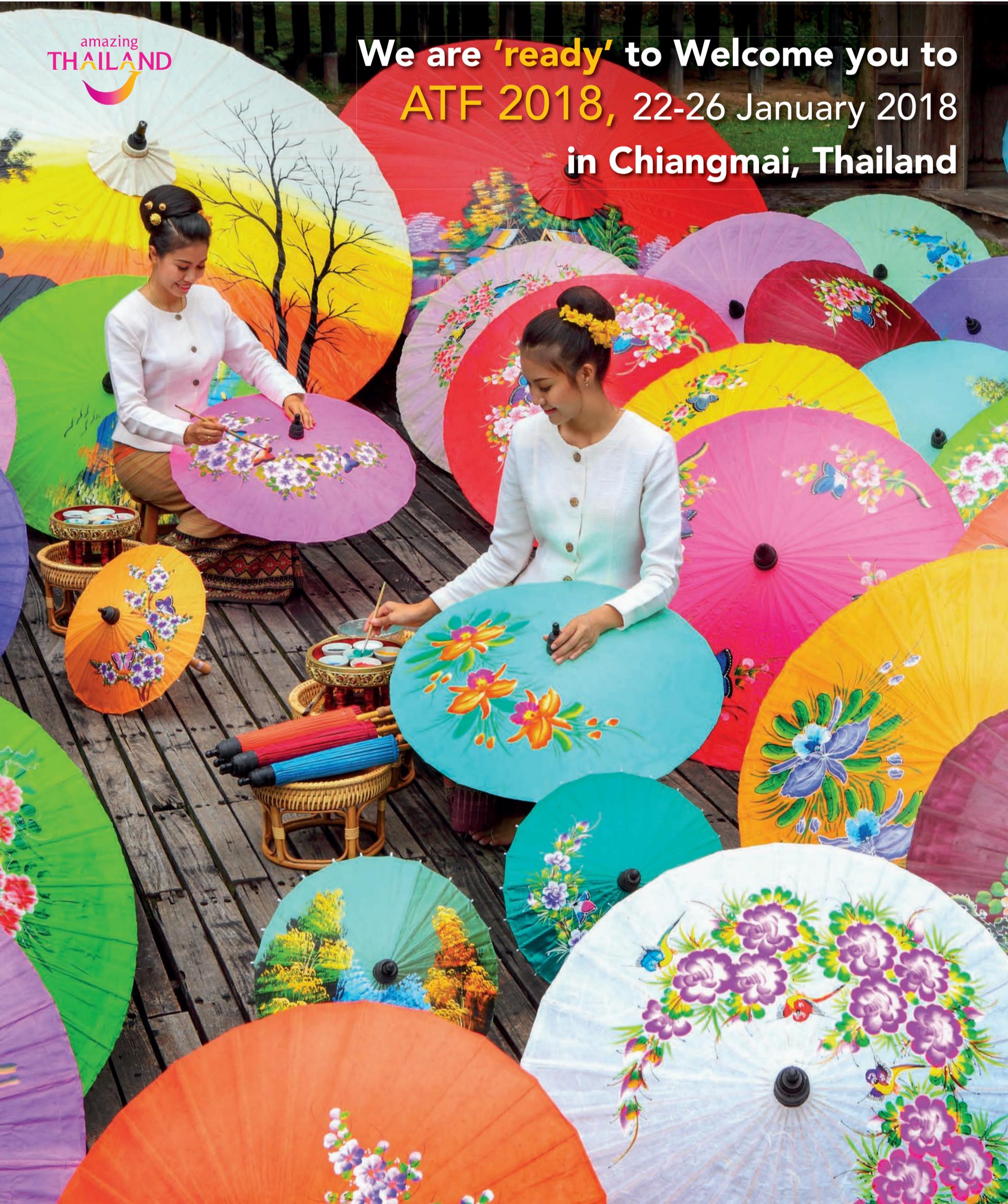




ATF 2017
January 18, 2017
Singapore



We are 'ready' to Welcome you to
ATF 2018, 22-26 January 2018
in Chiangmai, Thailand



YOU'D NEVER SMILE THAT MUCH ELSEWHERE

It's hard to find another place on Earth that delights every visitor as much as Thailand does, given the land's ever-smiling people, authentic cultures, diverse attractions, packed calendar of events and much, much more. Here's the lowdown.



Unique Local Experiences

Boasting six key regions, Thailand is a multi-purpose destination that caters well to the varied needs of visitors.

Take, for instance, **Thai cuisine**. Gourmands all over the world appreciate Thai food for its variety, be it sweet or savoury, fine dining or street fare, fusion or royal. Most Thai recipes involve a mix of different cultures, specific ingredients, and traditional cooking techniques. To better understand the Thai gastronomic culture, visitors can enroll in a half-day cooking class, which could include visiting a fresh market, picking herbs and spices, and learning to carve vegetables for decoration.

Sheer Thainess is also reflected in its **wellness and spa** options. No trip to Thailand would be complete without a go for the Kingdom's traditional spa and massage. Slather your face and body with the beneficial black mud at Phuklon, in Mae Hong Son, or have a dip in the mineral bath, swimming pool and Jacuzzi. Experience a unique therapeutic massage given by feet dipped in an herbal concoction, at Ban Rai Kong Khing in Hang Dong district. Want an alternative kind of sauna? Then go sit in a bamboo-woven chicken coop at Ban Chang Tune Community, sticking only your head out while the herbal vapor within gives your body a good steam. Meditation retreats and courses are also widely available for spiritual treatments.

Also top-of-mind is all that shopping available not just at the city malls but also at Thailand's **distinct night markets**. Shops and stalls lining both sides of the long **Tha Phae Walking Street** in Chiang Mai, for instance, showcase northern art and craftsmanship in handicrafts of all sorts, while amateurish artists paint portraits of visitors and street performers liven up the atmosphere. The **Kad Kong Ta Walking Street** in Lampang, commonly known as TalatJeen or Chinese market, features century-old, colonial-style buildings and wooden shop houses. Find here clothes, bags, shoes, accessories and handicrafts, including Lampang's most famous ceramics, as well as food stalls offering the assorted savory and sweet treats.

Thailand charms many with its **pristine beaches and islands** as well. Clear water, colourful marine life, talcum-soft sand, and swaying coconut trees provide an ultra-relaxing getaway. Adrenaline-pumping activities include jet skiing, parasailing, kite boarding, kayaking, surfing, and even rock climbing up a limestone cliff. The **Pranburi Estuary** in Prachuap Khiri Khan is dotted with boutique resorts, holiday homes, fishing villages and local seafood restaurants and boasts a forest park and scenic mangrove river. **Yao Noi Island** in Phangnga offers a homestay with a local family, who will take visitors to floating fish and lobster farms, rubber plantations, paddy fields by the sea and nearby islands; visitors also get to fish for squid at night, cook local sweets, make batik, and tie and dye fabric with natural colours.

For couples tying the knot, a classic **Thai-style wedding** ceremony will add to the once-in-a-lifetime experience. The **Lanna-style** wedding observed in the North begins with a Khan Maak procession, where the dowry, flowers and banana trees are carried to the bride's house by the groom and his relatives. The shaman will chant a prayer in the local Lanna dialect to call upon the guardian spirits' blessings to the couple. Another ritual is performed to cast away any bad luck before the elderly relatives guide the newlyweds to their bedroom. Add to that beautiful resorts and honeymoon getaways that make Thailand a perfect wedding destination.

Destination Within A Destination

Thailand's not all Bangkok. Travel up south and you'd be pleasantly surprised by yet another gem of the Kingdom – **Chiang Mai**. A little quieter and laid-back than Bangkok, this former capital of the Lanna Kingdom exudes both historical and modern Thai culture. Having once been the centre of Buddhism in northern Thailand, the old city houses centuries-old pagodas and temples alongside modern convenience stores and boutique hotels. Yet beyond beautiful and historic temples, visitors will also be intrigued by diverse ethnic tribes, numerous elephant camps, cooking and massage schools, outdoor activities, handicrafts workshops and cultural performances, as well as pristine mountains, waterfalls, and rivers.

Outdoor adventure seekers typically flock to Chiang Mai for its hill tribe trekking, which is often combined with river rafting and elephant riding. In recent years, innumerable activities and attractions have evolved both in the city and the surrounding province, including massage instruction, golf, and workshops where visitors can learn about silk or silver production and purchase hand-crafted souvenirs. An equally grand selection of dining and accommodation options tops all that up to complete a memorable Chiang Mai stay.

For recommendations on specific places to go, things to do, food to eat, ways to be a responsible traveller and more in charming Chiang Mai, visit Tourism Thailand website at <http://www.tourismthailand.org/About-Thailand/Destination/Chiang-Mai>

Eventful Year, Eventful Visit

Indeed, Thailand is the one place where it's totally legit for people to indulge in water splashing at one another without anyone ever getting offended. However, the Kingdom deserves to be known for more than just its famous Songkran Festival. Below is a quick list of all that will take place throughout 2017 – we can't apologise that you are spoilt for choice!

Thailand is the host country of ATF 2018 on 22-26 January 2018 in Chiang Mai, Thailand. For more information, visit website: www.atfthailand2018.com. Looking forward to welcome you soon.



JAN

The 14th Khon Kaen International Marathon

(www.khonkaenmarathon.com)
Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen Province

Chinese New Year Festival

(www.thaifest.org)
Throughout Thailand
Bangkok's Chinatown comes alive with a large-scale celebration, while the Nakohn Sawan Province is filled with parades, fireworks and community activities.

The 19th Amari Watergate & BMW Thailand Charity Midnight Run

(www.amari.com/watergate/charity-midnight-run.aspx)
Amari Watergate, Bangkok

Ayutthaya World Heritage and Red Cross Fair

Ayutthaya Historical Park

FEB

Trang Underwater Wedding Ceremony

(www.underwaterwedding.com)
Koh Kradan, Sikao District, Trang Province
Witness Buddhist rituals, pouring of lustrous water and escorting of the bride and groom to their suite by an elderly married couple.

Wedding Registration on Elephants

(www.thaifest.org)
Elephant Study Center, Tah Toom District, Surin Province

Honda LPGA Thailand

(www.lpgathailand.com)
Siam Country Club Pattaya Old Course, Pattaya, Chonburi Province

MAR

International Kite Festival

Petchaburi Province

Pattaya International Music Festival

Pattaya, Chonburi Province

World Wai Khru Muay Thai Ceremony

Ayutthaya Historical Park, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province
Thai and foreign boxers honour their teachers and exchange blows in a bid to become the real Muay Thai fighter.

ASEAN Barred Ground Dove Festival

Suan Kwan Muang, Muang District, Yala Province

APR

Songkran Festival

Throughout Thailand
Thailand's traditional New Year showcases various activities reflecting Buddhist influences and the Thai way of life.

MAY

Top of the Gulf Regatta International

Ocean Marina Yacht Club, Jomtien Beach, Chonburi Province

Thailand Music Festival

Cha-Am, Petchaburi Province

Yasothon Bun Bangfai Festival

Phaya Tan Park, Muang District, Yasothon Province
Watch processions, contests and the firing of rockets to ask the God of Rain for fertility in the coming planting season.

JUN

The 11th Laguna Phuket International Marathon

(www.phuketmarathon.com)
Laguna Phuket Hotel, Phuket Province

Bun Luang and Phi Ta Khon Festival

Dan Sai District, Loei Province
A performance to worship the spirits and protectors of the villages for Buddhist merit-making.

Amazing Thailand Grand Sale

Throughout Thailand

JUL

The 25th Pattaya Marathon

Pattaya, Chonburi Province

Ubon Ratchathani Candle Festival

Muang District, Ubon Ratchathani Province
Huge carved candles are prepared by the locals from the Buddhist temples and paraded through the city.

AUG

Thai Silk

Bangkok
Traditional Thai fabrics unique to each region are displayed.

SEP

International Food Festival

Phuket Province
Thai food and cooking process authentic to each region gets showcased.

Long Boat Racing

Throughout Thailand

OCT

Phuket Vegetarian Festival

Phuket Province
Devotees at Chinese temples walk barefooted on burning coals and ascend ladders with bladed rungs.

Nakhon Phanom Illuminated Boat Procession

Muang District, Nakhon Phanom

Tour De Thailand

Phuket Province

NOV

Loi Krathong Festival

Throughout Thailand
Watch the Noppamas beauty pageants, traditional performances and people floating krathongs to pay respect to the river spirits.

Laguna Phuket Triathlon

Laguna Beach Resort, Phuket Province

Surin Elephant Round-Up

Surin Elephant Performance Ground and Si Narong Stadium, Muang District, Surin Province

The 28th Standard Chartered Bangkok Marathon

(www.bkkmarathon.com)
Sanam Chai Road located at the east side of the Grand Palace, Bangkok

DEC

Happiness Festival

Bangkok
Join the locals in welcoming the New Year with Buddhist prayers, spectacular fireworks and live entertainment.

The 10th Chiang Mai Marathon

(Email: bkk@ChiangMaiMarathon.com)
Muang District, Chiang Mai Province

Jet Ski King's Cup – World Cup Grand Prix

Pattaya, Chonburi Province

New Year Countdown Celebrations

Throughout Thailand
Sanam Chai Road located at the east side of the Grand Palace, Bangkok



A long journey
that isn't short on sensations
Indulging my mind, body and soul
with a massage session
aboard a floating spa.



