

Asia's vegan boom

Vegan tourism has emerged as a special interest segment gaining traction in recent years, spurring the creation of more vegan-friendly and sustainable options for travellers

Macau's great comeback

Quarantine-free access between Macau and Mainland China, made possible by Macau's containment of the pandemic, is driving a promising tourism recovery for the Chinese autonomous region

Rebuilding travel demand

The pandemic has widened Hilton's customer base, bringing in customers who are keen to splurge unused travel budgets on a better staycation

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A warm welcome

The pandemic's work-from-home movement has nudged consumers into the arms of work-friendly hospitality spaces, presenting an unexpected boon to players in the long-stay market. Now, daytime workcation packages have become a life buoy for Asia's serviced residences

Hey, who turned on the lights?

Defeating darkness with creativity



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Singapore has just stepped back into partial lockdown this month due to new infection clusters and unlinked Covid-19 cases in the community. The current state also means yet another disruption to the highly-anticipated Singapore-Hong Kong Air Travel Bubble, which was supposed to materialise on May 26. At press time, both governments have agreed to revisit the arrangement on or before June 13, when Singapore's Phase 2 Heightened Alert restrictions end.

In yet another blow for Singapore, who has taken pride in resuming many in-person business events safely since October 2020, the World Economic Forum decided on May 17 to cancel its special annual meeting in the city state. The high-profile meeting was scheduled for August this year, following postponements from mid-May to late-May and then to August because of pandemic uncertainties.

Disruptive as these developments may be to travel and tourism recovery, most of us know that such evolving conditions are something we have to take in our stride. We have a full year and more to observe how the virus impacts countries and communities, and we know that even the best in Covid-19 containment is not immune to sudden infection surges.

Maldives, the envy of many destination marketers for being able to safely resume international tourism in July 2020 when most international borders were still shut, has been dealing with a surge in cases since early May. Maldives has now withdrawn her welcome to travellers originating from high-risk countries and regions.

Taiwan, yet another success story in Covid-19 containment, is battling a growing number of local infections.

India, Malaysia and Thailand are still trying to quell troubling new waves.

Hopes of 2021 being better than 2020 are dashed! Or not. It depends on how we want to remember this crisis. This is either a time of darkness or a time of creative brilliance. I will gladly go with the latter. There are plenty of creative survival examples here in Asia.

We have seen hotels, resorts and serviced apartments do well with workation, staycation, long-stay and themed stay packages, some built for beloved pets and others for home owners waiting out home renovations. Some hotels have successfully turned to delivering gourmet delights to customers stuck at home, while others have become skilled destination storytellers.

NTOs, tourist attractions and tour operators have devised out-of-the-box ideas to engage their customers and keep the travel dream alive, such as through virtual reality tours and online interactions with in-destination artisans, chefs, oenophiles, cave explorers, and many other subject matter experts that travellers would love to meet on their trips but might not always have the chance to do so.

Innovative partnerships with non-hospitality businesses have been forged to the benefit of travellers and guests.

We may be living in one of our darkest times in modern history, but these are also days of bright ideas that could forever change how we travel and appreciate destinations.



Travel and tourism players may be living in one of their darkest times in modern history, but these are also days of bright ideas that could forever change how people travel and appreciate destinations.



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08 A warm welcome

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time workcation packages have become a life buoy for Asia's serviced residences, reports Pamela Chow

12 Macau's great comeback

Quarantine-free access between Macau and Mainland China, made possible by Macau's containment of the Covid-19 pandemic, is driving a promising tourism recovery for the Chinese autonomous region. By Prudence Lui

14 Charting the road to recovery

Looking ahead to a post-



pandemic future, tourism players in Malaysia are adapting their strategies and offerings to capture travel rebound. By S Puvaneswary

17 Rebuilding travel demand

The pandemic has widened Hilton's customer base, bringing in customers who are keen to splurge unused travel budgets on a better staycation, reveals Nils-Arne Schroeder, global brand head, Conrad Hotel & Resort and vice president, luxury & lifestyle, Asia Pacific, Hilton. By Karen Yue



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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:
- 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 Pte Ltd (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 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.ttgtravelfhof.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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01 Cebu Canyoneering

ADVERTORIAL

Philippines: Your Next Fun Island Destination

Spread across 7,641 islands, big and small, the Philippines is more than just the thrill of Manila for big city excitement, or winding down in Boracay for a taste of idyllic island life.

The unique geography of the Philippines presents itineraries that include activities like canyoneering, diving, island hopping, surfing, or simply marvelling at wondrous natural sights.

For those looking for arts, culture, gastronomy and historical experiences, the blend of Filipino and Spanish Catholic traditions and American and other Asian influences is a showcase like no other.

Make sure to include these activities in your next trip once borders reopen and find out why Its More Fun in the Philippines!



01 Pump Up Your Adrenaline in Cebu

The island of Cebu is known for its historical sites, luxury resorts and vibrant nightlife. But not many may know that the southern part of this urban destination is where adrenaline junkies go for a heady rush.

Adventure seekers can take a leap from small waterfalls, navigate river rapids and free float through river canyons.

For a safe and enjoyable canyoneering experience, book a tour and explore with licensed guides. The guides know where to jump, land, step, what areas are safe and help you hold on in the water.

Don't forget to bring a dry bag and wear covered shoes with good grip for climbing on slippery rocks.

Cebu's location in Central Philippines is ideal as it provides connectivity between Luzon and Mindanao, and serves as an alternative gateway to the Philippines.



02 BenCab Museum

02 Cool and Artsy Baguio

For cooler weather, head to Baguio City, the summer capital of the Philippines, where temperatures range from 15°C to 23°C and rarely exceed 26°C.

The welcoming weather makes it ideal to spend time visiting Baguio's varied museums and art galleries.

Visitors can view the permanent and private collection of Philippine national artist Benedicto Cabrera at the eponymous BenCab Museum. Museo Kordilyera, located in the University of the Philippines Baguio campus, is the first ethnographic museum in the Northern Philippines and houses artifacts unique to the Cordillera region.

Baguio Museum presents the cultural history of Baguio City, while Aguinaldo Museum, inspired by revolutionary hero Emilio Aguinaldo, features other heroes who contributed to the country's independence.

Bell House, named after Major Gen. James Franklin Bell, showcases American colonial architecture. The building, part of Camp John Hay, has been perfectly preserved and is now a museum. Bell, a former commanding general of the Armed Forces in the Philippines transformed the camp into a military resort.



03 Lake Sebu

03 Explore South Cotabato's Rich Culture

Lake Sebu in Cotabato is the ancestral dwelling of the T'boli and Ubo tribes.

The lake and its surroundings are now being promoted as one of the prime ecotourism destinations in Mindanao.

Consisting of the expansive Allah Valley, the area is recognised as a cultural landscape by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Apart from Lake Sebu, the valley is also known for its natural environment and attractions which include Lake Holon, Baras Bird Sanctuary and Esperanza Hot and Cold Springs.

Lake Sebu has also been identified as one of the priority sites under the ASEAN sub-regional tourism growth cluster.



04 San Nicolas Cookies

04 New Tastes on Pampanga Gastronomic Journey

Northwest of Manila in Central Luzon is Pampanga, regarded as the country's culinary capital, and famed for its exotic *Kapampangan* cuisine.

Foodies will be able to sample Spanish-inspired dishes and the more unusual like farm-raised stuffed frog, water buffalo stew, cricket adobo braised with tomato and vinegar, sour guava soup and lechon, or pork, prepared five ways.

Considered a Filipino heirloom cookie, St Nicolas Cookies, or Sanikulas cookies as the locals call them, are not to be missed.

These special cookies, made with simple ingredients, can be traced back to Italy's San Nicolas de Tolentino, who lived some time in the 13th Century. He was the patron saint of bakers, the sick, children, the souls in purgatory and of calamity.



05 Bambike in Intramuros

05 Take a Walk in Historic Manila

Intramuros, which means "within the walls", is the historic core of the Philippine capital, and the oldest part of the city is encircled with massive thick high stone walls and moat.

