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Ninh Binh hosts National Tourism Year

Ninh Binh named as the official launch and closing host for the 2020 National Tourism Year events

VIETNAM'S northern province of Ninh Binh, will host the 2020 National Tourism Year grand opening celebrations, 22 February.

Ninh Bình City is located in the Red River Delta of northern Vietnam close to the Gulf of Tonkin, 100 km south of Hanoi. The province is famous for its karst mountain outcrops similar to Halong bay but inland. Tourism is emerging as a strong economic driver.

According to Vietnam News Agency, the ceremony will be held at the Dinh Tien Hoang De Square in Ninh Binh City and will be broadcast live on the national television channel and the provincial television channel.

Following the opening ceremony an art exhibition and performances, a spectacular firework display will entertain 3,500 delegates along with thousands of locals and visitors.

The opening ceremony is among a raft of activities planned during the National Tourism Year 2020 at various destinations.

According to the organising board, the year's theme is "Hoa Lu – Ancient Capital of a Thousand Years." There are 27 main activities, including the Bai Dinh pagoda festival that will open 30 January, Hoa Lu



festival 1 to 3 April 1-3, and Trang An festival 10 April to the 31 May 2020.

Other events include the Miss Capital ASEAN 2020 final round, the "Yellow Tam Coc – Trang An" tourism week, an international workshop highlighting "xam" singing, a music exchange between provinces known for their world heritage sites, the second Trang An marathon race and Ninh Binh Trade and Tourism Fair.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism will also organise 11 activities while 24 cities and provinces will host 79 events during the year.

Khánh Hòa Province hosted the 2019 National Tourism Year. Hosting passes from one province to the next but the actual events under the tourism year initiative, apart from the opening and closing events, are hosted by various provinces.

EDITOR'S POST

Thailand's popularity dips in Europe

There are certainly devils lurking in the details of Thailand's tourist arrival statistics for 2019.

On the surface, welcoming 39.79 million tourists and clocking up a 4.24% increase to boot deserves an okey-dokey slap on the back for the Ministry of Tourism and Sports. But does it?

Whether you look at the 39.79 million visits rising 4.24%, or the revenue improving 3.05% to reach THB1,876,136.90 million, there are some alarming trends once you move past the headlines.

Yes, China remains the top generating market with 10.9 million visits up 4.36% and revenue hitting THB543,707.33 million up 4.78%, and there are another 10 countries delivering 1 million visits each to Thailand's border checkpoints. Move to the details and discover that of all the 11 top nations on the 1 million a year plus list only two are located outside of Asia – Russia (1.48 million) and the USA (1.16 million).

Among the top five supply markets, China dominates with almost 11 million visits, and if the novel coronavirus retreats during the first quarter of the year, Chinese visits to Thailand could top 12 million by the end of the year.

Thailand's tourist arrivals and revenue from January to December 2019*

Malaysia is the second-largest supply market after China with 4.16 million up 3.64% followed by India in third place with 1.9 million visits up by a remarkable 24.85%. Korea in fourth place delivered 1.88 million

up 5.09%, and Laos in fifth place accumulated 1.84 million visits an improvement of 10.86%.

As for the devil in the details, annual visits and revenue data in recent years confirmed a steady almost unrelenting declines in travel from Europe and the Middle East.

Europe's 6.71 million visits to Thailand slowed yet again in 2019 this time by 0.61% and revenue declined 2.43% estimated at THB461,478.75 million.

On the surface comparisons with China's almost 11 million visits and THB543,707.33 million revenue look forlorn but dismiss the arrivals and focus just on the revenue. The gap shrinks considerably. By improving travel arrivals from Europe by a few percentage points, Thailand would earn a generous upswing in earnings. Easier said than done.

Thailand's tourism planners and industry leaders preferred to take refuge in the Asian travel boom and took their eye off the ball in Europe. Browse the statistics listed under Europe. Russia is the only European nation delivering positive growth in tourism earnings with 13 other European markets reporting negative revenue. Checking the tourist arrivals side of the chart out of 14 countries, identified by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, just five delivered positive visit results in 2019.

