



Win some, lose some

Amid a protracted trade war with the US, the impacts of Chinese tourists' reduced appetite for travel spending is playing out across Asia differently

By Prudence Lui and Rachel AJ Lee

The Sino-US trade war and a weaker yuan have put a damper on outbound travel from China, as Chinese travellers turn towards domestic travel or more value-for-money destinations in South-east Asia.

Guangdong Qiyouji International Travel Service's marketing and partnership director, Anson Neo, cited the appreciating US dollar as one of the reasons why Chinese are skipping longhaul travel.

"The overall economy has been affected by the trade war, bringing about a weaker Chinese currency. Clients believe that it will cost more to travel longhaul, but domestic travel or trips within Asia still remain affordable," he shared.

Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines and Thailand remain popular destinations, said Neo, with the falling yuan affecting the luxury sector less as high-end travellers still willing to pay for longhaul trips.

An anonymous buyer from a China-based OTA, however, offers a more depressing outlook of the Chinese outbound market amid the volatile economy.

He elaborated: "I've heard that many people have cancelled their longhaul trips, or cut the frequency down to one or two (a year). Nearby protest-hit Hong Kong is no longer a safe destination, and many charter flights have ceased. As a result, travellers find it expensive to fly out, and are switching to domestic travel, which explains why self-drive products in China have surged 30 per cent."

Although the uncertain economy has not led to an obvious decline in his business, the pace of growth has dropped, said

Shane Wang, project manager of overseas destination marketing, Tongcheng-Elong Holdings.

And since groups cannot be sent to Hong Kong due to protests, Wang's company sends groups to Macau instead, though as a mono destination now. Chinese OTAs such as Ctrip.com are also pushing a twinning of China and Macau, as they celebrate their respective milestone anniversaries this year.

(With a weaker currency), clients believe that it will cost more to travel longhaul, but domestic travel or trips within Asia still remain affordable.

Anson Neo, marketing and partnership director, Guangdong Qiyouji International Travel Service

Meanwhile, Thailand-based 500 Rai Resorts & Tours' managing director Atirat Danphattharaworawat, has noted a drop in Chinese visitors to both Phuket and Krabi, as both destinations focus on drawing mass-market Chinese.

"Their economies have slowed down after the Chinese switched to less expensive destinations like the Philippines and Vietnam," he added.

The Philippines and Malaysia, meanwhile, appear to reap the benefits of Chinese' reduced appetite for longhaul travel.

For instance, China has now risen to the second biggest inbound market for the country, according to Monina Valdez, market specialist ASEAN and the Pacific division at the Philippines' Tourism Promotions Board.

"There are no signs of this market slowing down. Even when Boracay was closed (a favourite destination for the Chinese), agents in the Philippines could still direct them to Palawan, Cebu and Bohol (as opposed to losing the business entirely)," added Valdez.

From January to July 2019, the Philippines welcomed around one million Chinese visitors, a 35.6 per cent spike year-on-year from 766,079 in 2018.

Olivia Ooi, senior vice president destination sales & marketing at Desaru Coast, in Johor, notices that the Malaysian integrated resort tends to draw the more affluent Chinese with the presence of international branded properties like Hard Rock and The Westin within its premises.

"We're still a new destination, but the Chinese market has been growing for us year-on-year, alongside other markets like India and Hong Kong. To capture more of the Chinese market, we've been participating in roadshows, as well as conducting our own sales mission in China," Ooi shared.

PATA ATCM heads to Sabah

Sabah is keen to showcase its abundance of culture and nature offerings to the trade when the PATA Adventure Travel Conference and Mart 2020 (ATCM 2020) takes place in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah next year, announced Iskandar Mirza Mohd Yusof, senior director of corporate communication division – Tourism Malaysia, at PATA Travel Mart 2019 yesterday.

Marking the first time the ATCM is hosted in Malaysia, Iskandar is hopeful that the event will bring greater media publicity to Malaysia as a destination for adventure travel and sustainable tourism, while giving a boost to the Visit Malaysia 2020 campaign.

The three-day niche event, which will be held at the Sutera Harbour Resort from February 12-14, 2020, is hosted by Tourism Malaysia in partnership with Sabah Tourism Board and Malaysia Airlines.

Bringing together tourism professionals in adventure travel and responsible tourism, the one-day conference is designed to support PATA's vision for the responsible development of tourism, while the one-day travel mart helps promote, build and strengthen business and networks for delegates.

Noredah Othman, general director – Sabah Tourism Board, shared that sustainability and conservation have always been top priorities for the state, with existing wildlife rehabilitation centres like Sepilok, as well as the government's push to increase the number of marine national parks in the country.

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Big smiles all around

By Yingyong Unanongrak



Palau Visitors Authority's Alessa Aguon, Yumie Morishita and Kadoi Ruluked



Sunway Lagoon Malaysia's Garry Loke and KC Chew, and Sunway Hotels and Resorts UAE's Faizal Iskandar Ghazali



The Marianas Visitors Authority's Priscilla M lakopo



Hong Kong Tourism Board's Gloria Fung, iVenture Card Hong Kong's Nicky Kwok, Elite Hong Kong Travel's Yulia Potselouiko, C & A Tours Hong Kong's Anatoly Rummyantsev, ATI Travel Hong Kong's Richard Woss, Hong Kong Tourism Board's Olivia Wan, Ngong Ping 360 Hong Kong's Angela C Sue, and Jebson Holidays Hong Kong's Alan Wu



Tourism Authority of Thailand's Nimitdee Sripong (third from left) and team



Ministry of Tourism India's Jaya Dubey and Ajit Pal Singh



Thumbs up from Macao Government Tourism Office



Tourism Malaysia's Iskandar Mirza Mohd Yusof (with red tie) and team



The Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Nur-Sultan's Indri Wahyu Susanti (third from right)



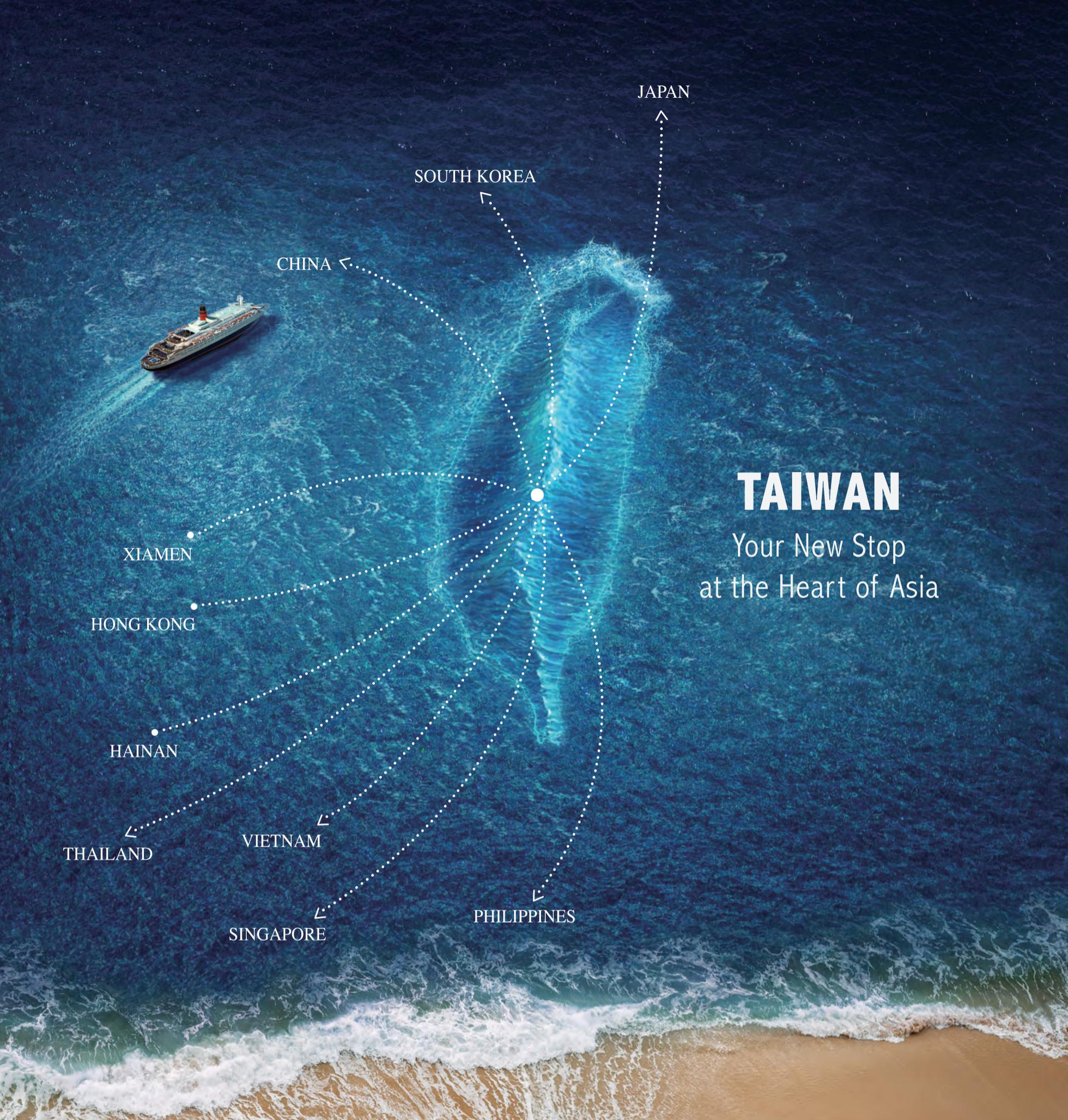
Tourism Promotions Board Philippines' show team



