



Asian Council of Tourism

Newsletter

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Message from the Chairman

Dear Members and Friends of CACCI,



I am delighted to address you through our latest newsletter, a medium that allows us to connect, share, and celebrate the achievements and progress within the Confederation of Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

As we navigate through these unprecedented times, our commitment to fostering economic growth, trade, and cooperation across the Asia-Pacific region remains unwavering. Despite the challenges, our collective resilience and determination have enabled us to adapt and find innovative solutions.

In the past year, we have witnessed remarkable strides in areas such as sustainable development, digital transformation, and international collaboration. CACCI has continued to serve as a catalyst for promoting best practices, facilitating dialogue, and creating opportunities for businesses both large and small.

We are particularly proud of our efforts to foster sustainable practices and responsible business behavior. Sustainability is not just a buzzword; it is a fundamental pillar of modern business. CACCI remains dedicated to supporting initiatives that promote environmental responsibility, social equity, and economic prosperity. Our region's future depends on the decisions we make today, and together, we are forging a path toward a more sustainable and inclusive future.

As we look ahead, CACCI is committed to expanding its reach and influence in the Asia-Pacific region. We will continue to advocate for policies that enable entrepreneurship, free trade, and investment. We will strengthen our partnerships with chambers of commerce, governments, and international organizations to create a more conducive environment for business growth.

I invite all of you to actively engage with CACCI, share your ideas, and participate in our initiatives. Your contributions are invaluable, and together, we can shape the future of commerce and industry in our region.

In closing, I would like to express my gratitude to our members, partners, and the dedicated team at CACCI for their unwavering support and commitment. Together, we will overcome challenges, seize opportunities, and build a brighter future for the Asia-Pacific.

Thank you for your trust and dedication to CACCI's mission.

Sincerely,
Anura Lokuhetty
Chairman, Asian Council of Tourism

Japan Tourism Woes an Opportunity for Needed Change

Tourism in Japan is recovering. It hasn't yet hit pre-pandemic levels but the number of visitors is quickly growing.

The tourism industry is another matter, however. Hotels, travel companies and other tourist-related businesses are having a hard time adjusting to this new environment. It is an opportunity to implement much-needed changes. Yet while the industry modernizes, it's vital that Japan not lose the special touch that has made this country a unique destination.

Japan has cultivated foreign traveler, touting its extraordinary sites and vistas, as well as a level of service and hospitality – its omotenashi – that distinguishes it from many other places. Japan hosted a record 32 million inbound visitors to Japan in 2019 as tourism boomed. Those tourists spend a record ¥4.81 trillion (\$43.6 billion), 6.5% more than in 2018 and a seventh consecutive annual increase.

Impressive though those numbers were, 2020 was expected to surpass them by a considerable margin when Tokyo hosted the Summer Olympic Games; industry experts anticipated 40 million visitors and a near doubling of spending to ¥8 trillion. Significantly, foreign travel was part of a larger tourism boom: The entire industry generated about ¥29 trillion in 2019 – a considerable boost to the economy.

Yet instead of continuing growth, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and Japan, like so many other countries, shut its doors to foreign travelers and domestic travel locked down. The number of foreign visitors to Japan in 2020 plummeted more than 87%, hitting a 22-year low of 4.12 million people, and tourism revenues fell to \$11.4 billion – just a sliver (0.23%) of gross domestic product.

That was not the bottom, however: Just 245,900 people visited in 2021 before the headcount rebounded to 3.83 million in 2022. Industry analysts expect 2023 to be a banner year and the numbers thus far justify those expectations. About 1.5 million people visited Japan in January, according to the Japan National Tourism Organization, a little over half the number of January 2019, but 84 times as many as in January of 2022. Monthly arrivals as expected to keep rising – the easing of entry requirements for tourists from China on March 1 should provide a huge boost – and Japan could welcome as many as 20 million visitors in 2023.

Tourist spending is a welcome boost to an economy that continues to struggle. Foreign visitors are expected to spend about ¥3.5 trillion, about ¥2 trillion (\$15 billion) more yen than was estimated to have been spent in 2022. This is a little more than half the amount spent in the year before the pandemic, however.

The surge in arrivals has intensified pressure on an industry that was already under strain. Airlines are not scheduling the number of flights that they had before the pandemic, resulting in full planes and expensive airfares. Ground staff have not returned to pre-COVID-19 levels, yielding long lines at airports and delays in customer service.

Charter bus services lack both drivers and guides. Taxis are harder to find and lines have lengthened at entry points.

According to an industry survey in summer 2022, the hotel, restaurant and entertainment sectors lost nearly 10% of their



workforce over the last three years, with the hotel industry labor force experiencing twice that decline. A January survey of more than 10,000 inns and hotels found that 77.8% did not have enough full-time employees and 81.1% said they did not have enough part-time and other irregular-hour workers. This is a record shortage even compared to the boom days of 2019.

Wages have increased in response, but bottlenecks are likely to become even tighter. That will strain efforts to provide the level of service that those visitors are right to expect from Japan.

The nation should diversify the tourist experience. Visitors crowd Tokyo and Kyoto, and while those are special experiences, more should be done to encourage travels to other equally, if not more, rewarding locales elsewhere in the country. That is a challenge in the best of times but even more so as rural populations age and shrink. It will take effort to make less traveled roads and places more hospitable to foreigners, most of whom will not speak the language nor understand local cultures and more.

Especially tricky will be navigating COVID-19 protocols. The disease remains a concern and Japan, like other tourist destinations, must adapt accordingly. That means reducing crowds most immediately and moving away from the mass tourism of the past. Japan continues to promote mask use and the temperature monitors, glass dividers and sanitizers found on many restaurant tables are not as common overseas. It will be challenging to balance the need for visitors to be welcome and respected and yet mindful of Japanese health practices.

Attention should be devoted as well to sustainability. The most recent tourism white paper notes that in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a renewed emphasis on sustainable tourism or “tourism that fully takes into account its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts while addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and the communities that host them.”

This obliges hosts to strike a balance. Tourist sites should be accessible but they shouldn't be overcrowded or congested. Facilities, practices and amenities should be modernized, but local conditions should be preserved and local customs observed. The white paper underscored then need for renovating facilities and removing old, outdated or abandoned buildings. This will take money.

The effective modernization and management of

tourism demands government can offer financial support as well as promotional efforts to expose non-Japanese to alternative destinations before they get to Japan. Prefectural governments and communities can help create economies of scale by establishing and promoting programs that encourage spending in defined areas through digital or local currencies. This should be part of the much-needed renovation of regional financial infrastructure.

Universities can promote hospitality programs and degrees and encourage the fertilization of ideas and efforts across studies. A particular area of focus should be digital projects to make areas and their products more accessible (in every sense of the word). Businesses can explore so-called workation options as they adopt more flexible work alternatives. Prefectures and municipalities should energize sister city programs to forge stronger links with their partners in other countries and facilitate tourism.

