

February/March 2014

TTGmice

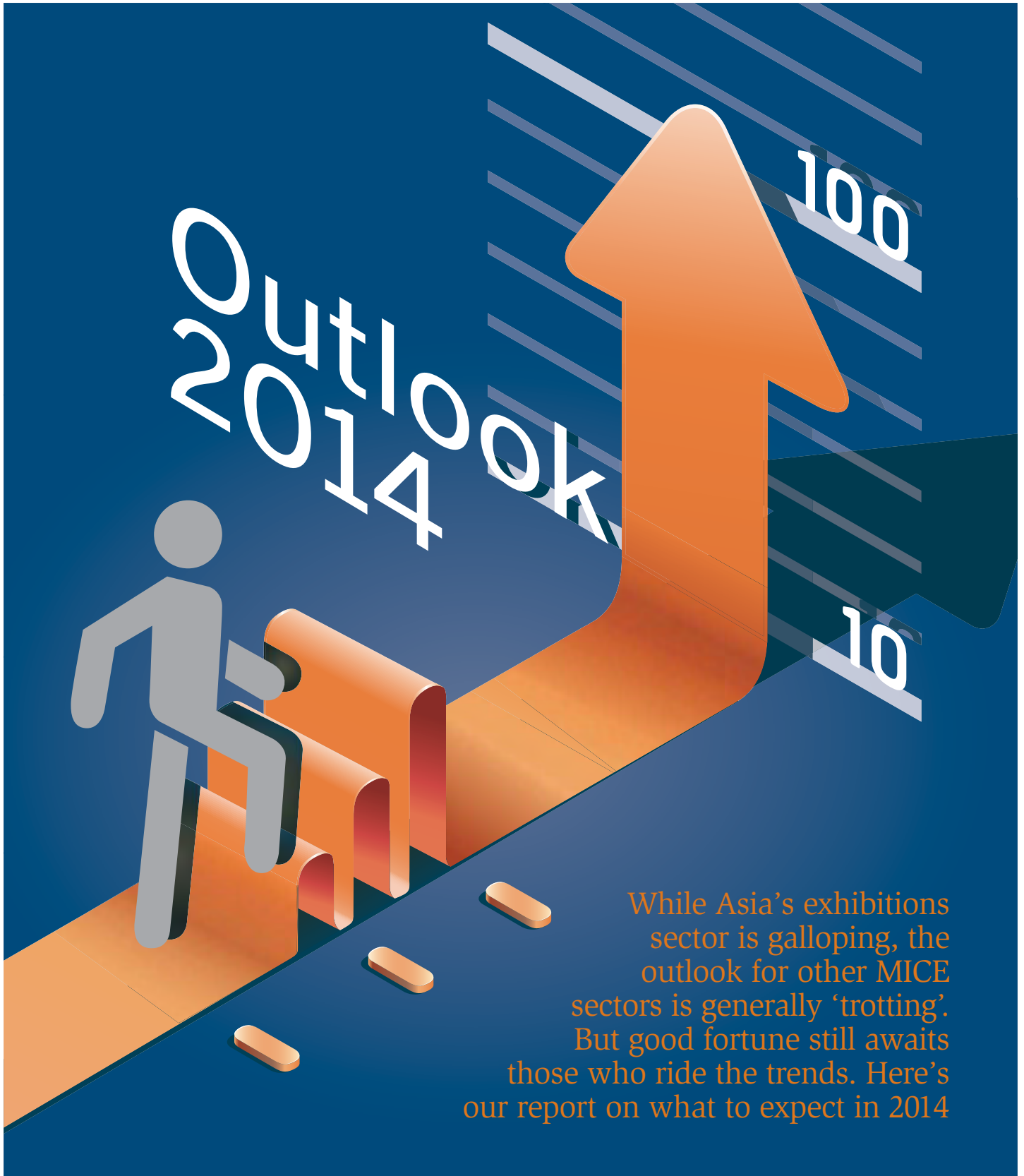
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CSR options for corporate groups in the Lion City

Thailand's innovative angles

ACTE's first Asia-based president, Kurt Knackstedt, talks about the future

Case study: Telcoinabox's colourful conference



While Asia's exhibitions sector is galloping, the outlook for other MICE sectors is generally 'trotting'. But good fortune still awaits those who ride the trends. Here's our report on what to expect in 2014

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Karen Yue
Group editor

New year, new look

Two months into 2014 and the year is unfolding with much excitement for all of us at TTG Asia Media, which is celebrating its 40th birthday this year.

Our first source of excitement lies now in your hands – a revamped *TTGmice*, which sports new sections such as *In focus*, an analysis of hot topics in the business event environment; *Marketplace*, an appetising compilation of the latest hotels, unique venues, attractions and other products and services that will appeal to your events; *Client files*, which spotlights what corporate clients and associations are doing recently; and *Mailbox*, a platform for you, our valued readers, to share your thoughts on business trends, experiences of recent trade events that were particularly good or bad and requests for certain topics to be covered in upcoming issues of the magazine.

And as more corporates in Asia-Pacific look beyond the region for their business events, *TTGmice's* editorial line-up will also feature longhaul destinations.

All these, along with familiar sections that you already love like *Talk of the Trade*, destination features and case studies, are now presented in a vibrant, fresher and cleaner layout.

Besides a rejuvenated *TTGmice*, we will also be launching in April *TTGassociations*, a quarterly publication catering to association secretariats and association event planners. If you are attending IT&CM China in Shanghai, good news – you will be among the first in the region to lay your hands on a copy of *TTGassociations*.

The year-long celebration will also see us rolling out a revamped *TTG Asia*, our sister title which focuses on the travel and tourism trade, an enhanced and mobile-optimised *ttgasia.com*, an additional issue of *TTG Asia Luxury*, and two new B2B online services for the travel and tourism trade.

Yes, we will be happily busy in 2014.

As with all celebrations, there will be plenty of activities throughout the year for all of you to partake in, from parties and fun runs to charity drives. We are blowing up the balloons and colouring the invitation cards now, so you will be hearing from us pretty soon.

Meanwhile, I hope you will enjoy this issue of *TTGmice*.



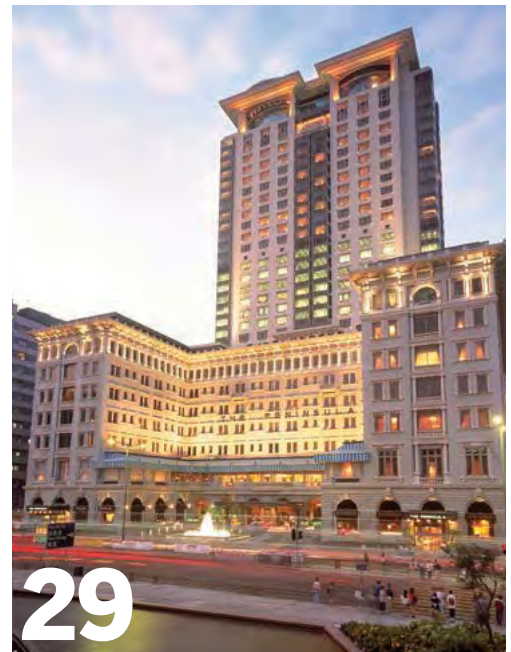
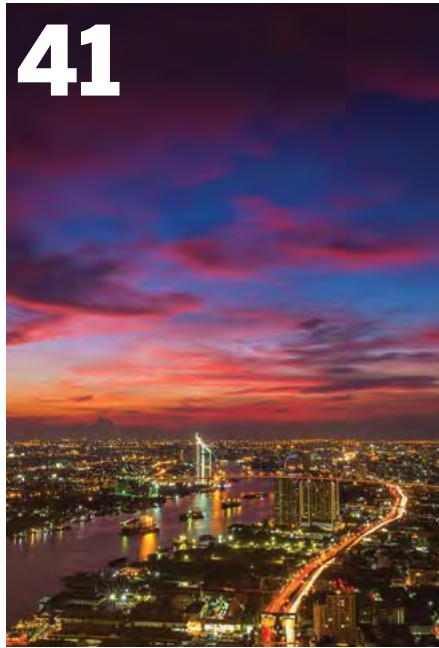
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Further rate hikes may place already expensive Hong Kong hotels on thin ice, prompting players to make moderate adjustments and seek out alternative strategies. Prudence Lui reports

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Key cities Tokyo and Kyoto are scoring well on the MICE front, while Sendai has risen from the shadows of the 2011 disaster as a hotspot for medical, geology and nuclear science conventions, writes Hannah Koh

TTGmice

www.ttgmic.com

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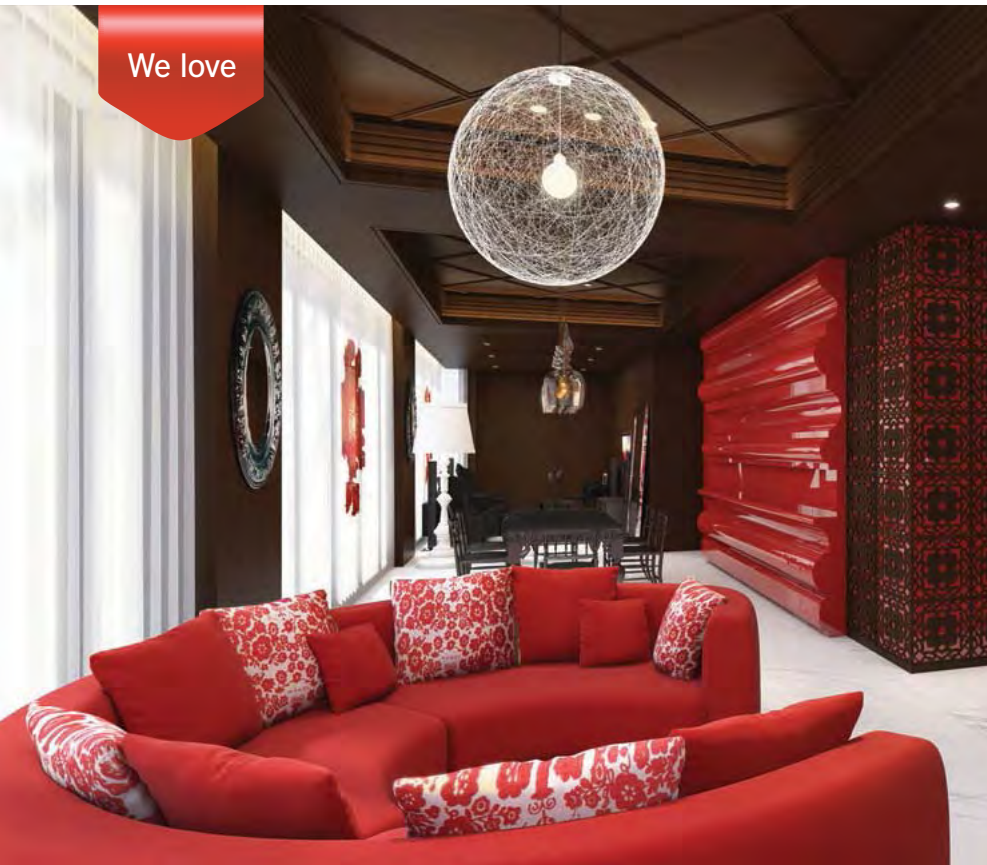
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We love



New moon rising

The Moonshine Suite at the new Mira Moon hotel in Hong Kong is an exquisite space on the 36th floor that functions as both a guest room and a venue for intimate events for up to 20 guests.

Its interior, a stunning medley of red, white and black, bears the beautiful and eccentric signature of Dutch designer Marcel Wanders who is behind the hugely popular Knotted Chair.

We love the luxurious circular lounge area and the grand all-black six-seater dining set – perfect spaces for some serious strategy brainstorming and intensive post-meeting networking drinks. Extra points for the private cocktail bar tucked in a corner – ask for a bartender to kick the fun factor up a notch.

Designed for the fashion-forward tech-savvy business traveller, Mira Moon offers 90 rooms that are fully equipped with modern features such as 32-46" HD IPTV and iPad mini as well as free Wi-Fi and complimentary minibar.

The hotel also offers a complimentary *Delegate Concierge Service* that provides porters to assist guests with post-conference baggage. At guests' request, porters will be stationed at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre during selected fairs, ready to whisk guests' belongings back to their hotel rooms.

Visit www.miramoonhotel.com for details.



A new cocoon

Hotel Éclat Beijing has launched a new ballroom, The Cocoon, boasting a glass rooftop and cityscape views from the 21st floor.

As part of the hotel's aim of fusing design and the environment, The Cocoon provides a setting with natural light and a tropical garden surrounding.

Wessel Krauss, general manager of Hotel Éclat Beijing, said: "This (natural lighting) means that the venue works well during the day as well as at night. The curved roof structure also provides a good starting point for designing creative events."

The 424m² ballroom can seat 150 guests and is well suited to display dramatic multimedia and lighting effects.

Positioned to lure luxury brands, Krauss said: "The Cocoon has already attracted bookings from a number of luxury brands such as Breitling, Lenovo and SK II. It lends itself well to events such as buffet dinners, fashion shows and cocktail receptions."

The 100-room-and-suite hotel, a member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World, is nestled in a glass-and-steel tower capsule within Parkview Green and boasts the largest private Salvador Dali art collection in China. Visit www.eclathotels.com/beijing. – Paige Lee Pei Qi

Responsible experiences

A selection of corporate social responsibility and sustainability initiatives are now available to meeting and event organisers who take their programmes to any Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts properties.

Initiatives offered by the new *Experience It* programme are designed around three categories: People & Planet, which features activities involving children from a hotel's local outreach project and conservation activities; Green, which utilises eco-friendly amenities during events; and Be Well, which offers event delegates fresh, sustainable and local dining options and rejuvenating activities.

"Meeting organisers are asking for alternative offerings that will spark creativity and engagement and have CSR elements, so we've created a menu of themed breaks, teambuilding exercises and activities that will cater to this need and energise attendees," said Mandy Chan, Shangri-La's director of corporate events management.

"Planting coral cones in a marine sanctuary, painting a school, engaging with local farmers on an eco-tour – these are just a few of the many *Experience It* activities available at our hotels."

Chan added: "Several clients have already incorporated *Experience It* activities into their meeting programmes in Beijing, Singapore and the Philippines, and we expect this to be a growing trend in 2014."

Details on Shangri-La's *Experience It* programme can be found at www.shangri-la.com.



Lounge in style

Singapore Airlines has unveiled a new concept for its SilverKris Lounge in Sydney, Australia, as part of a multi-million-dollar investment programme to upgrade all its airport lounges worldwide over the next five years.

The new SilverKris Lounge is modelled after elements of a home, following extensive research that included focus groups with customers. The lounge features art pieces sourced locally and from Singapore, and offers personal spaces ranging from a living room, kitchen and dining room to intimate coves for rest and relaxation.

Specially designed productivity pods enable customers to work in privacy, while signature armchairs will be a new feature in all refurbished SilverKris Lounges.

Iconic Singapore dishes will also be served alongside international choices and a wide range of wines and spirits.

Completing the "home" experience are Passenger Relations Officers who are trained to deliver the personal touch Singapore Airlines is known for.

Meanwhile, plans are underway to upgrade lounges at airports in London, Hong Kong and Singapore (Terminal 3) this year.



New sanctuary

The five-star Centara Grand Modus Resort Pattaya has soft-opened on the serene Wong Amat Beach, neighbouring the Sanctuary of Truth, one of Pattaya's famous attractions.

The resort offers 252 guestrooms, including one-, two-bedroom suites and penthouses as well as Deluxe Family Residences that are children-friendly.

Meeting planners have a choice of two function spaces – Wong Amat which can seat 120 guests in theatre style and Naklua which can accommodate a 60-pax banquet. Both meeting rooms are fitted with projectors and screens and offer complimentary wireless Internet access.

There are several F&B venues to choose from, including Modus Bistro, which serves Italian cuisine along with Asian and international favourites, and Breeze Beach Club, which dishes out comfort food in the day and transforms into a lively beach club in the evenings. Other facilities include Spa Cenvaree and a fitness centre.

Visit www.centarahotelsresorts.com.

You can be royals

Best Western International has launched its fourth property in Jakarta, the 156-room Best Western Grand Palace Kemayoran.

Situated in the heart of the Kelapa Gading area in Central Jakarta, the hotel's architecture captures the majesty of a palace with its white-pillared entrance topped with soaring arches.

The property offers 156 rooms including 13 suites, all with private balconies and free Internet access, a ballroom capable of hosting up to 300 delegates, five meeting rooms and outdoor function space. The property is also 1km away from JIExpo, reputed to be one of Indonesia's largest conference and exhibition venues.

Other amenities available within hotel premises include an outdoor lagoon-style swimming pool, a spa, Onyx restaurant, B'nW Cake Shop and the Sky Lounge.

Visit www.bestwestern.com for details.

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HOT DEALS



Hyatt Regency Hong Kong, Tsim Sha Tsui

Hyatt Regency Hong Kong

Hyatt Regency Hong Kong, Tsim Sha Tsui has rolled out a new *Executive Meeting Plan*. Priced at HK\$838 (US\$108) per pax, the package includes use of a meeting venue from 08.00 to 17.00, lunch, two themed coffee breaks with pastries, complimentary use of technology and communications equipment, complimentary meeting amenities and privileged rental of LCD projectors, video conferencing equipment and high-speed wireless Internet access.

The well placed city hotel offers a variety of event venues, including a 335m² ballroom that can be divided into two smaller spaces, and five salons.

Prices are subject to a 10 per cent service charge. Terms apply.

Contact +852 3721 1863 or e-mail hongkong.tsimshatsui@hyatt.com for information.

Rendezvous Hotels, Asia-Pacific

Rendezvous Hotels is throwing in a free *Value Promise Program* package for guests, which provides free unrestricted Internet access, free local telephone calls, low-cost long distance call, low-cost mini bar drinks and food, low-cost laundry pricing and no surcharges on credit card payments and weekend/public holiday F&B spend.

In addition, business travellers are offered the *Business Benefits* package from A\$27.50 (US\$24.60) per person daily. The deal includes free unrestricted Internet access, full breakfast for one, newspaper of choice and a choice of either a laundered or pressed shirt, or a complimentary drink at the hotel bar (offer may vary between hotels).

The offers are valid at Rendezvous properties in Australia, New Zealand and Asia-Pacific. Terms apply.

Visit www.rendezvous-hotels.com for more information.

Crown Hotels, Australia

All Crown Hotels in Melbourne and Perth will now offer free Wi-Fi Internet access to all guests. Guests who book accommodation or a spa treatment at any of the five properties – Crown Towers, Metropal Melbourne, Metropal Perth, Promenade Melbourne and Promenade Perth – will be able to log on and enjoy complimentary access for up to two devices.

Visit www.crownmelbourne.com.au and www.crownperth.com.au more details.

Furama Resort Danang, Vietnam

The five-star Furama Resort Danang is offering a meeting package at US\$180⁺⁺ per room per night, with a 50 per cent discount on room rates for the third night and a free fourth night thrown in for even longer stays. The offer includes a full-day meeting package with lunch and two tea breaks or a group

theme dinner, as well as high speed Wi-Fi across the resort and shuttle service to Hoi An ancient town.

In addition, a 15 per cent discount on F&B, water sports and tours is offered, while a 10 per cent discount is applied to spa services.

This package is valid until December 22.

Contact Charles Luong at ssm.hcm@furamavietnam.com or (84) 932 048 987 for more details.

Pullman Jakarta Central Park, Indonesia

Pullman Jakarta Central Park's latest *Wellbeing by Pullman* room package throws in an extra room night for three consecutive nights' stay, plus buffet breakfast for two and a voucher for spa treatments at the hotel's Fit and Spa Lounge.

Room rates start from 2,578,000 rupiah (US\$215) per night, excluding tax and surcharges. The offer is available from now through December 29.

Email www.pullmanjakartacentralpark.com for reservations or visit www.pullmanjakartacentralpark.com.

Angsana Lang Co, Vietnam

Angsana Lang Co in Central Vietnam is making it easier for meeting organisers to combine business with pleasure through its *Two's on Us*



Lufthansa, Air France take to Jakarta skies again

Lufthansa German Airlines is planning to resume Frankfurt-Jakarta flights come March 30 this year, putting an end to the suspension of this service since October 2012 due to the carrier's network restructure.

The resumption of the five-weekly service, operated via Kuala Lumpur, is backed by strong passenger traffic and cargo demand between Indonesia and Europe.

During the suspension of services to the Indonesian capital city, Lufthansa has continued to offer flights to Singapore, Bangkok and Hong Kong – routes that resulted in production that was "70 per cent beyond what we had originally targeted" last year, said Leandro Tonidandel, general manager Indonesia.

In addition to the new flights this summer, Lufthansa has been enhancing its reach to Indonesian travellers through various man-

ners, including a recent partnership with Garuda, Jetstar and Singapore Airlines to "link our gateways in Asia with different regions in Indonesia".

Noting that Indonesia is a G-20 member country, the 16th largest economy in the world and the 15th largest car manufacturer worldwide, Tonidandel said: "We see tremendous opportunity to continue improving commercial ties between Indonesia, ASEAN and Europe."

Meanwhile, Air France will commence daily services between Paris-Charles de Gaulle and Jakarta, via Singapore, on the same day, after 10 years of being offline.

Duncan Rutgers, country manager for Air France KLM Indonesia, said: "Jakarta as Air France's new route fits perfectly into our strategy to focus on South-east Asia's huge



potential.

"There are many French companies coming into Indonesia, with a current count of about 250 such firms," he said, adding that leisure and education segments will also feed traffic to the new route.

The service will complement KLM's daily Jakarta-Kuala Lumpur-Amsterdam and daily Denpasar-Singapore-Amsterdam flights.

"Altogether there will be 21 flights per week from Indonesia to Europe in Summer 2014," said Rutgers. – **Mimi Hudoyo**

offer, which includes a variety of fun activities in and around the resort.