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Singapore

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GOLDEN CELEBRATION 2017

MICE, a new darling for ASEAN

The overlooked segment will get a regional venue standard and MICE focus at ATF 2018

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena and Marissa Carruthers

The MICE industry is finally getting its attention at the regional level, with ASEAN member states placing increasing attention and rolling out concerted efforts to develop the sector further.

Wiparat Thara-teerapab, director, government and corporate affairs department, Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (TCEB), said: "In the past, ASEAN governments are more focused on leisure tourism (but there are many hotels and venues with events facilities, and many players in the MICE value chain."

Nichapa Yoswee, TCEB's director of MICE capabilities development department, told *TTG Show Daily*: "The existing Thailand MICE Venue Standard (TMVS), adapted from international ISO quality standards, is used to incentivise MICE operators to upgrade themselves. It already sees more than 400 meeting rooms certified in Thailand."

TMVS covers three categories – meeting rooms, exhibition venues and event events – with the meeting rooms standard being further divided into three groups

of hotels and resorts, convention centres and public facilities.

Thailand, as the ASEAN lead coordinator for MICE venues, will remodel TMVS for use at the regional level as the new ASEAN MICE Venue Standard (AVMS). According to Nichapa, the 45th



Nichapa: setting MICE standards

Meeting of ASEAN NTOs at ATF will see the adoption of AVMS' final version (in the category of meeting rooms in hotels) as well as its Audit and Certification Manual. ASEAN NTOs will discuss whether to expand the certification to exhibition venues or event venues next.

Following an audit training in March, auditors from each ASEAN member state will then nominate certified venues in their country for the first AVMS Awards at ATF 2018.

Nichapa hopes to get at least 10 nominees from each country. ATF 2018 will also see the launch of a MICE Forum, which will feature seminars and a small exhibition, according to Wiparat.

Meanwhile, Indonesia Ministry of Tourism, as the coordinator for Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professional (MRA-TPA), has drawn

up proposals to adopt and incorporate MICE competency standards at the ASEAN level. Ani Insani, director, tourism institutional relations at the Ministry of Tourism, said the standards will ensure the same experience at any 10 ASEAN countries.

The Philippines has also devoted more attention to MICE. Said Baby de Luna-Landan, who helms the MICE department at the Tourism Promotion Board: "MICE and Events Tourism is (one of the priorities) of the National Tourism Development Plan of the Philippine Department of Tourism."

To stay competitive, Singapore Tourism Board's Business Events in Singapore fund has been expanded to support industry-driven business development initiatives and provide funding for local association members to start lobbying activities prior to bidding for events. STB also recently collaborated

with CNN, Bloomberg and other online platforms to establish Singapore as a premier MICE hub anchored on thought leadership and business opportunities.

On the other hand, Manivong Sounh, director general of Laos' Tourism Marketing Department, says going niche is the way for the country to pursue its MICE ambitions. "We do not have the capacity or resources to cater to big events (so) we will focus on small-scale events and develop the relevant skills and knowledge," he said.

Lending a hand to Laos' MICE plans is the 2017 Mekong Tourism Forum (MTF), which will be organised by Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MCTO) in Luang Prabang this July. Said Jens Thraenhart, executive director of MCTO: "We wanted to look at how smaller destinations can compete with cities for big events, so we came up with the answer of (showcasing) experiential events at MTF."

We will focus on small-scale events and develop the relevant skills and knowledge.

Manivong Sounh
Director general, Tourism Marketing Department, Laos

Being disaster-ready is critical

By S Puvaneswary

A five-day disaster management training course will be held in June for trade participants from South-east Asia, to provide them with a solid understanding of national and institutional crisis.

A joint initiative by Federation of ASEAN Travel Agents (FATA) and ASEAN Tourism Association, the course will cover topics such as crisis and disaster management, identifying hazards, risk analysis and risk reduction procedures. Conducted by a consultant from Bournemouth University Disaster Management Centre and held in Kuala Lumpur, it will also have two exercises – one will be on evacuation response, while the second will be a planning exercise to help a fictitious country develop its disaster management plans. A follow-up session is being planned in 4Q2017 as well.



Rahmat: course is timely

FATA's president Hamzah Rahmat told *the Daily*: "We in the travel industry must know how to manage crisis such as earthquakes, floods, and airline disappearances like MH370."

Tam, Suzuki said: "As Daniel has a lot of regional management experience and expertise, I'm confident that he will be able to manage the additional role by working closely with the head office (Tour East Holdings). As for Francesca, the head office will provide her with JTB's higher management training course to enhance her management skills and provide day-to-day management support if necessary."

Tour East unfazed by resignations

By Raini Hamdi

Tour East Holdings does not see the departure of three of its senior management team as a blow, even though it risks losing accounts in the future as two of these leaders have joined competitor Diethelm Travel Group.

Industry members *TTG Show Daily* spoke to see the loss of Judy Lum in particular as a blow to the company because of the decades of relationship the former Tour East senior vice president sales & marketing – inter-

national has built with overseas tour operators, which reportedly made Singapore its second highest revenue earner after Australia.

Premier Holidays UK, which uses Tour East, said it does not have plans to change any of its ground agents and have contracts signed through to 2018.

"However, we do a review each year as standard procedure," said David Carlaw, head of long-haul product.

Lum, along with Yvonne Wong, former Tour East general manager Singapore, both served the company for around 30 years. Both have joined Diethelm

Travel Singapore, effective February 4, 2017, as general manager and business consultant respectively. Tour East also lost its general manager Malaysia, Stephen Chan.

The departure of these loyal leaders has caused the industry to speculate that a different culture, mindset and approach since JTB took over Tour East two years ago might be a reason.

Tour East Holdings CEO & president Shigeyuki Suzuki does not see the resignations as a blow.

When asked how the general managers are adapting to the new JTB ownership, Suzuki believes they are "on the same page in business direction and strategies".

He said: "I do not see a big difference in culture between the former management and us. Each company has its own corporate culture and strategy.

However, I think the ultimate goal for a DMC – i.e. to provide the best services and hospitality – is exactly the same even if a different approach is taken," he said.

Commenting on the loss of three leaders in a row, Suzuki said: "It happened by chance at the same time. Staff turnovers always happen in the industry and we simply adjust and adapt."

"As Tour East Singapore has more than 40 years of experience and have many talented staff, I'm confident that we can continue to promote Tour East as the number one DMC brand in Asia-Pacific (15 countries), and have a diversified client base and business portfolio."

Tour East has promoted its manager inbound Francesca Cheah to general manager of Malaysia. Daniel Tam, general manager of Tour East Hong Kong, is made concurrent chief of Tour East Singapore.

When asked what sort of support he would give to Cheah and

Tam, Suzuki said: "As Daniel has a lot of regional management experience and expertise, I'm confident that he will be able to manage the additional role by working closely with the head office (Tour East Holdings). As for Francesca, the head office will provide her with JTB's higher management training course to enhance her management skills and provide day-to-day management support if necessary."

Meanwhile, when contacted by the *Daily*, Lum said of her decision to leave Tour East: "It has been an amazing journey with Tour East. They are all set for the next phase while I am ready for my next challenge."

She added: "Together with Yvonne, our immediate task is to set up procedures and standards to make sure they are aligned with the rest of the Diethelm network. It's a young and small office and we've got to make sure they are ready for the expansion to come."



Staff turnovers always happen in the industry and we simply adjust and adapt.

Shigeyuki Suzuki
CEO & president, Tour East Holdings

News

Fears of UK sales slump 'deeply unfounded'

Opportunity for SE Asian operators to seize British outbound market

By Raini Hamdi

Despite the pound sterling taking a beating against major currencies, forward bookings from the UK market to South-east Asia are ahead of figures at the same time last year, allaying fears of a UK sales slump post-Brexit.

ForwardKeys CEO, Olivier Jager, said: "Looking at the UK bookings for travel to South-east Asia in 1H2017, we observe that leisure and group bookings to Malaysia are currently more than 80 per cent ahead of the equivalent time last year. Bookings to Indonesia for the same period in the same segments are currently more than 50 per cent ahead."

This peak winter season from January to March is also something to write home about, a check with UK tour operators shows. Darren Lancaster, director One World - Travel Sales & Marketing, said many UK operators are reporting stronger business, with some even expecting the peak booking period will lead to their best-ever summer arrivals in 2017.

"People in the UK are still

happy to spend money on leisure activities, including overseas holidays. They believe they work hard and therefore deserve to treat themselves. This shows that the fears of a post-Brexit UK sales slump are deeply unfounded," Lancaster said.

David Carlaw, head of longhaul product at Premier Holidays, has not seen any Brexit impact on winter booking patterns so far and tipped that destinations outside Europe might well see a demand spike as travellers decide to opt for destinations farther afield than traditional European resorts.

Lancaster added that Asia, already unrivalled in offering exceptional value, "now looks even better versus the European and Caribbean/North America destinations".

Tour operators said this is an opportunity for ASEAN NTOs to target a bigger share of the UK market, warning against complacency amid stiff destination marketing competition.

Carlaw said destinations with the most proactive NTOs and airlines will come up tops. "Thailand is our number one

seller, for example," he said.

Lancaster pointed to airlines' role: "Vietnam will continue to grow with VN flights switched to Heathrow on newer planes, and the 'city and beach' FIT market to central Vietnam via Danang will increase steadily on the back of direct flights from Bangkok.

"Similarly Qatar's new route into Krabi will develop growth in the south of Thailand. Bali is also doing well as the traditional 'bottleneck' when flying via Singapore is now eased with more indirect flights via the Middle East, plus Garuda's service from Heathrow via Jakarta."

Amid the prevalent optimism, David Kevan, director of Chic Locations, warned against "perennial blue skies thinking", as British holidaymakers will now exercise more frugality in their decision making.

"Clients used to travelling in the winter will not suddenly switch to summer, but they will consider March rather than February if there is a rate reduction – typically this happens in Phuket, for example. Repeat clients will find the garden view just as attractive as the ocean view, but a free upgrade would be kindly accepted," he said.

New Clark hub brings fresh destination pairings

By Rosa Ocampo

The emergence of Clark International Airport as a secondary air hub in the Philippines is opening up new business opportunities for travel suppliers in pairing destinations in the country.

Due to runway congestion at Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA), Philippine Airlines (PAL) was forced to start flying from Clark to Caticlan (Boracay) last December, followed by Incheon this month and soon Davao.

Qatar Airways returned to Clark recently with a daily flight to Doha, following the lead of Emirates which has been flying from Dubai to Cebu via Clark since last year. Both also fly from NAIA.

Cebu Pacific, meanwhile, has existing flights from Clark to Hong Kong and Macau.

Travel experts consultant Arnie Bayag told *TTG Show Daily* that increased domestic and regional flights via Clark present new business opportunities as travellers from Central and Northern Luzon need not pass through Manila anymore.

Bayag said he will look into developing packages covering destinations that PAL flies to from Clark, which can include Caticlan to enable passengers to

connect directly to Cebu.

Bayag thinks access through Clark will prove popular as the city is "green, with good hotels and restaurants".

Vic Chan, general manager of the new Midori Clark Hotel and Casino, is discussing with travel consultants the possibility of creating hotel and tour packages combining Manila for shopping, Clark for staycation, Subic for golf and adventure, for instance.

Chan said Clark Freeport Zone is fast developing as a tourist and business destination and more investments will flow in as the Philippine economy remains robust, underscoring the importance of air links and transport infrastructure in the area's tourism development.

Sabina Pe, managing director of Bridges Travel and Tours, said her Manila clients prefer Clark airport over NAIA as the former is more relaxed and convenient with free shuttle service provided from TriNoma (Quezon City) to the airport.

Pe also said that it is hard to get a seat from Manila to Europe and other destinations, so Clark is proving to be a better option especially as Qatar Airways has an ongoing promotions at Clark.



Jager: UK outbound travel not inhibited



Chan: more creative packages underway

More Singapore arrivals to Myanmar likely with visa waiver

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

A new visa exemption between Singapore and Myanmar, in place since last December, is likely to increase Singapore footfalls to Myanmar, predict travel specialists.

The new visa scheme allows citizens of both countries to cross each other's borders without a visa for up to 30 days.

Chan Brothers Singapore's spokesperson Joyce Tan said the visa exemption makes travel to Myanmar more convenient and expects demand growth to exceed the agency's 30 per cent

year-on-year growth rate from two to three years back.

While Yangon remains the most popular destination in Myanmar for Singaporeans, Tan said other cities are gaining attention. As such, Chan Brothers is offering new packages that take travellers deeper into the country.

Tan said: "We see cities like Mandalay, Bagan and the less explored regions of Inle Lake gaining interest. More travellers are looking to explore off-the-beaten-track destinations as they provide a more authentic experience."

While Dynasty Travel Singapore has yet to see a surge in leisure bookings for Myanmar, spokesperson Alicia Seah believes that the "greater ease and convenience" accorded to travellers by the visa waiver will benefit Singapore businessmen bound for the destination.

