

Glowing and growing

Not only is wellness tourism seeing robust growth, the multibillion-dollar industry has also brought about a convergence of sectors from airports to accommodation

Fulfilling the Tiaki promise

As New Zealand puts environmental and cultural values at the heart of its tourism pursuits, industry players are determined to play their part in caring for the country

Taking over the world

Airbnb has big ambitions of being an end-to-end travel company and driving new ways of living, says co-founder and CSO Nathan Blecharczyk



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OTAs VS HOTELS

WHY IT'S STILL COMPLICATED

As hotels now seek to assert greater control over their distribution channels and commission structures, how will their love-hate relationship with OTAs evolve in the next phase? By Pamela Chow



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The future of touring

Unique experiences vs traditional tours



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Experiences has become a buzzword of late in the travel industry, with many tour suppliers and operators slapping the term on every possible activity and tour. Douglas Quinby, Arival's co-founder and CEO, attributed to the popularity of "the 'E' word" to Airbnb, which launched its Experiences arm two years ago.

But what exactly constitutes a unique experience? For TakeMeTour's founder Taro Amornched, 'experiences' in the tours context means connecting travellers with locals who share their expertise, passion or hobby in a destination, giving the example of a local banker leading jogs around Bangkok's Lumpini Park followed by a street-side breakfast by the park's edge.

Or are experiences – according to Airbnb's definition – about discovering Berlin's forests and lakes with a professional dog walker or learning to make fake sushi with *sampuru* (sample food) expert in Tokyo?

But do travellers always want to 'live like a local' wherever they go, seeking in-depth interaction experiences with local hosts and communities? While industry predictions suggest that group tours are out and that one-of-a-kind, authentic experiences are now de rigueur, especially among the millennials, I believe the reality lies somewhere in between.

A core group of travellers probably still want sightseeing tours, whether it's hop-on, hop-off buses, city tours or attraction visits, especially when visiting a new destination. Most first-timers to a city still want to check off the must-see spots and iconic attractions – a reason why Eiffel Tower, Empire State Building or Angkor

Wat continue to see surging numbers of visitors year after year.

Renato Domini, CEO, Panorama Destination, believes there will always be interest in classic sightseeing tours, but thinks the delivery of tours and activities has to keep up with changing market preferences and competition. The onus, too, is on DMCs to offer creative products or special touches in tour programming to remain "specialists" of the destinations, he maintained.

The rise of experiential travel is also leading a new breed of package tours, one that strikes a balance between personalisation and independence. For example, attraction pass provider Leisure Pass Group has rolled out the Great Cities Passes for travellers to 'mix and match' the in-destination attractions, shared the company's vice president of product Asia, Ivy Chee.

Ultimately, it's about tour operators and suppliers knowing the market and matching the right product to the right customer. Just as Polaroid shots or drone videos to guests provide upselling opportunities for an Instagram tour, it would also make sense to pair chefs and restaurant owners with foodies looking to savour a destination's culinary heritage and offerings on a food tour.

While Airbnb has outlined its ambitions of being an end-to-end travel seller (see page 9), the sharing economy giant's foray into the experiences and adventures segments is unlikely to turn the tour operating business into a zero-sum game.

The global travel population is getting bigger each year, and within the colossal market of 1.4 billion travellers worldwide surely there is room for every type of player to carve out their niche.



The global travel industry is getting bigger each year, and within the colossal market of 1.4 billion travellers worldwide surely there is room for every type of player to carve out their niche.



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Mauritius



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- Banyan Tree Spa (2015)
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- Thai Airways International Public Company Limited (2016)
- Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (2016)
- Royal Plaza on Scotts (2018)
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HOTELS & RESORTS

The changing face of OTA-hotel relationships

Hotels and OTAs need each other, but the scales of their symbiotic relationship often appear tilted in favour of OTAs in the latter's aggressive growth path in the past decade. As hotels big and small now seek to assert greater control of their distribution channels and commission structures, how will their love-hate relationship with OTAs evolve in the next phase? By **Pamela Chow**

It's no secret that the relationship between OTAs and hotels has been a tumultuous one, characterised by an on-again, off-again dynamic as both parties couldn't survive without some level of dependence in the last two decades.

"The trouble is that we are too often over-reliant on a single source, whether it's OTAs in general or a single OTA. That's when it becomes dangerous," stressed Michael Belanger, vice president revenue & distribution, GCP Hospitality.

A "healthy" percentage of room reservations coming from OTAs should be about 50 per cent, with the other half from direct bookings. However, some hotels – in particular smaller, independent hotels – attribute up to 90 per cent of their bookings to OTAs, observed Adrian Caruso, founder and managing director of Fastrack Group.

This over-reliance on OTAs has resulted in some hotels being taken advantage of, lamented Ayudh Nakprasit, owner of Eastiny Pattaya.

"My relationship with OTAs is not the best," Ayudh admitted. "At the moment, I pay roughly between 15 to 17 per cent in commission rates, but taking into account the amount of abuse and harassment I probably get every other day, it is not good."

Claude Sauter, general manager, The Surin Phuket, remarked: "It's very hard to negotiate (commission rates), but we need them (OTAs)".

According to a poll conducted during the Direct Booking Summit 2019, the average OTA commission rate ranges from 10 to 20 per cent.

Different sides of same coin

The hotel-OTA relationship has seen better days. The honeymoon first began in 2001, when OTAs first emerged as a "new opportunity" for hoteliers to deviate from wholesalers who were "dictating the rates", recalled Sauter.

But in a striking case of déjà vu, the same threat now looms over hotels and their control over rate parity.

At the Skift Forum Asia in May, John Wroughton Brown, CEO, Agoda, stated: "We're on to OTA 3.0 now, where the best competitors are saying, 'Let's go back to wholesalers and get whatever rates are out there, whatever way we can get them.'"

"If there is a rate of \$80 that is bookable and Agoda doesn't have it, it's our duty to get it, whether by contracting directly with our partners or connecting to a wholesaler. If the rates are out there, then we will do whatever we need to do to put it in the hands of the customer."

This has led to "hard discussions" with many hotel partners", disclosed



Brown. "If the wholesale rates were allowed to go out into metasearch and other places, then by all means we should also have them. Hotels have control over these distribution channels; they can be clear with wholesalers about what they want."

Sharing an example of a hotel partner in Thailand that works with 80 wholesalers, Brown remarked: "I cannot imagine all of them putting the rates where you want them to go. There's going to be chaos and a lot of stuff falling off the back of the truck. OTAs can help to rationalise that, but it takes the support of the hotels too."

As online travel evolves into OTA 3.0, the love-hate relationship is starting to change too. OTAs are beginning to see that support slip, as hotels turn away from the giants to assert control over their distribution.

Earlier this year in India, hotels under the Sikkim Hotels & Restaurants Association and 400 hotels under the Hotel Owners' Association in Mysuru cut off Indian OTAs Golbibo and MakeMyTrip due to disagreements over the terms put forth by the associations.

In Singapore, the 37-key Warehouse Hotel limits distribution to two boutique OTAs – the US' Tablet Hotels and the UK's Mr & Mrs Smith – with each contributing 20 room nights a month, amounting to a healthy three to four per cent of total occupancy, said Tarun Kalra, the

hotel's general manager.

Hotels on Triptease's hotel distribution platform implements a "three-strikes policy" before cutting off hostile OTAs. This strategy has reduced the hotels' rate of being undercut to 4.1 per cent, and raised the average daily rate up by 12 per cent as well as website bookings by 22 per cent.

GCP Hospitality's Belanger stated: "For independent hotels, we need to learn to diversify our portfolios in terms of drawing corporates, MICE, other OTAs and direct channels. Once you have a very diverse portfolio, you can pick and choose, and go back to the ones that aren't playing fair and dictate what you want."

Redrawing relationship lines

Dictating its own terms was exactly what Marriott International did when the hotel giant inked a multi-year extension of its partnership with Expedia Group, commencing in 4Q2019.

For Expedia, the deal keeps Marriott's rooms on its platforms, as well as giving the aggregator a bigger role in Vacations by Marriott.

For Marriott, Expedia was a knight in shining tech armour, said Peggy Fang Roe, chief sales & marketing officer, Asia-Pacific, Marriott International. She explained: "We found a way to leverage what they have as a technology company and

platform. And they're able to help us solve other problems, which helps us lower costs."

While details about the deal remain obscure, what's for certain is that hospitality players in the industry are taking a closer look at the way they approach partnerships, with OTA-at-odds or otherwise.

Fang told TTG Asia: "Traditionally, there's been a tension between the hotels and distribution channels, but I think that's actually changing. It's different in Asia because we're at a different maturity level, and there's a lot of willingness to be creative."

Citing Marriott's partnership with Alibaba as an example, Fang described: "Alibaba is changing the distribution model – they don't charge us high commission rates in response to reservations. We're building a channel together."

Amid fiercer competition, OTAs are also putting an emphasis on the human touch – a trend that looks set to change their relationship with hotels. For example, Ctrip-owned Trip.com has launched two in-house call centres in Tokyo and Shanghai to "handle customer concerns with full-time employees who can empathise", revealed Peter Yoshihara, general manager, Japan, Trip.com.

