



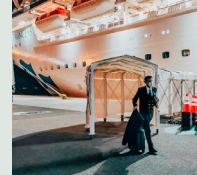
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ITB Berlin: The refund nightmares begin

Stress and nightmares surface as the operative descriptions following ITB Berlin's decision to cancel the world's largest travel show.

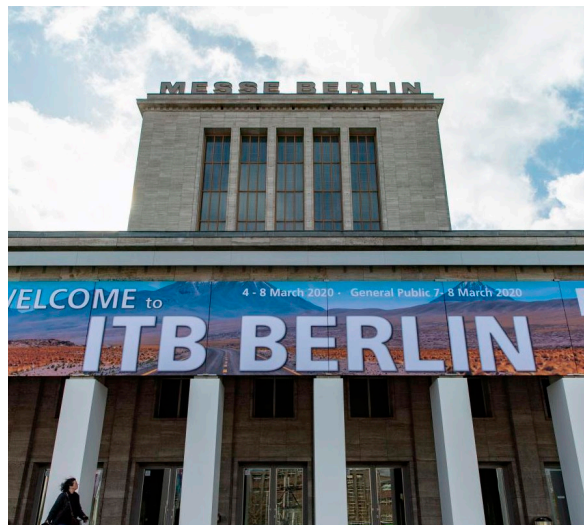
ONE leading tour operator called ITB Berlin's cancellation last Friday a nightmare as he tries to reach airlines and talk to the show organiser to secure a refund.

Phoenix Voyages Group's president, Edouard George, told TTR Weekly "we have wasted the weekend trying to reach airlines and cancel flights for seven of our staff who were supposed to attend the show."

Claiming there was "absolutely no information if we are going to get a refund or what so ever from the ITB Berlin organisation," he said the company had invested around EUR25 000 to attend ITB, and now we are "hoping it will not be wasted."

The good news for Phoenix Voyage came from a cooperative hotel that lifted most of the cancellation fees. However, bookings for staff from the group's European offices have since been maintained to enable them to conduct sales meetings as most of the short-haul flights were nonrefundable.

Noting there was considerable pressure from the German authorities to cancel the show George said



ITB Berlin should have kept the professional part of the show and cancelled the days when it opens to consumers.

"We have all been fighting hard to explain to our clients that they had to travel, and our destinations are safe etc.but cancelling the biggest travel show in the world will, of course, send a very negative wave to the public, and we may now need several months to recover from the strong economic, social and human negative impact."

HPL Hotels & Resorts vice president sales & marketing, Michael Chua said the last-minute cancellation caused considerable stress.

"My colleague and I are still waiting to hear from the hotel in Berlin if they will refund the hotel costs," he explained, "As for the air tickets we can keep them for one year or get a refund."

HPL sales teams that attend the annual trade fair in Berlin do not have their own booths but work out of country pavilions that the destinations rent directly from

ITB Berlin with participants paying a joining fee to the national tourism offices.

"Our guys are in the individual country booth, but it must be very stressful for those who have invested in rentals and the constructing of booths."

Trade dailies survive

Meanwhile, two travel trade media groups, fvw and TTG Media, that publish daily print editions at the ITB Berlin, went ahead with digital editions published live in Berlin instead. TTG Media Group and Fvw both confirmed three days of e-daily editions that were distributed online.

EDITOR'S POST

Debunking myths: Warmer weather kills Covid-19?

Achieving a degree of clarity is almost impossible due to fake news clutter and half-baked opinions that fuel the chaos surrounding the spread of Covid-19.

What we do know is that this is not a flash-in-the-pan epidemic that comes and goes with swings in seasonal weather conditions. It is also quite evident that with cases reported in more than 70 countries, there are no lucky ones that will remain immune to the threat. We are all in the same boat.

Despite what the US President Donald Trump believes, the arrival of the humid summer season will not kick the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 and the disease it causes, Covid-19, into the trash can.

Wishful thinking? There has been plenty of that recently. Back in January, we hoped the crisis would turn out to be a storm in a teacup; a few months of pain followed by fast recovery. In just a few months, we would sail into calmer waters and travel would be back fueling recovery in Asian economies. Now there are fears this virus could wipe out the region's tourism performance for the entire year inflicting massive declines in tourist arrivals averaging 14 to 20%.

