

April 2014

TTGmice

Asia-Pacific's leading meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions resource

The Melbourne vibe

Shanghai's superstar DNA

TCEB's new president talks
about online empowerment

Event planners race to
cater to a growing Muslim
MICE market

Luxe you can afford



With corporate budgets downsized, here's a guide to a slew of new mid/upscale hotel brands in the region, many with MICE capabilities



Hong Kong, The World's Meeting Place

Open up new opportunities. Enjoy world-class infrastructure and services. Capitalize on Asia's premier destination for meetings, incentive travel, conventions and exhibitions in the strategic gateway to China, where every handshake brings new potential.

As an incentive destination, Hong Kong is both exciting and awe-inspiring. This vibrant city is the perfect place to not only revitalise and recharge incentive winners, but also to motivate each other to reach even greater heights.

The Top Agent Award Program (TAAP)

Specially designed for MICE planners and agents in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and The Philippines, TAAP aims to keep Hong Kong the top-of-mind destination amongst industry experts and professionals. The program, which ran from June 2013 to 31 January 2014, had since attracted tremendous interest and positive feedback from the travel trade.

The backbone of TAAP is the Hong Kong Rewards Privilege Programme which is to provide an unparalleled

experience for visitors. Hong Kong Tourism Board and its partners have teamed up to offer a host of specially devised events. The programme is offered to groups of 20 or more staying for a minimum of two consecutive nights in Hong Kong. The offer ranges from welcome gift bags, airport meet and greet, lion dance to exclusive helicopter ride for VIPs.

Top agents of each country competed closely to vie for their first and second place in the category of "Number of Passengers and Number of Groups to

Hong Kong". After close to seven months of continued efforts, 20 top agents in the region were born and recognised at the Top Agent Awards Cocktail and Dinner on Mar 6, 2014. The ceremony didn't only mark a good time for the participants but a successful conclusion to the program. The winning agents are entitled to marketing funds that will be used to market Hong Kong in the coming months.

Congratulations again to the Top Agents of Hong Kong!

Winning Agents of Top Agent Award Program (TAAP)

	Category 1 Number of Passengers	Category 2: Number of Groups
Singapore	Safe2Travel Pte Ltd Chan Brothers Travel Pte Ltd	Dynasty Travel International Pte Ltd Commonwealth Travel Service Corporation Pte Ltd
Malaysia	Boustead Travel Services Sdn Bhd AF Travel Sdn Bhd	BMC Travel Sdn Bhd Orex Travel & Tours Sdn Bhd
Thailand	Sogo World Travel Co Ltd Bonus Travel Co Ltd	Bangkok Travel Club Co Ltd Creasia Travel Network Co Ltd
Indonesia	Panorama Tours Travel 10	Avia Tours & Travel AntaVaya Tour
Thailand	Royal Travel & Tours Inc Grand East Asia Travel & Tours	Rosch Travel & Tours Inc Griffin Sierra Travel Inc.



A Place for Team Building

Hong Kong's rich culture and heritage present ideal opportunities for delegates to immerse themselves and gain new insights through teambuilding activities. Delegates may indulge in fun activities like **Dim Sum Cooking Lessons** and gain cultural insights into **Lion Dances** and **Cantonese Opera**, while the **Dragon Boat Racing** and **Drumming Class** are guaranteed to get teams working in unison. The more energetic types can literally learn the ropes aboard the **Bounty** replica of the mutinous navy ship. The **Film Academy** lets participants test their skills both behind and in front of the camera, and produce their own film as a memento. Even more testing are the two **Dialogue** exercises, which help participants develop communication skills when limited to visual or hearing senses.



Dragon Boat Racing

For more information,
contact: Meetings & Exhibitions Hong Kong (MEHK)
Email: mehk@hktb.com
Website: www.mehongkong.com

Event Capital of Asia

Hong Kong has a full marketing calendar of events throughout the year, and when planning for an incentive itinerary, there is a trend to leverage on Hong Kong's biggest events to make the incentive trip more interesting.



Hong Kong Halloween Treats

Becoming more popular each year, **Hong Kong Marathon** in early February attracts over 70,000 runners from all over the world; the **Hong Kong Arts Festival**, a month-long extravaganza of performing arts opens in late February; and the **Rugby Sevens** in late March, when fans from near and far gather for sensational sport and relentless partying over a long weekend.

One of the most exciting times that Hong Kong has to offer is during the **Hong Kong Summer Spectacular**. Spanning from June to August 2014, a buzz descends upon Hong Kong within this period as the city indulges itself with sports, parties, shopping, beer, food and music. At the iconic

Victoria Harbour, muscled athletes from around the world gather to duke it out to claim the top prize in the **Dragon Boat Carnival**. In between the intensity of the races, cool off at the **BeerFest**, where athletes and spectators mingle and enjoy live music and ice-cold beer around the clock.

Shortly after summer, the spooky **Hong Kong Halloween Treats** and the intoxicating combination of fine wines and culinary delights amid a stunning harbour backdrop in **Hong Kong Wine and Dine Festival** sparkle every moment of your guests in October and November.



Hong Kong Wine and Dine Festival

As a city that inspires and brings out the best in people, where around every corner lingers a magical surprise, Hong Kong offers a treasure trove of programmes and special venues with themes to converge team spirit and guarantee your incentive trip will be a resounding success and full of memorable moments.

For more information, visit
www.discoverhongkong.com/mice

Hong Kong Tourism Board congratulates the top agents from Southeast Asia



Contract Hong Kong Business Session



Prize Award Presentation for winners from Southeast Asia



Hong Kong Tourism Board, Ms Daisy Lui & Safe2Travel Pte Ltd, Mr Steve Fung



Dynasty Travel International Pte Ltd, Mr Clifford Neo



Chan Brothers Pte Ltd, Ms Chan Guat Cheng



Boustead Travel Services Sdn Bhd, Mr Choo Kok Leong



Orex Travel & Tours Sdn Bhd, Ms Wendy Au-Yeong



AF Travel Sdn Bhd, Ms May Lim



Sogo World Travel Co Ltd, Mr Peerapong Tanvittayanont



Bangkok Travel Club Co Ltd, Mr Annon Timman



Creasia Travel Network Co Ltd, Ms Panjai Krutphan & Mr Pornthep Tengthanakit



Panorama Tours, Ms Shelvi Wijaya & Mr Alex Djunisap

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Raini Hamdi
Senior Editor

Pick the middle ground

The middle ground in hotel accommodation is being redefined. This is the space between 3.5 stars and 4.5 stars. It's not a hole (budget, self service and no amenities) and it's not luxury, so it's the ideal accommodation type for mid-level managers, owners of small and medium-sized firms, and even the more cost-conscious C-level executives of larger companies.

Asia is full of these people. They form the new breed of road warriors across the region – value-discerning, mobile, tech-savvy, time poor, connection-hungry – who are by no means just work horses; they have aspirational human needs and desires too. But not at any price.

The rise of this market as a result of growing economies from Indonesia to India, Cambodia to China, has led to a proliferation of new midscale and upscale hotel brands. Whereas in the past it's common for international hotel chains to elbow their brands through in Asia, today these big chains are joined – indeed, challenged – by homegrown Asian companies which believe they may have the upperhand in the race to be the most relevant midscale/upscale brand, being based in Asia and having a leg up on Asian travellers' needs and wants.

As a result, planners have a lot more choices with midscale/upscale brands, all of which are raring to plant more flags in the region. Aside from more affordable rates, for most, the brand standard also outlines provisions for MICE facilities and services.

Competition produces innovation. Next Hotels by Silverneedle Hospitality, for example, features an 'In Transit' zone comprising full shower facilities, luggage storage lockers, recliners, free WiFi, etc, for guests to use during early check-in or while waiting for a late flight after checking out. At Pentahotels, in place of traditional coffee-break settings are 'Timeout Zones' – unconventional break areas that often feature a popcorn machine, foosball table, LED TV and comfy seating with set-ups for casual refreshments.

I say, midscale/upscale has never been sexier. And about time too.



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COVER STORY

22 Luxe you can afford

Asia-Pacific will see the highest room rate increases compared with North America and Europe, but you don't have to put your road-warriors in a hole. Raini Hamdi guides you to a string of new mid/upscale hotel brands in the region, many with MICE capabilities

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Shanghai may not be the country's top MICE destination, but no other Chinese city has the same star quality and power. Caroline Boey finds out more

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With better infrastructure and connectivity, secondary cities are making headways in capturing the MICE market. By Mimi Hudoyo

38 Playful Seoul

After years of successful courtship with global congresses, Seoul is now flaunting more of its fun side to garner more incentive wins. By Karen Yue

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As a city with a dance style named after it, Melbourne is so cool it can hot up corporate events with its quirky city tours, unique dining concepts and fun new attractions. Karen Yue dives in to find out more

TTGmice

www.ttgmicem.com

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We love



Bar stories

Bond may prefer his martini shaken, but celebrated cocktail master Javier de las Muelas shows that a stirred martini – a dry martini to be exact – can be as remarkable. In fact, if Bond was real, he would have to admit that de las Muelas' gin and vermouth concoction was the most remarkable liquid to ever pass his lips – the master had spent 35 years to perfect this cocktail after all.

To take a swig of de las Muelas' dry martini, one no longer need to travel miles from Asia to his award-winning Dry Martini bar in Barcelona. One only has to strut down to Four Seasons Singapore's One-Ninety Bar by Javier de las Muelas.

Tucked away in a quiet corner on the hotel's ground floor, the rejuvenated bar offers a handsome indoor space that is furnished with a long marble bar, plush seats and bottle-lined shelves, as well as Terraza, a lush outdoor seating area and cigar bar. The sophisticated setting makes it perfect for intimate business gatherings and celebrations, although full private hire is not allowed.

One-Ninety Bar by Javier de las Muelas also seduces patrons with a selection of classic and signature cocktails, such as the refreshing Frozen Apple Martini. Tantalising bar bites such as crispy calamari with lime and chipotle aioli and mini Wagyu sliders complete the whole experience.

Stop by from 08.00 to 01.00 or call (65) 6831 7671 for reservations.

Nijo Castle in Kyoto opens gates to corporate events

Event planners looking to host gatherings in historical Kyoto will get a new option. UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site, Nijo Castle, in central Kyoto, will welcome business events from April and has appointed 12 coordinators to market and promote events on site.

Ovation Global DMC's strategic partner in Japan, The J Team DMC, is the only specialist DMC on the list, which comprises local hotel, media, event, travel and catering companies.

James Kent, sales and marketing manager, The J Team DMC, told *TTGmice*: "Our bid included a wide range of ideas that covered teambuilding, reward and award, workshops and training, as well as parties. I see potential for smaller, tailored events at the castle."

Kent said Nijo Castle was included in a couple of proposals for autumn, and it is possible for a piece of business to materialise by spring or summer.

The castle's exterior space is available for gala dinners for up to several thousands of people depending on the size of the marquee, while an indoor area can be booked for meetings with about 200 guests.

The primary concern is damage to the property, so no

catering is allowed within the castle building and proper preparations in marquee set-ups are needed.

Kent said: "One of the reasons Nijo Castle is opening up to MICE events is to help raise funds for its current restoration projects. This is a fantastic opportunity for CSR-minded companies to make a valuable contribution to the preservation of a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site by donating to the fund, and receiving recognition for it."



Fresh ideas

Popular Hong Kong attraction Ngong Ping 360 is gaining a new lease of life with a sensory tourism programme to debut this year, including fresh performances and MICE space.

The Monkey Theatre at Ngong Ping Village will be relaunched in 2Q with a 3D theatre and a live theatre for action-packed performances themed on classic Hong Kong movies. By the end of the year, additional themed activities such as movie stunt demonstrations will commence at the Village.

Stella Kwan, head of commerce for the attraction, said the revamp of Monkey Theatre costs more than HK\$30 million (US\$3.9 million).

Part of the Ngong Ping 360 terminal will be converted into a new, 310m² MICE venue from 3Q, called 360 Dialogue.

"Our team started approaching corporates in recent months to market our new one-day MICE programme, combining a half-day Dining In Silence session for food appreciation and interaction in total silence, with optional activities such as hiking and visits to Tai O," said Kwan.

Other programmes to begin in the second half of 2014 include the Aerial Wire Experience, while it will offer accommodation packages and afternoon tea tours for the first time.

Ngong Ping 360 has also implemented a new online ticketing system allowing mobile ticketing and reservation of return trip tickets. A new audio guide can be downloaded via WeChat. – Prudence Lui

Luxury on the high seas

The Royal Albatross, hailed as the first luxury tall ship in Asia, has reached the shores of Singapore and will begin operations from the middle of this year.

To be berthed at Resorts World Sentosa's waterfront for the next three years, this 47m long, four-mast ship can be chartered for private and corporate events.

It has five cabins, two bars and spacious open decks with a maximum passenger capacity of 200 when docked, up to 149 guests for day or evening cruises, and up to 10 for overnight voyages.

Peter L Pela, Tall Ship Adventure's owner and managing director, said: "The Royal Albatross is targeted at discerning high-wealth private charter or senior executives for corporate charter and is ready to take on their events."

To create tailored experiences "on a scale unlike any other", Pela said the ship, which is fully equipped with audiovisual equipment for presentations and satellite communications, offers the romance of a magnificent tall ship with historical and traditional elegance.

Pela pointed out that the multifunction Grand Salon

which contains a bar will appeal particularly to corporate guests. This space can hold approximately 60 guests in a fully air-conditioned environment and has built in audiovisual systems and customisable lighting.

Depending on the client's needs and requirements, they can opt for an alongside charter – where the ship is docked throughout the event – or a cruise voyage where the ship will sail around Singapore.

– Paige Lee Pei Qi



New spot on the coast

Sheraton Mirage Resort and Spa on the Gold Coast has unveiled Pandanus, a new flexible boutique venue suitable for up to 200 delegates. Formerly the Rolls Nightclub, the venue offers 350m² of indoor space, high speed Internet, built-in audiovisual systems and an outdoor terrace ideal for welcome gatherings and working lunches. Pandanus joins the resort's extensive collection of event venues, which includes the Mirage Grand Ballroom for up to 1,000 guests in a reception setting.

Good learning values

A new suite of activities that invites corporate event delegates to celebrate the customs of indigenous Australia is now on offer at Ayers Rock Resort in the Northern Territories.

Indigenous Encounters, promoted by Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia, has been designed to cater to groups of all sizes. Activities include traditional *Inma* dance and welcome, dot painting workshops, aboriginal campfire tours, performances by cultural dancers, an indigenous dance workshop, traditional aboriginal games, a didgeridoo session, spear and boomerang throwing lessons, and a teambuilding session created around boomerang painting.

A two-hour round-robin teambuilding session that features any four of the above activities costs A\$75 (US\$67) per person.

Besides *Indigenous Encounters*, Ayers Rock Resort also offers an insightful 30- to 60-minute presentation on the Indigenous Training and Development activities that are conducted by both the National Indigenous Training Academy and Mutitjulu Foundation.



HOT DEALS

Sheraton Macao Hotel, Cotai Central

The hotel is providing greater convenience for small meeting groups through a programme called *Meet 24*. Instead of the usual check-in time of 15.00 and check-out time of 11.00, *Meet 24* allows groups to check in and out at any time at no additional cost. The same flexibility is extended to the meeting space, which can also be held for the same duration.

Said to be a first for Asia-Pacific meeting planners and exclusive to Sheraton Macao Hotel, *Meet 24* is available only to members of the Starwood Preferred Planner programme from now till December 19, 2014.

To qualify for the offer, planners must book at least 20 guestrooms per day and a maximum of 100 guestrooms, plus one full-day meeting for all participants. Email sales.macao@sheraton.com for details.

Harbour Plaza 8 Degrees

Located in Kowloon, Hong Kong, the hotel has created a series of full- and half-day packages for conference organisers. Priced at HK\$480 (US\$62) per person, the full-day deal offers complimentary use of selected audiovisual and standard meeting equipment, unlimited coffee and tea throughout the conference, two

refreshment breaks, lunch and other benefits.

Half-day options, with and without lunch, are priced at HK\$390 and HK\$280 respectively.

These packages require a minimum booking of 10 pax, and are valid from now till December 31, 2014. Prices are subject to a 10 per cent service charge. Other conditions apply.

Conference planners can throw in a cooking class at HK\$280 per person.

Contact catering@hp8dcatering.com.

Grand Hyatt Singapore

A discount of five per cent is being dangled by the hotel to encourage meeting clients to go green with their events.

The offer is valid when clients adhere to a five-step green programme that requires clients to plan ahead by providing the hotel's event team with all information and event orders 10 days in advance to reduce the use of last minute resources; order only from the hotel's sustainable menu; distribute meeting materials from a single, central location so that attendees can take only what they need; set meeting rooms at reasonable temperatures; and ban the use of water bottles.

Meeting deals at the hotel are now priced from S\$115** (US\$91**) per person and include a welcome break, two coffee breaks and lunch, suitable for groups of 10 to 350 guests.

Email singapore.grand@hyatt.com.

Semara Luxury Villa Resort, Uluwatu, Bali, Indonesia

The seven-villa resort set on 7.5 hectares of manicured tropical gardens on the cliffs of Uluwatu, some 15km from Bali's Ngurah Rai International Airport, offers a basic meeting package at US\$70 per pax for a full-day meeting. It includes use of a meeting room for eight hours, standard meeting audiovisual equipment and stationery, morning and afternoon coffee break, three-course set lunch, mints and water.

The half-day option costs US\$10 less.

Prices are subject to taxes and service charge, and other terms and conditions.

The property can tailor packages to the requirements of the client.

Email info.uluwatu@semararesorts.com.



Semara Luxury Villa Resort

Cruise in style

Not on the high seas but down a railroad around the Japanese island of Kyushu. The new Seven Stars luxury sleeper train, which offers seven carriages with 14 well-appointed and uniquely designed suites, showcases the best sights of the destination. Over two- or four-day courses, travellers can indulge in local cuisine, luxuriate in hot springs, feast on Kyushu's natural scenery and learn about the island's history and culture.

Dining on board the train is possible too, at Jupiter, which serves seasonal cuisine.

Prices start from 155,000 yen (US\$1,513) per person for a two-day option, inclusive of all transportation costs incurred during the programme, meals, sightseeing, entertainment and accommodation.

Advance bookings are recommended. Visit www.cruisetrain-sevenstars.jp/en/ for more information.

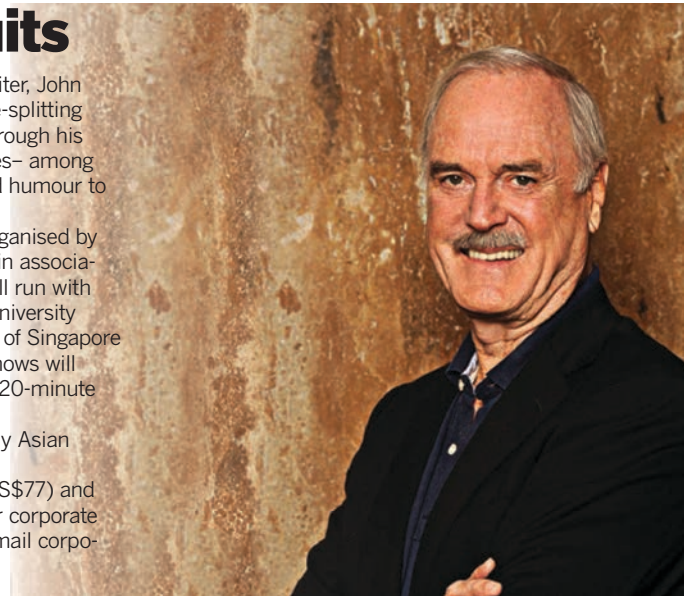
Happy pursuits

Celebrated comedian, actor and writer, John Cleese, who has brought many side-splitting laughter to audiences worldwide through his Monty Python films and TV sketches— among many others – will bring his wit and humour to Singapore in May.

An Evening With John Cleese, organised by Singapore-based LA Comedy Live, in association with Adrian Bohm Presents, will run with two shows on May 4 and 5 at the University Cultural Centre, National University of Singapore at 20.00. Cleese's family-friendly shows will comprise two separate acts, with a 20-minute intermission.

This will be Cleese's first and only Asian performance for his 2014 tour.

Tickets are priced from S\$98 (US\$77) and sold through www.sistic.com.sg. For corporate bookings, call (65) 6324 0764 or email corporate@la-comedylive.com.



Ciao

After cocktails/
dinner at this
new riverside

Italian restaurant of
the Mandarin Oriental,
Bangkok, your group would
loathe to say goodbye.

