

TTG

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Big data with a personal touch

In the age of Internet of Things, is data the holy grail for travel companies to win the personalisation war? **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena** finds out where the industry stands in using data, its struggles and what the future might hold

View from the top

With Trump as president, promoting the US as a friendly destination has become an even more crucial task. Chris Thompson, Brand USA president & CEO, shares his strategy with **Raini Hamdi**

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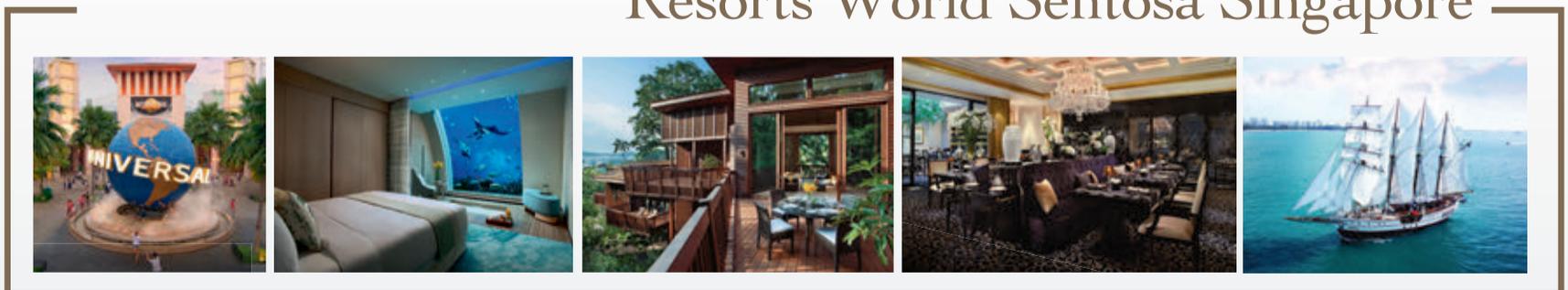
Big cruise ships making big waves

The dark side of dark tourism

From Australia's coast to outback



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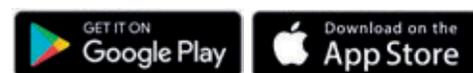


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Destination: South Korea

Data's the new black for travel



Data needs to be combined with the human touch to deliver the best of the man-machine symbiosis...

It has been 15 years since *Minority Report* hit the big screens and while some of the dystopian ideas put forth in the 2002 Tom Cruise movie could possibly exist in the future, the practical use of big data, predictive analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) are already in play today, albeit in less insidious but equally interesting forms.

Just look at Netflix, a successful example of a data-driven company and how analytics helps it to revolutionise the TV and film industry. By leveraging extensive data to track the habits of its 100 million (and counting) users, the popular streaming site can see what you're watching and what you like; it also knows what you'll watch in future; its sophisticated algorithms and big data analysis also enable it to become an original content creator with highly acclaimed shows like *House of Cards* and *Orange Is The New Black*.

Netflix is a good illustration that data is a potent ingredient in the quest for competitive differentiation and personalisation – and the application of data in the travel industry can be just as immense and powerful.

But big data also begets a big question: how can travel organisations tap the current data bonanza to power their strategy?

The plethora of data and its effective use still present considerable obstacles for travel companies (see page 4), many of which admit that they lack the expertise or resources to successfully extract this vast, largely untapped resource and turn it into critical insights.

The key lies not in the volume of data but how it is harnessed, industry watchers pointed out.

However, many organisations are still steeped in the descriptive stage in analytics, i.e. using data to reveal the past. But the next stage of analytics evolution promises to change that, as AI and machine learning come together to “learn” how to deliver more nuanced and personalised insights for business through proactive – instead of retro-active – use of data.

With the right technology and skills, aided by constant refinement and context placement of data, travel players will be better equipped to maximise the valuable resource that is data in order to become more insightful, efficient and productive.

We've entered an age of analytics. Like how automation and the Internet have not displaced travel agents, data needs to be combined with the human touch to deliver the best of the man-machine symbiosis, unlock new revenue opportunities for travel players, and create compelling travel experiences that connect emotionally with the consumer.

Will the availability of more accurate data see more travel marketers undergo a creative renaissance and introduce powerful campaigns? Will travel business, like Netflix, use data to guide all its strategies and decisions?

Watch this space.

Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

Editor, TTG Asia

liang.xinyi@ttgasia.com

www.linkedin.com/in/liangxinyi

COMING UP



VIETNAM Northern Vietnam is shaping up to be the country's ecotourism hub, but careful development is critical for it to retain its authenticity

MALAYSIA With the emerging China market firmly on its radar, Sarawak is now shooting for film and culture tourism to drive higher Chinese numbers into the state

THEME PARKS Amid fierce regional competition, Asian attractions are joining the race to reinvent the theme park experience with multi-generational and multimedia features

INNOVATOR Bus and ferry ticket booking startup CamboTicket wants to revolutionise Cambodia's fragmented transport booking space



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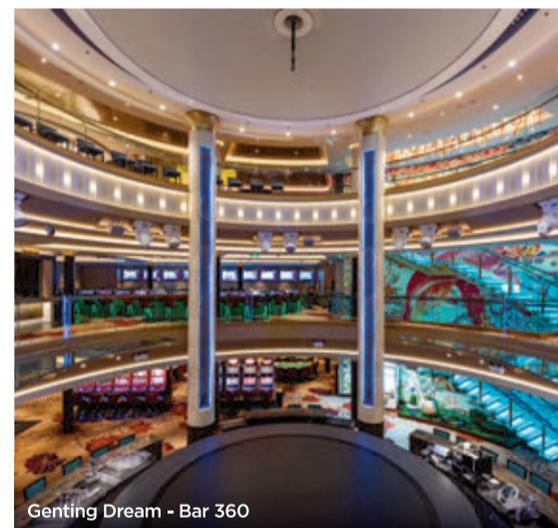
New Japan Discoveries

Starting July 2017, SuperStar Virgo will embark on a 8D7N Golden Journey from Japan to China. She will take you from Osaka, to Tokyo and iconic Mount Fuji, as well as Kagoshima with its famed onsen hot springs and juicy kurobuta black pork; and cosmopolitan Shanghai. Soak in the oriental charm!



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Analysis



Big data with a personal touch

In the age of Internet of Things, is data the holy grail for travel companies to win the personalisation war? **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena** finds out where the industry stands in using data, its struggles and what the future might hold

With rapid advancement in digital and mobile technology, more travel companies are awakening to the massive potential of using data to unlock possibilities in providing seamless, personalised customer experience.

Those who are able to leverage millions of travel data points will possess a “huge competitive advantage”, Hotelbeds’ managing director Carlos Muñoz told *TTG Asia* in a one-on-one interview during its MarketHub Asia event in Bangkok in May. Having access to such information will allow companies to manipulate the “emotional” aspects of travellers by shaping their customer behaviour and maximising their spending potential, he noted.

Earlier at the WTTC Global Summit in Bangkok in April, AirAsia CEO Tony Fernandes also played up the importance of data in the travel and tourism sector.

“The data explosion will decrease cost and increase revenue, and gives fantastic opportunities for airlines. That excites me tremendously,” he enthused.

But for travel to be personalised down to the individual level, data insights have to go beyond their current use and adaptation.

Even for Hotelbeds, a global bedbank with more than 136,000 hotels worldwide, Muñoz still sees significant gaps in harnessing the sheer volume of data available.

“Our clients have given us huge amount of data,” he shared. “We are using only five per cent of this data so there is a lot of improvement.”

Albert Pozo, president, Amadeus Asia-Pacific, added: “Data on its own will mean very little. We’ll also need systems that are clever and agile enough to integrate them and make sense of them – turning them into immediate, actionable insights... I think we’re only at the early stages of what could be a fully interconnected industry.”

The ability of data to transform the travel industry cannot be understated, although Pozo stressed that “it is not data itself that is the holy grail – but the analytical capabilities and technology we layer on top of it, and how well it is integrated into business processes. The possibilities are endless”.

Swimming in a sea of data

Bangkok-based DMC Asian Trails has also caught up in the data riptide, having taken advantage of information on the behaviour of clients and consumers to form its marketing and business strategies.

E-commerce and marketing manager Niels Steeman told *TTG Asia*: “Asian Trails regularly uses analytic sources on

our digital marketing channels, Google Analytics and other online applications to seek out trends and our success rate online. I believe that the availability of such data becomes an even more crucial part of the travel business.”

He added: “Looking back barely a decade ago when statistics were hardly available, we are now able to see the response of those showing interest in our products and how they read this. This mainly has been a positive feat with the shift from off to online marketing channels and the ongoing development in the analytics part.”

The digital revolution, however, also brings with it an explosive surge in the variety and quantity of data available, so much so that Steeman dubbed data analysis “a time-consuming and a speciality field”.

He elaborated: “The amount of data available is simply overwhelming and one cannot go and invest into additional resources unless you have a clear image of what you’re after.”

It is not data itself that is the holy grail – but the analytical capabilities and technology we layer on top of it, and how well it is integrated into business processes. The possibilities are endless.

Albert Pozo
President, Amadeus Asia-Pacific

Trying to make sense of data is hardly unique to Asian Trails; even large OTA players like Rakuten Travel, one of the biggest hotel reservation websites in Japan, also see hurdles in effective data utilisation.

Said Hirofumi Haraguchi, vice manager, business strategy group at the OTA’s international sales department: “Data is very important for Rakuten, as we have a huge e-commerce marketplace in Japan with over 80 businesses in our portfolio. However, customer demands are very diversified today so we need to use data better. We’re not maximising the use of data yet, and finding skilled personnel to manipulate data into meaningful insights is a challenge.”

Noel Swain, COO of Ezeego1, deemed data analytics a “learning process” for the India-based OTA, which has put in place associates across various departments in-

stead of a specific team to build a more complete insights picture.

But “the overload of data is quite real” and the challenge lies in figuring which of the immense data Ezeego receives to use, added Swain, but he foresees the company will get better at parsing information into useful insights in future.

Some industry players also share that current data insights are better catered to the B2C travel market, as B2B players still grapple with gleaning meaning from the vast sea of information available.

For B2B OTA Aviation Services Mongolia, currently in the early stages of developing a data analytics strategy, the uphill task lies in getting information from its agents about their end-consumers, according to CEO Margad Byambajav.

If unstructured sources of customer data could be better leveraged for his portal, he foresees being able to help agents narrow down hotel choices in a destination to offer more targeted and personalised recommendations for their clients.

difference. It’s not the size (of data) but what you do with it,” he said, adding that the effective data analytics can improve profitability for companies. “The analytics journey in the new world is going to be the prescriptive way, instead of descriptive.”

Echoing Turner’s view, Hotelbeds’ marketing & communications director Gareth Matthews added that predictive analytics has many potential applications in the travel industry, such as making airport delay predictions by combining weather, flight and traveller information.

But the current biggest hurdle to personalised service for companies lies in the lack of resources connecting different data sets, say, between a user’s frequent flyer programme and social media profile, pointed out Ming Foong, managing director Greater China & online business group, Asia-Pacific at Travelport.

Looking ahead, merging predictive analytics with artificial intelligence (AI) and matching learning capabilities appear to excite many trade players and industry watchers.

Amadeus’ Pozo elaborated: “Combined with AI, travel companies can use data analytics to create highly-tailored offers based on customers’ needs and preferences. Past behaviours can obviously feed AI computers to predict future purchase actions. But deep learning algorithms can help travel companies make the most out of their customer’s online activities... AI will also bring customised suggestions during the trip based on a traveller’s profile, location, time, and many other parameters and data that algorithms will process. This will take us into the future of ultra-personalisation.”

At the same time, Pozo insisted on maintaining a careful balance against rising privacy concerns in the pursuit of getting more information from travellers.

“Some boundaries must be maintained and at all times we must respect and protect personal data and the need for privacy. If we take this for granted we risk losing the trust of customers. And above and beyond adhering to legislation, travel players must also be able to articulate ‘what’s the value?’ for getting travellers to share their data,” he cautioned.

But Steve Saxon, partner, McKinsey & Company, reminded the industry not to lose sight of people – the critical factor that determines the success of data utilisation. “We need to think not just about data but how to embed data within the company culture,” he said.

“The power of the people is more important than the power of data,” Saxon concluded.

Not big but smart data

No one will be able to capture and analyse data from the future, but predictive analytics – i.e. applying the right statistical models to gain insights and find patterns in a vast amount of data – is getting the attention of more big data specialists and travel businesses alike.

Hotelbeds’ sales director Sam Turner spotlighted the accelerating pace of change in the digital world today. “By 2020 the world will produce 40 zettabytes, up from 0.1 zettabytes in 2001, a 400 times

AirAsia soars into the digital landscape

AirAsia sets out to transform into a digitally-led company with new technological innovations to create better flying experiences.

The Malaysian low-cost carrier AirAsia is expanding their expertise into the digitalisation field as it recognises that travellers today are seeking a personalised and seamless travelling experience. Utilising the digital experience, AirAsia shares how they have transformed the booking process.

Streamlining the booking process

Spencer Lee, head of commercial AirAsia, said: "Now everyone can fly. But before you can fly, you need to book. We have streamlined the booking process and made it personal."

