



ITB Asia
October 22, 2020
Virtual



OTAs capture ripe demand as travel returns

Personalised booking experience, clear messages on travel safety are key for tourism businesses

By Pamela Chow and S Puvaneswary

More consumers are gravitating towards OTAs as contactless transactions and information transparency race to the fore of the Covid-19 world, edging businesses towards the ever-increasing need for digitisation.

Since the onset of the pandemic, there has been an “acceleration of preference towards OTA” platforms, described Hermione Joye, sector lead, travel and vertical search APAC, Google. For instance, Chinese consumers have more than doubled their bookings via OTAs during the Covid-19 period, posting a marked shift away from direct sellers.

“This is because (OTAs) clearly articulated what was happening around China when it came to travel restrictions and opportunities, as well as what they were doing for safety measures,” said Joye.

Speaking at a keynote session at ITB Asia 2020 Virtual yesterday, Joye stressed the importance for companies to improve their digital presence, as the modern traveller is



Joye: greater preference for bookings with OTA

“incredibly digitised” and will be partial to platforms that can create a personalised booking experience.

Success also hinges on adapting and responding to new needs quickly; an approach that has helped airlines secure increased direct traffic. Joye advised businesses to create new strategies based on how each market is currently adapting to the pandemic.

In addition, she urged businesses to provide consumers with relevant and current

information clearly. “You need to improve your digital user interface – make sure it’s seamless and end-to-end – and make sure the consumers really understand the safety programmes, so that they feel comfortable booking with you.”

The need to instil trust and traveller confidence through messaging and tourism content is also emphasised by fellow keynote presenter Angel Llull Mancas, vice president & managing director, Asia Pacific with Booking.com.

Mancas emphasised flexible cancellation policies to give travellers’ piece of mind, as “we cannot predict when the next wave will come or how borders will react”.

Some travel trends to note, according to Mancas, include last minute bookings as well as bookings for future travel dates; and a growing preference for locations that are less populated as well as nature-based attractions such as beaches and mountainous areas. In response to these trends, Booking.com has improved on its search functions to make it more intuitive for users to find their preferred holiday locations.

He also foresees that remote working may result in a new type of customers in the years to come. These are people who choose not to work from home, but from an alternative setting, such as a beach or restaurant, where they can stay connected to their colleagues through Wi-Fi.



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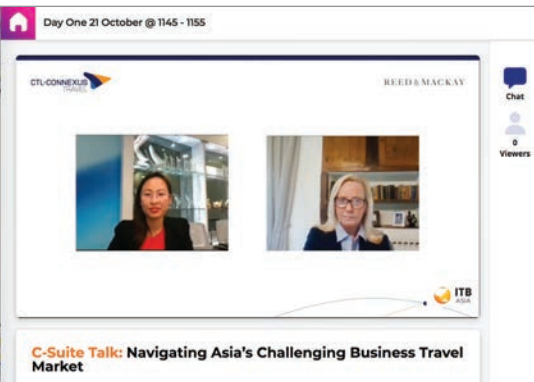
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Tech adoption crucial for TMCs

Technology to aid travel risk management, reporting



From left: Connexus Travel's Gloria Slethaug and Reed & Mackay Travel Singapore's Jane Warren

By Rachel AJ Lee

The pandemic has catalysed technology upgrades and adoption among TMCs that are looking to be better ready for the return of business, observed industry leaders in business travel.

Gloria Slethaug, CEO, Connexus Travel, noted that many TMCs are “going beyond booking tickets, with many doubling down on technology investments and reworking their operations” during this lull period.

Jane Warren, managing director, Reed & Mackay Travel Singapore, opined that the technology rush could have stemmed from the desire of employers to know where their staff are at any given time in today's volatile and risky environment.

“Whether it's a change in the country's status due to Covid-19, natural disaster or political unrest, a TMC can provide data to ensure the traveller's safety throughout, as

well as locate and communicate with impacted employees,” Warren elaborated.

Technology can also provide pre-trip risk assessment; point-of-sale intelligence on Covid-19 safety measures for both air and hotel; dynamic trip alerts; and multi-channel communication to help corporate travellers make informed choices.

