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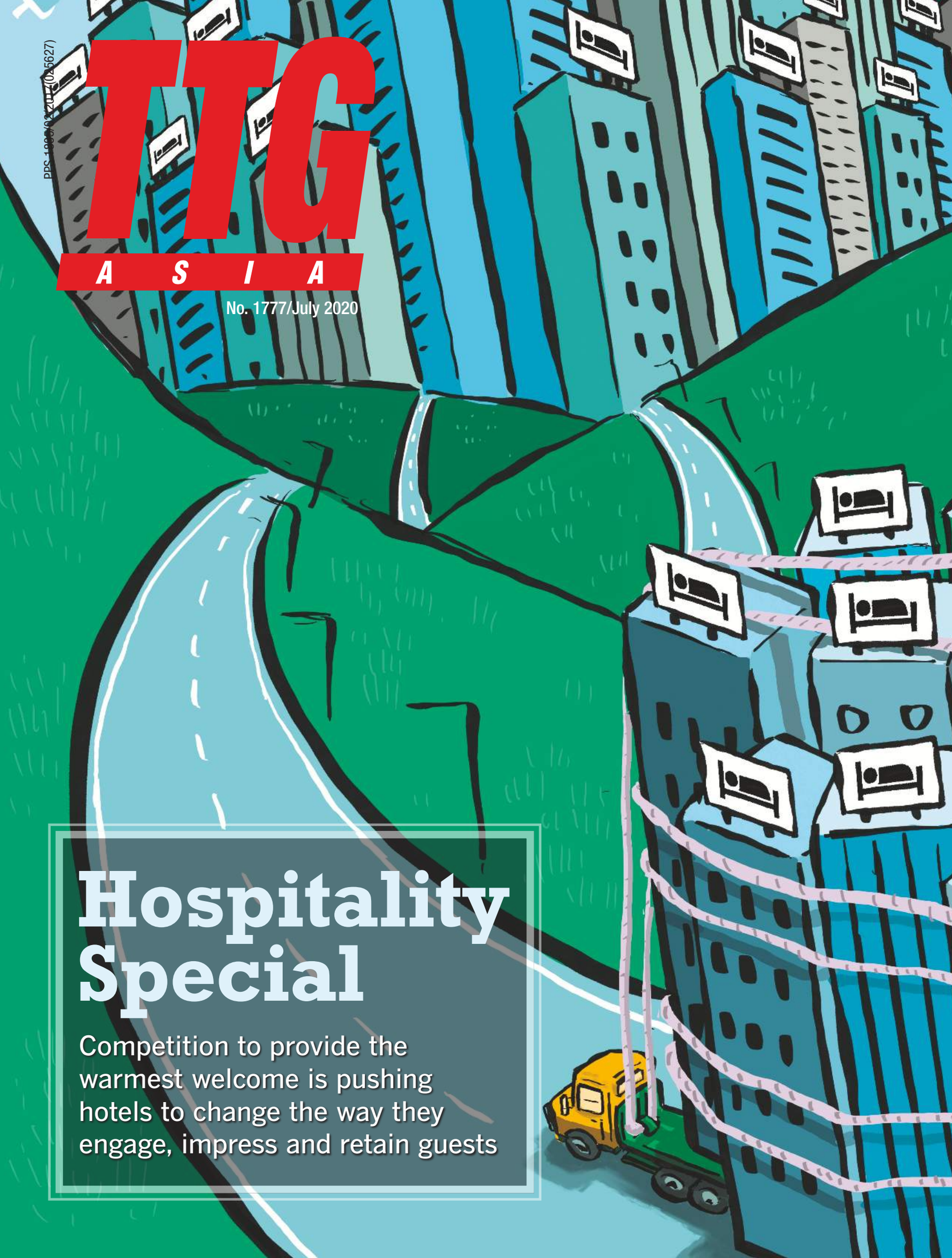
TTG ASIA

No. 1777/July 2020



Hospitality Special

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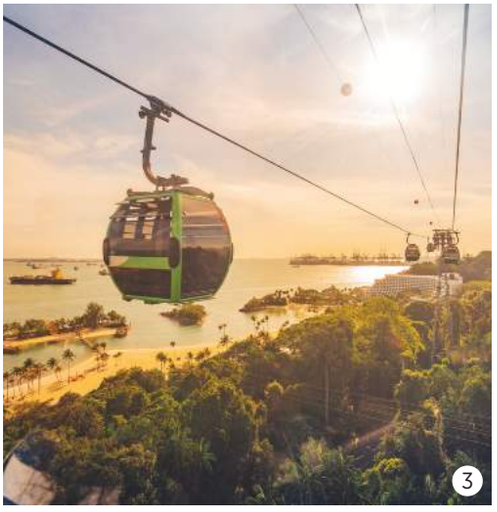

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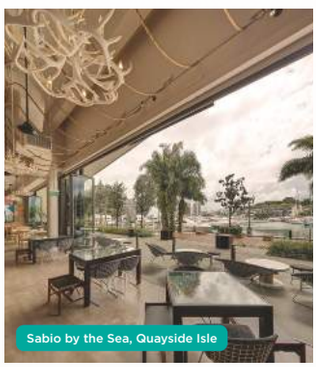
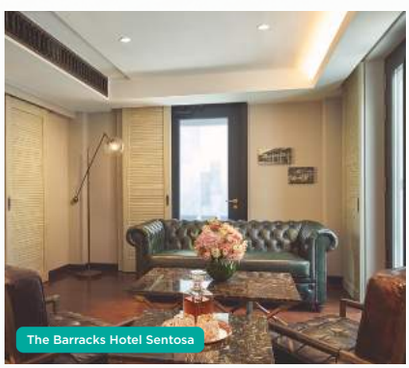
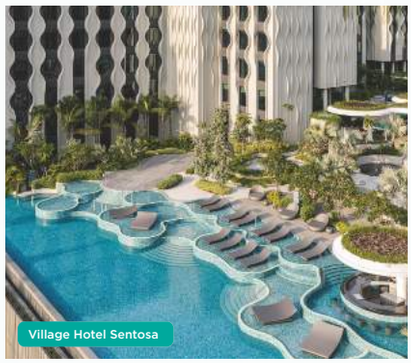

Sabio by the Sea, Quayside Isle

1-V:U


The Barracks Hotel Sentosa

W Singapore - Sentosa Cove

Shangri-La's Rasa Sentosa Resort & Spa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Positivity in trying times

Welcome to this TTG Hospitality Special, a unique *TTG Asia* and *TTGmice* co-branded issue that is developed with the audience of both titles in mind.

The readership profile of *TTG Asia* and *TTGmice* are rather different, in that the former are professionals across the entire travel and tourism supply chain while the latter play critical roles in the niche business events and corporate travel industry. Yet, readers of *TTGmice* will find themselves interacting with many points in the travel and tourism supply chain when they are evaluating options for their next meeting, event or business trip.

One common overlap is in travel accommodation, a product that trade buyers in both leisure and corporate spheres cannot do without.

When this *TTG Asia* and *TTGmice* Hospitality Special was conceptualised in late-2019, the travel and tourism industry was moving along at a decent pace. Despite VUCA being increasingly used to describe the state of the world, which had an impact on spending confidence, UNWTO's tourism barometer in December reported a four per cent growth in international arrivals in the first nine months of the year. Asia-Pacific had a five per cent increase in international arrivals in that period.

Hotel expansions were robust. JLL's October 2019 study valued Asia-Pacific's hotel transaction volume at more than US$11 billion, up 25 to 30 per cent year-on-year.

Nobody could have predicted that a surprise pandemic and a global travel freeze would cost the world 60-80 per cent of tourist arrivals (according to UNWTO's May 2020 data) and possibly displace more than 197 million tourism workers (according to WTTC's June 2020 data) this year. As of June 17, JLL expects the region's transaction volume to be just US$4 billion.

For a moment, my team pondered the fate of this special issue. Would our pages be all doom and gloom?

As the pandemic progressed, however, we started to see signs that it is not all bad news in the hotel sector. The downtime has presented an opportunity for innovation and revolution, as hotels move to connect with customers in unusual ways to keep inspiring travel; enhance their product and guest experience based on traveller concerns and needs in the 'new normal'; and rethink their loyalty programmes and revenue streams.

Hotel openings for 2020 are also proceeding as planned in several Asian destinations, while encouraging news on domestic travel demand leading the industry's recovery are emerging.

It is clear that our Hospitality Special continues to be relevant. There are still useful stories in the hotel sector to be told, for a view of how the hotel landscape looks at this point and what the new future holds. And among these updates lies a precious reminder that the industry will rebound from this crisis just as it had with many previous ones.

Karen Yue
Group Editor

Travel Hall of Fame

Since 2002, TTG Asia Media has honoured luminaries that have won the prestigious TTG Travel Award for at least 10 consecutive times for the same award title in the Travel Hall of Fame.

At present, these exceptional organisations and their years of induction are:

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- Lotte Tour (2011)
- Hong Kong International Airport (2013)
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- Banyan Tree Spa (2015)
- Qatar Airways (2016)
- Thai Airways International Public Company Limited (2016)
- Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (2016)
- Royal Plaza on Scotts (2018)
- Royal Caribbean International (2018)
- Best Western Hotels & Resorts (2019)
- Travelport (2019)

TTG Asia Media is pleased to announce that it has set up a virtual TTG Travel Hall of Fame (www.ttgtravelhof.com), which will enable us to showcase the accolades, artefacts and memorabilia of the region's most exceptional travel organisations in a far more effective way and to a global audience.

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MCI (P) 026/09/2019 • PPS 1885/02/2017(025627)

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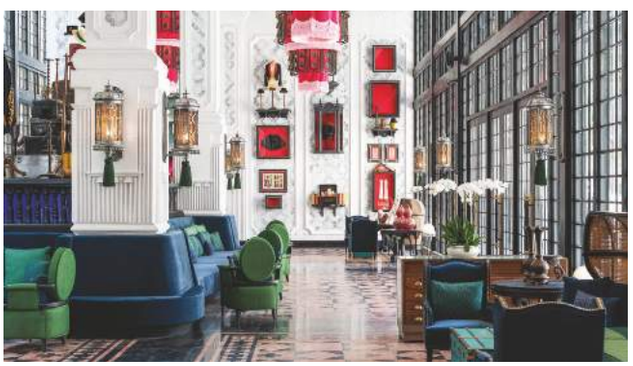

Editor's note

Positivity in trying times 02

Report

Construction in progress 06
Integrated advancements 14
In another world 18
Boutique bosses 20

Analysis

A new way to walk 10
Science and human touch 11
Loyalty wars 12
Designing the hotel of the future 16
Wave of the techno-future 19

Mover & shaker

Eric Ricaurte: Hard truths in going green 13

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Construction in progress

Most destinations in South-east Asia are seeing continued hotel developments, reflecting sustained investor confidence in the region's tourism potential. By TTG Asia reporters

Indonesia

A distressed global travel and tourism landscape has so far failed to disrupt new hotel openings planned for Indonesia this year, although hotel developers in the country have adopted a wait-and-see stance for new projects.

Ferry Salanto, senior associate director of Colliers International Indonesia, told *TTG Asia* that no hotel projects have been put on hold since the outbreak struck early this year, and Aloft Seminyak has opened as planned in Bali.

Demonstrating tenacity, Artotel Group's COO Eduard Rudolf Pangkerego revealed that " all projects will stick to plan", even as most of Artotel's partners were consolidating internally to ride out the Covid-19 pandemic.

That said, Eduard acknowledged that delays in construction due to restricted movements and activities as well as closure of businesses as part of health and safety measures will impact project work. Out of six to eight projects this year, Artotel Group hopes to be able to complete at least four by the end of 2020.

Similarly, Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts continues to maintain a target of 10 hotel signings and three to five openings this year, with another eight hotels that are slated for operations in 2021 and 2022.

Christy Megawati, business development manager with Horwath HTL, reasoned that ongoing hotel projects are able to continue because financing was secured before the Covid-19 crisis. Developments that are seeking financing now may need to be reassessed.

But with Indonesia's "strong fundamentals of tourism", established by a "heavy domestic component" along with a weakened Rupiah that makes the destination attractive to foreigners looking to stretch their dollar, investors will likely find Indonesian hotel projects attractive still, she opined.

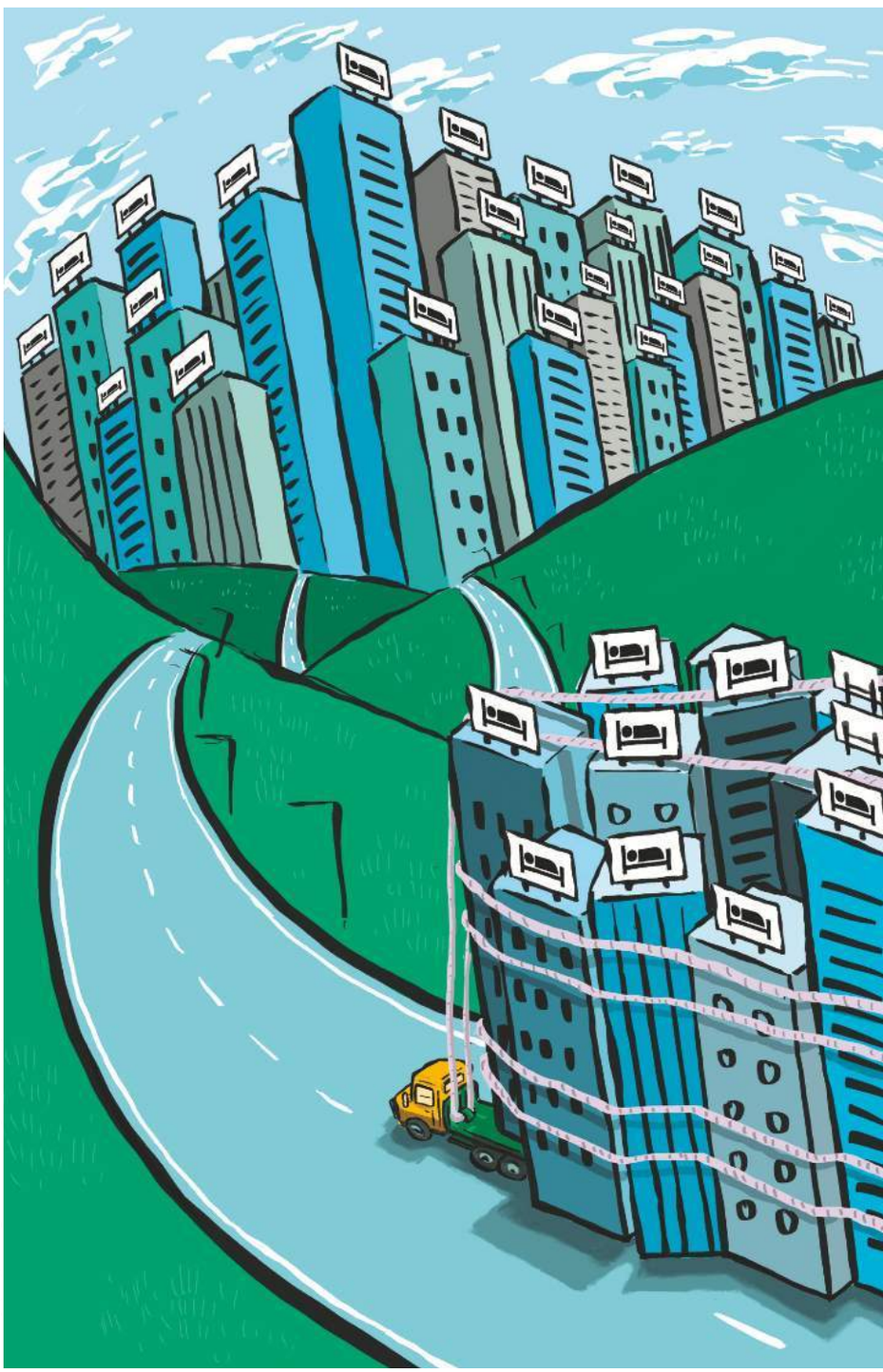
What the country has in her favour, according to Armand Steinmeyer, director of business development and investment, Tauzia Hotels, is a hotel sector that is very responsive to market changes. He believes that Indonesia's continued efforts to welcome foreign investment will pay dividends over time.

"The key message for most investors is that the current crisis has a short- to medium-term impact on business, and real estate is inherently a long-term business," he remarked.
– Tiara Maharani

Japan

Japan is seeing strong growth in hotel development at press time, thanks to stable demand from domestic travellers and a continued uptick in international arrivals. Inbound tourism is a core component of the government's long-term economic growth and regional revitalisation plans, and this brings confidence to the market.

