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Raini Hamdi
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Meetings that fly

I am often at airports, but rarely at airport hotels. I happened to be at one recently, the Radisson Blu Hotel Zurich Airport, and the general manager, Werner Knechtli, showed me the length airport hotels today go to in order to make people forget these properties are *not* 'airport hotels' but are full-service, attractive hotels located at airports.

This one boasts – what could be more appropriate – 'flying angels'. The lobby's centrepiece is a sensational 16m high wine tower, only the third of its kind in the world, and it comes to life when an 'angel' performs a mini version of Cirque du Soleil in it, or retrieves a bottle of wine and champagne from it for guests dining at two restaurants located on lobby level. Not only did the hotel spend CHF4 million (US\$4.3 million) on this magnet, the 'angels' who are professional dancers are on the staff count.

The property also boasts a meeting space of 4,232m². There's a conference centre with 23 multi-functional rooms, including a ballroom for 600 pax for meetings and 400 pax for banquets; another conference area on the seventh floor with panoramic views of Zurich Airport and the Swiss mountains; yet another on the eighth floor with 29 boardrooms, video-conference room, guest offices, executive day rooms, executive lounges and a Business Services Centre.

A huge percentage of the revenue comes from MICE, said Knechtli.

So is this an 'airport hotel' or a 'MICE hotel'? I think labels like these are unfortunate, for they don't accurately represent what a product really offers.

In Asia especially, with new airports being built and existing ones being expanded to cater to an explosion of travel demand from the region, a new generation of properties is quickly squashing widely-held views of 'airport hotels'. They benefit from advancements in technology, architecture, design and environment. Langham Place Beijing Capital Airport, for instance, is a virtual art gallery with more than 400 pieces of artwork throughout the hotel. For incentive groups, the hotel has half a football playground area with natural grass and a basketball area for any kind of teambuilding.

At Crowne Plaza Changi Airport Singapore, guests can swim in an outdoor pool which overlooks the Control Tower and a beautifully-landscaped garden. The hotel also has four spa treatment rooms and a 24-hour state-of-the-art gym.

So in case you're still stuck with the idea of hotels at or near airports being merely for layovers, think again.

Your next meeting could fly high in one of them.

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subscription charges are US\$70 (Asia) and US\$90
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MCI (P) 165/08/2013, KDN
PPS1140/09/2012(022844), ISSN 0218-849X
Printed by KHL Printing Co Pte Ltd, 57 Loyang Drive,
Singapore 508968.



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COVER STORY

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A new breed of airport hotels are evolving in parallel with the next-gen airports, shedding their utilitarian image in favour of sleek design, innovative services, lifestyle amenities and functional meeting spaces. By Raini Hamdi, Xinyi Liang-Pholsena, Paige Lee Pei Qi and Julian Ryall

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Hong Kong hotels are introducing more technology-driven services to help corporate clients deliver a more efficient, exciting event, writes Prudence Lui

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Hotels, theme parks and other hardware are mushrooming in the emirate, making it ever more attractive for business events.

By Feizal Samath

31 Switzerland sizzles more

Secondary destinations are being paired with usual favourites like Zurich and Luzern to meet growing demand of the Asian MICE market, writes Mimi Hudoyo

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Wickedly wow

W Singapore – Sentosa Cove's Extreme Wow Suite is one room you probably don't want to waste on mere sleep; you would want to throw the most glamorous party ever in this space.

This expansive 195m² room, which boasts panoramic views of the South China Sea and Quayside Isle, is no stranger to sophisticated soirees and A-list after-parties, and it is easy to see why.

A cool marble foyer with a silver shard installation overhead makes for a grand entrance, while the interior is swathed in a swirl of colours and playful illuminations thanks to a dazzling chandelier, stone floors and a reflective ceiling.

The suite's living room, dotted with an eclectic collection of chairs including an egg-shaped hanging chair in white leather, is perfect for casual gatherings of 10 people. For a more energetic social event, planners can take the spacious outdoor deck which features a DJ console, a gorgeous plunge pool lined with gold tiles, and several sofas and daybeds. This space is good for 20 guests.

And to truly knock the socks off your guests, plan a bold champagne bash in the bathroom. Yes, you heard right. The bathroom, hailed as a grand salon, is an attraction in its own right. Its decor comprises stone tiles, a textured purple leather-accented wall, a chandelier and – the highlight – a standalone stainless steel Jacuzzi that can double up as an oversized wine chiller.

Events held in the Extreme Wow Suite can be tailored to suit the needs of the planner and his guests.

And to fill the belly of event guests, a chef will be dispatched solely for the event. He will whip up goodies in the suite's kitchen, a fully functional work space equipped with a barbecue grill, stove, oven, wine chiller, refrigerator and coffee machine.

Complimentary Wi-Fi is available throughout the suite, for your guests to post photos of your glorious party on social media.

Visit www.wsingaporesentoscove.com for more information on how your event can be held in this space.

Build friendships at Angsana Laguna Phuket

A day spent with friends is a day well spent. Building its meeting experiences along those lines, Angsana Laguna Phuket has created a range of friendship meetings – activities that will add a dash of fun to corporate meetings.

Activities on offer include the half-day Cast Away session which takes delegates back in time. Participants travel to Rang Yai island where they are unable to use smartphones, Wi-Fi or any other form of modern technology, and must work together in teams to overcome the challenges presented.

Educational experiences can also be arranged, whether in the form of a massage workshop, cooking class, or cocktail-making session.

These friendship meetings are promoted along with nett-priced room rates. Meeting planners who book their next event at the resort can secure room rates of 3,200 baht (US\$95) nett, with those chalking up bookings worth 500,000 baht to receive a free iPad.

Angsana Laguna Phuket features a range of event spaces including the XANA beach club for parties and function rooms for up to 400 guests, while a dedicated events team will ensure that each meeting proceeds without hiccup.



Dedicated women-only floor at Qliq Damansara

The 271-key Qliq Damansara in Petaling Jaya City is targeting female business travellers with its new all-girls floor.

Although the hotel itself opened in March, the women-only floor debuted in May with 13 rooms in two categories, offering a full range of ladies' amenities.

The area is accessible by key card and is cleaned and staffed only by female talents.

Bennet Chang, general manager at Qliq Damansara, said in a release: "We saw a need (for a ladies-only floor) given that female guests make up over 40 per cent (of clients), and we wanted to be the first hotel in Petaling Jaya city to provide a dedicated floor for ladies.

"We are particularly trying to appeal to female business travellers, who are moving up the career ladder and hitting the road more often. Research done by Cornell University School of Hotel Administration has identified that safety, empowerment and pampering influenced women business travellers in deciding on their choice of accommodation."

Guests on this floor are also entitled to lounge facilities offering free Wi-Fi, free refreshments and finger food, and use of the gym.



Destination club Ku De Ta relaunches as Ce La Vi

L Capital Asia's Ku De Ta, perched atop the SkyPark of Singapore's Marina Bay Sands, now sports the name Ce La Vi.

An abbreviation of the French phrase "C'est la vie," which means "This is life", the restaurant, bar and nightclub will also be renovated in phases from June until September.

This follows the conclusion of Ku De Ta's five-year-long legal tussle with a Bali beachfront club of the same name, which saw the court weighing in favour of the Bali outfit.

Speaking to *TTGmice* at the brand's launch on June 4, Ce La Vi's CEO Kirk Martin said plans for the name change had already been in the works before the court ruling.

He said: "(But) the lawsuit accelerated our plans to introduce a new name. We thought this was the right way to go as we are still young, and we can build a new brand. With the previous history (as Ku De Ta), it is

also confusing for the customers as we may have different goals with the previous brand name."

Ce La Vi aims to be "the international titan of lifestyle and sophisticated hedonism" through five core pillars: an iconic rooftop location, inspirational architectural design, a modern Asian menu, innovative cocktails, and entertainment by renowned DJs.

A new Ce La Vi venue will open this month in Hong Kong on the top three floors of California Tower, right in the heart of the Lan Kwai Fong dining and entertainment district.

Martin said: "With each venue occupying a distinctive soaring site with 360° views at iconic locations in key cities, Ce La Vi reimagines and reinvigorates the concept of the adult playground."

Work is already underway to open the next Ce La Vi within the next five years in key cities such as Dubai and Taipei. – **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

Holiday Inn Singapore Atrium unveils new look, improved venues

The 512-room Holiday Inn Singapore Atrium has officially relaunched after completing an extensive multi-million dollar refurbishment.

With its revamped lobby, guestrooms, dining outlets and meeting facilities, this is the building's first major facelift in its 30-year history.

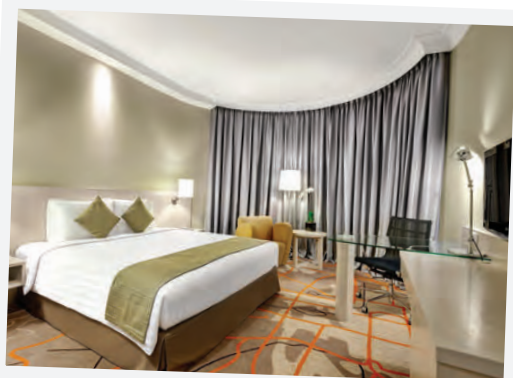
The new vibrant looks of the hotel lobby and guestrooms are inspired by the iconic Singapore River and the colourful rows of shophouses along its banks.

Additions to the dining scene include all-day dining venue Atrium Restaurant, and Atrium Bar 317, which overlooks the hotel's lobby atrium.

To maintain its popularity among business travellers, the hotel also upgraded its Atrium Ballroom and 12 meeting rooms,

fitting them with improved equipment, including new live recording, sound and lighting facilities.

The hotel's facelift was timed to coincide with its 10th year anniversary, while doubling as a way to stay competitive amid Singapore's recent falling visitor arrivals. – **Jerlene Ng**



Sentosa's new garden in the sky

South-east Asia's only indoor skydiving wind tunnel attraction, iFly Singapore, has launched a new event space, the Sky Garden.

Occupying over 558m² on the top of iFly Singapore at Sentosa, the Sky Garden comprises of both an indoor and outdoor event space.

The outdoor terrace offers an open-air rooftop lawn against a picturesque beachfront view, with twice-nightly fireworks and sunsets as backdrop. The venue also features a stage, bar and private area.

Over S\$800,000 (US\$598,000) was spent on the expansion project, including landscaping of the rooftop, Canon imaging systems, LED lighting for events and a state-of-the-art sound system by K-array and Bose.

The company's catering partners are Orange Clove Catering, Purple Sage Group and Rasel Catering Singapore, which is halal-certified.

A range of corporate packages are available for a minimum of 100 pax, starting from S\$90++ per pax for a corporate dinner-and-dance buffet.

Meanwhile, iFly Singapore's indoor skydiving remains a popular teambuilding activity for corporate and incentive groups because of its thrilling nature, said Lawrence Koh, founder and managing director of iFly Singapore. – **Jerlene Ng**



HOT DEALS

Grand Hyatt Incheon, South Korea

Designed to give guests an opportunity for work and play in South Korea, Grand Hyatt Incheon is offering a new Grand Value Meeting Package until June 30, 2016.

Available for groups with at least 20 pax, the package provides half- and full-day meeting options, which include rental of meeting rooms for five hours and nine hours respectively, and coffee breaks and lunch.

Wi-Fi access, conference amenities as well as free rental of LCD projectors and flip charts will also be offered. A dedicated event planning personnel will handle all meeting arrangements from start to end.

The half- and full-day packages cost 77,000 won (US\$71) and 99,000 won per pax respectively.

For planners with longer events in mind, meeting and stay options include a one-night stay plus breakfast. The full-day meeting package with stay is available for 285,000 won per pax, while the half-day meeting package including stay costs 263,000 won per person.

Package guests also enjoy a special discount at Inha International Medical Centre

and can choose between a Seoul or Incheon day tour, a gala dinner or transportation to and from wherever they want to visit.

All prices stated include 10 per cent VAT. Visit www.incheon.grand.hyatt.com.

InterContinental Grand Stanford Hong Kong

The hotel has rolled out a Summer Meeting Package, priced from HK\$500 (US\$64.50) per person, along with a guestroom promotion rate of HK\$1,400 per room night.