Prime markets such as the UK once a bright star for Thai tourism saw a growth of just 0.73% in tourist arrivals. Spain delivered the highest growth rate at 3.92%. Germany traditionally the strongest performer in Europe saw visits to Thailand drop 3.28% and Switzerland always a healthy niche market fell 7.88%.

Little is said about declines from Europe evident over the last few years indicating the blame is not entirely linked to recent foreign exchange fluctuations, Brexit or a softening EU economy. Is it time to revisit the annual tourist arrival data and ask why the tale of the tape, as far as Europe and the Middle East markets are concerned is negative?

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Speakers confirmed for Sabah PATA event

PATA confirms speaker line-up for the annual Adventure Travel Conference and Mart hosted in Sabah 12 to 14 February.

THE Pacific Asia Travel Association confirmed a line-up of international experts from the adventure travel industry who will make presentations at the upcoming PATA Adventure Travel Conference and Mart 2020 (ATCM 2020) in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia.

The event, hosted by Tourism Malaysia and supported by Sabah Tourism and Malaysia Airlines, will be hosted at the Sutera Harbour Resort 12 to 14 February with the theme 'Ahead of the Curve: Authenticity and Sustainability in Adventure.'

"Adventure tourism is one of the fastest-growing niches in the entire tourism sector, and the PATA Adventure Travel Conference and Mart provides the perfect platform for travel trade professionals to gain deeper insights into adventure travel trends and contribute to creating a more responsible travel and tourism industry," said PATA CEO Mario Hardy.

"It is important to note that for travellers, adventure travel offers a unique experience by allowing them to interact with local communities, immerse themselves in the natural environment, and have a positive impact when they travel.

"Meanwhile for destinations, adventure travel provides them with an opportunity to highlight their natural and cultural values, and in turn promote the preservation of the environment and the responsible and sustainable development of travel and tourism."

"Tourism Malaysia and Sabah Tourism, in organising this event which highlights their commitment in the development of a more responsible and sustainable travel and tourism industry," he added.

This year's conference programme will feature two concurrent handson workshops on Sustainability and



Authenticity, led by Eric Ricaurte, Founder & CEO, Greenview and Dan Moore, CEO, Pandion Consulting & Facilitation, respectively.

Other confirmed speakers include Graham Harper, Director – Sustainability & Social Responsibility, PATA; Irshad Mubarak, Owner, Junglewalla Tours; Jessica Yew, Co-Founder & Director, Sticky Rice Travel; Natasha Martin, Adventure Tourism Expert; Pakkanut Bansiddhi, DVM, MSc, PhD, Lecturer, Department of Companion Animals and Wildlife Clinics, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Chiang Mai University; Raj Gyawali, Founder, Socialtours, and Theerapat Trungprakan, President, Thai Elephant Alliance Association.

The conference will explore various topics including 'State of Adventure Tourism', 'Who Are Our Adventure Tourists?', 'Creating Meaningful Adventures', 'Sustainable Elephant Experiences', 'How to Use Responsible Travel Initiatives to Attract Adventure Tourists', and 'Starting Small: How to Integrate Adventure Elements Into Your Tour.'

In addition to the one-day conference designed to support PATA's

vision for the responsible development of tourism, the event includes a one-day travel mart that will bring together 60 buyers from 26 destinations with 60 sellers from 10 destinations.

Situated on the island of Borneo, Sabah is the second largest of 13 states in Malaysia. It shares the island with Sarawak, Brunei and Indonesian Kalimantan. With its lush rainforests, sub-aquatic splendour, magnificent mountains, and colourful cultures, Sabah is a treasure trove for the adventurous spirits.

Sabah is well-connected domestically and internationally. The main gateway to Sabah is the Kota Kinabalu International Airport (KKIA) situated about 20 minutes away from the city.

