

# ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

2019  
2020





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# Contents

**02**

Foreword

**04**

Australia

**07**

Hong Kong

**09**

India

**10**

Indonesia

**13**

Japan

**15**

Malaysia

**18**

Maldives

**20**

Philippines

**23**

Singapore

**26**

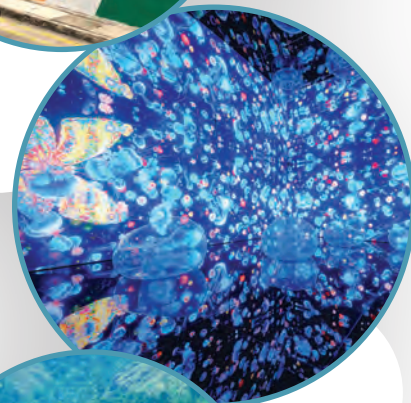
South Korea

**27**

Sri Lanka

**28**

Thailand



# Foreword



## Dear Travel Trade Partners,

The year 2019 has flown right by in a blink of an eye, with many developments in the economic and political space leaving indelible marks on the travel and tourism industry's performance report.

While an increasingly VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) environment makes it difficult to have a clear business projection, travel and tourism professionals must bear in mind that Asia's economic prospects remain bright on the back of growing affluence of its people and a young demographic that is hungry for knowledge, global experience, new technology and the latest products and services. And with all that, travel and tourism can continue to grow.

To see the future, one must understand the past. And so, our team of editors and reporters have once again produced this Asian Tourism Expert Guide, now in its 12<sup>th</sup> edition, to provide a snapshot of 2019 travel and tourism performance as well as developments that are worth watching in the new year.

This annual guide has, for the past decade, helped our travel trade readers in their programming and business plans, and we hope it will be the same for you.

Happy reading!

Warmest regards

**Darren Ng**  
Managing Director  
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# Australia

by Adelaine Ng



Take a drive through Francois Peron National Park, a national park in Western Australia

International visitor arrivals to Australia reached a record 9.3 million for the year ending June 2019, up three per cent compared to the previous year.

Tourist spending also reached a record A\$44.6 billion (US\$30.6 billion). But while growth continues to be led by education and holiday travel, the average length of trips fell by six nights over the last six years to 32 nights, although spend per night increased by 26 per cent.

There were mixed results for Australia's top markets from Asia-Pacific over the year. Growth was impressive for the Japanese market, with visitors up nine per cent to 445,000, and spend up 16 per cent, reaching A\$2 billion. Led by those visiting for education, spend for the China market grew six per cent to A\$11.9 billion. However, visitor numbers were up just one per cent to 1.3 million.

India saw the strongest growth over the past three years with visitor numbers increasing 53 per cent to 350,000, and spend 68 per cent to A\$1.8 billion over this period. India has been the strongest performing market over the last 10 years, growing by 13 per cent on average each year and more than tripling in size.

Business events remains a strong performing sector with one million arrivals spending A\$5 billion for the year to June 2019. But the rate of growth is moderating notably from China and the UK, which have seen declines in the past year.

On October 31, 2019, Tourism Australia unveiled a new three-year global campaign entitled Come Live Our Philausophy. This latest global strategy is part of an A\$38 million investment that will be rolled out in 15 key tourism markets over the next three years.

## FOUR KEY DEVELOPMENTS

### 1 NSW's budget slashed

The tourism budget for the state of New South Wales was cut by about 20 per cent to A\$141.1 million next financial year. It disadvantages the destination in an increasingly competitive market for both domestic and international tourists. Critics say the decision will impact business events attraction at a time when several hotels, stadiums and facilities are being built.

### 2 More Chinese groups wanted

In February, the Australian government announced A\$11 million in funding to attract more Chinese tour group tourists as part of China's Approved Destination Scheme. The scheme facilitates some 2.5 million Chinese tourists travelling to Australia in approved guided groups with a special ADS visa. The move boosts Tourism Australia's efforts to market directly to Chinese consumers.

### 3 Vital tourism improvements

In April, the government announced A\$50 million in funding over three years for a National Tourism Icons Program. The programme supports new tourism infrastructure and upgrades to drive tourism growth, particularly in regional areas. New attractions are considered critical to winning new and repeat visitors to Australia.

### 4 Perth rises up

Perth is expected to see a significant boost in visitors continuing into 2020 with ongoing new hotel development and direct air services. Hotel projects worth A\$1.5 billion have been approved in Western Australia, plus A\$3.7 billion for aviation infrastructure and arts, recreation and business. Latest results show Perth grew 7.9 per cent in spend and 12.3 per cent in visitation to the year ending June 2019.



From top: Elephant Rocks in Denmark, Western Australia; Sydney Harbour Bridge is one of Australia's most easily recognisable landmarks

## OUTLOOK



**Phillipa Harrison**  
Managing director,  
Tourism Australia

"After a number of years of strong growth, we are starting to see a slowdown in the pace of growth despite another year of record visitation and spend (June 2019 year-end). While tourism globally is facing some headwinds, we are confident that travel for leisure and business events will remain a key driver of economic growth for Australia in 2020."



**Matt Cameron-Smith**  
Managing director,  
AAT Kings

"Lonely Planet named Margaret River & Southern Western Australia as the number one place to visit in Asia-Pacific. These rankings certainly get the attention of consumers and put Australia on the global map. We're seeing great growth out of the US, UK, and domestic markets. (We also) expect travellers to go beyond the major cities and see more of the hidden beauty of Australia's outback and national parks."



**Margy Osmond**  
CEO,  
Tourism and Transport Forum  
Australia

"The future for Australian inbound tourism is bright. If global economic conditions remain favourable and sensible policy settings are implemented here at home, growth should continue beyond the latest figures which were up three per cent to 9.3 million visitor arrivals taking spending to A\$44.6 billion. This is a wonderful result for 2019 so far and our sector aims to build on this success in 2020 and beyond."

## WHAT'S NEW

### Reefsuites

Reefsuites is Australia's first underwater accommodation, launching in summer on the Great Barrier Reef. It features panoramic in-room, floor-to-ceiling views of tropical marine life including tropical fish, turtles and manta rays. Just two underwater rooms are available for overnight stays, with the full experience including a return cruise out to the reef, all meals and beverages, and some marine activities. Reefsuites is located on the A\$8-million Reefworld pontoon at the Whitsundays' Hardy Reef, 39 nautical miles from Airlie Beach.

### Kilsby Sinkhole

Independent visitors can now experience a two-hour snorkelling tour in the 60m limestone cavity that is Kilsby Sinkhole in Mount Gambier, South Australia. Primarily used for open water diving and diver training programmes, the sinkhole is the only site of its kind in Australia. Located on private farm property, Kilsby Sinkhole is also home to the Sinkhole Gin, produced from crystal clear limestone-filtered water and local native botanicals.

### Peninsula Hot Springs' new pools

Victoria's first geothermal mineral springs and day spa's A\$10 million expansion offers seven new hot springs pools; an amphitheatre; a 1.2-hectare food bowl that grows organic produce for onsite dining; two new saunas; an ice cave; and a cold room with falling snow. Located 90 minutes from Melbourne on the Mornington Peninsula.

### Ring Cycle Opera

Opera Australia will stage an ambitious world-first, fully digital production of Wagner's epic Ring Cycle at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre in November 2020. Known simply as the Ring, Richard Wagner's Der Ring des Nibelungen is rec-



From above: Change Overnight Hotel; and Kilsby Sinkhole

ognised internationally as a masterpiece and the pinnacle in operatic staging that attracts devotees from around the world, immersing themselves in an extraordinary musical event over four nights. The Queensland production features the latest technology resulting in the world's first fully digital Ring Cycle.

### Scout Bar Sydney

London's best bar, helmed by Europe's best mixologist 2019 Matt Whiley, has opened a new sister location in Sydney's trendy Surry Hills neighbourhood. Scout bar from Hackney's Sydney locale is in the basement of The Dolphin Hotel, offering a drink menu that features 10 original cocktails that incorporate a range of Australian native ingredients and bespoke Whiley beverages. These are offered alongside more familiar drinks like espresso martinis or vodka and soda, all offered with a Scout twist.

### Change Overnight Hotel

Guests can support a cause and stay the night simultaneously at this accommodation. Change Overnight is an 18-room apartment-style modern hotel built upon a social enterprise concept in Launceston.



Photo by Jessie Cripps

Choose one of eight causes, such as the Good Shepherd Agricultural Mission in India, where one night's stay contributes to nutritious breakfasts for the children of the orphanage. For guests passionate about the environment, a one night's stay can protect approximately 10m<sup>2</sup> of land in Tasmania through the Tasmanian Land Conservancy.

## THE EXPERT RECOMMENDS



**Catherine Cardinet**  
Melbourne-based executive tour guide

### Where: Australia

**Must eat:** Matilda in Melbourne for all manner of titillating smoky tastes for your buds, and Mary's Underground in the Sydney CBD because it is all the rage.

