SINGAPORE:
EXO’s Newest MICE Destination

INSIDER ACCESS:
A closer glimpse into Our Asia

DINING WITH LOCALS:
Freshly curated community-based dining experiences

EXO ACTIVE:
Where traditional touring meets adventure
IN THIS ISSUE...

Explorer #70 highlights a range of exclusive, newly-curated experiences that can only be found with EXO. From intimate encounters to sampling some of the region’s flavours alongside the locals, our aim is to get clients as close as possible to Experiencing Our Asia.

Additionally, this issue of Explorer marks the launch of EXO’s tenth country: Singapore. Learn a bit more on what makes this country stand out and why we’re so excited to add it as our newest MICE destination.

A meet and greet with our new Product Director, highlighted FAM experiences and classic travels with an adventurous twist are all featured topics this issue, so enjoy the read and keep travelling!

WEBINAR SERIES

25th Apr / Japan
04th May / China
18th May / Thailand
06th Jun / Vietnam
15th Jun / Myanmar

MEET THE TEAM

We’ll be attending plenty of shows throughout the year, so drop by and say hello!
Where can you see us? All of our currently scheduled shows are detailed below:

IMEX Frankfurt: 16th - 18th May
ILTM Asia: 5th - 8th June
Pure Life Experiences: 15th - 18th September

You can find an up-to-date list of our trade show appearances at exotravel.com/tradeshows

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Speciality experiences offering exclusive insights into some of Asia’s most unique and intriguing personalities, traditions and landmarks.

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From trekking and cycling to photography tours and scavenger hunts: these are traditional touring experiences with a dash of adventure!

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2017 was declared the Year of Sustainable Tourism by the United Nations. Discover how EXO Travel and the EXO Foundation are working together to implement responsible practices across our 10 countries.

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In March of 2017, EXO launched its tenth country in Asia: Singapore. Look beyond the stereotypes and discover why we believe this is one of Asia’s most exciting destinations.

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The best way to promote a destination is to experience it first hand! These are our highlighted 2017 FAM trips across six different countries.

25 - 26 DINING WITH LOCALS

Local homes, traditional recipes and authentic flavours: these are hand-crafted, community-based dining experiences that benefit everyone involved.

31 - 32 TAKE 5 WITH RUBEN DERKSEN

EXO’s new Product Director was born travelling. Take a moment to get to know Ruben Derksen and how his unique background has inspired a life of travel.
or those who are willing to step outside comfort zones and embark into the unknown, travel affords some of the most insightful and enlightening experiences imaginable. An infinitude of possibilities unfolds, the world appears much bigger and then exceedingly smaller, and preconceived notions evaporate into the foreign air.

While the act of travel constantly rewards intrepid personalities with unique experiences, sometimes it takes a bit of local knowledge to bring experiences to the next level. Due to our positioning all throughout Asia, we live and breathe each destination in which we operate. Not only can we offer the most authentic, inimitable experiences, we can also offer truly unique, local experiences with some of the region’s most remarkable people. What this means varies from destination to destination, but all encounters are equally memorable. Whether from a destination native or adoptive expatriate, a local take always unveils something new and exciting.

Insider Access provides just this: going beyond the main attractions, breaking the surface and becoming entirely immersed in an experience. Additionally, the sheer variety in encounters offers something for every personality and travel style.

ACCESS TO TRADITION

While tradition is a key element of travel in Asia, there is one destination that stands out in particular. Japan has become one of the world’s most progressive countries whilst retaining much of its traditional culture. This tradition is present in every corner of the nation and helps to make each destination extraordinary. Because Japan is so traditional, however, it can be difficult for an ‘outsider’ to crack the facade of the ancient empire. Enter: Insider Access.

Two quintessential images of Japan are sumo and geisha. Witnessing a sumo wrestling competition or a geisha performance is an undeniably enriching experience. What can make the encounter all the more unforgettable, however, is getting to spend quality, personal time with each of these iconic figures. Insider Access offers an intimate encounter with each personality, discovering exactly what it’s like to walk in the shoes of a living, breathing tradition. Discover the rigorous schedule and lifestyle that is required to sustain a sumo wrestler; crack the majestic surface of the geisha to learn what life is actually like for a traditional, yet modern-day entertainer in Japan.

For more information on these experiences, contact japan@exotravel.com

For most foreigners, little is known about the landlocked nation of Laos. Despite offering a plethora of attractions, the country often gets overlooked. For those who take the time to get to know this small, yet dynamic country, their efforts are highly rewarded.

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Of all the remarkable destinations in Laos, Luang Prabang always seems to come out on top. The spiritual hub of the nation, this sleepy UNESCO ‘city’ is drenched in natural beauty and entrancing cultural marvels. Among those is the Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre - a testament to and interactive exercise in Laos' diversity and charm. To supplement an already alluring experience, Insider Access offers a private encounter with either of the museum’s two co-directors, Ms. Tara Guadur or Ms. Thongphoua Sonthivisay. Experts in the field of ethnology and possessing a wealth of information concerning the collections, exhibitions and history of the centre, both women make for a fascinating encounter, particularly for those interested in culture and tradition.

Contact laos@exotravel.com for more information

ACCESS TO THE ARTS

The arts are cherished around the globe. Offered in all different modes, methods and mediums, receiving some insight into their creative processes and end results is a truly fascinating experience. When combined with landmark sites and historical significance, the experiences are extremely impactful.

Cambodia was once home to some of the most diverse and abundant arts in Southeast Asia. When the Khmer Rouge swept through the nation, it destroyed, among many other things, much of this thriving arts scene. Insider Access not only offers a glimpse into the revitalisation of the arts in Cambodia, but also the man who is responsible for a large portion of it. Ann Chom Pond is the founder of Cambodia Living Arts, an organisation established to preserve cultural heritage in Cambodia and support its new generation of artists.