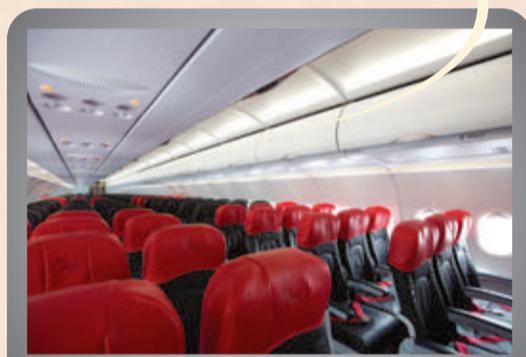
Elaborating on the AirAsia's Single Sign On function, Lee said: "When you sign up as a member, this allows your details and preferences to be saved. With BigPay, your debit and credit card details are secured with our Payment Card Industry-Data Security Standard certified partner.

"If you return to your browser, your last-searched destination will reappear in the origin and destination fields. We have reduced the number of steps from flight search to checkout on airasia.com while simultaneously proposing ancillary products—that is, everything that isn't airfare, from baggage, Santan inflight meals, preferred seats and Tune Protect travel insurance, to Wi-Fi, car rental and hotel bookings—so you can pre-purchase everything you need for your trip in one go."

Reaching out to where customers are

With the prevalence of instant messaging platforms, Lee highlighted how AirAsia has even made it possible to book flights via Line and WeChat. He said: "These are interesting new avenues for bookings, and we need to be where our customers are.

"We also give our guests more options to make their flights more enjoyable. On selected aircraft, they can connect with friends and loved ones with Rokki which is an onboard Wi-Fi portal that offers inflight entertainment and connectivity at their fingertips," Lee added.



Maximising the traveller's experience

To fully utilise the flight experience, Lee pointed out that AirAsia also offers a wide selection of duty free items and AirAsia merchandise that travellers can pre-order before taking the flight.

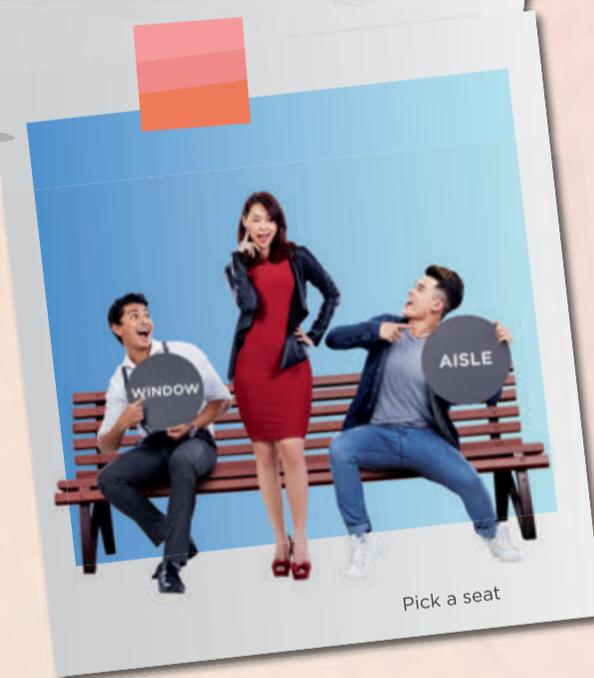
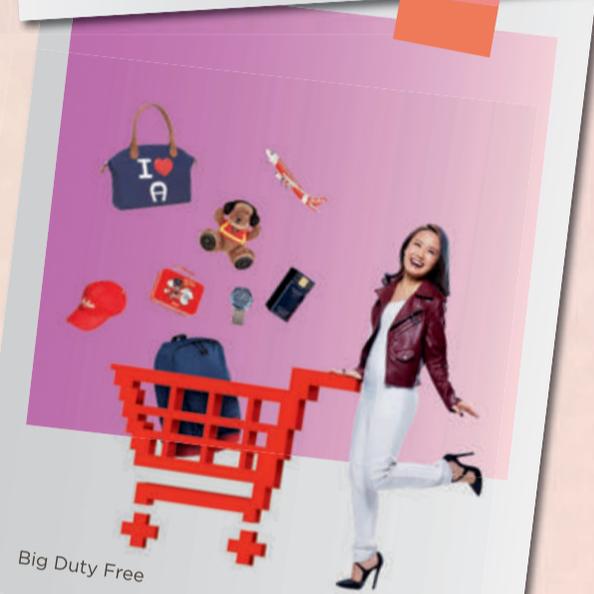
Lee said: "We have also found the cure for post-holiday blues by enticing our travellers with more holidays.

"AirAsia Big Points allow AirAsia members to earn points from everyday purchases like petrol or online purchases with flights and hotel stays as rewards," he said.

Investment in digitisation

Emphasising on how the company is making continuous great strides into the digital landscape, Lee pointed out the interface and the features of the company website and mobile app are constantly being upgraded and updated.

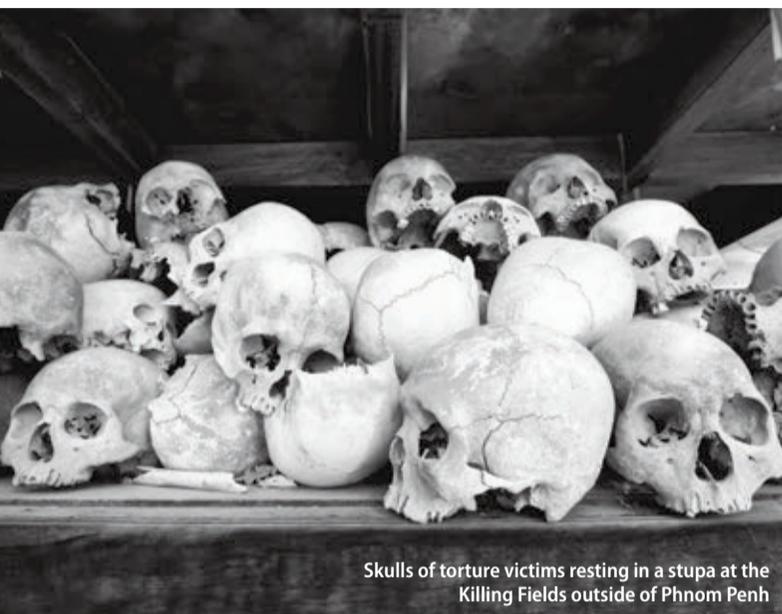
Keeping in line with their commitment, AirAsia has also since set up a full fledged data and digital team to manage its digital journey to further increase revenue and save costs, ensuring an optimal performance for the company.



Analysis

The dark side of dark tourism

Slaughter sites and killing fields are a major money-maker in Cambodia, but is this right? **Marissa Carruthers** reports the dark side to them as the kingdom moves on from the horrors of the Khmer Rouge regime



Skulls of torture victims resting in a stupa at the Killing Fields outside of Phnom Penh

As a country ravaged by decades of war, Cambodia is littered with former slaughter sites, killing fields and bitter memories for those who survived. While Angkor Wat remains the main tourist draw, the capital's barbaric S-21 prison and nearby Choeng Ek – one of the largest killing fields – also top the list of attractions.

S-21 or Tuol Sleng – the political prison where an estimated 17,000 Cambodians were tortured to death or sent to be slaughtered at Choeng Ek between 1975 and 1979 – receives 500 visitors daily, with more than 800 a day venturing to the Killing Fields during high season.

And while most international tour operators omit it from their itineraries, many tourists seize the opportunity to include the shooting range in the popular Choeng Ek-S-21 trip. Here, large sums of money are paid to fire AK47s, rocket launchers and other ageing weapons.

Pierre-Andre Romano, general manager of EXO Cambodia, said: "This is definitely not tourism. It's voyeurism. You can go and learn about the Khmer Rouge, then pretend to be one? That isn't right."

According to Elizabeth Becker, a war correspondent who covered Cambodia throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Cambodia's genocide tourist attractions should not exist. In her book, *Overbooked: The Exploding Business of Travel and Tourism* (2013), she accuses the country's dark tourism industry of being exploitative and disrespectful to those who died, and those who survived.

It's 'education'

However, Kimhean Pich, CEO of Discover the Mekong, disagrees. He said these dubious attractions not only drive tourism but provide a way to educate the world, and Cambodians.

He said: "For local people, these are places to learn about our bitter history and to make

sure we avoid repeating (the same) mistake in the future. For tourism, it is a unique product and attracts many visitors. Other countries can create similar events, temples and infrastructure, but they can't make up a history like ours."

But Romano argues it is time for Cambodia to "turn the page" and start promoting the country's other unique products, such as the wealth of community projects, rare wildlife and rural living. He added Exo Travel includes the Killing Fields and S-21 on tours due to high demand.

He said: "Of course, these sites are necessary for the education of Cambodians and to help the country understand and move forward. But for tourism, no."

As visitor numbers to genocide-related sites increase, reports of vandalism and disrespectful behaviour are on the rise. At Choeng Ek, visitors have been found collecting bones. Inappropriate selfies are often snapped in front of the blood-splattered torture tools at S-21 and graffiti sprawled across images of Pol Pot.

Last year, outrage erupted when Pokemon Go players stormed S-21 to capture characters. It resulted in the game being banned.

This is an issue Pich said needs to be tackled, with tour guides and agents having a role to play.

He said: "Before they visit the site, visitors need to be clearly informed about their behaviour. It is difficult for tourists to truly understand what our dark history means to us. Even some Cambodians have difficulty understanding, unless their family, relatives or they themselves experienced the regime. Guides and

tour leaders must translate those memories to be understood well by tourists and ask for their respect."

One organisation that is using tourism as a tool to educate and help the country heal is the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam). It has spent the last few years working in the remote area of Anlong Veng, the final Khmer Rouge stronghold.

Home to 14 landmarks, including Pol Pot's cremation site and home of infamous com-

can be done through dialogue and education. If a visitor really wants to learn about the Khmer Rouge, Anlong Veng is the best place to start and it can be developed into an important historical and educational tourist site."

Sinan Thourn, chairman of PATA Cambodia Chapter, agrees that dark tourism has a role to play in preserving the turbulent past. But it needs to evolve and the focus shift away from the macabre, such as the skulls and bones of Choeng Ek or the har-

For local people, these are places to learn about our bitter history and to make sure we avoid repeating (the same) mistake in the future

Kimhean Pich
CEO, Discover the Mekong

mander Ta Mok, the area is predominantly inhabited by former Khmer Rouge cadres, who are exiled from society.

Two years ago, DC-Cam opened Anlong Veng Peace Center, and has developed many of the sites, adding information for visitors. In July, it will start training local tour guides, and has encouraged former Khmer Rouge soldiers to share their experiences with visitors, many of whom are currently Cambodian students.

"Our main objective is to promote memory, justice and reconciliation," said centre director Ly Sok-Kheang. "We believe this

rowing cells of S-21.

He said: "Why can't we add cultural elements? Villages next to Choeng Ek can open (their homes to) homestays, or show what happens to Cambodian people when they die and put on Buddhist funeral ceremonies for visitors. We can't forget Cambodia's history but we can't just keep bringing people to these settings.

"Often when foreigners think of Cambodia, they think of landmines, genocide and Pol Pot. There is much more than that and there needs to be more promotion of the alternatives to get rid of this bad image."



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ROYAL PLAZA ON SCOTTS

Disney Explorers Lodge Celebrates Its Grand Opening Exclusive Marvel Experience to Celebrate Sales Excellence



Hong Kong Disneyland Resort (HKDL) celebrated the official grand opening of Disney Explorers Lodge and also hosted the prestigious “Celebration of Sales Excellence 2016” with about 300 travel trade and media guests on May 16, to recognize the unfailing support of the travel trade throughout the journey.



(From left) Officiating the grand opening ceremony of the new hotel were Philip Yung, Permanent Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region; The Honorable CY Leung, the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region; Bill Ernest, President and Managing Director, Asia, Walt Disney Parks and Resorts; Samuel Lau, Executive Vice President and Managing Director of Hong Kong Disneyland Resort, accompanied by Disney Friends.

Guests witnessed the grand opening of Disney Explorers Lodge in the afternoon outside the exotic themed garden. “Disney Explorers Lodge takes the experience of a hotel stay to a whole new level. This architectural spectacular at the beautiful waterfront of Lantau offers to guests an exploratory journey to the exotic cultures of the world, in the unique Disney style of storytelling,” said **Bill Ernest, President and Managing Director, Asia, Walt Disney Parks and Resorts**. “It further positions the resort as a comprehensive, world-class vacation destination that will enhance the competitiveness of Hong Kong tourism in the region”.

The annual **Hong Kong Disneyland Resort “Celebration of Sales Excellence” Awards Ceremony**, was held at the Cinderella Ballroom, Hong Kong Disneyland Hotel to recognize the exceptional sales performance of travel trade partners in the past year. HKDL presented a total of 26 awards — 20 outstanding partners were presented with Sales Excellence Award, while five partners received Sales AdvancEAR Award. The highest honor, Top Sales AchievEAR Award, was bestowed on Ivmama.com.



The highest honor of “Celebration of Sales Excellence 2016”, the Top Sales AchievEAR Award, was bestowed on Ivmama.com. (From left) Terruce Wang, Vice President, Sales and Hotel Operations, Hong Kong Disneyland Resort; Bill Ernest, President and Managing Director, Asia, Walt Disney Parks & Resorts; Captain America; Iron Man; Spider-Man; Lucas Zhou, Deputy General Manager, Ivmama.com; Samuel Lau, Executive Vice President and Managing Director, Hong Kong Disneyland Resort; and James Tung, Director, Travel Trade Sales, Hong Kong Disneyland Resort, celebrated the joyous moment on stage.