The meet-and-stay deal will offer guests a complimentary upgrade to the newly renovated Premier Room, complimentary daily breakfast at Café on M, welcome drinks at Tiffany's New York Bar, and welcome amenity.

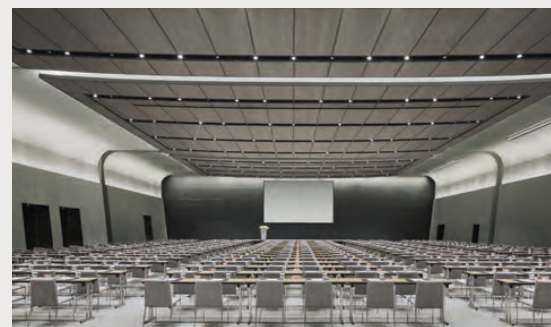
Every booking of 50 paid room nights will get the planner a complimentary guestroom upgrade to Premier Harbour View Room.

A three-night stay in a Premier Harbour View Room will also earn the planner a complimentary airport transfer limousine service.

The meeting group is also entitled to perks offered by Hong Kong Tourism Board, such as a lion dance performance or a digitalised welcome message displayed at the airport, subject to group size and availability.

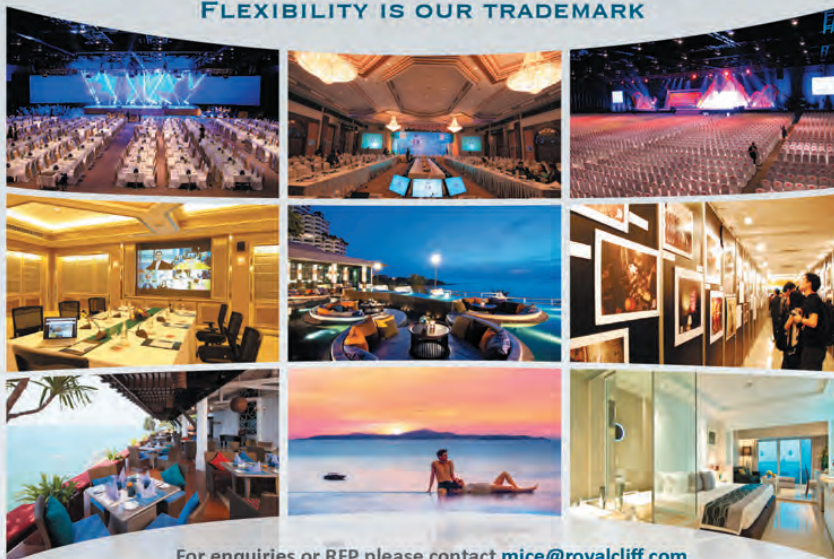
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Email mice@grandstanford.com.



From top: Grand Hyatt Incheon's meeting room; InterContinental Grand Stanford Hong Kong's Premier Room

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Magical meetings at Amari Watergate

Amari Watergate Bangkok has partnered with Thai entertainers, BeyonXd Magic, to bring mind-bending magic and incredible illusions to corporate meetings held at the city hotel.

Beyon Magic can showcase their talents while mingling with delegates during coffee breaks or cocktail receptions, or take an hour-long big stage comedy production to a gala dinner.

Beyon Magic's one-hour performance – delivered in two 30-minute sets – is priced at 12,000 baht (US\$355.70), while meeting packages by the hotel cost 1,450 baht per pax for a half-day meeting and 1,650 baht per pax for a full-day arrangement.



SilkAir starts flights to Cairns

Singapore Airlines' regional wing, SilkAir, has on June 2 added one more Australian destination to its network – Cairns.

The thrice-weekly service operates on a Boeing 737-800 aircraft with both business and economy class seats.

Saturday flights travel direct to Cairns and return via Darwin, SilkAir's only other Australian destination, while Monday and Thursday services fly to Cairns via Darwin but are non-stop to Singapore on the return leg.

Commenting in a press release, Cairns Airport CEO, Kevin Brown, said: "The connectivity with Singapore that the new SilkAir services provides will be a great boost for the Cairns and Great Barrier Reef destination."

"This Singapore service is a key link in our international network, giving (travellers) from Asia and Europe a new option for easy access direct into Cairns," he added.

"It also offers convenient new options for local people to travel overseas, whether to enjoy Singapore as a destination in its own right or to connect through to other destinations."

The Resort Café

The new all-day dining restaurant at Sunway Resort Hotel & Spa is sure to please all palates for its sheer variety of cuisines, discovers **S Puvaneswary**

All MICE organisers can, at some point, relate to the Mother Goose nursery rhyme of *Pease Porridge Hot*. It is so hard to please all taste buds of a diverse range of local and international delegates. Well, Sunway Resort Hotel & Spa, a MICE-friendly hotel, has a solution to that. Its new all-day dining restaurant, The Resort Café, which opened in April, caters to all tastes through eight sections that serve a range of dishes from Asia and the Middle East.

MICE application

The Resort Café is able to customise menus, buffets and experiences to the specific needs of MICE groups. Its bustling open kitchen features an impressive 60m long buffet line which provides every opportunity for guests to interact with the chefs throughout the event.

Alternatively, The Resort Café's degustation menus, which consist of six to 10 courses, provide a sampling of smaller portions of the chefs' signature dishes.

Special dietary requirements can be met with advance notice, and the hotel's events team can tailor a menu for groups.

The restaurant can accommodate up to 362 people through its three dining areas and a 10-seat private dining room. It is flexible and a section can be blocked off for just one group.

Coffee House 2 is the largest and can sit up to 164 people, while Coffee House 1 fits 128 people; Coffee House 3 is the smallest with capacity for 70 people.

During my dinner with friends, I was fascinated by the kaleidoscope of bold colours which gave vibrancy to the restaurant while the 5m high ceiling added to the sense of space.

Most thrilling for me was the sound of ice-cream bells and a man pushing an ice-cream cart around the café and stopping at tables to serve up icy treats. It brought back memories of the 70s and 80s when the sight of ice-cream vendors on bicycles, ringing bells to announce their presence, were a norm in neighbourhoods.

Food concept

What stands out here is the sheer variety of food. The buffet line offers 60 dishes across eight sections – Malay Archipelago (dishes from Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia), Indo-Chinese (dishes from Thailand and Vietnam), Oriental Far East (dishes from Japan, Korea and China), Spices of India (dishes from Northern and Southern India), Mirage of the Gulf (dishes from the Middle East), and Best of the West (Western comfort food, grills, carvings, rotisserie and churrasco). The remaining three sections serve salads, fruits and desserts.



The a la carte menu alone offers more than 50 chef's signature dishes.

In my opinion, what would attract repeat guests is the choice of familiar dishes of home, such as Thai green curry, Vietnamese *pho bo*, Malaysia's *pasembor*, *nasi lemak*, chicken rice and *nyonya laksa lemak* and Korean *bibimbap*.

There are two features that I love here. One is the open kitchen with its exciting live cooking activities and interactions between chefs and guests. The other is a pair of tall towers that blow 10°C cold mist at the greens and fruits, keeping them fresh and crisp. The salad tower is dramatically presented in two tiers with the first featuring over 32 types of local and international greens and the second offering home-made dressings and a rotation of Asian salads. At the fruit tower, fruits ranging from longan, jackfruit and soursop to grapes and strawberries are made available.

On Friday and Saturday nights, the buffet spread features churrasco which waiters carve out onto the plate of diners at their table.

Service and ambience

It's great Malaysian hospitality at its finest. The service staff were always discreetly close by and were genuine concerned if we enjoyed the food. The chefs at the open kitchen were cheerful and always ready to share cooking tips.

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Email: eventsrhs@sunwayhotels.com
Website: www.sunwayhotels.com

Opening hours

18.30 to 23.00

Auckland introduces business events advocate programme



View of Auckland city

By Mimi Hudoyo

To bring in more business events and double revenue from MICE by 2023, Auckland has nominated ambassadors in the country's first-ever business events advocate programme.

Fourteen prominent figures in the health, medical and IT fields have been selected based on their reputation, professional achievements and dedication to promoting Auckland as a global events destination, and they will represent the city in bidding for international business events.

Rebecca Nelson, manager international bidding of Auckland Convention Bureau (ACB), commented: "Most of these advocates have previously been involved in successful bids to bring international conferences to Auckland. They are influential and respected in their fields both nation-

ally and internationally. These advocates will work closely with the ACB, which is a division of Auckland Tourism, Events and Economic Development."

Auckland receives 70 per cent of New Zealand's total foreign arrivals, and boasts a convention facility that can accommodate up to 2,300 pax as well as 6,000 guestrooms.

Since July 2014, ACB has submitted 34 bids and secured NZ\$12 million (US\$8.8 million) worth of events.

Mayor Len Brown commented: "Auckland has benefited from impressive growth in the business events sector. In 2013, the sector contributed NZ\$236 million in direct spending to Auckland's economy."

The city aims to double that figure and increase delegate days from two million in 2013 to 2.6 million, both by 2023.

Asian incentive visitors are Sydney's biggest spenders: BESydney study

A recent study by Business Events Sydney (BESydney) has found that Asian incentive delegates are outspending leisure visitors by an average of 6.5 times, with international delegates being able to spend up to 9.4 times more per day than holiday-makers – A\$1,418 (US\$1,091) compared to A\$151 – and five times that of other business visitors.

Done in collaboration with the University of Technology, Sydney, the study analyses the incentive market with a focus on Asia, while measuring the expenditure of delegates and organisers of Asian incentives in New South Wales.

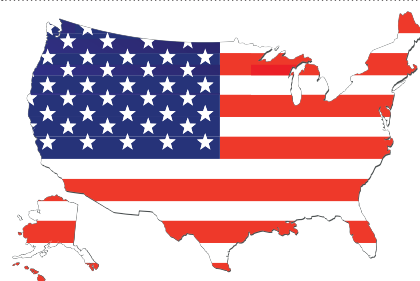
Shopping pursuits were revealed as a key part of the delegate experience, because shopping overseas demonstrates affluence and achievement.

Shopping experiences is important in incentive destination choice, and the highest expenditure across incentive event and nationality went towards clothing, handbags, shoes, souvenirs, jewellery and toys. But at the same time, Asian delegates were also knowledgeable and savvy, and they desired more immersive experiences.

Lyn Lewis-Smith, CEO of BESydney, said: "We've seen a 20 per cent year-on-year growth over the past decade in the value of events secured from Asia and this market now accounts for almost half of the business we (get) each year."

She said the study would improve understanding of the Asian incentive traveller and enable cities to further refine the delegate experience to meet the growing and changing needs of the market.

{ Talking numbers }



858

The number of international meetings held in the US in 2014, allowing the destination to top UIA's latest ranking of international meeting countries, published under the International Meetings Statistic Report, out on June 8. Singapore, South Korea and Japan are the only Asian countries on the top 10 list



850

The number of international meetings hosted in Singapore last year, allowing it to retain its lead position on the top meeting cities chart. Singapore hosted 994 meetings in 2013.

Cebu ramps up MICE capacity

By Rosa Ocampo

The MICE hub of the Visayas will get its first major convention centre in the SMX Convention Centre Cebu when the new facility opens its doors in 2017.

Revealing the news to this publication at the Asia Premium Travel Mart was Dexter Deyto, vice president and general manager of SMX Convention Specialists, who said construction on the convention centre will start this August.

SMX Convention Centre will be part of a development built on a piece of reclaimed land in Cebu city and modelled on Manila's Mall of Asia. It will come with a hotel and indoor arena for sports, concert and other events.

The size and capacity of the convention centre is still being determined.

The group's existing trade halls within SM Department Store in Cebu City would likely be maintained, said Deyto.



Deyto: move will benefit hotels too

He observed that while Cebu is the MICE hub in Visayas, the city does not have a convention centre. The opening of SMX Convention Centre Cebu will therefore help fill up hotel rooms

in the city.

The Cebu property is SMX's fifth, joining its other convention centres in Manila, Bonifacio Global City, Davao and Bacolod.

Kuala Lumpur clinches logistics association congress



Port Kelang is one of two Malaysian ports listed in the World Shipping Council's top 20 container ports in 2013

Malaysia has emerged victorious its bid to host the International Federation of Forwarders Associations (FIATA) World Congress 2017.

