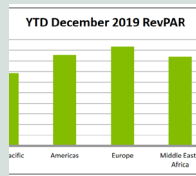




MEKONG
Gambling ban shakes Sihanoukville.

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YOUR STORIES
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China suspends tours

China halts the sale of all package tour holidays on the eve of Chinese New Year in order to contain the novel coronavirus.

CHINA ordered travel agencies across the country to suspend sales of domestic and international tours as part of an effort to contain the spread of a novel coronavirus last week without saying for how long the ban would be in place.

China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism ordered travel agencies and tourism companies to stop selling tour packages began last Friday, according to a document seen by Bloomberg.

The statement by the country President Xi Jinping was released by China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism on the evening of 24 January.

The action comes at the start of the Lunar New Year holidays when millions of Chinese travel across the country and abroad. China is taking extraordinary measures as it tries to halt a disease that some fear could rival SARS.

While more Chinese tourists have been arranging their own travel, taking advantage of no-frills airlines and internet booking sites, more than half of China's overseas travellers – 55% in 2018 – still choose packages, according to the China Tourism Academy.

In Thailand, the percentage of tour package business is much higher probably around 70%.

While the impact will be devastating for the travel industry across Asia, the suspension will not

impact on package tours already booked and due to leave the country during the week-long holiday. It halts all-new package sales until further notice while the ministry's statement asked hotels and airlines to take care of its citizens who are already travelling or are booked on packages due to depart this week. The suspension will impact heavily during February and possibly well into March. There will be a rush to

both individual and package tours exceeded 3 million.

While saying the suspension might help to slow the spread of the disease to other countries, tour operators in Thailand told *TTR Weekly* that if the sales ban extended well into February and possibly March the impact on travel businesses would be catastrophic. They are counting on the suspension being much shorter, but the death toll now over 40 and



seek full refunds on package tours and airline fares.

Thailand's travel companies handled just short of 600,000 Chinese travellers booked on package tours in February and March last year, according to Association of Thai Travel Agents data for arrivals at Bangkok's two airports. Over 10 million Chinese visited Thailand last year and during the first three months of 2019 arrivals including

cases exceeding 1,000 in China alone suggests the prospects of swift solution are fading.

"Many businesses would face bankruptcy if the suspension is lengthy and we have to recognise that Chinese airlines are now offering full refunds on airline bookings for travel up to 31 March. It suggests the suspension could last a considerable time," one leading inbound agent told *TTR Weekly*.

EDITOR'S POST

Friendship bridges that are not friendly

Four 'Friendship Bridges' span the wide majestic Mekong River as it creates a meandering borderline between Thailand and Laos but just how friendly are these border bridges?

When the first bridge opened back in 1994, spanning the river between Nong Khai in Thailand and Vientiane province in Laos, it promised a bright new era of trade and tourism. Since then three more bridges connect the border towns of Mukdahan (no2), Nakhon Phanom (no3) and Chiang Kong (no4) with their counterpart riverside towns in Laos.

For the towns that face each other across the broad river, building friendship and expanding trade and tourism hasn't been smooth sailing.

Crossing a Friendship Bridge can take longer than it should.

It is particularly rough for the growing breed of big bike tourists who dust off their superbikes and ride to the nearest Friendship bridge on tours that criss-cross Thailand and Laos. They are cashed up and known for splashing their dollars in remote villages where they enjoy a pit stop for snacks or an overnight stay for acholic celebrations dedicated to retelling the day's adventures and near encounters with the grim reaper.

But they are not given a rousing welcome at border checkpoints even if they top up the low-season bookings in places like Luang Prabang long after the tour groups head home to avoid the rainy season.

Friendship bridges in name but the reality is that

since the day they opened the countries that built them have trussed them up in red tape. One challenge focuses on the fact that crossing a Friendship Bridge is not as simple as opening the throttle on your BMW for a 60 seconds sprint across the bridge. You will have to load the bike on a pick-up truck and pay for the crossing. That unceremonious entry depends on your paperwork being in order and your ability to suss out the obstacle course that funds and nurtures officials in bureaucratic bliss. Around four departments at each end of the bridge are involved in making the crossing for motorcycle tourists as difficult as humanly possible.

