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Paris' Asian ambitions

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Karen Yue
Group editor

Travel safer

Every year my team and I attend eight travel trade shows around the region where we produce show dailies for event delegates. And if all destinations could be reached by direct flights, we would be in the air together 16 times a year.

That's 16 times of flying with at least five other key editorial personnel a year, from reporters to the layout designer and photographer.

For major travel trade events such as the ASEAN Tourism Forum, the entire editorial headquarters in Singapore is mobilised along with senior editors from the rest of Asia – and often, we would all be on the same flight.

So when Malaysia Airlines flight 370 (MH370) vanished en route to Beijing on March 8, along with 239 people on board including 20 employees from a single company, I got worried.

Sure, the need to ensure business continuity through careful travel risk policies has always been in the back of my mind since the first time I interviewed Tony Ridley – then travel security services director, Asia-Pacific for International SOS – back in 2008. As a young reporter then, Ridley's frank views on how the lack of proper travel risk management can impact a company's business were enlightening and fascinating.

But it took the MH370 incident, which happened so close to home, to bring that awareness to the fore years later.

I was not the only one who regarded the unfortunate incident as a wake-up call to relook business travel arrangements. The week after news broke on MH370, my company's head honcho ordered staggered arrivals for business trips involving multiple personnel from the same department.

For the recent IT&CM China in April, my colleagues and I arrived in Shanghai on three different flights over two different days. At the end of the trade show, we left for home on different flights over different days too. The arrangement needed some getting used to, but it was practical and necessary.

I welcome the new rules and hope it will lead to more up-dated corporate travel risk policies in the immediate future.

Corporate travel managers we spoke to for our *In focus* analysis this issue also admitted that the MH370 incident provided a wake-up call for them and their companies to ask if a better risk management policy was needed. Read about this in *Wake-up call for travel risk*, page 11.

Experience is indeed the best teacher. If aviation specialists could learn from numerous accidents recorded throughout modern aviation history to improve flight technology and deliver safer air travels for future generations, then companies have no reason not to learn from the experiences of other corporate travellers to put in place smarter, more responsible travel policies for their employees.



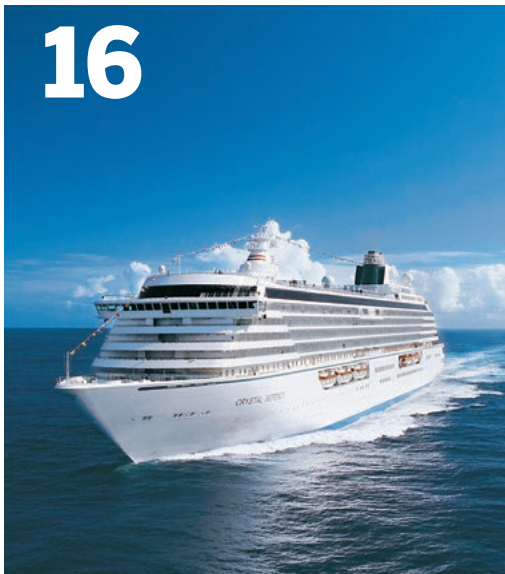
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We love

The right moves

Hallyu (Korean wave) may be its latest cultural export but long before Psy's famed swagger down the streets of Gangnam, South Korea was already uniting the world through taekwondo.

Seoul's Kukkiwon – home to the World Taekwondo Headquarters – is the only taekwondo-dedicated facility in the country but will soon be joined by Taekwondowon, a hub focusing on the education, training and research of taekwondo. (Taekwondowon's opening was originally scheduled for April 24 but at press time has been postponed due to the recent ferry incident.)

Located in Jeollabuk-do Province's Muju, 2.5 hours from Seoul, the 230ha centre features a 5,000-seat arena, a 423-seat theatre, a museum, interactive training facilities, VIP rooms, a food court and an observatory with panoramic views of its surroundings. Apart from training programmes, the multipurpose space can be used to stage taekwondo-related events such as global championships and performances. The centre is managed by Taekwondo Promotion Foundation.

Welcoming the addition of sports-oriented facilities in South Korea, ETourism managing director, Jacky Lee, said: "We will likely use Taekwondowon for incentive tours, either for taekwondo interest groups or as a site for corporate incentives and teambuilding."



Rejuvenating meetings

Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts has launched a new global meetings and events concept, *Meaningful Connections*, which combines business with the rejuvenation of mind, body and soul.

David Spooner, vice president sales & marketing of the hospitality company, explained that *Meaningful Connections* was created to "to deliver the perfect balance between business and rejuvenation to make any event a truly unique experience".

"Our locations and resorts allow delegates to get away from it all, in a highly motivating setting, and focus purely on meetings and events that inspire creativity and out-of-the-box thinking," Spooner added.

Along with unique event and dining options, teambuilding pursuits are on offer at 22 Banyan Tree properties worldwide. Meeting participants can enrol in various activities, from spa treatments and morning yoga sessions, to extreme activities such as ATV rides, and to CSR programmes via sustainability projects supported and managed by Banyan Tree.

A *Meaningful Connections* microsite has been developed in English and Mandarin, providing extensive information on key Banyan Tree destinations, seating capacity and styles, unique experiences and dining options for groups of all sizes. A RFP function ensures personalised and tailored information is communicated to planners promptly.



Qantas unveils new lounge in Hong Kong

Passengers travelling on Qantas flights will now have access to a new lounge at Hong Kong International Airport.

The multimillion dollar lounge takes on a stylish and contemporary design that reflects Hong Kong's "colour, vibrancy and luxury", said Qantas International CEO, Simon Hickey.

"The new Hong Kong Lounge is testament to our continued investment in the lounge and inflight experiences across our network," said Hickey. "It's the perfect environment for our customers to relax and work before their flight."

"All of our flights from Hong Kong to

Australia are overnight, so we know customers will enjoy being able to dine in the lounge before they fly so they can maximise their sleep onboard."

The Hong Kong Lounge builds on the success of the Qantas Singapore Lounge, with menus designed by renowned consulting chef Neil Perry, based on his Rockpool and Spice Temple restaurants. Customers can enjoy a range of dining experiences from the Spice Temple BBQ Bar to *yum cha* trolleys, an extensive buffet or the locally influenced plate of the day. Spice Temple-inspired cocktails

will be prepared alongside a world-class wine selection and barista service, to be enjoyed at the bar area with panoramic views across the airport overlooking Qantas gates.

Qantas has also partnered with Sofitel to offer a new service experience in Hong Kong. First-class passengers and Platinum One Qantas Frequent Flyers will enjoy exclusive services such as shirt pressing, shoe shining and priority access to showers.

The Hong Kong Lounge seats 300 guests, has 12 showers, a family zone and a flexible working area.



Meet and eat well

In response to rising demand for healthy dining options from health-conscious delegates, the Gold Coast's Outrigger Surfers Paradise has added more gluten-free, vegetarian, organic and low-fat noodle box options to its menu.

The new range of healthy eats are expected to appeal to the property's growing medical and allied health sector business. According to a press release from Outrigger Surfers Paradise, a high percentage of MICE business at the hotel is drawn from the medical sector.

The hotel offers nine meeting venues and can cater for up to 600 delegates.

Along with the new dining options, the hotel is also offering a special day package for the price of a half-day option at just A\$54 (US\$50) per person for bookings made before July 31 and held by November 30 this year.

SilkAir brings Hangzhou closer

The regional wing of Singapore Airlines will begin flights to its eighth destination in China from June 27 this year.

Subject to applicable approvals, SilkAir will operate four flights a week between the two cities using Airbus A319 and A320 aircraft, featuring both business and economy class cabins.

Services are operated every Monday,



Wednesday, Friday and Sunday. Flights from Singapore will depart at 10.00 and arrive in Hangzhou at 15.20. From Hangzhou, flights will depart at 16.20 and touch down in Singapore at 21.25.

"(This) reaffirms SilkAir's commitment to continue to grow (its) network in China. Hangzhou is a city that attracts both the leisure and business traveller and we believe that our new service will certainly benefit them," said SilkAir chief executive, Leslie Thng.

The new Hangzhou services conveniently connect Singapore to more than 90 international cities in the joint Singapore Airlines-SilkAir network.

New stays in Tokyo

The 150-room Courtyard by Marriott Tokyo Station has opened, located a four-minute walk from the Yaesu side of Tokyo Station and occupying the first four floors of Kyobashi Trust Tower.

Room range from 16m² to 33m². Guests can check in and out via self-service kiosks and use their smartphones to access their room, the first keyless entry service in Japan.

Female travellers will appreciate the hotel's women-only rooms that offer enhanced privacy and amenities.

Courtyard by Marriott Tokyo Station offers four meeting venues that can accommodate up to 130 people. Other facilities include a 24-hour gym, free Wi-Fi and various F&B outlets.



HOT DEALS

Marina Bay Sands Singapore

The massive integrated resort is offering an *Upgrade and Be Rewarded* package that dishes out several perks for event planners who choose to upsize their standard meeting package. The standard meeting package is priced at S\$375⁺⁺ (US\$230⁺⁺) per person and includes a night's stay in a deluxe room, use of a meeting room, audiovisual equipment, stationery, floral centrepieces, carpark coupons for up to 20 per cent of delegates, free Internet line for the organiser, morning and afternoon breaks, and a working lunch.

With a S\$4 upgrade, planners can get a Value Package and enjoy an upgraded lunch option to international buffet at RISE Restaurant.

With a S\$10 upgrade, planners can get a Deluxe Package that will give them an upgraded lunch option to international buffet at RISE Restaurant or near the meeting room, three snack items per refreshment break, a secretariat office with refreshments, and Internet access for up to 20 users per day.

With a S\$15 upgrade, planners will enjoy a Premium Package which comes with an upgraded lunch option to international buffet at RISE Restaurant or near the meeting room, three snack items per refreshment break, a secretariat office with refreshments, and Inter-

net access at both the convention centre and hotel for every room booked.

Terms and conditions apply.

Contact Up@MarinaBaySands.com for more information.

Hong Kong Disneyland Hotel

The themed hotel in Hong Kong's Lantau Island has introduced a series of perks for events booked at its premises between April 1 and August 31 this year.

For every 20 paid delegates, one can meet for free at the hotel. A Hong Kong Disneyland premium will also be given to each delegate. Meeting experiences will be enhanced with a refreshment break item tailored to carry the company logo, while planners will enjoy a 50 per cent discount on meeting games.

Furthermore, a 15 per cent discount on Hong Kong Disneyland merchandise will be offered to all delegates.

These perks come with a meeting package priced at HK\$825 (US\$106) per person, excluding a 10 per cent service charge. Package features include use of a meeting room from 09.00 to 17.00, basic meeting equipment and stationery, set/buffet lunch, two refreshment breaks, all-day flow of coffee, tea and candies, and one ticket to the theme park per delegate for admission after 16.00.

Terms and conditions apply.

Visit www.disneymeetings.com/hongkong/ for more information.



Hansar Bangkok

The all-suite hotel has rolled out new full- and half-day meeting packages which are valid until September 30 this year.

Priced at 2,000 baht (US\$62) nett per person/day, the full-day deal includes use of a meeting room from 09.00 to 18.00, Wi-Fi Internet access, LCD projector, audiovisual equipment, DVD player, plasma TV, meeting stationery, full-day supply of cookies, tropical fruits, Elefin cappuccino, espresso, tea and fresh juices, as well as two coffee breaks with three items and lunch.

The half-day option is priced at 1,500 baht nett per person/day. It offers meeting groups almost the same features as the full-day package, but with only one coffee break.

To qualify for these packages, a minimum booking of 20 guests is required.

Accommodation rates are from 5,591 baht nett per night, inclusive of breakfast, complimentary mini-bar items and Wi-Fi Internet access. For groups, a minimum booking of 10 rooms applies.

Contact sales@hansarbangkok.com or nina@hansarhotels.com for more details.

Facilitating teams

The Sheraton Guangzhou Huadu Resort has launched a teambuilding facility, giving itself bragging rights as the only international branded hotel in South China to boast such infrastructure.

The facility is equipped with a 'climbing wall', 'broken bridge', 'giant ladder' and 'trust fall' – features designed to help participants acquire communication and leadership skills, and fortify team spirit.

Ivo Estorninho, general manager of Sheraton Guangzhou Huadu Resort and Four Points by Sheraton Guangzhou, Dongpu, said the hotel was motivated to build the facility following numerous requests from guests for teambuilding activities.

Response from corporate clients have been "very strong" since its launch, said Estorninho, with several bookings confirmed for the coming months.

Half- and full-day teambuilding packages are available, and activities can be customised.



Tallebudgera Active Recreation Centre, Gold Coast

Renowned for delivering quality outdoor recreation activities to the education, sport and recreation sectors, the Gold Coast's Tallebudgera Active Recreation Centre now caters to the corporate market with the launch of a new corporate teambuilding package that includes use of a meeting room, audiovisual equipment, catering and an instructor-led teambuilding activity. Options include surfing and artificial wall or high ropes challenge course. Email info.tallebudgera@nprsr.qld.gov.au for more information.



Forest

If it is a feast for the senses that you want for your guests, then lead them gently into Forest where the decor is as exquisite as the quality of its dishes, writes **Karen Yue**

I was late for my dinner appointment at Forest, but there was something arresting about the interior of the restaurant in Equarius Hotel that compelled me to stop and marvel at the mighty tree trunk-like pillars that reach towards a ceiling built to resemble the many intertwining branches of trees in, yes, a forest. I soon discovered that Forest is not mere eye-candy; local celebrity chef Sam Leong, who sits at the helm, has created a formidable menu of fine, classic Chinese dishes that have been reinvented with modern techniques and flavours from around the world.

MICE application

Forest can seat 88 guests indoors and take gatherings of 10 people in its private room. Its beautiful interior and chef Leong's reputation for making magic in the kitchen have won Forest many corporate and private events since it opened in January 2012.

According to Tan Zhi Juan, spokesperson for Resorts World Sentosa where Forest resides, the restaurant is often used to host power lunches and corporate social gatherings. Most recently, Forest was chosen to host a corporate seminar and lunch for 50 guests on February 28.

An enchanting al fresco area spills out the back of Forest, and I imagine it would make a lovely venue for pre-dinner cocktails or small dinner gatherings when the weather is less humid. This space is good for 32 people.

F&B concept

According to Forest's marketing materials,

the restaurant specialises in contemporary Chinese cuisine and redefines the art of Chinese fine dining. I say, Forest enhances well-loved Chinese dishes with the best ingredients or cooking techniques common in the cuisines of other countries.

Take, for instance, the humble but so hard-to-perfect Chinese fried rice. Instead of using the common long-grain Jasmine rice, chef Leong opts for the rounder Japanese Pearl rice, which he said allowed flavours to coat every grain more consistently. Chef Leong also brings the briny squid ink – more common in Italian kitchens – into the picture, blending it perfectly with XO chili sauce – favoured by Cantonese chefs – to evoke rich flavours of the sea.

It is worth mentioning that every dish is presented beautifully, adding points to the complete dining experience.

Corporate groups in Singapore over the weekend should try chef Leong's new eight-course Sunday lunch which features signature dishes such as pan-seared foie gras with smoked duck breast on home-made crispy beancurd skin, and steamed salmon with ginger flower, lemon and kaffir lime leaves.

Service and ambience

In the day, full-size glass windows bring in views of the lush greenery outside into Forest. In the evening, the ceiling of 'branches' is illuminated, casting a magical glow throughout the restaurant.

Despite having a show kitchen, which allows diners to see nimble chefs at work, Forest retains a certain level of serenity. Servers interact with diners quietly, politely and with a warm smile. As a fine dining restaurant, Forest is definitely not stiff and intimidating, making it perfect for corporate events where you want your guests to relax, network and bond over memorable food.

