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A Conscious Travel Special

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Travel Hall of Fame

Since 2002, TTG Asia Media has honoured luminaries that have won the prestigious TTG Travel Award for at least 10 consecutive times for the same award title in the Travel Hall of Fame.

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

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

TTG Asia Media is pleased to announce that it has set up a virtual TTG Travel Hall of Fame (www.ttgtravelhof.com), which will enable us to showcase the accolades, artefacts and memorabilia of the region's most exceptional travel organisations in a far more effective way and to a global audience.



EDITOR'S NOTE

Right moves forward



Karen Yue
Group Editor

Conversations at trade events for our industry have been gravitating most towards three areas – digitalisation, manpower pains, and sustainability. Naturally, these three topics were top of my mind when it came to planning the theme for our year-end special issue.

It is sustainability that I chose to eventually build our content on because the topic is divisive. There remain opinions that the travel and tourism industry isn't as responsible as it claims to be; that travel buyers actually still care more about pricing and value than their emissions, and consumer intention studies showing strong desires for responsible travel are skewed by response bias.

Despite these dampers, it is clear that our industry is shifting towards more responsible actions. Travel and tourism suppliers are making responsible travel options more visible, to serve conscious travellers as well as to educate fence sitters about better options. They are scrutinising their internal processes as well as that of their partners to ensure goals are aligned.

They are broadening their sustainability view to consider more than just energy usage and waste reduction; they are paying attention to matters like community support and development, gender parity, and culture preservation.

At a higher level, governments are making clear their sustainability plans and establishing nation-wide roadmaps to get both the public and private sectors moving in the same direction. Such roadmaps will guide tourism developments too, benefiting the society and the environment.

The accusation that the very act of travel is detrimental to the environment remains loud. Yet, putting an end to travel is an extreme solution. The disruption of global travel for more than two years lays bare the important contribution it brings to economic and social activities.

Travel must continue, it must be done responsibly, and it is already happening.



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As you like it

RIU
HOTELS & RESORTS

A force for good

In response to travellers' growing determination to travel responsibly, tourism players are making sustainable, guilt-free options more identifiable and accessible, discovers **Karen Yue**



**Amilla
Maldives
Resort, located
in the Baa
Atoll UNESCO
Biosphere
Reserve, has
31 ongoing
sustainability
projects**

Making responsible travel choices is getting easier, now that many leading tourism suppliers are providing prominent labels that identify sustainable options.

Back in November 2021, Booking.com debuted what it said was a first-of-its-kind Travel Sustainable badge to help travellers identify properties that have implemented a combination of sustainable practices that meet the requisite impact threshold for their destination.

A study by the OTA found that 81 per cent of global travellers wanted to stay in a sustainable accommodation when they resumed their travel in 2022, while 73 per cent would more likely choose a specific accommodation if they knew it was implementing sustainable practices. The Travel Sustainable badge serves to support that desire, and a filter on Booking.

com's search function helps travellers to more easily identify responsible options.

Sharing that foresight is Small Luxury Hotels of the World (SLH), whose Considerate Collection of responsible and sustainable hotels has just celebrated its first anniversary. When it launched in October 2021, the Considerate Collection had 26 hotels in 16 countries. At press time in November, the network has expanded to 43 qualified properties.

Mark Wong, senior vice president, Asia Pacific of SLH, said the creation of the Considerate Collection has allowed the company to identify many attractive and responsible hotels that "were not on our radar".

He noted that there are many responsible hotels around the world – particularly in Thailand, Indonesia and the Maldives here in Asia – and SLH can use its global reach to bring

such properties to the attention of many conscious travellers and travel trade buyers worldwide.

The Considerate Collection is set for continued growth, evident in the number of hotels approaching SLH at an early stage of development for suggestions on incorporating sustainable features and experiences into their property, to ensure they qualify for induction into the programme once they launch.

Getting the green star

A stringent and scientific approach has been employed by these travel companies to determine who gets the coveted sustainable label.

For Booking.com's Travel Sustainable badge, qualifying attributes are determined and validated by the Travelyst Independent Advisory Group, and the OTA takes a step further by working with other industry experts to identify a set of the most impactful practices for a property to consider in five key areas: waste, energy and greenhouse gases, water, supporting local communities, and protecting nature.

This foundational framework is further broken down into 32 specific sustainability measures or practices that properties can implement, including everything from eliminating single-use plastic toiletries or switching to LED light fixtures to running on 100 per cent renewable energy sources or investing a certain percentage of profits into local community and conservation projects.

For SLH's Considerate Collection, properties looking to be inducted must do more than just end their reliance on single-use plastics. SLH partners reputable organisations like Greenview and Global Sustainable Tourism Council as well as subject experts and travel agents specialising in this field to provide it with guidance and ensure SLH is not "just green-washing our approach", Wong told *TTG Asia*.

All Considerate Collection hotels undergo strict assessment across three

levels – Environmentally Conscious, Cultural Custodians, and Community Minded.

“Our members have to take these pillars into their operational consideration to qualify and ensure that these are achieved both behind the scenes and in guest-facing experiences,” shared Wong.

For instance, Amilla Maldives Resort, one of the newly-inducted Considerate Collection properties, boasts 31 ongoing sustainability projects since its debut three years ago in the Baa Atoll UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. One of its projects utilises 2,500 coconut trees on the island to produce coconut oil, vinegar, milk and cream, as well as turn the resulting waste into nutritious coco peat for its gardens and crafting needs.

The property continually comes up with creative ways to celebrate island culture, from founding the country's first and only Maldives Cultural Week in 2021 which promotes local musical, artistic and fashion talents, to holding weekly Maldivian dinners and cooking classes for guests to get an authentic taste of Baa Atoll and beyond.

It also takes pride in operating with a team made up mostly of Maldivians, many of whom hold management positions, as well as sourcing from local producers and engaging local vendors.

Low impact experiences

Contiki Tours, which runs 350 trips across six continents, is contributing to the movement too, by putting up programmes that enable conscious travellers to explore guilt-free and with minimal carbon footprint.

It has made 100 per of its trips carbon-neutral this year. It is a momentous decision, but also just one of the many milestones in the com-

(Responsible travel options) won't go away any time soon and will become a requirement among conscious travellers.

Mark Wong

Senior vice president, Asia Pacific, Small Luxury Hotels of the World



pany's “long journey to sustainability”, said global CEO Adam Armstrong.

“Our journey to carbon neutrality requires a lot of work. First, we have to measure, and that's a task in itself. For every trip we have to work out how much carbon we are emitting through transport, accommodation, dining and experiences. Then, there is a load of initiatives around reducing emissions and getting third parties to work with us. After that, we offset what we cannot reduce and invest in carbon capture initiatives,” detailed Armstrong.

All initiatives are included in the ticket and there is no opt-in required. Contiki has chosen to keep its carbon neutrality offering simple and accessible, as the young generation views such features as a basic consumer right, reflected Armstrong.

SLH's Wong said spotlighting responsible travel options is now basic business and no longer just a post-lockdown travel trend.

“It won't go away any time soon and will become a requirement among conscious travellers. In fact, our corporate RFPs now come with a request for our hotels to submit details on their sustainability policy and programmes,” he said.

Contiki's Armstrong agrees, saying that data points to the growing importance of sustainable travel.

“Most Gen Zs prioritise sustainability and choose brands based on their sustainability credentials. They avoid brands with poor sustainability credentials. Going carbon neutral is therefore good for the environment and for the business,” he said.

Below, from left: All Contiki tours are carbon neutral now; Keemala has a strict anti-animal exploitation policy while its guests activities foster a strong sense of community spirit among guests

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Conscious cruising

Although often accused of their heavy carbon footprint, cruise lines have dedicated much of their resources to sustainable operations. **Serene Foo** charts their key green strides forward

One of the world's leading cruise companies, the Royal Caribbean Group was in on the sustainability game 30 years ago, long before sustainable tourism became a trendy mainstream conversational topic. Its Save the Waves programme continues today, and is recently joined by Destination Net Zero, which aims to reach net zero emissions by 2050.

Commenting on the new announcement, Angie Stephen, vice president and managing director, Asia-Pacific, Royal Caribbean International, told *TTG Asia*: "This is a bold mission that will require a mix of solutions including rolling out new technology across our fleet, building more efficient ships, developing alternative fuel sources, and working across industries

to develop new solutions that don't even exist today."

Come 2023, the group's Royal Caribbean International cruise brand will launch its first ship powered by Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), *Icon of the Seas*. The second LNG-powered ship, *Utopia of the Seas*, will set sail in 2024.

Committed to building one new ship every year for the next decade, the group is future-proofing its portfolio through fuel flexibility, energy-saving technologies and innovation to ensure each new ship class is 20 per cent more energy-efficient than its predecessor.

Presently, it is already leveraging best-in-class technology such as AI-based engine optimisation to improve speed and fuel efficiency. The air lubrication system on its ships is also designed to reduce drag when sailing

Leading cruise players have heavy investments in sustainable technologies and operations

to augment energy efficiency.

Thanks to significant upgrades in its Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning, vessels now also utilise 40 per cent less energy than previous iterations.

Apart from developing waste management technologies, the full fleet is equipped to be landfill-free.

Roughly 90 per cent of the fresh-water used onboard is produced via desalination plants and processes, and the group is taking water conservation further by using aerators and low-flow showerheads to cut usage.

The group will also incorporate more sustainable fuels and use hybrid fuel cells that allow for zero emission.

In a similar green vein, Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) drives positive impact on society and the environ-

ment through its global sustainability programme, Sail & Sustain.

Operating across all three brands within Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings (NCLH), the comprehensive initiative is centred on five pillars – reducing environmental impact; sailing safely; empowering its people; strengthening its communities; and operating with integrity and accountability.

Like Royal Caribbean Group, NCLH is also pursuing net zero emissions by 2050 across its operations and value chain. This year, NCLH joined the Methanol Institute to assess the feasibility of retrofitting existing engines to operate with dual fuels – diesel and methanol – with the aim of trialling methanol usage by 2025.

It has also established a target for approximately 70 per cent of the ships in its complete fleet to be equipped with shore power capabilities by 2025.