In 2019, there was strong appetite from domestic and



Sam Lay (JM); Instagram.com/oddlysequential.jm

overseas investors to increase their hotel footprint. According to financial services firm JLL Japan, hotel operators nationwide expanded the number of chains while real estate companies and developers increased development due to attractive yield targets.

"The availability of strong financing in Japan, at almost zero interest, has firmly supported hotel development activities," said company spokesperson Megumi Terakado.

Most recent developments are limited-service hotels held under a long-term lease agreement with the operator, thereby reducing risk. These hotels are particularly attractive to small and mid-size developers due to "easier feasibility of cash flow, the rarity of cohesive land in Japan to develop full-service hotels, and the size of investment required," she explained.

Rapid hotel development is seen in Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto, where hotel occupancy is 30 to 40 per cent higher than overall Japan's at 20 per cent, according to JLL.

Meanwhile, rural areas in Japan have been experiencing a boom in resort, boutique and lifestyle hotel developments. These new properties dangle unique experiences to lure travellers.

However, a 2019 report by Mizuho Research Institute warned that price competition is intensifying in the boutique hotel category, where supply is starting to outstrip demand.
– Kathryn Wortley

Malaysia

The Covid-19 pandemic has sent a chill through Malaysia's hotels, which will likely see average occupancy rate plunging to around 25.4 per cent for 2020, according to the Malaysian Association of Hotels.

This has presented a worrying situation for hotel owners and developers, with Previndran Singhe, managing director and CEO of Zerin Properties, predicting that those who are unable to sustain their business "will close or sell (off) their properties".

Previndran opined that stabalisation in the hotel sector might only return a year after the pandemic ends.

At press time, most of Malaysia's new hotel projects will only come online in 2021. Two hotel brands will debut in Malaysia next year – Conrad Kuala Lumpur with 544 keys and 8 Conlay Kempinski Hotel Kuala Lumpur with 260 rooms and 300 suites are both scheduled to open in 4Q2021.

Four Points by Sheraton Desaru is scheduled to open in February 2021 with 311 keys; Courtyard by Marriott will debut in Penang next July with 199 keys; and Fairfield by Marriott will open its second property in Malaysia early 2021 in Kuala Lumpur with 188 rooms.

Brendan M Wong, director of sales – Malaysia at D-EDGE Hospitality Solutions, said: "It is heartening to see more international brands entering the Malaysian market. Big brands bring with them an international (network) of customers who may not be familiar with Malaysia as a destination."

Casting his eyes towards the future, Malaysian Association of Hotel Owners executive director, Shaharuddin M Saaid, said demand from the domestic leisure segment could pick up in 1Q2021 but refrained from providing a time frame as to when hotels would return to pre-Covid-19 occupancy levels.

He said: "It would depend on how quickly our major markets recover from the outbreak, when travel restrictions are lifted, and how soon foreign airlines resume their services to Malaysia and domestic airlines rebuild and expand their overseas network."
– S Puvaneswary

An artist's impression of the Park Inn by Radisson Clark

Philippines

Over the last several years, the Philippines had a healthy dose of new hotel developments – branded and homegrown alike – on the back of a growing economy, rising foreign arrivals and huge domestic market of 70 million Filipinos.

The Conrad Kuala Lumpur is scheduled to open in 4Q2021

"But the Covid-19 fallout will hamper the completion of 6,590 keys (between) 2020 and 2023", said Tim Hallett, consultant at Philippine property development consultancy NAI RCL.

Hallett said in a webinar that "development and project pipeline is officially on hold, with most developers, large and small, furloughing projects until the future has more clarity".

It remains to be seen whether international brands that have plans to open from this year onwards will continue to do so. According to Colliers International Philippines, these brands include Okura, Movenpick, Mandarin Oriental; Okada Manila, Hilton Clark, among others, are looking to add rooms.

It is also a wait-and-see how successful homegrown brands like Seda and those owned by Filinvest, Rockwell, 8990 Holdings, Eton and Vista Land will spread across metro Manila.

Pre-Covid-19, developers in metro Manila are weaning off saturated CBDs in favour of the fringes and peripheries, near the international airport and Manila Bay MICE area, as well as further north to Ortigas, Pasig, and the untapped Quezon City area.

Outside the metro, groups like Marriott, Hilton and Park Inn By Radisson are expanding in Clark, which has her own international airport and gateway to Pampanga, Zambales, Baguio, Sagada and other tourist and business destinations.

C9 Hotelworks' managing director, Bill Barnett observed that hotel developers are lured to beach-type locations topped by Cebu, Boracay and Bohol. Aside from Manila, the trio will return to popularity among the country's top source markets, China and South Korea, when tourism returns. *– Rosa Ocampo*

The key message for most investors is that the current crisis has a short- to medium-term impact on business, and real estate is inherently a long-term business.

Armand Steinmeyer, director of business development and investment, Tauzia Hotels

An artist's impression of The Clan Hotel, Singapore's grand premier room

Singapore

Singapore's hotel industry entered 2020 with strong promise, with all sectors posting positive growth following several years of "subdued performance", shared Giuliano Esposito, senior vice president, strategic advisory & asset management Asia, JLL.

The economy segment grew the most by 4.1 per cent in 2019, followed by luxury at 3.2 per cent, midscale at 3.1 per cent and upscale at 0.6 per cent. This cross-industry growth came as Singapore welcomed more than 1,300 new hotel rooms last year, 60 per cent of which was concentrated in Sentosa.

Esposito said: "Prior to Covid-19, we were extremely positive about the growth prospects of the Singapore hotel sector. In terms of hotel supply, we are (now) forecasting limited growth in hotel rooms for 2021 and 2022, which would have allowed the sector to register sustained growth in RevPAR."

There will now be limited openings in the city-state, with the new additions including Dusit Thani Laguna Singapore, which will open in July, and The Clan Hotel, a Far East Hospitality property that has had its 2Q2020 opening pushed back to October this year.

Esposito remains positive about 2021, stating that more developments will emerge in the upscale and midscale sectors, as well as in the Greater Southern Waterfront and Sentosa redevelopment areas.

The sector is taking measures towards post-pandemic recovery, with JLL working with the owners and operators of nine hotels in Singapore that it currently asset-manages.

"Ultimately, developments will slow due to the fact that the construction industry has come to a standstill. Developers and owners in Singapore are generally well capitalised and have good relationships with banks, so (projects) are likely to progress, just at a slower pace than expected. As the current situation is unprecedented, we are working with owners and operators to start devising different scenarios of recovery, which may involve a complete re-think of target markets," he shared.

"We still expect Singapore to continue to attract capital into the sector as it has proven to be able to rebound, based on its solid fundamentals. The city is considered a safe haven and we believe that safe haven destinations will likely benefit from the current situation." – *Pamela Chow*

Thailand

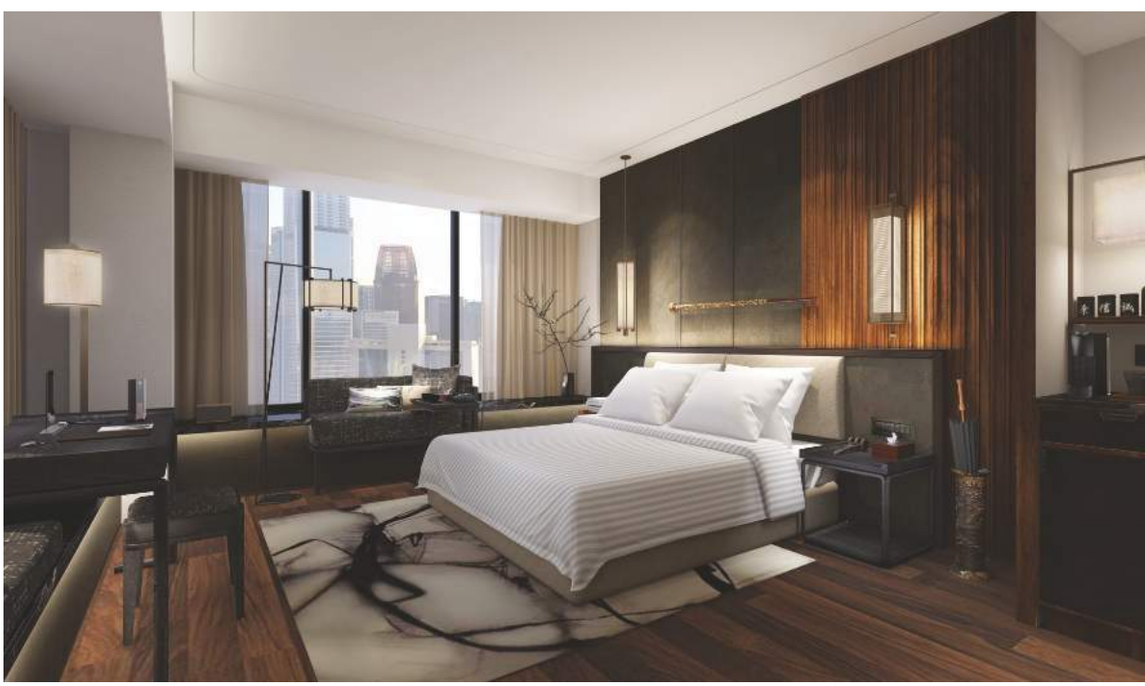
Over the past year, many luxury hospitality brands have made or planned their debut in Thailand. In 2019, Thailand welcomed South-east Asia's first Waldorf Astoria, as well as the country's first Capella and Rosewood properties.

Bangkok saw further expansions on a slew of mixed-use developments and integrated resorts including ICONSIAM, Mahanakhon Bangkok, the openings of Samyan Mitrtown & Sindhorn Village, and continued construction of One Bangkok (opening 2022).

The year 2019 also witnessed the flagship Dusit Thani hotel being torn down to make way for mixed-use project Dusit Central Park (opening 2024).

Pre-Covid-19, JLL data showed Bangkok had a total future supply of 11,420 keys opening between 2020 and 2022 – around 29 per cent in the mid-scale segment, 56 per cent in the upscale segment, and 14.8 per cent in the luxury segment; 5,627 of those (49.2 per cent) were scheduled to open in 2020.

"Thailand on paper has a robust



From left: Newbies on the block – Aloft Bali Seminyak, Indonesia; Anantara Quy Nhon Villas, Vietnam; and Sindhorn Midtown Hotel Bangkok, Thailand

pipeline going into late-2020, but the impact of Covid-19 has seen a failure to launch by new hotels all over the country in both Bangkok and resort markets," said Bill Barnett, managing director of C9 Hotelworks.

"In 1Q2020 hotels set to soft-open or fully-open made quick decisions to push back on paper at least to 3Q and 4Q. We'd expect this situation to domino and push some scheduled later in 2020 to 2021," he stated.

While a few hotels such as Villa de Phranakorn and Sindhorn Midtown went ahead with their openings in February and March, respectively, the onset of the pandemic led many hotels in Thailand to shut their doors until May or even June.

Luxury hotels scheduled to open mid-year have been pushed out to 3Q2020 or later; they include Sindhorn Kempinski, Capella Bangkok and Banyan Tree Krabi.

Mahanakorn Orient Express, scheduled to open by end-2020, has been postponed indefinitely.

Commenting on Phuket's hotel developments, Barnett said the popular resort destination has 24 new hotels and 5,735 keys in the pipeline, and the crisis is hurting mostly hotels in the planning cycle.

"Has the pipeline stopped? Absolutely not, but each and every developer is now rationalising and understanding they need a scale of guests to open. That's the big question," said Barnett.

"Projects that are now paused (are the ones) that we see are still in design or pre-development (phase); the ones under construction for the most part are going ahead. If projects are stopping now, it might be related to pre-Covid-19 issues, are under-financed, etc," he added.

A C9 Hotelworks report released in May 2020 highlighted five new hotels with 1,627 keys in the pipeline for small resort town Hua Hin.

"Noteworthy (for Hua Hin) is a growing long-stay segment that is pushing into the villa rental segment. By location and catchment of key demand generators – wellness and retirement, (Hua Hin's) markets are poised to grow," said Barnett. – *Anne Somanas*

Vietnam

As one of the few destinations that escaped the full brunt of the Covid-19 pandemic while benefitting from growing travellers' interest, Vietnam's hotel landscape has been able to remain strong as major players continue to pump up their presence in the destination.

The island of Phu Quoc has seen substantial investment in recent years as its popularity grows. And it is showing no signs of slowing with a series of hotels slated to open.

The 305-room Mövenpick Resort Waverly Phu Quoc and adjacent Mövenpick Residences Phu Quoc, which comes with 329 apartment-style residences and 79 pool villas, were the latest additions in April.

InterContinental Hotels Group's Regent brand is slated to establish a presence on the island later this year.

Jeff Redl, managing director of Diethelm Travel Vietnam, noted a rise in boutique properties in Hanoi city centre. Redl said there has been a particular focus on four-star properties, which were "missing" in the destination.

He added: "These newly opened properties have paid extra attention to design, which is more in line with the country' history and culture compared to other properties. Demand was on the rise, especially from European markets. They are travellers who usually love to experience local heritage and look for an authentic atmosphere."

Coastal development is also on the rise in both established and emerging destinations.

Linh Le, principal and co-founder of Luxperia, said development in emerging destinations is being driven by the local market.

Redl noted the Central Vietnamese coastal city of Quy Nhon is another area where interest for resorts development has recently boomed. Anantara opened a property there last year. Zannier Hotels will open in December and Fusion will follow in 2021. – *Marissa Carruthers*

Thailand on paper has a robust pipeline going into late 2020, but the impact of Covid-19 has seen a failure to launch by new hotels all over the country in both Bangkok and resort markets

Bill Barnett, managing director, C9 Hotelworks

A new way to walk

As consumers remain at home and are restricted from travelling, Asian hotels are taking a different tack to maintain engagement and income. By Karen Yue

Chinese KOLs striking a pose at Kempinski Hotel Hangzhou's Berthold Deli

Hotels in Asia-Pacific have found themselves treading new grounds to ensure continued brand presence and revenue streams during the pandemic.

Harking back to its F&B roots, when founder Berthold Kempinski started his restaurant and wine trade in Berlin in the 19th century, Kempinski Hotels in Asia has turned to meal takeaways from its properties to keep staff active and income flowing.

Its China properties joined forces with Meituan-Dianping shopping website to offer an F&B programme that featured "carefully selected high quality dishes which would survive long-distance delivery, using improved packaging to ensure freshness", shared Ilja Poepper, vice president sales & marketing Asia with the hotel chain.

As the virus spread across Asia, forcing governments to impose home isolation for safety, Kempinski brought the takeaway concept outside of China, to properties such as Siam Kempinski Hotel Bangkok and The Capitol Kempinski Hotel Singapore.

Shangri-La Hotel Tokyo, too, found itself having to innovate to keep the hotel top of mind. It launched The Boutique, a website selling food, bedding and other luxury items from the brand, to bring a flavour of the hotel to customers at home.

Live-streaming leads the way

In China, where online retail is as entertaining as variety shows, Kempinski Hotel Hangzhou is renting its beautiful grounds as shoot locations for Taobao's online sellers and key opinion leaders (KOLs), a move that has earned the new property both money and positive attention among netizens.

When Kempinski Hotel Beijing Lufthansa Center tried its hand at live-stream shopping, working with Ctrip to market F&B deals, it sold 790 packages in just two hours.

In early June, Poepper co-hosted a Sina Weibo live-stream with a local KOL with 12 million followers, where they promoted Kempinski hotels in China, its Make a Travel Promise package, and the Kempinski White Glove Services' health and safety assurance to customers. The event attracted 2.8 million viewers over two hours and "contributed to amazing branding results", he said.

Calvin Tay, senior vice president of strategic partnerships (global travel & hotels) with Shanghai-based REST Collections, which helps hotel chains and independent properties to market in China, noted that while Chinese travel and tourism companies are adept at utilising live-stream for sales, the concept is still new to players elsewhere. He has been helping his clients take the online plunge in China since mid-June. In each live-stream session, a show host would present holiday ideas and hotels for the audience's consideration as well as attractive early bird offers for immediate booking.

Even though travel rebound remains uncertain with the rise and fall of infections, Tay said hotels must be proactive in stimulating travel demand, and not "sit and wait" for the barriers to be lifted. "If hotels are able to come up with very attractive buy-now-stay-later deals, travellers will grab," he said.

Lina Ang, general manager, APAC at Sojern, a digital travel marketing solutions provider, agrees that "a great deal is a good way to start".