The annual get-together for international logistics industry leaders will attract some 1,200 delegates to Kuala Lumpur in October 2017, including freight forwarders, port and airport authorities and operators, government agencies, as well as related freight associations.

The total economic contribution from

development, a pressing issue for many countries today. As such, we are pleased to play our part in supporting this global agenda by hosting the FIATA World Congress 2017."

Zulkefli Haji Sharif, CEO of Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau, commented: "With two ports listed in the top 20 of the World Shipping Council's World Container Ports 2013, this event will reaffirm Malaysia's reputation as a logistics hub at the crossroads of Asia."

– S Puvaneswary

{ 2015 Calendar }

July 7-9

The Meetings Show,
London, the UK

July 15

ACTE Melbourne
Education Forum,
Melbourne, Australia

August 8-11

ASAE Annual Meeting
& Exposition,
Detroit, the US

August 26-27

ACTE Global
Corporate Travel
Conference,
Hong Kong

Singapore MICE Forum now awards education credits to attendees

The Convention Industry Council (CIC) has accredited the Singapore MICE Forum 2015, marking the first time the forum will be included in CIC's Preferred Partner Programme.

It means that attendance at the forum will yield 14 Continuing Education Clock Hours, which are credits that MICE professionals must accumulate to qualify for CIC's Certified Meeting Professional (CMO) programme.

Organised by SACEOS, this year's Singapore MICE Forum is the fifth edition and will run early this month, from July 2-3 at Marina Bay Sands.

Ong Wee Min, CMP, chairman of SACEOS' education and professional development subcommittee, commented: "The accreditation by the CIC is a strong endorsement of the quality of our courses. Being a preferred partner of the Council shows SACEOS' commitment to steer the content of our courses towards professional industry accreditation.

"It will also enhance the standing of Singapore's MICE professionals in the region and beyond, cultivate and grow our pool of local talents."



Singapore Mice Forum 2014 drew 357 participants, 75% of which are foreign delegates

Reed Sinopharm delivers mega healthcare show, plans more

By Luke Williams

Reed Sinopharm is going full steam ahead to tap into China's burgeoning healthcare industry, which is expected to triple in market size to US\$1.2 trillion by 2020 according to a 2013 state-issued whitepaper.

The company, a joint venture between Sinopharm, China's largest state-owned pharmaceutical group, and global events specialist Reed Exhibitions, recently concluded its first mega Health Industry Summit (THIS) in May, which saw 210,000 visitors from 150 countries in attendance.

Described as an event that will transform the Chinese healthcare industry, THIS is a combination of China's three top medical equipment and pharmaceutical exhibitions – CMEF, PHARMCHINA and API China.

It occupied 290,000m² of space at the new National Convention & Exhibition Center in Shanghai, with healthcare equipment giants GE, SIEMENS, Philips,

Mindray, and United Imaging being among the 6,800 exhibitors.

Commenting on the event, Rachel Duan, president and CEO of GE China, said: "Medical and healthcare equipment manufacturers highly value this platform, all bringing with them the latest and best technology to showcase. All the leading companies in the industry are here, all of the top industry talents are here."

Reed Sinopharm will make THIS an annual event in Shanghai, with the next edition planned for April 15 to 18, 2016.

The company is also pushing out shows that focus on specific healthcare segments such as Fibo China in Shanghai, a sister event to Reed's Fibo in Germany, and the China Dental Show, the most academically recognised event in China.

A spokesperson of Reed Sinopharm told *TTGmice* that the company intends to develop shows that "cover the entire value chain".

Sarawak gets MICE promotion going

Communicating, educating and awarding are the three central tenets of the Business Events Sarawak (BESarawak) programme, launched in May to grow the state's business events traffic.

Open to any organisation or industry player, local or foreign, that provides support services or promotes business events in Sarawak, the BESarawak programme provides partners with tools to promote Sarawak Convention Bureau's events, products and services.

Muhammad Leo Michael Toyad Abdullah, chairman of Sarawak Convention Bureau, said: "BESarawak offers its partners an advanced communications campaign that includes stakeholder engagement, media relations, social media and a (subscription for and a chance to be featured in) Business Events Sarawak magazine."

The programme will also develop its partners' global industry best practices through bespoke and targeted seminars.

BESarawak also encompasses the Anak Sarawak Award, which was established in 2007 to reward partners, media and future local hosts in the business events industry.

Those who qualify for the Anak Sarawak Award programme will receive development support worth between RM10,000 (US\$2,769) and RM20,000.

{ In brief }

MCI opens in Istanbul

Following last year's acquisition of a start-up focused on corporate and association event management, MCI has expanded in Turkey with the opening of Istanbul office. Leading MCI's presence in the country is Ufuk Yavuz Tümer, who was one of the three founders of 3Events, the start-up purchased by MCI in 2014. The office aims to develop business in the corporate meetings, events and incentives and DMC markets.

Taiwan seeks super team

MEET TAIWAN has launched the second edition of its successful business competition *Asia Super Team: Team Up for Good* to promote Taiwan as a top-of-mind destination for incentive travel. It will be held across six countries – Australia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea and Thailand. The winning team will enjoy an incentive travel package to Taiwan worth over US\$50,000, and have MEET TAIWAN donate US\$5,000 to a non-profit organisation of its choice. Registration ends August 30. For more information visit <http://asiastuperteam.meettaiwan.com>.

Bintan's Lagoi Bay springs to life

Bintan Resorts officially opened Bintan's new resorts area Lagoi Bay on May 31. Plaza Lagoi Mall, a 60-outlet mall, and two hotels – The Sanchaya and Swiss-Belhotel Grand Lagoi – are now in operation. MoUs were also signed for new hotels to be managed under the following brands: Four Points by Sheraton, ibis Style, Novotel, Dialoog Hotel, Prime Plaza and Ambhara Hotel.

{ Advertorial }



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30 Sep - 1 Oct

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Millennials are up next but their sense of volunteerism is quite different from the older generation. How should associations approach succession planning, and what changes are afoot?

Forum 2 | Being Smart About Rising Meeting Cost

The rising cost of services in the meetings and events space is a constant challenge for associations. Is outsourcing end-to-end meetings management really the most cost effective approach for time- and budget-strapped associations?

Forum 3 | Incentive Travel for Associations

How relevant is incentive travel to associations? Should such a programme be limited to full-time association executives only, or do board members need incentivisation as well? This session explores the case for incentive travel in the association industry.

Forum 4 | Partnering Your Sponsors

For associations, the sponsorship dollar is as important as it is elusive. Building greater efficiency into your sponsorship programme could start from changing your perspective and looking at potential sponsors as business partners. How do you create a menu of sponsorship opportunities that deliver greater value to your sponsors?

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Incentive Travel & Conventions, Meetings
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Gala dinner takes to the streets

JAPAN Some 2,000 delegates attending the annual convention of The Société Internationale d'Urologie (SIU) in Fukuoka, southern Japan, were treated to an authentic slice of street life during their gala dinner.

Designed to be the highlight of the convention, the gala dinner was held in Nakasu Kawabata Shotengai, a traditional roofed shopping arcade that is famous as the location for more than 100 small, family-run businesses.

As well as providing the delegates with a chance to interact with local people and get a better grasp of everyday life in a typical Japanese urban community, the event also helped to boost trade in the arcade's restaurants, specialist shops and souvenir stores.



It was not, however, planned that way.

Members of the society's central office were walking through the arcade during a site inspection visit when one of them asked accompanying officers from the Fukuoka Convention & Visitors' Bureau if a party in the street was possible.



The event idea had never been contemplated before, but city authorities worked with the Fukuoka Convention & Visitors' Bureau, local businesses and the conference organisers to make it happen.

The 2,000 delegates of the SIU annual convention were given vouchers to spend at any one of the Japanese-style restaurants in the arcade, where they feasted on local dishes like ramen, udon and yakitori.

Entertainment was executed down the length of the 400m long shopping street,

and it included traditional Japanese dances, a taiko drum show and a jazz performance. Delegates were encouraged to try on a Japanese kimono and mingle with local people, while the mayor of Fukuoka gave a welcome speech.

The event was a hit with the delegates. More than 90 per cent of those who replied to a survey said they enjoyed the evening.

Mahesh Desai, the then-president of the SIU, said: "The city did a great job in welcoming our attendees. Our board of chairmen had nothing but praise for the Fukuoka experience." – **Julian Ryall**

Mega incentive from China sweeps into Thailand

BANGKOK The Thai capital and resort destination, Pattaya, were the beneficiaries of Infinitus China's recent incentive programme.

The mega event moved 12,700 members of staff and salespeople on a six-night holiday between May 10 and



26. The group spent three nights each in Bangkok and Pattaya, and stayed at four- and five-star hotels, generating some 38,000 room nights in business for the properties.

Some 110 regular flights were used to transport the group over, while 400 coach trips and 36 river cruise tours

were utilised for transportation and entertainment.

Thai authorities pitched in with four welcome gala dinners in Pattaya, with the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), and Pattaya City taking turns to play host each night.

The 17-day event is estimated to have generated around 600 million baht (US\$18 million) in tourism revenue, according to Juthaporn Rerngronasa, Tourism Authority of Thailand's acting governor and deputy governor for international marketing – Europe, Africa, Middle East and the Americas.

The direct sales company is planning for another incentive programme in the kingdom next year, this time with up to 20,000 delegates.

Worlddidac uproots from Bangkok in favour of Hong Kong

HONG KONG Hong Kong's political stability, reputation as an education gateway to South-east Asia, close ties with China and excellent infrastructure have all won over the Worlddidac Association and led it to shift its biennial Worlddidac Asia from Bangkok to the Chinese city in March this year.

The event, which had been held in Bangkok since its launch in 2005, is branded as a leading Asian event offering solutions for high quality learning and best practices. Worlddidac Association is a global trade association for educational resources suppliers.

Worlddidac Asia, director, Preecha S Chen, told the magazine: "Moving a show from a country where it has been staged five times to an entirely new place is like a start-up; you have to invest a lot in the network, suppliers, communications, staff, and (pay) 2.5 times more in expenses, as well as make sure the target audience notices you and sees enough benefits to attend your event."

The Hong Kong edition featured the new Education Partnership Forum along with a school showcase and awards programme, allowing the establishment of many new cross-school collaboration among public and private institutions from nine countries in Asia.

Worlddidac Asia 2015 drew 5,955 visitors from 35 different countries. – **Prudence Lui**





Benjamin Zahn



Betty Yan



André Kretschmann



Sylvain Padeloup

China

Benjamin Zahn has been promoted to the position of general manager at **Le Royal Méridien Shanghai**. He was previously hotel manager of the property.

Hong Kong

Raymond Cheung has brought his culinary genius to **Hyatt Regency Hong Kong, Tsim Sha Tsui**, taking on the role of executive chef. Cheung commenced his career with Grand Hyatt Hong Kong as a pre-opening sous chef in Garde Manger in 1989, and went on to become chef de cuisine in Events Kitchen – Western in 1990, and executive sous chef in 2002.

The Langham, Hong Kong has appointed **Ricky Li** as its new director of business development – China and **Betty Yan** as director of business development – corporate. Li was last director of sales of China Eaton Hotels in the Langham Hospitality Group Shanghai Regional Office, while Yan was director of business development at Sheraton Hong Kong Hotel & Towers.

Indonesia

André Kretschmann, who opened the Chedi Muscat in 2003, has returned to helm **The Legian Bali**. In between, Kretschmann worked as area general manager for the Cheval Blanc Group across South-east Asia, the Middle

East and the Indian Ocean. He is armed with over 20 years of hospitality experience in Asia.

Sylvain Padeloup has ascended the ranks to become general manager at **Sofitel Bali Nusa Dua**, and will oversee hotel operations and management in his new post. He has been with the resort since it opened and was most recently its hotel manager.

South Korea

The Conrad Seoul has appointed **Vanessa Williams** to the position of director of business development. Williams was most recently the director of business development for the Waldorf Astoria Beijing. She has extensive experience in luxury hotels over her 20-year employment history, working at distinguished hotels including Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong and Raffles L'Ermitage Beverly Hills.

