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in the new year but Asian
MICE players are not one to
wallow in despair. *TTGmice*
takes a peek into the future
and discovers that much is
being done to stay prosperous





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Face risks bravely

News on the Jakarta city centre bombings and the ensuing gun fight between the police and suspects broke just as I was writing this editorial, and right away I thought, oh no, what a terrible start to the new year for the people of the Indonesian capital city.

And then the pity I had for the folks of Jakarta was quickly corrected when a stream of online messages of love, forgiveness and strength – many of them with a generous dose of humour – hit social media sites. They were mostly posted by Indonesians and all bearing the hashtag #KamiTidakTakut – *we are not afraid* in Bahasa Indonesia.

It showed the world what a tough and positive people the Indonesians are.

What Indonesia and its people need isn't pity; they deserve confidence and support from their neighbours in Asia and from the rest of the world. And we, coming from the travel trade, know exactly how acts of terrorism can swiftly cause frightened travellers to give perceived risky destinations a wide berth.

The ones who suffer the most from this effect are the service providers at the bottom of the chain: the taxi drivers, the retail assistants, the restaurant servers, the hotel housekeeping crew whose businesses they represent are suddenly left barren by a depleting tourist crowd and they risk losing their jobs.

As travel trade stakeholders, our opinions on destinations are heeded by our travellers and we can give rational advice on travel choices. We can remind our travellers that the incident in Jakarta was contained within the day and everything is back to business as usual. We can remind our travellers that their movements are safe as long as they take sensible steps that adhere to their corporate travel risk policy. We can remind our corporate clients that if a travel risk policy is not yet in place, it is time to get serious about implementing one.

It is heartening to know that on the business travel front, terrorism will not extinguish the need for businessmen to fly out and meet. In an editorial contribution to *TTGmice.com*, Hotel Reservation Service's managing director, Todd Arthur, pointed out that while several popular business travel destinations including Australia, Indonesia and India are among the UK Foreign Office's top 30 high-risk countries for acts of terrorism, the demand for business travel to these places has not waned. In fact, GBTA has forecasted an 11 per cent increase in business travel between 2015 and 2016, with business travel in India and China projected to grow at double-digit rates.

Meanwhile, let us all have no fear in our hearts as we ride out the economic and political storms that are brewing over-head this new year.



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We love



Wild encounters in the city

In a destination where new experiential meeting options are few, Singapore Night Safari's latest offering is a much-welcomed initiative.

Named *An Evening in the Wild*, the package features the attraction's diverse wildlife and is designed for organisers looking for a small but intimate venue for 40 (seating) to 60 (standing) guests.

On the recommended itinerary, the evening begins with a cocktail reception at Ankole Terrace, located conveniently near the entrance of the Night Safari. This is a great gathering spot where guests can keep themselves entertained by the grazing Ankole cattle nearby.

Once everyone has arrived, a chartered tram brings guests on the usual Night Safari tour, guided by a host. Roughly a third into the journey is where the path diverges from the norm.

Guests are ushered off the tram at East Lodge Station, where the Leopard Trail starts, but instead of heading down that route, visitors are guided to a wooden bridge leading into the forest.

What will draw you in first as you amble across the bridge are the fairy lights hanging from the thick branches of towering trees. Paired with the nearby campfire and tipi tent structure, the feeling is magical – of being completely transported away from the urban jungle of Singapore into a lush alcove of plants and wildlife.

You can touch these nocturnal creatures if you choose to, which range from majestic owls and spiny hedgehogs to scaly lizards and playful civet

cats. Zookeepers will be around to handle these animals of course, so guests who are not partial to wildlife need not worry.

The interior of the air-conditioned tipi tent is a warm and intimately designed space. There is flexibility for the setting to be altered to suit the occasion, but for my experience, a dessert buffet table and cocktail bar are the centerpieces, flanked by four long wooden tables.

A three-course dinner with vegetarian option is available, featuring mains such as wagyu beef tenderloin, black cod or grilled capsicum and eggplant. Free flow coffee, tea and house wine is also served throughout.

The dessert buffet steals the show here, serving as a central spot where guests, especially those seated at other tables, can meet, interact and mingle while jostling for the intricately placed treats. The pyramid of fruit skewers is especially photo worthy, while an assortment of pastries forms the bulk of the offerings. The most unique offering, the star anise crème brulee, is definitely an acquired taste but grows on you quickly.

After dinner, a Thumbuakar performance – a tribal fire dance – serves as an evening highlight before guests are whisked onto the chartered tram to complete the rest of the Night Safari tour.

As one of Singapore's most iconic attractions, this offering feels like a long time coming. Every part of the package makes sense and guests get to experience the full attraction while being treated to a formal yet lively event at the Night Safari.

Stay connected in the air

Qatar Airways, in partnership with telecommunications provider Ooredoo, has been offering 15 minutes of complimentary Wi-Fi on all of its A380, A350, B787, A319, and select A320 and A330 aircraft since December 17.

Passengers are charged US\$5 or US\$10 for one-hour or three-hour usage respectively beyond the first 15 minutes. A fixed US\$20 fee regardless of duration is also available.

Passengers on Qatar's A380 First Class cabin get to enjoy complimentary Wi-Fi for the entire duration of their flight.



© AIRBUS S.A.S 2014 – photo by master films/H. GOUSSE



Sri Panwa offers more

Villa resort Sri Panwa on the south-eastern tip of Phuket has opened 30 new pool suites and penthouses at the start of the new year.

Named The Habita at Sri Panwa, each unit ranges between 69m² to 139m² in size and features nature-inspired designs. They come with an infinity pool as well as panoramic views of the Andaman Sea.

Besides the collection of new accommodation options, two new dining options have also joined Sri Panwa's offerings. They are modern Chinese restaurant Baba Chino, helmed by Thai Iron Chef Pom, and shisha and cigar joint Baba Shisha Lounge.

Hong Kong links up with Kumamoto with new flight

Hong Kong Airlines has launched a new flight between Hong Kong and Kumamoto, Japan which will operate twice weekly on Mondays and Fridays.

On Mondays, flights depart from Hong Kong at 11.00 and arrive in Kumamoto at 15.00 while on Fridays, it will depart at 12.00 and arrive at 16.10.

Return flights leave Kumamoto at 16.00 and land in Hong Kong at 19.05 on Mondays. Friday's return flight will leave Kumamoto at 18.10 and land in Hong Kong at 21.00.

With the new route, Hong Kong Airlines now operates 26 weekly flights in total between Hong Kong and Japan.



Kumamoto castle in Kumamoto Prefecture

Best Western unveils third Myanmar hotel

Best Western Hotels & Resorts has opened the midscale Best Western Plus Eastern Palace Hotel in the city of Mandalay in Myanmar.

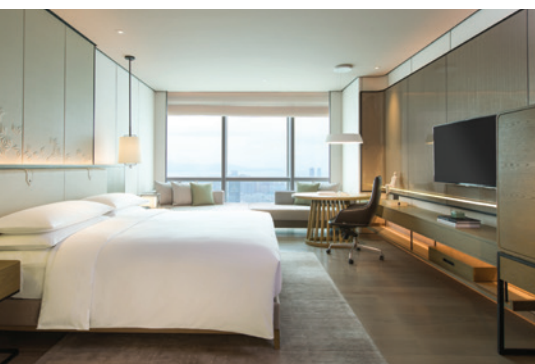
Sited minutes away from the city's main business district and historical landmarks, the new-build hotel offers a range of rooms and suites equipped with flat-screen TVs, USB ports and complimentary Wi-Fi.

Facilities include an all-day dining restaurant serving local and international cuisine, outdoor swimming pool, a pool bar, lobby lounge, spa, fitness centre, steam room, sauna, business centre as well as meeting spaces.

This is the group's third hotel in Myanmar with two others in operation in Yangon.



Shenzhen welcomes first Marriott hotel



Marriott Hotels has opened the Shenzhen Marriott Hotel Nanshan on the 43rd to 60th floor of the SCC Building.

The 340-room property is a 40-minute drive to Shenzhen International Airport and a 30-minute ride to Shenzhen North Railway Station.

The hotel features 2,000m² of meeting space, including a 900m² grand ballroom, seven function rooms and three boardrooms.

Guestrooms range from 40m² to 70m² with amenities including Internet-enabled TVs, iPods and Nespresso machines, as well as boasting views of Shenzhen Bay and the Hong Kong border.

F&B options include all-day dining Nanshan Kitchen, Chinese restaurant Man Ho, the Lobby Lounge bar and The Café which offers freshly brewed coffee, pastries, handcrafted sandwiches and desserts.



HOT DEALS

The Star Performing Arts Centre, Singapore

The arts centre offers two venues for private hire – The Star Gallery and The Star Loft.

Designed for flexible configuration, the multi-purpose Star Gallery is ideal for 400 to 700 guests in banquet and theatre setting. Prices from S\$15 (US\$10.40) per guest.

The Star Loft supports intimate and unique events, with packages priced from S\$14 per guest. Groups also get exclusive use of the adjoining alfresco roof terrace.

Packages exclude catering, additional equipment, and manpower cost. Terms apply.

Email info@thestar.sg or call (65) 6636 0055.

Royal Plaza Hotel, Hong Kong

Located in Kowloon, Hong Kong, the Royal Plaza Hotel is offering incremental perks for

events booked with it by December 31, 2016.

Groups that book 10 to 29 guestrooms will enjoy a complimentary upgrade to the next room category for two guestrooms, welcome cookies with the host's corporate logo for each guestroom, and complimentary non-alcoholic beverages throughout the meeting.

Bookings of 30 to 49 guestrooms will receive an hour-long complimentary welcome cocktail and complimentary upgrade to Royal Club Deluxe Room for two guestrooms.

Bookings of more than 50 guestrooms will earn two complimentary room nights for every 50 paying room nights, and a complimentary coffee/tea break with snacks.

Terms apply.

Email rpsales@royalplaza.com.hk

Shangri-la Hotel, Singapore

The hotel is offering Enhanced Signature

The Star Gallery Wooden deck



Benefits to all MICE groups with 10 to over 120 guestrooms per night with meetings. Groups can enjoy complimentary value adds such as S\$300++ credit per day, one-hour open bar for delegates and even guestrooms for the event organisers. Offer is valid till December 31, 2016.

Contact leon.chan@shangri-la.com or (65) 6213 4198.



The St Regis gets an address in Dubai

Located on Sheikh Zayed Road, the five-star The St Regis Dubai is the first of three Starwood properties set to open alongside the Dubai Canal project over the next few years. The hotel, which welcomed its first guests in November 2015, offers 234 keys including 52 suites, eight restaurants, a ballroom, eight meeting rooms, among other facilities.

Hainan Airlines opens Xi'an-Rome route

Hainan Airlines has launched a twice-weekly service between Xi'an and Rome.

Flights depart every Wednesday and Saturday from Xi'an aboard an airbus A330 at 01.00 and arrive in Rome at 05.55 the same day. The return flight will leave Rome at 12.35 and land in Xi'an at 06.00 the following day.

The flight is scheduled to increase to thrice-weekly come March 27, 2016.

A natural angle

D'Resort @ Downtown East is the first project to be completed under NTUC Club's five-year upgrading plans.

Sited close to Pasir Ris Park, the beach and mangrove walkways, D'Resort is a nature-inspired property with 387 guestrooms and a selection of event venues.

Of the nine guestroom types, the Rainforest rooms are most catered to corporate guests, with the Rainforest premium suite offering the ideal setting for private discussions and brainstorming sessions.

Planners have various venues to choose from, and all are equipped with state-of-the-art audiovisual systems and come with technical support and wireless Internet.

D'Resort supports clients with its in-house events management team, Quebec Leisure, as well as a restaurant, White Tangerine Café, which also provides catering services for events.

Planners can utilise the resort's recreational facilities for teambuilding programmes, such as the barbecue pits and the Wild Wild Wet waterpark.

More event venue options are available at the nearby Downtown East's E!hub, with function rooms ranging from 82m² to 1,700m² in size.

Me@OUE

Karen Yue goes on a culinary journey to France, China and Japan in a single afternoon at the rooftop restaurant



Opened in 2013, ME@OUE is one of the better dining venues in Singapore where one can take in a gorgeous view of Singapore, especially now that the Marina Bay developments are complete. Through ME@OUE's floor-to-ceiling windows, one can see the iconic structures of Marina Bay Sands, Gardens by the Bay and the Singapore Flyer.

While the venue isn't brand new, its menu is. Michelin-Star chef Jérémy Gillon and celebrity chef Chen Kentaro – who is famed for elevating Sichuan cuisine in Japan – lend their genius to the new menu, creating a selection of fine Chinese, Japanese and French dishes.

F&B concept

The open kitchen is busy with chefs and their assistants whipping up Japanese, French and Chinese dishes. That's ME@OUE's selling point – one could feast on the best dishes from three countries under one roof.

While ME@OUE prides itself for its support of local chefs that specialise in the respective cuisine, it regularly consults with world renowned masterchefs who will direct the menu and bring special, seasonal dishes to the table.

The new menu curated by chefs Kentaro and Gillon invites guests to start their journey with delicate appetisers like *kani* (crab) salad and salmon gravlax, proceed to mains like *buta katarosu yaki* (grilled Kagoshima pork), Atlantic seabass and Sichuan-inspired braised cod fish, and end with a modern version of millefeuille.

My lunch comprised a tuna and scallop tartare, pan-seared Hokkaido scallops, baked Canadian lobster with chef Kentaro's Sichuan sweet and spicy sauce, and a dessert duo of profit éclair and milk & cookies. They were all well executed and presented, but my favourite was the pan-seared Hokkaido scallops which were tender, juicy and bathed in a rich and addictive mushroom cream sauce.

It is worth noting that lunch sets are



changed every two weeks while the dinner a la carte menu is refreshed every three months.

MICE application

With its location in the heart of Singapore's business district, it is of little wonder that ME@OUE hosts many business luncheons, corporate cocktails, product launches and dinner gatherings. Cocktail receptions for internal guests and clients are the majority though, forming 90 to 95 per cent of the restaurant's corporate event business.

The indoor dining hall takes 90 seated guests or 200 standing, while the outdoor lounge is good for 50 seated or 150 standing. There is also a spacious private dining room for 14 guests seated at a long table, and which comes with audiovisual equipment.

Event planners who buy out the venue (minimum spend applies) will get to enjoy the restaurant's wraparound outdoor lounge which comes with cushy seats where one can enjoy a pre- or post-dinner tippie.

The indoor dining hall can be emptied of its furniture to make space for standing cocktail parties and even fashion shows, or adopt a different layout to support the planner's needs.

Service

Attentive. I appreciate waitstaff who take time to explain what's on the plate and is swift in refilling my wine glass.