Old-world Intramuros with its Spanish-era landmarks like Fort Santiago, featuring a large stone gate and a shrine to national hero José Rizal, takes visitors back in time.

Attractions also include the ornate Manila Cathedral which houses bronze carvings and stained glass windows, while religious artwork and statues are on display at the San Agustin Church Museum.

Better yet, go on a Bambike tour cycling around on a one-of-a-kind bicycle made of natural bamboo. Craftsmen known as Bambuilders, who make them by hand, can take up to four months or more to produce one bicycle.



06 White Beach, Boracay

06 Relaxing In Boracay

Famed for its white sand beaches, stunning sunsets and nightlife choices, award-winning Boracay gives visitors a taste of island life.

Once they arrive, they can slow down, take a break from the daily hustle and bustle and recharge.

It is easy to enjoy a relaxing time in some of the best hotels in the Philippines. Try exciting watersports with energy fully charged and wind down in a host of bars and restaurants before calling it a night.

Families and groups can enjoy varied day excursions and shopping trips, while couples can spend time alone exploring uninhabited coves on island hopping tours.

Boracay offers visitors the option to do nothing one day and be out and about the next, trekking in Mount Luho, the island's highest peak, going on a helicopter tour or visiting a shooting range.



07 Cloud 9, Siargao

07 Surf and Ride the Waves

Three places stand out when it comes to riding the waves in the Philippines – Siargao, La Union and Baler.

Once a well-kept secret, Siargao island in Surigao del Norte province – north-east of Mindanao, 800km south-east of Manila – is the surfing capital of the Philippines.

Siargao is sought-after for its world-class waves, white sand islets, turquoise tide pools and hidden lagoons.

For an easy-wave experience, head to La Union known for its consistent intermediate quality surf. The surfing seasons are July to October and November to March.

And surfing in Baler, the capital of Aurora province, is year-round. The surf in Cemento Beach is said to be powerful and Charlie's Point and Lindy's Point are also popular.



08 Chocolate Hills

08 Bohol's Sightseeing Wonder

The unique and majestic Chocolate Hills in Bohol are one of the most visited destinations in the Central Visayas region of the Philippines.

So called because the grass-covered hills turn chocolate brown during the dry season, the area which covers the towns of Carmen, Sagbayan, Bilar, Sierra Bullones and Valencia, transform into seemingly endless rows of Hershey's "chocolate kisses".

It is estimated that the island of Bohol is home to up to 1,800 of them.

At the Chocolate Hills Adventure Park, an ecotourism attraction and a 75-minute drive from Tagbilaran City, visitors can try a number of Zipline activities, drive an ATV or all terrain vehicle, go mountain biking or horseback riding, explore nature and camp outdoors.



09 El Nido, Palawan

09 Island Hopping in Palawan

Made up of 1,780 islands, the 90-minute flight from Manila to the capital Puerto Princesa, takes visitors to the centre of this ecotourism paradise.

Traditional outrigger boats, called banca, take visitors from island to island in nearby Honda Bay for snorkelling, swimming and spotting marine life.

Those planning to visit the Puerto-Princesa Subterranean River National Park – a UNESCO World Heritage site voted one of the New Seven Wonders of Nature – must have a permit.

It is best to book a guided tour, which includes a permit, to glide through the park's cathedral-like caverns on one of the world's longest navigable underground rivers.

Island hoppers can also choose to fly into Coron, explore Busuanga and sail towards the karst limestone formations of El Nido, or reverse the journey.

A tailor-made onboarding itinerary can include stops to meet island communities, shop at a lobster farm for tonight's dinner, or picnic on deserted islands.



10 Twin Rocks

10 Scuba Diving in Anilao

The Philippines offers some of the best scuba diving experiences with its pristine coral reefs, lush coral gardens, huge schools of fish, rare sea creatures, manta rays and even whale sharks.

Among the country's top dive destinations is Anilao, in Batangas province, about a three-hour drive south of Manila.

Divers and underwater photography enthusiasts are drawn to Anilao for its incredible diversity and its alluring beachfront resorts.



For more information, visit www.philippines.travel and www.tpb.gov.ph
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Asia's vegan boom

Vegan tourism has emerged as a special interest segment gaining traction in recent years. With that, more vegan-friendly options are sprouting up on the tourism scene as travel brands hunger after a piece of the meat-free pie. **Cheryl Ong** examines the flourishing trend



Singapore agency VegThisCity's vegan food tours allow guests to support local businesses such as Peranakan heritage brand Kim Choo Kueh Chang (above) and connect with foodies from around the world

The slow but sure rise of veganism in recent years as consumers awake to the health and environmental benefits of going meat-free has resolutely set vegan tourism on the path of steady growth.

Veganism has been vaunted as the more sustainable food option that is good for both the people and the planet, as a plant-based diet requires only one third of the land needed to support a meat and dairy diet.

While the pandemic brought travel to a standstill, the global appetite for veganism has grown since 2020, driven in part by a groundswell for sustainability and climate action.

A GlobalData survey conducted in December 2020 showed that post-Covid, more global consumers are influenced by how ethical, environmentally-friendly and socially responsible a product or service is.

The report indicated that changing traveller perceptions amid the pandemic may prompt many more to switch to veganism, as reduction of meat consumption has a positive environmental impact.

Vegan vacations: the next big tourism trend?

As the popularity of veganism grows, tour operators across the world like Intrepid Travel are answering the

eco-conscious call for more vegan-friendly travel options.

Since launching a series of vegan tours in mid-2018, the global tour operator based in Australia has seen a rise in interest for such tours held in India, Thailand and Italy. The company recorded an 80 per cent increase in bookings for its vegan tours between 2018 and 2019, shared Erica Kritikides, senior brand and product manager, Intrepid Travel.

Of these, more than 70 per cent of bookings were for its India vegan tour – which enjoys a popularity that Kritikides attributes to “the centrality of veganism within many regional Indian cuisines”.

Led by vegans or vegetarians, these vegan food tours run by Intrepid Travel comprise vegan-friendly cooking classes and all-vegan street food crawls, alongside culturally immersive activities.

Majority of guests (72 per cent) on such tours were female, mainly hailing from Australia, the UK and the US, with millennials making up over 50 per cent of all customers.

While the pandemic forced the company to pause its vegan tours, it is looking forward to how these tours could evolve when travel resumes.

According to Statista, nine per cent of the Asia-Pacific population identified as vegan in 2016. As a fur-

ther sign of growing appetites for veganism, between 2017 and the start of 2020, searches for “vegan tours” on Google grew by 76 per cent, noted Kritikides.

“Increased interest in vegan tourism is undoubtedly linked to more mainstream acceptance of the vegan diet and a general trend towards a more plant-focused way of eating – both for its recognised health benefits, as well as for sustainability reasons, with awareness around meat production being a carbon-intensive agricultural process,” she explained.

“More people – especially millennials and Gen Y – are also recognis-



More people – especially millennials and Gen Y – are recognising that vegan food can be delicious – and that there are some fascinating vegan culinary subcultures well worth exploring...

ERICA KRITIKIDES
Senior brand and product manager, Intrepid Travel



ing that vegan food can be delicious – and that there are some fascinating vegan culinary subcultures well worth exploring – and tasting – many of those found in Asia. Examples might be *shojin ryori* (Japanese monastic cuisine) or Jain cuisine in India – both of which are completely vegan.”

Eiktha Khemlani, founder of Singapore's first and only plant-based food tour company VegThisCity, said that vegan tourism “ticks all the right boxes” for a growing segment of travellers looking to travel responsibly and sustainably.

“They want products and experiences that are animal-friendly, better for the planet and allow them to leave a positive impact on the local community,” she said.

Started in 2018, VegThisCity offers themed vegan and vegetarian food crawls around neighbourhoods like Joo Chiat and Chinatown.

The company also runs collaborative dining events, virtual experiences and corporate tours, and works with global travel and event companies as the local operator for vegan walking tours in Singapore.

