

# TTG

ASIA

No. 1730/January 2016

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## VIEW FROM THE TOP

Nothing motivates more than building a legacy for the kids, which is why Outrigger Enterprises Group is buying resorts globally and creating a space for itself. President and CEO David Carey talks to [Raini Hamdi](#)



## RATE REVERSAL IN YANGON

With a big boost in hotel supply, Yangon's days of inflated room rates are over. [Xinyi Liang-Pholsena](#) sizes up the situation



## ASEAN CRUISING RE-SHAPED

How will Indonesia's lifting of sea cabotage shape the development of South-east Asia's cruise industry?



## PHILIPPINES' NEW STATE OF GREEN

The Bicol Region is poised to become an ecotourism hub with its abundance of natural attractions. [Rosa Ocampo](#) reports

# TRAVEL BUSINESS OUTLOOK FOR 2016

Travel companies in Asia-Pacific are generally optimistic about their business prospects in 2016, with Asian outbound travel expected to remain bright



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# Contents & editorial

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## SEEKING AUTHENTICITY IN TRAVEL



Experiencing all the different facets of a country, not shunning one for the other, will make for a fuller appreciation of a destination. The opportunity to visit a place as it is, and not how we imagine it to be, should be the aim of travel.

**My first trip to Myanmar in 2009 left a** very deep impression on me. The former pariah state was then under an oppressive military junta which had ruled it for decades, and without the massive development projects and mass tourism that characterised so many other cities in Asia, the country seemed like a land frozen in time.

After a hiatus of six years, I made a trip to Yangon last month and discovered vast changes that have taken place in the country since its gradual liberalisation process in 2010. From a quaint city where just vintage cars and rickety buses ply the roads, Yangon has metamorphosed into a city hungry for changes. There is no shortage of chic bars and restaurants and streets are clogged with SUVs, while high-rises are popping up and Shwedagon Pagoda is no longer the dominating icon on the skyline.

There are positive factors arising from all these changes too. Money changers are more readily available, as is the acceptance of credit cards at major establishments in the city. As new hotels mushroom amid a construction boom, the once highly inflated room rates have given way to more down-to-earth pricing, making Myanmar a more affordable and visitor-friendly destination (see page 6). And with growing air connections, the destination is fast shedding its off-the-beaten-track label, if surging visitor arrival numbers are a good indicator.

As Yangon joins the ranks of other Asian cities in its pursuit of economic development and modernisation, it would be tempting to dismiss the destination as losing its 'authenticity'.

In fact, the authentic Myanmar remains to be seen and discovered at every corner, as authenticity, after all, exists in the day-to-day rhythms of a place. A family of four chomping on fried chicken served up in the air-conditioned comfort of KFC is no less real than the *longyi*-clad man sipping a cup of tea at a dilapidated roadside stall, as is the spanking-new Myanmar Plaza which lures shoppers with international brands like L'Occitane and Skechers as well as the crumbling colonial-era buildings in the downtown – each of them offers a facet of the diversity, hybridity and history that make up Yangon.

By conflating traditions with authenticity and modernisation with Westernisation, we often project our own romanticised notions on how other countries and nationalities should be; economic advancement and tourism are often viewed in disdain, as contaminating and commoditising the 'culture' of a hitherto 'pure' place.

In reality, no culture is immune to changes and free from interaction with the outside world. Experiencing all the different facets of a country, not shunning one for the other, will make for a fuller appreciation of a destination. For me, the opportunity to visit a place as it is, and not how we imagine it to be, should be the aim of travel.

**Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**  
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### COMING UP



- MEDICAL TOURISM** A look at the health of medical tourism in South-east Asia amid intensifying competition
- SERVICED RESIDENCES** Major operators in the region share their outlook for serviced residences in 2016
- THAILAND** Phuket's villas grow in popularity as savvy travellers seek greater value and exclusivity

### WE LIKE



The highly anticipated *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* was a holiday gift for travel marketers during the festive season. From Emirates showing the first six of the *Star Wars* films on its in-flight entertainment system to All Nippon Airways' fleet of *Star Wars*-themed planes to stormtroopers and starfighter replicas at Changi Airport (left), the Force is strong across the global travel industry.



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# TRAVEL BUSINESS OUTLOOK FOR 2016



## SINGAPORE By Paige Lee Pei Qi

### Inbound Jaclyn Yeoh

Managing director,  
Siam Express

I have recently engaged a new Europe and China representative, hence I am looking forward to having more sales from these two regions. I will be happy if we can maintain the sales revenue as in 2015. We also need to bundle Singapore with our regional countries to sell them as one package in order to improve market share and hopefully this new marketing strategy will improve the sales performance in 2016.



such as China, Europe, Japan, Taiwan and regional cruises will remain popular, we also see a growing appetite for more exotic vacations to the Arctic Circle and South America.

We are implementing strategies to leverage technology to improve service, increase efficiency, broaden market reach and change our business model. Besides mainstream offerings, we are positioning the company as one reputed for alternative and exotic travels, a growing segment in the travel market. On the web, we are moving towards increasing our online presence to see growth regionally and worldwide.

## INDONESIA By Mimi Hudoyo

### Inbound Umberto Cadamuro

COO inbound, PACTO  
Having successfully weathered the multiple challenges in 2015 and posted another excellent year in terms of profit, 2016 presents exciting and



rich opportunities. With the strong demand for groups that not only cover 2016 but extends all the way to 2017, we feel we stand on solid ground.

Various challenges are afflicting our industry, yet we are able to keep expanding in new markets to maintain both profitability and a balanced market share. Our next stop is South America!

### Outbound Willy Sihombing

Managing director, Sedona Holidays Tour and Travel Medan  
My outbound business prospect for 2016 is positive. While the early part of 2015 saw slower business than in 2014, demand for incentives and FITs started to pick up towards the end of 2015. I am expecting this to continue into 2016.

The aggressive promotions by NTOs like Japan, Thailand and Malaysia have helped enticed (Indonesians) to travel. Overseas tour operators have come up with new ideas and programmes to attract travellers by allowing agents like us to send two or three pax to join a sit-in-coach tour together with guests from other travel companies, etc. (The diverse

tour options) make it easier for us to sell packages.

## THAILAND By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

### Inbound Pornthip Hirunkate

Deputy CEO and  
managing director,  
Thailand, Destination  
Asia  
2016 will be a challenging year for Destination Asia due to various factors including economics and political matters that compound on our business.

We still continue to see positive signs from our clients from the UK, Northern Europe, the US and Latin America markets. To stay on top we have to be more creative with our products and activities.

A positive sign is that there are also more cruise lines calling at Phuket, Laem Chabang and Koh Samui in 2016, and we have seen positive growth within MICE groups from the US since last year which shows confidence is returning to the destination.



### Outbound Anthony Chan

Managing director,  
Chan Brothers Group  
We are projecting five to 10 per cent year-on-year increase in travel demand for 2016. While (evergreen) destinations



Travel companies in Asia-Pacific are generally optimistic about their business prospects in 2016, with the outbound market expected to remain a bright spot

**Outbound**  
**Vorapong Muchaotjai**  
Director of sales and marketing, Standard Tour



We are seeing growth for the outbound market due to more direct flights coming in and out of Chiang Mai, where we are based. According to Thai immigration figures, the number of Thai outbound travellers from Chiang Mai is around 80,000 in 2015, and is likely to exceed 100,000 in 2016, and we are also recording a stronger interest from northern Thais to travel overseas as Chiang Mai grows in flight connectivity.

We are promoting destinations farther afield such as Japan as well as Bali, Australia and New Zealand by partnering SilkAir on chartered services via Singapore.

**MALAYSIA**  
**By S Puvaneswary**

**Inbound**  
**Francis Cheong**  
Managing director, Apxara Travel & Events



2016 is an extremely promising year for us. As of end-November 2015, our forward quotations are already up to December 2016. With Malaysia being the most affordable ASEAN destination due to a weak ringgit, Malaysian destinations are of great value for many incoming markets.

**Outbound**  
**Adam Kamal**  
CEO, Olympik Holidays



Outbound business will be slow unless the ringgit strengthens. We are placing emphasis on outbound packages to Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines as there are many LCCs flying to these destinations with affordable airfares, which is good for us.

**PHILIPPINES**  
**By Rosa Ocampo**

**Inbound**  
**Bernadette De Leon**  
General manager, Amiable Intertours



I used to have lots of inbound groups and families but they are hurt by (the bullet-planting scam at Ninoy Aquino International Airport) and peace and order concerns. And with a lot of ASEAN destinations offering cheaper fares, accommodations and tours, plus guaranteed security, (travellers) would rather visit Vietnam, Bali, Thailand and Malaysia and fly direct to those (destinations).

**Outbound**  
**Rowena Baltazar**  
Sales manager, Adam's Express Travel Group



Outbound business will continue to boom in 2016 as travel becomes even more affordable, with good rates for airfares, accommodations and

tours abroad.

Japan will be the top draw as it has eased its visa requirements and its government is more active in promoting the destination.

Filipinos will troop around Asia especially to the emerging destinations of Bali, Borobudur and Vietnam, apart from old favourites of Hong Kong, Bangkok and Singapore.

(Demand for) France will ease a bit due to recent terrorist attack but Italy will pull religious trips as the Pope opened the Holy Door of the Vatican for the Year of the Poor.

**HONG KONG**  
**By Prudence Lui**

**Inbound**  
**Hazen Tang**  
Executive director, HS Travel

Given the current global economy and falling arrivals, I am worried about business (this year). Provided that there are no major disasters or accidents this year, the city may experience around 10 per cent drop of arrivals. It's vital for Hong Kong to develop more new products for tourism.

**Outbound**  
**Simon Wo**  
General manager, Premium Holidays



Foreseeable economic downturn may dampen the middle class's appetite to travel but not high-spending professionals who will continue to seek novel destinations. Indeed, we remain cautiously optimistic because travel has become a lifestyle for Hong Kongers and airlines may come up with discounts to drive traffic.

We will channel more resources to high-end products with emphasis on South America, the North Pole and South Pole in 2016.

**MACAU**  
**By Prudence Lui**

**Inbound**  
**Cooper Zhang**  
Manager, international department, CITS Macau



I hope it will be better than 2015 with the opening of new hotels and integrated resorts in 2016. These new offers may attract more tourists to Macau, especially from China. If the Chinese Central Government relaxes the travel permits for Chinese passport holders visiting Macau, it would definitely help.

**Outbound**  
**Sabrina Long**  
General manager, EGL Tour (Macau)

The outbound traffic will be more or less the same as 2015 but this depends on the business environment and local gaming performance which affect the desire of travel. Moreover, Macanese are concerned about security when choosing a destination, so areas with terrorist attacks would be avoided. Overall speaking, we would be happy if we can maintain the same level of business achieved in 2015.

**CHINA**  
**By Caroline Boey**

**Inbound**  
**Sarah Keenlyside**  
Founder and CEO of The Bespoke Travel Company

China is poised to become the world's largest business travel destination in 2016, an increase we already saw last year. Many of our business travel clients are either adding sightseeing or integrating some form of cultural immersion/partner programme into their trip. We hope this uptick will continue, especially given the drop in inbound leisure and FIT travellers in 2015.

Continued improvement in the number and quality of hotels on offer in China's less-visited cities such as Kunming and Chengdu is also likely to encourage travellers to be a little braver with their trip planning.

**Outbound**  
**Lu Hao Shuo**  
Deputy general manager, inbound travel division, Kunming CITS



According to my outbound colleagues, demand from Yunnan will continue to increase in 2016. Travellers are still confident of China's economy and there is interest in visiting other parts of the world after having enjoyed domestic tours. Compared to the rising cost of domestic travel, outbound tour prices are also more stable.

South-east Asia, the Middle East and Europe are popular destinations during the peak holiday periods, and beach holidays are very attractive. But unrest and terrorist attacks are raising security concerns and have resulted in cancellations to the Middle East and Europe. Meanwhile, South Asia started picking up in 2014 at a rapid pace.

**JAPAN**  
**By Julian Ryall**

**Inbound**  
**Megumi Ueda**  
General manager, Ayabex



We have seen a tremendous increase in foreign tourists visiting Japan in 2015 and we expect that trend to continue into 2016 as well. We are anticipating more repeat customers – including FITs, groups and MICE clients – returning to Japan. That means that we need to identify new sightseeing spots and activities for them; it is up to us to provide them with interesting and exciting new destinations that meet their needs.

