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WEEKLY INSIGHTS

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Penang poised to gain from Asia's cruise market

The tourism sector in Malaysia, and Penang specifically, is well-positioned to take advantage of the bright prospects of the cruise market in Asia.

Angie Stephen, the Royal Caribbean International vice-president and managing director for Asia-Pacific, said the Asian market, in general, is very new to the cruise market, and that not many cruise ships visit the region compared with Alaska, Europe, and the Caribbean, which are saturated with cruise ships.

“Asia is the last untapped region and it has the fastest growing middle class. We all have a great opportunity to take the lead and drive the infrastructure and policy development here so that more ships will be drawn into the region, subsequently into Penang and Malaysia,” she told a media briefing in conjunction with the Royal Caribbean’s Spectrum of the Seas one-day showcase.

Penang Port has served 13 international calls totalling nearly 35,000 passengers just in July this year, 27,000 of whom were guests from Spectrum of the Seas. [READ MORE](#)



Sandakan Tourism Association and Malaysia Airlines look to boost tourism

Sandakan Tourism Association (STAN) and Malaysia Airlines (MAB) have jointly launched the “Discover a great deal more in Sandakan” promotional campaign to further boost tourist arrivals to Sandakan, the second largest city in Sabah.

The latest campaign offers domestic travellers to fly from Kuala Lumpur to Sandakan with an exclusive one-way fare of RM179. Likewise, travellers from Singapore will also enjoy special discounted fares of up to 15% when flying from Singapore to Sandakan (via Kuala Lumpur). As part of the promotional offers, customers can also expect flight offers, vacation packages, and experiences when booking from 5 to 19 August, for immediate travel until 31 March 2023. Bookings for the deals may be made on the Malaysia Airlines Holidays website.

Lau Yin May, group chief marketing and customer experience officer of MAB said: "With our commitment to #FlyConfidently, we have noticed a high appetite for travel, with most flights being 75 to 80% full, demonstrating customer confidence to travel. This is an incredibly encouraging sign that tourism has been progressively returning to full recovery. [READ MORE](#)



Malaysia targets Qatar and Azerbaijan for medical tourism

Malaysia is looking to expand its network of target countries to develop medical travel. The Malaysian embassy in Qatar said it was seeking potential cooperation from the country in the healthcare sector. The Malaysian Medical Tourism Council (MHTC) has also said it sees Azerbaijan as a new source of medical tourists.

Malaysia is looking to encourage collaboration with Qatari healthcare businesses.

Its embassy in Qatar, together with MHTC, recently hosted a webinar on hematopoietic stem cell transplantation in thalassemia. Tourism Malaysia also held a roadshow in Doha in May, bringing together Malaysian travel agencies, hotels, medical tourism players and locals.

Another target country for MHTC is Azerbaijan, where Malaysia seeks to increase the number of medical tourists. It said it was looking to build a network with healthcare providers in the region, especially with private hospitals. [READ MORE](#)



Airbnb urges Penang govt to reconsider draft proposal for short-term rental accommodation

Global hospitality company, Airbnb wants the Penang State Government to reconsider the draft proposal for short-term rental accommodation (STRA) over fears that it could affect the recovery of the tourism industry and the State's economy.

Airbnb Public Policy Head for Southeast Asia, India, Hong Kong and Taiwan, Mich Goh said she was concerned that the draft proposal would make it difficult for Malaysians to generate income.

"During a public dialogue with the Penang Housing and Local Government Committee chairman Jagdeep Singh Deo last July 28, Airbnb and its host community members discussed and gave feedback on the proposals by local residents' council and the Joint Management Body (JMB) regarding STRA activities.

"We (Airbnb) voiced our concern about Jagdeep's proposal for local JMBs to implement a strict limit on STRA activities up to three nights a week and 180 nights a year and prevent STRA in commercial strata buildings unless 75% of the owners are present at a general meeting to vote to allow STRA," she said in a statement.

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Jakarta, Bangkok see luxury hotel boom as tourism rebounds

More than 50 luxury hotels are set to open in Jakarta and Bangkok within the next five years, highlighting expectations of a strong economic recovery in two of Southeast Asia's largest cities as COVID-19 travel restrictions are eased.

Hyatt Hotels of the U.S. debuted a property under its flagship luxury brand in central Jakarta near the Indonesian president's official residence on July 8. Park Hyatt Jakarta opened on the grounds of the headquarters of MNC Group through a partnership with the local media giant.

A study by Nikkei found that 13 four-star and higher-ranked hotels are scheduled to open in Jakarta from 2021 to 2026. Japan's Hotel Okura plans to debut a five-star hotel in the city's central business district in 2025, while Hong Kong-based Langham Hotels & Resorts has opened its first Indonesian property.

Bangkok is anticipating a more rapid pace of high-end hotel openings. According to Germany's Tophotelnews, 28 four-star and 13 five-star hotels will launch in the Thai capital from 2021 to 2024. [READ MORE](#)



Ascott expands portfolio

CapitaLand Investment Limited's (CLI) wholly owned lodging business unit, The Ascott Limited (Ascott) is acquiring a freehold asset in Tokyo, Japan, via the Ascott Serviced Residence Global Fund (ASRGF), Ascott's private equity fund with Qatar Investment Authority.

The asset will be refurbished to introduce Ascott's first lyf-branded coliving property in the city. The acquisition follows Ascott's signing of over 7,500 units in 1H 2022, a 32% increase compared to last year.

Ascott opened 20 properties with more than 4,500 units in the first half of 2022, a 56% year-on-year increase in units. In addition, Ascott has recently completed its acquisition of Oakwood Worldwide (Oakwood) in July 2022, expanding its portfolio by about 15,000 units to over 153,000 units across over 900 properties. The newly signed and opened properties and the addition of Oakwood will further boost Ascott's recurring fee income. [READ MORE](#)

