

February/March 2015

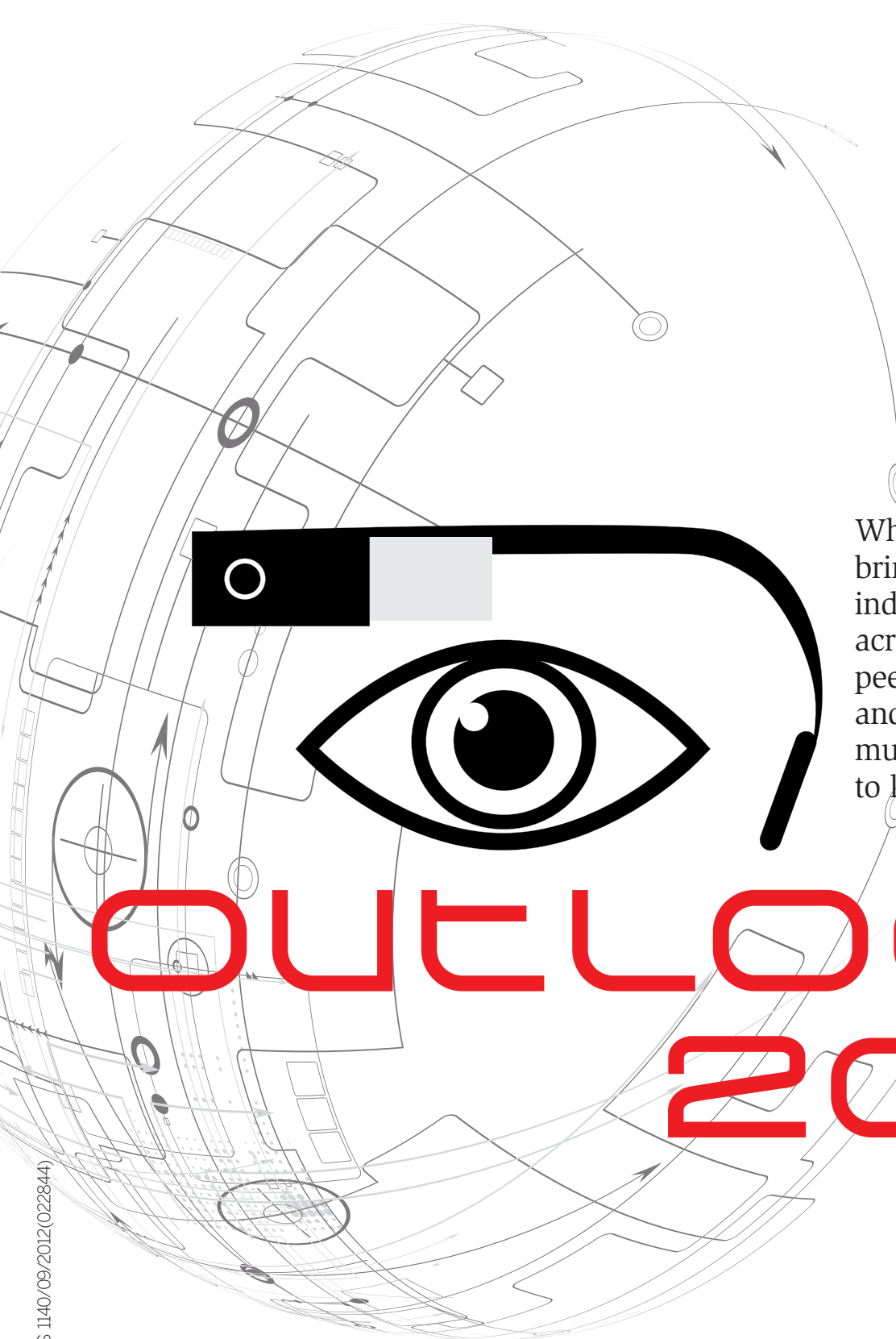
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beyond Golden Route



What will the new year
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Raini Hamdi
Senior Editor

ASEAN it is for me

Someone asked me the other day what's 'hot' in the region where he could bring his meeting. It got me thinking. I finally settled on South-east Asia.

Why? For one, there's the 'rouble trouble' factor. Russian travellers have fuelled demand for many resorts such as Bali, Pattaya, Phuket, Nha Trang, etc, but now, thanks to Vladimir Putin's dependence on the energy industry – devastating when oil prices whittle by half over six months – and sanctions on his economy following the Ukraine crisis, the rouble has all but collapsed and, along with it, a darling source market.

In its wake, there is a huge capacity that needs to be filled, considering that not only is Russia a volume market, its travellers have a healthy length of stay – in Thailand, the average is believed to be 11 nights. Planners may thus find places where there was a huge dependence on Russia suddenly becoming more available and value-for-money than before.

A destination like Indonesia has added pressure as public sector meetings – a huge business – are expected to drop significantly, now that new President Joko Widodo has decreed they should not be held outside government premises.

Meanwhile, there is excitement in Singapore, which is celebrating its 50 years of nation-building, with hotels and attractions rolling out special deals to leverage the milestone.

It's also great to see the Philippines getting back into the game with gusto. I was impressed by its new MICE marketing, *Fun Works*. The video made me want to meet in the Philippines, where a slew of new products and *Visit Philippines 2015* await.

Malaysia has launched a Festivals year and, with the shrinking ringgit as a result of the oil price plunge, it should be cheaper to meet in Malaysia.

And let's not forget Thailand, which is beautifully competitive because it is still trying to recover from the coup's devastating impact on MICE.

What I really like about Thailand is the nationwide beach clean-up effort. This has continued into the new year with Pattaya and Jomtien receiving the marching orders to offer 10m of public space or empty sand for every 100m beach-chair zone with each vendor concession separated from one another by one metre. The 2.9km stretch of Pattaya Beach now offers public space of 1.8km, 60 per cent of the total area. At Jomtien Beach, its 5.9km stretch now has a public space of 3.4km, about 58 per cent of the total area. The remaining areas at both beaches are for deckchair and umbrella rentals.

In our cover story this issue, *Outlook 2015*, planners are said to forget finding hotel cost-savings in Asia as rates are predicted to rise up to four per cent due to well-matched demand and supply.

But I think if you look deeper and wider in South-east Asia this year, you may find the best value.

Happy hunting.



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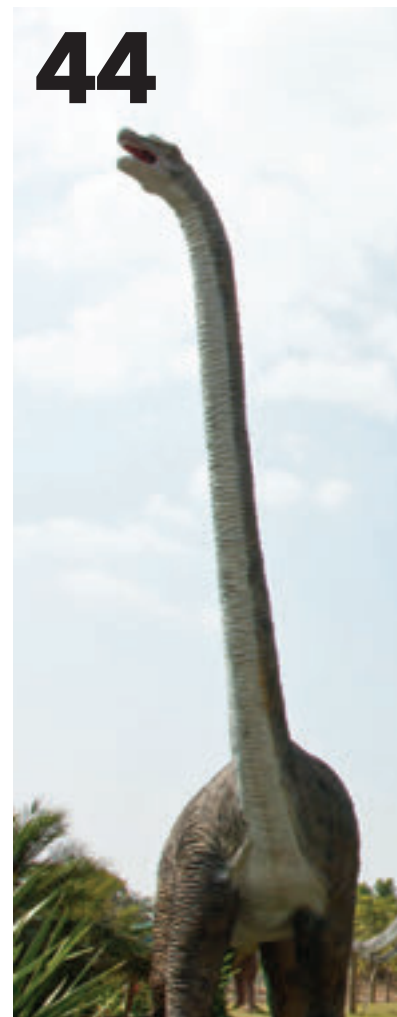
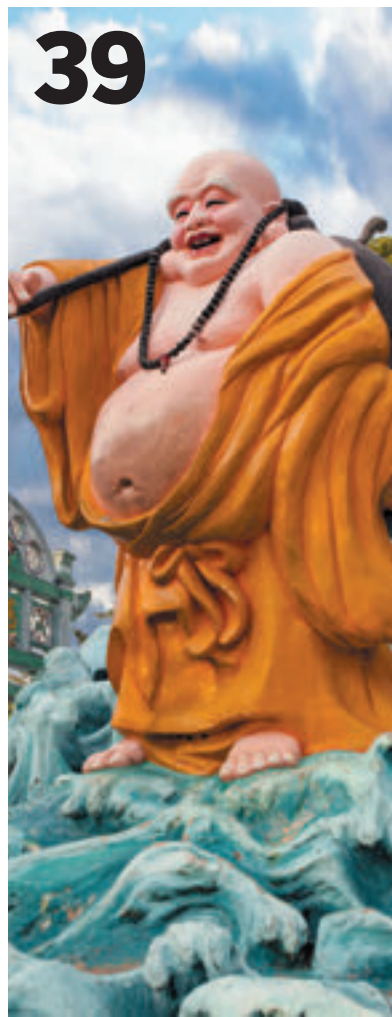


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Japan promotes destinations with historic European charm and theme attractions to attract Asian MICE, in particular incentives. By Mimi Hudoyo

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The island is shedding its leisure-only image, drawing MICE events with new products and rejuvenated ones, reports Paige Lee Pei Qi

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Most in the trade have reported little impact from last year's Occupy Central protests, citing few or no cancellations from clients. By Prudence Lui

44 A MICE city in the making

Khon Kaen in north-east Thailand may be your next emerging destination not least because of its proximity to Indochina and South China, writes Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

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A hidden jewel in Phuket for planners

It is called, simply, the Private Dining Room. You wouldn't think twice about it as a result, but don't let its nondescript name fool you.

One look at this 72m² venue at Point Yamu by Como, Phuket, gives you visions of a party in a dreamy place. An imposing, visually attractive burnt-orange door, whose handle is an oversized bronze Buddha hand, hints of the beauty one can expect inside. It does not disappoint.

Inside, a long white marble table is positioned underneath three white glass chandeliers. The polished marble floor and handcut mosaic wall tiles reflect the shimmering glow of candles during evening events. Created by Italian designer Paola Navone, it's a hidden secret in Phuket on where to hold an exclusive event for 20 pax. Pair it with healthy Como Shambala Cuisine – always a choice at all Como hotels – and you are on your way to having an event as pure as the whiteness of the room.

On a recent visit, we can vouch that the health cuisine here is actually delicious. The resort's chefs can also work with event organisers on bespoke menus for each occasion.

Point Yamu has three other meeting rooms which combined can accommodate 80 pax for a banquet, and a courtyard for 150 pax with unbelievable views of Phang Nga Bay. For a larger group, its Italian restaurant La Sirena, which overlooks a 100m pool and from where the bay never looks more beautiful, is a stellar choice. It seats 120 pax.

The ultimate option is to book the entire resort, which has 79 rooms and suites and 27 private villas, all with sea views.

The resort can also arrange group activities, teambuilding programmes, island cruises and corporate golfing.

Tel: (66) 0-76-360-100; email: pointyamu@comohotels.com – Raini Hamdi



TTGmice editor-Malaysia and Brunei, S Puvaneswary (third from left), gets an inside story into KLCC's kitchens

KLCC turns 10 with great appetite

Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre (KLCC)'s latest dining option offers delegates a tailor-made menu of appetisers and desserts, followed by a main course of hot sharing platter. Thus, diners can choose whatever they wish to eat and do not have to follow the tradition of having starters first, followed by main course and dessert. Food sharing is a Malaysian heritage, besides.

Executive chef Richmond Lim said the idea is to provide choice without the hassle of queueing at the buffet station; to enable guests enjoy a selection of small bites but not in the stand-up cocktail fashion; to recognise the Malaysian heritage of sharing food but in a way that is elegant; and to transform banqueting at the centre into a culinary art.

Deputy general manager, Simon Lomas, said: "With our 10th anniversary (this year) and in line with continuous efforts to enhance the guest's experience and further differentiate ourselves from the competition, the innovative culinary team felt an unconventional food and beverage service experience was the way to go."

Selected media and bloggers were recently invited to sample the new dining experience and also given a tour of the centre's state-of-the-art kitchens. Guests donned aprons and toques and participated in interactive experiences, creating house-smoked salmon and a variety of vol-au-vents.

At 3,157m², KLCC boasts the largest fully fledged kitchen in Malaysia. Furnished with the most advanced equipment and a designated area for food preparation behind every large function room, the facility can comfortably handle up to 6,000 meals a day.



Conference Centre of Orchard Hotel Singapore

Lion City gets really 50licious

Singapore celebrates its 50th year of nation-building and hotels are starting to roll out deals to leverage the milestone.

At Orchard Hotel Singapore, book 50 tables for your dinner event and get an exclusive S\$50 (US\$38) off per table from the package price, representing a discount of S\$2,500. The hotel's pillarless Orchard Grand Ballroom has been refurbished. Experienced event specialists will be by your side to ensure a spectacular event, the hotel said.

Orchard Hotel Singapore also has a multi-purpose Conference Centre with 13 versatile function spaces well equipped for any meeting or seminar regardless of size and scale. As part of 50SG, a MICE event for 50 persons enjoys 50 per cent off the hotel's AV rental list. Email: catering.ohs@millenniumhotels.com

2015 resolution: retreat with purpose

Integrated resort Thanyapura Phuket is training its sights on corporate groups looking for motivating off-site retreats, as more want vacations with a purpose, whether it is losing weight, getting fit, reconnecting with oneself or communing with nature.

"Many people are talking about mindfulness today, and more companies are seeking balance for (their) high performers to relieve stress," said Philipp Graf von Hardenberg, president and CEO of Thanyapura Phuket.

Thanyapura Phuket boasts its own team of leading coaches, sports scientists and therapists offering cutting-edge programmes from triathlon and weight loss to education and preventive medicine.

Renowned experts at the resort include four-time triathlon world champion and Thanyapura's executive chairman Chris McCormack, and Alan Wallace, an ordained monk and former translator to the Dalai Lama who now heads mind-training programmes for corporates.

Said von Hardenberg: "You don't come to us if you want a vacation by the beach; you come to us if you really want to do something for yourself, whether it's to lose weight, de-stress, increase your sports performance or seek mind training."

Corporates still comprise a small component of Thanyapura's current business, however.

The 23ha destination comprises four centres: Thanyapura Sports and Leisure Club, Thanyapura Mind Centre, Thanyapura Integrative Health Centre and Phuket International Academy Day School, in addition to the 77-room Thanyapura Sports Hotel and the 38-room Thanyapura Retreat Hotel. Separately, the resort will debut new track and field programmes this year and plans to partner professionals to develop indoor golf clinics. – **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**



Thanyapura Phuket

A perfect pairing

A local oyster grower and a winemaker have paired to open a venue in Hobart, Tasmania that can cater for up to 80 guests seated or 100 pax for cocktail receptions. It is also fitted with a private room that can hold up to 30 people for small group events.

The Bangor Wine & Oyster Shed, located 45 minutes away from Hobart and 35 minutes from the Hobart airport, is no mere 'shed'. It serves Tasmanian wine, cider, seafood and other local produce, its signature offerings being the cool climate wine produced by Matt and Vanessa Dunbabin of Bangor and the oysters grown by Alice and Tom Gray on the farm of Fulham.

The menu features interesting combinations like fresh Thai lime oysters and grilled macadamia pesto oysters.

Both the winemakers and oyster growers are at the venue daily, so delegates will have a genuine meet-the-maker experience. They offer wine and oyster tastings for groups.

Whisky tastings can also be arranged on request.

The venture between the two farming families came about after the devastating Dunalley Bushfires.

Both farms were burned, but miraculously the vines survived and the oysters were safe in the water.

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Amari Phuket gets bigger

Amari Phuket will boast a total of 345 rooms from June 1 as a result of the addition of 148 one- and two-bedroom units and suites from parent Onyx Hospitality Group's residences development adjacent to the hotel.

Four new meeting rooms with seat capacity of 20-80 pax will also be added to the resort, which has undergone a US\$20 million renovation and is now under the charge of Pierre-Andre Pelletier, who has been promoted to Onyx's vice president-area general manager, South Thailand.

Before this promotion, Pelletier had raked up a lot of billings in MICE from neighbouring Asian markets, particularly Singapore and Malaysia, for Amari Watergate Bangkok, where he was general manager.

With smart and stylish new rooms, and new services such as a facility akin to a first-class airline lounge that enables early arrivals or late check-outs to shower, work or just relax, Amari Phuket aims to be the best upscale hotel in Phuket and siphon off a larger share of corporate meetings and incentives.

According to Pelletier, the hotel has been seeing more incentive groups from Singapore and Malaysia banking, insurance and oil companies, and expects more growth, especially now that it has more rooms and MICE capability, aside from the fact that Phuket beaches have also regained their 'resort' feel after a clean-up of deep-rooted vendors and sunbed operators by the military.



Amari Phuket lobby bar: the hotel sports a new look and feel after a US\$20 million upgrade

"Our location is just great, as we're just a stone's throw from Patong, yet away from it all," said Pelletier. "And now that the beaches have been cleaned up, we're seeing more interest from Asian MICE groups to hold their events in Phuket, whose image is changing for the better."

Meanwhile, Onyx is also embarking on a US\$20 million renovation of its other established property in the south, Amari Samui. This will see the hotel being closed for a year from April.

The popular Prego restaurant, however, will remain open and can accommodate smaller groups seeking quality dining experience comprising excellent Italian food, service, ambience and value for money.

– Raini Hamdi

Lord Jim's

Raini Hamdi turns event planner for a day and throws a surprise party at Lord Jim's, Mandarin Oriental Bangkok



F&B director Thomas Kinsperger proposed four venues which were available on December 13, 2014: Le Normandie (maximum capacity 70 pax), Regency Room (50 pax), Lord Jim's (100 pax) and The China House (60 pax). One look at Lord Jim's and I knew that was it for me. It's the 180° breathtaking view of the River of Kings. At night, this was especially sexy, with lights twinkling from the buildings across and traditional boats plying the river. It's also the open layout, which enabled me to fit in eight tables of eight and nine pax. Its ambience was relaxed and youthful, yet without a doubt, classy.

The rest of the planning was truly effortless. General manager Amanda Hyndman, Kinsperger, Trepp and senior catering and event sales manager Pandajade Tantrakul backed me up fully. I had expected professionalism, but what a beautiful surprise to be dealing with real pros who had a sense of fun, mischief and real passion to wow and surprise people. I actually enjoyed planning this banquet because of them.

F&B concept

Lord Jim's serves seafood and international cuisine. For my party, Trepp whipped up several four-course menus. Each was mouth-watering and if there was one difficult moment in planning this event, it was deciding which to pick. I settled on the following: Sauternes-marinated foie gras terrine, roasted Brittany langoustines, refreshing trio of granite, a choice of roasted Atlantic sea bass or roasted grade four marbled wagyu beef tenderloin, and millefeuille of golden backed puff pastry and vanilla Chantilly with fresh berries.

All the thank you's I received after the party

My party was for 70 pax and it was a surprise for my life partner who was turning 70 years old. But my birthday bash would work for any incentive or event planner with a group 70 to 100 pax who, like me, dreams of a celebration that sparkles and leaves a lasting impression.

My RFP, sent on September 16, 2014, was attended to within 24 hours.

MICE application

I picked Mandarin Oriental Bangkok because I was planning the party remotely and had a lead time of less than three months, so I needed a venue and people I could trust. Another reason was that I had previously met the hotel's young and supremely talented executive chef, Stefan Trepp, and I believed he would cook up a fantastic menu for me.

Upon reviewing what I intended to achieve,



Food that matches the setting

showed that Trepp had dazzled my guests with his brilliance – not one failed to mention how amazing the food was in taste and presentation. Each course was a work of art.

