

October 2014

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Congresses sail into Yokohama

New ways to play in Bangkok

Hangzhou MICE gets a booster

Meetings experts explain why gamification of events is hot



No longer second place

They were not top-of-mind before for incentives or meetings, but a crop of 'second-tier' destinations across Asia-Pacific are fast becoming the new hot favourites for MICE planners. *TTGmice* has the list



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The debutantes

Across Asia, a string of second-tier cities and resorts, and emerging countries such as Sri Lanka and Myanmar, are being watched with interest, like debutantes on their first appearance in society.

Rising economies, a bulging middle class, cheaper labour costs and the availability of new talent are among factors that make these places the new apple of investors' eye, the base for multinationals, the points airlines want to fly to and the spots hotels want to plant flags in. Corporate travel and corporate meetings ensue, along with exhibitions eyeing new source markets and congresses by world associations eager to grow membership into new territories.

Be it Chennai or Chengdu, secondary cities and resorts are shedding their 'second place' status. I myself find it hard to describe a city like Chengdu as being *secondary*. Why, it's got some 14 million people (fourth most populous city in the mainland and more than twice the population of my hometown Singapore), while passenger traffic through Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport already exceeded 31.6 million in 2012.

While these destinations are potential pots of gold (get to know some of them in our cover story this issue), holding a MICE event in a second-tier place in all honesty is not without its challenges. As a journalist who has been in emerging cities and resorts for a tradeshow or incentive, I've experienced first-hand their 'rawness' if you like, and it all revolves around the same issues: lack of professional service staff, old convention venues, transportation woes, bureaucracy and officialdom – overall, it is still about the absence of modern infrastructure to handle MICE and the lack of understanding by the destination of the most basic expectations of MICE delegates.

I remember gritting my teeth when the meeting room in cold Kunming had no heater, or the last-minute painting job of a convention centre in Phnom Penh, or a transportation debacle in Manado that left many stranded outside the exhibition hall, or the lack of even proper toilets (I can't remember where but I still remember the sinking feeling about going to the lavatory). Last year, buyers and media of a travel tradeshow in a secondary city were invited to a grand opening ceremony, in an iconic state building no less, alas, only to find that their tables were in an outdoor pavilion while the grand ballroom was reserved for VIPs and the real action inside were beamed to them on a white screen. See what I mean by a lack of understanding on how to put on a show?

So expect less and be prepared if you're hosting a MICE event in an emerging destination. As to why you should, it is because the charm, innocence and eagerness of a second-tier destination, can melt one's heart and make one forget the shortcomings.

Just like debutantes.



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Clark is keen to attract more business events but numerous obstacles must first be crossed, reports Marianne Carandang

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We love



Recipe for a stunning event

Being chosen as the venue for the media launch of the sexy Lamborghini Huracán LP610-4 in August should give event planners a clear indication of Marble 8's appeal.

Opened in March this year, the classy Australian-style steakhouse quickly earned itself a loyal following of red meat lovers, thanks to its excellent quality of food and drinks, attentive service – expect a personal waiter at each table – and fabulous location on Jalan Binjai where guests are treated to a stunning view of the iconic Petronas Twin Towers.

Event planners who seek to impress their guests through their bellies will have the going made easy for them, as Marble 8 serves prime cuts of superior Wagyu and Angus beef. Wagyu cuts are aged through a tightly controlled dry-ageing process in the steakhouse's very own state-of-the-art ageing cellar.

As an event venue, Marble 8 charms with a lavish décor and spaces that suit various functions. Its dining hall is supported by the sleek M8 Bar which opens out to a grassy outdoor space that is great for product launches and social gatherings, as well as Privé, a premium cigar and single malt lounge on the upper floor. The latter, dressed in rich brown leather seats and oakwood panels and comes with a vaulted decorative ceiling, makes a perfect venue for business discussions and key client entertainment.

For more information on Marble 8, visit www.marble-8.com.

Cool, new spaces at the top of Four Seasons Singapore

Four Seasons Singapore recently unveiled a snazzier rooftop event space with a rejuvenated pool and new bar, and two redecorated function rooms, coinciding with the hotel's 20th anniversary.

Located on the 20th floor, Windows East and Windows West now boast floor-to-ceiling windows for natural light, chandeliers and new wood panelling, with one room in white wood and the other in dark wood. Both come with wide balconies and can accommodate between 50 and 60 people each, or five tables for roundtable sessions.

The luxury city hotel has also added a new poolside bar, an extension of its destination watering hole One-Ninety Bar by Javier de las Muelas which was opened in the lobby earlier this year. The entire revamped area holds up to 150 pax for casual receptions.

Hyatt Regency makes its mark in Eastern China

Hyatt Regency Suzhou has opened in Suzhou Industrial Park, within mixed-use development Jinghope Plaza which also features a luxury shopping mall, entertainment venues and two Grade-A office buildings.

From the hotel, Shanghai is 25 minutes away by train, Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport is an hour by car, and Suzhou SIP Railway Station is a 10-minute drive away.

The hotel offers 355 guestrooms and suites, five on-property restaurants and lounges, and The Residence event venue which spans more than 1,400m² and comprises the Regency Ballroom (for up to 450 pax for cocktail events or 340 for private dining events), four multipurpose rooms (for up to 360 pax) and the Loft Kitchen.

For relaxation, the Yue Spa comes with six private spa suites, two reflexology areas, and hydrotherapy facilities. An indoor swimming pool and 24-hour gym round up the hotel's wellness offerings.



Take a virtual step into Suntec Singapore

Suntec Singapore is now inviting guests on a virtual tour of the convention centre, before they even travel to the venue, through Google Maps' Street View (<http://bit.ly/1tXC5P1>).

Users will be able to see 360° indoor panoramic shots of the centre's indoor facilities, such as the entrance driveway, the 36 meeting rooms on Level 3, the concourse area, and the halls on Level 4 and 6.

Expecting this to set Suntec Singapore apart from its rivals, spokesperson Marc Bakker said: "This is an important benefit for decision-makers outside Singapore, who can now have a comprehensive view of the new venue prior to coming for a full site inspection or during their shortlisting process."

He added that Suntec Singapore's next step is to create an online environment for clients to visualise the convention centre's event space personalised to their own event requirements.



Cruise off into the sunset

The latest teambuilding option offered by Blue Star Yachting allows delegates to do just that – cruise off into the sunset after a day of wine tasting, while sailing around Singapore's Sentosa island, the Marina Bay area or off to the southern isles where a sumptuous barbeque dinner can be arranged.

These luxurious experiences are offered on board the Sunreef62 yacht, a fully-air-conditioned catamaran that can accommodate up to 37 guests. Wine tasting sessions feature boutique wines from Australia and New Zealand and are led by a wine connoisseur who will explain the craft of wine.

Customised cruises can be designed accordingly for any length of time, up to a week. Prices from S\$2,000 (US\$1,600).

For more information, visit bluestaryachting.net.

Rock your party like a hurricane

John B Sutherland, an agency which specialises in luxurious and unique travel experiences for leisure and corporate groups, is working with Karma Sound Studios in Bang Saray, Thailand to create musical themed events for incentive groups with no more than 300 participants.

Incentive groups can adopt 70s rock, disco, punk and glam rock for their party theme, and costumes, make-up and the music of their choice will be provided.

At press time, the agency's owner, John B Sutherland is looking to execute parties themed around Queen, Beatles, Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd.

These musical themed events will be held at Karma Sound Studios which boasts a state-of-the-art recording studio complex and a collection of six well-appointed accommodation units – five double rooms and one single.

Karma Sound Studios also offers an outdoor venue set amid private tropical gardens.

Email john@johnbsutherland.com for more details on these musical themed events as well as other music related programmes available to corporate groups.

Saha Signature Indian Restaurant & Bar



Host a party here and you can expect to be blown away by a unique twist to Indian cuisine.

By **Paige Lee**

The new Saha Signature Indian Restaurant & Bar is bold. Its eclectic menu features popular regional Indian cuisine that has been given an innovative spin, while its interior – in stark contrast to its location among conserved shop-houses on Duxton Hill – reflects the Indian love for colour, from bright paintings of sailboats and hunters on horseback on the ceiling to intricate patterns along the walls.

And when its kitchen is helmed by a chef who has been nicknamed "Gordon Ramsay of India", I know my belly is in good hands.

MICE application

Saha's private dining area, which is separated by a sliding door from the main area, can seat up to 20 guests. The elegant solid wood table for 12, which occupies the length of the room, is most welcoming. Furniture can be moved around this space to suit the needs of private parties.

The restaurant's 22-seat al fresco terrace bar, which overlooks Duxton Hill's tranquil surroundings, also makes a delightful place for intimate celebratory parties.

Larger groups with up to 42 guests can hire



the entire restaurant. A minimum spend of S\$4,000++ (US\$3,200++) applies.

F&B concept

I am no stranger to the rich variety of Indian cuisine, but Saha's extensive menu succeeded in catching my breath.

That afternoon, for lunch, I indulged in its signature Tasting of Mushroom, a trio of

a mushroom-infused masala cappuccino, tandoor-grilled mushrooms and frozen masala mushroom parfait powder; Kasoor Methi Seared Foie Gras which came plated with a spice stewed mango, mango salsa and mango panna foam; and frozen chocolate ganache powder, comprising cardamom, saffron soil and mint soil, for dessert.

What an innovative mash-up of Indian and Western flavours! But why am I surprised? Given chef Abhijit Saha's reputation as the best chef in India and for transforming traditional staples with modern molecular gastronomy techniques, there was no way he would allow Saha to serve mere naan or tandoori chicken.

Saha also boasts an extensive wine menu, and its India inspired cocktails are hailed as a must-try. I suggest an order of mango rosemary martini and kari-tini.

Event planners can work with the restaurant to put together a tailored menu or choose available dishes from the a la carte or tasting menus.

Service and ambience

Indians are renowned for their warm hospitality and the well-mannered and attentive staff at Saha certainly live up to that reputation.

Chef Saha is most amiable too. You can request to meet him to make sense of the full-bodied flavours behind your dish, or to simply say hello and thank him for the exciting gastronomic journey he had put you through.

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9A Duxton Hill, Singapore 089593

Email: info@saha.sg

Website: www.saha.sg

Opening hours

Monday to Saturday
12.00 to 15.00; 18.00 to 23.00



HOT DEALS



Marco Polo Hongkong

Marco Polo Hotels

Three Marco Polo harbourside hotels are offering promotions for full- and half-day meetings, with a range of add-ons thrown in as well.

Meeting groups that book 10 or more guestrooms can take up Marco Polo Hotels' deal at any one of its three properties – Marco Polo Hongkong Hotel, Gateway Hotel, and Prince Hotel.

Half-day packages include half a day's use of the meeting room from 09.00 to 13.00, one coffee break, and a buffet lunch at a designated restaurant. Full-day packages encompass use of the meeting room from 09.00 to 17.00, two coffee breaks, and buffet lunch at a designated restaurant.

Free add-ons that come with each package include rental of an LCD projector with screen for designated meeting rooms, PA system with microphones, flipchart with paper, or whiteboard with markers. Water and candies, meeting supplies, and Wi-Fi are also complimentary.

Marco Polo Hongkong Hotel's discounted half-day package costs HK\$480 (US\$62), while the same at Gateway Hotel and Prince Hotel cost HK\$470 and HK\$440 respectively.

Prices are per person per day, and subject to a 10 per cent service charge for groups with a minimum of 12 persons daily.

For reservations and more information, call (852) 2113 3203.

AsiaWorld-Expo, Hong Kong

AsiaWorld-Expo is offering a special full-day meeting package for its Runway 11 venue. Priced at HK\$650 (US\$84) per person, the package includes coffee break and lunch. A minimum booking for 300 pax is required and a 10 per cent service charge applies. Alternatively, event planners can utilise Runway 11 through a daily rental, priced from HK\$74,980 plus a minimum F&B spend of HK\$65,000. Terms and conditions apply. Contact (852) 3606-8888 or sales@asiaworld-expo.com for more details.

Amari Hotels Resorts & Spa

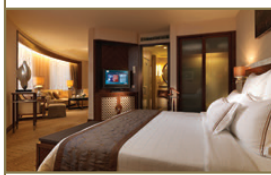
Coffee breaks at Amari Watgate Bangkok and Amari Pattaya have been given an educational twist through five separate themes: Going Bananas, Cubism, Brainteasers, Organic, and Cupcakes.

Choices will be reflected in display posters that show interesting facts about the chosen topic, uniform colours for the wait staff, and the F&B selection.

Meetings held between now and March 31, 2015 will get to choose a theme for free.

Meeting packages offered currently come in half- and full-day options, and are priced at 1,450 baht (US\$45) per person and 1,650 baht per person respectively.

For more information, contact Ya'kob Zaini, director, sales, Onyx Hospitality Group Singapore at (65) 6827 9768.



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Thailand puts on a 'MICE United' front

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

In a concerted effort to recover grounds lost from the volatile political situation earlier this year, industry players in the Thai public and private sector have joined forces to launch *Thailand's MICE United* to boost confidence internationally.

Comprising Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB), the Tourism Authority of Thailand (THAI), Thai Airways International (THAI) and Ratchaprasong Square Trade Association (RSTA), the alliance seeks to reach out to 250 key influencers, including 100 international media, and 150 high-potential MICE buyers within Asia, while maintaining the important European target market.

"*Thailand's MICE United* is a strategic partnership programme designed to re-invigorate the country's positive image and reaffirm confidence among the international business community," said Nopparat Maythaveekulchai, president of TCEB, at the Thailand Connect 2014 - Isan Indulgence media fam trip launch on September 8.

In addition to media fam trips to Isan and Chiang Mai (held earlier in August), the alliance has also planned MICE roadshows in Shanghai and London in September and November respectively.



Nopparat: stronger confidence is needed

THAI will offer support for the campaign by flying in international media delegates for the fam trips while RSTA will highlight new products and services of its members in the area.

With these promotion, TCEB expects 888,210 MICE visitors to Thailand and revenue to reach US\$2.9 billion in 2014.

RSTA president, Chai Sri-vikorn, commented that "(stronger) law enforcement at (the) grassroots levels" has been "a big transformation" that sends an important message to the international business community in Thailand.

When enquired if TCEB has other initiatives to convince overseas companies still hesitant about sending MICE events to Thailand when martial law is still in place, Nopparat revealed that the alliance will focus its attention on ASEAN countries that are "more familiar" with the situation in Thailand, with certain markets like China, India, Malaysia, Singapore, and South Korea already making a "quick comeback" in terms of MICE business to the country.

"Furthermore, Thailand winning the bid for One Young World Summit 2015 despite competition from Japan and Hong Kong shows the (growing confidence in the country)," he pointed out.

ICCA Malaysia picks leaders

ICCA Malaysia has nominated Ho Yoke Ping and Fu Kei Cheong to lead the charge in strengthening Malaysia's profile as a business events destination as chair and deputy chair respectively.

Ho is general manager - sales and marketing at Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau, while Fu is the general manager of Reliance Conventions & Events.