**Must See:** Orcas in their natural habitat at Bremer Bay in Western Australia, and Bruny Island in Tasmania to eat and trek to your heart's content.

**Must Stay:** QT Melbourne to experience Melbourne at its best, and Bungle Bungle Wilderness Lodge in Western Australia to get away from it all.

## INSPIRATION: BUSH ROMANCE

Whether it is a proposal, honeymoon, babymoon or special anniversary, Australia specialises in combining luxury with going bush for a romantic holiday.

You can stay in a luxe tent atop rust-red sand dunes with views of Uluru, for example, cosy up in frosty conditions surrounded by snow-capped peaks in Tasmania, or go paddling in a canoe with a thermos of hot chocolate.

Otherwise, go completely off grid and sleep under the stars on an isolated beach in Ningaloo Reef, with options to explore sand dunes; snorkel the coral reef; or head out by private boat to dive with resident whale sharks and passing humpback whales.



# Hong Kong

by Prudence Lui



Ongoing turmoil in Hong Kong has sent the city's once thriving tourism industry into a tailspin

**H**ong Kong's visitorship in the first eight months of 2019 recorded a year-on-year growth of four per cent, reaching 43.7 million tourists, according to the Hong Kong Tourism Board.

As a popular port-of-call for leisure cruises in Asia, Hong Kong welcomed 450,000 cruise passenger between January and June 2019, up 1.3 per cent year-on-year.

Hong Kong also saw growth in business event arrivals in 1H2019 – 4.2 per cent year-on-year to a million visitors.

However, as Hong Kong's anti-government protests extended beyond June and witnessed violence between protestors and the police, tourism numbers started to plunge.

The number of mainland Chinese visitors bound for Hong Kong by air nosedived 53.3 per cent from July 1 until September 23, and

forward bookings from September 24 until December 30 are 58.2 per cent behind the same period last year, according to a study by ForwardKeys.

The political storm also put off some event organisers. The Global Wellness Summit moved to Singapore, while the HSMIAI Hotel Revenue Optimization Conference 2019 chose to skip its gathering in November. Hong Kong Cyclothon and Wine & Dine Festival were also cancelled. Waning confidence in the marketplace prompted local industry players, such as the Hong Kong Exhibition & Convention Industry Association, to issue statements to reassure organisers that most exhibitions have remained.

Growth recorded in the first half of 2019 may be offset if political unrest continues until the end of this year.

## THREE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

### 1 More promotion muscle

The Hong Kong government has allocated an additional sum of around HK\$353 million (US\$45 million) to help the Hong Kong Tourism Board enhance its destination promotion. Various initiatives will be rolled out, such as a funding boost for the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong to develop more thematic tourism products.

### 2 Warmer welcome for more

A visa exemption pilot scheme for Myanmar nationals was extended for another year until September 30, 2020, while citizens of Panama and Armenia now enjoy visa-free stay in Hong Kong for up to 30 days. The move is expected to open up new markets for Hong Kong's tourism industry.

### 3 Cathay Pacific gets stronger

Cathay Pacific's acquisition of low-cost carrier Hong Kong Express Airways has given it control over three out of four Hong Kong-based airlines. Its other wholly-owned subsidiary is Cathay Dragon. Industry players expressed concerns over possible fare increment due to the company's monopoly of air services in the region.

## WHAT'S NEW

### Avenue of Stars

Regarded as one of Hong Kong's hottest tourist spots, the Avenue of Stars (AoS) reopened in January 2019 after a three-year renovation. It connects Tsim Sha Tsui East, Victoria Dockside and the arts and culture cluster in the western waterfront. With the return of the AoS, the Tsim Sha Tsui promenade is now vibrant again.

### Xiqu Centre

Xiqu Centre is the first performing arts venue by the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority. The building houses a Grand Theatre with 1,073 seats, a Tea House Theatre with 200 seats, eight professional studios, and a seminar hall.

### Ant-Man and The Wasp: Nano Battle!

Hong Kong Disneyland Resort (HKDL)'s newest Marvel attraction opened in March 2019, and is the world's first to feature Ant-Man and The Wasp, as well as a female superhero as the lead character. It



From left: Xiqu Centre; K11 MUSEA

expands the Iron Man Experience, which has been consistently rated as HKDL's most popular attraction since its opening in 2017.

### K11 MUSEA

Created to bring cultural, arts and retail together under one roof, the new K11 MUSEA on the Victoria Dockside in Tsim Sha Tsui claims to be the 'silicon valley of culture that will inspire global millennials,



and facilitate a broader discussion on the interconnectedness of creativity, culture and innovation'.

### Sai Kung jet boat tour

Led by Geopark guides who are certified by EcoGuide Board, the three-hour jet boat tour takes visitors into Hong Kong's nature in Sai Kung. Departures on the 16-seat Ecojet boat are at 09.30 and 13.30 every Tuesday and Thursday.

## OUTLOOK



**Wing Wong**  
Managing director,  
W Travel

"The recent implementation of an anti-mask law (during protests) may deter protesters and violence. Once protests stop, Hong Kong will rebuild herself. I am sure the trade will be co-operative and not ask for outrageous pricing (from suppliers)."



**Michael Wu**  
Managing director,  
Gray Line Tours

"I am not optimistic. Hopefully, there will be no more social unrest after the District Council election. From there, (the tourism industry can) start rebuilding through promotion. We lost 50 per cent of visitors, so we'd be grateful to recover 25 per cent of it in 1H2020."



**Charles Ng**  
Managing director,  
Sincere International Travel Service

"It will be a hard year to rebuild and maintain business in 2020."

# India by Rohit Kaul

Despite an economic slowdown, the tourism industry is one of the fastest growing sectors in India. Major factors driving tourist traffic include various government initiatives, such as liberalisation of e-visa rules, which has made India a preferred destination. International tourist arrivals in India during 2018 stood at 10.6 million as compared to 10 million in 2017, registering a growth of 5.2 per cent.

From January to July 2019, a total of 1.5 million visitors arrived on e-tourist visa as compared to 1.3 million from the same period last year. India also hosted a number of international conferences and exhibitions in 2019 including India International Footwear Fair, 22<sup>nd</sup> India International Security Expo 2019 and India International Trade Fair.



Taj Mahal is a UNESCO-listed site in Agra

## FOUR KEY DEVELOPMENTS

### 1 E-visa for private conferences

The Indian government has expanded the ambit of its e-conference visa to allow the facility to be used for attending private conferences too. Before, e-visa for conferences only covered events organised by the government or public sector undertakings. Indian MICE players had demanded this for a long time.

### 2 GST rate cut on hotel tariffs

India's GST Council has cut tax on room tariffs of Rs7,500 (US\$105) and above from 28 per cent to 18 per cent,

bringing much needed respite to industry stakeholders. Likewise, the tax on room tariffs of less than Rs7,500 was slashed from 18 per cent to 12 per cent.

### 3 Flexible e-tourist visa regime

India's Ministry of Tourism (MOT) has introduced a new e-visa fee structure for over 160 countries based on peak and lean tourist seasons. Under the new regime, the e-visa fee with a validity of 30 days is US\$25 during the peak season of July to March, and US\$10 during the lean period of April to June. This is a steep

drop from the previous e-visa fee of about US\$80 to US\$100.

### 4 Iconic sites

MOT has earmarked 17 sites in 12 clusters across the country for development as iconic tourism sites, including Taj Mahal & Fatehpur Sikri (Uttar Pradesh), Ajanta & Ellora (Maharashtra), Humayun's Tomb, Red Fort & Qutub Minar (Delhi), Colva (Goa), Amer Fort (Rajasthan), Somnath & Dholavira (Gujarat), Hampi (Karnataka), and Kumarakom (Kerala), among others.

## WHAT'S NEW

### Panambi Resort & Spa

Nestled inside the Rajaji National Park, the 35-key Panambi Resort & Spa offers a slice of serenity to guests. The property has a swimming pool with a small kid-friendly pool, kids' play area, a 24-hour restaurant, and a spa. River Ganges is a short stroll from the resort. Guests can also indulge in nature walks or take yoga classes amid lush greenery.

### WelcomHeritage Tadoba Vanya Villas Resort & Spa

Spread across 65 acres, this property sits on its own private lake. Notably, it is located within a 1.5km radius of the

Tadoba forest, which is home to the highest number of tigers and cubs in central India, making it an ideal getaway for nature and wildlife lovers. The 36-key resort features two restaurants, a bar, swimming pool and a 212m<sup>2</sup> conference hall that can house up to 300 people.

### The Ritz-Carlton, Pune

Situated in the heart of downtown Pune and right across the Poona Club Golf Course, this luxury hotel is ideal for travellers seeking to soak in the sights and unique experiences of this dynamic metropolis. The hotel offers 198 guestrooms and 35 suites, five

F&B outlets, a spa, fitness studio and yoga deck, and a 3,251m<sup>2</sup> event space with access to an outdoor foyer and deck area.



