

# Singapore Industry Focus

## Hospitality S-REITs

Refer to important disclosures at the end of this report

DBS Group Research . Equity

14 Jun 2022

### Sun is shining again

- A summer surge in travel demand on the cards as shown by a variety of positive indicators
- Hoteliers have pricing power in their hands, expect 2022 performance to exceed pre-pandemic levels
- ARAHT and ART expected to report robust operating metrics in US come 1H22 results
- Maintain BUY on [ARAHT](#) and [ART](#) with TPs of US\$0.70 and S\$1.40, forward FY22 yields at 9.5% and 4.0%, respectively

**A summer travel surge on the cards, as vacationers flock to holiday destinations.** We are excited about the prospects of a rebound in operating metrics observed in the USA, starting from 2Q22, which is the peak travel season. We see a variety of positive indicators starting from (i) major US airlines raising guidance on higher-than-expected ticket prices and capacity yields, (ii) cruise spending now just 10% shy of full recovery, and (iii) strong forward booking trends on travel websites. These encouraging signs point towards the ability of hospitality S-REITs with US exposures (ARAHT and ART) to post strong operating metrics come 1H22 results.

**Hoteliers upping prices as pricing power returns in the US.** Recent forward outlook statements from major hotel groups (Marriott, Hyatt, and Hilton) are also turning more promising, with most hoteliers expecting to see a leap in RevPAR in 2Q-3Q22 on the back of robust domestic travel demand for both the leisure and corporate travel segments. With pricing power back in the hoteliers' hands, we also note that STR and Tourism Economics recently upgraded their recovery timeline forecast for US hotel RevPAR to surpass 2019 (or pre-COVID-19) levels by 2022, which is a positive read for ARAHT (100% exposure to the US market) and ART (20% exposure to the US market). We note that these revisions are inflation-adjusted, implying that the pent-up demand for travel will likely be sustained, despite high inflation rates in the USA.

**Close correlation between RevPAR and share price not fully reflected in valuations.** With RevPAR-led recovery underway with further strength boosting upside potential, we remain confident that a re-rating in share prices for ARAHT and ART can be sustained. Trading at 0.7x P/NAV (ARAHT) and 1.0x P/NAV (ART) and offering FY22F yields ranging from 6%-9%, we remain attracted to remain vested in the multi-year growth story that the hospitality sector offers.

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#### STOCKS

	Price LCY	Mkt Cap US\$m	12-mth Target Price S\$	Performance (%)		Rating
				3 mth	12 mth	
<a href="#">Ascott Residence Trust</a>	1.16	2,744	1.40	12.6	11.5	BUY
<a href="#">ARA US Hospitality Trust</a>	0.49	276	0.70	(1.0)	(13.4)	BUY

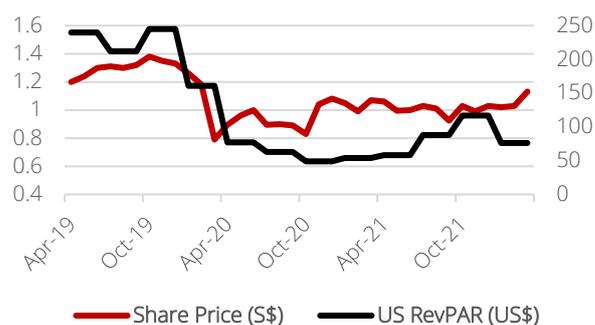
Source: DBS Bank, Bloomberg Finance L.P.

Closing price as of 13 Jun 2022

#### RevPAR to share price (ARAHT)



#### RevPAR to share price (ART)



Source: Bloomberg Finance L.P.



