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Fun with food

Some eat to live while others live to eat. I fall into the latter category, which should hardly be a surprise since I'm a child of the food paradise that is Singapore.

Interestingly, it seems that almost everyone I know in the MICE business has an equally deep passion for food. Conversations on recent trade events often bear food recollections: the impressive row of ice blocks housing fancy crustaceans at The South Beach's late-night party for ITB Asia delegates; the extravagant jacuzzi tub of champagne bottles in the Extreme Wow Suite during W Singapore Sentosa Cove's MICE showcase; the fresh produce free for anyone's picking at the Korea Tourism Organization Singapore Office's corporate dinner at The Westin Singapore; the food truck spectacular at AIME's opening reception.

Food conversations are fun, and gastronomic activities bind us all. I'm sure you will agree that some of the most memorable trade gatherings are so because they offer a great dining experience. So it is of little surprise that food themed activities are popular with planners of teambuilding and ice-breaker events.

Times have evolved and while activities that begin with a trip to the local market and followed by a fun cook-up back at a hotel's kitchen seem exciting five years ago, today's programmes are far more challenging. There is a programme that challenges teams to concoct tasty smoothies and plan a cut-throat marketing campaign for their creation within a tight time frame. There is one that encourages social interaction over a game of dessert hunt.

Oh, and if your delegates are ready to get messy with food, there's one that involves creating a team painting using not paint but liquid ingredients!

Hungry for more ideas? Turn right to our cover feature on page 18. We've sniffed out some fun ideas from around Asia to whet your appetite.

Enjoy!



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COVER STORY

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No doubt, food binds us all and some of the most memorable gatherings are so because they offer a great dining experience. Culinary themed activities that bond teammates and break the ice for newbies are not a new concept, but fresh and interesting spins on such programmes have emerged. *TTGmice* reporters sniff out what's cooking for corporate groups here in Asia

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We love

A new and appealing aura

Creating Singapore's next F&B institution is Aura, located in an institution itself, the newly-minted National Gallery which was formerly the City Hall and Supreme Court.

While The National Gallery will open November 24, Aura has lifted its curtains on a four-in-one dining destination, giving event planners a new venue to salivate over. It is the only F&B outlet in the commanding building, whose grand, historic architecture, especially when lit at night, will wow clients even before they even so much as step into the place.

We made an impromptu visit for drinks at the Aura Sky Lounge at around 10.30pm recently and, take our word for it, the all-embracing, magical views of the Padang and Marina Bay skyline from the outdoor terrace on this rooftop (Level 6) alone makes this a must for any planner who wants to give his or her group an uplifting vision of what this tiny country, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, has achieved. The outdoor space reminds us of the likes of a crowded SEVVA in Hong Kong – it's so 'in', so exhilarating, so trendy.

The whole Sky Lounge can easily seat 300pax. You can hire the whole space; if not, it holds three potential areas to fit groups or parties of all sizes and all occasions: Raw Bar (11.30-14.30 daily), which offers a free flow

buffet of Mediterranean food for only S\$18** (US\$13**) per pax; Tea Lounge (14.30-17:00 daily), which offers classic European hi-tea; and Lounge Bar (17:00 to 01:00 daily), which offers after-work drinks and deluxe bar grub.

On Level 5 is Aura Restaurant, a 90-seat Italian restaurant led by Beppi de Vito, who has also just opened ilLido Bali and Osteria Art Singapore. A quick glimpse at Aura Restaurant shows a beautiful venue. Alas, we did not eat there that night and could not vouch for its taste, however from what we know of de Vito's outlets, expect reasonable prices and homely recipes in a world-class venue.

A press release said every dish is unique only to Aura (and not de Vito's other restaurants) and guests are encouraged to share dishes in a casual family style so typical of Singapore eating-out. There is also a wine list of over 500 different labels, old world wines and arguably one of the city's best collection of Italian heavyweights.

Aura Restaurant is opened daily from 12:00-14:30 and from 18:30-22:30. A four-course dinner set menu is priced at S\$68** per person, just to give an idea of pricing.

For reservations, call (65) 6866-1977 or email: book@aura.sg. Aura is also on www.facebook.com/aura.nationalgallery.

Suntec serves up highly customised banqueting options

Keen on improving the way banquet services are offered to event planners, Suntec Singapore Convention & Exhibition Centre is rolling out today an extensive collection of customisable dinner menus that offer clients 168 dishes to choose from.

Twenty-one eight-course Chinese menus across seven series have been created, with the cheapest priced at S\$788** (US\$554**) per table. Each series will offer two Halal menu options, while one will cater for vegetarians.

Event planners are able to swap dishes from menus in the same series at no extra cost, while changes made between menus from different series will come with "a little bit more money", said Suntec Singapore's CEO, Arun Madhok.

Describing the new banquet programme as a revolutionary one in the MICE business, Madhok said: "Venues in the market today typically offer only two or three set menus with fixed items. We see the opportunity to do things differently and better by giving price-sensitive clients who appreciate good food the chance to provide their delegates with a great dining experience at Suntec Singapore, but without breaking the bank."

"Industry colleagues have told me that my new banquet programme is suicidal for business; how could the kitchen manage so many dining options for multiple large-scale events, they asked.

"But this is not an issue for us, as our kitchen operations have been computerised and optimised with new processes," he said.

He elaborated: "Take for instance our new induction ovens which can cook many dishes at once but are safe and use less heat, which also brings down electricity usage as our air cooling system will no longer need to work as hard. We have also reduced the number of suppliers, keeping only the top quality ones and employing a Just In Time delivery system to keep produce fresh and use less storage space."

To spread demand away from the popular Friday and Saturday evenings, Suntec Singapore is offering a discount of S\$50** per table for banquets hosted on Sundays to Thursdays.

All menus come with free-flow soft drinks and Chinese tea, fresh flower centrepieces, one VIP table service per 50 tables booked, and other perks. Terms apply. – **Karen Yue**



Keio Plaza Hotel Tokyo unveils refreshed banquet facilities

The five-star Keio Plaza Hotel Tokyo has unveiled its new event facilities on the 47th floor, following a month-long renovation that cost 300 million yen (US\$2.5 million).

The five banquet rooms on the level were updated with new interiors, while Akane room was expanded from 45m² to 65m² and Aozora room was fitted with improved lighting systems. Works were also done to the foyer, karaoke room entrance and restrooms on the 47th floor, as well as the banquet rooms on the lower levels which now offers wireless and local area network facilities.

Beside function rooms on the the top floor, the hotel has multipurpose venues on the fourth and fifth floors.

Hotel spokesperson, Sunaho Nakatani, told *TTGmice* that the renovations were made to improve the hotel's product for events and maintain the high quality of venues and experiences the hotel is known for.

"Our banquet and event facilities are very popular and our largest venue, the Concord Ballroom, enjoys a high occupancy of 90 per cent throughout the year," added Junko Saito, deputy director of marketing and PR.

The hotel hosts some 80 academic and international conventions a year and is regarded



as either the first or second top hotel venue for events in Japan, with its closest rival being a property in Kansai, according to Saito.

Saito said: "Our hotel is among the best in Shinjuku and Tokyo, and despite our room rates rising every year, we've been able to enjoy a healthy average occupancy rate of 89 to 90 per cent. Our rooms aren't cheap, so we work hard to make sure experiences and service standards are excellent. Our marketing efforts now are aimed at strengthening the hotel's branding." – **Karen Yue**



The Residence arrives at Kota Kinabalu

Hyatt Regency Kinabalu has launched a stylish multifunctional event venue centred around a show kitchen, called The Residence. It can accommodate up to 160 guests, is furnished with state-of-the-art audio-visual technology, and complements the renovated Tanjung Ria Kitchen, The Lounge and The Poolside Bar.

The multipurpose layout of The Residence enables event organisers to use the facility for various purposes, ranging from small parties to VIP dinners. The venue can also be combined with Tanjung Ria Kitchen for larger gatherings of up to 300 people.

Bennett Peter, director of sales and marketing, said the new offering was necessary because "the hotel customer of today needs, demands and expects flexibility and versatility in experiences and service".

Arifin Darmawan, general manager of the Hyatt Regency Kinabalu, said: "The new facility exudes an aura of elegance and relaxation with its contemporary yet classic décor, complemented by natural daylight window panels. With show kitchens and multiple rooms, the focus is on one-on-one guest engagement and personalising the entire hotel experience."



Meeting-friendly Novotel Manila Araneta Centre now part of Quezon City's skyline

Quezon City in the Philippines welcomed the Novotel Manila Araneta Centre last month.

The 24-storey hotel, located 15km away from Ninoy Aquino International Airport and sited within the Araneta Centre lifestyle complex, features 401 rooms and suites, the largest number in a single property in Quezon City.

The hotel boasts six meeting rooms, a boardroom and a state-of-the-art pillarless grand ballroom, which can accommodate up to 1,200 guests. A 2,500m² landscaped outdoor garden area is also available for cocktail events, soirees and fashion shows.

Amenities include the In Balance Wellness Centre, which houses a gym, spa and swimming pool; the Gymboree Kids Area, which caters to young guests; and the executive sky-lounge, which offers a 360-degree view of the city.

For dining options, there is the Food Exchange Manila, a 208-seat restaurant serving an array of international cuisine at live cooking stations, and the Gourmet Bar, which serves signature drinks and freshly-brewed coffee, with a focus on using organic produce grown and harvested from a farm in San Mateo, Rizal.



HOT DEALS

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A minimum booking of 40 materialised guestrooms per night is required, and black-

out dates apply.

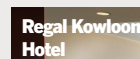
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Regal Kowloon Hotel

This business hotel in Tsimshatsui is offering its Business Suites as meeting venues. Equipped with a separate meeting space, the suite can be tailored for intimate business gatherings.

A meeting package for the business suite features exclusive perks such as Executive Club Lounge privileges, complimentary Wi-Fi Internet access in suite for all delegates, banquet service attendant, free mini-bar items and late check-out at 18.00. Meeting



amenities will also be provided. Set lunches and dinners are available at special prices.

Package is valid till March 31, 2016. Terms apply.

To book, email stay@kowloon.regalhotel.com or call (852) 2313-8629.

Klapsons Bangkok keen on corporate market

Luxury serviced residence provider klapsons has opened in Bangkok with a stronger pitch for the long-term travel market.

Klapsons The River Residences Bangkok contains 77 spacious rooms and suites, spread between one and three-bedroom units, on the 23rd to 31st floors of The River Condominium along the Chao Phraya River.

Amenities include a riverfront infinity pool, two outdoor lap pools, two multi-purpose outdoor courts and a sky garden.

The property is targeting expats relocating to Bangkok and expatriated Thais returning home. Key markets are MNCs and financial institutions, said managing director, Alex Loh.

The sales team is also approaching various embassies and governments. – **Michael Mackey**

HRS rolls out corporate app for clients

Hotel solutions provider HRS has launched a mobile app for its corporate clients, allowing users to search for hotels based on pre-set locations, and access information such as maps, negotiated rates and room availability.

New features will also soon be added to the HRS Corporate App, such as a payment function with company-specific options, including pre-defined payment and billing methods. Hotel bookings can also be entered into the mobile device calendar.

Todd Arthur, managing director, HRS Singapore, said: "Mobile channels are a great help, especially on business trips, because last-minute changes to the schedule often call for new travel planning to take place. With the HRS Corporate App featuring pre-stored information and specific corporate rates of importance for the business traveller, we make mobile bookings a lot easier for our customers."

The app is available for iOS and Android smartphone devices. – **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

New product video captures views of Perth

The Perth Convention Bureau has produced a Perth Product video to showcase the new infrastructure developments in the destination, following years of rapid expansion in the city.

Featured on the video are the highly anticipated projects, Elizabeth Quay and Perth City Link. The Elizabeth Quay development will open its public spaces at the end of 2015. A development closely watched by MICE players, Elizabeth Quay also houses the upcoming Ritz Carlton (2018) and the nearby DoubleTree by Hilton Perth Waterfront (2017), and sits minutes away from the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre.

In addition, Crown Perth has transformed into a fully-integrated resort with two hotels while work is progressing on the six-star, 500-room Crown Towers, due to open early 2017.