The Ritz-Carlton, Pune

# Indonesia

by Tiara Maharani



Jakarta is the centre of economics, culture and politics of Indonesia

A series of natural disasters that pummelled Indonesia in 2018 had forced the government to revise its international arrivals target in 2019 from 20 million to 18 million.

As the destination went on recovery mode, its people readied for the national and presidential election in April. As with most elections, corporate activities slowed in the preceding months, as business people held their breath as they waited to see how the next new government would impact their business plans. That resulted in reduced business meetings and events.

The elections presented Indonesian tourism with new hope. Acknowledging the growing significance of the creative economy in tourism, president Joko Widodo renamed the Ministry of Tourism to the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, and placed Wishnutama Kusubandio at its helm, replacing Arief Yahya.

Travel trade members welcomed the move and expressed renewed optimism that Indonesian tourism can be further developed and its quality improved.

Meanwhile, overall business confidence rebounded in the second half of 2019.

Latest data from Statistics Indonesia showed that the number of international arrivals to Indonesia in the January-August 2019 period reached 10.9 million. Malaysia leads as the biggest contributor of footfalls, with 2.1 million visitors (up 19.4 per cent).

China came in second with 1.4 million (up 13.2 per cent), followed by Singapore with 11.2 million visits (up 11.5 per cent), and Australia with 876,800 visits (up eight per cent).

Although arrivals showed positive growth in the last three months, Indonesian tourism stakeholders say they need to work much harder to achieve their targets for the year.

## FIVE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

### 1 More business events

For the next five years, the Indonesian government will be focusing on achieving revenue targets rather than visitor numbers. To achieve this, inbound business events will be at the core of Indonesia’s tourism development plans. The development of business events will fall under the coordination of the Ministry of Tourism. As part of the strategy, the ministry will be working with associations to bid for events.

### 2 Yogyakarta gets a new airport

Yogyakarta International Airport, which has been partially opened since May 2019, is due for full completion in mid-2020. By then, it will accommodate 20 million passengers each year and be equipped with a 3,250m long by 45m wide runway capable to serving wide-bodied commercial aircraft. The new facility is expected to solve Yogyakarta’s accessibility issue.

The destination’s current Adi Sutjipto International Airport has capacity for 1.8 million passengers a year but had to serve 8.8 million passengers in 2018.

### 3 A new capital

Indonesia’s plan to move her capital city to East Kalimantan by 2024 is just the beginning of one of the most ambitious infrastructure ventures in the country’s history. The new capital will be on a 180,000-hectare plot of land, and will drive urban development and improved access

to seaports and airports.

The relocation is expected to cost a hefty 466 trillion rupiah (US\$33 billion), but the tourism industry is excited over the prospect of new star-rated hotels and meeting facilities emerging across East Kalimantan. They believe these facilities will boost the destination’s tourism standing.

Meanwhile, president Joko Widodo has reassured his people that Jakarta will remain the country’s centre of business. Horwath HTL recently projected that based on the city’s 2018 performance and the fact that government events are an important market for Jakarta hotels, the hotel industry in the current capital city faces a potential loss of 1.4 trillion rupiah (US\$100 million) annually.

### 4 New tourism destinations

The Indonesian government is accelerating the development of the tourism sector in five priority destinations – Mandalika, Labuan Bajo, Borobudur, Lake Toba and Likupang. These destinations, part of the ‘10 New Bali’ project, are expected to develop their infrastructure by 2020. The government has budgeted 9.4 trillion rupiah for them. Private sector projects are expected to start developing from next year.

### 5 Better crisis management

The Ministry of Tourism has designated three regions to pilot the Tourism Crisis Management (MKK) project. They are Riau Islands, which represents the western

region; West Java for the central region; West Nusa Tenggara for the eastern region.

The MKK has four phases, namely the Preparedness and Mitigation Phase, the Emergency Response Phase, the Recovery Phase, and the Normalisation Phase. Its application aims to prevent and overcome tourism crisis that could hurt the country’s image as a tourism destination and lead to a fall in arrival numbers.



From top: Lake Toba; Yogyakarta International Airport

## OUTLOOK



**I Ketut Ardana**  
Managing director,  
Bali Sunshine Tours

“Indonesia’s tourism prospects for 2020 are still good. President Joko Widodo has stated a commitment to make tourism the leading sector for foreign exchange earners. With government commitment, tourism infrastructure and facilities can be improved. Moreover, the Ministry of Tourism is actively working to improve the quality of human resources in several destinations. I believe these will further stimulate tourism.”



**Jongki Adiyasa**  
Executive director,  
Ina Leisure Indonesia  
Specialist Tours & Travel

“If political issues in the country are not addressed, I’m afraid the dark clouds will still overshadow Indonesian tourism, made worse by the weakening global economic situation.

On the bright side, we can expect more arrivals from South-east Asia and cruise ships. The quality of tourists from China will improve with the removal of zero-dollar tours.”



**Budianto Ardiansyah**  
Managing director,  
Duta Leisure Indonesia

“In 2019, it was widely discussed that the focus of the government in 2020-2024 will no longer be about the (number) of visits but tourist quality instead. As such, I have positive hopes for 2020.”

## WHAT'S NEW

### Café del Mar Bali

Ibiza's iconic lifestyle brand Café del Mar made its South-east Asia debut by opening its latest beach club in Canggu, Bali. This two-storey club by the beach features several bars, a 1,000m<sup>2</sup> infinity pool, private VIP cabanas, a premium restaurant and world-class staging for large, outdoor music events. Café del Mar Bali has also fused touches of Mediterranean architecture from the original Café del Mar in Ibiza with modern Balinese nuances.

### Hakkasan Jakarta

Hakkasan Group, which runs several Michelin-starred restaurants, opened its first South-east Asia outlet in Jakarta's Sudirman Central Business District (SCBD). Located on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> floor of the Alila SCBD hotel, Hakkasan Jakarta offers a panoramic view of the city skyline. Serving signature Cantonese dishes, Hakkasan Jakarta is open for both lunch and dinner, with the bar opening at lunchtime and remain so till late. Menu highlights include black swan puff with musang king durian and steamed grouper with kaffir sambal sauce.

### The Kayana Beach Lombok

A boutique villa under Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts' The Royal Collection category, The Kayana Beach Lombok opened its doors in August. The property comprises 32 one-bedroom private villas. Guests can choose from four villa types –



Deluxe, Duplex, Beach Front and Hillside, each with its own pool and sundeck. Situated on the island's main tourist strip Jalan Senggigi, the all-villa resort boasts stunning views of the Lombok Strait, Mount Agung and the three Gilis. The resort is mere minutes away by boat from popular snorkelling spots.

### The Apurva Kempinski Bali

The Apurva Kempinski Bali opened in Bali with 475 rooms. Set amid the cliffs and beaches of southern Bali, this five-star resort has six signature restaurants, a cigar and shisha Lounge, an ocean-facing spa and fitness centre, a 60-metre swimming pool, kids pool, and a family club. For business events and weddings, The Apurva Kempinski Bali offers a 1,076m<sup>2</sup> pillar-free and ocean-view grand ballroom, meeting rooms, The Apurva beachfront wedding chapels, and 2,200m<sup>2</sup> ocean-front lawn for exceptional outdoor gatherings and events.



From top: The Apurva Kempinski Bali; Hakkasan Jakarta

### InterContinental Jakarta Pondok Indah

InterContinental Jakarta Pondok Indah opens with 311 guestrooms and suites. Nestled in the buzzing intersection of Pondok Indah, the property offers unrivaled amenities, including an all-day restaurant Sugar & Spice, swimming pool and kids play-ground area, fitness and movement Studio and the Aqua Lounge for those looking to indulge in cocktails by the pool. For special events and other functions, the hotel offers The Grand Ballroom – a venue that accommodates up to 3,500 people.

## THE EXPERT RECOMMENDS



### Adjie Wahjono

Operations manager, Aneka Kartika Tours and Travel Services

**Where:** Banyuwangi

**Must eat:** Rujak Soto, one of Banyuwangi's unique culinary creations, is a combination of *cingur* (cow lips) salad and yellow gravy soup with a savoury, fresh, sweet and spicy taste.

**Must see:** Mount Ijen, East Java's active volcano that radiates a natural phenomenon known as the electric blue flames. The beautiful turquoise sulphur lake that resides in the heart of the volcano is the largest acidic lake in the world and is formed by a volcanic crater.

**Must stay:** Dialoog Hotel Banyuwangi is a stylish, modern retreat for relaxation, romance and adventure in East Java. The tropical oasis has beautiful architecture that overlooks the ocean. Catch the sunrise from the infinity swimming pool.

## INSPIRATION: FAMILY FUN

Join the locals and hop on Jakarta's new MRT, rapid transit system. First stop, Karinda Garden, which is near Lebak Bulus station. There, learn how locals turn waste into compost.

Next, head north towards Bundaran HI and get off at Fatmawati station for the Basoeeki Abdullah Museum, where sculptures, masks, puppets, weapons and paintings are exhibited.

At Senayan station, stroll through Bung Karno City Forest or check out ongoing exhibitions at the Jakarta Convention Centre. Game for spicy Indonesian food? Make a beeline for Beautika.