Raini Hamdi writes why

When the sun goes down, the riverside terrace of the grand old dame never fails to take the breath away. Twinkling with lights from decorated trees, and full of life with traditional boats and private party cruisers plying the Chao Phraya, it is a setting that will wow delegates, especially those from overseas. Add to this the heritage hotel's new Italian restaurant, Ciao, whose mission is to create a chilled and relaxing atmosphere. That, I felt right at the start as the whole team welcomed me warmly.

MICE application

Ciao's size and layout are right for a small group. Its open-air restaurant seats 54 pax. A clear advantage is everyone will be together in one spacious area, yet this space is fashioned intimately, with a striking bar as the centre-piece decor, not to mention that your guests could admire the beautiful building of the Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok itself from where they sit. The disadvantage is, in some months it will be hot and humid, although I understand there are plans to install fans that blow cold air.

If you have a corporate group of just eight pax, you might want to take up the Chef's Table section. But you will lose the river setting, as it's tucked at the back of the restaurant.

The advantage though, is this section is air-conditioned.

Planners can take up the entire 54-pax alfresco area for a private function at a minimum charge of 350,000 baht (US\$10,781) to 450,000 baht in the low season.

F&B concept

In keeping with the chilled and relaxing mission, Ciao's menu is delightfully down-to-earth, yet innovative, comprising both classic Italian and 'Spuntino' (ie, Italian tapas). Our parma ham bruschetta, for example, had parmesan over it, which gave the taste a new dimension, a trick I quickly squirreled to the back of my head, to use when I'm cooking at home. Seaweed in the slow-poached tiger prawns with pomelo salad added a new dash. Chef Luca Casini draws new interpretations of classic dishes from his experiences across Europe and Asia. The result is fine Italian, but one that does not take itself all too seriously.

So we ended up with the happy predicament of deciding what to eat because most dishes on the menu were enticing. For Italian food aficionados, there was even a list of Luigi Guffanti cheese selection and a list of

Levoni salumi selection on the menu.

Service and ambience

There was a lot of happy chatter and laughter – the kind of 'buzz' you'd expect in a good Italian. It's hard not to feel fashionable in this restaurant, a 70 million baht investment by the hotel which engaged Fenn Design, Hong Kong to create a stylish venue that has a warm, natural and easy gait to it.

Capping it all are service staff who are confident, friendly and attentive in an intuitive way. I can't remember the last time a service staff in Bangkok made a smart suggestion to me, such as the Ciao staffer who suggested getting us some starters while we studied the menu. In between courses, she also asked if we were ready for the next course.

Ahh, this is Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok after all.

Contacts

48 Oriental Avenue, Bangkok 10500, Thailand
Email: Mobkk-Ciao@mohg.com; website: mandarinoriental.com/bangkok

Opening hours

17.00-01.00 (drinks and snacks)
18.00-22.30 (dinner)



Museum date

Sydney's Australian National Maritime Museum has gained a new venue with the launch of the Lighthouse Gallery this month. Converted from an existing exhibition space, the Lighthouse Gallery is set on the waterfront and flanked by the museum's own lighthouse. It is equipped with leading event technology and supported by an experienced events team and catering experts, Laissez-Faire.

Bookings can be made now for events to be held from the beginning of April 2014.

The museum has a total of eight function venues now.

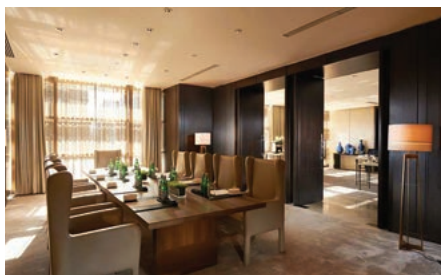
New stay option in Shanghai

Marriott International has launched Shanghai Marriott Hotel Parkview under a long-term management agreement with owners Shanghai Bao Hua Group for its 21st property in the Chinese city.

Located next to Multimedia Valley in Zhabei District and adjacent to the largest green space in downtown Shanghai, Danin Lingshi Park, the hotel is 25 minutes from Shanghai Hongqiao Airport and 45 minutes to Shanghai Pudong Airport.

It offers 317 rooms and suites with views of the park, 2,800m² of meeting space located on a single floor, four dining establishments, a 24-hour fitness centre, an indoor swimming pool, a golf practice green, a tennis court and the Executive Lounge on the 23rd floor.

Shanghai Marriott Hotel Parkview is said to be the only hotel in Shanghai city centre to house two pillarless ballrooms. The larger offers 1,400m² of space, while the smaller spans 1,000m². There are also five flexible function rooms for event planners to choose from.



Waldorf Astoria lands in Beijing

The luxurious 176-key Waldorf Astoria Beijing has opened in China's capital city, on the former site of Xianliang Temple. It brings with it three restaurants, 796m² of meeting space and other facilities.

Guestrooms include 28 suites in the main hotel tower as well as the Waldorf Hutong Villa, three Hutong studios and a room housed in two villas with private entrances located in a garden courtyard.



Ristorante Da Valentino

Singapore boasts many Italian restaurants which planners can book for corporate events, but few are as enchanting as Valentino's, which now has more MICE options.

By **Raini Hamdi**

Stepping into this restaurant, your group will likely be pleasantly surprised by the real feel of Italy it emanates, and will soon forget they are in Singapore. Ristorante de Valentino has been around for nearly a decade, but moved to a new and larger location last year. It spared no effort in creating the look and feel of a warm, inviting home in an Italian countryside, yet one that is in keeping with the times. Authenticity, excellent classic Italian food and the all-embracing charm of the Valentino family – chef/founder Valtulina, his papa, mama, sister and brother-in-law – make up the concoction that makes a gathering here an enchanting experience.

MICE application

I love the long private dining room with its stone-clad walls, family photos, paintings, flowers and fittings from Italy. I can imagine a corporate group quickly bonding over lunch or dinner here. The room accommodates 55 pax and can be divided into two separate rooms for smaller groups.

If you have a bigger group, the main dining area seats 95 pax and an alfresco area seats another 30 pax. Like the private dining room, the main dining, though large, looks cosy, intimate and quintessentially Italian, with imported Italian bricks on some walls and Italian

paraphernalia placed at nooks and corners. During my dinner, I was super comfortable – there was no air-con draft on my food, or on me, which happens all too often. I learnt that the AC units were placed on the floor in various locations, instead of on the ceiling as in many restaurants. To me, these are the details that show Valentino's passion for the business and the extent it cares for guests.

The alfresco area lets your group dine amid nature, with lots of potted plants, plants on trellises and sounds of chirping birds and trickling water from a small fountain.

Car launches can be done at Valentino's as doors from the alfresco section can be opened to let the car into the main dining area.

F&B concept

The F&B concept is classic Italian, enhanced by Chef Valentino's confident approach, creativity, a bit of Mama's influence no doubt, and the use of fresh and seasonal ingredients imported from Italy. My penne with veal ragout, and osso buco using Mama's recipe, were delicious.

Planners can choose from the extensive a la carte menu or set menus, or tailor a menu to suit clients' F&B requirements.

Valentino's also boasts a beautiful wine cellar featuring specially selected wines from north to south Italy, in half-bottles to magnums and at a wide range of prices. But I do find the wine prices to be a little on the high side.

Service and ambience

Beyond their charisma, the family are at heart real cooks and hosts, which is why they have such a loyal following. The crew is loyal too and has imbibed the affable manners and natural ways of the family. These are ways that make you smile, relax and feel you're dining at an old friend's place rather than a commercial restaurant.

Contacts

200 Turf Club Road #01-19 Singapore 287994
Email: ristvale@singnet.com.sg; website: www.ristorante-da-valentino.com

Opening hours

12.00-14.30 (last order)
18.00-22.30 (last order)

Asia hot for congresses, but experts warn of attendance leak

By Karen Yue

A new study of the meetings industry conducted by *Convene*, the magazine of the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA), has found that more respondents are looking to bring their events to Asia and Australia/Pacific Rim.

Sharing a selection of the results, Sheriff Karamat, COO of PCMA, said 42 per cent of respondents intend to host their events in Asia, compared to 38 per cent in 2013, while 28 per cent are keen to take their events to Australia and the Pacific Rim, over 21 per cent last year.

The study is conducted every year and draws responses from its members who are planners in the meeting, convention, event and tradeshow industries.

While this is positive news for Asian destinations and sellers keen on attracting trade and association events, specialists warn that congresses that shift from Europe or the US to Asia-Pacific tend to lose delegate numbers due to the greater distance of travel – and therefore higher cost of travel – needed to get to the shows.

Paul Zimmet, director emeritus, Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute and programme chair of the World Diabetes Congress 2013, told *TTGmice* that congress attendance fell from 16,000 in Dubai, 2011 to 10,300 in Melbourne last December.

“Distance is always an issue and a loss of attendance was expected when the con-

gress was brought to this region. What we did for the Melbourne event was to strengthen our content with celebrated speakers, using them as carrots to entice more delegates to make the effort to fly here and participate,” Zimmet explained.

Yariv Gal-Yam, associate director, purchasing with Kenes International, shares the same observation. Citing an example, he said a medical association event had 3,000 delegates at its edition in Europe and 2,000 in the US, but only 1,500 to 1,800 are expected to attend an upcoming one in this region.

Besides the longer travel distance, Gal-Yam also blamed the lack of content to cater to the local audience for the attendance attrition. “The language barrier

is a challenge most prominent in Asia and Latin America,” he added.

However, Karamat urged associations and congress planners to look at the big picture: “Taking events to Asia-Pacific gives societies an opportunity to raise their profile and attract new members from the region.”

Karamat also pointed out that not all association congresses are afflicted with this problem, as global associations are seeing a growing number of Asia-Pacific members, with some having as many as 60 per cent of members from the region.

He suggested that concerned associations could try hosting a regional congress first, before rotating the event to Asia-Pacific.



Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre

World Diabetes Congress 2013, held at Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, saw fewer delegates

HRG buys out rest of Hong Kong JV, forms team to grow local business

HRG Hong Kong, which bought out minority joint-venture partner Westminster Travel in February to become wholly owned, has set up a MICE team to target local clients, and serve recently signed global MICE business that is coming on stream in 2014 as well as existing clients.

Tim Hannan, general manager, HRG Hong Kong, told *TTGmice*: “HRG Hong Kong’s Meetings, Groups and Events (MGE) business is very strong and forms part of our growing presence in Asia-Pacific.

“HRG Hong Kong has a strong client base for transient travel and the majority of them have ongoing MICE requirements.



Hannan: will provide full service in-house

HRG Hong Kong has provided support assistance to clients in the past, and can now offer end-to-end MICE service in-house.”

Hannan said HRG recently signed global MICE agreements with Thomson Reuters and Vodafone, both of which would begin trading in 1H2014.

As to what clients were looking for in 2014, Hannan said:

“Gaining visibility of meetings spend is priority for clients this year. They have realised there is great potential for savings, and recognised the need for greater control, compliance and risk mitigation across their strategic meetings management programmes. – **Caroline Boey**

China power

A newly formed China MICE Committee (CMC) of top buyers from some 40 established travel agencies across China will join 30 buyers representing China International Travel Service (CITS) International MICE at this month’s IT&CM China show.

CMC, whose members include CYTS International Convention and Exhibition, China Comfort Travel Group and Xiamen Trip Exhibition Business Services, is expected to field 50 MICE buyers for the annual event in Shanghai.

Buyers from CITS International MICE have buying responsibilities across China and represent a range of corporate, government and association clients.

With the combined support of CMC and CITS International MICE, IT&CM China 2014 is expected to see a total of 480 buyers from the Middle Kingdom.

Gold Coast MICE to gain from games

By Karen Yue

Two upcoming major sports events will give the Gold Coast a significant boost in its branding as a business events destination, said Gold Coast Tourism Corporation chief executive Martin Winter.

The Australian city will host the 2014 Pan Pacific Swimming Championships in August and the 2018 Commonwealth Games in April.

“(These games) give us a big opportunity to attract a myriad of business events in allied activities, such as sports science and sports medicine meetings and conferences,” said Winter, adding that tourism and related businesses in the city and its surroundings will benefit from “big teams that come to the Gold Coast in the lead-up to the games for training and acclimatisation”.

Although athletes participating in the Commonwealth Games would be housed in a Games Village equipped with some 8,000 dwellings, hotels in the destination would benefit from these advance teams, said Winter.

“There are approximately 65,000 beds in the Gold Coast – more than what’s available in most other capital cities – which will provide sufficient accommodation (for the advance teams),” he explained.

Although Winter acknowledged that the city would be packed out and accommodation capacity stretched during the games, he believes that the impact on business events would be minimal as events unrelated to sports and the games would likely



Winter: chance to nab sports meetings

be held “at a different time”.

Winning the games’ hosting rights also presents the Gold Coast new opportunities to market itself to international consumers.

“The Gold Coast is given an 11-minute opportunity during the Glasgow 2014 closing ceremony to promote the destination and the next Commonwealth Games.

Besides that, we will have ground presence in central Glasgow where people can go and get information on the 2018 Commonwealth Games,” he said.

“A string of activities” will be rolled out to promote the destination and the 2018 Commonwealth Games, but details can only be revealed after the conclusion of the Glasgow edition, which will run from July 23 to August 3.

Mantra eyes Asian MICE

Asian corporate groups are now on the target board of Australia-based hotel operator Mantra Group, which has been on an expansion sprint in recent months.

Speaking to *TTGmice*, the company’s executive director of sales, marketing and distribution, Kent Davidson, said the group’s existing and upcoming properties are ready to cater to the corporate market.

Said Davidson: “We have 110 properties in Australia and New Zealand and two in Indonesia today... and most come with meeting facilities.”

An example of a suitable property is Peppers Moonah Links Resort in Victoria’s Mornington Peninsular. The 83-key

resort comes with two championship golf courses, 10 event venues and a 110-seat restaurant, among other facilities.

“We are in touch with global PCOs but I believe we can do more to reach out to Asian MICE buyers,” he said, adding that sales missions to Asia will “diversify from leisure to corporate markets, especially in major business hubs like Singapore, Jakarta and Hong Kong”.

“There is an obvious need to bring our properties to Asia so people in that region can see what Mantra properties are all about,” he added.

Mantra Group first expanded beyond Australia and New Zealand in late-2012 with Mantra Nusa Dua in Bali. The Indonesian island gained a second Mantra Group property with the opening of Peppers Sentosa Seminyak in March.

“We are talking to potential partners in South-east Asia for our expansion, and as much as possible we will have properties with conference facilities,” he said, adding that Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore have been earmarked for future properties. – Karen Yue



Peppers Moonah Links Resort is good for MICE

{ In brief }

Ambassadors appointed for Japan

Eight individuals from Japan’s associations have been appointed by Japan Tourism Agency and Japan National Tourism Organization to promote Japan as a conference destination, communicate the importance of business events to their peers and lend support to bids for conferences in the country. Both tourism bodies have pledged to support these ambassadors in the preparation of bid documents, site inspections and reception hosting, and have plans to increase the membership of the *Japan MICE Ambassador Program*.

Sri Lanka looks east for tourism growth

The Sri Lankan government has approved an additional US\$15 million boost for marketing promotions in growing Asian source markets, with South Korea among the new countries being courted. Passed by the Sri Lankan cabinet in mid-February, the sum will go towards holding and enhancing roadshows and outdoor promotions in South Korea, China, India and Russia over the next two years.

More Bangkok flights for Finnair

Finnair will pad up its winter service between Helsinki and Bangkok with three additional weekly flights, starting December. Between December 30, 2014 and March 27, 2015, the airline will deploy an Airbus A340 in a two-class configuration on the new evening frequencies. Flights leave Helsinki at 20.15 on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays and touch down in Bangkok at 11.00 the following day. Return flights depart on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 12.45 and land in Helsinki at 18.55.

ACTE moves conference to Hong Kong

Hong Kong will for the first time host ACTE’s 13th Annual Asia Corporate Travel Conference from August 6 to 7 this year. It will be held at Crowne Plaza Hong Kong Kowloon East.

{ 2014 Calendar }

April 15-17

IT&CM China
Shanghai, China

April 23-25

WTTC Summit
Hainan, China

May 5-8

Arabian Travel Market
Dubai, UAE

May 20-22

IMEX Frankfurt
Frankfurt, Germany

MICE plans drawn out for Sri Lankan port city

By Feizal Samath

Sri Lanka's southern coastal town of Hambantota is being dressed up as a major MICE centre, second only to Colombo, with a 1,500-seat convention centre and other upcoming facilities set to draw corporate attention, officials said.

"Hambantota will change the landscape for the local MICE market," said Sri Lanka Conventions Bureau (SLCB) general manager, Vipula Wanigasekara, adding that the promotion of the destination will be executed through the Colombo-based bureau.

Hometown of Sri Lanka president Mahinda Rajapaksa, the region has seen a remarkable change in infrastructure over the past few years – the country's second international airport opened in March 2013; the Magampura Ruhunu International Convention Centre, last November; new hotels have opened and more are coming up.

Imran Hassan, a MICE specialist, said Hambantota, 250km from Colombo, has tremendous potential and will be a major attraction once the new extension of the southern expressway opens in March. The expressway, which runs from Colombo to Galle, is being extended by another 35km to Matara, some 90km away.

SLCB's Wanigasekara said the bureau

is in talks with PCO/PEOs to shift some events to Hambantota.

"I am talking to many organisations to showcase Hambantota for their annual events," he said, adding that staging the Asian Youth Games in 2017 in Hambantota will enhance the city as a venue for international events.

"We are building an indoor stadium for the games which will then be converted to an exhibition centre," he said.

Wanigasekara believes that the 375-key Shangri-La's Hambantota Resort and Spa will enhance the region as a MICE venue. The resort, built close to the convention centre, is due to open next year.

"People are always looking for new venues and this is definitely a good option for a meeting," he said.

Sri Lanka will play host to some 50 MICE events this year, up from 40 in 2013.



Hambantota port city

Gold Coast Tourism to debut trade show for MICE buyers

Gold Coast Tourism Corporation will launch the annual *This is Gold Coast Business Exchange* in June, an initiative that will allow local meeting specialists to explore business avenues with more than 40 association and corporate event planners from Australia and South-east Asia.

The event is fully hosted and features a mix of networking events, site inspections and pre-scheduled appointments.

Gold Coast Tourism director of business events, Anna Case, said the event is the result of a collaborative city approach aiming to replicate the success of similar events held on a smaller scale last year.

"The Gold Coast continues to rival Australia's capital cities as a more effective conference and incentive option. Last year the number of business events held on the Gold Coast increased by 28 per cent and we aim to keep these numbers

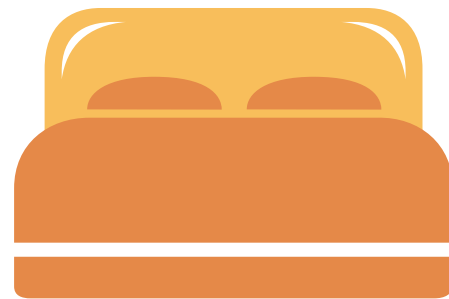
growing.

"*This is Gold Coast Business Exchange* provides association and corporate meeting planners with the most cost-effective and efficient way to research and plan a Gold Coast event, at the same time demonstrating that our city has the infrastructure, range of product and the professional services to deliver exceptional events.

"The event will create new business opportunities, energising the business events sector on the Gold Coast and cementing the destination's position as a world-leading conference, exhibition, meetings and incentives destination."

This is Gold Coast Business Exchange 2014 will be held from June 19 to 21, 2014 at the Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre. A post-event familiarisation trip will follow from June 21 to 22.

{ Talking numbers }



2.5

The year-on-year percentage increase in ARR of hotels in Singapore, pushing the cost of rooms to 175.10 pounds (US\$292), according to the latest study by HRG.

193

The ARR of Hong Kong hotels, making a stay in the destination the priciest in Asia, according to the same HRG study. The amount in pounds registered year-on-year growth of 0.6 per cent. Other "supercities" that exhibited gains in ARR include Shanghai and Beijing with 0.8 per cent and 8.2 per cent growth respectively.

Suntec Singapore nabs 3-year deal with JEC

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

Suntec Singapore Convention & Exhibition Centre (Suntec Singapore) will be the “venue of choice” for JEC Group’s major global events for the next three years.

Convened by JEC Group, the world’s largest organisation dedicated to the promotion of the composites industry, JEC Asia Composites Show & Conferences provides a platform for composites designers, manufacturers and suppliers to showcase their technologies and will take place in Singapore between November 17 and 19, 2014.