While the Japanese government is revising its Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan for 2023 to 2025, it has been reported that it will keep pre-pandemic goals of attracting 60 million international tourists in 2030, with related consumption valued at ¥15 trillion. That means that the strains Japan is experiencing are likely to intensify, especially when Chinese tourism resumes to pre-COVID-19 levels.

The Golden Week vacation will be revealing. Japan must gear up for those tests but the real challenge is modernizing an industry in need of overhaul – while retaining Japan’s very special character.

Japan Times

Amadeus Expands R&D Center in Istanbul



Investment Office President A. Burak Dağlıoğlu

European travel tech company Amadeus unveiled plans to expand its R&D center in Istanbul. The announcement event was held on May 4 in Istanbul and attended by Investment Office President A. Burak Dağlıoğlu and representatives from the Spanish government, as well as members from the global business community.

Since 1994, Amadeus has served travel agencies, airlines, airports, hotels, and destination management offices in Türkiye, demonstrating its commitment to the country’s investment environment. Amadeus is the only Spanish company having an R&D center in Istanbul, with almost 300 employees in the country.

During his address at the event, Investment Office

President A. Burak Dağlıoğlu said, “We would like to thank Amadeus that has continued to add value to Türkiye for nearly three decades and has been one of our major business partners in recent years, particularly through its R&D and innovation operations. Approximately 600 international companies conduct R&D activities in Türkiye either in technoparks or in their own facilities. The number of R&D facilities of international companies in Türkiye has been steadily increasing. As we always emphasized, Türkiye has been a regional hub for global companies for R&D, design, production, procurement, and regional management operations, among other related activities, and will continue to consolidate its position as a regional powerhouse. In the new century of our Republic, Türkiye will continue to offer an investor-friendly business environment and an alluring startup ecosystem under the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.”

Commenting on the investment, Amadeus SVP of IT, Application & Data Platform Niko Samberger, stated, “It is a great pleasure for us to announce the new location of the R&D Center in Istanbul. Amadeus has been almost 30 years investing in Türkiye, a key strategic market for us. We want to be perceived as Türkiye’s tech partner; we are investing in attracting and retaining local talent by growing our R&D community from 265 to 700 engineers by 2025. And we intend to continue doing so for the years to come.”

Türkiye has been a regional hub for global companies for R&D, design, production, procurement, and regional management operations, among other related activities, and will continue to consolidate its position as a regional powerhouse.

Investment in Türkiye

Sauna Helping to Revitalize Rural Tourism in Japan

Efforts are gaining traction to promote tourism in Japan by highlighting saunas, which have become increasingly popular, mainly among young people, in recent years.

In addition to selling travel plans that combine the use of sauna facilities with airline tickets, Japan Airlines (JAL) has developed a service that allows customers to check how crowded saunas are.

In rural areas, outdoor saunas that take advantage of the natural environment, such as by using tents, have been set up one after another.

Travel agencies have designed tours featuring saunas, while local governments are ramping up efforts to raise publicity for sauna-focused tourism and boost support for business operators.

Since March 2021, JAL has been offering a “JAL sauna travel dynamic package,” which gives customers a free hand in combining admissions to sauna accommodation with airline tickets.

As destinations, customers can choose from the Hokkaido, Kyushu, Hokuriku, Tohoku and Kanto regions. The package offers the option of buying a ¥500, one-day ticket that can be used at an affiliate facility in a destination of choice. Many of the customers are men in their 30s and 40s, with Hokkaido most

frequently selected, according to JAL.

Moreover, the airline plans to start, possibly in August, a service that checks flows of people in sauna rooms with high-precision sensors and allows customers to see how busy they are on outdoor monitors. The company also plans to launch a smartphone app for the service around autumn in a bid to tackle sauna congestions, which has become a challenge chiefly in urban areas.

An official involved in the project expressed hopes for market growth, saying, "Development of the sauna market is key to growth of our tour package."

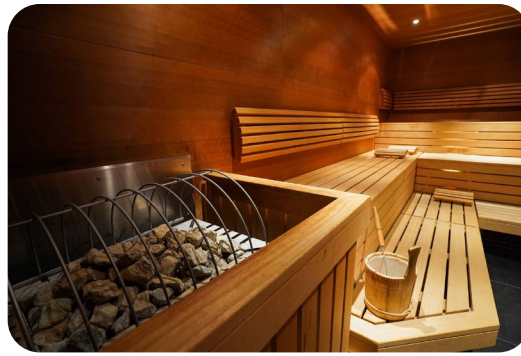
The Obihiro branch of Nippon Travel Agency's Hokkaido subsidiary, working in cooperation with local businesses offered in February a two-day special tour of saunas in Hokkaido's Tokachi area to those who were selected in lotteries.

The tour included *avanto*, a Finnish-style experience in which participants cool down by dipping in a lake after taking a sauna bath, and proved popular with customers, including first-timers. "We will create circuit tour plans for spring, summer, autumn and winter," an official operating the tour said.

In recent years, saunas have soared in popularity in Japan after being featured in manga comics and television dramas. According to Sauna Ikitai, a sauna website, there are more than 10,000 such facilities in Japan.

According to a survey conducted in 2023 by the Japan Sauna Institute, 5.47 million people across the nation visit a sauna one to three times a month, with 2.87 million people doing so four or more times monthly.

The Nature Sauna, established in autumn 2020 at a



Saunas have recently been used as a way of attracting tourists to Japan. | GETTY IMAGES

campground in a national park in the town of Kotoura, Tottori Prefecture, is a popular facility that allows users to experience the Finnish way of enjoying a sauna, in which water is poured on heated stones to create steam, in the middle of nature.

The Tottori Prefectural Government launched a website in autumn 2021 to distribute videos of model itineraries for visiting such facilities, restaurants and tourist spots. It also provides subsidies to the operators of sauna-related events.

There are calls for updating regulations governing saunas that could impede further market growth in Japan.

Operating saunas requires permission under the public bathhouse law, with installation criteria laid down in each related local government's ordinance to enforce the law.

As the law assumes conventional-model saunas that from parts of hot bath facilities, many rules are said to make it difficult for makeshift outdoor facilities to be authorized, including the requirement under the installation criteria that the sauna floors must be made of water-resistant materials such as tiles.

Such rules have forced some would-be operators to abandon plans to open for business. An industry official expressed worries that the law may "cut off green shoots of new tourism resources."

A nonpartisan group of national lawmakers eager to promote saunas, which was launched in November in 2022, plans to identify issues that need to be dealt with and discuss ways to improve the environment for invigorating sauna culture in Japan.

Japan Times

Vietnam emerging as Southeast Asia's new tourist hot spot

By Tommy Walker



Halong Bay is one of Vietnam's top tourist draws

As tourism rebounds after COVID, industry experts say Vietnam is becoming a favored destination for travelers to Asia. However, Thailand looks to remain No. 1 for the foreseeable future.

