

# TTG

ASIA

No. 1734/May 2016



## View from the top

Worldhotels' EVP Asia-Pacific Roland Jegge talks to **Raini Hamdi** about changes in the independent hotels market in Asia-Pacific

+

## Theme park market snapshots

## The Philippines' pursuit of fun

## Asia's hottest resort spots

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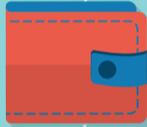
**Hilton**  
HOTELS & RESORTS



**Expedia**



**Marriott**



# THE BOOKING WAR HEATS UP

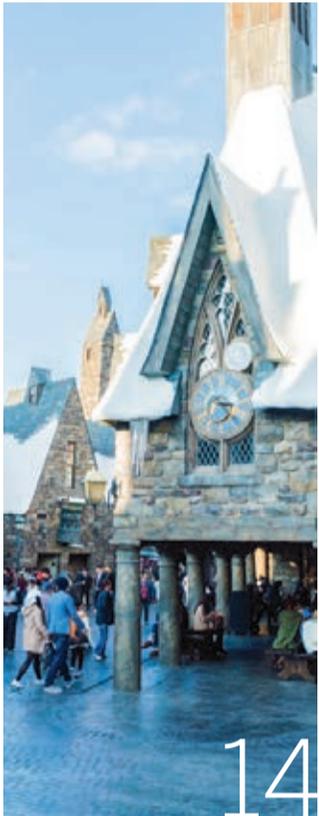
The financial stakes are high, so it's no wonder that hotels now want to wrestle control of travellers' bookings from intermediaries, especially as OTAs are becoming more consolidated than ever. By **Paige Lee Pei Qi**



# Contents & editorial

Want to read us on the go?



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## Putting hospitality into hospitals



Hospitals should do more than following the hospitality sector's lead in its client-centric approach; they should also look to successful hotels for lessons on how to keep employees motivated.

Lush trees and rolling fields occupied by orange-beak hornbills, swinging monkeys and hopping bunnies surrounded me. At the push of a button, I could call for room service to make up the bed, and warm meals prepared according to my requests would be sent to my room. In-room amenities included a flatscreen TV, a lounge sofa, a working table and in-suite bathroom facilities. Amiable butlers would swing around regularly for checks while the manager would drop in for a chat twice a day. In the compound, there were F&B outlets and cafes, a hair salon, gift shops and a 24/7 convenience store.

You would be forgiven to think that I'm describing a resort stay. It's actually a stay at a children's hospital, where my husband and I spent two nights when my 11-month-old baby suffered a severe bout of diarrhoea. The animal-studded landscapes were but colourful wall images in the children's ward, the pleasant butlers the team of nurses and the manager the paediatrician handling my daughter's case.

The deluxe accommodation and well-kitted amenities indeed made the hospital a healing environment for my daughter to recuperate in and a less stressful one for my husband and I, as we could take turns to rest on the bed and sofa, catch up on our work thanks to in-room Wi-Fi and keep a watch over our child.

This hospital stay made me reflect on the many parallels between the hospital and hospitality industries – both in the business of taking care of people. Associating healthcare with hospitality may appear mismatched at first glance, but shouldn't making

patients – and their loved ones – more comfortable a priority for both?

There are many compelling reasons for the highly competitive healthcare sector to focus more on hospitality. A patient-centric environment lowers infection rates and fosters quicker recovery, and when anxiety levels are down it paves the opportunity for higher patient satisfaction and customer retention. In the US, many hospitals have brought on hotel executives from the likes of Ritz-Carlton and Marriott as the antidote for happy patients.

However, hospitals should do more than follow the hospitality sector's lead in its client-centric approach; they should also look to successful hotels for lessons on how to keep employees motivated. Like the frontline staff of any hotel, nurses are the gatekeepers of any hospital and set the tone for the patient experience.

And with medical tourism becoming a huge business these days, more developments that combine healthcare with hotels, such as the One Farrer integrated facility or Six Senses appointing specialist doctors to its integrated wellness programmes, are likely to increase. All the more reason for to work towards a healthy hospital and hospitality symbiosis.

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### COMING UP



**CURRENCY WOES** Our analysis looks at how a fluctuating ringgit has created more than just package pricing issues for Malaysian tour operators

**MID/UPSCALE RESORTS** In an ever-expanding landscape of accommodation choices, we ask travel agents if price-based segmentation strategies make sense

**CRUISES** Major cruise lines are splashing out on new China-centric ships and onboard services in an effort to lure Chinese tourists to the sea

**THAILAND** Arrivals are up in the first quarter but the challenge for Bangkok hoteliers is a low average room rate. A look as well at whether efforts to get more high-yield tourists will go far



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## Analysis

The financial stakes are high, so it's no wonder that hotels now want to wrestle back control of travellers' bookings from intermediaries, especially as OTAs are becoming consolidated and more powerful than ever. **Paige Lee Pei Qi** looks at the growing tension

# The fight for hotel bookings

With increasing consolidation in the online travel space as booking giants like Expedia and Priceline strengthen their positions through organic growth and acquisitions, major hotel chains like Hilton Worldwide and Marriott International are pushing back aggressively at third-party distribution channels to reclaim direct sales market share.

In February this year, Hilton launched the *Stop Clicking Around* global marketing campaign in an attempt to change consumer perception, assuring potential guests that the lowest room rates can only be enjoyed through direct bookings on its websites.

Geraldine Calpin, chief marketing officer at Hilton Worldwide, commented in a press statement: "Our customers do not need to worry about sorting through a dizzying array of websites, enduring hundreds of clicks and wasting hours of time."

On top of the lower rates, Hilton is also offering direct booking benefits such as free Wi-Fi and digital check-in with room selection.

In a similar move to counter OTAs, Marriott has rolled out Marriott Rewards Member Rates in April, promising its loyalty members the best rates.

Karin Timpone, global marketing officer at Marriott, said in a statement: "We want to help dispel the myth that other travel websites offer better rates for our hotels."

Marriott even promises that if a guest finds a better rate within 24 hours of booking direct, they will match the lower fare and provide an additional 25 per cent discount.

These bold moves come on the back of the love-hate relationship between hoteliers and OTAs. Even as these online intermediaries help hoteliers to fill their rooms, they are also eating massively into revenues as commission rates paid to the latter can range from 10 to 30 per cent.

In response to Hilton and Marriott's direct booking campaigns, Mark Okerstrom, chief financial officer, Expedia, said: "We know these hotels are taking steps to compete with OTAs and are watching (the hotels) very closely."

These hotels risk losing their market share and credibility as the OTA booking ecosystem is already entrenched in consumer behaviour, cautioned Okerstrom.



**We want to help dispel the myth that other travel websites offer better rates for our hotels.**

**Karin Timpone**  
Global marketing officer, Marriott



**Hotels want to grow their customer loyalty but they are not going the way consumers want. Consumers want to have all the choices and content out there.**

**Dara Khosrowshahi**  
CEO, Expedia

It will not be surprising to see adverse impacts on their bookings through the Expedia website. Based on Expedia's sorting order, hotels will fall to less optimal positions and their conversions decline with less aggressive participation on Expedia sites.

Moreover, with other rival brands ready to take over with competitive prices, Hilton and Marriott will stand to lose even

more in the online marketplace, he added.

Okerstrom said: "Consumers are coming to (Expedia) because they do not know which hotel to stay. If they make an online search and do not find the hotel offering their best prices, they simply will not choose the hotel. That is the power of the marketplace."

"It is going to be difficult for

big chain hotels to have a broader selection of hotels than Expedia. People will continue to come to us to look for their perfect hotel at the best prices," he posited.

Expedia's CEO Dara Khosrowshahi even goes as far as to label Marriott and Hilton's global push for direct bookings "a mistake".

"I completely understand that the hotels want to grow their

customer loyalty but they are not going the way consumers want," said Khosrowshahi.

"Consumers want to have all the choices and content out there," he added, highlighting OTAs' fast growth over the past five years as a testament to what sells in the market.

And Expedia offers more than just hotels today.

Last December, Expedia acquired vacation rental site HomeAway for US\$3.9 billion in its largest-ever acquisition. This means that the online travel giant will no longer be watching the thriving shared economy space from the sidelines as it muscled into the lucrative market for apartments and vacation homes.

Explaining the decision to venture into this "new business segment", Khosrowshahi said: "Our consumers are telling us they love alternative accommodation and we can see that home owners are going to get significantly more travellers."

He elaborated: "The more inventory we present to customers, the happier they will be."

The Expedia-HomeAway combination has since displaced Booking.com (part of the Priceline Group) as the world's largest lodging seller in terms of numbers of hotels, vacation rentals and apartments as Expedia now offers at least 1.5 million properties compared with Booking.com's 893,000.

This acquisition concluded Expedia's mega shopping spree last year, which saw the company also acquiring Travelocity, Orbitz Worldwide and Australia's Wotif.

When asked if Expedia will still be snapping up any more companies this year, Okerstrom said: "Our focus this year is about integrating a lot of the acquisitions we made but we are still aggressively expanding into the huge opportunities which will give us a massive runway."

Despite all the major acquisitions, Khosrowshahi emphasised that Expedia's focus is on organic growth.

He said: "If I think about the long-term value creation of this company, it is organic growth and it will always be the top driver of our growth. Inorganic growth will always play a part but it will serve as a complement rather than as a core part of our strategy."

"That said, we will be very opportunistic as the company delivers well over one billion dollars of cash flow a year and I have to do something with that money," he laughed.

# 'Easy to Get to, Affordable and So Much to Do'

## That's Philadelphia or Philly for short



Philadelphia's skyline. Photo: Paul Loftland for PHLCVB

More and more travelers are discovering the historic city is not just a transit stop between the Big Apple and the U.S. Capital. Get insider tips from **Brian Said**, Executive Director of Tourism, Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau.

### What factors make your destination appealing to travelers?

Travelers are realizing that there are other cities in the north-east region they can explore, combine in a single trip and see it as a great way to save time and money.

Philadelphia, centrally located in between New York City and Washington, DC, offers travelers this opportunity and they can learn about the birthplace of America in the only World Heritage City in the country. Philadelphia also offers great value on accommodation, tax-free shopping on clothes and shoes and an outstanding selection of world-class affordable restaurants.

In Philadelphia's compact, walkable and safe downtown, visitors can explore prestigious art collections along Museum Mile, learn about the beginnings of America at Independence National Historical Park, where entry to the historic landmarks are FREE, and many other sightseeing, cultural and outdoor activities.

### What are some significant traveller trends? What are the key reasons for such trends?

In the past, many travelers passed through Philadelphia on organized itineraries from New York to Washington, DC. However, in recent years, Philadelphia has increasingly become an overnight stop for leisure groups to take advantage of the city's many attractions, dining and affordable accommodations. Furthermore, with more visitors traveling as FITs, they appreciate the ease of getting to Philadelphia by Amtrak train, or using Philadelphia as a hub for exploring the surrounding

cities and destinations such as Amish country. Philadelphia is also becoming a popular destination for MICE groups.

### What is one message you want to convey to the trade to promote your destination?

Easy to get to, affordable and so much to do.

### What attractions and what kind of itinerary do you suggest for the first-time visitor? How about repeat visitors?

We recommend three days to explore the city at its fullest, from historical sights, to cultural and artistic treasures and tax-free shopping.

Start your visit with a hop-on hop-off bus tour to get an overview of the city or join a Segway tour to explore the different neighbourhoods.

Then visit the Independence National Historical Park to see the Liberty Bell, Independence Hall, Carpenters Hall and many of America's most historic landmarks to learn about the country's beginnings and political roots.

Be sure not to miss

In Philadelphia's compact, walkable and safe downtown, visitors can explore prestigious art collections along Museum Mile, learn about the beginnings of America at Independence National Historical Park, where entry to the historic landmarks are FREE, and many other sightseeing, cultural and outdoor activities.



**BRIAN SAID**  
Executive Director of  
Tourism,  
Philadelphia Convention and  
Visitors Bureau



Above: Chinatown Friendship Gate.  
Photo: Jim McWilliams for PHLCVB

Below: The Avenue of the Arts with City Hall in the background.  
Photo: bkl-photo.com



Philadelphia's cultural side, from world-class art museums along Museum Mile to performing arts on the Avenue of the Arts. For example, The Barnes Foundation holds the world's largest private collection of post-Impressionist art and a few steps away is the Philadelphia Museum of Art, with over 200 galleries and more than 227,000 artifacts.

On your last day in Philadelphia, combine family fun with tax-free shopping or splash into the Delaware River aboard Ride the Ducks, a tour that covers both land and water. For those who prefer a bird's eye view of the city, the One Liberty Observation Deck offers 360° panoramic view of Philadelphia from 269 meters above.

Browse the boutiques of Rittenhouse Row and visit the department stores, such as Macy's and Century 21 along Market Street. While you're there, don't forget to stop by the Reading Terminal Market with its more than 80 vendors for a local culinary experience.

What other outdoor and family-friendly activities can visitors enjoy?

Philadelphia is known as the Mural Arts Capital of the World with nearly 4,000 murals painted on the outside of buildings.

During the warmer months between spring and autumn, pop-up beer gardens such as Spruce Street Harbor Park, street festivals featuring food trucks serving local food and free music festivals come to live all around the city.

Families can enjoy a visit to the Philadelphia Zoo and Please Touch Museum at Fairmount Park, the largest urban park system in the U.S., or learn about science and history at The Franklin Institute and the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University along Museum Mile.

For more information,  
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## Analysis

# The serious pursuit of fun

The Department of Tourism's (DoT) *It's More Fun in the Philippines* campaign is a marketing success and has raised the country's profile as a leisure destination, but in the years since its inception in 2012 there are questions if the slogan has been an overpromise.

Philippine tourism under-secretary Benito Bengzon Jr contended that the 10 per cent average growth in foreign arrivals during the last five years is higher than the average growth rate of global (4.5 per cent) and Asian (five per cent) tourism, putting the country "above the curve".

Proof of the campaign's marketing success, he added, also lies in the numerous citations and awards the destination has received. In 2014, the campaign took up third spot in the Warc 100, an annual ranking of the world's best marketing campaign.

With 55 million domestic tourist arrivals versus just 5.3 million foreign arrivals last year, a major success of the campaign can be attributed to its popularity among the Filipinos themselves, opined David Keen, CEO of Quo, specialist branding and communications agency for travel and tourism.

The campaign struck a chord among the Filipinos who created 80,000 memes out of it; many companies have even taken the initiative to stamp "It's More Fun" into their own marketing.

Yet the campaign also presents a "very one-dimensional image" of the Philippines, Keen surmised, portraying the nation as one that simply revolves around fun with colourful culture, vibrant entertainers and fun-loving people.

"The Philippines needs to be taken far more seriously," he said, emphasising the need for a multidimensional country brand that allows for wider range of experiences and associations.

"Caves, jungles, beaches, festivals, scuba diving and fun certainly have a place in this brand, but the brand should be complex enough to have room for everything else the Philippines has to offer", said Keen, citing the strong economy and booming construction sector as other facets that could be included in the country branding to enhance the



(The campaign) does not even begin to capture how this moment is an exciting one for the Philippines in terms of business, growth and development.

David Keen  
CEO, Quo

destination's attraction to different types of travellers.

Keen added: "In the imagination of a potential traveller, associating a country with a strong economy, profit and productivity opens up new possibilities of experiences. A stable domestic base will then be attractive for foreign big brands, and the cycle continues.

"While (the campaign) does not portray the Philippines negatively, its current incarnation does not even begin to capture how this moment is an exciting one for the Philippines in terms of business, growth and development", he explained.

Focusing on the fun factor has its limitations too, pointed out Mina Gabor, former Philippine tourism secretary and now president of the International School of Sustainable Tourism. The

campaign was, for example, held back for months after super typhoon Haiyan wreaked parts of the Visayas in 2013.

