

## COVID-19: Hotels rolling out more staycation packages for Singaporeans



Wanderlust Hotel in Little India is ramping up efforts to attract guests looking for staycations. (Photo: Wanderlust Hotel)

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**SINGAPORE:** With more Singaporeans unsure about travelling overseas due to the spike in COVID-19 cases across the world, hotels here are gearing up to entice people to take staycations instead.

Graphic designer Shermin Sim, 25, and her boyfriend were considering going to Japan for Sakura season in late March this year. However, they decided against it after the Ministry of Health advised Singaporeans to [defer non-essential travel to Japan \(/news/singapore/covid19-coronavirus-lawrence-wong-iran-korea-italy-checkpoints-12494744\)](#), in addition to South Korea, northern Italy and Iran.

**A** “don’t think the coronavirus made us feel like we wanted to stay (in Singapore), but the Japanese travel advisory changed our mind a little,” she said.

They were considering taking a short trip to Thailand, or a weekend staycation in Singapore, said Ms Sim.

“We were considering staying at lyf Funan, because you can take a cooking class there, watch a midnight movie, and (there is) easy access to good food and desserts,” she said, adding that they intend to spend about S\$500 on their local holiday.

Several hotels CNA spoke to have launched new staycation packages to attract the local crowd, and some have seen a spike in the number of Singaporean guests.

Millennium Hotels and Resorts Singapore has seen an increase in the overall staycation market this year compared to 2019, said group chief operating officer Kieran Twomey in response to CNA queries.

The company, which runs hotels including Studio M, M Social and Grand Copthorne Waterfront in Singapore, said they have rolled out staycation promotions because customers are looking to avoid overseas holidays and are looking for alternatives here due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

“The local market has always been a key source market for us, especially over weekends and school holidays. With the ongoing COVID-19 situation, we look forward to providing consumers with a wide variety of locally based holiday experiences during a time when their ability to travel overseas is limited,” said Mr Twomey.

Other than staycation promotions, the brand’s hotels also have alfresco dining offers, and additional loyalty perks like upgrades and complimentary parking, he added.

► **[READ: Singapore tourism to take 'significant hit' in 2020 due to coronavirus, up to 30% fewer visitors expected \(/news/singapore/coronavirus-singapore-tourism-to-fall-30-percent-12420674?cid=h3\\_referral\\_inarticlelinks\\_24082018\\_cna\)](/news/singapore/coronavirus-singapore-tourism-to-fall-30-percent-12420674?cid=h3_referral_inarticlelinks_24082018_cna)**

CEO of Far East Hospitality Arthur Kiong said staycationers today seek “unique, engaging experiences” from their stays, “not just the standard room and breakfast”.

According to Mr Kiong, the number of room nights for the staycation segment in January and February this year has grown by 25 per cent, compared to the same period in 2019.

Far East Hospitality runs the Village, Quincy, Oasia and Rendezvous brands of hotels. Each brand targets a different segment of staycationers and has their respective staycation packages, said Mr Kiong.

**A** When rolling out staycation promotions, it is important for us to provide value-add instead of going into price-war. This is because lowering price can affect the positioning of the brands,” he said.

“In fact, providing value-add to create these experiences are good ways to improve our hotels’ revenues and margins. Hence, (the) staycation segment can be a profitable one.”

YOTEL Singapore Orchard Road is focusing on its core market locally, and continues to see interest and enquiries about good staycation offers, said a spokesperson for the hotel.

The response to sales and promotions is “typically strong” and the hotel has seen an overall increase in bookings, said the YOTEL Singapore spokesperson, adding that it has launched a new two-night staycation package tailored for families.

“I think what we're going to see with this current period is that (the) majority of my guests over this March holiday period are going to be Singaporeans,” said general manager of Shangri-La's Rasa Sentosa Resort and Spa Gavin Weightman, speaking to reporters during a visit to businesses on Sentosa Island on Wednesday (Mar 11).

“It's going to be a lot more Singaporeans as a general percentage of my business than what I normally see because I think Singaporeans are going to look for somewhere closer to home to holiday. They still want to have that break, and that respite from working hard, and they're going to look for somewhere to enjoy time with their family.”

Mr Weightman said that as demand for air traffic and overseas travel has dropped, the hotel expects to see “a much higher ratio” of Singaporeans to international visitors this holiday period.

