

Singapore trade band together to uplift tourism industry

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Top News

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There is strength in unity, as the old adage goes. And that saying has never rang truer than for a tourism industry fighting to rise from the pandemic's ashes.

- Growing trend of tourism and hospitality stakeholders collaborating to chase the local tourist dollar
- Exclusive add-ons, complimentary tours part of hotel deals
- Value-aligned partnerships stir sales and attract new breed of experiential travellers



A guide from Monster Day Tours bringing guests on a two-hour walking tour around Changi Airport and Jewel, as part of the agency's collaboration with the airport (Photo Credit: Changi Airport Group)

There is strength in unity, as the old adage goes. And that saying has never rang truer than for a tourism industry fighting to rise from the pandemic's ashes.

With international tourism stuck in limbo, local players are scrambling to put all their eggs in the domestic tourism basket. Against that backdrop, a culture of collaboration is fast taking root, as more industry stakeholders pair up to craft unique and indelible experiences.

By collaborating with different stakeholders, companies can tap a pool of diverse talent. Such value-aligned partnerships can also prove a lifeline for businesses by unlocking new revenue streams amid the current headwinds posed by Covid-19.

Banding together in times of crisis

Following the government's approval for staycations to resume last month, as well as for attractions to reopen and tours to resume, local travel players are creatively upping the ante to attract staycationers and locals to explore their own backyards.

At a time when bonus dining credits and late check-outs have become par for the course with staycation packages, many hoteliers are finding creative ways to sweeten the deal.

For some, they have formed alliances with tour operators to bundle hotel stays with tailor-made tours. Raffles Hotel Singapore, for instance, has partnered with two tour operators to offer immersive heritage experiences as an exclusive add-on to its staycation packages.

A Raffles Bicycle Trail with Tan Ah Huat, in collaboration with Let's Go Tour Singapore, takes guests on a two-hour private bicycle tour (S\$180++/US\$131 for two pax) through the civic district enveloping Raffles Singapore.

An adaptation of the agency's highly-rated heritage tour, the journey centres on the crafted story of fictional immigrant Tan Ah Huat who came to Singapore in the 1920s.



Let's Go Tour's Robin Loh has adapted his highly-raved bicycle tour revolving around fictional immigrant Tan Ah Huat for the Raffles Hotel Singapore's staycation packages

Robin Loh, founder, Let's Go Tour Singapore, who curated a custom route for the hotel's guests, said that the tie-up with Raffles Singapore seemed like a natural move as his original bike trail features the hotel as one of the stopovers. Another commonality between the pair, according to Loh, is the heritage narrative, as the grand dame is part of Singapore's colonial history.

Since its August 1 launch, the bike tour has received bookings for seven persons to date – all expats, Loh shared, adding that the tie-up is “a long-term partnership”.

As well, Raffles Singapore has struck up a deal with private Peranakan museum The Intan to offer personally guided tours by owner and curator Alvin Yapp. The museum visit is part of a four-hour heritage tour, dubbed The Intricacies of the Peranakan Culture (S\$580++ for two pax), which also includes a trip to the Joo Chiat precinct.

Yapp said the partnership “was two organisations coming together at the right time and at the right space” amid Covid-19. Both companies, he added, shared the same positioning – offering niche, premiere, exclusive visits.

“For me, it was a case of being able to curate the experience just for the Raffles Singapore's guests, so that it feels like an extension of the Raffles experience... For example, the plating, the dishes, the kueh that we serve, and ending the visit with an impromptu song on the piano – these are all very much curated just for the Raffles' guests,” Yapp shared.

The tour also considers the interests of each individual. Said Yapp: “The Raffles’ guests have very niche interests; some could be very interested in, say, embroidery, while others could be very focused on jewellery, which we can’t dwell on too much during regular visits because different people have different interests. So, I try to know as much as I can about their personalities, so that I can curate the visit to their taste.”

Christian Westbeld, general manager, Raffles Hotel Singapore, said that both partnerships were formed in line with the nine-month SingapoRediscovered campaign, launched last month by the Singapore Tourism Board to give a leg-up to tourism. Some 40 businesses have come on board to push out promotions for tours, hotels, and attractions under the S\$45 million campaign.

Last week, the government followed up with another S\$320 million worth of tourism vouchers under the campaign to encourage locals to play tourist in their own city.

Far East Hospitality is offering a variety of ways for domestic travellers to do just that, having rolled out a suite of experiential staycation packages to enhance the guest experience, while supporting local SMEs at the same time.