Vietnam has fast become one of the most popular destinations in Southeast Asia, as tourists enjoy the country's diverse landscapes, beaches, mountainous rice terraces and

bustling cities.

According to a report by Google Destination Insights, Vietnam was the seventh most searched destination from March to June, and the only country in Southeast Asia in the top 20.

The popularity of Vietnam is showing in the number of international arrivals. The Vietnam National Administration of Tourism announced in June that the country had welcomed over 5.5 million foreign visitors in the first six months of 2023, already exceeding the total number of international arrivals in 2022.

More tourist growth predicted for Vietnam

Vietnam's tourist sector has set a target of 8 million visitors for the remainder of 2023, however, the tourism bureau has since predicted the numbers will likely rise to 10 million.

Bobby Nguyen, chairman of Rustic Hospitality Group, a tour agency, told DW that the boost is coming mainly from Chinese, Indian and Korean tourists.

"China has reopened the outbound market to Vietnam

and the Indian market has grown since 2022,” he said.

Nguyen added that the use of social media and the influence of large travel groups have also helped boost Vietnam’s international popularity.

“Having many online communication channels such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok or promotion channels on Google or other networking channels is also the fastest way to promote Vietnam’s image to the world,” he said.

Vietnam’s improved visa policy expected to boost tourism

Hanoi recently approved a new visa policy for international visitors arriving in the country, tripling visa waivers from 15 to 45 days for selected countries.

And for visitors from countries eligible to apply for an electronic visa to Vietnam, visas will now be valid for up to 90 days with single or multiple entries.

The changes will come into force on August 15.

Gary Bowerman, a tourism analyst based in Kuala Lumpur, said the visa changes will boost the tourism sector.

“It’s picking up, and over the next six months, you will see travelers to Vietnam increase. I think it’s going to be very strong, and you’ll see growth particularly now the Chinese market is back,” he told DW.

One of Vietnam’s selling points is that it’s a lesser-known destination, and it offers both tourism and business opportunities, said Bowerman.

“A lot of younger people now want to learn a bit more about the country. I think there’s a lot about Vietnam that isn’t very well-known. I think Thailand is probably better known. There is a sense of discovery and mysticism about Vietnam. It is the country where people want to invest, where they want to do business, and they want to travel,” he added.

Vietnam’s travel industry looks forward



The city of Hoi An on Vietnam’s central coast is famous for its lanterns

For travel companies in Vietnam, the new visa policy and prospect of more international arrivals is exciting.

“I’m looking forward to seeing what happens,” said Max Lambert, owner of Fuse Hostels & Travel.

Fuse launched two hostels in the popular city of Hoi An late last year, but Lambert already believes his company is operating near to what pre-pandemic levels would have been.

“We’re seeing in the last three months a substantial uptick in the number of international guests staying in hostels,” he told DW, adding that bookings are back to 2019 levels.

“I think the hangover from the COVID pandemic, for our end of the market, is pretty much over,” he said.

Thailand still holds top spot

However, international arrivals into Vietnam are still way off pre-pandemic levels. In 2019, there were nearly 19 million international arrivals.

It means Vietnam has still some way to go if it’s going to rival tourism in Thailand, said Lambert.

“Thailand is still getting more number growth. Thailand is the big player in the region, it’s going to take a long time for Vietnam to get to that level,” he said.

Tourism operator Nguyen said Vietnam must improve in several areas to fully maximize its potential.

“Tourism is an integrated economy, the coordination between ministries and sectors must be close. The infrastructure, including the system of highways, railways, and roads, does not meet the development of tourism,” he said.

“It is necessary to retrain and train new personnel working in the tourism industry to meet the quality of services provided to tourists,” he added.

Thailand expects to reach 20 million visitors by the end of 2023. However, Thailand’s tourism industry is aiming for a return to 2019 levels, when the country welcomed a record 39 million international arrivals.

“Thailand has reclaimed its place as the most visited country in the region and the dominant tourism nation in the region. And that won’t change. Tourism to Thailand is doing really well,” said analyst Bowerman.

“However, before the pandemic, Vietnam was really seen as not necessarily a challenger, but certainly an emerging force. Vietnam was seen as the next big thing in tourism in Southeast Asia. I think it still is,” he added.

DW

Asia and Pacific Countries Advance Shared Vision of Tourism for Development



Member States of United Nations of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) came together for the 35th meeting of its joint Commission for East Asia and the Pacific and South Asia to assess the major challenges to tourism development in the region for the years ahead.

UNWTO’s Members from Asia and the Pacific met as recovery from the impacts of the pandemic on tourism in the region steadily accelerates. According to UNWTO data:

- Worldwide, twice as many people travelled internationally in the first three months of 2023 than in the same period of 2022, taking global tourism back to 80% of pre-pandemic levels.
- For Asia and the Pacific, however, international arrivals got back to 54% of pre-pandemic levels by the end of the quarter.

- Recovery across the region is expected to accelerate following the re-opening of China to tourism. China was the world’s biggest tourism source market in 2019. Reflecting the significance of the moment, a high-level delegation from UNWTO visited China in February to mark the official re-opening.

“It is no exaggeration to say that, over the past year, all eyes in global tourism were on Asia and the Pacific,” said UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili. “Asia and the Pacific plays a key role in the state of our sector. It is a top source market, a hub of tourism innovation and home to many of the world’s leading businesses and most exciting destinations.”

Demonstrating Cambodia’s strong political support for UNWTO’s mission, Prime Minister Hun Sen met with the Secretary-General to discuss the steady acceleration of tourism in the region after the pandemic, while emphasizing the sector’s vital importance for sustainable development of tourism in the country and across the wider region.

UNWTO welcomed a participation to the joint Commission for East Asia and the Pacific and South Asia Joint Commission, including 15 Ministers, Deputy Ministers of Tourism and Ambassadors, and with 25 countries represented. The Meeting was held in conjunction with the 55th Meeting of the UNWTO Commission for East Asia and the Pacific (CAP), the 59th Meeting of the UNWTO Commission for South Asia (CSA), the UNWTO Conference on International Code for the Protection of Tourists and the UNWTO Affiliate Members Roundtable.

Asia and Pacific Members Support UNWTO Priorities

Member States were provided with an overview of UNWTO’s achievements guiding tourism forward, based on its Programme of Work and current priorities including:

- **Education:** Of the 300 education programmes certified by UNWTO’s Ted.Qual initiative, 160 are offered in Asia and the Pacific, to help tourism professionals grow in their careers. To support youth empowerment, UNWTO is also launching national versions of its Students League, with China currently developing its own edition.
- **Investments in Tourism:** Fostering the implementation of sustainable investment frameworks for the promotion of tourism investments and job creation in a post-pandemic world was one of the main objectives of UNWTO’s Executive Training Programme in the Republic of Korea last November. And in Phnom Penh, UNWTO invited Members to join the 2023 World Tourism Day celebrations (27 September), to be held around the theme of “Green Investments”.
- **Sustainability:** UNWTO announced that the Batanes Tourism Observatory in the Philippines has become the newest member of the International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (INSTO), with an institution in Japan set to follow soon.

