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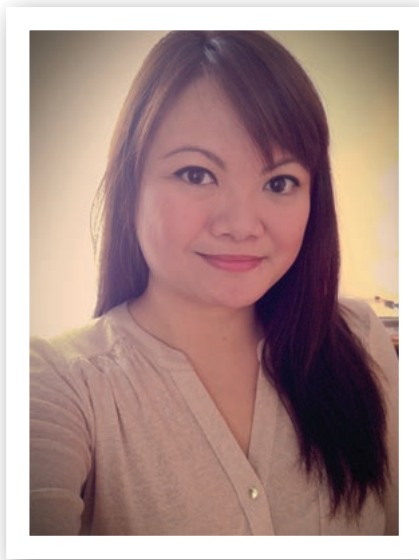
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To our readers

A better year



Karen Yue
Group editor

“More MICE players must recognise that creativity is key to success.”

Once again, I’m impressed by the resilient spirit of Asia’s MICE and tourism trade.

While most Asian MICE players had expressed concerns at the start of 2012 that the year would be a tough one, no thanks to the Western economic gloom, these individuals turned their fears into a fervent drive, pushing harder than before to ensure their business survives the economic storm.

In part due to their fiery desire to grow, or at least sustain, their business in 2012, and in part due to the fact that business opportunities have continued to emerge in Asia, the year did not turn out too bad after all.

The owner of a PCO in Singapore told me he was glad he panicked at the start of 2012, for that fear made him and his team work especially hard to win business for the year and beyond. Now, at the start of 2013, he has a comforting bag full of business events through to 2014.

Business sentiments are for sure rosier in 2013. Meetings and incentives are expected to see better days this year, while Asia’s – especially China’s –

economic and industrial performance will continue to advance the region’s convention and exhibitions business.

You can read more about this in our cover story *Running strong*, page 11.

But there is no time for a breather. Familiar hurdles in the form of rising costs, diminishing margins and human resource limitations still stand. Moreover, the Western world has yet to see the back of the economic crisis.

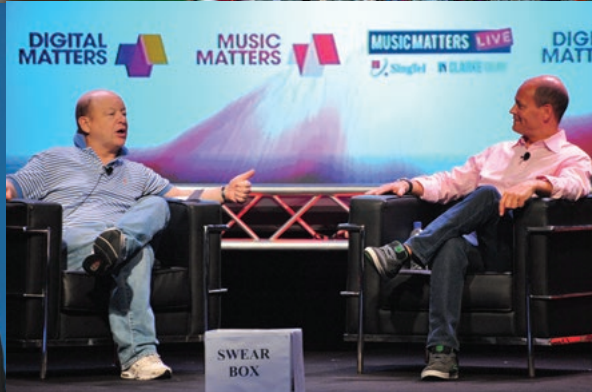
Clients’ expectations are also rising with every event they host and experience. Much more must be done to impress clients and have them sign on the dotted line.

More MICE players must recognise that creativity is key to success. Not just in the way they devise and deliver out-of-the-box events so that clients get more bang for their buck, but also in the way they overcome business hurdles, perhaps by seeing business opportunities in the face of problems. Creativity must also be applied in the development of new revenue streams.

I cannot wait to see what Asia’s MICE players will do in 2013, and I am certain this will be an exciting year. ■

TTGmice

FEB/MAR 2013



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Talk of the Trade

MALAYSIA

Penang forms first CVB

By S Puvaneswary



Abdul Malik: full support given

The Malaysian state of Penang has unveiled the formation of its first-ever convention bureau, as part of ongoing efforts to position itself as a MICE destination in South-east Asia.

Spearheading the launch of the Penang International Convention & Exhibition Bureau (PICEB) is Abdul Malik Kassim, State Religious Affairs, Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Committee chairman and Danny Law, Penang Tourism Development and Culture Committee chairman.

A pro tem committee with its own elected chairman and members would be established within the first quarter of 2013, according to Abdul Malik, but no date was given on when PICEB would be operational.

He said: "PICEB will be run by the private sector, and we (the state government) will support it in whatever means we can, except financial (assistance)."

Mike Williams, consultant to Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau, said: "PICEB can support us on product development in Penang and work with us on bids to bring business events to Malaysia. With its local knowledge (on Penang), we will need its help to handle fam trips to Penang."

While acknowledging PICEB as a potential competitor, Sarawak Convention Bureau's managing director, Mike Cannon, told *TTGmice*: "What counts here is Malaysia, and we need more products, services and destination marketing organisations. PICEB will add robustness to the destination and get people talking about Malaysia."

"We will share with PICEB our trade secrets, and set up meetings with government agencies, academia and associations in Sarawak so that PICEB will be able to network with them."

TALKING NUMBERS

2,000 The number of attendees expected at Amway India's second incentive for 2013 in Bangkok this December.

40 The number of top international coffee and tea companies that have confirmed, at press time, their participation in Singapore Exhibition Services' inaugural Speciality Coffee & Tea event in Singapore from April 8-11 this year.

34 The percentage of travel managers who intend to extend their programmes to budget airlines this year to optimise air transportation savings, according to a Carlson Wagonlit Travel report released in late-January.

THAILAND

Five-year MICE master plan in the making for Chiang Mai

The Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) has joined eight key government and private organisations in Chiang Mai to devise a framework to further raise the city's profile as a MICE destination.

The five-year *Chiang Mai MICE Destination* master plan will be implemented in three stages. The first phase will be implemented this year, focusing on the domestic MICE segment as well as infrastruc-

ture improvements. MICE education campaigns will also be introduced.

In the second phase, from 2014 to 2015, destination promotions will focus on regional cooperation blocs, such as the Greater Mekong Subregion.

Finally, in 2016 and 2017, efforts will be made to promote Chiang Mai as a global MICE city, one which is capable of hosting international

mega events.

According to TCEB, the framework will be submitted to the Thai cabinet for acknowledgement.

Thanin Supasaen, Chiang Mai governor, welcomes the formulation of the MICE master plan, saying: "Despite (Chiang Mai's) huge economic potential, most people only know it as a cultural destination. As a result, the province's economy relies on the travel

season."

Narong Kongprasert, president of the Chiang Mai Chamber of Commerce, believes that the "rapid development of regional cooperation framework(s)" such as ASEAN and Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation will lift demand for business events in member countries, benefiting Chiang Mai which sits "in the centre of the region".

New centre, sharper edge

By Raini Hamdi

Penang Waterfront Convention Centre (PWCC), part of The Light's commercial precinct, aims to compete with top event venues in Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Singapore and Hong Kong when it opens in early 2017.

Penang's chief minister Lim Guan Eng believes that the new centre will fill a huge gap. "There are 14 top convention centres in Malaysia but none are located in Penang," he said.

PWCC's centrepiece is a 10,000m² column-free multipurpose hall that can be divided or used as a single space for exhibitions, conventions, corporate events and private functions. Its development comes as the island sees record investments. Said Teh Kean Ming, group CEO and managing director



Suntec International's Arun Madhok, Penang's Lim Guan Eng, and IJM Corp's Teh Kean Ming and Soam Heng Choon

Continued on page 6

IN BRIEF

Ocean Park adds hardware

Hong Kong's Ocean Park has unveiled plans to launch several new attractions in 2014 and a hotel in 2016, as part of its strategy to expand the park into an integrated resort destination. The 495-room Ocean Hotel will be built on a 17,044m² site in front of the main entrance, in addition to a new shark aquarium and a koala exhibit that will open in the third and fourth quarter of 2014 respectively.

Get connected for free

The Ritz-Carlton, Guangzhou has started offering free Internet access throughout its 351 guestrooms. The upgrade, made effective on January 1, is part of the hotel's effort to provide guests with a more convenient, comfortable and efficient environment for business and leisure.

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THAILAND

Royal Cliff scores mega events

By Raini Hamdi



Royal Cliff Hotels Group and Pattaya Exhibition & Convention Hall (PEACH), which have undergone a billion-baht (US\$32.8 million) renovation and rebranding programme, will host several major events this year.

One of these mega wins include the 600-pax Asia Golf Tourism Convention in April, which will comprise a number of seminars conducted by sports icons and a buyers-meet-sellers programme. Royal Cliff Hotels Group and PEACH executive director, Vitanart Vathanakul, said the convention, coming on top of the Asia-Pacific Golf Summit it also hosted in 2011, would help promote Pattaya as a golf hub.

Other conventions confirmed at Royal Cliff and PEACH to-date included a money expo, an Asia-Pacific cardiology congress, a world health conference and key corporate meetings such as Singha Corp and Thai Beverage Corp, said Vitanart, adding the venue had been seeing more prestigious events and large-scale wedding groups since 2012. The list included a ministerial meeting where the Thai prime minister and her cabinet addressed issues to improve the Eastern Seaboard region.

Vitanart said the renovation and an investment on human resource training gave Royal Cliff an edge in clinching prestigious events. The 40-year-old Royal Cliff has repositioned the product to cover all segments and draw not just loyal customers but younger executives. For instance, the 544-room Beach Hotel is now pitched at those who love “casual luxury”, offering several new hardware such as modern Mini Suite Plus rooms, an infinity-edge pool, and beachside restaurant, Breezeo.

Continued from page 5

Penang's new light

of IJM Corp, The Light's developer: “In 2008, Penang received a record RM10.2 billion (US\$3.3 billion) in investments, the highest achieved in its history of industrialisation. Penang repeated this feat again in 2011, achieving RM9.1 billion in investments.”

Lim added: “Penang is poised to benefit from the two new convention centres, sPICE (Sub-terranean Penang International Convention and Exhibition) and PWCC, since these centres will not only serve Penang but also IMT-GT (Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand Growth Triangle). The IMT-GT has grown in geographic scope and activities to encompass more than 70 million people. It is now composed of 14 provinces in southern Thailand, eight states in Peninsular Malaysia and 10 provinces in Sumatra, Indonesia.”

In 2012, Penang welcomed 6.2 million tourists, the third highest after Kuala Lumpur and Pahang.

SINGAPORE

Triumphs for Suntec and AEG

Suntec International has inked the deal to design, market and operate the Penang Waterfront Convention Centre (PWCC), while AEG Ogden is over the moon for winning the bid to operate the new International Convention Centre (ICC) Sydney at Darling Harbour.

Suntec was in the running for ICC Sydney but pulled out to focus on the US\$147 million modernisation plan of its own centre in Singapore, which will re-open on May 1.

Arun Madhok, CEO, Suntec Singapore and Suntec International, said: “We remain close to the consortium in giving them advice and views. I was of the opinion it was best to

focus the time and effort on our (centre).”

Suntec was part of Australia's Plenary Group/Brookfield Multiplex consortium while AEG is in Destination Sydney, which will now develop the new integrated convention, exhibition and entertainment precinct at Darling Harbour.

For its latest deal, a subsidiary, Suntec Penang, has been set up. PWCC, developed by IJM Land, is part of The Light's commercial precinct, “an integrated, world-standard infrastructure” waterfront project that aims to redefine Penang, said IJM Corp's group CEO and managing director, Teh Kean Ming. — **Raini Hamdi**

SOUTH KOREA

COEX debuts Packaging World

COEX will launch a concurrent event, Packaging World, alongside its annual Automation World exhibition in Seoul this March, a move that is expected to boost trade buyers' interest and show experience.

According to Susan Kim, Coex overseas marketing manager, the new event “allows visitors to experience the entire factory automation process”. Visitors to Automation World will gain free access to Packaging World, and vice versa.

“We hope this concurrent event will widen the reach of Automation World and attract further businesses interested in (various) aspects of the automation industry,” said Kim.

South Korea's automation industry is valued at more than US\$15 billion, making it the eighth-largest automation market in the world. COEX noted that the opportunity to meet local buyers is consistently ranked as the leading reason companies choose to exhibit at Automation World every year.

COEX expects Automation World, slated for March 13-16 at the Coex Convention and Exhibition Center, to draw 30,000 visitors this year – a 25 per cent year-on-year increase. A stronger seller representation is expected too, with exhibiting companies projected to grow 10 per cent to reach 300. — **Karen Yue**

ASIA-PACIFIC

Membership growth, branding key for AACVB: president

By Karen Yue

A wider membership that comprises national and state convention bureaus as well as industry players, and a stronger brand presence for the Asian Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus (AACVB) are among the desires of the association's new president, Zulkefli Hj Sharif.

Zulkefli, who is also CEO of the Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB), stepped into the role in September 2012.

To achieve his goals,



Zulkefli: working together for growth

called on all current members to renew their commitment towards growing AACVB's membership. We each have a part to play. For instance, MyCEB has been encouraging state

Zulkefli told *TTGmice* that "collaborative effort from every member" was important. He said: "We have

convention bureaus and industry players in Malaysia to join AACVB, and we have received some expressions of interest. Meanwhile, it is also necessary to strengthen our membership benefits and the brand image of the association."

He added that the association has embarked on new marketing initiatives to raise the profile of AACVB. These initiatives include the first collaboration with ICCA to host a 90-minute *Asia Focus* session during IMEX America last

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October, which discussed key issues impacting Asia's MICE business, as well as a continued push for AACVB's flagship event, *Asia For Asia* summit.

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SINGAPORE

Strong pickings for new Parkroyal

By Karen Yue

Parkroyal on Pickering, Singapore opened on January 16 with several corporate meetings and weddings already on the books.

While the hotel's general manager, David Sullivan, was unable to quantify the number of corporate events secured to-date, which included a "major VIP event for 350 guests nine days after the opening", he told *TTGmice* that 52 weddings would take place at the hotel this year and 10 more had been confirmed for 2014.

Despite having several events in the bag ahead of opening, Sullivan said it was a "slow start" for the hotel due to "the time of the year".

He explained: "Corporate clients usually go on vacation from the middle of December to mid-January. So although we got some bookings on the books in mid-December, it was only in (January) that business started kicking into gear. And we are really gaining speed. We picked up three per cent occupancy in a single day. It is a matter of time before we hit the 90 per cent range."

Marketed as a hotel-in-a-garden and boasting extensive landscaping and environment-friendly features, the 367-room hotel opened with 200 guestrooms, as well as its signature all-day dining restaurant, Lime, an infinity-edge pool on the fifth floor, a luxurious residence-styled

executive lounge and rooftop terrace on the 16th floor, and a collection of meeting and event venues on the second floor.

Remaining guestrooms will be rolled out gradually.

Sullivan said the hotel's business mix would comprise 55 to 60 per cent corporate business, largely due to the property's location in the central business district.

Parkroyal Hotels & Resorts also operates two other hotels in Singapore – Parkroyal on Beach Road and Parkroyal on Kitchener Road – as well as the Parkroyal Serviced Suites Singapore.



PHILIPPINES

Marriott Hotel Manila beefs up

Marriott Hotel Manila is looking to boost its MICE business with the construction of a new wing with 228 guestrooms and a convention centre within the Resorts World Manila integrated resort (IR).