Two's on Us is applicable for groups that book a minimum of 20 room nights and a full-day meeting package. Delegates can enjoy any two benefits from a list that includes a 30-minute activity on an All-Terrain-Vehicle ride, archery or water pillar paddle experience; half-day guided meditation trip to Truc Lam Zen Monastery; and two 18-hole green fee waivers at the Nick Faldo-designed Laguna Lãng Cồ championship golf course for every 20 paid room nights.

Planners will also earn a two-night-stay gift certificate with daily breakfast and a 120-minute spa session at Angsana Spa for bookings confirmed on or before June 30, 2014.

The offer is valid for new bookings from now until June 30, 2014, for stays and meetings held by October 31, 2014.

Visit angsana.com or email reservations-langco@angsana.com for more information.

The Mira Hong Kong

The Mira Hong Kong is looking to tempt event organisers with seven avant-garde thematic coffee breaks which calls upon delegates to whip up legendary Hong Kong street snacks themselves. These unique coffee breaks also feature tantalising desserts hanging from trees and cocktails served in "light bulbs".

Themes include *Chic Sensations* which feature stylish glassware and creative cabinets bursting with global flavours from fancy Japanese rolls to black caviar cones; *Urban Hong Kong* which highlights popular street snacks; and *Out & Uplifted* which takes the coffee break outdoors. Vegetarian, halal and gluten-free options are available.

Event planners who book one of the seven new thematic coffee breaks will enjoy 30 per cent off the full-day conference package, priced at HK\$850 (US\$110). This offer is valid for bookings made by February 28 for events executed by June 30.

Contact mice@themirahotel.com or book online on www.themirahotel.com. Quote "TAKE A BREAK" to enjoy this offer.

Wall of fame

Suntec Singapore Convention and Exhibition Centre's high definition digital wall, also known as the Big Picture and which forms an integral part of the venue's new façade, has been awarded a Guinness World Records title for Largest High Definition Video Wall.

Standing over 15m tall and 60m wide, and comprising 664 full HD LED screens, the Big Picture provides a prominent welcome for delegates and visitors as they arrive at the venue.



L'Appart

With its certain *je ne sais quoi*, this rooftop French restaurant and bar in Bangkok will mesmerise groups with its elevated views, classy interiors and delectable cuisine.

By **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

Perched on the 32nd floor of Sofitel Bangkok Sukhumvit, L'Appart embodies the French spirit in its elegance and culinary approach, taking its design cues from a 19th century Haussmann-style apartment in Paris.

The 80-seat venue boasts an interesting play of spaces, with each interconnected room exhibiting its own character: the laidback lounge features a full bar and a DJ station, plus plush armchairs and black-and-white photos of Parisian life; the quiet library is adorned with soft lighting, books and objets d'art; the classy dining room is set in neutral tones with parquet flooring; and the lively open kitchen showcases a red Le Cornue stove, white-marble tables and leather banquettes.

Step outdoor and the open-air terrace, which extends 180 degrees, offers panoramic views of Bangkok's crowded skyline and the bustling Sukhumvit Road below.

MICE application

The flexibility of L'Appart's multi-faceted spaces enables it to cater to a wide gamut of events, including product launches, cocktail receptions, art display, fashion walks and annual corporate parties.

For cocktails, L'Appart can accommodate up to 300-350 pax but 150 pax will be the optimum number, advised Anthony Slewka-Armfelt, Sofitel South-east Asia & India regional director of sales and Sofitel Bangkok Sukhumvit director of sales & marketing.

The eight-pax private room can be booked for intimate gatherings. For bigger groups seeking exclusivity, the entire venue can be bought out for 400,000 baht (US\$12,500) for typically four hours of private usage, according to Slewka-Armfelt, who recommends corporate groups starting the evening at 17.00 to catch the sunset over aperitifs on the outdoor terrace before venturing indoors for dinners.

F&B concept

Led by chef de cuisine Jeremy Turret, L'Appart serves contemporary French cuisine with Asian touches.

Our dinner started with a beef tartare graced with quail eggs and black truffle, and the second appetiser – an onion soup capped with a crisp-golden pastry dome – kept

sending out aromatic wafts. For the main courses, the dishes tasted as delightful as their artful presentations: my order of steamed snowfish and king crab, served with black-ink risotto and *tom kha*-flavoured beurre blanc, balanced delicate and savoury flavours, while my partner's medium-cooked duck breast was juicy and tender.

A well-curated drinks list, from Old World Reds to Champagnes and cocktails, makes good company for the exquisite food.

Service and ambience

The venue eschews the typical restaurant layout, with tables spaced apart and tucked into intimate corners to retain the ambience of an upclass Parisian residence, so much so that a dinner at L'Appart feels like attending a soirée at a friend's sumptuous penthouse.

Although there was a bit of waiting between courses, L'Appart manager, Sylvain Neveu, and a waitress checked on us from time to time, providing attentive yet discreet service.

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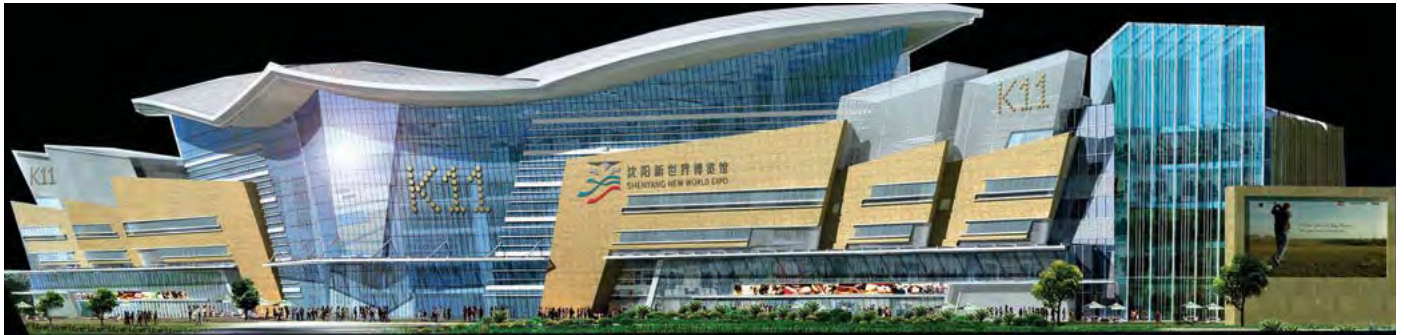
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Shenyang New World Expo will gun for small and mid-scale events

HKCEC operator backs new Shenyang venue

By Prudence Lui

CHINA Hong Kong based NWS Holdings which operates Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (HKCEC) has invested in the development of Shenyang New World Expo, a venue that will target small and mid-scale meetings and exhibitions when it opens in spring 2015.

Shenyang New World Expo will be part of a mixed-used development that comprises commercial and retail space as well as two hotels – a three-star Penta brand property and a five-star New World hotel. Facilities offered by the venue includes a 25,000m² exhibition space, a 1,800m² multipurpose convention hall and 2,200m² of meeting rooms.

The venue will enjoy a good location in the central business district, with direct access to the Shenyang Metro Line 2.

In an interview with *TTGmice*, industry veteran Cliff Wallace, who heads the centre's pre-opening team, said Shenyang – the capital of Liaoning Province – first came onto NWS Holdings' radar in 2006 and the company had conducted a feasibility study to "prove its MICE potential". Data collected influenced the company's "recommendations on size and space" to the property owner, New World (Shenyang) Property Development.

Explaining the company's plan for Shenyang New World Expo to court

small and mid-scale events, Wallace said: "We discovered that meetings and exhibitions are becoming smaller in size (due to) technology, as people now have the option of catching the event online via webcam."

He added that Shenyang holds good potential as a business events destination.

"Shenyang is equipped with a new airport terminal and offers direct air access to many countries like Japan, South Korea and soon, Germany. (This is especially appealing to) professional associations that are looking for a good regional market (for their meetings)," he said.

Wallace revealed that "unlike local operators' usual practice of taking bookings only upon opening, we will start contracting 12 months prior to the venue's official launch".

"We want to attract outstanding quality exhibitions to meet the needs of Liaoning Province's growing automobile and aircraft industry," said Wallace.

Global-Link MP, Kenes join forces

PHILIPPINES Kenes Asia has made its foray into the Philippine market with the help of Global-Link MP Events International Inc, a company owned by both Global-Link and MP International.

Together, they have so far staged the International Rice Genetics Symposium at the Dusit Thani Manila last November, and are organising the 10th Asia Pacific Congress of Hypertension (APCH) in February and Asia Pacific Rheumatology Congress (APLAR 2014) in April, both at the Radisson Blu Hotel Cebu.

Jing Lagandaon, COO at Global-Link MP, told *TTGmice* in an interview that Kenes took charge of trade show programming, while her company handled logistical matters.

Staff from Global-Link MP was sent for training at Kenes in preparation for the collaboration.

"The relationship with Kenes started two years ago. Now that Kenes is organising shows in the Philippines, we are

effectively representing them. Kenes is a relatively new player (here). Without us, it might be harder for them to do their events here," said Lagandaon.

"Our basic strength is that we know the Philippine market very well. We have a good network of connections; we are able to get volume discounts; and we are able to work with people who are expert in different fields," she added.

Besides co-owning Global Link MP Events, Global-Link also has an exhibition division, Global-Link Exhibitions.

"We're more known for organising exhibitions, like Philconstruct, held every November," said Lagandaon, who added that about 70 per cent of Global-Link's revenue comes from exhibitions, 15 per cent from official representation for Hong Kong Trade Development Council, Messe Frankfurt and Messe Dusseldorf, and the rest from conferences – a segment the company wishes to grow. –

Marianne Carandang

Destination Asia fortifies its MICE presence

ASIA Thailand-based DMC Destination Asia has launched Destination Asia Events (www.destination-asia-events.com), a new website created as a "one-stop resource tool" for events planners.

"We wanted to expand our presence as event organisers in Asia," said CEO James Reed. "We have organised thousands of events over the past 10 plus years, so we decided to create a platform for clients to access all the extensive creative work we have done so far."

The website features 360-degree views of key venues, downloadable content, fact sheets, essential technical support information and high-resolution images, designed to help clients simplify the process of creating an incentive brief. Clients are required to sign in with a password, and a qualifying process is required for new sign-ups. – **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**



{ Talking numbers }**70**

The number of trade shows hosted at Marina Bay Sands, Singapore in 2013, up from 51 in 2012. The show tally was referred to as being “record-breaking” in a press statement from the integrated resort. The property will welcome several new-to-Singapore shows this year, including MEDLAB Asia and Black Hat Asia.

7,200

The amount in tons of carbon emission from events that were successfully offset through Hilton Worldwide’s Carbon Offset Program in Southeast Asia in its first year of operations. The programme had “well exceeded” its initial target of 6,000 tons, said William Costley, vice-president, operations – Southeast Asia of Hilton Worldwide. The company added three more beneficiaries to the programme in January.

More destinations in Hainan join MICE hunt

CHINA Several Hainanese destinations are stepping up efforts to lure MICE groups, pushing nature, culture and well-being to counter Sanya’s popular appeal.

Qixianling, for instance, is promoting its scenic mountain settings and health-enhancing hot springs. Several five-star hotels are available in the destination which was featured in a five-night fam trip in January, hosted by Hainan Airlines, for major travel consultants and media personnel from Singapore.

Participating consultants said Qixianling makes a good option for leisure and corporate groups.

Sino-America Tours senior operations manager for MICE, Oh Bee Ann, said: “Hiking in the rainforests and moun-

tains is good for teambuilding; if not, the Narada Resort & Spa Qixian Mount should suffice as a destination itself, with its hot springs and array of activities like tai chi and bamboo rice-making.”

Pre- and post-show activities can take place in Tunchang, which boasts organic farm stays; Qionghai lures with small clean towns, coffee shops in heritage buildings, the BFA International Convention Center and two supporting hotels, BFA Hotel and Golden Coast Hot Spring Hotel.

Oh believes that the food, indigenous (culture), nature and hot springs at Hainan’s secondary destinations can attract Singapore’s corporate groups. – **Kathy Neo**

{ In brief }**SACEOS administers training scheme**

The Singapore Workforce Development Authority has appointed the Singapore Association for Convention and Exhibition Organisers and Suppliers (SACEOS) to promote and administer the Enterprise Training Support Scheme (ETS) for the MICE Industry. Developed and launched last year by WDA and the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), ETS helps companies implement progressive human resource systems that will enhance in-house training infrastructure and capabilities, which will in turn raise skills and productivity of staff. Up to 90 per cent of course fees for accredited Singapore Workforce Skills Qualification training may be provided. SACEOS will leverage its industry network to help WDA draw more MICE organisations into the ETS scheme, and also source for reputable and relevant programmes for its members.

PACEOS revises membership rules

The Philippine Association of Convention/Exhibition Organizers and Suppliers (PACEOS) has relaxed its rules for admission in order to reach more companies and suppliers interested in developing MICE business. Now, companies interested in a PACEOS membership need only have one national confer-

ence under their belt, instead of the former requirement of two international conferences. Allied membership may also be offered to companies that host “special” events, as opposed to “business” events, said Dinah Gonzalez, PACEOS membership head. Professors teaching tourism and event management may also be welcomed into the association. PACEOS currently has 38 members. – **Mari- anne Carandang**

New association for Sentosa, Harbourfront

Fourteen businesses and stakeholders in Singapore’s Sentosa and HarbourFront precinct have come together to form the Sentosa HarbourFront Business Association (SHBA) to promote the area’s tourism and leisure assets. The association, whose members include Sentosa Development Corporation, Resorts World Sentosa (RWS), Mapletree Investments and Singapore Cruise Centre, has pledged S\$3 million (US\$2.4 million) to market the area through joint promotions, events and campaigns in the next three to five years. The precinct’s total hotel inventory has more than 3,100 rooms while MICE facilities can accommodate over 22,000 delegates.

RWS chief executive Tan Hee Teck said: “With SHBA, the precinct can now pitch for bigger MICE events, make a bigger marketing impact and get stronger government support for our programmes.” – **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

{ 2014 Calendar }

**February
18-19**
AIME
Melbourne, Australia

March 5-9
ITB Berlin
Berlin, Germany

March 17
Moscow International
MICE Forum
Moscow, Russia

March 24-26
GIBTM
Abu Dhabi, UAE

MALAYSIA

MDRT achievers to meet in Kuala Lumpur



The MDRT Experience baton will pass from Hyderabad (pictured above) to Kuala Lumpur in 2014

By S Puvaneswary

Malaysia will host its first Million Dollar Round Table (MDRT) Experience, an event that will draw some 5,000 top life insurance and financial services professionals from 20 countries to its shores between February 13 and 15 this year and generate an estimated RM50 million (US\$15.4 million) in economic impact and RM30 million in visitor expenditure.

According to Raymond Kopcinski, meeting services director at MDRT, the event at Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre will feature three days of motivational and inspirational presentations.

“Most importantly, participants are presented with an opportunity to network with other top financial services professionals from around the world,” Kopcinski added.

Founded in 1927, MDRT consists of nearly 36,000 leading life insurance and financial services professionals.

The last MDRT Experience was hosted in Hyderabad, India.

INDONESIA

Indonesia scores dam meeting again

The Indonesian National Committee on Large Dams (INACOLD) has ousted India’s Agra and Sri Lanka’s Colombo in the bid to host the 82nd Annual Meeting of the International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD) in June this year.

The win is the country’s second, with the last ICOLD annual meeting hosted in Jakarta back in 1986.

The 82nd Annual Meeting of ICOLD will take place at Bali Nusa Dua Convention Center from June 2 to 6. The event is expected to draw an attendance of 1,500 delegates, comprising mostly of dam engineers and water resource professionals from 95 countries.

Adopting the theme, *Dams in Global Challenging Environment*, ICOLD’s programme will include a conference, an exhibition, a symposium, workshops and technical tours of dam projects in Indonesia.

Susilowani Daud, managing director of

Pacto Convex, the appointed PCO for the ICOLD gathering, told *TTGmice* that eight different study tours would be arranged to showcase dams and power plants in various Indonesian provinces, and visits to geographical, cultural and artistic sites across the country would also be conducted.

The exhibition component of the 82nd Annual Meeting of ICOLD will see 110 industry participants occupying a space of 2,200m².

Susilowani also shared that some 800 rooms at the 13 hotels close to the show grounds have been booked for the event.

Commenting on INACOLD’s triumph, Basuki Hadimuljono, president of the association, said: “I believe that through this important event we will be able to show the whole set of our experience in implementing the country’s development and management of large dams...and water resources.” – **Mimi Hudoyo**

AUSTRALIA

Pro-Health China to confer in Sydney

Known as Baojian on home ground, Pro-Health China will head to Sydney in 2H2014 for its five-day Annual Conference this year, a mega incentive that will involve some 4,500 participants and contribute an estimated economic impact of A\$22.5 million (US\$19.9 million) to New South Wales.

Explaining the company’s choice, Pro-Health China president, Jason Li, said: “Sydney is a dynamic city with many attractions that will give our distributors quite a unique travel experience. This is not only an incentive trip, but also a heart-to-heart interaction between Pro-Health and Sydney. Our delegates will be eager to learn the attractions, culture and everything there is to experience in this metropolitan city.”



Sydney Opera House

MYANMAR

French firms picks Myanmar for incentive

A French pharmaceutical company has engaged Asie Du Sud-Est Voyage, a Chiang Mai-based DMC specialising in European markets, for its 45-pax incentive programme to Myanmar. This company last visited Myanmar in 1997 during an eight-day incentive programme, but easier visa rules into the country now have enabled the company to opt for a considerably longer itinerary this time round. The three-week incentive programme will take place in November 2014, with stays in Yangon, Inle Lake, Bagan, Monywa and Mandalay. – **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

CORRECTION – We made a mistake in Alice Chou’s job title in our story, *Kaohsiung gets busy with MICE*, last issue. Chou is director of Meeting & Event Promotion Office, Kaohsiung City Government, not Kaohsiung Exhibition Center.

Tourism Australia

The art of shaping, keeping talents

From free skills training and encashable points for best performance to matchmaking parties, Asian convention centres are beating the industry's manpower crunch with unique solutions to build staff capability, loyalty and retention. By **Karen Yue**



- 1 **Michael Lim, director, human resource & information technology, Singex Holdings**
- 2 **Loy Joon How, general manager, IMPACT Exhibition Management**
- 3 **Rohizat Baharum, director of human resource, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre**

The acute shortage of talents in Asia's business events industry is not a new problem, but it is one that is being compounded over time as destinations rapidly expand their arsenal of event hardware – which must be brought to life by humans – to cater to intensifying MICE demand and higher quality expectations.

Factors contributing to the manpower strain include the short supply of new blood and what is said to be the arduous working conditions of the business events industry.

“Not only does the industry grow faster than the rate schools can churn out trained individuals for the marketplace, many MICE professionals exit due to the long hours and heavy workload,” said Michael Lim, director, human resource & information technology at Singex Holdings, the company behind Singapore Expo Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Oh, what woes!

Besides an inability to deliver quality service, convention centres lacking sufficient and experienced staff can risk a “loss of current and potential clients”, said Rohizat Baharum, director of human resource at Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, and be put at a “serious competitive disadvantage” according to Loy Joon How, general manager of IMPACT Exhibition Management, Thailand.

“The impact of poor service on an organisation's reputation cannot be underestimated as it can affect business and revenue,” warned Rohizat.

“High staff turnover and frequent changes (in personnel) is disruptive to operations and the business too,” said Tony Xu, vice president of China National Convention Center (CNCC).

Middle and senior management personnel are said to be the hardest to hire.

“The dearth of good mid-level manpower affected our ability to scale our business effectively and efficiently in the way we had envisioned. While we had an ambitious growth plan, our journey was hindered by the labour crunch and we had to rely heavily on technology by either upgrading our current system or buying new ones to ensure consistency and predictability in service delivery and (client

satisfaction),” said Lim.

Once the right people are hired, there comes the challenge of retention.

“The turnover rate of the Gen X and Y workforce, which makes up the bulk of staff in many corporations today, tends to be higher,” Loy observed. “These generations have organisational needs and expectations that are different from those of the baby boomer era.

“Unfortunately, most companies are not doing enough to actively engage these (people) to provide them with a stimulating working environment.”

Rohizat added: “It is not easy to retain staff as they constantly have doors opening for them.”

Human resource chiefs bemoaned poaching by competing venues and other related or similar businesses as being all too common.

Staying power

Convention centres in Asia have devised numerous solutions to retain staff, most of which seek to grow the individual's capabilities and improve his/her career advancement opportunities within the company.

Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre's *Ambassador Programme* targets flexible employees who are often the first to interact with clients and guests. It offers a skills training module developed by experienced departmental trainers and meeting industry professionals. Participants are given a ‘Passport to Success’ in which classes undertaken by the ‘ambassador’ are recorded. Since its launch in 2005, over 6,700 individuals have graduated from the programme.

Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre went on to launch the *Talent Acceleration Programme* (TAP) on November 18 last year, an 18-month scheme designed to expedite the development of its managerial talent pool. Starting off in December with an intake of 24 people, the programme comprises field trips, experiential learning sessions, internal and external leadership sharing and mentoring, as well as exposure to competencies such as commercial awareness, customer focus and change management, among others.

Rohizat said TAP graduates would be “eligible for higher positions” within the organisation.

Peter Brokenshire, who will retire from his position as general manager of Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre at end-March, shared at a session at the 52nd ICCA Con-





Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre invests in training for its frontline flexible team members

gress that communication with all staff is encouraged through an activity called *Coffee With Datuk*.

“Once a month rank-and-file members are welcome to have an open conversation with me in my office. They can raise any issues and offer ideas. It was through this that we heard the concerns of our staff and responded by improving the quality of staff meals and maternity benefits, for instance,” he said.

At Singex Holdings, incentive trips and opportunities to enrol in overseas diploma and degree courses by the International Association of Congress Centres (often referred to as AIPC) are offered to staff.

Lim said the management of Singex Holdings would “even realign (employees’) job scope to allow them to be more engaged with the overall strategic corporate direction.”