**Outbound**  
**Daisuke Watanabe**  
Senior manager, Micronesia division, JTB World Vacations



We think (business) this year will be about the same level as 2015 for outbound tourists from Japan to our destinations. That is in part because the number of flights to Guam from Japan, except for Tokyo, will be reduced from

April 2. Like other agents focused on the islands of the Pacific, we plan to draw up package tours that utilise charter flights to boost our numbers.

**AUSTRALIA**  
**By Rebecca Elliott**

**Inbound**  
**Sujata Raman**  
Managing director, Abercrombie & Kent



In a word, excellent. The low Australian dollar undoubtedly had an impact, but so has the perceived safety of the destination as well as its clean and green image. Forward bookings are double the value that we had at the same time last year. All markets are strong into Australia including Asia, and in particular China.

**Outbound**  
**Tom Walley**  
Head of leisure travel, Flight Centre



Asia continues to be a big focus for us in 2016. We are gearing up for the return of our big Asia campaign that spotlights the diversity of experiences on offer with some of the hottest market deals, while travel packages to popular destinations will feature throughout the year. River cruising in Asia has emerged as a trend in 2015 and we expect this to continue, alongside the rise of youth specific tours, small group journeys and family-friendly packages.

**INDIA**  
**By Rohit Kaul**

**Inbound**  
**Arun Anand**  
Managing director, Midtown Travels



I expect 2016 will be a positive year for the Indian inbound industry. The e-visa scheme has now been extended to 113 countries, simplifying travel to India for majority of markets. The new year will see the e-visa facility gaining momentum and playing an instrumental role in the growth of inbound markets like the UK and the US.

The Indian prime minister travelled to many countries in 2015 and created a positive image of the country globally. This, coupled with the efforts of the Ministry of Tourism and private players, will help the inbound industry to make inroads in many traditional and new markets.

**Outbound**  
**Anil Kalsi**  
Joint managing director, Ambe World Travels

2016 looks very promising for the travel industry. I feel that many more countries will reciprocate the visa-on-arrival facility for Indian nationals, making impulsive outbound travel a reality.

We are a nation on the move and with today's work pressure, everyone needs more breaks to unwind. I see a huge upsurge in the honeymoon segment for which we now have a dedicated website. The luxury segment has also matured and Indians now want to experience the exclusivities of the world, so this segment too will see good demand.

# Analysis

The days of inflated room rates in Yangon are over, as new hotels have opened up to ease the severe room crunch. Xinyi Liang-Pholsena sizes up the new situation



## CHANGING FORTUNES

It was barely three years ago when soaring demand and a paucity of rooms in Yangon sent the hotel industry booming and rates skyrocketing. The doors to the country had just opened after decades of military rule, drawing a massive influx of foreign direct investment and dramatic upswell of interest from the global travel community.

The situation is now changing, as a large increase in hotel supply has applied downward pressure on highly-inflated room rates and turned the tables for players in Yangon's tourism field.

### Supply up, rates down

Yangon's upper-scale room supply grew in 1H2015 with an addition of 489 rooms following the opening of Novotel Yangon Max and the soft launch of Rose Garden Hotel, according to Colliers International. This led to a 23 per cent HoH expansion of the citywide stock to 2,582 rooms – a record high. The supply is expected to dramatically increase in 2016 and potentially triple by 2018, the report added.

In October 2015, Sedona Hotel Yangon soft-opened its Inya Wing, adding 431 guestrooms and suites to its existing 366-room Garden Wing to bring its total inventory to 797 keys – the biggest in town.

More international-standard hotels are debuting in the next two years. In 2016 alone, hotels poised to open their doors include the 429-room Meliá Yangon, the 300-room Pullman Yangon Myat Min, the 238-room Jasmine Palace, the 300-room Grand Centre Point Hotel and the 155-room Grand Golden View Hotel. Global hospitality brands like Kempinski and Sheraton will also emerge on Yangon's hotel scene by 2017.

Despite the rise in visitor arrivals, the average occupancy rate has dwindled in the past three consecutive years. Based on figures from Colliers, the city-wide occu-

pancy for upper-scale hotels dropped four and 10 per cent in 1Q2015 from the same periods in 2014 and 2013 respectively.

Meanwhile, room prices in Yangon have dipped with boost in supply. RevPAR citywide in 1Q2015 also recorded a 11.6 per cent decline after rising 3.5 per cent year-on-year between 2013 and 2014.

"In the olden days, which were just three years ago, people were throwing money and couldn't get a room. Those were the really good days," said Mok Kok Meng, general manager at Sedona Hotel Yangon, who shared that average rates at the property have dipped from US\$250 to US\$165.

"It's much more balanced now, with three-star and economy hotels popping up across the board and providing some breathing space for the industry. We welcomed this because they helped in the overall sense by making it easier to get a room at a more affordable and logical rate."

### New opportunities, new challenges

While it may be a bane for hoteliers, lower room rates in Yangon now tilt the situation in favour for inbound players and visitors alike.

Thomas Barrows, product manager, Myanmar, Exo Travel, said: "One of the main drawbacks to travelling in Myanmar in the past was the high cost of the hotels compared to neighbouring countries. As the supply of rooms starts to greatly increase, we are seeing hotel costs going down, making Myanmar a much more affordable destination."

With the expansion in Yangon's up-market hotel inventory, Tour Mandalay managing director and owner Khin Zaw sees strong potential in pursuing the high-end FIT markets from the UK, the US, Germany and France. Changes in car import regulations have also made transfers a more comfortable and plush affair with

the availability of new luxury cars.

While room crunch is no longer an issue, inbound agents stress that the bigger challenge lies in overcoming the perception that Yangon – or Myanmar as a whole – remains a pricey destination.

Highlighting the need to update and educate overseas agents on the price situation in Yangon, Edwin Briels, general manager of Khiri Travel Myanmar, commented: "When I compare how much a three- or four-star tourist spends for a trip to Myanmar with other ASEAN countries, I think that Myanmar is not that expensive...prices spent in a day in other ASEAN countries are pretty much on par."

Compounding the pricey perception is the traditional slump in tourism during the monsoon season in Myanmar, another issue inbound players are keen to overcome too. Said Khin Zaw: "Our tourist season is only six months, unlike Thailand which sees tourists year-round. We need to tell visitors that Myanmar can be visited the whole year round, so we need to target new markets like Russia, Canada, Latin America and Australia (to spread footfalls during the low season)."

At the same time that Yangon's room crunch is being alleviated, the city's streets, on the other hand, are now facing congestion as the vehicular growth has vastly outstripped the road infrastructure.

Barrows commented: "The number of cars flooding into the country over the last three years has overwhelmed the infrastructure, particularly in downtown Yangon. With no real viable public transport, the gridlock downtown is becoming quite a problem. A new vision to handle this growing traffic is needed to keep downtown a popular tourist attraction."

Briels agreed: "A traffic-free zone in the downtown area or better public transportation would be good for tourism as we see that the average number of days tour-

ists are staying in Yangon is decreasing."

Myanmar Welcome Travels & Tours saw booming demand – an 80 per cent growth – from Thailand in 2015, in part driven by visa-free regulation between Thailand and Myanmar introduced last August.

Said its director Nwe Nwe Khaing: "Back when we had room shortage, the Thai market used to buy three-star properties but with more reasonable prices in Yangon, they have become less budget-conscious and are increasingly turning into a high-end market," she added.

### No longer a frontier destination?

Thailand is not the only market visiting Yangon in droves. The Ministry of Tourism has predicted 4.5 million tourist arrivals in 2015, up from 3.8 million in 2014 and 2.1 million in 2013. Nearly three-quarters of the international arrivals were from Asian countries, led by Thailand, followed by China, Japan and South Korea.

With rising confidence for Myanmar following the landslide victory of Aung San Suu Kyi in last November elections, the trade expects visitor interest and business prospects for Yangon to stay rosy.

Briels remarked: "We can see that Myanmar has developed itself from a niche destination only for early innovators to a more mature destination. A few years ago, tourists visited Myanmar because it was 'new', nowadays tourists visit the country because it simply has a lot to offer them."

But as Myanmar heads towards its target of 7.5 million tourists by 2020, will mass tourism develop too quickly in Myanmar along the lines of neighbouring Thailand and Vietnam?

Laurent Kuenzle, CEO of Asian Trails, contends that Yangon is still a "far way from being a modern city and a mass tourism destination" as the city retains its traditional ways and charismatic allure.

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# Intelligence

In this monthly column, we round up the most relevant data and insights from the travel industry to keep you abreast of the latest changes and developing trends

## IATA lowers long-term passenger forecast

Global air travel demand is expected to soften as a result of negative developments in the world economy. IATA is now forecasting demand to reach seven billion by 2034, instead of the stronger figure of 7.4 billion forecasted earlier.

The updated count is based on a 3.8 per cent average annual growth rate using 2014 baseline numbers (3.3 billion), a lowered outlook from the 4.1 per cent previously projected.

This dampened forecast reflects negative developments in the world economy, especially slower growth predictions in China, which is expected to reduce appetite for air travel globally.

Still, China is likely to remain the fastest growing market from now till 2034, with 758 million new passengers expected to be added. The next four biggest growth markets for the same period are the US (523 million), India (275 million), Indonesia (132 million) and Brazil (104 million).

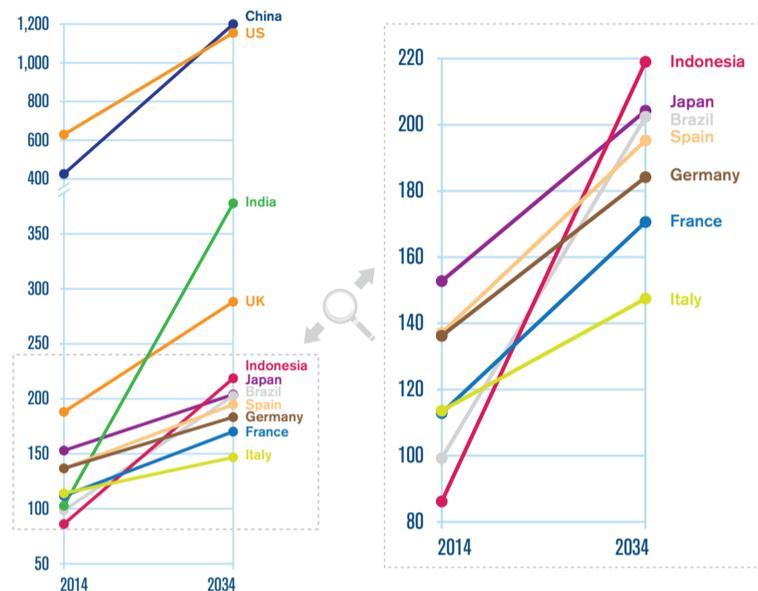
China and India are growing fast, with annual growth this year-to-date of 12.5 per cent and 16.5 per cent respectively. India has bounced back from a subdued 2014, and is seeing a strong increase in domestic frequencies. Although China's growth rate has moderated, it is still on course to add an additional 230 million passenger jour-

neys between 2014 and 2019.

Routes to, from and within Asia-Pacific will see an extra 1.8 billion annual passengers by 2034, for an overall market size of 2.9 billion. In relative terms, it will increase its size compared to other regions

### Top Ten Passenger Markets

Million O-D passenger journeys (to, from and within)



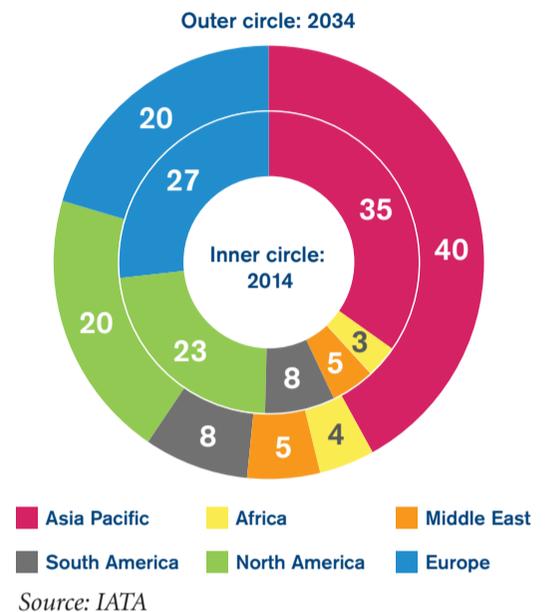
Source: IATA

to 42 per cent of global passenger traffic, and its annual average growth rate, 4.9 per cent, will be the joint-highest with the Middle East.