With some one-on-one personal time with the founder, learn everything from his extraordinary background and survival during the regime to his vision for Cambodia’s future.

Reach out to cambodia@exotravel.com for more information

In Thailand, Insider Access offers a glimpse into an entirely different side of the arts.

Born in the Thonburi district of Bangkok, Sakul Intakul began his professional life as an electronics engineer. Following a brief course in Japanese flower arrangements, his life took a dramatic turn to the creative. After a rigorous education in the art, Sakul ended up preparing floral arrangements for HM Queen Sirikit, prestigious red carpet events and ultimately launching Thailand’s Museum of Floral Culture.

For visitors keen on delving into one of the country’s most colourful, fragrant and aesthetically pleasing arts, this half-day experience is unparalleled. Follow the trail of flowers from market to museum, learning directly from Sakul how these meticulously designed arrangements come into being.

Contact thailand@exotravel.com for more information

In Indonesia, a glimpse into the arts is offered in a rather unexpected destination. The first thing that comes to mind when thinking about Indonesia’s capital of Jakarta is usually traffic and overpopulation, not the arts, fashion or design. Beyond the city’s ribbon of brake lights, in the Cilandak district of South Jakarta, is the home and museum of one of Asia’s most esteemed creative minds.

Harry Darsono is an Indonesian celebrity fashion mogul and ingenious designer who has outfitted the likes of Princess Diana and Jordan's Queen Rania. His home and museum displays a wide collection of fashion items and antiques, bringing visitors through the country’s haute couture scene and fashion evolution. A half day under this creative maestro’s roof is a veritable exercise in inspiration, succeeded by fine dining and a visit to one of Jakarta’s pioneering galleries and museums.

For enquiries, please contact indonesia@exotravel.com

ACCESS TO ARCHITECTURE

When it comes to architecture in Asia, China’s city of Shanghai is king. Hosting a number of the world’s tallest buildings alongside its hidden colonial gems, the metropolis offers insight into the past and foresees into the world’s emerging “megatall” structures. Whilst a stroll along the icons of Shanghai is requisite for any visit, Insider Access allows architecture buffs to see beyond the facade and set back into the past, present and future of China.

By walking, hiking, biking and multi-sporting through destinations, EXO Active brings travellers straight to the soul of a destination while reserving plenty of time to check out highlights and relax along the way. We supply the equipment, expertise, ground support and logistics, travellers supply the passion for adventure, and Asia supplies the gorgeous backdrops and charming local cultures.

For more information, contact china@exotravel.com

EXO ACTIVE

A growing number of travellers are in search of holidays that involve more than just checking off a list of highlights or lounging by a pool. EXO Active tours are specialised travel experiences designed for travellers who want to feel the pulse of a destination while filling their lungs with its air.

1. THAILAND: THE MAGIC OF MUAY THAI

Thailand’s ancient martial art of Muay Thai presents the perfect opportunity to showcase what EXO Active adventures are all about. While undeniably physical in nature, Muay Thai is steeped in ancient traditions which date back hundreds of years. Under the guidance of a professional Muay Thai trainer, guests are introduced to the history, traditions and rituals of Muay Thai before being baptised in the sport, learning fundamental moves and maneuvers.

They’re then treated to a series of exclusive encounters starting with a backstage visit at the world-famous Rajadamnern Boxing Stadium. Here they’ll have a chance to witness a side of the sport few outsiders get to see: the intense focus and preparation that takes place before a fight.

They then grab a ringside seat to witness all the things they learned and experiences through the day put into action. Afterwards, they meet the winner of the main event for an unforgettable photo opportunity before being presented with a pair of authentic Muay Thai boxing shorts as a perfect memento.

2. VIETNAM: FROM FARMING TO FISHING

One of the reasons Vietnam is such a joy to travel in is its ability to seemingly transport travellers to a bygone era. The deep connection that Vietnamese people have with their past and the speed at which bustling cities seem to fade into sleepy rural landscapes make it a study of contrasts and the perfect place to embark on an active outdoors experience.

Our Farm to Fishing tour in the historic town of Hoi An is a perfect example of the type of Active adventures that are in store for travellers in Vietnam.

Pedalling past rice paddies and villages, guests meander through winding back-country roads to arrive at a picture-perfect village far off the
beaten path. After meeting with some of the friendly local fishermen, they board a traditional ‘basket boat’ and drift onto the water.

While learning how to operate these classic round boats, guests are then taught how to cast a fishing net the traditional way—a tricky task that the local fishermen happily assist with. Afterwards, they take a leisurely cruise up the river back to Ho An Ancient City, taking in great views of the surrounding area along the way.

**CAMBODIA: ANGKOR THOM SCAVENGER HUNT:**

The mysterious ancient city of Angkor is among the world’s most iconic and rewarding travel destinations. The challenge in presenting Angkor to guests isn’t in impressing them, as the temples effortlessly do that on their own. The challenge is in finding a way to reveal the ancient city’s wonders in a uniquely memorable way.

In keeping with the spirit of Active adventures, the Angkor Thom Scavenger Hunt turns a standard sightseeing tour on its head by imploring guests to actively participate in discovering the city’s fascinating past.

After receiving a map and a set of clues, guests set off into the sprawling temple complex of Angkor Thom on a quest to capture eleven unique photos. By analysing statues and following the leads of answers revealed by them, guests are progressively led into the heart of the temple complex, learning fascinating and easy-to-miss tidbits of its history along the way.