In 2014, JEC Asia is targeting 5,000 delegates and visitors, and 300 exhibiting companies from 50 countries.

According to Arun Madhok, CEO of Suntec Singapore, the convention centre’s ability to offer flexible and customisable space attracts the JEC group most.

“The extreme flexibility of Suntec Sin-

gapore’s space allows us to easily accommodate multiple room configurations... we are able to switch room configurations in a very short time and resize meeting rooms and conference halls from one day to the next,” he said.

“Whether an event grows 10 per cent, 50 per cent or 100 per cent from year to year, Suntec Singapore’s flexible space will fit the need without wasting any resources,” Madhok added.

According to a press statement from Suntec Singapore, the growing interest in Asia is driven by the region’s key strategic position for the composites industry, having overtaken the Americas and Europe in terms of production.

Asia represents 41 per cent in production volume compared to 32 per cent in the Americas and 20 per cent in Europe, and is expected to reach 50 per cent by 2015.

Online gains for Rajah

The launch of an online booking tool last year has helped Philippine-based Rajah Travel Corporation gain a 15 per cent increase in inbound business event bookings, most of which came from clients in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Rajah’s president, Aileen C Clemente, told *TTGmice* that “there were barely business event bookings from these markets” prior to the company’s online boost.

The online booking tool was introduced on February 26 last year and upgraded with a payment gateway on February 27 this year, allowing clients to pay right away via the website, www.rajahtravel.com.

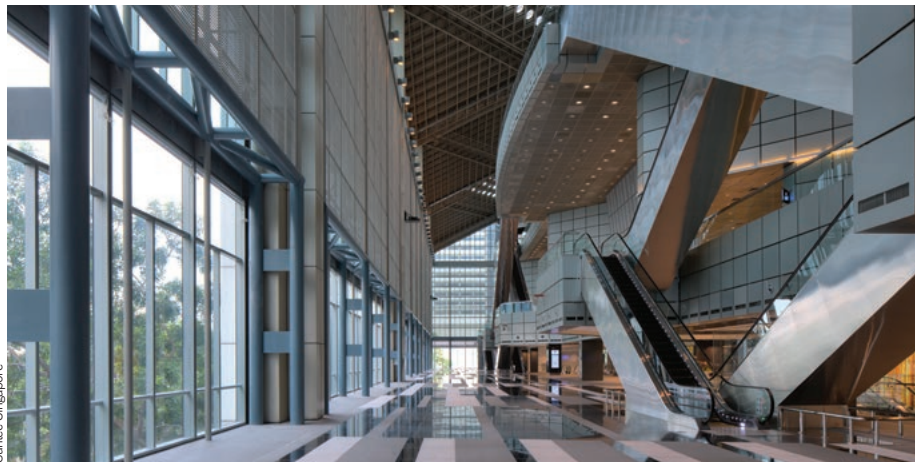
The website showcases destinations worldwide, besides the Philippines, offers sample itineraries of various price ranges and integrates websites of tour suppliers Rajah represents, such as Insight Vacations and Silversea.

“The Philippine Department of Tourism’s aggressive destination marketing efforts complemented our efforts. It is only with greater awareness of the Philippines that clients were motivated to go online to research the destination for business events,” Clemente said.

She projected good years ahead, largely due to “a build up of” positive sentiments as a result of Visit Philippines Year 2015 and the country’s hosting of ASEAN Tourism Forum in 2016.

“We will also benefit from the emergence of new tourism and business event products in destinations such as Manila, Davao, Boracay and Bohol,” she added.

– Karen Yue



Suntec Singapore

Big wins early in the year for Discover Holidays

Singapore-based travel specialist, Discover Holidays (Asia), has reported a strong start to 2014, with 15 events confirmed for the year.

Speaking to *TTGmice* in an interview, managing director, Rodney Yew, said “all contracts are signed” and “some have also paid in full”.

“1H2014 looks set to be better than the same time last year,” he said, adding that several more projects are still in the bidding process.

When asked what had spurred such a performance, Yew credited “hard work from the team in courting clients” last year.

These events will be held in Asia-Pacific and attended by delegates from within the region. They include a 200-pax oil and gas conference, a 150-pax F&B conference, a 120-pax cosmetics conference and a 200-pax IT conference – all planned for Singapore – as well as a 470-pax pharmaceutical meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

“Regional destinations are still most favoured by my clients,” said Yew, whose company specialises in group tours and corporate events from Asia-Pacific and the Middle East.

“Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Melbourne, Sydney and the Gold Coast are getting increasing attention from my clients, which

I believe is due to clients’ clear awareness and understanding of what these destinations can offer.”

Yew observed that clients are more likely to pick destinations they are familiar with, even though there are exciting options available elsewhere.

“For example, while I know that Perth has evolved a lot over recent years and has many fresh experiences to offer, not many of my clients know that and are reluctant to consider it. Destinations must invest in brand building not only in the MICE market, but also in the consumer market because clients are consumers themselves,” he added. – Karen Yue



Citroen's top achievers score a rustic incentive

By David Andrews

MYANMAR The quest for a destination that is far from generic commercial offerings led French car company, Citroen, to choose Myanmar as its incentive destination for distributors and sales managers who had succeeded in achieving loan subscription targets.

Explaining the destination choice, Estelle Vergnes, MICE manager of Exotissimo Travel Myanmar, said Citroen was attracted by Myanmar's ability to offer a blend of culture, beach activities and unspoiled local interaction.

Exotissimo Travel Myanmar was engaged to manage the programme which saw nine groups of 30 delegates each arriving in batches from France. The first group flew into Myanmar on November 13 last year, while the last arrived on March 8.

Programmes for all nine groups were the same, beginning with Yangon before moving on to Bagan, Inle Lake, Ngapali Beach and then back to Yangon. Highlights included breakfast in a monastery on the banks of the Irrawaddy River, dinner prepared by a host family in an *Intha* house illuminated by a hundred candles on Inle Lake, a barbeque on Pearl Island followed by snorkelling, and a gala dinner and party on Ngapali Beach with entertainment provided by a live DJ.

Citroen's latest incentive programme featured Myanmar's rustic side, with dinner with an *Intha* family as one of the many highlights

Philippine Retailers Association wins international congress bid for Manila

PHILIPPINES The Philippine Retailers Association (PRA) has trounced its counterparts in Thailand and Australia in bidding for the 17th Asia Pacific Retailers Convention and Exhibition (APRCE) next year.

Asked what's PRA's winning formula, assistant secretary general, Ana Marie Miranda, said: "We showcased why it's More Fun in the Philippines – both in the retail business side (since attendees are retailers, we highlighted our world-class shopping centres), as well as the tourism side. We made them want to come to the Philippines both for business and leisure."

APRCE is the main activity of the Federation of Asia-Pacific Retailers Associations, which has 17 association members from 17 countries. It is the longest running regional retail conference in Asia, held every two years. The 2013 edition was held in Istanbul, Turkey.

About 1,500 foreign delegates and 2,000 locals are expected during the three-day APRCE at SMX Convention Centre Manila in 2015. The date in September or October is yet to be determined, to ensure it will not clash with APEC Summit.

To boost delegate numbers, Miranda said PRA will "use all forms of media to connect and engage them to make them interested to come and attend. We will



utilise both traditional marketing efforts (ads in local and regional publications, TV, radio, etc.) as well as social media and digital/mobile marketing".

PRA is in the process of preparing the event programme.

"We aim to make APRCE 2015 another world-class regional event to benchmark on so we will be inviting world-class and global leaders in retail. We will also promote pre- and post-event tours," said Miranda, adding that destinations are still being finalised.

When PRA last hosted APRCE in 1993, it won the Kalakbay Award for Event of the Year. – **Rosa Ocampo**

Blood experts to meet in Melbourne, 2019

AUSTRALIA The International Society on Thrombosis and Haemostasis (ISTH) has chosen Melbourne for its 2019 congress, an event that will be held alongside the Scientific and Standardization Committee's 65th annual meeting.

Held once every two years, the ISTH Congress is attended by thousands of the world's leading experts on thrombosis, haemostasis and vascular biology who gather to present the most recent advances, exchange the latest science and discuss the newest clinical applications designed to improve patient care.

Prior to the Melbourne edition, the ISTH Congress will be held in Toronto from June 20 to 25 next year, and Berlin in 2017.



Melbourne wins the favour of ISTH

It's all in a day's work for some event planners from Asia and beyond who were given a memorable introduction to hotels, conference venues, dining destinations and attractions in Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges, as part of **AIME 2014** pre-show programme. Pictures by Karen Yue



The world's tourism players gathered in Berlin in March for the annual **ITB Berlin**, scoring themselves friends and new business deals. Pictures by Patrick Tan



Hong Kong Tourism Board and Macau Government Tourist Office rang in the New Year with a lunch party for trade partners in Singapore



Catering to Muslim MICE



Brunei Tourism

The Muslim MICE market is growing. The momentum to cater for it is rising, **Raini Hamdi** reports

** Additional reporting by Mimi Hudoyo in Jakarta and S.Puvanewary in Kuala Lumpur*

Kuoni Group Travel Experts (GTE) now moves as many as 150 Muslim-only tour groups a year from key Asian markets to European destinations and, increasingly, destinations in the Middle East and the US. These are small families, government groups or large MICE movements with up to 1,000 travellers. Kuoni GTE's head of MICE Sales Asia, Reto Kaufmann, estimates that annual growth could be as high as 30 per cent, with the MICE market increasing fastest.

Last year, the company saw double-digit increases in roomnights booked by group travellers from Indonesia and India, while those from Bangladesh quadrupled. China, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand also offer significant numbers of potential Muslim travellers. China, with a Muslim population of 23 million, recorded a six per cent rise in roomnights booked with Kuoni GTE last year.

According to a Pew Research Centre forum, 72 countries today have a million or more Muslim inhabitants and 60 per cent of them live in Asia-Pacific. Catering to Muslim travellers beyond *haj* and *umrah* pilgrims seems a no-brainer, with rising disposable income and a younger demographic among them. But that it's still a novelty shows how fraught it is with challenges.

One of the fundamental challenges lies

in a lack of understanding that pork-free is not necessarily halal. "(Muslim) travellers who could accept no-pork meals would go to non-Muslim countries, but those who could not will not," said Garuda Indonesia Holidays COO, Widjaya Hadinukerto.

Finding halal restaurants and Muslim-friendly facilities remain the fundamental challenge – even in countries such as India, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and China which have recognised the importance of Muslim travellers, "only parts of the programme comply with Islamic rules", said Dannie Soesilo, commissioner of an Indonesian agency, Sakinah Nurhidayah.

Not all countries have halal certification bodies and in fact rely on travel experts to develop halal products, added Widjaya. Accreditation of agencies is therefore becoming important, Widjaya said.

But being halal, like eating organic, can be expensive, and agency heads like Adam Kamal, general manager of Rakyat Travel Malaysia, expressed angst over operators who keep costs down by taking clients to pork-free restaurants whereas his agency uses only certified-halal ones. "Meals at these restaurants are more expensive and may be out of the popular tourist spots. Thus there is additional transportation cost incurred," Adam said.



Kaufmann: sourcing hotels/restaurants that will go the extra mile in catering to large Muslim MICE groups

Finding halal restaurants that can cater to big groups is a struggle, said Cooper Huang, CEO, Harmony Tours & Travel, Malaysia, who sometimes work with hotel ballrooms but outsource the cooking to chefs from halal restaurants.

Wide open space

The space to cater for Muslim groups is therefore wide open. Last December Kuoni GTE tied up with Crescentrating, a Singapore-based company barely five years old, whose primary business is to help the travel industry cater to Muslim clients through consulting, workshops and market research. It also rates hotels' halal-friendliness and is now moving to accredit more than 100 travel agencies over the next 12 months. Most of these agencies will be from South-east Asia, the initial target market for the first eight curated Muslim tour packages which the partnership launched in February. The tours cover five European cities, Paris, London, Rome, Berlin and Geneva, and are aimed at Muslim MICE and family groups from Asia and Europe.

"Our rating enables travellers to understand clearly to what degree their needs will be met with respect to availability of halal food, prayer facilities, service during Ramadan and level of non-halal activities and amenities in the hotel (for example, alcohol served in the hotel, separate pool and spa facilities, etc)," said COO, Dany Bolduc.

Asked what criteria it uses to accredit travel agencies, Bolduc said: "Three main criteria: They are an accredited travel agency with the local authority, preferably with IATA membership; have staff who have participated in our training workshop and understand the needs of the Muslim travellers; and sell Muslim travellers only packages that comply with Crescentrating criteria for packages."

Although Crescentrating has its own portal with booking engine, halaltrip.com, Bolduc said this till now serves individual and small group travel. Over 50 per cent of Muslims travel in family and/or multi-generational groups, which is why it needs Kuoni, he said. "Offering tour packages requires expertise in the logistics of transporting and managing large groups of people; a channel of DMCs who are experts in local sights and attractions, deep relationships with hotels and restaurants that can offer great quality at an affordable price. Kuoni is a world leader in tour packages," Bolduc explained.

Kuoni in turn needs Crescentrating's expertise on and commitment to halal travel to further bolster its credibility and value-add among Muslim clients. Added Kaufmann: "Part of it is helping to educate Europe's travel trade about



"Our rating enables travellers to understand clearly to what degree their needs will be met with respect to availability of halal food, prayer facilities, service during Ramadan..."

Dany Bolduc
COO, Crescentrating

halal food expectations, family-friendly environments, making allowances for religious practices and gender-related nuances, and that an increasing demand exists.

"We are sourcing hotels and restaurants that can not only meet the needs of large groups of people, but are also willing to go the extra mile and offer added value. European suppliers know that if Kuoni is investing in Muslim-specific tours, we've done our homework and there's a definite market here. We are confident more hotels and restaurants will join the initiative in coming months, so that we have a small number of partners in each of the cities that Asian and Muslim visitors most want to visit."

Going the extra mile

Kuoni itself goes the extra mile by ensuring, say, itineraries are carefully planned to allow for the regular prayer times that many Muslims continue to observe while away from home. It even works with local Muslim communities to arrange joint prayer sessions or exchanges that can

enhance the destination experience.

Asked what he'd wish destinations, airports and other tourism providers would do for halal travel, Bolduc said: "The availability of halal food is critical. Airports need to have halal-certified concessions. Restaurants and food suppliers in destinations would also be well-advised to offer more halal food choices in their establishments."

"Prayer facilities are also important while travelling. Governments have a role to play by raising the awareness of this untapped market to the tourism service sector and encouraging local business to cater to the unique requirements of Muslim travellers."

In its rankings, Malaysia has consistently ranked as the most Muslim-friendly travel destination under the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Co-operation) category. Kuala Lumpur International Airport was also ranked as the top airport in 2013. For non-OIC countries, Singapore and Thailand's Suvarnabhumi International Airport were ranked as the top destination and airport, respectively, in 2013.

"This year's ranking of destinations should be very interesting as a number of countries are recognising the potential of the halal travel sector and making significant in-roads in developing infrastructure and services to attract Muslim travellers," said Bolduc.

Japan, for instance, is seeking to create more user-friendly airports for Muslims, with prayer rooms, ablution facilities, halal food, etc, in the lead up to the 2020 Summer Olympics.

Meanwhile, a US\$170 million resort built on Islamic principles will open in the Maldives in October. A joint venture between Maldives' ADK Group and Turkey's Capris Gold Group, it will offer Muslim-friendly services such as a separate beach for ladies only, certified halal buffet in all restaurants, family-friendly facilities.

Needless to say, no alcohol or pork is sold in this resort.

– See how Kuoni GTE caters to a 600 pax Muslim MICE group to Switzerland, page 18



Kuoni Group Travel Experts

Muslim-friendly destinations stand to benefit from a huge Muslim population with rising disposable income



Prudential Indonesia incentive trip

A memorable shopping experience has been ordered for 1,700 top achievers, and the team at La Roca Village knows exactly how to execute a luxurious welcome, writes **Karen Yue**

Organiser
Panorama Leisure France

Client
Prudential Indonesia

Venue
La Roca Village

Dates
Early May, 2013

No. of participants
1,700

Objective
To provide a luxurious shopping experience for top achievers of Prudential Indonesia as part of a broad incentive programme

Challenges
A personalised welcome was required, as La Roca Village was opened to members of the public at the time of the incentive delegates' visit

La Roca Village in Barcelona, part of the collection of Chic Outlet Shopping villages, welcomed 1,700 Indonesian incentive winners in May 2013.

For smoother logistics, the event organiser, Panorama Leisure France, arranged for the massive group to visit La Roca Village on two different days, with 850 delegates flocking to the luxury shopping paradise each day. A staggered arrival was arranged each day, which saw coaches arriving within a few minutes of each other.

Although it was business as usual for La Roca Village on those mornings, a special welcome was arranged for the delegates.

Four top VIPs from Prudential Indonesia, including its president, received a personal welcome by members of Chic Outlet Shopping's tourism and retail teams.

A welcome banner was also provided. La Roca Village then distributed welcome bags, personalised with the insurance giant's striking corporate colours and logo, to all 1,700 delegates. These goody bags contained a VIP card that granted holders a 10 per cent discount off their purchases.

These came on top of a Welcome Pack that was delivered to the hotel room of 40 special guests prior to the day of their visit to the shopping destination. These gift packs contained a welcome letter from La Roca Village and a small leather bag from GOES-Guy Laroche Furs.

Four hostesses – one at every entrance of La Roca Village – were on hand to greet the delegates in English and Bahasa Indonesia and to assist with enquiries.

And all that was just the beginning.

Several branded boutiques arranged for special hospitality for all visiting top achievers. Refreshments in the form of champagne, juices, water, pastries, sweets and chocolates were served to all delegates, in addition to gifts with purchases and further price reductions.

As it was business as usual for these boutiques, other shoppers were also treated to these surprise perks, said a spokesperson from La Roca Village.

"Some boutiques presented small gifts to the incentive delegates who were identifiable by their welcome bags," added the spokesperson.

The spokesperson pointed out that La Roca Village is no stranger to hosting high-level incentive groups, and had welcomed 1,360 Indonesian guests in organised groups in 2012. Some 824 of these guests were top achievers participating in incentive programmes.

The same level of hospitality was extended to all visiting incentive groups.

Following Chic Outlet Shopping's success with hosting corporate groups, the company launched in September last year a dedicated group and events strategy to appeal to the MICE market.



KUONI GTE

Muslim incentive to Switzerland

The client wants a programme that incorporates alms-giving and daily prayers. **Raini Hamdi** looks at how Kuoni Group Travel Experts comes up with the solutions

Client

Withheld

Destination

Switzerland

Date

May 2013

No. of participants

600

Objective

To fulfil the specific and strict needs of Muslim client

Challenges

Must provide strictly halal food whereas destination does not have enough halal restaurants; must incorporate prayer times into itinerary; must incorporate alms-giving programme; must be an enjoyable and memorable trip

Result

Muslim participants rated the trip their best-ever longhaul trip, according to Kuoni Group Travel Experts

A milestone was achieved by Kuoni Group Travel Experts' (GTE) sales office in Malaysia when it secured a Muslim group of 600 travellers from the country who wanted to go Switzerland.

Beautiful as it may be, Switzerland is not a country that has many halal facilities. Adding to the challenge, the organiser wanted a programme that incorporates two of the five pillars of Islam, almsgiving (*zakat*) and daily prayers (*salat*).

Kuoni GTE studied the religious and cultural background of the group in order to come up with a curated programme.

To meet its priority of giving alms, a get-together with the local Muslim community in Zurich at its community centre in the town was included in the itinerary. Participants were introduced to the Swiss Muslim community there, learnt how it is organised and gained insights into the charity organisations it runs. They then did their *zakat* on the spot to the local Muslim charity organisation of their choice.

The delegates were then moved to enable them attend to their *Maghrib* evening prayer. As the group was large, Kuoni GTE handled the logistical issue by splitting them into several groups to different mosques and prayer rooms across the city.

Another main challenge for this group was the lack of halal restaurants in Switzerland. The client was strict about this requirement. Said Kuoni GTE's head of MICE Sales Asia, Reto Kaufmann: "We had to prove that meals served use ingredients from halal-certified suppliers and were prepared in pork-free kitchens. The restaurants used must neither serve alcohol nor feature any pork items on their regular menus."

In order to meet this requirement, Kuoni GTE turned to Kuoni's two decades of experience and expertise in catering for Indian travellers. Said Kaufmann: "We used

our cost-efficient Indian catering infrastructure to arrange spectacular halal cuisine at various locations across Switzerland.

