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# Be fair to travel agents

**Travel agents are the biggest victims of cancellations, claims MATTA chief in his latest post published on the association's website.**

THE Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (MATTA) is calling on airlines and hotels to be fair to travel agents who are the true victims of the Covid-19 outbreak.

MATTA president Datuk Tan Kok Liang presented the association's call for change in a blog on the MATTA website at the weekend.

He explains: "From late January, the coronavirus outbreak began to spread at an alarming rate and affected global travel with many tourists cancelling or postponing their holidays. In Malaysia, many customers have already paid for tour packages, especially from February to June, and travel agents, in turn, have made payments to airlines, hotels and other suppliers on behalf of their customers.

"With the recent spate of cancellations outbound tour operators may be saddled with an estimated potential liability of MYR500 million collected from customers for tour packages departing from February. However, cancellation policies and decisions are made by the airlines and hotels and many customers are not aware that travel agents can only pass on to customers whatever refund or credit is being offered.

"In most cases, airlines and hotels do not offer refunds for cancellations, and any refunds given may be in the

form of credit, which customers must use by booking a flight or room within a given time period determined by the airlines and hotels.

"Consumers should instead negotiate with their travel agents for amicable solutions rather than waste

Otherwise, travel agents will suffer a double whammy. Customers who insist on full refunds are disregarding a global standard industry practice where payments must be made in advance to secure reservations and once made, any refunds will be



resources pursuing legal action. Such actions are futile simply because local travel agents have disbursed money collected from customers to various suppliers and are unable to get a refund based on terms and conditions governing all affected parties. The crux of the issue is that cancellations were not forced onto customers. Instead, customers were cancelling of their own accord due to fear of contracting Covid-19.

"Airlines and hotels should waive normal cancellation charges.

subject to the cancellation policy of a particular supplier such as an airline, hotel or theme park.

"Regrettably, MATTA has received complaints from travel agents concerning double standards practised by AirAsia, which is not only unfair to travel agents but also confuses the public. This is because the budget airline is offering full or partial refunds to passengers that booked directly with them but not for travel agents that have placed group bookings," concluded Tan.

# EDITOR'S POST

## *Call for clarity on quarantine rules*

Clarity is clearly in short supply when the subject is how to battle Covid-19 at your borders. In the space of just a week, Thailand's Public Health Ministry dithered on how to deal with travellers from four hot-risk countries; China (including Hong Kong and Macau), South Korea, Iran and Italy.

At one point the Ministry of Public Health announced that all travellers from the high-risk countries, including transit passengers, would be quarantined for 14-days. That's a great way to tell people not to bother travelling whatever the state of their health.

Perhaps someone pointed out that most travellers from China and South Korea book holidays of less than 14 days. Who in their right mind would book a holiday to Thailand that starts with a 14-day lockdown in a hotel room?

As quickly as it appeared, the rule vanished, but it left thousands of travel agents worldwide struggling with mixed messages. It cost the country and damaged its reputation far more than the trickle of fake news or Facebook's frenzied scribbles.

So while Thailand's MOPH has worked hard and succeeded in battling the spread of the disease in Thailand gaining the praise of the World Health Organisation, it has dropped the ball when it comes to communicating a clear message to would-be travellers worldwide.

A leading tour operator who knows Thailand

like the back of his hand messaged me from Europe asking: "Yes or no will a traveller from Germany, France, Switzerland be quarantined for 14 days in Thailand once they arrive?"

It proved impossible to get a timely 'yes' or 'no' answer from the Tourism Authority of Thailand, and that is the single agency that the tourism industry relies on to provide clarity when faced with chaos. It's the pointsman for the industry to keep communications on track and having a competent global network to reach the global travel trade when other channels dither. More than ever, TAT needs to make sense of the misguided statements released by ministries to present plausible updates that cut through the clutter. It needs a fast response team.

By now the dust has settled. It appears travellers are still welcome and will only face an enforced quarantine if the Thermoscans and temperature checks at airports red flag them. In addition, aircraft arriving from the four high-risk countries and territories (there are very few flights operating now) dock at specific airbridges where rigorous checks take place before passengers proceed to passport checks and mingle with other passengers.

Travellers who are resident in high-risk countries are now going through temperature checks before boarding planes to fly to Thailand and need to show a health certificate signed by their doctor at the check-in counter.