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Opening hours

Monday to Friday, 18.00 till late

UBM, Alibaba to revolutionise trade buying experience

Alibaba Group's B2B business unit and trade exhibition organiser UBM have formed a strategic alliance to unite the online and offline trade buying experience, with their focus to first fall on Asia.

The two companies have begun exploring opportunities to link the B2B online and face-to-face trading worlds by leveraging their combined strengths, technologies and relationships. The alliance will begin with pilot programmes introducing Alibaba B2B business unit's online secure transactional platforms and business portals for companies participating in selected UBM Asia trade fairs.

Cross promotional marketing, match-making services and audience development of the two company's brands and networks will be another key aspect in working towards the longer term goal of creating the next generation of online and offline trade experiences.

Sophie Wu, president of the Alibaba B2B business unit, commented: "We are excited to collaborate with UBM to offer small and medium-sized enterprises a multichannel

B2B trading experience. They can also tap into the abundant and combined expertise of the two industry pioneers for more worldwide trading opportunities."

Tim Cobbold, UBM CEO, said: "A fundamental element of our 'Events First' strategy is our commitment to innovate and to deliver value for our customers. We are excited at the opportunity to partner with Alibaba.com, to create the next generation of trade buying experience."

Pilot programmes for the joint collaboration will begin this year with UBM Asia's Malaysia International Furniture Fair in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Finefood Shanghai, part of Hotelex Shanghai; and the co-located Materials Manufacturing & Technology and Fashion Access fairs in Hong Kong.

The collaboration will commence with promotions of the UBM fairs to both parties' respective trade audiences and Alibaba will begin offering its Trade Assurance service onsite to selected exhibitors. Alibaba's Trade Assurance service allows participating suppliers to offer guarantees



Alibaba's James Dong with UBM Asia's Jime Essink

on order quality standards and on-time shipment.

Further pilots in 2H2016 will include additional business match-making components for other UBM Asia events such as Shanghai International Children Baby Maternity Industry Expo and SIGN & LED CHINA fairs.

Jime Essink, president and CEO of UBM Asia, said: "With Alibaba and UBM Asia working together, we see opportunities to change how online and offline trade takes place, providing improved returns and efficiencies for our customers."

The progress on the business match-making components will be announced as the partnership develops.

Ashwin to lead Penang's new MICE charge

Penang State Government has appointed Ashwin Gunasekaran as CEO to set up and head its Penang Convention & Exhibition Bureau (PCEB), a non-profit organisation aimed at developing and growing the Malaysian city's MICE industry.

PCEB's primary roles will be to assist and facilitate MICE stakeholders and community at large in its marketing initiatives, and to provide services that enhance the quality of the MICE client's experience in Penang.

The bureau will be Penang's focal point for coordinating all MICE activities, where it will also serve as the chief liaison to all levels of government departments for support. It will also work closely with the Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau to bid for MICE events in Penang.

Prior to his new role, Ashwin was the assistant vice president of group sales and marketing with Themed Attractions, Resorts & Hotels. Being a Penangite, he knows the destination well and had served as the marketing manager at Penang Tourism Action Council for seven years, from 2003.

– S Puvaneswary



SECB beefs up Greater China-focused events assistance scheme

Singapore Exhibition and Convention Bureau (SECB) has enhanced its Inspire Great China 2.0 events assistance scheme with three new partners – Gardens by the Bay, Sentosa Leisure Group and Singapore Turf Club – in a bid to drive stronger MICE traffic from Greater China.

The scheme has three tiers – basic, value and premium – and aims to promote Singapore's unique attractions by packaging curated itineraries that appeal to visitors from the region. Applicants may apply before the end of 2016 and travel to Singapore before March 31, 2017.

Director of SECB, Low See Peng, said the scheme accords "VIP treatment with exclusive one-of-a-kind experiences" to meeting and incentive groups.

For instance, the premier tier – available to groups with more than 400 pax staying at least two nights in Singapore – will see partners like the Singapore Turf Club offering a complimentary light buffet, free-flow soft drinks, a guided tour to the parade ring, a workshop on "how to pick the winner", and admission to the racecourse.

Last December, SECB led a delegation of 15 suppliers to Hong Kong and met with some 50 key MICE agents. – Prudence Lui



AEC to present a tough playing field for Indonesian MICE players: INCCA

By Mimi Hudoyo

Different government regulations across South-east Asia, specifically those governing bank loans, are expected to result in a bleak future for Indonesian convention and conference players as the ASEAN Economic Community is officially formed, predicted the president of the Indonesia Congress and Convention Association (INCCA).

Iqbal Alan Abdullah said: "The way I see it, the business climate will be greyish dark as we enter the AEC era."

Iqbal explained that the AEC will facilitate the entry of more foreign business event owners and organisers onto Indonesian soil, intensifying competition in the country. To compete effectively, Indonesian business event owners and organisers will need to grow their portfolio of events and to do so,

they will require additional funding.

"The problem is, the bank interest rate in Indonesia is 13 per cent while in Singapore, for example, is only three per cent. Furthermore, Indonesian banks require a long list of supporting documents with loan applications. And after all that, companies can only loan up to 40 per cent of the event cost or 50 per cent (for rare cases)," said Iqbal, adding that some banks in other countries need only a letter of appointment for a large event and will grant up to 80 per cent of the event cost.

Ketut Salam, managing director of Pacto Convex, played down Iqbal's concern, saying that financial institutions are naturally prudent and reputable event companies will have little

trouble securing bank loans.

Iqbal's cautious projections for 2016 also stems from the weakening Indonesian rupiah that has encouraged overseas MICE players to bring their shows to Indonesia, further intensifying competition for business in the country.

Effi Setiabudi, chairman of the Indonesia Exhibition Companies Association, too, expects a greater presence of

international exhibition companies in Indonesia, drawn to the country's "huge population and healthy economy".

However, Effi has interpreted this development positively, describing it as "good times ahead" for Indonesia's exhibition sector.



Effi: good year for exhibitions

CINZ embraces plan for convention centre and movie museum in Wellington

Convention and Incentives New Zealand (CINZ) has agreed to collaborate with a company formed by Wellington-based international filmmakers Peter Jackson and Richard Taylor, along with Wellington City Council in a plan to build a combined convention centre and movie museum.

The building is to be sited opposite Te Papa Museum on the Wellington waterfront and will boast exhibition space and six meeting rooms that can accommodate 1,100 people for full-format conventions and 2,250 theatre style, as well as props from the collection of Jackson and Taylor's company for the museum.

"Wellington is the geographical centre of New Zealand, and a hub for creativity, technological expertise, culture and cuisine. It is the base for many associations, with a good range of accommodation, easy access to government, and it's walkable. This purpose-built convention facility, configured to meet modern and future needs and expectations, promises huge benefits for the city and the country," said Sue Sullivan, CEO, CINZ.

SMX Convention Center spruces up for a good fight

SMX Convention Center in the Philippine capital is undergoing major renovation and adding more front-of-house staff to be in step with newer competitors.

Targeted for completion mid-year, works to the eight-year-old facility include repainting, refreshing of front entrances to the halls and function rooms, updating of all signages, landscaping the building's exterior and on the second floor, and overhauling the 700m² loading bay area. As well, 20 additional staff will fulfill front-of-house allocations for welcoming delegates, attending to emergencies and manning shifts.

"No more can we do business and say 'I'm the venue'. It cannot be that anymore. We have to operate like a hotel," remarked Walid Wafik who joined three months ago as vice president-general manager of the four SMX convention centres and two SM trade halls around the country owned and operated by SM Group of SM Prime Holdings.

"Whether a hotel or a convention centre, the business now is about interaction with your clients and (how you) attend to their demands and needs, and that's what I'm trying to bring," Wafik explained.

"I don't want to give my competitors opportunities to say that (SMX Convention Center) is old. I will stand on value and compete," he added, referring to the recent mushrooming of convention centres and hotels with modern meeting facilities particularly in metro Manila.

Wafik also disclosed that the 1,500m² Megatrade Hall at SM Megamall in Ortigas will be totally renovated beginning next month. It will be a "more challenging" project, he said, because the venue is "always highly booked".

Renovation will thus be done in phases.



Shangri-La at the Fort, Manila brings five-star MICE option to Bonifacio Global City

By Karen Yue

Online marketing initiatives and sales promotions for the 576-room Shangri-La at the Fort, Manila in Bonifacio Global City that had begun long before its scheduled opening on March 1 this year, have led to strong expressions of interest from local and overseas MICE planners.

In an interview with *TTGmice*, the hotel's general manager, John Rice, said hard hat tours for interested parties and available rate structure and meeting packages have allowed the hotel to "submit our offers and negotiate for high potential leads".

While the Shangri-La brand needed little introduction, Rice's team made an awareness campaign their "first order of business". It touted its extensive conference and meeting spaces – 21 in total and said to be the city's largest collection – among other

selling points, drawing the attention of event planners.

The Grand Ballroom, measuring 1,800m², and other function rooms are inspired by a jewelry box and outfitted with Lasvit chandeliers that resemble a necklace and wall panels that look like brooches.

Rice expects "good demand particularly from within the Bonifacio Global City accounts, as there is a very limited supply of meeting venues and (five-star) hotel rooms in the area", with the brand and facility size drawing mostly "corporate and social milestone events".

"We will also be the venue of choice for our exciting and creative meeting packages and services, courtesy of the on-trend facilities this comprehensive complex will have the flexibility to offer," he added.

Shangri-La at the Fort intends to lever-

age its close proximity to Kerry Sports Manila, a 8,000m² sports complex across levels five and six within the same mixed-use development, to court sports events and corporate programmes that desire some action.

"Sports is popular locally, particularly basketball and badminton which Kerry Sports Manila will have the facility to host through The Arena, an NBA-grade indoor basketball court which can be converted into a badminton court. Our multiple training zones and the Adventure Zone may also be the venue for teambuilding exercises, family-bonding activities and themed breaks," said Rice.

Meanwhile, Rice hopes that the country's successful hosting of the 2015 APEC meetings in Manila will "put us back on the map of new MICE destinations".

Centara now known as Central Hospitality International

Centara Hotels & Resorts has rebranded and is now known as Central Hospitality International (CHI).

While its hotel brands, products and services remain unchanged, the new corporate identity serves to differentiate CHI from its member hotel brands.

"Our objective is to strategically grow the business and build international brand awareness and recognition through acquiring and managing hotels in global cities and resorts," said Thirayuth Chirathivat, CEO of CHI.

"These locations will be carefully identified according not only to the global travel profile of our existing and prospective guests but also in recognition of those destinations which embrace and value the elements of Thai service style that will continue to form part of the DNA of our brands," added Chirathivat on the inclusion of the word 'International' in the new name.

Currently, CHI operates Centara Grand Hotels & Resorts, Centara Hotels & Resorts, Centara Residences & Suites, Centara Boutique Collection, Centara Hotels & Resorts and COSI Hotels.



{ In brief }

Dubai to get Fox theme park

Al Ahli Holding Group has signed an agreement to develop a Fox-branded theme park and resort in Dubai, slated for completion in 2020. In partnership with Twentieth Century Fox Consumer Products, a division of Twenty-First Century Fox, Inc., the theme park will feature attractions based on some of Fox's most popular movies and TV shows.

New Sofitel hotels to open in SEA

Singapore and Kuala Lumpur will welcome a new Sofitel property in 4Q2016 and 2H2016 respectively. The 222-key Sofitel Singapore City Centre will be part of the upcoming multi-billion dollar Tanjong Pagar Centre, which will also feature a residential and office tower, as well as retail and event spaces. The 312-room Sofitel Kuala Lumpur Damansara is part of a new 3.4-hectare integrated development in Damansara City.

{ 2016 Calendar }

February
23-24

AIME,
Melbourne,
Australia

March
2-5

Incentive Travel
Exchange,
Las Vegas, the US

April
6-8

IT&CM China,
Shanghai,
China

April
19-21

IMEX,
Frankfurt,
Germany

Saxton fields inspiring speakers at AIME

A series of intimate interviews with inspiring personalities from around the globe, produced by Saxton Speakers Bureau, will be a highlight at AIME 2016 this February.

The *Saxton Up Close and Personal* sessions, held on February 23 and 24 at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, will provide visitors with in-depth knowledge and first-hand accounts of international business, the meaning of courage, entrepreneurship and technology, connectivity in the world, small business innovation and the high performance team.

Speakers include Turia Pitt who will share her incredible story of drive, determination and persistence after receiving burns to 65 per cent of her body in 2011 and recovering from more than 200 operations, and Richard Gerver whose transformative approach to leading change and innovation will offer unique insights for the business events community.



A PERFECT VENUE, A PLEASANT STAY

With 5,476 square feet of space and floor to ceiling windows, the pillar-free Grand Ballroom at Royal Plaza Hotel, Hong Kong is a perfect venue for meetings and conferences for up to 600 guests. For meeting and conference events with 10 guest rooms, we will surprise you with extra benefits.

A

- Complimentary upgrade to next room category for 2 rooms
- Welcome cookies printed with the company logo for each guest room
- Complimentary coffee, tea and soft drinks throughout the meeting

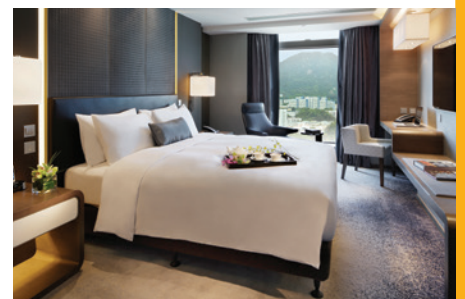
B

- Complimentary welcome cocktail reception for 1 hour
- Complimentary upgrade to Royal Club Deluxe Room for 2 rooms with club privileges

C

- 2 additional complimentary room nights for every 50 paying room nights
- 1 additional complimentary coffee/tea break with snacks

Bookings of 10–29 guest rooms: A
 Bookings of 30–49 guest rooms: A+B
 Bookings of 50 guest rooms or above: A+B+C



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Outlook 2016

Business challenges abound in the new year but Asian MICE players are not one to wallow in despair. *TTGmice* takes a peek into the future and discovers that much is being done to stay prosperous

Tailored communications the way to go

Sydney will welcome top achievers at Nu Skin this year



AUSTRALIA

Australia delivered a solid performance in terms of business events in the 2014/2015 financial year, with approximately 174,000 international delegates visiting the country for the purpose of attending a convention or conference according to the June 2015 edition of the International Visitors Survey. This was a five per cent increase on the previous year, and accounted for three per cent of all international arrivals.

But the real victory was in delegate spend which reached A\$612 million (US\$440 million), 14 per cent up from the previous financial year and a 34 per cent increase from 2010/2011.

According to Penny Lion, general manager of business events, Tourism Australia's strategy in 2016 will continue to focus on the markets and sectors that can deliver the greatest return on investment for Australia and the team will continue to deliver tailored marketing and communications that "reach the right customer at

the right time".

