

All aboard the Disney Adventure

Get the perfect Disney experience on Disney Cruise Line's newest ship with this four-day itinerary



Marvel Landing brings the theme park experience to sea with three brand new rides

With its maiden voyage set for December 15, 2025 from Singapore, Disney Cruise Line's *Disney Adventure* is all geared up to take passengers on a magical Disney experience out at sea.

From first-of-its-kind Disney attractions and entertainment, to seven unique Disney-themed areas, artfully designed staterooms, and casual to extravagant dining experiences, the ship's offerings have been conceptualised to bring to life Disney's fantastical worlds with personalised luxury, service and convenience for guests throughout their journey.

Here is a sample four-day itinerary for a family with children to get the best experience on board:

Pre-trip planning

Select from 2,111 staterooms, all of which feature Disney, Pixar, or Marvel-inspired artwork, and come with separate shower and toilet areas, elevated beds with space for luggage storage beneath, and 24-hour complimentary room service.

Concierge guests enjoy personalised pre-boarding services, exclusive lounges, and private spa rooms. On board, staff can assist with crafting personal itineraries, celebrating special occasions, in-suite dining and more.

Those eagerly awaiting their trip can download the Navigator App to plan and add the experiences they want to have onboard ahead of their sail date.



Disney Imagination Garden at the heart of the ship showcases Disney's magical worlds in larger-than-life landscapes

Day 1: Step into a whole new world

With excitement high on the first day, dive right into three brand new Disney attractions at Marvel Landing: Ironcycle Test Run, the longest rollercoaster at sea inspired by Tony Stark's Ironcycle prototype; Pym Quantum Racers, where guests zip around a track inspired by the car chase scene in Marvel Studios' *Ant-Man and The Wasp*, and *Groot Galaxy Spin*, a *Guardians of the Galaxy*-themed adventure.

Guests can also explore Disney Imagination Garden, an open-air space with landscapes inspired by Disney, Pixar, and Marvel characters, and its storybook castle showpiece.

After expending all that energy, it's time to refuel. The *Disney Adventure* offers rotational dining, the cruise line's signature dining concept where guests experience one distinct dining experience each day over three days, following a schedule included with their booking.

Each family will be accompanied by one service team, who will learn their preferences and be able to make recommendations, throughout their voyage.

Dinner will be served at two assigned seatings, at either the Navigator's Club or Hollywood Spotlight Club where they will get to interact with and see appearances by well-loved Disney characters.

Day 2: Splashing good time

Start the day at Toy Story Place, a whimsical water

park inspired by the Toy Story movies and have a splashing good time on Woody and Jessie's Wild Slides. Little ones can play at the Toy Story Splash Pad!

You can also relax at the Walt Disney Theater in Town Square with two Broadway-style productions, *Remember*, specially created for this ship, and *Disney Seas the Adventure*.

For dinner, you will get to dine at either animation restaurant — Animator's Palette or Animator's Table. Mealtime here is an interactive experience where guests can make sketches and watch them come to life amid animations of Disney and Pixar stories.

Day 3: From action-packed fun to lazy afternoons

Enjoy family fun at San Fransokyo Street, inspired by *Big Hero 6*. Play games at the Big Hero Arcade, test your skills at the Hiro Training Zone simulator, or compete in arcade games. Baymax Cinemas screens Disney, Pixar, Marvel, and Lucasfilm movies, including same-day premieres on land.

After the indoor activities, unwind outdoors at Wayfinder Bay, inspired by *Moana*. Relax by the pool while enjoying live shows and interactive events, including the musical *Moana: Call of the Sea*.

For your third rotational dining experience, you will be placed at either the Enchanted Summer Restaurant, a cosy village dining hall inspired by

Tangled and *Frozen*, or Pixar Market Restaurant, which celebrates Pixar films.

Day 4: Something for all ages

Adults and children have their own exclusive experiences to enjoy on board.

Parents can drop their children off at the various kids clubs — Disney's Oceaneer Club, Vibe or Edge, staffed by trained counsellors to enjoy the spa exclusive to them. Meanwhile, it's a small world nursery offers babysitting services for those aged six months

to three years.

For an upscale dining experience, head for Palo Trattoria, an adults-only Italian restaurant. For drinks, the Buccaneer Bar streams live sports events, while Tiana's Bayou Lounge serves craft cocktails amid New Orleans-style hospitality.



The action-packed San Fransokyo Street offers a wide range of activities including an arcade and cinema

Disney Cruise Line works with travel trade around the region in the lead up to the ship's sailing. For trade enquiries, please contact the Disney Cruise Line contact centre at +65-6228 3728.

Visit <https://disneycruise.disney.go.com/ships/adventure/> for more information.



Disney ADVENTURE

Disney CRUISE LINE

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Hello 2025!



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The new year is upon us, and with every new beginning is another opportunity to learn from the past and do better. It is so for us as individuals as well as for organisations in the travel and tourism industry. ‘Do better’ ought to be the motto for travel and tourism professionals, especially as the industry is so dependent on the well-being of the environment and host communities.

For our Outlook 2025 issue, we look at how people are expected to consume travel this year. Based on travel data and consumer studies, leading travel and tourism organisations say travellers will be expanding their itineraries to less crowded hidden gems, savouring their holidays at a slower pace, embracing all-inclusive resort stays, and tracking down speciality local goods. These motivations underscore the desire for more meaningful trips that also support local communities.

For travellers who yearn for off-the-beaten-path experiences, whether to feed their desire to be first-movers or to avoid contributing to overtourism in hot locations, Asia-Pacific has plenty of gems waiting to be discovered. Tourism authorities in this region have been leading campaigns to direct attention to cities and countrysides that have only been known to locals or have been transforming brilliantly to offer a warmer welcome. Tourism Western Australia, for example, went all out in 2024 to promote areas beyond well-known Perth. Also encouraging is the news that UN Tourism’s Best Tourism Villages initiative has expanded in 2024 to include 55 new qualified rural destinations, of which 13 are in our region (plus two in the Middle East).

Getting to secondary and tertiary destinations is also becoming easier, as low-cost carriers in our region rebuild their network strongly and into unserved/underserved routes.

Driving travellers deeper into areas and communities that hunger for tourism dollars is a collaborative effort, requiring the foresight of destination leadership, creativity and determination of tour operators and travel advisors, and the support of all in the travel and tourism eco-system. My team will do our part too, by building more content to highlight emerging destinations.

“

For travellers who yearn for off-the-beaten-path experiences, whether to feed their desire to be first-movers or to avoid contributing to overtourism in hot locations, Asia-Pacific has plenty of gems waiting to be discovered.

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Travel Hall of Fame

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

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

- Singapore Airlines Limited (2002)
- Changi Airport Group (2002)
- Hertz Asia Pacific (2005)
- Royal Cliff Hotels Group (2006)
- Sabre Asia Pacific (2009)
- Lotte Tour (2011)
- Hong Kong International Airport (2013)
- Raffles Hotel Singapore (2013)
- Regal Airport Hotel (2015)
- Banyan Tree Resorts & Spas (Thailand) (2015)
- Qatar Airways (2016)
- Thai Airways International Public Company Limited (2016)
- Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (2016)
- Royal Plaza on Scotts (2018)
- Royal Caribbean International (2018)
- BWH Hotels (2019)
- Travelport (2019)
- Harbour Plaza Hotels & Resorts (2023)
- Phoenix Tours International Inc. (2023)
- Resorts World Sentosa Pte Ltd (2023)

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





BEHIND THE NAME

Erika Rathi

Director, Namaste Holidays

You were already a successful owner of a hospitality business before entering the travel agency business. Why did you choose to take this step?

Owning Namaste Dwaar resort has given me unique insights into what travellers seek: authentic experiences that go beyond just accommodation. I wanted to extend the Namaste Dwaar philosophy into a travel company, Namaste Holidays, to offer more tailored, immersive journeys that connect people to local culture and wellness in a way that feels accessible and meaningful.

A lot of offline travel agencies in India are facing challenges competing with online agencies. How do you regard this competition as a new entrant?

While online travel platforms are prevalent, we have seen many travellers returning to offline agents due to the overwhelming amount of information online, which can make planning stressful and confusing. Namaste Holidays has actually been operating for over a decade, but we are now putting our full focus on it to offer curated and simplified travel solutions. With our experience, we provide personalised recommendations that cut through the noise, offering a seamless, enriching, and stress-free travel experience that combines digital accessibility with hands-on support.

How did you first come into the tourism business?

My journey in tourism began with our family's passion for creating spaces that foster relaxation, health and family connections, which ultimately led to Namaste Dwaar. Our vision has always been family-centric, valuing shared experiences and quality time together. Building on that foundation, Namaste Holidays was a natural extension, allowing us to bring wellness-inspired, family-focused travel and curated experiences to more people, while staying true to our values of authenticity and genuine connection.

How do you book a holiday for yourself?

I prefer to experience destinations in a way that feels unique and personal, much like what we offer at Namaste Holidays. For my own travel, I trust my team to suggest destinations and experiences that align with my interests in sustainability, wellness and cultural immersion. The best trips for me are thoughtfully curated yet flexible, with local recommendations, unique stays, and calming environments. – Rohit Kaul



APPOINTMENTS



Nathalie Altwegg



Akshat Sinha



Kyoung Hee Kang



Paul Mulcahy



Amanda Hyndman



Omar Romero

Nathalie Altwegg

SITA has named Nathalie Altwegg as senior vice president of its airports business unit. She will spearhead SITA's growth in the airports market and drive the digitalisation of operations and journeys globally through technology and innovation.

Akshat Sinha

As Conrad Maldives Rangali Island's new resort manager, Akshat Sinha will focus on executing key projects, including the ongoing repositioning of the resort's dining venues and the introduction of new signature experiences.

Kyoung Hee Kang

Kyoung Hee Kang is Korean Air's new regional manager for Vietnam. Having joined the company in 1997, she takes on her new position from her role at Korean Air's regional headquarters in South Korea, where she served as the head of sales management group.

Paul Mulcahy

The Lux Collective has appointed Paul Mulcahy as its new chief commercial officer. He has over two decades of extensive leadership experience in commercial strategy and business transformation.

Amanda Hyndman

Amanda Hyndman is the new chief operating officer at Mandarin Oriental. She has been with the group for 18 years, and has a career that spans over 30 years in the luxury hotel industry.

Omar Romero

In his new role as chief development and luxury officer of Minor Hotels, Omar Romero will lead global development, identify business opportunities, oversee project execution, manage key stakeholder relations, and help shape the luxury brand portfolio.

AI has practical impact on hospitality, says Joseph Ling, founder and CEO of Vouch, a digital-concierge platform that helps hotels streamline their operations and enhance their guest experience

Beyond the hype



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Beyond the hype and grand promises, AI is quietly solving real problems in ways that sometimes surprise even the skeptics.

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Last year, a luxury hotel in Singapore was ready to delay the launch of their digital guest experience platform – a solution that lets guests access all hotel services and information through their mobile phones by scanning QR codes. This platform would replace traditional in-room directories and allow guests to order room service, make restaurant reservations, and access hotel information seamlessly in their preferred language. However, there was a problem: the human translator they hired had delivered work that fell short of standards, and they were not comfortable launching a guest-facing platform with subpar translation.

Without informing them, we took

the initiative to run the client’s content through our AI-powered translation system. Upon review, they were pleased with the results and gave an enthusiastic approval. That’s when we revealed our little secret – it was entirely AI-generated. Their amazement was priceless. This moment perfectly captures where we are with AI in hospitality today. Beyond the hype and grand promises, AI is quietly solving real problems in ways that sometimes surprise even the skeptics. In my role, I’ve seen both limitations and practical magic of AI. Let me share some real stories from the frontlines.