VegThisCity's tours attract a wide range of both local and foreign vegans and curious foodies, including business owners exploring cruelty-free options.

To cater to the young ones, the company arranges child-friendly dishes and swap out cocktails and non-dairy lattes for fresh fruit smoothies and superfood popsicles.

“These experiences inspire conversations on food and the environment, and provide a platform for businesses and individuals to rethink traditional options and innovate in a more eco-friendly and sustainable way, no matter the industry,” said Khemlani.

With the plant-based movement taking root across the globe, interest in VegThisCity's tours has been on the rise. From hosting once or twice monthly tours to weekly outings within the first 18 months of starting operations, it is a growth Khemlani attributes to the company's varied and customisable offerings.

“(Vegan tourism) has been a growing segment for the past two years, especially now more than ever as people approach food with a greater emphasis on their personal health and want to know more about where and how food comes to their plate,” explained Khemlani.

“With organisations making greater investment on alternative food products, new advocacy documentaries on mainstream media and vegan food becoming more experimental – this is naturally fueling the foodie's curiosity.”

“As a lifestyle, veganism adapts to the most pressing ethical, environment and health needs... Travellers also realise that they can travel responsibly and eat better without missing out on the best experiences each country has to offer.”

While the company was on track for steady growth, with advance bookings for the first half of 2020, travel curbs imposed due to the pandemic saw its tour bookings dip. Khemlani, however, saw an opportunity to reinvent the company's guest en-

gagement and experiences.

“Guests who cancelled their existing bookings with us were not only offered full refunds, but also, a complimentary virtual Singapore experience with our professional guides to entice them to rebook their food tour with VegThisCity once travel resumes,” she said.

“The feedback we received from this was very positive, with some international guests booking our virtual teasers as surprise gifts for friends, and our tour experiences as travel incentives for their work teams.”

Fairkconnect, India’s first vegan travel company which operates vegan tours in India and Sri Lanka, had also seen swelling demand for its tours before the pandemic.

“We had a nearly 150 per cent increase in our bookings in 2019 compared to years prior,” shared Shilpa Jujavarapu, digital marketing manager, Fairkconnect.

In light of the pandemic, the company has lined up only one vegan tour in South India this December. The 11-day digital detox getaway in Bangalore and Pondicherry will bring guests to explore night markets and wildlife rehabilitation centres, as well as learn about sustainable fashion and the vegan food movement in South India.

The tour has garnered “quite a lot of interest”, said Jujavarapu, adding that the agency hopes to be able to expand its trips again in 2022.

Pre-pandemic, interest in Fairkconnect’s vegan tours came from all across the globe, with solo travellers from North America and Europe generating the bulk of its business. Its tours see a wide age range, dominated by those in their late 30s.

Veganism as a lifestyle

Many vegan tour operators go beyond serving up an itinerary filled with plant-based menu options, to also include sustainable initiatives such as local community involvement.

For Fairkconnect, its sustainable vegan tours are as much about the food, as they are about connecting with various animal conservation initiatives and visiting environmental projects.

Currently, the company works with various organisations and holds workshops on its trips to educate



From top: On VegThisCity’s History of Taste tour, guests get to savour traditional delicacies around Singapore’s Joo Chiat district and learn how families are keeping their food heritage alive (photo taken pre-Covid); Intrepid Travel’s vegan food tour in India brings guests to sample authentic food on cuisine crawls around the country



travellers on conscious travel, animal conservation, environmental efforts and veganism.

“Our trips are curated to teach travellers about global issues and movements around sustainable fashion, veganism, climate change, zero-waste, animal conservation and how to travel while making a low environmental impact,” explained Jujavarapu, adding that the company is also mindful about keeping its trips as zero-waste as possible.

With the growing tide towards environmentalism, Jujavarapu hopes for the company to work with bigger outfitters and organisations to help them veganise their trips.

Further, Fairkconnect prides itself on supporting local communities with its vegan tours by working with local organisations, visiting local restaurants and patronising small businesses.

That sustainability ethos also guides VegThisCity’s tours. A shared meal in a private farm, a botanical art session with a social enterprise and a lavish vegan feast in a 100-year-old establishment are among some of the tour experiences designed to not only celebrate local multicultural cuisine in a fresh way and showcase local culture, but also empower local communities.

Khemlani also recognises that veganism is a lifestyle that goes beyond food, and that philosophy is reflected in the company’s line-up for the coming months – from showcasing locally-made vegan lifestyle products on its tours and collaborating on wellness programmes such as the upcoming Recharge Retreat with Grand Hyatt to organising multi-day vegan adventures and pop-ups within homes of local hosts.

While still currently a niche market, vegan tourism is ripe for growth. No longer just appealing to vegans and vegetarians, vegan vacations are

gaining traction among a broader segment of health and environmentally conscious travellers.

Tour operator Responsible Travel, which offers a range of vegan and vegetarian holidays across the world including many parts of Asia, has seen a spike in demand generally for healthier and more sustainable holiday options, including food choices, shared its co-founder and CEO, Justin Francis.

“(Vegan holidays) are no longer only the preserve of yoga and wellness retreats. Any holiday can be a vegan holiday, or at least, inclusively so,” he said.

Post-pandemic, Francis predicts that demand for vegan tourism will continue on its upward trajectory, and that travel businesses will become much more inclusive of veganism and actively raise their game to offer the choicest vegan experiences.



As a lifestyle, veganism adapts to the most pressing ethical, environment and health needs...

EIKTHA KHEMLANI
Founder,
VegThisCity





Southeast Asia
feel the warmth

EXPERIENCE THE WONDERS OF SOUTHEAST ASIA



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Clockwise from above: The Shueng Wan by Ovolo is a partner property of Dash Living; Pan Pacific Serviced Suites Beach Road brings a luxury touch to work-from-home routines; Oakwood Residence Sukhumvit Thonglor Bangkok offers the Work from Oakwood programme

A warm welcome

The pandemic's work-from-home movement has nudged consumers into the arms of work-friendly hospitality spaces, presenting an unexpected boon to players in the long-stay market. Now, daytime workcation packages have become a life buoy for Asia's serviced residences, reports **Pamela Chow**

While recovery to pre-pandemic occupancy continues to elude the hospitality trade, serviced residences have received an unexpected blessing in disguise. Remote work and telecommuting are driving consumers in search of more conducive places to work that can double up as a vacation opportunity – a demand that has driven long-stay players towards more inventive, daily offerings.

For instance, Oakwood's workcation product, Work from Oakwood, provides its guests day access to available recreational facilities, a private kitchen, snacks and beverages, as well as complimentary and discounted printing services. Since its launch in September 2020 at 27 properties across Asia-Pacific and the US, the package has enjoyed "a consistent take-up in bookings month on month", accompanied by a "healthy" average occupancy of 55

per cent across all brands, shared CEO Dean Schreiber.

Schreiber added: "For the workcation segment, properties in dense gateway cities like Singapore, Bangkok and Tokyo have proven to enjoy greater demand."

Pan Pacific Serviced Suites Beach Road in Singapore also released a comparable workcation package in response to "the needs of locals who were in search of indulgent alternatives to the usual work-from-home routine", described Cinn Tan, chief sales and marketing officer, Pan Pacific Hotels Group (PPHG).

With this, guests can take up a one-bedroom suite with complimentary amenities such as a welcome hamper, mini-bar with snacks, in-room Nespresso coffee and tea as well as complimentary parking.

"We received good response during the initial launch period as people were seeking alternative working venues. However, demand has

slowed down slightly this year, most likely due to more people gradually returning to work. While the workcation bookings contribute only a slight increase in revenue, it has given us the opportunity to showcase our Serviced Suites to Singaporeans," shared Tan.