Philippines

Anthony Delaby has been appointed executive assistant manager of **Crowne Plaza Manila Galleria** and **Holiday Inn Manila Galleria**, his first stint in Asia. Delaby honed his career at InterContinental Hotels Group properties in Germany and Austria, and joined InterContinental Vienna as assistant executive housekeeper in 2009. Prior to this posting, he was director of rooms of InterContinental Vienna.

Ester Marcaida is now general manager of **Shangri-La's Boracay Resort & Spa**. She served as its resident manager during its pre-opening stage from 2009 to 2010, and was most recently general manager of Shangri-La Hotel, Lhasa, which she helped launch.



Anthony Delaby

Singapore

Richard Ong has been picked to lead **Orchard Hotel Singapore** as its new general manager. Bringing over 30 years of local and international hospitality experience to the job, Ong joined Millennium & Copthorne last year as general manager, operations, Asia.

Taiwan

Michael B Gaehler has been appointed general manager of **Regent Taipei**. Gaehler first joined FIH Regent Group in 2009 as general manager of Silks Place Taroko, and later returned to the group in 2013 as group general manager – pre-opening.



Titiya Chooto

Seasons Tented Camp Golden Triangle.

Samir R Wildemann is now general manager of **Siam Kempinski Hotel Bangkok** and senior vice president operations South-east Asia for **Kempinski Hotels**. A 28-year veteran hotelier, Wildemann has held a number of senior hotel management positions in five-star hotels.

Banyan Tree Phuket has made **Hery Kuswoyo** its new hotel manager. He joined Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts in 2010 and was most recently executive assistant manager for Banyan Tree Macau.

Thailand

Anantara Siam Bangkok Hotel is now helmed by **Titiya Chooto**, who is regarded as one of the most successful female general managers in Thailand's hospitality industry. She has over 20 years of key managerial experience, and was most recently general manager of Four Seasons Resort Chiang Mai and Four

Overcoming the odds



Sunflower Holidays’ good rapport with Perfect China helps when external factors almost cause the group to turn away from the destination. By **S Puvaneswary**

Event brief

Perfect China, a China-based health and wellness company, was Malaysia’s largest incentive group from China in 2014. Local destination management company, Sunflower Holidays, made a successful bid against Thailand way back in 2011 to bring this group to Malaysia, and was in charge of the ground arrangements and programme.

Challenges

The disappearance of Malaysia Airlines (MAS) Flight 370 on March 8, 2014 with many Chinese nationals on board, along with a poorly executed crisis communications, resulted in widespread negative sentiments about Malaysia as a destination among the Chinese, temporarily putting a spanner in the works.

Perfect China’s management contacted Sunflower Holidays to postpone the incentive until further notice. “This threatened our cash flow because by then, we had already paid deposits on the hotel rooms, convention and banqueting facilities of Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre and to coach service providers to ferry the group,” recalled Mint Leong, managing director of Sunflower Holidays.

Then in July, just after Leong had negotiated a new date with Perfect China, MH17 was shot down as it flew over Ukraine. This

Name of event
Perfect China Overseas
Incentive 2014

Organiser
Perfect China

Ground handler
Sunflower Holidays

Date
July 31 – August 6, 2014

Destinations
Kuala Lumpur, Malacca and Penang

Number of participants
3,800



second MAS incident again cast doubts on the organisers to hold their event in Malaysia. At risk of losing the deal, Leong immediately contacted the client to persuade them not to cancel. New dates were set, giving Sunflower Holidays less than two weeks to prepare for the group’s arrival. The dates also coincided with the summer holidays and Malaysian hotels were experiencing medium to high occupancies. The challenge was to get rooms, especially in Malacca and Penang, and to get suppliers to maintain the rates they had agreed on earlier.

Solutions

Leong said: “When Perfect China decided to postpone the trip, it was left to us to convince them not to delay for too long and to press for a new date. I also appealed to Perfect China’s chairman, Koo Yuen Kim, who is a Malaysian, to support his country. I stressed to him that Perfect China could support Malaysia’s tourism efforts by setting an example, which would help rebuild confidence and eventually lead to a return in MICE and leisure tourists from China.”

At risk of losing Perfect China a second time when MH17 was shot down, Leong immediately contacted the organisers and maintained that the incident was not the fault of the airline. She also emphasised that the Malaysian government was fully supportive of the event, and the Minister of Tourism and Culture had given Perfect China an official letter of invitation.

Sunflower Holidays had to rely on personal relationships with their suppliers to persuade them to maintain the earlier rates they had agreed upon. Delegates were accommodated in different hotels as the total group was too large to be kept together. In Malacca and Penang, some new three-star properties were also used as there were insufficient rooms in four- and five-star hotels. However, Sunflower Holidays ensured that every delegate could experience a five-star property within the entire programme.

Key takeaways

Looking back, Leong said: “We secured the business because we persevered by following up with the client and eventually we succeeded in persuading them. I was confident to commit to the new date because I had full trust in my team’s capability. Having built a good relationship with our client, suppliers and MyCEB helped immensely in solving challenges and paving the way to hold a very successful event.”

“We love Malaysia. We feel welcome because of the warm hospitality and we will definitely return. This year’s gala dinner has been the best one we’ve had so far in Malaysia.”

Koo Yuen Kim, chairman, Perfect China



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Now arriving: A new generation of airport hotels

A new breed of airport hotels are evolving in parallel with the next-gen airports, shedding their utilitarian image in favour of sleek design, innovative services, lifestyle amenities and functional meeting spaces. By Raini Hamdi, Xinyi Liang-Pholsena, Paige Lee Pei Qi and Julian Ryall

“AS THE AIRPORT GROWS IN CAPACITY, THE AIRPORT HOTEL IS AN ESSENTIAL OFFERING THAT A DISCERNING TRAVELLER WOULD EXPECT.”

Ivan Tan

Senior vice president, corporate & marketing communications, Changi Airport Group





From top: Crowne Plaza Changi Airport and Novotel Hong Kong Citygate's function room



**“CON-
TRARY TO
POPULAR
BELIEF THAT
NOT MANY
PEOPLE WOULD
BOOK OR HOLD
EVENTS AT AIRPORT
HOTELS UNLESS THEY
ARE ON TRANSIT...WE
DO HAVE CORPORATE
BUSINESS.”**

Sunshine Wong

General manager at Crowne Plaza Changi Airport



Gone are the days where airport hotels are viewed as staid, characterless properties that generate business from flight crew, early fliers or stranded passengers. In the past decade, airport hotels have undergone a dramatic transformation, carving out a new accommodation style that caters to the pleasure-seeking corporate warrior on the road as well as leisure travellers drawn to its lifestyle and tech-savvy amenities.

A destination in its own right

With global business and leisure air travel set to soar, many airports are now spearheading redesign projects to expand their itinerant roles into the retail and lifestyle sectors, and this increasing focus on the destination experience has propelled a makeover of accommodation in the proximity of these transportation hubs too.

Best Western International (BWI), senior vice president of brand management & member services, Ron Pohl, noted: “This

(airport hotel) trend matches the evolution of airports themselves. Many modern airports have turned into shopping and entertainment hubs, so travellers may prefer to stay at a nearby hotel to give themselves more time to sample these facilities.”

Ivan Tan, senior vice president, corporate & marketing communications, Changi Airport Group, said: “As the airport grows in capacity, the airport hotel is an essential offering that a discerning traveller would expect. This is especially so for a hub airport like Changi Airport. Not every passenger who arrives at Changi is visiting Singapore; about 30 per cent of Changi’s passengers are en route to another destination.

“Being directly connected and conveniently accessible, a passenger’s experience begins the moment they arrive. Being located in the vicinity of the airport means more time to rest and rejuvenate for passengers, making the overall airport experience even more enjoyable and memorable, easing the stress of travel.”

With Regal Airport Hotel, Hong Kong SkyCity Marriott Hotel and Novotel Citygate Hong Kong already in its vicinity, Airport Authority Hong Kong has planned more airline hotels in the pipeline “to capture the continuous growth of airport users as

Airport Hotels



From top: Regal Airport Hotel Meeting & Conference Centre, and the hotel's swimming pool



“(NEED FOR AIRPORT HOTELS TO BE) TRULY 24 HOURS IN OPERATION IN ALL AREAS.”

John Alexander Girard

Vice president development, area general manager, Regal Hotels International Hong Kong / General manager, Regal Airport Hotel Meeting & Conference Centre

and services make travel even more accessible and affordable.”

Patrick Basset, COO for Accor Thailand, Vietnam, South Korea, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and the Philippines, said: “Airports hotels have evolved beyond their functional role of convenience. Today, they offer many of the amenities and comforts traditionally limited to city hotels and resorts; these include dining, fitness, spas and swimming pools. Guests now want to find complete leisure and business facilities at an airport hotel, expecting their experiences to mirror those of a city hotel or resort.

“We’ve also gained increased revenue from businesses located near the airport. Guests are willing to spend a bit more for the convenience of an airport hotel as they offer less risk. Their proximity decreases the likelihood of missing a flight, yet they offer the same facilities and comforts as city hotels and resorts,” he added.

More airport properties are also playing up the wellness card, mirroring the growing wave of health-consciousness among travellers.

Citing Best Western Premier Amaranth Hotel Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok as an example, Pohl commented: “This luxury resort offers multiple options for travellers, including a spa, sauna and outdoor pool, and is close to local golf courses. This (property) has turned into more than just a one-night stopover for travellers – it has become a destination in

its own right.”

Similarly, the JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar, which opened in April 1km from the Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport, is the second property worldwide to feature the brand’s new Spa by JW concept with Ayurvedic, steam, make-up rooms and Jacuzzis.

John Alexander Girard, vice president development, area general manager, Regal Hotels International Hong Kong and general manager, Regal Airport Hotel Meeting & Conference Centre, highlighted the need for airport hotels to be “truly 24 hours in operation in all areas”, be it all-day dining or offering workout rental gear for guests to continue their healthy exercise practice any time during their stay.

According to Basset, The Novotel Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport has developed concepts such as the 24 Hour Flexi package, which allows guests to stay for a 24-hour duration irrespective of their check-in time, as well as the Flexi Meal programme that enables guests to choose the meal for which they wish to redeem their breakfast voucher.

Connecting the business, MICE crowds

More airport hotels are training their sights on the business and meeting crowds, as a sizable number of corporate travellers are increasingly keen to fly in, meet and fly home, instead of spending time to get to crowded downtown districts.

Michael Gnaegi, general manager, Langham Place, said: “We have regular

well as the commercial opportunities presented by the opening of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge”, a spokesperson revealed.

From pit stop to full stop

Amid intense competition in the hospitality sector, airport hotels have been reinventing the cheerless layover stay experience, rolling out a full suite of services and activities to drive more room nights and meetings business.

Sunshine Wong, general manager at Crowne Plaza Changi Airport, observed: “(Airport hotels) were previously conceptualised out of practicality and used to serve a strictly functional purpose: providing travellers with a place to rest in between longhaul flights. This has changed as more airlines, flights, apps

business travellers flying from different cities in China to our hotel...(they) have business meetings such as signing of a contract within one hour, then take a return flight back to their own cities, saving time and cost."

Sharing similar observations, Accor's Basset added: "The rise and ease of regional air transport has led to more intra-regional meetings organised at airport hotels. People take an early morning flight, arrive for a full day of meetings and then fly out in the evening. Companies are able to bring together participants from the region for a one-day meeting, while saving on accommodation costs."

Meeting facilities have become an important aspect of the business for Crowne Plaza Changi Airport, which often hosts trainings, seminars and events of companies located in its vicinity, shared Wong.

"Where we see great opportunity is in the niche market of meetings and events with 100 to 120 attendees. We are looking at events held by Singapore-based MNCs

here which require their delegates, representatives or clients to fly in," he added.

Unlike downtown locations, which usually bustle with activity, airport hotels' quieter atmosphere offers less distractions, which could be a benefit for meeting planners, added Wong.

The advantages of being located near Hong Kong International Airport are likewise apparent to Regal Airport Hotel. Said Girard: "MICE contributed to our room revenue with robust growth (in 2014), and remains the key driving factor...In the past two months, we got a few major MICE conferences in-house and experienced high traffic of check-in due to exhibitions and trade shows at AsiaWorld-Expo convention centre nearby."

