

December 2014/January 2015

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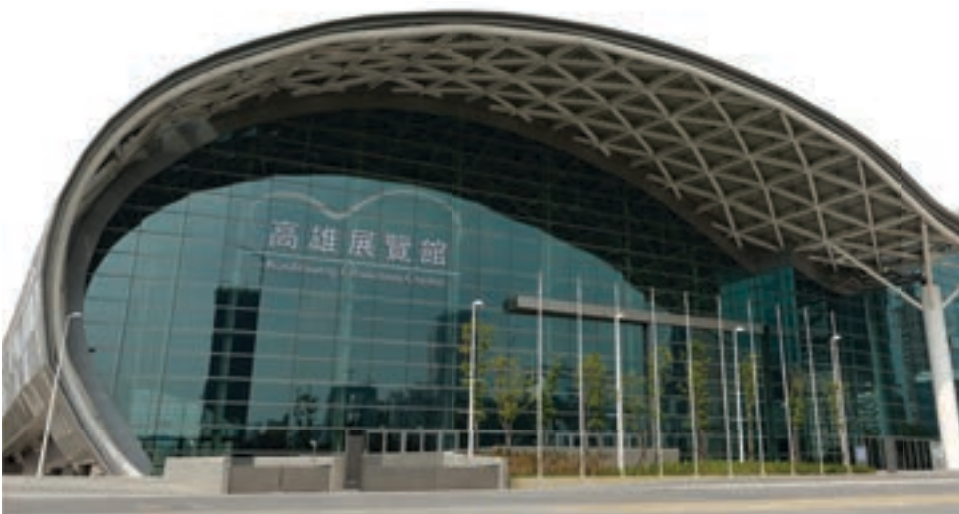
FCm launches MICE division
in Singapore

Hong Kong trade says no
cause for BIG concern

TTGmice reporters pick their
best – and worst – moments
on the job in 2014



2014 Debrief



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40 **tude**
Forty Years, As Strong As Ever



Raini Hamdi
Senior Editor

Never all bad

As the year comes to a close, it is common to reflect on what was good, what's bad; who won, who lost; what's most memorable, what's best left forgotten – as we do in this issue with our cover story titled, *2014 Debrief*.

While this presents a neat recap of the year that was, jogging our memory on the key developments of the past 12 months, let's remind ourselves that good vs bad is not always so black and white, that we should always try and see the 'good' that can come from the 'bad' (and vice versa, as too much of a good thing can also harm, as we know).

So you think Occupy Hong Kong is bad? One good, as a result of the pro-democracy student protests, is it opens the minds of MICE planners to venues and hotels in the outskirts (see our Hong Kong report on page 29), at a time when the demographic trend is towards younger Millennial executives who tend to prefer upscale 'lifestyle' options and want to absorb the colours of a neighbourhood in a destination.

So you think the military coup in Bangkok is bad? Well, look at what the army has done to clean up the beaches in Phuket of unsightly vendors and beach chairs operated by the mafia previously. I had to go and see the change for myself, so I headed to Phuket in the November 28 weekend and, for once, I could see the beach, whether in Patong or Laguna, where the problem was so entrenched previously that I would never think it could ever be resolved. But, in two days, the army came in and swept clean.

The beach clean-up is a boon for leisure travel and MICE, and is just the kind of good publicity that Thailand needs. Amari Phuket, for instance, enjoyed its best October and November this year since the hotel opened in 1982, outperforming its budget by 25-30 per cent, according to Onyx Hospitality Group vice president-area general manager, South Thailand, Pierre-Andre Pelletier.

"The clean up (of Patong beach) has helped, as well as the US\$20 million investment on the property's renovation which has enabled us to achieve higher rates," said Pelletier. "Before, MICE groups didn't really want to come to Patong, but now that word is out that it has a resort feel again, more are coming. We've had eight incentive groups recently from Singapore and Malaysia – bank, insurance and petroleum companies among them – and will be targeting for more next year."

So, there's almost always some good which will come out of a bad situation. At the time of writing this note, Japan is in a recession, the Eurozone is fighting off a deflation, China's economic growth is slowing while the Russian rouble has lost 30-40 per cent of its value – we could do well to chant this mantra!

My team and I wish you a joyful year-end and a happy, healthy and prosperous new year.



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COVER STORY

15 2014 debrief

The year brought heart-wrenching accidents, prolonged political strifes and nature's wrath in some places, all of which hurt business tourism. Despite this, the meetings industry in Asia-Pacific soldiered on.

COUNTRY REPORTS

29 No cause for big concern

Most meetings are continuing despite Occupy Central, Prudence Lui reports

32 A brighter incentive glow

More Asian MICE groups are starting to fall in love with Jeju, but the lack of direct air access can hinder growth, writes Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

35 Good buzzing in the southern state

A new MICE strategy and slew of infrastructure developments promise to raise the tourism appeal of Malaysia's Johor state. By S Puvaneswary

38 Building for the future

New and upcoming infrastructure, all with extensive event facilities, are helping Dubai to achieve its tourism vision, writes Shekhar Niyogi

40 Lure of the Big Apple

Encouraged by rising Asian MICE footfalls, New York City is working even harder to capture more Asian business events, writes Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

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DEPARTMENTS

- 1 To our readers
- 4 Marketplace
- 7 Talk of the trade
- 10 Client files
- 11 Case studies
- 43 Appointments
- 44 Gallery

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 14,000 sqm / 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

Highlights

- With the pillar-less Kashgar Grand Ballroom and six junior ballrooms, plus access to an additional three junior ballrooms in Sands Cotai Central, our total space can breakout to 166 individual meeting rooms.
- More than 2,500 guest rooms and suites are twin rooms which allows flexibility to accommodate large groups.
- Our professional banquet and culinary teams offer customized catering service for special off-site events.



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Bringing hops to life in Bangkok

What better way to reward your delegates or clients after a hard day's work or touring than swigging delicious craft brews from all around the world? If you're in Bangkok, send them off to Mikkeller for a round (or several rounds) of tipples.

One of three Mikkeller microbreweries in the world (the other two being in Copenhagen and San Francisco), the Bangkok outpost is tucked within a rustic house surrounded by lush greenery and private residences on Ekkamai Soi 10. Since opening its doors early this year – by a trio of beer experts Mike MacDonald, Jakob Rasmussen and Mikkel Borg Bjergsø – the bar has bubbled up as a hit among the city's discerning drinkers for its experimental approach and unique craft beers, offering a varied list of 30 rotating taps and specialised bottles from renowned breweries worldwide.

Private tastings at Mikkeller Bangkok can be arranged for groups up to 20 pax, which enable guests to explore a specific style (brand or country) during these closed sessions, from light beer tastings of around 800 baht (US\$24.40) per pax to more aficionado-oriented affairs focusing on vintage and barrel-aged beers, which could go up to 3,000-4,000 baht per pax.

Events are entirely customised for the group and, depending on what's in stock and the tasting theme, a session typically lasts one to two hours, and includes six beers, along with education, food and extras. Well-received beers include Mikkeller Sukhumvit Pilsner, To Oi Sofa King Pale, Amager Sinner Series Lust and Modern Times Lomaland.

Off-site tasting sessions can also be conducted for bigger groups. But as Mikkeller's products are draft, off-site events are usually focused on bottles instead, with one or two draft options.

Contact (66-2) 381-9891 or info@mikkellerbangkok.com for reservations and customised tasting programmes.

The Chandelier brightens Sheraton Hua Hin's business events offerings

A new pillarless convention hall has opened at the Sheraton Hua Hin Resort and Spa.

Named The Chandelier, the space is said to be the largest and most modern resort conference facility in Thailand's western region. Measuring 892m² in size and boasting a 7.6m high ceiling, The Chandelier can accommodate up to 680 pax in theatre-style or 800 guests for cocktail receptions. It also comes with a spacious foyer and direct access for vehicle displays, and is equipped with the latest technology.

Chatchaya Glaiprayong, director of sales & marketing of Sheraton Hua Hin Resort & Spa and Sheraton Hua Hin Pranburi Villas, said: "Our associates are excited to exhibit this new facility's versatility to the public. With

so many different event possibilities, we are eager to host and create memorable experiences in all aspects, from exclusive conferences to world-class events".

The Chandelier joins three other event venues – The Grand Ballroom, State Room 1 and State Room 2 – at the 240-key Sheraton Hua Hin Resort and Spa.



Aman launches first city property in Tokyo

Japan has become the first destination to offer an Aman city hotel with the opening of Aman Tokyo in December.

Located on the top six floors of the new Otemachi Tower, the 84-unit urban sanctuary overlooks the financial district of Otemachi.

The centrepiece of the hotel's lobby, soaring nearly 30m high, is an architectural feature resembling the interior of a paper lantern which diffuses sunlight in the day to illuminate the lobby while at night, the ambience evolves via a series of orchestrated lighting scenes.

Aman Tokyo features three F&B outlets: The Café by Aman which sells Mediterranean-inspired fare; The Lounge by Aman, offering drinks and snacks; and The Restaurant by Aman, serving Asian- and Japanese-inspired dishes.

There is also a glass-fronted walk-in wine cellar with more than 1,200 wines, a Cigar Lounge and a Resident's Library that offers books on Japanese art and culture.

Aman Tokyo's rooms and suites all contain a deep soaking tub, which is a core part of the Japanese bathing ritual. The 71m² Deluxe Rooms are the largest entry-level rooms in the city, followed by the Premier Rooms and the Suites which start at 141m².

Recreational facilities include a fitness centre with yoga/pilates studios, a swimming pool, an inner garden and an Aman spa.





HOT DEALS



Empire Hotel Hong Kong Wan Chai

Empire Hotel Hong Kong Wan Chai

Situated in the central business district on Hong Kong island, the hotel is offering a 50 per cent discount on meeting packages booked by June 30, 2015. To qualify, a minimum booking of eight guestrooms is required per meeting group.

The half-day package is priced at HK\$308 (US\$39) per pax, inclusive of one coffee break, while the full-day option costs HK\$528 per pax, inclusive of two coffee breaks. Special meeting offers include a complimentary set-up suitable for various meeting purposes and each coffee break

features two snack choices.

The Empire Grand Room meeting venue and guestrooms are subject to availability and hotel's confirmation. A 10 per cent service charge applies. Package prices are applicable for a minimum of 10 persons.

For more details, contact (852) 3692-2134 / 3692-2163 or email meetings-wc@empirehotelsandresorts.com.

The Mira Hong Kong

New business events booked at The Mira Hong Kong by June 30, 2015 will enjoy a number of perks, including an upgraded sixth room for every five rooms booked; a free conference package for the sixth person for every five delegates; a complimentary hour-long cocktail with five kinds of canapés at Vibes or one of the Specialty Suites for bookings of at least 50 room nights; and a free iPad mini for the event planner with a total minimum spend of HK\$150,000 (US\$1,934) net on one event, inclusive of room and F&B charges.

Conference packages offered at The Mira Hong Kong are priced at HK\$850 and HK\$700 for a full- and half-day arrangement respectively. The package includes luncheon, two/one thematic coffee break(s) and a full set of meeting amenities.

Terms and conditions apply.

Contact mice@themirahotel.com and

quote "MICETOTHEMAX2015" to enjoy this limited-time offer.

Klapsons The Boutique Hotel Singapore

This boutique hotel in Singapore's central business district is offering a series of meeting packages that require a minimum booking of only 12 people.

The full-day option is priced from S\$75** (US\$58**) per person, while the half-day option goes for S\$65** and up.

Event planners can also host breakfast meetings at the hotel, for 15 to 30 delegates. Prices from S\$28** per person.

Terms and conditions apply.

Call (65) 6521-9000 or email sales@klapsons.com for more information.



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Keyless simplicity now a reality

Starwood Hotels & Resorts has launched SPG Keyless, an initiative that transforms the guest's smartphone into a room key and enables guests to bypass the front desk when checking in.

First rolled out within a week in November to 10 properties under the Aloft, Element and W brands, SPG Keyless will eventually be made available on 30,000 doors in 150 hotels around the globe by early 2015. Hotels in Asia that offer this convenience now include Aloft Beijing, W Doha, W Hong Kong and W Singapore – Sentosa Cove.

It is available to SPG members who book a room through one of Starwood's channels.

Frits van Paasschen, Starwood's president & CEO, said: "Not only does SPG Keyless alleviate a perennial pain point for travellers, but it also transforms the first interaction with our guests from one that is transactional to something more personal."



Pegasus flaunts Jewels of Romantic Europe to South-east Asia

Vienna-based Pegasus – The Welcoming Agencies is promoting the region of Bavaria, Tirol, and Salzburg to South-east Asian MICE groups looking for a different experience of Europe.

Marketed as an alliance called Jewels of Romantic Europe, the region may not excite first-time MICE visitors to Europe, said Renate Forte, managing director of Pegasus. But the English-speaking region is 20-30 per cent cheaper than major European capitals and is easily accessible through Munich and Vienna, she added.

"There is snow throughout the year at Zugspitze, Germany's highest mountain about 90 minutes south of Munich, and snow activities can be organised for incentive groups even in summer," she said. "Incentive groups also have the option to use Munich, Vienna, Salzburg or Innsbruck as the base and make day trips to places of interest in the region."

Florian Pötsch, business division-aviation, head of travel industry and hub marketing, Munich Airport, said companies such as Prudential and Great Eastern Life from Singapore, and Thai conglomerate PTT, have chosen the region for mid-size incentive groups of 700 to 1,000-plus people.

"Löwenbräukeller (a venue offering a Bavarian cultural and dining experience) for example, which has a ballroom for up to 2,000 people, can offer halal food and Indian cuisine," he said.

Octave Rooftop Lounge & Bar

This multi-faceted venue elevates rooftop entertaining to a higher notch in the City of Angels. By **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

Bangkok has no lack of rooftop bars in the downtown districts of Sathorn and Ratchaprasong, but Octave – perched on the topmost 45th to 49th floors of Bangkok Marriott Hotel Sukhumvit – brings a fresh perspective with its slightly off-centre location in Thonglor, a buzzing lifestyle haven popular among Bangkokians and expats.

The venue features a restaurant, a private dining room, a bar and a rooftop lounge. With a contemporary design inspired by swanky New York apartment terraces, the décor veers towards modern industrial chic with liberal use of wooden furniture and timber-decked floor, and only a piece of reinforced glass separating visitors from the impressive vistas on each floor.

MICE application

Guests arrive at Octave via dedicated eleva-



tors to the 45th floor, a 76-seat elongated lounge with proper dining tables and high sofas; the indoor attic (47th floor) accommodates 50 pax and the balcony bar (48th floor) can host another 46 pax. A flight of stairs leads to the rooftop bar on the 49th floor bar, undeniably the pièce de résistance of the multi-level venue.

With a maximum capacity of 150 pax for cocktail receptions, the rooftop bar is also the most requested venue for private functions, according to Grace Hoang, the hotel's spokesperson. The hotel is flexible when it comes to corporate events. Upon special request, Octave's bartenders can perform for guests to jazz up the party.

For cocktail receptions, groups are encouraged to start welcome drinks at between 17.00 to 17.30, in order to catch the 'magical hour' as the sprawling metropolis is set aglow by a

dipping sun (good weather permitting) before turning into a twinkling destination criss-crossed with lines of bumper-to-bumper traffic and BTS skytrains plying along Sukhumvit Road, and ships and cranes docked along the Chao Phraya River in the not-too-far distance.

F&B concept

Marriott's director of beverage Asia-Pacific, Blake Walker, is the brain behind creative Thai-inflected cocktails like Taeng-mo Haze, which fuses agave tequila with water melon, lime juice, sweet vermouth and rosé wine; and Land of Smiles, Ketel One vodka stirred with junmai sake, lime, lychee, passion fruit and coconut syrup. The compact food menu focuses on fresh seafood as well as Asian-influenced dishes such as Wagyu beef udon noodles and meat yakitori – these tapas-style dishes come in platter sizes too, ideal for sharing.

Service and ambience

For me, the signature rooftop bar on the topmost floor is the real highlight as the space offers unbridled 360-degree views of Bangkok, further accentuated by a neon-blue circular open bar that makes an iconic statement in the middle of wooden-decked deck.

Bearing a low-key, mature yet edgy vibe, Octave does not have the pretentious air of other grander rooftop venues in town.

Contacts

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2 Sukhumvit Road Soi 57
Email: anchalee.m@marriott.com
Website: www.bangkokmarriott.com

Opening hours

17.00-02.00



Emirates goes after corporate opportunity

By Gracia Chiang

Emirates Singapore has created a global sales position to drive demand for the airline's five daily flights to Dubai, the most recent of which was launched in August.

Country manager Singapore and Brunei, Andrew Bunn, said the opportunity to develop the local market had only materialised in December 2012 when Emirates introduced an A380 for one of its daily services permanently, which pumped up capacity by 46 per cent. It now has 35 flights a week between Dubai and Singapore, 28 of them nonstop and seven via Colombo, and daily services from Singapore to Brisbane and Melbourne.

He said: "Before my time (Bunn came onboard in April), we would be crying out for seats from inventory control for point-of-sale Singapore. Our connectors from Brisbane and Melbourne were always operating with very high loads, with seats being sold by Australia and the UK, or other markets."

While only 15 to 20 per cent of revenue from Singapore is corporate, Bunn wants to grow this by reaching out not just to TMCs and business travel agencies, but also travel managers and end-users by building up loyalty through Emirates' frequent flyer programme.