Colony, The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore

Rachel AJ Lee's palate is taken on a culinary voyage of Singapore's local food in a five-star location



Taking over the space formerly occupied by the Greenhouse restaurant in the swanky Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore is Colony. The name of the restaurant pays homage to the treacherous sea voyage that the British once undertook when travelling to the South-east Asian region for trade in the 18th century.

The atmosphere is warm and casual, yet opulent and streamlined at the same time. Vintage maps and postcards adorn the walls behind brown banquettes and armchairs, attempting to take the diner back in time to a bygone era.

MICE application

In addition to The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore's more than 3,250m² of boardrooms, meeting rooms and pillarless grand ballroom, private functions can also be held at the 260-seat Colony. Small residential meeting groups have the option of enjoying lunch at Colony as part of the hotel's meeting package. Advanced notice is required.

Meeting planners looking for a venue within the hotel to organise social events can hire the entire restaurant. A minimum spend of S\$20,000 (US\$14,412) for lunch or S\$25,000 for dinner is required. Should there be budget constraints or the need for smaller spaces, the restaurant can be partitioned into three: left wing (114 pax), centre (32 pax) and right wing (114 pax).

The buffet menu at Colony rotates on a daily basis and can be tweaked and customised upon clients' requirements.

F&B concept

There are eight different open concept kitchens with "live" culinary showmanship. For example, there was a chef searing foie gras (which is a must-try by the way) while another was shucking briny oysters from Normandy.

Colony is split into two sections, the "cold" area – where the desserts, cold cuts, cheeses,

salad and variety of crustaceans can be found. The "hot" area is tucked at the back of the restaurant, and that's where I spent most of my time trawling through the grilled and stewed Western meats, local wok-fried delicacies, Asian noodle dishes, steaming baskets of dumplings, and spiced meats and Indian breads from a traditional Tandoor oven.

I ended the sumptuous buffet on a high note at The Patisserie, where an array of local and international sweet treats is seductively displayed. Alas, I had to wave the white flag after my first round. I did try two flavours of ice cream – both the chendol and gula Melaka were delicious – and two squares of handmade dark chocolates.

Colony serves breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea and dinner daily, and vintage Champagne brunch on Sundays. In the evenings, there is also a roving mixologist who will push a cart around to craft tableside speciality cocktails such as Bengal Brew and Governor's Invitation.

Service

Impeccable. I was milling about in the lobby as I was early for Colony's launch and within five minutes two of the hotel staff approached me to ask me if I was already being taken care of.

Within Colony, there was no shortage of chefs behind the various culinary stations and they were quick to refill empty woks or whip something up for me. The service staff made sure my water glass was constantly refilled.

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Email: rc.sinrz.restaurantreservations@ritzcarlton.com
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Silver lining for Malaysia, Thailand amid currency woes

By **S Puvaneswary and Michael Mackey**

Malaysian and Thai currencies are depreciating but there are signs that the MICE sector could benefit from the market turmoil.

In spite of the combined onslaught of a depreciating currency and sluggish economy, MICE operators in Malaysia are seeing strong bookings from Chinese groups for 2016. The bookings have been driven by improved air links from China and visa exemption to be granted for Chinese groups of 20 pax and more from October 1 to March 31, 2016.

Air China resumed four-times weekly services between Beijing and Kuala Lumpur from October 25, complementing the daily services of Malaysia Airlines and AirAsia X. China Southern Airlines will commence thrice-weekly services from Guangzhou to Kota Kinabalu from December 1.

Li Haijiao, account manager of Beijing-based Comfort MICE Service, told *TTGmice*: "Better direct air accessibility and visa waiver for groups will definitely help to promote (Malaysia). Air China also has a good reputation and is a trusted brand among Chinese travellers."

Chinese buyers are showing a stronger interest in Malaysia, observed Winnie Ng, deputy general manager of Kuala Lumpur-based Pearl Holiday Travel & Tour, which participated in a recent roadshow organised by Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau to major Chinese cities.

She said: "(Chinese) government officers are limited to a budget of US\$110 per room night in Malaysia. With good rates and promotions from five-star hotels in the capital, many (Chinese MICE) are opting for five-star properties.



Li: direct air links from China helps

"We have a confirmed booking of between 1,500 to 1,800 pax from a multi-level marketing company from China for May 2016 and another multi-level marketing company for 3,300 pax in July 2016."

Likewise, KL Tan, general manager of Borneo Trails Tours & Travel in Kota Kinabalu, is also seeing strong forward incentive bookings to Kota Kinabalu from

China for 2016.

Over in Thailand, the MICE sector might see some mild benefits from the depreciation of the baht, buyers at IT&CMA in October told *TTGmice*.

A weaker Thai baht will work in the favour of the Thai MICE sector "a little bit", especially in the context of other regional currencies, said Aleizer Yrrah Jasmin, MICE travel consultant with Philippines-based Corporate International Travel and Tours.

Longhaul buyers like Jorge Vasques Rodrigues, administrator/executive officer of Lisboa-based Sotto Tour Travel Engineering, also views a weaker Thai currency "an advantage".

However, some trade members are not convinced that a cheaper Thailand would

suffice to reboot its plateauing MICE sector, especially in an era of heightened security worries in the wake of the recent Erawan bomb attack in Bangkok.

Liam Crawley, chief financial officer, Wyndham Vacation Resorts Asia-Pacific, pointed to a more immediate financial problem a dipping baht brings. "Hotels will be negatively impacted should they incur costs not in Thai baht."

On the other hand, despite the Singapore dollar surging to a new high against the ringgit, Malaysia appears less desirable as a destination for Singapore MICE groups, with consultants reporting slower business events bookings from the Lion City this year.

RA Jits Travel & Tours managing director, Harminderjit Singh, said the strong Singapore dollar and good flight access out of the country had resulted in corporate companies looking further afield for their events, with many opting for Thailand.

Similarly, Raaj Navaratnaa, general manager at Johor Bahru-based New Asia Holiday Tours & Travel, has received many enquiries from incentive clients in Singapore looking at destinations such as Myanmar, Philippines and Vietnam. Its inbound business from Singapore, on the other hand, dipped 30 per cent drop this year.

"A meeting group of 600 pax from Singapore planning to have their meeting in Kuala Lumpur in end-September cancelled because of the (Red Shirt) rally," said Navaratnaa, adding that they went to Thailand instead.

He added that the main challenge for Malaysia is a lack of immediate new products to impress repeat corporate clients from Singapore.



Rodrigues: Thailand is more affordable now

Japanese Nobel laureates to help draw global events

Japan is aiming to take advantage of its traditional strengths in technology, sciences and medicine to attract more MICE events and particularly hopes to win more business from Europe and North America.

"We have many Nobel Prize winners in these areas and we feel that the opportunity to meet and learn from them will attract participants from all over the world," said Katsuaki Suzuki, executive director of the Japan Convention Bureau.

"We are (telling) potential delegates from abroad that they will be able to meet with Japanese scientists and researchers," he said.

Leveraging the appeal of these experts, the Japan National Tourism Organization

(JNTO) has introduced the use of these experts as conference ambassadors to promote the country.

"At the moment, we have 21 university professors who serve as ambassadors and the scheme has had some success," said Suzuki.

However, he admitted that some issues must be overcome before Japan's MICE sector can take advantage of its unique position.

"Firstly, there is not enough support – financial and human resource – for organisers of conferences and events," he said. "(The human resource limitation) is partly due to a lack of people with the

necessary English language skills."

Now that solutions are being devised to overcome these challenges, Suzuki believes the sector holds potential for Japanese companies. He noted that incentive travel, particularly from South-east Asia, holds huge potential.

"Those economies are developing rapidly and the JNTO is strengthening its marketing in those areas, such as through the opening of our Jakarta office last year."

Ultimately, markets further afield in Europe and North America are his prime targets. – **Julian Ryall**



Suzuki: aiming for more events

Spend optimisation takes priority as global financial crisis looms

By Mimi Hudoyo

Travel managers are looking to optimise travel budgets instead of simply slashing them as talks of a likely global financial crisis heat up.

Amarnath Lal Das, general manager India Travel, Accenture, told *TTGmice*: “We cannot change travel policy every time, although we do review them from time to time. We are now moving cautiously to focus on cost/spend optimisation.

“Say, I have a one-day meeting. I will go and return (on the same day), thus saving room cost. Downgrading myself from a five-star (hotel) to four-star will also get me savings.”

Alvan Aiau, vice president global sales & program management, Asia Pacific of Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CWT), noted that companies are no longer just fixated on travel expenses.

“Globally companies are tightening (travel budgets), but they are also thinking about what returns they will get from business trips,” he said. “You can cut cost and stop travelling, or you can think about what the return on travel investment is.”

Aiau said CWT has done a study on the travel ROI. “It gives companies insights on whether travellers achieve what they set out to do on their travels,” he said.

“We have found that when travellers plan in advance and plan more meetings in a single trip, they usually achieve their objectives. This is about maximising the purpose of their travels.”

Aiau added that many companies are in the business of people and a trip is necessary to achieve business objectives.

“Cutting cost and enforcing travel policy strictly helps but travel managers must now look beyond that,” he added.

For Credit Suisse, a consolidation of hotel partners is taken to achieve savings.

Lena Khoo, regional head of travel, Asia-Pacific of Credit Suisse, revealed: “We have consolidated the number of hotels in our programme. Having fewer hotels means we can put more business

into each property, thus giving us greater power to negotiate for better discounts.”

Khoo is also finding ways to trim hotel expenses by removing breakfast from room deals and have her travellers pay for that meal with their per diem allowance.

Offering a different view, Chris Reynolds, senior partner of UK-based 3SIXTY Global, said travel spend have actually been increasing. “For salespeople the best way to get out of a business crisis is to sell more. Hence, they are travelling more to get more business,” he remarked.



Khoo: more traveller volume into fewer hotel suppliers

{ In brief }

BESydney gets more funding

Sydney will be injecting another A\$1.5 million (US\$1.1 million) into Business Events Sydney (BESydney) between 2017 and 2021, after a strong return from their initial investment of the same value from 2014 to 2016.

CEO of BESydney, Lyn Lewis-Smith, noted that the initial investment had helped to secure 24 events worth more than A\$70 million in direct expenditure, and to activate the city precinct during the development of the new International Convention Centre Sydney and Darling Harbour precinct.

KTO to reward feedback contributors

Korea Tourism Organisation (KTO) is offering international meeting professionals a chance to win a trip to South Korea and other prizes through participation in the *Mega Survey Of Korea's Top Attractions* online event. Visit www.koreaconvention.org/eng/event/servey.kc.

{ 2015 Calendar }

November 2-5

World Travel Market,
London, the UK

November 17-19

IBTM World,
Barcelona, Spain

November 18

Pacific Area Incentives
& Conferences Expo,
Auckland,
New Zealand

December 9-10

IME,
Tokyo, Japan

CVBs must safeguard interest of event owners: Grimmer

CVBs need to start seeing themselves as customer representatives instead of being “official mouthpieces” lest they start losing their credibility, said Gary Grimmer, CEO of convention industry consultancy GainEdge.

Speaking to *TTGmice* on the sidelines of the ASEAN MICE Forum in Bangkok on September 29, Grimmer who is the former chairman of the board of the International Association of Convention & Visitors Bureau and former chairman of the Business Events Council of Australia, said: “I think a key (credibility) issue is that most CVBs are structured to be a representative (of their destination and suppliers). When CVBs represent the suppliers, they will always be protecting the supplier’s reputation regardless of the quality of service delivery.”

Providing an example of how CVBs can embrace the role of a customer representative, Grimmer said: “If I were representing a bureau, I would encourage people to visit

my website and critique the supplier’s service level. It is only then will CVBs be seen as being more transparent and credible.”

He added: “Suppliers are going to get angry when they receive bad reviews but that is the only way to force them to improve their services, or risk going out of business.”

Hugo Slimbrouck, director of strategic partnerships with Ovation Global DMC, also lamented that CVBs were “not working sufficiently together” with the DMC community which he said were the real experts on the ground.

Sharing this opinion during the opening panel session of the ASEAN MICE Forum, Slimbrouck said: “Very often CVBs would have the whole event plan drawn up on their own, then approach the DMC for sponsorship or to be part of the programme.”