Service

The other factor they mentioned was the "sleek yet friendly service".

For me, it was as if all the staff, led by restaurant manager Krit Subanarat, went beyond their usual duty to make sure the event was successful. This must be the ultimate perception a venue wants to impart to a planner.

In the end, there was a lot of heart and attention to detail by all the staff in that room that evening and this was what made my event outstanding.

With such youthful, creative and enthusiastic leaders behind her, no wonder the grande dame's legend lives on.

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48 Oriental Avenue, Bangkok 10500
Tel: (66) 2-659-9000; email: Mobkk-lord-jim@mohg.com

Website: mandarinoriental.com/bangkok

Function hours

Cocktails, 18.30-19.30; dinner, 19.30-23.30

Singapore rates to hold despite new supply

By Raini Hamdi

ROOM rates in Singapore are expected to increase marginally this year despite a challenging 2014 and a stream of 2,100 new rooms opening in 2015.

Cushman & Wakefield expects Singapore hotels to close 2014 at 84.3 per cent occupancy, down from 86 per cent in 2013, due to more rooms coming online and a decline in tourist arrivals spurred by massively fewer Chinese visitors. However, the ADR held steady, at S\$260 (US\$195), compared with S\$258 in 2013.

Said Cushman & Wakefield's regional director, Akshay Kulkarni: "Let us not forget that the current drop seems to be only driven by increased supply and not so much drop in arrivals."

"It is estimated that (2015) marketwide occupancy and ARR will be marginally,

say three to five per cent, higher than 2014 figures."

In his opinion, recovery for Singapore's hotel industry will come in the second half "due to higher inbound traffic from an overall settling of economies around the region and an increase in the number of attractions and events in Singapore".

Asked if a stream of 6,400 rooms expected to enter the market between 2015 and 2018 would not derail recovery, he pointed out that, of this, just over 2,100 new rooms are planned to open over the course

of 2015 and can be filled with the forecasted increase in inbound arrivals.

But he warned that continued focus on establishing Singapore as a corporate hub, leisure destination and MICE centre is necessary to propel growth.



Kulkarni optimistic

Putrajaya pitches 'affordability'

By S Puvaneswary

Putrajaya International Convention Centre (PICC) in Kuala Lumpur is intensifying marketing efforts in Asia as it believes the weakened ringgit has made it more competitive for Asian planners.

CEO Badlishah Ahmad is banking on corporate companies with shrinking budgets, and cost-conscious meeting planners, to shift their event from neighbouring countries to a more affordable venue like PICC.

He said forward bookings are strong, with the centre almost fully booked right up to April. PICC also has confirmed bookings every weekend through 2015.

Badlishah said: "For the first quarter of 2015, meeting room sales has seen a 30 per cent year-on-year increase from last year. I predict we'll close 2015 with a 30 per cent increase in business compared

to 2014, provided there are no untoward incidences this year."

The team at PICC also wants to reverse the current business mix – 60 per cent government business and 40 per cent corporate business – to 60 per cent corporate business and 40 per cent government business by 2016.

To achieve this new mix, the sales team is marketing the combined strengths of the venue and the destination. This includes competitive meeting package rates, free and abundant covered parking, a location only 15 minutes' drive from Kuala Lumpur International Airport and klia2, and an easy 40-minute drive without traffic from Kuala Lumpur city centre.

"We also tell meeting planners that there is less distraction here compared with the city, so delegates can better focus on the meeting," said Badlishah.

{ Talking numbers }



The percentage of respondents in UFI's 14th Global Barometer that consider the economic crisis is now over



The percentage of respondents who plan to expand exhibition operations to new countries. 76% said they are planning new activities in either the classic range of exhibition activities (venue, organiser, services) or in live or virtual events or both, the barometer shows

{ 2015 Calendar }

March 12-13

UFI Open Seminar
in Asia 2015,
Hong Kong SAR

March 16-18

GIBTM
ADNEC, Abu Dhabi,
UAE

April 14-16

IT&CM China
Shanghai

April 14-16

CTW China
Shanghai

TEA with SACEOS as ASEAN integrates

By Paige Lee Peiqi

FORESEEING more business opportunities in ASEAN as the region inches towards economic integration this year, Thai Exhibition Association (TEA) has signed an MoU with SACEOS, Singapore's grouping of convention and exhibition organisers.

Under the MoU, the areas of collaboration will include an exchange of information, joint promotion of products and services, member rates for each other's events for a maximum period of three calendar years and a reciprocal hyperlink on their respective websites.

According to Patrapee Chinachoti, president of TEA, the number of trade fairs in Thailand grew by at least 10 per cent last year, and "this new MoU will definitely help to increase this number further".

Supawan Teerarat, Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau's (TCEB) vice president, strategic and business development, said: "The world's gaze is now fixed on the opportunities presented by the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). As you know, the AEC will stimulate networks and cross-border trade."

SACEOS president Janet Tan-Collis

alluded to the need to collaborate in the face of greater competition. She said: "The AEC will offer a new battleground for foreign organisers. Currently, local organisers are competing among themselves and facing competition from foreign organisers. These foreign organisers are now on an aggressive acquisition trail in ASEAN countries."

"This partnership between SACEOS and TEA brings about collaboration not only in developing business opportunities but also in knowledge sharing (between Thailand and Singapore)."

Supawan added: "This will open the door to new market opportunities to uplift the region's MICE industry, especially within the exhibition sector. We are confident this partnership will lead to new investment among Thai organisers and SACEOS members, contractors, freight and service providers."

Thailand welcomed 77 trade fairs in 2013 which generated an estimated revenue of about US\$174 million, of which some 3,016 visitors were from Singapore, accounting for eight per cent of the total international trade visitors.

Corporate Travel World China debuts

TTG Events and Carlson Wagonlit Travel China will debut the first instalment of Corporate Travel World (CTW) China in Shanghai next month with a curated programme of 11 China-focused conference topics.

To be held at the Shanghai Convention & Exhibition Center of International Sourcing from April 14-16, CTW China has secured the participation of some 100 corporate travel professionals to-date.

Of this, Chinese corporate travel professionals make up the lion's share, with international delegates making up the

remainder. Around 60 per cent of the total number are hosted.

CTW China will cover topics including cost-saving approaches to corporate travel, corporate cards, China's legal landscape, travel technology and strategic meetings management.

Two case studies will be presented – the first on China's anti-graft campaign and the other on travel cost savings. Supplier perspective sessions focusing on air and hotel components have also been scheduled.

Visit www.corporatetravelworld.com/china for more information.

{ Appointments }

Arthur leads HRS Asia-Pacific operations

HRS has appointed Todd Arthur managing director of Asia-Pacific operations.

He is in charge of setting the business' strategic direction, developing talent and driving organic growth with new and existing customers.

Arthur has 20 years' experience within the corporate travel industry in various senior management roles with BCD Travel, Advito,

Finnair and Malaysia Airlines. He also sits on the board of directors of the Association of Corporate Travel Executives representing Asia.

Leung new executive director of ITB Asia

Katrina Leung is the new executive director at ITB Asia/Messe Berlin Singapore, replacing Nino Grüttek, who has left Messe Berlin after 10 years with the company to become the managing director of VNU Exhibitions Asia Pacific, based in Bangkok.

Leung was managing director of Terrapinn Asia.

{ Advertorial }



ONE MINUTE
with CTW Events

REVEALED!

10 Topics At First Corporate Travel World (CTW) China in Shanghai

Highlight of the first CTW China 2015

Launching in Shanghai from April 14 to 16, co-organisers TTG Events and Carlson Wagonlit Travel, China revealed the 10 tailored topics centered on Corporate Travel Fundamentals and Corporate Meetings & Events for the China market.

What Topics Can Delegates Expect?

Trending topics include Cost Saving approaches, Corporate Cards, China's legal landscape, Travel Technology and Strategic Meetings Management, while one of the 2 case studies featured will provide a first-hand account into China's anti-graft campaign. The other case study will focus on travel cost savings. 2 supplier perspectives sessions will be dedicated to the air and hotel components. A much anticipated topic "Do Business meetings and Incentive Travel Belong in the Corporate Travel Programme?" aims to underscore the benefits of looking holistically at corporate travel, corporate events and incentive travel, as well as how and why they should be managed as a whole.

Why Should CTMs Attend?

"I had a positive experience at the corporate travel roundtable series organised by TTG Events. With CTW China, I believe I will have more opportunities to understand from the various MNCs on the latest trends of corporate travel management and best practices such as how to procure effectively to attain higher cost savings strategies for the organisation."

Norvatis Pharmaceutical, China | Emily Tang,
Business Travel Category Sourcing Manager

CTW China 2015 will be held at the Shanghai Convention & Exhibition Center of International Sourcing from 14 to 16 April 2015.

CTW Events
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in Asia-Pacific and China

CTW
中国 China
国际商旅大会

CTW
Asia-Pacific
Corporate Travel World

Institute finds perfect venue for its thinkers



SINGAPORE The crème de la crème of Singapore's promising young minds put their heads together last September at Amara Sanctuary Resort Sentosa, which was the host venue for The Young Singaporeans Conference (YSC) 2014.

The conference is a flagship programme of the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), under the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore. About 70 Singaporeans between the ages of 25 and 35 who have demonstrated excellence in their fields are gathered once a year to discuss national issues.

Last year's event was themed *Game-Changers* and the full-day programme took place in the resort's Grand Ballroom on September 22.

Lynn Lee, associate director (public affairs) for the think tank, elaborated on the choice of venue: "Our main reason for choosing Amara Sanctuary for this conference was its location away from the city and its peaceful surroundings. The greenery surrounding Amara Sanctuary and its location on Sentosa allowed conference attendees to step away from the hustle and bustle of city life, if only for a day, to think

deeply about how Singapore is changing and what the future may hold for them and their fellow citizens.

"In planning for the YSC, we wanted a conference venue which would provide sufficient space for a full-day conference and dinner for close to 200 participants at a competitive price. Amara's conference package price was relatively comparable to hotels in the city."

Lee added that IPS was "pleased" with the services and amenities at Amara Sanctuary.

"Amara Sanctuary staff were efficient in setting up the conference ballroom, and made sure staff members were always on hand to assist us. The hotel staff were polite and they went the extra mile to check with us if we needed anything more than what was requested for," she commented.

The 140-room Amara Sanctuary Resort Sentosa boasts a two-storey full glass building comprising seven function rooms in addition to its Grand Ballroom, and is minutes from the Singapore CBD and other Sentosa attractions.

– Hannah Koh

Disabled enabled

MALAYSIA Civic-mindedness won the day for Petaling Jaya city, which enabled the biennial Fifth International Conference on Accessible Tourism to not just go on without a hitch but raise awareness of the need for disabled-friendly tourism in the city.

The four-day conference last December, organised by the Beautiful Gate Foundation for the Disabled, drew 260 delegates from 26 local and international organisations that are involved with people living and travelling with disabilities.

Organising chairperson, Pastor Sia Siew Chin, said: "This conference took more than a year of planning. We chose to have it in Petaling Jaya city because the city council was supportive and had agreed to provide us with a complimentary venue, Civic Centre, where we could use the auditorium to hold a festive performance on the first night, and the banquet hall to host the welcome dinner and conference. They also provided us with complimentary use of their PA equipment and outdoor canopies, and sponsored a lunch."

The city council also built five temporary wooden ramps for wheelchair users to ac-

cess the stage, made structural changes to roads close to the Civic Centre and built permanent ramps so those on wheelchairs could move freely between the Civic Centre and the shops close by.

The organising committee had also consulted local restaurants and food outlets nearby to build ramps which would make their outlets accessible to those on wheelchairs. Pastor Sia said: "It was easy to convince business owners as they saw the potential returns of this four-day conference."

The city council is now in discussion with business owners to build permanent ramps from the roads leading up to their business entrances. It is reviewing recommendations made by delegates who did a site assessment on ways to make Taman Aman Park more accessible to the disabled.

A two km awareness walk saw Tony Pua, Member of Parliament for Petaling Jaya North, walking blindfolded with a white cane for a short experience on what it is like to be blind. This drew the attention on the need for a barrier-free environment so the disabled can enjoy the freedom of mobility. – S Puvanewary

The winning feeling



Corporate clients turn up at Suntec Singapore International Convention & Exhibition Centre to celebrate its latest award and share the festive joy. From left: Chan Kok Wang, manager-Software Publishing Services, Hewlett-Packard Singapore; Annie Quek, head, Posterscope Singapore; CH Kong, senior director-Marketing and Product Development, Suntec; Thomas Ang, founder & director, Space Arena; and Shawn Lourdasamy, director, DMR Productions



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Back to School at The Pavilion

A restored heritage building always charms as a MICE venue, as proven by Shangri-La Hotel Singapore’s new event space, The Pavilion. **Paige Lee Pei Qi** reports

Shangri-La Hotel Singapore and TTG Asia Media joined hands last year to welcome corporate and MICE planners ‘back to school’ at The Pavilion, a former Dutch school in the 1920s, Singapore’s Hollandse School, which has been converted into a charming colonial-style venue that can hold up to 120 guests for meetings and events.

With nearly every guest gracing the venue for the first time, the pressure was on for Shangri-La Hotel Singapore to make an impression.

The unique aspect of the venue is the pavilion’s courtyard, where a purpose-built outdoor kitchen clearly differentiates an evening dining experience from other MICE venues in Singapore.

To tie in with the Back to School theme and transport guests back to their nostalgic school days, the service staff donned the attire of scouts, guides and other uniform groups, serving up milkshakes and bento boxes of finger foods indoors.

Then, the event rolled off to a memorable start with ‘recess time’ and the familiar sounding of the school bell, putting a momentous stop to the guests’ chattering. After that, the doors swung open to reveal the majestic courtyard where freshly grilled gourmet items awaited.

Guests were treated to a feast, with

delectable menu items such as galician-style grilled octopus, pork jowl brochette, omelette with porcini mushroom, grilled scallop with mentaiko sauce and beef short ribs with chocolate mole glaze and chilli.

Reto K Klauser, vice president and general manager of the hotel, said: “The experience took gourmet meals to a different dimension.

“The grilled food items are also not available at any other Shangri-La restaurant.”

While the gloomy dark sky threatened to disrupt the outdoor experience with an imminent thunderstorm, the hotel’s events team had planned for contingencies and were prepared to switch to indoor dining.

Fortunately, the sky soon cleared up, much to the relief of both guests and organisers.

The venue hosted 90 guests in total that evening, the setting enabling them to mingle and network freely.

Event and corporate planners were also taken on a personal tour of the venue’s meeting facilities by the Shangri-La events team.

One of the main draws of The Pavilion is its historical value.

As the building exudes a strong atmosphere of culture and heritage and has been well conserved, it made an impression on all guests.

TTG Asia Media’s group publisher, Michael Chow, said: “Our company is extremely delighted to partner with Shangri-La Hotel Singapore to showcase this unique new venue to our MICE and corporate planner guests.

“Back to School at The Pavilion is aligned with TTG Asia Media’s mission of continuously striving to feature special and new venues to our readers, who constantly seek fresh and exciting experiences for their meetings, incentive programmes and other events.”

Event

Back to School at The Pavilion

Organisers

Shangri-La Hotel Singapore and
TTG Asia Media

Venue

The Pavilion at Shangri-La Hotel Singapore

Date

November 26, 2014

No of participants

90

Objective

To introduce Shangri-La’s newly added and renovated heritage site The Pavilion, as well as commemorate TTG Asia Media’s 40th anniversary with industry leaders



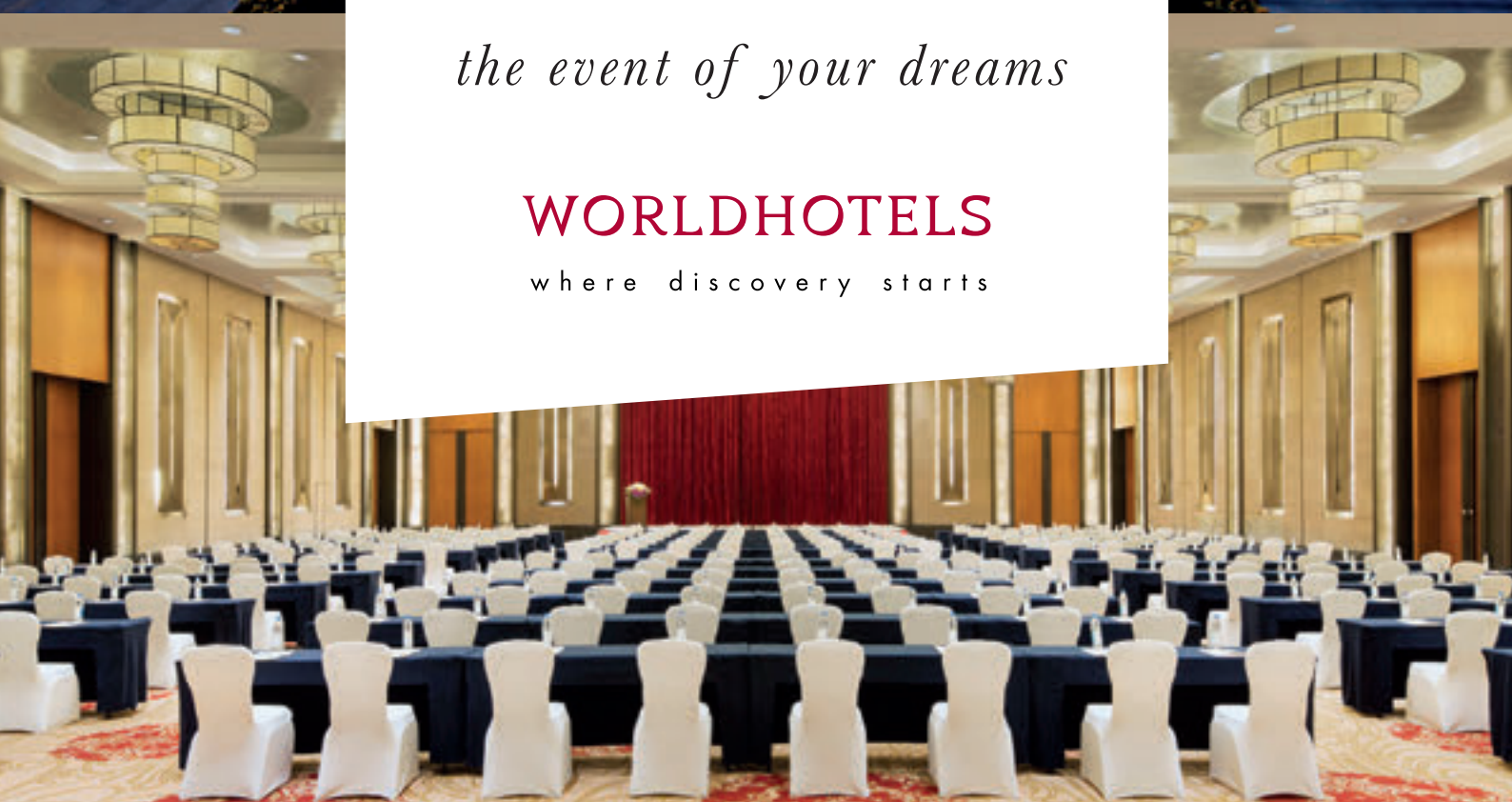
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Mercedes-Benz New C-Class

Unveiling six new models in China Rouge, southern China's most luxurious and prestigious nightspot, took a bit of magic, writes **Prudence Lui**



The plush China Rouge private club proved to be the perfect setting to show off the six new models to the 600 VIP guests who were settled in sumptuous and comfortable surroundings.

