PPS 1885/02/2017(025627)

TTG ASIA

No. 1795/May-June 2023

**Ever-changing Lantau**
Hong Kong's Lantau Island is evolving, now sporting new-builds that aim to attract more travellers to the destination

**Play together**
Spot these new travel products and experiences that are great for bringing families together

**ILTM Asia Pacific returns**
ILTM portfolio director, Alison Gilmore, is excited to return to Singapore with another edition of the luxury travel tradeshow

CHUAN CHUAN/shutterstock

# Aboard the ChatGPT train

The new-gen chatty chatbot is helping OTAs to better engage customers for eventual sale conversation, while making content creation easier for travel and tourism marketers

TTG Asia BUSINESS ARTICLE OF THE YEAR PATA Gold Awards

TTG Asia FEATURE OF THE YEAR (Silver) MPAS Awards

TTG Asia FEATURE OF THE YEAR (Bronze) MPAS Awards

TTG Asia TRADE MEDIA OF THE YEAR MPAS Awards

# Getting to know ChatGPT

Karen Yue
Group Editor
karen.yue@ttgasia.com
www.linkedin.com/in/karenyuesf/

I most certainly sit in the laggard category within the technology sphere. Most tech innovations do not send a shiver of excitement through me, and I remain contented with my trusty circa-2015 MacBook Pro and Samsung Galaxy S21 FE (for context, the S23 was launched this February).

But when ChatGPT made the headlines last November, my ears twitched. It was a big reaction from someone like me, and the world responded even more wildly. Within two months, ChatGPT gained 100 million monthly active users, while its developer, OpenAI, became one of the 50 most visited websites in the world.

By mid-February, there were some 200 e-books on Amazon's Kindle store that listed ChatGPT as the author or co-author. And according to a *Reuters* report, that number is climbing steadily. There was even a commentary on how ChatGPT was challenged to write a film – and it churned out 50 scripts in an hour.

How intriguing.

So, I went onto OpenAI to poke around. First, I asked ChatGPT to write me a family trip for Osaka, and then an off-the-beaten-path travel plan for the same destination. The first enquiry spat out all the usual tourist landsmarks. The second recommended Shinseikai District, Abeno Harukas Observatory and Dotonbori – not quite hidden gems – but it did point out a hike up Mount Koya and a temple stay as well as a bike tour and traditional tea ceremony. For first-timers to Osaka, ChatGPT could provide a useful starting point in their travel research.

Can ChatGPT take on more serious prompts? I asked for a news update on Singapore's business events industry. Within seconds, it churned out content that mirrored latest news reports on Singapore's busy calendar of events and pace of recovery.

For another test of accuracy, I asked it for a background of myself. It claimed I have been with the company since 1995 – which would have made me a 15-year-old worker.

Next up, can ChatGPT mimic a human writer and create content that tugs at heartstrings? I asked for a Singapore love story. That tale was bland, but Singapore Tourism Board would have been proud because the lovers found romance around the city-state's top tourist landmarks.

My verdict is this: ChatGPT is great as a starting point for travel and tourism content, which makes it a great customer engagement tool for companies keen to build travel interest and then reel the customer towards conversion. It can help with first drafts of trend reports, destination backgrounders, ad copy and the likes. But it is not so evolved yet to be able to understand and convey the emotions that are part of travel and tourism. Nor can it be relied on for factual content without a human fact-checker.

That said, ChatGPT is still learning and developing. With the speed of tech advancement these days, who knows, it might just close those gaps and more by the time this page is printed and put in your hands.

**04 Community**

**06 Technology**

**08 ILTM Special: In conversation with Alison Gilmore**
ILTM portfolio director, Alison Gilmore, is excited to return to Singapore with another edition of ILTM Asia Pacific, an event that has attracted intense interest from luxury travel specialists from around the world

**10 ILTM Special: A luxurious showcase**
ILTM Asia Pacific brings a range of luxury travel sellers from around the world to a single marketplace

**12 ILTM Special: The Curtain Rises**
Singapore has seen an explosion in live entertainment productions in recent months, many of which quickly sell out to locals and tourists

**14 Analysis: Aboard the ChatGPT train**
The new-gen chatty chatbot is helping OTAs to better engage customers for eventual sale conversation, while making content creation easier for travel and tourism marketers

**16 Analysis: The beauty of togetherness**
Families continue to be an important contributor to travel recovery this year, with demand fuelled by greater travel ease and weakened Covid fears

**19 Feature: Cruise away**
More cruise lines are making their way around the Asia-Pacific with new homeports and destinations to explore

**20 Itinerary: Travel together, play together**
A family that travels together, stays together – it is never too early to begin exploring the world so check out these new highlights for the next family trip

**22 Destination: Nature at the heart**
Attaining the Global Geopark status has motivated stakeholders in Langkawi to prioritise conservation and sustainable development on the Malaysian island

**24 Destination: Reinventing Hiroshima**
The City of Water is revamping itself to entice more travellers to its turf with new adventure offerings, historical and cultural experiences, and plenty of tasty eats

**26 Destination: Ever-changing landscape**
The progressive development of Hong Kong's Lantau Island now sports new-builds that aim to attract more travellers to Hong Kong

TTG Publishing Travel Trade
TTG Travel Trade Publishing is a business group of TTG Asia Media

EDITORIAL
**Karen Yue** Group Editor
karen.yue@ttgasia.com
**S Puvaneswary** Editor, Malaysia/Brunei
puvanes@ttgasia.com
**Mimi Hudoyo** Editor, Indonesia
idmfasia@cbn.net.id
**Rachel AJ Lee** Assistant Editor, TTGmice, TTGassociations
rachel.lee@ttgasia.com
**Serene Foo** Editor, TTG Content Lab
serene.foo@ttgasia.com
**Melissa Anne Tan** Sub Editor
melissa.anne.tan@ttgasia.com
**Adelaine Ng** Correspondent, Australia
adelaineng.abc@gmail.com
**Marissa Carruthers** Correspondent, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam
maris.carruthers@gmail.com
**Prudence Lui** Correspondent, Hong Kong
prului@yahoo.com
**Rohit Kaul** Correspondent, India
rohit.kaul@ttgasia.com
**Tiara Maharani, Kurniawan Ulung** Correspondents, Indonesia
tiaraul13@gmail.com,
alezkurniawan@gmail.com
**Kathryn Wortley** Correspondent, Japan
kathrynwortley@gmail.com
**Rosa Ocampo** The Philippines
rosa.ocampo@gmail.com
**Feizal Samath** Sri Lanka/Maldives
feizalsam@gmail.com
**Alastair Newport** Thailand
alastairnewport@gmail.com
**Redmond Sia** Creative Designer
**Lina Tan** Editorial Assistant

SALES & MARKETING
**Pierre Quek** Publisher and Head Integrated Solutions
pierre.quek@ttgasia.com
**Chimmy Tsui** Publisher and Head Integrated Solutions (China)
chimmy.tsui@ttgasia.com
**Shirley Tan** Senior Business Manager
shirley.tan@ttgasia.com
**Seth Leow** Business Manager
seth.leow@ttgasia.com
**Adrienne Yim** Marketing Executive
adrienne.yim@ttgasia.com
**Cheryl Lim** Advertisement Administration Manager
cheryl.lim@ttgasia.com

PUBLISHING SERVICES
**Nur Hazirah Sukarji** Web Executive
**Katherine Leong** Circulation Executive

TTG ASIA MEDIA
**Darren Ng** Managing Director
darren.ng@ttgasia.com

OFFICES
**SINGAPORE**
10 Science Park Road, #03-11 The Alpha
Singapore Science Park II
Singapore 117684
Tel: (65) 6395-7575
traveltradesales@ttgasia.com;
www.ttgasia.com

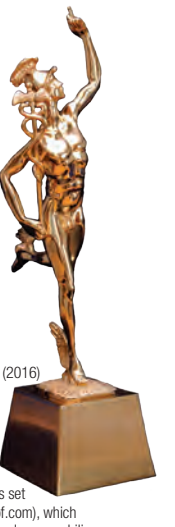
**HONG KONG**
Room 1007, 10/F, West Wing, Tsui Sha Tsui Centre,
66 Mody Road, Tsim Sha Tsui East,
Kowloon, Hong Kong
Tel: (852) 2237 7272
Fax: (852) 2237-7227

TTG Asia is a product by TTG Travel Trade Publishing, a business group of TTG Asia Media. It is mailed free on written request to readers who meet predetermined criteria. Paid subscriptions are available to those who do not meet the criteria. Annual airmail subscriptions are US$180 to Asia and US$199 elsewhere. Cover price US$5.
MCI (P) 005/09/2022 • PPS 1885/02/2017(025627)

Printed by Times Printers Pte Ltd
16 Tuas Avenue 5, Singapore 639340

## 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.

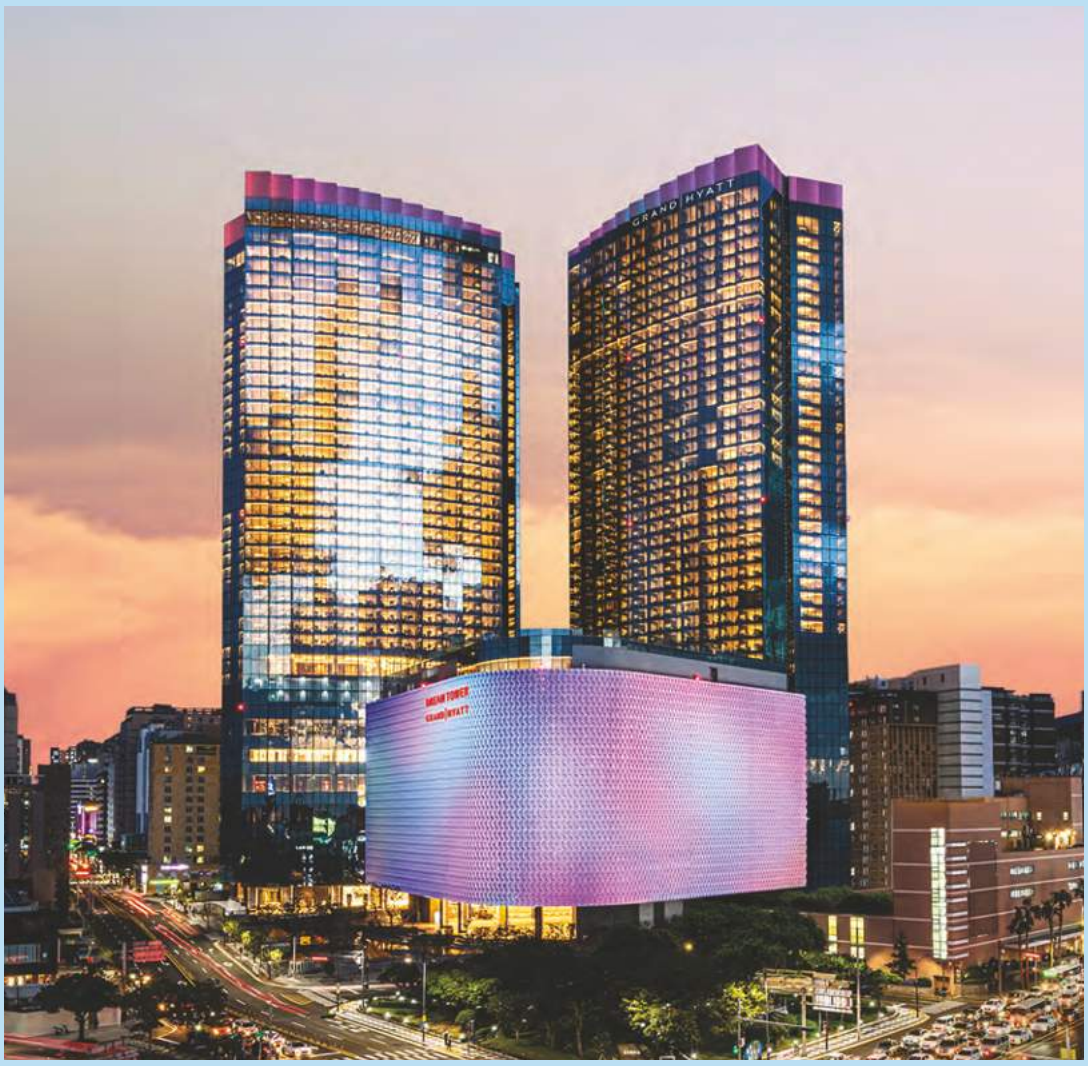


At present, these exceptional organisations and their years of induction are:

- Singapore Airlines Limited (2002)
- Singapore Changi Airport (2002)
- Hertz Asia Pacific (2005)
- Royal Cliff Hotels Group - The State of Exclusivity & Fascination (2006)
- Star Cruises (2008)
- Sabre Asia Pacific Pte Ltd (2009)
- SilkAir (Singapore) Private Limited (2010)
- Lotte Tour (2011)
- Hong Kong International Airport (2013)
- Raffles Hotel Singapore (2013)
- Regal Airport Hotel (2015)
- Banyan Tree Spa (2015)
- Qatar Airways (2016)
- Thai Airways International Public Company Limited (2016)
- Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (2016)
- Royal Plaza on Scotts (2018)
- Royal Caribbean International (2018)
- Best Western Hotels & Resorts (2019)
- Travelport (2019)

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.