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## Summer working its magic

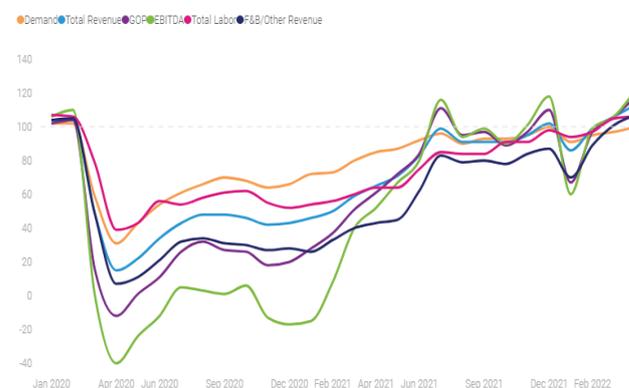
**Summer 2021 vs. summer 2022.** A year ago, travellers were aching to travel but remained cautious with the highly infectious Delta strain. Fast forward to today, the immense pent-up demand, easing of restrictions, and pandemic fatigue have restored a strong appetite and confidence in travel.

**US travel and tourism data unanimously points upwards, as a travel surge is on the cards.** As Delta and Omicron fears subside, a summer travel surge is likely on the cards. According to Mastercard Economics Institute, people are feeling more comfortable heading off to further destinations, despite a jump in cases and average airfares increasing 18% globally since the start of the year. Major US airlines such as United Airlines and American Airlines had all raised their revenue guidance for the year on higher ticket fares, despite trimming flight schedules. On a similar note, cruise spending was at 25% of pre-COVID levels at the start of the year, but it is now just 10% shy of full recovery. With these encouraging data points, travel demand ahead looks more optimistic than expected.

**US hotel industry RevPAR now expected to exceed 2019 levels this year.** In a precursor to travel and room demand, US booking sites such as Hopper and Kayak are seeing strong booking activity for spring break, leading to the start of a very strong summer. AirDNA data suggests that the booking pace for travel in the northern hemisphere is 49% higher than the same time last year and 26% higher than in pre-pandemic year 2019 across the 10 million vacation rentals they track daily.

STR and Tourism Economics upgraded their recovery timeline forecast for US hotel RevPAR to surpass 2019 levels this year, with an adjustment of US\$11 to the forecasted average daily room rate of hotels in 2022. Occupancy is expected to be pre-pandemic comparable, bringing overall RevPAR approximately US\$6 higher than 2019 levels. We note that the higher adjustment in numbers takes into account inflation, with inflation-adjusted recovery in ADR and RevPAR continuing to be forecast for the year 2024.

## Estimated US hotel revenues, profits, and metrics indexed to 2019



Source: STR, DBS Bank

**Profitability continues to be hindered by heightened costs.** Despite underlying metrics leaping ahead of expectations, hotel profitability has only started hitting 2019 levels recently. Data published by STR showed that US hotel gross operating profit per available room exceeded pre-pandemic levels for a second consecutive month in April 2022, or the highest level for the country since November 2018. Higher operating costs, such as wages and utility costs, weigh on profitability, and we see this trend continuing, on the back of inflationary pressures and the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

**However, select-service hotels are best positioned to mitigate these elevated costs.** The select-service hotel type continues to reflect more positively on profitability as opposed to their full-service counterparts due to the function of a leaner operating model and lower reliance on labour. Historical RevPAR numbers published by Hyatt Hotels Corporation show that as of 2021, RevPAR recovery has been stronger for select-service accommodation types across three different geographical markets. Hence, we continue to like this segment, which has proven its resilience and is well positioned to keep costs low.

## Positive datapoints from global hospitality peers

**Positive guidance from major hotel groups.** Hotel operators' guidance imply an immediate upturn. Based on the forward outlook statements by various hoteliers including Hyatt, Hilton Worldwide, and Marriott International, we see positives in their outlook, especially in the coming months, driven by pent-up travel demand.

Amongst them, we note that Hyatt is seeing its strongest recovery in the US select-service space, with RevPAR in 2021 jumping to 72% of pre-COVID (2019) levels, and ranging between 46% to 62% in the other regions. This is a positive for ARA US Hospitality Trust (ARA US), given their portfolio focus on the Hyatt Hotel group.