They include immigration, customs, tourist police, land transport and some instance governor's offices to pre-approve motorcycle paperwork ahead of the crossings.

Whatever the process at one end of the bridge, the entire routine repeats itself at the opposite end. In Laos, the process is fine-tuned with additional rules and demands for overtime payments. One rule that upsets motorcycle tourists entering Laos is the requirement that for groups of four bikes or more they must hire an official guide (sometimes local police) to ride pillion or sit in a back-up vehicle for the duration of the Lao visit. In an episode reported at a border checkpoint earlier this month, Lao officials fined four travellers riding two motorbikes THB5,000 each despite the four-plus rule being based on bikes, not riders and pillions.

Friendship bridges between Thailand and Laos are essential to ease the transport of containers and heavy-duty transport on routes that link to China, but they also have a tourism role and the early promise of using them to encourage overland tourism, both by car and motorcycle has long been ditched or ignored. This April, the Mekong Tourism Forum will meet in Bagan to promote regional tourism. Friendship bridges should be on the agenda.

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A trip down Bangkok's memory lane

Organised by the Creative Economy Agency, Bangkok Design Week 2020, 1 to 9 February, will be held under the concept "Resilience: New potential for living".

JOINING hands with 60 organisations and 2,000 creators will join BKKDW 2020 to present ways to support the city in facing future challenges, particularly from population growth.

The festival will showcase collaborative efforts to promote living together in diversity, creating a safe and secure society and improving access to public services.

To highlight Bangkok's status as one of the UNESCO's Creative Cities, this year's edition of BKKDW will expand its creative venues in Charoen Krung, Talad Noi, to include Samyan, Ari, Pradipat and Thonglor and Ekamai.

Visitors can enjoy activities in each area that will showcase the charm of Bangkok. Besides, the festival will offer chances for visitors to meet creative thinkers, designers, and discover their inventive ideas through workshops held 1 to 9 February.

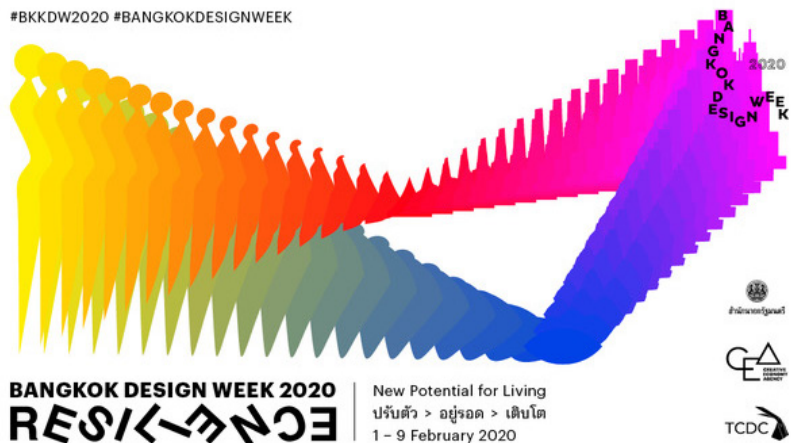
Highlights will include "Bangkok #Safezone Shelter" and an Air Quality Pavilion" a prototype for a green, safe space from air pollution. Another exhibit "Everlasting Forest by GC" focuses on daily life building and construction under the concept of Bio-Circular-Green economy.

Under the tagline Creative District, the festival promotes Charoen Krung through both commercial activities and community wellbeing.

"Made in Charoen Krung" develops the business potential of the district through traditional art and craft shops in the area.

Follow BKKDW2020 and get the latest updates on creative activities at www.bangkokdesignweek.com.

Organised by the Creative Economy Agency, Bangkok Design Week 2020, 1 to 9 February, will be held under the concept "Resilience: New potential for living".