The car launch, which was followed by the car show and car display at East Square, Diamond Lobby and Crystal Lobby, stretched over three months, drawing more admiring visitors and is the longest-running event Galaxy Macau has hosted to-date.

It was the largest event for Mercedes-Benz in Macau, attracting high visitor numbers from China and Asia, one of the brand's most vital markets in the region.

The launch event was the most challenging, according Galaxy Entertainment Group's chief marketing officer, Kevin Clayton. "Given the nature of the launch where the combined value of the cars was over HK\$10 million (US\$1.29 million), and given the exclusive guestlist, extra security and special attention were required.

"Apart from local and expatriate VIPs, there were also 120 guests from Hong Kong, so securing 500-plus roomnights, transportation and car parking spaces were paramount. Additionally, 12 security staff were deployed to ensure the safety of the vehicles," he said.

The fact that the cars could not be accommodated inside China Rouge for the unveiling was excitingly overcome by inviting Hong Kong-based celebrity magician Louis Yan to "work his magic" outside China Rouge with a live feed to the big screen inside.

Clayton recalled: "The biggest challenge was the technical aspect and the co-ordination needed to have the magician disappear from the stage before the eyes of the guests, only to instantly reappear

on the LED screen wall, sitting inside the new C-Class parked outside the club.

"Deservedly it brought the house down," Clayton said.

China Rouge was chosen because it is southern China's most luxurious and prestigious nightspot, perfectly matching the brand and its new offerings, he said. "The VIPs were greatly impressed by the contemporary Chinese art and design, distinguishing it as a suitably prestigious venue that evokes today's new, confident and successful Asia," said Clayton.

To create a memorable experience, the MICE team at Galaxy Macau added special flair by arranging a dance presentation portraying the evolution of the first Mercedes-Benz automobile to the new C-Class range.

What set this luxury launch apart was how it was smoothly integrated for the first time with China Rouge's exceptional stage shows, complementing the total luxury experience, Clayton explained.

There was non-stop entertainment throughout the event, on and off stage, thanks to an entertainment team of over 80 people including performers, crew and technical support.

Then came another absolutely over-the-top experience – the first in Macau lucky draw for 28 new Mercedes-Benz cars which took the level of excitement to a new high.

Apart from Galaxy Macau's 14-strong events team, 12 of the organising team's core members came from its different business units including its Advertising & Promotions, China Rouge, Entertainment and Catering teams. During the planning process they were in constant contact with the Mercedes-Benz head office in Germany.

Event
Mercedes-Benz New C-Class

Organiser
Mercedes-Benz

Venue
Galaxy Macau

Dates & No. of participants
Car launch
June 6, 2014, 600 VIP guests

Car show
July 12-13 2014, 3,500 visitors

Car display
July 19 July-October 24, 2014, 3.5 million visitors

Objectives
To present Mercedes-Benz as the world's leading automotive brand and to unveil its new C-Class cars in an impactful way to VIP audiences

Challenges
Holding the car launch event inside the China Rouge private club, which could not accommodate the cars, thus employing a bit of magic

Results
A spectacular car launch event was pulled off in front of 600 VIP guests, and an additional 3.5 million visitors came along to view the car show and display held at Galaxy Macau's East Square, Diamond Lobby and Crystal Lobby



What will the new year bring for the MICE industry in countries across Asia? *TTGmice* peeks into the future and discovers there is much for most of them to look forward to

Bird's eye-view of Shanghai city

I predict...



Business travel and corporate events will hold (steady) or increase because China is still developing and the economy is strong.

Some convention centres in Beijing have reported slow business in 2015, but it's a different story in Shanghai, which has won a number of international association conferences this year.

Liu Ping
CEO, China Star

Shanghai and Beijing will remain the top two destinations, according to the inquiries we have received for incentives and events in China in 2015.

About 60 per cent of the requested proposals are for Shanghai, 43 per cent for Beijing, and 22 per cent for both Beijing and Shanghai.

Michael Chang
Director, corporate meetings & events,
Destination Asia (China)

A more confident China MICE sector



China
by Caroline Boey

Beijing's successful hosting of the 2014 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meetings in November, and new mega infrastructure projects scheduled to open in Shanghai this year, bode well for the country's top two MICE destinations.

The goal of industry leaders is to leverage these developments and build on the current "positive" outlook for China's MICE industry, rolling over into 2016 and beyond.

James Zheng, vice director, Shanghai International Conference Management Organization, said Shanghai is targeting the whole spectrum of the MICE business.

Zheng noted: "The 2015 outlook for MICE in Shanghai is positive for both domestic and international arrivals.

"Shanghai is expecting more trade-show visitors in 2015 with the opening of the National Exhibition and Convention Center (NECC), and there are already 34 shows on its calendar of events."

Shanghai welcomed 7.6 million international arrivals in 2013, and there were 5.8 million up to September 2014, a year-on-year increase of 5.5 per cent.

Zheng predicts the soft-opening of NECC last September will benefit all category of hotels, luxury or budget, adding that this year's opening of Shanghai Disneyland Resort and China's tallest commercial building, Shanghai Tower, housing J-Hotel, will further add to the city's MICE allure in 2015 and beyond.

Over in Beijing, Wu Shaoyuan, chief international conference expert, China MICE Service Co, said the hosting of international events such as APEC is a stepping stone for Beijing to further develop

its conventions and exhibitions industry.

Wu said: "Beijing didn't have an international convention centre in the 1980s. After the 1990 Asian Games, the event press centre was turned into the Beijing International Convention Center, and there is now China National Convention Center (CNCC) after the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Hosting APEC has really given us another chance to develop the industry."

Liu Haiying, CEO of CNCC, said the Concluding Senior Officials Meeting, the Ministerial Meeting, the APEC CEO Summit and the APEC Business Advisory Council Dialogue with Leaders were held at CNCC, the first to provide a one-stop service integrating entertainment, hotel and dining facilities for conventions and exhibitions.

CNCC is now one of the busiest convention centres in Beijing. By end-October 2014, it had hosted 3,918 conventions and events, and 376 exhibitions, with occupancy rate surpassing 80 per cent.

Among conventions and meetings, about 16 per cent were international, and 12 per cent had more than 1,000 participants.

Unlike commercial events, Liu added high-level events, especially political meetings, tend to see changes all the time, placing a lot of challenges on operating the convention centre.

Having had to deal with many unexpected situations during APEC, CNCC is now truly tried and tested, he said.

MY RESOLUTION 2015 "ALTHOUGH CNCC WAS NOT THE FIRST CHOICE OF 2014 APEC ECONOMIC LEADERS' WEEK MEETINGS, IT WAS THE FINAL CHOICE, AND IT WILL BE THE FIRST CHOICE OF OUR POTENTIAL CLIENTS IN THE FUTURE."

Liu Haiying
CEO
China National Convention Center (CNCC)

Clawing its way back



HONG KONG
by Prudence Lui

Despite disruptions by the Occupy Central movement in Hong Kong that ended last December, the industry's outlook for MICE in 2015 remains optimistic but prudently so. While at press time the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) is not ready to share its 2015-16 MICE strategy, the trade hopes to see more proactive measures from the NTO in regaining meeting planners' confidence to hold events in the city.

InterContinental Hong Kong is looking to grow its overall MICE contribution throughout 2015. Director of sales and marketing, Linda Hodgson, pointed out MICE remains an important segment for the hotel.

"For our hotel, the MICE segment is of value seven days a week, 12 months of the year in terms of guestroom impact, event space impact and F&B contribution. The US MICE market is a key focus, a source of incoming meetings and incentive programmes. Planners and attendees find Hong Kong a welcoming world city where English is spoken widely. Other

key MICE markets
for our hotel
include
Australia,



Breathtaking cityscape

Singapore, the UK and Europe.

"Additionally, Hong Kong is regarded as one of the safest cities in the world, and visitors can stay between seven and 180 days without any visa application hassles. The Hong Kong dollar is also pegged to the USD, making the (currency) exchange and planning easier for PCOs."

However, The Destination Management Company managing director, Jenny May, has doubts about any increase in MICE business for 2015.

"The negative international media coverage on the Occupy Central protests hasn't helped. The Hong Kong hotels are hurting too and have come up with some special rates and offers for 2015. We will inform our clients in the main markets of New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and the UK about this and see if it can generate some business with short lead times. This could result in some last-minute smaller groups."

Meanwhile, the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (HKCEC), which completed its second expansion in 2009, has reached the maximum capacity of its purpose-built 66,000m² exhibition space, especially during the peak seasons.

Some other key venues in the city are also expected to achieve that scale within the next few years.

HKCEC managing director, Monica Lee-Muller, confirmed: "The use of space is expected to remain high due to recurrent exhibitions and growth in new business."

She pointed out: "Hong Kong

needs more exhibition space downtown, or the development of its convention and exhibition industry will be constrained, losing out to neighbouring cities."

"Hong Kong should continue to focus on international exhibitions given their recurrent nature and significant economic contribution. The next focus should be international conferences."

I predict...



2015 will be a very poor year for Hong Kong's MICE business unless we can attract some small groups with short lead times. The hotels are lowering their rates and their special offers are helping with this.

Our reps are organising roadshows and sales calls in their respective countries, which we will take part in. We will spread the message that Hong Kong is still exciting, affordable and a must-visit destination. Nowhere else in Asia does a city have as much to offer as Hong Kong, and our clients need to be reminded of this.

Jenny May

Managing director, Destination Management Company

Hotel rates will continue to rise but not too aggressively, given the impact of the Occupy Central incident. The business outlook is not as good as 2016 based on what we have observed.

Katerina Tam

Director, International Conference Consultants

MY RESOLUTION 2015 "TO EXERCISE MORE IN ORDER TO STAY HEALTHY AND BECOME MORE FOCUSED AND EFFICIENT AT WORK (AND THUS HELP THE CENTRE ATTRACT MORE BUSINESS)."

Monica Lee-Muller

Managing director
Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre



Victoria Memorial, Kolkata



**MY RESOLUTION
2015 "TO BUILD A
TEAM DEDICATED
TO THE SUCCESS
OF GUESTS'
EVENTS THROUGH
SELECTING THE
RIGHT PEOPLE,
CONTINUAL
TRAINING, RE-
EVALUATION
AND CREATING
A SENSE OF
BELONGING."**

Neil Paterson

General manager
Novotel Hyderabad Convention
Centre & Hyderabad Interna-
tional Convention Centre

India expects boom in conferences



INDIA

by Rohit Kaul

With a new government elected in India last year which announced and implemented measures like the launch of the e-visa scheme for nationals of 43 countries, there is a positive mood across the sector.

Said Swadesh Kumar, vice chairman, India Convention and Promotion Bureau (ICPB): "Overall, the outlook of inbound MICE arrivals in India has been getting better over the years. The sector is expected to grow eight to 10 per cent in 2015.

"India's economy is doing better and the untoward incidents related to the safety of women tourists are way behind us. The new government is also taking proactive steps for the growth of the industry and safety of foreign tourists."

The conference segment is expected to lead the growth of the MICE market.

"Europe has been one of our key source markets. But with industries there struggling, there are chances that incentive travel may take a back seat. However, the conference market will grow as companies are keen to come to India to explore business opportunities here," said Kumar.

He added that apart from the traditional markets, MICE movements are expected to grow from Latin America and

East European countries like Slovenia, Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, which have now begun to show interest in India.

After much dilly-dallying, ICPB is expected to organise its convention in April in Delhi NCR region.

"With the general elections taking place in India last year, we were unable to organise the convention. However, this year we are going ahead with the convention where our prime focus would be to convince office bearers of local associations to aggressively bid for the international conference business.

"Considering that 90 per cent of the international conference business come to India due to local associations, it is the need of the hour," said Kumar.

ICPB is also planning to conduct roadshows in international markets including Munich, Paris and Geneva in the first half of this year to showcase India as a MICE destination. ICPB also expects to launch a report this year that will highlight what steps are needed to grow the inbound MICE market in India.

India at present does not have a mechanism to count MICE arrivals in the country and there is no marketing budget assigned especially for MICE. However, the Ministry of Tourism reimburses companies which travel overseas to bid for a conference.

I predict...



Apart from key markets like the US, the UK and Europe, I see the emergence of newer markets such as Latin America, China, South Korea and the Far East.

For the coming inbound season, our internal research and analysis team has revealed that the number of tourists from China to India can be anticipated to increase by approximately 20 per cent.

Prashant Narayan

COO and head, leisure travel
inbound business, Thomas Cook
India



Indian cities like New Delhi, Mumbai and Hyderabad have been attracting a major share of international MICE movements.

But with the government elected last year looking to develop infrastructure and fuel industry growth across the country, other cities will also get their share of the market.

Chander Mansharamani

Managing director, Alpcord Net-
work Travel & Conferences

Indonesians keep positive stance



Mount Bromo, East Java



INDONESIA
by Mimi Hudoyo

Indonesia's MICE industry can expect a positive business climate this year, thanks to its growing economy and despite the new government's policy to watch costs.

At the Indonesia MICE Outlook seminar in Jakarta in December, Indonesian economist Aviliani said: "The Indonesian economy is projected to grow 5.2 to 5.6 per cent in 2015. This growth rate will propel Indonesia to the top three in the world, after China and India."

The consumption sector will still dominate with 57 per cent of GDP, while the investment sector will contribute 10 per cent and export/import, 15 per cent.

Aviliani also projected the telecommunications, financial, property and infrastructure sectors would continue to grow.

"The government puts a strong emphasis on the development of infrastructure with the national budget doubling to 400 trillion (US\$16.7 billion) from 200 trillion rupiah. This means that businesses related to infrastructure development, like cement and steel, will grow," she said,

adding that these sectors provide growth opportunities for the MICE industry.

However, the new Indonesian government has decreed that officials will have to fly economy class for business travel and has banned the public sector from having meetings outside government premises. This will have an impact on MICE-related businesses.

"Many hotels (in the various regions) have been built to cater for the (growing) demand of government meetings (in line with regional autonomy). If the policy is not revised, these hotels will suffer, putting pressure on the Indonesian economy," she said.

Under President Joko Widodo, who took office last October, the tourism authority has been elevated to a full-fledged Ministry of Tourism. As of December, the structure of the new ministry was still in the making.

Rizki Handayani, the ministry's director of MICE and special interest tourism marketing, said: "We are yet to see where the MICE authority will be positioned, but the existing plan for 2015 will see (the Ministry of Tourism) networking with other government offices like the Ministry of Trade and Ministry of Industrial Affairs to foster events, especially exhibitions."

For the first time, the ministry will focus on exhibition promotions and will work closely with the Indonesia Exhibition Companies Association, revealed Rizki. She said there are now 14 international exhibition players with offices in Indonesia, and the country needs to optimise this to attract B2B exhibitions in Jakarta and other parts of Indonesia.

"We will also try to encourage regional tourism offices, many of which now have tourism promotion bodies, to join the ministry in tradeshow and roadshows to promote their destinations," she said.

I predict...



There will be more corporate and incentive travel in Indonesia, especially in Bali, as domestic and international companies try to boost sales with training for staff and travel in regional Indonesia or overseas.

The Indonesian government will also be more selective in financing international events as part of its efforts to utilise the budget more effectively and efficiently.

Ketut Jaman

Managing director, Melali MICE Bali



Strong growth for the Indonesian MICE industry, since the country has various MICE destinations which are also value-for-money for international delegates.

The biggest trend will be an increasing number of international B2B meetings and exhibitions taking place in Indonesia, driven by improving global economic conditions.

Also, in line with our new government's focus, meetings and exhibitions in the infrastructure, maritime, food and energy sectors will dominate. As of now, we have confirmed four international events in 2015 including conferences and exhibitions, two to be held in Jakarta and two in Bali.

Susilowani Daud

President director, Pacto Convex

MY RESOLUTION 2015 "TO ASSIST AND SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF BALI CONVENTION BUREAU AND TO FOCUS ON EXPANDING THE MARKETSHARE OF MEDIUM TO LARGE-SIZED CORPORATE MEETINGS."

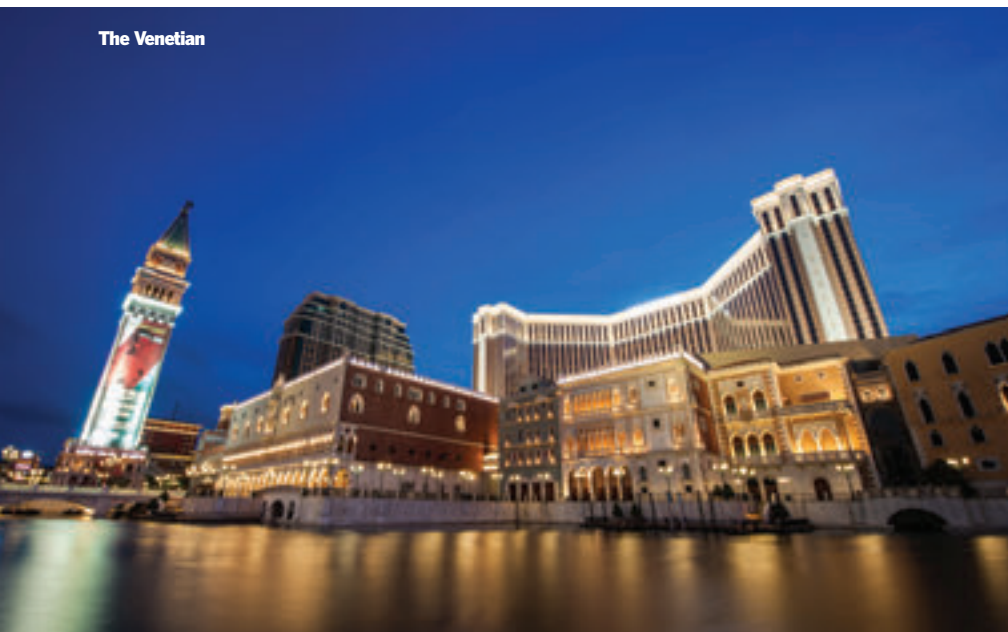
Bipan Kapur

Managing director

The Westin Resort Nusa Dua, Bali International Convention Centre



The Venetian



dailymirror/123RF.com

MY RESOLUTION 2015
"TO LEVERAGE THE SOPHISTICATION OF MACAU TOWER AS A MICE DESTINATION, PROMOTING ITS LESS CONVENTIONAL VENUES LIKE THE LAKEFRONT OUTDOOR PLAZA, AND TO REINFORCE (OUR) BRAND AWARENESS IN CHINA."

Rogier Verhoeven
 Executive director
 Shun Tak Holdings

New products bring excitement



MACAU
 by Prudence Lui

With new hotels set to open and expansion projects planned for existing integrated resorts like The Parisian and Galaxy Macau, 2015 will be an eventful year for Macau, with much to excite MICE visitors.

MCI Macau's managing director, Peter Hassall, believed the world will take further notice of Macau as the second wave of properties open.

Venetian Macau's vice president of sales and resort marketing, Brendon Elliott, said in 2015 it is "extremely important" for Macau to move towards becoming a final destination with multiple offerings, instead of a stopover for tourists within the region.

MICE is the second most fundamental part of Venetian Macau's operations. The property has enjoyed good growth in international meetings from farther abroad, such as the US, Europe and Australia, he said.

"The strength of these markets in 2015, 2016 and beyond looks positive. In order for us to get ahead in the competitive global MICE industry, we need to first promote Macau as a cultural and heritage destination rather than primarily on our established infrastructure and entertainment," said Elliott.