Presently Sabah enjoys almost 100 direct international flights that connect to major cities including Malaysia's capital city Kuala Lumpur (via Kuala Lumpur International Airport), Seoul (Korea ROK), Hong Kong SAR and Shenzhen (China), Singapore, Jakarta (Indonesia), Taipei (Chinese Taipei), Manila (Philippines), Bandar Seri Begawan (Brunei), Tokyo (Japan) and Perth (Australia).

Sihanoukville in focus

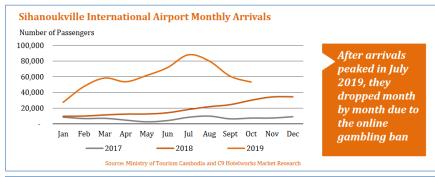
New C9 Report on Sihanoukville Cambodia's coastal gaming boomtown delves into the pros and cons of a runway tourism economy.

HOW did a Cambodian coastal village transform into a megacity and why are developers asking what will come next?

C9 Hotelworks dives through the data to find out in its latest report. As the country's online gaming ban becomes a key market disruptor, the C9 Hotelworks' market update, authored by managing director Bill Barnett, focuses on the current and anticipated market dynamics that are at play in Sihanoukville.

Once a peaceful coastal village set in southwest Cambodia, it attracted mostly Western tourists and was once a weekend getaway destination for locals.

However, starting in 2017, a boom in Chinese investment and travel driven by the Belt and Road Initiative transformed the seaside town dramatically with critics saying it has degenerated into the chaos of a perennial construction site. The emerging-market has drawn attention from various segments, especially the gambling sector and brought hundreds of thousands of mainland Chinese





Mainland China accounts for 38% of total passenger arrivals as of YTD Oct 2019, posting a CAGR of 43% between 2015 to 2018

workers and investors to the city.

Before 2016, only limited domestic and charter flights served Sihanoukville airport. As of YTD October 2019, the city's main getaway Sihanoukville International Airport hosted 602,755 passenger arrivals, which is a 266% y-o-y growth compared to the same period in 2018. Land values, rents and condominium

sales prices have skyrocketed during a three-year period due to the surging demand and massive development of the port town and surrounding beach resorts and islands.

Philippines: Travel on target

TWO Asian nations, South Korea and China figured as the top two source markets for travel to the Philippines during the 11 months, January to November 2019.

The Department of Tourism reported last week foreign tourist arrivals hit 7.4 million up by 15.58% year-on-year.

South Korea delivered 1,785,357 tourist arrivals, followed by China 1,626,309, and the United States with 954,952.

China continues to be the fastest-growing market, with a growth rate of 40.2% during the 11 months, but the outlook for this year is grim due to the spread of the novel coronavirus. Last week, airlines suspended flights from China, and at the weekend two charter airlines cut a tour series short

and repatriated 500 Chinese from the Philippines back to their home city of Wuhan where the virus was first detected a month earlier.

The Department of Tourism Secretary, Bernadette Romulo-Puyat, estimates that the country will hit 8.1 million for the entire year.

"If the December figures are the same as last year, for sure we're going to be getting at least 8.1 million visitors. The target is 8.2 million, but as I always say, I'm still for the revenue than the numbers. It's still good," the DOT Secretary told reporters during the press conference.

Boracay remained as the top tourist destination last year, with 1.6



foreign visitors, followed by Cebu which attracted 1.4 million tourists, and Davao del Sur with 1.3 million.

The data on international visitor arrival comes from arrival cards filled out by foreign nationals and collected by the Bureau of Immigration and does not differentiate between business or leisure travellers.

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Myanmar Ballooning up, up and away

Ballooning is taking off in Myanmar, with new destinations added for seasonal flights and hotair balloon safaris, as Keith Lyons discovers.

Keith Lyons

A hot-air balloon flight over the ancient city of Bagan in central Myanmar must rate of one of the top 'must-do' experiences in Southeast Asia, with the evocative image of dozens of balloons gliding over the pagoda-strewn plains featuring on the front covers of guidebooks, magazines and brochures.