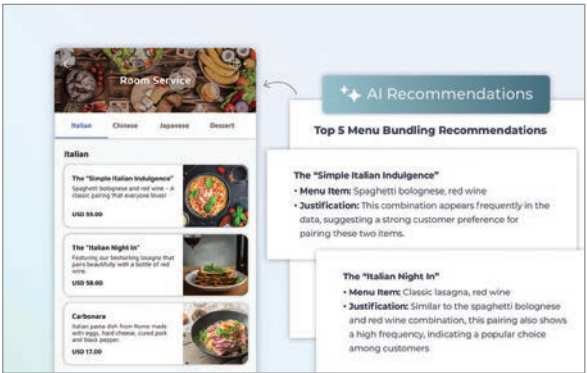
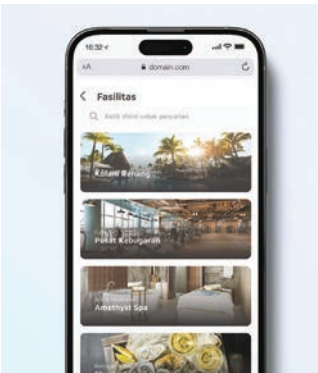
When AI speaks your language
If you have ever used standard translation tools, you know how they can turn elegant

hospitality phrases into awkward gibberish. “Please enjoy our signature room service experience” becomes “Please have fun in our autographed bedroom assistance” – not exactly five-star material. However, modern AI has learnt to understand context. It knows that “room service” is a concept, not just two random words stuck together. When our AI system translated the hotel’s content from English to Bahasa Indonesia, it preserved not just the meaning but the warmth and professionalism of hospitality language. The hotel’s marketing team could not tell the difference between AI and expert human translation. The result? Zero launch delays, approval on first review, and one very surprised client.

Teaching old menus new tricks
Here’s where things get really interesting. We discovered that combining AI’s old and new tricks could transform F&B operations. Traditional AI is great at number-crunching – analysing what dishes sell well together, what times are busiest, and what combinations maximise revenue. That’s useful, but not revolutionary. Now, imagine combining AI’s new talent for language with powerful analytics. A breakthrough that not only identifies profitable menu combinations, but also crafts irresistible descriptions that make your mouth water. It’s like having a data analyst and a creative writer working in perfect harmony. The result? Our hotel partners are seeing F&B revenue jump by eight to 15 per cent just by implementing these AI-suggested pairings and descriptions.

Making every guest feel special
I recently experienced the power of personalisation during my stay at a Hyatt property. The team created a custom *Morning Post* newspaper and a hand-drawn illustration of my three daughters. Those were touches that made our stays unforgettable. Traditionally, hotels reserve such personal touches for VIP guests because they are incredibly time-consuming to create. Now, here is the exciting part: with new tools like LM Studio and GPT4All, hotels can now run AI models right on their own computers. This means they can create personalised souvenirs for many more guests while keeping sensitive data private – no need to send information to external servers. What was once a luxury welcome for a few could become a special moment for many.

Moving forward
Through building Vouch and working with hotels across Asia, I have learnt that AI’s real value is not in flashy transformations but in solving specific, tangible problems. The technology is here. It is accessible to properties of all sizes, and its impact is very real. The key is starting with clear challenges and working backward to solutions, always keeping that essential hospitality touch that no amount of artificial intelligence can replace.



AI’s powerful analytics and new talent for language presents new opportunities for hospitality companies to leverage the technology for greater operational efficiency, grow revenue, and raise guest experience standards

Generative AI a top priority for travel



Generative AI (Gen AI) remains a central focus for the travel technology sector looking ahead to 2025 – but challenges are emerging as initial optimism begins to dissipate, according to a report released by Amadeus, *Navigating the Future: How Generative Artificial Intelligence is transforming the travel industry*, which surveyed experts in the field from across the travel ecosystem.

Gen AI was cited as a top priority for the coming year by 46 per cent – ahead of any other technology. This figure rose to 61 per cent in Asia-Pacific, suggesting the region may be ready to take the lead in this transformative technology. Other technologies cited as a top priority for 2025 included data management (38 per cent), cloud architecture (36 per cent), non-generative AI IT infrastructure (34 per cent), and biometric technology (23 per cent).

Globally, over half of travel technology leaders (51 per cent) argue Gen AI already has a “significant presence” in the travel industry in their country. A further 36 per cent expect this presence to emerge over the next year, while 11 per cent expect the process to take one to two years. Just two per cent of travel technology leaders think it will take three or more years for Gen AI to have a significant presence on the travel sector where they are.

Today, 41 per cent of travel companies say their organisation has the budget and resources in place to implement Gen AI, while 87 per cent are open to working with a third-party vendor to develop Gen AI-powered applications.

The study revealed a number of emerging challenges, including data security (35 per cent); lack of Gen AI expertise/training (34 per cent); data quality and inadequate technological infrastructure (33 per cent); ROI concerns, lack of use cases, or difficulty in estimating value (30 per cent); and difficulty in connecting with partners/vendors (29 per cent).

Today, Gen AI specialists are grappling to recruit experts and train existing workforces to bridge a skills gap, while working to secure data and convince senior leaders of the value of Gen AI investments.

While the process of experimentation continues with the deployment of Gen AI, several use cases have emerged in the travel technology sector, such as digital assistance for travellers during booking (53 per cent), recommendations for activities or venues (48 per cent), content generation (47 per cent), helping staff to better serve customers (45 per cent), and collecting and condensing post-travel feedback (45 per cent).

Study respondents were looking for, in ranked order, return on investment, customer satisfaction, efficiency and productivity improvements, performance metrics (accuracy, precision and relevance) and increases in key performance indicators.

Sylvain Roy, chief technology officer, Amadeus, said: “It is crucial that we use this new technology (Gen AI) responsibly, ensuring data security, privacy, and content reliability. It is time for Gen AI to prove it can live up to the hype.”

Atlas uses AI to fix airline retailing gaps

Low-cost airline retailer Atlas has introduced its AI-solution, Athena to tackle one of the industry’s most pressing issues: inconsistent quality of airline data and content.

With its monitoring capabilities and the ability to learn and evolve, Athena is designed to enhance data quality and air content performance, as well as to streamline the distribution of flights. The tool helps Atlas manage air content more effectively by monitoring airline performance across 150 carriers integrated with Atlas’s Air Travel Retailing and Information Platform (ATRIP) and resolving issues automatically in real time.

Athena applies machine learning and automation to address inconsistent content and data quality, avoid failed or inaccurate bookings, and improve traveller experience while the industry gradually develops and adopts cohesive and better aligned standards.

To catch issues impacting content performance, such as scheduled maintenance and payment complexities, Athena automates critical processes like monitoring airline API and HTML performance, ticketing quality checks, and data verification.

When content and data quality drops below the threshold, Athena automatically disables affected airlines, reactivating them once performance criteria are met. This proactive quality management helps Atlas’s partners deliver seamless booking experiences and avoid costly disruptions.

Atlas CEO and founder Mary Li said: “Airline retailing remains a hugely complex industry, constrained by legacy tech and uneven speed of technological advancement, with some airlines being quite behind on their tech journey. The scale of data quality and performance challenges in the industry is massive. It is a mammoth task to monitor and manage content from multiple channels – and AI can provide much-anticipated relief for everyone involved in the distribution of flights.”



Vouch gains adoption among prominent local hotel chains in Asia



Singapore-based AI-powered hotel management solution specialist, Vouch is seeing an expanded presence among local hotel chains across Asia, with more relying on its solutions to enhance guest experiences, boost revenue, and streamline operations.

Today, Vouch works closely with properties within Lexis Hotel Group, Compass Hospitality, and Kingston Group in Malaysia and Thailand, as well as Banyan Tree Club & Spa Seoul under Banyan Group in South Korea.

The company recognises that one major challenge local hotel chains face is driving revenue through ancillary services, such as upselling dining options, spa treatments, and activity bookings. These services are often underuti-

lised due to limited guest engagement – Vouch’s platform is designed to capture guest attention with personalised, relevant offers. The intuitive, user-friendly interface encourages guests to spend more time engaging with the platform, thereby increasing exposure to services.

With Vouch’s latest AI-powered upselling analytics, hotels gain valuable insights into their guests’ decision-making processes, allowing them to optimise their promotional bundles and enhance the presentation of their offerings, including improved descriptions and naming conventions.

Addressing another challenge, operational inefficiencies, Vouch’s Task Manager provides a unified backend system to improve coordination across departments. The AI-enhanced system facilitates real-time communication, photo and voice note attachments, and auto-translation to enhance collaboration among staff of different nationalities.

Vouch has designed its deployment process to minimise disruption and ensure a smooth transition.

Travel this way



Eval Mikosinutstock

Travellers will be expanding their itineraries to less crowded hidden gems, savouring their holidays at a slower pace, embracing all-inclusive resort stays, and tracking down speciality local goods, say travel trend studies for 2025. By Karen Yue

Iceland is a choice destination for travellers who want to view the Northern Lights

Venture farther

Driven by both a desire to not contribute to overtourism and to broaden their horizons while on holiday, more consumers are making a conscious effort to visit less touristy destinations in 2025.

According to the *Skyscanner Horizons: 2024/5* report, travellers are increasingly interested in exploring lesser-known destinations, with 27 per cent of Asia-Pacific respondents expressing intentions to visit these areas. This intention is strongest among South Korean travellers.

Unpack '25, Expedia Group's annual data-driven outlook on travel motivations, also spotted a rising trend for what it terms, Detour Destinations. Travellers will not skip tried-and-true tourist destinations in 2025, but will add on less crowded and lesser-known places that are close to popular hotspots.

Based on flight searches, Expedia has identified some top trending Detour Destinations in Asia-Pacific. They are Fukuoka, Japan as a detour from Tokyo; Abu Dhabi, the UAE as a detour from Dubai; Krabi, Thailand as a detour from Phuket; and Waikato, New Zealand as a detour from Auckland.

Slow and meaningful

Back in 2019, Skyscanner spotlighted the growing preference for slow travel, where travellers throw out packed itineraries to truly savour the moment.

At the same time, the term JOMO – joy of missing out – took hold among travel

marketers, content creators and consumers, further highlighting the value of escaping the hustle and bustle of city life and prioritising quality travel experiences.

Five years on, JOMO is still here to stay, observed Vrbo, an online marketplace for vacation rentals that is owned by Expedia Group. Sixty-two per cent of respondents in the *Unpack '25* study say JOMO trips reduce stress and anxiety, and nearly half say that it enhances quality time with loved ones. Such trips can be found by staying in cosy cabins, peaceful beach houses, or secluded lakeside lodge that are equipped with all the amenities to help them unwind.

It is clear that travellers are strategic about what they are choosing not to miss out. Booking.com's annual *Travel Predictions* research highlights a firm recognition that holidays are more than just a time to unwind. Sixty per cent of travellers want a longevity retreat – a super-charged flex on traditional well-being itineraries that could include body vibration (61 per cent) and red light therapies (54 per cent) to cryotherapy (51 per cent) and stem cell treatment (51 per cent). More than two thirds of respondents want new wellness activities that can be mix into their daily lives. In this region, travellers say they are willing to pay for a holiday that is solely meant to extend their lifespan and well-being.

Natural pursuits

Expedia Group found that droves of trav-

ellers booked private holiday homes along the path of totality to see the total solar eclipse in 2024, proving people will travel great distances to see natural phenomena in real life. *Unpack '25* study revealed that the Northern Lights (61 per cent) are the top phenomenon travellers want to see, followed by geological phenomena (30 per cent) like volcanoes, geysers and hot springs. In Asia-Pacific, travellers will be drawn to Hokkaido, Japan to witness the graceful ballet of Red-crowned cranes and Melbourne, Australia for the adorable penguin parade.

The fascination for nature's greatness is also picked up by Booking.com, which spotlights the trend towards noctourism – trips that are tailored around night-time activities. Two thirds (67 per cent) of respondents are considering visiting dark sky destinations in 2025, with star-bathing experiences (76 per cent), star guides (66 per cent), constellation tracking (62 per cent), and once-in-a-lifetime cosmic events (61 per cent) topping the stellar adventure list.

Concerns around climate change have also influenced this shift, with 57 per cent planning to elevate their night-time pursuits to avoid rising day-time temperatures and 56 per cent preferring to take their holidays in cooler locations. An appreciation for the nocturnal world is also deepening travellers' connections with nature, as the majority of travellers (60 per cent) say they would book an accommodation without lights to encour-

age less light pollution and preserve flora and fauna.

All-inclusive attention

According to *Unpack '25*, the year 2025 will be the all-inclusive era, as more Gen Z travellers discover the appeal of all-inclusive accommodation options. The report stated that all-inclusive resorts were no longer just attracting families looking for fun in the sun by the pool, but also younger travellers who want stress-free stays and a good deal that still feels luxurious.