**INDONESIA: LEISURELY CYCLING FROM KALIadem TO PRAMBANAN TOUR:**

As adventurous destinations go, Indonesia is gifted beyond imagination. Its volcano-studded landscapes, varied cultures, verdant rainforests and over 54,000km of coastline provide travellers options in spades. The key to EXO Active in Indonesia is balancing its abundance of options while maintaining a delicate balance of comfort and accessibility.

A great example of this is the Leisurely Cycling from Kaliadem to Prambanan tour. Departing from the cultural heart of Indonesia, Yogyakarta, guests head to a village overlooking the billowing active volcano of Gunung Merapi. From there they cycle, mostly downhill, through dramatic volcanic scenery, stopping by charming rural villages along the way.

The cycling tour concludes at the UNESCO-listed temple complex of Prambanan where guests take part in an insightful tour of its fascinating sites and learn about its history.

**LAOS: THERAPEUTIC TREK WITH ELEPHANTS TOUR:**

As the least densely populated nation in Southeast Asia, Laos is a nature-lover’s dream destination. EXO Active’s offerings in Laos help travellers get in touch with the natural side of the country that makes it such a special travel destination.

In a feel-good nod to both nature and the spirit of adventure, this engaging tour perfectly balances active exploration with pristine stretches of jungle and an unforgettable, close-up encounter with elephants.

Unlike other tours which often exploit the majesty of Asia, EXO Active re-imagines the classic Penang tour by combining culinary highlights such as food sampling and visiting a buzzing local market with a cycling adventure through the island’s little-seen and stunningly beautiful countryside. To top things off, guests then cycle to Kek Lok Si Temple for a look at Malaysia’s largest and most fascinating Buddhist temple.

**JAPAN: TOKYO STREET PHOTOGRAPHY TOUR:**

The Japanese word ‘kaizen’ accurately reflects not only the mentality of its people, but also the country. Simply put, kaizen is the continuous quest for perfection. This can be seen in the way people approach the work that they do and the things they are passionate about, as well as the snow-capped peaks of Mt. Fuji and the architecture of Kyoto.

Japan’s ceaseless motion and elegance beckons travellers to get out, explore and to adopt this mentality of kaizen.

Built around the principles of kaizen, this Tokyo Street Photography tour helps travellers do just that. Rather than simply taking in sights of the city’s highlights, travellers are taught the fundamentals of photography and learn to perfect their skills in the art.

EXO Active’s Shek-o’s Dragon’s Back and Beaches tour is the perfect way to shatter preconceptions about Hong Kong. Starting from the 200-year-old village of Shek O, guests set out by taking a look at the roots of Hong Kong’s heritage.

From there they head on an amazing 8km trek across the ‘Dragon’s Back’ for jaw-dropping views of lush natural scenery culminating in a panoramic view of Clear Water Bay and Stanley Beach. After taking in transformative views they then head to one of Hong Kong’s most pristine beaches for some rest and relaxation.
Travel trends are a worldwide phenomena that disappear almost as quickly as they arrive. Among the many travel trends for 2017 is one that hopefully follows a different course: sustainability.

The word itself makes some travellers self-conscious while it sends others into a frenzy of eco-bookings, carbon footprint evaluations and impulsive PayPal donations. Unlike most others, however, this ‘trend’ (or movement, as we envision it) carries serious impact, and its residual effects can either be exceedingly positive or devastating for the entire global community.

Forecasting the inevitable impact of travel, the UN wisely labeled 2017 the “International Year of Sustainable Tourism”. As sustainability has long been fundamental to EXO’s ethos, we’re glad it’s finally getting spotlight on the world tourism stage.

A BRIEF LOOK BACK

When EXO Travel was founded in 1993, sustainability did not carry the urgency that it holds today. Taking care of local communities, protecting the environment and helping to preserve culture and tradition simply seemed second nature, as it was our attraction to the region in the first place. Furthermore, with the number of travellers a fraction of what they are today, tourism’s negative impacts were minimal, to say the least.

As our regional experience and country list grew, so did our awareness of the need to implement more sustainable practices. Entirely immersed in each of the countries we operated in, we began working directly with reputable charities who were making a significant impact on the local communities. EXO’s commitment to sustainability took full form in 2011 with the establishment of the EXO Foundation.

THE EXO FOUNDATION

Working independently of EXO Travel, the Foundation’s mission is to instigate a system of travel that maximises the benefits for local communities while preserving their cultural and natural heritage. It aims to improve the livelihood of the most disadvantaged populations, while minimising the negative social, cultural and environmental impacts tourism may generate.

Sustainability advisors work in each destination to shape the company’s RTP (responsible travel policy), advising on best practices to ensure our offerings support the sustainable development of the region. The Foundation also works to educate and improve internal EXO functions, from sustainable practices in-office to small ways employees can reduce their ecological footprint.

Additionally, acting as the charitable arm of the company, the EXO Foundation supports external projects spanning all aspects of the spectrum, from health, sanitation and educational training to humanitarian aid, cultural revival, environmental and human protection.

How are EXO Travel and EXO Foundation working together to make a difference?

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Even in highly-developed countries, waste management can be an issue. In third world and developing nations, waste proves to be fatal. EXO Foundation has been implementing programs that transform “useless” waste into highly practical materials, which can directly benefit local communities. Inspired from a Montessori program implemented in Guatemala, items such as polystyrene, cigarette butts, aluminium foil and plastic bags are packed into discarded plastic bottles which are then transformed into useful building materials. The end product: recycled “bricks” that construct walls, schools, homes, etc. The project not only provides a new livelihood for a number of people, but also reduces the use of bricks, offers a practical solution to waste management, provides affordable housing and much more.

