



SUITE DREAMS OF THE EAST

According to most wealth researchers, Asia's community of Ultra High Net Worth families (those with a net worth of \$30 million plus) is now about even with Europe's in what is a segment growing worldwide at a ten-percent annual clip. Researcher Wealth-X puts the global number of Ultra High Net Worth families at 185,000, with 43,000 from Asia.

Over lunch at the towering new Marina Bay Sands in Singapore, Wealth-X CEO and co-founder Myklos Rambos, a Michigan transplant who cut his teeth at *Forbes* and a number of successful start-ups, made it clear that the world's wealthiest are gathering no dust as they expand their footprint from here to there.

One only needs to look at the order book for private jets to see that the hot segment of the market is ultra-long-haul aircraft that can fly nonstop from one continent to the next. Like in Europe and the Americas, private jet travel in Asia is hitting a similar rhythm, with planes being used for business Monday to Thursday, and then Thursday to Monday for some fun—the most efficient way to access new business centers and resort destinations.

A recent *Financial Times* article asserts that the UHNW community of elite travelers follows the good weather, good schools, good entertainment, beneficial tax regimes and business opportunities. CNBC wealth commentator Robert Frank—who wrote *Richistan*, the book about the fictitious global nation in which elite travelers live—recently noted a new city, Londograd, commenting if one wants to find wealthy Russians, you'd best look in the British capital, Dubai, Miami, New York or the south of France.



LEBUAH AT STATE TOWER / BANGKOK



MARINA BAY SANDS / SINGAPORE

The newly wealthy in the East are hopping daily in their jets across

the region and frequenting the West, where they are sending their children to school and acquiring property and businesses, while wealth from the West visits the East seeking business opportunities in this region of high growth.

According to Wealth-X, Asia's wealthy families control slightly over \$6 trillion of a global \$25 trillion total net worth, but the fact that Rambos and I were sitting in a billion-dollar Asian resort developed by American Sheldon Adelson speaks to how it is truly a global village for elite travelers. Tyler Brûlé, the founder of Winkreative who was recently assigned the task of marketing Thailand to global investors, noted in an interview with the *Bangkok Post* that the Kingdom's economy is growing at an annual rate of an envious 11 percent.

Like many of you we are also pursuing business opportunities in the East. With the launch of our Asia Edition last year and the opening of our own Hong Kong office earlier this year, I recently completed a tour that included stops in Hong Kong, Bangkok, Singapore, Delhi and Mumbai.

For me it marked 25 years and over 75 trips to the region, and I suspect fewer of these excursions are in front of me than behind. For a guy who remembers those low landings over Kowloon apartments into Kai Tak International Airport and the roar of the thrust reversers that stopped us short of the harbor (I even sat in the jump seat for one), or the approach into Changi when the view from the airport to the city was only lush, landscaped jungle, it is easy to judge where much of the future will be.

Even with modern commercial facilities, the private jet industry is booming. The number of movements at Hong Kong International more than

tripled in the past three years, and Warren Buffett's NetJets will come to Asia next year—a Good Housekeeping-like seal of approval that private jets in the region have come of age. When I met NetJets Chairman and CEO Jordan Hansell on my return he noted that development of infrastructure to support private jets is part of the Chinese government's five-year plan. Raymond Bickson, CEO of the Taj Group that includes over 120 hotels and operates a fleet of 16 private jets, says the current trend for India's top businesspeople is to buy their own. On any given day at Mumbai, there are 50 private jets compared to a handful just a decade ago. Bombardier forecasts over \$300 billion in new global private jets delivered by 2020.

A GLOBAL VILLAGE IN THE LION CITY

One thing that hasn't changed since I started coming out here is the fabulous hotels and resorts and the terrific way hospitality is delivered. While the Marina Bay Sands in Singapore may feature over 2,500 rooms, its two identical Chairman's Suites are fantastic (see p. 119)—as are the four Presidential Suites—and the Marina Suites would pass for the top suite in many hotels. The iconic Raffles Hotel, just across a manmade lake, will celebrate its 125th anniversary, its colonial charm intact and features meticulously maintained. New luxury hotels such as The St. Regis, Fullerton Bay and Capella, as well as renovated standards like the Shangri-La, The Ritz-Carlton, Regent, Four Seasons and Mandarin Oriental make for some hard choices on where to stay. Of course the old and new have no better contrast than a humid Sunday afternoon at the Singapore Polo Club where YTL President James McBride (owner of The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur; Pangor Laut Resort and Cameron Highlands) was on the winning team the day I stopped in.

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

MORE NIGHTS IN BANGKOK AND HONG KONG

Along the Chao Phraya, The Siam is a three-acre city resort led by young star General Manager Jason M. Friedman, already a darling of luxury hotel collectors for his work at Four Seasons' award-laden Tented Camp in Chiang Saen. Friedman's turning the trick again, this time for owner and Thai antique collector Krissada Sukosol Clapp (who personally sourced everything from tables to doors over the past seven years). The property is one of just a handful to be invited pre-opening to be "preferred" by Virtuoso, a network of travel agents that specialize in luxury (see p. 120).

