Asian destinations are still value-for-money for European travellers, but pricey airfares and limited air capacity are the biggest obstacles for those looking to return to the region for a quality vacation.

By Raini Handels

Bookings to Asia are looking healthy for 2023, according to European tour operators, but air seat capacity remains the main concern for the market to reach pre-pandemic levels.

The continent has bucked gloomy predictions last year following the Ukraine war and its ensuing energy crisis. Vail Street bank Goldman Sachs expects the euro zone economy to grow 0.6 per cent this year, compared with its previous forecast of a contraction, thanks to a fall in natural gas prices and the reopening of China’s borders, according to a Reuters report.

"Bookings are back in full swing and this makes us feel rather confident for this year," said Holger Baldus, managing director of Marco Polo Reisen.

"The yearly holidays are a very important part of the German lifestyle. After nearly three years of the pandemic, customers obviously don’t want to abstain from this highlight of their year," he said.

Stephan Roemer, founder of Tourasia, a Swiss tour operating company which also operates in Germany and Poland through subsidiaries, is seeing "excellent figures" coming from the UK, France and Switzerland.

But getting more growth is difficult. "All flights from Europe to Asia are packed to the fullest; there is simply no more capacity," said Roemer, who is also CEO of Thailand-based Diethelm Travel Group.

"Germany appears to us a bit slower (than UK, France and Switzerland), again because there aren’t enough flights and there might be a certain amount of reluctance because of inflation," he said.

According to IATA, international bookings for air travel in the UK were back to 80 per cent of 2019 levels in 2022, and more than 70 per cent in Germany.

This was a significant step up from 50 per cent of 2019 level for 2021, and 42 per cent for 2020, said a Centre for Aviation (CAPA) report. CAPA, co-founded in late October 2022 that a return to 2019 levels of capacity might not occur in Europe until 2024 or 2025, given "operational constraints and economic concerns."

TUI Group also reports a "promising booking development" for winter and summer for Asia. Spokesperson Anja Braun, however, noted that flight limitations, which have shrunk air fares, have "slightly" dentled Asia’s competitiveness.

"Asia has attractive pricing for accommodation compared with other longhaul destinations, but longhaul flight prices are difficult to compensate," she said.

Thailand is the number one Asian destination for Europeans. Europe, including Russia, accounted for 6.7 million tourists to the kingdom in 2019. Thailand’s National Statistical Office data shows. The pandemic shrunk the European market to Thailand to 2.1 million in 2020, and just 251,000 in 2021. Still, that 2021 preliminary figure represented nearly 60 per cent of all arrivals in Thailand in 2021, as travel restrictions prevented Asians and Chinese – the bulk of the kingdom’s arrivals – from travelling.

"We are seeing higher average travel budgets than pre-Covid," said Tourasia’s Roemer.

"Asia is extremely competitive, in particular Thailand, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. Hotels are still giving high discounts for early birds. Moreover, most Asian currencies have lost in value to the USD or CHF, which makes costs even cheaper," he said.

But China’s faster-than-expected travel reopenings from January 8 has raised the question whether a surge in demand in Asian destinations that are popular with Chinese travellers may put a squeeze on rooms availability and jack up rates in some of those places.

Thailand is the top Asian destination for Chinese travellers, welcoming 11 million of them in 2019. Japan, Vietnam, South Korea and Singapore are next.

"Demand of the Chinese market de-

"...Asia (demand) has been coming back at full speed..."

Holger Baldus
Managing director,
Marco Polo Reisen

The top five European sources for Thailand are Russia (1.5 million in 2019), the UK (993,000), Germany (853,000), France (745,000) and Eastern Europe (559,000).

"Demand for Asia was pretty low until late summer 2022, mostly because of travel restrictions that were still present in Asia. Since then Asia has been coming back at full speed, however flight availability continues to be the major problem," said Marco-Polo’s Baldus.