The Ascott launched its Work in Residence initiative in August 2020, giving guests the option of daily, weekly or monthly packages for work suites in 85 properties worldwide, as well as selected amenities such as a dedicated workstation, regular housekeeping, complimentary coffee and tea, high-speed WiFi, and complimentary parking. Guests can also request for task lights, USB charging ports, a webcam and Bluetooth speakers with microphones. Further conveniences, such as food delivery, grocery shopping, printing, concierge or book-a-chef for in-room dining, are available too.

This offering has allowed The As-

cott to maintain "robust" occupancy at its properties over the course of the pandemic, said Ervin Yeo, its managing director for South-east Asia.

For instance, lyf Funan Singapore was able to maintain a strong occupancy rate of more than 80 per cent from April to June 2020 as a result of the Work in Residence programme. As at March 2021, it had achieved 85 per cent average occupancy, with 68 per cent being corporate groups and long-stay guests of between one and 24 months.

Yeo elaborated: "Revenue from long-stay guests has increased, particularly on stays of three to 12 months. (The) Work in Residence initiative had the highest demand in Japan, followed by countries such as Singapore, China, Vietnam and Indonesia."

"We have (also) seen increased bookings of our Work in Residence packages for day use amid the Covid-19 situation."



We differentiate by creating a community for our tenants, with convenience, a sharing economy and tenant engagements in mind.

AARON LEE
Founder,
Dash Living

All work, all play

The Ascott has gone beyond the workcation game, now offering its apartments to be used as live-streaming spaces and fitness studios. For instance, Ascott Raffles City Shenzhen and Somerset IOC Hangzhou have hosted long-staying Internet celebrities and employees of new media and ecommerce companies, along with their live-streaming events and photo-shoots. Ascott Raffles City Chengdu and Somerset Riverview Chengdu in China have converted some apartments into fitness studios, which instructors can reserve at special rates to conduct classes for guests. In Vietnam, selected apartments in Somerset Grand Hanoi, Somerset Hoa Binh Hanoi and Somerset Vista Ho Chi Minh City have similarly been converted into yoga studios.

In another initiative, The Ascott released Space-as-a-Service in August 2020 for collaboration with corporations and enterprises. Under this banner, the company has partnered with Nestlé to set up “We Proudly Serve Starbucks” coffee kiosks in the lobby of its Citadines-branded properties.

These inventive verticals netted the group more than S\$91 million in 2020, revealed Yeo, and strengthened confidence in its brands. “Property owners continue to sign new management and franchise contracts with us despite Covid-19. In 2020, Ascott signed a record of over 14,200 units across 71 properties globally. This exceeds the number of units secured in 2019, marking a fourth consecutive year of record growth,” Yeo told *TTG Asia*.

Meanwhile, Dash Living, which offers serviced living rental solutions, is reaching out to merchants located around its partner properties – the most recent portfolio additions being Ovolo’s The Sheung Wan and The Aberdeen in Hong Kong – to foster a service ecosystem around the workcation experience. Its tenants are afforded lifestyle benefits in the precinct, such as fitness centre access, F&B discounts and monthly events organised by Dash Living or its tenants.

“We differentiate by creating a community for our tenants, with convenience, a sharing economy and tenant engagements in mind. During the pandemic, Dash Living has managed to maintain an occupancy rate of over 90 per cent,” said Aaron Lee, founder, Dash Living.

The journey forward

While demand from the workcation segment continues to hold strong for serviced residences, forward-looking players are levelling up in pursuit of higher domestic numbers.

The Ascott is turning its sights back to its loyalty programme, Ascott Star Rewards (ASR), having launched a mobile app in October 2020 to service its members. Besides membership and point management, the ASR app enables guests to perform self-check-in and check-out, make digital payments, access their apartments with a digital key and place service requests.

With flexible bookings now the name of the reservations game, ASR members may receive bonus loyalty points even for cancelled bookings, which can be redeemed in the future when travel resumes.

For PPHG, its serviced residences are paying close attention to the non-working crowd to keep its occupancy healthy for 2021. For instance, Parkroyal Serviced Suites has launched a pet-friendly staycation package, targeting local homeowners who desire a mini retreat with their “furkids”.



From left: Parkroyal Serviced Suites offers pet-friendly staycations; lyf Funan Singapore has done well on the workation route



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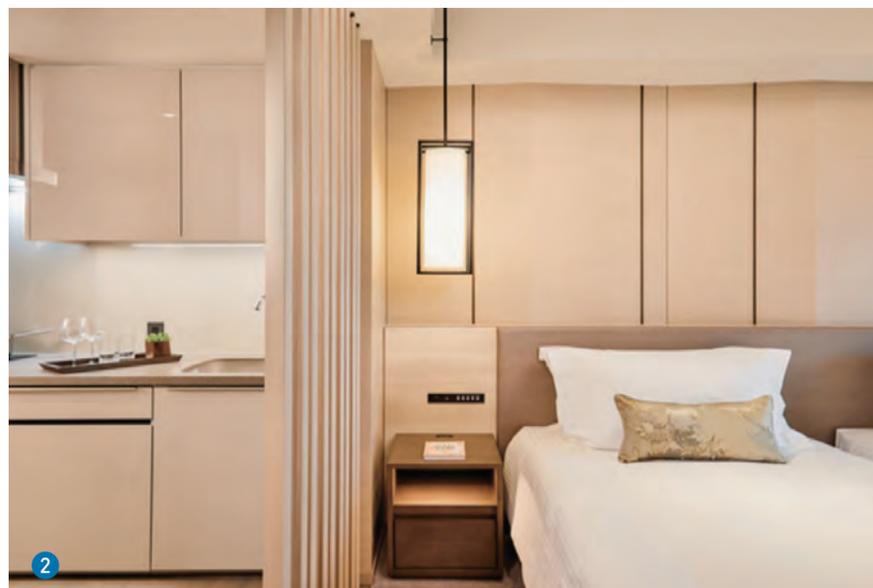
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Home away from home

Cheryl Ong rounds up some of the region's newest serviced residences

1 Beauty close to the beach

The Ascott has opened Citadines Berawa Beach Bali in the heart of Canggu, a destination on the southern coast of Bali, Indonesia. The 224-unit serviced residence is a stone's throw from Berawa Beach and surrounded by a plethora of cafes, restaurants, retail and recreational options. It is a 30-minute drive from the Ngurah Rai International Airport, and a 20-minute drive to Seminyak, a landmark tourist destination with high-end shops, bars and restaurants.

2 Living the suite life

Fraser Suites Akasaka, the 224-key serviced residence in Tokyo's CBD, offers a range of accommodation, from the 32m² deluxe room to the 60m² one-bedroom apartments. Outfitted with kitchenettes, rain showers and bathtubs, and home entertainment systems, the apartments also boast large bay windows that offer unobstructed views of Tokyo's city skyline, the Tokyo Skytree and Mount Fuji. Facilities include a Japanese-Italian restaurant, 24/7 gym, golf simulator and The Retreat, a conducive

space for work and relaxation that comes with massage chairs.

3 A slice of Thai lyf

Situated a mere five-minute walk from Nana BTS Skytrain station, lyf Sukhumvit 8 Bangkok is the first lyf property in Thailand, offering 196 studio apartments alongside creatively-designed, multifunctional social spaces. These include the Connect co-working and lounge zone, Bond social kitchen, laundromat, outdoor terrace and rooftop fitness area. Weekly social programmes are also held at the property to build connections and inspire the exchange of new ideas.