With limited advertising and promotion budget on hand now, Ang recommends that hotels be clear about their target audience and craft their message to give travellers the confidence to travel and visit them again.

Lasting effect

Having seen the success of using Instagram to auction off discounted rooms, F&B vouchers, and social event packages, Chandra Irawan, general manager of Atria Hotel Magelang in Indonesia, expects to maintain this sales channel even after the crisis.

The hotel has been able to sell at least 20 to 30 vouchers during each hour-long auction.

Poepper believes that the intensified digital sales and marketing efforts are part of the new normal, adding that "the future of consumption is live-streaming". He is open to the possibility of using the channel to promote other Kempinski properties to the China market and beyond.

The digital future is not daunting, as the revolution, catalysed by the pandemic, is allowing smaller hotel chains and independent properties to be competitive without having to pay an arm and a leg, opined Ang, who said "affordable website developers and marketing partners" can easily be found these days.

"At Sojern, we support independent hotels (with our) Pay On The Stay model where a hotel pays a commission for the booking we have driven and (use our) tools...to drive direct bookings," she added.

Science and human touch

As revenue management capabilities are improved by science, the presence of intuitive human intervention becomes all the more critical for hotels to optimise revenue and profit. By Caroline Boey

Described by senior hospitality executives as a delicate balance of art and science, revenue management has been reshaped by technology, with artificial intelligence (AI) and data-driven sciences expected to become the absolute competitive advantage hotels need to optimise their revenue and profit.

Recent technological advances have allowed hotels to use data to determine ideal pricing variations, improve the booking process, better understand the consumption motivations of specific market segments and thus allow personalised marketing campaigns and guest experience to happen, among other things.

No doubt, hoteliers who master technology and integrate it into their organisational culture will be able to maximise revenue not only from hotel rooms but all streams including meetings and events and F&B.

A joint effort

While the right algorithms and a methodical approach allow revenue managers to turn data into actionable insights, the industry agrees that hospitality is fundamentally a people-centred business that responds dynamically to changes in sentiment. As such, revenue management cannot do without the human touch.

Tracy Dong, senior advisor of advisory services, IDeaS, commented: "Machine-learning (and) automated revenue technology can handle and process more data (and) more accurately than any human can ever dream (to do). But the art and refinement of revenue management must come from the minds of experienced individuals."

She emphasised that "smart people and intelligent technology are not at odds", and that joint effort is needed to achieve greater profitability and productivity.

Agreeing, Melissa Gan, managing director, Asia-Pacific, World Hotels, drew parallels between intelligent revenue management and a game of chess. "The data is on the board where we can all see and access the same information. However, based on experience, assumptions and predicting human behaviour can bring about more than one possible outcome."

In fact, hospitality industry leaders believe that as technology supporting revenue management advances, skilled and intuitive revenue managers will rise in demand.

Hong Ruoying, associate director, revenue management and revenue optimisation, with Marina Bay Sands, Singapore, quipped: "Revenue managers now play an even more important role to ensure business sustainability. As markets open up and start to embrace meetings and travel at different rates, the collective nimbleness of revenue management, space optimisation, online distribution, and e-commerce will determine how quickly promotions can reach key markets, and how dynamic the rate can become."

An eye on market needs

The need for human intervention in revenue management is evident as the travel and tourism industry learns to cope with changing travellers' needs amid a Covid-19 pandemic.

Ben George, senior vice president and commercial director, Asia Pacific, Hilton, pointed out that travellers, emerging from post-Covid-19 lockdowns, will demand much greater flexibility and cost-effectiveness from their travel and tourism suppliers.

"Hotels will serve as more than just a place of lodging, but also a point of connection and convergence with local, in-destination activities," George predicted.

"This presents an opportunity for hotels to create platforms or avenues that connect guests to unique experiences and local know-how, and to consider partnerships that could lead to more innovative programming and unlock new revenue streams," he added.

Cinn Tan, chief sales and marketing officer, Pan Pacific Hotels Group, has identified new tourism opportunities for "emerging markets such as Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and even second- and third- tier cities in mature countries like Indonesia and China" that are inspiring evolved revenue streams for her properties.

"We see new investments and new industries arising which contribute directly to the corporate segments," Tan said.

For example, demand for corporate short- and long-stay is on the rise. To leverage this opportunity, Parkroyal Yangon converted some units into Soho (Small Office Home Office) serviced suites in 2019.

Tan added: "For mature markets, we now look beyond rooms and are providing more than beds for heads. As consumers are generally more sophisticated, hotels are catering to the lifestyle trend of dining experiences and adventures for both local and overseas guests.

"Travellers, especially family and solo travellers now look for experiences that enrich and expand horizons through exploration and education journeys. Hotels are providing these either as added/packaged experiences, for example cooking classes, partnering local suppliers, or part of their loyalty programme privileges, like the Pan Pacific Discovery local experiences."

The art and refinement of revenue management must come from the minds of experienced individuals.

Tracy Dong, senior advisor of advisory services, IDeaS

Loyalty wars

Hotel groups have been pulling out all the stops, such as VIP access to money-can't-buy-experiences, to attract and retain loyal guests. By Caroline Boey

Sam Lay (JM); instagram.com/oddlysequential_jm

Since borrowing from the success of airline mileage programmes in the 1960s, some of today's hotel loyalty programmes have reached stratospheric heights with member rewards that are out-of this-world and some which money cannot buy.

Big chains have adopted high-profile strategies and Accor, for example, "has invested more than our competitors in what we call augmented hospitality" through ALL – Accor Live Limitless, according to Steven Taylor, chief marketing officer.

Some of ALL's most treasured loyalty perks include a once-in-a-lifetime meet and greet with Paris Saint Germain football legends Neymar Jr, Kylian Mbappé and Edinson Cavani, and access to in-demand concerts and renowned festivals.

Beyond the stay

The stiff competition for customers' loyalty has driven hotel giants to offer value beyond the confines of their properties.

To plump up ALL's offerings, Accor also partnered with AEG, a producer of global tours for renowned musicians such as Ed Sheeran and Katy Perry, to gift loyal guests the opportunity to buy pre-sale tickets and enter VIP lounges.

Earlier this year, Accor joined forces with Grab and Visa, allowing their guests to maximise their points.

All for experiences

When Hilton conducted a survey among 2,300 travellers across 11 Asian-Pacific countries in 2Q2019 to better understand their consumption motivations, the hotel company discovered that two in three respondents sought "once-in-a-lifetime experiences" as a key aspect of travel, and and 71 per cent ticked 'local culture and authenticity' as important in attracting them to a new destination.

This led Hilton to further expand its Hilton Honors Experiences auction platform, shared Ben George, senior vice-president and commercial director, Asia-Pacific, Hilton.

The loyalty programme now curates money-can't-buy experiences through collaborations with partners like Live Nation that span various passion points – music, sports, culture and food.

Hilton Honors Experiences works by allowing members to bid for exclusive experiences with their accumulated points.

George recalled that the highest bid on the platform to date was registered last August. A member used 2.9 million points to successfully bid for a four-night stay at the Conrad Maldives Rangali Island, which included a private tour of The Muraka undersea villa and a session with the resident marine biologist.

George reckoned that the record might be broken post-Covid-19, as "demand for purposeful quality experiences will likely reach a whole new level when people start travelling again".

To please today's instant gratification consumer, Marilyn Li, executive director of loyalty marketing, Marina Bay Sands (MBS), stressed that loyalty programmes must be far more creative and dynamic in their approach.

Sands Rewards LifeStyle, she said, extends a multitude of incentives and experiential rewards across different sectors of the company's business – from meals at celebrity chef restaurants and tickets to Broadway shows, to exclusive fashion previews of the latest collections by luxury brands, and even celebrity meet-and-greets.

Li said: "These money-can't-buy experiences have transcended the dollar-for-dollar match in most loyalty programmes of the past, and this is increasingly important for global travellers today."

Customisation wars

According to Tracy Dong, senior advisor-advisory services, Asia-Pacific at revenue management company IDeaS, the use of dedicated apps for loyalty programmes has allowed hotels to reduce reliance on intermediaries and distribution costs as they build direct connections with their customers and develop personalised marketing strategies.

However, Cinn Tan, chief sales and marketing officer, Pan Pacific Hotels Group (PPHG), emphasised that loyalty programmes cannot neglect those who had booked via a travel agent and the intermediary itself.

She cited Pan Pacific Connections as an example of such an exercise, where meeting planners are rewarded for driving business to PPHG hotels.

On the other hand, an anonymous industry observer has questioned the benefits of such programmes for hotel companies, noting that the acquisition of new, loyal and active members is a "struggle" for many businesses today.

He opined that loyalty programmes, challenged by stiff competition and high cost of acquiring new clients, would be forced to evolve.

"This is why new programme tiers have emerged, like by invitation only, to enhance exclusivity of the programme," he remarked.

Hard truths in going green

A leader in sustainability expertise, boutique consulting firm Greenview advises organisations and companies in the tourism and hospitality sector. Founder and CEO Eric Ricaurte speaks to Pamela Chow about hard-to-swallow pills for the industry

Where do the sustainability measures taken by Asian tourism and hospitality players currently stand?
This field is constantly changing, as hotels have to keep addressing emerging issues like plastic and waste.

Overall, the big trend we have seen is hotel companies beginning to look at sustainability and social responsibility from a corporate standpoint... Before, it was somewhat piecemeal or focused on what could be done at each property separately.

Those in the region that have already developed robust platforms are now taking further steps (across) their supply chains and setting goals (covering broader and deeper measures).

How well are the active players in the region performing on this front?
Everyone is doing some aspects well (with room for improvement). (We hope to see) those who come out of this crisis and continue on their path to single-use plastic elimination – but who knows how that will turn out given the recent issues our planet is facing.

What would be the optimal way for a hotel to take the lead on sustainability?
Like all businesses, hotels need to...recognise the role they play in destinations and communities via their staff, procurement (processes) and their guests' spending (habits).

The optimal way is to converge solutions with guest experience. That sounds great but (difficult) in practice. Still, we could use some more critical thought on what guests care about and how to correctly communicate the message.

What more needs to be done in the industry?
(There needs to be) more renewable energy and collaboration. The elephant in the room of climate change is switching to renewable energy, and hotels simply haven't gone as far as needed to play their part, largely due to systemic issues.

Also, the industry and its various (sectors) should think more about how and where collaboration is possible, so that we aren't doomed to repeat the same thing when the next pressing issue arises.

For example, it pains me to see how the (issue of) single-use plastic (has) played out in hotels. Pretty much every hotel chain did the same thing: (got) internal teams together; (figured) out what kind of single-use plastic is in their hotels; (identified) how, when and what they could eliminate or reduce; (implemented a series of other measures; before they started) engaging with external initiatives offering solutions.

Hotel associations, hotel chains and consultants could have worked together to figure this out more effectively.

What do you believe would help push hotels towards a higher level of sustainability?
Hotels tend to be very reactive. The real way to drive sustainability is for governments to issue policies and requirements to address sustainability in hotel buildings and operations; for guests and corporate customers or planners to request and demand more in this area as part of their decision-making; and for distribution channels to provide more content...to help (hotels make) informed decisions. Once these levers are activated, hotels will jump on board much more quickly and broadly, and learn from each other.

The real way to drive sustainability is for governments to (order) sustainability in hotel buildings and operations; for guests and corporate customers or planners to (demand for it); and for distribution channels to provide more content... to help (hotels make) informed decisions.

Instead of being purely reactionary and part of a chain reaction, how can hotels step up?
By not placing the responsibility on other entities. Within the industry, the single biggest change that needs to happen is to integrate sustainability into the process of hotel development and investment.

The asset-light model that allowed chains to grow, coupled with the basic premise of real estate appreciation that hotels could tap into, created this systemic challenge where most of the solutions require longer-term thinking, scale and investment, but ownership is too fragmented and (owners) often (have) different business objectives from the hotel's operator and/or brand.

We dived into this in 2015 with broader sustainability movements of needing deeper targets to reduce environmental impact, and to address it we launched the Hotel Owners for Tomorrow Coalition with two dozen other entities to address this gap.

As we peeled (back the layers of this issue), we started to see the systemic challenge: in hotel deals, nobody was talking sustainability until the operator came in, which by then was too late. Many in the value chain were disincentivised from bringing it up.

To push for higher sustainability, the industry's various players that are involved in hotel development and investment need to start talking about sustainability, and get owners really interested in it so they can start proactively seeking it as part of their investment and operator selection.

Integrated advancements

Some of Asia's top integrated resorts are reinventing themselves with new stays, exceptional experiences and impressive entertainment. TTG Asia checks out what's in store

An artist's impression of Resorts World Sentosa's future waterfront promenade

Resorts World Sentosa, Singapore

Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) has major plans in store when business returns to full swing. The integrated resort is in the midst of a S$4.5 billion (US$3.2 billion) transformation into RWS 2.0, which will see an increase in gross floor area of about 50 per cent.

The added 164,000m^2 will be largely achieved through intensification of existing land, and new experiences.

The first attraction slated to open will be a new pirate-themed adventure dining playhouse that replaces the Resorts World Theatre. Next up are a public seafront attraction with free evening light shows, and expansions for both Universal Studios Singapore (USS) and S.E.A. Aquarium.

Prior to the pandemic, work had begun on the new Singapore Oceanarium, which triples the former S.E.A. Aquarium in size and takes over the Maritime Experiential Museum.

USS' expansion will bring about two new sections – Minion Park and Super Nintendo World – featuring family-friendly attractions, themed shops and restaurants.

RWS 2.0 will also introduce a new waterfront lifestyle complex boasting two destination hotels that will add up to 1,100 more rooms to the entire resort.

Capping off the redevelopment are plans to introduce a new Driverless Transport System that provides last-mile connectivity between the mainland and Sentosa. – *Pamela Chow*

Desaru Coast, Malaysia

Desaru Coast in Johor is Malaysia's first planned integrated destination with five-star international hotels, a conference centre, a water park, two championship golf courses, a retail village and a 17km pristine beachfront.

There are four hotels at Desaru Coast – the 275-key The Westin Desaru Coast Resort, 365-key Hard Rock Hotel Desaru Coast, Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas, and soon-to-open One&Only Desaru Coast.

The most recent hotel to join the fold – in December 2019 – is the Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas. The property has 123 keys comprising 90 deluxe guestrooms in low-rise buildings that overlook the gardens, lagoon and ocean; alongside 33 one- to four-bedroom villas.

The last property slated to open – this coming summer – is the 45-key One&Only Desaru Coast.

General manager, Jerome Colson, let on that guests can expect two unique experiences: The View from the Top tree-climbing experience and The Call of the Gibbons guided morning walk with the resort's resident naturalist to watch birds and gibbons in their natural habitat, and learn about the flora and fauna of the Panti Forest. – *S Puvaneswary*

Sands Cotai Central, Macau

Las Vegas Sands and Sands China will progressively open British-themed The Londoner Macao over the course of this and next year, which is an expansion and transformation of the company's existing Sands Cotai Central integrated resort.

Joining The Venetian Macao and The Parisian Macao at the Cotai Strip, The Londoner Macao will boast recreations of classic British landmarks, with an exterior facade modelled on the Palace of Westminster and Houses of Parliament, complete with a 96m-tall Elizabeth Tower and clock face.

Four hotel brands promise luxurious stays, including all-suites 594 key The Londoner Hotel (previously the Holiday Inn Macao Cotai Central). Two floors at The Londoner Hotel will contain 14 bespoke suites designed in collaboration with ex-footballer David Beckham, who is the brand ambassador for resort owner Sands China.

Billed as the most luxurious hotel ever in Macau, the 368-room Londoner Court offers a choice of one- to four-bedroom suites ranging from 130m^2 to 370m^2.

Guests will be able to shop from around 200 stores at Shoppes at The Londoner – some of which are first-to-market brands – and enjoy access to amenities such as spas and health clubs. Some 20 F&B offerings on property will provide guests with culinary entertainment. Notable restaurants include The Mews, a Thai restaurant; Gordon Ramsay Pub & Grill; Churchill's Table; and a special restaurant for Dongbei and Sichuan cuisine.

On the entertainment front, the resort is planning to roll out British-themed Streetmosphere shows such as the famous Changing of the Guards that takes place daily at Crystal Palace, as well as daily retail parades featuring iconic characters from British history, culture and literature. – *Prudence Lui*

From above: Desaru Coast transforms Johor's landscape with luxurious hotels, a water park, two championship golf courses, a retail village, and more; Okada Manila promises luxurious stays

Okada Manila, Philippines

Occupying a 44-hectare site in the Entertainment City overlooking Manila Bay, Okada Manila is the Philippines' newest, largest and most luxurious integrated resort.

