

- Best Western Virtual Tours
- PATA Advisory Policy
- Sydney Targets Indian Tourists
- Internet Travel Bookings on the Increase
- Worawia's Last Minute Specials

## World's largest hotel chain adding virtual tours



Best Western International launched its 360-degree "virtual tour" program for each of its 2,400 North American properties. The world's largest hotel chain says all properties by next summer will be able to offer five distinct virtual tours of every property in the US, Canada and the Caribbean. Each property will have a 360-degree display of the hotel's exterior, a standard guest room and other areas such as pools, meeting rooms and restaurants. Best Western says this initiative was launched because of the growing importance of visuals. Said

David Kong, president and CEO for Best Western: "With nearly half of our bookings originating online, it's critical that we provide consumers with the information and images they need and want to make decisions." In the past year, bookings on the company's Web site have risen nearly 48%, he added. On average, the site has been booking \$1 million in revenues per day since last January. "We expect the virtual tour feature to provide us with a distinct advantage in the mid-scale market and to propel the growth of our online revenue even further," said Mr Kong. (Source: *Travelmole News 01/09/2005*)



## PATA reaffirms Advisory Policy

**PATA has reminded its members of its policy platform on travel advisories, the key to which is the PATA Code for Fairer Travel Advisories.**

PATA President and CEO Mr de Jong said the Association's objective was to encourage greater transparency, accountability and even-handedness in the issuance of advisories. The PATA boss said: "Any PATA member destination that feels it is being unfairly assessed by an advisory should inform PATA. We will endeavour to take a balanced and well-argued case to the advisory issuing body." He added: "As your industry association, PATA has an obligation to speak out on your behalf. (Source: *News@PATA 21/09/2005*)

## Sydney goes after Indian tourists



The city's tourism business leaders have established two new forums aimed at rapidly increasing visitation from India. Sydney is hopeful of attracting some of the 200 million Indians who now have the means to travel internationally. "Last year we welcomed 42,500 Indian visitors to NSW [New South Wales] and they provided a A\$68.5 million boost to the NSW economy," Tourism NSW executive director and general manager John O'Neill said in a release. "Current tourism forecasts are for 200,000 Indian visitors to Australia each year within 10 years but with a strong, early focus on two-way trade in tourism and business we believe

Sydney and Australia can do much better from this massive market." The NSW India Travel Industry Forum and the NSW Tourism, Travel, & Hospitality Chapter of the Australia-India Business Council (AIBC) have been established to capitalize on the market's potential. "Tourism is a massive bilateral opportunity for NSW and India, and the successful launches have demonstrated how we can all work together for mutual benefit," Neville Roach, chairman of the AIBC, said. O'Neill said the challenge was not only growing tourism but developing new products and having the right customer service. (Source: *eTurbo News 21/09/2005*)



## Internet to overtake Agents/ Operators before end of decade



The internet will overtake agents and operators for booking travel in as little as two to three years time, a survey predicts. A poll of more than 4,000 travellers from the UK to the US shows that agents and operators accounted for a high of 88% of bookings in 1998 but this had declined to 50% by 2004. At the same time, the internet has moved from a zero start in 1996 to now account for 27% of travel bookings to the US. "If current trends are maintained [the internet] will overtake agents/operators in two to three years," according to the VisitUSA group. A poll tracking where bookings were made "underlines the

significant change in travel habits," according to VisitUSA. The results of the survey also show that the internet is poised to overtake agents and operators to become the primary source of travel information, from a standing start nine years ago. The figures come from an ongoing US Department of Commerce in-flight survey of travellers to the US. The survey also shows that UK PC usage is growing much faster than other countries worldwide. Meanwhile, international arrival figures for the year to the end of June show a 2.8% rise over 2004 which if maintained could see 2005 UK visitors to the US of more than 4.4 million. (Source: *TravelMole News 16/09/2005*)

## Worawia Holiday Haven – Last Minute Specials



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double (save \$120)

The news items in this issue have been compiled from SPTO (South Pacific Tourism Organisation) and VTO (Vanuatu Tourism Office) news updates, with whom Worawia Holiday Haven has membership.



**Worawia Holiday Haven**  
Dr. Fr. Lini (old Kumul) Highway  
Mele, Port Vila VANUATU  
Tel: +678 25 498  
Fax: +678 25 499  
[www.resort-vanuatu.com](http://www.resort-vanuatu.com)

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