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To our readers

Cast your eyes on the sea



Karen Yue
Group editor

“Chartering a cruise ship for a group event makes perfect sense for an event planner bent on keeping all delegates together and focused on the programme, without having to employ physical restraints.”

I was tickled pink by some of the comments made by event planners who had contributed to our cover story this month, *Team on board* (page 10-22), which looks at the allure of hosting corporate gatherings out at sea.

A supporter of the idea of packing corporate groups off on cruises for teambuilding programmes, Focus Adventure Singapore’s Andrew Chua, said “participants cannot run away” and would have to “do everything together for the next few days as the ship sails”.

Faraway Places Marketing India’s Arvind Tandon also declared that “participants cannot escape from the venue”.

Chua and Tandon sure conjure images of a horror-filled gathering where delegates are keeping an alert eye peeled for any means of escape.

But having planned and executed corporate and public events myself in an earlier part of my career, I know what a serious matter it is to ensure that the target audience remains physically and mentally captivated from the start to the end of the event.

Venues on land come with many distractions and delegates may be tempted to disappear into the crowds at nearby shopping malls or attractions. So chartering a cruise ship for a group event

makes perfect sense for an event planner bent on keeping all delegates together and focused on the programme, without having to employ physical restraints.

As you sail through our cover story, you will realise that the benefits offered by cruise ships are plenty.

Cruise ships are packed with recreational facilities, making them a natural playground for teambuilding activities.

In fact, at a time when the concept of *bleisure* – business with leisure – is fast gaining traction among event planners and delegates, cruise ships are an attractive *destination* option for events that feature meetings, incentives and spouse programmes.

Then there’s the pricing advantage as cruises charge an all-inclusive fare which minimises out-of-pocket expenses for the client and event attendees.

There is also the emotional high that cruises bring. I find myself more chirpy and chatty whenever I am on board. It must be the fresh, salty air at work...or the champagne.

But best of all, an expert ship captain like the one from Silversea Cruises can steer your event on the open deck away from wet weather. Now, can the resort manager do that for your beach party? ■

TTGmice

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Talk of the Trade

ASIA-PACIFIC

Creative spend tactics

By Lee Pei Qi and S Puvaneswary

With no bigger corporate travel budgets in sight for 2014, travel managers are devising creative ways to get the most out of allotted funds.

Usman E Gani, deputy manager – facilities (Travel), Tavant Technologies, India, told *TTGmice* that his company has been encouraging middle management staff travelling on lengthy trips to opt for serviced apartments instead of four-star hotels, as these properties offer 30 to 40 per cent in savings.

Another travel manager from India, Mohammad Ali, assistant manager – admin division, said his depart-

ment is upgrading rooms for staff who agree to stay at “good three-star hotels” instead of lead-in room types at pricier five-star properties.

Companies are also increasingly embracing low-cost carriers (LCC) for business trips. Continental Automotive Components Malaysia, for instance, puts staff on LCCs for short flights, such as those between



Kok: LCCs favoured

Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, according to the firm’s assistant to CEO, Kok Siok Mei.

Abhimanya Chettri, manager of Robert Bosch Engineering and Business Solutions India, noted that

LCC prices could be 30 to 40 per cent lower than full-service airlines.

Cheaper destinations are also preferred. Singapore-based BMW Group Asia, which has been given the same travel and events budget, has moved its product trainings and conferences out of the pricey city-state, favouring quality but affordable destinations such as Indonesia, Vietnam and Bangkok instead.

The luxury car company’s finance and administration purchasing manager, Tan Mei Ling, said: “Since the arrival of integrated resorts, hotel prices in the city have been (rising) while we continue to be restricted by our hotel budget.”

TALKING NUMBERS

97 The percentage of corporate travel companies polled in the 2013 Abacus Corporate Travel Practices Survey who had received instructions from clients to further tighten policy terms, upping demand for alternative flights and accommodation.

83 The percentage of respondents who felt mobile technology would have a moderate to significant impact on their business.

33 The percentage of respondents who had implemented mobile web or native applications.

4 The number of respondents – out of every 10 – who had enabled flights and hotel bookings via mobile devices.

NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand pursues Asian business events

Having previously honed its attention on the leisure sector, Tourism New Zealand is now looking to woo more MICE business from South-east Asia.

A three-year marketing plan was unveiled in June, with a worldwide budget of NZ\$34 million (US\$28.2 million) earmarked for the next four years, representing close to an 80 per cent increase

in funds from a low base, according to Mischa Mannix-Opie, regional manager South & South East Asia of Tourism New Zealand.

In the pipeline are stronger marketing efforts for Indonesia and India, which have been identified as emerging markets for the destination. Mannix-Opie said India’s budget had been quadrupled and its human resources

enhanced from two to four, while Indonesia – which used to be managed out of Singapore – had gained a new office in Jakarta with three staff.

“We will look at conventions and incentives from Singapore, and incentives from Malaysia, Thailand and India, where we (will) attract business partners and develop quality leads,” she revealed, adding that the NTO will also

add a new role in Singapore and two in China to cultivate New Zealand’s visibility..

The 100% Pure New Zealand – Beyond Convention campaign was rolled out in October alongside a revamped website (www.businessevents.newzealand.com) to showcase the country’s strengths as an incentive and conference destination. – **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

JAPAN

Japan hots up for Thai, Malaysian incentives

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena and S Puvaneswary

Japan's recent visa waiver for Thai and Malaysian nationals has made the destination more alluring as an incentive destination, according to planners based in both markets.

Japan is the "best-selling incentive destination" this year at Go Holiday Tour Thailand, whose bookings from January to October reached 1,600 pax, compared with 1,000 for the same period last year, according to sales executive, Adtaporn Theppreechachakul.

Bonus Travel in Thailand

has recorded a "doubling" of incentives to Japan so far this year, according to its sales manager, Arthit



Lee: fatter budgets for Japan

Kiatbenchaphong, who added that footprints are spreading beyond Tokyo and Nagoya,

with Sapporo, Okinawa and Fukuoka gaining popularity.

In Malaysia, the depreciation of the yen against the ringgit has also helped

to boost outbound incentives to Japan.

Desmond Lee, group managing director of Malaysia's Apple Vacations & Conventions, said the company has been seeing larger incentive bookings for Japan and bigger budgets for land components.

BMC Travel Malaysia's managing director, Billy Leong, expects Japan-bound incentives to grow 50 per cent year-on-year for 2H2013, as more corporate clients drop Europe in favour of the Asian destination.

Meanwhile, the strong travel demand from Thailand to Japan is outpacing air capacity between the two countries.

Always Vacation Thailand's Jiraporn Jearsilanuwat senior executive for sales and marketing urges carriers to raise flight frequencies and launch new destinations in Japan to spread footfalls beyond Tokyo and Osaka.

Arthit said: "We are advising our clients to travel during non-peak periods (to avoid competing with FIT and group tours)."

INDONESIA

Hilton Bandung enhances meeting experiences

Hilton Bandung, which draws the bulk of its weekday business from MICE, has created new experiences for clients.

One of the things the hotel has done is to partner local attractions to "transform MICE functions into meetings with meaning", said general manager, Scott Wilson.

Teaming up with Bandung Treetop, the hotel offers *Perfect Balance Meeting*, priced from 290,000 rupiah (US\$25.40) per pax. It includes a teambuilding activity such as a flight down a zip-line or a Tarzan leap through the lush rainforest.

With state-owned train company Kereta Api Indonesia, the hotel offers *Exquisite Meetings*, priced from 1.75 million rupiah per person. The programme kicks off a corporate gathering

with a ride from Jakarta in a private train carriage. Participants are promised mountain views as the train chugs towards a nearby hill station.

Corporate groups can customise programmes, combining the hotel's facilities with other highlights at partner attractions. They can also leverage the hotel's partnership with a teambuilding organiser to tailor specific programmes.

On top of that, Hilton Bandung will offset carbon emission generated by events at no additional cost to the client.

Another new feature aimed at event planners is the *Hilton Journey*, a dine-around dinner which starts with cocktails in the Presidential Suite, entrée at Jiwa Spa, main course at Fresco restaurant, dessert in a



private room at Purnawarman coffee shop, and finally coffee, tea, praline and cookies at Magma Lounge.

Hilton Journey is suitable for groups with up to 20 guests.

Juliet Elisabeth Mangowal, director of sales, believes that the experience allows guests to enjoy the hotel's different facilities while encouraging them to mingle and network with every change in venue.

– Mimi Hudoyo

MALAYSIA

MyCEB sharpens exhibitions focus

Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB) has formed a new exhibition unit to support the growth of home-grown trade shows and attract new trade events.

Along with the formation of the new unit, the MICE bureau has introduced subvention programmes that enable home-grown trade shows to achieve a stronger international attendance. Qualified events stand to gain financial support and event assistance.

Inaugural events and those that rotate around the region and beyond can apply for the subvention scheme, with special priority given to niche events and exhibitions that support Malaysia's key industry sectors. – S Puvaneswary

MALAYSIA

Weaker business from India

By S Puvaneswary

Malaysia's traditional peak season for Indian inbound incentives – September to mid-December – is likely to be a washout, according to Malaysian MICE specialists who have blamed the weak performance largely on the depreciating Indian rupee.

Hidden Asia Travel & Tours Malaysia's managing director, Nanda Kumar, told *TTGmice*: "All three incentive groups from India that were secured earlier and slated for travel to Malaysia this quarter have postponed their trips. Comparatively, in 4Q2012, we handled eight incentive groups with 80 to 300 delegates from India."

Arokia Das, senior manager of Luxury Tours Malaysia, has seen a 20 per cent year-on-year drop in incentives from India this peak season due to reduced Indian buying power and the stiff competition between inbound operators in Malaysia.

According to Das, inbound operators are resorting to selling below net rates to win business, with some surviving on shopping tours for both incentive and leisure groups.

Illustrating the severity of the situation, he said: "A three-night land package in Kuala Lumpur, inclusive of a twin-share stay in a local four-star hotel, costs about



Seaside destinations (Langkawi above) are dropped to reduce cost of programme

RM800 (US\$246) per night three years ago. Now it costs RM600 to RM650."

The Indian rupee had depreciated by 21.4 per cent, from Rs54.60 to US\$1 in January to Rs66.30 in September.

This has pushed Indian clients to scale down on hotel options and choose Kuala Lumpur as a single destination instead of twinning the city with a beach destination such as Langkawi or Penang, as they had done in the past, revealed Das.

C P Sharma, managing director of Neptune Travco New Delhi, too, had to feature only the Malaysian capital city in two meeting and incentive programmes this quarter in order to reduce costs for the client.

IN BRIEF

UFI calls Sharjah home

UFI Middle East/Africa Regional Office has set up home in Sharjah, following a three-year agreement inked with host venue Expo Centre Sharjah in the UAE. The office, previously located in Abu Dhabi and Kuwait, supports association members in the region, enabling them to profit from networking opportunities, industry information resources and a variety of education programmes.

Ascott reaches into Sri Racha

Ascott will open the first international branded serviced residence in Thailand's Sri Racha next year with the debut of Citadines Grand Central Sri Racha. Located a half-hour drive to Pattaya, the 133-unit property will cater to expatriates and business travellers working in the area populated by multinational companies such as Sony, ExxonMobil and Bridgestone.

Philippines, Dubai links up

Dubai-based, carrier, Emirates has commenced a direct daily service to Clark, its second route to the Philippines. Cebu Pacific and PAL Express have also brought the Philippines and Dubai closer with Manila-Dubai flights. Cebu Pacific launched daily services on October 7, while PAL Express kicked off five weekly flights on November 6.

Attractive new hardware

The Sukosol, Bangkok's refurbishment has resulted in a 40 per cent growth in meeting and conference business, according to the hotel's top level personnel. Incentives from China, South Korea and Europe – especially markets in the east – fuelled the surge in corporate event business.

AUSTRALIA

AIME 2014 to boast enhanced features for attendees

The organisers of AIME 2014 have rolled out new initiatives including a marketing resource for exhibitors, a communication medium to showcase destinations and a blog.

For the first time, exhibitors will be provided with tools to help them make the most of the event experience. The Exhibitor Marketing Plan offers access to AIME's top marketing tips, providing a step-by-step plan of activities that can be implemented in the lead up to and during the event. Additional marketing support will

come from the new Destination Inspiration emails which provide selected destinations the opportunity to showcase the best of what they can offer business event travellers.