A transient or permanent trend?

While a new wave of airport hotels have brought out the design bells and gustatory whistles, some trade players point out that not all travellers are biting though, as a portion of their clientele seeks only a

clean bed and easy access to their departure gates.

Acknowledging the more comprehensive service offered by a new crop of airport hotels, Destination Asia group business development director, Victoria Sertic, noted that airport accommodation is still perceived as a "functional choice" among her clients in the region.

"For early morning departures and sometimes arrivals, airport hotels are requested by our clients, but most clients would not chose to stay for long periods of time in an airport hotel," she remarked. "Traffic and proximity to the airport in many countries is not an issue so both leisure and meetings

From top:
Langham
Place, Beijing
Capital Airport's
ballroom and
Ming Court

"....(THEY) HAVE BUSINESS MEETINGS SUCH AS SIGNING OF A CONTRACT WITHIN ONE HOUR, THEN TAKE A RETURN FLIGHT BACK TO THEIR OWN CITIES, SAVING TIME AND COST."

Michael Gnaegi

General manager,
Langham Place,
Beijing Capital Airport



Airport Hotels



“THE REAL VALUE OF AIRPORT HOTELS HAS LONG BEEN UNDERESTIMATED BY (TRAVEL) AGENCIES AND MICE PLANNERS – IT IS NO DOUBT THAT THE BIGGEST ADVANTAGE OF AIRPORT HOTELS IS CONVENIENCE. TRAVELLERS CAN SIMPLY RELAX MORE EASILY AND TRAVEL WITH FAR LESS STRESS.”

Todd Arthur

Managing director, Asia-Pacific,
HRS - The Hotel Portal

clients and incentives opt for non-airport hotels.”

Jane Le Gall, product & marketing leader at FCm Travel Solutions Singapore, opined: “It really depends on the length of the layover, not many routes now have overnight layovers. The transit times have been drastically reduced by airlines. The First, Business and airport lounges now offer full shower and changing facilities, so business travellers will utilise these services.

“A traveller who is meeting another party whilst in transit would make use of an airport hotel from a meetings perspective. Often a business traveller might take an air route that factors in a longer layover in order to maximise his business travelling time to meet with a customer or company counterpart en route to his main destination,” she added.

However, the value of airport hotels remain underappreciated, several industry members remarked.

Todd Arthur, managing director, Asia-Pacific at HRS - The Hotel Portal, said: “The real value of airport hotels has long been underestimated by (travel) agencies and MICE planners – it is no doubt that the biggest advantage of airport hotels is convenience. Travellers can simply relax more easily and travel with far less stress.”

He continued: “Besides, being connected to the terminals, these hotels provide direct access to public transport services, which

save the travellers from long taxi queues should they wish to visit their local office or go sightseeing.”

Go Vacation Thailand director business development, Tobias Fischer, believes that hotels in the neighbourhood of international aviation hubs, such as the recently launched Le Méridien Suvarnabhumi, Bangkok Golf Resort & Spa, which offers a golf course and proximity to the Bangkok International Trade & Exhibition Centre, has potential to attract business travellers.

“When people hear ‘airport’ they generally think the location is far with limited facilities, which is not true,” remarked Gnaegi, who pointed out that the Langham Place Beijing Capital Airport has over 400 pieces of contemporary artwork within its premises.



From top: JW Marriott
Mumbai Sahar's lobby and
swimming pool



New hotels on the radar

Pullman Sydney Airport

To be developed in Mascot, near Sydney Airport, as part of a new mixed-use hotel, commercial and retail precinct, Pullman Sydney Airport will feature 229 rooms and suites, a restaurant and bar, conference facilities, gymnasium, and an executive lounge. The expected opening date for Pullman Sydney Airport is May 2016.

Accor Pacific COO, Simon McGrath, trumpets the new A\$100 million (US\$77.6 million) project as "the first internationally branded five-star hotel serving the (Sydney Airport) precinct".

Crowne Plaza Singapore

Consistently racking up some of the industry's highest accolades, the 320-room Crowne Plaza Changi Airport will boast a new 10-storey, 243-room extension in 2016. Together with the new wing, the hotel – which opened in 2008 – will feature 563 rooms, conference facilities for meetings and events, a business centre and round-the-clock business services. F&B outlets in the hotel span Azur, the all-day dining restaurant; a specialty restaurant; a lobby lounge bar; and a warm and cool bar. Leisure facilities include a pool, health club and spa.

Yotel Changi Airport Singapore

Known as an innovative hotel chain that operates largely in airports, including London's Gatwick and Heathrow, and Amsterdam Schiphol, Yotel has announced its inaugural airport hotel in Asia within the upcoming mixed-use Jewel.

The 130-key Yotel Changi Airport Singapore will feature Premium, Family and Shower cabins, all of which come with the brand's space-saving convertible bed, monsoon rain showers and techno wall with flat-screen TVs. Due to open in end-2018, the hotel will house a Club Lounge overlooking the Forest Valley that will come with a co-working space and Internet stations, and will serve light food and drinks.

JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar

Located just 1km from the Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport Mumbai, the 585-room JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar offers a vast array of luxury amenities at its six-hectare expanse, from a 930m² pillarless ballroom and 11 meeting rooms to the seven-room Spa by JW to a 24-hour fitness centre. Dining options consist of the all-day dining JW Café, the Italian Romano's, JW Lounge and JW Baking Company.



Enhance the visual aspect of meetings with the use of an LED wall at Regal Kowloon Hotel

Get smart

Hong Kong hotels are introducing more technology-driven services to help corporate clients deliver a more efficient, exciting event, writes **Prudence Lui**

As the competition for meetings business heats up among hotels in Hong Kong, an increasing number of properties are making technology investments to raise the appeal of their event facilities. Offers of high definition LED (Light Emitting Diode) walls in function rooms and event-friendly mobile apps created just for event delegates appear to be trending today.

The Langham, Hong Kong has installed a 7m by 3m LED wall in its Langham Place Ballroom, as part of an extensive hotel-wide renovation project. This piece of technology improves the visual appeal of presen-

tations, and videos that are screened via the LED wall can be controlled by an app on the event organiser's smartphone.

The hotel's director of sales and marketing, David Fung, explained that the LED wall supports meeting planners' constant search for "ways to better engage event attendees (through sharper) audiovisuals".

In addition, a Cloud printing service is now offered.

An LED wall has made an appearance too at Regal Kowloon Hotel's pillarless Versailles Ballroom. The installation allows organisers to showcase pictures, videos, graphics and live feeds on a big screen.

The hotel and its sister properties under the Regal Hotels International banner, have also created a multi-functional app to facilitate communications between the event organiser and delegates. Events details such as conference agenda, speaker's profiles and pre-event news announcements can be hosted on the app, which also contains a QR code scanner that comes in handy during registration. The app can even support real-time polls.

Regal Hotels International's vice president of marketing, Lyllian Poon, commented: "Our aim is to make our customers' lives easier with the help of technology which must also be fun to use. The ultimate benefit for the organiser and participants is instant, seamless and paperless (communication)."

Poon noted that the hotel company's customers are "responsive to technology", fuelling the need to "constantly bring in new services to enrich our guest experience".

Over at The Ritz-Carlton, Hong Kong, the ((Chime)) mobile app was launched earlier this year to bring convenience to meeting planners.



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Destination: Hong Kong

The smart in-room tablet offered by The Peninsula Hong Kong allows guests to easily access available services



Said to be the first of its kind in the industry, ((Chime)) enables planners to connect in real-time with the hotel's Meetings and Events Concierge and request for event services. The app can be used on smartphones, tablets or PCs.

Besides improving event technology, hotels are also making their guestrooms friendlier for modern

business travellers.

Guests of The Langham, Hong Kong can now easily charge their mobile devices through USB ports located on the sides of the bed. They are also provided with a pocket Wi-Fi to stay connected even outside of their rooms.

Regal Hotels International's new iclub Sheung Wan Hotel pioneered

an innovative mobile key check-in capability. Guests may opt for this service or the traditional key card system – or both – to access their room. This service will soon be extended to iclub Fortress Hill Hotel and iclub Soho Hotel.

Leveraging technology to lift in-room guest experience is, however, not new to The Peninsula Hong Kong. Its parent company, Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels, has an in-house research and technology department for the last 30 years, which has developed a touch-screen tablet, powered by Intel, that connects guests with available services offered by the hotel. Available in 11 languages, the tablet programme also includes room controls. Come this summer, free VOIP international calls will be offered.

While M.A.X. Event Management, event manager, Johnny Tse, felt that these products and services “deliver a sense of professionalism” and “add value to the hotel’s service quality”, he remarked that they do not factor in the venue selection process.

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Ideas Post-meeting summer sights in 48 hours

Day1 After breakfast, pack your group off to the old districts of Sai Ying Pun and Kennedy where they can stroll around on foot and see how the locals live. Then, hop onto an iconic *ding ding* tram – an experience that must be had in Hong Kong – to Central.

Stop for a lunch of Cantonese delights at the elegant China Tang, 4F of Landmark Atrium, then escape the summer heat by spending the afternoon in the Hong Kong Maritime Museum in waterfront Central. The attraction brings to focus Hong Kong's maritime heritage and tells the city's seafaring story in local, regional and international contexts.

As evening approaches, head over to the Hong Kong Observation Wheel and pop into a cabin to take in panoramic views of the city as the sun begins to set.

End the day at PMQ, a heritage building that now functions as a creative and design hub. Offer free time for your group to explore the many studios and shops before regrouping for dinner at Michelin star chef Jason Atherton's Aberdeen Street Social, which specialises in British cuisine.

Day2 This is a day of action, beginning with the *Wing Chun Kung Fu Experience Tour*, led by disciples of master Ip Man. Start with a warm-up walk down the Avenue of Stars before learning some Wing Chun moves. Next, get better acquainted with master Ip's famous disciple, Bruce Lee, through the Hong Kong Heritage Museum's *Bruce Lee: Kung Fu. Art. Life* exhibition.

The action continues after lunch at Discovery Bay Pier, where your group will hike up to the Look-



out Point for a panoramic view of Discovery Bay spanning from the Marina Club to Yi Pak Bay. Later, transfer back to Central by ferry.

Dinner tonight is at Wan Chai's Tai Hang, where your group can break up and go in search of local eats in the neighbourhood.

Hong Kong Observation Wheel offers glorious after-dark views



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Need to know



Come celebrate art and gastronomic delights

The new Tycoon Tann and Mod Bar on Wellington Street in Central is a dining destination that celebrates Hong Kong's culture through food, drinks, design and art. Mod Bar on the ground floor offers Chinese-inspired cocktails and East-meets-West bar snacks, while the two-floor Tycoon Tann restaurant presents local classic dishes with an upmarket spin. Diners can sink their chops into signature dishes such as braised abalone with black truffle in a casserole, and baked crab shell stuffed with fresh crab meat, onion and cheese.

Tycoon Tann and Mod Bar are great for private events. Mod Bar seats 32 people, while Tycoon Tann has a 32-seat private dining room on each floor.

Visit www.tycoontann.com for more information.

Hands-on protein party

The Nose-to-Tail Butchery Class is a hands-on activity designed to teach this ancient skill that treats every part of the animal as sacred.

Led by one of The Butchers Club's butchers or chefs, participants will learn how to butcher their own meat at home. The chef will butcher a whole lamb, after which participants will learn how to debone, roll and tie a lamb shoulder. There are also lessons on how to skin, score, stuff, roll, rewrap and tie a pork belly; and how to debone, butterfly and marinate a whole chicken.

Once the hard work is over, participants can sit down and enjoy a family-style meal prepared by the chefs. Free-flow wine and beer is included. Participants will later be given their deboned and butterflied chicken along with a jar of bourbon and maple glaze to take home in a cooler bag.

Each class can accommodate up to 10 pax and private classes for 6-12 guests are offered.

Email store@butchersclub.com.hk for details.

Be a child again

Help event delegates relive their carefree childhood with a private party at Hong Kong Disneyland. The theme park offers buyout packages on specific dates in September, and a *Frozen* experience can be included.

After enjoying *Disney's Haunted Halloween* preview and *Disney in the Stars Fireworks*, event guests will get an exclusive tour of the *Frozen* Village where a special performance will be held. Other activities include building a snowman, riding a toboggan, and meeting the movie's loveable snowman, Olaf.