Super show hall set for Bangkok

A new event space in the heart of the city is set to open soon to enhance Bangkok's position as a competitive



destination capable of hosting mega concerts, events and exhibitions sourced in Southeast Asia.

Located at the entertainment destination Show DC, the 7,000 sqm 'Show DC Hall' uses the latest technology and boasts a complete suite of facilities to host domestic and international events.

Situated on the sixth floor of Show DC, the multi-purpose facility can accommodate up to 7,000 people standing and 4,000 seated, making it one of the largest indoor event spaces in the city capable of hosting concerts and events, as well

as supporting Thailand's meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (MICE) sector. Show DC Hall will be completed in the first quarter of 2020.

Show DC chief executive officer Goh Soo Sing commented: "SHOW DC Hall will complement our established 90,000 sqm of outdoor event space that has become the number one choice for event organisers and brands who wish for a large-scale outdoor space in the heart of the city."

Show DC Hall will complement the current event facilities at SHOW DC which includes small and medium-sized indoor spaces as well as the outdoor Show DC Arena that can cater up to 90,000 for large-scale concerts.

Global tourism up 4%

UNWTO reports international tourism continues to outpace the global economy.

GLOBAL tourist arrivals reach 1.5 billion in 2019 according to the latest UNWTO World Tourism Barometer and the UNWTO forecasts growth will continue.

It represents a 4% increase on the previous year and the 10th consecutive annual growth. The same rate is also forecast for 2020, confirming tourism as a leading and resilient economic sector, especially in view of current uncertainties.

All regions saw a rise in international arrivals in 2019. However, uncertainty surrounding Brexit, the collapse of Thomas Cook, geopolitical and social tensions and the global economic slowdown all contributed to slower growth in 2019, when compared to the exceptional rates of 2017 and 2018. This slowdown affected mainly advanced economies and particularly Europe and Asia and the Pacific.

Forecasting future trends, UNWTO says tourism should grow 3% to 4% in 2020, an outlook reflected in the latest UNWTO Confidence Index, which indicates cautious optimism.

The index showed 47% of participants believe tourism will perform better and 43% at the same level as of 2019. Major sporting events, including the Tokyo Olympics, and cultural events such as Expo 2020 Dubai, are expected to have a positive impact on the sector.

The Middle East emerged as the fastest-growing region for international tourism arrivals in 2019, growing at almost double the global average (+8%).

Growth in Asia and the Pacific slowed down but still showed above-average growth, with international arrivals up 5%.

Europe, where growth was also slower than in previous years (+4%), continues to lead in terms of international arrivals numbers, welcoming 743 million international tourists last year (51% of the global market). The Americas (+2%) showed a mixed picture as many island destinations in the Caribbean

consolidated their recovery after the 2017 hurricanes while arrivals fell in South America due partly to ongoing social and political turmoil. Limited data available for Africa (+4%) points to continued strong results in North Africa (+9%) while arrivals in Sub-Saharan Africa grew slower in 2019 (+1.5%).

Against a backdrop of global economic slowdown, tourism spending continued to grow, most notably among the world's top 10 spenders.

France reported the strongest increase in international tourism expenditure among the world's top ten outbound markets (+11%), while the United States (+6%) led growth in absolute terms, aided by a strong dollar.

However, some large emerging markets such as Brazil and Saudi Arabia reported declines in tourism spending. China, the world's top source market saw outbound trips increase by 14% in the first half of 2019, though expenditure fell 4%.

Bali to lure MICE business

QUOTING a report in Beritabali.com, Bali Discovery warns the island's travel industry to prepare for a change in direction from mass to upscale tourism.

Bali has no shortage of tourists, but tourism officials at Indonesia's

volcanic eruptions.

Beritabali.com quoted the head of the Bali Tourism Service, I Putu Astawa, the top tourism official in Bali province, who was speaking at an interactive dialogue themed "Bali's Economy in 2020 Dominated by



top tourist destination claim earnings are down and the destination is too comfortable with mass tourism.