Nevertheless, Grimmer underlined the

importance of CVBs, saying that “they are vital as they are our hope to developing government support”.

Citing Singapore as an example of a country with a strong CVB, he added:

“I like Singapore because it is an example of a modern nation with barely any natural resources. Singapore more than anybody else understands how vitally important it is to have conventions and exhibitions (contributing to its) economy.

“Singapore in general has a reputation for great service and (the Singapore Tourism

Board) can continue to encourage radical transparency and move towards engaging communication with consumers beyond providing services to meeting planners.” – **Paige Lee Pei Qi and Mimi Hudoyo**



Grimmer: feedback on supplier services must be encouraged

Opportunities flourish for multi-city events in South-east Asia

By Mimi Hudoyo

Destinations in South-east Asia could potentially cater to multi-destination business event programmes, particularly for small-sized incentive and conference groups with optional pre/post-show activities, concluded the panellists speaking at the ASEAN MICE Forum's opening session on September 29.

Sharing her observations at the session on ASEAN, a one-stop MICE wonderland, Pornthip Hirunkate, deputy CEO of Destination Asia Group and managing director-Thailand of Destination Asia, said multi-destination incentives were more popular with longhaul clients "who have come

"meetings nowadays are shorter, lasting one and a half days or two".

Although destinations in South-east Asia offer much cultural and historical charms, and are seeing new tourism infrastructure developments, Slimbrouck pointed out that the purpose of the corporate or association meeting – not tourism appeal – would drive destination choices.

Referencing her past experience as event manager of major global firms like Morgan Stanley, Sarah Randall, head of MICE Services of Centara Hotels & Resorts, said destination choices would depend on "the individual market segment and objective of the event, whether

it needs teambuilding, CSR elements or purely economic (achievements)."

Business meetings that cover several destinations in the region were more likely with roadshows, Randall said, adding that financial sector clients tended to focus on business

hubs like Singapore, Bangkok and Jakarta.

The three panellists believe complex logistics that come with multi-destination programmes will deter event planners. To minimise such challenges, Randall said hotels must help by providing a single point of contact for event planners.

What destinations in South-east Asia have going for them is the availability of convenient air links within the region, said the panellists. While destinations in the region are connected by several low-cost carriers, Pornthip said these are not options favoured by incentive winners. Instead, full-service regional carriers are preferred.

More Asian MNCs shift to global travel management system

More Asian multinational companies are cutting down on local TMCs in favour of a centralised global corporate travel management system for greater convenience and savings.

Singapore-based Applied Materials South East Asia awarded its travel management contract to Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CWT) in November last year and is now using a call centre in Poland.

The company's regional travel manager of global travel services, Winnie Liew, told *TTGmice* that using CWT helped because many of her travellers head to the US where they fly on Southwest Airlines whose best deals are not available in Asia.

"We need non-GDS carrier content, especially for Southwest Airlines in the US," Liew explained. "This prompted staff to buy direct from the airline's website and as a result we lost track of our travellers."

Swiss global financial company UBS had also recently replaced 13 TMC relationships in 13 markets with two in the US and Asia-Pacific, and set up four to five call centres across the world.

Debbie Winston, executive director, regional head of travel, Asia Pacific, commented: "A global travel programme offers better compliance. Online booking tools particularly drive better behaviour as the number of touches per transaction is less than 25. Disciplined bookers drive efficiency and bring savings."

However, travel managers pointed out that content gaps in Asia-Pacific, especially in air and hotel components in China and Japan, are limiting the potential for companies to move entirely to a centralised travel management system. – **Prudence Lui**



(From left) Destination Asia Thailand's Pornthip Hirunkate, Centara Hotels & Resorts Thailand's Sarah Randall and MCI Benelux Belgium's Hugo Slimbrouck

all the way from Europe or the US to this region and want to cover as (many destinations) as possible because incentives don't usually (return to the same region)".

She said these clients would do Thailand-Myanmar-Cambodia, Singapore-Bali or Singapore-Malaysia combinations.

For corporate meetings, multi-destination itineraries are possible when optional pre/post-show programmes are included, according to Hugo Slimbrouck, director of strategic partnerships, Ovation Global DMC.

Core programmes are unlikely to be held in more than one destination in South-east Asia, he noted, especially since

TTG Travel Awards celebrates 83 top performers this year

TTG Travel Awards 2015 celebrates 83 top performing travel and tourism companies and individuals in Asia-Pacific this year.

Eighteen new winners, including Gardens By The Bay for Best Themed Attraction, Etihad Airways for Best Airline – Business Class, The Westin Singapore for Best New City Hotel, and Myanmar for Destination of the Year, emerged across various categories.

Amid strong competition, 16 organisa-

tions were able to make remarkable comebacks into the awards. Among them were The Langham Hong Kong for Best City Hotel – Hong Kong and Suntec Singapore Convention & Exhibition Centre for Best Convention & Exhibition Centre.

Veteran organisations such as Qatar Airways (Best Middle Eastern Airline), Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (Best Convention & Exhibition & Bureau), Resorts World at Sentosa (Best Integrated

Resort) and Singapore Tourism Board (Best BT-MICE City) defended their titles with consecutive wins.

For the first time, the Awards also honored two industry partners – Jae Pil Sho, editor and publisher of TravelPress Korea and Chower Narula, managing director of World Media – for their lifelong contributions and immense dedication to the travel trade industry and TTG Asia Media.

Asia grows in priority for Switzerland Tourism

By Rosa Ocampo

Switzerland is raising its budget by 50 per cent to trap more MICE from Asia, one of its most successful source markets for meetings and incentive travel.

Urs Eberhard, head of markets, Switzerland Tourism, said part of the increased marketing spend will tap South Korea with plans to invite important buyers and travel agencies to the third Asia Trophy next year.

The Asia Trophy was launched last year to give Asian MICE buyers – a different market segment with different needs – live experience in Switzerland, apart from the existing and bigger Worldwide Trophy.

Despite Switzerland being pricey and the weakening of Asian currencies which make

the destination even more expensive, Eberhard said Asia's booming economy means corporations will continue sending their winners and top employees to incentive trips.

In fact, about three weeks ago, Switzerland hosted an 800 plus pax incentive group for a Singapore insurance company. And last March, it also hosted three incentive groups of 50 pax each from a Philippine-based pharmaceutical company.

"Switzerland as a prize has a huge value. Incentive participants feel that they are indeed very valuable," Eberhard explained.

He said that in Asia, India and South-east Asia are the "highest producers of incentive trips to Switzerland". Incentive groups from India will increase



New destinations in Switzerland will be promoted, including Laussane (above)

from 95 this year to 120 next year. The 70 groups from South-east Asia will grow to 100 to 110 next year. From 50 groups this year, incentive groups from China will double in 2016.

New destinations being promoted apart from the usual Zurich, Geneva, Jungfrau and Zermatt includes Ticino, Gallen, Lausanne and the scenic routes covered by the Grand Tour of Switzerland.

Jurg Schmid, CEO of Switzerland Tourism, said new

products opening next year will further enhance Switzerland as a destination for both leisure and MICE.

These include the opening of the extension of the FIFA world football museum in Zurich; Charlie Chaplin Museum in Montreux which will allot space for MICE; the Gotthard base channel, the world's longest railway terminal connecting northern Europe with the south; and the 50th year of the Montreux Jazz Festival in July 2016.



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Unconventional workshop in a conventional setting

MALAYSIA Tina Altieri, managing principal of Media Australasia Xchange, was invited to run a workshop on networking at the Malaysia Business Events Week in September where she used an actual lunch affair to offer valuable advice on maximising social activities.

Altieri's *Art of Networking* power-hour was presented in a banquet-style lunch and guests were allowed to enjoy their main course before she launched into her workshop.

Networking is more than just collecting business cards at a function and making small talk about the delicious food. It is about being a better "connector" and realising the value of building stronger relationships in business.

Role play demonstrations

revealed the importance of body language and the power of a vocal presence.

"Body language such as eye contact and hand gestures also play as important a role as listening and finding a connection with the other person. Too many people underestimate the power of the voice when doing business. It has a massive bearing on whether people trust us, believe us and want to do business with us," said Altieri.

The session was lively with participants breaking out of their comfort zone by waving their napkins in the air. At the end of the session, new friends were made, participants feasted well and brought home the latest tools and techniques on the art of networking. – **S Puvaneswary**



Sibos gets event delegates to spin for charity

SINGAPORE A local traditional game of spinning the top got delegates of the annual financial services event, Sibos, to pitch in for a charity drive that eventually raised 40,000 euros (US\$44,470) for Beyond Social Services, a non-profit organisation.

Beyond helps those from disadvantaged low-income backgrounds curb delinquency, escape the cycle of poverty, and become responsible citizens. To support Beyond,

SWIFT, organisers of Sibos, hosted a digital *Gasing* game where Sibos delegates pitched their skills against each other on screen. SWIFT donated 15 euros for every game played.

Sven Bossu, head of Sibos, SWIFT, said: "SWIFT has a long history of supporting local charities in each of our Sibos locations. We are thrilled that Sibos delegates got behind our *Gasing* initiative and generated the much needed funds for Beyond."

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Going for the gold standard



Experience from a lost bid in 2009 paves the way for a successful attempt by Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre this time around, writes **S Puvaneswary**

Event brief

The 128th International Olympic Committee (IOC) Session saw over 700 delegates gathering at Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre to discuss and decide on key policy issues under its authority. Decisions made during this conference included the election of the host cities for the 2022 Olympic Winter Games and 2020 Youth Olympic Winter Games.

Challenges

Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre learnt from its failure in 2009 when they first tried to secure the bid for the 125th IOC Session. This time, it used the experience to further enhance the bid submission in 2012 by working closely with Team Malaysia partners (Tourism Malaysia, Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau, Malaysia Airlines, Malaysia Airports Holdings and Kuala Lumpur City Council) to offer a very attractive conference package.

Alan Pryor, general manager of the venue, said: "It was also essential for the proceedings

Event
128 th International Olympic Committee Session
Organiser
International Olympic Committee in partnership with Olympic Council of Malaysia
Venue
Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre
Date
July 30 to August 3, 2015
Number of participants
700 delegates from over 100 countries

to be streamed and broadcasted live to the Olympic House in Switzerland. However, during initial test runs, the connection to Switzerland had delays, intermittent pauses and line cuts.

"We (also) anticipated there would be organisational and coordination challenges and we knew preparations had to start early in order to ensure this event ran smoothly."

Solutions

To cope with the organisational and coordination challenges, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre began preparations in late 2012.

There were numerous teleconferences and

meetings with the Olympic Council of Malaysia and the International Olympic Committee. Internally, countless interdepartmental meetings were held to go over details. Many detailed briefings and site visits took place in advance, as well as brainstorming sessions to anticipate and plan for last minute requests and changes.

To cope with technological challenges, the centre's IT team sourced for an additional Internet Service Provider to handle the increased bandwidth demand to ensure a stable and seamless connection from Kuala Lumpur to Switzerland. This ultimately enabled the organiser to record, encode and transmit the proceedings in real time without interruption.

During the conference, the operations and security teams worked in tandem to ensure that VIP guests, including several heads of state, government heads and royalty, were appropriately hosted and attended to.

Key takeaways

Early preparations are crucial to minimise challenges and avoid setbacks during the conference. Also important is an enthusiastic and energetic team that has the patience to do relentless follow-ups, revealed Pryor.

He added: "We discovered that we needed to ensure that all equipment, cables and supporting technical infrastructure provided by third-party vendors were prepared in advance and tested before being set-up. This will help lessen the chances of event-day problems and avoid issues like sourcing additional bandwidth at the last minute."

"Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre's team – with their solid experience in big international events – proved to be the right choice for a smooth and very successful execution. Working together for many months was not only a pleasure, but an extremely successful partnership with a common goal. The delivery of an excellent event on all fronts!"

Sylvia Zulauf-Courtine, senior events manager protocol, events and hospitality services, International Olympic Committee

No group too large to handle

Open communication with all parties is critical if success is desired for an event with a large, global delegation, writes **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

Event brief

The IBM analytics sales, technical sales team, and its business partners were looking to come together for a four-day academy programme that would involve a total of 1,202 delegates from Asia-Pacific, Greater China, the Middle East, Africa and Japan.

