



Kempinski marches on

New signings, iconic openings are on the horizon worldwide for the company

By Karen Yue

Kempinski Hotels is going against the current of poor business confidence in the travel and tourism industry with news of continued portfolio expansion, with several openings lined up for Asia, as well as new agreements being signed for near-future developments.

At a media breakfast on Wednesday, CEO and chairman of the management board, Martin S Smura unveiled details surrounding its mega project in China – the Universal Beijing Resort.

Scheduled to open in 1Q2021, phase one of the project comprises The Universal Studios Grand Hotel, NUO Resort Hotel-Universal Beijing Resort, Universal Studios theme park and the Universal CityWalk retail, dining and entertainment complex.

The project is developed, constructed and operated by Beijing International Resort Co., while operations of the two hotels, as well as delivery of guest experiences, are shouldered by Key International Hotels Management Co., a joint venture between Beijing Tourism Group and Kempinski Hotels.

The Universal Studios Grand Hotel will sport 800 keys and offer a contemporary interpretation of Hollywood's golden age. The 400-key NUO Resort Hotel-Universal Beijing Resort will be a luxurious interpretation of China's ancient royal gardens.

In its entirety, Universal Beijing Resort will boast 6,000 keys.

Smura told the *Daily* that the ongoing Covid-19 outbreak and resulting in dismal travel and tourism performance worldwide have no bearing on the project.

He explained: "This project is geared towards the local market. China today is still a very local market; foreign travel business to China is less than 10 per cent. So I'm not worried about this project, and you will soon see why. Asian people, particularly from China, are much more swift commercially. When they bounce back (from a crisis such as this), they bounce back quickly and travel demand will be strong."

Smura added that construction is going according to plan, "and we are on time."

While Universal Beijing Resort makes progress, Kempinski Hotels will celebrate the opening of its second property in Bangkok this May – Sindhorn Kempinski Hotel Bangkok in the upscale Langsuan neighbourhood.

Guestrooms will be spacious – with sizes from 66m², and guests will enjoy an integrated spa, wellness and fitness facility that spans over 4,000m² across three floors. The wellness focus continues with restaurant Flow which will dish out plant-based cuisine prepared with locally sourced 100 per cent certified organic produce.

"Yesterday we signed an

LOI (letter of intent) for a big project in Vietnam, and in the coming days we will be signing on a new fantastic resort in Phuket (Thailand). We are also in the bid for one of the greatest hotels in Hong Kong," Smura revealed.

"If markets are in difficulty, then it is the best time to make our move. One cannot be shy to come through and close deals," he emphasised, adding that he also has his eye on Sri Lanka and a resort in Malaysia to join the upcoming Kempinski Hotel Kuala Lumpur.

"It is always nice to have a combination of a city hotel and a resort property (in the country). Our city hotel in Kuala Lumpur is now under construction towards a 2021 opening," he said.

Globally, the hotel company will add 6,000 new rooms in the near future. Notable openings beyond Asia include 7Pines

Kempinski Ibiza which will open for the season this May; The David Kempinski Tel Aviv in late-2020; and Kempinski Hotel Tbilisi in Georgia by the year-end.



Smura: grow boldly forward

Soundbite



Hotels will need to offer discounts for group bookings and give coordinators more flexibility for date changes or cancellations for the next couple of years – so they can build the demand back up. A long-term measure they can apply will be adding language to group contracts to covers pandemics. The current force majeure clauses are too vague. Hotels will also need to be more flexible to event date changes or allow cancellations without penalties.

Tim Hentschel

CEO and co-founder, HotelPlanner, on Covid-19's impact on the hotel industry



TTG's lensman is on the prowl for photos of trade events in Berlin.

Protel unveils new "weapons-grade" PMS

Germany-headquartered Protel Hotelsoftware has unveiled the latest version of its property management system (PMS), souped-up with voice capability, a digital registration that is PDPA compliant, as well as an integrated passport and ID scan.

Linda Vallner, vice president business development, Protel Hotelsoftware, told TTG Asia: "All hotels talk about wanting to better the stay experience for customers, but no one is talking about making the job easier for employees and helping them function more efficiently."

Illustrating ways the upgraded PMS could be used, Vallner said a hotel general manager who had just spoken to an unhappy guest regarding his stay could simply narrate the complaint into the PMS system on his phone. "The system will then transcribe and save the information for future

use," she said.

A housekeeper could also use the same PMS system to mark a guestroom as dirty or clean in her own language.

Protel also unveiled a digital registration card which allows front desk staff to see guest changes in real-time during check-in, such as an update of an email address or passport number.

"This is a very important feature because guest data is everything. Aside from reporting to the authorities, that data is also used for marketing purposes," Vallner explained.

The third major update to the PMS is an integrated passport and ID scan. While some properties have some level of digital registration through another proprietary software, others manually photocopy passports, which isn't as safe. With the

PMS, hoteliers can now just take a photo of the passport, which the system will store confidentially.

Currently, there are 14,000 hotels in 90 countries which are using Protel's PMS, about a quarter of which are located in Asia-Pacific. Most of protel's cloud-based software user base are independent three-star hotels and below, while the protel on premise software user base includes four-, five- and six-star hotels globally.

When asked why the cloud-PMS adoption rate in Asia-Pacific isn't higher, Vallner said the application of Protel's PMS requires customisation and the market prefers dealing with someone who "speaks and understands the local requirements".

"That's why we have a distributor based in Asia," she added.

Protel's Asia-Pacific representation is headed by Greg Spicer, chief executive of XN Protel Systems, who established operations in Sydney in 2004.

Spicer explained that it is "initially more challenging to implement a cloud PMS in Asia-Pacific, due to factors including localisation, language, government and tax rules being different in many countries".

For the same reason, Protel's new "weapons-grade" cloud PMS will be rolled out "one country at a time". It will be released in 1Q2020 in Australia first, then progressively in Singapore, Vietnam, Thailand, India, China and other country markets. Existing protel Air hotel users will get a free programme upgrade along with user training for their staff. All protel on premise clients will be offered upgrade paths to migrate to the

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"This significantly upgraded product will give us the functionality for larger chains including tier-one hotel clients, the kind with thousands of rooms in their global inventory," commented Spicer.

Vallner: improving job functions





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Vallner: improving job functions



Asian Trails scores Travelife awards

Milestone achievement for the group, as all but one branch are now Travelife Partners

By Karen Yue

Six more Asian Trails branches – Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia – have received the Travelife Partner award in recognition of their long-term efforts in sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility.

To be awarded, organisations must comply with more than 100 criteria relating to an operators’ office management, product range, international business partners and customer information. The Travelife standard covers the ISO 26000 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) themes, including environment, biodiversity, human rights and labour relations; and is formally recognised as being in full compliance with the United Nations-supported Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria.

Describing the new awards as a milestone for the company – as all of Asian Trails’ offices in South-east Asia are now Travelife Partners – CEO Laurent Kuenzle, said Asian Trails’ commit-

ment to sustainable practices has always existed.

“Whereas many of these criteria were already part of Asian Trails’ processes for years, others had to be newly implemented,” he told the *Daily*.

“Awareness and education are key criteria that needed to be addressed with managers and staff, suppliers and clients. Many of these may be understood in the Western world, but not in the Asian context of doing things today,” he added.

The latest achievement follows Asian Trails Vietnam’s acquisition of the award in 2018. With this, Asian Trails China is the only branch within the group that has yet to be awarded.

Kuenzle explained: “Due to the Covid-19 situation in China and the resulting skeleton crew at our China office for many weeks, we were not able to formalise all the necessary criteria in time to achieve Travelife Partner status in China. We will work on this during the course of 2020 and hopefully achieve our sus-



tainability objectives in China in the next few months.”

Achieving Travelife Partner status is not the end of the road for Kuenzle’s team.

“Sustainability needs constant and continuous efforts in improving processes, raising awareness among suppliers, and education, etc. The Travelife Partner status is a recognition of our efforts towards sustainability, but it doesn’t end there,” he remarked.

“I believe that as good citizens on this planet, our industry needs to work towards more sustainable operations. This is the main objective.”

In a press statement, Naut Kusters, manager of Travelife for tour operators, said: “I am delighted to see that sustainability in the tour operators sector is

gaining momentum. The award of... Asian Trails Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia will inspire other companies in those countries to follow the same path.”

Travelife, which has been established with the support of the European Commission, is the leading international sustainability certification for the travel sector. More than 35 national travel associations are promoting the scheme to their members, including the British Travel Association and the Pacific Asian Travel Association.

Since 2012, more than 600 Asian companies have been trained in CSR with the support of the Dutch government CBI programme. They are now working step-by-step towards more sustainable operations.

In brief

Travelport’s new air content

The technology company has signed multi-year content agreements with three new airline partners in the Pacific region – Fly Corporate (Australia), Fly Pelican (Australia), and Air Chathams (New Zealand). This comes two weeks after the company announced it had signed new multi-year content agreements with five other Pacific carriers.

Khiri unveils multi-gen trips

Khiri Travel has launched a host of flexible multi-generation tour options across seven destinations in South-east Asia offering a variety of experiences for parents, children and grandparents travelling together. The seven itineraries range from six to 12 days in Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam and Sri Lanka.

Hail a DiDi in Sydney

Come March 16, Chinese ride-hailing giant DiDi will launch ride-sharing services in Sydney, Australia, with DiDi Express (carpooling) and DiDi Max (seven-seater) services. The company first moved into the Australian market in May 2018, and has served more than two million passengers in seven cities across four states.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Accor’s garden of value

The global hotel chain has carefully sowed seeds of diverse partnerships that will allow it to grow an enriched and unrivalled loyalty programme, CMO Steven Taylor tells Karen Yue

What are some of the most exciting partnerships brought into the Accor Live Limitless (ALL) loyalty programme?

We surveyed our guests and discovered that their three key passion points were sports, food, and entertainment, so we are partnering with the best in these fields to offer ALL members extraordinary experiences that money can’t buy.

One of our most exciting partnerships is with Paris Saint Germain (PSG) football team, and we are taking that well beyond football. We recently held our first PSG activation in China, where members had a once-in-a-lifetime meet-and-greet with such legends as Neymar, Mbappe and Cavani. They watched the players in action and attended an exclusive fashion show modelled by the players.