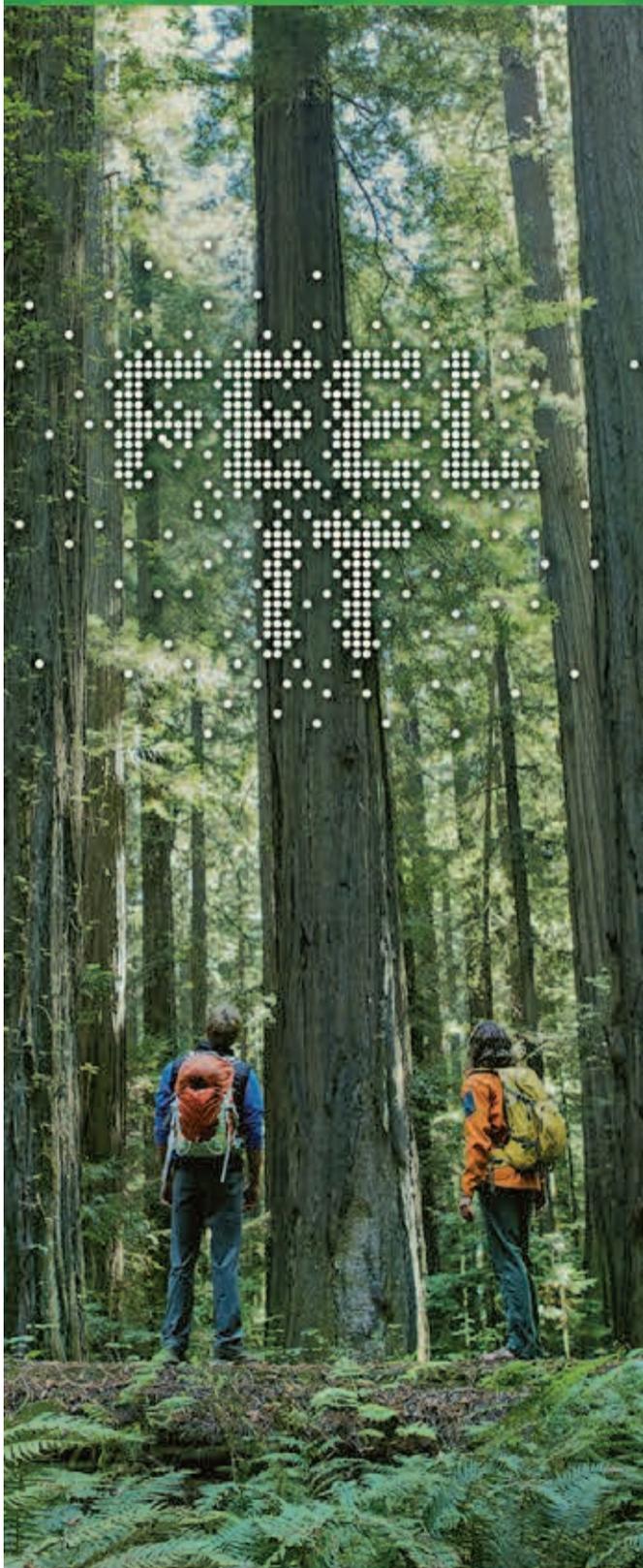
But Bengzon, while agreeing that the Philippines has many qualities other than fun, saw the need to craft a clear tourism campaign message without diluting it with other dimensions.

"It's very clear for tourism: the distinct advantage of the Philippines is the ability of Filipinos to provide the fun experience and that is what we highlight in the campaign... From a marketing standpoint, you have to look at the lead proposition – which is fun," he asserted.

Bengzon also claimed that the campaign, contrary to claims that it's targeted mainly at leisure travellers, "cuts across all travellers be it leisure, visiting friends and relatives, education and business".

Branding aside, has the campaign travellers' expectations of fun and led to more business for the trade then?

Jackeline Navarro, manager of Palawan-based Inland Tours and Travel, said that the campaign helped improve their business and made Palawan more popular, echoing the general trade



Discover this land,  
like never before.

Has the Philippines' colourful tourism campaign, which proclaims 'fun' as its slogan, lived up to its expectations for the trade? **Rosa Ocampo** finds out

sentiments that the campaign was effective.

However, the Philippines' infrastructure woes continue to cap tourism growth as difficulty of access deters foreign visitors with limited vacation time.

For Navarro, the campaign impact would be better if there was better connection within Palawan itself and with other destinations. There is no flight between Puerto Princesa and Busuanga, two gateways to Palawan, with only a twice-weekly charter flight between another gateway, El Nido and Busuanga.

Bernadette de Leon, general manager of Amiable Intertours, qualified that the campaign is questionable in many ways. "How can you have fun when flights are delayed or cancelled, road traffic is chaotic, infrastructure is not world standard, beggars are in the streets and garbage is everywhere?"

Sources interviewed by *TTG Asia* mentioned three main challenges: inadequate infrastructure, connectivity and the China factor.

What is sorely missing is a new airport in Manila. Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA), where 72 per cent of all international passengers pass through, is already heavily congested, causing frequent flight delays and cancellations. However, apart from palliatives like expanding and improving the passenger terminals of NAIA, the government still hems and haws on plans for a replacement airport.

Infrastructure in the Philippines is improving, with secondary airports and major thoroughfares being built and improved. The DoT is working with the Department of Public Works and Highways to construct and maintain access roads to major tourist destinations.

Air connectivity has improved substantially since the DoT formed its route development team in 2013, which liaises directly with airlines to persuade them to fly to the Philippines. Further improvements are expected with the implementation of the ASEAN single aviation policy, allowing foreign airlines to mount flights to Manila, not just to secondary destinations.

While *It's More Fun in the Philippines* is a brilliant campaign, the destination is still sorely missing out on the China market, noted PATA CEO Mario Hardy. The Philippines' political tension with the Asian behemoth has not aided the inbound tourism sector.

"Forget about politics and just have discussions directly with tour operators and travel agencies in China," advised Hardy, urging the Philippine private sector to band together and conduct joint trade missions to China.

Should *It's More Fun in the Philippines* campaign be continued or is a change in order four years after its launch?

While some industry players want to maintain the status quo because of its obvious effectiveness, Amiable Intertours' de Leon strongly favours reverting to *WOW (World of Wonders) Philippines* campaign, the predecessor of *It's More Fun in the Philippines*.

"The word 'fun' will be abused when the truth of the matter is disappointing and questionable," she said. "The Philippines has more to offer than any other country in Asia in terms of resources and attractions, yet the long list of 'buts, ifs and

we hope things will get better' is still a long way."

Said Keen: "A brand is only successful if it can live up to the promise and expectations it wants others to have.

"Hopefully in the near future, the Philippines will be more than just fun."



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Conservation Project  
by Wilderness Safaris,  
Botswana

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The Botswana Rhino Conservation Project by Wilderness Safaris, Botswana is a Tourism for Tomorrow Award winner in the Environment category.

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# Intelligence

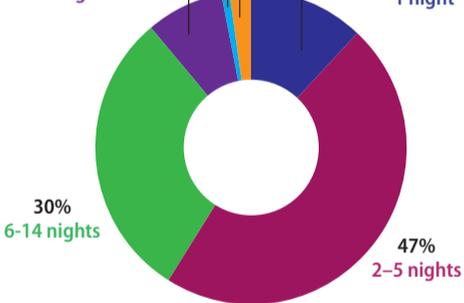
PATA's second youth travel report reveals the travel traits of Asia's millennials and how tourism stakeholders can benefit from their hunger to veer off the beaten track

# Asia's next travel generation



Following its earlier *The Rise of the Young Asian Traveller* report, PATA's second youth survey *Stepping Out of the Crowd* looks at the travel tastes and attitudes of over 1,000 millennials (16-35) from 13 source markets in Asia as this generation will be the main demographic behind region's outbound tourism growth in the next 10-15 years.

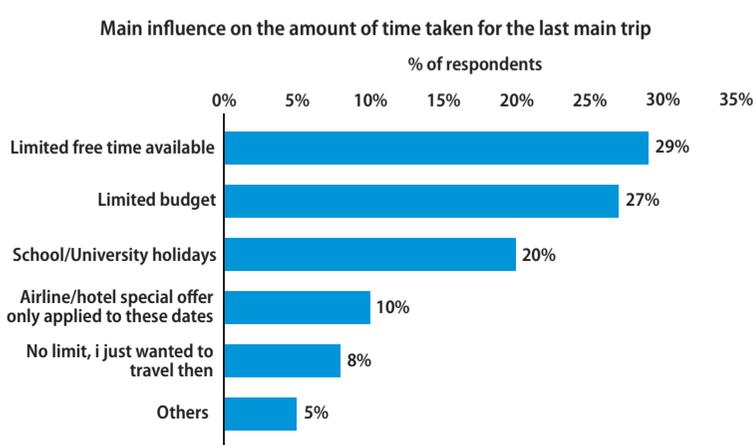
A high proportion of millennials (four out of five respondents) has taken an independent trip outside of their home country. However, overseas travel is still at a low level as only 47% of respondents had taken one trip away from their home country in the past 12 months and 20% had taken two overseas trips in the past year.



For these young travellers, free time is in short supply, making short breaks of between two to five nights the most popular option (47%), while longer holidays of one to two weeks were also common (30%). Given the high proportion of student respondents (66%), it is unsurprising that one in five stated time was more of a constraint on their travel plans than money.

Extended holidays of more than two weeks are rare though. This correlates with responses that respondents felt they did not have enough time in their destination. This may be due to the reason that the concept of extended travel periods such as a gap year is relatively uncommon in Asia, where cultural and family expectations of studying hard and climbing up the career ladder were more important than travelling.

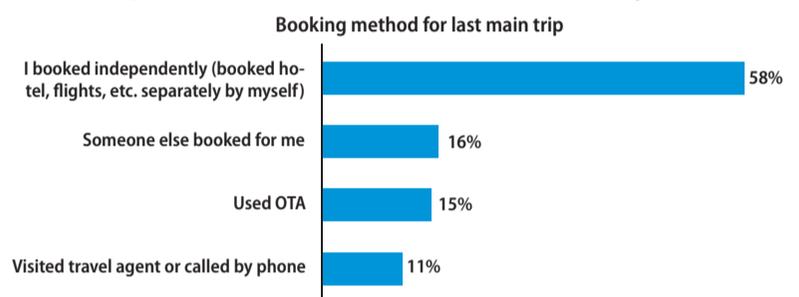
As such, the lack of available free time is the biggest limitation to how much Asian millennials can travel. Limited budgets come in at a close second, and this influences the number of days that their money will last for food and accommodation.



Millennials are tech-savvy and global curious, which is also driving the growth of free and independent travel. With the prevalence of mobile devices that can assist planning on the go, and a constant flow of travel inspiration and advice garnered from social media, millennials are well-prepared to travel freely.

More than half of the respondents expressed a major preference for booking all aspects of their trip independently, without the need for packaging by an OTA, or the assistance of a traditional desk travel agent. This is in line with the wider consumer trend in travel which is leaning towards booking tours without the middleman, as the Internet has allowed for rapid price comparison and the ease of online booking.

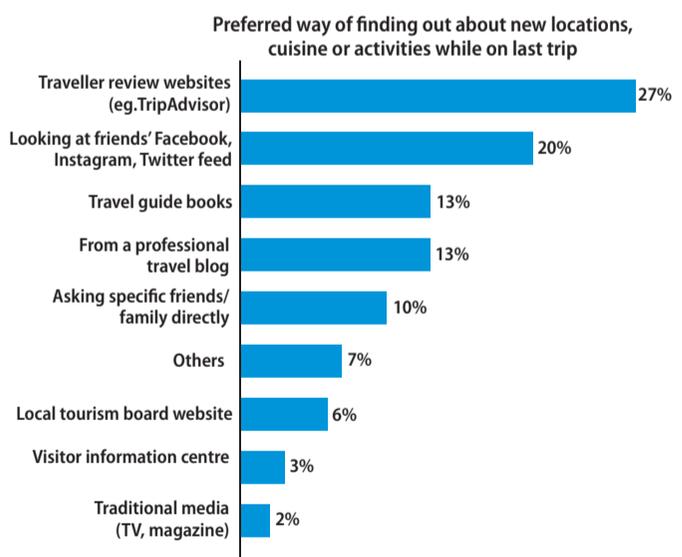
For the 16% of respondents that indicated that someone else booked the trip for them, this may be attributed to parents or family members. It is also significant that a mere 11% of respondents used the services of a traditional travel agent.



Composing an itinerary while on the go is apparently the preferred way to plan – 83% Asian millennials said they will create a basic plan of what they want to see in advance, and work out the rest of the details when they arrive at the destination.

Looking at traveller review websites such as TripAdvisor was the most popular way of finding information on activities and attractions (27%), while one in five respondents said that they were inspired by what their friends posted on social media (20%).

This shows that social media is a very effective and useful tool in inspiring, informing and recommending travel options to Asian millennials. It also shows how peer groups play a part in influencing the decision of this demographic, significantly more than any official source of information such as local tourism board websites, visitor information centres, and advertisements in traditional media. It is also worth noting that the two trust sources of information for young Asian travellers were the printed guide book and professional travel blogs (both 13%).



Time is of the essence for young Asian travellers when visiting a foreign city. They prioritised seeing the big attractions first, seeing the city with the aid of an organised tour (taking a bus or boat where possible) or following a pre-set tour individually, as such programmes are usually organised for a pre-defined amount of time, thus enabling easy scheduling and preventing wasting valuable travel time.

Spontaneity, or the notion of 'discovering the backstreets' are not very popular among Asian millennials, perhaps because they are not seen as a good use of time. Letting someone else take charge of the plans was the least favoured option, indicating that young Asian travellers like to take control of what they will be doing in order to ensure that they will get the most out of the trip.

Connecting with the city through its heritage, traditions, events and locally-produced items is a major priority. Asian millennials, similar with their global counterparts, like to seek out what makes a city's past distinctive amid a globalised world. Modern culture and 'cool things to do' for local youth are also a major attraction, with 85% indicating that they like to discover modern culture and fashion trends.

Food is fundamental – but in the streets and at the supermarket, rather than at the table. A significant 85% of respondents said that they love to visit a food market, and 72% liked to visit a supermarket when in a foreign city. Experiencing a city's nightlife is not a priority for Asian millennials on the other hand. Perhaps in contrast to their counterparts in other regions of the world, going to bars and clubs is not rated so highly in terms of getting to know a new city.

## View from the top

Worldhotels' EVP Asia-Pacific Roland Jegge talks to Raini Hamdi about changes in the independent hotels market as he marks 20 years of heading Worldhotels in the region

# Top of the world

### What's the Asia-Pacific market like back when you joined then SRS Hotels in 1996 as regional head?

There were very few players in the market. We had a portfolio of 23 hotels in Asia-Pacific in 1996. This has grown to almost 100 hotels today and we have also evolved into a full service provider, i.e. our range of services go beyond just sales and distribution to quality certification, training, revenue consultancy and even branding and procurement.

### What was your biggest challenge in increasing marketshare then?

When I started with the company, electronic bookings from Asia-Pacific markets comprised a small percentage, as the massive regional wholesalers were controlling and channelling both the leisure and business bookings via their networks. We had only three sales offices in the region and we were working with a number of GSAs representing us in key markets. We had to expand our own sales offices and footprint, and attract the best sales talent in the region to support our hotels.

### What was your biggest break in growing Worldhotels in the region?

There wasn't a single big break. When I came (to Singapore) we had 23 hotels of various levels and quality. I had to first establish the confidence that we were the right partner, work on our image and curate the portfolio.

A source of pride for me today is that we work with and support many of the finest and largest independent hotels in the region, and important national/regional hotel groups such as Stamford Hotels in Oceania, RIHGA Hotels in Japan and The Lalit in India.

### What's had the most impact on independent hotels in the last 20 years, forcing them to evolve?

The entry of the Gen Y traveller was probably the most prominent force. They desire instant gratification (even in instant booking) and to evolve a trip into an experience.

These travellers started to seek out the unique, individual experience and they continue to explore the world of 'non-cookie cutter' hotel models and a way to communicate that was more personal. A chain hotel was no longer a first choice but just one of many being considered. Have you ever seen so many chains trying to create 'independent' or 'boutique' offerings in their portfolios than now?

### So how have Asian independent hotel owners changed?

They are getting younger and are very savvy as they have travelled the world and many of them have studied overseas.

They are bringing a breath of fresh air and a new perspective into our industry with new concepts and designs, and the desire to do things differently.

It is hugely exciting to work with them and to share with them the experience I

gained over the years of looking after entrepreneurial independent hoteliers.

### What was your goal for the first year at then SRS Hotels and what is it now?

My goal has always been to have happy stakeholders at all levels – be they the hotels, our clients, the large multinationals, travel agencies or OTA partners, and finally my stellar team, of which the senior members all count 10 years and more with the company. It is about being truthful, transparent and sincere, building long-lasting relationships based on knowing and trusting each other.

### What is your challenge today?

To be innovative and stay ahead of the curve at all times in a fast-changing environment, and continue driving value to

It is vital, in the current environment, to ensure that we continue to evolve...I would say that the speed of evolution seems to be a lot faster than years ago.

our hoteliers.

It is vital, in the current environment, to ensure that we continue to evolve and provide the best resources. I would say that the speed of evolution seems a lot faster today than years ago.

### What are you working on currently to stay ahead of the curve?

This year, we are rolling out a programme called 'Start with the Why'. We are building the blueprint or the story of each of our independent hotels together with the owner, general manager and senior management team. This helps us bring out the essence and origin of each of our hotels and tell this story to the world.