"We will continue to deliver our trade programme, bringing influential buyers and media from Greater China, North America, New Zealand and the UK together with Australian industry at offshore events such as IMEX Frankfurt and on bespoke educational visits that provide first hand experiences to our audience on why there's nothing like Australia for business events," she said.

Lion also said the team would continue to produce content, both written and filmed, to deliver news, information and Australia's business events capability to potential clients.

In terms of business expectations in 2016, Lion said: "Direct selling companies in China continue to look for destinations that can inspire their teams, and they consider Australia unique as a place of inspiration."

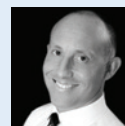
Sydney will host the 2016 Nu Skin Success Trip and the Amway China Leadership Seminar in 2017 for 10,000 delegates.

Lion said Australia had received more interest and enquiries from the North America market for incentive and association events, and that the New Zealand

market will continue to be a key focus.

"We are also planning several new initiatives in the content space in the UK market to leverage interest levels and support industry." – **Rebecca Elliott**

Top three trends



Andrew Hiebl
CEO/secretary,
Association of Australian
Convention Bureaux

1 Resurgence of incentive travel

Looking at Australia's convention bureaux performance over the 2014/2015 financial year, we saw an increase of 39 per cent in international corporate incentives won. This translates to further increases across event days, delegate numbers and delegate days with a 68 per cent increase in estimated spend.

2 Australia moves to innovation

Now that the Australian Government has recognised the trade and investment legacies of business events, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's A\$1 billion (US\$717 million) National Innovation and Science Agenda will unleash an opportunity to maximise additional benefits of the sector including knowledge sharing, attracting global talent, fostering innovation, boosting productivity, nurturing research collaboration and commercialisation.

3 Focus on regional delegate boosting

While Australia's convention bureaux won 16 per cent more international association conventions in the 2015 financial year than the previous year, it is estimated that the total number of international delegates and delegate days will have fallen by 12 per cent, putting more pressure on regional delegate boosting campaigns to lift economic impact.

MY BUSINESS RESOLUTION

To create a truly enjoyable workplace with rewarding jobs and exciting career opportunity for the 2,000 people that will open ICC Sydney in December this year.

Geoff Donaghy
CEO, ICC Sydney





Intensive destination competition and a volatile world economy will try Hong Kong's MICE sector in 2016

Bumpy ride ahead for MICE



HONG KONG

The year 2015 was not a good one for Hong Kong's business events sector, with only 1.1 million overnight MICE visitors recorded in the first nine months of the year, a 6.2 per cent drop year-on-year. Longhaul market traffic plunged 14.7 per cent while shorthaul arrivals fell 4.3 per cent. China, an important source market for Hong Kong's tourism sector, put forth weaker numbers with a 3.1 per cent decrease.

The year ahead will continue to be a challenging one, opined Hong Kong Tourism Board's executive director, Anthony Lau, who warned that the volatile macro environment will impact MICE and tour-

ism. He said: "To rise to the challenges ahead, we must remain optimistic, nimble and entrepreneurial. We will continue our strategic focus on high-growth markets and industry sectors, including science, medical science, engineering, social science, technology, and commerce.

"Apart from participating in major MICE tradeshows, we'll continue working with our trade partners to develop attractive offers that will increase the appeal of Hong Kong, so that it remains a top-of-mind destination for world-class events."

The bureau will hold travel missions, seminars, workshops, roundtables and networking events in key markets in Asia, Europe and the US.

Swire Travel, general manager for business development – destination & event management, Edmund Tsang, believes

that for Hong Kong to remain competitive in the long term, it needs to be marketed jointly with neighbouring Macau which is churning out new integrated resorts, more gaming facilities and upgraded ferry fleets.

East and West Travel, which specialises in shorthaul MICE, reported a 20 per cent decline in business last year. Manager Alan Tang believes that "2016 will be a critical year for MICE due to external factors such as the opening of Shanghai Disney Resort" which is expected to draw travellers' attention away from Hong Kong.

"However, business will improve because of realistic and affordable hotel rates (in Hong Kong)," Tang opined.

To recover Indonesian numbers which fell 30 per cent in 2015, East and West Travel held a road show in the market in January where it presented special packages put together with local agents and Cathay Pacific Airways.

For Panda Hotel, 2015 was a year that "performed well beyond our expectation".

However, in view of "the existing economic conditions", the hotel's director of meetings and conferences development, Virgie Choi, said HK\$50 (US\$6.40) have been shaved off the full-day meeting package price for 2016. Hosting a full-day meeting now costs HK\$480+ – the same rate offered in 2013.

The hotel is also banking on its new meeting facility – the 533m² Crystal meeting room which opened in December 2015 – to draw MICE interest in 2016, and will continue to engage overseas event planners in markets like Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. – **Prudence Lui**



MY BUSINESS RESOLUTION

Amid the infrastructure development in Pearl River Delta, Hong Kong will strengthen her status as a global MICE hub through joint efforts of both local and neighbouring industry partners. AWE will commit to innovation and collaboration with the industry to seize the many opportunities that arise.

Allen Ha
CEO, AsiaWorld-Expo (AWE)

National investments a booster



INDIA

The business events market for India turned out a lacklustre performance in 2015 as major source markets like Europe continued to suffer an economic slowdown.

R K Mishra, managing director of Eastern Voyages, lamented that there was no growth out of European markets in 2015 and the company had failed to find new markets to help overcome the business slowdown.

"India's tourism ministry is not spending on promotion and there is a need to create buzz about India as a destination," Mishra urged.

However, with a stable government now in place and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's string of international visits helping to establish India as a welcoming business destination, several MICE players are optimistic of a better year ahead.

Raj Rana, CEO, South Asia of Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group, said: "The Prime Minister's state visits in 2015 to countries like Japan and China will positively impact business in 2016, as many activities tend to follow such visits and we believe they will benefit our hotels in the larger cities."

Swadesh Kumar, managing director of Shikhar Travels India, sees growth potential in Asian markets in 2016. He said: "I expect 15 to 20 per cent growth from the Japanese market stemming from an expected surge in Japan's investment into India. An example of which is Japan's assistance in India's first bullet train project."

Several government initiatives have also been credited for renewed business confidence among inbound MICE players.

The government's *Make in India* initiative, which encourages companies to manufacture in India, is expected to catalyse international business events growth in the destination.

The National Rural Internet and Technology Mission in emerging Indian Tier II and III regions is another business motivating factor, opined Prashant Narayan, COO and head, Leisure Travel Inbound Business, Thomas Cook India. He commented: "(This initiative) is a sharp move and it will (benefit) the under-leveraged inbound MICE segment." – **Rohit Kaul**

Top three trends



Chander Mansharamani

Vice chairman,
India Convention
Promotion Bureau

1 Ease of entry for new businesses

The Indian government is making it easier for companies to set up in India through its *Make In India* initiative. For this to succeed, India also needs to create a marketplace that will motivate foreign firms to come and invest. If all that falls into place, a greater presence of international firms will result in more international business events coming to India.

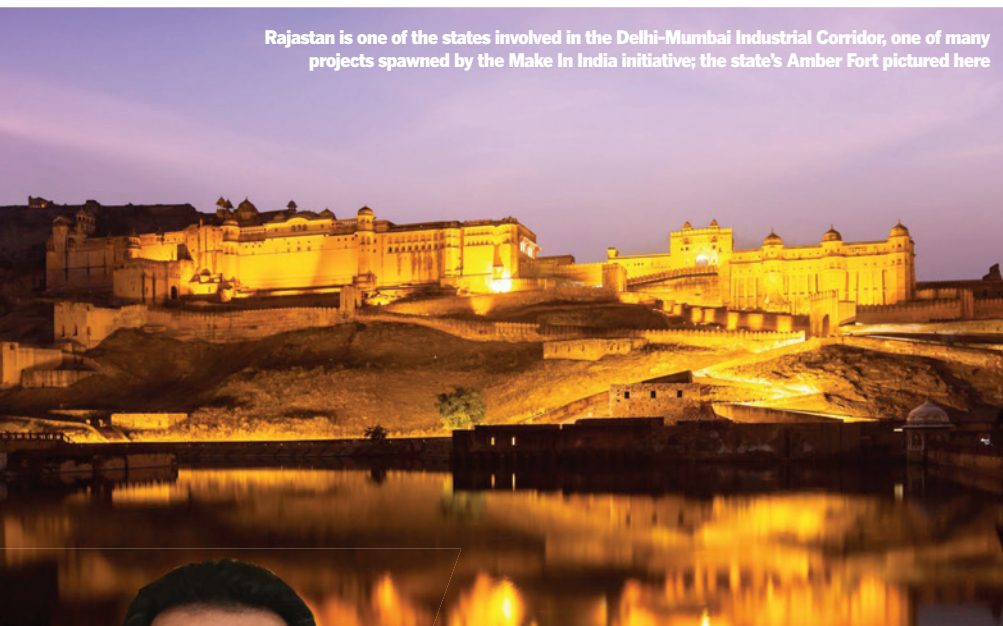
2 India gets more affordable

India today has hotel room supply that outstrips demand, and that augurs well for us in 2016 as we can offer competitive room rates. Due to economic considerations, many international markets have slashed business event budgets but we will be able to invite companies to organise their events here as the present inventory allows us to offer rates that suit their needs.

3 Key industries to prop up business

European economies are experiencing pressures but India's status as an important market and source of knowledge in fields like pharmacy, IT and insurance will enable it to continue drawing business events from Europe.

Rajasthan is one of the states involved in the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor, one of many projects spawned by the *Make In India* initiative; the state's Amber Fort pictured here



MY BUSINESS RESOLUTION

All hoteliers aim to create a home away from home for their guests. For us at The Suryaa, in 2016 we will commit ourselves to greater personalisation of services for our guests, which will be done by having more guest interaction so as to better understand their needs and in turn gain their loyalty."

M Tahir

Rooms division manager, The Suryaa New Delhi

Exhibitions, government meetings most robust



INDONESIA

A dedicated MICE directorate may have ceased to exist within the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism but the country's quest for international business events continues.

Esthy Reko Astuti, deputy minister for domestic tourism promotion, told *TTG-mice*: "We will continue to support bidding for events, development of destinations and promotions."

She expects the new Indonesia Convention and Exhibition Bureau, which is being formed, to take on the active role of developing the industry and promoting MICE in Indonesia.

Preliminary survey conducted by the Ministry of Tourism and Statistics Indonesia showed that MICE contributed nine per cent of domestic travel movements and about two per cent of international arrivals in 2014.

Indonesian MICE players say there are opportunities for growth in the country.

Wisnu Budi Sulaeman, CEO of Puntama Convex, said: "Government meetings in the country will keep MICE business going in 2016, thanks to the easing of government regulations on such meetings held outside state-owned premises. There are also a lot of associations in Indonesia



which we can tap (for events)."

According to Wisnu, the opening of new upmarket hotels with large meeting venues in Bali and the establishment of offices in Indonesia by international exhibition organisers are signs of strong confidence in the market.

"The growing middle class in Indonesia has attracted them. What we need next is to create exhibitions that attract international buyers, such as spa products or automotive spare parts," he added.

Hendra Noor Saleh, director of Dyandra Promosindo, one of Indonesia's most prominent exhibition organiser with some 400 events a year, has urged government agencies to work together for a stronger MICE future.

He said: "The spirit of Indonesia Incorporated among government agencies is still missing. While the Ministry of Tourism has come up with policies to ease arrivals (like visa-free facilitation), other government agencies are not supporting it. For example, we wanted to bring in the Batman car for an exhibition but the custom duty we had to pay to import and re-export the vehicle was almost the same as the price of the car itself." – **Mimi Hudoyo**

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Top three trends



Effi Setiabudi

Chairman,
Indonesian Exhibition
Companies Association

1 More manpower

We will see movements of human resources within the region, thanks to the ASEAN Economic Community. We may see more foreign workers coming into the country. Ready or not ready is no longer a valid question. We just need to make the most out of it.

2 More exhibitions

Indonesia's huge population and healthy economy attract exhibitions. Many international exhibition players have set up offices here, and we will see more coming in. The positive thing about this is that they bring in new exhibitions into the country.

3 More facilities

New facilities, such as the Indonesia Convention and Exhibition (ICE) in Serpong (off Jakarta), will change exhibition constellation, opening new opportunities for events in the country.



MY BUSINESS RESOLUTION

To see good growth in domestic and international MICE business for the property, especially since Medan has been named one of the MICE destinations in Indonesia by the Ministry of Tourism. Medan has also been named global business destination in North Sumatra, and enjoys direct links to Singapore, Penang and Kuala Lumpur. Looking at our forward bookings, we expect 10 to 15 per cent growth in business in 2016 – five billion rupiah (US\$357,142) more than in 2015.

Guido Andriano

General manager,
Santika Premiere Dyandra Hotel & Convention, Medan

Japan wants to promote lesser known destinations for MICE; Kanazawa Castle pictured here

More cities in the limelight



JAPAN

Japan's MICE sector has performed better in 2015 than in the previous year, for the same reasons that the nation's tourism sector has shown such stellar growth, and there are expectations that trend will continue in 2016.

"Most foreign MICE events in Japan this year have been fruitful and we are particularly happy to be able to say that Japan as a whole has been successful in attracting more incentive tours from overseas," said Katsuaki Suzuki, executive director of the Japan Convention Bureau, the division of the Japan National Tourism Organisation tasked with developing the MICE sector.

There are a number of contributing factors for this solid performance in 2015, Suzuki told *TTGmice*.

"There has been stronger promotion of Japan as a destination, favourable exchange rates against the yen and the relaxation of visa requirements, particularly

for people from other Asian countries," he said.

A second positive factor has been a return in interest among Chinese MICE buyers, he said, as political relationship between the two nations improve.

Bearing that observation out, a 2,000-strong incentive group travelled to Japan from Shanghai by cruise in early-2015, Suzuki pointed out.

The *MICE Ambassador Programme*, launched in December 2013, has also proven to be a good initiative, resulting in four international conferences in Japan.

The industry is aware, however, that other destinations in the region are also stepping up their MICE game and that Japan cannot afford to rest on its laurels.

"One of our plans is to strengthen the network between convention bureaus, such as through our Global MICE Cities project and other global associations in the MICE industry," Suzuki said.

One facet of that will be creating new opportunities for convention bureau operators to build new business relationships with key buyers from overseas.

MY BUSINESS RESOLUTION

My ambition in 2016 is, by further capturing international incentives and meetings, to firmly position Hilton Worldwide as the market leader in Japan, which has become a very mature MICE market recently. Our fully renovated and new hotels will be witnessing some very sophisticated and creative events in 2016.

Joris Vanzieleghem

Cluster director of sales, international MICE, Hilton Worldwide

"We are also working hard to promote new destinations in Japan and to encourage MICE visitors to explore areas that are more off the beaten path, but which are now readily accessible and have a great deal of unique attractions," he added.