The new wing and convention centre will be connected to the existing hotel structure by a walkway. The convention centre will house a grand ballroom that can sit 2,500 pax; two ballrooms for up to 300 people; some 50 meeting rooms; two wedding chapels; and other MICE facilities.

When these facilities are operational by 1Q2015, the hotel will boast a total of 570 guestrooms and 6,900m² of meeting space, making it the Philippines' largest in terms of hotel facilities and services category.

The hotel sees exciting opportunities for MICE which currently contributes 13 per cent to its total room nights, according to Marriott Hotel Manila's general manager Scott Sibley.

Sibley said the MICE segment would generate 56 per cent of the growth in total hotel revenue in the first year of operating the additional guestrooms and Marriott Convention Center.

The hotel's increased focus on MICE comes at a time when Resorts World Manila, the country's first IR, will be facing off with four larger rivals that will emerge in the Entertainment City in the Manila Bay area beginning this year till 2016.

In an earlier interview, Bill Barnett, managing director of asset management and hospitality consulting C9 Hotelworks, said the future augurs well for Marriott Hotel Manila, which has one of the largest occupancies in mega-Manila and 85 per cent corporate business.

Barnett said the property would not take business out of hotels in the Makati CBD, but would instead offer an edge in enhancing the MICE segment.

"(It is) a segment we haven't seen in the Philippines," he said. – **Rosa Ocampo**

IN BRIEF

Starwood's Asian expansion

Asia remains a high priority market for Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, accounting for approximately a quarter of the group's existing hotel rooms and over half of its pipeline. Nearly two-thirds of Starwood's new hotels in 2013 will open in fast-growing markets in this region. The company plans to open its first property in Tajikistan, and expand further in markets such as Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Bangladesh, China and India.

More knights for MyCEB

Ten more individuals have joined Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Bureau's (MyCEB) successful *Kesatria 1Malaysia* ambassador programme to help bring the country closer to its long-term target of growing business tourism arrivals from the current five per cent to eight per cent by 2020. The new *kesatrias* – or knight in the Malay language – hail from various key economic sectors, including science and medicine, research and innovation, education and law.

PHM to take on hotel in Palembang

PHM Hospitality has been appointed by Ulimo Baseliob to manage The 101 Palembang in Indonesia, which will open in mid-2014. The 141-key hotel will offer meetings rooms.

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COVER STORY



RUNNING STRONG

While expectations for 2013 are rosier than last year's, MICE players in the region agree that the race for survival is still on and there is no time for a breather

Meetings and incentives: Busier days ahead

Asia's healthy economy brings hope of better business and looser purse strings. By **Karen Yue** with inputs from **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena, Shekhar Niyogi** and **Mimi Hudoyo**

A spot of hand-wringing among meeting and incentive planners in Asia at the start of last year has given way to greater optimism today.

While trade players readied their hearts for a difficult 2012, the year panned out better than expected for most, with some reporting a double-digit increase in business last year. As such, many are confident of better prospects this year.

Jere Tala, director consulting APAC, Advito, said most companies in Asia-Pacific had maintained their spend on meetings and incentives last year because "this region is still seeing business growth".

Kritidech Srabua, founder and CEO of Oriental Events in Thailand, reported a pick up in regional traffic and a 25 per cent year-on-year growth in business.

He said: "Indications so far are good and we are cautiously optimistic about 2013."

Daniel Chua, managing director at Singapore-based Aonia, who expects a good year ahead, said: "Last year was unpredictable. We panicked and worked especially hard to make sure we had enough forward bookings to tide us through. As a result, we secured several events that will take place this year and through 2014. For this reason, we expect 2013 to fare much better than last year."

Indonesia's Pacto Convex and Melali MICE Bali also painted a pretty picture for 2013, encouraged by the country's hosting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit and related meetings throughout the year.

Pacto Convex president director, Susi-lowani Daud, whose company handled 71 conferences in 2012 – 90 per cent of which were international government and association events – expects the APEC Summit and related meetings to generate even more business from government events.

However, Pacific World country manager – Indonesia, Ida Bagus Lolec, warned that quality hotels in Bali might be booked out this year, especially during the prominent APEC CEO Summit from October 5-7.

Besides spillover business from the summit, Melali MICE Bali's managing director, Ketut Jaman, noted that Indonesia's economic growth would give birth to a rise



in meetings and incentives this year.

A welcome turnaround in business

There are, however, a number of meeting and incentive specialists who did not escape unscathed from the uncertainties last year.

MCI Group CEO – Institutional Division, Robin Lokerman, described 2012 as a "very challenging year, with margins lower than originally budgeted".

"Clients were restless, budgets were cut and projects were postponed. The political uncertainty due to elections in the US and several European countries, and the leadership change in China, created an erratic business environment. MCI made 55 per cent of its profit target and revenues were down 10 per cent from our budget. However, our business did grow eight per cent, mainly outside of Europe," recalled Lokerman. Today he expects increased spending in 2H2013, "as there are a lot of pinned up funds in major corporations".

He said: "Asia and South America will be key drivers of growth and the US will start to come back. Other mature markets like Australia and Europe will need another year before we can see increased business and client spending."

Lokerman believes a significant growth in incentives is on the horizon in Asia, as building staff and customer loyalty are crucial to companies in this region.

"Chinese incentives have the largest budgets. We see a growth of pre-paid credit cards in the incentive world, but

creating new and unique experiences to reward high performers will continue to be important in the MICE industry," he said.

Things are looking up too for Sushil Wadhwa, chairman of Platinum World India, who anticipates an "exponential growth" in business events this year, a welcome change from the "bad" year the company had in 2012.

"The cutback on spending from prime source markets in the US and Europe had a telling effect. Business was down 30 per cent year-on-year," he lamented. "We expect a 30 per cent growth in meetings business in 2013. Currently we have events until July, and they will be held in luxury hotels. For incentives, we expect an 800 per cent growth. (As of early-January) we have a high-yield booking for (an event at) Camp Nou in Spain for 80 top insurance executives, and a 200-pax incentive to Miami in 1Q2013."

Budgets up, but air of caution remains

The general consensus is that 2013 will see slight upward shifts in client budgets, particularly for incentives.

Lokerman expects bigger client budgets in 2013, but noted that clients are still very cautious and focused on ROI.

Tala is optimistic too, saying: "Most companies (in Asia) are still registering business growth, and that growth is outpacing the rising cost of travel. Therefore, to some Asian companies, there is no need to slash travel spend."

He predicts a controlled growth of no

more than five per cent in budgets.

E T Quah, owner of Feature Tour Malaysia, said: "Companies will still be thrifty with their meetings spend, but there will be an upward shift in budgets for gala dinners and meals during incentive trips as clients have to differentiate such programmes from normal tours."

On the other hand, according to Chua, some clients are raising the bar on qualification criteria for incentives in 2014 in order to reduce participant headcount and overall spend. Although cost per pax will be higher, Chua expects overall budgets to dip as much as 50 per cent.

Blessings of good exchange rates

With the euro still weak against Asian currencies, more clients are casting their eyes on destinations in Europe.

Wadhwa noted that incentive clients with large budgets and an appetite for luxury are keen on destinations such as Spain, Croatia and Hungary.

Chua said: "Europe isn't much of a

"We can expect an increase in meetings activity this year, with China, Japan, Vietnam and India as primary destinations."

Jere Tala

Director consulting APAC
Advito

MICE source market now. But whenever a source of demand shrinks, I see a new source of supply. In the case of Europe, I now view the region as a destination to market to my Asian clients because it is more affordable."

Goswami agrees with the price advantage, saying: "Prices in Europe are lower now and destinations there offer great quality, which allows us to create high-quality programmes at a lower cost."

However, Asian meeting and incentive buyers have not forsaken their own backyard. Tala believes that Asia will continue to be "self-sufficient, feeding itself with

intra-region traffic".

Tala said: "The euro may be weaker, but Europe is still an expensive destination. Here in Asia, countries are booming. Asia is hot as a destination for fun incentives, as tourism development is taking place in so many cities. It is also hot as a destination for business, as here is where many opportunities lie."

Indonesian events specialists singled out cities such as Jogjakarta, Medan and Surabaya as destinations to watch for in 2013.

Quah said: "China and ASEAN cities are evergreen destinations for Malaysian corporates, while South Korea and Japan are top picks now. Asia is popular because the value of the incentive tour suits the current sales targets set for average qualifiers. For European destinations, a longer qualifying period is needed. However, we are now encouraging clients to pick Europe for incentives because of the weak euro, which has resulted in lower land cost and greater value for shopping." ■



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COVER STORY

Bumps in the road

Event planners point out the obstacles in business this year

"Labour will continue to be a key challenge. The cost of hiring a graduate in Singapore is (very high). It is also difficult to find staff who are not afraid to get their hands dirty, while being able to visualise the nitty-gritty of planning and executing a business event. Labour challenges make it hard for companies like mine to grow (in terms of manpower). And while I want to increase my fees to better cope with the rising cost of operations, I cannot do so when competitors are absorbing the increment to win business."

Daniel Chua, managing director, Aonia Singapore

"Pricing is still a sensitive (decision-making) element and the greatest challenge in this business. Sometimes, with some extraordinary ideas, we can encourage the client to spend a little more. We will have to keep a look out for new, unique activities and attractions, and entice clients to choose destinations where these draws are. It will be an advantage for us to have

first-hand information, so access to destination information is even more crucial."

E T Quah, owner, Feature Tour Malaysia



"We are facing tougher competition as there are many new PCOs and event organisers. Consequently, professional manpower, especially those experienced in MICE, are harder to find. Also, increasing costs mean greater efficiency measures must be taken."

Ketut Jaman, managing director, Melali MICE Bali

"Competition has become so intense. We need good sales (figures) while maintaining a healthy profit margin to overcome high costs. We have to develop new and creative products, and present competitive proposals to negotiate successfully with suppliers."

Ida Bagus Lolec, country manager Indonesia, Pacific World

"India's current tax regime is oppressive. When we invoice a client, a 12.4 per cent

service tax is applied irrespective of where the event is held – overseas or in India. Many clients resent this burden. We lost some business when clients chose to (engage) DMCs in Singapore for their events in Asia-Pacific."

Sushil Wadhwa, chairman, Platinum World India



"Like the rest of the world we are following the roller-coaster ride of the eurozone and the politics that surround it. We are aware of the possible 'knock-on' effects of the fiscal uncertainty, so we plan for the worst and hope for the best!"

Kritidech Srabua, founder and CEO, Oriental Events Thailand

"Airfares will continue to be an issue. We have encountered business class fares from India to Las Vegas that varied by more than 200 per cent. Moreover, in the high season, airlines are averse to negotiating group rates for MICE."

Koushik Goswami, general manager-outbound, Travelcorp India



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The year forward for the meetings industry

ICCA CEO, **Martin Sirk**, puts his finger on the pulse of the international meetings segment and identifies four key issues that will impact the industry in 2013

Issue 1 Changing perceptions about the importance of international meetings

We believe that in 2013 there will be wider understanding at a national political level of how international meetings contribute towards national economic development strategies. Asia is already ahead of most other regions with regard to this issue, and intra-regional competition will encourage greater awareness and strategic thinking.

Once China fully understands this link between winning more international meetings and policy advancement in areas such as trade development, inward investment, high-tech knowledge transfer, healthcare programmes and commercial opportunities for local businesses, this will accelerate the trend throughout the region. Beijing recently launched its first *Congress Ambassador* programme for academics and healthcare leaders, specifically because of this change in perception about our industry. And where Beijing and Shanghai (which launched the first such programme a few years ago) lead, other Chinese cities will quickly follow.

Issue 2 Competition on the basis of intellectual factors

Singapore and various cities in Australia are leading the way by highlighting their Nobel Prize winners and leading research institutes rather than their tourist and cultural appeal, but other destinations in Asia are rushing to catch up. Brainpower is trumping tourist appeal in the congress decision-making process. Expect more of the same in 2013.

Issue 3 More marketing platforms to invest in, along with greater pressures to reduce spend

It's tough out there! We're hearing from numerous ICCA members all over the world about the pressures they are under to cut back on their marketing spend – especially from convention bureaus, as they rely on member contributions to fund this activity. At the same time, there are more media choices – both print and online, more trade shows, more decisions to make regarding levels of expenditure on social media, gamification ideas (the use of game mechanics to engage users and improve ROI) and website improvements, as well as more association memberships to evaluate.

This is going to be a year when any organisation looking for a share of the marketing spend is going to have to work incredibly hard to prove the effectiveness of their channels and activities. Asia's meetings market is doing better than the global average, to be sure, but competitive pressures are just as tough, so there are sure to be winners and losers among both meetings suppliers and the companies fighting to attract their marketing dollars.

Issue 4 Another year of scientific, healthcare, and technological breakthroughs

ICCA will be celebrating its 50th anniversary this year (visit <http://50years.iccaworld.com> for more details), and throughout this half-century we have seen a non-stop increase in the importance of international association meetings. Meetings activity has indeed accelerated over the past decade. This change is being primarily fuelled by advances in science, medical research and technological breakthroughs.

We are still in the early stages of the Information Revolution, and as researchers improve our understanding of genetics, as new materials are invented, and as computer power continues to obey the accelerating growth of Moore's Law, these are going to drive increasing association meetings activity, sustain existing events and create new ones for the fastest growing specialisations. For this reason, even though 2013 is almost certain to have some unpleasant economic surprises in store for the world, ICCA is very optimistic over continued growth in the international association congress sector. ■



COVER STORY

Conventions and exhibitions: Asia-Pacific rising

Asia-Pacific's exhibitions sector is brewing with opportunities, and several trends are gaining momentum now. UFI's **Mark Cochrane** shares his outlook for 2013 with **Karen Yue**



How did Asia-Pacific's exhibitions industry do in 2012 as a destination?

It takes several months for us to complete the update of our database of more than 2,000 Asian B2B exhibitions. So while I do not have a definitive answer regarding growth in 2012, my sense is that it was another solid year for exhibitions in this region. (See chart on Asian exhibition space sold on page 17.)

I expect South-east Asia will continue to perform well as international organisers are very interested in launches and acquisitions in this region.

China – despite concerns that the economy has slowed – is still expected to record GDP growth of 7.5 per cent in 2012. That should provide plenty of support for the growth of B2B exhibitions in China.

However, it is worth noting that the growth in China's exhibitions industry is by no means evenly spread. The category-leading exhibitions and events organised by international

organisers will generally outperform the weaker tier-two and tier-three events in most categories.

Which destinations fared best in 2012 according to UFI's research?

Again, we do not have definitive 2012 figures yet, but I would expect that the South-east Asian trend, which began in 2011, will continue throughout 2012 and 2013. The fastest-growing markets, measured by space sold in 2011, included Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia. I would expect that 2012 would result in a similar configuration of these markets at the top of the growth chart.