"For instance, we catered for a picnic lunch in Ballenberg, an open-air museum showcasing traditional buildings and architecture from various parts of the country. There, we incorporated (Swiss activities) such as cheese-making and wood-carving and challenged them with a competition featuring the traditional flag-throwing and alphorn blowing. One of the houses was converted to a 'Swiss Makeover' area, where participants could dress themselves in traditional Swiss costumes and take pictures together with locals dressed in costumes representing the different regions of Switzerland."

Another highlight was a cruise on the pristine Lake of Brienz. On board, participants were served the national dish of Switzerland, roesti (shredded fried potato), along with halal sausages. Participants were delighted as they never thought the dish could be prepared halal-style, said Kaufmann.

Meanwhile, as Asians love shopping, this highlight could not be overlooked. But, as most Muslim travellers from South-east Asia love to shop for souvenirs and hunt for bargains rather than go for luxury goods, Kuoni GTE came up with a 'Swiss *pasar malam*'. This street market shopping style which starts in the evening is ubiquitous in countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, usually in residential neighbourhoods.

Mindful of the behavioural traits of this market when it comes to shopping, Kuoni GTE brought the group to wet and flea markets, to shopping malls with affordable shops, and even arranged for several local street vendors to put up stalls selling Swiss souvenirs in the hotel lobby.



Mark Burns

Dusit annual global workshop

Dusit International proves that Bangkok is still open for business by hosting its annual workshop in the protest-hit capital city as planned, writes
Caroline Boey

Bangkok made the headlines in November last year when protesters returned to the streets over an amnesty bill that would have pardoned Thai politicians, including exiled former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Although the bill was overturned, the protests, led by the opposition, continued.

While the demonstrations were peaceful, it posed a conundrum for business events scheduled to take place in the coming months and the dates of the Dusit workshop would have coincided with the announced January 13 shutdown of Bangkok.

With many of the 100 attendees having to fly to Bangkok to attend the workshop, Dusit International had to carefully weigh its option to proceed, postpone or cancel the workshop.

Catherine McNabb, vice president sales and marketing, Dusit International, said: "After reviewing multiple potential scenarios, we were confident that our team would be safe travelling to/from and staying within the confines of the hotel as we had an extensive security plan in place.

"As a Thailand-based company, it was important to show our solidarity with the city, that despite any political uncertainty, we believed the city would bounce back. As hoteliers, it was important to walk the walk. If we were advising our clients that the city was safe to visit, that tourists and foreigners were not the targets of any demonstrations, then this was the perfect opportunity to demonstrate just that."

The three-day workshop included overseas speakers such as Liu Ping, CEO of China Star; Ananya Narayan, executive vice president, Asia-Pacific, Middle East and Africa, Preferred Hotel Group; Jens Thraenhart, co-founder & president, Dragon Trail; Robin Lokerman, president Asia-Pacific MCI; and Baki Colpan, contracting & reser-

vation manager, Pegas Touristik.

Dusit International eventually had to make some programme changes to work around the ongoing protests. The initial plan was to hold a number of presentations and the Awards Gala Dinner away from Dusit Thani Bangkok. But due to road closures and the desire to save time, all activities were kept in-house. Catering, audiovisual requirements, planning and event design were taken care of by Dusit International and Dusit Thani Bangkok.

Day one of the workshop included free time to explore Bangkok at leisure.

The demonstrations aside, the teams planning and executing the activities for the workshop were faced with the challenges of any meeting planner – budget constraints, developing a programme relevant to a mixed audience, and securing the participation of overseas speakers to add value to the event.

Although the workshop ran smoothly, the protests did impact the Awards Gala Dinner. McNabb said: "Our Awards Gala Dinners are always themed, and this year by coincidence, we chose the theme *Distinctly Thai*. We wanted to hire some costumes so we would have a few participants in full Thai regalia. But we had a hard time finding the costumes as many shops were blockaded by the rallies! Luckily we were able to borrow costumes from the dance troupe that entertained us that evening."

Guest speaker Liu during her presentation commented how much she enjoyed the Thai style of protests – peaceful, colourful, with lots of food and music. She took photographs from D'Sens French Restaurant on the 22nd floor of the hotel, which offers clear views over the demonstrators' camp set up in Lumpini Park and immediately blogged on her website that Bangkok was as vibrant and welcoming as ever.

Event

Dusit International Annual Global Sales & Marketing Workshop

Venue

Dusit Thani Bangkok

Dates

January 12 to 15, 2014

No. of participants

100 from Europe, North America, Africa, and Asia

Objective

Many, including setting priorities for the year, reviewing performance strategies, expanding revenue generating channels, sharing best practices and welcoming new members of the growing international team

Challenges

Determining if it would be safe to convene in Bangkok with the ongoing anti-government protest and threat to "occupy" major road intersections in the capital and shut it down on January 13

8 reasons to host your event at Cotai Strip Macao

It's one of the world's most attractive sites for MICE today, offering MICE planners an endless array of benefits and an unbeatable value proposition.

COTAI STRIP MACAO

At a glance

- Five hotels: The Venetian® Macao, Four Seasons Hotel Macao Cotai Strip; Sheraton Macao Hotel, Cotai Central; Conrad® Macao, Cotai Central; and Holiday Inn Macao Cotai Central
- Number of rooms: 9,000
- Meeting and exhibition space: 120,000 sqm
- Number of breakout rooms: 274
- Cotai Arena: 15,000 seats
- The Venetian Theatre: 1,800 seats
- Dining: 100 restaurants, ranging from food courts to Michelin-starred, with cuisines from around the world.
- Recreation: Spa, golf, gyms, swimming pools
- Shopping: 600 duty-free international brand shops



The Venetian Macao

COTAI STRIP MACAO is truly a treasure trove of ideas and benefits for event planners. Discover exceptional value, variety, convenience and excitement in this special area purpose-built for the ultimate MICE experience.

1 Easy Access

Cotai Strip Macao is easily accessed from Hong Kong, China and Southeast Asia. There are direct flights from 30 cities in China and Asia-Pacific to Macao, plus an additional 180 destinations on over 100 airlines from neighbouring Hong Kong, which is a mere one hour away by ferry. Cotai Strip Macao itself is only five minutes from Macao International Airport or Taipa ferry terminal.

2 Hassle-free group movement

Ground transport can be easily arranged with a large fleet of charter coaches in service. Cotai Strip Macao's own fleet of ferries between Hong Kong and Macao (Cotai Water Jet) can be chartered for MICE groups of up to 330 persons per ferry. Group activities can be easily managed, saving on transport costs and free from interruptions due to weather conditions.

3 Wide range of accommodation

Accommodation is one of Cotai Strip Macao's trump cards, because with 9,000 rooms in 5 hotels, there is something for all group sizes and budgets. Even for large groups numbering more than 10,000, having everyone under one roof is not a challenge.

4 Abundant event facilities

Cotai Strip Macao has 120,000 sqm of flexible meeting and exhibition spaces. Whether its a pillar-less ballroom for 5,000 delegates, private function rooms, concert halls or exhibition venues, they are all connected and within walking distance. From outdoor

pool events to indoor congresses, all is catered for.

5 One-stop event services

Cotai Strip Macao's resident event planner can help you tap its rich in-house resource of audio-visual, floral arrangement, banquet, travel and tour and 200 entertainers providing diverse entertainment, such as Circo Veneziano, Dance Acts, Live Music, Chinese Acts and "Shrek" from DreamWorks, that will wow your delegates at events. It's a one-stop shop with extraordinary flexibility and convenience.

6 Diverse activities for delegates

There is an endless array of entertainment, shopping, dining and recreation to be enjoyed — sports events and concerts at the Cotai Arena and The Venetian Theatre; 100 dining and 600 shopping options; spa, golf and the exciting DreamWorks Experience. There is never a dull moment at Cotai Strip Macao for your delegate to relax after a meeting.

7 Portuguese culture history

Beyond Cotai Strip Macao, Macao itself is well worth exploring on its own, which boasts 25 UNESCO World Heritage sites. From beautifully-restored colonial-era buildings to modern architectural landmarks, Macao's East-meets-West culture and rich array of tourist attractions will delight all.

8 Strong government support

The Macao government encourages MICE planners to bring their events to Macao. Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) provides a 'one-stop shop service' for MICE bidding and support in Macao. The generous Stimulation Programs help defray costs in accommodation, food & beverages, speaker travel, local transport, event promotion and other areas. ■

MICE facilities summary



1 The Venetian Macao

- "The Best MICE Hotel in Macao 2013" by TTG China Travel Awards
- 3,000 suites at 75 sqm each
- 108 meeting rooms
- 25,000 sqm meeting space
- 75,000 sqm Cotai Expo
- 330 stores at Shoppes at Venetian

2 Sheraton Macao Hotel, Cotai Central

3 Conrad Macao, Cotai Central

- Ranked No. 1 hotel in Macao and winner of Traveler's Choice Awards 2014 in China by TripAdvisor.
- 636 guestrooms and suites
- 6,500 sqm of meeting space

4 Holiday Inn Macao Cotai Central

- 1,224 guestrooms and suites
- DreamWorks Experience can be added to your event
- Access to 20,000 sqm of meeting space within Sands Cotai Central
- Pool Deck with views over Cotai Strip Macao for welcome event

5 Four Seasons Hotel Macao

CASE STUDY



Royale Suite at The Venetian Macao

A great success by all accounts

Cook Medical 50th Celebration & Sales Meeting

August 26-30, 2013 • The Venetian Macao

Background

The event was the third Asia Pacific Sales Meeting for Cook Medical, which occurs every three years. 2013 was extra-special as it marked the company's 50th Anniversary and first time spouses participated. 670 delegates, from Asia-Pacific, Europe and US.

Transport arrangements

Planning the logistics for group arrivals, departures and movements were a challenge because delegates came from all over the world. Cotai Water Jet was chartered to bring guests to and from Hong Kong to ensure maximum comfort and convenience. Every delegate was met and greeted upon arrival at the hotel and ushered to a specially set-up Delegates Lounge, where free-flow refreshments are served and a "spa" lets guests enjoy quick foot and back massages. Partner activities such as floral arrangement and mini-bazaars were also held here.

Programme highlights

Theme welcome event: 'BBQs of the World' poolside at The Venetian Macao, with multicultural food stations decorated with red lanterns and some air star lights for ambience.

50th Anniversary Party: Specially-designed Macanese-Chinese menu, tribute singers flown in from overseas by event company and choreographed parade of 100 waiters with sparklers and a birthday cake for each table.

Theme gala night: A richly-decorated "Venetian Masquerade" ball with silver candelabras, huge red rose centerpieces and giveaway masks on each table. Live in-house entertainment by The Streetmosphere, String Quartet and "Three Gondoliers".

Between delegate sessions, partners were treated to various activities, such as cooking classes with the hotel's executive chef.

"What an incredible event we had at your hotel, it was without any doubt the best event Cook Medical has ever had in its entire 50 years."

Barry Thomas Director, Asia Pacific, Cook Medical, on The Venetian Macao



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Opera — business meeting with a difference at The Venetian Macao.

Luxe you can afford



Broadly, Asia-Pacific will see the highest rate increases compared with North America and Europe, according to American Express Global Business Travel Forecast 2014. But you don't have to put your road-warriors in a hole. **Raini Hamdi** guides you to a string of new mid/upscale hotel brands that are hitting the region, many of them boasting MICE capabilities

Additional reporting by **Mimi Hudoyo, Rohit Kaul and Rosa Ocampo**



Ricky Theodores
Vice president
Parador Hotels & Resorts, Indonesia

Atria Hotel & Conference



A classroom set-up at Atria Hotel and Conference Gading Serpong

By Parador Hotels & Resorts, Indonesia

Competitive set Other four-star brands with MICE facilities, such as Mercure, Santika Premier, Novotel, Aston and Harris Hotels

Rate Atria Hotel & Conference Gading Serpong, Tangerang (off Jakarta) from US\$100

Why it is needed According to the Central Statistics Agency, Indonesians undertook about 236 million domestic trips in 2011 and this number will continue to rise with the promising middle-class market. The increasing number of budget airlines will certainly increase the number of domestic travellers in the country. Therefore, our future development

focus will be on midscale brands such as Atria and our three-star Ara Hotels.

How it reinvents mid/upscale A conference hotel focusing on MICE. We accommodate individual business travellers' needs by providing value such as free WiFi connection of up to 10 Mbps.

We aim to become a leading conference hotel in the region, and have dedicated staff to achieve this with a 'warmth & comfort' service philosophy.

How many in operation Four in Tangerang (off Jakarta), Magelang (Central Java) and Malang (East Java)

Expansion plans Five more hotels to open in stages up to 2019

MICE capabilities Atria Hotel & Conference-branded properties target MICE with sizeable meeting rooms.

The Gading Serpong property, for example, has a ballroom which can seat 450 theatre-style, and 10 breakout rooms with capacity for 24 to 60 pax theatre-style. The hotel in Magelang has a ballroom which can seat 1,250 theatre-style, six breakout rooms with capacity for 40 to 100 pax theatre-style and one boardroom for up to 25 pax.

All facilities are equipped with free WiFi. Each hotel has a loading dock at the back of the house. Small outdoor parties can be held at each hotel's swimming pool area.

Positioning





Dillip Rajakarier
CEO
Minor Hotel Group, Thailand



Glenn de Souza
Best Western International's vice president,
International Operations Asia & Middle
East, Thailand

Avani Hotels & Resorts

Best Western Plus



A conference room at Avani Kalutara Sri Lanka



Best Western Plus Grand Howard Bangkok ballroom

By Minor Hotel Group, Thailand
Competitive set Includes Aloft, Angsana, Pullman, Andaz and Hotel Indigo
Rate Lead in price in Sri Lanka tends to be about US\$150** and Vietnam US\$100**
Why it is needed Launched in 2011 to complement the five-star Anantara brand. Avani offers relaxed comfort and contemporary style in city and resort locations to guests who value details that matter.
How it reinvents mid/upscale The name stems from the Sanskrit word, 'earth', which Avani expresses through a grounded personality and simple sense of style. Each resort exhibits a passion for design, an emphasis

on tailoring details to deliver complete satisfaction, and service that is genuine and spontaneous.
How many in operation Three resorts, two in Sri Lanka and one in Vietnam
Expansion plans 2014 will see new additions to the brand in Malaysia (Sepang), Vietnam (Hai Phong), Thailand (rebranding of Amari Atrium Bangkok) and Seychelles Barbarons.
 In the pipeline are Avani properties in Bali, Ambalangoda (Sri Lanka) and a second property in Bangkok. We expect to shortly make an announcement on developments on the African continent.
 We plan to grow the brand across Asia, Africa and the Indian Ocean and in the Middle East.

By Best Western International, US
Competitive set Novotel
Rate On average US\$90
Why it is needed Best Western has traditionally offered customers hotels based on the core values of comfort, value for money and excellent service. But as we expand into new markets, especially in Asia and the Middle East, there is a need to cater for customers who want these qualities, but also that little extra. Best Western Plus offers more upscale amenities and facilities such as a fitness centre, business centre, spacious in-room work areas and a range of products tailored to the needs of each market.
How it reinvents mid/upscale Many international hotel companies operating today start in

the upscale sector, then try to expand into other segments. Best Western, on the other hand, has a proud 66-year history in the mid-scale segment and understands the needs of the everyday hotel customer.
How many in operation 11 in Asia and the Middle East, with just over 1,200 rooms. Thailand and India are our biggest markets for the brand (three hotels each); two in the Philippines and two in Saudi Arabia.
Expansion plans 10 more are set to open in Asia and the Middle East, adding a further 1,700 rooms. Indonesia and Malaysia will see three new Best Western Plus hotels. Firm plans for two hotels in Bangladesh.

MICE capabilities All Avani properties offer meeting facilities. Avani Kalutara and Avani Bentota in Sri Lanka both focus on small to mid-sized meetings and executive retreats, while Avani Sepang Goldcoast Resort, Malaysia has diverse meeting spaces including a grand ballroom that can host up to 1,400 pax. Avani Haiphong Harbour View has flexible seating options catering to meetings of up to 180 pax. Avani Quy Nhon offers two multi-purpose venues with 164m² of total space, catering for up to 120 pax. It also hosts incentive retreats that take advantage of the pristine beach setting with absolute privacy.

MICE capabilities Meeting planners enjoy a seamless experience and a high-level of connectivity, including free WiFi. Best Western offers professional booking services for groups, with online requests receiving personalised responses. Each hotel has its own selection of conference facilities, backed by audio-visual technology. In Bangkok, Best Western Plus Grand Howard, for example, offers six meeting rooms with sizes ranging from 70-900m², making it suitable for events of all sizes, while in the Philippines the Best Western Plus Lex Cebu features two function rooms accommodating up to 100 pax, plus a boardroom for more intimate meetings.

Positioning



Positioning



Luxe you can afford



Iqbal Jumabhoy
MD/group CEO,
SilverNeedle Hospitality, Singapore

Country Comfort



By SilverNeedle Hospitality, Singapore
Competitive set Best Western Plus, Country Inn & Suites, Hampton Inn, Holiday Inn Express, Premier Inn, Travelodge (Australia), Wyndham Garden Hotel
Rate A\$100 (US\$89) to A\$150 in Australia and New Zealand under the existing brand
Why it is needed Country Comfort, a well-known brand in Australia and New Zealand, was recently re-branded and updated with a fresh identity and look. The 28-year-old brand will spearhead new franchising business in its existing ANZ markets and the broader Asia-Pacific region. The target market comprises travelling sales people, small business owners and mid-level managers that spend more than half their time on business on a limited per diem budget. The refreshed brand promises convenience, quality and value.

How it reinvents mid/upscale By delivering what road warriors need the most and removing what they don't, so they avoid unnecessary expenses. Guests will enjoy an excellent stay, including the best-in-category sleep experience with superior amenities including a high-quality bed, an invigorating shower experience and a nutritious breakfast. Apart from competitive rates, a Fair Value Promise includes free WiFi, local calls and mini-bar items priced 30 per cent above local convenience stores. Laundry and dry cleaning will also be just 20 per cent above street pricing.
How many in operation None under the refreshed Country Comfort brand; 23 under the existing brand
Expansion plans Actively pursuing opportunities to manage, lease or franchise Country Comfort in South-east Asia, North Asia, South Asia and Australia/New Zealand.

MICE capabilities There will be a minimum of two eight-seat meeting rooms at every Country Comfort hotel. For a 100-room hotel, the meeting rooms will constitute an area of 56m² to 74m². To support our guests' conferencing needs, there will be a Business Bar that is linked to a printer-scanner cum fax machine which is open 24 hours.

Positioning



Next Hotels



By SilverNeedle Hospitality, Singapore
Competitive set Aloft, Crowne Plaza, East, Pan Pacific, Radisson Blu, Traders
Rate From A\$230 (US\$205) at Next Hotel Brisbane
Why it is needed Next Hotels is a game-changing concept created specifically for the modern business traveller. Guests demand full control over their time, particularly when they are travelling in unfamiliar cities, often on a budget and busy schedules. At Next Hotels, that control rests with guests as cutting-edge technology puts them in charge of everything they do, from reservations to check out. Using the Next Hotels mobile app, guests can check in before arriving through an encrypted code and access their rooms, bypassing the reception desk.
How it reinvents mid/upscale By committing fully to the core

concept of having services work according to the guests' wants, needs and more importantly, schedule. Along with the technology aforementioned, Next Hotels will also feature smart spaces and intuitive service. The Club Lounge, another innovation, is an exclusive space designed to work around each guest's schedule. It features the 'in transit zone' comprising full shower facilities, luggage storage lockers and recliners. Guests can relax during early check in, use free WiFi, or freshen up for late flights after check-out without disrupting their plans.
How many in operation The first Next will open in Brisbane in mid-2014
Expansion plans The second will be in Colombo in a mixed-use that includes a lifestyle mall and high-rise residential tower.
We have an aggressive expansion plan for the next five years.

MICE capabilities At every Next Hotel, there will be an executive studio comprising a minimum of four meeting rooms, all ideal for intimate business meetings. The meeting rooms' specifications will depend on the size of the hotel. At a 250-room hotel, for instance, it will span 79m² with one 12-seat meeting room, one six-seat room and two four-seat rooms. All meeting rooms will have collapsible walls/door panels for conversion into bigger spaces. A business centre with two desktops linked to a printer-scanner cum fax machine will support the meeting rooms.