Challenges

IBM needed a venue that could accommodate the large delegation, yet at the same time provide intimate meeting spaces that were customisable for breakout sessions.

Due to the sheer magnitude of people, there was a need to ensure that none of the delegates would be neglected. The event organisers needed a solution to ensure every delegate was well taken care of.

Solutions

The 3,896-room Sheraton Macao Hotel's extensive meeting facilities easily met the requirements as the hotel's pillarless grand ballroom could accommodate 5,000 guests in theatre-style – more than enough for IBM's delegation. Moreover, the hotel had six junior ballrooms in addition to 96 breakout rooms.

Nathan Nyvall, one of the event organisers from IBM, said: "The strengths of Sheraton Macao as a venue is that it is big enough to



Event
IBM Analytics Sales Academy 2015
Venue
Sheraton Macao Hotel, Cotai Central
Date
August 4-7, 2015
Number of participants
1,202 delegates



accommodate our group, the meeting space is nicely laid out and compact enough so that it is very easy to find the rooms. The digital signs (placed by the hotel) were also a great help when navigating our way around the property."

Nyvall added: "It's not easy to find hotels that are able to accommodate and run a world-class event for such a large number of people."

Keeping in mind IBM's concern about meeting the expectations of the delegates promptly, Sherwin Lucas, assistant director of event services, Sheraton Macao Hotel, Cotai Central, said they helped to customise a StarGroups booking system for this event. This ensured "seamless and open lines of communication" with the organisers, meeting planners, delegates and various internal teams.

Lucas said: "This system allowed delegates to manage their room bookings, have ac-

cess to event details and look up destination specific information about Macau through this one-stop web platform.

"It also enabled individual delegates to self-manage their preferences during their stay with us, their schedules and room arrangements as well as (submit) specific requests," he explained.

Key takeaways

Emphasising the importance of relationships, Lucas said: "It pays to build synergistic relationships and trust with meeting planners and event managers early in the game so that during the event, everyone is on the same page."

"We must also keep communication lines open among meeting planners, delegates and the hotel throughout the event to ensure quick response time to issues and unexpected requests. (That way), everyone is kept in the loop at all times," he added.



"It pays to build synergistic relationships and trust with meeting planners and event managers early in the game so that during the event, everyone is on the same page."

Sherwin Lucas, assistant director of event services, Sheraton Macao Hotel, Cotai Central

Delivering the wow factor

Careful attention to detail helps ICEM Regional to deliver a memorable and luxurious incentive for a new client, writes **S Puvaneswary**

Event brief

ICEM Regional was one of several outbound DMCs that received a request for proposal from Maxis, a local telecommunications company in Malaysia to organise a four-night incentive programme to Monte Carlo for their top dealers in the Enterprise Business Division.

While speaking with the Maxis committee, ICEM's head of sales Lim Pei Pei, gave feedback that a four-night stay in Monte Carlo would be "a little dry" and suggested instead that a programme could be created by combining two nights in Nice and another two in Monte Carlo. The last two nights in Monte Carlo would be a much grander experience than the first two, with stays in more exclusive properties and more high-end activities.

Challenges

ICEM was awarded the business in mid-April, leaving the company with less than three weeks to confirm flights and ground content within the allocated budget.

Adding to the stress, working with local suppliers in both countries was not easy due to the time difference, as Lim had to exercise patience while waiting for replies to queries.

Another challenge was that ICEM had never handled incentive programmes for Maxis in the past. Thus, Lim was clueless about the company's expectations. Being prudent, she went three nights ahead of the actual programme to run through the itinerary and check on the arrangements at hotels and restaurants.

She recalled: "In Monte Carlo, I went to a two-Michelin-star restaurant and had the chef change the duck breast dish from medium to

well-done because it looked too raw and will not agree with Asian taste buds.

"While checking on the hotel in Nice, I realised the lobby area was too small to place a hospitality desk. Thus, I changed this to a cocktail check-in on the rooftop."

Solutions

Lim worked closely with local agents throughout the planning of the itinerary and during the recce trip. She said: "They helped with the schedule and (took me to) places I should visit prior to the group's arrival."

ICEM was lucky because all seats with Turkish Airlines on delegates' chosen dates were confirmed.

The "wow" elements in Monte Carlo were created by getting stretch limousines to ferry delegates around, allowing delegates to enjoy a private dinner yacht cruise, wine pairing at a family-owned vineyard and flying them from Monte Carlo to Nice Airport.

"Delegates kept asking us what was next,

but we kept the details from them as we wanted it to be a surprise," said Lim.

Key takeaways

It was important to set the right expectations for delegates ahead of time, so they would know what to expect in foreign lands with different cultures, said Lim.

"For example, fine dining can take as long as three hours, which is different from what we (Asians) are used to. The tour manager would also brief participants on highlights of a particular restaurant and what they can expect."

We had a good working relationship with our partners and this contributed to a successful event.



Event
Maxis SME Business Partners' trip

Organiser
ICEM Regional

Client
Maxis

Destination
Nice and Monte Carlo

Date
May 8-14, 2015

Number of participants
27

"The overall programme was good and it helped us to deliver the unmatched experience to our business partners. The entire arrangement for this trip was also very well thought out and detailed. This trip was well planned."

Kevin Lee, Head of SME, Maxis

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Credit Suisse AG Singapore
Lena Khoo, Regional Head
of Travel



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Happy **BELLIES** *happy* **TEAMS**





No doubt, food binds us all and some of the most memorable gatherings are so because they offer a great dining experience. Culinary-themed activities that bond teammates and break the ice for newbies are not a new concept, but as time goes by, fresh and interesting spins on such programmes have emerged. *TTGmice* reporters sniff out what's cooking for corporate groups here in Asia

Team building

A pressure cooker

Organiser: Amari Watergate Bangkok

How this is served: Amari Watergate Bangkok's newest teambuilding activity, the Corporate Cook Up, is one hot hell of a pressure cooker as teams of eight to 10 pax are cajoled by an MC and a chef to prepare six different Thai dishes, each within 12 minutes. While half of the teams cook, the other half work on other challenges such as fruit carving, table setting, place card writing (in Thai) and flower arrangement. The pressure of cooking and presenting a meal is designed to bring them together, stimulate creative thinking and improve leadership skills – not to mention participants learn to cook authentic Thai dishes.

Available for morning or afternoon sessions, the activity can even include scripting and recording a radio ad to promote the food. Prices start from 3,500 baht (US\$99) per person. The package includes an English-speaking MC, chef, cotton chef aprons as keepsakes, chef hats, cooking ingredients, utensils, a team cookbook with step by step instructions and recipes, cooking venue and refreshments.

Where: A cooking venue within the hotel

Capacity: 20 to 150 people

Duration: Three hours

Contact: david.barrett@amari.com / (66 02) 653-9000



Celebrity dash

Organiser: Celebrity chef Emmanuel Stroobant

How this is served: For a real taste of what it's like to work under a celebrity chef, head to Saint Pierre restaurant, where Emmanuel Stroobant – who has multiple awards and books under his belt – puts aside his kitchen tools for a moment and consults with corporates the values they hope to foster. Values can include better planning, communication, crisis management, time management, multitasking and teamwork. He then whips up a specialised cooking programme, conducted in a professional kitchen shift setting at his very own restaurant, Saint Pierre.

Participants are assigned different kitchen tasks where



the aim is to prepare a three-course dinner, just as how chefs in a real gourmet restaurant kitchen function.

The cost of S\$1,000 (US\$720) per person (half-day) and S\$1,500 per person full day may sound as fat as foie gras, then again, how often does a star-studded chef open his kitchen to outsiders? Wouldn't it be exciting to get real tips on gourmet cooking while fostering team bonding?

Where: Saint Pierre restaurant's kitchen

Capacity: Eight to 14 people; senior management level or heads of department only

Duration: Half-day (four hours including one meal) or full day (eight hours including two meals)

Contact: info@saintpierre.com.sg / (65) 6438-0887

What's the most memorable food-themed corporate group activity for you?

"CIBTM 2015's ice breaker function at the brand new luxurious NUO Hotel, Beijing in early August. In line with NUO's brand identity, attendees got to taste some of Europe's finest gourmet ingredients and watched the hotel's experienced chefs demonstrate their culinary skills with accompanying special effects.

Some of the creations that are still fresh in my mind were the watermelon cubes and raspberries immersed in dry ice, intricately hand-sliced Spanish and Italian prosciutto, melted Swiss raclette cheese with potato hash, freshly smoked raw salmon paired with lemon bitters shots, and poached salmon with fish roe served in a mini ice-cream cone. Other pricey gourmet heavyweights included foie gras, caviar and assorted fine cheese.

This event was memorable because it was a really expensive experience and attendees waxed lyrical about it for a long time to come. Moreover, the dishes featured were seldom seen and tasted by the predominantly Asian audience."

Lee Choon Loong
CEO and president
DiscoveryMICE Malaysia

Master the Singapore Sling

Organiser: Raffles Hotel Singapore

How this is served: Celebrate the legendary Singapore Sling originally created at the Long Bar in Raffles Hotel Singapore by bartender Ngiam Tong Boon – by learning how to create the iconic cocktail. Bar-

tenders from Long Bar will disclose the secrets behind making the perfect tippie with splashes of gin, Dom Benedictine and Cointreau. Food and drinks will be provided.

Where: Long Bar, on at the second storey of Raffles Hotel Singapore

Capacity: 10 to 50 people

Duration: One hour

Contact: Jemimah. Apurado@raffles.com



What's the most memorable food-themed corporate group activity for you?

"We organised a TIC Kitchen Competition with teams from different departments. Participants were challenged to make dishes with a tight budget. Although cooking wasn't everyone's forte, they worked together and came up with fantastic ideas. The activity motivated teamwork and innovation and (fostered a) can-do spirit."

Quince Chong
Chief corporate
development officer
CLP Power Hong Kong

Creative juices

Organiser: Team Building Asia

How this is served: This is a smoothie making workshop that requires teams to produce 12 new and exciting smoothies supported with marketing campaigns in order to save the company.

Within a tight time frame, teams put their imagination, flexibility, planning and communication skills to the test while having fun. Teams also get to taste their creations during the wrap-up and successful teams will have to blend internal communication, resource management, distribution and marketing skills. They will also quickly discover that they will have to collaborate internationally if they are to achieve their goal.

Where: Any indoor venue across Asia

Capacity: 24 to 200 people

Duration: 150 to 180 minutes

Contact: enquiries@teambuildingasia.com /
www.teambuildingasia.com



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www.jiaxing.doubletreebyhilton.com



Team building

Pub crawling Japanese-style

Organiser: Fascinating Holidays, Singapore

How this is served: This is an activity that brings teammates together over a tippie or two and local dishes, while giving them a view into the lively *izakaya* culture. The *izakaya* is a traditional Japanese bar where food and drinks are served, and is loved by locals for celebrations, friendly get-togethers and quick after-work drinks.

The *izakaya* tour, run by a Bar Hopping Master who is fluent in English even

after consuming a considerable amount of alcohol, visits two or three *izakayas*, depending on the programme chosen.

Where: Ueno district, Tokyo, Japan

Capacity: One bar master can take a group of up to 10 people

Duration: Two hours

Contact: mice@fascinating.travel / www.fascinating.com.sg

Embark on a dessert safari

Organiser: Suntec Singapore Convention and Exhibition Centre

How this is served: The concept leverages on the insight that good food is a terrific catalyst for bringing people together. Following a Safari Map which “gamifies” the event, guests are enticed to strategise their routes to sample as many desserts as possible. Dessert Stations offer ready-to-go items as well as chefs preparing treats à la minute, creat-

ing an experiential event that engages all five senses.

Where: Any venue within Suntec Singapore

Capacity: Minimum of 100 pax for an optimal number of Safari Stations

Duration: One to two hours

Contact: sales@suntecsingapore.com / (65) 6337-2888

Get behind the bar for a day

Organiser: The Langham Hong Kong

How this is served: Mixologist Rajendra “Rush” Limbu will demonstrate to the group how to create cocktails. Participants work together to decipher the ingredients and attempt to replicate his creations using the same ingredients before conducting a blind taste test to see which is most like the original. Recipes are provided at the end of the class for delegates to make the drink at home.