# JEJU'S TALLEST AND LARGEST INTEGRATED RESORT



Experience the modern Korean lifestyle at this iconic 38-storey twin-tower with 1,600 rooms and suites, 14 unique restaurants and bars, Korea's largest K-fashion shopping retail, 2 premium spas and Jeju's largest outdoor deck with infinity pool. Non-stop entertainment awaits at Grand Hyatt Jeju!

**Visit jejudreamtower.com and grandhyattjeju.com**

For reservations and inquiries: call +82-64-907-1234 or email: jeju.grand@hyatt.com

BEHIND THE NAME

# Linh Le

## Principal co-founder, Luxperia

**How would you describe your leadership style?**
I am a hands-on, collaborative leader who likes to learn opinions from both my team and stakeholders. I also try to take an assessment of all angles before any decisions are made. I believe I'm a fair and pragmatic problem fixer, connector and brand ambassador for my company.

**How do you build business at Luxperia?**
Relationships are absolutely key, with both clients, suppliers and industry colleagues. I've found that remaining lateral-minded opens up opportunities everywhere, and from so many different areas in life.

**How do you find new destinations for your clients and partners?**
We keep close relationships with real estate development in the markets we serve. We also keep our ears close to the ground with regard to the development of infrastructure in remote areas, along with all eyes on social media to monitor what is trending within each of our markets.

**How would you describe your personality?**
I'm bold and open-minded to accept new opportunities and learnings while making the most of each moment and day, to celebrate all of the wins. I'm also bright and quick to grasp new ideas and formulate strategies to create winning outcomes in the industry.

**What does modern-day travel mean to you?**
I've noticed that the blend of corporate and leisure travel has merged, while family travel is now increasingly serving multi-generations. In addition, younger travellers are also travelling more in friendship groups to enjoy new experiences and create new memories together.

GROW

# SHATEC Institutes brings hospitality education to Saudi

Singapore-based SHATEC Institutes will establish its first overseas hospitality training and culinary arts college in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, with classes likely to commence in 4Q2023.

Describing the planned college as a "milestone" for the hospitality management institute that has been in service for more than four decades, SHATEC's CEO Lim Boon Kwee said it "marks an instrumental step towards further development and global expansion for the institution".

"This will be our first academy outside of Singapore although we have acted as consultants to several overseas colleges in the past," Lim told *TTG Asia* in an interview.

The college will be a joint effort between Saudi-owned Modern Hospitality Company (MHC) and SHATEC Institutes, with both signing an agreement on March 15. The signing ceremony was witnessed by two deputy ministers from Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Tourism – Mahmoud S Abdulhadi and Mohamed Bushnaq – along with Singapore ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Wong Chow Ming.

The establishment of the school underscores Saudi Arabia's quest for tourism advancement and excellence as part of its Vision 2030 mandate, as well as the Ministry of Tourism's commitment to training youths and locals in the profession.

Lim said SHATEC's role in this collaboration would be to provide consultancy services, expert knowledge and advice to the academy's pre-opening team. It will also serve as the educational partner of the academy.

"SHATEC is committed to assisting its partner in Saudi Arabia on human capital development in Saudi Arabia by offering curricula in our proprietary diplomas in Accommodation & Room Operations, and Culinary & Pastry Art," he added. **– Karen Yue**

**SHATEC Institutes' Lim Boon Kwee and Modern Hospitality Co.'s Hassan Nakshbandi ink an agreement towards the formation of a new hospitality college in Riyadh**

## APPOINTMENTS

David Herrera

Yibing Mao

Adrian Williams

Paul Stocker

Jason Worth

Sarah Clark

**David Herrera**
Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) has appointed David Herrera as its new president. He has been with NCL since 2015 and will be be responsible for the overall strategic vision and business plan execution for NCL.

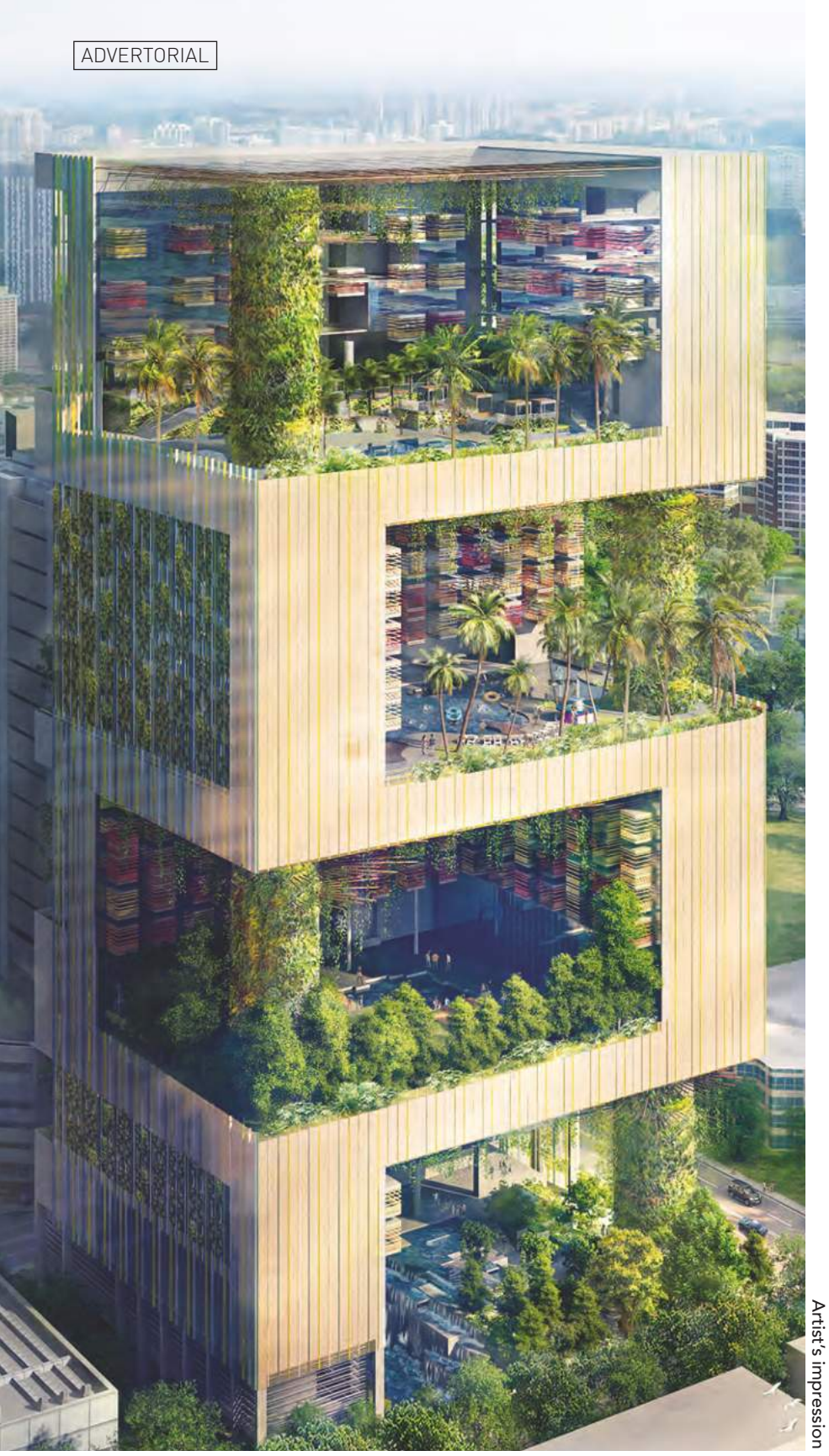
**Yibing Mao**
Yibing Mao is now the president of Marriott International (Greater China). She first joined Marriott in 1996. Based in Shanghai, she will lead the next chapter of growth for Marriott in Greater China.

**Adrian Williams**
Adrian Williams has been named senior vice president hotel operations, Pacific South, Accor, and will be responsible for its Premium, Midscale and Economy hotels in the newly designated Pacific South region.

**Paul Stocker**
Paul Stocker is the new vice president of operations in South-east Asia for Minor Hotels. In his new role, he will oversee commercial processes across the group's portfolio in South-east Asia.

**Jason Worth**
Oceania Cruises has named Jason Worth as vice president, sales & GM Asia Pacific. He will be responsible for the strategic expansion, vision and continued growth of Oceania Cruises' presence in the Asia-Pacific market.

**Sarah Clark**
Sarah Clark is the new chief executive officer of Tourism Tasmania, having served on the board since September 2021. She was previously managing director ANZ at Intrepid Travel.



Artist's impression

# New Pan Pacific Orchard whisks guests off to an idyllic escape in nature

Pan Pacific Hotels Group's latest addition to its Singapore portfolio is Pan Pacific Orchard, a new-build 23-storey architectural marvel on the prestigious Orchard Road shopping belt.

Designed by the award-winning WOHA Architects, its game-changing iconic design features four distinctive open-air terraces where hotel guests will be able to enjoy extraordinary lifestyle experiences across unique environments, come June 1.

Upon arrival, visitors will be greeted by a cascading water plaza lined with calming greenery at the Forest Terrace, allowing them to unplug from the hustle and bustle, and immerse themselves in nature — with over 200 per cent of the hotel's land area enveloped in lush foliage.

For a one-of-a-kind "seaside" getaway in the sky, guests staying at the Beach Terrace will be transported to a balmy resort escape in the middle of the city, complete with a pool bar and palm groves around a sun-drenched azure lagoon.

Orientated towards the quiet Claymore Hill, the Garden Terrace opens up to an expansive outdoor lawn, and houses the hotel's speciality destination bar, Florette.

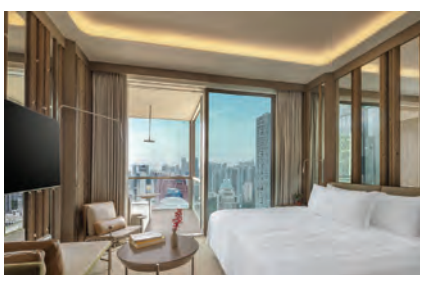
On the Cloud Terrace, the 347-key hospitality landmark presents one of the city's highest spaces for "events in the clouds" — a splendid ballroom with natural daylight on the 18th floor.

The Group's next flagship for the Pan Pacific brand also boasts an impressive collection of unique and flexible spaces, ranging from meeting rooms to outdoor open-air terraces, for personalised events and celebrations.

Marcel NA Holman, general manager and the Group's vice president of operations for China, Japan and Indonesia, said: "As hoteliers, we need to be adaptable and constantly embrace new ways to do things differently and better. Our goal is to bring bold new ideas to life and to craft something that is distinctively different, in celebration of people and to showcase our sincere service and signature experiences within a reimagined urban sanctuary."

## Hotel highlights

### Reimagining luxury for the experience-driven



**Lavish stays**
The exquisite guestrooms and suites offer a tranquil sanctuary with breathtaking views of either the terrace landscapes or the Orchard cityscape. Designed with luxury in mind, many come with a private balcony and sofa lounge for a distinctive indoor-outdoor experience. Club members are entitled to additional access to the plush Pacific Club Lounge with a dedicated check-in area and benefits for an extra special stay.

**Epicurean delights**
Mosella spotlights the sharing plates concept, dishing out Mediterranean cuisine with a Peruvian flair. A speciality bar for champagne and oysters, Florette, serves up the finest seafood and curated bottles of bubbly alongside well-crafted cocktails. Pacific Breeze focuses on afternoon tea and refreshments.

**Rejuvenation haven**
Exclusively for in-house guests, expert therapists at the signature St. Gregory spa provide head-to-toe pampering with a myriad of award-winning face and body treatments.

**Events in the clouds**
Planners can organise events at the hotel's pillarless ballroom on the 18th floor, suitable for a capacity of 420, and featuring an elegant foyer space, customisable immersive LED wall, accompanied by the sweeping vista of the awe-inspiring cityscape.

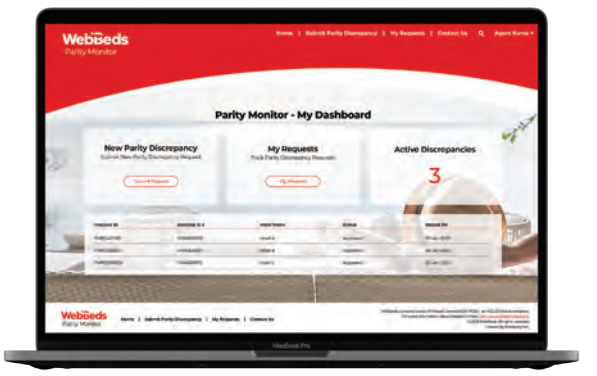
# Trip.com unveils real-time travel guide TripGen

TripGen by Trip.com is an advanced context-based Natural Language Processing-integrated (NLP) chatbot designed to provide travellers with live assistance through AI technology, enabling users to receive tailored travel routes, itineraries and travel booking advice in real time on the Trip.com platform.