Speaking after her appointment, Ho said: "It is timely to form a Malaysia committee so we can strengthen the Malaysian business events industry. As the host of ICCA Congress 2016, which will be held in Kuching, we want to showcase Malay-

sia's capability and lift the profile of the Malaysia business events industry.

"We will focus on working with students, the government, national associations and the trade to further strengthen the business events industry in Malaysia."

ICCA Malaysia member, Anthony Wong, said setting up the committee was a step in the right direction.

"We need to have formal gatherings so

we can work closely as a team and strengthen the industry further by pooling resources and working closely with academia and government," he commented. - S Puvaneswary

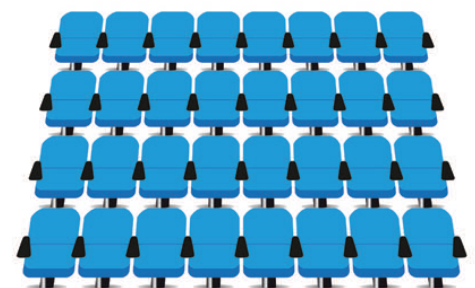


Ho (left) and Fu are chosen to head the new ICCA Malaysia committee

{ Talking numbers }



The percentage rise in sales volume achieved by Carlson Wagonlit Travel in 1H2014, compared to the same period in 2013. The global company bagged US\$14.4 billion, with transactions up 4.2 per cent to 32.5 million



5000

The number of seats in the main hall of a new congress centre planned for Antalya, Turkey, in preparation for the city's hosting of EXPO 2016. Discussions on this venue are ongoing

Government meetings to move beyond New Delhi

By Rohit Kaul

The Indian government is making an effort to take its major meetings and conferences outside the national capital of New Delhi in order to give other India cities a chance to shine.

A source in India's Ministry of External Affairs told *TTGmice* that prime minister Narendra Modi is keen to hold the government's high-profile bilateral, multilateral, and centre-state meetings in other destinations.

The annual Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas organised by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs for non-resident nationals will take place next January in Ahmedabad as compared to New Delhi this year.

Modi's first summit dialogue with Russian president Vladimir Putin will also be held outside New Delhi, though the destina-

tion has not yet been confirmed.

The third India-Africa Forum Summit, running from December 1 to 4, has likewise been shifted from New Delhi to the adjoining city of Gurgaon.

"The profile of a city is enhanced when a government event takes place there. This will give a good exposure to other smaller Indian cities like Pune for hosting meetings," said Monamita Sarkar, managing director, KW Conferences.

MK Ajit Kumar, president & CEO of Global Conference Management Group Chennai, commented: "The government should also consider hosting its meetings in Tier Two cities which may not have the infrastructure for hosting large meetings and conferences but can host smaller ones. This will result in hotels investing in those cities and overall improving economy of such cities."

Japan baits Singapore incentives with free add-ons

Japanese CVBs are dangling freebies to boost the appeal of their cities as incentive destinations and counter the image of Japan as an expensive travel option.

Momoko Maeda, incentive coordinator from Sapporo Convention Bureau, told *TTGmice*: "In order to bring more guests into our city, we must be able to attract them first with a value proposition and position ourselves at the top of their minds."

Incentive groups to Sapporo will be able to enjoy a list of benefits when they spend more than 200 nights in the city. The bureau will also sponsor the group's gala dinner and throw in a performance, or arrange a special welcome ceremony by a "kimono lady".

Likewise, the Okinawa Convention & Visitors Bureau's (OCVB) Welcome Project for incentive tours includes an airport greeting fronted by Miss Okinawa. This is valid until March 30, 2015.

Shuhei Kohagura, OCVB's MICE marketing specialist, said: "For receptions, we can provide Okinawan performing arts including Ryukyu, Eisa, and lion dances."

Arrival figures from Singapore to Japan between January and June are at 97,900, up from 83,304 over the same period last year, said Susan Maria Ong, deputy direc-



Sapporo Susukino Street

tor of Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) Singapore office.

Maggie Tay, director, Singapore-based Euro-Asia Holidays, said while Singapore travellers are always interested in Japan, budget is still an issue.

"Travelling to Japan is more expensive than other destinations in the region, and expenses there are quite high. However for clients who want to really reward their staff, they will be willing to spend a bit more, so they are the ones who will still choose Japan," Tay said.

Similarly, Jenny Ho, managing director of Classic Travel, who usually arranges for incentive tours to Tokyo and Osaka, said: "It is useful that the other (Japanese) CVBs are coming up with attractive offers so we can explore these cities instead of the usual major ones." — **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

{ In brief }

Singapore bids for 2019 transport congress

The Land Transport Authority (LTA), together with the Intelligent Transportation Society Singapore (ITSS), is bidding to host the 26th edition of the Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) World Congress in 2019.

An international platform for government transport agencies, industry players, and academic and research institutions to exchange information, review and showcase the latest global ITS products, services, plans and technological achievements, the annual event typically attracts about 5,000 international participants.

The result of the bid will be announced next April during the 14th ITS Asia Pacific Forum in Nanjing, China.

Philippine hotels to get regional ratings

The Department of Tourism's (DoT) programme to eventually convert all hotel ratings to a five-star system has been rolled out at 694 of the country's 6,873 accommodations so far.

Cesar Cruz, president of the Philippine Tour Operators Association, said the DoT initiative would align the Philippines' hotels more closely to regional standards in time for ASEAN economic integration in 2015.

Of the 694 hotels reviewed so far, 144 were surveyed by international assessors under the joint Asian Development Bank-Canadian international Development Assistance programme covering four pilot areas namely, Cebu, Palawan, Bohol, and Davao. The rest, in other parts of the country, were rated by DoT-hired accommodation consultants according to the existing accommodation system, with the end goal of further upgrading those ratings to the five-star system.

Indian tour operators object Kerala liquor ban

Tour operators in India are opposing Kerala's recently announced ban on liquor, saying the move would compromise tourism performance for the state.

Every bar in Kerala has been issued a 15-day notice to shut operations by September 12 as the state government prepares to achieve total alcohol prohibition in 10 years. Ten per cent of 383 state-owned liquor shops will also be shut yearly.

Speaking at the annual convention of the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) in September, EM Najeeb, chairman of IATO's Kerala Chapter, said: "We fear losing a substantial number of foreign tourists to neighbouring Sri Lanka."

Subhash Goyal, president, IATO, also chimed in: "Though the government will still allow alcohol in five-star hotels from April next year, we need to keep in mind that not all tourists stay in five-star accommodation. So this is bound to have an adverse impact on tourist arrivals in Kerala." — **Rohit Kaul**

CORRECTION – In *TTGmice* September's article, *China powers regional exhibitions growth*, we wrote that Edward Liu is past president of the Asian Federation of Exhibition & Convention Association. That is a mistake; Liu still holds this position.

Meetings brand, MICE manual on the cards for Philippines

By Rosa Ocampo

The Philippines will present a new meetings slogan and MICE manual later this year to raise awareness of what the country has to offer as a business events destination.

Tourism Promotions Board COO, Domingo Ramon Enerio III, hinted that the brand will be connected to *It's More Fun in the Philippines* because "if you are happy, then you are more productive".

Enerio said the goal of the MICE manual is to acquaint meeting planners with business meeting facilities in the Philippines, as business meetings is one of the five central themes of the Visit Philippines 2015 campaign.

The other four are history, culture, lifestyle, and entertainment.

Local MICE players had clamoured for MICE branding and a MICE manual during the Philippine MICE Conference in June.

The move is timely given the year-long series of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meetings involving 25,000 international delegates in 2015.

Over 150 small to medium-sized APEC meetings are due to take place, not including bigger events that will culminate in the November summit.

"This provides an opportunity for us to put our best foot forward," said Enerio.

Other events also on the 2015 calendar include the 70th anniversary of the Liberation of Manila in September, and Madrid Fusion Manila, an offshoot of one of Europe's most celebrated gustatory festivals.

Dongdaemun Design Plaza's opening breathes new life into hotel sector



New hotels are sprouting up in the vicinity of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP) while old ones have embarked on renovation projects in anticipation of a surge in MICE visitors, mostly from China.

Located in Seoul's Dongdaemun shopping district and fashion hub, DDP commenced operations in March this year as part of the Seoul metropolitan government's MICE Master Plan initiated in 2013.

Exuding futuristic vibes, the 8,500m² DDP encompasses recreational functions

and flexible event spaces including a museum, a learning centre, and a conference and exhibition centre.

DDP has so far attracted fashion and design-related conferences and exhibitions, and has also bolstered the city's hospitality sector.

JW Marriott Dongdaemun Square Seoul commenced operations last December; The Shilla Seoul completed its renovation last August; and Grand Ambassador Seoul Associated Pullman Hotel's renovation is due to complete in three years' time.

The main drive for hotels in DDP's vicinity to increase their capacities is understood to have stemmed from the China market, for whom Dongdaemun is a must-visit area in Seoul.

Last year, 4.3 million Chinese visited Seoul. The figure is expected to exceed five million in 2014 and 10 million in subsequent years. – **Nadia Chung**

Sofitel to open in Sydney's new MICE precinct

Accor has signed an agreement to manage the new Sydney International Convention Centre (ICC) hotel on Darling Harbour, which will complete construction in 2Q2017.

Sofitel Sydney Darling Harbour forms part of the New South Wales government's A\$2.5 billion (US\$2.3 billion) transformation of Darling Harbour, which includes the creation of Sydney's new convention, exhibition and entertainment precinct.

Sofitel Sydney Darling Harbour will offer roughly 600 guestrooms to support ICC Sydney and the city's growing demand for accommodation.

Commenting on Accor's announcement, Business Events Sydney CEO, Lyn Lewis-Smith, said in a press statement: "The ICC Sydney hotel is a highlight of the Darling Harbour redevelopment. We are thrilled that Australia's largest five-star hotel, a new Sofitel, will be located in the heart of (this) precinct."

She added that Business Events Sydney has so far secured 14 events that will take place in ICC Sydney from 2017.

Great Ideas comes to Asia

The American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) will bring its Great Ideas Conference to Asia next year.

Hong Kong has been chosen as the venue for the Washington DC-based association's first-ever Asian conference, which will see 150 to 200 association management practitioners from Asia-Pacific gathering.

ASAE's Great Ideas Conference tackles creative approaches to everyday issues in association management and is traditionally held in the US. Orlando, Florida is scheduled to host it in March 2015.

Emy Chavez, president of Philippine Council for the Advancement of Association Executives (PCAA), which is on the ASAE advisory board for the Great Ideas Conference 2015, said the upcoming Asia conference is a pilot event that could become annual if successful.

PCAA will aim to host the 2016 conference if so, said Chavez. – **Rosa Ocampo**

{ 2014 Calendar }

October 29-31

ITB Asia
Singapore

November 1-5

53rd ICCA Congress
Antalya, Turkey

November 14-17

SITE Global
Conference,
Rotterdam,
Netherlands

November 18-20

EIBTM
Barcelona, Spain

Madrid Fusión takes first overseas edition to Manila

MANILA The Philippines will be hosting the inaugural overseas edition of Madrid Fusión in April 2015.

Madrid Fusión Manila is led by Spanish organisers Foro de Debate, Arum Estrategias Internacionalizacion and the Philippine Association of Convention/Exhibition Organisers and Suppliers (PACEOS).

Bid for the hosting rights to the event kicked off last March with a selling mission to Madrid, led by the Philippine Department of Tourism. The agreement was inked on July 23.

"Madrid Fusión Manila is a celebration of the 370 years of Spanish and Filipino fusion," said Maria Leonor Esteban, administrator of Arum Estrategias Internacionalizacion, which will help to bring in Spanish suppliers of wine, olive oil, cheeses, sausages, jamón, beers, sweets, cookies and chocolates to exhibit alongside Philippine suppliers.

Monette Hamlin, PACEOS president,

told *TTGmice* that she hopes the event will make Manila "the talk of the culinary world".

"Aside from the (main) venue that will house the congress and trade exhibition, we are also planning to launch a gastronomy festival and involve bars, restaurants, museums, bookshops, gourmet shops, culinary schools, food stores, movie houses and so on to participate and create a (robust) environment to support Madrid Fusión Manila.

Attendance at the congress is estimated at 600 to 1,400 delegates, of which half are expected to come from Asia. The trade exhibition is expected to attract 25,000 participants.

All invited chefs will be Michelin-starred ones, revealed Hamlin, with at least eight Spanish chefs possibly coming. Local culinary geniuses Gaita Fores and Myrna Segismundo are on the roster. – **Marianne Carandang**

Zonta International picks Yokohama for 2018 gathering

YOKOHAMA The Yokohama Convention & Visitors Bureau has won the bid to host the 64th Zonta International Convention, which will see approximately 2,000 delegates from 67 countries coming together to Yokohama in 2018.

Zonta International, which is an international service organisation serving to advance the status of women through service and advocacy, has more than 30,000 members worldwide. Founded in 1919, the organisation will be marking the start of its 100th year anniversary celebrations with this convention in Yokohoma.

With Zonta International having 1,000 members from Japan, Hiroko Kano, convention manager of the Yokohama CVB said: "As Japan is not well-known to all the members of Zonta yet, this convention will help raise Japan's profile to international Zontians by showing the Japanese historical and cultural at-



tractions, social security and Japanese hospitality."

Although details are yet to be finalised, Kano confirmed that there are plans for pre and post congress tours.

Kano added that Yokohoma is growing to become a city renowned for hosting conventions to advance women's causes, which is "one of the pillars of the city's focus and the nation's growth strategy".

This upcoming convention will hence help fuel Yokohama's determination to become the city with the most conducive working environment for women in Japan, Kano said.

International Dragon Award Meeting 2015 goes to Dubai



DUBAI The Worldwide Chinese Life Insurance Congress has selected Dubai as the host destination for its 2015 International Dragon Award Meeting (2015 IDA Annual Meeting) from August 22 to 25 next year.

The 2015 IDA Annual Meeting, which will be held at the Dubai International Convention & Exhibition Center, is an international Chinese life insurance and financial services industry event recognising top insurance and financial professionals.

"We chose Dubai not only because it is one of the most attractive tourism destinations, but also (because it) has a state-of-the-art business and convention centre, which is equipped with the latest facilities. There is confidence that Dubai's accessibility in terms of airlift, the number of well-designed hotels, and the highest quality service standards will make the 2015 IDA Annual Meeting a successful business event," said Richard Wu, chairman of the Worldwide Chinese Life Insurance Congress.

Steen Jakobsen, director of Dubai Business Events – the Official Convention Bureau, commented: "We are honoured that Dubai was selected as the first city outside of Asia to host the 2015 IDA Annual Meeting, and we are very much looking forward to showcasing this remarkable city to the thousands of delegates who will be attending.

"China is an increasingly important market for Dubai, which is particularly well suited for Chinese visitors thanks to its high standards of hospitality and vast array of leisure attractions which include some of the best hotels and shopping malls in the world."

Snap! The event's a game

Event planners are increasingly recognising the benefits of bringing out the element of fun in meetings and corporate activities through gamification. By **S Puvaneswary**

Gamification is the latest buzzword in the business events industry and event organisers are paying attention to ways to best leverage this concept to keep their audiences engaged.