We have thousands of tickets for events at Qudos Bank Arena in Sydney, the Australian Open, music festivals and more, and we are creating an increasing number of exclusive member-only events throughout the year.

Everytime our members leave their house, we want to be there beside them.

What makes our loyalty programme stand out against our competitors’ is that we have the widest breadth of brands and geographic spread, and we offer members the chance to earn and redeem points for dining at our restaurants and

bars, even when they are not staying with us.

Accor has invested more than our competitors in what we call augmented hospitality across a range of complementary businesses including concierge services, co-working, nightlife and entertainment, catering, venues, etc.

How does Accor decide on who makes an ideal partner for ALL?

We want to partner with businesses that our members regularly interact with (to) amplify their experiences.

We categorise our partners based on how they allow us to extend the relationship we have with our members.

The first is ‘Everyday’, which includes partners that allow us to build relevance in the everyday lives of our members, such as industry verticals like co-branded cards, retail, and food delivery. For example, the introduction of the ALL Visa payment card enables Accor to engage customers beyond their stay via industry-leading benefits and innovative digital, mobile-first experiences. The card generates additional customer engagement in hotels and new member recruitment opportunities for ALL, as well as spend uplift.

The second (category) is ‘On the move’, which includes partners that allow us to build relevance while our members are travelling, so this includes verticals around mobility and transport.

Finally, we have the category ‘In destination’, which is where our experiential partners, tours and activities are placed.

What other exciting activities are in the pipeline to promote Accor’s APAC properties worldwide?

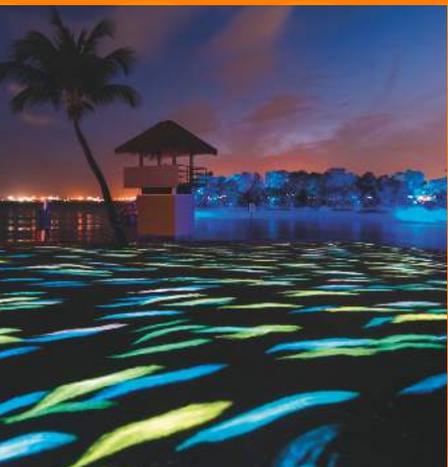
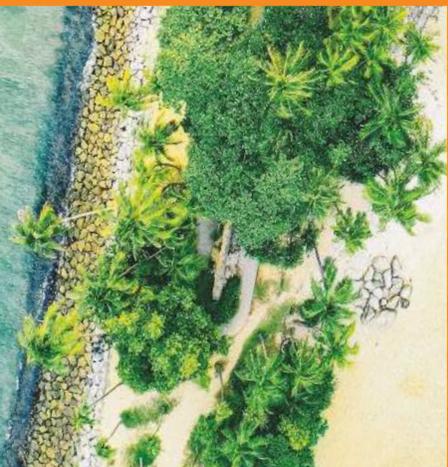
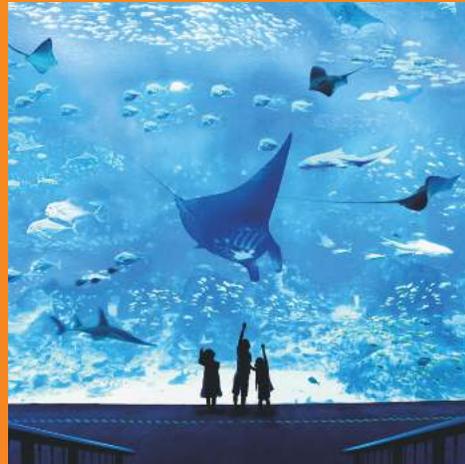
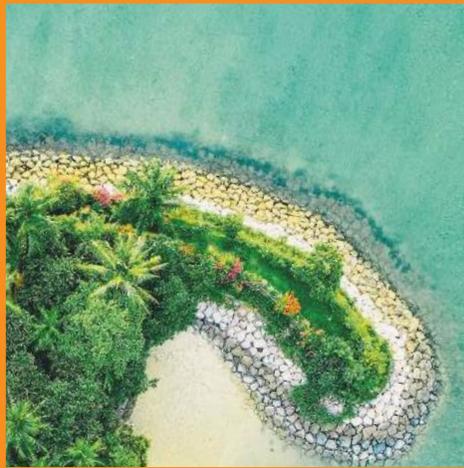
We have several major brand campaigns that will be rolled out in the coming months, including a new Raffles brand campaign that showcases Raffles Hotel Singapore.

We will have a new campaign for Fairmont, with our new brand ambassador Susan Sarandon, one of the most recognised actresses in the world. And we are excited to be opening Fairmont Ambassador Seoul later this year.

We also have a new campaign for Pullman, which will take advantage of our PSG sponsorship and showcase some key players.

In addition to brand campaigns, we will relaunch our CSR programme this year, which will build on the global announcement we made in January to reduce single-use plastics across our network.





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European dreams

Sudarsana, Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts' general manager corporate business development and marketing communications, shares with **Mimi Hudoyo** how the company is planning to attract more European clientele

How important is the European market for the group?

It is important for us, as the European market – particularly the UK, France, Germany, Netherlands, and Russia – makes up 15.4 per cent of our total. We believe in its potential, and are working to boost the market to 20 per cent of our total in coming years.

But for this year, with the Covid-19 outbreak, we are happy if we can maintain the current level.

What are your strategies to grow the European market?

We are actively participating in international tradeshows such as Vakantiebeurs Utrecht in Netherlands, FITUR in Madrid, and IFTM Top Resa in Paris.

We also take part in sales missions to potential markets, joining forces with European tour operators and wholesalers like TUI, DER Tour, Hotelbeds, WebBeds, as well as OTAs like Expedia and Booking.com.

Participating in such events allows us to directly communicate to both buyers and travellers what we have to offer.

Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts has hotels in major and secondary cities across the archipelago, such as Medan, Bengkulu, Palembang, Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Malang and Banyuwangi. We also have hotels with different brands and tiers, making it easier for tour operators when it comes to creating tour packages.

Our business partners

Which destinations in Indonesia are hot among European travellers?

Bali is still the top destination, but its surrounding areas are growing in popularity.

For example, The Kayana Beach Lombok – our new luxury boutique villa – is attractive to European travellers who are looking for beach experiences. Its location is also close to dive spots, as well as the famous Gili Trawangan island which attracts travellers who like both beach and sea activities.

Banyuwangi is another destination rising in popularity, thanks to the Ijen, where blue flames – created due to the sulfur gases – can be found.

What new European markets does Santika have its eye on?

There is a growing outbound market from Eastern Europe beyond Russia, such as Hungary, Poland, Ukraine, Romania, Belarus, Lithuania, Estonia, Serbia and Czech Republic that we are interested in.

We have plans to start penetrating these markets this year, but we need to wait and see how the travel situation pans out due to Covid-19.

Could you share with us what Santika's expansion plans are?

Our plans are in line with the government's development plans. For example, in line with the government's plan to build a bridge connecting the islands of Lombok and Sumbawa, we are planning to have a hotel in Bima. We are also planning to build hotels in the 10 destinations (10 New Balis) that the government is focusing on.

Our aim is to have properties not only in big cities but also properties at the regency level.

There are three hotels we are planning to open this year, the Hotel Santika Bukittinggi in West Sumatra, Hotel Santika Batam, and Kempil Hotel Belitung.

Also, we plan to open 15 more hotels in Indonesia between 2021 and 2022.



TTG Travel Trade Publishing is a business group of TTG Asia Media

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CNBC changes the game on travel

Leading global business news network, CNBC, recently launched its travel platform, Global Traveler. Its editor, Monica Pitrelli, tells **Karen Yue** how its content helps to inspire, inform and motivate high-yield travellers.

What has motivated CNBC to expand from its core business of providing business and financial news to enter the travel and tourism space?

At CNBC, audiences come to us to understand the trends transforming the world around us. The travel sector is no exception. Our audience is affluent and worldly, and they travel more than most for business and leisure, so we wanted to provide them with a platform to help them make the most of their trips.

Since launching in November 2019, Global Traveler (CNBC.com/Global-Traveler) quickly established a significant and loyal audience that's still growing. They come to CNBC for business news but are also interested to read about truffle trading in Provence or luxury sustainable travel in Patagonia. Time is scarce for our readers. These aren't the type of people who spend hours on Instagram, so we bring targeted, actionable content straight to them.

How is Global Traveler different from other travel information sources that are available in the consumer space?

Travel journalism is a mixed bag. Anyone who has ever used the Internet to plan a trip knows that. As a news organisation, we employ strict editorial standards for our content – and Global Traveler is no exception. We don't regurgitate press releases, round up a list of ten things and slap a "best of" label on it, and we don't ask questions or make insinuations in our headlines that go unanswered in our articles. We also steer clear of using imagery that is overly manipulated, no matter how beautiful it may be. We bring authentic, informative perspectives that our readers trust and stories that inspire them to explore the world.

What prominent travel trends is the Global Traveler editorial team keeping a close eye on, and how have these trends influenced the

content planned for the site?

The biggest trend we are seeing among our audience is the desire to avoid crowds. Our readers have seen the major tourist sites and are looking for something new. This could mean visiting smaller, lesser-known cities, or seeking out enriching experiences in large cities.

Luxury travel is evolving for our readership, and there's an appetite for sustainable travel and outdoor adventure. Marble bathrooms and complimentary cocktail hours aren't enough anymore; travel has to offer something meaningful or different – or ideally, both.

How can the travel and tourism supplier community utilise Global Traveler to further their business?

Global Traveler offers a quality platform for premium brands and partners to connect with an affluent audience. Singapore Airlines was our exclusive launch sponsor, and over the coming months ahead, we will be partnering with globally renowned



tourism boards and travel brands across some exciting content extensions.

What plans does CNBC have to achieve deeper engagement with the travel and tourism community?

In 2020, we will continue to focus on Global Traveler's four themes – Discover, Taste, Experience and Connect – to cover stories on everything from new destinations, food and architecture to world events, wellness trends and tech hacks. We will also be expanding our video content and creating enhanced immersive content, special series and on-ground events. If an opportunity is of interest to discerning travellers and frequent flyers, it's fair game on our site.