The new global sales executive hired in October would target Singapore companies that have a regional footprint or

South-east Asian companies that may not have a global deal in place. Bunn said: "What Emirates has traditionally done is focus more on the volume market. But over a period of time, especially with such a great business class product, we can go directly to the corporates. That also protects the yield."



Bunn: opportunity

"(Singapore) companies have always traditionally picked one carrier, but that is changing. We're able to position ourselves right up against the competition because of our network and product... Why not take a big aircraft into and out of Dubai and have product consistency all the way rather than connecting somewhere in Europe onto a small aircraft? As our network grows, we're able to offer that."

Emirates has been rapidly expanding, with routes launched in recent months including Boston, Chicago, Brussels, Budapest and Oslo. Next March, it is also stepping up frequency on New York (JFK) with a fourth daily flight using an A380.

Calling the new destinations a game changer in being able to attract the leisure market as well, Bunn said these have helped turn Singapore, which has traditionally been strong in transit traffic, into a market in its own right. From a "high percentage" before, transit passengers now generally account for 35 to 40 per cent across all flights.

Exotissimo now known as

EXO

TRAVEL

Exotissimo has shortened its name to Exo Travel and unveiled a new look, marking a new chapter for the Thailand-based DMC which has been operating in Asia for more than 20 years.

Group managing director Hamish Keith said the rebrand does not signal a change of direction, but is "more a case of the brand better representing who we are and the services we offer".

Exo Travel's new name is accompanied by two short films to explain the rationale behind the rebranding.

One of the videos, titled Our Brand Story, shows how the new logo provides Exo with more flexibility when used for marketing.

The new branding also allows the company "to breathe more life" into the specialist divisions working inside Exo, it said, referring to Exo Foundation, Exo Events and Exo Adventure.

Olivier Colomés, one of the founders, explained: "We now work with more than 1,300 agencies from 76 countries, and we've grown to 700 staff and 22 offices in eight destinations in Asia."

"With a global workforce and client base, we felt it was important to explain the new brand visually to our clients and team so they could really appreciate the new brand direction."

{ Talking numbers }



240

The amount in billion US\$ that US companies spend on incentive travel a year, a sizeable proportion outside their own country



48

The percentage of US respondents saying the overall use of motivational travel experiences will increase or substantially increase in the next six months, a four-year high. 87% believe the use of incentive travel over the next one to three years will rise or substantially rise

Source: SITE International Foundation

Meetings management up – except in China

End-to-end meetings management, with time and financial savings as well as an accurate overview of total event costs, is seeing success with meeting planners except those in China, the 2015 CWT Meetings & Events Forecast shows.

Meeting planners in Germany have realised savings of up to 23 per cent, while in Australia, average savings of 10-20 per cent have been achieved, said the survey. Interest in end-to-end meetings management is increasing across the Asia-Pacific and Latin America regions. However, the study noted that meeting planners in China are unique in going against the end-to-end trend and are expected to continue to separate business into group air, hotel room, meeting space and land operations bookings – using a specialist vendor for each one.

Compliance will also remain top-of-mind among meeting planners, especially for pharmaceutical organisations that have to abide by meeting and events regulations imposed by the Sunshine Act.

Floyd Widener, senior vice president, CWT Meetings & Events Worldwide, said: “This is the third edition of our forecast, and it’s interesting to see the renewed



focus on compliance in our industry. With 2015 on the horizon, the forecast provides valuable insight for our clients to refer to in upcoming budgeting and negotiations, whether they’re focused on meetings, events or strategic meetings management.”

The report also offers several recommendations to help meeting planners achieve success in the next 12 months. They include trying hybrid events to save costs and involve remote employees unable to participate in person; basing events in-country or in-region to minimise costs; decreasing carbon footprint and delegate travel times; and working with an agency with strong industry relationships to get the best deals and supplier terms.

Pac World enters three markets

Pacific World has forayed into three new emerging MICE destinations – Croatia, Sri Lanka and the Maldives – through parent company TUI Travel.

Existing TUI joint ventures on the ground in each destination will direct Pacific World’s operations.

For Pacific World Croatia, Pacific World is tying up with Gulliver Travel, which it said is a strong player in the Balkan region’s MICE scene.

Aitken Spence Travel, with its long-standing relationships with local suppliers, is the appointed partner for Pacific World



Sri Lanka and Pacific World Maldives.

Harsha Krishnan, strategic development director of Pacific World, said: “Through the shared ownership structure provided by TUI Travel, we can guarantee service standards and ensure that creativity and the customer experience is second to none.”

{ 2015 Calendar }

**February
24-25**

AIME
Melbourne Australia

March 4-8
ITB Berlin,
Germany

March 12-13
UFI Open Seminar
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FCm launches MICE division in Singapore

By Paige Lee Peiqi

TRAVEL management company FCm Travel Solutions has launched FCm MICE in Singapore to grab a slice of the meetings pie.

To compete effectively with established MICE players, Mark Ten, general manager of FCm Travel Solutions, said FCm MICE would leverage parent company Flight Centre Travel Group (FCTG) for “global negotiating muscle to deliver the most competitive prices on all travel, meetings and events requests”.

Explained Ten: “MICE planners are always

looking for creative programmes with more interesting and non-traditional offerings, yet this is also a very price-sensitive segment and customers want a lot more value for less.

“As such, we have a network of suppliers and DMCs that we can leverage, and close relationships with NTOs that will allow us to tap into new ideas for immersive experiences.”

He said establishing FCm MICE is part of the five-year plan at FCTG to boost its operations in Singapore.

“We have been fielding smaller meeting and

incentive requests from our corporate client base for some time, and now is the right time to extend ourselves into MICE.

“We see offering expertise in the MICE sector as a natural extension of our corporate offering, and necessary as part of an end-to-end service for our corporate clients,” said Ten.

FCm MICE comprises three staff. This will eventually grow to seven, said Ten.

It will tackle both inbound and outbound MICE and handle about 10 per cent of the overall business in FCTG.

ICCA goes to Dubai

Dubai will host the 57th ICCA Congress in 2018.

Hosting the congress is a step towards the destination’s Tourism

Vision 2020 to increase arrivals to the emirate through a regular stream of events, of which business events form an integral part, according to Steen Jakobsen, director of Dubai Business Events, a division of the Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing.

Said Jakobsen: “The ICCA Congress is known to attract a gathering of meeting

industry professionals from across the globe and will be a fantastic opportunity for the emirate to familiarise

leading ICCA members with everything Dubai and the Middle East have to offer for business and leisure tourists.”

ICCA CEO, Martin Sirk, added: “Dubai

is positioning itself as the Middle East hub for association development, and the potential for ICCA membership growth is very exciting, so there are very compelling business opportunities for both ICCA and our members.”



Sirk: Middle East potential for ICCA membership growth



Technology meets fashion at Fuji Xerox

HONG KONG When Fuji Xerox Hong Kong launched its Versant 80 Press, a new colour production printer suited for specialised professional printing requirements to print-on-demand jobs in offices, it fashioned two eye-catching dresses worn by models – made entirely from materials printed on the Versant series.

One of the models wore a full-length blue 'Gaia' dress which combined 38 sheets of A3 clear transparency with over 500 sheets of gold, galvanised and lustre metallic double-sided sheets. Every sheet was printed with about

eight feather images which were then cut out and sewn together to create a beautiful scaled effect.

A low-cut, above-the-knee pink 'La Fleur' dress worn by another model was made from over 70 A3 metallic sheets, including ice gold, pearl, lustre and gold leaf, and 20 sheets of Rives design paper, a white stock with a canvas-like texture, to form a fun, feminine design.

How's that for a lesson on how to make the launch of a new printer sexy, apart from demonstrating the might of new printing technology and the quality it can produce?



Nu Skin gives Dubai a shine

DUBAI Nu Skin, a skin care company celebrating its 30th anniversary, this year, brought a whopping 14,500 attendees from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan on an incentive in April.

The extensive and complicated logistics for the event included 77 flights which included two full Emirates A380 Charters, 40,000 roomnights in 40 hotels and more than 370 coaches escorting the guests on a full city tour of Dubai, a dhow cruise and a visit to the Dubai Mall, Burj Khalifa and Palm Jumeirah.

In addition, the group enjoyed full-fledged gala dinners in groups of 7,500 at the Bab Al Shams Desert Arena, and held educational seminars at the Dubai World Trade Centre, the Middle East's largest event and exhibition centre.

For all that, SITE International awarded Dubai a SITE Crystal Award for best destination-based experiential incentive travel programme, presented at the association's global conference in Rotterdam on November 18.

Paul Miller, SITE president 2014, said: "This was the largest single incentive

programme Dubai had hosted and they excelled in meeting an extremely demanding proposition which turned out to be an unmitigated success for not only the Nu Skin group and their delegates, but Dubai as a whole."



Steen Jakobsen, director of Dubai Business Events, a division of the Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, with the Crystal award

Fab food and fast cars

SINGAPORE Corporate clients in the city are being reintroduced in style to Suntec Singapore International Convention & Exhibition Centre through a regular CEO Cocktail Evening. For many, it opens their eyes that convention centres do have exclusive and intimate spaces and are able to pull off classy events – strengths which Suntec CEO, Arun Madhok, wants to send across.

Said Jennifer Pok, CEO of EventCliQue: "I enjoyed the opportunity to attend this cocktail and sample the delectable spread prepared by the Suntec chefs. The Summit

Suite is a wonderful addition to the centre's facilities and I look forward to future events at Suntec Singapore."

Corporates are able to book the Summit Suite, which can host up to 20 pax.

Said Adam Flinter, executive director of The Ate Group: "It was a wonderful evening of great food and company! The food selection was exquisite and I enjoyed the culinary team's close attention to detail. I thought the unveiling of the live dessert station was a nice touch."

The most recent CEO cocktail was held on November 27.

An August 15 evening which TTGmice attended started with a tour around the Marina Bay street circuit in a fine selection of super cars – an Audi R8 Spyder, a Lamborghini Gallardo Spyder and a Maserati Gran Turismo Coupe – an experience organised through

a tie-up with Dream Cars.

This was followed by a hors d'oeuvres buffet in the Summit Suite VIP lounge. It culminated in the unveiling of Suntec Singapore's executive chef Alfred Lee's latest creations – Avocado Roulade Boston Lobster with Ginger Flower Vinaigrette.





Singapore International Festival of Arts 2014 gala

Not blindly following the client’s instructions, Pan Pacific Singapore’s culinary team proposes an alternative that makes for a successful event, writes
Paige Lee Pei Qi

Event
Singapore International Festival of Arts 2014 gala opening
Client
Arts House Limited
Venue
Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall
Date
August 14
No. of participants
500
Objective
To deliver a presentable and palatable menu for the grand opening gala at the Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall

Pan Pacific Singapore was the official hotel partner for the Singapore International Festival of Arts 2014, which took place from August 14 to September 21. In addition to sponsoring 633 room nights for the visiting guest artists and VIPs, the hotel was tasked with the catering and crafting of menu for the grand opening gala at the Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall.

The client, Arts House Limited, originally requested for a buffet presentation for the opening gala. However, based on Pan Pacific’s previous experiences with off-premise events, buffet setups for a large number of guests often lead to a longer waiting time.

As such, Pan Pacific’s executive chef, Vincent Aw, suggested presenting butler-passed canapés instead, which would be more convenient for guests, allow for a more engaging session, and be better suited for the high-profile event.

Consequently, an international selection of canapés for 500 guests was approved and presented. Aw crafted the menu to present a variety of items including meat, seafood, vegetables and dessert to entice guests to sample them. As the Wagyu Beef Sliders has consistently been one of the most popular items on the menu at Atrium,

the hotel’s lobby bar, the culinary team prepared additional servings of this dish as a main. Most savoury dishes were also served on homemade bread and pastries to fill guests’ stomachs.

To ensure consistency in the quality of food, the initial crafting of the canapés was done at the hotel while the final preparations were completed on-site by the chef and his team.

The decorations for the gala were intentionally kept to a minimal, as the main focus of the event was on the setting – the recently unveiled architecture of the conserved Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall. To enhance the old-world charm of the colonial building, the team decided to use steel and glass-top cocktail tables, which served as an aesthetic contrast to the building, while providing a place for guests to enjoy the food and drinks more comfortably.

The culinary offerings and charming presentation of the canapés were well-received by the client and guests alike.

“Pan Pacific Singapore made the opening gala of Singapore International Festival of Arts so memorable with the delightful canapés of a beautiful variety paired with delicious beverages – just right to send us off happily to the performance,” said Lee Chor Lin, CEO of Arts House Limited.



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Food and Hotel Asia Maldives 2014

Despite the rough weather damaging some contestants' exhibits, the quick-witted organisers have not allowed that to deter fair competition, writes **Feizal Samath**



Organisers of the Food & Hotel Asia Maldives 2014 – Exhibition & International Culinary Challenge, held across three days in August in the Maldivian capital Male, probably could not be prepared enough for the kind of problems they encountered.

First, a lot of food ingredients, kitchen equipment and other exhibition items had to be transported from Colombo in Sri Lanka, by boat, according to Imran Hassan, energetic Director of CDC Events, the main Sri Lankan co-organiser.

The ship carrying the equipment set off on August 7 from Colombo, but encountered rough weather halfway and had to turn back. A second attempt too, was unsuccessful. The third trip succeeded but upon reaching Male on August 22, the sea was too rough for docking at the port. Special permission had to be obtained from the customs to unload the goods onto a barge mid-sea, then transfer them ashore.

Cake structures were among some of the many delicate items brought by boat. Coming in shaky *dhonis* (a traditional Maldivian sail boat), some chefs had their cake structures broken, which they had to quickly repair in the morning of the event, a mere few hours before the competition. Pre-made cakes packed inside boxes were also damaged, while pots and pans were jumbled up.

The rough sea also posed the second challenge, according to Imran, of transporting the chefs from outlying resorts, two to three hours away by boat, to Male.

Some chefs arrived the night before while others arrived only in the morning of the competition.

For Gerald Mendis, chairman of the Chefs Guild of Sri Lanka which helped to organise the event and put together a team of top international judges, it was one of the most challenging and unusual experiences.

“Judging competitions (in Sri Lanka and other parts of the world) has been relatively easy in terms of logistics, where you move equipment and goods inland. This event in Male was totally different, since the contestants came from other islands,” he recalled.

The organisers felt it necessary to inform the judges about the difficulties encountered by the contestants while they were being transported to Male for the competition.

“We told the judges to be lenient when it came to damaged cake structures. They were flexible and did not deduct marks for any ‘mistake’ or any imperfection due to the unavoidable crisis,” Mendis said.

The event was also subject to the risk of rainy weather, which, if it had happened, would not have allowed half the contestants to make it to Male on rough sea.

“We kept our fingers crossed, and fortunately, it didn’t rain,” Mendis shared.

“Fortunately also, due to the difficulty in transporting the delicate pre-made cakes, there were quite a few Maldivian women from Male who took part in the competition.”

Event

Food and Hotel Asia Maldives 2014

Venue

Dharubaaruge Exhibition Centre

Dates

August 24-26, 2014

No. of Participants

Over 2,000

Objective

To facilitate trade among exhibitors from all over the world offering products and services needed by the Maldives' resort industry

Challenges

Transporting 325 chefs from outlying resorts as well as kitchen equipment and other items from Sri Lanka by boat to Male, on rough sea

Solution

Requesting the competition's judges to be lenient with contestants whose exhibits were damaged or affected in the process of being ferried to Male



Clockwise from left: Occupy Central in Hong Kong, APEC in Beijing, Malaysia Airlines' mysterious disappearance, military coup in Thailand and the new Kaohsiung Exhibition Center



2014 debrief

The year brought heart-wrenching accidents, prolonged political strifes and nature's wrath in some places, all of which hurt business tourism. Despite this, the meetings industry in Asia-Pacific soldiered on. *TTGmice* looks back to a year too significant to be quickly forgotten



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AUSTRALIA By Natasha Dragun

Realising the country is woefully under-developed on event/conference space and infrastructure, several major cities in Australia announced plans this year to significantly expand their MICE facilities.

The Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre is set to expand the South Wharf precinct footprint to include new retail space, additional car parks, hotels, and multi-purpose convention and exhibition facilities, while Brisbane's Howard Smith Wharves will soon welcome a new 1,500m² exhibition space.

In Sydney, work is underway on a new convention centre capable of hosting three separate, self-sufficient, concurrent events, with an 8,000-seat plenary. The International Convention Centre Sydney, due to complete in December 2016, will also feature 35,000m² of exhibition space, a red carpet theatre, grand ballroom, meeting rooms, a hotel and public spaces.

"There will be challenges over the next few years while these developments are completed, but the results at the end of 2016 will be worth it," said Lyn Lewis-Smith, CEO of Business Events Sydney.

A number of states have recorded their most successful MICE year in history.

Victoria, for example, hosted 1,030 events with nearly 1.5 million visitors generating more than A\$274 million (US\$234 million) for the state economy.

The country as a whole remains a popular destination for international MICE planners. A recent Tourism Australia study found that 85 per cent of planners intend to recommend it to corporate clients in the next 12 months. Planners view Australia as "low risk", with the destination particularly popular among the Indian, Chinese and Indonesian markets.