The travel industry can do without the uncertainty and confusion resulting from see-saw quarantine statements made by various ministries. On the ground, travellers recognise that comprehensive health checks are in place at borders that meet WHO standards. Often it's the off-the-cuff comments that do the most damage and send mixed messages. Instead, the goal should be to eliminate ambiguity so holidaymakers can assess the risk and make a rational choice on whether to go ahead with their trips.

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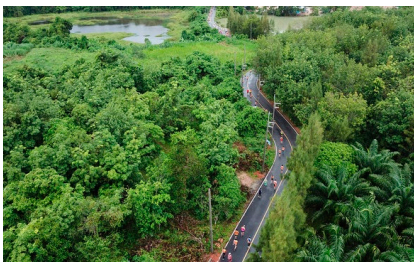
# Phuket marathon stays on course for June run

**No changes to the dates, organisers confident the Supersports Laguna Phuket Marathon will attract 15,000 runners 13 to 14 June.**

THE 15<sup>th</sup> annual Supersports Laguna Phuket Marathon will take place 13 to 14 June at Laguna Phuket, welcoming 15,000 runners from more than 70 countries and a new title sponsor, Supersports.

As Phuket's largest sporting event and a top marathon major in Thailand, Supersports Laguna Phuket Marathon meets stringent international standards.

Certified by IAAF AIMS (Association of International Marathons and Distance Races) since



the event's first year, it is a qualifying event for the Boston Marathon. With over 80% of runners coming from outside of Phuket and 20% travelling from overseas, Supersports Laguna Phuket Marathon is a leading destination marathon in Southeast Asia.

The event is significant for Phuket contributing THB291.58 million in 2019 alone.

"Our registration numbers are up on this time last year. Despite Covid-19 concerns, runners are committed to taking part, and we are working with our partners to ensure a safe and fun race for all.

Event planning is on schedule, registrations continue to be received, and we are confident that more than 15,000 runners from around the world will take part this year," said organiser, GAA Events' CEO, Roman Floesser. "We're also extremely pleased to welcome Supersports as a title sponsor this year. They are very



active in the running scene and well-recognised sports and lifestyle retailer in Thailand."

Supersports confirmed a three-year title sponsorship with GAA Events.

Held over two days, runners can choose from six distances: 2km Kids Run, 5km and 10km will take place on Saturday 13 June as the sun sets, and the Half Marathon (21.0975km), Marathon (42.195km) and Marathon Relay (42.195km) will take place on Sunday 14 June as the sun rises.

The scenic course takes runners past local villages, coconut plantations,

through the beachfront Sirinat National Park, and starts and finishes at Laguna Grove in the award-winning Laguna Phuket complex.

Registration can be made online at <http://www.phuketmarathon.com/registration>.

## For more information:

Website: [www.phuketmarathon.com](http://www.phuketmarathon.com)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/phuketmarathon](https://www.facebook.com/phuketmarathon)

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/LagunaPhuketMarathon>

## Middle East travel show moves dates

NO surprises Reed Travel Exhibitions bit the bullet and postponed the Arabian Travel Market to new dates, 28 June to 1 July 2020.

Earlier reports claimed it would go ahead with the show that was scheduled for 19 to 22 April at the Dubai World Trade Centre in Dubai, UAE.

In its official statement released 9 March, the organisers expressed concern for everyone impacted by the virus.

"Like all of you, we have carefully monitored the global health crisis

related to Covid-19 coronavirus. Our top priority is the health and safety of everyone involved in Arabian Travel Market; employees, partners, customers and exhibitors."

ATM 2020 plays an important role for industry professionals across the Middle East region to reach out to customers and partners worldwide.

Holding the show later in the year is important as Dubai will also host Expo 2020 in Dubai in autumn, an event that is promoted heavily by companies attending ATM, the organisers noted.



# What if the Chinese stopped travelling?

*PATA's CEO asked the question back in January 2019, in a challenging blog that called on governments and the travel industry to find out.*

It seems like an eternity, but just a year ago the Pacific Asia Travel Association's CEO, Mario Hardy, raised the spectre of a crisis that would see Chinese tourist arrivals crash through the floor.

He asked in a January 2019 blog: "What if the Chinese stopped travelling?"

Not many saw what was coming, but the writing was on the wall, according to Hardy, who leads a prestigious travel association that lobbies for the tourism and hospitality industry across the Asia-Pacific.

In his weekly blog just a year ago Hardy asked if he had the members' attention as he questioned what would happen to global tourism if the Chinese stopped travelling tomorrow?

