of the country is growing at such a fast rate, which can only benefit the European market as there are more and more reasons and attractions to visit the country."

Increased air connectivity is expected to drive the market forward this year, with

Market trends for 2019



Jeff Redl

Managing director, Diethelm Vietnam

Many German-speaking clients purchase a round trip through Vietnam followed by a several-day beach stay. As Phu Quoc island is now easily reachable, offers wide choice of accommodation and great weather almost all year, it's becoming first choice for such an extension. (Plus) now e-bikes are available in Vietnam, less able cyclists have the confidence to enjoy trails they may have considered too tough.



Trung Tran

German market business development manager, Asia DMC

Vietnam has numerous landscapes, natural wonders and World Heritage Sites, while (history and culture also serve as big draws), making it one of the top South-east Asian destinations for German travellers. These values match well with German travellers who look for adventure before the rest of the world taps in.

the launch of Qatar Airways to Danang at end-2018 playing a pivotal role.

Jones said: "(This) has opened up Danang and Hoi An to even more to European guests, making connections easier and quicker. Many Asian airlines fly into Danang, but Qatar Airways is the first international airline linking more longhaul European destinations into Vietnam."

The launch of new domestic airline Bamboo Airways in 1Q2018 is another boon for Vietnam's tourism. On top of connecting key domestic cities, it could open up a new destination to travellers from its base in Quy Nhon on the southern central coast.

What's new

InterContinental Long Beach Phu Quoc

The five-star resort situated on the island's long beach features 459 rooms, suites and villas, as well as six F&B outlets. An on-site spa offers a range of treatments, with activities including yoga, pilates and water sports. Indoor event venues include the Grand and Junior ballrooms, meeting rooms and board rooms. The hotel also boasts the island's only theatre for up to 130 delegates, suitable for concerts, film screenings and more.

Sheraton Grand Danang Resort

This five-star, 258-room beachside property is situated on the white sands of Danang city's Non Nuoc Beach. Set on seven hectares of landscaped tropical grounds, the resort is 20 minutes from Da Nang International Airport and Hoi An. Its six F&B outlets take in a range of cuisines, while flexible spaces for meetings and events span 3,300m².

Angelina Restaurant and Lounge

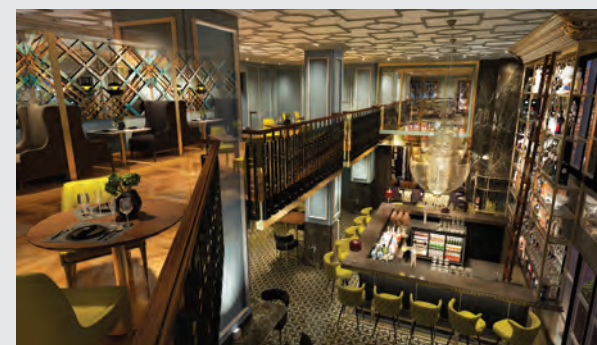
Sofitel Legend Metropole Hanoi's new bar-lounge-restaurant Angelina is a two-storey space that boasts an eight-metre-high floor-to-ceiling bar and seats up to 120 guests. A whisky lounge sits on the ground floor, while the second floor is an intimate dining area. A new chef, Aurélien Houguet, is now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

SpiceRoads Cycling

SpiceRoads Cycling has introduced e-bikes to its Vietnam programmes, which will enable cyclists with more varied experiences and fitness levels to enjoy biking trips in the country. The e-bikes can be hired per tour as an alternative to mountain, road or carbon bikes. Vietnam tours feature special bikes that use "pedal assist" technology to engage the bike's motor once the rider begins to pedal.



From left: SpiceRoads Cycling; Angelina Restaurant and Lounge



Boutique cruise in Cat Ba Archipelago

The Lux Group has launched Vietnam's first boutique cruise through the Cat Ba Archipelago in the Gulf of Tonkin. Amenities include a luxury spa, film under the stars, indoor and outdoor lounges, what's said to be Vietnam's first floating infinity swimming

pool, a pool bar and 20 suites offering river and ocean views. The three-deck ship also offers two restaurants and private cabanas, the Bach Thai Buoi Library, the White Lotus Spa, a fitness centre and games room, as well as an art gallery and auction centre.



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Destination Japan

In search of novelty

A plethora of natural and cultural attractions keep Germans intrigued. By Julian Ryall

Japan has seen a steady growth in arrivals from German-speaking markets in recent years, with travellers showing a greater interest in a destination that is widely perceived as exotic and unique.

According to Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) figures, 195,606 Germans visited Japan in calendar 2017, climbing 6.7 per cent over the previous year, while an additional 21,035 arrivals were recorded from Austria, up a marginal 0.4 per cent.

The growth of the German-speaking markets is apparent for industry players in Japan.