"We have a significant rise in the number of MICE groups in 2016-2019. Growth in the industry will continue as new infrastructure projects open, like the

Guangzhou-Zhuhai high-speed railway, the redevelopment of the Taipa ferry terminal and the final section of Hong Kong International Airport-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge."

The Macau Government Tourist Office (MGTO) said it intends to continue to leverage the support of its representatives in Asia, Europe and North America – including a new representative office in India that came on board in January – to promote the city for incentive programmes.

MGTO director, Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, said: "We will continue to show incentive planners the city's convenience as an incentive destination, given the integrated nature of the new tourism complexes and the diversity of our products."

"Our agenda this year for attracting more incentive events includes travel shows in Australia, China, Germany, Thailand and the US, as well as the promotion of our Incentive Travel Stimulation Program."

Overall, the mood is upbeat, with players preparing themselves to harness opportunities. MCI, for example, is embracing a "three Ps" approach in 2015, namely partnering, performance and preparation.

Said Hassall: "We aim to build stronger relationships with our existing clients and the venues we work closely with; we want to bring new clients to Macau; and we want to form new partnerships with new Macau properties. We aim to ensure every event we produce will inspire and engage our clients' audiences."

I predict...



The biggest trend in 2015 is that of companies striving towards greater connection with customers.

Our clients are seeking meaningful connection with their customers

and audiences, and the live, face-to-face communication solutions we provide will need to be outstanding in order to achieve the desired audience response, behaviour or emotion.

Events do not stand alone; they are connected to an integrated marketing strategy. Successful events will have close links with digital, social and other communication and marketing initiatives.

Peter Hassall
 Managing director, MCI Macau



I predict the lowering of rates and better concessions from major integrated resorts due to additional meeting space and 5,000 hotel rooms.

Organisers of mega events will also look at Macau for its two new auditoriums – one at Galaxy Macau and another at Studio City – for 2,000-3,000 people each.

Bruno Simoes
 Executive director, smallWorld Experience

Leveraging festivals year for MICE



MALAYSIA
by S Puvaneswary

The Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau's (MyCEB) goals are to make Malaysia one of the top five Asia-Pacific destinations for international conventions, and to attract 2.9 million business event visitors – eight per cent of overall tourist arrivals – by 2020.

In 2013, Malaysia attracted some 1.4 million business events arrivals, which translated to 5.2 per cent of total tourist arrivals to Malaysia.

This year, MyCEB will leverage the events held during the year-long tourism campaign, Malaysia Year of Festivals 2015 (MyFEST 2015), to attract more corporate and incentive groups to Malaysia, supporting the national campaign with special value-adds for business events visitors, according to Ho Yoke Ping, general manager – business events at MyCEB.

MyFEST campaign has a line-up of more than 200 events comprising cultural festivals, arts and music showcases, food promotions, shopping and sports activities.

Ho added MyCEB also plans to introduce a digital campaign for the corporate and incentive segment, targeted for launch in the first quarter.

"MyCEB will continue to focus on its current market mix – Europe, North America and Asia-Pacific – for the convention business, and mainly Asia-Pacific for corporate meetings and incentives," said Ho.

Conventions have always been the bureau's key focus and comprise around 60 per cent of the business mix. Corporate meetings and incentives are also important due to their large numbers, and short- to medium-term lead time.

Last year, MyCEB started to target the trade exhibition market and managed to secure three trade exhibitions which will be held in Malaysia this year. They are Café Malaysia 2015; Café Show Malaysia

Petronas Twin Towers, Kuala Lumpur



shirley7856/123RF.com

2015 and Cityscape Malaysia. The three shows combined are expected to attract some 3,720 international visitors to Malaysia this year.

The bureau will organise another Malaysia Business Events Week this year (the date and venue of which were not finalised as at press time), aimed at expanding the capability and creativity of Malaysia's business events industry players.

MyCEB organised the inaugural Malaysia Business Events Week in Kuala Lumpur last year to create a platform for local business events players to gather and discuss ideas that impact the growth and sustainability of the meetings industry.



MY RESOLUTION 2015 "TO CONTINUE PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES WITH OUR INNOVATIVE, FLEXIBLE AND VALUE-ADDED SOLUTIONS, SO WE STAY AHEAD OF THE COMPETITION IN AN INCREASINGLY CHALLENGING BUSINESS LANDSCAPE."

Alan Pryor
General manager
Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre

I predict...



More MICE planners will be looking at sea cruises around Asia as an incentive option. The incentive holiday starts from the moment passengers get on board, and they are entertained throughout. Cruise ship providers are also flexible with their offerings for big groups.

Saini Vermeulen

Head, international sales, Panorama Tours



Local companies budgeting for participation in meetings and exhibitions, and sponsorship budgets being put on hold until the stabilisation of the Goods and Services Tax (to be implemented on April 1). Companies would rather spend time ensuring implementation processes are correct than on business development.

Anthony Wong

Managing director, AOS Conventions & Events



Reception hall at Philippine International Convention Center, Metro Manila

**MY RESOLUTION
2015 “TO
MODERNISE,
THROUGH
THE UPGRADE
OF FACILITY,
EQUIPMENT AND
TECHNOLOGY; TO
BE AGGRESSIVE AT
MARKETING AND
PROMOTIONS;
AND TO EDUCATE
AND ENGAGE THE
ASSOCIATION
INDUSTRY.”**

Renato B Padilla
General manager
Philippine International
Convention Center

Ensuring fun works for meetings



PHILIPPINES
by Rosa Ocampo

While the Philippines' major MICE market has always been Asia-Pacific, the country is broadening its goal to include Europe and the US this year.

Domingo Ramon Enerio III, COO of the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB), said: “We will definitely be intensifying our campaign in our major European markets” following the lifting of the ban on Philippine carriers in early 2014 by the European Union.

“These European markets include the UK, Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland and Austria.

“We will also be looking towards expanding our campaign in North America, following the upgrade of the Philippines to Category 1 status by the US Federal Aviation Administration.”

The big-picture goal for the Philippines is to draw 8.2 million foreign tourists to the country in 2015 – or 64 per cent higher than the five million targeted in 2014.

TPB is confident the huge increase is achievable through two banner campaigns – *Visit Philippines 2015* and the MICE branding *Fun Works*.

Just how much of the arrivals target

in 2015 is MICE is not known. But undoubtedly, there is also going to be a huge leap in MICE arrivals from the slew of scheduled international MICE events, including the series of over 150 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meetings throughout the year.

“We regret that we don’t have information on Philippine MICE arrivals and spending in general,” said Enerio.

He added the main focus of this year’s MICE campaign, *Fun Works*, is primarily on international association meetings, followed by corporate meetings, then incentive groups.

Fun Works is connected to the destination’s branding, *It’s More Fun in the Philippines*, alluding to being more productive at work when one is happy and having fun.

Enerio said that in anticipation of the forthcoming ASEAN integration, “we will be focusing our efforts on areas that would ensure our preparedness and competitiveness in receiving business events visitors as well as leisure travellers”.

These areas include enhanced connectivity, accessibility, airport and seaport infrastructure and quality of the destination’s tourism offerings.

I predict...



Video is the next text (SMS). Events and exhibitions will be portrayed as an experience rather than a mere display of products and events, leaving an impact on the community. There will be also more cooperation, subventions and focus on research.

Asia is the region to watch. There will be more mergers and acquisitions of events, with foreign organisers increasingly looking to buying shows and setting up branch offices in other countries.

China will be the major player in Asia with more shows being organised and more exhibition centres in major cities being built.

Marisa D Nallana
President, Philippine Exhibits and Theme Parks Corp

Corporate and medium-sized meetings with 100 to 300 pax will be held mostly in hotels – one-stop shops where meeting packages, accommodation and everything else are well-provided for.

Bigger-sized meetings and international conferences will go to convention centres like SMX Convention Center and Philippine International Convention Center.

Carla Mariano
Manager, groups, MICE and special projects, Blue Horizons Travel & Tours

Five-year game plan commences



fazon/123RF.com

The towering Supertree Grove
at Gardens by the Bay



The Singapore MICE sector continues to remain in a “position of strength”, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) believes, and the tourism authority aims to further strengthen the leadership position by “pushing new frontiers”, said Neeta Lachmandas, assistant chief executive of STB.

A five-year MICE 2020 plan is being rolled out to ensure that Singapore is better positioned to deal with industry challenges and further elevate its value proposition.

The plan will begin its first phase with the STB looking at enhancing the MICE industry’s “experience creation capabilities”, and developing Singapore into a hi-tech destination as well as Asia’s MICE resource capital with skilled talent and knowledge.

Lachmandas added: “We will also

continue to focus on developing and attracting events’ content premised on value-creation, as well as driving the growth of a vibrant business events landscape.”

To develop Singapore into a “smarter” MICE city under the MICE 2020 plan, STB will, for example, look at incorporating seamless Wi-Fi connectivity in major MICE venues.

Of the 15.6 million Singapore visitor arrivals in 2013, 3.5 million were business and MICE visitors, who contributed S\$5.5 billion (US\$4.2 billion) of the S\$23.5 billion in total tourism receipts. However, at press time, STB is unable to provide projected figures for this year.

While the Asia-Pacific region will remain Singapore’s main MICE source market, with all segments of the MICE industry being critical for Singapore, Lachmandas said STB will be looking at attracting more business events from Europe and the US.

**MY RESOLUTION
2015 “TO PASS
UNKNOWN DOORS
TO UNCHARTED
DESTINATIONS
WITH MY TEAM
FIRMLY BEHIND
ME, BECAUSE THEY
BELIEVE IN WHAT
WE CAN ACHIEVE
TOGETHER.”**

Arun Madhok
CEO
Suntec Singapore

I predict...



A stronger focus on the development and protection of intellectual property in the MICE industry due to greater industry maturity, and as a response to greater industry competition due to MICE firms large and small widening service offerings to deal with demand gaps in traditional business areas.

Daniel Chua
Managing director, Aonia



A very positive outlook for the MICE industry in Singapore. Because as Singapore continues to reinvent itself with the growing number of hotels, attractions and unique MICE venues like Gardens by the Bay, the country continues to increase its offerings of breath-taking experiences.

Alex Yip
Executive director, Vacation Singapore DMC



Tuk-tuks in Colombo

MY RESOLUTION 2015 "INCREASING THE FACILITIES WITHIN OUR CONFERENCE HALL, SUCH AS ADDING ANOTHER AUDITORIUM FOR 2,000-3,000 PAX, AND EXPANDING STALL SPACE TO ABOUT 600 STALLS FROM THE CURRENT 400."

Bandula Ekanayake

Director
Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall

Hopes pinned on first-ever MICE Travel Mart



SRI LANKA

by Feizal Samath

Having had a successful year in 2014 attracting small conferences and meetings, Sri Lanka aims to expand this segment in 2015, starting the ball rolling with a travel mart for regional incentive and conference planners.

According to Vipula Wanigasekera, general manager of Sri Lanka Convention Bureau (SLCB), a MICE Travel Mart – the first ever here – will be held in February or March where 50 to 100 incentive and conference planners from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam will be hosted with pre-paid airfares and free hotel accommodation.

"We want to show this group – the most important in the MICE industry – the diversity of our offerings, ranging from city hotels to the green environment," he said.

The number of conferences in 2014 rose to 62, from 42 in 2013. A 10 to 20 per cent increase is forecast for this year.

Another initiative that is greatly anticipated for this year is a campaign roping in representatives of 200 government organisations to attend conferences abroad to promote the country as a con-

ference destination, with a special push for Colombo.

"We met the heads and senior officials of these state organisations and impressed upon them the need to promote Sri Lanka through the conference circuit," he said.

In January, SLCB launched a mega promotion campaign in several Indian cities, including Mumbai and New Delhi, to promote meetings and incentive travel to Sri Lanka.

Lanka Exhibition & Conference Services general manager, Aasim Mukthar, said there has been a drop in Indian incentive visitors due to high hotel rates. For instance, five-star rooms in Colombo command a minimum of US\$170 per night compared to US\$100 or lower in Malaysia or Thailand.

"Indians also find it boring outside (their hotels in) Colombo as there is not much nightlife or after-dark entertainment," Mukthar added.

However, SLCB's Wanigasekera said while 50 per cent of the Indian incentive market may look for cheaper options, the rest is willing to pay for a unique product and this is where Sri Lanka stands out, he believed.

"Our diversity is unmatched and we are essentially one of the few green destinations still around," he explained.

I predict...



An increase in the number of Chinese companies participating in local trade fairs and exhibitions.

There was an increase in 2014 and we see this growing in the next few years, particularly since

China is due to enter into a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Sri Lanka.

Chinese companies view participating in local trade fairs as a window to the Sri Lankan market and sales of their products. The proposed FTA will be a huge facilitation.

Aasim Mukthar

General manager, Lanka Exhibition & Conference service



We are excited by the major promotional campaigns planned by the Sri Lanka Conventions Bureau (SLCB) through the MICE Travel Mart and also a campaign encouraging

hundreds of government representatives attending overseas conferences to make a bid to host the next meeting in Sri Lanka.

These are challenging initiatives and we are fully backing SLCB in this endeavour and its many promotions that would take place in India next year.

Zian Ameen

General manager, Aitken Spence Exhibitions and Conventions, and president, Sri Lanka Professional Conference, Exhibition and Events Organisers

Thailand expects growth to return



Bangkok lights up at night



THAILAND
by Greg Lowe

Thailand's MICE industry was hit hard by the country's political crisis last year, but the national convention bureau is confident the market will return to growth in 2015.

Nopparat Maythaveekulcha, president of Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (TCEB), said Thailand is targeting 1,036,300 MICE visitors with total spending of 106.8 billion baht (US\$3.6 billion), up 17 per cent and 22 per cent respectively on last year's targets.

"TCEB has developed the *Thailand Connects the World: Global Businesses and Local Experts Link to Boost Business Events Success* brand communications campaign, which builds on last year's campaign.

"It targets top quality buyers and business events visitors from around the world, and will showcase three fundamental pillars of Thailand's MICE industry, including Destinations of Thailand, Business in Thailand, and People of Thailand," he explained.

The bureau's targets by market segment are: meetings, 255,000 visitors with

spending of 32.7 billion baht; incentives 252,800 and 19.2 billion baht; conventions 333,100 and 37.8 billion baht; and exhibitions, 190,400 and 17 billion baht.

To support its goals for meetings, incentives and conventions, TCEB has developed a Win, Promote and Develop strategy. Win focuses on generating demand, bidding for mega events, developing promotions and strengthening sales and marketing by expanding the network of overseas representative. Promote will see TCEB raise Thailand's profile at key trade events and roadshows, while Develop involves increasing the capacity and skills of local MICE businesses and venue operators.

For exhibitions, Nopparat said TCEB will focus on increasing the number of attendees at shows rather than trying to attract more new events. Regional collaboration will also be key.

"TCEB will work closely with strategic counterparts in ASEAN and beyond, in line with the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which will formalise a free trade agreement among the 10 ASEAN member states plus Japan, South Korea and China," he said.



MY RESOLUTION 2015 "TO RENOVATE OUR OLDER EXHIBITION HALLS AND ADD MORE MEETING AND CONVENTION FACILITIES SO AS TO CONTINUE OFFERING OUR CUSTOMERS MODERN AND HI-TECH VENUES."

Loy Joon How
General manager
Impact Exhibition & Convention Centre

I predict...

Green awareness and innovation will become more important for conferences. Besides social media, custom applications will be used as communication tools. As information is so easy to access online, the conference topic is very crucial and it must be very specific and interesting. International standards of conference management and the need for organisers to be certified will be more important (especially for the green or environmental aspects of an event).

Perapan Anghasuko

Head, NCC Management & Development

Corporate meetings tiptoe back

Corporate meetings and events across Asia-Pacific are expected to get back into the game this year, albeit with some prudence, reports **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

In 2015, meeting budgets are likely to register growth or a smaller decline than was seen previously.

Issa Jouaneh, vice president and general manager, AMEX Meetings & Events, said: "The last few years have given focus to meetings and events in a way that has driven a more disciplined approach around approval processes, increased scrutiny on spend, and a larger focus around accountability and expected outcomes for meetings.

"In many organisations, budget pressure exists, but people are still holding meetings where there is a clear need and purpose."

Similarly, Advito, the consulting arm of BCD Travel, revealed in its corporate travel price forecast for 2015 that companies will want to travel more as economic conditions continue to improve.

However, the report highlighted businesses "will remain cautious about spending too much too soon, so travel growth will be modest rather than spectacular".

Corporates are unlikely to find savings with the hotels, as rates across Asia this year are predicted to increase between one and four per cent, as "growth in demand and supply will be well-matched", the report added.

Likewise, Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CWT) Meetings & Events and Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) alerted corporate travel buyers to higher hotel prices in its joint Global Travel Price Outlook report 2015.

According to the report, hotel suppliers will be in a "better negotiating position than they have been for some time" in 2015. This improved outlook could lead to greater pressure on negotiated rates for travel managers and buyers, and in Asia-Pacific, hotel prices are expected to grow 2.7 per cent this year.

Joseph Bates, GBTA Foundation vice president of research, said most travel procurement managers are already bracing for the forecast single-digit increases in not just hotel, but also air and ground pricing.

But Bates urged travel managers to consider "contingencies" in their forecast including the escalating Ukrainian crisis, declining European inflation, burgeoning debt in China and oil price shocks, all of



"IN MANY ORGANISATIONS, BUDGET PRESSURE EXISTS BUT PEOPLE ARE STILL HOLDING MEETINGS WHERE THERE IS A CLEAR NEED AND PURPOSE."

Issa Jouaneh

Vice president and general manager
AMEX Meetings & Events

which could potentially have a negative influence on travel demand and pricing.

AMEX predicts air costs to rise two per cent this year, up from the predicted 1.6 per cent for 2014, due to slightly higher demand and airlines' tight management of capacity.

With business travel prices on the rise, effective budgeting is therefore key. Options that businesses are exploring to control overall cost include reducing the length of the event, and cutting down on unnecessary frills, according to Advito.

A travel manager of an MNC suggested: "We can look at other more cost-effective destinations to control our budget. Instead of holding meetings and incentives in high-demand locations, we could take staff to emerging destinations like Sri Lanka."

George Yeo, Magenta Consulting Services' business development manager, shared: "We are increasingly using more four- and even three-star properties, which can help reduce costs by at least 10

to 20 per cent. These properties are pretty impressive these days and as long as they have the adequate meeting facilities we need, our clients will be agreeable to using them."

AMEX's Jouaneh affirmed: "Meeting planners, particularly those seeking high-demand locations for their meetings, will likely feel the additional pressure on their meeting budgets so – for the third year in a row – we expect a rise in demand for mid-tier properties across the globe."

Additionally, the role of technology will continue to rise in importance, Jouaneh pointed out.

"Planners across all regions are predicting virtual will be a part of at least 10 per cent of their meetings this year. The evolution and sophistication of technology appears to be making it easier to use, leading to more serious consideration around implementing virtual or hybrid meetings today, whereas in past years the discussions were much more theoretical," he said.

Changing exhibitions landscape

The opening of Asia's largest exhibition centre in Shanghai is set to change the stakes for that market, predicts **Mark Cochrane**. He also tips that aside from China, South-east Asia remains a market to watch

2015 promises to be a dynamic year for exhibitions in Asia. There are plenty of significant changes playing out in key markets across the region, the most crucial of which is in China, with the opening of the new mega venue in Shanghai.