Large markets such as China, India and South Korea will also likely post modest, but reasonable exhibition growth.

And unfortunately, once again, Japan can be expected to be one of the poorest performers in 2012, given the strength of the yen and the weakness in Japan's underlying economic

fundamentals. Of course, Japan's ongoing political dispute with China over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands will hit trade between the two countries and that will inevitably negatively impact B2B exhibitions in Japan.

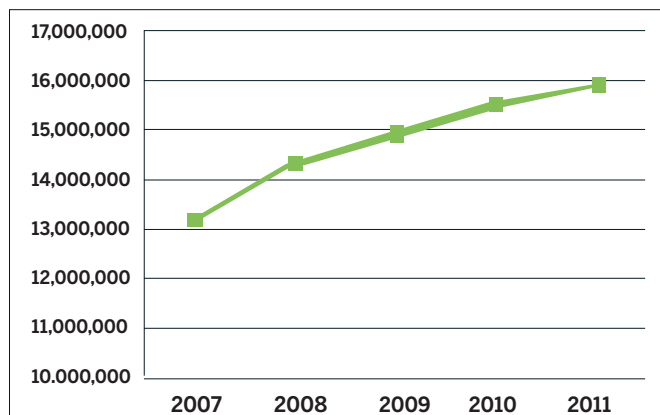
How did Asia-Pacific's exhibitions industry do in 2012 as a source market?

Trends in the exhibitions industry generally take several years to play out, so we are seeing quite a few interesting trends gaining momentum. There are three most interesting trends.

First, organisers are showing interest in exploring visitor services such as match-making, video conferencing for VIP visitors who cannot attend the exhibition in person and "guided tours" of the floor of large exhibitions. These are just some of the innovative visitor services currently being evaluated by exhibition organisers.

Second, paid conferences are getting increased attention from exhibition organisers as a means to generate both incremental revenues and unique content that can be re-used on an online platform.

Third, mergers and acquisition activity is increasing, as exhibition organisers with international reach are looking at Asia as a growth opportunity – especially when compared with their home markets in the US and Europe where finding growth is much more challenging. There are plenty of such examples



Total exhibition space sold (net m²) in Asia, 2007-2011
Source: UFI Research

throughout 2012. For instance, Tarsus took a 50 per cent stake in the China International Automotive Aftermarket Industry and Tuning (Guangzhou) Trade Fair, and Global Sources acquired an 80 per cent stake in China (Shenzhen) International Brand Clothing & Accessories Fair.

This trend will drive growth within these individual shows as the international organiser will help the local (partner) to bring



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COVER STORY

in a greater variety of visitors and exhibitors from overseas. It will also give the international organiser and the local partner a chance to work together to launch other new exhibitions in that particular market. Both sides of the deal will benefit with increased opportunities and incremental growth.

Which industries generated the highest frequency/scale of exhibitions in this region in 2012?

Actually, B2B exhibitions in Asia are very well diversified in terms of industry categories. We segment the Asian exhibitions market into 27 different industry categories. In 2011, no category held more than 10 per cent (in shares). The three largest categories, Furniture & Interior Design, Electronics & Components, and Engineering & Industrial Machinery, each held a 10 per cent share of the total Asian market.

All other categories accounted for six per cent or less of total space sold. In any given year, some categories may have an increased number of launches – energy, construction and automotive come to mind – but in terms of regional space sold, the industry will remain very well diversified.

Q: What sort of growth opportunities will Asia-Pacific see in 2013? Which destinations in this region will stand out?

A: China dominates the exhibitions industry in Asia, account-

ing for more than 55 per cent of all space sold in the region in 2011. So as long as the Chinese economy remains vibrant, one can expect the exhibitions industry in Asia to post a reasonably strong year.

I think that will be the case in 2013. China's overall economic growth may modulate and the exhibitions industry in mainland China may begin to mature and consolidate, but I think you will see quite strong growth for the larger, higher-quality events across the industry in China.

As I had said earlier, all indications are that the growth recorded in South-east Asia in 2011 will continue in 2012 and 2013. There is a lot of excitement about the exhibition opportunities in markets such as Indonesia, Malaysia and even Myanmar.

This is one of the many reasons that the annual UFI Open Seminar in Asia will be held in Jakarta in February this year. Markets in South-east Asia – in particular Indonesia – are finally and deservedly gaining attention.

For example, Indonesia is one of the most under-served exhibitions markets in Asia with a population of 240 million and a GDP of US\$845 billion. The economy there continues to grow and Jakarta is adding two new exhibition venues in the coming few years. Yet, measured by net square metres sold, Indonesia ranks 11th in Asia, behind Singapore.

The growth opportunity there and across South-east Asia is significant and should not be underestimated. ■



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Hotels in Singapore's Marina Bay are better positioned to attract tourists; Marina Bay Sands' Infinity Pool pictured here in the foreground



Singapore Tourism Board

Competition heats up

Marina Bay hotels are forging ahead of their counterparts in Orchard Road in the popularity stakes. But Orchard hotels are putting up a fight, reports **Linda Haden**

Singapore's hotel sector continues to boom as it competes neck and neck with Hong Kong for the title of the world's busiest hotel market.

According to the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), the standard average occupancy rate for the country touched 86 per cent in the first nine months of 2012, a figure far higher than global tourist destina-

tions such as Bangkok, London and Paris. The country's average room rate (ARR) climbed to S\$261 (US\$212) in January-September, versus S\$243 over the same period in 2011. In contrast, occupancy stood at just 76 per cent while ARR only managed to hit S\$190 in 2009.

As Singapore's economy shifted into recovery mode after the tumultuous global fiscal crisis of 2008, hoteliers were

one of the first beneficiaries of the country's expanding influence as a premier business, leisure and financial hub.

The opening of two integrated resorts in 2010 – Marina Bay Sands and Resorts World Sentosa – played a pivotal role in ramping up the performance of Singapore's hotel sectors. Occupancy and room rates soared as the number of visitors multiplied. By the end of 2011, ARR

had increased to S\$245, while occupancy jumped to 86 per cent.

On the surface, hotels in Singapore seem to be surging ahead together. However, if one delves beyond the initial figures, it becomes evident that hotels in Marina Bay are actually outperforming their counterparts in Orchard Road.

According to STR Global, revenue per available room (RevPAR) for hotels situated in Marina Bay grew by 13.2 per cent to S\$277 in the first half of 2012, a figure significantly higher than the islandwide average of 8.2 per cent. Properties lying within Orchard Road, on the other hand, reported a comparatively paltry 1.8 per cent growth in RevPAR over the same period.

Janet Tan-Collis, managing director of East West Executive Travellers, who has observed a clear shift in demand in the last two years, said: "Marina Bay has certainly become the accommodation hotspot for our clients, while demand for Orchard properties has been in the doldrums since the opening of the IRs, save for a handful of hotels such as the Four Seasons and the Shangri-La.

"There's just too little going on (in Orchard Road) compared to Marina Bay, which now has a bevy of attractions as well as entertainment and dining options to entice tourists and locals alike."

Unsurprisingly, given the immense



"There's just too little going on (in Orchard Road) compared to Marina Bay – which now has a bevy of attractions as well as entertainment and dining options to entice tourists and locals alike."

Janet Tan-Collis
Managing director,
East West Executive Travellers

competition, hotels in Orchard Road are rolling out promotional tactics to draw guests. According to DMCs, the discounts for hotel rates are as high as 20 per cent.

"There's definitely been an upswing in promotions of late. Special rates are usually offered over the weekend when there's normally a lull to draw staycationers and also during seasonal lows such as just after New Year or over Chinese New Year," said The Traveller DMC executive director, Yvonne Low.

Collis-Tan highlighted that even though hotels in Marina Bay also employ promotional schemes to attract guests, a large proportion institute longer or more frequent blackout periods than properties in Orchard Road.

"Promotions from hotels located in Marina Bay tend to come in dribs and drabs throughout the year, and are not as constant as those drummed up by hotels in other parts of Singapore," she

lamented.

In addition to competing on price, some hotels in Orchard Road are looking to raise yields over the long term by investing in asset enhancement programmes. Indeed, three hotels in the district – the Singapore Marriott Hotel, Orchard Parade Hotel and Pan Pacific Orchard – underwent extensive multi-million dollar facelifts in the last 24 months.

Even though industry observers agreed that sporting a new look would bulk up returns, many also pointed out that this was not the definitive solution to combat the mounting competition ahead.

"Besides a facelift, these hotels need to enhance their facilities, dining options and most importantly, their customer service to differentiate themselves," said Pacific World's regional director for Singapore & Malaysia, Selina Helen Grcott.

Tony Aw, assistant general manager

Singapore is set to debut several new hotels in 2013

Carlton City Hotel Singapore

Number of rooms: 386
Location: Gopeng Street, within the central business district

Changi Cove

Number of rooms: 135
Location: Fairy Point Hill in the east

Days Hotel Singapore at Zhongshan Park

Number of rooms: 405
Location: Jalan Rajah, a 10-15 minutes' drive to Orchard Road, Marina Bay and the central business district

East Village Hotel

Number of rooms: 229
Location: East Coast Road, a short drive from Changi International Airport and opposite

Parkway Parade shopping mall

Holiday Inn Express Clarke Quay

Number of rooms: 160
Location: At the junction of Clemenceau Avenue and Havelock Road, and close to the city centre

Holiday Inn Express Orchard

Number of rooms: 220
Location: Orchard Road

One Farrer Park Hotel & Spa

Number of rooms: 160
Location: Farrer Road, part of Connexion integrated healthcare and wellness hub

Pan Pacific Serviced Suites Beach Road

Number of rooms: 180
Location: Beach Road, bordering the central business district

Ramada Hotel Singapore at Zhongshan Park

Number of rooms: 384
Location: Ah Hood Road, a 10-15 minutes' drive to Orchard Road, Marina Bay and the central business district

Sofitel So Singapore

Number of rooms: 134
Location: Robinson Road, within the central business district

The Amoy

Number of rooms: 37
Location: Far East Square, within the central business district

Westin Singapore Marina Bay

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Location: Asia Square Tower 2, within the central business district



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(inbound), Hong Thai Travel Services, believes that Orchard hotels have to tread cautiously and not use a brand-new décor, services or facilities to justify drastic rate hikes.

He said: “Mind you, hotels in Orchard are not only competing with other hotels in Singapore, but with other properties in the region as well. Singapore is perceived as an expensive destination relative to our neighbours. There’s only so much that guests are willing to pay, and I believe that with rates at an all-time high, we are getting dangerously close to the breaking point.

“Hotels must not price themselves out by ensuring that they offer a compelling value proposition, and that they fulfil their promise of delivering excellent accommodation and exceptional levels of service.”

On top of offering value for money, hotels in Orchard Road should also leverage on their existing relationships with travel firms.

Dennis Law, managing director of Star Holiday Mart, said: “Hoteliers have to be much more proactive in engaging and working with local inbound travel experts to market their hotels to key target markets around the world and to expand their network and leads.

“Hotels are not doing as much as they should now to profit from this synergistic relationship. The close ties cultivated with local agencies will become more invaluable as the global economy continues to be mired in uncertainty.” ■



Singapore Flyer

A variety of attractions, such as the Singapore Flyer pictured here, are luring locals and foreign visitors to Marina Bay

Ideas

A taste of Singapore's vintage culinary delights



Chin Mee Chin Confectionary

Day one

Start the day with a hearty and traditional Singaporean breakfast at Chin Mee Chin Confectionary on East Coast Road in Katong. Step back in time at this 80-year-old institution to feast on creamy *kaya* (coconut jam) and dollops of butter lashed generously on sweet, soft rolls.

Head down East Coast Road and make a pitstop at Glory Catering to grab delightful morsels of Nonya *kueh*, or Straits Chinese cakes, then stroll to nearby Dunman Road to view a row of traditional Peranakan shophouses decked in an array of pastel shades.

Afterwards, walk to Joo Chiat Place, where Singapore's first Peranakan restaurant Guan Hoe Soon resides. Dishes served here are a veritable riot of South-east Asian spices and flavourings, blending the best of both Chinese and Malay cuisine. *Chendol*, a coconut cream-based ice treat, is a must-have here. Then head back to Joo Chiat Road and make your way to number 95, Kway Guan Huat, where its proprietors toil relentlessly to make stacks of *popiah*, or rice flour-based springroll wrappings, by hand.

From Joo Chiat Road, walk on to Geylang Serai Market. Browse through the shops selling bric-a-brac on the second floor, before stopping at one of the many drinks stalls for a refreshing *bandung*, a milky rosewater drink. If there's still room in your stomach, sample the satay, which are charcoal-grilled

marinated meats, or Indian *rojak* – a mixture of potatoes, fried dough fritters, boiled eggs, deep-fried tofu and prawns topped with a sweet, spicy sauce.

Day two

Today we head off to Tiong Bahru, which, alongside Katong, is one of Singapore's oldest neighbourhoods.

Kick the walk off with a helping of *chwee kueh*, or rice cakes with preserved radish, at Jian Bo Shui Kueh on the second floor of Tiong Bahru market. Next, step further down to Tiong Bahru Pau and fill up on freshly made steamed roasted-pork buns and prawn dumplings. On the ground floor, wander round the market stalls, as crowds jostle along, perusing the colourful stalls selling all manner of ingredients.

Step out of the market and head to the intersection of Seng Poh and Eng Hoon streets. Set your gaze on the old-school architecture before crossing to the opposite corner, where curry rice with pork chop has been served since 1946 at Loo's Hainanese Curry Rice.

At the end of the street, turn left onto Kim Pong Road, strolling along the verdant open space of Kim Tian Green. As the road curves stay to the right on Yong Siak Street, and 1950s modernist-style flats will greet you. By now its time to stop for a coffee or tea break so pop into Forty Hands which has become an acclaimed fixture in this gentrifying neighbourhood.



Tiong Bahru Market

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NEED TO KNOW

Marine Life Park makes a splash

Resort World Sentosa's long-awaited Marine Life Park finally opened its doors on November 22, 2012. The eight-hectare attraction is divided into two sections.

The SEA Aquarium is home to 100,000 marine animals of over 800 species in 45 million litres of water, while the Adventure Cove Waterpark is a water-based amusement park offering six water slides including Riptide Rocket – the region's first hydro-magnetic coaster – a wave pool and a 620m lazy river meandering through 14 themed scenes.

A total of 11 Ocean Suites, which are attached to the Equarius Hotel, features under-water views of the Open Ocean Habitat at the SEA Aquarium from floor-to-ceiling windows.

**Go MAD for eclecticism**

MAD, which stands for Modern Asian Diner, is the collaborative brainchild between Dick Lee, Singapore's celebrated singer-songwriter, and four luminaries from the local culinary scene – TungLok Group, Bar Stories, Bakerzin and Top Wines.