One-third of Gen Z travellers say their perception of all-inclusive hotels has changed for the better, and 42 per cent say an all-inclusive resort would be their preferred hotel type.

Precious procurement

Shopping on holidays are turning a refined turn, as more travellers make time during their trip to pick up local speciality goods, from viral chocolate bars from Dubai and butter from France to skincare products from South Korea and tea leaves from China.

Some travellers, according to Expedia's *Unpack '25*, are even creating entire trips around getting the goods.

The study found that 39 per cent of travellers visit grocery stores or supermarkets while 44 per cent shop for local goods they cannot get at home.

The love for Goods Getaways, as *Unpack '25* terms this trend, extends to expe-



chuck hsu/shutterstock



Jacob Lundshult/istock



Clockwise from top: Travellers can opt to detour to Fukuoka from Tokyo; tea-tasting experience in China; seek wellness options like cryo therapy

periences unique to the destination, such as coffee tours in Costa Rica, tea tastings in China, and *matcha* experiences in Japan.

Taste paradise

Food is the biggest decision-making factor when choosing a destination, finds *Skyscanner Horizons: 2024/5*. Two thirds of Asia-Pacific travellers agreed that food is important when picking a holiday destination – this consideration triumphs over weather (55 per cent), natural landscape (55 per cent), the attractions (54 per cent) and culture (54 per cent).

Echoing this observation is Hotels.com’s findings that point to travellers seeking standout hotel dining experiences and making dinner reservations when planning ahead for their holidays.

Nearly a third of travellers say room service from a famous hotel restaurant would make them more likely to book, while 31 per cent say restaurant tables reserved exclusively for hotel guests would be their top reason.

Attention to hotel dining is also reflected in the rise in positive reviews about hotel restaurants, chefs and bars on the Hotels.com website.



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Tourism leaders expect a good run in 2025, their optimism bolstered by improving air connectivity, growing tourism niches, and industry players' commitment to product innovation

Leadership outlook

Christina Garcia Frasco
Secretary of tourism, the Philippines

“We have challenges in chasing after projected tourist numbers especially in line



with external factors, among them geopolitical stresses over which we have little control, and limitations on our visa policies. I am not losing my optimism because our effort is very, very aggressive.

The simple reality is that the issuance of visas to the Chinese market – one of our biggest markets – has been more stringent. That is why the Department of Tourism is now pursuing South Korea, Japan, the US and other markets, including India, where we have opportunities.

We will continue diversifying our tourism products especially as they serve our sustainability goals, relying not just on the beauty of our natural assets but all other facets that we have yet to introduce to the world including gastronomy, culture, heritage, emerging and lesser known destinations.

I am hopeful that the judgment of the performance of the industry will not be pegged on physical arrivals alone, but on how much tourism contributes to the economy, employment, and the coffers of investors and private stakeholders.”

Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes,
Director, Macao Government Tourism Office

“The momentum of recovery and growth will continue in 2025 in view of the expansion of the Individual Visit Scheme (IVS), ongoing promotional activities targeting both the mainland and international markets, and our commitment to diversifying Macau's tourism offerings. This follows a very promising 2024 – the city welcomed 29.1 million visitors from January to October 2024. We have a target of 33 million arrivals for 2024 and are optimistic about exceeding that.

Macau will continue to diversify its offerings to excite travellers, such as through the addition of budget to four-star hotels, trial concerts at the new outdoor performance area in Cotai for 50,000 spectators, the new Kam Pek Market at San Ma Lo district by SJM



Holdings, and more.

However, we are aware that global competition for international conferences, exhibitions, and events may cause challenges to Macau this year. The ongoing global instability and economic conditions pose additional risks to international travel and tourism growth.”

Working up a travel appetite in 2025

Veteran destination marketers and communicators urge attention to trending travel motivations and the use of AI to sharpen messaging and reach, writes Karen Yue

Travel and tourism marketers are keeping evolving traveller preferences in mind as they shape their business and branding strategy for the new year.

Benoit Badufle, founder of Horus Development & Consulting, which is engaged to market destinations like Monaco and Brisbane in Asia, underscored experiential luxury, wellness, sustainability, personalised experiences, multi-generational travel, and bleisure travel as trends that command attention today.

Destinations must also focus on personalisation and digital engagement, as “travellers from Greater China, South-east Asia, and South Korea are increasingly seeking authentic journeys that align with their values and aspirations”.

Similar observations are made by Joleena Seah, managing director for South-east Asia with GHC Asia, one of the region's most recognised PR specialists for hospitality and lifestyle brands.

“From luxury hospitality to cruises,



Travel and tourism marketers are shaping their products, services and messages to respond to travellers' quest for sustainability, wellness, and immersive experiences

almost every client had similar iterations of these three themes: sustainability, wellness, and locally immersive guest experiences. It's evident that these words are no longer considered as trends, but an essential element of the guest journey towards living well,” Seah told *TTG Asia*.

Seah's participation in Further East 2024 also brought home a realisation that luxury travellers are choosing to go “completely off the grid”, creating demand for secluded and private travel experiences that are known to a privileged few.

She added: “More people are now in-

vesting huge sums of money for once-in-a-lifetime experiences, like expeditions to Antarctica, Amazon River quests, and even space travel.”

Play up strengths

To appeal to trending travel motivations, tourism developers and communicators should enhance available charms and convey these points of appeal through creative marketing and communications.

Monaco, as an example, is a destination that is attuned to these critical considerations while its tourism infrastructure

and facilities are well positioned to cater to new travel desires. Monaco has established spas, wellness retreats, and nature-driven experiences while the country's leadership has long been prioritising sustainability. The destination is also ready to welcome multigenerational travel groups and bleisure guests, thanks to its variety of leisure attractions and business facilities.

While Monaco is no stranger to creating exclusive and unforgettable moments for visitors, Badufle revealed plans to collaborate with travel influencers in 2025 to amplify its promise of experiential luxury.

To be successful in the new year, Seah encourages brands to “manifest the ‘travel is a force for good’ message in a holistic way by curating experiences that benefit the environment, local community, and self-care for the traveller”.

She said: “Brands which can demonstrate their appreciation for genuinely mindful and healthy travel experiences will do well in the years ahead.”

Leverage AI

Both Badufle and Seah acknowledged AI applications in their work in sales, marketing and communications.

Badufle believes that “incorporating AI-driven personalisation, interactive virtual tours, and mobile-friendly campaigns can enhance engagement”, especially in a region populated by tech-savvy consumers.

In the space of PR, generative AI can create visual assets like videos and images within minutes, allowing communications practitioners to redirect precious time to strategy, ideation and raising the quality of work, reflected Seah.



Andrew Hogg
Executive general manager, eastern markets and aviation, Tourism Australia

“Australia’s leisure tourism sector is poised for growth in 2025. In South-east Asia, we see great opportunity in attracting Muslim travellers from Malaysia and Indonesia, which forms a sizeable segment for Tourism Australia. We are stepping up our efforts to showcase more itineraries, spotlight the wide range of Muslim-friendly eateries in Australia, and provide comprehensive guides to help Muslim travellers plan their adventures. For example, we recently launched our first Muslim consortium in Indonesia.

Travellers from Malaysia and Indonesia are also increasingly looking towards multigenerational travel, creating an opportunity for us to spotlight more soft adventure offerings that are accessible to all ages. We work closely with partners to promote these activities to the right audience – for example, our work with Malaysian broadcast Astro on series *Projek Bapak Bapak* and *Travel With Parents* where we visit Kangaroo Island and learn to surf, and climb Sydney Harbour Bridge.”

Dane Cheng
CEO, Hong Kong Tourism Board

“We were optimistic about 2024 and continue to feel so about 2025. The year 2024 was an election year for many countries, so travel was somewhat disrupted. Now, things are pretty settled. At the same time, interest rates are coming down, which will have a positive impact on the economy and confidence to spend.

Looking ahead, Hong Kong has to keep innovating – just as we have been in 2024 through our festivals and events. In the first quarter of 2025, we will launch a new and major thematic brand campaign to tell the Hong Kong story. It will carry on the success of our *Hello Hong Kong* campaign.

We are also working towards building up air capacity to Hong Kong. Trans-Pacific flights are still tight in supply, so airfares are quite high as a result. We hope to see more seat capacity as well as new services this year.”



Manoharan Periasamy
Director-general, Tourism Malaysia

“We are seeing increasing international arrivals, and we expect this to continue, especially with the recovery of air connectivity.

Tourism Malaysia’s 2024-2026 strategic roadmap is focused on high-impact and fast conversion strategies in boosting international arrivals. The plan identifies three core strategies to achieve this goal – creating demand, increasing traffic, and prioritising target markets. To create demand, we implement targeted marketing campaigns... through digital and traditional channels. We aim to increase traffic by forming strategic partnerships with airlines, collaborating with travel agents and online travel agencies, and simplifying entry procedures like visa-free policies.

To adapt to evolving travel preferences, we embrace tourism-related technology to provide immersive experiences for tourists. We are also working with the Malaysia Digital Economic Corporation to promote digital tourism solutions from local start-ups.”

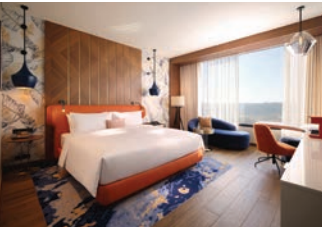


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HOTEL	MEETINGS & EVENTS	CASINO	AURORA	ARENA	INSPIRE MALL	SPLASH BAY
5-star hotel (3 towers) with 1,275 rooms	State-of-the-art meetings & events facilities including the largest hotel ballroom in Korea	Foreigner-only premium gaming venue with 150 tables, 700 slots & electronic games and exclusive player lounges	150m-long immersive digital entertainment street	Korea's first multi-purpose performance arena with 15,000 seats	A street lined with curated retail shops, F&B and entertainment facilities	Large scale, climate-controlled and versatile indoor pool dome



If these travel and tourism opinion leaders were king or queen of the world, what would they decree to ensure sensible development for the next 50 years? *TTG Asia* reporters find out

Leadership dreams

Damcho Rinzin

Director, Department of Tourism,
National Tourism Office of Bhutan

“As king of the world, I would implement a global directive that focuses on establishing a conscious global framework that prioritises sustainable tourism, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation. The foundation would rest on the principles of responsible travel, where every destination is treated with respect, ensuring that tourism brings tangible benefits to both local communities and the environment.

The Gelephu Mindfulness City model exemplifies how mindfulness and modernity can coexist for sustainable growth. This concept could be adapted globally, encouraging destinations to blend cultural heritage with innovative solutions. By fostering global collaboration and sharing best practices, we can create a tourism industry that not only thrives but also positively impacts the planet and its people for the next 50 years.



Arthur Kiong

CEO, Far East Hospitality

“I would ensure that 50 years from now, people who travel will still enjoy the personal touch, a personal smile, and a warm and caring welcome. This won’t change; this will not be replaced by AI.



Daniel Nugraha

Owner, Exotic Java Trails

“The universe and all that is in it was created by God for all His creatures without discrimination. Therefore, the tourism industry must preserve the ecosystem in a way that is friendly to the environment, nature, society, and local culture. As king of the world, I would also order that travel and tourism must not be for only certain wealthy groups to enjoy.



Hannah Pearson

Founding partner, Pear Anderson

“If I were queen of the world, I would stop tourism and hospitality workers from being treated like a commodity. I would encourage the private sector to recognise that by treating tourism workers right and developing their skillsets – whether that is AI, sustainability, or even flying taxis – they create an environment where employees can innovate, and it will ultimately benefit the industry as a whole. I would encourage the public sector to support these endeavours through grants, tax incentives and working groups where public-private collaboration and understanding is key. This will result in a resilient tourism workforce to which young people actually aspire to belong.”



René de Monchy

Chief executive, Tourism New Zealand

“I would pass an order to encourage every traveller to become a guardian of the places they visit – this would ensure every person gains the most from travelling and connecting to new places.

Being a guardian means travelling around a destination with care and respect for its environment, its people, and its culture. For example, in Aotearoa New Zealand we encourage all visitors to take the Tiaki Promise while they travel through our home.

