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★ Commentary | Singapore

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Commentary: Singapore's new tourism tagline deeply aspirational, but what does it mean?

Who does the new tagline target and what about Singapore inspires tourists to pursue their passion, asks Sin Harn Luh.



Would a walk around Gardens by the Bay inspire tourists or make them feel passionate about chasing their dreams?

SINGAPORE: Last week, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) and Singapore Economic Development Board (EDB) jointly launched a new brand initiative and slogan to market Singapore internationally.

Passion Made Possible takes over from a long line of tourism marketing slogans, the most recent one being YourSingapore.

As a branding initiative, it is an excellent and bold step forward for STB and EDB to come together and market Singapore to both tourists and businesses.

It represents a clear acknowledgement from the Government that in today's mobile world, one may be a tourist to Singapore one day, a business traveller the next day, and an investor or migrant to the country any time.

It has become almost impossible to separate and identify who is a tourist and who may be attracted to Singapore for longer term investments, work or education, so having a holistic approach to branding is a logical step forward.

Passion Made Possible as a slogan to attract businesses and others coming to Singapore to carve out a life and pursue their ambitions thus makes perfect sense. It exhibits a sense of possibility and is deeply aspirational.

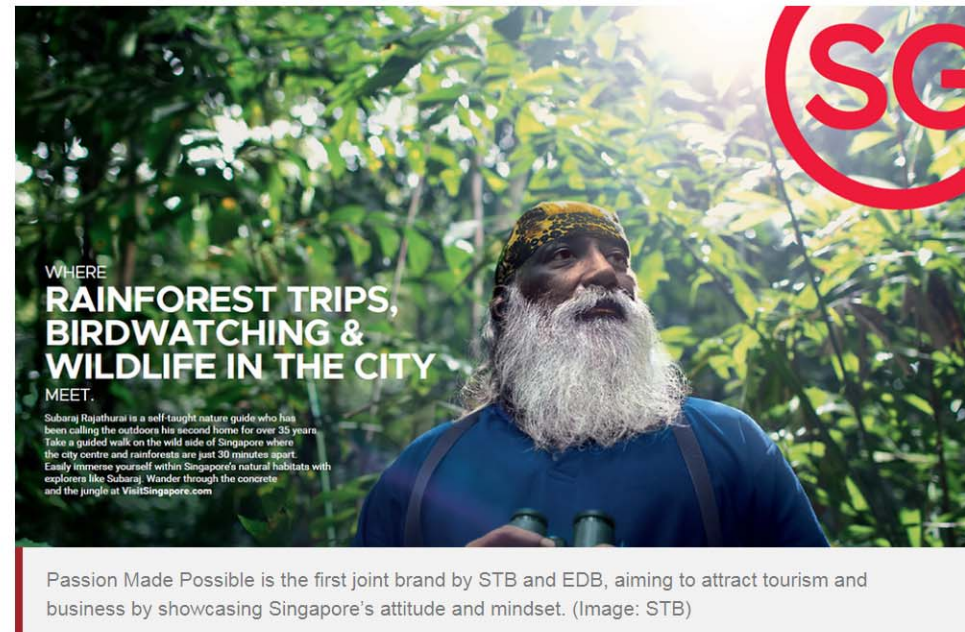
It portrays a positive image of Singapore as a place where one can make his or her dreams come true – for here Singapore is marketed as a global city that sets its sights on the world, where hard work is met with opportunities, and success depends on passion.

SG MARK SHOWS COMING OF AGE

The launch of the SG Mark logo as part of the campaign, an adaption of the SG50 circle, further showcases a quiet coming-of-age for Singapore.

More than a decade ago, I recall sitting in a talk given by EDB senior managers about the quality trademark and high-value precision engineering that is associated with what is stamped with a “made in Switzerland” label, and how Singapore similarly aims to make quality standards synonymous with a “made in Singapore” label.

At that time, we thought that a SG logo could mean care in production, precision science and quality goods, but the actual SG logo today has emerged alongside a string of Singapore-oriented creative products.



These include the Good Morning Mug that adapts old school Good Morning towels that most Singaporeans grew up seeing their parents or grandparents use, and all sorts of interesting adaptations of the iconic dragon playground and local food.

SG is therefore not just about manufacturing, production or export, but also very much about a Singaporean identity, nostalgia and nationhood.

PASSION MADE POSSIBLE IN THREE TO FIVE DAYS

Yet, to tourists, most of whom may only visit Singapore for three to five days, as tourism statistics show, what does Passion Made Possible actually mean?

“ What kinds of passion can one achieve in such a short stay?
Passion for eating a lot of good local food?

The adrenaline of taking a roller coaster in Universal Studios Singapore or trying indoor skydiving in IFly at Sentosa?

Would walking in air-conditioned Cloud Forest and Flower Domes at Gardens by the Bay allow tourists' passions to be realised?

Perhaps winning big in the casinos at our integrated resorts would come closer to achieving that.

There are of course destinations in the world that people associate as places where they can feel alive or become inspired to seek out and pursue the passions in their lives.



Mount Everest for avid and passionate climbers is an easy example. Other places include destinations with spectacular natural landscapes that is often thought to refresh the mind and heart and inspire one towards passionately seeking out life with meaning.

Global cities like London, New York or Tokyo are also often deemed to be deeply inspirational for those aspiring to take their careers to greater heights.

So what exactly does Singapore offer to visitors in three to five days that could allow their passions to be made possible?

Passions could indeed be about anything, so it's hard to say whether Singapore can or cannot allow tourists to have their passions made possible on our lands.

“ But as a branding slogan, it is difficult to imagine what an associated tourism development plan and focus should be for Singapore.”

One man's passion could be another man's disappointment, so how do we develop the space to cater to all, without necessarily narrowing what passion itself means?

POPULARLY RECEIVED BY SINGAPOREANS

At the gist of this is perhaps a deeper question:

“ As a branding initiative said to market Singapore to the world, is the target audience in fact the world, or Singaporeans themselves?”

One of STB's first videos released using the new slogan has been popularly received by many Singaporeans on social media.

The video featured many familiar faces Singaporeans would recognize – home-grown singers like Sun Yan Zi and Nathan Hartono, sporting heroes like Fandi Ahmad and Kyra Poh, and many other Singaporeans seen to be pursuing their unique talents and passions.

A few local media outlets and social media also compared the video to National Day Parade videos and suggested that they inspired more pride than the latter. Some concluded that “if a video can make Singaporeans feel good about Singapore for two minutes, it's something special.”



Screen grab of *Passion Made Possible*, featuring Nathan Hartono and Stephanie Sun Yan Zi.

Seen in this light, the tagline *Passion Made Possible*, if viewed as what Singapore represents to Singaporeans makes perfect sense.

It may still be a far cry from what regular Singaporeans think of as their own lives and whether their passions are easily made possible or are supported by the Government or communities in Singapore.

“ But it is a powerful projection of what Singapore can be, should be, and must be.”

It follows the same strategic positioning that the state has been emphasising in the recent years, where “every school is a good school” and that there are “many pathways to success”.

It projects an ideal image of what Singapore is to be, rather than just describing what Singapore is, and that projection can perhaps be said to be a passion in itself.

There's just one small problem though – the latin origin and meaning of the word passion is suffering. Perhaps it would have been prudent to have first checked the dictionaries before launching the brand worldwide.

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Source: CNA/si