It is a major project and it involves a certified coach sent from Performance Solutions, a training company, to work with each hotel. We are planning to roll this out over the next two years, as it takes time and resources to meet with each hotel team.

This year, I've also had the privilege to design and launch World Luxury, a strictly by-invitation-only collection comprising the most iconic independent hotels that share the same principles, vision and values. We are partnering LRA by Deloitte to certify (these) hotels.

### Every independent brand is now focusing on 'telling the story'. What's the next stage of telling the story?

It is not just about telling the story, it's about customising the story into the different distribution channels and for each audience.

## 10 NEED TO KNOW'S ABOUT ROLAND JEGGE

■ **Who's in your family?** My partners Bong and Franck, our homekeeper Dina, our beautiful dog Moka and cat Horlicks.

■ **What do you do for fun?** Spend time entertaining friends, customers, staff at My Awesome Cafe, which we opened two years ago. I also love gardening and spending time alone with nature, and long walks with Moka.

■ **Your ideal vacation?** Back home in Switzerland, spending time with my parents, hiking in summer and skiing with friends in winter.

■ **How do you book your own leisure trips?** I do a lot of research and book all my accommodation myself. For flights I always go to Lisa who has been our dear travel consultant for many years.

■ **What are you reading right now?** *A fortune teller told me* by Tiziano Terzani.

■ **How do you stay healthy?** I start my day with 20 minutes of yoga combined with meditation. I work out three to four times a week. I watch my diet when at home, but it gets more difficult when I travel, especially when I entertain.

■ **Favourite food?** Singapore local food, from popiah to beef rendang. I always try local food when I travel anywhere.

■ **A bad habit you cannot kick?** Driving fast, Bangkok-style or they say, Italian-style!

■ **Your pet peeve, something that never fails to annoy you?** Ignorance combined with arrogance – it is the worst combination!

■ **Most people don't know that you...** initially wanted to become an architect, and I am still fascinated with it. I love beautiful spaces, designing interiors, houses and gardens.



# Social

From the newest executive movements to recent trade celebrations and major upcoming events, we round up the latest happenings to keep you plugged in

## GALLERY



### 2 DECADES AT WORLDHOTELS' HELM

Twenty years into his leadership role at the company, Roland Jegge (second from right), executive vice president of Worldhotels, Asia-Pacific, receives recognition for his pivotal role in expanding the organisation's footprint across the region, and driving the partnerships and initiatives set up over the years.



### A SUPERHERO WELCOME IN LION CITY

The cast of *Captain America: Civil War* posed with Singapore Tourism Board's chief executive Lionel Yeo (second from right) and The Walt Disney Company South-east Asia managing director Robert Gilby (third from right) during the movie's gala premiere and fan engagement festival in Singapore.



### AMARI WATERGATE BANGKOK'S 22

In commemoration of Amari Watergate Bangkok's 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary, the hotel's vice president and area general manager, Bangkok David Cumming (fourth from left), together with the board of directors – Onyx Hospitality Group's chairwoman Nijaporn Charanajit (centre) and president & CEO Peter Henley (third from right) – recently joined hotel employees to make annual offerings at a shrine.

## TRADE CALENDAR SEE YOU AT...



### World Travel Fair

May 19-22, Shanghai

Tourism boards, OTAs, airlines and travel agencies will be among the exhibitors at this Chinese outbound travel expo hosted by VNU Exhibitions Europe. Taking place at Shanghai Exhibition Center, the event attracted over 9,000 trade visitors, 400 hosted buyers and generated over 12,000 meetings in 2015.



### Thailand Travel Mart Plus

June 8-10, Chiang Mai

Following 14 consecutive years of being held in Bangkok, the Tourism Authority of Thailand's annual B2B event will be held in Chiang Mai for the first time this year. The show is slated to welcome around 400 exhibitors from Thailand and the greater Mekong subregion, focusing on niche categories such as ecotourism, and health and wellness.



### Bali & Beyond Travel Fair

June 22-26, Bali

The annual B2B and B2C event is organised by Association of the Indonesian Tours & Travel Agencies Bali Chapter in conjunction with the Bali Art Festival, bringing buyers and sellers worldwide together in a single forum. Buyers can also register for post-show tours such as the 2D1N Bali and Banyuwangi itineraries. Bali Nusa Dua Convention Center will remain the main venue.

## APPOINTMENTS

### KURT EKERT

**NOW** President and CEO, Carlson Wagonlit Travel

**THEN** Executive vice president and chief commercial officer, Traveport

### LIM BOON KWEE

**NOW** COO, Dusit International

**THEN** President, Dusit Fudu Hotel Management Company

### THIBAUT VIORT

**NOW** Chief disruption and growth officer, AccorHotels

**THEN** Entrepreneur, including founding Wipolo, IsCool Entertainment and SMACH

### MICHAEL SAGLID

**NOW** CEO, Blink Design Group

**THEN** Founder, Saglid and Associates

### SIMON FIQUET

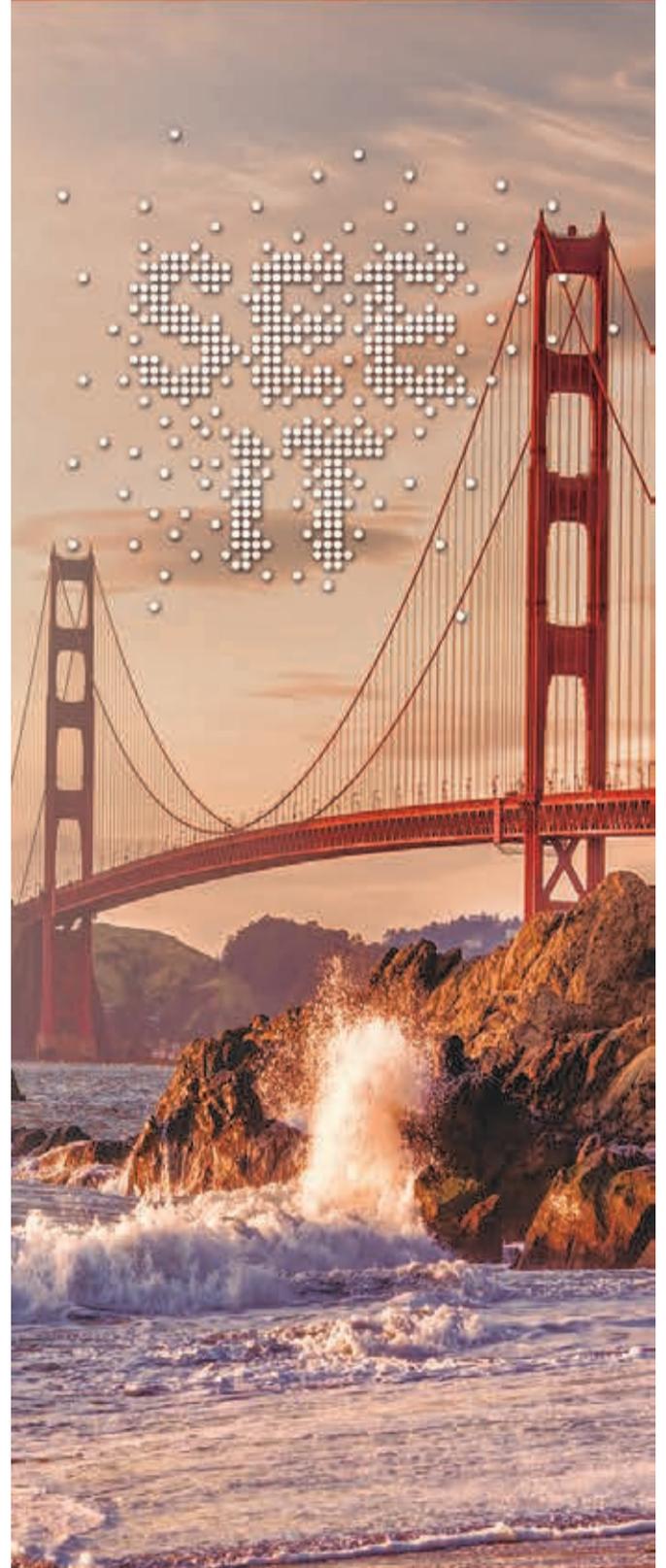
**NOW** General manager of South-east Asia and India, Expedia

**THEN** Industry head – travel Asia-Pacific, Google

### KARAM CHAND

**NOW** CEO, Royal Brunei Airlines (RB)

**THEN** Chief commercial and planning officer, RB



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## HOTELS



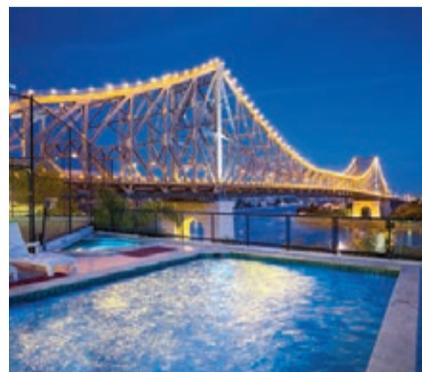
### 137 PILLARS SUITES & RESIDENCES BANGKOK, THAILAND

Newly-formed luxury boutique brand 137 Pillars Hotels & Resorts will launch its second property at Bangkok's Sukhumvit Soi 39 later this year. The property's 34 hotel suites, located from the 23<sup>rd</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> floors, feature one and two bedrooms between 70m<sup>2</sup> to 127m<sup>2</sup>, 24-hour butler service and walk-in wardrobes, while the 179 residences include the use of facilities such as tennis court, gym and rooftop infinity pool.



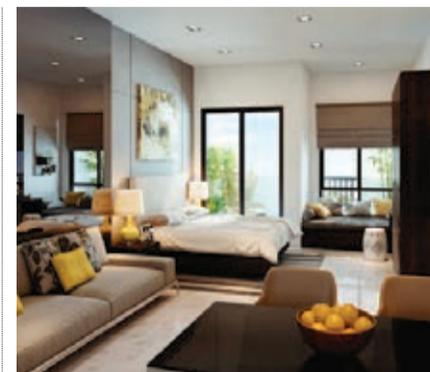
### SOFITEL LUANG PRABANG, LAOS

Restored from a century-old former governor's mansion, the property features 25 clay-roofed suites varying in sizes from 46m<sup>2</sup> to 120m<sup>2</sup>, each complete with a private garden and pool. Just 20 minutes away from Luang Prabang International Airport, hotel facilities include the Governor's Grill restaurant, a wine cellar, a 25m-long pool, a fitness centre, a spa and a boardroom and lounge for meetings. It also serves as a gallery with its wide Indochinese art and book collection.



### OAKWOOD APARTMENTS BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

Oakwood Asia Pacific has made its debut in Australia with the 162-key Oakwood Apartments Brisbane, offering guests a choice of studio, one- or two-bedroom apartments. Situated in between Brisbane's CBD and Fortitude Valley, facilities include a gym, sauna, outdoor pool and spa, and the Alto Restaurant and Bar which opens daily for breakfast and dinner, while the four conference rooms can accommodate up to 220 guests.



### AVILLION CAMERON HIGHLANDS, MALAYSIA

Avillion Hotel Group has signed a management agreement with Ascendvest to open Avillion serviced suites in Tanah Rata, Cameron Highlands in 2017. The 100 serviced apartments, comprising studios and two-bedroom units, will be part of the mixed-use Cameron Fair development. The property is a five-minute walk from Tanah Rata's main public transportation hub, and will offer proximity to retail and F&B outlets, parks and markets.

## ACTIVITIES

### NEW TOUR SHEDS LIGHT ON LEE KUAN YEW'S PRIVATE LIFE

New Singapore-based travel company Tribe has recently launched About Mr Lee, a tour that seeks to offer participants a more in-depth look into the personal life of the nation's founding father Lee Kuan Yew. The 3.5-hour tour was introduced in March as the country marked one year of the leader's passing.

Available in English and Mandarin, the tour starts at the Civilian War Memorial and then through Koon Seng Road for a taste of Lee's Peranakan roots. Participants will also discover stories of his family home in Oxley Rise followed by a walk through Tanjong Pagar and The Arts House (the Old Parliament House). The tour ends at the former City Hall (now National Gallery) steps in front of the Padang.

### ABU DHABI PLANS WARNER BROS THEME PARK

The iconic Warner Bros brand is making its way into the Middle East with a new theme park located on Yas Island – a man-made island in Abu Dhabi – alongside Ferrari World Abu Dhabi and Yas Waterworld.

Constructed to the tune of US\$1 billion, Warner Bros World Abu Dhabi will feature rides and attractions based on characters in the studio's portfolio. Expect to see DC Comics Super Heroes such as Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman, as well as cartoon characters such as Bugs Bunny, Scooby-Doo and Tom and Jerry. The first phase of the project will open in 2018. The world's first Warner Bros-branded hotel will soon follow.



## TRANSPORTATION

### ROYAL CARIBBEAN'S OVATION OF THE SEAS UNFURLS SAILS

In early April, Royal Caribbean Cruises received the latest ship in its Quantum-class fleet at the official handover ceremony in Bremerhaven, Germany. The 168,666-gross tons *Ovation of the Seas* spans 18 decks and has a total of 2,091 staterooms.

Built specifically for the China market, the massive boat – which can carry a total of 4,180 guests – features amenities such as the North Star, an observation capsule that rises more than 91m in the air to provide panoramic views; skydiving and surfing experiences; and SeaPlex, an activity area for basketball, roller-skating and bumper cars. Other facilities include a total of 18 F&B options onboard as well as staterooms offering virtual balconies – a large digital screen displaying real-time views from outside the ship.



### JETSTAR JAPAN LAUNCHES MANILA-NAGOYA ROUTE

On April 2, Jetstar Japan began operating seven flights a week between Manila and Nagoya on an Airbus A320 with 180 seats, marking the first LCC in Japan to offer direct flights to the Philippine capital. Flights will depart Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport at 00.45 and arrive in Chubu Airport at 05.35. Departure from Nagoya will be at 20.30 and arrival will be 23.35 in Manila.

Jetstar Japan also recently launched flights from Manila to Tokyo-Narita on March 15 and four-times weekly services from Manila to Osaka on April 7.

### ALITALIA TO BEGIN DIRECT FLIGHTS BETWEEN ROME AND BEIJING

From July 18, Alitalia will commence four-weekly direct flights between Rome and Beijing as part of its expansion plans in East Asia. Beijing will be the third East Asian city serviced by the Italian national carrier, after Tokyo and Seoul.

Utilising a 250-seater Airbus A330 with a three-class configuration, flights depart from Rome Fiumicino Airport every Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at 14.20, arriving in Beijing at 06.20 the next day. Departure from Beijing takes place every Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday at 09.15 local time, arriving in Rome at 14.25.

## TECHNOLOGY

### TRAVELPORT ACQUIRES GALILEO JAPAN

Travelport in April bought over its third-party distributor, Galileo Japan, which previously belonged to a group of airline owners. This acquisition allows the GDS to establish a consolidated Travelport Japan entity in the country, having operated on a franchise basis in the market for the last 30 years. Travelport will still offer customers a choice of Apollo or Worldspan platforms. All former Galileo Japan employees will transition to the new Travelport entity headquartered in Tokyo. There will also be two satellite offices in Nagoya and Osaka.

### SIA SIGNS UP FOR AMADEUS REVENUE MANAGEMENT SUITE

Singapore Airlines (SIA) will be adopting the full suite of Amadeus Revenue Management solutions, including the Amadeus Altéa Network Revenue Management, an origin and destination based system that integrates merchandising options such as dynamic pricing, fare families and ancillary sales. The solution promises to provide faster, more accurate and intelligent recommendations on the best price and packaging of airline offers. SIA will be adopting the Amadeus Dynamic Pricing and Amadeus Altéa Group Manager solutions as well.

# On the radar

Learn from the experts, take heed of tech-savvy agencies that have transformed their businesses and pick up new ideas on how to do better

## WHO GETS THE BOOKING?

As a one-week holiday in Sydney with two friends approaches, **Paige Lee Pei Qi** compares the wealth of options available on the Airbnb platform versus a traditional hotel website, in an effort to scout for a convenient and wallet-friendly accommodation

### Airbnb



**APPEARANCE** The website's clean interface greeted me with a 'we' banner, and juxtaposed against a backdrop of changing destinations, immediately put me at ease. Website navigation was idiot-proof as all I had to do was to select my destination, enter my check-in and check-out dates and number of guests – and I was good to go.

I could further refine my search by making selections for room type (entire place, private room or shared room), price range, number of bedrooms, bathrooms and beds.