Positioning





Philip Schaetz
Senior vice president sales & marketing,
Dorsett Hospitality International,
Hong Kong

Dorsett; Silka Hotels



Grand ballroom of Dorsett Grand Chengdu



Simon Manning
Vice president, sales and marketing,
Langham Hospitality Group, Hong Kong

Eaton



Eaton Hong Kong Diamond Ballroom

By Dorsett Hospitality International, Hong Kong
Competitive set Dorsett: Novotel, Traders; Silka: Ibis
Rate Dorsett's ADR Jan-Nov 2013: HK\$900 (US\$116); Silka HK\$600
Why it is needed The market is dominated by international hotel chains from outside Asia and this is where we make a difference. Being a true Asian-based company, we have a better understanding of the needs of our Asian travellers, in particular, with regards to hospitality and service.
How it reinvents mid/upscale Dorsett are contemporary midscale hotels in carefully chosen urban locations, providing business and leisure travellers with instant, easy access to city centres and business centres. Anchored in Asian traditions of hospitality with flashes of eclectic British touches, these hotels are energetic, innovative, dynamic

destinations designed to create a more energised business and leisure travel experience.
Silka Hotels Designed with the value-savvy and smart traveller in mind, Silka Hotels offer the best in convenience and comfort, providing hassle-free hospitality essentials.
 Quick, easy and efficient, Silka targets customers who are looking for the basics done right, with great service and value.
How many in operation Seven Dorsett hotels (two in China, three Hong Kong and one each in Singapore and Malaysia) Five Silka Hotels (three in Hong Kong and two in Malaysia)
Expansion plans Eight Dorsett and one Silka are in the pipeline. The group has a strong appetite to grow all its brands, which also include Dorsett Grand and d.Collection, in South-east Asia, Australia, UK/continental Europe.

MICE capabilities Dorsett hotels typically have MICE facilities such as ballrooms and numerous break-out rooms or function spaces with varying capacity. Silka hotels typically do not have them or have only limited function space that caters to small- and medium-scale meetings/events.

Positioning



By Langham Hospitality Group, Hong Kong
Competitive set Our aspirational competitive set (based on design) includes Ace Hotel, Nolitan, Casa Camper and Mama Shelter. Actual depends on location
Rate From US\$150
Why it is needed Eaton hotels are for the cosmopolitan, adventurous, culturally-savvy traveller interested in a lifestyle, fun and affordable stay. This brand bridges the gap between a four-star and five-star. We understand that different travellers have different needs. So we came up with options like the Smart Room and Family Room, in addition to conventional rooms and suites, all within a reasonable price range and done with great style and design, together with great service and eco-chic hospitality solutions.
 Eaton hotels are located in the heart of the city and local

experiences such as local tours to the nearby tourist spots and daily tai-chi classes.
How it reinvents mid/upscale 'Cool living' with style and sustainability is what Eaton is about. Guests get great value in well-designed, functional rooms with all the essentials, and honest, reliable, dynamic service. Our Social Hub brings people together to work and play. Eaton's Affordable Art programme is our way to help new artists to showcase their art using our public spaces as an open gallery. There is a trendy bar with fantastic cocktails and remarkable DJs.
How many in operation Five (Hong Kong, Toronto, New Delhi and two in Shanghai)
Expansion plans We are looking at expanding and increasing our Eaton hotel footprint globally at the right location, with the right partner and opportunity.

MICE capabilities Eaton hotels have flexible-size ballrooms and function rooms totalling an average of 3,000m², and banquet capabilities, all with state-of-the-art audio-visual equipment.
 Take The Lead offers company-based membership through special invitation. All members earn rewards for their meetings or events placed at our participating properties.
 Eaton hotels also encourage sustainable conferences with our Connect conferences where planners are offered the option to select solutions which offset the environmental and social impact from their event.

Positioning



The 5th International Infrastructure Investment and Construction Forum
 May 8-9, 2014, Venetian Macao
www.iiicf.org

Infrastructure development takes centrestage in Macao

Macao shows the world how it can be a gateway between China and the world by hosting the **International Infrastructure Investment and Construction Forum**



Macao's MICE industry is discovering new opportunities as the Special Administrative Region expands its role as a gateway between China and the world. With international-standard facilities and a well-trained workforce, plus excellent accessibility through its international airport and neighbouring Hong Kong, Macao will again be welcoming the world as the host of the 5th International Infrastructure Investment and Construction Forum (IIICF) this year.

Jointly organised by China International Contractors Association and Macao Economic Services, the IIICF will take place at The Venetian Macao from May 8-9, 2014. It is expected to attract ministerial officials from around 50 countries and regions, leaders from more than 30 international industry associations and senior executives from 40 renowned financial institutions. It will also be attended by some 1,300

participants from the world's leading contractors and services providers.

Themed "Infrastructure Connectivity Provides New Impetuses for International Cooperation", the 5th IIICF will address the vision and development of inter-regional infrastructure, financing solutions, multilateral cooperation, coordination of infrastructure projects, physical connectivity, economic cooperation, social welfare and other relevant topics.

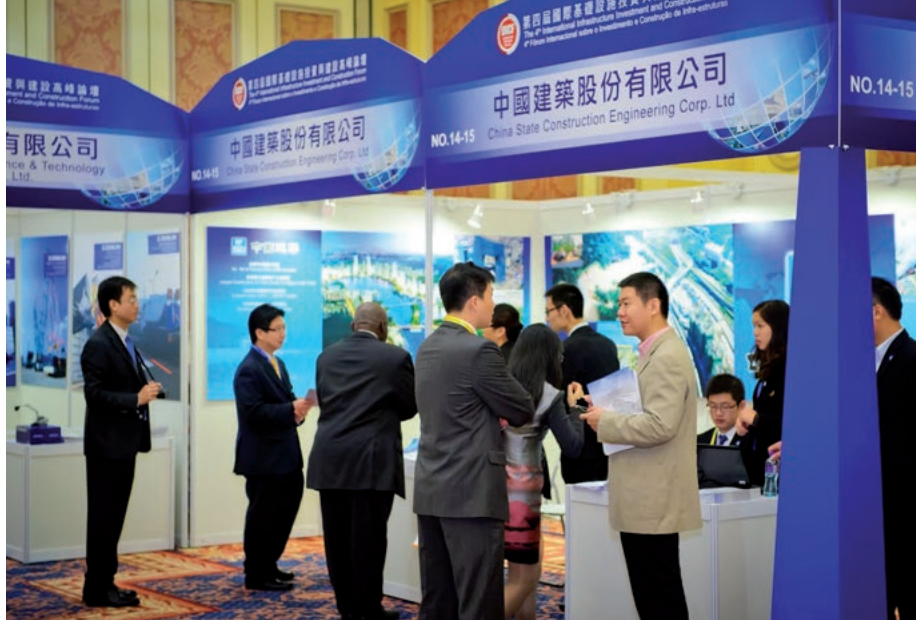
A focus on international infrastructure

Infrastructure connectivity was one of the three main themes at the 2013 APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting, which participating countries had agreed to pursue in the short term. During the meeting, Chinese President Xi Jinping highlighted this "new chapter of connectivity, of creating connected infrastructure across Asia-Pacific regions

and promoting the construction of sub-regional economic corridors... in order to achieve integration by steadily improving the interdependence and synergies among Asia-Pacific members."

In China, at the 3rd Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the CPC, "The Decision on Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening Reforms" clearly mapped out China's national strategy in opening up the China market further to the world. This included infrastructure investment and development. Infrastructure cooperation between China and other countries or regions is also a general direction of the country's trade and diplomatic strategy.

With the world today experiencing rapid globalisation and regional economic integration, international infrastructural connectivity has become a strong driving force for economic growth and social development.



Expos and conferences

In September 2012, as part of the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement between Mainland China and Macao SAR (CEPA), the Chinese Ministry of Commerce entered into the Agreement of Strengthening Cooperation on Expos and Conferences with the Macao Financial Services Bureau, with the goal

of developing stronger ties in the expo industry between Mainland China and Macao. The IIICF is a key event under this framework.

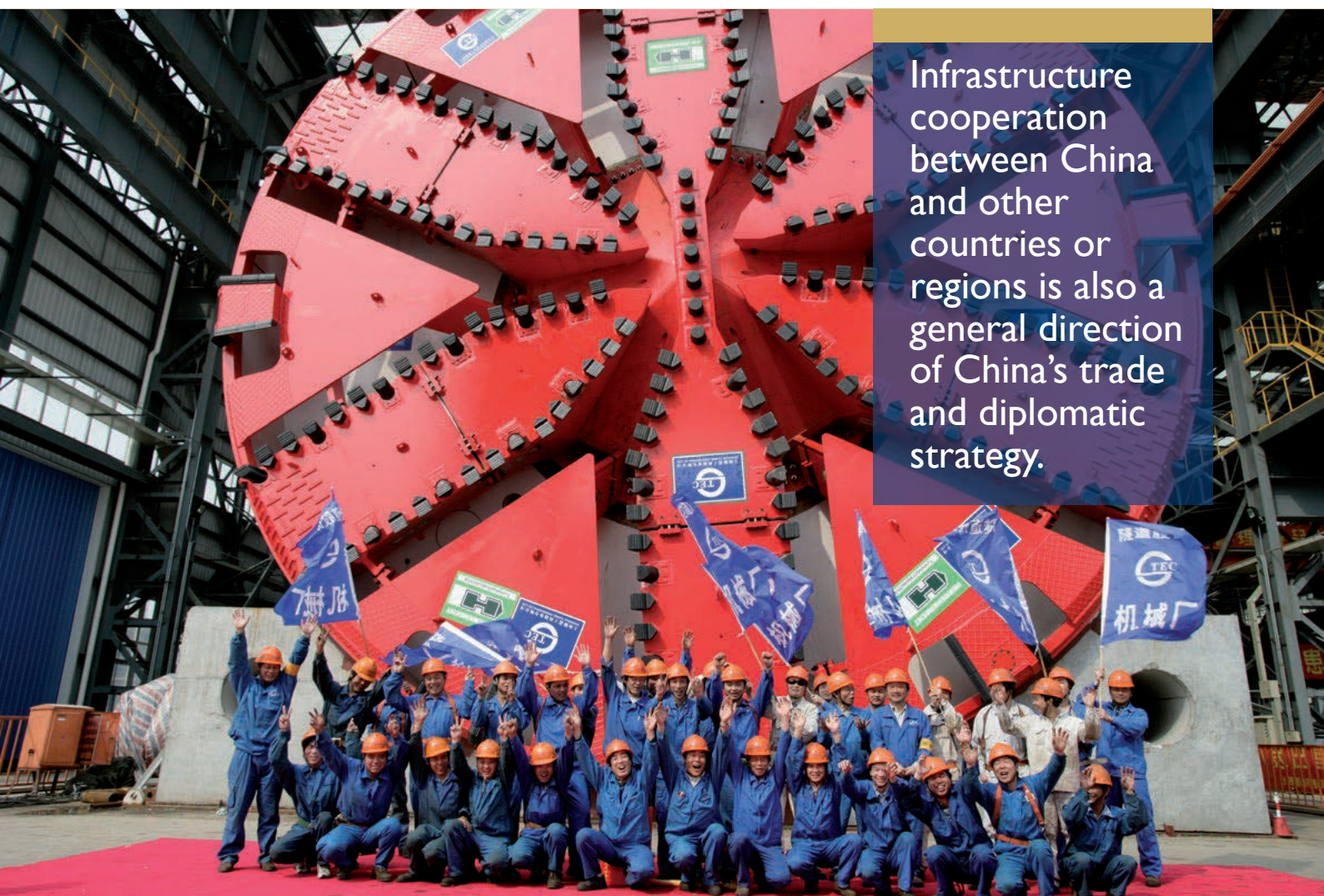
The IIICF is a platform for government agencies and private sector organisations of Macao, Mainland China and other parts of the world to build strong multilateral business relationships.

It is also a vehicle to diversify Macao's economy and showcase its MICE capabilities.

For its part, the Macao SAR government has carried out a number of large infrastructure projects, including urban light-rail, reclamation of marine land, the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Cross-Sea Bridge and the Hengqin Industry Park. It has also offered support to private construction projects.

Large infrastructure projects play an important role in accelerating Macao's economic growth. They create jobs and raise Macao's competitiveness.

The 5th IIICF will give the world an opportunity to get to know Macao better — by experiencing its capabilities in hosting large international expos and discovering new opportunities in international trade. ■



Infrastructure cooperation between China and other countries or regions is also a general direction of China's trade and diplomatic strategy.

Luxe you can afford



Rohit Vig
Managing director,
StayWell Hospitality, India

Leisure Inn



Leisure Inn Grand Chanakya, lobby

By StayWell Hospitality Group, Australia

Competitive set Includes brands like Country Inns & Suites by Carlson

Rate US\$48-US\$80 in the Indian market

Why it is needed There is a growing middle class in the country that is looking for quality world-class budget accommodation. We believe that even corporate travellers would prefer to stay in a product like ours that offers all the services at a competitive price.

Our product is fresh and young with a focus on F&B. The existing hotels in this segment in India don't focus on F&B. We will have speciality restaurants in all of our Leisure Inn properties in India.

How it reinvents mid/upscale We emphasise on location, extensive facilities, well-appointed rooms and international standard services, which properties operating

in this bracket don't offer.

In our properties a guest will get facilities like 24-hour service, multiple restaurants, coffee shop and banquet space, which are generally expected in a four or five star property. Even though we have international expertise, we focus on local experience. So in our properties, local people are hired to run the hotel, as they understand the needs of that particular market.

How many in operation One in Jaipur, Rajasthan

Expansion plans The group is looking to open Leisure Inn properties in cities like Hyderabad, Greater Noida, Raipur, Chennai, New Delhi, Thane and Bengaluru in 2014. Internationally, the group has a target of more than 100 hotels within the next three years across Australia, South-east Asia, India, China and Europe.

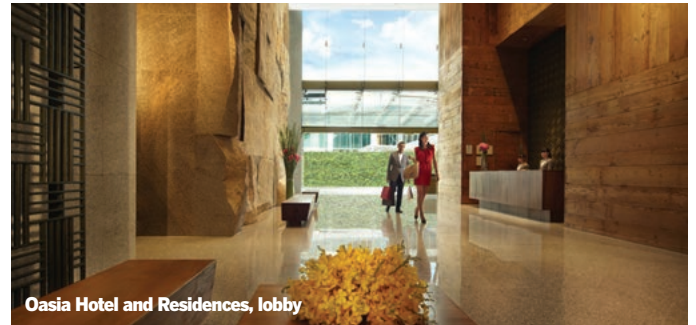
MICE capabilities Conference and meeting space is one of our major focus areas. In India around 50 per cent of the revenue in hotels is generated by F&B and conference facilities. So we have large banquet facility even in our Leisure Inn, which is a three-star brand. In our upcoming Leisure Inn property in Hyderabad, for example, we have about 650m² of banquet space, while in Raipur, it is 1,394m².

Positioning



Arthur Kiong
CEO,
Far East Hospitality Management,
Singapore

Oasia Hotels & Residences



Oasia Hotel and Residences, lobby

By Far East Hospitality, Singapore
Competitive set In Singapore, Sheraton Towers and Royal Plaza on Scotts

Rate From S\$200++ (US\$158++)

Why it is needed Oasia is our differentiated offer to business travellers who desire comfort without excess, aesthetics without ostentation, attention without pretension, relevance with elegance. We take into consideration business travellers' focus on their work and ensure every component of our service and design complements their mission.

Rooms at 25m² are modestly sized and designed to optimise comfort whether they choose to work or rest. The hotel's unique club lounge that extends into a lap pool also provides another option for them to unwind after a hectic day.

How it reinvents mid/upscale

We bring first-class experience to this segment but still maintain exceptionally reasonable prices for our guests. The high standards of guest experience that we provide are possible because we constantly reinvent the benchmarks that are typically associated with hotels under this category.

We believe in adopting efficient designs and deployment of manpower, and this allows our guests to enjoy benefits that rival those of luxury hotels. This includes Oasia's central location, comfortable rooms, well-equipped gym, unique club lounge and easy access to other facilities in a mall connected to the hotel.

How many in operation One in Singapore

Expansion plans Three planned

MICE capabilities In addition to regular meeting and banquet amenities, Oasia offers alternative venues like the Poolside and Verandah Lounge areas that can be customised for events such as cocktail meetings.

Positioning





Duncan Webb
Chief commercial officer,
Onyx Hospitality Group, Thailand

Ozo



A 'U'-shaped meeting room at Ozo Hong Kong

By Onyx Hospitality Group, Thailand
Competitive set Includes Ibis, Ramada Encore, Park Inn, Marriott Courtyard, Centra Hotels and Resorts
Rate The lead-in rate for Ozo Wesley Hong Kong is HK\$1,300 (US\$170). In Ozo Samui, launching early this year, it will be from 3,000 baht (US\$91)
Why it is needed Guests are becoming more savvy and are looking for quality services, connectivity and comfort at a reasonable price. We recognise that this segment is becoming increasingly popular, especially as both business and leisure travellers are looking to reduce costs and maximise their value for money. Ozo is a refreshing alternative to other select service brands. There is no compromise on the quality of product, from the comfort-

able bed, to bathroom amenities, technology and connectivity.
How it reinvents mid/upscale Ozo aims to surprise guests with the room product and service culture. Staff are trained to offer useful and intuitive assistance on the local area; in fact, each has his own specialist subject. Ozo understands that today's traveller is short on time, so the rooms are cleverly designed, making sure no time is wasted looking for switches or trying to figure out the shower. Even checking in is fast and paperless via a tablet.
How many in operation The first Ozo in Hong Kong opened in May 2013
Expansion plans Six under development, two due to open this quarter in Colombo and Koh Samui. They will be joined by Ozo hotels in Pattaya, Kandy, Galle and Penang soon after.

MICE capabilities Ozo targets the MICE market with a convenient and value added approach. Ozo Wesley Hong Kong has two meeting spaces that accommodate 12 to 100 pax.

Positioning



Simon Barlow
President Asia-Pacific,
Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group, Singapore

Park Inn by Radisson



Meeting room at Park Inn by Radisson Davao

By Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group, US
Competitive set International midscale brands
Rate US\$80-US\$120
Why it is needed The emergence of the middle class in India, China, the Philippines and Indonesia, together with the increase in infrastructure investment, will spur not only domestic travel but an increase in travel within Asia-Pacific. This will result in a growing requirement for midscale hotels in key locations, especially in tier II cities that can meet the demands of these new savvy travellers. These travellers seek consistently clean, friendly and affordable accommodation when they travel for business or leisure.
How it reinvents mid/upscale The midscale brand is friendly, fresh, vibrant and uncomplicated with a 26-year track record of delivering a quality guest

experience. Newly launched in Asia-Pacific, the new generation Park Inn by Radisson focuses on providing the modern essentials that resonate with today's business and leisure travellers.
 Park Inn by Radisson delivers a great night's sleep in a flexible and connected room. The hotel's lively, colourful design will appeal to Gen Y traveller while its 'Adding Colours to Life' philosophy enables the brand to deliver a quality experience that takes into account local cultures and preferences. Its restaurant and bar and meeting and leisure facilities are deliberately geared at the traveller of tomorrow. Guests enjoy free Internet access.
How many in operation 128 globally, four in Asia-Pacific
Expansion plans Globally there are 67 hotels in the pipeline, seven scheduled to open in Asia-Pacific.

MICE capabilities Smart Meetings & Events, supported by Carlson's Yes I Can! service philosophy, aims to provide guests with an outstanding meetings experience based on the four touch points. Smart Food features seasonal and local produce. Secondly, guests have a wide choice of innovative and flexible meeting spaces.
 Using the latest in technology for meeting facilities and connectivity like free Internet access, is the third touch point. Lastly through Club Carlson Meetings minus Carbon scheme, planners can go green with an automatic CO2 offset for bookings.

Positioning



Luxe you can afford



Sonia Cheng
CEO,
Rosewood Hotel Group, Hong Kong



Andrea Mastellone
Group general manager,
Seda Hotels, Philippines

Pentahotels



Pentahotel Shanghai studio 1

Seda



Seda Bonifacio Global City E-lounge

By Rosewood Hotel Group, Hong Kong

Competitive set Aloft, Hotel Indigo, and Ace Hotel internationally Rate In Hong Kong, over US\$100; in Shanghai, US\$75-US\$100

Why it is needed Pentahotels guests are road warriors, local digital nomads and independent-minded travellers who are looking for affordable yet stylish accommodation, with add-ons like free Wi-Fi, plus a cool communal space where they can relax during downtime. Pentahotels' mix of fun with functionality, comfort with creativity and style with simplicity, has established its appeal in Europe and is set to take off in Asia among travellers with the same mind set and needs. It's a 'neighbourhood lifestyle' approach, with a cool, hip vibe.