In practice, this means protecting nature and the environment by giving wildlife space, shopping locally, and supporting ethical tourism experiences; showing respect for people and culture by learning about customs and traditions, and engaging with local communities; keeping a destination clean by not littering and recycling where possible; and being prepared for the destination by knowing the weather, bringing the right clothing, and knowing who to call in an emergency.

If every traveller followed these principles, they would maximise the benefits of their trip and ensure that travel and tourism would thrive and have a positive impact on the world for the next 50 years.



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Outbound numbers from Japan remain weaker compared to pre-pandemic times, prompting Japanese authorities and tourism players to take greater action to stimulate travel demand.

By Kathryn Wortley

Rekindling Japan's wanderlust



Jamaica and Sands China are stepping up their courtship of Japanese travellers; Bob Marley Museum in Kingston, Jamaica (top) and Chelsea Garden within the new Londoner Grand, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Macao (bottom) pictured



Despite international tourism bouncing back to 96 per cent of pre-pandemic levels from January to July 2024, according to UN Tourism, Japan's outbound recovery continues to struggle, prompting both the public and private sectors to take stronger actions to stimulate the market.

Overseas travellers from Japan totalled 1.2 million in September 2024, 30.8 per cent less than in the same month of 2019, reported the Japan National Tourism Organization.

The number of international flights departing the country's six major airports (Haneda, Narita, Kansai, Nagoya, Fukuoka and Sapporo) in September 2024 was down 4.3 per cent on September 2019 data, with 3.6 per cent fewer seats, according to global travel data specialist OAG.

From January to September last year, only 9.5 million Japanese travellers took trips overseas, making it unlikely the outbound market can rebound soon to the record 20.1 million outbound visitors in calendar year 2019.

Japan's outbound recovery is "slower than that of other countries/regions", stated a study by JTB Tourism Research & Consulting Co.. Initially, Covid-related concerns were a key factor in the sluggish rebound, with only 2.77 million outbound travellers in 2022, equating to

13.8 per cent of 2019 levels. The ratio of passport holders dropped from 25 per cent pre-pandemic to 17 per cent in 2022, according to data from the foreign ministry.

As recently as May 2023, the Japanese government downgraded Covid-19 to an infectious disease on par with seasonal flu, meaning individuals and businesses rather than the government could decide on whether to take anti-infection measures. This was a positive step for the outbound market's recovery. Unfortunately, the depreciation of the yen and rising costs of travel have become new hurdles to those hoping to take overseas trips.

In response, Japan's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism has rolled out a three-pronged policy to promote outbound tourism, "not only to improve international awareness and deepen friendly relations with other countries, but also to expand the aviation network and further expansion of inbound tourism".

First, the ministry is strengthening collaboration with other countries. One example is the designation of January 2024

to March 2025 as the *US-Japan Tourism Year*, which aims to "expand mutual tourism exchanges that have declined due to the Covid-19 pandemic", according to the ministry. Japan was the second-largest source market for the US in 2019, largely due to Hawaii's popularity among Japanese travellers.

The ministry has also selected 24 countries and regions, including large parts of Asia and Europe, as "priority destinations" ideal for immediate travel. The official tourism bureaus of these destinations are collaborating with the Japan Tourism Agency and the Japan Association of Travel Agents (JATA) to heighten the appeal of their offerings for the Japanese market.

Second, the ministry is targeting specific demographic groups, such as youth and seniors. It made Japan's travel showcase event Tourism Expo Japan free for 4,000 students this year.

Finally, the ministry is fostering a safe travel environment and communicating this through the Japan Tourism Agency's Instagram account, which provides global travel information in real time.

In autumn, Hiroyuki Takahashi, chairman of JATA, called on the government to provide a free five-year passport to locals who reach adulthood at age 20. He also said travel agents need to stimulate the outbound market by offering new styles of travel, particularly for the youths.

JTB Corporation, the country's largest travel agent, has introduced new travel products, which can "help reduce the cost of meals, activities, and other local stay expenses", and a line-up of specialised travel products that cater to the experience trend. Minako Teraki, brand, marketing and communication team representative at JTB, told *TTG Asia*.

The company has partnered with Major League Baseball in the US and Canada to create hospitality sports packages, and with premium travel agency Royal Road Ginza for tours related to art and music.

Overseas tourism firms are also stepping up promotions in Japan to engage with more Japanese consumers and partners. For example, in June 2024, Sands Resorts Macao hosted *The Fabric of Macao* roadshow in Tokyo.

“

The stabilisation of air routes (to and from Japan) can attract more international visitors to regional areas (in Japan), contributing to local revitalisation.

Minako Teraki,
Brand, marketing and
communication team representative,
JTB

”

Pre-pandemic, Japan was "a key feeder market for Macao", said Kris Kaminsky, senior vice president of hotel operations for Sands China. In recent years, Japanese travellers who previously visited Macao have returned, even multiple times, he said, but overall recovery is "a little bit sluggish". Still, Japan's outbound market continues to be highly valuable to the company, he noted.

Jamaica is also working hard to rebuild Japanese arrivals since September 2022. A fam trip to showcase new packages to Japanese agents was among recent efforts.

"Japan represents a key market for reengagement given the country's outbound travel of over 20 million in 2019," said Jamaica's minister of tourism, Edmund Bartlett.

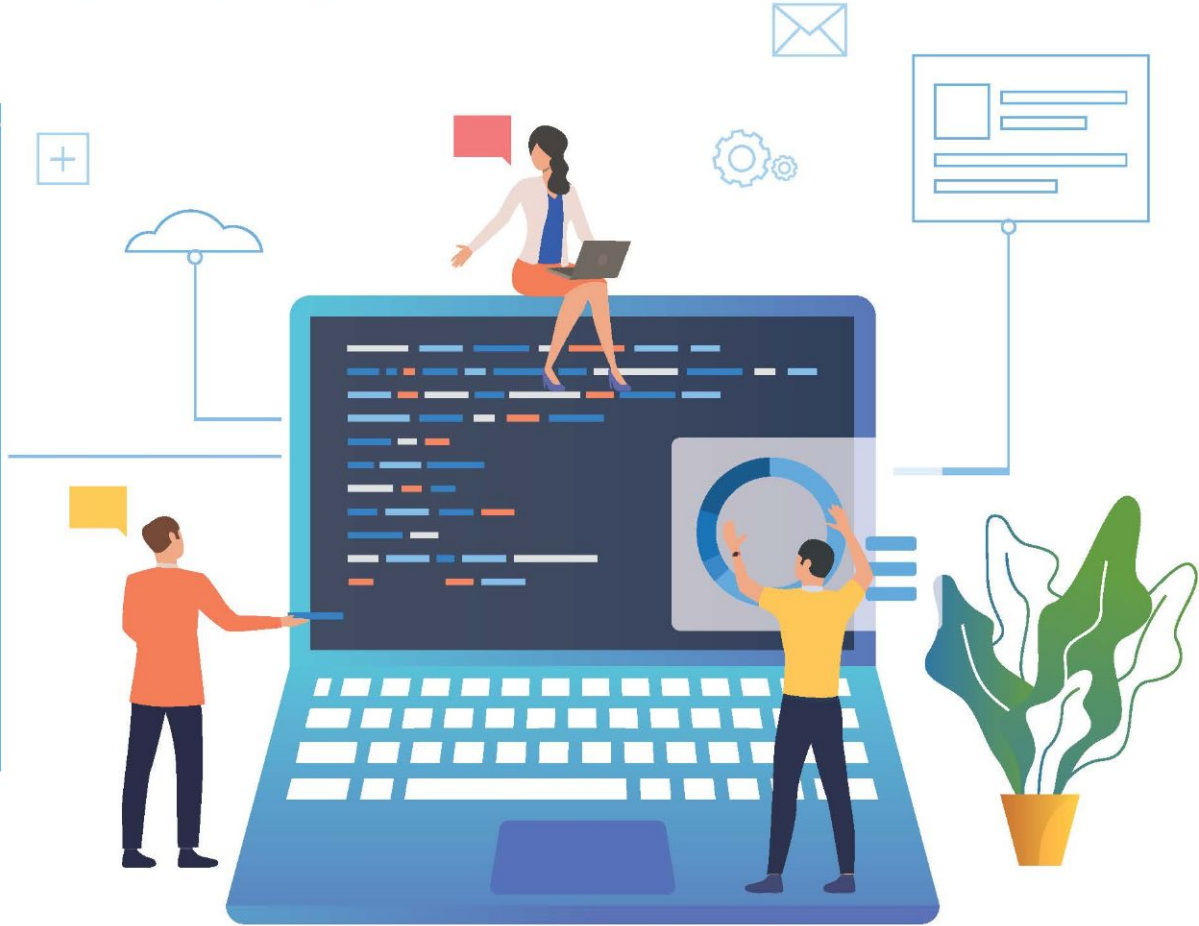
Industry players opined that the recovery of Japan's outbound market is also vital for the continued growth of Japan's inbound travel business.

Greater overseas trips by Japanese nationals can support "the stabilisation of air routes (which) can attract more international visitors to regional areas, contributing to local revitalisation", explained JTB's Teraki, who added that the "recovery of Japanese overseas travel demand is indispensable for balanced national growth".

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Singapore is stepping up its efforts to attract visitors with fresh experiences, campaigns, and new opportunities to explore; Lazarus Island, pictured

Revitalising tourism

Singapore is ramping up efforts to strengthen its position as a top global travel destination with new campaigns and experiences in 2025. By Caroline Boey

Singapore, which has become a popular destination for family, early-career, and established business travellers, is intensifying its strategic efforts to solidify the gains made post-lockdown.

The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) is focusing on understanding visitor “travel motivations” by categorising them as “entertainment seekers, culinary explorers, or outdoor adventurers”.

Kenneth Lim, assistant chief executive of the marketing group at STB, explained: “This holistic profiling of our global target audience will help us to deliver relevant and compelling content.”

According to STB, its source markets today are currently distributed across South-east Asia (33 per cent), Greater China and North Asia (32 per cent), and the rest of the world (35 per cent).

The NTO is also investing in shorthaul and longhaul markets to ensure Singapore’s resilience as a travel destination.

For visitors seeking more in-depth experiences and inspiring destinations, STB’s ongoing global campaign, *Made in Singapore* (MIS), highlights the essence of Singapore, from iconic attractions to hidden gems.

New lifestyle product New Bahru, launched in 2024, is an enclave showcasing over 40 of Singapore’s top local creative talents and businesses, including Beyond The Vines, Gin Lee, rye, and Sojao. The concept is housed within the premises of a former school.

In addition, new stay experiences such as Into the Woods, a slow-living glamping experience launched in 2024 on La-

zarus Island, offer guests the opportunity of an overnight beachfront glamping experience on the island.

The new year will mark the launch of Mandai Rainforest Resort by Banyan Tree, providing guests with a uniquely immersive experience that blends seamlessly with nature.

Lim shared: “One of the key highlights of the MIS campaign was the launch of a series of immersive 3D out-of-home billboards in high traffic areas such as Shanghai’s Xintiandi, London’s Piccadilly Circus, and New York’s Times Square in early-2024, to inspire consideration to visit Singapore and to foster a deeper brand connection.”

Upcoming concepts in 2025 will include a focus on wellness, with the launch of Nowhere, a bathhouse by Bathing Culture, and a new holistic wellness experience by Power Moves.

The entry of Disney Cruise Line, which will homeport its brand-new ship, *Disney Adventure*, in Singapore exclusively for five years starting December 2025, is expected to further enhance the city’s status as a premier cruise gateway.

Steven Ler, National Association of Travel Agents Singapore president and executive director, UOB Travel Planners, is expecting a good kick-off in 2025.

He said: “The outlook for Singapore’s tourism in January and February 2025 is positive, with growth expected across multiple markets and its position as a key cruise hub in Asia, attracting more European and American travellers as a pre- or post-cruise destination, is set to strengthen.”

Many see Singapore as an ideal stopover and gateway to other South-east Asian destinations, Ler noted.

“The upcoming winter break and Lunar New Year in January and February, coincide with the winter school holidays in China, and is a peak travel period for Chinese tourists. STB’s partnerships with Chinese media platforms and the addition of new flights will likely drive a surge in Chinese arrivals, as China’s outbound travel fully rebounds.