Gartner, Inc, a global information technology research and advisory company, describes gamification as “the use of game design and game mechanics to engage a target audience to change behaviors, learn new skills or engage in innovation”.

In an article published in November 2012, Gartner, Inc predicted that by 2014, 80 per cent of current gamified applications would fail to meet business objectives primarily because of poor design.

“The challenge facing project managers and sponsors responsible for gamification initiatives is the lack of game design talent... Poor game design is one of the key failings of many gamified applications today,” said Brian Burke, research vice president at the firm.

“The focus is on the obvious game mechanics, such as points, badges and leader boards, rather than the more subtle and important design elements, such as balancing competition and collaboration, or defining a meaningful game economy. As a result, in many cases, organisations are simply counting points, slapping meaningless badges on activities and creating gamified applications that are simply not engaging for the target audience,” he added.

“Gamification must be relevant to the clients’ business,” urged Nigel Gaunt, vice president global business at the headquarters of BI Worldwide. “For instance, I would use a game involving cars for clients in the automobile industry.”

Introducing the concept of gamification to Malaysian business event specialists at the Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Bureau’s Malaysia Business Events Week in August, Jason Fox, the author of *The Game Changer* and a motivation design expert, said meetings could be as engaging as online games if designed well and delegates would pay for good meeting experiences.

Mike van der Vijver, meeting designer of MindMeeting, which specialises in the design of effective programmes for international meetings, and co-author of

Fox's seven tips for successful gamification

- ✓ Put the player first. The sweet spot is an overlap between player motivation and business objectives.
- ✓ Remove any obstacles between where the audience is and where they want to be.
- ✓ Enhance the challenge and be deliberate about the challenges you design and see that they link to your players’ goals. Calibrate the challenge so there is real achievement because rewards without challenge is meaningless.
- ✓ Progress must be visible to sustain motivation.
- ✓ Embed meaning so the audience can link their progress to a higher purpose. When they can see how their efforts relate to a story bigger than themselves, that’s when the magic happens.
- ✓ Iterate relentlessly to ensure you challenge assumptions, and test, improve and refine your motivation/gamification design constantly.
- ✓ Rather than make a game or turn work into a game, recognise that there is already a game at play. Tweak goals/rules/feedback to make that game work better.

Into the Heart of Meetings, suggested that debate – regarded as a form of gamification – can be used in events to engage the audience and develop solutions, especially for resolving conflicts.

Familiar with the use of debates in meetings, Eric Chuo, deputy general manager at AOS Conventions & Events, said such activities work well with young professionals and ROI can be measured when the audience votes for the winner through conference mobile apps.

According to Andrea Lee, area director – Kuala Lumpur at Destination Asia, the adoption of gamification in meetings is on the rise among her pharmaceutical clients. She said: “Many clients want us to design more than just a mundane meeting. They want inexpensive solutions to keep the audience attentive as pharmaceutical events tend to be very dry. We use games, especially after lunch as energy levels tend to be low, and the objectives are to entertain and educate the audience. We have used

games to help the audience master the spelling of new drugs. Prizes are dangled to encourage participation.”

Gamification can also be used to motivate people towards aspirational goals.

Leon Qiu, client service director at BI Worldwide China, said online gamification is still very new in Asia, with countries receptive to this being China, South Korea and Singapore. He added that mobile and web based gamification is hot because it is fun and engaging for the player, and allows programme owners to easily track user generated data and behaviour.

Gaunt pointed out that gamification need not be a one-off activity. The qualifying period for some game-driven incentives can stretch up to a year, allowing participants to fulfil tasks and earn points towards their final score at the end of the period.

Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre has for some time now incorporated games into its internal meetings and training sessions to motivate and incentivise team members and to keep everyone attentive. An example of what the venue has done is *The I-Maze*, a hands-on game that challenges teams to discover a secret path to their goals through a series of mazes.

Rohizat Baharum, director of human resource at the venue, told *TTGmice*: “This problem-solving activity is great as it requires participants to work together and share specific information made available to them, in order to complete a task. It’s also excellent for team bonding as participants almost always begin in a state of confusion, followed by a major learning curve in effective planning, action and decision-making when they are forced to think out-of-the-box to complete the challenge. They also discover the value of common objectives and communication because the activity requires the full participation of all members.”

Sarawak Convention Bureau is also using games to motivate staff to win more event bids and meet more clients.

However, general manager Chew Chang Guan, warned that competition through gamification could make “players selfish and unwilling to share”.

“Thus we always emphasise on collaboration when we embark on such games,” said Chew.



2014 World Ophthalmology Congress

Boasting a massive audience of 20,000 delegates, the congress offers Tokyo the best opportunity to showcase its most appealing sights and encourage repeat visits, writes **Karen Yue**

When some 20,000 ophthalmologists and members of the International Council of Ophthalmology (ICO) descended on Tokyo in early April this year for the 2014 World Ophthalmology Congress (WOC), the Japanese capital rolled out the red carpet and concocted an extensive series of complimentary destination immersion programmes for delegates and their accompanying persons.

According to a spokesperson with the Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau (TCVB), 12 tour courses with five routes and 12 cultural programmes with six options were offered during the congress period, primarily for accompanying persons.

Led by English-speaking guides, the sightseeing tours covered iconic tourist landmarks such as the Hama-Rikyu Gardens, Meiji-Jingu Shrine and Tokyo Skytree, while the cultural excursions offered experiences in traditional mochi pounding, origami, ikebana, Japanese calligraphy, kimono dress-up and *ukiyo-e* (traditional woodblock printing).

The programmes were offered on a first-come-first-serve basis, and each delegate and accompanying person could register for up to two courses. Tour desks were set up in the registration area at the Tokyo International Forum and the Imperial Hotel, Tokyo – the two venues of the congress.

When asked if it was common for the city government and TCVB to develop such an extensive selection of complimentary tours for delegates of business events, the spokesperson said: “The Tokyo Metropolitan Government and TCVB select large-scale international conferences every year, based on the number of international delegates, to support by providing tours and cultural programmes. We also provide welcome desks at Narita and Haneda air-

ports and fly welcome banners and flags around the event venue.”

And the investment is a worthy one, as it allows Tokyo to put its best foot forward in promoting itself as an attractive tourist destination for delegates to return to with their family and friends.

The 2014 WOC made a great event to leverage for destination promotion, as it was deemed the largest-ever international conference to be held in Tokyo. Sponsored by the ICO, hosted by the Japanese Ophthalmological Society, and co-hosted by the Asia-Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology, the event was held concurrently with the 29th Asia-Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology and the 118th Annual Meeting of the Japanese Ophthalmological Society.

Although healthcare and pharmaceutical events are governed by strict laws to ensure transparency in event organisation and delegate benefits, among other things, TCVB told *TTGmice* that the regulations did not affect the destination immersion programmes.

“Since the objective of the tours and cultural programmes offered by TCVB and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government was solely for the promotion of tourism in Tokyo, the content was not restricted by the organisers,” said the spokesperson.

Besides the destination immersion programmes, delegates were also treated to a prized viewing of a cherry blossom tree that was brought from the Tohoku region and placed in an outdoor space at the Tokyo International Forum for the opening reception. The tree’s blossoms were timed to bloom during the five-day congress. Delegates also got to ride in a samurai ship from the venue to Tokyo Big Sight, where the Japan Night social function was hosted.

Event

2014 World Ophthalmology Congress

Organiser

International Council of Ophthalmology, Japanese Ophthalmological Society and Asia-Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology

Date

April 2 to 6, 2014

No. of attendees

20,000

Objective

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government and the Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau wanted to showcase the best of Tokyo to delegates through complimentary tours and cultural programmes, in hopes of encouraging them to return in the near future with their family and friends for a holiday



No longer second place

They were not top-of-mind before for incentives or meetings, but a crop of 'second-tier' destinations across Asia-Pacific are fast becoming the new hot favourites for MICE planners. *TTGmice* has the list



The spacious ballroom foyer at the National Convention Centre Canberra

CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA

While Canberra holds the title as Australia's capital city, it is not top of mind for corporate and leisure travellers alike when they consider going Down Under, but this is touted to change in the coming year.

The catalyst is the opening of a new terminal at Canberra Airport in April next year, spurring on the first international flights to the city.

Stephen Byron, CEO of Canberra Airport, described it as a "milestone development".

Byron said currently, about 7,800 passengers per week travel between Canberra and Asia/Europe via other Australian cities. Singapore contributes 50 per cent of this gateway traffic.

He said: "Singapore is the most obvious hub for us to connect to and we believe this gateway share (from Singapore) can increase by 40 per cent if there is a direct return flight to Canberra."

More than three-quarters of international visitors to Canberra are VFRs and about 14 per cent are business travellers, according to Tourism Research Australia.

As the city is a largely administrative and government enclave, the current MICE traffic is "mostly driven by the domestic market from government-related meetings and events", said Stephen

Wood, manager, National Convention Centre (NCC) Canberra.

"If we are hosting big meetings involving high international officials, we cannot expect the president to be waiting at the airport transfer lounge. With a direct connection now, it will make our destination much more appealing," he said.

NCC is the largest purpose-built meetings and events facility in Canberra. This 2,400m² venue has 15 major spaces across two floors, including the 2,460-seat Royal Theatre, an exhibition hall, a ballroom, theatrettes and workshop rooms.

A Digital Canberra initiative across 12 business cities in June is also enabling NCC delegates enjoy free WiFi – not just in the conference centre, but when they move around the city, from hotels to attractions.

The National Museum Australia, which is another popular venue for events, appeals with its architecture and accompanying mountain, lakeside and city views.

Head of communications and marketing, Karen Dempster, said: "To be located precisely at the spot where our national history resides is an attractive factor for event planners because they can explore the city's history at the same time."

The museum's 5,500m² Garden of Australian Dreams, an enclosed outdoor area which fits 1,500 pax in a cocktail setting, stands out with its water features and lighting effects, "ideal for any event under the stars". – *Paige Lee Pei Qi*

"IF WE ARE HOSTING BIG MEETINGS INVOLVING HIGH INTERNATIONAL OFFICIALS, WE CANNOT EXPECT THE PRESIDENT TO BE WAITING AT THE AIRPORT TRANSFER LOUNGE. WITH A DIRECT CONNECTION NOW, IT WILL MAKE OUR DESTINATION MUCH MORE APPEALING."

Stephen Wood

Manager, National Convention Centre Canberra

CHENGDU, CHINA

The capital of Sichuan province in southwest China and home of the iconic panda is booming, thanks to factors such as increased presence of Fortune 500 companies in the city and improved airlinks.

Its MICE profile is expected to only grow with the Chengdu Municipal Bureau of Exposition joining ICCA recently, according to Bryan Leong, director of sales and marketing, St Regis Chengdu, which opened in September. As well, the number of MICE professionals should increase quickly, observed Beijing-based Liu Ping, CEO, China Star, who singled out the only MPI and SITE member in Chengdu, Wu Chao, general manager of STOMICE and founder of Chengdu Strait International Travel Service, as an example.

China Star was among the first to send incentive groups to Chengdu 20 years ago from Hong Kong when direct flights to Chengdu were limited. That has changed. Chengdu is now served by more than 70 regional and international airlines and 32 direct international flights linking the city to Asia, Europe and North America.

"Last year, British Airways launched thrice-weekly direct flights from London, which have since been increased to five times weekly. In June this year, United Airlines started a direct service from San Francisco," St Regis' Leong noted.

Chengdu is also the fourth Chinese city to offer a 72-hour visa-free stay to visitors from 51 countries. It is linked by high-speed train to 34 major Chinese cities. To improve travel within the city, its subway



Just opened: St Regis Chengdu



“THERE HAS BEEN A MAJOR INCREASE IN CORPORATE AND INCENTIVE BUSINESS IN THE LAST TWO YEARS DUE TO THE NEARLY 253 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES BEING LOCATED IN THE CITY.”

Bryan Leong

Director of sales and marketing
St Regis Chengdu

system is being expanded from two to seven lines.

Leong said: “There has been a major increase in corporate and incentive business in the last two years due to the nearly 253 Fortune 500 companies being located in the city.” Leong also attributed the growth to lower costs of holding events in Chengdu compared to first-tier cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, the addition of new venues and hotels, and the government’s approval for Chengdu MICE incentives.

Facilities for big conventions and exhibitions in Chengdu include the Century City New International Exhibition Center, Crystal Hall of Century City New International Exhibition Center, New Century Global Center and Western China International Expo Center. The latter is scheduled to open later this year and will be the city’s largest facility.

Hotel inventory will increase by 3,000 to 4,000 rooms, according to Johnny Zhu, managing director, MICE Department, Sichuan CITS, which has been handling MICE groups mainly from Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong since 2006.

St Regis joins 16 five-star hotels including Ritz-Carlton, Shangri-La, InterContinental, Sheraton and Kempinski. In 2015, Chengdu is expected to have 30 five-star hotels.

In addition, there are more than 140

hotels above the three-star category.

China Star’s Liu noted that Chengdu hosted 105 international events last year. The city also hosted 53 international exhibitions occupying a total of three million m² of space last year, an 11 per cent year-on-year increase.

“Personally I feel Chengdu has paid more attention to exhibitions rather than incentives and conventions. I hope this situation will change. What Chengdu needs are government officials who understand incentive travel and conventions,” she said.

“Although the government in Chengdu is paying more attention to the MICE industry, the challenges are quite the same for the whole of China. My personal view is the government must pay more attention to internationalise, professionalise, and evaluate the ROI.

“The industry needs government decisionmakers who understand the business, pass the right messages to the central government and develop policies to (grow) MICE.”

Like Liu, Zhu said Chengdu needs more government support. “Local DMCs are still not as professional compared to the bigger cities in China, and we need the government’s support at tradeshow and roadshows.

“Although MICE business is growing, it is very competitive.” – **Caroline Boey**

CHENNAI, INDIA

Chennai, the capital city of Tamil Nadu, figures evidently on the global map as an automobile manufacturing hub of south India, which leads its economic growth. Following closely and contributing to a large share of development is the information technology and healthcare sectors, which have resulted in a significant influx of international and domestic travellers.

“Chennai is certainly an emerging destination for MICE. Currently, Chennai attracts more corporate meetings than incentives. Industries such as pharmaceutical, automobile, manufacturing and IT are now considering Chennai as a significant MICE destination,” said Prashant Narayan, COO and head Leisure Travel Inbound Business, Thomas Cook India and TCI.

Added CN Prasad, managing director of Chennai-based Travel Express: “Chennai has now 6,000 star-rated rooms and 1,000 keys are in the pipeline. The international congresses held in Chennai are mainly medical. The incentive market is very limited, rather, we have a number of automobile manufacturing units and IT-related foreign firms who hold conferences in related subjects.”

According to the Confederation of Indian Industry, Chennai is estimated to grow to a US\$100 billion economy by 2025, almost 2.5 times its present size.

The MICE industry of the city gained a boost from the opening of ITC Grand Chola in 2012. The property has 9,290m² of banquet and convention space, with 2,787m² of pillar-less ballroom, among the largest in the country.