Contacts

Equarius Hotel, Resorts World Sentosa
Email: dining@rwsentosa.com

Opening hours

12.00-14.30 (Monday to Saturday; last order at 14.15)

18.00-22.30 (Monday to Sunday; last order at 22.15)



AACVB mulls stronger HQ set-up

By Raini Hamdi and Paige Lee Pei Qi

No decision has been made on the structure of the new Asian Association of Convention & Visitor Bureaus (AACVB) headquarters, a far more crucial aspect in growing the region's congress market than the decision to move the base from Macau to Bangkok.

Thailand won the bid to host AACVB's HQ late last year, over South Korea, and Macau relinquished that responsibility to Bangkok officially on January 1 this year after hosting the HQ for 30 years. In Macau, it is believed the HQ comprised two or three Macau Government Tourist Office staff helping out with AACVB matters but, with Asia as a rising star in the conventions market, more support is needed.

Asked if the HQ would be a full-time secretariat or have dedicated full-time staff, Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) director of marketing and corporate image department, Parichat Svetasreni, said: "We are discussing this. My idea, and TCEB's vision, is to grow the AACVB and conventions in the region sustainably. We now have a good foundation with eight countries (in the membership)."



Parichat: a good foundation for growth

"Asia is the rising star in business events, while associations in Europe and the US like to rotate their conventions. We will try our best to be the one-stop centre in promoting the region to them. If an association wants to rotate its event from Europe to Asia – be it Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia or anywhere else – we can provide the information and assistance. As you know, there are different subvention schemes and (MICE attractions) in each Asian country."

However, the structure of the AACVB HQ is more critical than where it is based, said Kevin Leong, former AACVB secretary-general (1992-1995), when contacted by *TTGmice* for his views.

"If the HQ is required to be proactive in initiating or implementing programmes decided by the Board and secretary-general/president, it will be crucial that the HQ be well-organised and resourced.

"If that is the case, the location of the HQ will need to be stable and not subject to social instability as that detracts from the focus of the staff. If the HQ merely supports the secretary-general passively,

it does not matter where it's located. In that case, the staff of the secretary-general would be more important – as it was for me," said Leong.

Asked what sort of set-up would the AACVB need today to function effectively, Leong said: "A permanent secretariat with staff dedicated to the association to oversee the implementation of plans developed by the board and the secretary-general."

AACVB did discuss this as part of its full-day meeting/AGM in Shanghai on April 14, but president Zulkefli Sharif declined to comment, saying it was premature.

AACVB members currently comprise the MICE bureaus of China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Macau, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

Svetasreni said there was opportunity to court countries within the Greater Mekong sub-region (GMS) into the membership with Thailand's "strategic location" as the hub to GMS.

"Thailand is a good location and we can help coordinate and facilitate the expansion of the membership to other countries like Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam (where MICE is rising) to make the association a truly Asian (one)," she said.



Leong: a dedicated secretariat is needed

RPE Indonesia expands show portfolio

Reed Panorama Exhibitions (RPE) is bringing three global events into Indonesia this year and expanding an existing one.

The Indonesia Transport Supply Chain and Logistics and the Mining & Engineering Indonesia will both take place from October 29 to 31 at the Jakarta International Expo.

RPE president director, Michelle Lim, explained that the transport and logistics event is a clone of Reed's event in France while the mining and engineering show was brought from Australia.

"There are a lot of cross-border collaboration within the group (based on) what (a destination's economy) needs," Lim said, adding that the exhibitions will be customised for the market.

These events are focused on the trade, with exhibitors expected to come from Indonesia and all over the world. Buyers

are expected to be locals.

"We will start by targeting Indonesian buyers and gradually bring in regional ones," she said.

RPE is also planning to host the Indonesia Toys, Games & Comic Convention (ITGCC) which will take place in October or November. This pop culture event, which will feature exhibitors like Marvel and Disney, will target both trade and consumer attendees.

"We have been successful with Comic Con in the US and Australia, and had brought it to Singapore (the Singapore Toys, Games & Comic Convention)," noted Lim, who added that the shows tended to draw fans of certain brands who would attend as buyers.

For example, Comic Con has a community that follows the show and some

40,000 fans in the social media who have helped in communicating developments.

"(ITGCC) is a bit different because it comes with exclusives, where (some) exhibitors launch and sell products at the show," she said.

While the dates and venue for ITGCC are yet to be confirmed, Lim expects the show to draw 100 exhibitors, half of which will be from Indonesia, and some 50,000 buyers and visitors.

Meanwhile, RPE debuted Mega Build Indonesia last month. Running from April 17 to 20, the event combined the existing Renovation & Construction Expo and KERAMIKA, a ceramic industry exhibition in partnership with the Indonesian Ceramics Industry Association. It occupied the entire Jakarta Convention Centre. – **Mimi Hudoyo**



Lim: customised for the market

Triumphs for TNZ's MICE goals

By S Puvaneswary

Tourism New Zealand (TNZ), which has recently shifted more of its attention to the international business events segment, has scored two major event wins.

Sharing the good news with *TTGmice*, Mischa Mannix-Opie, regional manager South & South East Asia for TNZ, said Auckland had won hosting rights to the Asian Patent Attorneys Association Council Meeting 2017. The event is expected to attract 1,600 intellectual property lawyers, primarily from the Asia-Pacific region, and generate an estimated economic value of more than NZ\$4 million (US\$3.5 million) for the destination.

New Zealand's second win is the Asia Pacific Wind Engineering 2017, secured by the Department of Mechanical Engineering at Auckland University. Some 300 delegates are expected and the event will generate an estimated economic value of NZ\$850,750.

Mannix-Opie described the business events sector as "a high value market segment".

"International conference delegates

spend an average of more than NZ\$3,000, compared with the average leisure visitor who spends on average less than NZ\$3,000," she explained.

She identified China, India, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand as key MICE markets. The tourism board intends to focus efforts on courting corporate incentives and conferences from Singapore, and on corporate incentives from the other Asian markets.

TNZ is also hoping to encourage more business events delegates to stay on for leisure.

These objectives are supported by the bureau's 100%

Pure New Zealand – Beyond Convention campaign which was launched globally last September, targeting associations, conference organisers and corporate decision-makers in markets such as the US, Australia, China and South-east Asia.

The bureau also works closely with a dedicated business events team in various initiatives to grow quality leads, and manages the Conference Assistance Programme, which is aimed at securing international conferences to New Zealand.



Mannix-Opie:
good money in
conferences

Better PCO standards needed in China

China's MICE industry stakeholders are urging the development of truly professional PCOs and adoption of international standards to boost the country's appeal as an associations meeting destination.

China's growing prowess in the medical, scientific and technology fields has greatly raised its potential for hosting association events on the international stage, as reflected in the recent successful bid to host the 17th International Congress of Immunology in Beijing in 2019, according to Huang Bo, vice-chairman of department of immunology, Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences.

However, the pivotal role a good PCO plays in bidding for association meetings is still not widely recognised in China, lamented trade members.

"PCOs are still new in China, although DMCs and exhibition suppliers are common," observed Jennifer Salsbury, senior director, international, China National Convention Center.

The lack of a professional intermedi-

ary in China also poses a great challenge in wooing global association meetings.

"The government should (push) for the creation of professional CVBs in key cities; a strong CVB can act as an interface between the local trade and international organisations," Salsbury said.

She feels that China is not winning enough "big congresses" due to a lack of expertise in managing relationships with society headquarters, which she attributed to differences in working culture.

For example, while Chinese firms are used to brief contracts and the submission of a large amount of paperwork to the government, such practices often run contrary to international standards.

Other aspects like the absence of a CSR culture and corporate philanthropy are also hurdles for PCOs to surmount when it comes to soliciting sponsorship from Chinese firms when bidding for global association events, pointed out Alicia Yao, general manager of IME Consulting.

"Companies often deem scientific/technical association events as the government's responsibility and obligation to offer support, therefore they are often reluctant to render financial assistance."

– Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

{ Talking numbers }

50

The number of events that has been secured by Taiwan's Kaohsiung Exhibition Center, which celebrated its official opening on April 14. The venue is expected to attract more than 800,000 visitors and generate NT\$3 million (US\$99,294) in revenue in its first year of operations.



100

The number, in thousands, of Chinese visitors Sri Lanka is expected to welcome this year, according to the Sri Lanka Convention Bureau. The prediction will mean a 50 per cent growth in Chinese footfalls for the destination which has recently taken bolder steps to court business events traffic from China.

New partnership for growth

By Karen Yue

Pacific World and German MICE specialist, Eberhard v. Forstner DESTINATIONS + more, have come together to leverage the growing demand for China as a destination for German business groups.

Commenting on the partnership, Cindy Zhang, regional director for Greater China at Pacific World, said: "China was Germany's third-biggest foreign trade partner last year, with 140 billion euros (US\$193.5 billion) passing between the two countries, according to the Federal Statistics Office in Wiesbaden. China also ranks fifth among importers of German goods and is the second biggest exporter to Germany."

According to Zhang, Pacific World China has seen overall growth in German corporate meetings, incentives, trade missions, product launches and business travel, and has predicted continuous growth this year.

Eberhard von Forstner, owner of DESTINATIONS + more, a company well known in the German-speaking MICE industry, said: "China and Hong Kong have been on the list of the most (desir-



Forstner: interest in other Chinese cities will rise

able) destinations for German outbound business for years now, as they continue to have something very unique to offer to the MICE market, not least a number of emerging destinations."

Von Forstner identified Shanghai and Beijing in China as being the most popular among his clients.

"Shanghai is one of the favourites in China (and) is rapidly growing as a MICE destination. The city offers new venues, from small hotels to the biggest of exhibition centres. Meanwhile, Beijing has vowed to attract more business travellers, especially those from overseas, by rolling out many measures to promote the city's image. Beijing's long history and rich culture are key advantages for its MICE development," he explained.

He believes that more Chinese cities "will come into the game once there is special interest" from German corporates.

While Zhang did not give a financial projection of the growth this new partnership would bring, she said growth would be "stable and steady...over the coming years", especially in incentive travel business.

Taihu steps into MICE terrain

Industrial powerhouse Suzhou is now keen to fortify its presence in the MICE market, with the latest efforts zeroing in on Taihu, a scenic area that became one of China's national wetland parks in 2011.

Suzhou Yuyang Exhibitions was recently launched to spearhead Taihu's MICE development, according to the company's marketing department head, Pan Zhuzhu.

Pan said: "In addition, we rolled out a new incentive (on April 11), with the local government offering financial subsidies of up to 30 per cent for events with at least 100 pax and RMB100,000 (US\$16,073) expenditure in Taihu."

International branded hotels like Marriott and InterContinental will debut in the city come 2015, adding to the area's existing facilities like a yacht club, golf course and convention centre.

Lauding the government's new-found interest in MICE business, Suzhou Taihu International Conference Center sales department manager, You Jian Xin, said: "For years, Suzhou has placed emphasis on industrial development and our MICE development generally lags behind Hang-

zhou, which has achieved critical success in this area.

"We have not launched any individual efforts to promote our facility to international markets yet, but is currently following promotion efforts led by Suzhou Yuyang Exhibitions," You remarked, adding that the centre hosted several high-profile international events in the last few years, such as World Cultural Forum, China-Africa People's Forum and China-Europe High-Level Political Parties Forum.

Also seeing potential in expanding Taihu's MICE business, Jason Song, sales department assistant manager, Xiangshang International Hotel, commented: "The government's austerity drive impacted greatly on hotels, resulting in a big loss of business and revenue, hence hotels are now looking at other ways to make up for the shortfall."

Meanwhile, Song is looking forward to the competition that the debut of international branded hotels will bring to Taihu.

"Standards will be raised and there will be a multiplier effect on all businesses," he said. – Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

{ In brief }

US incentive rebounding

The US incentive travel market, slowed down by the debt crisis in recent years, is on the rebound, albeit with smaller budgets, and Asia faces competition for it from the Caribbean and Mexico, as well as second-tier European cities, according to Joost de Meyer, chairman and CEO of First Incentive Travel US and an active Site International member.

"The content of incentive programmes is also shifting because of the changing demographics of participants – younger people want to have more free time to experience the destination and meet locals," said de Meyer.

Second-tier European cities are getting hotter as they are cheaper than established incentive destinations like London, Paris and Italy, he said.

Asian destinations should also be benefiting from the rebound. Besides destinations like Thailand, China and Vietnam that are well-known to the US market, de Meyer sees growing interest for Myanmar.



Next-gen corporate travel tools now available

February's merger of ACTIVE Network Business Solutions and Lanyon in the US means corporate travel and strategic meeting management programme (SMMP) managers will have access to next-generation tools that provide a full view of spend and eliminate multiple-point solutions to gather spend data on their hotel and event programmes.

ACTIVE, a leader in event marketing and Strategic Meetings Management technology, and Lanyon, a transient hotel programme technology leader, will now operate under the Lanyon brand. In addition to data and analytics tools, Lanyon also provides hospitality and venue suppliers with access to thousands of corporate customers and associations searching for new properties and venues.

The merger enables clients to combine all data from the organisation's travel and event spend into a single technology platform and reduce disparate data points where they have to manually gather data from, to create reports.

{ 2014 Calendar }

May 5-8

Arabian Travel Market
Dubai, UAE

May 18-21

TRENZ 2014
Auckland,
New Zealand

May 20-22

IMEX Frankfurt
Frankfurt, Germany

June 12-13

ITE Hong Kong
Hong Kong

New convention venue on the drawing block for Okinawa

By Kathy Neo

Okinawa is set to increase MICE visitorship with the construction of a convention venue to accommodate events as large as 10,000 to 20,000 people.

Koji Niimoto, supervisor for MICE marketing section of Okinawa Convention & Visitors Bureau (OCVB), told *TTGmice* that discussions and research are ongoing for a suitable location to build the venue, preferably near to Naha Airport, hotels and key attractions. A final decision is expected in the next year or so.

Currently the largest convention centre in the Japanese prefecture is the Okinawa Convention Center, which offers a maximum seating capacity of 5,000 people in its biggest space.

Said Niimoto: "Okinawa wants to expand its MICE business from overseas source markets, hence efforts are ongoing to increase MICE capacity."

Besides its main source markets

Taiwan, Hong Kong, China and South Korea, OCVB is also seeking more traffic from Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and Europe, he said, adding that at the moment, the domestic market dominates the convention business while incentive groups hail from overseas.

When asked how Okinawa intends to stand out as an incentive destination against other Asian competitors, he said: "While other destinations also offer beautiful oceans and nature like Okinawa does, we have our own unique culture that is different from that of mainland Japan (due to historical influences). In other words, we offer a different Japanese culture. We are also known for our people's hospitality, which transcends the language barrier."

Akira Kakazu, manager for its MICE marketing section, revealed that a seminar in Singapore for the local media and trade is being planned for July.

'Hybrid carriers' generate more buzz

More corporates are turning to low-cost carriers (LCCs) to keep travel costs down while budget airlines simultaneously evolve to cater to this market.

Todd Arthur, vice president, sales & account management, Asia Pacific of BCD Travel, said: "LCCs now account for over 15 per cent of Asia's fleet, which outstrips the growth of full-fledged airlines. The bulk of the new aircraft is coming from the LCCs and these are evolving into hybrid carriers to expand themselves into the corporate market."

Lisa Akeroyd, vice president, global sales & program management, Carlson Wagonlit Travel, said: "Our clients are starting to...questioning if they have to continue solely supporting the national carrier. Hybrid carriers, which is a cross between no-frills and full service, are fitting into corporate travel requirements."

