

TTCG Show Daily



Issue

2



ITB Berlin, Germany
March 5, 2020



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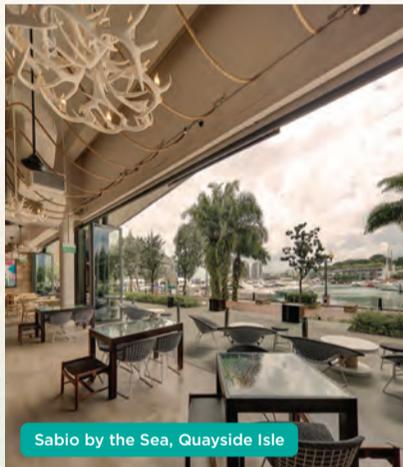
Kick back in a charming ambience at Siloso Beach's newest addition, **Rumours Beach Club**, where live music and great meat platters await. Live up your island party life from day to night at **1-V:U**, Singapore's first rooftop Day Club, overlooking the stunning views of the Singapore Straits. You'll feel the same infectious energy at **Stacks at Siloso** - an all-new lifestyle enclave built on containers, offering hip F&B options boasting incredible sea views.

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Coastes



Sabio by the Sea, Quayside Isle



1-V:U



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March 5, 2020



Little lodges, big hearts

Myanmar's rising collection of eco-lodges are improving the lives of local communities and attracting a growing number of eco-conscious travellers

By Marissa Carruthers

As travellers become more aware of their footprint and the impact they have on locals, hopes are being pinned on Myanmar's growing number of eco-lodges piquing the interest of conscientious tourists wanting to truly immerse themselves in local life.

Charmaine Goddard, general manager at Wah Phyu Villa, which opened in the coastal village of Magyizin, Ayeyarwady in February, said: "With global warming at the forefront now more than ever, people are increasingly aware of what they do when they go on holiday; they want to know they've benefited local people."

The eco-lodge is one of the latest to open as part of a strengthening movement of sustainable and community-driven tourism throughout Myanmar.

Goddard added: "We get a lot of private bookings and people ask what we do with our waste and how we work with villagers. This is becoming a very big part of tourism."

Kyaw Swar, owner of A Little Eco Lodge in his home area of Inle Lake, shares the same observation. He said: "Travellers want to be more responsible and think about how and where the money they spend is used."

"This is a great opportunity for Myanmar, especially small-scale entrepreneurs and locals. They can't compete with global



A Little Eco Lodge in Inle Lake supports local ikat weaving projects

and larger local businesses that have resources, finance, knowledge and technology. By developing Community-Based Tourism (CBT), communities can earn directly from clients."

In 2011, the newly-formed Ministry of Hotels and Tourism set about launching a series of community-driven tourism products across the country under its CBT initiative. Several have since started operations across Myanmar with the aim of ensuring communities benefit from the predicted rise in visitors while driving tourists to undiscovered areas.

In line with this, recent years have seen tourism entrepreneurs create sustainable lodges that work directly with neighbouring villages to share the tourism dollar and help improve life.

Swe Yi, co-owner of the 12-room Loikaw Lodge by the Lake in Kayah State,

said: "CBT is probably the most sustainable tourism approach in Myanmar as it can significantly contribute to poverty reduction and pave the way for a sustainable, economic tourism model."

Yi told *TTG Show Daily* that there is a new set of CBT initiatives for the Kayan, Kayah and Kayaw tribes, funded and led by the International Trade Centre.

Under the initiative, a series of programmes were developed to offer visitors culturally-rich experiences in villages across the state. Its success led to similar initiatives being rolled out in other areas of the country, including Kachin and Shan states, Magway Division in Myaing, and Chin State.

Yi, who continues to send clients to villages, added: "It's important the best practices of these programmes are shared to accelerate the learning for communities that want to start their own programmes. At the same time, it's important the government, private industry and respective communities agree on a framework that helps CBT develop in a sustainable manner."

Swar, who uses tourism as a tool to elevate the lives of the impoverished communities he grew up among, has since landed two awards from the Product and Package Innovation Competition run by UK Aid for his innovative community-led projects for ikat weaving, and a treasure

hunt-style cookery class in a neighbouring village. He recently added four rooms to A Little Eco Lodge, bringing the total to 10.

Edwin Briels, managing director of Khiri Travel Myanmar and co-founder of Lalay Lodge, which opened in February on the coast of remote Maung Shwe Lay in Ngapali as a sustainable lodge that works hand-in-hand with villagers, said this movement is opening up new opportunities by appealing to the longhaul markets of Australia, Europe and America.

The sustainable lodge trend is also helping develop new destinations and encourage visitors to veer away from Myanmar's main tourism spots. As arrivals grow, it is hoped this will alleviate the issue of overcrowding that other regional tourism stars have struggled with.



TTG ASIA IS IN BERLIN

We are here in the city and making the best out of a surprise. If you are in town and would like to chat, contact group editor Karen Yue at karen.yue@ttgasia.com

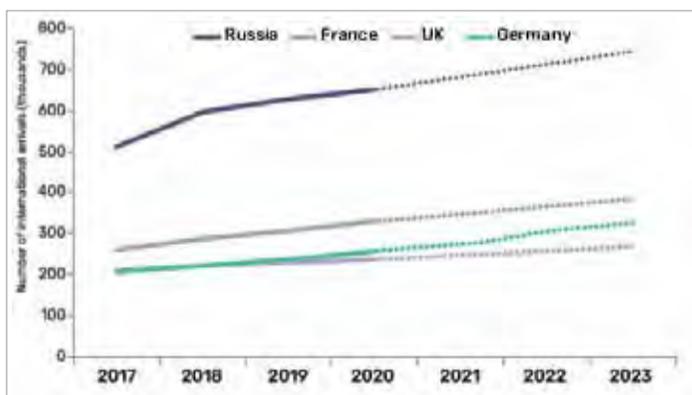
Vietnam leads in SE Asia's growing appeal to Europeans

South-east Asian countries are seeing strong interest from European travellers, and will stand to benefit from growing connectivity with Europe, according to a study by GlobalData.

Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia have all experienced expansive growth in inbound European travellers. Vietnam, however, stands out as the one country in the region that is currently experiencing an influx of European travellers.

Last year brought 2.2 million European travellers to Vietnam, largely from source markets such as Russia, France, Germany and the UK, which have all experienced considerable growth over the past three years.

The outbound tourism expenditure of European travellers reached more than US\$700 billion in 2019, and thus, are a



International arrivals from selected European destinations into Vietnam (thousands)

desirable market for any destination to engage.

GlobalData's latest report, Tourism Destination Market Insights: Association of South East Asian Nations – ASEAN, found that Russia, France, Germany and the UK are some of the fastest growing source markets for

the South-east Asia region. Germany, in particular, holds the highest projected compound annual growth rate at 8.02 per cent for a European inbound market for 2020-2023.

Europeans are known for having keen interest in developing tourism destinations that re-

main authentic, according to the CBI Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Promising market segments include culture, gastronomy, nature-based, adventure and backpacking adventures – all of which the South-east Asia region boasts in abundance.

Johanna Bonhill-Smith, travel and tourism analyst at GlobalData, said: "Vietnam has grown in popularity over the past few years, thanks in part to increased international promotion. At the World Travel Awards 2019, the country was named 'Asia's best golf destination' and 'World's Leading Heritage destination', helping Vietnam gain added traction."

"By 2023, all selected markets, as previously mentioned, are forecasted to have substantial growth in Vietnam. The long-awaited, comprehensive air

transport agreement between the EU (European Union) and ASEAN region is further likely to provide a substantial boost to air traffic between connecting destinations."

NTOs and DMOs have the opportunity to further leverage this growth, said GlobalData in a statement. Developing destinations such as Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar should look to develop bilateral relations as they are an effective avenue for joint promotions to increase the traction of both destinations.