“Singapore’s appeal as a culturally familiar and festive destination during the Lunar New Year season is expected to boost visitor numbers.

“Japan’s tourism recovery is slower, but new flight options, such as Peach Airline’s direct route from Osaka, is a promising sign. With direct flights, Singapore becomes more accessible, which would stimulate Japanese arrivals.”

Ler said Singapore hosting large-scale concerts that are not available in neighbouring countries, has resulted in an influx of visitors from South-east Asia eager for these exclusive events.

“This form of event-driven tourism, especially in the absence of similar events in other South-east Asian countries, should significantly boost short-stay visits in early-2025.”

With hotel operators rolling out tactical promotions and eliminating additional conference surcharges, Singapore is expected to appear more affordable compared to 2024, especially if the Singapore dollar weakens slightly, he commented.

According to STR, Singapore is ex-



TTG Travel Trade Publishing is proud to be the travel trade media partner of the ASEAN Tourism Competitive Committee, working together to support the ASEAN Tourism Marketing Strategy and promote ASEAN destinations for tourism and business events

What's hot | Ready for fun

By Caroline Boey



Resort makeover

Resorts World Sentosa, as part of a major S\$6.8 billion (US\$5.05 billion) expansion, will double in size by 2030 with the addition of a new waterfront lifestyle development. This will include a waterfront promenade, a four-storey retail, entertainment, and dining podium, and two new luxury hotels, adding 700 keys.

In addition, a new non-gaming attraction, Harry Potter: The Interactive Art Experience, launched last November, while Minion Land at Universal Studios Singapore is set to open in 1Q2025.



New wildlife park

Singapore's fifth adventure-based zoological park will open at Mandai Wildlife Reserve in March 2025. The attraction will feature 10 distinct zones, offering both above and below-ground wildlife and rainforest experiences.

Highlights include the Karsts limestone formations, The Cavern chambers inspired by Sarawak's Mulu Caves, Choice of Adventure with rugged terrains for exploration, and Rock Cascade, the largest animal habitat in the park, home to the Malayan tiger.



Speedboat adventure

Launched in 2H2024, the 60-minute Southern Albatross Speedboat tour showcases Singapore's iconic skyline and beautiful Southern Islands.

Departing from the S.E.A. Aquarium at Resorts World Sentosa, the tour is perfect for families, groups, and solo explorers seeking thrills, speed, and exhilarating ocean sprays.

Tickets are priced at S\$45 (US\$33.50), with bookings available online for the 13.00 and 17.00 slots. The welcome pack includes water, ponchos, and wet wipes.



Cutesy cabins

A first of its kind in South-east Asia, the joint 50th anniversary celebration between Singapore Cable Car and Hello Kitty features five unique garden party-themed cabin designs featuring Hello Kitty and her family.

Exclusively available on the Mount Faber Line, visitors are greeted by a two-metre-tall Hello Kitty in a gold ensemble at Mount Faber Peak.

Another two-metre-tall Hello Kitty, dressed in her signature red bow and blue overalls, stands at the boarding deck alongside vintage first- and third-generation cable car cabins, creating a picture-perfect backdrop for lasting memories.



From left: Singapore's Marina Bay comes alive at night with glowing skylines, lively bars, and waterfront views; New Bahru, a creative hub for local talents in a repurposed school



pected to end 2024 with 447 properties, representing a total of 79,648 keys.

Jesper Palmqvist, regional vice president Asia Pacific, STR, said another 647 keys would be added in 2025, in the upper upscale and luxury class.

On the challenges that Singapore would face in 2025, he pointed to rising airfares and capacity constraints impacting key source markets.

Palmqvist added: "Even as arrivals increase in 2025, both in business and leisure travel, we're not expecting a large percentage growth number (due to) uncertainty about consumer spending and the overall economic situation as Singapore gets more expensive for foreign currency holders, alongside the US dollar."

Singapore, he projected, is expected to gain from Indian travellers as airlift

continues to improve between the two countries.

An increase in Chinese arrivals is also expected, he shared, with more FITs compared to pre-lockdown levels, which is typically associated with higher expenditure globally. The Chinese will have a greater focus on experiences, hotels, F&B, and less on shopping – something already observed in those visiting Japan last year.



“

This holistic profiling of our global target audience will help us to deliver relevant and compelling content.

Kenneth Lim
Assistant chief executive, marketing group, STB

”

Switching the spotlight

To combat overtourism in Bali's southern hotspots, the Indonesian government is shifting focus to the island's northern and western regions, reports Tiara Maharani

In an effort to address the growing challenges of over-tourism in Bali, the Indonesian government is working to expand holiday options by promoting the island's northern and western regions.

According to Statistics Indonesia, Bali welcomed 4,155,540 visitors in the first eight months of 2024, marking a 21 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2023. This figure represents nearly half of Indonesia's total tourist arrivals during that time, which amounted to 9,092,856.

Despite the rapid growth in tourism, Bagus Pemayun, head of the Bali Province Tourism Office, believes that the island is not at risk of over-tourism on a broader scale, but rather in specific locations.

He said: "Tourists are concentrated in the Badung regency in South Bali, where popular spots like Kuta Beach, Canggu, and Seminyak are."

To redistribute tourist traffic away from the crowded southern region of the island, Indonesian authorities are promoting Bali's north and west areas.

New president Prabowo Subianto has reaffirmed his commitment to developing North Bali into a world-class tourist destination by bringing the long-standing plan for North Bali Airport to fruition as a mega project.

Currently in the feasibility study phase, the airport project is set to move forward soon, with support from several interest-

ed investors, according to Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono, coordinating minister for infrastructure and regional development.

In the meantime, the Ministry of Tourism has introduced a new travel route called the 3B tour package – comprising Buleleng, Bali Barat (West Bali), and Banyuwangi – aimed at diversifying tourism to the island's lesser-known regions. The itinerary offers a journey that begins in the village of Pemuteran in North Bali, before taking tourists to the natural wonders of Ijen Crater Natural Park and Bromo Volcano in East Java, with the option to either return home or continue overland journey through Java.

The tour package was recently introduced at the Tourism Destination Sales Mission event in Jembrana, Bali, and will be further marketed at upcoming trade-shows and sales missions.

The Ministry of Tourism, in collaboration with the Bali Provincial Government, also organised fam trips for travel agents as well as a press tour for nine national and four international media outlets to encourage travellers to explore Bali's lesser-visited, less crowded areas.

North Bali, still off the beaten path, offers hidden gems like Lovina Beach and Munduk, known for its waterfalls. With 28 waterfalls, many untouched and unnamed, the region provides a unique experience for those willing to explore beyond the crowds.

The peaceful Pemuteran Bay is an-

other highlight, where visitors can enjoy tranquil beaches and explore the unique underwater temple garden, a site of ongoing coral restoration. Meanwhile, the eco-friendly Handara Golf & Resort Bali offers a serene retreat surrounded by mountains and lush meadows.

Gede Dody Sukma Aktiva Askara, head of the Buleleng Regency Tourism Office, stated that the character of North Bali as a destination is centred around eco-tourism, with key attractions focusing on conservation activities. These include coral reef preservation through bio-rock technology, the protection of turtle habitats, tree planting initiatives, and preservation programmes on Udeng-Udengan Hill.

"Here, tourism development greatly involves the community, and tourists can feel the life of the local people in North Bali more. Local culture is also preserved," he added.

Putu Gede Parma, deputy chairman of the Buleleng Regional Tourism Promotion Agency, stressed that prioritising the development of tourism facilities and infrastructure is essential for North Bali's growth as a tourist destination.

"It is necessary to standardise basic amenities such as toilets, parking, and ticket counters at tourist attractions, as these facilities are currently inadequate at several sites," he told *TTG Asia*.

Additionally, Gede Parma highlighted the importance of improving transportation links to make Buleleng more ac-



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Banyumala waterfall, Buleleng



From left: the underwater temple garden at Pemuteran North Bali; dolphin watching off Lovina beach

cessible to tourists. Currently, visitors to Buleleng must travel by land for three to five hours from Ngurah Rai Airport. He believes that shortening the distance and travel time to Buleleng will lead to an increase in tourist visits. “Investors will come, and the development of Buleleng’s tourism will be much more significant,” he added. According to Gede Suyasa, regional secretary of Buleleng Regency, infrastructure improvements are already underway

to support this shift in tourism focus. The construction of the Singaraja-Mengwitani Shortcut, which consists of 12 sections, has been ongoing since 2019 and is targeted for completion in 2026. “The curves on the winding road have been reduced, with some sections cutting the number of curves from 16 to just five. Once the shortcut is completed, it will shorten the travel time from three hours to 1.5 hours,” Gede Suyasa explained. The plan to build the Gilimanuk-

Mengwi toll road is expected to begin by 2026 at the latest, and projected to be completed by the end of 2029. The toll road will span more than 96km, crossing three regencies, 13 sub-districts, and 58 villages, further improving connectivity across the island, making North Bali more accessible to both domestic and international visitors. While awaiting the completion of the toll road, the Buleleng regional government is designing sea access by preparing

a fast boat and yacht dock in Lovina. “The dock is there; it just needs to be extended and improved. The plan has now entered the feasibility test stage by the Ministry of Transportation,” stated Gede Dody Sukma. With the presence of the dock, travel time between Banyuwangi and Lovina could be shortened to between 30 and 45 minutes. Similarly, the travel time between Bena and Lovina will also be faster.

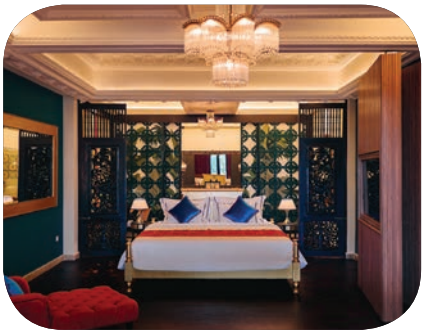
“It is necessary to standardise basic amenities such as toilets, parking, and ticket counters at tourist attractions, as these facilities are currently inadequate at several sites.”

Putu Gede Parma
Deputy chairman, Buleleng Regional Tourism Promotion Agency

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What’s hot | New stays

By Tiara Maharani



Historical house

House of Tugu Jakarta, which opened on November 7, offers 25 uniquely designed rooms, each with distinct interior décor. Situated in the historic Old Town area, the hotel features a collection of antiques and artifacts that tell the story of Jakarta’s past. Key attractions include the Peranakan Museum of Jakarta, housed within the hotel, and dining options at Jajaghu Restaurant and Babah Koffie. The hotel also offers a swimming pool, spa, and yoga corner (the last two have yet to open).



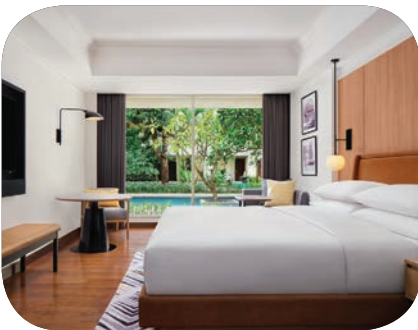
Suite life

Royal Tulip Gunung Geulis Resort & Golf has launched a new facility, The Suites, an extension designed to offer personalised hospitality and premium services for loyal guests. The Suites features 51 rooms across four categories, complementing the resort’s existing 173 rooms. Facilities include the all-day Cascade Restaurant, serving Chinese, Japanese, and Western cuisines, as well as pastries. Additional amenities include an infinity pool, fitness centre, and a 183m² meeting space.



Sleep and dine

Anantara Ubud Bali Resort features 85 suites and pool villas set amid dense forest, cascading down a hill to a mountain stream. There are five dining venues at the resort – Kirana all-day dining, The Amerta restaurant, Sulang Al Fresco Bar, Pool Bar, and Lobby Lounge. Recreational facilities include a spa, fitness centre, swimming pool, kids’ club, and yoga deck. The resort also has a function room for meetings or intimate cocktail receptions for up to 72 guests.



Airport convenience

Sheraton Jakarta Soekarno-Hatta Airport, just minutes from the Soekarno-Hatta International Airport, has reopened after a full renovation. The hotel boasts 227 rooms and facilities including a pool, fitness centre, spa, and kids’ club. Dining options include Daily Social, The Pool Bar, Unspoken Bar, and &More coffee bar. There are six meeting rooms, a 683m² ballroom, and three flexible workspaces. It provides shuttle service to and from the airport every hour.