The resort unveiled the **“Marvel Super Hero Summer”** program lineup to guests, who were trained as S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents in the Marvel-themed **“Celebration of Sales Excellence 2016”**. In true Disney fashion, the immersive entertainment for the night was tailor-made and exclusive, featuring a lineup of interactive first-hand Marvel experiences and heroic encounters with Captain America, Iron Man and Spider-Man. Guests were mesmerized by the event’s vibrancy and convivial atmosphere, and took with them unforgettable memories of the award ceremony. The evening came to a jovial finale with cocktails at Walt’s Cafe of Hong Kong Disneyland Hotel.



Guests also enjoyed a sumptuous buffet dinner featuring a spread of Marvel-themed desserts prepared by the resort’s renowned culinary team, stimulating guests’ sense of sight and taste.



The travel trade partners and media were transformed into S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents in “Celebration of Sales Excellence 2016”. A lineup of interactive Marvel-themed program, left guests with unforgettable memories of the award ceremony.

Hong Kong Disneyland Resort 2016 Top Sales AchievEAR of the Year Ivmama.com

Hong Kong Disneyland Resort 2016 Sales Excellence Award

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- Cola Tour
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- Expedia
- Gray Line Tours of Hong Kong Limited
- Guangdong Nanhu International Travel Service Company Limited
- GZL International Travel Service Limited
- Holiday World Tours Limited
- HS Travel International Company Limited
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- Lion Travel
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- Qunar.com
- Shenzhen Easywin International Travel Service Co., Ltd
- Shenzhen Sightseeing Co., Ltd
- Tong Cheng International Travel Service Co., Ltd
- Vacation Asia (Hong Kong) Limited

Hong Kong Disneyland Resort 2016 Sales AdvancEAR Award

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- Dongguan Youth International Travel Service Co., Ltd
- Dream Tour (HK) Limited
- Hanatour Hongkong Co., Limited
- Westminster Travel Ltd.

(In alphabetical order)

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To honor trade partners for their ongoing support, employees across designated travel trade sectors are welcome to enjoy the **“Travel Trade Salute Offer”** up to 25% off staying at Disney Explorers Lodge, up to 40% off at Hong Kong Disneyland Hotel or Disney’s Hollywood Hotel and 10% off the published price of Park Tickets. Please call (852) 1830 800 or email travel.agent@hongkongdisneyland.com for enquiries.

NEWS FOR THE TRAVEL TRADE PARTNERS

The **Travel Professional Website** has just been revamped to enable even more seamless communication with our trade partners. It also continues to serve as an information hub of the resort’s latest products and news, lists of HKDL’s contracted wholesalers, our e-newsletter for travel trade industry, Disney Connector, press releases and trade events photos for downloads. Please visit www.hkdlt.com or scan the QR code on the right for details.

To provide convenient communication channel for overseas trade partners, travel agents can simply call the **Travel Trade Toll-Free Enquiry Hotline** for the most updated information on the resort and its diversified products and offers with zero IDD cost for six designated countries, namely India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. For more details, please email us at travel.agent@hongkongdisneyland.com.



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View from the top

Marketing US as a friendly place

A new president throws a spanner in the works for Brand USA, which has been hard at work promoting the US as a welcoming and friendly destination to outsiders. The task has become even more important. **Raini Hamdi** talks to Chris Thompson, Brand USA president & CEO, about it*

Given that this is the first administration change since Brand USA started operations in 2011, how is it good and bad for you?

(President Trump) having convinced enough people in the country to elect him as president, then going into office against the established ways the government has run in the past, makes this election a little bit unique. As well, every president contemplates changes in policies. This president is focusing on policies that in many ways could have an impact on travel & tourism but what we're dealing with is a perception issue vs the reality.

How so?

There has been a lot of conversations by the president and the members of his administration on proposed changes. But the reality is everything that has made the US an aspirational destination all these years – nothing of that has changed. As a matter of fact, the brands that deliver the product – the hotels, retail attractions and experiences – are finding new ways to innovate themselves; the people who deliver the experiences, i.e. the US citizens, open their arms to visitors. None of that has changed.

As you and I are talking today, nothing legally has changed about how anybody in the world has to acquire visas to visit the US. The only thing that has changed as it relates to entry policy, legally, is the electronics that you can carry onboard, i.e. the laptop travel policy which affects 10 countries in the Middle East. While the number of visitors from those countries is small, the countries are gateways for many visitors, from Asia or (elsewhere), to the US, and we do know that there has been an impact. But that's the only thing that has legally changed.

What is the impact?

Based on indicators such as paid search, travel to the US has softened (since the election and new administration). Advanced bookings in some situations are down. Actual (figures) from the Department of Commerce are five to six months behind so until those actual numbers come in, what we have is anecdotal.

My colleagues and the industry were at ITB Berlin and many of the conversations they had with the leading operators and the travel trade in Germany showed that they were holding par to the prior year or were having a record year. Now that's just one market, one indication. We also hear from partners. Arne (Sorenson, CEO of Marriott International), who is on our board, said they have not yet seen actual effect.

But no matter how any market is reacting to the political sentiments, the thing that has most affected our ability to attract year over year numbers from a lot of markets is currency exchange. The strong dollar has had a major impact on many of our major markets – Canada, Mexico and some of the European markets.

What can you do?

We're planning to affect leisure travel as we're at the front of the summer season which for many of our major destinations is a significant time for travel. Our newest campaign has been launched in 11 markets – Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Germany, France, the UK, Japan, South Korea, India, China and Australia.

When wallets are challenged, we need to show the value proposition.

How?

The campaign shows value proposition through 3Ps: possibilities, persona and proximity.

The first is about the US having awesome possibilities for our visitors. I'd say even with our mature markets, there is much they do not know than they do know.

Then we're segmenting the market by persona, in three ways. One is through excitement, things that get your blood flowing, participatory or as a spectator. The second is living like a local; when I travel to a destination, I want to get to know the people, what makes them live there, what keeps them there. Then comes escape, that the US has the alternatives for whatever it is that you want to escape from, say, the day-to-day routine of your job.

The beauty of the US is the diversity, not just geographically, but in the experiences that you can enjoy. People can find alternative ways to enjoy the US and, historically, this has allowed us to overcome the strong dollar. This is why a big portion of the campaign is about proximity, showcasing what's available within five hours of the gateway visitors arrive at, which in many cases many are not even familiar with.

Our campaign is social first, mostly digital, i.e. through online videos, paid search, etc, and it's social centric – for instance, we're inviting our friends from around the world to photograph themselves in the middle of their US experiences and share that.

Is this one of your bigger campaigns, to address the perception vs reality issue?

It was already in the works prior

to election, not designed at all to address the election, rather it's our attempt to promote the nature of the destination, i.e. its diversity, the people who deliver the experiences and the US people as a whole. The whole foundation is a welcoming message, which does help to offset some of the uncertainties people may have on whether or not they are welcomed.

That, and what we're doing in corporate communications, which is communicating accurate and timely policy changes to visa and entry policies, making sure people understand what has actually changed vs what has been talked about or contemplated, are both going to help us.

Is there a role for travel agent?

Absolutely. The way we market is direct to consumer, such as this campaign. The second way is through the relationships we have with the travel trade. Even in mature markets like Japan, there's still a very active travel trade network that helps us fa-

ilitate travel to the US. We've been enjoying many visitors from Japan for years. A lot of those traditional visitors learn about the US through the travel trade and even though the Internet has enabled them to get first-hand information on their fingertips, a lot of them still use the travel trade.

The younger generation is probably slanting towards the Internet but many of them still use travel agents particularly if it's the first time they are visiting the US, to guarantee the quality of the visit. They might do their own research but call the agents to facilitate the travel.

So the travel trade still plays a critical role. We have 13 offices worldwide and it is those offices on the ground that help us facilitate the relationships with the trade.

You talked about the friendly message. But the first impression people tend to get, i.e. at customs, is unfriendliness.

Hospitality and security aren't mutually exclusive. How do you introduce hospitality into a process-oriented (patrol)? We've had those conversations. I'd say though it's gotten better than five, 10 years ago.

A wish for president Trump?

Keep travel & tourism as a high priority, based on its contribution both economically and diplomatically. We know security is a real threat and the decisions they make are the ones we have to trust. And when policy is changed to protect our borders, it also makes for a more secure place for our visitors. But while we are against terrorism, we are all for legitimate travel too.

* **Editor's Note:** This interview was conducted in April during the WTTC Global Summit in Bangkok and before president Trump's proposed fiscal budget for 2018 was issued. The budget called for the elimination of Brand USA, with its revenue made available to the US Customs and Border Protection. The matter is still uncertain.

"It is important to note that the budget any administration presents is a statement of priorities – not a budget that is presented to Congress to vote on. The administration's proposal serves as a way to outline the priorities of the administration, but it is ultimately up to the Congress to formalise and vote on a final budget," Thompson said in an email to TTG Asia (<http://bit.ly/2tQotey>).

Brand USA was approved by Congress in 2010 and began operation in 2011.



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Applications close on August 31, 2017. The programme is open to businesses from both travel and non-travel industries.



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HOTELS



OAKWOOD PREMIER OUE SINGAPORE

The 268-residence Oakwood Premier OUE Singapore, located in the Lion City's CBD, offers a mix of studio, one- and two-bedroom apartments. Amenities include a gym, outdoor infinity pool, executive club, lobby bar, lounge and the Se7enth restaurant.



FAIRFIELD BY MARRIOTT KATHMANDU

The 115-room property is located in Thamel, a commercial district in Nepal's capital city. Facilities on the property include an all-day dining restaurant, a bar and lobby lounge, fitness centre, a 24/7 convenience store, and two meeting rooms.



ST REGIS SHANGHAI JINGAN

The 491-guestroom St Regis Shanghai Jingan is situated on West Beijing Road, with rooms located on the 36th to 68th floors of a mixed-use building. Facilities within the hotel include six restaurants and bars, the Iridium Spa, indoor swimming pool and 24-hour fitness centre, as well as 3,000m² of meeting space across 11 meeting rooms.



CONRAD OSAKA

Situated on the 33rd to 40th floors of the Nakanoshima Festival Complex in western Japan is the 164-room Conrad Osaka. Rooms start from 50m² and suites from 66m², while on-site amenities include two ballrooms, five F&B options, spa, 24-hour gym and 20m-long heated indoor pool.



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Report Cruises

Big ships making big waves

Cruise lines are pulling out all the stops to entice potential customers in the emerging Asian market.

Paige Lee Pei Qi highlights what the major cruise lines are offering in their latest and upcoming pipeline

Dream Cruises

Latest: *Genting Dream* is the first ship under Genting Hong Kong's new premium cruise line Dream Cruises. Launched in November 2016, the 150,000-tonne ship was designed specifically for the Asian and Chinese markets and can cater 3,400 guests (see review on page 14).

A key highlight is the exclusive Dream Palace suites and garden penthouses, which include European-style butler service, private pool and lounge, and spacious rooms with luxurious amenities. As well, more than 70 per cent of the ship's cabins have balconies facing the ocean.

Other highlights include the world's first Johnnie Walker House

at sea, Penfolds Wine Vault, Zouk beach and night club, and more than 35 restaurants and bars, as well as family-oriented facilities like water slides, a rope climbing course, rock climbing, mini-golf, arcade, cinemas and the Little Pandas Club.

What's coming: Dream Cruises will launch *World Dream* in Asia in November 2017. The sister ship of *Genting Dream*, the newer ship will target the growing demand for luxury holiday travel in the region and offer exciting new destinations and programmes.

The 21-deck *World Dream* will be able to accommodate over 3,300 guests in 1,700 staterooms, of which 70 per cent have private balconies and over 100 offer connecting rooms.

Facilities onboard will include a spa, over 1,000m² of luxury shops, six water



Genting Dream

slides, a Zouk nightclub, as well as numerous F&B options. Special attention will also be given to the meetings and

incentive market, with numerous spaces and services designed to accommodate group needs.



Ferrari racetrack on Norwegian Joy

Norwegian Cruise Line

Latest: *Norwegian Joy* is Norwegian Cruise Line's first purpose-built cruise ship customised for the Chinese market. Just launched in June,

the 3,850-guest ship will sail from her homeports in Shanghai and Beijing (Tianjin) beginning in summer 2017. It will feature The Haven by Norwegian, the line's exclusive, ship-within-a-ship suite luxury complex, which includes an observation deck that features 180 degree views.

Other innovative features include a

first-at-sea, two-level Ferrari-branded racetrack on the ship's top deck, an open-air laser tag course, simulator rides as well as hover craft bumper cars and two multistorey waterslides. In addition, *Norwegian Joy* offers the line's largest upscale shopping district, complete with duty-free shops to world-renowned global luxury brands.

What's coming: At approximately 167,800 gross tonnes, the 4,000-guest *Norwegian Bliss* is scheduled for delivery in spring 2018 to become the brand's 16th ship.

The third ship in the line's Breakaway-Plus class, *Norwegian Bliss*' hull artwork was designed by marine life artist Wyland and will feature images of humpback whales to showcase the importance of conservation and ocean preservation.