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- Welcome cultural dance upon group arrival.

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Making great strides

Tourism honchos from Singapore, Vietnam and the Philippines tell *TTG Show Daily* their forward-looking vision to fuel market growth and build a competitive edge in the marketplace



KEITH TAN

Chief executive,
Singapore Tourism Board

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

NTOs play different roles in each country. For the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), we take on key roles such as promoter, planner and facilitator. As a promoter, we seek to increase the desire to visit Singapore among discerning international leisure and business travellers through the Passion Made Possible brand and innovative marketing.

As a planner and facilitator, we look ahead to help the tourism industry meet the challenges of the changing environment, and facilitate exchanges with international partners to unlock new growth areas.

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

In this digital age, technology and data are critical to our work. Through data analytics, tourism organisations and stakeholders can develop deeper insights into visitors' preferences, and sharpen engagement strategies.

Tourism professionals have to be tech-savvy, as their work increasingly involves using data analytics. Our Singapore Tourism Analytics Network helps us derive visitor insights, whereas our Tourism Information and Services Hub allows businesses to contribute and access content and travel software services for their own channels.

The STB Tech College – a series of technology and innovation-related talks and workshops – aims to guide stakeholders to be more innovative and user-centric.

What is the biggest opportunity your tourism industry can leverage in 2020 for significant growth?

Looking ahead, we will explore sustainable tourism and tap new growth segments like digital nomads, solo female travellers and disabled travellers in 2020 and beyond.

Diversifying our market portfolio is another way to stay resilient. To drive demand, we will maintain our marketing efforts and increase our reach in more Tier 2 and 3 cities of key source markets, as well as invest in markets that show good growth potential.

NGUYEN TRUNG KHANH

General director,
Vietnam National Administration of Tourism

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

Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) advises the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and Government on policies, strategies, and planning for tourism development. VNAT is also responsible for implementing national tourism promotion in the short-, medium- and long-term, conducting target market research and development, and stimulating the development of domestic tourism.

VNAT will continue to play the role of conductor to connect localities and businesses in destination management; ensure safety and preservation of the environment; promote public-private partnerships to create more resources for product development; organise training to improve service quality and enhance tourism promotion; and affirm Vietnam's reputation as a safe, friendly and hospitable destination.

What are VNAT's top investments this year to achieve its tourism goals?

In 2020, Vietnam has set a target of welcoming 20.5 million international arrivals. We will continue to promote public-private partnerships, strengthening cooperation between central state management agencies, localities and the business community to increase resources, improve destination quality, diversify products and enhance promotional activities. VNAT will leverage big events in its promotions, such as Formula 1 in April and National Tourism Year 2020 in Ninh Binh, as well as Vietnam's ASEAN presidency in 2020.

Resources will be concentrated on important markets, such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and China. VNAT will also be allocating resources appropriately to maintain the momentum of growth in European, Australian

and American markets; and heading to emerging markets such as India.

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

The new F1 race in Hanoi for the 2020 F1 World Championship is a great opportunity for the tourism industry to promote Hanoi and Vietnam throughout the world. Information about F1 Vietnam was highlighted in VNAT's tourism promotional events last year. VNAT is now working with Vietnam Grand Prix, and the two sides will sign a cooperation agreement to promote Vietnam as a destination in association with the race from 2020 to 2025. VNAT is also (encouraging) tourism businesses to leverage this opportunity to develop packages so visitors have more options in the destination.



BERNADETTE ROMULO-PUYAT

Philippine Tourism secretary

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

When I entered the Department of Tourism (DoT) in May 2018, it was (around) the time that Boracay was closed for rehabilitation, which made me realise that (our

work) cannot just be limited to promotions.

Since DoT has its infrastructure arm, the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority, we have to be proactive when it comes to rehabilitating tourism spots and building local infrastructure. There are funds for such efforts.

The DoT is now also proactive in sustainable tourism development which not only improves connectivity and infrastructure between our islands, but also elevates the lives in local communities as tourism continues to contribute hugely to the nation's economy.

The success of the tourism industry today mustn't come at the expense of the environment or depletion of our natural resources.

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

Improving air connectivity. We are an archipelago and most of the tourists can reach us only by air. That is why I consider initiatives like this as critical to the continued development of tourism. We need more flights now going to and from the Philippines. We are working on getting more connections to and from longhaul markets in Europe. There are now more flights connecting Manila and Cebu to North America, but we need more.

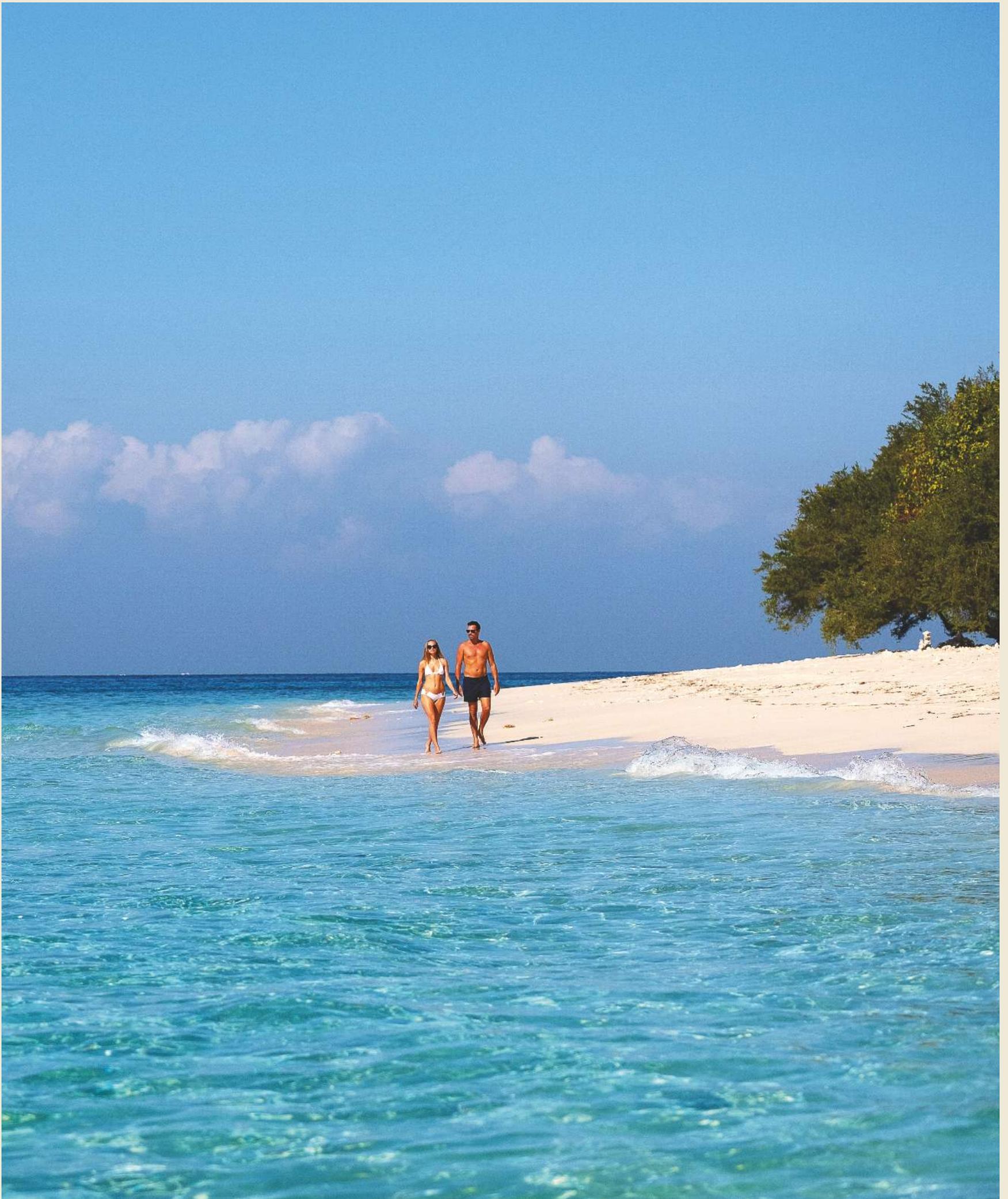
Also important is improving and adding airport and other tourism infrastructure. The expansion of Clark International Airport, and the construction of Caticlan international airport and the international terminal at Mactan Cebu International Airport will help better air connectivity.



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Beating the headwinds

A strong baht deterring European markets and stiffer competition from other destinations make 2020 a tough year for Thailand, writes **Anne Somanas**



European travellers' interest in Thailand is tapering off in the face of a robust baht; Doi Inthanon National Park in Chiang Mai, Thailand pictured

A surging baht coupled with the global economic slowdown has deterred many European source markets, with tour operators and DMCs saying that Thailand is particularly losing its lustre among Western European visitors from Switzerland, the UK, Germany and France.

Christian Stoeckli, general manager of Diethelm Travel Thailand, said: "The year 2019) was challenging year for inbound European source markets – many were down due to a strong Thai baht against the British pound and Swiss franc, Brexit, and lots of competition in Asia and Europe."

Four-decade hospitality veteran Pramookpisitt Achariyacha, founder of

Phuket's first hotel chain Kata Group, said: "The Thai baht strengthening has Europeans complaining that instead of 100 baht, they have to pay 120 baht (for the same thing). It would be good for tourism if the baht could weaken a tiny bit."

Pramookpisitt added that the market is becoming less predictable due to expanding flight options. While Europeans used to book their travels a year in advance, the slew of low-cost carriers and charter flights that slash prices as much as 50 per cent to clear leftover seat inventory, are causing the market to go for last-minute deals.

He said Europeans may now book only three months ahead of their trip.

Stoeckli observed that Russia remains the most stable, while Eastern European markets are picking up. The average stay and spending per guest in Thailand among Europeans remain "pretty high", he added.

Meanwhile, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has plans to target more Nordic visitors, who have proven to be some of Thailand's highest spenders and most loyal repeat travellers, via its *Bringing the New Shades of Thailand to Nordic Travellers* initiative. It aims to capture a greater slice of visitors from Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Iceland in 2020 through technology tie-ups.

TAT's core communication marketing theme will remain *Open to the New Shades*, which focuses on providing positive and unexpected experiences.