Advancing the International Code for Protection of Tourists

Ahead of the Commission meeting, UNWTO held a special conference on its International Code for the Protection of Tourists (ICPT). Here:

- Cambodia, the Maldives and Indonesia became the newest signatories to UNWTO’s International Code for the Protection of Tourists.
- UNWTO’s Member States across the Asia and the Pacific region adopted the Phnom Penh Declaration on the ICPT, promoting its implementation to ensure clear, transparent and efficient frameworks to protect tourists as consumers to foster confidence in travel.

Affiliate Members Roundtable

Under the theme “Public-private cooperation at the core of tourism sustainable development”, discussions focused on the importance of finding mechanisms to reinforce the dialogue between all tourism stakeholders and showcased tangible examples of initiatives and projects implemented by Affiliate Members to foster sustainable practices in the tourism sector.

Looking Ahead

In line with UNWTO’s statutory obligations, Members from East Asia and the Pacific nominated China, Indonesia, Japan and Republic of Korea to represent the region on the UNWTO Executive Council.

The two Commissions for East Asia and the Pacific and South Asia also agreed that:

- The 36th Joint Meeting of the UNWTO Commission for East Asia and the Pacific and the UNWTO Commission for South Asia will be held in Cebu, Philippines in 2024.
- World Tourism Day 2025, to be held around the theme of “Tourism and Sustainable Transformation”, will be hosted by Malaysia.

UNWTO

What Data Says About the Asia-Pacific Rebound

By Peden Doma Bhutia, Editor

Travelers are gaining more confidence to book long-haul travel again, and many destinations in the Asia Pacific region are making a comeback. Tokyo’s neon lights and skyscrapers, Phuket’s pristine beaches, and Hanoi’s Old Quarter, with its maze of narrow streets, are among the hotspots.

A [report from travel marketplace Skyscanner](#) has looked at flight search and booking data from the Americas, Asia Pacific, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa — studying how travelers are planning and booking travel over the next six months.

People are booking long-haul travel more than 90 days in advance, returning back to pre-pandemic levels. Moreover, the report also stated that search share has reverted to pre-pandemic seasonal norms.

“Globally, we’re seeing more travelers come to Skyscanner than ever before,” said Mike Ferguson, director of destination marketing. The brand, [owned by Trip.com Group](#), has more than 100 million travelers accessing its platform every month on average.

More Signs of Flexible Search Patterns

More than 50 percent of travelers are conducting exploratory searches without any set dates or destinations in mind, Skyscanner said. Many travelers are searching for ideas and comparing dates and locations to find the most favorable deal.

In a conversation earlier with Skift, Airbnb co-founder and CEO Brian Chesky pointed out how millions of customers have used the platform’s flexible date feature, which basically says, “I am willing to go anywhere for a night, a weekend, a week, a month in this date range.”

A Resurgence of Long-Haul Travel

The resurgence of long-haul travel globally presents destinations with a significant opportunity to attract high-value travelers undeterred by the challenging economic conditions, said Nick Hall, CEO of UK-based Digital Tourism Think Tank.

A key driver has been that airlines are adding back flight capacity.

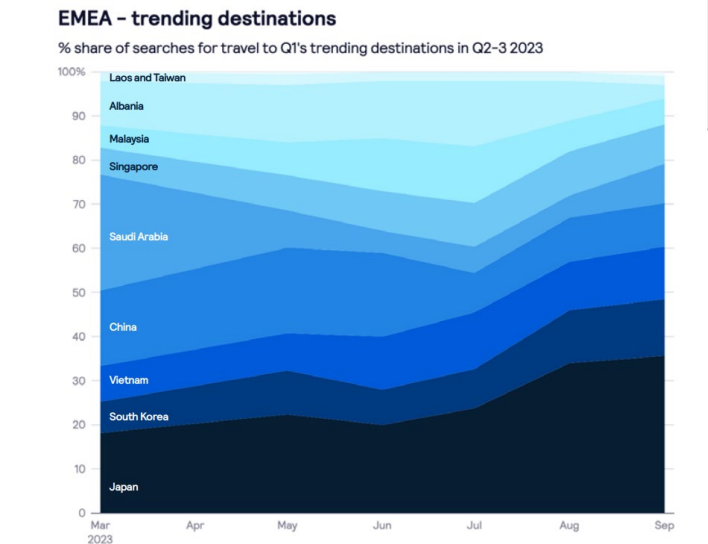
Asia Pacific airlines posted a 376 percent increase in international traffic in January compared to the same period last year reaching 56 percent of January 2019’s level, as witnessed by the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

The January numbers were by far the strongest year-over-year rate among the regions — albeit off a very low base, when much of the region was still closed to travel.

Capacity in the region rose to 167 percent, and the load factor increased 36.6 percentage points to 83 percent — the highest among the world’s regions.

Trending Destinations

Eight of the world’s top 10 trending destinations for travelers worldwide are in Asia, with Taiwan topping the charts, followed by Japan and Laos.



Despite Taiwan being the top trending destination, its relative share of searches is small. Japan takes the largest share, followed by South Korea and Vietnam.

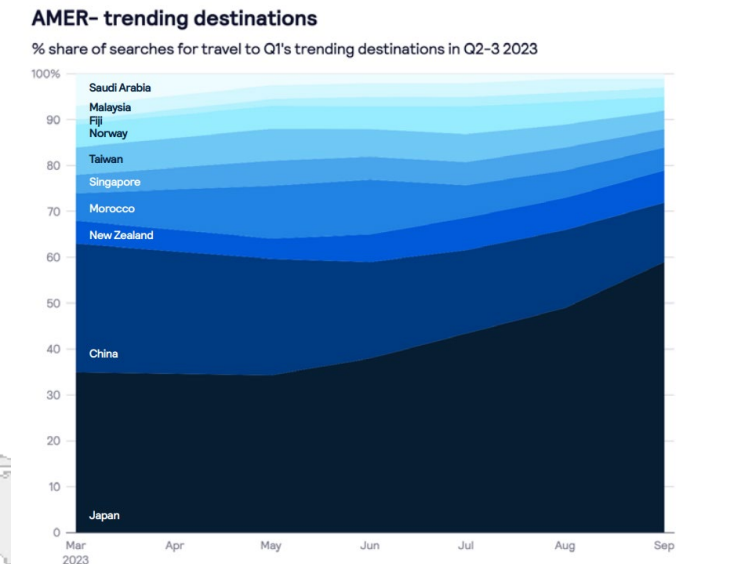
Skyscanner noted that all three countries have benefited from improved non-stop services and air connections.