"Our customer service employees have to pick up a call within two rings – that's how important the customer is to us," he stressed.

As online players put more care in approaching customer and business relationships, they are no longer regarded as silos but platform partners. Fang said: "Maybe previously we were looking at (each other) in more selfish ways – that it was just about bookings – but it should be about improving the whole experience. Nobody can really own the whole thing; it takes a collaborative effort."

The Warehouse Hotel's Kalra concurred: "OTAs do add a lot of value to marketing, PR and reach worldwide. But the important thing for us is how much these websites value the experience versus just giving consumers the best price, and whether their value system matches ours."

Besides enhancing its Asia-Pacific inventory and building up loyalty offerings through Marriott Bonvoy, Fang revealed that Marriott is "talking to multiple partners", particularly "local companies" which can help bridge an "end-to-end experience" for its guests.

After all, business partnerships are all about forming win-win relationships. Said Fang: "It may be an adjustment to how we're thinking about strategy. It's pushing us to work together to get that seamless experience."



Maybe previously we were looking at (each other) in more selfish ways – that it was just about bookings – but it should be about improving the whole experience. Nobody can really own the whole thing; it takes a collaborative effort.

– Peggy Fang Roe, chief sales & marketing officer, Asia-Pacific, Marriott International



THAILAND TRAVEL MART PLUS CONNECTS BUYERS WITH NEW DESTINATIONS



The Thailand Travel Mart Plus (TTM+), Thailand's leading annual B2B travel show, which was held between 5-7 June, has ushered in a fresh era of business opportunities for buyers looking for new Thai destinations.

This year, the theme of the "New Shades of Emerging Destinations" is designed to encourage visitors to explore the new shades of Thailand in the 55 provinces identified as emerging destinations or the "hidden gems" throughout the country.

This is part of Tourism Authority of Thailand's (TAT) strategy to promote provincial destinations which are already popular with domestic tourists and increasingly preferable by international visitors.



As a testament to the show's success, the first day of business networking session saw a total of 339 buyers from 51 countries and 370 sellers, including 10 from the Greater Mekong Subregion countries.

For the first time, the buyers list includes 13 companies from Brazil along with new buyers from Chile, Argentina and Colombia.

First time buyers have also been invited from other new source-markets; such as, Lebanon, Latvia, Estonia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Slovakia, Ukraine and Israel.

The sellers list includes exhibitors, mainly from the Southern and Central regions of Thailand. In order to help buyers home in on the emerging destinations, the directory of sellers includes a special listing of the 20 exhibitors from this segment.



Srisuda Wanapinyosak, TAT Deputy Governor of International Marketing (Europe, Africa, Middle East and Americas) said that this year's TTM Plus features some important changes in the trade show component to ensure enhanced business opportunities for both buyers and sellers.

She said: "We recognise that in this era, there are constant changes in everything from customer segments to technology and demographic profiles. The value of travel trade shows needs to be constantly refreshed and enhanced to justify the investment in time and money by both buyers and sellers.

We also have to marry the business objectives of the private sector with our national objectives to create jobs, reduce income disparities and better distribute visitors around the country. At the TTM Plus, all these objectives have been merged. It takes time and effort for emerging destination cities to be recognised and chosen by travellers, and this year's TTM Plus has set the ball rolling."

In 2018, the Thai tourism industry recorded a total of 38 million international arrivals, up by 7.54 per cent, generating an estimated US\$62 billion in earnings, up by 9.63 per cent over 2017. This year, TAT has set a growth target of twelve per cent in tourism revenue from the international market.



TTM+ 2019
New Shades of Emerging Destinations

A whole new world

A swathe of new developments and visitor attraction efforts are reframing the Middle East – traditionally regarded as transit hubs – into desirable holiday spots, with the Asian market a prime target. By
Marissa Carruthers

Home to several major transit hubs between Asia-Pacific and Europe, the Middle East is pushing hard to change its reputation from a stopover spot to a standalone travel destination.

Several Middle Eastern cities already offer transit visas for passengers passing through to extend their trip and spend more time in the destinations. In 2017, a free transit visa for travellers with a layover of five to 96 hours (four days) in Doha was extended to all nationalities. Abu Dhabi offers a 14-day transit visa, and Dubai offers a 96-hour stopover visa.

While the region is still predominantly regarded as a transit destination, perceptions are shifting with the launch of new attractions and hotels, as well as an increase in flights and marketing campaigns, observed industry players at the recent Arabian Travel Market (ATM) in Dubai.

A new roster of attractions are also helping to fan travel interest to the Middle East. For example, the Louvre Abu Dhabi opened in November 2017 as the largest art museum in the Arabian peninsula.

Expectations are high that the Expo 2020 Dubai, a six-month mega event that will see a diverse array of activities, entertainment and events take place at a 438ha purpose-built site, will boost the region's profile and attract more visitors into the future, John Williams, director of business development at Al Hadaf Travel & Tourism in Dubai told TTG Asia.

Said Williams: "We expect Expo 2020 to increase traffic. We are already seeing very strong interest from India and we are trying to (conduct more promotion in) Asia. Expo 2020 will play an important role in raising the UAE's profile in these destinations and we expect to see a boost (in Asian arrivals) on the back of it."

Yasser Moussa, deputy general manager at Al Bustan Centre and Residence in Dubai, said Expo 2020 is already proving to be a game changer. "We are already starting to feel the positive effects of Expo 2020 and are receiving a lot of big enquiries looking at longer stays of up to six nights. We expect this to be maintained with an increase in tourists after the expo," he remarked.

Warner Bros World Abu Dhabi, which opened last year on Yas Island, as well as the existing Ferrari World, are especially well received among Asian families, according to Marina Cipriano, general manager of Experience Hub (Yas Island's trade arm). Upcoming attractions such as SeaWorld Abu Dhabi and a Warner Brothers' hotel are set to elevate Yas Island's popularity among the Asian market further, she added.

At the same time, the growing roster of attractions and visitor-friendly policies appear to have the combined effect of encouraging longer stays from the Asian markets.

Cipriano noted: "From Asian countries, a lot of people currently stay in the UAE for three to five days.

Many will spend time in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, and include Yas Island in (their itineraries). It seems to be a key draw for tourists from Asia, especially China and India."

Not only is the average length of stay for Asian travellers increasing, Cipriano also observed that seven-day integrated packages are now becoming more popular.

Similarly for Moussa, China is emerging as a strong market, as Al Bustan has recorded healthy bookings between October and April, peaking for Chinese New Year in January 2020. He noted too that interest from South-east Asia is growing, with the UAE appealing as an "all-round destination".

He added: "(The UAE) is a great place for families and shopping. You have the beaches, desert, entertainment and world-class attractions. We are now seeing people stay for an average of three to four nights."

Meanwhile, as more Asian hospitality companies expand overseas and introduce familiar homegrown hotel brands to Arabian shores, they also help to bring the Middle East onto the radar of Asian travellers.

Thailand's Centara Hotels & Resorts recently opened Centara West Bay Residences and Suites in the Qatari capital of Doha, and is poised to roll out a second 509-key Centara Grand property in the city before 1Q2020.

Markland Blaiklock, Centara's deputy chief executive, said: "We want to develop in the region as we

Dubai Frame, a new architectural landmark, holds the record as the world's biggest picture frame

see a great opportunity. (The Middle East) is the gateway between two continents, and it has an exotic nature. Taking buggy rides to bash the dunes isn't something you can do anywhere."

Furthermore, the appetite of the Qatari government to push the destination on the global stage also made the country an attractive investment opportunity, he added. The country already hosts an annual tennis tournament, and is gearing up to host the FIFA World Cup in 2022.

Said Blaiklock: "We realise Qatar is still in the early stages of development, not unlike Thailand a few decades ago. Qatar has two million annual visitors so it will take some time (to grow more arrivals), but the elements for success are there."

Likewise, Thai hospitality company Dusit International also made its first foray into Qatar in April, opening a 264-key property in the heart of West Bay.

Gerhard Stutz, general manager at Dusit Doha Hotel, said: "Qatar is one of the fastest-growing countries in the world in terms of tourism, and its reputation as a destination of choice is only set to be cemented further when the FIFA World Cup is held here in 2022."

As the region continues to see huge investment pour into the region, stabilising political climes and constant rejuvenation, the industry remains hopeful of the potential the Middle East holds as a leisure and business destination for Asian travellers.



We expect Expo 2020 to increase traffic. We are already seeing very strong interest from India, and we are trying to expand more (promotion into Asia).

– John Williams, director of business development, Al Hadaf Travel & Tourism



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Taking over the world

Airbnb may have started out as an air mattress rental business, but this hospitality behemoth now wants to be the engine driving a new kind of travel and experiments in modern living. Co-founder and chief strategy officer

Nathan Blecharczyk tells **Rosa Ocampo** why Airbnb's future lies in more than just accommodation

Airbnb has changed and continues to change the travel and tourism landscape. How do you categorise it – rental service, OTA, tech company?

In some ways it's a lifestyle company. It's really changed the way people think about living their life. We think that travel should be transformative. It's really (about) coming away a changed person because you've gotten to see how other people live their lives, and based on that experience you might change the way you yourself live.