Seah is also certain that improved air access coming on

the back of the visa waiver will make the destination appealing to a wider audience. Currently,

Myanmar tends to attract older, well-heeled Singaporeans.

Myanmar National Airlines has launched additional services on its Singapore-Yangon route in the same month the visa waiver came into force.

Edwin Briels, managing director of Khiri Travel Myanmar and an executive committee member of Myanmar Tourism Marketing (MTM), a private sector destination marketer, told *TTG Show Daily* that requests for school group tours from Singapore are up, although it is still too early to assess the full impact of the visa exemption.

To stoke further interest in Myanmar, MTM is participating in tradeshow and supporting events in Singapore to showcase the country's food and culture.



Briels: keener interest from schools

WHAT'S HOT TODAY



ATF 2017 Opening Gala

This by-invitation-only event at Shangri-La Hotel Singapore's elegant Island Ballroom will not only mark the official opening of this year's ATF, but will also launch the *Visit ASEAN@50 Golden Celebration* campaign.

• 17.30 to 21.30 • Shangri-La Hotel Singapore, Island Ballroom

www.ttgasia.com



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18% According to Myanmar Tourism Marketing, more than 32,000 Singaporeans visited Myanmar as of August 2016, up 18 per cent from the same period in 2015.

43,000 For the whole year of 2015, 43,000 Singaporeans visited Myanmar.

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News

Agents in tight fix over cash crunch

India's demonetisation move stymies winter outbound travel, casts long shadow on traffic to Malaysia



By S Puvaneswary and Rohit Kaul

India's surprise demonetisation of its Rs500 (US\$7.35) and Rs1,000 bills in November 2016 has rattled the travel trade, as inbound and outbound travellers grapple with a cash crisis that sees no respite in sight.

The sudden move by the Indian government to crack down on corruption, counterfeit currency and black money has effectively made 85 per cent of India's cash illegal tender overnight while the circulation of the new Rs500 rupee and Rs2,000 bank notes have lagged behind demand.

The liquidity crunch has badly hit Indian outbound sector. Hitank Shah, Gujarat's chapter chairman of Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI), said: "Demonetisation has affected travel industry adversely with business down by 30 to 40 per cent."

To address the issue, the Gujarat chapter has inked a MoU with a private bank to facilitate travel loans for customers of TAFI members. "We expect the move will help to boost business of our members who are fledgling post demonetisation," added Shah.

Ashwani Sharma, CEO, Sheraton Travels, said: "In the mean time, outbound tourism is suffering from the demonetisation move. The leisure market especially has not taken the announcement positively."

For the recent year-end travel season, Rakshit Desai, managing director at India's FCM Travel Solutions, saw Indian travellers cancelling their long-haul plans to destinations such as the US and Europe in favour for countries nearer home.

The ripple effects of India's demonetisation move are also felt in South-east Asia. Malaysian inbound agents have been caught in a bind over this, with Andy Yow, director of sales and marketing at Vivanta by Taj - Rebek Island Langkawi, seeing a 10 per cent year-on-year drop in bookings from India in November and December 2016.

Leisure tourists from India

have also shortened their stay to two nights from three nights, added Yow, which he attributes to travellers exercising greater caution in spending amid the current cash crunch.

"Our business was badly hit during the Indian peak travel season in November and December 2016. We were down around 30 per cent year-on-year," said Arokia Das, senior manager at Luxury Tours Malaysia, who still expects a 20 per cent year-on-year drop in 1Q2017 business.

He noted: "Three-star hotel packages are currently selling better than four- and five-star properties. Indian holidaymakers are being thrifty as they don't know how long this issue will persist."

"We are trying to make up for the revenue shortfall by intensifying efforts to get more regional business. There is a host of air connectivity options from LCCs linking South-east

Asia's capital and secondary cities to Kuala Lumpur.

"However, yield is minimal compared with the Indian market who purchases fully loaded tour packages. South-east Asian travellers prefer to sightsee and move on their own, rather than rely on a travel agent."

Another Malaysian inbound agent, Nanda Kumar, managing director at Hidden Asia Travel & Tours, said Indian FITs business was down 40 per cent during the peak travel season in December while five incentive travel groups from India had postponed their trips in December 2016 to 1Q2017 due to payment issues.

Kumar told *TTG Show Daily* that Hidden Asia has since extended credit terms for some Indian business partners from 30 days to 60 days, and he hopes the demonetisation storm will pass before the Indian peak summer travel season starts in April.

Three-star hotel packages are currently selling better than four- and five-star properties. Indian holidaymakers are being thrifty as they don't know how long this (cash crunch) will persist.

Arokia Das

Senior manager, Luxury Tours Malaysia

Kuoni contract manager Asia leaves and goes on his own

By Raini Hamdi

Kuoni UK contracts manager-Asia, Australasia, Cruise, Darren Lancaster, has left the company after a decade to set up his own company, One World - Travel Sales & Marketing.

Lancaster said of his move: "I was with Kuoni for 10 years, primarily contracting Asia on behalf of Kuoni UK, but also within that three years were spent contracting additionally on behalf of the other European outbound Kuoni offices. As such, I have a wide spread of knowledge of the European market to Asia."

"Kuoni is a great company that has taught me so much, so it was a very hard decision to leave. But after 10 years there I decided that I wanted to put the knowledge that I had built up contracting Asia to wider use."

"In effect this means I no longer work to grow business to Asia for just one outbound operator, but instead I work hand in hand with many operators across the UK to support them in growing their business to Asia."

Being on his own also means he can have control over choice of partners, working with those that appeal to the UK and European markets.

Lancaster said: "If I don't think a partner is right for the UK and European markets, I will advise them so and not take their money. Secondly, running my own

company gives me the freedom to direct the future size and shape of the company in the way I want it, at the pace I want it."

Currently, these partners include The Diamond Cliff Resort & Spa, Phuket; The Soori Bali, The Elysian and the Bulgari Resort Bali; and Naman Retreat in Vietnam. But Lancaster is particularly keen to grow his company's presence in Thailand, thanks to "a long history of very productive and profitable relationships between partners and UK-based representatives."

"I also plan to expand the representation outside of the UK, to include more European source markets. This will allow me to deliver a more co-ordinated pan-European approach to my clients, which they have been asking for already," he told *TTG Show Daily*.



Lancaster: putting his Asian expertise to greater use

As Diamond Cliff Resort & Spa is at ATF, 2017 he will be joining many of its meetings with European buyers.

"I have also (several) meetings lined up with potential new partners from across the region. Additionally, as Asia never stands still, ATF is a great opportunity to learn about new destinations, products and services plus gather and swap information with suppliers and buyers alike on current market trends and business projections for the future," he said.

Meanwhile, Jennie Moore has replaced Lancaster at Kuoni UK.

First seed planted for new Mandai nature precinct project



From left: Mandai Park Holdings' Mike Barclay and S Dhanabalan, Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore's S Iswaran, Temasek Holdings' Lim Boon Heng and Mandai Park Holdings' Philip Yim

A ground-seeding ceremony on Monday, attended by Singapore's minister for trade and industry (industry), S Iswaran, has marked the launch of Mandai Park Holdings' (MPH) Mandai rejuvenation project.

MPH will be augmenting the existing Singapore Zoo, River Safari and Night Safari in Singapore's north with the addition of a new Bird Park (by 2020), a Rainforest Park (by 2021), a nature-themed indoor attraction and eco-accommodation options.

"Reviews and discussions on Mandai's rejuvenation have been going on for sev-

eral years with various stakeholders. With the necessary government approvals now obtained, we are delighted to mark this milestone with our partners today", said MPH chairman, S Dhanabalan.

The future Mandai nature precinct will be connected by enhanced public spaces, walking trails and boardwalks along the edge of the Upper Seletar Reservoir, using impacted land outside the Central Catchment Nature Reserve and part of Mandai's three existing nature parks. Development will be completed in phases.



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Immerse in the wealth of history that Melaka - a UNESCO world heritage site has to offer with Park Hotel Melaka. Located in the heart of Kota Laksamana's entertainment and business district, the 245-key hotel is near to the vibrant Jonker Walk and many famous attractions. When it opens in 2019, the hotel would also feature two dining outlets, an infinity pool, a sauna, gymnasium, business centre and meeting rooms.

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PARK HOTEL GROUP

News

Tourasia taps Polish market to ASEAN

Tourasia has set up shop in Poland, a market rife with opportunities for outbound travel to South-east Asia

By Raini Hamdi

TOURASIA, one of Switzerland's major specialised tour operators to Asia, expects to produce more arrivals from Poland to South-east Asia this year, having opened a subsidiary in Warsaw last month on December 1.

Managing director Stephan Roemer noted that four out of five most popular Asian destinations for Polish, in arrivals figures, are in South-east Asia. The top five, in order, are Thailand, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Singapore and Indonesia (Bali).

"If you look at the official figures there are considerable increases, particularly to Thailand and Sri Lanka. They report increases of high double digits," he said.

"Poland is a young market

with growth potential. The population is 40 million and at present, 10-20 per cent have the comparable buying power of a market like Germany. That equals to a market size of four to eight million potential travellers. The number of travellers is growing. The annual growth in GDP is approximately four per cent, among the highest in Europe," Roemer assessed.



Roemer: eye on luxe and tourist classes

Though young, Roemer said Polish are seasoned travellers who want to go farther. Tourasia is targeting the luxury segment with its refined concierge service, own deluxe vehicles and innovative roundtrips. But it will also have "an adequate offer for the tourist class segment", he said.

Its new office, centrally located in Warsaw, is manned

by four staff, led by Piotr Chojnowski, whose career rose from product director at TUI Poland to CEO of Onholidays before joining Tourasia.

"We are setting up our infrastructure and will start the promotions and sales in spring (March/April)," said Roemer.

This isn't the first time Tourasia operates in foreign markets. The company also owns Tischler Reisen in Germany, another major specialised tour operator to Asia.

In Asia, Tourasia operates its own network of DMCs in Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines under the name All Asia Exclusive, which also cater to Asian outbound markets. Presently it employs 32 employees in Switzerland and over 140 in Asia.

Tourasia is represented at this ATF by its product director Marcel Götz.



Initiatives shore up arrivals into Sihanoukville

By Marissa Carruthers

EFFORTS to spur international arrivals to Cambodia's Sihanoukville are starting to pay off, say trade players in the country.

Last January, Cambodia Airports started offering airlines cash incentives of US\$10 per passenger – capped at US\$1,000 per flight – on international scheduled flights departing Sihanoukville International Airport.

This "proved successful in attracting new airlines" as passengers landing at the airport grew 65 per cent in 2016, said Cambodia Airports spokesman, Khek Norinda. The scheme has been extended by another year.

National carrier Cambodia Angkor Air took full advantage

of the scheme to launch flights from Ho Chi Minh City in June 2016, Norinda shared.

As well, Tianjin Airlines launched flights to Sihanoukville in December, adding to its connections from Xi'an and Beijing launched in September.

Meanwhile, there are plans to double airport capacity to 500,000 passengers per year, and several casino developments are underway.

Mick Spencer, owner of Ana Travel & Tours, said: "The airport expansion is to accommodate an anticipated influx of casino-loving travellers from China," while the arrivals from Europe has remained stable in recent years.



Subang SkyPark Terminal

Subang SkyPark expands

By S Puvaneswary

A SECOND terminal that exclusively serves international routes is planned for Subang SkyPark, with works scheduled to begin by 1Q2017 and be completed 20 months later.

The new terminal will be located on the site of the former Immigration Department Building in Subang, adjacent to the current terminal.

Francis Anthony, senior vice president at Subang SkyPark, elaborated: "The vacant building will be torn down to build the international terminal, which will also be equipped with immigration facilities. The present terminal will then be converted to handle only domestic traffic."

Ravindran Menon, executive director at Subang SkyPark, added that the present terminal has reached its maximum annual handling capacity of three million passengers.

"Once the new terminal is ready, we can handle up to five million passengers in total between the two terminals," he said.

Both terminals will only serve turboprop aircraft. Currently, a fleet of 30 turboprops from both Malindo Air and Firefly airlines use Subang SkyPark terminal, which provides convenient access to those living in the Klang Valley, and is an alternative to Kuala Lumpur International Airport or its low-cost terminal, klia2.

Accessibility to Subang SkyPark will be further improved when commuter rail services – linking KL Sentral transport hub to Subang SkyPark – begin in 2Q2017. This marks a significant improvement in rail accessibility as KL Sentral is an important transportation hub, linking commuter and intercity train services, as well as bus services to the capital city.

IN BRIEF

Raffles icon turns 130

Singapore's Raffles Hotel will celebrate 130 years with a restoration project. Phase one begins mid-February on the Raffles Hotel Arcade, and the second phase starts mid-August on some suites. The hotel will close for the final phase late this year, with a grand reopening planned for mid-2018.

Anniversary events include the Walk of Fame History tours (February-August) and gala dinner.

Vietjet commences HCMC-Taichung service

With the launch of the Ho Chi Minh City-Taichung route on January 17, Vietjet now serves more destinations in Taiwan than any other budget airline.

The service departs Ho Chi Minh City four times a week at 10.25 and arrives at Taichung Airport at 14.45. On the return leg, it departs at 15.45 and lands in Ho Chi Minh City at 18.00.



