

ASEAN Watch

Swift recovery not in sight

Tourist arrivals climb above 80% of 2019 levels

Tourism recovery has regained momentum, having stalled earlier in 20-3023 (see report). Since Dec '23, tourism arrivals to ASEAN (as a whole) have climbed above 80% of 2019 levels (on a 2MMA basis) from an average of 72% between May '23 and Nov '23. Key drivers include returning Chinese tourists and host countries' efforts to boost tourism (e.g. visa waivers and events). The recovery momentum is likely to be sustained at least through 1Q'24, with (1) Chinese outbound seats to ASEAN expanding (see Aviation Nowcast #98) and (2) early daily releases out of Thailand pointing to a solid tourism recovery over LNY (see report). See Exhibit 1 to Exhibit 5.

Exports: Near-term outlook still somewhat patchy....

In y-o-y terms, ASEAN-6 exports growth in Jan '24 turned positive for the first time in almost a year. However, in dollar terms (3MMA basis), exports remain >2% below trend (based on past 10 years' data). This points to the y-o-y turnaround being driven more so by the low base from last year, rather than a sharp upswing in activities. The near-term outlook still seems somewhat patchy to us, with PMIs for *future* manufacturing output into early 2024 pointing to a slight softening of sentiment. See Exhibit 6 to Exhibit 8.

...but firmer recovery possible in latter part of 2024

External demand may pick-up more discernibly only in the latter part of the year as possibly lower inflation and less restrictive monetary conditions (as policy rate cuts commence) lift private consumption in developed markets. Meanwhile, our global semiconductor analysts expect inventories (still at elevated levels in 4Q'23 - 23 days above 5-year median) to normalize further through 2024 (see report).

2024 GDP growth to remain slightly below trend-pace

All in, we see ASEAN-6 GDP growth rebounding just modestly from 4.2% in 2023 to 4.7% in 2024. Private consumption should remain the key growth driver, supported by further tourism recovery and generally healthy labour market conditions. However, 2024 GDP growth would remain below the 2015-19 average of 5%, with external demand recovery likely incomplete (Exhibit 10). Our latest 2024 GDP forecast is also 0.1ppt lower vs. Nov '23, after we revised down Thailand's 2024 GDP forecast by 1.1ppt, with a full-scale digital wallet implementation no longer in our baseline (see reports).

Inflation less of a pressing concern for most

Our forecasts point to headline inflation in 2024 staying well within or below target ranges in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand & Vietnam, and close to the historical average in Malaysia (Exhibit 11). Singapore is an outlier, with core inflation (ex-GST) still seen above-historical average (see report) and inflation risks flagged in Budget 2024 (see report). Any reforms to energy subsidies present inflation tail-risks, but likely gradual and modest in the case of Malaysia (thus capping upside risk) and more likely to be considered only in 2025 in the case of Indonesia (new President takes office only in Oct; see reports).

Divergence in monetary policy rate paths

Continue on page 2

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04 March 2024

GEM Economics ASEAN

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Glossary

y-o-y: year-on-year

PMI: Purchasing Managers Index

We expect ASEAN central banks to diverge in their policy rate paths (Exhibit 12) if/when the Fed commences policy rate cuts from Jun. We split them into 3 camps below.