Featuring a wine cellar, bakery and retail shop purveying a variety of Singaporean brands, the 173-seat casual restaurant also serves up an eclectic mix of traditional dim sum, Spanish tapas and modern European dishes, amid a distinctively eccentric decor. It opened its doors on December 1 last year.

**Indulge in Colombian delights**

Dive into Colombian street food at La Barra, a casual dining concept dedicated to the culinary repertoire of this colourful country. Diners have the opportunity to create their own arepa, a corn pancake stuffed with fillings. The outlet also offers empanadas, corn-based pastry turnovers filled with an assortment of fresh ingredients. La Barra is situated at Star Vista in Bona Vista, a district on the island's west.

**Far East Hospitality to unveil hotel in Eastern Singapore**

Far East Hospitality Management is poised to open the 229-key East Village Hotel on March 1. Located in the eastern region of Singapore between the bustling food haven of Katong and Marine Parade, the hotel is targeted at both business and leisure travellers. All rooms will sport Straits Chinese-inspired touches, reflecting the rich cultural heritage of the area. Room rates start from S\$188** per night for a superior room.

**Have a hearty laugh**

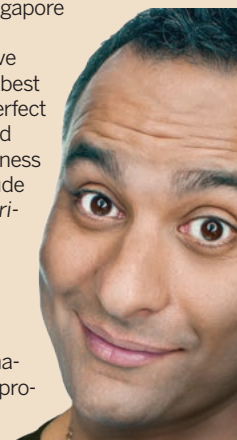
Canada's biggest comedy export, Russell Peters, will bring his hard-hitting humour back to Singapore's shores on March 25 at the Singapore Indoor Stadium.

He performed two sold-out shows on May 5-6 in Singapore last year, setting attendance records for a single stand-up comedian at the Singapore Indoor Stadium.

And if you believe laughter is both the best medicine and the perfect way to kick off or end days of solemn business meetings, then include Russell Peters' *Notorious World Tour* into your programme.

The show is produced by LAMC Productions.

For more information, visit www.lamcproductions.com.

**Siloso Beach sports new look**

Beachgoers to Sentosa now have more food and beverage options when they set foot on Siloso Beach, thanks to a S\$3 million (US\$2.5 million) facelift. Since the refurbishment was completed in end-December, visitors have been able to sample local fare at a food court or dine at the beach rotisserie, in addition to whiling the time away at the spruced-up venues of Coastes, Bikini Bar and Sand Bar.

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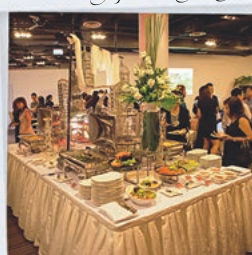
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City of Sapporo

Odori Park in Sapporo hosts the city's annual winter and lilac festivals

Attractive neighbours

South-east Asia's MICE markets are a shining target for Sapporo Convention Bureau, but high costs and a lack of awareness are obstacles, says **Mimi Hudoyo**

The City of Sapporo has locked on to South-east Asia as part of its efforts to ramp up MICE business into the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido, especially for the incentives markets.

Sapporo Convention Bureau (SCB) deputy director and MICE coordinator, Marico Ogi, said: "Our plan for this year is to focus more on the South-east Asia region through direct sales efforts in the market, invitations (for site visits) to (decision makers), and participation in (MICE) tradeshows."

Initially, only Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand were on the radar, but the bureau has since cast its eye on Indonesia, which it intends to enter in 2013.

In March 2013, SCB and the Thai Convention & Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) will ink a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Chiang Mai, sealing a new partnership to develop a climate suitable for MICE and foster better relations between the two sides.

Through the MoU, the bureau hopes to repeat the success it enjoyed when it signed a similar agreement with Daejeon,

South Korea, in 2010.

"The MoU between SCB and Daejeon International Marketing Enterprise proved the importance of such partnerships, as it helped both sides to improve the environment for holding international conventions through the exchange of information," Ogi remarked.

"Ties between the two bureaus were also strengthened through closer cooperation during international events and tradeshows such as the Korea MICE Expo and International Meetings Expo.

"We hope to achieve the same, and



Vidya Hermanto

Managing director, Panorama Tours Indonesia

“What we actually need is destination awareness. Japan in general, and Hokkaido in particular, needs to highlight what it has to offer for corporate incentives and show (clients) why they should go there instead of, say, South Korea or Europe. The availability of halal food is a plus point...not a major consideration...”

even more, through the MoU with TCEB,” she added.

As part of SCB’s partnership with TCEB, two projects in Sapporo have been planned for the year ahead. The first, Amazing Thailand Road Show, will provide a meeting platform for Thailand’s private sector tourism players and the Japanese MICE sector. The second, the Sapporo/Hokkaido MICE Contents Mart, is organised by the bureau and aims to enhance the competitive edge of Sapporo and its surrounding destinations.

There are also plans for joint programmes in Thailand, but they have not been finalised at press time.

Meanwhile, SCB is looking to revamp its Muslim travel offerings as it gears up to further penetrate the South-east Asian market. Said Ogi: “A deeper understanding of the market requires a deeper understanding of our customers. In November 2012, SCB representatives visited Malaysia and Singapore and met with MICE representatives of both countries to discuss future projects and collaborations.”

Among the insights gleaned from the trip was the need to satisfy the basic needs of Muslim travellers.

“We are in the process of developing a more Muslim-friendly environment, which includes improving hotel services through (the provision of) halal food options and (praying space),” she said.

This renewed focus on Muslim travel may well aid the bureau in its venture into the world’s most populous Muslim nation, Indonesia. SCB plans on making sales trips to Indonesia and host fam programmes for the market’s travel trade.

Ogi believes that building Muslim-friendly facilities is a “crucial measure when it comes to increasing awareness of Sapporo as a preferred destination for Indonesians”.

Commenting on SCB’s plans, Panorama Tours Indonesia’s managing director – corporate incentive management, Vidya Hermanto, said: “What we actually need is destination awareness. Japan in general, and Hokkaido in particular, needs to highlight what it has to offer for corporate incentives and show (clients) why they should go there instead of, say, South Korea or Europe, which are popular and value for money.

“The availability of halal food is a plus point and will be appreciated by Muslim travellers, but it is not a major consideration when choosing a destination. Food that does not contain pork or lard is acceptable to the majority of travellers.”

Besides Indonesia, the bureau is also keen on developing Vietnam as a new MICE source market. In conjunction with the Visit Japan Travel Mart held last November in Kanagawa, the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) invited overseas outbound operators including MICE specialists from Indonesia and Vietnam on a fam trip to Hokkaido.

JNTO Bangkok executive director Hiroshi Masud, who oversees both Thailand and Vietnam markets, told *TTGmice*

that almost all Japan-bound tours from Vietnam would take the golden route, which covers Tokyo and Kyoto. Through the fam trip to Hokkaido, JNTO hopes to encourage Vietnamese buyers to consider programmes to the northern region.

According to Vietnamese travel consultants, local government officials and corporate incentive participants tend to dominate the country’s outbound travel market due to difficulties in obtaining visas for leisure travel.

For Tour 100 Vietnam, demand for Japan as an incentive destination has been on the rise “over the last few years”. The company’s director of sales, Vu Minh Chau, said Japan’s famous Tokyo and Kyoto routes were most favoured.

She believes that introducing new destinations in Japan will help her to further grow the market.

However, Vu noted that because of Japan’s pricey nature, clients would regard the destination as being suitable for higher level incentives.

“A company would have a budget of US\$300 per person for an incentive trip to Thailand, but a programme in Japan for five to seven days would cost between US\$1,000 to US\$2,000 per person,” she explained.

Other MICE buyers from South-east Asia share Vu’s view, a challenge that Ogi acknowledges.

Ogi said: “The limited number of direct flights to Sapporo from Asia-Pacific is a challenge we are facing at this moment. Besides the issue of access – which is slowing progress in the development of MICE between Japan and South-east Asia – there is also the matter of cost.

“Getting to Sapporo is not cheap because one has to pay for two air tickets (in order to access Hokkaido from South-east Asia) and the tickets themselves are expensive. This is (aggravated by) the exchange rates between South-east Asian currencies and the Japanese yen.” ■

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Karen Ylue

(From left) Organise a dine-around at Otaru's Sushi Street, and dive into fields of flowers in Furano's Farm Tomita

A destination for all seasons

By Mimi Hudoyo

Sapporo Convention Bureau (SCB) and its tourism peers from the other cities in Hokkaido have put their heads together to devise ways to lure incentive groups from abroad.

Said the bureau's deputy director and MICE coordinator, Marico Ogi: "Last year, we established a MICE unit comprising members from Sapporo, Otaru, Niseko, Kutchan and Noboribetsu to provide customers a richer selection of teambuilding activities and unique venues.

"We plan to further develop and promote this colloration and the services offered. This year, we will work towards growing our menu in terms of venues, activities and attractions."

One of the unique services the MICE unit offers is to welcome incentive groups with melons that have the company's logo carved into the skin.

Hokkaido, which enjoys high travel demand during its long winter months from November to March, will bank on its snow and winter festivals, including the famous Sapporo Snow Festival, to pique incentive travellers' interest.

In winter, ski resorts also hold their own celebrations such as the Chitose-Lake Shikotsu Ice Festival, the Asahikawa Winter Festival, the Souunkyo Hyobaku (Ice Waterfall) Festival and the Lake Shikaribetsu Kotan Festival. Corporate groups

can join in the festivities and also partake in teambuilding activities on the ski slopes.

The northern island prefecture offers many other draws in the warmer seasons too. Akihiro Shiro, tourism policy planning section executive, tourism & convention promotion department, City of Sapporo Tourism & Cultural Affairs Bureau, recommends coinciding incentive programmes with the cherry blossom, lavender or lilac blooming seasons.

Besides nature attractions, Hokkaido also boasts several unique venues for events. The Okurayama Ski Jump Stadium, venue of the 1972 Winter Olympics, can host summer and night-time ski jump events, while a nearby hall has the capacity for a 150-pax party.

In summer, event planners can shape a teambuilding programme around Mount Kurodake. Delegates may take the ropeway from the base of the mountain to the fifth station, switch to a chairlift that operates only in summer to ride up to the seventh station, before embarking on a 90-minute climb to reach the pinnacle at 1,984m above ground.

For a less strenuous day, the onsen or hot springs within the Souunkyo gorges are a great way to soak away city burdens.

Hokkaido Hakone Farm in Chitose makes an interesting destination for incentive groups too, where participants can get

down and not-so-dirty with year-round activities such as butter churning, sausage- and cheese-making, and corn and potato harvesting. Seasonal options include parasailing and snowmobiling in winter.

The farm also has futsal and volleyball courts for sporting events and a barbecue house that can take up to 150 people indoors and 80 outdoors.

Yet another draw of Hokkaido is its plethora of unique gastronomic attractions. Delegates can try their hands at making ramen or tour sake breweries.

For instance, a hearty group dinner can be held at the Sapporo Beer Garden. Built during the Meiji era, the venue is fantastic for a beer-and-barbecue dinner. Pair the dining event with a visit to the Sapporo Beer Museum and a facility tour of the Hokkaido Brewery.

The port city of Otaru, a 25-minute drive from Sapporo, is home to a bustling Sushi Street, and adventurous incentive groups may even play an amazing race themed around the much-loved Japanese dish.

Otaru, is also famous for glassware and music boxes, and top achievers can watch artists at work or even test their glass-blowing and sandblasting skills.

"Asian (incentive) travellers enjoy shopping, and Sapporo has a wide range of shops to offer," said Shiro. ■

Ideas

One-day jaunt in Sapporo and Otaru



Mimi Hudoyo

Otaru Canal and its gas lamps draw photographers

Start the day early with a whirlwind romance with chocolates. Sapporo is home to Shiroy Koibito Park, a theme park by Ishiya, a local company that makes some of the best confectionery in Hokkaido. See how the popular Shiroy Koibito chocolate cookie is made, and even create your own.

Make time for lunch and a cup of thick, hot chocolate at the Chocolate Lounge on the fourth floor, where one can also enjoy a clear view of Mount Yoichi.

Then, pass through the Odori Park

where local landmarks such as the Sapporo TV Tower and the Sapporo City Archive Museum are close by. Hike up the Sapporo TV Tower – or 90m skywards – for a 360° view of the city from the observation deck.

Later, travel 25 minutes to the laid-back city of Otaru. Take in the sights along the Otaru Canal, hop on a rickshaw and stroll along Sakaimachi Street. Make a pit stop at Gin no Kane coffee house. Buy a souvenir cup and you can use it immediately for free refills of coffee.

NEED TO KNOW

Serenity Garden at Hotel Chinzanso Tokyo

Hotel Chinzanso Tokyo, formerly Four Seasons Hotel Tokyo at Chinzan-so, is building a rooftop garden, which will serve as an open-air venue for weddings, corporate parties and other special events.

The 1,500m² garden, which is expected to open in March, will offer a panoramic view of Tokyo and the Japanese botanical gardens.

The development of the outdoor venue is part of the hotel's renovation and upgrading following the management takeover by Fujita Kanko on January 1 this year.



Serenity Garden

Free Wi-Fi access in the city

Travellers will no longer have to look for Wi-Fi oases like desert wanderers. Free Wi-Fi is now available at Narita International Airport, Haneda Airport, as well as 13 train stations in Tokyo's metropolitan areas, including Shinjuku, Shibuya and Akihabara. The Japan Railway Company, which provides the service, launched it in October 2012.

This follows Kyoto's introduction of free Wi-Fi in August 2012, making hassle-free connections available in 630 locations such as subway stations and the city's public facilities.

Running wild in Kyoto

The second Kyoto Marathon will be held on March 10. The course starts at Nishikyogoku Sport Park and cuts through the north-eastern and eastern part of the city, where many temples and shrines such as the renowned Kinkaku-ji and Ginkaku-ji are located, to finish near Heian Shrine. The Kyoto Marathon was first organised in 2011 after the devastating March 11 earthquake.

Hold meetings before the emperor at Palace Hotel Tokyo

Previously Hotel Teito and Palace Hotel, the 290-room luxury Palace Hotel Tokyo has reopened in front of the Imperial Palace.

The property has eight function rooms that can be divided into 15 breakout rooms. Its ballroom, measuring more than 1,000m², can accommodate 1,440 pax in theatre style or 630 banquet guests.

Meeting room facilities include an 80-inch screen, on-roof projector, ceiling speaker, a Blu-ray and DVD player, as well as high-speed wired and wireless Internet access.

There are also 10 restaurants in the hotel.



Warner Bros

Harry Potter to cast his spell on Japan next year

The Wizarding World of Harry Potter will leave visitors spellbound when the attraction opens at Universal Studios Japan in 2014.

The Wizarding World of Harry Potter's debut will mark the global expansion of the wildly popular entertainment experience after its successful launch at Universal Studios Orlando in 2000.

Like the Orlando version, Japan's will include a Hogwarts Castle and Hogsmeade.