One such region that has been opened up this year is Hokuriku, on the north coast of Honshu island. A bullet train linking Tokyo with Kanazawa opened in March 2015, leading to a sharp increase in the number of tourists to the region.

The industry does have some concerns, however, chief among them the boom in visitors to Japan causing a shortage of accommodation. For the MICE sector, when delegate numbers can soar into the thousands, this poses a particular and immediate problem.

Nevertheless, Suzuki is optimistic about the year ahead.

"We have very developed infrastructure and we believe that the growing number of inbound tourists to Japan will encourage MICE decision-makers to come here as well," he said. – **Julian Ryall**

Top three trends



Teiji Sakurai

Secretary general,
Japan Exhibition
Association

1 Stronger economic support

Japan's economy appears to be recovering and that broader improvement should have a positive impact on our sector. According to the economic outlook from the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), Japan will see 0.5 per cent growth in 2015, rising to one per cent in 2016 and 1.5 per cent in 2017.

2 Growing awareness of Japan

We have made a breakthrough in the concept of Japan as a MICE destination, which will help to propel our business in 2016. Also, the number of foreign visitors to Japan is increasing rapidly and that is set to continue in the coming years, helped by the relatively weak yen and aggressive promotion campaigns by the national government and the Japan National Tourist Organisation. That is also going to reveal to visitors just what Japan can do in the area of MICE.

3 Exhibitions the driving force

The exhibitions business will be better in 2016 because our top exhibition organisers are becoming increasingly active and are building a track record for setting up bigger and better shows, both in terms of number of exhibitors and visitors.

Top-level support drives MICE



MACAU

Macau saw an increase in MICE events and participation in the first three quarters of 2015. Event count rose by 77 year-on-year to 637 while total delegate numbers increased by 8.7 per cent to 1,663,956 people.

Major MICE players like The Venetian Macao and Sands Cotai Central reported strong results from China, Japan, Hong Kong, India, Taiwan, Singapore, Australia and the US.

Director of sales for Venetian Macau, Stephanie Tanpure, expects a “promising” year in 2016 as clients are increasingly leaning towards accessible and unique destinations.

“Capitalising on our one-stop-shop offering of land and sea transfers from Hong Kong to Macau plays a large part in our success in growing business in 2016,” said Tanpure.

“We also believe that success lies with our properties that can provide the desired level of service, cultural authenticity, accessibility and, more importantly, security. While companies grow more interested in new and exotic locations, they remain committed to addressing these issues when finalising their venue of choice. In addition, we welcome The St Regis Macao which opened in December 2015 and The Parisian Macao which will open at the end of 2016,” she added.

According to Maria Helena de Senna



MY BUSINESS RESOLUTION

In 2016 I want to continue to mentor the many young people entering the hospitality field on how to open great hotels focused on owners, brand and customers.

Dominique Berhouet,
General manager,
Crowne Plaza Macau

Fernandes, director of the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO), Macau’s growing number of business events was a result of subvention programmes.

“We have been supporting incentive tourism by continually promoting the *Travel Stimulation Program*. From January to November 2015, we have supported 39 incentive events with 25,512 travellers through this programme,” she said, adding that new tourism facilities that are coming up over the next few years will further grow MICE business in the destination.

Taking destination promotion further is Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM), which has since the start of 2016 rolled out a series of MICE support programmes such as the *MICE Tradeshows Reward Program*, previously run MGTO, and *International Meeting and Trade Fair Support Programme*, previously run by Macao Economic Services.

An IPIM spokesman said: “Through the pooling of resources into one entity, the

industry will have a one-stop service for convention bidding and MICE support in Macau. IPIM will actively support local entities to bid for international events to be held in Macau, boosting the long-term development of Macau’s MICE industry.”

– Prudence Lui

Top three trends



Alan Ho
Vice chairperson,
Macao Convention and
Exhibition Association

1 More non-gaming developments

Macau’s new world-class facilities, especially Studio City, have made the city more attractive and enhanced its non-gaming offers. I am sure there will be increased international bidding given our integrated competitiveness.

2 Focus on Asian sources

The shift in MICE traffic from Europe and the US to Asia is a phenomenon that has become more obvious in recent years. For example, German MICE business has shrunk as China rises as the next powerhouse. After an estimated growth of six to seven per cent in 2015, I am projecting a similar single-digit increase for MICE this year.

3 Survival of the strongest exhibitions

Due to falling consumption and government subsidy to the exhibition industry, Macau’s exhibition business plunged 20 per cent in 2014. This is particularly an issue for small shows but has not affected international branded events like G2E Asia. Meanwhile, the economic uncertainty is driving real estate developers like Vanke to participate in exhibitions to push more sales.

Sands Cotai Central enjoyed good MICE business in 2015



JOVANNIG/123RF.COM

Air links catalyse MICE growth



MALAYSIA

Malaysia had improved her position in the ICCA Global Ranking 2014, jumping five places to 30th spot out of 115 countries. Malaysia also reaffirmed her credentials in the Asia-Pacific and Middle East region with a seventh placing, up two positions from 2013.

Zulkefli Sharif, CEO of the Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB), said: "This is testament to Malaysia's capability to successfully host large-scale, high-profile events and reinforces the country's reputation as the preferred business events destination that is equipped with state-of-the-art facilities."

MyCEB's two key initiatives, *Malaysia Like Never Before* campaign and *Malaysia Twin Deal X* programme had received good responses since it was launched in early 2015. Up to 3Q2015, MyCEB had supported 147 events and received 339,137 delegates with an economic impact of US\$258.1 million.

The Malaysian MICE trade is also optimistic about 2016. China which is Malaysia's largest medium-haul market for meetings, incentives and leisure traffic is set to see further improvements this year, on the back of improved air links between China and Malaysia from 2H2015 as well as the government's plans to introduce e-visa facility from January 2016.

Air China had resumed four weekly services between Beijing and Kuala Lumpur from October 25, 2015 complementing the daily services of Malaysia Airlines and AirAsia X. China Southern Airlines had also commenced thrice weekly services



New flights from Delhi to Kuala Lumpur will attract more Indian MICE business

from Guangzhou to Kota Kinabalu from December 1, 2015.

Low-cost airlines are also developing new routes between the secondary cities in China and Malaysia with AirAsia recently starting new services between Kota Kinabalu and Wuhan from January 22 and four weekly flights from Guangzhou to Langkawi on January 24.

Winnie Ng, deputy general manager, Pearl Holiday, said: "Improved direct air accessibility is an advantage and makes it easier to pitch to Chinese MICE planners for secondary destinations beyond Kuala Lumpur."

Mint Leong, managing director of Sunflower Holidays, said her client, Perfect China, a China-based health and wellness direct sales company, will bring 12,000 incentive delegates to Malaysia in March, with plans to visit Kuala Lumpur, Malacca and Penang. To date, this is the biggest confirmed incentive group for 2016. Coupled with confirmed bookings for smaller group ranging from 200 to 400 pax from March onwards, Leong believes 2016 will be a good year.

Local DMCs are also looking at a good year ahead for the Indian MICE market with the government's plans to introduce

e-visa facility by June to Indian travellers.

Air connectivity between Kuala Lumpur and Delhi will further improve from February 3 when AirAsia X resumes its direct flights from Kuala Lumpur to New Delhi with four weekly services. The new flights complements Malaysia Airlines daily services and Malindo Air's 11 weekly flights on the same route.

Arokia Das, senior manager at Luxury Tours Malaysia, said the increased flight options would allow him to bid for bigger incentive groups.

"In 2016, we plan to further tap the northern (Indian) region for incentive business." – S Puvaneswary

Top three trends



Amos Y C Wong

CEO,
Malaysian Association of
Convention and Exhibition
Organisers and Suppliers

1 Space limitation

Although Malaysia will continue to win bids to host international association meetings in Malaysia, the ability to host large conventions and exhibitions will be limited to the availability of large convention facilities.

2 Economic woes

The current weak global economic situation will affect all sectors of the MICE industry and is unlikely to be mitigated even if the Malaysian currency is seen to be attractive in the near term.

3 Time, cost considerations

The global geo-political situation is a hurdle that will make international travel cumbersome with a lot of time spent in airports undergoing security screening. To avoid that, many convention delegates may prefer webcasting over a physical presence. It also reduces their cost of participation in the near to mid-term.

MY BUSINESS RESOLUTION

To leverage the knowledge and experience garnered from our decade of operation to ensure we continue pushing the envelope with our innovative, flexible and value-added solutions so we stay ahead of the competition. We are confident that this, together with the ongoing delivery of excellent service, will hold us in good stead in 2016 and beyond.

Alan Pryor

General manager, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre



More fun for MICE in the works



PHILIPPINES

The Philippines' persistence in pushing for MICE is paying off as it is expected to have hosted more business meetings and conferences in 2015 than ever before.

Much of that increase came from major international events, foremost the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meetings and Summit and others like Madrid Fusion Manila and the 17th Asia Pacific Retailers Convention and Exhibition.

Tourism secretary Ramon Jimenez Jr said the hosting of APEC, from December 2014 to November 2015, brought in about 22,000 foreign delegates for meetings held in eight host venues around the country while the APEC Summit in November brought 8,800 foreign delegates.

APEC 2015 "has showcased the country's ability to set new standards for organising conferences and meetings," Jimenez said, alluding to the growing number of convention centres, sophisticated meeting facilities, and hotels that were built and continue to be constructed in metro Manila and other areas.

The new MICE brand launched last

year, *Fun Works*, is also giving MICE a boost. "The push really is for the whole world to know that the Philippines can capture international meetings. We encourage each Philippine region to build their own efforts in developing MICE and organise MICE-related activities," said tourism assistant secretary Art Boncato.

That the private sector is collaborating with the government to put the Philippines on the MICE world map also augurs well for meetings and exhibitions this year and in the future, said Agnes Pacis, vice president sales and marketing, SMX Convention Centre.

"We're optimistic. We're showing growth in our numbers in overall events," said Pacis, adding that MICE "is not so roller coaster" anymore the past months.

But Shan David, president of Corporate International Travel and Tours, echoed the view of many in the industry that two of the challenges of selling MICE is the lack of infrastructure facilities and insufficient air connectivity.

Even Boracay, highly popular for MICE, "has limited flights" and some destinations lacking in infrastructure are not ready for MICE, said David.

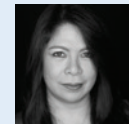
Others, like Hannah Yulo, director of sales and marketing, Paradise Garden

Boracay Resort and Convention Center, are exploring new MICE markets and opportunities.

Leveraging on Paradise Garden being the only halal-certified resort in the Visayas, Yulo said she will focus this year on the Muslim market. After attending the Arabian Travel Mart in Dubai and meeting with fam groups from Bangladesh and Kuwait last year, she will go on a trip to Turkey and be involved with a fam group from Oman and Iran this year.

– Rosa Ocampo

Top three trends



Jing Lagandaon
President,
PACEOS

1 Greater focus on ROI

Exhibitors are expecting more quantifiable benefits in participating in trade shows and sponsoring events. This means that organisers will have to resort to more content-driven and experiential strategies and promotions to make trade shows more relevant. This also means higher expense and a need for more experienced personnel to carry this out.

2 Consolidation of events

Merging of exhibitions and buying out of trade shows will result in an influx of foreign organisers in the Philippines in the next three years. This may trigger increase in cost of basic event requirements as foreign organisers are prepared to pay higher rates than local organisers.

3 Greater use of event apps

There will be a greater use of event apps, although the transition will be slow as organisers will require additional expense which is not normally in the basic budget of an event.



Limited flights still plague popular destinations like Boracay; Willy's Rock pictured here



MY BUSINESS RESOLUTION

My resolution is to strengthen loyalty programmes, the IHG Rewards Club and the IHG Business Rewards, and to continue driving our rooms and F&B through strong promotions and quality offerings.

Anthony Delaby

Executive assistant manager, Crowne Plaza Manila Galleria and Holiday Inn Manila Galleria

Singapore's modern and unique facilities are expected to draw the MICE crowd; Marina Bay Sands pictured here

MY BUSINESS RESOLUTION

As I contemplate the challenges in 2016, my resolution is to lead more and manage less, to better empower my team of high performers to give them the leeway and opportunity to take the lead in driving the business.

Arun Madhok
CEO, Suntec Singapore

Investments in collaboration



SINGAPORE

THE first half of 2015 saw a plunge in the business travel and MICE (BTMICE) visitor numbers to Singapore, as well as a respective dip in related tourism receipts, according to the latest set of statistics from the Singapore Tourism Board (STB).

According to STB, a year-on-year decline of 16 per cent was observed for BTMICE arrivals, and per capita spending went down by nine per cent in 1Q2015. The downward trend continued into the second quarter, showing an eight per cent year-on-year dip in BTMICE arrivals and a 16 per cent drop in spending.

Overall tourism performance for the Lion City was dolorous too, with total visitor numbers down three per cent year-on-year to 7.3 million, and tourism receipts tumbling 12 per cent over the same period to S\$10.5 billion (US\$7.4 billion).

Chew Tiong Heng, executive director of Business Tourism Development, STB, said: "Macroeconomic factors have had a strong impact on Singapore, in particular economic uncertainties in some of our top markets for business travel and events, and the strength of the Singapore currency."

While Judy Lum, group vice president for sales and marketing with Singapore's Tour East Group, agreed that business for 1H2015 was "significantly down compared to 2014", she said the second quarter had "picked up with a vengeance", and seemed to be catching up especially

from Europe.

Janet Tan-Collis, managing director of East West Planners Singapore, is equally optimistic, predicting "a busier 2016 ahead".

Her confidence stems from Singapore's "offering of unique and modern venues".

"We have spaces like the Waterfront Promenade and Esplanade which are very popular. Singapore is always coming up with nice venues which are attractive to clients," she said.

To boost this sector, STB has increased its BTMICE marketing investment globally to generate even greater awareness of Singapore as an attractive MICE destination.

Chew said: "The next six months, for instance, will see us collaborating with major media partners like CNN and *The Economist* to distinguish Singapore as a premier MICE hub anchored on thought leadership and business opportunities.

"To encourage more travellers to combine their business trips with leisure, we are also expanding partnerships with the travel trade, industry associations and various media owners to share destination lifestyle content and highlights with visitors, as well as provide flights, hotels and other deals targeted at business visitors from Asia-Pacific."

"Moving forward, the pipeline for BTMICE events remains strong and will remain a significant and steady contributor to tourism," he added.

According to Chew, Singapore's line-up of events in 2016 includes large-scale association conventions like SpineWeek 2016, debut events such as EdTechXAsia and Asian Robotics Week, and healthcare products firm Unicity International's first Global Convention in Singapore, which is tipped to attract some 25,000 people.