Mix-in buyout group size starts from 500 pax while park buyouts require at least 5,000 guests.

More access into Hong Kong

Flag carrier Cathay Pacific Airways launched new flights to Zurich on March 29 and will further grow its international network with a new service to Düsseldorf on September 1. Meanwhile, sister airline Dragonair has entered into a codeshare agreement with Shenzhen Airlines which had recently added Jinjiang in Fujian to its network. The Hong Kong-Jinjiang service is operated thrice daily.

Air access from the Philippines is boosted too, with the commencement of AirAsia Philippines' new Manila-Hong Kong service on May 8. It departs from Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 3 every Monday, Tuesday, Friday and Sunday.



Much talk about Ozo Wesley's new meeting offer

Event planners can look to take up Ozo Wesley Hong Kong's new meeting packages when they book its cheekily named meeting venue Talk. The space allows a range of configurations from 12-pax boardroom meetings to cocktail functions and classroom-style seminars, or theatre seating of 40 guests.

A Full-Day Meeting Package comes with use of the venue from 09.00 to 18.00, two refreshment breaks with snacks, and one set lunch for HK\$500 (US\$64.50). A Half Day Meeting Package includes venue rental from 09.00 to 13.00 or from 14.00 to 18.00, as well as one refreshment break with snacks and one set lunch, priced at HK\$400.

Prices are per person and subject to a 10 per cent service charge.

Furthermore, Ozo Wesley will throw in a 20 per cent discount for meeting packages if 20 or more room nights are booked.

Call (852) 2292-3000 for more details.



Ready for bigger things

Already seeing a rise in tradeshow coming from Jakarta, Surabaya is eager to grow business from the region and beyond.

Mimi Hudoyo reports

As Indonesia's second business hub after Jakarta, Surabaya has a thriving MICE sector that is supported by purpose-built event centres and a plethora of hotels armed with business event facilities.

The port city in Java offers event organisers the Grand City Convex, a venue capable of accommodating up to 3,500 seats, theatre-style, and which has a 4,000m² exhibition hall. The Dyandra Convention Center is another option for conventions and exhibitions. Its massive space can support large-scale banquet events with up to 5,000 guests.

Most hotels in the city, from economy ones to luxury properties, are fitted with meeting facilities to cater to the burgeoning MICE sector.

According to Handoyo, head of product development with the East Java Regional Culture and Tourism Office, MICE has been one of the significant contributors to the region's economy.

"Tourism contributed 101 trillion rupiah (US\$7.3 billion) to the East Java economy last year, and that came from hotels, restaurants and entertainment (sectors). While we do not have specific data on MICE, most hotels now have meeting facilities and this sector contributes 30 to 40 per cent (of total tourism revenue). So, (MICE) is a significant market for Surabaya and East Java in general," Handoyo said.

B2B and B2C exhibitions are on the rise in Surabaya, and according to Boediono, director of Debono Mitra Tama Surabaya, an event specialist, tradeshow for the machinery, mechanical and electrical, and building technology sectors are buzzing.

Boediono remarked: "We have seen more exhibitions moving from Jakarta to Surabaya to get closer to the market. We have also seen some

Irsam Soetarto



international exhibitions, such as HOMEDEC from Malaysia, entering Surabaya this year.

"The growing number of international exhibition organisers setting up offices here in Indonesia has presented new opportunities for Surabaya to welcome more international events. Reed Panorama Exhibitions, for example, is bringing MEGA BUILD to Surabaya this November."

MEGA BUILD, which has a version in the Indonesian capital city, is a premier event for the architecture, interior design and building industry.

Surabaya's growing popularity among business event organisers has resulted in major venues being booked out for events.

Boediono noted that it has been a challenge to secure slots for exhibitions at the Grand City Convex and Jatim Expo International although the latter has nearly one hectare of exhibition space.

Still, the country's tourism ministry is hungry for even more MICE business coming into Surabaya and is eager to promote the destination to regional and international markets.

Rizki Handayani, director of MICE and Special Interest Tourism Marketing, Indonesia Ministry of Tourism, told *TTGmice*: "Surabaya has the facilities...but like many other destinations in the country, it needs

to go out and meet potential markets. I am inviting the trade to participate in tradeshow (led by the) ministry next time."

As Surabaya is more accessible to international travellers than other Indonesian destinations besides Jakarta and Bali, Rizki believes the city is able to appeal to regional organisers. Major Indonesian airlines such as Garuda Indonesia, Lion Air and Citilink have made Juanda International Airport one of their hubs.

Surabaya is connected to the region by direct services operated by airlines such as Royal Brunei Airlines, Cathay Pacific and EVA Air. AirAsia flies to Surabaya from Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Johor Bahru, while Singapore Airlines and SilkAir flies over daily.

Monas Tjahjono, managing director of Monas Tours & Travel, urged the creation of a strong destination brand and earnest promotions in the region, especially in Singapore and Malaysia.

"It took me several years to bring a group of golfers from Singapore here...because there was lack of awareness about what the city had to offer," he explained.

Ina Silas, general manager of House of Sampoerna, agrees, saying that the city's myriad attractions only "needed packaging".

Surabaya's Suramadu Bridge glows at nightfall

Destination: Indonesia

“As the provincial government, we are facilitating the development of new products and destinations in East Java to give meeting and incentive groups a reason to come back again and again.”

Handoyo

Head of product development,
East Java Regional Culture and Tourism Office

To that end, the House of Sampoerna, part of the HM Sampoerna cigarette company and which operates a cigarette museum, created a series of heritage tours over the last few years. The *Surabaya Heritage Track* itineraries took participants around the older part of the city, visiting landmarks and attractions that were part of Surabaya's past. Some of the tours are operated with a tour bus, while some take participants around on foot.

Ina noted that the programmes would interest corporate groups, giving them a deeper understanding of the destination they were meeting in.

However, some trade players opined that Surabaya's weakness is that it does not have as many attractions to offer as compared to Bali and Jogjakarta, which are also popular

with corporate clients. They felt that Bali and Jogjakarta offer plenty of cultural attractions.

Monas rejected the complaint, saying: “Travellers do not only look for traditional things. Surabaya offers great shopping. We have many shopping malls that feature big brands and products can be cheaper here.”

Handoyo added that meeting in Surabaya could also allow event organisers to plan pre- and post-show tours to neighbouring cities.

“As the provincial government, we are facilitating the development of new products and destinations in East Java to give meeting and incentive groups a reason to come back again and again,” said Handoyo.

Some of the work that has been done include the improvement of ac-

cess to Ijen Crater, the introduction of Wurung Crater in Bondowoso, and the opening of a number of theme attractions around Malang, such as the Batu Night Spectacular and Museum Angkut + Movie Star Studio. Handoyo is confident that these attractions will appeal to MICE groups.

These efforts are paying off. At the recent Indonesia Corporate Meetings and Incentive Travel Mart in Surabaya, some corporate buyers told *TTGmice* they are keen to take their next company outing to the city and its neighbouring areas after learning about the surrounding attractions.

Susella Gustina, office administration Indonesia of JTI, said: “We are organising a company outing and family gathering for up to 100 people. Bromo is one of the destinations in East Java that we are considering, but we have now learnt that Malang has new attractions too.”

Ina Sinarsari, senior executive assistant at Fluor Daniel Indonesia, who is shortlisting several destinations for a 50-pax corporate event, said she would be considering Surabaya for its access to Ijen Crater and Merah Island.

Ideas Track the history of Surabaya

15.00 After a morning meeting, the heritage tour of Surabaya begins at the colonial-style House of Sampoerna. A bus, modelled after the tram that once serviced the city in the past, will take your group to Kampung Kraton, which literally means the royal village. Kampung Kraton is believed to be the gateway to the palace, and the bus ride takes about 15 minutes.

Upon arrival at Kampung Kraton, participants will be guided through Kramat Gantung and Jalan Pahlawan, where traces of the ancient kingdom remain through villages named about the royal troops.

15.30 The Surabaya Heritage Track will now make a stop at the City Hall, where your group will learn about the city's past, how the name Surabaya came about, and the different city emblems used over the years.

The City Hall itself is an interesting piece of history, as it was built in 1923 and started operations in 1927.



16.00 Next stop, Cak Durasim Performing Art Centre which was once part of the Surabaya Kanoman Palace. The centre is now named after a traditional performing artist, Cak Durasim, who pioneered the Ludruk performance in Surabaya. The

performance depicts local legends.

16.15 The tour ends at the House of Sampoerna.

This itinerary is part of Surabaya Heritage Track, a series of history themed tours by the House of Sampoerna

Need to know



Hotel Tentrem Yogyakarta offers new events venue

The five-star, 275-room Hotel Tentrem Yogyakarta has debuted a new ballroom that boasts a capacity for up to 2,000 guests.

Built next to the main building, the Tentrem Ballroom has a 15m high ceiling with adjustable rigging and it comes with sound-proof walls. It can be divided into three smaller meeting rooms.

The new facility adds to the hotel's existing nine meeting rooms which are able to host events with 40 to 70 guests. These meeting venues are equipped with multimedia and Wi-Fi capability.

Let's meet in idyllic Ubud

The Sense Bali, a 97-room hotel in Ubud on Bali island, opened this February with facilities built to charm both business and leisure travellers.

It houses a ballroom that can be divided into two smaller spaces, good for 150 pax each, and a 14-seat boardroom. Fun activities can also be arranged for meeting groups, such as a competition to make traditional Balinese offerings or a bicycle tour around a village.

Located in Ubud city centre, the hotel offers guests easy access to local attractions.

Move through time at a new transport museum

A new museum celebrating the evolution of transportation modes through the years has opened in Batu, a town some 20km from Malang, East Java.

Museum Angkut + Movie Star Studio displays more than 300 rides, some of them are rare and original, while others are replicas of models that date back to 1910. The museum is divided into zones such as Europe, Hollywood, and Batavia.

Visitors can also enjoy local dishes and shop for handicraft at the Floating Market.

Corporate groups can use the museum for themed events and teambuilding programmes.



Triple gastronomic delights

Bumi Surabaya City Resort has developed a three-in-one concept for its three adjacent restaurants: the outdoor Siti Inggil, the indoor Arum Manis, and the Kizahashi Japanese restaurant.

Dubbed *Pasar Senggol*, the concept will see all three dining outlets coming together as a single destination to tantalise diners with more than 100 dishes daily.

With a capacity of 300 seats, the restaurants are perfect for meeting groups and corporate gatherings.

Bumi Surabaya City Resort is also equipped with function rooms that can support events of various sizes.

Anyer gets a new hotel

Aston Anyer Beach Hotel has opened on the edge of the Sunda Strait, Cilegon, a coastal industrial city in Banten province, Indonesia. Anyer is now one of the most popular destinations for businessmen and pleasure seekers from Jakarta and West Java.

The 101-key beachfront property, some 90 minutes from Jakarta, is built with an inventory of meeting facilities, including a conference centre with three auxiliary meeting rooms located on the top floor to offer delegates spectacular ocean views. An outdoor terrace here offers a suitable venue for coffee breaks and sunset cocktail receptions.

The smallest of the three meeting rooms can accommodate up to 85 people, while the largest can take up to 400 guests.

The hotel also offers a cosy all-day dining restaurant that is great for casual gatherings, as well as recreational facilities such as an outdoor swimming pool, a private beach, a pool table, a table tennis table, a bonfire pit and a full-service spa.

The entire hotel is wired up for speedy broadband Internet.

Corporate groups can soon look forward to fun activities on site, such as paintball games.





Dubai now offers more hardware to entice business visitors, especially those from Asia

More excitement in Dubai

Hotels, theme parks and other hardware are mushrooming in the emirate, making it ever more attractive for business events. By **Feizal Samath**

New infrastructure, facilities and entertainment options particularly targeting MICE visitors and their accompanying families is setting Dubai apart from competing destinations.

In the hotel arena, some 8,000 rooms were added to the city last year, contributing to the current total of 93,000 rooms. New mid-range properties are also springing up, with 15,000 to 20,000 rooms – mostly in the three- and four-star categories – in the pipeline and due to come on stream in 2015-2016.