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Japan's top MICE cities offer not only superb infrastructure but also distinctive cultural experiences. Japan is a truly extraordinary MICE destination. It is safe, clean, well-organised and well-mannered, giving even first-time visitors complete peace of mind. Japan's well-

developed domestic MICE market means its infrastructure is highly sophisticated and its workforce eminently skilled. Being in the Land of Rising Sun is special because few destinations capture the imagination like Japan—so familiar yet mythical, so efficient yet unfailingly gracious. From meeting in a Japanese garden to touring the factory of a famous Japanese brand, MICE visitors will have much to discover.



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Thank you for considering Japan for MICE.

Japan has much to offer international visitors. Our strength lies in our well-developed infrastructure, rich culture and the gracious hospitality of the Japanese people. We are pleased to have learned from two recent events — the 2012 Annual Meetings of the IMF and World Bank in Tokyo and the financial services event Sibos 2012 in Osaka — that many participants rated their meeting in Japan as the best organised.

This is not really surprising for those who are already familiar with the country. We know from diplomats and international businesses based in Japan that the country offers exceptional security, reliability and liveability. There is much efficiency and few inconveniences.

The Japanese people are naturally talented in organisation and preparation. Way back in the 17th century, there were already scheduled shipping services between coastal cities. Notably, it was an initiative by operators themselves, not an order from a higher authority. Today, our trade associations and special-interest bodies in the tourism sector are similarly proactive. It's one of our cultural characteristics that is especially suited for the MICE business. Our domestic MICE market is now a very mature one. Our experience is deep and varied, and will benefit the international MICE organiser very much.

Japan is a special MICE destination also because we have a large business, scientific and academic community. Association event organisers know that events in Japan may achieve higher attendance because they are likely to attract a large local turnout.

We at Japan Tourism Agency are accelerating our marketing efforts overseas so that the true value of Japan is well understood. We also aim to grow our MICE market by helping organisations bid for international events to be held here.

We hope this supplement will give you a new perspective on Japan, and we look forward to welcoming you.

"Our domestic MICE market is now a very mature one. Our experience is deep and varied, and will benefit the international MICE organiser very much."



Mr Norifumi Idee
*Commissioner
Japan Tourism Agency*

New attractions and the reliability of its MICE infrastructure keep Tokyo ahead of the competition

Tokyo

TOKYO captures the imagination of the world with its ability to continuously reinvent itself. As one of the world's favourite cities for MICE, it offers more than 300 event facilities and a well-trained workforce. Whether it is for a convention or incentive tour, Tokyo is a rewarding experience because it fulfills the many classic imageries the world has of Japan—the distinctive culture, the cutting-edge technology, the gracious hospitality. The city is safe, well-maintained and easy to navigate despite its seeming complexity. Whether it is modern architecture, pop culture, traditional arts and craft, food or shopping, there are attractions galore. Tokyo is a high-achieving city with a dazzling array of MICE products that will delight even repeat visitors.



Tokyo Station Hotel.



Happo-En.

Cultural highlight SENSO-JI SHRINE & NAKAMISE- DORI



A well-loved Tokyo attraction, Senso-ji is a temple dedicated to the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy. Upon approach, the Kaminarimon (Thunder Gate) is marked by a distinctive giant red lantern. Nakamise-dori, the lively shopping street leading up to the temple, is ever popular with souvenir hunters. www.senso-ji.jp/

All-in-one TOKYO INTER- NATIONAL FORUM

Linked via a concourse to Japan Railway and Tokyo Metro stations, Tokyo's leading MICE venue consists of the Hall Building (seven halls and three conference rooms) and the Glass Building (one basement exhibition hall and 31 conference rooms), both purpose-built for conventions, banquets, meetings, concerts and exhibitions. Its stunning glass-sheathed architecture is an unmistakable landmark in central Tokyo. www.t-i-forum.co.jp

Razzle dazzle ROPPONGI ACADEMY HILLS

Part of the famous Roppongi Hills entertainment and shopping development, Roppongi Academy Hills is the MICE facility located on the 49th floor of Mori Tower. It offers a Tower Hall for up to 500 people, an auditorium for 150, and eight function rooms. Sections of the observation deck called "Tokyo City View" can be reserved for private functions. mice.academihills.com

tranquility throughout the garden available for private functions. www.happo-en.com

High point TOKYO SKYTREE

At 634m, Tokyo Skytree is the world's tallest free-standing broadcasting tower according to the Guinness World Records. At floors 450-445 (Tembo Galleria), enjoy a panoramic view of the city from the 110-metre long sloping "airwalk". At the Glass Floor, the city is literally below your feet. www.tokyo-skytree.jp

NEW

Chic shopping GINZA

Ginza is home to Japan's grand department stores such as Matsuzakaya and Mitsukoshi. Visit their basement food halls for Japanese sweets and gifts. A "Gin-bura" (Ginza stroll) on the street level will acquaint you with all the most famous luxury brands of the world and their beautiful window displays.



A new landmark — Tokyo Skytree.

Welcome back TOKYO STATION HOTEL

After years of restoration, the city's most historical train station building reopened in October 2012. Built in 1915, it is today a luxurious heritage hotel with 150 rooms and three banquet/function rooms. It is near the Imperial Palace, Marunouchi business area and Ginza. www.tokystationhotel.jp

NEW

Evergreen favourite HAPPO-EN

A 50,000 sqm oasis in the heart of Tokyo, Happo-En is a modern MICE venue set within a tranquil Japanese garden. Founded in the early 1600s, it sits on a naturally hilly area with a remarkable bonsai collection, stone lanterns, a picturesque pond and many traditional buildings. It has 14 meeting rooms, of which the largest can accommodate up to 800. There are also many pockets of

TOKYO FAST FACTS

Estimated total number of hotels: 687*
Estimated total number of rooms: 95,642*
Airports: Tokyo Narita and Tokyo Haneda
Approximate direct flight times to Tokyo:
See "Yokohama Fast Facts"

* Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare (March, 2011)

Contact

Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau
10F, 1-15-15 Nishikata, Bunkyo-ku,
Tokyo 113-0024, Japan
Tel: +81-3-5840-8893
Email: convention@tcvb.or.jp
Website: www.businesseventstokyo.org

Compact and complete, Japan's second city stands confidently on its own with a full spectrum of MICE facilities and attractions

Yokohama



THE FIRST CITY in Japan to open up to foreign residents, Yokohama has been welcoming visitors since 1859. First-time visitors will be pleasantly surprised that although it is the number one port city in Japan with a population of 3.7

million, it is really a friendly city with open spaces, uncrowded streets and a cosmopolitan outlook. "Japan's first port of call" is where the country got acquainted with many innovations: ice-cream, beer, daily newspaper, railway and Western-style furniture and fashion. Today, visitors can easily find their way around this compact city, whether it's attending a conference at Pacifico Yokohama, enjoying a leisurely stroll in the historic Motomachi shopping area and its neighbour Chinatown, checking out the varied attractions at Minato Mirai ("Port of the Future") by the sea or simply admiring the serene beauty of Sankeien Garden. Yokohama is also a gateway to two of Japan's best-loved tourism icons — Hakone (views of Mount Fuji) and Kamakura (Great Buddha).

Meet



Pacifico Yokohama – Japan's largest convention complex. More than 4,000 rooms are within 15 minutes' walk.

All-in-one PACIFICO YOKOHAMA

The largest convention complex in Japan, Pacifico Yokohama consists of a 20,000 sqm **Exhibition Hall**, a 1,350 sqm **Annex Hall**, a 5,000-seat **National Convention Hall** and a 50-room **Conference Center**. The 594-room **InterContinental Yokohama Grand** is part of the complex.
www.pacifico.co.jp/english/

Urban oasis THE YOKOHAMA BAY HOTEL TOKYU

Three minutes' walk from Pacifico Yokohama, this hotel has 480 rooms and



From left: The Yokohama Bay Hotel Tokyu and InterContinental Yokohama Grand.



Developed in the 1980s, Yokohama's Minato Mirai area is today a flourishing urban district and home to several MICE venues and hotels.

suites, two ballrooms and nine function rooms.
pphy.co.jp (From April 2013: ybht.co.jp)

Comfort & convenience
INTERCONTINENTAL YOKOHAMA GRAND

Shaped like a sail facing the sea, InterContinental Yokohama Grand is part of Pacifico Yokohama and offers a total of 594 rooms. It also has a variety of meeting rooms and a 722-sqm exhibition space. www.interconti.co.jp/yokohama/en/

Then & Now
RED BRICK WAREHOUSE



The Red Brick Warehouse consists of two early-20th-century buildings: a shopping mall (Warehouse No. 2) and an events venue (Warehouse No. 1) made up of a main hall and three function spaces. www.yokohama-akarenga.jp/



Seaside icon
OSANBASHI

Designed as an international passenger cruise terminal, Osanbashi boasts a 2,000 sqm, 1,500-capacity (buffet-style) multipurpose hall with a dramatic all-glass back wall suitable for banquets or conventions. On a clear day, Mount Fuji is visible from Osanbashi's futuristic undulating roof deck. www.osanbashi.com/en/

See



Poetic splendour
SANKEIEN GARDEN

Founded by the wealthy silk merchant Sankei Hara in 1906, Sankeien Garden is a sprawling traditional Japanese garden noted for its beautiful foliage and the many old buildings brought from various parts of Japan. Today, private functions and meetings can be held at what was once the owner's residence. Visitors can also learn about Japanese tea ceremony here. www.sankeien.or.jp

Sights and sounds
CHINATOWN

Marked by brightly-coloured gates, the largest Chinatown outside of China is home to more than 500 restaurants and stores. It's alive with activities throughout the year.

Shoppers' delight
MOTOMACHI

Motomachi ("Down the hill") has been a popular shopping street since Yokohama's early days when Western fashion was first introduced to Japan. It is still a very attractive area

for shopping, strolling, people-watching or enjoying a meal after a day of meetings.

Sky high
LANDMARK TOWER

Landmark Tower is Japan's tallest building at 296m with 70-storeys. Take the world's fastest elevator to Sky Garden observatory on the 69th floor. Yokohama Royal Park Hotel occupies the upper floors of the building.



Eat



Sail away
MARINE ROUGE DINNER CRUISE

Groups of up to 260 can enjoy a dinner cruise on the luxurious Marine Rouge. Take in Yokohama's evening skyline as you enjoy a French-style dinner set. www.yokohama-cruising.jp



Yokohama specialty
ARAIYA

With a history dating back to 1895, Araiya is synonymous with beef. Try the *gyu-nabe*, Japan's original beef hot pot or the *sukiyaki* or *shabu-shabu*. The main restaurant is in Akebonocho with a new branch at Bankokubashi.

YOKOHAMA FAST FACTS

Estimated total number of hotels: 80

Estimated total number of rooms: 14,000

Yokohama is accessed through Tokyo's two airports: Tokyo Narita (90 minutes by bus or train) or Tokyo Haneda (30 minutes by bus).

Approximate direct flight times to Tokyo:

Beijing: 2.5 hours

Taipei: 2.5 hours

Hong Kong: 3.5 hours

Manila: 3.5 hours

Ho Chi Minh City: 5 hours

Bangkok: 5.5 hours

Kuala Lumpur: 7 hours

Singapore: 7 hours

Jakarta: 7.5 hours

Contact

Yokohama Convention & Visitors Bureau

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Reputed to be the largest outside China — Yokohama's Chinatown.

Japan's closest city to mainland Asia is a rising MICE star, offering a winning combination of superb venues and unique cultural experiences

Fukuoka



WITH a population of almost 1.5 million, Fukuoka is Japan's eighth largest city. But as a city for MICE, it is consistently ranked among Japan's top three. Thanks to the city's superb MICE venues and hotels, international and domestic connectivity, rich culture and the warm hospitality of its people, Fukuoka is increasingly the choice of international event

planners. Fukuoka airport is only 20 minutes from downtown by taxi (10 minutes by subway), which is a great bonus for visitors. Also known by its historical name Hakata, the city is today well known among gourmets, who travelled from near and far to enjoy the city's fresh seafood, delicious local specialties and dine out at street-stalls called *yatai*. Fukuoka is also the gateway to Kyushu island's many scenic spots and historical and cultural attractions.



A decorated float at Kushida Shrine.



PHOTO : Fumio Hashimoto

Backed by mountains and facing the sea, Fukuoka has been welcoming visitors from mainland Asia for generations.

Meet

Multi-functional FUKUOKA CONVENTION ZONE



Fukuoka's Convention Zone consists of four venues, all within walking distance of one another. The **Marine Messe Fukuoka** is a multipurpose exhibition hall of 8,000 sqm. The **Fukuoka International Congress Center** (above) offers five floors of flexible spaces for meetings, conferences and exhibitions. Its main hall seats up to 3,000 people, while the **Fukuoka Kokusai Center** has a total floor space of 5,052 sqm suitable for a wide variety of events, including the prestigious Grand Sumo Tournament. The **Fukuoka Sun Palace Hotel and Hall** offers a 2,322-capacity auditorium and a 36-room hotel. www.marinemesse.or.jp/eng/

Waterfront luxury HILTON FUKUOKA SEA HAWK

The city's largest hotel (1,053 rooms) also has the most extensive convention space of any private facility in Fukuoka. All guest rooms overlook the sea thanks to the building's distinctive ship-shaped design. Together with neighbors Fukuoka Yahoo! Japan Dome and Hawks Town Mall, it is a landmark of the sea-front Momochi area. www.hiltonfukuokaseahawk.jp



The Fukuoka Yahoo! Japan Dome (foreground) and its neighbour Hilton Fukuoka Sea Hawk.

More than baseball**FUKUOKA YAHOO! JAPAN DOME**

Home to the professional Fukuoka SoftBank Hawks baseball team, the Fukuoka Yahoo! Japan Dome is a large-scale, 38,500-capacity stadium with the first-ever retractable roof in Japan. Visitors may join locals in cheering for the home team during game season (March to October). The venue is available for exhibitions, conventions or concerts during off-season.

Modern history**KYUSHU NATIONAL MUSEUM**

The Kyushu National Museum, noted by its striking wave-like architecture in a forest setting, is the newest among the four national museums in Japan. Opened in 2005, it offers an auditorium and several seminar rooms. It is connected to neighbouring Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine via an escalator and walkways. www.kyuhaku.com

See**Local insight
HAKATA-KAWABATA
SHOPPING
ARCADE**

This shopping avenue is the oldest in Fukuoka, with some 125 shops that are

windows into everyday life in Fukuoka – noodle restaurants, traditional fabrics, clothing, stationery and a great variety of unique, local items that make great souvenirs.

**Cultural highlight
KUSHIDA
SHRINE**

This shrine is home to one of Fukuoka's most famous summer festivals—Hakata Gion Yamakasa—where magnificently-decorated floats are carried and raced along city streets by groups of men. A decorated float is on permanent display.