IMPACTFUL MICE PROGRAMS

While MICE programs are often considered to be the antithesis of sustainable travel, EXO offers a range of impactful MICE programs that are beneficial for both the clients and the community. What helps to make a MICE trip sustainable?

• Using accommodation committed to improving their resource consumption and supporting local development
• Hiring modern vehicles producing fewer emissions
• Employing carbon offset schemes using energy saving equipment
• Implementing the use of refillable bottles as opposed to single-use plastic bottles
• Purchasing gifts from fair trade shops, employing local craftworkers
• Engaging in CSR (corporate social responsibility) activities and supporting endangered wildlife/environmental projects

The potential of tourism for sustainable development is considerable...[it can] provide important livelihood opportunities, help alleviate poverty and drive inclusive development...

Former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon

THE YEAR OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

In the year 2000, a total of 674 million people travelled the globe.

15 years later, the numbers skyrocketed to a mesmerising 1.2 billion.

With an estimated 1.8 billion people expected to travel the world by 2030, there is no denying tourism’s impact.

DID YOU KNOW?

• In Cambodia, 25% of the population does not have access to safe water and 58% to proper sanitation
• In Laos, 80% of households boil their water to make it safe to drink
• Nearly one out of two Indians lacks access to safe water, and more than 70 percent of the nation’s 220 million people rely on potentially contaminated sources

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Singapore’s iconic ‘supertrees’ are environmentally-sustainable attractions providing equal benefit to the environment and tourism industry. These vertical gardens house over 160,000 plants, generate and store solar power, provide air ventilation and collect rainwater for nearby conservatories.

THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM WAS CREATED TO PROMOTE TOURISM’S ROLE IN THE FOLLOWING FIVE KEY AREAS:

1. Inclusive and sustainable economic growth
2. Social inclusiveness, employment and poverty reduction
3. Resource efficiency, environmental protection and climate change
4. Cultural values, diversity and heritage
5. Mutual understanding, peace and security.

EYES ON THE ENVIRONMENT

A number of offset programs are underway to help combat our carbon footprint. In response to extensive deforestation in Asia, and in addition to Plant-a-Tree campaigns, EXO offsets all company-wide air travel through various NEXUS development programs. NEXUS works alongside local communities to help reduce the use of fuel/wood for cooking and boiling water (water purification). To replace the fuel, collaborations are set with various SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) to produce locally-made water filtration systems and energy-efficient cooking stoves.

Water treatment solutions reduce CO2 emissions and health hazards while alleviating the local reliance on forests for fuel. They also save households money by decreasing fuel purchases and creating new rural employment opportunities through local production and distribution.

EXO Travel has contributed to a variety of water filtration programs in Cambodia, Laos and Indonesia, reducing over 120 tons of emissions, saving over 75 tons of wood fuel (one year in Cambodia alone) and protecting 4.6 hectares of forest from deforestation (in Laos).

Plans are in the works now to initiate a similar program to offset CO2 emissions from clients’ regional and domestic flights.

HUMAN RIGHTS

EXO was the first worldwide tour operator to be ChildSafe certified by the award-winning Friends International. The ChildSafe program is a global movement protecting children from all forms of abuse, both implementing and advocating child protection policies and practices.

EXO is proud to have more than 300 guides and 150 staff fully trained to provide a ChildSafe tourism experience. Part of our commitment includes a complete ban of school and orphanage visits, following the campaign, ‘Children are not tourist attractions’.

THE NO PLASTIC INITIATIVE

Focusing on tackling Asia, and the world’s, obsession with plastic products, the No Plastic Initiative works on educating and reducing the use of harmful plastic-based products at work, in the field and at home.

From shopping bags, food containers and drinking straws to disposable cups and cutlery, poisonous plastics are found everywhere and prove to be extremely harmful to the environment.

EXO has piloted a scheme to replace plastic water bottles given to travellers by refillable, stainless steel ones. While a select few clients have followed us with enthusiasm on this project, we hope to extend this to many more clients.

In just one month of operations between four groups, we managed to save 1,500 plastic bottles from ending up in a landfill.

The initiative doesn’t just stop at plastic, but also focuses on culling the use of polystyrene containers, excessive paper tissue use and other wasteful products. In their place, teams actively promote the use of cloth bags and napkins, reusable cups, bamboo straws, stainless steel food containers and much more.

EXO’S ECO-TRAVEL OPTIONS

While many travellers are interested in seeing what life is like as a local, not everyone necessarily wants to live like a local.

We offer a variety of sustainable, eco experiences from hill tribe homestays and restaurants training disadvantaged youth to uniquely local forms of transport and interactive, impactful rural visits.

These encounters can be one-off experiences or combined together to make a truly unforgettable travel tale.

Additionally, experiences we have deemed unsustainable, such as school and orphanage visits, unethical elephant experiences and longneck tribe ‘sightseeing’, have been entirely removed from our repertoire.

GOING FORWARD

The fact that 1.5 billion out of a population of almost 7.5 billion are travelling the world is a fantastic step forward for global tolerance.

In a world that’s becoming increasingly smaller through technology and increased travel efficiency, it is imperative that a traveller’s impact benefits a destination, rather than exploits it.

EXO is firmly committed to ensuring that as many experiences as possible are fashioned in a sustainable manner, and we encourage all our clients to do the same.
INTRODUCING OUR NEWEST MICE DESTINATION:

EXO SINGAPORE

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March 2017

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Since opening its doors in 1993, EXO Travel has maintained a steady trajectory of growth. From humble roots as the first foreign-owned company to be granted a tourism license in Vietnam, we’ve become one of the largest and most-trusted DMCs in Asia. Every few years this presence grows with the addition of new countries to our area of operations.