According to these projections, China will overtake the US as the world's largest passenger market by 2029. In 2034, China will account for some 1.19 billion passen-

gers, 758 million more than 2014 with an average annual growth rate of 5.2 per cent. Traffic in the US is expected to grow at an average annual rate of 3.1 per cent to see 1.16 billion passengers by 2034. India will displace the UK as the third-largest market in 2026, with Indonesia rising to number five in the world.

### Global air passengers by region (% of total flows)



Source: IATA

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## Visa: APAC travellers flying closer to home

Travellers from Asia-Pacific are favouring getaways closer to home rather than longhaul destinations, according to Visa's *Global Travel Intentions Study 2015*.

The study found similar patterns globally, with a decline in the number of travellers choosing longhaul flights (nine hours or more) in favour of shorthaul flights (four hours or less). Some 23 per cent of respondents reported taking long flights on their most recent trip, down six per cent from 2013, while the number of respondents who reported taking shorter flights on their most recent trip rose to 46 per cent from 43 per cent in 2013.

Asia-Pacific respondents are also likely to spend the least number of days at a destination. While travellers from Africa and the Middle East are likely to spend an average of 13 days at a destination, travellers from Asia-Pacific spend only an average of eight days at a destination.

In terms of accommodation, in Asia-Pacific, hotels and resorts (82 per cent) are by far the most popular holiday stay choice, followed by hostels/guest houses/chalets/B&Bs (18 per cent) and staying at boutique hotels and staying with friends

### Average trip length

	Global	APAC
7 or more nights	48%	35%
5-6 nights	21%	23%
3-4 nights	23%	32%
1-2 nights	8%	22%
Mean trip length (no. of nights)	11	8

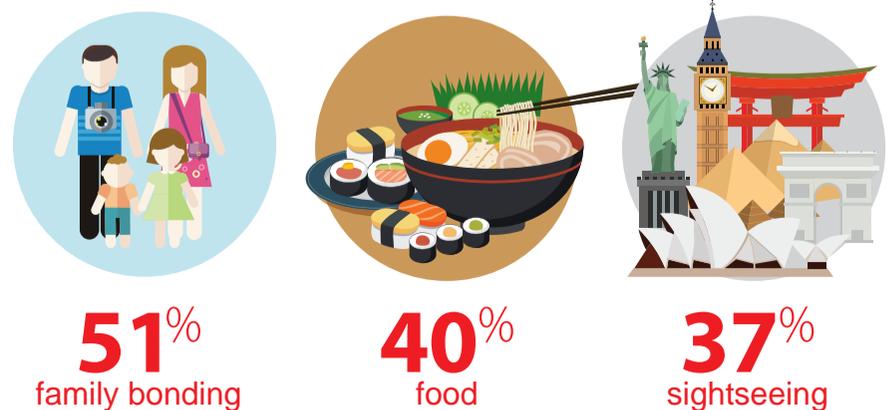
Source: Visa

and relatives, both 12 per cent.

The most popular reasons for embarking on international leisure travel by Asia-Pacific travellers was bonding with loved ones (51 per cent), experiencing cultures (40 per cent) and indulging in good food, shopping, spa treatments and other pleasures/entertainment (37 per cent).

At their destination, Asia-Pacific travellers enjoy shopping (68 per cent), followed by visiting local sites (62 per cent) and famous restaurants (50 per cent). More than a quarter of Asia-Pacific respondents say they shop for luxury items (26 per cent).

### What drives leisure travel for Asia-Pacific travellers?



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## HOTELS



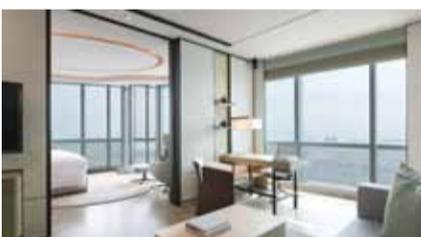
### HOTEL JEN TANGLIN SINGAPORE

Following its US\$45 million rebranding works, the 565-key Hotel Jen Tanglin Singapore now features six room types equipped with free Wi-Fi, USB charger outlets, walk-in showers and king-sized beds. Facilities include a Club Lounge, South-east Asian restaurant J65, café and snack bar Jen's Kitchen, a gym, health club, outdoor swimming pool, Jacuzzi, sauna, steam rooms and a pool bar.



### THE PRESIDENT, VIENTIANE, LAOS

Akaryn Hotel Group will open The President hotel in the Laotian capital of Vientiane come March 2016. It offers 30 rooms, inclusive of two presidential suites, and has seven dining establishments featuring a range of fine dining, local and international options. Amenities include business facilities, an Ayurah wellness centre, pool, private dining rooms and a ball-room capable of accommodating 100 guests.



### SHENZHEN MARRIOTT HOTEL NANSHAN, CHINA

This 340-key hotel, sited on the 43<sup>rd</sup> to 60<sup>th</sup> floor of the SCC Building, offers 40m<sup>2</sup> to 70m<sup>2</sup> rooms equipped with internet TVs, iPods and Nespresso machines. Features include 2,000m<sup>2</sup> of meeting space, all-day diner Nanshan Kitchen, Chinese restaurant Man Ho, the Lobby Lounge bar and The Café which offers coffee, snacks and desserts.



### AEROTEL SINGAPORE

The inaugural flagship transit hotel for Plaza Premium Group, Aerotel Singapore has launched at Changi Airport's Terminal 1. Amenities include an outdoor pool, Jacuzzi, gym and library lounge, plus a bespoke pillow menu. Rates are based on a six-hour block, beginning from S\$55 (US\$39) depending on room sizes, with every subsequent hour priced at S\$20 each.

## TECHNOLOGY

### BEMYGUEST OPENS MARKETPLACE FOR AGENTS

Tours and activities provider BeMyGuest has launched an online booking platform catered

to the needs of travel agents.

Named Agents Marketplace, it offers registered users industry rates for over 10,000 products gathered from more than 3,000 travel agencies, tour operators, attractions and transfer providers internationally.

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lect gross payments from clients, allowing for immediate commissions.

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## View from the top

Nothing motivates more than building a legacy for the kids, which is why Outrigger Enterprises Group is buying resorts globally and creating a space for itself. President and CEO David Carey talks to Raini Hamdi

# IT'S FOR THE KIDS

### You're the man who took Outrigger out of Hawaii into Asia.

Well, it wasn't just me, but yes it was under my watch. Hawaii is a great place and we've done extremely well there for years, but it's only one place. Sometimes as an owner of assets, you worry about the concentration in one place. If there is a big cyclone or some kind of (disaster), the company would be finished and that's not a good thing for a family business. So the idea of buying assets in different destinations makes good investment sense.

The other piece about it is it enables us to hedge the currency exposure. If we do this right, we will have multiple destinations around the world that have different source markets and different currencies so we're not exposed if one of them is down. In Fiji, for example, our customer base is mainly Australia/New Zealand, so part of our effort is to diversify the source and get more Chinese, Koreans and Japanese to come in bigger numbers.

### Are you an asset player or hotel player?

Our strategy is to buy on a generational basis. The family (Carey is married to Kathy Kelley, the granddaughter of Outrigger founder Roy Kelley) has indicated they want to hold these (resorts) for generations, so we're really different from a lot of other players. We want to be owner-operator for a long time.

We are not in the business of buying and selling assets, although we have bought and sold. For example, we sold 18 properties in Australia and New Zealand, then bought four back and recently sold them again. In the first instance it was an offer we couldn't refuse. The second one was because the four hotels are not on the beach and we are refocusing on beachfront properties only.

### So you're like, say, Patek Philippe – you never actually own it, you merely look after it for the next generation?

(Laughs) Yah, that's the idea. My kids are in their late 20s and early 30s, they are among 14 fourth-generation family members. My brother-in-law is in charge of the business of the family, I'm in charge of the family business, i.e. I run and operate it.

But what we've done as a family business is we've begun to expose and train the up-and-coming generation members on what it means to own a business and to be in the business. We have quarterly meetings, we train them on everything from why you need prenuptial agreements to how to buy insurance and basic tax rules. Hopefully they will be good citizens of the world but also understand the long-term strategy of the company. We help them be good owners.

Now that doesn't always work, as sometimes there are things that cause the need to prune the family tree, so to speak. But that's why we're unique; we spend a lot of time working on the family relationship. We have an annual event where family members try and build a relationship outside the business so that conflicts among people in the family are not detrimental to the operation of the business.

It's easy to say, hard to do. We're working hard and doing it as a focus, a non-trivial exercise.

### So where else are you looking at to buy?

We'd like to be in Bali, Hainan, Okinawa, the Seychelles, beachfronts in Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Australia. We've opened in Phuket, Mauritius, the Maldives – ideally we want to be in all the iconic beachfront destinations people want to go to.

But the biggest challenge in the last 18-24 months was finding reasonably-priced assets. We're not the only company that is interested in buying properties. All the equity funds and REITs have so much

money, so we'll have to be patient to find the right property at the right place and right time. We've also been looking at beachfront resorts in Mexico and the West Coast of US but the asset pricing has been prohibitive.

### So what are you going to do, given deals are few and far between and competition for them is stiff?

A lot of our focus right now is to look at the properties in our system today and see what investments we can make to further improve those properties.

For example, in Fiji, some of them could support additional units on property, and we could add maybe a spa, do pool improvements and other internal investments.

In Phuket, we're going to be putting in a beachfront restaurant, upgrade the pool bar and we'll probably do the usual rooms renovation as appropriate.

(The resort in) Maldives is brand new, but (the one) in Mauritius, which has just been taken over by us, is an older building, so there will be investments to upgrade F&B quality, the little things in the room, spa, etc – it's a fair amount of work while we continue to look for new acquisitions.

### Does it pay off to be only beachfront?

It is a small niche and we're a small company. If you look at the big global brands – they add 100 properties a year. We're not going to add 100 properties a year so how can we compete but through owning a niche and executing it exceptionally well from the operational standpoint. The idea is once a guest comes to us, he will go to another Outrigger resort.

Our brand promise is to deliver authentic, world-class hospitality and celebrate the culture of the places we do business. We're small enough we can be genuinely authentic to a particular culture...My website is not going to be as robust as Marriott's – they have billions to spend – but I can assure you that anyone who has ever stayed with us and has had that cultural experience will look again at our website.

### It's hard to find a real niche today, isn't it, and when you do it gets copied?

Yes, it's hard to find a niche but I think a values-based management is hard to copy. The genuineness of the hospitality delivery from an employee who believes he is there for a purpose – now that's hard to copy. It's also hard to replicate in a multi-thousand units chain.

### But doesn't this niche cut you out of city hotels or urban resorts?

We did talk a lot about that. We say we can't do both well, we're not big enough.

Our marketing system is also designed around the resort product.

Maybe one day when we have lots of different resorts.

### Are travel agents still a huge business for resorts?

In the US, we're very well-known in the agency community. When I first started in

## 10 NEED TO KNOWS ABOUT DAVID CAREY

■ **Who's in your family?** I have four kids ranging in age from 25 to 31 years. Two daughters and two sons. All live in California at the moment.

■ **What do you do for fun?** Golf is my favourite fun pastime. I enjoy EPL football (I'm a Chelsea supporter). I also like to take photographs on trips to cool places.

■ **Your ideal vacation?** A photography trip to a beautiful place with my lovely wife Kathy.

■ **How do you book your own leisure trips?** My assistant helps me with nearly all my travel.

■ **What are you reading right now?** *I am Pilgrim* by Terry Hayes. A spy thriller.

■ **How do you stay healthy?** Yoga. Some stationary bike.

■ **Favourite food?** Dark chocolate.

■ **A bad habit you cannot kick?** Not saying no to interesting but irrelevant projects.

■ **Your pet peeve, something that never fails to annoy you?** When news show guests on TV argue and do not use good manners.

■ **Most people don't know that you...** I like Jack Russells and toy poodles.

the business, 90 per cent of the business was through retail travel agents, either directly or through wholesale tour operators. We were able to reach 50,000 travel agents just through a good selling strategy.

Now, the agency business is declining a bit and is going direct to consumer. So now we've had to improve our Internet access. While we're known among consumers in the US and Japan, we're working hard to expose our brand in China, because we have several resort locations, for example, the Maldives, which is idyllic for the Chinese. The idea is once they stay with us, they'd go to another Outrigger resort.

It's tough because we're competing with the billion-dollar players. So we have to execute exceptionally well from the operational standpoint.