We hope that when people travel they make long-lasting connections and friendships. That's the kind of travel we're excited about, and that's why I say we're more a lifestyle than tech or even a travel company. And depending on how you look at it, we can be all those things because we're tech enabled, and we have a big investment in tech.

At the ultimate highest level, what does the company stand for? It's about people's lives and helping them to transform.

Airbnb has blurred the lines between homesharing and hotels. What's next?

Obviously our success has gotten everybody's attention and so you're seeing others trying to work from our success; one of the takeaways is that there is an appetite for unique and more local experiences. As you see, hotels are also trying to offer that.

Many entrepreneurs are trying to scale up the home concept so you see homes in some ways becoming a bit more like hotels in the sense that they're being operated at scale with more consistency and best practices. At the same time, you see hotels being operated a bit like homes in the sense of being more bespoke and boutique, etc.

It's a very interesting time and we hope to participate in all of that. Through some of our recent investments and acquisitions, we're now well positioned to work with hospitality players, hotels, etc. who subscribe to our brand values – not all hotels but the ones that really care about providing these local and unique experiences.

We just announced in New York a partnership to develop a very famous building (Rockefeller Plaza) into Airbnb-style apartments on a large scale, whereas in the past it was individuals offering their homes in the marketplace.

Three years ago, we did a research project and followed a bunch of people around to see how they travel, and we realised people were spending a lot of time planning; and yet they were all going to the same places which were not authentic. These were just tourist spots where no locals go, and they (travellers) weren't connecting with the local people.

Based on that, we had this vision that maybe Airbnb can be a platform for the entire trip, where we help with every aspect of travel and make it all a richer experience. Airbnb's not just about helping you find a place to stay, but (also about bridging you to the destination).

We're basically looking at every aspect of travel and we've been trying to reinvent them. We've done that with Airbnb Experiences for (the last) two years. There



At the ultimate highest level, what does the company stand for? It's about people's lives and helping them to transform.



are 30,000 Airbnb Experiences around the world, but now we're thinking how we might do that for transport and more (new projects) would come thereafter.

What about transport?

When I say transport, I mean all aspects of transport... We hired entrepreneur Fred Reid whose specific background is in the airline industry. He's done so many things for Virgin America – he created the Star Alliance loyalty programme and more. We're hoping and expecting him to help us reinvent transportation – flights and beyond. I cannot say much more. You will hear about it when the time comes, I guess within the year. (What I can tell you is we're) not selling tickets or starting an airline – rather something in between of the two that improves the flight experience.

What are your plans for India's Oyo after investing in it?

We haven't announced the specific plans there but we'll just say that they're a very innovative player in the accommodation space. And as the ecosystem around us evolves, we want to make sure that we have the right alliances and partnerships in place.

There are some observations that safety and security of Airbnb guests are not guaranteed as you don't fully check the properties.

With Airbnb Plus, these are homes that are inspected beforehand by folks who work for us against a checklist of a hundred criteria centred on comfort and design. And all those standards-like services kind of elevate the experiences that we are

now able to provide all around the world.

Not all Airbnb properties are Plus, but if you search for them you'll be able to find them. Travellers need only to read the reviews to get a very good idea of what to expect. If you don't and just book it, then expectations might be misaligned. Other than that, the system has worked remarkably as we're able to serve more than five million guests.

Who are your closest rivals in the industry: Google or Ctrip, perhaps?

We are the largest global travel brand at this point. The other big OTAs and hotels are also fairly global. Obviously we're very different from those other players so I think we're unique in what we do and we're the clear leader.

Where are you in China now?

We've managed to stay independent in China and do very well. We started initially focusing on outbound travellers – that's something we do uniquely well seeing as we have a highly global network of hosts and properties. However as many millions of Chinese got used to travelling abroad and became familiar with the brand and with the app, they now began to use Airbnb domestically. We now have more than 400,000 properties in China and (the domestic market) is now the majority of our business in China. China is the fastest growing country in the world for Airbnb – it's a remarkable success story.

China is a tough market to crack. How did you manage to win the trust and loyalty of the Chinese?

Everybody said, "you'll never be able to do

that". How it happened for us was through winning over the outbound market. With so many Chinese travelling abroad for the first time, they are very eager to experience the culture and to meet locals. Herein lies the appeal of Airbnb for the Chinese, plus we have some interesting homes (that make for unconventional accommodation). As they got to know Airbnb, a lot of our guests became hosts in China. It took time; trust and familiarity didn't happen overnight. Now we're about five years in the market and more than half of our business in China is purely domestic today.

How do you see the industry evolving 10 years from now?

I mentioned earlier about how hotels are moving more towards bespoke, home-like experiences, so that's one big trend.

Secondly, there's a lot of interest in the industry around experiences and that's a trend we have to kick off. The industry is thinking right now: how do we help guests to have interesting and memorable experiences outside the home or the hotel?

The people want to be able to have something memorable to share online that's unique to them, so I think that personalisation and technology can really help deliver what guests want. I think that technology should be able to help create personal connections that were perhaps lacking before.

I think the (travel) planning process is still too hard as I still spend way too many hours trying to plan a trip. But that's where I think technology, specifically AI and social, can better help travellers in their travel planning.

10 NEED TO KNOW'S ABOUT NATHAN BLECHARCZYK

- **Who's in your family?** I'm married and I have two kids
- **What do you do for fun?** I go to the gym. I also like to cycle and ski
- **Your ideal vacation?** Adventure. The more different the culture, the better. China has been very interesting to explore. Going to Cuba has really been interesting. I want to go to St Petersburg, I haven't been there.
- **How do you book your own leisure trips?** Via Airbnb only
- **What are you reading right now?** *Blitzscaling: The Lightning-Fast Path to Building Massively Valuable Companies* by Chris Yeh and Reid Hoffman
- **How do you stay healthy?** Going to the gym three days a week
- **Favourite food?** I like everything but sushi
- **A bad habit you cannot kick.** Answering emails in the middle of the night
- **Your pet peeve, something that never fails to annoy you.** I like things to be very neat and organised
- **Most people don't know that** I'm a host on Airbnb myself



Glowing and growing

Wellness tourism is entering a robust state of growth, having ballooned into a multibillion-dollar global industry and bringing a convergence of sectors from airports to accommodation. By **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

Wellness tourism, the pursuit of maintaining or enhancing one's personal wellbeing while on vacation, is no longer a hippy concept sought out by the spiritual or backpacker types.

It has become a US\$639 billion global market in 2017, more than double the 3.2 per cent growth rate for tourism overall, according to the *2018 Global Wellness Tourism Economy* report released by non-profit Global Wellness Institute (GWI).

This fast-growing tourism segment has been posting healthy growth, expanding by 6.5 per cent annually from 2015 to 2017. Travelers made 830 million wellness trips in 2017, which is 139 million more than in 2015. Furthermore, wellness tourism looks set to continue its rapid growth trajectory at 7.5 per cent annually through 2022 to reach US\$919 billion.

At the root of this robust growth is a confluence of factors – a burgeoning global middle class, stronger appreciation and desire for a healthy lifestyle, greater interest in experiential travel, and growing ease and affordability of flights and travel options – all of which are steamrolling the demand and development of wellness tourism worldwide.

“Once upon a time, our contact with wellness was occasional: we went to the gym or got a massage. But this is changing fast: a wellness mindset is starting to permeate the global consumer consciousness, affecting people's daily decision-making – whether food purchases, a focus on mental wellness and reducing stress, incorporating movement into daily life, environmental consciousness, or their yearning for connection and happiness,” noted

Katherine Johnston, senior research fellow, GWI.

“Wellness, for more people, is evolving from rarely to daily, from episodic to essential, from a luxury to a dominant lifestyle value. And that profound shift is driving powerful growth.”

While North America leads in wellness tourism expenditures and Europe remains the top destination for wellness trips, it is Asia-Pacific where the most gains in the number of wellness trips and expenditure has been made.

China, Japan and India reign as the top three wellness markets in Asia-Pacific in 2017, recording expenditures of US\$31.7 billion, US\$22.5 billion and US\$16.3 billion respectively.

Amid the eye-popping growth that wellness tourism is seeing, GWI also reports the convergence of wellness, hospitality and travel businesses in unprecedented ways, as businesses experiments with new partnerships and business models to help travelers incorporate wellness into every aspect of their trips.

Here's a look at key trends in Asia's wellness tourism sector and what to expect in 2019 and beyond.

Beyond skin-deep treatments

As medical tourism expands beyond cosmetic surgery procedures like facelifts and liposuction to body sculpting and facial rejuvenation, established medical hubs like Thailand are especially well-placed to capture the high-value medical and wellness tourism segments.

While many top-notch hospitals in the region have checked into hospitality – think Singapore's Farrer Park Hospital, which has an adjoining hotel for patients to recuperate



Wellness, for more people, is evolving from rarely to daily, from episodic to essential, from a luxury to a dominant lifestyle value. And that profound shift is driving powerful growth.

– Katherine Johnston, senior research fellow, Global Wellness Institute

– the converse is also true as more wellness resorts expand beyond traditional spa treatments and therapies into high-tech offerings.

