



Ho Kwon Ping

PinT has reported earlier on Ho Kwon Ping, head of Banyan Tree, concentrating on the expansion of his family-founded Banyan Tree resort group, and his broad business philosophy.

We have ignored his racial comments (basically, Asia v 'the west') but in more recent outputs his comments have developed to something closer to racist, and therefore we feel warrant rebuttal. We would like to keep topics close to the travel business, but accept that some are simply counter-comments to Ho's troubled statements. But we also believe Ho's apparent philosophies, if he matches words with actions, must (negatively) affect the activities of his company.

We also feel it necessary to note that Ho was once a salaried journalist (for the now-defunct Far Eastern Economic Review) and he was once held in jail in Singapore, presumably for political reasons but without trial and thus without conviction, for about two months, including about one-month solitary confinement.

The following comments from Ho, despite being in quotation marks, should be considered paraphrased:

• "Europe and the US think the recession is worldwide. But in Asia it was ok." *Recession has a financial definition of two consecutive quarters of GDP decline. Over 2008/9 that covers Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, but not China and India.*

• "Many non-Chinese see China as a negative. I am Chinese. China is going to be on a par with the west." *In economic terms, many might think that is an understatement for an economy which has overtaken Japan to become world No 2. But does Ho mean 'level' in other senses?*

• "I think it is not good that there are so many non-Asians in management positions in Asia." *We would always hope that intelligent people prefer meritocracies whenever possible - the*

best-available men and women for jobs at all levels in all regions. We hope that Ho's widespread Banyan Trees select their employees on merit, not race.

• "The modern tourism that started in Europe was colonial tourism and colonialism. Phase 2 was the American; Phase 3 will be global." *Generally, modern tourism is presumed to have started in the late-1800s with Thomas Cook tours from the UK to France (viz, the Promenade des Anglais in Nice) and Switzerland. We cannot see the colonial connection here, unless it is that the UK and France were colony-acquiring powers at the time. That would seem a tenuous connection to warrant such a 'colonialism' charge, but Ho is an extremist...*

• "I don't go to events such as Copenhagen because I don't think they achieve much." *This sounds pompous as well as wrong.*

Fortunately, Ho is also outspoken on travel business matters:

• "It is ridiculous for a fashion designer to put his name on a hotel; pretentious luxury. High-price products are out of fashion. I don't think people would buy a Banyan Tree perfume. Everybody talks of brand extension. Our expertise is hospitality. We need to control our brand." *Agreed.*

• "Club Med was a leading brand that did not change with the times." *We believe the reason for the decline was more sordid - a co-founder who preferred to give the top job to his son than find someone with talent for the job.*

• "The hotel business resists change. See how much manufacturing has changed." *Ho may be right in some details, but he is incorrect with this rather common comment. Hotels have changed, and change constantly. Conversely, many manufacturing business are failing because they cannot adapt to new customer demands.*

• "I am worried that thinking people are starting to think that not-to-travel is good. What about the poor farmer in Trinidad if we take only local food?" *Unfortunately, this sounds like Ho dumps his scruples if they be-*

come inconvenient. We would see a more nuanced response to this CO2 problem. And presumably that poor farmer in Trinidad can change to sell his food to the hotels in Port of Spain - who would no longer be importing food from afar?

Briefs

• When **Masashi Okatake** started Rakuten Travel, a now-popular online travel agency in Japan, he says he was asked to write a business plan for the first five years.

He responded by saying that an internet-year is like a dog-year, so asking him to plan for the next five years was similar to asking him what it was going to be like for the next 35 years!

• **Tony Fernandes**, head of Air Asia, said in what was presumed a private conversation, that its longhaul subsidiary Air Asia X, will start a route to Copenhagen in 2010.

No further details are known. But unusual is the fact that one reason he gave for planning the route, or the reason he liked Copenhagen (*the comment was not clear*), was that he has a Scandinavian girlfriend.

Whether true or not - there has been a similar report in a Danish newspaper - the story is strange, not least because there is really no such thing as a 'Scandinavian girl'. Unless, Fernandes meant she works for Scandinavian Airlines as a stewardess on Singapore Airlines is a Singapore Girl?

• **Max Moore-Wilton** has been appointed chairman of Airports Council International for a 2-year term. He takes over this honorific post from James Cherry on January 1. He has had a long career in aviation, including head of Sydney Airport and heading ACI Asia Pacific.

The main operating executive at ACI remains its director general, Angela Gittens.

ACI is indisputably the voice of airports; its members operate airports that collectively handle 98% of the world's air passengers.

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