It's a good time to debunk some of the myths starting with: "Will COVID-19 go away on its own in warmer weather?"

Here Marc Lipsitch, Professor of Epidemiology and Director, Center for Communicable Disease Dynamics, Harvard School of Public Health identifies two of the myths and reminds us that intense public

health interventions, not the weather, will save the day.

Myth 1: In 2003, SARS went away on its own as the weather got warmer.

"SARS did not die of natural causes. It was killed by extremely intense public health interventions in mainland Chinese cities, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Thailand, Canada and elsewhere. These involved isolating cases, quarantining their contacts, a measure of "social distancing," and other intensive efforts.

"These worked well for SARS because those who were most infectious were also quite ill in a distinctive way — the sick cases were the transmitters, so isolating the sick curbed transmission.

"In Toronto, SARS resurged after the initial wave was controlled and precautions were discontinued. This resurgence was eventually linked to a case from the first wave. The resurgence confirms that it was control measures that stopped transmission the first time."

Myth 2: The "common cold" coronaviruses are seasonal, with low transmissions in the summer, so SARS-CoV-2 will be too.

"Predicting how a novel virus will behave based on how others behave is always speculative, but sometimes we have to do so when we have little else to go on. So the first problem with this myth is that we don't know whether those coronaviruses, which go by the evocative names like OC43, HKU1, 229E, and NL63, are good analogies for this virus.

"Still, it is worth considering the analogy especially to OC43 and HKU1, which are SARS-CoV2's closest relatives among the seasonal coronaviruses.

"The other reason this is a myth is that seasonal viruses that have been in the population for a long time (like OC43 and HKU1) behave differently from viruses that are newly introduced into the population."

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PATA defers annual summit to 2021

PATA CEO confirms the association's annual summit due to be hosted in the UAE has been cancelled.

JUST weeks after it said the show would go on, the Pacific Asia Travel Association pulled the plug on its annual summit due to take place in Ras Al Khaimah in the UAE, 31 March to 3 April.

PATA CEO Mario Hardy confirmed the decision on Monday saying that "due to evolving dynamics of the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) the annual summit will no longer take place."

The decision was made after discussions with the Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAK TDA) that was underwriting the event, the first PATA summit to be held in the Middle East.

UAE currently has 21 confirmed cases of the Covid-19 virus with five cases cured.

Hardy made the announcement in his frequent "From the Office of the CEO" a blog to members. He stated: "The safety and well-being of our members, industry colleagues and local communities is fundamental in our mission in acting as a catalyst for the responsible development of travel

and tourism. With this in mind, we had come to this tremendously difficult decision."

tickets for the PATA Foundation Charity Dinner, can either transfer the registration fee and Charity Dinner



Expressing disappointment he assured members stakeholders "it was best that we made this decision in a clear and timely manner."

Ras Al Khaimah will now host the PATA Annual Summit 2021 and dates for next year's event will be announced soon.

As for refunds, delegates who paid registration fees or purchased

ticket fee to the PATA Annual Summit 2021 or receive a full refund.

Hardy still needs to announce the schedule for other related meetings such as the PATA Executive Board, Board, and Category and Advisory Committees, as well as the association's Annual General Meeting traditionally held on the sidelines of the summit.

Three ITB trade shows knocked out

ITB India joins its sister events ITB China and ITB Berlin, on a growing list of trade show victims derailed by the Covid-19 worldwide health crisis.

First ITB China announced its cancellation last month followed by ITB Berlin at the weekend just days before the show was due to open. Now ITB India, an inaugural trade fair bows out.

Initially scheduled for 15 to 17 April at Bombay Exhibition Centre, ITB India moves to new dates 7 to 9 April 2021 at the same venue in Mumbai, India.

ITB India blamed the cancellation on the rapid spread of the new



coronavirus that causes the disease Covid-19.

"There is much uncertainty in the region and around the world. The recent developments continue to be challenging, and the upcoming months are very hard to foresee at this stage," the statement read.

ITB India said it would continue

to monitor the situation closely and provide further updates based on official assessments of the overall risk situation.

ITB has just one show left, ITB Asia, that remains on course to convene this October, but travel and hospitality operators will be cautious booking space as long as the Covid-19 outbreak remains a health threat. Bets are off on predicting the end day of this crisis.

ITB India participants can reach the organising team by sending queries with regards to ITB India at exhibitor@itb-india.com. The three-day ITB India 2021 will be supported by the Indo-German Chamber of Commerce.