Just look to the newly-opened Mövenpick BDMS Wellness Resort Bangkok, which is tapping world-class physicians and latest molecular science in its lifestyle and wellness destination resort proposition.

By leveraging its connection with owner Bangkok Dusit Medical Services (BDMS) – Thailand's largest private hospital group – this 293-key destination spa resort seeks to tap the clientele at next-door BDMS Wellness Clinic, as well as the growing ranks of health-conscious travellers looking to rejuvenate their bodies and minds while on vacation.

Guestrooms are outfitted with wellness amenities like mood lighting, yoga mats and bouncing balls, while an established nutritionist has been roped in as consultant to develop healthy, GMO-free menus for F&B offerings, as well as coffee breaks for corporate events.

Mövenpick BDMS Wellness Resort Bangkok is not alone in pursuing the lucrative synergies between wellness and medical tourism.

Dedicated wellness resort pioneer Chiva-Som International Health Resort will complete a top-to-toe revamp in October this year that will see the addition of a new hydrotherapy suite and flotation chamber to its wellness facilities.

Urban push for wellness resorts

While wellness resorts were once the domain of destination spas in tranquil resort locations, the growing bleisure trend, as well as desire of travellers to have access to self care vacations, have led to a growing number of urban hotels in Asian cities to roll out wellness programmes and positioning themselves as wellness retreats.

Aman already moved into this space in Tokyo, while Six Senses recently forayed into Singapore with two properties in the city's commercial district; both wellness hospitality brands are expected to launch in New York City come 2020. Meanwhile, One&Only is set to debut its first urban resort in Dubai's One Za'abeel.

While cosmopolitan cities may not be typically perceived as wellness retreat locations, it's the very proximity of accessibility and serenity that draw hospitality companies to set up shop in some of Asia's busiest cities.

What Singapore has is the alluring marriage of accessibility and serenity, managing director of The Capitol Kempinski Hotel Singapore, Christian Gurtner, told TTG Asia.

He explained: “It's clearly the best of both worlds combined in one place. While you are able to retreat from hectic daily life and get a good rest with a relaxing ambiance, you are at the same time in the middle of everything and just steps away from entertainment, shopping, cultural events, bars and restaurants.”

For Fivelements, which runs an eco-wellness resort in Bali, it's with the vision of addressing the growing prevalence of mental health and physical wellbeing issues in urban centres that founders Lahra Tatriele and Chicco Tatriele brought its brand to Hong Kong.

“We see that people in Hong Kong are living highly demanding lives and are seeking greater balance, stress reduction and authentic, personalised wellness experiences. So we intend to create a home or ‘habitat’ for the growing ‘urban wellness tribe’ and cultivate it as the second most important place for urban dwellers,



Fivelements' plant-based cuisine

creating a bridge between their first, being their residence, and their third, being their workplace. We believe that urbanites are now ready for a city wellness concept,” said the founders.

The first Fivelements Habitat has just launched in Hong Kong’s Times Square in July 2019, and the brand will plant two more locations in the CBD over the coming 18 months.

Featuring a rich collection of holistic practices inspired by Balinese healing philosophy, Tri Hita Karana, to foster self-exploration, mental and physical health and wellbeing, Fivelements Habitats in Hong Kong offer a diverse array of formats, ranging from classes to private sessions, corporate groups, trainings and workshops, events and day retreats.

Airport wellness ventures take to new heights

As the numbers of people travelling by air surges around the world, airports are no exceptions to the wellness trend as they become wellness destinations in their own right, rolling out health-minded services that are a step beyond one restaurant menu or spa, varying from swimming pools to nap pods to full-service spas.

For example, Frankfurt International Airport touts dedicated silent chairs, which enable passengers to get some peace and quiet with their arched backrests and soundproofing glass panels, alongside facilities like yoga studios and an open-air rooftop terrace.

In Doha, Hamad International Airport’s dedicated Vitality Wellbeing & Fit-



From left: Swimming pool at Movenpick BDMS Wellness Resort Bangkok; Frankfurt International Airport touts dedicated silent chairs

ness Center is an oasis of therapeutic services, ranging from a glass-encased indoor pool to a hydrotherapy tub and nail salon.

Fitness, beauty and relaxation brands are making a push for their services into airports, according to a CB Insights report on wellness trends for 2019. Most recently, US-based airport spa brand BeRelax has raised US\$24 million for post-security relaxation and beauty treatments, feeding into the growing trend of airports becoming more like shopping malls.

Leading fitness membership network ClassPass, which recently expanded into Asia, has entered into the travel wellness market with its launch of ClassPass Getaways to offer day-long wellness experiences such as workouts or spa services, among other options, CB Insights noted.

Clearly, airports are on their way to becoming the stepping stone to a wellness-theme travel journey.

A new fleet of floating retreats

With the significant uptick in fitness-oriented vacations increase, cruise lines are also responding by offering a gamut of wellness experiences on board, from indulgent pampering to fitness classes to oxygen bars.

In fact, total restoration has been identified by Cruise Lines International Association as one of the key cruising trends in 2019, as travellers seek ways to relieve the stress of the daily lives, and more cruise lines are responding to such growing passenger demand than ever before.

Cruise line Lindblad Expeditions joined hands with New York-based Exhale Spas to roll out its first wellness retreats at sea. Seaboard, meanwhile, has tapped the expertise of integrative medicine guru Andrew Weill in its new programme that centres on holistic, mindful living across its entire fleet. Other major cruise lines

Oceania Cruises, Regent Seven Seas, Cunard and Celebrity Cruises have all partnered with Canyon Ranch to offer health-centric activities at sea and on land.

In Asia, Dream Cruises has also teamed up with ClassPass to offer special fitness-theme cruises earlier this year. Designed for millennial travellers and fitness fanatics, the three-night cruise programme was jam-packed with a wide range of classes, from high-intensity interval training and boxing lessons to chilled-out yoga sessions and aerobic Latino jam sessions.

“We’re seeing an increasing demand for holistic health and wellness options in Singapore, so fitness was an obvious choice for our first themed cruise in the Dreamer Series,” said Michael Goh, senior vice president – international sales of Genting Cruise Lines in a statement. – *Additional reporting from Pamela Chow and Tiara Maharani*

Advertorial

Mövenpick BDMS Wellness Resort Bangkok presents a new urban health and wellness sanctuary



As wellness emerges as one of the most popular ways to spruce up hospitality offerings, *Bruno Huber, general manager of Mövenpick BDMS Wellness Resort Bangkok*, shares how this new property stands out from other wellness properties in Thailand and how it will elevate the country’s status as a hub for medical tourism.

What are the highlights of Mövenpick BDMS Wellness Resort Bangkok? Mövenpick BDMS Wellness Resort Bangkok exudes the sense of serenity one would expect from an out-of-town retreat, an extreme rarity in a downtown hotel. Nestled in one of Bangkok’s first Western-styled gardens, a 1.2-acre natural space, the resort features 293 rooms and suites and a wide range of leisure facilities and dining outlets. With 2,000m² of indoor event space, plus our shaded gardens, we have one of the largest MICE facilities of any hotel in Bangkok.

The resort is directly connected to the BDMS Wellness Clinic, a cutting-edge facility where leading medical experts use state-of-the-art technology for preventative healthcare. This focus on well being is reflected throughout the resort, with dining venues specialising in healthy cuisine, a large outdoor pool and a fitness centre featuring the only full range of DAVID high-tech equipment in Asia.

A 750m² spa and a Thai specialty restaurant will be opening at the end of the year to complete our collection of world-class facilities.

How does the resort stand out from the rest of the hotels and resorts in Thailand? Our combina-

tion of a prime downtown location and a secluded resort-style ambience really set Mövenpick BDMS Wellness Resort Bangkok apart from the competition. This is a unique proposition for guests; a wellness-inspired resort with direct access to a state-of-the-art clinic and world-class facilities for health, fitness and MICE, but also with easy access to Bangkok’s most popular attractions.

Our extensive event spaces are great for meetings and weddings, and the exquisite gardens provide the perfect setting for alfresco functions and photoshoots.

Who is the target audience for the resort? We foresee strong demand from high net worth individuals, couples and families seeking health, wellness and medical tourism, along with leisure travellers and the MICE market.

Within this wellness industry, there are many sub-sectors, including personalised and preventative treatments, alternative medicine, sports therapy and nutrition, and we expect to attract domestic and international guests who are keen to improve their health and wellbeing.

We are also aiming to attract couples and families, who will be attracted by our close proximity to Bangkok’s major attractions, and the



MICE sector, which will be able to make use of our exceptional event spaces. We foresee strong demand for weddings from local and international couples.

How will this resort help to boost health tourism in the city? Bangkok is already considered a top destination for the wellness tourism sector, with its traditional focus on spa therapies. Our resort will elevate this status to the next level. International travellers seeking medical services will be able to access a wide range of treatments, including sports science, digestive wellness, dental services and fertility solutions and more.

We fully expect to enhance Bangkok’s reputation as a medical tourism destination and position the city as a global capital for health and wellness.