At the same time, TMCs can rely on technology to track their carbon emissions and enforce offset programmes should reduction not be possible.

And in fragmented Asia-Pacific, technology could smoothen operations, opined Slethaug.

She elaborated: “The region's business travel markets – China, Australia, Japan, Singapore and India, for example – all operate differently (in terms of) technology systems, GDS, fare structures, and language capabilities.”

Citing further examples, Warren said that Singapore is “slightly behind the curve in adopting technology for business travel programmes” while Australia already has online adoption due to its domestic market. To better navigate the different business travel landscape in this region, she encouraged companies to rely on a TMC that is pro-technology.

Slethaug added: “More companies are expecting their corporate travel programme to assist with their business assessments in the future, so TMCs should rethink how to use the right technology, that's relevant to the local market, to deliver extraordinary services for their clients.”

Strong preference for live events: study

The Global Recovery Insights 2020 report, published by UFI and Explori on October 20, has found overwhelming preference for live events, with no evidence of a major shift away from face-to-face meetings.

The findings were based on more than 9,000 responses from across 30 countries.

Although the intended frequency of participation has dropped for both visitors and exhibitors, this is only marginally the case for the latter, indicating a clear desire among exhibiting companies to return to onsite show floors.

Fifty-three per cent of exhibitors expecting show investments to return to pre-pandemic levels within 12 months, while 28 per cent expect this as soon as tradeshow resume.

In brief

Radisson Individuals debuts

Radisson Hotel Group has launched a new brand, Radisson Individuals, to welcome independent hotels and small chains into the family. While these chains and properties can benefit from Radisson's global reach, contracting power and operating know-how, they are allowed to maintain their own style and identity.

Thailand takes healthy journey

The The Tourism Authority of Thailand has kicked off its Amazing Thailand, The Healthy Journey campaign, targeting travellers from South-east and South Asia seeking medical and wellness services close by. Four routes featuring private healthcare centres and wellness resorts across Bangkok, Prachin Buri, Chachoengsao, Chon Buri, Kanchanaburi and Prachuap Khiri Khan were showcased in a fam trip for ambassadors and diplomats prior to the launch.

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Watch out for the clean wars

Health and safety promises are key to rebuilding travel confidence but hoteliers say extreme efforts can wash out the warmth of hospitality. By **Mimi Hudoyo**

In the hotel industry, a hallmark of hospitality is being able to welcome and care for one's guests as if they were family. In present times, amid the Covid-19 pandemic, that promise of care and concern becomes all the more critical for business continuity.

High standards of hygiene and cleanliness are now the baseline in service, and consumers look to health and safety protection to regain their travel confidence.

Marc Steinmeyer, president director of Tauzia Hotel Management in Indonesia, said that while hotels typically abide by high standards of cleanliness, an enhanced approach is now needed to "give guests greater ease of mind".

But in the quest to establish the ultimate safe environment for cautious guests, could hoteliers risk compromising the warmth of hospitality and become too sterile for their own good?

Fransiska Handoko, government relations director with the Bali Hotels Association (BHA), thinks so.

"It is important to strike a balance," said Fransiska. "We do not want to become sterile and turn Bali into a 'hospital' destination."

Norbert Vas, vice president of business development, Archipelago International also warned against joining the "clean wars" among hotel today.

"There is the tendency for hotels to over-emphasise the new normal hygiene standards in their advertising and promotional activities instead of focusing on their intrinsic qualities. Some hotels are competing to be the cleanest one of all. This is silly and will not help the industry," he remarked.

Instead, he suggested that hotel marketing focus on reassuring travellers and reminding them of the many good things that travel brings.

Over at Pan Pacific Hotels Group, health and safety messages are presented differently. While it rolled out its Pan Pacific Cares promise, which emphasises a commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of its guests and staff, the company has chosen to focus on the community outreach part of the programme.

CEO Choe Peng Sum said: "I am so proud of Pan Pacific Cares, and we take it



ONYX Hospitality Group ensures cleanliness and warm service touchpoints can co-exist

very seriously. (Health and safety messaging) is important but it is overdone. You look up and you see every hotel group has their own programme. It is now a given, no more an advantage.

