

CEO interview: How Plaza Premium Group redefines airport hospitality

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Song Hoi See, Founder and CEO of Plaza Premium Group

When interviewing Song Hoi See, Founder and CEO of Plaza Premium Group ([PPG](#)), he responds with the conviction of someone who built a global enterprise by being closely attuned to the needs of travelers. His story begins not in an airport lounge but in a moment of contrast: At one time a senior investment banker enjoying Business Class travel; later, traveling as an entrepreneur in Economy.

“I spotted an inefficiency gap,” he tells *PAX International*, explaining how the realization that 85 percent of passengers had no refuge in the airport environment for work and rest before flying led him to launch the world’s first independent airport lounge in Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 1998. His concept was simple but transformative.

“My vision was to democratize comfort at the airport and to make premium airport experiences accessible beyond Business Class,” he says.

Today, [PPG](#) operates as the largest independent airport lounge network in the world, spanning 600

airports across 150 countries and serving 30 million travelers annually. Its accolades include nine consecutive years of [Skytrax](#) recognition.

Yet as Song reflects on this growth, the company's expansion remains grounded in the principles he relied on at the beginning.

"It is important to focus on your personal strengths and be observant," he says. That same observation continues to shape the evolution of PPG's portfolio today.



With demand rising for premium experiences, PPG is expanding Plaza Premium First while diversifying into dining, transit hotels and passenger services

Leading with innovation and honoring a legacy

Much of Song's leadership centers on balancing the company's roots with the demands of modern travel.

"Having been in the business for almost three decades, we have had a front-row seat to the evolution of travelers' needs," he says.

PPG's agility has become a defining strength, particularly during the pandemic, when global aviation ground to a halt. Instead of retreating, Song continued forward with transformation.

"We decided to embark on a tech transformation journey, because we believed this was the right thing to do for the future of the business," he says.

PPG invested heavily in proprietary digital platforms, streamlined processes and new ways of working.

Today, innovation touches every part of the organization, from AI predictive rostering to robotics and autonomous mobility solutions. Purpose-built platforms such as [oneTECO](#), [Smart Traveller](#) and the PPG lounge management system connect operations, revenue and guest experience under one digital ecosystem. Song views this willingness to challenge convention as fundamental to long-term success.

“Entrepreneurs must always be prepared to challenge the status quo and find new business opportunities,” he says.



PPG sees the airport as a destination itself, with a focus on localization that is intentional and deeply rooted in community

Creating experiences that feel both global and personal

Consistency is essential for a brand operating on multiple continents. But Song emphasizes that cultural nuance and local authenticity matter just as much. Travelers carry different identities depending on their journey, and PPG designs its lounges with this versatility in mind.

“Our success has been driven by our quest to provide an end-to-end experience that prioritizes passenger well-being and satisfaction,” he says.

Product differentiation is central to this. From caviar bars in the Middle East to curated art programs and tasting experiences, each lounge reflects both brand standards and a sense of place.

Localization is intentional and deeply rooted in community. The ‘Proudly Local’ hospitality initiative helps to highlight and celebrate local food and culture. In Hong Kong, for example, PPG showcases signature dishes like fish ball noodle soup and its homemade XO sauce, connecting travelers to the destination through flavor.

The airport as a destination

As airports evolve into experiential hubs, Song sees significant opportunities for expansion.

“We believe that airports are destination hubs, where experiences are taking center stage,” he says.

With travelers willing to invest more in elevated moments, PPG is broadening its Plaza Premium First portfolio and diversifying into dining, transit hotels and passenger services. The next five years will focus on demand-driven growth, digitalization and deeper partnerships with airports worldwide. PPG’s strategy balances strategic investment with long-term value creation.

“It is about striking a balance between significant capital expenditure and long-term returns,” Song says.

At the heart of this forward-looking approach is a commitment to people and to the mission that has guided the company from day one: making travel better.

In Song’s words, PPG aims to create experiences “that travelers can emotionally resonate with,” supported by technology that enables personalization at scale.

In interviewing Song, it becomes clear that PPG’s story is as much about heart as it is about strategy. He continues to dream big, observe closely and build with purpose—the same pillars that carried a single lounge in 1998 to global prominence today.