The National Centre for Exhibition & Convention (NCEC) will add an incredible 400,000m² of indoor space to the market in Shanghai, making it the largest exhibition venue in Asia and one of the world's largest. The venue will also feature 100,000m² of outdoor space and a wide range of support facilities including hotels, restaurants, and office and residential developments. Nearby, there is an airport and a high-speed rail terminal.

NCEC will offer strong competition for Shanghai's other venues, particularly the Shanghai New International Expo Centre which features about 200,000m² of indoor space and 100,000m² of outdoor space. NCEC is 60 per cent owned by the China Foreign Trade Group (organiser of the massive Canton Fair) and 40 per cent by state-owned Shanghai EastBest International Company.

Consequently, how NCEC is managed will play a key role in shaping the future of the exhibition industry in Shanghai. How actively and aggressively will the managers of NCEC become involved in organising and launching exhibitions? The answer to that question will significantly impact all organisers in Shanghai – China's most commercial, international and dynamic exhibition market.

Given the model of the Pazhou venue in Guangzhou and the fact that NCEC has already announced plans to launch an exhibition which will directly compete with UBM Asia's Furniture China, it would seem that NCEC's managers plan to be an active organiser in Shanghai. But it is still early days and a lot can change in a year.

Another China-related trend to watch in 2015 is the increasing focus on second-tier cities. There has been plenty of talk about the potential of second-tier cities in China and undoubtedly, there will be growth there, but it is important not to overstate that potential, especially in the near term. The vast majority of space sold in China continues to be sold in Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Beijing.

There is, however, longer-term poten-



"HOW ACTIVELY AND AGGRESSIVELY WILL THE MANAGERS OF NCEC BECOME INVOLVED IN ORGANISING AND LAUNCHING EXHIBITIONS? THE ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION WILL SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACT ALL ORGANISERS IN SHANGHAI."

tial for growth in the major second tier cities, including Chongqing, Chengdu, Wuhan and Shenyang, to name a few. Major international organisers such as Reed Exhibitions and UBM Asia have been active in signing deals with government bodies such as the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade and various other organisations responsible for promoting exhibitions.

Unlike the more developed exhibition markets such as Shanghai and Shenzhen, there are fewer acquisition targets

in China's second-tier markets, so it is likely that there will be more development agreements such as Reed's and UBM Asia's as well as new launches. As these less-developed markets tend to be less international, it is also likely that, at least initially, the events will be more domestically-focused.

Moving beyond China, another long-term trend to watch is South-east Asian markets, which have been posting strong growth in recent years. In fact, in the past five years South-east Asian markets dominate the growth table. Comparing 2013 net space sold to 2009, the regional average was about 17 per cent, but the Philippines grew by more than 84 per cent, albeit from a low base. Singapore was up 37 per cent, Malaysia 28 per cent and Indonesia 24 per cent. These four markets were all among the top five fastest growing markets in that period.

And that growth looks likely to continue in Indonesia as Jakarta adds more space with the opening of a much-needed new venue in 2015. The Philippines, one of the most underserved exhibition markets, is getting plenty of attention from international organisers such as Comexposium and UBM Asia, among others.

In addition, Thailand is likely to have a good year in 2015 as relative political stability returns after several years of turmoil. Malaysia's market – although in clear need of additional venue capacity – is getting stronger support from the government in Kuala Lumpur.

Combine all of that with the heightened interest in the region due to the ASEAN Economic Community which is meant to come into effect in 2015 – and the result is a strongly positive one for the exhibition markets in South-east Asia.

Growth in Asian exhibitions has been impressive for more than a decade now and, given the continued interest in the region, the relatively strong economic forecasts and the addition of new venue capacity in key markets, 2015 is well positioned to be another good year for Asia's organisers, venue operators and service providers.

– Mark Cochrane is managing director of Business Strategies Group and is UFI regional manager Asia-Pacific

JAPAN

INSPIRING THE BEST

PHOTO: TOKYO CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

EXCELLENT
GROUND
SUPPORT

HIGH TECH
LIFESTYLE

SEASONAL
AND LOCAL
CUISINES

UNIQUE
CULTURAL
ACTIVITIES

FANTASTIC
SHOPPING

With continuous reinvention and greatly improved access, Japan has never been a more attractive incentive destination. Build on the excellent ground support and service culture in Japan and deliver a breakthrough experience for your group. Here's an itinerary to help you get started.



3 DAYS IN...

TOKYO BAY AREA

CHIBA > TOKYO > YOKOHAMA

The metropolis of Tokyo represents the cutting-edge of science, industry, art and gastronomy, while neighbouring Yokohama and Chiba offer the perfect complement, blending history, tradition and recreation. This three-day itinerary captures some of Japan's most iconic impressions.

DAY 1 CHIBA 千葉

Home to the Narita International Airport, Chiba stands on its own with a wealth of visitor attractions. The prefecture itself is an economic powerhouse, with an economy comparable to Hong Kong's.



Zen meditation at Naritasan

How about experiencing heavenly peace Japanese-style at one of Japan's largest and oldest temple grounds? Groups can arrange for a class at Naritasan Shinshoji Temple, amid a surrounding reminiscent of the Edo period. Or drop in during one of the many traditional celebrations taking place throughout the years.

www.naritasan.or.jp/english/index.html



Fruit picking

Many farms in Chiba offer fruit picking opportunities to visitors. Strawberries, blueberries, pears, grapes and loquats can be enjoyed for a fee. The time of the year in which a particular fruit is available depends on the location and the weather. Generally, fruit picking is available year-round in Chiba and overseas visitors are always impressed by the quality of Japanese fruits.



Moonlight helicopter cruise over Tokyo

Nothing compares to seeing the glittering city lights of Tokyo from the sky in the evening. Get a bird's eye view over the greater Tokyo area under a starry sky — an experience only a very special few have had the privilege to enjoy while visiting Japan. Some call it a "stroll in the sky"!

<http://www.excel-air.com/english/>



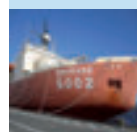
Tokyo Disney Resort

You can have fun, stay, dine, shop and much more at Tokyo Disney Resort. You'll find two theme parks, unique dining, a variety of shops and accommodations including the Disney Hotels. Come stay at Tokyo Disney Resort, and experience a multitude of fun and excitement in this place where dreams come true.

<http://www.tokyodisneyresort.jp/en/about/index.html>



UNIQUE VENUES



Unique venues for a group function or cocktail party include an airplane hangar, a small island or the retired Antarctic research expedition ship Shirase.

Access

Narita International Airport, the main gateway to Japan, is located in Narita city in Chiba Prefecture. This means almost all attractions in Chiba are accessible immediately upon arrival without additional travel. With Tokyo less than an hour away and easy accessibility to all major cities in Japan, Chiba is a fitting first stop for an extraordinary journey of discovery.

Local contact

Chiba Convention Bureau
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www.ccb.or.jp/e/

DAY 2 TOKYO 東京

The number one city in the world for global travellers according to TripAdvisor World City Survey is synonymous with a steadfast focus on quality. The drive for excellence has propelled this high-achieving city to the forefront of innovation, art and culture.



PHOTO: TAIKO CENTER

Taiko drummers - all for one

Japanese-style team-building that is also a fun exercise, Taiko drumming requires precise individual actions to produce a powerful distinctive beat. Be impressed by the amazing results when everybody works in sync. A fitting experience in the land where group harmony has produced an admirable legacy of excellence.

www.busesseventstokyo.org/social-programs-cultural-events/

Glamorous shopping at Ginza

One of the world's most elegant shopping districts, Ginza is lined with grand department stores, famous restaurants, stylish cafés, modern galleries and chic lifestyle boutiques. Here, beautiful presentation, great service and exquisite atmosphere elevate shopping to an art and a dazzling showcase of Japanese creativity.

www.gotokyo.org/en/tourists/areas/areamap/ginza.html

Make sushi

There is no better place to learn sushi-making than in Japan. Design a team-building activity around it and enjoy the results made with fresh ingredients and great camaraderie.

www.busesseventstokyo.org/social-programs-cultural-events/

Glorious food

Tokyo has more than 100,000 restaurants and the most Michelin stars in the world. Everything from a bowl of hot steaming ramen to the finest sushi is prepared with great artistry. Freshness, quality and presentation are hallmarks of Japan's culinary tradition and it's no wonder that traditional Japanese cuisine or "Washoku" has been added to UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list.



PHOTO: TOKYO CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

UNIQUE ATTRACTION

Robot Restaurant

It's technology, art and dining rolled into one entertaining experience. At the Robot Restaurant in Shinjuku, the fun-filled show features dancers, robots, vivid lighting effects and heart-pounding music.

Shibuya Crossing, Tokyo



PHOTO: TOKYO CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

INCENTIVE SCHEMES FOR PLANNERS

If you are considering Tokyo for corporate meetings or incentive tours and expect to book at least 100 visitor nights, you can take advantage of the special privilege programmes from the Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau.

www.busesseventstokyo.org/special-offer-for-corporate-events/

Access

Tokyo's two international airports at Narita and Haneda are served by major carriers from almost every capital city and major cities in Asia.

Local contact

Tokyo Convention and Visitors Bureau

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www.busesseventstokyo.org/

DAY 3 YOKOHAMA 横浜



The first port in Japan to be opened to foreigners and international trade in mid-19th century, Yokohama has since grown to become Japan's second largest city. However, parts of old Yokohama have been carefully preserved, making modern Yokohama a delightful blend of old and new.



Cupnoodles Museum

This museum was designed for children to enjoy the fun of discovery and invention. Through colourful displays and interactive programmes, visitors learn the creative thinking process of Momofuku Ando, the inventor of the world's first instant noodles. The best part: visitors can make their own Cup Noodles by designing a cup and matching soups and ingredients and bring it home as a souvenir. It's a favourite for visitors of all ages and groups are welcome.

www.cupnoodles-museum.jp/english

Tea ceremony

Experience the preparation and presentation of powdered green tea

at the Kaikoh-an tea room on the 65th floor of Yokohama Royal Park Hotel, located in Japan's second tallest building—Yokohama Landmark Tower.

www.welcome.city.yokohama.jp/eng/convention/program/



Yokohama Hakkeijima Sea Paradise

This is a new-generation sea-theme amusement park featuring one of Japan's top aquariums. Located at the tip of Yokohama

Bay and surrounded by nature, this beloved attraction features not only exhilarating rides but also specialty

shops, shows, restaurants, a marina and lovely gardens.

www.seaparadise.co.jp/english/



UNIQUE VENUE

Yokohama Minato Mirai Manyo Club

At the Minato Mirai waterfront area of Yokohama, this venue includes a banquet space for up to 300 people and an outdoor spa with views of the bay and Yokohama's signature ferris wheel. Guests can even choose to attend receptions in the casual "Yukata" kimonos.

www.welcome.city.yokohama.jp/eng/convention/receptions/

Access

Yokohama can be reached in 30 minutes by train or road from Metropolitan Tokyo. From Haneda Airport, it's only 15 minutes by taxi or 24 minutes by limousine bus. From Narita Airport, Yokohama can be reached in 90 minutes by limousine bus or train.

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T: +81-45-221-2111

www.yokohamajapan.com



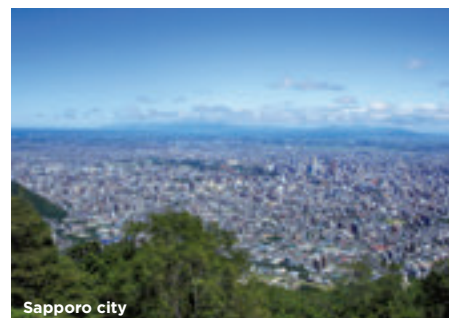
2 DAYS IN...

SAPPORO

Discover some of the tastiest foods and drinks in Japan in resource-rich Hokkaido. Its capital Sapporo is also the gateway to some of Mother Nature's most impressive gifts – splendid fields of flowers, stunning mountain sceneries, cozy hot springs and breathtaking ski resorts.



Hokkaido Shrine



Sapporo city

DAY 1 SAPPORO 札幌

Cherry blossom: Hokkaido Shrine

Every May, 1,200 cherry trees blossom at this most important and historic Shinto shrine in Hokkaido, drawing visitors from near and far for the spectacular blooms. It's the perfect time for a picnic under the cherry tree.
<http://www.hokkaidojingu.or.jp/eng/index.html>

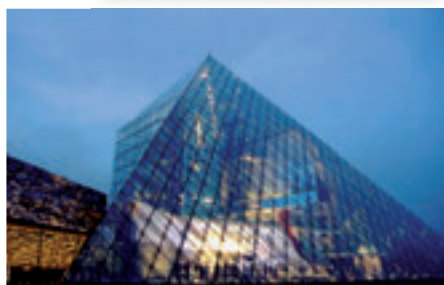
Tour and taste: Sapporo Beer Museum

One of Sapporo's most popular attractions, the Sapporo Beer Museum takes visitors behind

the scenes at one of the oldest and most famous beer brands in Japan. After touring the exhibits, sample Sapporo Beer at the beerhall-style Sapporo Beer Garden where the Genghis Khan lamb BBQ is the specialty.
www.sapporobeer.jp/brewery/s_museum/



King crab



UNIQUE VENUE The Glass Pyramid

The Glass Pyramid at Moerenuma Park is an elegant setting for dinner. Designed by artist Isamu Noguchi, the park itself can be regarded as a giant sculpture combining art and nature. The expansive ground is noted for its geometric designs and dramatic vistas.
www.sapporo-park.or.jp/moere/english/



Sapporo Beer Museum



White Lovers Chocolate

The "White Lovers" (Shiroi Koibito) cookie with chocolate filling is a Hokkaido icon. At the factory where it is made, groups can view the production line, design their own cookie in a workshop and have their photos custom-printed on the packaging.
www.shiroikoibitopark.jp/

DAY 2 SAPPORO 札幌

Sake brewery and Housui Winery

Learn and taste sake, the Japanese rice wine, at Kitanonishiki Museum, where Hokkaido's famous Kitanonishiki brand of sake was first made in 1880. Hokkaido's Housui Winery is also noted for its fine wines made with local grapes. At the winery, guests can tour the wine-making facility and taste practically all of the wines sold. Don't miss the wine-flavoured ice cream.
www.kitanonishiki.com/housui-winery.co.jp/

especially lavender. There are many visitor facilities too, such as a lavender museum, distillery, perfume workshop, gallery, cafés and gift shops.
furano-shizenjuku.com/english.php
www.farm-tomita.co.jp/en/

Teambuilding at Historical Village of Hokkaido

Plan a group activity at the Historical Village of Hokkaido, an outdoor museum that recreates the industries, lifestyles and cultures of Hokkaido's frontier era. Be transported 100 years back in time and sightsee on a horse-drawn carriage and take part in workshops making traditional crafts.
www.kaitaku.or.jp/

Natural wonders at Furano

At NPO Furano Field (Furano Shizenjuku), go on a nature trail for the environmental education workshop. After that, visit Farm Tomita, which is noted for its colourful flower fields,



Furano / Blei

Access

Sapporo's New Chitose Airport is served by several direct flights from Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Taipei, Seoul, Bangkok and etc. Frequent flights also connect it to all major cities in Japan. Tokyo Haneda-New Chitose is the busiest air route in the world.

Local contact

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Dima Azarov
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T: +81-11-211-3675
www.conventionsapporo.jp/



2 DAYS IN...

OKINAWA

It's sun, sand and sea and the leisurely island lifestyle. Subtropical Okinawa has always been known for its cheerful character but the legacy of the ancient Ryukyu Kingdom has given this chain of islands a history distinct from the rest of Japan.

DAY 1 OKINAWA 沖縄



Shurijo Castle



Shurijo Castle

The UNESCO World Heritage site Shurijo Castle was the palace for Ryukyu kings for centuries. Dating back to the 1300s, the present structures are careful reconstruction from 1992. The multiple gates, halls and open plazas showcase the glory of the Ryukyu civilisation.
<http://oki-park.jp>

Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium

Few aquariums in the world has an exhibit as grand and arresting as the giant Kuroshio Sea display at the world-famous Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium.



See the largest fish in the world—the whale shark—swimming gracefully with manta rays and other fish in this truly magnificent space. Other displays take visitors through the Sea of Okinawa complete with coral reefs illuminated by sunlight. The best part: selected venues within the aquarium,

including the Kuroshio Sea display area, can be reserved for private functions.
<http://oki-churaumi.jp/en/index.html>



Shopping at T Galleria

Operated by DFS, The T Galleria in downtown Naha is an expertly curated collection of some of the world's leading brands in luxury goods, including fashion, jewellery, wine & spirits, fragrances and beauty products. Enjoy duty free shopping and great service in an elegant setting right in the heart of Okinawa's capital city.
<http://www.dfs.com/en/tgalleria-okinawa/>



A private function at Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium

DAY 2 OKINAWA 沖縄

The Kerama Islands National Park

The Kerama Islands is the perfect image of Okinawa as an island paradise—crystal clear waters, white sandy beaches, beautiful corals and rich marine life. No wonder visitors have nothing but praise for it. Less than an hour by boat from Okinawa's main island, it's an excursion everyone from children to first-time snorkellers to advanced deep-sea divers can all enjoy. There are more than 100 dive spots.

en.okinawastory.jp/enjoy/okinawanblue/kerama/

The Kerama Islands



UNIQUE VENUES

Cave party at Gangara Valley

While the geological formations at Gangara Valley continue to interest geologists, a natural limestone cave called "Cave Café" near the entrance has been designated a multi-purpose space suitable for up to 100 people. Special lighting brings out the unique formations within this cave, giving it an atmosphere that is both wild and wow-worthy.

mice.okinawastory.jp/en/vendors/unique/?planners_guide_id=56



Cave Party

Gala Aoiumi

Perfect for a leisurely sun-downer after a day of activities, the Gala Aoiumi is a salt-theme facility popular with overseas visitors for its salt-inspired snacks, ice-cream and noodles.
www.gala-aiumi.com/english/

Access

Naha airport is served daily by numerous domestic flights from major cities in Japan, including Sapporo, Tokyo and Kansai (Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe). There are also direct flights from overseas: Beijing, Shanghai, Taipei, Taichung, Seoul, Pusan and Hong Kong.

Local contact

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T: +81-98-859-6130
www.ocvb.or.jp/en/



6 DAYS IN...

NORTHWEST JAPAN

KANAZAWA > TAKAYAMA > TOYAMA

From the Sea of Japan to the highlands of Takayama, discover World Heritage villages, Samurai culture, castles, hotspots, alpine vistas, exceptional cuisines and local crafts. Now you can travel to the region in style on the new Hokuriku Shinkansen bullet train.



Northwest Japan — “Hokuriku” to locals — is home to the famous Japan Alps. This means the region is not only a land of striking natural beauty, it is also rich with onsens (Japanese hotspots). This uniquely Japanese way of relaxing can be enjoyed in local inns as well as hotels, where onsens can be either private or public, indoors or open-air with views of the mountains or the sea. A trip to the onsen also promises an opportunity to sample the local cuisine and sake.



Service begins March 14, 2015

SPECIAL TREAT

Travel on Japan's newest bullet train!

Get a taste of cutting-edge rail technology on Japan's newest bullet train! The new Hokuriku Shinkansen will begin service on March 14, 2015, inaugurating a bullet train service linking Tokyo to the Hokuriku region with several stops including Nagano, Toyama and Kanazawa. The “Kagayaki” service and “Hakutaka” service will each complete 10 and 14 roundtrips respectively from Tokyo to Kanazawa each day.

TRAVEL TIME

- Tokyo-Toyama: 2 hours 08 minutes
- Tokyo-Kanazawa: 2 hours 28 minutes.