Eat**Local treats****YATAI
(STREET
STALLS)**

A unique dining culture in Fukuoka, the *Yatai* or street stalls appear in the evening in Nakasu, Tenjin and other areas. It's a great way to eat as locals do, and taste each *Yatai*'s specialty, such as *tonkatsu* (pork bone) ramen or *tempura* (battered and deep-fried seafood or vegetables).

**Freshly-cooked
MIZUTAKI**

The *Mizutaki* is one of the specialty *nabe* (hot pot) dishes of Fukuoka, with vegetables, tofu and other ingredients boiled with chicken. It is served as a communal dish.

**Dining Yatai-style.****The Mizutaki.****Traditional crafts
HAKATA
MACHIYA FOLK
MUSEUM**

Visitors can learn about local crafts such as the Hakata doll and Hakata Ori (woven textile) here through demonstrations by artisans in what is a traditional building from the Meiji period.

**Shopping in Tenjin.****Shopping hotspot
TENJIN**

Tenjin (downtown Fukuoka) is a shoppers' paradise with numerous department stores, specialty shops, boutiques, restaurants and cafés. Don't miss the 150 shops at the 590-metre long Tenjin Underground Shopping Arcade.

**Tasty excursion
DAZAIFU
TENMANGU
SHRINE**

Dating from 1591, Tenmangu Shrine in Dazaifu is very popular among visitors for its beautifully kept grounds and 6,000 plum trees that bloom in February and March. The shopping street leading up to it is where Dazaifu's famous *Umegai-mochi* (pounded rice cake filled with sweet bean paste) can be found.

**Behind the scenes
INDUSTRIAL
TOURS**

Fukuoka prefecture boasts a wide range of industries—

automobiles, foods, drinks, textile, brewery and more. Visitors can go behind the scenes at factories to learn about how Asahi beer

or Yakult are made or watch a robotics performance. www.crossroadfukuoka.jp/en/

**Try the freshly made *Umegai-mochi* on a visit to Dazaifu's Tenmangu Shrine.****FUKUOKA FAST FACTS**

Estimated total number of hotels: 200

Estimated total number of rooms: 30,000

Airport: Fukuoka International Airport. 10 minutes by subway and 20 minutes by taxi to city centre.

Approximate direct flight times to Fukuoka:

From Beijing: 4 hours

From Shanghai: 1.5 hours

From Taipei: 2 hours

From Hong Kong: 4.5 hours

From Ho Chi Minh City: 4.5 hours

From Manila: 3.5 hours

From Bangkok: 5 hours

From Singapore: 6.5 hours

Contact

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www.welcome-fukuoka.or.jp

Why Japan

Four factors are giving planners and delegates new reasons to consider Japan for MICE.

More affordable now

Persistent deflation over the last 20 years have made prices in Japan more affordable. Its reputation of being an expensive destination is no longer true. Furthermore, tipping is not practised in Japan, so substantial savings can be realised on meals, accommodation and other services.



More connected than ever

Tokyo, Fukuoka, Osaka are all enjoying greater connectivity with cities in Asia-Pacific. Foreign low-cost carriers such as AirAsia and JetStar are rapidly expanding their networks to include destinations in Japan, which continues to be served by legacy carriers.



Language is not a problem

Visitors will have little problem finding their way in Japanese cities thanks to the extensive use of English language in signposting on city streets and on transport systems. While not all Japanese can speak English fluently, they are, by nature, ready to assist anyone who needs help.



A rich variety of unique experiences

Japan's cities are exciting destinations in themselves with their unique mix of attractions. But smaller towns and the countryside are increasingly accessible and popular too. From foodies to nature-buffs, artists to techies, everyone will discover a Japan that appeal to them.



News update

Asian visitors are returning

UP UNTIL March 2011 when the tsunami and nuclear crisis in Fukushima kept visitors away, Japan had been achieving strong arrival numbers from most Asian countries. From 2007 to 2010, visitors from Singapore grew 19%, Thailand grew 28%, Malaysia grew 14% and Indonesia grew 26%.

At press time, preliminary same-period (January to November 2012) figures from JNTO suggest that these markets are bouncing back strongly. Compared to 2011, Singapore grew 30%, Thailand grew 86%, Malaysia grew 67% and Indonesia grew 68%. While Singapore is still down 20% compared to the pre-crisis arrival numbers of 2010, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia have all surpassed their 2010 numbers by 20%, 17% and 27% respectively.

China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, important source markets for Japan, grew 43%, 48% and 36% respectively in the same period compared to 2011. China and Taiwan have both surpassed their 2010 numbers by 2% and 14%, but Hong Kong is still 6% below its 2010 arrival number.

Arrivals from major Western markets such as the US, Canada, UK, France, Germany and Russia have yet to recover to 2010 levels.

FAST FACTS

TIME ZONE Japan is one hour ahead of China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore, and two hours ahead of Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia.

AIRPORTS Japan's major international airports are: Tokyo Narita, Tokyo Haneda, Nagoya Centrair, Kansai (serving Osaka, Kyoto and Kobe) and Fukuoka.

At your service



The Japan Convention Bureau and Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) are well-equipped to assist overseas MICE planners and organisers.

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Pain of rising rates

As Hong Kong room rates continue to surge, DMCs are seeking savings elsewhere to secure business and help clients keep to budgets, writes **Prudence Lui**

A familiar scenario is persisting in Hong Kong's hotel industry this year, and it isn't a pretty sight for business event planners: hotel rates will continue to remain strong in 2013, despite an expanded room inventory.

Industry sources told *TTGmice* that strong inbound traffic from mainland China, which is far outpacing the rate of supply growth, will prop up room rates in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) reported that the destination's hotel room count grew from 62,259 in 2011 to 66,815 as of October 2012. Between January and October 2012, average room rate leapt 10.7 per cent to HK\$1,461 (US\$188.50).

Five-star hotels, which are categorised as High Tariff A hotels in HKTB's statistical report, registered the highest growth in room rates for the same period – up 10.7 per cent to HK\$2,417.

Hong Kong's room inventory is expected to rise further this year, to hit 71,688 rooms with a total of 237 hotels.

According to Knight Frank's director, head of research, Greater China, Thomas Lam, double-digit growth in room rates this year will come as no surprise.

Lam explained: "We don't have enough five-star hotels while three- to four-star properties are being taken up fully by groups and FITs. We also lack sufficient downtown hotels, as many new properties are situated outside the central business district in areas such as Kwun Tong and Tseung Kwan O."

Hong Kong's MICE industry had lamented the city's escalating hotel rates in 2012, and with the continuous rise expected this year, event planners and DMCs are employing various methods to stay competitive and help clients keep costs manageable.

MICE World, for instance, banks on its

flexible Japanese clients, who tend not to press for lower rates, according to head of project and business development, Rosanna Leung.

Leung added that the company has also been advising clients to avoid taking events to Hong Kong during peak periods when room rates leap skywards.

"Given the ease of accessibility within Hong Kong, we have simplified itineraries by not providing city tours. For instance, a two-day meeting package will include tours in Macau, followed by a free-and-easy day trip to Hong Kong."

Hong Kong-based The Destination Management Company's conference and incentive travel manager, Adrienne Lynch, said the days of flying guests into Hong Kong on business class were gone, a change that had allowed clients some savings.

Expensive gifts for delegates have also been replaced by cheaper but fun

novelty items.

"Many companies also no longer invite spouses on incentive trips, while some meeting groups have opted for twin-share rooms to keep costs down," said Lynch.

"Communicating openly with hotels is very important. There may be a certain week in a certain month when hotels can offer competitive rates, and that's when we will encourage clients to hold their events."

When asked if clients were pushing harder this year for discounts on other land components in order to accommodate Hong Kong's pricey room rates, Lynch said mark ups had to be relooked to "meet clients' budgets".



"It is hard to reduce the price of land components due to cost appreciation on everything, from commodities to labour. Clients are reacting by breaking up the land programme and getting price quotations from different agents."

Alan Wu
Managing director
Tour Asia

She added: "At the same time, (reduced mark ups) cannot affect the quality of the overall experience. We are very fortunate in Hong Kong to have such a great variety of venues for mid-sized groups. All types of budgets can be accommodated without sacrificing the quality of F&B options.

"It only becomes more challenging when you get larger groups that can only be accommodated by buying out venues or taking a 24-hour hold on meeting space."

As rising costs have prevented any substantial reduction in prices of other land components (excluding hotel rates), Tour Asia managing director, Alan Wu, said clients, especially those from longhaul markets, have been downgrading their accommodation choices, from five- to four-star hotels. Some have even settled for three-star properties.

He cautioned that the situation would be exacerbated by the implementation of a new minimum wage regulation of HK\$30 per hour in early 2013, which would "jack up overall pricing". ■

Secret pleasures

By Prudence Lui

The concept of private kitchens has gained a foothold in Hong Kong in the last decade, and event planners are starting to recognise the opportunities these cosy, unique setups can offer as unique dining and activity venues.

Many new private kitchens have debuted in Hong Kong's industrial areas like Wong Chuk Hang, Kwun Tong and Kwai Chung, driven out of the central business districts by sky-high rental. But it is exactly the pairing of a decentralised location with the tantalising prospect of a quality private dining experience that draws event planners.

CulinArt, one of the newest additions to Hong Kong's private dining scene, opened in March 2012 and is located within an industrial block in Wong Chuk Hang. It has a purpose-built kitchen and cooking workshop where cooking classes, teambuilding activities and private parties are held.

Since its opening, CulinArt has hosted several corporate events. Morgan Stanley took a team of 30 people to the cooking studio for a four-hour teambuilding programme recently. A 15-pax group from Apple did the same.

Chef Stanley Wong told *TTGmice*: "What sets us apart from ordinary restaurants is our setting, flexibility and our ability to customise the programme according to our clients' needs."

Wong added that private kitchens "are a hidden gem in Hong Kong and overseas travellers have to do much research to locate us".

CulinArt also provides offsite catering for events.

However, not all private kitchens are run by chefs. Donna Dolce in Kwun Tong is the brainchild of Esther Au, a food critic and truffle expert. Opened last October, Donna Dolce occupies 185.8m² of space and boasts an interior décor that was inspired by life in Tuscany, Italy.

Au describes her private kitchen as being "homey", unlike the "formal settings in hotels".

She said: "Service here is more personal and interaction with clients is intensive, as the group size is often small. We just did three cooking sessions for the cosmetic brand Shiseido and 52 invited journalists.

Although we do not offer private dinners, our cooking classes are popular options for teambuilding. Personalised souvenirs such as cookies that carry the client's brand or employees' names can be arranged."

Donna Dolce offers courses on Chinese, Western and Japanese cooking and baking, as well as wine and coffee appreciation. During truffle season, the establishment will hold courses on truffle appreciation, some of which are led by guest chefs.

Tucked away in Wan Chai is yet another hidden gem that has been winning over hearts and stomachs since 2008. Founded by model-turned-chef Esther Sham, Ta Pantry resembles a quaint home. It takes on an open kitchen concept, and offers a dining area with a single table, a living room with plush sofas, and a furnished balcony.

With a maximum capacity of less than 10, Ta Pantry is ideal for exquisite gatherings and celebrations. Signature dishes are foie gras wontons and melt-in-the-mouth onion duck. ■



Learn to make a new dish at Donna Dolce

Ideas

Live like a local for a day in Hong Kong

Morning

Start the day with breakfast at the legendary Tsui Wah Restaurant, a Hong Kong-style tea house that is well-loved for its milk tea and innovative dishes. Fun fact: it is also the first Hong Kong-style tea house to be listed on the stock exchange.

Later, take a brief hike on the renowned Dragon's Back Hiking Trail, which is popular among locals and tourists alike. Voted as the Best Urban Hiking trail in Asia by Time magazine, the 4.5km journey starts from Shek O Road, passing Cape Collinson Road, Mount Collinson and Wan Cham Chan. A feast for the eyes, the trail offers panoramic views of Shek O, Tai Long Wan, Stanley, Tai Tam and the South China Sea.



Hong Kong Tourism Board

Afternoon

Replenish lost energy with lunch at Wang Fu Dumpling, situated on Wellington Street. It is a popular local eatery that serves up hand-made Beijing dumplings. Tuck into the egg and tomato dumplings, a top favourite among diners.

Evening

Be one with the youths in Hong Kong who inhabit the shopping streets of Mong Kok. The bustling district offers a plethora of delights – Dundas Street is popular for street food, Sai Yeung Choi Street charms with street performances, and Fa Yuen Street is the place to go to stock up on flashy new sport shoes.



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NEED TO KNOW

New venues at the Hyatt Regency

Following the renovation of its meeting venues, the 381-key Hyatt Regency Hong Kong, Tsim Sha Tsui now boasts five larger salons which promise greater flexibility for event planners.

Salon I, II and III can be combined to accommodate up to 217 guests, while Salon IV and V can seat up to 64 people. On their own, these spaces are ideal for small meetings or intimate events.

The salons are fitted with floor-to-ceiling windows and equipped with the latest technology and communications support and wireless Internet connectivity.

Meeting planners can experience the new spaces with the hotel's *Executive Meeting Package 2013*, which are priced from HK\$820 (US\$106) per person. The package includes use of a salon, a business lunch with an exclusive menu or buffet at Cafe, as well as two themed coffee breaks with a selection of refreshments. Terms apply.

Contact hongkong.tsimshatsui@hyatt.com.

**AsiaWorld-Expo grows inventory**

Following the success of Runway 11, a refurbished venue that offers 4,400m² of column-free space, AsiaWorld-Expo has debuted Runway Suites. The latter is a collection of up to 10 rooms, each capable of seating between 80 and 200 people in a theatre set-up. All rooms are fully carpeted, sound-proofed and equipped with audio-visual technologies. It is ideal for large conferences which require break-out sessions and separate meeting spaces.

New air connections

Hong Kong-based Dragonair has entered the New Year with several new services. It commenced a daily service between Hong Kong and Zhengzhou in the northern-central China on January 8, and inaugurated Hong Kong-Yangon flights a day after.

On January 25, it launched daily services to China's Wenzhou.

Ming Court tantalises with new look, new tastes

The two-Michelin star Ming Court Chinese restaurant in Langham Place Hong Kong Hotel has completed its renovations and now sports a new interior.

Located on level six, the restaurant's luxurious dining rooms are now adorned in champagne, mother-of-pearl and moonlit tones matched with dark chocolate shades and further embellished with contemporary Chinese art. One of the rooms is able to accommodate 16 guests.

New culinary creations are also introduced by executive chef Tsang Chiu King. Feast on luxurious dishes such as *Gold On Gold with Gold Caviar*, *Golden Sea Urchin*, *Lobster and Silky Egg White*, which is a blend of European caviar and fresh ocean harvests, and *Boxed Australian Wagyu Beef with Black Truffle*.