Covid-19 dents US outbound travel

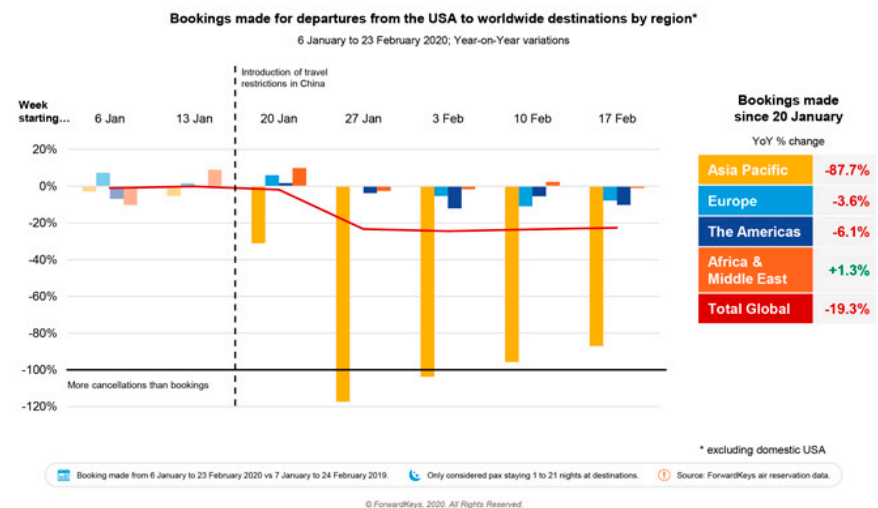
Billed the world's second-largest outbound travel market after China, travel from the USA takes a hit.

COVID-19 could dent holiday and corporate travel bookings from the USA, the world's second-largest outbound travel market after China, according to travel analytics company ForwardKeys.

In its latest study of booking trends, ForwardKeys says that based on five weeks following the imposition of travel restrictions on outbound travel from China (20 January to 17 February 17, there was a 19.3% decline in bookings made for travel from the USA.

The majority of the decline was caused by a collapse in bookings for travel to the Asia Pacific region, down by 87.7%. In other words, relatively few people booked a flight from the USA to the Asia Pacific region in the past five weeks.

The setback in outbound bookings from the USA is not just limited to the Asia Pacific region. A similar