“The international associations that organise their conferences in cities like Singapore, Macau or London can now consider Chennai for their events with the opening of ITC Grand Chola. Their Indian chapters can now strongly bid for such events in Chennai,” said Chander Mansharmani, managing director, Alpcord Network Travel & Conferences.

Apart from ITC Grand Chola, Chennai Convention Centre offers a variety of conference and banquet space ranging from 23m² to 1,858m² that can accommodate 25 to 2,000 delegates.

“Chennai has recently added new hotels which have vast meeting spaces and these venues have been able to host large conferences, corporate meetings and incentives. Airlines see Chennai as a market with great potential, with international players such as Mal-



Easiest way to remember Chengdu? It is home to the iconic panda, which is sure to bring a smile to delegates

divian Airlines launching direct flights. The commissioning of new airport terminals are also expected to drive additional airline segment demand,” said N. Prakash, general manager, Taj Coromandel. The property has a ballroom with 1,672m² of pillarless banquet facilities.

In Asian markets, Chennai has been predominantly attracting Japanese MICE movements. “Being an auto hub, the city of Chennai is hugely attractive to the Japanese market, and the establishment of a Japanese conclave in the outskirts of the city is underway,” observed Prakash.

However, like other Indian cities, infrastructure woes continue to hamper growth. “The main problem is infrastructure like power, water and roads. The Metro Line, which is under construction, is aggravating traffic snarls,” said Prasad.

But he added: “While the venues are now equipped to cater to the specialised needs of the customer, the infrastructure in the city is being looked into, to ensure that Chennai emerges as a key MICE destination in the country.” – **Rohit Kaul**



“INDUSTRIES SUCH AS PHARMACEUTICAL, AUTOMOBILE, MANUFACTURING AND IT ARE NOW CONSIDERING CHENNAI AS A SIGNIFICANT MICE DESTINATION.”

Prashant Narayan

COO and head of Leisure Travel Inbound Business
Thomas Cook India and TCI



Chiang Mai: Incentives and meetings continue to lead the MICE business

CHIANG MAI, THAILAND

Chiang Mai’s MICE industry has gained strength over the past few years, thanks to the opening of the Chiang Mai International Convention & Exhibition Centre (CMICE) in 2012 and growing business from the region, but the lack of large-size hotels and flight capacity crimps the destination’s potential, industry specialists said.

Incentives and meetings continue to lead the sector in Thailand’s second city, with China, Hong Kong and Taiwan as the major markets, according to Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (TCEB). Chiang Mai’s MICE sector has also so far managed to emerge relatively unscathed from Thailand’s political crisis, which has plagued the country since last October, said Tim Upchurch, MICE manager at Exotissimo Thailand.

“Chiang Mai seems to be more popular this year and into the first half of 2015, especially for corporate conferences and small group incentives,” he said. “There’s high interest from Asian markets, particularly Singapore, although we know that this market is very sensitive to the political situation and we currently evaluate the effects of this.”

Despite the opening of CMICE, one of the region’s largest MICE facilities with 60,000m² of functional space, the industry still faces a number of challenges, said Kantarath Jirakittirath, CMICE services director.

“There are not enough direct flights to Chiang Mai for big conventions or conferences. Transferring from Bangkok is very inconvenient and there are not enough four and five-star hotels in Chiang Mai (to accommodate delegates, a problem which also affects large incentives groups),” she said, adding that exhibitions also tend to remain small scale as such problems scare off organisers of larger events who are concerned about attracting enough visitors to be profitable.

Pishnu Plaikaew, a TCEB spokesperson, said both the public and private

“CHIANG MAI SEEMS TO BE MORE POPULAR THIS YEAR AND INTO THE FIRST HALF OF 2015, ESPECIALLY FOR CORPORATE CONFERENCES AND SMALL GROUP INCENTIVES.”

Tim Upchurch

MICE manager
Exotissimo Thailand

sectors have acknowledged the need for more high-end hotels and other relevant facilities in the city and are acting to improve supply.

“Chiang Mai is developing fast in terms of infrastructure and facilities to meet the demands of MICE travellers from around the world,” he said. “The city, along with strategic counterparts, are working closely to drive the MICE industry to meet growing international demands.”

TCEB and the government put increased focus on the city’s MICE sector under a five-year strategic plan which ended last year. Initiatives included the inauguration of the Chiang Mai as a ‘MICE City’, one of five such destinations in the country where capacity was developed and incentives were offered to lure more MICE business. In addition, last year TCEB signed a memorandum of understanding with Sapporo Convention Bureau in Japan to build better relations between the meetings industry in the two cities.

The bureau is also promoting a number of other cultural attractions around the city, such as Angkhang Royal Agricultural Station and Inthanon Highland Agricultural Extension Station, along with special venues including the Thailand Creative & Design Center Chiang Mai and Lanna Folklife Museum.

Flight connectivity is also likely to improve later this year with Bangkok Airways’ plans to launch more direct flights into Chiang Mai from Yangon, Mandalay, Phuket and Udon Thani. – **Greg Lowe**

MICE Destinations

DAVAO, PHILIPPINES

This clean and green city in southern Philippines is wrongly perceived as unsafe and part of conflict areas in certain portions of the autonomous region of Mindanao.

In reality, Davao is very far from the conflict areas and Mindanao has many tourists havens that are equally safe and peaceful, including Siargao, Camiguin, Cagayan de Oro and General Santos.

The underrated destination got a vote of confidence with the opening of the SMX Convention Centre Davao two years ago. It is the biggest privately-owned convention centre outside Manila with a capacity for 4,000 pax.

Hotels followed suit, including the Park Inn By Radisson, Seda Abreeza and Tune Hotel last year, easing a shortage of city accommodation.

Davao is attracting mainly association meetings and national conventions. Plus having a venue for big gatherings, "SMX Davao has become a favourite concert venue for international performers, including Patti Austin, Dionne Warwick, John Ford Coley and Don Moen," said Dexter Deyto, vice president and general manager, SMX Convention Specialists Corp.

It is now getting into the radar of international events organised by local PCOs, including Ex-Link Management and Marketing Services which will bring the International Beauty, Health and Wellness Expo to Davao next year.

Explained Ex-Link CEO Mitch Ballestero: "Davao is an emerging destination and is now ready to host big events."

As well, Davao is "looking at post-convention activities focused on eco-adventure and eco-tourism" for which the city is renowned, said tourism assistant secretary Art Boncato.

"We're now looking at regional corporate meetings and incentives. We had a Davao Cultural and Food Festival and a Philippine product presentation and sales mission in Singapore where MICE was a highlight," Boncato added.

A second version of the MICE manual, *Let's Meet in Davao* (www.micedavao.com), has been published. "We just formed a private sector committee to look at extending citywide incentive to planners," Boncato said, although he was not able to give more details.

Still, limited accessibility is a hurdle in bringing MICE from Asia. Singapore-based SilkAir is the only foreign carrier flying direct to Davao.

Boncato is holding talks with South Korean airlines to fly direct to Davao. There also are plans to twin Davao with Cebu and other destinations and to package it with Cagayan de Oro.

With limited connectivity, "Davao is overshadowed by the popularity of Boracay, Cebu and Manila", said Kennedy Kapulong, manager, Seda Abreeza Hotel. "Other more established locales are more top-of-mind. Cebu is always a top choice for domestic MICE because it offers more connecting flights."

The new *It's More Fun in the Philippines* campaign focusing on specific destinations rather than Philippines as a whole should help improve Davao's image problem. The campaign *Davao Explore. Relax. Repeat.* highlights its wealth of eco-adventure, wellness and eco-tourism attractions.

"If you're here in Davao, you'd see how wrong that perception is," said Annie Lopez, assistant director of sales, Park Inn By Radisson, pointing to strict law enforcement; 911 integrated emergency response system and accolades Davao has garnered over the years, including as one of the safest cities in the world with the lowest crime rate, the most liveable city, the most child-friendly, the most competitive city for doing business, etc. – **Rosa Ocampo**

KAOHSIUNG, TAIWAN

Determined to have a cut of the lucrative MICE business, Taiwan's Kaohsiung City Government established a Meeting & Event Promotion Office last year, entrusting it with destination promotion and event bidding responsibilities.

Hailing Kaohsiung as a "new MICE star of Asia", Tseng Wen Sheng, director-general, economic development bureau, Kaohsiung City Government, said: "The city has been attracting small meetings for years, but it is ready to pursue large-scale international meetings now."

"We were also encouraged to establish this office because of the new Kaohsiung Exhibition Center. The city never had a dedicated convention and exhibition centre. This office will help local PCO/PEOs bid for events to fill the new venue."

Opened in April, the Kaohsiung Exhibition Center features a wave-like design to complement its waterfront location and offers capacity for 1,500 standard booths, a conference hall for 2,000 pax, two conference halls for 800 pax each and 10 meeting rooms for 20 to 40 pax.

It has already hosted two major trade

**"WE JUST FORMED
A PRIVATE SEC-
TOR COMMITTEE TO
LOOK AT EXTENDING
CITYWIDE INCENTIVE
TO PLANNERS."**

Art Boncato

Tourism assistant secretary



The new Kaohsiung Exhibition Center – a catalyst



“THE CITY NEVER HAD A DEDICATED CONVENTION AND EXHIBITION CENTRE. THIS OFFICE WILL HELP LOCAL PCO/PEOS BID FOR EVENTS TO FILL THE NEW VENUE.”

Tseng Wen Sheng

Director-general, economic development bureau
Kaohsiung City Government

events, the Taiwan International Fastener Show and the Taiwan International Boat Show. This puts the city in good stead to attract more conferences and exhibitions, said Tseng.

The Asian New Bay Area, where the centre sits, will also have other MICE-related facilities that will open progressively over the next two years. They include the Kaohsiung Maritime Cultural & Popular Music Centre, which will boast an outdoor theatre for more than 12,000 pax

and nine indoor halls; Dadong Culture & Art Centre, which will offer an 800-seat theatre and a 200-seat music hall, a library, a cruise terminal and hotels.

Tseng said: “Kaohsiung now has a lot more land to develop new hardware for business events. Attractions in the outskirts, now part of the city, will be used in enhancing pre- and post-show tours and incentive experiences.”

Amanda Hsu, project manager of the Meeting & Event Promotion Office, is confident that the new MICE venue will give business event planners and delegates “a new reason to come to Taiwan and visit a new city”.

She said: “It is the only waterfront MICE venue in Taiwan. Some of our conference rooms offer ocean views. Just imagine how refreshing that will be for event delegates.”

While planners are more accustomed to hosting business events in Taipei, some of them are already considering Kaohsiung.

Senior project executive of APAC MICE, Taiwan, Jin Liao, said: “We normally prefer to hold our activities in Taipei because delegates are more comfortable being in the main city. But it is good to be able to offer a new option.”

Vicky Lin, senior event executive of TW MICE Event & DMC, said Taipei is the usual go-to place for business events since there is no lack of hotels and meeting facilities, so Kaohsiung must develop more supporting infrastructure and build greater awareness to succeed in its MICE ambitions.

Kaohsiung City Government’s Tseng acknowledged more needs to be done. He said: “Kaohsiung has well-equipped MICE facilities now, but software still needs to be improved. For example we need to improve the quality of services and train more MICE professionals in their English communication skills.” – *Paige Lee Pei Qi*

LOMBOK, INDONESIA

Lombok is one of 16 cities/islands the Indonesia tourism authority is focusing on for MICE development and promotion.

Bali’s neighbour offers beautiful beaches and small islands that may appeal to planners organising beach resort events.

Indeed, hoteliers and DMCs in Lombok and Gili Trawangan said some of their corporate clients who have organised events in Bali are now looking for a new beach resort destination for their events.

Imam Wahyudi, general manager of Villa Ombak and Ombak Sunset on Gili Trawangan, said: “Some of our regular clients have organised their meetings here. They said it was more effective and fruitful, because the island is self-contained and participants (are therefore a captive audience).”

Ombak Sunset has a ballroom with capacity for 300 pax and other smaller meeting rooms but its private beach can accommodate up to 1,000 pax for a function.

Lombok has also seen the entry of upscale, midscale and economy hotels and they come with meeting rooms with capacity for 100 pax to 2,500 pax.

As part of the West Nusa Tenggara province, which covers the main island of Sumbawa and as many as 280 tiny islands, Lombok is a haven for island incentive trips, said DMCs.

Awan Aswinabara, president director of A&T Holidays Tour and Travel Lombok, said: “We can do island-hopping events, or have one island just for the group to do outdoor activities and parties, something Bali does not have.”

Lombok is a natural setting for teambuilding and cultural-themed events, said Awan.

“We involve the local people in the programmes. We hire their boats to bring participants to the islands, have them cook the food, and involve them in the teambuilding activities,” Awan said.

However, Lombok still needs to do a lot to catch up with neighbouring Bali or cities like Surabaya and Jogjakarta which have developed the MICE market earlier.

Pacto Convex president director Susilowani Daud said for Lombok to step up to the next level – hosting small regional ASEAN events for example – it must improve its facilities and human resources.

Rizki Handayani, director of MICE and Special Interest Tourism Promotion, Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, said the ministry invites regional MICE





Gili Island: Lombok 'ideal' for beach incentives

players to participate at regional and international MICE tradeshow to raise awareness of new destinations among buyers and enable regional players to network, learn what other destinations do and what they can do to meet planners' needs.

"Unfortunately, only Jakarta and Bali usually participate at the shows. There seems to be a lack of confidence among new destinations to reach out (to regional and international markets)," said Rizki.

Awan acknowledged that Lombok still relies on DMCs in Jakarta or Bali, such as Asian Trails Indonesia and Pacific World Nusantara, for international business.

"I think that is the approach to get regional or international events while Lombok is still developing its infrastructure, facilities and most importantly the human resources to deliver the service. These partnerships have been yielding business, although small compared to the domestic market."

Through its partnership with Talisman Asia in Bali, for example, A&T has received six incentive groups from France of between 40pax and 60pax each, staying three nights in Lombok.

"We will need to do direct international marketing one day, but as it requires a big budget to do that, we need to consider the right time for it," Awan said. – *Mimi Hudoyo*

"WE CAN DO ISLAND-HOPPING EVENTS, OR HAVE ONE ISLAND JUST FOR THE GROUP TO DO OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES AND PARTIES, SOMETHING BALI DOES NOT HAVE."

Awan Aswinabara
President director
A&T Holidays Tour and Travel

PENANG, MALAYSIA

Efforts by the state government to position Penang as a key business events destination in South-east Asia are continuing, the latest being progress made on the setting up of the Penang International Convention and Exhibition Bureau (PICEB), originally mooted by chief minister Lim Guan Eng in January 2013.

David Hall, senior partner at David Hall & Associates, has been hired to recommend a sustainable funding model and structure for PICEB, as well as potential candidates for a chief operating officer who will head the bureau, which will be a division under Penang Global Tourism.

Adelaide-based David Hall & Associates had provided consultancy for the formation of the Sarawak Convention Bureau.

While the state government is confident PICEB will be set up by this year-end, in all likelihood it will be up-and-running only in 2015, considering the time needed to find the right candidates, for one.