CRAFTING A MEMORY WITH NEEDLE AND THREAD

Fuchsia Lane, a womenswear label, took on a bold challenge by Singapore Tourism Board to design a shirt for ministers and heads of state attending ATF 2017. Designer Vivienne Ong-Lin and her team, spent a month visiting the Peranakan museum and shophouses, talking to artisans and poring over historical books for research and inspiration. The result was a shirt with a simple Mandarin collar, sleeves piped with Batik trim and simple embroidery of orchid blossoms and buds on the left side of the front yolk. For female ministers, soft crepe scarves in lilac and with rich embroidery were created.

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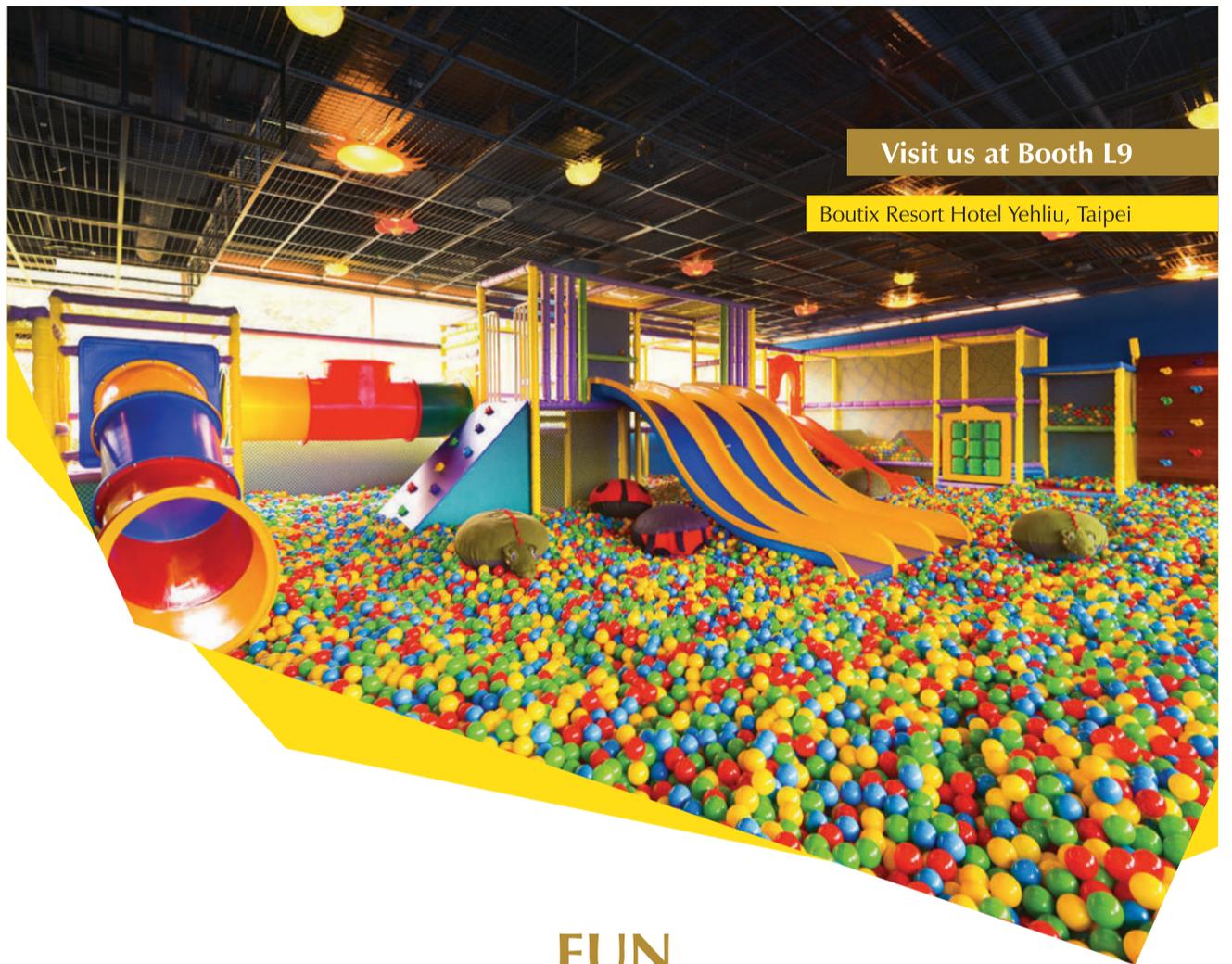
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ASEAN @ 50

The bloc's driving forces

Tourism chiefs in South-east Asia reveal their plans for ASEAN's Golden Jubilee in the second of this three-part special.

By TTG Show Daily reporters

Laos



Saly Phimphith
Director general, tourism marketing and promotion department, Ministry of Information Culture and Tourism

Is your country ready for Visit ASEAN@50 campaign?

Laos strongly supports this milestone event. During the ASEAN Summit held in Vientiane in September 2016, the logo of the Visit ASEAN@50 campaign was officially launched by leaders of the 10 ASEAN countries.

We are doing our best to promote and implement the relevant activities in our country.

What is being done?

We are working with the industry to improve service quality with the aim of realising ASEAN standards in the tourism sector. In addition, we are working with travel agents to promote and sell South-east Asian tour packages, particularly those that combine neighbouring countries.

How significant is Visit ASEAN@50 to your country and what do you hope to achieve from it?

Nowadays, international tourists want to visit more than one country on a single trip. It makes sense to combine Laos with other destinations in South-east Asia as international tourists currently cannot access Laos directly from outside the region.

Through this event, we are expecting there to be greater efforts to promote our country to longhaul tourists, who make up our main target markets.

Malaysia



Mirza Mohammad Taiyab
Director general, Tourism Malaysia

Is your country ready for Visit ASEAN@50 campaign?

Malaysia is ready and excited to be part of the campaign as we commemorate the 50th year since the establishment of ASEAN. Malaysia, located at the heart of South-east Asia, welcomes everyone to enjoy and appreciate the region's hospitality at its best.

What is being done?

To support the Visit ASEAN@50 campaign, Malaysia has taken the lead to publish the ASEAN Tourism Packages featuring dual and triple destination tours within ASEAN countries.

It's a great opportunity to see many of South-east Asia's unique attractions packaged together to give the best experience to travellers including UNESCO World Heritage Sites, cruises, homestay programmes and unique cultural heritage.

The ASEAN Tourism Packages are offered by travel agents from the 10 ASEAN countries and are available on the ASEAN Tourism website.

How significant is Visit ASEAN@50 to your country and what do you hope to achieve from it?

The campaign is significant on so many levels. For the country, it is a celebration of how much Malaysia has developed economically and socially from the benefits of tourism.

And as members of ASEAN, we embrace the opportunity to raise the profile of South-east Asia in the world market and position it as a single destination and top choice for business and leisure.

More importantly, we hope that Visit ASEAN@50 will successfully help our economies prosper and better the lives of the ASEAN people.

Myanmar



Daw Khin Than Win
Deputy director general, Ministry of Hotels and Tourism

Is your country ready for Visit ASEAN@50 campaign?

Yes, we have gotten together with other ASEAN member states to celebrate the campaign. For example, the chairman of Myanmar Tourism Marketing attended a pre-launch campaign at ITB Berlin 2016.

We also attended the Visit ASEAN@50 press conference at the World Travel Mart in London last November to unveil the special campaign packages.

What is being done?

We will incorporate our awareness activities about Visit ASEAN@50 into upcoming events scheduled for early 2017, such as ASEAN Tourism Forum in January in Singapore, International Travel Mart Mandalay and Yangon, Naga New Year Festival at Lahe, a town in Naga Hills of Myanmar's Sagaing division, and Manaw Festival in Kachin State, Myanmar.

We will print, display and distribute Visit ASEAN@50 brochures, banners and backdrops at the mentioned travel fairs and festivals. We also intend to promote the campaign video at local and international fairs.

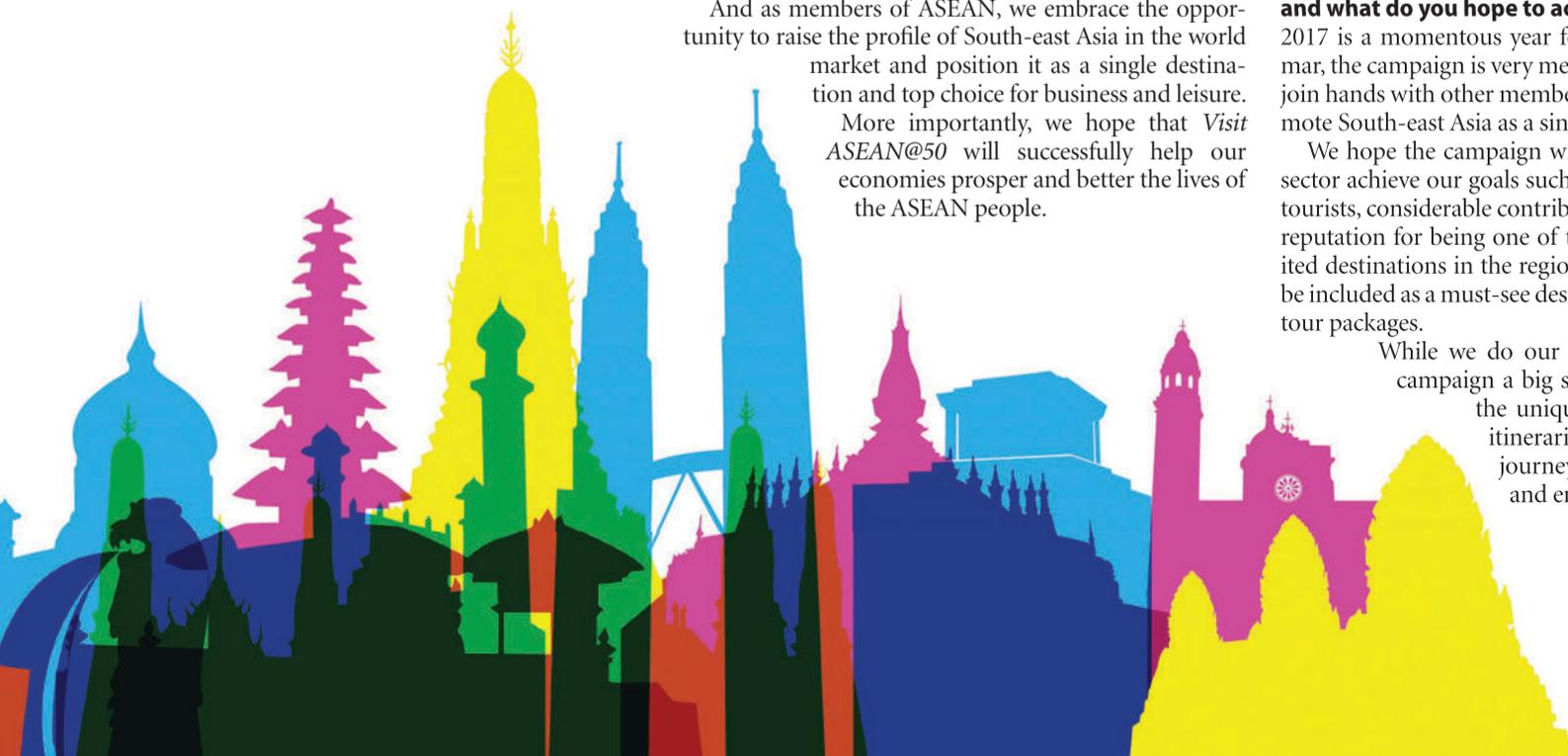
Recently, through our Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we provided Myanmar gifts to the awardees of a travel essay contest held biannually in China with the purpose of raising awareness of the campaign in China.

How significant is Visit ASEAN@50 to your country and what do you hope to achieve from it?

2017 is a momentous year for ASEAN. And for Myanmar, the campaign is very meaningful and practical as we join hands with other member states to develop and promote South-east Asia as a single destination.

We hope the campaign will help Myanmar's tourism sector achieve our goals such as an increased number of tourists, considerable contribution to the nation's GDP, a reputation for being one of the most attractive and visited destinations in the region, and, last but not least, to be included as a must-see destination in South-east Asian tour packages.

While we do our part to try and make this campaign a big success, we are positive that the uniqueness of Myanmar's travel itineraries will make the traveller's journey begin with great pleasure and enthusiasm.





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ASEAN @ 50

Dawn of a new standard

ASEAN has long been plagued by non-conformity of standards in many areas, so will the MRA-TP set a new benchmark for standardisation of skills in the regional tourism sector? **Mimi Hudoyo** investigates

Over a decade in the making, the Mutual Recognition Arrangement of Tourism Professionals (MRA-TP) is finally up and running, achieved through a supporting infrastructure that is touted to step up the game for the standardisation of skills in the region's tourism industry.

Under the MRA-TP, ASEAN has developed benchmarking standards for 32 job types in six labour divisions – namely front office, housekeeping and F&B services in hotels, as well as tour operations, food production and travel agencies – initiated 52 qualifications and 242 training toolboxes.