He too said that most Asian destinations are price competitive – "as long as we can secure flights at reasonable fares".

"Asia is mainly competing with the Caribbean, for instance, the Dominican Republic. It lost significant market share to the Caribbean during the pandemic, as travelling there was much easier and less bureaucratic. Ever-changing rules in a number of Asian countries during the pandemic made travel agencies reread demand to destinations that guaranteed their income and posed much less operational problems," added Baldus.

As to which Asian destinations are popular now, based on forward bookings, TUI’s Braun said the Maldives is topping the sales chart, thanks to its "specialist offers", while Thailand and Indonesia are "picking up now".

Christiane Thomas-Rattanasis, senior product and contracting manager for TUI and Airports brands for India, Nepal, Indochina, Myanmar, Hong Kong, Greater China, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan, sees a trend for longer stays in Cambodia.

"Cambodia’s average length of stay was 3.2 days but now we are seeing long stays of 10 to 14 days in Siem Reap, which are really good value bookings for our hotel partners. I believe Cambodia is benefitting from its move to be the first Indochina destination to reopen borders for tourists," said Thomas-Rattanasis.

On the other hand, Laos is still suffering from being the last to reopen.

"Laos is a niche product with low bookings, but now bookings have hardly returned and I think we will take a long time for it to get back to normal," she said.

Vietnam is picking up day by day but figures are still behind pre-Covid levels.

For Marco Polo, Japan is on fire. "Since its re-opening in August/September, Japan has seen total recovery and will enjoy a boom in 2023 if flight capacity improves," said Baldus.

And it seems that Europeans are not cutting back on spending.

"We are seeing higher average travel budgets than pre-Covid," said Tourasia’s Roemer.

European airlines will not reinstate their capacity as quickly as the Chinese counterparts, in part due to operational constraints posed by access to Russian airspace, said Mayul Patel, head of Asia, OAG Aviation.

"For those flights, this can add up to two hours’ additional flying time in each direction, which can increase operational costs due to higher fuel prices. In turn, Chinese carriers will have an upper hand given their access to Russian airspace. This will increase demand to Europe for Chinese travellers as China resumes package tours," he said.

Nevertheless, Patel said additional seat capacity growth from Europe to South-East Asia will continue, "given the high confidence level in longhaul travel from European markets and Asia’s wide variety of destinations and tourism product offerings."

In short, the conversation in 2023 has shifted, from how to fill airline seats and rooms, to how to find them.

That augurs well for the industry to return and even exceed pre-pandemic levels.

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March 7, 2023

Thailand is a hot favourite; Phuket pictured

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Improved tourism KPIs for South-east Asia

Tourism performance is getting back on track, but more work has to be done

By Karen Yue

Continued destination marketing under the ASEAN banner as well as the progressive relaxation and removal of travel restrictions by member states throughout 2022 have yielded more positive tourism numbers for the South-east Asian region.

At the February 5 press conference concluding the 26th Meeting of ASEAN Tourism Ministers (26th M-ATM) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, meeting chair Sandiaga Uno, minister of tourism and creative economy, Indonesia, noted that destinations in the economic grouping have altogether achieved a 1.706.61 per cent year-on-year increase in tourism receipts based on preliminary figures for 2022.

ASEAN member states have also recorded 1.222.99 per cent year-on-year increase in international arrivals, while hotel rate occupancy has improved by 16 per cent over the same period.

Destination marketing efforts fueling the return of tourists to the region include social media content, digital campaigns and activities bearing the new brand and tagline, A Destination for Every Dream.

The Meeting emphasised the need for member states to deepen their collaboration with relevant partners in the areas of destination marketing. It also commended initiatives that were supported by external partners, such as the Intra-ASEAN Tourism Recovery Campaign, which received support from the Canadian Trade and Investment Facility for Development, as well as ASEAN’s collaboration with regional travel trade publisher and event organiser TTG Asia Media and the Sub-Regional Secretariats to amplify the call to visit South-east Asia.