But cost and distance remain issues at the decision-maker's level. The report recommends customising exclusive experiences to overcome these barriers.



Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre

Most memorable

- **105th Rotary International Convention Sydney** Held in Australia for the first time since 2003, this was arguably the largest MICE event of the year.
- **2014 G-20 Australia summit** The first time the summit was held in Australia, the event marked a major test of infrastructure and security for Brisbane when it took place from November 15 and 16.
- **Australian Tourism Exchange** headed to Cairns for the first time in the event's 35-year history, with fam trips taking in the Great Barrier Reef and other places.

Best forgotten

- The **20th International AIDS Conference**, the largest international conference on HIV and AIDS to be held in Melbourne, attracted worldwide publicity not because of any boo-boos but due to the fact that many of the researchers attending the event were on MH17, which was shot down over Ukrainian airspace en-route to Australia via Kuala Lumpur.
- The **International Convention of Jehovah's Witnesses** attracted 70,000 people to Melbourne during the three-day event, which coincided with the Caulfield Cup and saw the city bursting at the seams in terms of room and event space capacity.
- **Sydney 2014**, originally scheduled for two days in Sydney, was cancelled this year as the group goes into liquidation.

Most memorable

- **Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)** The prestigious series of meetings returned to China after a 13-year hiatus, taking place in Beijing in November. Shanghai was the first Chinese city to host APEC in 2001.
- **43th International Advertising Association's World Congress** Marking the most spectacular event to date for the China National Convention Center in Beijing, the event in May was attended by 1,600 delegates from the world's leading advertising agencies.
- **Asian Attractions Expo 2014** When the event took place in Beijing in June, it drew 9,000 delegates, beating 2013's record of 5,350 delegates when it was held in Singapore's Sands Expo and Convention Centre.

Best forgotten

- The **APEC meetings** turned out to be a double-edged sword, with at least one DMC reporting that a confirmed conference had to move to another destination as the high-level meetings occupied key venues in Beijing.
- **No national CVB** China still does not have a CVB at the national level, and MICE players are less supportive of city convention bureaus.
- **Austerity drive** The government's anti-corruption drive has resulted in huge downsizing of government-related events. Grand banquets have become buffets; last-minute meetings have become the norm. Five-star hotels have been the worst hit.



CHINA By Caroline Boey

China's MICE market is developing at full throttle, with convention and exhibition centres sprouting all over the country.

James Zheng, vice director, Shanghai International Conference Management Organization, attributed this to city governments' realisation of MICE benefits to their local economies.

But he lamented: "The number one issue with China's MICE industry is that it is usually about *zhan* (exhibitions) rather than *hui* (meetings), and the majority of companies are exhibition support businesses rather than meetings management and meetings support businesses."

The number of international meetings held in China has grown, however, and more were held in cities other than Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, the 2013 ICCA data shows. Jennifer Salsbury, senior director, international, of the China National Convention Center in Beijing, said this trend will continue. She said: "By holding their meetings in China, international organisations not only expose many leading scientists to cutting-edge research in China, but it becomes possible for many Chinese, who may not be

able to travel overseas to attend similar meetings, to learn from world experts."

With the China MICE Cities Alliance's membership expanding to 14 cities – Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Xi'an, Chengdu, Hangzhou, Kunming, Sanya, Nanjing, Xiamen, Dalian, Guilin, Guangzhou and Suzhou – from the original eight founding members in 2012, professional standards are expected to improve, Zheng opined.

An increasing number of training courses are being offered in various Chinese cities vying for MICE, he noted.

But gaps in pricing expectations remain challenges, said Barbara Wang, general manager, Motivate China. "Many clients think China is a low-cost destination but the reality is China is getting expensive due to the strengthening of its currency over the years."





HONG KONG

By Prudence Lui

Hong Kong's business events sector continues to grow at a steady pace, with markets like North Asia, Singapore and India performing particularly well in the first six months of the year, going by statistics from the Hong Kong Tourism Board.

The city welcomed nearly two million overnight business visitors in 1H2014, an increase of 13 per cent. MICE arrivals rose 23.4 per cent to 894,766, with all sectors showing healthy growth from 2013.

Despite rising regional competition, Regal Airport Hotel area general manager (Hong Kong) John Girard said Hong Kong could hold its own. "We dealt with a

last-minute pick-up from an Asian country to Hong Kong for a MICE event, which required our hotel team to organise an international conference involving 2,500 people within a short two-month time frame.

"We faced keen competition in pricing from our Asian counterparts, yet still won the bidding for a deal. This goes to show that Hong Kong is a draw in its own right."

However, the geographic limitations of Hong Kong make it necessary for DMCs to keep rolling out innovative products. PC Tours and Travel, general manager, Cary Chiu, said: "The biggest issue is the city doesn't have any new incentive ideas. It's mostly old wine in a new bottle. I rely on local magazines to seek out interesting activity ideas like a cooking studio in Kwun Tong."

The impact of Occupy Central on MICE business has been minimal (see also page 29). Despite receiving many queries from clients, MV Destination, general manager, Clemson Lo, did not see any cancellation. "Enquiries still come as normal and the meetings still take place. I haven't had any events shifted away," he said.

"Future project organisers are keeping a close eye on the development but still trust there would not be any effect on the programmes. That said, who knows if there were events that did not consider Hong Kong at all in the beginning?"

Most memorable

- **2014 Nu Skin Greater China Convention** marked the sixth regional convention in Hong Kong with around 30,000 attendees, one of the biggest events in town this year.
- **International Trademark Association 136th Annual Meeting** debuted its inaugural event in Asia with Hong Kong as the destination, attracting 8,500 pax from 140 countries.
- **The 13th ACTE Asia Corporate Travel Conference**, organised by the Association of Corporate Travel Executives, descended on Hong Kong on August 6-7 for the first time and drew 450 pax.

Best forgotten

- **Occupy Central** Although the civil disobedience movement saw minimal fallout on arrivals at the start, it has impacted leisure and business tourism as the movement drags on. Hotel bookings for November and December have slowed, while several events, like Hong Kong Wine & Dine Festival, shifted to Kai Tak Cruise Terminal as disruption to transport continues in the Central and Wanchai areas.
- **Shifting politics** As China assumed the chairmanship of APEC in 2014 and the APEC Finance Ministers' Meeting 2014, Hong Kong was originally picked to stage this high-level event in September but the meeting was shifted to Beijing in the end with political reasons speculated.

Most memorable

- **FDI Annual World Dental Congress 2014** returned to India after 10 years. It took place in Greater Noida and drew 10,000 visitors.
- **6th BBC TopGear Magazine India Awards** was held at Hriday, the 2,800m² outdoor space at Sofitel Mumbai BKC, showcasing the most impressive cars and bikes with popular Bollywood stars and corporate stalwarts attending the event.
- **2nd World Tea & Coffee Expo** in Mumbai provided a platform to India's hot beverage industry for networking, business expansion and ideas exchange. The event had 4,100 business visitors from India and abroad.

Best forgotten

- **Election uncertainty** The Indian elections to choose a new government posed a challenge during the first half of the year for many hotels. Once the election dates were announced, many of the tentative event bookings were either postponed or cancelled.
- **Prohibition** The liquor ban imposed by the state government of Kerala in all hotels and bars, with the exception of five-star hotels, resulted in cancellation of meetings in many hotels.
- **Visa barriers** The Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum 2014 saw fewer participants than expected as some of the delegates were not able to obtain visas on time.



INDIA

By Rohit Kaul

The MICE market in 2014 was healthy, with demand mostly generated by traditional markets like Europe, the US and the UK. New markets like Latin America and South Korea added to the numbers.

"India of late has received more interest from the global MICE market. Comparative cost advantage, improvement in infrastructure and opening of new hotels have resulted in more countries viewing India as a favourable MICE option," said Prashant Narayan, COO and head leisure travel inbound business, Thomas Cook India. "Interestingly, we have seen the emergence of newer markets such as Latin America, China, South Korea and the Far East. The (MICE) segment recorded year-on-year growth of 10-15 per cent in 2014."



Transportation woes in India

Chander Mansharamani, managing director, Alpcord Network Travel & Conferences, said fields like medicine, technology and science generated a lot of international meetings and conferences in 2014. Cities like New Delhi, Mumbai and Hyderabad drew the majority of international meetings, while destinations like Rajasthan, Kerala and Goa were popular for incentive travel.

Said Shaijo Rajan, director of events, Sofitel Mumbai BKC: "This year, we saw growth of 20 per cent in business events and hosted a number of investors and medical conferences."

But a lack of convention centres of international standards, and top-quality transport, continues to pose a challenge in executing MICE activities, Rajan pointed out. A section of the industry, meanwhile, has urged for more aggressive marketing campaigns and new destination promotion in international markets. Said Ranjan Kumar Mishra, managing director, Eastern Voyage: "There is need to create infrastructure and project regions beyond metro cities or golden triangle for MICE-related activities."

A PCO, who declined to be named, rues that India still has no mechanism to record inbound MICE arrivals and needs a dedicated convention bureau.



INDONESIA

By Mimi Hudoyo

This year might not have brought high-profile events like APEC CEO Summit or Miss World to Indonesia unlike in 2013, but 2014 has turned out to be a better year than expected for the MICE industry.

Susilowani Daud, president director of Pacto Convex, said: “(Indonesia) did not have huge events this year, but we have handled some 300 small conferences, seminars and trainings.”

Danny Budiharto, operational director, Dyandra Media International, agreed: “Last year, we were concerned that with general and presidential elections this year, business would be slow, especially in Bali. It turned out that there have been quite a number of corporate events (of) between 400-500 participants per event.”



Bali Nusa Dua Pecatu Hall

Bali aside, other destinations also fared better than expected for Dyandra, which manages Bali Nusa Dua Convention Center, Medan International Convention Center and Dyandra Convention Center Surabaya, Danny added.

Meetings not only took place in major hotels and venues but in smaller facilities, observed trade members. Kang Jacob Antung, president director of Asia Wisata Promosindo, the developer of Hotel Ibis Kemayoran in Jakarta, said MICE contributed 60 per cent of the hotel's revenue.

Jakarta's profile as a MICE destination has risen, said Indra Sukirno, executive director, Jakarta Convention and Exhibition Bureau. She said: “Bali has always been the choice for big conferences, now we are starting to see some interest from medical conference organisers for events in Jakarta (for 2016 onwards).”

With new president Joko Widodo giving special interest to the MICE sector, the bureau's budget was raised this year, allowing it to better promote Jakarta as a MICE destination overseas. The city's presence at IMEX in Frankfurt this year, for instance, was the largest to-date.

But at press time, the MICE industry is grappling with cutback orders on government meetings. The Indonesia Hotel and Restaurant Association has appealed for a review on the regulation.

Most memorable

- **1st Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) International Forum on Islamic Tourism 2014** co-organised by OIC and Indonesia Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy at Hotel Borobudur Jakarta in June.
- **82nd Annual Meeting of the International Commission on Large Dams** The meeting, in Bali Nusa Indah Convention Center in June, drew 3,000 delegates from 95 countries – bigger than the past year's edition in Seattle.
- **Indonesia Infrastructure Week 2014** Held in November, it occupied the entire Jakarta Convention Centre and boasted a slew of conferences and exhibitions, among them Construction Indonesia 2014 and Airport & Expo 2014.

Best forgotten

- **Mount Kelud's eruption** not only forced Jogjakarta, Solo and Semarang airports to close for a few days but resulted in massive cancellation and postponement of MICE events in Jogjakarta in mid-February.
- **Political uncertainty** surrounding Indonesia's elections earlier this year saw the postponement of the first Indonesia Spa and Wellness Expo & Festival – originally scheduled to launch in September in Bali – to next year.
- **The state budget** was cut to minimise deficit. This included the trimming of the 1.7 trillion rupiah (US\$141 million) tourism budget by 458 billion rupiah, forcing the Directorate of MICE and Special Interest Marketing to reduce its support of domestic events.

Most memorable

- **Asia Oceania Geosciences 11th Annual Meeting** The biggest international meeting in Sapporo this year was held from July 28 to August 1 with 3,000 delegates.
- **A large Taiwan incentive group** of more than 4,500 guests descended on Okinawa, bringing 100-200 guests arriving every week for three consecutive months. Close to 50 welcome ceremonies at Naha airport were performed for this event.
- **A mega incentive party** for 5,000 pax themed – what else? – anime was held at the Imperial Hotel Tokyo. Participants, mostly from the Hong Kong insurance industry, came dolled up in their cartoon best.

Best forgotten

- **Jostling for room** An inadequate number of hotels in Sapporo, which has a population of two million, saw incentive tours being squeezed out, especially during big festivals such as the snow festival in February and during autumn season.
- **Insufficient ground transportation** has been a major issue in Japan and could continue through to next year. But JNTO, regional CVBs and regional tourism offices are aware and working on the issue.
- **Lack of space** The modest size of unique venues in Sapporo (generally no more than 150 pax can be accommodated at a time) has raised the need to develop bigger unique venues for events.



JAPAN

By Hannah Koh

The ascending popularity of Japan as a travel destination for South-east Asians has helped buoy the MICE market, particularly the incentive segment.

DMC Sapporo meeting planner, Megumi Minabe, said this year Sapporo has been a popular destination for Asians, in particular Singapore and Thai incentive groups, most of whom headed to ski resorts to experience snow first-hand.

“From this year, we're focusing on South-east Asia, although we have European clients as well.

“Since 2013, Thai Airways International has been flying directly from Bangkok to Sapporo, though I heard it's hard to reserve seats on these flights. Our city and the hotels are preparing Thai-language material for Thai visitors,” she added.

Marico Ogi, director/MICE coordinator of Sapporo Convention Bureau, said as part of a five-year MICE strategy that began in 2010, the bureau this year promoted 20 unique venues around Sapporo, including the Okurayama Ski Jump Park where the 1962 Winter Olympic Games was held.

The CVB, which exhibited at IT&CM

India this year, also designated India as the target market for 2014. Said Ogi: “In the year ahead, we expect the India market to grow and we will invite key persons and travel consultants from India on fam trips to Sapporo.”

JAL Hotels' Dai Takahashi said MICE business at Hotel Nikko Tokyo has risen three per cent year-on-year.

“We anticipate further growth in our MICE businesses towards the Olympics and Paralympic games in 2020,” he said. Hotel Nikko Tokyo is in close proximity to the games venue.

Down south, Shuhei Kohagura, MICE marketing section of Okinawa Convention and Visitors Bureau, also sees stronger MICE results this year. But he worries about issues such as insufficient ground transportation next year.



Okurayama Ski Jump Park, Sapporo



MACAU By Prudence Lui

Industry players, who for years have sought to dispel the notion of Macau as purely a gaming destination, saw the greatest success in the incentive segment.

While Macau recorded 472 meetings and 31 exhibitions in 1H2014, incentive travel drove the MICE market. Between January-September 2014, the Macau Government Tourist Office (MGTO) received a total of 50 applications and 42,109 incentive travellers through its Incentive Travel Stimulation Program, a 39 per cent and 94 per cent rise year-on-year respectively.

MGTO indicated that China, Hong Kong and Taiwan are the strongest players for its programme.

Said an MGTO spokesperson: "Although we have been striving to attract more longhaul incentive groups to Macau, travelling time and accessibility remain the biggest issues for incentive planners. Yet, we still picked up some groups from medium to longhaul markets such as Spain and Australia."

Sharing similar views, MCI Macau managing director, Peter Hassall, said: "The exhibition market remains slow, mainly due to travel and transport logistics, but this should change when the



new Hong Kong-Macau Bridge opens. As Macau is being marketed as a destination, not just a gaming city, the incentive market is growing and we are seeing more interest from international companies.

"Some companies shy away from Macau as a MICE destination due to casinos and gaming. We counter this by demonstrating there is more to Macau than just casinos and show its entertainment and culture as well as its bright lights."

The Venetian Macao Resort Hotel vice president of sales & resort marketing, Brendon Elliott, said: "We are seeing growth in luxury meetings demand from Asia-Pacific...we tailor-make itineraries for clients requesting a luxurious experience in Macau."

Most memorable

- **Flight Centre Travel Group mega incentive** in July, comprising 3,500 management personnel and top executives from Australia and the US for a series of meetings and teambuilding activities.
- **8th APEC Tourism Ministerial Meeting** and the 45th APEC Tourism Working Group Meeting in September. More than 500 attendees participated, including tourism ministers and other representatives from 21 APEC member countries plus representatives from 10 international organisations.
- The **Jeunesse Expo 2014** hosted at The Venetian Macao in September was the destination's biggest event this year, with the group size exceeding 10,000 delegates.

Best forgotten

- **Neighbouring politics** Political issues in Hong Kong would affect business in Macau given the geographical proximity of both cities. Some event organisers in Macau have already lost a few incentives due to concerns over the Occupy Central protests in Hong Kong.

"This year has exceeded all our expectations, with occupancies at the Conrad in the high 80s and the Holiday Inn in the high 90s. The positive growth that we see has been in international meetings from further abroad out of the US, Europe and Australia," he added.

Most memorable

- **Offshore Technology Conference Asia**, held at Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre from March 25 to 28, gathered 25,000 international delegates and took up the entire centre plus a 4,000m² outdoor exhibition.
- **2014 Toastmasters International Convention** Held in Kuala Lumpur in August, it was the first time the annual convention was held outside of North America, for 2,000 pax.
- **The Asia Pacific Regional Conference of the World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA) 2014** Held in Kuching May 21-24, it drew 1,000 pax with representation from each WONCA region globally, making it a 'world' conference", said organising chairman Mohammad Husni Jamal.