IMPACT Exhibition Management rewards top performers with all-expense-paid incentive trips to destinations like South Korea, Hong Kong and Japan, and implements an annual staff engagement survey index that measures how the company is doing in fostering and developing a stimulating working environment.

According to Loy, the index is an integrated part of the company’s KPI, as “equal focus” is placed on both financial and human capital performance.

“The saying, ‘staff don’t quit working for companies; they quit working for their bosses’, rings true. We believe that good leadership is key to hiring, developing and retaining talents, (and will help to) create a healthy, dynamic and positive company culture that fosters a motivated and engaged workforce. (Such a) workforce is less likely to suffer from high staff turnover,” said Loy.

IMPACT Exhibition Management not only focuses on cultivating good leadership, it also invests in training and skills

development. Loy revealed that the company’s human resource training and skills development budget had tripled “over the last couple of years”.

“We have also adopted a management style based on staff engagement and empowerment. This has helped to develop a sense of ownership and accountability among all levels of staff (which boosted loyalty and) reduced staff turnover.”

At CNCC, staff retention initiatives take an unusual spin. “China’s one-child policy has created a generation of lonely people who crave friendship. So we play the role of the parent and hold regular matchmaking parties for all our single employees and have eight staff clubs that provide recreation and self-improvement activities,” Xu said.

Money talks

Monetary rewards are also dangled to encourage the best in service delivery and inspire loyalty.

Brokenshire said staff who “go above and beyond their call of duty” are rewarded with shopping vouchers and points that come with a cash value. Bonus points are also given whenever a staff member receives a compliment from a guest and when the entire team excels in

a particular job or project.

CNCC helps to lighten employees’ financial burden by offering heavily subsidised accommodation.

Xu said: “Accommodation is very costly in Beijing, so CNCC bought over a building, converted it into a staff dormitory and offered a roof over employees’ heads for just US\$20 a month. Free Wi-Fi is also thrown in so they can stay in touch with loved ones.”

Returns on investment

Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre has maintained an enviable staff turnover of under two per cent since its opening in 2003, while its regular senior management retreats, which comprise teambuilding activities and meetings on future business strategies, have yielded “fantastic” and profitable ideas.

“For example, in 2008 when business was challenging, the management retreat proposed offering free flow of food and drinks to attract meetings. That idea spurred the creation of meeting packages that are now a RM10 million (US\$3.1 million) business,” said Brokenshire.

CNCC sees a six to seven per cent staff turnover, a figure Xu is comfortable with.

Loy said: “By and large, from the results of our staff engagement surveys, I think we have been rather successful in attracting, developing and retaining our talents. Our turnover rates and cost of hiring and replacing staff have all been reduced.

“More importantly, we are achieving better than expected scores in our Customer Satisfaction Survey Index which shows an increase in our capability as a company to (meet and exceed) the needs of our customers.

“With a better engaged workforce, ideas on new and innovative products and services such as our *Complete Meeting Package*, *Healthy Coffee Break Package*, *Customized Logo* booth catering services, etc have all been rolled out successfully over the last few years. Productivity and internal communications have also improved.”

Opportunities to learn

AIPC Sales & Marketing Summit, Frankfurt May 18, 2014

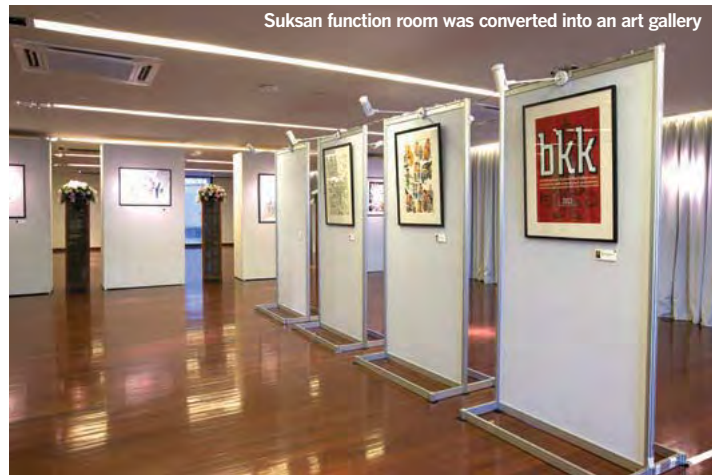
This is designed for sales and marketing managers who need to keep up on the latest market developments and exchange perspectives with colleagues and key clients. Senior-level convention centre sales and marketing executives are welcome. Visit www.aipc.org/trai_sales.php
Fees: 135 euros (US\$184)

AIPC Facility Operations Summit, Barcelona

November 16 and 17, 2014
This event brings together operations and event managers from around the world in a two-day programme designed to address key operations and event management issues. Operations and event managers are welcome. Visit www.aipc.org/trai_faci.php
Fees: 270 euros



BK Magazine's milestone party drew people from the creative and hospitality sectors



Suksan function room was converted into an art gallery

BK Magazine 500th Issue Party

Hansar Bangkok turned a conventional open-air function space into an elegant art gallery and throbbing party zone for BK Magazine's milestone celebration. By **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

Client

BK Magazine

Venue

Hansar Bangkok

Dates

August 1, 2013

No. of participants

300

Objective

To celebrate its 500th issue and conduct a charity fundraiser through the sale of art pieces

Challenges

Constant changes to space layout to accommodate newly acquired event sponsors; complaints of noise level from nearby residents; short turnaround time for next event

Result

Guests were impressed and Hansar Bangkok was able to showcase its best side to an audience of media, advertising and hospitality practitioners

Attracted by Hansar Bangkok's sophisticated décor, intimate ambience and an event space that fitted with its party theme, English-language lifestyle publication *BK Magazine* decided to host its 500th issue celebration and inaugural charity fundraiser on August 1, 2013 at the boutique hotel.

While meetings and events are run-of-the-mill requests for Hansar Bangkok's function space on the eighth floor, the magazine's request to combine an art exhibition with its party posed "quite a challenge", admitted the hotel's director of sales, Mark Shrives.

Besides opting for the party to be hosted on the open-air deck next to the swimming pool on the eighth floor, BK had also requested for the art exhibition to be placed in the adjoining Suksan Room. Hansar Bangkok had to think out of the box to convert the 165m² function room into an art gallery by building partitions to split the room and which double as "walls" for the artworks.

Featuring A2-sized illustrations by 10 Thai artists, these drawings were revealed at the party, during which guests could bid for their favourite artwork through a silent auction to raise money for the Home for the Multiple Handicapped Blind Children in Bangkok.

As the big day approached, more challenges started to crop up.

"Last-minute changes came when the number of drink sponsors kept changing, from the two originally planned to five just before the party, so we had to keep re-organising the space to ensure the sponsors were (accorded proper feature space) while guaranteeing the best locations for the main sponsors," said Shrives.

On the event day, only 10 of 20 extra part-timers turned up, but the issue of staff

shortage was swiftly resolved when one of the alcohol sponsors roped in its staff to help out. Furthermore, the outsourced set-up team accidentally dropped one of the paintings and broke the glass frame, so an emergency trip had to be made to the framemaker just two hours before the party.

The party finally kicked off by 18.30. The vibe was relaxed and chic, and party-goers were free to mingle on the alfresco deck, help themselves to drinks from the sponsor booths or snacks at the two canapés stations, and browse the art gallery.

However, shortly after 22.00, an unexpected complaint came from a resident of a nearby condominium about the noise emanating from the party. The hotel responded by asking the DJ to lower the volume before switching off all music at 23.00.

Although the party officially ended at midnight, work was not over for Hansar Bangkok. As the venue was booked for a traditional Thai wedding ceremony early next morning, the organisers had to quickly clean up the area so that planners for the next event could do the set-up.

All in all, despite the last-minute hitches that surfaced behind the scenes, the party was fun and well-received by guests, much to the client's satisfaction.

Gregoire Glachant, managing editor of BK Magazine, commented: "Our guests were really impressed by the space. The exhibition was set up like a proper gallery, while the party area was an incredible terrace that was lined with a pool and beneath a soaring ledge in case it rained."

Shrives added: "Everyone enjoyed the event; it was a great experience for both teams. We had the opportunity to present our hotel to BK Magazine's guests, many of whom hailed from the media, advertising and hospitality industries – profiles that match our key target groups."



The poolside area was transformed for the event

Telcoinbox Annual Conference 2013

Communication, planning and swift action enables QT Gold Coast to organise a theme poolside event that charms attendees and convinces the client to return for another.
By **Natasha Dragan**

In the past, the Telcoinbox Annual Conference was held as a barbeque, a simple social gathering. However, in 2013, the event for 115 Telcoinbox staff underwent a transformation when it was held at the edgy QT Gold Coast hotel for the first time.

“Telcoinbox wanted to bring everyone together and kick-start its national conference in a way that inspired and motivated its delegates,” said Kobi Facto, director of brand development at the hotel. Together with the client, Facto and the hotel’s events team sat down to brainstorm on a concept that would impress.

“We wanted a vibrant theme that matched our colourful Gold Coast setting and poolside venue, and something that hadn’t been done before,” said Facto.

It was decided that the mid-August event would take on a Miami Vice theme. To achieve this, the hotel’s poolside area was transformed full scale, with enticing lighting, projection displays, furniture and hot pink flamingo centrepieces added.

“We created a special welcome blueberry and mint cocktail with a colour matching the sponsor’s logo. Our head chef specially created a tapas menu and interactive food stations for the night – something a bit different from your standard barbeque dinner,” said Facto. Assistance was also extended to the evening’s entertainer, Matt Hollywood, who provided delegates with a 30-minute magic show.

The QT Gold Coast events team is used to thinking out of the box when it comes to events, said Facto.

“We are an extraordinary hotel where an eclectic mix of design and art comes to life, injecting colour and quirk into the MICE space to bring imagination and unique experiences to meetings and events, plus all the facilities planners expect – chic

designer finishes as well as unforgettable food and drink experiences.”

The event took some three months to plan, with the biggest challenge being the short turnaround time from changing a publicly used space – the hotel’s pool deck – into an event space.

“We had 2.5 hours to clear the space of guests, set up and get ready to serve,” said Facto.

“Additionally, being held at an outdoor venue, the event was weather dependent. There was also the challenge of improving on previous years’ events and wanting to exceed the client’s expectations.”

According to Facto, communication was key. “We had pre-event meetings with both the client and our operations team to ensure everything would run smoothly,” she said. “We believe we exceeded the expectations of the client, sponsor and delegates as a result.”

Needless to say, the client was overwhelmingly satisfied with the event, and has indicated that it will be back for more.

Interactive food stations were one of the highlights



Event	Telcoinbox Annual Conference 2013
Organiser	QT Gold Coast
Venue	QT Gold Coast poolside
Date	August 12-14, 2013
No. of participants	115
Objectives	Bring staff together and kick-start the company’s national conference in a way that inspired delegates
Challenge	Tight turnaround time for converting a public space for the event
Result	Event was a resounding success, and Telcoinbox will be back for future events



While Asia's exhibitions sector is galloping, the outlook for other MICE sectors is generally 'trotting'. But good fortune still awaits those who ride the trends. Here's our report on what to expect in 2014

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CORPORATE MEETINGS & EVENTS

Discipline sets in

Goodbye exuberance, hello control. Meetings spend is flat this year, but firms that provide solutions to manage the expenditure see opportunities. By **Raini Hamdi**

The outlook for Asia-Pacific's corporate meetings and events is flat this year, thanks to a more cautious overall business sentiment in the region, heightened regulatory scrutiny and increased awareness of safety and security issues.

Following two years of predicted increases, American Express (AMEX) Meetings & Events 2014 Global Meetings Forecast predicts a slight decline (-1.2 per cent) in the number of meetings in the region, but the largest decline among all regions in overall meetings spend per organisation (-3.6 per cent). As well, a 2.4 per cent decline in the number of attendees per meeting.

Meeting planners it surveyed expect to hold more meetings within their region and/or their own facilities. Compliance, cost and travel time are all noted as top drivers. The bottomline is, said, AMEX, companies are likely to seek alternative

ways to control costs and reduce time away from the office.

The approval process for meetings is also expected to become increasingly complex and more rigorous across all regions as a result of expected delayed

approvals and a likely shift toward more revenue-focused, external meetings. Senior level executives must often approve meeting programmes above a certain budget or attendance number threshold, further delaying the approval process,

"IF YOU ASK A TRAVEL MANAGER (ABOUT HIS MEETINGS SPEND) ... YOU WILL USUALLY DRAW A BLANK."

Kelly Kuhn
President Asia-Pacific
Carlson Wagonlit Travel



AMEX added.

Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CWT) Meetings & Events is just a tad more optimistic than AMEX. CWT expects a modest overall growth in meeting volumes of two to five per cent in the region, mostly driven by increased spending in China, India and Indonesia.

For events, it expects clients to continue to hold them, but on a smaller scale, and in domestic or shorthaul destinations compared with the longhaul favoured in the past. But large corporates may tap into major events in 2014 such as the World Cup in Brazil and Olympics in Russia, it said.

Structural change

But while volume growth of corporate meetings and events is lame, this belies an active structural change which appears to be occurring, reshaping the way meetings and events are approved, processed, planned and conducted.

At least that's what the major meeting solutions providers want us to believe. Having long waited for the Asian market to manage the meetings and events spend – often described as the last frontier of corporate travel management – these providers said they are seeing “a real desire on the part of our clients for a new degree of rigour around meetings”, in the words of Kelly Kuhn, president, Asia-Pacific, CWT.

At Hogg Robinson Group (HRG), roughly over 60 per cent of clients in Europe/North America already seek advice and consolidate their meetings, groups and events programmes globally, while another 22 per cent seek to integrate these with their transient corporate travel business, according to Amanda Hanlin, director of global sales for HRG Meetings, Groups and Events (*see the four stages of maturity on page 19*).

The trend is now spilling across to Asia-Pacific, said Hanlin. Whereas corporates typically operate without contracts in meetings and events, clients have now signed up to work on a contractual basis for three to five years, she said.

The scope is also increasing, with bids including requests for venue sourcing, meeting registration, small events and payment solutions.

“In some cases we're seeing RFPs for both transient (corporate travel) and meetings/events as companies look to get full leverage from their suppliers,” Hanlin added.

“This has resulted in stricter and clearer SLAs (Service Level Agreements), KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and a more focused approach for risk management, escalation and 24-hour support. A consistent pricing model across multi-

markets, where feasible, is also a growing requirement,” she said.

Danielle Puceta, director, AMEX Meetings & Events, Asia-Pacific, said: “This region is following a similar path in relation to how meetings and events activity has evolved in the US and Europe. In particular, we are still seeing significant opportunities to further formalise and clarify meeting policies, particularly around payment procedures.”

Senior managers are recognising that complacency in the meetings planning process can have serious financial, legal and reputation consequences, Puceta added.



“... COMPANIES LOOK TO GET FULL LEVERAGE FROM THEIR SUPPLIERS.”

Amanda Hanlin

Director of global sales
HRG Meetings, Groups and Events

Providing more

As companies pay serious attention to meeting programmes, demanding better outcomes and lower prices, providers will have to improve their offering or be forced out of the market entirely, predicted CWT's Kuhn.

Typically, providers start a strategic meetings management programme for clients by giving them “clarity” and “visibility” over their overall spend. Using their back office technology system, they then consolidate the client activity, des-

tinuation analysis, budget breakdown and hotel spend, in an attempt to give clients a holistic view of their spend.

“If you ask a travel manager about their company's annual travel spend, they will know it to the nearest dollar, but ask them the same question about their meetings spend and you will usually draw a blank,” said Kuhn. “Without that level of visibility and understanding, it is impossible for companies to make smart decisions about the future of their meetings programmes.”

AMEX's Puceta said adjustments are made for different regions. “For multinational companies, it is important to be

realistic about the local environment in each country. For example, the entire supply chain in some of the more remote areas within Asia might not be as advanced as in the US. In these areas, adjustments may need to be considered in keeping with the local business environment and technological capabilities, while still be mindful of the organisation's overall goals and regulations.”

Payment solutions, service and technology – to automate bookings, consolidate pre- and post-trip meetings data, etc – are

AMEX highlights: Regional meetings professional predictions

Prediction	North America	Europe	Asia/Pacific	Central/South America
Number of meetings	+1.5%	0.0%	(-1.2%)	0.0%
Number of attendees per meeting	+0.6%	(-1.8%)	(-2.4%)	+0.6%
Overall meeting spend within organisation	0.0%	(-1.8%)	(-3.6%)	(-1.4%)
Regional meeting demand	+2.3%	+2.4%	+4.0%	+0.6%
Lead times	(-1.6%)	(-2.7%)	(-4.0%)	(-1.0%)
Top five meeting destinations	1. Orlando 2. Chicago 3. Las Vegas 4. Atlanta 5. San Diego (Source: Cvent, 2013)	1. London 2. Paris 3. Barcelona 4. Amsterdam 5. Brussels	1. Shanghai 2. Singapore 3. Sydney 4. Hong Kong, Macau 5. Bangkok, Chiang Mai	1. Rio de Janeiro 2. Riviera Maya, Cancun 3. Cusco, Macchu Pichu, Lima 4. Cartagena de Indias 5. San Jose

Managers exercise restraint

Rita Tandon

Senior manager, special events
Amway India

Considering the present economic scenario, we have restrained our budget for meetings and travel. Economies of scale are being worked out with our regular partners. We are now using different categories of hotels including five-star ones for meetings and events, depending upon the requirement.

We are also observing the ROI we get from MICE activities. The focus now is to calculate the spend vs objective achievement. We calculate the ROI at two levels: organisation and participation. A combination of both gives us a holistic view. At the organisation level we aggregate all costs, compare this to a value that is estimated by the organisation, then determine the financial benefits of the event. At the participation level, we estimate the value on a per participant basis, then view its benefits.

However, going forward, we expect the economic scenario to improve and this will have a positive impact on our meeting spend.



Kok Siok Mei

Assistant to CEO
Continental Automotive Components,
Malaysia

We had a slight change in the budget last year, so we have started minimising travel and optimising group sizes. For instance, we used to fly three to four people out for meetings; now we will try to send just one person. We have always used the fare comparison policy where we look at three different flights to (find) the cheapest (option). LCCs are definitely used more now. If you fly from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur, it is just 45 minutes, so LCCs are useful.

Leong Sat Sing

Vice president Group Corporate Affairs
UCSI Group Holdings, Malaysia

Our guidelines for holding meetings and events remain the same. The first choice for holding meetings is in our own facilities – we have meeting rooms and a ballroom. The venue chosen depends on the number of participants involved.

Where appropriate, we use teleconferencing and Skype (*see also page 22*).

We have not received any new instructions on spending for 2014. Meetings remain a necessity for group communication, discussion and decisions. There is no measurement of ROI from meetings.

Louisa Chan

General manager
Amway Hong Kong

Guidelines on meetings and incentives remain the same. Amway applies strict guidelines in its vendor selection (and is subjected) to an internal audit and corporate governance.

Instead of stricter spend control this year, we are investing more on incentives and meetings because we are celebrating our 40th anniversary.

Amway Hong Kong will bring some 500 pax on a Mediterranean cruise. There will also be a tour to our headquarters in Michigan, an incentive to New York for distributor leaders, a visit to our organic farm in Washington for business builders, and a few other trips around the Greater China region.

Locally, there will be a large-scale meeting and expo, and a gala dinner at a five-star hotel for up to 6,000 pax.

There is always ROI and target set for our meetings and incentives. For instance, distributors have to qualify for participation in these trips by achieving specific personal sales growth and group volume. During the incentive trip, we make use of every moment for business presentation, teambuilding and fun to motivate the distributor force or participants.

Incentives and meetings do not only foster business growth, it helps to build team spirit and rapport, and drive distributor momentum to contribute to growth.



Alan Miu

Managing director
TNT Express Worldwide (Thailand)

Our policies and guidelines to hold meetings and events have not changed.

(But) we are using videoconferencing more. Usually we schedule videoconferences among multiple countries for our own internal meetings. This is getting more economical and effective, as it helps to save costs and also reduce the travelling time for the senior executives.

It is not a matter of stricter spending, rather, ensuring we spend according to our budget, and planning. We still maintain more or less the same budget for our meetings/events as in the past years. When planning meetings, we need to make sure the duration is neither too short nor too long. Apart from the cost impact, duration also sets the right tone and objective for the meetings.

Yes, we need to look at the ROI for the meetings. Apart from the cost element, it is also about the effectiveness of the meetings. Attending a meeting is important but the most important part is whether the agreed follow-up actions are followed through after the meeting. This is the true ROI of meetings.

key areas these companies focus on to come up tops in the competition.

HRG, for instance, recently integrated its global meetings services with a Citi Virtual Card to help clients manage meeting-related costs more effectively.

Like AMEX's Puceta, CWT's Kuhn also identifies the need to work with clients to manage and improve the legal and regulatory compliance of their meetings programmes as a focus for 2014.

"The recent scandals in the industry relating to non-compliant behaviours have brought this issue to the forefront for meetings and events agencies, and our focus in 2014 is working with our customers to develop meetings programmes that achieve the highest levels of compliance," she said.

With the increasing role of corporate procurement departments in the decision-making process, the onus is being placed more firmly than before on agencies that can offer a higher standard of accountability, responsibility and transparency over meeting programmes, she said.

Kuhn predicted a consolidation of agencies, as has happened elsewhere in the world, as a result. But as bigger agencies emerge, they will need to retain their creativity and nimbleness in order to compete with niche players, although the greater buying power and wider networks will be a boon for clients.

Corporate planner's role

What then is the role of the corporate meeting planner vis-a-vis agencies that

provide meetings management solutions?

Said Puceta: "Meeting planners must focus on collecting information for reporting purposes at an enterprise level. They need to get a holistic view of where M&E activity is occurring for internal and external reporting purposes, and to ensure the safety of their meeting attendees in times of disruption or crisis, for example. To get a sufficient view of where M&E activity is occurring, there will also be a greater focus this year on more sophisticated data collection."