Well, we know now exactly what it means now. Airlines face billions in losses, tourism destinations that were discussing "over-tourism" are now wondering will they see Chinese tourists visiting deserted beach resorts six months from now? Tour companies



are sinking into a cash flow bog, some even facing closure. Hotels mothball floors as occupancies slide south to ground zero. Worst still hotel owner fire staff or ask them to take unpaid leave.

Hardy challenged PATA members in his January 2019 blog: "It doesn't matter if it's China or any other source market, but by removing them from the equation it does help put things into better perspective. This is an exercise well worth trying for your respective destination or organisation."

Hardy linked his comments to the

Asia Pacific Visitor Forecasts 2019-2023, noting that he had cautioned "ASEAN tourism ministers and national tourism organisations on the the "importance of diversifying their source markets."

At the time he identified potential threats such as environmental, economic and political changes, currency fluctuations, volatile stock markets, and extreme weather patterns stating that any of them could have an impact on travel.

He missed the tiny, but notorious, coronavirus family that last gained the travel industry's attention 17 years ago. The SARS virus lasted nine months and disappeared almost without a trace, but the damage to travel was horrendous. It put countries back three years on performance targets. No one dreamed a year ago that the Chinese travel boom would ever unravel or turn tourism into a wasteland.

Hardy commented: "I will be the first one to admit that the title of this blog post was meant to be provocative, however in all seriousness, we see a slower pace of growth in China's economy as well as fears of a global economic slowdown. What does this mean for your business, and which source markets are seeing growth?"

Now in hindsight, we know exactly what it means when China shuts down travel for whatever reason.

## SiteMinder launches Insights

SITEMINDER has unveiled 'Insights', a set of smart monitoring and reporting capabilities that help hotels improve pricing intelligence and distribution.

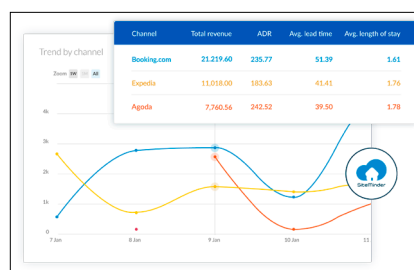
The capabilities are native to users of the channel management, direct booking and pricing intelligence features on SiteMinder's platform.

They provide hoteliers with a single place to access clear and actionable data on their local market, business performance and guests.

### Study highlights

Delivering to the increasing guest expectations (71% agreed).

Forecasting and managing demand amid the rise of last-minute bookings (62% agreed).



Rethinking sales and marketing strategies, including pricing, because of Airbnb (58%t agreed).

When asked to nominate their key drivers for investing in technology, hoteliers cited better management of room rates and pricing, less time spent on administration and more on guests.



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# Qantas slashes flights as bookings falter

***Qantas responds to Covid-19 spread, cutting back flights and downsizing services to smaller aircraft through to September.***

QANTAS Group has cut more international flights or changed aircraft types to reduce capacity by almost a quarter for the next six months.

The latest cuts follow the spread of the Covid-19 virus in Europe and North America over the past two weeks, as well as its continued spread

A further two A380s are undergoing scheduled heavy maintenance and cabin upgrades, leaving two of its A380s flying.

In response to strong customer demand for the direct Perth-London service, the existing Sydney-Singapore-London return service (QF1 and QF2) will be temporarily rerouted to become a Sydney-Perth-London service effective 20 April.

The start of Qantas' new Brisbane-Chicago route will be delayed from 15

April to mid-September.

Jetstar will make significant cuts to its international network, including suspending flights to Bangkok and reducing flights from Australia to Vietnam and Japan by almost half. Jetstar's daily Gold Coast to Seoul flight was suspended last week.

Domestically, Qantas and Jetstar capacity reductions will be increased from 3% to 5% through to mid-September 2020, in line with broader economic conditions.

In total, this is the equivalent of grounding 38 Qantas and Jetstar aircraft[2] across the international and domestic network. The Group's total capacity reduction changes from 4% (announced on 20 February) to 17% for the last quarter of FY20.

Announcing the changes, Qantas Group CEO Alan Joyce, said: "In the past fortnight we've seen a sharp drop in bookings on our international network as the global coronavirus spread continues.

"We expect lower demand to continue for the next several months, so rather than taking a piecemeal approach, we're cutting capacity out to mid-September."



through Asia, which has resulted in a sudden and significant drop in booking demand.

