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What a ride, 2012!

MICE players in Asia and beyond recollect their adventures
as the year draws to a close



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To our readers

2013: As crazy as climate



Raini Hamdi
Senior editor

“2013 won’t be a Santorini, where you find the most dazzling sunshine and blue sky; it’ll be a Singapore, where it rains often but the sun does come out.”

I asked about 20 CEOs to describe 2013 for me in climate terms – and such great weather frogs they make.

“The year ahead will be a little cloudy and potentially stormy, but with good chances of sunny spells sprinkled throughout the year,” said one.

“Rain clouds and the occasional heavy shower with brighter conditions later in the day,” said another.

“Batten down the hatches to be ready for some stormy weather, but don’t forget to pack the swimmers as there will be some sunshine as well,” said the other.

The sentiment is clear. I will sum it up in country terms: 2013 won’t be a Santorini, where you find the most dazzling sunshine and blue sky; it’ll be a Singapore, where it rains often but the sun does come out.

In Asia, we can certainly hope for some sunny spells. It’s the region that is likely to see the strongest growth in both number of meetings and meeting spend, according to American Express Meetings & Events 2013 Global Meetings Forecast. The report tips a rise of 6.4 per cent and 4.2 per cent in number of meetings and meeting spend respectively in Asia and a decline in other regions, most sharply in Europe (down 2.3 per cent and six per cent respectively).

While we’re lucky to be operating in a region whose economy is relatively strong, the

year ahead will still be challenging. Flexibility, manpower and technology are key.

In the last quarter, we’ve already seen – and reported – how companies are being more stringent with corporate travel and meeting approvals. And now the AMEX report points to an emerging trend of meeting budgets not being approved until companies’ latest financial data is available. Imagine how this will shorten booking times further. So flexibility will be a strength of planners and venues going forward.

But the manpower shortage in the industry does not make it any easier for us to be flexible and attuned to clients’ fast and ever-changing needs. The whole tourism industry in Asia is headed for a terrible labour crunch – a shortfall of eight million jobs in the next 10 years – with the shortage being most acute at managerial levels. Think of the implications on service levels at hotels, venues, etc, apart from the real worry of finding staff for one’s own needs.

The year ahead will also see a continued blurring of the offline and online worlds, which necessitates planners to be adept at harnessing technology in order to give clients more value.

As they say, life is not a beach. But we’ll manage, won’t we? Maybe even get a tan in the process.

On that note, a happy 2013 to you from all of us at *TTGmice*. ■

TTGmice
DEC.2012-JAN.2013



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Talk of the Trade

ASIA-PACIFIC

A global Pacific World eyes a tripling of revenue

By Raini Hamdi

Pacific World has repositioned itself as a global DMC, with other TUI Travel-owned DMCs in Europe rebranded Pacific World, and aims to triple in size by 2017.



Herve: growth is in Asia

All 12 Pacific World offices in its five geographical areas – Europe, Greater China, Singapore/Malaysia, Thailand/Indochina and Indonesia – now report to a global MD in Singapore, Herve Joseph Antoine. Though TUI is European, Pacific World's Asian base reflects where business is expected to grow the most in the next five years.

Born in Asia 30 years ago by founders Jacques Arnoux and Bob Guy, Pacific World was snapped up by First Choice UK in 2006 and came under TUI when TUI merged with First Choice in 2007. The four TUI-owned DMCs in Europe which have been rebranded Pacific World are Ultramar Events Spain, Travel ScotWorld Scotland, TUI Hellas Corporate Services Greece and Miltours MICE Division Portugal.

Asia contributes 60 per cent of business and remains the driver of growth, said Herve. He plans to “multiply the size of Pacific World by three” in five years “by opening new destinations and new source markets” either through acquisitions or partnerships. Currently, Pacific World owns all its offices.

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TALKING NUMBERS

15 The percentage increase in the number of events held at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre between January and October 2012. The centre registered 1,258 events in this period, compared to 1,097 in the previous corresponding period.

6 The percentage (6.4 per cent to be exact) increase in the number of meetings Asia is expected to host in 2013, according to the American Express Meetings & Events 2013 Global Meetings Forecast. Overall meeting spend in this region is predicted to rise 4.2 per cent.

JAPAN

Tussle for luxury trade show ILTM Asia

Japan is overtly courting Reed Travel Exhibitions, organiser of International Luxury Travel Market (ILTM) Asia, to move the annual show from Shanghai, which has hosted the event since it started seven years ago, to Kyoto.

Though Japan tourism authorities have managed to persuade Reed to launch an ILTM Japan edition next year in Kyoto from March 11-13, it is ILTM Asia they are after.

“Our final goal is for Reed to move ILTM Asia to Kyoto,”

Yoshikazu Kuki, director, Kyoto City Tourism & MICE Office, told *TTGmice*, adding that Singapore is understood to have also expressed interest to Reed to host ILTM Asia.

Added Kyoto Convention Bureau (KCB) managing director conventions & tourism, Shubei Akahoshi: “We know it’ll be difficult to switch from Shanghai to Kyoto, as the show is established in Shanghai and it is perhaps more costly to hold it in Kyoto than Shanghai – but we’ll keep trying.

“For two years, we had been trying to get ILTM Asia to Japan, and now Reed has decided to do a Japan version, which is a start.”

However, a spokesperson for ILTM Asia said: “Reed Travel Exhibitions has no plans to move it at this stage”.

A target of 50 luxury travel buyers and 50 luxury travel sellers has been set, according to Akahoshi. ILTM Japan will be held at the Kyoto International Conference Center, and Kyoto will be sponsoring the

opening reception.

James Kent, KCB’s director international marketing, said KCB was putting all its support behind the show. He said: “When it comes to luxury in Japan, Kyoto is the destination. In fact, Japan overall is synonymous with luxury. Though it may appear more expensive for the show to be held in Japan, the quality you get in return makes it a real value and we’re keen for Japan to show how high luxury levels can reach.” – **Raini Hamdi**

Look east for sponsorships

By Linda Haden

Associations that target firms from Asia-Pacific stand a better chance of gaining sponsorship than those relying on support from companies headquartered in the US or Europe, according to practitioners.

Therese Lauriola, CEO of the Master Painters Association New South Wales, has seen its sponsorship revenue, which is derived mainly from Australian sources, treble in the last five years.

"Australia's economy is thriving, and naturally, companies are more willing to sponsor events that they believe can deliver a lot of value for them. We're fortunate in a sense as we are linked to industries in Australia that are expected to continue to flourish despite the uncertain global economic conditions," she said.

Kellen Company's group vice president, Alfons Westgeest, believes that Asia-Pacific's economic resilience will continue to motivate companies in the region to sponsor events that are aligned with their

strategic and marketing goals.

"This is especially true when it comes to events held in China, a market which many firms are trying hard to infiltrate or expand their influence in," he added.

Conversely, it is getting harder to secure sponsorships from European and US companies, according to Cheam Gim Chng, marketing and sponsorship manager for the Singapore Infocomm Technology Federation.

She said: "Not only are there more associations competing for the same sponsor dollars, budgets are tightening and (European and US) firms are looking more closely at how much value our events transmit to their organisation, particularly in terms of ROI. We see no let up in this for the time being."

"So far, we've never cancelled an event because of a lack of sponsorship, but we've had to scale back or trim costs to make our events viable."

IN BRIEF

RCE joins MyCEB programme

Reliance Conventions & Events (RCE), a local PCO has joined the Professional Conference Organiser Partner Programme, an initiative by Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB) to help further its members' MICE capabilities through assistance in areas such as research, bidding and financial management. RCE will be a Tier 1 member, having satisfied a five-year PCO experience requirement with at least five international conferences under its belt. As such, it will enjoy a higher value of support from MyCEB.

Winter elected once more

Gold Coast Tourism CEO, Martin Winter, has been re-elected to the ICCA Board of Directors, and will continue in his current role as the association's regional chairman for the Asia-Pacific region. Winter's two-year extension to the ICCA board would allow the Gold Coast a strong voice among the movers and shakers of the industry and facilitate a strong position of global influence, said a press release issued by the tourism bureau.

Vietnam hikes visa fees

Vietnamese authorities are raising visa fees for incoming travellers with effect from January 1, 2013, said a report on the local government's online news platform. According to a circular from the Ministry of Finance, fees for single-entry visas for foreigners and Vietnamese residing abroad will be increased to US\$45 from US\$25. Multiple-entry visas will be divided into three categories, with validities of one month, six months and more than six months. These will cost US\$65, US\$95 and US\$135 respectively.

The best kind of boom

Best Western International is set to expand its portfolio in Indonesia with the opening of 25 new hotels in the next three years, beefing up its room count in the country from just over 600 now to almost 3,500 by the start of 2015. The new developments will span nine destinations across the country and two of Best Western's brand tiers – the mid-scale Best Western and luxury Best Western Premier.

MALAYSIA

Sarawak offers pro-convention scholarships

The Sarawak Convention Bureau (SCB) has awarded five scholarships, each valued at RM10,000 (US\$3,281), that enable recipients to attend an international convention of their choice.

The International Association Convention Scholarship Award covers travel, accommodation, association membership and convention registration fees, and must be utilised by December 2013.

Mike Cannon, managing director of SCB, said: "Our aim is to encourage potential new bidders to actively participate in attending international conventions and in turn, showcase

the benefits and opportunities that come from networking at these conventions."

The scholarship recipients are Ong Puay Hoon, president, Dyslexia Association of Sarawak; Ting Choo Yee, associate professor, Multimedia University, Cyberjaya; Kang Chia Yang, lecturer at Politeknik Mukah Sarawak; Joseph Ramanair, senior lecturer, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak; and Khong Heng Yen, senior lecturer, Universiti Teknologi MARA Sarawak.

Dylan Redas Noel, research director of the MICE bureau, said: "The (recipients) were selected based on their submis-

sions and feasibility of the conference rotation and its scope of programme. These winners are very dedicated to their work, and the (scholarship) will further encourage them to consider bidding for conventions to be held in Sarawak."

The International Association Convention Scholarship Award is into its fourth year. Chew Chang Guan, SCB general manager, noted that since the inception of the scholarship in 2009, the programme has met its objective of creating ambassadors for Sarawak and encouraging Malaysians to bid for international associations.

CHINA

Jumeirah gets ravenous for China

By Karen Yue

Jumeirah Hotels & Resorts' move to install a MICE specialist in late-2011 to woo business events from China for the company's properties in Europe and Dubai has reaped a good harvest.

Speaking to *TTGmice*, Jumeirah Hotels & Resorts, vice president sales & marketing, Asia Pacific, David Loiseau, said: "Tony Ma's (associate director of sales) job is to help the group seek and qualify MICE business from main Chinese gateway cities such as Beijing and Guangzhou, and emerging markets such as Dalian and Chengdu. Since (his appointment), we have seen good results."

Loiseau noted that MICE business out of China had leaped 40 per cent between 2011 and 2012 as a result, with 90 per cent of events being incentives.

He said: "We have been very success-

ful with 10-to-200-room scale of events, but we want to go for more of the mega types that are attended by 1,000 to 4,000 participants. We can easily handle events of such scale in Dubai, where we have many hotels. And that is what we are doing – marketing Dubai as a destination for mega business events.

"We have been bidding for three or four events of such scale out of China for 2013 in Dubai, and two of them are confirmed."

Jumeirah Hotels & Resorts has nine properties in Dubai, including the world-renowned all-suite Burj Al Arab.

According to Loiseau, Burj Al Arab is immensely popular with the Chinese market, which makes up 25 per cent of all bookings at the hotel in 2011 and 2012. However, leisure bookings are dominant.

He said: "We will introduce an aggressive MICE offer for Burj Al Arab in 1Q2013, targeting small and mid-scale events out of China. We want to show the Chinese that it is possible to have a luxury MICE event at reasonable prices. It makes good sense to debut this offer at such an iconic hotel. If successful, we may roll out the same programme at other properties."



Burj Al Arab's Marina Garden



Calendar

January 17-24

ATF
Vientiane, Laos

February 26-27

AIME
Melbourne, Australia

Continued from page 4

Group expansion

Herve would not reveal current revenue figures or Pacific World's contribution to the TUI group. Business is split 65 per cent DMC, with the rest divided equally between corporate and PCO accounts. "We expect to grow each segment," Herve said, adding that a global Pacific World attached to TUI has certain advantages such as the ability to offer clients wider diversity, stability, good insurance cover and compliance policy.

"With the economic crisis, especially in Europe, a lot of boutique MICE agencies are in difficulty. Clients are wary about sending (groups) to them," said Herve.

"The business is no longer about relationships."