“We just introduced these packages last week and we've seen some really strong positive signs, and I'm sure that's going to continue over the next couple of weeks,” added Mr Weightman.

The Capella Resort on Sentosa Island has also been affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, but “fortunately” sees Singaporeans taking staycations on weekends, said Ms Kwee Wei-Lin, senior vice president (Hotels) of Pontiac Land Group.

She noted that the hotel rolled out staycation packages last week, including ones targeted at families and couples, and the packages include activities on Sentosa Island as well as dining experiences. The take-up rates for these packages are “good”, she added.

► **[READ: Sentosa to grant free entry until end-June, rent deferments to support businesses through COVID-19 \(/news/singapore/covid19-sentosa-free-entry-june-rent-deferments-12526600?cid=h3\\_referral\\_inarticlelinks\\_24082018\\_cna\)](#)**

**H**ilton Singapore has introduced a staycation package targeted at local foodies, which will include a **steak** dinner experience, said a hotel spokesperson.

Although there has been “no significant increase” in local bookings for the past two months, the hotel hopes to drive more interest among locals with the introduction of the new staycation package, she said.

Local bookings “have always been a key sector” for The Fullerton Hotels and Resorts, said general manager Cavaliere Giovanni Viterale.

The hotel is actively reaching out to the staycation crowd through attractive staycation packages, targeted promotions and partnerships with banks, clubs and corporate clients, he said.

“With the current scenario, staycations are now a popular part of our business mix,” said Mr Viterale, adding that with the new staycation packages, the brand is likely to see an increase in the average staycation duration.

#### **SMALLER HOTELS VYING FOR STAYCATION GUESTS**

Smaller hotel chains like Naumi Hotel and 8M Collective, which runs Wanderlust Hotel, are already popular with the staycation crowd, but continue to ramp up efforts to attract guests.

For example, Wanderlust Hotel is running a special promotion until the end of April to celebrate its opening and has seen more local interest than international guests.

“Our 8M Collective properties are all popular for Singaporean staycations because of the locations they are in. For example Wanderlust in Little India, KēSa House and Ann Siang House in Chinatown,” said a spokesperson for the brand.

Local bookings have also consistently been Naumi Hotel’s top source of monthly reservations, said a spokesperson.

“As such, we can’t say that we’ve seen a surge in Singaporeans booking. However, actively reaching out to the staycation crowd remains a necessary measure to ensure that we maintain a choice option for Singaporeans looking for an urban getaway,” she said.

The hotel initially pushed its weekend getaway package to entice Singaporeans. “But as more hotels started to offer more competitive rates, vying for staycation goers became more challenging,” said the spokesperson.

She added that the hotel has a newly launched staycation package, and to encourage friends or families to book a staycation together, the room package also offers staycation goers the option of booking a second room at 50 per cent off.

## **KEEPING GUESTS ENTERTAINED AND OCCUPIED**

With more staycation packages and discounts available, Ngee Ann Polytechnic senior lecturer in tourism Michael Chiam said more Singaporeans will choose staycations instead of going overseas due to the uncertainty about vacationing abroad.

To attract Singaporeans to take staycations, including longer ones that last more than two days, hotels will have to “keep guests entertained and occupied” during their stay, he said.

He added that hotels could organise interesting workshops within their properties, and include spa treatments and F&B deals in the packages.

“They could also collaborate with other interesting businesses around the hotel to offer guests special deals like discounted admission tickets to theme parks or concerts,” he said.

Hotels can also promote places in Singapore “that even Singaporeans may not know about”, including the historical aspects of the hotel and its surrounding areas, added Dr Chiam.

Co-founder of Oriental Travel and Tours Stanley Foo said Singaporeans can take this opportunity to go on a tour of Singapore instead of other countries.

He noted that the company has seen an increase in Singaporeans signing up for their “Creepy Tales of Singapore” and “Nocturnal Gems” tours, and added that this is likely due to the COVID-19 outbreak limiting overseas travel.

Mr Foo said that Singaporeans could plan for a two- to three-day tour around Singapore with or without having to stay in a hotel.


For example, they could explore Haw Par Villa, take a boat to Pulau Ubin and explore the island, or visit some interesting museums and enjoy some of the guided tours, he added.

“We find that many Singaporeans do not really know their own country that well, and they can perhaps sign up for some interesting local tours or visit some places that they have not been to.”

*Additional reporting by Tang See Kit.*

*Source: CNA/hw*

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