The wellness-conscious can enjoy complimentary aqua exercises and yoga led by local trainers of Aquaspin and Freedom Yoga when they book the Weekend TWogether package (from S\$888++ for a 3D2N stay in the Club room) at Oasia Hotel Downtown.

Elsewhere, urban explorers can fish for their own lunch and enjoy fresh seafood at the homegrown aquaculture farm and floating restaurant, Smith Marine Kelong, under the Rediscover Our Village package (from \$500++ for a 2D1N stay in the Deluxe room) at Village Hotel Bugis.

A complimentary one-hour photoshoot at the Singapore Botanic Garden by local photography studio StudioPlay is available to lovebirds who book the Picnic Rendezvous package (from S\$488++ for a 2D1N stay in the Club room), which also includes a snack basket and a picnic mat, at the Orchard Rendezvous Hotel.

Staycationers at The Barracks Hotel can set sail on a three-hour private yacht trip, under the Breakfast Sail with Ximula (S\$800++), available as an exclusive add-on to the Sea Breeze and Champagne Staycation package (from \$559++ per room per night) that also comes with a picnic basket, thanks to a tie-up with local yacht charter group Ximula Sail.



Staycationers at The Barracks Hotel Sentosa can opt to embark on a private yacht trip led by Ximula Sail

On the group's move to step up partnerships with local brands, Arthur Kiong, CEO of Far East Hospitality, told *TTG Asia*: "Staycationers value unique and highly enjoyable hotel experiences that they otherwise cannot get at home. In other words, they do not seek the standard room and breakfast."

Kiong's view was echoed by Singapore Hotels Association's president, Kwee Wei-Lin. "Our industry is undergoing a redefining moment right now. Apart from redesigning traditional jobs, guest services and space planning, the hotel experience needs to be upgraded to offer beyond a clean, comfortable room," she said.

"Recent travel trends suggest that discerning travellers seek meaningful local immersion and community engagements. This is the perfect time for hotels to be creative in augmenting their existing facilities and guest experiences to cater to these changing expectations. Beyond Covid-19, this will enhance Singapore's position as an appealing destination for both business and leisure travellers."