AUSTRALIA

Ayers Rock unveils new events product

Located at Australia's largest attraction Ayers Rock, Uluru Meeting Place (UMP) has opened, giving event planners a reason to dream big.

The owners, Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia, spent some A\$30 million (US\$31.3 million) on the new conference centre as well as the makeover of the adjacent Sails in the Desert Hotel, both part of the larger Ayers Rock Resort.

The result is a series of striking modern spaces designed with indigenous flair, from the three meeting rooms in Sails to the two main conference rooms in UMP, namely the Tjungu Ballroom and Wanari Conference Room with seating capacity for 420 and 300 people respectively. All 231 guestrooms at Sails have also been given a facelift.

Coinciding with the launch, a range of teambuild-

ing activities has been introduced, including hosted talks and cultural performances. A new, premium under-the-stars dining experience, Tali Wiru, has commenced, offering guests the opportunity to dine outdoors with views of The Rock, as have the Out-back Sky Journeys, a series of stargazing tours.

Voyages' executive general manager sales, marketing and distribution, Ray Stone,

said: "We see great potential here for the Asian market – it's an emerging market that has real scope for growth in the near future, especially in the area of incentives and meetings."

Stone told *TTGmice* that Voyages was working closely with a number of business, tourism, trade and events groups to actively promote UMP throughout the region. – **Natasha Dragan**

FIJI

Fiji goes for Asian MICE

By Natasha Dragun

Following success in the leisure market, the island nation of Fiji is putting strategies in place to attract more business travellers and event planners in the near future.

According to Dixon Seeto, the President of the Fiji Islands Hotel & Tourism Association, Australia and New Zealand remain the country's most important MICE markets, although the bureau is hoping to grow Asian business by establishing a presence in Hong Kong in end-2012, as well as improving countrywide infrastructure.

The archipelago's largest conference facility has a current capacity of 400 people. A new convention centre, casino and luxury hotel complex on Denarau Island, just offshore from Nadi, is set to grow this to 1,500 people.

Seeto said that the bureau had been targeting medical, tourism and hospitality industries to host confer-

ences in the destination to supplement the growing incentives market.

The first phase of development will see 190 luxury rooms, three restaurants and a sports bar open, while the second phase will add more accommodations, a nightclub and other entertainment venues. There will also be a 1,500-seat convention centre with fully equipped banquet and catering capabilities.

A smaller convention centre and casino have also been also earmarked for Suva, Fiji's capital city.

Other hotel developments span the main island of Viti Levu as well as a number of offshore islets: just north of Nadi, Naisoso Island will soon be home to the five-star Peppers Naisoso Island Resort; off the Coral Coast, the Yadua Bay Resort & Villas development will offer an upscale hotel; in Suva, the historic Grand Pacific Hotel is preparing to re-open in 2013 after being left derelict for decades; and Mana Island Resort and Spa recently opened a new conference and convention centre.

Air Pacific is also keen to court more corporate clients, having recently announced details of its rebranding and fleet upgrade.

CHINA

Zhuhai mega resort to open mid-2013

Guangdong Chimelong Group will unveil in the middle of 2013 its new Chimelong International Ocean Resort in Zhuhai, a prefecture-level city on the southern coast of China's Guangdong province.

The resort's general manager, Ivan Leung, said the property would feature a 1,888-room ocean-themed luxury hotel, a man-made beach with a wave pool, and various MICE facilities including a 3,000m² grand ballroom, a 1,300m² ballroom and 24 smaller function rooms.

Water taxis will provide transfers between the hotel and the Ocean Kingdom water theme park via a 1km canal. Covering 500,000m², the park will offer nine different rides, three separate shows featuring sea lions, dolphins and beluga whales, as well as the largest aquarium in the world, filled with 24,000 cubic tonnes of water. - **Brian Higgs**

MALAYSIA

New app to promote trade events

Malaysian event and exhibition contractor, Instant Tradeshows & Exhibitions, has developed a mobile application that guides users to fairs and exhibitions in the destination.

Called MyExpo, the free application provides details such as floor plans, special promotions and short video clips of fairs and exhibitions that are due to take place in Malaysia.

K Kaarthik, managing

director of Instant Tradeshows & Exhibitions, said the application was developed with the intention of informing the public about upcoming events.

Kaarthik is in talks with show organisers in the ASEAN region and India to have their conferences listed on MyExpo.



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Exterior of Sheraton Macao Hotel

Sheraton Macao Hotel, Cotai Central, Asia's premier destination for world-class meetings, incentives, conferences and events has launched in grand style! Reported globally by news and hospitality media, the hotel opened amid grand fanfare this past September with 1,829 rooms and suites in the majestic Sky Tower. Another 2,067 rooms will be available in the Earth Tower in the first quarter of 2013.

Macau's newest and largest hotel

As Macau's newest and largest hotel, Sheraton Macao Hotel is the epitome of style and convenience. Located within the buzzing resort of Sands Cotai Central, right in the heart of the glittering Cotai Strip, Sheraton Macao Hotel is perfectly positioned amidst Macau's most exciting attractions and amenities. Its warm and welcoming guestrooms and suites are luxuriously appointed

and its vast array of meetings and event facilities are top-notch in Asia Pacific. As Starwood Hotels & Resorts' largest hotel globally, Sheraton Macao Hotel is truly a shining star and a much-anticipated addition to Macau's burgeoning MICE market.

Since opening in September, Sheraton Macao Hotel has already hosted a number of exciting events.

Opening ceremony dazzled at Jaya pool deck

The hotel's Grand Opening events showcased its diverse MICE facilities and capabilities. The Opening Ceremony was held alfresco-style on the Jaya pool deck. This dazzling outdoor space, one of the hotel's three pool areas, was creatively utilized with themed elements incorporated into the pools



"Silver Light" theme outdoor set up at the Jaya Pool



"Silver Light" stilt walkers

– showcasing the talent of the hotel's innovative events team.

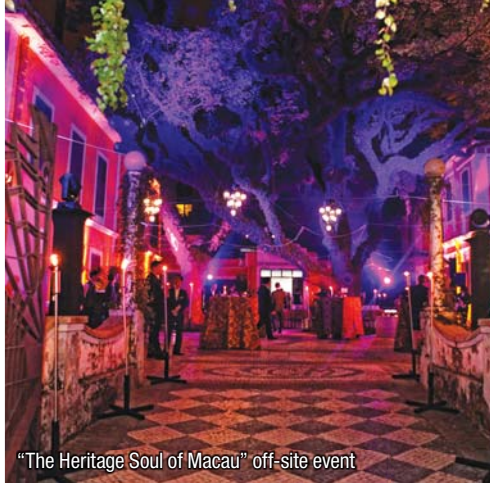
Gala Dinner at the majestic Kashgar Grand Ballroom

The Grand Opening Gala Dinner, held in the pillar-less Kashgar Grand Ballroom, welcomed 1,500 guests who were wowed with exemplary cuisine and entertainment. The Kashgar Grand Ballroom, 6 junior ballrooms and 6 smaller meeting rooms span a total of 152,050 square feet of meeting space with the capacity to host over 5,000 delegates. This fully versatile space can also be converted into 113 breakout rooms or smaller meeting rooms for more intimate events. A total of 166 individual meeting rooms are available at Sheraton Macao Hotel and within the Sands Cotai Central making this one of the largest convention centers anywhere in Asia.

Starwood MICE Advisory Board was also treated to a tailored series of events during their 3-day meeting program at Sheraton Macao Hotel. Held under the stars at the Jaya pool, 50 attendees enjoyed an exclusively designed "Silver Light" themed welcome cocktail, where costumed stilt walkers, saxophonists and other entertainers created a magical atmosphere. This unique and sparkling theme is scalable to up to 1,000 guests poolside and can also be reproduced in any of the hotel ballrooms.

"The Heritage Soul of Macau" Dinner

A highlight of Starwood MICE Advisory Board program was a special "The Heritage Soul of Macau" dinner, held off-site in Albergue, a distinguished and picturesque heritage building in Macau. Sheraton Macao Hotel's culinary and banquet team set up a kitchen and dining space for the 50 delegates, who were served a four-course sit-down dinner of Portuguese delights, whilst being entertained by Portuguese folk dancing, a Portuguese fado guitarist, fado singers and four vocal artists who charmed dinner guests with a series of arias on the history of Macau. The evening further demonstrated the events



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team's ability to produce imaginative and bespoke occasions to impress any kind of audience.

"Experience Macau" program designed for Asia Pacific PCOs

To further display Sheraton Macao Hotel's creative prowess, an innovative familiarization program was arranged for over 40 Professional Conference Organizers in Asia Pacific. Alongside a Gala Dinner held in the Kashgar Grand Ballroom, the Hotel collaborated with local partners to showcase a series of "Experience Macau" off-site team building events to highlight the cross-cultural heritage, diverse selection of outdoor activities and unique experiences that Macau has to offer.

400 media and guests transported around hotel's dining venues in "Dine Around Experience" event

As part of the opening

celebrations, a "Dine Around Experience" event saw 400 guests being transported between the tropical oasis-inspired Palms lobby lounge and the hotel's three signature restaurants – Italian "mama" style cuisine at Bene, five-star hotpot dining at Xin and the freshest international flavors at Feast – to sample various dinner courses, accompanied by culturally relevant entertainment performed at each venue.

With an additional 2,067 rooms opening in the first quarter of 2013, the hotel's ability to welcome more groups and events of all sizes will be extended even further. This, coupled with its professional events team's tailor-made solutions to ensure every event – from gala dinners and international conferences to weddings and intimate meetings – is handled with care and exclusivity, will seal Sheraton Macao Hotel's position as the ideal MICE destination in Asia.

What a ride, 2012!

MICE players in Asia and beyond recollect their adventures as the year draws to a close



A memorable showcase

Familiarisation trips are essential for MICE buyers, as they offer a real taste of what the destination and property can offer. **Brian Higgs** hears what makes a programme successful



My most memorable familiarisation trip in 2012 was one that took me to the Dominican Republic and El Salvador. The itinerary was very productive and useful, and I got to see a lot of hotels and attractions. I even managed to sign a few contracts with local sellers.

Kinga Zalewska, project manager, Key Solution Poland

The best familiarisation trip for me in 2012 was to South Korea. The trip was educational, and I learned a lot about the destination in terms of hotels (supply) and quality, pricing, and how to travel from one city to another. However, what South Korea needs is more support from the NTO to market the destination. Canadians need to know what there is to see before they will consider heading there.



Vivek Khanna, president, Tourcan Vacations, Canada



My favourite in 2012 was a tour inspection of Bali for a management meeting, during which I experienced wonderful cooperation between Conrad Bali and Smailing Tours. I normally prefer to deal directly with suppliers, so I booked separately with the hotel and tour operator. The tour inspection went very smoothly in terms of coordination. Even with changes in the programme, they (Conrad Bali and Smailing Tours) were already aware without me having to brief them individually.

Sabine Elisabeth Giza, managing director, In Search for Leaders, Germany

The most memorable familiarisation trip for me in 2012 was to Bhutan. It was a very good experience. I didn't have much idea about Bhutan before, but now I know that it is only a one-hour flight away, clean and well promoted, and there is no pollution or traffic jams. I also made many friends with local sellers.

Taufiq Rahman, chief executive, Journey Plus, Bangladesh



My favourite for the year was a familiarisation trip to Chiang MAI and Chiang Rai in Thailand, which opened my eyes to the possibility of organising combination tours to these two destinations. Thailand is not a new destination for Indonesian (incentive groups), but they usually only visit Bangkok and Pattaya. I discovered that in Chiang Mai there are a lot of things to do and see, such as shopping and visiting markets, and that it is not only suitable for honeymooners. I also found Chiang Rai relaxing – perfect for a one-night stopover.

Cicilia Anwar, manager, tour & incentive department, Global Tour-Ayowisata, Indonesia

YEAR-END SPECIAL

Red hot sellers

MICE buyers let *TTGmice* in on the destinations that are hot favourites in 2012, and point out which cities must do better in 2013 to remain competitive and attractive in their books

Turkey was especially hot in 2012, and it was a trend that we had expected. The destination sold really well in 2011, hence we were expecting business to pick up in 2012 – and it did.

We had more than 50 per cent growth in incentive business (to Turkey). For Malaysians, Turkey is multicultural and caters to every race. When Muslims travel they worry about whether food is halal; if they don't have to worry it is a big load off their shoulders.

Rate wise, the destination is also very attractive. It costs RM6,000 (US\$1,970) for a nine-day/six- or seven-night package, all-inclusive. There are also more flight options with ramped-up frequencies by Qatar Airways, Emirates and Malaysia Airlines.

I hope that the Singapore Tourism Board will be able to offer more (in 2013). In terms of activities, the destination is endless, but a lot of Malaysian corporates are not considering Singapore because of the high rates.