Focus ahead will be on accomplishments even more key measures under the Post-Covid-19 Recovery Plan for ASEAN Tourism. These include developing regional cruise tourism and the promotion of new and lesser known destinations in the region.

Sandaga recognises that connectivity improvements – not just within South-east Asia but also from markets outside of the region – are crucial for ASEAN member states to achieve these joint tourism goals.

In the case of India, direct flights to and from India are still lacking despite the latter being the “lowest of the low-hanging fruits” for tourism.

Philippine Tourism secretary Christina Garcia-Frasco said tourism heads have agreed to work on boosting air lift by identifying airports that can be used to operate additional direct flights for the purpose of driving tourism flow into both key and emerging destinations.

She added that some of the new flights – either scheduled or chartered – may be launched this year, for routes within South-east Asia as well as to and from ASEAN-Plus Three partners China, India and South Korea.

Tourism development across the region will also consider responsible and inclusive growth for all, and the need for greater digitalisation.

Attention to Asian detail

RIU Hotels & Resorts is replicating its European success in Asia-Pacific, says Petra Gauthey, director of business development Asia. By Jeetheng Yew

How was 2022 for RIU?

It is a fact that 2022 has been a fruitful year in which we have finally put behind the Covid-19 crisis in most of our destinations. We have registered record figures, both in terms of occupancy and average rates, surpassing the ones of 2019. The buoyant demand made it unnecessary to launch (stimulating) offers.

What are RIU’s plans for Asia and the surrounding region this year?

The Asian market is key for the RIU chain. We have put in a great deal of effort into the region over the past years, opening two brand new hotels in the Maldives in 2019 and another in Dubai in 2020.

At the end of 2019, we started to think about improving the quality of our establishments even more. In 2020, we went ahead with renovation plans for RIU hotels in Mauritius, and chose to demolish them in order to create new buildings.

The new hotels (in Mauritius) will be part of the RIU Palace and RIU Classic lines, and have 700 rooms in total. They will have main dining rooms and two themed restaurants each, as well as a spa. Guests at both the RIU Palace hotel, which will be for adults only, and the RIU Classic will be able to enjoy the Splash Water World water park, which will be located in the latter.

What is RIU doing to encourage its established European and American markets to travel to Asia-Pacific where there are RIU properties?

Within the European source markets, RIU has been an established and well-respected brand for many years. Therefore, when we opened our first hotel in Sri Lanka in 2016, we were able to drive sales to this new destination with our established network of contacts.

Market confidence in the RIU product enabled us to quickly establish our hotels in Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Zanzibar, the Maldives and Dubai. Our extensive network of tour operators, travel agents, and other industry partners were able to easily sell our hotels to their customers.

We would like to highlight that, at the moment, the European source markets are the biggest volume drivers to our Asia and Indian Ocean properties. They represent well over half of our total business in this region.

In the past year, there has been a surge of interest from North America for the Maldives and Dubai. Considering the strong position and recognition RIU has in the market, we are confident in the growth potential to Asia.

Will RIU beef up its sales and marketing presence in high potential Asian source markets as well?

We are aware of the significant influence the Asia-Pacific markets have on the tourism industry. At the moment, the all-inclusive concept, which is one of our specialties, is extremely valuable for these traveller markets.

With our experience working with the Asia-Pacific markets, we cater special offers in our hotels, including a selection of Asian dishes, as well as events and celebrations for the Lunar New Year, Diwali and the Sri Lankan New Year.

Our presence in different Asian markets is essential. We have offices in China, Singapore and India. This year, as we traditionally do, we are planning to visit our partners in Australasia, Malaysia, and South Korea, and start penetrating new markets such as Japan and Taiwan.
Nestled along a pristine stretch of Mengiat Beach, Merusaka Nusa Dua, a 5-star resort, offers a haven of relaxation and rejuvenation. Indulge in the ultimate experience at the luxurious Merusaka Nusa Dua resort with stunning ocean views, an array of amenities, and personalized service.