After her inaugural summer season in Alaska, *Norwegian Bliss* will seasonally homeport in Miami from November 2018 to offer seven-day Eastern Caribbean cruises, featuring calls in St Thomas, US Virgin Islands; Tortola, British Virgin Islands; and Nassau, Bahamas.



Costa Cruises

Latest: From April this year, Costa Cruises has based *Costa neoRomantica* in Asia to offer new itineraries covering destinations in Japan, South Korea and Russia. The fifth Costa ship to be based in Asia, the 1,800-pax *Costa neoRomantica* recently underwent a 90 million euros (US\$101 million) makeover.

As part of Costa's neoCollection cruises, the newly restyled *Costa neoRomantica* boasts contemporary interiors designed by Tillberg Design, a

Royal Caribbean International

Latest: *Ovation of the Seas*, which is Asia's largest and one of the world's most technologically advanced ships, was launched in April 2016. This was the first time Royal Caribbean International deployed a brand-new ship to Asia, underscoring the region's vast cruising potential.

The 18-deck, 4,905-guest Quantum Class ship homeports in Tianjin, Hong Kong and Sydney, and features several new Singapore sailings next April.

It offers a wide array of next-generation features exclusive to Royal Caribbean, such as the iFly skydiving simulator and the North Star observation glass capsule that rises 90m over the sea.

There's also SeaPlex, the largest indoor activity space at sea – housing bumper cars, roller-skating, circus school, basketball court, among others.

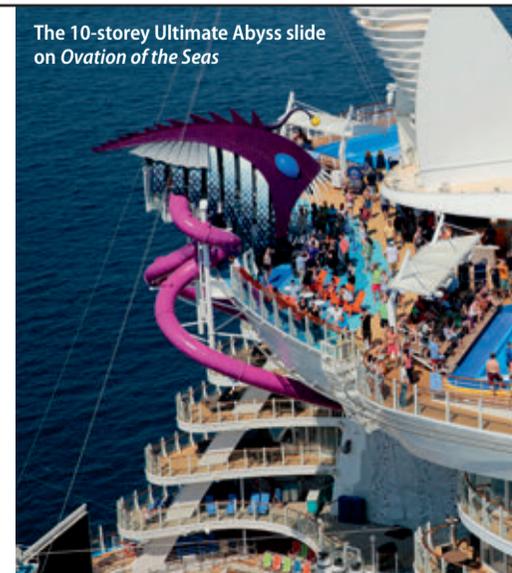
What's coming: The world's largest ship at 230,000 gross tonnes, *Symphony of the Seas* will be delivered in April 2018. This 18-deck 6,780-guest Oasis Class cruise ship will feature 28 more staterooms than sister ship *Harmony of the Seas*.

Guests will enjoy the Ultimate Abyss,

the tallest slide at sea touting a 10-storey plunge, the Perfect Storm trio of waterslides, interactive aqua park Splashwater Bay, the Bionic Bar, as well as the ZipLine, AquaTheater, Boardwalk with the carousel and Central Park, the first living park at sea. Also, there are 20 dining outlets onboard, to give guests diverse dining options.

Symphony of the Seas will begin her inaugural season in the Mediterranean to offer three- and seven-night cruises from Barcelona calling at Palma de Mallorca, Provence, Florence/Pisa, Rome and Naples. Following which it will offer seven-night Eastern and Western Caribbean itineraries from Fort Lauderdale for winter 2018-19.

The 10-storey Ultimate Abyss slide on *Ovation of the Seas*



Princess Cruises

Latest: *Majestic Princess*, launched on March 31, 2017, is the largest and most luxurious ship in the Princess Cruises fleet. It has a guest capacity of 3,560, with 1,780 staterooms spread over 19 decks.

A highlight on *Majestic Princess* is the two speciality restaurants created in collaboration with renowned chefs: La Mer, A French Bistro by three-Michelin-star chef Emmanuel Renaut and Harmony by Michelin-awarded chef Richard Chen.

Majestic Princess' other star features include the largest duty free shopping at sea with 1,100m² of luxury boutiques, and the Princess Luxury Bed available in all staterooms. Other facilities include karaoke rooms, an indoor swimming pool and a newly-rebranded Youth Centre in partnership with Discovery Communications for young cruisers aged three to 17.

What's coming: *Regal Princess* will

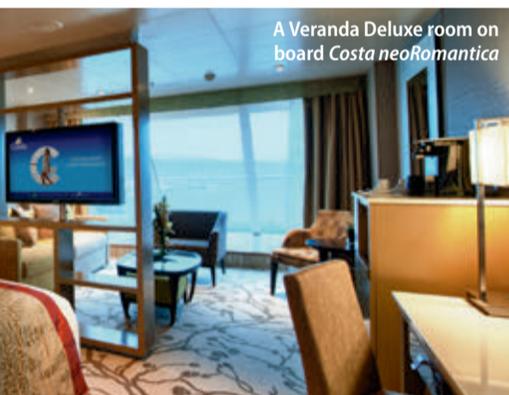
be the first ship in the Princess Cruises fleet to boast the revolutionary Ocean Medallion Technology which will go live in November 2017, followed by *Royal Princess* and *Caribbean Princess* in early 2018.

Replacing the electronic key card, the wearable coin-size device

can be worn on a wristband, as a pendant, in a clip or simply placed in a pocket. The Ocean Medallion experience is designed for an effortless, personalised vacation, starting with swift embarkation, and require no log-ins, passwords and tapping of the device against anything.



La Mer on *Majestic Princess*



A Veranda Deluxe room on board *Costa neoRomantica*

Swedish architectural firm, and Syntax, the London-based company specialising in prestigious hotels and spas. It also brings the concept of "Italy at Sea" to Asian passengers, with the new *Costa, Let's Festa!* campaign introduced across Costa Asia's fleets in 2017.

What's coming: Two new Costa ships will be built by Italian shipbuilder Fincantieri. The ships, each with 135,500 gross tons and carrying 4,200 guests, will be delivered in 2019 and 2020. They will be operated by Costa Asia, whose new ships are worth a total investment value of more than six billion euros.



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Report Cruises

Small and intimate journeys By Yixin Ng

Avalon Waterways

Latest: Avalon introduced its suite ships to South-east Asia with the debut of the *Avalon Siem Reap* in March 2015, sailing between Ho Chi Minh City and Siem Reap, followed by the launch of the *Avalon Myanmar* cruising the Upper Irrawaddy.

With a capacity for 36 guests, both ships were built smaller than their European counterparts to allow them to traverse narrower sections of the Mekong and Irrawaddy rivers.

Cabins measure 23m² and feature open air balconies with floor-to-ceiling windows measuring 4.3m across.

What's coming: The *Avalon Saigon*, scheduled for launch in 2018, will share identical features with its sister ships, and is likewise built small to make manoeuvres through narrower waterways possible.

"With a maximum capacity of only 36 guests, our smaller Mekong and Irrawaddy suite ships invite travellers to see the world differently by sailing into surpris-



Avalon Myanmar

ing places other ships cannot," explained Terri Burke, managing director of Avalon Waterways.

All three ships in Avalon's South-

east Asia fleet will sail the new 18-day Heart of Cambodia & Vietnam itinerary in 2018, cruising the Mekong River through Cambodia and Vietnam.

Pandaw

Latest: *Champa Pandaw* was launched in September 2016 with 14 staterooms measuring 14m². The two-deck vessel is fitted with an extra powerful engine to take on the strong rapids of the Upper Mekong, allowing Pandaw to pioneer sailings from

Laos to China's Yunnan Province, including Luang Prabang, Pak Ou Buddha Caves, Chiang Khong and Jinghong.

However, these reconnaissance journeys are subjected to changes and the possibility of having to transfer to speedboats in the low water season (December to March).

What's coming: While Pandaw does not yet have plans for new ships it will debut a seven-night Irrawaddy Delta itinerary in March 2018, according to Sven Zika, a company spokesperson.

Katha Pandaw's journey will begin from Yangon to Pyapon via the Twante Canal. It stops at Bogale, a historic trading port, before sailing across the delta to Myaungmya and heading up to Bassein. The ship then sails for Wakema, before winding down at Maubin and cruising back at Yangon.



Katha Pandaw

Heritage Line

Latest: Heritage Line birthed the 46-pax *Anawrahta* in March 2016, unveiling one of the largest cabins and suites sailing the Irrawaddy river.

Deluxe cabins span 32m² while suites range from Junior (48m²) to Executive (59m²) and Palatial Royal (86m²). Suites in the highest category were also given an added touch of luxury in the form of private Jacuzzis.

The *Anawrahta* also boasts a 1:1 crew to passenger ratio, and offers amenities such as a spa and pool deck.

What's coming: Heritage Line may have retired its 10-year-old *Ginger* in February this year, but its namesake – a brand-new 12-suite ship – is expected to hit the waters of Halong Bay



Anawrahta's Royal Suite

in mid-2018.

Heritage Lines' director of sales and marketing, Andreas Schroetter, told *TTG Asia* that the new *Ginger* will give Halong Bay its only ship with a pool on the sun-deck. Further details were not available at press time.

TRIED AND TESTED Genting Dream

Aboard the floating palace that is *Genting Dream*, **Prudence Lui** finds herself with nary a dull moment as she immerses in the full suite of activities

WHAT The 18-deck, 151,300-tonne *Genting Dream* was specifically designed to tap the high-end market in China and Asia. Out of 1,674 cabins, more than 70 per cent offer private balconies while over 100 provide connecting rooms catering for extended families and groups.

I embarked on a three-day, two-night weekend cruise that departed from Kai Tak Cruise Terminal on a Friday evening, with a full-day high seas voyage across the South China Sea the following day before returning to the Hong Kong terminal on Sunday morning.

Apart from six meals a day (inclusive dining) at Dream Dining Room (Lower and Upper) and Lido Buffet, guests are spoilt for choice with over 35 restaurant and bar concepts covering Chinese regional, Asian and international cuisine to suit different palates. My favourite is the Silk Road, which offers Chinese fine dining by day and turns into a cabaret and burlesque show by night.

While there is no room service, food outlets like the Lobby Bar operate till 01.00

and Bar 360 stays open round the clock.

Not to be missed are some pioneering concepts like the world's first Johnnie Walker House at sea serving upscale Scotch whisky.

WHY The premium Asian hospitality style is fully reflected from the bilingual (English and Chinese) public signage and room keycard, as well as its 2,000 crew members who are mostly friendly Asian faces i.e. Chinese and Filipino. Since the liner has a guest capacity of 3,352, it creates a high crew-to-guest ratio for cruising in Asia.

My 20m² Balcony Stateroom on the 12th floor can accommodate up to four guests, thanks to the extra sofa bed and a spare duvet set stored in the cabinet. What won my heart were the premium in-room amenities – think TWG tea bags packed in a dedicated black case – and the comfortable bed, clad with bouncy duvet and a choice of pillow from satin to feathers, ensured two nights of sweet dreams for me.

For those who yearn for the ultimate



Ocean View Pool Junior Suite

luxury experience, the two-storey Dream Mansion offers a 'ship-within-a-ship' experience with 142 suites featuring European-style butler service and exclusive facilities like private pool deck swimming pool and Genting Club restaurant.

HOW After completing a business conference on Saturday morning, I was only left with half a day to explore this 335m-long vessel proper – and that's not enough.

Duty-free retail outlets and gaming facilities aside, the ship abounds with diverse entertainment options. The 45-minute *China's Got Talent* is a theatrical representation of the Chinese hit TV series held in the 999-seat Zodiac Theatre at 21.00 while the *Rhythm Divine: Latin Ballroom Dance Show* is scheduled at 23.00 and the *Voyage of a Lover's Dream* takes place at 14.00 and 16.00.

However, I missed the afternoon shows

as I was too engrossed in other recreational activities like bubble football, hip hop dance with staff, mini golf, a water park featuring six different slides and a rock climbing wall.

Karaoke fans will be thrilled to know that five private karaoke rooms are provided on board.

VERDICT An ideal short escape for families as well as guests seeking a premium cruise experience at sea.

Rates Summer promotional rate from HK\$1,649 (US\$212) per person, based on double occupancy and excluding gratuity, port charges and visa

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- A city that comes alive with captivating festivals and activities.
- Upon boarding Costa Cruises, guests will have the opportunity to indulge in a variety of "Carnival of Venice at Sea" activities. The themed party is filled with Venetian masks, traditional costumes, live music & a colourful parade.
- The delicious Carnival of Venice menu will be served on the themed night with top-notch service.



Murano

- This city is specialized in producing Murano glass, a fancy glassware and artwork.
- Costa Cruises brings this traditional glass onboard and guests can purchase the Murano at the duty-free shop. Together with the incredible Italian art collections, guests will be able to experience the authentic Italian atmosphere.



Florence

- This city fully embodies Renaissance Italy, and art lovers flock here for a close-up of the art pieces.
- Costa ships are transformed into a floating art gallery as guests can discover the rich art collection onboard, which showcases the contemporary Italian art pieces, famous masterpieces, paintings and sculptures.



Sicily

- The legendary Gelato is believed to have originated from here.
- Guests will be glad to appreciate the top quality Gelato with various flavours onboard Costa Cruises.



Naples

- The birthplace of renowned Neapolitan pizza.
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Report Cruises

TRIED AND TESTED Seabourn Sojourn

Seabourn Sojourn lives up to the line's concept as a stylish, personalised and enriching cruise, says **Raini Hamdi**

WHAT While its parent Carnival Corporation is a behemoth, Seabourn is anything but. It started operation in 1988 and carved a name for itself as an intimate, stylish luxury cruise line with three ships offering only suite accommodation and no more than 300 suites per ship.