Another new resource for the event next year is the AIME blog which will feature content contributed by industry leaders such as Info Salons' Jo-Anne Kelleway and ICCA's Martin Sirk.

Jacqui Timmins, exhibition director at AIME and CIBTM, said: "The blog will be a great resource which will allow the

business events community to stay engaged throughout the year, and provide another avenue for our audiences to stay connected to their peers and share ideas and knowledge on a regular basis without relying on the AIME event (for interaction)."

AIME 2013, which will be held in Melbourne from February 18 to 19, is also targeting a 25 per cent increase in the number of Australian Hosted Buyers. For more information visit www.aime.com.au.



Calendar

November 2-6

ICCA Congress
Shanghai, China

November 4-7

World Travel Market
London, the UK

December 9-13

Dreamtime 2013
Melbourne, Australia

ASIA-PACIFIC

Awards celebrates the best, raises funds for tourism development

The 24th Annual TTG Travel Awards once again gathered the luminaries of the region's travel industry in Thai capital Bangkok, this time with a new fund-raising initiative to drum up support for tourism development and sustainability efforts in Asia-Pacific.

This year, a record 120,000 votes garnered over a two-month period from print and online subscribers of TTG Asia Media's six titles – *TTG Asia*, *TTG China*, *TTG India*, *TTGmice*, *TTG-BTmice China* and *TTG Asia Luxury*. A total of 68 winning travel supplier and travel agency organisers were recognised for their



Singapore wins Best BT MICE City

excellence.

Twenty-eight winners claimed their titles from last year's victors, including Frasers Hospitality, Incheon International Airport and Korea Tourism Organization

for Best Serviced Residence Operator, Best Airport and Best NTO respectively. Additionally, 10 of the 16 travel agency awards also went to different organisations.

Winners of the Business Travel-MICE Awards category include Thai Airways International for Best Airline – Business Class; Grand Hyatt Erawan Bangkok for Best Business Hotel; Centara Grand & Bangkok Convention Centre at CentralWorld for Best Meetings & Conventions Hotel; Singapore for Best BT MICE City; Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau for Best Convention & Exhibition

Bureau.

Carlson Wagonlit Travel snagged Best Corporate Travel Agency award.

This year's awards show also debuted a fund-raising initiative in the form of a silent auction, the proceeds of which went to PATA Foundation to support tourism development and sustainability efforts for the travel and tourism community.

Travel Hall of Fame honorees including Hong Kong International Airport, Hertz, Royal Cliff Hotels Group, Lotte Tour and Abacus came forth to sponsor items to raise funds for the cause.



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Gallery

A great exchange

Corporate travel managers, MICE specialists bring a lively buzz to IT&CMA and CTW Asia-Pacific in Bangkok



Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau's Teerapat Puangngern and Siriwan Kamonwichian, and ICCA Malaysia's Noor Ahmad Hamid



BOSCH Indonesia's Erdiajeng Mukti



Nokia Belgium's Monique Petrus



Diesenhuis Israel's Doron Sternberg, Computer Sciences Corporation India's Neal Rogers and Aricent Group India's Kala Rayaprolu



Corrs Chambers Westgarth Australia's Leeanne Mooney and Stephani McKay



EMC International SARL Singapore's Sally Chua, EMC US' Norma Serra and EMC International SARL Singapore's Geraldine Gan



Integrated Micro-Electronics Philippines' Eleanor Misa, US Travel Korea's Woongjak Kim and Virgovirgin Thailand's Yupha Moonsarn



DTZ Singapore's Nancy Chua and MARSH Thailand's Justine Hammill



◀ Pen Petroleum Malaysia's Jeannie Ng, Paryatan Holidays India's Gajesh Girdhar, Continental Automotive Holding China's Angela Lim and Continental Automotive Components Malaysia's Koh Siok Mei

▶ UGL Australia's Lynn Liu and Premah Krishnan, DTZ Hong Kong's Elaine Lau and DTZ India's Parag Gujar



An evening of glitz and glamour

Who's who in the travel and MICE trade gather for TTG Travel Awards 2013



Park Hotel Group's Mohd Rafin (left) spices up the evening with a perfect rendition of a Beatles song



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Team on board

The team that boards together bonds together. **Raini Hamdi** looks at a rise in Asian meetings on cruise ships and why teambuilding occurs more effortless at sea than on land, as cruise lines would have us believe

It is hassle-free, complete, all-inclusive – the same advantages that have attracted more Asian leisure travellers to cruise are also winning over Asian MICE planners.

And where the need to bond a team is a key aim of the meeting or incentive, cruise lines are pushing the message that theirs is a proposition that's hard to beat. Ships are destinations in themselves, with ideas for teambuilding limited only by the imagination, they said. But even without as much as having to lift a finger to execute a teambuilding exercise, cruise companies argue that bonding happens more “naturally” at sea than on land.

Fresh air and gentle breezes aside, it is back to the nature of cruising as being hassle-free, complete and all-inclusive which they said break even the tiniest psychological barriers to teambuilding.

“Normally, it is not natural for a woman to buy a man a drink, for instance. As we're all-inclusive and no money changes hands, it is much easier for a lady to ask for a drink from the bar and get one for her male colleague as well.

“We have had many groups and charters where clients commented they had tried repeatedly over the years to bring their various teams together with activities and ‘mixing them up’ on coach, but failed. On board, the clients said they finally succeeded and they didn't even try deliberately. Teambuilding is a natural occurrence on the ship, it always is,” said Melvyn Yap, Silversea Cruises' regional director-Asia.

Said Marnie Whipple, Crystal Cruises' regional sales manager, Asia & the Pacific: “Being at sea gives a rare opportunity to

be in an environment where guests feel comfortable, relaxed and thus generally more open to candid conversation that may not perhaps take place in a corporate setting.

“Because of this, we often see that incentive groups have a greater bonding



Out in their gala best

experience with their colleagues as they connect in various locations – organised or not – around the ship.

“The environment onboard is more conducive to creative and spontaneous encounters versus a land resort or hotel, where guests tend to adventure more off-site on their own or in segmented groups. On the ship, everyone relaxes in one over-

all space, yet can mingle and discuss ideas in a variety of settings.”

Cruise lines like Crystal and Silversea, which have relatively smaller ships and are positioned at the higher end of the market, do not have a teambuilding department per se but see to all aspects of the meeting organiser's requests, or those of the teambuilding specialist the organiser works with.

Asia's oldest cruise line, Star Cruises, celebrating 20th anniversary this year, on the other hand, said it is equipped with skilled, trained staff to design and execute teambuilding programmes on board its ships. The company also has a strategic partnership with Focus Adventure in Singapore and at times rope in corporate training facilitators to implement teambuilding workshops based on the client's requirements.

Said Star Cruises senior vice president-sales, Michael Goh: “These learning programmes are impactful and effective as they are developed based on real-time organisational issues. As a result, dynamic teams with strong synergies are formed. Importantly, the team enjoys a fun time during the ‘learncentive’ cruise, a combination of adventure teambuilding learning and incentive. What's more, they discover exciting destinations each day, savour up to six sumptuous meals daily, enjoy sensational entertainment and indulge in pampering recreational facilities and services, with a touch of warm Asian hospitality.”

Operations also include the cruise entertainment team, F&B team with celebrity chefs, tours & travel and conference teams, all of whom work together to enhance



Networking happens more naturally at sea than on land, said cruise operators

COVER STORY

organisers' expectations.

Royal Caribbean International boasts having dedicated onboard convention service coordinators providing round-the-clock personal assistance to organisers, although it does not have dedicated team-building staff.

Said Royal Caribbean's managing director-Singapore, Jennifer Yap: "These coordinators can work with our clients' teambuilding planners (external parties) to make special, customised arrangements for onboard group programmes, menus for group dinners and facilities for group meetings and conferences. We can also assist to organise exclusive group shore excursions tailor-made or selected from our shore excursion menu."

Under one roof

Not only do event organisers and team-building specialists have a captive audience in hand, what a rich playground under one roof too.

Ships today have a wide variety of entertainment and relaxation options, outdoor and indoor spaces, and meeting rooms that lend themselves well to teambuilding. In fact, mega ships appear made for it: those from Royal Caribbean, for instance, have a 9m rock-climbing wall, full-sized sports court, ice skating rink, surf simulator, Zip Line, AquaTheatre for aquatic acrobatic performances and 3D movie theatres.

The opening of new cruise terminals in Asia, such as Singapore's Marina Bay Cruise Centre last year, enable these

companies to deploy larger ships, such as Royal Caribbean with its *Voyager of the Seas* and *Mariner of the Seas*, both 138,000 GRT. These ships come with a wider variety and larger onboard MICE and entertainment facilities, which invariably appeal to larger groups and discerning corporate clients.

This does not mean smaller ships are disadvantaged, however. Silversea's Yap recalled: "We have had programmes where all delegates were dropped on land and the ship 'left' them on the island. The delegates had to do a treasure hunt involving getting to another location on land and, bingo, the ship was there again to pick them up."

"Or, how about the time when we had a group of radio-controlled model planes take off from the deck of our ship and participants had to 'shoot them down' with laser guns. All special audio effects were made onboard with the specialist equipment the clients brought."

Entire Silversea ships have also been chartered for incentives, with clients tailoring the programme to give their delegates something they cannot buy off the shelf. Silversea's Yap urged planners to "see us (ships) as the venue, the canvas on which the total programme can be projected."

"There are very few things which are not possible. Whatever you can arrange in a hotel or resort, we can do it onboard and often better! The ships are the venues. Especially when you charter the ship – you can let your imagination run free," he said.

Photos courtesy of Crystal Cruises



Cruise companies are also quick to point out that not only are they a one-stop, under-one-roof option, they also do not cause much out-of-the-pocket unexpected expenses for meeting planners.

All-inclusive cruises such as those offered by Crystal means "the entire cost of the shipboard experience for our incentive clients is represented solely in the cruise fare; the only services that are additional are spa and salon treatments and shore excursions", explained Crystal's Whipple.

"Our all-inclusive shipboard experience for incentive groups even includes any meetings or events you would like to arrange exclusively for your group. In addition, standard incentive group amenities on a Crystal cruise include one complimentary private cocktail party and US\$200 per person shipboard credit. Our streamlined all-inclusive shipboard experience makes budgeting easy for meeting planners as it removes the concern of unexpected costs."

Said Royal Caribbean's Yap: "Most of our corporate groups onboard conduct teambuilding activities. The use of our venues and amenities onboard are compli-



All smooth sailing: a pow-wow on board



Cruise ships' F&B, entertainment and meeting spaces complement teambuilding facilities to offer a holistic alternative to meet on board

mentary. Manpower for the running of the activities and F&B will be chargeable."

Sunrise industry

Cruise lines interviewed said they are seeing a healthy rise in Asian meetings and incentives, with most corporate groups conducting teambuilding sessions on board.

Said Crystal's Whipple: "Teambuilding is an essential component. Part of teambuilding is networking and developing connections via special, organised private functions onboard and in ports. It also appeals to meeting planners and organisers because all of the services necessary for any event – dining, meetings, product showcases – are available onboard, typically at no additional cost."

Star Cruises observed a double-digit year-on-year growth in Asian meetings. "More corporate companies and event planners are in search of unconventional venues to host their regional meetings and incentive holidays," said Goh.



“Teambuilding also appeals to planners because all the services necessary are available onboard, typically at no additional cost.”

Marnie Whipple

Regional sales manager - Asia & the Pacific, Crystal Cruises

Royal Caribbean's Yap said incentive travel is a popular trend for companies in Indonesia, India, South Korea and China – the line's top Asian MICE markets – and the novelty of something new like cruising raises MICE sales that it now makes up “almost 50 per cent of our total sales, and we expect this to grow further”.

Princess Cruises' director, South-east Asia, Fariek Tawfik, cannot wait to get in the act. “When *Sapphire Princess*

homeports in Singapore for an extended season of cruise trips in the region next year, we will be offering shorthaul cruise trips of three or four days which are highly suitable for teambuilding and meeting purposes.

“We have plans to set up a separate department to cater to the corporate meetings market and we are confident that as cruise travel in Asia continues to increase in popularity, we will see a healthy pipeline of interest from this sector.”