Bonhill-Smith concluded: "Ultimately, with aspirations to more equally distribute the benefits of tourism throughout the (South-east Asia) region, engaging source markets across Europe could prove extremely beneficial for the whole tourism economy."

Luxurious steps

Hiking tours, especially to off-the-beaten-track locales, are climbing in popularity among the luxury crowd

By Pamela Chow

Hiking is getting a touch of luxury as travel agencies see demand picking up for itineraries that take travellers to less-traversed nature trails with a unique spin.

Beyond a simple walking or hiking route with arranged accommodation, such tours elevate the experience with elements that “allow guests to feel a deeper connection to the destination’s culture and traditions”, described Paul Christie, CEO of Walk Japan.

He continued: “Hiking and nature trails are getting more popular amongst luxury travellers because they incorporate wellness, eco-therapy and physical exercise into the holiday experience.”

Walk Japan specialises in unconventional off-the-beaten-path itineraries through Japan, including self-guided walking tours such as the Kumano Wayfarer, one of only two UNESCO-registered pilgrimage trails worldwide; and the Tokaido Wayfarer, a gastronomic exploration of the ancient highway between Tokyo to Kyoto.

Similarly, Scott Dunn has also rolled out a selection of adventurous tours that span an entire destination, rather than focusing on a single attraction. Guests can

trek across remote and picturesque destinations such as the vast wilderness of Namibia, the relatively undiscovered Fann Mountains of Tajikistan and the stretch of the Salkantay Trail leading to Machu Picchu.

To elevate the experience, Scott Dunn can provide premium perks to accompany travellers on the journey, such as a porter or chef.

Sheena Seah, global specialist, Scott Dunn, observed: “Guests are increasingly moving away from ‘typical’ hiking destinations such as the Swiss Alps, and exploring more under-the-radar places like Bhutan’s Druk Path.

“In general, active holidays have been on the rise, and so at Scott Dunn we have found that guests are more interested in a walking activity over the course of their trip, rather than hiking specific vacation.”



Fann Mountains of Tajikistan

BLR’s western approach



By Tiara Maharani

Keen to grow the number of guests from Europe and the US, Bintan Lagoon Resort (BLR) in Indonesia has created a number of special packages that are attuned to what travellers from these markets favour.

Gerald A Hendrick, senior vice president and general manager of Resort Venture and Bintan Lagoon Resort (BLR), told the *Daily* that these packages were crafted together with their travel trade partners in the western markets, so as to address specific needs of their customers.

An example of such a package is a daily half-board programme that comes with free flow of alcohol during meals, spa treatments, and unlimited daily golfing.

“This is one of the most sought-after packages for longhaul guests, and it is heavily promoted by our travel trade partners,” Hendrick shared.

All packages can be tailored to feature more inclusions according to the traveller’s length of stay.

Furthermore, in line with BLR’s prod-

uct positioning as a suitable “gathering resorts” for families, groups of friends, honeymooners, and business partners, Hendrick said a longer-stay full-board package of five days/four nights has been created. The comprehensive package features access to a wide range of meals, from international cuisine to Japanese bento sets, free flow of selected alcoholic beverages, spa treatments, outdoor tours, as well as leisure activities. A game of golf is offered as an optional addition.

Hendrick said this package can easily be incorporated with travel trade partners’ own Singapore programme to create a dual-destination itinerary.

He expressed confidence in the performance of the European and American travel markets this year, and said Bintan island would appeal to those seeking a retreat that offered pristine coastlines, tropical jungles and unspoiled natural landscapes.

And for those wanting a glamorous getaway, BLR is the perfect choice, opined Hendrick. He explained: “BLR is the largest five-star resort in Bintan. Our double-storey villas with a private pool are perfect for families, where they can have a barbecue party and fun under the sun. Meanwhile, our exclusive suites, which come with top-notch service, postcard-perfect views and supreme privacy, are the ultimate luxurious, romantic escape for couples and adult vacationers.”

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

It is set to enhance the overall experience of guests strolling through the island in the day and night.

Construction is currently ongoing, and set to be completed by 2022.

Would the island experience be affected by ongoing redevelopment works?

Guests can continue to enjoy our diverse array of leisure offerings, with 17 hotels, over 120 dining options and approximately 30 attractions still delivering great guest experiences.

A number of new leisure offerings have also recently opened, such as Rumours Beach Club from Bali, 1-V:U rooftop day club and restaurant, and The Barracks Hotel.

Sentosa Express trains continue to connect guests from mainland Singapore to Sentosa. We have also increased our on-island bus frequencies, and introduced an additional bus service.

What aspects of the Master Plan are you most excited about?

This is a game-changing development for Sentosa that taps on the strengths of Sentosa-Brani by emphasising its unique island charm, which cannot be replicated anywhere else in Singapore.

The five character zones will also bring out the best of Sentosa-Brani.

This also gives us the opportunity to think through the guest experience, and curate an exciting and seamless experience for all, anywhere on the island.

Finally, our Master Plan is guided by sustainable development to ensure that we take due care of our heritage and environment, even as we look towards the future.

A spectacular transformation

Singapore’s Sentosa island is on her way to becoming even better than before, with new experiential zones and improved accessibility. Sentosa Development Corporation’s CEO Quek Swee Kuan, shares his excitement with **Karen Yue**

Sentosa is metamorphosing as we speak. For the benefit of our international readers who may be unfamiliar with it, can you provide a quick introduction to what the developments will mean for island visitors?

The Sentosa-Brani Master Plan (announced last September) is a comprehensive blueprint which will be rolled out in phases over the next two to three decades.

Integrating the development of Sentosa island and the adjacent Pulau Brani, the plan will see Sentosa Development Corporation leveraging the two islands’ ridge-to-reef attributes to bring in novel leisure offerings, world-class attractions, and fresh and bold night-time offerings, while enhancing last-mile transport connectivity to and within the islands.

New spaces and concepts that are authentic and environmentally sustainable will also be created, including rejuvenated beaches and expanded nature and heritage trails.

The redeveloped islands will feature five distinct zones – Vibrant Cluster, Island Heart, Waterfront, Ridgeline, Beachfront – each delivering unique experiences, with the zones progressively taking on a more leisurely character as guests travel from the city into the islands.

The Master Plan is a key tourism development for Singapore’s Greater Southern Waterfront. It will entrench our position as a leading tourism destination in the coming decades.

What will be ready in the first phase of redevelopment?

The 30,000m² Sentosa Sensoryscape – the first milestone project of the Master Plan – will link Resorts World Sentosa in the north to Sentosa’s beaches in the south through a multi-sensory experience.

Inspired by Sentosa’s natural wonders such as its lush tropical landscape, Sentosa Sensoryscape will feature a series of novel, picture-worthy vessel-like structures. Each structure will be framed by unique architectural features, and is set to pique and amplify the five senses through elements such as polyphonic water features, mist, as well as fragrant flowers and plant species.

The precinct will incorporate Universal Design principles, and feature break-out spaces and expanded vistas through new photo and look-out points overlooking the beaches.



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*Island admission charges apply

Bold new inclusive tour for Singapore

Friendly haunts and stays for the LGBT community will be featured in the programme, demonstrating the city-state's inclusivity for all travellers

By Pamela Chow

Tour operator Oriental Travel and Tours has rolled out a bold new tour of Singapore geared towards members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. The tour features local LG-BT-friendly haunts and stays, on top of a customisable itinerary of other attractions.

Stanley Foo, founder and managing director, Oriental Travel and Tours, told the *Daily* that he and his team will launch the product to European travel trade buyers this week in Berlin through face-to-face meetings.

The team had originally hoped to launch the tour at ITB Berlin 2020, which has since been cancelled.