Following on from the long-standing *Amazing Thailand* slogan, widely recognised as one of the most impressive brand campaigns in Asia, TAT's future advertising campaigns will continue to target specific groups and highlight the trademark warm Thai hospitality.

Under the 5G Plus strategy, TAT will focus on specific quality markets, including four Scandinavian countries, and middle-upper income groups (Go High); seek first-time visitors in new markets and long-standing source markets (Go New Customer); and try to balance out the seasonality factor by generating more demand in the "Green Season" (Go Low); alongside efforts to strengthen Thailand's image to maintain its competitive edge.

Other products, such as homestays, walking streets and local cuisine (Go Local), will also be promoted; while new digital technologies will be deployed to reach potential customers (Go Digital).

TAT aims to boost tourism revenues by 10 per cent this year.

Experiences spotlight



Chinatown Unplugged Walking Tour

Experience Thai Culture To Save It may well be the theme when it comes to salvaging the country's vanishing cultural traditions, from craftsmanship to cuisine, which are at risk of being lost as last-generation artists, chefs and business owners strive to carry on their legacy sans successors.

As a way of preserving Thai traditions and intangible culture heritage, many community-based tourism operators and social businesses seek to link travellers to local communities through immersive travel experiences.

Travell Thailand tracks the fascinating journey of making an alms bowl by hand with its A Day As A Monk Alms-Bowl Maker tour; while Bangkok Vanguard's spotlights disappearing neighborhoods, many of which are in the process of being torn down to give way for urbanisation, in its Chinatown Unplugged walking tour.

Elsewhere, HiveSters brings attention to the vanishing art of Thailand's ancient dance-drama Lakhon Chatri and Lai Rot Nam (Thai lacquer works); while Local Alike serves up fine dining of local community menus crafted by celebrity chefs via its Local Aroi initiative, all of which are available for booking by private tours.

Airlines update



Budget carrier FlyDubai launched daily Krabi-Dubai flights via its Boeing 737-Max 8 in December 2019, providing a further boost to Middle-eastern arrivals into the Thai province which is home to popular leisure destinations such as Phi Phi Islands, Ao Nang, Ko Phi Phi Don, and Ko Lanta.

With Krabi International Airport adding a third terminal to double its capacity to eight million by 2022, one can expect

even more carriers to eye future routes to the Thai province.

Luc Citrinot, a consultant in tourism and air transport, suggested that Gulf carriers are closely watching route developments to Thailand. He pointed to Qatar Airways which commenced Doha-Krabi & Doha-Chiang Mai flights during the 2018-19 winter season; and Turkish Airlines, which increased its Phuket-Istanbul capacity to four direct flights per week as of July 2019.

He predicts greater activity on the Middle-east to Thailand sector compared to Europe to Thailand, due to "a current lack of demand and limited margins" in the latter.

New services coming online this year that will benefit European inbound to Thailand include Thai Airways International's additional capacity for its Vienna-Don Muang flight between October 27, 2019 and March 2020; seasonal flights by Finnair to Phuket and Krabi from Helsinki; and AirAsia X's Bangkok-Prague daily flight in late 2020 with its Airbus A330s.

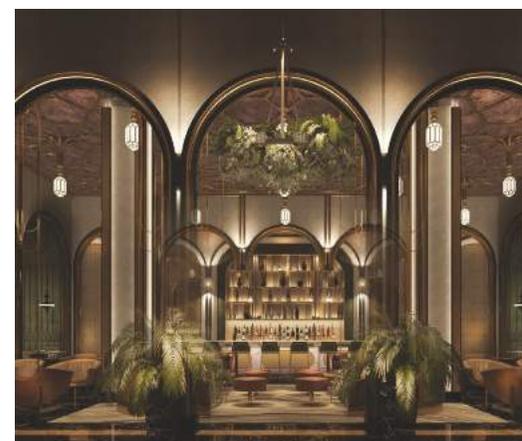
Hotels update

In 2019, Thailand welcomed South-east Asia's first Waldorf Astoria, as well as the country's maiden Capella and Rosewood properties. Bangkok also saw further expansions on a slew of mixed-use developments and integrated resorts, including Iconsiam and Mahanakhon Bangkok; the openings of Samyan Mitrtown & Sindhorn Village; and the continued construction of One Bangkok (towards a 2022 opening).

The year also saw the Queen Sirikit National Convention Center demolished via a six billion baht (US\$1.9 billion) renovation that will expand its capacity to 10,000 pax by 2022, and the flagship Dusit Thani hotel torn down to make way for mixed-use project Dusit Central Park (opening 2024).

The Thai hotel landscape will continue to see changes this year, with many more upscale openings, such as Four Seasons Hotel Bangkok at Chao Phraya River (April 2020); and new brand launches in Thailand, including the world's first Orient Express hotel (at Mahanakhon Bangkok), Carlton's

entry with the Carlton Hotel Bangkok Sukhumvit, Kimpton Maa-Lai Bangkok & Staybridge Suites Bangkok Thonglor by IHG, and Sindhorn Midtown by Siam Sindhorn (March 2020). Other expected openings in southern Thailand in 2020 include Banyan Tree Krabi, Sheraton Phuket Grand Bay Resort, Park Inn by Radisson Phuket Town, and SO Sofitel Samui & SO Sofitel Beach House Samui.



Four Seasons Hotel Bangkok at Chao Phraya River

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The city constantly reinvents itself by adding new attractions to its repertoire as well as flights from Europe, allowing it to continue to appeal to this priority market

Steadfast growth

Europe continues to favour Singapore, posting record arrivals for the city-state. **Pamela Chow** finds out how the country stays relevant amid greater volatility.

Singapore continues to be a choice destination for traditional European markets, including the UK, Germany and France. The three markets provided increasing numbers of visitors to the city-state in 2019, according to latest statistics from the Singapore Tourism Board (STB).

More than 607,000 travellers from the UK, more than 380,000 from Germany, and more than 212,000 from France visited Singapore in 2019.

Of these, Germany posted the largest growth of 6.7 per cent, compared to the same period in 2018.

In total, Europe sent some 2.1 million travellers to Singapore in 2019, a year-on-year increase of 3.3 per cent. The market accounted for about 11 per cent of Singapore's total international visitor arrivals.

Not only has the European market been performing well, it shows great growth potential, noted Carrie Kwik, regional director, Europe, STB.

Increasing brand awareness of Singapore in Europe will allow the city-state to "counter increasing global volatility" by diversifying its inbound markets beyond Asia, explained Kwik.

In January, STB attended Fitur 2020

travel and tourism tradeshow in Madrid with Singapore Airlines and Changi Airport Group (CAG), clearly demonstrating the tourism office's commitment to wooing European travellers. STB will continue to do so by participating in other European travel tradeshows, said Kwik.

Promoting the fly-cruise segment is top on the agenda. STB has signed a partnership with Royal Caribbean International and CAG to ensure seamless inter-modal transfer for travellers.

The partnership looks to generate S\$430 million (US\$309 million) in tourism receipts between end-2019 and 2024.

Airlines update

Singapore Airlines (SIA) is expanding its Europe network. In December last year, the national carrier announced that it would be introducing non-stop flights on its new Singapore-Brussels route come October 25 this year.

Subject to regulatory approval, the Singapore-Brussels flight, SQ304, is set to depart from Changi Airport on Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Sundays at 23.55 and arrive in the Belgian capital the next day, at 06.50.

Similarly pending approval is the return sector, which will be operated as flight SQ303. It is slated to depart Brussels on Mondays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 11.20 and arrive in Singapore at 06.55.

Adding to the the roster of low-cost carriers connecting Singapore and Europe is Jetstar Asia, the Asian arm of the Australian-based Jetstar Airways.

The carrier has announced a codeshare arrangement with Air France and Dutch carrier KLM for 12 selected routes in South-east Asia. Meanwhile, Jetstar Airways Qantas Group, will partner solely with KLM. Jetstar Airways is the leisure arm of Qantas.

Under the codeshare arrangement, Air France and KLM will place their AF/KL codes on 12 destinations operated by Jetstar Asia. This will allow Air France and KLM's customers to enjoy access to a wider range of destinations in

South-east Asia by connecting through Jetstar Asia flights in Singapore.

Russian carrier Aeroflot will also debut the first non-stop service between Singapore and Moscow's Sheremetyevo International Airport from October 25, via a five-weekly service on an Airbus A350-900 aircraft.



lyf Funan Singapore opened in September 2019

Hotels update

To quench the modern traveller's thirst for memorable experiences, Singapore's hoteliers are getting creative. They are introducing immersive and fun-filled concepts into their properties to reinvent the hospitality experience.

A prime example of this is Ascott's co-living brand lyf's first property, lyf Funan Singapore, which was launched in September last year.

The 412-room co-living property is nine storeys high. Besides studio apartments, lyf Funan houses four- and six-bedroom apartments that feature individual bedrooms complete with shared living, kitchen and bathroom spaces.

Common areas for all of lyf Funan's guests include a communal space that doubles up as a co-working spot, an open gym, as well as a social kitchen. Guests can participate in activities organised by lyf and Funan Mall's tenants, such as a series of rooftop barefoot yoga classes that were held in March.

Mindy Teo, deputy managing director, lyf, said: "Today's travellers, especially millennials, are looking for experiences that are local, authentic and that add value to their lives."

lyf Funan responds to this by offering guests a fresh experience of community living, and a space where they can build connections and exchange ideas, explained Teo.

In May 2019, Capri by Fraser, China Square opened. It boasts communal spaces such as the Den – a 24/7 hub with designer furniture, wireless charging pads, games and refreshments – and self-service laundrette Spin & Play, which features an Atari Pong set-up.

Coming in mid-2020 is Far East Hospitality (FEH)'s The Clan, FEH's response to a new demand for hotels that boast a stylish design, a strong sense of place, as well as quality service to match, said Arthur Kiong, CEO, FEH.

Reminiscent of how clan associations took care of early migrants to Singapore, the 324-room hotel will emphasise the concepts of kinship and community. Guests have the opportunity to meet local craftsmen and go on precinct tours.

"Guests will be treated like a member of an exclusive club, receiving special privileges at popular lifestyle establishments," he said.