However, Joana Yap, general manager, HRG Singapore noted that most clients still opt for full-fledged airlines. – **Paige Lee Pei Qi**


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Cities vie for mega Chinese insurance professionals meeting

By Raini Hamdi

SHANGHAI A string of cities, among them Nanjing, Tianjin, Macau, Jeju, Melbourne and Dubai, have formed a beeline to bid for the world's largest meeting of Chinese finance and insurance professionals in 2015. The annual meeting, the International Dragon Award (IDA) Annual Conference, drew some 5,000 delegates when it was held in Kuala Lumpur last year.

Chairman Richard Wu declined to narrow down the contenders for the 2015 host country, saying a decision would be announced at this year's annual conference in August in Xiamen.

But in an interview with *TTGmice*, it appears that countries that could underscore the value of the insurance industry to the conference attendees would be on top of the pecking order.

In Kuala Lumpur last year, for instance, the Malaysian Premier, Najib Razak, spoke at the event and gave 'face' to the profession. "It is important that the attendees feel the host country has a certain regard for their profession and reaffirm the importance of the industry to them," explained Wu.

As well, the ability to offer a unique insight would earn a score. When IDA was held in Singapore in 2008, the city included a visit to a desalination plant that was highly interesting and educational to attendees.

Apart from government and convention bureau support, the host country must also have a venue that could host 5,000 pax, including meeting rooms that could hold 1,000 pax, and hotels of different classes, said Wu.

The four-day conference, delivered in Mandarin, is attended by Chinese finance and insurance professionals from 200 insurance companies in 17 countries, including China, Taiwan, Australia, New Zealand and the US.



Chinese companies get more traveller-centric

SHANGHAI The centre of gravity for Chinese firms has shifted to employees, from management before, an evolution that is beneficial for meetings and incentives, according to industry members.

With the business environment becoming increasingly competitive in China, private sector firms are fighting hard to stay cutting edge and to keep their staff loyal and motivated. As a result, they are holding more meetings, incentives and teambuilding retreats in a bid to strategise, seek ideas and innovations from staff, and keep the good ones from leaving.

Benson Tang, regional director-Asia, Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE), noted that MICE expenditure in turn is rising due to the changing business environment.

An increased MICE spend is also driving more companies to include MICE expenditure management as part of their corporate travel management policy, he added.



Tang: better HR understanding

"(Today) there are events managers who not only do RFPs for meetings and incentives but look after the travel experience. China firms have become traveller-centric. This translates to a simpler policy today and one that engages the person's well-being and travel experience," Tang said.

Tang attributes the change to a maturing human resources discipline in China.

Boon Kwee Lim, president of Dusit Fudu Hotels & Resorts also noted that corporates in China are meeting through the weekend, not just Monday to Thursday. "Although (this arrangement) is pricier, the weekend (is) meant to reward staff and build the team." – Raini Hamdi

Perth bags World Wide Web academic conference

PERTH Come May 2017 Perth will welcome and host Tim Bernes-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web (WWW), along with more than 1,000 global key influencers, decision makers, technologists, businesses and standards bodies who will present their ongoing work, research and opinions on the future direction of the WWW during the five-day academic conference.

Perth's bid was presented at the annual meeting of the International World Wide Web Committee, held on April 12 this year in Seoul.

Perth Convention Bureau's

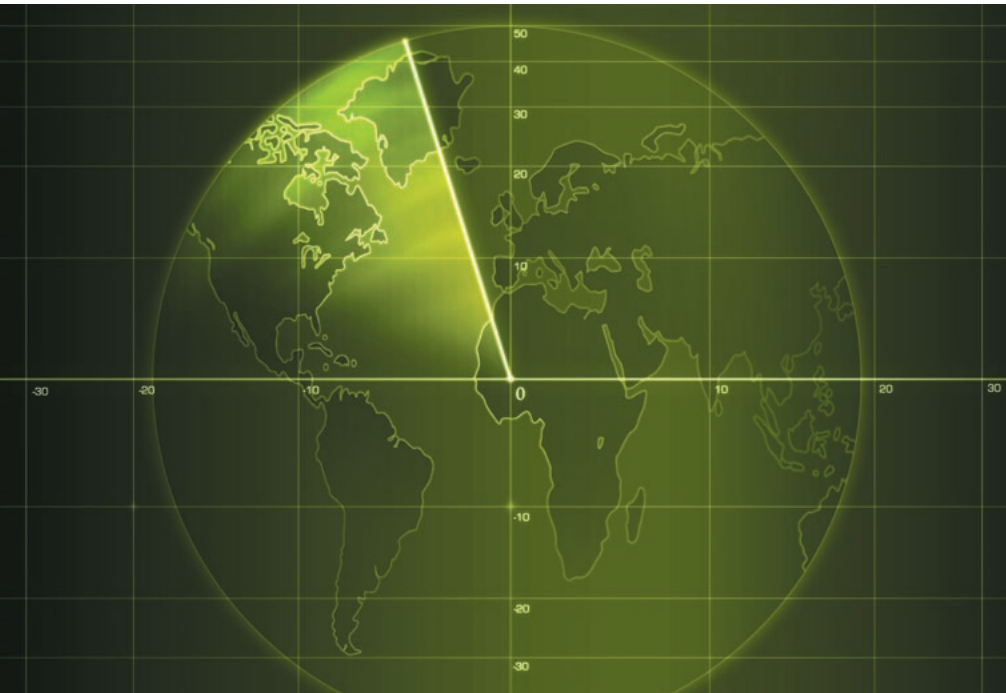
director of marketing, Sue Stepatschuk, said in a press statement: "Perth's successful bid was the result of years of joint intellectual efforts, negotiations and networking involving all of the WWW2017 Perth Bid Committee along with academics from the WA universities, and industry supporters."

Paul Beeson, CEO of the MICE bureau, added that hosting the event would present a substantial opportunity to facilitate knowledge transfer and deliver economic and social benefits to Western Australia.



World Wide Web experts will gather in Perth in May 2017

A wake-up call for travel risk



The industry takes a hard look at ways to assess travel risk better and improve management policies as the search for answers to the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines flight 370 continues. **Caroline Boey** reports

While it is imperative for companies to incorporate as many elements of risk in the air, on the ground, at the hotel, the booking channel of record, data protection, privacy, etc, it is impossible for any risk management policy or duty of care to be 100 per cent foolproof.

The disappearance of MH370 from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing on March 8 provided a wake-up call for corporate travel managers and their companies to ask if they need to, and/or how they can beef up their risk management policies.

Twenty employees of Texas-based semiconductor company Freescale were on the ill-fated flight.

Kurt Knackstedt, president of the Association of Corporate Travel Executives, pointed out that any risk management policy should be clear, applicable to the entire organisation and supported directly by C-level endorsement.

He said: "A well-managed travel programme should at the very least ensure maximum visibility into who is travelling, where they are travelling to and when, and the suppliers (used). Companies (should) have the best possible support structure and information network when things go wrong by sourcing, partnering with and leveraging a preferred TMC and supplier structure.

"Anything outside this network weakens a company's ability to respond to a

crisis and to support their employees – all the more reason why a strong relationship with partners is critical."

Greg Treasure, managing director, HRG Asia-Pacific, said TMCs are at the heart of protecting employees and employers and this includes providing a 24-hour service, real-time security information, traveller tracking, and being able to respond instantly and appropriately to any emergency.

It takes both hands to clap

Human behaviour is unpredictable, said a Singapore-based corporate travel manager, who used to work for a security software MNC, and business travellers do not always stay within policy for various reasons. This manager said: "In my opinion, loyalty programmes are the most evil things. If the traveller gets the agreement and approval of his line manager, he has the ability to go out of policy.

"Travellers know they should make their bookings with the appointed TMC, stay in a preferred hotel and fly on a preferred carrier so that the company with the help of its travel suppliers can track and help him in the event of a crisis or an emergency. But we are not able to do this at times."

He continued: "Companies may invest in systems to (direct) travel advisories, information on whether or not they require vaccinations, security procedures, etc, to travellers' smartphones, but some travellers forget to update their mobile numbers or refuse to provide their contact, next-of-kin details, etc. The traveller must realise he has a role to play in the duty of care equation."

Knackstedt personally uses the tools and support structure provided to him as a traveller to the fullest. "From the advice I receive from my TMC during the booking process, to the email and security updates provided by the risk management and security advisory provider, to the safety card in my seat pocket and the escape plan on the back of the hotel room door, I (read them all)," he said.

"When you are urged to watch a flight safety video, you should because you are always going to be in a different seat. Even with hotels I return to frequently, my room is invariably on a different floor, or wing, and you need to be 100 per cent clear how to get out of trouble each and every time you travel."

Dean Fowles, a corporate travel manager who has facilitated the Global Busi-

ness Travel Association Fundamentals of Business Travel Management certification programme for Asia, said: "I've seen some companies simply mandate the adoption. If you don't comply, you can't file for leave or take advantage of other benefits. This may seem harsh at first, but it ensures compliance.

"In the GBTA certification course, we talk about the fact that the policy needs to be timely and reviewed periodically as a best practice. This means that someone is tasked to review it every few months. People change jobs and move regularly, which means it's critical that the plan is up-to-date when something happens."

The former corporate travel manager of a security software MNC considers an 80 per cent compliance rate as good. "If it falls to between 50 and 60 per cent, a review is necessary," he opined. "Compared to 10 years ago, crisis management capabilities in tracking travellers have improved and the gaps have closed. There is still room for improvement though."

Safety in smaller numbers

The anonymous corporate travel manager said his 15,000-strong company had 6,000-7,000 employees on the road, but fewer than five would be on the same flight. "Take travel from Singapore to Hong Kong as an example. There are eight daily flights and two, perhaps three, employees would be on the same flight, unless it is a meeting, then it would go up to six or seven. If it's an annual sales conference with 500 delegates going to



"I've seen some companies simply mandate the adoption (of travel policy compliance). If you don't comply, you can't file for leave or take advantage of other benefits."

Dean Fowles

Manila-based corporate travel manager

a destination, we would have to seek exception from each business unit and increase the insurance coverage."

Far reaching impact

Lisa Akeroyd, Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CWT) vice president, global sales and programme management, Asia-Pacific, said the potential cost to companies that do not have a corporate travel risk assessment and management policy in place, or do not enforce their policy strictly, are three-fold.

She said: "First and foremost, it can result in direct harm to their travellers in the event of a crisis or emergency. Secondly, when a company asks an employee to travel as part of their job, it has a moral and legal responsibility to ensure the safety of that traveller. In many countries, employers have a legal obligation to provide a reasonably safe working environment for their employees, including when they are travelling on company business.

"Finally, if employees do not feel safe and secure when they travel, this could

represent a hidden cost for the organisation in terms of a loss of productivity due to stress."

According to CWT, severe travel risks affecting just this region over the last decade have run the gamut from natural disasters involving volcanic ash and floods, to political situations such as protests in Bangkok, and terrorism such as the attacks in Mumbai.

As many companies expand in less-developed and higher-risk countries, their travellers may not be familiar with the cultural nuances and infrastructure limitations, let alone heightened security risks, tensions, local adverse weather hazards, or even natural disasters that can put them at risk.

Akeroyd added: "Given the increasingly interconnected world today, new security challenges for companies have expanded well beyond isolated corners of the world to centres of commerce – places where business travellers go on behalf of their companies. Citizens of specific nationalities can be targeted for crimes based on profit or political gain."

Life-saving app in your pocket

EarthCheck, an internationally recognised environmental management and certification programme with more than 1,300 members in over 80 countries, has launched the ERI Risk App, designed to help the hospitality industry rebound from crisis situations and climatic events such as tsunamis.

Extreme weather events, according to EarthCheck, are expected to escalate and research shows that 80 per cent of businesses without a continuity plan will not survive two years after a major crisis.

The ERI Risk App puts paper-based crisis management practices into a smartphone with timely prompts for handling disaster mitigation based on pre-loaded preparatory action plans. It reminds users to capture time-stamped imagery, provide status updates, track unfolding incidents, communicate with

stakeholders and map out recovery.

EarthCheck's vice president sales, Andre Russ, seeded the idea of applying the company's research and benchmarked intelligence to a risk app after experiencing first-hand the chaos that followed the 2013 Cebu quake.

Forced to flee his hotel, Russ and his clients watched helplessly without access to the action plans and contact lists they had carefully crafted.

"We couldn't go back into the hotel where our paper-based reports and references for handling risks were filed," he said.

David Simmons, a New Zealand-based



scholar on sustainable tourism and a contributor to groups engaged with the redesign of Christchurch following the 2010 earthquake, believes the app will assist tourism businesses to prepare prior, during, and straight after a crisis.

"Our experience in Christchurch reminds us that visitors can be overlooked in disaster planning. They may not know the escape routes, may not be connected with local media, and they may not speak the same language as local residents.

For these visitors the tourism industry is often their first safety lifeline."

A TMC can play a significant role in helping clients develop their travel risk assessment and management policies and strategies, as well as provide support during crises or emergencies.

Treasure said: "Risk management is increasingly becoming a key component of an organisation's travel management programme in RFPs. Today, organisations are expected to provide a more thorough level of travel risk management than ever before to employees who have to travel."

He said: "In an MNC, duty of care is not the responsibility of a single department. It should be a cross-functional approach led by the organisations' top executives. If the CEO is seen to be briefed before travelling, no one will question the need.

"The only difference is that SMEs, by their very nature due to the size, may not have separate departments such as HR, legal, security, compliance, etc to engage in such a policy development plan so it is more likely to fall on the shoulders of a single person.

"Regardless of whether a business traveller is from an SME or a MNC, it is incumbent on the organisation to provide the optimum level of duty of care that is compliant with both their business needs – for example, not having all their board of directors travelling on the same flight – and local laws.

"It is a legal requirement now that companies owe a duty of care to their employees in many countries. If they do not, they can be found criminally and financially liable. In the most extreme cases, the company can face hefty fines and the executives jailed. They can also face personal lawsuits."

Further costs include loss of the company's reputation and potential security risk to the company in the event of stolen company property such as the business traveller's laptop which lacks sufficient data protection.

A good TMC partner is critical but the corporate travel manager still needs to be on top of everything.

Fowles said: "Years ago, a TMC account manager told me candidly, 'Don't count on us for this sort of information (traveller tracking).' However, at the end of the day, some of the teams performed very well, anticipating storms and verifying if travellers were affected by new alerts.

"Your company's sales representative may or may not understand the importance or have the experience in dealing with unfortunate incidents. That's why when we are engaging hotels we need to take the time to meet the head of security for the property.



Business travellers must be responsible for their own safety by ensuring their movements are trackable by their company and/or travel service provider, and by practising common sense while overseas

Back to safety and security basics

Tony Ridley, CEO of Intelligent Travel, a company providing travel health, safety, security and risk management solutions to corporates and travel industry providers, said there is still a long way to go as far as the interpretation of duty of care or the practical application of travel health, safety, security and risk management are concerned.

"Many of us will continue to be confronted with the serious nature of what at times seem like minor administrative decisions," he noted, adding that hotel fires and bus accidents are far more frequent and likely to occur than plane crashes. "Yet few consider the sensibilities of factoring them into their travel risk management strategies."

According to Ridley, the top three items overlooked in corporate travel risk assessment and management policies are the policies themselves, the generic coverage and pre-travel requirements.

"The reason the policies are a problem is that they make the assumption that every journey and traveller is the same. They fail to adequately segment the policy to include those travelling for the first time, senior/junior managers, gender, groups or those with special circumstances. It is more about convenience and appearance that this has been allowed to happen. If they looked at travellers as individual assets first, just like the rest of the business, then policies would be inclusive of the variations and requirements."

Having a risk assessment and management policy to protect travellers is fundamental in doing business and cost should not be an issue.

According to Ridley, having or implementing a corporate travel risk procedure can cost as little as AS\$7 (US\$6.45) or as much as A\$50 per journey with a full suite of integrated travel booking, management, monitoring, support, assessment, news, and on-call assistance. An effective audit or templated corporate travel risk management policy that is customised to a particular business could range from A\$2,500 to A\$7,000.