**Bleisure trend likely contributed to summer travel boom.**

Bleisure travel, which is a combination of business and leisure travel, is on the rise. With travel plans delayed or

cancelled due to the pandemic, many are now taking the opportunity to extend a work trip for leisure, especially in an era of hybrid working. We think that the travel demand could have also been spurred by bleisure demand, in addition to just pure leisure demand.

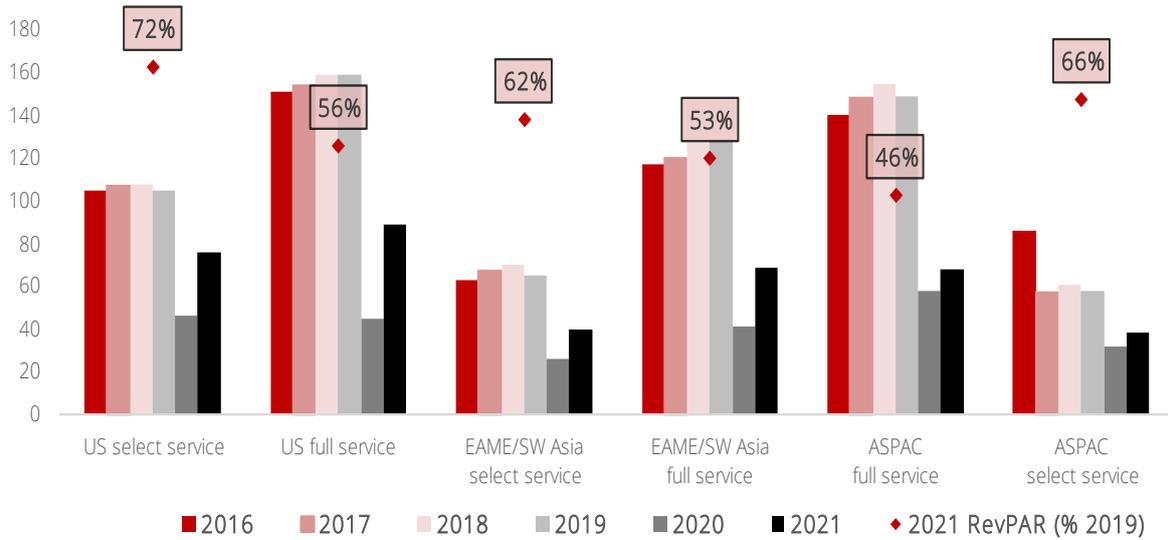
**More room for rate hikes; good inflation hedge for select-service hotels.** With travel demand ahead looking more optimistic than expected, we see potential for hoteliers like ARAHT and ART to increase room rates. Given that the select-service room offering is generally more affordable than full-service hotels, the crunch in room rates could see a similar hike in room rates for the middle to upper middle accommodation, bringing its offerings in tandem with luxury-tier, full-service hotels. We also like that the repricing of room rates is dynamic, acting as a good hedge in an inflationary environment.

## Hotel operators' guidance

Key Guidance	Summary:
<p><b>Hyatt:</b> The strength of Memorial Day weekend and the positive booking pace for May and beyond suggest a robust summer travel season ahead. Expect higher rates and volume of business in all regions, other than Asia Pacific. Hyatt is seeing the strongest recovery in the US select-service space, with RevPAR in 2021 jumping to 72% of pre-COVID (2019) levels, and ranging between 46% to 62% in the other regions.</p> <p><b>Hilton Worldwide:</b> April 2022 RevPAR was at c.95% of 2019 levels. Guidance: 1) 2Q22 system-wide RevPAR growth between 45%-50% y-o-y or 5%-10% below 2Q19; 2) reach 2019 system-wide RevPAR levels in 3Q22; and 3) FY22 RevPAR growth between 32%-38% y-o-y or 5%-9% below FY19. Expecting to see a very strong leisure demand base and increasingly strong leisure business transient and group base in 2022 and 2023. Decent, albeit uneven, recovery across Europe – stronger recovery seen in western Europe than eastern Europe. US recovery is the strongest, while China is still lagging, but long-term recovery is expected in the region.</p> <p><b>Marriott International:</b> They remain very positive about the summer and believe that there is still a lot of consumer demand for their brands and a significant amount of pricing power. Demand in major urban markets has been recovering in recent months, with a few more leisure-orientated markets exceeding 2019 levels. Both leisure room demand and rates are anticipated to exceed 2019 levels. China has been challenging, but they are confident of demand returning rapidly once restrictions are lifted.</p>	<p>Most hotel groups are seeing a strong rebound in domestic demand and expect to see a robust summer (CY2Q/3Q), with hoteliers seeing good pricing power.</p> <p>US/Europe expected to hit pre-COVID levels ahead, while China recovery is uncertain, given the COVID-19 lockdowns – but they appear to be easing.</p> <p>Key to watch is the reopening of China's borders, which will bring the next leg of growth.</p>