DAY 1 KANAZAWA 金沢

The great castle town of Kanazawa features three world-famous attractions: Kanazawa Castle Park, Kenrokuen Garden and the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, all located next to one another in the city centre surrounded by great shopping and dining. With so much to see and do, it is unquestionably one of Japan's top tourist cities.



Breakfast at Kenrokuen

Start your day with sumptuous views of ponds, trees and hills at the garden recognised as one of the three most beautiful in Japan. Sample a meticulously prepared breakfast in one of the tea houses. Kenrokuen is also one of the loveliest places for a Japanese tea ceremony. www.pref.ishikawa.jp/siro-niwa/kenrokuen/e/index.html



Kanazawa Castle

Construction of Kanazawa Castle began in the 16th century but it was razed by fire several times and rebuilt in ever more elaborate designs through the centuries. The current

group of buildings are based on what existed in 1850s, built using traditional techniques and materials. www.pref.ishikawa.jp/siro-niwa/kanazawajou/e/index.html

Making Japanese confections

Wagashi (Japanese confections) are carefully crafted sweets that please the eye as much as the palate. Their designs reflect the changing seasons and the Japanese people's highly refined aesthetic. Organise



a wagashi workshop and let your participants create these edible works of art with guidance from wagashi artisans. www.kanazawa-kankoukyou-kai.gr.jp/craft-tourism/en/cooking/index.html

UNIQUE VENUE

Kanazawa Castle

Selected venues at Kanazawa Castle may be reserved for MICE groups, including Gokukken Nagaya, the former weapons storehouse, and the Kahoku-mon Gate, the main gate to the Castle. These venues offer a most memorable backdrop for any activity in this city. www.pref.ishikawa.jp/siro-niwa/kanazawajou/e/index.html



Kaga-ryori

A highlight of any visit to Kanazawa is the local cuisine “Kaga-ryori”, which reflects the abundance of fresh local ingredients. Dishes are served on beautiful Kutani porcelain or lacquerware from the Prefecture. Also not to be missed are Kanazawa's famous sweets and sake.



DAY 2 KANAZAWA 金沢



Dance of the Four Seasons

“Yamanaka-za” is home to Yamanaka Onsen, a hot spring offering not only a relaxing bath but also a traditional song-and-dance performance by geikos (traditional Japanese female entertainers). www.yamanaka-spa.or.jp/english/guide/place/yamanakaza.html

Yamanaka Onsen District: Kiku-no-Yu

The historic Yamanaka Onsen district buzzes with visitors throughout the year, who come to enjoy the many hot spring spas, ryokans (Japanese-style inns), cafés, restaurants, shops and galleries showcasing traditional arts and crafts. The oldest communal bathhouse in town, Kiku-no-Yu, dates back more than 1,300 years and features separate baths for men and women and a foot spa. www.yamanaka-spa.or.jp/global/eng/view3.html

Access

The new Hokuriku Shinkansen will cut travel time from Tokyo to Kanazawa to only 2.5 hours when it opens in March 2015. Rail links connect Kanazawa to Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya. Kanazawa's Komatsu Airport is connected to Tokyo Haneda and Narita, Sapporo, Sendai, Fukuoka and Naha. International flights link Kanazawa with Seoul, Shanghai and Taipei.

Local contact

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T: +81-76-224-8400
www.kanazawa-cb.com/index_e.html

DAY 3 TAKAYAMA 高山

Due to its isolated location in the Japanese Alps, the highland city of Takayama, meaning “tall mountain”, has over the centuries developed its own unique culture. Today, the city’s old streets, foods, crafts, galleries, temples, festivals and beautiful views make it one of the most enchanting cities to experience “Old Japan” through the four seasons.



Takayama



Sightsee in a traditional kimono

In Hida Takayama, the city area of Takayama, visitors can step out in style in a rented Kamishimo (for men) or Kimono (ladies). Part of the fun is trying them on and going for a commemorative photo in town.
www.hida.jp/english/activities/experiences/trip-to-the-edo-period-through-a-time-capsule



Old town Sanmachi

The old houses in Sanmachi have been nationally recognised as important historical buildings. The atmosphere here is classic Takayama, with quaint merchant houses and latticed bay windows.
www.hida.jp/english/activities/sightseeing-information/old-private-houses

Government House

Takayama Jinya, the former government house, was designated a historical landmark back in 1929 and is



the only remaining building of its kind. It includes the oldest and biggest granary in Japan.

www.hida.jp/english/activities/sightseeing-information/old-government-outpost

Sake tasting

Takayama is home to many sake breweries, each with their own specialty. Some feature a restaurant where visitors can enjoy its sake with traditional Japanese cuisine.
www.hida.jp/english/events/sake-brewery

MUST-TRY FOOD Hida Beef

Gourmets and overseas visitors have long praised “Hida-gyu” (Hida beef), the local beef from the black-haired Japanese cattle. It has been certified to have attained the highest quality in marbling, lustre, colour, texture and smell.



Festa Forest

DAY 4 TAKAYAMA 高山

Festa Forest: Relive the Takayama Festival

The Geo-dome at the Matsuri-no-Mori (Festa Forest) displays the colourful floats and marionettes used at the famous Takayama Festival, one of the three biggest festivals in Japan. The dome is located inside a mountain and the space is certainly impressive!
<http://www.togei-hida.co.jp/english/index.html>

Access

Takayama is accessible from Tokyo by bus (5.5 hours). The new Hokuriku Shinkansen travelling between Tokyo and Kanazawa will stop at Toyama, where another train service will link Takayama. Travel time from Kanazawa to Takayama is 2 hours and 40 minutes on the train and 2 hours and 15 minutes on the express bus. Takayama is also accessible by train from Nagoya.

Local contact

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T: +81-577-36-3315
www.takayama-cb.jp

DAY 5 TOYAMA 富山

Facing the Sea of Japan with mountains on three sides, Toyama fills the imagination with sublime scenery and delicious foods. It is the gateway to the famous Tateyama-Kurobe Alpine Route, Kurobe Gorge Railway and World Heritage site Gokayama village.



Toyama's coastline

World Heritage site Gokayama

Home to 23 “gassho-zukuri” style thatched-roof farmhouses, Gokayama attracts visitors from all over the world who come to marvel at these unique houses that date back 400 years. Gokayama’s World Heritage status ensures that these architectural gems and the area around them are carefully main-



tained so that visitors can continue to experience Gokayama’s tranquil atmosphere as if time has stood still.
www.gokayama-info.jp/en/gokayama.html



Papermaking in Gokayama

Gokayama was once a centre for paper-making and its reputation for high quality paper is well recognised today. Gokayama’s paper is a nationally designated craft and is used in everything from calligraphy to sliding doors. Making traditional Gokayama paper can be designed as a teambuilding activity on a trip to this historical village.
<http://www.gokayama-info.jp/en/washi.html>

Toyama Castle Park

Once the residence of the powerful Maeda clan, Toyama Castle Park is better known today as a site for viewing cherry blossom, which lasts for only about a week every April. A private function or party can be arranged here with a tour of the museum at the castle tower.



Toyama Bay sushi

Toyama Bay is a treasure trove of warm water and cold water seafood, which supplies the city with fresh ingredients for some of the finest sushi in Japan. Just ask for the “Toyama-wan-Sushi” set.

UNIQUE TOUR Sightseeing on Centram

Centram is the tram that travels around Toyama city centre in a 20-minute loop service. Visitors can sightsee and stop anywhere along the way for shopping and dining. A new icon of Toyama, it may be reserved for group use.



DAY 6 TOYAMA 富山

The Tateyama Kurobe Alpine Route

The Tateyama Kurobe Alpine Route passes through the magnificent sceneries of Tateyama Mountain Range in the Japanese Alps on a 90 km journey from Toyama towards Nagano. The full route is open from April to November, with change of sceneries as you go higher in elevation. In spring, the route is literally “carved through” the 18-metre high snow! Summer is best for sightseeing and nature walks,

while in autumn the colours change from green at the foot of the mountain to red in the middle and white snow at the top. It’s a blockbuster attraction not to be missed.
www.alpen-route.com/en/



Access

The new Hokuriku Shinkansen takes only 2:08 hrs to travel from Tokyo to Toyama. From Kanazawa, it takes 20 minutes on the Shinkansen. Regular rail services from Tokyo takes 3:30 hrs. From Kyoto, Osaka and Nagoya train journeys are 3:00 hrs, 3:10 hrs and 3:30 hrs respectively. There are also flight connections to Tokyo, Sapporo and four overseas destinations: Seoul, Dalian, Shanghai and Taipei.

Local contact

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www.cap.or.jp/~tcb/



Clockwise from above: view of Hakodate cityscape, Hokkaido; Tokyo National Museum, the oldest and largest museum in Japan; Nijo Castle in Kyoto

Options beyond Golden Route

Japan promotes destinations with historic European charm and theme attractions to attract Asian MICE, in particular incentives. By **Mimi Hudoyo**

Japan is opening up destinations beyond the Golden Route, not only for leisure travel but also for MICE, especially the incentive market.

This strategy is part of the country's efforts to reach 20 million arrivals by 2020.

Akira Ninagawa, executive director, Japan Convention Bureau (JCB), said: "Apart from academic conferences, our target is to develop incentive tours."

While the Golden Route of Tokyo, Hakone and Kyoto remain the major destinations, Hokkaido, for example, which started to open up in recent years, is gaining popularity as a MICE destination among Asian travellers.

Ninagawa said JCB is identifying unique venues and cultural programmes to attract MICE programmes to the country.

Said Ninagawa: "Places like Tokyo National Museum, Nijo Castle

in Kyoto and *Atake-maru* (Samurai ship cruising around Tokyo Bay) are unique venues we would like to introduce to international MICE visitors."

One of the destinations which is opening up for MICE is Nagasaki Prefecture in North Kyushu.

Takako Sonoda, director, General and Internal Affairs Overseas Department, Promotion Section of Nagasaki Prefecture Convention and Tourism Association, said: "On



the meeting and convention side, Sasebo City has a number of convention venues to offer.”

Arkas Sasebo, a multi-purpose centre, for example, can accommodate up to 2,000 people in the main hall plus has several conference and tea rooms.

In addition, Wins Sasebo and Huis Ten Bosch Utrecht Plaza are two convention facilities in the Huis Ten Bosch area.

Wins Sasebo has capacity for up to 1,800 people and a 300-inch giant screen, while Huis Ten Bosch Utrecht Plaza can accommodate up to 1,000 people.

Huis Ten Bosch itself is a picturesque village on the shore of Omura Bay. It was built to mimic a medieval Dutch town with brick houses, canals and flower gardens.

Western influences are found in many places in Nagasaki Prefecture because it was the only place open to visitors from Western Europe during Japan’s national isolation period from 1641 to 1859.

In line with JCB’s efforts to identify unique venues, Sonoda said Na-

gasaki has a number of such places.

Glover Residence in Glover Garden, for example, is Japan’s oldest wooden Western-style residence. It was the former home of Thomas Blake Glover, a Scottish merchant who played a role in the modernisation of Japan in shipbuilding, coal mining and other fields.

Sonoda said: “The beautiful garden has statues related to the Madam Butterfly opera, which was set in Nagasaki. It also offers a stunning view of the harbour.”

The garden has been nominated for UNESCO World Heritage status in 2015. “Incentive groups or corporate companies can organise theme events here,” she noted.

Dejima Museum, located on a fan-shaped artificial island with a 400-year history of Dutch trade, is another unique venue, where meeting planners can organise theme parties related to the period.

Another unique venue is the Unzen Miyazaki Ryokan, an upmarket Japanese ryokan which has been in operation since 1929.

It has 98 rooms with a mix of Japanese traditional and modern Western bedrooms, and meeting rooms which can accommodate up to 300 delegates. Groups have a choice of Japanese tatami seating for group dinners, or Western-style meetings and banquets.

Unzen Miyazaki Ryokan is located

“Places like Tokyo National Museum, Nijo Castle in Kyoto and Atake-maru (Samurai ship cruising around Tokyo Bay) are unique venues we would like to introduce to international MICE visitors.”

Akira Ninagawa

Executive director, Japan Convention Bureau

near the famous Unzen Hot Spring and Unzen Jigoku Hell, about 90 minutes' drive away from Nagasaki Airport.

Nagasaki has also attracted movie producers to film in the area, and can be considered for a movie-themed incentive tour.

Sunset in the Kujukushima Islands, Sasebo City, for example, appeared in *The Last Samurai* (2003). *The Wolverine* (2013) starts with a scene of the bombing of Nagasaki Harbor during World War II. The actual images of the scene were created by composing real views of Nagasaki Harbor.

Sonoda added: "The Battleship Island of Hashima inspired the James Bond 007 *Skyfall* (2012) film producers for the lair of the villain (Raoul Silva).

"The island which in silhouette looks like a battleship, was featured as the model of the Dead City in the film, but the filming did not take place there."

With China and South Korea being the closest destinations from Nagasaki, travellers from both countries contribute the bulk of the traffic for this prefecture.

"However, we are starting to tap the South-east Asian markets such as Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia," she commented.

Nagasaki has direct flights from Shanghai and Seoul and is linked to

other countries via Tokyo Haneda, Nagoya, Osaka (Itami, Kansai and Kobe Airports) and Okinawa.

Fukuoka is the main airport in North Kyushu with international flights from the Netherlands, Singapore, the Philippines and Hawaii. From Fukuoka, travellers can either transfer by bus or take the JR Train to Nagasaki, about one hour and 50 minutes away.

For those looking for experiential tourism, Ajimu in Oita Prefecture in the north-eastern part of North Kyushu, is a suitable choice. Oita is accessible with domestic flights from Tokyo, Osaka and Haneda. Direct international flights are available from Seoul.

Ajimu is known for its wineries and vineyards, and travellers can visit the wineries to learn about the production process and taste some of the products.

Ajimu is also the birthplace of green tourism in Japan, dating back to 1996. It was wine-grower Seiichi Miyata who had the idea of creating additional income for the farmers in the area through agro-tourism or green tourism.

He developed the concept through a self-comparative study with a village near Freiburg in southwest Germany, which is famous for its vineyard retreat since the 1960s.

"In the beginning, it was not

easy to convince the people here to go into the business.

"Many houses around Ajimu are a century old or more, inherited from generations past.

"It was not easy to convince the owners to maintain their original structure in the beginning. Only when tourists started to come and appreciate the heritage houses, many start upgrading their houses but retaining the originality," Sonoda said.

Many houses have introduced air-conditioning and also provide western-style toilets, for example.

"There are 70 houses in Ajimu, which are open for green tourism, with a total capacity of up to 250 people today," she added.

So far, many of the guests are students on study tours and families, but working with local DMCs, tailor-made programmes can be arranged for incentive groups.

Group members can gather at the community hall for briefings and are divided into smaller ones.

The hosts will then meet the groups and take them to their houses to experience their daily activities.

The activities require a lot of interaction with the hosts, who mostly do not speak English.

Therefore, groups will need to have an interpreter if travellers do not speak Japanese.

From left:
Kumamoto Castle
in Northern Kyushu;
a restored building
at Dejima



OKINAWA

— Japan's Secret Paradise —



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Ideas Three-day post-conference tour in North Kyushu



Unzen Jigoku

Day 1 Arrive at Nagasaki Airport at about noon and proceed to Chijiwa Kanko Center for lunch, then visit Unzen Jigoku (which means hell), one of Japan's most famous hot spring resorts located about 90 minutes away from Nagasaki City.

Drive to Nagasaki City and visit Dejima, an artificial island with a 400-year history of Dutch trade. Built in the shape of a fan with an area of about 13,000m², it was built during the Edo Period in order to accommodate Portuguese Christian missionaries and prevent the propagation of their religion. It also used to be the residential quarters of the Dutch, the only foreigners allowed to trade in Japan during the Sakoku (Isolation) Period, and a Dutch Trading House operated on the island.

Walk along the island flanked by old buildings – some 10 of them have been restored – and visit the Chief Factor's Residence, the First Ship's Captain's Quarters, which have a mix of Japanese and European interiors, and the former stone

warehouse which has now become the Archaeology Center, just to name a few.

Visitors can try on the kimono here. It usually takes half an hour to put on a kimono, but in this kimono shop, visitors can dress up in the traditional kimono in just three minutes. This fun and easy kimono-wearing experience starts from 500 yen (US\$4.20) for half an hour's rental. Dressing up in a kimono and taking a picture against a backdrop of Japan-meets-West buildings is becoming a popular activity for many visitors.

Prior to checking in at Crowne Plaza ANA Nagasaki, have a sumptuous set dinner at Hamakatsu with Nagasaki beef on the menu. Nagasaki beef won the 2012 Japanese Beef Olympics.

Day 2 After breakfast in the hotel, drive to Peace Park and Atomic Bomb Museum, then head on to Nagasaki Museum of History and Culture, two museums that show the history, culture and tradition of Nagasaki.

The Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum presents the history of the devastating bombing on August 9, 1945 and the impact on the city, and the reconstruction up to the present day.

The Peace Park shows that despite the projection that no vegetation can grow on the soil for 75 years after the bombing, the park is full of plants and flowers and is covered with green grass.

Drive to Fukuoka, and on the way stop by at Imari Pottery in Arita, an area in Saga Prefecture, famous for its Arita-yaki porcelain pottery. Here, enjoy a fusion set lunch at the restaurant at Imari Pottery before heading to the workshop to see how artists decorate the pots and plates.

With prior bookings, groups can participate in painting pots.

After arriving in Fukuoka in the afternoon and checking in at Royal Park Hotel The Fukuoka, which is a 15-minute drive from the airport and a five-minute walk from Hakata train station, guests have time to visit Canal City Hakata shopping area, which is also a five-minute walk away from the hotel.

Canal City is a large shopping and entertainment complex with an artificial canal running through the middle of the five-storey complex.

End the day's activities with a hot pot dinner at Hanamidori.

Day 3 In the morning, drive from Fukuoka to Ajimu in Oita Prefecture to visit the green tourism area. Participants are divided into small groups of four or five and each visits a family and participates in their daily activities. The half-day programme includes learning to make soba, harvesting rice in the field, fruit and vegetable-picking and enjoying the home-cooked lunch.

In the afternoon drive to Beppu, about an hour away from Ajimu, and check in at the 287-room Beppuwan Royal Hotel. Soak in the hotel's onsen before going for dinner. The Japanese restaurant, tatami-style, is recommended. Put on the yukata, or casual kimono, for an immersive Japanese experience.

Itinerary based on a fam trip by Japan National Tourism Organization



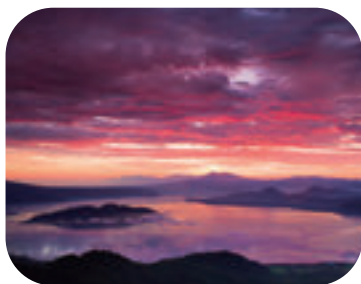
SAPPORO



irankarapte

H E L L O

HOKKAIDO



TOP OF JAPAN

SAPPORO CONVENTION BUREAU
conventionsapporo.jp

Need to know



Kansai Airport Station in Osaka

Narita and Kansai airports kick off fast lane for business event travellers

In a bid to attract more MICE groups, Japan will introduce fast lanes for VIPs and international travellers attending MICE events this year, starting with Narita International Airport and Kansai International Airport

The country will also allow “trusted” travellers, ie, frequent travellers to Japan who have been identified by the immigration stand control as having “low risk”, to use automated gates at immigration check points.