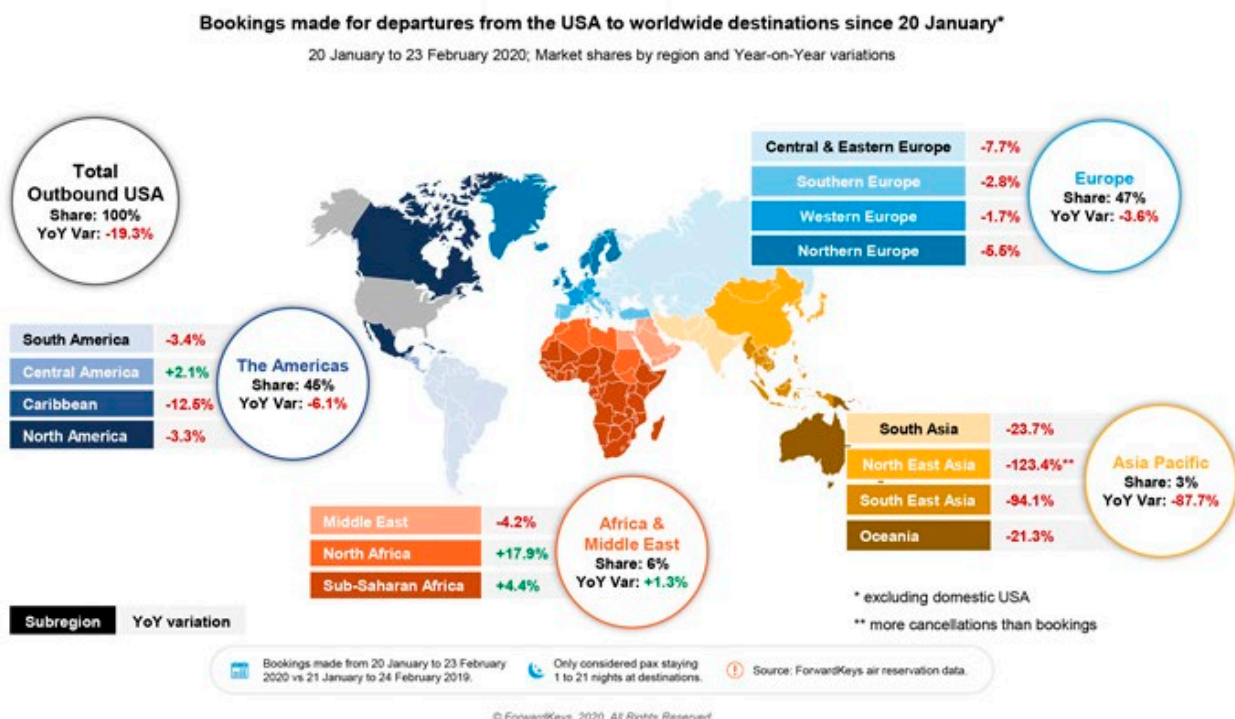


but milder trend has impacted on bookings out of the USA to Europe down 3.6%, and to the Americas, down 6.1%. However, bookings to Africa and the Middle East, which has only a small (6%) share of outbound US travel increased by 1.3%.

Booking data for 15 different regional destinations, show drops in bookings from the USA, in the past five

weeks, with the exception of North Africa, Sub Saharan Africa and Central America, which have seen their bookings rise by 17.9%, 4.4% and 2.1% respectively.

ForwardKeys VP Insights Olivier Ponti said: "Now it's not just China but the world's second-largest and second-highest spending outbound travel market, the USA, which is stalling."



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VFS Global extends eVOA to Vietnam

VFS Global launches an eVOA service for Vietnam starting at USD22 a shot.

VFS Global launches the first online portal to process Vietnam's eVisa on Arrival for all eligible nationalities worldwide.

Vietnam's Vice President Dang Thi Ngoc Thinh signed off on the Memorandum of Understanding during a recent visit to India that authorises VFS Global as the exclusive service provider of the Government of Vietnam to process an electronic Visa On Arrival (eVOA).

VFS Global processes the eVOA through an exclusive partnership with Vietnam's embassy in India. The actual authorisation document that must be presented to immigration officers at the border checkpoint is issued by Immigration authorities in Vietnam.

In response to questions from TTR Weekly, VFS Global head of business development Chris Dix said: "The price for the Vietnam eVOA is USD22 for a normal one-month single entry Vietnam eVOA. The turnaround timeline for this is within two working days of your application submission."

There are different prices depending on the timeframe. The prices for priority visa services (for one-month single entry visa) is USD 27 to receive the visa on the next day of application, and USD33 for same-day processing.

The application has to be submitted before 1215 (Vietnam time) on working days only. Standardised pricing for visa customers across different countries is a key feature of the new Vietnam eVOA solution.

The digitally integrated solution developed by VFS Global as an exclusive service provider to the Embassy of Vietnam in India will offer eVOA applicants a digital wallet/locker (which ensures high levels of data protection). This includes scanned copies of their passport, live facial biometric capture and finally, the receipt of their eVOA approval



letters once approved. Customers can also make online payments using the portal.

Simple steps to obtain an eVOA

1. Visit <https://vietnam.vfsevisa.com/> and complete the easy-to-use application form
2. Upload the required documents

which are securely transferred on the digital wallet and complete the online payment.

3. Once the online payment has been made and the visa decision is approved, eligible travellers will receive their eVOA approval letters directly into their respective digital wallets.

MTF dates move again

THE Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office confirmed on Saturday it was moving the annual Mekong Tourism Forum dates to 25 to 26 August 2020.

Myanmar will host the forum this year in Bagan essentially to promote its status as a UNESCO World Heritage site a designation that was awarded in July 2019.

The MTCO executive director, Jens Thraenhart, confirmed the MTF revised dates while attending a climate change tourism conference in Malta last week.

He was due to lead a Mekong Tourism event, 4 March, at the ITB Berlin this week. However ITB Berlin announced it was complying with federal government instructions and cancelled what is arguably the world's largest travel show.

"We will not be able to organise the 4th MTF Session @ITB Berlin on 4

March in Berlin, under the theme of Visual Storytelling," he said in an email update to stakeholders.