Amy Wei, senior product director at Trip.com group and product owner of TripGen, shared that with so much information available to users, TripGen provides travellers "with closed-loop services before, after, and during their trip".

Schubert Lou, chief operating officer of Trip.com, said: "The release of TripGen provides real-time, question-and-answer services in the Trip.com app, resulting in greater, faster, and more diverse support for travellers."

The all-in-one app currently supports the languages English, Japanese, Korean and traditional Chinese. More languages will be added in future according to user needs.




# WebBeds' new online tool to improve rate parity

WebBeds has launched a new online tool, Parity Monitor, which aims to help their hotel partners streamline internal processes and improve the speed of resolving parity issues.

The Parity Monitor will establish the foundations for the development of future automated solutions, with the ultimate goal of achieving zero BRG (best rate guarantee) discrepancies through the WebBeds marketplace.

In its first phase, Parity Monitor will initially serve as a global hub where hotels will submit parity discrepancies to WebBeds. This new tool will be the front end for the newly streamlined internal processes that will track, monitor, report back and quickly resolve rate discrepancies for hotel partners.

A simple dashboard will consolidate and display the status of any submissions, providing clarity and better management reporting for hotels.

In addition, WebBeds has created a new centralised team that will be dedicated to resolving parity issues raised via the Parity Monitor.

Future developments of the Parity Monitor will include incorporating technology solutions to prevent parity integrity issues occurring in the first place, proactive scanning of the market for rate discrepancies, automated identification and rectification of parity issues, enforcing minimum selling price and tracing opaque rates with buyers across all sales channels.

WebBeds CEO Daryl Lee said: "Hotels want rate parity to be strong and consistent, particularly given the strategic priorities within their business ecosystem.

"This new tool is just the start of a programme of work to develop automated technology solutions to proactively prevent, detect and resolve rate parity issues in real time."

# Boosting next-generation loyalty programmes

Sabre Corporation and Capillary Technologies, a loyalty management and customer data platform provider that delivers AI-based, cloud-native SaaS programmes and solutions, have signed an agreement to help airlines and hoteliers offer travellers an enhanced travel experience.

The Sabre and Capillary agreement will provide valuable insights into customer loyalty data through real-time analytics; new opportunities for end-to-end loyalty management and incremental revenue opportunities for airlines and hoteliers; and enhanced customer experiences across the entire traveller journey.

Using AI to interpret comprehensive data sets, Capillary Technologies provides meaningful, real-time insights into customer preferences, providing recommendations to empower airlines and hoteliers to step-up their relationships with travellers, while enhancing revenue-creation opportunities, through truly personalised interactions across all traveller touchpoints.

By incorporating the Capillary Loyalty Management solution into the Sabre platforms for airlines and hoteliers, Sabre Hospitality customers will be able to access applications like Central Reservations, Property Hub, Voice Agent, and Booking Engine.

For airlines, Capillary's loyalty management solution can be integrated with SabreSonic, Customer Insights, Payment, and Dynamic Rewards products.

Joe Doran, senior vice president, Capillary Technologies, remarked: "It is essential that loyalty management solutions are at the forefront of this travel evolution to enable airlines and hotels to attract, retain, and delight their travellers through real-time advanced analytics and recommendations."

"Our joint loyalty management solution will enable airlines to stay connected with their flyers, understand their preferences, reward their loyalty and improve customer engagement through AI-driven recommendations that create incremental value for our customers and their frequent travellers," added Corrie DeCamp, senior vice president, product management, Sabre.

# BOLD DESTINATIONS

One brand. The Philippines.

MACTAN | BORACAY | MANILA

## IN A HEARTBEAT

**CRIMSONHOTEL.COM**

crimsonhotelsandresorts  crimsonbrands

email info@crimsonhotel.com

FILINVEST HOTELS | Driven by Chroma Hospitality

CRIMSON

HOTELS & RESORTS

# In conversation with Alison Gilmore

ILTM portfolio director, Alison Gilmore, tells Karen Yue that she is excited to return to Singapore with another edition of ILTM Asia Pacific, an event that has attracted intense interest from luxury travel specialists from around the world

Gilmore: returning to 2019 levels of participation

**ILTM Asia Pacific's first in-person gathering last year was buzzing despite some remaining travel restrictions. Now, with even greater travel freedom globally, how do you expect the show to perform this year?**

ILTM Asia Pacific last year was indeed buzzing, but this year brings the buzz to new levels of travel expertise and boundless energy! As you say, if we cast our minds back, there were some remaining travel restrictions across Asia-Pacific then, but over 800 participants still gathered in Singapore for ILTM Asia Pacific 2022, many of whom were experiencing their first live connection for over two years.

This year, we are looking at attendance levels close to ILTM Asia Pacific 2019 and welcoming over 1,000 delegates. (Confirmed exhibitors range from) smaller independent brands such as Jawakara, a new high-end family friendly and multigenerational Maldives island; and Angama, a stunning new safari lodge in Kenya; through to new hotel groups such as Artyzen and small niche hotel chains such as Airelles.

International destinations present range from Fiji to South Korea.

Established brands such as Hyatt Hotels & Resorts, Langham Hotels, and Mandarin Oriental Hotels Group are also taking part, plus Outlet City returning from the high-end retail market.

**What are some highlights planned for 2023?**

Over 450 hand-selected luxury travel advisors from across the region will be meeting with over 450 luxury travel providers from all four corners of the world. Business will take place across three days of pre-scheduled meetings on the show floor and reach into each night with social-networking events and parties.

In addition, our dedicated PR company Spotl1ght Communications has identified 35 of the most influential luxury travel media to attend the event from the US, the UK and Europe as well as across Asia-Pacific. These media representatives will take part in a VIP programme to meet with those on the ILTM Asia Pacific exclusive guest list.

**The unveiling of fresh market research on luxury travel is always a highlight at ILTM tradeshows. I see we will get a treat again this year. Will you tell us a little more about the study that will be presented at the event?**

Of course. ILTM will be unveiling its latest research, *Decoding the Luxury Travellers Mindset; Spotlight China* during the event' Opening Forum at The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore on June 19. This will be the third edition of ILTM's much anticipated research series, *Buzz versus Reality*, which has the simple mission of separating fact from fiction when it comes to luxury travel trends.

The last three years have seen the travel industry confronted by unique and unprecedented challenges, giving way to predictions, opinions, and forecasts. And as China moves out of a prolonged period of lockdown, the travel industry needs to understand which trends are being reflected and which are mere speculation.

In response to this, ILTM has collaborated with affluent research specialist Altiant to deliver this new report focusing on the travel behaviours of wealthy Chinese travellers. Surveying high-net-worth individuals from across China, this research explores recent and planned travel behaviours. The report will answer questions such as how often will wealthy Chinese consumers travel and to which destinations; what are the most important considerations when they plan travel and during their time in-destination; which factors drive their decision making in travel planning and purchasing; and what are the spend intentions of Chinese travellers in the coming year.

The report will be a unique and reliable barometer of luxury sentiment. It will be vital reading for luxury travel professionals who want to understand the mindset of the luxury Chinese traveller today.

The full report will be available for download from the ILTM App and website on June 20.

**Besides scheduled meetings, what other opportunities are there for sellers and buyers to interact during the event?**

The Opening Forum will be followed by the Opening Party, hosted by The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore. We will finish the week off with a great view of Singapore from LAVO, a contemporary Italian restaurant and rooftop bar at Marina Bay Sands.

These events frame a week defined by the many opportunities to network. As we hear continually, the success of ILTM is not just (defined by) the appointments on the showfloor, but the many different occasions where people can connect – often informally or unofficially, where we understand many business conversations are conducted, forming the basis of many new business relationships.

**There is a lot of attention on the Chinese outbound market, but are there other potent source markets across Asia-Pacific that the world's luxury sellers should keep a close eye on too?**

Wherever they are in the world, high-net-worth individuals will spend their money on luxury brands, which would include travel. Our global *Buzz versus Reality* research revealed at ILTM Cannes last December showed that the luxury travel industry has had to show all its tenacity and resourcefulness to ride out the recent challenges and uncertainty, but there is now cause for real optimism as we move into a new era of luxury travel.

Having been unable to enjoy their money over the past two years, the affluent are now looking to resume travelling in new and fulfilling ways, as well as in style. "No expense spared" and "Time is precious" are sentiments expressed by many in the West and will be increasingly uttered by Asian travellers.

There has been much discussion over the past three years about which traveller behaviours will now accelerate, which will stabilise, and which will recede. Increasingly, we are moving into a period of (heightened) conscious and considerate tourism, where factors such as wellness, sustainability, philanthropy and human connection will become more (crucial), as people look to travel better.

Extra bureaucracy will also ensure travel advisors remain essential in helping their clients have stress-free trips.

As we know, Asia is a continent of immense diversity, with a wide range of cultures, languages and economic systems. The imminent ILTM research will reveal the true facts about which country's luxury travellers are choosing to spend the most on travel as well as why and how.

Already, those from Hong Kong and Taiwan have doubled their attendance. China attendance will also increase from five to over 40 year-on-year.

There will be 44 per cent new buyers at ILTM Asia Pacific this year, with 60 per cent from Australasia; nine per cent from South-east Asia; eight per cent from China; seven per cent each from India and Hong Kong; six per cent from Taiwan; and three per cent from Japan.

ILTM Asia Pacific 2022 was a success

IT&CM Asia
Incentive Travel & Conventions, Meetings

CTW Asia-Pacific
Corporate Travel World

# Participate At Asia-Pacific's Only Doublebill Event in MICE and Corporate Travel

# SAVE THE DATE 2023

## 31st IT&CM Asia and 26th CTW Asia-Pacific

## 26 - 28 September 2023

**Bangkok, Thailand**

itcma@ttgasia.com

ctwapac@ttgasia.com

www.itcma.com

www.corporatetravelworld.com/apac

Organised By

Strategic Destination Partner

Supported By

Partner Event

Official Technology Partner

IT&CM events Leading MICE Events In Asia-Pacific, China | IT&CM Asia Incentive Travel & Conventions, Meetings | IT&CM China 国际会奖旅游博览会 | Incentive Travel & Conventions, Meetings | CTW Events Leading Corporate Travel Management Events in Asia-Pacific and China | CTW Asia-Pacific Corporate Travel World | CTW China 国际商旅大会

# A luxurious showcase

ILTM Asia Pacific brings a range of luxury travel sellers from around the world to a single marketplace in Singapore. Here are some that buyers can expect to meet

## ÀNI Private Resorts

Àni Private Resorts presents a collection of private resorts, with four exclusive and exquisite hideaways located in Anguilla, the Dominican Republic, Sri Lanka, and Thailand (pictured).

Each resort is designed for a single group at a time, accommodating up to 20 or 30 individuals across 10 to 15 suites. Expansive living, dining and entertainment areas are positioned around private swimming pools. Guests are supported by generous hosts who are dedicated to creating unscripted experiences and memories – and all are included in the price.

The brand is founded on philanthropic principles, with each Àni property co-founded alongside an art academy to bring opportunities for an art education to many aspiring individuals in these regions.

## Artyzen Singapore

Opening in October 2023, Artyzen Singapore is a fresh interpretation of the luxury lifestyle hotel. Designed in partnership with Singapore-based architecture firm ONG&ONG and Australian interior design studio Nicholas Graham & Associates, this contemporary hotel draws inspiration from the culture, colours and patterns of Singapore. The combination of extensive indoor landscaping, soaring ceilings, and Peranakan colours and patterns create a unique and eclectic design that will make Artyzen Singapore an exuberant and inviting home for both international visitors and local residents.

## Chroma Hospitality

Following a refurbishment, Crimson Mactan in the Philippines will welcome guests with renewed dining concepts. Aka will be Cebu's first Japanese *kaiseki* restaurant; Saffron will sport action stations that serve up freshly prepared dishes; Azure (pictured) will be a fun and stylish dining destination.

## Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts

The hotel company brings its properties from across the globe to ILTM Asia Pacific. Representatives from Four Seasons in Bora Bora, Seychelles (pictured), Istanbul, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Paris, Madrid and Hawaii are ready to welcome luxury travel buyers.

Buyers can look forward to development updates, such as the newly-renovated Four Seasons Hotel Hong Kong; refreshed and expanded multi-bedroom suites at Four Seasons Resort Seychelles; and new spaces and experiences at Four Seasons Hotel Singapore.

## Hyatt

Fuelled by growing leisure and luxury travel appetite, Hyatt is poised to expand its portfolio with nearly one in four pipeline properties classified as a lifestyle hotel.