It is expanding with two new ships, *Seabourn Encore*, which had a naming ceremony in Singapore in January before going on its inaugural voyage, *Gems of the Java Sea*, and *Seabourn Ovation*, which will set sail in spring next year. Both are designed by famous New York-based hospitality designer Adam Tihany.

WHY *Seabourn Sojourn*, which I cruised on last month, may not have rock-climbing walls, central parks, water slides or a surfeit of F&B. It is built for the less-is-more discerning passengers seeking a more personalised and an eco-conscious cruise experience.

Being small, it is also able to navigate the narrows, bays and arms inside fjords, something that would make large ocean liners look awkward if they tried. The in-

side passage cruise to Alaska (<http://bit.ly/2sOtKWF>) that I took was a perfect example.

My ample 28m² Veranda Suite has a full-length window and glass door to a private veranda (6m²). Smart, timeless design makes the space roomier, with a living room that has a long sofa and dining table for two; a bedroom with a queen-size bed and flatscreen TV; a walk-in closet; and a bathroom with a bathtub, two wash basins and a separate shower room.

Make no mistake, this ain't a miniaturised suite. The comfort I enjoy is better than many luxury hotel rooms I've stayed in. It's down to little details such as having more storage space than I can use, and correct lighting in the bathroom, which many hotels somehow don't get it right.

HOW Dining is a sheer joy. Seabourn collaborates with three-Michelin-star American chef Thomas Keller – who's behind The French Laundry restaurant in Napa Valley – and food is delicious, full stop. My favourite is The Restaurant, the most elegant dining room which serves fine

Western cuisine. There's also an attempt to cater to a diverse mix of guests of 18 nationalities, albeit over half are Americans. The Colonnade serves a theme buffet dinner each night, including Indian, Chinese, Vietnamese and Japanese. I can vouch they are authentic.

When the sun shines, the place to be is The Patio Grill on the open deck. There's also Restaurant 2, a small, by-reservations-only venue serving fine French, which I find, frankly, is as nondescript as its name.

There are six lounges and bars. My favourites include The Square, as it's lined with wonderful books, and the Observation Bar, which offers 180-degree views of the scenery outside.

The ship brings in rangers and expedition members under a programme called Ventures by Seabourn to give pointers and lectures on wildlife, geology and nature. Destination talks are conducted by real insiders. There are photography lessons, cooking demonstrations, dance classes, spa seminars, etc. It's just as well the Internet speed is slow; it enables me to work less and live more. I understand though the ship is planning a few improvements.

Seabourn has a range of shore excursions to suit every need. I love the catamaran ride to a tidewater glacier in the Endicott Arm, where the calvings are astonishing and memorable. I will also remember my hike in Juneau to the Mendenhall Glacier as it features a dash through a short glacier tunnel which I find scarily exciting.



Guests enjoying views of Margerie Glacier on the deck of Seabourn Sojourn

Staff remember our names and likings. My assistant housekeeper Nicole, restaurant managers Will and Diana, and service staff Daniel and Alberto are hardworking and eager to please, even though tips are neither required nor expected.

VERDICT How do 11 nights fly by so quickly and how do we readjust to our humdrum lives? That, is a sublime sojourn.

Rates: From US\$4,999 for Alaskan sailings in 2017 (at press time)

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The business of pr

With insolvencies and bankruptcy filings on the uptick among travel businesses in recent years, is the trade seeing enough protection against such risks from insurance providers? **TTG Asia reporters** find out

As the middleman in the travel business, running a travel agency in the current challenging economic climate is not without its perils, as risks ranging from bankruptcy and sudden cessation of services from partners could affect their operations and cause financial loss.

However, a check with agencies across the region reveals that there is currently no insurance or scheme in place that offer a hedge against such specific business risks.

“Travel agencies are the weakest part of the entire travel distribution (chain), but there is no insurance protecting our business,” lamented Royanto Handayam, CEO of Panorama JTB Tours Indonesia.

Travel agents are also vulnerable as there is no insurance protection against defaulters or scams, some common risks that agencies face, especially as the threshold for entry into the travel agency business is relatively low in certain markets.

Fe Ablang-Yu, second vice president of Philippine Tour Operators Association, welcomes the tackling of such issues. “It is easier to apply for a business permit to open travel agencies unlike before when licensing is with the Department of Tourism, and there are cases of consumers getting scammed. If something happens to consumers, the bottom line is we need to take care of them more than anyone else.”

“There is no insurance policy in existence as it is difficult to prove to an insurance company that you have not been paid by your client whose business is still in operation,” said Ally Bhoonee, executive director of World Avenues Malaysia. “If they default, there is also nothing much we can do. If we decide to take them to court, it will have to be in their home country and getting a hearing may take years.”

Limited insurance coverage

Earlier this year, the collapse of Tokyo-based discount travel agency Tellmeclub, which affected as many as 90,000 corporate and leisure travellers, has forced the Japanese trade to reappraise its existing regulations on

insurance, which were last revised around 20 years ago.

“The bankruptcy of Tellmeclub has the potential to damage the image of the travel industry,” admitted Yoshinori Ochi, director of the board and secretary general at Japan Association of Travel Agents.

“For this reason, the Japan Tourism Agency has set up a working group to look into ways to conduct management governance in the industry so that the involved parties can act accordingly, and in a timely manner, in the event of travel agency bankruptcies in the future.”

He added: “Consumers are protected from bankrupted agencies – if they are JATA members – under our Compensation Security System, but neither consumers nor the agencies buy insurance against bankruptcy from insurance companies. JATA’s system does not cover agents dealing with errant clients or partners, although they are eligible for protection through other channels not related to JATA compensation.”

Current insurance protection in the travel agency community is typically limited to IATA’s default insurance scheme or selected programmes signed up based on their own needs, Elly Hutabarat, chairman of the Association of the Air Ticketing Companies in Indonesia (ASTINDO), told *TTG Asia*.

She said: “As IATA

agents, it is mandatory for us to take the Default Insurance Programme as well as the bank guarantee payable to banks appointed by IATA.

“If an agency defaults, the insurance company will settle the payment to IATA. But it does not mean that the default agent is free from any debt. Instead of paying to IATA, it will need to pay back the debt to the insurance company. In this case, the insurance that we are paying is to protect the airlines and not the agents. On the other hand, if an airline collapses, agents will be impacted.

“ASTINDO once worked on finding an insurance company who would protect agents from a default airline. This move was (initiated) when a number of Indonesian airlines like Sempati Air, Adam Air and Mandala Airlines collapsed, leaving agents in limbo and forcing some to close shops.”

Elly added that Raya Insurance had rolled out a scheme to protect agents’ deposits with domestic non-IATA airlines, so that if an airline ceases operation agents can get back their deposits. However, few

tection in place if clients (make claims in event of accidents). Therefore, some operators handling inbound groups would buy insurance.”

HATA, as an example, also insured its annual overseas convention from AIA to ensure a safe trip for delegates, said Shum.

Other Hong Kong agents like Swire Travel, which uses Aon, also takes up insurance separately for its cruise business, according to managing director, Gloria Slethaug.

Worth paying a premium?

Intensifying competition from OTAs, discounts on direct flights and hotel bookings, and higher merchant fees for credit card companies are some key reasons why more agencies are “struggling to stay afloat”, remarked Kay Swee Pin, president of Singapore Outbound Travel Agents Association (SOTAA).

The industry is seeing more agencies shuttering, with the most recent case of the Singapore Tourism Board revoking MISA Travel’s agency licence. As a result, the sudden closure of high-profile agencies makes it “increasingly harder” for the surviving operators to acquire financing from banks, explained Kay.

And even if insurance was available to travel agents to protect themselves against bankruptcy, the premiums are likely to be exorbitant, several agents pointed out. Most players, big and small alike, hence do not see the urgency of taking up such insurance.

Pauline Suharno, managing director of Indonesia’s Elok Tour, said: “There are a lot of small- and middle-sized agents who feel that paying the premium means cutting their slim profit margins even thinner.”

World Avenues’ Bhoonee shares similar sentiments: “It is good to have bankruptcy protection coverage, but the premiums will be high. How can we cover premiums when profit margins are so thin? If we increase the profit margin, it will be ideal.

“However, to do this, we have to educate our clients (both local and overseas agents) who buy from us that they are protected. This way they will accept higher rates knowing that they are covered in the event that my company goes bankrupt,” he added.

The Philippine Travel Agencies Association (PTAA) had earlier tried to push for industry-wide coverage for its members, said Jojo Clemente, president of Rajah Tours, during his term as PTAA president from 2005-2007. “But it didn’t push through because of the big amount involved and not all agencies wanted to be a part of it,” he explained.

took up the insurance. Furthermore, following the improved regulation in Indonesia’s transportation sector, there has not been no more airline defaults. ASTINDO is currently working with airlines to agree on transactions using credit cards only, starting with Garuda Indonesia, according to Elly. “With credit card payment, liability will lie with the credit card operators, not with us,” she said.

Elsewhere in the region, Hong Kong Association of Travel Agents’ (HATA) chairman, Jason Shum, said: “For inbound travel agents, it’s not mandatory to insure for professional indemnity, but agents handling group tours tend to have their pro-

Protection

Viewpoints

Exercising own diligence, checks

In the absence of insurance coverage against partners' insolvency and defaulting clients, it all boils down to having their own checks and schemes in place to protect their business, said travel agency bosses.

"We will study how bona fide the client or business partners are," said Panorama JTB Tours' Royanto, who added that it is still "easier" to monitor a partnership than with a company contracted through a sub agent.

To minimise business risks and potential losses from bad business dealings, Abdul Rahman Mohamed, general manager at Mayflower Holidays, said: "We have a set of internal criteria for procurement dealing with agents. Our partners must be the top three players in their respective markets. We also ask for documentation such as the last three years of audited accounts to check their credit worthiness. We check our partners on a yearly basis to check their financial health.

"It is the same with clients who engage our services. They too will do their due

diligence and check our financials. If our shareholder fund is in a negative position, they will reduce their risks by giving us small projects or not appoint us as well."

World Avenues' Bhoonee shared: "We protect ourselves when dealing with a new client by asking them to pay a bank guarantee. On the other hand, regular clients expect us to give them limited credit so they are not inconvenienced and they don't have to pay bank charges for every booking they make."

As well, Chan Brothers Travel in Singapore has cast its own safety net with more than "S\$200 million (US\$144.6 million) of asset backing in local and overseas properties... (spanning) Singapore, China, Hong Kong and Australia", said spokesperson Justine Koh.

The agency is also selective in choosing only "longstanding partners" and establishing "a wide network of operators worldwide", said Koh, in order to "circumvent such circumstances and minimise its liabilities". – *Reporting by Mimi Hudoyo, S Puvanewary, Julian Ryall, Pamela Chow, Prudence Lui and Rosa Ocampo*

What kind of insurance coverage do travel agents want?



Ally Bhoonee, executive director, World Avenues, Malaysia

Insurance companies could look at devising policies to protect agencies from going insolvent in the event of civil unrest, war and continuous acts of terrorism in a particular destination. Banks may close so how are agents to transfer money to their partners' overseas? Agents may also face cash flow problems due to weak business at the time.



Raaj Navaratnaa, general manager, New Asia Holiday Tours & Travel, Malaysia

The umbrella bodies of the travel associations in ASEAN should spearhead a group insurance coverage to cover its members against potential bankruptcy and other forms of business losses. By having a centralised insurance policy, the coverage can be wider and premiums made more affordable. The minimum requirement of premiums can be met based on an individual company's turnover.



Jojo Clemente, president, Rajah Tours, Philippines

It would be helpful if there's an insurance policy that will cover all incidents that occur against our clients. Travel agencies going bankrupt have happened before, and sad to say you are only covered by how much the Philippine Deposit Insurance Corp covers you – there's no protection. The most you can do is to be accredited by the Department of Tourism if you're an inbound (agency) but if you're outbound, you don't need to be accredited.



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Tourism minister urges growth of Bali show

Indonesia's biggest tradeshow still has some way to go before becoming an international marketplace, but its organisers are confident that such aspirations are not far away with better schedule, promotion

By Mimi Hudoyo

The Bali & Beyond Travel Fair (BBTF) must expand its horizons, attract more buyers and grow into an international event if it is to become a true marketplace, according to Arief Yahya, Indonesia's minister of tourism, who spoke at the closing press conference of the two-day trade show last month.

The minister had last year recommended for the organising committee to step BBTF 2017 up from an Indonesia inbound-only show to become a regional event by having neighbouring ASEAN sellers, before further expanding to become an international event.

This year, he urges the same, stressing that "customers like a one-stop shop more than an stand-alone one" and citing the success of international shows like ITB Berlin.

Ketut Ardana, chairman of the BBTF organising committee, reported that the fourth edition of the annual trade show this year saw participation of 188 sellers from 19 provinces and one seller from South Korea. Last year there were 154 sellers from 18 provinces, with no international seller.

While there was a slight improve-



From left: BBTF organising committee's Ketut Ardana, Bali Tourism Office's Anak Agung Gede Yuniartha Putra, IHRA Badung Regency's I Gusti Ngurah Rai Suryawijaya and Arief Yahya

ment in international representation this year, *TTG Asia* noted that a number of the big inbound operators and international hotel brands were not represented.