How it reinvents mid/upscale

Pentahotels pushes the design envelope in a direction that's

not typically taken in Asia. The signature Pentalounge – an upbeat combination reception, lobby, bar and café – is a new 'third place', an extension of one's lifestyle and a gathering place for both guests and neighbours. The hotel eliminates unnecessary frills in favour of fuss-free efficiency and uncomplicated comfort, while New York loft-style guestrooms, contemporary rustic décor, quirky, local cultural references, and fun and friendly service create a singular hospitality experience.

How many in operation 18 (three in Greater China – Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai; 11 in Germany, one in Austria, two in the UK and one in the Czech Republic)

Expansion plans Announced projects include three hotels in China, four hotels in the UK and five hotels in Belgium, with a target of 80 Pentahotels in operation or under development by 2020.

MICE capabilities Pentahotels are designed to provide simple and functional yet creative and fun meeting spaces for intimate corporate and social functions ranging from brainstorming sessions, workshops, teambuilding and training to after-work, informal cocktails and intimate parties. All meeting spaces are WiFi-enabled and can be configured in different styles to suit different needs. Instead of traditional coffee-break settings, Pentahotels feature Timeout Zones – unconventional break areas that often feature a popcorn machine, foosball table, LED TV and comfy seating with set-ups for casual refreshments.

Positioning

NA

By Ayala Land Hotels and Resorts, Philippines

Competitive set Undisclosed Rate Examples, Seda Fort Bonifacio Global City, from 6,000 pesos*** (US\$135***); Seda Abreeza in Davao City, from 4,200 pesos***

Why it is needed There is a tremendous opportunity in the country's flourishing foreign and domestic tourism industry. Our Seda hotel line is well-positioned to capture more than its fair share across various regions with our superior product and strategic location within Ayala Land's mixed developments.

How it reinvents mid/upscale

Seda offers a new concept in hospitality: urban lifestyle hotel. It offers a fluid hospitality experience with modern accommodation, state-of-the-art technology and exceptional service – all supporting the excellent value-for-money proposition.

Seda is Filipino for 'silk', a distinct fabric that represents the

brand's commitment to providing a seamless accommodation experience. As each Seda hotel is easily accessible to an Ayala mall and office spaces, it offers the convenience and security of a high-energy, central location, combined with warm, efficient service and global best practices. It is designed as an ideal environment where relaxation, play and work can mix.

How many in operation Three, in Metro Manila, Cagayan de Oro City and Davao City. Seda Nuvali Laguna will open in the first quarter

Expansion plans In development are Seda Vertis, Quezon City and Seda Circuit, Makati, both targeted to open within the next two to three years.

Further expansion is in the works as Seda hotels are intended to be an integral part of Ayala Land's mixed-use development projects in key cities of the Philippines.

MICE capabilities Seda hotels have function and meeting rooms that can accommodate small to medium-size events. In Seda BGC (Metro Manila) and Seda Centrio (Cagayan de Oro), capacities range from 10 to 100 pax; in Seda Abreeza (Davao), they go up to 300 pax.

Positioning



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- Pre-matched appointments (up to 100%)
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Be among those who take advantage of this unparalleled marketing opportunity and book your space to Enjoy Early Bird up to 15% Booth discount.

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Hosted by Ministry of Tourism of Cambodia

www.tourismcambodia.org



Superstar DNA

Shanghai may not be the country's top MICE destination, but no other Chinese city has the same star quality and power. **Caroline Boey** finds out more



Glamorous Shanghai draws high-end incentives and trendy lifestyle events

MICE rankings are a useful yardstick to measure a destination's success and popularity and ICCA's annual ranking reports provide a glimpse into Shanghai's standing.

In tracking regularly occurring association events, which rotate between at least three countries, ICCA's 2012 Asia-Pacific International Association Meetings Market Rankings placed Shanghai in 10th spot with 64 meetings and Beijing second with 109, behind Singapore with 150.

In ICCA's 2012 Top 20 Rankings for Cities and Countries, China was placed 10th with 311 meetings; Beijing, 13th. Shanghai was not on the list.

Janet Tan-Collis, chief executive of Singapore-based East West Executive Travellers who has been doing business in China for a dozen-odd years, observes that foreigners are fascinated by Shanghai but Beijing with ancient Chinese culture still intact is more real: "It satisfies their impression of what China is or should be."

Glamorous, modern Shanghai tends to attract high-end incentives and trendy lifestyle events like watch exhibitions and car launches, aimed at the affluent domestic market. Anything new, curious or novel grabs local media attention.

With the likes of Accenture, Standard Chartered and other Fortune 500 companies operating in Shanghai, the international market wants to do business in the city. Tan-Collis said: "Event planners who choose Shanghai are willing to spend because the

economy is strong and the pace is unbelievable. It's F1, not Rolls Royce. There is a willingness and the ability to do things in Shanghai. There is total excitement and the perception is this is the future."

If budgets are tight, Shanghai can be out of reach. The president of a PCO in Taipei said Shanghai is expensive and she has not done any business there recently.

Still, Shanghai manages to attract new events such as Global Business Travel Association's China Conference, and retain longer-standing ones such as China Business Forum, ILTM Asia and IT&CM China.

In addition, ICCA picked Shanghai for the association's 52nd congress in November last year. The event attracted 936 delegates from 61 countries, who stayed in four different hotels. The congress was held at the Shanghai International Convention Center; the welcome reception at Golden Hall, Expo Center; and the social networking CAT Night at Shanghai Exhibition Center.

CEOs and delegates whose companies plan to invest in China were taken to Shanghai World Expo to learn how a major event transformed a city. They also visited the R&D facility of SKF, a global engineering company, to learn how MNCs are engaging with China as a target business market, centre of innovation and source of highly skilled personnel.

Martin Sirk, ICCA CEO, told *TT-Gmice*: "The ICCA Congress in Shanghai not only attracted more attendees

than any previous event held outside Europe – and the second highest number ever – it also scored some of the highest delegate evaluations ever, with combined 'excellent/good' scores for on-site instant surveys and post-event questionnaires on educational content and organisational efficiency of almost 82 per cent, on a par with the best results ever.

"About 65 per cent of delegates were visiting Shanghai for the first time, and the city excelled in delegate perceptions of its qualities: warmth of welcome scored 72.3 per cent combined 'excellent/good', overall level of services scored 64.2 and overall safety scored 83.4, while quality of hotel accommodation, air accessibility and suitability for international meetings scored 84.1, 87.9 and 70.5 respectively.

"It's clear the congress has created an army of highly influential brand ambassadors for Shanghai!"

Sirk credited the highly motivated local host team which understood from the start what ICCA was trying to achieve, and that this was a rare opportunity to showcase Shanghai and China to the meetings world.

"The attention to detail was exceptional and every effort was made to bridge any gaps of cultural understanding or business practice. It was also critical that this was an event supported by China's entire meetings industry, and the support from city authorities in Beijing and national tourism institutions was highly valuable and visible.

Hangzhou

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"I think the delegates found Shanghai to be such a success because of the incredible creativity shown during the social events, the genuine smiles of the host venue employees and volunteers and the opening of delegates' eyes to Shanghai's business buzz and economic dynamism."

Market intelligence shows a decline in the MICE market in 2H2013, but the industry remains cautiously optimistic.

According to Adelina Ye, area director of sales and marketing, East China, Marriott International, business from the pharmaceutical industry and government fell. However, the group, which operates the most number of hotels in Shanghai with more than 20 properties, still enjoyed year-on-year market share growth of 8.9 per cent in 2013.

Ye said corporate meetings and exhibitions would continue to be strong in 2014, although the market witnessed a decline from Japan with Sino-Japan relations under pressure.

For Fairmont Peace Hotel, 2013 was "very challenging" and 2014 will be "equally challenging", said George Wee, its general manager. "But the establishment of the Shanghai Free Trade Zone will propel the city to a world-class hub, attracting key corporate brand names to set up offices."

Although targeted at the domestic market, Wee said Shanghai Disneyland Park, Asia's biggest and opening in 2015, would increase awareness of the city as a choice destination and attract more Chinese corporates to hold their events in Shanghai.

Daniel Aylmer general manager, Le Royal Méridien Shanghai and area

managing director, East China, Starwood Hotels & Resorts, said demand from state-owned enterprise and government-driven business will remain soft, but agrees there are opportunities for MICE and domestic business, and the opening of Shanghai Disneyland will generate demand. "With the addition of the world's largest exhibition centre, the Shanghai New International Expo Center (SNIEC) opening in Hongqiao (in 2015), there will be more reasons to visit one of the world's most exciting cities," he said.

Marriott's Ye believes Shanghai will continue to be "the champion of the modern service sector" and drive the economic engine of the Yangtze delta boosted by the opening of SNIEC: "Shanghai aims to be one of the leading MICE destinations in Asia, competing with Hong Kong and Singapore."

MICE mission possible

With 24 18-hole championship golf courses, to-date, Mission Hills wears the Guinness World Records crown as World's Largest Golf Club. While the company is still expanding its golf courses, it has also taken mega steps to add a new feather in its cap.

Gaining popularity as a meetings mecca in China's southern Guangdong Province, the company's Mission Hills Shenzhen opened in 1990 and is only 15 minutes from Hong Kong International Airport, while Mission Hills Dongguan opened in 2000, 40 minutes from Guangzhou.

Both locations are a 20 minutes' ride from each other and a regular shuttle bus service operates between them, with a stop in-between at the Mission Hills Mid-Valley Clubhouse.

Mission Hills Dongguan houses a 334-room hotel, and the hotel in Mission Hills Shenzhen has 188 rooms.

The total meeting space in Shenzhen and Dongguan is 7,348m², with

rooms of various sizes for board meetings, accommodating up to 3,000 pax in The Grand Ballroom in Mission Hills Dongguan's Convention Center, and everything in-between.

The Dongguan ballroom measures 2,000m² and other spaces include 38 multi-purpose function halls, an auditorium and a media centre, making it a popular venue for international events. The Grand Ballroom at Mission Hills Shenzhen's resort is 400m²; the Clubhouse Ballroom, 324m².

Companies which hosted events in both locations last year included Australian Trade Commission, Callaway, Credit Suisse, China Resources Power, Dell, and more. Group size ranged from 10 pax for a meeting, 100 for a teambuilding event, 300 for an exhibition, 800 for a tradeshow, and 1,600 for an annual meeting, according to hotel manager Brian Cheng.

Cheng said Dongguan with its convention centre was developed with

MICE in mind, and Missions Hills has begun to adopt a green programme to meet RFPs with such requirements and to grow the business.

It is sourcing for produce within a 5km radius to maintain freshness and to reduce transportation. It will be introducing recycling bins in its hotel rooms and meeting spaces and replacing bottled water with reliable drinking water, among others.

Cheng added: "Stations for freshly prepared sandwich and fruit have been introduced, and more healthy meals with less salt, sugar and oil will be used for buffet menus." Semi-buffet and live cooking stations help prevent hot food wastage, and butter and sugar are provided in loose form.

New teambuilding activities will include activities that teach better nutrition and how to cook more healthily. Mission Hills Dongguan also runs a small organic farm. Other green Mission Hills initiatives include the use of solar-powered golf carts.

Fun teambuilding activities can also be tailor-made for non-golfers at the Golf Academy, as well as other sporting activities around its tennis facilities and swimming pools.

Meanwhile, the opening of Mission Hills Centreville late-2014, at the entrance of Mission Hills Shenzhen, will enhance its MICE appeal, Cheng noted. Attractions include a Hard Rock Hotel and a second 700-room property, a spa, an auto exhibition centre and a cinema, among others.

Mission Hills, which also operates in Hainan, plans to expand into Yunnan, Beijing, Shanghai, Xi'an, and Chongqing. – **Caroline Boey**

Mission Hills Dongguan houses a hotel and offers spaces for meetings and events



Ideas One-day tour of Puxi

Start your delegates' day with a ride in the side-car of a vintage 1930s motorcycle along the tree-lined streets of Shanghai's old French quarter, as they catch a glimpse of locals going about their everyday chores.

After the ride, put your group on a coach to Nanjing Road shopping area. This pedestrian-only area is said to be the busiest retail district in China. Watch people from all over the country and the world flock together to hunt for local craft and brand name merchandise.

Before leaving the busy People's Square/Nanjing Road area, delegates will visit the best Bronze Age collection in China, housed in the nearby Shanghai Museum.

It is now time to sample authentic

Shanghai cuisine and the famous *xiao long bao* – soupy dumplings – are not to be missed. Lunch is at the Lubolang Restaurant just outside Yu Garden, next to the pond and the Bridge-of-Nine-Bends.

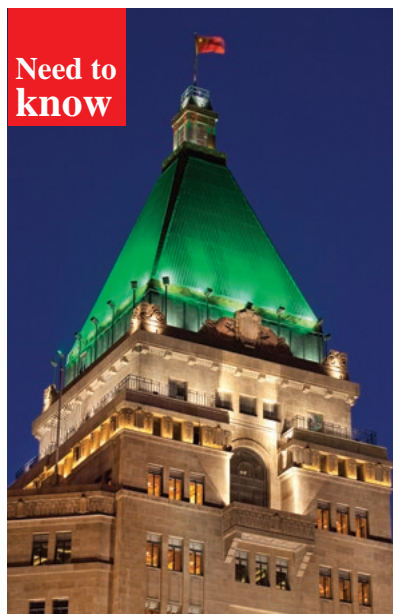
After lunch, travel back in time and discover a typical Chinese landscaped garden built by a high-ranking court mandarin. The numerous pavilions, corridors, cobbled pathways, man-made rock and water scenes provide the perfect backdrop for more photos.

From the peace and tranquility of the garden, head back to modern-day Shanghai. Explore the famous Bund riverbank with its wide boulevard



lined with awe-inspiring, restored historical buildings of the 1920s. Take in the sights from across the river, a contrasting picture of new Shanghai and the Pudong skyline.

Itinerary by Associated Tours, Hong Kong



Need to know

Peace Hotel adds spaces

Shanghai's iconic Fairmont Peace Hotel has added 1,200m² of meeting space on its roof terrace and mezzanine level.

The roof terrace houses the 25m² Scotland Room and the 35m² England Room. Adjacent to the roof terrace is the Nine Heaven Hall, which has been restored to its original 1920s splendour. The roof terrace doubles up as a recreational area where guests can practise tai chi before breakfast.

The mezzanine level houses the 215m² Chun Shen Room with floor-to-ceiling windows and capacity for 160 pax, theatre-style. Adjacent to this is the 110m² Thames Room which can accommodate a 50-pax banquet.

These spaces are equipped with advance audiovisual technology and high-speed wireless Internet access.

Email peacehotel@fairmont.com.

Tall order

J Hotel Shanghai Tower will become the world's highest luxury property when it is completed in 2Q2015.

Timur Senturk, managing director, said an opening date had not been confirmed as the hotel was still under construction and in the design phase. Many details are yet to be finalised.

Located in Pudong's Lujiazui CBD and sitting on levels 84th to 105th floors in Shanghai Tower, J Hotel will have 180 rooms, each about 70m² in size. The lobby will be on the 101st floor.

Managed by Interstate China Hotels & Resorts, the property carries the J Hotel label, the new prestige brand of Jin Jiang Group.

Shanghai Tower itself is being developed as a mixed-use complex with exhibition, shopping and leisure facilities.



On a mission to go green

Mission Hills Resorts (www.missionhillschina.com) has launched green meeting programmes for its properties in Shenzhen, Dongguan, and Haikou, valid for groups with a minimum of 10 people. The half- and full-day *Green Meeting Package* goes for RMB418 (US\$68) and RMB518 respectively, and includes use of a meeting room, audiovisual equipment, stationery, candies, refreshment, healthy lunch/buffet lunch for groups of more than 30 people and Wi-Fi. Half- and full-day *Meeting Business Package options are also available*, and are priced at RMB420 and RMB520 respectively.

Eco-themed activities such nature walks – led by naturalists – that showcase the flora and fauna in and around the resorts are available too.

Holiday Villa beefs up software to better cater to international business events

Holiday Villa Hotel & Residence Baiyun Guangzhou (holidayvillaguangzhou.com) is hiring more English-speaking staff and management personnel with experience in organising large international conferences in a bid to grow its MICE business. It is targeting regional seminars and conferences from North and South-east Asia in particular where Holiday Villa's brand image is well established and where many companies are keen to penetrate the growing China consumer market.

International companies which have held meetings in the hotel recently include Hong Kong's Watsons and South Korea's Hanhoo. The hotel's MICE business so far has come from established Chinese consumer goods companies, with groups of between 100 and 600 people coming from all over China attending annual planning meetings.



Small cities make waves

Gili Trawangan, a small island off Lombok island, is an emerging MICE destination

With better infrastructure and connectivity, secondary cities are making headways in capturing the MICE market. By **Mimi Hudoyo**

As demand for meetings and incentives increase on the back of a growing economy and improving accessibility from neighbouring countries, secondary destinations in Indonesia such as Jogjakarta, Lombok and Padang are now putting more focus on developing the MICE market.

In cooperation with MICE Centre, an Indonesian MICE research and development, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy has finalised mapping and rating 16 cities/islands it is focused on developing and promoting as MICE destinations, according to Achyar Rudin, director of MICE and special interest development at the ministry's directorate general of destination development.

"The mapping tells us the strengths and weaknesses of each destination. Not every destination is ready to accommodate all MICE sectors," Achyar said. Based on the ministry's criteria, Jakarta and Bali are rated as "existing" destinations, Jogjakarta is a "potential" destination, while Lombok and Padang fit in the "emerging" destinations category.

Corporate and association meet-

ings combining incentive or leisure components are a major market for Jogjakarta, according to ATA Travel Service director, Malia Sayuti.

Said Bagus Dewa Karuniawan, director of sales and marketing at Royal Ambarrukmo Hotel, where MICE contributed 30 per cent of business last year: "The city has lost a number of businesses to other (Indonesian) destinations because we did not have a big convention facility."

To meet the growing MICE demand in Jogjakarta, Royal Ambarrukmo Hotel has added the 2,000-pax Kasultanan Ballroom – currently the biggest venue in the city – to its existing 1,000-pax Kraton Ballroom.

The new 193-room Eastparc Hotel Yogyakarta, with a ballroom of 1,000 pax capacity plus 20 breakout rooms, was built to cater for MICE. The hotel's general manager, Erny Kusmatuti, explained: "With MICE, there are a lot of segments to sell, from the rooms and meeting facilities to F&B and dinner celebrations."

Lombok, in eastern Indonesia's West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) province, has enjoyed the steady growth of domestic MICE in recent years, thanks

to aggressive promotion efforts by the regional government in the last decade. In 2013, NTB recorded over 1.3 million arrivals, increasing 22 per cent from 2012.

"Of this number, some 900,000 arrivals were from Indonesia, of which meetings and incentive contributed 55 per cent," said Awan Aswinabawa, chairman of NTB Tourism Promotion Board.

Gili Trawangan, a small island near Lombok, has gained popularity with MICE groups as its remoteness enable clients to have fruitful and effective meetings by staying within self-contained resorts, according to Imam Wahyudi, general manager of Villa Ombak and Ombak Sunset on Gili Trawangan.

Christina Rudatin, advisor of MICE Centre, said: "Lombok is a promising destination, but venues, the people's readiness to be hosts and the availability of vendors to provide things MICE organisers need are among the things it needs to improve."

In West Sumatra, Padang's burgeoning room supply and air connections, including 28 daily flights from Jakarta and direct links with Medan, Batam, Pekanbaru and Kuala Lumpur, are "start-up capital" for Padang to develop its MICE sector, said Yusran, who is also chairman of Indonesia Hotel and Restaurant Association West Sumatra Chapter.

Minangkabau International Convention Centre (MICC) is due to open mid this year with a 4,500m² convention hall. Maulana Yusran, board member of Sungai Tanang Sinergi, which owns MICC, has noted "the development of new hotels in Padang following the 2009 earthquake".

Padang's inventory grew from 1,500 rooms before the earthquake to 2,800 rooms at end-2013, with several hundred more rooms expected to enter the market this year, he added.

Having recently organised Tourism Indonesia Mart and Expo (TIME) 2013 in Padang, the destination has the potential to host regional events of about 1,000 participants although facilities and human resources need to be improved, noted Pacto Convex president director, Susilowani Daud.

