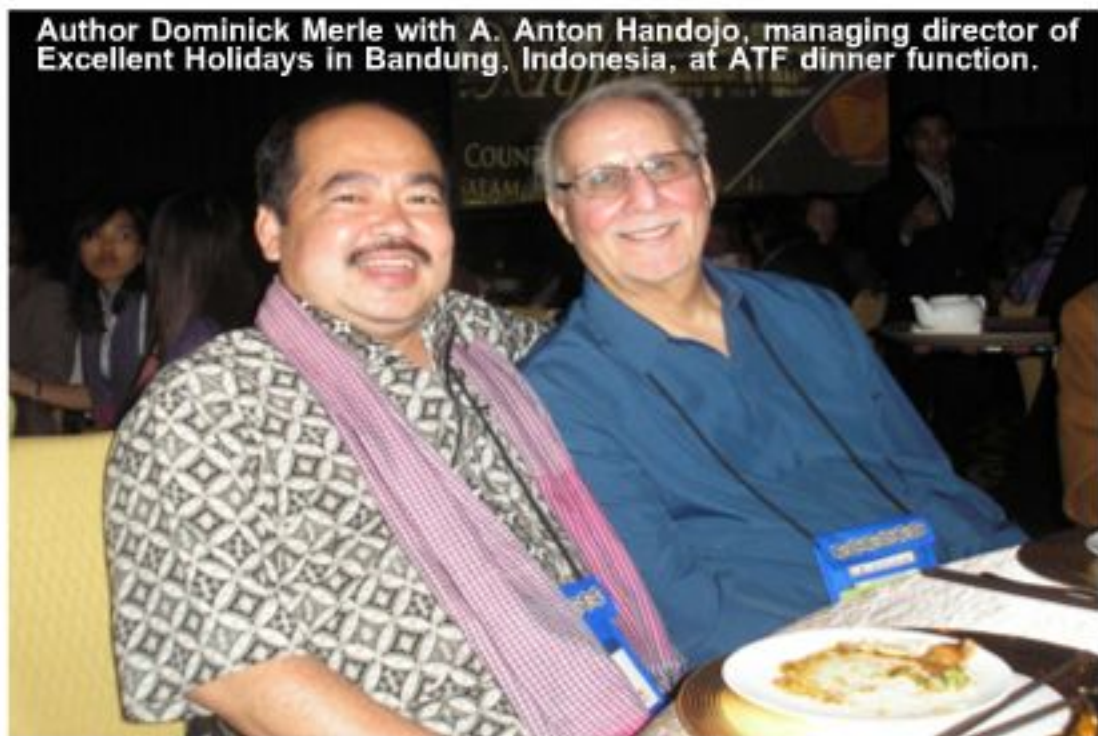


A FIVE-STAR SUCCESS AT ATF 2010 BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, BRUNEI

By DOMINICK A. MERLE

Author Dominick Merle with A. Anton Handojo, managing director of Excellent Holidays in Bandung, Indonesia, at ATF dinner function.



Tiny Brunei on the sprawling island of Borneo has set the bar a little higher for the «bigger players» in Southeast Asia by its hugely successful hosting of the 2010 Asean Tourism Forum (ATF) in the capital city of Bandar Seri Begawan.