Where: The Artesian bar, although other venues within the hotel can be offered

Capacity: A minimum group of 10 people

Duration: Flexible, but non-peak hours and weekdays are preferred

Contact: (852) 2378-9324 / tlhkg.sales@langhamhotels.com



What's the most memorable food-themed corporate group activity for you?

“When I first joined InterContinental Singapore, I was looking for an engaging platform to network with my team. I had to organise a teambuilding session within two weeks. Based on the hotel's brand positioning around the arts and heritage precinct of Bugis, Food Playground created a menu of locally-inspired dishes like *kueh dadar* (sweet coconut stuffed pancake roll) which the team had a lot of fun putting together. More importantly, the session allowed me to interact with and get to know my team members better in a relaxed environment.”

Rex Loh

Area director of sales & marketing, Singapore
InterContinental Hotels Group

A royal culinary experience from a bygone era

Organiser: Ping Anchorage Travel & Tours, Malaysia

How this is served: In this teambuilding programme, the kingdom of Langkasuka which once ruled over Malaysia's Terengganu, is recreated with food from ancient royal cuisine.

Conducted at Terrapuri Resort in Penarik, Terengganu, guests will go around the well-manicured garden where there are more than 100 types of vegetables to identify. Plucking of the necessary ingredients for the cuisine will also be done. They will then be taught to cook a few simple dishes, before dinner is served in the courtyard with *Mak Yong*, a royal dance performance from the olden days. Guests also have a chance to play musical instruments like the gamelan and learn the dance.

This is an exciting programme as it recreates the royal court in olden days and gives participants an insight of royal life in the past with an English speaking guide sharing stories about court life.

Terrapuri Resort has 22 villas, with architecture resembling old Malay palaces.

Where: On the resort's grounds

Capacity: Maximum 80 people

Duration: Four hours

Contact: sales@pinganchorage.com.my / Pinganchorage.com.my



Island cooking escapade

Organiser: Cookery Magic, Singapore

How this is served: Conducted in a 100-year old kampong on the rustic island of Pulau Ubin, off Singapore's coast, participants will literally get in touch with the roots of the island by harvesting herbs directly from a garden. Cooking will also be done in the garden, and participants will learn how to make the little known Malay dish, *nasi kerabu* (herbed rice) as well as *sambal belachan* (chilli paste) and butter prawns.

Where: Pulau Ubin, which is accessible via a 10-minute boat ride from Changi Jetty

Capacity: 20 to 80 people

Duration: Five hours

Contact: www.cookerymagic.com



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Team building



What's the most memorable food-themed corporate group activity for you?

"We recently created a Halloween-themed private event at our centre where we put together the creepiest-looking dishes from Eyeball Cake Pops and Tomb Desserts to Blood Shooters. We had all the equipment and facilities to make the special effects happen. The food was exquisite and innovative. Most of all, we had a lot of fun."

Arun Madhok

CEO

Suntec Singapore Convention & Exhibition Centre

When food and art collide to create a masterpiece

Organiser: The Stones – Legian, Bali

How this is served: Meeting delegates will be placed into groups and participants from each team will draw on a large paper canvas while being blindfolded. Participants will draw according to instructions and participants will take turns at completing the artwork. The team that creates the most beautiful piece wins a prize.

Good team work is required to complete this activity as the blindfolded member needs to trust his/her group mates' instructions while at the same time block out voices from competing groups.

The fun part of this activity is that instead of using real paint, participants will use ketchup, mustard sauce or cupcake icing that come in paint tubes.

More than just a refreshing teambuild-

ing activity, this works as a fun alternative to the usual meeting break. The meeting room or coffee break area, will be transformed into an Andy Warhol-esque studio called The Factory. Foods are displayed in containers shaped like paint cans, while sauces are presented in tubes. Ladders and artist palettes are used in serving canapés. Completing the art studio look, banquet staff are dressed in white jackets with paint stains.

Where: Hotel's function rooms

Capacity: 10 to 30 people

Duration: At least 30 minutes

Contact: sales@stoneshotelbali.com / www.stoneshotelbali.com



Kitchen adventure

Organiser: The Westin Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

How this is served: Pots, Pans and Palate is an innovative culinary teambuilding programme that promotes creativity, communication and teamwork by having people working together to create delicious dishes.

Participants will be divided into groups and each team will have to prepare a two- or three-course menu, supervised by a chef.

The kitchen will be set up like a marketplace where participants can grab the necessary ingredients for the recipe, and dash off to their cooking stations. Obstacles and surprises can be introduced into the programme to make it more exciting.

Variations of this programme can also include Superfoods-themed menus and a nutritionist providing a talk on healthy eating.

Where: Pool area

Capacity: 10 to 30 people

Duration: Three hours

Contact: Lenny.tan@westin.com / www.westin.com/kualalumpur

What's the most memorable food-themed corporate group activity for you?

"Member chefs had to cook a giant paella for 1,000 people to the beat of the drum while at Madrid Fusion Manila 2015 in April. It was to raise funds for the non-profit Sociedad Espanola de Beneficencia.

I loved it for bringing us chefs together as a team to do something different for a cause, something that we haven't done before. I love the end result – a giant paella that tasted so good even we ourselves were surprised."

Jerome Valencia

Member

Les Toques Blanches

Philippine Chefs Association



Serious business on a resort island

Jeju has ascended UIA's global rankings and it wants to grow MICE traffic from South-east Asia, writes

Paige Lee Pei Qi

While Jeju Island may be popular among Chinese event planners, the Jeju Convention and Visitors Bureau (JCVB) is courting the South-east Asian market with much fervour.

Describing the region as one that is "growing rapidly" for Jeju, JCVB's marketing director, Cho Jin Hun, noted that interest from Indonesia and Vietnam has been especially strong.

While the CVB does not track MICE visitor statistics, its overall visitor numbers showed a year-on-year increase of 13 per cent to 12 million footfalls in 2014. A record-breaking 2.8 million were from China, up 55 per cent from 2013.

Visitor numbers from Indonesia numbered 36,850, a 62 per cent year-on-year increase, while from Vietnam there were 32,000, up 76 per cent year-on-year.

Eager to intensify its destination marketing in other South-east Asian markets like Singapore and Malaysia, Cho said the CVB intends to participate in more international exhibitions and may explore organising fam trips.

He said: "Previously, many people thought Jeju was more for holidays. They did not know that the island can host meetings and conventions too. There are many good meeting facilities available, allowing the destination to offer a perfect mix of business and pleasure."

MC MICE'S managing director, Yang Minku, agrees. "Our (predominantly Chinese) clients are always

looking to mix business with leisure elements and that can easily be achieved in Jeju because (it is a) resort island," he said.

Fun factor aside, Jeju has experience in hosting large-scale global gatherings. Having hosted 85 international conferences last year, up from 82 in 2013, Jeju is now ranked 21st in the world and seventh in Asia according to the Union of International Associations 2014 Global Rankings.

It continues to welcome several prestigious global events this year, including the Annual Meeting of the World Aquaculture Society which saw 4,000 guests, and the International Conference on Diabetes & Metabolism which welcomed 1,500 delegates from around the world.

The resort-style convention centre ICC Jeju is easily the island's most popular meeting venue due to its size and availability of customisable space. The seven-storey venue, which is divisible into three spaces, can take up to 4,300 pax in theater-style and 3,500 in classroom-style. The 1,500-seat auditorium, built for concerts and performances, is also suitable for keynote presentations, conferences and seminars.

Kim Jay, MICE manager with ICC Jeju, said: "ICC Jeju is unique because of its location along the beach,

which allows delegates to also enjoy the view of the Pacific Ocean. The setting relaxes delegates even though they are in a convention centre, and this is something no other convention venues in the world can offer."

Acknowledging that convenience and accommodation quality are important considerations for business event planners and attendees, Jay pointed out that there are four "first-class" hotels within the Jungmun Resort Complex next to the ICC Jeju. They are the 429-key The Shilla Jeju, 500-room Lotte Hotel Jeju, 223-room Hyatt Regency Jeju, and the 90-key The Suites Hotel Jeju.

These luxury properties are also equipped with meeting facilities of their own.

E J Fieldhouse, Pacific World South Korea's country manager and director of Kim's Travel Service, told TTGmice that Jeju's "island culture and breathtaking views" have made it "especially attractive for incentive programmes".

The destination boasts three UNESCO World Natural Heritage sites – Hallasan Mountain Natural Reserve, Geomunoreum Lava Tube System, and Seongsan Ilchulbong Tuff Ring. The island's dramatic coastline can also be explored via the Jeju Olle, a series of coastal walking paths with different levels of difficulty.



The volcanic island of Jeju boasts dramatic natural landscapes

{ Insider }

Verena Han, sales and marketing manager of Yeha Tour Seoul, recommends three must-dos in Jeju

Dress up like a local

A trip to Korea will not be complete without trying on a *hanbok*, the country's traditional dress. Don't forget your camera because you will want to take this memory home to your family and friends.

Join a cooking class

To have a feel of the Korean culture, you must first experience its food. Having fun having a go at making the food yourself. Join a class and learn how to prepare various local favourites like kimchi, bulgogi, bibimbap, *tteok* (glutinous rice cakes) and even royal Korean cuisine.

Stay in a hanok

Break away from modern accommodation and experience the traditional housing and lifestyle at a hanok in some of the most famous hanok villages or hanokmaeul. Referred to as living museums, hanoks retain ancient Korean architecture and offer a memorable experience.



Kasan Tobang in Jeju offers quaint hanoks for stays

{ Spotlight }



Mega property to up Jeju's appeal

Jeju Island is the next destination to feature a Resorts World integrated resort. The US\$1.8 billion (S\$2.4 billion) development by Chinese developer Landing International Development and Genting Singapore will occupy 2.5 million square metres of land. It will be the largest property on the island.

Named Resorts World Jeju (RWJ), the property will open progressively from 2017. There will be hotels with more than 2,000 keys, with options including luxury villas and the island's first six-star hotel.

For recreation, RWJ offers a destination spa, a sprawling family theme park and a casino.

Also built with meeting planners in mind, RWJ boasts a convention centre

with fully equipped meeting and conference facilities.

The entire development is expected to be completed by 2019.

Welcoming the development at a groundbreaking ceremony earlier this February, Jeju governor Won Hee Ryong said: "Jeju is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the region. It attracts more than 10 million visitors annually. We are confident that this iconic resort will further strengthen Jeju island's reputation as a holiday paradise."

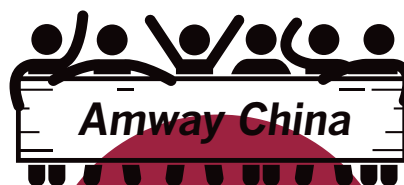
Genting Singapore's executive chairman Lim Kok Thay, added: "RWJ will be a game changer in Jeju. We believe it can help Jeju attain its goal of surpassing 15 million tourists by 2018."

{ Talking numbers }



65

The number of minutes taken to fly from South Korea's main gateway Incheon International Airport to Jeju International Airport



25,000

The number of people from direct-selling company Amway China who attended an incentive programme in Jeju last year



ARRIVALS

42.6

The year-on-year percentage increase in foreign arrivals to Jeju, hitting 3,328,316 footfalls last year



제주에

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Inspiring incentives

Efforts are made to highlight the fun side of business city Singapore and raise its attractiveness for incentive programmes

Enhancements to existing incentive programmes are necessary to appeal more to lucrative MICE markets. By **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

Singapore has her eye set on the lucrative incentive market from China and India, luring them with exclusive and premium tailored experiences through the *In Singapore Incentives & Rewards* (INSPIRE) programme.

The programme, which was revamped late last year, has since been extended to end 2015. Recent enhancements for the Indian programme include customised food menus and VIP access to popular attractions.

Chang Chee Pey, executive director, South Asia, Middle East and Africa, Singapore Tourism Board (STB), said: "The revamped INSPIRE brings more exclusive privileges and activities customised to satisfy the evolving preferences of India's incentive travel segment, who are now looking for experiences that are compelling, immersive and sophisticated."