Deryk Yap, senior sales manager-MICE, Parlo Tours, Malaysia

Bangkok was especially hot for us in 2012 in terms of conventions and seminars. To consumers in Poland, Thailand is a very popular destination, and we have people going there for recreation, MICE and everything in between.

The CVBs and DMCs in Singapore and Hong Kong need to be more proactive with promotions in 2013. They need to create new programmes



Clockwise from top: Bodrum, Turkey; Gyeongbokgung Palace, Seoul, South Korea; The GRAND Palace, Bangkok, Thailand



and provide new ideas, not the standard, run-of-the-mill itineraries.

Kinga Zalewska, project manager, Key Solution, Poland

Vietnam came up for us in 2012 because of rising (consumer) interest, the perception that it is value for money, and stronger destina-



tion promotions carried out by tour operators in Canada. We expect demand for Vietnam to continue to grow in 2013.

Vivek Khanna, president, Tourcan Vacations, Canada

Thailand was hot for us in 2012. Bangladeshis are fond of shopping, entertainment and nightlife, and Thailand has

everything as a destination. It is only a two-hour flight away and airfares offered by THAI Airways International, Bangkok Airways and Biman Bangladesh Airlines are reasonable. This wasn't expected because of the political turmoil and floods in 2011, which meant the destination wasn't so attractive. With increased stability



Hoi An,
Vietnam

comes more interest.

On the other hand, India needs more promotions, targeted especially at its neighbouring markets. So many meetings and business travelers from the region head to India, but accommodation is very expensive, especially in New Delhi. There needs to be more incentives and infrastructure.

Taufiq Rahman, chief executive, Journey Plus, Bangladesh

South Korea was popular for us in 2012. We experienced a 30 per cent year-on-year increase in business due to the *Hallyu* phenomenon (popularity of South Korean entertainment and culture), and increasing interest in K-pop and Korean dramas.

(It helps that) Korea Tourism Organization has been rolling out promotions since 2011, and rates for direct flights have been quite reasonable.

(On the other hand), Japan needs more promotions. It must provide more information about the other cities besides Tokyo. Indonesians only know about (Tokyo) Disneyland and Ginza, but they are keen to find out more about Japanese culture, traditional houses, hot springs and kimonos. Japan also needs something different to offer to MICE groups, especially incentives.

Cicilia Anwar, manager, tour & incentive department, Global Tour-Ayowisata, Indonesia

MICE steeplechases

Asian MICE sellers recount their most challenging event in the past year, and share the lessons that are acquired

In end-October, we hosted 400 pax for a five-day international conference by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. It was a large group with arrivals from all over the world, and every guest came with their own requests. There were also many last-minute changes, so I had to be on my toes all the time.

Through this event, I learned how to juggle (multiple) customer requests and to eventually meet their needs.

My goal is to satisfy all our clients and have them leave the hotel with positive memories.

Im Gun, manager, sales team, Lotte Hotel Seoul

* * *

I discovered that handling K-pop (bands and their entourage) is very difficult. Singers' management teams tend to

be very demanding, requesting for all rooms to be on the same floor and these rooms must be on the smoking floor too. Even when they smoked in non-smoking rooms, we had difficulty (forfeiting) room deposits. And we had to clean out their rooms after they checked out.

We learned how to handle requests from demanding clients, how to be flexible even though some practices are not in accordance to hotel policy, and most importantly, how to refuse an unreasonable request.

Boonsita Sinthuvanont, sales manager, Centara Grand & Bangkok Convention Centre at CentralWorld

* * *

One of the most challenging events I had in 2012 was a three-day conference and

gala dinner for Blackberry maker Research in Motion. The delegates were staying in several five-star hotels, and it was difficult to coordinate transport to the venue. The event was also demanding food-wise and in terms of logistics.

In the future, we will persuade clients to hire a DMC, events company or PCO to handle their ground arrangements. There are just too many things to handle. If we have to manage logistics, we may end up not being able to concentrate solely on the event.

Simon Chow, assistant director of sales, Macau Tower Convention & Entertainment Centre

* * *

Our toughest in 2012 was a visit by the Malaysian prime minister, together with a 120-pax business delegation from the country, to foster business ties with Cambodian businessmen. Even though the event was only three nights, we had to prepare up to 12 days in advance for their arrival. There were issues regarding safety, room requirements and airport transfer.

The event taught me how to handle safety and security for a high-level delegation, and how to cater for additional requirements such as arranging private jets, which we had never done before.

Susie Ibrahim, head, business development, MICE & business travel, NagaWorld Hotel & Entertainment Complex, Cambodia



Demanding K-pop idols and their entourage are a challenge to Centara Grand & Bangkok Convention Centre at CentralWorld (pictured here)

YEAR-END SPECIAL



The Asian Development Bank had their annual summit in Manila, and there were 2,500 pax including 900 VIPs in attendance. There were a lot of central bank governors and the Philippine president also spoke at the gala dinner.

With such a high-profile guest list, we had to ensure that security was beefed up.

The most challenging aspect was the VIP dinner, where we had to take care of food requirements, security and transport arrangements from different hotels.

We discovered that it is possible to hold large-scale, high-level events in the Philippines.

Charry B Casabar, director of sales, SMX Convention Center, the Philippines



We were the groundhandler of InDreams, one of the leading incentive houses in Poland. We brought a 100-pax Polish



incentive into the jungle in Sungai Kampar, a non-touristic and remote region in Perak, about three hours' drive from Kuala Lumpur. They wanted a very (rustic) experience, with elements such as trekking and survival cooking.

There was only basic lodging available, and bringing 100 Polish into the jungle was not easy, especially because the nearby town was very small. It was difficult to obtain alcohol and the necessary support and logistics. Fortunately, it was only for one night.

We learned that everything is possible when it comes to incentives. We can deliver what clients want. It just requires a lot of preparation, and we have to be well versed with their expectations.

Noor M Ismail, director, business development, Asian Overland Services Tours & Travel, Malaysia



We had a three-night incentive from India, attended by 130 top dealers of a garment

Above: The Asian Development Bank's annual summit and gala dinner put SMX Convention Center's security capabilities to the test

Left: Asia Overland Services makes a jungle conducive for an incentive

company. Participants arrived at different timings, and in groups of three to four pax each day. We had to make sure the travellers had all the necessary entry permits.

Another challenge emerged when we had to source for restaurants, as Indian eateries in the Philippines do not have very large capacities. We had to be creative in coming up with solutions to overcome the space constraints.

We learned of the need to be more flexible in making arrangements. You can't just stick to one idea. You need to prepare for many contingencies, so that you can still achieve the end-objectives despite constraints.

Kristine L Shroff, marketing director, Shroff International Travel Care, the Philippines

Hopes for the new year

CVB chiefs reveal their wishes for their destinations in 2013



"I wish for more corporate and incentive groups from the region and beyond. We are anticipating the recovery of the long-haul market next year."

Zulkefli Sharif, CEO, Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau

"We expect another busy year ahead. Our new Kai Tak Cruise Terminal, situated at the former runway of the old Kai Tak airport, will open in mid-2013. With its completion, Kai Tak will once again become a gateway to welcome visitors from around the world. I just cannot wait to see its opening and better still, take a cruise vacation and set off from Kai Tak – this time by sea."

Anthony Lau, executive director, Hong Kong Tourism Board

"I have recently submitted a vision statement to the Ministry of Tourism, recommending how to grow the business potential of the MICE industry and enhance the competitiveness of our venues in bidding for international events. I wish that my recommendations are accepted and moulded into policy."

Chander Mansharamani, vice-chairman, India Convention Promotion Bureau



"I wish to be able to have a comprehensive national strategy to promote the meeting industry and make Indonesia a renowned MICE destination."

Rizki Handayani, director of MICE and special interest marketing, Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, Indonesia



"I wish for another year of successful partnerships and fruitful collaborations, and look forward to working closely with our industry partners. With our vibrant MICE ecosystem and dedicated industry partners, we are optimistic that we will continue to attract flagship MICE events of international standing that reinforce Singapore's status as a leading MICE city."

Neeta Lachmandas, assistant chief executive, Singapore Tourism Board



Raini Hamdi
Senior editor

BEST Speed-dating! One was at the World Gourmet Summit in Singapore between journalists and featured chefs, the other at the Hotel Investment Conference Asia-Pacific in Hong Kong, where delegates introduced themselves briefly to one another before the conference started. The first yielded a strong feature on F&B trends, the second yielded lots of new contacts.

WORST A late-night function we organised, where the hotel had a new space which could be used for events but neither the general manager nor the vice president of sales and marketing bothered to talk much about the venue (or talk much to us actually!) when I asked about the space. What a wasted opportunity for them.



Karen Yue
Group editor

BEST I had such fun researching on and writing *A brighter shade of green* cover story for the July issue. I was so proud of the region's green convention centres, but was also disappointed that not many Asian buyers pay particular attention to a venue's sustainable hardware and practices when choosing a site.

WORST I found Singapore's national flag flown upside down at the entrance of the India Expo Centre & Mart in Greater Noida, where TTG Asia Media's first IT&CM India tradeshow was held. If a venue wants to draw global events, even the tiniest detail must matter.



It's a wrap!

The *TTGmice* team spills the beans on the year's highs and lows

YEAR-END SPECIAL



Gracia Chiang
Deputy group editor

BEST Attending the inaugural IT&CM India, where I learned first-hand about the phenomenal rise of the domestic market for meetings and conferences, the emerging business from Russia and got to rub shoulders with major Indian MICE players.

WORST In the same vein, the traffic in New Delhi was horrendous! If India is to be a serious MICE contender, it certainly can do with better point-to-point connectivity, as time wastage is possibly one of the top bugbears of business travellers.



Xinyi Liang-Pholsena
Sub editor

BEST Having made several trips to Phuket over the past few years as a leisure traveller, it was interesting to find out how much MICE appeal – and untapped potential – the destination possesses when I reported on the island's developments.

WORST Not any I can think of, although it will be great if CVBs in the region will be more forthcoming with their plans and statistics.



Mimi Hudoyo
Editor, Indonesia

BEST Panorama Management Conference in Jogjakarta. It offered me a peek into the group's business strategy, and I had such a fun experience throughout four days of well-planned and executed team-building activities and theme dinners.

WORST A hotel opening that included an overnight stay for the media. We were given a mask to cover our face because work was still being done. The hotel was also hardly three-star, as it so claimed.



S Puvaneswary
Editor, Malaysia/Brunei

BEST Seoul Convention Bureau organised the best-ever familiarisation trip. The event was so well organised. All the venues we visited were MICE-related and complete press kits with pictures were prepared. The bureau also followed up promptly after the event.

WORST A very irresponsible representative of a foreign NTO who did not fulfil his promises to reply. Countless email reminders were met with silence. When I finally got him on the phone, he plied me with more excuses.



Linda Haden
Senior reporter

BEST Interviewing the inspirational Ramon Jimenez, the Tourism Secretary of the Philippines.

WORST Trying to talk to Chinese buyers at IT&CM China with my rudimentary Mandarin.



Shekhar Niyogi
Chief correspondent, India

BEST Kerala Travel Mart in Cochin in September takes the cake for being the best organised conference. The event's layout had distinctly different spaces and timings didn't clash.

WORST SATTE in New Delhi in January was disastrous in terms of delegate registration. The system caused an unmanageable crowd even on B2B days, and the lack of security led to my camera being picked from my jacket pocket!

Prudence Lui
Correspondent, Hong Kong

BEST Grand Hyatt Macau's 3rd Anniversary Ball, which was themed after Shanghai in the 1930s. It delivered a real touch of old Shanghai, with costume, entertainment and decoration traced from the past.

WORST A one-on-one interview with an NTO chief during a roadshow came to an abrupt end after only a few minutes because the consul general had arrived. I was told it was protocol and the NTO chief must drop everything on hand to greet the official.

Rosa Ocampo
Correspondent, The Philippines

BEST Getting information from Art Boncato, The Philippines' Department of Tourism's (DoT) regional director Davao region, was a breeze. He always replies quickly to emailed questions, thoughtfully including the phone numbers and email addresses of other industry sources even without being asked.

WORST Getting information from DoT officers in Manila who don't even have the common courtesy to acknowledge receipt of emailed questions.

Marianne Carandang
Correspondent, The Philippines

BEST A MICE familiarisation trip to Davao, which featured French dining at Claude's Le Cafe de Ville, wine and cheese tasting at Malagos Resort, and a visit to the newly refurbished Malipano Villas at Pearl Farm Beach Resort on Samal Island.

WORST None, but I wish local MICE associations and groups would band more strongly together to win bigger international events.