The resort offers 998 keys, ranging from the 50m^2 deluxe rooms to 1,000m^2 luxury villas.

The family-friendly destination offers PLAY (Purposeful Learning and Activities for the Young) comprising eight purpose-built play areas; dedicated learning programmes for children; alongside regular facilities such as swimming pools and 21 dining options.

The Londoner Hotel is the latest all-suite product to join Sands Cotai Central

Representing the height of opulence, indulgence and wellness is The Retreat Spa, which offers bespoke spa programmes conducted by certified therapists. There's also The Sole Retreat Foot Spa and Reflexology Center for high-quality spa, beauty, wellness and grooming treatments. Both offer an exclusive range of products.

The resort's piece de resistance, Cove Manila, is South-east Asia's largest ultra-luxe indoor beach-by-day and nightclub-by-dusk event venue. This UVA- and UVB-protective mega glass dome – 100 meters in diameter and 30 meters in height – can host up to 3,500 guests, and boasts advanced audio, video and ambient lighting technologies, as well as an in-house production team that that can whip up eye-popping shows and entertainment for up to 3,500 guests. .

The integrated resort welcomes private functions, such as family gatherings and celebrations, with a mix of indoor and outdoor venues. The Garden, for instance, appeals to romantic celebrations, with its set of leafy trees, lush blooms and reflective ponds that are looked after by a special team of seasoned landscape horticulturists, landscape architect, urban forester and irrigation specialist. – *Rosa Ocampo*

Designing the hotel of the future

Despite a new emphasis on safety and security, hotel design is set to continue foregrounding sustainability, technology and personalisation, finds Pamela Chow

Good hotel design transcends 'soft' power and appeal; they can heavily impact a brand's return on investment and guest loyalty. As economies around the world gradually reawaken and travel returns, the future of hotel design may be forever altered.

"Increasingly, the (hospitality) essentials will relate to hygiene, sanitation and operational reliability. In terms of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, we've moved right back to the bottom of the pyramid – in the short term, at least – where safety and security are much more important than self-actualisation. Brands seen as able to guarantee standards of cleanliness will benefit," opined Matt Turner, founder, AHEAD Awards.

AHEAD Asia recognises hotels and hotel facilities in the region that have effective design and features, and this year's edition saw the judges convene via a virtual meeting.

While transparent and consistent hygiene standards are expected to become a mainstay in hospitality, customers are likely to continue to favour flexible, engaging spaces.

Turner added: "Effective design today must be from the point of view of delivering great guest experiences, rather than just design for design's sake which (is to look) nice, eye-catching or unusual in some way."

Meanwhile, Toby Smith, managing director of Swire Hotels and judge of AHEAD Asia 2020, remarked: "Appropriate design can have a huge influence on business performance, whether that be through maximising space, optimising efficiencies or (effecting) more aesthetic influences that shape a brand."

The lobby bar of The Opposite House, Beijing is a flexible space that allows a variety of seating options

Flexible and sustainable

A key feature that many customers are drawn to now is the appeal of flexible common spaces for both leisure and corporate guests.

Smith told *TTG Asia*: "Something that was repeatedly raised in our discussions was versatility in design or creating spaces that effectively accommodate guests at various points of their day or life."

Notable examples of this include EAST Hotels' Domain spaces, which function as cafés, meeting spaces, co-working zones and early evening bars, as well as UNION at The Opposite House in Beijing that provides an elegant environment with a variety of seating arrangements.

Consumers are also getting smarter when it comes to choosing sustainable stays. Providing environmentally-responsible amenities alone is no longer adequate; guests now pay attention to a hotel's commitment to minimising waste and impact, even in its design.

"A sustainable approach is now table stakes. The degree to which sustainability is achieved is becoming more important and distinguishable, especially (among the) younger generations," observed William Harris, founding partner, AvroKO and judge, AHEAD Asia 2020.

According to Harris, needing to be sustainable has driven hotels towards solutions that are more unconventional or register as more authentic. This has spurred hotels to redefine their offerings and do their part for the community, making the need for sustainability a "positive challenge".

For instance, more properties are using natural and recycled materials, LED lighting, as well as renewable energy technology in their design. "Less talked-about features that are equally important include innovative water treatment and waste management systems," said Nicholas Clayton, CEO, Capella Hotel Group, and judge, AHEAD 2020.

Visually, sustainability efforts can be communicated through "biophilic forms in hotels", said Harris. These include outdoor experiences brought into the public spaces of hotels and resorts, such as indoor waterfalls, all-season terraces, rugged outdoor-style furnishing, oversized plants and panoramic views.

Such features also serve to help guests "feel soothed and balanced in a world where many people in urban settings can be spending up to 90 per cent of their days indoors", explained Harris.

Personalised tech matters

No talk of the younger generation is complete without mentioning the need for technological integration.

As personalisation climbs in importance among well-heeled and discerning consumers, the use of technology has become ever more critical in creating the ultimate guest experience.

Casting his eyes into the future of hotel design, Clayton predicted: "Technology and personalisation will work in tandem. Going beyond pillow selection and customised toiletries, guests can expect to arrive in a room that's set to their preference, from desired lighting to work and entertainment systems that mirror their standards back home."

The main challenge, posited Smith, is being able to "successfully blend the digital with the human", as people are ultimately social creatures who "thrive (on) face-to-face interaction".

He added: "Creating vibrant, interesting spaces that ignite conversation is key, while at the same time harnessing the benefits of technology."

We've moved right back to the bottom of the pyramid – in the short term, at least – where safety (is) much more important than self-actualisation.

Matt Turner,
founder, AHEAD Awards

EAST Hotels properties address guests' growing preference for multifunctional spaces through their Domain spaces

Technology and personalisation will work in tandem.

Nicholas Clayton,
CEO, Capella Hotel Group

In another world

One of the many charms of travel is the chance to stay in a different world set up by stylish, creative hotels. Here are some of TTG Asia's top picks

MGallery Hotel de la Coupole, Vietnam

About eight hours from Hanoi, amid the mountains of Sapa, sits the 249-key MGallery Hotel de la Coupole.

Step into a world of rich colour and textures inspired by the dress of local minority tribes, juxtaposed with elements inspired by French *haute couture* or high dressmaking.

According to designer Bill Bensley, the concept of the hotel arose from a polka-dotted Vietnamese bamboo hat uncovered in the streets of northern Paris.

Selected rooms and suites overlook the mountains and Sapa's signature rice paddies.

Shinta Mani Wild, Cambodia

Tucked away in a valley in southwestern Cambodia is a luxury camp with 15 tents deftly placed amid and over the rivers and waterfalls of Cardomom National Park.

Designed by Bill Bensley with his signature emphasis on sustainability, the resort also serves as a conservation project.

Under Bensley's direction, each tent has its own unique flavour. Art and design enthusiasts might gravitate towards the bohemian tent, but other options, such as the botanists' tent, prove equally inspiring.

The Kayana Beach Lombok, Indonesia

Located just a few kilometres north of Senggigi, the tourist hotspot of Lombok Island, is the quiet The Kayana Beach Lombok.

The 32-villa resort features a contemporary take on Sasak architectural design, passed down across generations to the tribe that calls the island home. One of its highlights is the Blues Restaurant & Bar, perched atop a cliff. On clear days, the open-air deck is a choice spot from which to admire sunsets while taking in the breathtaking beauty of Mount Agung in Bali.

Kamana Lakehouse, New Zealand

Billed as the hotel with the highest altitude in Queenstown district is the 73-key Kamana Lakehouse. The South Island district is a popular spot for adventure sport aficionados.

Skillfully designed with wall-to-wall windows, rooms offer astounding views of the lightning-bolt-shaped Lake Wakatipu – the third largest in New Zealand – and the majestic Remarkables mountain range.

Another choice vantage point is the Nest Kitchen and Bar. The modern Mediterrenean outlet brings together Kiwi-inspired decor and the style of European mountain lodges.

Sofitel Inle Lake Myat Min, Myanmar

On the eastern banks of the famed Inle Lake, 900 metres above sea level, is the 101-key Sofitel Inle Lake Myat Min.

Built using local materials, the resort is set not only against the natural splendour of the lake, but also amid mountains and rice fields.

Its design crosses the charm and richness of Myanmar's colours and textures with minimalist influences.

Arrival by motorboat offers the chance to take in the vistas and snippets of daily life of the *Inthas*, the main ethnic group among the lake-dwellers who call Inle Lake home.

KAI Tsugaru, Japan

Aomori prefecture is home to the Owani *onsen*, where the 41-key KAI Tsugaru is located.

A contemporary twist on traditional Japanese hot spring inns, the lodging's design features local touches and charms guests with daily concerts featuring the *shamisen, a* traditional instrument.

Apple-scented baths are available during harvest season, a tribute to Aomori's reputation for being the country's top producer of the well-loved fruit.

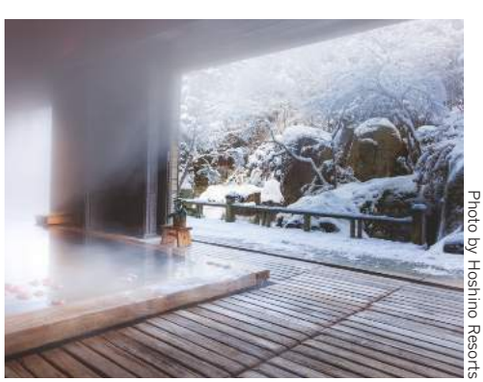
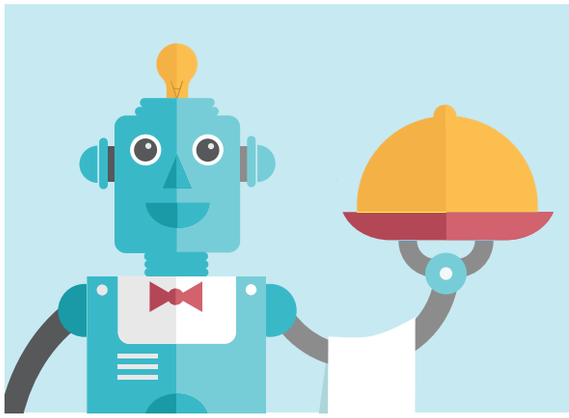


Photo by Hoshino Resorts

Wave of the techno-future



Hoteliers are smartening up their act and future-proofing their properties by investing in innovative tech solutions like AI and robots. By Caroline Boey

The future has arrived, with the innovative use of artificial intelligence (AI) and technology in hotel spaces birthing automated experiences such as contactless check-in and check-out, facial recognition room entry, mobile controlled in-room services, as well as robots delivering housekeeping amenities and in-room dining.

What once was science fiction is now helping many hotels to improve the guest experience. Hilton's Connected Room, being piloted in the US, for example, allows occupants to utilise a smartphone to control the room temperature and lighting, and even sync Netflix shows on the TV set.

Ben George, senior vice president and commercial director, Asia-Pacific, Hilton, said: "What I enjoyed most (about the Connected Room) was the fact that I was empowered and could control everything around the room swiftly and seamlessly without taking away the warm service and hospitality."

That, he said, freed the concierge up to recommend and curate local activities, and for the hotel barista to better engage with guests about coffee preferences.

But even if travellers of the future have higher digital expectations, Ong Wee Min, vice president of conventions and exhibitions, Marina Bay Sands, believes technology will only remain an enabler to help companies improve operational efficiency and enhance guest experiences.

Ong stressed that it still boils down to the emotional bonds forged to retain guest loyalty.

For Pan Pacific Hotels Group (PPHG), its Guestroom Management System leverages smart devices and the Internet of Things (IoT) connectivity to provide an integrated and seamless automated solution to enhance operational efficiency and guest convenience.

Cinn Tan, the group's chief sales and marketing officer, elaborated: "When rooms are vacant, the system sets the air-conditioning to an energy-efficient temperature.

"When a guest checks in and the room's PMS (property management system) status changes to occupied, the system lowers the temperature so the room is comfortably cool when the guest enters. As the room's motion sensor detects occupancy, lights come on automatically.

"When the guest leaves, the system switches off the lights and saves his/her preference, so the guest's favourite ambience setting is launched the next time he/she returns.

"If there is a malfunction in the room, or when guests request for the make-up-room service, engineering and housekeeping staff receive real-time updates on their mobile, ensuring quick response time. The occupancy status on the system also allows them to service the room when it is vacant, minimising guest disturbance."

Tan shared the system would be rolled out at the renovated Parkroyal Collection Marina Bay when it reopens in 3Q this year, adding that the system contributes to the hotel's energy conservation efforts.

Looking ahead, Hilton's George envisaged mobile-first experiences becoming the new normal. He noted digital services on the Hilton Honors app would continue to evolve and become more sophisticated for guests to personalise their experience.

He said: "By 2030, we will see these high-tech features being implemented widely around the world, potentially with added elements of VR (virtual reality) or AR being integrated into the rooms to provide personalised travel insights and recommendations.

"We are always excited to test-bed novel solutions that help to address guests' needs and pain points. We launched our Innovation Gallery in 2017 to pilot new technologies, incubate, and prototype cutting-edge products – like noise cancellation and sleep improvement devices – to offer more options to enhance the travel experience."

In the case of World Hotels, Melissa Gan, managing director, Asia-Pacific, said trial proof of concept for an AR experience was being carried out at member property, The Garden Hotel in Guangzhou.

Gan explained: "This hotel is extremely historical with many amazing stories and artifacts. AR (augmented reality) was used to enhance the guest experience to learn about the stories and artifacts (via) the guest's personal smartphone and also to capture and record the experience."

Gan predicts evolving technology will give rise to a-la-minute in-room cooking and housekeeping, health and wellness value adds.

"I envisage hotel rooms of the future in health and wellness resorts being able to use technology to plan individual experiences and goals on a great scale and with greater accuracy," she said, adding that AR experiences and memories would be captured with AI.

In addition, PPHG's Tan believes voice activation service would become more common.

"We already see the likes of Apple Homepod, Amazon Alexa and Google Home, where AI is leveraged to allow us to search and activate services through voice commands," she remarked.

"In time to come, this will become more widely accepted with technology advances, lower costs and greater security, and we will assimilate this into our lifestyle."

By 2030, we will see high-tech features being implemented widely (in hotels) around the world, potentially with added elements of VR or AR being integrated into the rooms...

Ben George, senior vice president and commercial director, Asia-Pacific, Hilton

Boutique bosses

From thinking outside the traditional hotel room, to rooting their properties in localism, these hoteliers in Asia have broken new ground on the boutique hotel scene. By TTG Asia

Sudamala Resorts, Indonesia

Family is behind the concept of Sudamala Resorts, which currently operates four suites and villas in exotic places in Bali, Lombok and Labuan Bajo.

As well, it was family that brought Emily Subrata, director of Griya Usaha, the owner and operator of Sudamala Resorts, to her hotel business.

She said: "Sudamala Resorts is a family venture, so first and foremost, my raison d'etre is family. It has been my father Ben Subrata's dream to own hotels, so it is an honour for me to be able to be a part of this business."

Being Indonesian, she believes that hospitality is hardwired into her DNA.

"Hosting family and friends is second nature to every Indonesian. It's in our blood, and to be able to build a livelihood around that is an opportunity too good to be true," she said.

With the concept of the Sudamala project being rooted in family, everything from the planning process to the construction and service is personal.

"A lot of my family and friends have commented that Sudamala feels and looks like our family's private homes, just much larger. Not only do we (provide) the intimate cosiness of a home, we also infuse local culture into each property's design. For example, we brought in local Sasak artisans to create Lombok mother of pearl designs on our pool villas' doors at Sudamala Suites & Villas, Senggigi."

Despite the mushrooming of hotel developments in the areas where the Sudamala Resorts are situated, Emily believes the properties have carved out their own niche in an overcrowded market.

"We don't want to just be about beautiful rooms and surroundings. Most importantly, we want our guests to walk away feeling like they've made a friend in us, and look forward to returning again. We strive very hard to be a bridge between our guests and the local community. What we offer is genuine connection," she said.

The hotel brand continues to take its cues from the local community when curating its journeys, said Emily.

"Locals are an unpredictable, variable factor, but they are what make an experience so genuine. They know about their surroundings, and where we should go to get a genuine feel of the locale.