Forte Hotel Group Taiwan's Benjamin Liao (fourth from left), PATA Chinese Taipei's Stephen Chang (centre), and Taiwan Tourism Bureau Singapore's Trust HJ Lin (fourth from right), alongside the Taiwan delegation



KidZania Kuala Lumpur's Wan Mahsuri W A Kamal, Desaru Coast Malaysia's Olivia Ooi and Tourism Malaysia's Iskandar Mirza Mohd Yusof



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By Yingyong Unanongrak



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PATA Thailand's Mario Hardy and Chris Bottrill



Korea Tourism Organizations' Jang You Hyun and Phil-Sang Sung (middle two) and team



Esprit D'Adventure Canada's Ariane Arpin-Delorme



SHOWFLOOR OPENS FOR BUSINESS



PTM 2019 officially opens with a ribbon-cutting ceremony graced by PATA's Chris Bottrill, Nur-Sultan City's Altay Kulginov, Kazakhstan Ministry of Culture and Sports' Bakytzhan Temirbolat, PATA's Mario Hardy, and Air Astana's Peter Foster, as a local group of boys playing *dombra* (a two-stringed instrument) and towering giants add to the show's resplendent display of Kazakh culture.

Report **Tours & activities**

See the world in 45 unique ways

From discovering a place like a local to offering out-of-the-world views, these 45 travel products are redefining Asia's experiences supply in creative ways

1. Helicopter tours in Laos

In Laos, Summit Discovery organises helicopter tours to experience Vientiane and its nearby attractions, including the Elephant Temple and Nam Ngum lake. Gourmet meals can be arranged.

2. Changi's new crown Jewel

The latest Jewel in Changi Airport's crown is its S\$1.7 billion (US\$1.3 billion) complex, a multifaceted indoor destination with 280 retail and F&B units; YotelAir Singapore Changi Airport; and the world's tallest indoor waterfall.

3. World's first underground hotel

The 336-room InterContinental Shanghai Wonderland in Sheshan Mountain Range is a mostly subterranean property with two floors underwater. All rooms offer a good vantage point for the nightly water show. Guests can kayak or zipline across the quarry, or go rock climbing.

4. Insects-infested fine dining

At Insects in the Backyard in Bangkok's new Chang Chui creative hub, six-legged critters are served up in fine-dining style by chef Mai Thitiwat. Insects are sourced from family-run, chemical-free farms.

5. Tracing Gandhi's footsteps

Delhi Walks' Gandhi experience tells stories associated with Mahatma Gandhi. The tour covers the National Gandhi Museum with original relics, books, documents, journals, photographs related to Mahatma Gandhi and his wife Kasturba Gandhi.

6. Malaysia's own 'Salar de Uyuni'

An hour from Kuala Lumpur, Sky Mirror is a sandbar that appears on the Straits of Melaka twice a month during the new moon and full moon periods. With its shallow waters and mirror-like reflection, the attraction offers unique photography opportunities.



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7. Deportees connect through tours

A social enterprise offering tours of Cambodia, Zin Adventures is run by Cambodian-Americans deportees from the US. A walking tour takes guests through Phnom Penh's Old European quarter, while the one- to three-day tours go to Kirirom National Park's historic pine forest. The company aims to hire 20 more deportees.

8. Solar-powered boat in Myanmar

Myanmar's Burma Boating offers environmentally-friendly expeditions around the Mergui Archipelago in its 100 per cent solar-powered yacht for six people and three crew. The S55 has three levels with a salon and four cabins.

9. Shelter for the marginalised

Gawad Kalinga (GK) or Give Care, promotes voluntourism by inviting visitors to build hous-

es in marginalised communities through the Philippines. GK Enchanted Farm in Bulacan is a social enterprise and offers tours of its farm, rooms and dorms.

10. Ship turns hotel in Bintan

The 104-year-old *MV Doulos* has been turned into a hotel dry berthed in Indonesia's Bintan. The overhauled eight-deck vessel has 104 cabins, a maritime museum, banquet hall, meeting rooms, library and club lounge. On-land amenities include a beach club, swimming pool, kid's playground and amphitheatre.

11. Theatrical impressions of Melaka

The 70-minute *Encore Melaka*, the first of the Impressions series outside of China, recounts tales of the historic Malaysian city with a 360 degree rotating auditorium, 3D projection mapping and intricate props, creating a virtual reality effect.



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12. Coming soon: supersonic travel

Come mid 2020, Boom Supersonic will roll out its supersonic aircraft in Overture, capable of flying at twice the speed of sound. Japan Airlines and Virgin Group have placed pre-orders for the Mach 2.2, 55-seater passenger jet.

13. VR ride through Amazon

Ocean Park Hong Kong's upgraded virtual reality (VR) rollercoaster Mine Train syncs virtual movement with real motion, as guests journey come face to face with animals in the Amazon rainforest by donning Samsung VR headsets.

14. Cambodia on two wheels

JustRide Motorbike Adventures explores Cambodia's lesser known spots on its modern 400cc bikes, with tour options that range from all-inclusive day tours of Siem Reap to multi-day options of remote provinces.

15. Pop concerts in Disneyland

Hong Kong Disneyland Resort's Fantasy Road is venue for high-profile concerts such as Taiwanese band Mayday and Ed Sheeran. With a capacity of 20,000 people, the venue can attract large-scale music events.

16. Skywalk with a view

Bangkok's Mahanakhon Skywalk is a rooftop observation deck perched 314m atop a 'pixelated' mixed-use building. A 50-second elevator ride takes guests up to 74th floor for 360-degree views. A 'terrifying' glass floor beyond the building's edge await.

17. Michelin-star food on bus

Hong Kong's Crystal Bus combines sightseeing with a culinary experience on a bus ride. Michelin-star dim sum is served onboard a Swarovski crystals donned double-decker bus. Two standard daily routes are offered: Lantau Island with lunch, and one through Victoria Harbour from Tsim Sha Tsui to Central.

18. Local family immersion

Khiri Travel Laos works with a local Khmu family to offer a tour with kayaking, a traditional lunch with the family, learning the traditions of animism and production of *lao hai* (rice wine), walking through paddies and caves.

19. Dine in a grounded plane

Kuala Lumpur's Plane in the City offers a 90-minute fine dining experience in a Boeing B737 jet on the ground, where diners can take selfies while sticking their heads out of the cockpit or walk on the wing of the plane.