"There has been an increase of 2.8 per cent in German guests over last year, and a 12.5 per cent increase over last year in European guests as a whole," said Yukio Kanao, general manager of Tokyo's Imperial Hotel.

"We believe the increases (can be attributed) the perception of Japan as being a safe, secure, technologically-advanced and culturally-rich destination, coupled with interest generated by the upcoming 2020 Olympic Games," he said.

Kanao added that while most of his European guests are interested in Japan's cuisine and historic architecture, the Germans tend to be interested in skiing, and are on the lookout for new spots to ski in the country.

Thorben Groebe, group leader for JTB Global Marketing & Travel, indicated Japan is also benefiting from a higher profile internationally, thanks to the 2020 Olympic Games and the country's crowning of a new emperor in May.

"Germany is famous for its contrast between the traditional and the high-tech, so many Germans want to see robots and *kabuki* (classical Japanese dance-drama) or geishas, and temples that are close to modern buildings," he opined.

He added: "Many Germans are well educated and want to experience the 'real' Japan, so places like the Robot Restaurant in Tokyo are not popular with them. But hearing about the experiences of people in Hiroshima at the atomic bomb museum, for example, is something that they would be interested in."

Germans also have a reputation for enjoying the great outdoors, so trekking the Nakasendo Way are popular. Meanwhile, people with specific hobbies and interests – such as gardening, bird-watching, or anime and manga – can also have unique experiences in Japan, Groebe said.

Group tours that take in the main sites and the Golden Route still mainly appeal to older and less adventurous travellers, but a growing segment of German FITs are encouraged to visit due to the vast amount of information available online.

JNTO, on its part, has spearheaded a promotion campaign to stoke the German travellers' interest to visit Japan, revealed Hiroshi Yamashita, head of the JNTO's overseas promotion department for Europe.

"In 2018, we intensified our online promotion efforts targeted at the German market, under the tagline *Enjoy my Japan...* which means there is something to suit everyone in Japan," shared Yamashita.



Fushimi Inari Temple in Kyoto is a popular tourist destination

"We emphasised seven areas of interest – tradition, cuisine, city, nature, art, relaxation and outdoors. Of these seven categories, we focused particularly on (promoting) relaxation and outdoors to the German market."

The campaign, deemed a success, is expected to continue its run in 2019, said Yamashita. As Japan is still perceived as a relatively expensive longhaul destination for German travellers, JNTO is targeting its campaign at the more affluent seg-

ments.

Research by JNTO revealed that most German visitors are keen to experience different types of Japanese food, immerse themselves in nature, and enjoy the country's traditions and culture.

Yamashita elaborated: "(German) consumers are now seeking experiences that will live long in their memories. They are looking for relaxing experiences, and natural and cultural experiences that are unique to different regions of Japan."

Market trends for 2019



Alastair Donnelly

Founder and director, Inside Japan Tours

We have seen an increase in demand from German-speaking markets, with travellers intrigued by the culture of places such as Tokyo and Kyoto, but we're also seeing a desire to discover places away from the well-trodden trails. There has also been more demand for walking products.

We recently created the six-day, 70km-long Shin-etsu Trail, which takes travellers across mountains straddling Nagano and Niigata, while staying in traditional ryokans and minshukus along the way. This allows guests to sample Japanese hospitality at its best.



Evelyn Teplass-Mugii

Executive director, The Art of Travel

We are finding that many of our clients – who are at the luxury end of the spectrum – put an emphasis on enjoying their leisure time. They really want to get deeper into the Japan experience, get off the beaten track and are keen to open themselves up to this completely new culture.

What's new

The Peanuts Hotel

Fans of Snoopy, Charlie Brown and the rest of the gang from Charles Schultz's comic strip can now stretch out in rooms themed on the characters' adventures. Located near Sannomiya Station in Kobe, the boutique hotel has 18 uniquely-decorated rooms such as one depicting Snoopy on the moon, and another in Yosemite National Park.

Tax-free shopping simplified

The Japanese government will be simplifying tax-free shopping for foreign visitors by digitising all required paperwork.

Tourists who want to avoid paying the local consumption tax presently need to have proof-of-purchase of an item stapled to their passport to show to customs officials when they leave Japan.

By April 2020, dedicated terminals will be installed at customs that will match information from retailers with the National Tax Agency and customs.

Luggage-free travel service

The JTB travel agency has teamed up with Panasonic and Yamato Transport to launch a luggage-free travel service. The aim is to take the stress and strain out of a trip to Japan, particularly among independent travellers by enabling visitors to entrust their suitcases to Yamato Transport to be

delivered to their next destination.

Anyone can sign up for the service through its website, which also takes reservations and issues e-mail notifications to inform users when their luggage has been delivered.