End the day with some retail therapy. At Bundaran HI, there are up-market shopping malls where many local and international branded labels are sold. Alun-Alun at Grand Indonesia Mall is a great place to snag some upmarket traditional cloths, such as batik and *tenun* (handwoven fabrics; pictured). For good bargains, try Thamrin City.



# Japan

by Pamela Chow



Himeji Castle during the spring season is one of Japan's premier cherry blossom viewing spots

Japan is well on its way towards meeting its 2020 goal of 40 million international visitors, with 2019 expected to surpass 35 million arrivals.

Of these, Asia continues to dominate Japan's inbound traffic, with 85 per cent coming from China, South Korea and Taiwan. Repeat travellers comprise 60 per cent of all incoming traffic, and 80 per cent of these come from Asian countries.

Earlier in July this year, Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) and Singapore Airlines (SIA) signed a Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) to further promote travel and tourism to Japan from five key markets of Singapore, Australia, India, Indonesia and Malaysia.

As part of the partnership, JNTO and SIA has jointly fam trips and marketing activities. The two-year agreement has been pegged at ¥48 million (US\$445,536) for the first year, with the second year of

funding currently undecided.

The country's MICE sector has seen a leap in visitorship from India and Vietnam at 153 per cent and 493 per cent respectively, owing to JNTO's new offices in these markets. In 2018, China claimed the top spot, while Singapore climbed from being unranked to being the fourth largest MICE market.

Smaller destinations outside of Japan's main cities have also taken promotions into their own hands to attract corporate traffic. Kobe City, for instance, launched its After MICE programme in August, which encourages groups to experience the city through 20 shortlisted activities in a guidebook.

Recently in September, Japan Convention Bureau, part of JNTO, launched a #LetsMeetInJapan social media campaign to bring attention to the variety of business events that can be held throughout the country through the lens of event planners, attendees and trade media.

## FIVE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

### 1 First cruise terminal underway

The port of Sasebo in Nagasaki Prefecture will be the site of Japan's first cruise terminal. To be operated by Carnival Corporation, the terminal is expected to open in summer 2020, and is expected to support the country's growing popularity as a cruise destination.

### 2 Tourism scores thanks to mega sporting event

The Rugby World Cup has fuelled a tourism boom for Japan. According to ForwardKeys, competing nations registered a YOY 38.1 per cent jump in flight bookings to Japan during the period from September 12 to November 6, which covers the dates of and around the tournament.

### 3 Choice makes Japan its choice

US-based Choice Hotels International expects to open more than 30 new Comfort hotels in the market by 2033, potentially raising the profile of Japan in the US market. The first seven of the new



The New National Stadium (pictured) is currently under construction in Kasumigaoka. It will serve as the main stadium for the opening and closing ceremonies

Comfort hotels are set to open over the next three years in large cities such as Kyoto, Matsuyama and Nagoya.

### 4 Japan removes barriers

Japan is ramping up its accessibility efforts to better cater to a growing number of overseas and domestic visitors with mobility issues. To date, 93 per cent of Tokyo's subway stations and 1,000 taxis are wheelchair accessible. In soft infrastructure, the Japan Tourism Agency

is supporting barrier-free mindset education to aid staff in the tourism sector.

### 5 Spreading the tourism load

While the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games may spike international arrivals for Japan next May, it may also create a crowding-out effect deterring tourists from visiting during the month and beyond. JNTO will roll out a number of measures to combat this, including promoting outlying regions around the country.

## WHAT'S NEW



The Ritz-Carlton, Nikko, is the brand's first Japanese resort in a UNESCO World Heritage site

### An illustrative journey

Half an hour from downtown Osaka is the artsy town of Izumi, which recently unveiled its self-guided walking tour, Art Gush. The route winds through the numerous murals and sculptures in the city.

### A kabuki makeover experience

New Japan Travel Planner has launched a Kabuki makeover experience under its Tajima offerings. It is Japan's only such experience, and the tour brings participants to Kansai's oldest play house located in Izushi, where guests will be dressed by professionals into kabuki actors. This is an experience that even Japanese people cannot easily access.

### Kagawa opens castle for stays

This year, private castle Anabuki Tei has opened its doors to visitors as a guesthouse. The castle had served as a private

residence for the past 50 years, and group bookings can now be made on Airbnb for all seven rooms in the building.

### Ritz-Carlton goes to Nikko

The Ritz-Carlton, Nikko, will be located along the East end of Lake Chuzenji and South of Mount Nantai Plans. Plans for the hotel include 94 guestrooms and suites, each providing a view of either Lake Chuzenji or Mount Nantai. Dining options are expected to include an all-day dining restaurant, a lobby lounge and bar, as well as a Western restaurant. The hotel will also feature facilities such as a spa with treatment rooms, and an onsen.

### Spotlight on Japan's indigenous

Akan Adventure Tourism has opened Kamuy Lumina, an outdoor multimedia night experience inspired by an Ainu legend in Akan, an area home to Hokkai-

## OUTLOOK



**Michinori Yamasaki**  
Executive vice president,  
Japan National Tourism  
Organisation

"With major events happening in Japan such as the Rugby World Cup 2019, the Olympic and Paralympic Games next year and the World Expo 2025, JNTO is utilising these opportunities to further spread the charms of Japan overseas. JNTO is now expanding our worldwide offices, and we have begun to establish new offices in Guangzhou, Dubai and Mexico City. We are planning to further expand to other destinations in the near future."

do's largest Ainu settlement. Created by Canada-based multimedia entertainment company Moment Factory, the show uses technology to transform the woodland landscape by displaying nature and Ainu culture in light and sound.



# Malaysia

by S Puvaneswary



Georgetown peeks out in the background; view from Penang Hill at dawn

Malaysia's tourism performance in 2019 is an improvement over 2018. The destination recorded RM41.7 billion (US\$1 billion) in tourist receipts for 1H2019, a 6.8 per cent growth over the corresponding period in 2018.

The country also welcomed some 13.35 million international tourists from January to June this year, up 4.9 per cent over the first half of 2018. Shorthaul, medium-haul and longhaul markets all registered growth at 4.7 per cent, 7.2 per cent and 1.8 per cent respectively year-on-year.

On the business events front, destination promotion efforts have intensified to attract more Asian gatherings that are aligned with the strategic direction of the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia.

To this end, the Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB) has targeted new incentive travel markets such as Vietnam, Taiwan and Indonesia, while retaining marketing commitments in traditional source markets of China, India and South Korea.

On September 1, the Malaysian government introduced an air departure tax ranging from RM8 to RM150, with the amount varying according to the destination and flight class. Local tourism trade players argued that the tax would affect the competitiveness of Malaysia.

On October 1, the government moved to reduce passenger service charge for international flights from RM73 to RM50 at all airports in Malaysia, except the main air hub Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

## FIVE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

### 1 Friendlier skies

To attract more airlines to fly to Malaysia, particularly from medium- and long-haul markets, and to encourage existing airlines to increase their frequency and routes to Malaysia, Tourism Malaysia and Malaysia Airports have set up a RM20 million (US\$4.9 million) fund in January for new and existing airlines to use for their marketing and promotions of Malaysia. Known as Joint International Tourism Development Programme (JITDP), it is expected to continue into 2020. Airlines that have benefited from this programme include AirAsia, Malindo Air, Air Arabia, Air Busan, Condor Airlines, China Airlines and Royal Brunei Airlines.

### 2 European exposure

As the Official Country Partner of ITB Berlin 2019, Malaysia put on an energetic cultural performance to an audience of about 3,000 international trade visitors and media attending the event's official opening ceremony in March. Becoming the Official Country Partner was part of Tourism Malaysia's efforts to rebuild promotions in Europe while generating further tourist interest from the region. Media exposure alone, as a result of interviews by international media at ITB Berlin, is expected to generate an investment return of RM175 million. In addition, Tourism Malaysia also received numerous partnership proposals from German, Austrian and Swiss industry partners,

with an estimated total revenue of RM120 million to the country.

### 3 Improved Middle Eastern capacity

Air Arabia commenced daily direct flights between Sharjah and Kuala Lumpur from July 1 while Qatar Airways launched a new route to Langkawi via Penang from October 15. These services bring welcome relief to the local travel trade, as seat capacity is often stretched thin, especially during the super-peak Middle East summer season. Qatar Airways had also increased its frequency from four to five times weekly to Penang and Langkawi on October 27, bringing even more tourists to the Peninsular's north.

### 4 Funding support

In July, Malaysia's Ministry of Finance dished out a RM5 million tourism fund for the private sector to use in their destination promotions aimed at the domestic and international sectors. The fund is a matching grant, and seeks to enhance promotion and marketing efforts by the private sector. It is seen as a timely support, as the country gears up for Visit Malaysia 2020, which aims to attract 30 million tourist arrivals.