"The meeting planner will still have a role," added Hanlin. "The majority of the time, they own the relationship between the venue and their company. (We) take away the admin function of the venue sourcing - for example, the T&Cs and the negotiation of the venue. This means that the client/company is better protected, as the risk of an employee agreeing to T&Cs that maybe they don't understand is minimised while he/she still gets to keep the relationship with the venue."

Kuhn summed up: "The role of a good agency should be to support and enhance the work of the meeting planner and to enable them to deliver outstanding events. The end client still wants that personal touch and see a familiar face throughout the meeting process, and the meeting planner is the person in that space."

"THERE WILL...BE A GREATER FOCUS THIS YEAR ON MORE SOPHISTICATED DATA COLLECTION."

Danielle Puceta
Director
AMEX Meetings & Events, Asia-Pacific



Where are you at with managing your meetings spend? Here are the four stages of maturity:

- STAGE 1** A local service is often characterised by a lack of policy with no approval process or supplier. Meetings are not logged centrally and are contracted on a per event basis.
- STAGE 2** A consolidated approach provides some level of strategy together with basic policies and approvals based on those minimal policies; there will be some level of registration process and existing technology but adoption will be low.
- STAGE 3** The third stage - strategic - sees a defined strategy and the alignment of key stakeholders. There will also be a defined policy across multiple areas, data and common definitions will be in use, savings will be consistently reported and registration and adoption is above 50 per cent.
- STAGE 4** An optimised programme will have a strategy that is aligned to business objectives and will have business-wide support with adoption of the policy at over 80 per cent. There will be centralised technology supporting all components and strong preferred supplier programmes. Savings will be both defined and reported and an achievement target will have been set.

CORPORATE MEETINGS & EVENTS

Small rise in virtual meets



Companies in Asia are using virtual meetings or hybrid solutions to meet, but these lower-cost alternatives will not replace the real thing.

"In our 2013 forecast, 56 per cent of the audience projected that virtual or hybrid meetings would represent more than 10 per cent of their meetings activity, however, this year only 26 per cent of the planners surveyed reported so," said American Express Meetings & Events Asia-Pacific director, Danielle Puceta.

Said Carlson Wagonlit Travel president Asia-Pacific, Kelly Kuhn: "In a market such as Asia, in which business is driven by face-to-face relationships, the ability to meet in person is crucial to getting business done. However, we are seeing an evolution in how technology can enhance the meeting process. Virtual meeting technologies have been around for quite some time, but as Internet-based solutions are now coming to prominence, we are able to add this technology into our meetings, for so-called 'hybrid meetings', combining some in-person attendance with virtual components."

HRG Meetings, Groups and Events director of global sales, Amanda Hanlin, too said such solutions, though growing, remains a small portion of a client's overall meeting portfolio. "With the increasing sophistication and ease of videoconference and telepresence solutions, our global clients are already substituting videoconference for face-to-face meetings. It tends to apply to small meetings or those occasions where it just doesn't make sense to jump on a plane due to time, cost and discussion content.

"In the more mature Asian locations, we are also seeing clients use laptop technology more, such as document sharing through Microsoft Outlook. For example, contract discussions or presentations which would typically have been held face-to-face are now performed through document sharing, Webinars and conference calls," she said. – **Raini Hamdi**

ASSOCIATIONS MEETINGS

Sleepless over reduced numbers

In Union of International Associations (UAI) 2013 Associations Survey, released last November, associations worried the most about reduced participants numbers and lack of sponsors/exhibitors or reduced sponsorship on their current and future meetings.

When asked about their specific concerns about the impact of the current global economic situation on their current and future meetings, 55 per cent and 53 per cent of respondents picked these two issues, respectively. Another 43 per cent picked budget reductions, travel costs or visa problems, while 32 per cent picked transportation costs.

Interestingly, of least concern was safety (health, terrorism or political violence).

Joel Fischer (left), head, Congress Department, UAI, picks three other findings he finds most surprising:



1 Opportunities which could add value to the planning of an association meeting are unknown and unexplored, with 48 per cent of respondents saying they were not familiar with the services offered by a convention bureau.

Fifty per cent of the respondents indicated a total lack of awareness of airline partner programmes.

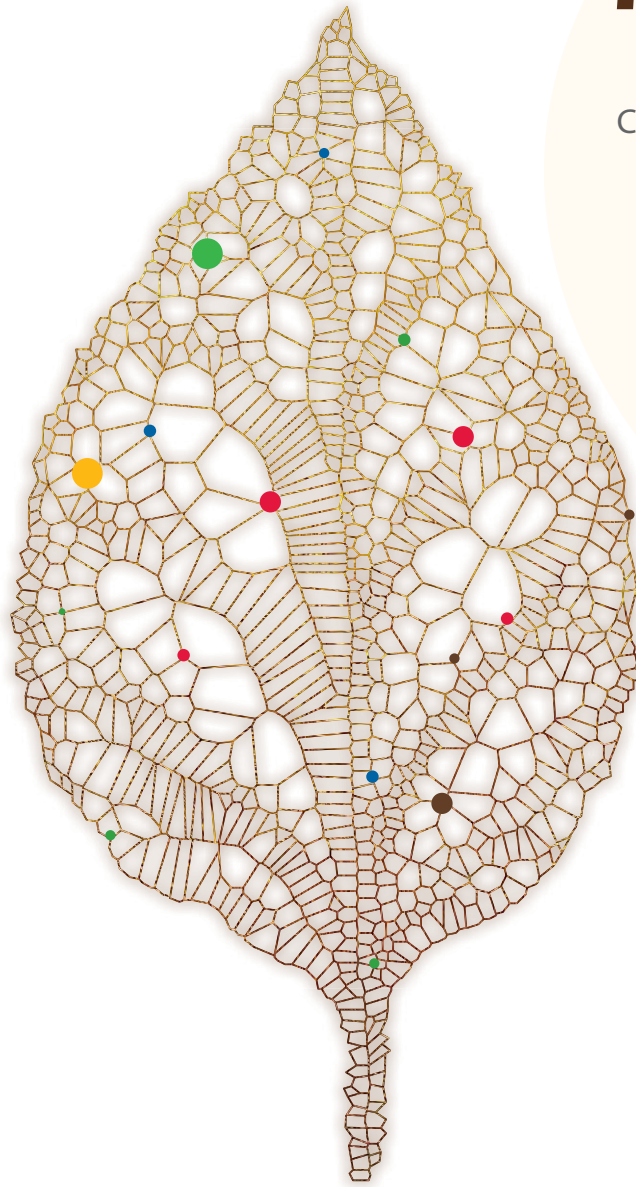
2 The Internet and new technologies continue to have a significant impact on associations and the form and function of their meetings.

In 2009, 10 per cent of respondents indicated that they had no website for their major meeting. In 2013 this figure was 7.8 per cent – perhaps more of a surprise now than four years ago (that nearly eight per cent still did not have a site).

Of little surprise is the growth in the use of videoconferencing of one kind or another, up 15 percentage points from the 2009 survey.

3 Changes to publishing media and the continuing move away from paper in all facets of a meeting were evident. But opportunities offered by technology also posed challenges to some association meetings, (in relation to) proficiency levels, service expectations, costs and availability/stability issues. – **Raini Hamdi**

Find out how associations plan their meetings in the inaugural issue of **TTGassociations**, April 2014



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ASIAN INCENTIVES

Pockets of opportunities

Overall, incentive travel as a motivational tool is gaining wider acceptance in Asia – but it is not without key challenges. **TTGmice** reporters dish their market report

Singapore

Motivating news

With more companies in Singapore recognising the power of incentive travel to goad staff to be super-achievers, organisers are expecting another buoyant performance this year.

A travel-loving nation, incentive travel is a motivational tool that hits the right spot. Dynasty Travel reported a 20 per cent year-on-year growth in 2013 and is forecasting a 30 per cent increase for the first half of 2014. Safe2Travel reported a 10 per cent increase last year. CEO Steve Fung said: “Companies know the importance of keeping their staff motivated and I believe 2014 will do even better because the economy is better now.”

Agreeing, Dynasty’s CEO Clifford Neo said: “The benefits of an incentive trip is becoming evident to many companies today, and we are already getting more enquiries for their retreats in 2014.”

Steven Smith, senior director of CWT Meetings & Events Asia/Pacific, noted that even SMEs in Singapore are using incentive travel. He said: “Many of the corporate companies that reward their top sales performers are from the banking and financial institutions but last year we observed an increase in incentive requests from SMEs, which are also starting to recognise and reward their staff.”

Singapore companies typically opt for shorter trips of three to four days. As such, the popular incentive destinations are Thailand, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Australia.

The short timeframe poses a challenge for Smith. He said: “Often, the challenge is offering an itinerary that can showcase a destination within a limited time while maximising the client experience.”

European destinations like Switzerland, Paris and Spain are always popular with the big corporates like insurance



Star Cruises



An Asian group on a cruise incentive doing a teambuilding exercise

“WE OBSERVED AN INCREASE IN INCENTIVE REQUESTS FROM SMEs (NOT JUST BIG FIRMS).”

Steven Smith

Senior director
CWT Meetings & Events Asia/Pacific, Singapore

firms, which can bring as many as 2,000 staff members. Last year saw a steady demand for Europe, thanks to the weak euro which made Europe “easily 20 to 25 per cent cheaper than a few years back”, said Fung. “Generally the big companies will prefer to bring their staff to Europe because the destination is more exotic compared with Asia, which their staff can easily visit on their own. We foresee the same type of demand for Europe in 2014,” he added.

Melvyn Nonis, director, MICE Matters, expects greater demand for Switzerland in 2014, thanks to SWISS’ direct Singapore-Zurich flights and the greater presence of Switzerland Tourism, which has a Southeast Asia office in the city. “Switzerland is increasingly popular and a viable destination for MICE,” said Nonis.

“Eastern Europe is also gaining popularity because it is a place less travelled. People are seeking exotic places, so we see growing interest in Eastern Europe cities such as Prague, Budapest, and Vienna. We expect a 30 per cent growth there in 2014.”

Although these destinations are more expensive, Nonis said companies in the insurance and the multi-level marketing industries are doing well. “With the

upcoming World Cup in Brazil in 2014, we are also receiving greater demand for Brazil,” he said. – **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

Hong Kong

Planners cautious

Hong Kong planners are cautious about the business outlook for 2014, saying the world economy has not picked up, while China government’s stringent policy on official spending affects bookings.

Lotus Tours MICE, Pilgrimage, Cruise Planner’s senior manager, Arthur Choy, suggests that 2014 won’t be better than 2013. “The last quarter dropped drastically due to the stringent government policy,” he said. “The subsequent crisis with two pharmaceutical companies in Shanghai (which also have offices in Hong Kong) exerted a negative impact and resulted in stricter checking on tenders by their procurement teams.”

Few agencies expect the going to be easy this year, what with increased competition from other retail agents for the incentive traffic; greater transparency that enables clients to compare quotes; and shorter lead times of less than four months, which makes it hard to secure air seats and rooms for big groups.

“We also see airfares of the mainstream carriers getting more expensive for MICE

groups than normal groups and FITs, whereas clients will not really accept low-cost carriers for MICE travel. In some extreme cases, the quoted MICE airfare may be over HK\$2,000 (US\$258) more than the airline's special promotion airfare," lamented Towa Tours/MICE World's head of project and business development, Rosanna Leung.

She added: "Clients like to gain advice from agencies, but book direct."

Moreover, Leung pointed out, many veterans in the industry are reaching the age of retirement, while the market is short of staff to carry on the succession. "This is an industry of relationships. It takes years for an individual to gain a profound knowledge of MICE operation and to be recognised for his/her work," she said.

Lotus' Choy said he will keep looking for opportunities and push destinations such as Vietnam, Bali and Taiwan, which have improved air connections and growing interest among clients.

"Our biggest incentive clients are from insurance and direct sales. They tend to use fewer luxury elements and require standard offers. Still, the budget of reward trips for stellar sales performers will be retained because of the drive for better sales records.

"For longhaul destinations, new air connections and easier visa processing may also provide opportunities. We already have two to three groups to New York from direct sales and insurance companies with a group size over 300 pax," he said. – **Prudence Lui**

Indonesia

Wait and see

A weakened rupiah and the imminent general and presidential elections in April are casting a shadow on the Indonesian incentive market.

Specialists who handle the market said companies are taking a wait-and-see stance on their incentive programmes as a result.

The rupiah has weakened by 20 per cent over the last five months. The general election is taking place in April, smack in the middle of the incentive travel season.

"Many companies have reconsidered their incentive programmes, either postponing or seeking alternative destinations. Some are even taking a wait-and-see stand," said WITA Tour director of sales and marketing, Rudiana.

Although the election itself is only a day, companies will be paying attention to the political agenda months before the date. "Following the general election, people's concentration will then be on who the next President will be. Again, there will be a wait-and-see period," he sighed.

Tara Tour incentive & MICE supervisor Elny Rosita said: "With the rupiah at 12,000 per USD (at end-November), only the financial and automotive industries are moving (ahead with incentive programmes) for 2014, but the groups are smaller."

Even though some companies have raised their MICE budget, the increase does not offset the rupiah's devaluation, she said.

As such, Tara tries to create memorable experiences within the budget by changing destinations, for example, from Europe or Australia to Asia, reducing the trip's duration and revising itineraries.

"For example, the original full-board

changing destinations entirely."

Panorama Tours has been breaking records in handling the biggest incentive groups from a major insurance company for several years. Alas, Vidya said this year the group would be smaller than last year. "The outbound incentive market is still there, but it is not as buoyant as it has been in the last couple of years," she said. – **Mimi Hudoyo**

Malaysia

Firms look east

Specialists expect the Malaysian outbound incentive travel market in 2014 to be even better than 2013, which turned out to be a good year despite the national general election in May and the ringgit's depreciation.

Agency CEOs predict that, as with last year, neighbouring destinations will do



"AIRFARES ARE MORE EXPENSIVE FOR MICE GROUPS THAN NORMAL GROUPS AND FITs..."

Rosanna Leung

Head of project and business development
Towa Tours/MICE World, Hong Kong

programme now has one free evening or an additional shopping programme. Indonesians love shopping, so they welcome it," she said.

She agreed some companies are taking a wait-and-see on their incentive tours due to the elections.

Panorama Tours, which saw a 30 per cent growth in Indonesian incentives in 2013, expects a moderate if not flat performance this year.

Vidya Hermanto, managing director-Corporate Travel Management, Panorama Tours, said: "A number of companies has postponed programmes since the currency dropped (around September last year). If and when they eventually decide to go ahead, they need to change the programme to fit the budget.

"We don't need to change destinations, only downgrade the class of hotels, or take off some itineraries, although there are cases where 'to fit the budget' means

better over longhaul destinations this year. Last year, some of them saw a 30 per cent drop in the longhaul market.

Countries within six hours' flight time from Kuala Lumpur especially will gain a greater share, as this is a radius of plentiful seat capacity, said Richard Vuilleumier, managing director of Panorama Tours Malaysia.

"Bookings for 2014 started coming in in the last quarter of 2013, and the demand was for Thailand, South Korea and Indonesia," he said.

Last year, the favourite destinations were China (Guangzhou and Shenzhen), Hong Kong and Indonesia (Bandung and Bali), Vuilleumier compared.

Raaj Navaratnaa, general manager of New Asia Holidays Tours & Travel in Johor, said: "As the ringgit has softened, I foresee demand for this year will mainly be to ASEAN destinations. I already have incentive bookings to Bali and Jakarta."

ASIAN INCENTIVES



“JAPAN’S MOVE TO LIFT VISAS FOR MALAYSIANS, COUPLED WITH A WEAKENED YEN, HAS SPURRED DEMAND TO TOKYO, OSAKA AND MT FUJI...”

Desmond Lee

Group managing director
Apple Vacations & Conventions, Malaysia

“WITH THAI’S NEW SENDAI SERVICE, I EXPECT JAPAN TO STAY POPULAR THIS YEAR.”

Mona Visitwattanakul

Operations executive
Image Holiday, Thailand

But Desmond Lee, group managing director of Apple Vacations & Conventions, disagreed, saying there is still plenty of opportunities in the longhaul.

He pointed out the weakened ringgit in 2013 had resulted in more SMEs incentivising their dealers and sales staff to meet targets. Apple had seen a 100 per cent and 50 per cent increase in demand for trips to Japan and the US, respectively, in the second half of 2013.

He said Japan’s move to lift visas for Malaysians, coupled with a weakened yen, had spurred demand to Tokyo, Osaka and Mt Fuji; likewise, easier visa processing to the US turned on the tap for incentive trips to Los Angeles, San Francisco and Las Vegas. Lee predicts demand for Japan will continue to grow, but a challenge is insufficient seat capacity, especially to Tokyo and Osaka.

Another challenge facing companies is strong competition, which has led to price wars and lower profit margins. Lee lamented: “They are offering cheaper tour fares at the expense of quality service.” – **S Puvaneswary**

Thailand

Tighter budgets

Thailand’s political turmoil will not roil the market, said outbound incentive

planners, who explained that incentive travel has become the norm in such sectors as insurance, direct sales and banking sectors.

But many are expecting corporate purse strings to remain tight. Said Incentive Design’s production manager Anukul Phuttanan: “Budget control has become more evident among our client companies for the past few years, through means such as cutting out unnecessary sites, special requirements or even free gifts. But they still expect highlights during each trip, such as cocktails following a tram ride in Prague or a river cruise in Budapest, so it is a challenge for us to craft an itinerary that wows and yet fits their budget.”

Bonus Travel is anticipating a “similar or better performance” and has set a five per cent growth target for the segment this year over last year, said the firm’s sales manager, Arthit Kiatbenchaphong.

Outbound incentive business from Thailand in 2013 was also “good” for Incentive Design, which expects demand to be similar this year. Said Anukul: “The majority of our business comes from existing clients, with different departments within the same company requesting for incentive travel.”

For Image Holiday, the incentive outbound business has been recording an average 30 per cent growth annually, according to operations executive, Mona

Visitwattanakul.

Japan’s visa waiver for Thai travellers since mid-2013 propelled the country to become the top incentive destination for Thais last year, a common thread observed among the incentive planners *TTGmice* spoke to.

“With Thai Airways International (THAI)’s new Sendai service (which started in December 2013), I expect Japan to stay popular this year,” Mona commented.

Non-traditional, far-flung destinations are also making inroads with some Thai incentive groups. Said Arthit: “Several companies have shown interest in organising incentive trips to Brazil for the FIFA World Cup this year. This is definitely a niche, high-end segment as tickets can easily cost 500,000 baht (US\$15,600) for just two matches, on top of tour expenses of around 300,000 baht.”

Thailand’s potential as a source of MICE arrivals has not gone unnoticed by Tourism New Zealand (TNZ). The NTO launched inaugural business events promotion efforts in Thailand this year and “expects a better performance in 2014” for the Thai incentive market, according to Mischa Mannix-Opie, TNZ’s regional manager for South & South-east Asia.

She said: “New Zealand is a still a relatively new MICE destination, so we

may not be a top-of-mind destination among the Thai incentive operators yet. We're working with partners...such as Auckland International Airport to offer a visa-free subsidy for incentive groups flying on THAI."

While Europe continues to be lusted by Thai incentive groups, the new visa information system introduced by the Schengen States in November 2013 could add to the travel hassle, warned Arthit, as travellers are now required to visit the respective embassy in Bangkok to provide their biometric data – 10 fingerprints and a digital photo.

He added: "As some clients are based upcountry, companies have to fly them into Bangkok to complete this visa procedure. This will certainly add to expenses and may deter incentives from visiting Europe." – **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

India

Defying obstacles

The prognosis is Indian outbound incentives will continue to grow even though the market has witnessed a tough time due to the ever-fluctuating Indian rupee and economic slowdown.

Despite difficulty for corporates to plan an event four to six months in advance as the end cost could not be predicted with the rupee's yo-yo, the Indian outbound incentive market grew in 2013, according to organisers. Many expect the trend to continue.

Karan Anand, head - relationships, Cox & Kings, said in fact in challenging economic conditions, incentives are "a key catalyst that drives employees and business associates to perform and India market is no different".

"In 2013, the market did exceedingly well and was a key growth driver for our company. We believe the Indian market has grown by over 25 per cent," he said.

Helping it along is some serious wooing of Indian incentives by overseas NTOs. Said Chander Mansharamani, managing director, Alpcord Network Travel & Conferences Management: "NTOs have been quiet aggressive in 2013 and have been regularly visiting the country. This has played an important role in the growth of the incentive market."

Anand agreed, adding: "This year we partnered with various tourism boards to promote their destination to corporates."

But some travel consultants noted

that corporate clients have been sensitive about budgets. This helped Asian destinations like the Philippines and Indonesia.

"Economic slowdown resulted in corporates choosing Asian destinations like the Philippines and Indonesia. Even within Europe a section of corporate clients opted for destinations that fit their budgets," said Mansharamani.

However the outlook for 2014 is positive and new destinations are expected to emerge. "The incentive market will definitely grow and new destinations like Vietnam, Cambodia, Morocco, Jordan and Eastern Europe are likely to emerge as favoured incentive destinations," said Vikas Khanduri, managing director, Viva Voyages. – **Rohit Kaul**

Philippines

Fighting spirit

The Philippine incentive market ended 2013 with sanguine results and prospects for this year are even better, on the back of a growing economy and increasing popularity of incentive travel as reward for a growing number of companies.

Boding well for incentive travel is the fact that the Philippine economy remains strong even after factoring in the after-

cifically in 2013", said even trading companies now offer incentive trips to their employees, sales people and distributors, not just the traditional industries such as direct sell, insurance and pharmaceutical.

These companies are also open to new destinations and product offerings and are more receptive to longer itineraries of seven nights, from four, she noted.

There are however several challenges for planners, including limited destinations because the market is so driven by price. "Even if we recommend a destination, clients don't want to consider it," said Junio.

Agreeing, Shroff said corporate clients' buying power can be volatile and an incentive trip could be the first to be given up in case of business fluctuations.