Eddy Soemawilaga, senior officer for tourism and transportation, ASEAN Secretariat, commented: “(The implementation of) MRA-TP started in 2012 (but) what we did not have then was the registration platform. With the launch of ASEAN Tourism Professional Registration System (ATPRS) we now have a complete infrastructure to support the running of MRA-TP, although this is still a work in progress.”

Launched during the international conference on MRA-TP in Jakarta in August 2016, the ATPRS was first conceived to support the MRA-TP's goals to increase certification among tourism professionals and facilitate their free movement and employment among ASEAN member countries.

One key component of the web-based facility is to serve as a job-matching platform for tourism professionals and industry stakeholders in ASEAN. The platform also seeks to register and disseminate details of certified tourism professionals, provide and facilitate training programmes, develop a regional pool of trainers and assessors, and market and promote the MRA-TP, in addition to being a revenue source for the regional secretariat stationed in Jakarta.

A recognised criterion?

Despite its ratification by ASEAN member states, the actual adoption of MRA-TP on the ground is much more complicated, compounded by issues such as a paucity of tourism schools in some countries, a lack of awareness among employers and tourism professionals on the importance and benefits of certification, as well as certification costs which are prohibitive for some industry players.

For example, Cambodia's burgeoning tourism sector accounted for 620,000 jobs in 2015 but only 20 per cent of the tourism workforce graduated from tourism universities and schools. It is estimated that 63 per cent and 45 per cent of employees in the country's hotels and travel services respectively are in need of training to meet the ASEAN standards.

Try Chivv, deputy director general of tourism and director of the National Committee for Tourism Professionals under the Ministry of Tourism Cambodia, said: “By 2020 we target to receive more than seven million arrivals (up from 4.7 million in 2015), and we will have 850 jobs (to fill). Having qualified tourism professionals is very important for us.”



Indonesia, on the other hand, sees the reluctance of stakeholders to participate in the certification despite the government's mandatory ruling.

Sumarna Abdurahman, head of the Indonesian Professional Certification Authority (BNSP), said: “We are still working very hard to convince employers to recognise the competency certification in their recruitment (procedures).

“They are still questioning the effectiveness and quality of the certification and whether the certified applicants can perform according to their certification,” he said, adding that higher salary demand from prospective certified employees also weighs on employers' concerns.

Alexander Nayoan, managing director of The Dharmawangsa Jakarta and chairman of the Jakarta Hotels Association, said the resistance also stems from a lack of understanding on the importance of certification. He said: “There are questions of ‘What is it for me?’ and ‘Why should I spend more?’ among tourism employers and professionals alike.”

Also showing disinterest are international branded hotels, which deem themselves to be having higher qualification standards than their national and regional counterparts, he shared.

And while the ATPRS is lauded as a critical tool in aiding the regional quest for common tourism skills standards, its by-registration operating model means that companies need to advertise their job

We are still working very hard to convince employers to recognise the competency certification in their recruitment (procedures).

Sumarna Abdurahman
Head, Indonesian Professional Certification Authority

openings through the platform while professionals need to indicate their interest in seeking jobs.

As such, the success of ATPRS is very much reliant on the regional secretariat's ability to step up awareness among the ASEAN travel trade in order to maximise its potential, which according to Eddy will be automatically promoted to tourism professionals applying for accreditation to register themselves into the system.

“A (greater) challenge is getting tourism providers to join in. The conference was actually an invitation to the industry to buy in,” he said.

Eddy also acknowledges that the MRA-TP is still a work in progress. “ASEAN is the only region in the world with this practice, so we have no reference (for benchmarking). However, there are indicators that MRA-TP is gaining recognition even outside the ASEAN region. We have seen interest from other (non-

ASEAN) countries to participate in this (initiative).”

Maria Susan Dela Rama, executive director of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, the certification office of the Philippines, confirmed that she has indeed received queries from several Middle Eastern countries on joining the MRA-TP.

Building up momentum

Individual ASEAN countries have devised their own strategies to overcome the challenges in the tourism sector.

Cambodia has defined 10 directives including launching apprenticeship programmes, promoting in-house training, setting up mobile tourism trainers and encouraging tourism study loans, among others.

Rising up to the challenge of grooming future hospitality talent is NagaWorld in Phnom Penh, which has established an intern programme to hire 1,000 interns in 2014 and more in the following years.

“It does not matter whether or not they will work for NagaWorld,” said NagaWorld's managing director for corporate affairs Robert Choo, who shared that the company works with more than 35 industry partners to ensure jobs for all its intern graduates. “It is our CSR (contribution) to the country.

“MRA-TP provides opportunity for all hospitality professionals regardless of their economic or educational background. This is a game-changer in Cambodia as well as in many other countries,” he posited.

To overcome challenges hindering the implementation of the MRA-TP, NagaWorld and several other industry players in Cambodia have come together to leverage the online video and audio resources on NagaWorld's website for national training efforts.

Indonesia, meanwhile, is considering the possibility of offering tax incentives or reducing cost to attract more participants to using MRA-TP, said Sumarna.

And with the millennials making up a significant portion of ASEAN's tourism talent pool, the promotion of MRA-TP should adapt to the way they consume information, industry members pointed out.

Moving forward, trade members also called on expanding the categories of MRA-TP to cover other job areas such as MICE and spa & wellness.

Nayoan believes that the benchmarking standards should apply to all levels of the tourism industry instead of being confined to the front-end staff. “I think even owners should seek certification,” he remarked.

“Otherwise, how can you get the managers to be certified if owners themselves do not understand the importance and won't spend money on it?” he questioned.

“What we need is (information and promotion) that will convince the industry how the MRA-TP can be truly beneficial,” Nayoan elaborated. “If implemented properly, it will actually increase profits for the industry and tax revenue for the government.”



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Report Mid/Upscale hotels

Confusing categorisation

TTG Show Daily's probe into mid- and upscale hotel labels uncovers flaws that are present in a seemingly arbitrary classification system – and why travel agents think the muddle should be taken out of such ratings

SINGAPORE

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

Judy Lum, group vice president for sales and marketing, Tour East Group Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands

- Midscale: S\$200 (US\$145.70)-S\$250; Orchard Hotel, Hotel Rendezvous and Swisshotel Merchant Court.
- Upscale: S\$300-S\$400; Grand Hyatt, Pan Pacific Singapore and Fairmont Singapore.

Current demand Companies undergoing corporate cut backs tend to move from upscale to midscale hotels, which will be seen as a prudent move while (retaining) a presentable image for the company.

C-level executives are (downgrading) from suites in signature and iconic hotels to upscale hotels, which still have strong branding but do not cost an arm and a leg.

Current supply We have good supply of hotels overall but it does not hurt to have more. Singapore is a top destination for business and MICE events so rooms will be filled. A bigger supply will not exert downward pressure but will stabilise rates and make the destination more attractive.

Areas for improvement There's an increasing number of hotels changing their check-in to 14.00 or even 15.00 and check-out to 11.00. It used to be 12.00 for both check-in and -outs.

Clarification or confusion? In Singapore, I feel that the mid- and upscale labels are being used by some hotels to blindsight the industry and consumers alike to accept a certain price point when their hotel cannot meet the desired star-rating criteria. Hence, it is best to use star ratings or associate the standard or category with a known brand.

Michael Chong, manager of global business, Star Holiday Mart Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands

- Midscale: S\$120-S\$160; applies to boutique hotels in general.
- Upscale: S\$180-S\$300, for four stars and above rated hotels.

Current demand There's a stronger demand for newer hotels. Price and location are the main deciding factors for both categories.

Current supply More midscale hotels are entering the market and the category seems to be oversupplied. With lesser new supply and stiff competition, upscale hotels are lowering rates to a similar level as midscale hotels.

Areas for improvement There should be clearer definitions of category and facilities, and rate stability.

Clarification or confusion? The differen-



tiation line is very thin and blurred, as different hotels have varying classifications. Hotels should work on clearer updates and differentiation factors.

THAILAND

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

Victor Mogilev, general manager, Diethelm Travel Thailand Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands

- Midscale: 4,000 baht (US\$112.30)-7,000 baht; Amari, Centara and Avani.
- Upscale: 7,000 baht and above; Banyan Tree, Aman Group and Six Senses.

Current demand With the current uncertain world economy, more people are looking to spend (more wisely) while still wanting personalised services. There is hence a higher demand for midscale hotels, which also see opportunities to attract new clientele beyond their usual segments.

Current supply We expect further development of midscale properties with a focus on quality, personalisation and efficiency, while upscale properties will have to work to retain occupancy and rates.

Areas for improvement Midscale hotels should look into delivering personalised service and consistent standards for both guests and industry partners.

Upscale hotels should make sure products and services are on the bespoke level as guests paying top money have become more demanding than ever.

Clarification or confusion? The main issue is the difference in individual perceptions. For some guests and markets, a room priced at 4,000 baht per night is considered an upscale product while for others even a room at 8,000 baht will be taken as an average product.

Kim Martin Rasmussen, product manager, Exo Travel Thailand Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands

We rely on star ratings and our hotel classification system instead of these terms.

Current demand Midscale hotels are emerging for new growth markets where price is still a factor for travel to Thailand; these hotels are also widely used in our SIC programmes. We always have a demand for upscale hotels due to (our predominantly high-end clientele).

Current supply Small boutique hotels in the midscale category can be in shortage during peak seasons, so more boutique midscale hotels would be nice. Upscale hotels appear to be in demand year-round and run out of supply during peak seasons.

Areas for improvement More boutique hotels and better service in the midscale range would be good in key destinations. Upscale hotels can benefit from more options and inventory, clear separation of rates for agents and direct clients, and extra benefits when booked through agents.

Clarification or confusion? We do not use these terms. The confusion comes more from boutique vs luxury distinctions.

MALAYSIA

By S Puvaneswary

Manfred Kurz, managing director, Diethelm Travel Malaysia Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands

- Midscale: RM400 (US\$103)-RM500 in Kuala Lumpur and RM500-RM800 in Langkawi and Sabah; Four Points by Sheraton, Dorsett and Holiday Villa.
- Upscale: RM600 and above in Kuala Lumpur, and RM800 and above in Langkawi and Sabah; for St Regis, Mandarin Oriental and Grand Hyatt.

Current demand The favourable exchange rate has contributed to demand. As well, demand for beach hotels is higher during the Malaysia and Singapore school holidays. City hotels do well on weekdays because of corporate and meetings demand.

Current supply Kuala Lumpur has an oversupply of mid- and upscale hotels. In Sabah, there is an undersupply during the May-October peak season. In Langkawi, the supply is just right.

Areas for improvement Service levels must be improved on for both categories.

Clarification or confusion? A midscale five-star property could operate like a four-star brand, so guests' expectations are not (always) met.

Ally Bhoonee, executive director, World Avenues Definition of mid- and upscale hotels in terms of prices and brands

- Midscale: US\$70-US\$80; four-star hotels like Holiday Inn, Furama and Melia.
- Upscale: US\$110-US\$250; five-star hotels like Westin, JW Marriott and Ritz-Carlton.

Current demand There is greater demand for upscale hotels due to the ringgit depreciation, which makes upscale hotels good value for money as it costs a third of a similar brand in Europe.

Current supply There's an oversupply in the capital city right now and Kuala Lumpur City Hall has temporarily stopped issuing new licenses for all hotel types. In secondary destinations such as Penang, Johor and Kuching, there is room for more investments in upscale hotels.

Areas for improvement I would like for hotels to improve service and for owners to upkeep their properties.

Clarification or confusion? Some define midscale as a four-star and upscale as a five-star property, while others refer to a five-star deluxe hotel as midscale and a five-star super deluxe hotel as an upscale one. Such (varying) definitions are confusing to travellers who tend to recognise hotels by their brands and star ratings only.

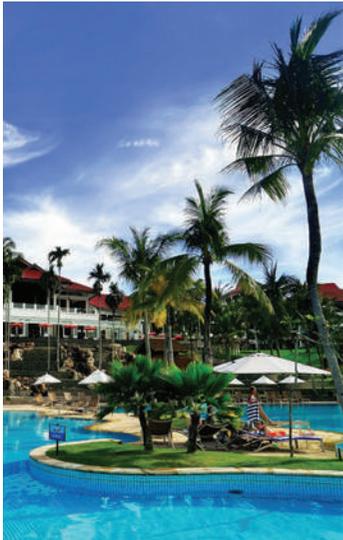
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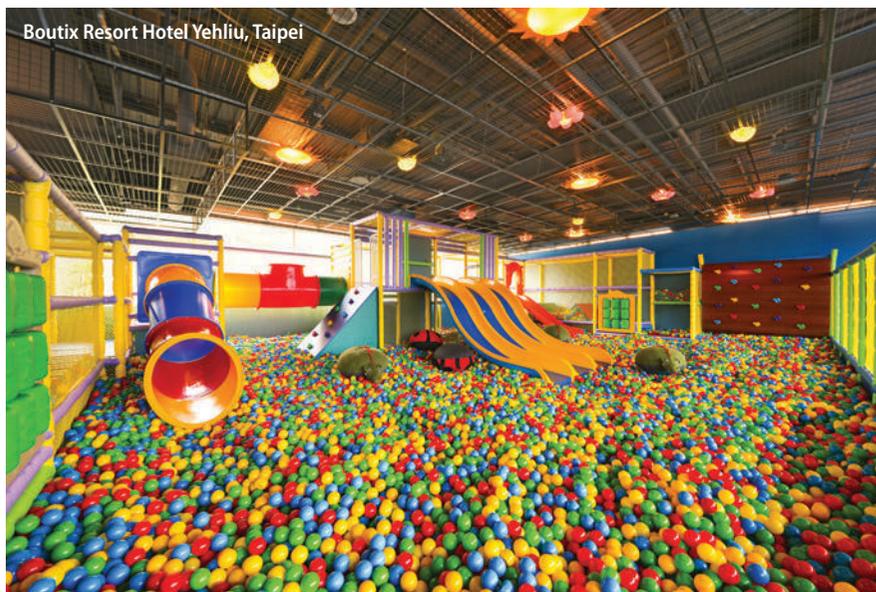
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Contact: sales@furama.com



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Contact: webinquiry@rajahtravel.com

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Contact: wpsin@worldexpress.com.sg



Sarawak, where adventure lives

Located on the island of Borneo, Sarawak is 48 thousand square miles of rich indigenous culture, exciting adventure and pristine nature, ready for the hungry traveller to explore.

