

10 Key Trends in Asian Travel & Tourism

As aspirational Asian travellers drive change across the global tourism map, Check-in Asia assesses the hottest topics in Asia's shifting travel landscape.

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Entice the Dragon

China’s tourism juggernaut is transforming the travel sector from top to bottom. And not just because of its expected 145 million outbound travellers and 4.8 billion domestic trips in 2017.

Chinese travel/tech leaders, such as Ctrip, Alipay, HNA, Meituan-Dianping, WeChat and Mobike, are globalising at a rapid clip, and partnering with hotel brands, retailers and banks to create data-driven services. Meanwhile, tourism providers worldwide are reframing their approach to meet the diversifying demands of Chinese vacationers.

A Check-in Asia area of specialty for more than a decade, evolution continues to be the new normal in the world’s most dynamic travel market.

Emerging India

The planet’s second-fastest-growing outbound market is steered by similar socio-economic drivers as China, but garners less global face-time. That’s changing.

Around 22 million Indians will travel overseas in 2017, and the UNWTO predicts 50 million per year by 2020. China achieved this figure in 2010, albeit bolstered by visits to Hong Kong and Macau.

The average propensity to spend of Indian holidaymakers is impressive, domestic travel is booming, the LCC sector is expanding and thriving outbound niches range from destination weddings to extended family travel and MICE.

All Access Africa

Improved air access, diversifying tourism services and global hotel chains prioritising expansion across the continent are enabling African destination marketers to be more proactive in Asian markets.

African tourism providers are now ramping up their efforts to tap Asian travellers' growing appetite for locations beyond the ordinary.

At ITB Asia, engaging presentations showcasing the desert pyramids of Sudan, wildlife migrations in Kenya and Tanzania, the 'Smoke that Thunders' of Zimbabwe's Victoria Falls and helicopter tours over Cape Point in South Africa drew large crowds of travel buyers and media.

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3 Driving Domestic Demand

Aside from China and India, which together account for more than 6 billion annual domestic trips, travelling within national borders is gaining popularity across Asia.

In South East Asian countries like Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, homegrown tourists take advantage of competitive LCC sectors for long weekend and public holiday escapes.

South Korea, where domestic trips increased from 35-38 million between 2011 and 2015, has designated special holidays to encourage citizens to spend more time (and money) exploring their nation, while Airbnb has signed a partnership with All Nippon Airways and Peach Aviation to promote domestic travel in Japan.

5 Diversity of Destinations

Surging demand for travel combined with shifting demographics make China, India and South East Asia honeypots for destination marketers.

Hence, ITB Asia 2017 – the region's leading travel trade show, held in Singapore in October 2017 – attracted emerging players, such as Albania, Bangladesh and Uzbekistan. Visible visitor bureau presences from Russia, Thailand and Indonesia sat beside smaller stagings by Tunisia, Guam and Solomon Islands.

Shifting trade engagement strategies (and ITB Asia being timed close to World Travel Market in London) likely explained the absence of tourism boards from the UK, France and Australia.

4

Tech-Generated for Seamless Authenticity

Global tourism is reaching a Real vs Augmented inflection point, with smartphone-saturated Asian markets driving the convergence.

Travel presenters seamlessly exhort “authentic, holistic and personalised experiences” before deigning “data-driven, mobile-centric, AI technologies” as the gold standard. Adventurous travellers may crave exploration, but “feeding the behaviour of online consumers” is deemed pivotal to “the creation of desire.”

Travel at its best is routine-dodging escapism, but the forensic dissection of trip data married with “contextual signals” from online activity to augment new tourism services is viewed as a tricky yet essential challenge as demand moves towards virtuality and beyond.

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6 Make Room for the MMTs

An aspirational new generation of Muslim travellers is starting to influence the marketing mindsets of tourism providers, as well as retail brands, banks, restaurateurs and fashion houses.

The figures tell their own story. Some 36% of the 121 million Muslim travellers in 2016 were aged under 38, and spending by Muslim millennials is predicted to top USD100 billion by 2025.

The Muslim Millennial Travel Report 2017 – launched during the second Halal in Travel Asia Summit in Singapore – analyses how faith-based needs and services are combined with a desire for new discoveries, and assesses the challenges and opportunities for destinations and tourism and hospitality providers.

The Changing Nature of Niches

If you deposited a dollar every time a travel CEO dropped the phrase “independent travellers,” you could buy Bitcoin. Asian tourists who plan their own itineraries are in demand.

Ride-sharing and home-staying are ubiquitous, specially designed cruise ships are embedding celebrity guests to appeal to younger cruisers, and sporting adventures, from arctic skiing in Greenland to football tours in Spain, are on-radar. Meanwhile, multigenerational travel requires engaging different age groups travelling together.

And everyone from hotel designers to museum curators is fashioning photogenic backdrops for snap-&-share tourists to update their Instagram and WeChat accounts.

8

Advantageous Alliances

From China to Cambodia and Myanmar to Malaysia, it's impossible to avoid the penchant for partnering between hotel brands, airlines and tourism providers and retail, financial and data services companies.

In the quest for meaningful customer engagement in fast-shifting and aggressive Asian markets, aligning with brands that complement a travel-based offering is an increasingly trusted tactic.

Moreover, carefully chosen brand partnerships can expand consumer reach and erode the commercial advantage of competitors. Expect a swathe of expansive alliances in 2018 as the travel world seeks those elusive 'win-win' outcomes.

O.V.E.R.T.O.U.R.I.S.M.

There have never been more tourists in history, and the 'O' word is starting to cast a shadow. From January to August 2017, the world welcomed 901 million inbound arrivals. Globally, tourism expenditure grew fastest from China (19%) and South Korea (12%).

Dispersing visitors across a broader landscape is becoming essential. "Growth is not the enemy," Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General of the UNWTO, has said. "We need to diversify visitors' activities, reduce seasonality and raise awareness of less busy destinations."

Community protests and diverting cruise ships from Dubrovnik and Venice are just the beginning. The overtourism issue will move further into the mainstream across Asia and worldwide in 2018.

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Check-in Asia produces bespoke reports, articles, presentations, publications and online content covering travel, hospitality and destination trends across Asia. We also provide tailored marketing services for world-leading hotel brands and travel companies in Asia and worldwide.

With bases in Hong Kong, Shanghai and Kuala Lumpur, the Check-in Asia team comprises experienced travel analysts, marketers and creative consultants. Our on-the-spot insights and detailed analysis are invaluable for clients seeking to expand their reach in Asia's new travel landscape.

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