"In Sanur, Bali, for example, the oldest known artefact on the island is simply a ten minutes' stroll from our flagship resort. The Blanjong inscription was established in the early 900s and was believed to be erected on the beach to commemorate a king's military campaign. It is now located in the same complex as a temple in the local community whose priest comes to pray at Sudamala Suites & Villas, Sanur." – *Mimi Hudoyo*

Treeline Urban Resort, Cambodia

Architect Hok Kang is aiming to inspire a wave of homegrown hospitality brands with his innovative Siem Reap property, Treeline Urban Resort.

Located on a leafy stretch of Siem Reap River, Treeline opened in November 2018 and since then, has been championing the city's sustainability movement, while aiming to elevate local hospitality levels.

Hok said: "I thought, 'What is the most recognisable hospitality brand in Cambodia?', and I couldn't think of many. I knew we had to give it a good design, build a strong team, and understand the product and hospitality."

Determined to ensure that the boutique property stood out from Siem Reap's crowded hotel market, design was key to Hok's vision.

He also wanted to capture the essence of the city's famed Angkor Wat, while showcasing contemporary Cambodia.

He said: "You have to know inside out what your brand is. The inspiration for the hotel took a long time. There are so many hotels (in Siem Reap) and so many are international. Siem Reap is so special and we wanted to create the feeling of old and new at the same time."

The result is a stunning 48-room luxury property. Minimalist in design, the hotel boasts clean lines and a central courtyard home to manicured gardens and an exhibition space.

Nature features heavily, with trees dotting the outdoor space and tropical fauna running throughout. A second-storey infinity pool looks out over the canopy of trees that line the river, with sustainability sitting at the heart of the resort.

Added Hok: "With Treeline, we wanted to create something new and inspire other local hospitality groups to be innovative, creative with design, and incorporate sustainability." – *Marissa Carruthers*

Amdaeng Riverside Hotel, Thailand

Sitting amid lush greenery on the banks of the Chao Phraya River, Amdaeng boutique hotel makes a strong fashion statement. The 10-room property has lately skyrocketed to fame in Bangkok's boutique hotel scene – but even more awe-inspiring than its exterior is its backstory.

"We're two creatives who dreamed of having a riverside property. When we finally got our hands on this plot of land, we began dreaming of what it could be. The plans got bigger and bigger until suddenly one day, we realised we had a hotel on our hands," laughed its co-owner Passapol Limpisirisan, who set up the hotel with Wiboon Leepakpreeda.

The creative duo is also behind Thailand's award-winning advertising agency Monday, which they run concurrently with the hotel.

"For us, the biggest challenge was getting the design on point. We didn't want to be another chain hotel. We wanted to find a way to differentiate ourselves," shared Wiboon.

Recounting the process of designing the two-year-old boutique, Passapol said: "I think the architect must have felt a bit of apprehension when we handed him our concept board for the hotel. As creatives, anyone would expect that we're not going to be easy to satisfy."

(From left) Passapol Limpisirisan and Wiboon Leepakpreeda

Central to Amdaeng's design are elements of Thainess, art and culture. Case in point: a 200-year old Pho tree on the plot of land remains where the hotel's courtyard is today, at Wiboon's insistence, even though ridding it would certainly have doubled their room count.

Instead, they planned for a swimming pool to be placed in the tree's shadows – a pool the same shade as the *oang* or earthen jars that the ancient Thais used to bathe from. The scarlet red pool later earned them a spot on Booking.com's *7 Unusual Pools Around the World* article in 2018.

As well, Victorian-style gingerbread embellishments accent the hotel's interior – a hybrid of Thai and European architectural styles harking back to Thailand's golden age.

Passapol draws parallels between his dual careers in advertising and hospitality, especially in terms of client service.

"We still have to take care of our (hotel) guests, just as we do our (advertising) clients," he remarked.

"Although we know that customers who come (to our hotel have) a love for the same things that we do, they also have very high expectations when they walk through that door – and that's where our job as hoteliers begins." – *Anne Somanas*

Sunset Valley Holiday Houses, Malaysia

Nestled on the Malaysian island of Langkawi, Sunset Valley Holiday Houses is poles apart from the corporate sugary fizz of Coca-Cola where David Bradley previously worked in various Australian and Asian locations.

During his time with the soda giant, Bradley spent three years in New Zealand, where he completed a part-time Diploma in Business and Industrial Administration at Auckland University, majoring in statistics.

He worked in marketing in Australia and New Zealand before being posted by Coca-Cola to Bangkok. In 1982, he moved to Singapore after being headhunted to join Carnation Company, and following the firm's acqusition by Nestlé, took on the role of marketing and sales director for Malaysia.

In 1987, returning to Sydney to do his own thing, Bradley walked straight into that year's stock market crash.

Retrenched, he turned to self-employment, becoming a tour guide with Great Divide Tours, Australia's leading 4x4 operators, before setting up his own company Platinum Adventures.

After his first and successful foray into tourism, Bradley decided on a fresh start with his wife in Malaysia, where she had also previously worked.

The couple purchased a catamaran and in 2011, started a yacht charter business operating from Langkawi, taking guests around the Andaman Sea, with Thailand and Myanmar their playgrounds.

The couple eventually settled down in Langkawi and in 2012, purchased a partly built resort called Sunset Valley.

Eight years on, Sunset Valley Holiday Houses consists of six private heritage chalets – five of which are original Malay houses sourced from Langkawi and relocated to the property, before being rebuilt and renovated with modern bathrooms, kitchens, air-conditioning and furnishings.

Sitting at the foot of Langkawi's tallest mountain, Gunung Raya, Sunset Valley is an eco-friendly operation that has adopted composting and recycling practices, while its natural setting overlooking paddy fields and a rubber plantation encourages wildlife.

Guests flock to Sunset Valley for the slice of serenity it offers, with the chance to commune with nature amid greenery.

Bradley shared: "Our guests love the location and the self-catering style of accommodation as they can come and go and explore the island as they like, use the well-equipped kitchen in each house (to whip up a meal), or barbeque and relax by the pool."

Bradley and his wife have since discovered that Sunset Valley is the "real thing" in their lives. Looking ahead, they plan to build Balinese-styled luxury villas, each with its own swimming pool, on an adjacent parcel of land. – *S Puvaneswary*

Sleeep, Hong Kong

In hyper-dense Hong Kong, where cramped high-rises make up the city's jam-packed skyline, space comes at a premium. This housing crisis was what prompted Alex Kot, co-founder of Sleeep, to start the city's first licensed capsule hotel in 2016.

The idea was first born in 2014 when Kot and his partner took part in a competition to use design to solve cruxes posed by urbanisation. The duo floated the idea of a capsule hotel as a way to tackle shortage of space, sleep deprivation and high population density.

In addition to overnight stays, the hotel also sells quality sleep experience by-the-hour, and targets young urban travellers and office workers looking to catch some lunchtime shuteye.

What sets it apart from other hotels is its branding, patented innovation and technology. For instance, the hi-tech Sleeep experience is centered on an intelligent sleeping capsule called a SLPer that is comfortable, scalable and renewable. As well, its minimalistic-chic design has won it a Red Dot Design Award.

The current model of the SLPer is version 2.4 and features the latest R.E.M. (Responsive Environmental Modulator) technology, allowing guests to customise the environment inside their own capsule, including sound, lighting and air flow.

Three Hong Kong Sleeep outlets and a fourth in Bangkok later, Kot is still not resting on his laurels.

Apart from setting up capsule hotels, he has also been busy developing hardware and software technologies that aims to solve pain points of other hotel owners and operators.

He explained: "This is not new and we dedicated resources for R&D from the outset, i.e. reservation systems that was not commercialised, but there's no better time than now to sell our infrastructure as a service to other hotel investors and owners who face pain points like manpower and cost issues.

"For instance, equipment, capsules plus our self-designed operations system that includes access control like QR code or facial recognition during check-in or out process; as well as booking inventory linked to cloud-based PMS to enable hourly booking so as to increase revenue." – *Prudence Lui*

Hotel Soloha, Singapore

Sitting in a serene shophouse of vibrant cultural centre Keong Saik Road, Hotel Soloha's personality is anything but quiet. The 45-room independent property, owned by founder Josh Hu, glows with a mash-up of artsy, neon and tropical vibes, with a smattering of local art and social spaces within its limited real estate.

Hu expressed: "We wanted to create a new hotel within the old whereby there's a juxtaposition of heritage and modernity, and create a visual riot of colours and graphics for our guests once they step into the hotel."

Hotel Soloha is like a friend's chic abode. Guests are greeted at a check-in counter and bar in the cosy lobby, which shares the space with a lounge and noodle bar, as well as an armoire stocked with locally made trinkets for purchase. One can take in the sprawling art splashed across the hotel lobby, the entire lift shaft and in the rooms by local artists Ethrisha Liaw and Danielle Tay.

Each floor of the hotel is uniquely designed and themed according to the layers of a jungle – from forest floor to canopy – and features a "guardian animal", such as the hornbill on the third level.

Hu explained: "We wanted to pay tribute to Singapore's progress as a true metropolis and garden city. We found it most apt to create a mystical jungle within urban confines."

The property shines in a time when more travellers are demanding affordable options, but which also offer convenience, style and local flavour. They have been "getting weary of the mass cookie-cutter hotels", noted Hu, and are now "gravitating towards small hotels with good design, personalisation and that are located within interesting neighbourhoods".

Singapore's conserved shophouses are the perfect seat for such hotel concepts, but are limited in quantity. A golden opportunity was presented to Hu when a lot – where Chinatown Hotel once stood – opened. He said: "I was enamoured with the idea of creating a boutique hotel within conserved shophouses; Hotel Soloha was an opportunity to bring a fresh perspective to the market."

As important as it was to convey the heritage and vibes of the surrounding Keong Saik and Chinatown precinct, Hu was wary of "being ornate and cliché".

He said: "Modern travellers are discerning and well-travelled; they don't need to see Chinese wordings and rickshaws in the lobby to feel (that) they are staying in a hotel near Chinatown. Instead, they would be keen to see a local interpretation of things universal and global."

Although business has come to a standstill amid worldwide lockdowns, Hu is using the downtime to research and plan for new trends.

"We are taking the induced time off to look into new trends that we see resurging in the near-term: domestic demand, regional travels and virtual working arrangements. Therefore, we will be looking at realigning our target markets and improving on our technological offerings to entice the new generation of workers who can work wherever, whenever," impressed Hu. – *Pamela Chow*

Modern travellers are discerning and well-travelled; they don't need to see Chinese wordings and rickshaws in the lobby to feel (that) they are staying in a hotel near Chinatown.

Hue Hotels and Resorts, Philippines

Siblings Dennis and Dexter Lee built Hue Hotels and Resorts with a foresight for design-forward and culturally-rooted properties interspersed with a sense of community empowerment and development that their family's retail business is noted for.

As co-managing directors of Hue Hotels and Resorts, the Lee brothers run the hotel brand's two properties in Palawan and Boracay.

They also lead boutique community developer Lotus Development where they first learnt the tools of the trade by helming the company's varied commercial projects.

Dennis said they picked the name Hue to reflect "the different shades of comfort and experiences" offered to guests.

Hue prides itself on being "glocal" by being relevant to a global audience, yet rooted in local culture and traditions.

"Each property has its own identity, which is inextricably connected to its locale... We wanted to inject the local colour to highlight the destination – the vibe of the place, what it's known for, what draws travellers to it," Dennis said.

"We made the conscious decision to make each property unique while still tying them together as Hue Hotels and Resorts with our quality of service and facilities and the local flair. It's most apparent in the design, the architecture, and facilities."

Thus, the 122-key Hue Puerto Princesa takes inspiration from Palawan's lush greenery and natural beauty. Ground floor rooms are garden units where guests get a feel of nature even in their rooms. The swimming pool with glass side cantilevered on the rooftop offers stunning mountain vistas, while the mangrove roots patterns on the lobby floor evoke feelings of pristine Palawan.

Elsewhere, just like how Boracay offers a complete beach experience of diverse activities, the 127-key Hue Boracay touts itself as an all-in-one lifestyle destination. Housing dining, shopping and leisure experiences under one roof, the property is also home to a retail complex called Station X with homegrown brands in support of local entrepreneurs.

Dennis said that "glocal" is the driving force behind all their projects, which "is stemmed from our core purpose of gathering and growing local communities".

And nothing is about to stifle that ambition of his – not even the ongoing global pandemic. The duo is in the midst of planning for a Hue flag in a major city to showcase the brand's versatility.

Said Dennis: "It would also be a great opportunity for us to implement improvements, based on what we learnt from building the first two hotels." – *Rosa Ocampo*

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Award Categories

1. Travel Agency Awards
Winners in this category are decided by votes from industry suppliers.

- Best Travel Agency – Chinese Taipei
- Best Travel Agency – Hong Kong
- Best Travel Agency – India
- Best Travel Agency – Indonesia
- Best Travel Agency – Japan
- Best Travel Agency – Malaysia
- Best Travel Agency – Singapore
- Best Travel Agency – South Korea
- Best Travel Agency – Thailand
- Best Travel Agency – The Philippines
- Best Travel Agency – Vietnam
- Best Corporate Travel Agency
- Best Online Travel Agency

2. Travel Supplier Awards
Winners in this category are decided by votes from travel consultants and experts.

Airline Awards
- Best Full Service Carrier
- Best Airline - Business Class
- Best Inflight Service
- Best Boutique Airline
- Best Airline Connectivity
- Best Low-Cost Carrier

Hotels, Resorts and Serviced Residences Awards
HOTEL Chains
- Best Global Hotel Chain
- Best Regional Hotel Chain
- Best Local Hotel Chain
- Best Hotel Representation Company
- Best Luxury Hotel Brand
- Best Mid-range Hotel Brand
- Best Budget Hotel Brand

HOTELS – Individual Property
- Best Luxury Hotel
- Best Mid-range Hotel
- Best Budget Hotel
- Best Independent Hotel
- Best Boutique Hotel
- Best City Hotel – Bangkok
- Best City Hotel – Hanoi/Ho Chi Minh City
- Best City Hotel – Hong Kong
- Best City Hotel – Jakarta
- Best City Hotel – Kuala Lumpur
- Best City Hotel – Macau
- Best City Hotel – Manila
- Best City Hotel – Seoul
- Best City Hotel – Singapore
- Best City Hotel – Taipei
- Best New City Hotel
- Best Airport Hotel

RESORTS – Individual Property & Serviced Residences
- Best Beach Resort
- Best Integrated Resort
- Best Serviced Residence Operator
- Best Serviced Residence (Property Level)

BT-MICE Awards
- Best Business Hotel
- Best Meetings & Conventions Hotel
- Best BT-MICE City
- Best Convention & Exhibition Centre
- Best Convention & Exhibition Bureau
- Best Events Technology Provider

Travel Services Awards
- Best Airport
- Best Airport Lounge Operator
- Best NTO (National Tourism Organisation)
- Best Tour Operator
- Best Theme Attraction
- Best Cruise Line
- Best Luxury Cruise Line
- Best River Cruise Line
- Best Car Rental Company
- Best Travel Technology Provider

3. Outstanding Achievement Awards
The winners in this category are decided by the TTG editorial team.
- Travel Personality of the Year
- Destination of the Year
- Travel Entrepreneur of the Year
- Best Travel Marketing Effort
- Most Sustainable Travel Company

4. Travel Hall of Fame
Honoring organisations that have won at least 10 consecutive years at the awards.

These special award winners will be recognised at every TTG annual awards presentation ceremony. Votes for them will not be counted.

Inducted Travel Hall of Fame honoraries are:
- Singapore Airlines Limited (2002)
- Singapore Changi Airport (2002)
- Hertz Asia Pacific (2005)
- Royal Cliff Hotels Group - The State of Exclusivity & Fascination (2006)
- Star Cruises (2008)
- Sabre Asia Pacific (2009)
- Silkair (Singapore) Private Limited (2010)
- Lotte Tour (2011)
- Hong Kong International Airport (2013)
- Raffles Hotel Singapore (2013)
- Regal Airport Hotel (2015)
- Banyan Tree Spa (2015)
- Qatar Airways (2016)
- Thai Airways International Public Company Limited (2016)
- Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (2016)
- Royal Plaza on Scotts (2018)
- Royal Caribbean International (2018)
- Best Western International (2019)
- Travelport (2019)
- Habour Plaza Hotels & Resorts (2020)
- Phoenix Tours International Inc. (2020)

VOTING INSTRUCTIONS AND GUIDELINES

For Travel Agency and Travel Supplier Awards

1. Please use the correct voting form.

Voting Form A: Travel Agency Awards
For voting by hoteliers, airline staff, car rental companies, cruise operators, national tourism organisations, GDS companies and all other travel professionals (except travel consultants, tour operators and destination management companies).