Foo: Singapore is inclusive

Foo, said: "We've found that many people around the world have the impression that Singapore is strict, like some of our neighbouring Muslim countries, such as Indonesia and Malaysia. We want to broadcast the message that Singapore is an inclusive country that welcomes everybody. We have taken this step forward to create a tour specially catered to this group of travellers."

The decision came after feedback

from guests who have experienced the agency's other itineraries, explained Foo. He elaborated: "In our regular tours, we find that many visitors would like to know about the LGBT scene in Singapore. So our guides will be trained to give them a background on the local community, tell them about the dos and don'ts, and bring them to some LGBT-friendly places."

The tour will be led by a guide who is a member of the community and can share personal anecdotes and relate to the guests.

He believes that this tour can work to market Singapore as a surprising and accepting destination.

Tokyo games fever spreads to corporate incentives

By Kathryn Wortley

Disregarding ongoing debate on the fate of Tokyo's Olympic and Paralympic Games which are slated to begin in July 2020, the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) has gone ahead to introduced a new range of content for inbound corporate incentive tours this year that will take advantage of the festivities.

Launched on February 20 and running until the end of the year, the 'Your Japan. Your 2020. Your Way.' campaign offers unique venues and teambuilding activities

in 15 locations nationwide.

According to JNTO, the initiative is designed to "add originality to incentive tours and create a Japan journey that will make a lasting impression" during Japan's special year.

"We hope the upcoming Olympic and Paralympic Games will get people interested in Japan and think that now is the time to go to Japan, so we asked local governments to put together this special programme," Etsuko Kawasaki, executive director of Japan Convention

Bureau, told the *Daily*.

For groups of up to 400 pax, Naha in Okinawa Prefecture is offering a traditional music session. Delegates can play the string and percussion instruments of *sanshin*, *sanba* and *shima-daiko*. Part of the fee will be donated to Shuri Castle, which was ravaged by fire last year, and participants will receive a traditional Bangata-dyed tapestry featuring Shuri Castle and the name of their company.

In Gifu Prefecture, groups that use Nagaragawa Convention Center or Juroku Plaza, can rent for free a river boat for a night of fishing using trained cormorants. The special technique has 1,300 years of history in the area and can be experienced between May and October.

Groups can also head to international curling competition host city Karuizawa in

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Nagano Prefecture to learn the sport from international-level players as a team-building activity. It can be customised based on participants' fitness and desired outcomes. Kawasaki said that if the programmes are successful, the Japan Convention Bureau has plans to expand them.

Protel beats the flu blues

By Caleb Richard Lai





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On the roadmap ahead

Tourism heads from Indonesia, Macau and India share with *TTG Show Daily* their tourism blueprint to drive significant growth and developments in their respective destinations



MARIA HELENA DE SENNA FERNANDES

Director, Macao Government Tourism Office, Macau

How do you see the role of NTOs evolving and why is the change necessary?

Aside from analysing and assisting in formulating tourism policies, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) is responsible for the implementation of tourism planning and promotion, product and event development, tourism management, as well as training and quality control. Over the years, sustainable development has emerged as a global trend and direction for cities, in which tourism plays an increasingly important role. The world is now engaged to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. The Office is carrying out 91 short-, medium- and long-term action plans based on the objectives and planning proposals outlined in the Macao Tourism Industry Development Master Plan, which lays out a blueprint for the future development of Macau's tourism industry in the next 15 years, ensuring the sustainable and diversified growth of the sector.

What would you say is the most important investment an NTO today must make to achieve its goals?

Tourism is a dynamic industry vulnerable to unpredictable external factors. In accordance with the ever-changing external environment, the Master Plan as well as the daily work of MGTO are constantly reviewed and improved. As an NTO, we need to be flexible, consider priority of strategy implementation, and make quick adjustments in tourism source markets to respond to the actual situation.

To succeed in our objective of achieving a more sustainable future, MGTO engages and works in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders, including govern-

ment and industry partners, associations, as well as the regional and international tourism community.

What is the biggest opportunity your destination's tourism industry can leverage this year for significant growth?

In 2020, MGTO will continue to advance Macau's development as a Creative City of Gastronomy, including organising the International Gastronomy Forum, Macao, to promote cultural exchange and cooperation with other Creative Cities, while promoting Macau's gastronomy as a calling card of the city to attract more visitors and as a key lever for supporting sustainable economic growth. With regards to destination marketing, the Office will launch new multi-destination tourism products in international markets and develop Hengqin-Macau tourism products and brand both destinations together. In terms of the enrichment of local tourist products, the Macau Grand Prix Museum is expected to open in 2020 and will be equipped with a variety of multimedia and interactive facilities, offering a brand-new experience for visitors.



PRAHLAD SINGH PATEL

Tourism minister, India

How do you see the role of NTOs evolving and why is the change necessary?

The role of tourism boards and ministries have changed over the years with the transformation in the global tourism and hospitality landscape. Today, most of the

tourism boards realise the economic benefits that the sector brings coupled with significant job opportunities. For a large country like India which has diverse tourism products, our marketing and promotion strategy has to be in line with the ever-evolving demands of the new-age travellers. In the past, tourists used to be involved in mere sightseeing of tourist attractions but today, experiential travel is the buzz. So, tourism boards have to evolve with the changing times and cater to the demands accordingly.

What would you say is the most important investment an NTO today must make to achieve its goals?

I think it is a mix of both time and effort. If one doesn't make efforts, the desired goals can't be achieved. On the other hand, ample time is necessary in efforts to yield results. With the growing competition to attract global tourists, NTOs across the globe have to invest time as well as efforts to draw international tourists.

What is the biggest opportunity your destination's tourism industry can leverage this year for significant growth?

Our government has taken a lot of steps to increase international tourists in India, be it reducing e-visa fees or aggressive marketing in overseas markets. We have also opened 137 Himalayan peaks, including the 8,589m-high Kanchenjunga, to foreigners for mountaineering expeditions and trekking. Earlier, foreigners needed to seek permission from the ministries of defence and home to climb these peaks. I think it will help us project India as a key adventure tourism destination globally.



WISHNUTAMA KUSUBANDIO

Minister of tourism and creative economy, and head of Tourism and Creative Economy Board, Indonesia

How do you see the role of NTOs evolving and why is the change necessary?

In the case of Indonesia, the tourism sector has been integrated with creative economy under the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (MoTCE). President Joko Widodo has also formed the Tourism and Creative Economy Board (TCEB). The MoTCE acts as the policymaker that takes on the coordinating role, while the TCEB is the executive body. The emergence of the two sectors aims to promote mutual support for growth. No matter how good a creative product is, it will not grow without a market. On the other hand, tourism will need products and attractions to entice travellers to come.

Under this new nomenclature, the minister and vice minister of MoTCE also spearhead the TCEB to ensure efficient and integrated run of the two entities.

What would you say is the most important investment an NTO today must make to achieve its goals?

There are five main values in which we will focus on between 2020-2024, namely, sustainable tourism, skilled tourism professionals, traveller's satisfactory experience, diversification of products and services, and adoption of technology in tourism.

What is the biggest opportunity your destination's tourism industry can leverage this year for significant growth?

We will start creatively promoting the five super priority destinations – Lake Toba (North Sumatra), Labuan Bajo (East Nusa Tenggara), Mandalika (Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara), Borobudur (Central Java) and Likupang (North Sulawesi). We will create quality events on an international scale, with a touch of creativity that involves the local community so as to uplift both the image of the destinations as well as Indonesia's reputation.

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Cruise lines are no exception to the battle to offer more immersive, multisensory products. *TTG Show Daily* checks out some of the most exciting features that are transforming the cruise experience



Royal Caribbean Cruises

Royal Caribbean is enhancing the cruise experience with bold offerings on its Oasis and Quantum Class ships. The Quantum Class *Spectrum of the Seas* brought onboard a virtual reality (VR) bungee trampoline and augmented reality (AR) games, on top of a skydiving simulator, bumper cars, and a Bionic Bar among other highlights. The Oasis Class ships offer the tallest slide at sea and high-tech entertainment showcasing high divers against a backdrop of stunning projections and a cast of drones for ice shows.