The bureau is timely in the wake of a string of new developments in Penang that are ideal for MICE, including two convention and exhibition centres.

The Subterranean Penang International Convention & Exhibition Centre (SPICE) Arena in Bayan Lepas, formerly the Penang International Sports Arena, completed a RM25 million (US\$7.8 million) renovations last year, while construction of the Penang Waterfront Convention Centre (PWCC) at The Light's commercial precinct will be completed in 2017.

Two big events have already been held at the SPICE Arena on level two, a pillarless space which can accommodate conferences of up to 9,000 pax and which also offers four meeting rooms. These

included the V-Con international conference last May with 8,000 delegates from 40 countries, and a two-day conference by Singapore-based Riway International Group with 5,000 delegates last December.

Khairie Yusoff, events sales manager at Shangri-La's Rasa Sayang Resort & Spa, said: "When large events such as these are held at SPICE Arena, most four- and five-star properties in Penang benefit from room sales. We received 300 roomnight bookings from the V-Con conference, for instance."

The arena is but one of five components of SPICE. Construction of the other four components, which will include a convention centre, an aquatic centre, 42 lots of retail outlets and a 400-room business hotel, is expected to be completed in 2016.

"The entire development is envisioned as an integrated centre that would feature facilities for a holistic, healthy lifestyle, exchanging of knowledge, culture and information, business activities and sports activities, embracing SP Setia's development philosophy, Live, Learn, Work and Play," said Khoo Teck Chong, general manager, SP Setia Property Division (North).

The centrepiece of PWCC, on the other hand, is a 10,000m² column-free, multi-purpose hall that can be subdivided or used as a single space for exhibitions, conventions, corporate events and private functions. It can also be converted into a 9,000-seat arena for world-class concerts. PWCC is developed by IJM Land. Suntec Penang, a subsidiary of Suntec International Singapore, is consultant for its design, marketing and operations.

Penang also has a large inventory of 15,000 rooms, of which four- and five star properties make up 8,000 rooms. By year-end, another 1,240 rooms will open. New hotels opening in the fourth quarter include G Hotel Kelawai with 208 rooms, The Wembley - A St Giles Premier Hotel, Penang, with 415 rooms and Cititel Express Penang with 234 rooms.



Penang gets serious about courting business events

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“ONCE THE BUREAU IS SET UP, IT CAN ALSO IDENTIFY ACTIVE ASSOCIATIONS IN PENANG AND ENCOURAGE THEIR MEMBERS TO HOLD MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES IN THE STATE.”

Ooi Geok Ling
Managing director
Penang Global Tourism

With direct air access from neighbouring cities such as Bangkok, Medan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Taipei, and 150 flights weekly from Kuala Lumpur, Penang Global Tourism is targeting the Asia-Pacific markets with either direct or one-stop access to Penang, particularly sectors it is strong in such as medical and pharmaceutical. Added managing director Ooi Geok Ling: “Once the bureau is set up, it can also identify active associations in Penang and encourage their members to hold meetings and conferences in the state.”

Adam Kamal, a deputy president at the Malaysian Inbound Tourism Association, said the bureau will create more awareness about Penang and compete for business events with other nearby island destinations such as Bali and Phuket. But a challenge for Penang, he said, is a lack of large local restaurants to cater to big business events. He said: “Penang is known for its local delicacies and many delegates want to experience local food in a local setting. We cannot be using a hotel ballroom for the entire duration of the event. The facilities at Gurney Drive also need to be upgraded.” Gurney Drive is a popular seafront promenade and is one of the best places in Penang to savour local hawker fare. – **S Puvaneswary**

SRI LANKA

Faced with a shortage of exhibition space for big ticket events, Sri Lanka is aggressively promoting incentive travel – and finding success.

“We are promoting incentive travel vigorously given the shortage of exhibition space in Colombo, a situation that would however be overcome in three years’ time,” said Vipula Wanigasekera, general manager of the state-owned Sri Lanka Convention Bureau (SLCB).

There are just two convention centres in Colombo, the main one, Bandaranaike Memorial International Hall, and the Sri Lanka Exhibition & Convention Centre. Both accommodate not even 300 stalls. There are about 40 to 50 exhibitions a year at both centres.

Aasim Mukhtar, general manager of Lanka Exhibition & Conference Services (LECS), the country’s biggest conference and exhibition organiser, said: “We need facilities that can cater to over 350.”

A new facility, the Magam Ruhunupura International Convention Centre, opened in the southernmost town of Hambantota in November 2013 with 1,500 seats and break-out rooms like the Bandaranaike hall, but does not attract as much business as Colombo, due to the distance, even though it is in the vicinity of Sri Lanka’s second international airport located there.

Wanigasekera said three new multi-purpose convention and exhibition centres are coming up in Peliyagoda, just outside Colombo, Katunayake and Negombo, both close to Sri Lanka’s main international airport which is about 30km from Colombo. They each can cater to 2,000-3,000pax for conventions and handle over 350 booths for exhibitions. “When these come on stream we can bid for big international exhibitions,” he said.

Less than 10 per cent of the exhibitions now attract foreigners and even if they do, are targeted at consumers.

LECS’ Mukhtar said Sri Lanka should move away from B2C to B2B events. “Many international companies are inter-



Fishermen on stilts, a unique Sri Lankan sight

ested in direct contact with clients (not the general public),” he said.

MICE business has grown nine per cent this year, industry officials said, given an aggressive promotion in Asia and Europe. Wanigasekera said conference traffic comes from Asia-Pacific, incentive groups from Europe and India, and exhibitions from South Asia (mostly India).

This month (October), SLCB is organising a roadshow in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Oman. “There is a lot of interest in the Middle East and we want to ignite that interest with some good incentive packages to Sri Lanka,” Wanigasekera said.

The bureau recently organised a promotion in Kuala Lumpur and plans to take part in CIBTM in Beijing, again focusing on the incentive market.

“Incentive travel is growing. There is only one way for this segment – up,” noted Chandra Wickramasinghe, chairman/managing director of Connaissance de Ceylan, which owns hotels and is an inbound travel specialist.

The company recently hosted a group of 132 real estate dealers from France who were taken across the country in six Bell helicopters. “They are all high spenders,” said Wickramasinghe, adding that this month (October), 128 owners of print shops from France are due to arrive on a four to five nights’ tour.

“Incentive travel is going upmarket and our hands are full this year,” he said.

New domestic carriers that fly to many inland destinations, along with new hotels and restaurants catering to a wide range of international taste buds, add to the infrastructure needed to grow incentive travel in Sri Lanka. – **Feizal Samath**

“WE ARE PROMOTING INCENTIVE TRAVEL VIGOROUSLY GIVEN THE SHORTAGE OF EXHIBITION SPACE IN COLOMBO, A SITUATION THAT WOULD HOWEVER BE OVERCOME IN THREE YEARS’ TIME.”

Vipula Wanigasekera
General manager, Sri Lanka Convention Bureau

Congresses sail in

A strong life sciences industry and attention to environmental issues have made port city Yokohama a hit with related associations for meetings. By **Karen Yue**

Yokohama, the capital city of Kanagawa Prefecture and the commercial hub of the Greater Tokyo Area, has enjoyed several years of good business in the associations congress sector.

In 2012, Yokohama hosted several massive international meetings such as the Annual Meeting of the International Society for Stem Cell Research (3,500 delegates), and the 4th Congress of the World Union of Wound Healing Societies (3,000 delegates). The same year also saw the city winning a number of high-profile meetings like the Goldschmidt Conference (2016), Biennial Congress of the Asian-Pacific Hepato-Pancreato Biliary Association (2017) and the International Orthodontic Congress (2020).

Yokohama's congress fortunes flowed into 2013, when it hosted major international meetings like the 28th International Chemotherapy and Infection (1,500 attendees) in June, and the 2013 IDF World Dairy Summit (2,200 delegates) in October.

A spokesperson with Yokohama Convention & Visitors Bureau (YCVB) told *TTGmice* that 2014 would be another good year.

"We had some major meetings this year too, like the 16th International Congress of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists in June and the XVIII ISA World Congress of Sociology in July," the spokesperson revealed.

Both events attracted about 5,000 delegates to the populous port city.

Eager to further grow its crop of association congress wins, YCVB last year developed a new brand and tagline – *Japan's First Port of Call* – to better reflect its status as a destination for conventions.

The spokesperson said: "This is



meant to convey the message that one of Yokohama's characteristics is that we are the first in many ways.

"From being the first Japanese port to open up (to the world in 1859), to hosting first-in-Asia congresses, and the first in innovation and research and development, our 'can-do' approach has made Yokohama Japan's first port of call. For international meeting organisers who want to bring their events to Yokohama, YCVB is their first port of call as we are a full-service bureau."

The new brand is reflected in a logo that uses a Japanese *nami* pattern, representing waves and reinforcing Yokohama's status as a harbour city that is open and dynamic, and at the same time offering Japanese tradition, hospitality and efficiency. A key image, capturing the port and the main convention area was also created.

The new branding and tagline is aimed at international and regional associations, with a focus on life sciences, environment, medical, IT and biotechnology industries.

"In 2013, we applied the new branding to our new website, sales collateral and promotional video. This year we will go further in promoting

our city in the associations market," the spokesperson added.

She shared that Yokohama is especially keen to attract associations related to life sciences and the environment.

Explaining the importance of the life sciences industry to the destination, she said: "Yokohama was designated Life Innovation Special Zone (Comprehensive International Strategic Zone for the Life Sciences) by the national government, and has four main areas where bio-science research and development (facilities and companies) are concentrated.

"We have many (research and development facilities) and universities, so meeting planners will find (a ready pool of) enthusiastic local delegates and suppliers wanting to attend medical meetings."

Yokohama Bio Industry Center and the Advanced Medical Research Center are good examples of city-private sector collaboration. The head of the Advanced Medical Research Center was involved in the 12th Annual World Congress of the Human Proteome Organization in September last year. The event drew 1,500 researchers on human proteome to Yokohama.

Yokohama is supported by more than 14,000 hotel rooms, making it a convenient option for large-scale meetings



PACIFICO
Yokohama, the
anchor convention
venue in the city,
wants to see more
association congress
business by 2015

"Yokohama is also keen on environmental issues. It has been designated Future Environmental City by the national government since 2011. The city aims to create and promote solutions for a variety of social issues related to the environment," she said, adding that this direction has led to the creation of Yokohama Green Valley, Yokohama Eco School and a global network that supports Asian nations in environmental matters.

Yokohama's strong support in this area earned it the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Changes, which was held in March this year.

The spokesperson explained that association meetings can benefit from a strong local attendance due to a "large and active Japanese society" in various industries.

"And because of the availability of Japanese experts in many fields, excellent content is promised at meetings held here. Proximity to China and South Korea also means good turnout from these two countries, making it a more attractive meeting," she added.

Associations that bring their congresses to Yokohama will also enjoy certain support from the city and YCVB. The city offers financial help to international meetings of over 1,000 delegates, while YCVB provides in-kind support that varies according to the percentage of international attendees.

Yokohama's track record of welcoming large-scale congresses is sufficient proof of its MICE capability. PACIFICO Yokohama is the city's main convention complex, featuring a 1,350m² Annex Hall, a 20,000m² Exhibition Hall, a 1,004-seat Conference Center, a 5,002-seat National Convention Hall and a selection of outdoor

spaces. It is also connected to the 600-room InterContinental Yokohama Grand hotel. It held 100 international association meetings in 2013.

Meeting planners can also utilise function rooms in business hotels across the city.

Maiko Hiraoka, spokesperson for The Yokohama Bay Hotel Tokyu, said her hotel was often used when massive events required more venues than what PACIFICO could offer.

The city is supported by over 14,000 hotel rooms. While no new hotels are coming up, congress delegates can look forward to refreshed stays over the next few years. InterContinental Yokohama Grand hotel will refurbish 90 per cent of rooms this year and renovate its 100 suites in 2015. Hotel New Grand, a five-star property, will add a terrace to its renewed banquet room, giving event guests clear views of Yokohama Bay.

In terms of international air access, Yokohama is served by two international airports – Narita and Haneda.

The YCVB spokesperson shared that Haneda Airport will raise its number of arrivals/departures this year from six million per year to nine. Among the new air services are All Nippon Airways' (ANA) flights to Vancouver, Hanoi and Munich from March. Additional frequency to/from London, Paris, Frankfurt, Munich, Singapore, Bangkok, Jakarta and Manila will come too.

At Narita International Airport, ANA commenced new services to/from Düsseldorf in March while the number of LCCs serving the airport is growing.

Despite the heavy tourist footfalls and benefits to the local economy and related industries that come with congresses, this segment of business

events is "not top of mind" for many local MICE suppliers.

The "long period it takes from bid win to the event actually taking place" is one of the reasons, said the spokesperson, who added that domestic meetings and weddings are "big business in Japan".

Yoko Ueda, sales manager of Yokohama Royal Park Hotel, told *TTGmice* that association meetings made up less than five per cent of the hotel's total events business and numbers had not grown significantly in recent years.

"We are keen on marketing to this segment but we have a budget issue for promotions. We tend to chase the domestic meetings market which is very strong and reliable (and) work with YCVB (for international association meetings) instead, as it has an overseas network," Ueda said.

To get local stakeholders to be more active in courting international association events, YCVB formed the MICE Experts Consortium with 50 local suppliers and holds meetings regularly to discuss the issues Yokohama needs to address in order to win more business.

The bureau's spokesperson added: "YCVB endeavours to illustrate to its supplier community the beyond-tourism impact of hosting such meetings. In February, YCVB invited GainingEdge's Mike Williams to share international case studies on (such) benefits at a half-day symposium."

Jordan Takako Kurosawa, director of international sales & marketing at PACIFICO, agrees that hosting international association meetings brings benefits beyond that of tourism earnings.

"They provide opportunities for local businesses, researchers and institutes to interact with top leaders and experts in the field, and help incubate local business/academic research by adapting the latest trends and studies published during these meetings," she opined.

PACIFICO is looking to grow its business contribution from this segment of events, from the current eight to 10 per cent to 10-15 per cent by 2015.

"We plan to have more sales and promotions in Europe and North America, markets that are not yet familiar with Yokohama being an association meeting destination. We will exhibit at major trade shows like IMEX, IMEX America or EIBTM with YCVB," Kurosawa said.

Need to know



Take a walk in the park

Yokohama is not all concrete buildings. The Sankeien Gardens shows a different, serene side of the big city, with traditional Japanese houses and architecture, manicured gardens, a pond and small streams setting the scene of ancient Japan. Open to the public since 1904, Sankeien Gardens is most beautiful in autumn and spring. It is illuminated at night during the cherry blossom season, which falls around late-March/early-April.

The garden is open daily from 09.00 to 17.00; last admission at 16.30. Visit www.sankeien.or.jp for more information.

Explore Yokohama's factories

Yokohama is home to several prominent manufacturers such as Nissan Motor Corporation, Kirin Brewery and FANCL, and educational factory tours can be arranged with the help of the Yokohama Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Hands-on experiences are often included in these factory tours. At Kirin Brewery, for example, visitors can take part in a beer-making class and learn what are the ingredients needed to make a good brew, and understand the various necessary processes such as fermentation and aging.