Voting Form B: Travel Supplier Awards
For voting by travel consultants, tour operators and destination management companies only.

Online Voting Forms
You can also opt to vote using our online form at awards.ttgasia.com

2. Voting Criteria
Please refer to the voting criteria for each category and title to ensure that all judging is done on an equal basis.

3. Voting Rules
i. Only one voting entry per person is allowed – using the voting form or online voting.
ii. All votes are confidential.
iii. Voting forms are published in selected TTG Travel Trade Publishing print titles and issues and are also available online at awards.ttgasia.com
iv. No responsibility will be accepted by the organisers for voting forms lost, delayed or damaged in the post.
v. There are no pre-nominated contenders for any voting awards.
vi. The results for TTG Travel Awards 2020 are final and no correspondence will be entertained.
vii. Voting forms will be tabulated and evaluated by an independent auditor in Singapore.
viii. Voting Closes 10 July 2020.

4. Voting Form Submission
Completed voting forms are to be returned to:

SINGAPORE
Delia Ng (TTG Travel Awards 2020)
TTG Asia Media
1 Science Park Road #04-07 The Capricorn
Singapore Science Park II
Singapore 117528
Tel: (65) 6395-7575 Fax: (65) 6536-0896

HONG KONG
Ms Carol Cheng (TTG Travel Awards 2020)
TTG Asia Media
8/F, E168, 166-168 Des Voeux Road Central,
Sheung Wan, Hong Kong
Tel: (852) 2237-7272 Fax: (852) 2237 7227

VOTING FORM A: TRAVEL AGENCY AWARDS

For voting by • Hoteliers • Airlines staff • Car rental companies • Cruise operators • National Tourism Organisations • GDS companies • All other travel professionals (except travel consultants, tour operators and destination management companies)

VOTE ONLINE AT awards.ttgasia.com

Criteria
Best Travel Agency in its respective category in terms of:
- Professionalism and excellence in staff.
- Best value-added services to client.
- Best use of computer technology applications towards improving efficiency and effectiveness in services provided to client.

1. Best Travel Agency– Chinese Taipei
2. Best Travel Agency – Hong Kong
3. Best Travel Agency – India
4. Best Travel Agency– Indonesia
5. Best Travel Agency – Japan
6. Best Travel Agency – Malaysia
7. Best Travel Agency – Singapore
8. Best Travel Agency – South Korea
9. Best Travel Agency – Thailand
10. Best Travel Agency – The Philippines
11. Best Travel Agency – Vietnam
12. Best Corporate Travel Agency
13. Best Online Travel Agency

VOTER INFORMATION

Name:
Job title: Company:
Address:
Country:
Telephone no.: Fax no.:
Email: Signature:

Please refer to the next page for VOTING FORM B: TRAVEL SUPPLIER AWARDS

VOTING FORM B: TRAVEL SUPPLIER AWARDS

For voting by • Travel Consultants • Tour Operators • Destination Management Companies

Airline Awards

Criteria

Best airline in its respective category in terms of:

- Best product, services and facilities.
- Most consistent and reliable network and schedules.
- Most agent-friendly in terms of reservations, commissions, incentives, ancillary opportunities and servicing.
- Best agency outreach programmes, including trade promotions and marketing, training and relationship-building.

14. Best Full Service Carrier

15. Best Airline - Business Class

16. Best Inflight Service

17. Best Boutique Airline

18. Best Airline Connectivity

19. Best Low Cost-Carrier

Hotels, Resorts and Serviced Residences Awards

Criteria

Best Hotel Chain in its respective category in terms of:

- Most consistent in products and services.
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas, incentive programmes and servicing.

Best Hotel/Resort/Serviced Residence in its respective category in terms of:

- Best services and facilities.
- Best range of value-added benefits.
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

HOTEL CHAINS

20. Best Global Hotel Chain

21. Best Regional Hotel Chain

22. Best Local Hotel Chain

23. Best Hotel Representation Company

24. Best Luxury Hotel Brand

25. Best Mid-range Hotel Brand

26. Best Budget Hotel Brand

HOTELS – Individual Property

27. Best Luxury Hotel

28. Best Mid-range Hotel

29. Best Budget Hotel

30. Best Independent Hotel

31. Best Boutique Hotel

32. Best City Hotel – Bangkok

33. Best City Hotel – Hanoi/Ho Chi Minh City

34. Best City Hotel – Hong Kong

35. Best City Hotel – Jakarta

36. Best City Hotel – Kuala Lumpur

37. Best City Hotel – Macao

38. Best City Hotel – Manila

39. Best City Hotel – Seoul

40. Best City Hotel – Singapore

41. Best City Hotel – Taipei

42. Best New City Hotel

43. Best Airport Hotel

RESORTS – Individual Property

44. Best Beach Resort

45. Best Integrated Resort

SERVICED RESIDENCES

46. Best Serviced Residence Operator

47. Best Serviced Residence (Property Level)

BT-MICE Awards

Criteria

- Best services and facilities catering specifically to the BT-MICE market.
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing the BT-MICE market.
- Most desirable and attractive incentives and value added services to business travellers and MICE planners.

48. Best Business Hotel

49. Best Meetings & Conventions Hotel

50. Best BT-MICE City

51. Best Convention & Exhibition Centre

52. Best Convention & Exhibition Bureau

53. Best Events Technology Provider

Travel Services Awards

Criteria

- Best product, services and facilities.
- Most consistent and reliable in delivery.
- Most innovative offerings.
- Most agent-friendly in terms of ease of booking, commissions, incentives and servicing.
- Best agency outreach programmes, including trade promotions and marketing, training and relationship-building.

54. Best Airport

55. Best Airport Lounge Operator

56. Best NTO (National Tourism Organisation)

57. Best Tour Operator

58. Best Theme Attraction

59. Best Cruise Line

60. Best Luxury Cruise Line

61. Best River Cruise Line

62. Best Car Rental Company

63. Best Travel Technology Provider

VOTER INFORMATION

Name:

Job title: Company:

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JULY 2020

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A same yet different future

Karen Yue
Group Editor

We had exciting plans for this *TTG Asia* and *TTGmice* co-branded Hospitality Special issue when it was conceptualised in late-2019.

Sure, the year had its share of challenges, slowing economic growth in the major tourism and business events feeder markets of Europe, China and India, while Asian MICE hub Hong Kong entered a lengthy fight for democracy. But amid these difficulties, many Asian business events cities continued to thrive on a busy calendar of events, with some announcing plans for further infrastructure developments to cope with rising demand for beds, venues and unique experiences.

We wanted this Hospitality Special to highlight what's to come for Asia, how the region is stepping up its game for business events and tourism, particularly the exciting developments in business hotels, specialised convention and exhibition centres, and unique venues that will pique the interest of event planners from around the world.

Then, Covid-19 socked us right in the gut. The impact on travel, tourism and business events is unprecedented, shocking and destructive to the livelihood of many people in the industry.

At the same time, the pandemic has catalysed a revolution in business events. It forced the digitalisation of events and made the benefits of virtual meetings clear as day. It also created demand for a new profession – virtual event managers.

Yet, as the number of daily virtual events climbed to facilitate continued business interaction during times of travel and movement restrictions, it also reinforced the value of face-to-face interactions. The forbidden fruit of meeting and socialising with real people – not on a screen – has never tasted sweeter.

Within weeks of the digital event revolution, more industry specialists see that offline and online events can co-exist even when Covid-19 is medically conquered. The revolution is now shifting to how physical spaces are set up to cater to this new demand for hybrid formats while providing solutions to incorporate new hygiene and safety requirements into event arrangements.

These considerations join planners' growing checklist, which still includes the familiar need for unique venues; authentic and memorable experiences; and sustainable operations.

So while we are still faced with the pandemic, many of what we sought at the beginning to highlight in this Hospitality Special remains valid.

As we wait for our governments to bring infections under control and resume travel and economic activities, this is the time to examine how innovative and sustainably-responsible hotels, venues and event destination specialists in Asia can contribute to impressive business events of the future.

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

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TTGmice, endorsed by the Asian Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus, is published by TTG Asia Media Pte Ltd, and is mailed free-of-charge on written request to readers Asia-wide who meet a set of predetermined terms and conditions. Annual airmail subscription charges are US$70 (Asia) and US$90 (elsewhere). All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in part without written permission of the publisher.

MCI (P) 057/08/2019
KDN PPS1888/02/2017(025626),
ISSN 0218-849X
Printed by Times Printers Pte Ltd
16 Tuas Avenue 5, Singapore 639340

TTGmice

Editor's note
A same yet different future 01

Report
Asia's mega drawcards 03
Think outside the box 08
Wow galore 09

Analysis
Sparkly clean and ready to roll 06
Sustainability champions 12
Loyalty in review 14

Mover & shaker
Lynette Ang: Primed for a strong return 07
Brad Langley: Lure of the unusual 11

Asia's mega drawcards

Integrated resorts are a wonderful convenience for event planners needing varied venues and experiences under one roof. Here are some innovative ones in Asia

Galaxy Macau

Macau is affirming its appeal as a business events destination with the unveiling of the upcoming Galaxy International Convention Center (GICC) and 16,000-seat Galaxy Arena, set for an opening in 1H2021.

Operated by the Galaxy Entertainment Group and part of the Galaxy Macau integrated resort, GICC will boast 40,000m^2 of event space, including a 10,000m^2 pillarless exhibition hall, an auditorium for some 600 guests, a banquet hall for up to 2,400 guests, a 4,000m^2 conference hall comprising three dividable spaces, and a ballroom catering to more than 1,000 guests.

GICC is also touted to be able to elevate business events planning capabilities through its Event Studio – a team of event professionals who can collaborate with organisers on venue selection, theme, décor, entertainment, as well as visual and lighting effects.

One of the most innovative features planners can look forward to is the interactive wall displays around GICC. These digital screens can be synced to mobile devices, allowing attendees to interact with visuals on their smartphones. Organisers can also customise the sweeping 75m-long LED façade wall for branding purposes.

Luxury lifestyle hotel Andaz Macau will be joining the precinct, with a similar targeted opening in 1H2021. The hotel will feature a dedicated check-in lounge catering to large corporate groups, over 700 rooms and suites, an Andaz lounge, a bar and restaurant, state-of-the-art fitness centre and an indoor pool.

Andaz Macau will be connected to Galaxy Macau, which offers more than one million square metres of entertainment, retail and leisure attractions as well as 120 dining options.

Galaxy Macau currently boasts the destination's largest collection of luxury hotel brands under one roof, comprising The Ritz-Carlton, Macau; Banyan Tree Macau; JW Marriott Hotel Macau; Hotel Okura Macau; Galaxy Hotel and Broadway Hotel.

These facilities present event organisers with the freedom to mix and match accommodation types, venues and experiences.

Arena of the Stars at Resorts World Genting, Malaysia

To court event planners and strengthen its network in the pre-opening phase, GICC is working very closely with the Macau government and local stakeholders to promote both the precinct and Macau as an attractive business events destination. It has attended well-known business event tradeshows and is supporting bidding projects as well as reaching out to all of Galaxy' existing business partners to establish partnerships.

A spokesman added: "To better connect with the event community, we are now part of key global MICE associations such as ICCA and UFI." – *Prudence Lui*

Resorts World Genting, Malaysia

Resorts World Genting (RWG) in Malaysia is ready to go all out to win a bigger market share of regional and international meetings and incentive groups once travel restrictions are lifted.

The integrated highland resort, popular for its cool weather, boasts over 10,000 rooms of different star cat-

From above: artist's impression of the Galaxy International Convention Center; Galaxy Macau integrated resort; and an elegant function room at Ariyana Convention Centre, Danang, Vietnam

egories. These hotels stand alongside the more than 37,000m^2 Skytropolis Indoor Theme Park; two cable car systems; the SkyAvenue shopping mall; Genting Highlands Premium Outlets; and numerous speciality restaurants such as Burger & Lobster.

An outdoor theme park is also under construction, but the opening date and name of the park has yet to be decided.

For events, numerous unconventional venues including Zouk Genting are available for exclusive hire. More traditional meeting spaces, such as a ballroom for up to 4,000 pax in theatre-style, are available too. For massive gatherings, planners can consider the property's multiple performance halls where the largest, the Arena of Stars, has been retrofitted with concert standard audio and visual systems, and can hold over 5,000 guests.

Kevin Tann, vice president of MICE, entertainment & events at RWG, shared that the integrated resort is showcased as a "one-stop solution for business event organisers" and is suitable for a range of corporate gatherings, from business meetings to fun teambuilding programmes.

"All resort events are produced by our in-house entertainment team, so clients who want something special for their events can leverage this expertise. We are able to service clients from the proposal stage right up to execution," he noted.

Some unique experiences the team can arrange include a meeting or teambuilding activity in the 100-million-year-old rainforest which surrounds the area; and a private golf tournament at the 18-hole course at Resorts World Awana.

"We also have the resources and expertise to (make the experience even more personalised, such as) arranging for private cable car lines as part of an incentive experience; drinking cocktails at -6°C at SnowWorld; or accommodate a private buy out of our theme park after operating hours," he added.

Tann shared there was growing demand from organisers in Asian markets pre-pandemic. RWG has plans to host fam trips for event organisers – from key markets such as South-east Asia, China, India, and the Middle East – to visit and experience Genting Highlands for themselves.

It also helps that RWG's strength lies in its location, which is within an hour's drive from the nation's capital and 90 minutes' drive from its main

gateways, KL International Airport and Kuala Lumpur International Airport 2. For quicker access or for VIP guests, helicopter rides from the airport can be arranged. – *S Puvaneswary*

Ariyana Tourism Complex, Vietnam

Ariyana Tourism Complex is home to Furama Resort Danang, Ariyana Convention Centre, Furama Villas Danang and the International Convention Palace.

Thanks to government efforts and infrastructure investments, the coastal Vietnamese city of Danang has been steadily gaining recognition as a business events destination.

Prior to the Covid-19 outbreak, the resort was welcoming business travellers from across the globe, with domestic and regional visitors making up the bulk.

Planners are able to house delegates in Furama Resort Danang's 198 rooms and 27 suites, while corporate functions can be hosted at the Furama Convention Palace, good for up to 1,000 people. Another 10 function rooms can cater for between 50 and 300 people. Next door, Ariyana Convention Centre's pillarless ballroom can take up to 2,500 guests, providing even more space for event planners.

These facilities have played host to a string of exhibitions, conferences, meetings and other business-related events. Value-added options and services that can be enjoyed include beachside banquets, cultural excursions and a variety of tailor-made programmes. Two 18-hole golf courses sitting nearby allow corporate groups to have friendly tournaments pre- or post-event.

Furama Danang Resort also has its own helipad, meaning VIP guests can arrive in style.

One of the most recent events Furama hosted was in March 2020, when economic ministers from the 10 ASEAN member countries gathered for the 26th ASEAN Economic Ministers' Retreat.

Truong Ngoc Thanh, Furama's spokesperson, said that flights and international travel are key for corporate events but due to the current pandemic, there have been no guests.

He added: "Now is the hardest time for MICE as people are not yet ready to (travel)."

Furama Resort Danang is part of the Ariyana Tourism Complex

However, he shared that the resort continues to support event planners as much as possible by providing flexible rates and innovative options.

During the downtime afforded by the pandemic, Furama Resort Danang has made use of the time to upgrade its facilities. This includes the refurbishment of walls, floors, doors, equipment of rooms and swimming pools. – *Marissa Carruthers*

ADVERTORIAL

GANGWON PROVINCE Tourism Marketing Department

Gangwon, a year-round destination

Leverage on abundant tourism resources and the provincial government Tourism Marketing Department's support scheme to create successful and unforgettable events

A big welcome awaits. More than 2,000 tourism industry partners are part of the Clean Gangwon campaign to step up cleanliness and hygiene, implement contract tracing with the Clean Gangwon Passport, and are offering attractive discounts.

Kim Chang Gyu, head of Tourism Marketing Department, Gangwon Provincial Government, said: "Gangwon is easily accessible from Seoul and its metropolitan area and FIT travellers can enjoy private three-hour tours in tourist taxis in four cities at only 20,000 won (US$16.60)."

Gangwon is blessed with natural beauty. Enhanced by changing seasons and colour palettes, seasonal activities and festivals create a vibrant K-Wave atmosphere.

Pyeongchang, a winter paradise, hosted the 2018 Winter Olympic Games. A fun ski festival event can include teambuilding activities like curling competitions or a snow sled race and culminate in a gala dinner with participants dressed in Hanbok outfits enjoying lively cultural performances.