Meanwhile, the four-star, Marriott-managed Lapita Hotel with 503 keys is expected to open alongside three new theme parks for the entertainment of business visitors.

Legoland Dubai, Bollywood Parks Dubai and Motiongate Dubai all aim to woo more business from Asia and are located in the same site between Dubai Airport and Abu Dhabi Airport, with Phase One construction expected to complete in October 2016.

Also opening in 2015-2016 is the IMG Worlds of Adventure, expected to be the world's largest indoor theme park. Home to four zones – Marvel, Lost Adventure, Dinosaur Adventures and Cartoon Network – this fantasy land is a US\$1 billion investment.

The city will break another record when it opens the world's largest airport – with a capacity of more than 200 million passengers – by 2030. Already it has excellent air

connectivity with two international airports connecting hundreds of destinations across six continents.

The emirate is also planning to allow multiple-entry visas, especially for Asians seeking to make several visits.

Amorntheep Bhatia, managing director of Bangkok-based Orient Travels, said the multiple-entry visas would definitely encourage more visits and boost business for Dubai.

The UAE capital is targeting 20 million visitors by 2020, the year it will play host to the World Expo. Foreign visitors numbered 11.6 million in 2014.

One of the city's goals is to treat today's business visitor as tomorrow's leisure tourist.

“To achieve that goal, we need strong branding and marketing, which are in the works, while infrastructure is already in place,” commented Steen Jakobsen, director for Dubai Business Events, the city’s official convention bureau.

He shared that significant measures have been taken to ensure hotels are available across all price points, and that there has been a steady increase in the number of business events taking place in Dubai.

Philippe Harb, COO of One to One Hotels and Resorts in Abu Dhabi, opined that dynamic markets such as Dubai do well when it comes to improving the performance of the tourism and MICE sectors.

He added that Dubai operators also adapt well to adverse mar-

“To get there (i.e. Dubai’s goal of treating today’s business visitor as tomorrow’s leisure tourist), we need strong branding and marketing, which are in the works, while infrastructure is already in place.”

Steen Jakobsen

Director, Dubai Business Events

ket conditions, being able to cut expenses dramatically and maintain profitability.

He cited the example of the CIS economic slowdown, during which Chinese business travellers amply compensated for the decrease in CIS business visitors, with operators providing attractive options.

Shujaat Yyar, deputy general manager at the Le Meridien Dubai Hotel and Conference Centre, noted that Dubai’s vision to welcome 20

million visitors by 2020 is significantly accelerating the projects and infrastructural development of the city.

“The number of flights to and from Asia, the extensive choice and quality of hotels, event venues, indoor and outdoor incentive activities as well as the reassuring fact that Dubai is virtually crime-free, make this emirate a preferred choice for Asian countries,” he added.



Sharjah a magnet for Asian MICE

Sharjah, designated the capital of Arab tourism for 2015 and historical destination for art and Islamic culture, is aiming to welcome 10 million visitors by 2021. In 2014, there were two million hotel guests, up from 1.8 million the previous year.

To achieve the target, the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) is partnering with the tourism trade in several ways.

Investments are being made in the development of sophisticated convention and conference facilities, high-end hotels and shopping centres. About 30 new international-brand hotels or an estimated 4,000 additional rooms are expected to open in the emirate over the next few years. The city now has 10,000 hotel rooms.

Among the developments is the new five-star luxury beachfront hotel and resort, Majlis Grand Mercure Sharjah, to be managed by Accor.

Additionally, a new leisure cruise ship terminal is being built at Sharjah’s east coast, at Khorfakkan Port. Industry officials said the tourism sector is currently enjoying a successful 2014-2015 cruise season, expecting an estimated 36 international cruise ships to bring in more than 80,000 tourists.

Khamis Kazzaz, general manager of the Radisson Blu Resort, Sharjah, told *TTGmice* that Sharjah was the first emirate to have an expo centre, and that it has developed tremendous-



Alluring nightlife in Al Qasba, Sharjah

ly with world-class business facilities and infrastructure. “Our resort strongly supports Sharjah’s vision to receive 10 million tourists – we offer nine function rooms along with various activities such as fishing, boating and water sports,” he said.

Connectivity-wise, in February this year Sharjah-based Air Arabia became the first low-cost airline from the Middle East and Africa to connect the region with China, operating regular non-stop services to Urumqi, the largest city in western China.

The emirate has significant potential to attract Asian MICE visitors given its long-established trade and

business relations with the region and growing public-private partnership.

A senior spokesperson for SCTDA said visitor numbers from Asia had registered sustained growth in the past few years, with hotels recording a 19 per cent year-on-year rise to more than 313,000 Asian guests in 2014.

“Sharjah draws Asians due to its safe and secure environment, wide selection of hotels and diverse tourism offerings. Business event planners will also find it a cost-effective choice offering advanced infrastructure and facilities as well as easy access to other markets in the region,” he added.

Need to know



More room for meetings at Le Meridien

The 580-room Le Meridien Dubai Hotel & Conference Centre offers one of the newest and largest conference and banqueting facilities in Dubai. In line with the country's vision to welcome 20 million visitors by 2020, it has almost doubled its meeting room capacity with the opening of The Great Ballroom in May. This state-of-the-art venue can accommodate up to 1,500 guests and is supported by 20 additional meeting venues within the hotel.

View cityscape from world's highest point

An unforgettable experience awaits up on the 148th floor of the Burj Khalifa, supposedly the world's tallest building. There, an observation deck called At The Top, Burj Khalifa Sky, stands 555m above ground level. It offers a breathtaking 360-degree view of Dubai city.

Fun activities on soft desert sand

The Desert Safari experience is a must for anyone visiting the UAE. Tours are held daily and participants depart in the afternoon dune-driving across Dubai's desert, with several stops for photo-taking before reaching the first destination, a camel farm. Participants also get to watch the beautiful sunset before the drive ends at a campsite.

The experience includes a camel ride, belly dancing performance, henna painting, BBQ dinner, sand skiing, etc.

Experience Taj hospitality in Burj Khalifa

Visitors, especially Indians who prefer a 'home away from home', can check out the new Taj Dubai, which opened in March in the prestigious Burj Khalifa downtown area.

The 296-key hotel offers Taj Club Rooms, 16 Junior Suites and 15 Luxury Suites with panoramic views of Burj Khalifa, dancing fountains and Dubai Mall.

There are two especially lavish suites. The Maharaja Suite on the 33rd floor is inspired by opulent Maharaja's palaces in Rajasthan and boasts a roof terrace. The 680m² Presidential Suite, with its fine balance of understated elegance and opulence, occupies the entire 35th floor and boasts its own fitness suite and yoga room.



whiteleg/123RF.com

Jumeirah Mosque

Tour the city on double-deckers

Dubai's hop-on, hop-off city tours on board modern double-decker buses, with a dozen language options, allow passengers to explore different areas of interest at their own pace.

Launched last October, the Blue Route with 12 stops takes visitors to Dubai Mall, Burj Khalifa, Jumeirah Mosque, Madinat Jumeirah, and the iconic Palm Jumeirah, among others. The Red Route with 16 stops goes to the Gold and Spice Souks, Al Fahidi, Dubai Museum and Old Souk, among others.

Alternative shopping in the open

Located in Jumeirah on Al Wasl Road, the BoxPark open-air shopping and leisure precinct is made up of 220 shipping and industrial containers of various colours on a 1,200m stretch. Featuring about 44 high-end F&B outlets and retail stores, BoxPark was developed by Meraas Holding as a refreshing alternative to large indoor malls.



www.searide-dubai.com

On a board out at sea

Flyboarding is the latest craze offered by SeaRide Dubai, based at Al Souq Harbour, Jumeirah, to hit the waters of Dubai.

A flyboard enables the rider to use water pressure to 'fly' above the sea. Clad in a life jacket and a helmet for safety, the rider stands strapped to a board connected to a jet-ski with a small pipe that pumps water into the board to propel it upwards. A good sense of balance is required.



Lugano Turismo

Switzerland sizzles more

Secondary destinations are being paired with usual favourites like Zurich and Luzern to meet growing demand of the Asian MICE market. By **Mimi Hudoyo**

Monte Brè in lesser-known Lugano, Ticino, is currently being pushed for pairing with key destinations

Switzerland is not only seeing arrivals from Asia pick up but also more repeat and longer-staying visitors from there.

India, China and South-east Asia are its main markets, with Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand registering significant growth last year.

According to Switzerland Convention & Incentive Bureau (SCIB), South-east Asia alone contributed 500,000 hotel overnight stays in 2014 – a year-on-year 10 per cent increase – out of which MICE constituted between 15,000 and 20,000 overnight stays.

Data from SCIB India also showed growth in Indian overnight stays, from 467,967 in 2013 to 485,216 in 2014, out of which MICE contributed 19 per cent. Aishvarya Guhagarkar, director of MICE India, SCIB, said: “The hotel overnights did not include apartment stays, which can add another 200,000 overnights.

“Apartments in Switzerland are in high demand in the Indian market because some communities, for religious reasons, prefer a kitchen facility to cook vegetarian food.”

Guendalina Rampazzi, head of

market development MICE, SCIB, said: “India and China are doing well for us, but South-east Asia has been growing significantly as well, following the appointment of a dedicated SCIB manager for the region, in January 2014.”

Rampazzi opined that the region, with its huge population, is a massive market that was previously untapped: “Having someone in the South-east Asia region has created a better understanding of the market for us. We have also convinced travel consultants in the market to change their programmes towards longer-staying ones in Switzerland.”

Dominique Oi, dedicated MICE manager South-east Asia, SCIB, said: “Leisure travellers now stay two to three nights on average while MICE travellers stay four to five.”

South-east Asian travellers, she added, are among the biggest spenders, with CHF350 (US\$374) per night for MICE.

To grow the Asian market, SCIB does not only promote the well-known destinations like Zurich, Geneva or Luzern, but also the country’s “hidden gems”.

For example, the bureau recently invited corporate clients from South-east Asia and Indian travel consultants on a fam trip to Luzern and the lesser-known Ticino in southern Switzerland.

Rampazzi said: “More groups are coming to Switzerland for the second time, so people are ready to discover new destinations. We encourage travellers not only to visit the must-see, but also discover the hidden gems where they can experience something more authentic and traditional. MICE groups look for experiences more than leisure visitors.”

Lugano, the biggest city in Ticino, offers diverse experiences, according to Silvana Redemagni, director of Lugano MICE Convention Bureau.

“In a very small area (bordering with Italy), you can have the best of Italian culture and cuisine, and also sightsee in a day mountains and valleys, rivers and lakes. Five to 10 minutes away from the city centre is the countryside. For those looking for nightlife, Milan is very near too,” she said.

Lugano now has 3,500 hotel rooms, with each hotel on average

able to hold groups of up to 250 pax. Meeting facilities range from conference rooms in the hotels to standalone convention centres.

Swiss Diamond Hotel, for example, has meeting facilities for 10 to 150 participants, while Palazzo dei Congressi's auditorium can fit up to 1,130 theatre-style, along with several breakout rooms and smaller meeting rooms in the adjacent Villa Ciani.

The centuries-old Ristorante Grand Cafe Al Porto has a patio and a private room for small meetings of 20 to 30 pax, while the Swissminatur theme park is good for bigger meetings of up to 300 pax, combined with team-building activities or a gala dinner at a resident restaurant that serves international food, including Asian and halal options.

Dominique Vuigner, CEO of Swissminatur, said: "We had a group from Malaysia last year and we are going to host another from India later this year."

Meanwhile, the new Lugano Art and Culture venue will open in September with a 1,000-seat theatre and concert hall, museum space for exhibitions and several multipurpose halls for meetings, gala dinners or product launches.

Redemagni said Lugano is also great for incentive programmes, which range from city life to nature, light activities to extreme sports. She added: "Groups can organise a dinner cruise on Lugano Lake, have games on board, or simply enjoy beautiful views of the city set against the Lugano Prealps."

Anand Veerkar, general manager Sales (West) of Fountainhead Mumbai, said Ticino has an appeal, but not as a stand-alone destination. "Indians like Italian food and they can find it in Lugano. The city has MICE facilities so it can attract corporate meetings. But it needs to be combined with well-known destinations, such as Luzern, for the post-event tour," he explained.