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Forming key partnerships

From metaverse adventures to super app partnerships, Singapore tourism players are coming together to explore engaging ways to draw overseas visitors. By Serene Foo

Since June 2022, the leading travel and leisure e-commerce platform has been teaming up with over 20 in-market influencers and content partners to create engaging and immersive content, specially tailored for each market. Additionally, Singapore is keen to enhance different touchpoints across the traveller’s journey – from offering attractive online deals at the booking stage to ensuring ease of payment at local merchants – through key partnerships with major tourism stakeholders such as Ant Group, Traveloka, Agoda, Trans Digital Media, CapitalLand Investment, Malaysia Aviation Group, Philippine Airlines and airasia.

For example, Ant Group expanded its cooperation with STB to make cross-border travel to Singapore more seamless and convenient with the SingapoReimagine with Alipay+ campaign. To help local businesses reach new customers while creating more awareness of local tourism offerings, the joint campaign spotlights exclusive offers to users of the six Alipay+ partner mobile wallets when they travel to Singapore. Travellers with these wallets can also easily and securely transact with local businesses that accept Alipay+.

At the same time, STB joined forces with lifestyle super app Traveloka and Trans Digital Media. The Traveloka partnership helps drive interest to a wider target audience and offers an easier booking experience for Singapore offerings in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

The collaboration with Trans Digital Media spanned a wide array of businesses such as banking, retail and fashion.

WHAT’S HOT

Snowy fun
Asia’s first snow, surf, and skate attraction, Trifecta, will launch in Singapore’s famous shopping belt, Orchard Road this year. The exciting space will enable visitors to experience the hal- lowed trifecta of snowboarding, surfing and skating in one day and all under one roof. Facilities will be rounded out with unique F&B concepts and retail outlets.

Birds of a feather
Debuting in 2023, the 17-hectare Bird Paradise will be the first of its kind in the region, and the only place in the world to have a naturalistic mixed-species habitat. The attraction offers visitors a chance to experience immersive and naturalistic mixed species habitats, and explore the unique large walk-through aviaries that reflect different biomes of the world.

Chocolate heaven
An experiential journey of delicious chocolates begins at the new Mr. Bucket Chocolaterie at Dempsey Hill. Visitors can try their hand at Singapore’s first ever build-your-own chocolate slab station and fill their own containers with the delicious treats from a dispensary. The curious can also witness the entire bean-to-bar process, as well as savour chocolate and cacao wine.

Need for speed
For the first time in South-east Asia, HyperDrive, a gamified electric Go-Kart circuit, will open its doors this year to racing enthusiasts. Transporting speed demons into the realm of virtual gaming, drivers can zip around the three-level indoor track, turbo-charge their racing experience or sabotage competitors within an interactive experience, heighten- ed with light and sound effects.
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Malaysia gears up for travel

Tourism players up the ante with new offerings to attract inbound travellers. By S Puvaneswary

Industry players in Malaysia are optimistic that 2023 will be a better year for inbound tourism as domestic, regional and international air connectivity gradually improves since April 1, 2022 when Malaysia reopened its international borders.

Traditionally, regional tourists form the bulk of tourist arrivals, and this is expected to continue into 2023 due to good regional air connectivity provided by Malaysia Airlines, AirAsia and Batik Air. For the South-east Asian market, Tourism Malaysia aims to effectively communicate the diversity of Malaysia’s tourism product offerings, increase visitors’ length of stay and local expenditure, and attract return visitors.

According to Tourism Malaysia’s marketing plan 2022-2026, the NTO will work on joint promotions with local travel agents and OTAs to create and sell attractive travel packages, as well as forge smart partnerships with domestic and foreign airlines such as Royal Brunei, Scoot, Jetstar Asia and Philippine Airlines to increase market share of air travel into Malaysia.