### Are agents still important for you then?

They are still a part of our business, particularly out of Europe, Japan, (South) Korea, which are still an agency business. We've set up GSAs in the UK, France, Germany, Russia and will probably have one in Dubai to help us penetrate the agency market there.

In destinations such as Hawaii, consumers just go straight to the Internet instead of the retail agent. It is interesting to watch what's going to happen to the retail travel agent, how they are going to morph over the years. Some are more technology-savvy and have learnt how to connect.

But I think there is room for agents in remote locations. My daughter is getting married in Costa Rica. We go online and find ideas that look interesting – but what is it really like? So the role the retail agent can play is to tell customers 'I've been on a fam trip there, here's what it's like'.

You can search all you like but there is nothing like a human explanation.

My brother-in-law is in charge of the business of the family, I'm in charge of the family business...



# Guide Cruises

How will Indonesia's lifting of cabotage restrictions shape the future development of South-east Asia's cruise industry? [Mimi Hudoyo](#), [S Puvaneswary](#) and [Paige Lee Pei Qi](#) speak to cruise lines and agents

# WIDER ACCESS ON THE HORIZON



Agents believe that Indonesia's abolishment of the cabotage principles will encourage cruise lines to venture into Indonesia's remote destinations like Raja Ampat (above), which is not accessible by air

In a bid to boost arrivals, the Indonesian government has recently relaxed its cabotage principles imposed on cruise ships by allowing foreign vessels to anchor at selected ports in the country.

International cruise lines can now embark/disembark tourists through the seaports of Benoa (Bali), Tanjung Priok (Jakarta), Tanjung Perak (Surabaya), Belawan (Medan) and Soekarno-Hatta (Makassar).

Cruise companies interviewed by *TTG Asia* are salivating at the prospects of a larger domestic cruise market and more interesting itineraries.

Welcoming the development, Michael Goh, senior vice president – sales, Star Cruises, said: “We foresee it will have a significant and positive impact on the region, boosting the development of both the domestic and South-east Asian cruise markets.

“Recently, Star Cruises had completed its 46-night Southern Hemisphere cruise onboard *SuperStar Virgo*, calling at several ports in Indonesia including Jakarta and Bali late last year. With the new ruling, this will enable Star Cruises to explore new itineraries and most importantly, expand our reach in Indonesia, as the country has the making and potential to be one of the leading cruise hubs in the region.

Buhdy Bok, Costa Group's Asia president, is equally positive: “As a key market for Costa, Indonesia's latest move provides a huge opportunity to develop the cruise market both domestically and around the region. We are always keen to explore new

itineraries in the region, and are excited to see the development of more itineraries with the increase in port calls in Indonesia, enriching our cruise holiday offerings for guests in the Asia region.”

Melvyn Yap, regional director-Asia of Silversea Cruises, said: “The Indonesian archipelago is a long stretch. This will give us a lot of time to explore all the beautiful islands instead of trying to get to another country just to meet the cabotage requirements.”

It is hence not surprising that Indonesia's outbound operators are viewing the cabotage lift in positive light, especially as Indonesians, who still need to fly out of the country to embark on a cruise ship, will be able to sail from domestic ports in the future.

Nurdin Supena, manager, Bayu Buana Travel, said: “It would be more attractive

for Indonesians because it means reduced cost in terms of air tickets to Singapore, and it is also time-effective to be able to hop onto a cruise from Jakarta as the major outbound market comes from here.

“The cruise package prices need to be attractive though,” she added. “The most important thing, however, is the readiness of the ports to berth the big ships which are operating in the region nowadays.”

Furthermore, the ability to cruise from homeground will likely appeal to Indonesian travellers seeking to enjoy the facilities on board a ship, rather than those whose cruise journeys are motivated by the destination, observed Rama Tirtawisata, group managing director of Panorama Leisure Group.

“The new policy opened up more opportunities to grow the first group, as it would be more convenient for them to

start their trips from Indonesia. For these people, the destination is not the main interest, and short (South-east Asian) cruise programmes such as Singapore-Port Klang-Phuket are popular.

“For the second group – those who would travel to places like the Mediterranean or Alaska – the new policy does not bring any change,” he added.

At the same time, Rama also sees ample opportunities for international cruise lines to roll out domestic programmes for Indonesians across the sprawling archipelago. “Indonesia has so many interesting destinations such as Togean and Raja Ampat which are not easily accessible by air, and cruising can be a good alternative for adventurous Indonesians,” he said.

Likewise, Lim Chee Tong, managing director of Malaysia's Jebson Travel & Tours Services, foresees cruise lines will offer itineraries to more exotic destinations in Indonesia beyond current ports of calls like Komodo Island and Bali. “This will benefit agents as they will have more products to sell,” he said.

On the other hand, Richard Vuilleumier, managing director, Panorama Tours Malaysia, foresees a lukewarm reception for all-Indonesian itineraries, as many Malaysians have already been to Indonesia for shopping, sightseeing, golfing and cultural experiences, and therefore would rather take cruises to novel destinations farther afield.

John Chan, business consultant at Malaysia's Kris International Traveltours, views the cabotage lift as the nascent

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**Nurdin Supena**  
Manager, Bayu Buana Travel

# Guide Cruises

development of the Indonesian cruise industry and as it matures, there will be more opportunities for corporate companies to hold their incentive events on-board a cruise ship, with embarkation and disembarkation in Indonesia.

He commented: "For the Malaysian market, Indonesia will be a new destination for cruise holidays as compared to Southern Thailand and Hong Kong. Malaysia will also benefit as passengers could transit at the international airports here before boarding an onward flight to Indonesia."

The biggest loser may be Singapore, which has established itself as the cruise hub of South-east Asia.

Alicia Seah, director of marketing communications at Dynasty Travel, deems the cabotage lift a threat as it will "definitely affect and reduce the numbers" boarding from Singapore.

She said: "With Indonesia's big population base numbers, secondary cities will benefit to depart from their homeport country rather than via Singapore where accommodation and transfers will definitely cost more."

Echoing similar sentiments, Chan Brothers Travel Singapore's marketing communications executive, Rebecca Chia, commented: "With the lifting of cabotage of the sea, we foresee that passengers from Jakarta may choose to embark and disembark from their homeports instead of Singapore for domestic and regional cruising.

"We have seen bookings from the Indonesia market gaining traction only in the last two years, with majority of travellers originating from Batam, Jakarta and Yogyakarta. (Nevertheless), they may still find it more convenient to embark and disembark from Singapore than through their own seaports due to our strategic location within South-east Asia," Chia said.

However, the trade is not expecting Indonesia to compete with Singapore's cruise hub position yet.

Seah added: "We reckon that there will be challenges in (the Indonesia cruise industry) for at least the next two to three years in terms of infrastructure building as well as pricing strategies as they may be pegged against the US dollar."

Star Cruises' Goh urged: "We hope Indonesia will continue to implement



Indonesia's cabotage lift may threaten Singapore's cruise hub position in the future

cruise-friendly measures and develop the overall cruise tourism network, economy and infrastructure for the selected sea-

ports, which are equally important in order to attract more cruises and tourists to the country in the near future."

## South-east Asian cruise market makes bigger waves

### Cruise tourism's economic contribution

The fast-growing cruise industry has made a significant economic contribution of nearly US\$1.7 billion to South-east Asia in 2014, according to a Cruise Line International Association's (CLIA) study which covered the five countries of Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam.

There were a total of 1,672 cruise ship calls at the destination ports of the five countries. A quarter of them were turnaround port calls and the remaining 75 per cent transit and overnight port calls. Malaysia had the highest number of transit and total calls (35 per cent of transit port calls and 30 per cent of total cruise ship calls in the region) while Singapore had the highest volume of turnaround calls (63 per cent).

The calls generated just over three million passenger visit days and just over 422,000 crew visit days. Cruise ports in Malaysia and Singapore each generated more than one million passenger and cruise visit days.

Cruise passengers were the bigger spenders, spending a total of US\$1.5 billion while crew spent US\$22.9 million. Turnaround passengers spent an estimated US\$1.3 billion (an average of US\$842 per visit day), with transit and overnight passengers spending US\$198 million (US\$132 per visit day).

### Rapid increase in port calls

The number of port calls in South-east Asia has grown 28 per cent from 2013 to reach a record 1,973 in 2015, according to the latest CLIA figures.

Malaysia welcomed 580 port calls in 2015, the second largest number in Asia after Japan. Singapore with 374 calls is also among the top ports with over 200 total calls in 2015.

"These are very encouraging results and a positive sign for future success. Such dynamic growth confirms that South-east Asia's great potential as a major international cruise market is being realised," said Ann Sherry, chairperson for CLIA South-east Asia and CEO of Carnival Australia.

### Cruising boom in Asia

Cruise tourism in Asia is growing at double-digit rates – both in cruise liner capacity deployed in the region and as a passenger source market. The absolute number of cruise travellers from Asia has almost doubled since 2012, growing from

775,000 to nearly 1.4 million passengers, a 34 per cent compound annual growth rate (CAGR).

China is a main driver of passenger growth in Asia, adding 480,000 more cruise travellers since 2012 – an almost 80 per cent CAGR. Other markets with leading double-digit growth include Hong Kong (74 per cent), India (36 per cent), Japan (20 per cent) and Taiwan (14 per cent).

China accounted for nearly half of Asia's passenger volume in 2014. An estimated 679,000 passengers were from mainland China, compared with 700,000 from the rest of Asia.

Other leading source markets include Singapore (163,000 passengers), Taiwan (137,000) and Japan (119,000).

In response to the increasing demand, the cruise industry is bringing more cruise visits to Asian destinations. In fact, Asia had the greatest gain in share of global capacity deployment (2.4 percentage points) among all regions.

There were 980 more port calls in 2015, up 34 per cent in absolute volume from 2013. Destinations with the greatest growth in total port calls are Japan and Malaysia, with 238 and 197 additional calls respectively. Other destinations with total port call growth include Hong Kong (101), Singapore (84) and South Korea (68).

The CLIA study findings show that Asian cruisers sailed mostly within the region in 2014. Almost half (48 per cent) of them took short cruises of four to six nights, followed by two to three nights (38 per cent).

The momentum of cruise tourism in Asia continued in 2015. Twenty-six brands are serving the market last year, with 52 ships deployed and more than 1,000 cruises scheduled.

As in the previous year, cruises within Asia and short sailings of two to three nights and four to six nights dominate itineraries in 2015.

### Cruise ship calls and expenditures in South-east Asia in 2014

	Region total	Indonesia	Malaysia	Singapore	Thailand	Vietnam
<b>Cruise calls</b>						
Transit	1,066	139	368	28	237	294
Turnaround	423	12	132	267	11	1
Overnight	183	25	5	40	45	68
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,672</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>363</b>
<b>Passenger and crew visit days</b>						
Turnaround passengers	1,512,934	11,763	434,630	1,031,553	34,394	594
Transit/Overnight passengers	1,498,138	139,685	503,841	84,157	379,735	390,720
Crew	422,598	28,668	138,649	100,883	75,918	78,480
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,433,670</b>	<b>180,116</b>	<b>1,077,120</b>	<b>1,216,593</b>	<b>490,047</b>	<b>469,794</b>
<b>Direct expenditures (US\$ million)</b>						
Turnaround passengers	1,273.77	8.54	315.14	924.72	24.94	0.43
Transit/Overnight passengers	198.11	20.48	35.53	12.62	71.52	57.96
Crew	22.90	1.89	8.47	5.64	4.00	2.90
Cruise lines	166.32	5.94	5.05	148.69	3.39	3.25
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,661.10</b>	<b>36.85</b>	<b>364.19</b>	<b>1,091.67</b>	<b>103.85</b>	<b>64.54</b>

## Which South-east Asian destinations are cruise lines most excited to sail to in 2016?

### **Buhdy Bok**

**President, Costa Group Asia**  
In South-east Asia, travellers usually prefer shorter cruises lasting four to five days. In January as well as from November to December 2015, Costa Asia will continue to offer homeport cruises out of Singapore. Given the short duration of the cruises, Costa Asia is excited to bring guests to the region's most popular destinations like Malaysia (including Malacca, Penang and Langkawi) and Thailand (Phuket).

### **Sean Treacy**

**Managing director, Singapore and South-east Asia, Royal Caribbean Cruises**

Penang, based on guest feedback, has always been a very popular choice given its wide array of cultural, gastronomic and cultural attractions, close proximity to the pier and thus the convenience for our guests to visit and explore this port.