20. Premium camping in Zhuhai

Located on Small Hengqin Mountain in China's Guangdong, the Sumlodol Hengqin Camping Park offers 60,000m² of tents, villas, wooden chalets and luxury caravan equipped with private courtyards with outdoor barbecues.

21. A salute to valour

Rajah Travel Philippines' Salute to Valour tour packages include Palawan's historical and cultural attractions highlighting the province's history and liberation during World War II. The tour has added the Calamian Islands, and Coron Bay where 11 Japanese shipwrecks lie.

22. Backstage tour of Chinese opera

Traditional Chinese Opera in Singapore is brought back to life through Xperience DMC's tour, allowing guests to go behind the scenes and meet performers.

23. Javanese rail journeys in style

State-owned Kereta Api Indonesia has launched new sleeper trains for overnight journeys across Java. These trains also run services from Jakarta to Semarang, Central Java, and Jakarta to Yogyakarta.

24. Tracing Jewish heritage

Jane's Singapore Tours uncovers the story and heritage of the Jewish community in the city. Key highlights will be a visit to two synagogues – Chesed-El Synagogue in Oxley Rise and Maghain Aboth Synagogue in Waterloo Street.

25. Where Beatles did yoga

The Maharishi Mahesh Yogi Ashram in Rishikesh, made popular after The Beatles' visit in 1968, has recently reopened. Find murals on the walls of the abandoned ashram, located within India's Rajaji National Park by the Ganga River.

26. Pay for Sleep by the minute

Sleep is Hong Kong's first licensed capsule hotel that sells by the minute so users pay for only what they need. The intelligent sleeping capsule hotel in Sheung Wan won the Red Dot Design Award.

27. The art of making nougat

Mondo Nougat is currently offering nougat masterclasses to groups of up to 30 pax. Classes can be conducted at its Swan Valley factory or off-site in Perth.

28. Get your WishTrip

Founded as a navigation app where travellers record their journeys, WishTrip has 30,000 trails created by some 500,000 users. WishTrip also has in-app tools warning visitors of potentially dangerous areas.

29. See Singapore of yore

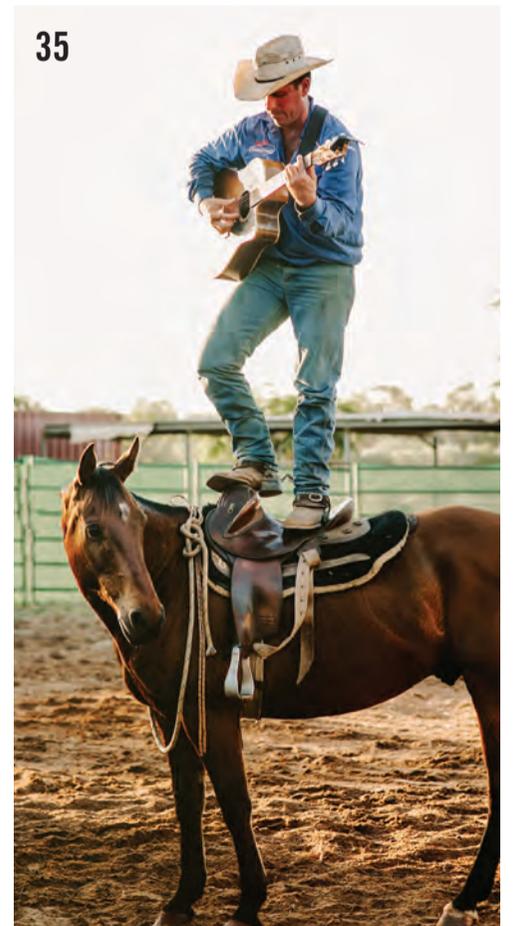
Travel back to pre-war Singapore through the eyes of an early immigrant. Trails of Tan Ah Huat, Singapore 1920s by Let's Go Tour Singapore is a cycling tour of heritage areas like Kampong Glam, Singapore River and Chinatown, alongside immersive storytelling.



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Report Tours & activities

30. Eco estate by the sea

Nestled between the sea and mountains, the 325ha Lio Tourism Estate in El Nido, Palawan is a planned ecological sustainable development, with hotels, resorts, residential communities, and commercial establishments.

31. Urban onsen theme park

The “urban onsen resort” in Osaka Bay Tower complex has a range of thermal baths containing natural waters with different properties, a rooftop garden, restaurants, shops and beauty services.

32. 3D animated culinary journey

At Elements Kuala Lumpur or Park Hyatt Bangkok, have food cooked by Le Petit Chef, an animated chef projected onto diners’ plates via 3D mapping technology. Food is designed by Michelin-star chef Jeff Ramsey.

33. Onsen gastronomy tour

Walk Japan’s Onsen Gastronomy tours take guests through some of the country’s off-the-beaten-path regions, punctuated by soaks in natural springs and meals featuring local flavours.

34. Vespa sidecar tours

Experience Singapore’s sights, sounds and flavours in a unique fleet of hand-restored vintage Vespa sidecars from Triquetra Singapore. Guides lead the heritage, art and architecture tours. Bespoke options are possible.

35. Window into Outback life

The Katherine Outback Experience gives insight to life in the Australian Outback. Led

by two-time Golden Guitar winner Tom Curtain, the show includes horse breaking and dog training demonstrations, live music and entertaining stories.

36. Karst rock conservation park

Masungi Georeserve is a conservation in Rizal, near Manila. Home to 60-million-year-old limestone formations, attractions include a suspended platform, a giant hammock; hanging bridges, rope courses and eco-trails.

37. Shang tours Tsim Sha Tsui

As the first hotel to open in the reclaimed Tsim Sha Tsui East, Kowloon Shangri-La has pioneered a walking tour of the precinct’s heritage, including visiting a school attended by Bruce Li.

38. Tales of rural India

Tales from India’s tours offer insight to rural life in Indian states like Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand. Visitors share a meal with local families or visit a local temple. Accommodation ranges from guest houses to privately-owned palaces.

39. MAD tours with impact

MAD (Make A Difference) Travel is a Philippine social tourism platform that supports indigenous and marginalised communities. Its Seed Nation project collects seeds from companies and restaurants for planting in Zambales, Rizal and Aurora.

40. Warehouse heritage

Fifth-gen owners of Lhong 1919, a 19th century Chinese warehouse in Bangkok, has turned the



site into a riverside heritage complex. A shrine to the Chinese goddess of seafarers, original Chinese murals and stonework were found and restored. There’s also a 800m² hall and river-front restaurant.

41. Bali makes wines

Award-winning Sababay Winery in Bali’s Gianyar produces some 800,000 bottles a year and imparts wine-making knowledge to local farmers, putting the famed Indonesian island on the world wine map.

42. Flying adventures in Rishikesh

At India’s first extreme aerosports destination, adventure seekers can try open cockpit flying, as well as hot air ballooning during the winter season. The operations and the fleet of the company, Rajas Aviators, are approved by the Indian aviation regulatory body.

43. Yoga by the holy river

Modi Yoga Retreat, on the banks of the holy river Ganga in Rishikesh, has 29 luxury rooms

and offers yoga, nutrition, proactive health-care and spa facilities, and lifestyle and well-being consultations with in-house experts.

44. Marine research expeditions

Rascal Voyages and Conservation International Indonesia have teamed up to offer The Exploration Series of scientific expeditions across the Indonesian Archipelago, South-east Asia, the Indian Ocean and beyond.

45. Star Wars in Asia

Resorts World Genting has scored Star Wars: Secrets of the Empire, the first multisensory immersive experience in Asia that blurs the line between the physical and virtual world, evoking all the senses.