P&O Cruises

P&O Cruises Australia has responded to a growing demand from Australian holidaymakers for short breaks with the launch of two niche themed cruises in 2020. A 1980s Tribute Cruise, running for three nights on the two cruises which depart Brisbane and Sydney in early 2020, celebrates the MTV-generation's music from pop, hip-hop, metal and rock. The Country Music Festival at Sea cruise, which departed Brisbane in December 2019, celebrates Australians' growing interest in new styles of country music including rockabilly, country rock, folk and bluegrass.

Burma Boating

Burma Boating launched exclusive monthly cruises that combine yachting and scuba diving in and around Myanmar's Mergui Archipelago – which only recently started welcoming visitors. The eight-day/seven-night sailing adventures take place between November 2019 and April 2020, and are the first in the region to combine the two water activities. Guests sail aboard the luxurious *Dallinghoo*, a 30m classic gaff-rigged schooner, during which they can enjoy a range of experiential activities that include meeting the Moken (sea gypsies), fishing with locals and feasting on fresh food cooked by a personal chef.

Emperor Cruises

Emperor Cruises recently rolled out a new expedition exploring the untouched islands in off-the-beaten-track Bai Tu Long Bay and Van Don in Vietnam. The expedition avoids the increasingly-popular nearby Halong Bay. The three- or four-night cruises also champion environmental sustainability through highly-regulated waste storage, eco-friendly engines, and supporting community and socially responsible initiatives, such as beach cleanups.

Sneaks from the chiefs



Stuart Alison
Senior vice president,
Asia Pacific commercial & operations,
Princess Cruises

Princess Cruises

The big development for us will come at the end of 2020 when we bring our first Medallion Class ship to Asia, the *Grand Princess*. I like to think these are smart ships, like the smartphones that have changed the way we live. The smartphone does everything and takes a lot of the friction points out of our life.

We apply the same principle behind the OceanMedallion. We want our customers to get on the ship and start enjoying themselves as quickly as possible. The technology expedites the embarkation process, allows hands-free purchases, and acts as a beacon to show where mum and dad are, and how to get to them.

When we bring it into Asia, we may discover how it can help tour leaders manage their group more effectively onboard. As we roll out the technology on some of our ships in Alaska and the Caribbean, we learn something new about its capability every day.



Felix Chan
Vice president & general manager, Asia,
Norwegian Cruise Line

Norwegian Cruise Line

The refurbished *Norwegian Spirit*, which marks the biggest investment for a single Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) ship and is scheduled to be ready by April 2020, will be based in Japan next June and July to coincide with the Summer Olympics in Tokyo. Travellers can take a cruise before or after the event, as hotel prices are expected to increase due to limited capacity.

Planning cruise itineraries around such special events is a good value proposition for Asian travellers. Asians are more pragmatic and price-sensitive, and are likely to convert to taking cruise vacations if they can find better value and experiences.

With the doubling of Asian guests on NCL ships over the past three years, we have observed that they are looking for more exotic and authentic experiences beyond visiting malls and capital cities while travelling in groups. As such, we are developing more itineraries that will cater to their curiosity and desire for new experiences.



Michael Goh
President, Dream Cruises & head
of international sales at Genting
Cruise Lines

Dream Cruises

With the growing trend in experiential travel, Dream Cruises is geared towards redefining the future of cruising with the 208,000GRT *Global Dream* – the first Global Class ship scheduled to arrive in Asia 2Q2021. On board the Global class ships, guests' journeys are elevated to new heights with a seamless experience featuring a high degree of innovations, driven by state-of-the-art robotics, artificial intelligence, new technology and digital systems such as facial, voice recognition, smart sensors, and more.

In addition, new experiential excitement awaits guests with a series of firsts, including the first-ever Dream Park at the Pier theme park, featuring the world's longest roller coaster at sea; the largest cinema at sea with eight theatres convertible for MICE meetings; the largest variety of Asian and international cuisine at sea; the industry's most spacious staterooms; and The Palace, Asia's largest "ship-within-a-ship" luxury enclave.

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Gems of the sea

More travellers are craving Far East destination discoveries on luxury boats. *TTG Show Daily* profiles Indonesia and the Philippines, which are in the game but with their own obstacles to overcome



Amandira

Indonesia

Indonesia may be home to thousands of scattered islands, a venerable seafaring history, and a rich biodiversity above and below the waterline, but the archipelago has not been a choice for recreational boating for tourists until recently.

According to Umberto Cadamuro, COO inbound of Pacto, the luxury expedition market has emerged as a new trend, with the number of travellers signing up for private yachting and customised trips on the up.

Umberto said: “The number of luxury yachting (trips) have increased by an average of 20 to 30 per cent in 2018 (compared to 2017) and it will (keep) growing the next few years.”

For Dominique Gerardin, co-owner of Lamima, the archipelago offers the promise of exploration and freedom of sailing in remote natural splendour. “People who want to do something more authentic, less shiny,” he added.

While foreign-flagged yachts still can’t undertake chartered vacations in Indonesian waters, the country’s natural beauty and wilderness tucked away in islands yet inaccessible by scheduled flights is inspiring tourism players to invest in their own high-end expedition boats.

Dominique shared that since Lamima was launched in 2015, demand has grown as more affluent tourists take an interest in seeing lesser known destinations in the archipelago.

This has recently been driven by the increasingly affluent domestic market.

Umberto said that Europeans, especially Russians, are still the strongest market,

but the domestic market share is growing. He expects these changes to “prompt a shift in geographic markets in future”.

Yozua Makes, CEO of Plataran Indonesia, added: “There is a trend among rich Indonesians where the biggest (source of) pride is being able to explore the country’s exotic destinations in luxurious comfort.”

In Plataran, growth in the domestic market began in the last five years, and now 35 per cent of guests who enjoy Plataran phinisi ships are Indonesians.

As the company experiences the ascent of a new generation of guests, Yozua also noticed deeper motivations behind recreational boating.

“Many Indonesians are successful by age 30-40 and they are far better educated than the previous generation,” Yozua said. “Their travelling needs have also changed. They no longer just want to explore exotic places and (passively take in the) beautiful scenery. They want to do something for nature and conservation.”

Agreeing, Steve Ebsworth, founding partner of Rascal Republic, said luxurious travellers need more than just a comfortable liveaboard. They want to do their part for the environment.

“The concept of authentic experiences in yachting has changed, from going to exotic places to having the chance to take a hands-on approach to marine or nature conservation.”

Rascal has partnered with Conservation International Indonesia (CI Indonesia) to create scientific expeditions that gives travellers the opportunity to take a role in conservation while exploring Indonesia’s off-radar island destinations.

Park remain most popular, guests may tailor make their own itineraries according to their preference.

Apart from the popular Komodo itineraries, Taufik said *Alila Purnama* has rolled out a special 4D3N departing from Bali to Komodo to attract Indonesians and Asians. *Alila Purnama* also creates trips based on “booking per suite”, expected to drive more business in 2019 and beyond.

Marc Bittner, general manager of Amanwana, *Amanikan* and *Amandira*, pointed out that every aspect aligned with the luxury yacht industry is in constant evolution, led by fast changes in demand. However, more prescient operators will pre-emptively identify these markers and pioneer market innovations.

Amanikan and *Amandira* are custom-built, luxurious Phinisi cruisers.

Bittner revealed that Aman is currently assessing new exploratory itineraries within the vast Indonesian archipelago to attract more luxury travellers. He said: “We are continuously seeking ways to improve Aman Voyages be it through high-end culinary cuisine experiences or navigating through new, exploratory regions.”