4 Oakwood lands in Yokohama

Oakwood Suites Yokohama marks Oakwood's first international serviced apartment brand in the Japanese port city, and its 12th property in Japan. Occupying the 46th to 51st floors of The Kitanaka Yokohama Tower, the 175-unit property offers studios to three-bedroom residences, each fully-equipped with a kitchenette, washer and dryer. Facilities include a residents'

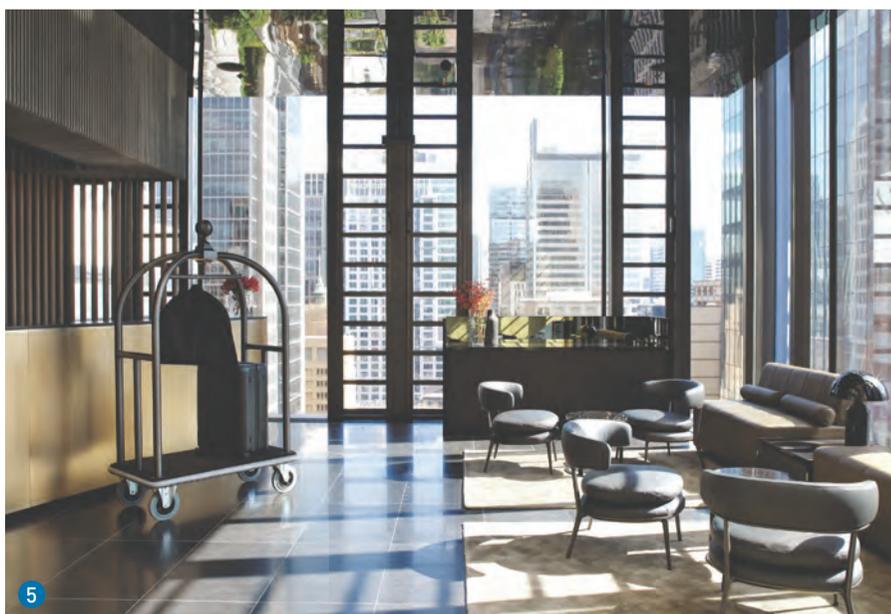


lounge, 24-hour fitness centre and restaurant.

5 Sydney's new crowning glory

Owned and operated by TFE Hotels, A by Adina Sydney forms the showpiece of a 26-storey tower at 2 Hunter Street. In a first for TFE Hotels, the property boasts an integrated control system that readies any one of its 194 apartments (82 studios, 104 one-bedroom units, and

eight two-bedroom apartments) the moment guests check in. The apartment hotel features Australia's first-ever Sky Lobby perched 100m above street level, and wrapped in a four-storey, glass-encased 'golden crown'. Recreational facilities include a swimming pool and gym with city views. F&B options are Dean & Nancy on 22, a cocktail bar and dining experience; and an Italian eatery boasting indoor and alfresco dining.



Destination

Macau's great comeback

Quarantine-free access between Macau and Mainland China, made possible by Macau's containment of the Covid-19 pandemic, is driving a promising tourism recovery for the Chinese autonomous region.

By **Prudence Lui**

Mainland Chinese arrivals to Macau surged over April and May, much to the delight of hotel operators



Macau's strict Covid-19 monitoring system at her borders and across her land has resulted in zero local infections for over a year, earning the confidence of travellers from Mainland China.

Travel from the mainland was allowed to resume in mid-August 2020. Between then and April, provisional visitor arrivals have recorded month-on-month increments.

Macau welcomed 191,828 Chinese arrivals over the week of April 9 to 15, with an average daily volume of 27,404 visitors. The recent five-day Labour Day holidays also brought forth outstanding arrival numbers – Macau welcomed 167,000 visitors, of which 156,000 came from the mainland. Average daily visitor arrivals hit 33,000 during this peak period, which rose by 158.2 per cent over the Spring Festival Golden Week in 2021, and increased by 25.4 per cent compared with the figure in April.

In line with the resumption of tourism exchange, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) tune up its destination marketing efforts in China. Its messages are clear: Macau is safe and welcoming, and no quarantine is needed for the majority

What's hot

Something for all ages

Macau is keeping her charms on with new and revitalised tours, attractions and hotels, discovers **Prudence Lui**

1 New view on racing history

Grand Prix Museum is expected to reopen after its trial operations in April and May. Visitors can explore the remodelled and expanded premises, and experi-

ence four floors of educational fun while learning about the iconic Macau Grand Prix. A host of multimedia interactive equipment has been employed to engage visitors.

2 A grand brand arrives

Raffles at Galaxy Macau will open in Macau in 2H2021, offering 450 suites on the eastern promenade of the Galaxy Macau integrated resort in Cotai. The design of

each suite draws inspiration from a modern palazzo, with a selection of suites featuring private pools and gardens. There will also be a small number of unique loft suites. All suites will be equipped with a Samsung The Frame Hospitality, a multi-usage canvas that transforms from art to in-room entertainment portal with just one click.

3 Splish splash in the city

The Studio City Water Park has opened on May 22, drawing visitors with a variety of family-friendly rides and attractions. Highlights include a towering complex with five slides, a giant bucket that tips out 1.8 tons of water every three minutes, a kid-friendly area with a fountain and slides, as well as a 450m river adventure that takes guests on an action-packed joyride.

Season passes and day passes are now available for sale.



of Mainland Chinese visitors entering Macau.

The assurances are joined by attractively-priced packages and discounts for flight, lodging and other forms of consumption in Macau, so as to encourage Mainland visitors to visit, stay on longer and spend more.

“When conditions allow for travel restrictions to be lifted with our regional and international markets, we hope to extend similar marketing ef-



Demand for our offerings from customers able to visit remains robust and we are confident in the eventual recovery in travel and tourism spending.

KRIS KAMINSKY
Senior vice president of resort operations, Sands China



forts to encourage visitors to come to Macau,” an MGTO spokesperson said.

For now, MGTO does not expect a strong tourism rebound. Between six and 10 million visitors are expected this year, with the majority coming from Mainland China.

Working alongside MGTO’s efforts to court returning Mainland Chinese visitors is the private sector, which has also rolled out its own health and safety promises as well as new experiences.

Sands Resorts Macao, for example, has introduced the Sands SafeStay, a comprehensive programme of cleanliness and disinfection measures to ensure the safety of guests.

Sands China, senior vice president of resort operations, Kris Kaminsky, told *TTG Asia* that Sands SafeStay has “provided the confidence and assurance visitors need in order to return”.

The integrated resort is enjoying weekly increments in visitorship, and its performance mirrors MGTO’s figures.

“Demand for our offerings from customers able to visit remains robust and we are confident in the eventual recovery in travel and tourism spending,” remarked Kaminsky, who revealed that business events have returned in March along with a gradual upward trend in tourist numbers, particularly leading up to the Labour Day Golden Week holidays in May.

Elsewhere, new facilities have emerged to guarantee something new and attractive for repeat visitors.

The Londoner Macao unveiled its first phase in February while the 300-room Nüwa debuted in the City of

Dreams in March. Studio City Water Park opens this month.

Coming up next is Grand Lisboa Palace Resort, which is slated to open in 1H2021. The luxury property in the Cotai district, developed by SJM Holdings, will reflect Macau’s long history of Sino-Western cultural exchange through its architecture, facilities and services.

MGTO’s vision is not limited to bringing back leisure tourists, as it has joined forces with the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute as well as private sector business events suppliers to conduct a series of seminars aimed at luring Chinese corporate activities. After seminars in Guangzhou, Dongguan and Zhongshan in March, two more were held in Zhaoqing and Huizhou in April. More are scheduled to take place this year in thriving Greater Bay Area cities.

MGTO’s multi-layered approach to rebuilding Macau’s tourism industry includes a revamped Travel Simulation Program, with new assistance aimed at supporting sports travel. This is driven by MGTO’s larger endeavour to focus on deepening “tourism-plus” cross-sector integration and promoting products that answer the tourism-plus-MICE, tourism-plus-culture-and-creativity, and tourism-plus-sports needs. MGTO believes that taking this stance will steer the tourism industry towards recovery and generate greater momentum to move other industries forward.

While Macau’s tourism figures are promising, Pun Cheng Man, travel department sales and marketing manager with CTS (Macao) told *TTG Asia* that most of the Mainland Chinese arrivals to-date are leisure FITs, which mostly benefits hotels.

For Macau DMCs to see a return



We agents (DMCs) are still waiting for the government’s approval of inbound Chinese groups to Macau.

PUN CHENG MAN
Travel department sales and marketing manager, CTS (Macao)

in tourism business, inbound tour groups are needed, opined Pun, who said fellow agencies are still holding their breath for this to be allowed by the authorities.