"(By focusing on Pan Pacific Cares' community work) we want our customers to understand that with our ability to care for the community, the environment and our staff (even in challenging times), we can be trusted to take good care of them too."

Besides being careful with messaging, hoteliers also advised against going overboard with technology replacements even as contactless standards are sought.

Craig Bond, executive vice president, operations, ONYX Hospitality Group, said: "We believe in deploying technologies and systems to empower our team members, not to replace them, as hospitality is a people-driven business."

Bond cited *wai*, the traditional Thai greeting with palms clasped at the chest

and with a slight bow, as an example of how warmth and welcome can still be conveyed without physical contact.

"We are seeing *wai* replacing handshakes in many countries, and we are glad that this uniquely Thai cultural export is offering some relief to our friends worldwide during this pandemic. Our team members have over time figured out a way to smile through their masks, offering acknowledgement, assurance and a sense of comfort to our guests through that subtle sparkle in their eyes," he added.

Vas said told *TTG Show Daily* that "beautiful menus and personal conversations with waiters are being replaced by QR codes, while self-check-in and check-out are becoming more popular". But beyond these changes, Vas sees no place for robotic replacements in the service line, saying that "people will get annoyed" once the novelty wears off. – *Additional reporting by Karen Yue*

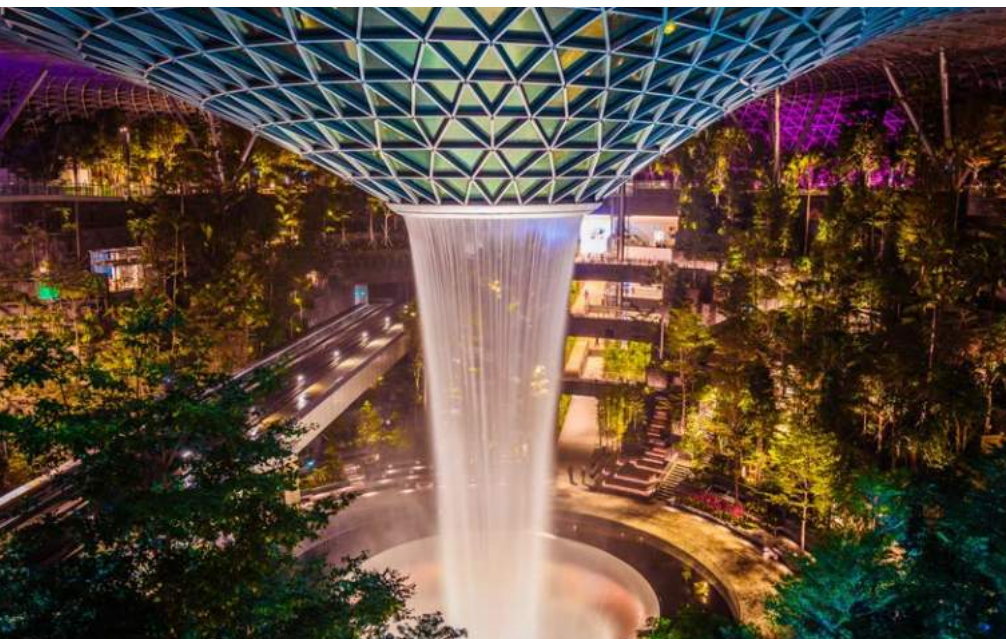
Fun for the whole family

With family travel on the rise, more attractions are crafting activities suitable for bonding with the brood. *TTG Show Daily* rounds up five fabulous vacation ideas across Asia for the next multigenerational getaway. By **S Puvaneswary**



teamLab/Valley of Flowers and People: Lost, Immersed and Reborn, 2020. Interactive/Digital Installation, Endless. Source: Hideaki Ikehashi/© teamLab

From top: teamLab SuperNature Macao's Valley of Flowers and People: Lost, Immersed and Reborn, 2020; HSBC Rain Vortex at night, Jewel Changi Airport, Singapore



teamLab SuperNature Macao

Situated at The Venetian Macao's Cotai Expo, the permanent immersive museum by the multimedia collective teamLab spans more than 5,000m² of labyrinthine floor space. Coupled with impressive 8m high ceilings, the monumental "body immersive" space offers an interactive art experience, alongside learning and experiential activities for visitors of all ages.