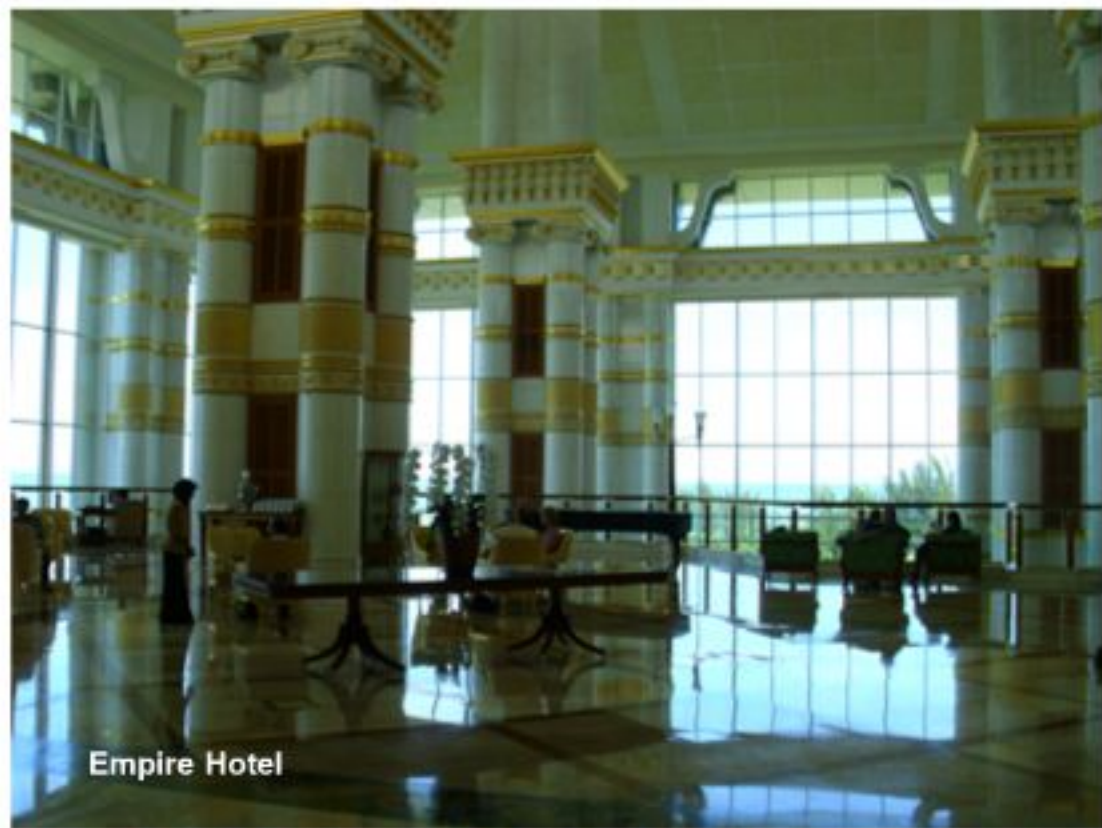
The oil-rich kingdom on the South China Sea, smallest of the 10 member countries that comprise the ATF, handled the hosting with crisp but smooth professionalism throughout the business end of the forum, along with the pre-forum and post-forum tours.

Practically every delegate I spoke to---buyers, sellers and media---were lavish in their praise of

Brunei's efficiency. «Cambodia (the 2011 host country) has a tough act to follow,» a buyer from Mexico City remarked.

The theme for the 2010 ATF was «Asean, the Heart of Green: TenDestinations, One Conservation Vision.» It resonates well with Brunei Darussalam's efforts in promoting eco-tourism,





Empire Hotel

as 70 percent of its land area is covered by rainforests and the kingdom is committed to preserving them.

The ATF's member nations are, alphabetically: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. Next year will mark the 30th anniversary of this event since its inauguration in Malaysia in 1981.

The ATF events make it simple and efficient for suppliers of ASEAN tourism products and services and international buyers to meet one-to-one at pre-scheduled meetings to explore, negotiate and ink deals with each other. Judging by the buyers I spoke with, many such deals were made in Brunei.

Many of the existing cultures today in the ATF community hail

from between the 13th and 15th Centuries. There are strong Buddhist and Hindu elements in some member nations, along with European and Muslim influences in others.

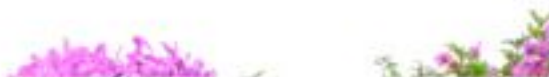
In addition to the religious mix, one can visit a remote hill tribe and a cosmopolitan urban metropolis in the same afternoon in some nations. In Brunei, for example,

you can literally walk from the capital city into the jungle in about 30 minutes.

Dates for ATF 2011 at the newly built Diamond Island Convention Center in Phnom Penh, Cambodia are from Jan. 1521- followed by post tours. The theme will be «ASEAN---A World of Wonders and Diversity.



Closing ceremony





Dinner and Show



Hanli and Asma

to Manila, continuing on PAL to Bandar Seri Bagawan. Service and comfort were excellent.

On my first day at ATF I suffered a fall on some marble steps leading to our hotel shuttle buses, resulting in minor to more serious body bruises. Members of the ATF staff came to my assistance, helped

me back into the convention center and within minutes four medics and three nurses aides were patching me up, with an ambulance on ready.

They did such a good job that I was able to join a city tour later that afternoon.

Author Dominick Merle with the current Miss World, Kalane Aldorino of Gibraltar, at ATF reception