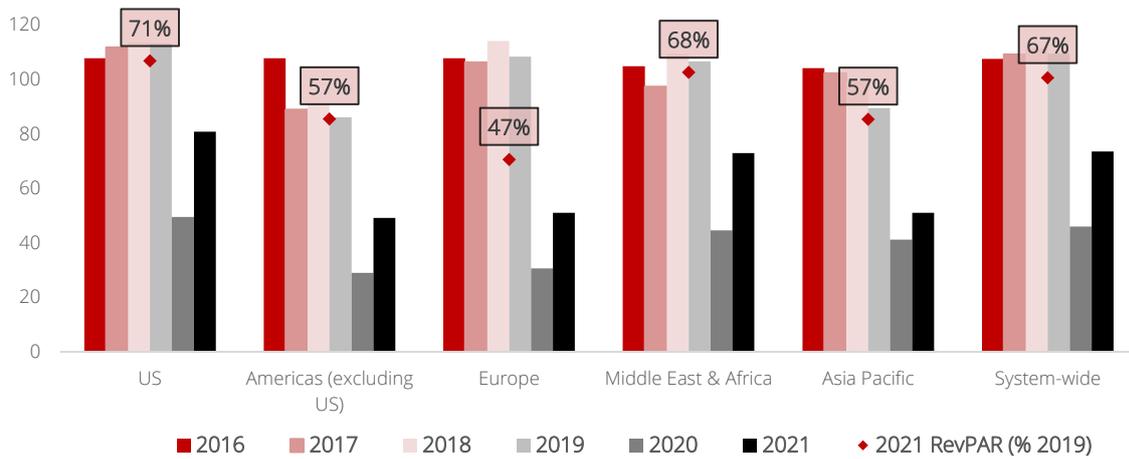
Source: Various companies, DBS Bank

**Hyatt Hotels RevPAR 2016-2017 by region and hotel type (2021 % recovery based on 2019 levels)**



Source: Hyatt Hotels Corporation, DBS Bank

**Hilton Worldwide unaudited RevPAR 2016-2021 by region (2021 % recovery based on 2019 levels)**



Source: Hilton Worldwide Holdings, DBS Bank

## Who is best leveraged to ride on the upturn?

### ARAHT best leveraged in the US upturn (BUY, TP S\$0.70).

In 1Q22 results, management shared that forward bookings for 2Q22 were coming in stronger than pre-COVID levels. Further, using Hyatt Hotels as a proxy, April 2022 RevPAR for the Americas exceeded pre-COVID levels by 3%, while comparable system-wide RevPAR in May 2022, at c.US\$127, was the highest since November 2019. Looking ahead, the rebound in travel demand could come faster than we initially anticipated.

**Recovery in RevPAR to drive share price re-rating.** We believe that ARAHT will likely see an uplift in RevPAR ahead, as we turn more positive on travel demand and on the back of inflationary pressures as well as a higher willingness to spend. According to a study by Skyscanner, travellers are spending more on accommodation with higher budgets, even amid a higher cost of living. We think there could be two reasons for this: 1) High level of savings from not travelling in the past two years and 2) immense pent-up demand. Hence, we look forward to higher RevPAR figures for 2Q22 and 3Q22, which, we think, are not priced in yet.