And eating like a local, tasting different types of delicious Korean cuisine, makes every meal a social media moment.

The Millionaire Club Indonesia, China's Xiuzheng Pharmaceutical Group and Naturally Plus Malaysia organised recent events that enjoyed support such as cash grants, handmade welcome gift sets, shopping coupons, welcome banners and show-stopping welcome ceremonies.

And for travellers looking to relax and recharge, Gangwon's health and unique wellness experiences, like pampering mountains ski resorts with special red clay spas, enchanting forest walks or nature-inspired yoga sessions, are hard to beat.

Guests can also learn how to experience sound sleep in personalised programmes and those on a spiritual journey can choose a temple stay to achieve peace of mind.

For more information, email kim.nuri@ymail.com, Nuri Kim, Tourism Marketing Manager, Gangwon Tourism Kuala Lumpur Office.

Sparkly clean and ready to roll

Event venues are scrubbing up nice and clean, and in accordance with strict new standards, to welcome business gatherings in a post-lockdown world. By Karen Yue

Enhanced cleaning procedures deployed by event venues during the Covid-19 pandemic will likely remain a key part of operations in a post-lockdown world, as event organisers looking to resume physical meetings are expected to deliver heightened duty of care for attendees, partners and staff.

At the *TTG Conversations: Setting the stage for a return in business events* webinar on May 21, panellists representing the business events industry emphasised that venues hoping for a business rebound would have to provide a safe and reassuring environment for their clients and visitors.

Ian Cummings, global vice president, commercial, CWT Meetings & Events, stated that the safety and wellbeing of attendees – which have always been key considerations – will bear even great scrutiny going forward.

"Venues with the highest level of (health and hygiene) accreditation will be the ones that win. But (this requirement is not just limited to) venues, as airlines that invest the most in safety for passengers will get the highest level of confidence. Airports (that do not) have correct distancing capabilities and (better processing of passengers) may cause us to change the meeting destination," Cummings said.

The way to godliness

In April, Hong Kong's AsiaWorld-Expo (AWE) led the cleanliness charge among event venues when it deployed a high-tech disinfection installation and advanced air purification technology in preparation of business resumption.

The CLeanTech disinfection installation and advanced air purification technology can sanitise visitor's outfits and carry-on items in 12 seconds, among other features. It is believed that AWE is the world's first exhibition and event venue to deploy the system.

While venues elsewhere in Asia-Pacific may not yet boast such high-tech cleanliness deployments, they have expressed commitment to maintaining an active clean mode when business resumes.

According to Loy Joon How, general manager of Impact Exhibitions Management, which manages the Impact Muang Thong Thani event complex in Bangkok, "comprehensive precautionary and preventative measures" have already been in place since February to "ensure the safety and peace of mind of attendees".

"If there is a need, we will definitely explore the deployment of technologies such as cleaning robots, and other effective cleaning solutions available," he added.

Accor, whose property portfolio includes hotels with event spaces as well as convention centres, has put in place enhanced hygiene protocols and established the ALLSAFE Cleanliness label to reassure guests and customers.

The hotel group has also taken a step farther by providing a complimentary AXA insurance that grants staying guests access to a telemedical appointment should they feel sick.

"This will give guests another level of comfort and assurance, so that they feel safe when they are in our hotels," said Kerry Healy, vice president sales Asia Pacific, Accor.

Here for good

Venue operators and managers are certain that these measures will remain for a long time to come.

Loy said the pandemic has brought venue cleanliness into sharp relief across the world.

"Clients will now expect higher standards of hygiene and disinfection processes, and we as a venue should rightfully comply in the interest of safety hygiene," he said, adding that a venue's hygiene standards have always been a key criteria for clients deciding on which venue to use.

Geoff Donaghy, CEO, ICC Sydney, agreed: "Inevitably there will be an increased scrutiny on venues' hygiene by clients as we emerge from this pandemic. ICC Sydney is proud to have always maintained highest standards in hygiene to ensure the safety of guests and team members. These – plus any other measures deemed necessary – will be in place when the venue reopens for events."

Signalling ICC Sydney's readiness to reopen for safe business, the venue launched its EventSafe Operating Framework on June 11. The framework sets out protocols spanning 16 key areas of event management, including the customer journey, environmental hygiene and food service. It integrates best practice from parent group ASM Global's VenueShield – a programme of advanced hygienic safeguards, informed by public health authorities, medical and industry experts – which is deployed in its 325 facilities worldwide.

Primed for a strong return

Even as travel freezes, Sentosa Development Corporation's CMO Lynette Ang has ensured the island remains top of mind among travellers and business partners. By Karen Yue

How does tourism recovery look for you?

While some countries are starting to open up their economies, it is likely that travel restrictions will continue to be in place globally for some time to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

At Sentosa, we are heartened that Singapore residents have been our single largest market, even before the onset of Covid-19. Between April and November 2019, for instance, our local visitorship increased by about 23 per cent, compared to the same period in 2018. This is testament to the strong value proposition that Sentosa provides, not just for tourists but also our domestic guests.

These figures are in line with Expedia's 2018 Singapore Staycation Study, which found that Singaporeans are avid staycationers.

How did your marketing approach change during the period of restricted activities, known locally as the Circuit Breaker?

We collaborated with our Island Partners to roll out several free online offerings, such as the virtual Sentosa on Animal Crossing: New Horizons and other leisure experiences, to keep engaging guests at home.

We will continue to build on and deepen our guest engagement through our diverse range of unique leisure offerings. These efforts include continuing to refresh and rejuvenate our offerings, and working with our Island Partners (tenants) and others to prepare for a strong recovery through events and other novel initiatives.

As we look ahead beyond Covid-19, we will continue to engage both locals and tourists by leveraging on the assets of our one-of-a-kind resort island, including our golden beaches and array of novel leisure experiences, to keep guests of all ages coming back for more, day and night.

How do regional and long-haul markets factor in your mid- and long-term sales and marketing plans?

Being a leading leisure destination in Asia, our regional markets such as China, India and South-east Asia will continue to be key.

In recent years, we have also strengthened our efforts to engage our longhaul markets in Europe, the US and Australia, such as through tradeshows like ITB Berlin, IMEX, IBTM World and the World Travel Expo.

For longhaul markets, we also focus on MICE, and we anticipate that business travel could see an earlier recovery than leisure travel.

We will continue to monitor global developments, and resume activities with our regional and longhaul markets once it is appropriate to do so.

How is Sentosa Development Corp (SDC) preparing for the rebound?

As a unique island-in-a-city that offers an array of differentiated leisure and MICE experiences, we are unlike many other destinations. Therefore, we take a holistic view in attracting visitors with various interests and across ages.

Sentosa has laid a strong foundation through active engagement with our key markets over the years, enjoying strong annual visitorship of 19 million from markets including Singapore, China, India and South-east Asia.

SDC is also a one-stop solutions provider for novel MICE experiences in Sentosa, and has been working with DMCs, PCOs and other venue operators to increase awareness of our destination on an industry level, providing (these partners) with constant updates on (what's on offer).

We also work closely with the Singapore Tourism Board through programmes such as the Singapore MICE Advantage Programme as well as the In Singapore Incentives & Rewards, aligning our approaches with efforts at a national level.

Despite the inability to meet our Island Partners and travel agent partners face-to-face (during the lockdown), we have (maintained contact with) them regularly through platforms such as webinars, ensuring that we keep these relationships warm.

We have also been working with our partners and stakeholders on a strong marketing and promotional plan (that will) bring visitors back to the island once we are able to.

To position Sentosa for a strong recovery, SDC has been actively strengthening the resilience of our Island Partners, (such as by) offering rental support...and providing operational assistance.

What new processes have been put in place to ensure the island experience is safe for visitors?

The safety and well-being of our guests are always of utmost importance to us. Since early this year, SDC has put in place precautionary measures such as increased cleaning frequency of our common and high-touch areas, safe distancing in queues, and temperature screening, among various other measures.

The majority of our Island Partners have also been certified with the SG Clean quality mark, representing a commitment to uphold good sanitation and hygiene practices.

As Singapore reopens safely, we will continue to ensure the safety and well-being of our guests by aligning with prevailing Covid-19 measures set by Singapore's Multi-Ministry Taskforce. These include safe distancing, temperature taking (and) contact tracing (using) technologies such as the national SafeEntry system.

New processes may also be in place in certain areas, such as in managing crowds on the island. For example, guests may have to pre-book their date and time slots for certain activities, considering capacity reductions.

Such processes will enable guests to plan ahead and enjoy these experiences in a safe and comfortable way.

Think outside the box

With an abundance of event venues on the market, hotels now have to yield to trends, transform spaces, push creativity, and go beyond their four walls to win business. By Rachel AJ Lee

Depending on how one sees it, hotel spaces can be regarded as uninspiring function areas bounded by four walls, or stand as a blank canvas on which event planners can paint their masterpieces on.

As experiential and festivalisation event formats gain traction, hotels with function rooms cannot afford to fall into the first category. They have to find ways to be more creative in transforming their spaces while working closely with event planners.

Liow Qixin, senior account manager, experiential events, Pacific World Singapore, said clients were avoiding conventional venues and reaching for creative options instead – and some would bluntly state that they were not looking for a hotel space.

As such, Liow opined that it is important for hotels to work closely with event planners to dispel the myth that hotel spaces are boring.

Slowly disappearing are run-of-the-mill indoor sessions, complete with tables and chairs. Instead, indoor spaces are now sporting beanbags and wooden pallets to encourage informal networking. Gardens are being transformed into carnival grounds with live cooking stations and a DJ corner.

"We've definitely seen an increase in clients wishing to create their own festival atmosphere when planning events," shared Michelle Sargent, director, CWT Meetings & Events, Australia & New Zealand.

Citing examples, Sargent said exhibition have been conducted on a golf course, and pop-up food stalls or massage stands have been included in conferences and conventions.

For hotels to deliver on such out-of-the-box ideas, Amanda Elder, chief commercial officer, Kempinski Hotels, said it was important that hotel representatives be "extremely familiar with all of their property's event options and spaces" and be ready to offer creative suggestions that can optimise the use of available spaces.

She related an example from the Ciragan Palace Kempinski Istanbul. The historic building regularly holds conferences for 1,500 guests. To push the envelope, staff came up with the idea of transforming the hotel's Turkish Bath into an event space for cocktail parties, coffee breaks and dinners.

"With its towering ceiling, engraved wall decorations, ornaments, and columns of pure marble, this one-of-a-kind venue...is hard to beat," shared Elder.

Ramesh Daryanani, vice president, global sales, Asia-Pacific (excluding Greater China), Marriott International, said "making serendipitous connections...is among the greatest benefits of attending large-scale professional events like conferences".

Therefore, he stressed the significance of setting an intimate and relaxing conference atmosphere.

When the St Regis brand first entered Shanghai, the team at The St Regis Shanghai Jingan set out to transform the hotel's spaces into something creative but fit for glamorous occasions. Starting out with a mood board, the team put together modern design inspirations, and went on to completely transform the hotel's champagne bar.

Featuring an elegant green and marble interior, complemented by soft, pink and velvety chairs, the design brought home a fairytale setting for the hotel's grand opening.

Both hoteliers and event planners have a part to play to bear impressive event ideas to fruition, opined Elder. She said the hotel team would provide event planners with valuable support in the planning phase and in ensuring attention to aesthetic details.

Ciragan Palace Kempinski Istanbul's grand Turkish bath is a unique event venue

Due to the pandemic, however, events that have people mingling in close quarters are on hold, and a different kind of creativity is now required.

Milton Rivera, vice president, global business development, global client group & APAC region for meetings and events, American Express Global Business Travel, stressed the need for hotels to beef up their technology capabilities, as virtual events will probably hold sway for the time being.

He elaborated: "Virtual/hybrid events are built on new and exciting technologies that are creating the next level engagement for all attendees. We are in the early demand phase and are finding great benefit bringing speakers and moderators together in a hotel venue, and broadcasting to broader audience groups or hybrid hubs."

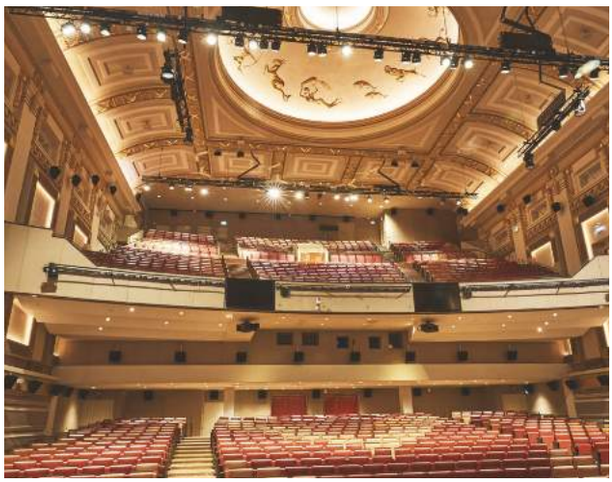
Rivera emphasised that much of the energy at live events come from the speakers and the audience. "Creating two-way interaction (online) is challenging, and that is where the venue and technology providers really need to work hard to come up with creative approaches," he added.

(It is) all the more important for event planners to work closely with the hotels to dispel this myth that hotel spaces are boring and uncreative.

Liow Qixin, senior account manager, experiential events, Pacific World Singapore

Wow galore

Stretch your imagination with TTGmice as we take you on a tour of extraordinary venues in the region



Capitol Theatre – The Capitol Kempinski Hotel, Singapore
In the heart of the city sits the iconic Capitol Theatre, which is directly linked to The Capitol Kempinski Hotel. The versatile venue lends itself to large-scale seminars and conferences, gala dinners and award ceremonies.

A testament to Singapore's film history, the cinema – Singapore's first – was restored to incorporate modern technology, including one of the biggest single screens in the region.

Using an innovative floor rotation mechanism, the space can be changed from one with 1,000 seats to one with a flat floor in less than eight minutes.

Wet Deck – W Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Situated on the 12th floor of the hotel, Wet Deck boasts vibrant colours and chic furnishings, defying the impression most have of a typical pool bar.

With a capacity of 300 pax, the bar makes a choice venue for post-event receptions, where guests can take in views of the Petronas Twin Towers while grooving to beats spun by a DJ.

For an extra local touch, look to the drinks menu, which features concoctions inspired by the tropics and using local ingredients such as *tuak* (rice wine).

Cultural Pavilion – Aman Summer Palace, China
The Cultural Pavilion is the pièce de résistance among event spaces at the Aman Summer Palace.

The 200m² venue boasts a tea ceremony hall and a library with books ranging from Chinese anthropology to architecture.

Opening up to an alfresco courtyard, the interior of the pavilion can seat a 60 pax banquet or a 140 pax cocktail reception. Be sure to request for delegates to engage in immersive cultural experiences such as calligraphy, paper cutting and kite-making.

Presidential Villa – One Farrer Hotel, Singapore
Sized at 200m², the Presidential Villa at One Farrer Hotel can be repurposed into a event venue for 40 guests.

Exquisite artefacts – such as the specially commissioned, hand-knotted Persian Nain carpets, as well as two Khmer jars dating back to the 12th and 13th century – adorn the space, giving it a touch of heritage.

Equipped with a kitchenette and a wine cellar, and offering stunning views of the cityscape, the villa lends itself to unconventional boardroom meetings and small incentive events.

Peace Hall – Fairmont Peace Hotel, China
Boasting a 91-year history, the restored Shanghai ballroom has played host to glamorous social events over the years. Now, the 540m² hall is a sophisticated venue for banquets and seminars of up to 300 pax.

Marvel at the art deco embellishments on the walls and the crystal chandeliers cascading from the 6.5m-high ceiling. The original maple dance floor has been revamped to bring back its shine, providing a touch of elegance for events.

Bridge Marquee – Pier One Sydney Harbour, Australia
Housed within a former ferry station with over a century of history, the Bridge Marquee features the Sydney Harbour as its stunning backdrop.

Spanning 168m², the marquee can host a 120 pax banquet or a 200 pax cocktail reception. Planners can avail of more space at the adjacent 60m² Bridge Room.

A short walk would bring guests to iconic Sydney spots, including the famed Sydney Opera House and shopping precinct The Rocks.

Studio I-IV – Signiel Seoul, South Korea

Located 76 storeys above ground within Seoul's iconic Lotte World Tower, Signiel Seoul's event studios provide intimate settings for guests to network with a view.