Metro Manila's tourism



The infrastructure boom in Metro Manila comes at a time when the full recovery of Philippine tourism is not expected until 2026

The Philippine capital city is accelerating its tourism growth through major infrastructure upgrades and hotel developments, with a strong focus on long-term expansion, writes Rosa Ocampo

While Metro Manila still has some progress to make in reaching its tourism goals, it is one of the most active destinations that is rapidly developing and improving its tourism infrastructure.

A major achievement is the recent transfer of Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) management and operations from the government to the private sector.

The New NAIA Infrastructure Corp., a subsidiary of San Miguel Corp. (SMC), will modernise the 76-year-old, single-runway airport, enhancing both international and domestic connectivity. As tourism secretary Christina Frasco stated, this “remains a significant hurdle to tourism due to the country’s archipelagic nature”.

SMC is also building the Bulacan International Airport, which, upon completion in 2028, will feature four parallel runways capable of handling up to 100 million passengers annually, along with an interconnected infrastructure network including expressways and railways.

The impact of new skyways, roads, and improved transportation options is already being felt in Metro Manila, a city that is notorious for heavy traffic congestion and limited accessibility to certain areas.

Colliers Philippines reported that the Philippines’ ongoing investments in major railway projects, such as the new LRT-1 Cavite Extension and the Metro Manila Subway, which connects key central business districts, are driving the growth of primary and secondary submarkets like

boom



Tourism Promotions Board

of 121,000 new hotel keys to meet the increasing demand.

The Philippine Hotel Owners Association (PHOA) reported that the industry currently has only 335,000 hotel rooms. Its executive director, Benito Bengzon Jr., reaffirmed PHOA's commitment to investing in the expansion of the hotel sector across the Philippines to enhance the country's tourism competitiveness.

Metro Manila, as the country's primary urban and business hub, is attracting both international and home-grown hotel investments and brands. In the coming years, the metro will welcome the return of Mandarin Oriental, a second Hotel Okura, Banyan Tree, another brand from Marriott International, as well as home-grown brands like the upscale FILI hotel from Robinsons Hotels and Resorts, Megaworld Hotels and Resorts, and Seda Hotels.

The reclaimed Bay Area in Parañaque City, part of the integrated resorts complex, has become a favourite among investors. Megaworld Hotels and Resorts recently soft-launched the Philippines' largest hotel, the 1,530-key Grand Westside Hotel, located next to its Kingsford Hotel. Additionally, Seda Manila Bay has opened, and more hotels and serviced residences are expected to debut in the area.

Megaworld's parent company has revealed plans to transform the area into the Westside City township, featuring malls, theatres, and entertainment spaces. This development model has been successfully implemented at Newport World Resorts in Manila and other sites.

Integrated resorts, which have significantly grown in Metro Manila, play a key role in increasing the availability of hotels, business events venues, F&B outlets, and entertainment centres.

The metro is home to four integrated resorts, with a fifth, Solaire Resort North, under development in Quezon City. A local developer is also exploring plans for an integrated resort in Las Piñas City.

Mandaluyong, conveniently located near Makati, San Juan, and major transport hubs, is attracting more investors. Robinsons Hotels and Resorts, with several properties in the Ortigas area, along with international brands such as Westin, Marco Polo, and Joy-Nostalg, are among those expanding in the city.

The Linden Suites general manager, Tet Romualdo, noted that demand in the Ortigas area is driven by corporate offices, medical centres, clinics, and its proximity to major transport hubs.

Highlighting the importance of tourism infrastructure, Christina emphasised that "every delay in building capacity and improving infrastructure is a missed opportunity" for the country's travel and tourism businesses.



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Makati CBD, Bonifacio Global City, Ortigas Center, and Quezon City.

This infrastructure boom in Metro Manila comes at a time when the full recovery of Philippine tourism is not expected until 2026.

In an earlier briefing for Hotel Sales and Marketing Association members, Alfred Lay, director for hotels, tourism, and leisure at Leechiu Property Consultants, forecasted that the target of 7.7 million tourist arrivals for 2024 would likely not be met, but would be offset by an increase in domestic tourists.

The ongoing infrastructure boom is focused on long-term gains. Tourism prospects remain positive in the medium term, with foreign tourist arrivals expected to double to 12 million by 2028 – a growth that will require the construction

What's hot | Life in the city

By Rosa Ocampo



All aboard the bus

Explore Metro Manila with the Hop-On-Hop-Off (HOHO) Bus Tours mobile app. Integrated with payment gateways, the app allows tourists, including international transit passengers at Ninoy Aquino International Airport, to easily book tours or create custom DIY itineraries.

In addition to the Makati and Manila hubs, a new Entertainment Hub has been added to the Pasay-Parañaque circuit, featuring 13 bus stops at integrated resorts, entertainment hotspots, and shopping malls in the Manila Bay Area.



Tang Yan Song/shutterstock

Visit the MET

The 93-year-old Manila Metropolitan Theater (MET) is gaining recognition as a unique business events venue due to its historical significance and art deco style, which is rare in the metro.

As the oldest theatre in the Philippines, it is both a National Historical Landmark and a National Cultural Treasure. The MET regularly hosts film screenings and related programmes, allowing attendees to admire its interior designed by National Artist Juan Arellano.



Stay in luxury

Recently opened Solaire Resort North in Quezon City boasts 530 luxury rooms and suites, starting from 42m² in size. The 38-storey integrated resort also has 14 dining options to choose from, a health club with gym and spa, an outdoor swimming pool with a kids' water park, and an indoor Kids' Club. It offers a 1,800m² pillarless grand ballroom for over 1,600 guests with theatre-style seating, which can also be divided into three halls.



Say cheese!

Okada Manila's signature Medley Buffet reopened in early 2024 with a larger space, private dining rooms, and the addition of The Cheese Room, which boasts 50 types of premium cheeses in a temperature-controlled setting.

A cheese ambassador helps guests choose from the selection and pair it with wines and snacks.

The Cheese Room is available for lunch and dinner, accommodating only four guests at a time.



Sapporo comes alive with twinkling city lights at night, drawing visitors to its bustling nightlife and winter charm

Spotlight on Sapporo

Hokkaido’s capital is positioning itself as a top destination for global travellers, leveraging its natural beauty, adventure tourism offerings, and growing partnerships. By Kathryn Wortley

As Japan’s fifth-largest city, Sapporo attracts around 15 million visitors per year. More than half of them hail from other parts of Japan, but Hokkaido’s capital is determined to benefit more from the country’s booming inbound tourism and the government’s push for greater dissemination of international visitors to regional areas.

Post-lockdown recovery has been strong for Hokkaido, with 6.2 million inbound visitors staying at accommodation in 2023, only four per cent fewer than in the peak pre-pandemic year of 2019, according to the Japan National Tourism Organization. Sapporo has been central to the rebound, thanks to new and improved attractions, facilities and experiences.

Inbound tourism has long been important to Sapporo, with the city’s tourism GDP growing faster than its overall GDP, making it “a key driver of the local economy”, according to the city gov-

ernment. Now, efforts are “focused on promotion to Europe, the US, Australia, South-east Asia and India”, Yuko Ogawara, chief of the city tourism development department, told *TTG Asia*.

One key offering is adventure tourism. In September 2023, Sapporo welcomed the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) for Japan’s inaugural Adventure Travel World Summit. The event “signalled to the community that the destination is ready to welcome adventure travellers”, said Hannah Pearson, regional director – APAC, ATTA.

The Japan Tourism Agency has also noted Sapporo’s potential “as a promising destination for adventure tourism” such as “hiking, biking and rafting combined with Ainu culture”.

With six ski resorts within one hour’s drive from the city centre, snow sports is an increasingly popular reason for visiting. “Visitors can easily return to the downtown area after skiing to enjoy après-ski or experience more snow activi-

ties in the great outdoors,” noted Ogawara.

From the 2024/25 season, a bus service will operate between the ski resorts of Bankei and Mount Moiwa and common lift tickets will be on sale. Smile Rink Sapporo, a seasonal skating rink and series of events and activities launched in 2023, will also be expanded in 2025, she added.

The upcoming Sapporo Snow Festival, which will mark its 75th anniversary in 2025, is also expected to be bigger and better. In 2024, the multi-venue event welcomed more than two million visitors over eight days in early February. The Tsudome site was opened for the first time since 2020, offering snow rafts and slides, a snow maze, stage events and Hokkaido-themed booths introducing the island’s food and drink. Additional events were also held at Sapporo Hitsujigaka Observation Hill.

Looking further ahead, Sapporo Hotel by Granbell is scheduled to open in front of Sapporo Station in April 2025,

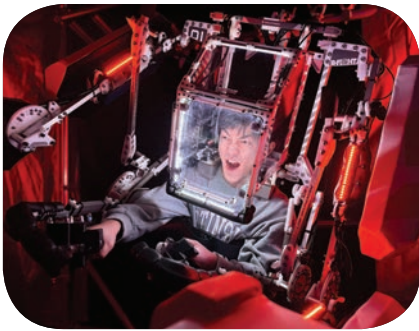
What's hot | Play and stay

By Kathryn Wortley



Coastal charm

Nagasaki Marriott Hotel, the brand's debut hotel in Kyushu, features 207 guestrooms and suites that offer views of the port and Mount Inasa. In addition to four F&B options, the hotel has Japan's first M Club executive lounge for Marriott Bonvoy Members with elite status. The property is inspired by Nagasaki's coastal location; its exterior is shaped like a cruise ship while the interior design combines serene blue-green furnishings and textures.



Friendly fight

Robot Fight is Red Tokyo Tower's latest high-tech attraction, offering visitors the opportunity to don robot suits and engage in physical, yet safe, combat. The interactive eight-minute game involves using a specially made exoskeleton that combines real and virtual experiences for two players to fight each other at a time. Red Tokyo Tower also features other immersive activities for group activities, such as soccer and racing, which use advanced digital technology.



Ocean gem

Located on the coast of the Pacific Ocean and near the Kii mountains, Grand Mercure Wakayama Minabe Resort & Spa is just about an hour's drive from Osaka. The hotel offers 323 keys with rooms and suites in Western or Japanese style. The restaurants and bars serve seasonal dishes using local, sustainably sourced ingredients. Facilities include open-air and indoor *onsen* baths, a wellness lounge, swimming pool, shop and numerous meeting spaces.



Lights of wonder

Laguna Ten Bosch, a resort complex comprising a theme park, shopping mall, spa and hotel in Nagoya, has unveiled Aqua Planet, an illumination themed around the mystery and beauty of deep sea and space. The attraction, which was designed as a Light and Water Carnival, uses light and colour to express the silence of the deep sea and the infinite expanse of space in a dream-like collection of illuminations that can be explored on foot. There are shuttle services to and from the airport available every hour.



Tanukikoji Shopping Arcade features around 200 shops



The Sapporo TV Tower is one of the iconic attractions situated within Odori Park

and IHG Hotels & Resorts will launch InterContinental Sapporo in late 2025. These developments follow the launch of Courtyard by Marriott, which opened in July 2024, and Sapporo Stream Hotel by Tokyu Hotels. Sapporo Stream is located in Cocono Susukino, a new multi-purpose facility featuring restaurants, shops, a cinema and a game centre.

More Indian travellers are also expected this year, thanks to a strategic partnership between Sapporo, All Nippon Airways, and India-based travel solution provider Global Destinations. Signed in November 2024, the agreement aims to promote the city as a travel destination for the India market through social media campaigns, webinars and networking, with support from a Bollywood film that showcases Sapporo's landscapes; the film is scheduled for release in 2025.

Tomonori Aoyama, director general of Sapporo's tourism and MICE promotion department, said: "We look forward to sharing Sapporo's magnificent nature, beautiful four seasons, delicious food, and unique culture with Indian travellers."

Pranav Kapadia, founder and director of Global Destinations, remarked that he is "confident this partnership will significantly enhance the appeal of Sapporo for the Indian market".

The Philippines is another source market predicted to grow. In January 2025, Cebu Pacific will launch thrice-weekly flights between Sapporo and Manila in response to growing interest in Japan among Filipino travellers. Philippine arrivals to Japan in the first nine months of 2024 totalled 542,800, 35 per cent more than the same period in 2019.