Highlights include artworks that constantly change in response to the presence of visitors, such as Valley of Flowers and People: Lost, Immersed and Reborn; as well as laser-based works collectively called Light Sculpture – Plane. Comprised of 11 separate artworks, laser beams are used to create a collection of light planes constructing a spatial object.

Jewel Changi Airport

Opened in October 2019, the 10-storey entertainment and shopping complex spanning 135,700m² is built on the site of the former Terminal 1 open air carpark.

For extended families, a myriad of attractions and interactive experiences promise to keep the whole brood entertained for hours on end. You can also eat your way around the world with more than 110 F&B outlets on offer, or marvel at the awe-inspiring 40m high HSBC Rain Vortex, which is the world's largest indoor waterfall.

Billed as a virtual world of Changi Airport, the Changi Experience Studio offers guests a digital experience through its interactive exhibits and immersive shows. A fun activity that families can play together here is Amazing Runway, a multiplayer game for up to 10 people that is based on an actual race between a Boeing aircraft and Porsche supercar down a runway at Changi Airport back in 2009. Families can form two teams to pit their agility against each other in a high-adrenaline competition.

Canopy Park, nestled on the topmost level of Jewel, houses seven play attractions – from mazes to bouncing nets – alongside creative garden trails filled with plenty of photo opportunities.



Clockwise from top: Kampung Warna Warni, Indonesia; Mahanakhon SkyWalk, Thailand; Alma Resort Cam Ranh, Vietnam; Angkor Thom, Cambodia

Kampung Warna Warni, Indonesia's rainbow village

Looking at Jodipan Village in Malang, Indonesia in all its multi-coloured splendour, it is hard to believe that until 2016, the current tourist magnet was a slum on the verge of eviction. So terrible were the living conditions in the village that the local government had decided to relocate all residents.

It was then that a group of students from a nearby university suggested giving the village a splash of color in hopes of attracting tourists with a refreshed look. A collaboration was formed with a local paint distributor who donated three tons of paint. Local artists and painters, alongside village residents and Indonesian Air Force troops, worked together to transform previously drab corners into beautiful backdrops.

Today, Kampung Warna Warni (Village of Colour), dubbed Indonesia's rainbow village, is a bona fide Instagram sensation. Destination Asia holds four- to five-hour tours in this village, providing guests with an exclusive peek at what goes on behind the scenes, together with the village head and his team of artists. Visitors also have the opportunity to produce simple artwork such as a decorated bowl.

Suitable for all ages, the educational tour gives guests a deeper understanding of the history of this hillside town and the culture of its residents, whose quality of life have been improved, thanks to additional income through tourism.

Angkor Thom Photographic Scavenger Hunt

This half-day activity by Hanuman Travel in Cambodia offers a novel and culturally engaging twist to the typical sightseeing tour



around the majestic temples of Angkor.

The educational hunt makes for a fun and engaging family bonding activity, allowing participants to navigate the temples and their intricate details in this immense walled city, while discovering intriguing little gems along the way.

Players are provided with a map and a list of cryptic clues to decode in order to unravel the mysteries of the temples. Tour guides will also be on hand to provide in-depth background information on the architectural wonders and lend assistance when guests are stumped.

Alma Resort Cam Ranh

Situated on Vietnam's emerging Cam Ranh peninsula fronting Long Beach, Alma Resort Cam Ranh opened last December, offering 580 suites and pavilions – including three bedroom oceanfront pavilions, each spanning 224m² with a living room, kitchen, four bathrooms and a private pool, ideal for extended families.

From a variety of water sports such as kayaking to dry activities like archery, a variety of fun to-dos promise to keep families

entertained throughout their stay, without ever having to leave the resort.

Family-friendly facilities include 12 swimming pools cascading down to the beach, a water park with wave pools and slides, a water sports centre, 13-treatment room spa, a 70-seat cinema, an art gallery, science museum, gym and yoga room. There is also a youth centre with virtual reality games, a kids' club and an 18-hole miniature golf course.