The new INSPIRE activities include complimentary dining experiences suited to the Indian palate at Singapore's newest attractions. These include a buffet spread at the Flower Field Hall at Gardens By The Bay, with access to the Flower Dome and the Cloud forest; cocktail session at Madame Tussauds; a dinner on the beach at Sentosa; and Indian vegetarian buffet breakfasts at Resorts World Sentosa's (RWS) Adventure Cove Waterpark and Uni-

versal Studios Singapore (USS).

VIP access to popular attractions, such as early entry into Adventure Cove Waterpark and priority access to enjoy the *Revenge of the Mummy* ride at USS are also part of the new additions.

The INSPIRE programme was launched in India and China in 2013 and 2014, respectively, with major stakeholders such as Changi Airport

Group, Gardens by the Bay, RWS, Sentosa Leisure Group, Singapore Turf Club and Wildlife Reserves Singapore.

Chinese and Indian incentive groups can enjoy curated itineraries that are unlike the typical tourist programmes. For example, RWS will provide welcome cocktails with a meet-and-greet session with movie characters at USS. The Night Safari

{ Talking numbers }



The number of delegates expected to visit during the 103rd Lions Club International Convention 2020 – the largest-ever association congress secured for Singapore



The number of hotel rooms available in Singapore by the end of 2015, a notable increase from the 54,962 rooms recorded at the end of 2013

will also offer complimentary welcome drinks and an exclusive animal appearance for incentive groups.

Vijay Dadhich, managing director of Blue Moon Travels, said the programme will help generate greater interest in Singapore.

"This is an attractive initiative because Indians are always looking for unique experiences to do something different," commented Dadhich.

According to RWS spokesman Clement Ng, China, Malaysia and India are the property's top three MICE clientele and each of these markets have grown by about 10 to 20 per cent annually over the past five years.

Ng said unique venues within RWS have been popular with corporate event organisers. Hot picks include USS' New York Street zone, which can seat 1,500 guests for evening functions, and the Water-world Stunt Show Amphitheatre which can seat 3,500 delegates, and offers pyrotechnics and stunt performances.

While these top attractions are ready to do things differently to

welcome incentive groups, Michael Chiay, senior director, meetings & events, Asia Pacific at Carlson Wagonlit Travel, pointed out that it is a challenge for planners to get the right venue with the right capacity at the right price.

Chiay explained: "For non-hotel venues, organising dinners for more than 300 delegates may be difficult, and for large group that can only be supported by integrated resorts, the costs can be high."

He added: "Nevertheless, Singapore still stands out because of its international accessibility and central location within the Asia-Pacific region and for its great infrastructure and safe reputation."

Matthew Smith, director of perfor-

mance improvement, MCI Group Asia Pacific, also opined that Singapore is rarely seen as an incentive destination, but more of one that is strong in conventions and conferences.

To address this limitation, INSPIRE seeks to inject unique programmes into existing attractions to help boost Singapore's appeal as an incentive destination.

Jeannie Lim, executive director, conventions, meetings & incentive travel, STB, added that incentive travel is one of the growth areas the tourism board is focusing on. To boost this segment, STB has collaborated with Singapore Airlines and Changi Airport Group to increase international marketing efforts to promote MICE traffic to Singapore.

"Nevertheless, Singapore still stands out because of its international accessibility and central location within the Asia-Pacific region and for its great infrastructure and safe reputation."

Michael Chiay

Senior director, meetings & events, Asia Pacific, Carlson Wagonlit Travel



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{ Spotlight }

Catering to exquisite taste buds



My Private Chef is able to source for unique venues like Tanjong Pagar Railway Station

Known among locals and visitors as a foodie's paradise, Singapore has no lack of gastronomic delights that come at all price points. Adventurous business event groups can hold a dine-around programme at various popular hawker centres to give their foreign delegates a true taste of local favourites, while planners with a more traditional group can simply reserve a table or two at one of the city's restaurants headed by Michelin-star chefs.

But when new experiences in the Lion City are desired, it may be time to consider a tailored dining event with

a unique theme in a unique location, and with a unique menu crafted by a handpicked chef.

That's what My Private Chef promises to deliver. The company in Singapore specialises in creating memorable event experiences for corporate and private clients, and works with many talented and entertaining chefs, each specialising in a different cuisine, to deliver top notch food that reflects the organiser's message and objectives.

My Private Chef has done offsite gala dinners for corporate groups and boardroom dining which involves an elaborate meal being prepared and served in an office meeting room.

Founder and director, Crystal Chua, told *TTGmice* that boardroom dining is an increasingly popular option with C-level guests.

"In the past, the meeting would adjourn and delegates would go to a restaurant for lunch or dinner in a private room. These days, offices are so beautifully designed and they come with their own meeting venues. The office boardroom often makes a suitable venue for social gatherings. Furthermore, dining in the office is less disruptive for guests who want to return to business quickly after their meal," said Chua.

For gala dinners, My Private Chef gets involved from the get-go, working with clients to conceptualise the event, ensuring the theme gels with the purpose

of the rest of the conference programme. The company will source for a suitable venue, identify a chef who will design the menu and lead the kitchen, and hire entertainment – often emerging local talents – and staging equipment.

"We often go abroad to source for talented chefs, and at clients' request, we've also engaged celebrity chefs. Clients like featuring celebrity chefs, as that is impressive and encourages more of their VIPs to confirm their attendance," Chua added.

Chua believes that presenting food in interesting ways can encourage guest interaction and make the event more memorable.

At a private dinner function hosted by a bank at Gardens by the Bay, My Private Chef incorporated the garden theme into its food and created an attractive vertical garden-themed dessert using macarons and chocolate bumblebees. For a dinner hosted by an aesthetic clinic, My Private Chef had food items served in syringes.

Receptions with canapés cost about S\$200 (US\$280) per person while a banquet in a unique location, such as the historical Tanjong Pagar Railway Station, along with entertainment is priced from S\$350 per pax.

"Such tailored dining events don't come cheap, hence we often have financial institutions, and oil and gas firms knocking on our doors for events with VIP clientele," she said. – **Karen Yue**

{ Insider }

Rodney Yew, managing director of Discovery Holidays, shares three of his favourite activities in the Lion City

Shopping along Orchard Road

A visit to Singapore would not be complete without visiting Orchard Road, the country's iconic shopping belt. The shopping and nightlife there is enough to keep your eyes and wallets busy. If you are visiting during the Christmas period, it gets better because the lights and sounds there are vibrant.

Rediscover your inner child

All adults and children can enjoy themselves at Universal Studios Singapore because there are so many rides, shows and attractions there. I suggest that they devote one full day to this place. It is like being in another world, where you can meet and greet cartoon characters. This will guarantee a very enjoyable experience.

Visit a fantasy garden

Gardens by the Bay is a huge garden in the city, and the flowers and trees there are really beautiful. When everything is lit up at dusk, there is a very magical feeling about the place. There are a lot of photo taking opportunities for sure.

Gardens by the Bay





Soak up the sunshine

Vietnam's Mui Ne is being promoted as an up-and-coming MICE hotspot

The weakened rouble has sparked a tourist exodus from one of Vietnam's popular beach resort areas. Tourism operators are now looking towards MICE to pick up the slack. **Dave Fox** reports

A long stretch of beach, drier weather than most of the country and sand dunes that offer unconventional teambuilding opportunities are among the draws that have tour operators and resort managers promoting two neighbouring towns on Vietnam's South China Sea coast as new MICE hotspots.

Located 190km north-east of Ho Chi Minh City, Mui Ne and Phan Thiet were once sleepy fishing villages with virtually no tourists. Then in 1995, Mui Ne was found to be the ideal viewing area for a total solar eclipse. Throngs of eclipse-watchers flocked to the area and discovered

a 10km-long stretch of idyllic sandy coastline.

A resort town emerged, becoming especially popular among Russian tourists. But with Russia's economic downturn, tourism has dwindled in the past year.

Tour operators, locally and in Ho Chi Minh City, are now attempting to reposition the area as a viable option for small- to mid-sized conferences.

The big attraction, said Robert Tan, director of business development for Lac Hong Voyages, is the nature. Tan recommends conference organisers consider two urban days in Ho Chi Minh City, coupled with two days by the sea.

"Phan Thiet is still a natural environment, and also a place for incentives and activities, indoor and outdoor," Tan said.

Nikolaos Chatzipetros, general manager of Anantara Mui Ne Resort & Spa, said meetings in their sea-view conference rooms create a refreshing vibe.

"From the moment you sit down," he said, "you see water."

The Anantara is Mui Ne's largest conference facility, Chatzipetros said. Its ballroom can hold 210 visitors in a theatre-style seating, or 90 in a classroom set-up.

This size limitation is one of Mui Ne's challenges for MICE events, Tan

said. The area has no other facilities to support larger gatherings.

Some have also questioned the logistics of getting there.

Speaking earlier this month in Ho Chi Minh City at a forum on Vietnam's MICE industry, Herb Cochran, executive director of the American Chamber of Commerce in Vietnam, said: "The development of the industry has been far behind the potential."

Asked specifically about Mui Ne, Cochran told *TTGmice*: "In my personal opinion, there is inadequate transport infrastructure and quality accommodations for Mui Ne or Phan Thiet to develop a MICE industry."

Chatzipetros disagreed. He said while road conditions were an issue in the past, they have improved considerably. He estimated travel time between Ho Chi Minh City and Mui Ne is about 3.5 hours, though when *TTGmice* visited, heavy traffic stretched the journey to five hours.

The train, which takes less than four hours, is another option. With enough lead time, Tan and Chatzipetros said, it can accommodate large groups.

Tan acknowledged that Mui Ne and Phan Thiet face logistical challenges in expanding their MICE infrastructure. For small to mid-sized conferences, however, he said he believes it's worth the journey.

With a new airport scheduled to open in 2018, these two towns, untouched by tourism two decades ago, are striving to diversify and become new players in Vietnam's young MICE industry.

{ Insider }

Jonathan Tran, executive director of Lac Hong Voyages, recommends some teambuilding fun



Traditional fishing boats in Phan Thiet



Be a fisherman

Phan Thiet's original fishing village still retains its authenticity in spite of nearby tourism development. Groups can spend a morning learning about the traditional lifestyle of local fishermen, try their hand at rowing the tricky-to-manoeuvre, basket-like fishing boats that are unique to the area, and see who can catch the most fish.

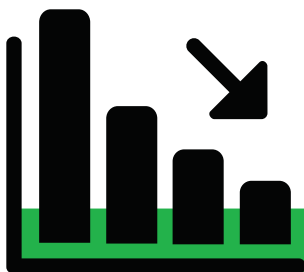
Frolic in the dunes

The area's famous red and white sand dunes offer fun teambuilding challenges. Teams can compete in sand-sledding competitions as they zoom down hills of sand on plastic sheets. For a motorised adventure, they can hire all-terrain vehicles and race across the dunes. Plan to get dirty here; no business attire, please!

Hit the beach

After a long day of meetings or activities, a refreshing stretch of sandy beach awaits. Nearby dunes create a microclimate that keeps Mui Ne drier than nearby areas. When the winds pick up, particularly between November and March, it is thrilling to watch the kitesurfers fly above the waves. Why not take a class and join them?

{ Talking numbers }



46

The number of ICCA-approved events held in Vietnam in 2014, a slight decrease from 52 in 2013



US\$1.5 million

The estimated amount spent on business travel in 2014, which is equivalent to 10.6 per cent of Vietnam's overall travel revenue for the year



7.6 per cent

Vietnam's anticipated rise in business-travel spending in 2015 compared to the previous year, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council



Positive winds of change

Both the public and private sectors are taking steps to raise the profile of MICE in the Philippines, writes **Rosa Ocampo**

The underperforming Philippine MICE sector is making up for lost ground through a more vigorous private-public collaboration, infrastructure renaissance and better air access.

Heeding the call of the Philippine Tourism Promotions Board (TPB), more private companies and associations are going out of their way to bid for and bring international events into the country.

Several months ago, the Philippine Council for the Advancement of Association Executives (PCAA) assembled a group of ambassadors from over 70 national associations to bid for and win international events.