Inbound agents are also targeting the regional market with new itineraries.
Feel at home around the world

Sincerely Yours
A brighter road ahead

As travel picks up around the world, Thailand is hopeful for the future of tourism. By Alastair Newport

AAA

the number of tourist arrivals steadily creeps up towards pre-pandemic levels, leisure tourism in Thailand is enjoying a busy and lucrative new year that promises to continue, barring any more international health crises, for the foreseeable future. The future looks so promising that the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has revised its expectations for the year ahead, upping the forecast for foreign visitors from approximately 20 million to 25 million by the end of 2023. A large part of this revision is down to the recent decision by the Chinese government to ease travel legislation, where about half a million visitors from China hitting Thailand to participate in the Chinese New Year celebrations during end-January was expected.
Asia in focus

Schubert Lou, chief operating officer of Trip.com, believes that the conditions for the recovery and growth of Asia’s travel market are favourable, which is why the OTA is working towards becoming the number one player in the region. By Rachel AJ Lee

Which international markets are your best performing markets, and how are you growing your market share in markets that don’t really use Trip.com?

Pre-Covid, we were aggressively expanding in two areas – Asia and Europe. For Asia, the countries are Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand and Malaysia, while in Europe they were UK, France, Italy, Spain and Germany. Our fastest-growing market right now is Thailand, and we have seen a great growth in South Korea as well.

Trip.com has a very different philosophy for branding and marketing, and we believe in a very focused, targeted approach. We look at a couple of factors when it comes to branding. First, we consider whether our product market fit is ready for each market. We assess that by looking at the organic growth through a certain percentage of market share, which differs from market to market. Once you attain that market share, it is an indication that your product is being adopted by the market on a natural level, and that is when we start amplifying our branding efforts.

What region is Trip.com’s focus moving forward?

Asia will be what we’re focusing on. It is the most important region for Trip.com, and we need to increase our market penetration, and understand how we can dominate in the OTA space. We have the right people, the right team structure, and with Asia’s current rate of recovery, we also have the right timing. We want to be the number one player in this space in a couple of years.

How has your sales performance been during recent online sale seasons like 11.11 and 12.12? Were sales on those days particularly high?

The 3.3 sale in Singapore this year was the very first one that we ran. It was well received, and we were pleasantly surprised with the response. With that, we started getting into a rhythm and having more frequent sale campaigns, and also increased the frequency from once in two months to monthly. Singapore was the first trial in March this year as it was a market that was ready for such campaigns, with the loosening of the travel policies. We also looked at the policy progression in other markets, and tailored the sale campaigns to each market accordingly.

Sale campaigns are further localised for each market. For instance, we ran a Pay Day campaign in Thailand, which focused on attractive 9 Baht travel deals. This is a combination of the local cultural understanding of 9 Baht being a good discount, as well as pay day, which worked really well for Thailand.

With the recent lifting of restrictions in China, does Trip.com anticipate more domestic travel and movement?

We are optimistic about the Chinese market. China travel bookings were boosted by Lunar New Year demand, where Trip.com Group has subsequently seen a huge increase in searches and the volume of travel bookings. We are looking forward to the upcoming spring travels with excitement and optimism as the recovery driven by pent-up consumer demand continues.

What trends do you see in the travel OTA space?

For one, we think there will be a lot of regionalisation in travel. People have been cooped up for two years, and domestic travel can only go so far. But with current geo-political conflicts, there will be an increased desire for rational, financially-sound travels, which will most likely be to nearby countries.

For example, in Asia, we think that travellers will go on more regional, medium-haul trips, or weekend trips. Because in Asia, a majority of destinations are within a four-hour flight.