To offer our guests even more chances to visit Penang, we are going to introduce a three-night weekend cruise

to Penang from Singapore for our next season in 2016/17 on *Mariner of the Seas* with 10 sailing dates.

### **Farriek Tawfik**

**Director of South-east Asia, Princess Cruises**

For Princess Cruises in 2016, we are most excited about bringing *Diamond Princess* to South-east Asia, where she will homeport for her first time in Singapore for the winter 2016-2017 season.

She will travel to many exotic

South-east Asian destinations including Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam. The *Diamond Princess* has been refurbished to appeal to the Asian market, such as the addition of the Izumi Japanese bath – the largest of its kind at sea – as well as the Kai Sushi restaurant.

### **Michael Goh**

**Senior vice president – sales, Star Cruises**

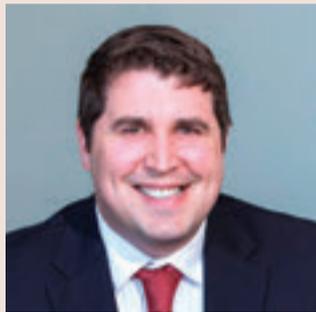
In 2016, Star Cruises will continue to deploy its fleet across Asia

with homeports in Singapore, Haikou, Keelung, Hong Kong and most recently, Guangzhou. Among some of the popular destinations (in South-east Asia) are Penang, Langkawi, Malacca and Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, Danang, Hue and Halong Bay in Vietnam.

### **Melvyn Yap**

**Regional director, Asia, Silverseas Cruises**

Definitely Indonesia and Myanmar, because we are the first international cruise company to explore these regions.



From left: Buhdy Bok, Sean Treacy, Farriek Tawfik, Michael Goh and Melvyn Yap

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## Report Longhaul

# FRANC-LY SPEAKING

Two major developments – Asian currency depreciation, which continues to slow travel from South-east Asia, and recent terrorist attacks and threats to Europe – will determine how Switzerland inbound will fare this year.

In the aftermath of the November attacks in Paris which were followed by terrorist threats to Belgium and England, travel consultants are looking out for alternative destinations in Europe – Switzerland and lesser-known cities included – as they expect the general demand for the continent to drop this year.

Ian Evasco, retail team leader-travel products of Adventure International Tour, Philippines concurred that tourists could divert to Switzerland as “it is in the heart of Europe and has always been a very safe and secure destination, which is very important”.

Indeed, safety and security have always been Switzerland’s selling point, apart from its natural charm as an “all-time, all-season destination” with clean air, water and environment and efficient transport system.

But its expensive image – dearer than Paris and other more popular European countries – is a challenge, according to South-east Asia travel consultants who attended the 18<sup>th</sup> Switzerland Travel Mart in Zermatt last September.

They noted that the depreciation of a basket of Asian currencies made Switzerland even more expensive, while the economic and political situation in specific countries kept people hesitant to travel. So much so that towards the end of 2015, business from Singapore and Malaysia to Switzerland were reported as “bad”, and from Indonesia “very bad”.

While Switzerland is not about to cheapen its prices, it is luring Asian FITs, families, repeats and mini groups with value-added products. Foremost of these is the Swiss Travel Pass for unlimited travel by rail, road or waterways across the country.

Cynthia Tan, operations director of Roystar Travel & Tours, Malaysia, said considering the expensive public



Kempinski Grand Hotel des Bains, St Moritz

transport in Europe, the Swiss Travel Pass made Switzerland affordable, enabling travellers to stay longer and see more.

There is good demand for the pass, agreed Yen Thing, tours consultant of Boustead Travel Services, Malaysia as the pass also features attractive discounts for youths and adults and is free for kids below 16 years old, among perks.

Feliz Gracielle Axalan, marketing executive, Tradewings Tours & Travel, Philippines, foresees ample potential for Switzerland from the new and small Philippine market which still “lacks awareness” of the destination.

She said that Switzerland’s continued marketing and promotions would unlock opportunities in groups, cor-

porates, students travelling on semester breaks and young employees going on summer vacations.

Another new market, Vietnam, is still small but there is potential including for luxury travel, said Dang Tran Thuc Doan, director of strategic planning for Tourist Service & Trading Corp.

In Asia, Switzerland Tourism works largely with the travel trade and its director of South-east Asia, Ivan Breiter, said it “can help with pricing” by advising agents to step up sales during the low and shoulder seasons, and during weekdays, when rates are lower.

Breiter said 40 per cent of tourists from South-east Asia were generated during the shoulder season.



## AN ITALIAN YIN AND YANG

By Raini Hamdi

As the segment of sophisticated and free independent travellers from Asia grows larger, destinations that were once aspirational have become banal for this lot, putting pressure on outbound travel agents to come up with new ideas to please clients.

Combine Venice and its lagoons with the Dolomites and agents will in effect be offering their clients two UNESCO World Heritage Sites at one go.

Venice and the Dolomites are only a 2.5 hours drive away. While the former is

known to every well-clad Asian tourist, the same cannot be said of the Dolomites. Currently, it is fair to say only the discerning Asians would have the Dolomites on their radar, like the couple from Singapore and Hong Kong who recently booked out the entire Queen of the Alps hotel, Rosa Alpina Hotel & Spa (see right) for their wedding. They could have chosen Florence or Rome, but they chose the village of San Cassiano, 1,537m above sea level in the tourist district of Alta Badia. The village has only 750 inhabitants. The Dolomites:

A name befittingly close to ‘dynamite’ and ‘dynamic’ – every bit this unique mountain range in the northern Italian Alps it is. Venice has feminine, wily charms, while the Dolomites exudes masculine, single-focus power. A contrast that is so perfect and compelling – think ‘His’ & ‘Hers’, Ying & Yang, Snow & Ice.

Unlike triangle mounds most mountains are, the Dolomites are exquisite pinnacles, spires, towers, dramatic vertical limestone walls and various sculptural forms in a great diversity of colours. Comprising 18 peaks rising to above 3,000m and covering 141,903ha, the Dolomites is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Italy had done well last year. According to results from the European Cities Marketing-MKG report, the city of Milan experienced the strongest RevPAR in Europe in the first three quarters of 2015, over the same period last year, thanks to Expo Milan which was held from May 1 to October 31. The city of romance, Venice, too, was ahead of 2014, experiencing an average daily rate rise of over 19 per cent, leading to a RevPAR increase of 17.3 per cent.

Overall, 2015 was the Year of Europe, which was world’s most visited region with a five per cent increase in arrivals compared with four per cent for Asia-Pacific, the Americas and the Middle East, while Africa looks set to decline five per cent, going by UNWTO’s preliminary figures.

## TRIED & TESTED

### Rosa Alpina Hotel & Spa

The loveliness of this hotel is the perfect complement to the bizarre pinnacles of the Dolomites, says Raini Hamdi

**LOCATION** In the serene, picturesque village of San Cassiano in Badia, north-east Italy. An easy 2.5-hour drive from Venice and I’m in the heart of the Dolomites. From the hotel, it is convenient to drive to the various must-see trails.

**AMBIENCE** Feels like home. Cozy corners, a fireplace, the warm hues of wooden flooring and golden candelabras, fresh roses everywhere, jars of cookies and sweets for the taking and, my first encounter with the real reason why this hotel feels like home: Resident manager

The rising popularity of Switzerland may be put to test this year as Asian currencies weaken, reports Rosa Ocampo. Meanwhile, Raini Hamdi explores new options in Italy to satisfy Asian FITs seeking something new

# STARCHITECTS BRING GLAMOUR TO REMOTE VALLEY

By Raini Hamdi

A quiet village in Switzerland that prides itself on having just “1,000 inhabitants, 1,000 sheep, 1,000 guest beds” has been hurled into the limelight as starchitects descend upon it to build projects that capture the imagination.

Vals, 1,250m above sea level in the canton of Graubunden, is famous for a hotel and thermal spa designed by award-winning Swiss architect Peter Zumthor; also for the bottled mineral water, Valser, and its beautiful Valsian quartzite.

There isn't much else.

However, a new owning company of the hotel has given the hotel the kind of attention reserved for celebrities, thanks to its bold expansion plan to build an iPhone-slim tower extension designed by American architect Thom Mayne of Morphosis. Another starchitect, Tadao Ando, is designing a meditation park, Valser Path, within the complex.

Formerly known as Therme Hotel & Spa, the resort has been renamed 7132 Hotel (7132 being the postal code of Vals). The new owning company, 7132 Ltd, is led by Remo Stoffel, an entrepreneur who was born in Vals and who bought the property from the local community three years ago.

The new tower is a startlingly slender 381m tall building with 107 rooms – virtually one room per floor – with a transparent exterior sheen that will mirror the mountains. If all goes well, it will open in 2019. But first, the company must win the votes of the community for the tower. To this end, it has set up a gallery with large-scale models of the extension, so that the locals could view the plan and have their concerns addressed.

But even without a brick being laid for the new tower, a



metamorphosis has already occurred at the existing hotel, which aims to attract international jet-setters, including well-heeled Asians, to Vals.

Renovations at the hotel, which comprises the main wing and another wing called Selva House, have been completed. The latter, renamed House of Architects, now fields 13 new rooms designed by yet another starchitect, Kengo Kuma, and 18 new rooms by Ando. Both are highly-skilled at deflecting a 20m<sup>2</sup> space with their eye-popping minimalist design and unique effects. Kuma for instance uses warm, curved wooden panels to create a soft cocoon of a room, while Ando sliced off a rectangular space to create a bathroom that is triangle in shape.

Morphosis' Mayne is also designing another 20 rooms

which will be ready by summer this year, revealed the hotel's managing director, Sonia Dietrich.

These new rooms join 20 retro-chic rooms designed by Peter Zumthor, completing the concept to offer designer rooms in the House of Architects.

In the main building, three new 90m<sup>2</sup> suites designed by Kuma have also opened. Each suite booking comes with a helicopter or a limousine at guest disposal in case he spontaneously wants to lunch in Geneva, shop in Zurich, whatever takes his fancy, included in the rate of CHF2,480 (US\$2,515) per night. The 35 Zumthor rooms in the main building – larger at 24-30m<sup>2</sup> compared with those in the House of Architects (18-20m<sup>2</sup>) and more luxuriously furnished – have also been spruced up, with new bathrooms designed by Kuma.

The new meditation park, Valser Path, meanwhile, is scheduled for completion in 2017. Both the park and the new tower are within the hotel complex, which sits above the town centre and blends quietly into the natural surroundings. The Valser Path is open to the whole community, not just hotel guests.

Dietrich said the main difference since the new ownership came onboard was that, “for the first time since 30 years, we have the vision, plans and money to invest”.

“It is now difficult for Switzerland to get good guests because the Swiss franc is strong. You can't build a three-star hotel, you need something unique to compete. We have to go this way,” she said.

She believed the changes at 7132 Hotel would draw more top-paying guests who love architecture and design, thermal springs, a destination that does not attract mass tourism, top-notch service and F&B (one of the hotel's restaurants is helmed by Sven Wassmer who previously worked for three-Michelin-star Andreas Caminada).

Prospects from Asia are good, she said. “Even though there aren't a lot of Asian guests at the moment, it might improve in time with the Japanese architects' involvement. Most of the Asian guests we have are FITs from South Korea, Japan and China and their main reason for coming here is the therme, the architecture and a desire to enjoy unspoiled areas of Switzerland,” Dietrich said.

Prices have increased following the renovations and rates have been simplified: CHF390 for rooms in the House of Architects, CHF590 for rooms in the main building and CHF2,480 for the suites.

Stefania Belle comes flying down the stairs to welcome me; insists that I have a bit of early lunch on her as my room isn't ready. It's the first encounter of the hotel's family-like hospitality which will provide me with many happy and relaxed moments over the next few days.

**ROOM** There are 51 individually-designed rooms. My Chalet Loft Suite is far from a humble chalet or loft. Rather, it's alpine chic bar none! And how utterly luxurious it is in space, quality furnishings and amenities, typically a Relais & Chateaux. I step into the balcony and I don't want to leave it: views of the hotel's private, immaculate garden below and the dense pine forest across, not to mention the fresh air, makes me feel utterly content and recharged.

**FACILITIES** But leave the warm and modern comforts of my suite I must, for the Dolomites beckons. Stefania even takes the trouble of arranging for a private guide, Diego, to come to the hotel and brief me on the must-see's, as I have only five days. At the end of our meeting, I feel I must stay a month, for there is just so much to see and do, and it involves hours of driving and hiking in order to see the



stunning sites.