Luxury cruises have also taken off. Silversea's Yap said the growth is Asia “is increasing at a rapid pace”.

“We, Silversea, have acknowledged this quite a few years ago and are expanding our activities in Asia both with financial as well as human capital. We are beginning to see the fruits of our labour in the past and are stepping up our activities on all fronts.”

Likewise, Crystal is seeing “a healthy increased demand”. Said Whipple: “As the economy continues to have a healthy return, businesses are seeking more creative rewards for their top producers. Luxury cruises are presented as an option more

COVER STORY

than previously, and have proven to be a great value. As a result we are experiencing more Asian incentive groups.

"This year, we had our first two incentive groups, and will have another from Asia next year. We are working on more as we speak. All the groups are of a sig-

nificant size. Banking is a key incentive market, and the most popular itinerary for Crystal's Asian incentive groups are seven-day Mediterranean cruises. We typically host incentive groups on our European voyages, but are now experiencing increasing requests for

Canada/New England as well.

"Generally voyages of seven days or shorter are an excellent fit for MICE."

For Asians, cruise durations are shorter, typically between three and five nights in South-east Asia or fly-cruises to Alaska and Europe.

All aboard

Cruise companies said teambuilding on board is virtually foolproof; aside from the 'danger' may be of putting on a few pounds on the waistline, and bad weather, which always is a factor whether at sea or on land, there is little that could go wrong.

The trick, they said, is for planners to understand what innovative amenities and unique-at-sea facilities are available at their fingertips.

"Once they understand and appreciate this difference with shoreside options, they can better leverage facilities to engage the group, instead of replicating a land-based teambuilding experience on a cruise," said Royal Caribbean's Yap.

And, as always with teambuilding, event planners must define their company's business objectives, added Star Cruises' Goh.

"From there, we will conduct ship tours with them to identify (potential) event venues, evaluate the integrated cruise options and onboard requirements, before we formulate a detailed cruise programme to fulfil their needs. Once communicated and agreed upon, we will move into event implementation. With such a foolproof plan, pitfalls can be easily avoided," he said.

As for bad weather, one line at least claims to even be able to control it.

Recalled Silversea's Yap: "We once had a deck BBQ set up for a client and it began to rain just before the event started. The captain rushed to the bridge and asked both the MD of the client company and I to join him there. He switched the radar on and you could see the rainclouds around the ship. He lifted the anchor and very slowly zig-zagged around the rain areas. The result was a successful deck BBQ; the MD took pictures of the rain clouds on the radar copies, which were given to each delegate. They talked about it for years!" ■

The team that learns or plays together brings higher results to companies. Top, Crystal Cruises' University at Sea. Left, fun on board Star Cruises



Crystal Cruises



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PLANNERS' EXPERIENCES Pros and cons of teambuilding at sea

First United Travel Philippines president, Mayie Cruz

Every year, we send one or two incentive groups on a fly-cruise in Asia or Europe.

Filipinos love and enjoy cruising, even if it's only in Singapore.

In Asia, the trip lasts four to five days. In Europe, seven days. Anything longer, say 10 days, they get bored.

The cost of a fly-cruise is about the same as going to Asia or Europe and staying in a hotel.

Cruising is easy to handle. Everything is pre-arranged. Everything that the incentive group needs is there.

Yet another advantage is the availability of good food – and it is served buffet-style. So the team is happy with the quality and quantity of food.

Another plus are the many activities to choose from. Our clients, under pressure from work, really look forward to cruising because they feel it's a relaxing break.

Cruise ships are a good venue to build the team. It's so easy to gather the group for shore excursions and to get them back onboard. Since there is a fixed time for

going ashore and returning to the ship, everyone is mindful of the time and punctual. This is unlike group movements during overland incentive trips.

Meals and shore excursions offer opportunities for bonding. Delegates take their meals together every day; there are no fixed sitting arrangements so people are encouraged to mingle and get to know each other. It is the same during shore excursions.

There will be days of rough seas, but there are medicines for that. Moreover, people who are affected will usually just stay in their cabins.

One downside is the lack of priests onboard, as most of my clients prefer to hear mass every day. – **Rosa Ocampo**

Menara Tudjuh Sembilan Indonesia president director, Imam Syafii, and business development manager, Musthafa Luthfi

We had one client company that did a teambuilding programme on *Costa Victoria* earlier this year.

It was a software provider for education institutions and it brought the managers and their families on an incentive tour. The programme comprised a motivational forum where members shared their problems and best practices, a teambuilding programme, plus an award presentation.

Our client had done a similar programme on land and was looking for an alternative.

We proposed taking the group on a cruise and managed to convince the client that this was more cost-effective than a land programme. Unlike land programmes, cruise passengers need not check in and out every time they arrive at and depart from a destination, nor do they require transportation from one venue to another.

The package included accommodation, all meals and entertainment. A teambuilding activity was conducted around the swimming pool. Besides that, there were many onboard programmes to encourage bonding among participants, most of whom had not met each other



Syafi: a real ice-breaker

before.

The four-day Singapore-Phuket-Penang-Singapore cruise saw participants spending much of their time together, doing things such as watching shows,

taking aerobic classes and dining in their own corner in the dining room. All that facilitated communication and helped develop relationships.

The feedback from our client was positive, an indication that trip's objective was achieved.

The only thing that needed improvement was the language barrier onboard. As a Preferred Sales Agent of Costa Cruises, we act as a liaison between the cruise company and the client; we do not have an employee to accompany clients onboard, not for a small groups at least. While English is one of

the languages spoken onboard, not all Indonesians speak English. Furthermore, not all Italian crew members speak fluent English.

In future we will try to provide information in Bahasa Indonesia or send an employee to accompany our groups. – **Mimi Hudoyo**

Resorts World Tours Malaysia senior operations executive, Leon Yap

In 2012, we organised a three-night cruise for 600 salespeople from an insurance company, most of whom came from Malaysia and Indonesia. It was held onboard *SuperStar Virgo*, homeporting in Singapore with port calls at Langkawi and Phuket.

A two-hour teambuilding activity on the open deck was offered as a non-compulsory option. The client requested that the activities be kept simple and interesting for participants aged 30 to 60. Almost 70 per cent of the participants were males but we had to make sure the activities appealed to both genders. Thus, we created

a series of games using hula hoops, eggs and ropes with the objective of fostering better relationships.

Judging by the attendance – 90 per cent of participants stayed for the entire teambuilding activity – the event was a great success. Seeing the smiles and hearing the laughter and cheers, we knew they all had fun.

The Star Cruises team gave us their full support and contributed to the event's success. We provided a client profile, such as the age range and preferences of participants and in turn they gave us a selection of teambuilding activities to choose from. Star Cruises was also prompt in responding to our client's queries.

Star Cruises was also able to tailor the teambuilding activities to the requirements of the client.

One of the benefits of organising a teambuilding event on a cruise ship is the availability of experienced cruise organisers to coordinate and make the event hassle-free for handling agents.



Star Cruises teams up with Focus Adventure to bring teambuilding on board

COVER STORY

The cruise package is also all-inclusive with no hidden costs. Accommodation, meals and entertainment are taken care of. However, an additional cost is incurred for teambuilding activities.

The disadvantages of doing a teambuilding activity on a cruise ship include the need for clients to coincide their outing with the ship's departure dates and the duration of the programme with the length of the sailing.

It is also more costly to host a teambuilding event on a cruise than at a local beach resort. For example, a two-day/one-night stay at a four-star beach hotel with teambuilding activities would cost around RM900 (US\$274) per person, but an international cruise package would cost from RM1,300 per person. – **S Puvaneswary**

Focus Adventure Singapore owner, Andrew Chua

We had a group onboard the *SuperStar Virgo* for three days and two nights, including a port call at Malacca. The package included accommodation, food, meetings and entertainment, which encouraged the group to do everything together day and night.

For teambuilding activities, we planned games on the ship. The liner's wide-open space allowed many types of activities.

The group was split into teams and played a game of treasure hunt. They had to crack codes and find treasures around the ship. The hunt continued when they disembarked in Malacca, this time using GPS receivers, walkie-talkies and digital cameras.

It was well received by all participants because some of them had never been on a big ship before and found it a novel and refreshing experience.

Meetings also felt more fun due to the different setting on the seas.

The advantage of running a cruise incentive is (getting a captured audience). Participants cannot run away. They will eat all meals together and do everything together for the next few days as the ship sails. Cruise incentives foster a strong sense of unity.

However, the downside of such a programme can surface when a participant has sudden personal matters to attend to. He/she cannot return to land unless a helicopter is deployed to fetch him/her! – **Lee Pei Qi**



Choy: teambuilding-at-sea specialists needed

Lotus Tours Hong Kong MICE manager, Arthur Choy

We organised an incentive trip for a direct sales company several years ago. It was a seven-day journey, combining meetings and recreational activities for 200 staff cruising from Vancouver to Alaska.

The client found the cruise ship enormous and requested that Lotus Tours conduct some activities such as a ship walk to familiarise participants with onboard facilities and directions around the ship. The goal was to ensure that participants knew how to get to meetings and maximise the use of facilities during their stay.

To that end, we proposed a treasure hunt on the second day at sea. Participants were divided into 20 teams and made to race against time to complete different tasks within two to three hours.

We established 12 checkpoints at locations such as restaurants, meeting venues, theatres, and the front and rear of the ship – places that would be frequented by participants throughout their event on the ship. At each checkpoint, teams were given a task to perform, such as taking a photo of a particular ship facility, forming a company symbol or shooting basketball hoops.

The treasure hunt proved to be a much better activity than a ship walk, as participants got to explore the vessel in a fun way.

Besides this client, we hardly had a chance to do similar activities for clients in Hong Kong. There isn't any company that specialises in teambuilding at sea.

However, with the new Kai Tak Cruise Terminal, we hope to create a new product for clients who have the misconception that cruising is more expensive for teambuilding and corporate events. Unlike hotels, cruises offer the advantage of an all-inclusive deal. Many venues onboard can be booked for free, with an additional

charge for technical services. However, permission is required from the cruise company when booking onboard venues for teambuilding. Different ships impose different limitations and an expert event organiser will choose the right ship for the event. – **Prudence Lui**

Faraway Places Marketing India managing director, Arvind Tandon

We brought a Michelin group onboard a cruise, and it brought with it several cars that featured in a group activity. Participants were required to identify unmarked Michelin tyres and fit them to the cars. The first team that installed all the right tyres won prizes.

We also had a 170-pax L'oreal India group spending time on interactive and competitive games onboard an incentive cruise. One of the games saw teams

mixing their own cocktails from ingredients supplied. Points were awarded for presentation and taste.

Results from these programmes were good – team bonding was intensive (and uninterrupted) as participants cannot escape from the venue, which happens often with land-based incentive trips. Confining participants in a defined space

for a number of nights ensures bonding, which is especially good when they come from different offices across India.

However, not all companies will include teambuilding activities in an incentive cruise. As most incentive programmes are held partly to reward good performance and partly to motivate greater effort in the year ahead, most companies prefer to leave their participants to let their hair down and have fun on the cruise, instead of thrusting upon them tasks to complete.

Moreover, most sailings in Asia are for only three nights, too short for many activities.

Another disadvantage of corporate gatherings on cruises is that a ship does not allow segregated space for teambuilding activities involving smaller groups of, say, 100 to 150 guests. There is also the difficulty of having too many structured teambuilding activities onboard.

In Europe and the Caribbean, many small vessels are geared for corporate teambuilding. Perhaps when the demand grows, more of such vessels will be made available to Indian and Asian incentive planners. – **Shekhar Niyogi**



Tandon: cannot escape



Chua: novel idea



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Would you consider teambuilding at sea?



“ Yes. Cruises are considered a high-value reward in our industry.

We are always wanting to be the first to offer novel incentive tours. For example, when Universal Studios theme park opened in Singapore, Canon was the first IT company in the Philippines to offer it as an incentive destination.

When considering a teambuilding programme at sea, we will look at factors such as costs – the total expense should be around 50,000 pesos (US\$1,136) per head, including all incidentals, land excursion, airfare and in-transit hotel; safety – ports of call should be free of armed conflict and security issues, and ample medical facilities must be available in case of emergency; onboard services and entertainment facilities – the ship must be well maintained and of five-star quality, there should be enough entertainment offerings to keep guests occupied, staff must

be efficient and well trained, the event/account manager should be accommodating and quick to respond to all our inquiries; F&B – food must be well prepared and of good variety; and finally, the timing of the voyage.