Christina agreed: "There are many things the destination needs to improve to catch up with other cities." she added that while it was natural for Padang to rely on PCOs from mature destinations like Jakarta or Bali, the destination needs to develop skilled manpower at the operational level.

Ideas

One-day outing in Jogjakarta

morning Take a cycling or walking tour of Kotagede, a historic neighbourhood which in the 16th century was the capital of the Mataram kingdom. Wander around the narrow lanes lined with century-old houses showcasing traditional Javanese wooden houses combined with elements of Dutch brick architecture. These houses were homes of rich merchants during the colonial era. If you are lucky, some owners might be willing to open their houses for guests to go in and take a closer look at the unique architecture and living traditions.

Visit the remains of the Mataram kingdom including the royal mosque, royal cemetery, defensive walls and moats.

Kotagede is known for its silverware, so do not miss the opportunity to drop in to one of the smith shops to see the jewellery making and take home some souvenirs.

Lunch at a local restaurant that serves traditional Jogjakarta food.

afternoon After lunch, drive north to Kaliurang, a small town on the southern slopes of Mount Merapi and take a four-wheel Jeep Tour (three pax per jeep) to visit villages, fields, bridges and roads destroyed by the lava and hot clouds during the 2010 eruption. Cold lava covering creeks, heaps of sands and boulders still remain, bearing witness to the devastating eruption.

Meanwhile, the majestic Mount Merapi itself is a beautiful backdrop for photoshoots while the off-road ride on the old Willys Jeep is an experience in itself.



Off-road ride on an old Willys Jeep is an experience on its own

Need to know



BICC sports refreshed meeting facilities

Following a recent full refurbishment, the Bali International Convention Centre (BICC) has updated its meeting facilities.

The renovated facility now boasts 26 revitalised meeting rooms and two VIP holding rooms to accommodate heads of states, in addition to the Mangupura Hall, a spacious 2000m², 10m-high venue that can accommodate up to 2,500 pax in a theatre style set up, and the 506-seat auditorium with a built-in stage – the only tiered theatre of its kind in Bali.

A brand-new facility is The Lounge, located on the second floor with full-length windows, a fully-stocked bar and an assortment of table settings.

BICC also incorporates accessible hallways, wide doors and elevators, making it a wheelchair-friendly venue.

Website: www.baliconvention.com

Experience local living

Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy is currently working with villages across the country to develop and showcase themselves as unique cultural destinations.

International travellers to these destinations can observe villagers' daily lives and take part in their activities, while MICE travellers can also conduct CSR programmes. Activities offered include learning to play the gamelan (a traditional musical ensemble), rice field ploughing, coconut picking and cooking classes.

In Jogjakarta, these villages include Desa Wisata (Tourism Village) Pentingsari, Brayut, Sambi and Tembi. More information available at <http://desawisatasleman.wordpress.com>.

Transformation completed

The Westin Resort Nusa Dua, Bali has unveiled new additions as part of its multi-million revitalisation project last year.

In the Premier Wing, each of the 99 rooms and suites boast contemporary decor adorned with Balinese artistic elements, a balcony and a spacious bathroom. The new wing also has its own swimming pool.

The Heavenly Spa by Westin, the first in Indonesia, features 16 treatment rooms and a hair spa. There are separate thermal facilities for male and female guests, including hydro-pools, salt-wall saunas and steam rooms, plus an inner relaxation lounge for snacks and drinks before or after treatments.

Prego is the new Italian restaurant, offering an open-plan kitchen and convivial atmosphere.

Website: www.westinnusaduabali.com



New adventure hub in Ubud

Bali Adventure Tours has opened the Ubud Adventure Centre, a 4000m², four-storey complex overlooking the Ayung River gorge in Kedewatan, Ubud.

The destination is also home to nine separate leisure facilities, including restaurants, cafes, gift shops and a rooftop function area, plus two Adventure Suites with a private outdoor dining pavilion and swimming pool. It also serves as the new check-in facility and finish point for the company's white water rafting operations.

Website: www.baliadventuretours.com

Wider MICE perspective

Hilton Bandung has rolled out Panorama, a multi-purpose, integrated rooftop event space.

Panorama combines an open-air area consisting of the outdoor Fresco restaurant featuring an open kitchen concept, next to which is the 181m² contemporarily designed indoor meeting room, which with its floor-to-ceiling glass sides overlooking the swimming pool, also offers meeting planners "in the pool" long table meetings and dining options.

Altogether, Hilton Bandung has 13 adaptable meeting rooms, including Panorama and the pillar-less ballroom. www.bandung.hilton.com



Stretch those limbs after a meeting and learn to move like K-pop idols at DEF Dance Studio

Playful Seoul

After years of successful courtship with global congresses, Seoul is now flaunting more of its fun side to garner more incentive wins. By **Karen Yue**

In a marketplace where competition for international congresses is intensifying by the minute, South Korea's capital city has managed to retain fifth spot on UIA's ranking of top international meetings cities for three years running – in 2010, 2011 and 2012 – while raising its count of qualified meetings from 201 in 2010 to 253 in 2012.

Now that it has developed a forte in hosting international congresses, Seoul is eager to boost its performance in another events sector.

Maureen O'Crowley, vice president of Seoul Convention Bureau at the Seoul Tourism Organization (STO), said: "It is time for us to shift our focus onto incentives. The great thing about incentives is that they materialise much faster than conventions and exhibitions which take years to prepare and happen."

In general, Seoul Convention Bureau is strengthening communications and cooperation with DMCs and incentive professionals to garner more incentive wins.

Since intensifying its courtship of incentive clients last year, Seoul Convention Bureau has supported 66 corporate meetings/incentives in 2013, compared to 45 in 2012.

One of these events was a team-building programme for 200 mem-

bers of McDonald's Singapore in May. Activities were an interpretation of *Running Man*, a popular Korean TV game show, in Lotte World amusement park. Another was a 1,000-pax Nuskin Japan gathering in July.

"We also had many small-sized incentive groups," said O'Crowley.

The number of meeting/incentive footfalls in Seoul registered an even more spectacular jump – from 5,265 in 2012 to 18,665 in 2013.

"Much of this can be attributed to the expanded support programme we offer to DMCs," she explained.

The enhanced support by the bureau included its first-ever financial subvention. To qualify for this, groups must have at least 50 international attendees who stay a minimum

of two consecutive nights in Seoul. The scheme provides 20,000 Korean won (US\$18.70) per delegate, up to a maximum of 20,000,000 Korean won, as well as souvenirs, welcome events at the airport, ground transfers, banquets, performances and city tours.

The financial portion of the scheme is dispensed in two ways: a financial credit of 10,000 Korean won plus a small gift, or a premium gift valued at 20,000 Korean won.

The financial credit goes to the local organiser who will use it to cover certain expenses incurred in Seoul, such as transport, dinner and performances, O'Crowley explained.

"We have also created new programmes to support our DMCs through workshops, newsletters and advertisements," she added, pointing to a soon-to-release 38-page Incentive Guide as an example of the bureau's initiatives.

The guide will spotlight existing products and venues in Seoul that can up the fun factor for incentive programmes. Event planners will be presented with ideas that feature traditional venues, cultural experiences, technology and medical tours.

"It is important to work creatively with what the city already offers," she said. "It is very interesting how groups are coming up with great ideas themselves. Last April a pharmaceutical company in China got its participants to take photos that captured determination, confidence and passion – the three key traits of Korean businessmen that the company's CEO liked."

The bureau also assists incentive planners in customising programmes with the help of its Seoul MICE Alliance, which now boasts 144 members including unique venues, hotels, convention centres, PCOs, transportation specialists, travel agencies, entertainment providers, shopping centres and other suppliers.

The bureau will focus its market-



"It is important to work creatively with what the city already offers."

Maureen O'Crowley
Vice president
Seoul Convention Bureau



Appreciate South Korea's love for fashion and creativity at Simone Handbag Museum

ing efforts on incentive buyers in Asia-Pacific – China and South-east Asia in particular – due to proximity, ease of air access and familiarity with Seoul as a destination.

O'Crowley credited the Korean pop – or K-pop – culture for helping to establish great incentive interest from China and South-east Asia, and said Seoul's new Klive – said to be the world's first dedicated K-pop hologram performance hall – would get delegates from those regions excited.

Located in Lotte FITIN building, a

new shopping mall in Dongdaemun, Klive (www.klive.co.kr) utilises state-of-the-art technology and K-pop content to create a fantasy world where visitors can go in search of Psy and catch idol bands in action.

Incentive winners can also ride the K-pop wave at DEF Dance Studio (www.defcompany.com), which can customise content for corporate groups. It has two dance studios which can each take up to 40 trainees. Exclusive use of a dance studio costs 20,000 Korean won per pax per hour, and clients can choose their preferred song to dance to.

South Korean cosmetics have also garnered a strong following worldwide, the effectiveness of these products promoted by the country's numerous beautiful celebrities. Incentive delegates keen to learn about the history and development of South Korean cosmetics can visit Space C (www.spacec.co.kr), a venue managed by Coreana, a local cosmetics company.

Coreana Cosmetics Museum within the building displays more than 5,300 beauty-related items used by women

in the Joseon Dynasty, as well as plants that provide crucial ingredients for beauty products. At the end of the learning journey, top achievers can adorn to The Beauty Space where a therapist at the skin clinic will prescribe various indulgent body treatments.

Alternatively, feature Kwangdong Traditional Medicine Hospital (english@ekwangdong.co.kr) in Gangnam, where visitors can learn about traditional health treatments that have withstood the sands of time.

Beside granting sufficient time for delegates to comb the myriad shops in downtown Seoul, incentive planners can include Simone Handbag Museum (simonehandbagmuseum.co.kr) in the itinerary. A reflection of South Korea's passion for fashion, the museum carries a collection of 300 bags, some dating back to 1550.

When delegates have gotten their fill of the big city, whisk them off to scenic Namsangol Hanok Village which showcases five traditional houses from the Joseon Dynasty as well as traditional activities such as archery and performances.



Need to know

Hot, new stay in Seoul's fashion enclave

The 170-room JW Marriott Dongdaemun Square Seoul has opened, making it the first international luxury business hotel to be located in the heart of the city's popular fashion district.

Featuring a stylish urban facade and elegant interiors, the property offers five meeting rooms over 972m² of space. The grand ballroom can accommodate up to 750 guests.

F&B offerings include BLT Steak, an internationally renowned New York steakhouse; Tavolo 24, a casual all-day dining restaurant featuring live cooking stations; The Lounge, which specialises in artisan chocolates, martinis and afternoon tea; Seoul Baking Company, which serves fresh cakes and pastries from its open kitchen; and the roof-top Griffin Bar overlooking the East Gate.

Indulge in a visual feast

Occupying a black and white building with clean lines in a neighbourhood of international embassies, Si Wha Dam positions itself as a sophisticated gallery that specialises in fine-dining cuisine. Dishes celebrate traditional Korean cooking styles and ingredients, but are presented in artistic forms, offering diners a feast for both the eyes and palate.

Set lunch and dinner options carry beautiful names, such as *A Lyric Poem*, *A Beautiful Painting* and *Pleasant Story*. Dishes featured under *A Beautiful Painting* set dinner include an artistic interpretation of the humble rice cake sandwich, among others.

Advance reservation is necessary. Visit www.siwhadam.com or call (82-02) 798-3350.

Eat your way through Seoul

O'ngo Food Communications organises a series of food-themed tours in several destinations across South Korea.

In Seoul, it serves up a variety of tours such as the *Korean Street Food and BBQ Tour* that combs through seven classic shops, street stalls and restaurants; the *Korean Night Dining Tour* that celebrates good food and imparts local eating and drinking customs to participants; and *The Great Korean Pub Crawl* that focuses on traditional pubs and new watering holes.

Tours are led by English, Spanish, or Japanese speaking guides. Private tours are available. Contact ongofood@ongofood.com for details.

Artistic souls

The Naksan Art Project in Dongsung-dong district features a range of art installations and more than 70 beautiful murals, decorated walls and houses, and more, making it a fun place to explore as part of a pre/post-meeting tour.





Melburnians' love for unique dining experiences has created many exciting gourmet enclaves in the city; Centre Place pictured above

The Melbourne Vibe

As a city with a dance style named after it, Melbourne is so cool it can hot up corporate events with its quirky city tours, unique dining concepts and fun new attractions. **Karen Yue** dives in to find out more

The year 2014 may have only just begun, but it is set to be a stellar one for Melbourne.

By the end of this year, the vibrant Australian city will have hosted 70 international conferences – and these are just those secured by Melbourne Convention Centre (MCB) – and welcomed 85,000 delegates.

MCB CEO, Karen Bolinger, said that in 2013 and 2014, the number of events had risen 37 per cent, delegate numbers by over half and economic impact by over a third compared to 2011 and 2012.

Soon after hosting the 22nd World Diabetes Congress last December, an event that drew an excess of 10,000 attendees from 140 countries and generated some A\$63 million (US\$56.3 million) for Victoria State's economy, Melbourne will go on to welcome 9,000 delegates for the World Congress of Cardiology in May and 14,000 delegates for the 20th International AIDS Conference in July.

“As most major international conferences are held every two years at a minimum and are on a regional rotation with hundreds of cities to choose from, it is unlikely that other city in the world will ever be able to emulate this feat,” said Bolinger.

She quipped that Melbourne continues to be a hit with business event planners because it is always “evolving and thriving” and offers plenty of creative opportunities.

“(Planners) can hold events in a bubble in the sky (the new Melbourne Star Observation Wheel, see *Need to know*) or get their teams to test their musical flair at the new event space, Melbourne, Music & Me, at Mushroom Records Museum,” she suggested, adding that groups can even replicate the recent Australian Open Tennis Championships with an event at the Olympic Parks and have a local tennis star as the umpire.

Addressing 2014 AIME delegates at a breakfast reception, lord mayor

Robert Doyle credited Melbourne's success in MICE to its quality convention venues, strong industry partnership, creative people and unique city vibe.

“I say it all the time – Melbourne is the most livable city in the world (Economist Intelligence Unit Survey ranked it top spot from 2011 to 2013). To know the real Melbourne, you need to wander around...discover our street art, quirky cafes, art galleries,” Doyle said.

There are many ways for a business event to project the Melbourne vibe. MELTours (info@meltours.com.au) runs a variety of walking tours that spotlight exciting aspects of the city. The three-hour *Melbourne Laneway Tour* journeys into back alleys and laneways, offering participants a peek into the city's street art, architecture, hidden shops and unknown tales that dwell in the depths of these areas.

Tipple lovers will enjoy MELTours'

excursions that explore the heady bar scenes of the city.

For groups that want to know how Melbourne came to be, MELTours' *Hidden Gems Of The Yarra Tour* takes participants back in time and along the Yarra. Guides will regale participants with stories of early pioneers, treaties with the indigenous tribes and lunatic asylums.

A new walking tour was recently rolled out by Walk Melbourne Tours (questions@walkmelbourne.com.au). The *Dumpling Discovery Walk* tells the story of Melbourne's Chinese community through the savoury flavours of Melburnians' favourite Chinese treat.

Both companies can tailor tours for corporate groups.

Melbourne's good food and creative dining culture can also be showcased at corporate functions. A great example of this was presented at the 2014 AIME Welcome Reception on Birrarung Marr, where more than 2,500 delegates tucked into an assortment of dishes from 11 of the city's hottest food trucks as well as canapes, grazing dishes and desserts supplied by Epicure Catering, and were entertained by roving acts and DJs brought together by Creative Entertainment Concepts.

Olivia Dal Bo, event coordinator of Peter Jones Special Events, the event management company that produced the reception, explained the concept was a reflection of Melburnian life. "Food trucks are loved by the locals. We wanted to give international delegates a taste of what we have been enjoying. By bringing these food trucks together on a spectacular location like Birrarung Marr, set against the cityscape, and with roving entertainers, we gave our street food culture a new dimension."

Peter Jones Special Events (reception@pjse.com.au) has produced several dining events in unique venues around Melbourne. It was behind a sit-down dinner in the iconic 19th century Block Arcade shopping mall in 2010, hosted by Oprah Winfrey, and a 500-pax gala fund-raising dinner for the Variety Club in Melbourne's Mullum Mullum Tunnel, EastLink.

If dining at a single restaurant does not quite cut it for delegates who love to bond over good food, then how about a dine-around option?

Located on the south bank of the Yarra River and surrounded by restored heritage cargo sheds, the South Wharf Promenade boasts a collection

of dining venues such as Akachochin, a Tokyo-style *izakaya*; Bangpop, a lively restaurant that specialises in Thai cuisine; and Plus 5, a cocktail and tapas bar. All restaurants can be hired for exclusive use. Those good for gatherings of up to 1,000 guests include Cargo Events Hall, Melbourne Public, Showtime Events Centre, The Boatbuilders Hut and The Bridge.

Cassandra Geneopoulos, business development & events manager of South Wharf Promenade, said: "Dine-around events here are very popular with corporate clients as it offers an interactive experience, indulging in a variety of activities around food, beverage, music, culture and education."

The destination had "quite a few" such events in 2013, revealed Geneopoulos, who listed a 30-pax "corporate progressive" dinner as an example. "It started with a (mixology) session at Plus 5, live paella cooking stations at Bohemian, mains at Meat Market, and then desserts served on human tables outside Common Man overlooking the Yarra River," she said.

She suggests four venues be used for groups with 30-50 pax, and three for larger gatherings of 200 guests.

Massive dine-around functions involving multiple merchants at South Wharf Promenade have been held for companies such as Optus (1,000 pax), Woolworths (3,000 pax) and Herald Sun (1,200 pax), as well as for events such as Cypriot Wine Festival (3,000pax) and British Lions Rugby (2,000 pax).

"We are in the process of working with large festivals and corporate welcome receptions of 10,000-15,000 guests," she shared.

Last year, Kuala Lumpur-based ICEM Regional orchestrated a dine-around event at the South Wharf Promenade for Malaysia's DiGi.Com.

The 39-pax group started the evening with coffee and sweets at the industrial chic Charlie Lovett, moved on to tapas in a motorcycle workshop at the Italian-influenced Gasolina, and ended the evening with barbeque meats and drinks at Meat Market.

ICEM Regional also tapped Melbourne's wealth of unique experiences to deliver an itinerary so memorable that the client has ordered the events specialist to focus on experiential aspects for future events, Lim told *TTGmice*.

"The itinerary was kept from the delegates, so every part of the journey was a surprise. The group had a city tour on roaring Harley-Davidson motorcycles, a fun dinner at Taxi Kitchen on Federation Square, a site visit of Apple office, a visit to a brewery and a full day of tasting, stomping and blending wine at Rochford Winery in Yarra Valley. When they exited the winery, eight helicopters were waiting to whisk them back to the city. "It was spectacular," said Lim Pei Pei, head of sales at ICEM Regional.

For airport transfers on the last day in the city, a 25-seater stretch Hummer was deployed.

"Melbourne is such a creative city with creative people to help us execute ideas," Lim said.

Poh Ching Huey, DiGi's trade marketing - event and promotions, told the magazine: "It has been months since the event but it is still the talk of the town. The word that is going around the local telco industry is that the event was very exclusive, very impressive."

Poh added that Melbourne is a true gourmet paradise: "We tried so many different meats, wines and beers on this trip, and everything was awesome!"



Massive dine-around events are supported at South Wharf Promenade

In the valley's embrace



The beautiful Rae's Restaurant is suitable for private dining events and wine tasting sessions

Yarra Valley needs little introduction, its name synonymous with fine Australian wine. Its impressive stable of more than 80 award-winning wineries with cellar doors and restaurants that serve up stellar dishes using the freshest local produce, along with scenic views and myriad attractions and recreational activities have lured many domestic and international travellers into its embrace.

Corporate clients have also been charmed by what Yarra Valley could do for their events. The region offers a variety of unique venues and hotels and resorts with function rooms and supporting recreational facilities.

Balgownie Estate Vineyard Resort & Spa in Yarra Glen, for instance, features 69 rooms, an events centre with four function spaces, Rae's Restaurant which can seat a 180-pax banquet, two private dining rooms, a cellar door and a luxury spa.

RACV Healesville Country Club, nestled in the foothills of the Great

Dividing Range, offers 80 keys, 14 function rooms (the largest being the ballroom for 300-pax cocktails) that are supported by breakout areas and grassed outdoor spaces with stunning views of the mountain ranges, an 18-hole golf course, a four-hole short course, and a bowling green and croquet lawn, among others.