She added that MGTO also needed to step up communications on Macau’s border crossing policies to more Chinese residents. “(Many Chinese citizens) think that both Macau and Hong Kong have the same policy (for tourists),” she said.

Presently, Chinese travellers are required to serve mandatory quarantine upon their return from Hong Kong; this is not needed for Chinese returnees from Macau.

Despite her concerns, Pun expressed “cautious optimism” for Macau’s inbound tourism performance this year.



4 Grand Lapa adds Artyzen label

The iconic Grand Lapa Macau has been rebranded as Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau, with an official launch planned for June. A celebratory campaign will feature events that embody Artyzen’s ethos of Art, Culture and Emotional Wisdom as well as convey the heritage hotel’s Portuguese connection through its “Boa Vida” programme – which means “enjoying the good life” in Portuguese. Activities will suit families and couples.

5 Bavarian vibes

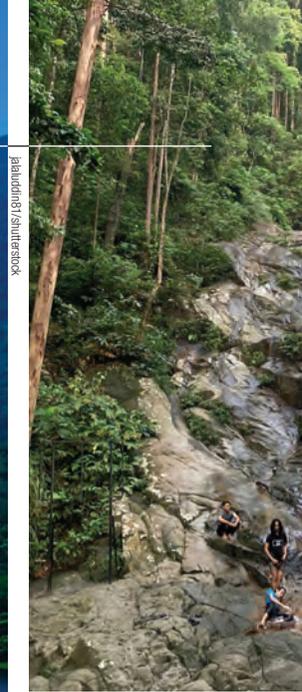
Paulaner Wirtshaus Macau is the latest restaurant to open in Taipa Village. It occupies three floors, including a rooftop terrace. The ground floor dining hall can seat 20 guests, while the first floor welcomes no more than 40 guests. The rooftop offers both outdoor and indoor spaces, and can accommodate private events of up to 60 guests. Diners can enjoy authentic Bavarian food and freshly tapped Paulaner beer imported from Germany.

6 See Macau differently

Six new See, Dine and Stay in Macao programmes are now available, featuring unique ways to appreciate the destination. Visitors can hop on a helicopter tour, go on an ecological journey in glitzy Cotai, explore the Nossa Senhora Village of Ká Hó in Coloane, and partake in hotel-arranged activities that support local communities and businesses. These tours are conducted daily between July and August, and on weekends and public holidays in April to June and September to December.

7 Easy, breezy stay

The Holiday Inn Express brand has debuted in Macau with the 259-room Holiday Inn Express Macau City Centre. Facilities range from complimentary high-speed wireless Internet access and self-service laundry, to all-day dining restaurants and bars. The hotel is conveniently located in Nape area, a five-minute drive to Macau Outer Harbor Ferry Terminal and a 20-minute drive to Macau International Airport and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Port.



Destination

Charting the road to recovery

Looking ahead to a post-pandemic future, tourism players in Malaysia are adapting their strategies and offerings to capture travel rebound. By **S Puvaneswary**

Amid sustained headwinds from the Covid-19 pandemic, Malaysia's ongoing vaccine rollout have lifted hopes among tourism players that travel recovery lies just around the corner. The government is aiming to inoculate at least 70 per cent of the population by December in order to achieve herd immunity by year-end.

Nigel Wong, honorary secretary-general, Malaysian Association of Tour & Travel Agents (MATTA), commented: "Achieving herd immunity will boost confidence among Malaysians to travel domestically. Herd immunity will also help with the reopening of our borders to international inbound travellers."

While borders have been closed to international tourists since March 2020, the government is in ongoing talks to establish travel bubbles with neighbouring countries, including Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

Wong said that travel bubbles will provide a critical lifeline to the tourism industry. "For the time being, the travel trade has to rely on domestic tourism, but this does not have long-term sustainability as Malaysia does not have the population mass

required to rely solely on domestic tourism, unlike larger countries such as China," he said.

On its part, the government has resumed a tourism fund dubbed Gamelan for tourism operators to tap on for promotions and marketing campaigns to spur recovery.

The fund, first introduced in July 2019 with an allocation of RM5 million (US\$1.2 million), was postponed last year when the movement control order kicked in and the country shut its borders to foreign arrivals. The finance ministry has since approved the resumption of the remaining sum of over RM3,000,000 for the Gamelan programme, for use through this year on both domestic and international promotions.

To drive post-pandemic recovery, Tourism Malaysia is putting digitalisation at the heart of its marketing strategy. In April, the tourism board rolled out five interactive brochures and travel guides, in a rebranding of its digital travel brochures.

The new digital versions incorporate multimedia elements such as text, audio, graphics, animation and video, and is accessible via Tourism Malaysia's recently revamped micro-site, ebrochures.malaysia.travel.

Clockwise from left: Raban Lake in Lenggong; Kanching Waterfall; Sungai Serai Hot Springs in Selangor

Replacing static PDF brochures, the new site integrated with Google Maps helps users plan and navigate their journey. The site also has a share function which allows users to share posts on Facebook, Twitter, and Whatsapp, and via email.

As well, MATTA has been encouraging its members to embrace digitalisation by introducing digital adoption programmes for marketing and promotions, and lobbying local banks for better access to e-payment facilities and lower charges.

Wong said: "In the new norm, international travellers will plan their holidays by accessing services online."



In the new norm, international travellers will plan their holidays by accessing services online.

NIGEL WONG
Honorary secretary-general, Malaysian Association of Tour & Travel Agents



We are gearing up members to meet this new trend by providing them the know-how to promote and market their services online and increase their digital footprint."

MATTA has also partnered with Bureau Veritas, a world leader in testing, inspection and certification, to deploy the "Travel Safe Malaysia" Hygiene Excellence and Safety Label, which is designed to support the operational restarting of activities in the travel and tour industry.

MATTA president, KL Tan, said: "Positioning Malaysia as a safe country will encourage travellers to choose Malaysia once travel resumes."

Uzaidi Udanis, president of the Malaysia Tourism Council, said the agency will launch a B2B platform in July specialising in niche products, and targeted at both international and domestic travel trade players.

The platform, dubbed Universal Pass (UPass), will focus solely on Malaysian niche products that are not easily available to overseas wholesalers and not sold by OTAs.

It will give owners of niche products such as homestays, white water rafting, glamping and soft adventure an avenue to promote their services, and sell directly to local and foreign travel agents. The platform will have a reservation system that allows dynamic pricing and bookings to be made with instant confirmation.

Uzaidi, who is also the president of the Malaysian Inbound Tourism Association (MITA), said: "We are also working with state tourism boards in the country to hold workshops for their members in order to help them develop new tourism products in off-the-beaten destinations in Malaysia. These include places such as Sekinchan, Kuala Kubu Bharu and Lenggong Valley."

Uzaidi believes that post-Covid, foreign travellers will look for unique and Instagrammable nature and cultural experiences in remote areas.

Hotels in Malaysia are also adopt-



Michael Hanratty



We are working with state tourism boards in the country to hold workshops for their members in order to help them develop new tourism products in off-the-beaten destinations in Malaysia.

UZAIDI UDANIS
President of both Malaysia Tourism Council and Malaysian Inbound Tourism Association

ing digital solutions to enable a safe and contactless guest experience.

G Hotel, a leading business hotel in Penang, is looking at investing in Augmented Reality solutions that will provide 360-degree virtual tours and walkthroughs of guestrooms, facilities and meeting rooms to allow international guests to “experience” the hotel prior to booking, said its general manager, Michael Hanratty.

He added: “Besides our current contactless initiatives such as QR code menus and cashless payment options, we are also looking to capitalise digital ordering and payment via mobile application to further reduce contact and make food ordering a seamless process for guests.”