In the short term, the company has committed to offset three million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent over a three-year period to 2023 to bridge the gap in its decarbonisation efforts.

Identifying a tangible achievement specific to NCL, Braydon Holland, senior director, Asia, said 14 million single-use plastic water bottles and over 50 million plastic straws were removed from potential environmental harm through partnerships such as Flow Water, which uses sustainably produced paper-card packaging and a plant-based cap.

NCL's brand-new Prima Class of ships offer a wide range of sustainability features, with technologies such as a nitrogen oxide reduction system (SCR) that cuts the ship's overall environmental impact. They will also

be equipped with an Exhaust Gas Cleaning System (EGCS), an Advanced Wastewater Treatment System to treat and clean all wastewater to meet stringent international standards, and Cold Ironing functionality to connect to onshore power grids to reduce emissions further while in port.

NCL's responsible tourism efforts can be supported by guests when they patronise the sustainably-focused Metropolitan Bar onboard *Norwegian Prima*. It boasts zero-waste cocktails prepared with surplus ingredients, as well as a collection of sustainable spirits and biodynamic wines.

A recent survey among its guests revealed that up to 55 per cent rate environmental and sustainability policies as a very important factor when selecting a cruise line.

New-to-market Resorts World Cruises (RWC) also adheres to sound environmental practices in its operations, including increasing energy efficiency and recycling, conserving fuel and water, reducing solid waste generation, protecting marine life, and preventing oil pollution.

For instance, its ship is equipped with Eniram trim optimisation; and the exterior hull coating system incorporates the most advanced silicone-based paint to decrease drag for better fuel efficiency. The vessel also uses an EGCS to minimise emissions.

Besides, the company follows the highest marine industry standard where its bio-waste treatment system is equipped with dryers to incinerate or bag waste materials for offloading and disposal.

RWC president Michael Goh told *TTG Asia*: "Customers' expectations of conscious travel and carbon impact are definitely shaping sustainable

(Destination Net Zero) is a bold mission that will require a mix of solutions including (those) that don't even exist today.

Angie Stephen, vice president and managing director, Asia-Pacific, Royal Caribbean International



cruise operations. It's important for cruise lines to be at the forefront in developing and executing responsible environmental practices, and to lead by example."

Norwegian Prima's Metropolitan Bar serves zero-waste cocktails prepared with surplus ingredients, and boasts a collection of sustainable spirits and biodynamic wines



Shore excursions that care

With shore excursions forming a big part of the complete cruise experience, cruise companies are also making sure that their sustainable cruising promises are kept on land.

To date, Royal Caribbean Group offers more than 2,000 Global Sustainable Tourism Council-certified tour destinations.

NCL's new Go Local series of destination tours take guests into local communities and offer immersive experiences such as spending time at a goat farm to learn the generations-old way of making cheese, and fishing with residents.

A partnership with Alaska Native-owned Huna Totem Corporation has created authentic and sustainable ways to explore the region. This in turn provides jobs for the locals and maintains the area's heritage and cultural values.

On RWC's part, tour options with lower carbon footprint, such as touring on foot or on trishaws, are encouraged, and so are visits to nature and heritage sites.

Goh noted that there is heightened interest among cruise customers in such shore excursions, as well as those that are immersive and allow guests to interact with communities in the destination.

A critical juncture



Sustainability in travel and tourism is a hot topic, but Roi Ariel, general manager of Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), said the industry needs accountability and greater public awareness. By **Jeeheng Yew**

Where do you think the travel and tourism industry stands in terms of sustainability?

The term sustainability is now mainstream. We have all the framework in place; we have credible assurance programmes set by GSTC, our partner certification bodies and accreditation bodies. We are working in this ecosystem together so we have this foundation.

We are also working with governments to support training to increase knowledge on the skills and benefits of sustainable operations and businesses. We have OTAs that are promoting (sustainability) to their customers.

We are at a critical point here. There are many stakeholders that can (facilitate) change and are making the change.

However, from a consumer perspective, it is still difficult to find a sustainable provider. We need hotels and tour operators to start making this shift to become more sustainable, especially since this proper system has already been set.

It is now much easier to explain the benefits of making this shift: becoming more sustainable usually means cost savings, allows for better market benefits, and it is the right thing to do!

Sustainability has been the keyword for the travel industry. How will GSTC assert its authority as the global body for sustainable tourism to better educate both the industry and the public on this subject?

That is a very good question. Clearly, there's still a lot of greenwashing, as well as misleading and false claims.

The UK's competition and markets authority as well as equivalent bodies and two European Union member states had recently begun investigating companies over eco-friendly and sustainability claims, to make sure that consumers are not being misled. A greenwashing lawsuit was also filed against KLM Airlines in court in the Netherlands.

So, it raises the topic again on the liability to organisations and companies when they make sustainability claims. The assurance of sustainability claims is very important, and it is one of the GSTC's core activities, which is eventually providing assurance for sustainable tourism. We do that through an accreditation programme for certification bodies as well as collaboration with standard owners.

I'm happy to see that different actions are being taken by regulators and private organisations to tackle that and to criticise those that make false or misleading claims.

It is also important to note that when we speak about sustainability in tourism, it is not just about the environment; it refers to a number of dimensions as set out in the GSTC criteria, including societal, cultural and economic aspects.

How has GSTC's work evolved?

(There has been greater) involvement from governments with regards to guidelines and enforcement. We are now working specifically on supporting businesses in the region or country to be more sustainable.

In Japan, for example, we run tens of trainings every year sponsored by the Japan National Tourism Organization. In Turkey it will soon be mandatory for tourism businesses to follow the Turkish version of the GSTC criteria, with a transition period until 2030.

Booking.com, Agoda, Traveloka, Makemytrip, Google Travel – and a few more in the coming months – work with GSTC on different levels. The foundation is to highlight sustainable hotels and tours on their platform to consumers, a segment the GSTC does not directly engage with. When customers learn more about sustainable brands through these OTAs, it helps to push hotels and tour operators to adopt more sustainable measures.

(Accommodation buyers) are also joining the scene. For example, TUI and American Express Global Business Travel make it clear in their RFPs that they prefer sustainable hotels.

So, GSTC's collaboration with these three main stakeholders influences the travel and hospitality industry to become more sustainable.

What more can we expect from GSTC's work in 2023?

One core message to highlight in 2023 is the emphasis on the general usage of the sustainability standards as guidelines. Anyone can use the standards, which are readily available and free on the Internet, such as the one published by GSTC.

Apart from the GSTC Destination and Industry criteria, we are now in the process of creating the GSTC Attraction criteria and the GSTC MICE criteria which we expect to be published at end-2023 or early 2024.

Setting a conscious goal

Switzerland Tourism is leading a movement towards sustainable tourism that benefits both the industry and an increasingly environmentally conscious travelling public, explains CEO Martin Nydegger.

By Karen Yue



I love the Swiss spin on your sustainable tourism approach by labelling it Swisstainable. What are the key pillars in Switzerland's sustainable, responsible tourism approach?

Together with our country's tourism industry, Switzerland Tourism (ST) launched a national sustainability initiative last year. This strategy – although I prefer to describe it as a movement – called Swisstainable, facilitates the entire tourism industry in implementing sustainable solutions. Thus, our key pillars are: the movement, the programme and the campaign.

How is ST rallying your tourism players on this movement?

Swisstainable is an ambitious programme on three levels,

namely Committed, Engaged, Leader. We already have roughly 1,200 Swiss tourism providers on board and hope to reach a total of 4,000 by the end of 2023. With the Swisstainable movement, we share knowledge, create emulation among tourism providers, and give our guests guidance on ways to travel more responsibly in Switzerland. Our goal is to become the most sustainable destination worldwide.

There is plenty of attention now on the term Conscious Travel. How does Switzerland Tourism regard this trend, and how much further does it go beyond environmental consideration, which is often the most common focus?

Conscious travel is already ingrained in Swisstainable, since the movement aims at helping travellers see sustainability as an enrichment rather than a limitation whenever they travel. With Swisstainable offers and products, we hope to let them enjoy nature up-close more often, to experience more of the local culture and regional products, and to prolong their stays to get a more in-depth (understanding) of our country.

Consumer intention surveys all point to respondents being keen on travelling more responsibly and consciously post-lockdown. Is that intention translating to actual action now that Switzerland has already seen the return of travel for months? How are they travelling around Switzerland and what experiences are gaining the most favour among these conscious travellers?

I guess the one dimension of travelling, where we will see the most drastic changes in the coming months and years, is mobility. Travellers are increasingly aware of the impact the type of transportation they choose has on the environment.

Our visitors from longhaul destinations are particularly keen on using public transportation when they travel within Switzerland, which is quite easy given our highly efficient and extensive public transportation network. Travelling by public transportation, combined with a longer stay, contributes to making the whole journey more sustainable.

What upcoming tourism developments in Switzerland will appeal most to travellers wanting a low-impact and meaningful vacation?

The comfort and freedom of travelling by public transportation in Switzerland will become even more popular than it currently is. In this respect, the Swiss Travel Pass, a universal ticket to travel by train, bus, boat, and cable car, which also includes entry to over 500 museums, is already an ideal product for any visit in Switzerland.

This year, we are focusing on gastronomy with a Swisstainable Veggie Day. Participating restaurants will offer vegetarian and/or vegan dishes on this day. We hope that more diversity on the plates will also be a long-term aim for our Swiss gastronomy players.

Finally, this year, we have launched a partnership with Kuoni-Tumlaire and The Travel Corporation to build and scale up the global distribution of itineraries featuring Swisstainable suppliers.

Set to serve the world

Recent challenges have only made Marriott International far more aware of the need to advance sustainability and drive social impact, says Rajeev Menon, president for Asia Pacific (excluding China). By [Karen Yue](#)

Marriott's Serve 360 has some very substantial sustainability and social impact goals to achieve by 2025. What has your region achieved?

Since the launch of Serve 360, Marriott International's sustainability and social impact platform, our global operations have made significant impact across the four priority areas – Nurture Our World, Sustain Responsible Operations, Empower Through Opportunity and Welcome All, and Advance Human Rights.