### 5 Expedia boost

In August, Tourism Malaysia and Expedia Group announced a major collaboration whereby both parties will work together on global campaigns in 2019 and 2020



From top: Malaysia tourism community at ITB Berlin 2019; AirAsia benefits from JITDP

to promote inbound travel to Malaysia from Australia, Japan and the US. These markets are the three biggest points of sales for Expedia Group while for Malaysia all three markets attracted long-staying and high-spending tourists.

## OUTLOOK



**KL Tan**  
President,  
Malaysian Association of Tour &  
Travel Agents

"The tourism industry is expected to perform better in 2020 which coincides with the Visit Malaysia 2020 campaign. The industry can expect attractive air fares, value-adds and new packages in line with current trends, new strategies in promotions and marketing, and improved air connectivity. All these will entice more tourists to visit Malaysia."



**Patrick Theseira**  
Director,  
Platinum Charters

"Next year will be a good year for Malaysia's inbound tourism because Tourism Malaysia and industry players have ramped up their promotions in conjunction with Visit Malaysia 2020. This will create more awareness and excitement around Malaysia, which will in turn boost arrivals. Air connectivity from the Middle East has also improved, which will bring us more longhaul travellers in 2020."



**RoseMawaty Adil Embun**  
Senior manager,  
Myne Travel

"Arrivals to Malaysia is rising and I believe we will see a larger than normal increase on the back of Visit Malaysia 2020. The international promotions led by our government have helped us to stand out from other destinations as we promote our diverse cultures, heritage and eco-tourism products."

## WHAT'S NEW

### The Grill

Le Petit Chef, the world's smallest chef at only 58mm tall, takes centre stage at The Grill at TREC Kuala Lumpur where he prepares a Tropical Colada with help from an active volcano and a tropical jungle. A product of advanced 3D projection mapping technology, Le Petit Chef promises a memorable dining experience. The Grill sits up to 60 diners, and is open daily from 17.00 to 02.00.

### Monopoly Mansion by Sirocco

The 290-key Monopoly Mansion by Sirocco in Kuala Lumpur will soft open this December as the world's first Monopoly-themed hotel. Inspired by the popular board game by Hasbro Inc., the property will comprise 14 floors, each featuring traits of a particular country that Mr Monopoly, a fictional character from the game, has visited. Event planners rejoice, as the unique hotel will offer function rooms including a junior ballroom for up to 174 people in theatre seating and a grand ballroom for up to 322 people. There are three other meeting rooms to support breakout events.

### Bukit Bintang walking tour

A tour of lively Bukit Bintang road in Kuala Lumpur is conducted every evening, during which a guide regals participants with tales of the city's history and heritage. Highlights include a bird's-eye view of the Kuala Lumpur

skyline, optical illusions in a 'distorted room', and a special meal comprising local dishes and drinks. The guided walk starts at 16.00 from The Federal Hotel Kuala Lumpur and covers a distance of 2.5km.

### Penampang Village Experience

Borneo Trails in Sabah offers a half-day cultural experience at the Penampang Village, hub of the Kadazandusun community in Sabah. Participants will visit the tamu, or local market, where they can purchase local food products and handicraft, as well as try local delicacies such as sago worms and rice wine. After a trip to the market with the help of a guide, participants will proceed to Madam Nurhanidah's Kitchen for a hands-on cooking class to create typical Borneo dishes such as hivana (pickled fish salad), lihing chicken (chicken with local rice wine), and rice cooked with yam and wrapped in a leaf. The Penampang Village Experience is good for 20 people each time.

### The Prestige Hotel Penang

This Victorian-inspired hotel stands in Penang's UNESCO Heritage area, and is within walking distance to the Malaysian city's myriad cultural attractions and gourmet hotspots, making it an attractive location for bleisure travellers. It offers 162 guestrooms, an all-day dining outlet, a retail arcade, a gym, event spaces and a rooftop infinity pool.



From top: IMAGINATRICKS; Monopoly Mansion by Sirocco

### IMAGINATRICKS

A new highlight at Resorts World Genting's Genting International Showroom, IMAGINATRICKS fuses acrobatics, dance and comedy into a loud and thrilling performance for all ages. Running from now until May 2020, the audience can expect an hour-long action-packed treat presented by a stellar cast of stuntmen, world champion ice skaters and talented dancers.

## THE EXPERT RECOMMENDS



**Sasha Aru**  
Director, Fratres  
Events & Tours

### Where: Kuala Lumpur

**Must eat:** Nasi lemak – coconut flavoured rice enjoyed with a mix of simple dishes such as small fried anchovies and *sambal* hot sauce – is loved by all Malaysians. Different ethnic groups prepare it differently. Have a taste of it at a PappaRich restaurant, which is present in major cities, or at a local coffeeshop.

**Must see:** The Petronas Twin Towers which is the pride of Malaysia. The buildings are linked at the 41<sup>st</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> floors by a skybridge which is open to the public at selected hours. It gives visitors an amazing bird's-eye view of the city and surroundings.

**Must stay:** The RuMa Hotel and Residences is a new luxury hotel that blends the city's tin mining and colonial past with modern comforts and Malaysian hospitality.

## INSPIRATION: ADVENTURE

Glamping – a form of luxury camping where guests enjoy direct access to the outdoors without compromising on comfort and convenience – has taken off in Malaysia.

Canopy Tribes in Nusajaya, Johor, charms glamping fans with cosy cotton bell tents that bring to mind images of Arabian Nights under moonlit skies.

Tiarasa Escapes Glamping Resorts (pictured) in Janda Baik, Pahang – where the rainforest is literally at one's doorstep – features 20 safari-style tented villas and treetop villas. Attached bathrooms, hot showers, deep-soaking bathtubs, air-conditioning and free Wi-Fi will keep modern travellers happy. It is also easily accessible, being just 30 minutes by car from Kuala Lumpur.



# Maldives

by Feizal Samath



The Maldives is still a relatively popular holiday destination

An aggressive US\$7 million destination marketing campaign in 2019, up from US\$2 million in previous years, has been instrumental in a spike in tourism arrivals to the Maldives.

Tourism data for 1H2019 revealed the highest-ever growth in tourist arrivals – by 19 per cent – over the past five years. In particular, arrivals from India showed the most significant increase – almost 100 per cent in the January to July period.

The destination expects to welcome 1.6 million tourists by the end of 2019, up from 1.4 million in 2018.

A flurry of new resort openings in the Maldives reflects continued industry confidence but also heralds a price war. The destination's room inventory has bulged to 47,250 by July 2019, up from 42,960 by end-December 2018. Heavy discounts on rooms are seen being offered to the mainstream segment.

Meanwhile, there are delays in the expansion of the destination's Velana International Airport to accommodate 7.5 million passengers annually by 2022.

The airport expansion, a US\$800 million project, will see the construction of a brand-new runway, a new passenger terminal, a seaplane terminal, as well as other support facilities.

While the new runway was completed in September 2018, it cannot be used as the old seaplane terminal, near the same land, has to be moved first. Hence, the new passenger terminal will not be ready until 2022.

The country is aiming to welcome 2.5 million arrivals in 2022-2023, largely dependent on the completion of the airport expansion. The current airport can only handle two to three million passengers annually, and its runways are congested. Planes have had to circle the airport until the runway is clear for landing.

## THREE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

### 1 First integrated resort opens

The Maldives welcomed her first integrated resort when phase one of Crossroads Maldives was completed in September 2019. Owned by Thai developer Singha Estate, Crossroads encompasses nine islands fringing the Emboodhoo Lagoon in the South Male Atoll. Three of the islands form phase one of the project, which contains SAii Lagoon Maldives, Hard Rock Hotel Maldives and The Marina @ Crossroads, a lifestyle area and beach walk with retail, entertainment and dining outlets.

### 2 Greater tourist safety measures

A tourist scout programme has been initiated to ensure the safety of holiday-makers in the Maldives, with enlistment of tourist scouts to begin in January 2020. Under the programme, water safety-trained lifeguards will be dispatched to



Crossroads Maldives

incident-prone islands. The first phase of the project will introduce 50 lifeguards in 19 islands. Tourist scouts will eventually be deployed across the destination.

### 3 Eyes on resort safety standards

A spate of tourist drowning incidents and

fires at three resorts has prompted the government in mid-2019 to review safety standards and inspect resorts, hotels and guesthouse across the Maldives. Several overseas tour operators, such as TUI and Kuoni, have also started to conduct their own health and safety audits of resorts.

## WHAT'S NEW

### Hard Rock Hotel Maldives

Hard Rock Hotel Maldives opened in September 2019, as part of the Crossroads Maldives integrated resort. The 178-key tropical hotel infuses Maldivian culture into its design, and shows off authentic music memorabilia belonging to international superstars like Shakira and Justin Timberlake, alongside regional sensations like Asanee Chotikul.

### InterContinental Maldives Maamunagau

The luxury resort, located 35 minutes from Velana International Airport via seaplane, boasts 81 villas with their own private pool and terrace. Facilities include six gastronomic concepts including The Retreat, an adults-only enclave with a private bar and infinity pool; a signature AVI Spa with six overwater treatment villas; and a Planet Trekkers Kids Club.