After an active outing each day, the thought of returning to the plush hotel is comforting. The highlight begins with a drink at the bar, where the soft-spoken bartender, Omar, serves gracefully while the pianist plays and sings. Then dinner, always at the hotel, for it has the best restaurants. People come here just to eat at its two-Michelin-star St Hubertus, helmed by R&C grand chef Norbert Niederkofler. No wonder! Every dish is a work of art, delicious and served by a line of white-gloved waiters, led by the dashing Valentine.

The Wine & Grill is where I go for comfort Italian food. It had mucked up the early lunch on arrival (my 'Salad Leaves



with Lobster and Endives' came without a single salad leaf). But as the menu lists mouth-watering salads, grills and wood-oven baked pizzas, I give it another try and it's heartwarming how they try to make up for that little error. Besides, Antonella who serves me is yet another staff who makes this place so wonderful.

The Wine & Grill also has private rooms that serve meat, cheese and chocolate fondues, perfect when the weather outside is cold.

For more pampering, there's a spa with an indoor pool, jacuzzi, steam bath and Finnish sauna.

**SERVICE/VERDICT** I always think I'm lucky if I find one or two stars among a

hotel's team members. Rosa Alpina is astonishing in that it has so many stars. This speaks for small, family-run hotels. The three-generation Pizzinini family can be proud of their achievement. Rosa Alpina is as monumental as the Dolomites – only, size has nothing to do with it.

**Name** Rosa Alpina Hotel & Spa  
**No. of rooms and suites** 51

**Rates** Depends on season. A current all-inclusive five-night winter package is priced from 1,680 euros per pax (for five nights) – see website

**Contact details**

Tel: (39) 0471-849-500

Email: info@rosalpina.it

Website: www.rosalpina.it

# Destination Philippines

The tourism landscape of Bicol is still green, both figuratively and literally



## IN A STATE OF GREEN

**N**ot yet a prime tourist destination, the undeveloped Bicol Region in south-eastern Luzon is still considered to be malleable and relatively easy to develop an ecotourism blueprint, compared with mature destinations with similar aspirations.

While there's no denying that Bicol has what it takes to become an ecotourism hub, will it be able to sustain it in the long term? Bicol's local governments appear keen to play the cards right in the province's ecotourism development.

Joey Salceda, governor of Albay province – the gateway to Bicol – has been emphasising ecotourism by reducing the province's carbon footprint and increasing its forest cover by 88 per cent to 45,000ha. He said: "Tourism forces us to become green as it's what tourists come here for."

Salceda said the present Legazpi airport will be converted into a tourism hub that is similar to Sentosa in Singapore. However, development will be limited to three or four storeys so as not to obstruct the view of the iconic Mayon Volcano.

He added that Albay tourism is entering the investment-led phase of growth, and is actively courting investors to place their money in resorts and ease the room

shortage.

Department of Tourism Bicol has outlined long-term ecotourism goals in anticipation of higher visitor arrivals to the region with developments such as the opening of the new Bicol International Airport in Daraga, Albay in 2018, according to director Maria Ravanilla.

There are also concrete plans to develop more ecotourism products based on the region's vast wealth of natural sites and attractions, she added.

Aside from sprucing up Albay, the province has joined hands with the neighbouring provinces of Masbate and Sorsogon to form the AlMaSor tourism alliance. A similar alliance with three other provinces – Camarines Norte, Camarines Sur and Catanduanes – is already in place, Ravanilla said.

Speaking during the PATA New Frontiers Forum held in Albay in November, PATA CEO Mario Hardy lauded Albay's ecotourism goals: "There are not many destinations anymore that you see are green... an indication that you have something unique here."

Donsol, in the province of Sorsogon, is home to a sustainable community-based whaleshark encounter programme, which has been so successful in elevating local

livelihoods that the previously fourth class municipality is now third class and on its way to becoming first class.

AA Yaptinchay, a marine wildlife expert and also the general manager of Kirschner Travel Manila, is widely credited as the person who developed Donsol's community-based whaleshark encounter. He emphasised that marine wildlife should be protected, not exploited; tourists should also be educated, and not just entertained.

"We see lots of misguided and misused ecotourism. (Most people) think that anything with beach or sea is ecotourism, but ecotourism should have an educational aspect to it. It's about helping the community and enhancing the natural sites," Yaptinchay said.

One of Albay's main attractions is the ATV rides on the slopes of Mayon Volcano. While this may seem a harmless activity not uncommon in other countries too, several delegates at the PATA New Frontiers Forum remarked that it is not ecotourism and that the social and environmental impacts of the ATVs should be considered.

JP Cabalza, managing director of Centcorp Travel and Tours, said that "protection (of tourist attractions) should be given priority to assure a balanced growth

### Destination in numbers

**1.1 million**

The number of tourist arrivals in Albay in 2015, a 14 per cent hike from 2014

**500,000**

The number of foreign arrivals targeted for Albay in 2016, up from 399,000 in 2014

**5,000**

The number of hotel rooms targeted for Albay by 2020

and development of the Bicol Region".

Apart from Mayon Volcano in Albay and whalesharks in Donsol, Cabalza urged protection of other important ecotourism sites in Sorsogon like Caramoan National Park, Basot and Quinalaang Islands, Tanglar Point, Libmanan Caves, Mount Isarog Natural Park, Malabungot Protected Area, Lagonoy Natural Park in Camarines Sur, and Calaguas Island in Camarines Norte.

The Bicol Region is poised to become an ecotourism hub with its abundance of natural attractions and outdoor activities, but care must be taken to ensure its sustainable development. By **Rosa Ocampo**

**How to sell**

**STAY** Live the high life in the 53 rooms and 37 villas on the five-hectare **Misibis Bay Resort** on Cagraray Island. The resort offers a slew of marine-based activities and a helicopter journey over various attractions including the Mayon Volcano where a helipad sits atop the lava deposits.

**SEE** **Lignon Hill** offers a panoramic view of Mayon and the city. Near the volcano is the Cagsawa church bell tower, the only part of the building that was not buried in the 1814 eruption, and stores selling local food, souvenirs and colourful handicrafts.

**DO** Take the “taxicle”, a combination of a taxicab and tricycle, around the scenic **Legazpi Boulevard** which stretches along the sea and has iconic Mayon Volcano looming in the backdrop.

**EAT** Savour spicy Bicol cuisine and fusion food at **Balay Cena Una**, a restored Spanish house in Daraga, Albay. Bicol uses a lot of chilli, coconut cream and pili nuts native to the region. It even has chilli ice cream and chilli chocolates.



**Viewpoints**

What are the inbound prospects for Bicol in the next few years?



**Marjorie Aquino, senior sales and marketing manager, Blue Horizons Travel and Tours**

Bicol is one of our best-selling products. Foreign tourists

go for the Legazpi Experience package and whaleshark interaction in Donsol. A growing number of divers head to Ticao Island to see manta rays. Many also go to Camarines Sur for wakeboarding.

However, there are only a handful of hotels that we can recommend to our agents for their European clients. Misibis Bay is the only five-star hotel in Albay and it's quite far away; the rest are three-stars.



**Ritchie Tuano, general manager, AsiaReps Travel**

Bicol is very promising. From what I can see, it has a lot of activities and natural attractions that would surely propel ecotourism. It's

just right to have an international airport in Daraga, Albay so tourists can discover more sites in other Bicol provinces apart from Mayon Volcano in Albay and whaleshark interaction in Donsol.

**NEWS IN A MINUTE**



**1 Ticao Island Resort**  
Offering nine beach cabanas, this relatively low-key island hideaway in Masbate is great for marine activities like diving, snorkelling and spotting manta rays in the Manta Bowl.

While there, interact with fishermen, tour the island on motorbike, discover hidden waterfalls, go horseback riding and island hopping.

**2 Elysia Beach Resort Donsol**  
This small resort of just 15 cabanas in Donsol is not newly minted but offers a quaint atmosphere. Hammocks and comfy seats strewn on the beach are perfect for relaxing and watching the sunset. The thatched roofs blend well with the tropical surrounding, while the all-white linens and curtains in the cabanas evoke a sensuous feel.

**3 Bicol International Airport**  
In 2018, Bicol will boast a new international airport in Daraga, Albay,

which will replace the existing Legazpi International Airport in Legazpi City.

Currently under construction, the new airport will have more domestic flights linking Bicol to other Philippine destinations like Boracay and Palawan. There may also be room for chartered flights.

**4 Mount Quituanan**  
The Department of Tourism is planning to develop Mount Quituanan in Camalig, Albay, which used to serve as Japanese base camps during WWII.

Its high vantage point offers a lovely scenery of Mayon Volcano and the surrounding areas. There are 21 Japanese tunnels there, of which four will be developed for a historical adventure of tunnel hopping. With its extensive grounds, Mount Quituanan is also ideal for picnics, horseback riding, hiking and kite-flying.

**MY WAY**

**How do you unwind after a long week?**

If schedule permits, we love to have our family time in the laid-back town of Bacacay just 30 minutes away from Legazpi. The beach, cruising the Sula Channel, plus local delicacies and fresh produce at the fabulous Sunday market make for a wonderful weekend escape.

**What are your favourite hangouts in Legazpi City?**

Legazpi Boulevard has a jogging/biking lane, local vendors selling a variety of things and superb view of Albay Gulf and Mayon Volcano.

The Oriental Hotel has a mag-

nificent swimming pool area and my little boy likes going there every chance he gets. There's also a spa for my mother and a nice lobby lounge to hang out at.

**What food would you recommend visitors?**

Sea Dog Diner's Pasta Bikolandia and spring rolls of chilli and smoked fish; First Colonial Grill's chilli ice cream and *tinutungan* or roasted rice ice cream; Small Talk Cafe's pili nut pesto; Balay Cena Una's pili nut opera cake; and Albay Bakery's *ensaymada* or localised pastry topped with grated cheese, butter cream and sugar, *inulukan* or stuffed crab meat, and *pinangat* or fresh taro leaves cooked in coconut cream and chilli.



**Jessica Noelle Wong**  
Sales and marketing manager  
Donsol Eco Tour

**What are Bicol's unique attractions?**

An ATV ride to the slopes of Mayon Volcano. A quest through Camalig's caves, rolling green hills, heritage homes and the awesome view of Sumlang Lake.

Ticao Island is great for divers and non-divers alike. Scuba divers flock to Manta Bowl for manta rays, whalesharks and thresher sharks. Non-divers can enjoy the beauty of the islands and the rustic Ticao Island Resort which focuses on community-based activities.



Legazpi Boulevard

# Destination Philippines

## NEW DESTINATION ON THE RISE

Clark in Pampanga is enjoying a tourism investment renaissance, thanks to the forthcoming expansion of its airport and the growing number of property developers lured by prices half of those in nearby Metro Manila.

Poised to become the premier gateway in Pampanga once completed, the construction of Clark International Airport's new passenger terminal building will begin in 2016. It will have a capacity to handle three million passengers a year.

The second phase will be an expansion of the same terminal building so it can handle an additional five million passengers annually.

Several foreign airlines already operate to Clark International Airport. Even AirAsia Philippines, whose hub is now in Manila, would want to return to Clark if the planned road network connecting to Manila/Makati pushes through.

On the property front, the 164-key Park Inn By Radisson recently opened in December in Clark while the 77-key Best Western Plus Hotel opened in Subic. Both are aimed at business and leisure travellers.

Located in the 288ha Clark Green City,

the five-star Midori Clark Hotel and Casino has soft-opened in December. The 111-room establishment boasts outdoor bathtubs on balconies in some of its suites. Rooms also feature high-end Dedon furniture, Sealy beds, and Acca Kappa and L'occitane bathroom amenities.

Darlene Achumbre, assistant sales and marketing manager of Midori Clark Hotel, said Clark is already a fast-growing business and leisure destination, and that the expansion of Clark International Airport will create more flights, improve business prospects and boost tourism.

Set to open in 2017 is the 260-room five-star Marriott at Clark, launched in partnership with the Korean owner of Widus Hotel & Casino, which has also invested in a 600-seat convention centre.

Also, Korean company Donggwang Clark Corp will build an international hotel brand in its Clark SunValley Resorts and Country Club. The property's two 18-hole championship golf course are already open.

Clark's potential was why Afro Asian Travel and Tours president and managing director Angel Ramos Bognot decided to base the annual international event, B2B



Travel Business Exchange, in Clark, beginning since 2015.

"Logistically speaking, Clark makes (the show) easy to manage; it's near Manila, it's safe and secure and the airport is one of the best in Asia. It's a growing des-

tinuation," Bognot pointed out.