In 2023, the Andaz brand will be launched in new markets. Andaz Pattaya Jomtien Beach resort (pictured) in Thailand opened this January, while Andaz Macau will debut as the largest Andaz hotel in the world, with more than 700 rooms and suites. Andaz Nanjing Hexi in China also join the collection.

The JdV by Hyatt brand will enter India's Goa, while The Unbound by Hyatt brand will expand in Japan with Hotel Toranomon Hills in the heart of Tokyo.

Yoshihiro Makino

## Kyoto

Kyoto is keen to unveil more of its gems at ILTM Asia Pacific 2023. First up, an invitation to luxury travel buyers to join the Gion Matsuri in July. Regarded as the midsummer celebration of Yasaka Jinja Shrine, the festival is one of the three greatest local festivals in Japan.

Spotlight is also placed on attractive accommodation options, like the stunning Old Mitsui Family Shimogamo Villa, located to the south of Shimogamo Jinja shrine and built in 1925 as a retreat for all Mitsui families. A stylish new option is Ace Hotel Kyoto (pictured), described as a love letter to Japan's cultural capital. Meanwhile, an enduring favourite is Hotel Granvia Kyoto, an elegant haven of modern comfort and style.

Bear Luxe Japan is also at the show, ready to discuss how it can build an unforgettable experience in Kyoto for international travellers.

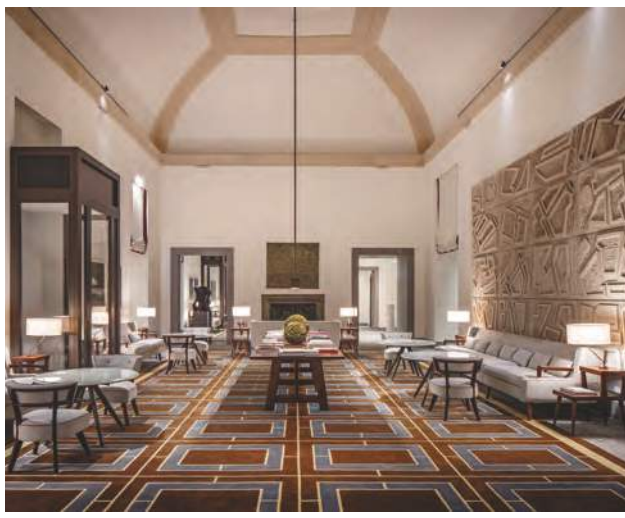
## Luxurique Inc

Luxurique Inc is a boutique hospitality company that specialises in crafting exclusive Japanese experiences for high-net-worth individuals and corporate businesses.

Aligning with the slow travel trend, Luxurique has developed new itineraries that incorporate wellness and a special porcelain experience with a Living National Treasure in Arita.

The wellness-centric itineraries bring together zen and meditation, nature, the atmosphere, and environment. An example of a wellness experience would be living alongside the senior monks of Japan's most renowned Buddhist temples, immersed in zen living and meditation tutorials alongside a cleansing vegan Buddhist diet.

The Arita Porcelain Experience is a two-day/one-night porcelain discovery in a quiet mountain town that is famed for producing the world's finest porcelain and the thousands of porcelain shops lining its 6km-long main street. The experience includes a visit to the Kyushu Ceramic Museum and a porcelain-making class (pictured) led by a direct 14th generation descendant of the Korean artisan Ri Senpei who initiated porcelain making in the town 400 years ago.



## The Leading Hotels of the World

Some of the world's most exquisite properties are showcased under The Leading Hotels of the World banner.

Keep an eye out for Portrait Milano (pictured), a property that pairs the rich tradition of Milan's grand mansions with a decidedly contemporary aesthetic; Urban Resort Concepts' collection of hotels, including the award-winning The PuLi, Shanghai; The PuXuan, Beijing; The RuMa, Kuala Lumpur; and Villa d'Este, an iconic five-star hotel located in Cernobbio on Lake Como.

## Marriott International

Marriott International's enduring expansion of its Asia-Pacific luxury portfolio is front and centre of its participation at ILTM Asia Pacific this year.

A number of fresh openings, such as The St. Regis Jakarta, Indonesia; The Ritz-Carlton, Melbourne, Australia; JW Marriott Goa, India; and Bulgari Hotel Tokyo, Japan in April are spotlighted.

Meanwhile, buyers can get a peak into soon-to-open properties like The Ritz-Carlton, Fukuoka, Japan; Rissai Valley, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve in Jiuzhaigou, China; W Macau – Studio City; W Sydney, Australia; JW Marriott Hotel Xi'an, China; The Tokyo Edition, Ginza, Japan; The Singapore Edition; and Shisui, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Narain in Japan (pictured).

## Silversea

Silversea is proud to bring attention to its pioneering Nova class ships that will launch this year. *Silver Nova* and *Silver Ray* will be two of the most sustainable ultra-luxury cruise ships ever launched, representing important milestones on Royal Caribbean Group's journey to achieving a net zero new-build.

Buyers calling at the booth can also learn about S.A.L.T – an acronym of Sea and Land Taste. It is Silversea's innovative culinary enrichment programme, which enables guests to travel deeper through a range of destination-focused gastronomic experiences both on board and ashore.

Another fresh product discovery is Silversea's new Grand Voyages for 2024, with the Mediterranean sailing lasting 43 days and covering 34 destinations, and the Indian Ocean sailing lasting 66 days and covering 45 destinations.

## Soneva

Offering families the luxury of space, privacy and seclusion, Soneva's barefoot resorts are found in some of the world's most breathtaking locations for a blissful island getaway. At Soneva Fushi in the Maldives, one- to nine-bedroom island and overwater villas fringed by lush tropical vegetation capture the essence of a luxurious castaway fantasy.

Across the Indian Ocean at Soneva Jani (pictured), guests can choose from expansive one-to four-bedroom island or overwater villas that feature its iconic slides straight into the lagoon. On the Thai island of Koh Kood, Soneva Kiri's private villas are nestled next to its private beach, hidden in the jungle on the hillsides, or command spectacular views from the clifftop.

# The curtain rises

Singapore has seen an explosion in live entertainment productions in recent months, many of which quickly sell out to locals and tourists. Low Shi Ping finds out why

Maestro Productions

It has been challenging trying to pin down Lauretta Alabons. Since pandemic restrictions were relaxed, the co-founder of LAMC Productions, who is also known as "Singapore's First Lady of Entertainment", has been working around the clock to populate her events calendar with live music and comedy acts.

Case in point: at the start of June, she will host renowned South African funny man Masood Boomgaard for a one-night-only performance at the Victoria Theatre. But this is just the tip of Alabons' iceberg.

"Performers and artists have been impacted by the pandemic and are ready to come out and see their fans," she said, adding that there is also pent-up demand for shows.

Alabons is not alone in her sentiment about the thriving live entertainment industry in Singapore. These include concerts, musicals, theatre, sporting events, performances and exhibitions.

In the process, this has led to a mini boom in tourism, as many of these events – some of which are large-scale – attract foreigners to the city-state.

Marina Bay Sands

MARQUEE Singapore

**Clockwise from-top: Anirudh Ravichander performs to a full house; spotlight on Rain at the Marquee Anniversary celebrations on April 8, 2023; Joey Yung at Sands Live in March 2023**

## Destination entertainment

Earlier this year, Maestro Productions organised a one-night concert for Indian music producer and singer Anirudh Ravichander. All 12,000 tickets sold out in two days, with more than 20 per cent bought by foreign visitors.

"This underscores the popularity of Anirudh's performances as well as the strong pent-up demand for good quality concerts here from foreigners who want to come to Singapore not just for the usual sightseeing tours," said Parthiban Murugaiyan, who is the chairman and managing director of Maestro.

Recent acts brought in by LAMC have also seen similar breakdowns. It organised The Singapore Rockfest and hosted The Piano Guys, both of which saw 25 per cent of ticket buyers from overseas markets.

"The Singapore Rockfest was an opportunity to draw fans from Malaysia, India, Vietnam, Hong Kong and Manila. Our first market is Malaysia, as many of the rock bands are not able to perform there," Alabons told *TTG Asia*.

Some concertgoers even arrived on cruise ships, prompting Alabons to consider reaching out to cruise lines to package such unique local experiences for their passengers.

Parthiban attributes the lifting of pandemic travel restrictions and the love for globetrotting as among the key factors contributing to the spike in popularity of live performances.

He said: "Singapore's trusted tourism brand name has attracted visitors to come here for events.

"I think it's also the mindset of the people where balancing a good lifestyle has become a priority."

## A continuous encore

The industry is certainly rising to the occasion. Over at Marina Bay Sands, its vice president of regional entertainment, David Baxley, said the integrated resort is looking to grow its entertainment tourism segment from Singapore, South-east Asia and beyond.

"We set our eye on attracting entertainment seekers with the emphasis on providing a premium luxury experience. We expanded our scope beyond a traditional 90-minute performance to include pre- and post-event experiences," he shared.

It seems to have worked, given how it repeatedly hosts sell-out shows. These include JJ Lin's *After the Rain* concert in November 2021; South Korean hip-hop group Epik High's concert in July 2022; and more recently, Hong Kong star Joey Yung's concert in March 2023, which saw over 6,000 fans in attendance.

Additionally, in a reflection of the surging demand for great entertainment, Baxley said there were more than double the number of concerts, musicals and performances staged at Sands Theatre and Sands Expo & Convention Centre, from just 13 events in 2021 to 34 in 2022.

"Building on the momentum, we grew our entertainment repertoire by expanding our Sands Live concert series in 2023, which aims to showcase the biggest stars from Asia and beyond, across different venues and presentation styles," he added.

At press time, veteran Taiwanese singer Zhao Chuan and South Korean megastars Rain and PSY are set to perform in April.

"The current entertainment landscape is highly competitive and the challenge lies in not just trying to secure the best international acts for Singapore, but also ensuring that the experience is unique and compelling enough to draw tourists," Baxley pointed out.

And when these stars descend on Singapore, they bring a revenue boom to the country's travel, hospitality and related businesses.

Maestro's Parthiban said: "The multiplier effect on jobs and the Singapore's economy can be substantial. By having more blockbuster shows here, we can also boost Singapore's brand name and expand its range of offerings to lift tourism numbers and revenue."

TTG TRAVEL AWARDS 2023

TTG TRAVEL AWARDS 2023

*Coming soon!*

# Your Vote Defines Asia Pacific's Travel Industry Excellence

TTG Travel Awards, Asia-Pacific travel trade's most prestigious and celebrated event, is back for its 32nd year to honor the industry's finest and brightest. Tell us which organisation has made exemplary achievements and contributions that have raised the bar of excellence and taken the industry to greater heights.

Get ready to vote and help your favorite travel suppliers and agenciesbring home the title of being the best in the travel industry.

awards.ttgasia.com

Voting Opens 1 April Until 31 July 2023

An event by: TTG Publishing Travel Trade — TTG Travel Trade Publishing is a business group of TTG Asia Media

Organised by: TTG ASIA

Supported by: TTG CHINA 旅业报 · TTG INDIA · TTGmice · TTG BT mice 企业旅游报 CHINA · TTGassociations · TTG ASIA LUXURY for buyers of premium travel and luxury meetings

The new-gen chatty chatbot is helping OTAs to better engage customers for eventual sale conversation, while making content creation easier for travel and tourism marketers. By Karen Yue

# Aboard the ChatGPT train

While still in its early stages of development, having launched only in November 2022, the artificial-intelligence chatbot ChatGPT has lured major OTAs with its use potential.

Developed by OpenAI, ChatGPT is able to take prompts – or questions – from human users and sweep through vast data on the Internet to generate a human-like and comprehensive response. Its capability is regarded as a major step up from the chatbots the world has been relying on, which are only able to respond with structured answers to a limited set of keywords and instructions.

So appealing is ChatGPT that, according to Similarweb, it gained 100 million monthly active users in January, just two months after its launch. Its developer, OpenAI, also became one of the 50 most visited websites in the world, found Digital-adoption.com.

Making sense of what that adoption rate meant, *Time* magazine wrote that Instagram took 2.5 years to reach 100 million users while TikTok got there in nine months.

Among the companies that are riding the ChatGPT wave are Trip.com and Expedia Group.

In February, Trip.com unveiled TripGen, a chatbot that is integrated with the OpenAI API and designed to provide travellers with live assistance through artificial intelligence (AI) technology, enabling users to receive tailored travel routes, itineraries and booking advice in real time on the Trip.com platform.

TripGen supports English, Japanese, Korean and traditional Chinese, with more languages to be added in the future. Work is also being done to allow users to book directly with Trip.com after TripGen searches, and to integrate with the new WhisperAPI for speech-to-text transcription and translation.

Amy Wei, senior product director at Trip.com Group, told *TTG Asia*: "Users can make more complex requests, such as suggestions for a romantic holiday. Business travellers (with packed schedules) can easily enquire about one- or two-day tours. This is an efficient way of finding out and narrowing down information for time-starved travellers."

