

## TRAVEL ROUND-UP

### HK LAWMAKERS APPROVE TRAIN LINE TO CHINA

HONG Kong lawmakers approved funding for a HK\$66.9-billion (S\$12-billion) train line linking the city with China's high-speed rail network.

The train line will plug Hong Kong into China's network by 2015, cutting travel times and deepening Hong Kong's links with the world's fastest-growing major economy.

The railway is one of the 10 infrastructure projects that Hong Kong's government hopes will help boost its economy. The project had been delayed twice amid objections about the cost and planned destruction of homes in the rural New Territories.

More than 1,000 protesters staged a sit-in outside Hong Kong's Legislative Council last Saturday.

### BLOOMBERG

### SAVE WITH VISA WHEN RENTING LUXURY VILLAS

VISA is teaming up with leading independent villa guide Private Homes & Villas to offer up to four nights' complimentary accommodation when booking one of 32 selected luxury private villas in Bali, Koh Samui and Phuket, Visa said in a press release last week.

Available throughout this year, the offer is open to all Visa Premium cardholders, and can save travellers up to 33 per cent. For more information, visit [www.privatehomesandvillas.com/visa](http://www.privatehomesandvillas.com/visa)

### SELL USED TRAVEL GUIDEBOOKS ON WEBSITE

TRAVELLERS can now sell their used guidebooks on [www.GuideGecko.com](http://www.GuideGecko.com), the publishing platform and bookstore for travel guides, the company said in a press release.

Titles are listed immediately, and are available to customers worldwide. Listings are free.

Visit [www.guidegecko.com/sell-travel-guides](http://www.guidegecko.com/sell-travel-guides) for more information and to list guidebooks for sale.

### FOG IN NEW DELHI STOPS TRAINS AND PLANES

A THICK fog paralysed New Delhi yesterday, hitting air and rail services badly.

Around 10 international and domestic flights, as well as nearly 42 trains, were affected because of poor visibility, leaving scores of travellers stranded at the Indra Gandhi International Airport and the three main railway stations in the capital.

### AGENCIES



## THE SWEET LIFE ON PLEASURE ISLAND

*Boracay in the Philippines is a sanctuary for the world-weary*

EASY BREEZY: The writer on Boracay's famed White Beach, which features fine sand and pristine waters. (PHOTOS: JOY FANG)

BY JOY FANG

**B**ORACAY in the Philippines might be tough to get to as there are no straight flights to the island from Singapore, but going there is well worth the journey.

The tiny dogbone-shaped island south of Manila is a slacker's haven where city-slickers can trade in cement pavements for fine white sand, and polluted air for cool breezes.

Last year, the New York Times named Boracay - which is 7km long with an area of 10.32km sq - one of the top 44 places to go.

It's also chalked up a whole slew of awards. It topped Yahoo Travel's list of the World's Most Popular Beaches in 2007, and BMW Tropical Beach Handbook hailed its most famous beach, White Beach, as one of the world's best.

That beach was also voted the world's best beach by a Sydney newspaper, the Sun Herald.

These accolades weren't given out for nothing. Boracay has 32 beaches, beautiful clear blue waters, and a laid-back atmosphere. Call it a cool beach refuge for the world-weary.

Boracay's most-visited White Beach, a long 4km stretch of sand, was the highlight of my four-day trip. Though two of those were spent travelling from Singapore, I found all the action on that little slice of paradise.

**ISLAND THERAPY** With hammocks swinging lazily in the winds (you can buy one for about S\$13 from shops there) and comfy sofa deck-



LAZY AFTERNOON: Stroll down the main thoroughfare and you'll find restaurants galore, with cheap food and drinks.

chairs scattered all along the beach for an afternoon of languid lazing under the sun, White Beach is truly a sanctuary for beach-lovers.

At night, the bars and pubs turn the beach into a giant informal dance floor, with the music turned up and free-spirited parties sprouting up in random corners. It is not an unusual sight to see tourists and locals mingling together, dancing with beers in hand.

There's no shortage of food, either. There are heaps of options to fill the tummy. A huge array of international and local cuisines are available - German, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Mexican, American, and, of course, Filipino food.