Other forms of rewards, like cash, also compete with incentive travel.

Rigid government policies on granting visas to Philippine groups also pose a challenge, while political upheavals such as the turmoil in Thailand and natural disasters beyond one's control such as Haiyan, which made a landfall in Visayas, keep planners on their toes.

Asked if recent Philippine efforts to spur domestic travel through Bangon Tours would lure incentives away from foreign shores, Shroff said based on

"INCENTIVES ARE A KEY CATALYST THAT DRIVES EMPLOYEES TO PERFORM. INDIA IS NO DIFFERENT."

Karan Anand

Head - relationships
Cox & Kings, India



math of Haiyan, said Ine Faustino, general manager, CCT 168 Travel & Tours.

Added Gigi Junio, assistant general manager of Corporate International Travel and Tours: "We are looking at a positive trend, as incentive travel is always part of the tradition for rewarding champions and bringing in more qualified staff."

Sheena Shroff, business development director of Shroff International Travel Care, which has seen the market "quickly growing year on year and spe-

enquiries received to-date, Bangon Tours are more suited for the leisure market, with five per cent of sales proceeds going to communities affected by Haiyan.

As incentive travel is goal-driven, Shroff said several companies may prefer Bangon Tours but others want the energy and excitement of other itineraries.

"Ultimately, it is not the travel but the goal of travel, which can be to bring more business to the company, or forge better relationships among staff, among other goals," Shroff said. – **Rosa Ocampo**

EUROPEAN INCENTIVES

Waiting for the upside

The consensus is European incentives remain in the doldrums, but DMCs are not about to give up on a key market. By **Raini Hamdi, Mimi Hudoyo, S. Puvaneswary, Rosa Ocampo and Prudence Lui**

Europe's economic problems prove one thing: Whoever said that when times are bad, companies would turn more to incentive travel to achieve higher revenues?

The inconvenient truth is European incentives, a key source for destinations across Asia, have been in the doldrums and few DMCs expect the market to return this year.

"Are they back? Unfortunately, the answer is the combination of N and O," said Richard Brouwer, CEO of Diethelm Travel Group, after studying figures from Diethelm Events in Thailand and Malaysia.

Agreeing, Laurent Kuenzle, CEO of Asian Trails and Kuoni Destination Management Asia-Pacific, said: "I wish I could say yes, but that would not be correct. Some incentive movements are back, but not on the level that we would like them to be."

Across the region, the overriding sentiments are the same. In Indonesia, Pacific World's country manager Ida Bagus Lolec said 2013 did yield "some" groups from Europe but not to the maximum the market could have done, blaming "the economic situation in Europe, which has not recovered fully".

In Malaysia, Luxury Tours' manager, Ganneesh Ramaa, said: "Inbound incentives from Europe was bad in the first half of 2013 but picked up slightly in the second half, where we had more groups, especially from Germany, France, Austria and Switzerland."

In the Philippines, Eleanor Ng, Marsman Drysdale Travel's director of tourism services, said "we didn't have much European incentives last year; we had more in 2012", while Marjorie Aquino, Blue Horizons Travel and Tours' sales and marketing manager, echoed: "In general, European incentives to the Philippines dwindled. Several European countries are still in financial crisis so when they travel, they go to nearer destinations and opt for

budget tours."

In Hong Kong, DMC - The Destination Management Company's conference and incentive travel manager, Adrienne Lynch, said European incentives were in a down cycle last year. "The upside is the market will always come back, as it knows Hong Kong works well (as an incentive destination) and always has something new to offer," she said.

According to Brouwer, the current neg-perception of incentive travel in Europe in general is "a biggie to overcome". "The perception is one should not travel far, it shouldn't take too much time, have a long weekend at the most, etc. Incentive travel in groups is less popular in Europe; it is more about getting a reward which can be shared/experienced with the direct family of the award winner," he said.

as Poland or Czech Republic are growing nicely."

Hamish Keith, COO and co-owner of Exotissimo Thailand, said: "The market continues to be challenging. However, we do see more interest in Asia and more appetite for European and American clients to travel further and to more exotic destinations. That means more requests are coming our way but not necessarily more conversions as competition and price pressure is more intense than ever.

"Many of the requests we receive now do not have the budgets of a few years ago and pressure on budgets and price is often a determining factor as to which destination the client chooses and where and what they do during the event.

"We also see more competition and a strong trend for agencies to put bids out to tender with multiple suppliers. Although this is understandable, it does create more work for all concerned and this eventually translates back into cost that has to be absorbed by the end-user or the supplier."

Kevin Leung, marketing director, Tomco Incentive & Travel Service Hong Kong, noted more enquiries for 2014 and 2015 for Hong Kong specifically rather than 10 destinations within Asia like in the past.

"I was in Germany and Portugal for sales calls recently. Europeans feel bored after restricting incentives within Europe with not more than a four-hour flight time. This explains why they have started shopping in Asia again," Leung said.

"Unlike a few years ago, when the market was dead quiet, I started receiving enquiries at tradeshows like EIBTM last year. We had a proposal for a group from Switzerland in September, site inspection in October and arriving in early December. The lead time was short because the group was confirmed on an ad-hoc incentive budget and needed to spend it in the same year. In 2014, we hope the positive phenomenon prevails. So far, we have

"ARE THEY BACK? UNFORTUNATELY, THE ANSWER IS THE COMBINATION OF N AND O."

Richard Brouwer
CEO
Diethelm Travel Group



But the silver lining is, while few expect the market to be back in force this year, DMCs are encouraged by signs it is stirring to life.

Asian Trails' Kuenzle said: "We are not back to the good old times, however, we are quoting for many more movements this season than last season and that is a good sign. European incentives that materialise are generally with smaller participants than in the past and with smaller budgets. Clearly large European incentive movements concentrate on European destinations mainly for budget reason. What is a further good sign though is that incentive requests and materialisations from emerging markets in Europe such

secured two to three European groups.”

Different pressures

While DMCs in Thailand are dealing with the extra pressure of volatile political protests, in Hong Kong many are feeling the additional burden of competing with more affordable destinations in the region at a time of budget limitations of European companies.

Lynch said: “Hong Kong is not the most reasonable destination, value-wise, in Asia, so there is constant pitching against other more reasonable, more perceived value-for-money destinations, such as Thailand, or the US, because of the weak USD now.

“We should not forget that Europe is still in a downturn, even though it is on an upward (trajectory), so for (image) purposes, trips may take place in Europe and with room rates between 100 and 150 euros a night, Europe becomes a reasonable option – and that’s without flights.”

Tomco’s Leung is also concerned that Hong Kong “keeps losing its old charm to modern building and luxury shopping malls” while his high-end groups and VIPs from Europe want the traditional and heritage look of the city. “Moreover, many new restaurants have moved into high-rise shopping malls, e.g., i-Square, where logistics is an issue when you have a big

group.

“It would be great if the government could relax the policy to use public areas for incentive activities, e.g., tai chi at a local park. We held one in a local park in an early morning but was told we needed to apply for permission.”

Even in Indonesia, DMCs said they feel the pressure

of competition from other destinations such as Thailand or Malaysia, which are “aggressive in promotions”, said Lolec, and Singapore, which has an established infrastructure.

“With Garuda Indonesia planning to start services between London and Jakarta this year, I do hope the airline will allot some seats for MICE players and incentive houses for a familiarisation trip to Indonesia,” said Lolec.

Asian Trails Indonesia’s managing director André Seiler is hopeful that more inventory for groups and better rates than in the past will help him to nab a few European groups.



Manfred Kurz, managing director, Diethelm Travel Malaysia, said: “To get the business, pricing is very important as European companies have cut down on their budgets. It helps that Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Bureau provides assistance such as hosting the gala dinner, or hosting a cultural performance, as this helps to keep costs down.”

Philippine DMCs hope the lifting of the EU ban on Philippine Airlines, which allows the carrier to return to London and encourage other carriers to link the Philippines to Europe, will be a positive move for the market. But Marsman’s Ng said Haiyan has clouded this prospect.

Key challenges with European incentives

Laurent Kuenzle

CEO

Asian Trails and Kuoni Destination Management Asia-Pacific, Thailand

- Security at destination. Political unrest and instability, or the perception of it, keeps incentive movements away from destinations that are seen as unstable such as Thailand. Winners are destinations like Vietnam and Cambodia.
- Budgets. Budgets in general are limited and we need to do more with less. A challenge at most destinations in Asia.
- Profitability. With lower budgets comes more pressure on prices and to retain profitability is a challenge.
- Innovation. We constantly have to reinvent ourselves and propose new ideas to differentiate ourselves from the competition. A fun task that all our teams love, but it gets difficult in particular at saturated, traditional destinations in Asia.



Eleanor Ng

Director of tourism services

Marsman Drysdale Travel, Philippines

- Hotel rates. The Philippines is one of the most expensive destinations in Asia.
- Access. Although we had a good start with PAL returning to London, it’s not enough to encourage (European incentive trips) to move farther. Domestic flights are still too unstable.

Ganneesh Ramaa

Manager

Luxury Tours, Malaysia

- Lack of direct flights from Europe (to Malaysia). Most European travellers come to Malaysia via the Middle East, Singapore or Bangkok. It will help when Lufthansa commences its new five weekly direct flights from Frankfurt to Kuala Lumpur and onward to Jakarta from March 30. Currently, Lufthansa flies to Kuala Lumpur four times weekly with a connection from Bangkok, thus the seat allocation is shared with Bangkok.
- Malaysia also needs more destination marketing in Europe to be able to compete with the likes of Indonesia, Thailand and Hong Kong. MyCEB should provide financial support to incentive houses in Europe to print brochures and collaterals on Malaysia.

EXHIBITIONS



Exciting days ahead

Asia is the most dynamic exhibitions market worldwide, according to **Mark Cochrane**, UFI regional manager Asia-Pacific. And it is only becoming more exciting. Here's his take on the three key trends to watch for in 2014 and beyond

During the past decade, the exhibition industry in Asia has consistently and without interruption grown year-on-year, and I expect that impressive growth record to continue this year. The following three trends, combined with the overall strong macro-economic outlook of Asian economies, suggest that, yet again, the year ahead looks to be a good one for the Asian exhibition market:

01

The maturing of the exhibition market in mainland China According to our research, the exhibition market in mainland China grew three per cent in 2012 (latest available data). But growth was not evenly distributed across the entire country.

Mainland China is, by a wide margin, the largest

exhibition market in Asia. Of around 16.3 million net m² space sold across Asia in 2012, 55 per cent, or nearly nine million m², was sold in mainland China. And in recent years, China's largest city markets – Shanghai, Shenzhen and Guangzhou – have tended to outperform the rest of the country. Perhaps more importantly, within individual

exhibition themes or categories (e.g. furniture, electronics, fashion shows, etc.) the category-leading exhibitions grew much faster than the average.

This could be taken as a sign that the exhibition market in mainland China is headed into a period of consolidation. Higher growth rates should be anticipated at

category-leading events, and in the key geographic exhibition markets.

Lower growth rates can be expected in tier-two and tier-three markets as well as at “me-too” or “al-so-ran” exhibitions across the country as exhibitors become more discerning with their marketing spend.

02

The impressive growth recorded in South-East Asian exhibition markets For the past three years, exhibition markets including Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore have been at the top of growth charts. For example, in 2012, Malaysia grew by 8.2 per cent, Singapore by 7.6 per cent and Indonesia by 6.6 per

cent. The regional average was considerably lower at 2.7 per cent.

Look for this trend to continue this year and beyond as new capacity comes online in markets such as Indonesia and Malaysia and more international organisers look to South-east Asia for acquisitions and launch opportunities.

03

Additional venue capacity This will unfold over the next several years, not just in 2014. New venue capacity will be added in some key markets.

Notable additions will include the Hongqiao venue in Shanghai which will add an incredible 400,000 m² of indoor space and 100,000 m² of outdoor space when it opens in 2015.

Two exhibition centres will open in Jakarta in Indonesia in 2015. BSD Convention Center will have an exhibition space of 100,000 m², while Alam Sutera International Exhibition and Convention Center will be 60,000 m².

Finally, the New MA-TRADE venue in Kuala Lumpur will add 100,000 m² to Malaysia's capacity when it opens in 2016.

Setting the price right

Further rate hikes may place already expensive Hong Kong hotels on thin ice, prompting players to make moderate adjustments and seek out alternative strategies. **Prudence Lui** reports

Hong Kong hotels have been blamed for aggressive price hikes in recent years, but given the volatile global economy along with the implementation of China's new tourism law last October that impacted Chinese outbound, hoteliers are now feeling the pinch and making mild rate adjustments for 2014.

Harbour Plaza 8 Degrees in Kowloon, for instance, has opted for a marginal room rate increase and the same meeting package rate as 2013 to stay competitive. Its general manager, Christina Cheng, explained: "The supply of hotel rooms and (event) venues has been increasing in Hong Kong (and) there are now fewer Chinese governmental events being held due to China's new travel policy.

"The MICE segment has become more competitive with increased venue vacancies in the market. However, we have so far received a good number of MICE enquiries pertaining to 1H2014, most of them pending confirmation."

To combat the situation, the property has worked on designing attractive meeting packages that offer theme coffee/tea breaks, cooking classes for teambuilding, etc. (See other offers in Hong Kong on page 30)

Cheng added: "We are also focusing more on shorthaul markets such as South Korea, Japan, India and South-east Asia. We see great potential from these markets whose economy and MICE segment have been progressing in recent years."

Courtyard by Marriott Hong Kong Sha Tin has projected a mild rate increase of four to six per cent. Its

director of marketing, Chris Wong, said: "We remain conservatively optimistic considering there is still uncertainty in the region, like (the impact from) China Central Government's new policies relating to leisure and business travel."

Meanwhile, The Peninsula Hong Kong remains cautiously optimistic regarding rate growth. Its price adjustments for both room and meeting packages in 2014 will be in line with the market. A spokesman said: "We will adopt a moderate approach to attracting business from longhaul and regional markets through our new conference centre's offerings. Currently, the outlook for 2014 is fairly positive. The pace of our group bookings (so far) is much stronger compared to the same period last

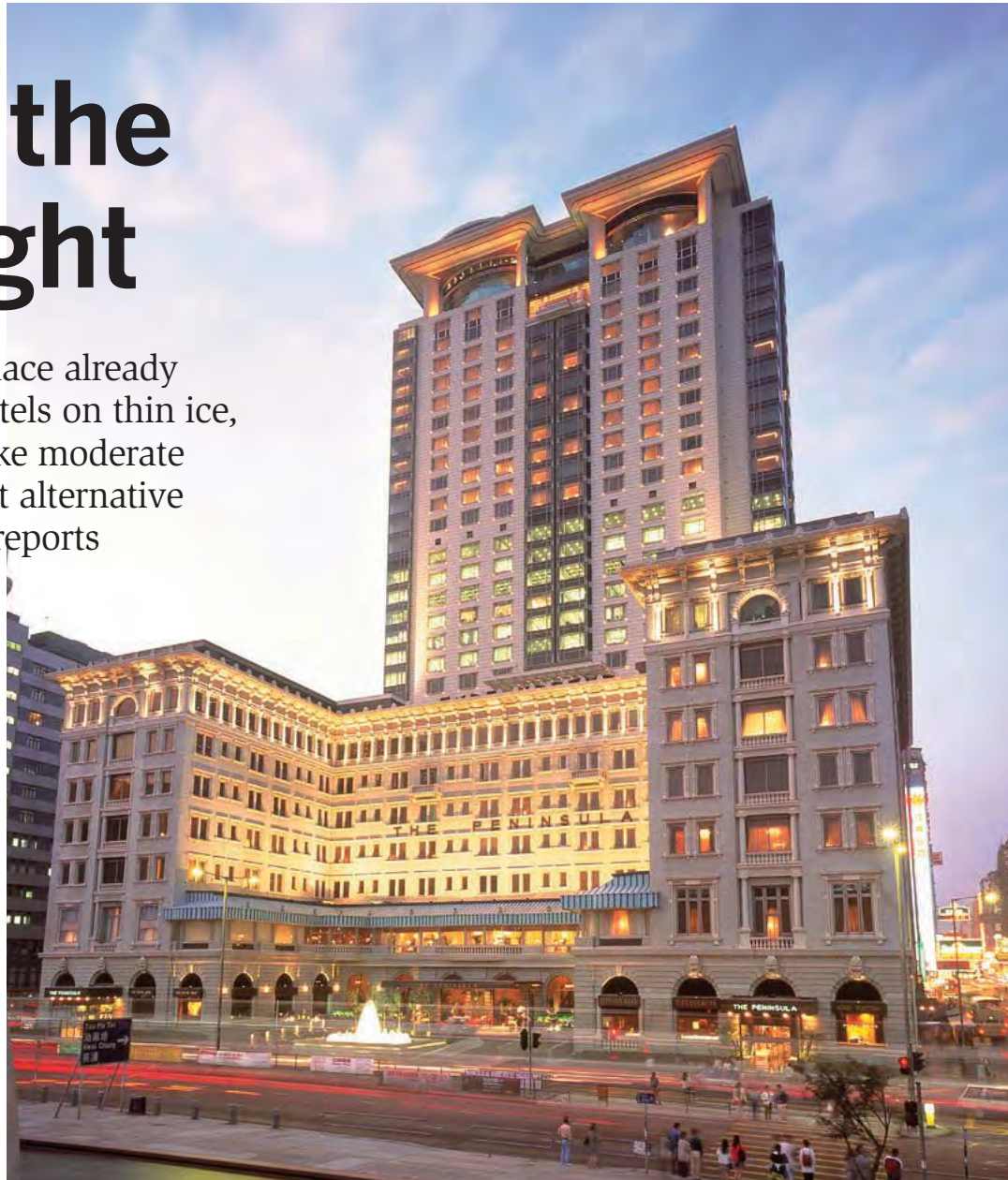
year."

Amway Hong Kong general manager, Louisa Chan, hopes to see less aggressive rate adjustments among Hong Kong hotels.

"Savings from rooms and venue rental rates allow us the flexibility to consider better quality land programmes, such as the engagement of top-notch outside speakers for our meetings," said Chan.

PC Tours and Travel, general manager, Cary Chiu, welcomes the hotels' decision to impose only mild rate hikes, as he feels that "Hong Kong is not a must-visit destination compared with other countries such as Thailand, so the savings may help" to entice clients who are increasingly budget-conscious.

While Hong Kong hotels are



The Peninsula Hong Kong is cautiously optimistic about rate increases

Destination: Hong Kong

voicing intentions to make upward adjustments to their rates, Diethelm Travel Hong Kong's general manager, Edward Chan, predicts a five to 10 per cent drop in prices this year due pressures from a growing hotel room supply.

"It is possible for large group bookings to bargain rates down. In fact, I've heard it only cost HK\$2,000 (US\$258) to book (a room at) The Peninsula last November."



"Because the supply of hotel rooms and (event) venues has been increasing in Hong Kong, we will monitor our rates closely."

Christina Cheng

General manager
Harbour Plaza 8 Degrees

Hong Kong's hotel room inventory will continue to expand in 2014 against a backdrop of weaker arrivals in 2013 and tighter corporate travel budgets this year.

Harbour Plaza 8 Degrees' Cheng said some 5,804 additional rooms will come into the market by end-2014, bringing the total room count to 74,484 and exerting further pressure on existing hotels.

According to statistics from Hong Kong Tourism Board, MICE overnight arrivals from longhaul and shorthaul markets dropped 2.4 per cent (262,882) and four per cent (322,979) respectively between January and November 2013.

Jones Lang LaSalle Property Consultants, Hotels & Hospitality Group vice president for research and strategic advisory (Asia), Frank Sorgiovanni, warned that major industries such as banking and insurance will continue to see travel budgets being trimmed, resulting in shorter stays and pressure on room rates.

"Nevertheless, Hong Kong will remain a vibrant business and leisure hub and its hotel market will continue to trade well, although the pace of growth of five to 10 per cent is likely to temper. Despite continuing uncertainty in the global economy and operators' expectations earlier this year of a decline in performance, upscale hotels in Hong Kong have (so far) continued to exhibit stable trading performance," he added.

TAKE YOUR PICK OF THESE OFFERS



InterContinental Hong Kong ▲

The hotel's 2014 *Meetings to Inspire* package offers the use of Harbourview Function Room; a personal meeting butler; complimentary coffee, tea, distilled water, candies and dried fruit; special offer on LCD projector rental; stationery for each delegate and 10 per cent discount on I-Spa treatments, among others.

Valid till December 31 for a minimum of 20 pax, a full-day meeting is priced at HK\$950 (US\$122) per pax subject to 10 per cent service charge; half day at HK\$850, half day without lunch at HK\$700, breakfast enhancement at HK\$200, lunch at Nobu InterContinental Hong Kong at HK\$150, and Harbourside Buffet lunch supplement at HK\$100.

Email enquiries to hongkong@interconti.com.



Kowloon Shangri-La ▲

The hotel's *Meetings Go Well* package with accommodation from HK\$2,550 (subject to 10 per cent service charge) per room night includes one night in a deluxe room with daily buffet breakfast and complimentary in-room wired Internet and Wi-Fi. A full-day meeting package includes use of a private function room from 9.00 to 17.00, refreshments for morning and afternoon coffee/tea breaks, and lunch in a private function room or at Cafe Kool.

Valid till September 30 for single occupancy with a minimum booking of 10 rooms and maximum of 40, group bookings of 25 rooms or fewer can choose from a complimentary upgrade to a deluxe harbour view room for VIP, 25 per cent discount on all business centre services, or complimentary use of LCD projector with wireless microphones.

Group bookings of more than 25 rooms enjoy three additional perks, such as one complimentary round-trip hotel limousine airport transfer, complimentary coffee/tea throughout the event for 40 pax, etc.

Contact ksl@shangri-la.com for more information and bookings.