We prefer programmes in March to reward 2H sales performance based on the calendar year, and in October when there are no more typhoons in the Philippines and there are longer weekends to reward 1H sales performance.

We also prefer a three-day/two-night itinerary since company owners in our industry could not afford to stay away for too long.

We favour teambuilding activities such as Amazing Race-type of games, Zumba, yoga and ballroom dancing, and look to conduct soft-skill training sessions, award ceremonies, special back-of-house ship tours so that guests can see the workings of a cruise ship, navy or pirate-themed masquerade balls and even speed-dating.

” – Grace Obeya, sales & marketing

manager, consumables group, Consumer Systems Products Division, Canon Marketing Philippines



“ Yes, provided it is within our budget and the duration does not exceed two days/one night, as our staff have their own tasks

and responsibilities and, collectively, the team cannot be away from the office for too long.

Teambuilding is always part of our company's incentive programme, which we hold once every two years. Whenever we organise teambuilding for the staff, our entire office of almost 30 people are involved.

Teambuilding on a cruise ship will have offer a very different experience from the ones we have had in a resort setting in the past. ” – Vincent Soon, director, F&B Facilities, Malaysia





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“ Generally, activities that can sustain team interest, and allow for team engagement and interaction would be

ideal. In this case, teambuilding activities out at sea where members spend time together in a defined space would be suitable.

A day out at sea, complete with fresh air and beautiful scenery, makes for a fun and relaxed atmosphere which contributes to a positive teambuilding experience.

Off-site venues like the sea allow room for novel and interesting activities to engage the team and foster bonding. This brings better communication among the team and understanding of each other's roles, and more effective collaboration at work.

A team that enjoys spending time together will more likely be a cohesive team that enjoys working together. ”

– **Mark Fletcher, director of human resources, The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore**



“ I think that teambuilding at sea is a creative solution for incentive planners who want to add unique team experiences, but are challenged by tight budgets.

but are challenged by tight budgets.



Facilities on mega ships such as those of Royal Caribbean appear made-for-teambuilding

There are plenty of ways to incorporate teambuilding into a group cruise event, both onboard the ship and ashore. One option is a treasure hunt as we land on a beach, with clues being handed out as the group disembarks, and concludes with a barbecue competition.

I fully endorse teambuilding activities on a cruise as all activities are confined to the deck space or limited land excursions, and livens up the day as well as adds value by inducing bonding among an often disparate group of people. ”

– **Anirban Sen, general manager, corporate marketing, Uniworld Logistics Bengaluru, India**



“ Amway Hong Kong organises frequent teambuilding and training, including weekend camps.

At our 35th anniversary

distributor incentive trip onboard a Mediterranean cruise, Amway Hong Kong specially invited a segment distributor group to join the outdoor activities which included basketball games and rock-climbing in a bid to enhance bonding and foster team spirit. This successfully concluded a series of formal business presentations. ”

– **Louisa Chan, general manager, Amway Hong Kong**

Photos courtesy of Royal Caribbean Cruises



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The RAWR Awards recognises excellence in various disciplines across four major industry categories, namely: Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions. At the inaugural RAWR Awards 2013 held at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre on the 18th September 2013, a total of 21 category winners walked away with the highest industry honours.

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The soon-to-be-completed Singapore Sports Hub, with its iconic architecture and diverse MICE spaces, will add another feather in the cap for the Lion City



Lion's new tricks

A steady injection of fresh venues helps the Lion City to keep its edge as one of Asia's top cities for business events, reports
Lee Pei Qi

Amid the booming meetings and incentive travel market in Asia, Singapore is looking to stand out from the crowd with the constant addition of new and unconventional MICE venues.

Andrew Phua, director, exhibitions and conferences, Singapore Tourism Board (STB), said: "More companies are planning for hybrid events that combine meetings with incentive programmes to cater to a growing demand for corporate events to feature fuller agendas."

For Singapore to stay ahead in the MICE game, Phua said: "We need to raise the bar and go beyond what we have today, and the key challenge thus lies in differentiating ourselves by offering unique and value-added experiences."

"Unconventional venues allow event organisers to come up with creative programmes that deepen the overall delegate experience," he said, adding that upcoming developments such as the Singapore Sports Hub and the National Art Gallery will make interesting backdrops for team-

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Suntec Singapore has enjoyed an overwhelming response since reopening in June 2013

building activities or meeting programmes.

The S\$1.3 billion (US\$1 billion) Singapore Sports Hub, which will open in April 2014, will boast a 55,000-seat stadium capped with the world's largest free-spanning dome roof. The 35ha sporting facility will also house two 1,000-pax restaurants, a multi-purpose indoor area that can be configured to hold up to 3,000 seats, as well as the Sports Information Resource Centre, which is intended for exhibitions.

"There is no other venue like (the Singapore Sports Hub) – it is a special place for companies to capture a unique experience for attendees," said Mark Collins, managing director, Singapore Sports Hub.

Meanwhile, Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) has been drawing growing interest from MICE planners since its 2010 debut. Spokesperson Clement Ng said RWS hosted more than 2,700 events last year and at least 3,000 would utilise the integrated resort by this year-end. He added that more than 80 per cent of these events were meetings and conventions.

According to Ng, unique venues within RWS have been popular with corporate event organisers. These hot picks include Universal Studios Singapore's New York Street zone, which can sit 1,500 guests for evening functions, and the Waterworld Stunt Show Amphitheatre which can seat 3,500 delegates and offers pyrotechnics and stunt performances.

Although the emergence of unconventional venues has intensified competition in Singapore's business events arena, traditional convention and exhibition centres told *TTGmice* that they welcome these unique rivals.

Said Ng Sok Hia, executive assistant manager, sales and marketing of Fairmont Singapore and Swissôtel The Stamford: "An ever-changing MICE landscape is one

of our biggest challenges, but it definitely energises the industry and pushes all players in the market to continuously be at the top of their game."

Suntec Singapore CEO, Arun Madhok, agreed: "Having a wider choice of venues, combined with the country's natural vibrancy and attractions, has raised the overall profile of Singapore as an appealing MICE destination.

"Furthermore, each venue is sufficiently different to facilitate a certain degree of specialisation," he added.

To keep itself up to date with the needs of modern business events, Suntec

Singapore International Convention and Exhibition Centre underwent a massive revamp and relaunched in June this year. Since then, back-to-back bookings for its spaces have swept in, forcing the popular venue to turn some events away, according to Madhok.

Highlighting the strengths of existing, traditional business event venues such as Raffles City Convention Centre, Tour East's group vice president of sales and marketing, Judy Lum, said: "Many clients have a strong preference to house everything under one roof, and will want (all their activities) to be in the same complex as their hotel (or at least someplace nearby)."

As Singapore's MICE infrastructure development continues to boom, STB's Phua stressed the importance of service delivery standards.

He said: "Venues form just one of many components that contribute to the success of a business event. But more importantly, it is the combined ability of the event organiser, venue and other MICE service providers to deliver the relevant products and services to consumers, according to real needs.

"This is a critical step in reinforcing Singapore's value proposition as a leading business destination in the region," Phua added. ■

Ideas

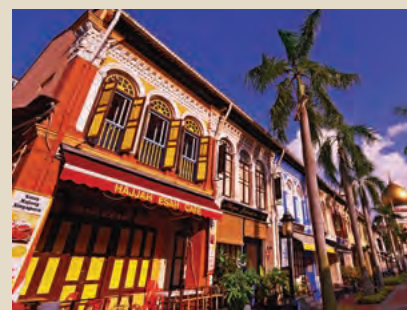
Relish multicultural flavours in one day

The tour begins in the morning at Waterloo Street, where the Sri Krishna (Hindu) and Kwan Imm (Chinese) temples are located side-by-side on this lively lane.

The Malay enclave Kampong Glam comes up next. Stroll down Arab Street where quaint shops selling traditional garb, accessories, handicraft and Arab-Muslim food are located and keep your eyes peeled for the magnificent Sultan Mosque.

Later, move on to Little India, where a riot of colours and scents offer a unique welcome. Walk through the maze of alleyways and get to know the various spices and perfumed incense so loved by local Indians.

To reward famished stomachs, plan a lunch of *roti prata*, a crispy and fluffy Indian pancake adored by Singaporeans



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One of the grand dames in Singapore's luxury hotel scene, Regent Singapore opened in 1988 on a prime piece of land. Located a few minutes' walk to shopping malls on Orchard Road and a short drive to the business districts, the hotel is favoured by both leisure and corporate travellers. It recently underwent an eight-month-long renovation – which ended in June – to refresh all the guestrooms and three meeting rooms.

Meeting facilities

Regent Singapore has 16 function rooms spread over 1,565m² of space, which, according to the hotel's spokesperson, are often booked out for private events. These rooms include the Royal Pavilion Ballroom which can accommodate 500 guests in a seated banquet layout.

Cuscaden, Nassim and Tanglin rooms have benefitted from the recent renovations. Cuscaden and Nassim, which can seat 90 pax and 210 pax theatre-style respectively, now boast large windows that let in abundant daylight, a higher ceiling, fresh wallpaper and carpet, and the latest audiovisual equipment. Nassim, one of the more popular venues, offers a private foyer and its own restrooms.

Tanglin, which can be divided into four smaller venues, features new audiovisual equipment.

Rooms

The hotel's 440 rooms and suites were all given a makeover and have been welcoming guests into an embrace of new carpeting, wall coverings and furniture fabrics in warm tones of gold, orange and beige. The rooms exude a quiet elegance that is typical of the Regent brand. Other new touches include ergonomic chairs, modern light fixtures and docks for iPods and MP3 players.

The 88m² executive king suite where I stayed was a handsome space with essential amenities done just right: the bed was comfortable; the bathroom spacious, well-lit and clean; and the work desk large and equipped with easy-to-reach universal power points. I also love the new bed-top level power points which allowed me to charge my Kindle while I read myself to sleep. All suites come with a spacious balcony, and mine overlooked greenery and a part of town.

I had a peek at the hotel's deluxe twin room and was impressed by the spacious lay-



Fact file

Maximum pax

680 pax, theatre-style, in the Royal Pavilion Ballroom

Past events

A four-day residential meeting for 100 pax from a manufacturing company; a black-tie charity fashion show and gala dinner by a non-profit organisation for 200 guests; an annual awards gala dinner for 220 pax from a publishing firm

out. At 38m², this room type is large enough to offer a comfortable stay for business travellers who are required by corporate travel policy to share rooms.

F&B

Regent Singapore is home to two of Singapore's best loved restaurants – Basilico and Summer Palace.

Specialising in authentic Italian cuisine, Basilico rolled out an *Italian Journey* showcase this year, which sees its three-course Basilissimo dinner combining à la carte mains with a buffet spread of antipasti and desserts, rotating its menu by region every month. During my August stay, I had the pleasure of journeying to Puglia and feasted on a rich seafood risotto, a wonderfully moist oven-baked sea bass with black mussels, and a most satisfying dish of 'locorotondo-style' Wagyu beef stuffed with pancetta and smoked camorza.

The culinary journey proceeded to Piedmont and Sardinia in September and October

respectively, and lands in Tuscany this month.

Basilico offers two private dining rooms that can seat eight to 10 guests.

Summer Palace, popular among connoisseurs of fine Cantonese cuisine, recently introduced a dim sum buffet lunch for meeting groups of up to 50 pax. This is set up within the restaurant's private dining rooms.

Tea Lounge, a personal favourite, draws a loyal following of high tea lovers on week-ends. The hotel also offers Tenshin, a modern Japanese restaurant; Grand Palki, a luxurious venue for North Indian cuisine; Dolcetto by Basilico, a new gourmet pasticceria on the ground floor that is perfect for hurried business travellers seeking takeaways; and The Bar, which can be hired for private functions.

Other facilities

The Regent Club is a serene, dignified venue for club floor guests to enjoy complimentary breakfast, evening cocktails and tête-à-tête. Wi-Fi is available, so are complimentary private meeting rooms.

For recreation, there is an outdoor pool and fitness centre with an indoor whirlpool, sauna and steam room on level two. Relaxing body treatments are offered both at the fitness centre and in guestrooms.