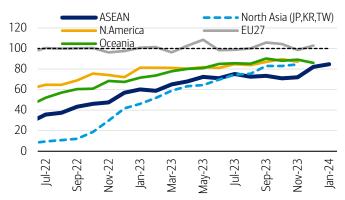
- (1) **Easing cycle (Indonesia, the Philippines & Thailand):** We expect all 3 central banks to commence policy rate cuts from Jun, in sync with the Fed.
- Bank Indonesia (BI) & Bangko de Sentral (BSP) are more sensitive to capital flows & FX movements, and should follow the Fed's gradual easing cycle closely, facilitated by high real policy rates in both (Exhibit 13). We expect BSP to cut policy rate by 100bp (25bp in 2Q, 50bp in 3Q and 25bp in 4Q) and BI to cut policy rates by 75bp (once every quarter from 2Q) (see reports).
- Bank of Thailand (BOT): Monetary policy stance could turn tighter as (a) lower inflation expectations imply real interest rates, and (b) lower potential growth may result in lower neutral rates. As such, we expect BOT to cut policy rate by 50bp in 2024 (2Q and 4Q).
- (2) No change, but bias towards easing (Malaysia & Vietnam).
- Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM): Current growth-inflation dynamics are in favour of BNM staying on an extended pause (see report). However, with policy rate at neutral setting and factoring in BNM's final objective of sustainable growth, policy rate cuts may be considered if GDP growth is seen tracking decisively below 4%.
- State Bank of Vietnam (SBV). Preference would be to keep policy rates
 unchanged amidst financial concerns (having already cut multiple times in 2023),
 and to rely on easing of macro-prudential policies (e.g. extending debt rescheduling)
 to support growth. However, SBV may cut policy rates if political pressures mount.
- (3) No change, but bias towards tightening (Singapore).
- Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS). We see a stronger case for MAS to stay on an extended pause, after Jan inflation report pointed to early signs of upward price pressures easing (see report). However, more durable slope steepening may be needed if core inflation surprises to the upside in the coming months and is seen staying sticky longer than expected.



Tourism

Exhibit 1: Arrivals into different regions (% 2019 levels, 2MMA)

ASEAN tourism recovery gained grounds towards end '23,,,

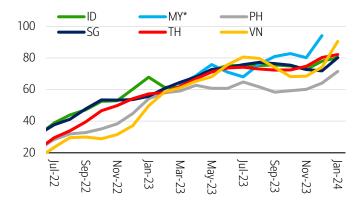


 $\textbf{Source:} \ BofA \ Global \ Research \ estimates, CEIC, Haver \ Note: (1) \ ASEAN \ covers \ ID, MY, PH, SG, TH \& VN; North \ Asia: JP, KR \& TW; N.America: CA \& US; Oceania: AU \& NZ; (2) \ Aggregates \ are calculated as a simple average of individual economy's available data$

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Exhibit 2: Arrivals into ASEAN countries (% of 2019 levels, 2MMA)

...with similar upswing seen across the region

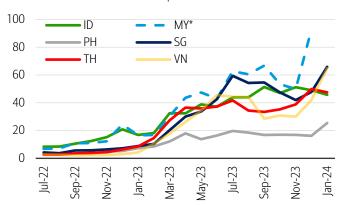


Source: BofA Global Research, Haver, CEIC Note: MY's figures exclude arrivals from Brunei and Singapore (majority of which are arrivals via land borders)

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Exhibit 3: Arrivals from China into ASEAN (% of 2019 levels)

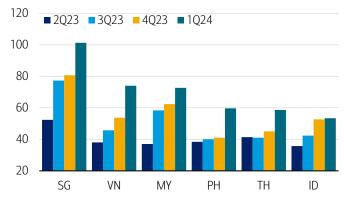
Arrivals from China saw noticeable improvement towards end '23...



Source: BofA Global Research, Haver Note: Malaysia's data includes Macao & HK

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Exhibit 4: China outbound seats into ASEAN (% of 2019 levels) ...and likely sustained through 1Q'24 amidst seat capacity expansion

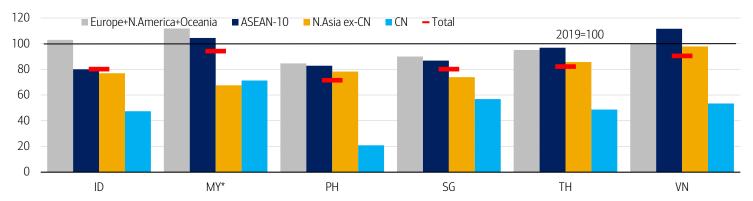


Source: BofA Global Research, OAG See: <u>Asia Pacific Aviation Nowcast: Nowcast #98: High</u> Frequency travel trends tracker: Chinese New Year special edition