"Very few businesses can justify not making such investments in the management of their traveller's risks to either their financial controller, the concerned colleagues and family or the courts in the event of claims or litigation," he noted.

Philippe Guibert, International SOS Regional Medical Director, Consulting Services, South & South East Asia, told *TTGmice* that while a comprehensive corporate travel risk assessment and management policy might need some investment, some companies might not see the necessity for such a policy and might have the perception that basic insurance coverage was sufficient for employees who travelled abroad.

Despite the increase in business travellers, only 32 per cent of the 628 organisations surveyed by the International SOS Foundation had conducted person/location risk assessments prior to expatriate assignments.

"Very few businesses can justify not making such investments in the management of their traveller's risks to either their financial controller, the concerned colleagues and family or the courts in the event of claims or litigation,"

Tony Ridley
CEO
Intelligent Travel





D'Exclusive Trip 2013

Having experienced several creative incentive events, DiGi.Com has set the bar high for ICEM Regional for its Melbourne programme.

By **Karen Yue**

Event
D'Exclusive Trip 2013

Client
DiGi.Com

Organiser
ICEM Regional

Destination
Melbourne, Australia

Dates
November 11-16, 2013

No. of participants
39

Objective
To reward top performing dealers with a memorable and unique experience in Melbourne

Challenge
ICEM had to develop an incentive that was as creative as past years' reward programmes, if not more extraordinary

When Malaysia's telecommunications giant, DiGi.Com, decided to take 39 of its top performing business partners to Melbourne in 2013, its orders to event specialist, ICEM Regional, were simple: the incentive event must have a "wow" factor.

Speaking to *TTGmice*, Poh Ching Huey, DiGi's trade marketing – event and promotions, said: "We hold incentives every year, and each time the programme is unique and impressive. The same standard was expected from the Melbourne programme."

Giving an example of how unique and impressive DiGi.Com's incentives are, Poh said a trip in 2009 saw an entire street in Lijiang city of Yunnan, China being "wrapped up" in the company's corporate colours and branding imagery. Winners were given "DiGi cash" to use at shops in the area and participating merchants were later reimbursed with real money.

The Lijiang event was put together by Lim Pei Pei, currently head of sales at ICEM Regional but who was with another event house then, so the challenge for Lim was to outdo herself in the Melbourne project.

Kuala Lumpur-based ICEM Regional was first alerted to the project at the end of July 2013, and event plans were finalised by September. Commenting on the timeline, Lim said: "We scrambled a little, but we were lucky to have had some good advice from Edward (Kwek, regional sales director-South Asia, Melbourne Convention Bureau) and found a reliable groundhandler in Tour East Australia. Plus, our client was very cooperative, flexible and realistic in their expectations."

To keep participants excited throughout the programme, ICEM Regional built an air of mystery around the itinerary. Lim said: "The itinerary was kept from the delegates, so every part of the journey was a surprise. That made delegates look forward to the next item on the programme, but it was a

challenge as everyone kept probing. Plus, we needed an advance team to be at the next venue or attraction two hours ahead to ensure all's in place for the group."

After arriving in Melbourne, the group enjoyed brunch and was sent off on a city tour on roaring Harley-Davidson motorcycles. A fun dinner was hosted at Taxi Kitchen on Federation Square later that day.

A site visit of Apple office was also conducted, as was a visit to a brewery and a full day of stomping grapes and tasting and blending wine at Rochford Winery in Yarra Valley.

Lim said: "When they exited the winery, eight helicopters were waiting to whisk them back to the city. It was spectacular."

Another highlight of the incentive trip was a dine-around event at the South Wharf Promenade. The group started the evening with coffee, sweets and conversations 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.

For airport transfers on the last day, 25-seat stretch Hummers were deployed.

"The helicopter transfer was a tad tricky to pull off because a weight restriction applies to each helicopter and we needed participants to declare their body weight ahead of the trip," revealed Poh. "And because of the weight restriction, we had to assign ahead the seating arrangements to prevent participants from choosing who they wanted to take the flight with."

According to Poh, her winners loved the winery activities most because "it was a great bonding experience for all".

Poh added: "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 incentive was very exclusive, very impressive. Everybody felt like true VIPs."



Audi A3 Experience Days

Drama and surprise are a must, so is an unusual event venue for the Audi product launch. Uniplan works its creative juices to deliver all that and more. By **Prudence Lui**

Organiser

Uniplan Hong Kong

Client

Audi Hong Kong

Venue

Kai Tak Cruise Terminal

Dates

September 2013

No. of participants

More than 8,000 over two weeks, plus in excess of 700 for the VIP/launch night

Objective

To create an event that reaches out to the existing client base and introduces the Audi brand to a new and bigger audience

Challenges

Finding the right location with all the necessary elements needed to house the two-week event and bring surprise and drama to visitors

When German automobile manufacturer, Audi, decided to launch the new A3 Sportback in Hong Kong, it realised that the event would not be just a one-night launch party but the beginning of a brand awareness blitz.

Uniplan Hong Kong, an event and brand communications specialist, was engaged to handle this project.

According to executive director for client services, Darren Chuckry, his key challenge was to identify a suitable location that could accommodate the massive two-week event.

Uniplan's second challenge came in the form of Audi Hong Kong's requirement to have surprise and drama for all visitors.

Chuckry said: "The target audience has been to all events in Hong Kong and is familiar with all the different venues, so it was a real challenge to surprise everyone with a fresh experience.

"Finding an unexpected location that can work on many levels and is flexible enough to accommodate a star-studded VIP launch for 500 pax, plus a series of experience days for 6,000 people, was the key (requirement) of the client."

The idea of using the Kai Tak International Cruise Terminal came to mind.

Chuckry noted that the terminal was, at that point, still under construction.

"There were many hurdles to overcome, as it is a new customs area run by both a private management company and the Hong Kong government," he recalled.

"But as it sat on the site of the old Hong Kong airport, Kai Tak International Cruise Terminal had all the facilities and logistics needed to accommodate the multitude of requirements listed in the clients' brief.

"The internal area of the terminal

is large enough to allow the required number of people to attend over several days. It also has areas that are suited for test drives and slaloms. It even has easy access to water, should we need that.

"Another added advantage was the panoramic views of Hong Kong skyline, which provided a great backdrop for some of the Audi Experience Days elements."

On the day of the event, visitors were dazzled by visual and sensory stimuli at various areas, and a strong brand presence was communicated through a build-up of signage and presence of Audi-branded ground marshals.

Entertainment came in the form of live performances, a music video jockey, an Audi radio station with a DJ, live photographic backdrops and an Audi Breathing car display. There was also an Audi Cafe and Juice Bar.

A highlight was the live digital graffiti wall on which guest could design their own Audi-branded T-shirts and then print them out instantly. Later, the top 20 T-shirt designs were chosen and presented to the creators.

The interactive wall also provided a platform for guests to express their artistic prowess, as designs were relayed to the video jockey who mixed the artworks with music and put them on display.

The Audi A3 Experience Days turned out to be a tremendous success, according to a proud Chuckry. It welcomed more than 8,000 people who registered online to participate in the activities across the two weekends. More than 1,200 test-drives of the new A3 Sportback was conducted.

The VIP/launch night drew more than 700 guests and some 120 accredited press covered the event globally.



Let's cruise South-east Asia

More ships are homeporting in South-east Asia for regional cruising, resulting in healthy competition to enlarge the MICE cruise market, write **Raini Hamdi** and **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

Efforts to make South-east Asia the next cruise playground are bearing fruit as the region now sports more ships, which means more marketing and promotion by cruise companies to reach Asian consumers and entice them to sail in their own backyard.

Around 1.5 million Asians cruise today, but a large chunk of these passengers cruise longhaul, for example, Alaska or Europe and not Asia, according to cruise lines' representatives interviewed. Making Asians cruise Asia is therefore their new sport, as most have to rely on the home market to help fill the capacity that has been deployed to the region. Whether it is the 922-pax *Crystal Symphony*, the 2,670-pax *Sapphire Princess*, the 2,800-pax

SuperStar Virgo or the 3,114-pax *Mariner of the Seas*, to name just a few, Asia now has an armada of vessels shooting tacticals and campaigns to expand and capture the Asian cruise demand. The target is for the market to grow from 1.5 million today, to 3.7 million by 2017.

A region like South-east Asia, however, while exotic to Westerners, is a tough sell to Asians who know its various destinations at the back of their hands, especially following a boom in hotel devel-

opment and air connectivity across the region in recent years that have made holidays affordable and accessible.

"Most of our well-heeled seafarers head towards Europe, or the polar regions. South-east Asia routes are mainly popular with Americans, Europeans and

"THE GRASS IS ALWAYS GREENER ON THE OTHER SIDE OR, IN OUR CASE, THE OCEAN IS BLUER THAN ON THE OTHER SIDE."

Melvyn Yap
Regional director-Asia
Silversea Cruises

Australians. The grass is always greener on the other side or, in our case, the ocean is bluer on the other side," said Melvyn Yap, regional director-Asia, Silversea Cruises.

Yap is not too concerned as a Silversea ship usually has only around 190 suites. But for larger ships, this is precisely why markets such as Asian MICE are being sought-after, because of the numbers they can bring and because South-east Asian ports-of-call are relatively less important to them than to the leisure travel market. The objectives of a business event – be it an incentive or corporate meeting – are to reward participants, build a team and motivate them to higher targets. For this, the ship itself can be the destination – with the icing on the cake being the luxury of waking up in Penang one day and in Phuket the next day and visiting the towns if delegates so wish.

At sea, planners have a captive audience for meetings, brainstorming and teambuilding sessions during the day, while at night, the choices for dining, theme parties and entertainment are gloriously endless. And free of charge.

"Few MICE options are as unique and appealing as a cruise," said Michael Goh, Star Cruises' senior vice president of sales. "An all-encompassing cruise is a one-stop destination on its own and a perfect option for corporate companies to balance the seriousness of business with leisure."

Added Samuel Manalo Jr, regional sales manager South-east Asia, Royal Caribbean Cruises Asia (RCCA): "Cruise packages for MICE groups are all-inclusive (meals, drinks, entertainment, on board activities are usually included in the price) and therefore great value-for-money.

"There is something on board for everyone in one place, and organisations can enjoy these activities day and night as groups or individuals with great flexibility."

Asked if most planners simply book a cruise and dispense with arrangements on F&B, entertainment, etc, since these are already available on board, Marnie Whipple, Crystal Cruises' regional sales manager, Asia-Pacific, said: "Each incentive group varies in their interests but generally yes, incentive planners book typically a seven-day Crystal cruise and take advantage of the many included offerings and facilities.

"Additionally these groups typically host one or two private cocktail parties, usually one at the beginning of the voyage as a welcome and one at the end as a celebratory activity. Depending on the size of the group, we have various members dine in Prego and Nobu Matsuhisa's



Crystal Serenity's theatre: Cruise ships boast MICE facilities

"AS YOU KNOW, AT A HOTEL, EVERY PASTRY, EVERY GLASS OF WINE AND EVEN EVERY AUDIO-VISUAL SET-UP IS CHARGED FOR..."

Marnie Whipple

Regional sales manager, Asia-Pacific
Crystal Cruises



Silk Road (the two signature restaurants on *Crystal Symphony*) one day, then switch on another day so all guests in the group may enjoy these lovely venues. Again, depending on the size of the group, often we see organisers host dinner for 12 pax at our Vintage Room, a unique and memorable dinner where we pair the food to the vintage wine.

"As you know, at a hotel, every pastry, every glass of wine and even every audio-visual set-up is charged for, and usually expensive! The cruise value is incomparable."

Special requests from Asian planners on board the *Crystal Symphony* have included a day of mahjong in a private space in the Silk Road restaurant and a gala type function in the ship's Hollywood Theater, complete with microphones and video-capability to honour top producers. "Interestingly we have not had special requests for Asian food, but groups have enjoyed Silk Road one evening of their voyage and embraced delectable cuisines in our other venues," said Whipple.

At Star Cruises, staff are ready to formulate and execute MICE programmes, said Goh. "From orchestrating the entertainment and arranging fun teambuilding activities on board or ashore, to setting up the event and conferences, the staff on board are ready to meet their needs," he said.

On Royal Caribbean ships, dedicated on board convention services coordinators provide round-the-clock personal assistance to ensure corporate events run smoothly, according to Manalo.

Mass market cruising, in particular, has become a real option for budget-conscious planners. "In fact, meeting planners often find the costs are higher when using land-based resorts," said Star Cruises' Goh.

More than 30 per cent of business for Star Cruises is now MICE business and, while it may be that well-heeled leisure clients prefer to cruise longhaul, South-east Asia remains "unprecedented" as a cruise destination for MICE travel with group sizes of up to 1,000 pax, according to Goh.



“WE ARE STRATEGICALLY HOME-PORTED IN THIS REGION TO CATER TO THE EVOLVING NEEDS OF SOPHISTICATED MICE PLANNERS.”

Michael Goh
SVP sales
Star Cruises



Left: SuperStar Virgo's Gran Piazza

“We are strategically homeported in this region (the *SuperStar Virgo* and *SuperStar Libra* in Singapore and Penang, respectively) to cater to the evolving needs of sophisticated MICE planners,” he said.

Favourite South-east Asian ports-of-call among planners include Redang, Penang, Malacca, Kuala Lumpur, Langkawi, Phuket and Krabi, he added.

Manalo too is seeing more Asian MICE business on board each year. In fact, MICE from Indonesia and Thailand now comprise 50 per cent of total sales at RCCA and further growth is expected. Its other top Asian MICE markets include the Philippines, Vietnam and India. “Incentive travel is a popular trend for companies in these markets to reward their staff, and cruising is a relatively novel travel option for them.”

According to Manalo, MICE groups mostly choose to depart from Singapore due to the convenient geographical proximity and ease of logistics such as pre- and post-cruise arrangements and transfers from airport, hotel or pier.

Princess Cruises, known for its long-haul sailings, now recognises the potential of the Asian corporate and incentives market and that shorthaul cruises are highly suitable for teambuilding and meeting purposes, said Farriek Tawfik, director of South-east Asia. The cruise line will homeport the *Sapphire Princess* in Singapore for a four-month season between November 2014 and February 2015, offering trips to seven countries includ-

ing Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand, on sailings between three and 11 days. “We are confident that as cruise travel in Asia continues to increase in popularity, we will see a healthy pipeline of interest from this (MICE) sector,” he said.

Luxury cruise lines are also seeing a similar uptake. Crystal Cruises received its first Asian incentive group last year and is seeing “a healthy increase” in

Asian MICE demand. Overall, its market mix is 70 per cent North America and 30 per cent international. Asia has grown 34 per cent since 2008 and now accounts for 20 per cent of all guests for Crystal Cruises. Said Whipple: “Luxury cruises are presented more than previously as an option, and South-east Asia is especially attractive to those for whom Europe is already well trodden.”

Tips for planners

What's the best size for groups? What advice do you have for MICE planners on how best to use a ship for their groups?

Marnie Whipple, regional sales manager-Asia-Pacific, Crystal Cruises:

There is no best size for groups as it depends on the end client. From 20 guests to a full ship charter, it is all possible.

Typically, MICE clients prefer shorter voyages and plan a healthy year or two in advance. We have published our itineraries through to 1Q16, in large part to assist this segment of the business. We have more seven-day voyages than ever before, and some voyages of even shorter durations.

The best advice in considering a cruise is to know that the shipboard environment is conducive to casual connections and encounters throughout the day. Whereas a land-based

incentive sees clients perhaps going off-site for shopping or other entertainment, on the ship the group has many opportunities to connect during activities from golf lessons to a beverage during cocktail hour, and of course dining together. Also, we do not charge for deliveries to staterooms and other items that add up significantly for a land-based (event).