The move signals improved sentiments over Japan's jet fuel shortage. Earlier in July 2024, Qantas Airways and Singapore Airlines had cancelled their 2024/25 snow season flights to Sapporo's New Chitose Airport over concerns about procuring sufficient fuel for the return journeys.

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Sapporo is ready to welcome adventure travellers.

Hannah Pearson
Regional director – APAC,
Adventure Travel Trade
Association

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Quest for purposeful travel

Luxury travellers are paying more attention to what they are travelling for, and Asia-Pacific offers many meaningful attractions, reports Mimi Hudoyo



From left: Street food culture is brought into The Nanee hotel in Bhaktapur, Nepal through the Bara Shop; Ibu Sari lifts Balinese women and children through her support centre, where visitors are invited to join them in activities

Asia-Pacific destinations' cultural and historical richness, authentic hospitality as well as quality travel products sold at attractive prices have been lauded as solid draws for luxury travellers, according to hoteliers and DMCs participating at the recent Further East 2024 luxury travel tradeshow in Bali.

Travel and tourism players in this region have become ever more innovative with their products and services to charm well-travelled guests, especially as luxury travellers – particularly those from the west – turn away from flashy experiences to favour engaging and immersive options.

Le Hong Lan, co-founder of Luxperia, Vietnam, said tours today are focused on delivering enhanced personalised experiences across the whole journey.

An example lies in a Luxperia programme where guests are invited to dinner with a Michelin-starred chef – Lan said the experience extends beyond the food.

"Having dinner at a Michelin-starred restaurant is nothing special for high-end travellers. However, having dinner with a Michelin-starred chef while learning to prepare Vietnamese dishes and then taking home the prized recipe is," said Lan.

He added that the experience is special, as the interaction with the chef results in practical tips, such as substitute ingredients that guests can use back home to create a fusion Vietnamese dish of their own.

Over at Destination Asia Indonesia, 15 Impact Tour programmes have been created. These feature local personalities heading unique causes – such as interaction with someone specialising in fireflies conservation, where guests will visit rice fields in the evening to watch the lightning bugs dance in the dark; and participation in a women empowerment project.

Elaborating on the women empowerment project, David Nuetzel, director of leisure at Destination Asia Indonesia, said the initiative was founded by Sari Pollen, known affectionately as Ibu Sari, who had risen up from a difficult life following her divorce and a 12-year separation from

her daughter. She created a safe space for vulnerable women and children in Bali after realising that many other women had gone through similar adversity. The women's centre provides a secure environment for divorced women, who are often highly stigmatised and ostracised by their community, according to Nuetzel.

At the centre, women learn to cook, make clothes and accessories, and selling techniques. Visitors are invited to learn about Ibu Sari and the role of women in the Balinese society, as well as to participate in activities such as herbal tea workshop, batik painting, soap making, paper recycling, or cooking. A Balinese lunch, prepared by the women at the centre, is also served to visitors.

Product innovation with regenerative tourism in mind is also happening.

The Nanee, an 18-room hotel in Bhaktapur, Nepal, is a good example. It was built and opened in 2023 as "an experiential property to contribute to the sustainability and regeneration of the heritage of Bhaktapur", said managing director Ajay Pradhanang.

Bhaktapur was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979, and is recognised for its outstanding cultural and historical significance.

Bhaktapur's heritage and culture are given attention through The Nanee's Storytelling Room where local artisans, sto-

rytellers and cultural experts often come to share their stories about the destination with guests. The hotel also conducts various tours and activities for guests to experience and appreciate Bhaktapur, such as street food tours, pottery workshops, and interaction with local artisans in their home, workshop or gallery.

Pradhanang explained that when visitors immerse themselves in the way of life in Bhaktapur, they inject income into the local community, allowing the locals to sustain their traditions.

Attractively priced

The abundance of meaningful experiences unique to Asia-Pacific also comes at a good price point.

Comparing Asia with the Caribbean, which is also popular among US travellers, Nuetzel said that while airfares to this region are not cheap, due to the vast distance, luxury travellers could score a top-notch hotel stay for US\$1,000 to US\$1,500 per night; in the Caribbean, the same would cost between US\$3,000 and US\$4,000 per night, or as high as US\$8,000 per night.

Luxperia's Lan added that the hotel landscape in Asia-Pacific has become a lot more exciting after the pandemic, with many investors erecting new hotel projects and appointing international brands to manage their properties.

In Vietnam, hotel capacity has boomed, especially as developers convert apartments and residences into hotels. The supply surge has dampened prices, making fresh accommodation options available at attractive prices.

Lan added: "Similarly, airlines are expanding their network. Vietnam Airlines, for example, not only flies to and from Vietnam, but also across the region, serving routes between Laos and Cambodia. This creates borderless travel and gives travellers more destinations to choose from. With more choice, travellers' demand has become more sophisticated," he remarked.

Powerful welcome

Serge Dive, CEO of This is Beyond, which owns the Further East event, said Asia-Pacific is also very powerful in the competition for travellers because of its hospitality spirit.

"The region often holds very different values to those in the West. For one, many Asia-Pacific countries traditionally elevate the collective over the individual; from Confucius to Buddhism, people here have a root awareness of the small improvements to body and mind that link every human being. We can see that in how Asia-Pacific brands treat their guests by emphasising subtle touches that slowly align into a satisfying whole, even if you don't notice that as much as splashier, typically luxurious elements to service and design.

"It's the difference between waiting for a huge meal under magnificent chandeliers and eating by the ocean, under a night sky, with the guy who caught the crab putting it on the grill a few feet away.

"Travel in this region is more naturally attuned to what we have in common, instead of what keeps us apart," Dive explained.

He added that the "sheer optimism of tens of millions of hospitality workers in Vietnam, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, etc, is very special", and has the power to deliver a spectacular welcome to guests from all over the world.

“

(Travellers) are thinking longer and harder about where they're going and why.

Serge Dive
CEO, This is Beyond

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Day out at sea

Join an indulgent marine safari onboard the *Scubaspa Zen*, with scuba diving and rejuvenating spa experiences among the activities on offer. The 53-metre long Phinisi-like vessel has nine cabins that can accommodate up to 20 guests and an additional dhoni dive boat, making it the only operator with a two-boat system in the country.

The *Scubaspa Zen* will bring guests around Eastern Indonesia to destinations like Raja Ampat, Cendrawasih Bay and Banda Sea. The seven-day Scuba and Spa package includes up to 10 dives and five spa treatments, while a 10-day option packs in up to 14 dives and seven spa treatments.

Guests can choose to be very active with daily fun such as island-hopping adventures, snorkelling, and more, or take it slow with onboard movies and relaxing scenery.

A fine side of Bali

Mimi Hudoyo picks out a selection of tours and programmes that highlight Bali's natural gifts and traditions

Dine responsibly

Begawan Biji is a new destination restaurant set amid Bali's scenic countryside, minutes from downtown Ubud. The restaurant offers a farm-to-table concept with an open kitchen that presents pure produce harvested from Begawan Biji's own permaculture garden and surrounding three hectares of rice fields. Local farmers grow Mansur Heritage Rice here, using 100 per cent natural and chemical-free practices as part of Begawan Biji's regenerative agriculture programme.

Guests can join a 30-minute Mini Farm Tour to learn about regenerative farming practices before sitting down to enjoy their lunch.



Art and agriculture

Alila Manggis has an immersive experience that explores the island's agricultural and artisanal roots. The programme starts with a walk across expansive rice paddies, where the fields shift in colour with the seasons. Each landscape tells a story of Bali's enduring connection to the earth, inviting a deeper appreciation for its agricultural heritage. Guests are invited to pause and taste the wild fruits that grow abundantly in the forest, before journeying onwards to Kastala, where the age-old farming practices remain a testament to the island's agrarian soul. They will have the opportunity to taste *tuak*, Bali's traditional palm liqueur, as well as sample honey harvested from the surrounding flora and enjoy a cup of East Balinese tea. The tour ends at Tenganan Village, where guests will witness the rare and sacred art of double *ikat* weaving.



Power of music

Amandari-Ubud, Bali, in collaboration with Quantum Temple, a blockchain-powered regenerative travel platform, has created the Balinese Maestro Fusion of *Gamelan* and Dance experience.

This is an exclusive programme guided by UNESCO-awarded ethnomusicologist and Balinese cultural maestro Made Bandem at his own house. It is designed to showcase not only Balinese culture but also its sophisticated philosophy and home-style hospitality.

In this three-hour programme, guests will learn from the maestro himself the philosophy of the *gamelan* musical instruments while enjoying coffee, tea and a selection of traditional snacks known as *jajan pasar*. The session is followed by a dance performance by Bandem himself, with the accompaniment of live Balinese *gamelan* music.



Precious papers

Visit Saraswati Papers in North Kuta, Bali and learn how its all-women team transforms used paper collected from schools, offices and hotels around Bali into fresh, reusable paper. No chemicals, bleaches or unsustainable practices are used in the process. Instead, natural dyes and other sustainable plant additive such as flower petals and bamboo are added to the recycled material pulp. This recycled paper is used to create a variety of high quality, eco-friendly products, such as books, stationery, invitation cards, packaging and ornaments.

Guests can join in and appreciate the environmentally-sensible process.

Customised approach



Archaeological city Petra can tap into wellness tourism by leveraging Jordan's strong reputation in medical services

Croatia, Jordan and Japan are focusing on curated journeys to charm seasoned luxury travellers, writes Meredith Woo

Destinations around the world are adjusting their offerings to appeal to increasingly discerning high-net-worth individual (HNWIs) travellers for whom exclusivity and authenticity are key.

Franka Gulin, director of the Croatian National Tourist Board, noticed a post-lockdown shift in Asian touring behaviours. From previously large groups, a new type of FITs wanting curated experiences is on the rise, she noted.

Croatia has capitalised on this trend by offering small, luxury accommodation with rich histories, providing HNWIs with a sense of exclusivity as these are often difficult to book.

Jordan, another rising star in luxury tourism, is leveraging its wealth of UN-

ESCO World Heritage Sites, like Petra. However, historical appeal alone is not enough to attract luxury travellers.

"In Petra, 87 per cent of our tourists in 2023 were from North America and Western Europe and a few other (overseas markets). After the war in Gaza, we lost over 80 per cent of (them). Therefore, we have to diversify markets and products. Luxury tourism is fundamental to that direction," said Fares A Braizat, chief commissioner of the Petra Development and Tourism Region Authority.

One opportunity that Petra could capture would be wellness tourism, he shared, highlighting how Jordan is highly regarded for its medical services and medical industry.

Over in Japan, overcrowding in key cit-

ies has been an issue. One strategy is to focus on regenerative tourism, especially to combat overtourism in certain areas, as well as to heighten travellers' emotional involvement while increasing revenue, said Naomi Mano, president and CEO of Luxurique.

Mano added that working with municipalities, unique temples and destinations to curate exclusive experiences can channel tourist dollars to the local community.

"We are almost customising the emotional involvement that these travellers have with these destinations – because when you're donating to something you believe in, or you're donating your time to what you believe in, it gives a further emotional involvement to that destination," she said.

Marina Bay Sands completes Paiza transformation

Singapore's Marina Bay Sands (MBS) has unveiled a new brand vision and campaign as it marks a significant milestone in its US\$1.75 billion reinvestment programme, with the completion of the exclusive Paiza Collection across all three hotel towers.

First announced in 2022, MBS' transformation has been done in phases, starting with new hotel rooms and suites across its three towers, dining experiences and lifestyle amenities. The transformation also includes the Sands SkyPark, lobby and wellness facilities.

The refreshed Paiza Collection is made up of first-class rooms and suites on the top floors that house the the Chairman, Presidential, Skyline and Horizon Suites. Guests arrive via a discreet lobby with private lifts and are escorted to their residential-style suites by their personal butler.

The Chairman Suite comes with a 146-inch television, a baby grand piano,



spa and gym facilities, and a fully stocked kitchen for dinner parties. The Presidential and Skyline Suites are fitted with a golf simulator or a media room, while the Horizon Suite is a wellness sanctuary with a Himalayan salt wall, massage tables, dry sauna, hammam shower and gym.