**PRODUCT** My main aim was to find an apartment with three beds in the city. I found one located along Kent Street, which can accommodate four pax and is a five-minute walk from Town Hall train station. The spacious apartment featured a combined living and dining area with a kitchen, and balcony. It also had 44 verified reviews.

I sent a message to the owner to enquire if the sofa-bed provided in the living room was a real bed. She replied within the hour, stating that the sofa came with a spring mattress and bed topper, which assured me.

**EASE OF BOOKING** I could book the place instantly with just one click. Payment was via a credit card.

**PRICE** This apartment would cost me S\$213 (US\$157) a night.

**VERDICT** Given how both options were a stone's throw away from each other and within walking distance of Darling Harbour, I chose the more affordable Airbnb apartment. I was also won over by the more unorthodox experience in an apartment where I could have access to a living room, kitchen and a washing machine (good for my one-week stay).

### Parkroyal, Darling Harbour Sydney

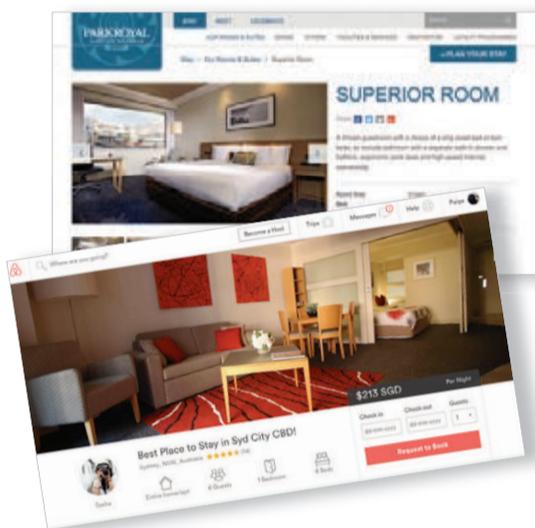
**APPEARANCE** The website greeted me with photos of the hotel building accompanied with bright lights of the Darling Harbour area. Website navigation was straightforward, and the check-boxes at the top prompted me to indicate my arrival and departure dates before it hunted down rooms for me.

**PRODUCT** A variety of rooms – ranging from a superior to an executive – were available on the hotel website. There was even a Darling Harbour room which overlooks downtown Sydney's skyline. There was also a hotel e-brochure available for download if I wanted more information.

However, there was only one generic picture of the bed available for viewing when I took a look at the superior room.

**EASE OF BOOKING** Booking could be done instantaneously in my preferred currency. Upon confirmation, booking conditions were also flexible up to 24 hours prior to arrival.

**PRICE** For a superior room for three, it would be S\$517/night.



## CASE STUDY

# Curious encounters in Sri Lanka

By Feizal Samath

**WHO** Rukmankan Sivaloganathan (below), co-founder and CEO of Trekurious.com, an experiential travel and lifestyle company based in Sri Lanka, was formerly a well-paid banker but felt that "something was missing" in his previous job.

During a visit to Hindu temple ruins in Cambodia on a group tour, the assigned guide fell ill and was quickly replaced on-site by an archaeologist who gave the visitors a whole new paradigm on Cambodian culture, history and their way of life.

"This was my eureka moment," he recalled.

In his current role, Rukmankan leads Trekurious.com in its strategy, product and business development, and seeks to fill the many gaps in the high-end travel market.

**WHAT** Trekurious.com offers a wide range of experiences to travellers. Instead of tour guides, the company arranges for meetings with architects, historians, authors and sportspersons who play hosts for the duration of the tour.

"We find a great experience, curate it by putting it together, find a good host, structure it, test it, trial it and then take it online," Rukmankan elaborated.

Interested parties select the experience or activity on the website and make a booking. A confirmation email will then be sent with all the necessary information.

Examples of tours include a Dodgy Bar Tour of Colombo, where a local will take visitors through the city's oldest watering holes and relate quirky facts relating to the origins and history of each bar while sipping on local beers.

Travellers can also try their hand at making traditional Sri Lankan masks – from the carving and whittling to the painting and decoration.

They could also visit a restaurant and learn how to cook Sri Lankan food from a chef, enjoy the dishes and leave with detailed recipes to recreate them at home.

**WHY** Sivaloganathan believes that travellers today are discerning and prefer an active holiday that provides a variety of experiences, instead of a group tour package with standard offerings.

He has also observed that once a visitor has had a unique experience, they eventually return for more, becoming repeat customers.

**Target** Trekurious.com has two business models: travel experiences and lifestyle experiences. The first category usually comprises middle-aged travellers who hail from the UK, the US, Australia and India. The second category caters mostly to 20- to 50-year-old Sri Lankans and expats.

Since opening in 2013, the company has hosted hundreds of foreign and local travellers on many curated travel experiences.

In addition to its B2C component, the company also sells B2B packages through DMCs keen on enriching their itineraries with hosted events. To date, the company has dealt with six DMCs in Sri Lanka and has conducted 30 experiences through them.



Above: A visit to an art gallery, one of the experiences offered by Trekurious.com

**CORRECTION**  
In last month's Innovators column, Sarah Keenlyside, managing director of Bespoke Travel Company, was incorrectly identified in the photograph. We apologise for the error.



# Report Theme parks



## Fun times ahead

### Malaysia

#### A boost to secondary locales

S Puvanewary

Fast becoming the theme park capital of South-east Asia, the growing crop of theme parks in Malaysia has enhanced the country as a family-friendly destination and spread tourist footfalls out from Kuala Lumpur to secondary destinations.

Ally Bhoonee, executive director at World Avenues, said: "The opening of new theme parks in Perak and Johor have helped us to sell Malaysia to overseas partners with itineraries that go beyond Kuala Lumpur.

"Theme parks such as Legoland Malaysia Resort and Sanrio Hello Kitty Town have helped promote Johor to families. In the past, Johor used to be a passing destination into Singapore," noted Bhoonee.

"The Lost World of Tambun in Perak has helped us develop one- and two-night itineraries in the state, whereas in the past Ipoh used to be a stopover lunch destination for tours heading to Penang," he added. "With Movie Animation Park Studios (MAPS) opening in July, it will give us another major attraction to sell in Perak."

Developed to a tune of RM450 million (US\$111.6 million), MAPS is the first animation theme park in Asia with attractions and characters entirely based on cartoon animation themes, according to CEO Darren McLean.

Calvin Ho, senior general manager of Sunway Theme Parks, welcomes the complimentary effect the upcoming MAPS will bring to business at Sunway's Lost World of Tambun and Sunway Lagoon.

He explained: "More marketing dollars invested in attracting tourists to the country can only be good for the economy. Tourists may want to visit more than one theme park during their entire stay."

As well, John Chan, business development director, Kris International Travel-tours, said the recent growth of theme parks linked to international brands such as Nickelodeon (see Tried & Tested on page 16), Legoland and Hello Kitty Town

will grow a new segment of tourists who do not see shopping as a main draw.

### Singapore

#### Building on family-friendly reputation

Paige Lee Pei Qi

While the cosmopolitan Singapore is renowned to be a shopper's paradise, its appeal as a theme park destination rocketed when Universal Studios Singapore (USS) in Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) debuted in 2010.

According to Michael Chong, manager of global business at Star Holiday Mart, travellers who enjoy theme park attractions in Singapore are mostly families from South-east Asia and China.

Judy Lum, group vice president for sales and marketing with Singapore's Tour East Group, share similar observations: "Most visitors are groups of young people travelling together or multi-generation families from India, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and regional countries.

"Singapore's close proximity allows them to have holidays at theme parks of international standards as most Asian working class do not have long annual holidays to travel to the US or Europe to enjoy such theme parks," she elaborated.

Apart from USS, the eight-hectare Marine Life Park in RWS has pulled in large numbers of tourists too.

Leong Yue Weng, general manager of interactive indoor edutainment centre KidZania Singapore, which just opened at Palawan Beach on Sentosa Island last month, said theme park operators are enticed by Singapore's positioning as a family-friendly destination.

However, competition is just at bay. Said Star Holiday Mart's Chong: "Singapore faces regional and destination competition for theme parks – an example is the upcoming Shanghai Disneyland which will compete with Singapore for theme park tourists."

Hence, to sustain Singapore's appeal as a theme park destination, Lum urged theme parks to always "reinvent and re-

fresh" their attractions and keep costs "affordable for surrounding countries" as the Singapore dollar is just too strong against the regional currencies.

### Japan

#### Regular updates fan domestic love affair

Julian Ryall

The Japanese love affair with theme parks started with the opening of Tokyo Disneyland in 1983. Since then, theme parks have grown to become a key part of the domestic tourism industry, with three parks – Tokyo Disneyland, Tokyo DisneySea and Universal Studios Japan – in the world's top five attractions by attendance.

Japan witnessed a boom in theme

From left: Legoland Water Park in Johor, Malaysia; Universal Studios Singapore brings Madagascar characters to life

in Kyushu, will introduce the new Kingdom of Robots attraction this year, a move that "will definitely bring in new visitors", said Kotaro Takada, director of the corporate planning department.

"Last year, around 200,000 of our guests were from overseas and we're seeing foreign visitor numbers increasing by as much as 10 per cent a year," said Channum Om, who oversees the park's foreign promotion efforts. Key to that has been the establishment of offices in South Ko-

The opening of new theme parks in Perak and Johor have helped us to sell Malaysia to overseas partners with itineraries that go beyond Kuala Lumpur.

Ally Bhoonee  
Executive director, World Avenues

parks in the 1980s, Motohisa Tachikawa, spokesman for JTB, pointed out, but not all the smaller ones survived the economic downturn of the following decade.

"Parks need to open something new every year or, at most, every two years because that is what keeps visitors returning regularly," he said. "Repeat visitors are critically important and if someone feel that one visit was sufficient, they won't want to return."

Universal Studios Japan has experienced just that surge in visitor numbers. The opening of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter in 2014 led to a 28 per cent increase in admissions over the following year. To meet the demand, work has recently begun on a new high-rise hotel.

Huis Ten Bosch, the Dutch theme park

rea and Taiwan to bring in guests.

Foreign visitors have also helped to increase overall numbers to Japan's theme parks, Johta Takahashi, USJ's spokesman said, with the sector in general benefitting from an increase in LCCs flying into Japan, relaxation on visa regulations and the relative weakness of the yen in recent months.

At the same time, more Japanese have been visiting after being dissuaded from travelling abroad due to recent terrorist incidents, primarily in European cities.

### China

#### Theme park boom

Caroline Boey

International theme park operators continue to make a beeline for China as the

As theme parks of all brands and types proliferate across Asia, park operators are finding that change is the name of the game. **TTG Asia** reports

country becomes a key target market, with Italian luxury car manufacturer Ferrari the latest to announce plans to build a branded theme park in China.

For now, all eyes are on the June 16 opening of the Shanghai Disney Resort, which is three times the size of the 28ha Hong Kong Disneyland Resort (HKDL).

This will set a new benchmark for theme parks and add a new international dimension to China's offerings, according to Joy Liao, sales director, Inbound Center, Century Holiday International Travel Group.

Kris Van Goe- them, managing director, Asian Trails China, said it would be logical for the domestic market to shift focus to the Shanghai Disney Resort.

"It is the first park of such high international standard to open here. It is also more expensive for the Chinese to

travel (to Hong Kong for HKDL) compared with domestic flights to Shanghai."

A Legoland park is currently being built in Shanghai by Merlin Entertainments, which already has five attractions in China, with another two (Madame Tussauds and Sea Life aquarium in Chongqing) due to open soon.

Opening in 2019 will be the Universal Studios in Beijing – the third in Asia after Osaka and Singapore – and at 120ha, it is reportedly the biggest in the world, according to a China National Tourism Administration report.

The homegrown theme park scene, meanwhile, is dominated by Chime-long Group and Overseas Chinese Town (OCT) Group.

Guangzhou Chimelong Tourist Resort is the group's first world-class comprehensive resort housing several of China's top theme parks such as Chimelong Paradise, Chimelong International Circus, Chimelong Water Park and Chimelong Safari Park.

OCT has established a network of theme parks across China over the past two decades, including Shenzhen's Window of the World (which showcases replicas of world-famous icons) and China's first amusement park chain under the Happy Valley brand.

Violet Wang, destination manager

at Pacific World, opined that China's massive domestic market will assure business for the various theme parks in southern China and the Yangtze River Delta.

### Hong Kong

**Buckling up for rollercoaster ride**

*Prudence Lui*

Hong Kong Disneyland Resort (HKDL) and Ocean Park Hong Kong saw visitor numbers drop last year, but players are downplaying speculations that the opening of Shanghai Disney Resort may further dampen business.

HKDL's sales director for Hong Kong and International, Martin Leung, said: "We see the opening of new theme parks in the region as advantageous because their presence will help create top-of-mind awareness of theme parks and the Disney brand among guests."

Similarly, chief executive of Ocean Park Hong Kong, Tom Mehrmann, believes that more theme parks in China will cater to the rising number of the Chinese middle class while strengthening the region's appeal for longhaul tourists.

"A critical mass of attractions will actually (improve the appeal) of tourist destinations, which is exactly what has been happening in southern China that

### Theme parks by the numbers

**7,400 yen**

The price, equivalent to US\$65.24, of a single-day ticket for adults to Tokyo Disneyland, up 500 yen from last year

**US\$54**

The cost of a one-day pass to Universal Studios Singapore for an adult

**120ha**

The size of Universal Studios in Beijing, reportedly the biggest in the world

**7.5 million**

The record attendance for Hong Kong Disneyland in 2014

**RM450 million**

The cost to build MAPS in Malaysia in ringgit



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# Report Theme parks

## TRIED & TESTED Nickelodeon Lost Lagoon

**S Puvaneswary** enjoys a splashing good time with her young niece at Asia's first Nickelodeon-themed attraction

**WHY** Nickelodeon Lost Lagoon, the newest attraction at Sunway Lagoon, opened in February this year following a RM100 million (US\$24.8 million) investment. The destination is spread over five hectares, and features 12 new rides and attractions.

It was a sultry day in late March when I visited, intent to find out whether its offerings met the hype. I came prepared with sunscreen and a gardener's hat but was pleasantly surprised it was quite cool within the park, kudos to the trees that provided shade from the blistering heat.

### Coming soon

#### Legoland Korea, Chuncheon

Legoland is slated to debut in South Korea come 2017, after Merlin Entertainments – the global park operator powerhouse behind the franchise – entered into a US\$270 million investment with a South Korean property company. The development is likely to be the world's largest Legoland at a staggering 1.3 million m<sup>2</sup>, more than double the size of the Windsor franchise in the UK.

#### 20th Century Fox World, Genting, Malaysia

Set to open in late 2017 in Resorts World Genting, the world's first film-inspired theme park will boast 25 different rides based on popular Fox movies such as *Rio*, *Titanic*, *Planet of the Apes* and *Alien vs Predator*.

#### Universal Studios Beijing, China

The US\$8 billion complex will launch in 2019, with a considerable portion of its attractions and rides built indoors to circumvent Beijing's harsh winters. The Lost World and Ancient Egypt are some of the Hollywood-inspired themes planned for the 120ha park.

#### Ubisoft, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Scheduled to open in Kuala Lumpur in 2020, the 10,000m<sup>2</sup> indoor park will offer virtual reality simulations, rides and shows built around Ubisoft's games and characters. The development is the outcome of a partnership between Ubisoft and R Segari Group, which also co-developed the Movie Animation Park Studios in Perak opening later this year.

#### Nintendo Theme Park in Universal Studios Japan, Osaka

The world's very first Nintendo theme park has been planned for 2020 launch in Universal Studios Osaka in time for the Tokyo Olympics. The US\$350 million development aims to bring to life memorable Nintendo characters such as the Super Mario brothers.

**WHAT** Nickelodeon is rife with water offerings, be it gentle rides, plunging water slides or cascading waterfalls.

The park appeals to little ones and kids at heart, ensuring hours of fun for all ages. The Spongebob Splash Adventure, for example, features a short slide for children and a much longer one for older ones. Here, my activity of choice was cooling off in the pool, waiting for the bucket overhead to fill up and overturn, splashing everyone beneath.

My six-year-old niece's favourite was Splish Splash, which has multiple water features that created an interactive water spray experience. She had immense fun playing and shooting water at other children.

I prefer the adrenaline rush that comes with exhilaratingly fast water rides. The Primeval section features three similar ones – Cobra Creek, Boa Constrictor and

includes Hong Kong and Macau," he said.

Still, it seems the industry senses competition from neighbouring destinations and has sought to add new attractions to keep visitor experience fresh.

For instance, HKDL's Star Wars-themed special events will be introduced this summer, offering rides such as Hyper-space Mountain.