The second trend will be the anticipation of the China outbound, and we hope that it will happen sometime in summer 2023. And when that happens, travel patterns will then be tailored to this crowd and their behaviours. We are seeing user behaviours changing in China, especially with their e-commerce purchasing patterns. We think that travellers will be more value-driven due to the current economic conditions and their income.

What are some new initiatives to support travel suppliers that rely on Trip.com’s network?

We have been engaging with our partners a lot more and increasing our touchpoints with them, as we have a lot more data to support the recovery. We believe that product solutions will change, especially with the soon-to-happen China outbound travel, and are working with our partners on the right product offerings and pricing.

The second thing we have been doing is working closely with tourism boards and stakeholders to work on key messaging and branding for destinations to attract a traveler’s attention. Economic conditions in the future may not be ideal, so we also have to be smarter in targeting customers.
Sustainability: a long-term goal as airlines recover

Airlines associations are pushing ahead with sustainable air travel efforts, but state commitment to facilitating Sustainable Aviation Fuel production and clearer emissions information at point of travel booking are needed to drive greater achievements. By Karen Yue

IATA has reiterated the importance of keeping sustainable growth in sight as the air travel industry rises from the ashes of the Covid pandemic and travel disruption.

Speaking at the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines’ (AAPA) Assembly of Presidents in Bangkok in November 2022, Conrad Clifford, IATA’s senior vice president and deputy director general, recalled IATA members’ unfaltering efforts towards achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050 since 2021, despite the travel crisis, as well as the recent adoption of the Long Term Aspirational Goal (LTAG) at the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Assembly to achieve the same.

“We are extremely encouraged by the LTAG agreement at the ICAO Assembly. With both governments and industry focused on the same goal, the significance of LTAG cannot be overstated. But to achieve net zero CO2 emission by 2050, government policy support in key areas of decarbonisation is critical. One such area is incentivising the production capacity of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF),” said Clifford.

SAF is currently expected to account for 65 per cent of carbon mitigation in 2050. It will be the largest contributor to the industry’s sustainability. Airlines purchased all available SAF in 2021 and have committed to over US$17 billion of forward purchasing agreements.

“We urge other states to take similar steps, and to support the efforts to develop a global framework for a Book & Claim system for SAF,” he said.

The Book & Claim system enables travelling consumers to claim the CO2 reduction that their purchase achieves even if their aircraft lacks SAF access at the airport. This is achieved by directing their SAF purchase to another aircraft elsewhere with access to SAF.

Speaking to TTG Show Daily separately, Clifford said the Book & Claim system has been instrumental in enabling public participation in sustainable travel. Through the system, companies are able to support sustainable business travel and urge their airline vendors to use more SAF.

“Not it is more than just the corporates that are driving the use of more SAF. In Europe, the general public demands that too,” he added.

Clifford acknowledged the benefits of having emissions listed with flight searches, such as on Google, as that has allowed consumers to make informed decisions on sustainable travel.

“We have developed a global standard for the industry to measure emissions, and that helps to reduce confusion when consumers look at different sites,” he shared.

The airline industry’s sustainable efforts are also supported by the ICAO Assembly’s reinforced commitment to the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA) as well as goal to stabilise emissions of international aviation at 85 per cent of 2019 levels.

When asked about the effectiveness of carbon offsets compared to emissions minimisation right from the start, Clifford told TTG Show Daily that air travel’s sustainable efforts currently could not be without carbon offsets.

He explained, “Carbon offsetting is important at the beginning, especially when we have this massive gap in SAF supplies. We need carbon offsets to ensure airlines are meeting their (emissions) targets. Carbon offsets is a gap-filler and certainly not the ultimate answer, but it helps at this point.”
Securing confirmations

Business events around the world have pretty much resumed, but new challenges such as last-minute registrations, a shortage of logistics and operations staff, as well as sky-high travel costs have surfaced, posing new challenges to event planners. By Rachel AJ Lee

Last-minute registrations for overseas business events continue to be a challenge for event organizers post-lockdown, and PCOs and PEOs are deploying various methods—from working on more flexible arrangements with venues to highlighting the higher costs of travel—to encourage early confirmations.