Bittner added: “With an expansive archipelago of 17,000 islands, the most challenging aspect is deciding where to explore next!” – **Tiara Maharani**

Philippines

It’s surprising that the Philippines has not developed luxury pocket cruises or small capacity boats for tourism, a natural fit for a country with 7,641 islands and one of the world’s longest coastline.

A sign of its strong potentials, this fledgling sector has managed to grow despite the lack of government support and infrastructure.

Did Novo, CEO of LXV Group, a luxury online marketplace which rents out yachts with concierge service, said factors behind growth include the country’s “perfect location in the middle of East Asia... with so many islands to discover, and travellers looking for new destinations”.

Novo shared that foreign clients are mainly Asians, but there has also been an increase in catamaran demand coming from Spain and France. “Europeans are looking for remote places without tourists, and diving opportunities. Expeditions and glamping on virgin islands are also very trendy.”

As for where boaters are going, Palawan is the top pick of locals while Europeans like exploring Linapacan Island between El Nido and Coron in Palawan. Some Europeans also opt for Siargao as a less crowded alternative to El Nido. Mean-

Led by scientists from CI Indonesia, travellers will be able to learn all about underwater reef diversity and coral health, survey turtles and mantas, and meet with local communities to learn about their approach to marine resource management and current threats.

Since the programme was launched earlier this year, interest has been “unbelievable”, he said.

Meanwhile, *Alila Purnama* is venturing into more remote waters, with guests sailing to locations such as Banda Islands in Maluku or Cendrawasih Bay in Papua.

Taufik Rachman, vice president, global sales - travel trade of Alila Hotels and Resorts, explained that while Komodo National Park and Raja Ampat National



Alila Purnama

while, the Chinese prefer areas around Manila and Cebu, including Oslob.

Manila Yacht Club president Robert Lim Joseph added: “Dumaguete is getting a good share of the market, and Iloilo and Cagayan de Oro are booming. Davao is fully booked. Many things are happening including in Palawan. Scuba diving is doing great guns. Clark hotels are full. More investments are coming their way from the big taipans in the county.”

For Thomas Cachera, managing director of Europa Yachts Philippines, which has the largest fleet of luxury yachts from leading European builders, business is 90 per cent Filipino.

Since coming to the Philippines in 2012 to sell luxury yachts and provide technical support, Cachera said Europa Yachts sells two to seven boats a year, a number expected to grow every year.

There are also foreigners bringing their own yachts to join races and regattas.

Those private sector players are mounting their own events to trumpet the nascent sector.

Manila Yacht Club’s Joseph said that after the initial clean-up of the Manila Bay, “in a year’s time, we will invite the Hong Kong Yacht Club for a Hong Kong-Manila Race.”

Such events are happening more frequently in Subic and Boracay, while Europa Yachts’ second annual edition of Lagoon Escapade took place in April 2019 with 12 boats participating. The first edition the previous year was from Punta

Fuego Yacht Club in Batangas to Puerto Galera in Mindoro.

The Philippine Department of Tourism (DoT) and the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club had partnered for the first Hong Kong to Puerto Galera yacht race (April 17-21, 2019). It plans to take place on alternate years to the Rolex China Sea Race, whose 2018 edition started from Hong Kong and ended in Subic Bay, Zambales.

Industry players remarked that the destination could also push for foreign yachts to stay in the Philippines during their winter months, becoming an alternative moor to Asian destinations like Hong Kong that already have crowded marinas.

However, infrastructure is a hurdle, some pointed out. There are not enough marinas in the Philippines and the top ones, including the Manila Yacht Club and Subic Bay Yacht Club, are already running at maximum capacity, leaving the question of where to moor, refuel and do repairs.

For Cachera, it comes down to changing the mindset of the government that yachting is merely “an expensive toy for the rich” and to adopt a “wider vision” of creating jobs and developing tourism.

Some government officials are already open to dialogue and discussion.

In fact, in the Philippines’ National Tourism Development Plan, cruise tourism was identified – and not limited to big cruises ships, according to Narzalina



Sailing boat in Coron, Palawan, The Philippines

Lim, founder of hospitality and tourism consultancy Asia Pacific Projects.

There was the idea to attract High Networth Individuals from overseas to fly directly to Manila, Cebu, Panglao, Iloilo and eventually, to Busuanga, Palawan (once that airport is upgraded to an international gateway) and board their own yachts to sail around the islands, shared Lim, who was the country’s tourism secretary many years ago. However, this was left unpursued.

“There are also yachts which can hold 30-50-100, ideal for inter-island cruising,” she emphasised, echoing what other industry stakeholders lament about

smaller boats deserving attention, not just the big ships.

In 2013, Asia Pacific Projects went as far as to prepare a terms of reference for DoT, pro bono, to commission a study on this product. But again, this came to naught.

Lim said: “It will be difficult to develop any new tourism product without baseline information. DoT should allocate funds for studies. If Langkawi and Phuket can do pocket cruises, the Philippines certainly can.

“Our islands are just as, if not more, beautiful. The problem is we don’t do our homework.” – **Rosa Ocampo**

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Eye on the prize

Direct Malaysia-Germany airlinks are severed and longhaul flights are limited, but Malaysia is firmly keeping up its European courtship. By **S Puvaneswary**



Langkawi Development Authority

Kilim Geoforest Park, located on Langkawi, is part of the UNESCO Network Of Global Geoparks

German arrivals to Malaysia for the first nine months of the year rose 5.8 per cent to 104,083 year-on-year, according to Tourism Malaysia.

This can be attributed to Malaysia's position as Germany's principal trade partner. It resulted in more destination awareness among key decision makers from

Europe. Another contributing factor is the scheduled charter flights between Frankfurt and Kuala Lumpur, which Condor Air, the leisure airline arm of Thomas Cook AG, began offering in November 2018. In January, however, Condor Air ceased the service on that route, severing the only direct link between Malaysia and Germany.

Meanwhile, for the first nine months of 2019, arrivals from the UK – Malaysia's biggest inbound European market – decreased by 0.7 per cent to 276,582. Musa Yusof, Tourism Malaysia's director-general, blamed the drop in UK arrivals on Brexit.

Manfred Kurz, Diethelm Travel Malaysia's managing director, agreed. "UK spending has been dampened by uncertainties related to Brexit. UK travellers are reluctant to plan their longhaul holidays too far ahead," he said.

Moving forward, Tourism Malaysia will continue to have a presence at major shows, said Musa.

"As the country has limited direct flights from Europe, we will also be promoting charter flights and the incentives available via the Joint International Tourism Development Programme to European outbound travel agents," he added.

Hotels update

Visitor arrivals to Malaysia in the first three quarters of last year rose 3.7 per cent year-on-year to 20.1 million, according to the latest statistics released by Tourism Malaysia.

Despite this, hotel occupancy fell by 4.7 per cent to 60.8 per cent in the same period, according to a survey by the Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH).

According to MAH's CEO, Yap Lip Seng, the factors behind the slight decrease in occupancy are more complex than the figures reveal at first glance.

"We have to factor in the impact of the rapid increase of unregulated accommodation supply, such as those from Airbnb," said Yap. This could be why despite more visitor arrivals, there has been lower demand for hotel rooms, amid an increasing supply, he reckons.

Areas such as Kuala Lumpur and Penang faced a drop in hotel room demand due to over-mature attractions, according



The new Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas

to Yap. "The high density of homes offered to tourists (through avenues such as Airbnb), coupled with the lack of control over property development, are also affecting demand," he added.

In contrast, one destination with consistently growing demand for hotel rooms, and has room for further growth is Sabah and its capital city Kota Kinabalu, he said.

Yap does not expect strong growth for Malaysia's hotel industry in 2020. "De-

spite the *Visit Malaysia 2020* campaign, increasing supply and lacklustre demand means maintaining the current performance is the best case scenario," he said.