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Tammy Piatti of OPTIMUM Thailand

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Michal Barszap, President/CEO of ITS Tours, Meetings & Incentives, USA

"Am **very satisfied with the numerous new contacts** I made at the event as well as new ideas and knowledge on destinations gained."

Agnieszka Kaminska, Project Manager of Impuls Travel, Poland

"I've attended a lot of industry events and **this is the best** among them."

Gabe Dakwa, Travel Manager of Agilent Technologies, USA

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Leena Andrews, APAC Travel Manager of Juniper, India

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Crown Plaza Phuket Panwa Beach Resort enjoys 200m of private beach (pictured here)

An evergreen dream

A constant crop of new resorts and air links is keeping Phuket's MICE allure shining, but its infrastructure needs to play catch-up. By **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

A perennial favourite on the Asian MICE scene, Phuket continues to see a healthy line-up of MICE events, driven by the perpetual expansion of its hospitality sector and F&B attractions suitable for use by event and incentive planners.

According to C9 Hotelworks, a total of 5,080 rooms are expected to enter Phuket by 2015, representing an increase equivalent to 11 per cent of the existing inventory. Notable additions in 1H2012 include the 228-key Crown Plaza Phuket Panwa Beach Resort and the 303-key Novotel Phuket Vintage Park Resort, while the 262-room Pullman Phuket Arcadia Naithon Beach Resort and the 250-room All Seasons Phuket Patong Beach are some of the properties expected to open next year.

TCEB's senior manager of meeting industry department, Puripan Bunnag, estimated that Phuket received about 15 per cent of all meetings and incentives in Thailand. Phuket was named the

bureau's first 'MICE City', which saw the destination being promoted through the *7 Wonders of the Andaman* campaign earlier this year to target the Oceania market.

Airports of Thailand commenced the 5.7 billion baht (US\$185.7 million) expansion of the congested Phuket International Airport in September 2012. Due to be completed by April 2015, the airport will see its annual handling capacity ramped up from 6.5 million to 12.5 million passengers, and the addition of a new international terminal.

At the same time, an increase in air links and frequencies are additional factors fuelling MICE growth for Phuket. Besides upcoming links to Dubai and London by Emirates and Thomson Airways respectively, on the domestic front, THAI Smile has launched daily Bangkok-Phuket flights on 168-seat Airbus A320-200 aircraft since October 1, 2012.

Li Ann Loo, Westin Siray Bay director of sales, said: "With more (flights into Phuket) expected to come online

in 2013, (the destination will have) a greater potential internationally.

"This year our MICE bookings have grown by more than 25 per cent, particularly for the meeting segment. We have definitely seen a significant increase from Russia and China which are among the top growth markets, with a combined share of 34 per cent in 1H2012 as compared to 25 per cent for the same period in 2011."

Jeroen Meijer, director of business development of Hilton Phuket Arcadia Resort & Spa, said: "We have seen double-digit growth this year compared to 2011. The impact of several direct flights into Phuket, the strong Australian dollar and the increase in Chinese visitors to the island has driven this growth.

"For 2013, we are seeing continued growth, predominantly from the South-east Asian, Chinese and Australian markets, and we have already secured several events more than one year out. It's been a while since we last saw this in the marketplace, with a few excep-

tions on the side. Medium-sized events are currently growing in demand.”

Besides the rosy outlook on Phuket’s MICE future, industry members also told *TTGmice* that the destination was fast gaining popularity among Chinese MICE groups.

JW Marriott Phuket Resort & Spa, where MICE comprises 25 per cent of the resort’s business, has observed stronger MICE demand over the past few years and regional markets, especially China, have taken over traditional European sources, according to Kewalin Sukumjittanon, spokesperson of the five-star property.

Kinkid Mok, MICE project director of Bangkok-based CCT Group, which specialises in the Chinese MICE market, said: “Our Chinese bookings for Phuket have grown by 30 per cent year-on-year. First-time MICE visitors from China tend to opt for Bangkok or Pattaya, while repeat groups often opt for Phuket.”

CCT Group will handle a 200-pax

incentive group from China’s F&B industry. The group will reside at Mövenpick properties in Phuket when it arrives in December. Meanwhile, the company is bidding for various groups for 1Q2013.

However, several local MICE players feel that Phuket is a better fit for small- to medium-sized groups due to limited venues that can accommodate big groups or large-scale meetings.

Said Max Jantasuan, director of Asia World Destination Management which had won a 1,200-pax incentive group from the UK and Eastern Europe to Phuket for May 2013: “Phuket benefits from its location. The emergence of new luxury resorts and villas offers a good selection for clients looking for upscale accommodation.

“However, Phuket is a challenge for MICE clients who require more rooms, because most of the new luxury properties in the destination have a smaller room inventory.”

The lack of large meeting spaces is

another stumbling block for Phuket.

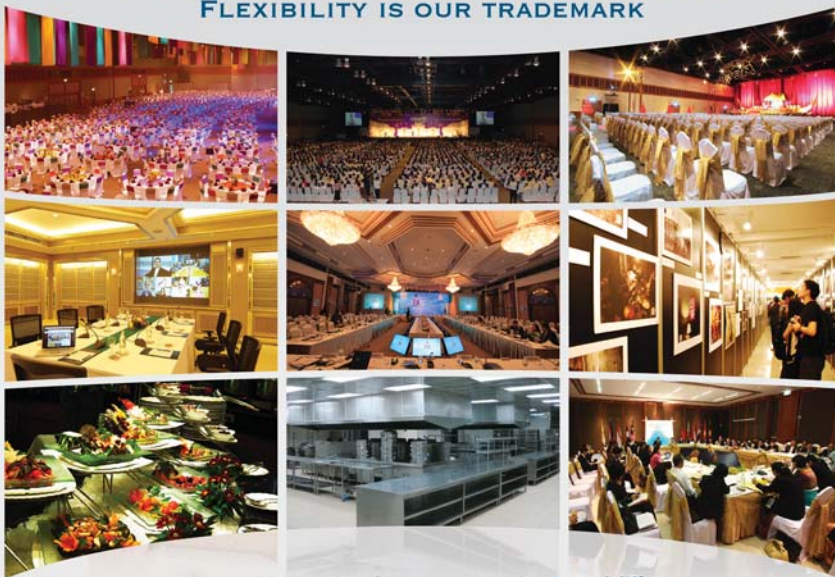
“Sometimes potential groups would turn to Bangkok or even rival cities such as Singapore, Macau and Hainan simply because Phuket does not have a large-enough meeting facility to accommodate huge groups,” said CCT Group’s Mok.

While Phuket has a stock of unique event venues, these spaces are of little consequence when it comes to attracting Chinese MICE groups. He explained: “(These clients) still prefer five-star international hotel brands and traditional venue set-up with round tables, a stage and plenty of room to mingle in.”

Max said: “Once Phuket gets a convention centre, there will no longer be low seasons for (the destination).”

Unfortunately, no progress has been made in this direction despite repeated calls and studies purporting a large-scale meeting venue. The latest effort to construct a 2.6 billion baht international convention centre was cancelled in early-October 2012. ■

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Laguna Phuket builds for the future

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena



Laguna Phuket's sprawling grounds offer a one-stop destination for corporate events

Having established a reputation for being a one-stop tourism destination, thanks to its engaging mix of resorts, golf course and meeting venues, as well as a popular sports destination, the 40.5-hectare Laguna Phuket on the island's north-western coast is set to sharpen its product offering with a new design concept.

Unveiling the expansion plans during its 25th anniversary celebration in August, Ho Kwon Ping, CEO of Laguna Resorts & Hotels, said: "As our international source markets and the demands of holidaymakers and residents inevitably change, we must anticipate these shifts and adjust our offerings to remain relevant, maintain our focus and consolidate our industry-leading position."

Earmarked for development is a parcel of land overlooking the west-facing beachfront lagoons – between Dusit Thani Laguna Phuket and the upcoming Outrigger Laguna Phuket Resort

– which will comprise a 407-key hotel, luxury condominiums, a themed water park and space for up to 1,000 shops and restaurants.

Blending "glamour and glitz", the design concept was expected to "appeal to the Asian market", said Debbie Dionysius, assistant vice president-destination marketing.

Said Dionysius: "Laguna expects to attract renewed interest from MICE groups when the renovated Outrigger Phuket Beach Resort opens in April 2013. This property, together with the neighbouring Angsana Laguna Phuket and Dusit Thani Laguna Phuket, are Laguna's strongest MICE hotels and have the ability to combine their room inventories and facilities to attract large multi-hotel groups.

"Add to this, the sheer beauty and tranquility of Laguna's manicured environment, our free inter-resort transportation, Quest – our on-site teambuilding

facility, our own Laguna Tours operation, our on-site 18-hole golf course and two 1,000m² convention marquees, Laguna is uniquely positioned to satisfy the requirements of MICE groups looking for a high-quality, convenient and exotic location."

After acquiring the 254-key Laguna Beach Resort, Hawaii-based Outrigger Hotels and Resorts rebranded the property as Outrigger Phuket Beach Resort and set it up for major refurbishments. Facilities will include a spa, tennis courts, meeting and conference rooms, extensive water features and slides, a swimming pool, a gym and a kids' club.

Meanwhile, the 409-room Angsana Laguna Phuket – formerly Sheraton Grande Laguna Phuket – also put forth brand new hardware since December 2011, following a US\$30 million facelift. It upped the game on the events arena by launching Xana in June 2012. Helmed by Singapore-based nightlife operator Attica Group, the all-day beach club can accommodate up to 1,000 guests, with highlights such as a 35m swim-up pool bar, four cabanas with a seating capacity of 14 pax each and a rooftop deck that can be booked for private parties and VIPs.

In April and May 2012, Laguna Phuket welcomed its biggest-ever corporate gathering when it hosted the Amway China leadership seminar, which involved 15,000 delegates in a month-long programme of activities. Looking forward, the integrated resort will roll out the welcome mat for a 250-pax Du Pont group from Singapore from February 18-21, a 3,000-pax Nuskin group from April 21-25 and a 1,200-pax Herbalife group from the US from May 14-19. ■

Ideas

Phuket Heritage by Exotissimo

Explore the unique heritage of Phuket with a guided tour of the island. Unlock the history behind the Chinese, Portuguese and Asian-influenced architecture and religion.

Start downtown, where a wide array of exotic tropical fruits are available in the fruit market. Then, explore the oldest Chinese shrine and uniqueness of the Sino-Portuguese architecture that are standing testimonies to the influence of the Chinese

migrants during the tin mining days of the 19th century.

After the walk, head to the summit of Rang Hill where delegates will get to savour a refreshing cocktail and snack while taking in the sweeping panoramic views of Phuket town.

Cap off the day with a delightful local dinner at the Natural Restaurant, which charms with excellent food and service amid an innovative décor.

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CHECKING IN

JW Marriott Phuket Resort & Spa

Five-star, 252 rooms and 13 suites

Tel: +66 7633 8000

Email: jwmarriott.phuket@marriotthotels.comWebsite: <http://jwmarriottphuketresort.com>

The JW Marriott Phuket Resort & Spa is located on a secluded 11-hectare plot with direct access to the virgin, fawn-colored sands of Mai Khao, a 17km beach within Sirinath Marine National Park.

Only 20 minutes away from Phuket International Airport, the resort has few neighbours, such as the Anantara Phuket Villas and a small high-end shopping strip called Turtle Village. Save for the island tours, guests will be tempted to stay in because of the many spa and wellness treatments, beach and water-based activities and F&B options.

Scheduled shuttles are available to bus-tling Patong Beach and Phuket town.

Rooms

My ground floor deluxe room, spacious at 47m², is charmingly designed with an indoor elevated sala where one can lounge around or have a massage. A private terrace in the back leads out towards the beach. All rooms have mosquito repellent pads, which are helpful in the evening.

Twelve oceanfront pool suites are located adjacent to the North and South pools, each measuring 98m². Eight of these can be converted into two-bedroom suites, with huge terraces perfect for private dining.

Three villas serve as oceanfront two-bedroom suites. Of these, the 340m² Royal Suite has an extra 305m² of space for an 18m pool, an outdoor whirlpool and a sun deck.

Meeting facilities

The resort's meeting facilities are conveniently located close to the lobby, covering an area of 1,450m². Spacious foyers with plenty

of natural lighting front the 600m² ballroom, which was renovated in January 2012 and is said to be the largest event space in the Mai Khao beach area. It can be arranged in any orientation and is divisible into five smaller venues - one main area of 240m² and four breakout spaces.

Four other function rooms can accommodate up to fifty people, classroom-style.

Meanwhile, the Kamala boardroom faces a lotus pond and is bathed in peaceful sounds of rushing water.