Mahanakhon SkyWalk

One of the newer additions to Bangkok's skyline is the iconic King Power Mahanakhon. Its crowning feature is the 314m-tall Mahanakhon SkyWalk, Thailand's highest observation deck offering 360-degree panoramic views from an indoor and outdoor viewing area.

For thrill-seekers, a giant glass platform jutting out over the edge of the building on the 78th floor lets one 'walk in the sky' to enjoy breathtaking views of the city.

The 78th floor is also home to Mahanakhon Bangkok SkyBar, a modern brasserie serving Western and Asian cuisine.

Creating travel aspirations

From the ease of booking attractions to wellness destinations in Gangwon, *TTG Daily* identifies the top picks meant to tug at travel buyers' heartstrings



GANGWON PROVINCIAL OFFICE

South Korea's Gangwon Province is known for its tranquillity. It is evolving itself towards becoming a wellness-themed incentive destination for the new travelscape.

Five attractions – Healice Seonmaeul, Yongpyong Resort, Park Roche Resort, Musuem SAN Meditation Hall, and Mureung Health Forest – have been selected by Korea Tourism Organization as prime attractions that can boost travellers' physical, mental, and social health.



AIRASIA

AirAsia launches two new routes within Thailand, connecting Hua Hin with Chiang Mai in the north, and Udon Thani in the northeast. This marks the inaugural connection of the beach destination to other cities in the country.

The bi-weekly flights depart every Friday and Sunday, and are available for sale on AirAsia's website and mobile app.

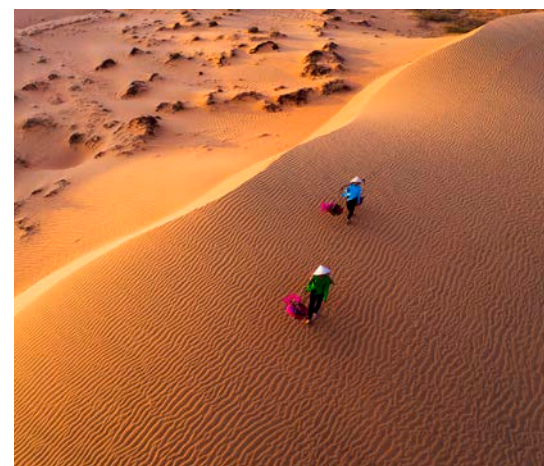


THE GATSBY LOUNGE

Fans of the roaring twenties will delight at this turn-of-the-century bar. True to its Prohibition theme, the bar is located in the basement of heritage listed Regent Arcade in Adelaide city centre.

The venue can accommodate 400 pax across three separate event spaces: a Tiffany-blue Soho Lounge, Manhattan dining room with red velvet booths and imported marble tables from Italy, and a private laneway for outdoor functions.

Culinary offerings feature the executive chef's sharing menu, a fusion of Japanese and International influences, priced at A\$65 (US\$47).



ABERCROMBIE & KENT

Journey through Vietnam with a series of corporate teambuilding and incentive tours for groups of 10 people or more.

Each tour includes hotels, private guides, vehicles, and access to personalised meeting and event services. Special rates are available for Vietnam residents.

The company also offers custom day tours with private guides in Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, Hue and Hoi An.

In the pipeline are regional tours with special Vietnam Resident Rates for travel to Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar.

GRAB AND KLOOK PARTNERSHIP

Grab has entered a partnership with Klook in launching a new Attractions tile on the ride-hailing app to encourage bookings of domestic experiences and promotions, tapping on Klook's extensive catalogue of over 100,000 attractions, tours F&B outlets, local activities, as well as offers from exclusive partners such as Disneyland and Legoland.

Grab users can book and pay for these activities with GrabPay and earn GrabRewards points along the way. Reservations and promotions can be redeemed through the Grab app without the hassle of physical receipts or tickets.

A wishlist function, reviews, and integration with other Grab services, such as booking an admission ticket while on the ride to an attraction, will be rolled out progressively.

