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Destination

New developments coming ashore

With sweeping changes afoot for Sentosa and its surrounds, expectations are high that the new developments will step up the destination's appeal to a wider market segment and extend visitors' length of stay. By Pamela Chow



Plans are well underway to reshape and rejuvenate Sentosa

The island of Sentosa will soon welcome a host of developments that are expected increase the destination's appeal to a wider market segment, particularly families and visitors with mid-tier budgets.

Sentosa Development Corporation's (SDC) assistant chief executive and chief financial officer, Chin Sak Hin, told *TTG Asia* that the nearby Pulau Brani will also be "transformed" as part of Sentosa's rejuvenation blueprint, which will see the former retaining its idyllic charm while new attractions and nature zones are added.

As well, Sentosa will be jointly developed as part of the Greater Southern Waterfront precinct which will bring a host of new attractions, improved transport connectivity, enhancements to its beaches and more MICE facilities, added SDC's chief marketing officer Lynette Ang.

The SDC is now working closely with other government agencies to draw up development plans for the whole area, which will form part of the Sentosa 2030 masterplan that it is currently developing.

Said Chin: "We always say that we are a world-class destination, but this will bring us to another level."

Sentosa's hardware overhaul has already begun, with reburishment of the island's main north-south pedestrian thoroughfare set to complete by 2021.

Next month will see Far East Hospitality (FEH) opening the

Village Hotel at Sentosa, offering 606 rooms including family rooms, as well as The Outpost Hotel, a new adults-only brand featuring 193 keys and a stylish colonial island concept. Come 3Q2019, the old-school luxury-styled Barracks Hotel will accompany its sibling properties along Artillery Avenue, bringing 40 rooms within a conserved colonial building.

The trio of FEH properties will raise Sentosa's total room count to 4,200 and make Sentosa more accessible to more tourists with its mid-range prices.

Arthur Kiong, CEO of FEH, said: "Sentosa is a driver of business and is very popular, but it's interesting that 90 per cent of its 3,200 rooms are in the luxury class. (Our new cluster) caters to families, groups, MICE and niche segments. Visitors may be encouraged to extend their stay in Singapore and Sentosa from one to two days."

He added that rooms will be "egalitarian" and "priced effectively", as FEH works on "establishing key partnerships with attractions on Sentosa".

Inbound tourism players are hopeful that the new properties will entice foreign visitors to extend their stay in Sentosa and Singapore.

Guy Allison, director of procurement, Tour East Holdings, remarked: "Sentosa's becoming quite a family destination. It's starting to attract people to stay in Singapore for not just one or two nights, but three or four – maybe even a week. With the new developments, it might even

become a destination in itself."

He also expressed confidence that despite Singapore being a costlier destination compared to its neighbours, the country is "becoming more value-for-money" and more affordable than five years ago.

Meanwhile, to position the island as a holistic destination, SDC has been rolling out a year-round calendar of diverse events to attract visitors, said Chin. These include family-friendly attractions such as Sentosa Sandstation: Marvel Edition and Sentosa GrillFest. The destination recently launched a night light-up event, Island Lights, featuring the first Pikachu Night Parade outside of Japan.

Chin added that SDC is marketing these programmes according to themes such as beach, music, food, sports and festivals to help visitors gain awareness of the island's suite of offerings.

The SDC has also teamed up with Singapore Tourism Board (STB) for a consumer co-branding campaign *Epic Adventures from the Island Beyond*, which is aligned with the *Passion Made Possible* brand to markets such as Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines.

Lynette Pang, assistant chief executive, marketing group, STB, described: "Through our marketing promotions, we continue to position Sentosa as an exciting island destination, ideal for families with young kids, with plenty of activities and offerings available to visitors from the foodie, explorer, action seeker and socialiser passion tribes."

Hotels

Dipping into experiences

Hotels in Singapore are jumping on the tours and activities bandwagon, seeing opportunities to lure guests and connect with them on a deeper level, finds Pamela Chow

Hotels in Singapore are diversifying their portfolio of offerings and services by adding day tours and activities, with several joining hands with local tour operators and booking platforms.

This comes as Singapore's occupancy levels reportedly hit an all-time high in 2018, the first since 2012. According to data from STR Global, average occupancy rate rose by 3.1 per cent from 2017's numbers to 83.7 per cent in 2018; average daily rate by 0.7 per cent to S\$271.49 (US\$199.80); and revPAR by 3.8 per cent to S\$227.35.

Grand Copthorne Waterfront (GCW), for instance, launched a year-long campaign, *Live Like a Local*, offering hotel guests weekly neighbourhood tours and monthly cultural activities. These include a half-day tour with Tour East through one of Singapore's oldest housing estates, Tiong Bahru, and dumpling making workshops. GCW and Tour East have also partnered and built a Premium Tour Lounge on the hotel's third floor.

Roping in tours into hotel offerings is an "innovative approach" in the face of Singapore's competitive hospitality landscape and technological disruption, which is "threatening the viability of the traditional hospitality model", opined Gilbert Ong, director of marketing and communications for Millennium Hotels and Resorts, the operator of GCW.

He added the rise of FITs and demand for smaller group tours have spurred "a more intimate, immersive, meaningful and authentic experience".

Other hotels like Amara Sanctuary Resort Sentosa leverage the storied past of the compound it occupies to offer a per-

manent tour in the Amara Heritage Trail, which takes guests on a walk through old soldier quarters and Sentosa's World War II air raid shelters on the hotel's grounds.

Six Senses Maxwell, on the other hand, has paired with Jane's Singapore Tours to bring guests through locales such as MacRitchie, Botanic Gardens and the Civic District. Similarly, sister property Six Senses Duxton offers local heritage tours, complimentary traditional Chinese medicine consultations and tea appreciation sessions.