The Rain Vortex is a centrepiece at Singapore's newly opened Jewel Changi Airport

The smart, experiential airport of the future

A new model for airports has emerged. Some of the world's most cutting-edge aviation gateways are rethinking the customer experience by transforming their spaces into attractions in their own right and incorporating digital solutions that extend passenger engagement beyond the confines of arrival and departure halls. By **Prudence Lui** and **Yixin Ng**

As functional aviation hubs evolve into destinations for today's high-tempo and experience-driven travellers, lines are blurring between airport and destination, physical and digital customer experience, and the different stages of air travel.

To adapt to new needs of today's travellers, airports are increasingly incorporating entertainment features, immersive retail experiences, as well as design or product elements that evoke a sense of place.

The concept of airports as experience hubs was brought to fruition, arguably in its most complete form to-date, when Jewel Changi Airport was launched this year as a massive lifestyle destination with multi-dimensional offerings (see sidebar).

In Hong Kong, the SkyCity megaproject is underway, scheduled to be completed in phases between 2023 and 2027. Connected to Hong Kong International Airport, the landmark will boast 35ha of floor area, comprising 19.5ha for dining and retail outlets and 5.3ha each for experience-based entertainment facilities and office space.

New World Development was awarded the tender for the project, which it hopes would serve as a commercial-retail-entertainment hub for locals and visitors from the Greater Bay Area and abroad. The project is expected to introduce an array of international "technovation" brands to the city and region, including Hong

Kong's first indoor and outdoor go-kart track, AR and VR interactive game facilities and an "experiential zone" for kids.

With Airport Authority Hong Kong's acquisition of AsiaWorld-Expo (AWE), located within a multi-modal transport hub and fully integrated with the city's airport, opportunities for larger-scale events such as sporting events, concerts and exhibitions could also open up within the airport's vicinity and make the airport "a destination in itself", said Fred Lam, CEO, Airport Authority Hong Kong (AAHK).

He added: "The concept (of SkyCity) goes far beyond the traditional notion of a shopping mall and will provide a full range of retail, dining and entertainment facilities plus offices and hotels. Right next to it is AWE which offers a wide range of facilities for conventions, exhibitions, entertainment and sporting events.

At Sydney Airport, manager for service strategy and customer experience, Claire Donnellan, also shared that a lifestyle precinct opened in Terminal 2 recently, encompassing new F&B concepts as well as fresh experience for passengers.

Airports are also aspiring to reflect a sense of place. Donnellan said: "Years ago a standard bathroom was considered fine, then travellers started expecting more (motion-activated) functions – and now, people actually want a sense of place and experience even when they go to the

bathroom."

The need to serve as more than just embarkation and disembarkation points is perhaps most pronounced in transit hubs.

Abu Dhabi International Airport's head of airport service quality, Muna Al-Ghanim, said: "Customer experience has changed dramatically. Passengers used to travel day-to-day and thought of it as transport from point A to B. Over time, it has evolved into a total experience. Nowadays, they don't just pass through airports, but go and look at airport websites, roam social media platforms and even download the airport apps to know what the offerings are in terms of service and facilities."

For Plaza Premium Group, brand director, Mei Mei Song, the growing transit volume has placed increasing importance on rest-stop amenities, beyond simply F&B and retail experiences.

Meanwhile, the digital era has ushered in new demands for information at travellers' fingertips across different stages of the air travel journey.

Song said: "Now with technology advancement through Amazon, Uber, or WeChat, people are accustomed to a level of convenience that was unheard of even two years ago."

Indeed, the airport experience today spans pre- to post-arrival. Carlos Criado, business development director at Corporacion Quiport, which manages a brand-new airport outside Ecuador's capital city, believes that



Nowadays, (travellers) don't just pass through airports, but look at airport websites, roam social media platforms and even download the airport apps to know what the offerings are.

– Muna Al-Ghanim, head of airport service quality, Abu Dhabi International Airport

customer experience starts from as early as beginning of trip planning.

Now, the task ahead of those in the game of improving customer experience for travellers is to be able to provide real-time, up-to-date information to travellers. Social media has bred an expectation for fast and easy access to information, making it "vital" that travellers get timely flight updates even before arriving at the airport, Criado stressed.

Similarly, AAHK, general manager, Terminal 1, Chapman Fong, remarked that the social media and greater computation power of smart have drastically changed the customer expectations. "Big giants in e-commerce or digital platforms like



Hong Kong SkyCity

Google and Apple offer very good user experience, so we are not competing with airports but with these giants in user experience. This presents a big challenge to airport operators.”

Through surveying customers, AAHK has found that customers expect personalised information delivered to them before they even arrive at the airport. “We want to turn these challenges into opportunities for us to improve further,” Fong said.

For Texas’ San Antonio International Airport, chief customer experience officer, Karen Ellis, greater convenience also includes having the option of self service. “We need to include the ability to have self-service function while having some-

body provide assistance if needed. We know some millennials want simply to be able to go through airport processes as quickly as possible.”

A shift to cloud technologies has also lessened the reliance on hardware within airport premises, according to Amadeus’ head of airport IT, Sarah Samuel.

Samuel said: “Digital transformation, as well a shift to cloud technology, removes the need for costly hardware within the premises, helping free up valuable space and eliminate the costs associated with hardware maintenance. This in turn also reduces an airport’s environment impact by lowering emissions. Cloud technologies are also being implemented for

cyber security purposes, as protecting on-site servers is a complex, expensive task. Airports are choosing to outsource via the cloud to highly-secure data centers, such as Amadeus’.

“While optimising processes inside the airport can have a significant effect on passenger management and customer experience, the more innovative airports are those who are investing beyond the four walls and collaborating with external stakeholders or third-party providers,” Samuel expressed in a statement.

Examples of innovations that take air travel processes beyond the airport are curbside check-in, Samuel said. Off Airport Check-In Solutions provide pop-up

check-in and baggage drop service. The system uses Amadeus’ Airport Common Use Service cloud technology to communicate with Virgin Australia’s system, providing travellers with off-site check-in at areas such as cruise terminals, hotel and sporting events. He also foresees door-to-door bag drop service being a viable solution down the line.



From above: View of Beijing Daxing International Airport; Holland Boulevard at Amsterdam Airport Schiphol

Less transitional, more experiential

Jewel Changi Airport, Singapore

The newly opened Jewel Changi Airport offers a bevy of entertainment, activity retail and F&B options within its striking dome-shaped, glass-and-steel façade. Amid the post-launch hype surrounding the 40m-high Rain Vortex – the world’s tallest indoor waterfall – the 14,000m² Canopy Park on the topmost level features play dining outlets, gardens, walking trails and play attractions, from giant slides to hedge mazes and bouncing nets. Jewel also boasts the Changi Experience Studio, with over 20 different touchpoints and 10 zones providing interactive games, projection storytelling, immersive shows and gallery exhibits over 3,000m².

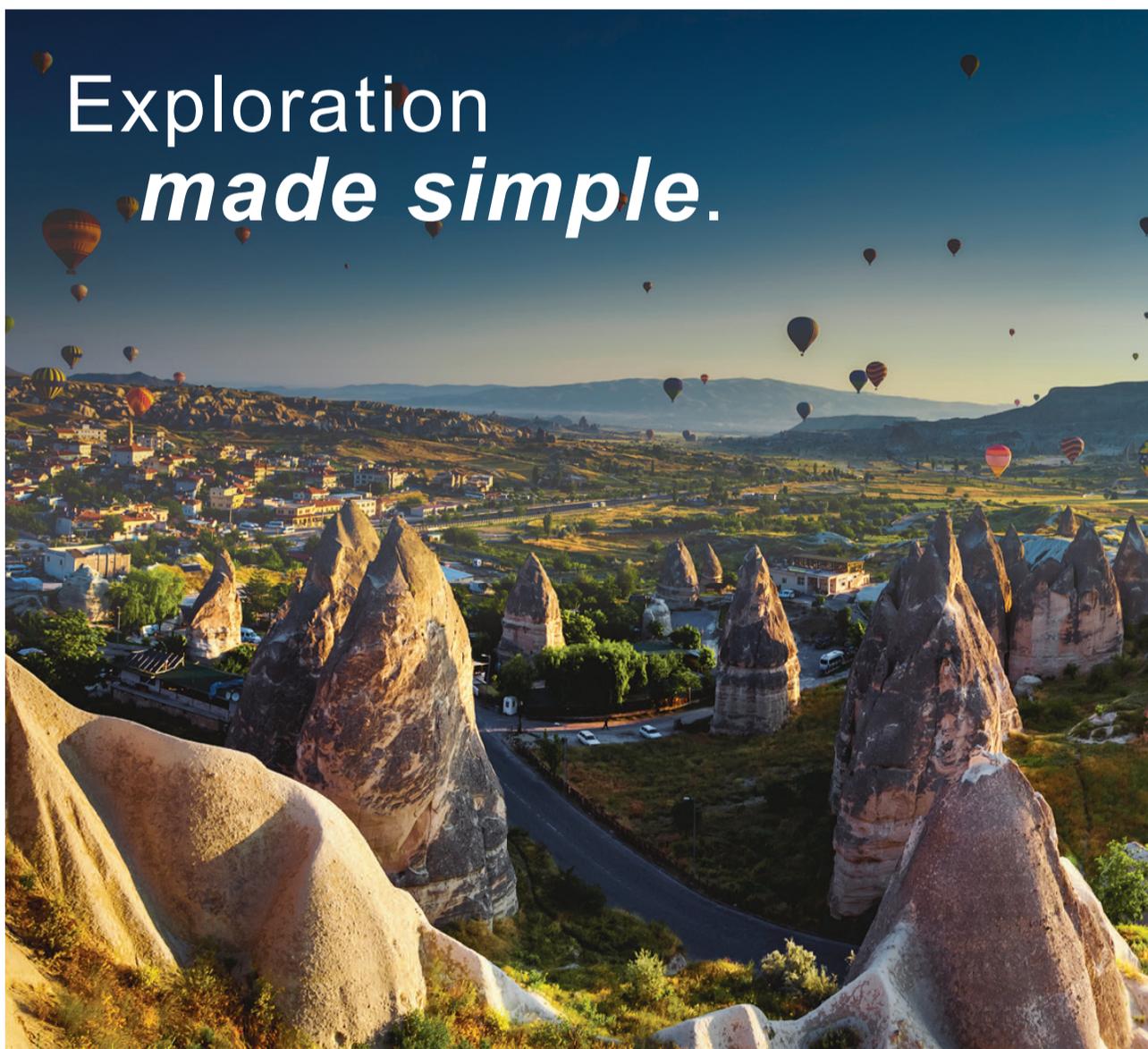
Beijing Daxing International Airport, China