> **AI is not productive or efficient on day one – it takes time to get the data, train, evolve and scale up the models.**
>
> **Rathi Murthy**
> CTO,
> Expedia Group

So far, response to TripGen has been good, according to Wei. User numbers have been doubling every day since it launched, with users asking four to five questions during their searches.

In March, Expedia Group introduced a plugin for ChatGPT users to bring their travel conversations to life. Powered by Expedia Group's 70 petabytes of travel data, the Expedia pluggin allows ChatGPT users to get real recommendations on how to get to a desired destination, where to stay, and what to see and do.

Barely a month later, Expedia Group deepened its ChatGPT use by bringing a ChatGPT trip planning capability into its app. The new function allows Expedia members to have an open-ended conversation in the Expedia app for recommendations on destination activities

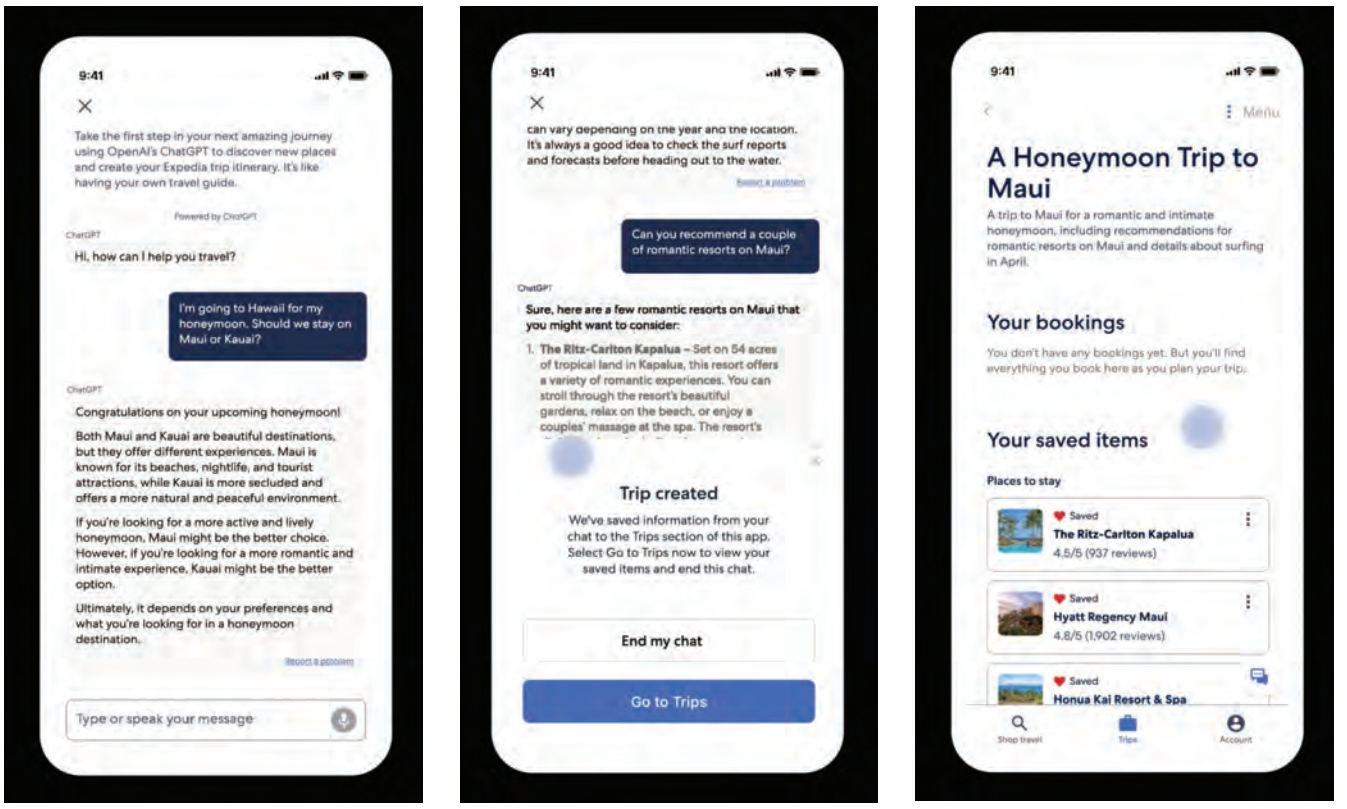
and tourism products, and have hotels discussed in the conversation saved for future booking. Expedia members can choose dates, check availability, and add on other trip components, such as flights, cars, or activities.

The conversational trip planning beta experience is rolling out globally in English on the Expedia iOS app.

Kurt Weinsheimer, chief solutions officer at Sojern, a marketing specialist for hotels, attractions, and destinations, said these ChatGPT integrations are "exciting and inevitable".

"Travel experts (right away) saw the potential of ChatGPT to offer an end-to-end user experience. It can help in the (travel) planning stage… and also tell that story when (travellers) are done with their trip," he told *TTG Asia*.

"ChatGPT, Natural Language Processing (NPL) and AI require… content. The algorithms that power them need a ton of data in order to maximise their potential. Hence, having ChatGPT partner with a travel company like Kayak Group or Expedia Group makes a ton of sense. Now, a travel enquiry on ChatGPT will not just give you broad information and ideas, but very specific options that can be pulled from Kayak's data and lead the customer to real-time rates, availability and a booking function," he explained.




**Expedia members can move from trip recommendations to bookings**

## A boost for marketing

The conversational nature of ChatGPT's output has not escaped the eyes of travel and tourism marketers.

Weinsheimer said: "In the history of tech, we know that innovations have taken away some roles only to replace them with new ones. Calculators did not take away math jobs; they allowed mathematicians to advance to higher levels of computing and engineering. So, we see NLP providing an opportunity to enhance content creation. It will be good for good writers and make marketers even better at their job."

Ewan Cluckie, founder of Thailand-based travel operator and distributor, Tripseed, has "done some quite extensive testing with ChatGPT".

Cluckie sees potential use cases for it within the travel industry, particularly in content creation. "It can speed up copywriting tasks and rewrites, and help to lay basic structure," he remarked.

"I have also found it can be surprisingly competent at the localisation of existing content for different language markets," he added.

Joleena Seah, managing director – Southeast Asia with leading regional publicity agency, GHC Asia, told *TTG Asia* that her company has been experimenting with the possible uses of ChatGPT and alternatives, like YouChat and Bing. Her team recently chose ChatGPT to trial a questionnaire that sought to draw media representatives' opinion on a hospitality brand.

Seah said: "ChatGPT and the likes can be useful for our line of work. We could use it to start a draft for itinerary suggestions, drafting general factsheets and FAQs for our clients (destinations, hotels or brands), researching ideas to promote destinations, and understanding guest sentiments, and more, before we embellish the content. Basically, ChatGPT can help us to reduce time spent on research so that we can add more value to our clients' press materials."

However, Weinsheimer emphasised that travel and tourism companies should not limit their vision to just ChatGPT. Rather, they need to think about their investment in big data and AI in general.

He said: "It is a challenging time for marketers today. A recent study shows that over 70 per cent of consumers want a personalised experience, and almost the same percentage expressed concerns about how their data is being used."

Balancing personalised experience in a permission-based world can be attained through AI, he opined. Sojern uses AI to predict the likelihood of travellers acting in a certain way or wanting certain experiences.

"You need models to go through billions of data points to come up with the right matches. You also need to understand that within those billions of travellers, there will be those that don't want to get advertisements," he said.

With AI, Sojern is able to fine-tune the audience, and provide the opt-in audience with the right messages at the right time for the maximum impact.

"The same way that we see ChatGPT is leveraging conversational data to write personalised experiences, big data and AI can be used to create personalised marketing and advertising. AI is here to stay, and it is up to companies to leverage it to minimise the number of monotonous tasks they have to deal with, and free them up to do more interesting, revenue-generating work," said Weinsheimer.

> **Travel experts (right away) saw the potential of ChatGPT to offer an end-to-end user experience.**
>
> **Kurt Weinsheimer**
> Chief solutions officer,
> Sojern

## Limitations

As promising as ChatGPT is, corporate users are clear about the chatbot's limitations – the system relies on data on the Internet and, for now, its knowledge is limited to 2021 content. And with it accessing an assortment of published data online, there is also the possibility of it pulling inaccurate information.

People with subject matter expertise continue to remain important even as ChatGPT comes into the picture, asserted Weinsheimer.

"ChatGPT is sometimes accurate and other times not quite, but it is always 100 per cent confident. And that's where you need human experts to ascertain accuracy," he said.

Seah said: "There are also limitations when a job requires senior leadership's personal insights, brand messages and new announcements. Most of our work involve hotel launches and new brand initiatives, which render AI chatbots ineffective because these information are not yet available on the Internet."

Thiam Wei Toh, founder and chief storyteller of Indie Singapore Tours, has trialled chatbots for customer service and the creation of itineraries, but found that "even (OpenAI's latest) GPT-4 is still a bit off from being able to be properly harnessed".

Thiam is looking into other AI tools like Midjourney, Stable Diffusion and Copy.ai to to help with content generation and productivity.

Cluckie agrees that ChatGPT and the likes "will not be replacing any jobs anytime soon".

"We've being doing more extensive testing on the localisation of content for different markets but even this still requires a human editor. The inaccuracies in content produced by ChatGPT, and the generic blandness of its responses, are still far too prevalent for it to be used as much more than a writing aid," said Cluckie.

He added that the system's reliance on training data prevents it from generating original thought.

"Innovation and originality is, for now at least, still safely within the biological domain. In the context of travel, this limitation means that tools like ChatGPT inherently perpetuate issues such as overtourism unless specifically prompted otherwise, and even then, they are fundamentally limited to what is already provided to them in their training data," he said.

To address potential inaccuracies, Trip.com is working to embed booking links into TripGen, so that the existence of system-recommended products can be verified, shared Wei.

On Expedia's part, its collaboration with OpenAI is currently in the beta testing phase, allowing it to rapidly evolve the experience based on members' interaction.

"It's also important to remember that while many measures have been taken to limit inaccurate results and inappropriate responses, at times the experience may not work exactly as expected. Feedback from both our employees and all those using the experience will be continually evaluated to make sure responses meet our standards," commented Rathi Murthy, CTO, Expedia Group.

To travel companies eager to weave ChatGPT and similar AI functions into their system, Murthy has a word of advice: "Travel is a complex industry with lots of tech debt, so before companies can integrate with technologies like ChatGPT, they need to make sure the technological fundamentals of their platform are sound, and their data quality is high."

It would be a long-term investment. She said: "For AI to truly deliver on its potential, including commercially, it requires large quantities of high-quality data and a highly skilled team; it must be viewed as an essential part of the infrastructure to run a business, and it needs time. AI is not productive or efficient on day one – it takes time to get the data, train, evolve and scale up the models. It's an ongoing capability and there's not really an end in terms of value that it can bring to a business."

Families continue to be an important contributor to travel recovery this year, with demand fuelled by greater travel ease and weakened Covid fears. By Karen Yue

# The beauty of togetherness

Family reunions through overseas vacations were a common sight as Covid-19 fears waned, isolation ended and international borders progressively reopened to travellers throughout 2022. This trend looks set to stay, with travel and tourism companies describing family travel as a growing and promising segment.

According to Agoda's Family Travel Trend survey 2022, conducted in partnership with YouGov and released in December 2022, four out of five travellers will take a vacation with their immediate family in the next 12 months.

The survey polled 10,000 travellers aged 18 and above from across Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan, Vietnam, Taiwan, South Korea, and the US.

**Four out of five travellers will take a vacation with their immediate family in the next 12 months, finds Agoda and YouGov study**

While travelling with friends proves more popular than travelling with extended family, 52 per cent are keen to catch up with relatives on their vacation.

Travellers from Singapore (61 per cent), Taiwan (61 per cent) and Vietnam (59 per cent) are most likely to take at least one trip with immediate family, while the Philippines (47 per cent), Indonesia (40 per cent) and Malaysia (35 per cent) are most likely to plan two or more family jaunts in the coming year.

Family groups have featured strongly throughout 2022 for The Lux Collective's portfolio of properties across Mauritius and Reunion Island, the Maldives and China, with Asian groups typically drawn to Lux* South Ari Atoll. In China, Lux* Chongzuo in Guangxi and the seven Lux* Tea Horse Road resorts in Yunnan are still attracting the domestic crowd since international travel access had only just eased in February.

The company's CEO, Paul Jones, said this segment is lucrative, as it typically consists of five to six people per group across two to three generations; families prefer villas or interconnected rooms/suites that offer ample space for everyone, and they stay for six nights on average; family groups also gladly splurge on F&B, spa and group activities within the hotel or resort, observed Jones.

Amenities such as pools, kids' clubs and family-friendly activities also score well with such multi-generational travel groups.

Family travel "continues to drive increased occupancy" this year, said Jones.

"We see a strong demand for family-friendly accommodation and experiences, as families prioritise quality time travelling together and creating memorable experiences post-Covid," he said.

