

# People-in-Travel

## Tracking Travel's Leaders



From Travel Business Analyst

### Ng Yen Yen

Paraphrased notes from **Ng Yen Yen**, Malaysia's minister of tourism. (Her titles, Dato Sri Dr, are usually added.)

- We want to increase the repeat-visitors share from 17% to 30% in three years, then to 50% in five years. And also to increase visitors' length-of-stay from 6.4 days to 8 days.

*In answer to questions from PinT, Ng did acknowledge that these are tough targets, but did not seem to realise they are near-impossible in practical terms (unless, for instance, repeat holidays are free). And she has announced no plans on how the destination will reach these targets.*

*Ng also noted that her LoS target excludes visitors from Singapore. But presumably the repeat-visitors target includes them – because travel from Singapore already includes a high repeat share.*

*So part of these targets may be no more than common politico's manipulation of statistics to serve a particular political need.*

- Malaysia is now ranked 11th in the world (in visitor arrivals, according to the World Tourism Organisation); we want to be 10th.

*More politico-speak. Quite soon, Malaysia will announce it has reached its target. Because current-10th is Mexico, but when Mexico announces the 2009 count, it will likely show a 6% fall to 21.2mn, and Malaysia has already reported a 7% growth to 23.6mn.*

*The minister will not quibble with the fact that Mexico does not count land arrivals from the US, whereas Malaysia does count land arrivals from Singapore – so the measures should not be directly compared. Nor will she be bothered with the fact that, because of the way Malaysia treats arrivals its Singapore-arrivals data, Malaysia is 14th in the visitor-spend table.*

- Our main target markets are China, India, and the Middle

East. We are also building domestic tourism. We now have 3600 homes for homestays, for instance, but we need to do work harder. They are called 'homestays' only if the homestay hosts offer activities for their guests – such as local work or cultural activities. In 2009 there were 109,000 guests in homestays.

*Earlier data indicates clarification is needed. Ng's ministry said that in 2008 there were 142 villages in the program and 2800 foreign guests.*

- We see our neighbour destinations as partners, not competitors; we want our visitors to also visit other destinations. This is not a campaign, just a wish. We need to make the country more welcoming.

*No more specifics; can be considered commendable sentiments, not business-talk.*

### Briefs

- Paraphrased comments from **Suraphon Svetasreni**, new head of Thailand's destination marketing organisation, Tourism Authority of Thailand.

- I will be TAT governor through end-2013; I am the 8th.

- This year is the 50th anniversary of TAT. If the aim in the first 50 years was to increase visitors and their spending, the next 50 will be to minimise the environmental impact of visitors.



- We are creating awareness. But the move is also a reflection of customer-demand. For instance we have Green Leaf hotels. Koh Samui is trying to turn around the situation in terms of environmental impact.

- **Jim Eckes**, long-time in aviation in Asia - including a spell in the 1970s with Air America, considered an arm of the US Central Intelligence Agency – died in Bangkok last month, following a heart attack.

For a long time Eckes had been running his own consulting and trading company, Indo Swiss Aviation.

- We don't believe in travel trade awards (*unless we win them*) because there are too many awards, most programs must find a different winner each year (thus almost by definition there must be some who are less deserving), and the award-givers are doing it primarily to gain publicity.

But we do support the Lifetime Achievement Award going to **Randy Smith**, head and co-founder of Smith Travel Research – given by the American Hotel & Lodging Association.

Smith and STR changed US hotel-results tracking (now called 'benchmarking'), and this has now been expanded worldwide.

However, the main reason for the cooperation Smith received from hotels followed the tightening of government controls on sharing operational data between hotels. They could share it with an independent body, such as STR, but not with competing hotels.

Without that legal restriction, STR's start would have been harder and, indeed, may not have worked so well for Smith and STR. That it did is good for the hotel business.

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