Meanwhile, Singapore hospitality company Next Story Group is bringing its community-focused brand Ink Hotels from Melbourne to Singapore.

Set to open in 2021, the Singapore property will feature social public spaces where locals and travellers can exchange ideas and stories.

DESTINATION: SINGAPORE

What to buy

Raffles Hotel Singapore

After 2.5 years of restoration work, the iconic property reopened in August 2019 with an all-suite concept. There are 115 keys across nine suite categories, from the lead-in State Room Suites to the Presidential Suites. Visitors can choose between five restaurants and six bars, including the well-known Long Bar and its most famous cocktail, the Singapore Sling, as well as French restaurant La Dame de Pic by Anne-Sophie Pic of Valence's three-Michelin-star Maison de Pic fame.

Siloso Green

Singapore's offshore destination Sentosa has welcomed a new waterfront lifestyle quarter, Siloso Green, which is located on the western end of the island. Boasting a shipping container theme, the 24,500m² Siloso Green houses eateries, shops, event spaces, as well as waterfront accommodation. Featuring bars, food trucks, innovative business concepts and live music, the enclave was introduced to boost Sentosa's roster of night activities.

New attractions at Jewel Changi Airport

Jewel Changi Airport's latest additions include the Changi Experience Studio and Canopy Park, which take the air hub's transit offerings to the next level. Spread across the 3,000m² Changi Experience

Studio's ten zones are interactive games, projection storytelling, immersive shows, as well as gallery exhibits. The Canopy Park is a 14,000m² expanse of recreational facilities, which comprise eight F&B outlets; events space Cloud9 Piazza; seven play areas, interactive gardens, and the glass-floored Canopy Bridge, which is suspended 23m above the ground.

NERF Action Xperience

Singapore communication design group Kingsmen Creatives has launched the

world's first NERF Action Xperience in Marina Square. The arena spans more than 1,600m² and encompasses four play zones themed after extreme environments. The Compete zone features the world's Zombie City and Camp Dune, which test teamwork and strategy; the Conquer zone offers obstacle courses like rope courses; the Challenge zone has mini zip lines and a NERF dart ball pool for children aged six and under; while the Create zone allows visitors to tie-dye T-shirts using paint from NERF guns.



Kingsmen Creatives' NERF Action Xperience boasts play zones themed after extreme environments



Kampong Glam's Gelam Outdoor Gallery

Experiences spotlight

Singapore is shaping up to be a prime destination for art enthusiasts. STB and the National Gallery Singapore have announced a partnership to launch four special art exhibitions over the next four years featuring renowned artists. The first two shows, Matisse & Picasso and Nam June Paik, will open in May 2020 and Oct 2021 respectively.

Fans of graffiti can also take to the alleys of Singapore to enjoy strikingly beautiful street art tucked away in lesser-known corners of the city. Monster Day Tours conducts free walking tours through some of these works in painted alleys of Kampong Glam and Little India.

Visitors can also check out the newly-rejuvenated Kampong Glam's Gelam Outdoor Gallery and go mural-hunting among the shophouses of Tiong Bahru.

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All in good order

Fresh hotel openings, a more visible presence at European-based tradeshow, and new air routes bode well for Vietnam tourism, writes **Marissa Carruthers**



The UNESCO-listed Ha Long Bay in the Gulf of Tonkin comprises some 1,600 islands and islets

Vietnam continues to pique Europe's interest, evidenced by the 6.4 per cent jump in European arrivals for 2019.

According to the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT), there were more than 2.1 million visitors from Europe in 2019 out of the total international visitorship of 18 million.

Russia topped the European table with 646,524 arrivals, a 6.6 per cent increase. UK arrivals climbed 5.7 per cent to 315,084 visitors. France was the third strongest source market, with 287,655

travellers representing a 2.9 per cent rise.

But the most impressive performance was by Finland, which put in a 94.3 per cent increment to produce 21,480 visitors for Vietnam in 2019. In 2018, there were just 2,654 arrivals from Finland.

In 2019, VNAT held roadshows in Russia as well as a series of tourism exchange events, which it said helped raised destination interest.

A series of other promotional activities are planned across Europe in 2020. VNAT is here at ITB Berlin and will attend WTM London. Fam trips are in the pipeline to

introduce new products and emerging destinations across the country.

In December 2019, authorities announced plans to continue visa exemptions for visitors from a swathe of countries until the end of 2022. This includes Russia, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Belarus.

VNAT has also set its sights set firmly on the UK market for 2020. In November, it opened its first overseas office in London. With this opening, Vietnam aims to attract 500,000 visitors from the market by 2023.



Banh mi and pho

Experiences spotlight

Vietnam is famed across the globe for its food and innovative new products aim to showcase the country's culinary delights.

The country's diverse street food can be sampled on dedicated foodie tours on the back of a Vespa in Hue, Hanoi, Hoi An and Ho Chi Minh City. On top of tasting Vietnamese staples, including fragrant pho, banh mi and fresh goi cuon spring rolls, visitors can connect with communities and visit the farmers growing the ingredients as the country's agricultural tourism sector develops. This includes visiting rural rice farming communities, sugar cane producers, and villages creating the country's favourite foods.

Local authorities in Hue have also unveiled plans to position the ancient city as the country's cuisine capital. It already serves almost 1,700 of the country's 3,000 dishes, with work underway to promote the region's signature eats.

In response, a range of gastronomy-centred tours has been developed to promote local cuisines, with a focus on street dishes, royal favourites, ancient recipes and Hue vegetarian food.

Hotels update

Leading hospitality brands are tapping into Vietnam's potential as they expand their presence in the destination.

In September 2019, InterContinental Hotels Group's Holiday Inn-brand made its Vietnamese debut with the opening of 350-room Holiday Inn & Suites Saigon Airport.

This year got off to a good start with Accor opening its first Mercure in south Vietnam. In January, the 80-key Mercure Vung Tau Resort opened on Nghinh Phong Cape in Bien Hoa Province.

Also in Vung Tau, homegrown wellness brand, Fusion expanded its portfolio, opening Fusion Suites Vung Tau in

the same month. The 19-floor property features 171 suites and apartments, and forms part of the company's plans to triple its properties in developing destinations by 2023.

Meanwhile, Radisson Hotel Group recently opened a 292-key beachfront resort in Cam Ranh Bay, with five further projects listed in the pipeline – Radisson Blu Hoi An, Radisson Blu Resort, Quy Nhon, Radisson Resort Phu Quoc Long Beach, Radisson Hotel Danang and Radisson Hotel Quang Bin.

In addition, Thai hotel operator Centara set a target to launch at least 20 hotels across the country by 2024.



Fusion Suites Vung Tau

Airlines update



Vietnam Airlines commenced flights to Phuket, Thailand last October

Europe looks set to get better connected with Vietnam, thanks to several new routes scheduled for launch this year.

Privately-owned homegrown airline, Bamboo Airways, launched operations in 2017. Late last year, it received its first Boeing 787-9 and announced plans to connect Prague, Czech Republic, with the Vietnamese capital of Hanoi from April.

In December, Russia's S7 Airlines started weekly direct flights from Vladivostok to Cam Ranh International Airport. This is close to the coastal resort of Nha Trang, a popular destination with the Russian market.

The launch of a series of new connec-

tions with other popular regional destinations is also predicted to boost multi-destination travel throughout the region.

For example, in October, Vietnam Airlines started thrice-weekly flights from Ho Chi Minh City to Phuket, Thailand.

In December, Vietjet started operating daily return flights between Danang and Singapore, and Danang and Hong Kong. In January, the LCC followed up with daily flights connecting Hanoi and Bali.

Vietravel Airlines – owned by Vietnam's tour operator Vietravel – will also begin operations this year, making it the sixth domestic airline to launch in the country.

Up in arms against human trafficking

With sexual exploitation and modern slavery still rearing its prevalent head in Asia, authorities are joining forces with the tourism sector to stem the tide of human trafficking. By **Rosa Ocampo**



Asia's travel and tourism sector is progressively joining the fight against human trafficking – which includes the sexual exploitation of children and women – as the region remains one of the world's hotspots for this modern day scourge.

Criminals have become more sophisticated and organised with the advent of the Internet, online social networks and new ways of travelling in what C9 Hotelworks' managing director Bill Barnett termed the "gentrification of the institutional sex industry" in his 2018 report, *Of Condos and Condoms*.

Harrowing are the latest statistics from the International Labor Organization (ILO). Roughly 40.3 million people across the world were victims of modern slavery in 2016, including 24.9 million in forced labour. The latter is divided into: 16 million in domestic work, construction and agriculture in the private sector; 4.8 million sexually exploited adults and children; and four million in state-imposed forced labour.

Asia-Pacific accounted for almost two-thirds of the 24.9 million forced labour victims. "More than seven in 10 victims of forced sexual exploitation worldwide were found in the Asia and Pacific region. Although males are also victims of sexual exploitation, they are overwhelmingly outstripped by females," ILO said.

Such is the dark side of tourism, rooted in poverty and the unintended downside of the growth in travel and tourism. Actual numbers are likely higher as these crimes are clandestine in nature and many go unreported.

In ECPAT Thailand's 2017 report, *Sexual Exploitation of Children in Southeast Asia*, author Deanna Davy wrote: "Whilst traditional destinations for foreign child sex offenders such as Thailand and the Philippines continue to attract child sex offenders, countries such as Cambodia, Vietnam and Indonesia are increasingly becoming popular destinations as well."

"Countries that had in the past not been affected by the sexual exploitation of children (SEC) on a significant scale, such as Laos and Myanmar, are becoming increasingly popular tourism destinations and studies suggest that SEC is now in these countries also, albeit on a lesser scale than that which is occurring in more popular SEC hotspots in other countries," Davy noted.

Inadvertently, Asia's hospitality industry has become the unwitting accomplice in human trafficking as aircraft and land transport, hotels and home rentals, and other sectors are the main points of contact between the perpetrators and their victims.

Yet, the growing industry with its vast value chain and workforce – travel and tourism created 319 million jobs worldwide and one in 10 jobs in Asia-Pacific in 2018, according to WTTC – is also in a vantage position to combat human trafficking.