Saudi Arabia and Albania are the two nations outside Asia with the biggest increase in searches from last year during

the first quarter.

Although Europe remains a popular region for travelers from the Americas, Asia Pacific destinations dominate seven out of the top 10 trending spots, with Asian countries occupying the top five spots.

China is the top trending destination, followed by Japan and Taiwan.



For Asia Pacific travelers, seven out of the top 10 trending destinations are within the region itself, as Taiwan, Laos, and Japan experienced the most significant year-on-year growth in the first quarter.

Laos, in particular, enjoyed a resurgence due to the introduction of new routes from international and regional airlines and an increasing demand from travelers for more unique and off-the-beaten-path destinations.

During the second and third quarters, Japan, Thailand, and Vietnam are the most popular destinations among travelers, accounting for more than two-thirds of the trending search volumes.

Booking Windows Go Up

Travelers in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa are booking flights for summer holidays two to three months in advance, while those from Asia Pacific are booking both last minute and much further in advance, the report noted.

In the first quarter of this year, domestic travel bookings within Europe, the Middle East, and Africa were mostly booked in the 7-29 day window. The booking window further went up while planning for summer vacations as holidays booked 60-89 days in advance went up by 50 percent.

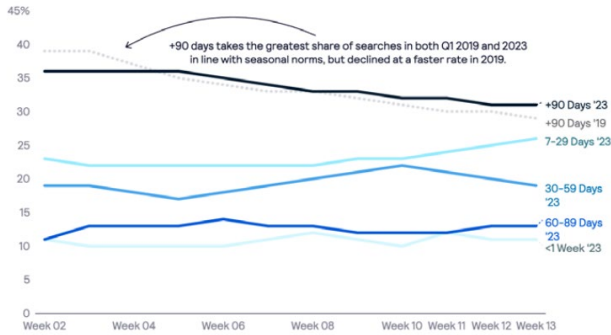
At the end of the first quarter, a booking window of more than 90 days still holds the highest share (31 percent) for travel to short-haul destinations from Europe, Middle East, and Africa.

This confidence is also reflected in booking long-haul travel, particularly to Asia-Pacific, as the share of booking windows of over 90 days increased by 11 percent in the first quarter to reach 40 percent.

The travel booking time frame for Asia Pacific remained fairly consistent during the first quarter as travelers preferred shorter booking periods for domestic travel.

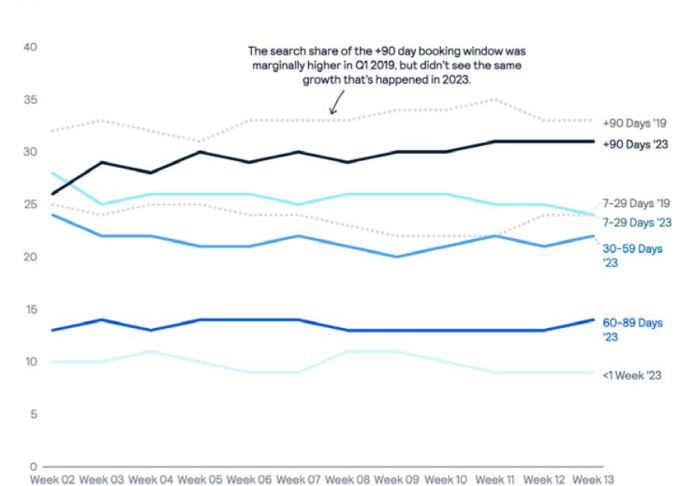
EMEA short haul

% of searches for booking window segments in Q1 2023, with selected comparisons to Q1 2019



APAC long haul

% of searches for booking window segments in Q1 2023, with selected comparisons to Q1 2019



However, with the easing of travel restrictions ease, people are booking both last minute and with a longer booking horizon.

The Skyscanner report said that booking windows of over 90 days witnessed an increase of 55 percent for short-haul travel, while bookings of less than a week increased by 22 percent.

And as Asia Pacific travelers become more confident about traveling long-haul and planning, booking windows for long-haul trips have seen significant increases.

For the Americas, booking windows are returning to seasonal norms as travelers plan their domestic and short-haul trips at least two months out.

For more insights, look for [Skift Research's Travel Tracker to release updated results.](#)

Skift

The Tourism Recovery in South East Asia: Twelve Months On

By Gary Bowerman, Tourism analyst



Endemic is not a word you tend to hear today. Rewind twelve months, and it was hard to avoid throughout South East Asia. Politicians talked frequently about “a transition to endemic.” With target vaccination rates achieved, Omicron infection curves falling and economies under pressure, governments prepared their citizens to “live with Covid.” This was a prerequisite to restore international mobility after two years of airtight restrictions on travel.

One year ago, on 1 April 2022, the borders fully reopened in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines as quarantine mandates were removed. Cambodia and Vietnam had recently



Malaysia was one of the first Southeast Asian countries to reopen to tourists. Photo by Esmonde Yong on Unsplash

reopened. Thailand, although open for tourism since November 2021, still required a lengthy online visa application, a Covid test on arrival and a one-night stay in an assigned hotel until a clear test result was confirmed. Laos would reopen in early May.

It marked an important milestone for a region that had battled to resurrect travel activity via risk-averse travel bubbles, vaccinated travel lanes and

sandboxes. Residual restrictions remained in place, such as pre-departure tests, masking and showing a vaccine certificate, but these would soon be phased out. While South East Asia unlocked its airport gates, North East Asia remained shut. Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan wouldn't drop their travel restrictions until October, and China would wait until 8 January 2023 to reopen.

One year after South East Asian flyers took to the skies once more, the anniversary passed unnoticed. Travellers tend to look forward. The travel industry's eye are focused further in the past. Restoring visitor arrivals parity with pre-pandemic 2019 is the primary objective.

A more worrying development also explains the muted celebrations. Dry season has arrived in mainland South East Asia. With it comes farmland and plantation burning on a huge scale to facilitate agricultural renewal. The unwanted outcome is acrid smoky air hanging over the region. On Saturday 1 April, parts of

Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam experienced air quality deemed unhealthy. Although the rainy season continues in Malaysia and Indonesia, a smoky drift from the north can be seen and smelt in the mornings in Kuala Lumpur. Once dry season commences, daily life in both countries and Singapore is likely to be impacted by the “transboundary haze” – perhaps for several weeks or even months.

Toxic smoke clouds are causing concern for the tourism industry just as it starts to recover. Last weekend, authorities in Chiang Mai, a popular tourism destination in Thailand, handed out face masks to locals to protect them from breathing airborne particulates. April is a vibrant month for cultural celebrations that attract tourists. After three years of Covid gloom, hopes were high for tourist-friendly Songkran reveries in Thailand, Khmer New Year in Cambodia and Eid al-Fitr festivities across the region. If the burning continues, it could spark booking cancellations for China’s five-day May Golden Week, starting on 29 April, which South East Asian nations are hoping will kick-start the return of Chinese tourists in larger numbers.