Galaxy Lounge, Crystal Symphony



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Let's cruise South-east Asia

Knock-knock, who's calling?

When it comes to picking a cruise, MICE planners are spoilt for choice as more ships call on South-east Asia. Here's a look at who's calling at some of South-east Asia's key ports this year*

* From March to December, at press time on April 7, based on availability of information from port authorities, NTOs and cruise specialists

Mariner of the Seas at Marina Bay Cruise Centre, Singapore



SINGAPORE

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

Singapore has two international cruise terminals, the new Marina Bay Cruise Centre which is close to attractions such as Gardens by the Bay and Marina Bay Sands, and the Singapore Cruise Centre which is located near Sentosa island.

Ships calling at Marina Bay Cruise Centre *Crystal Serenity, Crystal Symphony, Diamond Princess, Arcadia, Costa Deliziosa, Aurora, Silver Whisper, Silver Shadow, Adonia, Amadea, Sea Dream II, Celebrity Millennium, Black Watch, Queen Elizabeth, Ocean Princess, Europa 2, Voyager of the Seas, Queen Mary 2, Sun Princess, Dawn Princess, The World, Sea Princess, Sapphire Princess, Mariner of the Seas, Costa Victoria, Silver Wind*

Ships calling at Singapore Cruise Centre *AIDAaura, AIDA Sol, Amsterdam, Astor, Asuka II, Azamara Journey, Azamara Quest, Columbus 2, Deutschland, Europa, Europa 2, Explorer, L'Austral, Le Soleal, Minerva, Nautica, Ocean Dream, Orion, Pallada, Paul Gauguin, Rotterdam, Seabourn Legend, Seabourn Odyssey, Seabourn Pride, Seabourn Sojourn, SeaDream II, Seven Seas Voyager, SuperStar Gemini, SuperStar Virgo, Volendam*



INDONESIA

By Mimi Hudoyo

There are as many as 115 ports-of-calls in Indonesia where ships can berth and anchor. Some of the bigger ports are Benoa, Bali, Jakarta, Lembar (Lombok), Komodo National Park and Belawan (Medan).

Ships calling at Benoa, Bali *Silver Shadow, Astor, Celebrity Solstice, Silver Discoverer, Queen Mary 2, Seabourn Sojourn, Radiance of the Seas, Arcadia, Sun Princess, Sea Princess, Amsterdam, Diamond Princess, Sapphire Princess*

Ships calling at Jakarta *Sea Dream II, Rotterdam, Crystal Serenity*

Ships calling at Lembar, Lombok *Celebrity Millennium, Dawn Princess*

Ships calling at Komodo *Seven Seas Voyager, Crystal Symphony, Seabourn Odyssey, Amadea, Columbus 2, Asuka II, Europa, Ocean Princess, Dawn Princess, Paul Gauguin, Volendam*

Ships calling at Belawan, Medan *Seabourn Legend, Azamara Journey, Silver Whisper, Silver Wind*



MALAYSIA

By S Puvaneswary

Malaysia boasts 10 ports-of-call: Swettenham Pier International Cruise Terminal, Penang, Star Cruises Terminal Langkawi, Port Klang Cruise Centre (gateway to Kuala Lumpur), Malacca river mouth, Kota Kinabalu Port, Pending Port in Kuching, Kuantan Port, Bintulu Port, Redang Island and Tioman Island.

Ships calling at Penang Port Adonia, AIDAura, AIDAsol, Amadea, Astor, Asuka II, Azamara Journey, Azamara Quest, Balmoral, Celebrity Millennium, Crystal Symphony, Costa Victoria, Le Soleal, Mariner of the Seas, Caledonian Sky, Rotterdam, Volendam, Minerva, Nautica, Ocean Princess, Princess Cruise, Queen Elizabeth, Sapphire Princess, SeaDream II, Seven Seas Voyager, Silver Wind, Sea Princess, Star Pride, SuperStar Gemini, SuperStar Virgo, Volendam, Voyager

Ships calling at Star Cruises Terminal Langkawi Adonia, AIDAsol, Artania, Astor, Aurora, Azamara Quest, Celebrity Millennium, Columbus 2, Costa Deliziosa, Mariner of the Seas, Columbus 2, Europa, Europa 2, Volendam, Discovery, Minerva, Voyager, Queen Mary 2, Sapphire Princess, Seabourn Legend, Seabourn Odyssey, Seven Seas Voyager, SeaDream II, Sea Princess, Silver Wind, Star Pride, SuperStar Gemini, SuperStar Libra, SuperStar Virgo

Ships calling at Port Klang Adonia, Amadea, Arcadia, Artania, Astor, AIDAura, AIDAsol, Aurora, Celebrity Millennium, Costa Deliziosa, Crystal Symphony, Azamara Journey, Diamond Princess, Mariner of the Seas, Columbus 2, Europa 2, Rotterdam, Volendam, Nautica, Ocean Princess, Pacific Princess, Queen Elizabeth, Queen Mary 2, Sapphire Princess, SeaDream II, Seabourn Legend, Sea Princess, Seven Seas Voyager, Seabourn Odyssey, Silver Whisper, Silver Wind, Star Pride, SuperStar Virgo, Voyager

Ships calling at Malacca jetty Adonia, Crystal Symphony, Volendam, Minerva, Seabourn Odyssey, SeaDream II, Silver Shadow, Star Pride, SuperStar Gemini, SuperStar Virgo

Ships calling at Kota Kinabalu Port Adonia, Artania, Asuka II, Azamara Quest, Balmoral, Black Watch, Costa Victoria, Crystal Symphony, Le Soleal, Europa 2, Columbus 2, Queen Mary 2, SuperStar Aquarius, Voyager

Ships calling at Pending Port Kuching Adonia, Amadea, National Geographic Orion

Ships calling at Redang Island SuperStar Gemini

Ships calling at Tioman Island SuperStar Gemini, SeaDream II

Ships calling at Kuantan Port SuperStar Gemini, Minerva

Ships calling at Bintulu Port SuperStar Aquarius, Europa 2



VIETNAM

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

According to the Vietnam National Tourism Administration, there are over 44 ports-of-call in Vietnam but only 17 are ranked international. They are: Cam Pha (Quang Ninh), Hon Gai (Quang Ninh), Hai Phong (Hai Phong), Nghi Son (Thanh Hoa), Cua Lo (Nghe An), Vung Ang (Ha Tinh), Chan May (Thua Thien-Hue), Danang (Danang), Dung Quat (Quang Ngai), Quy Nhon (Binh Dinh), Van Phong (Khanh Hoa), Nha Trang (Khanh Hoa), Ba Ngoi (Khanh Hoa), Ho Chi Minh City, Vung Tau (Ba Ria-Vung Tau), Dong Nai (Dong Nai) and Can Tho (Can Tho).

Ships calling at Halong Bay Azamara Journey, SuperStar Gemini, Crystal Serenity, Seven Seas Voyager, Seabourn Legend, Aurora, Celebrity Millennium, SeaDream 2, Silver Shadow, Columbus 2, Volendam, Adonia, Seabourn Sojourn, Nautica, Europa 2, Queen Elizabeth, Silver Wind, Minerva, Costa Victoria, Le Soleal

Ships calling at Danang Azamara Journey, SuperStar Gemini, Crystal Serenity, Seven Seas Voyager, Seabourn Legend, Silver Shadow, Silver Whisper, Celebrity Millennium, Volendam, Columbus 2, Seabourn Sojourn, SeaDream 2, Nautica, Europa 2, Queen Elizabeth, Crystal Symphony, Diamond Princess, Sapphire Princess, Silver Wind, Minerva, Star Pride, Le Soleal, Costa Victoria

Ships calling at Nha Trang SuperStar Gemini, Silver Shadow, SeaDream 2, Volendam, Aurora, Columbus 2, Adonia, Europa 2, Diamond Princess, Sun Princess, Sapphire Princess, Silver Wind, Minerva, Crystal Symphony, Star Pride, Le Soleal

Ships calling at Ho Chi Minh City Azamara Journey, SuperStar Gemini, Seven Seas Voyager, Crystal Serenity, Silver Shadow, SeaDream 2, Celebrity Millennium, Mariner of the Seas, Seabourn Legend, Diamond Princess, Volendam, Silver Whisper, Aurora, AIDAura, Columbus 2, Adonia, Seabourn Sojourn, Nautica, Europa 2, Crystal Symphony, Ocean Princess, Queen Mary 2, Sun Princess, Sea Princess, Sapphire Princess, Voyager of the Seas, Amsterdam, Silver Wind, AIDAsol, Star Pride, Le Soleal, Costa Victoria



Let's cruise South-east Asia

MYANMAR

By Sid Dhartha

Myanmar has two main ports, Yangon Port and Myanmar International Terminals Thilawa (MITT) Port.

Most cruise ships dock at Thilawa Port, located 16km south of Yangon Port and about an hour's drive from Yangon city centre. They usually dock two or three nights, allowing passengers to visit Yangon, nearby Bago and in some cases destinations further afield such as Mandalay, Bagan and Inle Lake.

The Yangon Port, located next to the downtown on the banks of the Yangon River, has been the main port handling Myanmar's shipping cargo since colonial times. It is being redeveloped into a modern harbour to be completed in 2015.

According to Myanmar Port Authority, last year, eight international cruise ships visited the country. It predicts 2014 would be the best year to-date for cruise arrivals in Myanmar as about 22 international cruise ships have been confirmed to call at Yangon.



THE PHILIPPINES

By Rosa Ocampo

The Philippines is promoting 18 ports for cruising, including four key ports: Manila - South Harbour, Boracay Island - Caticlan Jetty Port, Palawan - Puerto Princesa and Zambales - Subic Bay Freeport (though no cruise ship calls here as yet).

The other ports are: Leyte - Kalanggaman Island, Cebu City - Cebu International Port, Bohol - Tagbilaran Port, Palawan - Coron Port, Palawan - El Nido Port, La Union - San Fernando International Port, Cagayan - Port Irene, Davao City - Davao Port, Zamboanga City - Zamboanga Port, Cagayan de Oro - Cagayan de Oro Port, Manila - North Harbour, Ilocos Norte - Currimao Port, Albay - Legazpi Port and Iloilo - Iloilo Commercial Port.

Ships calling at Manila South Harbour Azamara Journey, Seabourn Sojourn, Azamara Quest, Europa 2, SuperStar Aquarius

Ships calling at Boracay Caticlan Jetty Port Seabourn Sojourn, Europa 2, SuperStar Aquarius, The World

Ships calling at Palawan Puerto Princesa Silver Discoverer, Seabourn Sojourn, Europa 2, Flipper Odyssey



THAILAND

By Greg Lowe

There are six ports in Thailand: Laem Chabang (Bangkok), Klong Toey (Bangkok), Nathon on Koh Samui, and Phuket Deep Sea Port and Patong beach. Koh Yao and Similan Islands are accessible for smaller vessels.

Ships calling at Phuket Amsterdam, Voyager, Astor, Crystal Symphony, Costa Deliziosa, Seabourn Legend, Seabourn Odyssey, Silver Whisper, Amadea, Seabourn Sojourn, Rotterdam, Balmoral, Nautica, Azamara Journey, SeaDream II, Seven Seas Voyager, Sea Princess, Mariner of the Seas, Silver Wind, Star Pride, Celebrity Millennium, Sapphire Princess, Azamara Quest, Volendam

Ships calling at Koh Samui* Silver Shadow, AIDAaura, Europa 2, Volendam, Crystal Serenity, Silver Whisper, Silver Shadow, Crystal Symphony, Ocean Princess, Seven Seas Voyager, Sea Princess

Ships calling at Koh Yao Noi Star Pride

* Until July only.

As provided by Destination Asia only



CAMBODIA

By David Andrews

Sihanoukville Port is the only deep water port in Cambodia. Most cruise lines make a stop here on their journey between Ho Chi Minh City and Bangkok (a few coming from Singapore and Bandar Seri Begawan). Few tour operators propose a city tour as Sihanoukville city itself has little to offer. The preferred choice of most visitors is to experience the beaches within close vicinity such as Ochheuteal and Victory beach before finishing with a tour of Ream National Park. If time allows then an overnight visit to Kampot to see the pepper plantations and fishing villages offers more cultural insight.

The Port of Phnom Penh is located 290km from the ocean at the junction of the Bassac, Mekong and Tonle Sap rivers. Most visitors travel to see the French colonial architecture and remnants from the Pol Pots regime, including Choeung Ek Memorial (Killing Fields) and the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum. Authorities are currently clearing an area to the northern end of the port to accommodate more boats. This extension of the quayside area will attract further restaurants and bars along the riverfront. Shinta Mani will clear a site on the quayside in 2015 for a new hotel.

Ships calling at Sihanoukville Port *Voyager, SeaDream 2, Crystal Serenity, Europa 2, Volendam, Adonia, Crystal Symphony*

Ships calling at Phnom Penh *Viking Mekong, La Marguerite, River Orchid, AmaLotus*



LAOS

By David Andrews

As Laos is a landlocked country, cruising is generally restricted to the Mekong River and greatly influenced by the seasons. However there are a number of boats that can handle over 30 sleeping guests, making multi-day cruising a viable option. The attractions are largely based around the river itself – focusing on riverside villages where locals produce textiles and Lao whiskey. The majority of cruises cite Luang Prabang as the highlight, focusing on its colonial structures and endless temples.

Ships calling Vat Phou *Mekong Explorer, Mekong Sun*



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Let's cruise South-east Asia

Where to drop your anchor

Raini Hamdi returns from a South-east Asian cruise on *Crystal Symphony* with first-hand insights for MICE planners



Crystal Symphony at sea

Duration

The full duration of the 'The Treasures of South-east Asia' cruise which *Crystal Symphony* offered in March was a 14-night Singapore roundtrip covering Singapore, Penang, Phuket, Yangon, Andaman Islands/Port Blair (India), Kuala Lumpur/Port Klang, Malacca and Singapore.

This clearly would be too long for most Asian MICE groups but, depending on availability, planners could do a shorter cruise, say, a four-night Singapore-Phuket, or a seven-night Singapore-Yangon, and fly out from those cities.

I would choose to board and embark in a city that has good air connectivity, especially if the group comprises incentive winners or delegates from many countries. This is a reason why Asian cities like Singapore or Hong Kong are popular

homeports, as transfers from airport and port, not to mention visas and immigration, are easy, speedy and convenient.

Ports-of-call

As a Singaporean who has 'been there, done that' in South-east Asia, I was pretty relaxed about wanting to go out each time the ship docked at a port. Especially after my experience in Yangon, where it took nearly two hours just to get from the port to the city centre, thanks to the port's location in the boondocks and snarling traffic. South-east Asia's temperature too was unbearably hot at this time.

So I was a happy camper in the ship. The ports-of-call were secondary. The ship was the destination.

This is an advantage of regional cruising for Asian planners with a group that is

familiar with South-east Asia. Organisers have a captive audience in their hands and can anchor their programme around the ship's meeting facilities, activities and services without worrying too much about delegates' need for a lot of sightseeing. All the more if it's a luxurious ship like the *Crystal Symphony*, where they would want to extract maximum value for money.

Facilities

Firstly, planners may think a 922-guest ship that's 75 to 80 per cent full at the time of sailing would be milling with lots of people and noise. In reality, this is a 50,000-tonne ship, one of the most spacious cruiseships at sea. So there is no overcrowding anywhere and the sense of privacy everywhere is a real luxury.

As in an integrated resort, there are so many places where groups could be hosted for meals and cocktails, so planners need not worry about boredom settling in. With splendid F&B outlets, menus and meal/drink times all perfectly planned and spread out over a slew of restaurants, planners are in fact relieved of F&B arrangements – unless of course there are specific requirements.