Corporate groups can also enjoy guided tours of specialty museums such as the Shin-Yokohama Raumen Museum, where an expert will explain the history and culture behind this familiar noodle dish; and the Silk Museum, where delegates can join a loom weaving workshop and other activities.

Contact Yokohama Convention & Visitors Bureau at (81-45) 221-2111 for a full list of industrial tours available to corporate groups.



Cup noodle paradise

Anyone who appreciates the convenience of cup noodles will enjoy a visit to the interactive Cup Noodle Museum in Yokohama. Exhibits lead visitors into the mind of Momofuku Ando, inventor of the world's first cup noodle and founder of Nissin Food Products, and showcase the astounding variety of cup noodles that have been created through the years. Visitors can also make their own cup noodles at the Chicken Ramen Factory and the My CUPNOODLE Factory.

Visit www.cupnoodles-museum.jp for more information.

Get connected for free

NTT East is offering free Wi-Fi access to overseas visitors in Yokohama. To enjoy the complimentary connection, visitors need to present their passports at designated counters located across the city and collect a Wi-Fi card with user ID and password, or download the free app, NAVITIME for Japan Travel, onto their smartphones ahead of their travel.

Free Wi-Fi access is available for 14 days from the day of registration, at specific Wi-Fi hotspots.

More details can be found at www.yokohamajapan.com/about/free-wi-fi-service-overseas-tourists-visit-yokohama-2/.

Meet and stay at a new Best Western property

Opened in May, Best Western Yokohama sits in the Tsurumi ward of the port city, close to the bay area, and is easily accessible from the JR Yokohama and JR Shinagawa stations.

It appeals to meeting planners with its 100m² meeting room, a space good for events with up to 60 delegates.

Guests can choose from single, double, twin and triple options, with all of Best Western Yokohama's 185 rooms equipped with flat-screen TVs and free Wi-Fi.



Free your mind

Yokohama's Sojiji Temple, regarded as one of the most important Zen Buddhism temples in Japan, features a collection of traditional Buddhist architecture and boasts a serene environment.

Visitors to the temple are invited to participate in *zazen* meditation sessions, conducted in English.

If meditation is not quite your cup of tea, strolling through the temple and its gardens will be refreshing enough for hurried city dwellers.

Visit sojiji.jp/zenen/sanpai/zazen-english.html for more information.

New ways to play

Fun activities for corporate groups are emerging in Bangkok, giving repeat clients opportunities to rediscover the city, writes **Greg Lowe**



(From left) Spice Roads and Taste of Thailand Food Tours specialise in unique ways for visitors to truly experience Bangkok

Whether it's snoring, snacking or cycling, Thailand travel specialists are developing a range of products which either provide delegates with unique ways of experiencing the local culture and environment, or offer them the ultimate opportunity to recover from the pressures of corporate life, all of which make ideal elements for immersive incentive programmes and pre/post-meeting tours.

Leisure itineraries for visiting corporate groups have included traditional Thai cooking classes, fruit carving lessons and bamboo raft trips for decades and while such activities may be popular for first-time visitors to the country, they quickly loose their appeal with repeat clients who are constantly pressuring DMCs for new ideas.

Indigo Pearl Phuket, Taste of Thailand Food Tours and Spice Roads have all recently launched innovative products that can add another experiential level to corporate programmes.

Jacob Hodder, who started Taste of Thailand Food Tours last year, said his company seeks to provide clients with "an intimate window into Thai culture, history and people through food" by taking them on walking tours to small local restaurants and hawker stalls.

The company, which currently runs tours in Bangkok and will be launching a nighttime tour this month, keeps group sizes small but can run concurrent tours to handle larger corporate groups.

"We aim to provide full bellies and full minds by the end of our experience," Hodder said.

He added: "Every dish has a story to tell – from the historical influence of Indian spices and Chinese noodles to the folklore of finding your perfect love through the use of a mortar and pestle.

"Often the story is in the amazing people who serve secret recipes handed down generation after generation for more than 100 years or the great grandfather's street cart that grew in popularity to become a locally renowned restaurant. Sometimes it is even the architecture of an eatery or local market that provides us a glimpse into the yesteryear of Bangkok and how rapidly the city is modernising."

Spice Roads is another company that provides visitors with a street-level view of life in Bangkok. The cycling specialist launched two new tours – Chinatown and Bangkok Sunset Ride – in the Thai capital in September.

The Chinatown tour starts at the Grand China Hotel and takes riders through bustling back alleys

before crossing the river to visit the Portuguese church and on to Wat Arun. Meanwhile, the Bangkok Sunset Ride takes participants past the palaces and temples in the Rattanakosin Island area. Both trips cover about 15km in four hours.

Patricia Weismantel, product manager at Spice Roads, told *TTGmice*: "If you're driving around Bangkok in a minivan, you're not going to see much of the city. These tours take people right into the old part of town, down little back alleyways which they would otherwise have walked past. It's hard to find these places on your own."

"We also have similar day and night tours in Chiang Mai. The night ride is really cool because it takes you around the old town and through the night market. Our clients love it because they feel they have experienced Thailand in a different way."

Indigo Pearl Phuket, on the other hand, has introduced an incentive package which is all about doing as little as possible.

The Art of Sleep, which is aimed at executives needing a serious recharge from the pressures of work, was developed by Chris Oakes, the resort's general manager and a self-confessed insomniac, who said the property is the first in Thailand to offer such a package.

"Sleep has become the great casualty of modern life, stolen by the stresses of work and family and the round-the-clock connectivity imposed by the Internet age," he said.

"For many companies that have been working hard towards a goal or an incentive, time together with plenty of time for sleeping and recovering would be a very attractive proposition.

"And with that rest and relaxation often comes a flowering of creativity and seeing old problems with new eyes. So the benefits for a company could be manifold."

To adapt the package for MICE groups, Indigo Pearl has added elements including group sleeping sessions on beanbags under shady trees that line the beach, specially crafted spa therapies, in-room aromatherapy to induce relaxation, tai chi and yoga classes, and more.

The property is targeting high-level groups from Hong Kong, Singapore and Australia.

Art of Sleep can be added to an existing package from 6,500++ baht (US\$201.50) per person.

Ideas Two-day teambuilding

Day1 Kick off the day with a Bangkok Food Challenge. Your group will be split into teams and a Thai chef will show participants how to make three local dishes. The team is then given a crash course in Thai to help them purchase key ingredients and handle local transport. A set of flash cards denoting the ingredients and 1,000 baht of spending money will be distributed before teams are sent off to secure all ingredients in under three hours. Points are awarded for the fastest time, greatest variety of transport used, most relevant posts on the activity on Facebook, etc.

The cook-off begins after lunch, and teams have 90 minutes to cook the three dishes from scratch.

Free time/coffee break is offered after this challenge.

Up next: Escape Hunt Bangkok. Teams will compete to solve a historical murder mystery challenge.



Your group will have the evening off to themselves.

Day2 The day begins with surfing lessons and teambuilding games at Flow House Bangkok.

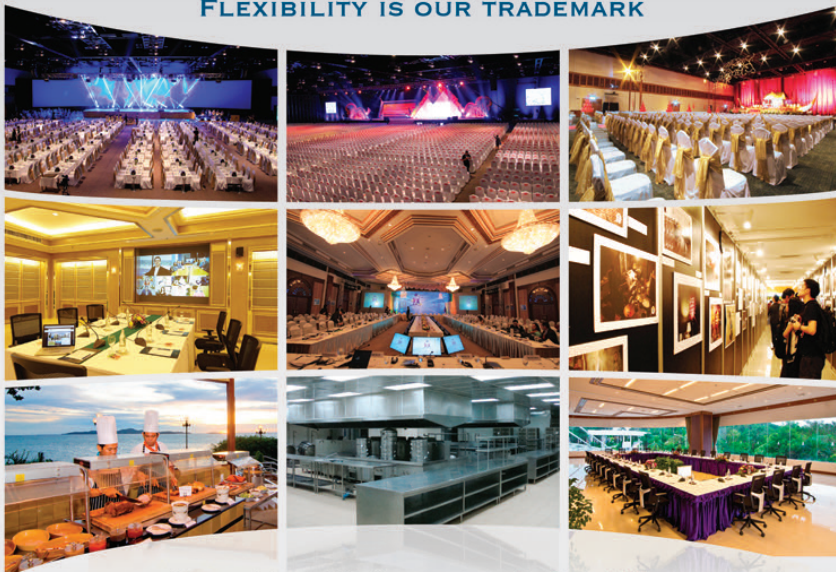
After lunch, your group will head to Healthland Asoke for a revitalising Thai massage.

Come evening, take on a cocktail mixology class from Flow Cocktail and compete with one another to create the best libation.

End the two-day teambuilding programme over dinner and drinks at LB Terrace.

Escape Hunt Bangkok offers participants a chance to test their sleuthing skills

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Need to know



Celebrity twist to Thai street food and classic dishes

Housed in a 100-year-old villa, which has been painted shocking pink, Naamsah Botling Trust is celebrity chef Ian Kittichai's latest addition to Bangkok's dining scene. The restaurant serves Kittichai's personal take on classic Thai dishes and street cuisine, some of which have been combined with other cosmopolitan comfort foods, such as tacos and foie gras. The bar serves more than 30 kinds of cocktails.

Visit www.naamsah.com for more information.

Enjoy more than a tippale at Mikkeller Bangkok

Situated in a former house and gardens off Ekkamai Road, Mikkeller Bangkok is the fourth addition to the Danish gypsy brewery's global bar footprint. Serving 30 craft beers on tap, with more in bottles, the bar boasts the country's best range of high-quality drafts, many of which are one-off creations from the master brewer. The taste-before-you-buy policy makes choosing more fun.

Plan a private movie night

Corporate gatherings need not always be over cocktails and dinners. Event planners can arrange for a cosy movie night at Bangkok's poshest cinema, Embassy Diplomat Screens, where cinephiles can choose from a host of seating options, from cocoons to day beds.

The smallest theatre in the venue offers just 31 seats.

Other facilities include a bar, quality bites from DEAN & DELUCA, headphones with private language choices, and a living room waiting area.

Embassy Diplomat Screens, located in Central Embassy on Ploenchit Road, is open for private bookings.

Visit www.embassycineplex.com.

Meetings & Events



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Engineer a hot cocktail party

Ashley Sutton, the godfather of Bangkok cocktail bars, has outdone himself with his latest creation, A R Sutton Engineers & Co Siam, which, he says, combines colonial inspirations with a touch of black magic.

Drinks are design by Joseph Boroski, a big name in the world of bars and mixology. The bar's dark interiors sport plenty of exposed beams, red brick and polished metal.

Visit www.facebook.com/A.R.Sutton engineers for more information.

Italian indulgence in a Thai kingdom

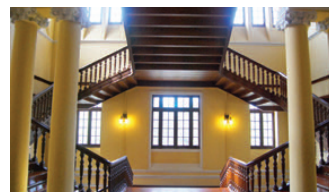
Paolo Vitaletti earned a reputation for serving some of Bangkok's best Italian food with the opening of Appia. His latest venture, Peppina, is already rated by some as being home to the city's best pizza. No pasta is served here but there are plenty of other Italian favourites and grilled meats, as well as a solid list of wines, craft beers and cocktails. Advance booking is strongly advised.

Visit www.facebook.com/peppinapizza for details.

Excellent access for museum fans

Anyone wanting to check out more than a couple of Bangkok's museums should purchase the Muse Pass ticket book which provides entry to 20 museums in the city and its environs for 199 baht (US\$6.20). Participating museums include Museum Siam, Siam House of Bizarre Creatures, Phaya Thai Palace, Bangkok Folk's Museum, King Prajadhipok Museum, Thai Film Museum, Science Museum and The Queen's Gallery.

Visit www.thaiticketmajor.com for details.



Museum Siam

In search of exclusivity

Heritage sites are in abundance across Macau but approval for private use is tough to secure, frustrating event planners, discovers **Prudence Lui**

Despite Macau's status as a UNESCO World Heritage Centre and its plethora of historical sites, business event planners are hitting a brick wall when it comes to securing a meaningful unique venue for their clients.

According to Macau's Cultural Affairs Bureau, no applications from private companies for the use of heritage sites under its management have been accepted for the last six to seven years. The reason? These venues were abused during past events.

Only applications by non-profit organisations for charity activities will be considered.

The bureau's stand on this matter has drawn criticism from local event specialist Bruno Simoes, CEO of smallWORLD Entertainment.

"No government owned space is available for private events. It is unfortunate."

Sharing the same observation is MCI Group Macau's managing director, Peter Hassall.

Hassall recalled: "Mount Fortress (built from 1617 to 1626 as the city's main military defence structure) used to be available for event hire but we were told that was stopped due to past abuse of the property."

In order to continue to provide unique settings for client events, MCI Group Macau has turned to privately owned venues.

In mid-2013 it organised a VIP event for global hospitality giant, Starwood Hotels & Resorts, at Albergue 1601. The restaurant sits in the heritage St. Lazarus Quarter on the Macau Peninsula, serving up contemporary Mediterranean cuisine in a traditional Portuguese setting. It can accommodate a sit-down dinner banquet for 240 guests.

"We had to get permission from the owners, which normally takes around three weeks, (and approval depends) on whether there are other events (being booked at the same time) at the venue," said Hassall.

For the event, MCI Group Macau paid a fee to hire Albergue 1601 for



"The supply of off-site venues in Macau is limited. Organisers have to constantly look for fresh and new venues to thrill their attendees."

Anita Ao

Business development director
MacPro Gallery

privacy, engaged entertainment from The Venetian Macao and had Sheraton Macao Hotel cater F&B.

Hassall said: "People think that Macau is all Chinese, but this event presented them with a unique insight into the destination's Portuguese history. The entertainment was specially chosen to showcase

Macau's heritage (through storytelling)."

Offering event planners yet another privately owned venue option is the new Macpro Gallery in the downtown Central district of Macau Peninsula.

The venue occupies the second floor of a commercial complex and had undergone a year-long renovation to become the multipurpose space it is today. A picture-hanging system, various lighting modes, professional audio equipment recording system, projector and Wi-Fi access are all provided, allowing Macpro Gallery to meet the needs of a variety of events.

Macpro Gallery is joined by Macpro Business Centre on the 27th floor of the same building, a venue that offers 13 serviced offices and two meeting rooms that can accom-

Unable to access heritage sites, MCI Group Macau took a client event to the beautiful Albergue 1601 restaurant in heritage St. Lazarus Quarter

modate three and 50 pax respectively.

Business development director of Macpro Gallery, Anita Ao, said: "The supply of off-site venues in Macau is limited. Organisers have to constantly look for fresh and new venues to thrill their attendees."

Ao said Macpro Gallery's unique selling points are its "fresh look and chic feel" and relative affordability compared to function rooms at hotels in the destination.

"It is also away from the gaming environment," she added.

Business events held at Macpro Gallery can incorporate walking tours of the surrounding historical sites, Ao suggested.