Family bookings are on the rise too at Radisson Hotel Group's resorts. Andre de Jong, area senior vice president, South East Asia and Pacific, told *TTG Asia* that the Radisson Blu Resort Maldives, for instance, has seen "significant pickup in bookings of the family villa room type".

The preference for spacious accommodations is not only driven by the need for comfort but also by the desire for more privacy and quality family time.

"We foresee demand continuing to increase with the return of multi-generational travel, thanks to the reopening of the Chinese market. Additionally, we are seeing positive trends in the Australian and European markets, especially during the school holidays," said de Jong.

He pointed out that "families are increasingly travelling together for leisure and are willing to spend more on accommodation and activities".

Shared wanderlust is benefitting tour operators too. Nick Lim, Asia CEO at The Travel Corporation (TTC), noted that whole family trips are on the rise for his brands since the resumption of travel, peaking during the school holidays.

Lim said improving ease of travel and greater confidence in vaccine efficacy for children and teenagers have helped to

CandyRetriever/shutterstock

grow the appetite for travel among families. While there are still months to go before the November and December school holidays, families have booked up Trafalgar and Uniworld's Christmas itineraries.

Escorted tours work great for families, as "(they) can sit back, relax and not worry about planning, safety or the complexity of coordinating transportation", opined Lim.

He observed that family groups travelling with TTC brands are "worldly and often curious about the history, culture and the way of life of local people", and they prefer "local, authentic experiences that connect them to their destination".

"Tours with TTC are enriching for the entire family because children are exposed to the culture of the destination and of their fellow travellers from all over the world. Guests walk away from the destination with more than what history books can teach them," he said.

**A family visiting Italy can participate in Trafalgar's Gladiators, Gondolas and Gold itinerary, where they will experience life as a gladiator at a Gladiator School in Rome**

## Family lures

Hoteliers say families from different geographical markets have specific holiday preferences.

Jones noted that European families typically seek out enriching programmes at kids' club for the little ones, while the adults go for spa, watersports and cooking/pastry classes on their own.

De Jong said US and European families prefer off-site or outdoor activities that allow children to explore and discover the destination and immerse in local culture.

As for the Asian market, both Jones and de Jong agree that families tended to value time spent together.

"It is important to understand the different preferences of families from different markets that will enable them to reconnect with loved ones and create memorable moments together. By tailoring our offerings to cater to these preferences, we can ensure that families have a memorable and enjoyable vacation experience," said de Jong.

That said, de Jong emphasised that "certain basics" remain for engaging families. Radisson Hotel Group's family programme, Rad Family, is designed to enable families to create memorable moments together, no matter which property they are spending time at. F&B is an integral part of the programme, where hearty and healthy kid-friendly meals contribute to the complete vacation experience.

Launched in 2019, Rad Family is being rolled out progressively across hotels and resorts in the South-east Asia and Pacific regions. Pilot programmes are in the works for Radisson Blu Phu Quoc Resort in Vietnam and the soon-to-open Radisson Collection Resort Galle in Sri Lanka.

Over at The Lux Collective, collaboration with external partners ensures activity-packed vacations for its guests. A variety of family experiences are brought in throughout the year, such as Expert-led Workshops conducted by professional trainers and collaborators to deliver a mix of education and entertainment for everyone in the family.

Placing further emphasis on quality guest experiences, the company's flagship brand Lux* recently unveiled a new Life Extraordinary campaign, through which breathtaking adventures, such as swimming alongside the whale sharks as a family, are curated under the banner, Extraordinary Experiences. These add to Lux* resorts' signature onsite offerings, from tailor-made Lux* ME Spa and wellness sessions to unique guest activities like junk art galleries and film screenings on the beach.

Jones said all properties under the group are designed with families in mind. Interconnecting rooms are available in Lux* Le Morne, Lux* Grand Gaube, Lux* Belle Mare, and Lux* South Ari Atoll, while the Play kids club in all properties offers programmes for the young ones as well as for everyone in the family.

Differences in holiday preferences are also seen through tour choices. Lim noted that different TTC brands attract families with different priorities. For example, families that seek value and choice of experiences tend to pick Costsaver tours, while those that crave enriching experiences tend to gravitate towards Trafalgar tours.

That said, family group bookings are especially strong with Trafalgar.

"Trafalgar has the most comprehensive list of itineraries and experiences of all tour brands, with over 300-plus tours in our arsenal," said Lim.

This year, Asian families keen to discover Europe can bookmark Trafalgar's eight-day Christmas Markets of Austria, Germany and Switzerland. The tour calls at magical market stalls and spotlights old-world traditions, local craftsmanship and mesmerising city backdrops.

For families looking to customise their experience, Costsaver's seven-day Jewels of Italy shines.The tour uncovers centuries of tradition, heritage, and culture, while visiting iconic landmarks such as the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

Young adults who are looking to treat their parents to a premium holiday can consider the nine-day Best of Britain tour from Insight Vacations. Traversing Scotland, Wales and England, families visit the most magnificent sights in the UK, including Edinburgh Castle, Stonehenge and the English Lake District.

**"We see a strong demand for family-friendly accommodation and experiences, as families prioritise quality time travelling together and creating memorable experiences post-Covid."**

**Paul Jones**
CEO,
The Lux Collective

# JOIN US AT
# PATA EVENTS 2023

PATA®
Pacific Asia Travel Association

NTB | nepal

## PATA ANNUAL SUMMIT & ADVENTURE MART 2023

**Sustainability through Tourism**

**MAY 30 - JUNE 2**
Pokhara Grande Hotel, Pokhara, Nepal

- *PATA Board Meeting & Annual General Meeting*
- *Conference on Emerging Trends*
- *Destination Experience*
- *Adventure Travel Mart with Carefully Selected Buyers/Sellers*

Learn more about PASM

Ministry of Tourism, Creative Industry & Performing Arts Sarawak | STB SARAWAK TOURISM BOARD | BUSINESS EVENTS SARAWAK | RESPONSIBLE TOURISM | Sarawak More to Discover

## PATA DESTINATION EXPERIENCE FORUM & MART 2023

**SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION**

**JUNE 21 - 23**
Borneo Convention Centre Kuching (BCCK)
Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia

- *One-day Destination Experience*
- *One-day Conference*
- *Tabletop 1-1 Meeting*
- *Networking Sessions*

Learn more about PDFM

Incredible India
www.incredibleindia.org

## PATA TRAVEL MART 2023

**OCTOBER 4 - 6**
New Delhi, India

- *One-day Conference*
- *B2B Travel Mart with 1,000+ Global Delegates*
- *Networking Opportunities with High-growth Travel Markets*

Learn more about PTM

Follow us: @PATA.HQ @PATA_HQ Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA)

www.PATA.org

More cruise lines are making their way around the Asia-Pacific with new homeports and destinations to explore. By S Puvaneswary

# Cruise away

## Time for discoveries

Regent Seven Seas Cruises will conduct 38 sailings through Asia for 2023 and 2024, with adventures led by *Seven Seas Explorer*, *Seven Seas Mariner*, *Seven Seas Navigator* and *Seven Seas Voyager*. These cruises will cover more than 20 destinations across Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.

For nature buffs, *Seven Seas Explorer*'s 17-night voyage from Indonesia's Benoa to Australia's Sydney, departing December 5, 2023, will shine. The voyage calls at 11 ports including Celukan Bawang, Gili Mas and Komodo in Indonesia as well as Darwin, Cairns and Airlie Beach in Australia. The ports-of-call in Indonesia offer a gateway to explore nature. There are 31 included excursions, a highlight of which is a shore excursion on Komodo Island, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

For ardent fans of Japan, *Seven Seas Explorer*'s 12-night round trip from Tokyo departing March 6, 2024, is not to be missed. The voyage features ports-of-call in Kyoto, Beppu, Oshima Island and Kochi, giving cruise guests the opportunity to explore both Japan's ancient and modern marvels with great ease.

## Full-on Asia

Princess Cruises cruise schedule for 2023 and 2024 offers travellers a rich flavour of Asia's best.

From her homeport in Japan's Yokohama and Kobe from March to November 2023, *Diamond Princess* will call at 38 destinations across the country as well as South Korea and Taiwan. She will then move to Singapore, where she will be based from December 2023 to March 2024, offering eight lengthy sailings ranging from 10 to 23 days to Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

She will return to Yokohama in 2024, where she will sail roundtrip from March to August, and call at 35 destinations.

Sister ship, *Royal Princess*, will make her Japan debut in April 2024, when she departs from Brisbane to Yokohama on a 15- to 22-day sailing, visiting nine ports in Australia, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan.

Highlights in Japan are opportunities to access remote parts, such as Aomori, Hakodate, Niigata and Tsuruga. Cruise guests can pick from land programmes that take them to UNESCO World Heritage Sites like Mount Fuji, or to experience cultural festivals and Sakura blossoms.

Sean Pavone/shutterstock

Goryokaku Park in Hakodate, Hokkaido

## Hot city calls

This year, Resorts World Cruises' *Genting Dream* departs from Singapore and Kuala Lumpur (via Port Klang) and offers two and three night cruises to popular South-east Asian destinations Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Phuket. While in Phuket, cruise guests can head out to explore smaller islands such as Phi Phi Ley and Phi Phi Don, as well as visit cultural and religious sites like Wat Chalong, Big Buddha, and Phuket Old Town.

The cruise line's other ship, *Resorts World One*, covers another exciting part of Asia, with cruises from either Hong Kong and Kaohsiung. A series of two-, three- and four-night cruises are offered between both cities. Cruise guests can expect a myriad of experiences, historical and cultural awakenings to gourmet and retail indulgences.

## Fresh additions

Norwegian Cruise Line's deployment of *Norwegian Jewel* to Asia from this October will feature a diverse range of 14 sailings and five new ports-of-call – the Philippines' Boracay, Puerto Princesa and Salomague; Taiwan's Hualien; and Indonesia's Bintan.

These destinations are particularly known for their breathtaking beaches and are well-loved by local and foreign travellers alike. Shore excursions are wide ranging and include immersive experiences like the Aboriginal Homelands excursion in Hualien, where guests interact with the Amis people and learn about their culture.

Mo Wu/shutterstock

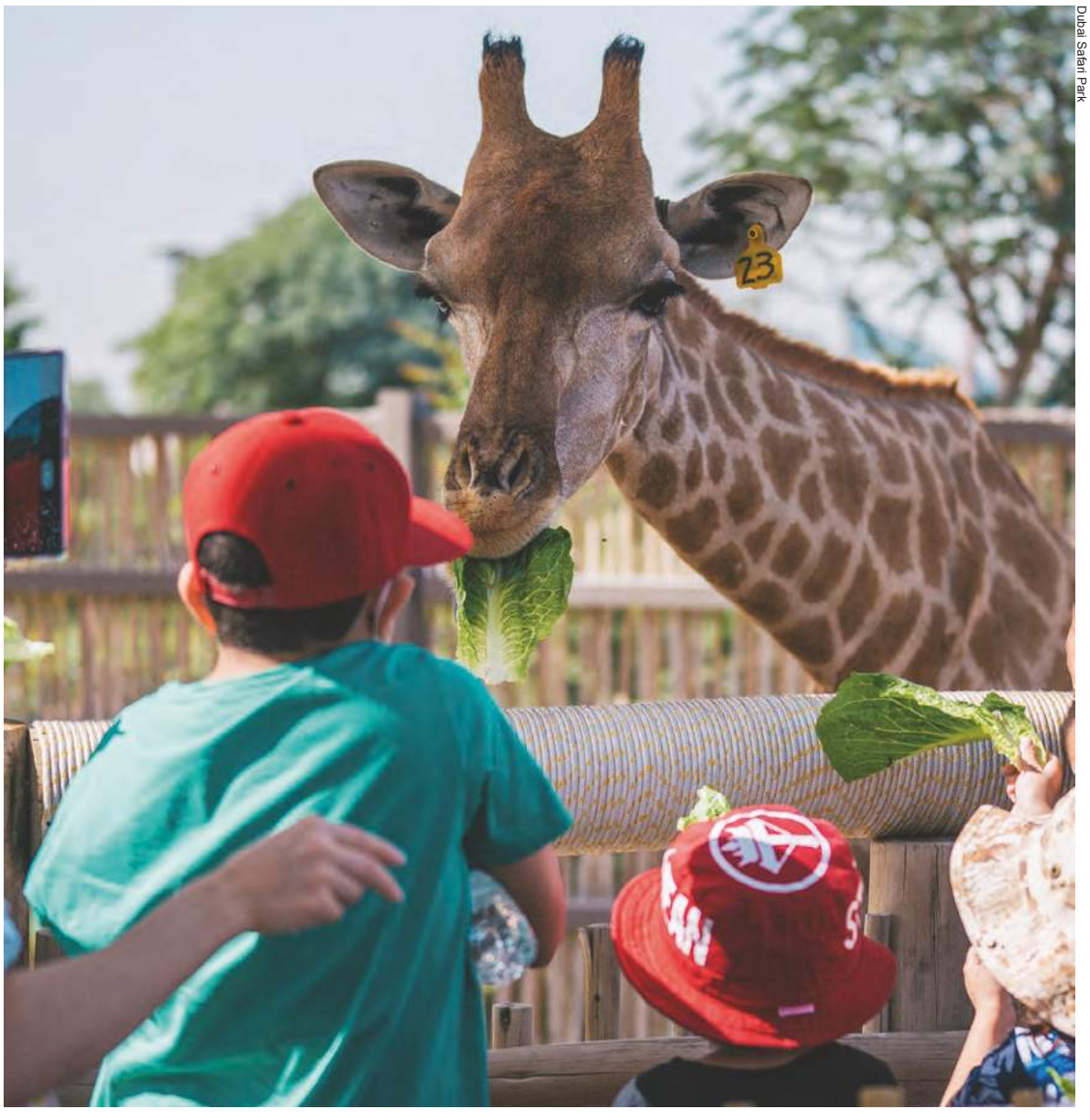
loveyousomuch/shutterstock

Maxim Tupikov/shutterstock

Clockwise from left: Komodo Island; Phuket Old Town; Boracay

A family that travels together, stays together – it is never too early to begin exploring the world so check out these new highlights by Melissa Anne Tan for planning the next family trip

# Travel together, play together



Dubai Safari Park

## 1 Step into the wild

Having undergone renovation, Dubai Safari Park has reopened and welcomes all animal lovers to visit. Home to around 3,000 animals from all over the world, the 119-hectare park is divided into different zones, with each featuring animals native to their regions, such as the jungles of Asia, the deserts of Arabia, the rainforests of Africa, and more. Visitors can spend a full day meeting the animal residents while enjoying interactive experiences and live shows.