The 2020 Mekong Tourism Forum will focus on the theme of "Achieving Balanced Tourism" in Bagan, Myanmar, hosted by the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism of Myanmar.

Usually, the MTF is held in May, but the ministry moved it forward to April to miss the onset of the rainy season.

Now it looks like the Covid-19 outbreak, not the weather, will have the last say on meeting dates for events this year. If there are no signs of the virus burning itself over the next three months more high profile events will need to be rescheduled or cancelled.

MTCO also released its Mekong Tourism Booklet, to showcase various programmes and initiatives. Download: <http://bit.ly/MekongTourism2020>.

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SCAN FOR MORE

Elephant fund raisers paddle on regardless

Unperturbed by Covid-19, the second annual elephant boat races and river festival got underway in Bangkok at the weekend.

BOAT racing in Bangkok bucked the trend that has seen sports events cancel or postpone for fear of stoking the coronavirus spread.

The second annual Elephant Boat Race and River Festival concluded on the banks Bangkok's Chao Phraya River at the weekend.

The Covid-19 outbreak has caused the cancellation of mega-events worldwide including ITB Berlin this week, but in Bangkok, 16 teams turned out to compete for the trophy and raise funds for elephant welfare projects in Thailand, as hundreds of spectators looked on from the festival grounds.

Teams paddled specially commissioned traditional racing boats decorated with artistic elephant heads rising elegantly above the water, and tails inspired by Thai fish motifs.

The knock-out races took place on a 20 metre stretch of the river in downtown Bangkok with four teams per heat.

On the sidelines of the primary races,



a riverside festival played out. Visitors to the three-day event snacked in luxury tents where they could follow the boat races, view kite flying sponsored by the Thailand Kite Association, and listen to concerts by top Thai artists including Paradox, Oat Pramote and a line-up of international DJs.

A street-food village with pop up food stalls hosted by some of Bangkok's top restaurants and chefs completed the festival offerings.

Organisers of the boat race festival, Anantara Hotels, Resorts & Spas, raise funds through ticket sales to elephant-related projects in Thailand.

PATA finds a face for the future

THE Pacific Asia Travel Association named the PATA Nepal Chapter's chief executive officer, Suresh Singh Budal, its 2020 PATA Face of the Future.



The prestigious honour is open annually to young tourism professionals in the Asia Pacific region. "On behalf of everyone at the

Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), I would like to congratulate Suresh on winning the 2020 PATA Face of the Future award," said PATA CEO Mario Hardy.

"Having worked closely with him as the CEO of the PATA Nepal Chapter, he has been a consistent champion for the tourism industry in Nepal."

As a tourism lecturer in Nepal, he understands the importance of human capital development and empowering the next generation of young tourism professionals, PATA's CEO pointed out.

"This has been highlighted by the growth of the PATA Nepal Student Chapter and by his assistance in bringing PATA Human Capacity Development Programmes to the

country. This award will provide him with greater exposure in Nepal and throughout the industry, allowing PATA the opportunity to further its mission across the region."

Commenting on winning the award, Suresh said: "It is a great honour for me to receive the PATA Face of the Future Award 2020. PATA is an unparalleled public and private partnership organisation, embracing a wide spectrum of tourism industries at international and local levels."

Holding a post-graduate degree in Travel and Tourism Management from the Kathmandu Academy of Tourism and Hospitality, he has been actively engaged with the PATA Nepal Chapter since 2013.



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Diamond Princess captain a hero

Princess Cruises recognises the Diamond Princess captain as a hero for his leadership during the ship's quarantine crisis in Japan.

PRINCESS Cruises praised the captain of Diamond Princess, Gennaro Arma, in a twitter message earlier this week recognising him as a hero along with senior officers and crew following the unprecedented quarantine of the ship in Japan last month.

The Diamond Princess had been held at Yokohama port since the beginning of February and suffered the highest number of coronavirus cases outside of mainland China at one point during the virus outbreak.