High-powered teambuilding activities led by an in-house operator can be arranged around the resort's three beachfront pool areas, the outdoor Lotus Pavilion, and on the beach itself. Programmes using trapezes and trampolines are provided. A popular option is based on the Survivor reality show, taking participants to nearby islands via speedboat, where they will solve different challenges. Corporate groups are also invited to execute environmental programmes that benefit Phuket and sea turtles, a locally protected species.

For something less gruelling, guests can sign up for culinary classes at the Ginja Cook Cooking School or yoga breakfasts - yoga sessions followed by breakfast at the Andaman Grill.

The hotel can help to arrange island tours which come with half- or full-day charters of luxury yachts, and options for F&B, snorkelling equipment, photo documentation and onboard massage therapists.

F&B

There are six restaurants and four bars spread across the resort and pool areas.

Marriott Cafe offers guests a healthy start to their day with a plethora of fresh juices and "body boost" tonics at the breakfast buffet.

Other dining establishments that will please gourmands include Siam Deli, Cucina, Andaman Grill, Kabuki - Japanese Cuisine Theatre, and Ginja Taste.

At dusk, converge at the Sala Sawasdee Lobby Bar to witness a dramatic fire lighting ceremony at the Reflection Pond, followed by tapas and jazz music later in the evening. One can continue the evening at Out of the Blue Drink bar, which overlooks the beach.

Private barbecues within the oceanfront suites can be arranged.

Fact file

Maximum pax for meetings
260

Maximum pax for banquets
400

Recent events handled
An incentive gathering for BMW;
A four-day Sunseekers dealers' conference for 240



VERDICT

An ideal venue for events with memorable leisure activities.

Marianne Carandang

NEED TO KNOW

Swissotel lands on Phuket

Phuket welcomed its first Swissôtel property when Swissôtel Hotels & Resorts took over the management of Courtyard by Marriott on Kamala Beach on April 2, 2012.

Rebranded Swissôtel Resort Phuket, the resort features two restaurants, a spa, a lagoon-style swimming pool and a fitness centre, as well as 180 one- to three-bedroom suites, each equipped with a separate living room and private balcony.

Event planners have plenty of function space to play with. There are eight versatile function rooms and a pre-function area, good for events with 10 to 150 delegates.



Luxurious retreats

Opening its doors in December 2012, the Avista Hideaway Resort and Spa will be an ideal venue for high-end corporate retreats or incentive groups.

Perched atop a hill with twin vistas of Patong and Karon beaches, the resort offers 150 rooms and suites, each measuring upwards of 55m², three pools, two restaurants, a fitness centre and free Wi-Fi throughout the hotel.

Besides a 91m² banquet room that can seat 60 pax in theatre style and 50 pax in round-table setting, casual meetings can also be organised at any of the six rooftop terraces or private beach club.

Other customised programmes include helicopter rides, private yacht charters and wellness sessions with an in-house doctor who specialises in ayurvedic treatments and yoga.

Visit www.avistahotelsandresorts.com for more information.

Sail away in a fancy catamaran

Blu Anda is a Phuket-based boutique tour company offering custom excursions on luxurious catamarans to the region's iconic seascapes such as Phang Nga Bay, Phi Phi Islands, Similan Islands and Hong Island.

Its fleet comprises two 12m catamarans that seat 30 guests each and two larger 17m vessels for up to 40 people each.

Ideal for corporate retreats, charters to Phi Phi Island and Phang Nga Bay for up to 30 pax are available between December 2012 and February 2013 at a promotional rate of 180,000 baht. Departing from Ao Por Marina, all packages are inclusive of round-trip hotel transfers, English-speaking guides, breakfast and lunch, snorkeling equipment and national park admission fees.

For more information, contact sales & marketing manager Pattiya Mengchuai at pattiya@bluanda.com or (66-8) 1797-3323.



Run off and join the circus

Founded in August 2011 by trained circus performers, Adam Lambert and Ben Martin, to spearhead circus development in Asia, Mid-Air Circus Arts (MACA) is Phuket's first fly trapeze and circus arts academy. Set up on the premises of the British International School in Phuket town, MACA offers participants a chance to safely pick up skills on flying trapeze, aerial acts, pole dancing and juggling, with equipment imported and rated according to international safety standards. Ideal for teambuilding, a two-hour package is priced at 1,450 baht per person for a minimum group of 10 people. Visit www.midaircircus.com for more information.



SETTING THE PERFECT STAGE FOR A MEMORABLE MEETING

Swissôtel Resort Phuket is the ideal address from which to explore Phuket's sun-kissed beaches, turquoise seas and the many recreational activities well suited for incentive experiences and executive retreats. The resort offers a choice of eight function rooms which can accommodate groups of up to 150 persons. Be it group retreats, high-powered meetings, offsite events, incentive trips, or gala dinners, you can depend on Swissôtel Resort Phuket to ensure every detail is well taken care of.

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Taipei gets a wake-up call – and takes it in great stride

Meet Taiwan



Taiwan plays catch-up

Bigger grants are dished out to woo international meetings and incentive groups, reports **Raini Hamdi**

Taiwan's capital city Taipei is bent on regaining its conventions ranking in Asia, which slipped to number four last year, from number two in 2010.

As a measure, it has raised the maximum subsidy to NT1 million (US\$32,500) per case this year, from NT500,000 previously, to motivate local associations further in bidding for conventions.

Beijing and Seoul overtook Taipei last year as the number two and number three convention city in Asia respectively, according to ICCA, which does the ranking based on the convention data submitted by the cities. Singapore was number one

for 10 years running.

Dayton Wang, chief, Department of information and Tourism, Taipei City Government, admitted Beijing and Seoul in particular were "very competitive" in their marketing, but a factor could also be that not all the meetings held in Taipei were submitted and captured in the ICCA data.

Last year saw 123 events receiving subsidies, bringing 150,000 delegates spending NT3 billion. This compared with 104 events, 134,000 delegates and NT2.7 billion spending in 2010.

Apart from raising the subsidy, Taipei City Government also marched into IMEX in Frankfurt for the first time this year in

a bid to lure European buyers to meet in the city. "We still stand a good chance of attracting European meetings despite the European debt crisis. Taipei is relatively cheap, and accessible, as there are flights all over the world," Wang said.

While Taipei takes its wake-up call in great stride, two other Taiwanese cities, Kaohsiung and Tainan – a city in southern Taiwan – entered ICCA rankings for the first time last year (see Need to Know section on the next page).

They were placed 23rd and 51st respectively in the Asia-Pacific and Middle East regions, according to the Taiwan MICE Advancement Program (Meet Taiwan).

All this is impetus for Taiwan's Bureau of Foreign Trade, under which Meet Taiwan operates, to launch numerous cash subsidies to assist meeting and exhibition organisers in bidding, promotion and implementation stages.

These subsidies range from US\$10,000 to US\$90,000, depending on the size of event.

Meet Taiwan was also out in force at IMEX Frankfurt in May, in a bid to woo more European association meetings.

On the incentive front, the Taiwan Tourism Bureau (TTB) has launched a new subsidy for 2012-2013 to increase incentive travel to Taiwan by offering grants, planning assistance, cultural performances and souvenirs.

The bureau is selling Taiwan's "soft power" such as art, cuisine, hospitality, advanced IT and bio-technology development and industrial innovation to incentive planners.

Overall, Taiwan had about six million visitors last year and is enjoying a boom from the mainland.

But, "too much of a good thing can be bad," said Sin Chen, project leader, Meet Taiwan, International Marketing and Promotion Project, referring to the China market boom, which he said brought with it new challenges. In particular is the need for Taiwan to promote high-quality travel to Chinese incentive groups – not "price-driven, five different places to tick off kind of itinerary", Chen said.

Efforts to diversify Taiwan's market mix are being undertaken by TTB, which appointed New Delhi-based Think Strawberries in January to raise awareness of Taiwan as a MICE and leisure destination.

Some 23,927 Indians visited Taiwan last year, with 1,163 heading there for leisure and the rest, business. The market grew 11 per cent in the last quarter of 2011. ■

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Ideas

See Taipei's past and present in a day



Norman Cho

National Palace Museum

After breakfast at the hotel, start the day's adventures with a visit to Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall in the centre of Taipei City.

Later, drive past the Presidential Office Building en route to Longshan Temple, a house of worship built during Emperor Qianlong's reign in the Qing Dynasty. The temple is loved for its exquisite architecture and incorporation of ancient poems into its interior décor.

Next stop: the National Palace Museum, home to nearly 700,000 pieces of antiques that date far back into China's 5,000-year-old history. But before exploring this facility, break for lunch at Sanxi-tang Teahouse. Located on the fourth floor of the museum, the restaurant is named after the study room of Emperor Qianlong and boasts a luxurious interior and reasonably-priced menu. On weekends, a live *guzheng* show is performed from 13.30 to 15.30.

After lunch, take time to feed the senses with the museum's extensive collection of historical artefacts.

Emergence from the museum by late afternoon and head for Shilin Night Market, where stalls selling local snacks, international foodstuff and a multitude of other products start to come alive from 16.00.

Leave your delegates to explore the sprawling night market and the rest of the city on their own.

For delegates who prefer a fancy dinner, point them in the direction of Taipei 101 Mall, which offers a good selection of quality restaurants as well as shops selling both international and local fashion labels. For those who want to experience more of Taipei's famous night market culture, Raohe Street Night Market and Tonghua Street Night Market come highly recommended.

NEED TO KNOW



Hsu Tse hui

Next stop in Taiwan: culturally-aesthetic Tainan

Consider a conference in Taipei, then head south to Tainan for a Taiwanese cultural tour. Tainan's effort to restore old buildings and preserve historical monuments in recent years has helped create a distinctive local cultural and artistic space in the city.

As a reward, it made it to the ICCA rankings for the first time last year (51st in Asia-Pacific and Middle East regions). At present, most conferences in Tainan are held by pharmaceutical companies, according to Meet Taiwan.

Let your meetings blossom

Taiwan has many beautiful Chinese gardens, most established in the Qing Dynasty. More recently, some of them have been developed into great venues for a variety of events.

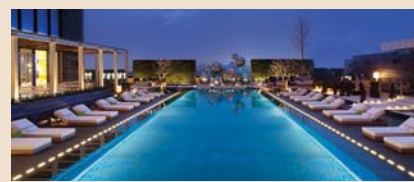
Check with the Taiwan Tourism Bureau or DMCs on how to have a memorable setting for meetings or incentive parties in one of these gardens.

Kaohsiung's new venue

When completed by end-2013, the Kaohsiung World Trade Exhibition and Convention Center, built by the Kaohsiung City Government, will have an exhibition space for 1,500 booths, a convention hall for 2,000 pax, two smaller convention halls for 800 pax each, and several meeting rooms for 20 to 40 pax.

The centre's wave-like design reflects Kaohsiung's maritime setting.

It will host the 2014 International Boat Show, which is expected to stimulate the development of the local yacht industry and enhance Kaohsiung's image as an international port city.



Winter wonderland at W Taipei

Reflecting the W brand's flamboyant flair, W Hotel Taipei will transform its WET outdoor pool into CHILL, a 2,000m² custom-shaped hybrid-ice rink for the year-end festive season. A series of packages have been introduced around this new attraction, which will welcome ice-skating enthusiasts from December 22 to January 20, 2013.

Available to corporate event planners on weekdays, from December 24 to January 18, 2013, the *Sunny Day Package* is priced at NT\$350,000 for 200 guests, while the *Starry Night Package* costs NT\$350,000 for 80 guests. *Sunny Day Package* includes four hours' use of the rink and bar, decorations, snacks and beverages, and 30 skates. The other package offers four hours' use of the ice rink and bar, DJ, decorations, buffet dinner and beverages, and 30 skates.



Marine Ecology Research Centre helps event delegates contribute to marine conservation

MERC

drive, rafting and mountain biking in Kiulu District, incentive participants will also visit a local farming community and make a cash donation to purchase uniforms, shoes and school bags for a class of 40 pupils in a local school.

Trek Finder Tours also offers a *Use and Donate Your Bicycle* programme, in which clients will purchase a mountain bike to use on any of its cycling tours and then donate the two-wheelers to needy village children.

Some hotels in Sabah are also picking up strong corporate interest in CSR activities. The Marine Ecology Research Centre (MERC), which is attached to Gayana Eco Resort and next to Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park, invites resort guests to be involved in the centre's giant clam propagation efforts. MERC lays claims to being the only centre in Malaysia that is actively propagating all the seven species of giant clams found in Malaysian waters.