As a wildlife park, animal sanctuary and education centre, Dubai Safari Park is eco-friendly and runs primarily on solar power.

Mandai Wildlife Group

## 2 Spend the night with animals

Singapore Zoo's Glamping in the Wild returns from April 1 with a refreshed programme featuring behind-the-scenes tours to thrill the heart of any animal lover looking for a meaningful respite amid nature.

Visitors can feed Asian elephants, discover the inner workings of the zoo's Wildlife Nutrition Centre, enjoy an afternoon performance with priority seats at the Splash Safari presentation, and tuck into a hearty dinner before retreating into the cosy comfort of a dome tent. The next morning, indulge in the signature Breakfast in the Wild while encountering animal ambassadors such as orangutans, tamandua, coatimundis and macaws.

The Glamping in the Wild experience is priced at S$1,699 (US$1,259) for a one-night stay in a fully air-conditioned tent for up to four people – it includes two-day admission to Singapore Zoo, Asian Elephant feeding, guided tours, behind-the-scenes tours at Wildlife Nutrition Centre and Wildlife Healthcare and Research Centre, priority seating at Splash Safari presentation, and Breakfast in the Wild.

For guests who prefer getting up close with aquatic animals, River Wonders offers Glamping with the Manatees, also available from April through August this year. Priced from S$1,299 per tent (for four people), the package comprises priority seating at Once Upon a River presentation, meet and greet with animal ambassadors, Manatee-inspired activity before bedtime, and two meals (dinner and breakfast).

## 3 Fun in the sun

At the new Parkroyal Langkawi Resort, little ones will have the time of their lives at Jungle Camp, the resort's kid's club. They will get to play and learn while making new friends at fun facilities like the activity centre, playground and even at the pool play zone.

As for the adults, they can head up to the Sky Pool to cool off from the heat of the tropics while enjoying a panoramic view of the Straits of Malacca.

Family meal times are also a great way to spend quality time while indulging in international cuisine at the F&B outlets offered at the resort.

## 4 Health is wealth

Zulal Wellness Resort by Chiva-Som in Qatar has come up with a Family Bonding Retreat which focuses on mental, physical and nutritional well-being to encourage younger guests to engage and explore good lifestyle habits, while fostering stronger connections between families.

The two-night retreat comprise daily age-appropriate activities and curated experiences as well as group activities such as aerobics, swimming and circuit training. Earthing and mindfulness activities such as *tai chi*, meditation and stretching are also part of the family wellness journey.

## 5 Holistic healing together

The Farm at San Benito is offering holistic healing and transformative retreats for families with curated creative activities for the kids – even furry members are welcomed!

Located in Lipa, Batangas, just a 90-minute drive from Manila, families seeking the ultimate getaway can indulge in The Farm's immersive wellness experience, with supervised health programmes carried out by medical doctors and licensed health professionals.

Spa treatments, water therapy at the Family Acqua Wellness, creative Mandala Flower Meditation, organic farm tour and vegetable picking, and more can be arranged.

## 6 Splash and play

Nestled on Non Nuoc Beach close to downtown Danang is the newly-opened Danang Marriott Resort & Spa, which offers 200 rooms and suites, and 39 villas.

The hotel is a paradise for those who love the water, with five infinity pools, including a kid's pool.

There is also a colourful kid's club to keep the little ones entertained.

Nearby are beaches, golf courses and UNESCO World Heritage sites such as Hoi An and My Son Sanctuary, Ba Na Hills and Son Tra Nature Reserve. Families can rent bicycles to explore the area together.

## 7 Outback adventure

Head straight into the wilds of the Kimberley region for five days and discover this often overlooked and untouched part of Australia's outback. With unique wildlife, rugged cliffs, gigantic gorges and clear waterholes for young – and old – kids to explore, learn of the area's myths and legends, dive into a new swimming spot, search for freshwater crocodiles, or have a go at creating local artwork.

In the evenings, families can relax beside the campfire, share stories and toast marshmallows while watching the Kimberley night sky come alive in swathes of stars above.

Best of all, there is no need to worry about directions or meals as it is all included in this Aussie adventure.

Intrepid Travel

CMSG

## 8 A peek into the past

Located in a double-storey colonial building lies the Children's Museum Singapore, opened in December 2022.

Permanent exhibitions include A Voyage Back In Time, which features sailing adventure *Ahoy Singapore*, immersive theatre show *The Hidden Chamber*, and a marketplace and colourful neighbourhood to explore life during olden Singapore.

There are also special exhibitions like *Imagine A Garden* for kids to discover the wonders of nature and learn about different types of birds and flowers that can be found in South-east Asia; and *Happy Birthday* which shows the ways different communities in Singapore celebrate birthdays. Little tots even have a special Play Pod zone to engage in free play and explore nature's bounty.

edusma7256/Shutterstock

Langkawi hopes to attract more high-yield, environmentally-conscious tourists to the destination; Langkawi Sky Bridge pictured

# Nature at the heart

Attaining the Global Geopark status has motivated stakeholders in Langkawi to prioritise conservation and sustainable development on the island. By S Puvaneswary

Langkawi, an archipelago of 99 islands, will undergo its fourth assessment by UNESCO appointed evaluators sometime in 2H2023.

This evaluation takes place every four years and Langkawi has to tick all the right boxes in terms of geo-conservation, sustainable development, and involvement of local communities in managing their geo-heritage resources.

Awarded the UNESCO Global Geopark status in 2007, Langkawi has successfully passed three UNESCO evaluations to date to retain the brand. Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) has also created many initiatives to educate the community about the Geopark branding.

Recalling the uphill battle in the early days of receiving the Geopark recognition to convince tourism stakeholders that the Geopark branding was the way forward, Azmil Munif Mohd Bukhari, deputy manager, tourism division at LADA, said: "Hoteliers and the travel trade had (the) preconceived notion that Geopark related only to ancient rock formations and doubted whether rock formations had enough allure to entice visitors to the island. Other islands, such as Phuket and Bali were also competing for tourists."

LADA has developed a UNESCO Global Geopark Discovery Centre in Killim and four smaller galleries spread across the main island of Langkawi, offering visitors a better understanding of Langkawi's complex and ancient landscapes and to explain its geological and environmental significance.

Through LADA's recent efforts, 32 primary and secondary schools in Langkawi have set up Geopark Corners as a means of educating students on the unique geological formations and the importance of nature conservation.

Today, the branding is widely accepted by tourism stakeholders who say it is what differentiates Langkawi from other islands in the region.

Anthony Wong, owner and operator of Cottage by The Sea by Frangipani Langkawi, told *TTG Asia*: "The UNESCO branding is also not easy to obtain and all stakeholders in Langkawi are aware of this. We have to be on our toes with preserving and conserving nature to ensure that we continue to be revalidated every four years."

Nigel Wong, director of Big Blue Holidays, remarked that the Geopark branding will help attract more high-yield, environmentally-conscious tourists and place Langkawi on the global map as one of the must-visit destinations in Asia.

Langkawi's Global Geopark status has also motivated stakeholders to prioritise conservation and sustainable development on the island.

For instance, Cottage By The Sea by Frangipani Langkawi, has recently established itself as the Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Hospitality with support from LADA and UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

Wong has developed an efficient system to clean and convert polluted water, including sewage and waste cooking oil, into drinking water within three or four days, as well as a desalination process using special bio-engineered constructed wetland – all without requiring any energy consumption.

He is also a consultant for an ongoing water treatment project funded by the state government to treat waste water in the tourist hubs of Pantai Tengah and part of Pantai Chenang.

The Ritz-Carlton, Langkawi introduced the Sea Cucumber Reproduction Project in mid-2022, to counter overfarming which is hurting the local marine ecology, including the rise of coral bleaching. General manager, Ellen Franke, commented: "One of the growing trends we're observing is how conscious people are about their impact on the environment and the destinations they visit.

# What's hot | Island adventure

By S Puvaneswary

## Trail of dreams

Using multi-sensory technology, projection mapping, sophisticated lighting and mesmerising soundscapes, Dream Forest Langkawi transforms a trail in a prehistoric forest of over 100 million years old at the foot of Mount Raya into a high-tech immersive experience. When the sun sets, the forest comes alive with Langkawi's folktales in this first-of-its-kind outdoor attraction. During the day, visitors can also spot wildlife on a nature walk.

## Spot the birds

JungleWalla Langkawi offers half-day and two-day birdwatching tours in Langkawi, suitable for both serious birders and birdwatching enthusiasts. There are over 270 species of birds on the island, including three species of hornbills, namely the Oriental Pied Hornbill, Wreathed Hornbill and Great Hornbill. Bird enthusiasts can catch a glimpse of these winged-wonders during peak season from mid-October to mid-March.

## By the beach

Parkroyal Langkawi is a beachfront resort that just opened in mid-February. The 301-key property is located on the touristy stretch of Pantai Tengah and offers six types of rooms, eight types of suites and seven spacious villas. On-site are eight meeting spaces, spa, lounge, gym, and F&B options.

## Sail away

Platinum Charters offers private luxury yacht charters from both Royal Langkawi Yacht Club and Telaga Harbour Marina. There is a charter yacht for almost any budget – yachts vary in sizes to accommodate from two to 25 people on board. The company is also building solar-powered boats which will be operational for day cruises from next year.

Langkawi's tourism players are doing their part to preserve the environment

> **One of the growing trends we're observing is how conscious people are about their impact on the environment and the destinations they visit.**
>
> **Ellen Franke**
> General manager,
> The Ritz-Carlton, Langkawi

"The Sea Cucumber Reproduction Project provides an excellent opportunity for our guests to connect with the environment, allowing them to give back while staying with us."

To support the sustainability of these unique creatures while directly increasing local sea cucumber populations in the Andaman Sea, the resort's in-house marine biologist provides guests with a hands-on educational experience to learn more about the asexual technique. There is also an opportunity for guests to release mature sea cucumbers out in the open sea.

Participants will also gain a better understanding of the importance of the sea cucumbers and its ecosystem.

Southeast Asia
feel the warmth

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

Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Park – or Genbaku Dome – is a critical part of the city's history

# Reinventing Hiroshima

The City of Water is revamping itself to entice more travellers to its turf, with new adventure offerings, historical and cultural experiences, and plenty of tasty eats. By Kathryn Wortley

Over May 19 to 21, eyes of the world will be on Hiroshima as it hosts the G7 Summit, and the Hiroshima Convention & Visitors Bureau (HCVB) is hoping the exposure of the global event will inspire an uptick in inbound travellers to the city.

Indeed, as early as September 2022, at international travel event Tourism Expo Japan, representatives of HCVB commented that "Hiroshima, as a cosmopolitan city, welcomes the G7 Hiroshima Summit and looks forward to welcoming (international visitors)".

The unveiling of the famed "floating" *otorii* (grand gate) of Itsukushima Shrine on Hiroshima's nearby island of Miyajima in late 2022, after more than three years of painstaking restoration work, is expected to be a major draw. At 16.6m tall and weighing 60 tonnes, the gate is a symbol of Hiroshima, attracting 4.7 million visitors in 2019, according to Miyajima Tourist Association.