The levels of commitment to stem human trafficking vary, from companies integrating CSR initiatives into its operations to raising the public's and employees' awareness – all part of the Tourism Child-Protection Code of Conduct launched in the US several years ago,

which is the world's only voluntary set of business principles to prevent child trafficking.

"Asia is no longer a Third World entity. Applying the same rigorous human trafficking approach in the East as they do in the West is needed. It's long overdue and comes down to hotels and tourism doing the right thing," Barnett told the *Daily*.

IATA approved a resolution in 2018 committing to anti-trafficking initiatives such as sharing of best practices among airlines, staff training to spot and report potential trafficking cases, and urging the government to establish mechanisms for the reporting of potential trafficking activity.

The Association of Asia Pacific Airlines' (AAPA) director general, Andrew Herdman, said that AAPA is "fully supportive" of IATA's range of initiatives, as aviation plays a key role "in assisting governments and national law enforcement agencies in combating such criminal activities".

Since February 2018, the government has enlisted national carrier and AAPA member Thai Airways to play anti-trafficking inflight videos on its international routes.

The videos are also being shown in airports, shopping malls, movie theatres, train stations and other tourist hotspots as part of the Thai government's efforts in tackling human trafficking.

Elsewhere, AirAsia has started training staff to spot and stop human trafficking since 2017. Yap Mun Ching, executive director of Air Asia Foundation, shared: "We have trained over 1,200 staff and crew as of now, and we plan to introduce

the training for ground staff (in 2020).

"We don't have numbers and actual reports that we can share as these are investigative matters, but we can confirm that suspected trafficking cases have been identified and reported by our crew."

Marriott International has implemented its human trafficking awareness training in Asia-Pacific since 2018. "As of end-June (2019), 77 per cent of our on-property associates across Asia-Pacific have completed the training. And the completion rate averages 85 per cent across the Philippines, China, Hong Kong, Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia," said Yuen Kwan Cheung, senior manager, corporate communications and social impact, Asia-Pacific.

All of Marriott's on-property associates worldwide would have completed the training by 2025. New associates are required to complete the training within the first 90 days of employment as part of Marriott's 2025 sustainability and social impact goals.

Homesharing behemoth Airbnb leverages technology in its collaborations with local law enforcement officials and anti-trafficking advocates around the world to stop trafficking and hold criminals accountable.

A spokesman in Asia-Pacific said: "Airbnb uses sophisticated technology and risk scoring of every reservation to try and prevent incidents from occurring."

He added that the company recently partnered anti-trafficking organisation Polaris "to combine their long-standing expertise with the innovation and scale of the sharing economy to take a modern approach to modern slavery".

Meanwhile, ridehailing giant Grab joined hands with Liberty Shared in January 2019 to train its drivers to spot and report human trafficking crimes.

"The training will be updated to include modules specifically aimed to protect and support women and children, and (Grab) will work with local governments in their respective countries to support the implementation of the training programmes," said Arvi Lopez, public relations manager of Grab Philippines.

"Grab's customer experience representatives will undergo a training programme to equip them with the skills to manage reports of human trafficking flagged by driver-partners, even as Grab is already working with the local police in the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia (to combat trafficking)," Lopez said.

Besides Thailand, the Philippines has also recently stepped up anti-human trafficking initiatives, backed by various government agencies such as the Department of Tourism as well as global networks, ECPAT International and Friends International, which both actively protect women and children in various Asian countries.

Philippine tourism secretary Bernadette Romulo Puyat said that as anti-human trafficking is part of tourism's sustainability ethos, they will also provide trainings and seminars for the safety of women and children, and help train tourism frontliners to play a role in prevention.

Indeed, while tourism boosts economic growth, it can also endanger the lives of the most vulnerable groups in society, including children and women, if not carried out responsibly and with proper planning.

Much ado about branding

In this roundtable discussion, travel experts from across Asia-Pacific examine and debate the value of hotel branding as travellers gravitate towards unique accommodation experiences amid an increasingly complex hospitality marketplace burgeoning with new lifestyle brands



Hui Juan Lim, co-founder and COO, Quotient TravelPlanner Singapore



Audrey Marc, deputy general manager, Asia World Indonesia



Ally Bhoonee, executive director, World Avenues Malaysia



Charlotte Harris, director, Charlotte Travel Hong Kong



Arokia Das Anthony, director, Luxury Tours Malaysia



Sandy Ho, country manager China & Hong Kong, Buffalo Tours



Marciano C Ragaza III, president, Travel Enterprise Corp Philippines

TTG Asia: What key changes are you seeing for hospitality brands? Are brands still relevant?

Lim: Chain hotels felt quite sterile and were geared towards efficiency when we started out 12 years ago. However, in the last few years, we've seen big brands starting to soften and incorporate properties with a sense of place. They're no longer in glassy buildings, but can be housed in historical buildings. These hotels can now create a measured experience for travellers; they have good service; and they know how to operate a hotel well. Big brands can now have a boutique feel, and they know travellers are looking for a variety of experiences, not just the singular feeling of staying in a Hyatt or Westin. With boutique hotels, there is the risk of having to deal with weak booking and payment mechanisms.

Harris: With more hotels consolidating and brands merging under one umbrella, we are seeing an even stronger sense of consistency among hotels under the same brand, leading to an increase in brand loyalty.

Ho: Customers are focusing less on brands but rather on good service standards and price value. Travellers are also seeking options for smaller, independent accommodation with less facilities and

F&B outlets. Brands may still be relevant to corporate travellers and luxury clients, but leisure travellers are now more attracted to residential-style accommodation that are well connected to shopping areas and restaurants.

Marc: Main hotel chains nowadays prefer to invest in acquisitions and huge marketing campaigns instead of developing new products and services for their customers. Their focus seems to be on expanding faster globally and in some cases at the expense of guests' demand for good service, amenities and comfort.

Anthony: Brands will become more relevant. It is the brands that will ride out Airbnb's rapid expansion. Branded hotels have strong brand loyalty and this will remain. While a small percentage of market share may be lost to Airbnb and other short term accommodation services, the majority of travellers are still keen on staying in branded properties they are familiar with. Brands are also relevant for well-heeled travellers who seek good service, comfort, familiarity of brand and a personal touch.

Bhoonee: Brands will still remain relevant to people with status as they have always been brand conscious. Also with brands, travellers can expect a consistent level of service at the hotel regardless of

which part of the world they are in. There are no surprises for the customer. Brands also offer loyalty reward programmes and this is an added value.

TTG Asia: What hotel branding trends and preferences do you notice among your clients, especially younger travellers who are said to be more brand agnostic?

Marc: The younger generation is looking for new and unique experiences (which explains the growing trend for boutique hotels over standard hotel chains). The power of Instagram also emphasises the demand for independent hotels and villas; millennials crave inclusion and recognition from their online community, so they tend to gravitate towards places with social media credibility which also explains the rise in popularity of villa rentals.

Harris: The current trend among younger travellers is lifestyle travel and we are seeing many hotel brands edging towards this by combining high-quality services and personalised amenities and touches. With Hyatt developing the Andaz brand and Marriott with Edition, millennials are able to stay loyal to a larger umbrella brand, yet find a concept that meets their personalities and requirements.

BHOONEE: Millennials often seek hotels that offer wellness facilities such as spa, gym, rooftop bar and restaurants offering healthy cuisines due to a growing wave of health consciousness. Location is also important – hotels that are close to popular shopping districts and spots, or near the beach tend to be more attractive to them. Millennials are willing to pay more for the location of hotels that meet their requirements; as compared with their counterparts a decade ago who tended to be more careful with their spending and went just for the basics.

Ho: Younger travellers want an environment focused on wellness, offering simple yet stylish comforts, and at a good price point. Personalised services are growing in demand. To tap into the young travellers market, direct online marketing and social media channels are the way to go.

Lim: We have younger clients who grew up staying at big hotel chains with their

parents, and they would ask us to book them in those hotels. But we also have both young and old guests who are willing to try boutique brands.

Anthony: India and regional markets are cost-conscious. Even the well-to-do would rather stay in a three- or four-star property or local brand rather than in a five-star branded accommodation. They don't mind staying a little bit out of the central area if it gives them some savings and which can then be spent on other things like entertainment and shopping.

Millennial travellers see the hotel as just a place to stay. They are not looking to have the full hotel experience.

In the past, staying in a branded property was part of the bragging rights. Today, travellers use social media to share or brag about their experiences.

TTG Asia: What benefits and trade-offs have come with the spate of boutique brand buyouts by bigger chains? How does it impact your customers and you as a travel expert?

Marc: Greater access to powerful marketing funds has been a major benefit, along with bigger customer databases and improved efficiency in booking systems and websites. But, of course, all these have come at a cost. The trade-offs would be a proportionate tightening of rules and regulations, combined with a lack of flexibility in terms of sales, distribution and marketing.

As a DMC, we are facing more difficulties with regard to contracting and special deals. Big hotel chains are growing increasingly intransigent in promoting the best rates on their own websites rather than through a more flexible independent.

Ho: The concern will be that pricing structures will be affected as bigger hotel companies are likely to demand control on yield with less competition. We can see commissions getting less down the line when dealing with big hotel companies versus boutique hotels.

Also, some global brand hotels are allowing commissions only if clients pay BAR rates directly at the hotel which adds to the challenge of working with them. Global brand hotels should expect to see a significant drop in sales over time.

HARRIS: We see benefits of cross-selling within different hotels that fall under a single brand. Clients are keen to chase points and utilise them whenever they can. If they are able to do this at different hotels, then we're only seeing positive feedback from our clients.

Ragaza III: Boutique hotels usually shunned by travellers who are more comfortable staying with branded hotels will gain more acceptance with these buyouts. As a travel agent, I too will be more confident recommending such boutique ho-



Above: Moxy Boston Downtown

tels. But that won't matter for the adventurous and bargain hunters.

TTG Asia: What future do you see for smaller independent brands?

Lim: There is always space for everything, even smaller hotels. Every client is different and there are always going to be travellers who want to stay in a smaller, independent property. This is especially the case in Japan, where a lot of family-run ryokans operate very smoothly and are very popular.

Bhoone: There will still be a big market for boutique hotels or independent brands. Affluent Malaysian travellers like niche boutique hotel experiences that offer personalised services. They stay away from big hotels and crowded all-day dining experiences. Independent hotels that offer unique designs or experiences and an atmosphere unlike a large commercial hotel tend to be of greater interest to Malaysians.