Tomas Kastberg Andersen, who is general manager of both Gayana Eco Resort and Bunga Raya Island Resort & Spa, said: "We're getting more enquiries on CSR programmes and on how local agents in Sabah and non-governmental organisations can contribute to the saving of the giant clams. On request, DMCs can incorporate a day package to MERC and sign delegates up for the *A day as a marine biologist* programme. It will give them a glimpse of the work conducted by marine biologists and the research that goes into producing giant clams and restoring the coral reef. For a fee, participants can also adopt a coral and receive updates on the progress of their adopted coral every quarter."

Over at Shangri-La's Tanjung Aru Resort & Spa, Kota Kinabalu, CSR programmes are shaped around the resort's five adopted schools. The resort's director of sales and marketing, Suzaini Ghani, said: "We can help MICE organisers arrange school visits, interaction with students, or activities that will improve the school facilities. Our programmes are well-received, as these are ongoing initiatives that can be easily arranged."

Sutera Harbour Group director of sales & marketing, Nicolas Reschke, said: "Whether to justify the expenses or simply to do a good deed, CSR has become an important part of modern MICE business."

"We often get requests from meeting and incentive delegates to arrange for visits to the four children's homes we have adopted in Kudat. Visitors usually donate toys and food, and spend time with the children." ■

To Sabah with love

Local MICE sellers are luring corporate groups with a plethora of CSR programmes, writes **S Puvaneswary**

Demand for corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes started to emerge in Sabah following the economic crisis in 2008, and local MICE operators responded with programmes to woo international companies to the Malaysian state.

Today, the destination is leveraging its expertise in CSR programmes to draw MICE arrivals.

Borneo Passages, a Sabah-based DMC, develops customised CSR programmes for corporate clients. According to its managing director, Madeline I Regis, there is increasing demand for such programmes from international companies based in Malaysia, South-east Asia and the UK. She told *TTGmice*: "Most requests have been for donation drives, by way of funds or food items such as milk, that benefit the orphaned orang-utans residing at the Sepilok Orang Utan Rehabilitation Centre, which also boasts the world's largest successful orang-utan rehabilitation programme. In turn, the centre will present a certificate of appreciation to every participant and take them on a special tour of its facilities."

Destination Asia destination services manager, Anna Marie Chai, said: "Sabah

is a value for money destination, while CSR is an additional selling point that can entice buyers if the programme offered is able to match the client's pledge."

Popular programmes are community- and nature-related, but Chai also observed that "many companies look to fund programmes that are related to their work. A pharmaceutical company may want to do a half-day health programme in a village, working alongside the local medical team, while a home furnishing firm may want to assemble some furniture and donate them to a remote village".

Trek Finder Tours in Sabah is keeping its CSR options fresh for clients. It launched a new programme in 2012 in response to a growing demand for meaningful community-based projects. It helps a local primary school in Kiulu District through book donations, and its students through donations of stationery, school shoes and uniforms.

Trek Finder Tours general manager, Auther J Datuk Kimon, said he recently secured an incentive programme for 20 delegates from a pharmaceutical company in Holland to visit Sabah in March 2013 – a piece of business that was won through Trek Finder Tours' CSR pitch. Besides experiencing nature through a four-wheel

A cultural adventure

By S Puvaneswary



A slice of tribal life at Mari Mari Cultural Village

Traverse Tours

On a dark and deserted road, a bus carrying 20 top achievers from a neighbouring country was ambushed. Fierce looking tribespeople leapt into the bus, evoking screams of terror from the passengers, who feared for their heads – Sabah was once the land of head-hunters after all!

Fortunately for these incentive participants, the invasion was a staged one, created to ensure an unforgettable opening to a tour and dining event at Mari-Mari Cultural Village in Kionsom, Inanam, about 30 minutes' drive from Kota Kinabalu city centre.

Mari Mari Cultural Village is a fairly new product in Sabah, having opened in December 2008. With a remote forest setting, it gives visitors a peak into the lifestyles of the five main tribes in Sabah – the Bajau, Lundayeh, Murut, Rungus and Dusun – in the olden days.

A typical visit to the village begins with a briefing at the entrance. Participants are warned against littering, smoking and the plucking of leaves, as the villagers still believe in spirits that dwell in the natural surroundings.

A tour guide will then lead the group to tribal longhouses where there are live demonstrations of the traditional way of life. Participants can see how blowpipes were made, fires were started using bamboo, honey was extracted from trees and clothes were made with tree bark.

Mari Mari Cultural Village business development manager, Lydia Silas, said

visitors are always invited to participate in the activities.

Later, visitors will be treated to a 30-minute traditional performance, the highlight being the Murut bamboo dance. Participants are encouraged to join in and master the engaging moves.

The grand finale is the lunch or dinner that is to follow. For MICE groups with at least 200 people, a private session can be arranged.

Event planners can have the dining hall dressed up according to a preferred theme, such as a headhunters night or rainforest night. Outside caterers are allowed too, ensuring that guests can be indulged in a five-star dining experience should such an arrangement be desired.

Destination Asia services manager, Anna Marie Chai, believes that Mari Mari Cultural Village will make a delightful half-day incentive programme, and appeals to all markets and people of all ages.

Hailing the attraction as a one-stop destination for cultural immersion, Chai said: "Many foreign delegates here in Sabah wish to learn more about the local cultures. The hands-on experiences (offered at the attraction) appeal to all ages and all market segments, and everyone enjoys the half-hour cultural performance.

Best part is, for MICE groups, (the programme) can also be tailor-made to the clients' needs to make it more memorable. Fine touches, such as giving clients a refreshing cold towel and a chilled drink upon their arrival, can also be added." ■

Ideas

Dive into action or take it slow in Sabah

Day one

Upon arrival in Kota Kinabalu, your group will take a deluxe transfer to the hotel, where they will receive a welcome garland while being checked in. Delegates are free to do as they wish until evening, when they will regroup for dinner. Feast on fresh harvests of the sea, prepared Chinese-style at Ocean Seafood Restaurant, Portview Seafood Restaurant or Kampung Nelayan Restaurant.

After dinner, delegates will return to the hotel for a good night's rest.

Day two

Start the day with a sumptuous breakfast at the hotel, before exploring the destination.

Groups with action-seekers can go for a teambuilding river rafting programme on Kiulu River, or a white-water rafting adventure down the Padas River, through the scenic Padas Gorge. Both options will be followed by a riverside barbecue lunch.

A slower pace can be enjoyed on the nostalgic North Borneo Railway steam train, which comes with a tiffin luncheon onboard. Two short excursions are included in the 33km journey. Alternatively, take a boat transfer to one of the idyllic islands within the Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park for snorkelling and relaxation.

Later, pay a visit to Mari Mari Cultural Village where an authentic local dinner will be served.

Day three

Offer the day for shopping or relaxation before departure.



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CHECKING IN

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I arrived at Sutera Harbour Resort, Kota Kinabalu after a 10-minute drive from the airport. The resort's sprawling grounds – two hotels and a manicured golf course that overlook the sea and bobbing yachts – provided a distinct sense of arrival, long before my car entered the driveway.

Sutera Harbour Resort is the largest hotel property in the city, offering 956 rooms and suites across two properties, The Pacific Sutera Hotel and The Magellan Sutera Resort. Packed with plenty of event spaces that are supported by recreational and varied dining facilities, the resort makes a strong MICE product.

Meeting facilities

The Magellan Sutera Resort's pillar-less grand ballroom can accommodate up to 1,400 pax banquet-style, while The Pacific Sutera Hotel's pillar-less ballroom can seat up to 550 guests. Both ballrooms have their own entrances and driveways, allowing event organisers to transport equipment and materials right up to the doorstep.

The two ballrooms are supported by a collection of 28 meeting rooms located across both hotels. All are equipped with high-speed Internet access. Of these meeting rooms, Hibiscus Garden at The Pacific Sutera Hotel and Rose Garden at The Magellan Sutera Resort are especially notable. They open out into a garden setting, providing a refreshing venue for lunch and tea breaks for meeting delegates.

There is also a 100-seat auditorium.

Guestrooms

Sutera Harbour Resort offers guests the best of both worlds, but within a single complex. The Pacific Sutera Hotel has a city hotel ambience, while The Magellan Sutera gives off a resort vibe. All rooms boast views of the South China Sea, the golf course or the manicured gardens.

Broadband access in the guestroom is chargeable, and if that bothers you, skip to the foyer and public spaces to tap complimentary Wi-Fi access.

My stay at The Pacific Sutera Hotel was wonderful. I loved the bed most. The mattress and pillows were so comfortable I had difficulty leaving the room. My room was huge, and came with a nice sitting area and a large desk. The bathroom was pleasantly spacious

**Fact file****Maximum pax for meetings**

1,400 classroom-style in the two ballrooms

Recent events handled

- ING Cup Korea Convention Incentive trip in April 2011; 350 pax
- University Teknikal Melaka's The World's Premier Student Technology Competition from May 15-19, 2012; 400 pax
- The United Sabah Sze Yip Association's 3rd World Youth Congress of Jiangmen 2012 from June 1-3, 2012; 186 pax
- Asustek Computer Malaysia East Malaysia Dealers' Gathering from June 25-26, 2012; 112 pax
- Financial Park Labuan annual conference from September 15-16, 2012; 235 pax

**VERDICT**

A perfect one-stop destination for meetings and incentives.

S Puvaneswary

too, with plenty of counter space.

F&B

There are 15 restaurants and bars within the complex.

I found the breakfast buffet at The Pacific Sutera Hotel simply excellent. It woke my sleepy tummy most effectively with a mixture of local favourites as well as the usual staples of cereal, breads, fruit and yoghurt. I loved the freshly cooked *meehoon* most.

On my second night, I slipped into Silk Garden Chinese Restaurant for an early dinner. The interior decor was just as impressive as the exterior – two landscaped ponds front the restaurant, which enchants diners further with picturesque views of yachts by the marina and the Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park on the horizon. And yes, the food was delicious too.

Other facilities

Guests can take a break from meetings at the resort's 27-hole championship golf course, designed by Graham Marsh, or go yachting. As the resort complex also manages several off-site attractions and properties, such as a seafood restaurant and 20 chalets on Manukan Island, and the vintage North Borneo Railway steam train, customised functions and parties can be arranged.

NEED TO KNOW

Sabah Tourism Board's deal sweetener

Sabah Tourism Board (STB) has developed several incentives for MICE.

For events in the bidding stage, STB will provide a custom-made bidding video and promotional materials, as well as any other necessary support. The extent of such assistance will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

For confirmed bookings of 50 to 199 delegates, and a minimum stay of two nights in Sabah, the bureau will arrange for a fast-track immigration lane at the airport and provide traditional hand-strung Rungus bead necklace garlands, presented by ladies in ethnic costume at the airport or event venue.

For groups with at least 200 delegates who stay a minimum of two nights, organisers can request for a cultural show at the dinner function, a welcome garlanding for all delegates at the dinner venue, and a fast-track immigration lane at the airport.

For more information, email STB at cassie@sabahtourism.com.

Paddle your way to a tighter team

The Kayak Challenge, a teambuilding activity offered by Gayana Eco Resort, requires teams of four to solve a riddle incorporated into a race. No more than two teammates are allowed on the kayak at the same time. The goal is to be the fastest group to get all teammates over to the other side of the race course.

Besides building team spirit, the activity gives city folks a good workout. For details, contact Duncan Hong, sales manager of Gayana Eco Resort, at duncan.hong@gayana-eco-resort.com.

Discover Kota Kinabalu with Diethelm

Diethelm Events Malaysia offers a teambuilding activity that allows participants to see the wild and active side of Kota Kinabalu, and at the same time make friends with the locals. Participants are divided into teams and required to walk, run, cycle and go water rafting to complete tasks. For details, email the company at jacqueline.h@diethelmevents.com.my.

Head for these new stays

Sandakan, the second-largest city in Sabah, welcomed its first international hotel brand on May 30, 2012. Four Points by Sheraton Sandakan opened with 300 rooms and nine conference and banqueting spaces. Its grand ballroom can accommodate 500 guests in theatre-style.

Gaya Island Resort, a 15-minute boat ride off Kota Kinabalu, opened on July 1. It has 120 villas and a suite at 188m², as well as a conference room for up to 100 people.



Sail away into the sunset

Puteri Sutera, a luxury yacht, provides fine dining experiences and sunset cruises for themed events.

The vessel, which can comfortably accommodate 10 guests, can also be chartered for group tours. Diving and fishing are said to be popular activities with guests.

For details, email: infoNBY@suteraharbour.com.my

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Appointments



Rohit Tokhi



Jason Blackwell



James Pook



Syntio Camilleri



Elsie Boon



Nicolas Reschke



Katja Henke



Helen McCabe-Young



Adwin Chong



Marco Torre

AUSTRALIA
RACV Royal Pines Resort in Queensland, Australia has made Mark Rowsell-Turner executive chef. He was former palace chef to the royal family of Bahrain.