VERDICT

A comfortable hotel that is also a versatile venue for business events.

Karen Yue



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NEED TO KNOW

**Swimming with dolphins**

Resorts World Sentosa's Marine Life Park has launched new dolphin interaction programmes to allow visitors to get up close with these marine animals and explore their habitats. One of the highlights is the 80-minute underwater programme Dolphin Trek which offers the opportunity to trek on the lagoon floor while breathing freely through an underwater helmet.

**Inspiring club experiences at The Ritz-Carlton**

Club floor guests at The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore can now indulge in different experiential activities each day at the newly renovated Ritz-Carlton Club Lounge.

Experiential activities include wine tastings with a sommelier, bespoke cocktail mixing, chocolate afternoon tea, caricature paintings by a resident caricaturist, handcrafted culinary presentations and Sunday champagne brunches. This 75-seat lounge is open from 07.00 to 23.00 daily.

A new MICE advantage

The Changi Airport Group, Singapore Airlines and Singapore Exhibition & Convention Bureau have come together for the first time to develop an advantage programme for the MICE industry.

Branded as the Singapore MICE Advantage Programme (SMAP), the initiative offers business event organisers perks such as preferential airfares, additional baggage allowance, event marketing assistance and visa facilitation.

Soft-launched earlier, SMAP has been well received. Among the first events that will benefit from the new programme is the 2017 Pacific Rim International Conference on Lasers and Electro-optics.

To qualify for SMAP, events must be hosted in Singapore by December 31, 2017 and applications must be submitted to secb@stb.gov.sg between now and December 31, 2016.

The art and science of seating

Explore the life and work of Charles and Ray Eames, the husband-and-wife team famed for their timeless furniture creations, at the Essential Eames: A Herman Miller Exhibition. Held in the ArtScience Museum, the exhibition will run until January 5, 2014. The exhibition will showcase over 100 artifacts, including a number of rare and never-before-seen works and images; highlights include original paintings by Ray Eames as well as a special chair designed for Pope John Paul II.



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Jamie's Italian settles down in Singapore

Arguably one of the most famous British chefs in the world, Jamie Oliver has made his foray into Singapore's dining scene with the debut of his eponymous casual Italian eatery in VivoCity.

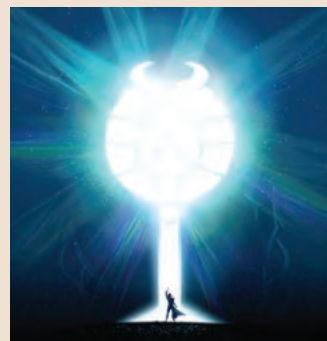
In typical Jamie's Italian style, the restaurant – first in Asia – exudes rustic charm and is furnished with bespoke furniture that are artistically handmade by local craftsmen.

Jamie's Italian offers an extensive menu featuring antipasti, pasta and risotto dishes. Cocktails and wine are available.

A limited number of reservations are accepted each day. Contact (65) 6733-5500 for bookings of eight to 12 people.

Seek out a new light

World acclaimed songwriter Dick Lee will present Light-seeker, a multi-million dollar fantasy musical at Resorts World Sentosa from November 24 to March 24, 2014. The 90-minute show features songs composed by Lee and performed by a global cast that includes stars from London's West End. Tickets from S\$48 (US\$38.60).



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Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre is an established icon in the city, but MICE players are also urging for newer, large-scale venues



Meeting demands

Undeterred by declining MICE arrivals from traditional markets, Hong Kong has boosted efforts to grow emerging markets and launch new products. By **Prudence Lui**

In the first six months of 2013, overnight MICE visitor arrivals to Hong Kong declined 4.7 per cent year-on-year to 725,298, based on Hong Kong Tourism Board's (HKTB) figures. All major markets unanimously indicated negative growth, ranging from 0.9 per cent for Australia, New Zealand and South Pacific to 29.6 per cent for Macau.

MICE performance has been less robust this year for Kowloon Shangri-La, according to the hotel's director of sales

and marketing, Lilian Lui. She opined: "Perhaps due to uncertainties in the global economy, organisers are becoming more prudent in budgeting and planning, plus the relatively smaller group sizes also make an impact on the overall performance. The lead time is becoming shorter. Some organisers do not plan far ahead and would rather wait until the last minute (to make bookings)."

Meanwhile, sister property Island Shangri-La also saw a slight decline in

the Chinese MICE market and has since been actively exploring new and emerging markets, with South Korea showing a significant growth this year, Lui added.

September and October used to be the peak season for MICE, but Lotus Tours' MICE manager Arthur Choy has observed a drop of 30-40 per cent in traffic. He said: "The outlook for MICE is not positive for this year and next. We handle MICE traffic from China but with the new Chinese government's policy to control

lavish entertainment expenses and luxury travel trips, we received less Chinese official groups. Coupled with the new tourism law implemented on October 1, (travel consultants) have to restructure their offers to meet the stringent rules.”

Meanwhile, Tomco Incentive and Travel Services has observed more incentive traffic from Russia for 2014. Said marketing manager, Kevin Leung: “Unlike European planners who are (already) working on 2015, Russians tend to book very last minute so it’s hard to predict this market. Overall speaking, the market is a bit quiet in 2013, similar to 2012.”

According to DMC – THE Destination Management Company’s conference and incentive travel manager, Adrienne Lynch, economic conditions in Europe and the US have affected MICE arrivals from traditional market sources.

She said: “We’ve seen strong interest from new source markets and are building up our offerings to them.”



Lilian Lui

Director of sales and marketing
Kowloon Shangri-La

She added: “A gradual fine-tuning of (tourism) services and infrastructure will help to raise standards in the future. (However), I would love to see more venues for bigger groups that reflect the city’s stylish elements.”

Similarly, a lack of new venues, particularly large-scale facilities, remains an issue for MV Destination, remarked general manager, Clemson Lo.

“The lead time is becoming shorter. Some organisers...would rather wait until the last minute (to make bookings).”

Hong Kong’s crop of new venues this year, including the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal, the 695-room Pentahotel in Kowloon and the 325-room Auberge Discovery Bay on Lantau Island, all boast MICE spaces and facilities.

To stimulate visitors’ interest in Hong Kong, HKTb’s New Tour Product Development Scheme launched in 2012 has led to the development of new tour ideas such as Sham Shui Po Foodie Tour and Muslim Harbour Cruise Dinner, said the NTO’s general manager of MICE and cruise, Kenneth Wong.

He revealed that HKTb continues to work with the trade to develop new ideas for MICE visitors, including Silence le Cabaret, a dining concept in which a troupe of deaf actors performs in complete silence; The Bounty, an European tall ship replica that can be used for harbour cruises and teambuilding sessions; and the Lion Dance Academy, which enables groups to learn techniques of the traditional Chinese lion dance. ■



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Grooming future talents

By Prudence Lui

Rising competition in the current business climate undeniably calls for a new generation of MICE professionals to drive the industry's future growth.

"The industry needs more newcomers to serve the growing numbers of exhibitors and visitors, and increasing demand from organisers and event attendees," said Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre's director of human resources and administration Terry Kwan, who added that competent exhibition event planning professionals and well-trained F&B service staff are also in high demand.

"Due to the long working hours and the requirement of high service and language skills, it is challenging to recruit skilful and trained F&B service staff," he

remarked.

Kwan also believed that degree programmes would be useful in grooming the next generation of MICE specialists.

He said: "People who want to join the MICE industry must acquire soft skills like communication, multi-tasking and decision-making, etc. (A good) attitude is the key to success in the service industry, and therefore any MICE course provider should bear this in mind to prepare interested parties to serve and commit."

To support the development of Hong Kong's MICE industry, more institutions have rolled out full-time programmes. The School of Hotel and Tourism Management (SHTM) of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) launched the city's first Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Convention and Event Management in



2009. It remains Hong Kong's only degree programme in events management, with an annual intake of 60 students.

NEED TO KNOW



Essence of Cantonese opera

Experience Cantopera will be shown at Yau Ma Tei Theatre every Friday to Sunday until December 29, 2013. Performed in Cantonese but with English subtitles provided, this 45-minute show features a video screening, choreography demonstrations and excerpt performances. The audience can meet with the performers at the end of the show.

Tickets are priced at HK\$150. Backstage tours and Cantonese opera make-up trial (lasting around two hours) can be arranged for small groups at additional cost.

Guided wetland walks

Hong Kong Wetland Park is offering free guided eco tours for overseas MICE groups. The tour lasts for about one to two hours, and participants will receive a souvenir upon completion of the walk.

Admission fee costs HK\$30 (US\$3.90) per person, with a 30 per cent discount offered to groups of over 50 pax.

Tours are conducted in English, Cantonese and Mandarin.

Advance booking is required; email: ka_hong_cheung@afcd.gov.hk.

Italian delights

Hong Kong has an abundance of quality restaurants that will feature well in any business event itinerary, but here is one to consider for your next programme – Il Milione Bar & Ristorante Italiano. Helmed by Michelin-starred Umbrian chef Marco Gubbiotti, the restaurant promotes slow food movement, with dishes prepared using natural ingredients sourced from small producers in Italy.

Another highlight is star mixologist Giancarlo Mancino who brings exciting concoctions and vintage cocktails to the Italian fine-dining restaurant.

Contact (852) 2481-1120 or info@il-milione.com for details.

Trust or bust?

Offered by Team Building Asia, *Trust or Bust* is a teambuilding activity themed on the customs area of an international airport. Participants will learn about facial expressions, body language, congruity of speech and eye assessing cues in relation to trust and deception, before putting these skills to test as teams adopt the roles of arriving passengers or customs officials aiming to detect contraband items (DVDs, money, etc).

These experiential activities will foster better communication and trust among participants, and help to build better business relationships.

More information is available at www.teambuildingasia.com.



Students are given practical training in organising conferences at Hong Kong's School of Hotel and Tourism Management

Jinsoo Lee, associate professor at SHTM, said: "Due to the limited number of undergraduate MICE programmes across the world, not many students are given the opportunity to learn about MICE in a comprehensive manner."

The programme includes the Special Event Project, a subject that requires students to work on a real international conference from the planning stage to on-site operation to post-conference.

Lee added: "Given that the SHTM holds an international conference annually and has quality facility support from Hotel ICON, this elective subject can be actualised. It is limited in number to 40 students who are recruited through interviews."

In 2012, Hong Kong's Community College of City University started a non-government funded Associate Degree Programme on Event Management, with the first batch of students expected to graduate in 2014, whereas the Insti-

tute of Vocational Education (IVE) has kick-started a two-year, full-time higher diploma in Tourism and MICE in both its Chai Wan and Haking Wong campus.

IVE Chai Wan Department of Hotel, Service and Tourism Studies, senior lecturer, Rosalina Lam, told *TTGmice*: "The number of event management courses are few in supply and we cater now for the new "3 + 3 + 4" academic structure implemented in the higher education sector in 2012, including a six-year secondary education and four-year higher education."

"Out of last year's intake of 300 students, one third of them chose MICE. We have an eye on a 400-student intake for 2013-14. Industrial attachment is vital for student exposure, so what sets us apart from the others are versatile opportunities to feel the pulse of the industry via participation in mega exhibitions and festivals like Wine and Dine as well as Chinese New Year Parade." ■



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Ho Chi Minh City offers a mix of colonial sights and modern architecture



Vietnam's MICE is growing at a faster rate than before but its development is being hampered by low service standards, weak infrastructure and the country's 'closed sky policy', travel companies say.

As with leisure tourism, the trade is calling on the government and the tourism bureau to do more to promote emerging destinations within the country while curbing rampant development and negative policies, such as hiking visa fees.

While there is still significant room for improvement, Vietnam's MICE market is growing and service levels have improved over the past five years, according to George Ehrlich-Adam, general manager of Exotissimo Travel Vietnam.

"Regional MICE business has picked up, especially with Singaporean organisers and event planners who are now more frequently choosing Vietnam as a new destination thanks to a solid choice of five-star hotels, including new properties such as the JW Marriott (Hotel) Hanoi and the InterContinental Danang (Sun Peninsula Resort)."

However, developing human capital remains the key priority followed by improving infrastructure if Vietnam wants to build its competitive position within the region, opined Edouard George, president of Phoenix Voyages.