Air quality issues are clouding a buoyant first quarter for travel and tourism in the region. After a slow start last April, air passenger numbers and visitor arrivals increased notably in the final months of 2022, and 2023 began positively. Airlines are restoring flight routes and frequencies, and airports are busier and customs lines noticeably longer. The travel buzz is definitely back although tourist volumes remain well below the record 2019 levels.



China is a key source of tourists for many Southeast Asian countries. Photo by Lukas Souza on Unsplash

Airline seat capacity in South East Asia in March was 20 percent lower than the same month in 2019. Domestic air capacity is recovering fastest, down just 13 percent from March 2019, while international air capacity remained 31 percent lower, according to OAG. The scaling up of outbound travel activity from China, which began its vastly expanded summer schedules for airlines at the weekend, will bolster South East Asia’s airport traffic over the coming months.

Competition among destinations to attract tourists is being fiercely fought. Increasing travel activity in 2023 from Asia Pacific countries is helping. In 2019, China was the top visitor market for the 10 countries of South East Asia, contributing 22.5 percent of all visitors. South Korea ranked 4th, Japan 7th, Australia 11th, Taiwan 15th and Hong Kong 23rd. Four of South East Asia’s top 10 visitor markets were located within the region itself, Singapore (2nd), Malaysia (3rd), Thailand (5th)

and Indonesia (6th). All countries are now watching each other’s travel promotions assiduously and marketing hard to entice each country’s tourists.

Thailand, which is South East Asia’s most visited country, leads the way. In the first quarter of 2023, it welcomed 6.15 million visitors, more than half the 11.15 million that visited across the 2022 calendar year. The Tourism Council of Thailand forecasts 30 million visitors this year, which would represent a 75 percent recovery from 39.9 million in 2019. Vietnam greeted 2.7 million visitors from January to March this year, compared to 3.6 million in all of 2022. In the first two months of 2023, Singapore’s Changi International Airport handled more than one quarter of total passengers in 2022.

All of this is happening against a backdrop of high airfares, a situation unlikely to improve anytime soon. “I see airfares going higher and higher,” Shukor Yusof, CEO of Malaysia-based Endau Analytics, told The South East Asia Travel Show in March. “Airline capacities have not yet risen back to pre-pandemic levels to cater for the number of people travelling at the moment, and some carriers are not back to 100 percent in terms of putting planes back into their fleets.”

It’s not all about air travel in 2023, though. South East Asian nations will invest heavily to expand rail infrastructure over the next decade, but two projects developed before the pandemic offer exciting travel possibilities. The China-Laos railway, which connects the Chinese city of Kunming and the Lao capital Vientiane is scheduled to commence cross-border trips later this month. The railway opened in December 2021, but offered journeys only within the stunning landscapes of Laos while China’s borders were closed.



As tourism continues to grow across Southeast Asia after the pandemic, the high cost of travel is having an impact.

Also highly anticipated is South East Asia’s first high-speed railway, slated to launch in July. Part-financed and built by Chinese rail technology and contracting firms, the 142km line connects Indonesia’s capital Jakarta and its third-largest city Bandung. Manufactured in the Chinese city of Qingdao, the high-speed trains will travel at up to 350kpm, can withstand earthquakes and feature a livery inspired by Indonesian Komodo dragons. The launch will create a great deal of tourism interest and, most likely, clarification about plans to extend the high-speed railway from Jakarta to Surabaya. “This will be a ground-breaking moment in the history of rail travel in South East Asia,” says James Clark, Editor of the Future South East Asia newsletter.

Asia Media Centre

High times in Thailand: New weed laws draw tourists from across Asia

By Yucheng Tang

A Japanese tourist reaches into a baggie of cannabis he's just bought in a central Bangkok weed shop, pulling out a gram of buds to chop down in a small black grinder, before rolling them neatly into a joint.

Only the slight spillage onto the smoking lounge's table — and his cough as he lights up and inhales deeply — betray the fact that until two weeks ago, he'd never tried marijuana.

Most Asian nations have strict drug laws with harsh penalties, and Thailand's de facto legalization of marijuana last year has brought a wave of tourists from the region like the visitor from Japan, intrigued by the lure of the forbidden leaf.

"I was curious about how I would feel after smoking," said the 42-year-old tourist who spoke on condition that his name not be used, for fear his experimentation in Bangkok could lead to legal issues at home.

"I wonder why Japan bans it?" he pondered. "I wanted to try it."

Even as more countries around the world legalize marijuana, Thailand has been the outlier in Asia, where several countries still have the death penalty for some cannabis offenses. Singapore has already executed two people this year for trafficking marijuana and its Central Narcotics Bureau has announced plans to randomly test people returning from Thailand.

Japan does not have the death penalty for drug offenses, but has warned that its laws on cannabis use may apply to its nationals even when they are abroad.

China's embassy in Thailand has warned that if Chinese tourists consume marijuana abroad and are "detected upon returning to China, it is considered equivalent to using drugs domestically. As a result, you will be subject to corresponding legal penalties." It issues similar warnings for travel to other countries where marijuana is readily available, such as the United States, Canada and the Netherlands.

On a recent flight from the Chinese city of Shanghai, passengers were cautioned not to "accidentally" try marijuana in Bangkok, with an announcement that in Thailand "some food and drink can include cannabis, so please pay attention to the leaf logo on the package of food."

Neither Chinese nor Singaporean authorities would detail how frequently they test citizens returning from countries where marijuana has been decriminalized, responding to queries from the AP simply by reiterating their previously announced policies.

It's no wonder that weed dispensaries in Bangkok say that customers from Singapore and China are among the most cautious, asking questions about how long traces of the drug remain in the system and whether there are detox products.

But many remain undeterred, and Thailand's cannabis industry has grown at lightning speed, with weed dispensaries

now almost as common as the ubiquitous convenience stores in some parts of the capital. Through February, nearly 6,000 licenses for cannabis-related businesses have been approved, including more than 1,600 in Bangkok alone, according to official figures.

There are no government figures on how many tourists come specifically to smoke marijuana, but Kueakarun Thongwilai, the manager of a weed shop in central Bangkok, estimates at least 70%-80% of his customers are foreigners, primarily from Asian countries like Japan, Malaysia, China and Philippines, and some from Europe.

Most cannabis shops, including his, now only hire employees who speak English, the lingua franca of the industry.

"You don't need to speak perfect English, but you need to communicate with foreigners," Thongwilai said.

About half of his customers are first-time weed users and most of them are Asians, he said.

Some want to try edible cannabis products, but Thongwilai said he tries to steer them toward smoking.

"Edibles take more time to take effect, and during that time people may eat more and more, leading to an excessive experience for beginners," he said.