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Exhibit 5: Sources of tourist arrivals into ASEAN (latest 2MMA data, % of 2019 levels)

Arrivals from North Asia (especially China) lagging relative to Developed Markets and ASEAN-10



Source: BofA Global Research, CEIC Note: (1) MY's figures exclude arrivals from Brunei and Singapore (majority of which are arrivals via land borders), (2) Latest data refer to Dec '23 for MY, and Jan '24 for others

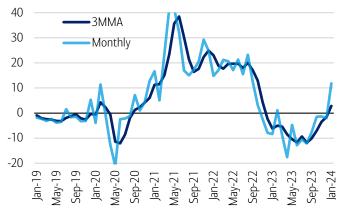
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Exports

Exhibit 6: ASEAN-6 exports (%yoy)

Exports turned positive for the first time since end-22 in y-o-y terms...

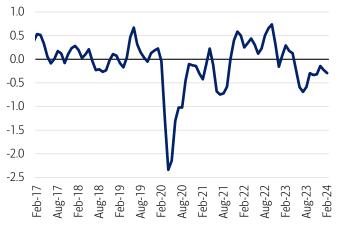


Source: BofA Global Research, Haver, CEIC

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Exhibit 8: S&P Mfg PMI: Future Output for ASEAN (z-score) (lower reading = more pessimistic)

Purchasing managers' sentiment softened slightly in early 2024



Source: BofA Global Research, S&P, Haver Note: Figures above refer to deviation away from 2016-2023 mean

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Exhibit 7: Exports, actual vs. trend (3MMA, \$bn)

...but remained below trend in dollar terms



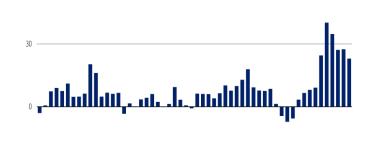
Source: BofA Global Research, Haver, CEIC

inventories still on the path to CY24E normalization

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Exhibit 9: Semiconductor inventory days relative to the 5-year median

Inventory days in 4Q'23 remain 23 days above the 5-year median



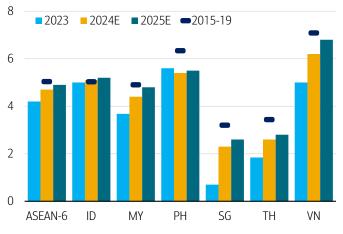
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Growth / Inflation / Policy Rates

Exhibit 10: ASEAN-6 GDP growth (% yoy)

Further growth recovery expected in 2024 & 2025

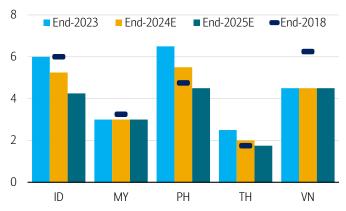


Source: BofA Global Research, Haver

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Exhibit 12: Central banks' policy rates (% p.a.)

2024: We expect BI/BOT/BSP to cut rates, and the rest to stay status quo

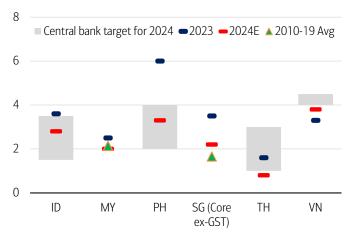


Source: BofA Global Research, Haver

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Exhibit 11: Inflation forecasts (%) relative to target & historical average

Inflation less of a pressing concern across the region, except in Singapore

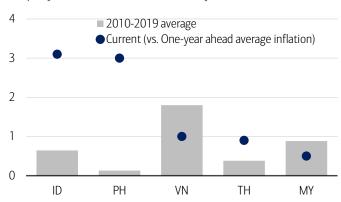


Source: BofA Global Research, Haver

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Exhibit 13: Real policy rate (%)

Real policy rates widest in PH & ID, followed by VN & TH



 $\textbf{Source:} \ \text{BofA Global Research, Haver} \quad \textbf{(1) For one-year ahead, we refer to 2025 average inflation forecast as compiled by Focus Economics}$

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