Earlier this year, in line with Nurture Our World, our Asia-Pacific teams (excluding Greater China) launched a campaign in response to Ukraine's humanitarian crisis. More than 2,000 associates contributed 3,500-plus volunteering hours to raise US\$21,027 for the World Central Kitchen, which (feeds) Ukrainians fleeing their homes.

As part of Sustain Responsible Operations, one of our key programmes is the removal of tiny, single-use toiletry bottles. So far, 70 per cent hotels in my region have already implemented this change.

In line with Empower Through Opportunity, we've made significant progress towards gender parity for management positions: around one-third of our hotel management positions are taken up by women, and there are 60 female general managers and hotel managers in the continent with a robust pipeline of top talent.

Supporting LGBTQ+ inclusion has also been a key priority for us. In this region, we created a formalised LGBTQ+ committee to increase visibility of the community and promote the importance of allyship within the workplace. We have also partnered with external organisations like Community Business to raise awareness and support for LGBTQ+ inclusion.

And finally, for our Welcome All and Advance Human Rights priority area, we are committed to the fight against human trafficking and forced labour. In my region, more than 55,000 associates have completed the human rights training and are now better equipped to identify and respond to potential indicators of human trafficking.

Did the pandemic disrupt Marriott's work in these areas?

To a certain extent, it did result in many of our programmes being put on hold. However, it is during these trying times that we also need to heavily rely on our core values to put people first, pursue excellence, embrace change, act with integrity, and continue to find the drive to serve our world.

We are immensely proud of how our associates showed up for their local communities. Across the region, our hotels delivered lunch boxes, donated daily necessities, and collected unused linen for face mask production, just to name a few. There were many different efforts, but the outcome was the same – to help push through the crisis and serve our world.

(The rise of) more complex, global events... have led to significant increase in consumers prioritising purposeful brands. Challenging times like these have helped us reflect even harder on ways to advance sustainability and drive social impact.

Last year we announced our ambition to go net-zero and our commitment to setting a science-based target to aggressively reduce our environmental footprint. This year, we announced (our plan) to hire 1,500 refugees over the next three years. Pioneered in Asia-Pacific, (our) Good Travel with Marriott Bonvoy programme was designed to meet our guests' concerns about their personal impact on the environment and their need for more meaningful travel.

As the largest hospitality company in the world, we believe we have the responsibility to make a positive and sustainable impact wherever we do business. We are optimistic about the future of travel, and ready to pick up where we left off, go further, and look for more suitable opportunities to do good.

How does Serve 360 influence your conversations with clients?

Sustainability has been a priority for our customers for some time. However, a heightened focus on sustainability has become clearer during the pandemic as the natural environment in destinations previously impacted by over-tourism begin to recover. Our Serve 360 goals provide a framework for us to partner with our customers, who have their own sustainability goals in mind, and are looking to embed many aspects of sustainability throughout their operations and value chain.





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An accessible welcome

Holidays and destination experiences do not always come easy for differently-abled individuals, but some tourism players are making sure that their welcome is equally warm for all guests. By **Karen Yue**

Travel accessibility is improving after more than two years of disruption, and people around the world have responded to easing border restrictions by getting back to travel planning.

However, for people with mobility, mental and/or sensory issues, the definition of travel accessibility takes on a much deeper meaning. While differently-abled, these consumers share the same wanderlust as everyone else and look to destinations and tourism suppliers to provide the support they need to fulfil their travel dreams.

The Spain is Accessible website helps users to search destinations by theme or disability



Spain, whose tourism appeals range from big-city draws, star-studded football clubs, historical landmarks and tantalising cuisine, says all these and more welcome travellers with disabilities. Fifteen cities across the country whose historical centres and urban spaces have been declared UNESCO World Heritage Sites promise universal accessible routes.

Take Ávila for instance. The destination, renowned for its medieval city walls, is regarded as one of the leading accessible tourist destinations in Spain. The Visitor Reception Centre offers wheelchairs for loan, while travellers relying on hearing aids can communicate with a magnetic loop installed at the information desk. Taphological scale models of five of the nine gates in the iconic city walls enable travellers with visual difficulties to learn about the monument through touch. Furthermore, audio-video guides are available in nine different languages, including international sign language and a version adapted for children.

As differently-abled travellers explore Ávila's best sights via a specially-designed accessible route that threads

through town, they will notice that commercial establishments with basic accessibility requirements are identified by the international symbol of access on their doors along with the Ávila Accessible label – the latter awarded by the Ávila Town Hall and the Municipal Board for the Disabled.

To further assist differently-abled travellers, Turespaña has created the Spain is Accessible website that allows users to search destinations by theme or disability.

Contributing to Spain's commitment to accessible tourism is local hotel chain, Ilunion, which has 29 properties adapted for people with disabilities. Supportive facilities include individual articulated beds, telephone adapted for people with hearing and visual disabilities, inclined bathroom mirrors for people in wheelchairs, and recreational areas and parking designed for the disabled. The hotels are awarded with the universal accessibility certification (UNE 170001-2), while Ilunion itself has earned the Ethics Award from the UNWTO for its work in the field of accessible tourism. As of November 2021, two in five of the company's

37,000-strong workforce have an impairment – demonstrating Ilunion's determination to have diversity in both its clientele and talent teams.

Here in Asia-Pacific, Tropical North Queensland in Australia is the latest to take firm steps towards accessible tourism. In September, it announced the addition of Accessibility Hub to its destination website, listing experiences and accommodation that are accessible to all travellers.

Tourism Tropical North Queensland worked closely with Spinal Life Australia and Out There Travel Care to put together content showcasing accessible products, such as wheelchair-friendly beaches and rainforest boardwalks that are wheelchair-friendly.

"People needing to consider accessibility can now easily find accommodation options from specialised providers like Spinal Life's Healthy Living Centre which has personal support workers, to traditional hotels with accessible rooms such as the Cairns Novotel Oasis Resort," said Mark Olsen, CEO of Tourism Tropical North Queensland.

Disabled Mission Beach journalist Imogen Kars has trialled a selection of accessible accommodation and tours, and has produced a series of blogs on travel options in Cairns, Palm Cove, the Cassowary Coast, Port Douglas and the Atherton Tablelands.

To align tourism operators with its accessible tourism goal, the NTO led a Making Tourism More Accessible Workshop at the Spinal Life Healthy Living Centre. Trade participants got to learn about opportunities in the accessible tourism market, access business case studies, and hear from people with physical disabilities about what they are looking for in a destination.

Senior advisor access and advocacy for Spinal Life Australia, Dane Cross, said the accessible tourism market represented a largely untapped opportunity for tourism operators.

"Often, tourism operators don't know where to begin on their journey towards better accessibility – this workshop enables people to ask simple questions and find out more about where to begin. We'd love to help tourism operators understand how to be more accessible and to secure a larger part of this market," said Cross.

Accessible sandy paradise

Recognising that the Maldives is usually physically out of bounds for differently-abled travellers, no thanks to its sandy island paths, water jetties and layout of villas and restaurants, one private island resort has made it its mission to make its space welcoming for everyone, including those with additional mobility, sensory and cognitive requirements.

Taking guidance from Inclucare, a UK-based organisation that works to remove barriers to travel for disabled people across the globe, Amilla Maldives Resort has ordered staff training on inclusion excellence and has had its facilities audited by Inclucare officials.

The property is now waiting for the certification process to be completed.

General manager Jason Kruse told *TTG Asia* that Amilla Maldives Resort is equipped to meet inclusive travel needs. It already boasts many universally accessible villas on the ground level, all designed with wide doorways and accessible showers. These units also come with beach wheelchair, floating wheelchair for swimming, and in-villa phones that light up when



Tripseed's electric tuk tuks are designed to bring ease of movement to differently-abled guests

they ring, for the benefit of hearing-impaired guests.

Soon to come are deaf-alert systems, induction hearing loops, magnifying glasses, adaptive yoga, aroma and sound experiences through the jungle for vision-impaired holidaymakers, and facilities that regulate sensory input for guests on the autism spectrum.

Taking ground control

Thailand-based travel operator and distributor Tripseed has recently made the country even more welcoming through a range of accessible travel programmes and experiences.

These inclusive tours for elderly and disabled travellers promise more than just wheelchair-accessible facilities. Extensive audits have been conducted across properties, tour locations and transportation – all to evaluate ramp inclinations, availability of grab bars, manoeuvrability clearance and other important aspects, and to advise agents and partners on the most suitable travel options based on the level of assistance required.

Looking to support travellers with invisible disabilities, Tripseed is standing by specialised guides who are trained in American sign language, British sign language and Thai sign language, as well as those trained to assist guests with other audio-visual impairments.

With this universal accessibility arrangement, Tripseed's differently-abled guests can enjoy top-selling tours, such as an evening street food experience in an electric tuk-tuk, specially outfitted with a built-in wheelchair ramp and unique wheelchair restraint system – a first in the industry.

Tripseed also scrutinises tour routes to ensure that travellers are not met with navigation difficulties.

Founder Ewan Cluckie told *TTG Asia* that his company has delivered two accessible trips for the Thai market at press time in September, and has a few international bookings lined up for the upcoming Christmas period and through to mid-2023.

It is also working with Wheel the World to reach out to differently-abled travellers.



Skyrail Rainforest Cableway is an accessible tourism experience

Responsible footprints

Savouring the finest experiences in a destination can be done in a responsible manner. **Jeeheng Yew** picks out some tourism options that take their environment and communities into consideration



Buahan, A Banyan Tree Escape

Buahan, A Banyan Tree Escape, Bali

Birthed this June near the small Buahan village in the heart of the Balinese jungle, this luxury resort adopts a “no walls, no doors” approach, allowing guests to truly immerse themselves in nature and in the community.

The resort was built with environmental consciousness right from the beginning, with the site approved by local experts following strict sociological, architectural and cultural research. Its promise to benefit the local community continues through guest experiences. Wellness treatments are inspired by and created in consultation with local healers and experts, while products are handmade from locally-sourced pure and natural ingredients. F&B takes a sustainable approach, where local ingredients from nearby farms and local suppliers are used, and a zero-waste farm-to-table concept is employed.



panied by a highly-experienced crew who are local experts. The one-to-one crew-to-guest ratio not only allows for exclusiveness in the experience, but also ensures that the journey through natural environments is supervised.