Nothing new there, but authorities are calling on the travel industry to pursue events related tourism often called MICE an abbreviation for 'Meetings, Incentives Conferences and Exhibitions' in preference to mass tourism promotions.

The only downside of the events tourism market is the need for stability, and in the past, that has not been the strongest element the industry could rely on in the face of earthquakes and

Tourism" held earlier this month.

Astawa said Bali should intensify promotions in the MICE market sector in 2020 while, at the same time, presenting special tourism events in Bali that include the Kintamani Chinese Festival 8 February, the Bali and Beyond Travel Fair in June 2020, and the Mekepong Governor's Cup (Bull Race) in July 2020.

In 2019 some 6.7 million foreign tourists visited Bali, according to the head of the Bali Center for Statistics (BPS). That's about 600,000 foreign tourists visiting Bali every month.



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Gambling ban dents Sihanoukville fortunes

An online gambling ban in Cambodia has dented the fortunes of casinos in Sihanoukville while tourists head for the province's island resorts.

HIT by a ban on online gambling Sihanoukville's once-prosperous casinos are dropping likes flies.

Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen halted online gambling provisionally last August following through with a permanent ban effective 1 January, to counter money laundering.

Online gambling bolstered the fortunes of bricks and mortar casinos across the country and according to local media represented up to 25% of all the tax revenue sourced from 136 casinos nationwide.

In Sihanoukville, the immediate fallout from the ban culled employment for 7,000 people who had migrated from factory and farm employment to work in the resort's 75 casinos. Following the permanent ban, just 36 casinos remain in business.

A booming coastal port blessed with more than 227 hotels according to Booking.com, Sihanoukville is losing its economic momentum that was mainly driven by Chinese investments and cash flow.

Pessimistic comments on Facebook pages penned by Sihanoukville fans claim an invasion of Chinese tourists have taken over the city's three popular beaches of Serendipity, Otres and Ochheuteal. In response, tourists of other nationalities scurry to quieter island resorts.

Cambodia's Pacific Asia Travel Association Chapter president Thourn Sinan appears to agree. He said in an interview late last year: "Although the number of other tourists visiting mainland Preah Sihanouk province has decreased due to the influx of Chinese nationals, tourists visiting the province's islands has increased. Tourists have always enjoyed going to the seaside, but now the most attractive place for non-Chinese tourists in Preah Sihanouk province is

the islands."

TTR Weekly asked a reliable tour guide service in the town for a comment that got the terse response, "don't believe everything you read" and "we cannot answer in a couple of sentences."

Sihanoukville's fairy tale ending has gone missing. Once a sleepy town blessed by the presence of three superb beaches just beyond the city limits, so-called over-tourism coupled

Booking.com quotes a rate of THB41,137 during mid-February. Of the 32 islands in Preah Sihanouk, the most popular ones are Koh Rong and Koh Rong Samloen that have resorts ranging from budget to five stars.

Top-end resorts

Bangkok's Asian Trails chairman, Luzi Matzig, has a stake in the luxury Royal Sands on Koh Rong island offering 67



with uncontrolled hotel expansion now threatens its future.

It's evident in the proliferation of real estate advertisements. We counted four resorts on the mainland and islands for sale this month.

One of them, the up-scale 27-villa Song Saa Resort, located a 45-minute ferry ride from the town's port, is up for sale according to publicity released by JLL a global real estate agency.

The resort's name that roughly translates into "Sweetheart" occupies the two islands of Ouen and Bong linked by a rustic footbridge. Song Saa had all the hallmarks of a fairy tale in the making after investors from Hong Kong optimistically leased the two tiny islands for 99 years in 2007 and built an eco-lodge with villas.

The price for a luxury holiday break on the private twin islands according to its website will set you back around USD2,000 a night.

up-scale villas with pools and direct access to Sok San beach. The ferry transfer from the Sihanoukville's port to the resort takes 40 minutes. Booking.com quotes a rate of THB17,783 inclusive for an Ocean View Villa during mid-February.