Currently under construction, Beijing’s new Daxing International Airport is scheduled to begin operations on September 30 as the world’s largest airport. It will have a commercial terminal encompassing work spaces, retail, dining, and entertainment options. There are also plans to incorporate interactive pet hotels, a child care and nursery, hybrid online retail and dining, and a showroom for companies. Beijing New Aeropolis Holdings in May signed an MoU – for the commercial terminal only – with Emaar, the Dubai-based developer behind the Burj Khalifa and other landmarks around the world. More details were not available at press time.

Amsterdam Airport Schiphol

In late 2017, Amsterdam Airport Schiphol completed its upgrade of Holland Boulevard, an art, culture and leisure space between Departure Lounges 2 and 3. This brought on the addition of Airport Library, with around 500 books by well-known Dutch authors translated into more than 40 languages.

The Nemo Science Museum features eight interactive setups, each allowing the participant to learn about technology and science through experiments. Travellers can make sound waves visible, tame electricity and blend your face with someone else’s. The area also houses a branch of the famous Rijksmuseum, exhibiting original 17th century art pieces.



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Destination

Walking the walk on sustainability

Destination New Zealand has pledged to put environmental and cultural values at the heart of tourism pursuits, where for the first time, its NTO is trudging forward in partnership with the conservation ministry. **Mimi Hudoyo** finds out about the nation's fervent commitment to its key assets, and how tourism players in the private sector are also doing their part

Sustainability is becoming a bigger priority in New Zealand's tourism sector, with both the public and private sectors eager to uphold indigenous cultural values and preserve the destination for generations to come.

While tourism has brought tangible economic benefits to the country in recent years, industry stakeholders are now making a concerted effort to incorporate visitor, environmental and community goals in its strategy.

The added weight on sustainable goals is evident in the Tourism Industry Aotearoa's (TIA) – Aotearoa is the Maori name for New Zealand – *Tourism 2025 & Beyond* report as well as the New Zealand-Aotearoa Government Tourism Strategy, which was recently unveiled at Trenz 2019.

Chris Roberts, chief executive of TIA, said: "By any measure, New Zealand's tourism industry has experienced a remarkable period of growth. Visitors and the businesses that service them are making a crucial contribution to the economic and social well-being of cities, towns and regions across (the country)."

Indeed, tourism has been breathing new life into the country's small towns, with Roberts citing the example of small-town patrol stations and restaurants having managed to survive due to business from tourists.

"A local builder born and bred in Taumarunui reckons he has never seen the town so vibrant. And what does he put that down to? Tourism," he shared.

Yet, there is another side to this rapid growth. The surge in visitor traffic has introduced strains on both

infrastructure as well as labour in some regions.

To safeguard New Zealand's future, TIA has revised its former Tourism 2025 Growth Framework launched in 2014.

Kelvin Davis, New Zealand tourism minister, said: "We want tourism to improve New Zealanders' social, cultural, environmental as well as economic well-being. We want tourism growth to be productive, sustainable and inclusive."

Social, cultural, environmental and economic goals are "not to be traded off against one another", he asserted. "A well-functioning tourism will see these all working together."

This will mean building partnerships with the Maori society across all outcomes of the strategy, as well as building a low-emission and climate-resilient economy to support the transition to a 'clean, green and carbon-neutral' New Zealand-Aotearoa, Davis elaborated.

"Importantly, (the new tourism strategy) recognises the environment – our cultural capital – as the economic foundation of New Zealand-Aotearoa and growth will need to be created within ecological limits," the tourism minister declared.

Reflecting the country's commitment to environmental goals, the tourism strategy was launched together with the Ministry of Conservation for the first time.

Eugenie Sage, minister of conservation, said: "The Department of Conservation (DOC) contributes to the strategy because it's acknowledging that our natural and cultural heritage is at the heart of our success as a country and society.

"It is our responsibility to help ensure that we have a sustainable visitor industry that protects and cherishes natural and cultural heritage for its own sake and for the present and future generations."

She shared that the new tourism strategy would enable the government to adopt a more active and coordinated approach to make sustainability a core value in tourism and mitigate the industry's impacts.

The DOC also sees its role as going beyond providing the infrastructure for recreation in nature or preserving

Visitor numbers to Mount Cook National Park have exceeded one million for the first time this year

and protecting the natural environment. Sage shared that the department is also working in partnership with the Maori community and businesses to understand and encompass their cultural values.

For example, at Mount Cook, where annual visitor numbers recently reached one million, "the DOC has worked to ensure that facilities are adequate and visitors have access to a safe, high-quality experience, while at the same time the outstanding natural and cultural values of the national park are protected",

Tours & Activities

Connections in a storied land

1 Stargazing in Martinborough

Hammonds Wellington Tours has a new guided tour at the new Star Field Tours Martinborough. Travelers can enjoy an evening of stargazing with astronomy guides, learning about constellations and exploring the stars and galaxies using celestial navigation and a telescope.

The package is available for groups of up to 22 pax. Contact www.tranzit.co.nz

2 The Katoa Mokoia Island Experience

Arriving by water taxi to the sacred Mokoia Island at the heart of Lake Rotorua, guests will be greeted in a Powhiri welcome ceremony and cultural performances put up by descendants of the Te Arawa tribe.

A guide tour by a member



of the Te Arawa tribe will shed light on Maori heritage through myths and legends handed down through generations. Participants will also visit Hinemoa's pool and hear about the love story between Hinemoa and Tutanekai.

according to Sage.

Since 2010, the DOC has invested NZ\$16.5 million (US\$10.9 million) in facilities including a new visitor centre, road improvements, tracks and additional toilets. Some NZ\$122,000 was also spent on repairing the Hooker Valley Track following severe weather damage last March.

To fund the projects, the government has introduced an International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy as of July 1, which requires international visitors staying in the country for less than 12 months to pay a NZ\$35 levy. The government expects to generate NZ\$350 million in revenue from the new levy over the next five years.

Meanwhile, the industry has increasingly recognised and adopted Maori values of guardianship, hospitality and togetherness.

In November 2018, TIA and six other New Zealand organisations



Importantly, (the new tourism strategy) recognises the environment – our cultural capital – as the economic foundation of New Zealand-Aotearoa and growth will need to be created within ecological limits.

– Kelvin Davis, tourism minister, New Zealand

also launched *Tiaki, Care for New Zealand*, an initiative which encourages international and domestic travellers to act as guardians of New Zealand by following a set of guidelines outlining the ways visitors can preserve and protect the land.

Tourism-related businesses in the country have also been active participants in their efforts to live up to the *Tiaki* promise.

For example, Malcolm Johns, chief executive of Christchurch Airport, said: “In the past four years we have been investing in activities to

decarbonise our business. The priority is on direct emissions for now, (but we plan to) deal with indirect business (in future).”

“Since we started, we have removed 90 per cent of our direct emissions and by October this year we would be within touching distance from being (free of) direct emissions in our business.”

However, in the project’s final stages, Johns acknowledged that the airport is faced with the touch challenge of dealing with fuels that fire power engines and emergency back-up generators.

Meanwhile, Air New Zealand is putting its focus on “reductions and innovation – minimising emissions by using fuel more efficiently, and exploring new commercial solutions and technology to stabilise our carbon emissions by 2020”, said chief revenue officer, Cam Wallace.

“One of the most significant ways to reduce emissions is by operating a modern and efficient fleet. We (started operating) 787-9 Dreamliner in 2014 and retired our last Boeing 767 aircraft from our fleet in March 2017.