Discova tours in Cuba

Destination specialist Discova's newest launch in Cuba promises travel trade partners exclusive and unique experiences that would otherwise be inaccessible. The company boasts access to private-owned products, as well as in-destination knowledge through its reliance on a majority local personnel.

Proposed itineraries include a visit to the pioneering ecovillage of Las Terrazas (which dates back to a reforestation project in 1968); meeting a small, sustainable community in a nature reserve in the Sierra del Rosario mountains; and dining at Cuba's first farm-to-table concept restaurant.

Accommodation is carefully selected to provide exclusive and intimate experiences, such as Paseo 206 in Havana, a preserved and restored boutique hotel that is part of Small Luxury Hotels of the World; and Hotel Palacio Casa in Azul Cienfuegos, a mansion that was once the private residence of a wealthy tobacco manufacturer and is now one of the most stunning properties with the best bay and city views in Cienfuegos.

La Résidence Phou Vao – A Belmond Hotel, Laos

Set on a serene hilltop, La Résidence Phou Vao satisfies conscious travel in many ways. Firstly, Tam Nan, the flagship restaurant of the hotel, sources 80 per cent of its ingredients within a 100km radius. The hotel takes pride in using only local Saffron Coffee grown in Luang Prabang. Laotian coffee farmers were educated by the hotel to maximise quality yield through organic and sustainable farming methods.

The hotel's herb gardens offer a hands-on traditional rice-farming experience, and



Belmond

guests can cycle into Luang Prabang to see monks collect alms at dawn.

In giving back to the community, the team at Belmond La Résidence Phou Vao pioneered the Green Thursdays initiative, where staff set out on tuk-tuks to keep Luang Prabang clean and pristine. Along the way, they strike up conversations with locals to raise environmental awareness. The hotel also works with the Luang Prabang Government Orphanage School, providing necessities to the children as well as internship opportunities to ensure social and economic sustainability.



Marriott Luxury Hotels

JW Marriott Khao Lak Resort Suites, Thailand

One of the newest draws at JW Marriott Khao Lak Resort Suites is the shark nursery and conservation project, which provides an educational experience for the whole family. This wildlife sanctuary has a fully-trained team of conservationists to nurture bamboo shark eggs from their incubation, before releasing them back into the wild. Guests are invited to participate too.

The resort also adopts a “KM 0 policy” for its F&B operations, where the use of local ingredients from responsible, small-scale suppliers are encouraged wherever possible. The upcoming opening of the JW Garden will see restaurants using the resort's own harvest of organic vegetables and herbs. With a 360-degree sustainable cycle, the garden will be watered using treated wastewater, and fertilised with eggshells and waste food compost.

Aqua Mare, Galapagos Island

The Aqua Mare is a superyacht carefully designed to reduce the environmental impact on the oceans, where 100 per cent clean water is being returned to the bodies. Its operator, Aqua Expeditions, is also active in conservation and rehabilitation programmes, setting high standards in responsible travel in destinations such as the Galapagos Island.

Guests can experience the east or the west of the Galapagos Island in a seven-day itinerary, or both in 14 days. The experiences are led by scientific naturalist guides and accom-

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Impactful visions

Consumers' growing awareness of the environmental impact of their travel decision is bringing exciting business opportunities to suppliers. TTG Asia finds out how some travel agencies have responded to the market's call for conscious travel

The founding of Tripseed is our response to the market's need for more conscious travel opportunities. The touring industry in Thailand has become an extremely homogeneous and extractive one, with over 70 per cent of Thailand's tourism revenue being removed from the country by foreign-owned businesses, and the majority of sustainability claims lacking substantiation and transparency. It's also a large part of the reason why it was vital from our very incorporation that we were a majority locally-owned and women-owned business.

From the outset, we have been impassioned to address the diversity, equity, and inclusiveness issues that plague the industry here. Addressing this has enabled us to secure some of the best talents in the market, giving us a significant operational advantage even in our early stages, while many of our competitors struggle to attract employees back to the same pre-Covid working conditions.

In addition, our dedication to supporting marginalised travellers, such as our recently launched accessible travel opportunities, has introduced Tripseed to an enormous untapped global market which has so far been ignored by other players.

- Ewan Cluckie, founder, Tripseed, Thailand



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We have noticed several years ago that travellers are trying to avoid big hotels, bus-tours and restaurants offering international cuisine. Instead, they prefer to mingle with local people, share with them local delicacies, watch them in their traditional way of working, and interact with them.

Accordingly, we have implemented this (preference) in many of our tours and excursions, working with families and local communities. Feedback from our guests has been fantastic, especially after the pandemic.

The different races and indigenous tribes in Malaysia make it quite easy to come up with exciting visits, paired with the friendliness and hospitality of the local community. Of course, we are constantly looking into new experiences in this product line, especially in Sabah and Sarawak.

We also plan to have more partnerships with local community leaders and NGOs to develop sustainable tourism programmes that will create employment opportunities for the locals as well as thrilling experiences for our visitors. We already have some projects in (the works), but it will take some time before we can offer them to tourists.

- Manfred Kurz, managing director, Diethelm Travel Malaysia



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The lack of seat capacity and resulting airfare hikes after the reopening of borders has led to luxury travel leading initial travel recovery. Most luxury travellers are more conscious about responsible travel, and they tend to choose hotels that are environmentally friendly and supportive of the local community.

Their itineraries mostly feature village tours where they will engage with the locals in cultural activities.

Bali has huge potential to offer to conscious travellers. We have been identifying hidden gems on the island for our travellers to experience. We rope in local respectable experts from the village, and have them share their expertise and experience with our customers.

For example, not many travellers know that Karangasem (a regency of Bali) produces quality salt. We feature a chef who runs cooking classes using traditional methods and utensils.

In Ubud, we feature Dharma, a botanist who has successfully encouraged the younger generation to grow herbs and make remedies using traditional Balinese methods.

Next, we want to explore destinations beyond Bali, such as Sengkang and Tana Toraja in South Sulawesi, as well as South Papua where the Korowai tribe lives.

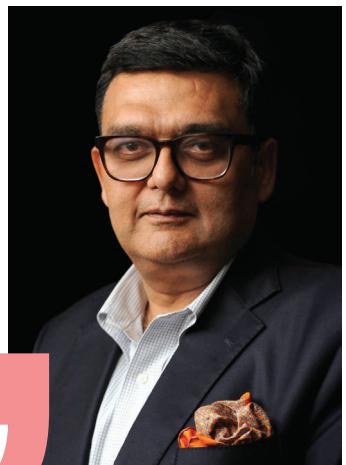
- Sugeng Suprianto, managing director, Top Indonesia Holidays

A resolute effort was made in 2016 when we launched our sustainability measurement criteria for excursions and tours. Our consumption of sustainable tours has gone up by 55 per cent over the last year. I am extremely proud that we are able to offer products that have been rated as per our sustainability index – a first in the Indian travel industry.

In 2020, we launched our Sustainability Action Plan with a focus on our sustainability agenda and commitments. We believe that it is the right of future generations to experience the beauty and majesty of the planet as we have had the privilege of seeing it.

In 2021 we went one step deeper and developed sustainability criteria measures to evaluate the sustainability quotient of our service providers. This has helped us to identify areas of improvement and collaborate with partners for a focused effort towards imbibing sustainable practices in our daily workings. We aim to promote quality over quantity, and to make the right choices to achieve this. We want to take full cognisance of current and future economic, social and environmental impacts of our business, addressing the needs of our guests without compromising on the quality of delivery.

- Dipak Deva, managing director, Sita, TCI and Distant Frontiers, India



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Even before the pandemic, Southeast Travel is already offering conscious travel and responsible tourism programmes through our cultural and heritage tours.

Conscious travel needs well-thought out tourism programmes that require not just hotel components or free-and-easy packages being offered by OTAs.

Conscious travel programmes does not only answer to the requirements of clients but also to the call of the environment and the people in it. This is where tour operators like Southeast Travel specialises in.

We can strengthen our partnerships with eco-friendly hotels, resorts, restaurants and local organisations for a sustainable destination management.

- Marlene Insigne, general manager, Southeast Travel Corp, the Philippines

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Editor's note: In the print version of this feature, the wrong image of Top Indonesia Holiday's Sugeng Suprianto was used. This online version reflects the correction. We apologise for the error.

The conscious tourism trend is rising in popularity across the globe but we can see it in particular with our European and American markets. We are also seeing different demands emerging within these markets as a result of this trend. Our clients are asking for longer stays or prefer to spend more time in one place and have more contact with the local communities. We have now been working for more than two years to develop our products to meet with this developing trend.

In addition, we are currently in the process of finalising the requirements to be certified by Travelife and, most importantly, we will be the only agency in Cambodia to offer all of our clients a tailor-made carbon impact calculation.

Jacques Guichandut, managing director, All Dreams Cambodia





Talents take centre stage

Karen Yue, group editor

Out of the terrible situation that is the travel disruption rises an opportunity for the travel, tourism and business events industry to correct and improve employment conditions so as to rebuild its talent resources.

The severe competition for experienced and passionate staff, as companies race to ramp up operations, is forcing businesses to get creative with their hiring process (casting calls to spot gregarious individuals for guest-facing roles, for instance), be flexible with work arrangements, do better with remuneration and recognition, and expand training and career growth opportunities across all levels.

Happy employees make happy customers, and happy customers make happy companies. It is win, win, win for all.

Improving the employment conditions of travel and hospitality people will ultimately raise the image of the profession, so crucial in correcting the public misperception that service is servitude and to accord professionals the respect they deserve.

Oh, what a year!

Having covered Asia-Pacific's travel and tourism recovery through the year, the TTG editorial team reflect on the most striking development in their opinion

Hip hip hooray! Thailand is back!

Alastair Newport, correspondent, Thailand

Without a doubt, the most exciting development for tourism in Thailand this year was the announcement on October 1 from the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) that, at long last, the Kingdom will be fully open to international tourists without the need to show proof of vaccination or (Covid) test results.