Patricia Cheong, managing director Asia, International Conference Services, shared with the Daily how a recent medical congress saw its registration surge to 1,100 in the last three weeks before the event, up from the expected 700.

Cheong noted: “Over the last two years, people have held on to their conference registrations to the very last minute as it is quite risky in the sense that the event may be cancelled, or if they contract Covid. Either situation could mean they would be unable to obtain a refund.”

Moreover, companies’ internal budgets have been cut, which means that attendees may have trouble justifying their travel to their management or have to wait longer for the approval of their travel budgets.

“Speakers are also in the same situation, which then becomes a chain reaction, and makes it challenging for PCOs like us,” Cheong added. Richard Ireland, CEO, Clarion Events Asia, observed: “Events have always experienced late registration patterns but in the post-lockdown environment, this has certainly increased.”

He attributes this to delegates who are usually senior executives, stating that these individuals “want flexibility in their schedules and tend to book late”.

To deal with last-minute sign-ups, Cheong shared that she works closely with the venue to enable more flexibility in accommodating changes in attendee numbers on shorter notice, or prepare for a hybrid option from the beginning and encourage attendees who register at the last minute to participate online instead.

Chong added: “We have also encouraged some of our association clients to consider making the in-person registration price the same as the virtual price, which makes it less risky for the attendee if they have to switch to an online attendance.”

“He also encouraged his exhibitors to put forth that ‘hotel rates and airfares are skyrocketing’.

Other challenges Yong is currently experiencing revolve around logistics and operations, where venue owners, freight forwarders and contractors are “rusty post-lockdown”, while also dealing with a “manpower crunch” arising from “back-to-back” events.

To encourage earlier sign-ups, Yong works with official hotels earlier in the year to ensure attendees benefit from exclusive rates. Overall, Yong is optimistic for 2023, as his company is already seeing floor plans that are 80 per cent filled, buoyed by the surge in demand for in-person events.

Ireland also pointed out that after a “very successful last few months” for Singapore, he hopes that the return to pre-Covid numbers will help “customers, partners and prospective employees feel confident about the long-term certainty of the events industry.”

While late registrations present some challenges, other challenges of impacted supply chain and talent leaving the industry still exist.

Richard Ireland
CEO, Clarion Events Asia

We are better prepared now, but in order to move forward, we need to focus on what is most important for delegates, such as making connections. Patricia Cheong
Managing director Asia, International Conference Services
A resurgence in the market, especially in Corporate travel, has been noted as the rebound. The impacts of Covid, or other macroeconomic factors, may take a while, given the lasting effects of the pandemic. The initial rebuild was slow, but today, travel momentum is continuing to grow strongly.

Corporate travel momentum will continue to grow in 2023. Travel managers are looking to minimise physical contact with people or equipment. Check-ins at hotels or registrations at events or meetings through mobile apps or face recognition technology, QR code, and such has become a new ask by travel managers. Keyless entry to hotel rooms is another new technology keeping anxious travelers satisfied.

Hotels need to make a strategic shift

The report also revealed that 50 per cent of travel managers state their organisations’ programme considerations have somewhat changed since 2019. Know what the travellers want: Hotels and venues that quickly understand the changing preferences of customers and implement measures facilitating those will get an edge over those who continue to rely on old practices. The time is to bring back existing customers and create opportunities for new customers by offering them what they are looking for. Innovate using technology: Technology is set to bring a positive change to the travel industry. Its potential is limitless and those who know how to leverage it are sure to succeed. Imagination robots receiving guests at hotel lobbies and escorting them to the rooms or meeting venues is not a farfetched thought now. Several properties are investing in AI (Artificial Intelligence) and ML (Machine Learning) guided technology to make the guest experience safer and more efficient.