Harbour Grand Hong Kong ▲

The hotel offers a full-day meeting package starting from HK\$698 per pax, subject to 10 per cent service charge. Perks include use of a meeting room from 9.00 to 17.00, coffee and tea service throughout the meeting, refreshments for one morning and one afternoon coffee break, dedicated butler service, choice of lunch served in the same meeting venue (subject to venue availability) or international buffet lunch at Harbour Grand Café, stationery, bottled water and candies, among others.

A half-day package starts from HK\$590 per pax and includes the above perks, except use of the meeting room is from 9.00 to 13.00 or 13.00 to 17.00 and

refreshments are provided for one coffee break only.

Audio-visual equipment rental charges are priced at HK\$1,200 net per port per day for wired or wireless Internet access in the meeting venue, and HK\$2,000 net per set per day for portable LCD projector and screen.

Offers are valid from January 1 till December 31, for a minimum of 10 pax.

Email enquiries to hghk@harbour-grand.com.



Regal Airport Hotel ▲

The hotel's We CARE Residential Confer-

ence package is priced from HK\$880 per pax per day for a full-day meeting and includes one night's accommodation (on twin-sharing basis) and use of Pegasus, Polaris, Phoenix or London Suite.

Other We CARE options (chargeable per pax) include upgrading the entire meeting to a green meeting at HK\$180, one extra coffee break with refreshments at HK\$60, free flow of coffee/tea through the meeting at HK\$20, a 55-minute body massage at HK\$388, a three-hour team-building activity at HK\$1,000, upgrading the normal refreshment break to theme break at HK\$80, among others.

Offers are valid from now until December 31 for 16-60 pax per day.

Email enquiries to meet@airport.regalhotel.com.

Holiday Inn Golden Mile ▶

The hotel's Executive Meetings package for a minimum of 15 pax is offered at as low as HK\$650 per pax (subject to 10 per cent service charge). Perks include the use of the conference room from

9.00 to 17.00, lunch menu choices (international buffet or Chinese style), morning and afternoon coffee breaks, and standard meeting equipment.

Email enquiries to reserv@golden-mile.com.



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* Price is subject to 10% services charge

Ideas A day in Hong Kong

Hong Kong boasts miles of scenic coastline and beaches, so small MICE groups may want to embark on a relaxing sea excursion post-meeting. Here's a simple itinerary comprising cruise and land activities.

morning Be picked up at 10.30 from Central Pier 10 by private yacht charter, The Lazydays [tel: (852) 3488-1534], and be greeted on board with the aroma of fresh coffee, gourmet tea and full breakfast featuring bacon rolls and homemade pastries. During the hour-long journey to Saikung, sunbathe on deck to enjoy the fresh sea breeze and natural scenery along Hong Kong's shorelines. Alternatively, have some light-hearted distraction by an Xbox with a Karaoke function. A Versatile assortment of books, magazines and board games are also available.

afternoon Cruise and berth at Tapmun Island (nicknamed Grass Island) tucked away in a remote corner of Hong Kong Sai Kung East Country Park. Here, enjoy a meal of fresh local seafood at New Hon Kee waterfront restaurant and have a chat with owner Pekky Lam, who will tell you the history, culture, and life of Tanka fisherfolk, the island's inhabitants.

Outside of the waterfront village, the island is a hotspot for camping and hiking. After lunch, gear up for a teambuilding activity, such as treasure hunt, or divide into small teams and to run along the circular route dotted with ecological highlights like pebbled beaches and cultural icons like the Tin Hau Temple. While weighing anchor at about 16.00 on the stylish motor launch,



The Lazydays is available for charter

enjoy snacks and free-flowing drinks including Prosecco, a selection of wines, beers and soft drinks as you return to the city.

evening Back in the city, choose from an array of F&B and entertainment outlets and party the night away.



Need to know

Refreshing changes, new experiences

Hotels are attempting to outperform one another with revamps. Hotel Nikko Hongkong (left) has refurbished its Nikko Floor and Toh Lee Chinese Restaurant. The in-room amenities for all 136 guest rooms are upgraded with a blue-ray player, iDock and trousers presser. The 180-seat Toh Lee welcomes all five upgraded VIP rooms; the restaurant now also uses partitions between tables in the main dining area. Meanwhile, on the other side of Victoria Harbour, the 454-room Cosmopolitan Hotel Wan Chai will complete its revamp of guestrooms, hotel lobby, gym and the hotel's exterior later this year, blending Victorian style with oriental elements. Some of the new in-room features include long mother-of-pearl executive desk, built-in ironing board, ample storage space and ultra high-speed Wi-Fi.

Work, dine, relax all at once

Plaza Premium Lounge (email: hongkong@plaza-network.com) unveiled another pay-in lounge at Hong Kong International Airport's West Hall last December. It operates 24 hours with special zones for relaxation, work and dining. Executives may stay connected with free Wi-Fi or complete a deal at the private workstations. Another highlight is The Market Place, which features F&B stalls ranging from a tea station serving Chinese milk tea to a noodle bar serving signature Hong Kong delicacies.

Further links with America

Air connectivity with the US is reinforced in 2014 following American Airlines' announcement of DFW International Airport's first flights to Hong Kong. The new daily service will start on June 13 using Boeing 777-300ER aircraft. Meanwhile, Delta Air Lines will launch a daily nonstop service from Seattle-Tacoma International Airport to Hong Kong on June 18 (tickets already available for booking). The service will operate via Airbus 330-200 aircraft with BusinessElite, Economy Comfort and Economy cabins.

Kung fu fighting, anyone?

The five-hour Wing Chun Kung Fu Experience Tour (www.shoestringtravel.com.hk) starts with a one-hour Wing Chun class at the school of Yip Man Martial Arts Athletic Association, followed by a stroll along the Avenue of Stars. Then, tuck into a delectable dim sum lunch before heading to the Hong Kong Heritage Museum for the Bruce Lee: Kung Fu, Art, Life exhibition. The tour is conducted in English with departures every Monday, Thursday and Friday at 9.50. A minimum of three participants are required per tour.

Dine like an elite

Newly opened restaurant Elite Dining (email: eld@elite-concepts.com) boasts a private dining room concept offering a seasonal Chinese menu. Located on the 31st floor of iSquare shopping complex, it features eight private rooms commanding panoramic views of Tsim Sha Tsui and Victoria Harbour. The premise could cater for a small group of four people (minimum spending of HK\$800 per pax) to a maximum of 170. For private groups, the outlet offers a set menu for a minimum of six people to a maximum of 170.

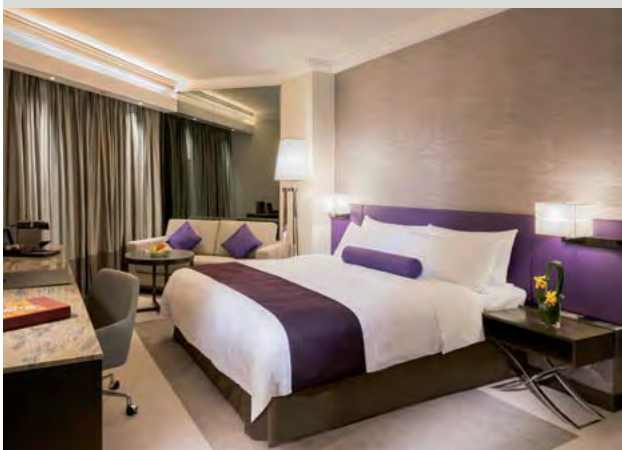


Stylish comfort in bustling Kowloon

Sleek design transforms the newly renovated **Gateway Hotel** into a chic oasis



Hotel lobby



A Continental Club guestroom



A Continental Club suite

HARBOUR CITY is best known as one of the largest shopping malls in Hong Kong, but business visitors in-the-know have come to recognise that it is also home to one of the city's most attractive new business hotels — Gateway Hotel.

Conceptualised by Hong Kong's well-established Marco Polo Hotels group, its name is certainly apt: It is located at the junction of Canton Road and Haiphong Road, a prime shopping hotspot where international fashion brands put their best on display. It is also within walking distance to China Ferry Terminal, Star Ferry and the MTR subway station. Just moments away is the Airport Express Kowloon station as well as the unforgettable panorama of Victoria Harbour.

But the most impressive experience is to be found in the hotel's new design and facilities. After a complete renovation recently, all 400 rooms and suites have been transformed. The outlook is chic and contemporary, and the ambience is serenely residential. All rooms now offer a 40-inch flat screen TV, Nespresso machine with complimentary capsules, an iPhone docking station and free Wi-Fi. Suites offer the additional luxury of a newly designed bathroom with a rain shower and bathtub.

For added exclusivity, the Continental Club Floors is the answer. Guests here have access to the Lounge, where complimentary daily breakfast, afternoon tea and cocktails are served. The elegant atmosphere and gastronomic spread make this a suitable space for business networking too. A butler service is available round-the-clock to ease away any inconvenience.

There are other notable perks: Gateway Hotel is also home

to Three on Canton, a gourmet dining destination comprising a hip restaurant, four function rooms, a wine room, and lounge and bar. It is perfect for a special treat or business entertainment.

Take your pick – cuisines of China, Italy, India, Japan and Southeast Asia are well represented and beautifully presented. The vibrant outdoor dining terrace, Be on Canton, also adds to the charm with delectable bites, cocktails and aperitifs.

A touch of elegance, superb location and thoughtful facilities – Gateway Hotel delivers the best new experience in Kowloon.



Continental Club Lounge



Outdoor dining at Be on Canton

Gateway Hotel
Harbour City, Kowloon
Hong Kong
www.marcopolohotels.com



Get into the drama of a green environment at Bollywood Veggies

Heart of a lion

Don't dismiss Singapore as a fertile ground for CSR opportunities, say event experts here, as there are plenty of good options beneath the city-state's sleek veneer. By **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

There is a growing interest among companies to engage their event participants in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, and although Singapore is as bright and shiny as any developed society could get, there are plenty of options available for interested delegates to help the local community and environment.

DMCs and event organisers said the trick was to know where to look for such opportunities.

World Express managing director, Darren Tan, said: "It is of course more challenging to find blatant poverty in Singapore but in any city in the world, no matter how rich they are, if you dig deeper below the surface you will surely find people in need."

Tan attributed the greater interest in CSR among his clients to heightened awareness of the importance of giving back to the society.

He said: "The US and European corporate markets probably pioneered this whole (CSR) concept but we can see that this is no longer just

limited to Westerners now."

Visits to children's homes are some of the community programmes World Express had done for corporate clients.

Janet Tan-Collis, managing director of East West Planners Singapore, said four out of ten companies today would request for CSR to be injected into their incentive or teambuilding programme.

She said: "Corporates are becoming more conscious about their social responsibility and instead of just (giving) donations they want to engage the community directly."

According to Tan-Collis, one of the more popular activities under its *Do For Better* programme is the assembling of bicycles to be presented to children at orphanages. Other available programmes include creating batik prints for the community and donation-linked drives.

Teambuilding specialist Asia Ability's managing director, David Powell, said: "CSR activities create a powerful teambuilding experience and has a feel-good factor."

According to Powell, CSR activities that are preferred by corporates revolve around helping children. However he admitted that such homes in Singapore already have sufficient support.

He said: "Most organisations and homes in Singapore have a lot of government and community support and require far less when compared to (their peers in) other Asian countries in Asia."

As such, Asia Ability sees more clients building bicycles and toys from scratch to donate to homes in Singapore instead.

Tan-Collis pointed out that Singapore "does not come first to mind" when companies are purposefully seeking community-based activities due to the country's image as a prosperous nation.

However, she said CSR need not be restricted to caring for the society, but can also be extended to the environment.

Lee Meng Tat, CEO of Wildlife Reserves Singapore, which manages four parks – Singapore Zoo, Jurong Bird Park, River Safari and Night Safari – said there have more requests from corporate groups to participate in educational programmes at the attractions.

Lee said: "Such programmes provide an up-close and more personal encounter with wildlife as well as opportunities to learn about animal behaviour and how to protect the species. Allowing visitors to have close contact with these animals can actually galvanise an individual into caring and doing more for his or her environment."

Corporate groups desiring a more 'green' experience can head to Bollywood Veggies farm in the Kranji countryside, where delegates can partake in teambuilding programmes such as potting, treasure hunts and culinary classes that promise fresh, farm-to-table cuisine.

Farm owner Ivy Singh-Lim told *TTGmice*: "Farming activities are novel and they allow participants to get out to the countryside and enjoy nature in a true kampong (instead of) a prim and proper garden, and that is quite rare in Singapore."

According to Singh-Lim, the four-hectare farm welcomes 100,000 visitors a year, half of which is made up of traffic from event groups.

CSR options in the Lion City were recently expanded with the opening of two new green facilities at the Singapore Botanic Gardens (SBG) – the

SBG Heritage Museum and the City Developments Limited Green Gallery.

Through interactive exhibits, visitors can learn more about the rich history behind the 154-year old garden and Singapore's greening journey over the last five decades.

Hoteliers are also jumping in to support their guests' CSR needs. For example, under Shangri-La Hotels and Resort's *Shangri-La's Care for Nature Project*, the beachfront Shangri-La's Rasa Sentosa Resort & Spa is currently developing a new nature centre, slated to open early this year. Research is now underway to select the types of flora to be planted in the nature centre.

According to Ben Bousnina, general manager of the hotel, the nature centre will play host to nature-related activities for hotel guests.

On the broader scope of things, sustainable practices down the MICE

supply chain are being enforced through a new set of guidelines established by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB). The Sustainability Guidelines, referenced from international standards such as ISO 20121, covers seven industry categories including hotels, venues, planners, transportation, F&B and audiovisual set-up. Areas covered include advice on waste management and the efficient use of water and energy, and initiatives that encourage employees to develop a commitment to sustainable practices.

STB executive director for business tourism development, Chew Tiong Heng, said: "With corporate clients and delegates becoming increasingly concerned about the environment, business event organisers and meeting planners are turning to destinations and venues with strong sustainability policies in place."

"Green initiatives are gaining traction among MICE organisers who recognise that such endeavours significantly enhance the overall visitor experience."

Chew Tiong Heng

Executive director, business tourism development
Singapore Tourism Board



Honest-to-goodness CSR ideas

Community Circus Challenge

Delegates are first empowered with circus entertainment skills, which they will then pass on to people sheltered under a charity of their choice. A set of juggling props for selected acts – Juggling, Plate Spinning, Chinese Yo-yo and Diablo – will also be provided. The result is a rewarding experience that promises to boost perseverance and self-esteem among delegates and helps forge an irreplaceable bond between delegates and the recipients.

Contact singapore@teambuildingasia.com or visit www.teambuildingasia.com for more information.



Building A Dream

Presented as a team challenge, participants are tasked to correctly assemble brand new bicycles. Teams representing divisions of a corporation must each solve challenges and puzzles to earn tools and bicycle parts. When teams have enough resources, they will begin creating an efficient assembly process to produce a variety of bicycles within a limited timeframe. Completed bicycles will then be presented to a selected home.

Email ask@asiaability.com or visit www.asiaability.com for details.



From top: Pick up juggling techniques through Community Circus Challenge; build bicycles for charity through Building A Dream

Ideas One-day marine themed incentive tour

Kick off the incentive programme with a hearty breakfast at the hotel before embarking on a journey into the ocean on Sentosa island. First, dive into Resorts World Sentosa's Marine Life Park, the world's largest oceanarium with thousands of marine animals. Sign your delegates up for a number of memorable marine activities here, such as the Sea Trek Adventure, Shark Encounter and Open Ocean Dive.

Break for lunch at celebrity restaurant Ocean Restaurant by Cat Cora. Located inside the enormous S.E.A. Aquarium, the world's largest aquarium, diners get to savour both an exquisite meal and a magnificent view of the Open Ocean habitat. The restaurant serves sustainably sourced seafood.

After satisfying their tummies, whisk your delegates off to meet and greet the dolphins in Dolphin Island. Expect some close interaction with these gentle creatures. Options to swim with the dolphins are available too. Spend the rest of the afternoon at Adventure Cove Waterpark.

End the day on a high note with the Songs of the Sea performance which features water jets, flame bursts, lasers and music. Watch this space though, as the popular performance will be given a spectacular update come mid-2014.

Learn about marine life at Discovery Touch Pool, S.E.A. Aquarium



Need to know



Trickeye Museum debuts in Singapore

Keep an eye out for a whole new world of optical illusions at the Trickeye Museum which will open at Resorts World Sentosa by mid-2014.

Originating from South Korea, the 800m² museum will feature six theme zones with 80 three-dimensional paintings and optical illusion masterpieces which will take into account the unique aspects of Singapore, including the city-state's ecosystem of nature and wildlife. The six theme zones include Love, Circus, Masterpiece, Safari, Fairytale and Adventure.

Visitors can 'walk' into these artworks, strike poses and become part of the story.

Trickeye Museum will be one of the anchor tenants at the integrated resort's waterfront strip, which will be developed to a "Little Korea" cluster of Korean F&B and fashion retail outlets.



Jazz it up

The Singapore International Jazz Festival – slated to be the largest of its kind here – will kick off on February 27 at Marina Bay Sands. Jamie Cullum will headline a gala performance on opening day, and the musical gathering will roll out back-to-back performances by jazz and R&B greats such as Natalie Cole, James Morrison and India Arie over the next three days. Local acts will be in on the action too. Tickets cost from S\$78 (US\$62) for a one-day general admission for adults. The festival ends on March 2.

Grease is the word

The multi-million dollar musical Grease will blaze into Singapore's MasterCard Theatres at Marina Bay Sands on April 25, direct from London's West End.

This popular musical production needs little introduction and promises to rock the stage and the audience with explosive energy, featuring a spectacular international cast, slick dance moves, dazzling costumes and all those unforgettable songs from the hit movie, including *Summer Nights*, *Sandy, Hopelessly Devoted To You*, *You're The One That I Want*, *Greased Lightnin'* and *Grease Is The Word*.

Grease will end its run in Singapore on May 11. Tickets from S\$60 (US\$47.40).



Catch UK jazz sensation Jamie Cullum in action

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Why it's Unique



Flower Field Hall

Meeting planners and DMCs looking for a cool, literally and figuratively speaking, all-weather venue in tropical Singapore will be thrilled that the Flower Dome, which houses the Flower Field Hall, is a perennially cool 23°C to 25°C and the humidity is a low 60 per cent to 80 per cent.

Flower Field Hall inside the Flower Dome overlooks the changing floral display on one side, and the stunning Marina Bay skyline on the other. The special ceiling LED globe lights are programmable and can create any kind of mood, while the on-site Asian and Western kitchen set-up can whip up all kinds of culinary treats.

Here 750 people can sit down to an exclusive gala dinner, and up to 1,100 people can attend special-themed and MICE events.



Waterview Room

Adjacent to Flower Field Hall is the equally delightful **Waterview Room**. It looks out to the Marina Bay waterfront and can double up for pre-event cocktails, and is suited to small events for between 200 and 500 people, depending on the event requirement and set-up.

There's More

Did you know that Bay South in Gardens by the Bay is a sprawling 54 hectares, so outdoor space is plentiful? **Silver Leaf**, which overlooks Dragonfly Lake, is another event option. Here the sweet scents all around, the Supertrees, Flower Dome, and unmistakable Marina Bay Sands provide the perfect backdrop for any exclusive, sunset private outdoor event like a sit-down dinner for 320 people or a cocktail for 500 people.



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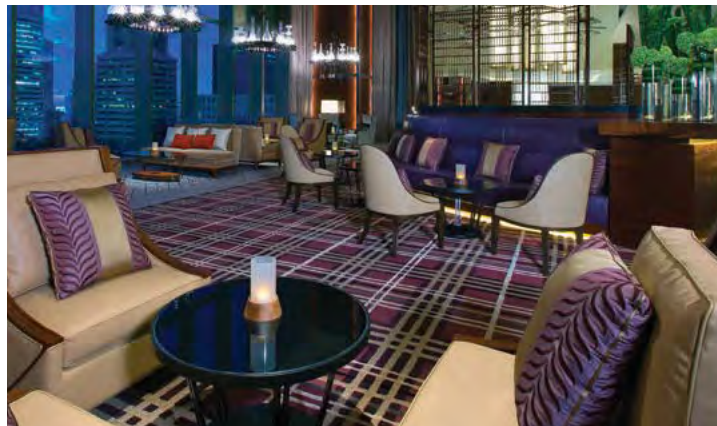
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The Westin Singapore



The property in Singapore's Marina Bay financial district is a short distance from corporate headquarters, a variety of retail shops and restaurants, as well as Gardens by the Bay. It starts with the lobby on the 32nd level through to the 46th of the new Asia Square Tower 2. Since opening in November 2013, it has drawn mostly business travellers, while leisure guests and local staycationers typically check in over the weekends. The new MRT station, Downtown, is close by.

Meeting facilities

The hotel's 600m² Grand Ballroom can seat up to 300 people, banquet style, and can be divided into two separate spaces for smaller events. There are 10 configurable meeting rooms totalling 1,350m² in space, each accommodating up to 10 people and equipped with the necessary audiovisual and lighting amenities. Green events are possible here through a dedicated supply station dispensing stationery and bottled water as required. However, Wi-Fi may be chargeable, depending on the meeting or room package.

F&B

Seasonal Tastes features five interactive kitchens and offers breakfast, lunch and dinner buffets. I loved the breakfast spread which comprised Western varieties such as made-to-order eggs, waffles and sausages as well as local choices such as congee and fried mee hoon (vermicelli), among other things. Several types of fresh fruit juices were available for a healthy start to the day. Gastro bar Cook & Brew offers classical pub favourites and local comfort food, and can be booked for private events for up to 150 people. Gourmet market

Daily Treats allows guests to pick up breads, sandwiches, coffee and juices, while the cosy Lobby Lounge is good for afternoon tea and drinks with colleagues or business partners.

Rooms

The 305 rooms are categorised and priced according to the views they command. I stayed in a 40m² Deluxe room overlooking the port and financial skyscrapers.