On top of this very welcome update is the additional news that the Thai government will now extend the length of stays for visitors, rising from 30 to 45 days for visitors from nations with visa exemptions and doubling from 15 to 30 days for visa-on-arrival applicants.

The announcement sees the travel and hospitality industry throw their hands up in jubilation as we, even travel journalists, celebrate the reopening and welcome the whole world back to this beautiful country. This allows hotels, DMCs, and travel agents to resume their passion and put Thailand back on the map for everyone!

Digitalisation rocks

Serene Foo, assistant editor, TTG Content Lab

Call it a silver lining – the digitalisation shift of the tourism industry, no doubt accelerated by the pandemic, gave rise to a wonderful wave of innovation by stakeholders in a bid to come up with creative prepositions.

For instance, Klook launched Flickket, a dedicated technology solution to empower its merchant partners by helping them digitise faster and expand their product distribution globally. To thrive post-lockdown, some OTAs powered ahead beyond their web-based marketplaces by expanding their service suite with superapp capabilities.

Hospitality brand citizenM's playbook on building virtual and physical hotels by utilising NFTs for financing, promoting digital art and artists, and engaging guests both online and offline even saw it venturing into the brave new world of the metaverse!

Renewed efficiency

S Puvaneswary,
editor, Malaysia/Brunei

Covid cases may be ebbing, but a lesson we learnt during the pandemic, which is to avoid a queue, resulted in suppliers adopting new and more efficient ways to serve their customers. I hope this change is here to stay.

The Malaysian borders reopened to international travellers on April 1, resulting in massive pent-up demand for overseas travel. I was one of many thousands who had to get a new passport.

My recent experience at the Immigration Department can best be described as surreal. I usually dread the process, as it could take at least half a day, with a long queue ahead. But this year with a new system requiring applicants to make an appointment online, it took me a mere 40 minutes to get a new passport. It was that fast!

Hotels, too, have invested in digitalisation to offer more efficient services to their customers. For instance, my check-in at Grand Hyatt Erawan Bangkok was a breeze, done in the comfort of my home in Kuala Lumpur. A day before my stay, I received an email from the hotel with a link to click and check-in. And upon arrival at the hotel, I got my room key card in under three minutes. I was so impressed by the new, post-lockdown efficiency.



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Patience pays off

Kathryn Worthley, correspondent, Japan

After two and a half years of waiting for the full return of inbound tourism and business events, the most exciting news for Japan in 2022 is undoubtedly the relaxation of border measures to allow visa-free, independent travel without a daily entry cap, which occurred on October 11.

But there have also been other good news for the country's travel and hospitality sectors, which have been struggling for some time – particularly in regional areas – due to the loss of inbound tourism. Japan successfully held its flagship event, Tourism Expo Japan, in the autumn after a long hiatus, and the country is expected to see a rebound in arrivals to pre-pandemic levels in 2023, according to a WTTC report this year.

Getting ready to welcome back travellers, in recent months the country has seen a slew of new or resumed airline routes as well as hotel openings and travel product launches. And, with more expected for early 2023, next year looks even brighter!

”

Two different tracks

Feizal Samath, correspondent, Sri Lanka/Maldives

It has been a gloomy period for news-gathering in crisis-hit Sri Lanka, where tourism has taken a tumble due to a multitude of crises triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic and shortages of foreign exchange. After two straight years of weak arrivals, there is finally a slow pick-up in 2022.

However, long queues for fuel, cooking gas and even medicines – which led to tourists avoiding Sri Lanka, as hotels also experienced resource shortages – meant the story was focused on how Sri Lanka was battling these crises and when it would end. It did end, and Sri Lanka is now hoping for a better winter season.

It is a different story in neighbouring Maldives, where tourism is thriving and heading for a record two million arrivals next year. One of the showpieces this year was the 50th anniversary celebrations of the country's tourism, marked with a UNWTO conference to discuss post-Covid-19 trends and other developments; it was an interesting event to cover as a reporter.



“

Greater responsibility

Marissa Carruthers, correspondent, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam

I attended my first overseas conference in March 2022 after a 27-month hiatus. It was in Dubai, where the requirement for pre-arrival PCR tests was already dropped. Three days before I departed, Cambodia announced it was also scrapping pre-arrival PCR tests. Travel suddenly became much less stressful. In the months that followed, South-east Asia started dropping restrictions and fully opening borders, prompting some sort of resumption to pre-pandemic normality. In recent months, I've started seeing more tourists pounding the streets of Cambodia. Albeit nowhere near pre-pandemic levels, they bring a sense of hope that tourism will return and remains a strong sector despite the devastation of Covid-19.

As tourism rebounds across the region, I've enjoyed hearing a real push towards conscious, eco-travel with some really exciting products on the market. I hope when the tourists flood back, the momentum doesn't get lost and the region can transform itself into a community-based eco-tourism haven.



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Hong Kong presses on

Prudence Lui, correspondent, Hong Kong

There is finally some light at the end of tunnel after the Hong Kong government scrapped the unpopular hotel quarantine requirement for travellers from September 26. But looking back is heartbreaking, as the fifth Covid wave turned the city upside down with record-high infections and record-low arrivals (16,182 visitors) in January-April 2022. The pace of recovery was far too slow and agents could only rely on local tours.

Despite all that, the tourism industry continues to prepare for recovery. I'm impressed by the government's decision to open up Sha Tau Kok Pier within a closed frontier area – an unprecedented decision that will diversify tour options for visitors to Hong Kong.

Also exciting is the opening of the iconic Hong Kong Palace Museum, which reinforces Hong Kong's competitive edge as an arts and cultural hub, along with the creation of a dedicated bureau to handle culture, sports and tourism under the newly-structured government.

Meanwhile, hopes are high for the Hong Kong Sevens and Global Financial Leaders' Investment Summit to end 2022 on a splendid note and demonstrate the city's readiness to welcome worldwide travellers.

Prepare for the unpredictable

Rachel AJ Lee, assistant editor, TTGmice/TTGassociations

I live and breathe travel, and not being able to get out of this Little Red Dot took a huge toll on my mental well-being and left me uninspired to write.

Hence, I am incredibly ecstatic that fam trips and overseas tradeshows are now back on the agenda! I get to network and meet with my travel industry peers, learn from them, listen to them, and pen stories that I am so proud of.

With the resurgence of travel, I am also thankful to see that the focus on responsible travel has intensified, with many travellers more conscious of spending their money within local communities, showing respect for cultures and traditions, and seeking genuine connections with individuals they come across.

Meanwhile, a life lesson the pandemic has taught me is how to expect the unexpected, and to always have several back-up plans when travelling. Too often we are stuck in the humdrum of our daily lives, we forget what it is like to be faced with uncertainty.



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Recovering in style

Adelaine Ng, correspondent, Australia

It's been quite a year for tourism and events, after almost two years of uncertainty, during which I couldn't help but think about all the cobwebs that might be building in airplanes while almost no one could fly. How excited were we in Australia when it was announced that our borders were re-opening in February, after a false start last November thanks to Omicron.

While the loss has been incredible, I cannot help but marvel at the industry's resilience, which can be mostly attributed to the tenacity shown by this industry's leaders and visionaries. Because hoping against uncertainty isn't an easy place to be in for any length of time. I've loved how the industry is showing sure signs of recovery, even while it's still licking its wounds. And it's returning in style, from what I've seen at destination showcases. There's also a higher value than ever on human connection and respecting our environment. Gotta love that.

”



Hello again, positivity!

Rohit Kaul, correspondent, India

The travel and tourism industry in India has been much more confident about its future in 2022 when compared to previous pandemic years. The situation in 2021 was grim, with a large number of causalities recorded across the country. India state governments were sceptical about receiving tourists, often blamed for spreading the virus. This resulted in many states having restrictions in movement of people.

However, industry sentiments have been taken a positive shift this year, as the pandemic comes under control. Domestic tourism is witnessing record growth – better than pre-pandemic years. The critical weddings business for India hotels is now back to its old glory.

The Indian government also earlier in the year allowed the resumption of scheduled international flights, paving the way for arrivals recovery.

The demand for outbound tourism has been massive too, with many European destinations finding it difficult to manage the sudden rush for visas.

Overall, 2022 marks the beginning of revival for travel and tourism in India.

Experience explosion

Mimi Hudoyo, editor, Indonesia

The most exciting thing to come out of the pandemic is the creation of new and improved experiences to cater to new needs. I'm seeing cooking classes using traditional techniques and utensils to appeal to sustainable travellers; emergence of glamping, camping vans and open-air restaurants with stunning natural views to satisfy travellers' desire for open space.

Furthermore, supply shortages have inspired some hotels to turn to local producers or grow their own vegetables and herbs.

Tech saves the day

Caroline Boey, senior correspondent

It may be a cliché to say technology is, and has been, the game changer in transforming travel and tourism businesses, helping them to evolve, innovate, create fun, and do things better.

Event technology provided a lifeline for the industry during the pandemic and now, the union of the metaverse and travel is no longer science fiction but reality.

To mitigate the high cost of travel this year and also reduce my carbon footprint, I imagine my avatar accessing new, creative and exciting experiences to recapture nostalgic memories of faraway destinations and also visit new ones.

Like everyone, I love to shop. I imagine the metaverse allowing me to try and buy anything and everything. And perhaps one day I will also be able to smell and taste food and produce from anywhere in the world.



The only constant is change

Rosa Ocampo, correspondent, the Philippines

Ever changing best describes Philippine tourism in 2022.

When Ferdinand Marcos Jr became the new Philippine president, the role of tourism secretary changed hands from Bernadette Romulo Puyat to Christina Garcia Frasco and so did the Tourism Promotions Board chief operating officer, from Maria Anthonette Velasco Allones to Margarita Montemayor Nograles. Both incumbents came from political families.

What did not change is the long-term slogan *It's More Fun in the Philippines*, which was retained with some tweaks. Garcia Frasco flipflopped from plans to replace the slogan due to strong objections from tourism stakeholders who believe it remains effective.

Creative evolution

Tiara Maharani Kusuma, correspondent, Indonesia

The year has been full of excitement for Indonesia, as the country welcomed various global events, from Pertamina Grand Prix of Indonesia in Mandalika, West Nusa Tenggara to G20 summit in Bali.