Six Senses with 40 villas is located on Krabery Island, a 3 km ferry crossing (around 15 minutes) from the jetty at mainland Ream National park. The best Booking.com rate starts at THB32,677 a night for a stay mid-February.

Alila Villas marketed through Hyatt is located on Russey Island, which is part of the Koh Rong archipelago. The 62-villa resort is a short 10-minute ferry crossing from the Ream commune jetty, 25 km from Sihanoukville town and 5 km from the airport. For a mid-February, stay, Booking.com quotes a rate of THB19,396 a night inclusive.

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Empty Esky helps Australia bounce back

Tour company AAT Kings joins the 'Empty Esky' campaign to support tourism communities devastated by Australia's bushfires.

AAT Kings is launching Bushfire Relief Giveback not-for-profit trips starting on the Lunar New Year's eve 24 January.

Additionally, parent company The Travel Corporation has donated AUD 100,000 to the NSW Rural Fire Service to support volunteer firefighters.

Backing the #EmptyEsky movement and regional tourism businesses in Australia, AAT Kings is inviting the travel industry and the wider community to join it on newly launched not-for-profit Bushfire Relief Giveback Experiences – a selection of day tours and short breaks across New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.

The trips are designed to help provide immediate support directly to tourism communities that have been affected by the devastating bushfires.

AAT Kings transports participants and their empty Eskies, to visit local markets, cafes and stores, where guests will have free time to wander through the town, spend with the local shopkeepers and fill their Esky or reusable bag with locally made products.

To enrich the experience, guests will also meet locals who will tell stories of recovery and share firsthand how best to help these destinations.

AAT Kings' managing director, Matthew Cameron-Smith stated: "Having worked with Australian tourism operators for over 100 years, AAT Kings live and breathe these communities and they need us now more than ever. We've worked with local businesses to bring much-needed benefit through the tourism economy directly back to restaurants, cafes,

farmers markets and local stores, to help start providing immediate support to the regions that need it the most."

Empty Esky co-founder, Erin Boutros added: "Partnering with AAT Kings offers our community the opportunity to put their pledges into action and visit fire-affected towns. Since the Empty Esky campaign launched, we have witnessed firsthand the spirit of Australians. The

#EmptyEsky to Shoalhaven Ex-Sydney."

The trip blurb and outline: "Journey to Kangaroo Valley and take in morning tea at a local café, before heading to Nowra Farmers Market. The market is jam-packed with local farmers produce for guests to taste and buy and fill up their #emptyesky, knowing every cent goes directly to the growers. There will also be the



'Empty Esky' trips will lead the way in effectively supporting bushfire affected towns as they recover."

All of AAT King's Bushfire Recovery Giveback trips are 100% not-for-profit and have been designed in collaboration with the local community to inject funds into small businesses and support farmers.

Cameron-Smith added: "Our nation and the world have been deeply affected as we watched parts of our country and wildlife ravaged by the fires, we are so privileged to be able to take advantage of our experience & network, to facilitate bringing as many visitors as we can back to our most affected townships. Working in partnership is the best way that we know how to help, and we invite the industry to join us in supporting our fellow Australians to get back on their feet for the long-term."

The first-day trip took place Friday, 24 January under the title "Bushfire Recovery Giveback Experience:

opportunity to meet up with some of the community who have been affected by the bushfires, as they share stories of recovery over a locally-sourced lunch at Bangalay Dining."

More trips and short breaks will be announced in the coming weeks.

To make a booking – go to aatkings.com/bushfire-recovery

About AAT Kings: Since 1912, AAT Kings as a tour operator has been helping people from all over the world discover and explore Australia and New Zealand from top to bottom on holiday options including Guided Holidays, Short Breaks and Day Tours.

Empty Esky: A successful grassroots campaign that inspires people to go on a road trip to Australian towns affected by the bushfires and spend their money on local goods and services to inject money back into the community – take an #emptyesky and fill it with local produce, goods and treats.