Xinyi Liang-Pholsena, Prudence Lui, Pamela Chow, S Puvaneswary, Mimi Hudoyo, Marissa Carruthers, Rosa Ocampo, Rachel AJ Lee, Adeline Ng, Tiara Maharani, Feizal Samath, Rohit Kaul, Julian Ryall and Yixin Ng contributed to this feature

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Ministry of Tourism, Government of
India, India

Marketing – Secondary Government Destination
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Taiwan Tourism Bureau, Chinese Taipei

Marketing – Carrier
Two Cities, One Spirit
SriLankan Airlines Ltd, Sri Lanka

Marketing – Hospitality
The Art of Winning Campaign
Melco Resorts & Entertainment, Macao

Marketing – Industry
Malaysia International Gastronomy Festival
AsiaReach Events Sdn. Bhd, Malaysia

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Environment – Corporate Environmental Programme
Responsible Eco-Sustainable
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Cardamom Tented Camp
YANNA Ventures, Thailand

Environment – Environmental Education Programme The Purple Ray
Flash - Environmental Education
Programme of Euploea in Siraya
Taiwan Tourism Bureau,
Chinese Taipei

Corporate Social Responsibility
Borneo Eco Tours
Malaysia

Women Empowerment Initiative
Ethnic Restaurant at Kumarakom
Kerala Tourism, India

Heritage
Payuan Community Slate Houses
Taiwan Tourism Bureau,
Chinese Taipei

Culture
Guru Gedara Festival 2018
Cinnamon Hotel Management Limited,
Sri Lanka

Community-Based Tourism
Airai State Cultural Tour
Palau Visitors Authority, Palau

Education and Training
We Love to Care
Hotel ICON, Hong Kong SAR

Marketing Media – Travel Advertisement Broadcast Media
Come Out and Play Campaign
Kerala Tourism, India

Marketing Media – Travel Advertisement Print Media
2019 Korea Tourism Calendar: Travel
Korea by Theme Korea Tourism
Organization, Korea (ROK)

Marketing Media – Travel Brochure
Mice Chess Box
Cox & Kings Limited, India

Marketing Media – E-Newsletter
Diethelm Cares
Diethelm Travel Group, Thailand

Marketing Media – Travel Poster
Khon - An Aesthetic Art of Drama
Tourism Authority of Thailand,
Thailand

Marketing Media – Public Relations Campaign
*INDY GUIDE - Insight Tourism on Central
Asia and Mongolia*
INDY GUIDE, Switzerland

Marketing - Social Media Campaign
Discover Hong Kong Facebook Page
Hong Kong Tourism Board,
Hong Kong SAR

Marketing Media – Travel Video
Why Limit Yourself
Sarawak Tourism Board

Marketing Media – Web Site
www.keralatourism.org
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Travel Journalism - Travel Guidebook
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Destination Philippines

Chasing new growth markets

In the face of declining visitor arrivals from most Asian markets, the Philippines' travel industry is doubling down on efforts to diversify its tourism offerings and sniff out new potential markets. By **Rosa Ocampo**



The Philippines is seeking to find a balance in quality versus quantity tourism (pictured: Oslob Bay off Cebu Island)

Quantity or quality? The Philippine tourism sector is having a tough time balancing both as inbound travel can be rough and rocky in the globally competitive industry.

While the 7.1 million foreign arrivals in 2018 fell short of the targeted 7.4 million due mainly to Boracay's six-month closure, the Philippines looks on track to achieving the 8.2 million arrivals projected for this year, given that inbound tourist arrivals for 1H2019 hit 4.1 million pax.

Although arrivals from several Asian source markets are down, what's growing are the South Korean and China markets, both of which comprise nearly 44 per cent of the total inbound pie and essentially bailing out the underperformers.

Top market South Korea grew 15.8 per cent to 946,025, accounting for 22.9 per cent lion's share of total arrivals. China, a close second and the fastest-growing market, surged by 34.1 per cent to 866,581, cornering 21 per cent of total arrivals.

But at the rate that China is dominating the Philippines' inbound visitor market, it's likely to supplant South Korea as the top feeder source, as it did the US and

Japan – which used to be the Philippines' second and third biggest source markets, respectively – within a short span.

In contrast, other Asian source markets fared poorly in 1H2019: Singapore dropped 11.5 per cent to 81,151, Indonesia fell 8.9 per cent to 37,357 while Thailand was down 8.9 per cent to 29,279. Brunei dipped 24.0 per cent to 3,889 and Laos slid 7.3 per cent to 5,234.

Only Malaysia managed a slight increase of 0.9 per cent to 74,3017.

Hong Kong arrivals, which plunged 36.3 per cent to 44,558, is expected to nosedive further in the second half due to ongoing mass protests in the city. Furthermore, Hong Kong's unrest is likely to have a knock-on effect on arrivals from Macau to the Philippines, which already slackened by 20.6 per cent to 4,138.

To make up for the fall in tourist receipts, the Philippines is keen to attract more longhaul travellers from Europe and North America who are traditionally longer-staying and higher-spending.

The US market rose slightly by 2.0 per cent to 569,735 in 1H2019 for a reduced market share of 13.8 per cent and the UK by 4.1 per cent for a 2.6 per cent share.

Germany, which used to be down, is up 15.9 per cent for a 1.3 per cent market share while France rose 19.8 per cent for a 1.3 per cent market share. Even Japan's growth is slowing, up by 3.4 per cent for a 7.9 per cent share.

Jojo Clemente, president of both Rajah Tours and Tourism Congress of the Philippines (TCP), stressed the need for "balance between (tourism) revenue and numbers".

"We cannot deny that China is really strong but it doesn't mean that we have to exclude other markets... It is good that we are targeting higher income markets because at the end of the day, that is what stakeholders want but we cannot also discount volume apart. It is one of the main touch points to quantify how tourism is growing," Clemente explained.

To uphold both quantity and quality, Clemente said that the TCP is looking to tap into new source markets.

"We found that Latin America – virtually undiscovered – is very interested in having the Philippines as a possible destination... Our recommendation is to enter these (new) markets," he said, stressing the importance of pumping advertising dol-

lars into tapping potential source markets.

Christine Urbano-Ibarreta, president of Hotel Sales and Marketing Association, said that TPB will also prepare a Philippine mission to tap nearby destinations like Hawaii and Guam, a US territory just three and a half hours by plane to Manila. The agency will also step up promotions in Asia, which includes the Philippine mission that was dispatched recently to the travel trade in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia.

Product differentiation and diversification is already underway. The Philippines is primarily a beach destination but other aspects like its culture, heritage, and history with the Spaniards, the US and Chinese are also being promoted. Existing destinations are also being enhanced and new experience-centric ones are being developed for groups, families and FITs.

Tourism secretary Bernadette Romulo Puyat said campaigns for niche products like diving, bird watching, wellness and adventure travel in the provinces of Rizal and upper market hotels and resorts are also ongoing to diversify the Philippines' tourism offerings and source markets.

To entice visitors to Manila, Puyat said the Department of Tourism will address the problem of informal settlers within the periphery of the city's prime attraction Intramuros. Elsewhere, the development of Maestranza Creative Hub will see a convergence of the creative economy, tourism and heritage. Rizal Park and its esplanade, another main tourist draw, will also be redeveloped.

New source markets, including the Middle East and Muslim markets in Asia, are set to be tapped with the launch of halal tourism some time this year. Tourism undersecretary Art Boncato said that the launch will be a "jumpstart" to halal tourism using a "more strategic long-term approach" to the delight of the travel trade hoping to shore up the Muslim markets in South-east and South Asia as well as the Middle East source markets, which dropped tremendously this year.

Travel experts said despite continued interest in Boracay, its closure last year has opened up new destinations and diffused foreign arrivals to areas including Palawan, Bohol, Dumaguete, Siquijor and other lesser-known beach destinations.

What's hot

Ride-sharing in choppers

Beat metro Manila's gridlock with tech startup Ascent's helicopter ride-sharing service using a seven-seater Bell 429 or a five-seater Airbus H125 helicopter.

The helicopter will take riders to and from INAEC Aviation Corp's hangar at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) to various points in Bonifacio Global City, The Peninsula Makati hotel, Tagaytay, Cavite and Clark.

The three-minute ride from NAIA to BGC costs roughly US\$134 while the 20-minute flight to Tagaytay is priced at US\$425.