"We need to have professionals managing this (MICE) segment," he said. "Even among the trade there is still a wrong idea of what MICE actually is. At (Noi Bai International Airport) recently I saw a tour guide carrying a welcome board stating 'Welcome MICE group - 2 PAX'."

"Another main challenge will be to develop proper infrastructure for domestic and inbound MICE business in Vietnam. We are still lacking meeting rooms, congress centres, original venues and hotels in certain areas, even though the situation is fast improving in Hanoi, Danang and Ho Chi Minh City."

While the lack of large-scale convention

A decent performance

But MICE players urge smarter tourism policies, higher service standards, among others, for Vietnam to truly shine.

By **Greg Lowe**

centres is limiting the sector's ability to attract major events and large groups, government restrictions on air access – what George dubs Vietnam's 'closed sky policy' – is seriously dampening demand.

He said: "Vietnam as a MICE destination is absolutely not competitive for longhaul business due to its 'closed sky policy'. It is improving slowly. Shorthaul incoming flights are fast developing with low-cost airlines, but MICE agencies are still reluctant to use such carriers for their clients."



"At (Noi Bai International Airport) recently I saw a tour guide carrying a welcome board stating 'Welcome MICE group – 2 pax'."

Edouard George
President
Phoenix Voyages

Travel specialists say MICE performance generally tracks slower growth in Vietnam's overall tourism during the first-half of the year although this is expected to pick up in the last quarter.

There is also a consensus that the Vietnam National Tourism Administration should do much more to promote the country.

Tony Dzung, owner of AsianaTravel, urges the NTO to avoid poorly thought-out policies, such as almost doubling visa fees from US\$25 to US\$45 at the end of last year, and spend more time enforcing standards across the industry.

Growth in international arrivals almost halved in the first seven months of 2013, rising just 5.9 per cent over a year ago, achieving a touch over 58 per cent of the target of 7.2 million international visitors for the year, according to official statistics. Total tourism spending was 105 trillion dong (US\$5 billion) in 1H2013, up 23.5 per cent year-on-year. China was the largest market with 998,921 visitors, up 29.2 per cent year-on-year, followed by South Korea 439,139 (4.3 per cent) and Japan 338,972 (2.9 per cent). Russia was the second largest growth market in percentage terms, rising 54.7 per cent to 170,541. Arrivals from 15 of Vietnam's top 29 source markets contracted from January to July. ■

NEED TO KNOW

History in motion

Performing arts in Vietnam received a shot in the arm this year when A O Show launched at Saigon Opera House. Don Ca Tai Tu music and other traditional elements are featured in the unscripted contemporary hour-long performance, which combines music and dance, and depict Vietnam's transition from a rural agrarian country into a nation of bustling urban centres.

Visit www.aoshowsaigon.com for more details.



Wonder women

Facilities and standing exhibitions at the Women's Museum Hanoi were recently renovated to enhance their storytelling nature. The attraction pays homage to the significant role women have played in the country's history and development. In 2013, TripAdvisor ranked it among Asia's top 25 most interesting museums. Women's Museum Hanoi also curates temporary exhibitions that explore changes in contemporary society through the experiences of vulnerable women and disadvantaged children.

Visit www.womenmuseum.org.vn.

A brand new strip

Vietnam's largest tourism and recreation complex, The Grand – Ho Tram Strip, opened in July. Located in Ba Ria-Vung Tau province, the integrated destination boasts 541 five-star rooms, 2,200m² of meeting and convention facilities, 10 restaurants and bars, luxury retail outlets and three outdoor swimming pools. The US\$4.2 billion project will soon add another 559 rooms, a casino and more convention, dining and entertainment facilities.

Contact info@hotram.asiancoastdevelopment.com for more information.





Fortune 500 companies with offices in the Philippines are being courted by the Tourism Promotions Board

Next Asian darling

Planners are increasingly drawn to numerous infrastructure developments in the Philippines, making it a destination to watch. By **Rosa Ocampo**

Previously overlooked and bypassed, the Philippines is beginning to merit the attention and interest of the international MICE community.

It's about time. Given the seal of approval by credit rating agencies and global companies as "the most improved nation in ASEAN" and having the "fastest economic expansion" of 7.5 per cent in Asia, the destination is ever-expanding its tourism cache of upmarket hotels, convention centres, integrated resorts, wellness and

spa facilities, and natural and man-made attractions.

The buzzword at the moment within the business event community is the Philippines.

Alastair Lennox, event director of the Meeting & Incentive Forums Asia held in Manila last May, aptly put it: "People are very curious about what the Philippines has got. They're very interested in what the Philippines can offer as a MICE destination".

Explaining the good attendance at the

M&I Forums in Manila, Lennox pointed out that "some of the delegates have not been to the Philippines ever and others have been here a long time ago and want to see what the fuss is all about".

Vijay Tirathrai, president and CEO of Fabulous Group Malaysia, who is exploring new products and destinations for incentive groups, noted the improvements and additions to Manila's MICE offerings.

He regards Solaire Resort & Casino, the first of the four integrated resorts to grace Manila's Entertainment City, as "a great

product which was not there.”

Vieng Chivuth, general manager of First Travel Lufthansa City Centre in Phnom Penh which arranges business events for corporate clients, is looking at prospects in the Philippines, especially Cebu, which is “something new to our clients”.

Vieng Chivuth explained: “We usually send clients to Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand which are more accessible from Cambodia. But we’re now trying to go a bit farther, maybe to Myanmar and the Philippines.”

Said Bui Le Quan, manager, international business development unit of VCCI Exhibitions Service in Vietnam: “We would like to explore the Philippines’ growing market. We’re familiar with Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand, Europe and the US, but not the Philippines”.

The emerging darling of the ASEAN region can also benefit from its neighbours’ maxed out capacity.

A Singapore event planner mulled transferring his annual international gathering to Manila. He explained: “Singapore is just an impossible destination during the F1 race season. Hotel rooms are always fully booked. Rooms are blocked by (the race) so prices are just too steep. We want to move to a kinder destination and Manila could be it.”

Based on the enthusiasm of MICE buyers at the forum, the Philippines is likely

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The spot the Philippines takes on ICCA’s country rankings in 2012, determined by the 48 international association meetings hosted in the destination in 2011

to further improve its MICE standing, from the 48 international association meetings it hosted in 2012, which represented a 45 per cent growth from just 33 in 2011, based on ICCA data. ICCA ranked the Philippines 49th in the world in 2012 and 54th in 2011.

Manila is the undisputed MICE hub in the country, having hosted 31 of the international association meetings last year, while taking the lion’s share of tourism investments into the country.

Even aviation developments augur well for Philippine MICE. Before the European Union’s lifting of the ban on Philippine carriers middle of this year, Philippine

carriers could not fly to Europe and no European carrier flies directly to Manila.

While most of the current MICE interest is from Asia, Europe may soon follow suit as Philippine Airlines began in November four weekly non-stop services between London’s Heathrow Airport and Manila, with plans for more flights that cover Rome, Paris, Frankfurt, Amsterdam and other European markets.

Meanwhile, the MICE and Business Development Unit of the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) soldiers on although this sector has very limited funds, not having the privilege of heavy subsidy that other destinations enjoy.

While MICE Plus, a package of hotel discounts and other sweeteners to bring more business events into the country, has postponed its launch from late this year to 2014, TPB continues to give technical assistance and other forms of support to MICE planners and organisers.

Besides this, TPB recently sent letters to the Philippine offices of Fortune 500 companies, inviting them to hold their business events in the country, according to Jerome Diaz, senior convention services officer of TPB’s MICE and Business Development Unit.

Also expected, he said, are stronger online promotions for MICE and more familiarisation trips for meeting planners. ■

Richer experiences on offer

By Rosa Ocampo

As the capital city, Manila has to grapple with the challenge of offering visitors quality and value for money given the perception that it is a pricey destination.

This perception is real and worrisome for Manila’s MICE sellers.

Marriott Hotel Manila general manager, Bruce Winton, calls it the “diminishing value proposition”.

“Manila hotel rates are about 50 per cent higher than Bangkok. So which is a better MICE destination?” he said.

While “not suggesting lowering rates for a second”, Winton just wants “to make sure the whole Philippine experience makes the value proposition worthwhile”.

The depreciation of the Philippine peso in recent months, from 40 pesos to US\$1

to 44 pesos to US\$1 currently, “softens the blow for overseas visitors and investors for a while,” said Winton.

“It’s a delicate balance and I’m not an economist but I do see the country having stiffer competition the more expensive it gets, and the less we can use the quality/value ratio as a selling point. (The weaker Philippine peso) is a strong selling point not just for hotel rooms but meetings, F&B and entertainment as well,” he added.

Rosario Lachica, manager of Inter Alliance Services, noted that while Manila hotels are generally more expensive than their counterparts in Bangkok, the latter have bigger rooms and better facilities.

Drawing attention away from Manila’s



“The old MICE formula of basic packages and standard products is dated. It’s now about tailored MICE, making (business events) as unique and special as possible, to add value to the experience,”

Simon Ang
Operations manager
Celebrate Life TLC

THE PHILIPPINES

pricier MICE products, Simon Ang, operations manager of Celebrate Life TLC, argued that for a destination that is only just blossoming with luxury hotels and MICE facilities, the selling point really is “experiential travel”.

“The old MICE formula of basic packages and standard products is dated. It’s now about tailored MICE, making (business events) as unique and special as possible, to add value to the experience,” said Ang.

Agreeing, Grace Obeya, manager, Canon Marketing (Philippines), Inc. said the best business events are not the most expensive, but are instead special.

She told *TTGmice* that a well-travelled and well-heeled client was bowled over by the walking tour of Cebu that she did with renowned heritage interpreter Ka Bino Guerrero.

Not your typical tour guide, Guer-



Cebu's scenic coastal fringes offer splendid playgrounds for post-meeting recreation

rero is a man living in Cebu’s past, brimming with passion for what he does best, and armed with a thorough knowledge of Cebu’s culture and his-

tory. “The walking tour didn’t cost an arm and a leg but it was made special by the attitude of the tour guide,” said Obeya. ■

NEED TO KNOW



A walk into the past

After a meeting, explore the city of Cebu through the new Pasiyo sa Kabilin heritage walk.

The trail calls at various historical landmarks dating back to the Spanish era, including Fort San Pedro built in 1565; the original cross planted by explorer Ferdinand Magellan, the first person who circumnavigated the Earth; the old Parian district or Chinese settlement; and several others more.

The tour features a ride in a local horse-drawn carriage called *tartanilla* and has option for a hearty Cebuano buffet meal and some local entertainment.

Contact info@cebucitytourism.com for more information.

More air access for Chinese MICE visitors

China Eastern Airlines debuted in October its Manila-Shanghai direct flight, using A320 aircraft with 150 seats in economy and eight in business class. The aircraft departs Shanghai at 23.55, arriving in Manila at 03.40. The return flight leaves Manila at 04.55, arriving in Shanghai at 08.15.

Astoria Boracay expands, eyes MICE

Boutique hotel Astoria Boracay on Panay Island, Aklan Province is looking to win more business events and corporate groups after completing its expansion from 39 rooms and suites to 71 keys. Facilities include a function room that can be divided into two separate spaces, a business centre and secretarial service.

Wi-Fi Internet access is free.

Visit www.astoriaboracay.com for more information.



Quirky stays in Cebu

Event planners looking for an unconventional hotel may consider The Henry Hotel in Cebu City, which features 38 spacious rooms, all with a unique interior. Good for small-sized events, the hotel's function room can host a standing reception for up to 100 guests while the meeting room is good for up to 40 standing guests.

Visit www.thehenryhotel.com for more information.

Guide to MICE

The new Events Planning Manual, an 80-page tome produced by the Philippine Association of Convention/Exhibition Organizers and Suppliers, Philippine MICE Academy and Anvil Publishing, is a user-friendly resource meant to enhance the skills of MICE organisers. It tackles the basics of event planning and execution, with pointers on budget allotment and sponsorship.

Appointments



Lyn Lewis-Smith



Yates Fei



Frederic Chretien



Alejandro Helbling



Bill Sheppard



Kurt Macher



Pauline Ng



Robert Lohrmann



Tash Tobias



Rory Campbell

AUSTRALIA

The **Association of Australian Convention Bureaux** has appointed chief executive of Business Events Sydney, **Lyn Lewis-Smith**, as its new president. She takes the reins from Damien Kitto, chief executive of the Adelaide Convention Bureau.

