

Dispatches from Asia's Recovery:

Agents, Hotels & DMCs Tell All



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Asia was first to enter the crisis, tentatively emerge and begin the long road back – so we assembled an all-star panel of Asia's leading travel titans to report from the frontlines of recovery. The headlines? Occupancy across Asia is generally increasing, reaching up to 50% for selected regions in China after record single-digit lows in January; leisure is recovering far faster than corporate, as expected, but Singapore's 'fast-lane' for essential business travel to-and-from China is a positive marker for the trade market. Consider the dispatches below a postcard from your near future.

Hotels Are Focused on Contactless Connections, Self-Sufficiency and Rapid Innovation



*As told by Jinou Park,
VP, Design Hotels – Asia Pacific*

1. Less Contact, More Connections

Creating meaningful interactions in a contactless world is a key focus for Design Hotels' Asian properties, where tech is playing an increasingly critical role in allaying customer fears. "Automated tech that is smart and hassle-free is key to giving travellers confidence," Jinou revealed. In Singapore, QR check-ins now come as standard, with similar tech – from codes to trackers – popping up in hotels across Asia. However, he stressed the importance of balancing customer safety concerns, local mandates and tech with brand standards.

2. Hotels Should Become More Self-Sufficient

As Asia's domestic travellers seek greater privacy than ever before, an end-to-end, fully self-sufficient hotel is being touted as a potential solution. "A half-board package is now standard procedure – hotels want to take even more ownership of the provenance of their F&B, and communicate this to their guests," added Jinou. Many of Asia's high-end properties and rural retreats are ideally positioned to do this, enabling guests to enjoy a full and varied vacation without ever leaving the property.

3. Innovating For The Future

"Now is the time for a meaningful reset," explained Jinou. "While demand is low, short-term action is possible – but we will have to evolve into a very different future reality for travel." Happily, the strongest innovations are often the product of a crisis, but hotels must do the work and look inwards, questioning their very foundations to safeguard their future. "Hotels are no longer just a place for lodging and dining – they're a vehicle to give back to your community; a venue; and a place for travellers to achieve something or find themselves," urged Jinou.

DMCs Are Battling Multi-Layered Protocols, Reassessing Their Offering and Discovering Sustainable Alternatives



As told by
Andreas Grosskinsky,
GM, Destination Asia –
Indonesia

1. Navigating Hotel Protocols and Local Laws

“As a DMC, we have to look at all layers of travel services,” explained Andreas. “We are responsible for what we sell (and guest safety) so we must be assured that hotels are okay, providing guidance and assistance where necessary.” Not only do they have to work closely with local partners and suppliers, but also different government mandates and policies across the continent. And while none of its destinations’ borders are open as of yet, Destination Asia is collaborating with fellow DMCs to iron out health and safety requirements across the supply chain, from activity suppliers to local ferries and boat services.

2. Retraining to Sell Relevant Product

While Asia’s temperate climate means it is ideally placed for outdoor activities, DMCs are reviewing their product offering in light of social distancing measures. Andreas is retraining his sales team on the relevant product to push and sell right now, predicting walking and cycling tours will become ever more popular on itineraries once travel fully reopens.

3. Sustainable and Safe Alternatives Are Emerging

Andreas predicts the online provision of information, already popular in the region, “will get a big boost.” From restaurants offering barcode-activated menus to all travel documents being hosted online by DMCs, the shift to contactless is having a positive impact on not only customer confidence but sustainability, too. Having worked to drive sustainable activities for several years, Andreas views this shift as “a fantastic push to get away from printing and paper.”

Agents Are Focused on Staycations, Flexible Supply Chains and a Surge in Hotel Bookings



As told by
Kathryn Davies,
MD, 360 Private
Travel – Asia

1. Domestic Travel is King

With Hong Kong's strict border controls and quarantines in place for the foreseeable future, 360 Travel are focusing on staycations while their clients are reluctant to travel overseas. "There is a huge pent up demand for many of our clients – we've been in this situation a lot longer than the rest of the world," Kathryn told the audience. "But strict quarantines are a huge barrier to global travel – we are reliant on government rules being relaxed before we book trips overseas." For now, she is focusing on booking overseas trips in Q4 or, more frequently, 2021. With a majority of their clients based in Hong Kong, 360 are working closely with partnered hotels to sell staycation packages.

2. Flexible Rates Are Driving Bookings

"Without a doubt, the key to securing bookings in Asia is offering flexibility to clients – from DMCs and hotel partners to suppliers," explained Kathryn. An approach of 'pay now, stay later,' where customers get preferential rates and the ability to amend dates until the end of 2021, has been a key reason for the recent uptick in bookings.

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3.

The Future Looks Positive, For Industry, Agents and The Planet

For the travel industry...

From political unrest to the coronavirus, Hong Kong has lived through its most difficult year in recent memory. Yet in the last few weeks, room nights in the city have gone up to 30-40 per cent occupancy, and Kathryn is seeing a definite uptick in domestic travel. Further afield, she is working with DMCs for Australia and New Zealand-based clients, and predicts that while people may travel less often in the future, the trips they do take will be longer and more meaningful.

For agents and buyers...

Our moderator, Kissa Castañeda, put it perfectly – “you can’t put a price tag on agent expertise”. One positive to emerge from the crisis for 360 Travel has been the response of their clients, who have been extremely thankful for the support they have provided. “The benefits of booking with an agent are clearer than ever,” added Kathryn, who mentioned she was fielding requests for private yachts, jets and boats in lieu of airline travel before the borders closed.

For the planet...

A greener, more natural approach to travel is emerging as Asia takes steps towards travelling again. “There are positives to this situation. People will be looking for more unique opportunities to be outdoors and with nature. This is something we need to embrace,” agreed Kathryn.

**This is
Beyond.**