Get racy on the high seas

In line with its luxurious profile, The Peninsula Hong Kong has launched a 40-foot racing yacht that is ideal for small-sized, high-end incentive groups.

Spotting the Peninsula branding on the spinnaker, main sail and hull, *The Peninsula Signal 8* racing yacht is competing in a selection of races and regattas in Hong Kong, China, Thailand and the UK. When it is not racing, it can be chartered for sailings along the Victoria Harbour.

End the treat with a stylish ride in a chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royce back to hotel.





ART OF THE MEETING

The Peninsula Hong Kong sets new standards of excellence with the launch of our Conference Centre, showcasing leading-edge technology, sophisticated design and our legendary events expertise.



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HONG KONG

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Appointments



Ray Shaw



Loic Mention



Alice Lem Chu Hong



Ulrich Hoffgen



Viktoria Riley



Philippe Kronberg



Simon Scoot



Phil Broad



Selina Chan



Pamela Conover

AUSTRALIA
Gold Coast Tourism has appointed **Anna Case** as director of business events. Case has worked with Tourism Australia, the Hong Kong Tourism Board, Encore Business Tourism and SquareOne Events.

MCI Australia has made several changes to its management structure. **Ray Shaw**, former MCI Australia managing director, is now chairman of the new Board of Directors and non-executive director. **Stephan Wurzinger**, director association relations for Asia-Pacific, has taken on the additional role of managing director. Newcomers include **Rebecca Schepers** who joins the company as director of association relations for Australia, filling much of Wurzinger's association relations role in Australia, and **Jerome Buchanan**

who is sponsorship and development manager.

CHINA
David Campbell is now director of sales and marketing in **Rosewood Beijing**. Campbell has worked in Asia for more than 16 years and has a background in opening new hotels.

The Ritz-Carlton Beijing and JW Marriott Hotel Beijing have appointed **Radu Cernia** hotel manager. Cernia joined The Ritz Carlton Company in 1998, and was most recently executive assistant manager, culinary/F&B at The Ritz-Carlton, Tokyo.

INDONESIA
Ayana Resort and Spa in Bali will now be led by **Ed Linsley**, who was general manager of The Nam Hai Hoi An, Vietnam.

JAPAN
Japan specialist DMC, **J Team**, has appointed

Loic Mention as sales representative for its Kyoto branch office.

MALAYSIA
Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre (KLCC) has promoted **Alice Lem Chu Hong** to sales manager-exhibitions. Lem has more than 13 years of experience in the meetings and events industry, and had joined KLCC in July 2011 as exhibitions floor manager.

MALDIVES
Conrad Maldives Rangali Island has made **Peter Nilsson** general manager. He joins from Six Senses Resorts, Residences and Spas where he was managing director-Gulf of Thailand.

Ulrich Hoffgen is now general manager of **Centara Ras Fushi Resort & Spa Maldives**. Prior to this, Hoffgen was resident manager at Constance Halaveli in the Maldives.

THAILAND
Anantara Hotels, Resorts & Spas recently appointed **Viktoria Riley** as cluster director of sales & marketing for **Anantara Phuket Villas**, as well as the new **Anantara Phuket Layan Resort & Spa** opening in 2013. Prior to joining Anantara, she was director of sales & marketing at the Sheraton Phoenix Airport Hotel in Arizona.

Hilton Pattaya is now led by **Philippe Kronberg** who has been appointed general manager. He has vast experience in hotel management, and has spent 10 years with Hilton Worldwide.

InterContinental Hotels Group has added two senior leaders to its Asian operations. **Simon Scoot** has been relocated to Bangkok as the vice president of global brand marketing for the InterContinental

brand. He was vice president, global brand management, based in the UK. **Phil Broad**, also based in Bangkok, has been appointed vice president, F&B, Asia, Middle East and Africa. Broad joins from Jumeirah Restaurants.

Selina Chan has assumed the role of director of sales & marketing for **Outrigger Phuket Beach Resort**. She was most recently group director of sales & marketing for Mangrove Tree Resort in Sanya, Hainan, China.

THE US
Pamela Conover has been appointed CEO of **SeaDream Yacht Club**, which offers luxurious itineraries in Asia, the Caribbean, Costa Rica, the Amazon, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, targeting leisure, meeting and incentive travellers. Conover will be based in Miami.

Case studies

Mega Leadership Seminar 2012

Amway India leads a group of 4,000 top achievers to Melbourne and other fun destinations in Victoria, an adventure made easy with help from the Melbourne CVB, writes **Warren Beaumont**



The cricket match and closing ceremony at the Melbourne Cricket Ground was the star of the programme

Amway India's Mega Leadership Seminar 2012, held in Melbourne from December 9 to 15, was the company's largest biennial mega incentive group. It was attended by more than 4,000 independent business owners out of a pool of 10,000 competing to qualify for the incentive event.

The seminar sought to recognise participants for their achievements during the past year and motivate them towards future goals and plans such as the establishment of a new manufacturing facility in India.

Transporting that many participants from India to Melbourne is no easy feat. Rita Tandon, senior manager special events for Amway India, said 48 flights were used to transport all delegates to the destination on December 9 and 10, and assistance in securing travel visas was provided by the Australian embassy and Tourism Australia in Delhi.

Besides tailoring an itinerary for Amway India, which included highlights such as a visit to Ballarat's Sovereign Hill outdoor museum on the second day,



"The MCVB can showcase this event, convention facilities, catering and logistics and believes other business groups in India will aspire to visit Australia and Melbourne and see that we can do that."

Karen Bollinger

CEO
Melbourne Convention and Visitors Bureau

a welcome reception at the Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre (MCEC) on the third, a trip to Phillip Island on the fourth, and a closing ceremony at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) on the fifth, the city's MICE bureau also helped with the logistical aspects of the massive

event.

According to Karen Bollinger, CEO of Melbourne Convention and Visitors Bureau (MCVB), efforts were made to ensure that all 4,000 delegates were accommodated in eight centrally located city hotels and catered for in one sitting at events such as the gala dinner at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG).

MCVB also made sure that transportation services went smoothly for the Amway India delegation, which allowed everyone to travel as "one group" instead of waves to various destinations in and around Melbourne.

For instance, a total of 88 coaches were chartered to take the entire delegation to Phillip Island, some 140km south-east of Melbourne. Delegates enjoyed exclusive access to the island's nature parks, including the Koala Conservation Centre and the penguin sanctuary.

Besides hosting the welcome reception, MCEC was also utilised for various dining events and business sessions. The centre's executive chef, Tony Pinnetta, led a team of multicultural chefs to cater

Case studies

lunch and dinner for some 4,500 guests over several days, and were able to satisfy all dietary needs.

Amway CEO, Bill Pinckney, noted that delegates were delighted to be able to feast on a balanced mix of Indian and local cuisine. "They were able to enjoy *raj*, dhal and curries, and were very happy as they were all together and had the kind of food they like," he said.

He revealed that participants were also pleased with their accommodation, especially Crown Towers.

"Amway India's business sessions also went really well. The environment (MCEC's plenary hall) was excellent and support staff were very competent," he said.

However, it was the finale at MCG that won the hearts of Amway India's star achievers. Delegates enjoyed a 20/20-style cricket match between two Indian teams and were entertained by Indian pop singer and Bollywood star Mika Singh. A spectacular dinner and fireworks display signalled

the end of the incentive programme.

"Clearly the MCG event made this incentive trip and we cannot speak highly enough of how professional and accommodating the MCG staff were in handling such a large group," Pinckney said. "Catering was outstanding and the cricket match went well, as did other aspects. It was truly a day and night to remember."

The only weakness in the Mega Leadership Seminar 2012, according to Pinckney, was the logistics and catering during the trip to Phillip Island. He noted that the destination had a very difficult time hosting "such a large group" and the food component "did not work" for the participants.

Fortunately, the weak spot hardly left a dent in participants' overall view of the incentive experience.

"Amway India is pleased that the Melbourne tourism team and other providers really delivered. Feedback from the delegates has shown that this trip exceeded expectations," said Pinckney. ■

Name of event

Mega Leadership Seminar 2012

Destination

Melbourne, Australia

Date of event

December 9-15, 2012

No. of pax

More than 4,000

Objective

To recognise top achievers' efforts in 2012 and motivate them towards future goals and plans

Challenge

The massive group size of more than 4,000 participants poses potential logistical hiccups

Solution

MCVB helps to accommodate all delegates in eight centrally located hotels and ensure the group can move together from point to point

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Digital and Music Matters 2012

Despite having to handle 1,200 delegates, staff at Branded Asia and The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore pull off the Herculean event through sheer teamwork, reports **Linda Haden**

The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore hosted Digital and Music Matters, a regional digital media and entertainment industry event, for the second consecutive time from May 22 to 25.

Organised by Branded Asia, a media and entertainment brand marketing agency, this edition saw a line-up of 175 speakers, including Lady Gaga's manager Troy Carter; Bob Ezrin, the music and entertainment producer for Pink Floyd, Nine Inch Nails and Alice Cooper; and Adam Smith, head of Asia Pacific, YouTube.

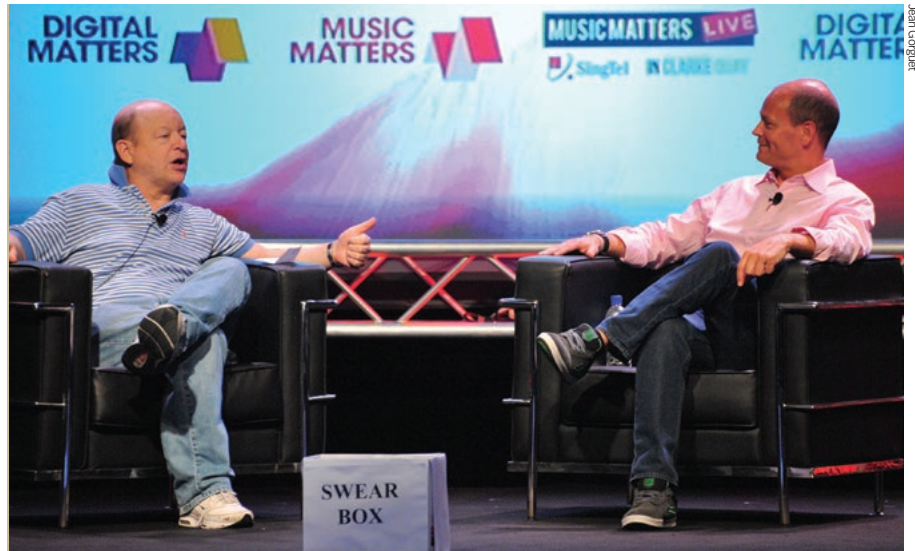
Over 1,200 participants from 497 companies across 30 countries attended the four-day conference, which comprised of 40 panels, including 17 keynote presentations and interviews, as well as six roundtables and workshops focused on digital publishing, gaming, music publishing, copyright, video and live music.

Branded's president, Jasper Donat, stated that The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore was selected to host Digital and Music Matters again as it met the organiser's requirements. "We wanted a venue that was large enough for our event yet still retained a sense of intimacy."

The conferences were staged in the hotel's various function places including the Grand Ballroom for keynote presentations. The foyer was transformed into an exhibition space while the Grand Gallery hosted a standing buffet luncheon and two evening cocktail receptions for 300 guests each time. On the second night, guests were treated to a poolside reception.

Communication was the crux to pulling off the event. The Ritz-Carlton and Branded teams consistently shared updates in the months before the event, and stepped up communications closer to the date. When Branded's event planner arrived in Singapore, the hotel gave her a mobile phone loaded with complimentary local calls as well as a pre-saved contact list comprising key hotel staff members.

Despite the substantial number of delegates, there were no major logistical or operational hurdles. "There were no major hiccups per se as we had a good understanding of what expectations and results were to be, given that this is the second



Bob Lefsetz and Kenneth Parks at Digital and Music Matters 2012

Event
Digital and Music Matters 2012
No. of pax
1,200 delegates from around the world
Venue
The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore
Date
May 22 to 25, 2012
Objective
To draw members of the digital and entertainment industries together to network, share best practices, insights and trends
Challenges
Attending to last-minute changes and requests for room bookings and set-ups, presentation formats and audience size

year that Digital and Music Matters has taken place at The Ritz-Carlton," said the hotel's general manager, Peter Mainguy.

He added: "With any event on this scale, last-minute changes were anticipated and the hotel team was able to react quickly to facilitate these changes... The

schedule was rigorous and demanding however, with careful planning, close communication and tracking of event take-up numbers up to the very last hour."

The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore drew invaluable lessons from hosting the event the second time round, with "mutual understanding, trust and strong timely communication" being the key learning points, said Mainguy.

Donat said he was highly pleased with how the conference turned out. "The (hotel) was a terrific partner to work with because they were happy to go the extra mile, resulting in an absolutely flawless event. We did not get any complaints from attendees.

"For one session we had 400 delegates registered, but 600 showed up. The hotel staff responded really well and brought chairs from all over. Overall, this was an extremely great team effort between Branded, The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore and Singapore's government bodies."

Branded Asia's efforts paid off when the agency won Trade Show of the Year at the Singapore Experience Awards 2012.

The close partnership between Branded Asia and The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore will continue in 2013, when the latter plays host to Digital and Music Matters for a third outing in May 21 to 25.

Hotel updates



Gallery Hotel, Singapore



The Majestic Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



Centara Grand & Bangkok Convention Centre at CentralWorld, Thailand

Centara Grand & Bangkok Convention Centre at CentralWorld, Thailand

The new M23 event space at Centara Grand & Bangkok Convention Centre at CentralWorld aims to draw meeting planners looking for an intimate setting and a quirky round of golf.

Located on the 23rd floor of the hotel, the venue comprises four boardrooms that are equipped with the latest audiovisual capability, built-in LCD projectors and screens, and high-speed Wi-Fi Internet access. Meeting rooms M1 and M2 also boast interactive screens.

Each of the four boardrooms has a capacity of between 18 and 50 pax.

M23 also comes with its own reception area, open show kitchen and bar for coffee breaks, lunches and social events, as well as a 50m long open-air patio with a putting green.

www.centarahotelsresorts.com/cgcw

Dusit Thani Laguna Phuket, Thailand

Dusit Thani Laguna Phuket has completed a 10 million baht (US\$329,245) renovation of its

meeting spaces, which will allow it to better cater to the anticipated increase in demand this year.

The 223.7m² Dusit Laguna Hall, which can accommodate up to 300 pax theatre-style, now features new carpets, antique carvings, textured fabrics and furnishings that are complemented by state-of-the-art audiovisual equipment. Suriyan, Chantra and Dara functions rooms have also been remodelled.

Free Wi-Fi Internet access is also available across the resort.

www.dusit.com/dusit-thani/dusit-thani-laguna-phuket.html

Gallery Hotel, Singapore

The 12-year-old Gallery Hotel Singapore, which is popular with both leisure and business travellers due to its location in the city, has completed the initial phase of its first major refurbishment project, with guestrooms being the key beneficiary of the makeover.