Quiapo walking tour

Now that the new mayor of Manila is doing a massive clean up of the city, a walking tour of old Quiapo is in order.

Tour guides from the Bukas Quiapo Tours or Open Quiapo Tour are city residents who have been trained by the Save San Sebastian Basilica Conservation and Development Foundation and Fundacion Santiago.

Quiapo is often seen as downtrodden and crowded but the tour highlights its cultural and heritage values with itineraries that cover several unique churches including Quiapo Church and its vicinity, the Muslim quarter, historical sites like the saints' wood carvings at Maglaqui

Talyer and Nakpil-Bautista house, retail outlets like Excelente Ham and Vienna Bakery that have withstood the test of time as well as shopping time at Quinta Market and under the Quezon Bridge.

Touring the Philippines' art capital

The town of Angono in Rizal, a province in the Calabarzon region, is home to renowned painters, musicians and sculptors, who undoubtedly drew inspiration from their tranquil surroundings.

Art tours, which are now being offered by several tour operators, include visits to the residences, museums, art galleries as well as the ateliers of famed painter Botong Francisco,



Nemiranda Art House in Angono

Nemiranda, Jose Blanco, Perdigon and Vocalan, amongst others. Art workshops and art therapy classes are also available.

Destination Sri Lanka

Down, but not out

The recent Easter Sunday bomb attacks dealt a devastating blow to Sri Lanka's fast-growing tourism sector as travellers shunned the Indian Ocean island in droves. But recovery is on the cards now, with the emergency ruling lifted and industry players rolling out a raft of incentives to woo back tourists. By **Feizal Samath**



Stilt fishing, a dying livelihood, is now a tourist attraction in Sri Lanka

Barely a few months after *Lonely Planet* named Sri Lanka the top travel destination in 2019, the country was rocked by a series of deadly bomb attacks on April 21, which killed over 250 people and sent the lucrative US\$4.4 billion tourism industry into a tailspin as visitor arrivals took a severe hit.

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, there was a spike in cancellations and bookings collapsed, according to travel business intelligence company ForwardKeys. The first week saw a decline of 181 per cent, which meant that not only were there no new bookings, there was a wave of cancellations of existing bookings. Over the three-month period from April 22 to July 21, bookings plunged 69 per cent from the equivalent dates in 2018.

But there are signs that the crisis has bottomed out, said ForwardKeys. Less

than two months after the suicide bombings, flight bookings to Sri Lanka stabilised. From June 9 to July 21, the level plateaued at 26 per cent down from the equivalent period last year.

The trade began to see light at the end of the tunnel when Sri Lanka in late August lifted its state of emergency – imposed after the Easter Sunday bombings in April – bringing hopes to the industry that the move will lead to a much-needed boost to tourist arrivals.

Trevor Rajaratnam, president, Travel Agents Association of Sri Lanka, said the move would send a positive message to the rest of the world that Sri Lanka is open for travel. “It’s a huge positive move and will also help airlines which depend on more inbound travellers,” he noted.

Mahen Kariyawasam, former president of the Sri Lanka Association of Inbound

Operators, said that the removal of emergency rule was a very positive move that would help in the recovery of tourism.

As well, tourism industry officials said that even though several countries have relaxed travel advisories, these advisories were still at the category 2 and 3 levels, which denote ‘be cautious’ when travelling to Sri Lanka. Some countries like Russia have not relaxed their travel advisories.

Kishu Gomes, chairman of Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau, earlier revealed plans to mount a destination marketing campaign worth 916 Sri Lankan rupees (US\$5 million) as soon as travel advisories are relaxed.

But the campaign has since been delayed due to bureaucratic procedures, according to Gomes, alongside a move to cancel roadshows for the remaining year and instead to rely on offering free on-

arrival visas for 45 countries, including India and China, to entice visitors back to Sri Lanka.

In the absence of tourism recovery efforts by the Sri Lankan government following the Easter Sunday terror attacks, the country’s private sector industry is ploughing its own resources to woo visitors back to the country.

One such company is Aitken Spence Travels (AST), which is the largest DMC in Sri Lanka. Parakrama Dissanayake, deputy chairman of Aitken Spence Group, which controls AST, said the DMC and its chain of hotels are spending “a lot of money” to boost inbound tourism.

The travel firm is 50 per cent owned by TUI, which is also stepping up promotion efforts, he said, declining to give details of their marketing budget. AST said in an earlier statement that in the 12-month period ending March 2019, it invested over 250 million Sri Lankan rupees to promote the destination in overseas markets.

Veteran hotelier Hiran Cooray of Jetwing Hotels said the company is investing its own resources into marketing the country, with many foreign journalists and travel magazines offered fam trips to the destination. “There is a lot of PR taking place now, urging people to visit Sri Lanka,” he said.

Devindre Senaratne, managing director at JourneyScapes, said that his inbound travel company has spent US\$35,000 on marketing promotions across many markets and fam tours for agents from Germany, Belgium and Australia in the aftermath of the Easter attacks.

“We are a small- to medium-sized company so our investment is nowhere near those of the big DMCs,” he said, adding that such promotions should have been carried out by state tourism agencies.

He added that small companies, which form the bulk of the industry, find it hard to spend money on promotion, and that they need state support.

Meanwhile, at least 50 tourism organisations including Sri Lanka’s biggest local hotel chains – Jetwing Hotels, Heritage Hotels and Resorts, and Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts – supported by international chains, Movenpick and Anantara, have come together to form the Sri Lankan Tourism Alliance (www.lovesrilanka.org) to provide a single point of contact for updates to travellers and for trade overseas.

“We felt there was a need for an independent message from the industry, apart from the government’s, on the status in Sri Lanka because there were different messages going (around),” said Hotels Association of Sri Lanka president Sanath Ukwatte, who is also chairman of Mount Lavinia Hotel, one of the supporters of this initiative.

To stimulate tourism recovery, Sri Lanka’s aviation authority has also cut ground handling charges, reduced fuel rates and lowered embarkation taxes at its main airport to attract more airlines and airline frequencies.

Since August 1, a 10 per cent reduction in ground handling charges has been implemented at the Bandaranaike International Airport, while aircraft fuel is sold at cost and on par with the lower Chennai prices. The airport embarkation tax has been cut from US\$60 to US\$50.

“With these measures, the government expects airlines to pass the benefit of these concessions to customers by way of reduced airfares, restore suspended flights and increase existing frequencies and capacities,” a spokesperson from the Civil Aviation Authority said in a statement.

How is Sri Lanka doing for overseas travel experts?



Sri Lanka is going through short-term pain at the moment, but once the Foreign Office’s (FO) advice changes, there will be tremendous pent-up desire to travel (there). And whether we like it or not, clients will be looking for price incentives to travel; they are not being unfeeling, just seeking to maximise their value. The Sri Lanka tourist board, never the most active even in the best of times, will need to do very little – the demand will be there.

I have great faith in the destination and I think the future looks good, both short and long term. My view is that now the island has probably never been safer, and the security checks in place are reassuring rather than concerning. Once the FO advice changes, I would have no hesitation in travelling to the island once again. – **David Kevan, Chic Locations UK**



What Sri Lanka needs to revive its tourism is stability, such as six months of calm, and to be free of terrorist incidences and riots. Peace has to be restored and curfews lifted, before Malaysians

feel it is safe to visit the country. Its beaches and heritage sites used to attract Malaysians of all races. The pilgrimage sites also attracted Buddhists and Hindus alike. – **Stephen Thomas, managing director, Topaz Travel & Tours Malaysia**



Sri Lanka is not very popular for leisure travel, so demand hasn’t been so affected. Some customers express interest, but they hold back due to uncertainty. However, such incidents have happened in other destinations before, like in Bali, and it’s never stopped travellers. It’s up to tourism bureaus and airlines to reach out to travel agents, have a face-to-face discussion, and invite them to see that the destination is safe. Sri Lanka must give travellers the confidence that the government is in control of the situation. Right now, everyone is still hovering with a ‘wait-and-see’ mindset. – **Wee Hee Ling, CEO, Euro-Asia Holidays Singapore**

Reported by Xinyi Liang-Pholsena, S Puvaneswary and Pamela Chow

Destination Indonesia

An ever-changing island

From north to south, Bali is seeing a flurry of new developments and plans, all with the aim of uncovering new markets and opportunities for the popular island destination, writes **Mimi Hudoyo**



Above: State-owned Indonesia Tourism Development Corporation is currently drawing up a new masterplan for Nusa Dua

Despite being an established destination on the regional travel map, private investors as well as state-owned enterprises alike continue to see tourism opportunities on the Island of the Gods, rolling out a flurry of new infrastructure and attractions.