“We’ve recently introduced three A320neos and six A321neos. New-generation engines, fuel-efficient Sharklet wingtip devices and approximately 25 per cent more seats mean the neos are expected to help deliver fuel savings and efficiencies of at least 15 per cent compared with the aircraft they’re replacing,” he revealed.

Despite the progress made in cutting emissions, Air New Zealand is still some way off from being entirely emissions free, admitted Wallace.

“The reality is that there will be a limit to the efficiencies we can make, and despite an extensive global search, aviation biofuel supply at the scale we need for our operations is still a way off,” he said.

“This makes carbon offsetting hugely important to balance some of the impact of air travel. We offer our retail and larger corporate customers the option to offset carbon emissions associated with their flights through our FlyNeutral programme.”

to enjoy high tea. www.katoalak-erotorua.co.nz

3 Canopy tour, Rotorua

Ultimate Canopy Tours, an upgraded version of Rotorua Canopy Tour’s flagship Original Canopy Tour, takes participants on a 3.5-hour adventure deep into the ancient forest, which has been left untouched and unlogged for over 1,000 years.

The experience features a clifftop walk, 400m-long zipline, suspended staircases and a controlled descent from a towering tree down to the forest floor below.

A portion of each ticket sold goes towards pest eradication efforts.

Tour participants must be at least 10 years old and weigh under 120kg. www.canopytours.co.nz

Destination

Welcome to Wellywood

Tourists arrive in Wellington for its famed film locations, but stay for the other experiences it has to offer, writes **Mimi Hudoyo**



Rover Tours Group’s Lord of The Rings themed tours



If Hollywood is the film capital of the US, then Wellington is New Zealand’s. In Wellington, affectionately termed Wellywood, the film industry is the second largest employer.

Most notably, the *Lord of the Rings* (LOTR) movies catapulted the city into greater prominence not only in the film industry but also in tourism.

Scott Courtney, director of Rover Tours Group, said: “Before *LOTR* there were about five films made here. Since the first *LOTR* film, there has been nearly 200 (and counting).”

Tours themed around *LOTR* are Rover Tours Group’s best selling products.

“We have not seen any year where the demand for the tour was down since (the first film) was launched in 2001,” he said.

Having said that, famous film locations are not all that the city has to offer, as evidenced by the growing number of tourists visiting the city for overnight stays rather than just day tours.

Wellington has seen the average length of stay of tourists increase from point-zero night 10 years ago to around two nights today.

Philip Louie, trade and sales manager of Rover Tours Group, said: “(Traditionally), travellers followed the Golden route of Auckland down to Rotorua. They might get to Wellington, not to stay, but to catch the ferry to go to the South Island.

“We have started to see that change a little bit. A lot of this has to do with high season capacity in New Zealand where places like Rotorua and Napier are so overly done.”

Travellers are having to seek out less crowded spots to visit during high season – and Wellington fits the bill to a tee. “Our peak seasons particularly for accommodation are almost reversed. Being the country’s political capital, we receive the most visitors during the weekdays and in the middle of the year.

“If we look at the accommodation capacity on weekends and particularly around Christmas and New Years, Wellington hotels tend to be at their lowest occupancy. Hotel rates also tend to be lower on weekends than weekends,” Louie observed.

Furthermore, over the past 10

years, the tourism supply has been growing considerably since the Te Papa Museum opened in 1999. Local products like craft beer and coffee in particular have increasingly figured into tourists’ itineraries.

Helen Tickner, marketing manager of Transit Group, added: “Wellington may not attract first-time travellers to New Zealand, but repeat visitors enjoy the city because it offers something different. Brewery tours, for example, are popular.”

Meanwhile, Kapiti Island, which started off with day tours and domestic demand, has stepped up its offer to international tourists.

Len Yu, tourism trade specialist of Wellington Tourism, said that it is not realistic to expect travellers to come a long way only to visit Wellington – but visitors should stay a minimum of two nights in order to truly experience what the city has to offer.

“Wellington is very compact. Many activities take only half a day or a few hours, and one attraction is close to another. This allows travellers to have multiple activities within one day,” Yu said.

While this has worked well for daytrippers, tourism players will have no trouble piecing together overnight itineraries for visitors.

Yu remarked: “Wellington attracts those who are looking deeper into getting local experiences.”

Experiences such as behind-the-scene tours of beer breweries or chocolate factories, or having a meal hosted by a local family, tell the Wellington story to tourists.

In addition, Rover Tours Group, recently introduced the Seal Coast Safari, a half-day 4x4 tour to see the seal colony in the South Coast of Wellington.

As well, Museum of New Zealand: Te Papa Tongarewa, a major attraction in the city, has just added Te Taiao Nature, an interactive experience with specimens showcasing New Zealand’s unique environment.

Working in Wellington’s favour is Singapore Airlines’ recently launched services between Singapore and Wellington via Melbourne.

“Even if you arrive in Auckland, there is a flight to Wellington every 15 minutes, so accessibility is not really an issue,” Yu said.



During the walk, guests will have a chance to see abundant bird life, many of which are endangered, including the kiwi, saddlebacks, weka and kokako. Following the tour, guests will visit Peppers on the Point luxury lodge

Destination

A balancing act

Although overcrowding at popular tourist sites is not yet causing major problems for some tourism players, it is not too early to start dispersing traffic to lesser visited areas, **Prudence Lui** writes

Macau is showing early signs of capacity strains after recent accessibility enhancements in the Pearl River Delta like the high-speed rail connection and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge.

During the recent May 1 Labour Day Holiday, visitor arrivals surged 37 per cent to 636,644, almost equivalent to the city's total population (667,400).

With visitors concentrated in some key attractions, industry players say more can be done to disperse traffic. Based on findings from several visitor profile studies conducted by the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) in the past five years, the top three attractions for the visitors are the Ruins of St Paul's, Senado Square and Cotai Strip. Taipa and Coloane Village have also experienced visitor surges during peak periods.

China Travel Service (Macao), travel department sales and marketing manager, Pun Cheng-man, said: "We feel the (effects of) overtourism especially during weekends and public holidays. Cotai and Taipa are key sightseeing points, and both are always packed with tourists."

Pun said the uneven distribution of tourists has caused "nuisances to neighbourhood and local residents".

Charles Huang, COO of Macau Hotel Sun Sun, located within Inner Harbour, opined: "Overtourism is a result of government's focus on promoting traditional attractions only."

Huang suggested that unused piers in Inner Harbour can be transformed into tourist-friendly F&B zones. He also hopes for Inner Harbour to be added as a stop for event-goers during festivals such as Chinese New Year.

Visitor traffic can also be managed by holding tourist activities outside of peak periods. "For instance, the annual Macao International Fireworks Display Contest takes place on



busy weekends. Why not do it Friday? This can also entice visitors to stay one more night. It'd better if the event can be held in first half of the year," Huang proposed.

In Taipa Village, some tourism players don't believe crowding is a problem yet. Taipa Village Destination, head of marketing Pamela Chan, said: "Since there is a growing number of attractions in Macau, visitors are being distributed to different areas."

She added that Taipa Village can afford to continue welcoming more visitors. "I can see the footfall traffic diversification all around Macau, between Cotai, Taipa and the Macau Peninsula."

A restaurateur who sees tourist business peak in the month of May, too said that visitor traffic is adequately spread out between his Taipa

and Macau Peninsula outlets.

"We did see a slight bump in visitors as compared to last year. However, traffic was divided in both areas. Cotai caters to more upmarket tourists and Macau has more options for budget hotels."

Similar to Chan, he feels he is ready to welcome even more business.

Still, the strong growth in arrivals is already prompting the MGTO and relevant bodies to implement measures to alleviate crowds. For instance, a new app was launched in March 2019 to help residents and visitors better monitor traffic to avoid crowds. The application predicts visitor density at tourist attractions within four hours, 24 hours and seven days, and classifies the forecast at various levels from "comfortable" to "heavily congested".

The MGTO spokesman said: "An-

Crowding a regular phenomena at the Ruins of St Paul's

other focus has been on attracting visitors to different parts of the city, during different times of the year, with projects like the Step Out, Experience Macao's Communities walking tours, along with events like the Art Macao (which inaugurated on June 6), as well as new attractions such as Anim'Arte Nam Van and the Grand Prix Museum."

Meanwhile, there are pipeline projects for urban planning in and around the Ruins of St Paul's and Barra. The Transport Bureau has also continually improved traffic control measures, and the Light Rail Transit (Taipa Line) System is expected to be operational in 2019.

Moreover, MGTO hopes to complete feasibility studies within this year, before submitting its findings to the government for further analysis and consideration.

Tours & Activities

The new and old in Macau

1 Art and Music Jamming

Contrary to popular belief, Ukuleles did not originate in Hawaii – they were brought there by Portuguese immigrants. Guests can also experience the ukulele tradition in Macau, which received strong Portuguese influences in colonial times. Tour participants will be guided by local artists to paint the Azulejo (Portuguese tile) pattern onto their ukulele, before learning how to play the instrument. info@cofortehk.com

2 City of Dreams backstage tour

City of Dreams is giving visitors backstage access to its signature

House of Dancing Water show. The hour-long guided Explorer Tour will give theatre enthusiasts an insider look at stage operations, machinery, diving and elaborate costumes.

