

Singapore

Singapore expecting high yields from its tourism sector

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The ups and downs of the global economy and soaring airfares appear to be leaving their mark on the tourism sector within the island state of Singapore. For the three months June to August of this year there was a decline in visitors compared with the same period last year, with August showing a fall of 7.7 per cent.

But this is certainly not dampening plans by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) to transform its tourism sector into a key revenue generator by 2015 with ambitious targets to bring in \$21 billion in tourism receipts and attract 17 million visitors annually by then.

And though the global numbers may be showing a downturn, visitor arrivals from the Middle East are bucking the trend, according to Jason Ong, the STB's area director for Middle East and Africa.

"In the first half of 2008 we have witnessed growth of 18 per cent year on year, with the largest numbers of visitors coming from the UAE, followed by Iran and then Saudi Arabia," he said. "Visitors from this region feel very comfortable with what Singapore has to offer, with 15 per cent of the population being Moslem, and with English universally spoken. Singapore is a cultural melting pot and offers a warm welcome to people of all nationalities and religions."

Singapore was also recently awarded the title of 'Best Business City in the World' by Business Traveller Asia Pacific for the 10th consecutive year, and for the third year running it has also been ranked as the easiest place in the world to do business – edging out New Zealand and the United States in the "Doing Business 2009" ranking by the World Bank.

To ensure that Singapore remains a choice destination, the STB has launched its Tourism 2015 roadmap, charting growth opportunities and attractions which include the Singapore Flyer - the world's largest observatory wheel which was launched in March 2008 and similar to the London Eye – except that its diameter is a whopping 175 metres.

September saw the launch of Singapore's Formula 1 Grand Prix; and in 2009 and 2010 respectively, two integrated resorts - Marina Bay Sands and Resorts World at Sentosa – will be opening, with many pundits expecting them to create a catalytic effect on the tourism and hospitality sector with numbers of visitors at any one time anticipated to increase from the current 90,000 to around 140,000, a substantial 55 per cent increase.

To cope with this influx, some 15,000 extra hotel rooms will be added to the current room inventory of over 37,000 rooms over the next three or four years, and the STB has been working closely with both the Urban Redevelopment Authority and the Singapore Land Authority to identify more sites for hotel development, as well as unoccupied state buildings that can be developed into hotels.

And not to miss a trick, the STB is also targeting the more than five million airline passengers who transit through Changi International Airport every year.

Many may be unaware they can make the most of those precious hours to start (or end) their holiday with a sensational Singapore experience thanks to a number of free transit initiatives for passengers with more than five hours' transit time.

For instance, a free city shuttle operates regular scheduled two way services from the airport to some of Singapore's key attractions and shopping hotspots, dropping off passengers at popular locations such as the Singapore Flyer, Little India, Suntec City and Bugis Street, to explore in their own time, and according to their own interests.

A licensed tour guide on board the coach provides a short, informative commentary, while a tour attendant is available at each drop off location to advise passengers of the key activities and sights in each area and to help them make the most of their time.

By Brian Salter