Bognot added that attractions including the Fontana's Water Theme Park, Dinosaur Island, Zoobic Safari, and Zoocobia Fun Zoo will add to Clark's appeal to families.

## TRIED & TESTED



### A whale of a time

Rosa Ocampo heads out on a boat off Sorsogon with Donsol Eco Tour in an attempt to spot – and swim – with the gentle giants of the underwater world

**WHAT** Donsol is the first whaleshark sanctuary in the Philippines. Whalesharks are the largest fish in the world and a threatened species. They are known locally as *butandings*.

The 70 or so whalesharks in the area feed on plankton that are aplenty in Donsol's waters. January through May mark

the best time to spot them, but they visit the area from November to June.

**WHY** I was told beforehand that sightings were not guaranteed since whalesharks were wild animals. At the Butanding Interaction Centre of the Municipal Tourism Office, we were required to watch

a video about the proper interaction with these gentle giants so as not to disturb them in their natural habitat.

The don'ts: no riding or blocking them, no feeding and no touching. One should also swim three metres away from its body and four metres away from its tail. No flash photography is allowed.

Each boat is limited to a maximum of six pax. Ten minutes of interaction are allowed, while sailing is limited to three hours. During the peak months of March to May, a maximum of 30 boats are allowed in the area.

**HOW** Our BIO (Butanding Interaction Officer) Junar Principe instructed us on

what to do should a whaleshark be sighted. Get ready with your mask, snorkel and fins, and jump in the water when he tells you to, and enjoy the experience of swimming alongside the whaleshark.

Aside from the BIO, there are four other crew members on the boat. The spotter atop the boat is a weather-beaten old man who never talks, his eyes forever scanning the water. He spots whalesharks based on sunlight, its shadow and movement in the water. There's also the boat captain and his assistant who ensure the sailing is smooth, plus another spotter inside the boat.

**VERDICT** No whalesharks were spotted but it was a relaxing experience. We were the only boat out at sea, the waters turning a deep emerald as we went farther away from the shore.

And I was in good company. My travel companion Shroff, managing director of Shroff International Travel Care, has a good sense of humour.

It's a privilege and a responsibility to come close to the whalesharks. Donsol has not succumbed to feeding and touching the whalesharks, practices that harm these gentle giants. Now, that's what I call ecotourism.



**Name** Whaleshark Interaction

**Rate** Pricing depends on the number of pax; from 2,000 pesos (US\$42.30) per pax for a group of six to 5,200 pesos for one pax

**Contact details**

Tel: (63) 2-576-5934, (63) 2-893-8173  
Email: info@donsolcotour.com

## Destination Japan

Primarily visited by domestic tourists, the smallest of Japan's four main islands is working hard to grow its appeal to international visitors, writes *Julian Ryall*

# THE ALLURE OF A SMALL ISLAND

**T**he eastern prefectures of Shikoku – arguably one of the least-known and most underappreciated areas of Japan – are rolling out the red carpet to foreign visitors.

“We definitely think that low recognition is a problem,” admitted Kanako Maeda, head of the International Strategies Division, Tokushima Prefectural Government.

“Unlike Tokyo and Osaka, not a lot of people know about Tokushima,” she said. “We are working hard to relay as much information as we can, so more people know about Tokushima and want to visit.”

“At the same time, we will continue to improve the situation in the prefecture for foreign visitors, such as placing signs in more languages.”

Other incentives include new subsidies of up to 50 per cent for coach charters and similar assistance for rental car tours.

The three prefectures of Tokushima, Kagawa and Kochi – often overlooked by overseas visitors – make up the eastern reaches of the smallest of Japan's four main islands, and local tourism operators

are hoping to build on their relative proximity to Osaka.

“Most people do the Golden Route of Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka when they come to Japan, particularly if they are first-time visitors, but we are less than two hours by bus from Osaka and visitors can see something here that can only be seen in two other places in the world,” said Kazuko Kifuku, manager of Onaruto Bridge Museum Eddy.

In the narrows between the north-east tip of the prefecture and Awaji Island, powerful ocean currents generate massive tides and whirlpools, many ranging up to 20m in diameter. The only other places in the world where such potent currents come together is off Vancouver in Canada and in the Straits of Messina, between Sicily and the Italian mainland.

“Most of our foreign visitors are from Asia, and tourists from China, Taiwan and South-east Asia tend to travel in groups,” Kifuku added. “People from Hong Kong, Europe and North America seem to prefer to travel independently, and we are keen to reach out to both groups.”

Activities in Tokushima include tak-

ing a small boat along the Oboke Gorge or soaking in the hot springs of nearby mountain towns. For the more adventurous, activities like whitewater rafting, traversing the vine bridges of the Iya Valley and surfing off the southern coast await.

The prefecture is also home to the Shikoku Pilgrimage, a 1,400km route that links 88 sacred sites on the island.

But it is the 400-year-old Awa Odori festival for which the prefecture is most famous for. Held over three days in mid-August, the event attracts some 1.3 million visitors to Tokushima City each year to see men and women in brightly coloured kimonos and distinctive pointed hats dance through the streets.

On the north coast of Shikoku, Kagawa Prefecture includes dozens of islands that are linked by ferries.

The largest island is Shodoshima, which is effectively a miniature version of Shikoku. A cable car rises through Kankakei Gorge to the highest point on the island. The island also boasts traditional terraced rice paddies at Nakayama, *somen* noodles still stretched by hand

### Destination in numbers

## 237,300

The number of foreign visitors to Shikoku between January and December 2014, up from 170,630 in the same period a year earlier

## 45

The number of days that the Shikoku Pilgrimage usually takes to complete on foot. It visits 88 sacred locations across the island

## 1,100km

The distance of railway track that is accessible with the All Shikoku Rail Pass

in Hiraki, traditional soy sauce factories and the Michi-no-Eki Shodoshima Olive Park.

“We are trying to let more foreign visitors know about our island because most people who come here at the moment are domestic Japanese travellers,” said Mizuki Shimamoto of the Shodoshima Tourism Association.

“We are promoting ourselves through social media sites, websites, booklets and TV shows, while I am teaching some local people in the tourism sector to speak English. It's a start and we're hoping that it will bring more people to this part of Japan,” Shimamoto added.



# Destination Japan

## Viewpoints

Access seems to be the biggest hurdle in getting more visitors to Shikoku, so how can this be remedied?



**Hiroki Sogami, head, International Strategies Division, Tokushima Prefectural Office**

We highly recommend rental cars.

There are retro school buses, or Bonnet Buses, that take visitors on scheduled tours of western parts of Tokushima. A test-run of a sightseeing bus that takes tourists around Oboke and Iya has also started. We haven't been able to advertise it in different languages yet, but apparently 30 per cent of the customers are foreign.

**Robert Day, president, Robert Day Travel Australia**



One solution might be to have a local driver programme, with either volunteer drivers or the local authorities providing a shuttle service to the more remote locations that they want to promote. People who have already paid a lot of money to get to Japan just aren't going to pay for taxis on top of that, but they probably would if it was at least subsidised.

## MY WAY

**Where is your favourite off-the-beaten-path destination for a short break in Japan?**

I have a young family and, in some ways, that limits our ability to be adventurous, but we have discovered that Shimoda and the tip of the Izu Peninsula keeps all of us happy. We tend to use an Airbnb property there instead of a hotel, but that's because we have found one that is just a five-minute walk from the beach.

**Why is it so special?**

The whole coastline there is just picture-postcard perfect. I find the beaches and the coast there reminiscent of Devon and Cornwall, but you have the very distinct advantage of Japanese weather instead of what we get back in the UK. And then when you come inland, it's very hilly, green and rural.

**What's there for the family?**

The kids are happy there because it has beaches and all the things that keep them occupied, but for my wife and I, it's really a chance to get away from the city and just relax. Plenty of onsens to lay back in and soak the hustle and bustle of Tokyo away.

**What would you recommend for a first-time visitor?**

From Shimoda town, as soon as you step off the train, you can take a cable



car up to a peak and there is a magnificent view right across the Izu Peninsula and out to sea. Go a little farther and there are some beautiful gardens, completely out of the blue. It's classic Japan; just when you least expect it, you always come across something that catches the eye.

**Is the local cuisine worth sampling?**

The food is great, of course, and seafood is the local speciality – particularly the crab they catch there. It's usually very simply done. Also, you can be driving and come across tiny restaurants where you're not sure of

**Jonty Brunner**

Regional commercial manager - Japan & Korea, British Airways

what you are ordering, but then a little off-piste cuisine is always fun.

**Is the place easy to access?**

The trains go directly from Shinjuku Station in Tokyo to the top of the peninsula and then it's a beautiful ride along the coast in a local train, or a three-hour drive. It's close, quiet and very Japanese.



From left: Awa Odori; Kazurabashi Bridge in Iya Valley; and Hotel Iya Onsen

## How to sell

**SEE** The **Awa Odori** is one of Japan's most famous festivals and takes place over three days in Tokushima city in mid-August every year.

Dozens of teams – known as *ren* – wear brightly-coloured costumes, chant and dance through the city's streets to traditional pipe and drum music. For anyone visiting at other times of the year, Awaodori Hall puts on a 40-minute demonstration three times a day.

**DO** High in the **Iya Valley** is a bridge made of vines and wood that stretches 45m across the rocky gorge.

Legend has it that this enclave was

the last redoubt of a defeated clan during Japan's feudal era and they used vines because it would be easier to cut the bridge's supports and halt an attacking force. Note that the gaps between the planks of the bridge are rather wide and anyone fearful of heights should not attempt to cross, although a closer look reveals cleverly concealed steel cables.

**STAY** It would be folly to travel to Japan and not enjoy a long and relaxing soak in an onsen at a traditional ryokan, such as the **Hotel Iya Onsen**.

The hotel is perched on the edge of the stunning, steep-sided Iya Valley and anyone

wanting to use the onsen needs to take a cable car down to the bottom of the valley, where the open-air pools are set alongside the river. The view is breathtaking in autumn when the leaves turn gold, red and russet. The hotel has just 19 traditional Japanese rooms so book well in advance.

**EAT** Shikoku's ramen noodles come in a surprising array of styles and one of the best local varieties is Shinasoba. It can be found at **Sampa Ramen** in Naruto City in Tokushima Prefecture. The noodles come with

slices of roast pork and are served in a flavourful broth made from a stock based on chicken, pork bones and vegetables.



## NEWS IN A MINUTE

### 1 All Nippon Airways

All Nippon Airways is stepping up services between Tokyo's Haneda International Airport and Shanghai by adding a third daily flight from February 1, 2016, just ahead of the Chinese New Year period. The airline has recently introduced a second daily flight on October 25.

### 2 Central Japan Railway

Central Japan Railway, which operates the busiest bullet train line – the Tokaido Shinkansen – in the country, announced a major upgrade to its carriages. The line connects Tokyo to Osaka, and also has stops in Nagoya and Kyoto.

The company will be spending 104 billion yen (US\$842 million) on new interiors and services aboard its N700A trains. The new train cars is set to be ready by spring 2020.

### 3 Imperial Hotel Tokyo

The Imperial Hotel Tokyo recently marked 125 years of establishment with an extensive renovation of all 361 rooms in the 31-storey Imperial Tower. The revamp will be complete on March 31, 2016.

The Main Tower, the other building of the 931-key luxury property, last saw a revamp of its lobby, guest rooms, dining areas and wedding chapels in 2009.

Guests should stop by the Old Imperial Bar for a Mount Fuji, the oldest cocktail in Japan, which was first poured in 1923. The drink is a cheeky combination of gin, pineapple, lemon and egg white, served with a glace cherry.

### 4 AirAsia Japan

AirAsia Japan is poised to take to the skies again, marking its second launch in the Japanese market after its failed joint venture with All Nippon Airways in June 2013.

The airline is scheduled to commence domestic and international operations from its base at Chubu Centrair International Airport in Japan's Aichi prefecture to three locations – Shin-Chitose Airport in Sapporo, Sendai Airport in Sendai, and Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport in Taipei in Spring 2016.

### 5 Noku Roxy

Located near key tourists spots and popular restaurants, Noku Roxy features 81 rooms across six floors, with the upper floors offering scenic views of Kyoto Imperial Palace's gardens.

The rooms, which range in size from 20m<sup>2</sup> to 51m<sup>2</sup> each, are furnished with the finest Kyoto craftsmanship and artwork. It also boasts a complimentary minibar filled with a range of local snacks and beverages.