Ocean Park recently launched free Wi-Fi service and has in the pipeline, two new hotels – Hong Kong Ocean Park Marriott Hotel and The Fullerton Hotel @ Ocean Park; scheduled for completion by 2017 and 2020 respectively – and the 64,381m<sup>2</sup> Ocean Park Water World (2H2018).

W Travel, managing director, Wing Wong, feels that the theme park market is already mature. "There is not much room for big expansion given (Hong Kong's) shortage of land. I believe there won't be any dramatic growth of visitors but new facilities may help to drive more visitors."

### Macau

#### Casinos still primary attraction

*Prudence Lui*

The theme park industry is unlikely to exist or get off the ground in Macau, as the small territory – with a minuscule population of just 650,000 – is already dominated by the gaming industry and its integrated resorts, said observers.

John Ap, visiting professor at the Institute for Tourism Studies, said: "The current lull in the casino business would not provide the impetus or likely business environment to warrant development of any large-scale theme park that would be financially viable."

"What potential exists for Macau are family entertainment centres (FECs). Stu-



Crocodile Gully – all of which involve riding down a long, winding tunnel on a rubber tube before plunging into a pool. What differs is the length of the tunnels, amount of light within and number of swerves. I found Cobra Creek the scariest, as it was dark inside what seemed like a never-ending tunnel, when in reality the experience lasted than a minute.

The only section that didn't involve water was the Explorers' Trail, a short walking trail set along a suspended bridge. From here, I could get a bird's-eye view of the entire park as well as attractions underneath like the MariMari Rapids.

**HOW** This self-contained park has many stalls offering items from ice-cream and light snacks to refreshments and wholesome meals, so visitors can take food breaks without venturing out.

There are also great photo opportuni-

ties as Nickelodeon characters such as SpongeBob Squarepants, Patrick Star, Dora the Explorer, Boots, and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles make appearances at scheduled times during the day.

**VERDICT** Ideal for adults and children to enjoy activities together, Nickelodeon Lost Lagoon is a good place for families to cool off and caters to a wide audience with unique attractions offering varying degrees of fun and thrills. It is also easily accessible from Kuala Lumpur.

Opening hours 10.00 to 18.00

Admission rates

RM150 (US\$37.22) for 12 years and above, RM120 for 11 years and below

Contact

Email: [slsales@sunway.com.my](mailto:slsales@sunway.com.my)

Website: <http://sunwaylagoon.com>

It would be logical for the domestic market to shift its focus to Shanghai Disney Resort... the first park of such international standard to open (in China).

**Kris Van Goethem**

Managing director, Asian Trails China

dio City is one of the first casinos to introduce this concept with its current Batman Dark Ride, Golden Reel ferris wheel and Warner Bros Fun Zone. It is expected other casinos will follow suit."

However, FECs remain secondary, not drawcard attractions, and this is what Macau will be primarily limited to, he added.

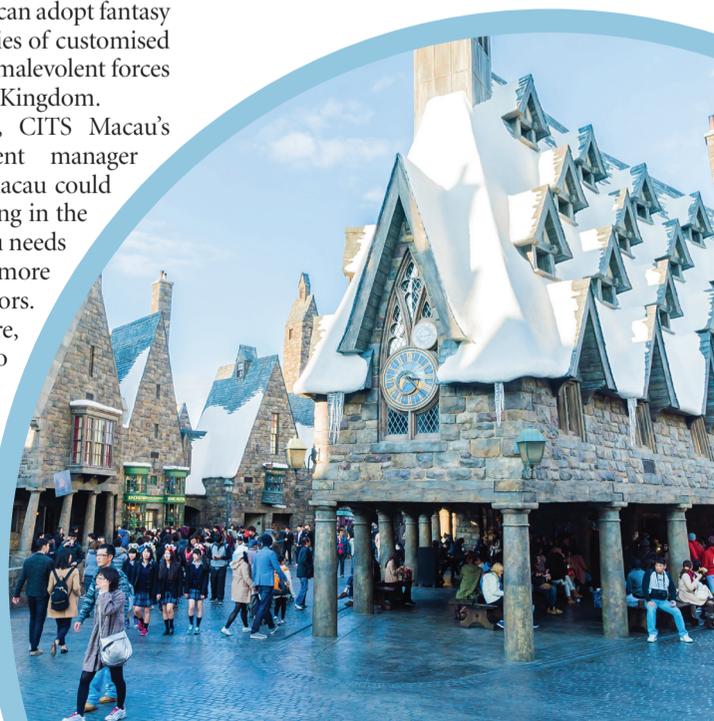
Things might change with the debut of Macau's first theme park, Planet J. Armed with Magic Scroll – a smartphone loaded with apps and connected to a master computer – participants can adopt fantasy personae to act out a series of customised challenges to drive away malevolent forces from the mythical Stone Kingdom.

On the other hand, CITS Macau's international department manager Cooper Zhang thinks Macau could have emulated Hong Kong in the theme park field. "Macau needs (theme parks) to draw more youth and family visitors. Since land is scarce here, the scale can't compare to Hong Kong but in terms of creativity, it's possible to focus on educational and cultural element given the ex-

isting commercial tourism offers," he said.

Gray Line Tours, managing director, Andy Wu, concurred: "In the past, all attention went to the fast-growing gaming industry and other business sectors were neglected. Now, the pace of the gaming industry has slowed and the government stressed on diversification of tourism offerings so I believe more opportunities for theme park development in future."

Universal Studios Japan's The Wizarding World of Harry Potter



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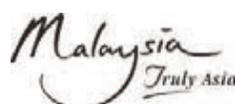
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# Report Resorts

Accessibility, picturesque beaches and myriad activities are key makings of top resort destinations. TTG Asia speaks to outbound agents to reveal the region's hottest – and emerging – resort spots

# Asia's hottest resort spots

## THAILAND

\*HOTNESS SCORE 8.4

**WHAT'S HOT** Phuket, no doubt, remains an evergreen favourite among Asia's outbound travel agents.

"Phuket's popular with honeymooners, young couples and families because it has beautiful beaches, marine sports and other activities nearby," said Koto Takebe of the marketing strategy department of Tokyo-based HIS, adding that it would be a tall call for other destinations to usurp its lead.

Daniel Chan, deputy general manager of Hong Thai Travel Service Hong Kong, agreed: "It's home to quality five-star resort hotels with activities like spa, swimming, cuisine (and island excursions)."

Phuket's diversity of offerings, from run-of-the-mill attractions like shopping and night shows to extraordinary activities like helicopter rides and boat parties, translates into "unlimited ways" for agents to sell to different market segments, according to Nishan Senaveratne, general manager (outbound) at Aitken Spence Travels in Sri Lanka.

Furthermore, pockets of tranquility still exist on the island, pointed out Royanto Handaya, CEO of Panorama Tours Indonesia. "The main beaches include Kamala and Bang Tao while Mai Khao, Beach, part of the Sirinat National Park, is still blessedly undeveloped."

Clockwise from right: Langkawi, Bali and Phuket are some of the hottest resort destinations in South-east Asia

**WHAT SHOULD BE HOT** Krabi, with its stunning seascapes and offshore islands, is still unexplored among Indian travellers, said Yatra.com's president, Sharat Dhall. Koh Samui also has potential to become a hotter resort destination.

HIS' Takebe shared: "Samui and Krabi are becoming more popular but they're still some way behind Phuket. Samui, for instance, does not have a big shopping district, which is a must for Japanese tourists."

Hong Thai's Chan, while acknowledging Samui's appeal, cites pricey airfares as the biggest deterrent for Hong Kong visitors. "Airfare (to Samui) may cost about HK\$3,000 (US\$386.83) while a destination like Bangkok is more affordable."

And for Singapore and Malaysia markets, Hua Hin looks promising.

Said John Chan, business development consultant at Malaysia's Kris International Traveltours: "Hua Hin can be considered an undiscovered gem with plenty of up-

side potential. (Although) its location and limited activities compared with better-known destinations present a downside, this will change for the repeat traveller who may appreciate its rustic charms."

Chan Brothers Travel Singapore's head of marketing communications, Jane Chang, agreed: "Hua Hin is making a comeback as a destination where cosmopolitan living meets the sea. Family-friendly attractions like Swiss Sheep Farm and Santorini Park have also raised its appeal."

**OUTLOOK** "The country is sitting atop others as a resort destination. We expect 2016 to continue in the same direction," commented Yatra's Dhall, echoing the general sentiments of other agents.

Chang opined that Thailand will continue to do well as long as it clamps down on crime in its resort islands.

## MALAYSIA

\*HOTNESS SCORE 7

**WHAT'S HOT** Langkawi clinched the top spot among several outbound agents, for whom the archipelago's combination of nature and beaches is a hit.

"It has the nicest beach in Malaysia and offers more beach activities than the other resorts," said Nishan Senaveratne, general manager (outbound), Aitken Spence Travels. "When it comes to outdoor pursuits – whether it's mangrove exploring, jungle trekking, waterfall hiking, snorkelling, diving or even banana boating – Langkawi wins on all counts."

Borneo gets the attention of Koto Takebe of HIS' marketing and strategy department, due to direct, regular flights from Tokyo's Narita International Airport. "It is also famous for its abundant nature and wildlife, marine sports and a number of high-quality golf courses," he added.

**WHAT SHOULD BE HOT** For Nishan, Penang has potential to step up its appeal among South Asian visitors, especially since it offers historical sights, shopping, street food and accommodation at economical prices.

The Perhentian Islands, on the east coast of Peninsula Malaysia, are already established among backpackers and divers, according to Chan Brothers Travel's head of marketing communications, Jane Chang, but the lack of access compared with Thai island resorts makes it a "second place in mind".

Moreover, Tioman Island is still "not a familiar name" for Indonesians despite its strong snorkelling and diving attractions, said Royanto Handaya, CEO of Panorama Tours Indonesia.

**OUTLOOK** Agents say Malaysia's affordability will attract footfalls to its resort destinations.

Hong Kong's Miramar Travel, general manager, Alex Lee, said: "There are (many) options for beach and urban resorts. Moreover, the (cost of living) is low so young visitors and families can spend (more) freely."

"Given the proximity and budget-friendly attributes, Malaysia has grown to be a favourite resort destination for Indian travellers," added Yatra.com's president, Sharat Dhall.

## INDONESIA

\*HOTNESS SCORE 7.8

**WHAT'S HOT** Ruling the roost is Bali, which is "almost synonymous with Indonesia", said Sharat Dhall, president of Yatra.com, a sentiment shared among other agents.

"Bali is still the biggest name for Japanese visitors to Indonesia. They go for its unique and traditional culture, beautiful beaches and mountain resort town of Ubud," said Koto Takebe of the marketing strategy department of HIS. "For women travellers, it is also famous for reasonably-priced massages and aesthetic treatments."

It is a similar story for Hong Thai Travel Service, for which Bali is the only Indonesian destinations the Hong Kong agency promotes. "The island offers many six-star, luxury hotels and is a hotspot for beach and sun," said deputy general manager, Daniel Chan.

On Bali itself, Seminyak and Nusa Dua are most popular among Kris International Traveltours' clients, business development consultant John Chan said.

**WHAT SHOULD BE HOT** Just across the Lombok Strait from Bali lies Lombok, a potential resort destination that agents say is often overlooked by tourists.

Chan said: "Although gaining popularity fast, Lombok can be considered a relatively new kid on the block. Its natural beauty and exquisite handicrafts will require additional promotion."

Said Chan Brothers Travel's head of marketing communications, Jane Chang: "Indonesia's other island resorts such as Komodo Island and Gili Islands are often overshadowed by Bali."

Takebe, on the other hand, considers Bintan Indonesia's best "hidden resort". "The island is just a short ferry ride from Singapore, so it is relatively easy to get to from Japan, but not enough people know about it," he said.



\* Derived from the average scores given by agents interviewed

# Report Resorts

**OUTLOOK** Chan surmised that Indonesia will remain a sought-after destination for Malaysians, “drawing both novice and (seasoned) travellers alike with a broad selection of attractions”.

Karan Anand, head of relationships at Cox & Kings India, is sanguine due to Indonesia’s “series of investment announcements” to boost tourist arrivals.

Furthermore, resorts in Indonesia have a reputation for being more upmarket and developed than neighbouring countries, said Dhall, and will continue to “attract travellers in good numbers”.

## PHILIPPINES

**\*HOTNESS SCORE 6**

**WHAT’S HOT** Cebu’s strong promotion and direct air links to various Asian cities have earned it popularity among the region’s travellers, according to Pauline Suharno, managing director of Elok Tour Indonesia.

“Cebu is relatively easy to get to from many parts of Japan – the direct flight takes less than five hours – while the white sandy beaches are a big attraction. Many people also go there to (obtain) their scuba qualifications,” said Koto Takebe from HIS’ marketing strategy department.

Boracay reigns for affluent travellers from Singapore due to the wide availability of high-end accommodation, Chan Brothers Travel’s head of marketing communications, Jane Chang said.

Though Boracay is a choice destination for the Hong Kong market according to Hong Thai Travel Service, agents are not actively promoting the Philippines due to the recent hostage incident.

**WHAT SHOULD BE HOT** Boracay has yet to reach Cebu’s popularity in some markets primarily due to its lack of direct flights.

Sharat Dhall, president of Yatra.com, said: “Boracay has pristine beaches and beautiful resorts. However, it has limited flight options and (its tourism potential) is still untapped.”

Bohol could see more visitor footfalls

too, according to John Chan, business development consultant of Malaysia’s Kris International. “Bohol still lacks basic creature comforts such as basic infrastructure and shopping sought after by the modern-day traveller,” he said.

He added: “There is a need to cater to the increasing demand of the Muslim traveller via the availability of halal food as well as places of worship.”

Palawan, with its shining attractions such as the Puerto Princesa Underground River, also has potential to be a strong resort destination, said Suharno.

**OUTLOOK** “The many untapped and unexplored islands make the Philippines attractive for newbies and seasoned travellers alike,” said Chan.

Other agents take a more wary stance, with accessibility commonly cited as a bugbear.

Suharno said: “The Philippines offers similar products as Indonesia like beaches and dive sites. Unless there is easy access and value-for-money airfares, it (would be) a challenge to push the market.”

Hong Thai Travel Service deputy general manager, Daniel Chan, still finds it a challenge to promote the country in Hong Kong following the 2010 hostage incident. However, should there be a breakthrough, he foresees prices would be “very affordable” as the destination has not been promoted for the last few years.

## VIETNAM

**\*HOTNESS SCORE 7**

**WHAT’S HOT** Danang tops the list as Vietnam’s most appealing resort based on agent feedback.

The coastal city is a favourite among Japanese tourists, said Motohisa Tachikawa of JTB Corp’s marketing division. “Vietnam Airlines started direct flights from Japan to Danang in 2014, which helped to open up (the destination). The city has good beaches, excellent hotels and is close to Hoi An, a UNESCO World Heritage site,” he said.

In addition to the wide availability of

resort properties, Danang is also popular for its beautiful landscape, French influence and timeless charm, according to John Chan, business development consultant of Kris International Traveltours.

However, the strength of the longhaul market has jacked up room rates during winter and as a result Hong Kong travellers tend more to choose Japan instead, according to Miramar Travel, general manager, Alex Lee. As well, the city does not appeal to families as tourism infrastructure is not yet well-developed.

**WHAT SHOULD BE HOT** Nha Trang, in southern Vietnam, is an emerging destination with its beaches, scuba diving and offshore islands, revealed Clifford Neo, managing director of Dynasty Travel Singapore.

Even for Japanese travellers, for whom Vietnam is still a new market, there is already a “gradually growing interest in Nha Trang”, said Tachikawa.

There are some factors working against Nha Trang’s favour though. Said Chan: “Nha Trang has been hit by negative publicity over illegal and unauthorised tour operators and service providers.”

Sharat Dhall, president of Yatra.com, sees potential in Phu Quoc, Vietnam’s southernmost island. “However, not many people are aware about the island, which is why it remains relatively unexplored by travellers.”

**OUTLOOK** Agents are generally optimistic about Vietnam’s resort market.

“Vietnam is frequently visited by Indian travellers seeking a short getaway,” said Dhall. “There should be more visitors to the country this year.”

Tachikawa added: “We are really positive about Vietnam as a destination over the longer term, but it still needs development and, more importantly, promotion and advertising in Japan to make it better known.”