Event planners who do take gatherings to such standalone private venues are supported by a variety of catering services. MGM Macau, for instance, has a specialised catering and events team, comprising of eight personnel who manage all in-

house and off-site events. The team is experienced and has handled several government functions.

Vice president of sales, public & community relations, Irene Wong, told *TTGmice*: "(Clients can choose) either plated dinners or cocktails with pass-around canapés – it all depends on the venue. The key challenge in using off-site venues is limitation on power and water supply, food preparation areas or even sheltered spaces."



A real taste of Portugal

Hotel Royal Macau's latest dining destination brings traditional Portuguese flavours, crafted by two internationally recognised Portuguese chefs, Luis Américo and Marco Gomes, to the shores of Macau.

The 120-seat FADO restaurant features four private rooms and offers a menu of well-loved dishes made with a contemporary touch and using ingredients, such as squid and olive oil, that are imported directly from Portugal. A live cooking demonstration is offered when the Bolinhos de Bacalhau dish is ordered.

Diners can also enjoy a good selection of Portuguese wines.

FADO is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Hotel Riviera and Hotel Beverly Plaza Macau introduce new accommodation experiences

Macau CTS Hotel Management (International) is renovating two of its member hotels in Macau.

The 132-key Riviera Hotel has just completed phase one of works which gave some of its guestrooms a new resort theme. Other room themes will be introduced through the next stage of refurbishments.

The other property to benefit from refurbishments is Hotel Beverly Plaza Macau. Four suites have been upgraded and each boast a unique theme. Phase two of work, due to complete in 2015, will give four other suites decor themed after the four seasons, spring, summer, autumn and winter.



City of Dreams kicks lifestyle entertainment up a notch

The new SOHO at City of Dreams integrated resort is a complex offering 16 restaurants and bars, state-of-the-art entertainment and engaging street art, making it a new destination for visitors to hang out and have a good time.

The extensive array of dining outlets include familiar chain restaurants such as Din Tai Fung and Hard Rock Café, as well as popular eateries imported from Hong Kong like Chan Kee Roasted Goose.

For entertainment, visitors can expect street performers executing stunning acts, including a one-of-a-kind flash mob featuring international award-winning dancers, graffiti artists who will speed-spray paintings, comedians, magicians and musicians.

Refreshed coastal attraction

Macau Fisherman's Wharf is now under redevelopment and will present refreshed facilities, new dining establishments and three new hotels – Harbourview Hotel, Legend Palace Hotel and Legendale Hotel – when it completes in 3Q2016.

The first hotel of the trio to open will be the four-star 445-key Harbourview Hotel, a property modelled after 18th century architecture in Prague. It is expected to welcome its first guests in 3Q2014.

The completed attraction will also increase in size, from 23,500m² to approximately 133,000m².

It is located at Freguesia da Sé in Macau Peninsula.



behind THE magic

'The Majestic Journey of Time'
by Hennessy at Tiki Pool.

World-class facilities are just the beginning. Meet Sheraton Macao Hotel's Event Concierges – the magic ingredient behind its successful events.

Boasting a rich fusion of East-meets-West culture, coupled with a dazzling array of luxury shopping, world-class dining and modern entertainment options, Macau is commanding attention as one of Asia's premier tourist hotspots. Center stage on the glittering Cotai Strip, yet minutes from Macau's charming historic areas, is Sheraton Macao Hotel, Cotai Central – the largest hotel in Macau, and also the largest property in the Starwood Hotels and Resorts portfolio.

A highly specialized team of Event Concierges are key to the hotel's enviable reputation for successful events which exceed clients' expectations. As the main contact person for clients and their guests, a dedicated Event Concierge manages each event from conception to completion. They bring clients' visions to reality through creative thinking, while ensuring the seamless execution of each event.

Specially selected for their calm, intuitive and quick-thinking natures, Sheraton Macao Hotel's Event Concierges possess a unique, comprehensive knowledge of all hotel departments, meaning they can act fast and most often personally solve any issues that arise immediately, minimizing any impact to the guest experience.

For example, needing a creative solution for a large-scale projection at a poolside event. Client has envisaged covering the entire surface of the open-air pool with a layer of 10,000 ping pong balls. One of the Event Concierge Sherwin Lucas, has creatively created the solutions and overcame the logistic, projection of image and guarding of the safety, the result was stunning canvas for projecting images and thrilled the client! At sunset, just prior to the event's start, Sherwin realized guests may mistake the pool for a walkable surface, so gathered 50 stanchions from around the hotel to cordon off the pool, all within 30 minutes. Creative thinking, quick problem solving and a can-do attitude are essential traits for Sheraton Macao Hotel's Event Concierges. Plus, their broad skill set and ability to engage and coordinate multiple departments makes them indispensable!

Alongside the Event Concierges and their skilled support teams, promising flawless execution and innovation, Sheraton Macao Hotel has an impressive inventory of 3,896 rooms and suites and a variety of event spaces totalling 152,000 sq ft that can cater to large meeting groups of up to 5,000 people, as well as be especially configured for exclusive intimate meetings.



Sala Pool

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Hangzhou MICE gets a booster

New infrastructure, stronger government support to clinch more business will hopefully help the city maintain position in China. By **Caroline Boey**



chuanyu/23RF.com

MICE programmes can highlight Hangzhou's water heritage and slower pace of life compared to other major Chinese destinations; West Lake pictured above

Hangzhou is hungry for MICE and the Hangzhou Tourism Promotion Centre (HTPC), which set up a MICE department in 2009 and China's first MICE Association with more than 100 members from all sectors of the industry in 2010, wants to up the ante.

New high-end hotels in the CBD and resorts set amid tea plantations and forests is giving the city new breadth of accommodation options.

To boost MICE, Hangzhou has launched an ambassador's programme to attract international meetings and conventions in industries the governments is targeting.

At a recent industry roundtable discussion co-presented by Starwood Hotels and Resorts and *TTGmice*, and held at the Sheraton Hangzhou Wetland Park Resort, Roger Shu, MICE manager, MICE Department of HTPC, said steps are being taken to add a second brand, the Hangzhou MICE Promotion Center (HMPC) which will act like a convention and exhibition bureau (CVB) to ensure the destination does not lose

its number three ranking in China, especially to rival Nanjing.

Hangzhou also wants to be more appealing to international source markets and the message it wants to send is that China comprises not only Beijing and Shanghai.

In ICCA's 2013 ranking of Chinese cities for international association meetings, Beijing takes top spot with 105 meetings, followed by Shanghai with 72. In joint third position with 17 meetings each are Hangzhou and Nanjing, and Hangzhou is determined to outpace its rival.

Roundtable attendees from the airline and hotel sectors agreed the creation of HMPC will benefit the destination.

Shu noted: "Hangzhou welcomed 10,000 delegates in 2013 and our target is to reach 25 international association meetings with more than 500 people each, in three years' time.

"HTPC bid for 50 international association meetings this year and clinched three. With the HMPC, Hangzhou will be in a stronger position to influence decision-makers to hold association meetings (here) and

to attract regional association meetings and incentive business."

Shu hopes the HMPC will be ready by 2015. Meanwhile, a system to collate MICE data is also being set up.

While MICE group extensions from Shanghai, only about 90 minutes away by car and is served by several daily train services, are important, Hangzhou is eyeing more direct business.

With the support of HTPC's MICE Department and the MICE Association, Hangzhou has been ramping up its promotions by launching media familiarisation trips with hotel groups, and trade familiarisation trips with scheduled table-top appointments for buyers from national associations, among others.

Air France KLM, as the first international carrier to launch direct flights from Amsterdam to Hangzhou in 2010, has also organised a familiarisation trip for European buyers.

Today, Hangzhou is served by 20 airlines, with 12 offering direct flights to several major Asian cities.

Tina Zhou, director of sales, Sheraton Hangzhou Wetland Park Resort, said: "Before the hotel opened in 2011, we invited 20 buyers from Beijing for a familiarisation trip. In 2013 we organised a MICE event for 300 trade professionals to showcase the hotel's new meeting space (and promote the wetland park for MICE activities (including teambuilding))."

Jackson Wang, deputy managing director, Hangzhou New China Travel Service, which has expanded into MICE, said incentive groups tend to stay three to four nights and the company is trying to encourage longer stays by combining the city's classic and modern elements, its water heritage, and slower pace compared to other big Chinese cities.

Wang explained: "Hangzhou is an important tea centre and MICE

groups can visit tea plantations and learn more about Hangzhou's tea culture, hike and bike in its nature parks, and visit UNESCO World Heritage sites such as the Grand Canal and the West Lake."

He noted that direct flights and attractive pricing have appealed to incentive groups from Malaysia and Singapore, who enjoy night attractions such as the *Impression West Lake* performance and local cuisine.

Starwood's The Azure Qiantang, A Luxury Collection Hotel, Hangzhou, which opened in September, has added a new high-end dimension to the destination and is now offering the brand's Gold Concierge Service.

General manager, Andy Wang, said the hotel's 700m² ballroom, seven meeting rooms, and signature restaurants are positioned for MICE.

"Our ample garden is ideal for theme parties for between 200 and 250 people," he said, adding that Starwood's Hangzhou room inventory, which now includes the Sheraton and Four Points by Sheraton brands, will grow to 1,550 within two years.

While the industry acknowledges government support has boosted the destination, the wishlist now includes the development of more professional conference organisers, more exciting and exclusive quality products, better service standards, greater market awareness of the city's MICE capabilities, and more international direct flights.

Ideas One-day tour of Hangzhou

Begin the morning with a visit to the Longjin Tea Plantation and get a small workout climbing up the hilly terraces to 300m for the best view. On the way down, visit a farmhouse for tea tasting and snacks.

To know more about tea production and the different types of tea, the group can visit the China National Tea Museum on the West Lake as part of the afternoon itinerary if a lake cruise is to be included.

From the Longjin Tea Plantation, head to the famous Linyin Temple built in the 4th Century AD by monks from India, and rebuilt no less than 16 times. On the temple grounds are Buddhist relics and fascinating Buddha statues carved into the rock face.

A vegetarian meal can be arranged at the temple or at one of the restaurants at the exclusive Aman Fayun, located in a private area of the temple grounds.

After lunch, send the group to Hefang Street, popular for souvenirs and knick-knacks.

Around the neighbourhood in 95 Dajing Lane is Hu Qing Yu Tang, the most successful Chinese pharmacy. It opened in 1878 and still dispenses medicine today.

In August and September, view-

ing the tidal bores of the Qiantang River, where waves rise as high as 10m, is a popular activity. The well-located Azure Qiantang, A Luxury Collection Hotel, which opened in September, provides a vantage point from its Panorama Signature Restaurant and 22nd floor terrace.

Return to the hotel to rest and refresh and finish the day tour by watching Zhang Yimou's production, *Impression West Lake*, when the sun sets. The hour-long dream-like performance starts at 19.45 and is based on two classical and legendary Chinese love stories.

Itinerary provided by Hangzhou New China Travel Service

Linyin Temple



Caroline Booy

Starwood's sister act

Shanghai remains a hot MICE destination but meeting planners looking for new locations with easy access can turn to nearby destinations such as Hangzhou and Huzhou. Both are under two hours away by land or rail from Shanghai.

Starwood's growing portfolio around the Yangtze River Delta throws up two options that can stand alone or twinned.

The 380-room Sheraton Hangzhou Wetland Park Resort, which opened in 2011, sits within the Xixi National Wetland Preservation Area, and the sprawling nature reserve can be used for outdoor activities, ranging from hiking to teambuilding programmes.

With its inventory of more than 1,900m² of function space, the resort has been picked for product launch-

es or meetings for between 300 and 400 people.

General manager Kathy Ma told *TTGmice*: "MICE is our bread and butter (across the week). Although we didn't reach our budget, business has increased 42 per cent year-on-year, while the market has been trading downwards this year. The corporate FIT weekday segment also expanded significantly from last year, growing 39 per cent."

The property now wants to improve the five per cent contribution from longer-staying, higher-spending international MICE guests, and to book more corporate meetings.

Education, automobile, real estate, tourism, IT, financial, and pharmaceutical groups remain the segments the resort will continue to tap.

Aiding Ma's business goal is

Hangzhou's improving global air access. Qatar Airways, for example, added a frequency linking Hangzhou to Europe earlier this year, SilkAir now flies from Singapore, and a new service linking Moscow was launched in June.

Travel time from the Hangzhou Xiaoshan International Airport to the resort varies and is 50 minutes or significantly less without traffic jams.

Hangzhou's relatively good infrastructure compared to other second-tier cities has attracted large fairs, such as the Xihu International Expo, according to Ma. Its natural tourism resources also provide a good fit for MICE programmes incorporating outdoor activities.

Starwood's portfolio in Hangzhou includes the Sheraton, Luxury Collection and Four Points by Sheraton brands, with two more Sheratons

Continued on page 32

Continued from page 31

opening in 2015 and another Four Points by Sheraton in 2020.

In contrast to the Xixi wetland park, Taihu Lake provides the backdrop for the 321-room Sheraton Huzhou Hot Spring Resort which opened end-2012.

Huzhou is 75km north of Hangzhou and 160km west of Shanghai, and the resort is about 90 minutes away by car from the Sheraton Hangzhou. The destination has a long history, is one of China's four major silk-producing cities, and is the birthplace of calligraphy and the writing brush.

Sheraton Huzhou's modern classic architecture – an incomplete doughnut-shaped glass structure – is a sight to behold. Referred to as the Ring of Happiness and nicknamed Moon Hotel, the reflection of the building in the water creates the vision of the moon, which is symbolic in Chinese culture.

At night, state-of-the-art lighting technology, which can be themed with music and display a company's logo for corporate events, turns the building into a light and sound show for guests and local residents.

The luxury resort is the only international hotel brand in Huzhou, and Mystic Spa, with 101 hot spring pools, is the largest hot spring resort in China.

The resort has 2,200m² of indoor

meeting space. The 300m² Taihu Meeting Room on the 27th floor provides a panoramic view of the lake filled with sailboats.

Outdoors, the 1,600m² floating Rose Garden and sprawling grounds provide ample space for unique incentive events or teambuilding activities around the lake. The hotel is planning to introduce fishing trips next summer.

Close to the resort are Fisherman's Wharf with F&B options, Capital Outlets, which opened in October last year and stocks mid-range brands, and the fascinating Wood Museum housing naturally formed, but strange-looking wood pieces.

For golfers, the 18-hole Huzhou Hot Spring Golf Club is located about 20 minutes away.

Jonathan Kuss, Sheraton Huzhou hotel manager, said: "Not many people, including those in China, know about Huzhou perhaps because there is no airport and there are no direct flights. Huzhou is a beautiful destination with a country town feeling. There is a real opportunity for the Sheraton Huzhou, with what it offers, to put the destination on the map."

"Of the 10 per cent international markets the resort caters to, the majority of guests are from Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong."

The resort is intensifying its MICE



Sheraton Huzhou's architecture is a stunning sight on Taihu Lake

marketing and kicked off with a major domestic and international media event for 82 journalists in May.