Sized between 59m^2 and 92m^2, each studio can host 20 to 50 pax. Studios II and III to be combined to form a larger event space of 117m^2.

Billed as one of the highest event venues worldwide, the studios provide a vantage point to take in views of the Bukhansan National Park.

The Arches – The Murray, Hong Kong

A former carpark ramp, this unconventional venue sits in The Murray, a former government headquarters that has been repurposed into a hotel.

Comprising two rectangular and two curved spaces, the semi-alfresco venue measures 635m^2 in total and can host up to 310 pax for cocktail receptions. Its unique layout makes it ideal for car launches and runway shows.

Aravalli 1 – Alila Fort Bishangarh, India

The sprawling, 2,772m^2 lawn is the largest venue at Alila Fort Bishangarh, a heritage resort in the Rajasthan region converted from a warrior fort with 230 years of history.

Featuring commanding views of one of the oldest mountain ranges in India – the Aravalli Range – the venue can accommodate 750 pax theatre-style and 600 pax banquet-style.

Guests can enjoy dishes characteristic of Rajasthan, such as spicy, slow-cooked mutton curry *lal maas*, served up by in-house restaurant Nazaara.

The Rosamonde Aviation Lounge – The Peninsula Shanghai, China

China's aviation history comes alive at The Rosamonde Aviation Lounge, where a life-sized replica of a Loening aircraft beckons guests to explore a trove of aviation memorabilia.

Named Rosamonde after Sun Yat-Sen's wife and featuring the first aircraft to be designed and constructed in China, the lounge sits on the 14th floor of the Peninsula Shanghai. Through its floor-to-ceiling windows, guests can admire the Pudong skyline. The 223m^2 meeting space can host 60 pax reception-style and 24 pax boardroom-style.

Galaxy International Convention Center, Macau

The Galaxy International Convention Center (GICC) is a four-storey business events facility that is on track to open its doors in the Galaxy Macau integrated resort precinct come 1H2021. Besides the 16,000-seat Galaxy Arena, GICC will house a pillarless Exhibition Hall spanning 10,000m^2 and a 4,000m^2 Conference Hall, among other venues. Delegates can enjoy direct access to other amenities, including Michelin-starred restaurants.

Ithaa Undersea Restaurant – Conrad Maldives Rangali Island, the Maldives

Billed as the first all-glass, underwater restaurant across the globe, Ithaa offers 180-degree views of the Maldives' underwater beauty.

At sixteen feet below sea level, guests can marvel at fascinating coral gardens and colourful marine life, while sampling dishes that fuse local spices with European influences.

Testament to the country's fame as one of top scuba diving spots in the world, Ithaa can be set up to host between six and 16 guests.

Photo by Mount Cook Lakeside Estate & Retreat

Pukaki Wine Cellar & Observatory – Mt Cook Lakeside Retreat, New Zealand

Be awed by the immensity of the universe at Pukaki Wine Cellar & Observatory, which sits amid Lake Pukaki of *The Hobbit* fame.

After tasting thoughtfully-selected whisky or wine, guests are escorted to the observatory, where the right conditions mean a chance to catch the *Aurora Australis* or Southern Lights.

Advance bookings of a minimum of four people are necessary.

ACES – Angsana Laguna Phuket, Thailand

The inclusion of a massive, multifunctional event space, namely the 1,500m^2 Angsana Convention and Exhibition Space (ACES), is what sets the Angsana resort apart from others at the Laguna Phuket resort complex.

ACES can host 1,500 guests theatre-style. Planners can request for the space to be transformed into various themes, such as Royal Siam and traditional Lanna. A dedicated banquet team is at hand to help.

Lure of the unusual

The desire for unique business event venues is intensifying, fuelled by factors such as a hunger for authentic experiences and greater demand for smaller, more focused gatherings. Aventri's vice president-channel and partner management, Brad Langley, tells Karen Yue more

Aventri's partnership with VenueBook clearly indicates a growing need for unique, standalone venues among corporate planners. Is this trend present and growing in Asia-Pacific?

Over the past few years, demand for non-traditional meeting spaces has been growing worldwide. The venue is one of the most important drivers for attendance and attendee satisfaction. Attendees today are looking for unique cultural experiences, and planners are finding unconventional venues are a great way to deliver on this promise.

This is good news for event professionals in Asia-Pacific, home to stellar non-traditional venues.

Event spaces in high demand here include restaurants, art galleries, museums, bars, historic landmarks, speedboats and sailboats for group excursions, renovated mansions, theatres, as well as venues in botanic gardens, parks, aquariums, towers, zoos and more.

Is a growing need for shorter, more focused meetings one of the factors driving the demand for such venues?

Yes, that's one of the factors. Non-traditional venues work well for shorter events, including meetings within meetings.

Let's say you want to entertain customers during a large international conference at a convention centre. Hosting a meeting at a unique venue nearby is a great way to deepen connections and provide a richer and fuller cultural experience.

Switching up the venue to a favorite local restaurant, boat excursion or vineyard and winery, for example, can provide a refreshing change of pace and a look at the distinct flavour of the destination.

What other factors are driving this trend?

Rise in experiential events, (the preferences of the) millennial workforce, and growth of small meetings.

Global meeting owners and planners today are focusing more on the experiential aspects of meetings and events, according to the *2020 Global Meetings and Events Forecast* by American Express Meetings & Events.

(The theme) and content (now) demand more attention; organisers are increasingly looking at the venue as a way to deliver unforgettable, immersive experiences.

This brings us to the next trend. (The millennial generation) is expected to form the largest group of business travellers worldwide starting in 2024.

Here are a few general insights Aventri has gathered about millennials' attitudes on meetings and events: the Internet and globalisation have produced a generation that's keenly culturally aware. Millennials value broadening their global perspective and experiencing different ways of life first-hand.

This means going beyond the meeting room and experiencing the host destination. Non-traditional venues fit the bill, providing authentic local experiences.

The trend toward small meetings has also driven interest in unique venues.

According to GBTA's *How Do Companies Approach Simple Meetings?* study, half of all corporate meetings are simple or small meetings.

Venue contracts will need to be more flexible (in giving) planners leeway on attrition, cancellations, F&B minimums and force majeure.

Small meetings encourage two-way conversations, feedback and bonding among attendees. Non-traditional venues provide more intimate settings for achieving vital business goals.

What does this mean for traditional venues?

Traditional and non-traditional venues can work hand-in-hand.

When attendees come to a city for larger events, you may want to change things up with smaller supporting events. From concerts and wine tastings to dinners with key clients at iconic restaurants, unique venues help you deliver the unexpected... after being inside all day for a conference.

How do you expect the Covid-19 pandemic to impact venue choice when events resume?

When meetings resume, there will likely be changes in the size and type of meetings. We also expect to see more emphasis on health and safety, food service, hybrid events and contract clauses.

Some other predictions that apply to both unique and traditional venues are: an increase in local and regional drive-to events as air travel remains a concern for some; smaller meetings with more spacing between seats will be in-demand; and more events may take place in large museums or outdoors in private parks, botanic gardens and sports stadiums, with plenty of room for people to spread out.

All venues must meet more stringent health and safety standards. Before booking, planners will make in-depth enquiries about behind-the-scenes operations, including sanitising procedures and food preparation. During events, attendees will want to see plenty of hand sanitisers available.

Physical distancing protocols (mean that) planners and venues (will need) to provide more space in lobbies and public areas. Bar set-ups will need to factor in (safe) distancing too.

Sustainability champions

Collaboration with peers and partners in sustainability efforts is taking root among leading MICE venues in Asia-Pacific, finds Rachel AJ Lee

Business events are, without a doubt, a major economic driver but it is also a significant generator of waste through excess food and unwanted marketing collateral and souvenirs.

The good news is, recognition of this weakness is growing and many business events venues in Asia-Pacific are doing their best to minimise waste and more, by striving for better sustainability credentials.

Embrace different aspects

Several large event venues in the region have the basics down pat. Think solar panels and maximising natural sunlight; making the switch to energy-saving LED lights; eliminating single-use plastics and using biodegradable disposable cutlery if they must; separating waste and recycling; and working with suppliers in the vicinity to reduce its carbon footprint.

For Malaysia International Trade & Exhibition Centre (MITEC), sustainability efforts started right at conceptualisation.

CEO Gunther Beissel, said MITEC was built with "strict intentions to ensure that the development preserves the surrounding environment".

That commitment remains, and MITEC makes it a point to reuse as much as possible items left behind at events. Citing examples, Beissel said a backdrop curtain from a gala dinner could be reused as furniture storage covers or curtains for changing rooms, while remnants of timber and pipes from exhibitions would be be taken in for future events.

Looking to sow the seeds of sustainable operations, MITEC incentivises exhibition organisers and partners with certain discounts if they used biodegradable products, and encourages all stakeholders to obtain ISO standards to help develop better regulation.

So serious is the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC) about sustainability that it recently appointed a leader for the task: Samantha Ferrier.

Said Leighton Wood, the venue's chief operating officer: "Sam's brief is simple – to seek out best practice in green, eco-friendly options and make it easier and more cost-effective for customers to incorporate eco-friendly practices into their events."

Within the same city limits, Melbourne & Olympic Parks is focusing on the future with Centrepiece at Melbourne Park, opening late-2021. The venue is aiming for LEED Gold Certification, meaning it will be recognised as a green building that practices the highest standards of sustainability.

Lara Burnes, general manager of premier events & experiences at Melbourne & Olympic Parks, elaborated: "The venue has a

Melbourne & Olympic Parks is gunning for a LEED Gold Certification for its soon-to-come Centrepiece at Melbourne Park

Photo by Marina Bay Sands

From left: MITEC incentivises partners that use biodegradable materials; Marina Bay Sands buys from responsible seafood sources

a sophisticated water harvesting system, which will reduce the amount of potable water it will use over a year, by reusing harvested water captured in the precinct's 4.5 megalitre underground stormwater retention tank."

Melbourne & Olympic Parks has also partnered with local company Memobottle to offer reusable water bottles as corporate gifts.

Burnes encourages corporates to rethink gifts, saying: "Rather than handing out something that will likely end up in the bin, exhibitors could plant a tree in the name of someone or pay for travel offsets – sharing a gift with their guests that gives back in the long term."

Marina Bay Sands (MBS) Singapore has chosen to source seafood in a responsible manner.

Kevin Teng, MBS' executive director of sustainability, said the property has stopped serving species on WWF Red List since 2017, and is on track towards its goal of responsibly sourcing 50 per cent of its seafood by this year.

"To help our clients reduce food miles, we also purchase ingredients which are produced close to Singapore wherever possible. Locally-grown sustainable kale, edible flowers and micro cress are some examples. In 2019, we procured 18,000kg of locally farmed, responsible barramundi, which was also served at our MICE venue," Teng shared.

The twin complex of Fairmont Singapore and Swissôtel The Stamford, which includes the Raffles City Convention Centre, has introduced the "world's first Aquaponics farm in an urban hotel setting", said general manager, Marcus Hanna.

"This project lowers water usage and power consumption for us, and makes real contributions to future global food security. It also greatly reduces the carbon footprint of food as the hotels now produce and supply more of what we need to use, and rely less on external purchases and transportation," he told *TTGmice*.

Finding the motivation

Understanding the need to mitigate the amount of waste a large event could potentially generate has made stakeholders mindful of the need to develop new ways to do business even more sustainably and ease the strain on the local environment.

When asked what drives them towards their green goals, Beissel shared that MITEC launched a "#myWorld Programme that supports the development and implementation of minimum standards for sustainable events and exhibitions, allowing the venue to work towards reducing its environmental impact and drive sustainability.

Juliet Alabaster, general manager of business & major events at Brisbane Marketing, notes that "sustainability has become a key factor in the decision-making process of conference and incentive organisers".

From the bid stage through to planning and event delivery, Brisbane Marketing works with stakeholders to demonstrate its sustainability credentials. Moreover, the Brisbane City Council recognises sustainability as critical to its long-term plan through the Brisbane. Clean, Green, Sustainable 2017-2031 vision.

Being accountable is also a big motivator. MBS's global corporate sustainability strategy, Sands ECO360, guides the way the property runs its business.

As Fairmont Singapore and Swissôtel The Stamford is part of Accor, the property is required to monitor and provide regular updates on their environmental impact towards the group's Planet 21 sustainable development programme.

Dream team

Stakeholders say that the best way to better their own sustainable operations is through collaborating and sharing best practices with each other, as a cleaner and greener world would benefit all.

"Nothing good happens in sustainability unless all of the players in the value chain collaborate. All stakeholders need to be educated, coordinated and motivated," noted Wood.

In order to promote sustainability across the industry, a leadership body is required.

The Exhibition & Event Association of Australasia (EEAA) in Australia, for instance, has created a Sustainability Working Group, comprising representatives from a number of event organisers, venues and suppliers across industry, working together to agree on sustainability practices and targets.

In Penang, Malaysia, Setia SPICE is taking the lead to host more international green conferences in collaboration with the Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau and Penang Convention & Exhibition Bureau.

Nothing good happens in sustainability unless all of the players in the value chain collaborate.

Leighton Wood, COO, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre

Loyalty in review

How would loyalty in corporate travel and MICE be shaped by the pandemic? Some hospitality players are taking stock of this during the downtime, discovers Caroline Boey

The current season can be seen as a pit stop providing hospitality players with the opportunity to rethink what loyalty means and relook at the purpose and effectiveness of their corporate loyalty programmes.

After all, business travel and physical events are not viable at the moment, and the pandemic has pushed companies everywhere to digitalise their operations, noted Ben George, senior vice president and commercial director, Asia-Pacific, Hilton.

For George, this means that loyalty for corporate travel and business events can no longer involve just points and incentives. "Future innovations in technology, from interactive Q&A platforms to (VR/AR-enabled) live streaming, will be (the) key to winning the loyalty of corporate clients and (event organisers in the future)," he reckoned.

Melissa Gan, managing director, Asia-Pacific, World Hotels, however, opined that the value of loyalty programmes in attracting and retaining corporate clients is made more evident in "unprecedented times like this".

She added that loyalty is a "valued asset" for hospitality businesses looking to compete in the existing climate, where Covid-19 has reshaped the travel and hospitality industry.

"With customer expectations driving the programmes, they will need to evolve from just a point programme for free stays, gift and travel cards, to include an extensive retail shopping platform, aligning with partners to enable more flexibility and choice for consumers and heightened partnerships with industries not normally linked to travel," she said.

Nevertheless, Gan acknowledges the cost of developing competitive programmes and their impact on the bottom line.

Such considerations will bear even more weight in the immediate future, as hospitality businesses struggle to recover.

Pre-pandemic moves

The need for corporate-facing loyalty programmes to be competitive and relevant is not new, as hotel companies have had to fight hard in good times to capture a larger market share in corporate travel and business events.

When Pan Pacific Hotels Group (PPHG) initiated its corporate bookers' reward programme, Pan Pacific Connections, in 2018, it was to "compete better" in the corporate space, recalled Cinn Tan, chief sales and marketing officer.

To sweeten the lure, Pan Pacific Connections is by-invitation-only and the privileged access is granted solely to clients with existing contracts with the hospitality group. Points are earned though booking venues and guestrooms at participating properties, and used to claim free room nights and dining perks.

Invited businesses can either apply for company membership, where points are credited to the company's account, or allow employees to take on a personal membership to gain points throughout his employment with the organisation.

Hospitality giant Accor, in line with the revamp of its consumer and corporate loyalty programmes and assimilation under one brand – Accor Live Limitless (ALL) – introduced the ALL Meeting Planner offer, which rewards business event organisers when certain criteria is fulfilled.

Depending on the agreement between employer and employee, points could go towards cutting the costs of future events or paying for sports matches and concert tickets.

Got leverage?

According to PPHG's Tan, corporate loyalty programmes can "impact the RFP negotiation process" and act as leverage when the organisation and the individual take into account perks such as guaranteed rates and rewards.

A corporate travel manager in charge of Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam, shared that the US-based MNC he works for is firm about choosing a hotel group that offers a corporate loyalty programme when it comes to business events, even though it is not explicitly brought up in RFP conversations.

In fact, such loyalty programmes could help companies better manage travel costs, noted another corporate travel manager in the pharmaceuticals industry, who is in charge of the company's travel programme in the region.

(Corporate loyalty programmes) impact the RFP negotiation process as corporate travellers may be more motivated to book with the hotel if they see potential in guaranteed better rates, if they can earn rewards for both the company and the individual, and if the programme is better suited to their business travel needs.

Cinn Tan, chief sales and marketing officer, Pan Pacific Hotels Group