I liked that the door opened into a small hallway before leading to the bedroom proper, where the usual amenities such as a flatscreen TV, minibar, work desk and safe were. The king-size signature Westin Heavenly Bed indeed afforded a lot of comfort and sweet, restful slumber. Décor was simple, with a brown and beige palette exuding The Westin's organic, natural feel, said the hotel's spokesperson. I also liked that the lights, TV and air-conditioner switched on and off automatically with each entrance and exit.

The bathroom was spacious but I wished the bathtub could be gripped at the edge or had come with some non-slip mat. Female guests may frown upon the lack of a powerpoint at the vanity for the hairdryer; I had to plug in at the workdesk without any mirror, the short cord threatening disconnection at more than a slight tug.

Other facilities

Apart from a business centre, there is also an outdoor infinity pool on the 35th floor overlooking Singapore's south coast. Business travellers may also work out at the fitness studio, or rejuvenate at the signature Heavenly Spa.

FACT FILE

Maximum pax for meetings

300 at the grand ballroom, banquet style

Recent events handled

Asset management company's three-day conference for 70 investors at the ballroom (November 2013); week-long banking conference for 200 pax at the ballroom (January 2014)

VERDICT



Friendly and attentive service, comfort as well as the variety of F&B and leisure venues should satisfy even the fussiest of business travellers.

Kathy Neo



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W Singapore – Sentosa Cove



If you're familiar with W Singapore – Sentosa Cove's marketing collateral, then you might, like me, expect it to be a nightclub that rents out beds.

So there was some surprise when I strolled into the cream and khaki Living Room (lobby) adorned with orchid motifs, filled with a gentle buzz rather than thumping bass beats. The opposite wall of the Living Room was all glass, allowing in natural daylight and views of the hotel's lawn, Wet (pool) and pier.

"Part Miami, part Barcelona and part Sentosa, we're more like a W Retreat," said the hotel's director of sales, Alvin Lim. Indeed, for a hotel that had supposedly sold out for the weekend, there wasn't the furious cacophony of sound or mad rushing about that might have been the case elsewhere.

Later I returned to the Living Room to witness another face of W Singapore. Here came the booming bass as the DJ worked the console at Woobar; here came the flaring purple lights that erased the earlier resort vibe. The transformation injected an additional dose of hip factor into the guest experience.

Meeting facilities

MICE experiences at W Singapore come spiced with a dash of fun.

The Strategy Room sits 16 pax in boardroom style while Studios 1-4 takes 30 pax each in classroom style. When these spaces are joined, they can seat 180 pax altogether in theatre-style. The Great Room accommodates up to 50 banquet tables and can be split into two for smaller groups and is decked with plush carpets and "fairy" lights, literally. These venues come with drop down projectors and screens.

Smaller spaces are also available. The W Lawn is good for a 220-pax sit-down function, while the adjacent Rock Garden can host cocktails for 80. When I stopped by the Secret Garden, located in the sliver of space between the Great Room and Studios, a punching bag was set up for feisty or frustrated delegates. A ping pong table can also be arranged.

Besides the usual refreshments, dispensers are set up at the back of the room offering marshmallows and M&Ms. The iconic Asian bubble tea drink is served up as a welcome drink, while macarons and handwritten notes greet delegates in their rooms. At turndown, guests receive a matronly handwritten

post-it note reminding one to brush his teeth and a tube of toothpaste that turns out to be a tube of chocolate!

Rooms

W Singapore's 240 rooms come in several tiers, with top-tier ones featuring private plunge pools.

I stayed in a Wonderful Room and was pleased with its array of creature comforts. The room's cool greyish hue turned into a canvas for four mood lighting options (Hello, Escape, Runaway, Flirt) by night and gave the space a futuristic feel. The king sized bed was firm and sheets comfortable, though the pillows were too flat. The modern traveller is sure to appreciate the multiple cables provided for charging gadgets with, complete with plug heads catering to a range of brands.

I was very fond of the bathroom. One could watch TV while soaking in the bath. Privacy is offered by sliding shut the frosted glass panels. The rain shower was a highlight as was the Bliss brand toiletries.

Above all, it was the devil in the details that captured the essence of the W brand (and my heart) – the mood lighting rimming the bed, a CD of W-approved tracks to capture the spirit of the hotel, the plaster cast 'hand' emerging from the wall and clutching a test tube that served as a vase, and the nifty wood panels that concealed the minibar.

F&B

Skirt serves premium grilled meats and wines, while The Kitchen Table dishes up a range of international cuisines buffet style. For those looking for a more casual sit-down, there's the swim-up Wet Bar and Woobar. Lounge and bar Woobar offers a special high tea experience for two between 15.00 to 17.00, served in a decorative bird cage and hung on a tree-like stand beside the table.

Other facilities

The hotel's pool comes with an underwater sound system and gigantic floats. I had a 90-minute signature massage at AWAY Spa on a bed that was held up by a glowing blue structure. Masseur Ani was very good, but I couldn't help feel that the W focus on avant garde designs made the interior less relaxing. There's also a big gym next to AWAY that will delight health-conscious road warriors.

FACT FILE

Maximum pax for meetings

680 pax, theatre-style in the Great Room and Studios 1-4 combined

Maximum pax for banquets

64 tables in the Great Room and Studios 1-4 combined

Recent events handled

The Festival of Media Asia; meetings and conferences by JP Morgan, Estee Lauder and Standard Chartered

VERDICT



Laidback yet effortlessly cool, W Singapore – Sentosa Cove is for companies that want a dose of hip-ness and a load of fun.

Hannah Koh



Innovative angles

Thailand has exceeded its MICE targets last year but for it to achieve an equally stellar showing in 2014, quality and creative ideas are needed, say event specialists. **Greg Lowe** reports

Thailand's MICE industry posted healthy growth last year as Asian feeder markets drove business across all sectors and DMCs and incentives planners focused on providing customised experiences for clients in order to win new business, attract

repeat customers and help keep the kingdom on the leading edge of the region's industry.

While MICE specialists continue to differentiate themselves by developing unique elements for client itineraries, few are optimistic last year's double-digit growth can be achieved

in 2014 as long as the spectre of political instability and protests remain.

Wanchai Thavornthaveekul, deputy managing director of Destination Asia (Thailand), said: "The current unrest in Bangkok will likely affect projections for 1Q2014, especially for US and European markets."

While some DMCs have managed to relocate existing groups elsewhere within Thailand or to neighbouring countries such as Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia, others are worried that the political instability is scaring off new business.

Michael Lynden-Bell, general manager of Exotissimo Travel Thailand, said: "Corporate companies are not willing to risk bringing their staff and clients into a country that is perceived unstable or dangerous.

"We have lost a lot of quotes to Malaysia recently and I expect this trend to continue following these protests."

Travel companies told *TTGmice* that the protests have already dampened business in the first quarter and could lead to a significant rise in cancellations and downturn in new bookings for the next six to eight months if the anti-government rallies are protracted, disrupt the February 2 general elections or turn violent.

Political analysts have forecasted more violence and a bleak outlook for Thailand in the near term which, if accurate, would scotch the chances of a repeat of last year's strong tourism performance.

During fiscal 2013, which ran from October 2012 to last September, the country welcomed 1,013,502 overseas MICE visitors, up 13.2 per cent from 2012, generating earnings of 88.5 billion baht (US\$2.7 billion), an increase of 10.9 per cent on the previous year, according to Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB).

"(Performance surpassed) our annual targets for both (arrivals) and industry earnings," said Pishnu Plaikaew, TCEB spokesperson. "Asia was our largest source of MICE visitors, representing 75.3 per cent of all MICE visitors, followed by Europe, with 10.1 per cent, and the US, with 4.7 per cent. The top five countries were China, India, Malaysia, Japan and Singapore."

TCEB figures show international conventions continued to lead Thailand's MICE market with a 33 per cent market share, followed by corporate meetings (25 per cent), incentive travel (24 per cent) and

Destination: Thailand



Tourism Authority of Thailand

Satiate corporate groups' growing thirst for cultural experiences with a visit to Chiang Mai's hill tribes

international exhibitions and trade fairs (18 per cent).

Some DMCs remain relatively optimistic about this year's performance given the usually fast rebound from crisis-sensitive Asian markets.

Hans van den Born, managing director of Diethelm Travel Thailand, said: "Asian source markets tend to cancel rather quick but also have a very short lead time, therefore I am not too pessimistic for 2014.

"There are several nice projects in our portfolio this year which will not be affected by the current political uncertainty."

Ensuring product quality and inno-

vation will be even more important for Thailand's success in the MICE market due to current challenges, and operators should be mindful of developing programme elements outside of potential troublespots.

Given the highly competitive nature of the market, DMCs are keen to keep their latest products and event ideas close to their chest, however, they have noted some emerging trends in the local MICE market.

Clients from within Asia-Pacific are now requesting the same level of innovation as Western groups to be incorporated into pre- or post-event packages. Elements range from popular favourites such as Thai cooking classes and cultural performances to challenging teambuilding activities like building boats from wooden pallets.

"We're especially interested in unique products," said van den Born. "Demand for pure incentive tours is diminishing and for those that we do handle, CSR is becoming more important."

Lynden-Bell agreed that CSR is becoming a key focus for corporate incentives and that such activities must have clear tangible benefits.

He cited developing sustainable vegetable gardens for local schools who could then sell produce to support their English-language Saturday camps as one such example.

"Group sizes are also becoming slightly smaller with lower overall budgets but at a higher spend per person (while clients are) requesting for more authentic experiences with more local interactions," he said.

"With smaller groups, activities such as cultural dinners in a 'real' rather than staged ethnic village make for a more memorable incentive."

Dave Belcher, managing director of Making Teams, said experienced clients are likely to be more demanding in terms of innovative activities.

"They know what they want and expect something new each year," he said, adding that such groups ranged from 20 to 40 pax and were mostly from within South-east Asia.

Popular elements include treasure hunts and Amazing Race- and Survivor-type activities, Belcher observed, saying that these are typically organised for one- or two-day teambuilding programmes or incorporated into a two- to four-day meeting or conference-cum-incentive.



"With smaller groups, activities such as cultural dinners in a 'real' rather than staged ethnic village make for a more memorable incentive."

Dave Belcher
Managing director, Making Teams

Memorable corporate events are made of these

Get rough



Integrated resort Thanyapura Phuket has recently added the *Project Xtreme Boot Camp and Assault Course* to its offering of world-class sports facilities. Designed by staff member and former British special forces soldier, Barrie Buck, the course puts participants through mental and physical endurance tests. The intensity of activities can be adjusted according to fitness levels and age. Buck plays the role of a demanding drill sergeant to a T, bellowing to motivate teams. While the whole experience is challenging, the emphasis

remains firmly focused on fun. There's a barbecue pit at the end to round off the experience with plenty of food and beer.

Thanyapura Phuket also offers a conference hall for 150 pax, a boardroom for 12 to 15 pax and the Wine Cellar for high-end dinner events.

Call (66 0) 76-336 000 or visit www.thanyapura.com.

Koh Klang's rustic embrace

Suitable for longer incentive trips wanting to offer participants an eco-friendly culturally immersive experience, Khiri Travel's *Koh Klang Eco Experience* tour visits a Muslim fishing village on the island of Koh Klang near Krabi. Activities include kayak tours, traditional batik painting and activity-based visits to the local rice fields as well as lessons on how to make local delicacies and demonstrations by master craftsman on constructing model boats. Itineraries can be customised from

shorter visits to the full 4D3N tour.

Email Khiri Travel Thailand at sales.thailand@khiri.com.

Meet the Karens

Deep in the mountains north of Chiang Mai, visitors can meet the indigenous Karen hill tribe and contribute to the preservation of its precious culture. Accommodation is available at a 10-room, open-air bamboo house that is surrounded by rice fields and forests of banana, palm and sugarcane trees. Go trekking in the scenic countryside and verdant jungle, learn about the lifestyle of the villagers and try an old weaving technique to make colourful clothing and bags. At night, Karen children will charm the audience with songs and music around a bonfire underneath a star-studded sky.

Email Diethelm Travel Thailand for arrangements at info@diethelmtravel.com.

How I did King's Cup Elephant Polo

Organising the unorthodox sport of pachyderm polo is no mean feat, especially when it is Thailand's marquee event, the King's Cup Elephant Polo, which Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) ranks among the kingdom's top 10 most widely covered tourism events, explains Dillip Rajakarier, ceo of Minor Hotel Group.

The five-day event, which celebrated its 12th anniversary last year and started on August 28, pulled in scores of sponsors and combined a host of activities, including the polo games themselves, a book launch, monastic blessings, fashion events, a CEO media briefing and a gala dinner which significantly contributed to 4.1 million baht (US\$124,899) raised as part of the event's CSR efforts.

"We started the planning process at least nine months (ahead)," said Rajakarier. "That's how much time it takes to bring it all together. We have a dedicated team to handle the elephant polo although many

departments across the company contribute."

"You start the planning, you get the sponsors and arrange the PR events."

Last year's event brought together 40 sponsors – including main sponsors Anantara Hotels, Resorts & Spas, TAT and Audemars Piguet – with 16 elephant polo teams each sponsored by different companies. Around 180 local media and 70 international media attended and Minor used a single company with 30 branded vans and limousines for transport.

Sponsors typically use the event as a key incentive. Luxury watchmaker Audemars Piguet, for example, flies a handful of top spending clients from their branded boutiques across Asia



for four days and donates one of its latest models to the charity auction.

"It's amazing when you look at how the elephant polo has evolved over the past 11 years," Rajakarier said. "People come each year and say, 'Wow, this is the best year ever. But that's the real challenge, how do you keep raising that bar?'"



Need to know

Have a feast at Gaggan

Gagan Anand, who heads Gaggan on Lang Suan 4 in Bangkok, was the first Asian chef to study at Michelin-starred chef Ferran Adria's culinary research institute in Spain. His experiences armed him with a unique, unorthodox approach to Indian cooking. Sous-vide, gelification and plenty of liquid nitrogen are deployed to add a new dimension to traditional curries. Trying the tasting menu at the Chef's Table is a must. Call (66) 2652-1700 or visit www.eat-at-gaggan.com.

Snoop around

Making Teams has crafted Supersleuths, a race around a city's cultural sites in search of a missing historical artefact. Teams of up to 10 are provided with city maps, audio cues and cryptic emails which they must decipher to find the target locations. A range of transport modes from foot, bicycle and bus to tuk tuk, taxi and water taxi can be used to navigate the city in question. Teams must recover the hidden artefact from the final location before returning to base.

Call (66) 7724-8228 or visit www.makingteams.com.

New fancy party place

October saw the launch of Bangkok's first superclub when the upscale Ku De Ta opened its doors on Sathorn Square's rooftop. From this downtown Bangkok location, Ku De Ta offers staggering city views and an unparalleled space for dining and clubbing. It has two clubs, seven bars, three restaurants and a high-altitude terrace spread over two floors.

Call (66) 2108-2000 or visit www.kudeta.com for more information.

Jetsetting

Fly elite corporate event travellers around Thailand in style with the help of private jet specialists MJETS (www.mjets.com) and Siam Land Flying's Executive Wings (www.aircharterthailand.com/ewing).

Boasting decades of experience, MJETS' pilots, aircraft engineers and technical staff are trained and rated by the US' Flight Safety International and Thai DCA. Its services are fully insured and operated at the highest global safety standards. Plus, it has its own private jet terminal with full ground services at Bangkok's Don Mueang International Airport.

Executive Wings, another pioneer in private jet services for high-level executives in Thailand, operates a fleet of Hawker 850XP, Hawker 800XP and King Air 350, all spacious and luxuriously appointed.



Topsy-turvy world

Baan Teelanka, which opened in February, claims to be the first attraction of its kind in the country – a fully furnished 13m tall western-style house with three levels where everything from the kitchen and bedrooms are arranged upside down. A-Maze, a 1,000m² garden labyrinth located outside the house, follows the mind-bending theme. The venue is available for private hire for events and themed parties.

Call (66 84) 456-5279 or visit www.upsidedownhouse-phuket.com for more information.



International meetings are returning to Sendai after 2011's natural disaster; the vibrant and hugely popular Sendai Tanabata Festival pictured here

Resolute recovery

Key cities Tokyo and Kyoto are scoring well on the MICE front, while Sendai has risen from the shadows of the 2011 disaster as a hotspot for medical, geology and nuclear science conventions, writes **Hannah Koh**

Japan's cities both big and small have forged ahead into 2014, having secured a roll call of events across the country including the crown jewel of international sporting events, the Olympic Games. At the same time, the once-devastated region of Tohoku is gradually finding its feet again.

Said James Widgren, international marketing coordinator of Kyoto Convention Bureau (KCB): "We won't know the precise figures (of the number of MICE events in Kyoto in 2013), but the feeling here is that continuing from 2012, MICE in Kyoto has been good in 2013."

He explained: "Most of the negativity that came from the 2011 tsunami has cleared and organisers seem to be regarding Kyoto as an excellent MICE destination."

Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau (TCVB) business events team director, Kazuko Toda, was also similarly upbeat about the situation:

"We realised that there is growing demand for Tokyo as an ideal business events destination...Tokyo has been accustomed to hosting dignitaries and business leaders from around the world on a daily basis during the year of 2013, participating in major international conferences such as the 20th ITS World Congress Tokyo 2013, the IROS 2013 (IEEE/RSJ International Conference on Intelligent Robots and Systems), IFEA 9th Endodontic World Congress and The Consumer Goods Forum - The Global Summit."

ICCA's survey from last year ranked Japan eighth in the world for its number of association meetings and first in the Asia-Pacific region.

Tokyo remains the hot spot for convention and conferences in Japan. Congresses scheduled in the Japanese capital include the World Ophthalmology Congress 2014 (12,000 pax) in April, the 26th International Ornithological Congress (1,300 pax) in August, International

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Richard Holmes, International Director of Meetings

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POP Inc, Japan
Robert Cotter, International Editor

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covering relevant topics.

Accenture Australia Pty Ltd, Australia
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Destination: Japan

Bar Association General Meeting (5,000 pax) in October, and the 2014 General Meeting of the International Electrotechnical Commission (1,500 pax) in November.

Meanwhile, Kyoto was confirmed last September as host city for the World Congress of Neurology 2018.

In anticipation of more business events in the near future, both cities will soon roll out new programmes or facilities.

Said TCVB's Toda: "To enhance the support given to organisers and meeting planners, our subvention programmes of FY2014 are to be renewed, and they will be available at the end of March 2014."

Looking further into the future, a new facility called ROHM Theatre Kyoto is scheduled to open adjacent to the Miyako Messe convention centre in January 2016. It will include a main hall that can take up to 2,000 people, a sub-hall that can accommodate 700 and a 200-pax multi-purpose hall.

In the north of Japan's Honshu island, MICE is trickling back into an unlikely destination. Ground zero for the March 11 earthquake and ensuing nuclear disaster, Tohoku is seeing a slow but steady stream of large-scale events.

Sendai, capital of Miyagi prefecture and the largest city in Tohoku region, saw 91 international meetings in 2012 or double 2011's 45. According to statistics from the Sendai Tourism & Convention Bureau, the number of overseas MICE delegates almost tripled between 2011 and 2012 to hit 3,455.

Kurato Hasegawa, assistant manager of international promotion section, international economy and tourism department, Economic Affairs Bureau, City of Sendai, noted: "In 2012, the number of international meetings, delegates and overseas arrivals finally topped the figures in 2010; however, some of the meetings in 2011 must have been postponed to 2012."

He explained that Sendai's international MICE market is made up largely of conventions, especially science meetings.

"Most of which are held by the professors/researchers belonging to Tohoku University," he said.

This in part was catalysed by the establishment of the Institute for Disaster Reconstruction and Regeneration Research by Tohoku University in April 2011 that gave Tohoku a foothold in this niche. Delegates at-



Guided tours to post-disaster areas near Sendai's coast can be arranged

Sendai Tourism & Convention Bureau

tending conferences related to these fields have the unique opportunity to visit areas near Sendai's coast that were affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Atsuhiko Takahashi, executive director, head of Tohoku office for Congress Corporation, a PCO, shared: "Since the earthquake, there has been increasing interest in holding international conferences in the region. Medical conferences in particular account for the largest share of our MICE business. Tohoku University, which is one of the leading universities in Japan, being a national university, is one of Congress Corporation's principal clients."

Since 2011, the region has hosted the International Atomic Energy Agency's Fukushima Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety in Koriyama, Fukushima prefecture (December 2012); the 6th International Symposium on In Situ Rock Stress (August 2013); and 13th World Conference on Seismic Isolation, Energy Dissipation and Active Vibration Control of Structures (September 2013).

Coming up in 2015 are the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in March in Sendai and the Pacific Islands Forum in May in Iwaki City, Fukushima prefecture.

When asked what impact the 2020

Olympic Games is expected to have on Sendai's MICE business, Hasegawa said: "Sendai is known as one of the closest major cities to Tokyo. We now plan to approach MICE organisers who plan events in Tokyo to promote Sendai as an alternative venue for subsidiary events such as sub-working meetings or excursion tours, which will allow participants to enjoy both Japan's central city and local attractions at once."

He also commented that the bureau would be introducing a new grant in April 2014 to lure large-scale conventions to the city, on top of the two existing subsidies targeted at international and domestic conferences.

Furthermore, Sendai city is constructing an exhibition facility to be located next to Sendai International Center. With a hall as large as 3,000m², the building is scheduled to debut in April 2015.

According to Takahashi, South Koreans account for the majority of organisers and participants at Sendai's medical conferences but pointed out that participant numbers were falling, possibly due to "concern about the nuclear power issue in the aftermath of the March 11 disaster".

Significantly, statistics also indicate that Sendai city is the region's only bright spot, hosting 45 of the 54 meetings held in Tohoku.

Takanori Ogasawara, director at the Tohoku Tourism Promotion Organization, said: "We haven't worked on MICE much, but we're starting... Actually, even before the earthquake we hadn't succeeded in getting many leisure tourists to come to Tohoku and only had about one to two per cent of total visitors to Japan. Now, the number is under one per cent."

He said the promotion entity was now sharpening its marketing focus to promote a select number of attractions and thus introduce the charms of Tohoku more effectively.