Not all are new to the drug, said Thongwilai, remembering a Malaysian customer who snuck away from a meal with his wife and daughter at a nearby restaurant. The man said he smoked marijuana secretly at home, but had heard the Thai product was better quality and wanted to try it.

"He bought the cheapest weed in our shop and tried it in a mall, and then he came back and bought more," Thongwilai recalled.

Not far from Thongwilai's shop at Dutch Passion, a newly opened retail branch of a Netherlands seed distributor that has been in business for more than three decades, about half the customers are also first-time users, said Theo Geene, a Dutch shareholder in the business.

Cannabis has been available in coffee shops in the Netherlands since the 1970s, and Geene said he has used his experience to train his staff how to serve those unfamiliar with the drug.

"For beginners, it's not good to use a bong," he said. "It's too much for them. We don't want anyone to pass out here."

Most customers refused to talk about their experiences, with the Japanese tourist in Geene's shop the only one who agreed to — and only on the condition his name not be used.

Most of the shop's Asian customers are similarly discreet, choosing to smoke their purchases inside rather than on the streets like many Westerners do, which is common but a violation of Thai regulations, Geene said.

"They are more cautious and afraid," he said. "They don't



want to be seen when they smoke weed.”

Before he embarked on his trip to Thailand, the 42-year-old Japanese tourist said he researched extensively online and determined that while customs might randomly check bags and luggage for marijuana being smuggled into Japan,

there was no testing going on in line with government policy.

Since his first puff two weeks ago, he said he’s been smoking every day, visiting different shops, comparing prices and trying different strains.

Dispensary staffers taught him

how to grind buds and roll a joint and he’s been having fun perfecting the technique.

“I practice it every day,” he said, looking down at the joint he was rolling and repeating the word “practice” twice before bursting into laughter.

AP News

Philippines seen to become tourism powerhouse in Asia by 2028



Tourism industry stakeholders on March 17 expressed confidence that the Philippines would become a tourism powerhouse in Asia by 2028 through the government’s national tourism development plan (NTDP).

“Traditional initiatives will no longer be the way to go, but innovative programs can attract new markets that we have never tapped before,” Loleth G. So, Hotel Sales and Marketing Association president, told BusinessWorld in a Viber message.

For the hotels industry, this means partnerships with airlines and tour operators, upskilling existing industry talent, and providing expertise in the government’s tourism workshops.

“A lot of our member hotels have implemented sustainable programs and innovative strategies to be able to keep up with global markets,” Ms. So added.

Travel companies also expect collaboration between the

public and private sectors to be key, Aileen C. Clemente, Rajah Travel Corporation (RTC) chief executive officer, said in a phone message.

She said the NTDP’s implementation will hinge on DoT’s ability to coordinate with other sectors.

“It is largely dependent on DoT and how well they are receptive to private sector and other stakeholder inputs,” she noted. The RTC is one of the companies that DoT consulted in forming the NTDP.

Philippine Airlines Spokesperson Cielo C. Villaluna said that the flag carrier “supports the DoT’s aims towards a sustainable, innovative, inclusive, and globally competitive tourism industry.”

The airline also said it will continue to introduce innovations such as its new online portal focusing on flight deals and build its route network this year, including added flights to and from Perth, Seoul, Beijing, and Macau, among others.

In 2022, international arrivals reached 2.65 million, translating to P214 billion or roughly \$4 billion in estimated revenue.

Tourism Secretary Christina G. Frasco formally unveiled the completed NTDP for 2023 to 2028 on March 15. It will serve as a guidebook to “grow the impact of tourism upon our economy in the next few years.”

BusinessWorld Online

Tourism Malaysia returns to ATM for the 29th year

Tourism Malaysia’s efforts to publicize its comprehensive promotional activities continues to the Middle Eastern region. The Malaysian delegation is led by the The Honourable Khairul Firdaus Akbar Khan, Deputy Minister of Tourism, Arts & Culture Malaysia, to participate once again in the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) in Dubai from 1st to 4th May 2023 at Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC).

The four-day ATM offers Malaysia as an excellent platform to market and promote the latest attractions and

destinations for shopping, family fun, eco-adventure, honeymoon, luxury holidays, as well as safe travel destination. ATM 2023 also marks the 29th anniversary of Malaysia’s participation in this prestigious event, which is a strong testimony to the country’s support to the event and its commitment in attracting more Middle Eastern tourists to Malaysia.

As in previous years, this prestigious annual event sees the participation of a strong Malaysian delegation from 76 organizations



comprising hotels and resorts, travel agents, tourism products owners, representatives

from various state governments, including Langkawi Development Authority (LADA), Penang Global Tourism, Sabah Tourism Board, Sarawak Tourism Board, Tourism Melaka, Tourism Pahang, and Tourism Johor.

The mission aims to reinstate and enhance the commitment to establishing good tourism cooperation, engaging in future collaborations, and cooperation with the travel and tourism industry in the region. Honourable Khairul Firdaus said during the launch, “In line with the Visit Malaysia in 2025, Tourism Malaysia will strive to attract more tourists from the Middle East to Malaysia. We are confident that we will be able to achieve our target to put Malaysia as the top destination for Muslim travelers.”

Throughout the event, the Malaysian delegation is scheduled to meet up with the top management of a few Middle Eastern airlines such as Qatar Airways, Emirates, Etihad Airways, Saudia Airlines, Air Arabia, Oman Air and Salam Air to discuss future collaborations, besides having several interviews with the local media.

On the 2nd and 3rd May 2023, Honourable Khairul Firdaus will also witness the signing of two Memorandum of Collaborations (MOC) between Tourism Malaysia and Saudia Airlines and Tourism Malaysia with Air Arabia. These MOC will benefit the Malaysian economy and strengthen economic ties through the tourism industry between Malaysia and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. Following that, Honourable Khairul Firdaus will be hosting a ‘Malaysia Nite Gala Dinner’ on 2nd May 2023 to thank the tourism fraternity in Dubai and the local media for their support and assistance in promoting Malaysia.

Since its full reopening of international borders, Malaysia has recorded a total of 10,070,964 (10.07 million) tourist arrivals and RM28.2 billion (AED 23.5 billion) in tourist receipts in 2022, surpassing its initial target of 9.2 million international tourist arrivals. In 2023, Malaysia is targeting to welcome 16.1 million international tourist arrivals (300,000 tourists from the West Asia) and generate RM49.2 billion (AED 41.1 billion) in tourist receipts.

In 2022, Malaysia recorded 88,534 tourist arrivals from the Middle East.

Zawya

Taiwan launches NT\$5,000 lucky draw to attract tourists on May 1

Taoyuan, April 29 (CNA) Foreign independent travelers who were scheduled to arrive in Taiwan at noon on May 1 and afterward register for a lucky draw to win a prize worth NT\$5,000 (US\$163) to cover part of their spending during the visit, according to the Tourism Bureau.