In the case of Shangri-la Hotels and Resorts, the luxury hotel group entered into a total product and marketing partnership with booking platform Klook. Guests at Shangri-La Hotel Singapore can now book experiences offered by Klook on a tablet with the Klook Concierge service. Both companies are set to jointly launch various marketing initiatives and unique experiences to Shangri-La on the platform.

Such a move has also helped to shine light on lesser-known experiences possible in Singapore's tours, said Anita Ngai, chief revenue officer, Klook.

She elaborated: "Foreign guests know the top sights and activities in Singapore, such as Universal Studios and the Singapore Zoo, however, there are always more interesting and unique activities that deserve more exposure."

As this movement burgeons, it may spark further collaborations between hotels and local tour providers. Six Senses Singapore's general manager Murray Aitken and GCW's Ong have indicated that this is a possible path they would take, in a bid to promote the local tourism sector while delivering unforgettable guest experiences.

NEW HOTELS

The Capitol Kempinski Hotel Singapore

Housed in the restored Capitol Building, The Capitol Kempinski Hotel Singapore opened its doors as Kempinski's debut in the country. The 157-room property features a blend of timeless heritage with modern luxury, spanning almost 50 unique room configurations each marked by intricate detailing and light-filled high-ceiling interiors. In all eight room categories, guests can expect amenities such as a Sonos audio system, complimentary non-alcoholic beverages from the minibar and complimentary Wi-Fi.

Grand Park City Hall

Grand Park City Hall reopened last year after a complete revamp of its hardware and software, which includes a suite of technological enhancements through its mobile app. With this app, guests can now use facial recognition technology to check in on the go and skip the front desk queue with a selfie; enable the user's smartphone to be used as a key; as well as perform as an in-room electronic controller for room amenities.

Holiday Inn Express Singapore Serangoon

Located within walking distance of the Little India cultural district, this contemporary hotel of 119 keys offers convenient access to

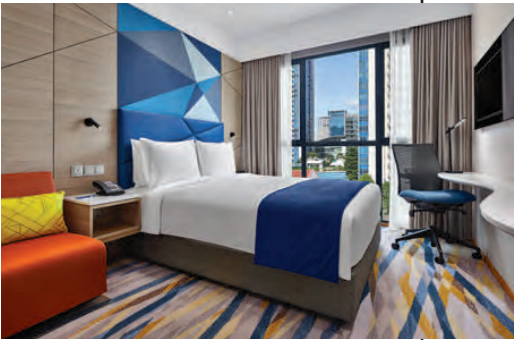
Farrer Park and Jalan Besar MRT stations and is also only a few minutes' walk from the famous 24-hour Mustafa Shopping Centre.

Six Senses Maxwell

Last December, Six Senses Maxwell opened in the historic Tanjong Pagar district, accompanying sister property Six Senses Duxton to complete the brand's first city hotel project. Housed in a colonial-style 1929 heritage building, Six Senses Maxwell accommodates 138 guest rooms and suites across four floors, all outfitted with custom furnishings and original artwork. Amenities include an outdoor rooftop lap pool, gym, two restaurants and three bars.

Oakwood Premier OUE Singapore

Originally available only for long-stay guests, luxury serviced apartment Oakwood Premier OUE Singapore has now opened its doors for daily stays. The 268-key property has successfully obtained a hotel license whereupon the guests are no longer required to have a minimum of six nights' stay.



From top: Holiday Inn Express Singapore Serangoon; The Capitol Kempinski Hotel Singapore



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WHAT'S HOT

Tours & Activities

The past and future Singapore

Behind the curtains
Visitors can now learn about The Art of Chinese Teochew Opera by meeting with one of Singapore's last remaining Teochew Opera & Puppetry troupes.
Xperience Singapore goes behind the scenes to give guests a glimpse at how the troupe's third-generation performers apply their expressive makeup and wear their costumes; to learn the meanings behind the costumes and choreography; and don a costume before performing a skit under guidance from the masters.

Revel in the rush
Crafted for adventurers and adrenaline junkies, the Fear Factor Tour from Monster Day Tours features three thrilling challenges – indoor skydiving, zipline, high-element swing

– on Sentosa Island. Daredevils can choose to add another heart-stopping activity, the AJ Hackett Bungy Jump, if they so wish.
Experience the virtual world
Resorts World Sentosa has opened Singapore's first virtual reality (VR) theme park, and one of the biggest of its kind in South-east Asia.
HeadRock VR brings 11 Xtreme VR attractions across different themes, from extreme outdoor adventures to high-action firearm combat. Admission is open to all except children younger than six years and infants.

A dose of local culture
Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel launched a year-long campaign entitled *Live Like a Local*, which offers guests weekly experiential local tours and workshops.




From left: A mural in the Tiong Bahru district; learn about Chinese Teochew Opera

Until November 31, complimentary half-day tours depart every Saturday, taking guests through the storied Tiong Bahru residential estate to visit wall murals and sample old-school local pastries. Additionally, on every first Saturday of the month, guests can participate in hands-on activities in celebration of Singapore's cultural festivals.

An intricate Peranakan story
Journey back to the 15th century, when the Peranakans first settled in Singapore, in the heartlands



of Katong. Here lies the main factory of Kim Choo Holdings – which was a finalist for Best Shopping Experience in the Singapore Tourism Awards 2018 – where visitors can participate in a Curated Boutique Tour.
During the tour, visitors get to sample mini *nyonya* treats, witness a shoe-beading demonstration and learn more about Singapore's Peranakan heritage. Other activities available include porcelain shopping and a beadwork workshop.



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