The customs of the local people remain laced in the daily lives, infusing their food, art, music, clothes, and way of life. With over 20 ethnic groups, each with their own language and culture, Sarawak's communities are a tapestry of unique cuisine and customs living in harmony.

In the heritage-filled capital city of Kuching, travellers can walk the unaltered cobbled paths of the Waterfront while feasting on local delicacies and buying traditional beaded and carved crafts. Pay a visit to the living museum that is the Sarawak Cultural Village, just an hour outside the city, where seven unique traditional houses can be found along with local people demonstrating their traditional cultural way of life.

Known as a land of pirates and kings, of headhunters and warriors, there is no lack of adventure in Sarawak. Be it diving in the clear waters and stunning reefs of Miri, kayaking along the ancient Rajang, hiking through old Headhunter trails in the highlands, spelunking through the largest cave systems in the world in Mulu, or roughing it in the untouched terrain of Batang Ai, Sarawak has quests for the brave of heart in droves.

With over 30 national parks, four wildlife sanctuaries and 10 nature reserves spanning an area of over 800,000 hectares, the natural wonder of Sarawak is unparalleled. Step in to witness the world's largest flower, the rafflesia, in bloom and walk under the same trees that have shaded the earth for a millennia; spot the animals that have roamed since a land before time; and experience nature, untouched, whole and beautiful as it should be.

Sarawak, a land unlike any other, is truly the land where adventure lives.

Contact: stb@sarawaktourism.com

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Five-star urban resort, One Farrer Hotel & Spa, takes an intuitive and trend-setting approach towards lifestyle and hospitality, offering unique and distinct accommodation, F&B, conference and spa facilities.

Its Asian Wellness Spa and Spa Retreat was named Singapore's Best Hotel Spa 2016 by World Spa Awards.

Nourishing both body and soul, the hotel and its surroundings resonate with notes of serenity with 15 gardens over 20 levels, including a 11,000 square feet operating urban farm.

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A member of Preferred Hotel & Resorts, One Farrer Hotel & Spa offers 243 contemporary chic guestrooms within a 'Hotels within a Hotel' concept, comprising three distinct hotels – Urban Hotel, Loft Apartments and Skyline Hotel & Sky Villas.

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Bespoke services and amenities await guests of the *Meritus Club* - from the personalised service of Meritus Ambassadors, to all-day refreshments served in the exclusive environment of the Meritus Club Lounge.

Mandarin Orchard Singapore offers over 25,000 square feet of versatile meeting and function spaces, backed by the dedicated assistance of Meeting and Event Specialists.

Starring in the hotel's vibrant lineup of restaurants is the all-time favourite *Chatterbox*, home of the legendary *Mandarin Chicken Rice*. Also taking centrestage is *Shisen Hanten* by *Chen Kentaro*, the only Chinese restaurant in Singapore to have been awarded two Michelin stars.

For some well-deserved retail therapy, right on the doorstep of Mandarin Orchard Singapore is *Mandarin Gallery*, an intimate shopping destination comprising four storeys of high-end international fashion brands and boutique eateries.

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Destination Laos

Building up a momentum

Despite an increase in tourist arrivals, takings have not kept pace as visitors become more cost-conscious due to a slowdown in the global economy. But the trade remains optimistic for 2017, reports **Bernie Rosenbloom**



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Clockwise from above: Reclining Buddha statue at Wat Pha That Luang in Vientiane; crossing a bridge in Savannakhet; street food in Luang Prabang



Viewpoints

What is needed immediately to support Laos' tourism growth?

John Morris Williams, general manager, Luang Prabang View



Laos tourism needs to provide consumers and tour operators with a better understanding of what it offers outside mainstream attractions. (For instance), a TV campaign would bring the face of Laos to the world stage. This needs to progress over time to develop Laos as a high-end destination without overselling it.

Andreas Hofmann, managing director, Asian Trails Laos



Laos must boost its PR and social media efforts to generate destination awareness in key source markets, which is lagging behind Vietnam and Cambodia. DMCs, hotels, and the government can collectively work on season extension measures that can be implemented quickly.

Destination in numbers

20%

The percentage jump in annual foreign arrivals into Luang Prabang in 2016 over the previous year, a result of low-cost carriers launching direct flights throughout the region

21%

The year-on-year percentage increase in Japanese arrivals into Laos in the first nine months of 2016 due to publicity efforts

1,957

The number of natural, cultural, and historical tourist sites officially designated by the Lao Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism

Laos tourism got off to a slow start in 2016, as international arrivals struggled to reach 2.9 million for the first nine months, down 10 per cent from the previous year.

According to statistics from the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism (MoICT), the country's top four markets – which account for more than 80 per cent of arrivals – showed declines or modest growth over the period.

Thai arrivals fell 12 per cent to 1.4 million, and Vietnam tumbled 19 per cent to 760,500. China eased ahead four per cent to nearly 400,000, while South Korea held steady at around 130,000 arrivals.

However, the MoICT believes a spike in peak-season arrivals during 4Q2016 will lift the annual tally 10 to 14 per cent over 2015 to top US\$5 million, although revenue will not keep pace.

“We have evidence of flat or decreasing yield in daily per-person spend. While there is impressive growth in arrivals,

overall the sector appears to be declining in value,” said Ross Corbett, an international tourism specialist advising the MoICT.

Corbett added that arrival numbers from large-spending Western markets will likely be flat.

Laos Mood Travel's general manager Laurent Granier agreed: “While the number of international visitors seems to keep progressing, there is either a slowdown or decrease from Europe and the US.”

Granier also pointed out some clients are more cost conscious. “We offer a range of hotels, but often end up selling less pricy options.”

He further noted that the 2016 launch of low-cost carrier (LCC) flights to Vientiane and Luang Prabang from Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur “does not help sell higher-end hotels”.

“SilkAir could be a nice addition, but connecting times in Singapore from Europe and Australia are not optimal,” he

lamented. Granier also noticed a rise in last-minute bookings, with more clients waiting to “clinch a super deal.”

Pablo Barruti, Sofitel Luang Prabang's general manager, however, welcomes the LCC connections. He said: “The (flights) from Bangkok in March 2016 made the low season more stable, as they brought visitors from the region that previously found air access too expensive.”

He opined that 2016 was pivotal year for Luang Prabang in attracting direct regional flights and more international hotel brands. As such, Luang Prabang is on track to reach the forecasted 600,000 visitors in 2016, up nearly 20 per cent from the previous year's 530,000.

Meanwhile, southern Laos has yet to attract more regional flights, but Pakse Hotel's manager Chris Mulder said the destination was expecting a direct flight from Incheon.

Mulder said tourism performance for southern Laos in 2016 trailed behind 2015, but he remained optimistic for 2017, as southern Laos is “now more in the picture” thanks to the launch of the *Southern Laos, Charming by Nature* marketing campaign led by the Southern Laos Tourism Marketing Network.

Inspiring themes



Clockwise from above: Nature on the Vang Vieng Challenge; Saffron Coffee offers cups of joe from local beans; a CBT trek



Adventure in nature

Since 2004, Green Discovery has been offering adventure tourism in Laos, and they recently launched a two-day Vang Vieng Challenge.

The first day will take thrillseekers to scale a waterfall, and cross a gorge by via ferrata. The night is spent on a mountaintop campsite or bungalow. The next day, participants head to the bottom by zip-lining through a forest canopy.

Gourmet lures

Lao coffee producers are going organic, with cafes and shops devoted to the naturally-grown Arabica beans popping up around the country.

In Luang Prabang, Saffron Coffee grows and roasts coffee from over 700 farming families, and now offers cold coffees in recycled bottles at their Mekong riverside establishment. Common Grounds in Vientiane recently renovated their café and bakery, and specialises in espresso and Americano.

Responsible travel

A UNESCO-backed project launched the country's first community-based tourism (CBT) activity in Luang Namtha in 2000. It went on to win a UN award for poverty alleviation, which triggered a wave of CBT treks in Laos' north-west.

Phou lu Travel now offers several CBT tours, such as the four-day Chao Fa Trail that explores Laos, China and Myanmar. The trek takes visitors to Akha and Tai Lue ethnic villages to experience their culture through overnight homestays and traditional meals.

Products to watch

Sabaidee Luang Prabang

Luang Say Residence is teaming up with the Elephant Experience and Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden to offer a Sabaidee Luang Prabang package. Guests spend two nights at the hotel – inclusive of dinner – and can pick either a half-day Elephant Experience with rides along the Mekong or an edu-tour through Pha Tad Ke's 14-hectare "ethnobotany" centre.



The surrounds near Luang Say Residence

Mekong Kingdoms

Mekong Kingdoms is adding two vessels to its recently-launched Luang Prabang fleet in early 2017. The 13-suite *Bohemian* will operate multi-day cruises between Luang Prabang and Chiang Rai, while the two-cabin *Gipsy* will offer private cruises on the upper Mekong. They will join the *Monsoon* shuttle boat to Pak Ou Caves, the *Play* restaurant boat, and the *Nomad* private explorer.

many of which overlook the Nam Song River backed by limestone cliffs.

Its design draws inspiration from the surroundings, with natural colours and patterns visible throughout the property. Facilities include a restaurant, coffee shop, swimming pool and bar, spa, kids' club, as well as a ballroom and several meeting rooms.

Amari Vang Vieng

Scheduled to open in late 2017, the Amari Vang Vieng will offer 160 rooms and suites,



An artist's impression of Amari Van Vieng

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Destination **Indonesia**

Full steam ahead for China

Visa-free policies and global destination marketing will likely lead Indonesia to its 2016 tourism targets, but the new year will see public and private efforts turning to the Chinese market in particular. By **Mimi Hudoyo**

Indonesia's arrivals in the first 10 months of 2016 stood at 9,403,614, putting its goal of 12 million arrivals for the entire year within reach.

Arief Yahya, Indonesia's minister for tourism, spoke to *TTG Show Daily* with an optimistic beat: "The target for the last quarter of 2016 is 3.9 million arrivals but in October alone we welcomed 1,040,000 visitors, up 18.6 per cent from the same month last year. We are optimistic that we can achieve more than 2.9 million arrivals in November and December as these are peak season for travels."

The government's efforts to grow arrivals through a visa-free policy for 169 countries, coupled with branding, advertising and selling strategies, have re-

sulted in strong growth rates out of some source markets like Egypt, Bahrain, India, France. Arrivals from these markets grew by between 20 and 45 per cent.

But a grander ambition is reserved for Greater China, with the government looking to welcome 10 million Chinese visitors in 2019. This seems to be an ambitious target as China, Hong Kong and Taiwan altogether contributed only 1,439,854 arrivals in 2015. China alone put forth 1.1 million footfalls.

For 2016, Indonesia aimed to chalk up 2.1 million arrivals from Greater China. However, arrivals acquired in the first 10 months of the year was 1,221,422 – just past the half-way mark.

Arief defended the target as an achiev-

able one that is backed by various government-led strategy and action plans.

While Bali has been the darling destination for Chinese travellers, interest appears to have grown for Manado and North Sulawesi in 2016, thanks to a significant improvement in air access. Indonesian airlines Citilink Indonesia, Lion Air and Sriwijaya Air have all put up chartered flights to Manado and North Sulawesi. Lion Air alone has a target of 30,000 passengers by the end of 2016.

Bambang Sugiono, director of Gajah Bali Tour, opined: "Having chartered services from China to Manado is a great way to spread travellers to other destinations in Indonesia."

The next destination to benefit from

the chartered airlinks is Belitung island, east of Sumatra. Citilink commenced chartered services in November and December 2016 between China's Guangzhou and Belitung.

Bambang said: "Belitung has beautiful beaches and water sports that the China market likes."

Efforts to tap deeper into the Chinese market are underway. The Indonesian Ministry of Tourism recently organised a sales mission to Dalian, Qingdao and Beijing to promoting diving trips.

Flag carrier Garuda Indonesia is also planning to expand its market to inner Mongolia through chartered flights to Bali as well as from cities like Jinan, Zhengzhou, Lanzhou and Fuzhou this month, according to Bambang.

Bambang revealed that the Associations of the Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies Bali Chapter is currently preparing packages and hotels for these chartered arrangements.