Best forgotten

- **Missing MH370** in March resulted in a big drop in arrivals from the China market. According to Tourism Malaysia, some 30,000 tourists, from both the leisure and MICE segments, had cancelled or suspended their visit to Malaysia.
- The **downing of MH17** over Eastern Ukraine on July 17, just four months after the disappearance of MH370, further damaged the reputation of the national carrier.
- **Kidnapping cases in Sabah** involving foreigners had a bigger impact than the disappearance of MH370, and on the entire state, not just the east coast of Sabah where they occurred.



MALAYSIA By S Puvaneswary

Rosy to gritty, what a mixed performance it has been for Malaysia's MICE players.

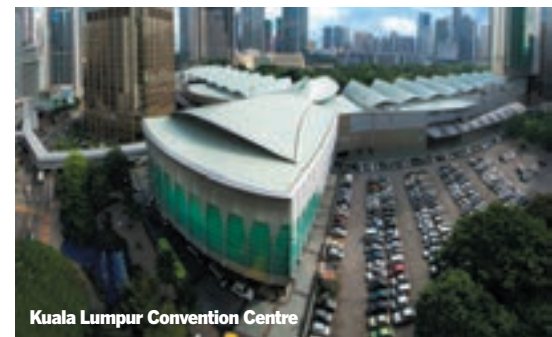
Those specialising in the China market had it rough as inbound traffic tumbled in the wake of the missing MH370 flight on March 8. Thus, when Perfect China sent 4,000 pax to Malaysia for an incentive/conference in August, the trade hoped the event would signal a return of confidence.

Mint Leong, managing director of Sunflower Holidays, the groundhandler for this event, said the event showed the Chinese corporate sector still supported Malaysia. More than half of the delegates booked seats on Malaysia Airlines.

Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau organised a roadshow to China in November covering Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Chengdu.

MyCEB also organised a Malaysia Business Events Week (MBEW) in August to create a platform for all stakeholders to debate issues and discover new trends in the meetings industry. MBEW is set to become an annual event.

Said Zulkefli Sharif, CEO of MyCEB: "Malaysia continues to win more bids for international business events each year...



we want to sustain this momentum by ensuring industry players have the right knowledge and skills to compete..."

Meanwhile, DMCs attribute marked improvements in meetings and incentives from India to improved air connections.

Arokia Das, senior manager, Luxury Tours Malaysia, saw 30 per cent year-on-year growth in Indian incentives, on the back of Malindo Air's new services from Mumbai, Delhi, Trichy and Kochi to Kuala Lumpur.

Noor M Ismail, head, sales & marketing, Asian Overland Services Conventions & Events, added better accessibility has made it possible for delegates from three cities in India, say, Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai, to arrive and depart Malaysia on the same day but on different flights.



PHILIPPINES

By Rosa Ocampo

Meeting specialists in the country saw good growth this year, not just in Manila but beyond.

Mina Gabor, president of the International School of Sustainable Tourism, observed the MICE business is now spreading to provinces beyond Manila, especially with new openings like SMX Convention Centre Bacolod and SMX Davao, while Iloilo International Convention Centre will open next year.

Paolo Bautista, assistant director of sales, Dusit Thani Manila, said amid good growth especially in meetings and conferences this year, the hotel recently finished renovating its ballroom and is



SMX Davao

now upgrading a third of its rooms.

A strong performance aside, MICE specialists continue to lament the absence of subventions in the Philippines that other countries like Thailand and South Korea generously provide.

There is also a need to “put in black and white” incentives for meeting planners and delegates, said Angel Ramos Bognot, president and managing director of Afro-Asian Travel, noting that incentives from the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) such as meet and greet, airport security and technical support are given on a case-by-case basis.

Marisa Nallana, chair, Philippine Association of Convention/Exhibition Organizers, said the grouping and TPB have already drafted a set of incentives for the MICE industry since last year although its implementation is not yet confirmed.

To raise service standards in the meetings sector, Nallana said PACEOS has been conducting MICE training in different parts of the country including Cebu, Davao, Cagayan de Oro and Bohol, in addition to Manila.

Domingo Ramon Enerio III, COO of TPB, also informed *TTGmice* that the Philippine MICE Manual and the country’s MICE brand – along the lines of *Business Meets Fun in the Philippines* – will be launched late this year.

Most memorable

- **23rd World Economic Forum on East Asia** Over 600 government leaders, heads of international organisations and economic chiefs from more than 30 countries participated in this high-level conference in May, making it one of the Philippines’ most challenging events due to safety and security concerns for the attending VIPs.
- **Tugging the heartstrings** PCO Team Asia added a heartwarming touch to a meeting by inviting a musically talented family for a beautiful 30-minute performance. The dad played the drum, the mom the piano and the kids other musical instruments. The kids were autistic but played very well.

Best forgotten

- **Going nuts** A meeting delegate was rushed to the hospital due to an allergy to nuts. He notified organisers beforehand of his allergy and while the meal didn’t include nuts, peanut sauce was served.
- **Keeping sponsors (un)happy** A conference organiser duly listed its sponsors on the stage screen for everyone to see, but the display was way too high and the font small.
- **Rebranding gone awry** A hotel was unable to cope with the surge of people during its rebranding party, including a handful of uninvited guests who came in undetected by security. Food was bountiful but waiters, drinks and cutlery were scarce, while road traffic went awry when they blocked the street fronting the hotel.

Most memorable

- **The Secret Garden Party** Pacific World astounded delegates with an unusual yet delicious dinner – plant seeds as appetiser, and flowers for desserts!
- **Herbalife International** pulled off one of the largest corporate meetings ever held in the Lion City at the Singapore EXPO Convention and Exhibition Centre this year – 22,000 delegates fitted within one place.
- **Women’s Tennis Association** Singapore became the first Asian city to host this championships. Held at the new 7,500-seat Singapore Indoor Stadium, part of the new Singapore Sports Hub, the battle had stars like Serena Williams and Maria Sharapova.

Best forgotten

- **A pricey state** Singapore was ranked as the most expensive city in the world this year by EIU’s in Worldwide Cost of Living survey, further stumbling MICE planners already hesitant about its high costs.
- **Video gone wrong** Singapore Tourism Board’s three-minute video designed to attract Filipino tourists became a viral hit for the wrong reasons – badly filmed, acted and scripted. It was eventually deleted from STB’s YouTube channel and Facebook page.
- **Bad patch** The new National Stadium opened to much fanfare in June, but the state of its pitch has been criticised due to its less than ready condition, resulting in a reschedule of the line-up of events.



SINGAPORE

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

The cosmopolitan city has many elements working to its advantage, but rising living and labour costs have exacerbated challenges in its quest to remain competitive on the MICE front.

“Singapore is small geographically, which can be uncovered within days – this can be a challenge to attract repeat visitors. It also faces increasing competition within Asia-Pacific as a MICE destination, and challenges from rising costs and labour crunch, said Herve Joseph-Antoine, global managing director, Pacific World. “The constant perception of being a high-cost city has put Singapore in a less advantaged position. Event planners need to inject a lot of creativity into event planning to differentiate each event and maintain high-level service.”

Nevertheless, Singapore continues to outshine its regional counterparts in the business events sector, being one of two Asian cities (the other being Seoul) to be ranked among the top 10 convention cities in the world by ICCA in 2013.

Maintaining its position as Asia’s top convention city for 12 consecutive years, Singapore hosted a record 175 ICCA-qual-

ified events in 2013, up from 150 events in 2012, achieving the strongest year-on-year growth since 2005.

Singapore hosted 3.5 million business visitors in 2013, up three per cent from 2012, who spent S\$5.5 billion (US\$4.2 billion), excluding sightseeing, entertainment and gaming expenditure.

While MICE performance figures for 2014 are unavailable at press time, Neeta Lachmandas, assistant chief executive of Singapore Tourism Board (STB), said MICE did “reasonably good” for the first half of the year, and STB is optimistic about the year’s performance.

Meanwhile, Singapore continues to conceptualise first-in-Asia and first-in-Singapore events, such as the Annual Conference of the International Association for Philosophy and Literature.

Singapore Indoor Stadium





Visitors and mourners tied yellow ribbons to tents in remembrance of the victims of the Sewol ferry tragedy



SOUTH KOREA

By Kathy Neo

In 2014, Seoul continues to chalk up impressive accolades on international rankings, reflecting the strong rise in global interest in the South Korean capital as an events destination.

Seoul's ranking rose eight places to reach the ninth spot in ICCA's 2013 Country and City Statistics Report, with a total of 125 meetings held in 2013, representing a 25 per cent increase in meetings from the previous year.

Seoul also played a significant role in improving South Korea's ranking, which moved from 16th to 12th place with 260 meetings recorded for 2013, up from 229

meetings in 2012, reflecting a 13.5 per cent increase.

At the same time, Seoul also rose to the fourth place in the 2013 UIA's International Meetings Statistics Report, having hosted 242 international congresses in 2013, accounting for 2.3 per cent of the global total. Again, Seoul also played a major part in South Korea's ranking, which rose to third place with 635 meetings, up from fifth place with 563 meetings in 2012, reflecting a 12.8 per cent increase.

Said a spokesperson for the Seoul Convention Bureau: "In Asia-Pacific, Seoul's popularity for events – and increasingly, for incentives – has much to do with its role as a gateway to, and main producer of *hallyu* or the Korean Wave, covering a range of attractions from Korean fashion, cosmetics, pop music and television."

Meanwhile, Jeju also recorded strong performance based on the 2013 UIA's International Meetings Statistics Report, which ranked the island at the 19th worldwide and seventh in Asia, up from the 22nd and eighth positions in 2012.

Over in the private sector, Bosuk Tours said the biggest challenges in 2014 were the strong Korean won (a deterrent up until September) and MICE groups' diversion to Japan due to the weak Japanese yen, according to the DMC's president Richard Suh.

Most memorable

- **ACI Asia Pacific/World General Assembly**, held in May in Seoul at Coex Convention and Exhibition Center and Lotte World, drew 965 professionals from 150 airports in 69 countries.
- **International Congress of Mathematicians 2014** This took place in Seoul at the Coex Convention and Exhibition Center from August 13-21, attended by over 5,000 people from more than 125 countries and 200 invited speakers.
- **Amway China Incentive Tour** in Jeju in May brought 15,000 Chinese participants to the island. Sean Shin, manager, marketing, Jeju CVB, said the mega event had "a ripple effect on the regional economy of Jeju Island".

Best forgotten

- **The sinking of the Sewol ferry** was a major boo-boo. South Korean prosecutors alleged that a deadly combination of cargo overloading, illegal redesign and poor helmsmanship led to the April disaster that claimed more than 300 lives, mostly schoolchildren.
- **Ebola outbreak** cast its pall across many countries, South Korea notwithstanding. Precautionary measures were put in place for participants' safety. For example, the organisers for the 10th World Symposium on Choral Music in Seoul worked closely with the Immigration Office at Incheon Airport and the Korea Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and followed through important safety measures.



SRI LANKA

By Feizal Samath

With economic progress and a wave of infrastructure development, the case for Sri

Lanka as a MICE destination has become stronger.

China is Sri Lanka's fastest-growing market with nearly 150 per cent increase in arrivals from January to October, compared with the same period in 2013. From a zero base 10 years ago, China is expected to become the third-largest source after India and the UK in 2014.

Aasim Mukthar, general manager - Lanka Exhibition & Conference Services, the country's biggest conference and exhibition organiser, is anticipating Chinese companies to visit the country in bigger numbers when the proposed Free Trade Agreement between Sri Lanka and China is signed next year.

However, Colombo's current MICE facilities can only accommodate smaller events of 250-270 stalls or a maximum of 1,500 delegates for a convention. "We need facilities to accommodate 350-400 stalls," he said.

Vipula Wanigasekera, general manager of Sri Lanka Convention Bureau, acknowledges the shortage of large exhibition spaces but is confident that the problem will be alleviated in the next few years when three new multi-purpose convention centres are built in Peliyagoda, just outside Colombo; and Katunayake and Negombo, both in close proximity

to Sri Lanka's main international airport located about 30km from Colombo.

These convention centres can accommodate 2,000-3,000 pax and over 300-400 stalls.

While Chinese companies are showing a marked interest in conventions and exhibitions in Colombo, industry players are betting on incentive travel to be the hottest segment.

"Incentive travel is growing. There is only one way for this segment – up," noted Chandra Wickramasinghe, chairman/managing director of Connaisance de Ceylan. The company recently hosted a group of 132 high-spending real-estate dealers from France, taking them across the country in six helicopters, and hosted 128 print shop owners from France on a five-night incentive tour in October.

British Airways flights to Colombo terminated



Most memorable

- **Miss China** The finalists visited Sri Lanka in August on a two-week cross-country tour. This was a tremendous branding boost for Sri Lanka as a destination for young, wealthy Chinese travellers.

Best forgotten

- **Casino fears** The government made a grand announcement about casinos in two new mixed-use resorts including hotels and restaurants, but officials later said no casinos will be allowed in these projects following huge protests by the Buddhist clergy.
- **Bye BA** Barely 17 months after British Airways resumed flights to Colombo in March 2013, the airline announced that it will plug the Colombo route in March 2015 due to poor load factors.
- **Travel restrictions** Hotels and guesthouses started opening in the once war-wrecked northern town of Jaffna a few years back when free travel was permitted for tourists, but a surprising announcement in October 2014 now requires tourists to get permission from the military to visit the area.



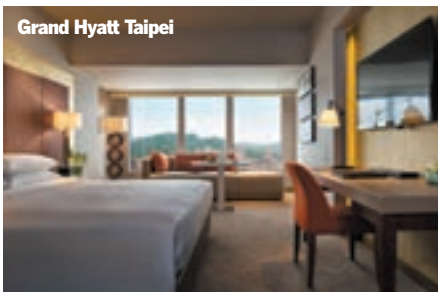
TAIWAN

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

Taiwan is making progress on the international stage as a MICE destination, with both the CVB and industry players seeing growing interest from corporates to visit the island for meetings and events.

The number of inbound visitors to Taiwan broke the eight million mark in 2013, up from 7.3 million in 2012, with the figure expected to grow to nine million by end 2014. According to the latest statistics on the Taiwan Tourism Bureau's website, there were about 930,000 business travellers in 2013, up from 890,000 in 2012.

Thomas Tsou, secretary general, Taiwan Convention & Exhibition Association, said: "Taiwan is growing very well as a MICE destination because we are one of the most hospitable countries in



Grand Hyatt Taipei

the world, and service is one of the most important factors when doing MICE."

TW MICE Event & DMC's sales director, Stacy Yang, said: "There is definitely more interest in Taipei because people are starting to see that our country is attractive. Our transport and venues are very convenient, plus I think our country is quite an affordable destination."

According to Liling Chu, director of events, Grand Hyatt Taipei, the hotel recorded a 15 per cent year-on-year rise in MICE business following its renovation this year. She said: "We continue to see all kinds of renewed interest in Taipei as a destination for corporate travellers...meetings organisers look to Taipei as a safe and stable MICE destination."

To boost MICE traffic further, Taiwan's MICE Promotion Program (Meet Taiwan) kicked off the Super Team in Asia campaign in August to promote Taiwan as a top-of-mind destination in Asia. This marks Taiwan External Trade Development Council's first-ever multi-national campaign held across Taiwan's top five source markets, namely Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia.

During this competition, participants from corporate companies created their dream incentive itinerary in Taiwan and acted as ambassadors to promote incentive travel to Taiwan in their country.

Most memorable

- **The 26th Annual International Olympiad in Informatics**, which took place in Taiwan for the first time this year. Held at Grand Hyatt Taipei, it welcomed many first-time visitors to Taiwan and saw more than 1,120 room-nights booked at the hotel over one week.
- **The Facebook Asia-Pacific team** of 200 pax visited Taipei as part of their incentive programme. TW MICE Event & DMC transformed the Huashan 1914 Creative Park into a dinner venue, featuring night market food stalls and cultural themed activities.
- **Regent Taipei** had to work in record time when it received a last-minute booking from a banking industry client – requiring 500 roomnights for a five-day meeting event – just three months before arrival.

Best forgotten

- **TransAsia Airways crash** on the offshore island of Penghu in July claimed 48 passengers, damaged a few streets and resulted in the cancellation of several MICE events.
- **Rejection of visas** for awardees and presenters from certain African countries slashed the final turnout of K&A International's supposedly biggest event this year, from 2,000 pax to only 1,600 delegates.
- **Typhoon Matmo** in July slammed into the eastern coastal counties of Taitung and Hualien. While the island was spared major damage, at least 43 international flights and a handful of domestic flights to and from Taoyuan International Airport were cancelled.

Most memorable

- **UNICITY Global Convention** One of the biggest incentive events ever held in Bangkok, bringing 50,000 delegates to IMPACT Muang Thong Thani October 15 to 18.
- **4th International Rice Congress** The annual event netted its best attendance to-date (some 1,500 delegates from 69 countries) with the largest number of papers submitted. It was held in BITEC October 27 to November 1.
- **1st Asian Conference on Open Access Scholarly Publishing** Held at the Shangri-La Hotel Bangkok June 2 to 3, it was the first OAPSA international event in the region.