CHINA

Hogg Robinson Group (HRG) has promoted **Yates Fei** to general manager of **HRG China**, succeeding Harald Weber-Liel. Fei was last director of sales and account manager, and has been with HRG for eight years. Meanwhile, Weber-Liel will take up a key position within the senior management team at HRG Germany.

Lars van der Most is now general manager of **Le Méridien Yixing**. He has held senior management positions with leading hotel chains worldwide, and joins

the hotel from Westin Bund Center Shanghai.

Tourism Australia has appointed **Tony Everitt** regional general manager for Greater China, based in Shanghai. He was general manager Asia at Tourism New Zealand, where he was responsible for all commercial and marketing activities.

HONG KONG

Mark Irwin is now general manager of **Hotel Indigo Hong Kong Island**. Irwin, who has more than 13 years of hospitality experience, was last with Holiday Inn Golden Mile Hong Kong.

INDONESIA

Vineet Mahajan has been appointed both director of sales & marketing at **InterContinental Bali Resort** and area director of sales & marketing, Bali resorts at the group level. He also oversees

Holiday Inn Baruna and Holiday Inn Penang. He was last director of sales & marketing at Ayana Resort and Spa.

MAURITIUS

Frederic Chretien is now general manager of **Outrigger Mauritius Resort and Spa**, which will open next month. He joins from The Residence, Mauritius where he was general manager for 14 years.

SINGAPORE

Alejandro Helbling has been made general manager of **Capella Singapore**. He joins from Dorado Beach, a Ritz Carlton Reserve in Puerto Rico where he was pre-opening general manager.

Bill Sheppard now helms **Crowne Plaza Changi Airport** as general manager. He was regional general manager for UAE at InterContinental Hotels Group and general man-

ager of Crowne Plaza Deira Dubai.

Kurt Macher has joined **Pan Pacific Singapore** as resident manager. Macher brings with him 18 years of international hospitality experience and was last executive assistant manager at The Peninsula Hong Kong.

Singapore Marriott Hotel has picked **Pauline Ng** as director of sales. Ng was last assistant director of sales – MICE at Mandarin Oriental, Singapore.

THAILAND

Centara Hotels & Resorts has named **Robert Lohrmann** general manager of **Centara Grand Mirage Beach Resort Pattaya**. He was last general manager at the Renaissance Zhongshan Park Hotel in Shanghai.

Crowne Plaza Bangkok Lumpini Park has

appointed **Tash Tobias** and **Michiel de Kleer** as general manager and executive assistant manager, respectively. Tobias has almost 15 years of experience in the hospitality industry, and was last general manager of InterContinental Singapore. De Kleer joins from Sheraton Saigon Hotel and Towers where he was director of F&B.

Rory Campbell is now director of sales and marketing with **Outrigger Laguna Phuket Beach Resort**. He was last director of sales and marketing – rooms at Hilton Barcelona.

UAE

Dusit International has appointed **Sameh Shawkat** regional director of sales and marketing – Middle East and Africa, based in Dubai. He was last executive assistant manager, sales and marketing at Grand Hyatt Doha.

Hotel updates



Dusit Thani Abu Dhabi, UAE

Dusit Thani Abu Dhabi, UAE

Dusit International has opened its fifth property in the Middle East. The Dusit Thani Abu Dhabi offers 402 guestrooms, 131 deluxe serviced apartments, five dining outlets and a conference centre that can host up to 2,000 guests. It is 20 minutes from the airport and 10 minutes from the Abu Dhabi National Exhibitions Centre. www.dusit.com

Kempinski Hotel Yixing, China

Kempinski Hotel Yixing has opened on the banks of Lake Tai in southern Jiangsu Province. It houses 446 rooms and suites, a grand ballroom, 16 meeting and function venues, and a range of F&B venues including Le Chai which is said to be Yixing's first European wine bar. Wireless high-speed Internet access is available throughout the property. www.kempinski.com/en/yixing/hotel-yixing

Hotel Indigo Lijiang Ancient Town, China

The scenic ancient town in China's Lijiang has welcomed

the arrival of Hotel Indigo Lijiang Ancient Town, a 70-room hotel that features meeting and dining facilities. It is styled as a modern 'Post House' along the Tea-Horse Trail, and boasts an interior design that marries Naxi and Tibetan flavours. www.ihg.com/hotelindigo/hotels/us/en/lijiang/ljgin/hoteldetail

Lanson Place Bukit Ceylon Serviced Residences, Malaysia

Hong Kong-based Lanson Place Hospitality Management has launched its flagship Lanson Place Bukit Ceylon Serviced Residences in Kuala Lumpur. The property is the first Small Luxury Hotels of the World member located in the Kuala Lumpur central business district. It offers 150 units in one- to three-bedroom configurations, a gym, a library, an outdoor barbecue area, an Internet centre, a billiard area, a sky lounge called 163 Lounge with views of the KL Tower and Petronas Twin Towers, and the 163 Garden on the 50th floor. www.lansonplace.com

The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore

Club floor guests can now look forward to a different experiential

activity daily at the hotel's newly renovated The Ritz-Carlton Club Lounge. A new introduction to the Club Lounge, these activities include wine tastings with a sommelier, chocolate afternoon tea, caricature paintings by a resident caricaturist and Sunday champagne brunches. Guests are also welcome to bring out the Monet in them at the Club Lounge's The Drawing Room. Complimentary easel stands, paper and pencils are provided. These unique experiences are complemented by the refreshed interior of the Club Lounge, which now features luxurious details including custom-tailored furniture, hand-woven carpets and a floor of Indonesian teak wood and Italian marble. www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/Singapore/Default.htm

Avani Quy Nhon Resort & Spa, Vietnam

Life Wellness Resort Quy Nhon is now Avani Quy Nhon Resort & Spa, following a rebranding exercise undertaken by Minor Hotel Group. The resort offers 63 guestrooms and suites, two multi-purpose venues, three dining outlets, a spa, beachfront pavilion for wellness activities, and bicycle rentals. It is 50 minutes from Quy Nhon Airport. www.avanihotels.com/quynhon



Avani Quy Nhon Resort & Spa, Vietnam



M Hotel Chengdu, China

M Hotel Chengdu, China

Millennium & Copthorne Hotels has taken its M brand outside of Singapore with the recent opening of M Hotel Chengdu. The property offers 196 rooms and suites, a bilingual customer care centre that provides 24-hour concierge services, two conference rooms, as well as dining and recreational facilities. Xin Nan Tian Di, an area with many luxurious shopping malls, is a mere five-minute stroll away. www.royalwingsuites.com

Heritage Christchurch, New Zealand

Heritage Christchurch, set in the 100-year-old Old Government Building on Cathedral Square, within the quake-damaged city centre, has reopened. The luxurious hotel offers guests an option of one- and two-bedroom suites, and supports meeting planners with two venues – Maddison's Cellar, which can seat 30 pax theatre-style; and Old Government Building Suite, which can accommodate a cocktail reception for 30 guests. www.heritagehotels.co.nz/hotels/heritage-christchurch

Packages



CHINA

W Guangzhou is offering a promotion for meetings until the end of this year.

The *Mix & Mingle Package*, available for half- and full-day meetings, includes use of a studio space, high-speed Internet access, signature mocktails, recess and flower arrangements to complete the lavish ambience.

The *Mix It Up Package* is available for groups that book up to 20 Wonderful rooms for a night's stay. It includes breakfast, triple Starwood Preferred Planner reward points and unlimited Internet access.

The hotel offers nine meeting spaces that are supported by 317 guestrooms.

Terms apply.

Visit www.WGuangzhou.com

HONG KONG

Sheraton Hong Kong Hotel & Towers has rolled out a *Work Now & Stay Later* promotion that offers event organisers five per cent off room rates on master account and a free night for every 50 room nights per booking. Organisers can also choose two value-adds from a list that includes double Starpoints, Internet access in guestrooms and double complimentary upgrades. Starwood Preferred Planners and Starwood Gold and Platinum Planners will also earn a Starpoint for every US\$3 and US\$2 spent respectively, and a room night credit towards elite status for every 10 group room nights consumed.

To qualify, events must be held by March 31, 2014.

A second promotion, *Earn Reward of Your Choice*, entitles meeting planners to two value-adds. Options include a complimentary LCD projector, welcome reception or an additional coffee break and a lunch upgrade.

Events that are booked and held by December 31 this year will earn an additional perk.

Contact karina.ting@sheraton.com or (852) 2732-6706

THAILAND

JW Marriott Phuket Resort & Spa is offering event planners a five per cent discount on both meeting packages and F&B spend between now and December 15. The five-star hotel will also enhance the meeting experience with two perks for events with 80-150 room nights and four value-adds for those consuming more than 150 room nights. Meeting planners can choose their preferred benefits from a list that includes Wi-Fi Internet access, an hour-long cocktail reception and double Marriott Rewards Points.

Event bookers will also be rewarded with four complimentary nights' stay and a two-hour Thai massage at Mandara Spa.

Email naruemon.s@marriotthotels.com

HONG KONG

Bubba Gump, a restaurant within Hong Kong's Peak Tower, has two new group menus that were designed with corporate gatherings in mind.

Bubba's Meeting Menu, priced at HK\$199 (US\$25.70) per head, includes a breakfast selection of assorted pasties and tea or coffee, as well as lunch. The latter comprises dishes such as Captains Fish n Chips, Classic Shrimp Caesar Salad and Bubba Gump Sundae.

A premium option comes in the form of *Gump House Meeting Menu*, priced at HK\$268 per person. The package also includes breakfast and lunch, but features the restaurant's signature dishes.

Bubba Gump throws in complimentary return passes for the Peak Tram.

The restaurant has a capacity for up to 200 guests, and can be hired entirely for private gatherings. An audio system with microphone is provided.

Prices here exclude a 10 per cent service charge.

Contact (852) 2849-2867



Have a red hot deal on hand to offer event planners? Send details to ttgnewsdesk@ttgasia.com and we may just share it on Packages.

Case studies

Nu Skin Greater China Regional Convention

AsiaWorld-Expo in Hong Kong hosts its largest convention ever, a 20,000-pax three-day Nu Skin event with a variety of activities, and pulls it off with finesse. By **Prudence Lui**



Nu Skin Enterprises, Inc. took its Greater China regional convention to Hong Kong's AsiaWorld-Expo (AWE) for the fifth time last year, packing the venue to the rafters with 20,000 participants.

So massive was the turnout that the three-day 2012 Nu Skin Greater China Regional Convention was deemed the largest conference to be held in Hong Kong.

For AWE, the 2012 Nu Skin Greater China Regional Convention, now a fixture on the venue's calendar, is a proud win.

"The revisit is not without reason," said AWE, director of business development, Monique Yeung. "AWE's facilities meet Nu Skin's requirements and have been providing the company with a high flexibility for programme design. Nu Skin also appreciates AWE's professional service (standards)."

AWE's ability to accommodate an event with varied activities is perfectly illustrated by its successful execution of the 2012 Nu Skin Greater China Regional Convention. The event featured an award ceremony, a

large-scale conference, seminars, product exposition, breakout meetings and a VIP dinner.

Nu Skin's internal MICE team worked with a renowned production house to plan and execute the convention over a period of nine months. Yeung said AWE's team offered "new ideas on leveraging the venue's features".

"We proposed combining four halls at AWE to create a 170m wide stage with enhanced 3D and LED light mapping effects for the opening show and build the largest-ever seat-riser for all delegates to fully enjoy the event," she said.

Another highlight of the convention was the construction of a 28m long DNA chain model to mark Nu Skin's 20th anniversary in the region. Some 20,000 business partners from China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and other South-east Asian countries joined in to set this Guinness World Record.

To ensure a smooth delivery of the event, Nu Skin and AWE engaged 1,000 staff – half of which were recruited by the venue for security, cleaning and F&B tasks.

Yeung told *TTGmice* that one of the key challenges in this event was crowd management.

To manage the massive wave of participants, AWE used its unique Marshalling Area which provided hassle-free parking for more than 150 coaches. The space allowed simultaneous arrival and easy movement of participants.

Yeung added: "We also came up with the idea to use badges of different colours to divert participants to different zones."

She pointed out that every aspect of the convention was intertwined, and a delay in one activity would affect everything else that followed.