“We too can help in this effort. Inbound MICE will dramatically increase now and in the future as the country continues to get positive economic and political reviews internationally,” explained PCAAE president and CEO Octavio Peralta.

For its second year in 2016, the B2B Asia Premium Travel Mart (APT) will include not just buyers and sellers for luxury properties but MICE specialists as well,

said Edwin Villanueva, director of APTM organiser S8 Exhibition.

He noted rosy prospects for MICE as the Philippines already has an extensive list of upmarket hotels and events venues that are supported by highly trained and service-oriented hospitality staff.

Indeed, private sector confidence reflects developments in recent years that bode well for MICE.

“Inbound MICE will dramatically increase now and in the future as the country continues to get positive economic and political reviews internationally.”

Octavio Peralta
PCAA president and CEO

Firstly, the shortage of hotels and resorts is being eased by international brands that continue to make a beeline not just for Metro Manila, but also elsewhere in the Philippines. In the pipeline are Okura, Mandarin Oriental, Conrad, Westin, Hilton, Sheraton and more

Marriott, Movenpick, Dusit Thani and Accor properties.

Secondly, convention centres are being built where there were none, in Cebu City, Iloilo and Bohol, apart from new ones in Davao and Bacolod. Another convention centre is also being planned for the Makati CBD in Metro Manila.

While air traffic congestion at the single runway of Manila’s Ninoy Aquino International Airport remains a major hurdle, its Terminal 1 has been spruced up, while Terminal 3 is now open to foreign airlines.

Airports in secondary destinations are also being upgraded, paving the way for increased direct flights from abroad. Mactan-Cebu International Airport will have a second terminal by 2018. Puerto Princesa International Airport is undergoing expansion while the gateway to Boracay, Caticlan Airport, is being expanded to accommodate wider-bodied aircraft.

The Philippines’ accessibility has improved substantially this year as more airlines opened routes to Manila and increased flight frequencies to secondary gateways. Carriers now flying to Manila include Turkish Airlines from Istanbul, Ethiopian Airlines from Addis Ababa and Garuda Indonesia from Jakarta. Flag carrier Philippine Airlines now flies to New York, Australia and New Zealand and together with Cebu Pacific, the carriers have opened routes to several points in China and the Middle East. There also are more non-stop flights from Asia to Cebu, Davao, Kalibo, Palawan, Clark and Iloilo.

MICE prospects are sanguine this year, the year of *Visit Philippines 2015*, and the debut of MICE brand Fun Works, said TPB COO Domingo Enerio III.

The country is playing host to over 150 meetings of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), culminating in the November summit. APEC is expected to bring in 25,000 international delegates and over 4,000 media personnel.

Other high profile events this year include the Madrid Fusion Manila, the 17th Asia Pacific Retailers Convention and Exhibition, and the 70th anniversary commemoration of the end of World War II hostilities.

“These (events) give us the opportunity to put our best foot forward,” enthused Enerio III.

{ Insider }

Farid Schoucair, general manager of New World Makati Hotel, suggests what visitors can do in Manila

Rise and shine

Pick your side of the Makati CBD on weekend mornings, and inhale the vibe of the Salcedo and Legazpi markets. Explore and discover the fresh, the organic and the artisanal.

Retail reinvented

Explore, browse and pick up great finds at the Greenbelt Lifestyle Center. The premier lifestyle complex is home to international luxury brands, fine local boutiques, a museum and a heritage library.

Holes in the walls

The local gastronomic scene has expanded to compete for a share of the palate with the authentic, the fusion or the deconstructed. In the same token of authenticity, speakeasy bars have sprouted in hidden corners with a fine collection of premium blends.

Hit the streets

Ride in the iconic Philippine jeepney or the calesa at the historic walled city of Intramuros. Better yet, join the famous walking tours through Spanish colonial churches, museums and other landmarks.



Go on a walking tour and see the country's Spanish influence



{ Spotlight }

For the grandest of business events

Inaugurated in July, the Marriott Grand Ballroom (MGB) in Marriott Hotel Manila is described in superlatives. It is the Marriott group's biggest convention and exhibition space outside the US; the biggest ballroom in the Philippines. MGB is also the most modern, the grandest; and the most sophisticated in terms of technology. Its location is also extremely convenient, sited just a stone's throw away from Ninoy Aquino International Airport.

MGB is huge and boasts 8,000m² of space for more than 4,000 people in cocktail-style. Its column-free main ballroom and 28 other meeting spaces – including six VIP sky boxes – are flexible, allowing more creativity when handling events, accommodating different MICE group sizes, and holding exhibitions, concerts and performances.

MGB boasts the latest in meeting

technology such as SkyFold (automatic vertical folding partitions set from the ceiling); 176 programmable ceiling lights that change to 360 colours; and an adjustable ceiling height. Furthermore, the three restaurants on-site eliminate the need for outside caterers.

There are also booking tools and meeting services apps that can help to connect meeting planners and MGB in real time, any time. For example, on an event day itself, the meeting services app allows meeting planners to manage events without moving from their seat.

For event attendees who meet and stay under Marriott's roof, they can make use of the mobile check-in, which enables guests to check-in and check-out at their own convenience. The hotel has an existing inventory of 342 rooms, and it is building another 228 luxury rooms, which will be available next year.



{ Talking numbers }



13

The year-on-year percentage decrease in the number of meetings hosted in the Philippines in 2014, according to ICCA's latest report. The country welcomed 46 meetings, down from 53 in 2013



50

The ranking held by the Philippines in ICCA's 2014 listing of top countries for international association meetings. It was in 49th place in 2013

{ Hot moves }



Alex Cabañas

Alex Cabañas

The International Association of Conference Centres has elected Cabañas global president. Cabañas, who is CEO of Benchmark Hospitality International, will serve a two-year term as head of the association, which has over 350 conference and meeting venue members in 22 countries worldwide.

Augustine M Silva

Sunway Hotels & Resorts has appointed Silva Sunway Putra Hotel Kuala Lumpur's senior general manager. Prior to this, Silva was



Augustine M Silva

head of asset management and fund manager for Ascendas Hospitality Trust, based in Sydney.

David Cao

Starwood China has welcomed Cao back into the fold as general manager of Sheraton Shanghai Hongkou Hotel. Last general manager of Hengshan Moller Villa Hotel, Cao first joined the Starwood family as director of human resources at Sheraton & Four Points Shanghai, Pudong in October 2006.

Diane Chen

Shenyang New World EXPO has appointed



Fay Gauna Luge

Chen its new deputy general manager. Chen joined Shenyang New World EXPO Management in June 2012 as director of business development.

Fay Gauna Luge

The Sanchaya, Bintan has named Luge its director of sales and marketing. She was most recently the COO of In2Nite Singapore, a last-minute hotel booking app.

Helene Fong

Fong is now JW Marriott Hotel Bangkok's new director of sales and marketing. She joins



Helene Fong

from JW Marriott Hong Kong where she was director of marketing.

Karen Tan

The Pan Pacific Hotels Group has named Tan senior vice president, sales and revenue performance, based in Singapore. She was last executive director, sales & marketing, Asia-Pacific at FRHI Hotels & Resorts.

TS Cheah

Cheah is now cluster director of sales and marketing with Sunway Putra Hotel Kuala Lumpur.



Karen Tan

la Lumpur. Cheah was most recently the area director of sales and marketing for Shangri-La Hotels in Tianjin, Tangshan and Qinhuangdao.

Yandell McEnroe

Gold Coast Business Events has appointed McEnroe business development manager. She is responsible for securing business events within Victoria as well as international opportunities in Indonesia and Malaysia. She joins from RACV Royal Pines and Noosa Resort.

{ Inspire }

Hatta Teo, Events revenue manager
Shangri-La, Hotel Singapore

How did you land this position?

Having started out as a Sales Manager (MICE) at a previous five-star hotel, I was at the right place at the right time as the Shangri-La, Hotel Singapore had newly created the role of events revenue manager and was looking for someone with experience in both MICE and revenue management. I was lucky enough to have completed my internship as a revenue management intern at Shangri-La, Pudong back in 2010 and this was the perfect opportunity for me to expand my business acumen by taking on a more strategic role as it deals with forecasting, pricing and demand analysis, among the other things that I do.

What do you do on a daily basis?

My main role is to maximise the

hotel's events revenue, both in the short- and long-run. I ensure that our products are priced appropriately in relation to the demand, and how I determine the latter is via extrapolation of past data and combining it with what we have on the books. Daily, I work very closely with my director of events to ensure that she has good data to make decisions on how the department will be able to achieve its targets, and drive revenue generation the extra mile.

What do you find most exciting in this role?

The most exciting aspect is that it is still in its early stages of development, unlike revenue management for rooms. Unlike in Northern America or Europe, not many hotels here in Asia have a dedicated events revenue manager

to assist the MICE and events department so I have free-reign to apply what I have learnt in my previous positions.

What's even more exciting is seeing the fruition of your efforts at the end of the month when the figures are extra robust and healthy. At the same time, it is also a challenge for me as I will have to set the standard and benchmarks for all of our other properties to follow.

What advice would you give to someone looking to specialise in MICE revenue management?

Be meticulous with the details. The MICE specialist must be able to cover all bases and bring up

points which even the organiser themselves may have overlooked. In my line of work, information is power and with it, you will be able to provide the operations team with a seamless handover to prevent mistakes. Most importantly, have fun while you're at it. This will naturally translate to you being a happier person and being able to give your all, which in turn converts to guest satisfaction.



Over coffee with

Sandy Russell

Carlson Rezidor has finally launched a signature MICE product for its event-friendly Radisson Blu hotels in Asia-Pacific, five years since the brand arrived in this region. The company's vice president of commercial operations, Asia Pacific tells **Karen Yue** why the wait is necessary

What drove Carlson Rezidor to come up with this signature MICE product, Experience Meetings?

We have been ramping up Radisson Blu and the new Experience Meetings is unique to the brand. Today, Experience Meetings (*see sidebar on facing page for details*) is available worldwide.

It took us a while to get Experience Meetings tweaked and set and ready for the market. We took our time (researching Brain Box). We wanted something truly different. Many hotels will just repackage a meeting or menu (to attract meeting planners). Not us. We wanted to impact meeting outcomes in a scientific way.

And we wanted to make sure we were in good shape before launching Experience Meetings (in 2013 in the US, Europe, the Middle East and Africa; in August in Asia).

Did the gap between 2013 and 2015 give Carlson Rezidor a chance to see how Experience Meetings could be adapted for the Asian market?

We typically like to jump right in and swim, but for this product we wanted to see how it fared so we sat back and watched. So yes, we did tweak it to make it perfect for the Asia-Pacific customer.

For Brain Food, for instance, we went back to the masterchef team and asked them to adapt it for Asians. For some of these delegates, you really need to provide noodles and rice – foods that don't fall into the Brain Food bucket (they contain carbohydrates that raise blood sugar levels and bring on food coma).

We didn't have to adapt Brain Box for the Asian market though.

Other hotel chains are also offering creative meeting solutions. What is Carlson Rezidor doing to get planners' attention?

We have been around the globe and across this region to shout the message and to get people to touch it, taste it, experience it.

We've done several fun launches in various Asian cities for the media and the trade.

And did these roadshows generate good business leads?

Oh yes. We had something like 13 or 14 meetings. This is very early stages now, and not everybody has a meeting to plan right away but they will keep us in mind. It is difficult to track (the business generated directly from roadshows). Getting business is a wonderful thing, and it is the name of the game, but it wasn't the main objective of our promotional exercise. It was all about creating awareness for Experience Meetings and planting the seed in customers' minds.

Why is Experience Meetings limited to Radisson Blu hotels?

Radisson Blu is very forward thinking, very iconic, it is sophisticated, it is stylish, and we think that it is the right fit for the differentiated product that is Experience Meetings.

All Radisson Blu hotels have meeting facilities, some more extensive than others. An example of a Radisson Blu property in this region with extensive, convention centre-type facility is the Radisson Blu Hotel Shanghai Hong Quan in China.