Best forgotten

- **WCA Conference** Cancelled due to the political unrest in Bangkok. Combining the world's largest freight forwarders association's 16th annual conference and 6th worldwide conference, it would have brought 2,499 delegates to Bangkok Convention Centre at CentralWorld March 2 to 9.
- **Martial law** Army chief Gen Prayuth Chan-ocha imposed nationwide martial law on May 20, the day IMEX Frankfurt opened, followed by a military putsch on May 22. And to think that this year's IMEX was the best-attended in the German edition's 12-year history.
- **Politics** claimed several scalps as major concerts were cancelled, including Eric Clapton in March due to security concerns and Taylor Swift's sold-out event in June due to the coup.



THAILAND

By Greg Lowe

A coup d'état battered Thailand's MICE industry, which was left powerless as scores of countries issued travel advisories in the wake of the May 22 military putsch, which saw curfews raised and nationwide martial law imposed.

Patrick Basset, COO for Accor Thailand, Vietnam, South Korea, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and the Philippines, saw an overall slowdown in MICE end-June/early-July across all markets except Japan, which unexpectedly grew almost 19 per cent January to September year-on-year.

DMCs reported similar negative trends. "Diethelm Events had a tough year due to the political tensions, especially in Bangkok," said Hans van den Born, managing director of Diethelm Travel Thailand.

Thailand Incentive and Convention Association (TICA) provided significant support for the industry throughout the crisis, he said. "But despite our entire industry's efforts to restore confidence, this market is sensitive and can take longer than we wish to come back again."

Other DMCs said Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (TCEB), like TICA, also did a sound job of keeping the trade

updated.

TCEB's figures show international MICE arrivals contracted 7.5 per cent to 918,530 visitors in fiscal 2014 (October 2013 to September 2014), while spending fell 7.7 per cent to 79.6 billion baht (US\$2.4 billion).

But Pishnu Plaikaew, a TCEB spokesman, stressed the positive, saying during the first three quarters of fiscal 2014, the US market grew both in visitor number and revenue by 18.6 per cent and 14 per cent respectively, thanks to strong performance in the convention segment. Likewise, the UK and European markets.

Basset too pointed an upside in a resilient domestic market. Accor hotels in Pattaya saw the most significant growth, up 44 per cent January to September year-on-year as Thai companies and government agencies refrained from traveling abroad for meetings, he said.

Martial law imposed nationwide





VIETNAM By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

Industry members rate 2014 as satisfactory. For Lac Hong Voyages' Robert Tan, it actually paled in comparison with 2013 as the Ho Chi Minh City-based DMC saw "mainly small group movements of less than 30 pax mostly from Asian countries".

According to Tan, austerity measures continued to bite the regional MICE market, resulting in prudent spending.

"The market is very price-conscious this year; even incentive groups fly on LCCs and big groups are splitting into smaller groups," he said, adding he does not foresee big growth in 2015 due to the global economic situation.

Tan will be concentrating more on India because Jet Airways has started services from Delhi to Saigon via Bangkok in November, and on Brunei, because Royal Brunei Airlines now flies to Vietnam and Australia. "This could potentially bring MICE traffic from Australia," said Tan.

Luxury Travel's founder and CEO, Pham Ha, said the development of new air services is helping MICE travellers to venture farther in Vietnam.



Likewise, the arrival of many chartered flights has led to a "booming Nha Trang" for Vinpearl Joint Stock Company, which manages Vinpearl properties in Nha Trang, Danang and Phu Quoc. Director of sales Dang Dinh Viet said Nha Trang is popular with the Russian market, but these flights are bringing in the Chinese-speaking and Korean markets.

With the November 1 debut of Vinpearl Resort Phu Quoc – the only visa-free area in Vietnam – Dang thinks Phu Quoc's potential as a MICE destination is ripe for discovery, further driven by the recent launch of regional flights linking the island to Singapore (Vietnam Airlines) and Seoul (Korean Air) respectively.

Most memorable

- **Vinpearl Luxury Nha Trang** welcomed a 2,500 pax incentive group from South Korea in November, split into four smaller groups of 500 across two weeks by chartering flights by Korean Air from Seoul to Nha Trang. It usually hosts around 500 pax at the most.
- **Lac Hong Voyages** hosted a 50 pax group from an Indian fishermen association, which saw the DMC arrange visits to fishing villages, ports and wholesale markets to immerse this group in the fishing culture.
- **Luxury Travel** organised a MICE trip for 350 people from Italy in July. For their gala dinner at InterContinental Asiana Saigon they requested for the best cheeses of France. Paying attention to the ambient temperature to optimise the degustation experience was the challenge it took on with relish.

Best forgotten

- **Anti-China protests in May** resulted in the evacuation of thousands of Chinese citizens, affecting Chinese arrivals into the country.
- **September was the worst typhoon month** this year, sending DMCs scrambling to cancel, say, trips to Halong Bay and replacing it with other alternatives in Hanoi.
- **Hong Kong protests** could possibly dent the city's outbound MICE traffic to Vietnam, especially popular MICE destinations with direct links, such as Danang.

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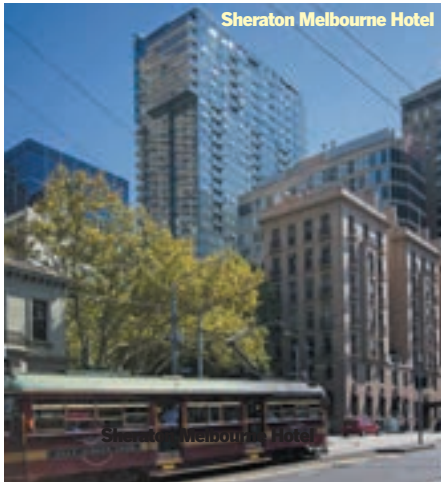


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Welcome additions

Here's a recap of new infrastructure additions in the region this year that can only be good for the MICE industry



AUSTRALIA

Dockside Pavilion Sydney, an anchored floating pontoon at Darling Harbour, opened mid-year to cater for up to 1,440 pax banquet-style and 2,000 pax standing.

Melbourne this year welcomed more business hotels, including **Quest Melbourne Airport**, **Sheraton Melbourne Hotel** and **DoubleTree by Hilton Melbourne**.

HONG KONG

PMQ, heritage site of the former Hollywood Road Police Married Quarters, provides two events spaces including the 600m² Qube and 1,000m² Aberdeen Courtyard and Marketplace, as well as pop-up stores on different floors.

Kai Tak Cruise Terminal offers a picturesque location with four flexible indoor venues totalling over 3,000m² that can accommodate up to 3,000pax each. Tenants include the Federal Restaurant Group, which opened a production kitchen and banquet facility for 80 tables.

Hong Kong Maritime Museum has relocated from Stanley to Victoria Harbour at Central Pier No. 8. It comprises 15 galleries, an exhibition and events space, and a rooftop café, catering for different MICE events.

INDONESIA

The expanded **Sepinggan Airport** opened in Balikpapan, East Kalimantan and can now accommodate 10 million passengers a year, up from 1.7 million previously. Balikpapan is an important industrial city in Indonesia with many multinational companies, especially the oil and gas sectors.

Ciputra Artpreneur opened in August in Jakarta. It is a 10,000m² art-dedicated space comprising a museum, a theatre, exhibition galleries and multi-function rooms, with capacity for 300 to 1,500pax, theatre-style.

MACAU

Macpro Gallery and **Macpro Business Center** located in a commercial building at the heart of Macau Peninsula opened early this year. Both offer affordable venues within a non-gaming environment. The business centre offers rooms for small meetings of seven pax or larger gatherings of 20 to 40pax, theatre-style. The gallery has a chic design and is suitable for small- to medium-sized events.

SINGAPORE

Singapore Sports Hub opened in June, boasting a 55,000-seat stadium capped with the world's largest free-spanning dome roof. It also houses two restaurants, a multi-purpose indoor area able to hold up to 3,000 seats, and the Sports Information Resource Centre, intended for exhibitions.

Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall, the grand dame of Singapore's performing arts scene, opened its doors in June, following a S\$158 million (US\$127.1 million) refurbishment. The concert hall, which can seat 600pax, has foyer spaces to accommodate standing events of up to 150 guests. Perfectly suited for cocktail events seeking to inject elegance and style, this venue, which is also known as Singapore's oldest performing arts centre, will be sure to impress both foreign and local guests.

MALAYSIA

klia2 opened in May as the largest low-cost carrier terminal in the world. MICE planners can organise a half-day shopping programme at its four-level mall comprising 225 commercial outlets on the day of departure, or make arrangements with Malaysia Airports Holdings to have special lanes at the immigration for international meeting delegates, avoiding long queues.

Skytrex@Perdana Quay Langkawi opened in August and is great for holding corporate events and team-building activities. The park offers challenges for different levels of fitness. Customised programmes can also be organised to suit organisational needs.

The new four-star **Imperial Hotel Kuching** offers 339 guestrooms and suites, including two executive floors. Its pillarless Imperial Grand Ballroom can hold up to 1,400 pax for banquets, while the Boulevard Grand Ballroom can accommodate up to 500 pax for receptions. There are nine multi-function meeting rooms of varying sizes.



Nestled in the relaxing surrounds of a rainforest, **Faber Peak Singapore** has undergone a revamp with three new restaurants: Spuds & Aprons, Faber Bistro and Moonstone – all with a view. Two new event spaces, The Ballroom and The Private Dining Room, can be used for a 30pax meeting or a 300pax product launch.

SOUTH KOREA

Dongdaemun Design Plaza opened in March in Seoul and has been billed as the world's largest freestanding asymmetrical building. It offers a total floor space of 86,574m², as well as five meeting halls for a wide array of events.

South Korea's first man-made island complex **Some Sevit** opened in April on the Hangang River in central Seoul, ahead of a major new MICE Zone currently being

developed in the Gangnam district. It comprises three islets that include a convention hall, restaurants, water sports facilities and a floating stage.

WE Hotel, Jeju, launched in February, boasts a beautiful primeval forest as well as facilities for medical treatments and plastic surgery. There is also an events/banquet hall for up to 220pax theatre-style and 200pax for banquet. There are 82 hotel rooms and 30 patient rooms.



Dongdaemun Design Plaza



Kaohsiung Exhibition Center

TAIWAN

The 853-key **Grand Hyatt Taipei** completed its first phase of renovation in July. It has 13 well-equipped meeting rooms, including the pillarless grand ballroom which can fit up to 840 guests for banquets and 1,400 pax for conventions. Wi-Fi is available throughout the hotel.

The newly opened 303-key **Mandarin Oriental Taipei** features a range of event spaces, including the 960m² Grand Ballroom for up to 1,200 guests. Wi-Fi is avail-

able throughout the hotel, and meeting packages offer well-equipped function rooms.

Newly opened in April, **Kaohsiung Exhibition Center** offers space for 1,500 standard booths and a conference hall for 2,000 pax, two conference halls for 800 pax each and 10 conference rooms for 20 to 40 pax. The facility has the potential to host marine-related trade events as it is located along a deep, natural harbour, allowing boats to be brought into the exhibition space.

THAILAND

Queen Sirikit National Convention Center became Asia's first events space to achieve ISO 20121: Event Sustainability Management Systems accreditation, enabling the venue to compete more effectively for international events from organisations like the UN.

CentralFestival Samui opened in March adding 90,000m² of retail and lifestyle space to the island's offering with around 200 international branded stores, a bowling alley and cinema.

The Port, when it opens, is set to become one of Samui's key clusters of gastro bars and chic restaurants.

The **North Pattaya Alliance** was officially launched in June, with seven hotels pooling together almost 3,700 rooms and a host of meetings facilities in a bid to change the area's sleazy image to one of a high-end MICE destination. Additional support is provided by Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau, Tourism Authority of Thailand and City Hall.

VIETNAM

The five-star **Lotte Hotel Hanoi** opened in September, offering 318 guestrooms with complimentary high-speed Internet access, three F&B outlets, a spa and three large function rooms, including the Crystal Ballroom for up to 1,200 pax. The Hanoi National Convention Centre is only 15 minutes away by taxi.

Hai Au Aviation kicked off its **seaplane service** in September with the launch of a Hanoi-Halong Bay route. This high-end sightseeing of Halong Bay via a 12-seater Cessna Caravan C208 EX is an alternative to skip the three- to four-hour overland drive from Hanoi to Halong Bay.

Luxury Travel Vietnam and cruise company Huong Hai Ha Long launched **Emperor Cruises** in September, which will start its first cruises in Nha Trang by mid-2015. MICE groups can sail the clear waters and lush islets of Nha Trang Bay on board a junk boat or a 32-pax cruise boat.



Lotte Hotel Hanoi

Reporter's notebook

As is the tradition, *TTGmice* editors and reporters share their best and worst moments when on duty during the year

From left: Raini Hamdi, Karen Yue, Gracia Chiang, Hannah Koh, Paige Lee, Pei Qi, Xinyi Liang-Pholsena and Kathy Neo



Raini Hamdi

Senior editor

BEST My best interview this year was with Kwek Leng Beng, executive chairman, Singapore-based City Developments Ltd. I could not believe my luck that he spent nearly three hours with me for the interview and that I could ask him anything. I was even more delighted when he answered each question freely and frankly, and nothing was off-the-record. Look out for his South Beach Hotel project which is opening next year; it is linked to Suntec International via an overhead bridge. 'Chairman Kwek', as his men addressed him, was particularly happy about that MICE opportunity.

WORST My worst experience was when I was harangued by a tourism official at ITB Berlin this year after we ran a factual account of how the country's bad image was affecting bookings. I also could not believe how one of the industry players from that destination, whom my reporter interviewed for views on the issue, stoop so low as to turn around and deny he was interviewed after the article was published.

Karen Yue

Group editor

BEST This has been a glorious year, largely because *TTGmice* underwent a transformation to give it a fresher, more vibrant look, with new sections. The magazine is always looking to make

itself more relevant to its readers and to consistently deliver the quality content it is known for, so it gave me great joy to see this dedication being acknowledged through yet another award. The cover story in the November 2013 issue won the PATA Gold Award Travel Journalism - Business Article. It was the fourth PATA Gold Award *TTGmice* has won to-date. Adding to the excitement, we unveiled *TTGassociations*, a quarterly publication for association secretariats and event planners.

WORST It takes a lot to get me down and I have no terrible work experiences this year to share. However, I do wish more marketing and communications officers would understand that editorial coverage is not for sale and that *TTGmice* - or any respectable publication - owes it to its readers to run objective and relevant content.

Gracia Chiang

Deputy group editor

BEST I had such a great first-time cruise experience on an Oceania fam trip to Greece and Turkey that I am already dreaming of my next voyage. Being the restless traveller that I am, I was pleasantly surprised that I actually enjoyed spending seven days onboard. I saw for myself why cruising's appeal for leisure and MICE is growing among Asian travellers. What did I like? Waking up to a different gorgeous view every day,

no transportation and packing hassle, and the all-inclusive fine cuisine!

WORST Being stuck in Sanya's airport for over eight hours and almost missing my connecting flight back home from Guangzhou. Despite being a VIP guest of China Southern Airlines for the WTTC Global Summit, I had great difficulty securing a seat on the next available flight out of Hainan after my original one was delayed.

Strangely, I also found the logistics for such a high-profile event was not well-executed. I was told that I would be able to make it for the half-day city tour the morning of my departure, but on site, I was told there would not be enough time. Wrong information was also given out about the airport pickup timings. It was a harrowing trip, plus it was not particularly productive as it was hard to arrange for interviews or get face time with top executives.

Hannah Koh

Assistant editor,
TTG Asia Online

BEST Prague, right after ITB Berlin. Is there a place as magical? Long the site of political and ideological clashes, none of this was obvious during the extremely photogenic violet hour when the setting sun cast a golden glow on medieval buildings and the magnificent Charles Bridge.

WORST There's a casual cruelty in this industry I sometimes feel, amid

all the wining, dining, boozing and schmoozing. A particular five-star hotel unveiled its refurbished meeting spaces this year with a rooftop party and I aimed to get a story out of it. The sales director and comms folk were wonderful: kind and considerate, they helped me locate the marketing director who was best positioned to comment. Said marketing director agreed to meet for a quick quote at a certain hour and location, but failed to turn up, despite repeated reassurances from the sales and comms folk, who had run off to look for him. I surrendered after 20 minutes and headed home for the night, later sending in follow-up questions that earned pretty dissatisfactory answers. I regret when courtesy is so clearly lacking from the other side.

Paige Lee Pei Qi

Assistant editor-Singapore

BEST I will bestow this honour to Tourism Australia for the VIP treatment rendered to all guests during the Australian Tourism Exchange in Cairns this year. Just imagine: upon arrival at the airport, we were taken by surprise as the traditional Gimuy Walubara Yidinji dancers spontaneously danced around us as we collected our luggage. But it didn't stop there. We were even greeted by helicopters and ships cruising along the harbour that rolled out welcome banners! Now, how's that for a warm welcome? **WORST** Staying in one of

the hotels in Cambodia which was undergoing renovation works. Word of advice to all hotels: It does not go well with guests to welcome their mornings with drilling and hammering noises at 7am.

Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

Assistant editor-Thailand/
Indochina

BEST Attending AIBTM in Orlando this year was quite an eye-opening experience for me. Besides it being my virgin trip to the US, what was also interesting for me was to mingle among trade reporters from around the world and observe the greater importance that American consultants placed on education and the faster adoption of technology (think Google Glass) in the US' MICE industry. Asia is a diverse continent, no doubt, but I would like to see a stronger spirit of being nimble and adapting to technology among event and exhibition planners, especially in the more advanced economies in the region.

WORST Following a press conference, I approached the head of a CVB to request for more information and comments. After introducing myself and presenting my business card, I posed my questions to him and asked if he could share his name-card too. His reply was quite unexpected though: "If you already know who I am, why do you need my namecard?"



From left: S Puvaneswary, Mimi Hudoyo, Greg Lowe, Prudence Lui, Caroline Boey, Rosa Ocampo and Feizal Samath

Kathy Neo

Copy editor

BEST My five-day fam trip to Okinawa. The sponsor, Okinawa Convention & Visitor Bureau, customised my itinerary well and responded readily to my interview requests. It was also my first trip to Japan, making it doubly memorable.

WORST Fortunately, none.

S Puvaneswary

Editor-Malaysia/Brunei

BEST Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau's Business Events Week in August was the best MICE conference I attended this year. I enjoyed the interactive sessions and it was also a great opportunity to network with MICE players from all over the country.

WORST The Malaysia Tourism Exchange 2014 conference, jointly co-organised by Malaysian Inbound Tourism Association and Kris Destination Management in Kuala Lumpur. The programme was not updated so I was hugely disappointed when the invited VIP from the Ministry of Tourism and Culture was not present to give the keynote address. Tourism Malaysia's director-general, Mirza Mohammad Taiyab, was also not present to deliver the country's marketing plans. In fact, there was no keynote address and no representative from Tourism Malaysia to present the marketing plans. The event started late and after a brief introduction of all the speakers, the MC immediately held a press conference. I reluctantly went, out of politeness, and as expected, the media had no questions to ask as the sessions had not started. So, to kill time, the MC gave us a lengthy briefing about himself and the

different companies he had worked for in the past, and his achievements.

Mimi Hudoyo

Editor-Indonesia

BEST The best travel mart and fam trip I had this year was New Zealand's TRENZ. The show was well organised and the breakfast talks were interesting and informative. The participation of all stakeholders – government, airlines, hotels, attractions, airports and ground handling operators enabled me to complete the various assignments I was given.

WORST I was assigned to interview and attend a destination presentation by a visiting NTO but I had already accepted an invitation to a media conference by a cruise company at around the same time. To honour both, I interviewed the NTO 30 minutes before his presentation, then rushed to the next appointment, as the PR company said the cruise executive's time was also limited. Turned out that not only was he 90 minutes' late, he did not seem to be in a hurry at all.

Greg Lowe

Correspondent-Thailand

BEST Covering the Euro-mic AGM in Cairo in January was without a doubt the highlight of my year. Organised as an incentive, after three days of visiting sites in and around the Egyptian capital, and attending a few meetings, we were treated to a five-day/four-night post-event cruise of the Nile, taking in the archaeological wonders of Karnak, Luxor, Valley of the Kings, Philae and Aswan.

WORST Trying to get believable occupancy figures from a centrally

located business hotel in Bangkok. After weeks of delays, panic set in when it unintentionally disclosed occupancy figures that could still only be best described as wildly optimistic. Backpedalling ensued, along with claims that the data couldn't be used as it was inaccurate.

Prudence Lui

Correspondent-Hong Kong

BEST Hong Kong Disneyland Resort's Celebration of Sales Excellence event which took place in Adventureland. The queue area outside Theater in the Wild was transformed into a cocktail and dinner venue for the first time. I was impressed by the creative décor and music, coupled with the provision of straw safari hats and animal print scarves to guests, which set the mood for adventure and exploration.

WORST I requested for two media interviews at the 3rd Global Tourism Economy Forum but the PR informed me on the day that only one materialised. During the group interview session, we the English media were mixed with the mainland Chinese reporters and simultaneous translation was needed for all questions raised. This wasted a lot of our time.

Caroline Boey

Senior correspondent-China & Special Projects

BEST I'm so happy whenever industry officials in China reply to my emails and questions. I give two thumbs up to the Shanghai International Conference

Management Organization, and the MICE Department of the Hangzhou Tourism Promotion Centre. Both organisations provide insightful comments, and the same-day reply is an unexpected bonus.

WORST I can't recall any!

Rosa Ocampo

Correspondent-Philippines

BEST The Philippine-India Travel Exchange stood out because it was well organised with well-chosen buyers and sellers. Organiser Glen Agustin and his team from the Department of Tourism were helpful.

Buyers from India were Philippine specialists and were also approachable, open and easy to talk to. Plus, the venue was great: Sunset Pavilion tent at Sofitel Philippine Plaza's landscaped garden on the edge of Manila Bay.

WORST Several trips of mine were marred by flight delays either on takeoff or touchdown or both due to runway overcapacity in Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA). Once, the plane was already in Manila but had to delay landing by 15 minutes. On another occasion, the aircraft had to stay an extra 90 minutes in Bangkok due to busy traffic in NAIA's runway.

Feizal Samath

Correspondent-Sri Lanka/Maldives

BEST My best MICE event was visiting the newly renovated Bandaranaika Memorial International Hall, the country's biggest convention centre in Colombo, for a musical performance and witnessing the new changes. With its modern facilities, convention rooms and halls, it is the best location

for business meetings, exhibitions or conventions. It can accommodate 1,000-1,500 pax in the main conference hall, has large break-out rooms (some with the capability to accommodate 200 pax) and an exhibition centre that can accommodate 200-250 booths.

WORST When a top travel consultant pulled out of a last-minute interview and I had to rush to get a replacement story to meet an urgent deadline. No apologies from the man – won't contact him again!

Natasha Dragun

Correspondent-Australia

BEST My best fam trip was to Chicago for IPW 2014. I was blown away by the creativity of the city's MICE sector and its ability to deal with thousands of extremely demanding travel journalists and travel trade members. A good range of pre- and post-fams were on offer, as well as dozens of trips to take in everything from the city's architecture to its craft distilling scene.

WORST An evening event hosted on board a boat carrying guests around Sydney's harbour. There were way too many people on board, which meant I was crammed in a corner with food and drinks flung at me. The speeches lasted the whole event, which meant no time for networking. And to make it worse, they were in multiple languages, which slowed everything down. The worst part? Being on board meant people could not escape.

– Other team members: Marianne Carandang, Shekhar Niyogi, Rohit Kaul, KC Sim, Redmond Sia, Goh Meng Yong and Lina Tan

No cause for big concern

Most meetings are continuing despite Occupy Central, Prudence Lui reports

The Occupy Central Movement that started end-September has sent thousands of protesters to the streets of Hong Kong's central business districts, leading to the closure of major roads and hampering traffic. The protests have also spread to the commercial areas of Causeway Bay and Mongkok.

The city's MICE business has inevitably been affected. Some events, such as the 4th Nobel Laureates Symposium on Global Sustainability originally scheduled for October 8-11, were cancelled.

Langham Place, Mongkok, situated a block away from the protest scene, noted a slight slowdown in short-term enquiries for October and November. Its general manager, Shaun Campbell, said: "Customers were either considering other locations or holding their bookings to see if the protests would conclude (Mongkok is still preferred for its central location). In cases where events wanted to relocate, our first priority was to offer our sister hotels, The Langham and Eaton."

Fortunately for Eaton Hong Kong, it saw only one meeting cancellation when the protests started. Its director of sales and marketing, Edward Hobson, said in late October: "Everything (corporate meetings) is going ahead as planned towards year-end. Fortunately, we're in a location that isn't affected and we're also within easy reach."

Corporate event management companies too, did not report much impact on business. While International Conference Consultants has held and will be holding all its meetings as scheduled as clients viewed the unrest as a peaceful one, Cievents only had to rearrange transport for one group that came in October due to the roadblocks.

Pacific World Hong Kong's destination manager, Ivy Sung, said: "December is usually low season for



Victoria Harbour: Retail in 'occupied' areas seems more affected than MICE

us, so there's no real impact. But I have a proposal for a 100-pax meeting in 2015, and the client has asked me not to develop it further after the protests started."

Meanwhile, Momentous Asia Travel and events general manager, Doris Lam, has observed some traffic shifting to the outskirts. She said: "Hong Kong is a very compact city and even if the hotels are not in the city centre, as long as they are near the MTR, it is not too big a concern. Besides, outskirt hotels are relatively new and more 'techie' and so appeal to some clients."

Despite the minimal impact, DMC-The Destination Management Company's general manager, Luke Mitchell, nevertheless cautioned: "As most foreign media coverage is always on the violence, Hong Kong is starting to look like a dangerous place, even though it isn't. If the protests drag on, the city's reputation will definitely be affected."

International SOS and Control Risks has so far handled 95 security cases directly related to the protests from its members. Said its security director, Lane Aldred: "The majority of cases for assessment and advice were dependent on members' geographical location within the city.

"However, while pro-democracy

protests are likely to continue to flare up intermittently to 2017 or beyond, they are unlikely to cause long-term disruption to business. A majority of Hong Kong residents still favour stable relations with China, and will resist any political upheaval that threatens the city's long-term political and economic stability."

Aldred noted that while not any one segment is particularly more affected than another, the retail and catering industries in 'occupied' areas are suffering. At the same time the government is collecting data to assess the impact of the protests on the economy, he said there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that credit card spending has dipped in the major shopping areas of Mongkok, Central and Causeway Bay.

Nevertheless, he added that Hong Kong remains a low-risk travel destination. "Serious, widespread, or destabilising unrest is highly unlikely. The campaign has lost momentum, and turnout is expected to be limited. Effective crowd-control measures will also ensure disturbances remain contained, even within the compact central business districts of the city. While all protests should be avoided...the main concern for travellers arise from potential delays in travelling within the city."

Ideas A day tour in Hong Kong

Begin the day travelling up to Victoria Peak on the Peak Tram. From the Sky Terrace atop, take in the spectacular 360-degree view of the city, with its corporate skyscrapers and quiet outlying islands. Explore the galleries and shops for a while before descending the Peak via the central and mid-level escalator system – the longest outdoor covered escalator system (800m) in the world with 20 escalators and two moving footways.

The next stop is Central, at the heart of Hong Kong. Embark on a one-hour walking tour of the metropolis, which will take you back to the early days of British rule with the historic buildings, while the towering skyscrapers keep you grounded in the present. Enjoy lunch at a traditional tea house or Dim Sum restaurant – a must-have

Hong Kong culinary experience.

Post-lunch, take the Star Ferry from Central Pier to Tsim Sha Tsui, where activities abound. Visit the Art Gallery and Hong Kong Cultural Centre, walk down the Avenue of Stars which honours celebrities of the Hong Kong film industry, get lost in the myriad of streets and mega malls, enjoy afternoon tea at the Peninsula Hotel, or stroll along Nathan Road, known also as The Golden Mile.

For a memorable dinner, 21 floors up from the bustling Nathan Road is the Woolloomooloo Prime restaurant. Wind down with a glass of cocktail on the outdoor terrace offering 270-degree view of Victoria Harbour and Hong Kong Island. Dine as the sun sets and the lights of the city are switched on, culminating at 20.00 in *A Symphony of*



Statue of Bruce Lee on the Avenue of Stars in Tsim Sha Tsui

Lights, a multimedia light, laser and music show involving 40 of the city's buildings.

Itinerary by MCI Hong Kong



Need to know

Hotel with a visual impact

InterContinental Hong Kong has installed the city's largest hotel ballroom LED wall. About 12m long and 4m wide, the wall is able to present live event coverage, graphic effects and a 'live feed' of the hotel's spectacular view of Victoria Harbour and Hong Kong Island. Event packages comprising these different backdrop options are available.

Call (852) 2313-2211 or email icevent-shk@ihg.com for more information.



Revamped Royal Plaza

Royal Plaza Hotel now dons a new look following a two-year renovation.

The 699 guestrooms, hotel lobby, drive way, F&B outlets, health club and grand ballroom all boast a new contemporary design.

Guestrooms are equipped with complimentary Wi-Fi, a 40/46-inch LED TV, as well as a USB charging socket on the wall.

Facilities added include the Lion Rock Bar and junior ballroom, both on level 3, Royal Room (level 1) and massage centre (level 8).

Digging into black gold

The Peninsula Academy's 90-minute *Caviar Connoisseurship: A Gourmet Class in Refining Tastes* teaches guests how to appreciate the 'black gold' and shows how chefs' pick premium caviars. Guests will also be taught subtle training of the palate in order to sample the delicacy with the world's finest vodkas and champagnes. Advance booking is recommended.

Call (852) 2696 6693 or email dining-phk@peninsula.com

Gordon Ramsay restaurant

Gordon Ramsay has partnered Dining Concept Group to open the Hong Kong edition of his popular London dining establishment, Bread Street Kitchen & Bar, in Lan Kwai Fong. The restaurant features a 90-seat dining area and bar seating for 30 pax, as well as a private room for 12 pax. Find signature British-European cuisine in a warehouse-style venue with a mixed vintage and modern décor.

Email reservations.bsk@diningconcepts.com

New private event venue

Xi Yan Penthouse offers four spacious dining cum function rooms, which can be transformed into a 100-seat banqueting space. The roof terrace is flexible for outdoor parties of up to 180 guests. The venue also caters for seminars, exhibitions, conferences and workshops. Its show kitchen cum chef's table enables the video recording of cooking shows. Call (852) 3622-3912 or email penthouse@xiyan.com.hk





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A brighter incentive glow

More Asian MICE groups are starting to fall in love with Jeju, but the lack of direct air access can hinder growth, writes **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**



Scenic Jeju, long loved for its numerous natural earth formations, is seeing more corporate incentive interest thanks to increased exposure in films

Bolstered by the numerous Korean drama serials that had been filmed on the island and subsequently building up a substantial interest in the destination from the leisure outbound market in Asia, Jeju now sees ripe opportunities in leveraging the Hallyu (Korean wave) fame to become the region's incentive hot spot too.

While China and Japan make up the biggest MICE markets for Jeju, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia are currently "growing strong", according to Jeju Convention & Visitors Bureau (JCVB) marketing manager, Sean Shin. He also anticipates the recent launch of daily direct flights (running through May 2015) between Bangkok and Jeju by Eastar Jet, a Korean LCC, will further whet the outbound incentive appetite from Thailand.

South-east Asia has since been identified as an important market for JCVB. "There is a craze for popular Korean cultures in many parts of

South-east Asia...Also, unique venues will make incentive tours in Jeju more (memorable) with special events and theme parties. These efforts will enable us to make inroads into South-east Asian markets.

"We are also targeting the Muslim market in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Middle East, and have invested in Muslim offerings in hotels and restaurants. So far, we're seeing a 10 per cent growth year-on-year for the Middle East market," he added.

Having witnessed strong leisure demand for South Korea, Asian travel companies are also keen to grow outbound meeting and incentive interest to the destination, with Jeju a strong favourite for MICE groups.

Sophiya Travel & Tours Cambodia's director of tour development, Leng Pagna, said: "We are getting a lot of enquiries for South Korea for our corporate clients in Cambodia; they have already been to nearby countries like Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, so South Korea is

viewed as a newer destination."

Outbound MICE groups to South Korea at Sophiya are mostly incentives from the Cambodian agriculture and association sectors, averaging around 30-35 pax who spend six days in Seoul, Jeju, Nami Island and Sorak Mountain, added Leng.

Sharing similar sentiments, Christina Pakpahan, director of Okdo Tour & Travel Service in Medan, said: "Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand are close (to Indonesia) and already done, so we are looking for farther destinations in Asia-Pacific like South Korea and Australia. While the Indonesian leisure outbound market is established, MICE traffic to South Korea is growing at about eight to 10 per cent."

According to Pakpahan, her MICE groups average around 50-60 pax from the insurance and government sectors, spending five days to a week combining meetings and incentives in Korean destinations like Jeju, Seoul and Busan.

Urging the Korean authorities to build on the rising wave of interest from Indonesian MICE market, Pakpahan remarked: "We would like to see more roadshows by Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) and direct flights launched to Indonesia, especially as Medan now has a new airport. As there are no direct flights to South Korea, we have to transit in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur."

Likewise, Richard Suh, president of Seoul-based Bosuk Tours, which has already built up a stable incentive demand from Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia to Jeju, is now casting his sights on new markets like Istanbul and Delhi – two cities where KTO has recently set up branch offices – to tie in with the NTO's broader outreach efforts.

In particular, Jeju's visa-free status is what Suh leverages when it comes to courting incentive groups from overseas. "Jeju is particularly favoured by Indian incentive groups as they do not need a visa to visit, and most usually stay for two nights," he said.

However, a lack of direct flights and seat inventory are what hamper Suh's efforts to promote Jeju to the Indian market. "Indian groups usually transit via Hong Kong but Hong Kong (travel consultants) block seats so it's sometimes difficult for Indians (to get seats)," he shared. "I'd urge for more direct flights to Jeju to attract the Indian markets, plus easier visa access overall to South Korea."

Jeju opseoyo

"Honjeo opseoye" is the Jeju dialect for "Welcome!!!"