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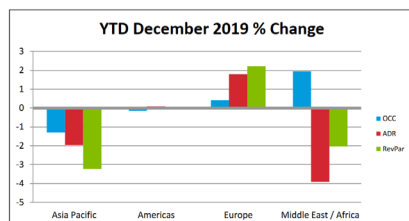
Asia Pacific hotels suffer revenue dip

Asia Pacific's hotels suffer performance setbacks according to STR data for 2019.

HOTELS in the Asia Pacific region reported a negative performance with occupancy slipping 1.3% and the average rate down 2%.

STR measures the 2019 performance of the region's hotels using three key performance metrics.

In US dollar constant currency, 2019 versus 2018, STR data on hotels



in the Asia Pacific region showed occupancy declined 1.3% to 69.3%, average daily rate (ADR) dropped 2.0% to USD98.73, and revenue per available room (RevPAR) slumped 3.2% to USD68.38

STR highlighted local currency performance in specific cities for 2019 compared with 2018.

Sydney

Occupancy: -1.9% to 82.5%

Average daily rate (ADR): -3.0% to AUD220.50

Revenue per available room (RevPAR): -4.8% to AUD181.81

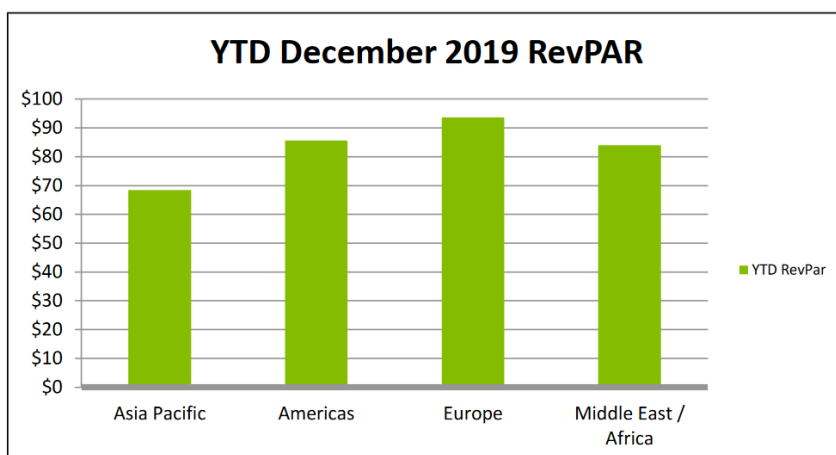
Sydney performance had been trending downward for most of the year, largely due to supply growth (+2.0%) and overall flat demand. STR analysts note that the devastating bushfires in Australia created an added burden on performance late in the year, especially in the areas surrounding Sydney.

The worst drop in December RevPAR occurred in Sydney Drive Regional (-29.5%), a submarket within a two-hour-drive radius of Greater Sydney.

Delhi, India

Occupancy: +4.9% to 73.0%

ADR: +3.4% to INR6,581.95



RevPAR: +8.5% to INR4,801.75

Delhi recorded its fifth consecutive year of RevPAR growth, and the absolute occupancy level was the market's highest for any year since 2007. STR analysts point to a 7.1%

jump in demand as the driver of that performance. November was the strongest month of the year for RevPAR growth due to the Diwali festival calendar shift from November in 2018 to October in 2019.

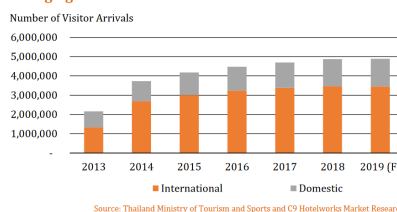
C9 Hotelworks releases new Khao Lak report

INCREASING hotel supply in Khao Lak with stable tourism growth reflects a destination market that is now entering a new development cycle, the latest C9 Hotelworks' report focusing on the popular beach destination just north of Phuket.