The 102-key Yarra Valley Lodge offers 10 meeting rooms, with the largest being the Marmion Room for 400 pax in cocktail set-up, as well as Bella Restaurant, Lodge Bar, a day spa and two golf courses close by.

Rochford Wines provides two function rooms and Rochford Restaurant. For clients who prefer to take their gatherings outdoors, such as for teambuilding games, there is Courtyard, a shaded outdoor space, and expansive lawns that can support large events.

Besides partaking in wine tasting, delegates can also work up a sweat with a laser strike battle at the Hedgend Maze, or take it slow with a visit to The Big Bouquet where 60,000 gerberas bloom year-round and shop for quality craft at specialty shops like Indidjart Gallery and Cafe and Warratina Lavender Farm.

However, Yarra Valley's fun appeal and proximity to Melbourne mean venues and accommodation are often booked out quickly.

Melanie Watson, Balgownie Estate conference & events sales executive, said: "Our venues are often

completely booked out. For clients with large groups, we often advise an advance booking of six to eight weeks. Alternatively, we can work with clients to bring their delegates from the city to the estate for a day programme."

Booking challenges at Yarra Valley are also a result of the lack of hotels and resorts with large room count.

Anthony LoGiusto, Yarra Valley Lodge's general manager, said: "We have just 102 keys and 10 meeting rooms and are considered the largest residential conference facility here."

Kylie Shorter, conference & events sales manager of RACV Club, which manages RACV Healesville Country Club, noted that weekend bookings are especially tricky for corporate groups: "Yarra is very popular with locals on weekends and as a country club, members get priority."

To cater to large corporate groups that desire overnight programmes in the wine and gourmet destination, some sellers such as RACV Healesville Country Club, Château Yering and Balgownie Estate have banded together to manage overflow, on top of planning itineraries for clients.

Kiff Saunders, pilot of Global Ballooning which operates hot air balloon flights over the Yarra region and Melbourne city, said the company works closely with "all major accommodation and venues here" to plan programmes for conference groups.

"What we all want is holistic growth for Yarra," Saunders said, adding that such collaboration among tourism sellers makes life easier for event clients. – **Karen Yue**

Ideas Post-meeting day tour of Yarra Valley

Embark on an hour's drive to Yarra Valley from your hotel in Melbourne city centre early in the morning. First stop, Rae's Restaurant at Balgownie Estate Vineyard Resort & Spa for a hearty breakfast of the freshest local produce, followed by a wine tasting session.

Next, pay a visit to Healesville Sanctuary where you will get to meet some of Australia's indigenous wildlife, from kangaroos to dingoes. Catch a show of regal birds of prey and playful parrots, and stop by the Australian Wildlife Health Centre to learn what is being done to rescue and rehabilitate injured wildlife.

Later, get lost in the chocolate wonderland that is Yarra Valley Chocolaterie. Help yourself to free tastings, watch chocolate artisans at work and buy some of the sweet treats for loved ones back home.

Break for lunch at Yarra Valley Lodge's Bella Restaurant, which overlooks the stunning Yarra Ranges. Proceed to Heritage Yarra Valley Day Spa within the property for a soothing foot therapy, then work off the post-lunch sleep bug with an energetic Seglympics series of teambuilding games on Segways, organised by Segway Victoria at the sprawling Rochford Winery.



Seglympics activities can be conducted on any area of private land, indoors and out

Enjoy one last wine tasting experience at the Rochford Cellar Door before returning to Melbourne city. – **Karen Yue**

Need to know



New star arising in downtown Melbourne

See Melbourne in a new light on board the new Melbourne Star Observation Wheel which rises 120m into the sky with 21 fully enclosed air-conditioned glass cabins.

The new attraction in the city's Docklands area also boasts a selection of function rooms that can cater to corporate gatherings of all sizes and styles.

The Star Room can entertain up to 400 guests for cocktails or 250 for a seated breakfast, lunch or dinner, and includes two boardrooms – Star and Constellation – that can function as breakout rooms.

The Star Deck is perfect for private receptions before or after a flight on the observation wheel.

The Star Cabins can also be used for intimate gatherings of 14 for cocktails or eight for board meetings.

The landscaped alfresco Star Piazza can take more than 1,500 guests, making it the largest function space in Melbourne. Catering is provided exclusively by Peter Rowland Catering. Visit www.melbournestar.com for more information.

Under the sea, under the sea

Sea Life Melbourne Aquarium (www.melbourneaquarium.com.au) was relaunched last September, following major renovations. It now offers fresh venues for corporate events of various sizes.

The circular Coral Atoll, which boasts a large, stunning aquarium as its centrepiece, is good for a 400-pax sit-down banquet or a 600-pax cocktail function. Guests can also network under the sea in the Fish Bowl room, as sharks, stingrays and sea turtles circle around in the 2.2 million-litre oceanarium.

The Upper Deck, with its interior themed after the Australian rainforest, makes a unique venue too. It can take 70 guests for a sit-down dinner.

For breakfast meetings with a difference, choose the chilly Antarctica room, where King and Gentoo penguins hang out behind a glass enclosure.

Conferences can be held in the Yarra Room, which can accommodate 120 pax theatre-style.

New venues at Melbourne's Pullman

Pullman Melbourne Albert Park has unveiled two new meeting venues after the completion of an A\$20 million (US\$18 million) renovation. The new Victoria and Albert rooms and adjoining pre-function space are ideal for meetings for up to 50 people or as additional breakout rooms for large residential conferences.

With the addition of these venues, the hotel now offers 31 event spaces totalling 2,600m², making it the largest and most comprehensive residential event venue in Melbourne.

Pullman Melbourne Albert Park shares a common building on Queens Road with Mercure Melbourne Albert Park, offering a total accommodation inventory of 379 rooms.

Plan it better in 3D

Melbourne Convention Exhibition Centre (MCEC) has a new service that allows clients to work with its technology team to create 3D floorplans of function spaces.

Visualisation Studio, as the new service is called, is built on MA3D, a German-made programme and enables event organisations to try out various lighting effects, layouts and positioning of projectors and screens, etc to see how the space would look in reality. It is offered free to clients who book venues at MCEC.

Walk in The Park

Set within Melbourne's iconic Albert Park and overlooking the crisp Albert Park Lake, The Park is a flexible venue that allows planners the freedom to create unique events.



Owned by Publican Group, The Park works closely with Design Depot to bring in furniture and decoration that best suit the client's desired theme. It is supported by an in-house caterer, but is able to work with others.

It can accommodate a 1,000-pax standing reception indoors and another 280 on its sheltered balcony.

The Park must be hired entirely. Visit www.theparkmelbourne.com.au or email info@melbournereventsgroup.com.au.



View from the top

The best way to take in Yarra Valley's sprawling vineyards, rolling hills and scenic mountain ranges is from high above. To get a great view from the top, contact Global Ballooning, which has over 15 years of experience in corporate hospitality. It offers tailor-made programmes that include a scenic flight over grape vines in a hot air balloon. Pair the experience with a champagne breakfast at Rochford Winery. Free pick-ups are provided from selected Yarra Valley accommodation. Email balloon@globalballooning.com.au for more information.

Checking in

Five-star, 32 suites
42 Melba Highway, Yering, Yarra Valley,
Victoria, Australia
functions@chateauyering.com.au
www.chateauyering.com.au

Château Yering



FACT FILE

Maximum pax for meetings
150 at The Oak Room, theatre-style

Maximum pax for banquets
140 at The Oak Room

Recent events handled
A Ferrari Club Christmas lunch for 127 pax; car launches involving helicopter transfers and degustation dinners for 32-50 people over different days; wine tasting and archery for 32 pax by an international fashion company; a nine-pax bootcamp by an international sunglass company

VERDICT



Karen Yue

A stark difference from the usual city hotel, this luxurious, fairytale property will make any corporate gathering most memorable.

It is easy to imagine oneself being transported into the pages of a Jane Austen or Charles Dickens novel when one sets foot in Château Yering, an all-suite two-storey hotel in Yarra Valley that sits in a beautiful heritage building whose history harks back to the mid-1800s.

When the handsome homestead was ready to be transformed into a luxurious hotel in 1997, interior designer, Elly Milner, cleverly accentuated the building's Victorian charm by bringing in plush fabrics, luxurious furniture and European *objet d'art* that effectively recreated an elegant ambience of a bygone era. I almost expected ladies in basque and bouffant skirts to emerge from behind doors!

Meeting facilities

The Oak Room, which spans 165m², can seat 150 guests in a theatre or cocktail setting. It comes with its own bar, bathroom and a foyer that is perfect for mid-meeting refreshments.

Smaller groups can book The Library, a cosy space with an open fireplace, good for a 14-pax board meeting or a 20-pax cocktail party; or The Chinese Room, an elegant boardroom for 14 guests.

Besides these dedicated event venues, Château Yering's Drawing Room makes a splendid option for pre/post conference drinks. The lush garden that spills out in front of the property is also a lovely spot for BBQs, high teas and cocktail parties for 150 pax. Add a marque and the garden is ready for a 100-pax sit-down dinner.

F&B

Sweetwater Café, with its large windows and conservatory-style glass ceiling, is a delightful place for breakfast as it allows

guests to also feast their eyes on the surrounding greenery. Breakfast is served semi-buffet style, with guests ordering their main course and picking breads, cereals and fruits off a buffet line.

A fine-dining option is offered at the ornate Eleonore's Restaurant.

Private dining rooms are available in the evening for up to 130 guests.

Rooms

All suites are uniquely decorated. There are 22 River Suites which look out to the Yarra River; three Stable Suites which come with an open fireplace, spa and private verandah; six Yarra Suites which are equipped with a separate lounge, dining area, marble bathroom with spa and an oversized balcony or verandah; and a Yering Suite which is accessible by a private staircase and offers a separate lounge, a dining room, two private balconies and a large marble bathroom with a corner spa bath.

My River Suite, dressed in various shades of pink, fabrics with floral prints, plush seats and a large, soft bed, was a real sanctuary after a long day of business meetings and site inspections. The white marble bathroom is spacious and has both a claw-foot bath and separate shower. I adored the heated bars on which towels were hung. How ingenious! No more shuddering in a towel cold from the room's air conditioning after emerging from the shower.

Other facilities

Château Yering boasts its own helipad and offers guests a tennis court and swimming pool. The beautiful Yering Station, said to be Victoria's first vineyard, is a three-minute leisurely stroll away.



Karen Bolinger



Dorian Rommel



Oh Kin Tat



Rex Loh

Australia

Tourism Australia has named **John O'Sullivan** its new managing director. Most recently the CEO of Fox Sports, O'Sullivan has held executive positions with Events Queensland, the Football Federation of Australia and the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Organising Committee. His appointment follows the departure of Andrew McEvoy who is now with Fairfax Media Events.

Karen Bolinger, CEO of the Melbourne Convention

Bureau has been appointed 2014 Board Chair of **BestCities Global Alliance**.

China

Dorian Rommel is now general manager of **Shangri-La Hotel, Dalian**. Rommel was last general manager at Kempinski Hotel, Yinchuan and has worked at several international hotel groups in Europe, Asia and the US. He brings 20 years of hospitality experience to his new role.

Marriott International has made **Pearl Peng** general manager of **Beijing Marriott Hotel City Wall**. With more than 20 years of hospitality experience, of which 15 have been with Marriott International, Peng first joined Marriott Global Sales Office Beijing in 1999.

Malaysia

Four Points by Sheraton Sandakan has named **Kanit Sangmookda** its new general manager. He was last regional director of revenue management for Starwood Hotels & Resorts in South-east Asia.

Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre has appointed **Oh Kin Tat** sales manager – conventions and conferences, and Thien Tsen Kiat, sales manager – TenOnCall. Oh has over 17 years of hospitality experience, while Thien is

armed with more than 14 years of experience in corporate sales from the retail, telecommunications and F&B industries.

Myanmar

May Myat Mon Win has been appointed general manager of **Chatrium Hotel Royal Lake Yangon** in Myanmar. She brings with her 10 years of hospitality experience. Prior to this promotion she was assistant general manager of the property for five years.



Denis J Thouvard

Singapore

Rex Loh has moved from The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore to his new role as director of sales and marketing of **InterContinental Singapore**. Loh brings with him over 15 years of experience helming sales, marketing and revenue functions in the hospitality industry.



Franck LaFourcade

Thailand

Centara Hotels & Resorts has promoted **Darren Shaw** from general manager of Centara Karon Resort Phuket to area general manager of both **Centara Grand Phuket Beach Resort Phuket** and **Centara Villas Phuket**. Shaw has over 20 years' experience in the hotel industry.

Denis J Thouvard has taken on the role of general manager at **Dusit Thani Laguna Phuket**. Thouvard was last area general manager at the Centara Grand Beach Resort in Karon Beach, Phuket.

Sofitel Krabi Phokeethra Golf & Spa has named **Christian Schlegel** its new general manager. Schlegel was most recently hotel manager of Sofitel Bangkok Sukhumvit.

Vietnam

Franck LaFourcade is returning to **Sofitel Legend Metropole Hotel** in Hanoi for a second stint as general manager. Previously general manager of the hotel between 2000 and 2005, LaFourcade's homecoming follows nine years managing Sofitel properties in Shanghai as general manager and area general manager.



John O'Sullivan

Nopparat Maythaveekulchai

Crossing into the MICE realm from the national telco, the new president of Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, tells **Karen Yue** that he is having fun learning the ropes and applying his IT know-how to boost the destination's marketing reach

You started your career with TOT Public Company and was with it for 20 years. Why the crossover to the MICE industry?

The business events industry is not entirely new to me. When I was with TOT I had the chance to participate in a number of trade exhibitions and meetings. I believe the telecommunications industry contributes 10 per cent of business to the MICE industry.

Just as the telecommunications industry is important to Thailand's economy, so is the MICE industry. One per cent of Thailand's GDP comes from the MICE industry, and MICE revenue ranks third highest for the country, after export and tourism.

I believe that with my leadership, stronger promotions and better planning, MICE revenue can grow even more.

But MICE industry is still quite different from what you have been so used to. Have you been put through a rigorous crash course on the workings of the MICE realm since joining the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) on May 16, 2013?

I am very fortunate to have joined TCEB with a very strong and motivated team in place. This team has taught me a lot about the MICE business and I am loving every moment. With them working with me, coming to work feels like partaking in a fun hobby!

Since coming onboard, I've joined the team in attending several trade shows such as IMEX America in Las Vegas, IT&CMA in Bangkok and AIME in Melbourne.

With so much attention on the political demonstrations in Bangkok, has it been difficult trying to sell Thailand at these trade events?

Attitudes of buyers and media are different everywhere. At AIME, I was delighted to find that Australian delegates still regard Thailand as a peaceful destination. They recognise that Thailand offers good service and quality, and a mix of adventure and entertainment. Australia is an important market for Thailand, so this is great news.

Before coming to Melbourne (for AIME), we had braced ourselves for tough media questions about the demonstrations. We had also expected buyers to stay away from the Thailand booth. Fortunately, journalists and buyers at the show were very supportive and most only wanted to know what new things TCEB is doing to push



Thailand. We heard that Thai Airways had 26 appointments each day at AIME!

The demonstrations occupy only a small area in Bangkok. Business is on as usual in the rest of the city and other destinations in Thailand. There are six international airports in the country to take you to other parts of Thailand. AIME provided an excellent platform for us to reinforce those messages.

So what new initiatives do you have up your sleeves?

TCEB established a Digital MICE team on Feb 25 and it is behind the bureau's new online marketing and communication strategy. This is an example of what I'm bringing to the table for TCEB – I have good IT knowledge from my previous job and am applying that to new digital initiatives, with inputs from the team of course.

Part of the new online marketing and communication strategy is the creation of an information management system, a comprehensive database of past events held in Thailand that we can use to project and plan for the future. We intend to share such market intelligence with Team Thailand, that is, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Transport.

We will also make some information accessible for industry players. For instance, we have hired a company to conduct an annual survey on the MICE industry, and findings will be distributed. Hopefully, they can use that data in their business planning.

We have also launched www.businesseventsthailand.com to provide MICE specialists with all the information and materials they will need to sell and promote Thailand as a destination. You can get MICE statistics, destination features and suitable attractions, supplier contacts, and testimonials from people who have taken business to Thailand or attended trade events in Thailand.

Sounds like you and your team will have a busy year!

(Laughs) That's not all. We are powering up our social media reach. In January we reached out to event bloggers and PCOs through the *MICE Destination Review Competition*, in partnership with Thai Airways. By inviting these individuals to share their experiences (in five of Thailand's MICE cities) via social media, we hope to improve future MICE travellers' impression and experience of Thailand. *(Five finalists were shortlisted and put on a tour that showcased the MICE capabilities of Bangkok, Phuket, Chiang Mai, Pattaya and Khon Kaen from January 19-25.)*

Then there is also the *Spice Up Your Business agenda* campaign which will start in April to offer perks such as flight tickets to MICE visitors. *(Days after the interview, TCEB issued a press release announcing details of its online marketing strategy which will be implemented under three key frameworks, including the development of the above-mentioned database, production of digital sales and marketing tools, and innovative online marketing and public relations activities. Spice Up Your Business campaign is part of three new initiatives; the other two being Dream Meeting Contest and Itinerary Contest.)*

Do you think these online activities will soften the impact of the political protests on Thailand's MICE business?

Tourist arrivals to Thailand are actually holding up despite the demonstrations and news coverage, although MICE clients are taking longer to consider and confirm their bookings.

In January this year, Thailand saw 2,319,821 visitors. The same month last year it was 2,318,447. Visitor arrivals are still averaging at two million the past few months. Between October and December 2013, Thailand welcomed 186,864 MICE travellers, up 5.2 per cent over the same period in 2012.

I take that to mean that TCEB will not be adjusting its MICE targets for 2014.

We are sticking to our targets. You could say we are a little fortunate that the demonstrations are happening in months that are

usually low season for business event. If this problem continues into March, we may have to play catch up in the later part of the year but we will still work towards our existing target. *(On February 28, protestors issued a statement to say they will end blockades in key parts of Bangkok and consolidate their movement at Lumpini Park instead.)*

We have several initiatives in place to motivate meeting planners to keep choosing Thailand, such as the *Thai CONNECT* campaign which comes with subvention. On top of current programmes, we have announced new ones such as *Be My Guest* (a hosted buyer programme that provides complimentary room nights to entice business event travellers to extend their stay in Bangkok), additional meeting and convention support through *Meetings Bonus* and *Conventions Bonus* rewards packages, and *Business Up 2 U* (a fixed subsidy programme for exhibitions).

How useful are these subvention programmes in rebuilding MICE buyer confidence in Bangkok?

We hosted a party for 100 Australian MICE buyers during AIME 2014 and took the chance to give our guests an update on the political demonstrations in Bangkok, showcased the various destinations in Thailand, and presented all the new campaigns and subvention programmes we have.

By the end of the evening, we got a confirmation from Tupperware Brand for a 500-pax event in May.

The next morning we got news that a 300-pax group is also planning to head to Bangkok.

We are not trying to use money to solve our problems, but these subvention programmes can help to compensate clients for the extra costs they may have to fork out for (contingency plans).



An interesting read

Read your article on talent management (In focus: *The art of shaping, keeping talents*) in the February/March issue of TTGmice. Thank you for making it such an interesting read!

Koh Pei Yin

Senior communications executive,
Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre

Why let spaces in the new cruise terminal go to waste?

The Kai Tak Cruise Terminal which commenced operations last June had nine ship arrivals in 2013, and 26 are scheduled for 2014. So far, 22 have been scheduled for 2015. Hence there are a great number of days when the multi-million-dollar infrastructure, which (can function) as a MICE venue, is left vacant. I am somewhat disappointed that the operator of the terminal has not been proactive in marketing the vast space which has (MICE-friendly) facilities such as the baggage room and the roof garden with sweeping views of Victoria Harbour!”



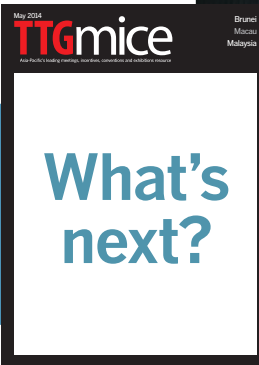
Richard Willis
Vice president,
Hong Kong Association of Travel Agents



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.



Asia rides the waves – find out how hot South-east Asia is as a cruise destination for MICE groups in our cover story next issue. TTGmice May will also take the MICE pulse of **Brunei, Macau** and **Malaysia** and uncover new products and services that are on offer for business event planners.

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Stephani McKay, Travel Team Leader

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Abacus International
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