### Nautilus Maldives

The Nautilus Maldives is an exclusive resort of 26 beach and ocean houses on a private island in the heart of the Baa Atoll UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. A modern bohemian vibe prevails at the resort, where guests are not restricted by rules, dress codes, set restaurant hours and fixed menus.

### The Standard Huruvalhi Maldives

The former Carpe Diem Beach Resort and Spa has been renamed The Standard Huruvalhi Maldives following its takeover by US-based Standard Hotels. Located in Raa Atoll Huruvalhi, the property has 115 rooms with private pools. Facilities include a spa with nine treatment rooms and a communal hammam; an overwater nightclub; and six F&B offerings.

### Emerald Maldives Resort & Spa

The all-inclusive Emerald Maldives Resort & Spa resort, a member of The Leading

Hotels of the World, welcomed its first guests in August 2019. Surrounded by 1.5km of soft white sand and enjoying complete privacy on a 20-hectare private island, guests are accommodated in an environment constructed out of natural materials such as bamboo, stones and Langhi Langhi leaves.

### Baglioni Resort Maldives

Touted as the first Italian luxury resort in the heart of the Indian Ocean, the new Baglioni Resort Maldives offers 96 exquisite villas surrounded by tropical nature, turquoise waters and velvet-smooth white sands. A pool bar and three superb restaurants – Gusto Italian restaurant, Umami Japanese restaurant, and Taste for international cuisine – serve gourmet dishes as well as a kids' menu. Baglioni Resort Maldives sits on the island of Maagau in Dhaalu atoll, a 40-minute flight from Velana International Airport.



From left: InterContinental Maldives Maamunagau; Hard Rock Hotel Maldives

# Philippines

by Rosa Ocampo



Women of the Ifugao Ethnic Minority going about their day in a rice terrace in Banawe

In February 2019, the Philippine Department of Tourism (DoT) revived its *It's More Fun in the Philippines* campaign and anchored it on tourism sustainability.

Sporting a new logo that weaves the unique colours and culture of the Philippines as well as a new font, the refreshed campaign is 100 per cent crowd-sourced using photos and videos shared by tourists. With every photo or video shared through the hashtag #itsmorefuninthePhilippines, US\$10 will be donated to the World Wildlife Fund.

The DoT is hopeful that the refreshed campaign will help grow its foreign arrivals by nearly 14 per cent to meet its goal of 8.2 million this year.

Indications at press time are that the country will likely meet this target. In the first eight months of 2019, the Philippines already welcomed 5.5 million visitors.

Most of them were leisure ar-

rivals, but business event arrivals – comprising between 10 and 20 per cent of the total – are catching up.

The healthy arrivals are attributed to the reopening of Boracay island which was closed for six months for a thorough clean-up, influx of mainland Chinese tourists, growing awareness about the destination, and in the case of business events, greater commitment to bidding for international events.

About 70 per cent of the arrivals are still Asians, hence the effort to diversify source markets through intensified marketing and promotions in the west while tapping new Asian and niche markets.

Along with the refreshed campaign, the Philippine Tourism Promotions Board intends to highlight more tourism assets that appeal to niche interest, and part of that will involve opening up new destinations. Surfing, diving and bird-watching are among the possible niches that will be developed.

## FIVE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

### 1 Cleaning out overtourism

Sustainability is the new operative word in Philippine tourism, using Boracay as model. It remains to be seen if nascent efforts to clean and ward off overtourism in other beach destinations like Bohol, Palawan and Siargao are going to be successful.

### 2 Warm Chinese welcome

The Philippines' open-door policy for mainland Chinese travellers, which has become its second biggest source market within just several years, is lifting up foreign arrivals to new highs. The

next step is how to earn more foreign exchange from this mass market.

### 3 Connectivity boom

Infrastructure facilities are being built and improved on, an integral part of making the Philippines' 7,641 islands become more accessible and connected to tourists.

### 4 Diversified draws

Known primarily as a beach destination, the Philippines is reinventing itself by diversifying its showcase to include underrated attractions: farm and agro-

tourism; local culture and traditions; colonial heritage under Spain, Japan and the US; culinary; wellness; eco-tourism; and a lot more.

### 5 Lo and behold Iloilo City

Iloilo City in the Visayas is being primed as a leisure and MICE destination. An airport deemed one of the best in the Philippines, a convention centre, new hotels, a clean-up drive of the river and the city, strict preservation of heritage buildings, and new-builds that help retain old-world charms are among the destination's strengths.



From left: Virgin Mary Statue in Boracay; Cebu's Fort San Pedro, a military defense structure built by the Spanish

## OUTLOOK



### Bernadette de Leon

General manager, Amiable Intertours

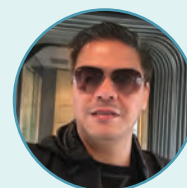
"The Philippines is beautiful and offers vast tourism opportunities. Prospects in 2020 depends on how the Department of Tourism will market the Philippines. We should look into other lesser-known islands like San Joaquin off Bicol, and San Vicente in Palawan, etc. to prevent overtourism and overpricing in the more established beach destinations in Boracay, Bohol and Palawan."



### Jojo Clemente

President, Rajah Tours

"The Asian source market has slackened a little but interest remains. We have been seeing interest from countries like Vietnam and Myanmar. It's a matter of getting them to eventually come over. I'm sure we will be able to make headway in tapping other markets that we haven't been into before, like Latin America. The Philippines is primarily a beach destination but playing up other attractions and a little bit of product differentiation will help."



### JP Cabalza

Inbound manager, Corporate International Travel and Tours

"Inbound looks rosy and promising in 2020. We should be able to keep the growth momentum as the destination creates more awareness in existing and new source markets. We are improving the tourism infrastructure and new ones are forthcoming. We have more attractions and new destinations on offer."

## WHAT'S NEW

### Lio Tourism Estate

This eco-friendly destination in El Nido, Palawan has attractions for varied travellers. A number of resorts are offered, each catering to a specific segment, such as couples, youthful and carefree travellers, and corporate groups. Besides having its own airport terminal and jetty lounge, Lio Tourism Estate also boasts artisanal shops and sustainable activities that are a first in the Philippines.

### Ascent

Ride-sharing helicopter service Ascent is offering travellers an alternative transportation mode to beat metro Manila's notorious traffic jam. Helicopter rides can be booked online for flights between Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) and Bonifacio Global City (BGC), Makati, Tagaytay and Clark. It reduces travel time from NAIA to Manila to just 10 minutes for only 8,900 pesos (US\$171) per pax. Also available are airport transfers via helicopter, shuttle service to specific heliports, and corporate packages.

### Seda Vertis North, Manila

Seda Vertis North is the only hotel in Vertis North shopping mall in Quezon City, a burgeoning business district with varied entertainment, dining and retail options. Departing from the boutique scale of the six older Seda hotels, Seda Vertis North's 438 keys is nearly double

the number in other Sedas. There are two restaurants, a roof deck bar, a 700m<sup>2</sup> pillar-less grand ballroom, five function rooms, separate swimming pools for adults and children, a fitness centre, a spa and an lounge with iMac stations for guests to use.

### National Museum of Natural History

The new National Museum of Natural History is proving to be an exciting venue for business events. The renovated colonial building has a soaring ceiling spanning several storeys that offer a natural acoustic for musical and other performances, while the atrium wrapped around the Tree of Life sculpture adds an extra dash of novelty to meetings and conferences. The museum's spacious grounds are ideal for al fresco cocktails.

### Anthony Bourdain's Food Trail

A product of Blue Horizons Travel and Tours, this tour takes corporate groups on the famed food critic's culinary journey to Pampanga, the country's culinary capital. The tour tackles the syncretistic food culture from past colonisers and other influences that were adapted to local ingredients and palate. A side trip to the province's main tourist attractions is thrown in for a bit of culture.

**From top: Seda Vertis North, Manila; National Museum of Natural History**



## THE EXPERT RECOMMENDS



**Greg Hutchinson**  
Founder, Tribal  
Adventures

**Where: Palawan**

**Must eat:** Tagbanua indigenous people's cuisine based on seafood and seaweed. Add to that is the national delicacy called *turon*, banana with a dash of ripe jackfruit wrapped in rice wafer and fried in honey or sugar.

**Must see:** Sea cow or dugong in their natural habitat in northern Busuanga's Dugong Bay. It's home to more than 30 dugongs, the largest family of sea cows in the Philippines. Snorkel or paddle a sea kayak for a closer look of these sea mammals.

**Must stay:** Camping in a deserted white beach with a chef to prepare your meal and amenities for daily ablutions. The heavenly stars and awed silence at night as well as the spectacular morning view are as close to nature as one gets in this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

## INSPIRATION: SPORTS TOURISM

While the Philippines is best known for its fine beaches, it is also becoming known for sports tourism.

Marine sports tourism abound, with the country hosting several annual international sports festivals like dragon boat festival and beach volleyball tournament in Boracay, sailing regatta in Puerto Galera, surfing in Siargao, diving, parasailing, wakeboarding in various parts of the islands.