Meanwhile, Lugano will be welcoming a 500-pax group on a post-convention tour from another country later this year. Guhagarkar revealed: "Half of the group will have a one-day tour here, while the rest will stay two nights, attend a gala dinner, and partake in lake cruising and other activities."

Ideas Three-day teambuilding and incentive

Day1 Zurich – Thun – Gruyères – Montreux

Upon arrival in Zurich, participants take a quiz related to the Swiss International Air Lines that has just flown them to the country. A second quiz on the Swiss Travel System is given when the group is on the way to Thun by train and boat.

At Thun, participants are divided into teams to play two traditional Swiss games – flag throwing and Talerschwingen (rolling a coin inside a bowl).

They then transfer by coach to Gruyères to visit a medieval village. Lunch follows, after which they visit the chocolate factory of Cailler. Teams then compete in yet two more games, shooting an apple with a bow and arrow, and hammering a nail into a piece of wood in as few blows as possible.

Participants then head to Montreux by overnight coach.

Day2 Montreux – Vevey – Lavaux – Lausanne

Participants depart in the morning by coach to the village of Vevey for a walking tour and a visit to the Alimentarium Museum of Nestlé.

During the tour of Vevey, the teams have to sample some milk and guess which was cow, soya and almond milk. They then have to try to weigh some cacao beans, and the team that manages to weigh closest to the required 187 grams wins.

Next, participants take the coach to the vineyards of Lavaux, a UN-

ESCO world heritage site. Here, they visit wine producer Domaine de la Daley's wine cellar, taste some wine, and after lunch, tour the vineyard.

At the wine cellar, teams will play a water game. They are each given an empty vessel marked to indicate a certain volume of liquid it should be filled up to, choosing five out of a number of bottles of different sizes, all filled with water.

Next, participants head to Lausanne by coach to visit the old town and taste local products. They again take a quiz about the city's facilities, before enjoying an unforgettable evening at The Olympic Museum.

Day3 Montreux – Gstaad – Glacier 3000 – Montreux

Participants take a train ride from Montreux to Gstaad on the Golden Pass Line. Upon arrival, they take a walking tour of the main street of Gstaad, enjoy the local specialties, and play the native instrument alphorn in the village.

Then, participants take the coach to Glacier 3000 to experience the new Peak Walk attraction. After lunch, four members from each team put on a pair of special skis designed for four people and race with other teams on a short course. Next is the five-hole snow golf for three members from each team.

Participants return to Montreux by coach. They take a boat ride to Chillon Castle for a gala dinner.

Itinerary by SCIB in collaboration with Kuoni Group Travel Expert



The historic centre of Lausanne

Need to know



New convention centre to open in Bellinzona

Cast – Event Arena, a new congress centre will open in autumn this year in Castione-Arbedo, Bellinzona.

The new centre with modern equipment and design will accommodate up to 540 people in 1,525m² of space. It will become the key location for hosting congresses, fashion shows,

product launches and other events in the area.

The Ristorante located on the ground floor will also provide an additional 180m² of space to accommodate 96 guests, suitable for breakfast gathering, business lunches and banquets.

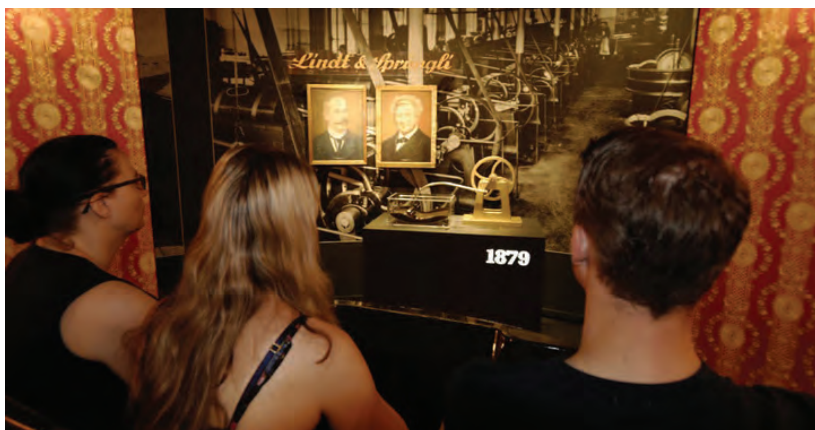
Be adventurous with Swiss chocolate

The Swiss Chocolate Adventure is a new attraction at the Swiss Museum of Transport in Luzern. The 25-minute ride takes visitors to learn interesting facts about the discovery, origin, production and transport of Swiss chocolate.

Through the 10 stops of the tour, visitors learn the entire value creation and transport chains, from the cultivation of the cocoa bean and the transport to Switzerland up to the manufacture and sale of the finished chocolate product.

Throughout the ride, visitors will not only see pictures and films and listen to the explanation, but also smell, feel and taste the chocolate product.

The multimedia voyage is conducted in German, but visitors can listen to the translation in French, Italian, English, Spanish and Chinese through a multi-lingual translation device.



Meet the Queen of the Mountains

Trekking Team AG has a hiking programme for adventurous groups to take on Mount Rigi, also known as Queen of the Mountains. The group will take off-the-beaten-tracks and, with the help of maps and compasses, try to find the most direct route to the defined destination.

In teams, the group also needs to solve creative, entertaining and challenging tasks along the way. All activities require strong teamwork.

The programme is available from May to October and requires a minimum of 12 participants.



Lugano urban trail thrill

Companies that are interested in teambuilding activities can take part in Foxtrail, an urban travel hunt that also serves as an alternative way to discover the city.

The teams (from two to six people) have to “follow the trails of the fox”, on foot or by public transport. To reach the fox, participants must solve complicated missions and decipher coded messages.

Also known as Galileo Galilei, the trail has a duration of two and a half hours, but there is also a shorter 90-minute alternative.

The trail is not targeted only at travel enthusiasts and sun lovers. The teams will be able to soak in the culture and history of the city, complete with breathtaking views of Monte Brè and Monte San Salvatore.

Participants will need to decipher the meaning of ancient inscriptions, follow a ‘bloody’ trail and request for information via text messages.

The trail starts at the train station or city centre and concludes at Piazza Riformazione.

Ryoichi Matsuyama

He became president of Japan National Tourism Organization in October 2011, months after the Tohoku earthquake and disaster, and led Japan to prominence. Watch him hit 20 million arrivals by 2020 with mega events in Japan's pocket. But far from rushing headlong into things, **Raini Hamdi** finds Ryoichi Matsuyama a pragmatic leader with an eye for sustainability

Were the months after the tsunami the biggest challenge in your illustrious career?

It was one of the most difficult challenges. I have been in the private sector for some time now and there have been so many ups and downs (laughs). But the tsunami was very serious, because of the number of lives lost, and the nuclear radiation fears. Even when we had said Japan was safe to visit, no one believed us. But we kept giving only the facts and we invited 1,000 journalists and travel agency people to see Japan for themselves. As well, celebrities like Lady Gaga – she loves Japan and she was spreading the good message for us.

Eventually we were able to restore the confidence of visitors, including those from countries such as Singapore and Germany who were sensitive (about safety). Arrivals went up drastically and we hit 10 million in 2013. We had 8.6 million in 2010, 6.2 million in 2011 (disaster year), 8.3 million in 2012, 10 million in 2013 and 13.4 million in 2014.

Was visa easing the main reason why Japan rose to such prominence in the last couple of years?

It was a combination of factors, including our effort to restore the confidence of people to visit Japan; Abenomics, which saw the devaluation of the yen and made Japan cheaper for people to visit; a growing middle-class in Asia; visa facilitation on our part of course; but I believe a major driving force was that the private sector – airlines, hotels, meetings sector, etc – was eager to collaborate with one another to bring back arrivals. In the past they operated more on an individual basis; the disaster brought them closer together.

Regarding the visa easing, was that a

government initiative or did you have to push for it?

We assessed the different visa requirements for different countries and tried to streamline them.

But of course we have always to work with other government departments and approach visa facilitation with the perspective of having a balance: ease visas on the one hand but maintain law and order on the other, making sure the 'right' people are coming in and they don't stay longer than they should.

Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia now enjoy visa-free status and we are now seriously working to try and get this facility for Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines – but it will take time. India and China now have multiple-entry visa status, from single entry previously.

We are also trying to speed up visa processing and are studying to implement electronic visas but again, this will take time.

So now your task is to double the 10 million to 20 million by 2020.

Yes, as you know, Japan is hosting the Olympic Games in Tokyo in 2020. We have also successfully bidden for the 2019 Rugby World Cup (which will be held in 12 venues across Japan) and, in 2021, we will host the World Masters Games (in Kansai – the event is an international multi-sport athletic competition which gives the middle-aged and older generation the opportunity to participate).

With the Olympics you can draw some 10 million visitors. With the World Masters, 26 million, sometimes even more.

So there is a chain of mega events and everyone can take this opportunity to



visit Japan. We also believe these events will expand and strengthen the image of Japan as a place for meetings.

How so?

Actually right after we won the bid to host the Olympics, in September 2013, Japan secured four big events with more than 6,000 delegates, outbidding strong countries including Singapore.

I think such events demonstrate to planners our capability to host and organise meetings. For example, we took over the IMF/World Bank meetings in 2012 when they had to move from Cairo. Such meetings are huge and complicated; normally it takes four years of preparation but we did it in two years.

So track record, the ability to perform, is important for MICE.

Studies have shown it isn't necessary that host countries of mega events actually benefit from them.

Yes, there is an argument that they require lots of investment in the construction of the necessary infrastructure, that afterwards the economy drops. Sometimes that happens, especially to emerging countries, but in the case of Japan,

we hosted the Olympics in 1964 and there is some legacy remaining. Then, we had invested heavily in building freeways, bullet trains, stadiums, hotels, so for the Tokyo Olympics, apart from a new stadium, we will try to use the existing facilities as much as possible. Our Olympics investment isn't huge, estimated at ¥340 billion (US\$2.5 billion), compared with more than US\$13 billion for the London Olympics. Of the ¥340 billion, ¥150 billion will go towards building the new stadium.

Is your stadium as designy as the Bird's Nest in Beijing?

(Laughs) It is designed by Zaha Hadid and at first it was so fabulous, but we found it cost too much! So we had to modify it. There are lessons from the past which we can learn from. For example, when Nagano hosted the winter Olympics (in 1998), it built huge facilities and faced serious financial trouble afterwards. Mega events create a good impact but the key is to pay attention to what happens after the event – how do we persuade people to come back as repeat visitors? This is what we are now seriously discussing with Visit Britain, with which we signed

an MOU. London, which successfully hosted the Olympics in 2012, is also a mature city like Tokyo and there is much we can learn from it. London used the Olympics as a means to change the image of Great Britain as a friendlier destination. Los Angeles was so commercial, with lots of sponsorships. Barcelona used it to build a new city. We are discussing with the many stakeholders in Japan what legacy we want the Tokyo Olympics to leave behind. One is perhaps as the most handicapped-friendly Olympics. Another is as a model of how a mature city can successfully host the Games without the normal heavy investments that come with them, and one that is able to sustain the benefits after the event. 2020 is a milestone, it's not the end.

There are not enough rooms as it is in Tokyo. What are you doing about it?

We are persuading hotel developers to come in and build more hotels, especially more four-star hotels. We don't give incentives; we present the facts and they can see for themselves how attractive it is to build. Price increase is a worry but presently Tokyo hotels are two-thirds of London prices, so they are fairly cheap.

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Learning moments



The **ACTE Education Forum** held its Singapore edition on April 30 at The St. Regis Singapore, with Singapore Institute of Technology's David L Jones (left) leading the event with a keynote presentation on the impact of sharing economy on the business travel industry



Ce La Vi's Kirk Martin
with TTGmice's Paige
Lee Pei Qi

Party life

Once Ku De Ta, the popular party destination at the top of Marina Bay Sands Singapore is now known as **Ce La Vi**. *TTGmice* joins the launch party and shares a moment with Kirk Martin, CEO of the venue. Photos by *Hannah Koh*



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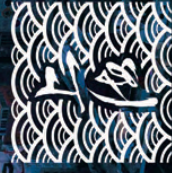
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