In response to the tourism minister's

urging, one BBTF committee member told *TTG Asia* that the show was still very new and the committee wanted to strengthen the inbound market and grow it regionally to prevent outbound business from overshadowing the inbound

sector.

"We will open the show to regional and international participants as the minister wishes one day, but for now, strengthening the inbound business is our priority," the source said.

This year, 198 buyers attended the show (264 buyers from 54 countries had registered), down from 222 buyers from 30 countries last year.

Notably, Arief pointed out: "China is the top arrivals source into Bali today, but I do not see (many) buyers from China."

He added: "The fact that only 19 out of 34 provinces in the country participated (and the low participation of buyers) shows that this show has not become a marketplace."

Ardana suggested that the low participation could be due to the show being held during the Muslim fasting month.

Tanto Ruwiyadi, executive committee member of BBTF 2017, added: "We have actually approached neighbouring ASEAN members, but they could not participate this year due to Ramadan. Next year, our show will take place after Lebaran (end of fasting month), so hopefully more will take part."

South Sumatra guns for recognition as sports tourism destination

By Mimi Hudoyo

As Palembang, the capital city of South Sumatra, casts its sights on becoming a sports tourism destination by leveraging the 2018 Asian Games – which it will co-host with Jakarta – some in the trade expressed concern about sustaining visitor volume beyond the event.

With support from the central government, the regional government is currently beefing up infrastructure in South Sumatra. The Jakabaring sports stadium is undergoing expansion to become a 'sports city', with the addition of sporting facilities, athlete accommodation, a convention hall and more.

Also under construction are a Light Rail Transit connecting the airport, two new bridges across Musi River that runs through the city, and the 22km toll road between Palembang and Indralaya.

Speaking during the opening dinner at the recent Bali & Beyond Travel Fair, of which South Sumatra was a co-host province, governor of South Sumatra Alex Noerdin said: "We are getting our-

selves ready to host Asian Games 2018 and showcase our tourist attractions. Following the Asian Games, we will host the Moto GP Circuit too."

Ahmad Najib, assistant governor, government affairs and community welfare, South Sumatra, added: "From the central government budget for infrastructure, we received 70 trillion rupiah (US\$5.2 billion). From the regional budget we spent eight trillion rupiah plus funding from some businesses in South Sumatra."

The destination is expecting a combined 10,000 athletes and spectators during Asian Games.

However, this demand may be more seasonal than is desired. Jonathan Moku, corporate director of sales and marketing, Sintesa Hotels Group, questioned: "It is great to have new facilities, but what will happen after the games? The destination needs to sustain traffic to fill hotel rooms."

While lauding the efforts the provincial government has taken to develop



Jakabaring Aquatic Centre in Palembang

Palembang as a sports destination, Muhammad Erfandi, owner of Muba Wisata Tour & Travel in Palembang, commented that the industry could benefit from some government budget diverted to improving tourist attractions.

Responding to the concerns, Ahmad said the regional government has collaborated with international sports federations, which could help keep up a stream of events in Palembang.

"In 2011 we hosted SEA Games and University Games. In 2015, there were 23

single and multi-sporting events."

For him, the benefits of hosting major sports events are undeniable. "Before 2011 (the year Palembang hosted SEA Games), there were only nine flights per day, today there are 52 flights per day and four direct flights from Singapore and Kuala Lumpur," he pointed out.

Data from the South Sumatra Tourism Office showed international arrivals to the destination last year totalled 64,257, a 34 per cent increase from 42,321 in 2015.



A showcase of culture and beauty

At the fourth Bali & Beyond Travel Fair, co-hosted by South Sumatra this year, sellers from across Indonesia's 19 provinces presented their best products to international buyers at the two-day trade show



ASITA's Bali, South Sulawesi chapters link up for tourism promotion

By Mimi Hudoyo

The Association of the Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies' (ASITA) Bali and South Sulawesi chapters have signed an MoU at the recent Bali & Beyond Travel Fair 2017 to boost traffic between the destinations.

Enhanced cooperation would facilitate the creation of combined packages covering the two destinations, under an hour from each other by plane, and enable the trade to attract more international tourists, said Didi Manaba, head of ASITA South Sulawesi Chapter.

"As Bali is still the major gateway and the number one destination of international tourists, we expect more travellers to Bali will continue their trips to South Sulawesi."

Meanwhile, Denpasar City Tourism Promotion Board (TPB) is taking further steps to promote the Balinese city's tourism.

Ida Bagus Sidartha Putra, chairman of Denpasar City TPB, said not many travellers are aware that tourist attractions in Sanur – such as the Sindhu Market and Badung Market – are located within Denpasar City.

Sidhartha Putra said the TPB was formed in 2015 to raise tourism awareness.

"Our priority is to lift the Denpasar City branding, as well as attract investment into Denpasar and Sanur. We work closely with Sanur Development Foundation, which foresee the development in the area, and us the bridge between the investors and the (foundation)."

With a tourism promotion strategy that focuses on reaching out to the youth market through digital and online platforms, he said the board has received a biannual budget of US\$200,00 from the mayor office, and the figure is expected to increase in the next term.



Traditional Tana Toraja village in Rantepao, Sulawesi

Dayak stays in Tanjung Puting

By Mimi Hudoyo

The Tanjung Puting Destination Management Organisation has launched the Staying with the Dayak community-based tourism programme during last month's Bali & Beyond Travel Fair 2017.

Under the supervision of Swisscontact, the programme was created to introduce new attractions and extend travellers' length of stay in the destination.

The Staying with the Dayak programme brings visitors to Tanjung Puting National Park and includes a traditional welcome ceremony by the Dayak Tomun tribe and a stay in a guesthouse or longhouse, followed by trip to Lamandau Regency located three hours away.

Soraya Ragil Dien, programme officer

destination development and marketing of Swisscontact, said the organisation has been working with the local community for years to create the product.

"The local community has developed one guesthouse with three rooms for FITs, but a number of local people have let their long houses to be managed as accommodation for tourists."

Activities vary from cooking classes using local produce, basket weaving lessons, as well as hunting and spearfishing with the locals.

There is also a jungle trekking for beginners and adventurers (including an overnight stay in the jungle).

The package starts from 5D/4N, with two days in Tanjung Puting and three days in Lamandau.





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Ijen's Blue Fire - Banyuwangi, East Java • Indonesia

Ijen Blue Fire

Ijen volcano complex is a group of composite volcanoes within a 20 kilometer wide caldera. This fascinating volcano has a one-kilometer-wide turquoise-coloured acidic crater lake. Around the lake, sulphur vents spew yellow molten sulphur which miners haul by the basketful. As evening falls, watch an amazing after dark show. Take a two-hour hike up to the rim of the crater, then after scaling down the crater walls for more than half an hour, witness electric-blue flames, which are ignited sulphuric gas emerging from cracks at temperatures up to 600°Celsius (1,120° Fahrenheit). The flames can reach 5 meters high. It is said to be the largest blue flame area in the world.

Red Island Beach

Located in Sumberagung Village, Pesanggaran District, Red Island Beach, known locally as Pulau Merah, is a tranquil beach in a secluded bay surrounded by lush hills and mountains. It offers the best sunsets in East Java, and beach breaks that are perfect for beginner surfers. Supposedly, the beach takes its name from the color of the oxidized rock islet in the middle of the bay. Another version is the pink-tinged color of the sand. Being just 60 kilometers south from the town of Banyuwangi, or a 2,5 hour drive by car, it's also easy to experience some of the local attractions, such as Banyuwangi's Gandrung Dance. Scheduled performances are available.



Red Island Beach - Banyuwangi, East Java • Indonesia



G-land (Plengkung Beach) - Banyuwangi, East Java • Indonesia

Surfing G-land

Situated about 53 kilometers south of Banyuwangi, in the easternmost tip of Java, G-Land, also known as Plengkung Beach, is a world-class surf break on Grajagan Bay. The very long, barreling wave breaking along the east side of Grajagan Bay is considered one of the world's best left hand waves and several surf camps readily cater to visiting surfers. Grajagan's unique attraction also lies in the combination of rolling ocean waves and dense forest bordering the beach. It is also not far from Alas Purwo National Park, which can be accessed by canoe.

How to get there:

- From Jakarta to Banyuwangi : Garuda Indonesia daily flights (twice a day) from Jakarta to Banyuwangi with layover in Surabaya.
- From Bali to Banyuwangi : Ferries run from Gilimanuk Harbor in Bali to Ketapang Harbor in Banyuwangi every 30 min, operated 24 hours a day.

Rise of the Chinese explorer

More Chinese travellers are now enabled and emboldened to seek out Australia's regional gems, a far cry from how the market was when the tourist boom from China first took off in 2007. By **Adelaine Ng**



Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, Northern Territory

Andrii Sorochak/Shutterstock

Chinese travellers are growing more confident about exploring Australia independently, and regional parts of Down Under are readily embracing them.

At 1.3 million entries in the year to March 2017, China is on the cusp of overtaking New Zealand's long-held spot as top source market.

But the profile of today's Chinese visitor is a far cry from their counterparts at the start of Australia's Chinese tourist boom in 2007.

"The traditional stereotype of the Chi-

nese visitor as someone who just comes to visit their relatives, eats at Chinese restaurants and shops a lot is changing," said David Beirman, a destination marketing specialist and senior tourism lecturer at University Technology Sydney.

"Many of them are second- or third-time visitors so they want to have a more authentic Australian experience – to see the koala in the great outdoors and visit regional places, especially those with connections to Chinese history, e.g. where coal was discovered in Ballarat and Bendigo in Victoria or the mining gold fields

in New South Wales and Queensland."

David Tang, marketing manager at Grand City Tours, observed Chinese demand grow 20 or 30 per cent from the year before, for places like Uluru in the heart of the Australian outback. "This market doesn't care about hotels or access to Chinese food," he said. "They only want to see the beautiful views."

Two key reasons underpin the confidence of the modern Chinese traveller, according to Andy Jiang, Tourism Australia's country manager for China.

"One of the biggest enablers is the mobile phone and the ability to get information and stay connected," he said.

"The second is the enormous progress China has made over the past 20 to 30 years as a global power. China's confidence on the global stage is being reflected and embraced by Chinese consumers, allowing them to venture further, see more and do more."

Moreover, Chinese travellers are less inhibited of not speaking perfect English, and they no longer crave for traditional tourism products. "They want to experience something unique that reflects their lifestyle, or aspirations of doing not just what everyone else is doing," Jiang said.

The Chinese experiential trend is also driven in part by social media. Visits to Tasmania, for example, saw a spike after Chinese model Zhang Xinyu posted photos of herself clutching a lavender plushie bear that she and other celebrities acquired from Bridestowe Lavender Estate during a fam courtesy of Tourism Australia.

Zhang's post garnered massive atten-

Destination in numbers

A\$8,220

The average Chinese visitor spend, equivalent to US\$6,250, about four times that of New Zealanders in second spot

11%

The growth in international visitor numbers to Australia to 8.3 million in 2016, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics

Viewpoints

How will Chinese tourists change tourism in regional Australia?



Peter Homan, general manager, Outback Queensland Tourism Association

The modern Chinese traveller doesn't find the outback a challenging destination, but big groups will be a challenge (for suppliers) in more remote regions that want the income but don't know how or are unwilling to cater for them. There's much work to be done in the areas of room capacity and interpreters, and knowing what these groups look for in a destination.

Hans Belle, managing director, AAT Kings & Inspiring Journeys

Although Chinese visitors still prefer group travel, especially for first-timers, we are starting to see FIT and tailored small group growth, which allows for flexibility. While coastal regions such as Cairns and the Great Barrier Reef are still popular, inland destinations like Ayers Rock and Alice Springs are gaining popularity due to its unique offering and in response, an extensive range of guided holidays, short breaks and day tours on offer to meet this demand.

tion in China, driving many of her young FIT followers to emulate her journey in Tasmania and the lavender farm in particular, remarked Jiang.

As well, regional Australia is now better prepared to take on the cultural challenges that large groups of Chinese tourists might bring. Added Jiang: "A lot of the experiences in regional Australia are run by small- to medium-sized businesses who are very passionate about the market and what they do."

They are also using the latest technologies that are changing consumer behaviour in China such as WeChat Pay and UnionPay, he observed.

However the farther travellers venture into the outback, the more they must be prepared to have less access to familiar comforts, in terms of language or otherwise, Bierman pointed out.

Issue of the day

Citizen guiding: friend or foe?

New platforms connecting tourists to local hosts defend themselves in the face of sceptical tour guides. By **Adelaine Ng**



Airbnb and Australian startup Localyokl have moved into the guided tours space, offering “live like a local” experiences often led by unlicensed hosts, a development some industry leaders in Australia are uncomfortable with.

About 400 guides have registered to be hosts with Localyokl, which offers 140 experiences from paddle board yoga to astrophotography.

“It’s not so much a threat,” said Rosemary Cameron, administrator for the Professional Tour Guide Association of Australia. “These are all opportunities for guides. It just means that guides have to change the way we find work.”

Rather, her unease is based on the lack of training or insurance involved and how

people are becoming guides without understanding the pitfalls of the job.

The two digital disrupters were recently criticised by Australian Tourism Export Council managing director Peter Shelley, who called them cowboys in the marketplace that damaged expectations of Australia’s brand.