The Ironman triathlon is now a yearly event in various parts of the country. Several topnotch golf courses in Manila are becoming known to foreign golfers. For adrenaline junkies, go mountain climbing in Mount Pulag (pictured), Mount Apo and other mountains and volcanoes; off-road motorcycling in Rizal and Subic; spelunking in Rizal, Cagayan and Sagada.





# Singapore *by Pamela Chow*



Singapore's Changi Airport is an instantly recognisable icon

Inbound tourism continues to climb for Singapore, when in 1H2019, International Visitor Arrivals (IVA) increased 1.3 per cent over the same period last year to reach 9.3 million visitors.

China (1.8 million), Indonesia (1.5 million), India (0.7 million), Malaysia (0.6 million) and Australia (0.5 million) were Singapore's top five international visitor-generating markets in 2019. These markets accounted for 56 per cent of total IVA in January to June 2019.

And although tourism receipts reached S\$13.1 billion (US\$9.6 billion) for 1H2019, it is a decline of three per cent compared to the same period last year. Tourism receipts for 2Q2019 was estimated at S\$6.5 billion, a 1.3 per cent decline over the same period last year. This was due to lower expenditures across some components including accommodation, F&B and sightseeing, even though shopping and other components grew.

To continue driving tourism

numbers up, Singapore Tourism Board (STB) has signed a number of partnerships.

For instance, Singapore- and Dubai-headquartered search engine Wego – which is the largest online travel marketplace in the Middle East and North Africa – has teamed up with STB Middle East to drive more GCC travellers to visit Singapore during the winter season

STB and Traveloka, South-east Asia's largest technology company in the travel and lifestyle industry, have also signed a Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) to promote Singapore as a preferred destination for visitors from five major Southeast Asian markets: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

Trip.com, an independent OTA part of the Ctrip Group, and STB have agreed to deepen their cooperation through multi-pronged efforts which include technology and data, exploring product R&D and brand marketing.

## FIVE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

**1 Hotel investment sales hit a high**  
Singapore has seen a record high in hotel transaction volumes of S\$2.5 billion (US\$1.8 billion) for 2019, according to JLL Hotels & Hospitality. The research foretells an incoming wave of refurbishments and reopenings, as well as a possible rise in average occupancy.

**2 Upcoming infrastructure**  
In April, it was announced that the Jurong Lake District (JLD) in west Singapore is set for a major transformation and will soon welcome an integrated tourism development with attractions, hotels, retail and F&B offerings. On the south side, Sentosa island will soon welcome a host of developments that are expected increase the destination's appeal to

a wider market segment, particularly families and visitors with mid-tier budgets.

**3 Marina Bay Sands to get fourth tower**  
Marina Bay Sands is pumping S\$4.5 billion into plans that include a fourth tower, to be constructed on roughly eight acres of land beside the current resort. It will feature a suites-only luxury hotel with some 1,000 keys, a sky roof with a swimming pool and a "signature restaurant", ballrooms, exhibition halls and F&B offerings.

**4 Two more hotels for Resorts World Sentosa**  
As part of its S\$4.5 billion redevelopment

plans, Resorts World Sentosa will expand its existing hotels in the Central Zone and introduce a new waterfront lifestyle complex helmed by two new destination hotels, adding a total of up to 1,100 more rooms to the integrated resort.

**5 E-arrival card trial service expanded**  
More visitors to Singapore can now submit electronic arrival cards online up to 14 days before their arrival, as part of an Immigration and Checkpoints Authority trial. This service applies to visitors arriving via transport operators AirAsia, Jetstar Asia, Cathay Pacific, Singapore Airlines, Transtar Travel, BatamFast Ferries, Bintan Resort Ferries, Horizon Fast Ferry, and Majestic Fast Ferry.



From left: Marina Bay Sands; artist's impression featuring a bird's-eye view of the developments on Sentosa and Pulau Brani, under the Sentosa-Brani Master Plan

## OUTLOOK



**Cyril Constantino**

Asia-Pacific supplier management lead, CWT Meetings & Events

"The additional capacity being added by Far East Hospitality (to Sentosa) will be welcomed by meeting and event planners, as rates have been rising significantly on the island due to limited availability. We expect Village Hotel to generate considerable interest, as it will provide a more cost-effective option compared with most of the alternatives (which are) high-end luxury properties."



**Guy Allison**

Director of procurement, Tour East Holdings

"Sentosa's becoming quite a family destination. It's starting to attract people to stay in Singapore for not just one or two nights, but three or four – maybe even a week. With the new developments, it might even become a destination in itself."



**Aloysius Arlando**

CEO, SingEx Holdings

"We believe that Singapore's outlook of business events in 2020 will remain positive and resilient against the wider landscape of economic concerns. With the deceleration of India's and China's economies, South-east Asia is increasingly becoming a destination for investment by corporates, and that bodes well for business events in Singapore. This is as organisers look to the country as an attractive MICE destination with stable economic and geopolitical factors."

## WHAT'S NEW

### Raffles Hotel Singapore

After 2.5 years of restoration work, the iconic property has fully reopened with an all-suite concept. There are 115 keys across nine suite categories, from the lead-in State Room Suites to the Presidential Suites. Recreational facilities include the Raffles Spa, 24-hour gym and a rooftop swimming pool. There are 10 F&B concepts, ranging from the well-known Long Bar and its most famous cocktail, the Singapore Sling; to French restaurant La Dame de Pic by Anne-Sophie Pic of three-Michelin-star Maison Pic in Valence.

### Siloso Green

Sentosa has welcomed a new waterfront lifestyle quarter featuring eateries, shops, concert and event spaces, as well as waterfront accommodation. The 24,500m<sup>2</sup> Siloso Green comprises bars, food trucks, innovative business concepts and live music boasting a shipping container theme. Along with a pilot trial of driverless shuttle buses, the new space is an effort to extend visitor stay in Sentosa at night.

### New attractions at Jewel Changi Airport

Jewel Changi Airport has opened the Changi Experience Studio and Canopy Park, elevating the air hub's transit offerings. The 3,000m<sup>2</sup> Changi Experience Studio features 10 zones of interactive games, projection storytelling, immersive shows and gallery exhibits about the



From left: NERF Action Xperience; lyf Funan Singapore

airport. The Canopy Park is a 14,000m<sup>2</sup> space comprising eight F&B outlets; events space Cloud9 Piazza; seven play attractions and creative gardens, such as the Mirror Maze and Hedge Maze, Manulife Sky Nets, Discovery Slides, and the glass-floored Canopy Bridge.

### NERF Action Xperience

Kingsmen Creatives has launched the world's first NERF Action Xperience in Marina Square. The arena spans more than 1,600m<sup>2</sup> encompassing four different play zones themed after extreme natural environments to challenge players of all ages. The Compete zone features worlds Zombie City and Camp Dune requiring teamwork and strategy; Conquer offers obstacles like rope courses; Challenge has mini zip lines and a NERF dart ball pool for

children aged six and under; while Create allows visitors to use Super Soakers to tie-dye T-shirts and tote bags.

### lyf Funan Singapore

The Ascott Limited has debuted its millennial-focused brand with lyf Funan Singapore, housing 412 rooms ranging from twin-sharing studios to six-bedroom apartments for short- and long-term stay. These include two unique configurations centred on the coliving concept, featuring individual bedrooms and shared living, kitchen and bathroom spaces. Other coliving aspects of the property include an expansive lobby of community spaces and meeting rooms, an open gym and a social kitchen. Guests will also be able to participate in workshops, movie screenings and tours.

## THE EXPERT RECOMMENDS



### Vincent Tan

Founder & managing director, Citrus Events & Communications

#### Where: Singapore

**Must eat:** Fratini La Trattoria is a restaurant with an interesting concept: it has no menu. Instead, head chef Gabriel has a chat with guests on their preferences and dietary restrictions, before he whips up an eight-course menu guaranteed to surprise.

**Must see:** The Marina Bay area – not just Gardens By the Bay, but also Marina Barrage. Using the network of park connectors, one can cycle or ride a scooter from the Marina Barrage to the National Stadium, and even East Coast Park, within two hours.

**Must stay:** Naumi Hotel along Seah Street is a boutique hotel in the heart of the city. The hotel's rooms are clean and modern, and it also boasts a rooftop infinity pool with sweeping views of the city skyline.

## INSPIRATION: A TECHNICOLOUR CITY

Singapore has its share of strict regulations against graffiti, but strikingly beautiful street art can still be found in many corners of the city. Participate in a different kind of art gallery tour with local operator Monster Day Tours, which conducts free walking tours through the painted alleys of Kampong Glam and Little India. Free-and-easy visitors can also check out the newly refreshed Kampong Glam's Gelam Outdoor Gallery (pictured), or go mural-hunting among the shophouses of Tiong Bahru.



# South Korea by Karen Yue

South Korea has enjoyed a year-to-date growth of 16.3 per cent in international arrivals between January and August 2019, based on latest data published by the Korea Tourism Organisation.