To give an example, for dinner, *Crystal Symphony* boasts a grand dining room, two signature restaurants (an Italian Prego and Nobu Matsuhisa's Silk Road & The Sushi Bar) and The Vintage Room (ideal for a wine/food pairing dinner for small groups). There are two Black Tie evenings – perfect to tie up with the gala night. Pre-dinner cocktails can be held in the Crystal Cove or the Palm Court, with live pianist/band respectively provided. After dinner, head for Starlite Club for ballroom dancing, Avenue Saloon for a drink, Luxe nightclub for karaoke, Galaxy Lounge for a live entertainment show produced by the Crystal Ensemble of Singers and Dancers, Hollywood Theatre for the latest movie screenings, the casino – you get the



Gone were the days when accommodation and food on board were modest. Above, *Crystal Symphony's* deluxe room and Prego restaurant

drift. Cruise ships just want you to eat, dance and be merry.

For breakfast, lunch, tea and day activities on board, again, variety is the name of the game. There's a full gym and spa on board, with fitness directors offering everything from 'walk on water' to Nordic walking lessons. Dancing lessons, computer lessons, knitting lessons – you name it, it's all there. Imagine a spouse programme that has something for every spouse, male or female.

All planners need to do is to understand who their customers are, what they desire the most and choose the right ship that provides. *Crystal Cruises* is more for those who have climbed to the top, than younger and sporty winners who will probably feel more enthralled with a *Royal Caribbean* ship that is equipped with rock-climbing walls and other more strenuous or adventurous activities on board.

Meeting spaces

Most ships have theatre-style lounges, smaller venues and breakout rooms. On *Crystal Symphony*, for example, the Hollywood Theatre (122 seats) has cushy seats and the latest projection technology, including devices for the hearing-impaired. The Galaxy Lounge (420 seats), venue for its production shows and other evening entertainment, is also another perfect venue for your gala or awards presentation night.

Planners will do well to leave no stone unturned in checking out spaces on board a ship that can be transformed for unforgettable meetings.

Value for money

Everything is all-inclusive. However, I've met planners who are disenchanted with

the word as, often, it means quantity, not quality, is being delivered, or expensive ingredients being pared back, i.e., either those are omitted or served in miserly quantities.

My experience with a luxury cruise like *Crystal* is, instead of cutting back, it spoils the customer to heaven, both in terms of quantity and quality. If the menu says Maine Lobster, Black Angus or Milk-Fed Veal, you do get a generous portion of the meat and it's all fresh. Dining at the signature restaurants feels like going to an exclusive top-notch restaurant in town, with dedicated Prego and Silk Road staff pampering you to bits with their service. Even the buffet breakfast and lunch spread at Lido Cafe is as good if not better than spreads at luxury hotels in terms of range, quality, presentation and service staff.

Champagne and wines too are of good quality and served copiously. But if you wish to splurge on a *Cristal Rose* on your group, it is available at an additional charge. Choice is always available.

It's not so much all-inclusive but all 'exclusive' that planners should be studying before making a decision on which ship to cruise with, particularly if they are dealing with top incentive winners or senior company executives.

Planners should also check to what extent is the ship all-inclusive to avoid unnecessary charges as some ships may impose fees for meeting rooms, signature restaurants, etc.

An all-inclusive on board *Crystal* includes even pre-paid basic gratuities for the shipboard staff.

Sea-sickness?

These worries are so out of this world today. You wake up in Phuket one day and Yangon the next day without realising

you've sailed 573 nautical miles without 'aircraft' noise, ambient light or cloud turbulence – it's smoother than a flight!

Entry-level cabins are also the size of a standard hotel room, are tastefully-designed and maximise space to the tilt, so it really feels like staying in a resort room – except this one moves without you feeling it move!

Conclusion

Getting Asians to cruise South-east Asia is actually a smart move for Asian MICE planners to make. The ship, rather than the ports, is the anchor, enabling planners to extract maximum value from the ship's F&B, activities and entertainment options, and service.



A pilates reformer class on board – a spouse programme is easy to do on a cruise ship



Despite many hotel developments in Macau, the destination's past can still be glimpsed at Senado Square

Business as usual from China

MICE from across the border holds steady for Macau despite new tourism laws and restrictions on government travel. By **Prudence Lui**

Despite China's stringent new tourism laws and restrictions on government travel and event expenditure, Macau – sitting across the border and recipient of a large number of Chinese arrivals – reported growth in its business events sector.

Macau welcomed 1,030 business events in 2013, up eight per cent year-on-year, and attracted more than two million participants to its shores.

Macau Economic Services director, Sou Tim Peng, said this was possible because the new laws and restrictions did not target business travellers.

Sou added that the Mainland and Macao Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement, introduced in 2011, had a part to play in the destination's sturdy MICE performance, as it facilitated the participation of Chinese delegates in conventions and exhibitions held in Macau.

The Convention and Exhibition Stimulation Program was also credited for lifting business events performance.

In 2013, the programme supported 14 events from China, more than it had in 2012. These 14 events drew 15,683 Chinese participants, up 10.5 per cent from the year before.

MGTO director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, said the Convention and Exhibition Stimulation Program had attracted several repeat businesses from the mainland.

"These events see a year-on-year increase in participant numbers. We are also seeing more incentive groups coming from pharmaceutical, IT, transportation and electronics industries," she said.

Stakeholders in Macau's MICE sector have also reported upbeat business from across the border.

SmallWORLD Experience CEO, Bruno Simões, has seen more bookings from China, although the market represents a small 15 per cent share in his company's revenue.

Simões shared an optimistic observation: "The Chinese market is becoming more demanding and spending a bit more. A few years ago, the opportunity to travel is in itself an incentive. Today, many companies must offer unique experiences that their (winners) cannot access on their own."

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Destination: Macau

MGM Macau enjoyed sustained Chinese MICE performance in 2013 and expects a “small increment in 2014 from the Chinese MICE segment”, said executive director of sales and guest services, Irene Wong.

The Westin Resort Macau reported significant growth from China, especially from Guangdong and Shanghai markets. Director of sales and marketing, Antony E Box, told *TTGmice*: “We forecast that the Chinese market will continue to generate growth. To ensure this, proactive face-to-face sales development is key to positioning our unique offerings, such as outdoor venues, lush landscaped gardens and opportunities for a variety of teambuilding activities in and



Macau continues to attract Chinese corporate groups

around Colane and Macau.”

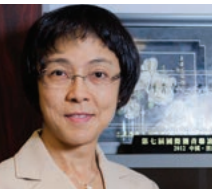
Galaxy Macau’s assistant vice president of hotel and event sales,

Samson Woo, also noted a 20 per cent rise in Chinese MICE spend last year, due to greater demand for activities and entertainment.

Meanwhile, MGTO launched an additional MICE support scheme at the start of 2014. The International Meeting and Trade Fair Support Program provides assistance and financial support to event organisers.

“We are seeing more (Chinese) incentive groups from pharmaceutical, IT, transportation and electronics industries.”

Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes
MGTO director



See the other side of Macau



A-Mia Temple, built in 1488, is covered in one of the walking routes

To encourage visitors to explore lesser known quarters in Macau and boost community tourism, the Macau Government Tourist Office (MGTO) unveiled a new programme called *Step Out, Experience Macau’s Communities* last September.

Four walking routes have been launched under the programme, each designed to cater to specific interests.

For instance, *A Tour of Historical Trails* takes participants to landmarks that played a prominent role in the destination’s past, such as Avenida da Praia Grande and Praça de Ponte e Horta.

Other walking routes are *A Tour of Nature and Creativity*, *A Tour of East Meets West* and *A Tour of Arts and Culture*.

Tour maps are available in traditional and simplified Mandarin, English and Portuguese. Interested travellers can also get a sneak peak of the various highlights of each of the four routes via videos.

In time to come, MGTO will roll out smartphone applications for the routes and build directional signs and maps at starting and finishing points of the trails.

Bruno Simões, CEO of Small-WORLD Experience in Macau, wel-

comes *Step Out, Experience Macau’s Communities*.

“They are great for both incentive groups and leisure travellers,” Simões said.

“In fact, we are using 80 per cent of the featured sites and routes in our own city races and treasure hunts. We are already recommending these routes or something similar to our clients.”

However, not all corporate event specialists are aware of the new programme. Paradigm Consultants International, business development manager, Jake Erlich, is one of them.

Erlich told *TTGmice* that MGTO should market the programme to event companies if it wants “companies such as ours to develop programmes incorporating these routes”.

“Then we would be more likely to take time to visit (the routes) and consider how we could develop programmes around these locations,” he said. – **Prudence Lui**



Need to know

Wynn Tower's winning new look

Wynn Tower at Wynn Macau has been given a facelift. Guestrooms now feature a fresh, light-colour palette as well as wall fabrics, carpets and lamps that were created exclusively for the property. In-room entertainment systems have also been upgraded.

A new experience also awaits guests at the hotel's spa, which now sports refurbished treatment rooms.

Visit www.wynnmacau.com for more information.

Make movie magic

Galaxy Macau has developed a treasure hunt-style teambuilding activity called *Movie Maker*, which will see teams roaming the integrated resort with iPads and other tools in hand to help them complete various tasks in their mission and film their activity at the same time. Films made by the different teams will then be edited into a clip that serves as a memory of the group's stay at Galaxy Macau. Contact (853) 2888-0888 for details.

Go wow at the House of Dancing Water

Grand Hyatt Macau is offering a *House of Dancing Water* WOW package which includes one night's accommodation in a Grand Suite King, two tickets to the spectacular House of Dancing Water performance, 500 Hyatt Dollars redeemable at Grand Hyatt Macau's restaurants and two tickets to the Dragon's Treasure show.

Package prices vary according to the seat category, from HK\$2,633 (US\$340) for C-Reserve tickets to HK\$3,233 for A-Reserve tickets. Prices excluded a 15 per cent tax. Other terms apply.

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Big wins from China

Putrajaya International Convention Centre will host a major Chinese event this year

MyCEB steps up promotional efforts in China to keep the flow of major events coming from first- and second-tier cities, writes **S Puvaneswary**

Malaysia has seen strong growth in Chinese business events over the last few years, with the average group size expanding from 190 delegates in 2011 to 340 in 2013, according to data collected by the Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB).

Last year saw two major events from China being held in Malaysia – the 2013 International Dragon Award Annual Conference in August, which

drew 5,000 local and international delegates; and the Malaysia-China Economic Summit 2013 in October, which was attended by more than 1,000 business leaders from the two countries. The latter had a VVIP guest list that included China's president Xi Jinping and Malaysia's prime minister Najib Razak. Both events were held at Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre (KLCC).

This year will also welcome several big events from China such as the Saw Clansman Association of the

State of Malaya at Resorts World Genting, with an estimated 1,000 delegates; and International Chinese Film Festival in May at Putrajaya International Convention Centre, with more than 2,000 delegates from China. In February, Roche Annual Sales Conference was held at KLCC with 1,400 delegates from China.

Attractions and hotels have reported good performance in the business events segment last year and expect to see the same in 2014.

Bill Holman, consultant/director,

Sunway Lagoon Theme Park, said the number of corporate groups from China has risen year-on-year, with most hailing from first- and second-tier Chinese cities.

The theme park can cater to teambuilding programmes, corporate family days, gala dinners and themed parties. The area by the wave pool can host dinners for 1,500 delegates.

Sheryl Lim, director of business development at Hilton Petaling Jaya, expects to see significant year-on-year growth in the Chinese market this

year. “We will be working closely with tourism players to customise solutions for their China bids. (We will) continue to invest in the hotel and leverage Hilton’s global assets, knowledge and resources to emerge as the preferred hotel venue for the MICE sector,” she said.

The property, recently refurbished, boasts a refreshed exterior, lobby and lobby lounge, as well as 18 meeting rooms including a pillarless ballroom for 1,000 delegates in theatre set-up.

To further penetrate the Chinese

MICE market this year, MyCEB participated at IT&CM China last month and will conduct roadshows in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing with Malaysian MICE suppliers. It will continue to work with industry partners to host fam trips for corporate clients and key MICE planners, and leverage on Tourism Malaysia’s presence in China as an extended sales team to promote the destination for business events and to obtain leads, said Zulkefli Sharif, MyCEB CEO.

MyCEB has also extended its *Malaysia Twin Deal* + + subvention programme to events confirmed by June 30, 2014.

However, BMC Travel managing director, Billy Leong, who has noted forward bookings to be slow so far this year, warns that business will be challenging in 2014 due to the stronger Renminbi giving Chinese clients greater buying power and more destination options.



“We will be working closely with tourism players to customise solutions for their China bids. (We will) continue to invest in the hotel and leverage Hilton’s global assets, knowledge and resources.”

Sheryl Lim

Director of business development
Hilton Petaling Jaya

How I did Reckitt Benckiser (Thailand) 2013 Sales Conference

Destination management company, Luxury Tours Malaysia, had only a week to put together the logistics, venue, teambuilding activities and gala dinner for Reckitt Benckiser’s (Thailand) four-day annual sales conference held in Kuala Lumpur in January 2013.

Its manager, Ganneesh Ramaa, said the group of 240 comprising top level management and sales staff, were originally supposed to hold their event in Dubai but changed the venue at the last moment, as a number of delegates could not obtain visa to enter the United Arab Emirates.

He added: “Our partner in Thailand passed this group to us and we immediately set to work. As this was during the peak Chinese New Year holiday season, we had numerous challenges. The client wanted a five star international brand which could cater as the conference and gala dinner venue as well as provide accommodation facilities.

“There were not many five-star international brands at that time which had 180 vacant rooms and conference facilities which were large enough to include 34 tables, in half-moon seating, and a stage.

“We used our good relations with Renaissance Kuala Lumpur Hotel

to secure the hotel venue and they were flexible on payment terms and let us have an extra 15 rooms, as additional delegates confirmed their attendance at the last moment.

“They also gave us good rates due to our long-term relationship with them. The biggest challenge was meeting the client’s requirement of having rear projections. For this we had to engage a contractor to build a stage for performance and presentation.

“Getting a contractor was not easy as this was during the holiday

season and many contractors were either on leave or were rushing jobs as they had order backlogs to fulfil. Again, through much persuasion we managed to get a contractor to do the necessary within 24 hours.

“For the gala dinner entertainment, we hired Malaysian Drum Symphony and they had two days to coordinate a line-up which showcased drumming from the various ethnic groups in Malaysia.

“We managed to pull off a successful event simply because we had good relationships with our suppliers.”



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Need to know

Other new attractions to debut in the theme park include a high-dive show at the Giant Surf Pool area from May with 20-minute performances thrice daily as well as Cleopatra's Adventure within the Scream Park in the second half of 2014.

The only integrated resort city in Selangor is where companies can hold an annual corporate dinner for 1,000 pax and where delegates can eat, shop, ten-pin bowl, catch a live show or the latest movie all in one location.

Sunway Lagoon's new draws

Sunway Group, which operates the 21-year-old Sunway Lagoon, recently announced it will open Asia's first Nickelodeon-branded attraction zone within the theme park come March 2015.

Highlighting Nickelodeon's hit characters, including SpongeBob SquarePants, Dora the Explorer and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Explorers' Oasis will comprise nine attractions and six rides.

There will be immersive attractions such as the Oasis Lagoon Splash Pad and climbing structure, an interactive water play area using reactive technology, daily signature slime events, retail shops, games and F&B establishments.

The new zone will add to the existing rides and attractions in Sunway Lagoon, which total more than 80 and span over 35 hectares.

Swing in style on Langkawi Island

The first Els Club in Asia will open this month on Langkawi Island, giving golf enthusiasts a chance to play on an 18-hole championship golf course nestled in centuries-old lush rainforest with towering tropical foliage, and overlooking the picturesque shores of the Andaman Sea.