Going forward, the Ministry of Tourism will step up destination marketing activities through digital platforms.

The ministry has been working closely with online businesses such as TripAdvisor, Google, Baidu and Ctrip to court digital-savvy travellers.

Arief said: "Travellers today looking for travel information online. They compare products, book trips and share information through digital media. Going digital is the way for us (to boost travel)."

With this in mind, the ministry has developed an online marketplace, where small-scale travel companies can upload their products and packages.



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Destination in numbers

23.5%

The percentage of total arrivals into Bali between January and October 2016 that had come from Australia, the destination's top source market. China followed in second place with a 20.2 per cent share

9.4 million

The number of arrivals to Indonesia between January and October 2016, based on data from Statistics Indonesia. Arrivals rose by 9.5 per cent over the same period in 2015. The Ministry of Tourism is optimistic of achieving its target of 12 million arrivals by end-2016

15 million

The target number of international arrivals the Ministry of Tourism has set its sights on for 2017, while the aim for the domestic market is 265 million



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Destination Indonesia

Viewpoints

What is needed immediately to support Indonesia's tourism growth?

Adjie Wahjono,
Operations manager,
Aneka Kartika Tour and
Travel Service



Support at home is the most critical. Infrastructure development, creating new tourist attractions and enhancing older ones, and investing in human capital are crucial requirements.

Training and workshops for the people living around key tourist attractions need to happen, to explain to them what tourism means and how they can be good hosts. The mindset that tourists are money bags should change.

We appreciate the destination promotions done by the government in the last couple of years but if products are not up to tourist expectations, their efforts are wasted.

Monas Tjahjono,
Managing director,
Monas Tours



The Ministry of Tourism is putting a lot of effort into supporting online travel businesses to grow FIT arrivals but has dropped MICE from its portfolio. It should actually balance its support for both online and offline businesses as a way to encourage shrinking group tours to still grow. Promoting Indonesia for MICE can also help. The government should take the lead and not leave it (MICE promotions) to the trade.

Products to watch



Mövenpick Resort & Spa Jimbaran Bali

Mövenpick Resort & Spa Jimbaran

Opening this month, Mövenpick Resort & Spa Jimbaran Bali will offer 297 rooms and suites, each featuring private balconies, complimentary Wi-Fi and a subtle Balinese sense of art, colour and style. Highlights of the resort include a free-form swimming pool, Meera Kid's Club and a Teen Club. Guests can also look forward to five F&B facilities and a 24-hour gym. A spa will open later in March.

InterContinental Bali Resort

InterContinental Bali Resort will unveil 125 redesigned Singaraja Rooms come February 2017, as the first phase of its renovation programme. New room features include wall murals inspired by Balinese textiles, carved wood headboard panels with lattice patterns typical of those seen on traditional Balinese doorways, and pendant lamps inspired by the elaborate terracotta crown finials of tra-

ditional Balinese thatched roofs. The rooms' original teakwood flooring will be carefully restored.

In line with the resort's Green Engage sustainability programme, the rooms will be fitted with an energy management system as well as energy-saving LED light fittings, energy-efficient mini-bar fridges and low-flow bathroom fittings.

Alila SCBD Jakarta

Jakarta is set to welcome its second Alila hotel in 3Q2017. The 227-key Alila SCBD Jakarta will feature 13 meeting and conference facilities as well as seven dining and entertainment venues.

Hilton Bali Resort

Perched atop a 40m-high cliff in Nusa Dua, Bali, the 11.3ha resort boasts 389 guest-rooms with private balconies, as well as 19 villas offering a private plunge pool, butler

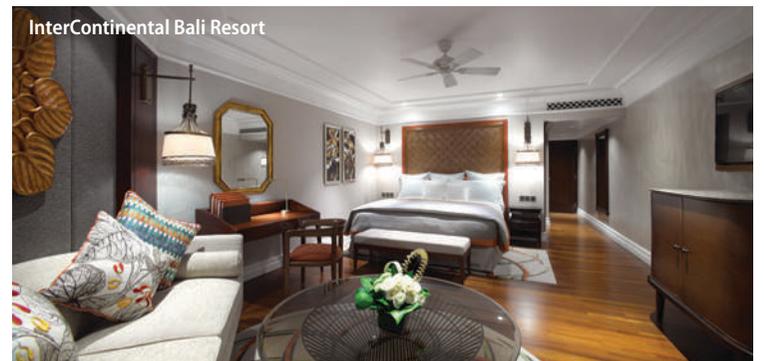
service and a separate living area. Recreational amenities include four interconnecting swimming pools, a spa, sand lagoon, kids' club with playgrounds, three indoor tennis courts and six dining spaces. The resort boasts 8,470m² of indoor and outdoor event spaces, including two conference centres each with a pillarless ballroom that can accommodate 1,500 guests, and nine meeting rooms.

Hoshinoya Bali

Japanese luxury hotel operator Hoshinoya Resorts is opening its first property outside of home base this month. Hoshinoya Bali will be located in Ubud, overlooking the Pakerisan River. It will comprise 30 rooms in three categories, a restaurant, café, spa and pool. The resort is designed to coexist with the surrounding rice terraces, which have been designated Bali's first UNESCO World Heritage site.



Hoshinoya Bali



InterContinental Bali Resort

Inspiring themes



From left: Tuck into a bowl of *soto daging betawi* (beef soup) that has been a local comfort food for generations; get a taste of local lifestyle at Omah Kecebon; The Sanchaya Bintan is the latest celebrity hideout

Gourmet lures

Indonesia has a great variety of culinary delights where each destination in the various regions has unique and specific food options that travellers can try. Jakarta, as a melting pot of Indonesian culture and people, does not only have its own traditional food like Soto Betawi, or Jakarta beef soup, served at Soto Betawi H Ma'ruf in Menteng. There is also street food like Asinan Betawi, or a fruit and vegetable salad, which can be found along Jalan Cikini 4. Travellers can also enjoy traditional Indonesian food from other areas.

Family fun

Family travel is big business in Indonesia as most Indonesians like to travel with their family members. Facilities catering to their needs are growing in line with the growth of the domestic market. Some of these facilities, are suitable for international travellers. In Jogjakarta, Omah Kecebon, which means Tadpole House in Javanese, offers a traditional guest house experience and showcases local culture, food, horticulture lessons, touring the village on an ox cart and playing traditional games.

Romantic moments

A new luxury resort that has emerged during ongoing developments in Bintan, about 75 minutes by ferry from Singapore, has elevated the destination's status as a romantic destination for weddings and honeymoons. The Sanchaya offers guests the ultimate privacy with only 30 spacious suites spread across five hectares of beachfront land and private access to a white, sandy beach. Barely two years old, the property has already won the hearts of Middle Eastern royal families and international celebrities.

Destination **Malaysia**

The shape of things to come



Malacca, Malaysia

Malaysia's inbound arrival numbers saw a positive growth overall, thanks in part to a newly e-visa facility. **S Puvaneswary** reports

Introduced in March 2016, the e-visa facility has greatly reduced the visa-processing period for tourists to Malaysia from five working days to one.

Benjamin Yip, general manager for inbound and outbound at CITS Guangdong, said that as a result of the e-visa facility, his company saw a five to 10 per cent increase in group and FIT travel to Malaysia from March to August, as compared to the corresponding period in 2015. He also added that forward bookings were also strong for the Golden Week Holidays in October.

Chinese arrivals to Malaysia are expected to continue its growth trajectory, buoyed by encouraging 1H2016 results. During that period, China had its largest first-half growth ever, at 32.1 per cent

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Destination Malaysia

over the same period in 2015, where the total number of arrivals to Malaysia stood at 992,463.

Meanwhile, South-east Asia was Malaysia's largest contributor of tourist arrivals with a 75.7 per cent share, or 9.87 million of total arrivals. Due to the strengthened Thai economy in 1Q2016, the country had the highest growth of outbound tourists to Malaysia at 32.1 per cent. This was followed by Laos, Brunei, Indonesia and Singapore. For 1H2016, the top 10 arrival markets to Malaysia were Singapore, Indonesia, China, Thailand, Brunei, India, South Korea, the Philippines, the UK and Japan.

Adam Kamal, CEO of Olympik Travels Malaysia, said: "It is easy to promote Malaysia to regional travellers as there is good connectivity, no visa requirements and there is consistent business year round. Yield per passenger may be lower than longhaul travellers but the higher volume compensates."

For the first 10 months of 2016, Kamal said there was a 10 per cent growth in regional travellers compared to 2015.

Inbound agents have also seen improvement in business from longhaul travel from Europe, with the top two arrival markets being the UK and Germany.



Clockwise from above: View of the Petronas Towers at sunset; youth celebrating during Malaysia's 58th Independence Day in Kuala Lumpur; chicken satay, a local dish; the 125m-long Langkawi Sky Bridge



Diethelm Travel Malaysia's managing director, Manfred Kurz, said: "The German market improved by 10 per cent in the first 10 months of this year as compared to the corresponding period in

2015. However, the market has not yet returned to 2014 levels, which was a good year. The German economy was in a better shape then."

Yap Sook Ling, managing director at

Viewpoints

What is needed immediately to support Malaysia's tourism growth?

Adam Kamal,
secretary-general,
Malaysian Inbound
Tourism Association



There is a lot of emphasis being put on promotions in China, but I think more promotions have to be done in all other major markets. There should also be more effort in attracting more European carriers to fly to Malaysia as this will improve longhaul arrivals into the country.

Manfred Kurz,
managing director,
Diethelm Travel
Malaysia



For the last three years, Malaysia has often been portrayed negatively in the press. This has to change and some immediate PR activities can be done to improve her image, without investing a lot of money. For example, inviting journalists and TV crews for documentaries and letting them report about the beauty of Malaysia, while assisting them as much as possible.

Asian Overland Services Tours & Travel, further revealed that her company introduced new tour programmes in 2016 which were targeted at the European markets. Those tours to East Malaysia promoted eco-tourism attractions and culture, such as Maliau Basin in Sabah and a five-day programme in Sarawak that begins in Kuching and goes up to Miri.

The Journey to the Interiors of Sarawak tour, in particular, includes visits to longhouses of the different tribes, as well as Similajau National Park.

While full-year 2016 tourism performance figures are not yet available at press time in December, the tourism ministry is targeting 30.5 million foreign tourists for the year and RM103 billion (US\$23 billion) in tourism receipts.

Destination in numbers

75.7%

The percentage of total tourist arrivals to Malaysia in 1H2016 who are from the region, equivalent to 9.9 million tourists. The total number of tourists for 1H2016 stands at 13 million

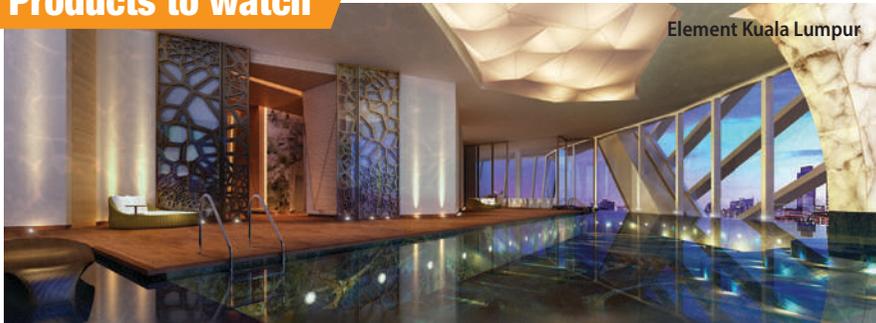
4.6 nights

The average length of stay in 2015 for South-east Asian visitors, as compared to 7.5 nights for European tourists and 9.7 nights for West Asian tourists

RM488.60

The average per diem expenditure, equivalent to US\$109, of foreign tourists to Malaysia in 2015, as compared to RM397.60 in 2014

Products to watch



Element Kuala Lumpur

The first Element brand in South-east Asia, Element Kuala Lumpur is scheduled to open in March 2017. Located within the mixed-use Ilham Tower, the hotel will have 252 rooms in a range of configurations from studio units to three-bedroom suites. Facilities include a restaurant, fitness centre, spa, an indoor swimming pool, and 162m² of meeting space. The hotel lobby, situated on level 40, affords a 360-degree view of the city skyline.

SPICE Convention Centre

Scheduled to open in March, the Convention Centre is one of five components of The Subterranean Penang International Convention and Exhibition Centre (SPICE).

The 4,546m² Grand Ballroom will be able to accommodate large conventions of up to 8,000 people in a theatre-setting. It can be further divided into four smaller rooms via operable wall partition, to cater to smaller capacity requests. The ballroom is further supported by two VIP serviced rooms and 13 smaller function rooms, both on the lower and ground floors. Atop the Convention Centre is a rooftop park, a 2.8-hectare "green lung" which is capable of hosting outdoor events.

Sunway Velocity Hotel

Opening in 3Q2017, Sunway Velocity Hotel will feature 351 guestrooms in the integrated mixed-use development of Sunway Velocity Kuala Lumpur. The 9.3-hectare development will also be home to a lifestyle shopping mall, medical centre and park. The hotel is located 3.8km from the city centre and is directly connected to two underground MRT stations.