Double-digit growth in international arrivals has been reported every month since the start of the year, with April – the country’s popular cherry blossom season – welcoming the highest number of footfalls for the eight-month period and seeing the biggest percentage growth at 1.6 million and 22.8 per cent respectively.

East Asia and the Pacific dominate arrivals. China, the leading source market for South Korea in August 2019, contributed 578,112 tourists or 36.4 per cent of total arrivals for the month.



Dosanseowon Confucian Academy

## THREE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

### 1 Busan’s makeover

Busan is in the midst of three city developments: the East Busan Tourism Complex, a luxurious enclave; the North Port Redevelopment Project which will take in a future waterfront park, passenger port facilities and commercial buildings; and a project in the west that has been earmarked to support the city’s bid for World Expo 2030.

### 2 Suwon joins the MICE stage

The new Suwon Convention Centre (SCC) is expected to help the city of Suwon – about 30km south of Seoul – rise to compete on the global business events stage. SCC houses 28 meeting rooms. Plans are afoot to turn part of the convention centre into a complex, which will eventually have a five-star hotel, entertainment facilities, and more.

### 3 Seoul gets a bigger MICE heart

A 720,000m<sup>2</sup> plot of land between Coex – Seoul’s prominent convention and exhibition centre – and Jamsil Sports Complex is being developed into a single, massive Coex Center Jamsil which will house a new convention centre, hotels, and shopping and entertainment facilities. The project is undertaken by the Korea International Trade Association (KITA).

## WHAT’S NEW

### Andaz Seoul Gangnam

The new 241-key Andaz Seoul Gangnam fuses traditional local culture and creative modern living to present a chic venue for stays and events. Art is featured prominently across the property, with all artworks being creations of artists either from Seoul or with a strong connection to the city.

### Museum DAH

This digital art museum in Busan – founded by digital artist col.lage+ and art production company Kunst1 – opened in August 2019 in Busan’s upmarket Centum City. It utilises LEDs and LCDs to present eye-popping high-resolution visual displays across all its surfaces. Artworks draw inspiration from the art nouveau movement and are given a modern spin.

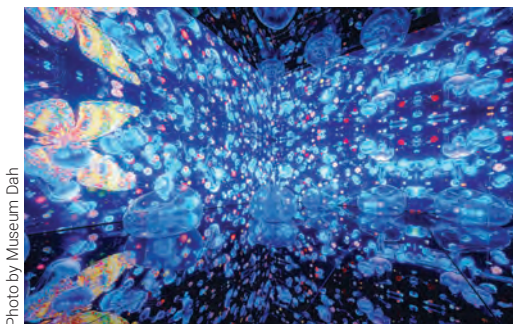


Photo by Museum Dah



From left: Museum DAH in Busan; Andaz Seoul Gangnam

### Seowon UNESCO World Heritage Site

Nine seowons, or Neo-Confucian Academy of the Joseon dynasty, have been designated as cultural heritage sites by UNESCO in August. They are: Sosuseowon, Namgyeseowon, Oksanseowon, Dosanseowon, Piramseowon, Dodongseowon, Byeongsanseowon, Museong-

seowon, and Donamseowon. They are an excellent preservation of South Korea’s Neo-Confucianism tradition and illustrate how Neo-Confucianism developed and was adapted in the country. Diverse tour programmes and events are being planned to attract travellers to these ancient academies.

# Sri Lanka by Feizal Samath

**T**ourism in Sri Lanka was shattered in April 2019 when suspected Muslim extremists triggered suicide bombs in three luxury hotels and three churches on Easter Sunday, killing over 250 people including 50 tourists. The carnage saw dozens of tourists making a beeline for the first flight home while the former war-wrecked country was hit with hundreds of cancellations in new bookings.

Bookings nosedived by 70 per cent in May but since August has seen an uptick with winter arrivals estimated to drop by 30 per cent year-on-year. The long-delayed destination promotion campaign hasn't been greenlit, adding to the country's woes. In its absence, a marketing campaign in 12 markets got underway in October.



Nine Arches Bridge in Ella

## THREE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

### 1 Sri Lanka ends emergency rule

In August, Sri Lanka lifted a state of emergency, which was imposed following the Easter Sunday massacres. Tour operators and hoteliers welcomed the move, saying that it would result in countries lifting their travel ban on Sri Lanka and bring about recovery for the floundering tourism sector. However, tourism officials said that even though several countries had relaxed travel advisories, they remain as level two and three travel warnings. Some countries

like Russia have not fully removed their travel advisories against Sri Lanka.

### 2 Open skies for foreign airlines

Sri Lanka will be opening its skies for foreign carriers to operate domestic flights in the country, to boost accessibility to tourism hotspots. According to the government's decision on October 1, 2019, cabotage rights will be granted to foreign carriers which have bilateral air services agreements with Sri Lanka to operate domestic

flights to airports within the country. Three domestic airports at Ratmalana, Batticaloa and Jaffna have also been designated as international airports.

### 3 Expansion of VoA facility

Sri Lanka has expanded its visa-on-arrival scheme to benefit citizens of 45 countries, including India and China, from August 1, 2019, to woo visitors back as the country's tourism industry recovers from the aftermath of the Easter Sunday bombings.

## WHAT'S NEW



King of the Mambo

### Cinnamon's Bring A Friend Home campaign

Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts launched its Bring A Friend Home campaign encouraging Sri Lankans to nominate foreign friends to visit the island through an array of attractive packages. The campaign is aimed at aiding the recovery of the country's tourism industry in the wake of the Easter Sunday bombings.

### King of the Mambo

Latino lounge-restaurant King of the Mambo has opened at the oceanfront Galle Face Hotel in Colombo. Decked out in 1950-style decor, the establish-

ment serves up a selection of creative cocktails, sharing dishes and a roster of entertainment. This iconic heritage hotel has been touted as one of the best spots in Colombo to soak in the sunset. The space also features a large BBQ area for live cooking.

### Le Grand Galle

The five-star hotel has opened in the southern, historic coastal city of Galle. The property offers 50 rooms and seven suites; alongside facilities such as a gym, Jacuzzi, sauna, steam room, spa, an all-day dining venue and a speciality seafood restaurant.

# Thailand by Anne Somanas

**B**ouyant predictions of 10 per cent year-on-year growth for 2019's inbound tourism were scaled back to 9.5 per cent in July, and again in August due to the US-China trade spat and the Thai baht strengthening against other currencies.

In total, the first nine months of 2019 saw international tourist arrivals to Thailand rise 3.5 per cent, from 28.5 million last year to 29.5 million this year.

This led to a concerted effort by the local government and private sector to boost tourism in the second half of the year with ameliorating measures such as the extension of 2,000 baht (US\$66) visa-on-arrival fee waivers for nationals of 20 countries, including China and India – Thailand's fastest-growing group of visitors.



Wat Benchamabophit, or the Marble Temple, is a major attraction in Bangkok

## THREE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

### 1 Eye on sustainable development

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), Expedia Group and UNESCO have come together to pledge collaborative efforts in sustainable tourism development. The Expedia Group will support TAT's strategic goals in attracting high-value travellers, promoting emerging destinations to first-time visitors and generating more demand during low season. The agreement also supports the Thai government's commitment

towards marine conservation and marine debris resolution.

### 2 Baht strengthening

Due to the strengthening baht, the Tourism Council of Thailand has downgraded the year's tourism revenue projection to 1.9 trillion baht (US\$62.9 billion) from 2.1 trillion baht. Although the country has no control over external factors like the US-China trade spat, it remains to be seen if the government and the Bank of Thailand will lower interest rates to help operators in both

the tourism and export sectors. Should the baht break 30 to the dollar in 2020, experts predict the tourism sector will see fewer inbound tourists and more Thais travelling abroad.

### 3 Gearing up for medical tourists

Hoping to place in the world's top ten for medical tourism and establish the country as a wellness hotspot, Thailand may update its visa offerings with a 12-month Medical Visa which would allow holders to stay in the country for up to a year for the purpose of medical treatment.

## WHAT'S NEW



Iconsiam

### Iconsiam, Bangkok

Iconsiam, a mixed-use development on the banks of the Chao Phraya River, has become a huge draw for tourists in the Charoen Nakhon area. Featured within is the River Park riverside community space; SookSiam, an indoor floating market spotlighting Thai products; a 400m-long water, light and sound feature which is said to be the country's first and longest; and True Icon Hall, a two-level auditorium that seats up to 2,700 people.

### Na-Oh Bangkok

Renowned fashion designer Somchai Songwatthana, founder of upcycle-

themed art creative space Chang Chui which made Time Magazine's 2018 list of World's Greatest Places to Visit, takes the sustainable luxury concept to the next level with the opening of Na-Oh Bangkok, a fine-dining experience and unique venue set inside a refitted decommissioned Lockheed L-1011 Tristar airliner.

### New train stations

Four culturally atmospheric subway stations (Sanam Chai, Wat Mangkon, Sam Yot and Itsaraphap) have opened near Bangkok's Chinatown. They are designed to be destinations themselves due to beautiful cultural displays.

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