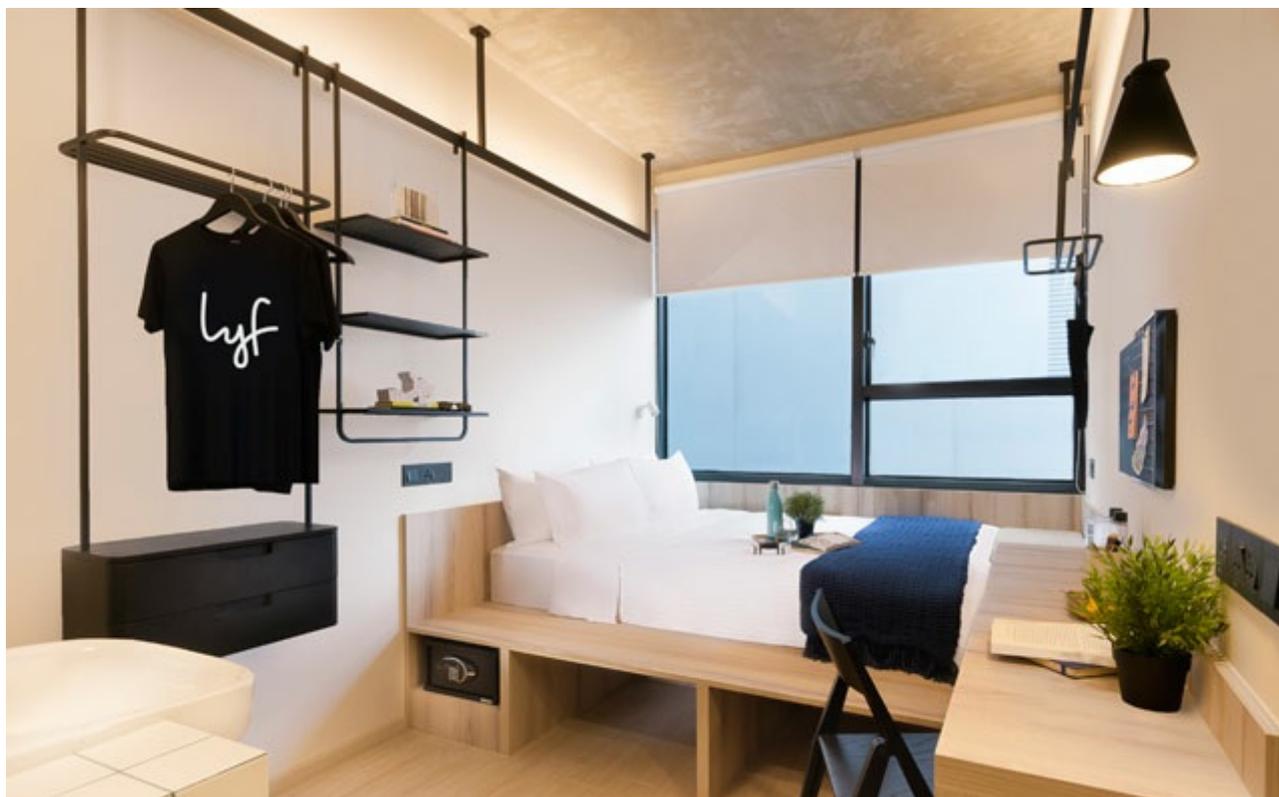
Room for growth

For some hotels, dangling complimentary tours as an additional perk to their staycation packages has significantly boosted occupancy rates. One such example is lyf Funan Singapore which has hooked up with two tour agencies to weave free curated tours into its staycation experience.

A private SG55 walking tour led by Monster Day Tours through August brings five guests on the hotel's Staycation Adventure package (S\$350++ per night) to unearth hidden gems on home soil, while the Perfect Instacation package (S\$190++ per night) available through rest of 2020 includes a guided photography tour for two helmed by Tribe Tours.

These travel agency tie-ups are part of lyf Funan Singapore's signature #lyfgoeslocal programme, where guests get to experience the neighbourhood's local and authentic elements, shared Ervin Yeo, managing director for Southeast Asia, The Ascott.

"Since the launch of the joint offerings on August 1, 2020, we have seen an increase in enquiries and reservations on our staycation promotions, especially during the recent long weekends. lyf Funan Singapore was operating at near 100 per cent occupancy across the Hari Raya Haji and National Day long weekends," he added. In comparison, the hotel was running at 85 per cent average occupancy rate from April to June 2020.



lyf Funan Singapore has seen a spike in demand since launching its staycation packages which bundle tailored tours, as part of the hotel's efforts to bring hyperlocal experiences to guests

It isn't just hotels that are waking up to the power of partnerships. Changi Airport is also hopping onto the collaboration bandwagon to boost footfall and brick-and-mortar sales. For the month of August, the airport is collaborating with Monster Day Tours to offer a two-hour Changi Airport & The Jewel Connection walking tour diving into fun facts about Singapore's gateway to the world.

Priced at S\$55 for a group of five, the tour includes discount vouchers and Changi gift cards worth S\$20 that can be used at all participating outlets at Changi Airport.

Such initiatives help to build Singaporeans' understanding of the airport's history, while supporting local tour guides and the travel industry amid the pandemic, shared Peh Ke-Wei, vice president, passenger development, Changi Airport Group.

Multiple partnerships, multiple synergies

When it comes to partnerships, for some tourism players, it's a case of the more, the merrier.

For Loh, the net has been cast wide. Since end-July, Let's Go Tour has been offering two-hour boat tours (S\$450 per session for a max of five pax) that explores kelongs, or floating fish farms, off the coast of Pulau Ubin on board a half cabin cruiser.

Alongside this new kelong tour, Loh has cosied up to fellow travel agency Singapore Sidecars to offer bundled packages marrying both experiences.

He said that the partnership was sealed as both tours "are on the slightly pricier side" and appeal to the same customer type – "people who appreciate our experiences and are willing to pay for them". Loh shared that both agencies are co-crafting a bundled package for the upcoming Mid-Autumn Festival.

Furthermore, he said that the agency is exploring tie-ups with other tour operators, DMCs and hotels to roll out more deals and tailored programmes. "In fact, quite a few hotels have reached out to us, and we are working out different tours for different hotels," he said, but stressed that none of these partnerships have been cast in concrete.

Likewise, The Intan has roped in several business partners to ride on the e-commerce boom. The museum's online shop, launched during Singapore's circuit breaker, hawks the merchandise of several homegrown brands. Offerings include Peranakan-inspired earphones, in partnership with audio electronics outfit Morph; as well as local-inspired cookies with flavours like bak kut teh (pork bone broth) and goreng pisang (fried bananas) as a tie-up with bakery Old Seng Choong. Plus, a potential partnership with KrisShop is in the pipeline, Yapp said.

Better together: the power of partnerships

If there's one silver lining behind the Covid-19 cloud, it's how it is fueling creativity and collaboration.