Top three trends



Janet Tan-Collis
President, SACEOS

1 Corporate cuts

There is a continuous steady flow of events from international associations, but there seems to be a slow down from the corporate side. It could be due to a budget cut on the corporate side, so there is more tightening. We can expect less corporate events in 2016.

2 AEC drives new business opportunities

The establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015 will see increased vibrancy around the ASEAN countries. AEC might see a rise in different types of businesses involving collaboration between the countries that will impact and benefit the regional MICE sector.

3 Greater security considerations

The recent terrorist attacks in Paris and also with the rise of terrorism would make corporates extra cautious and selective in their destination used for corporate meetings and events, and there will also likely be increased levels of security checks.

A darling of trade exchanges

Improved relations with China is expected to boost MICE traffic from the mainland



TAIWAN

THE business events industry in Taiwan celebrated a record revenue of US\$1.23 billion in 2014, an impressive 21 per cent year-on-year growth from 2013, with 544 business events held.

Latest Meet Taiwan data found that nearly 190,000 international travellers visited Taiwan in 2014 to attend business events, with the bulk from Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Australia. The growth is attributed to leading trade events such as COMPUTEX, Taipei International Cycle Show and the Taiwan International Boat Show.

Taiwan also emerged as the fourth top Asian destination in ICCA's 2014 ranking of destinations by the number of international meetings hosted. It held a record total of 145 international meetings.

Walter Yeh, executive vice president of Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA), said: "The new record we set in terms of the number of international meetings organised in 2014 is a result of our determination and efforts."

Ming Shui Yeh, TAITRA deputy secre-

tary-general, said: "(The growth) was also a result of new convention and exhibition facilities in the northern Taipei suburb of Nangang and the southern industrial area of Kaohsiung. There are more (events) planned for centrally located Taichung."

While 2015 MICE data has yet to be published, Yeh said the mayor of Kaohsiung city expects an increase in business events and conferences last year and has forecasted US\$6.4 billion in revenue.

Kaohsiung Exhibition Center which opened its doors in 2014 and the TWTC Nangang Exhibition Hall 2 in Taipei which will be completed in June 2016 are expected to create further new opportunities for Taiwan in the Asian MICE industry.

TW MICE Event & DMC's sales director, Stacy Yang, said: "Taiwan's hotel sector is thriving, buoyed by the island's transformation into an up-and-coming destination for Asian travellers. The number of visitors from China, Japan, South Korea, and Malaysia all rose by double-digit percentages last year, and this sustained tourism boom is changing the face of Taiwan's hotel sector."

"Top global hospitality brands, which ignored Taiwan for years as they ramped up expansion in China and South-east Asia, are now giving the island a second

look. The change is most visible in Taipei's five-star segment, which is critical for attracting business travellers."

Taiwan's MICE sector has also been enjoying strong government backing. TAITRA had invested US\$5.3 million in the Meet Taiwan project while the Ministry of Economic Affairs had allocated NT\$230 million (US\$6.9 million) to "accelerate the growth of talent, facilities, research expertise, and marketing support in 2015" to better the future of Taiwan's business events sector.

Thomas Tsou, secretary general, Taiwan Convention & Exhibition Association, expects growth to continue into 2016, spurred particularly by a reshuffling of government that will improve cross-strait relationships and trade between Taiwan and China. – **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

Top three trends



Thomas Tsou
Secretary general,
Taiwan Convention &
Exhibition Association

1 Greater security scrutiny

The growing terrorist threats in western cities will divert European MICE operators' attention to safer destinations in Asia. As the world's second safest country (by US lifestyle magazine, *Presscave*, based on the annual Global Peace Index), Taiwan will certainly benefit.

2 Cheaper flights draw longhaul groups

Continued drop in oil prices will bring about cheaper airfares from Europe and the US, resulting in stronger traffic to Asian countries including Taiwan.

3 Boom in mainland incentives

Total tourist arrivals from Greater China in 2015 will reach six million, and we will see a tremendous increase in incentive travellers from China in 2016.

MY BUSINESS RESOLUTION

We want to expand into new markets and let Taipei Marriott Hotel become the synonym for the top MICE venue in Taiwan. We will increase our partnership with Taiwan's convention and visitor bureau, agencies as well as domestic vendors to develop Taiwan as a MICE destination.

Elaine Chin

Director of sales and marketing, Marriott Taipei Hotel



Banking on world connections



THAILAND

Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) has set a modest five per cent growth target for the year ahead, aiming towards 1,060,000 international business travellers who will generate 92 billion baht (US\$2.5 billion) for the Kingdom.

This compares to the 1,036,300 business events visitors and approximately 106.78 billion baht in revenue recorded for the 2015 fiscal year running from October 2014 to September 2015. For the 2014 fiscal year ending September 2014, Thailand welcomed 919,164 business events visitors and generated 80,800 million baht in revenue.

To ensure MICE performance improves after a turbulent 2014 that was rocked by political unrest, the bureau has invested in a series of destination promotion campaigns which will continue into 2016.

TCEB's president Nopparat Maythaveekulchai said: "For 2016, we will promote Thailand with the new campaign, *Thailand Connect Our Heart, Your World*."

The campaign highlights three key pillars of Thailand's MICE industry: Destinations of Thailand which spotlights the country's diverse destinations; Business in Thailand which emphasises Thailand's location and its ability to help businesses seize opportunities around the globe; and People of Thailand which celebrates its people's excellent and passionate service.



MY BUSINESS RESOLUTION

I will commit more resources to drive greater MICE revenue in 2016. These additional resources include my ongoing direct sales support, the addition of dedicated sales people in key feeder markets and an increase in our MICE sales outreach programmes and FAM activities."

Brian Connelly

General manager, Angsana Laguna Phuket

"The campaign will stress for business planners that Thailand is a unique destination at the heart of the South-east Asian pro-business bloc and is a thriving hub that offers seamless service from the heart and with an unforgettable smile," Nopparat said.

TCEB will also focus on courting the high quality market to drive sustainable growth for the local MICE sector, and pay attention to the exhibitions sector, which is seen as a vital platform to enable local industries to expand trade and investments. To this end, TCEB has bid for and won the hosting rights to the UFI Open Seminar in Asia 2016 which will take place in Chiang Mai on February 25-26.

A TCEB press statement explained that hosting the event will strengthen the capability of local exhibition professionals

and underline Chiang Mai as a gateway to Greater Mekong Subregion market.

Meanwhile, trade players the magazine spoke to are generally optimistic about 2016. Kris Srisatin, founder and managing director of Stream Events Asia, expects to see a broader mix of clients coming from Europe, the US and Australia.

Brian Connelly, general manager of the Angsana Laguna Phuket which had recently upgraded its ballroom in part to better cater to the MICE clientele, believes that "the coming year is looking more positive". – **Michael Mackey**

Bangkok is still the first choice of event planners heading to Thailand



Top three trends



Sumate Sudasna

President,
Thailand Incentive and
Convention Association

1 Decisions driven by exchange rates

Destinations with favourable exchange rates are always a draw for planners of meetings and incentives.

2 Moderate spend

Budgets will not be right but planners will spend moderately and pay attention to value-for-money destinations and experiences.

3 China continues to be key

China will contribute the largest number of MICE and leisure arrivals to Thailand for many years. We expect a slight increase of five to seven per cent in overall international MICE arrivals this year.



The power and reach of the Chinese dragon

This year may be the year that China becomes the world's largest business travel market after considering its recent rapid expansion, writes GBTA's Joseph Bates

For years now, GBTA has been forecasting the impending, and seemingly inevitable, move for China to overtake the US as the world's largest business travel market. Now that we have flipped our calendars to another new year however, and given the spending growth rates for each country, it appears 2016 will indeed be the year when this becomes reality.

China's business travel market represents roughly 20 per cent of global business travel spending, up from 5.1 per cent in 2000. Despite recent economic

turmoil, China business travel spending is projected to grow at 10.7 per cent in 2016, with business travel spending forecasted to increase by more than 60

per cent from 2014 to 2019 reaching US\$420 billion.

In 2015, the GBTA Foundation looked beyond overall business travel spend and conducted the first-ever assessment of China's MICE market.

GBTA estimates a total of US\$110 billion was spent by Chinese business travellers attending meetings and events in 2014 in China, and we expect this market will continue to grow at a rapid pace as China's economy expands. Nearly one-third (29 per cent) of Chinese business travellers expect the number of MICE meetings they will attend to increase over the next year.

Business travel for MICE activity comprises 42 per cent of total domestic business travel volume in China and 45 per cent of total business travel spending. Shanghai (27 per cent) and Beijing (25 per cent) hosted the majority of MICE trips in China over the last 12 months, followed by Guangzhou (24 per cent), Hong Kong (11 per cent) and Macau (six per cent).

Given that three-quarters of all meetings spend in the region is spread across just three countries, the industry has a lot of potential for growth, which presents a large opportunity for travel suppliers.

What do these trips look like? In the past 12 months, 86 per cent of business travellers have taken a trip for MICE purposes in China and each business traveller spends an average of US\$1,100 per trip. Chinese MICE trips last 2.9 days on average with the majority of trips (59 per cent) lasting between two and four days. Most business travellers (64 per cent) reach their MICE destinations by air while 18 per cent travel by train and 14 per cent by car. MICE meetings are typically held at conferences and convention centres (38 per cent) or hotels (33 per cent).

Still, MICE business travel tends to be more discretionary than individual business travel. While a proportion of MICE activity is focused directly on sales, there is also a large emphasis on networking, education and training. This is a hallmark characteristic of a developing economy and training and education are vital to the long-term growth of Chinese businesses and the country's economy in general.

GBTA expects MICE activity in China will only continue to grow for the foreseeable future.



Joseph Bates

Vice president of research,
GBTA

A firm hold despite uncertainties

SITE's Rajeev Kohli is fixed on the optimistic horizon of the incentive travel industry in a tumultuous world climate

As we begin 2016, we stop and ponder on all that happened in the past year and wonder what the year ahead holds for us.

The incentive travel industry has always been one that is easily affected by the going-ons of the world. From uncertain economies and natural calamities to terrorism and political instabilities, the world saw much happen over the past year, affecting the way people travel.

Despite that, our industry has held strong. The 2015 SITE Index Benchmark Survey has thrown up some very interesting and encouraging indicators for 2016, showing positive trends for our industry.

Budgets are up – Overall, the study found a net increase in incentive travel budgets over the past year, a trend that should continue for the next 12 months at least.

While budgets are increasing a bit, nearly three quarters of incentive buyers are managing costs through a variety of approaches, the most common being planning shorter programmes (34 per cent), having fewer inclusions (29 per cent), and having fewer expensive destinations (29 per cent). At the same time, nearly seven out of 10 sellers (69 per cent) of incentive travel services are attempting to add value for their participants through more innovative event design.

World affairs – Despite data showing that incentive travel participation and spend are both increasing, the net impact of national and world events seems to be largely negative. Interestingly though, the state of the economy and cost of airline tickets were noted to have a far stronger negative impact than acts of terrorism. In

some ways, it seems buyers and suppliers alike have accepted the paradigm shift in the world safety scenario.

Work, along with play – A growing aspect of incentive travel programmes that has become the norm is including a meeting component as part of the overall experience. According to the study, the portion of buyers who say that a meeting component is “always” involved in incentive travel programmes (42 per cent) is significantly higher than what many sellers recognise (19 per cent), while 84 per cent of incentive travel buyers at least “occasionally” include a meeting component in their events.

Do good – It is increasingly becoming the norm to incorporate a corporate social responsibility (CSR) component, with approximately seven in 10 incentive programmes including at least one CSR activity. Among participants in those programmes, 12 per cent place an emphasis on CSR.

It might be easy to assume that CSR activities are geared toward younger participants (e.g. millennials), but in reality, only about one in three programmes gear their CSR activities towards younger participants. The vast majority of respondents say they target everyone equally.

Faith and belief is the new ROI – Interestingly, while nearly everyone believes their incentive programmes are effective, only 28 per cent actually formally track the ROI of their programmes. Programmes



Rajeev Kohli

President, Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) 2016 and joint managing director, Creative Travel India

are commonly accepted as being effective for driving successful performance, whether or not there is hard data to support that premise. In many cases, there is no requirement to formally assess a programme's effectiveness, and often the success of a programme is assumed to reflect in the overall success of the organisation.

The bar is rising – Another finding of the study is that the incentive travel industry in all likelihood is going to become even more competitive.

Among those who sell incentive travel services to the industry, seven in 10 are currently developing newer and more creative ways to add value for their customers. With the creative standard becoming even higher, sellers of incentive travel services cannot afford to remain complacent about creating value through innovative offerings. If they do, they are very likely to quickly fall behind the competition.



Transforming the Asian exhibition space

In a connected world that relies heavily on technology, UFI's Mark Cochrane predicts that the exhibition industry will evolve as new partnerships emerge

The exhibition industry has remained remarkably unchanged for a century or more. Even throughout the first dotcom boom 15 years ago, the global exhibition industry continued to grow and expand. The story in Asia has been similar. Face-to-face events expanded year after year – even during the dark days of the global financial crisis.

According to UFI's latest research, net space sold at trade fairs in Asia jumped 6.8 per cent in 2014 reaching 18.6 million square metres, compared to 17.4 million square metres in 2013. More impressive, over the past five years (2014 vs 2010) net space sold in the region is up over 20 per cent – rising from 15.5 million square metres to 18.6 million square metres.

That is a remarkable and enviable success story, but it is now clear the exhibition industry will change more in the next decade than it did in the last century. The forces of change are primarily tech-driven.

In fact, the opportunity for online platforms to move into exhibitions has been clear for more than 10 years.

In 2003, Hong Kong-based Global Sources, a B2B online sourcing platform, entered the exhibition space with little to no event organising experience. Today, the company has built a US\$80 million exhibition business by leveraging on both its database of buyers and suppliers as well as its digital marketing capabilities.

Then in December 2015, a bigger tremor rumbled through the Asian exhibition industry. Alibaba.com and UBM Asia announced that they would begin to cooperate in 2016, effectively linking the world's largest digital marketplace operator with one of the largest commercial exhibition organisers in Asia.

At this stage, the details of the partnership are unclear, but the potential opportunities are transformative. Alibaba reports that its online platform has 350 million active users and its mobile



Mark Cochrane
Regional manager Asia-Pacific,
UFI

platform has an average of 290 million monthly users. Together, its various platforms posted a gross merchandise volume (the value of goods traded on Alibaba's platforms) of over US\$390 billion in 2014.