With eased restrictions since mid-2022, the industry finally entered a promising recovery period. Hopes are high as we see hotels filling out, more events being staged, and tourists' enthusiasm soar.

Personally, I'm thrilled to see tourism players in Indonesia getting very creative and flexible in the way they craft tours. For example, *melukat* (soul purifying) and hidden waterfalls in Bali are being introduced to travellers.

The list of new and creative experiences will continue to grow, simply because Indonesia has so much waiting to be discovered.



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Celebrating Travel Excellence

On Thursday, 22nd September 2022, Asia Pacific's travel industry gathered once again to celebrate the achievements of 41 outstanding organisations who have earned themselves the industry's highest honour.

Held at Centara Grand & Bangkok Convention Centre at CentralWorld, guests were welcomed with an extraordinary gastronomical dining experience as well as first-class entertainment by the very talented and renowned saxophone virtuoso, Koh also known as Mr. Saxman and his band, The Sound of Siam.

This TTG Travel Trade Publishing event is proudly organised by TTG Asia, with the support of TTG China, TTG India, TTGmice, TTG-BT MICE CHina, TTGassociations and TTG Asia Luxury. Visit awards.ttasia.com for the full winners list and event pictures.





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EDITOR'S NOTE

Regenerative effect



Rachel AJ Lee
Assistant Editor

Tourism plays a huge part in the development of the known world. Throughout the years, the industry has helped create economic and social value, sustain jobs, promote an understanding of culture and heritage, and highlight conservation efforts.

On the other hand, tourism also contributes to waste, puts pressure on natural resources through over consumption, adds to carbon emissions, and upsets fragile ecosystems and the oceans. All of this went away when the whole world went into an unexpected pandemic standstill.

If there's one thing good that came out of the pandemic, it is the increased focus on sustainability and travelling responsibly. The business events industry is no exception, and should play its part to help delegates and corporates travel with a purpose.

Fortunately, NTOs like Tourism New Zealand are making it easier for event planners to act with pragmatism. In its first global campaign since 2019, *If You Seek*, Tourism New Zealand builds destination desire by beckoning curious travellers to the country, promising to enrich their experiences through extraordinary travel. *If You Seek* also teaches international visitors to not only be mindful of, but also embrace Maori values and traditions which includes taking care of the land. Its capital Wellington (page 8) is an environmental trailblazer, making strides to becoming a zero-carbon city by 2050.

Hotel chains like Accor (page 4) and Marriott (TTG Asia section, page 10) are also pushing the envelope on responsible action. For instance, Accor provides employment opportunities to local communities it operates in; while The Athenee Hotel, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Bangkok – under the Marriott umbrella – purchases organic rice directly from local farmers, contributing to and sustaining their livelihoods.

Travel management companies like CWT and AMEX GBT have also partnered Delta and Shell Aviation respectively to drive the decarbonisation of aviation by investing in the research of Sustainable aviation fuels (SAF).

I am heartened to see all the verticals in the tourism space go beyond orphanage visits and one-time monetary donations.

What can you do then, as an individual?

I encourage you to take small, practical steps to better the world around you the next time you are travelling for business or a conference. Bring along a tote bag for your shopping needs, stay in a green property, choose to explore with local guides, opt for a DMC or PCO that champions sustainability, reduce food waste, and hold your event in an LEED-certified venue.

Responsible travel is more than just sustainability, it is about taking actionable, quantifiable steps, and leaving a place better than when you first encountered it. It's about leaving a legacy behind.

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Editor's note: In the print version of TTGmice September-October 2022 issue's Look to the north feature (page 26), a wrong destination image was used. It has since been replaced, and we apologise for the error.

TTGmice



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Sarah Derry

Accor's CEO Pacific sheds light on how the company is galvanising its efforts to advance sustainability with accountability. By [Rachel AJ Lee](#)

How does Accor's ongoing and upcoming programmes support sustainability-focused meeting clients?

Accor holds a powerful sense of social, environment and economic responsibility, and we believe that we are responsible for building a world for future generations. Conscious travel and sustainability is at the very heart of our organisation, and an integral part of what we do.

As an active member of the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, our goal is to move to a contributory model, where we help to solve critical environmental and social problems.

Our priorities are threefold: to accelerate our net zero trajectory (Accor is committed to achieving net zero by 2050); to innovate and protect biodiversity by leading our industry in adopting responsible and ethical business practices to stop food waste; and act as a social

elevator providing equal opportunities to all.

To achieve this, we are putting these priorities at the heart of our business model. This means that every conference, corporate function, every hotel, every employee and every partner of Accor integrates social and environmental issues into their business practices and activities.

How is Accor helping clients be a catalyst for change, and ensure that their travel and events benefit communities?

Accor has numerous initiatives in place across the globe to provide responsible hospitality, such as sustainable procurement practices; an industry-leading food waste reduction strategy; a commitment to eliminate all guest-related single-use items in hotels and meeting and events spaces by the end of 2022; and a

Plant for the Planet programme which has planted more than 7.2 million trees in the past 10 years.

A cornerstone of our strategy within the business events segment is our Net Zero Carbon Calculator, which helps clients calculate the carbon footprint of their event and purchase carbon credits to remaining emissions. This solution is provided in collaboration with myclimate – a Swiss non-profit organisation and global leader in carbon accounting and climate protection.

What other actions is Accor taking to streamline and funnel the tourism dollar so it goes to those that need it the most?

Hospitality is about welcoming and taking care of others. This mission is particularly important given the challenges that are affecting local communities across the globe. Climate change, Covid-19, inflation can mean hardship for many.

We actively participate in the life of the communities in which we operate. We are attentive to the needs of the most fragile sections of society and work for local economic development.

For example, we provide local communities with opportunities to grow – either directly by providing employment and training, or indirectly through the local companies we partner with. In 2020, Accor launched the All Heartist Fund that has already provided more than A\$6.5 million (US\$4.2 million) across Asia-Pacific alone – and euro 35 million (US\$33.9 million) globally – across many initiatives such as internships, employees in distress, and vulnerable persons in the communities in which we operate.

Across the Asia-Pacific, we have also invested more than A\$350,000 in domestic violence service providers, and through our Accor Community Fund we've raised over A\$2 million to support building healthy families in the community.

What other steps is Accor taking to help guests travel consciously and leave a positive impact on the destination?

We want to shape the transformation of the hospitality industry. This means supporting new ways of travelling, such as rewarding longer stays and stays closer to home.

Our hotels are the heart of our transformation as they are embedded in their local neighbourhoods and can help these communities thrive in new ways. Biodiversity and natural resources are equally important, and we preserve natural habitats by rethinking our food value chain and protecting endangered species close to our hotel activities.

Accor has also put in place new governance mechanisms and developed new ways of measuring extra-financial performance. We believe in collaboration over competition to solve those seemingly intractable challenges.



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GRAND | HYATT

Eric van Piggelen

The CEO of Borneo Convention Centre Kuching tells **S Puvaneswary** that his primary focus is on cultivating homegrown events and improving the venue's sustainability efforts

What is Borneo Convention Centre Kuching (BCCK)'s strategy to rebuild the business events segment in Sarawak?

We used the global slowdown in business events to update and upgrade our facilities and internal systems.

Taking a three-pronged approach, our focus was on improving modern comforts, digitalisation and efficiency. We have upgraded our internal systems to the best-in-class

versions available, expanded the centre's products and services, as well as beautified the venue.

By upgrading our internal systems, we aim to bring increased efficiency and quality assurance to our patrons and event organisers. These include the upgrading of the centralised air conditioning system, automated kitchen food quality monitoring systems, and integrated building management systems, which have led to more reliable, efficient service and product delivery.

These recent enhancements are designed to ensure we are ready to welcome our international clientele at in-person, hybrid and virtual events.

Moreover, BCCK has also expanded into hybrid, fully digital and televised events, armed with a Digital Broadcast Suite complete with high-definition recording and broadcasting camera sets, and other studio fixings. This will offer added value to larger international events, we can broadcast, distribute recordings or archive events taking place at the centre.

The centre's customisable digital event platform is an end-to-end platform to manage diversified event requirements post-lockdown.

At the same time, we are constantly driving future developments to further enhance BCCK's offerings locally and globally.

What are some major collaborations and smart partnerships that BCCK has made this year?

We have entered partnerships with like-minded organisations to produce homegrown events, with the aim of making it into annual events that can become hallmark events.

Our partners include Sarawak-based PCO ARC Creators, Sarawak Tourism Federation, and the Kuching Chefs Association.

Upcoming homegrown events next year include Borneo Extreme Auto Show & Tradefest; Borneo International Garden Expo Sarawak; Asia Pacific Tourism Expo & Conference; and Borneo Travel Mart. We intend to encourage and nurture these local events so that they can grow, and become regional events one day.

Planners and corporates are increasingly embracing sustainability. How does the centre support event planners in creating sustainable events?

Event planners can now opt to digitise their banners through myriad digital solutions available in-house, such as digital signages and large LED screens to reduce or eliminate printing. Our free public Wi-Fi system – which is capable of connecting 8,000 devices concurrently – also provides support for planners to digitise their event programmes.

On the F&B front, we have collaborated with a leading farm situated in Kuching to manage food waste via a bioconversion process. The segregated waste is recycled into organic fertilisers used to grow pesticide, chemical-free plants and herbs to meet our needs.

This eliminates waste and keeps it out of landfills and incinerators, thereby cutting down on harmful factors that affect the environment. Our food suppliers have also taken the step to work directly with farms, which is a great step for the community in the long term.

We are motivated to reduce and minimise any negative impact of our day-to-day operations on the environment. We currently have the assurance of ISO management systems, from the appointed vendor to process, salvage and turn our waste into reusable materials, which bodes well with our efforts to be environmentally sustainable.





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The Amari collection of hotels and resorts brings to life a contemporary re-imagining of Thailand's rich cultural roots, with the influences of unique localised settings amplified through architecture, design, art, cuisine and services. From scenic seashores to vibrant cities, Amari's network expands beyond Thailand, with Amari Kuala Lumpur and Amari SPICE Penang being its latest Malaysian additions.