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World's leading the Business Event Destination, Jeju, Korea

Need to know



Four Seasons Seoul joins city's line-up of top-end properties

Following the surge of high-end hotels like Conrad Seoul, JW Marriott Seoul Dongdaemun Square and W Seoul Walkerhill in recent years, next to rise up on the city's luxury scene is Four Seasons Seoul come May 2015. Marking Four Season's foray into South Korea, the hotel will be housed in a 25-storey building in Sejongro Square in Seoul's central business district. The 317-key luxury property will boast high-end restaurants, a speakeasy bar, a state-of-the-art fitness centre, a saltwater pool, plus glamorous spaces for events and meetings.

Making drama in Jeju

Moong Chee Event Tour is offering the Making Drama Programme which enables groups to bond while accomplishing missions at Jeju's Locadio World.

Participants can transform into their favourite Korean film hero or heroine and reenact famous scenes at various film sets of different time periods and historical backgrounds. At the same time, participants will be challenged to accomplish team missions within a set time frame. Tasks include puzzle challenges, *yunnori* (a traditional game played by throwing sticks), Golden Bell of the Joseon Period and the likes.

The winner will then be announced and awarded at the end of these fun activities.

Visit www.moongchee.com or call (82-64) 724-6887 for programme details.

Go shopping

Korean retail giant Lotte Group in October launched the completed commercial retail buildings on the lower part of Lotte World Tower & Lotte World Mall, located in Songpa-gu, Seoul.

Lotte World Mall, an 11-storey commercial building, houses about 1,000 local and global stores across 429,000m² of space, including a cinema, a duty-free shop, an aquarium, a food court and a space dedicated to Hallyu.

The adjacent Lotte World Tower, currently under construction, is set to become the country's tallest building at 123 floors when it opens in October 2016. The uppermost part (levels 120-123) of Lotte World Tower will serve as an observatory while levels 117 to 119 will be home to an art gallery. A hotel, offices and a medical centre are also expected to be part of its amenities.

Gangnam welcomes Aloft

Aloft Seoul Gangnam, which opened its doors on October 1, features 188 urban-inspired rooms and suites, each bearing in-room amenities such as platform beds with plush bedding, walk-in showers with custom amenities by Bliss Spa, plug-n-play docking stations, 42" LCD TVs and complimentary Internet access.

The hotel offers 64m² of meeting space, including three versatile meeting rooms that can seat up to 48 pax in a theater-style setting.

Recreational spaces include the 24-hour grab-and-go beverage area, Re:fuel by Aloft; Nook, the all-day dining restaurant; the W XYZ bar; and the Re:chargeSM fitness centre.

Located on Yeongdong-daero in Gangnam, the hotel allows for easy access to the COEX Convention and Exhibition Center, as well as the office district in Samsung-dong. For more information, visit www.alofthotels.com/seoulgangnam.



VietJet links Hanoi and Danang to Seoul

Vietnamese LCC VietJet in July launched daily flights from Hanoi and Danang respectively to Seoul, adding the city to its list of international destinations that includes Singapore and Bangkok.

From Hanoi, flights depart Noi Bai International Airport at 01.45, while flights take off from Da Nang International Airport at 02.00. Both flights leave Incheon at 11.05.

The airline expects to serve 2,520 passengers per week on the new route, which is operated under a partnership with South Korea's Seyou Corporation.

Moonlight tour of Changdeokgung Palace

Changdeokgung Palace, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is said to be the most traditional and authentic among Seoul's five grand palaces built during the Joseon Dynasty, and a moonlight tour makes one of the best ways to take in the beauty and grandeur of this architectural gem.

Ideal for MICE groups, this unique experience enables participants to stroll selected sights in the palace, including the Injeongjeon Hall, the venue for royal ceremonies; Nakseonjae, the king's compound; and Yeongyeongdang, a performing stage with seats, Korean tea and traditional snacks for the audience.

As the tour takes place on two days around the full moon period during April to May and September to November, tickets are limited to 100 pax per tour.

More information is available at <http://eng.cdg.go.kr>.



Good buzzing in the southern state

A new MICE strategy and slew of infrastructure developments promise to raise the tourism appeal of Malaysia's Johor State. By **S Puvaneswary**

An earnest transformation has been taking place in Johor, the southern-most state of Peninsular Malaysia and a bustling destination just across the border of Singapore.

New tourist attractions, specifically Legoland Malaysia and Puteri Harbour Family Theme Park, which opened in recent years, have helped to boost arrivals to the state.

But the Johor State Government wants more than just leisure traffic. Along with the Iskandar Regional Development Authority (IRDA) and Johor Department of Tourism, the trio has set in motion plans to establish a state convention bureau by 2016 which will be tasked with attracting regional and international business events to Johor.

Johor will be the third secondary destination in Malaysia to have a convention bureau, after Sarawak in East Malaysia and Penang in the north, which is in the midst of setting up the Penang International Convention and Exhibition Bureau.

A working committee, comprising the public and private sector, has been formed to hammer out the details of the new convention bureau. It is co-chaired by Mohammad Rosly Md Selamat, senior vice president of economic intelligence at IRDA and Badrul Kassim, director of Johor Tourism Department.

Ismail Ibrahim, chief executive, IRDA, said the state is concurrently developing hardware in order to attract more business events.

On the hotel front, there are 10,400 rooms in 65 member hotels of the Malaysian Association of Hotels Johor Chapter in Johor Bahru, the state capital. Across the entire state, the inventory totals 12,500 rooms in 72 member hotels.

Since 2013, several international brand name hotels have opened in Johor Bahru. They include the 345-



key Renaissance Johor Bahru Hotel which offers seven flexible function rooms, and the 283-key Traders Hotel, Puteri Harbour which features a 515m² ballroom and five other multi-function rooms that are suitable for smaller groups ranging from 40 to 280 guests.

More rooms will come online in Iskandar Malaysia, which is being developed as a metropolis three times the size of Singapore. Room count in this district is expected to increase to 6,600 rooms by end-2015, from around 5,000 rooms now.

Noor M Ismail, head, sales & marketing at Asian Overland Services Tours & Travel, said: "New international hotels will help to draw delegates to the destination."

He opined that the state's numerous retail options such as Johor Premium Outlets, a collection of 130 designer and brand name outlet stores, along with family-friendly attractions add further value to Johor's appeal.

"They will keep meeting delegates

and their (accompanying family) happy," he said, adding that clients from South-east Asia, India, China and the Middle East view Johor as an attractive option when packaged with Singapore, as meetings and tours in the southern state are more affordable.

Joe Lim, executive director of Konsortium Express and Tours in Singapore, agrees, saying that should more meetings be held in Johor, Singapore would benefit from day tours rather than overnight stays due to the higher cost of accommodation in the city state.

Michael Goh, senior vice president, sales of Star Cruises, suggested that delegates attending conventions and meetings in Johor could extend afterwards to Singapore for leisure cruises.

Attention is also being paid to the development of convention facilities. Johor's main convention centre today is Persada Johor International Convention Center, which can accommodate up to 4,000 delegates.

The future Puteri Harbour Convention Centre will be able to support a variety of business events, from exhibitions to banquets

Destination: Malaysia

Recognised as the largest purpose built convention centre in Johor Bahru, Persada Johor International Convention Center has hosted high profile events such as the 8th World Islamic Economic Forum which attracted 2,100 delegates from 86 countries in December 2012.

The adjoining Puteri Pacific Johor Bahru provides accommodation support with 425 guestrooms, and is also equipped with a ballroom for 350 pax in a banquet setting and seven function rooms.

During the 8th World Islamic Economic Forum, meeting spaces at both the convention centre and hotel were fully optimised.

Ismail projected that three to four more convention centres would be needed in Nusajaya, Pasir Gudang and Senai over the next five years.

UEM Sunrise is expected to start constructing a convention centre in Puteri Harbour, Nusajaya, in April 2015. The venue – Puteri Harbour Convention Centre – is scheduled for completion in early 2018. Designed by Cox Architects as a boutique convention centre in a resort setting, Puteri Harbour Convention Centre will sit on a prime waterfront site and be flanked by Traders Hotel, Puteri Harbour, Johor and International Ferry Terminal. Facilities will

include a waterfront ballroom that can seat a 1,200-pax banquet, a plenary hall for 1,200 people which will be connected to a 5,000m² exhibition hall, allowing for flexible expansion, as well as 1,500m² of meeting space.

K Nirubah, director of sales and marketing for Persada Johor International Convention Centre and Puteri Pacific Johor Bahru, welcomes the formation of a convention bureau.

“With a bureau, we can market Johor more effectively and have a better presence at MICE trade shows. One of our biggest challenges is that we have not been able to get through to foreign meeting planners and incentive (specialists) due to the lack of awareness of (Johor),” she said.

Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB) has also backed Johor’s move. Zulkefli Sharif, CEO of the federal convention bureau, said establishing a state bureau would complement MYCEB’s efforts in bidding for more international events.

He added: “A bureau will also be



Persada Johor International Convention Center in Johor Bahru is presently the state's main venue for large business events

able to inform and update meeting planners, incentive houses and all MICE players on the state’s meeting capacities, attractions and strengths as a MICE destination.

“Organisers will feel comfortable when fam trips and product updates are presented by people who know their products well and can provide technical support and advice.”

Besides support from a convention bureau, Syed G Qadir, managing director at Wonder Ways Dhaka, would like to see Singapore and Malaysia offering a single visa for MICE groups from Bangladesh, as that would encourage planners to twin both countries.

Ideas Two-day corporate bonding excursion to Johor

Day1 Start the day with a city tour of Johor Bahru. First, pay a visit to Sultan Abu Bakar State Mosque, one of the finest mosques in Malaysia. After a photo stop, drive past the Royal Mausoleum and proceed to Eastern Pewter for a demonstration by craftsmen on creating pewter accessories.

Break for lunch at Savaro Restaurant at Puteri Harbour, where a great view of the marina can be enjoyed.

Next, make a beeline for Johor Premium Outlets where your group can indulge in some retail therapy, buying up discounted brand name items.

Later, the tour continues onwards to Arulmigu Sri Raja Kaliannan, a Hindu temple made of glass. In May 2010 it was listed in the Malaysian Book of Records as the first and only glass temple in the nation.

The tour ends with a visit to Plaza Seni, a cultural centre showcasing

local handicraft such as batik, textiles, copperware, wood carving and ceramics.

Day2 Spend the day at Kukup Village, a fishing community in Pontian District, approximately 80km from Johor Bahru. The journey from the state’s capital will take your group past rubber estates and oil palm, coffee and cocoa plantations.

At Kukup Village, a private tour waits your group. Start with a visit to a fish farm where participants will get to feed the fishes. A sumptuous seafood lunch will be served in a traditional fisherman’s house, followed by a guided tour around the village, which is entirely built on stilts.

Depart the village at 16.00 for Johor Bahru.

Itinerary by East Coast Adventure Travel & Tours



Take a trip back into the quiet, good old days with a visit to Kukup Village and see how the fishing community lives

Need to know



DoubleTree by Hilton opens in Johor's central business district

Opened in July, DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Johor Bahru offers 335 rooms, a business centre and four F&B outlets.

It boasts a dedicated event floor that comprises 10 versatile meeting spaces including two divisible ballrooms and spacious outdoor function areas. The largest venue, the Grand Ballroom, can host 750 guests for receptions or 450 in theatre-style.

It is also perfect for business travellers, thanks to its location in the central business district and close proximity to Persada Johor International Convention Centre. The hotel is also minutes from the Singapore-Malaysia causeway.

EduCity gives Johor a new sporty edge in events

Johor's capacity for sports events notches up with the opening of EduCity Stadium & Sports Complex on March 1, 2013. The 14,000-seat stadium comprises a world-class football cum rugby field, a 400m athletic track, an aquatic centre complete with Olympic-size swimming and diving pool, an indoor arena with multiple courts for badminton, basketball and futsal, and outdoor courts for tennis, volleyball and futsal.

The complex can also support private functions such as corporate gala dinners, concerts and Chinese opera shows.

For enquiries, email esc.info@educity-iskandar.com.my.



A grand option for business events in Johor

Featuring 330 stylish rooms, 18 meeting rooms, an indoor ballroom that can seat 300 people in a banquet setting and three outdoor banquet venues, Le Grandeur Palm Resort Johor is able to support a range of business events.

Gala dinners can be hosted outdoors by the resort's Olympic-size swimming pool where a floating stage can be arranged.

Customised teambuilding activities can also be done on-site, thanks to the resort's impressive range of sports and recreational facilities including an eight-lane bowling alley, squash and tennis courts, a bicycle rental service, and a lawn for games like futsal, volleyball and netball.

As Le Grandeur Palm Resort Johor sits close to Palm Resort Golf & Country Club, event planners can easily fit in friendly golf games before or after meetings. Palm Resort Golf & Country Club offers three golf courses that are suitable for novice and professional golfers.

More information on both properties can be found at www.palmresort.com.



Take a break in natural surroundings

The Endau-Rompin National Park comes highly recommended as a destination for business warriors to escape the bustling city and bask in nature's lush environs. Participants can enjoy various activities such as jungle trekking, camping, visiting an aboriginal village, bird watching and nature studies.

More than fruity delights at the Desaru Fruit Farm

Ideal as a pre- or post-tour programme, Desaru Fruit Farm in Johor offers visitors a guided tour of the 180-acre tropical fruit land which is home to more than 100 varieties of tropical fruit. Visitors can learn about good agricultural practices and integrated pest management. Visit www.desaruff.com for more information on the attraction.

A spicy affair

The Spice Kitchen in Johor Bahru is loved for its Indian-Chinese fusion cuisine which features traditional Hakka recipes infused with Indian spices. North Indian and Thai dishes are available too. The restaurant can seat around 140 guests and offers outdoor catering services.

For reservations, contact restaurant@thespicekitchen.com.my.



Building for the future



Burj Khalifa Dubai

New and upcoming infrastructure, all with extensive event facilities, are helping Dubai to achieve its tourism vision, writes **Shekhar Niyogi**

Dubai has established a new tourism vision for 2020, which aims to welcome 20 million visitors per year – including 1.9 million international business visitors – by the end of the decade. Supporting this ambitious goal is the recent emergence of new tourism developments that are drawing the interest of international business event planners.

One of the destination's most prominent newbies is the 72-storey, 355m high JW Marriott Marquis Hotel. Said to be the world's tallest hotel, the property has won over event organisers with its massive inventory of 1,608 rooms and suites, and almost 8,000m² of indoor and outdoor event spaces.

Its general manager Rupprecht Queitsch told *TTGmice*: "Since open-

ing in February 2013 we have hosted more than 1,700 meetings of 10 people or more, worth US\$24.4 million."

Queitsch opined that Dubai now "ranks alongside (business event) destinations such as Orlando, Las Vegas and Shanghai", which all offer hotels with mammoth inventories to cater for large-scale meetings.

Also making its debut in 2013 is Conrad Dubai. The 555-room hotel in the heart of Dubai's financial and shopping district offers 4,400m² of event space spanning three ballrooms, 11 meeting rooms and a business centre. One of the ballrooms is equipped with an indoor elevator large enough to transport vehicles, making the venue ideal for car launches.

The Oberoi, Dubai, which welcomed its first guests in June 2013, also caters well for business events. It has 252 rooms and suites, a grand ballroom that can be divided into three sections, nine meeting rooms and an executive boardroom with a private terrace.

Come 2016, Dubai will see the completion of the US\$3 billion Al Habtoor City project on Sheikh Zayed Road. Spanning 929,030m², the entertainment and hospitality development will comprise three hotels operated

by Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide and under the brands St Regis, W and Westin; a standalone theatre; the world's first Bentley Café & Boutique which will come with a car display area; a classical French-style garden; and a tennis academy with a clubhouse.

It is expected to transform the city's Business Bay and Dubai Water Canal district into a prime meetings hub due to its extensive event and accommodation facilities and close proximity to the Dubai International Convention and Exhibition Centre.

According to Al Habtoor Group chairman, Khalaf Al Habtoor, the massive development will also enable Dubai to better compete with top business event destinations like New York, London, Paris and Hong Kong.

So far, Dubai is making progress on the business events front. This year ICCA ranked Dubai among the top 100 cities for international association meetings. It stood in 63rd position for having hosted 37 ICCA-qualified meetings in 2013, and is the only UAE emirate to be on the top 100 chart.

A prominent event hosted in Dubai this year is the Project Management Institute Global Congress, held from May 5 to 7. As the world's largest not-for-profit membership association for the project management profession, the annual meeting attracted more than 1,200 decision-makers from around the world.

In April, Nu Skin China led a 16,500-pax incentive to Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

Ahmed Alkhaja, senior vice president-venues, Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC), said: "We are seeing some major wins across tactical industry segments, which further reinforces Dubai's knowledge economy proposition and creates a rich sharing platform for ideas and discussion that will positively impact decisive regional market sectors."

In the coming years, Dubai will play host to two heavyweight events – 2018 ICCA Congress and the World Expo in 2020.

Ajay Bhojwani, managing director of MCI Middle East, said: "Showcasing events and having testimonials of success (will) strengthen the Dubai brand and build confidence in anyone looking at holding meetings here."

Need to know



Marriott plants massive property in Dubai city centre

Opened in 2013 in Dubai's Business Bay, the towering JW Marriott Marquis Hotel features 1,608 rooms and suites including four two-storey penthouse suites, 14 dining destinations, a spa, a health and fitness club.