Radisson Blu hotels are a good place to start off for now. We will continue to evolve because the MICE sector is important to us. It touches every aspect of the hotel's revenue. Planners and attendees spend money on rooms, meeting venues and food. They are the kind of customers we love.



RADICAL MEETING EXPERIENCES

Radisson Blu's Experience Meetings concept is a departure from traditional meeting arrangements, focusing instead on solutions that encourage creative thinking and interaction among delegates. It comprises two elements – Brain Box and Brain Food.

Brain Box was created following extensive research and relies on the room setup to support the four styles of learning: Auditory – meeting rooms are fitted with top quality sound system and planners are offered a playlist of specific sounds and tunes that create a conducive learning environment; Tactile – colourful pens and glass panels or wall canvases are provided to facilitate creative ways of illustrating the discussion; Kinesthetic – old fashioned swings and large, colourful balls provide unusual seating

for attendees, which encourage them to move about during meetings; Visual – colourful setups and top quality of visual equipment are provided.

Explaining the practical purpose of the swings, Russell said: "If you are in a meeting where there are people not agreeing on a particular point, put them in the swings. We have been able to prove that when people start swinging in sync with each other while talking and negotiating, they actually come to a resolution."

Brain Food is a culinary concept developed in consultation with nutrition experts and masterchefs to emphasise the use of fresh, locally-sourced ingredients while maintaining great taste, low fat content and reduced sugar. The result is food that helps delegates experi-



ence optimal concentration and minimal fatigue during meetings.

Experience Meetings is additionally supported by complimentary Wi-Fi, a loyalty programme for meeting planners, and a carbon offset programme.

According to Russell, the Experience Meetings concept is ideal for small-sized groups of no more than 30 pax.

And there are more Radisson Blu hotels coming into Asia, yes?

We have 44 Radisson Blu properties in Asia-Pacific and more than 280 globally in 62 countries. Those 44 were launched within the past five years that we've entered this region. And we have 90 hotels (across all brands) in the pipeline for Asia-Pacific, in exciting destinations like Vietnam and Cambodia.

Asia-Pacific is the focus of our company. Like most hotel companies, we've figured out that the opportunities for exponential growth lies here. Our plan is to double in size in Asia-Pacific – to hit 200 hotels in 2020.

Focus areas are China, Indonesia and India. We are the number one hotel company in India now – 70 per cent of our footprint is in India – and India will continue to be a key area for us.

Some markets are more conservative than others when it comes to adopting funky, new ideas for solemn meetings. Which ones do you think will readily embrace Experience Meetings?

I suspect that in some areas in China we will have customers who will find our meeting concept risky.

The great thing is, there is no price difference – the customer pays the same for a traditional meeting setup and an Experience Meetings setup. There's minimal risk for the customer, so why not give it a try?

Say your meeting is going to be held across two or three days. We can give you an Experience Meetings on day one and if your delegates are uncomfortable and things aren't working out – I'd be

surprised if that happens though! – we will just flip things around and get you back your traditional arrangements. We will get rid of all the funky, crazy stuff and furniture, no problem at all.

Experience Meetings is a concept, so how do you ensure your salespeople rightly identify an event that is suitable for it?

Interestingly, most meeting planners do not actually know what their meeting objectives are. They know they are bringing people together, but to do what?

So we talk with our customers to find out what are they hoping to get out of their meeting and then help them get there with the varied Brain Box setup and Brain Food support.

I think it is common sense (driving salespeople's understanding of customer's needs), but common sense is not as common as we like it to be. That's where our education comes in. This is also why we didn't want to roll out Experience Meetings before everyone is ready.

We have a strong communications system in place to ensure that everybody understands the concept.

Supporting all that is the Radisson's

"It is expensive to host a meeting, we know that. So we want to make sure our customers get the best results, and we make that happen with scientifically proven methods (that aid learning and interaction)."

Yes, *I Can* service culture training that was created 25 years ago. Every employee, from the dishwasher to the general manager, are mandated to go through this training before they hit the floor. It is an extensive training, and it isn't just about taking care of the guest. We want our people to think, "this may not be my area (of responsibility) but I will make sure I take care of your needs and I will get you to somebody who can fix that".

It is also about anticipating needs. We have an element called Surprise and Delight which is about finding ways to really wow the guest. It could be something you've heard or picked up – it is about being a little sneaky, if you will – that would make the guest's experience memorable.

We hire for that and we train our employees to have this mindset and attitude. I call that the heart of hospitality. This heart isn't in everybody. There are people who are suited to our business, who like to take care of guests, and there are people who genuinely don't like people.

You hire for that, but isn't it tough to recruit people with the heart of hospitality here in Asia, where the service line isn't seen as a real career?

This isn't a problem unique to Asia. Finding good people is hard as there is a shortage, whether it is a result of culture or the impact of (higher) education that has led people to think that this isn't the most desirable of careers.

Personally this has been a very rewarding career for the past 15 years!

But we are fortunate to have been able to attract the right people. We have different sources – we go to hospitality schools and partner with training programmes.

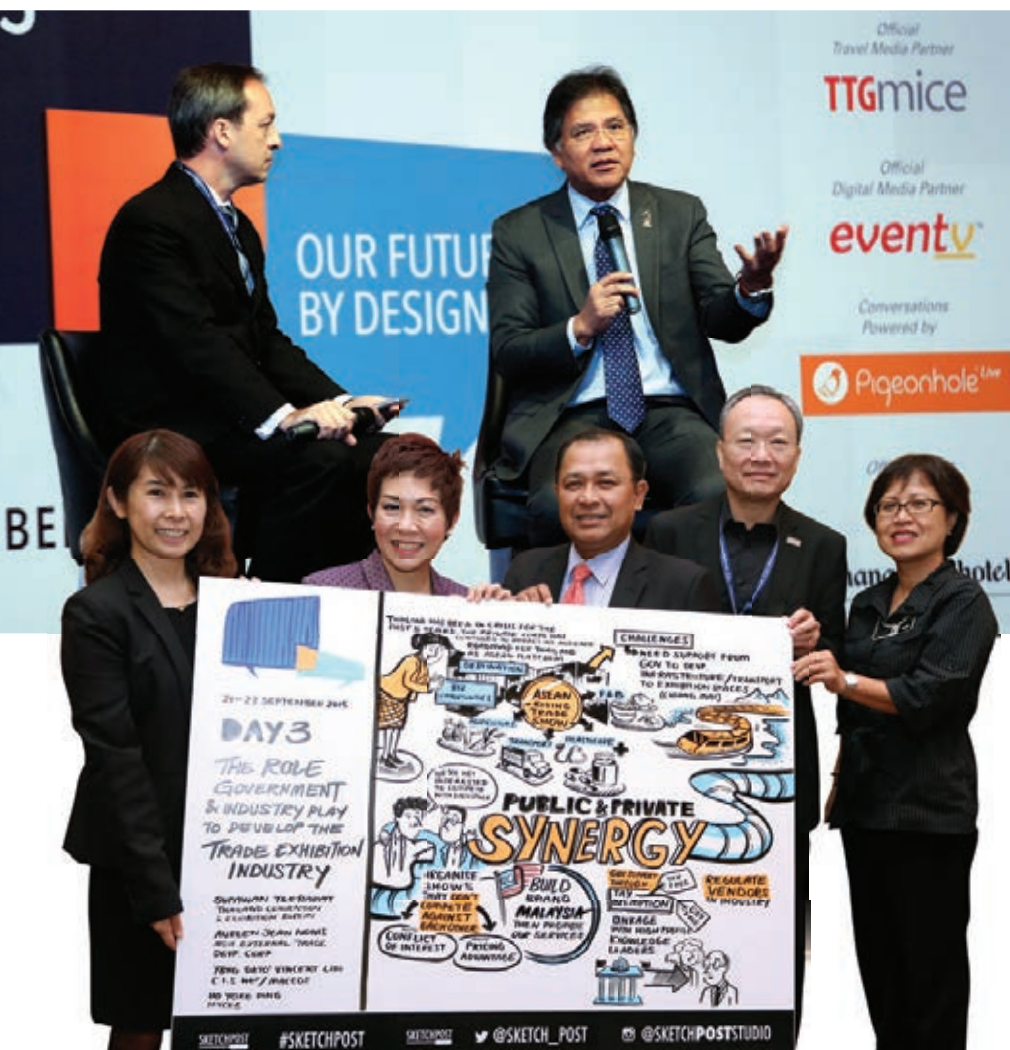


26TH
TTG TRAVEL AWARD
CEREMONY & GALA D



A glittery affair

Eighty-three top performing travel and tourism companies and individuals in Asia-Pacific were celebrated at the annual **TTG Travel Awards 2015** awards dinner on October 1 in lively Bangkok. Winners from the BT-MICE category included Etihad Airways for Best Airline–Business Class, Suntec Singapore Convention & Exhibition Centre for Best Convention & Exhibition Centre and Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau for Best Convention & Exhibition Bureau



A week of knowledge exchange

Building a sustainable and resilient MICE industry was the topic of choice at the second **Malaysia Business Events Week**, held from September 21 to 23 in Kuala Lumpur. Attendees got to tap the brains of 20 renowned speakers through plenary sessions, break-out sessions and cluster sessions





Getting to know Switzerland

More than 460 tour operators and media from over 50 countries gathered in Zermatt in September for the 18th **Switzerland Travel Mart**, where they got acquainted with the latest MICE and tourism products in Switzerland through meetings, workshops and an exciting post-show tour



TTGmice
Asia Pacific's leading meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions resource

What's next?

A business is nothing without its people, so *TTGmice* is celebrating the people driving the MICE industry in its year-end special. Find out how Millennial bosses are managing their team and what's being done to enthrall a young audience, among other exciting reads. The issue also checks out what's brewing in Macau, Pacific, Malaysia and Taiwan.

Deal with an event crisis

Managing unforeseen situations with poise is a skill that is learnt through experience, advises communications specialist Roy Ying



Most event managers would agree that it is impossible and unrealistic to expect every event to go down as originally planned. During the planning stage, I would include risk management provisions such as exclusion clauses in service contracts, insurance coverage, currency hedging and contingency plan.

But despite my best efforts, I still have to deal with emergencies and crisis situations. Below is a checklist that I use in making decisions whenever something unexpected happens:

- ✓ Don't Panic and approach the situation with a clear mind
- ✓ Report immediately and seek advice from your direct supervisor
- ✓ Consult people who have experience in similar situations

- ✓ Play safe, don't gamble, and always take the safest option
- ✓ Make records, wherever possible
- ✓ Take your time, don't be rushed into making someone else's mistake

Let me illustrate this with a charity concert I managed a few years ago. It was already 18.00, only two hours before the concert, when I received a call from the office of a very senior dignitary asking whether there were still seats available. He and his wife were hoping to drop by for half an hour before heading off to another banquet. To my chairman, it was great news, but to me, it was an emergency I would rather not have to deal with, especially with only a few hours before the concert.

Instead of panicking, I told myself to approach the situation with a clear mind

by asking myself what issues I needed to sort out.

As the concert's event manager, I was able to take care of most logistical arrangements, but I struggled to identify a couple of suitable seats because the best ones had already been reserved for the VIPs and major donors.

I reported this to my supervisor and then sought advice from the venue manager who, in my opinion, was the best person to guide me as he would probably have dealt with similar situations in the past.

The conversation I had with the venue manager was most valuable as I learnt what the normal protocol was in dealing with VVIP's presence. He also assured me that adding a couple of seats to the front row would not be a problem in this circumstance.

Although the problems seemed to have been solved, my supervisor decided not to rush into making a decision. She asked me to call a special briefing with the venue operator, choreographer, production staff and service providers to make sure that there was a proper action plan. She wanted to play it safe.

During the event, the camera crew followed the dignitary everywhere because it was a great honour to have him and his wife at our concert. We even had the communication team rush out a short script for our chairman, allowing him to greet the dignitary with a few key messages.



Roy Ying was the North Asia head of communications and external affairs of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), a role that saw him manage

RICS' portfolio of events, communication channels, external relations and stakeholder engagement programmes in China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea. Ying is now senior manager of corporate communications with Hong Kong's Mass Transit Railway. He is also a visiting lecturer at a number local universities in Hong Kong and lectures on various event management and crisis communication subjects.