Localyokl experience creator Ben Crisp rejected the criticism, telling *TTG Asia*: “I don’t think we’re eroding anything they provide. They’re always going to provide a good service. All we’re going to do is (offer) an alternative for those who don’t want to get trapped in the one-size-fits-all tourism mould. (We’re about) flexible, small group tours.”

Crisp added that his company is looking into liability insurance for every guide

but admitted they currently rely on a liability waiver with the onus still on the guide to have the relevant insurance.

Meanwhile, Airbnb insists many of the existing licensing laws are designed for mass tourism. For experiences that pose safety risks, like a motorcycle or helicopter ride, the vetting processes are strenuous.

Institute of Australian Tour Guides spokesperson Suanne Adelman advised that while training, first aid and insurance are extra costs, guides are better off paying that upfront “than to have someone from a very litigious country overseas sue you if something goes wrong”.

However, both Cameron and Adelman hope that the introduction of sharing economy guides in Australia will increase their membership numbers.

MY WAY



Brenden van Blerk
Hotel manager,
Holiday Inn Potts Point, Sydney

What are the three greatest challenges to Australian tourism and how would you address them if you had your way?

Labour shortage The primary issue in my eyes as a hotel operator is the attraction and retention of talent. The industry needs 36,000 team members and leaders, and we are not attracting or producing talent fast enough to keep up with demand.

More emphasis is required from high schools on the types of careers available in the hospitality and tourism industries. Vocational institutions need to find ways to ensure fees are affordable and government assistance programmes are accessible to students.

Digital experiences As an industry, we are sometimes slow to adapt to the rise of digital marketing and shopping experience. The consumer today is demanding media-rich digital content and engaging experiences before they even buy the product or use the service. It is all about the experience.

We need to (attract) digital leaders from other industries into the hospitality and tourism sectors and act on their recommendations. We also need to adapt our brands to be more nimble in this landscape to entice and secure buyer preference through experience loyalty.

Transport infrastructure Tourism transportation is nearing (or possibly already) at maximum capacity and yet we don’t have the right structure to grow significantly or handle the scale of international segments we are targeting.

We need to find the operational expertise, with state government support, to sign major projects like Western Sydney Airport so that we can exponentially increase connectivity into New South Wales.

By doing so, it will create growth in Western Sydney and then flow into benefits such as easier domestic travel and international choices, thereby helping reduce the perceived high cost of travel in Australia.

NEWS IN A MINUTE

1 Tasmanian tales in a hotel

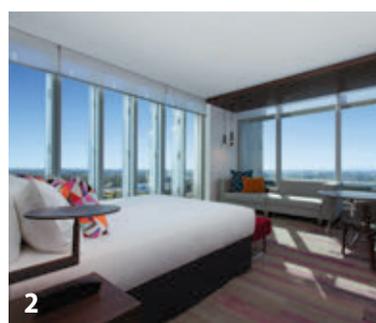
The MACq 01, an immersive storytelling hotel, opened its doors in Hobart on June 2.

Each of the 114 rooms and suites room is named after a Tasmanian historical character whose personality is reflected in the design and decor. The hotel also features The Story Bar, Old Wharf Restaurant and an atmospheric Lounge.

Complimentary storytelling tours hosted by handpicked scholars of Tasmania’s past are available too, covering the Hobart Waterfront and the dark underbelly of the Wapping district.

2 Aloft hotel opens in Perth

Opened in May, the 224-room Aloft Perth features a WXYZ bar for live music and craft cocktails, an outdoor heated Splash pool, 924m² of meet-



2

ing rooms and Aloft’s signature 24/7 grab-and-go market for light meals.

The hotel’s signature restaurant, Springs Kitchen, has a pet-friendly terrace, although pets are not allowed as guests unless they are a service animal.

3 Virgin Australia codeshares with Air Canada

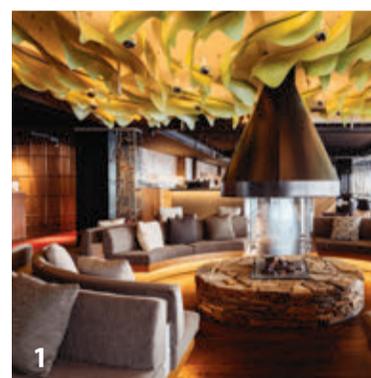
Virgin Australia has begun code-share services on Air Canada flights between Los Angeles and three Canadian cities – Toronto, Calgary and Montreal – the first phase of an MoU signed in December 2016.

Air Canada currently operates daily non-stop flights from Vancouver to Sydney and Brisbane, and plans to offer seasonal non-stop flights between Vancouver and Melbourne from December 2017.

4 Emirates flies all-A380 to Melbourne

From March 25, 2018, Emirates will provide an all-A380 service from Melbourne when it upgrades its third daily flight from the Australian city to Dubai from a Boeing 777-300ER, right as Qantas replaces the Melbourne-Dubai-London with the Melbourne-Perth-London route on March 24, 2018.

Emirates’ move will add 945



1

seats per week on flights EK408 and EK409, representing a 10 per cent increase in capacity.

The Emirates A380 offers 489 seats in a three-class cabin configuration with 14 private suites in first class, 76 flat-bed seats in business class and 399 spacious seats in economy.

5 AccorHotels partners Cirque du Soleil’s Avatar-inspired show

AccorHotels is the official accommodation partner of TEG as well as *TOURUK The First Flight* by Cirque du Soleil. The production tour Australia and New Zealand for the first time from September 1, 2017, performing almost 100 shows. Le Club AccorHotels and Accor Plus loyalty members will get access to pre-sale tickets and VIP opportunities.

Destination South Korea

A breath of fresh air

Angela Thairu/sutterstock

Julian Ryall takes a look at how the country's largest port city makes a name for itself among international visitors by forging partnerships, launching campaigns and opening new attractions



Haedong Yonggungsa Temple in Busan

Destination in numbers

2.9 million

The number of foreign tourists who visited Busan in 2016, up from 2.1 million the previous year

9

The number of five-star hotels in the city, including the newest Hilton Busan

5

The number of subway lines that criss-cross the city

Like the rest of the country, Busan has benefited from the wave of South Korean movies and shows, with the latest blockbuster *Train to Busan* in part boosting the destination's arrivals to 2.9 million in 2016, a strong rebound from 2.1 million in 2015, the year of the MERS outbreak.

However, the recent row between Seoul and Beijing over the deployment of THAAD anti-missile systems in South Korea threatens to derail arrival figures (see next page) this year as China has banned domestic travel agents from selling package tours to South Korea.

Looking to make up for the arrival shortfall, Busan Tourism Organization (BTO) is now seeking out new source markets beyond China and Japan.

Said Yoon Young-gi, assistant manager of BTO's tourism marketing division: "Busan is quite well-known as a destination for FITs and we have high expectations that the inbound market from South-east Asia will grow."

As well, 15 per cent of arrivals hail from outside Asia, another area that BTO intends to further tap into.

It has teamed up with Asiana Airlines since May to promote Busan to visitors from seven Asian cities – Manila, Singapore, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh, Jakarta, New Delhi and Phnom Penh – offering free passes for sightseeing tours on bus.

"The campaign focuses on FITs from South-east Asian countries, and we

are promoting it primarily online and through social media," said Yoon.

Meanwhile, new infrastructure and hotel developments are expected to attract new travellers to the port city. The latest attraction is the Busan Air Cruise, a glass-floored cable car that operates the 1.6km trip from Songdo Beach to Aman Park.

Arguably even more important are plans for a multi-billion-dollar project for a new airport on Busan's outskirts. A feasibility study has been approved for the US\$5.2 billion project that includes a 3,200m runway, new terminal, and associated facilities and infrastructure adjoining the existing Gimhae International Airport.

Once completed, the new airport will be able to handle 38 million passengers a year, a significant upgrade from the current 17.3 million. Work on the new airport is scheduled to start in 2021, with the facility operational in 2026.

Hilton Hotels and Resorts, similarly confident in Busan's tourism potential, has opened its newest property in the city earlier this month.

The 310-room Hilton Busan offers three pools, fitness and spa facilities spanning more than 3,500m², a conference centre with two large ballrooms, plus proximity to a Lotte mall, a cinema complex and 180 retail outlets.

"This is a key gateway city and the second-largest city in South Korea, which

makes it an important destination for us," said Jean Sebastien Kling, general manager of Hilton Busan and Hilton Namhae Golf & Spa Resort.

"South Koreans come here to enjoy the beach life and there are a lot of positive attributes to the city, although there is internationally still a lack of awareness about Busan and we hope to be able to help to change that," he added.

"Busan is becoming the complete destination and I am confident that more international hotel brands will want to be here soon," Kling remarked.

Viewpoints

What should Busan do to attract more foreign leisure visitors?



Il Moon, director of sales and marketing, Park Hyatt, Busan

"It is important to secure international air routes to Busan in order to

expand the inbound market. Cities in South Korea have relied too heavily on China and Japan; Busan needs to make more of an effort to develop markets in other countries. As well as countries in South-east Asia, we need to bring in more tourists from Europe and America."



Sandra Kim, vice president, Jane Tour

"Longhaul travellers from Europe and North America are really interested in our history and culture,

and like to hike in the mountains around Busan. I think they are more adventurous, but there is not enough of such attractions for them at the moment. We need to provide these kinds of experiences to make sure that Busan is an interesting destination for longhaul travellers."

MY WAY



Hailey Shin
Founder and CEO,
Funtastic Korea

If I had my way, I would increase flight connectivity into South Korea. This would be the most important priority for the industry. We are effectively an island, and we need more routes. Flying has become much more affordable in the region, so we just need to provide the flights for people to get here.

If I had my way, I would improve English signage in South Korea. The biggest problem travellers face in the country is the language barrier, so we need more signs and information in English. Shops and restaurants that attract a lot of overseas visitors should make an effort to use English for their menus and signage, for example. This would make things easier for tourists.

If I had my way, I would promote the country in a more efficient and effective way. Too often, there is a duplication of efforts as the travel authorities focus too much on Seoul, Busan and Jeju Island for foreign visitors. There needs to be an effort to get tourists to visit other parts of the country that offer great things to see and do too. We are not making the most of our fantastic tourism resources.

I also believe that South Korea needs to promote its culture and content better through social media outlets such as YouTube and bloggers. Those play an important part in reaching out to today's international travellers. That includes people in their 40s and 50s, who make up our main customer target.

Issue of the day

The dragon withdraws

Declining Chinese arrivals compel operators to seek out other market sources. By **Julian Ryall** and **Rachel AJ Lee**

A mere 227,811 Chinese tourists arrived in South Korea in April 2017, a plunge of more than 66 per cent year-on-year, after China banned its travel agencies from selling packages to South Korea in retaliation to the bilateral row over the THAAD anti-missile systems deployment.

"The travel industry has been hit pretty hard the last few months, particularly for companies that effectively had their eggs all in one basket and dealt almost solely with the inbound Chinese market," said Albert Kim, vice president of This Is Korea! travel agency, who noted a shift in travel companies rewriting their business strategies to develop new markets.

Seoul-based Sunburst Tours is one agency that has launched new advertising campaigns targeting fresh clients, said office manager Ginger Kim, after seeing the number of Chinese travellers plummet by 90 per cent. "We are only handling FIT travellers from China now, and it is a big difference," she said.

While arrivals from Japan hold "steady", Sunburst is gaining traction with package tour visitors from Muslim-majority countries in South-east Asia. "We are cooperating with a number of agencies in Muslim countries to draw up plans," she added.

Other operators have similarly seen an uptick in Muslim travellers, lured by South Korea's improved provision of Muslim-friendly facilities, its colder climate as well as the popularity of K-dramas.

Mustalifa Yunus, Korea eTour's sales manager, said: "The percentage of Muslim travellers visiting South Korea is more than non-Muslims. For my company, the percentage can be 60-40 sometimes. We get many requests from Muslim travellers, especially those based in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei, as well as the occasional Arab country."

To cope with the growth, Mustalifa shared that Korea eTour recently opened its first branch office in Kuala Lumpur, "where our main bulk of Muslim travellers come from".



Asian tourists at Seoul's Gyeongbokgung Palace

Stunning Korea, which has handled around 50 Muslim FIT groups of 20 pax or less, is likewise targeting Muslim travellers from Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia, according to the agency's president, Youngsik Youn.

Growth from the Muslim market has overall been modest, according to Korea Tourism Organization's latest figures, with arrivals from Malaysia, Pakistan and Bangladesh climbing 8.4, 13 and 6.3 per cent respectively.

Keeping its customer base worldwide and not reliant on the Chinese market has been a strategy of Seoul Touch Up, said manager Jasmine Lee. The agency also targets longhaul travellers, particularly from English-speaking markets.

"The market is beginning to stabilise again," said Lee. "But now our customers are asking if it's safe to come to South Korea because of all the news about North Korea and the threats being made."

NEWS IN A MINUTE

1 An integrated Paradise

The 339,000m² Paradise City opened in Incheon in April, close to the international airport. Touted as the largest integrated resort in Asia, the vast facility comprises a casino, spa, five-star hotel, convention centre, high-end restaurants, art galleries, and a multitude of shopping and entertainment options.

2 E-visas for SE Asian tourists

The South Korea government in May started issuing electronic visas to tourists from South-east Asia.