A must try: grilled fresh seafood and meats, which you can pick off a rack at almost any beachside restaurant. Get your picks grilled on the spot. I tried

Venues for water-sport activities like jet skiing, banana-boat rides, snorkelling and diving are widely available. You don't have to worry about where to find them - touts are everywhere, shadowing you as they persistently try to sell you activity trips or sunglasses.

But don't go with the first "guide" you meet. Compare prices along the way and bargain with each one until you find one whose offer meets your needs - and budget.

You can also drive an ATV scooter or a buggy on rugged and stony paths along the less-travelled areas of Boracay.

My favourite spot was Puka Beach, located at the northern tip of the island.

Though the sand is slightly coarser, the waters are a pristine azure and the beach, when I visited, was relatively empty and quiet - a perfect spot for a peaceful picnic.

I was loathe to return home, and gazed wistfully at the beach as it retreated from view on my ferry ride back to the airport.

But I know the idyllic and sweet island will always be there for me, a pleasure island that is already calling for my return. [joyfang@sph.com.sg](mailto:joyfang@sph.com.sg)

### HELPEDESK 我的字典

Refuge: 庇护所 bì hù suǒ

Hammocks: 吊床 diào chuáng

Languid: 懒散的 lǎn sǎn de

Touts: 招徕顾客者 zhāo lái gù kè zhě

## Starwood accuses Hilton of espionage

**NEW YORK:** Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide accused 44 Hilton Worldwide executives of stealing trade secrets, escalating a battle of alleged corporate spying between the hoteliers.

In an amended complaint filed at Manhattan's federal court, Starwood said Hilton chief executive Christopher Nassetta knew that two Hilton employees were sifting confidential information from Starwood and using it to create a new hotel chain.

The amended complaint is the latest twist in the lawsuit between Starwood and Hilton. Starwood first sued Hilton in April last year, saying that two of the company's executives, Mr Ross Klein and Mr Amar Lalvani, developed a new group of hotels for Hilton, called Denizen, by using a confidential formula crafted by Starwood.

Before shifting to Hilton, both Mr Klein and Mr Lalvani were employees of Starwood, where they were in charge of efforts to expand and develop Starwood's luxury brands, including its popular W hotel chain.

Attorneys for both Mr Klein and Mr Lalvani said the lawsuit has no merit.

Mr Nassetta has not been named a defendant in the case, but Starwood said in court papers filed last Thursday that he did not voice any objections to the use of confidential information.

REUTERS

"At least 44 Hilton executives were personally involved in or aware of and condoned Hilton's wrongdoing," including five on its executive committee, Starwood said.

Starwood wants the court to appoint monitors to ensure Hilton complies with any injunctions the court has granted and may grant in the future. Not only that, it also wants the court to prevent Hilton from expanding its luxury and lifestyle brands, including its Waldorf Astoria hotels, for a "reasonable time".

"The Hilton luxury and lifestyle brands...are all infected by Hilton's wrongful use of Starwood confidential information," Starwood said in the complaint. "Hilton knows this."

Hilton is the world's fourth-largest hotel chain by the number of rooms. Starwood ranks eighth.

The introduction of Starwood's W hotel in 1998 unveiled the voracious appetite of travellers for trendy hotels with chic designs. Major hotel operators have been clamouring to gain a foothold in this market, which can command a higher room rate.

"You might say (Starwood) invented the lifestyle brand," said Ms Janet Brashear, an analyst with Bernstein Research.

"It's their core competitive position. They've got to defend it."



AFTER THE SUNSET: Watch the sun go down, then head to a bar. The nightlife turns the beach into a giant informal dance floor, where you'll find yourself mingling and dancing with the locals.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BORACAY

### HOW TO GET THERE

TAKE a flight from Singapore to Manila, followed by a 30min domestic flight to Caticlan.

From there, take a 5min ride on a tricycle to Caticlan Jetty to catch a 20min ferry to Boracay Island.

Currently, no flights go directly to Caticlan from Singapore. You need to book a flight to Manila, then book seats on domestic airline South East Asian Airlines ([www.flyseair.com](http://www.flyseair.com)).

You can also take a flight from Singapore to Manila, then transfer to a 45min domestic flight to Kalibo. From there, you have to take a 90min bus ride to Caticlan Jetty, to catch the 20min ferry to Boracay.