The Els Club Teluk Datai is said to be one of the most incredible courses within the Els Club collection.

A private boardroom equipped with the latest in audiovisual technology is available for up to 24 guests.

For more information on Els Club Malaysia, visit www.elsclubmalaysia.com/about.

Silka Cheras opens its doors in April

Adjacent to the newest shopping mall Cheras Sentral, Silka Cheras opened last month, offering 319 guestrooms with four room categories: Superior (26m²); Silka Room (32m²); Studio (38m²) and the open-concept design, Silka Suite (42m²). Facilities include an all-day dining outlet and a function facility for up to 220 people, theatre-style.

The hotel is just a 15-minute drive away from the heart of Kuala Lumpur City Centre and 45 minutes from Kuala Lumpur International Airport. Other attractions within a 5km radius include the Alam Damai Recreation Park, Velodrome, National Swimming Centre and Kuala Lumpur Football Stadium.

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I-City offers a few tricks up its sleeves

Selangor's theme park, i-City, will welcome a 240-room Best Western hotel in September as well as a shopping mall and a convention centre in 2017, allowing it to draw more MICE business. Its Wax Museum will have new exhibits this month that are interactive, taking a bow or waving at visitors. Other new attractions that have come online since 2H2013 include the House of Horrors and Trick Art Museum.

The Trick Art Museum renders two-dimensional paintings in three dimensions by creating illusions. Each exhibit looks different when seen from different angles. At a perfect angle from camera lenses, the paintings seem to just 'jump out'.

The museum comprises five themes, each in a separate room: famous masterpieces, Egyptian lost tomb adventure, animal kingdom, marine life and modern classics. Unlike a real museum, visitors are free to roam around, make as much noise and spend as much time here as they wish. In fact, when posing with exhibits on the floor, they are encouraged to step on them or lie on them to create a realistic photo.

Tickets are at RM10 (US\$3) for adults and children. Website: <http://i-city.my/tourism>

Malaysia Airlines to suspend flights to Los Angeles flights

Malaysia Airlines will suspend its flights into Los Angeles following a route rationalisation exercise effective April 30. The airline will continue to offer one-stop air connectivity between Kuala Lumpur and several major cities in the US through a codeshare arrangement with American Airlines and Japan Airlines, its partner airlines in the Oneworld alliance.

Mega development announced for Malacca

An iconic waterfront development in what is said to be South-east Asia's largest cluster of islands has been planned for Malacca, featuring an international cruise terminal, a theme park, seven-star hotel and the Malaysia Eye. The RM40 billion Melaka Gateway to be completed by 2025 will comprise one natural and two man-made islands. It is expected to drive home Malacca's maritime importance through the new Melaka International Cruise Terminal and Ferry Terminal for up to three cruise ships, a world-class maintenance and repair facility for mega yachts, and the region's largest marina with up to 1,000 berths.



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FACT FILE

Maximum pax for meetings 250
Maximum pax for banquets 400

Recent events handled

- AO Asia Pacific Regional Scientific Forum, comprising surgeons from Asia-Pacific, 80 pax, September 2013
- Ageas Insurance Company (Asia) Limited Hong Kong incentive group, 200 pax, November 2013
- Illumina Scientific Summit, comprising scientists and engineers from around the world, 200 pax, April 2014

VERDICT



Raini Hamdi

The reopened Victory Annexe is a victory for E&O Hotel – and is the place for planners to celebrate corporate victories and plan how to win the next ones!

First, a quick history. The Sarkies brothers built the 100-room Eastern & Oriental Hotel (E&O Hotel), Penang in 1885 and, in 1922, extended the property with 40 more rooms in The Victory Annexe. The Heritage Wing reopened in 2001 after a major refurbishment, while The Victory Annexe reopened last year with thrice the number of rooms (122 suites). It was here that I checked in, after a mere 20-minute drive from the airport. The hotel is located in the heart of George Town and is the only one in this UNESCO World Heritage Site that fronts the Andaman Sea.

Rooms

I stayed in a Corner Suite. At 123m², it's wonderfully spacious, with many touches of the colonial era – the claw-footed long bath on black-and-white Victorian floor tiles, white plantation shutters that open to sea views while you luxuriate in the bath, pedestal ceramic basins, lazy ceiling fans, a two-poster bed and many other features. Very charming.

Meeting facilities

The Sarkies knew the value of MICE. They added a grand ballroom to the hotel in 1903 and soon it became the venue for the island's major official functions, weddings and banquets. With such an illustrious MICE history, I was expecting a lot by way of MICE facilities. I was not disappointed.

The new Victory Annexe offers a ballroom that seats 300 pax for banquets and five meeting rooms that can accommodate 16-150 pax. What I like is they are all sea-facing, with modern, elegant decor. Many of the meeting rooms were occupied that day. In the evening, the

hotel was also hosting a festival opening. Big cars were pulling up on its cavernous porch, in them dignitaries and other Who's Who. Little has changed from the days of the Sarkies.

I took a peek at the grand ballroom in the Heritage Wing which the Sarkies built. It has been renovated of course but the royal boxes, gallery and full stage are still there. Imagine a colonial theme dinner party here, with a few gentlemen and ladies in Victorian costumes fanning themselves away in the royal boxes! The grand ballroom seats 400 pax for banquets. There are also six function rooms accommodating 15-180 pax in the Heritage Wing.

F&B My favourite time of the day was 5pm, when cocktails and canapes are served at The Planters Lounge to guests staying at The Victory Annexe. It's everyone's favourite time too, for we were all there in the terrace enjoying wine and sea breezes. The poolside terrace close by offers a lot of privacy and spectacular views of the sunset and the Andaman Sea, a fantastic area for a cocktail party.

No Asian group would not want to miss dining at Sarkies, one of Penang's best-loved eateries featuring local and international buffet, which has made its new home in The Victory Annexe. An outdoor setting in the gardens on a lovely day or evening would be equally delightful.

For something more elegant and formal, head for 1885 in the Heritage Wing.

If you want to impress a small group of C level executives, do a private, exclusive cocktail/dinner in the expansive balcony of any of the four Corner Suites of The Victory Annexe. The balcony offers a 270-degree view of the sea.



Brunei Tourism

Persistent pursuit

Obstacles abound, in the form of limited air access and night entertainment, but Brunei MICE sellers are bent on winning over the Chinese, writes **S Puvaneswary**

Air access and limited entertainment options in Brunei are main obstacles to the Sultanate's quest for corporate events from China, but local MICE specialists are not letting that stop their courtship of Chinese clients.

Currently, Royal Brunei Airlines is the only airline serving the Bandar Seri Begawan-Shanghai route with three flights weekly. It operates every

Monday, Wednesday and Friday using the Airbus 320 with a configuration of 12 business class and 132 economy class seats.

This is the only point in China that Royal Brunei Airlines flies to.

Inbound MICE specialists in Brunei said the destination needed more direct flights to China, especially to first-tier cities, in order to gain a bigger share of the Chinese MICE market.

Khirul Zainie, managing director of MegaBorneo Tour Planner, told *TTGmice* that he is only targeting small groups of less than 50 people from Shanghai, as securing seats for larger groups is a challenge.

Khirul added that Brunei will be sold as a dual destination, either combined with Malaysia or Singapore. Explaining the rationale, he said: "Brunei lacks attractions that appeal to Chinese MICE travellers such as night entertainment, gaming and drinking. It is easier to sell when Brunei is combined with another destination where travellers can drink, shop and have venues for night entertainment."

Freme Travel Services manager, inbound and MICE division, Sugumar Nair, shares Khirul's constraints with seat capacity.

"If we get a bigger group (of more than 50 pax), we will have to split the group and have the delegates arrive into Brunei in batches," he said. "We will have a stronger chance of securing more business from first-tier cities like Beijing and Guangzhou if we had direct flights. Most MICE organisers prefer direct flights due to time constraints as the average stay

Brunei's lush forests, such as the one in Temburong pictured above, can be explored as part of a pre/post-meeting programme

in Brunei is about three days.”

Last year, Freme saw an uptick in incentive business from China over 2012. It is still too early to gauge how 2014 will pan out for the company, but Sugumaran said forward bookings are coming in.



“It is easier to sell when Brunei is combined with another destination where travellers can drink, shop and have venues for night entertainment.”

Khirul Zainie

Managing director,
MegaBorneo Tour Planner

Jodie Chu, tour coordinator for Bon Asia Holidays, said the company had confirmed a number of incentive groups for 2014 with an average of two- to three-day stay. Sabah was usually a popular choice for twin programmes with Brunei, she noted.

Also in on the Chinese MICE action is Orchid Garden Hotel. Mohd Iswandi Maaruf, director of sales, said the hotel is working with inbound operators handling the Chinese market to create conference and leisure packages.

He said the hotel works well for Chinese MICE groups because of its Vanda Chinese Restaurant and proximity to Brunei International Airport and Brunei Convention Centre.

Private MICE stakeholders in Brunei are supported by Brunei Tourism’s efforts to promote the Sultanate as a meetings and incentives destination. The bureau is going direct to the top 1,000 corporate firms in Greater China, most of which are headquartered in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Hong Kong, while its China office will also participate at ITE 2014 in Hong Kong.

A MICE guide has also been produced to raise awareness of the destination and its event infrastructure. It provides meeting planners with details of meeting and convention venues, recreational activities, tourist spots and the range of services and support offered by Brunei Tourism

to organisers who are hosting events with international participation.

According to Salinah Salleh, the bureau’s tourism officer for marketing & promotions, Brunei gets more leisure visitors from China, compared to business event travellers.

Brunei lacks statistics on MICE arrivals, although available tourism data showed 26,407 Chinese visitors in the first 10 months of 2013, an increase from 2012 which saw 24,504 arrivals.

Salinah said: “Our goal is to have MICE planners consider Brunei when they are looking for a new destination for incentives, meetings, conferences, product launches or teambuilding activities. Brunei makes a very convenient and refreshing pre/post-conference destination (for events held in) nearby meeting capitals such as Singapore, Kuala Lumpur or Bangkok.”

Salinah also recommended twinning Brunei with Sabah or Bali for programmes that feature the sun and the sea, or with Dubai for a desert and jungle experience, or use Brunei as a stopover for groups travelling to and from Australia or New Zealand.



Freme Travel Services

Get back to nature

City folks attending meetings in Brunei should take the chance to get closer to Mother Nature. Start the day with morning tea at a local restaurant in Bangar, the capital of Temburong district, then continue onwards to Batang Duri Village.

Light refreshments at Freme Rainforest Lodge can be arranged, before proceeding further on to Bukit Patoi Forest Reserve. Here, stroll down the wooden walkways to the Canopy for a panoramic view of the surrounding countryside and enjoy the serenity.

Return to Freme Rainforest Lodge for lunch. For groups with energetic delegates, a series of outdoor teambuilding activities can be planned for the afternoon.

Contact Freme Travel Services at fremeinb@brunet.bn for arrangements.

Shopping like a local

One of the best ways to see how the locals live is to visit the local market. The Kg Kianggeh Open Air Market is a lively place where a wide selection of fresh fruits, vegetables and seafood are sold by friendly merchants. Some stalls also sell fresh coconut and sugar cane juices, as well as grilled fish, offering shoppers an opportunity to snack as they explore the market.

A taste of Indonesian cuisine

Considered one of Brunei’s most established Indonesian restaurants, Pondok Sari Wangi specialises in dishes from Java, Padang and Sulawesi. *Ayam penyet* (flattened crispy, fried chicken), *ayam rendang* (chicken cooked in a rich and spicy coconut sauce), *tahu telur* (bean-curd omelette) and beef satay come highly recommended. Pondok Sari Wangi has three branches across Brunei, in Gadong, Sengkuring and Citi Square.



Explore a night market

Besides visiting a local market, visitors to Brunei should make time for a walk through Pasar Malam Gadong, or Gadong night market. For just a few dollars, one can load up on freshly cooked local favourites such as *hati buyah* (stir-fried slices of beef lungs) and *pulut panggang* (rice and prawns or beef wrapped in banana leaves and grilled over fire).



Paris is flaunting more than its iconic Eiffel Tower to attract more business event groups from South-east Asia

based on estimated figures from PCVB.

Partnering Air France, PCVB in March led its second annual sales mission comprising 13 tour operators and sellers from Paris to Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta and Bangkok as part of its aim to “meet major tour operators and understand clients’ rapidly changing expectations” and “present new ideas to the market”, said Barthelemy. Fam trips for this market trio are also in the pipeline this year.

Most Paris sellers, likewise, already had their radar tuned to the Chinese market for the majority of the last half decade, but South-east Asia’s MICE outbound potential is starting to register too, with several sellers sharing how they are stepping up contact with partners and launching more sales calls in the region.

Arnaud Calteau, founder & CEO of Azurever, a Paris-based DMC, told *TTGmice* that he began looking at the Asian MICE market in 2011 but currently keeps his focus on high-end segment of FITs, seminars and groups from Asia.

“It takes time to build up partnerships with Asian partners, but I have seen interest from incentive planners during this Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok workshop,” he said. “Indonesia has huge potential for incentives and leisure, as they are more open to ideas.”

Expecting the South-east Asian market to mature faster than its Japanese counterparts did in the seventies and eighties, Calteau has hence created MICE programmes plying to Asians’ love for shopping and glamour in Paris, such as a private tour of Fondation Pierre Berge-Yves Saint Laurent, where a curator highlights the famed French designer’s fashion collections, life and approach to art; plus private cocktails and dinners in addition to backstage access to Lido or VIP access to Notre Dame Cathedral after closing hours.

Similarly, Lido’s international tourism sales manager Claude Miccallef shared that the famed Parisian cabaret theatre has “adapted (itself) some 10 years ago to the rising Asian tide”. “We have received a lot of Asian corporate groups. We can personalise the venue through means such as putting company name (on the screens) or offering cocktails two hours before our shows,” he said. “The possibilities are endless.”

For Domaine de Chantilly, a 7,800ha historic estate in Paris’ out-

French flair, Asian ambitions

Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia are showing great MICE outbound promise, inspiring Paris to turn on its charms, discovers **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

Paris’ well-honed reputation as a capital for fashion, art and culture, as well as the nexus of economic and corporate business in France, bides well with its efforts to lure more Asian leisure and MICE visitors.

A city of 2.2 million habitants, Paris welcomed 29 million visitors in 2013, with business and MICE travellers making up half of the destination’s arrivals, according to Patricia Barthelemy, marketing manager of Paris Convention and Visitors Bureau (PCVB).

“We are seeing lots of leisure and incentive visitors from Asia, as Paris is usually (one of) the first destinations of a Europe trip,” she informed.

“New MICE markets are China, India and South-east Asia, while Japan is already an established market. Incentives from Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea are doing well, so these countries are no longer new markets for us.”

Having started the Chinese market 15 years ago, Barthelemy informed that PCVB “had time to understand the Chinese market”.

In contrast, the NTO only started making inroads into South-east Asia (excluding Singapore) in 2009, with particular attention given to the emerging markets of Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, which accounted for 80,000, 70,000 and 65,000 arrivals respectively to Parisian hotels in 2013,

skirts, its MICE strategy was adopted in 2008 when the destination came under private management, revealed international sales manager Patrick Allais.

“We are seeing lots of leisure and incentive visitors from Asia to Paris, as Paris is usually (one of) the first destinations of a Europe trip.”

Patricia Barthelemy
Marketing manager,
Paris Convention and Visitors

He commented: “We only started the South-east Asian market (Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand) two years ago and China three years ago; Japan was our first Asian market. For now, we mostly focus on emerging markets like Russia, Brazil, South-east Asia and India.