Kuss said: "We want to target the international MICE market, specifically senior management and upmarket meeting groups. Our strategy is to offer a 'very negotiable' weekday approach, and to cater to very creative events from Thursday through Sunday."

– Caroline Boey



Need to know

M&C operates first China resort in Hangzhou

The 151-room Millennium Resort Hangzhou, which opened in 2Q2014, is the first Millennium & Copthorne resort property to open in China.

The city resort boutique hotel sits south of West Lake and along the Nine Creek, nestled among tea plantations and ancient forests. Its serene location makes it suitable for corporate retreats.

Millennium Resort Hangzhou has a 400m² ballroom that can cater for up to 280 people, and four smaller function rooms. Besides an all-day dining restaurant, there are seven private dining rooms, authentic Longjing tea service, and a large bar with live music.

Nearby are world-renowned attractions such as Liuhe Pagoda, Lingyin Temple, and the Song Dynasty Town.

An appealing opening offer

Azure Qiantang, A Luxury Collection Hotel, Hangzhou, which opened in September, is offering a special package until end of this year. Its deluxe room package at RMB1,300 (US\$211.50) a night is inclusive of breakfast for two, and high-speed Internet access.

The hotel caters to meeting groups with its 650m² Grand Ballroom and the 312m² foyer. F&B options include Lan Ting Chinese Restaurant which serves a variety of local Chinese cuisine and signature dishes reflecting the "five water" elements that surround Hangzhou.

Huzhou's natural hot spring destination

Sheraton Huzhou Hot Spring Resort opened its signature Mystic Spa and Hot Spring Village in March.

The 20,000m² spa and hot spring village complex, adjacent to the resort's main building, has 101 hot spring pools, 39 private guest villas, eight spa chalets for private treatments, and 21 treatment room. It is billed as the largest and most sophisticated natural hot spring resort in China.

Central to Mystic Spa is a large glass dome pool complex featuring 28 hot spring pools of various shapes and sizes, and privacy access overlooking the resort's private lake.

The red wine spa pool, with a wine bottle-shaped spring pouring wine into the pool to provide antioxidant benefits, is a unique feature.

Fighting for recognition

Clark's fun surroundings and host city status for APEC 2015 will up its appeal as a MICE destination but access must improve, writes **Marianne Carandang**

Clark, a freeport zone in Central Luzon, about 90km north of Manila, has set its sights on international business events, counting on the region's cultural heritage within the Pampanga region, and its relatively short distance from the beach and adventure attractions of Subic, which already enjoys visibility as a MICE destination on its own.

However, Ronnie Tiotuico, regional director for Central Luzon with the Department of Tourism, admitted that "Clark cannot be a stand-alone destination on its own".

Clark's positioning, Tiotuico noted, becomes stronger when viewed as a "single" destination in conjunction with nearby Subic which has a convention facility of its own, the 12,000m² Subic Bay Exhibition and Convention Centre (SBECC) and a plethora of outdoor sports activities and natural parks.

Besides hosting this year's edition of the Philippine MICE Conference in June, an event that drew about 500 trade participants, including international buyers, Clark is also starting to work closely with associations. According to Tiotuico, the destination has won two upcoming conventions – the Mother Butler Guild National Convention from November 7 to 9, 2014 at the Hotel Stotsenberg, which aims for 1,500 delegates, and the 40th Kiwanis International Asia Pacific Convention, which is expected to welcome 1,300 delegates from March 5 to 7 next year at Fontana Convention Center.

In 2015, the city will host the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit.

To publicise the array of MICE venues in Clark and its surrounding region, Tiotuico's office launched the Central Luzon Convention Planners Guide in March. In Clark, properties that can support business events include Holiday Inn Clark, Lewis Grand Hotel, Grand Palazzo Royale and Widus Hotel & Casino.

Conversations between *TTGmice* and representatives at SMX Convention Specialists Corp (SMXCC)

in 2012 and 2014 revealed that an SMX Convention Centre, or at least a smaller trade hall facility at the nearby SM Clark mall, was under serious consideration. In June, SMXCC vice president and general manager, Dexter Deyto, confirmed that a convention facility remained in the works.

Meanwhile, parent company SM Hotels and Conventions Corporation is going ahead with plans to open a 150-key Park Inn by Radisson hotel in 2016.

On the access front, the destination is supported by Clark International Airport which services airlines such as Jin Air, Asiana Airlines, Dragonair and Qatar Airways. Arrivals through this gateway grew 71 per cent from 2011 to 2012, to reach 1,315,757 passengers.

In August this year, the Aquino presidential administration revived a US\$400 million, 80km railway proposal aiming to link Ninoy Aquino International Airport to Clark, a project which stalled in 2012. If this had gone ahead as planned two years ago, it would have boosted the destination immediately.

Doubts over the project's status

almost certainly had an effect on Clark's tourism and MICE prospects in the short-run. In 2013 arrivals declined 8.8 per cent to 1,200,592, when carrier pullouts began in earnest, starting with Airphil Express (February 2013) and Philippines AirAsia (September 2013).

While AirAsia is resuming flights between Kuala Lumpur and Clark on October 17, it is a far cry from the ambitious operations initially promised by AirAsia CEO Tony Fernandes.

Meanwhile, Cebu Pacific, which operates flights to Singapore, Hong Kong and Macau, ran a short-lived service to Shanghai in end-2013.

Emirates' attempt to mount daily flights between Clark and Dubai – a launched October 1, 2013, – likewise ended in May this year because of "intense competition" and jet fuel excise taxes, the carrier stated.

Despite these setbacks, Clark is still viewed as an intermediate destination, particularly for incentive travellers visiting northern Luzon from Manila, said Anna dela Cruz, account officer of Annset Holidays, who has brought incentive groups of

Clark's airspace comes alive every year for the Philippine International Hot Air Balloon Fiesta. Next year's edition will be held from February 12 to 15

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Ideas A day around Clark



Clark Museum

Continued from page 33

70 to 80 pax to Clark on the way to Baguio and Sagada.

Mitch Ballesteros, chief marketing officer at Ex-Link Events, recommends convention activities of up to 400 pax in Clark.

"I can see an ASEAN business conference being held here, or Rotary International events, because of the proximity of the airport and the absence of traffic," she said.

While Gilda Padua, who operates two travel companies and is president of the Greater Clark Visitors Bureau, is planning to promote nearby Angeles as a destination, so as to strengthen Clark's tourism appeal, she admitted that it would be a tough run.

"(Clark has) small convention facilities but there are still some components missing in the area," commented Padua. She is working with a small but growing base of inbound tour operators and is sourcing for guides and licensed tour buses from Manila.

On the upside, however, Padua said short-stay MICE visitors could take half a day to play golf in Clark, either before or after business meetings, or be brought to neighbouring Subic for a day of post-event leisure activities or overnight stays.

She is also optimistic that Fontana Leisure Parks and Casino's 200-million peso investment into expanding the Fontana Convention Center will grow Clark's current capacity from 500 to 1,000 pax, in time for some of the initial APEC 2015 events in January and February.

Start the day of sight-seeing with a tour of Clark's historical landmarks.

First stop, Clark Museum where well-preserved military artifacts dating back to World War II are on display. Appreciate Clark's past as a military base under Japanese occupation.

After that, drive past the wide open Clark Parade Grounds, where many old-fashioned post-war homes have been converted into restaurants and corporate offices, as well as the sprawling Air Force City grounds, which displays old fighter jets no longer in use.

As lunch hour beckons, make a stop at Camalig Restaurant in downtown Angeles and indulge in

Pampanga's rich specialties which include pork *sisig*, stuffed frog, deep fried crickets and *morcon*.

Later, get onto the pristine highways of the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway and enjoy a 45-minute drive into the port town of Subic, landmarked by high trees. Keep an eye out – and perhaps a camera ready too – for bats and monkeys that trail along the roads.

Continue onwards into the Subic Bay Metropolitan Area and walk down the waterfront, which has a lighthouse and great views of a yacht marina.

Spend the rest of the afternoon at the Zoobic Safari or watch dolphins perform to music and jump through hoops at Ocean Adventure.



Need to know

Widus adds room and facilities

The 119-keys Widus Resort and Casino in Angeles, Clark has completed an initial phase of guestroom and meeting room expansion. Works included the addition of a second hotel tower with 114 rooms in November 2013.

The hotel's lobby was also renovated, while a new 120-seat dining room/function area was added in the casino. By the end of this year, the property will debut a new casino.

Better overland connections

The Greater Clark Visitors Bureau will soon launch a shuttle bus service connecting various business hotels in the Clark area to Metro Manila.

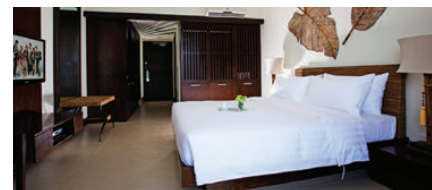
This will complement an existing Airport Lounge service in Trinoma Mall in Quezon City, which brings airport passengers to Clark. The Airport Lounge runs a thrice daily service from Trinoma Mall in Quezon City, and four services a day from Clark to Trinoma.

Escape from the city

Kamana Sanctuary Resort and Spa has 48 beachfront rooms and over-water cottages overlooking Subic's deep water bay, making it an ideal destination for incentive trips. Its location in the Nabasan Beach/Ilanin Forest district allows guests to easily partake in jet-ski and wreck dive activities, as well as hikes through Subic's virgin forests.

Other facilities at the hotel include a restaurant with a well-stocked cellar, a function room for more than 100 people and a spa.

Visit www.kamanasanctuary.com for more information.



Clark International Airport grows in size and capability

Clark International Airport in the Clark Freeport Zone recently completed a 417 million Philippine peso (US\$9.6 million) expansion of its existing passenger terminal, which has expanded from 8,587m² to 18,573m².

The larger terminal now offers 34 check-in terminal counters and 24 immigration counters, and boasts increased baggage and passenger handling capacity. It can now tackle five million passengers annually, up from 2.5 million pre-expansion.

A new budget terminal is also underway, which will further expand airport capacity to 10 million per annum.



Michael Murphy



Bernard Rodrigues



Alain Bachmann



Arnaud Girodon

Australia

Edwina San has joined **Park Hyatt Melbourne** as director of sales & marketing. San was last with the Melbourne Convention Bureau, where she held the position of general manager commercial partnerships for seven years.

SilverNeedle Hospitality has appointed **Russell Durnell** as general manager of **NEXT Hotel Brisbane**. Durnell has extensive expertise in the pre-opening, opening and managing of award-winning hotels and resorts, as well as 20 years of experience in operations, brand and marketing, industry engagement, sales and corporate relations. He joins from Palazzo Versace on the Gold Coast.

China

Michael Murphy is now general manager of **Six Senses Qing Cheng Mountain**, scheduled to open in early 2015. He was recently general manager of the pre-opening team for Howard Johnson Hi-Tech Plaza Chengdu.

Hong Kong

Bernard Rodrigues is now general manager of **New World Millennium Hong Kong Hotel**. Prior to this, Rodrigues headed The

Charterhouse Causeway Bay Hong Kong. He has more than 29 years of hospitality experience across Asia.

Indonesia

Alain Bachmann is releasing his post as general manager of Chedi Andermatt, Switzerland to take up the same position at **The Chedi Club Tanah Gajah**, Ubud, Bali. His managerial experience covers stints at the Peninsula Chicago, the Mandarin Oriental Washington D.C., and the Ritz-Carlton Moscow.

Giulio D'Alberto, formerly on the pre-opening task force for GHM development projects, is now general manager of **The Chedi Sakala**, Bali.

Destination Asia

Indonesia has named **Alysia Gilligan** senior MICE manager, based in Bali. Gilligan has spent the last decade in the Middle East conceptualising and coordinating regional and international level projects, conferences, VIP events, incentives, gala dinners and press launches with multinational firms as clients.

Tate Husband has moved from Swissôtel Grand Shanghai to **Fairmont Jakarta**, taking on the role of director of sales and marketing.

Malaysia

Arnaud Girodon is now general manager of **The Datai Langkawi**. He brings a wealth of hospitality experience to this role, having led at some of the region's luxury hotels and resorts.

Sunway International Hotels & Resorts has appointed **Lucia Franziska** as general manager of Banjaran Hotsprings Retreat Ipoh. Franziska brings with her over 30 years of experience in a range of positions and institutions within the hospitality industry.



Lucia Franziska

Singapore

Cheryl Ong is now director of sales & marketing with **Raffles Singapore**. She was most recently director of sales & marketing for The St. Regis Singapore.

Vincent Lelay has taken on the role of cluster general manager of **Sofitel So Singapore** and **The Singapore Resort & Spa Sentosa Singapore**. Lelay brings to both properties a wealth of international hotel management experiences which include his role as vice president of hotel operations for Greater China.



Vincent Lelay

has picked **Jeff Ross** to lead **Swissôtel Resort Phuket** as general manager. Ross joined the company in 2010 and was last hotel manager at Swissôtel The Stamford, Singapore.

Dusit Thani Laguna Phuket has made **Sanjeev Tandon** its director of sales and marketing. Tandon brings 25 years of international experience in several senior sales and marketing management positions to his new role, and joins the Thai resort from Mövenpick Hotel Al Khobar and Mövenpick Beach Resort Al Khobar.

Thailand

Swissôtel Hotels & Resorts

The importance of content management

Enzo Global's Justin Santiago gives the lowdown on managing content before, during and after your event

Business events can be likened to wedding dinners. Often, there is so much fuss over details such as the menu, decorations, costumes, etc that little is done to ensure guests' participation and enjoyment of the whole experience. In the end, everybody goes home with a full stomach and not much else.

For a business event, it is the content that pulls the whole event together. It is important that this content is communicated as much as possible to attendees so that at the end of the event, they feel they have benefited from it.

Content can be packaged in multiple forms, and there are multiple occasions to utilise it.

If you are featuring good speakers at your event, why not have them write an article on the subject that they will be presenting on and **have the thought leadership article published in the local media prior to the event?** Such articles are not meant to hard-sell your event; rather, they get people to think about the subject matter of your event at a deeper level.

Spend some time to find out the type of content that would suit a particular publication and tweak the content accordingly. Moreover, the media will be more than willing to publish well-written articles by experts rather than carry your press releases providing only the barest details of your event.

During the event, content can be generated from the various presentations being made, summarised and distributed to those who are attending

via a social media platform. These short bursts of information distributed almost real-time either through Twitter, LinkedIn or Facebook provide starting points for discussions among attendees. Those who could not attend a particular session because of time constraint or overlapping tracks can tune in to find out what is going on without missing a beat.

Additionally, discussions with the longest threads will provide an indication of sessions that were of the most interest to participants, thus providing a guide when planning for future events.

Finally, discussions need not end with the conclusion of the event. You can **compile all summaries and discussions into a final report post-event**, which can then serve as a record of what happened and act as an information bank. The report can also be used as a marketing tool providing potential sponsors or interested parties detailed information about your event when you start planning it for the following year.



Justin Santiago is the director of Enzo Global, a strategic communications company with offices in Malaysia and Singapore and is in the business of helping event organisers bring their events to the next level.

For more information, visit www.enzoglobal.com

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