CHINA
Timur Senturk is now managing director of **J Hotel Shanghai Tower**, the flagship property of Interstate China Hotels & Resorts Company. Senturk comes to his new assignment from 12 years with The Ritz-Carlton Company where he was most recently general manager of the Ritz-Carlton Guangzhou.

INDIA
Rohit Tokhi has joined **Kempinski Ambience Hotel Delhi** as executive chef, bringing with him over 16 years of culinary experience.

INDONESIA
Paul Linder will

head up **COMO Hotels and Resorts' Uma by COMO, Ubud and COMO Shambhala Estate**. Linder joins from Chiva-Som in Thailand, where he was general manager for more than 10 years.

LAOS
Exotissimo Travel Group has appointed **Jason Blackwell** as general manager, based in Vientiane, and **James Pook** as product manager of **Exotissimo Laos**.

MALAYSIA
Four Points by Sheraton Sandakan in Sabah has appointed **Syntio Camilleri** as general manager and **Elsie Boon** as director of business development. Camilleri was general manager of Sheraton Bandung, while Boon was director of business development at Le Méridien Kota Kinabalu.

Nicolas Reschke is

now group director of sales & marketing with **Sutera Harbour Resort** in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. Reschke joins from Courtyard by Marriott Nusa Dua in Bali, where he was director of sales and marketing.

The Andaman, a Luxury Collection Resort Langkawi has appointed **Norsidah Ahmad** as its new director of sales & marketing. Norsidah's career in hospitality spans 10 years across Starwood Hotels & Resorts. Prior to this new role, she was the complex director of sales for the Sheraton Langkawi Beach Resort and Four Points by Sheraton Langkawi Resort.

THAILAND
Hansar Hotels Group has appointed **Indra Budiman** as CEO. He was general manager of Hansar Samui Resort at Bophut Beach. He has 20 years of experience

in the luxury hospitality industry, gained through properties such as Sheraton Bandung, Le Méridien Singapore, Four Seasons Jakarta and Hôtel de la Paix in Siem Reap.

The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels has appointed **Katja Henke** general manager of **The Peninsula Bangkok**, replacing Nicolas Beliard who will be transferred to The Peninsula Paris from January 1, 2013. Henke will rise to this new role from her position as hotel manager of The Peninsula Shanghai.

UAE
Kerzner International has appointed **Helen McCabe-Young** as executive vice-president, sales & marketing, **One&Only Resorts**. McCabe-Young is based in Dubai.

VIETNAM
Crowne Plaza Danang

has appointed **Adwin Chong** general manager. Chong has more than 25 years of experience in hospitality and F&B management. He joins from Crowne Plaza Resort Xishuangbanna in China, where he was executive assistant manager.

Park Hyatt Saigon has made **Marco Torre** executive sous chef. Torre will be in charge of the hotel's Italian restaurant, Opera, and the Events Kitchen. He started his culinary career working in a number of Michelin-star restaurants throughout different regions in Italy, such as Lake Garda. He was last with Grand Hyatt Hong Kong.

Correction: In TTGmice November's Appointments page, Malachy McArdle was said to be both general manager and director of sales and marketing of Sheraton Huzhou Hot Spring Resort. It is a mistake. McArdle is general manager, while Antony Box is the new director of sales and marketing.

Case studies

Sunset Music Fest on the Tip of Borneo

Strong winds are bent on distorting sound quality and two faulty generators are threatening to ruin the concert, but Sound Tech Productions stays composed, writes **S Puvaneswary**



Sounds Tech Production

Sri Pelancongan Sabah, a wholly owned subsidiary of Sabah Tourism Board, has been organising the annual *Sunset Music Fest at the Tip of Borneo* in Tanjung Simpang Mengayau, Kudat since 2009.

As Sabah's largest outdoor concert, the musical event attracts both local and international acts, delivering a diverse buffet of classical, folk and contemporary hits. A backdrop of the setting sun and rugged coastlines lends a magical touch to the ambience.

In 2011, it appointed Kota Kinabalu-based Sound Tech Productions to provide the event's sound system, lighting, canopy supply and generator, as well as street lighting from the car park to the stage area.

Recognising the fact that Kudat is a four-hour drive from Sabah state's capital city Kota Kinabalu, Kenny Shiau, managing director of Sounds Tech Production, came prepared for the event. He and his team of engineers and crew brought back-ups of every equipment, from generator sets and microphones, to lighting and canopies.

Mother Nature presented Shiau and his team the first challenge. Tanjung Simpang Mengayau is known for its strong evening breeze, and Sounds Tech Production must ensure that the music was not affected by the strong winds.

To achieve undistorted music quality,

Name of event
Sunset Music Fest at the Tip of Borneo

Venue
Tanjung Simpang Mengayau, Kudat

Organiser
Sri Pelancongan Sabah

Date of event
July 15-16, 2011

No. of pax
600 people per night, over two nights

Objective
To use music as a means of promoting tourism at Tanjung Simpang Mengayau in the northern most district of Kudat

Challenges
Strong winds threaten sound quality; Two generators on hand have failed and the team must scramble to fix them before showtime

the team used Condenser microphones and windshield for the music equipment to minimise wind noise.

Shiau recalled: "Initially we wanted to provide wireless microphones for the musicians but the frequency of sound was disrupted by the strong winds."

Another challenge was the lack of electricity supply in the area. Two 20-foot wide 300kVA generator sets had to be brought

in by two ten-ton lorries three days ahead of the concert, so the crew could start setting up and testing the microphones and street lightings.

Shiau said: "Actually, only one generator was needed, but we brought in a back-up just in case a problem crops up. Being cautious paid off, as one of the generator sets did indeed fail."

Unfortunately, as testings progressed, the second generator start to spew trouble for the team.

"We could not turn on the digital mixer and other equipment as they were dependent on a steady supply of electricity. I was really nervous as things were getting out of control and the reputation of our company was on the line.

"Getting a (third) generator from Kota Kinabalu was out of the question as there was no time. The show could not be delayed," said Shiau.

Eventually, the engineers found a solution: they swapped parts between the two generators. The problem was solved less than an hour before showtime.

Sounds Tech Production's successful delivery of the event earned them a contract for Sabah Fest 2012, and this time, the company was tasked to manage the full production.

"One of the things we learnt from this experience is to stay calm in a crisis, and always have a back-up close at hand," he said.

Case studies

4th APHRS Scientific Session

Hilton Fukuoka Sea Hawk puts its head together with the conference organiser and delivers a successful business event that is rich in local culture. **Karen Yue** finds out how



The 4th Asia Pacific Heart Rhythm Society (APHRS) Scientific Session, held from September 20-22, 2011 in Hilton Fukuoka Sea Hawk, was a huge undertaking for the Japanese hotel.

The conference was attended by 2,000 participants, and used up the hotel's full inventory of event space on the first floor, as well as some meeting rooms on the third and fifth floors. Some 650 guestrooms were also occupied each day throughout the event.

However, according to Hilton Fukuoka Sea Hawk's spokesperson, Jeremy Nam, the hotel is well-acquainted with events of such scale.

Nam told *TTGmice*: "Hilton Fukuoka Sea Hawk is one of the three largest hotels in West Japan, so it draws many large-scale events. In 2012, the hotel held several international medical and pharmaceutical events with more than 1,000 attendees."

The oceanfront hotel boasts 1,053 guestrooms and 6,000m² of meeting and conference space. Its largest event space, the Argos, can accommodate 3,200 pax in a theatre setting.

The hotel was able to commit full manpower to the event, as no other functions were held during the same period.

To bring a touch of the destination to the 4th APHRS Scientific Session, the organisers decided to have a Fukuoka-themed dinner party for all delegates. Hil-

ton Fukuoka Sea Hawk's event staff thus sat down to discuss how best to present Fukuoka's culture and customs.

While a traditional Japanese drum troupe was initially requested as a form of dinner entertainment, the hotel's event team found the item too pricey and brief – the drummers would play for only 20 minutes.

"So we had another brain-storming session, and eventually presented the *Dontaku Odori* as a replacement," said Nam.

Dontaku Odori is a street parade held during spring in Fukuoka. Some participants would dress as three of the seven Japanese gods of fortune, while others would don pretty *yukata* (or casual, cotton kimonos), playing musical instruments and banging wooden rice scoops together as they walk down the streets.

Nam added: "As *Dontaku Odori* allows every delegate to join in, only a few professional dancers were needed. That saved the client a large amount of money."

The dinner party, held in the Argos ballroom, also featured other forms of traditional entertainment, and tantalised delegates' tastebuds with Hakata cuisine such as *mizutaki* (chicken soup) and *donkotsu* ramen (noodle in a rich pork broth).

Delegates were also introduced to the stories behind the flavours of local wines.

Bringing the whole Japanese experience together, the venue was decorated in luscious bamboo and banquet staff were

dressed in kimonos, said Nam.

The experience fostered a deeper appreciation of Fukuoka's rich culture among the evening's party-goers.

Mark Roth, hotel manager of Hilton Fukuoka Sea Hawk, said: "The client was very pleased with the warmth of the event, in which we had incorporated cultural elements...(to bring about) a truly memorable Fukuoka-inspired experience."

Name of event

4th Asia Pacific Heart Rhythm Society Scientific Session

Venue

Hilton Fukuoka Sea Hawk, Japan

Date of event

September 20-22, 2011

No. of pax

2,000

Objective

For APHRS, to gather members and promote excellence and advancement in the diagnosis and treatment of patients with heart rhythm disorders

For Hilton Fukuoka Sea Hawk, to facilitate a smooth delivery of the event, while introducing Fukuoka's rich culture to attendees

Hotel updates



Conrad Seoul



Anantara Sanya Resort & Spa



DoubleTree Resort by Hilton Hotel Phuket - Surin Beach

Anantara Sanya Resort & Spa, Hainan, China

Anantara has planted its first flag in China with the opening of Anantara Sanya Resort & Spa on Hainan island. Situated on the southernmost tip of Hainan island, the resort offers 122 rooms, suites and private pool villas, as well as four dining establishments, an outdoor swimming pool and a fitness centre, among other facilities.

Perfect for high-end incentive groups, the resort also invites guests to take yoga and tai chi classes in paradisiacal settings.

sanya.anantara.com

Conrad Seoul, South Korea

Strategically located in Seoul's financial district in Yeouido, the five-star Conrad Seoul welcomes guests with 434 keys.

The hotel occupies one of four towers in IFC Seoul, the first large-scale multipurpose commercial venue in Yeouido, and is adjacent to a world-class luxury shopping mall. It also offers direct access to the Yeouido subway station.

Conrad Seoul's strong MICE position is backed by three floors – or 2,608m² – of meeting and banquet space, including two ballrooms with private foyers and the

whole floor to themselves.

Other facilities include a Wellness Zone and several quality dining establishments.

www.conradseoul.com

DoubleTree Resort by Hilton Hotel Phuket - Surin Beach, Thailand

Formerly the Courtyard by Marriott, the rebranded DoubleTree Resort by Hilton Hotel Phuket - Surin Beach features over 80 suites, four meetings rooms, a business centre and three F&B outlets including Asia Alive, an all-day restaurant.

Recreational facilities include a fitness club, outdoor lagoon-style pools, water slides and a kids club.

It is 30 minutes from Phuket International Airport by car.

www.doubletree.com

Holiday Inn Express Ahmedabad, India

The first Holiday Inn Express property in India has arrived in the commercial and shopping district of Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India. It has 173 guestrooms, a business centre and a fitness centre.

Targeting both leisure and business travellers, the hotel offers a complimentary Express Start

breakfast bar and complimentary Wi-Fi Internet access.

www.holidayinnexpress.com

InterContinental Hong Kong

The hotel has completed extensive renovations to its collection of 11 harbourview function rooms.

These spaces, ranging from 34m² to 79m² in size, now feature custom-made carpets bearing circular patterns and motifs, representing intersecting pools of energy that are reflective of Victoria Harbour. Etched patterned glass is used to frame satin walnut veneered doors, while bronze mirrored glass on the ceiling and side walls by the windows reflects the water currents from the harbour.

www.hongkong-ic.intercontinental.com

Parkroyal on Pickering, Singapore

Soft-opened in January 2013, the 367-room hotel boasts a stunning hotel-in-a-garden concept that incorporates energy-saving features throughout the building.