Meanwhile, hoteliers can tap on luxury travel and business events to increase occupancy rates in 2020. "Travellers in these high-yield markets spend at least three times more than conventional tourists in general," he said.

Malaysia is still a considerably new destination on the luxury travel map, notes Yap. As a result, he reckons luxury hotel demand has great potential. He shared: "Up till August 2019, the luxury segment was the only one where occupancy rose."

On the business events front, restrictive policies and lack of connectivity pose challenges, said Yap. "Greater connectivity allows more international business events to be organised here and easier facilitation of such events," he said.



Pahang glamping resort Tiarasa Escapes

Experiences spotlight

Glamping is trending across the world. Malaysia is no exception. Also known as luxury camping, the hospitality concept gives discerning holiday-makers direct access to the outdoors without compromising on comfort, luxury and convenience.

Featuring cotton bell tents under moonlit skies that bring to mind images from *Arabian Nights* is glamping destination Canopy Tribes in Nusajaya, Johor, the heart of Iskandar Malaysia.

At Janda Baik, Pahang, visitors can find the rainforest at their doorstep in glamping resort Tiarasa Escapes. Its 20 safari-style tented villas and five treetop villas come with attached bathrooms, hot showers, bathtubs, air-conditioning and free wifi.



Sunway Lost World Of Tambun, Perak

Tiarasa Escapes is easily accessible; the resort is a 45-minute drive away from Kuala Lumpur.

Designed for theme park enthusiasts, unique glamping and adventure destination Sunway Lost World Of Tambun houses seven theme parks, surrounded by lush tropical jungle and breathtaking limestone features in Perak that date back 400 million years.

Each glamping tent features modern amenities such as lights, fan, power sockets and of course, free Wi-Fi.

Packages include access to the theme parks and the Lost World Hot Springs Night Park.

Airlines update



Malaysian Airlines taps on oneworld members

In October last year, flagship carrier Malaysia Airlines signed a codeshare agreement with British Airways. This gave passengers the option of flying to Kuala Lumpur, from UK cities such as Edinburgh, Glasgow and Manchester.

When the codeshare agreement was announced, Malaysia Airlines also revealed plans to codeshare with British Airways for flights to Barcelona, Berlin, Copenhagen, Vienna, Brussels, Geneva, Hamburg, Lyon, Toulouse, Paris and Zu-

rich, subject to regulatory approval.

According to a source at Malaysia Airlines, there have been strong forward bookings for 1Q2020 on the Kuala Lumpur-Heathrow route.

Malaysian Airlines will continue to focus on commercial cooperation with other *oneworld* alliance members already operating flights in Europe, through partnerships and codeshare agreements, said the same source. The airline will also organise fam trips for UK agents this year.

Meanwhile, Condor Air, which offers scheduled charter flights, has stopped servicing the Frankfurt-Kuala Lumpur route since January 16.

Tourism Malaysia has joint promotions with Middle Eastern carriers Qatar Airways, Emirates Airlines, Oman Air and Turkish Airlines. These airlines fly between Germany and Malaysia via their hubs. As such, Musa reckons that the suspension of services would not affect arrivals from Germany.

Diversifying tourism sources

Traditional European source markets have taken a hit, but Myanmar remains optimistic as it turns its attention towards easing visa restrictions to court other countries in Europe. By **Marissa Carruthers**



Night view of Thatbyinnyu Temple in Bagan, Myanmar

European arrivals to Myanmar continued to tumble throughout 2019, with main markets slipping in the first 10 months of the year.

According to the latest available figures from the Ministry of Hotel and Tourism, Myanmar welcomed more than 3.5 million international visitors in the first 10 months of 2019.

In Europe, leading source market France slipped two per cent YoY in arrivals, generating 31,790 travellers. The UK in second place, fell nine per cent to generate 26,598 arrivals. Meanwhile,

German visitors fell by one per cent to 20,943.

On the other hand, Italian arrivals rose 16 per cent to 13,490, Spanish arrivals grew by 20 per cent to 10,808, and Austrian arrivals increased by seven per cent to 2,610.

China remained the strongest overall source market, with arrivals increasing by 161 per cent to 593,658.

Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism, U Ohn Maung, said the ministry is currently developing a new tourism master plan for 2020 to 2030. This aims to

elevate the country's tourism appeal and outline products and developments to appeal to specific markets.

He shared: "In 2020, we will ease visa procedures for some European countries that are friendly with us, create more training programmes for capacity building, and promote sports and gastronomy tourism for new markets."

From January 1, 2020, visas-on-arrival were granted to an additional five countries for a three-year trial, where European destinations include Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Luxembourg.

Airlines update

A new air connection with Dubai is hoped to fuel European arrivals.

In May 2019, Emirates discontinued the Yangon to Phnom Penh flight it launched in 2017, connecting the two destinations with Dubai instead due to low traffic. It replaced the Myanmar leg with Bangkok in Thailand.

This came as a blow as the route served as an easy connection to Europe.

However, in December 2019, Dubai-based LCC flydubai stepped in and launched daily flights from Dubai to Yangon and Thailand's Krabi, which is operated via a stop in Yangon.

The flights to Yangon International Airport, which are codeshared with Emirates, give passengers easier access to Myanmar, both from Europe by transiting through Dubai, or for multi-destination visits with Thailand.

Also boosting multi-destination travel throughout Asia, in August 2019, Cambodia's JC International Airlines launched thrice-weekly routes connecting the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh with Yangon.



Hotels update



Investment into Myanmar's hotel industry has slowed as the tourism industry experienced a tough few years.

However, as arrivals steadily get back on track, leading international hotel brands are expanding in the destination. In May last year, Thailand's Centara Hotels & Resorts and KMA Hotels Group signed a MoU to develop and renovate six hotels in Myanmar, managed under Centara brands.

This will see three of KMA Hotels Group's existing properties in Inle, Naypyitaw and Taungoo undergo refurbish-

ment, and the development of three new hotels in Bagan and Than Daung. In early 2020, the 95-key Centara KMA Resort Inle Lake is slated to start re-welcoming guests.

Last October, Marriott announced it will bring the Westin brand into the country by late-2021. The Yangon property will feature 281 rooms and suites alongside 90 serviced apartments.

Also in Yangon, Oakwood will also launch its first Oakwood Hotel & Apartments in the Bahan Township of Yangon in mid-2021.

Experiences spotlight

Home to diverse landscapes and nature, and a melting pot of cultures, Myanmar ticks all the boxes when it comes to responsible travel.

A string of carefully-curated tours lets visitors experience Myanmar's natural beauty while contributing to the income of struggling communities, as well as helping to preserve rich nature and traditions.

For example, Living Irrawaddy has developed tours that take visitors to meet dwindling cooperative fishing communities near Mandalay. Visitors can stay overnight in luxury tents, spend the day with villagers and hit

the Irrawaddy River with fishermen in search of endangered dolphins.

In Hpa-an, villages benefit from community-led tours that include kayaking through flooded paddies, trekking up Mount Zwegabin and admiring the region's striking limestone formations during a sunset river cruise.

Alternatively, innovative social enterprises such as Inle Heritage in Inle Lake use tourism as a tool to empower impoverished locals. It boasts a vocational school – students here are commonly snapped up by the country's leading hotels – accommodation, art gallery, restaurant and gift shop.

The age-old fishing method as demonstrated by Myanmar fishermen



Philippines' innovative blend

There is great potential for creative voluntourism and experimental tourism offerings in the archipelago, home to indigenous peoples and UNESCO cultural heritage sites, writes **Rosa Ocampo**

There were 683,573 European arrivals between January and November 2019, making up 9.13 per cent of total arrivals to the Philippines. This was a 9.4 per cent increase over 2018, when the destination welcomed 625,000 during the same period.