Narita Premier Lounge

A luxury lounge that includes a traditional Japanese tea room has opened in Terminal 1 of Tokyo's Narita Airport. The 930m² Narita Premier Lounge can accommodate 148 people, and offers shower facilities, as well as F&B – including halal meals. The operator expects around 60,000 people to use the lounge each year.

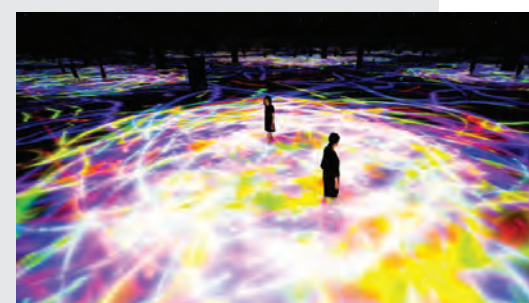
teamLab Planets museum

Tokyo's museum and sensory art scenes have been enhanced with the opening of the 10,000m² teamLab Planets museum in the Odaiba waterfront district.

Visitors are asked to remove their shoes and socks at the entrance because some of the exhibits are knee-deep in water. The museum makes clever use of light and dark spaces, mirrors and sounds, all of which serve to invigorate the senses. The temporary museum will open through autumn 2020.

The Okura Tokyo

The much anticipated reopening of The Okura Tokyo is set for early September 2019.



From top: teamLab Planets; The Peanuts Hotel

After the revamp, The luxury hotel will offer a total of 508 rooms across across two buildings. The 17-storey Okura Heritage Wing will boast its own reception, the Yamazato Japanese restaurant and Chosho-an tea ceremony room. The 41-storey Okura Prestige Tower will also offer fine dining options and banquet facilities – one of which will be the largest ballroom in Tokyo.

Destination **India**

Seizing growth opportunities

E-visa, greater product diversity offer opportunities for India to attract more arrivals from Germany. By Rohit Kaul

India's inbound tourism players are expecting better performance from Germany in 2019, thanks to greater ease in obtaining visas and a growing portfolio of tourism products to entice this high-yield but undertapped market.

According to the latest statistics available from India's Ministry of Tourism, 10 million tourists visited the country in 2017, of which 269,380 hailed from Germany, the ninth top source of foreign tourist arrivals.

Ravi Gosain, managing director, Erco Travels, shared that German-speaking markets – Germany, Switzerland and Austria – did better in 2018 than the previous year for his company.

He is hopeful that the growth momentum will continue this year, driven by a "good demand for Ayurveda- and yoga-related packages".

Abhilash K Ramesh, executive director, Kairali Ayurvedic Group, agreed: "I predict high volumes of demand in Ayurveda, along with natural weight loss and detoxi-

fication (programmes) for the German-speaking markets in 2019.

Vineet Raina, founder and managing director of Pink Elephant Journeys, believes there is huge potential to increase the number of tourists from Germany, whose market share is a mere 2.7 per cent of total foreign tourist arrivals.

He remarked: "The German market is very interesting as 75 per cent of Germans travel at least once a year with an average duration of 13 days. About 62 per cent of Germans love the sea, sun and sand, as well as exploring cities with rich culture and heritage."

Bearing that in mind, Raina will promote beach holiday options such as Goa, Kerala and Odisha to the German market, while developing itineraries for yoga enthusiasts, as well as river cruising on Brahmaputra.

Vibhas Prasad, director of Leisure Hotels Group – which has hotels in the four states of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Goa – expects

good demand from the German market in 2019, especially for leisure, adventure, wilderness and spiritual experiences.

He shared that around two per cent of guests at the group's hotels in Rishikesh and Haridwar are from Germany. To grow business from this market, the group is offering experiential activities on top of stays.

Gosain, who thinks "India's rich cultural heritage" remains a strong drawcard for foreigners, believes "promoting historical and cultural spots with a mix of lesser-known tourism products can give further boost to demand from German-speaking markets in 2019".

Meanwhile, the greater ease of obtaining visas for foreign tourists, with Raina dubbing the e-visa facility a "game-changer" for the Indian inbound sector.

Ramesh concurred: "India has become an easy destination to travel to, (due to) the e-visa facility. This has helped to grow the German market".

Visas aside, Ramesh indicated that im-

proved connectivity and infrastructure development in major Indian cities and popular tourist destinations have also helped to attract repeat travellers from Germany.

"Infrastructure development taking place in India's north-eastern states will encourage tourism to most of the region," added Raina.

However, industry stakeholders feel that a lot more needs to be done to boost tourist numbers for German-speaking markets.

"India still lags behind when it comes to (projecting a) tourist-friendly image, so the government PR departments must work hard to spread as much as positive news as they can, to counter negative publicity. The tourism industry should also focus on offering new and varied products rather than competing on prices," lamented Gosain.

Added Raina: "The government must also lower the tax burden to ensure we remain competitive, and stress on the safety and security of tourists."