Anthony: It will get harder for boutique hotels or smaller independent brands to survive as the majority of business is driven online. The big chains will win because they have marketing budgets that run in the millions and billions.

In my opinion, smaller hotels with small budgets will cease to exist because they cannot compete. Existing independently managed hotels that have been around for a decade or more provide good service, but unfortunately the newer ones seem to only provide lip service to what they promise.

Ragaza III: Eventually, as a new generation of frequent travellers become more savvy in choosing and staying in lesser known hotels or brands, these independent brands will be mainstream too. Word of mouth through travel agents, social media and friends will help them.

HARRIS: Personalised guest engagement based on local experiences is what results in client satisfaction. Those looking for a unique, one-of-a-kind stay will prefer to stay in a boutique hotel which are usually more innovative, trendy and quirky.

TTG Asia: What are your thoughts on hotel chains' efforts to acquire or partner with boutique and independent brands? Do we still need more brands?

Marc: Boutique brands, even those by mega hotel chains, can offer good service and a cosier and intimate ambience, which is what the market wants. However, these hotels tend to remain quite generic and reflect the style of a chain hotel.

Ho: We definitely welcome more brand diversity in the market. Tour operators and DMCs can service client needs a lot better if we are able to offer more options to both the corporate and leisure markets.

HARRIS: Different brands cater to different travellers and needs. I, for example, may look for a specific brand when I am travelling alone on business. However, I might look for another type of brand when I am travelling with my family. I would be interested to see if hotel brands are able to find a market gap and a unique concept to fill it.

Anthony: Brands are good for a destina-

tion. They have their own niche segments, own clientele and they bring prestige to a destination. Having lots of brands in a single destination suggests that the destination is safe.

However, launching more 'boutique' brands in tourist destinations such as Kuala Lumpur, Melaka, Penang, Johor will also cannibalise existing market share unless tourist arrivals into Malaysia grows exponentially.

Ragaza III: Having more or less brands is not the issue, but rather having quality hotels at price levels acceptable to the market. There will always be a market for all types of accommodations. The main beneficiaries of this trend are the travellers.

Reporting by S Puvaneswary, Prudence Lui, Mimi Hudoyo, Pamela Chow and Rosa Ocampo



Andaz Singapore

Happy airports roll in dough

Traveller satisfaction should be a paramount concern for airports and travel brands as a recent Collinson report showed that happy travellers are more likely to spend at the airport



Retail spending in airports linked to travellers' satisfaction: Collinson

Happy travellers are likelier to splurge at the airport, according to new research from Collinson, urging airports and their ecosystem of travel-related businesses and brands to prioritise traveller satisfaction across the entire journey so as to increase passenger dwell time and spend.

Collinson's Airport Journey report surveyed 6,667 people across 11 countries in the Americas; Europe, the Middle East, Africa (EMEA); and Asia-Pacific to track evolving traveller preferences and behaviours, and learn more about travellers' satisfaction with the airport experience.

Overall, traveller satisfaction with the airport experience is on the rise, found the report. In 2019, 63% of global travellers said they enjoy the airport experience, a jump of 13 percentage points from 2018 when only 50% of travellers said the same. Collinson's 2019 data drew on five additional markets not included in the 2018 data; with markets held constant, a jump of eight percentage points year-on-year was recorded.

However, there is a significant gulf between traveller satisfaction in Asia and the Middle East, compared to the US and Europe. On average, three in four travellers (74%) across markets like India, China and the UAE enjoy the airport experience, compared to less than half (48%) across markets like the US, the UK and Germany.

The polarisation in airport experience should concern airports and their ecosystem of businesses since the research found that happy travellers spend more.

Nearly nine in 10 (88%) travellers who routinely spend over US\$200 at the airport said the airport experience is an enjoyable part of the journey. Contrarily, the least satisfied travellers spend less than US\$28, among whom only 40% saying that they enjoy the airport experience.

Mignon Buckingham, corporate strategy officer, Collinson, said: "It may seem unsurprising that happy customers spend more, but the devil is in the detail. The airport experience is fragmented and relies on an ecosystem of players, including airlines, airport authorities, security and operational service providers, merchants, duty-free, retailers, bars and restaurants. Dissatisfaction at any point of the airport journey can trigger a loss in overall satisfaction and have a knock-on impact for all other players.

"The staggering differences in satisfaction rates in Asia and the Middle East compared to Europe and the US point to a variety of conclusions. Asia and the Middle East are leading international tourism growth, with arrival numbers growing by 6% and 8% from January to June 2019, respectively. This boom in tourism arrivals and the regions' growing middle class are major motivations for the development of new airports and the evolution of existing ones.

"Without the long-standing legacy infrastructure that other regions must contend with, airports in Asia and the Middle East can build ultra-modern facilities, cherry-pick best-of-breed features, and keep the customer experience absolutely central to it all. These are no doubt contributing factors to travellers' strong enjoyment of the airport experience in these regions."

Asia-Pacific has been called the busiest area on Earth for airport development, accounting for 48.5% of global spend on airport upgrades and 57% of investment in new airports. Starting from scratch in very recent years means airports in Asia and the Middle East can leverage innovative design and offer seamless technology and services to passengers, as seen in some of the world's top airports like Singapore Changi, Incheon International

and Dubai International.

On the other hand, airports in the US and Europe must contend with how to update long-standing facilities to accommodate booming passenger numbers. Europe and the US are home to the world's 10 oldest airports, while the average US airport is over 40 years old.

Mignon continued: "But infrastructure alone does not deliver traveller satisfaction. With so many innovative travel experience solutions now coming to market, this is an exciting time for airports in every region to consider new ways to boost traveller satisfaction and spend. Airports in Asia and the Middle East can integrate trailblazing products and services into their offering, to ensure travellers' on-the-ground experience matches the airports' modern physical infrastructure.

"A brand new terminal may look impressive to a traveller, but unless the services offered are equally cutting-edge, customers won't be satisfied. Airports in the US and Europe have a different challenge and must seek out solutions that enable a seamless journey and offer unexpected moments of delight, so that no matter the age of the infrastructure, travellers enjoy a world-class airport experience."

New opportunities to help improve traveller satisfaction

Collinson's Airport Journey research indicates many key opportunities for airports and other businesses to enhance traveller satisfaction and encourage engagement and spend. Travellers want more opportunities to take control and create a smooth, enjoyable trip even before the journey begins, with nearly three in four (70%) saying they would consider pre-ordering food and beverage if the option was available.

More than half (53%) of travellers who spend upwards of US\$150 on retail said they do not spend more because of baggage restrictions, and 39% would spend more if a delivery or collection service was offered.

The travel retail app Inflyter is currently working to connect airports and duty-free providers to deliver services which will allow travellers to pre-order and collect duty-free purchases on their inbound

journey or have them delivered to an airport lounge.

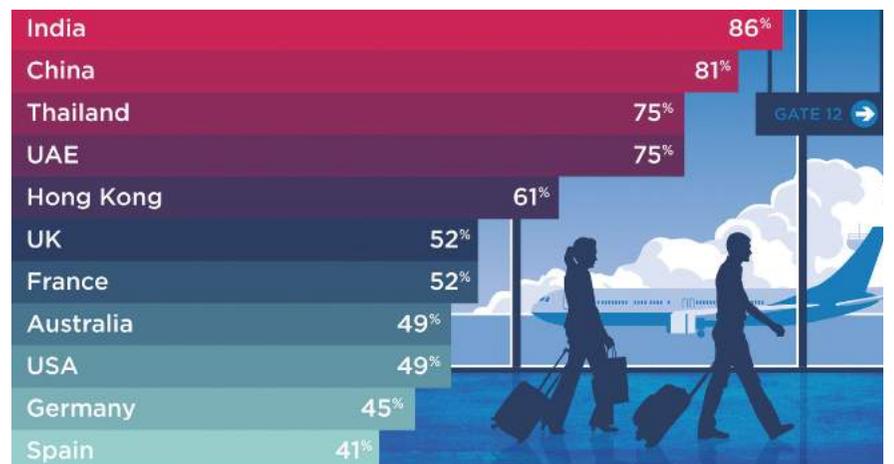
Travellers want relevant marketing communications

Another key finding from Collinson's Airport Journey research is that there is considerable opportunity for airports to improve their traveller relationships via communications. Nearly one in two travellers (45%) receive communications at times when they are not planning to travel; indicating a lack of relevance and personalisation, not to mention wasted marketing spend for airport businesses and brands.

An explanation for this may be that, in the absence of a structured loyalty or engagement programme, many airports have no means of knowing when customers will be travelling. Still, 48% of travellers said they receive communications that encourage them to spend more time at the airport, and another 46% said receiving discounts ahead of travel encourages them to shop and dine at the airport. Both points reveal that travellers are in fact open to receiving marketing-driven communications from the airport, if these are relevant and tailored.

Mignon added: "Traveller satisfaction with airports is improving, but there is still a significant gap between travellers' ideal experience and what airports deliver. Our research shows a number of opportunities where all of us in the travel experience landscape can help to give travellers a little more luxury, comfort and peace of mind right across their journey.

"For example, when we know who the traveller is, we can make their experience smoother via inbound or in-lounge duty-free collection services or the ability to pre-order airport meals. Travellers can also be incentivised with card- and payment-linked offers that are personalised and relevant. Ultimately, communications is key, which is why Collinson is focused on helping our partners get to know individual travellers better so that we can provide them with timely information and tailored offers that make the journey more efficient, enjoyable and stress-free."