Visitors may also opt for the 45-minute Experience Tour, which takes visitors on stage to experience the thrill of being part of a world-renowned show and a chance to meet the performers. www.cityofdreamsmacau.com

3 Studio City's new attractions

Studio City will launch two new entertainment attractions once it obtains the required licences.



The Flip-Out is Macau's first indoor trampoline centre, run by an operator with 78 arenas worldwide. Meanwhile, the Legend Heroes Park will use VR, AR, hologram, motion tracking, projection mapping, 4D+ technologies, alongside video arcade games and 'sportainment'.

4 Largo da Sé food tour

Klook's three-hour Macanese food crawl around Largo da Sé (Cathedral Square) will introduce participants to five popular savoury dishes. There is also the chance to sample local eats at seasonal food stalls. Tours are available in English, Chinese or Cantonese, for groups of four to six pax. www.klook.com

Fresh Eyes

When passion meets acumen

Tours are not merely a passion project for this former urban planner, who believes he has a model that answers market needs. By **Prudence Lui**

An urban planner by profession, Manuel Wu gave up his government job and started Macau Explorer Cultural Travel in 2014.

At that time, nobody believed the travel agency could survive in what's regarded as a sunset industry with online travel habits at the fore.

However, Wu felt there was still a market for offline booking of in-depth local cultural tours that deviated from mainstream sightseeing-and-shopping tours.

Wu mused: "What prompted such a career shift was my passion for travel. It was nurtured during my stint with the Land, Public Works and Transport Bureau. One of my duties was to receive overseas diplomats or consuls who came to the enclave for exchange. I showed them around the city and observed numerous fast-paced sightseeing tours and hop-on, hop-off coaches in the market, which did not immerse visitors in the local culture."

He then became determined to walk visitors into Macau's 400-year history.

Being new to the business, he skilled himself by enrolling in an inbound tour guide course before leaving his full-time job.

He recalled: "I also volunteered to take groups in my leisure time to really feel the pulse of tourism. The experience was rewarding and reinforced my decision to join tourism."

The company began with two cultural routes before custom-made tours took off in recent years. Today, itineraries cover history, nightlife, the Historic Centre of Macau and gourmet themes.

Apart from leisure, overseas MICE visitors also opt for local experience outside of meetings, leading the company to create tour ideas like DIY Portuguese egg tart classes.

He observed a gap in the market when it comes to one-stop services for both business events, as well as tours that fit with the specific interests, needs and schedules of delegates.

"That's why many come to us for new ideas when planning overseas exchange or study tours. We do all the sourcing including for (special) requests i.e. incinerator visits and childcare services."

Wu has kept his head down in the past

five years to build the business and a professional team, with special emphasis on tour guides. The company started to break even from last year, and Wu now sees 'intangible' services and professionalism as

key assets to sustain business.

Wu explained: "It might be very easy to copy our itineraries but not our software like intangible services and professional standards."



It might be very easy to copy our itineraries but not our software like intangible services and professional standard.

Manuel Wu
Managing director,
Macau Explorer
Cultural Travel



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OFFICIAL PUBLICATION





Hotels

Rising ambitions

Hotels in the historic Macau Peninsula strive towards the success seen in the buzzier Cotai, writes **Prudence Lui**

With newer developments raising the profile of Macau's Cotai Strip since 2007, hotels in the Macau Peninsula are determined to not be left behind.

According to China Travel Service (Macao), travel department sales and marketing manager, Pun Cheng-man, hotel rates are lower in the peninsula, which is dominated by old hotels. During the low season, it's typical to see weekday hotel rates in Cotai priced at MOP\$900 (US\$112), compared to MOP\$600-700 in the Peninsula.

The two areas are generally non-competing, pointed out Crowne Plaza Macau's sales director, Benedict Wu, with Cotai Strip hotels focused on casino guests.

However, hotel operators in the peninsula are impacted when the casino market softens and Cotai hotels lower their rates.

"To stay competitive, we are developing different markets instead of relying on the mainland Chinese. Since we are a non-casino hotel with a big ballroom, MICE and corporate clients are important to us."

Artyzen Hospitality Group, vice president of Macau operations and Grand Lapa general manager, Rutger Verschuren, said: "We have to fight harder due to the limited marketing funds and other resources available compared with the more recent products and facilities in Cotai."

However, he stressed that this is a healthy driving force as both areas appeal to different segments. "No hotel or destination can attract all markets. We are each (complementary).

"Cotai is more attractive to the mass market and ideal for huge MICE groups, but not all people are attracted to mega resorts where gaming facilities play a major role," he elaborated. On the other hand, the Macau Peninsula targets more families, corporate guests, educational, government officials and diplomats, or simply those who prefer to be closer to local experiences.

Verschuren thinks a collaborative branding effort could lift the Macau Peninsula back into the limelight. His idea is to brand the Avenida da Amizade – the peninsula's equivalent to the Cotai Strip – as the Friendship Road.

The avenue has lots to leverage on for this branding effort. It the longest avenue in Macau where hotels and attractions are concentrated. Avenida da Amizade spreads from near the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao bridge arrival terminal and Macau Ferry Terminal all the way to Grand Lisboa, next to a UNESCO heritage area and Macau's famous walking streets and department stores, Verschuren explained.

He added: "I hope to drive a campaign with other properties to brand this strip in the peninsula as 'The Friendship Road' or 'The Friendship Mile'. By uniting businesses along this strip, we can boost the identity of the peninsula."



I hope to drive a campaign with other properties to brand this strip in the peninsula as 'The Friendship Road' or 'The Friendship Mile'. By uniting businesses along this strip, we can boost the identity of the peninsula.

Rutger Verschuren, vice president of Macau operations, Artyzen Hospitality Group

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FINAL WORD

Nurturing Asia's first luxe show

Alison Gilmore, portfolio director of ILTM, discusses what it takes to build up the first B2B luxury travel event in Asia at a time of unprecedented dynamism in the business of high-end holidays. By **Yixin Ng**

How has the decision to carve out the China show and anchor the Asia-Pacific edition in Singapore worked out?

Before we took that step, we had been in China for 11 years as an Asia show. (It took a long time to establish our presence there) but the decision to have separate shows for China and the rest of Asia-Pacific is absolutely the right strategy. Now, we've found the true Asia focus here in Singapore.

In China, consumers have different travel habits and travel agents buy differently. You could have a 24-year-old booking travel for his four friends and bring in millions to the supplier, which is not typical elsewhere. We are happy we now get to focus on what works in each show.

This year, we had just 20 Chinese buyers out of 572 at ILTM Asia Pacific. We plan to bring this down to zero over time to cater to the different subregional strategies of suppliers.

What led to making wellness the theme at this year's show?

Last year at Cannes, I launched the

2019 year of health and wellness. In 2018, I lost my mom to illness and had an operation on my foot. I made a commitment to live better and was determined to put well-being at the centre of what I was doing.

This ILTM Asia Pacific, we introduced The Retreat, a relaxation area with a juice bar, wellness therapies and more. It's where attendees can go to relax outside their busy schedules, (but also a way for suppliers to demonstrate their wellness strengths). It was incredibly successful.

We may have become a bit of a victim of our own success (in this regard). Many of the treatments were oversubscribed this year. The Retreat will return bigger next year and with some slight changes.

What were some fruitful changes you've introduced?

(I engaged a seasoned professional in the Asia-Pacific industry) to take care of the buyer side of things this year.

With a real track record in the luxury travel trade and knowing all the agents, he's a little diamond. He has been able to find new buyers. He also helped not only to weed out (rogue buyers or those he knows to not convert), but also get on the phone with registered buyers when they've not made their appointments.

Non-chain brands have been trending in luxury travel. From an exhibition organiser standpoint, how difficult is it to maintain the presence of smaller brands?

Some travellers will only stay in a Ritz-Carlton, others want something

off the beaten track. We need to give our buyers a palette of different products and services.

If you're a small supplier, it's a big investment to (exhibit) at the show. But the fact that we have these people exhibiting here means we're doing something right for them. Some have returned, which says to us that they are getting their ROI.

There's only so much budget companies have – few can afford to attend every show. We advise our suppliers on what's best for them. Some of the smaller brands say they'd return in three years, some say they'd (rotate between China) and Singapore.

What's next for ILTM Asia Pacific?

In its two years, the show has grown (100 per cent). This is only the start. The show will evolve over time, guided by feedback from our clients – suppliers, buyers and media.

We want to keep presenting new products to our buyers. There are so many new launches in the travel space. (The opportunities are vast) with a never-ending source of luxury travel products and experiences out there in the world.

We survey suppliers on where they want to see buyers from. This year, New Zealand was the number one requested buyer market from our suppliers. We went out and got those buyers. If our suppliers feedback that they want Vietnam buyers next year, that's where we'll be looking.



Some travellers will only stay in a Ritz-Carlton, others want something off the beaten track. We need to give our buyers a palette of different products and services.



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* Air New Zealand will operate a five times weekly seasonal service between Singapore and Christchurch from 1 December 2019 to 22 February 2020.