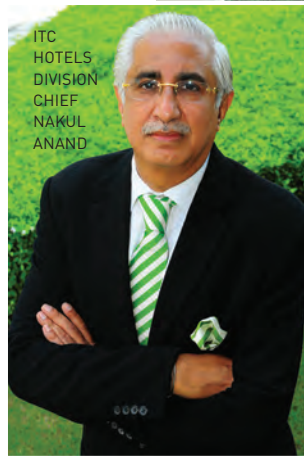
At the top of Bangkok's skyline, high-altitude *al fresco* dining whiz Deepak Ohri is still weaving his magic with Sirocco on the roof-deck and with Mezzaluna, whose elegant, panoramic and air-conditioned setting draws lines of people to the 65th floor of State Tower. If new hotels are your deal, Sofitel's luxury division just opened two new properties here, and Japan's Okura Group is about to open as well in the Thai capital, all following last year's opening of The St. Regis.

Meanwhile Hong Kong's luxury hotel scene goes from strength to strength. Ricco DeBlank, CEO of Sun Hung Kai Properties' Hotel Division and owner of the W, Four Seasons and the year-old Ritz-Carlton, has made his company into a dominant luxury player, and early next year Peninsula Hong Kong General Manager Rainy Chan will complete the extensive renovations at her hotel with suites in both the new and old building getting a full makeover. Standards such as the Island Shangri-La, InterContinental (née Regent) and Mandarin Oriental compete against new luxury entries The Landmark (also from Mandarin Oriental), historically based boutique Hullett House and the slick Upper House.

INCREDIBLE INDIA

Across the Bay of Bengal, India is going full force in business growth, private jet orders, luxury hotels and new cities skyrocketing in the hinterland.

Unbelievably the entire country of some 1.3 billion, with 700 million annual domestic trips, has only 170,000 hotel rooms—fewer than Orlando—meaning that there is huge investment coming in this arena. The World Travel and Tourism Council predicts the country will need 351,000 rooms by 2021. Former Indian Joint Secretary of Tourism Amitabh Kant is leading development as CEO of



THREESIXTYONE / THE OBEROI, GURGAON

the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor, a \$90 billion mega-project that will spawn seven new cities each with populations of over one million, 24 new cities in total, eight new airports along a new highway and a high-speed rail link enabling goods produced in India's land-locked north to reach western ports in 12 hours. It is one of the largest infrastructure projects in history, something that if successful will seal Kant's legacy as an architect of modern India.

New hotels abound across most of the country's luxury groups with Taj, ITC, Oberoi and Leela all very busy. The sleek Oberoi, Gurgaon in Delhi's flashy new business zone looks ready for some *Vogue* models to strut along its blue pool that shimmers in the 108-degree heat of a late May afternoon. Stylish men and women wander through its air-conditioned mall that includes the likes of Louis Vuitton, Burberry and Canali, while others sip cappuccinos in the California-chic Threesixtyone restaurant. ITC Grand Chola will be one of the first luxury hotels in the country to feature both residences and hotel rooms. Needless to say development and cranes are everywhere here across all segments: Taj's Bickson is creating a new \$50-a-night brand using prefab containers, cutting building time from 18 to six months.

ITC, the \$30 billion market cap conglomerate with businesses across FMCG, paperboards and packaging, agribusiness and information technology, has earmarked \$2 billion for its hotel division chief Nakul Anand to build and manage new properties, mainly in its homeland. Operating under a company slogan "Putting Country before Corporation—Always," the hospitality division is housed in the world's "greenest" office building. The charismatic Anand, who also serves as head of India's Hotel Association, offers a different take to how hotels have traditionally approached green initiatives, doing away with those little signs en-

couraging guests to reuse towels and sheets. He calls these moves "less than one percent of the solution" and instead has focused his efforts on back-of-the-house with construction, technology and staff practices: "We want you to indulge when you are our guest, and know we are doing the work behind the scenes." All ten of the company's luxury hotels are LEED Platinum rated. You can read my interviews with Anand and NetJets' Hansell at www.elitetraveler.com in the Leaders in Luxury section.

For those who lust after an imperial experience, the Maharajas' Express, a 23-car wonder train, offers a charming way to visit the country on a series of eight- and four-day itineraries, with spacious accommodations including a Presidential Suite encompassing an entire train car, complete with windowed bathtub. The train is ideal for full take-overs and typical among the 88 guests are CEOs, princes and celebrities (see p. 114).

Our annual 101 Top Suites story is focused mainly on new and newly renovated suites, however my passage through India brought me all too brief stays in two past winners. At ITC Maurya in Delhi, I was welcomed to my Presidential Suite with a picture of myself imposed onto white chocolate, while the Taj Mumbai's Tata Suite, meticulously restored after the 2008 attacks, features stunning views of the Gateway of India, out to the Arabian Sea beyond. Yes, in the space of four nights I slept in the same beds as Presidents Obama, Clinton, Bush I and II, Sarkozy, spouses Michelle, Laura and Carla, Tom Cruise and Madonna. All in all, a suite way to mark a quarter century doing something I truly love.

All the Best,

Group President and Editor-in-Chief
doug.gollan@elitetraveler.com