Regarded as a business events hub, the hotel boasts a stable of two ballrooms, 32 meeting rooms, four boardrooms and a selection of outdoor event spaces. The largest venue on site is the Dubai Ballroom which can accommodate events with up to 1,548 guests.

Visit www.jwmarriottmarquisdubai.com for more information.

Meet and stay at the Al Murooj Rotana

Located in downtown Dubai, close to the Dubai Mall and Burj Khalifa, the Al Murooj Rotana caters well for residential meetings and business travellers with its inventory of 247 rooms and suites, 140 apartments, a grand ballroom for 700 guests in a theatre setting, eight meeting rooms, and 11 dining outlets, among other facilities.

To wind down, business warriors can retreat to the hotel's fitness centre and temperature-controlled swimming pool.

Al Murooj Rotana also offers 27 semi-furnished offices that can be chartered for short- and long-term use by event organisers.

Email almurooj.hotel@rotana.com for more details.

Take a joyride in the skies

The Jazirah Aviation Club in Ras Al Khaimah, an hour's drive from Dubai, offers incentive delegates early morning joyrides in the skies, an experience that promises breathtaking views of the sea and sand. Each flight on a microlight aircraft lasts between 30 and 60 minutes and is led by a trained pilot or flying instructor. Charges from 300 dirhams (US\$82) for a 20-minute joyride. Visit www.jac-uae.net for more information.

Experience Dubai after sunset on a traditional dhow

White Sands Tours & Travel conducts a dinner dhow cruise along Dubai's Deira Creek. Guests can catch sights of the destination's illuminated city skyline as well as old trading dhows and luxury yachts that bob over water as they dig into a sumptuous buffet dinner of continental and oriental dishes. Call (9714) 2826-800 or visit www.whitesandstours.com for more information on this programme.

Underwater adventures

The Lost Chambers Aquarium at Atlantis The Palm offers visitors an interactive and educational trek through underwater mazes and tunnels, where they will feast their eyes on 65,000 marine animals, such as sharks, eels, seahorses and piranhas, swimming freely by.

There are over 20 marine life exhibits in the aquarium including a touch tank and an interactive Aquatheatre show.

Special arrangements can be made for corporate incentive groups. A 'chamber' can be chartered for private gatherings, with canapés and drinks being served while marine biologists share amazing facts about the aquarium's inhabitants.

Email lostchambers@atlantisthepalm.com for more information.



Dusit Thani Dubai refreshes its suites

Dusit Thani Dubai has completed the renovation of its one- and two-bedroom suites, which now feature traditional Thai-inspired handcrafted timber furniture, "floating" walls embellished with gold leaf mouldings and intricate hand carved artwork, along with modern lighting and entertainment systems.

All 147 suites have also been replanned to allow better use of existing space.

The five-star hotel's last renovation effort in 2013 involved its deluxe rooms and executive suites.





New York City's
livewire vibes
are familiar and
attractive to Asian
travellers

Lure of the Big Apple

Encouraged by rising Asian MICE footfalls, New York City is working even harder to capture more Asian business events, writes **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

Thanks to the pervasive influence of Hollywood movies and American pop culture, many Asians already look to New York City (NYC) as an aspirational destination and industry players are hence eager to leverage the Big Apple's brand recognition for outbound travellers from Asia.

Makiko Matsuda Healy, vice president, tourism development for NYC & Company – NYC's official marketing and tourism organisation – contends that the city's energy, diversity and attractions are among its best assets in courting Asian MICE business.

"As the world's number one draw for business and leisure, attendees have an additional incentive to come early, stay late, bring their spouses and get business done," Healy said.

"NYC's cultural diversity is an advantage to host Asian guests. From language capability, variety of authentic cuisine options and dietary requirements such as halal and vegetarian needs, many cultural-specific talent and items can be sourced locally because of our community's diversity."

The greater interest from Asia is also reflected in official statistics. According to figures from NYC & Company, the city welcomed 677,000 international MICE visitors in 2013, of which China and Japan were among the top source markets at eight per cent and seven per cent respectively.

"Although we do not have a specific figure, both China and Japan are key generators of the incentive travel segment as well. We have also been seeing more movement from India and South-east Asia such as Indonesia," said Healy.

"We have been active in the MICE

space across Asia, especially China, Japan, India, Australia and South Korea, through our international offices outreach, trade shows (like CITM and AIME), sales missions, seminars and fam trips, etc. We also started our outreach in South-east Asia last year through our first presence at ITB Asia."

Likewise, significant growth has been recorded from China, South Korea and Japan in the past five years for New York Marriott Marquis, said director of sales & marketing, Leon Goldberg.

While Japan remains a "steady feeder market", South Korea and

"As the world's number one draw for business and leisure, attendees have an additional incentive to come early, stay late, bring their spouses and get business done."

Makiko Matsuda Healy

Vice president, tourism development
NYC & Company



China are two markets that “have been evolving for the past two years in all segments”, Goldberg observed.

“We also see business delegations (from Asia). For the pure incentives, we are seeing interest in affluence, and the aspirational trip to NYC as the “carrot” to this ultimate destination. We are also seeing an increase in direct sales organisations such as Amway, Herbalife, etc.,” he shared.

Like many Western hotels that in recent years have rolled out Asian-centric programmes, New York Marriott Marquis also gave a culture crash course to its staff on welcoming Chinese visitors in preparation for Amway China’s 1,500-pax visit in April 2014.

“We replaced all hot water carafes from the coffee makers in all guest rooms, as Chinese people in general prefer warm water over ice-cold faucet water. They also prefer tea to coffee, so this allowed them to heat water in the privacy of their rooms,” shared Goldberg. “We also engaged cultural expert Terri Morrison, author of *Kiss, Bow or Shake Hands*, to conduct cultural training on-property,

with all the do’s and don’ts of interacting with Chinese guests.”

Other NYC hoteliers are positive in their outlook of the Asian market. Said Trump SoHo’s director of sales and marketing, Mary Mayes: “We are currently focusing on growing the Asian MICE market. Industry intelligence all points to the importance of courting this demographic.”

Elaborating on Trump SoHo’s multi-pronged promotion strategy for Asia, Mayes said: “On the marketing front, we have invested in a Chinese-language website, as well as efforts to target the online and offline media channels that are most influential. From a sales standpoint, the Trump Organization has a new development office in Shanghai to grow the brand’s footprint in the region. On the property level, we have multilingual staff to assist travellers, a dedicated arrival procedure for Chinese guests that keeps cultural customs top-of-mind, and several traditional Asian dishes on our in-room dining menu.”

And it’s no longer just hotels that

have their sights trained on the Asian inbound market, meeting venues are also getting into the Asian bandwagon.

“Since Convene’s founding in 2009, we have seen many global companies – including Asian-based organisations – leverage our expanding network of off-site, professional meeting centres,” said Chris Kelly, president and co-founder of Convene, which operates conference centres in NYC and Washington. “Meetings from Asia are a very important prospective market for Convene.”

With the rise in flights linking Asia and the US, NYC & Company’s Healy recognises that visa regulations remain an obstacle in luring inbound visitors. “The US visa processing waiting times have been shortened tremendously, especially in China, India and Brazil because of the Obama administration’s commitment,” she said. “We need to continue to advocate for this even more and into other countries so that planners have no hesitation about selecting the US – and NYC in particular – as their next destination.”

Working the theme park magic

Orlando came up tops as the most visited destination in the US, surpassing arch-rival New York City to receive a record 59 million visitations in 2013, a three per cent increase from the previous milestone achieved the year before.

Speaking to the media on the sidelines of AIBTM in June, Visit Orlando president and CEO, George Aguel, said: “We are one of the top three convention destinations in the US. Orlando is way up there because of its personal appeal... We have highly attractive leisure destinations and we enjoy the highest event attendance (among US cities).

“Some 50-60 per cent of delegates coming in for meetings will sneak in a day or two, or even a night, to enjoy Orlando’s offerings. We get extended platform – a majority of meeting delegates come back and find new things a few years later, motivating (them) to come back for vacations,” he added.

The undisputed theme park capital of the world is in the midst of “one of its most significant expansion periods”, Aguel emphasised, highlighting

a US\$5 billion investment earmarked for the rejuvenation of Orlando’s retail, dining and attraction scene.

SeaWorld Orlando recently unveiled its biggest expansion in the company’s history and Universal Orlando Resort in July debuted The Wizarding World of Harry Potter – Diagon Alley, while the opening of Four Seasons Resort Orlando has bumped up the city’s luxury inventory. Anticipated debuts in coming years include the world’s tallest observation wheel, Orlando Eye (opening spring 2015), and the Avatar Land (opening 2017) in Walt Disney World.

Home to four theme parks, two nighttime entertainment districts, six convention resorts, another 10 resorts for overflow and more than 65,000m² of flexible meeting space, Walt Disney World Resort’s position as “a complete destination rather than just a hotel or collection of hotels” is its greatest strength in vying for international MICE business, remarked director of resort sales, Amy Pfeiffer.

However, despite Orlando’s immense popularity in the American meetings market, industry players



acknowledged that the destination’s outreach to Asian visitors is somewhat more limited.

Admitting that it’s “a long way to come to Orlando” from Asia, Michael Lyons, exhibition director – AIBTM, Meetings and Events Portfolio of Reed Travel Exhibitions, posits that the destination’s “great halls, phenomenal theme parks and world-class MICE facilities like Orange County

The Wizarding World of Harry Potter – Diagon Alley

Convention Center” make it “a special place to do MICE and leisure together”.

When asked how Visit Orlando can raise the appeal of the destination to the Asian MICE market when numerous theme parks have popped up in Asia in recent years, Aguel expressed confidence that “the Asian theme park effect” will work to Orlando’s advantage.

“We (Orlando) are the mother of all theme parks. Tokyo has seen the reverse trend – visitors also want to visit the flagships in the US/Southern California – same thing happened for

Europe/Paris patrons too,” he said.

“We have not yet courted the Asian meeting market as we’re restricted by a lack of direct flights to Asia, but we’re gaining brand awareness in China and Japan; we have seen fantastic lift for Europe and South American markets with direct flights (so expect the same thing once there are flights from Asia).”

Aguel added that the NTO is working on expanding its airline lift to Asia.

Similarly, more Asian MICE groups are currently heading to the Disneyland Resort in California than Walt

Disney World, a trend that probably mirrors the overall travel patterns of Asian groups, observed Pfeiffer. Walt Disney World is hence keen to step up destination awareness among Asian visitors.

She elaborated: “We have dedicated teams located in-market and States-side that focus specifically on the Asian MICE market. An example of how we’re growing marketing and sales efforts is that we have greatly increased our presence at AIME the last two years. We’re excited to see how this affects future business.” – **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**



Need to know

Gripping Chicago on the edge

Just launched in spring 2014, Tilt is a glass-and-steel-enclosed moveable platform that extends 30 degrees outwards to generate downward-facing views of The Magnificent Mile and Chicago’s famed skyline – from 94 stories at 360 Chicago (formerly the John Hancock Observatory).

Accommodating eight guests at any one time, the Tilt experience can also be combined with private cocktail receptions or seated dinners at the observatory deck.

Visit www.360chicago.com or email groupsales@360chicago.com for more information and reservations.

More glitz on the Strip

Casting the recession blues behind, Las Vegas is again bustling with several mega developments and breathing new life into previously mothballed projects.

Malaysia’s Genting Group will develop a US\$4 billion Resorts World Las Vegas project on a 35ha site on the Strip’s northern end. The project’s first phase will include 3,000 hotel rooms, a 16,000m² casino, a 4,000-seat theatre, 30 F&B outlets and an elaborate garden attraction. Work has begun in 2H2014, with construction expected to take 24 to 36 months.

MGM Resorts International, along with Los Angeles-based AEG, have broken grounds on the US\$375 million, 20,000-seat Las Vegas Arena, a centrepiece that will complement MGM’s US\$100 million entertainment district between the New York-New York and Monte Carlo resorts as well as the Park dining complex. Both developments are scheduled to open in 2016.

Opened since March in the heart of the Vegas strip, the High Roller is the world’s tallest observation wheel at 168m tall. Conceived as the centrepiece of The Linq – Caesars Entertainment’s new US\$500 million open-air shopping, dining and entertainment district – it boasts 28 passenger cabins that can accommodate 40 passengers each, and is illuminated with 2,000 LED lights nightly.



Convene with ease

A developer and operator of off-site meeting venues in the US, NYC-based Convene now operates at five locations (four in NYC and one in Washington).

The company offers all-inclusive, turnkey meeting packages, with proprietary in-house services including production support (programme design, logistics and content delivery), F&B (full commercial kitchens and on-site chefs), technology (in-room technology and on-site specialists), operations and staffing.

Convene’s facilities span a wide range of sizes and can accommodate two to 400 pax. Options include open community spaces and individual workspace areas at the centres.

Visit www.convene.com or contact info@convene.com for more information.



Motortainment for corporates

Richard Petty Driving Experience at Walt Disney World Resort Speedway, a mile-long, tri-oval track, has rolled out a brand-new line of adrenaline-charged Motortainment events.

Designed for groups of 150 or more, planners can select up to four programmes to incorporate into a private event. Programmes include the Exotic Driving Experience, which lets attendees get behind the wheel of exotic supercars by Ferrari, Lamborghini, Audi and Porsche, and the Head-to-Head Challenge where thrill-seekers can race other participants in a timed competition.

More information at www.drivepetty.com.



Christian Sack



Angela Hassan



Jon Bourbaud



Bennet Chang

China

Fairmont Peace Hotel has made **Annelin Ni** director of sales and **Rosa Lei** director of sales and marketing. Ni was last with Regal International East Asia Hotel as director of business development while Lei joins from JW Marriott Hotel Beijing where she was the director of marketing.

Raffles Beijing has appointed **Christian Sack** general manager. Sack moves from Raffles Grand Hotel d'Angkor, Siem Reap where he was general manager since 2011.

Fiji

Angela Hassan has joined the new luxury property, **Nanuku Resort & Spa**, as sales manager. She brings with her more than 20 years of experience in business development and sales, and was last sales and marketing manager at the Naviti Resort on Fiji's Coral Coast.

Hong Kong

Denise Chiang has moved from Hong Kong Airlines where she was head of corporate sales to her present position as director of business development – corporate at **The Langham, Hong Kong**. She possesses more than a decade of hospitality experience and was with luxury properties such as Four Seasons Hotel Hong Kong and Conrad Hong Kong Hotel.

Mael Vastine has started his new role as general manager of **OZO Wesley Hong Kong**. Vastine built his career within the Accor Group and was resident manager of the ibis Hong Kong Central and Sheung Wan Hotel prior to joining ONYX Hospitality Group's OZO Wesley Hong Kong.

Indonesia

Harper Kuta Bali Hotel has appointed **I Nyoman Agus Suparta** as its sales manager. Agus last held the position of assistant sales manager at a hotel in the Kuta Beach region and has more than six years of experience in the hospitality industry.

Laos

Apple Tree Group has named **Jon Bourbaud** its new area general manager for Laos. Bourbaud last headed Apple Tree Group's Bagan Lodge in Myanmar and has over 10 years of experience in managing properties across South-east Asia.

Malaysia

Vive Hospitality has appointed **Bennet Chang** as general manager of the new **Qliq Damansara** in Selangor. Bennet has held various senior management positions with major international hotel chains and was most recently general manager at Swiss-Belhotel International Hotels and Resorts.

Singapore

Anne Tan is now group sales director of **Park Hotel Group**. She brings with her over 20 years of industry experience, having held global sales positions in other international hotel chains within the region. Her most recent role was vice president of marketing and sales for Meliá Hotels International.



Anne Johnston

FRHI Hotels & Resorts has appointed **Terence Tan** as director of global accounts in Asia-Pacific. Prior to this, Tan held the position of director of sales and marketing at Fairmont Singapore and Swissôtel the Stamford.



Maarten Groeneveld

Holiday Inn Singapore Atrium has named **Anne Johnston** its general manager and **Chua Yew Hock** its new executive chef. Johnston's career with the Intercontinental Hotels Group has so far spanned 14 hotels in eight countries. She was last general manager of the Crowne Plaza Bratislava. Chua has more than 30 years of culinary experience and was last executive chef at Grand Park Orchard.

been promoted to CEO of **Diethelm Travel Group**, replacing Richard Brouwer. Groeneveld joined the group in 2000 in its Myanmar operations and had been COO since 2012.

Thailand

Dusit Thani Laguna Phuket has promoted **A L Claude Benjamin Perera** to resident manager. He joined the property in March 2014 as executive assistant manager – F&B.

Maarten Groeneveld has

Rajat Chatterjee has been appointed general manager of **Bangkok Marriott Hotel Sukhumvit**. Chatterjee brings with him a wealth of experience with over 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry, having joined Marriott International in 2002. He was last at Dubai Marriott Harbour Hotel and Suites.

Shangri-La Hotel Singapore and **TTGmice** partnered recently to welcome corporate and MICE planners *Back to School* at **The Pavilion**, a former Dutch school in the 1920s converted into a delightful new venue on the hotel grounds. Photos by Eugene Tang



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What's next?

After this month's look back to 2014, read our **Outlook 2015**, which will give you insights into the hopes and challenges for the year. Find out too how the MICE space is being innovated to connect with **Millennials**. The February issue will also take you to **Hong Kong, Japan, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam** and **Malaysia** – a bumper crop of MICE destination reports. Don't miss it.



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