Now in its 21st year, pioneers Balloons Over Bagan (https://www.balloonsoverbagan.com/) with its distinctive burgundy-coloured balloons decorated with a gold motif logo, spread its operations to Shan state's Inle Lake in 2013

This month the company, part of the Memories Group since late 2017, commences the second season flying at the off-thebeaten-track Loikaw, the capital of Kayah state, best known for its 'long-neck' Padaung women. Balloons Over Loikaw has daily flights during the short January-February season (with two-day balloon safaris in two locations also possible),

while Balloons Over Inle (https://www.balloonsoverbagan.com/services/balloons-over-inle) operates from early November to mid-March, coinciding with the peak tourist months – and also the driest, calmest, coolest time of year.

Visitors to Inle Lake, the secondlargest in Myanmar (116 square kilometres), invariably board a long-tail





boat to explore its lake-dweller Intha villages, leg-rowing fishermen, craft workshops and floating gardens.

Travel agent Mu Kyi who works for Mr A Tun Travel (nangmuskyi1985@gmail.com) in Nyaungshwe is one of a few people in the travel business from the Pa-O hill tribe minority groups. He explains that the balloon flights, as well as providing a novel way to get

a real appreciation the terrain, also spark the curiosity of visitors about exploring on foot or bicycle around the lake and its hinterland.

The option of a balloon flight (USD350) gives travellers a unique bird's eye view of the topography of the lake and its human habitation. "The

view from above gives you a whole new perspective on the landscape," says Dustin Main who runs 'un-tours' to Myanmar (dustinmain.com/tour-to-myanmar). Having explored on the ground – and on the water – for more than half a dozen years around Inle lake, Main says a balloon flight can reveal new insights into the lake, which is one of the highest in Myanmar at 880m (2,900 feet) above sea level.

The excursions begin pre-dawn, with early-morning wake-up calls and short transfers to Nyaungshwe's canal jetty for those staying in the main settlement servicing the lake. Guests domiciled at resorts on the long lake itself are ferried in long-tail boats, across the lake to the western shore, to the main launch area – though this can change depending on the wind direction. As well as life-jackets, warm blankets are provided, as mornings can be misty and chilly.

After a safety briefing and hot drink, guests can observe the balloon's inflation alongside local villagers who emerge from their houses to witness the spectacle. With just six or eight in a basket, there's an intimate atmosphere, and mounting anticipation. Veteran Yorkshire pilot Dave Sutcliffe adds some humour to proceedings, alleviating the nervous expectation fueled by caffeine.

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Sarawak promotes festival calendar

Sarawak lines up its musical and cultural festivals, adding a new music festival at the state's cultural village in Damai.

IN the newsletter, STB promises visitors they will "experience a whole new level of music performances led by a cast of famous musicians".

A brand new addition to Sarawak calendar, the festival will be held at the Sarawak Culture Village on Damai beach. It will bring in renowned artists from all around the world to play different music genres in an outdoor setting. The venue will also host an







Serian-176613146337554

The state's flagship event remains the annual Rainforest World Music Festival, 10 to 12 July 2020, a threeday music festival celebrating world music. RWMF presents workshops and concerts to an audience of 6,000.

all-day bazaar.

For more information on ticket admission, visit the official Facebook page on https://www.facebook.com/ BMFL2020/.

Danu Lake Festival 2020 will be hosted at Tasik Danu Lake in Serian from 3 to 5 April 2020.

The festival started in 2018 to promote the beauty of the lake and enhance the economy of the local community in Serian.

Activities include kayaking, tug of war, duck catching, food fairs, exhibitions, beauty pageant at the Pentas Rakyat (People's Stage).

Serian is around 64 km from the state capital of Kuching.

For more information, visit the official Facebook page at www.facebook.com/Pesta-Tasik-Danu-

Sabre snatches up OYO account

SABRE Corporation has signed a strategic long-term global partnership with OYO Hotels & Homes.