% of travellers across various markets who enjoy the airport experience, according to global Collinson Airport Journey research

Plotting path of success

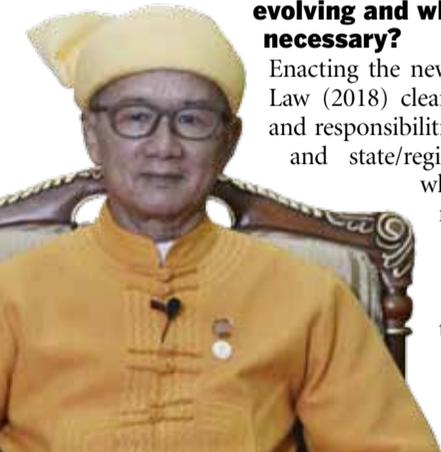
Tourism heads from Myanmar and Thailand share with *TTG Show Daily* their goals for the industry, and plans to ensure sustainable development at the local level

OHN MAUNG

Union minister for hotels and tourism, Myanmar

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

Enacting the new Myanmar Tourism Law (2018) clearly divided the roles and responsibilities between the NTO and state/regional authorities in which the NTO implements tourism policies and guidelines, supervises all tourism stakeholders and tourism businesses, and gives necessary support in coordi-



nation with relevant government organisations. Through the supportive activities of state/regional governments in their respective terrain, this has eased delivering tourism services in territories, and the organic development of destinations will be seen from 2020 onwards.

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

The goals for 2020 set by the NTO are to attract more quality visitors and to meet the five million visitors target, as well as to enhance the service quality in tourist destinations.

In light of these expectations, the NTO is deploying both online and offline marketing tools to attract visitors from East to West, establishing the structure of ASEAN-based human resource competencies and maximising available funding resources.

What opportunities are there in Myanmar in 2020 that the NTO will use to promote tourism?

Tourism is a tool for the development of the national economy. In Myanmar, we have our eyes on quality and sustainable tourism development for the long-term benefits of local communities, and also, alleviating negative impacts in tourist destinations. To promote Myanmar to the world, the relaxation of restriction on entry into the country has been made. For example, visa-on-arrival has been granted to neighbouring non-ASEAN countries, China, India, and several European nations. In addition, Myanmar is simplifying procedures for doing business and investing in Myanmar, especially in the hospitality sector. Significant exemption and tax/tariff reliefs for investment in tourism-related superstructures and MSME enterprises in emerging destinations are other key opportunities.

YUTHASAK SUPASORN

Governor, Tourism Authority of Thailand

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

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)'s visions and missions are evolving around global trends such as the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals. As a leading organisation promoting Thailand as a preferred destination, TAT is committed to making travel and tourism the kingdom's most economically promising, environmentally sustainable and culturally vibrant sector in the years to come.

TAT is marking its 60th anniversary in 2020 with core messages highlighting the importance of responsible tourism and being good hosts, having launched several projects over the past years to promote responsible and sustainable tourism including the Thailand Tourism Awards and the Sustainable Tourism Pledge with Expedia Group and UNESCO. The "Nam Jai" (Generosity;

Kindness) project urges tourism stakeholders and Thais to be hospitable hosts to all visitors. As part of TAT's CSR strategy, the "Upcycling the Oceans, Thailand" clean-up effort has been running for three years, thus reaffirming our commitment to promoting responsible tourism and our leadership role in driving green initiatives.

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

Sustainable development is core to TAT's MOVE plus initiative, which comprises: M for Marketing – marketing Thailand's attractions to increase tourism spending and strengthening its position as a preferred destination; O for Operational excellence – organisational development to foster trust both locally and internationally; V for Value creation – Local and international collaboration

throughout the tourism value chain to drive sustainable tourism; and E for Effectiveness Development of mechanism to ensure tourist confidence and satisfaction.

MOVE targets raising Thailand's tourism revenue to be among the world's top seven markets through various strategies to stimulate tourist spending in local destinations, (growing) the premium mass market, and expanding to new potential sectors by offering value for experience to all travellers.

What is the biggest opportunity your industry can leverage this year for significant growth?

With anniversary celebrations this year, TAT has set clear directions to move the Thai tourism industry out of mass tourism and towards responsible tourism with an emphasis on quality, revenue-generating tourists.



Kempinski's morning date By Caleb Richard Lai



Changing tactics

The Maldives goes digital in its promotions, while resorts offer flexibility in cancellations to hold bookings

By Pamela Chow

To navigate the Covid-19 crisis, Maldives is currently re-evaluating its marketing efforts to include strategies that double up as efficient recovery measures.

The Maldives Marketing & PR Corporation (MMPRC) will revise campaigns from what was previously a “packed calendar of marketing events in different markets”, shared Thoyyib Mohamed, its managing director.

Instead, the destination’s new marketing strategies will focus on being “more relevant and effective to its significant markets” such as China, India, Italy, France and Germany, which were Maldives’ top sources before the outbreak.

Promotional activities will also be rolled out “in order to recover the loss” of arrivals from these countries and “to keep Maldives visible” across both key and non-key markets, shared Thoyyib.

He described: “We foresee a significant impact on the tourism sector and arrivals. Chinese tourism previously contributed more than 16 per cent of total arrivals, hence the travel ban on Chinese tourists will deal a massive blow.”

Moreover, for some resorts whose market share of Chinese tourists stood at 50 per cent or more, they will definitely take a “massive hit”.

Aside from Chinese tourists, as South Korea and Italy are also affected by Cov-

id-19, other resorts have also been reporting slow pick-up in terms of arrivals.

“In coming days, we will re-evaluate the impact and bring necessary changes to our strategies. We will employ various marketing techniques and activities to reach our top markets that have been affected by Covid-19, while targeting other (non-affected) markets.”

The hope is to boost the market share from non-affected markets by promoting Maldives as a safe destination, a measure that is expected to help the destination “maintain similar arrival numbers as 2019”.

Resorts in the island nation are also undertaking measures such as allowing flexibility in cancellation – which can encourage customer bookings – while further increasing digital and social media marketing activities.

This is as the Maldives moves away from its traditional image as a romantic honeymoon destination, and is gaining popularity as an adventure, culinary and wellness destination. Such experiences will also be marketed in MMPRC’s activities this year, alongside a strengthening of 2019’s visibility campaigns.

Thoyyib shared: “With the current travel ban and the cancellation of trade fairs and mass gatherings, we will have to further explore the marketing and promotions on digital platforms.”



A rendering of a guestroom in Centara Reserve Samui

Centara’s new luxe brand

Thailand-headquartered Centara Hotels & Resorts has unveiled Centara Reserve, its latest luxury hotel concept, the first of which will be located in Thailand.

In a press statement, Centara revealed that the collection will be “dedicated to creating personal moments and memories in iconic destinations”, as well as “evoke and inspire stories old and new, enabling guests to make memories and savour new sensations”.

Centara Reserve Samui will be the first member of the Reserve collection. Formerly known as Centara Grand Beach Resort Samui, the property will undergo a transformation overseen by design and concept firm AvroKO.

Opening end-2020, Centara Reserve Samui will comprise 184 brand-new luxury rooms, pool suites and beachfront pool villas. Each accommodation will

fuse international and Thai-inspired elements, boast private balconies and terraces, while suites and villas will be attended by “Reserve Hosts” – Centara’s take on butler service.

Leading Centara Reserve Samui will be Patrick Moukarzel, the resort’s newly-appointed general manager.

Meanwhile, resort facilities will include a gin bar featuring over 100 different varieties and craft labels; a destination restaurant serving modern, seasonal cuisine; a mozzarella bar offering international fare and celebrating all things about the cheese; and a beach club concept featuring line-caught local seafood and a cultured wine list. The resort will also be home to the world’s first Cenvaree Reserve Spa.

Two more Centara Reserve properties will open before the end of the year.



An aerial view of a resort in the Maldives

In brief

Lemax brings travel tech to Berlin

Zagreb-based travel tech company Lemax is in Berlin to introduce automated back-end systems for travel operators and agencies, and is keen to expand its pool of boutique luxury clients and Asia-Pacific contacts.

Vistara strengthens ties with Sabre

Indian carrier Vistara has signed a new deal with Sabre Corporation which will enable the airline to boost its ties with

partner airlines and enhance its scheduling capabilities using components of the Sabre Commercial Platform. It has also adopted Sabre Codeshare Manager and partner solution Sabre Schedule Manager.

ITB India postponed to 2021

The inaugural edition of ITB India has also been postponed to the following year due to Covid-19. Originally scheduled for April 15-17 at the Bombay Exhibition Centre in Mumbai, the B2B tradeshow has been postponed to April 7-9, at the same venue.

Wellness takes centre stage at Sofitel Inle Lake Myat Min

In celebration of its first anniversary, Sofitel Inle Lake Myat Min has unveiled a new-to-market luxury wellness programme centred on holistic therapies, traditional treatments, nutrition, fitness coaching and educational wellness initiatives.

A first in Myanmar’s wellness space, the programme focuses on four key pillars: spa and fitness, yoga and meditation, culinary journey, and local culture and traditions.

Offerings include the Wellness Discovery package, which provides benefits such as a pre-arrival consultation, yoga sessions, customised meditation class, spa

treatments, as well as in-room wellness minibar and holistic rituals in the morning and evening.

Each guest will receive a wellness basket in their suite stocked with essentials such as a yoga mat, skipping rope, wellness ball and dumbbells. The Wellness Discovery package is available from US\$180 per person, per night.

In another first for Myanmar, Sofitel Inle Lake Myat Min has partnered with high-end cosmetic brand L’Occitane to create treatments available at the Sofitel Spa. These combine local, ancient and authentic healing practices with modern

cosmetology to provide guests with a rich selection of sophisticated massage treatments and wellness experiences.

The wellness programme is “redefining the current offering of experiences in Myanmar”, described David G Daguise, the resort’s cluster general manager.

He continued: “In this fast-paced world, we want to provide our guests with the opportunity to be transported to a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. Guests can take a back-to-basics holistic culinary journey complete with organic dishes and the utmost respect for Mother Nature.”

The wellness programmes are designed by onsite yoga master, Sudhir Thampi, with private and group yoga classes held in a series of waterfront villas perched at the edge of the lake. Chef Aung Kyaw Swar also adds to the programme through the curation of healthy and nutritious dishes – made with locally sourced organic products and regenerative ingredients – at the Roots Signature Restaurant.

Aung and his team are also supporting local communities by working closely and responsibly with producers and short food supply chains in their creation of authentic and delicious local flavours.

Additionally, Sofitel Inle Lake Myat Min maintains its own organic and hydroponic garden, which embraces local Shan methods with a contemporary approach to produce fruits, vegetables and herbs. Harvests are not only used in the kitchen and spa, but also shared with the local community and hotel staff.



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