A major project underway in Sanur is the overhaul of the 58-year-old Grand Inna Bali Beach, as owning company Hotel Indonesia Natour (HIN) has unveiled plans to remake Bali's first five-star hotel into an integrated resort.

To be renamed Hotel Indonesia Bali, the 43ha estate will comprise the existing 525-room hotel and garden villas – which will be renovated and expanded – a new mid-scale hotel opening next year with 166 keys, a convention centre with a capacity of 10,000 guests, a lifestyle art market, an eco-park and a pier.

The whole project is targeted to finalise in five years with a total investment of Rp2.8 trillion (US\$197.2 million). When ready, the resort will boast a total of 1,017 keys, comprising 943 rooms in three- to five-star categories, 73 premium villas and one presidential villa.

Hotel Karya Indonesia, a joint venture between HIN and four state-owned companies – Hutama Karya, Pembangunan Perumahan, Waskita Karya and Wijaya Karya – is the developer of the project.

The redevelopment of the Grand Inna Bali Beach, whose last renovation dated back to 1993, would enable the historic property to better keep up with the competition, according to Iswandi Said, president director of HIN.

Recognising the estate's valuable asset,

location and potential, Indonesian president Joko Widodo has instructed the revitalisation of the hotel, and minister of state enterprises Rini Soemarno came up with the idea of turning it into a small-scaled integrated resort.

Iswandi remarked: "Hotel Indonesia Bali will not only provide a new convention destination in Sanur, it will become a new icon for Bali with all its facilities."

While acknowledging that Sanur's laid-back character has been its asset in attracting senior travellers from Europe and long-staying visitors, Iswandi said the new development is critical for the destination to accommodate and tap onto other market segments, particularly business events and leisure travellers.

In the meantime, state-owned Indonesia Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) is in the process of drawing up a new masterplan for Nusa Dua, a 350ha integrated tourism estate on Bali. With the refined masterplan, the resort is expected to attract not only MICE businesses but also the leisure market.

Ricky Baheramsjah, head of investment and marketing division at ITDC, said: "With the re-master-planning, ITDC intends to revitalise Nusa Dua and offer something unique and differentiated from other destinations in Bali."

The new masterplan will enable Nusa Dua to keep up with changing customer preferences, said Ricky. "Nusa Dua's (existing) masterplan is 30 years old already."

"When you look at the type of new hotel brands coming into Bali such as W, Aloft and Moxi, (they are different from the earlier types of hotels); even established hotel brands like Four Seasons and

St Regis are repositioning themselves to attract a new generation of travellers.

"Travellers are looking for something different. A lot of the guests in Nusa Dua may stay in the area from morning until lunch time, and then they would head out and seek out entertainment like the Rock Bar, and Omnia or other trendy, bohemian-type attractions. We want to offer something of similar feel and quality but still maintaining our high-end luxury position," he said.

While MICE will remain a key market for Nusa Dua as the area is home to two major convention centres, Ricky said focus will now be given to the leisure market too.

"For the hotels, leisure is part of their business too. In order for us to be competitive in the leisure market, we need to provide a more interesting and entertaining proposition, (offering more fun activities) in Nusa Dua."

While the new masterplan for Nusa Dua may not be ready until the year-end, some "revitalising" programmes have been introduced.

The peninsula area, for example, has been landscaped in such a way to be able to host large-scale events.

Recent launches that will appeal to investors include the launch of the Manarai Beach House, a beach club run by the Ismaya Group, pointed out Ricky.

"With the investors, we are also looking at revitalising the Bali Collections (shopping, dining and entertainment centre), to make it more attractive to the new market," he added.

Meanwhile, ITDC is already in the early stages of developing north Bali

as a cruise tourism destination, with plans to develop a resort similar to Nusa Dua with about 10 to 12 hotels, F&B and entertainment facilities, a marina or a proper cruise terminal. The resort will stand on a 100ha piece of privately owned land, expandable to 250ha, near Menjangan National Park.

Ricky explained: "The lack of sea ports in Indonesia means that any cruise ships going from Singapore or Thailand to Australia and South Pacific bypasses Indonesia almost completely, which is a loss of opportunity. If we provide stopovers across Indonesia, these will provide a great opportunity to capture the cruise market."

However, accessibility is currently North Bali's greatest development challenge, as the airport lies on the island's south, from where it takes about three hours to drive to the Menjangan area.

ITDC hence considers north Bali more accessible by cruise ships. And with contemporary cruise ships offering many man-made entertainment on board, the beaches, nature and national park in the north will make attractive drawcards for cruise passengers, Ricky added.

Furthermore, the area's development is expected to stimulate the arrival of more infrastructure and facilities, which is still lacking in north Bali.

Amid its push for better infrastructure and modern facilities for the destination, the Bali regional government, on the other hand, is also working to cultivate the island's core strengths in tradition, culture and attractions.

As part of the government's aim to disperse tourist footfalls away from the island's packed south, the Bali Government Tourism Office, together with academics and experts in the field, has selected local events and attractions across different destinations for promotion.

Dewa Ayu Laksmiadi Janapriati (Laksmi), head of marketing, Bali Government Tourism Office said: "We are identifying local attractions and festivals in Bali, particularly in areas less popular to travellers."

She shared a few examples, among which is Jembrana in west Bali, an area known for its cattle breeders and a traditional bull race festival. To attract visitors and stimulate the locals to develop tourism, a Governor's Cup is planned for Jembrana this year.

To showcase the community-based ecotourism that Pemuteran, West Bali is known for, the Pemuteran Bay Festival was held last year featuring activities like underwater art parade, underwater expo and biorock reef conservation.

In the meantime, the assimilation of the Balinese and Chinese cultures is shown in the Balingkang Kintamani Festival, a cultural parade depicting the romantic legend between King Jaya Pangus with Kang Cing We of China.

"We collect local (traditions and attractions) from each regency in Bali, categorise them into local, national and international events, and promote them accordingly," said Dewa Ayu, citing the promotion of Balingkang Kintamani Festival to the China market as an example.

Destination **Hong Kong**

A cultural awakening

A slew of revitalised and new cultural projects opening across the city is stoking Hong Kong's ambitions of becoming a global cultural destination. By **Prudence Lui**

An increasingly vibrant and flourishing cultural and artistic scene currently unfolding in Hong Kong is stirring up great interest among foreign visitors to seek out lesser-known facets of the city.

The growing arts and cultural scene is in part bolstered by active support pledged by the Hong Kong government to the sector's development, with recent initiatives including HK\$20 billion (US\$2.6 billion) set aside for upgrading existing cultural hardware and building new facilities, and HK\$500 million allocated to the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) to acquire museum collections and organise exhibitions.

Having positioned itself as an art city in Asia through events like Art Basel and numerous openings of blue-chip galleries, a fresh crop of mega cultural projects launching over the next few years is set to inject a new buzz to Hong Kong's arts and culture scene.

For instance, the 57-year-old Hong Kong Museum of Art will reopen in November this year on the Tsim Sha Tsui waterfront following a major makeover with an eye-catching glass façade. Not only will the institution see its total exhibition area expand by 40 per cent from 7,000m² to 10,000m² and the number of galleries increase from seven to 12, it has also received 350 Chinese painting and calligraphy masterpieces from Chih Lo Lou Art Promotion for its permanent collection.