To encourage foreign arrivals to Incheon, Busan and Seoul, the government also introduced a five-day visa-free programme for tourist groups from South-east Asia who are headed to Jeju Island and tran-

sit through Incheon or Gimhae airports.

3 Old overpass, new purpose

Opened in the capital in May, the Seoulo 7017 Skygarden is a derelict elevated highway turned 983m-long park home to 24,000 plants.

The project is the first in a series designed to repurpose defunct infrastructure and increase green spaces in the metropolis. Other areas in the city have also been earmarked for renovation by 2030.

4 One card to rule them all

Launched in February, the Korea Tour Card offers discounts on tourism activities, including shopping, attractions and performances. The 4,000 won (US\$3.60) smartcard,



which can be topped up, also acts as a pass for public transport.

It can be purchased on international flights operated by Jeju Air, as well as at 7-Eleven stores, and travel centres in airports.

5 A whole Lotte love in Seoul

Seoul's first six-star hotel opened in April in the 123-storey Lotte World Tower. Located between the 76th and 101st floors, the Signiel Seoul has 235 guestrooms, five F&B options, a spa, sauna, gym and swimming pool.

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MOST READ/COMMENTED**MALAYSIAN TOUR OPERATORS PERPLEXED OVER NEW TAX RULES**

Conflicting statements by the federal and state governments, as well as the lack of official documentation over the charging of the controversial tourism tax – supposed to be effective on July 1 – are making it difficult for Malaysian operators to inform their overseas counterparts.

At press time, the Malaysian trade is still in the dark over the implementation date of the tourism tax, as there has been no official word from the authorities.

As a precaution, Adam Kamal, CEO, Olympik Holidays, has included the state tax and new tourism tax for new bookings made from July 1 onwards, and would discount the amount in the case that the implementation of the new tax is deferred or the state decides to abolish state taxes.

Manfred Kurz, managing director of Diethelm Travel Malaysia, questioned the lack of clarity surrounding the mechanics of the tourism tax, and called upon the authorities to give at least half a year's lead time for implementation.

NEW PRESIDENT FOR NATAS AFTER OHRI'S SURPRISE EXIT FROM AGENCY BUSINESS

Devinder Ohri has lost his presidency at the National Association of Travel Agents Singapore (NATAS) after he issued a statement confirming that his company, GC Nanda & Sons, had "decided to cease and orderly wind down (its) retail travel related operations". GC Nanda & Sons also relinquished its Travel Agent License from the Singapore Tourism Board on May 30.

Following an urgent NATAS executive committee meeting convened on June 19, deputy president Steven Ler will assume the role of acting president until a new president is appointed or elected at the association's next Annual General Meeting scheduled for May 2018, according to a NATAS statement.

NATAS stressed that it is business as usual at the association despite the recent changes in its leadership. The NATAS Travel Fair – Holidays 2017 will proceed as planned from August 11-13.

**JTB SWOOPS IN ON KUONI TRAVEL SERVICES**

Hot on the heels of Thomas Cook India's purchase of Kuoni Global Travel Services' DMC network in Asia, Australia, the Middle East, Africa and the Americas, JTB Corporation in end-May acquired all shares of Kuoni Global Travel Services for an undisclosed price.

The Kuoni Global Travel Services acquisition is a move to bolster JTB Corporation's ambitions to become a top global DMC, as the partnership is expected to strengthen the inbound business services and increase the market share in Europe. It will also support the expansion and strengthening of the global MICE services in Europe and the US markets, which is complementary to existing JTB MICE business.

Thomas Cook's acquisition does not include Kuoni Destination Management Europe and Kuoni Destination Management US, which remain in the portfolio of Kuoni Global Travel Services.

Kuoni Global Travel Services said in a statement it will continue efforts to be a neutral land operator to work with many companies other than JTB, paying full attention to the protection of any sensitive information.

WHO'S SAYING WHAT**Instagram**

AJ Hackett Sentosa, slated to open in mid-August, will feature a vertical skywalk and double swings. The attraction's eponymous New Zealand entrepreneur was in Singapore last month to be the first to take the leap of faith off the 50m-tall bungee tower on Siloso Beach. #ajhackett #sentosa #bungeejump #leapoffaith

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TWITTER.COM/TTG_ASIA
INSTAGRAM.COM/TTGASIA

WE LIKE Snippets of happenings good and bad surrounding the travel trade**OVERSEAS TRAVEL BAN FOR AUSTRALIA'S PAEDOPHILES**

In a world-first move aimed at eradicating child sex tourism, the Australian government has announced a proposal to cancel passports of convicted paedophiles to prevent them from travelling overseas and commit offences. This plan, if approved by parliament, would make it illegal for the nation's 20,000 registered child sex offenders to travel abroad. About 800 registered sex offenders travelled overseas from Australia in 2016, including half who travelled to less developed countries across South-east Asia.

DESIGNER HIJAB FOR AIRASIA'S FEMALE PILOTS

Since June, Muslim female pilots at AirAsia and AirAsia X have a choice to don the white Naelofar Hijab, a product of the LCC's collaboration with hijab brand Naelofar Hijab. According to AirAsia, its female pilots were involved throughout the design process to create a functional and comfortable headscarf suitable for their day-to-day



operations, and prototypes underwent multiple wear testing before being rolled out. The result is a hijab made of stretchable fabric, adorned with the Naelofar Hijab symbol created in Swarovski crystals.

ASIAN AIRLINES TOP WINNERS AT SKYTRAX AWARDS

Qatar Airways took top honours as the world's best airline at the 2017 Skytrax World Airline Awards, beating last year's winner, Emirates, and perennial favourite Singapore Airlines.

In second place this year is Singapore Airlines, followed in order by All Nippon Airways, Emirates, Cathay Pacific, Eva Air, Lufthansa, Etihad Airways, Hainan Airlines and Garuda Indonesia. In the LCC category, AirAsia clinched the top accolade, while Jetstar Airways placed sixth, AirAsiaX seventh and Indigo 10th.

As well, the best airline economy class accolade went to Thai Airways, while Qatar Airways also bagged the world's best business class award. Singapore Airlines got the winning votes for the best business class seats and Garuda Indonesia retained its title for the world's best cabin staff.

**GULF-QATAR ROW AFFECTS AIR TRAVEL IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

Several Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain, as well as Yemen, Libya's eastern-based government and the Maldives last month announced the breaking of diplomatic ties with Qatar, accusing the tiny Gulf state of supporting extremism in the region.

This ongoing row has affected air travel in the region, as Qatar Airways has suspended all flights to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt "until further notice" while Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain had closed all transport links by land, sea and air with the Qatari peninsula. Other airlines in the affected countries, including Emirates, Etihad Airways, Bahrain's Gulf Air, flydubai and Air Arabia, have also cancelled flights to and from Doha.

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EDITORIAL

Karen Yue Group Editor
karen.yue@ttgasia.com
Xinyi Liang-Pholsena Editor, TTG Asia
liang.xinyi@ttgasia.com
S Puvanewary Editor, Malaysia/Brunei
puvanewary@ttgasia.com
Mimi Hudoyo Editor, Indonesia
idmfasia@cbn.net.id
Pamela Chow Reporter, Singapore
pamela.chow@ttgasia.com
Rachel AJ Lee, Yixin Ng Sub Editors
rachel.lee@ttgasia.com, ng.yixin@ttgasia.com
Rebecca Elliott, Adelaine Ng Correspondents, Australia
rebeccaelliott@hotmail.com, adelaineng.abc@gmail.com
Marissa Carruthers Correspondent, Cambodia
maris.carruthers@gmail.com
Caroline Boey Senior Correspondent, China & Special Projects
caroline.boey@ttgasia.com
Prudence Lui Correspondent, Hong Kong
prulu@yahoo.com
Rohit Kaul Correspondent, India
rohit.kaul@ttgasia.com
Julian Ryall Correspondent, Japan
jryall2@hotmail.com
Rosa Ocampo Correspondent, The Philippines
rosa.ocampo@gmail.com
Feizal Samath Correspondent, Sri Lanka/Maldives
feizalsam@gmail.com
Chadamas Chinmaneevong Correspondent, Thailand
chadamas@gmail.com
Paige Lee Pei Qi Assistant Editor, Special Projects
lee.peiqi@ttgasia.com
Redmond Sia, Goh Meng Yong Creative Designers
Lina Tan Editorial Assistant

SALES & MARKETING

Michael Chow Group Publisher
michael.chow@ttgasia.com
Pierre Quek Publisher, Online Section
pierre.quek@ttgasia.com
Shirley Tan Senior Business Manager
shirleytan@ttgasia.com
Ingrid Chung Business Manager
ingrid.chung@ttgasia.com
Cheryl Tan Corporate Marketing Manager
cheryl.tan@ttgasia.com
Kwek Wan Ling Marketing Executive
kwek.wan.ling@ttgasia.com
Cheryl Lim Advertisement Administration Manager
cheryl.lim@ttgasia.com
Carol Cheng Assistant Manager Administration and Marketing
carol.cheng@ttgasia.com

PUBLISHING SERVICES

Tony Yeo Division Manager
Kun Swee Qi Publishing Services Executive
Lynn Lim Web Executive
Katherine Leong Circulation Executive

TTG ASIA MEDIA

Darren Ng Managing Director
darren.ng@ttgasia.com
Raini Hamdi Senior Editor
raini.hamdi@ttgasia.com

OFFICES

SINGAPORE 1 Science Park Road #04-07 The Capricorn,
Singapore Science Park II, Singapore 117528
Tel: (65) 6395-7575 Fax: (65) 6536-0896
traveltradesales@ttgasia.com; www.ttgasia.com
HONG KONG 8/F, E168, 166-168 Des Voeux Road Central,
Sheung Wan, Hong Kong
Tel: (852) 2237-7288 Fax: (852) 2237-7227

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Travel Hall of Fame

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

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

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

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



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Award Categories

1. Travel Agency Awards

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

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

2. Travel Supplier Awards

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

Airline Awards

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

Hotels, Resorts, Serviced Residences & Spa Awards

HOTEL Chains

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

HOTELS – Individual Property

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

RESORTS – Individual Property

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

SERVICED RESIDENCES

- Best Serviced Residence Operator

SPAS

- Best Spa Operator

BT-MICE Awards

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

Travel Services Awards

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

3. Outstanding Achievement Awards

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

- Travel Personality of the Year
- Destination of the Year
- Travel Entrepreneur of the Year
- Best Travel Marketing Effort
- Most Sustainable Travel Company
- Best Trade Supporter

4. Travel Hall of Fame

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

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

Inducted Travel Hall of Fame honourees are:

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

VOTING INSTRUCTIONS AND GUIDELINES

For Travel Agency and Travel Supplier Awards

1. Please use the correct voting form.

Voting Form A: Travel Agency Awards

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

Voting Form B: Travel Supplier Awards

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

Online Voting Forms

You can also opt to vote using our online form www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards

2. Voting Criteria

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

3. Voting Rules

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

- No responsibility will be accepted by the organisers for voting forms lost, delayed or damaged in the post.
- There are no pre-nominated contenders for any voting awards.
- The results for TTG Travel Awards 2017 are final and no correspondence will be entertained.
- Voting forms will be tabulated and evaluated by an independent auditor in Singapore.
- Voting Closes 7 July 2017.

4. Voting Form Submission

Completed voting forms are to be returned to:

SINGAPORE

Ms WanLing Kwek (TTG Travel Awards 2017)
TTG Asia Media
1 Science Park Road #04-07 The Capricorn
Singapore Science Park II
Singapore 117528
Tel: (65) 6395-7575 Fax: (65) 6536-0896

HONG KONG

Ms Carol Cheng (TTG Travel Awards 2017)
TTG Asia Media
8/F, E168, 166-168 Des Voeux Road Central,
Sheung Wan, Hong Kong
Tel: (852) 2237-7272 Fax: (852) 2237 7227

VOTING FORM A: TRAVEL AGENCY AWARDS

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

VOTE ONLINE AT
www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards

Criteria

Best Travel Agency in its respective category in terms of:

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

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

16. Best Online Travel Agency

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

VOTER INFORMATION

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

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

VOTING CLOSES
7 JULY 2017

VOTING FORM B: TRAVEL SUPPLIER AWARDS

VOTE ONLINE AT
www.ttgasia.com/ttg-awards

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

Airline Awards

Criteria

Best airline in its respective category in terms of:

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

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

Hotels, Resorts, Serviced Residences & Spa Awards

Criteria

Best Hotel Chain in its respective category in terms of:

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

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

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

HOTEL CHAINS

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

HOTELS – Individual Property

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

50. Best **New City** Hotel
Best city hotel that opened in 2016/2017

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

RESORTS – Individual Property

52. Best **Beach** Resort
Best resort located by a beach. This resort must also boast the best visual appeal and ambience reflecting local flavour.
53. Best **Resort** Hotel (Non-Beach)
Best resort not located by a beach. This resort must also boast the best visual appeal and ambience reflecting local flavour.
54. Best **New Beach** Resort
Best beach resort that opened in 2016/2017
55. Best **Integrated** Resort
Best hotel offering comprehensive accommodation, shopping, dining, entertainment and sports.

SERVICED RESIDENCES

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

SPAS

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

BT-MICE Awards

Criteria

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

Travel Services Awards

Criteria

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

VOTER INFORMATION

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

VOTING CLOSES
7 JULY 2017

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