Despite this growth, we have always maintained a steadfast grip on our roots as approachable, in-destination experts who, with the addition of each destination, maintain the same commitment to product innovation, operational efficiency and fail-proof guest services that paved the path to success in the beginning.

Continuing in this tradition, this year we took another step in our journey by adding Singapore into the fold. With EXO Events already launched and plans to open to the FIT market by the end of the year, we can hardly contain our excitement.

**WHY IS SINGAPORE SO EXCITING?**

Singapore is just a business and transport hub, right? Not quite. Recent trends in travel in the region indicate otherwise.

In addition to its convenient geographic location, making it an easy stopover for travellers to Southeast Asia, Singapore has increasingly gained traction as a holiday destination on its own. In 2015, it topped Lonely Planet’s list of must-visit destinations.

The secret is out: Singapore has far more to offer than just business and convenience. Travellers from around the world are lining up to go there.

**NATURAL OFFERINGS:**

Naturally, Singapore has two things going for it. First, it’s a quintessential tropical nation. Being just over 100km from the equator, there is very little seasonal variation in weather with only a vaguely defined ‘wet’ and ‘dry’ season. For the most part, Singapore is open to tourism year-round.

This equatorial geography contributes directly to the second natural asset, despite being heavily developed, it’s still incredibly lush. In fact, it’s one of only two major cities in the world to contain a bona fide rainforest within its city limits, bringing entirely new meaning to the phrase ‘concrete jungle’.

**ANYTHING ELSE?**

Beyond these attributes, Singapore’s natural offerings thin out. The island’s highest point is Bukit Timah Hill, which stands just 164 metres in elevation. Although the island once had abundant coral reefs surrounding it, most of these areas have disappeared due to the surge of industry and Singapore’s claim to having one of the world’s busiest ports.

In recognition of these shortcomings, and as a product of Singapore’s staggering financial successes, huge investments have been made to the country’s tourism infrastructure which are now beginning to pay off.

Take Gardens by the Bay, for example. Located just next to Marina Bay, already one of Asia’s most stunning cityscapes, it combines two ultra-futuristic conservatories with a grove of ‘supertrees’ to make one feel almost as though they are surrounded by an advanced alien civilisation. It’s nothing short of magical!

If that isn’t reason enough to feel confident in sending travellers to Singapore, there is a slew of other world-topping investments the country has made to bolster its tourism as well.

Singapore’s first UNESCO World Heritage site, the Singapore Botanical Gardens, is lauded for both natural and cultural heritage. The man-made island of Sentosa has literally been created from the ground up to offer locals and visitors the ultimate range of activities and attractions; from Universal Studios to artificial beaches packed with imported fine Malaysian sand.

Add to that the Singapore Zoo, Jurong Bird Park and Night Safari, all easily among the world’s finest and most professionally operated animal parks, the world’s tallest observation wheel, the Singapore Flyer, and a slew of other attractions. Filling an itinerary with exciting things to see and do in Singapore is a breeze.

**BUT WAIT, THERE’S MORE!**

Those who are ‘in the know’ realise that the real reason to visit Singapore isn’t its ultra-modern infrastructure, amazing attractions or tropical surroundings – it’s the food and culture!

Singapore is the most diverse nation in Southeast Asia. With four official languages, one for each of its substantial ethnic populations: Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English, Singapore is a cultural amalgamation that represents the very best of each influence.

Charming ethnic enclaves such as Chinatown, Arab Street, Little India and Kampung Glam are veritable paradises for culture vultures looking to dive headlong into local experiences. At nearly every corner, incredible food offerings await; some are local takes on traditional ethnic dishes and others are entirely unique to Singapore, but nearly all are memorable.

**ICING ON THE CAKE:**

Singapore also boasts some of the world’s most efficient and comfortable transportation. As they say, first impressions are often the most lasting, and that’s an area where Singapore rarely fails to impress. Changi Airport has won the title of best airport in the world 4 years in a row.

Even public transportation in Singapore is a pleasure to use. Between its network of trams, buses and reliable government-operated taxis, one can easily access all the major points of interest in Singapore within a very short space of time. This comfort and efficiency makes Singapore an incredibly smooth place to operate tours in.

**WHO IS SINGAPORE FOR?**

Because of its world-class facilities, positive business environment, professional services, widely spoken English and generous offering of hotels, Singapore is one of Asia’s most ideal destinations for MICE programs. It’s one of the few places in Southeast Asia where one can rest assured that high-value bookings will be brought to fruition without delay, complication or inconvenience.

In addition to its efficiency, professionalism and contemporary appeals, Singapore’s central location within Southeast Asia makes it easily accessible for all travellers and a perfect addition to multi-country itineraries. Through our Malaysia and Indonesia-based offices, we can arrange any number of multi-country itineraries with Singapore as supplementary destination.

**WHAT’S NEXT?**

EXO is poised to take MICE programs to the next level in Singapore. Combining the country’s cultural and natural allure with its world-class accommodation, venues and flawless transport, we believe Singapore adds a whole new array of choice to our already comprehensive offerings in Asia. With plans of opening EXO Singapore to the FIT market by the end of the year, the bar is set high for our tenth destination.
Indulge in the magic of nature at Koh Tao, in Haad Tien’s private secluded resort. Feast your eyes on untouched panoramic vistas above ground, or explore the Gulf of Thailand’s famous warm waters and their vibrant subaquatic marine life.

There is no better way to promote a destination than by experiencing it first-hand. FAM (familiarisation) trips are a direct, intimate means of experiencing the unique itineraries crafted by EXO, covering everything from classic destinations to hands-on, adrenaline-fueled journeys.