Prosper with dynamic pricing: The preference of travel managers has shifted towards receiving dual or dynamic pricing from the properties. Around 62 per cent of respondents across all markets surveyed say they’re requesting dual or dynamic prices during their 2023 RFP negotiations. These strategies could open new doors for hotels, giving them the opportunity to vary pricing based on factors such as demand, availability, and customer loyalty.

Closing thoughts

The travel landscape has undergone a massive shift and is evolving every day, pushing the need for hoteliers to stay relevant to attract corporate travellers and event planners. There is a need to find the perfect balance between technology, cost containment and sustainability to deliver an experience that is safe for customers who are regaining faith in travelling and for organisations that are concerned for their employees to rebuild their customer connections by meeting face-to-face.

*All figures above are a consolidated representation of findings from Cvent’s Travel Managers Report covering markets across Asia/ANZ/MEA regions.*

Graham Pope is the vice president of international sales, Cvent. He has more than 15 years of experience in the events and software-as-a-service (SaaS) space. Prior to joining Cvent, he spent five years as EMEA group commercial director at Global Experience Specialists.
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Asia’s fresh flavours

Embark on a gastronimical journey at these five new restaurants in Asia that are sure to tantalise any tastebuds. By Melissa Anne Tan

Authentically Thai

Benjarong has opened in Dusit Thani Laguna Phuket, serving up authentic Thai Cuisine crafted from unique recipes passed from generation to generation – an ode to Thailand’s culinary heritage. A must-try is the lobster dish Mung Korn Lui Fai and the Yum Nue Yang, a Thai-style tenderloin beef salad. Ingredients are sourced locally from Phuket, Phang Nga, Krabi and the north-eastern region of Thailand, and collaborations with farmers and producers in different parts of Thailand help deliver the freshest ingredients to the table.

Taste of Spain

Calle Ocho is a convivial tapas restaurant and bar located in Hong Kong’s Causeway Bay. Inspired by Spain’s historic Madrid de Los Austrias neighbourhood, it encompasses over 130 seats across two storeys on a corner site overlooking Victoria Park and Fashion Walk. The Calle Ocho menu features the humble Pan con Tomate, the playful Uni-Cone, a selection of indulgent Charcuteria, Spanish Suckling Pig ‘Boneless’ Terrine, a Vegetables section, and the indulgent and slightly salty ‘Candela’ Manchego Cheesecake.

Bento delight

Magurokadan is the place to go for sushi lovers, known for its beautiful bara-chirashi. Imagine being served what looks like a jewellery box, only to discover a colourful assortment of raw fish (sourced from across the country), rice seasoned with red vinegar, kanpyo and shitake mushrooms. Each order comes with three seasonal side dishes, a chawanmushi and a soup. Prices start from 2,500 yen (US$19) depending on the choice of toppings. Magurokadan is located on the 12th floor of Daimaru department store at Tokyo Station.

Eat and craft

Tanah Liat is a pottery atelier and cooking lab by day, and is located in Renaissance Bali Nusa Dua Resort in Bali. Transforming into an arts-and-crafts-inspired restaurant in the evening, Tanah Liat’s menu is packed with Bali-sourced seasonal seafood and plant-based cuisine. Guests can sit back and relax at the brick-walled indoor area and admire the pottery and arts made by talented local artists, or head outdoors for a breezy dinner by the garden where the chefs pick the freshest ingredients for your meal. For the adventurous, there are daytime pottery classes available too.

Culinary traditions

Inside One Farrer Hotel lies a Chinese restaurant that delivers a delectable range of timeless dishes, innovative dishes, and great service. Jia He Grand Chinese Restaurant has much to offer – from hand-crafted dim sum to Bambired beef briskets, there is a wide variety of appetizers to try, as well as roasted meats and claypot dishes. Finish off the meal with a double-boiled whole pear with peach resin or chilled guiling herbal jelly with bird’s nest.
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