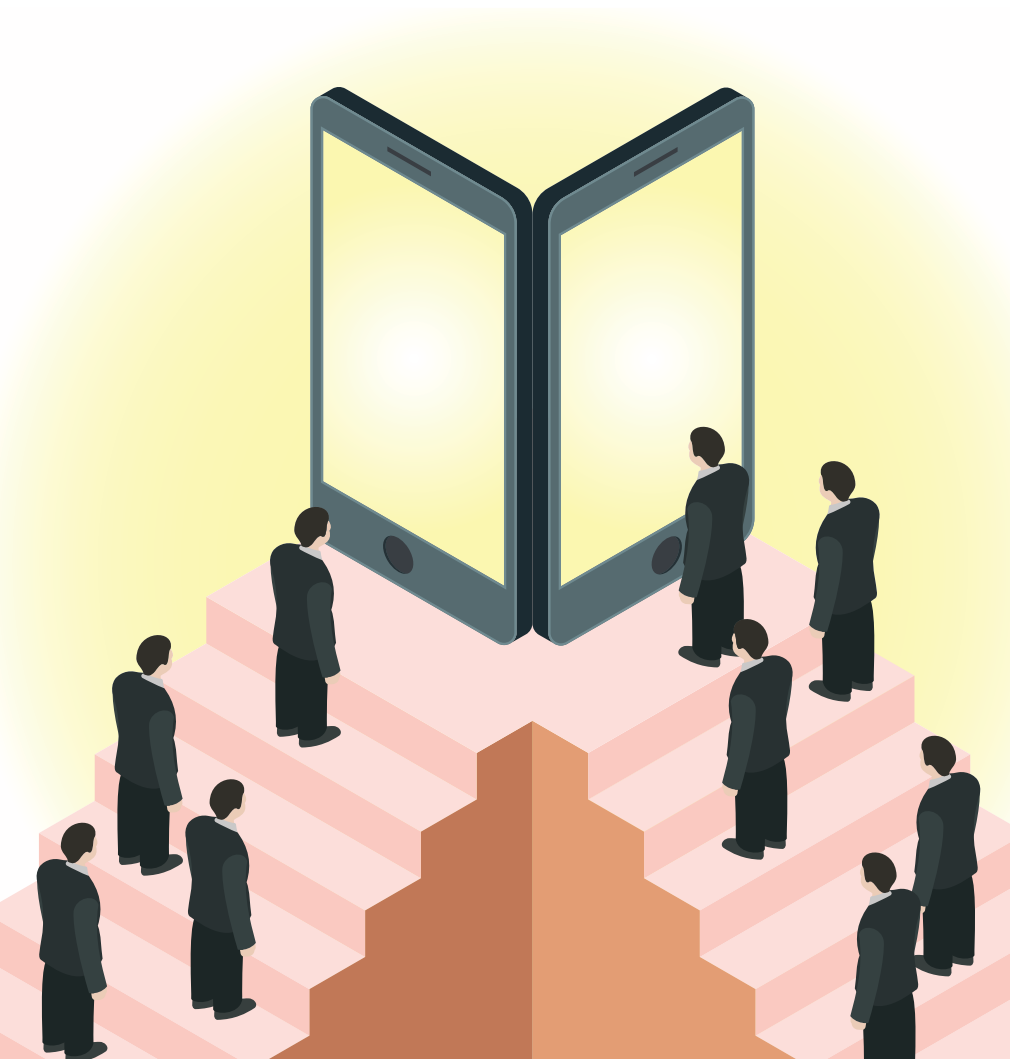
UBM organises more than 400 business events annually. It is an industry leader in key markets including China, India and the US. In Asia, UBM organises 230 events each year and has offices in 24 cities across the region.

As a first, relatively straightforward step, the partnership could allow UBM to market its portfolio of events to Alibaba's database of millions of businesses – opening up a whole new world of potential exhibitors and visitors.

Alibaba could also pull invaluable insight and analysis from the millions of searches that run through its platform to guide UBM to better cover the hot product categories or even launch new events to address emerging buying trends in a particular industry or geography.

In addition to leveraging databases and business intelligence, there is also the potential for onsite matchmaking services and of course, further down the road, the promise of facilitating transactions.

While transactions may still be ways off, but my hope for 2016 is that the Asian exhibition industry is indeed poised to enter an exciting era of change.





A tropical MICE paradise

Shuri Castle has hosted events on its grounds

Okinawa's unique heritage and geography have given her many unique sights, venues and activities that event planners can use, writes **Julian Ryall**

Okinawa is looking to ramp up its reputation as a MICE destination as it prepares for two major infrastructure projects that will further boost its appeal to event planners.

The prefectural government is scheduled to open a state-of-the-art exhibition centre on the east coast of the main island of Okinawa in 2020, while a second runway is due to become operational at Naha Airport the same year. Combined with the unique culture, hospitality and the legendary beauty of the 160 islands that make up Japan's most southerly prefecture, local operators believe these two developments will place Okinawa firmly on planners' radar.

"The market has already been growing in recent years, which can be attributed to the Okinawa Convention and Visitors Bureau (OCVB) becoming more proactive in the menus that it can offer to MICE

planners," said Kazuya Yasuda, a representative of MICE Promotion Division, Akane Creation Co. in Naha.

"A decade ago, Okinawa only had direct international flights to Taipei and Seoul," he said.

"Now we have direct flights from up to seven international cities, including some of the biggest and most important in the region, such as Beijing, Hong Kong and Shanghai."

To date, international conferences hosted in Okinawa tended to be relatively small and specialised, with the largest in 2014 attracting 681 delegates to the Okinawa Convention Centre for the 7th Congress of the International Society for Hemodialysis.

The centre's facilities are complemented by the Bankoku Shinryokan Resort, which was built on a small peninsula on the west coast of the main island to serve as the primary venue for the 2000 summit of the

Group of Eight nations. Additional options became available in 2012 with the opening of a 496-seat auditorium, seminar rooms and related facilities at the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology.

But with capacity for 20,000 people and 20,000m² of exhibition space, with a further 25,000m² to be added subsequently, the planned new convention facility will herald a new dawn for MICE events in Okinawa.

"A venue like that will obviously act as a big draw for organisations that are considering locations for their events, particularly if we are able to emphasise some of the unique events and locations that companies here can provide," said Yoshie Johnson, executive director of Okinawa Congress Corporation.

A unique facility in the tropical Japanese destination is the Zakimi Castle, which was recognised as a

Destination: Japan



Okinawa Convention Centre (above) hosted one of Okinawa's largest association congress, the 7th Congress of the International Society for Hemodialysis

UNESCO World Heritage site in 2000. It can host demonstrations of traditional Okinawan martial arts, music and dance, and when illuminated at night, the spectacle is breathtaking.

Similarly, many event organisers request a banquet or entertainment at Shuri Castle, the crimson fortress that overlooks Naha. Another UNESCO World Heritage site, the OCVB has been able to use its contacts to convince the guardians of arguably Okinawa's most important historical site to permit events to be held on its grounds.

Okinawa's weather and environment are also a major advantage to companies that provide teambuilding exercises.

"We are very positive about the outlook for what we do, and for many reasons," said Hiroyuki Tokuda, president of DMC Okinawa Inc., which has led events for Citigroup and BNP Paribas.

"There are more tourists coming here now, and that is helping to dramatically raise our profile as a MICE destination as well," he said. "Meanwhile the islands' infrastructure is also being developed smoothly."

DMC Okinawa is the organ-

iser of the *Amazing Race* series in Okinawa and can lay on anything from events in which participants make traditional Okinawan dresses to performing island music, treasure hunts, boat races and 'beach Olympics'.

Asked what single development would bring a significant increase in MICE visitors to Okinawa, Tokuda is swift to reply: direct flights from Singapore. And the prefectural government is in discussions with carriers to try to arrange that, he said.

The OCVB has also introduced a number of measures designed to attract MICE planners, including providing conference bags and guidebooks to delegates, having *Miss Okinawa* ambassadors take part in reception parties, presentations and ceremonies, hosting a welcome ceremony at the airport and providing introductions to organisations that can perform traditional cultural shows.

Additional assistance from the bureau includes financial support for charter bus services, accommodation subsidies for incentive groups and arranging discounts for conference venues, including the Okinawa Convention Centre and the Bankoku Shinryokan.

{ Talking numbers }



7

The number of cities outside Japan that with direct flights to Okinawa's Naha Airport: Taipei, Taichung, Seoul, Busan, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Beijing



70

The discount rate available at the Okinawa Convention Centre for business events with at least 1,000 participants from overseas



22.7

The average annual temperature in Naha City, making it a year-round destination for business events

{ **Spotlight** }

Cave dwelling of a wonderful kind

Technically, the Valley of Gangala is not a new venue on Okinawa. It has, after all, been around for an estimated 100,000 years – but the operator has turned this ancient limestone cave complex into arguably the coolest venue on the islands. An added bonus is that it is completely unique.

The valley was formed when part of the roof of the cave collapsed. Ancient people lived in and around the valley – there is a burial chamber built into one wall and archeologists only discovered 20,000-year-old shell tools at the site in 2014, making them the oldest in Japan. Nature has also reclaimed part of the area, with giant bamboo sprouting upwards while the feathery roots of banyan trees hang down into the depths of the valley.

After a 15-minute hike through the valley, visitors enter a narrow passageway that

slopes down into a spectacular natural cavern that serves as the venue for parties and receptions.

Limestone stalactites descend from the domed roof and are illuminated by spotlights, while one end of the cave can be fitted with a stage for entertainment and speeches.

A variety of meal options are available, ranging from the Premium Party Plan, catered by the Marriott Resort Okinawa, to more casual offerings. Traditional Okinawan cuisine is inevitably popular, including the local pork and beef dishes, as well as myriad types of seafood. Halal food is also available.

Orion beer is on tap for party-goers, while the local spirit – awamori – is also poured freely. Don't miss an opportunity to try the selection of craft ales created by the Nanto Brewery, just a five-minute walk from the venue.



The venue has room for around 150 people seated, but can accommodate as many as 600 people for a concert.

MICE organisers looking to provide entertainment for delegates during a party in the Valley of Gangala should look no further than *Diamantes*. The

seven-piece band is fronted by Alberto Shiroma, whose grandparents emigrated from Okinawa to Peru. Shiroma has returned to his roots and created a unique blend of Latin-infused Okinawan music, which is addictive.

{ **Insider** }

Takashi Kinoshita, director of Ichimarine, suggests three fun cultural immersions in Okinawa

Conquer the water dragon

Anyone who takes part in a dragon boat race will always remember it. The Nago Tourist Association operates programmes that can be as short as two hours or last six hours, with local fishermen teaching teams how best to paddle and steer one of the Okinawan-style Haarii dragon boats. Then, when the 10-strong teams have mastered the boats, there is always a final race. Visit kanko.city.nago.okinawa.jp/micemenu/index.html.

**Find delight in dyeing**

Bingata is a traditional style of dyeing cloth that uses stencils to create designs that are unmistakably Okinawan. It uses bright colours and the designs tend to feature natural images, such as tropical flowers, fish and water. The Naha City Traditional Arts and Crafts Centre, in the heart of the city, runs classes for up to 100 people. Visit www.kogeikan.jp/international/english/.

Dive like a Water Bird

Ichimarine arranges MICE activities and teambuilding sessions, as well as water sports, entertainment and cultural experiences. It is also the only company in Japan that operates the Water Bird. The Water Bird is unique, as it uses a boat with an outrigger that cruises out into the lagoon, where guests climb onto a board that is then lowered beneath the surface of the water. Guests are given scuba masks and breathing devices. The experience begins with a gentle cruise offshore, where guests can see many different types of fish and other sea life, coral and just explore the ocean. It's a really good introduction to the sea for people who have not done anything similar before. Visit www.ichimarine.com/water-bird1.html.



Get creative in a Bingata class



The SINGAPORE MICE Advantage

Asia's premier business events city sweetens the deal and doubles the savings and rewards for your next meeting or incentive trip



The Singapore experience begins on Singapore Airlines.

Singapore offers the unique prospect of delegates arriving on the world's best airline, to the world's highest-rated airport, and a warm, personalised unique welcome to Asia's top international meeting city.

Singapore Airlines has been named the world's best international airline for 20 consecutive years by *Travel & Leisure* magazine. Operating a young and modern fleet to more than 60 cities in over 30 countries around

the world, Singapore Airlines' extensive network connects you to Singapore. The national carrier's commitment to service excellence ensures your Singapore experience begins even before touchdown.

Changi Airport has been named the world's

best airport for the third consecutive year by Skytrax. In addition to Changi's unique facilities such as swimming pool, movie theatre, and wifi zones, upcoming attractions include a fourth terminal and Jewel Changi Airport, an upcoming lifestyle and

retail complex which connects the three existing terminals.

Awaiting your arrival are a range of award-winning venues, unique event spaces and green facilities for hosting unforgettable events in iconic settings. The winner of the Top

International Meeting City according to the Union of International Associations (UIA) for 8 years running, Singapore is a pioneering and stimulating presence in the MICE industry.

You will find one of a kind experiences such as the **National Gallery Singapore**, a new visual arts institution housed in two beautifully restored national monuments—the former Supreme Court and City Hall—with guided tours, rooftop dining, and unique event spaces. Delegates will be wowed by **Gardens by the Bay** as they sip their cocktails beneath the Garden's **Supertrees** which come alive with an exhilarating display of light and sound at night.



Shopping at Changi Airport.



The Supertrees at Gardens by the Bay.



The new National Gallery was formerly Singapore's Supreme Court and City Hall.



An Evening in the Wild at Night Safari.

Singapore offers the ease of mixing business and pleasure with a wide array of exclusive and novel experiences. Here's a sampling of what's available.

An Evening in the Wild, **Night Safari's** new dining programme for groups of up to 40 seated guests. Night Safari's exclusive tipi tent and its majestic vista of the serene Seletar Reservoir are the perfect backdrop for your celebration.

The Intan, a Peranakan heritage space and museum that can accommodate up to 40 guests provides tours conducted by Alvin Yapp, the owner. Groups can even enjoy a traditional Peranakan meal prepared

by Mr Yapp's mother.

Pocket Trips, a location based mobile trail app that M&I planners can use to create a personalised cultural precinct or food tour for their delegates in an interactive and engaging manner.

Those offerings can be part of your seamless business experience. Let your one of a kind business experience take flight in Singapore.

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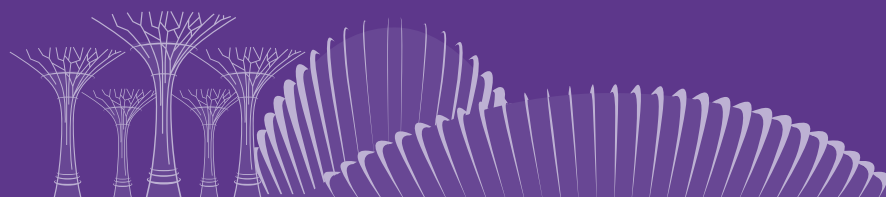
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Thinking outside the city

Chiang Rai is gaining popularity among incentive groups

Incentive groups are starting to look beyond Bangkok as there are more opportunities to conduct a more diverse range of activities. By **Michael Mackey**

A movement out of Bangkok, led by incentive groups, is being noticed by industry sources. The reason for this change is the opportunity and scope it creates for more diverse activities such as those covering CSR, green, sustainability and wellness.