West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD), a government-funded development project that seeks to create a hub of arts and cultural venues in a 40ha water-

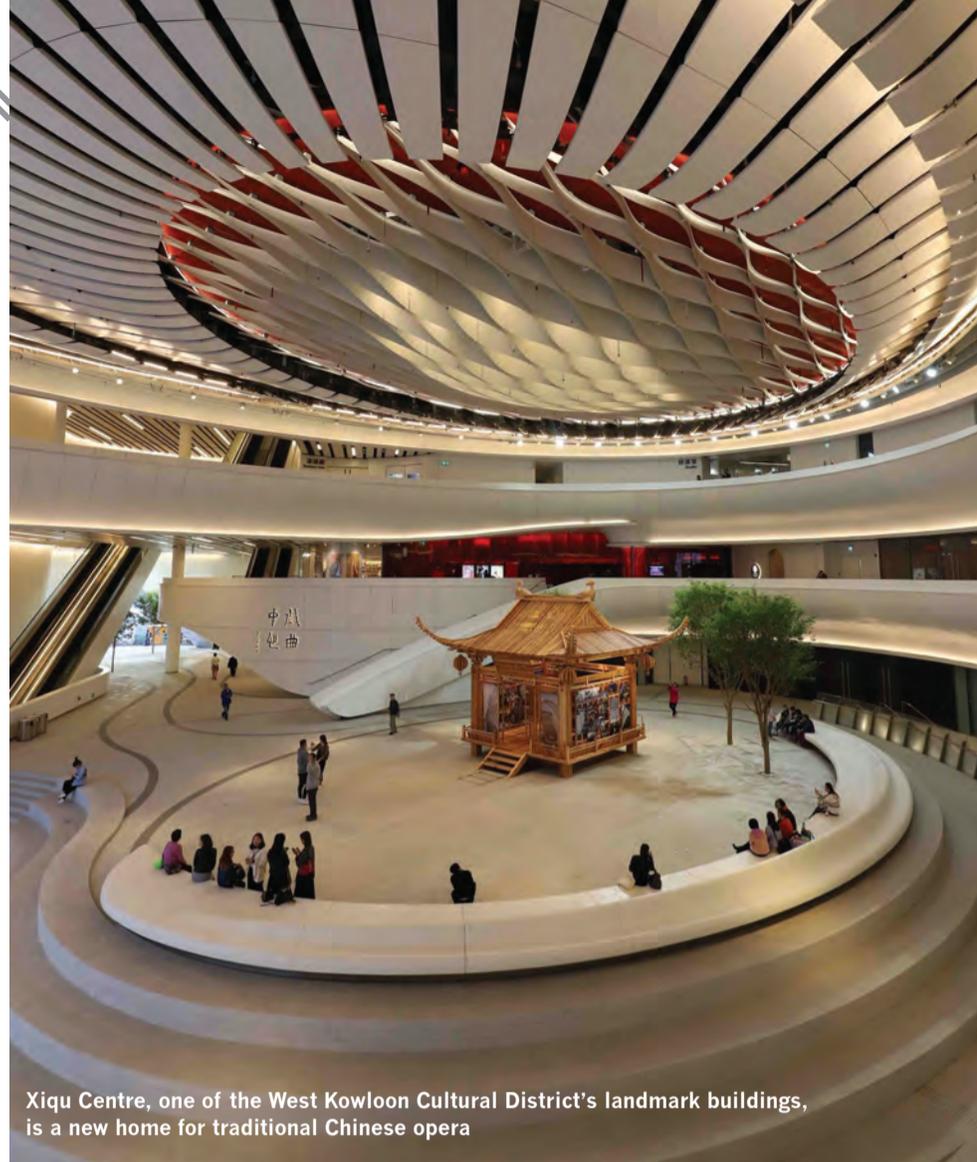
front area west of Yau Ma Tei, will house numerous facilities. This includes the Xiqu Centre, a venue for Cantonese opera; Freespace, presenting contemporary arts performances; Lyric Theatre Complex, focusing on international dance and theatre; M+, a museum of visual culture; and the Hong Kong Palace Museum, which will display Chinese art and culture from the imperial period.

Hong Kong's flourishing cultural scene has given a visible marketing push for tour operators, say industry players.

For instance, Hong Kong A La Carte's managing director Alexandra Malandain has added tours of Tai Kwun, a contemporary art and heritage centre housed in the restored and revitalised Central Police Station compound.

She explained: "The western market, especially FITs and corporates, is definitely interested in hosting events and meetings at the brand-new Tai Kwun. They like the way the compound mixes contemporary buildings with old ones. They are also keen on the art exhibitions and the numerous F&B offers there. The Museum for Contemporary Art, M+ and K11 should interest them as well."

Likewise, Via Vai Travel, director, Sef Lam, also offers architecture and heritage tours of key and revitalised landmarks like the new University of Chicago campus in the old Victoria Detention Centre; the Haw Par Mansion, which has been given a new lease of life as Haw Par Music Farm; Xiqu Chinese opera, which gives "an excellent introduction to an art form many are not familiar with"; and twinning a visit to Tai Kwun with H Queen's, a building dedicated to art and lifestyle.



Xiqu Centre, one of the West Kowloon Cultural District's landmark buildings, is a new home for traditional Chinese opera

"Based on our experience, these are popular destinations, each with its own attraction," Lam remarked.

Nadia Quinn, lead guide at Hong Kong Greeters, believes that such attractions not only add breadth to Hong Kong's portfolio of tours, but also helps to cultivate a lasting impression of a destination offering "diversity and variety."

She added: "We observed travellers attending Art Basel are mainly business people or those who have a direct connection to art and culture, whether through work or personal interest. I hope more staff training would help tourists receive friendly guidance upon their arrival at these new cultural attractions and make it easier for them to navigate."

Hospitality players are also keen to get a piece of the action in Hong Kong's flourishing arts scene, with the new Hotel Alexandra slated to open in early 2020 as a design-led property. Melding Victorian elegance and modern concepts to create an atmosphere evocative of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, the 840-room hotel will be adorned with art fixtures like en-

graved golden doors and pendant crystal chandeliers, general manager Christina Cheng informed.

She added: "We are excited to be a part of this integral artistry, bringing Hotel Alexandra to new heights within the growing art scene in Hong Kong, making it a friendly social hub space and a welcoming arena for creative campaigns, art installations and showcases."

However, art and culture is often not the sole attraction for tourists visiting Hong Kong, noted Paul Chan, co-founder, Walk in Hong Kong.

He explained: "Except for Hong Kong Arts Month and Art Basel, there is no defining feature that stands out for the city's cultural tourism push at this stage. Still, we need these kind of new attractions to build up the (momentum) with (multi-faceted support) to boost tourism."

"Factors like quality of curated exhibitions, access to performances and events, as well as availability of a systematic information channel are crucial software to draw visitor interest. In fact, there isn't any integrated system that shows what the city offers in a day, and ticketing is tied up with two ticketing agents that often have a lot of glitches during purchasing."

It's still early days for Hong Kong's culture tourism development, Chan elaborated, as the under-construction WKCD is not yet anchored on the cultural hub ecosystem while existing institutions like Xiqu Centre needs supporting attractions in its vicinity to become a staple stop on tour itineraries.

The management of cultural venues is also a key link, Chan pointed out, stressing the importance of having a roster of "creative promotions and new themed exhibitions" for tour operators to incorporate them into walking tour programmes to attract international visitors.

Lam also noted: "In the long term, education is important to get tourism school students interested in arts and culture. I believe strongly in students acquiring hands-on experience and getting involved with an art form, so that they will develop a growing appreciation for the art form as they mature and share this knowledge and passion with the people being guided."

What's hot

Temple Street Night Foodie Tour

This experience was launched in 2018 as Hong Kong Foodie Tasting Tour's first evening tour. On the three-hour Foodie Tour, participants will get to sample iconic Hong Kong street food and finish at a seafood restaurant in Yau Ma Tei. The

journey covers selected food and drink tasting at six locations. Tours are available on Mondays or Thursday nights, taking a maximum of 12 participants.