Replicating the direct client experience and combining it with a few added touches, these inimitable, highly-discounted journeys are travel highlights of the year for everyone involved. 2017 has six brilliant experiences lined up that will carry agents through Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Japan and Indonesia.
VIETNAM:

From the Mountains to the Delta

A 12-day, north-to-south experience, this journey displays the many allurees of Vietnam. Begin in the millennia-old capital of Hanoi, exploring its historic sites and culture-infused streets before moving north to the terraced landscapes of Sapa. After some off-piste trekking, mountain biking options and hill tribe explorations, the journey moves south along the coast to heritage-rich Central Vietnam.

The 17th century UNESCO-protected ancient town of Hoi An is a gem of the nation. Enjoy time wandering around its mango-coloured alleys and colourful background in its cultural quarters, and sample its delicious food safari.

A visit to Siem Reap and its Angkor Archaeological Complex are quintessential experiences for any traveller coming to Asia. This 10-day trip covers the majestic temples, verdant countryside and alluring attractions of Siem Reap, of course, but it also reveals some of the other beautiful destinations.

Cambodia has to offer. After three comprehensive days in Siem Reap, continue south to the lesser-known Santeay Chhmar. See what an Angkor complex may have looked like prior to being discovered with these overgrown ruins before spending some village time with the locals.

Continue on with a truly alternative day of transport in Battambang, topped off with an evening snack tour. A stop is made in the capital to visit some of its iconic (and infamous) sites before journeying farther south to Sihanoukville and Kep. Along with lounging beach time, enjoy a variety of activities from kayaking and snorkelling to jungle trekking and market visits.

LAOS:

Asia’s Hidden Treasure

Eight days in Laos offers curious travellers insight into what makes this landlocked nation one of the most distinctive destinations in Southeast Asia. The trip is entirely unique from the onset, beginning in the southern 4,000 Islands region of the country. A lesser-known part of Laos, this wide stretch of the Mekong is home to innumerable cascades and tiny islets, hosting quaint villages and lush plantations. Discover some colonial roots of the region before jumping to Pakse and catching a flight to the far north.

The latter part of the journey explores the Luang Prabang region, a destination that never fails to win the hearts of visitors. The country’s laid-back spiritual capital, a visit to Luang Prabang is marked by wild landscapes, solemn temple experiences, heritage strolls and colourful locals. Continue with three days in the surrounding countryside visiting villages, cruising the rivers and enjoying light treks, discovering some of the many reasons why this part of Asia is one of the most unforgettable.

INDONESIA:

Indonesia for Adventurers

Indonesia has something to offer every style of traveller. However, this specific FAM is for the true adventurer at heart. A week-long journey is filled with cycling, trekking and diving, through a broad range of untamed landscapes. Starting in Manado, embark on this North Sulawesi jaunt into the highlands for a local immersion experience before beginning a cycling trip around Tondano Lake.

The adventure continues into Tangkoko National Park with an ascent to the rim of an active volcano. Breathtaking views and bubbling lava encounters are followed up with two days of unforgettable wildlife trekking, ultimately leading into the diving aspect of the trip.

Based in the Bunaken Marine National Park, encounter some of the world’s finest diving and most exotic underwater marine life, with ample time for relaxing along the idyllic coast.

Tongkap National Park, offers two full days each to experience four of Myanmar’s absolute must-see destinations. Starting in Mandalay, discover the bustling streets, vibrant markets and historic landmarks of the city before reaching Nyaung Shwe and its breathtaking Inle Lake.

No visit to Myanmar is complete without boating (and, in this case, kayaking) alongside Inle’s stilted houses, floating gardens and leg-revewing fishermen. Tour a few ancient temples before heading to the real temple haven of Myanmar: Bagan. Enjoy cycling around the endless stupas and pagodas of this ancient spiritual hub before concluding the experience in Yangon. Discover Myanmar’s colonial heritage with architectural wanders and tea house visits, uncover its colourful background in its cultural quarters, and sample its variety of flavours with a delicious food safari.

MYANMAR:

The Quintessential Myanmar

Myanmar embodies the qualities that initially attracted global travellers to Asia: refreshing authenticity, untainted landmarks and a melting pot of surrounding cultures. This 8-day odyssey offers two full days each to experience four of Myanmar’s absolute must-see destinations.

Starting in Mandalay, discover the bustling streets, vibrant markets and historic landmarks of the city before reaching Nyaung Shwe and its breathtaking Inle Lake.

No visit to Myanmar is complete without boating (and, in this case, kayaking) alongside Inle’s stilted houses, floating gardens and leg-revewing fishermen. Tour a few ancient temples before heading to the real temple haven of Myanmar: Bagan. Enjoy cycling around the endless stupas and pagodas of this ancient spiritual hub before concluding the experience in Yangon. Discover Myanmar’s colonial heritage with architectural wanders and tea house visits, uncover its colourful background in its cultural quarters, and sample its variety of flavours with a delicious food safari.

JAPAN:

Progress & Tradition

A week in Japan offers visitors a perfect taste of what this island nation has to offer. A sample of traditional, a glimpse into its modern metropolises, a stroll through its cultural climes and a dash of the unconventional.

The experience launches in the heart of it all, Tokyo, with time to explore its Tsukiji Market, idiosyncratic districts and remarkable culinary offerings. While luggage is transported onwards to Kyoto, spend two light days exploring Hakone and Mie.

Known for its onsen hot springs, open-air museum and extensive cable car system, Hakone offers a great combination of history and nature, while Mie provides visitors a glimpse into one of Japan’s most remarkable professions: the Ama free divers. Continue the journey further west to Kyoto, soaking up the culture, tradition and spirituality the city is known for.