## JAPAN

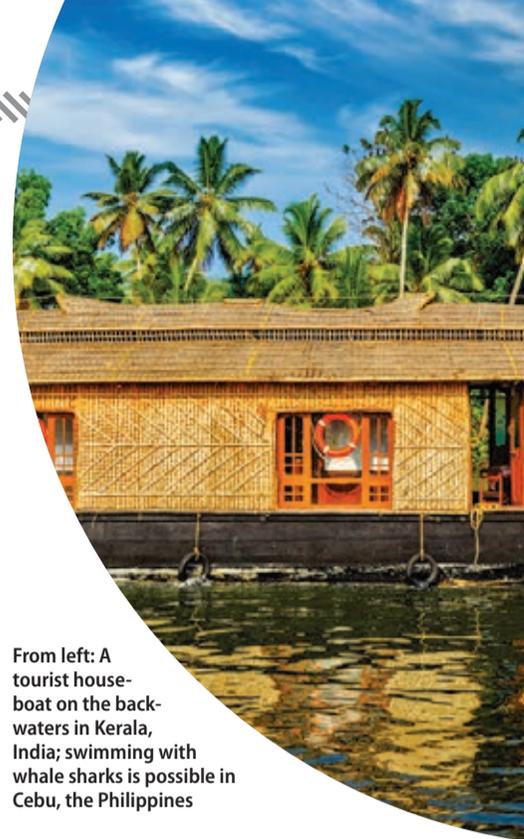
**\*HOTNESS SCORE 7**

**WHAT’S HOT** Hokkaido is a clear choice for the South-east Asia outbound market.

“Hokkaido is well known for its ski and snow experience in the winter, and is a much sought-after spa/onsen getaway among Singaporeans during the December-March period,” said Clifford Neo, managing director of Dynasty Travel.

Hokkaido and Sapporo are destinations that are finding favour among Indonesians who have already visited Tokyo or Osaka, according to Putu Ayu Aristyadewi, group vice president, marketing and communications at Smiling Tours. “The four seasons, food, shopping and cultural attractions add to the easy access and relatively short travel time.”

On the other hand, Osaka sees greater appeal among Hong Kong travellers. Said EGL Tours, product development manager, James Lam: “Osaka has replaced Tokyo as a hotspot after the 3/11 earthquake because people want to avoid north-western Japan, and Osaka enjoys easy access to cities like Kobe.”



From left: A tourist houseboat on the backwaters in Kerala, India; swimming with whale sharks is possible in Cebu, the Philippines

**WHAT SHOULD BE HOT** Both Neo and Putu see good potential in Okinawa but flight connectivity has posed a challenge. Neo elaborated: “It was not easy to get there without direct flights before but now with aggressive campaigns by the tourism board to create awareness and SilkAir’s direct flights into Naha, Okinawa will become a resort hotspot in 2016.”

As well, Kyoto has plenty to offer in terms of temples and shrines, but the resorts there “lack the pulling power of the better-known key destinations in offering a wider appeal of entertainment, shopping and nightlife”, John Chan, business development consultant of Kris International pointed out.

**OUTLOOK** Agents expect that the recent visa exemptions for South-east Asian visitors, growing LCC links and the upcoming Olympics will tilt the balance in favour of Japan’s overall resort market.

Said Neo: “With the 2020 Tokyo Olympics coming up, there will be great funding from the government for infrastructure and the addition of hotels or conversion of homes to homestays and different modes of transportation around the country for tourism growth. This will boost the overall resort market.”

The projection is much dimmer for the Indian market, as Japan “is not a very popular resort destination of choice”, posited Sharat Dhall, president of Yatra.com.

## CHINA

**\*HOTNESS SCORE 5.8**

**WHAT’S HOT** Agents’ choices of what’s hot in China are as diverse as the country itself.

Clifford Neo, managing director of Dynasty Travel, voted Jiuzhaigou for its abundance of hot springs and wellness resorts like the InterContinental Resort Jiuzhai Paradise Hotel and other well-known international brands including Sheraton and Shangri-La, plus local four- and five-star resort properties.

Sanya and Guilin are hottest for Kris International business development manager, John Chan. “There are amazing natural landscapes, strong cultural legacy and relics of China are widely displayed in hotels and places of interests. Club Med Guilin and Sanya Marriott Yalong Bay Resort & Spa are popular with Malaysians.”

Likewise for Sharat Dhall, president of Yatra.com, Sanya is a natural choice for re-

Hokkaido’s Otaru Canal in winter



\* Derived from the average scores given by agents interviewed



treats. “Travellers aiming for relaxing stays choose to go to Yalong Bay (in Sanya), home to many resorts and beach houses.”

EGL Tours, product development manager, James Lam, commented: “Xiamen is ranked the cleanest city and its rich tourism resources such as strong culture make it a favourable getaway. Most importantly, the city is located close to Hong Kong and shares similar culture and cuisine.”

**WHAT SHOULD BE HOT** Haikou can be more popular due to its proximity to Hong Kong, suggested Lam, “but news on local seafood restaurants ripping off tourists” have put a damper on demand.

Elsewhere on Hainan, Wuzhizhou has a famous underwater world, according to Yatra.com’s president, Sharat Dhall, but its distance from Beijing – a six-hour flight away – is a major deterrent.

Chan said: “Hangzhou makes up the famous triumvirate of Shanghai and Suzhou well-known for their spectacular silk embroideries and water villages. (But) it cannot be considered a standalone destination compared with the many attractions of better-known beach and mountain resort destinations.”

**OUTLOOK** Neo said: “China is an ever-green destination among Singaporeans and is growing at a rate of five to eight per cent annually. More youngsters are now

looking to visit this destination due to its history, culture and natural wonders.”

Conversely, youth travellers in Hong Kong are more interested in other Asian destinations, leading to Lam’s negative outlook.

Similar to Japan, Indian travellers do not perceive China as a resort destination and often do not visit the country beyond main cities like Beijing, according to Dhall.

## INDIA

**\*HOTNESS SCORE 5.5**

**WHAT’S HOT** Goa’s established beaches appeal to honeymooners while Kerala, famous for its boathouses, draws families, honeymooners and nature lovers, said Aitken Spence Travels, general manager (outbound), Nishan Senaveratne.

John Chan, business development consultant, Kris International Traveltours Malaysia, agreed: “Both destinations are easily accessible with exotic cuisine and strong religious influences.”

Premium Holidays, general manager,

Simon Wo, picked Jaipur as it’s a “classic destination” that can easily be combined with popular attractions like Taj Mahal in Agra.

**WHAT SHOULD BE HOT** Resorts in Mumbai can offer a relaxing getaway, opined Chan, but being better known as a commercial and financial city, the destination lags behind resort destinations in northern and eastern India.

Kashmir’s landscapes are fantastic but it suffers from safety perception issues as well as facility standards that do not match guests’ expectations, said Wo.

Nishan, meanwhile, urged the promotion of Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal.

**OUTLOOK** Chan expects positive growth in Goa and Kerala. He said: ‘India will continue to hold the fascination and awe for many due to her deep-rooted historical past. Besides beach resorts, hill stations and palaces remain in high demand.’

Wo has bleaker prospects: “The majority of traffic is for business. Given the uncertain global economy, the outlook is not positive and there is also competition from neighbouring destinations that offer more affordable options. Meanwhile, it also loses traffic to Sri Lanka which provides a safer option for tours and FITs.



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# Destination South Korea

South Korea is not yet a top-of-mind winter sports destination, but industry members hope that the 2018 Winter Olympics will showcase the country's finesse in this arena, writes **Julian Ryall**

More Asian visitors are visiting South Korea during winter, attracted by its ample skiing and snowboarding opportunities



## High ambitions for alpine glory

South Korea has hosted major sporting events – the 1988 Olympic Games and joint hosting of the 2002 World Cup with Japan – and its athletes have a solid track record in Winter Olympics Games, but the nation's ski resorts have, to date, been primarily designed to meet the needs of domestic travellers.

But the travel trade is confident that will change when Pyeongchang hosts the 2018 Olympic Winter Games. The XXIII Winter Olympiad will train sights on Pyeongchang, a county in Gangwon province, where facilities including hotels and a world-class ski resort are currently under construction.

"We hope the Winter Games will have a huge impact on tourism," said Jung Chang-soo, president, Korea Tourism Organization (KTO), who hopes that the major sporting event will showcase South Korea as an attractive year-round winter sports destination.

Jang added: "Winter sports are getting more popular in South Korea. As 70 per cent of South Korea is mountainous and our winter lasts four to five months per year, the country has a huge potential to be developed as a winter sports destination for foreign travellers.

"South Korea is already a winter sports destination for national visitors. The number of travellers from neighbouring countries are also rising during winter pe-

riod," he elaborated.

The local organising committee for the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympic Games has signed a MoU with KTO to collaborate on a number of projects designed to raise the profile of South Korea as a tourist destination.

Winter sports in South Korea are starting to gain a following among regional visitors, according to trade players.

"We're not like the Nordic nations, who have been doing winter sports for many years. (However, it is) becoming more popular in South Korea," said Seo Tae-won, director of Seoul-based Suhyun Tour, one of the five official partner travel agencies for the games.

"We are beginning to gain a reputation with the people of South-east Asia who want to try skiing and snowboarding, etc, but aren't able to do it in their countries," he said. "And for people from Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea is much cheaper than Japan."

Seo expressed hopes that even after the Games are over, Pyeongchang will continue to attract winter sports fans worldwide as the city would have seen an injection of new sporting infrastructure and hotels during the Games.

Min Woo, head of public relations for Hana Tour, agrees that Pyeongchang's successful hosting of the Winter Olympics will serve as a major boost for the entire winter sports sector in South Korea,

but expresses concern that the broader travel industry will not feel a genuine up-tick in business.

"People will love the Games, but that will only be visible in Pyeongchang," he said. "Tourists will still primarily come (to South Korea) for the shopping, food, and Korean pop culture."

Similarly, Oh Donghee, sales executive at the Koreana Hotel in Seoul, is not sensing much of an immediate benefit from the Games, although he hopes that it will raise the profile of South Korea as a destination.

"Seoul is too far from Pyeongchang so there will be no major increase in the number of people staying with us during the events, although we may see a few more as people arrive in South Korea before they go on to the Games," he said.

Promotional efforts have not started in earnest yet, Seo said, adding that the travel industry would appreciate greater strategic support from KTO to spread the word. All stakeholders need to break through the bureaucracy that could slow down efforts to promote the Pyeongchang games, he opined.

Seo added: "It may take a while for South Korea to catch up with Japan in terms of winter sports infrastructure, but that's ultimately where we want to be."

– additional reporting by Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

### Destination in numbers

**13.2 million**

The number of overseas visitors to South Korea in 2015, down from 14.2 million the previous year

**33.9km**

The length of the world's longest sea dyke, which is part of the Saemangeum project for a new tourist area on the west coast of the peninsula

**556m**

The height of Lotte World Tower when completed. Home to a luxury hotel, cafes, shops and an observation deck, Lotte World Tower is poised to become the tallest building in the country and the sixth tallest in the world

### Viewpoints

How can South Korea further build itself as a sports tourism destination?



**Jeff Park, president, Sweetravel Korea**

South Korea has everything needed to be a great sports destination. We have the mountains for winter sports fans,

rivers for rafters, world-class stadiums and sporting infrastructure, but we're just not promoting it. The potential is huge, but we need to draw up detailed programmes to promote sporting opportunities here and get the message to sports fans worldwide.



**Jooyeon Ahn, brand marketing manager, Westin Chosun Seoul**

To further build itself as a destination for sports tourism, South Korea needs to identify key strategies such as creating a supportive environment, facilitating sport development and the promotion of athletes, as well as fostering community volunteerism.

Issue of the day

# Female power

Julian Ryall reports on how Seoul is enticing female travellers with the promise of safety and Korean dramas

Seoul has long had a reputation for meeting the needs and desires of female travellers, but after a disappointing 2015 for South Korea's tourism sector as a whole, the trade is once again keen to flaunt its positives to attract more ladies.

While the MERS outbreak last year slowed international visits by some 50 per cent during the June and July period, said Eric Funtowicz, director of sales and marketing for AccorHotels Korea, the company was quick to remedy the situation by leveraging its relationships with agencies and wholesalers to introduce promotions and special offers for the leisure segment.

Despite increasing competition from a growing hotel supply, 2016 already looks better than last year, added Funtowicz, with female travellers keen to return.

"South Korea definitely has strong assets for this segment of travellers as it is one of the safest destinations worldwide. It has easy international access, good public transportation, attractive touristic and cultural points of interest, shopping opportunities, an active nightlife and international dining venues," he pointed out.

Also aiding Seoul's appeal to women travellers is the availability of spas of high standards throughout the city.

For instance, Hotel Shilla has teamed up with French cosmetics brand Guerlain for its spa, where a dozen professional therapists iron out kinks picked up during the day's exertions.

The signature treatment at W Ho-

tel's Away Spa is a total body massage and scrub with lavender flower buds and warm salt, while the elegant spa at Four Seasons Hotel Seoul makes use of traditional Korean therapies.

A number of hotels have also instituted ladies-only floors in their properties, including Lotte Hotel Seoul, Best Western Premier Kukdo and Hotel SkyPark Myeongdong.

"Our location in Itaewon is one of the main reasons why female guests chose our hotel," said Jordan Yoo, sales executive, Imperial Palace Boutique Hotel told *TTG Asia*. "This area has some of the best nightlife in Seoul, all within walking distance, and women like that it is so safe."

With Korean popular culture a significant export, the city is welcoming women looking to visit locations in their favourite films or drama series, and to attend concerts by K-pop bands.

The city's landmarks are also proving popular, such as the royal palaces, the Seoul Tower on Mount Nam, and Noryangjin Fish Market. The market has become a must-see destination for Chinese tourists, with more than 1,000 visitors daily, in part because the location features in the soap opera *My Love from the Star*, which has a large following in China.

"Malling" has entered the Korean language thanks to the number of malls in Seoul. Parnas Mall and the COEX Mall in Gangnam have both reported a dramatic rise in foreign visitors, while the Yeouido IFC Mall is the largest in the country.



Shopping, spa and K-pop come together to entice women travellers to Seoul

## MY WAY

### Lubosh Barta, general manager, Four Seasons Hotel Seoul

#### What are your current challenges?

In recent years, Seoul has received growing interest as a major destination in Asia. However, compared with how other top-tier Asian cities such as Hong Kong, Shanghai and Tokyo are perceived worldwide, we believe that Seoul is underestimated.

Seoul deserves the same level of awareness as other major destinations in the global arena, especially in Western and European cultures. With so much to offer, Seoul could easily establish a stronger presence as a destination in the global community.

Over the last couple of years, we have seen an increase in airlift into South Korea. There are many international travellers who come

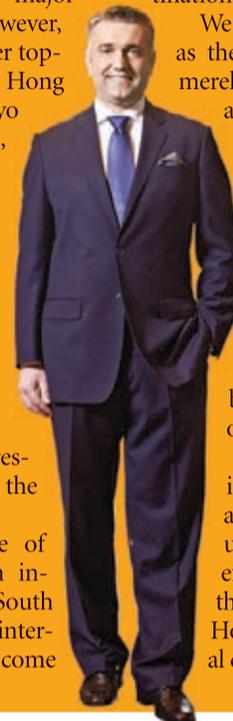
into Incheon, but only for transit purposes and not as their final destination.

We want to position Seoul as the final destination and not merely a transit city or a stop along the way, which would help increase sales dramatically.

#### If I had my way to improve things, I would...

grow awareness of Seoul as a destination in the global market to increase sales to the city. This is our biggest challenge as well as our main goal.

By targeting global VIPs in the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts database, we are using various PR channels to effectively market Seoul and the opening of Four Seasons Hotel Seoul in the international community.



## NEWS IN A MINUTE

### 1 Hotel Shilla Seoul

Hotel Shilla Seoul is investing 300 billion won (US\$262.4 million) in a new annex featuring traditional Korean-style (hanok) accommodation. Currently, South Korea has around 20 hanok-style hotels, but none in the capital.

Slated to open in 2019, the 90-room hotel will have three storeys above ground and another three below ground.

### 2 Seoul's first Michelin guide

The first Michelin guide to Seoul's top dining spots will be published by end-2016 as an e-book in both Korean and English. Besides singling out exceptional restaurants for one, two or three stars, the guide will identify down-to-earth venues – with correspondingly cheaper prices – with the Bib Gourmand logo.

### 3 Digitising the city

The Seoul Metropolitan Government is spending 460 billion won to digitise the city, such as providing free Wi-Fi in all public places such as parks and tourist hotspots by 2017. The city is also developing a new app that will deliver real-time information on the availability of parking spaces nearby.

### 4 Extra cable car service on Namsam

A new cable car service will ferry visitors 888m up Namsam from the foot of the mountain – which will be

connected to the Myeongdong Subway station via a tunnel.

Scheduled to open in February 2018, there will be 20 new gondolas with a capacity of 10 passengers each. This will ease the congestion, especially on weekends, on the existing cable car service.