It features 15,000m² of lush gardens, waterfalls and planter walls, as well as six meeting rooms that

can accommodate 12 to 500 guests, a club lounge with private meeting spaces, a 24-hour restaurant, and a dedicated wellness floor.

singaporehotels.parkroyalhotels.com/pickering

Pudong Shangri-La, East Shanghai, China

Pudong Shangri-La, East Shanghai has unveiled its latest event space – The Summit Room. It is ideal for high-powered meetings, dinners or events, and boasts an exclusive entrance that allows for a high level of privacy. The 360m² space packs in a living room, an 18-seat boardroom, an 18-seat dining hall and a built-in terrace.

www.shangri-la.com/shanghai/pudongshangrila

Sheraton Bali Kuta Resort, Indonesia

The 203-key Sheraton Bali Kuta Resort, Indonesia opened on December 1. Besides offering enchanting views of the Indian Ocean from its elevated position, the resort entices event planners with nine meeting spaces. Other facilities include two signature restaurants, an outdoor pool on the rooftop and a fitness centre.

www.starwoodhotels.com

Over coffee with...

“I’m good at managing change and bringing people along on the journey. On March 31, we get the building back. It’s mine to win or lose. I intend to win.”



Arun Madhok

The new CEO of Suntec Singapore tells **Raini Hamdi** how the venue’s US\$147 million upgrade will redefine the meetings business when it reopens on May 1

You joined Suntec Singapore International Convention & Exhibition Centre in 2009 as business development director, then promoted to COO, and now CEO, in a span of three years.

Yes, but don’t forget I had quite a career behind me as well. I was with British Airways (BA) for many years, where I ran the whole of Europe for the airline. Pieter Idenburg (his predecessor) was my mentor from BA and that’s how I got into this business. When he recruited me, the MICE business in Singapore was going through a change. Marina Bay Sands (MBS) and Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) were coming online and a different type of person was needed. I used to do strategic planning for BA and business change is my forte.

Did you imagine you would be CEO of Suntec?

I didn’t come with that objective. The objective was meeting the challenge of the new business, defining the new business model, learning how to be a non-monopolist.

A non-monopolist?

(Laughs) Suntec was a monopolist in Singapore. There’s the Singapore Expo of course, but we were the only large convention centre space in town and we had to reposition as the business expanded to include MBS and RWS. They were great for our business because they raised the profile of Singapore and boosted the entire business.

We started developing plans for our next-generation convention centre and here’s where I think I’m the luckiest man in town. I worked about two-and-a-half years on the design and concept, and now I get to lead it. I get to do what I’m basically good at, which is managing change, and maybe even actually change the way the convention business is being done and influence it.

How?

We’re designing for flexibility, such that we can offer the right space to the clients whenever they need it. In the past, you have a 4,000m² exhibition hall. The client’s event is growing so a centre says “take another hall” when the client probably needs just 1,500m² more.

We are now in position to allow the space to grow with the client. Give him what he wants as opposed to what you have. That’s the essence of the modernisation programme: getting the building to be relevant to the client’s changing requirements by having a high level of convertibility, capability and technology.

Tell me more about the high level of convertibility.

A lot of our walls can move. A moving wall is not new in the convention business but having so many spaces that can be configured to the client’s requirement is quite new. We have a meeting room that has one fixed wall and three (mobile) walls. So we can remove three walls and use the room as a reception area in the morning and close it up as a break-out in the afternoon if the client wants to meet in the same space. And when it is closed, it is fully closed, i.e., it’s a proper room.

Is the building gutted out completely?

The building has been stripped bare. We’re changing a large portion of it. Level one and half of level two are retail. Level three is all new and there will be 36 meeting rooms which you can convert into various configurations for big receptions, small exhibitions or break-out rooms.

Level four and five (double height) will have four exhibition halls. We can move walls and add interesting lighting concepts so you can use the space either as an exhibition hall or, at a flick of a switch, change the lighting and create the right ambience for a

a conference or dinner and dance.

Business is evolving. Before I joined Suntec, I was told if it was an exhibition or convention, it was clear it was an exhibition or convention. Now there is a merging of the two, convention with exhibition component, meeting with incentive, etc.

We are well-positioned for hybrids. We can co-locate events. There is no need for delegates to go to one hall for their exhibition and another for a conference. For an exhibition with a conference, we can now create a soundproof section for them to have the conference. Today, you see a lot of exhibitions cordon off space for the conference and the speaker competes with the sound and buzz from the exhibition.

So after the modernisation, is your convention space bigger, smaller or the same?

I have a little more space, but I could do a lot more with that space than I could before. Productivity comes in from using space as often and as efficiently as we can. It does not come from selling more space that the client does not need. We want the same customer to come back again and again. We want to be the convention and exhibition centre of choice in Singapore and Asia by having the perfect location, right space, flexibility, technology and service-oriented people.

So the client buys only the space he needs. What he's going to get with it is next and we are going to make a big difference to competitors. Venue managers have been sort of content in just giving space, not realising we are an integral part of the entire experience and we need to add value to the client. Space can no longer be just a shell.

How will you be different?

One of the things we're doing is something the industry has been asking for for a long time. I am surprised we didn't have it. We're going to offer free wireless LAN connectivity to all delegates. We're working with renowned suppliers and telcos to allow 6,000 gadgets to be connected simultaneously and, once you connect, you can go from floor to floor without losing connectivity and having to sign in again.

We are also going to use technology to improve processes and change the way people look at the convention business. For example, clients need to know how their event is going to look. If it's a conference, how many rows, how the chairs are arranged, how much distance to the stage, etc. (Instead of a 2D floor plan, which is the norm), we are investing in an online system which will allow, possibly for the first time in the convention and exhibition business, a client, if he so chooses, to actually take control of the configuration of his floor plan. So without any training or qualification in the area, with his sign-in code, if he does not like what we've planned for him, he can remove a chair from a certain row, add a chair back in or move a table to the back of the room, etc.

We're allowing clients to visualise and modify the layout of their events, thus giving them a little more control. So when they turn up on the actual day and look at the floor plan, there are no surprises. In our business, we don't need surprises.

How are you gearing up your staff for the new Suntec?

You're right to point out that there are challenges when space is so modular. And while high-tech is all well and good, people are

going to be the differentiator still.

Though we closed end-September and will reopen May 1, we did not lay off anyone or cut anyone's salary. Staff are being retrained. It (a new Suntec) requires a slightly different way of running and selling. The actual service style changes. We're lucky to have the luxury of taking staff through a longer period of training. We have 150 permanent staff now and are working towards 200 later on.

I've also changed my leadership team, promoted a couple of people internally. It's a tight team of eight people. Every business goes through a cycle and you need a different team to bring the vision to reality.

In light of the change in product, we're also looking at a rebranding exercise so that the image is also upgraded and modernised. Suntec is perceived as a leader, but we have to go out with the message that while we have all the experience, expertise and credibility, we also have a new product offering.

What sort of conventions/events would you love to clinch with the new product you have?

Our first order of business is to bring back our loyal customers who have had to move their events elsewhere as we're closed for five months. We want to give them the first chance to experience the centre. So Tax Free World Association will be the largest exhibition to operate in the month of May when we reopen. We already have a good line-up for the month, including a conference, a consumer show and a trade show.

But of course we also want to collaborate with organisers to bring events into Singapore and offer them space/services in a compelling way, so those who might not have considered us before will do so now.

The venue did 1,600 events with 7.1 million guests last year. What's your target for the first year after reopening?

I don't know if these metrics mean as much as some people make them out to be. We have to watch our occupancy and the type of yield we getting but these do not necessarily correlate with the number of events held.

So we are re-evaluating our position if we want to continue to do some of the big consumer shows and we're looking at new business such as pharmaceutical and medical events. We want more international business, but we also want the local business, including weddings and government business.

For me, the better metrics to measure success is, yes, to report profitability back to the owners/shareholders, but what's important is getting the right mix of clients and developing long-term relationships with them. My personal objective is to work with a large customer base which will commit their events to the venue for longer terms, so as their events grow, we adjust the space to meet the growth.

How different are you to Pieter Idenburg?

Pieter is a mentor and a good friend. We have different personalities though. I've this thing about converting vision to reality. I leave him to tell you what he's good at. I'm good at managing change and bringing people along on the journey. On March 31, we get the building back. It's mine to win or lose. I intend to win.

“Venue managers have been sort of content in just giving space... Space can no longer be just a shell.”

Packages



THAILAND

Royal Cliff Hotels Group and Pattaya Exhibition and Convention Hall in Thailand, is offering its new *Royal Cliff Ultratech Meeting Package* at 1,700 baht (US\$55) per person per day for a full-day arrangement and 1,500 baht per person per day for the half-day version.

Inclusions in the package are: use of a meeting room, one coffee break for half-day meetings or two for full-day events, customised set lunch or buffet, Wi-Fi Internet access, meeting equipment and stationery, as well as an on-site technician.

The package is valid from January 16 to May 31, 2013.

Terms and conditions apply.

Contact: mice@royalcliff.com

CHINA

Pudong Shangri-La, East Shanghai, China has created meeting packages for its latest event space, The Summit Room.

Priced from RMB880 (US\$141) per person, the *Summit Meeting Package* includes use of The Summit Room from 09.00 to 17.00, two themed coffee breaks, a customised lunch, personalised butler service, complimentary use of built-in LCD projector and screen, and Wi-Fi Internet access.

Enhance the meeting programme with an Asian or continental set breakfast at RMB280 per person, or a cocktail reception with canapés and free-flowing soft drinks, juices, beers and house wines at RMB300 per person per hour.

The hotel also offers a *Summit Dining Package*, priced from RMB980 per person. It includes use of The Summit Room from 18.00 to 22.00, exclusive welcome cocktails in the reception area, a customised Chinese or Western fine dining menu, personalised butler service and Wi-Fi Internet access.

Terms apply.

Contact: events.slpu@shangri-la.com

VIETNAM

New World Saigon Hotel in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam has debuted the *Saigon Arts and Culinary* package.

Suitable for event delegates looking to explore the Vietnamese capital after their meetings, the package includes a visit to a traditional villa that houses a private collection of Vietnamese combat and propaganda art belonging to students from the first French-founded School of Fine Arts, the Fine Arts Museum and leading contemporary art gallery Galerie Quynh, as well as an elegant Saigonese-style street food set dinner.

The package comes in two categories. The *Deluxe Arts Package*, with accommodation in a Deluxe room, is priced at VND3,780,500 (US\$180) for a single room and VND4,683,000 for a double room. The *Executive Arts Package*, with accommodation in an Executive Club Deluxe room, goes for VND4,620,500 for a single room and VND5,523,000 for a double room.

Terms and conditions apply.

Contact: reservations.saigon@newworldhotels.com



THE PHILIPPINES

Dusit Thani Manila is offering *Stay and Meet* packages that combine room stays and meeting requirements, priced from PHP7,700.00++ (US\$187.40++).

Packages include accommodation in a Deluxe Room with buffet breakfast for two at Basix, complimentary unlimited in-room broadband Internet access, complimentary use of a meeting room, morning and afternoon coffee breaks, and buffet lunch, among other inclusions.

Meeting planners will also enjoy 10 per cent off rental of audio-visual equipment.

Stay and Meet packages are valid until January 31, 2013. Terms and conditions apply.

Contact: dtmnrsvn@dusit.com

“Tittle tattle”

How to get guests to arrive in timely fashion for dinner

An invitation sent out by Swissôtel Merchant Court Singapore for its 15th anniversary bash caught our eye. The time stated was 18.38 to 21.18. Hmmm, we pondered, must be something to do with feng shui, or a strange Swiss tradition perhaps?

When we asked, a spokesman from the hotel laughed and explained: “We learnt recently that it was a good way to make people remember this particular time or event. Usually when you indicate 18.30 or 19.00, it doesn’t really register in people’s minds. But when you use a unique number like 18.38 or 19.42 for example, it really catches people’s attention and they remember.”

It sure did work on us and we think planners can use this trick for their next gala!



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“Tittle tattle”

CDM dances to changing client tunes

A proud moment for Sumate Sudasna, head honcho of CDM Thailand, must have been the Rotary International Convention earlier this year at Impact Convention & Exhibition Center in Bangkok, when the opening featured a cultural presentation that had a dance troupe flanking the flag-bearers from the member countries and the word ‘CDM’ flashing largely on the screen. It was spectacular publicity for CDM.

Sumate himself was chuffed when contacted. He said planners must adapt and diversify to suit changing business needs. Providing entertainment and theming arrangements for business events is now part-and-parcel of CDM’s offering. Aside from Rotary, it also arranged for “medieval babes” for a Destination Britain & Ireland’s (DEBI) function at Shangri-La Hotel Bangkok Ballroom when DEBI came to town with travel agencies/media this year.

Now we know why Sumate never looks a day older each time we see him - creativity and energy keep him relevant.



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