Despite Thailand's MICE business in 2016 showing modest growth, Nooch Homrossukhon, director of the meetings and incentives department of the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB), told *TTGmice* that: "We are seeing more and more groups move out of Bangkok."

These incentive groups head to Pattaya, Chiang Mai and Phuket, places dubbed MICE Destinations by the TCEB, as well as to Koh Samui and Krabi. This move is supported by the *CONNECT Beyond The Capital Package*, part of the three-pronged *CONNECT* campaign.

"With this campaign, we are subsidising airfares for groups moving out of Bangkok. We believe that there are many more groups moving out of the city that we are not supporting," Homrossukhon said.

Homrossukhon reported that TCEB's approach is working particularly well for business groups with between 50 and 300 people, namely insurance and pharmaceutical companies, although it is available to any industry event.

"We have welcomed (incentive groups) from all sectors (of the economy) and our key clients are still Asian," she said.

However, TCEB and others in the private sector acknowledge that shifting events outside of Bangkok is not for everybody.

"Big groups choose to stay in Bangkok for logistical reasons – for the capacity and (ease) of moving people around," Homrossukhon explained.

Sudasna Sumate, president of the Thailand Incentive Convention Association, told *TTGmice* that incentive programmes are the only type of corporate event that can feature secondary destinations.

"Meetings and conventions would still be best held at main destinations," he said, but was quick to acknowledge the emergence of Chiang Rai and Krabi.

Krabi, on the southern coast of the country, is blessed with easy access owing to both local and direct international flight connections from Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia. It also earns its popularity from a wide range of hotels of different rating and the availability of many land and sea activities.

Kritsanee Srisatin, founder and managing director of Stream Events Asia, who has fielded more requests for new destinations this year, said: "Krabi is (largely a) beach destination, (yet it is) suitable for corporate meetings and incentives. We have clients from insurance and financial companies – who have been to Phuket and Koh Samui – wanting to try new places."

New destinations also allow for fresh experiences to be sold to business delegates, which support the increasing focus on activities that go beyond work and networking.

Kritsanee said conducting outdoor events on a private island, beach parties, and releasing mud crabs or working with the local community to learn about the culture as part of a CSR initiative are

some “fresh ideas” that can be done in Krabi.

Events Travel Asia, which has also seen stronger interest in new activities done in fresh Thai destinations, has brought on board a new line of products. Programmes with wellness and sustainability angles are offered, such as an excursion to an organic farm with a health talk, before rounding off the session with a Thai cooking lesson.

Group managing director, Max Jantasuwon, said the programmes will be positioned as extensions of a Bangkok stay.

“The wellness programme can be done in Bangkok, or outside of the city if they have more time,” he explained.

Max opined that a gem of an experience can be found at the organic farm on the Sampran Riverside.

“We recently brought an American client there (for a site inspection) and (the representatives) loved it. The experience links to their business in natural products, health and wellness,” he said.

“They booked the place straightaway for their 300-pax incentive programme in April 2016.”

{ Spotlight }

In the belly of a floating behemoth

The Thai government is currently working on measures to make Thailand a hub for superyachts and their owners.

With organisers starting to see them as formidable resources for meetings of different types, these vessels look set to become more important for the events sector in the coming years.

Not only do these superyachts bring luxury to a meeting, they also offer something that meetings try for but have difficulty finding – peace and quiet, and a genuine sense of being away from it all – due to its unique setting.

Martin Holmes, general manager of yacht brokerage Lee Marine, told *TTGmice*: “The biggest advantage would be having a completely captive audience and being able to conduct the meeting in total privacy. Most superyacht also boast superior audiovisual and communication suites which allow for video conferencing. With onboard catering, a day can be planned to make maximum use of time on board.”

This has some great advantages for foreign event delegates.



“What better way to experience the beauty of Thailand than from the deck of a cruising superyacht? (Event attendees) can reconnect with nature and the sea and (organisers can) take people out of the normal office or boardroom environment,” said Holmes.

“Many superyacht are owned by company CEOs and they may whisk their senior management away for a few days to allow meetings to take place in an informal yet inspirational setting,” Holmes added.

Some hotels in southern Thailand, especially in resort destinations such as Phuket and Koh Samui, offer these vessels for hire.

Holmes, who deals with a wide range of differently-sized vessels, added that because a superyacht is highly adaptable and suited for tropical cruising, they can be tailored to provide the exact experience a client is looking for. For example, it is possible to charter a superyacht for a day, or a week, and have the entire crew on hand to advise on a suitable itinerary.

Hosting your next meeting on a superyacht is possible in Thailand



{ Insider }

Max Jantasuwon, group managing director of Events Travel Asia, highlights three important local experiences

Taste Thai cuisine

The country's cuisine ranges from fiery to saccharine. There are some amazing restaurants in Bangkok such as Blue Elephant and Mango Tree where one can get acquainted with Thai cuisine. There's also The House on Sathorn which is a complex with a courtyard, bar and signature restaurants. It has four hospitality suites for private dinners.

Indulge in a Thai massage

Even world travellers will have to admit that no other massage styles can compete with the Thai one, which can either help set up a productive meeting or calm everyone down after a stressful one. Therapists can be brought to an event or delegates can choose to visit one at some of the cities' many landmarks such as the Temple of the Reclining Buddha. An invigorating twist-and-rub can be rather cheap too!

Immerse in Thai culture

Classical Thai culture such as temples and *Khon* (a genre of dance drama) have real colour and are widespread. Equally as vibrant is the street culture which is increasingly urban and hip. The country is also home to night markets where food, drinks and clothes can be bought cheap and local friends easily made.

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Cooking up a furious storm

In the space-starved city, MICE groups can also look indoors for memorable teambuilding events, writes **Prudence Lui**

The surge of private cooking studios and kitchens in recent years provides an alternative for event planners who opt for a unique and personalised experience. Owing to affordable rent and generous space, most operations set up shop in traditional industrial districts like Wong Chuk Hang, Kwun Tong and Kowloon Bay.

Chef Studio by Eddy, which debuted in Wong Chuk Hang five years ago, is the brainchild of former hotel executive chef Eddy Leung. With more than 30 years of expertise, he

specialises in tailor-made French cuisine for small private groups.

Leung said: “The private kitchen concept has flourished in recent years with many new openings. I think it’s vital to establish your own style of food and service. Unlike ordinary restaurants, I place emphasis on delivering an experiential dining process with my clients and ensure a memorable journey. They watch how I cook and exchange ideas with me along the way. It’s a more personalised interaction.

“What set us apart from others is

flexibility. We don’t charge corkage fee and the outlet is available for hire, (whether it is a) cocktail session or a full three-hour dinner.”

He added: “In terms of strategy, most of the MICE business is referred from DMCs so our role is pretty passive. Given limited resources, it’s often a word-of-mouth promotion.”

Another outfit, Xi Yan Penthouse, was established by chef Jacky Yu in November 2014. The venue is equipped with a show kitchen cum chef’s table, four dining/function rooms supported by audiovisual facilities, as well as a roof terrace for outdoor dining and barbecues. Besides offering contemporary Chinese cuisine, the cosy 557m² venue in Wong Chuk Hang also caters for teambuilding cooking classes (up to 60 pax) and sit-down dining for up to 100 guests.

Brand communications manager Carol Lau said: “We have a great chef team and offer a great variety of food. Our target audience are corporates and groups from the mid- to high-end market. Besides offering full audiovisual facilities,

Xi Yan Penthouse is one of the newer kids on the block

Destination: Hong Kong

The Butchers Club Deli is an industrial space that event planners can have a free rein in customising



our event management experience allows us to propose ideas. To date, corporate events make up only 10 per cent (of the business) and most are activities to engage worldwide colleagues.

"Since it's still a new area for us, we need to be well equipped for this niche business. For instance, we will consider upgrading our PA system."

Elsewhere, The Butchers Club operates a full scale kitchen helmed by an executive chef that has worked in Michelin-star restaurants in the UK. The Butchers Club Deli is its second venue and is located in an industrial

building in Wong Chuk Hang.

A spokesman said: "We opened the larger space because of customer demand. The venue is a truly unique and amazing space. The entry to the venue is an experience in itself. Guests need to travel through a bus carpark with bustling bakery and laundry trucks, into a huge industrial elevator which opens up into a vintage lobby adorned with wood from an old Chinese junk boat and vintage Italian oil lamps.

"For private dining, the space can be divided into eight sections, each with its own vintage theme. It can

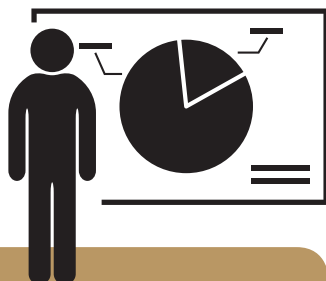
accommodate eight separate tables of eight to 20 pax at any one time or a sit-down dinner for up to 200 pax in the venue downstairs, or up to 500 standing cocktail-style. The upstairs area can accommodate 400 and 700 pax respectively. Unlike hotels or large restaurants our venue is versatile. We can empty the entire space within an hour and provide a blank canvas where event planners can do their magic."

Destination China's managing director, Gunther Homerlein, said private kitchens make great venue options because they are very personal and overseas clients can't go there by themselves.

He said: "As Michelin-star restaurants can't take groups due to limited seats, we've promoted this idea to clients for a couple of years. They are not expensive. For instance, Chef Studio by Eddy is priced from HK\$850 (US\$157) plus 10 per cent, and you may bring your own wine without corkage fee."

However, Shaohua Travel Service (HK)'s managing director Fanny Fan, said: "It may draw South-east Asian MICE but not Chinese MICE groups at this point. This may be due to their hectic meeting schedule, or it may be that they prefer to do sightseeing. Unless the group is associated with the food business, delegates may feel uncomfortable to visit the industrial area for such an activity."

{ Talking numbers }



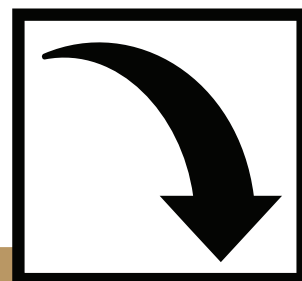
1,115,927

The total overnight MICE arrivals from January to September 2015, down 6.2 per cent year-on-year



49.4 per cent

The percentage of overnight arrivals generated by the China market, which demonstrated a 3.1 per cent decrease year-on-year



21.8 per cent

The American overnight arrivals market suffered the worst hit, decreasing 21.8 per cent to 84,133



{ Insider }

Owner of DMC – The Destination Management Company, **Jenny May**, proposes three teambuilding activities in the city

Treasure hunting at the local markets

The morning starts out at a local bar where clues, a quiz sheet and MTR tickets are handed out and the group divided into teams. After that, it's a race around the Jade, Flower and Bird Markets picking up pre-placed clues and objects along the way. The first team back to the bar with all the objects and correct answers is the winner.



Dragon boat racing

Dragon boat racing at Deep Water Bay

The group is divided into teams and each allocated a dragon boat complete with life jackets, paddles and a local drummer who sets the rhythm. The event begins with on water training led by professional local dragon boaters before the races begin! It can get competitive and is a great teambuilding exercise.

A gala dinner at the Aberdeen Marina Club

Guests sail from Central on a private boat with drinks and canapes served on board. Then it's a quick walk up to the club's ballroom where they will be welcomed by a Lion Dance troupe. Local artists such as fortune tellers, fan painters and calligraphers will also be present. During dinner, guests will be entertained by a face-changing performance and the evening will conclude with dancing – the perfect way to end the Hong Kong experience.

{ Spotlight }

From an elevated perspective

The Courtyard by Marriott Hong Kong Sha Tin has transformed all 12 guestrooms on its 30th storey into LEVELthirty Meeting Suites and LEVELthirty Lounge & Bar. Originally an executive floor for VIP guests, the conversion took 18 months to complete. The rooftop venue offers both outdoor and indoor space.

A spokesman said: "We thought the VIP access might just be a little too exclusive and we then had a vision to turn this space into something that more of our guests can enjoy and appreciate.

Now, we are the only hotel in Sha Tin area to offer such panoramic views of the neighbouring mountain landscapes, and attractions like the racecourse and Tolo Harbour from the rooftop."

There are three meeting suites ranging from 24m² to 53m² in size and a 164m² Presidential Suite. All four rooms can cater for small to mid-scale events, functioning as a breakout room, a place for board meetings or company presentations and celebrations, or simply as an executive dining venue.

For those who wish for more privacy,

the Presidential Suite features a living room which is ideal for casual brainstorming sessions. Its 16-seater private dining area provides direct access to a balcony.

The right wing of the 30th storey houses the LEVELthirty Lounge & Bar which was soft-launched in July.

Two VIP rooms can be used to address the media. The entire area can accommodate up to 70 pax. Tailor-made Chinese and western set menus, cocktails, a mini buffet, a wine pairing or tasting session can also be arranged. Live music, set up and decoration can also be provided upon request.

From bottom left: Courtyard by Marriott Sha Tin's Meeting Suite 3001 and Presidential Suite



Back in business

Five years after the ground shook, South Island's largest city is ready to rock the MICE market once again, writes **Rebecca Elliott**

Caroline Blanchfield, manager of the Christchurch and Canterbury Convention Bureau in New Zealand has a very clear message: "We're back".

Monday, February 22 will mark five years since an earthquake measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale devastated South Island's largest city, killing more than 180 people and leaving behind a trail of destruction resembling a war zone.

Prior to the earthquake, Christchurch's conference market was

booming. It had 25 per cent of New Zealand's international and domestic business and 40 per cent of the country's share of the Australian market, with the only embedded resource in Sydney.

"We were rocking, excuse the terminology," said Blanchfield, "So much so that we were extending our convention centre to meet the demand."

Post-earthquake, 25 per cent plummeted to just two per cent. And that's when Blanchfield, with more

than 30 years working in the tourism industry, was called in.

"We had a mess on our hands. We had just printed our planner, but half the venues no longer existed. We had a lot of confusion as to what the offering was."

Blanchfield concedes that while all purpose-built conference infrastructure was decimated, there was a core group of buildings that could facilitate business events. Given Christchurch's pre-quake popularity with Australia, the decision was

Christchurch's conference buildings were destroyed but alternatives were found while rebuilding is ongoing



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Destination: New Zealand

made to test the market by hosting a group of PCOs, but to no avail.

Blanchfield pulled out of all trade-shows and directed the bureau's focus to the New Zealand domestic market, with its first job to create an online planners' guide.