The emphasis on general tourism is understandable given the dire state of the sector, with arrivals from South Korea and Hong Kong a mere 25 per cent of pre-earthquake numbers, largely due to radiation concerns.

The urgent need to bring tourists back into the prefecture has spawned a grass-roots movement in Fukushima called the Fuku-no-Shima Project, which facilitates tourism projects with MICE potential (see Need to Know).

But beyond concerns of radiation, Tohoku must address more basic needs. Congress Corporation's Takahashi cited hotel supply and international air access as two press-

ing needs. "If there were more hotel rooms and large-scale banquet facilities, it would be easier to invite conferences to the area," he explained. "(Before the earthquake), there were daily non-stop flights between Sendai and Incheon International Airport in Seoul, South Korea, but now there's only one every two days."

A twice-weekly flight from Shanghai was also suspended after the

will open close to Sendai station in 2015. Thai Airways International also kickstarted a thrice-weekly service between Sendai and Bangkok on December 3.

Said Hasegawa: "We have to admit that Tohoku, in regard to MICE business, has some weak points like name value and infrastructure, compared to Japan's major MICE cities such as Yokohama, Kyoto and

"We have to admit that Tohoku, in regard to MICE business, has some weak points like name value and infrastructure, compared to Japan's major MICE cities such as Yokohama, Kyoto and Okinawa."

Kurato Hasegawa

Assistant manager of international promotion section, international economy and tourism department, Economic Affairs Bureau, City of Sendai

earthquake, but the deterioration of diplomatic relations between China and Japan was the final nail in the coffin.

On a positive note, the 223-key Sendai Washington Hotel, part of the well-known Washington Hotels chain, opened in December while a new hotel by the same company behind the Hotel Metropolitan chain

Okinawa.

"However, we are rolling out our new grant in 2014 and exhibition facility in 2015, which is expected to bring Sendai up to the same level of competitiveness as those rival cities. MICE planners always seek new destinations. We believe that Sendai will become more attractive (for) MICE in the near future."



How I did 11th Annual Meeting of the Japanese Society of Medical Oncology

Congress Corporation was appointed official organiser of the 11th Annual Meeting of the Japanese Society of Medical Oncology which took place from August 29 to 31 last year at two venues, Sendai International Center and Tohoku University Centennial Hall (Kawauchi Hagi Hall), attracting some 5,000 participants and over 30 international experts from the US, China, and other countries.

Atsuhiko Takahashi, executive director, head of Tohoku Office, Congress Corporation, told *TTGmice* that the biggest challenge his team faced in planning and executing the event was "finding a space for the accompanying exhibition".

"The two venues did not have spaces appropriate for this scale of an exhibition, so Congress Corporation proposed setting up tents in the open space next to Sendai International Center. At first the organisers were very concerned about the ef-

fects of the hot summer weather that Japan is famous for, but we worked together with the tent company and came up with an air conditioning plan to which the organisers agreed," he said, adding that various requisite permits were obtained and construction of the tents started just a week prior to the conference.

"The temporary venue turned out to be quite professional," he said. "LED lights and 27 air conditioning units were installed in the ceiling."

Connected by a corridor, the two huge tents were set up – one spanning 1,000m² for 300 poster presentations and the other a 1,250m² space for six large-scale corporate installations and 20 booths.

A casual wine and cheese tasting was held under the tents too.

"Another interesting aspect of the meeting was the Storytelling Taxi Driver Tours to areas in Sendai that were hit hardest by the March 11



disaster, including Arahama Beach, once popular with swimmers, and Yuriage fishing port. The taxi drivers, (were trained by) a local non-profit organisation, gave explanations about the incident as they guides people around various sites. These tours were very well received by the meeting participants."

Poster presentations and discussions took place in the smaller tent

Need to know



Somaro

Edo era opulence

A former restaurant dating back 200 years and once the haunt of artists and writers, Somaro in Sakata city, Yamaga Prefecture has now been gazetted a tangible cultural asset. The storied building was renovated in 1999 and boasts luxurious red lacquered banisters, gilded corridors, traditional Japanese rooms laid out with tatami and mini exhibitions of works done by artists that used to patronise Somaro.

The highlight at Somaro is a performance by locally-trained *maiko*, or apprentice geisha. For 3,500 yen (US\$34), Somaro will arrange for a lunch-time *maiko* performance and boxed lunches in a banquet hall for a taste of old Sakata. Reservations are required for groups of two or more. Alternatively, daily *maiko* performances begin at 14.00 for 1,000 yen, includes admission.

Hooking up in Japan

Corporate road warriors no longer have to fear the dearth of free Wi-Fi spots in Japan, with more companies offering services that will have the traveller connected right at the airport. One such company is b-Mobile that sells Visitor SIM cards allowing the traveller to connect to the Internet without activation. Cards can be delivered to major airport postal offices, hotels or any other specified address in Japan. Meanwhile, Global Advanced Communications rents smartphones, SIM cards and pocket Wi-Fi devices and can have them delivered ahead of the traveller's arrival.

Visit www.bmobile.ne.jp/english/index.html or www.globaladvancedcomm.com for more information.

Game for a battle?

Delegates from a wide range of companies will gird their loins and charge into battle on the sandy beaches of Okinawa, when the prefecture hosts the first-ever Okinawa Corporate Games from March 5 to 8, 2015.

Tony Sakuda, general manager of Naha-based Okinawa Tourist Service, the travel agency that brought in the concept, explained that participating teams could comprise of people from each branch of a company and team size would differ from game to game.

"This promotes teambuilding, strengthens (work) performance and gives (participants) something to look forward to next year. It also builds loyalty to their own company."

The event will feature 15 sporting categories, including dragon boating, beach soccer and open water swimming, all facilitated by Okinawa Tourist Service.

Corporate Games will also include in its programme a Grand Parade, Great Games Party and Closing Awards Celebration to enhance the overall experience.

Visit www.corporate-games.com for details on registration.

Fuku-no-Shima project

The Fuku-no-Shima project is an organisation comprising Fukushima-based agricultural producers, hotels, travel agencies and others who want to bring tourists back to the prefecture by tackling the stigma of radiation head on. Unveiled last month, the Fuku-no-Shima group has rolled out a series of tourism products and possible itineraries to show what the prefecture can offer. This includes industry inspection tours to Fukushima's state-of-the-art medical facilities, showcases of Fukushima's Aizu culture and tradition, and visits to 3/11 affected zones as well as tours led by survivors of the disaster.

Email info@fukunoshima.jp

A feast for the senses

Kamezaki is a quaint eating establishment that opened 150 years ago in Sakata and is still run by the same family. On offer are a range of banqueting rooms for large parties, with the biggest room accommodating up to 100 pax, and exquisite cuisine that includes home made plum wine made with the fruit of the tree in Kamezaki's very own gardens. Tastefully designed, the building offers picturesque views from every window and is often booked out in October when autumn foliage comes to town. Making one-month advance bookings for groups is recommended.

Call (81-234) 23-3366 or visit www6.ocn.ne.jp/~kamezaki

Bottoms up in the north

Known among Japanese people for pristine waters and the best rice, it only follows that the prefectures of Fukushima and Akita should be famous for the quality of their sake. Planners can treat their winners to some of the smoothest sake in the country and give them a chance to learn more about the sake-making process at a number of breweries that are open for inspection.

Amanoto in Yokote city, Akita welcomes groups to inspect its premises and rounds up the tour with a tasting session of its premium sakes; while Aizu Wakamatsu city in Fukushima has at least seven breweries keen to host visitors.

Interested parties may visit Amanoto's website (www.amanoto.co.jp), or call the Aizu Wakamatsu brewery cooperative at (81-242) 26-1515.



Amanoto



Teri Orton



Richard H'ng



Mark Meaney



Eric Cheng

China

Richard H'ng has joined **Shangri-La Hotel, Ningbo** as general manager, bringing with him a wealth of experience spanning over 20 years. He has worked in Malaysia, Thailand and China.

Sandakan has named **Kanit Sangmookda** its general manager. He was most recently regional director of revenue management for Starwood Hotels & Resorts in South-east Asia.

Japan

Hilton Worldwide has appointed **Heinrich Grafe** as general manager of **Conrad Tokyo**. Grafe joins from Conrad Centennial Singapore where he served as general manager since 1998. He succeeds Gregor Andréewitch who has relocated to Europe as general manager of Waldorf Astoria Berlin.

year veteran of the hospitality industry, Riaz was last general manager of the Sheraton Dammam Hotels and Towers in Saudi Arabia.

Bernold Schroeder has joined Singapore-based **Pan Pacific Hotels Group**, replacing Patrick Imbardelli who has resigned after more than five years with the company. Schroeder was previously CEO of Jin Jiang International Hotel Management.



Alan Pryor

Hong Kong

Dorsett Tsuen Wan recently welcomed **Eric Cheng** as general manager and **Henry Tse** as director of sales and marketing. The new appointments come on top of their existing roles as general manager and director of sales and marketing, respectively, at Silka Far East, Hong Kong.

Peggy Fang Roe has been promoted from her previous position of vice president, global operations for **Marriott International** to chief sales and marketing officer for Asia-Pacific. Her previous roles at the company included vice president of brand management, and director of marketing. She has also worked for General Electric, Amazon.com and Homestead.com.

Stephane Masse now leads **Le Méridien Cyberport**, Hong Kong as general manager. Armed with 30 years of hospitality experience, Masse was most recently general manager of Sheraton Guilin Hotel.

Malaysia

Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre has appointed **Alan Pryor** general manager designate. He will take over from current chief, Peter Brokenshire, who will retire at the end of March. Pryor was last deputy general manager.

US

AEG Facilities, which assumed management of the **Hawai'i Convention Center** on January 1, has named **Teri Orton** general manager of the facility. Orton joins from Outrigger Enterprises Group where she was vice president of Condominium Resort Marketing.



Peggy Fang Roe

Singapore

Hilton Worldwide has appointed **Mark Meaney** general manager of **Conrad Centennial Singapore**. Meaney has held several management positions in Japan, the US and Ireland in his 17-year hospitality career.

Riaz Mahmood has been named general manager of **Orchard Hotel** Singapore. A 20-



Bernold Schroeder

Indonesia

Four Points by Sheraton

Kurt Knackstedt

The 25-year-old Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE) has elected its first Asia-based president. Rio Tinto's global category leader of travel & expense management, who lives in Singapore, tells **Caroline Boey** what members can expect



Congratulations Kurt on your appointment. So how will having an Asia-based president benefit members in the region and the association?

Asia being the epicentre of the world economy is great for ACTE and the association has seen the most rapid growth in this region. Membership has grown about 50 per cent, with new members from Pakistan and Mongolia joining in 2013. ACTE is also seeking new members in Kazakhstan, where Asia regional director, Benson Tang, recently participated in a travel event.

Asia is maturing rapidly in its knowledge about corporate travel and ACTE has proven it is ideally placed to lead this knowledge growth.

I believe I bring a unique perspective to both the president role and the region having been based here for 10 years across Sydney, Hong Kong and Singapore, with a year in London in the middle of the decade. I began my travel industry career 12 years ago in North America at Rosenbluth International, moved to Sydney and London with Galileo, returned to Sydney with American Express, set up my own consultancy before I joined Rio Tinto and moved to Singapore in 2011.

Technology, rapidly maturing payment and expense management systems, and the emergence of world-class Asian-based suppliers have risen rapidly in the last 10 years.

I have been active with ACTE since 2001 when I attended the inaugural ACTE Asia Education Conference in Singapore and I feel strongly that I can help adapt corporate travel best practices and knowledge to help make it relevant for Asia.

What are your goals and objectives over the next two years of your presidency?

They are numerous, but my key areas of focus are to further enhance ACTE's global corporate travel education and advocacy capabilities, extend its already significant reach into Greater China, India, Japan and ASEAN, and bring new, innovative and visionary companies and leaders into our association.

In the past decade, corporate travel in Asia has developed from being an area of expertise among MNCs to one which is now pervasive across local, regional

and global Asian-based businesses. We now see strong travel purchasing strategies being deployed in companies of all sizes, and more and more companies are realising the benefits of a well-managed corporate travel programme.

What are the top corporate travel trends in the US and Europe now, and how will they impact Asia in the future?

What will be interesting to watch is whether Asia will leapfrog the US or Europe in the coming year or two in finding new and innovative ways to manage corporate travel. The US and European economies still face significant challenges. Although Asia has slowed since the dizzying heights of the mid-2000s, there is still much to do and lots of opportunity to invest in Asian corporate travel. The region is well placed to continue to invest in its future around corporate travel.

What are the key challenges and opportunities for companies in Asia?

The big challenge is for companies to decide how corporate travel will be managed. Do you want to focus on compliance and company-specific objectives or a long-lasting relationship with suppliers not necessarily based on cost analysis and open sourcing? If you ask me, I believe it will be a balance of the two. Businesses are aware of the need to balance relationships and competition. The big trend among buyers in China is how to apply proper procurement and sourcing processes. It's the same in India and South-east Asia.

Companies such as Lenovo, Haier, Tata, Samsung, Alibaba and Qunar are growing bigger and are expanding their economic base. Will they adopt local or global practices, or blend the two? What's exciting for me is the prospect of meeting the buyers – expatriates and local talent, in particular, which has been emerging in the last couple of years.

Another thing that is very exciting is the technology. It's not the same in Asia like in the past with online booking tools in North America. A lot is being done and can be done with mobile technology and on smartphones. Yes, Asia is fragmented but that gives it vibrancy and its lack of legacy offers a lot of opportunities.

What ACTE initiatives are being planned in Asia, what new innovations?

We are enhancing our education teams worldwide to bring new and innovative networking and learning opportunities to our Asian events, including more in-depth workshops on hot topics, utilising interactive technology and social media to engage our members and attendees to make our events more “alive”. We’re also going to some new and exciting locations in Asia to continue to spread our vision for the corporate travel industry.

There will be different types of learning opportunities. ACTE started exploring virtual conferences in 2012 and it looks more feasible now with the technology. In Asia, budgets and visas can be an issue, so we want to offer a range of options.

ACTE will go where the buyers are, Central Asia, Kazakhstan where there are big oil and gas government-linked, state-owned enterprises, Chengdu and Harbin. India, for example, is being looked at as a more specialised market needing specialised events. Japan is underserved and we are addressing it.

ACTE is also looking at new destinations and may move the ACTE Asia Education Conference, which has been in

Singapore for many years, to stay fresh. If we do move the conference there will be other events in Singapore.

Watch this space as we will be announcing the exciting locations for all our 2014 events very soon, including some new locations for events in Asia.

We are getting different feedback from different regions regarding membership and we are looking at a different fee structure as a top priority. It will be a different model by 2014.

Why did you put your name down for the ACTE President's role?

I do spend a fair bit of time on ACTE since being elected to the board in 2012 as the Asia Region Board Representative. But it is worthwhile because I get to meet other industry peers and suppliers, which is very valuable, and learning from them is beneficial for what I do at Rio Tinto. It's win-win.

What new destinations will you be travelling to in the coming year as ACTE president?

As ACTE is a truly global organisation, I will be attending board meetings, conferences, events and networking opportuni-

ties on nearly every continent to connect with as many people as possible.

How do you balance work and family life, and what keeps you sane on the road?

Thankfully, my family loves to travel as much as I do. So at every opportunity I either meet them before or after a business trip or we plan our holidays on the back of my work travel. Also, my son, who is now seven years old, knows how to use the video applications on our smartphones so we can chat face-to-face rather than just talk on the phone. This has made a world of difference in sharing my travel experiences with him.

What are the three most important things on your checklist before you leave for the airport?

Passports – I hold US and Australian citizenship, mobile phone, and at least one complete set of clothes.

If there is one thing you could change about your business trips in 2014, what is it?

Have more of them and to take my family with me on all of them!

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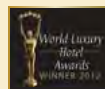
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Remedy needed for an unbalanced client-supplier system

“Dear doctor, could you propose a solution first for my psoriasis, and I’ll pay you during or after recovery? And yes, this will be a house call.”

Funny as it sounds, this equivalent situation occurs too often in the MICE industry, with the exception that most clients have gotten used to asking for and getting exactly that.

This is a systemic economic imbalance where the client’s brief – often too brief – results in a potential avalanche of requests from one or more agencies to a plethora of suppliers worldwide, as clients expect a full and detailed proposal. Thus, with minimal risk to the requester and yet plenty of time risk to the agency and its partners, exponential amounts of time are spent down the line in crafting proposals (that may not eventually be taken up by the client).

It is time to address this industry-wide abuse, beginning with having clients better understand the time, effort, talent and other resources required to craft every proposal, especially when it’s ‘urgent’.

Free quotes and proposals should be restricted to products and services requiring little to no customisation.

A simple solution could be to impose pitch fees that go into credits for future projects even if the project is not won, if not outright cash for the professional efforts exerted. This would certainly help clients in issuing more definite, detailed and relevant briefs and with more circumspection.

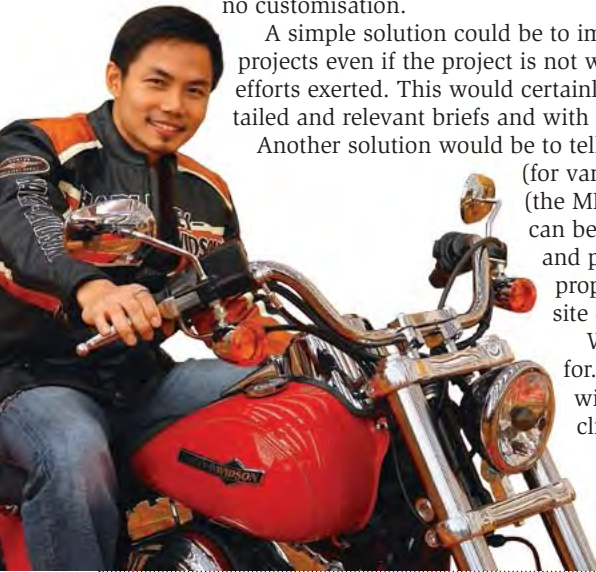
Another solution would be to tell clients upfront what the professional rates (for various components) are, based on the key value (the MICE agency can) provide. These (components) can be: research and concept; sourcing; planning and production, which can be a percentage of the proposal creation costs; communications; and on-site event management.

We tend to value more what we need to pay for. The industry must ease itself of an abuse that will lead to the longer term detriment of the client-supplier eco-system.

More suggestions, anyone?

Daniel Chua

Head MICE architect, Aonia Singapore



Hoping for the best

Thailand’s MICE industry is once again affected by (internal) political turmoil, but we will never give up and will keep on offering great experiences to our clients.

We liken the political crisis to *Muay Thai*, an activity that we offer to groups through a boxing ring set up at Lumpini Park, complete with branded outfits and boxing gloves. While *Muay Thai* is a sport that can be concluded with winners and losers, the same cannot be said of the crisis in Thailand – it does not seem to end. I hope it will come to an end soon with victory to all Thai people.

Suwat Jirahswakedilok

Executive director, Oriental Events

Price war impacts industry’s competitiveness

The ongoing price war locally and regionally is counterproductive as significant discounting merely dilutes the product and ultimately, quality, and standards suffer.

Discounting has certainly made Malaysia less competitive compared with her neighbours, Singapore and Thailand.

To create a dynamic and competitive industry, instead of discounting, the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre value-adds so we can continue to provide quality products while still being able to meet clients’ expectations.

Clients are prepared to pay if they are assured of a quality experience. This is where Malaysia should be positioning herself – providing products and services of international standards versus discounting, especially when it comes to business tourism.

Peter Brokenshire

General manager, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre



What's next?

Luxe you can afford – read our cover story in *TTGmice* April on new mid/upscale hotel brands that are hitting Asia. Also, journey with us to **Australia, China, Indonesia** and **South Korea** where we will discover what these destinations can offer your business events.



Do you have an interesting observation on current trade issues or feedback

on a recent event that you would like to share? Or perhaps you have something to say about a story in the last issue of *TTGmice*, or would like us to feature certain destinations or topics in future issues?

We would love to hear from you. Write to us at mice@ttgasia.com with “TTGmice Mailbox” in the subject header.

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19 - 21 August 2014

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“The event gave us the opportunity to expose and publicise our hotel to potential buyers.”

Eric Ng, Royal Plaza Hotel, Hong Kong

“Excellent show with a great buyers profile. It gave us the opportunity to network and promote our brand.”

Ashish Seriga, Creative Travel, India

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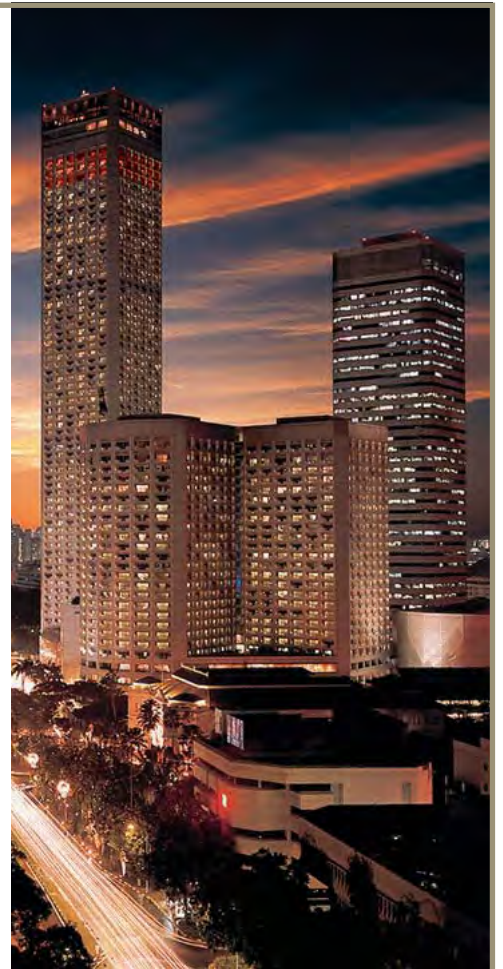


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