Check out Cebu Pacific ([book.cebupacificair.com](http://book.cebupacificair.com)) or Philippine Airlines ([www.philippineairlines.com](http://www.philippineairlines.com)) which flies to Kalibo (with stopovers at Manila).

### THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW

**Currency:** The island uses Philippine pesos, so make sure you stock up on the currency before you go. There are ATM machines and moneychangers scattered around, but it is not advisable to use their services unless it is an emergency. The conversion rate is about S\$1 to 33 pesos.

Also, remember to have enough cash for airport tax. Domestic flights leaving from Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport cost 200 pesos (S\$6) while international flights cost 750 pesos.

**How to get around:** Locals and tourists typically travel by motorised tricycles, which can be found everywhere. Make sure you ask the driver how much the trip is and bargain for a lower price, before hopping on. Prices usually average about 50 to 75 pesos and not more than 200

pesos to any point on the island from the White Beach.

**Accommodation:** Affordable resorts are everywhere on the island, and they usually provide transportation from the airport to the ferry terminal and to the resort.

Visit [www.asiatravel.com](http://www.asiatravel.com) for cheap roundtrip land packages.

**History/culture:** Rumour has it that the sleepy island was "discovered" by a British film crew which had filmed a World War II movie, *Too Late The Hero*, there in the 1960s.

After the movie was released in 1970, it attracted a score of European backpackers onto its shores in the 1980s.

Since then, it has developed into one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Philippines.

The majority of the Filipinos there can speak English.

## ACTIVITIES

### MUST-DO

BOAT rides around the island, which cost about 1,500 pesos (S\$45) for two, will take you to various islands, such as the Crystal Cove island for a visit to its sea caves, and the Crocodile Island, which is a good spot for snorkelling.

Snorkelling equipment is usually included in the fee, but take note of extra costs. Entrance to the Crystal Cove island is about 150 pesos and you also need to pay a snorkelling fee of 20 pesos per person for the preservation of its marine life.

You can also drive a buggy or an ATV scooter (above, right) in one-hour or two-hour slots. Guides will take you to visit



sights such as Mount Luho, a butterfly park, Puka Beach and Bat Cave.

For a shopping fix, visit D'Talipapa, an open-air market along White Beach which has rows of shops selling clothing,

souvenirs, straw bags and hats, and woodcraft. Also, go to D'Mall, a shopping area which has air-conditioned boutiques.

### MUST-VISIT

AT AN altitude of about 100m above sea, Mount Luho is the highest point in Boracay and a must-visit for the panoramic view it offers of the entire Boracay island.

Also visit Puka Beach. Found there are the famous small puka shells which locals gather to make the jewellery that is sold on the island. This beautiful beach is quieter and is a good spot for chilling out.

For the sports enthusiast, Bulabog Beach is the spot for kitesurfing, windsurfing and other water activities.

## Morocco sets sights on 10% growth in tourism

**MARRAKESH, MOROCCO:** Morocco aims to draw 10 per cent more visitors this year to help fill fast-growing hotel capacity and bolster tourism income after it slipped last year.

Heavy investment in hotels, resorts and holiday apartments has helped the north African country more than double tourism earnings in the past decade - providing a lifeline for a government battling widespread poverty.

But industry estimates show the number of hotel stays fell 1.6 per cent and tourism income slid 5.7 per cent to 52.4 billion dirhams (S\$9.2 billion).

Morocco's tourism sector hopes new seaside resorts opening their doors, travel operators offering a wider choice of Moroccan holidays and budget airlines adding cheap flights from Europe will boost earnings per tourist.

"We aim to realise growth of 10 per cent (in 2010 tourism numbers), or three times the world trend that is forecast," the newly-appointed Tourism Minister Yassir Znagui said in a speech.

Industry officials said the

rise in tourist numbers hoped for this year would not come at the expense of profitability. Last year, visitor arrivals grew to 8.35 million, while those in rival markets such as Spain and Tunisia fell, according to government figures.

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"We have a strong desire to gear Morocco towards sustainable tourism, respect for the environment and (being) a top-quality tourism product," tourism minister Znagui said.

REUTERS