The campaign, called “Taiwan the Lucky Land,” will formally begin at noon on May 1 for independent travelers entering Taiwan with passports issued by countries other than the Republic of China (Taiwan), Transportation Minister Wang Kwo-tsai announced at a press event at Taiwan Taoyuan International

Airport on April 29.

Foreign tourists, whose flight arrives in Taiwan at noon on May 1 or afterward, are eligible to register and take part in the lucky draw, if they stay in Taiwan for three to 90 days, the bureau said in a statement on Saturday.

Visitors who travel to Taiwan in tour groups or whose trips are subsidized by tour group-related incentives of NT\$5,000-NT\$50,000 from Taiwan would not be eligible to take part in the lucky draw, the bureau added.

A total of 500,000 prizes will be offered during the campaign period, which is set to conclude on June 30, 2025, Wang said, adding that the promotional period could be extended if such incentives are proven to be effective.

To demonstrate how the lucky draw works, several foreign tourists who arrived at the airport’s Terminal 2 on Saturday were invited to try their luck, and a few of these visitors from France, Canada, South Korea and Hong Kong won some of the NT\$5,000 prizes, the bureau said.



Transportation Minister Wang Kwo-tsai speaks at the press event at Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport on Saturday. CNA photo April 29, 2023

During the press event, tourism officials also explained how to use the official website, which began accepting registration on Friday, reminding the eligible visitors to register for the lucky draw within the period of one to seven days before their scheduled arrival date in Taiwan.

For example, visitors traveling on a flight that is scheduled to arrive in Taiwan at 11:59 p.m. on June 1 can begin registering for the lucky draw after midnight on May 24 until 1 second before midnight on May 30, according to the website.

Apart from their travel and contact information, the visitors planning to travel to Taiwan need to choose how the NT\$5,000 would be redeemed -- which is available in the form of a payment card stored with the value, or five NT\$1,000 vouchers that can be used to pay for their accommodation in Taiwan -- the bureau said.

Visitors who have completed the registration before their trip to Taiwan would receive a confirmation email with a QR code that will be used for the lucky draw, according to the bureau.

After the registered visitors arrive in Taiwan, they should proceed to a dedicated area in the arrival hall of one of the four airports -- Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport, Taipei Songshan Airport, Taichung International Airport and Kaohsiung International Airport.

The visitors can then scan the QR code at the dedicated

area to take part in the lucky draw and see whether they can win the prize.

The NT\$5,000 lucky draw is part of Taiwan's plan to attract 6 million foreign tourists by the end of this year, and 12 million in 2024, which was the original target set for 2019, Wang said.

As of Friday, Taiwan had recorded 1.55 million inbound visitors so far this year, Wang said. According to the Tourism Bureau data, Taiwan attracted a record 11.86 million inbound visitors in 2019.

The incentives and subsidies are part of the government's NT\$380 billion post-pandemic economic recovery package approved by lawmakers on March 24.

Focus Taiwan

Booking.com unveils the ultimate K-pop experience in Seoul for diehard fans

By Vicky Karantzavelou

Booking.com is introducing the Ultimate K-pop Experience in Seoul to bring K-pop fans dreams to life and inspire a memorable travel experience for its customers. From diehard K-pop fans cheering through multiple comebacks to newer stans who have only recently fallen under the spell of K-pop's infectious beats, this once-in-a-lifetime experience will make it fun and easy for fans to explore the birthplace of K-pop: Seoul, South Korea.



Only one lucky pair of guests will be able to book this exciting experience and be flown to Seoul, where their extraordinary journey into the world of K-pop will unfold. Their exclusive access begins with a two-night stay at the Executive Producer Suite at RYSE, autograph collection – a haven typically reserved only for the biggest stars.

From coveted front-row seats at the live music show, M COUNTDOWN, to a private idol makeover led by celebrity hair and makeup artists, every moment of the Ultimate K-pop Experience has been meticulously crafted to ensure guests will live and breathe the essence of everything K-pop culture has to offer.

Located in the vibrant Hongdae district, guests will receive the ultimate K-pop star treatment with their stay at RYSE's

Executive Producer Suite, featuring the trendy Y2K aesthetic, a dazzling private stage for guests to belt their favourite K-songs in their version of a 'noraebang' (karaoke room), and even an in-suite hot food station featuring their Korean favourites like ramyeon and tteokbokki, to take room service to the next level.

Booking.com has also teamed up with none other than K-pop sensation, KANGDANIEL, to add the finishing touches to the experience with exclusive fan treatment – including autographed albums and personalised recorded content by KANGDANIEL himself.



"I'm thrilled to join forces with Booking.com to bring K-pop fans an experience they will never forget. Together, we'll showcase the very best of K-pop and all the incredible things Seoul has to offer. Travelling brings me pure happiness and a whole new level of inspiration, and I can't wait to share that joy with my fans," said KANGDANIEL.

This experience will include:

- Flights, airport and local transfers, and all local transportation to and from attractions and activities
- A two-night stay at the Executive Producer Suite at RYSE, Autograph Collection
- Two front row tickets and VIP treatment at live music show, M COUNTDOWN
- A head-to-toe K-pop makeover with professional hair and make-up artists who work with K-pop idols and celebrities, from IU and Lee Seunggi to members of Girls Generation and Kepller, done in the comfort of the suite
- A photoshoot to follow the makeover, and a printed photo book to take home as a keepsake
- A private dance lesson with YN Company to master the hottest new K-pop choreography
- Signed albums and exclusive, personalised recorded content from KANGDANIEL

"Music and travel go hand in hand and K-pop is undoubtedly a big pull for travellers as part of South Korea's appeal. With our Ultimate K-pop Experience, we wanted to celebrate the amazing ways the Korean wave can inspire memorable and unique travel memories via its beloved food, local experiences and of course, K-pop. The stay also gives guests a taste of how easy it is to explore their favourite cities with Booking.com, whether it's finding surprising and wonderful stays, or tapping into local cultures with unique experiences," said Laura Houldsworth, Managing Director, Asia Pacific, Booking.com.

TravelDailyNews



About CACCI

The Confederation of Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CACCI) is a regional grouping of apex national chambers of commerce and industry, business associations and business enterprises in Asia and the Western Pacific.

It is a non-governmental organization (NGO) serving as a forum for promoting the vital role of businessmen in the region, increasing regional business interaction, and enhancing regional economic growth. Since its establishment in 1996, CACCI has grown into a network of national chambers of commerce with a total now of 28 Primary Members from 26 Asian countries and independent economies. It cuts across national boundaries to link businessmen and promote economic growth throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

As an NGO, CACCI is granted consultative status, Roster category, under the United Nations. It is a member of the Conference on NGOs (CoNGO), an association of NGOs with UN consultative status.

For more information, please visit www.cacci.biz.

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