Jackie Chan’s *Chinese Zodiac* movie, which was shot on location at Domaine de Chantilly, has made it easier to introduce the château to the Asian market, with China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Thailand rising to become the destination’s top MICE source markets from Asia, while MICE requests from India are starting to roll in, according to Allais.

“We surfed on the wave of Jackie

Chan – he’s the best advertisement for us,” he said.

Domaine de Chantilly has also actively pursued new initiatives to strengthen its appeal for Asian MICE groups, said Allais.

Besides providing Chinese guides on-site, the destination has just entered into agreements with Asian food specialist caterers to offer such options as halal or pork-free food.

Furthermore, a Chinese website and marketing tools in Thai, Bahasa Indonesian and Melayu are expected to launch soon.

Meanwhile, the management is now looking at appointing a marketing representative in South-east Asia and India.



Need to know

A grand estate

Located a 20-minute drive from Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport, Domaine de Chantilly is one of the best examples of princely grandeur France has to offer. The estate houses the Musée Condé, home to rich collections of historical paintings, books and manuscripts; three different gardens; the Great Stables featuring one of Europe’s largest equestrian centres; a restaurant helmed by a two-Michelin-star chef and a new Relais & Châteaux hotel. The estate offers myriad MICE possibilities, from intimate parties for 50 pax in The Stags Gallery and 450-pax gala dinners in The Equestrian Gallery accompanied by private equestrian shows to private guided tours of the château and museums. Teambuilding activities are also available, such as treasure hunt by GPS in the gardens. Contact Patrick Allais at patrick.allais@domainedechantilly.com.

Oh, what a show!

The glamorous cabaret and burlesque show, *Bonheur*, performs at the iconic Lido theatre every evening, with 70 artistes putting on a glitzy extravaganza with 23 sets, 600 costumes and special effects.

Spread across six floors, the 7,500m² venue at Champs-Élysées features a 1,150-seat panoramic theatre and a giant elevator that allows the orchestra to sink 80cm into the floor to improve visibility for dining guests. Lido is set to undergo a renovation from January through March 2015, and will reopen with new shows.

MICE planners can also avail the venue’s corporate event packages or give clients the star treatment by requesting for customised options such as pre/post-show cocktails, backstage tours, meetings in the Bluebell Room or booking the entire venue for special events.

Visit www.lido.fr for details.



Hilton readies for new look

The historic Concorde Opera is currently undergoing extensive refurbishment to be rebranded as Hilton Paris Opera (pictured below) in autumn 2014. The area surrounding the 124-year-old landmark is undergoing large-scale redevelopment too. The rebranded 266-room hotel will boast an executive floor and lounge, meeting rooms and dining outlets.

Meanwhile, Hilton Chantilly Hotel & Conference Centre, located 30km from central Paris, is under construction and is expected to open in early-2015.



Charming river cruises

Offering year-round cruise tours along the Seine River, Bateaux-Mouches’ fleet of 15 open-deck riverboats will enable visitors to take in sights of Paris’ most iconic attractions such as Notre Dame Cathedral, Musée d’Orsay, Eiffel Tower, Louvre Museum and the underbellies of bridges that criss-cross the river.

Dinner cruises depart every evening at 20.30 while lunch cruises operate on weekends and public holidays only at 13.00, with all tables set on the water’s edge to give passengers a clear view of Parisian monuments over traditional French cuisine. Seating up to a maximum of 600 pax for dinners, corporate conferences, cocktails and gala dinners can be organised on board while special dietary options like kosher, Indian and halal food can be prepared upon request.

Visit www.bateaux-mouches.fr for more information or contact Chloe Wilhelem at c.wilhelem@bateaux-mouches.fr.

When in Paris, go shopping

Incentive planners working with Asian clients will do well to include a stop at Printemps, the French luxury department store founded in 1865 and with 17 outlets across France. The historic flagship store on Boulevard Haussmann boasts 44,000m² devoted to over 3,000 luxury brands and goods, a Maria Luisa store featuring famous and up-and-coming fashion names, a 2,000m² parfumerie and an entire building devoted to men’s fashion. Events can be hosted at the Brasserie Printemps. More information at www.printemps.com.



Beverley Parker



Bede Barry



Joy Florentino



Gino Tan

Australia

Beverley Parker, former executive director of sales and marketing for the Dockside Group, has moved to join the **International Convention Centre Sydney** as director of business development. Parker's career in business events and hospitality industries include senior roles with Four Seasons Hotels, Accor Asia Pacific and Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre.

China

Pan Pacific Hotels Group has appointed **Justin Guo** area general manager, China and general manager of Pan Pacific Suzhou. An experienced hotelier, Guo is tasked with overseeing the Group's expansion in China and taking charge of Pan Pacific Suzhou's daily operations and overall performance.

The St Regis Chengdu has chosen **Richard Deutl** as its general manager. Armed with nearly three decades of hospitality experience, Deutl will lead the hotel's pre-opening team in preparation for the grand opening in July 2014. Prior to this appointment, Deutl served as general manager of The Westin Nanjing where he led its successful opening.

Macau

Bede Barry is now general manager of **Conrad Macao Cotai Central**. Barry has more than 25 years of hospitality

experience, working in luxury hotels throughout Europe and South-east Asia. He has a strong business and management background, as well as extensive experience in hotel pre-openings and renovations, both at the property and corporate level.

Malaysia

Sean Choo Shyang Lin is now general manager of **Sunway Lagoon Theme Park**. Choo has over 17 years of professional experience in the hospitality industry, specialising in hotel management and sales and marketing. He was hotel director at Legoland.

Philippines

Joy Florentino has joined **Marriott Hotel Manila** as its first director for convention sales. The hotel will open in January 2015. Florentino has a strong background in the MICE trade and has worked with Marriott International as director of sales for the Sacramento Area Cluster and senior market account executive for Western Mountain Pacific Sales.

Singapore

Pan Pacific Hotels Group has appointed **Gino Tan** as general manager of **Parkroyal on Pickering Singapore**. Tan brings 20 years of experience to his new role and was last general manager of Millennium Hotel London

Mayfair. He spent the first 15 years of his hospitality career in sales and marketing positions with Omni Marco Polo Hotel, Merchant Court Hotel and Raffles Hotel in Singapore, as well as Swissôtel Beijing and Raffles Hotel Beijing in China.

Jeffrey Tan has joined **Pan Pacific Singapore** as director of events, overseeing MICE, group rooms, catering sales, banquet operations and event services for the hotel. Armed with a decade of experience, Tan has been with The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore and Marina Bay Sands and most recently, Resorts World Sentosa. He is, however, no stranger to Pan Pacific Singapore, having worked with the hotel's sales team from 2006 to 2008, and the Singapore sales team in 2009.



J Edward Brea



Oriol Montal

Thailand

J Edward Brea has taken the helm as general manager of **Shangri-La Hotel, Bangkok**. Armed with more than 30 years of hospitality experience, Brea was last general manager of Jing An Shangri-La, West Shanghai. He joined Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts in 2000 and was the first hotel manager at Island Shangri-La Hong Kong and Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore before moving through the ranks.

Oriol Montal now leads **JW Marriott Phuket Resort & Spa** as general manager. He has 20 years of experience in hospitality and had started

his career in the industry at the Hotel Barcelona Sants. He joins the Thai resort from The Ritz-Carlton, Osaka where he was general manager.

Shangri-La Hotel, Bangkok has appointed **Caroline Cheah** as hotel manager. She was last group director of rooms at Shangri-La International Hotel Management. Cheah has been working with Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts for almost 20 years, taking on roles such as director of rooms and executive assistant manager at Island Shangri-La, Hong Kong; and hotel manager at Pudong Shangri-La, East Shanghai.

Aloysius Lee

Can you be alone together? Can a 654-room hotel be a highly individual place? This new project soft-opening in Singapore in 1Q15 says yes. South Beach Consortium's CEO, Aloysius Lee, tells **Raini Hamdi** why it's the new choice for MICE planners

You have been working on the project since 2009, translating CDL (see box) executive chairman Kwek Leng Beng's vision to create a 'non-cookie cutter' hotel. So how unique is it?

Ours is a HIP hotel, ie, Highly Individual Place. (When conceptualising the hotel), we were looking at the Hudson in New York, Delano in Miami, SLS Hotel Beverly Hills and Le Royal Monceau (Raffles Paris).

These hotels really bring life, energy and connectivity to their public spaces. They understand people want to be 'alone together' (laughs) or, as some call it, "isolated togetherness".

What an oxymoron (laughs).

Yes. Four and a half years ago, when chairman Kwek spoke to me about such a hotel concept, it was still a fresh trend. Now of course most hotel refits are going along these lines.

Won't you be common then?

In Asia, it's not done to the same extent yet. Asian hotels are still largely traditional – the typical big lobbies, halls, etc.

Our three pillars are, firstly, we are a designer hotel, not only in the sense that the hotel is designed by Philippe Starck. We have, for example, the best IT design in-house right now. If you are IT-savvy, you will be extremely happy staying with us; we have the technology, for example, for the TV to be mirrored onto your own device. If you are not IT-savvy, you will also be happy as we are not one of those hotels where you have to figure out how to work the technology.

Our second pillar is to offer a fresh dining experience. We will hopefully sign up a concept from Europe soon – not a celebrity restaurant – but a stylish, contemporary experience that combines shopping and dining in a space of 30,000sqft (2,787m²).

Thirdly, we will have a lot of imaginative social spaces to cater to the need for 'isolated togetherness'. We even have such a position as head of social space.

What are these social spaces like?

It's all about 'connectivity', about providing spaces for people to eat, work, socialise, or be alone in the presence of other people, in places other than their rooms.

We will have as many as 17 social spaces, in different areas and settings. Some might serve snacks, some will have music and there is always IT support. The smallest social space would





be in the lobby, which will have different corners where people could relax, read the papers, use the Internet – it is not going to look like the traditional lobby I can assure you.

What are the F&B options in the hotel itself, ie, excluding the retail dining concept you've just mentioned, and what MICE facilities will be available?

The hotel will have an all-day dining outlet and three bars. MICE facilities will include a ballroom which seats around 500 pax for a banquet and 350 pax for cocktails. Planners can do incentives here and we're working closely with Suntec Singapore to have a fair share of convention delegates. I believe we have the best access to Suntec – from the hotel, just a walk across Nicoll Highway through an overland bridge and you're already at the convention hall.

We're creating a new product, probably the first in Asia that offers this kind of a lifestyle choice. With high occupancies in Singapore, we are a serious choice for all segments, be it MICE, bleasure, leisure, etc. Most new hotels that are opening are smaller in roomcount. We have 650 rooms.

What rate are you looking at?

The current rates of hotels in the neighbourhood are around S\$400 (US\$317) to S\$500.

CDL also owns St Regis and W in

Singapore. How would you position South Beach in this collection?

St Regis is traditional luxury while W is hip, which is closer to South Beach, but in a different environment.

How many people do you need and how are you going to get them in this labour crunch?

We're recruiting around 60 people from now (at the time of interview in mid-March) till June, including the GM and head of human resources. By September the full recruitment will start for around 500 people.

It is difficult to find people. On the other hand, we must be innovative with our job offerings, by thinking differently about positions, by offering the right people an advancement when they join us, not just a lateral transfer, so they are motivated by a real new challenge.

We've even set up a good pre-opening office at the site – now just waiting for the bodies to come in (laughs).

How innovative are you with your job offerings, apart from the aforementioned head of social spaces?

We will have, for example, an EAM-sales & marketing services, and all the customer-facing departments will be under him – sales, branding, revenue, catering, front office, reservations, concierge, VIP services (many of these

AT A GLANCE: SOUTH BEACH DEVELOPMENT

- A mixed-use contemporary/ecological development comprising over 46,000m² of Grade A office space; 190 residential units; a 654-room hotel designed by Philippe Starck; a retail concept; and a private membership club
- Developed by City Developments Limited (CDL) Singapore and IOI Corporation Berhad
- Located opposite Raffles Hotel Singapore on the Beach Road side and is directly connected to Suntec Singapore via an overhead bridge on the Nicoll Highway side
- A heritage site formerly comprising three army blocks and the NCO Club, a favourite haunt for army, naval and air force offices, and famed for its Olympic-sized swimming pool
- Architecture by Foster + Partners and Aedas

Note: The hotel is currently called The South Beach. A decision has yet to be made on a third-party management, franchise or marketing representation

functions are usually under operations).

Service should be part of sales and marketing. When I started my career with Singapore Airlines in 1972, I believed the airline had all services – cabin crew, amenities, menus and so on – going under marketing, not operations. Marketing has a stronger feel of the market, which it can drive back to operations.

So what does your EAM-operations do?

They cover F&B – again, a departure from the common practice – housekeeping, engineering and security. So in effect we have two EAM positions which will enable the executives to become a future GM. This is what we want to do as well, ie, groom talent.

What advice do you have on working with Asian tycoons?

Firstly I've observed that tycoons really love talent and are passionate about the business. They are open and they like to share their thinking, philosophy, vision and strategy. And they hope you can deliver it for them.

Sometimes it may be that they are so far ahead and running so fast – after all, they are more seasoned, successful and have seen the world – that it is difficult for the executive team members to follow. But I believe when they speak, there is a lot of wisdom and big value at the end of the day, even if they can't justify it there and then.

Members of the MICE Committee of China Association of Travel Services and the Alliance of China Conference Hotels gathered on April 13 and 14 for an intensive **training course** to improve their understanding of the dynamic business events industry and raise their standards to a global level. The session in Shanghai is the first to be held alongside IT&CM China.



Friendship and business links were renewed at this year's **IT&CM China** in Shanghai. The event welcomed 3,000 MICE professionals from all over the world.



All 63 students from 10 educational establishments in China attended the **IMEX-MPI-MCI Future Leaders Forum** at IT&CM China 2014 on April 16, where they tapped the brains of MICE industry experts such as IMEX Group's Sarah Skavron, ICCA's Noor Ahmad Hamid, First Incentive Travel's Joost de Meyer and Greenview's Eric Ricaurte.

All pictures by Patrick Tan

澳門

Macao

理想的會議展覽舉辦地
THE IDEAL MICE DESTINATION

- 世界旅遊休閒中心、國際級會展設施
A World Tourism and Leisure Centre Equipped with World-class Convention and Exhibition facilities
- 位處大珠三角地區，地理位置優越
Advantageous location in the Greater Pearl River Delta region
- 政府提供鼓勵會展優惠政策
The Government provides preferential policies to encourage the development of the convention and exhibition industry
- 貿易投資促進局提供會展競投及支援“一站式”服務
IPIM provides “One-Stop Service” for MICE Bidding and Support in Macao

會展競投及支援 “一站式” 服務

“One-Stop Service” for

MICE Bidding and Support in Macao

服務內容 ◆ SERVICE FIELDS

招攬、引進會展活動在澳門舉辦	◆ Attract and introduce convention and exhibition projects to Macao
協助競投會展項目	◆ Assist in bidding for convention and exhibition projects
“一站式” 會展資訊	◆ “One-stop” Convention and exhibition updates
委派專人協助跟進落實在澳門舉辦會展項目	◆ Designated staff to provide follow-up service and assist in organising events in Macao
協助申請會展活動激勵計劃	◆ Assist in the application for the Convention and Exhibition Stimulation Programme
協助於本局參與之活動 (澳門境內外) 進行宣傳推廣	◆ Provide publicity and promotion opportunities in local and overseas events participated by IPIM
協調與本澳相關政府部門聯繫	◆ Co-ordinate and liaise with Macao government departments
協助在澳成立公司開展會展項目	◆ Assist Macao Companies to develop MICE projects
提供會展合作配對服務，協助尋找合作伙伴	◆ Provide MICE cooperation matching service in search for potential partners

澳門貿易投資促進局
Instituto de Promoção do Comércio e do Investimento de Macau
Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute

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