Inspiring themes

Family fun

If there is only time for one family attraction while in Kuala Lumpur, spend it at Sunway Lagoon, an outdoor theme park packed with rides and attractions.

There are more than 80 rides and attractions spread across Water Park, Amusement Park, Extreme Park, Wildlife Park, Scream Park and the first Nickelodeon-branded attraction in Asia, Nickelodeon Lost Lagoon.

Sunway Lagoon is also home to the world's first Waterplexx 5D and world's largest water ride, Vuvuzela. Other noteworthy attractions include the world's largest

man-made Sandy Surf Beach, Malaysia's first interactive zoo, Asia's longest flying fox trail, and one of the longest pedestrian suspension bridges in the country.

Gourmet lures

Yee sang or *yu sheng* is a salad of raw fish slices (or abalone slices for a more luxurious option), thin strips of vegetables, and sauces of many flavours which Malaysians and Singaporeans eat during Chinese New Year period – but is surprisingly not common in China.

The colourful salad symbolises all the positive things the Chinese desire in the new

year, and is often enjoyed with many people who will toss the ingredients together. The higher one tosses the ingredients, the better the luck.

It is usually sold at all Chinese restaurants throughout the country during the Chinese New Year. Visitors who happen to be in Malaysia then should give the dish a try.

Adventure in nature

Malaysia is home to many majestic land formations which allow courageous travellers to climb a mountain or explore the mysterious depths of caves.

Kinabalu National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage site. While its tourist trails are well-worn, the majority of the park is an unspoilt paradise for rare flora and fauna. For those who are not keen on testing themselves on Mount Kinabalu's slopes, there is still much to enjoy from a visit to the park.

Another UNESCO World Heritage site is Mulu Caves National Park in Sarawak. It is great for those who love adventure caving.

Meanwhile, at Taman Negara National Park in West Malaysia, there are trekking trails, whitewater rafting opportunities and wildlife observations with an experienced guide.



From left: Go on many adventure rides in Sunway Lagoon; do a yee sang toss during Chinese New Year for good health and prosperity; learn about the rare flora and fauna on Mount Kinabalu

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Marketplace

Pan Pacific Hotels Group positioned for growth

The travel and tourism sector is projected to grow 25 to 50 per cent faster than Asia's GDP, and Pan Pacific Hotels Group (PPHG) is well-positioned to ride the region's growth potential by steadily growing the presence of its Pan Pacific Hotels and Resorts brand.

New-build properties in Naypyidaw, Myanmar and Johor, Malaysia will emerge in the next two years.

Further reinforcing its presence in Indochina, PPHG opened its first Pan Pacific hotel in Vietnam with the rebranding of the former Sofitel Plaza Hanoi to Pan Pacific Hanoi. Located by the West Lake, the hotel has become an iconic part of the city skyline ever since it was acquired by PPHG in 2001.

Featuring 273 guestrooms and 56 serviced suites, the hotel is minutes from the historic Old Quarter and commands picturesque views over the West Lake and the Red River. A US\$1.5 million investment was made to refresh the lobby, lobby bar, all-day dining restaurant and meeting spaces before its official opening in October 2016.

Over in Myanmar, Pan Pacific Yangon is being jointly developed with Shwe Taung Property Management towards an autumn 2017 opening. Part of an integrated development which features office spaces and retail offerings in the heart of Yangon, Pan Pacific Yangon will offer 348 contemporary guestrooms and suites. The showpiece of the 25-storey property is its Sky Lobby on level six, which, with its double height ceiling, will offer impressive views across the city to the breath-taking Shwedagon Pagoda. Anticipations for a stunning opening are high, with the hotel already receiving high commendations for "Best Hotel Development" and "Best Hotel Architectural Design" at the 2016 Myanmar Property Awards.

In 2018, PPHG will launch its first Serviced Suites property in Malaysia under the Pan Pacific brand. Pan Pacific Serviced Suites Puteri Harbour, Johor is a 205-unit waterfront property that spans 16 floors in the luxury mixed-use development Puteri Cove Residences, a 10-minute drive from the Malaysia-Singapore Tuas Second Link.

Contact: enquiry@pphg.com



Pan Pacific Hanoi



Much fun under the sun with Sunway Theme Parks

Experience the best of Malaysia with Sunway Theme Parks's two destinations – Sunway Lagoon and Lost World of Tambun.

Sunway Lagoon lives up to its title of Asia's best attraction, with over 90 rides and attractions spread across multiple zones – Water Park, Amusement Park, Extreme Park, Wildlife Park, Scream Park and the first Nickelodeon-themed attraction in Asia, Nickelodeon Lost Lagoon.

Sunway Lagoon is also home to Malaysia's first Waterplexx 5D, Malaysia's largest water ride, the Vuvuzela, Malaysia's largest Surf Wave Pool, Malaysia's first interactive zoo, Malaysia's first bungee jump, and Malaysia's longest pedestrian suspension bridge.

Lost World of Tambun is an action packed, wholesome family adventure destination. The self-contained wonderland is cocooned by lush tropical jungle, natural hotsprings – the only theme park in South-east Asia with its own natural hotsprings, breathtaking limestone features that hark back to 400 million years ago, seven amazing attraction parks that create a unique eco-adventure excursion for visitors of all ages. With a range of fun educational elements around the park, Lost World of Tambun promises a conducive learning environment.

Just a stone's throw away is the Lost World Hotel, a perfect snooze chamber after a long day of adventure.

Contact: lostworldoftambun@sunway.com.my

Discover Malaysia and beyond

Founded in Malaysia in 2000, Discovery Overland Holidays is today a well-established travel expert that provides a wide selection of products and tailor-made programmes. Its services include hotel reservations, transfers, FIT and GIT tours, meeting and incentive programmes, special interest programmes, charter flight arrivals and departures, and

provision of multilingual guides.

Discovery Overland Holidays branch offices are in the main hubs of Penang, Langkawi, Kota Kinabalu and Kuching, Malaysia and Singapore, while associate offices are in Phuket, Koh Samui and Bangkok, Thailand.

Contact: doh_product@discoveryoverland.com

Luxurious new face in Kuala Lumpur

The Face Suites is a wholly owned property by Platinum Victory Resorts Group of Companies. Soft-opened on January 11, 2016, the luxury all-suite hotel is conveniently located in the

vicinity of Kuala Lumpur's Golden Triangle, the city's commercial, shopping and entertainment hub.

Boasting an enviable accommodation

address on Jalan Sultan Ismail, The Face Suites is within walking distance to the iconic Petronas Twin Towers and KL Tower as well as the shopping and entertainment

districts of Suria KLCC and Pavilion Kuala Lumpur.

Designed by award-winning architecture firm, GDP Architects, the property offers 200 well-appointed suites that come along with stunning views of the city skyline. All suites are fully furnished with an integrated modern living room, kitchenette with appliances, a bedroom with en-suite bathroom, and a functional space for work and play.

Catering to both business and leisure travellers, the all-suite hotel offers one- and two-bedroom units in four room categories: Superior, Deluxe, Premier and Grand Premier. Room sizes range from 83m² for the one-bedroom Superior to 138m² for the two-bedroom Grand Premier.

For recreation, the hotel offers an infinity pool and gym on the 51st floor.

Dining options are available in the form of Café Il Viso, a coffee and juice bar at the lobby, and a soon-to-come restaurant on the 51st floor Sky Deck.

The opening of The Face Suites marks a major step in the development of Platinum Victory Resorts Group of Companies' hospitality portfolio.

Contact: info@thefacekl.com





It's more fun in the
Philippines

Philippines Night

An Official Late Night Function of ATF 2017

19 January 2017, Thursday
9.30pm to Midnight
Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore
Island Ballroom



Entry By Invitation Card or Delegate Badge Only

ONE-WAY TRANSPORT WILL BE PROVIDED FROM THE CLIFFORD PIER (DRIVEWAY EXIT POINT), TO SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, SINGAPORE
Pick-Up Time: From 8.40pm to 9pm

Hosted By Philippine Department of Tourism
and Tourism Promotions Board Philippines

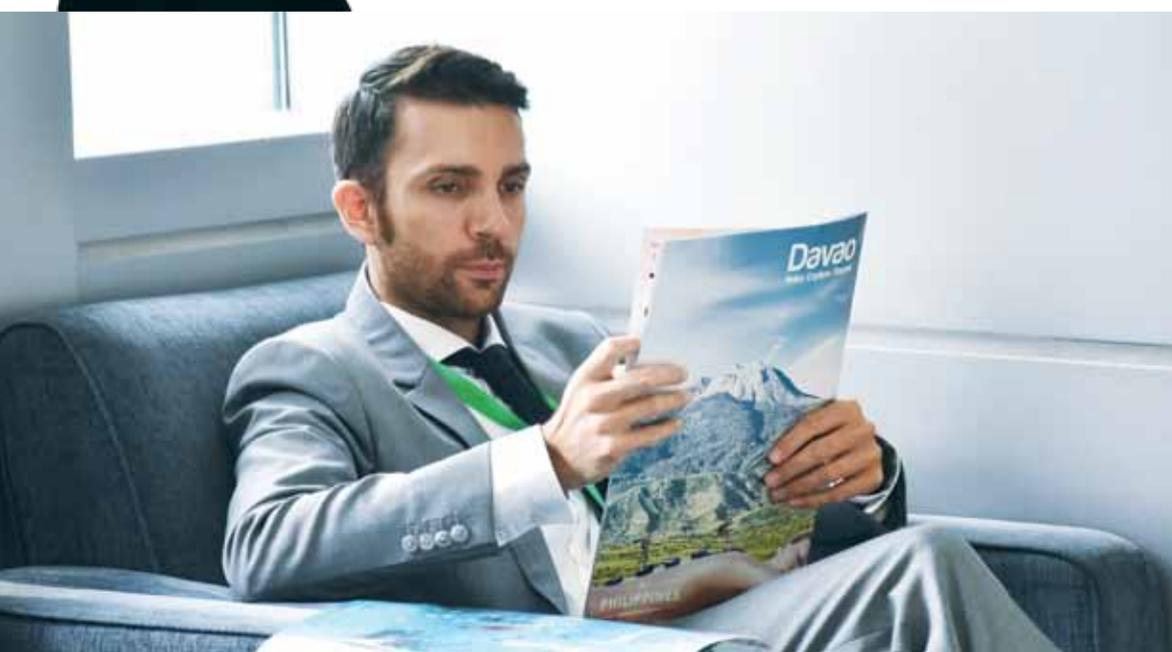
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TTG Asia pictorial special

Catch all the action at ATF 2017 in this three-page spread. Photos by *TTG Asia Daily's* photographer Eugene Tang



TTG Asia pictorial special

Engagement in high gear By Eugene Tang



STR Singapore's Jesper Palmqvist, Expedia Singapore's James Marshall, Amadeus France's Sebastien Gibergues and TripAdvisor Singapore's Aaron Hung spoke at the ASEAN Tourism Conference yesterday



Tourism Authority of Thailand's Charun Ohnmeew and Sudaporn Worapon



Furama City Centre, Singapore's Charles Wong and Danny Toh



RZ Travels US' M Zaki, World Master International Travel Philippines' Leilani Agana and Owllah Travel & Tours Philippines' Ollah De Gula Quilatan



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Together for ASEAN By Eugene Tang



Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia's Chong Wai Kit and Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism Vietnam National Administration of Tourism's Tran Phu Cuong



Southeast Asia Tourist Guides Association Indonesia's Mangku Nyoman Kandia, Inspire Travel and Tourism Learning Center Indonesia's Tetty Ariyanto and Ministry of Tourism Indonesia's Lokot Ahmad Enda



Greenview US' Eric Ricaurte, Pacific Asia Travel Association Thailand's Halona Padiachy and Mario Hardy



Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia's Nor Yathi Binti Awang and Khairiah Binti Kamaruddin



IJM Corporation Malaysia's Ajit Singh and Taylor's University Malaysia's A R Neethiahnanthan



India Tourism Singapore's R K Suman



Russian State University for Tourism & Service's Fedulin Alexander



Ministry of Tourism & Sports Thailand's Pongpanu Svetarundra



Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office Thailand's Jens Thraenhart



Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (Public Organization)'s Nichapa Yoswee



World Bank Group Singapore's Wouter Schalken



Tourism Authority of Thailand's Walailak Noypayak



Ministry of Hotels and Tourism Directorate of Hotels and Tourism Myanmar's Khaing Mee Mee Htun, Tint Thwin and Win Thein, and Thazin Garden Hotel Bagan's Daw Tin Mar Myint



Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau's Waraporn Sornprom, Nichapa Yoswee, Wiparat Tharateerapab, Pattanachai Singhavara and Patumwadee Oyyapat

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 GOLDEN CELEBRATION 2017

A man in a dark suit and glasses stands on a stage, holding a microphone and gesturing towards an audience. The audience, consisting of people of various ages and ethnicities, is seated at long tables and is clapping. The room has a modern design with blue accent lighting on the ceiling. The text 'The PHILIPPINES' is overlaid on the image, with 'The' in a script font and 'PHILIPPINES' in a large, bold, sans-serif font. Below it, the tagline 'itsmorefuninthephilippines' is written in a smaller, lowercase sans-serif font, flanked by horizontal lines.

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