### Paring down of debt likely the immediate priority.

ARAHT's portfolio valuations rose 5.2% y-o-y to US\$722.6m as end-FY21 but remain below FY19 levels on a same-store basis. While pricing in a full recovery in portfolio valuations by FY24, which now looks to be conservative, we estimate ARAHT's FY22F gearing to decline from 42.2% to 41.6%, should the full quantum of divestment proceeds be used to pay off debt. This alleviates one of the key market concerns for ARAHT in the current hawkish interest rate environment, and an improvement from their 44.3% leverage ratio as at end-FY21.

**ARAHT – bullish on both top line and bottom line; reiterate BUY with TP of US\$0.70.** We reiterate our BUY call on ARAHT on the back of conservative recovery estimates, projecting a full RevPAR recovery only in 2024. With travel and hotel sector data pointing upwards in unison, we think that 2Q22 will register ARAHT's strongest quarterly performance since the pandemic months, with higher highs y-o-y this year. ARAHT's select-service operating format will also help alleviate cost pressures from heightened costs of labour and utilities, while riding on the RevPAR momentum pegged to its higher end hotel offering.

We recalibrate the risk-free rate for ARAHT to 3.0%, in line with the S-REIT industry re-rating. FY22/23 DPU is forecast at US 4.7/6.1scts, respectively, implying forward yields of 9.6% and 12.4%, respectively, on last close price. Our TP remains unchanged at US\$0.70, as we roll forward valuations into FY23.

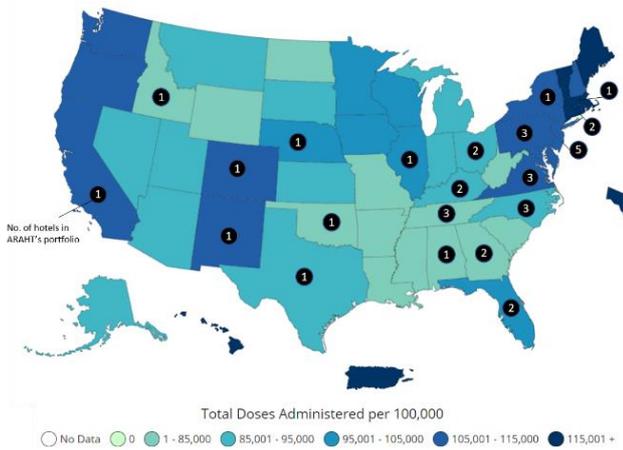
**Ascott REIT – 20% US exposure; maintain BUY with TP of S\$1.40.** Amongst the hotel S-REITs, Ascott REIT is the only other hotel S-REIT with US exposure apart from ARAHT. ART owns three US hotels within New York and will be a key beneficiary of the return of MICE events in the coming quarters. RevPAR for their US hotels ended 1Q22 at US\$76, or approximately 33% of 2019 levels, and we expect RevPAR to play a strong game of catch-up in the coming quarters for ART's three US hotels in New York. Management has also guided on stronger international bookings flowing through as city-wide events and leisure demand return.

## Summary of exposures

	Others		Domestic markets				
	Singapore	Rest of Asia	China	Japan	UK/Europe	USA	Australia/NZ
Ascott Residence Trust	16%	8%	4%	19%	20%	20%	13%
CDL Hospitality Trust	64%	7%	0%	3%	15%	0%	11%
Hospitality Trust	36%	6%	0%	9%	18%	0%	32%
Far East Hospitality Trust	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
ARA US Hospitality Trust	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
<b>Average exposure</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>14%</b>