Peninsula's new yacht

The Peninsula Hong Kong has introduced a new yacht. This Sunseeker Manhattan 60 is a 90m cruiser that can take up to 15 passengers. It sails on the Harbour Sunset Cruise, a two-hour evening programme featuring the Symphony of Lights on the Victoria Harbour.

The package includes canapés and unlimited consumption of house Champagne, wine and other beverages, available from 18.30 to 20.30 nightly. The package is priced at HK\$1,400 (US\$178) for adults and HK\$600 nett for children.

Ant-Man and The Wasp: Nano Battle!

Ant-Man and The Wasp: Nano Battle!, which has launched at Hong Kong Disneyland Resort since March 2019, is the world's first attraction

featuring the two superheroes, and marks the resort's second Marvel-themed attraction.

Guests will find themselves immersed in the imaginary S.H.I.E.L.D. Science and Technology Pavilion, where they are shrunk to the size of an ant, ready to engage in a heroic battle alongside Ant-Man and The Wasp. The new attraction is located next to the Iron Man Experience in Tomorrowland at the theme park.

Hong Kong Geopark hiking

Recognised by UNESCO for its geographical significance, Hong Kong Geopark is a popular spot to explore the natural beauty of Hong Kong. Accompanied by an experienced tour guide, travellers can marvel at stunning hexagonal columnar joints, one of the largest geological formations of this kind in the world, among other sights. Travellers could also explore Hakka villages in the surrounding areas, gaining a deeper understanding of a lesser-known side of Hong Kong.



Hong Kong Disneyland's Ant-Man and The Wasp attraction



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News/Gallery

Diving into new worlds

Direct links are key to courting new markets for Palau, The Marianas

By Rachel AJ Lee

Direct air connections and the changing perceptions of Palau and The Marianas as simply diving destinations are top-of-mind concerns for the two destinations in the Pacific Ocean, as they look to sustain their traditional visitor source markets while seeking out new prospects.

Palau and The Marianas share similar top inbound markets – primarily North Asia – of China, South Korea, Taiwan and Japan, most of which with direct connections to both destinations.

Priscilla Iakopo, managing director, Marianas Visitors Authority (MVA), shared: “The reason why we focus on these Asian countries is because we have direct flights to major ports, as well as the short amount of flight time of between three to 3.5 hours.”

New source markets are clearly on the cards for MVA, with Iakopo indicating The Marianas will be participating in ITB Asia for the second time this year to woo “South-east Asian markets like Singapore and Malaysia”.

Palau Visitors Authority (PVA), chairman, board of directors, Ngiraibelas Tmetuchl, has the same sentiments: “One market we would really love to have direct flights to is Singapore. They are the type of customer we want, but the challenge is that this market wants direct flights. The last thing a Singaporean wants to do is to stop somewhere else and shorten their already limited vacation time.”

Should direct flights from Singapore take off, they would also help to open Palau up to the European markets, Tmetuchl said.

Hence, both tourism authorities agreed that the most important thing now was to grow more direct connections, which would in turn help to bring in new source markets.

“The Marianas signed an agreement last year with Skymark Airlines – a domestic Japanese carrier – for a direct flight between Tokyo and Saipan.

Saipan is also the first international flight on its network,” Iakopo revealed.

Similarly, Tmetuchl hopes that direct flights out of Narita, also operated by Skymark, will be able to start by March 2020. He added that South Korean LCC T’way Air currently has some scheduled charters coming up in 2020, with the possibility of daily flights in the future.

In South-east Asia, Vietjet will commence twice-weekly direct flights between Ho Chi Minh City and Palau on September 20. While the target is naturally the Vietnamese outbound market, Tmetuchl hopes that Chinese travellers will also use that route.

Both tourism authorities also see the need to diversify their offerings beyond dive tourism, which is just but one sector in the destinations.

“The divers will find their

way here anyway. We want to diversify our markets to families and honeymooners – and we’re missing out on this market due to the lack of direct connections,” Tmetuchl said.

He added that PVA is also working to develop other attractions such as community-based tours and cultural experiences, in order to “balance out” the destination’s diving offerings.

For The Marianas, new marketing initiatives include promoting sports tourism such as marathons and water sports, according to Iakopo. “We are also exploring ecotourism, as people are increasingly concerned about sustainable tourism,” she said.

Other initiatives include developing a regional marketing scheme with other Micronesia islands to exhibit together at Asian tradeshows.

“For instance, we exhibited together with Guam and The Marianas at Asia Dive Expo in Singapore. It was a success, and we replicated it at the Taiwan International Tourism Expo. We’re currently in talks for another Micronesia booth at the upcoming International Travel Fair (also in Taiwan) this November,” Tmetuchl revealed.

A more defined marketing message needs to be relayed to showcase the diversity across the destinations though, Tmetuchl stated. “We are all very unique destinations. Each set of islands is different. We have different cultures, languages and food!”



Iakopo: eyes on SE Asian market



Tmetuchl: more than just diving



Jade Mountain, Yushan National Park, Taiwan

Taiwan aims high for Asians

By Prudence Lui

Taiwan is seizing a bigger chunk of the South-east Asian market, aided by its New Southbound Policy launched in 2017, and recent extension of Mutual Visa Requirements between Taiwan and 18 countries.

Subsequently, the share of these 18 markets, previously at 16.7 per cent, grew to 21.2 per cent in 2017 and 23.4 per cent in 2018.

A key factor, said Trust HJ Lin, director for New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, India and the Middle East for the Taiwan Tourism Bureau (TTB), was the greater length of visa-free stay, which proved to be a great incentive for last-minute travel decisions.

“Based on my experience, the length of visa-free stays and ease of obtaining visas really influence the desire to travel to a destination. For 1H2019, arrivals from these 18 markets went up by 4.9 per cent to nearly 1.3 million visitors,” he said.

Stellar performers for Taiwan in 1H2019 include New Zealand (+26 per cent) and Australia (16 per cent), thanks to Air New Zealand’s resumption of a five-times-weekly service – up from three – between Taipei and Auckland.

Lin expects this upward trend to prevail until this year-end, owing to favourable factors like more charter flights from Russia and Scoot turning its Kaohsiung-Singapore service to daily since June 2019. “I reckon South-east

Asian traffic will take up a quarter of total visitors arrival this year,” said Lin.

When asked if Taiwan has benefitted from traffic diverted from protest-hit Hong Kong, Lin remarked: “It’s a yes and no, because we work closely with Cathay Pacific Airways to fly Indians via Hong Kong, given only two weekly connections from New Delhi by China Airlines. With Hong Kong now in trouble, Cathay’s plan to cut its winter service may affect us.”

Amid greater competitor from market rivals like Japan, TTB is sparing no effort in wooing repeat visitors from South-east Asia, said Lin, with a strategy placing greater emphasis on Taiwan’s immersive fun and authentic culinary experiences.

He added: “To tap more new and repeat travellers, 2020 will be designated the year of mountain tours, our first-ever effort to promote mountain trips. Taiwan has 268 mountains above 900m, which is a strong asset for us. Looking ahead, a slew of themes are set to draw return visitors, i.e. bicycle tours for 2021 and railway tours for 2022.”

Furthermore, TTB’s marketing budget has been given a double-digit boost since September 1, 2019, shared Lin. Plus, the bureau recently rolled out a charter flight incentive programme, offering subsidies of US\$3,000 for Hong Kong/Macau and US\$8,000 for South-east Asia (except the Philippines) and Russia.

Great welcome to the vast steppes Photos by Yingyong Unanongrak





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El Nido, Palawan

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Transport yourself to one of the world's most renowned island paradise and forget time. The idyllic beauty of El Nido, Palawan has been repeatedly acclaimed by international publications as magnificent. From its gradient azure waters to towering limestone formations, white sand beaches and diverse flora and fauna, El Nido lures like an wondrous enchantment that will leave you mesmerized.

Discover El Nido and find out why the Philippines last frontier is truly an incomparable destination.

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