The experience culminates with a visit to Japan’s eclectic urban retreat, Osaka, one of the country’s most famous food hubs.
Our name Silavadee means "beautiful rock" in Thai, as its located on Laem Nan Beach, between Chaweng and Lamai Beach. Beautiful Granite boulders enclose a private and secluded "secret beach", with some of the best snorkeling available on Koh Samui.

Comprising 44 private pool villas (25 pool villas NEW) and 36 deluxe rooms, Silavadee Pool Spa Resort has its own unique style with a "back to nature" concept.
LUNCH IN THE KHLONGS OF BANGKOK:

One of Bangkok’s best-kept secrets is its network of klongs or canals, which helped the city earn its nickname the ‘Venice of the East’. This corner of Bangkok retains much of the city’s famed energy but in a form that’s completely distinct from the tuk tuk-filled streets of the inner-city.

While visiting this unique area of Bangkok, guests join a local family at their riverside house in the klongs for a delicious home-cooked meal. While longtail boats buzz up and down the canals, guests engage in an insightful conversation with the English-speaking host who is a fountain of knowledge about the area and its history.

This is an especially amazing experience on the weekends due to the house’s proximity to the local floating market. After filling up on a home-cooked meal and chatting with the host, guests can then explore the floating market. This lunch is a perfect addition to any canal tour in Bangkok.

LOCAL LUNCH AT A HOUSE IN ANGKOR PARK:

Channelling one’s inner-Indiana Jones can be exhausting work. What better way to take a break from temple hopping than to join a local family in their home for a home-cooked lunch?

Located in a small village within the Angkor Archaeological Park, the family’s home is a typical Khmer-style house surrounded by rice paddies – not unlike those that would have been found in the area during the Khmer Empire’s heyday.

While the host family prepares a simple but filling lunch, guests hear stories about the area’s history and learn about the village’s lifestyle. Afterwards they can take a tour of the village itself.

LUNCH WITH A LOCAL FAMILY IN SHANGHAI:

The ironic thing about large cities is that, despite being filled with people, they often leave visitors with an impersonal impression. As the largest city in the most populous country on earth, Shanghai has few peers as big cities go. To humanise the experience of this vibrant super-city, we’ve created an enchanting lunch experience with a local Shanghai family.

The experience begins with a tour of one of Shanghai’s most famous wet markets – the perfect chance to see the nuts and bolts of Shanghai’s culinary engine. After learning about some of the locally-sourced ingredients, guests head to the family’s house. There the hosts teach guests how to prepare traditional Chinese dumplings. It’s a fun and slightly challenging activity that will be sure to evoke fits of laughter shared among all.

ROYAL DINNER IN HUE, VIETNAM:

The importance of food and family in Vietnam cannot be overstated. They influence virtually every aspect of Vietnamese culture, from holidays and traditions right down to daily life. To really understand what makes Vietnam tick, it’s essential to experience the inextricable link between food and family. Only then can visitors truly grasp Vietnamese culture.

This dining experience not only exposes guests to this unique side of Vietnam, but it allows them to take part in an incredibly exclusive experience that simply cannot be had anywhere else.

The host for this amazing experience is Ms. Nhu Huy. She’s not only a professor, food presenter and author of several cook books, she’s a descendent of the formal Royal Family of Imperial Hue. Guests meet with Ms. Nhu in her gorgeous ancient house and learn how to prepare a special royal treat: Salt Rice. In imperial times, this dish was only served to special guests, and has become a dying culinary tradition. Guests will learn how to blend up to nine kinds of salt to create this unique and delicious meal while learning the history behind it and the Imperial Dynasty of Hue.
Bali Tropic Resort & Spa is located just 20 minutes away from Ngurah Rai International Airport, an exclusive beach hotel in Bali is built in a subtle blend of Balinese and modern architecture and offers a marvellous ambiance for a truly wonderful and relaxing beach vacation. A beautiful setting among frangipani and Bougainville with the most breathtaking views of the warm and wonderful Indian Ocean. Very centrally on the world famous Tanjung Benoa – Nusa Dua Beach on the south coast of Bali Island, Indonesia.

The unique combination of beautiful and spacious rooms feature balcony or terrace with excellent garden, luxury and well equipped bathrooms coupled with great hospitality, breathtaking scenery and the wonderful climate will make you want to come again and return again to this magical place.

Guests can head to the gym for a work out or enjoy a pampering body treatment at the spa. Water sports like scuba diving and white water rafting can be arranged. The resort also offers some game activities, a garden chess, a Kids Club, and free Wi-Fi. Outdoor dining by the beach can be enjoyed at Ratna, while Windsurf features barbeque delights. Drinks are served at Cempaka Bar or Sriwedari.

Jl. Pratama 34a, P.O. Box 41, Nusa Dua, Bali 80363, Indonesia

www.balitropic-resort.com

www.exotravel.com/trade
TAKE 5 WITH EXO PRODUCT DIRECTOR

RUBEN DERSKEN

We’re excited to introduce our new Product Director, Ruben Derksen. As a company that prides itself in innovation, Ruben’s role is vital in developing new ways to help clients experience our Asia – the place we’ve called home for 23 years.

In addition to having an MBA and heaps of experience within the industry, Ruben also has a very interesting story. As the son to the former Dutch Counsel to Bhutan and Nepal, he literally has travel in his DNA. He took his first international flight at the tender age of two months and has, since then, lived in 13 countries across Asia, Africa and Europe. He also speaks English, Dutch and French fluently, and can even read and write Tibetan.

YOU HAVE A PRETTY UNIQUE BACKGROUND. COULD YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT IT AND HOW THIS SHAPES YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON TRAVEL IN ASIA?

I’ve had the unique and fortunate opportunity to spend significant lengths of time learning about and integrating with cultures across the globe. This not only helps me relate with people from various backgrounds, but it gives me an appreciation of the diversity that makes our world so amazing.