To date, approximately 1,540 new rooms, including 635 suites, have been completed, and refurbishment works are now focused on completing the Sands Collection in Tower 3 by 2Q2025. Once complete, there will be approximately 1,850 rooms including 775 suites.

The new brand vision, *Above Beyond*, reflects the grandeur of MBS' iconic architecture, while also embodying its ambition to surpass expectations and

Marina Bay Sands' Paiza Collection transformation is now complete; Chairman Suite pictured

The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection debuts new superyacht



Ilma's Marina and Marina Terrace features a hydraulic platform that connects guests directly with the sea

The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection's latest yacht, *Ilma*, is its second new-build luxury superyacht, offering suites with private ocean view terraces, dining curated by Michelin-starred restaurant chefs, a pool deck, new itineraries, and more.

Accommodating up to 448 guests and offering among the highest space-to-guest and guest-to-staff ratios at sea, *Ilma* boasts 224 suites, all with private terraces providing direct access to the sea. Stopping at signature and intimate ports of call, *Ilma* takes guests on itineraries to destinations such as Santorini, Porto Cervo, and the historic sites of Valletta, before departing for the Caribbean to Virgin Gorda, Gustavia, and St. John.

Ilma will additionally sail the North and Baltic Seas of Northern Europe – a first for The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection – during the 2025 summer season, featuring immersive itineraries in destinations like Amsterdam, Stockholm, and Reykjavík.

Onboard are five dining venues, a refreshed in-suite dining programme, bars, and a signature wine vault. Debuting on *Ilma* is the extensive Marina and Marina Terrace, featuring large glass windows that draw in natural light, side doors that open and float above the water, and a hydraulic platform that connects guests directly with the sea when the yacht is at anchor.

There is also an open-air space for live entertainment and sunbathing, complete with the main pool, pool bar, and an outdoor LED screen. Additional experiences include The Ritz-Carlton Spa, and three fitness spaces: a movement studio, cycle studio, and fitness studio.

set new benchmarks in hospitality. This vision is supported by a multi-million-dollar redesign and campaign to reinforce the resort's position as a global leader in luxury destinations.

MBS has engaged a group of creative visionaries to interpret and express *Above Beyond* through a short film, striking visuals and one-of-a-kind experiences. As part of this multi-part campaign launch, which will run into 2025, a suite of over 500 assets comprising campaign photographs and short-form videos was also commissioned, featuring globally renowned photographers.

MBS' COO Paul Town said: "We are now at the next stage of development with our ambitious transformation that is pushing the boundaries of luxury hospitality. The new brand vision and property refurbishment is timely as it mirrors and complements this vision, setting the tone as we enter the next phase of growth."



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How is Virtuoso building up its Asian presence?

We opened an office in 2019 in Shanghai that was supposed to be for all of Asia. However, this year, we decided that it was important for us to separate Greater China from the rest of Asia. Our team in Shanghai would focus on Greater China while another would focus on North Asia (for South Korea and Japan) and South-east Asia. We found that Singapore was the perfect place for this new team.

Our approach here is exactly what we do everywhere else. We start with a team and we build the momentum. This office in Singapore is supported by the team that builds our global infrastructure – branding, technology, and curation of all of our partnerships.

Virtuoso has 20,000 travel advisor members across 58 countries now. How large is the Asian membership, and does the size of your travel advisor network matter?

We have 68 members in Asia, and 19 specifically in North Asia and South-east Asia. The new team will grow this network, but there is no magic number. What matters for us most is the quality of travel advisors in our network. We don't just add members; the Virtuoso membership is by invitation only.

We regulate our membership from the perspective of the size of the market and growth potential – and I see tremendous growth potential in this region.

The number one competitor for Virtuoso is not really other travel agencies, but clients who book travel themselves. So, we focus on making sure that we develop a number of travel advisors that can meet market demand.

How does a travel advisor earn the invitation to join Virtuoso?

It is primarily referrals followed by a track record of having successfully built enough business to show they have the skills to grow. We also require our members to engage and have the mentality of wanting to help others because we believe that there's more to be gained by sharing than by keeping to yourself.

This has been part of Virtuoso's ethos for a long time. In fact, the thing that makes the Virtuoso network so powerful is the core benefit of sharing information and best practices on a global scale.

How do you define 'enough business'?

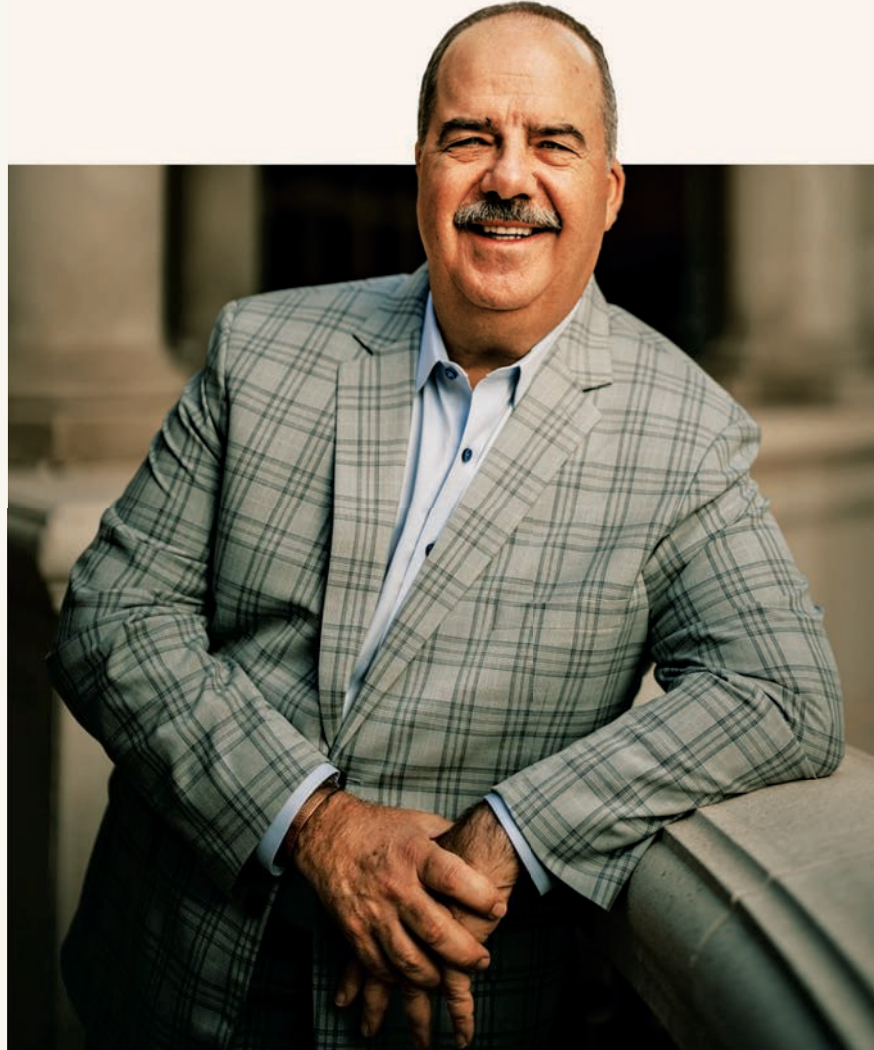
We look at total luxury production divided by the number of travel advisors in the firm. We are aware of the different types of business models – some members are boutique and do only luxury travel while some are larger entities with a division or department specialising in luxury travel.

A McKinsey report stated that luxury travel demand is expected to grow faster than any other industry segment. Is this triggering a spike in new travel advisors? What qualities are needed for them to succeed?

This is absolutely happening. There is one important thing a travel advisor should know: you would have lost the game the moment you told people that you booked travel for a living. A real travel advisor adds value in three different areas – before the trip, during the trip, and after the trip.

Our consumer research tells us the one thing that differentiates a transactional travel agent from a trusted travel advisor: it is what happens after a trip. A trusted travel advisor will try to engage with the client after the trip to ask what could be done better.

Orchestrating an expansion



The global community of luxury travel advisors and specialist suppliers has started its march into Asia. Virtuoso CEO Matthew Upchurch tells Karen Yue his plans for the company in this region and lists the qualities of a great travel advisor

What value can Virtuoso bring to travel advisors wanting to excel in the luxury travel game?

People new to the game don't realise that when they are serving this high-end segment of travellers, who are so very well travelled, well educated, and technologically savvy, they cannot possibly be more knowledgeable than their customers. In fact, there is no way anyone can know everything about everywhere.

This is where Virtuoso shows value to travel advisors. We have a global network of what we call Virtuoso on-sites, which are in-country destination experts. Some of our travel advisor members have placed their clients in three-way calls with our Virtuoso on-site representatives when conversations on destination planning get a little too complex. These destination experts are not simply pulling something off the Internet; they are vetted and qualified people who know the destination and will be servicing your clients on the ground.

This gives customers a lot of confidence and allows the travel advisor to serve with speed.

At the same time, to be a Virtuoso preferred partner (hotels, cruise lines, tour operators, specialty providers, and tourism board), you must have a dedicated Virtuoso contact. No Virtuoso travel advisor will ever have to send an email to a hotel or tour company with an address that is enquiry@partner.com.

The other thing that we do for travel advisors is the huge investment of time and effort in networking opportunities. The quality of the relationship travel advisors have with our Virtuoso partners can change the quality of the experience for the client. We started our main show, the Virtuoso Travel Week, at the Bellagio in Las Vegas in the late-80s, running appointments for 5,000 people from nearly from 100 countries. Today, we are doing hundreds of thousands of appointments every year.

Is the Virtuoso Preferred Partner programme as tightly curated as you do with your travel advisor network?

We curate everything. We never accept brands across the board. Just because Ho-

tel XYZ in this destination is a Virtuoso Preferred Partner does not mean others around the world carrying the XYZ brand will be too.

We are now updating our Virtuoso on-site programme to become even more granular by creating specialty operators for just one region.

Meanwhile, we are also creating a whole new programme just for villas and homes.

As we continue to watch travel trends, we are working to spot regional products that are really good for a particular outbound market but not quite for others.

What trends in luxury travel will be advantageous to Virtuoso members and partners?

I'd like to start with what I call creative tension in luxury clients wanting to return to places they know and love and to try out somewhere different. The secret to addressing that creative tension lies in creating pairings of the two. A lot of our travel advisor members are having to get creative, so that their clients can get the best of two destinations.

Another trend is the rise of high-end travellers getting out of the peak season and out of primary destinations and into smaller secondary and tertiary cities.

Thirdly, we are excited about the rise in multi-generational travel. This is growing tremendously in Asia outbound. A subset of that is skip-gen travel, where grandparents take their grandchildren on holiday.

The global population is ageing, but better quality of life and healthcare means people now have extended opportunities to travel in one lifetime. Are there enough travel advisors who are in tune with this silver market?

Part of Virtuoso's success is due to the development of our travel advisors matching the development of our customer base.

I will cite you an example. We have a travel advisor member in Dallas who just turned 90. Her energy is ridiculous. She went with her granddaughter to a Taylor Swift concert in Paris, and danced, sang and screamed the entire three hours. Somebody had her on video and posted on Instagram, saying, who is this incredible grandmother? She went viral and has five million views now. She spoke on TV news about travel and being youthful.

We are starting to get data on the travel potential of this segment of clients. In the next 15 years, the wealthiest cohort of US travellers will be single women over the age of 60.

As we grow in Asia, we want to help our members identify ways to be successful in their business, and to develop new travel advisors that match these different types of consumer opportunities.

So, a travel advisor new to Virtuoso may not always be someone young.

Absolutely! We have a lot of travel advisors who are career-switchers as well as those who have reached 55 or 60 years-old and wanting to get out of their corporate job and try something else. There is a real entrepreneurial opportunity in travel and tourism.

However, we are also working to develop the next generation of travel advisors, which will in turn help us to attract the next generation of luxury travellers. We have an interesting observation from this effort. When people found out what a modern travel advisor actually does, which is more than just booking travel, they started to get interested in planned travel.

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Pre-scheduled appointment	X	√	√
Destination Briefings	X	√	√
Speed Networking	X	√	√
Access to Networking Evenings (If any)	X	√	√
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and many more...

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