With this partnership, OYO will be connected to almost 900,000 travel agents globally, through the GDS connectivity solution powered by Sabre Hospitality Solutions' SynXis platform.

Sabre says it will help OYO generate bookings and open up additional revenue opportunities for its asset owners worldwide.

OYO Hotels & Homes global chief strategy officer, Maninder Gulati said: "Asset owners are the backbone of our business at OYO, and this partnership

will help owners generate additional demand for the properties and broaden their reach."

Under this agreement, OYO Hotels & Homes will be connected to Global Distribution Systems (GDS), including Sabre, and in addition to linking the chain's portfolio to numerous distribution channels.

"We are enabling a new distribution model for OYO and increasing their exposure to global markets... It supports travel agents to cater to the ever-changing needs of their customers," said Sabre Hospitality Solutions chief commercial officer, APAC Frank Trampert.









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Emirates flies to new service to Penang

Penang will become Emirates' second destination in Malaysia.

EMIRATES plans a new daily service from Dubai to Penang International Airport, via Singapore starting 9 April 2020.

Emirates' flight to Penang will be a linked service with Singapore, allowing passengers to travel easily between the two cities.

Penang will become Emirates' second destination in Malaysia after Kuala Lumpur served by three flights daily since 1996.

The flight will be operated by an Emirates Boeing 777-300ER aircraft in a three-class configuration, offering eight private suites in First Class, 42 lie-flat seats in Business Class and 304

Flight no	From/ to	Departure time	Arrival time
EK348	Dubai/ Singapore	02:30	14:05
	Singapore/ Penang	15:35	17:15
EK349	Penang/ Singapore	22:20	23:50
	Singapore/ Dubai	01:40	04:55

spacious seats in Economy Class.

The new route enables travellers from the Northern cities of Malaysia to enjoy convenient onward connections from Dubai to destinations in Europe, North America and the Middle East.

Located on the North-western coast of Malaysia, the state comprises a mainland portion as well as an island, connected by Malaysia's two longest road bridges.

Penang is the country's secondlargest populated city and is known for its rich heritage and architecture, vibrant multicultural society, modern entertainment and retail options, cuisine as well as the natural beauty of its beaches and hills. The city is home to a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a variety of tourist attractions.

"Penang is a major centre for tourism, business travel, as well as medical tourism and the increased levels of inbound travel is consistent with the growth in numbers of visitors to the country. We have been serving Malaysia through our flights to Kuala Lumpur for more than 20 years, with three-times daily service, and the



introduction of flights to Penang will help us meet growing demand from leisure and business travellers, both to and from Malaysia. We are also pleased that the fifth freedom flights between Penang and Singapore will connect two sister cities and increase connectivity for passengers in Southeast Asia," said Emirates chief commercial officer Adnan Kazimat.

To book and for more information on Emirates and its global network visit https://www.emirates.com.

Centara supports local community

CENTARA Grand Hua Hin 8th Annual Scholarship Ceremony presented THB 150,000 worth of scholarships and gifts to underprivileged children earlier this month.



The annual scholarship ceremony hosted at the hotel's Colonial Hall, support the Hua Hin's local community.

Led by David Martens, general manager & corporate director of operations Hua Hin, Krabi, Samui & Vietnam, the event also welcomed Sirapan Kamolpramote, adviser to the

Mayor of Hua Hin, Soraya Homchuen, director of Tourism Authority of Thailand (Prachuap Khirikhan Office) and Wassana Srikanchana, Oresident of the Cha-Am Hua Hin Tourism Business Association.

They joined the ceremony to congratulate the students, personally presenting each child with scholarships and gifts such as bikes, radio, mobile phones, sports equipment as well as school uniforms.

By partnering with Jamsai Publishing Thailand, the hotel also sponsored 500 brand new books for school libraries, broadening the range of resources to which they can refer students.

Martens said: "My team and I are very glad to see another successful year that Centara Grand Hua Hin is able to take part in supporting the local community and improve early childhood education in Hua Hin."



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