These additional changes will bring the total international capacity reduction for Qantas and Jetstar from 5 per cent to 23 per cent versus the same time last year and extend the cuts until mid-September 2020.

The biggest reductions remain focussed on Asia down 31%. Capacity reductions to the US (down 19%), the UK (down 17%) and Trans-Tasman (down 10%) will also be made in line with booking trends.

Rather than exit routes altogether, Qantas will use smaller aircraft and reduce flights to maintain overall connectivity.

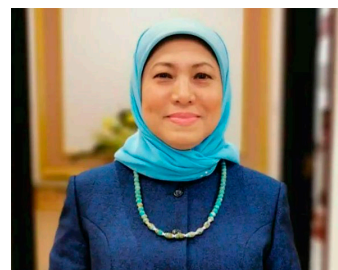
This approach results in eight of the airline's largest aircraft, the Airbus A380, grounded until mid-September.

## Nancy Shukri leads Malaysia's tourism

BATANG Sadong Member of Parliament Datuk Seri Nancy Shukri has been named Malaysia's Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture.

In a statement quoted by the national news agency Bernama, she thanked the Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and Sarawak Chief Minister, Datuk Patinggi Abang Johari Tun Openg for their trust.

"To my constituents in Batang



Nancy Shukri.

Sadong, I am still the same Nancy Shukri you know and will continue to serve you in my capacity as the Member of Parliament of Batang Sadong," she said in the statement.

With the appointment, she said that she was committed to coming up with effective solutions and long term economic measures to manage the nation's tourism, which faces an unprecedented challenge battling the Covid-19 virus.

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# Windsor Suites shuts for renovations

*Windsor Suites blames closure on Covid-19, but it also provides an opportune time to renovate the property.*

THE spread of the Covid-19 virus is linked to a multitude of misfortunes so no surprises when the owners of the Windsor Suites Hotel blamed the virus for having to close the 50-year-old property.

Last week, the hotel's general manager, Bobo Klingenberg, issued a memo to all staff stating the hotel, located on Bangkok's Sukhumvit Road Soi 20, would close 30 April.

The GM's memo dated 5 March stated: "It is with great sadness that I need to inform you that as a result of the Covid-19 crisis and the dramatic downturn in business over recent months we no longer have a choice but to close down the hotel."

## Capitol Kempinski names MD

CAPITOL Kempinski Hotel Singapore names Matthias Al-Amiry as managing director and regional vice president Southeast Asia.

He takes over the dual role managing the five-star luxury hotel at 15 Stamford Road, Singapore and overseeing Kempinski's properties in Southeast Asia.

The group has properties in Bangkok, Jakarta and Bali as well as planning a hotel and residences in Kuala Lumpur.

He most recently held the position of managing director of Kempinski's flagship property, the Hotel Adlon Kempinski Berlin.

Capitol Kempinski Hotel Singapore is located in the city's civic and cultural district in the iconic Capitol Building and Stamford House that has been restored to unveil the 155-room Capitol Kempinski Hotel Singapore.



Covid-19 made its appearance in earnest in January this year although Chinese public health officials said forensics suggested the first case was evident in early December 2019.

Once operations close at the Windsor Suites, an extensive remake will begin. According to the statement, the 347-key property will reopen when demand returns to normal.

While Covid-19 probably had a hand in the decision to close the property, other factors may have come into play. Occupancy plummeted in recent months and like other family hotels in the city that are not part of a global hotel group, the competition was fiercer than ever.

Accor signed an agreement to manage the Windsor Suites Hotel in July 2019, and the deal pivots on completing a THB500 million renovation project to meet Accor's standards for its Grand Mercure brand.

Noted for being one of the oldest properties on the famous Sukhumvit Road tourist strip, Accor said the property would be rebranded Grand Mercure Windsor in 2021. At the time, both the owners and Accor confirmed

the hotel would undergo an extensive refurbishment with the lobby, dining outlets and rooms to be completed in phases in 18 months. Closing the property was probably the preferred option to complete the renovation in a shorter time span. The Covid-19 became the tipping point when it sent occupancy and room revenue into a steep dive.

Hotel owner, Bundit Bosereewong, told local media the project could be completed in eight months from now and reservations technically open this September on online booking sites.