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What's hot

New trove of treasures

A multimillion-dollar theme park, scenic cycling trail and plane-spotting deck make up Malaysia's new tourism offerings, finds **S Puvaneswary**

1 New hot spot at Sunway Resort

Gordon Ramsay will be bringing his Bar & Grill concept to Sunway Resort, the flagship of Sunway City Kuala Lumpur, in what will mark his Malaysian debut and the brand's first outpost outside of London. Set to open in 3Q2021, Gordon Ramsay Bar & Grill will be available for all-day dining, with private dining options. Diners can select from a menu which includes prime cuts of the finest meat, locally sourced and dry-aged in-house, as well as the very best elements from Gordon Ramsay's signature dishes.



2 Genting's brand new playground

Resorts World Genting is preparing to open its US\$800 million outdoor theme park, Genting Sky-Worlds, by mid-year. It will comprise 26 rides, including water rides and spinning rides, in addition to nine movie and adventure-inspired “worlds”, including Ice Age, Studio Plaza, Epic and Eagle Mountain. The activities will be complemented by a wide array of themed retail, dining and entertainment experiences.



3 Peranakan-style staycay

Nestled on the idyllic Teluk Bahang Beach, Angsana Teluk Bahang, Penang which opened last October, is about a 50-minute drive from the Penang International Airport, a 30-minute drive from George Town and a five-minute drive from Batu Ferringhi. The resort's 250 contemporary rooms and suites are exquisitely designed with intimate details of Peranakan-themed interior décor and colourful tapestries. All rooms and suites offer a panoramic view of the Andaman Sea.

4 Fun on wheels

Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) has introduced the Langkawi Cyclotourism Trail, offering visitors a chance to explore the island through cycling. Visitors have seven routes to choose from: Ironman Route, Legendary Route, Gunung Raya Route, 99Bikes MTB Trail, Chengkuan MTB Trail, Bukit Sawak Trail and Buffalo Park Trail. LADA has also prepared Langkawi Cyclotourism Trail pamphlets, which details information about the routes as well as addresses of sales and service centres for bicycles on the island.

5 Nature escape

Nestled in a lush, green setting within the Hulu Langat district, Lepoh Waterfalls is the latest attraction being promoted by Tourism Selangor. The falls is best known for its natural ‘slide’ – a large, flat and super-smooth rock formation often used by visitors to glide into a small lagoon near the bottom. It is a 10-minute drive from Gunung Nuang Recreational Forest, with homestays and simple nature resorts close by.

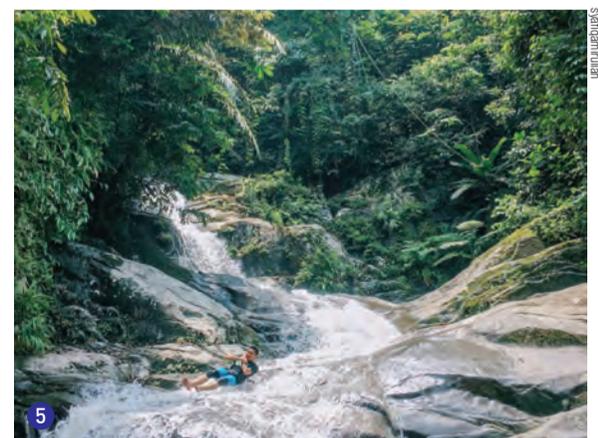


6 Cave of wonders

Situated about an hour's boat ride from Kudat Marina Jetty, Balambangan Cave in Sabah is over 60 million years old and home to bats. It is big and deep, with many unique cave formations comprising stalactites, stalagmites, flow stones and many other speleothems. This year, the state government of Sabah has earmarked RM1 million (US\$ 240,000) to build basic infrastructure in the area and make it more accessible to tourists.

7 In plane sight

Developed by Malaysia Airports, Anjung Spotter is currently the only outdoor plane observation deck in Malaysia. Sited on Jalan Pekeliling, the facility can accommodate up to 40 people at a time, and is a haven for watching planes flying in and out of the Kuala Lumpur International Airport. Over here, photographers will be able to capture airplanes taking off and landing from various interesting angles.



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Rebuilding travel demand

The pandemic has widened Hilton's customer base, bringing in customers who are keen to splurge unused travel budgets on a better staycation, reveals Nils-Arne Schroeder, global brand head, Conrad Hotel & Resort and vice president, luxury & lifestyle, Asia Pacific, Hilton. By Karen Yue

Many in the luxury travel space are predicting a travel recovery that is led by high-net-worth travellers – people with the financial ability and control over their own time to get through the many hurdles required of travellers amid a pandemic. Is this happening with Hilton's best of the best properties?

I don't think recovery is restricted to luxury travellers. Everyone is travelling again once it is possible.

We are seeing in Asia-Pacific that there are now more domestic travellers than we saw a year ago, which is a natural outcome of the closure of travel borders as a result of the pandemic.

In China where we have a big number of Waldorf Astoria and Conrad hotels, we have benefited a lot from the restrictions on Chinese people leaving the country for holidays. As a result, many are rediscovering China instead.

In Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore, many locals who did not choose to stay at our hotels for a vacation pre-Covid-19 have changed their mind. In Singapore, locals are motivated by the SingaporeDiscovers vouchers put in place by the govern-

ment (to stimulate domestic tourism spend) and their staycations are really helping the hotels.

In Japan and South Korea, staycations were already a big hit pre-Covid-19, and are more so during the pandemic.

Many people who are not able to travel overseas are thinking of using their time and money instead on experiences they never considered or have been thinking about for a long, long time. For some, staying at a Waldorf Astoria or a Conrad is that option.

With such a reduced market size due to international travel restrictions, are your luxury hotels reaching out to a segment of guests who previously could not afford a stay? Would this impact brand positioning?

It is our regular customers who are returning first.

The rise of new customers is natural, as our brand presence has been growing over the last few years. In China, for example, we opened four hotels in 2019 – two in Hangzhou, one in Shenyang and one in Tianjin. These hotels are now attracting a new

customer base for us. Residents who saw such iconic hotels in their cities became curious about the brand; they wanted to know where else on their future travels could they experience the same brand.

If a customer has just discovered us, we are very happy.

Has marketing to the luxury traveller changed – or will change – as a result of the pandemic and new travel priorities?

Our messages have (changed). In the beginning of the pandemic there was no need for us to tell our customers how beautiful our hotels are because everyone was stuck at home.

As the pandemic progressed, we developed our Hilton CleanStay and Hilton EventsReady messages to rebuild customer confidence.

When the first wave of infections came under control, and people began to dream again of travel, we started the *Hilton Dream Away* campaign. As we saw more markets restarting some travel, we had more pockets of marketing activities but using the same channels.

We continue to be sensitive in our messaging because we cannot ignore the fact that we are still in the middle of a pandemic.

How is Hilton working towards rebuilding traveller confidence?

I remember how we used to keep our housekeepers hidden (before the pandemic). We told them to only clean the lobby between 02.00 and 04.00 early in the morning, and please do not show themselves to guests.

Nowadays, they will clean in the day and we are happy for them to stay as long in the lobby as they can and be visible to guests. But it is more than just a show, you know. We are a company of over a hundred years old, and cleanliness has always been a part of our DNA. Particularly because our luxury customers expect the very best from us, and that they are safe and taken care of. We didn't have to reinvent our cleanliness processes.

That said, we have to be sensitive to Covid-19 requirements, which is why we now place a Hilton CleanStay seal on room doors as a way of assuring customers that nobody else has entered their room after it is cleaned and sanitised. Some things are also triple-cleaned now, and we have a partnership with RB, the maker of cleaning brands Lysol and Dettol, to allow guests to feel safe knowing that we are using products they trust and are familiar with.

How does the luxury guest journey look in this Covid-19 era?

We start communicating with our guests days before their arrival to understand their desires and have that prepared in advance.

When they arrive at the door to their room, they will see a Hilton CleanStay seal, as I have described earlier.

Our hotel can provide an absolutely contactless experience should guests wish for that. But, with luxury travellers, complete isolation is rarely chosen. They often expect some interaction, to be able to sense the smile behind the mask. They expect to discover why this hotel is luxuri-

ous, why the restaurant is famous, why the brand is positioned as such, what's special around the neighbourhood, etc. Of course, they can know all that from Google, but they would rather find out by themselves, perhaps through a five-minute conversation with our concierge.