Akira Ninagawa, executive director, Japan Convention Bureau, said: “MICE is one of the six (grand) initiatives to create Japan as a tourism-oriented country, and facilitating travellers into the country is one of the measures we are going to provide.”

Preparations for the new facilitation are under way at press time.

Kyoto launches website for Muslim travellers

The city of Kyoto and the Kyoto Convention Bureau have launched a website for Muslim travellers at <http://kyoto.travel/muslim/> under the supervision of the Kyoto Muslim Association.

The website, with English, Arabic, Turkish and Malay language options, provides information on the Japanese diet, how to find halal food in Kyoto and a guide to Muslim-friendly hotels, as well as finding qibla, the direction of the Kaaba, in Kyoto.



Explore Gion on a cycling tour

Most of Kyoto's attractions are in a 10km² area, and one of the best ways to visit these spots is to cycle, where visitors can access narrow alleys and explore local life and culture.

Visit Kyoto Cycling Tour Project's (KCTP) website www.ktcp.net to arrange private cycling tours, and with the growing demand for cycling tourism among MICE groups, KCTP now has professional cycling tour planners who can arrange MICE group tours on bikes.

One of the popular tours available in the KCTP programme is the 12km Back Street Cycling Tour, which includes places such as Gion and the Imperial Palace, Higashi-Honganji Temple and Heian Shrine. The tour takes three hours.

Osaka Marriott offers rooms with views

Osaka Marriott Miyako Hotel in Abeno Harukas, which opened in March last year, occupies 19 floors of Abeno Harukas Tower, the tallest building in Japan.

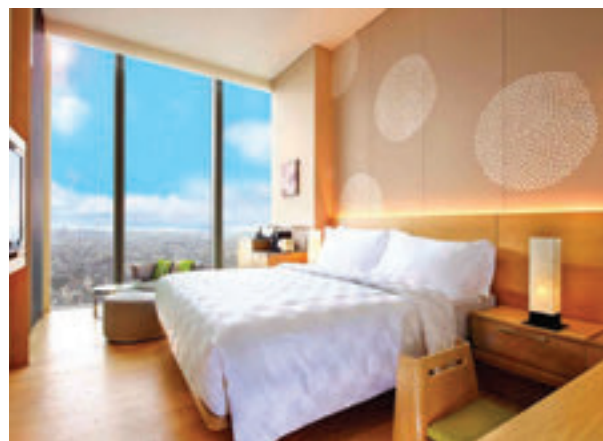
The hotel is the fourth Marriott property in Japan. Its 360 guestrooms occupy the 38th to 55th floors and, it goes without saying, offer stunning views of Osaka.

The restaurant, located on the 57th floor, houses an extraordinary collection of liquors from all over the world. It features multinational dining menus.

With seven meeting rooms – the biggest capable of accommodating 160 people – Osaka Marriott is going after leisure and business travellers, and MICE groups.

Guests have easy access to Kansai International Airport in 30 minutes by the airport express train called Express Haruka, as well as multiple local train services to major landmarks in Osaka.

Abeno Harukas Tower is a new 984-feet tall skyscraper with 60 floors of dining, shopping, art and business.





Yasufumi Nishi/INTO

Enjoy Tokyo on a traditional Japanese houseboat cruise

One of the ways to enjoy Tokyo by night is to take a unique group dinner cruise on a yakatabune, a traditional Japanese houseboat. MICE groups can charter the boat, whose capacity ranges from 20 pax to 100 pax, or share with other groups.

With Japanese tatami-style seating, travellers enjoy traditional Japanese cuisine such as sashimi-funamori (assorted slices of raw seafood), tempura, chirashi sushi, Japanese noodles and Japanese drinks ranging from beer, shochu sake, to green tea and soft drinks.

The boat cruises on the Sumida River and passengers enjoy views such as the Tokyo Skytree, the Rainbow Bridge and other Tokyo landmarks.

The Yakatabune Tokyo Association has 29 member companies with a total 108 yakatabune cruisers which can accommodate up to 6,000 guests.

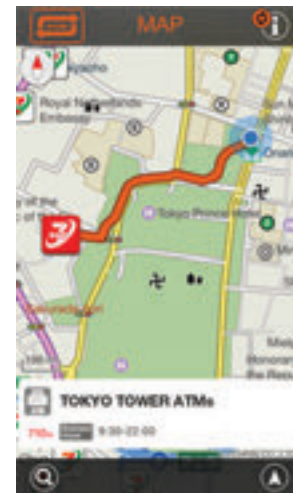
Get cash in a flash any time of day

Travellers in need of Japanese yen late at night can turn to the more than 20,000 ATM machines at 7-Eleven stores in Japan.

Operated by Seven Bank, travellers can withdraw cash any time of day, and apart from the stores which are open 24 hours, the ATMs are also available in malls, airports, train stations and other public areas.

The ATM machine has instructions in English, Chinese, Korean and Portuguese. Information on their locations are available at <http://www.sevenbank.co.jp/english/personal/atm/app/>.

Travellers can download the Japan ATM Navigation mobile application which provides the user with a route from his current location to the closest Seven Bank ATM.



Experience authentic geisha tradition

Kyoto is the home of geisha tradition, and the entertainers are called geiko and maiko.

WaRaiDo Guide Network arranges private and authentic geisha parties with dinner for small incentive groups, including a private geisha party in a tea house not usually open to the public, accompanied by a geisha specialising in a musical instrument.

Tokyo-Kanazawa fast connection

A new Hokuriku Shinkansen line will be launched on March 14 between Tokyo and Kanazawa with 12 cars, including Gran Class, Japan Rail's first class.

The Kagayaki super-fast train category takes passengers between two destinations in two-and-a-half hours, or more than an hour faster than the existing connection.

Kanazawa is in Ishikawa Prefecture, a destination popular for its hot spring resorts. The new service will give incentive groups easy access to the onsens.



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Sentosa means business

The offshore island is shedding its leisure-only image, drawing MICE events with new products as well as rejuvenated ones, reports **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

Sentosa, long known among families and leisure travellers for its sun, sand and sea, has in recent years evolved to become a one-stop MICE destination. Today, the rejuvenated island is home to 14 hotels, over 30 attractions and more than 100 F&B and retail outlets.

Latest hotel additions include W Singapore – Sentosa Cove, along with improvements made to existing meeting facilities in hotels like Shangri-La's Rasa Sentosa Resort & Spa and The Singapore Resort & Spa Sentosa. New attractions include a new multimedia night show *Wings of Time* and Singapore's own Madame Tussauds.

Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) alone houses six hotels, convention and meeting spaces, the Universal Studios Singapore theme park and a range of quality F&B, entertainment and retail outlets.

Tan Bee Ling, vice president, resorts sales, RWS, said: "Increasingly business travellers want to accomplish more than just work during their participation in MICE events. There is a strong demand for a variety of activities, and organisers are looking for a one-stop destination catering to business in the day and leisure activities in the evening."

The 49ha property can hold 35,000 pax at any one time. Its event spaces include Resorts World Convention Centre, with 26 function rooms, and a column-free ballroom for 7,300 pax.

In 2013, RWS hosted more than 9,500 events, welcoming over two million MICE visitors, Tan shared.

Meanwhile, Shangri-La's Rasa Sentosa Resort & Spa last year opened a standalone seafront event centre, Atmosphere by the Sea, measuring 322m² indoors and comes with a



120m² covered terrace and an adjoining 120m² timber deck. These spaces can seat 150 pax, while the lush, sprawling lawn can hold another 100 pax for a standing cocktail reception.

The property's director of sales and marketing, Jennifer Yong, said: "To capture rising demand from meetings organisers seeking out-of-the-box MICE venues, we are able to transform typical boardroom meetings into fun, creative and memorable events."

Geraldine Wong, director of sales, Mövenpick Heritage Hotel Sentosa, said: "Sentosa is a major attraction with many teambuilding activities available, creating a well-rounded experience for business and leisure."

She said the hotel has experienced 15 per cent year-on-year growth for MICE since its opening in 2012.

Sentosa Leisure Management international and corporate sales senior assistant director, Steven Chung, said:

"Sentosa has ramped up efforts over the past few years, bringing in more participative and skills-based activities on our beaches... customised team-building experiences are constantly refreshed."

While Sentosa offers adrenaline-rushing activities like iFly Singapore, an indoor skydiving experience, and high rope course trails at MegaZip Adventure Park, Chung said there is more to come, including a bungy jump experience at AJ Hackett Sentosa.

He said the island's teambuilding programmes – Imbiah Challenge and Beach Challenge – are popular with the Chinese and Indian groups, and there is a rise in MICE traffic from Australia. Over 8,000 people have participated in them since 2008.

Unlike leisure travellers who have the luxury of more time, business travellers always seek to maximise limited time in a destination. RWS' Tan said: "Containing all events within the island will definitely provide convenience for delegates and event organisers, with more being accomplished within a limited period of time."

"Marketing the precinct as a whole will not only strengthen the business proposition, but also multiply the impact in terms of awareness and benefits for stakeholders and guests."

Rasa Sentosa Resort & Spa's Atmosphere by the Sea, opened last year to meet higher MICE demand



"There is a strong demand for a variety of activities...organisers are looking for a one-stop destination catering to business in the day and leisure activities in the evenings."

Tan Bee Ling
Vice president, resorts sales, RWS

Ideas Garden City tour

Morning Start your day taking in the fragrance and sights of the flowers at the awe-inspiring Gardens by the Bay. This 101ha green zone is full of activities for nature lovers. Don't miss Bay South Garden's highlights – the Cloud Forest and Flower Dome conservatories – which house close to 100,000 plants, and the towering steel Supertrees that stretch up to 50m into the sky.

Afternoon Drive over to Labrador Nature Reserve after lunch. This is a haven for flora and fauna such as monitor lizards and beautiful fish poison trees. Trekkers can also go on enlightening heritage trails that shed light on Labrador Park's role in Singapore's maritime and war history.

Evening Why not head

over to Southern Ridges just before winding down? This impressive 10km route links up several iconic green destinations, including HortPark, Kent Ridge Park and Mount Faber Park. Just a short walk from the latter is the spectacular Henderson Waves pedestrian bridge, which is particularly beautiful at night when lit up.

Credits: Singapore Tourism Board



Need to know

Enter the tiger's den

Embark on an unforgettable journey through the whimsical landscape of Haw Par Villa, also known as the Tiger Balm Garden. Built in 1937, it is the world's only eclectic Chinese mythological park of its kind.

This new walking tour offered by The Original Singapore Walks will take participants through the villa, helping them make sense of the tapestry of Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism seamlessly woven into the poetry of the garden.

Tickets are priced at S\$35 (US\$26) for adults and S\$15 for children.

For details visit <http://journeys.com.sg> or call (65) 6325-1631.

Anyone can be a pilot

Located at the Singapore Flyer, Flight Experience is a simulator that fully replicates a commercial jet. It offers a fully immersive experience, allowing participants to take to the skies controlling a Boeing 737-800, in a fully enclosed cockpit with full-functioning avionics and photorealistic visuals.

The simulator features a 180-degree wraparound screen which projects stunningly accurate visuals of scenery and terrain. Think flying into Paris in semi-darkness at dusk, or viewing picturesque Rome overhead from the air, among other breathtaking sights.

Check out Flight Experience's website at <http://flightexperience.com.sg> for more information, or call (65) 6339-2737.



UK budget hotel debuts in Singapore

Premier Inn, the UK's largest budget hotel chain with over 670 properties globally, is making its Singapore debut with Premier Inn Singapore Beach Road, expected to open mid-2016.

Located within walking distance to the cultural districts of Haji Lane and Arab Street, as well as the Marina Bay Sands business district, the 300-room Premier Inn Singapore Beach Road will have 300 rooms of an area from 18m². It will have a swimming pool, gym and meeting facilities.

Erik van Keulen, senior vice president for development, Asia-Pacific, said: "We want our hotels (in South-east Asia) to be looked upon as three-star properties rather than fully budget ones like our UK properties – which mostly have no additional amenities apart from rooms."

Keulen said Premier Inn is courting "a good mix" of business and leisure travellers, and expects the initial bulk of traffic to come from the UK and the Middle East, markets which are more familiar with the Premier Inn brand.



Take your events out of the ballroom and into Gardens by the Bay

Flower Field Hall

Step into a space where inspiration blossoms. Where you're surrounded by dazzling flowers in full bloom. Where panoramic bay views will take your breath away. Nestled in the Flower Dome, the World's Largest Glass Greenhouse as featured in the Guinness World Records 2015, the Flower Field Hall brings the best of outdoors, indoors. Surrounding it are fascinating flowers in full bloom and uninterrupted bay views. Inside, specially programmed LED lights add ambience and highlight any theme. It's the perfect place for weddings, gala dinners and private events. This is just one of the many spectacular event spaces that we offer. To learn more about our unique venues, email us at venue.hire@gardensbythebay.com.sg



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Key attractions like Victoria Harbour continued to draw visitors during Occupy Central

A minor case of interruption

Most in the trade have reported little impact from last year's Occupy Central protests, citing few or no cancellations from clients. By **Prudence Lui**

Hong Kong's MICE players are pleasantly surprised at how little the industry has been affected by the Occupy Central (OC) campaign, which ended with the police's clearing of the final protest site in Causeway Bay on December 15.

Looking back on the 79 days of disruption brought about by OC, industry players in general have observed minimal impact to corporate meetings and incentives, especially given that the affected period in 4Q14 was the usual low season.

PC Tours and Travel general manager, Cary Chiu, shared that a client's initial cancellation of a site inspection was nevertheless carried out later.

He said: "I didn't see any major negative impact on our business as the protests were peaceful. Though it has been predicted that this year is not going to be promising for MICE,

it is not related to OC."

Meetings specialist MV Destination's general manager, Clemson Lo, said: "For our meetings segment, there was little impact and we had no cancellations.

"Events had taken place as scheduled and groups arrived as scheduled."

Similarly, Grand Hyatt Hong Kong observed little impact on its business. Between last October and early December, the hotel had cancellation from only one group and postponement from just one other to 2015.

Its director of sales and marketing, Cecilia Lo, said: "All other bookings were actualised. Similar to past years, we also continued to receive MICE leads for 4Q14 during the OC weeks, as the business community did not see major disruptions other than traffic congestion, which was managed by better planning.

"As Q4 is a key business-closing period, we did not see a conclusive drop in any particular segment, and this is the same for MICE bookings in 2015.

"Many of our events are repeat business and we have been signing up new groups not only for 2015 but for 2016 as well.

"The city is sophisticated, hence many multinational companies still believe Hong Kong is the most suitable destination for their events, due to convenience from friendly visa procedures and excellent flight connectivity."

While professional conference organiser International Conference Consultants shared the same observation of little impact, its director Katerina Tam said some meetings with government officials were delayed, presumably because of OC.

She said: "Local meetings organisers were more cautious about the likely impact of OC than their international counterparts. Although, business is expected to be quiet this year, we've already clinched some big events for 2016, which will be a better year."

Team Building Asia, however, had a number of group bookings cancelled during the OC period. Its co-founder and director, Stuart Harris, said: "We had three or four groups which selected other locations but the percentage of cancellations was low.

"A couple of clients even changed their programmes to in-house activities."

For Swire Travel, there were requests for postponement of site inspections from some overseas organisers. Its general manager of business development, Edmund Tsang, is not upbeat.

"They (the overseas organisers) may not return and we're going to lose the business to aggressive competition from neighbouring countries," he said.

"It's still hard to tell how 2015 will fare but now that the demonstrations have ended, the Hong Kong Tourism Board needs to shoulder the immediate responsibility of channelling more resources to regain the trust of MICE planners and draw more events to the city.

"The government should also allocate more funds to the board so it can cast a wider net and secure more international conferences for the city."

Need to know



Observations from the waterfront wheel

The long-awaited 60m Observation Wheel on the Central Waterfront was launched in December 2014 featuring 42 luxury gondolas (including one special VIP gondola) each of which gives its eight passengers a jaw-dropping 15 to 20-minute view of the harbour and of Kowloon, plus iconic landmarks such as the Star Ferry. Each gondola is equipped with a high-speed HKT Wi-Fi communication system. The giant ferris wheel swings into action between 11.00 and 23.00 throughout the year and is priced at HK\$100 (US\$13) per adult. There is also a convenient taxi and private car drop-off zone for visitors. According to operator Swiss AEX, 90 per cent of the wheel's site is accessible to the public.

Take your event to greater heights

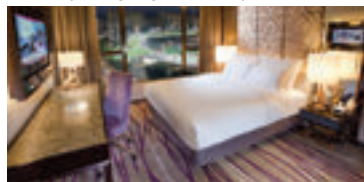
The sky100 Hong Kong Observation Deck is wooing event planners with a new sub-brand called sky100 Events.

Perched on the 100th floor of the International Commerce Center in West Kowloon and proclaimed the highest event venue in town, this landmark eyrie offers unobstructed 360-degree views of the city. It is also a highly flexible venue that can host a range of functions from wedding banquets to corporate events.

The venue's abundant space also allows multiple zoning for a wide range of catering options and simultaneous activities. Add to that a dedicated events management team.

Cosmopolitan becomes Dorsett

The 454-room Cosmopolitan Hotel in Wan Chai will be rebranded as a Dorsett property later this year, and is now undergoing major refurbishment in phases, expected to complete in Q3/Q4. All 11 room categories will don a new look e.g. mix of classical-oriental and western styles for the Grand Deluxe rooms, and contemporary style for Superior. The thematic Executive Suite concept will continue, while the Sony's 4K Experience Suite was launched last November, making the hotel first in town offering the revolutionary 4K visual sensation with a surround sound system.



Grand Deluxe room

Feel green and eat better

The 300-seat Congress Plus at Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre welcomes delegates with new contemporary cityscape decor utilising green materials such as bamboo flooring and partitions made with recycled wine bottles. A gallery at the entrance showcases art made by disabled artists. There are also new healthy lunch options from an array of a-la-carte choices, as well as the Salad and Noodle Bar. The new lunch menu offers an international spread comprising Chinese, Western, Japanese, Thai and Indian cuisines.

Hotel stays that help make the air cleaner

More hotels are committed to environment-friendly technologies and emission-free mobility towards a greener Hong Kong.

For instance, Mira Hong Kong has added to its limousine fleet the Tesla Model S that enables emission-free arrivals to and departures from the hotel. Wi-Fi connectivity is available on board.

Meanwhile, Kowloon Shangri-La has unveiled its complimentary shuttle service using Smart Fortwo electric cars. Guests can book the cars with the Concierge for rides around Tsimshatsui and Tsimshatsui East.



The new Smart Fortwo electric car deployed for Kowloon Shangri-La's free shuttle service


Meetings & Exhibitions Hong Kong




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A MICE city in the making

Khon Kaen in north-east Thailand may be your next emerging destination not least because of its proximity to Indochina and South China, writes

Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

A recent boost in marketing and promotional efforts to raise Khon Kaen's visibility might help the province gain more traction among international corporate and meeting planners.

One of the largest cities in Thailand's north-eastern region, and more commonly referred to as Isaan, Khon Kaen has steadily risen as a domestic MICE destination in recent years. But trade players are hopeful that with its growing flight connections and geographic

location near Indochina and South China, Khon Kaen will become a strong contender for the international MICE business.

In 2013, the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) signed an MoU with Khon Kaen to promote the province as the fifth MICE City in Thailand – the others being Bangkok, Pattaya, Phuket and Chiang Mai.

This was followed by the implementation last June of the four-year Provincial Development Model (2014-2017) that mapped out key

strategies to reach outlined goals.