### 6 Japan Airlines

Japan Airlines has relaunched its Tokyo (Narita)-Dallas route in December 2015 with four-times weekly flights taking place on odd days of the week. The service between the

two cities was discontinued in 2001.

The airline is operating the route using a Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner, with plans to increase the frequency to daily from March 20, 2016.



5



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*'Increasing Adventure Tourism Competitiveness'*

**Mei Zhang**, Founder & CEO, WildChina, China  
*'Understanding the Indian and Chinese Adventure Traveller'*



**Sarah Mathews**, Head of Destination Marketing APAC, TripAdvisor, Hong Kong SAR  
*'How to Design Effective Co-operative Marketing Campaigns'*

**Ryan Bonnici**, Marketing Director, Hubspot, Australia  
*'The Inbound Marketing Playbook'*



**Hamish Keith**, Co-Owner & Managing Director, Exo Travel, Thailand  
*'Creating Experiences that Challenge, Delight and Inspire'*

The choice of the destination in Thailand's northernmost province - Chiang Rai, with its stunning mountain sceneries and remote hill tribes - reflects the growing importance of dispersing tourists to emerging destinations.

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# Destination Japan

## TRIED & TESTED

### Hilton Okinawa Chatan Resort

On the burgeoning holiday island of Okinawa, **Julian Ryall** finds a new five-star landmark with warm hospitality to boot

**LOCATION** By occupying the prime location between the old town's port and the Mihama American Village – a complex of restaurants, bars, boutiques, a cinema, bowling alley, live music venues and even a Ferris wheel – Hilton has ensured that it sits at the very heart of everything that happens in Okinawa's western coast town of Chatan.

**ROOM** Nearly all the property's 346 rooms and suites take advantage of the graceful curving design of the exterior to look out over the harbour, the turquoise

waters within the fringing reef and the deep blue of the ocean beyond. It's just what those wide balconies were made for.

The room interiors are bright and airy, with every need catered to. The designers have also gone out of their way to incorporate island touches throughout, such as the delicate blue Okinawan glass tiles in the bathrooms. Tasteful furnishings, sumptuous beds and simple details – like a Peter Thomas Roth shower gel infused with the scent of orange that lingers long after I have checked out – leave a lasting impression.

**FACILITIES** The Hilton Chatan make the optimum use of its space, with two outdoor pools on the seaward side of the property, including a lagoon pool with a slide for the children. An oval-shaped garden has hammocks broad enough for two and serves as the location for morning yoga sessions. A third pool is indoors, along with a shop, fitness centre and a spa.

The needs of business guests are also catered to, with a number of meeting and board rooms, as well as a ballroom that seats up to 400 pax. I could sit for hours in Mahru, the high-ceilinged lobby lounge, which looks out across a mesmerising water feature to the Pacific beyond.

**F&B** Inspired by the most chic of New York's Italian restaurants, Corrente serves contemporary meals from a kitchen that is open to diners' scrutiny. The chefs pride themselves on the use of local produce, with plen-



ty of Okinawa dishes worked into the menu as well. The Suriyan restaurant is a bustling all-day dining space that gives out onto the terrace and is touted to offer the best breakfast buffet on the island.

**SERVICE** Service at the Hilton Chatan is with a constant smile and nothing is too much trouble for an immaculately turned-out and proactive team. They're as fluent in their care as they are in their languages.

**VERDICT** Outstanding. The attention to detail is remarkable and Hilton has melded a stunning physical property with top-notch service.

**Name** Hilton Okinawa Chatan Resort  
**Rates** From Y21,000 (US\$175)  
**Number of rooms** 346  
**Contact details**  
 Tel: (81) 98-901-1111  
 Website: [www.okinawachatanresort.hilton.com](http://www.okinawachatanresort.hilton.com)

#### ADVERTORIAL

## FITUR 2016 THE LATEST DIGITAL TRENDS THAT DEFINE THE NEW TOURIST

20 - 24 January 2016  
Feria de Madrid, Madrid, Spain

The application of new technologies has revolutionised the tourism industry from both the marketing point of view with the incursion of online travel agencies and booking portals and from travellers' experiences, who employ the Internet and different mobile devices to search for, choose, buy and share their holidays. This is why the use of new technologies and their association with a type of tourism that is increasingly multi-device will be one of the most striking features of FITUR, the International Tourism Fair due to be staging its 36th edition from 20 to 24 January 2016 at Feria de Madrid.

The prominent role that new technologies will play at FITUR 2016 will be visible in the innovative offering of businesses and exhibitors (airlines that allow boarding passes to be shown on wearable devices; hotel establishments where you can check in from a smartphone, or where a SmartWatch can be used as a room key, etc.), but above all in the specialised sections such as FITURTECH and FITUR KNOW HOW & EXPORT.

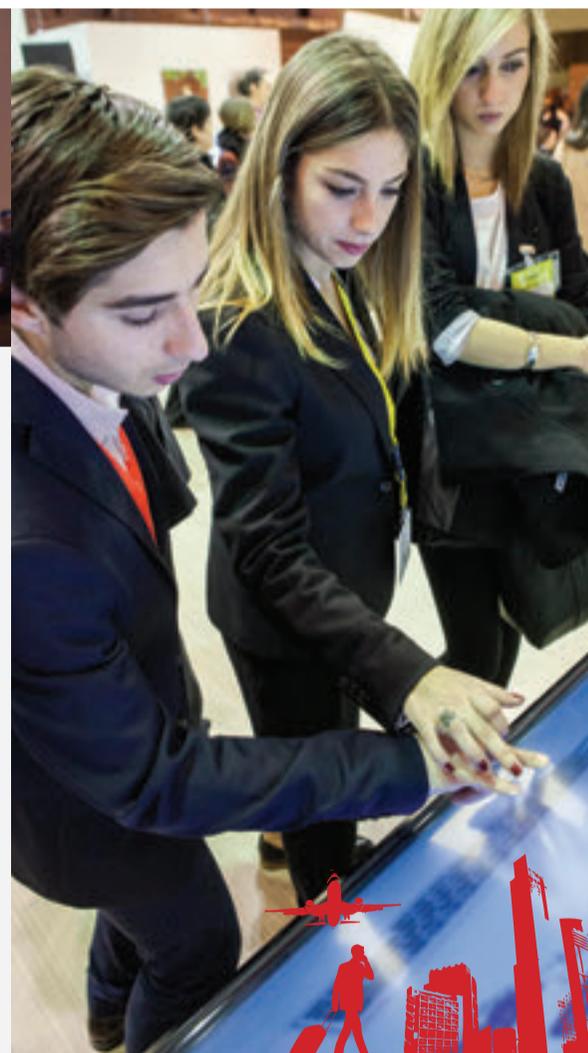
The FITURTECH Tourism Innovation and Technology Forum organised in collaboration with the Instituto Tecnológico Hotelero, ITH, is becoming consolidated at its tenth staging as a standard in tourism innovation and technology. The meeting will showcase the technological advances that are impacting on tourism and on traveller behaviour, which is increasingly technical and connected with destinations. The Forum will also feature the application of artificial intelligence to the tourism business to make it more competitive.



Furthermore, the fourth staging of FITUR KNOW HOW & EXPORT, promoted by SEGITTUR, the State Corporation for Innovation Management and Tourism Technologies, will focus on more transformative solutions in integral tourism management and its projection abroad. Special relevance will also be given at this forum to projects by entrepreneurs and start-ups associated with technological development, such as tourism apps.

SEGITTUR has in fact organised the third edition of "The AppTourism Awards", which recognises the best tourism apps for mobile devices and whose winners will be announced on 21 January 2016 at FITUR. On this occasion, the categories of best national tourism app and best international tourism app have been joined by SmartWatch app (national and international) in response to the penetration of these smart watches among 2.0 tourists.

In short, technology and tourism are coming together at FITUR 2016, demonstrating the Trade Show's commitment to the innovations being generated in the travel industry.



**(Fitur) 2016**  
International Tourism Trade Fair

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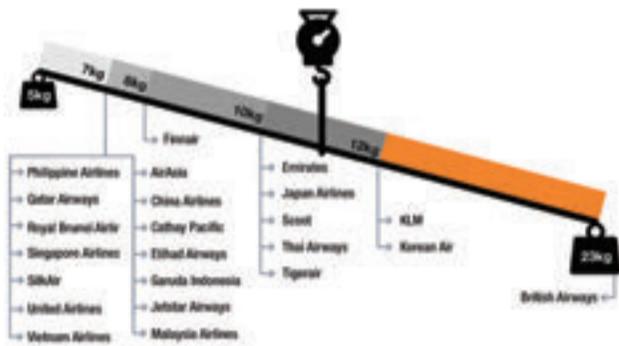
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ICYMI: Tune in to what's been going on at [ttgasia.com](http://ttgasia.com) and the social media space

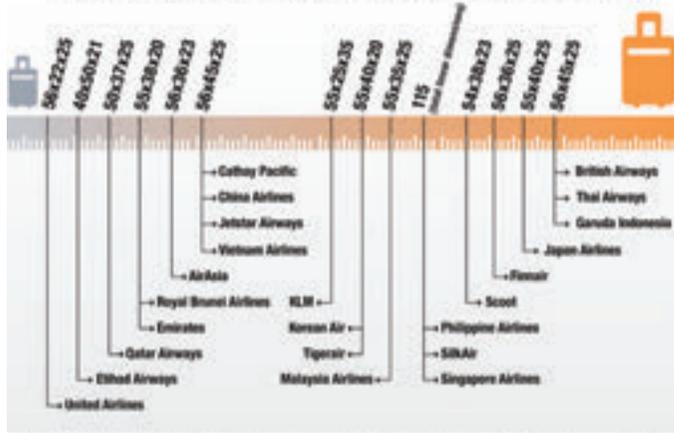
## TOURISM DATA

### Cabin Luggage Weight allowance and extra costs if the allowance is exceeded

#### Cabin luggage weight allowance per airline



### Cabin luggage size allowance per airline



Indicated prices and cabin luggage allowances are based on information received from airline employees or websites. Cost are subject to change and conversion rate; prices may vary depending on flight route, flight segments, booked airline or departure airport; airlines may charge indicated costs at its respective check-in counters; prices indicated are based on applicable excess luggage fees of the airline.

\*Data is based on information gathered by Kayak from airline employees and websites



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## WHO'S SAYING WHAT

### Instagram



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Singapore's first hotel named a national monument. Still looks like a treasure to this day. [#raffleshotel](#)



The crowds, festive market and magnificent lights at Gardens by the Bay makes it one of the best ways to get in the mood for [#Christmas](#).

### Overheard

#### ASEAN'S LAST FRONTIER OUTBOUND MARKET TO BLOOM?

We have it on good authority that Myanmar's Ministry of Hotels and Tourism is stepping up its enforcement of the outbound travel sector by making it compulsory for travel companies in the country to apply for licences to offer overseas trips for Myanmar nationals.

In general, tour companies have been offering air tickets, hotels and outbound tour packages for many years without an outbound licence. With the introduction of the new rule, many travel companies are expected to apply for the new licence, with at least one company – Myanmar Polestar Travels & Tours – already expressing the desire to do so.

Its chairman Kyaw Min Htin, who is also president of JTB Polestar, welcomes the government's efforts to regulate the outbound travel sector and protect both customers and agents at the same time. He is also looking forward to tapping the Burmese travel interest to India's Bodhi Gaya and growing the nascent outbound market "systematically".

At a time when Myanmar's tourism traffic is heavily tilted towards the inbound sector, the lopsided trend looks set to reverse in the near future when it becomes easier for Myanmar nationals to travel overseas.

The door to South-east Asia's last tourism source market is opening soon.

### Most commented

#### STARWOOD CEO QUILTS; HEINECKE HITS OUT AT MERGERS

I agree with Bill Heinecke's comments on the merger. Who loses? Hotel owners but more importantly, the guest. – Graeme Laird

#### TAT WANTS MORE THAIS TO TRAVEL DOMESTICALLY

TAT hasn't a clue how to market overseas and struggles with domestic promotions. They have no idea how much revenue is earned nor how many visitors go to any location. – upena1

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- Royal Cliff Hotels Group (2006)
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- Sabre Travel Network Asia-Pacific (2009)
- SilkAir (2010)
- Lotte Tour (2011)
- Hong Kong International Airport (2013)
- Raffles Hotel Singapore (2013)
- Regal Airport Hotel (2015)
- Banyan Tree Spa (2015)

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



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