Author and managing director of C9 Hotelworks, Bill Barnett commented: "The upcoming second gateway Greater Phuket airport is expected to push the destination to diversify offerings in a more mature tourism scenario."

Khao Lak, located in Thailand's Phang Nga province, differentiates itself from Phuket's mass tourism by appealing to Western travellers. Asian visitors are in the minority in Khao Lak as they prefer to visit the popular west coast beaches on Phuket island.

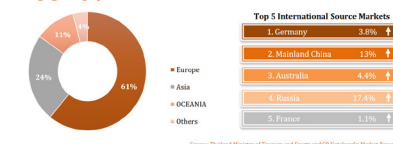
Phang Nga Visitor Arrivals



Source: Thailand Ministry of Tourism and Sports and C9 Hotelworks Market Research

Market share ratio between international and domestic segments stable over past three years, averaging 71% and 29%, respectively

Phang Nga Geographic Source of Business - 2018



Source: Thailand Ministry of Tourism and Sports and C9 Hotelworks Market Research

As of year-to-date November 2019, Phang Nga province recorded 970,692 guest arrivals at accommodation establishments with most of the hotels concentrated on Khao Lak's main bay.

Tourism demand remained stable last year with a slight 0.7% growth y-o-y as of YTD Nov 2019 according to the report's preamble.



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Emirates marks 20 years flying to Bahrain

Emirates celebrates 20 years of operations in Bahrain, offering four flights daily.

Emirates celebrates its 20th year flying to Bahrain from Dubai International Airport this Saturday, 25 January.

A Boeing 777-200 flew the route and 20 years later, more than 6.7 million passengers have flown with Emirates on the route to Dubai –four times the population of Bahrain.

Emirates senior vice president commercial operations for Gulf, Middle East and Central Asia, Adil Al Ghaith said: “The connectivity Emirates continues to be pivotal for business and tourism in Bahrain.”

Bahrain's economy is one of the most diverse in the region, and Emirates helps to play an important role in supporting the country's thriving trade relationship with the UAE, currently estimated at USD878 million in 2018.

Emirates' four daily flights, with a cargo capacity of up to 23 tonnes per flight on the Boeing 777-300ER, have helped to facilitate the carriage of close to 130,000 tonnes of cargo



to and from Bahrain over the last five years, transporting goods such as fruits, vegetables, meat, machinery and equipment. Emirates' global network has also enabled local exporters to connect to both developed and emerging markets in the east.

Emirates is the world's largest operator of the A380, with 115 in its fleet flying to 53 destinations across the

globe. It has also brought its flagship to the Kingdom to participate at the Bahrain International Airshow for three editions of the event, showcasing its signature products and services on this aircraft to trade and industry stakeholders, as well as the general public. The Emirates A380 has received over 20,000 visits throughout the three airshows.

STB refreshes Sabah branding

SABAH Tourism Board has launched its new brand, Enchanting Sabah, which has been featured in promotional collateral since 1 January and will spearhead promotions worldwide.

Created by the STB's Communication and Digital Division, the board will churn out new promotional collateral throughout this year to support and complement its marketing efforts.

“Sabah has always been known as an eco-destination way before the term eco became popularised,” said Sabah Tourism Board chairman Ken Pan. “The conservation efforts in Sabah should be commended from having the Sepilok Orang Utan



Rehabilitation Center which has been in operation since 1964, Selingan Island Turtle Hatchery since 1977 and of course in the recent years the Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Center and soon to come, a Pangolin Sanctuary.”

Commenting on the branding and

promotions, Sabah Tourism Board general manager, Pn Noredah Othman said: “Consistent branding helps with visibility in the sphere of marketing and advertising. Sabah Tourism constantly finds cost-effective yet impactful marketing activities in order to achieve our destination promotion. The move to create brand sentiment will help the

public recognize a Sabah advert when placed either in mainstream media or online. It's now time to showcase and highlight the Enchanting elements of Sabah.”

Link to Enchanting Sabah video – <https://youtu.be/9-H0JnH-pk>



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