Eastern Europe seems to be the region with most potential for growth. While other regions saw a slight year-on-year dip in market share – 0.11 per cent, 0.41 per cent and 0.02 per cent respectively for western, northern and southern Europe – the share of Eastern European markets rose by 0.02 per cent.

Encouraged, NTO funds for 2019/2020 winter promotions were doubled.

“60 per cent (of the budget) went to digital ads emphasising beach destinations that target a wide range of travellers, including families, millennials and FITs,” revealed Howard Lance Uyking, assistant tourism secretary for brand and marketing communications, Department of Tourism, Philippines (DoT).

“We will continue hosting fam trips, as well as attending European travel tradeshows and tourism roadshows,” Benito Bengzon Jr, DoT’s undersecretary told *TTG Show Daily*.

“We are looking at introducing a more experiential form of tourism in the new year.”



Preceding the birth of Christianity in the Philippines, the Sinulog festival with its grand parade, street parties and fireworks, is held every January in Cebu

Hotels update

A boom in domestic and international tourism drove up demand for hotels in the Philippines in 2019, while the hotel landscape continues to be attractive for developers and hotel companies. Several prominent brands, such as Sheraton, Okura and The Ritz-Carlton, have opened or are opening hotels at the Resorts World Manila integrated resort.

Thai hotel brand Dusit International planted its flags in Bonifacio Global City, Cebu and Davao.

Over at Clark, 80 km north of Manila,

the Hilton Clark Sun Valley Resort will open in 3Q2020.

Successful homegrown brands like Seda, Aruga, Bai, Luxent and Savoy prove that they can compete with international brands, according to Colliers International Philippines, which expects that about 40 per cent of the 5,500 new hotel keys coming on stream from 2019 to 2021 will be classified as three stars.

Colliers also expects more two- and three-star hotels to open in the fringes of business hubs such as Makati, Ortigas



Hotel Okura Manila is slated to open in 1H2019

and northern Quezon City, and budget hotels catering mainly to millennials and staycationers to rise in the peripheries.



Philippine Airlines offers daily flights to London

Airlines update

The Philippines' limited air connectivity remains a major hurdle for the growth of European inbound tourism.

National carrier Philippine Airlines' flights on the Manila-London route – flying from Manila to London on one day and London to Manila on the next – is at present, the only nonstop flight from the continent.

Previous speculations about the flagship carrier mounting flights to Italy have remained just that – speculations.

Turkish Airlines, however, has been bringing traffic from the Philippines to Europe via Turkey, with its affordable daily direct flights from Manila.

As Turkish Airlines has an extensive network in Europe, this signals great potential for improving air connectivity. The DoT will continue to tap on the carrier to bring in European passengers.

Experiences spotlight

Travellers in search of rugged destinations unsullied by mass tourism have been visiting indigenous communities across the Philippine archipelago for educational and immersive adventures.

A trek to Banaue and Sagada could provide the opportunity to meet the Igorot peoples, who preserved their authentic culture by resisting foreign domination. Among the Igorot peoples are the Ifugao, who built the Banaue rice terraces, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Travellers have the opportunity to share in and learn more about the Igorot peoples' unique cuisine, folklore, agricultural feasts, sacred rituals, and hear stories of how they



Ifugao women standing near the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras

adapted to the merciless, mountainous environment.

A sample Batak tribe cultural tour in Palawan could include trekking to their village in Concepcion, witnessing a tribal dance performance, sharing in their meals, based largely on seafood,

as well as admiring their traditional costumes and musical instruments.

Sadly, the indigenous culture scattered around the archipelago is vanishing. Responsible tourism is therefore, not just to be passing through, but fundamentally necessary.



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

What to buy

Lio Tourism Estate

The latest additions to this eco-friendly destination in El Nido, Palawan, are the new artisan shops open at its artist village, named the Shops@Kalye Artisanano. Designed to appeal to a wide variety of travellers, the 325ha attraction boasts its own airport and jetty lounge. A wide variety of resorts, each catering to a specific segment, including couples, youthful and carefree travellers, and corporate groups, are available.

Ascent

Since April last year, ride-sharing helicopter service Ascent has been offering an alternative form of transportation for travellers who wish to save time and beat Manila's notorious traffic jam. Rides are currently offered between Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) in Manila and Bonifacio Global City, Makati, Tagaytay or Clark. Ascent also offers flights from NAIA to Manila's city centre at 8,900 pesos (US\$168) per pax, reducing travel time to just 10 minutes. Also available are shuttle service to specific heliports, and corporate packages.

Seda Vertis North, Manila

Located in Quezon City, a burgeoning business district offering a variety of entertainment, dining and retail options, Seda Vertis North is the only hotel near the Vertis North shopping mall. Moving away from the boutique scale of other Seda hotels, the Seda Vertis North boasts 438 guestrooms and suites, two restaurants and a roof deck bar. Other facilities include a 700m² pillar-less grand ballroom, five function rooms, and a lounge with iMac stations.

National Museum of Natural History

Housed in a renovated colonial building, the new National Museum of Natural History's several-storeys-high-ceiling means great acoustics for musical and other performances. Located in Manila, the museum is also proving to be an exciting venue for business events. The Tree of Life sculpture in the atrium 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

Hosted by Blue Horizons Travel & Tours, this tour allows corporate groups to trace the food critic's journey to Pampanga, the country's culinary capital. The tour tackles the syncretistic food culture, delving into the various influences, including that from past colonisers that were adapted to the local palate. A side trip to the province's main tourist attractions is thrown in for more cultural experiences.

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Going for bigger tourism goals

With its myriad gastronomic and cultural offerings and plans for increased air connectivity, Macau is determined to raise its destination appeal among discerning travellers, notes **Prudence Lui**



Macau, together with Zhuhai's Henqin island, offers European visitors the option of a multi-destination experience

Despite the impact of social unrest in Hong Kong, visitor arrivals to Macau in 2019 went up by 10.1 per cent year-on-year, to 39.4 million, according to preliminary figures released by the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO).

European inbound travel, however, did not grow at the same pace, rising only 0.1 per cent to 278,000. For 3Q2019, the latest quarter with statistics available, per capita spending by European travellers remained flat at MOP\$1,253 (US\$157), compared to MOP\$1,261 in 3Q2018.

The UK kept its top spot among Macau's European markets, with arrivals coming in at more than 59,000, and marking a 5.6 per cent year-on-year growth — the highest among its peers. Though France continued to be in second place, with 37,000 arrivals, French arrivals registered a significant year-on-year decrease of 5.9 per cent.

About 16,000 Italian visitors chose Macau as their travel destination, allowing the market to take top spot in terms of visitor growth (5.6 per cent) among European nations.

European travellers generally preferred short stopovers in Macau. While the number of same-day visitors went up by one per cent to 144,502, overnight stay visitors fell 0.8 per cent to 133,341.

Land travel is becoming more popular among European travellers — increasing by 82 per cent — while sea arrivals from arrival fell by 21 per cent.

This is likely due to the opening of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau bridge (HZMB) in October 2018, connecting Macau to the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA), though arrivals through Border Gate also rose by eight per cent.

For 2020, the MGTO has laid out two key agendas: putting Macau's gastronomy and cultural heritage on the map and attracting Nordic visitors, said a MGTO spokesperson.

"Nordic travellers have high spending power and go on frequent trips," she noted. The MGTO will also leverage on Macau's proximity to Henqin island in Zhuhai to brand the two destinations as one tourism product.

Hotels update

Across Macau, hotel occupancy rate for 2019 stood at 91 per cent, while the average room rate (ARR) improved only slightly by 1.5 per cent over that of 2018 to reach MOP\$1,361 (US\$170).

While European bookings fell by 5.2 per cent year-on-year in 1H2019, they rose 3.4 per cent in 2H2019. The growth in European hotel demand in 2H2019 runs counter to the 6.7 per cent year-on-year decline in European arrivals for the same period. This indicates a greater preference for overnight stays among European visitors.