In 2013, Khon Kaen's MICE industry generated US\$33.9 million in revenue from 692,292 local and international visitors, according to TCEB.

Pornthip Hirunkate, managing director, Destination Asia Thailand, opined: "The popularity of Khon Kaen is certainly growing and there is great potential for it to develop along with Isaan in general as a MICE destination, especially with its close proximity to Laos. Journeys can continue north into Vientiane and access to southern Isaan is just a two-hour drive from Bangkok."

She added: "There is great capacity for Isaan to grow as a MICE destination with the Chinese market looking for experiential events and more authentic encounters. It has a developed infrastructure and there is plenty of accessibility throughout the region via LCCs."

At the same time, a growing selection of boutique hotels in Khon Kaen offers "more authentic Thai experiences", Pornthip pointed out.

Concurred Thanavalai Laorauvirodge of Supanniga Home, a four-key boutique resort in Khon Kaen: "Supanniga Home is a unique property that is suitable for a niche portion of the market. We have hosted functions for global companies in which the executives spend the day doing workshops and attend meetings in our garden."

He continued: "We have seen more interest and bookings for high-end MICE events for the past two years, and we expect this will only continue to grow."

"Most of our MICE clients are from domestic offices of international companies."

Growing MICE demand has led the 48-key Wishing Tree Resort to expand its meeting facilities to accommodate an additional 200-300 pax and afford MICE groups the possibilities to organise outdoor activities at its riverside location, according to resort manager Pasuta Sukmanop.

But while prospects generally appear positive for Khon Kaen, the province needs to diversify its attractions and MICE feeder markets, according to industry members. The meeting demand is still predominantly domestic, with government meetings and academic seminars comprising the bulk of MICE business in Khon Kaen, they

**Pullman Khon
Kaen Raja Orchid**



said. “Some 80 per cent of our MICE business is from the government sector, typically larger-scale meetings lasting two to three days to a week, while the remaining 20 per cent is from the corporate sector, usually smaller-scale meetings of between 50 and 100 pax, ranging from pharmaceutical to automobile companies hosting dinners for their regional salespersons,” said Sirikwan Tesarin, assistant director of sales-corporate at Pullman Khon Kaen Raja Orchid.

“(Academic) conferences are important too, especially with conferences/seminars from Khon Kaen University and Mahasarakham University (in neighbouring province),” she added.

Likewise, academic conferences and government meetings also make up a significant MICE market for Centara Hotel & Convention Centre Khon Kaen, said the hotel’s spokesperson. The hotel, which opened in December 2013, and the Pullman Khon Kaen Raja Orchid, are the province’s only two internationally branded hotels with convention facilities.

Sirikwan hence suggests the devel-



Statues of dinosaurs: Dinosaurs are the symbol of the province

opment of more attractions in Khon Kaen that will widen the selection of recreational choices for MICE delegates, especially as competition heats up with Udon Thani, the province’s main rival city in Isaan.

As to leveraging dinosaurs –

Khon Kaen’s provincial symbol and source of heritage pride since paleontological discoveries in the 1970s – she commented: “The dinosaurs (discovery) are 30 years old! It’s time we develop new icons for Khon Kaen.”

Ideas

3 Days/2 Nights in Khao Yai

Day1 Kick off the morning in Bangkok with a visit to Pak Khlong Talat, the city’s biggest flower market, and Nakorn Kasem, popularly known as the Thieves Market.

Following a two-hour drive to Khao Yai, enjoy lunch at your own expenses and check into the hotel. At 16.30, you will be picked up from the hotel to check out a small hill opposite a bat cave.

Enjoy the landscape as the sun sets and watch bats flying out of the cave.

Then, enter the Night Safari in the Khao Yai National Park for animal watching before heading over to the camping area where field staff will prepare a barbeque dinner for you.

Exit the forest around 21.30 for transfer back to the resort.

Day2 After breakfast, drive to a viewpoint and stop for pictures of the surrounding landscapes from

higher ground.

Start your soft-trekking tour of around three hours, with equipment like binoculars provided, and have lunch in the jungle prepared by the field team.

Visit a waterfall and while having excursions or swimming in the area, the field staff will serve snacks and cold drinks.

Transfer back to your hotel to freshen up before continuing to PB Valley Khao Yai Winery.

Begin with a guided 75-minute tour of an established vineyard and winery, with explanations about the various grapes for wine-making and orchards grown with fruits like the dragonfruit. There are ample photo-taking opportunities at other vineyards along the way.

The guided tour of the winery concludes with wine tasting at the foyer of the winery, followed by a Western set dinner at the Great Hornbill Grill restaurant served with a glass of red or white wine.

After dinner, return to hotel.



Wild deer pose in the beautiful landscape of Khao Yai National Park

Day3 After breakfast, check out and drive back to Bangkok, where the tour ends at the hotel or the airport.

*Itinerary provided by
Go Vacation Thailand*

Need to know



Khao Yai Convention Center

Having recently opened its doors in July 2014 as part of a mixed-use development, Khao Yai Convention Center (KYCC) offers 3,700m² of indoor meeting space, including a grand ballroom that can accommodate up to 1,000 pax seated and 1,700 pax theatre-style, a 970m² exhibition hall and seven meeting rooms.

KYCC adjoins the upcoming 11.5ha Scenical World, an expansion and rejuvenation of the existing Life Park amusement park that will add a shopping mall (Greenery Park Mall) and a water park (Splash World). Scenical World will soft open in early-2015, and shuttle buses will be provided to transfer guests and delegates from one point to another.

The development is also home to the 254-room Greenery Resort, the 116-room Botanica Khao Yai and the 300-room Khao Yai Foresta that is scheduled to open in two years' time.

Hybrid meeting package at Amari

Amari Watgate Bangkok has rolled out a Hybrid Meeting package, which leverages technology to enable meeting planners to reach more delegates via the virtual environment, by connecting multiple events happening simultaneously in different locations and including attendees who may not otherwise be able to attend.

"We are moving with the times and embracing technology to enhance our guests' meeting experience. Hybrid meetings are showing tremendous growth this year as more corporates look to extend the reach of their conference message using enhanced webinar technology," said David Barrett, executive director events of Amari Watgate and Amari Pattaya. Microsoft, eBay and ICCA are among organisations that have realised the value of hybrid meetings, said the hotel.

The package offers the traditional face-to-face meeting while giving the organiser the opportunity to share content, ideas and experiences with attendees across multiple geographies and time zones.

For the face-to-face, planners can make use of Amari Watgate's Connections meetings hub for gatherings of up to 50 pax, the Banglampoo room for meetings of up to 100 pax and the Watgate Ballroom for large-scale events of up to 600 pax.

Valid until December 31, the package is priced at 1,700 baht (US\$53) per person, excluding the cost of technical set-up. It includes the use of a meeting room set-up; room rental from 08.00-12.00 or 13.00-17.00; one coffee break with fresh pastries; one lunch per person; a dedicated high-speed Internet line, separate from hotel Wi-Fi; video cameras; video editing suite and live-streaming; and a production team, among others.



Sheraton Hua Hin unveils new convention hall

A new pillarless convention hall, The Chandelier, has opened at the Sheraton Hua Hin Resort and Spa. Measuring 892m² in size and boasting a 7.6m high ceiling, The Chandelier can accommodate up to 680 pax 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.

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.

Courtyard by Marriott opens in South Pattaya

The Courtyard by Marriott South Pattaya has opened its doors within walking distance to Pattaya Beach and Walking Street. The seven-storey hotel offers 132 rooms with natural lighting and contemporary décor, each equipped with amenities such as a flat-screen LCD TV, satellite TV with international channels, electronic personal safe and flexible areas for work and relaxation.

The all-day dining MoMo café offers a combination of Western delicacies as well as Thai specialties, while MoMo Bar serves refreshing signature drinks, snacks and light music for chilling out in the evening. Other facilities include an outdoor swimming pool, a 24-hour gym and Ananya Massage.

Tamnak Hill and Multi-function room, fully equipped with the latest audio-visual equipment and Wi-Fi access, can accommodate up to 150 guests. Complimentary Wi-Fi is available in-room and throughout all public areas of the hotel.

Jetstar Pacific links Bangkok-Hanoi

Traffic on the Bangkok-Hanoi route is set to increase from March 29 when Jetstar Pacific starts daily flights between the two capital cities on Airbus A320 aircraft. This is the Vietnam-based carrier's second flight to Thailand after it commenced daily services on the Ho Chi Minh City-Bangkok route on December 10 last year.



Hanoi grows in stature

Despite a shortage of skilled staff, the MICE business in Hanoi continues to grow as infrastructure developments keep pace while the city retains its ability to offer groups an experiential visit, writes **Greg Lowe**

Vietnam's MICE industry has faced more than a few ups and downs over the past few years, but the sector in Hanoi continues to grow, especially for incentives, according to industry experts.

Infrastructure development and the opening of new meetings-focused hotels have improved the local hardware, while DMCs are focusing on localising experiences for clients, in line with the general trend across the trade.

"Hanoi is Vietnam's heavyweight incentive destination," said Hue Nguyen, business development leader at Diethelm Travel Vietnam. "Hanoi's local authorities have worked hard to keep the momentum going, building efficient infrastructure and offering attractive investor benefits."

Key developments which have increased the destination's attractiveness for MICE clients and expanded local capacity for hosting events include last September's opening of Vietnam's second-tallest building, Lotte Center Hanoi – a 272m high integrated project comprising offices, serviced apartments, shopping centres and the five-star Lotte Hotel Hanoi – and JW Marriott Hanoi, which opened end-2013 and features 2,400m² of meeting space on a single floor.

These advances have helped bolster Hanoi's position as a MICE destination, and raised Vietnam's profile at the same time. However, some challenges continue to dampen performance, said George Ehrlich Adam, general manager of EXO Vietnam.

"The new JW Marriott with 450 rooms and big meeting facilities adds points for Hanoi as a destination, benefiting the whole industry," he said. "But it can be difficult to compete for major big conferences due to less flexible visa rules and lack of big commercial purpose-built conference centres compared to Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong and Singapore."



mpalls/123RF.com

Pieter De Weerd, area general manager for Accor Northern Vietnam, agreed that bidding for large-scale meetings is a crunch point for the local sector. Hanoi often loses out to other regional destinations for events with more than 1,000 delegates due to the relatively small number of hotels that can accommodate larger groups and other issues such as transportation. However, the destination is performing well for mid- to large-size groups.

He said: "Hanoi offers a nice package combining good hotel venues,

unique culture and great food. And for incentives the proximity of Ha-long Bay is of course a big plus.

"Furthermore, I am convinced that once the new airport is fully in operation, the new bridge crossing the river open, the highways to the east fully deployed and the public transportation projects activated, Hanoi will have a large boost in the incentive market and events."

Despite the challenges, the rich cultural heritage of the city and surrounding areas provide ample opportunities for creating experiential

Cityscape of Hanoi



Vietnam's second-tallest building, Lotte Center Hanoi

incentive itineraries. Diethelm's Hue said immersive elements can include visiting local contemporary artists in their studios, tai-chi classes on the grounds of the Ly-dynasty Tao Sach Temple, bicycle tours of the capital's backstreets or catching a performance at a water puppet theatre.

While DMCs are continually searching for new products to offer clients, repackaging existing offerings also proves affective, said

Torsten Edens, managing director of Diethelm Travel Vietnam. "We are re-engineering most of our classics," he said. "It is not always about coming up with something different; most of the time it is about adjusting to what the markets require."

The Press Club, itself a venue, has adjusted its offering to include off-site options such as hosting events in the 1,000-year-old Temple of Literature. In terms of trends, general

manager Kurt Walter said group sizes have reduced slightly to 30-60 pax.

"There is strong demand for impeccable services and facilities from the finance and banking sector, from Germany, France, the US and Hong Kong," said Walter. "Our customers are high-end."

The Press Club will undergo a renovation to upgrade its facilities from May to September in order to better tap the high-spending segment.

While many people in the trade cite the skills shortage among local staff as a key challenge for the MICE sector, they remain confident Hanoi's plus points outweigh this and other negative factors.

"Where there are challenges, there are also opportunities," said Press Club's Walter. "Hanoi provides an ideal destination for MICE events. It is the capital of Vietnam with over a thousand years of history, arts and culture. It is also close to other attractive destinations like the UNESCO site of Halong Bay, as well as Ninh Binh and Sapa. And, in general, there's been a surge in five-star hotels which house state-of-the-art conference facilities."

Ideas

Post-incentive programme: A James Bond mission

Day 1 In the early morning, join a private tai-chi master who will teach the art of tai-chi combat. Agents will be assessed for their ability and focus with each awarded a score.

After lunch, navigate through Ha-

noi's labyrinth of 36 streets to collect clues to complete your team's 'undercover' mission. Clues will eventually lead you to a secret meeting point, where you will receive the brief for the remaining mission of the day.

Accommodation will be at your selected hotel.

Day 2 Journey to the sub-tropical islet hideaway (Halong Bay), once the lair of Dr No when he resided in Vietnam. Board your private boat. Special Agents will undergo water-based training and search for clues as to the current whereabouts of Professor Huy Nguyen No.

A black-tie dinner with entertainment will be taken in the very cave previously inhabited by Dr No.

Accommodation will be aboard *Bhaya Classic Cruise*.

Day 3 To improve the martial arts skill, Special Agents can opt for more tai-chi practice on the sundeck before disembarkation at Tuan Chau pier and transfer to the airport for your next flight.



Halong Bay

*Itinerary provided by
Diethelm Travel Vietnam*

Need to know



ref: at/123456789

Sky bar

Top of Hanoi Kitchen & Bar offers panoramic views of the city from its location on the 65th floor of Lotte Tower. The illuminated venue features a dining garden which serves contemporary brasserie-style cuisine. Guests can dine at tables or opt for cocktails in comfy sofas.

Call (84-4) 3333-1000 or visit www.lottehotels.com

Lotte Hotel Hanoi

Having opened last September, the five-star hotel in the city's tallest building added 235 rooms and 83 suites to Hanoi's supply. It features four restaurants, two bars, a bakery, gym and spa, and more than 1,200m² of meeting space. Groups can utilise two meeting rooms and a ballroom which have a combined seated capacity of 1,200 people.

Call (84-4) 3333-1000 or visit www.lottehotels.com



Eat like a local

Experience the fabulous diversity of Hanoi's vibrant culinary scene at ground level with Hanoi Street Food Tours, run by two local food enthusiasts and bloggers, Van Cong Tu and Mark Lowerson. The specialist operator takes groups along boulevards, down back-alleys and through markets. Tours take a couple of hours to a full day and the experience embraces the full range of food available, from pho noodles to French desserts.

Email to tuvancong2003@gmail.com or visit streetfoodtourshanoi.blogspot.co.uk

{ Pictorial }

Local Associations Laud IT&CM Events' First Association Day in Singapore

Organised in collaboration with venue sponsor Suntec Singapore on 2 December 2014, the half-day programme drew over 30 industry professionals from various industries including AMCs, finance, energy, engineering, education, insurance and tourism. Helmed by expert speakers from association management company MCI Singapore and destination Sarawak Convention Bureau, the successful event scored high in knowledge delivery while providing opportunities for networking during the coffee break and hosted lunch.





Bart Buiring

The SVP-lodging services and operations of Marriott International, Asia-Pacific, talks to **Greg Lowe** about reimagining meetings for Millennials

How significant is the influence of Millennials and what are you doing to connect with them in meetings?

They for sure are decision-makers. The eldest are around 35 years old. Tech firms and ad agencies are run by them. They are also the generation that will travel more than any other, and the way they travel and share their experiences are different from previous generations. They want to collect and share their experiences through social media. They have grown up in a much more visual environment. This affects what they expect to see and experience at an event. These trends have influenced our thinking and the development of Meetings Imagined.

Can you explain more about Meetings Imagined and your other MICE-related digital developments?

Two years ago we took a close look at our meetings business. Back then meetings accounted for 32 per cent of global room-nights. We decided it was time to reinvent that space within our properties.

We focused on the purpose of meetings and identified seven reasons why people meet: promote, celebrate, decide, ideate, network, educate and produce. There are different ways to approach meetings which are dependent on why the meeting is taking place. We decided to put all of

our knowledge into one site – Meeting-sImagined.com – where we could communicate with meeting planners and we rolled the concept out at 13 hotels across Asia-Pacific.

A picture says more than a thousand words and Meetings Imagined is an intuitive platform which uses thousands of images of our facilities and events to show planners what we can do. Planners and delegates can post pictures of the set-up process or coffee breaks. Our hotel teams can post too, so that helps create some friendly competition between properties to see who gets the most engagement with their content.

We've also launched Meeting Services App. It's a closed-loop system which enables planners to communicate with our events team in real-time from their smartphone or tablet. So, if you're in a meeting with 160 people and don't want to leave, you can use the app to request for the lighting or air-conditioning to be adjusted, order more coffee or delay lunch. Our team will respond immediately and inform the planner of how their request is being processed.

The app will soon be able to handle the billing process too, which is a major development as billing is the current pain point for most planners.

Since planners and delegates can post on Meetings Imagined, how do you deal with risks from negative feedback when things go wrong?

Our team does check that the content posted is relevant, but beyond that users can say what they want. In this day and age you cannot try to filter what people say, especially on social media. We try and make sure that events go smoothly. Occasional mishaps happen, but if that's the case then we use it as an opportunity to learn and improve our services.

How important is it for you to keep innovating and do you ever worry that other operators will simply copy the good ideas that work?

Innovation is fundamental. It's flattering to be copied. And if we are (followed), then it energises the team to (come up

with) something better. Our team in Bethesda (US) has an innovation lab where they do anything from testing room design to developing other products and services. It's key to developing performance and staying ahead of the crowd.

There's an ever-growing desire for technology from guests, but it's also about the hardware and what our teams provide. Events these days are much more of a blend of work and play. Every event is different. If you need to ideate or educate, then there are certain formats for that. However, you can also be very creative. It's much less about listening to financial reports and watching presentations. We're using all parts of our properties and even host small groups in the hotel library.

At our own regional operations meeting in Bangkok we broke down into smaller groups, and arranged labs with 20 people. We had a treasure hunt making use of different properties across the city where teams had to make *som tum* (a spicy Thai salad) in the open kitchen. It's all about having a more immersive experience. And it needs to be fun. However, rolling these ideas out across 4,000 hotels has its own logistical challenges.

What gets you out of bed in the morning after more than 25 years in the trade?

I love this business passionately. We have an amazing team. And it's the best time to be in Asia-Pacific, where we're growing rapidly, entering new markets and building a lot more new hotels. That means we can design our new properties to match the needs of guests and the emerging trends in the market.

At the same time the market and guests from the region are themselves developing. If you look at the JW Marriott Phuket, which opened in 2001, for the first six to seven years it was popular with guests from the US, UK and Europe, then there was a shift to Russia and the Middle East. Now it's changed again. The number of Chinese, Korean and Indian guests is increasing.

It's super interesting to see the changing demographics.



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What happens at IMEX?

IMEX is the meetings industry's largest show, where international events and meeting planners come to meet representatives from all areas of the supplier world: from airlines and destinations to hotels, venues and service providers. It's a great opportunity to talk business face to face and get deals done right then and there. As well as making valuable new connections and fuelling up on inspiration, a trip to IMEX will remind you why you love your job.

Why should you be there?

No two IMEX shows are the same. Each year brings a fresh display of creativity, culture, information and new ideas. Just arrive with a comfy pair of shoes, and you'll leave with a head full of inspiration, an address book full of contacts, and a checklist full of smiley faces.



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