Varanasi, the spiritual capital of India

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Destination Singapore

More robust offerings in making

To keep its allure for Germany and key European markets, the Lion City is banking on Sentosa's rejuvenation and a lineup of global events year-round, writes Pamela Chow

Germany remains a key longhaul market for Singapore, keeping its position as the city's second top arrivals source from Europe, with visitor volume rising 1.3 per cent year-on-year to reach 317,750 in the January to November 2018 period.

During that period, total visitorship from Europe reached almost 1.9 million, marking a 10.8 per cent increase from the same timeframe in 2017.

To maintain these numbers, Singapore is shoring up a host of developments in 2019 and beyond. Most imminent is the opening of three new hotels on Sentosa Island by Far East Hospitality (FEH), marking the debut of mid-range accommodation options on the island.

Opening in April 2019 are Village Hotel at Sentosa, offering 606 rooms including family rooms, and the 193-key adults-only Outpost Hotel. In 3Q2019, The Barracks Hotel will open its 40 rooms in a conserved colonial building.

With the entrance of FEH's more affordable offerings on the island, Sentosa is expected to gain points with the European market, which has eschewed five-star luxury accommodation for three- to four-star boutique hotels, said Guy Allison, director of procurement, Tour East Holdings.

He projected that Sentosa's new affordable offerings are likely to enhance its appeal to Europeans and families, and possibly entice them to extend their stay in Singapore.

"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 added.

While Singapore remains a costlier destination than its neighbours, Allison also stated that the country is "becoming more value-for-money" and more affordable compared to five years ago.

Market trends for 2019



Judy Lum
General manager,
Diethelm Travel (Singapore)

In Singapore, Germans like sightseeing and food. They are game to try local fare and dislike stopping at shops. The older visitors tend to book sightseeing tours, while the younger Germans tend to go for walking tours covering the ethnic enclaves of Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam; and they love to chill out at Haji Lane and al fresco places in the evenings. They appreciate culture, arts and history, and are very keen on local experiences.

To strengthening its branding, the Sentosa Development Corporation has partnered the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) in the Epic Adventures consumer co-branding campaign, shared Lynette Pang, assistant chief executive, marketing group, STB.

"Through our marketing promotions, we continue to position Sentosa as an exciting island destination, ideal for families with young kids, with plenty of activities and offerings available to visitors from the foodie, explorer, action seeker and socialiser passion tribes," described Pang.

This month, STB has also launched the second wave of its *Passion Made Possible* destination marketing in Germany. This wave will target "action seekers" – global fans of sporting activities – with material such as promotional films featuring Singaporean athletes as well as international sports stars, such as Olympic gold medalist Joseph Schooling and former tennis champion Martina Hingis.

The films will spotlight sporting activities available in Singapore, such as go-karting, skating and wakeboarding, as well as sporting events such as the annual Formula 1 Singapore Grand Prix and HSBC Singapore Rugby Sevens.



AJ Hackett Bungee Jump, one of Sentosa's myriad attractions

Singapore is also boasting a calendar of events poised to stimulate the growth of European arrivals, said Tan Yen Nee, regional director, Europe, STB.

The country will this year commemorate its bicentennial with events such as an experiential showcase at Fort Canning Centre from June to September, and the Find Your Place in History trails that will feature projection installations at various historical spots.

In 1H2019, the opening of Design Orchard – a retail and creative space for local designers and brands – as well as Jewel at Changi Airport are expected to rejuvenate the retail scene.

Meanwhile, Singapore's growing culinary scene will be spiced up with a series of five 50 Best events, starting with The World's 50 Best Restaurants awards this year – the first country outside of the UK to host the awards.

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.

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.

Capitol Kempinski Hotel Singapore

The city-state's first Kempinski hotel stands in the downtown Civic and Cultural District, offering 157 guestrooms and suites spanning almost 50 unique configurations. In all eight room categories however, guests can expect regular mod-cons such as a Sonos audio system, complimentary Wi-Fi, complimentary non-alcoholic beverages and a work desk area.

The property also offers meeting spaces ranging from the Private Room, good for 12 guests, to the Salon, which can hold 220 pax theatre-style. Other facilities include a spa, gym and saltwater pool.

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 offers 120 keys in a property

designed by French architect and designer Jacques Garcia. Facilities include F&B options, a 25m-long rooftop lap pool and gym. Its sister property Six Senses Duxton is a five-minute walk away, and offers 49 guestrooms housed in a colonial-style 19th century heritage building.

Orchard Rendezvous Hotel

Far East Hospitality has 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-key Orchard Rendezvous Hotel offers room sizes that start from the 26m² Superiors and go up to the 76m² One Bedroom Deluxe Suites. Amenities on-site include a club lounge, outdoor swimming pool and lobby bar.



From left: Capitol Kempinski Hotel Singapore; tour of Teochew opera



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