### 5 New half-top double-decker city tour buses

The Seoul Metropolitan City has added half-top double-deckers to their fleet of tour buses.

The vehicles will have 65 seats in total, with 45 open-air seats upstairs. The 20 seats below boast a glass ceiling, enabling tourists to enjoy the view of the city's skyscrapers.

The buses will ply the city's culture route, taking in Dongdaemun Design Plaza, Tongin Market, Myeongdong, Insadong, Gwangjang Market and Seoul Folk Flea Market.

### 6 Tax refunds

Since January 1, 2016, foreign tourists have been eligible for immediate tax refunds when purchasing goods from non-duty free shops. The system aims to reduce the waiting time to receive a tax refund.

The immediate tax refund applies to purchases of less than 200,000 won, and is limited to a total value of one million won per visit.

Previously, tourists were required to pay the full price with tax included, keep the receipts and then file a refund at the airport before departure.

# Destination South Korea

## TRIED AND TESTED

# Shilla Stay Guro

Despite initial misgivings over the steel-and-glass interiors at Shilla's latest outpost, **Julian Ryall** soon discovers that its faux log fire and hospitable staff are more than enough to keep him warm



**LOCATION** Opened in February, Shilla Stay's eighth and latest hotel in South Korea is located a five-minute walk from the Guro Digital Complex station that serves the city's IT hub.

With business travellers' needs met, dedicated shoppers will appreciate the close proximity of Seoul's several top shopping malls such as Mario Outlet and Hyundai Outlet Gasan.

**ROOM** The 25-storey hotel's interiors are all shimmering greys, glass and burnished steel. Designed by Italian architect Piero Lissoni, they are eye-catching in a sleek manner but the check-in

seemed slightly antiseptic and gloomy to me, however.

The rooms, ranging from standard to the expansive Grand Room, continue the designer's theme but with more warmth. The sofa with cushions was a great place to watch the sun descend over Seoul. Also, the 100 per cent Hungarian goose-down bedding was a joy to sleep in and a special mention must be made of the invigorating shower and fluffy towels.

**FACILITIES** I'm a sucker for open log fires radiating heat and feel-good bonhomie, even if it is a gas-fuelled faux fire, making

the hotel welcome a truly warm and uplifting one. The fire dominates the lobby and it's tempting to open a book or magazine from the nearby stacks, and treat the place like home.

Befitting its role as a business hotel, the property has three multipurpose meeting rooms that can be tailored to business functions or private events, while Wi-Fi is free throughout the property.

The fitness room, on the 21<sup>st</sup> floor, has state-of-the-art equipment and TVs attached to most machines, although the view across the city is arguably more entertaining.

**F&B** Unlike the need to incorporate the log fire to lift the mood in the lobby, the use of light and straight lines works well for the inviting breakfast and dining room on the second floor.

The buffet breakfast was excellent and included a good mix of local specialities and healthy options to set the guest up for the day ahead. The same space is used for lunches and dinner buffets, with the food taking its cues from South Korea, neighbouring Asian nations and beyond. The wine list is superb too.

**SERVICE** Excellent. It helped immeasurably that the staff in

the restaurant were most obliging by providing a beer even though I had turned up shortly after closing time.

**VERDICT** Chic and sophisticated, the hotel is perfectly located for events and meetings in south-west Seoul and sufficiently close to the centre of the city. Plus, it's a rare treat to find a log fire in a city hotel.

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# Destination Sri Lanka

Free from the shackles of civil war, Sri Lanka's tourism is ready to welcome a new dawn. But new tensions are surfacing amid rapid development with issues of sustainability at the heart, writes **Feizal Samath**

Silhouettes of the traditional stilt fishermen at sunset near Galle

## Making peace with progress

Sri Lanka is celebrating 50 years of organised tourism and the cherished goal of two million arrivals this year, but it seems the industry has not been able to reap the full benefits of peace since the decades-long bloody civil war ended in May 2009.

Some believe the growth in arrivals to the country – 1.8 million in 2015, a sharp rise from 450,000 in 2008 – is unrepresentative of sustained interest in Sri Lanka as a tourist destination.

Srilal Miththapala, director at Laughs Leisure and former president of the Tourist Hotels Association of Sri Lanka, opined: "Though year-on-year arrivals grew after the end of the conflict, it is mostly due to the curiosity factor and pent-up demand."

"There has been no proper focused country promotions except for participation at roadshows and trade fairs," Miththapala noted, echoing a sentiment among many industry players of the need for a targeted marketing plan.

In defence, state-owned Sri Lanka Promotions Bureau chairman Paddy Withana said promotions are ongoing but efforts are mainly channelled towards

digital marketing at the moment.

On the other hand, Shafraz Fazley, managing director of Viluxor Holidays, witnessed the surge in Chinese arrivals despite the lack of promotions in China.

Fazley reckoned the few country promotions undertaken some years ago have created lingering awareness even in the absence of more recent promotions.

"In fact if there are country promotions, we may not be able to meet the demand," he said.

The growth in Chinese arrivals is dramatic. From just 10,410 arrivals in 2010 and without even ranking in Sri Lanka's top 10 source markets, China swept aside the competition to reach 214,783 arrivals in 2015, a 67.6 per cent surge from 128,166 in the previous year.

This year China is expected to overtake India as Sri Lanka's main source market, a reflection of the dramatic change in the visitor profile to the country which was once dominated by European travellers from the 1970s to 2000.

Since 2009, new hotels, guesthouses and homestays have sprung up in Colombo and its outskirts, with pricing varying from US\$10 to US\$1,500 per day.

Online bookings, mostly for two- to three-star and lower-tier accommodation, have surged to an estimated 30-40 per cent of all bookings against established contracts through travel operators.

New upscale brands opening in 2016-2018 are Shangri-La (with two resorts), Sheraton, Hyatt, ITC, Movenpick, adding to existing properties such as Hilton, Taj and Ramada. Home-grown brands such as Heritance, Cinnamon and Jetwing are also expanding rapidly.

Further adding to the landscape are new restaurants offering international cuisines and a few shopping malls.

However, some industry stakeholders are questioning if a fixation on burgeoning touristic establishments may eclipse the more enduring attractions of the island such as untouched nature, rich culture, vast swathes of green countryside and rustic villages.

Heritage, for instance, holds a rare charm unparalleled by the appeal of newer establishments, evident from the over 200-year-old Mount Lavinia Hotel, Queen's Hotel (160 years), Galle Face Hotel (152 years) and The Grand Hotel (124 years), former mansions of governors

### Destination in numbers

**48.8%**

The percentage increase in Chinese tourist arrivals from January-February 2016

**4.5 million**

Tourist arrivals targeted for 2020, up from an expected 2.2 million in 2016

**2,873**

The number of listed accommodation establishments in Sri Lanka in 2014, up from 2,075 in 2013

**2%**

The percentage contribution of tourism to Sri Lanka's GDP in 2014, lower than Malaysia (12.5 per cent), Vietnam (7.5 per cent) and Singapore (5 per cent)

during British colonial rule.

"Sustaining and maintaining the industry is the challenge," said Hiran Cooray, chairman of Jetwing Group.

"What is distinctive in our market? We have to score on the warmth, friendliness and cheerfulness of our people. That comes naturally (to an island nation like Sri Lanka). Even during troubled times, tourists came because of the people," he added.

Another challenge, he said, is to keep Sri Lanka as green as possible. "We are blessed that close to 50 per cent of our country is still green – plantations and forests. This should be in the DNA of tourism."

Suppose these remain part of the landscape, travellers will continue to visit Sri Lanka, enchanted by the same quality of beauty, gemstones and spices that enticed 13<sup>th</sup>-century explorer Marco Polo – with or without promotions.

# Destination Sri Lanka

## Issue of the day

# Overpricing comes under fire

Jacked-up entrance fees for foreign visitors are also hurting local travel operators. By **Feizal Samath**



Sigiriya, an ancient rock fortress in Sri Lanka

**T**ourists and tourism players in Sri Lanka are lamenting the country's tiered pricing system that charges foreign visitors inordinately more than locals to enter national parks, and cultural and heritage sites.

"This is a serious issue we have had for many years," said Dirk Grigson, an in-

dustry veteran and chairman of the 2016 Tourism Fair organised by the Sri Lanka Association of Inbound Tour Operators.

"We did a survey three to four years ago and found this is far too expensive for visitors (compared with other regional rates)," he commented, adding that it costs US\$17 to visit India's Taj Mahal versus US\$35 to

enter and climb the Sigiriya rock palace in Sri Lanka.

Furthermore, entry rates at the Buddhist Temple of the Tooth in Kandy was recently raised to Rs1,500 (US\$10) from Rs1,000 for tourists, while locals are charged half the price, he said.

Travel operators said it would cost be-

tween US\$150-200 per person to visit all the best-known sites in Sri Lanka, a significant sum for visitors.

"Why should they charge tourists to visit religious places if some of them go there (for) worship?" an anonymous industry official challenged.

Disagreeing, Dharma Dharmapala, CEO of Lanka Sportreizen, an adventure agency, said rates in Sri Lanka are generally in line with international rates. The biggest problem, he opined, is the lack of infrastructure at Sri Lankan attractions.

"There are no proper toilets, restaurants and rest facilities. Vendors in the vicinity charge exorbitant rates for food and drinks," he pointed out.

Other common grouses of the trade are sudden hikes in entry rates and the depreciating value of the local currency.

"When sudden increases are made, we have to bear the additional costs as overseas DMCs which contracted months ahead refuse to pay the increase," said an agent, who stressed that tourism authorities are not acting in line with industry trends and practices.

However, the depreciation of the local currency could also mean lesser fees to pay for some foreign visitors.

For example, entry into Sigiriya has remained at Rs3,900 per person over the past two years. This was equivalent to US\$30 a year ago, but the rupee depreciation has brought the fee down to US\$26 (at press time).

Industry players are not calling for a single-fee-for-all approach however.

"That might not be a viable solution because of varied needs. What the industry wants is reasonable site rates not much more than the local rate and good facilities," said a veteran industry member who declined to be named.

## Viewpoints

Is Sri Lanka being sufficiently marketed abroad as a destination?



**Dileep Mudadeniya**, head of brand marketing, Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts

While organic growth is taking place, the industry also needs to invest on promotion and not rely solely on the government. Cinnamon Hotels on its own promotes the country first and then the brand. Another priority is the need to improve standards here to the level of a mature destination like Spain, for example, where hygiene is a priority.



**Shafraz Fazley**, managing director, Viluxor Holidays

Whatever promotion done in China has been during the period up to 2014. That is still paying dividends since the Chinese are coming in large numbers. Moving forward, Sri Lanka desperately needs more Chinese-language guides and translators.

## MY WAY

### Nilmin Nanayakkara, managing director, Nkar Travels & Tours

#### What are your current challenges?

We have a super platform of absolute peace after the end of a bloody civil conflict, unfortunately we are not making the most of this opportunity due to insufficient marketing. For the past 12 to 18 months there has been no (considerable) advertising or country promotions in other source countries.

With limited resources at hand, we are doing as much as possible to promote Sri Lanka through digital marketing, Facebook, Twitter, etc which have been able to move online sales.

We also attend as many trade fairs as we can to establish new links and consolidate existing operators. We are offering additional products to what we have been selling earlier like adventure and travel with different experiences.

We are also identifying emerging markets and linking up with tour operators in those markets. China is the

biggest provider but is still considered an emerging market because rapid growth was only seen in the past three to four years. We have two Chinese nationals as representatives to handle Shanghai and Beijing regions, one based in our Colombo office and the other in Shanghai.

#### If I had my way to improve things, I would...

get the tourism agencies to be involved in marketing the destination. We are doing as much as we can to promote Sri Lanka but our resources are limited. Our individual efforts to market Sri Lanka are just a drop in the ocean (compared with how much the government can do).

A marketing plan on consumer awareness and targeted promotions need to be launched immediately.

For the longhaul market, we need aggressive TV ads to enhance aware-



ness and different campaigns in different cities. It is also important to create more awareness among travel agents in other countries by educating these counter-sales staff of their product knowledge in selling Sri Lanka.

The shorthaul market is a totally different segment but we can similarly benefit from awareness raising at point-of-sale.

The authorities must spend on marketing and promotion which can be funded through tax revenue from tourism spending in shops, hotels, malls, etc.

## NEWS IN A MINUTE

### 1 **Shangri-La Hambantota and Colombo**

Shangri-La is opening two properties in southern Hambantota (June 1, 2016) and Colombo (2017).

The 300-room Shangri-La's Hambantota Resort & Spa includes 26 suites with private butler service and an 18-hole golf course.

Guests arriving at Colombo International Airport will be transported by Shangri-La's private luxury coach to the property.

The 500-room Shangri-La Hotel, Colombo is part of a mixed-use development that comprises 50 floors with 406 residential units and 33 storeys of offices and retail shops.

### 2 **SriLankan Airlines**

SriLankan Airlines will stop flights to Rome from May 1 but will continue its other European sectors and increase some frequencies in an effort to reduce loss-making routes.

The airline will add a fifth weekly flight to Frankfurt from July and retain its twice-daily London and four-times weekly Paris services. It will retain its slots in Rome for a re-assessment likely in two years' time.

### 3 **Amari Galle Sri Lanka**

Thailand-based Onyx Hospitality Group will introduce the Amari brand in Sri Lanka in late-2016.

The upmarket Amari Galle Sri Lanka will be located at the south-western coastal region of Sri Lanka, on a beachfront approximately 90 minutes by car from Colombo.

The 172-key property offers rooms and suites with direct sea views, an extensive multi-tiered pool deck with direct beach access, Amari's signature Breeze Spa, two restaurants, banquet facilities and a fitness centre.

Onyx currently operates Ozo Colombo and Ozo Kandy in Sri Lanka.

### 4 **Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle Resort**

The 152-key Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle Resort, which opened in December 2015 in southern Sri Lanka, boasts an unconventional welcome ceremony for guests.

Three women dressed in traditional attire and playing the *rabana* (traditional drum), accompanied by a conch shell blower, will greet guests upon their arrival at the resort.

Guests arriving in the day also get ferried to their room on an authentic bullock cart.

### 5 **Sri Lanka Tourism turns 50**

Sri Lanka marks 50 years of organised tourism in the island nation with multiple events to commemorate the anniversary in May.

This includes the release of a new logo to mark this milestone, release of a commemorative stamp and a video film on the 50 year history of the industry.

Cultural shows, exhibitions of cultural heritage, gem and jewellery,

handicrafts, wildlife conservation, zoological and botanical gardens and Ceylon Tea will be featured at a special exhibition.



## ARE YOU UP FOR THE US\$500,000 PATA CEO CHALLENGE?

For the second year, the PATA CEO Challenge sponsored by TripAdvisor is celebrating the diversity of cultures, customs, and landscapes of emerging destinations around the world.

The award categories are:

### STATE, REGION, PROVINCE, AND COUNTRY

*Nations and individual island destinations must attract less than 100,000 international visitor arrivals annually*

### SECOND-TIER/THIRD-TIER CITIES

*Excluding first-tier (capital) cities but including regional cities*

Winners will work with TripAdvisor to create a digital marketing campaign to showcase their destination to a global audience valued at US\$500,000 each.

The awards will be presented at the PATA Aligned Advocacy Dinner as part of PATA's extensive activities at World Travel Market London, United Kingdom.

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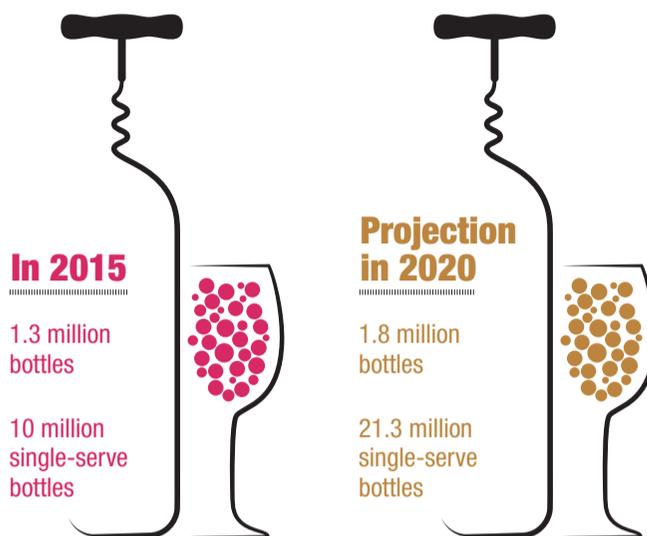
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# Connect

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

## TOURISM DATA

Emirates spills on the total amount of wine consumption across its fleet last year, and how much it expects guests to consume by 2020.