Last July, Accor chief operating officer for Upper Southeast & Northeast Asia and the Maldives, Patrick Basset said: "We're really excited to have the Windsor Suites Hotel join the Accor network giving visitors to Bangkok an added choice of hotels in the Sukhumvit area".

Accor is the leading hotel operator in Thailand with 83 hotels and with a pipeline of 13 hotels scheduled to open over the next five years. The group currently manages a portfolio of 44 Grand Mercure hotels across the Asia Pacific region.





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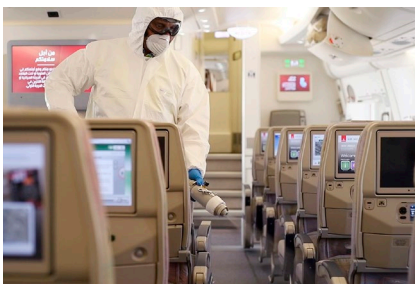


# Emirates doubles down on deep cleaning

*Emirates delivers enhanced cleaning and disinfection on all aircraft from Dubai regardless of the route to offer peace of mind.*

IN response to the latest developments in the Covid-19 outbreak worldwide, Emirates is taking extra steps that go above and beyond industry and regulatory requirements to provide passengers with confidence and peace of mind when planning their travel.

It starts with enhanced cleaning and disinfection. On all aircraft departing from its hub in Dubai, Emirates has implemented enhanced cleaning and complete disinfection of all cabins as a precaution. In line with the latest expert medical finding



that the Covid-19 virus is primarily transmitted by touch, Emirates has placed its greatest focus on surface cleaning.

The airline uses an approved chemical that is proven to kill viruses and germs, leaves a long-lasting protective coating against new contamination of viruses, bacteria and fungi on surfaces, and is eco-friendly.

The cleaning process includes a comprehensive wipe down of all surfaces – from windows, tray tables, seatback screens, armrests, seats, in-seat controls, panels, air vents and overhead lockers in the cabin, to lavatories, galleys and crew rest areas. All of this is done in addition to other normal procedures such as changing headrest covers on all seats, replacement of reading materials, vacuuming, and more.

To complete this thorough cleaning process within an hour while the aircraft is preparing for its next mission



requires a team of 18 trained cleaners on a Boeing 777, and a team of 36 for an A380. In a 24-hour period on an average day, some 248 aircraft go through this process.

On any aircraft that were found to have transported a suspected or confirmed Covid-19 case, Emirates would go even further and implement deep cleaning and disinfection in a process that takes between six to eight hours to complete. This includes the defogging of cabin interiors and misting with disinfectant across all soft furnishings, and replacement of seat covers and cushions in the affected area. The aircraft's HEPA cabin air filters will also be replaced.

All of Emirates' aircraft are fitted with HEPA cabin air filters which are proven to filter out 99.97% of viruses. They also remove dust, allergens and microbes from the air recirculated into the cabin and cockpit, which helps to provide a safer, healthier and more

comfortable environment for the passengers and crew.

## **Peace of mind on travel plans**

Emirates is also providing customers across its network added flexibility, choice, and value; with the ability to change their travel dates without change and re-issuance fees. Visit [emirates.com](https://www.emirates.com) for more details on the waiver.

## **Helping loyal flyers retain tier status**

Recognising that some of its members will be impacted by travel restrictions and flight reductions, Emirates Skywards is providing its Platinum, Gold and Silver members with the ability to maintain their current status by fulfilling 80% of their tier travel requirements between 31 March and 30 June 2020. In addition, Skywards members booked to travel between 1 March and 30 June 2020 will be able to benefit from an additional 20% bonus Tier Miles.

## **Monitoring and response protocols**

Since January, the airline has activated its contingency response team to monitor daily developments on the Covid-19 outbreak, maintain contact with all relevant health and regulatory authorities, to ensure travellers' safety.



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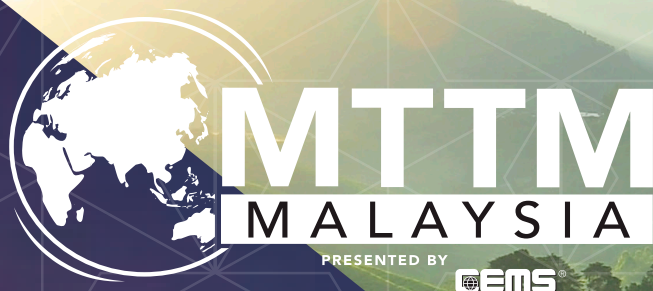
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