At our Maldives resorts, we will even arrange for a Covid-19 test on the island if the guest wishes. As you know, some guests are required to clear a Covid-19 test before they can re-enter their country, so this is an option available for them. And that, to me, is a clear example of the difference between a luxury hotel and a hotel of a smaller scale.

Speaking of the Maldives, Hilton has just launched Ithaafushi – The Private Island in January. And this autumn we can expect LXR's debut in Asia-Pacific, in Kyoto. What about them excite you most?

Ithaafushi – The Private Island is part of Waldorf Astoria Maldives, and is essentially a private island for bigger families because there are four villas. Guests can only get there by boat, so it delivers on privacy.

Families staying on Ithaafushi – The Private Island have 24-hour access to a personal concierge and all team members who are stationed at the main resort. If they wish for a meal, chefs from the resort will go over and prepare a meal on the island. It has its own spa, gym, a large living space – everything a family could need.

We have been getting enquiries for family stays.

Meanwhile, Roku Kyoto is under our latest brand, LXR. It is a wonderful hotel, just 20 minutes from the city centre but in a wonderful nature setting. It (has) a couple of authentic F&B outlets on its grounds. I think it is a wonderful addition to the LXR brand and a great way for us to bring the brand into Asia-Pacific.

How will Hilton's luxury portfolio continue to grow for the rest of this year in this region, and which brands will we see more of in the coming years?

Despite the pandemic, our expansion hasn't stopped. We maintain our long-term vision for our brands. In fact, we had more signings for new hotels last year than we ever did before for all our brands.

Over the last couple of months, we are getting many partners who have expressed their trust in our brands and what we have been doing. And that is helping our hotel portfolio to grow. Ultimately, we have absolute trust that travel will return.

We are opening two Conrad hotels in China this year, one in Jiuzhaigou (Sichuan province) and another in Urumqi (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region). It is important that our luxury brands go to destinations that are beautiful and perhaps not where we would have gone five years ago but are now interesting (and unknown for the growing market of domestic travellers). The world is craving for new destinations.

Here in South-east Asia, we will have Conrad Kuala Lumpur and Waldorf Astoria Bali. Later, we will welcome Waldorf Astoria Tokyo Nihonbashi (in 2026), which we announced end of last year.



It is important that our luxury brands go to destinations that are beautiful and perhaps not where we would have gone five years ago but are now interesting (and unknown for the growing market of domestic travellers).

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Pandemic sparks demand for private jets in Japan



Surge in wealthy Japanese travellers turning to private jet services to escape crowds amid the pandemic

Demand for private jets in Japan is seeing record growth among high-end business and leisure travellers who are seeking to avoid crowds and maintain social distancing amid the ongoing Covid-19 crisis.

ANA Business Jet Co. reported a 10 per cent year-on-year increase in charter flights in 2020, as well as a 30 per cent increase in inquiries.

The subsidiary of ANA Holdings was launched in 2018 with the goal of arranging charter flights connecting to scheduled ANA services, mainly bound for North America and Europe. Their planes, which include long-range, mid-sized and light jets, were initially targeted primarily at executives, but the pandemic has spurred the company to diversify.

Jun Katagiri, president of the company, said the recent growth has been stimulated by wealthy individuals and businesses looking for private aircraft because they seat fewer passengers and pose lower infection risks.

Japan Airlines also reported in-

creased sales of its chartered jet flights in the past year.

Also capitalising on demand for social distanced-travel is Fuji Business Jet. Based near Mount Fuji, in Shizuoka Prefecture, the company started operating in April 2020 with two jets, but has since added to its fleet following an uptick in customers.

High-end travel agents are seeing the expansion of the private jet market as an opportunity to build more custom-made travel options into their Japan packages. US-based travel agent All Japan Tours, for example, offers charters on private jets in addition to rides on private helicopters and private yachts.

The demand bodes well for the development of the luxury aviation market in Japan where the number of wealthy households reached 1.3 million in 2019, the highest since 2005.

Still, the market remains small. At the end of 2019, there were only 61 charter jets registered in Japan, compared with 20,978 in the US and 497 in China. – **Kathryn Wortley**

Live it up

Fresh pickings in travel and tourism continue to beat the blues of travel restrictions. By **Karen Yue**



1 BENSLEY Outsider Gallery, Thailand

Renowned for designing stunning luxury hotels in Asia with low environmental impact as well as his passion for conservation, Bill Bensley is putting up all his paintings for sale to support Wildlife Alliance's conservation work at Cambodia's Cardamom National Park.

Eighty of his paintings are now exhibited at the BENSLEY Outsider Gallery in Bangkok, Thailand, and two more exhibitions are in the pipeline.

All sales proceeds from the three art exhibitions as well as his online store will go to Wildlife Alliance, which has seen diminished financing during the travel and tourism downturn.

While the Bensley Collection – Shinta Mani Wild luxury resort used to direct a portion of earnings to pay for park protection against illegal logging and poaching pre-pandemic, Bensley has now chosen to take over conservation financing out of his own pocket.

Bensley discovered the joy of painting three years ago, and has developed a fauvist style. His art pieces burst with beautiful, bold colours, and often come with a touch of humour.

2 The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore

The East Wing of The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore has been transformed with new features – the Library Reception to welcome guests and the Republic dining venue which changes throughout the day.

The Library Reception draws design inspiration from a grand residential library, and shows off natural oak wood floors and ceilings, a collection of literature on diverse subjects, and a Digital Hub that offers business centre services.

The Republic feeds guests from morning to late in the evening, offering light bites, à la carte dining options as well as an elegant five-tier afternoon tea experience.



While a curated music playlist complements the transition of the East Wing from day to night, a standalone deejay booth offers the option of live music.

3 La Clique, Singapore

Award-winning live theatrical performance, La Clique, debuts in Singapore in May at the Marina Bay Sands. It is described as a "melange of cabaret, new burlesque, circus and contemporary vaudeville", and has played to audiences across multiple big cities around the world.

An evening show is put up every Tuesday to Friday at 20.00, while two shows are offered on weekends, at 16.30 and 20.00.

Tickets are priced from S\$98 (US\$73.88), excluding a S\$4 booking fee.

4 Capella Hanoi, Vietnam

Capella Hanoi has opened its doors in the heart of Vietnam's vibrant capital city. Nestled in the Old

Quarter, just steps from the iconic Hanoi Opera House, the Bill Bensley-designed hotel features 47 themed rooms and suites, ranging from 35m² to 194m². Crowning the hotel, four Opera Suites open out onto alfresco terraces overlooking the tree-lined avenues below.

The hotel's signature restaurant, Backstage, offers vegan dishes and northern Vietnamese-inspired specialties. Diva's Lounge, meanwhile, serves up Bohemian cocktails and Opera Punches, accompanied by Diva's Bar bites.

Guests can unwind at Auriga Spa, which features couples' treatment suites, saunas, steam baths, a fitness centre and La Grotta, an indoor pool that resembles a haven for opera singers to rest their voices.

5 LUX Chongzuo, Guangxi Resort & Villas, China

Surrounded by lush tropical gardens with vistas of the majestic karst formations, LUX Chongzuo, Guangxi Resort & Villas is Daxin County's first international luxury resort. Located in Guangxi province and separated from Vietnam by the Mingshi River, the resort features 50 suites and six villas in the first phase of opening.

The resort's five F&B venues include an all-day dining restaurant, a speciality steakhouse, a rooftop bar, a pool bar and a cafe that is inspired by the cafés and bars in France and Italy.

Wellness-focused guests can experience traditional Vietnamese spa treatments al fresco at the award-winning LUX* Me Spa, set amid lush greenery and traditional Zhuang-style architecture. There are also a 35m infinity pool and a gym.

Young guests are entertained by a kids' club which offers activities designed for ages three to 12.