Also adding to the prefecture's appeal is the increased number and range of hotels available. These include the luxury Japanese- and Western-style Kyukamura Taishakukyo, which opened in February 2023, as well as the popular Fav Hotel and international brand Hilton Hiroshima, both of which launched in autumn 2022.

The biggest change in Hiroshima since the outset of the pandemic, though, is in adventure travel, defined by the Japan Adventure Tourism Organisation (JATO) as "trips that consist of two or more of the three elements of activity, nature and cultural experience".

In 2023, more arrivals to the prefecture are expected to take part in adventure tourism than ever before, thanks to recent local efforts, buoyed by national support. In autumn 2022, the Japanese government named adventure travel as one of its three focus areas – along with sustainable travel and luxury travel – to entice travellers back to Japan. Officials are banking on post-lockdown visitors seeking out trips that are slower, longer and more connected to nature or offer unique outdoor and cultural activities.

And the travel trade in Hiroshima has been busy preparing for the arrival of these travellers.

Takeo Tamamoto, director of the MICE promotion department at HCVB, said there are many new tours and activities that cater to travellers who want to enjoy the local area's culture and scenery.

A popular option is an early morning hike up Mount Futaba, according to Taeko Abe, supervisor of the creative tourism department at HCVB. After setting off from the city centre, participants call at Hiroshima Toshogu, a shrine dedicated to the god of peace and where residents fled in search of water following the 1945 atomic bombing. On reaching the summit, a *bento* breakfast made with local, sustainable ingredients is served and enjoyed against the backdrop of the city, Seto Inland Sea and Miyajima.

Food and drink activities are also booming. Tokyo-based company ByFood offers guided tours around Hiroshima by day or night. Guests get to try the region's unique and renowned dishes, such as *okonomiyaki* pancakes and oysters. Hiroshima produces more than 60 per cent of Japan's oysters, according to the Japan National Tourism Organization.

Leading local alcohol maker Sakurao Brewery and Distillery also recently launched a tour and tasting package to showcase its whiskey and craft gin.

And, as Hiroshima is known locally as a City of Water, thanks to the six rivers that flow through it, the past few years have seen growth in water-based activities, too.

Hiroshima Castle is a reconstruction of the former 1589 landmark

Hiroshima-based Magic Island offers SUP tours that pass by the city's two world heritage sites: Itsukushima Shrine and Hiroshima Peace Memorial Hall.

Companies are also maximising Hiroshima's advantageous position beside the Seto Inland Sea and its many islands.

Tokyo-based company Heartland Japan's tours include walking part of the Tobishima Kaido, a 100km route connecting Kawashiri, Kure and Shimo-Kamagari via a series of bridges, and an island homestay incorporating cycling and sailing on Etajima.

Local company Setouchi Reflection Trip, meanwhile, offers a range of airborne activities including a 50-minute seaplane tour over the area's coasts and islands. It is also possible to take an eight-minute or 17-minute helicopter ride to view the city's famous sites such as Hiroshima Castle and the Peace Memorial.

Indeed, "momentum for adventure tourism promotion is increasing in Hiroshima and the surrounding area", according to JATO. June 2022 saw the establishment of the Hiroshima Adventure Tourism Association (HATA), designed to revitalise the prefecture's tourism industry "through promotion and awareness of adventure tourism".

HATA offers a five-day adventure tour under the theme of *Hiroshima's story woven through time*, which aims to tell the story of the city's "origin, reconstruction, passion and future" via cycling, river trekking, hiking and sea kayaking.

"Hiroshima has many places and activities that have the potential to change lives and the world," said HATA chairman Toshiro Yoshihara, noting that the association aims to make "physically and mentally adventurous products" for visitors to enjoy and for the revitalisation of the area.

In February 2023, AdventureConnect, a national event organised by JATO, Adventure Travel Trade Association and HATA, was held in Hiroshima for the first time, marking the prefecture's continued rise in Japan's adventure tourism sector.

> **Hiroshima has many places and activities that have the potential to change lives and the world.**
>
> **Toshiro Yoshihara**
> Chairman,
> Hiroshima Adventure Tourism Association

# What's hot | Hiroshima happenings

By Kathryn Wortley

## Seto Inland Sea cruises

Bordering the Seto Inland Sea and boasting some 140 islands, Hiroshima prefecture offers a range of new tailored sea voyages. A popular option is a tour around the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Miyajima, home to Itsukushima Shrine with its floating *otorii* (grand gate), unveiled in late 2022 after three years of restoration. Other tours include fishing trips, a sunset cruise, onboard parties and a trip to Okunoshima, where rabbits outnumber people.

## Peace cycling tour

Hiroshima City is home to many sites that remind visitors of the horrors of war and the importance of peace. A new customised tour by electric bicycle introduces these places, including the A-bomb Dome and Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, as well as attractions that survived the atomic bombing, such as Gotoku Shrine and Hiroshima Castle. Local guides also take participants to hidden gems and green spaces off the city's main streets for shopping, dining and relaxing.

## Kayaking on the coast

Tomonoura, one of Hiroshima's many port towns, is the inspiration for Studio Ghibli's *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea*, thanks to its scenic landscapes and seascapes. Visitors can experience this coast first-hand on a one-day sea kayaking tour, paddling past pristine beaches, island shrines and seafront villages. Alternatively, a one-hour sea kayaking experience will introduce visitors to views of Miyajima and Itsukushima Shrine's *otorii* from Hiroshima Bay.

## Kagura performance

One of Japan's oldest performing arts, Kagura, is dedicated to the gods to ask for a plentiful harvest. Over the centuries, it has developed in different ways depending on local cultures and practices. Hiroshima Kagura is characterised by flamboyant costumes, lively music from traditional Japanese drums and flutes, along with dynamic dancing. A Kagura show designed for visitors in mind is performed in Hiroshima City weekly to keep this ancient practice alive.

Clockwise from above: Wisdom Path at the foot of Lantau Peak; Hong Kong International Airport; artist's impression of the completed 11 SKIES

# Ever-changing landscape

Prudence Lui bears witness to the progressive development of Lantau Island, which now sports new-builds that aim to attract more travellers to Hong Kong

Armed with new and enhanced tourist infrastructure as well as improved accessibility, Lantau Island is now recognised as an attractive "double gateway" that connects Hong Kong with Greater Bay Area (GBA) and other parts of the world via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai Macao Bridge and Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA).

HKIA commenced aircraft take-off and landing operations on its third runway in July 2022, while remaining enhancement works on the aviation facility is pressing ahead. HKIA is due to get a reconfigured central runway, expanded Terminal 2 and a new concourse, updated automated people-mover system, and high-speed baggage handling system.

The ultimate goal is to complete HKIA's three-runway system by 2024, since work first started in August 2016.

The airport opened its Sky Bridge – a 200m-long and 20m-width footbridge equipped with escalators and automated walkway – last November, enabling airport users to cover Terminal 1 (T1) to T1 Satellite Concourse on foot.

The Sky Bridge is also an architectural magnet – it is the world's longest airside bridge that allows the largest passenger aircraft, like the A380, to pass under. Featuring panoramic views, the Sky Bridge has become a prime viewing spot for passengers. An observation deck, catering outlet and shop will soon open in phases.

The vicinity of HKIA has also been enhanced with the progressive opening of 11 SKIES next door. This landmark, when completed in 2025, will be home to over 800 shops, including more than 120 dining concepts, and Hong Kong's largest indoor entertainment hub that will host world-class entertainment attractions never seen before in the region.

11 SKIES is also meant to integrate workplaces for GBA enterprises, with a focus on wealth management, wellness and medical services.

There is development on the hotel front too. After welcoming the 206-room Silveri Hong Kong-MGallery last summer, Tung Chung, on the north-western coast of Lantau Island, has its hotel inventory expanded further with the opening of the 1,208-key Regala Skycity Hotel early this year.

Owned and operated by Regal Hotels International, this new hotel is directly connected to AsiaWorld-Expo and 11 SKIES via an enclosed footbridge, making it an ideal accommodation option for both leisure and business travellers.

Regala Skycity Hotel packs in five game rooms, cabana rooms with patios available for private hiring, and a landscaped rooftop Sky Deck that offers panoramic views of Lantau Island. For fitness buffs, the hotel charms with a jogging track and organic farm.

Hong Kong's largest island has also raised its fun quotient, with its most notable attraction – Hong Kong Disneyland Resort (HKDL) – launching fresh draws.

HKDL has unveiled a reimagined Castle of Magical Dreams, home to a

fully-refreshed Follow Your Dreams daytime musical stage show and the all-new night-time spectacular, Momentous. Its activity calendar for 2023 is packed with immersive experiences, such as Stella-Lou's Wonderful Wishes Ballet in April; a series of Heroic Encounters with Marvel Super Heroes in May; Disney Halloween Time with Disney Villains November to December; and A Disney Christmas special to round up the year.

Furthermore, a number of world's firsts will come to HKDL – The World of Frozen will open in 2H2023 and Walt Disney and Mickey Mouse Statue-Dream Makers in October 2023.

Commenting on Lantau Island's various developments, HKDL director of sales for Hong Kong and international, Eva Lau, told *TTG Asia* that travellers would be encouraged to stay on longer in the destination. More travellers from around the world would also have a reason to explore Hong Kong.

"In the long run, these (developments) will definitely enhance the overall appeal of Hong Kong as a tourist destination, attracting more tourists to Hong Kong Disneyland, Lantau and Hong Kong," Lau added.

Renee Kim, general manager of Regal Hotels International, said the developments play a crucial role in contributing to the success of Lantau Island as a tourism central, especially with the opening of 11 SKIES, which she expects will attract more travellers from the GBA.

She said: "(Lantau Island) has changed a lot in the past decade. With all the natural scenery, history and culture, plenty of famous attractions as well as new developments coming on line in the near future, I believe that this area will become one of the most popular destinations for tourists who visit Hong Kong."

> **"With all the natural scenery, history and culture, plenty of famous attractions as well as new developments coming on line in the near future, I believe that this area will become one of the most popular destinations for tourists who visit Hong Kong.**
>
> **Renee Kim**
> General manager,
> Regal Hotels International

# What's hot | City charms

By Prudence Lui

## Crystal clear

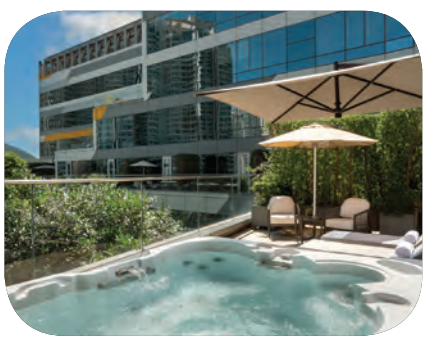
Ngong Ping 360 features seven Crystal+ cabins – all four sides of the cabin, including the bottom, are made from transparent tempered glass. Guests can enjoy 360° views of Lantau Island and landmarks such as the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, Hong Kong International Airport and the Big Buddha. Each cabin can accommodate up to 10 passengers (a loading capacity of 750kg).

## Head to the farm

Sheraton Hong Kong Tung Chung Hotel, in partnership with Winnie the Farm, has created a community-driven staycation programme to raise awareness of the implementation of sustainable practices at farms. Valid till June 30, this family farmcation package includes an overnight stay with breakfast, one-way transfer from hotel to the farm, a guided tour to the local farm at Mui Wo, and workshops for two persons.

## Shopping haven

The Citygate Outlets' new extension opened in summer of 2019, allowing visitors to explore a whole new level of shopping and dining experiences with almost double the amount of retail space. The complex features more than 150 world-renowned premium brands, over 40 international dining hotspots, and one-stop entertainment experiences. Located in the heart of Lantau Island, Citygate Outlets is a stone's throw from Tung Chung MTR Station.



## A resort experience

Silveri Hong Kong-MGallery boasts 206 roms and suites, and is situated in the Citygate complex at Tung Chung. Promising a true resort-style experience, the hotel comprises a dozen signature suites that surround the garden with outdoor terraces – each with its own private outdoor plunge pool or private outdoor-heated Jacuzzi overlooking the hills of Lantau. Other facilities include an outdoor garden, a swimming pool, fitness area, and three F&B outlets.

TTG TRAVEL AWARDS 2022

CELEBRATING 25 | FRASERS HOSPITALITY

Enriching Lives Since 1998

In 2023, Frasers Hospitality celebrates 25 years of enriching the lives of modern travellers across our award-winning serviced apartments and hotel residences in more than 70 cities.

**Beyond 25**

As the world evolves, the group is well-positioned to meet the changing needs of the extended-stay market as it continues to expand in Southeast Asia, China, the Middle East and Africa.

FRASER SUITES HANOI

FRASER RESIDENCE ORCHARD, SINGAPORE

FRASER SUITES
LE CLARIDGE CHAMPS ELYSÉES, PARIS

FRASER SUITES GUANGZHOU

FRASERSUITES FRASERRESIDENCE FRASERPLACE capri BY FRASER hotel residences MODENA BY FRASER

FRASERSHOSPITALITY.COM