Shama introduces serviced apartments that epitomise comfort and style, complete with compelling lifestyle programming aimed at fast-tracking the social lives of residents. Currently operating in Hong Kong and China, Shama is also augmenting its Bangkok portfolio to six by year-end.

Designed for adventurous, savvy travellers hungry for fresh discoveries, the lifestyle-led OZO hotels are aimed at creating buzz and zest downstairs - and peace and quiet upstairs. Staff stay in the know about the local best so guests can have rich insider experiences. OZO is presently in Phuket, Pattaya, Koh Samui, Penang and soon-to-be in Medini Iskandar - marking its continued portfolio expansion regionally.

Going for green

Jeju's sustainable efforts are helping to strengthen its business events industry, reports **S Puvaneswary**



From left: Hwansang Forest Gotjawal Park and ICC JEJU

The Jeju Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) takes sustainability and green efforts very seriously.

Aside from promoting sustainable business events and organising related forums, the CVB continues to encourage event organisers and tourism suppliers to take a more responsible approach.

Its chairman, Kim Ae-sook, shared: "We have been branding Jeju as a safe and sustainable business events destination.

"The island has world-class conference facilities for business events, and is the only place in the world certified in three UNESCO's Natural Science Sector lists – as a Biosphere Reserve, World Heritage and Global Geopark."

Many meeting facilities and unique venues in Jeju are already eco-friendly.

For example, the state-of-the-art International Convention Center (ICC) Jeju has installed multiple 751kw solar power generation facilities – the largest in scale on the island. The panels produce approximately 790,590kwh of electricity per year, saving approximately 100 million won (US\$ 71,054) in electricity bills annually.



Kim: sustainable events are a priority

Meanwhile, Hwansang Forest Gotjawal Park, a natural primeval forest popular for teambuilding events, offers various educational programmes which include protecting the forest for future generations, and supporting local farmers who use only locally-grown ingredients for all F&B sold in the park.

As a result of its green efforts, Jeju CVB has obtained the ISO 20121 (Event Sustainability Management System) international certification, while five other organisations, including ICC Jeju, are seeking to obtain this certification.

Kim said: "We are also encouraging our MICE Alliance members to obtain ISO 20121 certification, as this will provide guidance and best practices to event organisers."

As part of its responsible meeting efforts, in July 2021, Jeju CVB organised a Green MICE Forum to raise awareness on sustainability issues, such as minimising waste during events and using fairtrade products. The CVB also launched a guide for hosting green business events, and provided organisers with useful information on how to create a sustainable event in Jeju.

This year in August, Jeju CVB organised an ESG Management Forum to help strengthen local stakeholders' understanding of Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG), and provided a platform for further discussions related to ESG management.

While sustainability management has risen in importance across the global business events industry, the downside to hosting a green event is that it may cost more, and involve more thought and planning, reflected Kim.

To help organisers create a memorable and responsible event, Kim shared that the CVB provides all the necessary "guidance and support".



Meeting place of the future

Wellington has embraced and respected its environment, and put sustainability at the forefront of its future plans, ensuring the city's business events industry will also be able to thrive in the long run. By **S Puvaneswary**



Clockwise from above: A panoramic view of Wellington CBD and harbour; St James Theatre; a rendering of Tākina Wellington Convention and Exhibition Centre



The Atakura – First to Zero is a blueprint that Wellington city – and by extension its business events industry – is following, with the aim of becoming a zero carbon capital by 2050.

This move towards being greener is encapsulated in the soon-to-open Tākina Wellington Convention and Exhibition Centre, scheduled to open in June 2023. The purpose-built venue is also the first convention in New Zealand to be awarded a 5 Green Star Design certification in 2021.

The venue's green star design includes enhanced thermal insulation and high-performance double glazing, as well as efficient, automatically-controlled LED lighting, air conditioning and ventilation systems. When

combined, these create a 66 per cent carbon reduction, and 60 per cent in energy savings when benchmarked against a comparable new build.

Tākina will also sport a rainwater harvesting system estimated to reduce potable water consumption by 30 per cent, while timber materials used in its construction were sourced from sustainable forestry.

When complete, the multi-storey convention centre will boast 10,000m² of conference space with a plenary seating up to 1,600 people, a 2,500m² exhibition floor, two large, flex-



Ferreira: Wellington raises the sustainability bar

ible plenary halls and meeting rooms.

Its project director Danny McComb pointed out that the project has considered the impacts on the environment, as well as the comfort and well-being of the people inside it.

"Increasingly, conference and event organisers are looking at the values, attitudes and approaches to climate change and sustainability of venues and we expect that this will only increase."

Aside from Tākina, other venues in the city have reiterated their commitment to being more responsible in areas of waste, water and energy, and are working with local suppliers to help planners achieve zero waste events.

They include four WellingtonNZ-managed entertainment venues – Michael Fowler Centre, Opera House, TSB Arena and Shed 6 – all of which have also attained EarthCheck's Bronze Benchmark accreditation.

Aside from sustainable venues, Irette Ferreira, Business Events Wellington's manager, added: "Conferencing in Wellington provides event organisers with an opportunity to make a lasting difference by collaborating with local organisations such as Zealandia, the world's first fully-fenced urban eco-sanctuary regenerating the city's biodiversity, and Kaibosh, a food rescue organisation redistributing surplus food to people in need."

Besides the direct economic benefits business events bring to the city and region, conferences in particular are a catalyst for change, investment and improvement.

Through exposure to new or different ways of thinking, sectors grow and develop, new ideas are formed and refined, and governments change policies and regulations. Through new relationships, business is conducted, not only during an event but potentially for years to come.

"Wellington is home to thought leaders who live and work in the city, crown research institutions, central government agencies, national associations and several universities. That means we have access to their knowledge, and a breadth of speakers that live locally," Ferreira noted.

To date, Business Events Wellington has secured more than 40 conferences for the city from 2023 to 2026, with an estimated spend of more than NZ\$34 million (US\$28 million).

Rewarding incentives

As corporate incentive trips return, planners are spotting a stronger desire among top achievers to travel more responsibly and to leave their destinations in a better place than they were previously. By **Rachel AJ Lee**

A stronger desire to build back lives better post-lockdown has influenced people to travel more responsibly, and this in turn has shaped corporate incentive trip programming.

Zaim Muhammad, managing director at Dubai-based Red Berry Travel & Tours, told *TTGmice* that he has noticed an uptick in clients' requests for programmes that offer opportunities to preserve the local culture and to minimise negative impact on the destinations. There is also a preference for destinations where tours can directly support the local community. For instance, money will be spent at local restaurants, shopping will be made at small community shops, and local guides will be hired.

Along with conscious travel goals, big cities have fallen out of favour while requests for "mountain hiking and train journeys" having surged in recent months.

Sugeng Suprianto, managing director of Top Indonesia Holidays, echoes the shift away from big cities. His European and American clients are requesting for cultural experiences in Bali instead. In response, his agency has put forth walks in rice fields, where attendees can "burn some calories while learning about traditional rice farming", as well as water blessing rituals "that is very famous in Bali to help wash the bad luck away".

These activities are "immersive and meaningful", allowing travellers to learn about the local culture and "providing the local community with a sense of pride that their culture is being appreciated by people from other countries", Sugeng said.

"This is one way culture and traditions will continue to live on," he added.

Petrina Goh, director at CWT Meetings & Events, observed: "As people return to travel, it is all about coming back better...as a more informed traveller that is more conscientious about their impact on the community."

She has noticed a rise take up for farm-to-table activities, where attendees would forage for ingredients, prep the meal together, and dine with local hosts. Attendees take away a joyful memory, knowing that the activity is off-the-beaten-track, and the

experience is local and meaningful.

Making the first move

For corporates wanting to be more impactful with their travel programmes but are unsure about taking the first step, incentive planners can provide valuable direction.

Singapore-based MICE Matters' director Melvyn Nonis takes the initiative to discuss with clients how the content can be structured responsibly from the get-go.

He would recommend maximising the number of seats on coaches to save on costs and minimise carbon emissions; choosing set meals over buffets to reduce food wastage; providing reusable water bottles; and purchasing room drop gifts from locals.

On the travellers' end, Nonis would "remind delegates to be courteous and respectful to both the hotel staff and local guides given the shortage in manpower, be generous in tipping for good service, as well as (support) green efforts like reusing towels in the room".

While some clients

Goh: travellers are becoming more informed about their decisions



like to visit orphanages and children homes, Nonis offers a more meaningful approach by planning lunch with the beneficiaries, making monetary donations, and bringing items the orphanage might need, such as stationery and clothes.

While conscious incentive travel is becoming more common, AB Sadewa, corporate secretary of Panorama and chairman of Panorama Foundation, found demand for sustainable travel to come mainly from "the US, Canada and Europe". There have been few requests from the Asian market.

The Panorama Foundation is a social body that focuses on sustainable tourism growth. It ensures its own tourism products are developed in compliance with Travelife standards, which are acknowledged by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council. Travelife itself is a system that helps tour operators and travel agencies manage and improve social and environmental impacts by complying with sustainability criteria.

"One of the ways we can encourage our clients to think more about responsible travel for their future programmes is by doing a post-event campaign that shows what their efforts mean to local communities," Goh suggested.

This can be in the form of farewell notes or pictures, or even a short study on how the trip has helped to boost the local economy or supported the charity.

Goh believes that tracking legacy is the responsibility of planners and event agencies "because this will help make their planning for future events be progressively more meaningful than the last". — **additional reporting by Mimi Hudoyo**

BEST-IN-CLASS IN BORNEO

Upgraded and ready to take on the world, the Borneo Convention Centre Kuching looks forward to a new era



The Borneo Convention Centre Kuching (BCCK) used the global slowdown in business events during the pandemic to update and upgrade its facilities. Taking a three-pronged approach, its focus was on improving modern comforts, digitization and efficiency. It has upgraded its current systems to the best-in-class versions available, expanding the Centre's products and services as well as beautifying the venue.

By upgrading its internal systems, the Centre aims to bring increased efficiency and assure quality to event organisers. From the centralized air-conditioning to the automated kitchen food quality monitoring systems, upgrading to systems such as the Integrated Building Management Systems has led to more reliable and efficient service and product delivery.