"We were probably one of the first bureaux to do that work because we had to. We were put in a situation where you have to think, how can we do it better?"

Three years later, Christchurch was up to a nine per cent share of the market and has remained fairly static, but what has changed in recent months, according to Blanchfield, is the increasing interest in the city.

"We've already got a long list of conferences waiting to contract," she said. "We're working on bids for 2021 and 2022 so we're filling the funnel quite nicely and we haven't even started. I definitely don't think it would be out of the realms to take on equal share with Auckland."

Blanchfield said Christchurch's conference pipeline can be attributed to its key pillars of business.

"People go to conferences to learn, so we identified what was really different and what we were known for – earth science, health science, education, IT and technology, and building technology.

"We've won some amazing conferences working with Tourism New

"You can look at it as glass half empty or glass half full. We've got stories to tell that we didn't have before so people have more motivation to come back."

Caroline Blanchfield

Manager, Christchurch and Canterbury Convention Bureau

Zealand because they fit with the here and now."

The bureau has also managed to retain its membership base close to pre-quake levels over the last five years.

"This industry is so connected to each other and I'm really proud of the way our whole sector works together. We've got a philosophy – keep it in Christchurch."

Members will be on show when the bureau returns to AIME in Melbourne at the end of February after a five-year hiatus. And one thing is for sure – they won't be short on new products to showcase.

The 4.5-star Rydges Latimer Christchurch hotel, purpose-built for conferences with 11 meeting rooms and capacity for up to 500 delegates, was one of the city's first hotels to

open post-earthquake.

Sudima Christchurch Airport opened in the latter part of 2015, while Chateau on the Park, with seven events spaces and a bonus of two hectares of lush gardens is set to open soon.

The partially-rebuilt Isaac Theatre Royal has been open since end-2014. With 1,290 seats, it will continue to serve as a stand-in venue for the Convention Centre, scheduled to open at the end of 2018. Located in the heart of the city, the NZ\$284 million (US\$185 million) state-of-the-art centre will have capacity for 2,000 delegates, complete with hotel and residential accommodation, F&B outlets, and retail and office space.

While Australia is the immediate target for the bureau, Asia is well and truly on the horizon, but not until the right infrastructure is built, said Blanchfield.

"A number of five-star hotels are on their way, but you don't go into Asia and the incentive space until you have the product or are at least nearly there," she remarked.

Reflecting on the last five years, Blanchfield concludes: "You can look at it as glass half empty or glass half full. We've got stories to tell that we didn't have before so people have more motivation to come back.

"I believe Christchurch could be the best boutique conference city in Australasia."

Christchurch's MICE market has what it takes to be on equal footing as Auckland



{ Insider }

Tracey Thomas, director of Conference Innovators, suggests three activities to do in and around Christchurch

Gap Filler Walking Tour

Gap Filler is a creative urban regeneration initiative that facilitates a wide range of temporary projects, events, installations and amenities in the city. This is a great conference social or teambuilding activity and there are lots of different sites. Just download the Gap app and latest map, and go! Make sure the last stop is the coin-operated, outdoor Dance-O-Mat – it's great to show the footage the next morning at the conference!

Little River Rail Trail

This one-day cycle trip is a bit of off the track, but it's easy. The Trail mostly follows the route of a 19th century railway line between Hornby and Little River, and takes you through a changing landscape that has seen a thousand years of human history.

Quake City

I know it may seem a bit odd, but Quake City gives you an overview of what Christchurch has been through with the earthquake. Coordinated by Canterbury Museum, Quake City is a unique, multisensory attraction aimed at informing, engaging and educating both New Zealanders and international tourists about the Canterbury earthquakes. Take a little quiet time to have a wander through.



See the city differently while on a Gap Filler Walking Tour

{ Spotlight }

A flexible multipurpose space

The head office for a global digital wireless communication technology company may seem like an unlikely venue for a conference or meeting, but Tait Communications, just minutes from Christchurch International Airport, is proof of concept.

Opened in April 2015, the Tait Technology Centre is a boutique facility with capacity for 260 delegates.

Caroline Blanchfield, manager of the Christchurch and Canterbury Convention Bureau, said it reflects a "business on campus" or multi-use philosophy that many new venues in the city are employing.

"Tait is a world leader in producing radio communications so other like-minded organisations or tech companies will be drawn to that because they're in an environment they like," she explained.

The centre occupies the upper floor in a two-storey complex. The main conference room can be divided into two or three spaces with

soundproof walls, each with complimentary, high-specification audiovisual technology and Wi-Fi.

The entrance to the building opens into a light-filled, spacious atrium, which is also available for hire and suited for registration, welcome functions and small exhibitions. The space has an industrial-chic feel with floor-to-ceiling windows, timber finishings and dotted with planter boxes. It is furnished in part by local social enterprise Rekindle, which has converted timber and other waste products from residential demolition post-earthquake into sleek tables and chairs.

Light catering is available from the on-site café, but for anything more complex, suppliers need to be brought in.

The centre is managed by local event management company, 360 Degree Events.

Managing director Karen Hamilton said the facility has experienced a steady increase in bookings over the last eight months with "several" conferences booked for 2016



and 2017.

She added that Tait Technology Centre has hosted many events for Chinese organisations.

"We will be reaching out to the Asian market via relationships with PCOs and target groups with a

keen interest in the New Zealand marketplace. We are working closely with airport hotels, mainly the Sudima Christchurch Airport and the Commodore Airport Hotel, to ensure that we can offer the MICE industry a full package service," she said.

Tait Technology Centre is a boutique facility with a 260-pax capacity



Titan gets bold and beautiful

To impress its VIP business associates, the Indian jeweller opts to host its meeting and incentive in unusual locations in Singapore, writes **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

Event brief

The task was to create a mind-blowing and unforgettable incentive trip for Titan Company's retailers and distributors at its annual business associate incentive trip. Titan wanted to make sure its delegates were treated like VIPs in an unorthodox venue for a memorable experience.

Challenges

With a group size of 1,200 people, Titan was determined to secure a unique venue that could be booked exclusively for the event.

As most of the delegates were Indian vegetarians, their diet was also of a concern. As food is a rather big part in Indian culture, Titan was very particular when it came to the menu planning as it wanted to ensure a variety.

Solutions

On the meeting front, instead of using conventional ballrooms, Titan made the bold move of selecting Resorts World Theatre as the venue of the daily conference. It was enough to create some buzz and anticipation.

Even though it may seem unconventional, it was in fact the ideal setting – tiered seating and a mega LED screen for an unhindered view from every seat. But the icing on the cake was the Wi-Fi access the venue

Event
Titan – Jewellery Business Associate meet

Client
Titan Company

Venue
Resorts World Theatre and Universal Studios Singapore

Date
April 24 – May 1, 2015

Number of participants
1,200

provided. This came in handy during a live online voting segment. Delegates were able to instantly connect to the Internet via their mobile device and vote.

Food wise, the Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) F&B team worked very closely with Titan's event organisers to customise an Indian vegetarian menu for all provided meals during the conference period.

The highlight of the incentive trip was no doubt the gala dinner at Universal Studios

Singapore (USS). Delegates were accorded a red carpet welcome at Pantages Hollywood Theater, where they enjoyed a cocktail reception and a 1950s-style all-American welcome performance by Mel's Dinettes.

Buffet dinner then followed at New York Street where delegates were treated to a spread of authentic Indian dishes, exclusive performances, and photo opportunities with popular characters Woody Woodpecker and Marilyn Monroe.

Key takeaways

Success is in the details. While the conference and gala dinner wowed both Titan and its delegates, it was the little things the RWS staff did which left an indelible impression.

On the evening it rained, staff brought umbrellas to shelter dinner-bound delegates along the unsheltered areas of USS, making their cocktail reception and dinner more enjoyable despite the gloomy weather. Moreover, with the delegates being housed in three different hotels in RWS, Titan felt that there were ample directional signs in place, and hotel staff were always on hand to assist with directions and queries.

In a letter of appreciation from Titan, they expressed how deeply impressed they were with the event, with many delegates citing it as their best corporate event ever.

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Develop a perfect event app

With smartphone ownership at an all-time high, developing the right mobile event app will be beneficial to everyone, says Lanyon Mobile's **Michael Douglas**



When developing a mobile application for your event, first you need to take a closer look at what you're trying to achieve and what the people attending want from the experience, in order to identify key objectives. Then work with your supplier from the outset to make sure your app delivers. Here are five basic rules for creating an app:

✓ Know your delegates' needs
Understand your audience and what they want from your event, plus what intelligence you need. Then give a clear brief to your supplier. There's plenty of functionality available, but it won't all be suitable for your event.

✓ Encourage networking
A common key driver for attendees is to meet people, and an app can be the perfect networking tool. To do this, it will need to allow visitors to search who's there and help them research their backgrounds, so they can choose the appropriate people to meet, and ideally let them schedule a meeting.

✓ Showcase the programme
With education becoming increasingly important to ensure delegates get key business value from attending events, and programmes becoming more sophisticated, choosing the right content can be vital. To allow attendees to achieve this,

your app must be able to showcase what seminars and workshops are available quickly and easily, and allow delegates to book a place.

✓ Collect key data
From an organiser's perspective, apps can help assess the effectiveness of an event by delivering key intelligence. Apps can include seminar and workshop attendance figures, number of meetings arranged between delegates and/or exhibitors if your event has a sponsored element, and requests for delegate feedback.

✓ Market your app
Make sure delegates are aware of your app by marketing it effectively, plus provide guidance on how to get the most out of it. A good vendor will be able to help with this, such as providing a video tutorial you can host on your website. Make sure you don't just tell delegates how to use it, but also show how it will help them to meet their objectives. You can extend this awareness and guidance to signage prompts, and have people on the ground providing hands-on help.

Why app user experience is key
No matter what amazing functionality your event app delivers, if it's not easy to use or impractical it will annoy rather than wow delegates, says Lanyon Mobile's Michael Douglas.

There are some quick wins that can

help boost ease of use. First, have the minimum amount of functionality relying on Wi-Fi, and make sure that you have a clear idea of the connectivity available at your event, and where and when there is likely to be peak demand.

Live polling and interaction, for example, can add real value to your event, and doing this through the app can make the process easier for your delegates. If a debate has taken place, you can immediately find out what the audience thinks. However, if your app relies on Wi-Fi and the connection is weak or fails, you will be left with disappointed and disgruntled delegates, not to mention speakers.

Also, if a key part of delegate preparation is making selections and doing research – who's there, what exhibitors to visit or seminars to attend, arranging meetings, etc – it's not always easiest to do this on a phone. So choose an app provider offering a unified experience with a computer that delegates can access before the event, so they can plan their time in the comfort of their own office or home.

This also helps delegates to personalise the app to their own needs, rather than it simply being a catalogue of everything. This helps to create a more tailored and rewarding experience for attendees.

Finally, it's vital to assess how easy delegates have found your app to use. Don't just focus on the number of downloads, but also investigate how much the app was used to see how you can improve it for future events.



Lanyon Mobile's vice-president of sales Michael Douglas is part of a company which believes that when people get together amazing things can happen. Relationships are built and business gets done.

This is why Lanyon created the industry's leading cloud-based software for managing corporate meetings, events and travel programmes. Lanyon's unmatched software and the data it provides helps thousands of organisations and hotels around the world to better engage their customers, reduce costs and grow revenues.
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{ Hot moves }



Giles Selves

Piyoros Naronglith

The Westin Siray Bay Resort & Spa, Phuket has appointed Piyoros Naronglith as general manager. He has over 10 years of hospitality management in Thailand and was most recently the executive assistant manager of W Retreat Koh Samui.

Giles Selves

Selves has taken over the reins of Anantara Mai Khao Phuket Resort. He takes on the general manager position after 19 years with Starwood Hotels &



Lutz Mueller

Resorts, most recently as general manager at Keraton at the Plaza, a Luxury Collection Hotel in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Alice Mafaity

Mafaity is now resident manager of InterContinental Hong Kong. She has spent over 15 years in the hotel industry working in her native France as well as in Tokyo, Dubai and most recently at Jumeriah Himalayas in Shanghai as hotel manager.

Lutz Mueller

Anantara Bophut Koh



Paul Stocker

Samui Resort has named Mueller as its general manager. He spent 22 years with Marriott International in Germany, India, Thailand and China, before joining Anantara Hotels, Resorts & Spas as general manager at Wanda Vista Resort Xishuangbanna, China, which was his most recent position.

Paul Stocker

Stocker is now vice president of sales, marketing and revenue management at Oakwood Asia Pacific.



Md Mahbubor Rahman

He will take charge of revenue-generating initiatives across Oakwood's branded properties, reporting to Dean Schreiber, managing director of Oakwood Asia Pacific. Stocker was last vice president, revenue management and sales at Galaxy Entertainment Group in Macau.

Md Mahbubor Rahman

Le Méridien Angkor has picked Md Mahbubor Rahman its new general manager. He began his extensive career with Starwood 20



Stefan Keel

years ago at the Dhaka Sheraton Hotel, Bangladesh, and was last cluster director of finance for Plaza Athénée, A Royal Méridien Hotel, Le Méridien Bangkok, Vana Belle, a Luxury Collection Resort in Koh Samui and Sheraton Samui Resort.

Stefan Keel

Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts has appointed hospitality professional Keel as general manager of Mövenpick Resort Boracay which is scheduled to open in 2Q2016.

{ Career inspiration }

Beatrice Remy

Managing director, Asia, WRG Creative Communication (Asia)

How did you find your way into the events industry?

I joined the marketing and communication industry as a strategist just before the Internet took off 17 years ago.

Before that I had been expatriated to Hong Kong in 1992 to lead the Asian operations in another industry. Yet I was resolute to be part of a creative and innovative force that had an impact on our society and the Internet made that possible. From this great career change, I quickly specialised in experiential marketing.

What's your responsibilities at WRG?

I lead the Asian offices for WRG, a global and independent live communication group that shapes memorable experiences for some

of the world's most ambitious people and organisations.

How many events do you handle on average each year?

I cover about 35 corporate events in Asia, with audiences ranging from 100 to 20,000 in size.

What is your most memorable job-related incident?

We did a gala for presidents of large global banks in Mumbai. Despite being secret, the stay of a foreign head of state in the same five-star hotel sparked street demonstrations. The show had to go on. After hours of negotiation with the police, we broke the curfew and lifted our equipment through every third-floor window to make up

for time. Staying calm is a must when facing the unexpected.

What advice would you give to someone looking to come into events management?

Curiosity matters above all. To get ahead you will need to stand out in a very competitive marketplace. Aim to attain technical and marketing knowledge.

Take time to volunteer to obtain small and large hands-on experience for any events such as charity.

Try being a guest of both physical and virtual events to see how it feels. And finally, don't specialise too early to allow for a broader range of skills and experiences to be developed.



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