"Survival is the priority for many SMEs today amid the economic fallout from Covid-19 and many businesses have stepped up to help them weather the pandemic. As we continue to wrestle with the pandemic, we must not only worry about our own business survival but those of our key partners as well," Kiong said in a press statement.

"Hospitality is a part of the tourism ecosystem and we must do all possible to help each other preserve core capabilities. If there is one takeaway from this crisis, it is – we will survive only when we consider others."

Such collaborations can be a lifeline, especially for SMEs. Loh said partnerships help raise awareness among Singaporeans about domestic tours.

“Generally, I think that tours are not the top (consideration) on Singaporeans’ minds. Every tour agency is trying to market tours to locals, but locals are probably not searching for tours. So, it’s collaborations like (bundling tours with hotel stays) that will bring awareness to tours, and encourage locals to go on tours,” he said.

As his agency’s curated tour for Raffles Singapore has only attracted the interest of the expatriate community so far, Loh is doing more tie-ups with other players in the tourism ecosystem in hopes of courting local residents.



Private Peranakan museum The Intan offers tailored tours for Raffles Hotel Singapore’s guests

The Intan’s Yapp said that industry collaborations help cater to customers who are now seeking curated, instead of a la carte, experiences.

He elaborated: “(Collaborative partnerships) lend a different angle to what we usually do. For example, if I didn’t work with Raffles Singapore, those other creative elements would not have come in. I think visitors today...want to be able to see that the whole staycation experience – the dining, the shopping, and the attraction – is seamless.”

Citing an example, Yapp said hotel guests could visit The Intan, stroll down Joo Chiat Road and end the day with a shopping experience at The Intan Atelier shop at the Raffles Boutique.

Kwee agreed that industry collaborations birth opportunities for all.

“I am a strong advocate of collaboration over competition, especially during an unprecedented crisis. Until Singapore’s border reopens in a safe manner, the tourism industry is facing the same challenges. Our objective is the same: to ensure the commercial success of our industry long after this crisis is over,” she said.

“Given the same constraint on resources and market conditions, we can only benefit from the synergy of collaboration. The end result is a win-win-win situation for Singapore as a destination, the tourism industry and individual travellers.”

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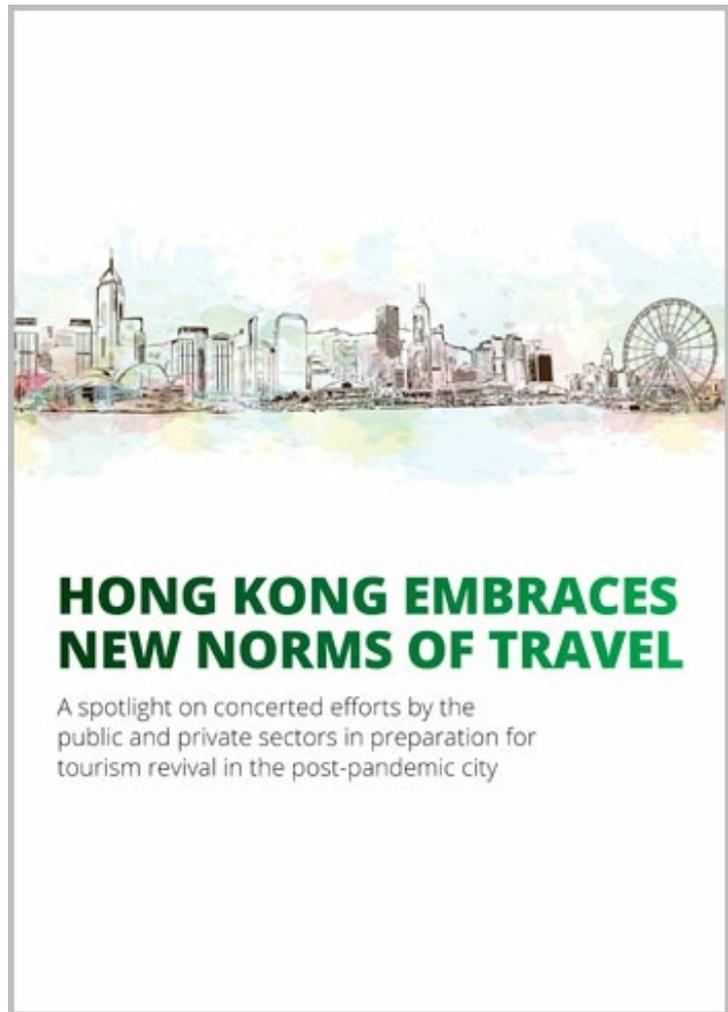
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