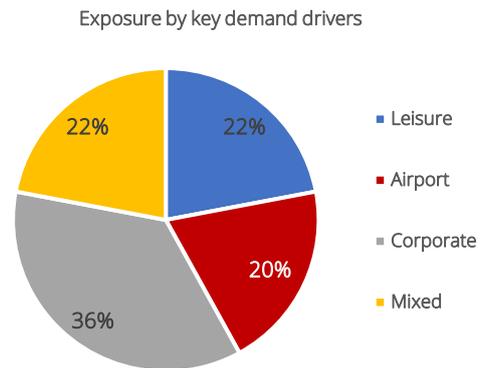
Source: Companies, DBS Bank

**ARAHT's portfolio exposure vs. US state vaccination tracker**

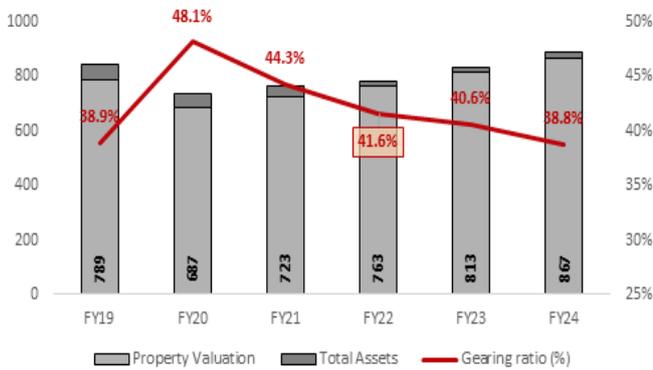


Source: Company, DBS Bank

**ARAHT's portfolio exposure**

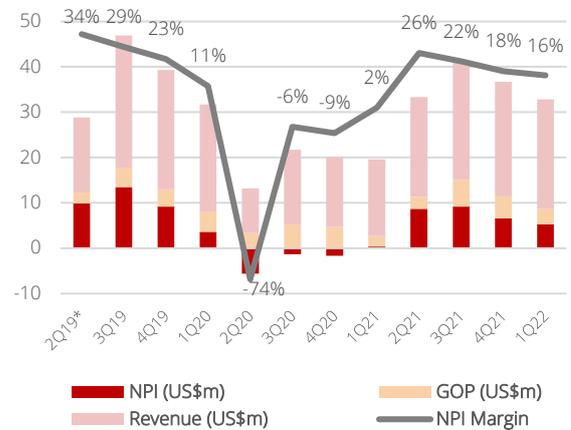


**ARAHT gearing sensitivity with divestment proceeds used to reduce debt (US\$m)**



Source: Company, DBS Bank

**ARAHT's historical revenue, GOP, NPI (US\$m), and NPI margins (%)**



Source: Company, DBS Bank

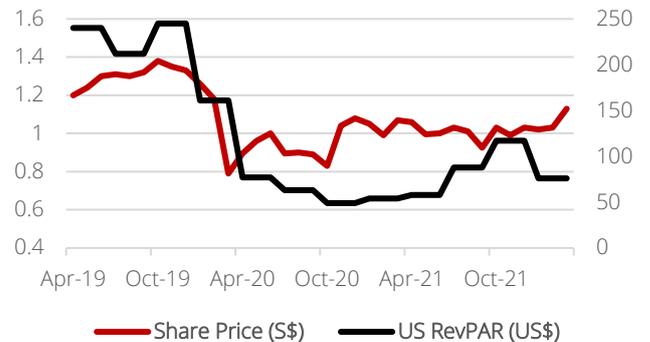
\* 2Q19 represents listing date (9 May 2019) to 30 June 2019

**ARAHT (US\$) – Share price vs. RevPAR**



Source: Company, DBS Bank

**Ascott REIT (S\$) – Share price vs. US RevPAR**



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**BUY** (>15% total return over the next 12 months for small caps, >10% for large caps)

**HOLD** (-10% to +15% total return over the next 12 months for small caps, -10% to +10% for large caps)

**FULLY VALUED** (negative total return, i.e., > -10% over the next 12 months)

**SELL** (negative total return of > -20% over the next 3 months, with identifiable share price catalysts within this time frame)

\*Share price appreciation + dividends

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