I’ve learned that, regardless of where people come from, we all share certain human tendencies. At the same time, the way people express this humanity is so varied: from art and architecture to religion and tradition. The beauty of travelling, to me, is in being able to witness this variation – and this is what I try to highlight in everything we do.

IF YOU ‘ARE WHAT YOU EAT’,ONE COULD ALSO SAY ‘YOU ARE WHERE YOU GO’. IF YOU COULD GO ANYWHERE IN ASIA, WHERE WOULD YOU GO AND WHY?

In terms of food, I like things spicy. I like my travel destinations the same way. The kind of places that I personally enjoy the most, though, are places where I can get lost in nature. I’m really drawn to the incredible biodiversity in Asia. The region is home to some of the world’s most lush and verdant landscapes and filled with an array of impossibly exotic wildlife that, even after 20 years of living here, still blows my mind.

Borneo’s a great example of this. Although I’ve been there once, I still haven’t properly explored it. I dream of visiting places like Gunung Mulu and Bako National Parks in Sarawak.

ASIA HAS INSPIRED TRAVELLER’S IMAGINATIONS FOR GENERATIONS. WHAT IS IT ABOUT THE REGION THAT MAKES IT SO MAGICAL?

Part of what makes Asia such a magical place is how steeped in history it is – both naturally and culturally. It’s home to the oldest rainforests on earth. Places like Taman Negara, in Peninsular Malaysia, harbour rainforests that have existed mostly as they are today for more than 130 million years.

At the same time, Asia is also home to the oldest continually existing civilisation on earth. Chinese civilisation, which has profound cultural influence throughout Asia, is rooted in at least 5,000 years of history. The result of this deep connection to history is a place that often allows travellers to feel as though they’ve stepped back in time.

TRAVEL IS AN EVER-CHANGING INDUSTRY. WHAT ARE SOME TRENDS THAT YOU SEE SHAPING THE WAY PEOPLE TRAVEL IN THE NEAR FUTURE?

One of the biggest things that’s transforming travel these days is connectivity. Never before have people separated by vast distances been able to share experiences so easily. In some ways, this connectivity lacks a real human element to it. Though, we’ve found that there’s an increasing desire from our guests to bridge this digital divide through real-world cultural interactions.

This is one of the reasons EXO has been making a big push into experiential cultural encounters that bring travellers face to face with local people in mutually beneficial experiences such as our Insider Access and Local Dining tours.

ALTHOUGH ASIA IS KNOWN FOR ITS ICONIC LANDSCAPES AND DESTINATIONS, IT’S OFTEN THE ‘LITTLE THINGS’ WHICH ARE MOST MEMORABLE. HOW DOES EXO INCORPORATE THESE INTO ITS OFFERINGS?

I couldn’t agree more. EXO has always recognised the importance of ‘little things’ in creating successful travel products. It’s part of what separates us and our partners from the competition. Designing ‘highlights tours’ is a necessary part of the game. Ultimately, you want to offer guests what they want to see.

By including exclusive encounters with local people and visits to hidden spots along the way, we’re able to introduce guests to an entirely different aspect of destinations that they might not experience otherwise. We also believe including ‘little things’ operationally as well. This is often a simple matter of finding out what our guests’ personal preferences are, and taking an extra step to include them in tours.

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Ruben Dersken, Product Director
BOOKING WITH EXO

We offer a variety of ways to book or inquire about our services. Whether your preference is via online, email, telephone or visiting one of our regional offices, our expert teams are standing by ready to answer any question and process your bookings.

GO DIGITAL
Our Travel Trade site offers several options for online booking and enquiries. With EXO Connect, six of our destinations are instantly bookable online, and our XML feed plugs directly into your internal systems making bookings easier than ever.

OUR SALES OFFICES
Prefer to make your booking via one of our international sales offices? No problem, we have dedicated teams standing by, ready to assist you via phone or email, with any advice or insider information you require.

ASIA BY EMAIL
For a quick and easy response, contact our reservation teams in Asia by email. We make every effort to respond within 24 hours for simple enquiries and within 48 hours for more complex enquiries.

OUR COMMITMENT TO YOU

We understand the benefits of a good working relationship. With our partners, we share a common commitment to the professional delivery of unique travel experiences and providing an uncompromising level of service. To that end, we offer the following:

A TIMELY RESPONSE
We know that a fast response is imperative for success in our industry, and we are committed to responding to every inquiry the same day or, at the most, within 24 hours.

A PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATION
Using TOURPLAN, on which our reservations and operations teams receive comprehensive training, our organisation delivers fast and consistent service and seamless itineraries throughout our destinations.

HIGH QUALITY SERVICE ON THE GROUND
Through strong guide training and using the best vehicles, we are committed to providing the highest quality of service possible. Our preferred suppliers are all subject to regular and rigorous inspections.

CONSULTATIVE AND WELL-TRAINED STAFF
We ensure our teams are the most knowledgeable, and qualified in the business through industry-leading comprehensive training programs developed with one of Asia’s premier training organisations.

SPECIALISED TEAMS AND PERSONAL SERVICE
Whether you have a request about general travel, MICE, adventure, or luxury, we have small specialised teams in every destination to handle each area, and deliver the personal service that you deserve.

AN INVESTMENT IN PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT
Our product teams are based in every destination ensuring authentic, immersive and innovative experiences that can only be sourced from living and breathing the destinations on a daily basis.

FINANCIAL STABILITY
As part of the Apple Tree Group of companies that includes hotels, real estate and other asset holding companies in Asia, EXO Travel is financially secure.

Full contact details for all of our offices are on the back cover