ENHANCEMENT

BCCK has also enhanced digitally and technologically, incorporating top-of-the-line sound systems from D&B Audiotechnik, digital signages and billboards throughout the centre, and equipping selected meeting rooms with 20,000 ANSI Lumens projectors.

IMPROVED WEBSITE

The Centre's website has been completely overhauled, streamlining client and partner's experience which has made seamless communication and navigation for BCCK's most recent and upcoming offerings.

INVESTMENT

Expansion takes a front seat in BCCK's development plans for 2022. Venue-wise, the centre invested in a Mobile Telescopic Bleacher Seating System that can seat nearly 1,900 people within the Great Hall, hence diversifying the types of spectator events BCCK can host.

BCCK has also had a face-lift, refurbishing, fixing and repainting some of its more iconic features such as its leaf-shaped roof and decorative beams, as well as phasing out older linens used in banqueting for a fresher look.

HYBRID READY

BCCK is expanding into hybrid, fully digital and televised events, armed with a digital broadcast suite complete with high-definition recording and broadcasting camera sets and other studio fixings. Offering add-on value to larger international events, it can broadcast, distribute recordings or archive events taking place at the Centre.

REDEFINING BUSINESS EVENTS

BCCK has also begun focusing on generating its own home-grown events with the goal to create annual events that like-minded delegates can look forward to, annually. This will also encourage and nurture local grass-roots events into regional events in the near future.

Among these home-grown events are the Engage and Taste Borneo Conference

2022 (EAT Borneo 2022), Borneo Extreme Auto Show & Tradefest (BEAST 2023), Borneo International Garden Expo Sarawak (BIGEXS 2023), Asia Pacific Tourism Expo & Conference (APTEC 2023) and Borneo Travel Mart (BTM 2023) which aim to be the catalyst for change in bringing together industry-leading experts to convene in Kuching, Sarawak.

For over a decade, BCCK is proud to have served as the largest and best equipped convention centre in Borneo. Its recent enhancements are designed to ensure it welcome back its international clientele at in-person, hybrid or digital events.



CONTACT

For further information visit the website: www.bcck.com.my

- facebook.com/BorneoConventionCentreKuching
- instagram.com/BCCKSarawak
- twitter.com/BCCKSarawak
- linkedin.com/company/BCCK



choice, based on the hotel's design and sustainability programmes.

In general, Accenture requires its suppliers to respond to a set of questionnaires that looks into their sustainability programmes.

When asked by panel moderator, Karen Yue, group editor of TTG Asia Media, if Accenture have had to disqualify travel suppliers that failed to align with the company's own sustainability goals, Das said "leeway is given to those who just started their sustainability journey".

He also emphasised a supportive approach, where Accenture looks at helping suppliers to catch up on responsible actions.

For example, should a potential airline supplier fall short on Accenture's sustainable requirements now, it would consider the airline's future plans to acquire fuel-efficient aircraft and how it intends to optimise passenger load to reduce carbon emissions.

Supplier support

The pressure on businesses to be sustainable is real and strong.

Brayden Lai, senior business development manager at South Pole, a Swiss carbon finance consultancy, noted that more companies are getting serious about their climate strategy. 2021 saw a 29 per cent increase in the number of companies in Asia-Pacific reporting through CDP – an international non-profit organisation that runs a global disclosure system for investors, companies, cities, states and regions to manage their environmental impacts – compared to 2020, and a more than five-fold growth from fewer than 700 companies in 2016. One-third (32 per cent) were first-time responders, demonstrating a growing momentum among businesses towards embedding transparent environmental disclosure in their operations.

The report shows that climate action has risen to the C-suite level, with almost all respondents (98 per cent) having management-level oversight for climate-related issues. Three-quarters (76 per cent) of companies reported having a process for identifying, assessing and responding to climate-related risks and opportunities.

"Companies now regard sustainability efforts as a way to engage consumers who are highly aware of environmental issues. Many are starting to disclose their carbon emissions and environmental impact," said Lai.

Currently, South Pole's website lists many major global firms across industries as its clients. Within the travel and tourism industry, South Pole supports

Walking the sustainability talk

Companies are establishing a number of stringent policies to propel the business events and travel industry forward on its sustainability journey. By **Rachel AJ Lee**

The sustainability focus on travel and events has intensified and trickled down the supply chain, putting pressure on businesses to support clients' responsible objectives, noted speakers on a panel at IT&CM Asia and CTW Asia-Pacific in October.

Emphasising the importance of sustainability and scope of focus at Accenture Solutions, Amarnath Lal Das, vice president – India of travel, meeting & events, said: "Sustainability spans environmental, social and governance issues. We have made sustainability one of our greatest responsibilities, not just because it's the right thing to do, but also because we believe that it is one of the most powerful forces for change in our generation."

Accenture started its sustainability journey in 2012, and in the space of travel and events, its efforts have moved past the elimination of single-use plastics and cutlery. It has its own system to digitise invoices to reduce paper usage, and is developing a booking tool that will identify carbon emissions based on the fuel efficiency of the aircraft used by Accenture travellers. The booking tool will be an improvement on the current system, which provides emissions information post-trip.

Das said the booking tool would be ready by 2025.

A similar approach is taken with hotel suppliers, where Accenture travellers can identify their carbon emissions from their accommodation

Above: The Athenee Hotel, a Luxury Collection Hotel in Bangkok, sources direct from local food producers as part of its sustainable commitment

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Hilton and FCM Travel Solutions.

With Hilton, South Pole helps to facilitate carbon-neutral meetings at the group's hotels. Hilton calculates emissions from onsite meetings and events, and takes part in South Pole's offsetting projects.

With FCM Travel Solutions, South Pole provides clients of the corporate travel agency with insights into their carbon emissions and facilitates carbon-offsetting through its projects.

Lai told *TTGmice* that there is a "huge interest in this because business travel contributes to Scope 3 emissions, which is more challenging for companies to track".

Chooleng Goh, general manager, The Athenee Hotel, a Luxury Collection Hotel, has seen sustainability practices reigning as the "number one question" among event clients.

"Once we share our sustainability story, it's a 99 per cent done deal. Some clients don't even need to see our spaces or look at our service (to decide on us)," she said.

Located in Bangkok, The Athenee Hotel is an active campaigner for environmental sustainability, and is the first hotel in the world to be certified ISO 20121 for event sustainability management systems.

A major milestone in its sustainability journey is the purchasing of organic rice directly from Thai farmers. This keeps costs low for the hotel and provides a sustainable livelihood for over 700 keeps. On Goh's agenda now is the move towards electric vehicles, and the installation of charging stations.

To help clients make responsible travel choices, travel-related organisations like SAP Concur and Amadeus have partnered CHOOOSE, a climate-tech company that integrates climate action options into the customer experience.

SAP Concur and CHOOOSE launched this year the CHOOOSE Climate App, which automates flight-related carbon emission measuring and reporting, and allows companies to address unavoidable emissions by supporting verified, high-impact climate solutions, such as carbon removal, offsetting projects, and Sustainable Aviation Fuel.

Over at Amadeus, CHOOOSE's technology is used to provide emissions calculations across the entire travel journey – rail or air travel, accommodation, and ground transportation – built upon industry standard frameworks. The collaboration also offers trade buyers access to a marketplace of solutions aimed at reducing or eliminating climate change.

Concrete climate actions

Barbara Ewals, executive director with Initiative for Global Resilience (i4gr), said "it's great to see that everyone has more sustainable intentions now, which pushes the corporate side".

"This, in turn, pushes the government to enact more policies for corporates to be more intentional (in their sustainability efforts," she added.

The Bangkok-based social enterprise supports leaders in creating large-scale and lasting social change by facilitating and advancing solutions to global challenges through multi-stakeholder partnerships, and the sharing of knowledge and best practices, via position papers, forums, and the media.

Ewals believes in influencing sustainable practices with personal experience and flexibility, instead of "force-feeding" values.

Citing an example, she pointed to i4gr's F&B approach at a series of global meetings on sustainable food and agriculture, where it was one of the content providers. i4gr intentionally designed vegetarian meals for delegates. The arrangement was a success in Asia, Europe and North America.

"But when we went to Brazil, there were vehement protests, (as the locals insisted on) their right to their meat!" she recalled with a chuckle.

A compromise was reached, with a vegetarian offering only on the last day. The outcome was encouraging, as the attendees "were pleasantly surprised that vegetarian options were edible".

"This is an incremental change," said Ewals, adding that the positive experience could influence some of the 300 Brazilians in attendance to make an intentional change to their future event menus.

As for relying on carbon offset programmes, Ewals spoke bluntly against potential scams, where organisations

sold credits to protect national parks – trees cannot be felled easily in these areas, so credits are meaningless.

Instead of buying credits to get to net-zero somewhere in the future, she urged companies to take actions now to reduce their emissions.

Agreeing, Goh said her hotel provides options for clients to minimise their event footprint from the get-go. Such options include reducing food waste through the hotel's work with Scholars of Sustenance Foundation where excess food is donated, or by repurposing unused ingredients.

When asked what more could the travel and events industry do to contribute to a sustainable and resilient world, Ewals suggested establishing cross-industry partnerships.

For example, hotels and resorts could work more closely with a landscape architecture association on responsible design.

"We need to stop (staying in) our own silos and engage other like-minded associations," Ewals encouraged.

She also advised corporates to drop the term CSR (corporate social responsibility), because it is "self-serving". Instead, she suggested adopting the terms "stakeholder engagement" or "community engagement" because they inspire more meaningful work.

As for Goh, she underlined the need to consider sustainable actions for the long run.

"Instead of a one-off donation to a youth orphanage, it is better to provide them with education and take them on as young future trainees and educate them.

"Same for the rice farmers. They do not want one-off donations; they want to have a sustainable livelihood and to continue farming for the next 10, 20 or 30 years," she said. – **additional reporting by Karen Yue**



From left: TTG Asia Media's Karen Yue; The Athenee Hotel's Chooleng Goh; Initiative for Global Resilience's Barbara Ewals; and Accenture Solutions' Amarnath Lal Das speaking at the IT&CM Asia and CTW Asia-Pacific 2022 panel

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