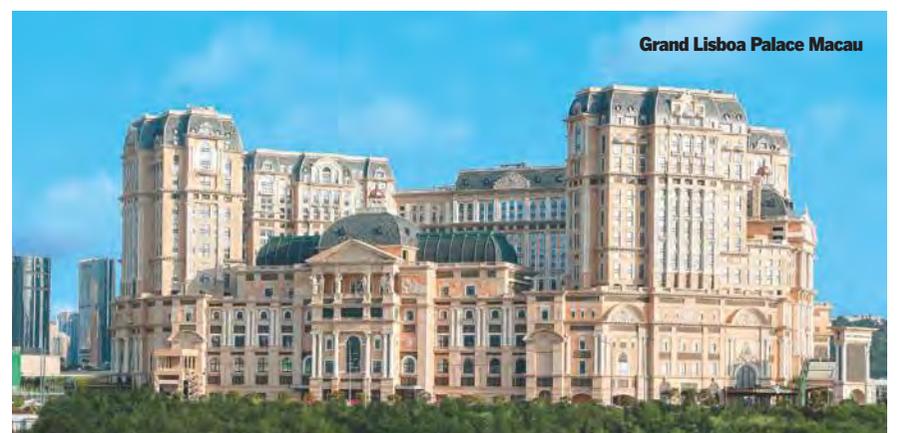
Hotel Riviera Macau's general manager,

May Wong, attributes the low growth in overall ARR to the slowdown in business in September and October.

She noted, however, that it was not a "bad year" overall, as monthly occupancy rates across Macau managed to reach "80 to 90 per cent".

According to the MGTO, there were 41,148 hotel rooms on the market at end-2019, a 2.6 per cent growth from 2018.

This year, Grand Lisboa Palace Macau and Lisboaeta Macau, two integrated resorts in Cotai, will be completed. Together, they will inject about 2,720 rooms into the destination's total hotel supply.



Airlines update

Macau currently does not have direct flights from Europe. Turkish Airlines' plans to introduce a Turkey-Hong Kong-Macau service, which was announced in 2019, has not materialised.

Most European visitors therefore, have been accessing Macau through Hong Kong. It comes as no surprise that the prolonged protests in Hong Kong, which flared up in June 2019, had impacted European traffic in 2H2019.

In response to reduced demand for flights to Hong Kong, Cathay Pacific has cut seat by 1.4 per cent in 2020. This will further hurt access to Macau.

A sliver of hope came from Deng Jun, Macau International Airport Company (CAM)'s executive committee chairman, who is determined to improve Macau's air connectivity.

Speaking at the CAM's 2019 Business Summary and 2020 Work Plan meeting, Deng said there were plans to explore more freedom rights as well as establish more medium and longhaul routes to keep pace with the development of the destination.

Meanwhile, Macau International Airport (MIA) has been resilient, welcoming 9.6 million travellers in 2019, 16 per cent more than 2018.

Experiences spotlight

True-blue gourmands will know that Macau is loved for her unique Macanese cuisine as much as her impressive wonderland of integrated resorts. Hence, it was no surprise when UNESCO designated Macau as one of its Creative Cities of Gastronomy in 2017.

So, where does one begin a culinary journey in Macau? Macau's famed street food is always a good place to start, and Taipa City is where one can find the widest array, from pork chop bun and Portuguese egg tarts to almond cakes and dim sum.

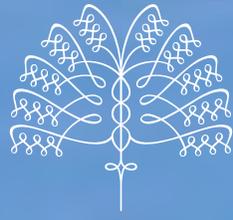
To make sure one does not miss out on Macau's best eats, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) launched the online Gastronomy Map, which directs visitors to delicious offerings in lesser-known districts.

To encourage sustainable food practices, MGTO collaborated with National Geographic to

launch an editorial project in 2019, titled The Great Green Food Journey.

Travellers with more discerning palates can choose to refer to the *Michelin Guide Hong Kong Macau 2020*.

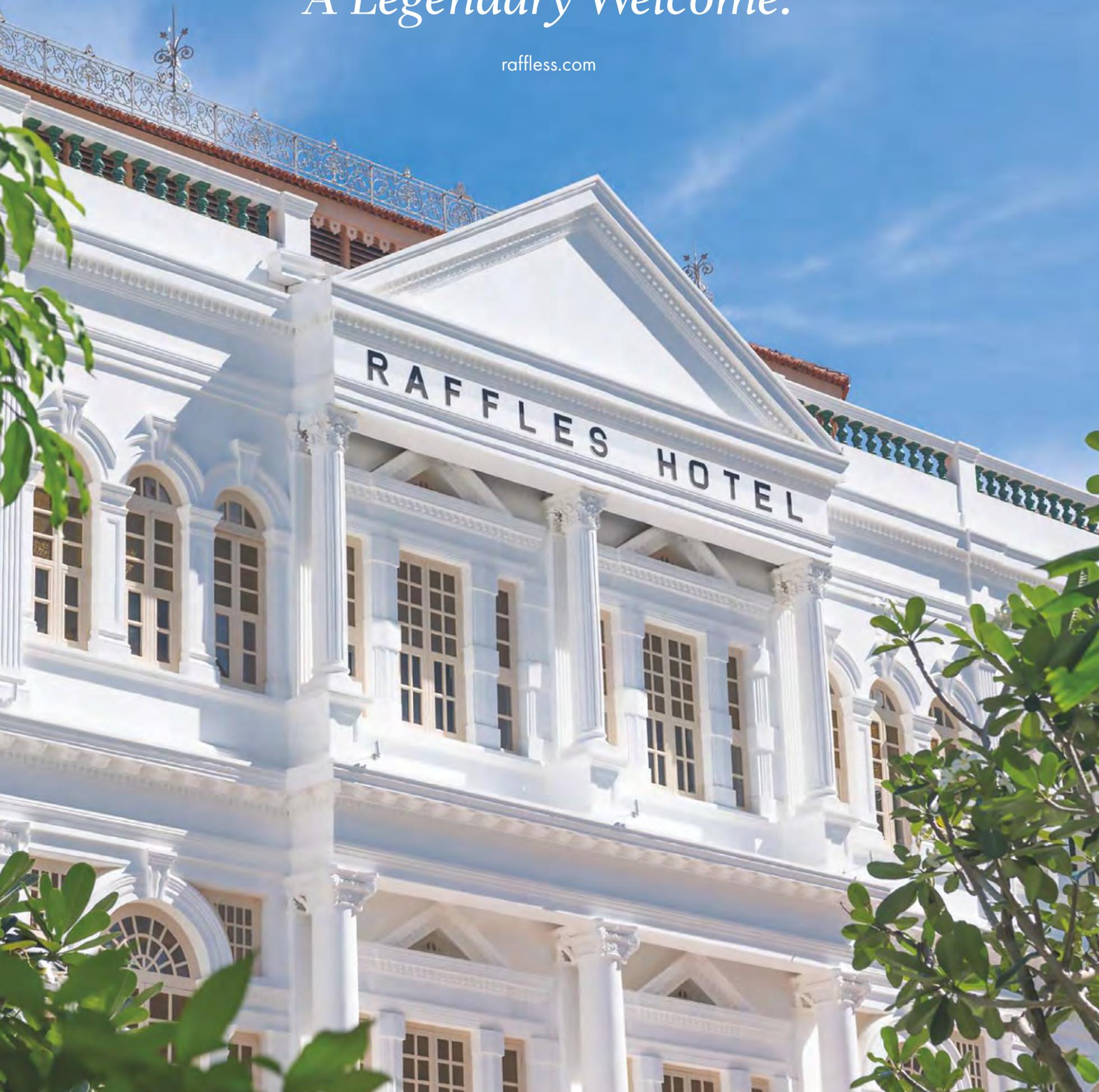




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