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[AIRLINE EXECUTIVE RUFFLES FEATHERS WITH CANDID STATEMENT OF INTENT]

Lufthansa's attempt to 'disrupt' channels riles agents and GDSs

By Robert Silk

Lufthansa Chief Commercial Officer Jens Bischof's admission earlier this month that the carrier's controversial surcharge on bookings through GDSs was intended to "disrupt" the travel distribution landscape immediately ruffled feathers within the industry. But analysts said no one should be surprised that a major airline isn't happy with the status quo.

"It's not a secret that airlines don't like the GDS model and paying things like segment fees," said Henry Harteveldt, a travel industry

analyst with Atmosphere Research Group.

Speaking during an Oct. 6 webinar by the Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE), Bischof said that Lufthansa's charge for covering distribution costs, which went into effect on Sept. 1, is about much more than the \$18 surcharge itself.

"We are very aware that our new distribution strategy is disruptive, and it will change the future way of distribution," he said. "But we simply feel that now is the right time to trigger this change as new technologies allow us to go this way."

Bischof's words were hardly comforting to travel management companies and leisure travel agencies, which have pushed back hard since Lufthansa announced the surcharge in early June, largely out of concern that other airlines will follow suit.

See **LUFTHANSA** on Page 84

Three more major cruise lines unveil plans to move ships into China market

By Tom Stieghorst

Three more cruise brands last week revealed plans to move into the China market, as the industry scrambles to meet an anticipated surge in demand among Chinese consumers in coming years.

The new entrants include Carnival Corp.'s flagship brand, Carnival Cruise Line, as well as its German club ship product, Aida.

In addition, Norwegian Cruise Line will contribute a yet-to-be-finished ship that initially had been expected to sail in North America as the Norwegian Bliss.

All three brands plan 2017 debuts, joining a growing stable of Western cruise lines that includes Costa Cruises, Royal Caribbean International, Princess Cruises and,

soon, MSC Cruises.

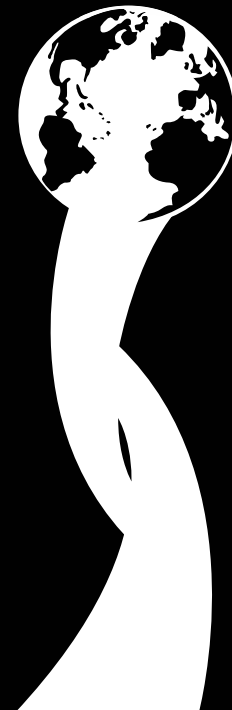
The number of Chinese cruisers, projected at 1.1 million this year, is expected to grow to 2.5 million by 2020 and seven million by 2030, according to figures presented at Travel Weekly's CruiseWorld China conference held in Shanghai for the first time last week.

With the addition of the Norwegian ship, at least four newbuilds are bound directly for the Chinese market.

Norwegian, which is getting ready to take delivery of the Norwegian Escape this week in Germany, had planned to follow that ship in North America with Norwegian Bliss in 2017.

Two more Breakaway Plus-class ships are See **CHINA** on Page 82

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MARK PESTRONK

A U.S. agent can legally book Canadian travelers but should consider a Canada office. 20

Authenticity at Myanmar properties

By Kristi Eaton

As more tourists from the West venture to Myanmar, a variety of accommodations are popping up throughout the country to help visitors see and experience Burmese culture up close.

In 2012, the number of visitors to the country surpassed the 1 million mark for the first time. The increase has led to new opportunities for people like Aye Aye Thant. Together with her husband, Thant runs Thahara Pindaya, a cozy farmhouse home stay that helps visitors navigate and make the most of their stay by offering package deals that include meals, excursions and relaxed solitude in an isolated, picturesque setting a few miles outside of Pindaya, a township in Myanmar's Shan state.

"Normally tourists come here just to see the caves [and] umbrella-making, [then] sleep and go back; they don't know about our scenery and beautiful rural life," Thant said of Pindaya, located about one hour by car from Heho Airport. "I want to give real hospitality and show our real life."

Thahara Pindaya, which had its soft opening in February, is part of the Thahara travel company, a startup founded by hotelier Yin Myo Su with the backing of

Anthem Asia, an independent investment group. Thahara, which means friendship in the ancient language of Pali, focuses on providing all-inclusive yet authentic experiences that emphasize sustainability and personalized travel. In addition to Thahara Pindaya, the company includes Thahara Inle Heritage at Inle Lake and the Thahara Irrawaddy, a river cruise ship.

The Pindaya property features five rooms equipped with coffee-making supplies and WiFi and offering stunning views of the countryside. Thant cooks the meals herself and focuses on offering local dishes such as fried noodles for breakfast or a lunch of chicken curry with potato crisps and a juicy mango for dessert. Guests have a variety of excursions to choose from during their stay, including a cooking demonstration, a lake picnic or a heritage visit to a nearby village.

During my stay, I selected a daylong trek and a visit to a rural village, both opportunities that

enabled me to see and interact with friendly, kind and energetic locals eager to share their way of life and learn about mine.

Inle Lake luxury

Another new property is the ultraluxurious Sanctum Inle Resort at Inle Lake, also in Shan state. With a focus on appreciating the monastic life, the 96 rooms at Sanctum Inle feature minimalist design elements infused with comforts such as air conditioning and minibars.

Flanked by the famed Inle Lake — Myanmar's second-largest lake, known for stilted wooden

homes — Sanctum Inle, which held its soft opening in May and opened officially this month, offers a variety of room options, from the Sanctuary Suite, with loft ceilings and a private terrace, to the Cloister Classic, showcasing garden views.

Visitors to the high-end resort can enjoy a hearty breakfast buffet or a Shan-inspired dinner at the Refectory followed by a Myanmar-brewed beer at the Cloister Bar.

The Workshop Boutique sells handicrafts from artisans, while guests can rejuvenate at the Sanctuary Spa, whose signature treat-

ment is a tamarind scrub.

Prices for Thahara Pindaya start at \$75 for a one-night stay with breakfast during low season (April through September) and \$100 in high season (October to March). Package A, which includes three nights' accommodations, meals and three activities, is \$850 in the low season and \$1,035 in the high season. See www.thahara.com.

Prices at the Sanctum Inle Resort start at \$484 per night for the Cloister Classic and increase to \$1,724 per night for the Sanctuary Suite. Visit www.sanctum-inle-resort.com.



Above, the exterior of Thahara Pindaya, a farmhouse in Myanmar's Shan state. Far left, the kitchen area; near left, soup prepared by host Aye Aye Thant.

PHOTOS BY KRISTI EATON


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