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## WHO'S SAYING WHAT

### Instagram



Congrats to WITA Tour founders Mr and Mrs Soeseno with their son and fellow staff members as they celebrate the agency's 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary at its head office in Jakarta. #indonesia #happybirthday



The *Costa Fortuna* at its maiden call in Singapore. Trade members were given a tour aboard the ship as it prepares to make several itineraries in the region. #costacruises #costafortuna #traveltrade



Todd Arthur, managing director of HRS, spoke to travel managers in Singapore on the state of business travel management at the corporate OTA's first Travel X'Change event. #BusinessTravel #TravelXchange

## WE LIKE Snippets of happenings good and bad surrounding the travel trade



### CEBU PACIFIC PLANS ERGONOMIC SEATS FOR NEW AIRBUS FLEET

At a time when many airlines seem more keen to maximise seating capacity by reducing the amount of space allocated for each guest, it is refreshing to hear that at least one airline still has guest comfort in mind. Cebu Pacific has ordered the

Recaro SL3510 seat model to be retrofitted on all its 30 new Airbus A321neo aircraft, the first airline in the Asia-Pacific to do so.

According to the Philippine carrier, having these seats mean increased space between seat rows, as well as better support for the spine, due to the ergonomic netting material used. Delivery of the aircraft can be expected gradually between 2017 and 2021.

### STAY TRUE TO YOURSELF AT W HONG KONG

In adherence to the brand's fun loving and edgy persona, W Hong Kong has launched a digital campaign encouraging guests of all types – whether business travellers, couples, families or LGBTs – to take part in a social media contest for a chance to win prizes including a one-night stay at their Marvelous Suite.



The contest involves watching the four videos, one dedicated to each aforementioned guest type, and choosing a favourite and sharing comments on social media. The contest period runs from April 29 to May 27.



### QUAKES HIT SOUTHERN JAPAN

Strong earthquakes tore through Japan's southern regions last month killing at least 45 and injuring many more, as well as severely damaging infrastructure, homes and buildings. Kumamoto Airport was also closed for a time, but has since resumed service.

Foreign visitors in the affected areas were fortunate enough to have escaped unscathed, and travel agents *TTG Asia* interviewed are still sanguine about demand for Japan, saying despite a few cancellations, most forward bookings are going ahead as planned.

In the meantime, relief efforts are ongoing for Japan from both public and private sectors, such as Korean Air's delivery of supplies including 36,000 litres of mineral water on April 20 via flight KE787.



### HEATWAVE SPREADS THROUGHOUT ASIA

Soaring global temperatures has sent mercury rising, resulting in uncomfortably hot tropical climates, droughts and even deaths in many parts of Asia. Close to the equator, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand are experiencing record-breaking conditions resulting in closed schools and halting of outdoor work.

Worry is mounting fast especially for India and neighbouring Pakistan, where hundreds are feared dead as temperatures soar above 40°C in some states. With acres of crops dying due to drying irrigation canals, local governments are working as fast as they can to set up emergency centres to provide basic necessities like drinking water and shelter from the heat for those affected.

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

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

- Singapore Airlines (2002)
- Singapore Changi Airport (2002)
- Hertz Asia Pacific (2005)
- Royal Cliff Hotels Group (2006)
- Star Cruises (2008)
- 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.ttgtravelfof.com](http://www.ttgtravelfof.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.



TTG TRAVEL AWARDS 2016



**Cast Your Vote Now!**

# You Determine Who Clinches The Top Honour In The Industry

TTG Travel Awards, Asia-Pacific travel trade's most celebrated event, is back for its 27<sup>th</sup> year to honor the industry's crème de la crème. Tell us which company has made exemplary achievements and contributions that have raised the bar of excellence and taken the industry to greater heights.

Vote now and help your favorite travel suppliers and agencies bring home the title of being the best in the travel industry.

[www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards](http://www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards)

**Closing Date: 15 July 2016**

An event by:



Organised by:



Supported by:



## Award Categories

### 1. Travel Agency Awards

Winners in this category are decided by votes from industry suppliers.

- Best Travel Agency – Australia
- Best Travel Agency – China
- Best Travel Agency – Chinese Taipei
- Best Travel Agency – Hong Kong
- Best Travel Agency – India
- Best Travel Agency – Indochina (Cambodia, Laos)
- Best Travel Agency – Indonesia
- Best Travel Agency – Japan
- Best Travel Agency – Malaysia
- Best Travel Agency – Singapore
- Best Travel Agency – South Korea
- Best Travel Agency – Thailand
- Best Travel Agency – The Philippines
- Best Travel Agency – Vietnam
- Best Corporate Travel Agency
- Best Online Travel Agency

### 2. Travel Supplier Awards

Winners in this category are decided by votes from travel consultants and experts.

#### Airline Awards

- Best North American Airline
- Best European Airline
- Best Middle Eastern Airline
- Best South-east Asian Airline
- Best North Asian Airline
- Best China Airline
- Best Pacific Airline
- Best Regional Airline
- Best Asian Low-Cost Carrier

#### Hotels, Resorts, Serviced Residences & Spa Awards

##### HOTEL Chains

- Best Global Hotel Chain
- Best Regional Hotel Chain
- Best Local Hotel Chain
- Best Hotel Representation Company
- Best Luxury Hotel Brand
- Best Mid-range Hotel Brand
- Best Budget Hotel Brand

##### HOTELS – Individual Property

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

##### RESORTS – Individual Property

- Best Beach Resort
- Best Resort Hotel (Non-Beach)
- Best New Beach Resort
- Best Integrated Resort

##### SERVICED RESIDENCES

- Best Serviced Residence Operator

##### SPAS

- Best Spa Operator

##### BT-MICE Awards

- Best Airline – Business Class
- Best Business Hotel
- Best Meetings & Conventions Hotel
- Best BT-MICE City
- Best Convention & Exhibition Centre
- Best Convention & Exhibition Bureau

##### Travel Services Awards

- Best Airport
- Best GDS
- Best Cruise Operator
- Best NTO
- Best Theme Attraction

### 3. Outstanding Achievement Awards

The winners in this category are decided by the TTG Asia editorial team.

- Travel Personality of the Year
- Destination of the Year
- Best Travel Entrepreneur
- Best Marketing & Relationship Effort
- Best Trade Supporter

### 4. Travel Hall of Fame

Honoring organisations that have won at least 10 consecutive years at the awards.

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

Inducted Travel Hall of Fame honourees are:

- Singapore Changi Airport (2002)
- Singapore Airlines (2002)
- Hertz Asia-Pacific (2005)
- Royal Cliff Hotels Group (2006)
- Star Cruises (2008)
- Abacus International (2009)
- Silkair (2010)
- Lotte Tour (2011)
- Hong Kong International Airport (2013)
- Raffles Hotel Singapore (2013)
- Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts (2015)
- Regal Airport Hotel (2015)
- Qatar Airways (2016)
- Thai Airways (2016)
- Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (2016)

# VOTING INSTRUCTIONS AND GUIDELINES

## For Travel Agency and Travel Supplier Awards

### 1. Please use the correct voting form.

#### Voting Form A: Travel Agency Awards

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

#### Voting Form B: Travel Supplier Awards

For voting by travel consultants, tour operators and destination management companies only.

Online Voting Forms

You can also opt to vote using our online form [www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards](http://www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards)

### 2. Voting Criteria

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

### 3. Voting Rules

- Only one voting entry per person is allowed – using the voting form or online voting.
- All votes are confidential.
- Voting forms are published in selected TTG Travel Trade Publishing print titles and issues and are also available online at [www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards](http://www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards)

- No responsibility will be accepted by the organisers for voting forms lost, delayed or damaged in the post.
- There are no pre-nominated contenders for any voting awards.
- The results for TTG Travel Awards 2016 are final and no correspondence will be entertained.
- Voting forms will be tabulated and evaluated by an independent auditor in Singapore.
- Voting Closes 15 July 2016.

### 4. Voting Form Submission

Completed voting forms are to be returned to:

#### SINGAPORE

**Ms Lina Tan** (TTG Travel Awards 2016)  
TTG Asia Media  
1 Science Park Road #04-07 The Capricorn  
Singapore Science Park II  
Singapore 117528  
Tel: (65) 6395-7575 Fax: (65) 6536-0896

#### HONG KONG

**Ms Carol Cheng** (TTG Travel Awards 2016)  
TTG Asia Media  
8/F, E168, 166-168 Des Voeux Road Central,  
Sheung Wan, Hong Kong  
Tel: (852) 2237-7272 Fax: (852) 2237 7227

## VOTING FORM A: TRAVEL AGENCY AWARDS

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

**VOTE ONLINE AT**  
[www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards](http://www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards)

#### Criteria

Best Travel Agency in its respective category in terms of:

- Professionalism and excellence in staff.
- Best value-added services to client.
- Best use of computer technology applications to help improve efficiency and effectiveness in services provided to client.

- Best Travel Agency – Australia
- Best Travel Agency – China
- Best Travel Agency – Chinese Taipei
- Best Travel Agency – Hong Kong
- Best Travel Agency – India
- Best Travel Agency – Indochina (Cambodia, Laos)
- Best Travel Agency – Indonesia
- Best Travel Agency – Japan
- Best Travel Agency – Malaysia
- Best Travel Agency – Singapore
- Best Travel Agency – South Korea
- Best Travel Agency – Thailand
- Best Travel Agency – The Philippines
- Best Travel Agency – Vietnam
- Best Corporate Travel Agency  
Best travel agency specialising in serving the needs of corporate travellers.

### 16. Best Online Travel Agency

Best online-based travel agency offering the most user-friendly and effective interface to meet client needs. This online travel agency must also boast the best sales and marketing network in terms of service innovation.

VOTER INFORMATION

Name:	<input type="text"/>	Passport no.:	<input type="text"/>
Job title:	<input type="text"/>	Company:	<input type="text"/>
Address:	<input type="text"/>		
Country:	<input type="text"/>		
Telephone no.:	<input type="text"/>	Fax no.:	<input type="text"/>
Email:	<input type="text"/>	Signature:	<input type="text"/>

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

**VOTING CLOSES**  
**15 JULY 2016**

# VOTING FORM B: TRAVEL SUPPLIER AWARDS

VOTE ONLINE AT  
[www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards](http://www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards)

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

## Airline Awards

### Criteria

Best airline in its respective category in terms of:

- Providing the best service, network and schedules.
- Most agent-friendly in terms of reservations, confirmations and commission payments.
- Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas, incentive programmes and servicing.

17. Best **North American** Airline  
Best airline based in North America operating Asia-Pacific routes.
18. Best **European** Airline  
Best airline based in Europe operating Asia-Pacific routes.
19. Best **Middle Eastern** Airline  
Best airline based in Middle East operating Asia-Pacific routes.
20. Best **South-east Asian** Airline  
Best airline based in Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, The Philippines, Singapore, Thailand or Vietnam operating Asia-Pacific routes.
21. Best **North Asian** Airline  
Best airline based in South Korea, Japan, Chinese Taipei, Macau or Hong Kong operating Asia-Pacific routes.
22. Best **China** Airline  
Best airline based in China operating Asia-Pacific routes.
23. Best **Pacific** Airline  
Best airline based in the Pacific operating Asia-Pacific routes.
24. Best **Regional** Airline  
Best airline based regionally operating Asia-Pacific routes.
25. Best **Asian Low-cost Carrier**  
Best airline based in Asia-Pacific that operates on a low-cost strategy.

## Hotels, Resorts, Serviced Residences & Spa Awards

### Criteria

Best Hotel Chain in its respective category in terms of:

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

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

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

### HOTEL CHAINS

26. Best **Global** Hotel Chain  
Best hotel chain operating a network of properties globally.
27. Best **Regional** Hotel Chain  
Best hotel chain operating a network of properties in the region.
28. Best **Local** Hotel Chain  
Best hotel chain operating a network of properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.
29. Best **Hotel Representation Company**  
Best company providing the most agent-friendly products and services and showing the best marketing effort in generating sales for member hotels via agents.
30. Best **Luxury** Hotel Brand  
Best hotel chain operating a network of luxurious properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.
31. Best **Mid-range** Hotel Brand  
Best hotel chain operating a network of mid-range properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.
32. Best **Budget** Hotel Brand  
Best hotel chain operating a network of economical properties within any one Asia-Pacific country.

### HOTELS – Individual Property

33. Best **Luxury** Hotel  
Best hotel catering to the upmarket traveller. This hotel must also boast the best visual appeal and ambience reflecting upmarket status.
34. Best **Mid-range** Hotel  
Best mid-range hotel catering to the traveller who seeks three- to four-star quality and comfort.
35. Best **Budget** Hotel  
Best hotel catering to the budget traveller.
36. Best **Independent** Hotel  
Best non-chain (ie not part of a network of properties) hotel.
37. Best **Boutique** Hotel  
Best small, fashionable and unique hotel.
38. Best **City Hotel – Bangkok**
39. Best **City Hotel – Delhi**
40. Best **City Hotel – Hanoi/Ho Chi Minh City**
41. Best **City Hotel – Jakarta**
42. Best **City Hotel – Hong Kong**
43. Best **City Hotel – Kuala Lumpur**
44. Best **City Hotel – Macau**
45. Best **City Hotel – Manila**
46. Best **City Hotel – Seoul**
47. Best **City Hotel – Singapore**
48. Best **City Hotel – Taipei**
49. Best **City Hotel – Tokyo**

50. Best **New City** Hotel  
Best city hotel that opened in 2015/2016

51. Best **Airport** Hotel  
Best hotel – located within the vicinity of an airport – that caters to travellers in transit.

### RESORTS – Individual Property

52. Best **Beach** Resort  
Best resort located by a beach. This resort must also boast the best visual appeal and ambience reflecting local flavour.
53. Best **Resort** Hotel (Non-Beach)  
Best resort not located by a beach. This resort must also boast the best visual appeal and ambience reflecting local flavour.
54. Best **New Beach** Resort  
Best beach resort that opened in 2015/2016
55. Best **Integrated** Resort  
Best hotel offering comprehensive accommodation, shopping, dining, entertainment and sports.

### SERVICED RESIDENCES

56. Best **Serviced Residence** Operator  
Best serviced property catering to mid- and long-term staying guests.

### SPAS

57. Best **Spa** Operator  
Best managed and operated spa or network of spas in the region.

## BT-MICE Awards

### Criteria

- Best services and facilities catering specifically to the BT-MICE market.
  - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing the BT-MICE market.
  - Most desirable and attractive incentives and value added services to business travellers and MICE planners.
58. Best **Airline – Business Class**  
Best business class airline across the board.  
Refer to Airline Criteria.
  59. Best **Business** Hotel  
Best hotel catering to the business traveller.  
Refer to Hotel Criteria.
  60. Best **Meetings & Conventions** Hotel  
Best hotel catering to meeting and convention needs.  
Refer to Hotel Criteria.
  61. Best **BT-MICE City**  
The city most friendly and desirable to business travellers and for MICE planners to host their events.
  62. Best **Convention & Exhibition** Centre
    - Best facilities.
    - Best value for money.
    - Most flexible in catering to MICE planners.
    - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.
  63. Best **Convention & Exhibition Bureau**
    - Most efficient, flexible and friendly in terms of response to enquiries and information.
    - Most effective in raising awareness of MICE at government and community levels.
    - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

## Travel Services Awards

### Criteria

- Best product, services and facilities
  - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.
64. Best **Airport**
    - Best facilities.
    - Most user-friendly, efficient and hassle-free immigration.
    - Most organised baggage claim.
    - Best planned floor layout, with easy ground access.
  65. Best **GDS (Global Distribution System)**
    - Most comprehensive network offering ease of operation and user friendliness.
    - Most efficient and reliable system.
  66. Best **Cruise Operator**
    - Best product in terms of service, routes and schedules.
    - Best onboard programme and facilities.
    - Most agent-friendly in terms of reservations, confirmations and commission payments.
    - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas, incentive programmes and servicing.
  67. Best **NTO (National Tourism Organisation)**
    - Most efficient, flexible and friendly in terms of response to enquiries and information.
    - Most effective in raising awareness of tourism at government and community levels.
    - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.
  68. Best **Theme Attraction**
    - Best ambience.
    - Best facilities and services.
    - Most professional sales and marketing team in terms of innovative ideas and servicing.

VOTER INFORMATION

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

VOTING CLOSES  
**15 JULY 2016**



## The Smartest Choice for Your Hotel Investment



**For more information:**

[bestwesterndevelopers.com](http://bestwesterndevelopers.com) | [asiadevelopment@bestwestern.com](mailto:asiadevelopment@bestwestern.com)

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