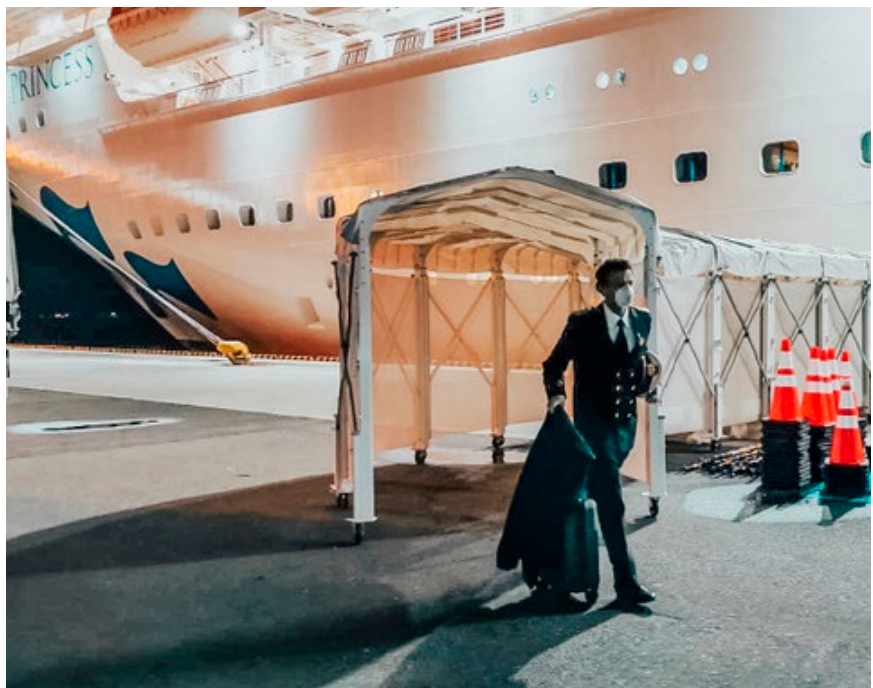
On Sunday, the last of the crew

Royal Cliff's spa wins award

THE Cliff Spa of the Royal Cliff Hotels Group was recently awarded the 2019 Best Spa Destination in Thailand by Haute Grandeur Global Spa Awards.



Winning the award through a rigorous rating process relying on quality feedback from guests, the Cliff Spa demonstrated it offers an extraordinary spa, health and wellness experience. Considered one of the most anticipated awards in the hotel industry, the Haute Grandeur recognises the finest hospitality experiences across seven continents and more than 60 countries and attracts entries from the top luxury brands that vie for the ultimate accolade in excellence annually.



members left the ship and its Italian captain, Gennaro Arma, who had vowed to stay on board until everyone else had left, was the last person to disembark, the Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera reported.

In social media posts on Twitter and Facebook, Princess Cruises said: "Captain Arma was the last to leave Diamond Princess, and he is a hero in the eyes of all of us who are a part of the Princess global community. We thank him and his senior officers for their leadership, along with the service of our exceptional onboard team.

"We offer our sincere gratitude to all of the government agencies in Japan and around the world who worked with our shoreside colleagues to support our guests and team members through this extraordinary time."

During the quarantine onboard Diamond Princess, the captain was quoted as saying: "I am confident that remaining united as a family, we will successfully complete this journey together. The world is watching us. This is an additional reason for all of us to show our strength."

Arma faced the greatest leadership challenge of his career in keeping passengers' spirits up as they were stuck on board, sometimes in windowless cabins, Newsweek reported.

The Twitter post and comments were shared more than 3,000 times. One tweet said: "Bravo Captain!!!!!! You deserve more than an applause and standing ovation as being the leader who not only took care of his passengers but also, more importantly, his crew!!!!"

Another wrote: "Ur leadership gave us hope and courage to finish what we have started."

Carole Welch wrote: "Well done, Captain Arma and all the crew, you worked so hard to keep us all comfortable and reassured during that difficult time."

See:
<https://www.facebook.com/PrincessCruises/>
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EMBRACE A NEW MOMENT IN TIME

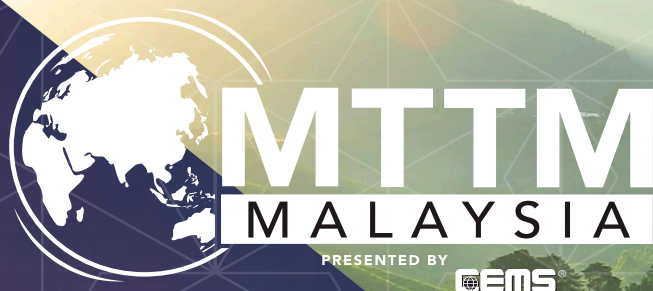
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