Phase one of renovations involved 48 club rooms, eight junior suites and eight executive suites.

Refurbishment of the remaining guestrooms in the 222-key hotel and the creation of a club lounge are being planned.

Armed with five function rooms, the largest being Amadeus, which has a capacity of 25-150 pax, the hotel is also favoured for corporate

meetings, seminars and dinner events.

www.galleryhotel.com.sg

The Majestic Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The historical Hotel Majestic in Kuala Lumpur has been refurbished by YTL Hotels and reopened under the name The Majestic Hotel.

The 300-room property, which sits on Jalan Sutan Hishamuddin, opposite an old railway station in the historical quarters of the capital city, features new wings and modern facilities.

The original building houses suites, The Colonial Café, The Bar and The Tea Lounge, while the new 15-storey Tower Wing comprises 16 meeting rooms, a pillar-less ballroom which can accommodate 1,200 people in banquet-style, a gym and a swimming pool. The seven-room Majestic Spa is located in a separate wing, and The Smoke House, a two-storey building, boasts a lounge, a grooming room, a cigar room, a private dining area with a chef on call, a screening room and a card room.

www.majestickl.com

Pullman Hanoi, Vietnam

The 242-key Pullman Hanoi – the former Hanoi Horizon Hotel – has

opened with modern facilities after a comprehensive renovation.

There are several event spaces in the hotel, the largest being the Van Mieu which can seat 700 guests in theatre-style or 470 in a banquet. Van Mieu can be divided into three smaller spaces.

Other facilities include La Cheminée international restaurant, Mint bar and a business centre.

The hotel is a 40-minute drive away from Noi Bai International Airport and within close proximity to government, embassies and offices.

www.accorhotels.com

Shangri-La Hotel, Haikou, China

Located adjacent to the Hainan International Exhibition Centre, the 337-room Shangri-La Hotel, Haikou offers a total of 2,400m² of meeting and conference space. It also has a 986m² pillar-free ballroom, one of the largest among the city's hotels.

Dining options include Shang Palace, which serves Cantonese cuisine and Hainan specialties; Sirena, a Mediterranean restaurant located by the sea; and Café Kool.

There are also recreational facilities such as natural hot spring pools, a tennis court, gym and spa.

www.shangri-la.com/haikou/shangri-la

Packages



TAIWAN

W Taipei has launched the *Step Up to Spectacular* room package that brings together several winning experiences at the hotel.

The package includes a night's stay in a Spectacular Room with views of the iconic Taipei 101 tower; al fresco breakfast at The Kitchen Table; W Taipei's signature cocktails as in-room welcome drinks; and unlimited access to SWEAT fitness centre, WET swimming pool, hot bath, sauna and steam at AWAY Spa Change Room.

This is available from now through December 30, and is priced from US\$407 per night for a Spectacular Room. Booking is subject to availability and does not include a 10 per cent service charge and five per cent tax.

Contact: reservations.taipei@whotels.com

INDONESIA

Courtyard by Marriott Bali Nusa Dua, which has 244 guestrooms, six suites and a collection of meeting rooms, is offering a full-day meeting package that includes usage of a meeting room from 08.00 to 17.00, two coffee breaks with two kinds of snacks, a buffet lunch, complimentary use of an LCD projector and screen, meeting stationery, and free Wi-Fi within the meeting room, among other things.

It is priced from US\$50 per person, and a 21 per cent government tax and service charge applies.

The package is valid until June this year. Terms apply.

Contact: sales.bali@courtyard.com

INDONESIA

Sheraton Bali Kuta Resort is offering the *Experience Sheraton* package to celebrate its opening.

Priced from US\$225++ per night, the package includes accommodation in a deluxe guestroom, breakfast for two at Feast, one-way airport transfer from or to Bali International Ngurah Rai Airport, and daily resort credit of US\$25 to indulge in various food and beverage offerings or spa treatments.

Starwood Preferred Guest members earn double Starpoints.

The offer is valid until June 30. Rates are subject to 21 per cent service charge and government tax.

Contact: res.sheratonkuta@staystarwood.com

VIETNAM

Angsana Lang Cô, located within the new Laguna Lang Cô integrated resort and 60 minutes by car from Da Nang International Airport, is offering meeting planners a *Stay and Meet* offer.

Valid from February 1 until June 29, the package is priced at US\$265++ per person and includes two nights' stay on a twin-share basis in a deluxe room, daily buffet breakfast, complimentary group round-trip airport transfer to Da Nang International Airport, a full-day meeting package with lunch and two tea breaks, a three-course set dinner at Market Place restaurant, complimentary high-speed Internet access resort-wide and complimentary daily recreational services.

One guaranteed upgrade to one-bedroom suite with ocean view and private pool is thrown in for the organiser. Meeting delegates will also enjoy discounts on spa services and special rates at the Laguna Lang Cô Golf Club. Terms apply.

Contact: reservations-langco@angsana.com

SINGAPORE

Klapsons The Boutique Hotel has rolled out a package that combines accommodation and full-day access to meeting facilities.

Valid from now till March 31, the package is priced at S\$320++ (US\$262) per person and includes a night's stay in The Executive room, buffet breakfast in The Sleeping Rhino, complimentary high-speed Wi-Fi access, use of the in-room Nespresso coffee machine and tea-making facilities, complimentary mini bar, as well as full-day use of a meeting room, two coffee breaks, a three-course set lunch and complimentary car passes.

A minimum booking of eight guestrooms is required.

Contact: sales@klapsons.com

THAILAND

Dusit Thani Laguna Phuket is offering a *Maximizing Meetings* package that allows event planners to book at best available rates and receive 25 per cent of the first night's rate as credit for use on additional spend at the resort. The package includes dining, cocktails, delegate packages, teambuilding activities, spa treatments and an array of other services.

Maximizing Meetings is valid for new bookings made between January 5 and March 31 this year for meetings held between April 1 and July 31.

Contact: dtlpsmevsmgr@dusit.com

Over coffee with...

“ We don’t have a Europe or US mindset. We have a global mindset. ”



A now international Pacific World aims to triple its size and revenue by 2017. Its global managing director, Hervé Joseph-Antoine, spills the gameplan to **Raini Hamdi**

It’s a sign of the times that TUI has rebranded all its DMCs in Europe – Ultramar Event Management Spain, Travel ScotWorld Scotland, TUI Hellas Corporate Services Greece and Miltours MICE Division Portugal – as Pacific World and this global organisation is now based in Singapore under you.

Yes, 60 per cent of the business is already in Asia and with the continued growth of this market, it makes sense that our headquarters is here. Usually, you (cover the region) with an affiliate in China, Singapore, etc. For us, it’s the other way round. We look at the world from where the main business is.

TUI also separated the MICE business from Hotelbeds, whereas both used to come under the Accommodation & Destination platform. Why?

The business model is changing fast. Hotelbeds is growing rapidly. The FIT/individual business is now online, less tied to the local industry and more transactional. Your portfolio is in one place, contracting in another, the product is sold elsewhere and all this is connected, so the nature of the business has changed.

MICE remains tied to the local industry and is also changing fast. TUI acknowledges that the business model is in flux and allows the companies to follow what’s right for them. That’s why the separation.

What difference does it make being on your own?

We are the MICE platform within the group. So we have the strengths of group functions like legal or HR but are recognised as a very specialised business within the group. Our people, like Jeff Amato (regional director, Thailand and Indochina) and Cindy Zhang (regional director Greater China), have worked in the MICE business all their lives.

Who do you report to?

The TUI board, every quarter.

What is the advantage of being a global organisation?

Your perspective is richer, because you have people of different cultures working with you. Your clients today are also more global and have people of different cultures working for them too. You can’t have one culture or country dominating the decision-making anymore. We don’t have a Europe or US mindset. We have a global mindset.

As the MICE platform of TUI, has your parent set you higher targets?

The mandate is growth, to multiply our size and revenue threefold by 2017. We’re going to grow all segments of our business, which is 65 per cent DMC and the rest split equally between corporate/association and PCO.

What’s your revenue now?

I won’t say (laughs). Size-wise, we have a staff count of more than 200.

Hervé Joseph-Antoine

What will you do to triple your size?

Open new destinations and source markets while growing existing ones.

Pacific World fully owns all its 12 offices in five geographical areas – Europe, Greater China, Singapore/Malaysia, Thailand/Indochina and Indonesia. Will you be opening, acquiring or partnering up to set up new offices? And where?

Our presence is very balanced worldwide but there are still places in Europe and Asia (we have yet to reach). In Asia, this is namely Japan and South Korea.

We're signing papers for legal entities – I can't say where yet – and if we find partners with the right level of operational excellence, offering top service, creativity and places which others have not opened – all this is our DNA – we will team up. If we can't find the right partners, we can open our own offices, acquire or postpone.

There are also some MICE businesses within the TUI group, which is a large organisation, that can be integrated into Pacific World if they are at the right level of maturity.

Going forward, do you foresee most of the growth coming from Asia?

Yes, if you look at the additional MICE market growth between 2012 and 2017, 80 per cent comes from Asia as a destination or as a source, because of the region's economic growth. So if you are a global MNC headquartered in the US or Europe, you're going to be doing more conferences and business meetings in Asia.

There is a correlation between MICE and the economy. If GDP grows two per cent, the multiplier effect on MICE is three times, thus you can expect six per cent growth. If GDP is down, the multiplier effect is about 10 times. So if GDP is minus two per cent, your business collapses 20-25 per cent. It's true, I've seen this myself.

In a recession, the first thing that gets cut is the marketing budget. If a company (usually) holds two big conferences, it will do one or none. That's why US incentives disappeared in 2010/2011, though they are now coming back, as are incentives from Brazil and South Africa, but not so much for Europe.

As you know, the MICE industry has seen many fluctuations since 2006 – up in 2008, down in 2009, that sort of pattern. MICE is vulnerable to economic changes and is not as resilient as the luxury travel business. It's also very fragmented because when you have a crisis, a lot of companies disappear.

Ninety per cent of the business in Europe, the US and Asia are small companies with five to 10 pax that can lose 20-30 per cent of business in a crisis. That creates a change in the marketplace – the small companies are becoming more fragile while the big, international players who have a certain stability because of their shareholders or size, are growing bigger.

As a company owned by TUI, you benefit.

We need to see how the market evolves in Europe as the

economic crisis in 2009 and the (debt-crisis) now add another layer of impact: What's going to happen to the boutique agencies and DMCs in Europe?

The market, from the corporate and association point of view, is looking for stability and reliability. You don't want to give your big conference to a company that will disappear in six months. You look for people who have good insurance cover. MNCs also have a strict compliance policy as they want to safeguard themselves against legal or credit risks.

There is also the impact of new laws, such as anti-bribery laws. An agency with a local owner and five to ten people may do things to facilitate immigration or entrance to venues that the client does not want it to. Although that may have been alright two to three years ago, such arrangements are high-risk now.

Major companies want to make sure we have controls in place. So relationships are still important, yes, but the traditional relationship model as we know it has changed.

What's the biggest challenge in multiplying your size by three?

I don't know yet, but I think it is related to generational change. The interaction with clients or hotels is different because project managers belong to Gen Y, so your communication with them has to change. They do video conferencing, look at what we do on Facebook, look at pricing differently, i.e., quicker and more of a procurement type discussion. We are preparing ourselves for this.

How?

More empowerment. I'm not the 'father' of the Pacific World organisation, with the team under me. The team is empowered to make decisions. Cindy (Zhang), for example, is in charge of global marketing

and empowered to come up with our strategy for tradeshow, budgets, marketing approach, etc. It's a big change but one we must make.

Who do you view as your strongest competitor?

The business is so fragmented. If you look at the biggest players at the country level, each has a seven or eight per cent share. It's not like some industries where it is clear-cut, with the number one player holding a 20 per cent share, number two 15 per cent and so on. We are all very small in a big market.

You handled MICE at Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CWT) before joining Pacific World. What best practices would you take from CWT in your new role?

The region is different, the market dynamics are different. I can't think of a good example – probably its diversity. CWT is an MNC present everywhere. It's not a monoculture and it's good to bring that experience to Pacific World. We want to take that diversity further.

Why did you join Pacific World?

It's the future. ■

“What's going to happen to the boutique agencies and DMCs in Europe? The market, from the corporate and association point of view, is looking for stability and reliability. You don't want to give your big conference to a company that will disappear in six months.”

How to

Stay healthy on business trips

With tight schedules to keep while on business travel, staying healthy is paramount for many who travel frequently for work. International SOS' medical expert, **Philippe Guibert**, prescribes some tips



✓ **Prevent travel fatigue:** Travel exhaustion can have a huge impact on the success of your business trip. Before you go, get plenty of exercise and a full night's sleep the day before. During the flight, drink plenty of water, limit your alcohol and caffeine consumption, and dress loosely and comfortably. Whenever possible, get out of your seat for a walk or stretching exercises.

✓ **Be smart about carrying medications abroad:** For each medicine you carry, ensure that you bring an ample supply, keep them in their original packaging, and pack a copy of your prescription. Place them in your carry-on bag so that they stay with you the entire time, and consider packing an extra supply in your checked luggage in case

your carry-on gets lost or stolen.

✓ **Select safe food and drinks:** Consuming food contaminated with bacteria can lead to gastroenteritis, so ensure you select food that is thoroughly cooked. Avoid raw meat and seafood, and fruits and vegetables that you have not peeled yourself. Opt for bottled water or canned drinks, and stay away from ice unless you know it has come from a safe source. Wash your hands more frequently than usual with clean water and soap, particularly before any meal.

✓ **Maintain a healthy diet:** Business travellers are often faced with a lack of healthy food choices. An unbalanced diet can exacerbate travel

fatigue and put your body at a greater risk of infection. To maintain a healthy diet when travelling, be sure to get protein from safe sources such as beans and lentils, have at least five servings of fruit and vegetables a day, and eat lots of whole grains. Stay hydrated with two litres of water each day and consider packing a vitamin or mineral supplement.

✓ **Keep mosquitoes at bay:** Certain types of mosquitoes carry serious diseases, including dengue fever and malaria. To prevent bites while outdoors, wear light-coloured clothing and long sleeves/pants, and use an effective insect repellent, such as one containing DEET. Consult your physician if you develop a fever after your return.

While most of us think we know the basics of travel safety, there are some issues that may escape our attention and put us at a health risk. Take a minute to participate in International SOS' *Spot the Risk* quiz (www.spottherisk.com) to determine how aware you are of your travel health risks. ■



Philippe Guibert is regional medical director, consulting services for South and South-east Asia for International SOS, based in Singapore.

International SOS (www.internationalsos.com) is the world's leading medical and security services company, operating from over 700 sites in 76 countries with 10,000 employees, led by 1,100 physicians and 200 security specialists.

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