"Most of the participants were new to AWE, so when they left the general assembly for the breakout sessions, our security team had to pay extra attention to ensure a smooth, efficient and safe movement of people," she said, adding that the venue's unique configuration provided abundant entrances and exits.

In terms of dining service, AWE's F&B team devised an efficient system to serve 20,000 delegates during all activities of the convention, which included a gala dinner, refreshments, lunch, dinner as well as a variety of receptions.

Yeung said: "We tailor-made a series of menus and F&B packages to meet the needs of the event programme and guests' dietary preferences." ■

Event
2012 Nu Skin Greater China Regional Convention

Client
Nu Skin Enterprises, Inc.

Venue
AsiaWorld-Expo, Hong Kong

Number of pax
20,000

Objectives
A platform for Nu Skin's top distributors in Asia to meet and be introduced to new products

Challenges
The massive attendance required careful crowd control; sufficient refreshments must reach every delegate

Solutions
Coloured badges were employed to divert participants to different zones, minimising congestion

Les Clefs d'Or UICH International Congress

Society of the Golden Keys Malaysia beats Italy, Argentina and Dubai for the right to host the pinnacle event of UICH in 2014 and draw 600 top concierges to the country. By **S Puvaneswary**



Society of the Golden Keys Malaysia puts up a successful bid for the 2014 international congress; president Ragu Kumarasamy (left) pictured here with colleague Shahrezal Abdul Wahid and fellow delegate Mohammed Jumali

Malaysia's quest to host the 61st Les Clefs d'Or Union Internationale des Concierges d'Hotels (UICH) International Congress began in October 2010 when the Society of the Golden Keys Malaysia expressed its bid intention during an international board of directors meeting in Dubai.

Recollecting the early days, Ragu Kumarasamy, president of the Society of the Golden Keys Malaysia, told *TTGmice* that the bid was put forth at the encouragement of the director-general of Tourism Malaysia, Mirza Mohammad Taiyab.

The bid was strongly supported by the Ministry of Tourism Malaysia, Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB), Kuala Lumpur City Hall, The Royale Chulan Kuala Lumpur and Prince Hotel & Residence Kuala Lumpur.

"We presented our bid in Toronto the following year during the annual board of directors meeting, held in conjunction with the international congress. One of the challenges was to come out with a short presentation that would capture the hearts of our audience," said Kumarasamy.

"After consultation with MyCEB, the organising committee chose to present a short video by Tourism Malaysia which

provided a general overview of the country's modern (infrastructure) and cultural attractions, such as our vibrant cities, snorkelling and dive sites, traditional homestays, transportation systems and cultural traditions, that delegates can experience."

The video presentation was supplemented with PowerPoint presentations promoting popular destinations in Malaysia such as Langkawi, Penang, Malacca, Sabah and Sarawak.

Kumarasamy opined: "We were up against Italy, Argentina and Dubai but I think it was our short but comprehensive video presentation that made an impression on the board of directors. The video... was very impressive and everyone watching it could get a feel of the destination's offerings."

Malaysia was then invited to make another presentation in London the following year, this time during the international board of directors meeting and the general assembly.

"By then, Federico Barbarossa, president of Les Clefs d'Or Italy, had accepted our request to step aside to allow the congress to return to Asia, leaving Argentina and Dubai as our competitors," he said.

Event

61st Les Clef d'Or Union Internationale des Concierges d'Hotels International Congress

Bid initiator

Society of the Golden Keys Malaysia

Dates

January 10 to 15, 2014

No of delegates

More than 600

Challenges

Malaysia must produce a lively presentation that can capture the destination's best offerings in a short time frame in order to oust bid competitors Italy, Argentina and Dubai

For the second presentation, the Society of the Golden Keys Malaysia "hyped up" its pitch by including a brief itinerary for the five-day programme "so members knew what to expect if they were to choose Malaysia", said Kumarasamy.

Malaysia's proximity with regional countries and the availability of numerous budget airlines were also highlighted.

He said: "The presence of former Malaysian tourism minister, Ng Yen Yen, as the honorary patron and the government's support were factors in our favour. The board of directors and delegates were impressed with the preparation we had done and we were officially awarded the right to host the 2014 conference.

"(The win offers us a) chance to highlight to the world what Kuala Lumpur and Malaysia can offer and share our warm hospitality to further promote ourselves as the premium choice for business events in the world."

The Les Clefs d'Or UICH International Congress will be held in Malaysia for the first time, although it had rotated in Asia previously. Hangzhou, Singapore and the Philippines hosted earlier editions of the congress, which is described as the 'pinnacle event' of UICH. ■

Over coffee with...



“ We...have proven that (building convention centres) will not only benefit Dyandra, but also the cities where (these venues) are located. ”

Danny Budiharto

Indonesian PEO/PCO Dyandra Media International, which organises 700 events each year, is aggressively growing its property arm by building convention centres and hotels, a move COO Danny Budiharto tells **Mimi Hudoyo** is critical for organic growth

Why is Dyandra Media International taking this property development direction? Isn't the construction of venues under the domain of the government?

You should ask our government why it isn't building venues in the country. Being in the MICE business, Dyandra Media International regards convention centres as a raw material that is necessary for growth. How can the company grow its exhibition and conference businesses without venues to host them in?

As part of Kompas Gramedia (Indonesia's largest media conglomerate), we are lucky to have stakeholders who are willing to invest in properties that require huge outlay but bring in returns over a long period.

We believe and have proven that such investments will not only benefit Dyandra, but also the cities where the convention centres are located.

Which cities have benefited from Dyandra's investment?

Surabaya is the second largest business city in Indonesia after Jakarta, but it did not have a large and proper exhibition hall back in 2008. The only space available then was around 2,000m², which was not big enough to host Dyandra's exhibitions. We could not wait around for the regional government to build us a venue, so we went ahead and built one ourselves – the 4,000m² Gramedia Expo.

The convention and exhibition business in Surabaya grew over the years, attracting other investors to build even larger venues. Today, Grand City Surabaya (which comprises a mall and a convention and exhibition centre) is the largest facility in the city.

When our exhibitions outgrew Gramedia Expo's capacity, we

moved them to Grand City Surabaya. That prompted us to renovate Gramedia Expo to enable it to better cater to more conferences and weddings. We rebranded it to Dyandra Convention Center a few months ago.

The same was seen in Medan. Medan International Convention Center stimulated the growth of meetings and exhibitions in the city. We would not have been able to introduce (Medan Automotive Fair) there without a proper, sizeable venue.

Dyandra is also building a 150,000m² convention centre in Serpong, Tangerang, which is far from Jakarta city centre. Are you not worried that the city's notorious traffic jams will cause organisers and delegates to shun it?

When we moved the Indonesia International Motor Show (belonging to the Association of the Indonesian Automotive Industries, it is the country's largest automotive show and covered 75,000m² in gross area this year) from Jakarta Convention Center (in the city centre) to Jakarta International Expo in Kemayoran (north of the city) a few years ago, exhibitors complained. They were afraid of losing the crowd as the venue was far from the city centre. But look what happened. Now, Jakarta International Expo is too small for the motor show. We lost 30 per cent of potential business that was put on the waiting list this year because of the lack of space.

We will move the event to Indonesia International Expo, Serpong, which opens next June and I'm confident of the turnout. For participants and guests from out of town, Serpong is more accessible from the airport than the city.

We are building a hotel within Indonesia International Expo

and plan to add more in the coming years to support the venue.

The company doubled the size of Bali Nusa Dua Convention Center (BNDCC) within two years of its opening to cater to the APEC meetings, making it the largest venue in Indonesia. Is that necessary for Bali, the country's smallest province?

BNDCC 1 was built for the East Asian Summit in 2011. At that time, we thought the 25,000m² venue was very big for Bali's standards. As it turned out, that was too small for the APEC Summit this year. But even with both BNDCC 1 and 2 (the latter opened in September), the summit had to also utilise the Bali International Convention Centre.

BNDCC 1 became profitable within two years of operation. This year's performance is above target, with 60 per cent occupancy and revenue of more than 100 billion rupiah (US\$8.9 million). Normally, 30 per cent occupancy is considered good for a new convention centre.

Coming up in December, the WTO Ministerial Conference (with some 7,000 delegates) will occupy the entire venue.

Massive events like that do not come to Bali every year, so how will you fill the venue?

It is true that we will not get massive events every year, and

that is why BNDCC 2's halls are divisible to accommodate smaller meetings for a few hundred people. A five-star hotel on site (slated to open in December) will support the facility.

Presently, the BNDCC complex has at least 16 association meetings with more than 1,000 participants each in the books, as well as other smaller corporate meetings. While January to March is usually a quiet period for MICE in Bali, BNDCC will be busy then.

Considering how the world economy is still slow and the Indonesian currency has dipped in the last few months, how do you expect 2014 to pan out?

It will be a challenging year, due also to the upcoming general and presidential elections.

Our sales team at BNDCC will need to work very hard to maintain the strong momentum, but Bali is an international destination and its potential for inbound MICE is high.

Elsewhere, our plans to begin building a convention centre in Makassar, South Sulawesi next year have been put on hold as we wait and see how the economic situation will impact business.

However, ongoing projects such as Indonesia International Expo and the 11 hotel projects we are targeting to open progressively throughout 2014 will continue according to schedule.

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Venue check

Spettacolo at Lenkerhof

This venue defies notions that Swiss mountain resorts offer hearty, cheesy food. It's part of a gourmet and spa resort which also pampers MICE groups. By **Raini Hamdi**



Lenkerhof Gourmet & Spa Resort is located in Lenk in Simmental, Switzerland (www.lenk-simmental.ch), the word 'Simmental' equals 'best Swiss beef'. Think, therefore, of happy cows grazing on the greenest of green pastures, and of nature providing endless possibilities for teambuilding – try a rope course in the mighty trees or squeeze C-level brains to build a 'boat' then race it on the lake, to name a few examples.

MICE application

The five-star resort has ThinkTank packages for MICE. It has 80 modern guestrooms and suites, three cutting-edge seminar rooms (total 300m²) with views of Lenk's mountains, indoor/outdoor activities for MICE that can be tailored to group's objectives and, of course, F&B, for which it has created a name.

I dined at its Spettacolo Restaurant, awarded 17 points by Gault Millau in 2012, and find it a gratifying culinary journey. If a company wants to drive the importance of creativity and quality, on top of making its employees feel highly-valued and deserving of the best, dinner here will hit the right spot.

F&B concept

Dinner at Spettacolo Restaurant is a gastronomic event. Lots of elegantly-dressed guests fitting into an elegantly-designed restaurant. I was welcomed warmly by maitre d'hotel, Christian Muller, who explained how the menu works: choose from 15 dishes, from starters to desserts or, if I like, have all 15 and twice, thrice, etc, of anything.



Fact file

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Badstrasse 20, CH-3775 Lenk im Simmental (Bernese Oberland), Switzerland

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Member of Relais & Chateaux (www.relaischateaux.com)
Email: rc-asia@relaischateaux.com

Opening hours

Breakfast (serves buffet)
Dinner (serves a la carte - see review)

* Dinner is included in the half-board package; check out also other meeting packages offered by the hotel

Fifteen dishes may sound a lot, but each portion which came was tiny but *huge* on the art of plating which, as we know, is half the battle won. Often, I found myself unable to knife through what was presented on the plate – just as one would not bear to destroy a beautiful piece of art.

My starter, scampo (shrimp) with caviar and peas with essence of wild mushrooms, rightway reflects the use of fresh ingredients from the surrounding region, and that there is a wizard in the kitchen who is skilful with new production techniques. The taste was delicate, yet flavourful.

Everything I picked, including simple-sounding dishes like tagliolini with goat cheese, lime and boletus, tasted exquisite. Make sure to leave space for desserts. My two desserts, Nyangbo couverture with biscuit and mascapone, and passionfruit creme brulee, both sealed the Spettacolo Restaurant as *the* reason to stay or meet in Lenk.

Service and ambience

There was a bit of waiting in between courses but I didn't mind it too much: this was no quick cookie-cutter food after all, and when the plate arrives, it is food worth waiting for.

Besides, the service staff were attentive, English-speaking and always there to serve breads (of which there were seven types), wine and water.

And why the rush, when you can linger with the rest of the team and relax in a plush setting amid the cool, refreshing mountains? ■

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