

July 2016

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wind for Rwanda

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Companies are increasingly incorporating opportunities for their meeting and incentive delegates to do good for the community of the destination where their event is hosted



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Spread love for the right reason

Amid a flurry of distasteful world developments that seem to make up the bulk of media content these days, it is delightful to come across stories that remind me that there's still love all around.

In researching for our cover feature on the demand for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) elements in meetings and incentive events (*Positive forces*, page 14-18), we discovered that more companies are wanting to give back to the communities in the host destination.

We sought to understand the drivers behind this rising trend, and while writing the story I paused to wonder if the reasons even matter. Good deeds are being done, the needy are getting help and delegates are feeling awesome – that's enough to celebrate ya?

But that was a naive thought to entertain. When a CSR programme is done out of corporate vanity – for publicity and for that feel-good factor – and not to make a difference for the selected beneficiary, little thought will go into the execution and the aftermath.

Sabre Corporate Development's Talan Miller shared painful examples of how a client once presented to team members flashy prizes for completing a charity task that were worth more than the value of the donation – while the charity representative was still in the room, and how popular CSR activities in the past were those that felt “cute” to accomplish whether or not the end-result truly benefitted the charity organisation and its wards.

We've all also read about rogue charity organisations that parade their dependants and exploit their plight for money, and we need to be smart about choosing who to help and how to go about doing it.

This is where events specialists come in. Experienced ones have a strong local network in the destinations they sell and can be an effective filter for worthy CSR causes for their clients' consideration. They will also have the foresight to understand the client's corporate culture and existing CSR commitments before identifying a suitable programme so that it contributes to a long-term goal.

Business events specialists we spoke to for *Positive forces* know this, and more are taking the initiative to understand what truly good causes are available for their clients to contribute to and are working these into their proposals before clients can even ask.

So if you are hoping to add a CSR activity to your next meeting or incentive trip, consult your planner and be sure they think critically about your options.



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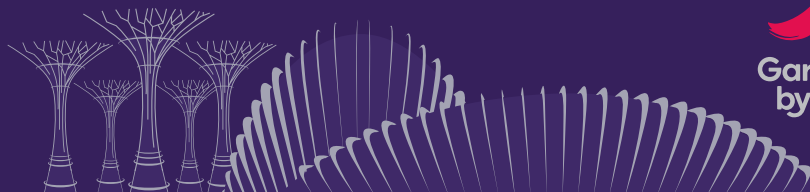
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We love



Fairytale meetings

We all know that meeting spaces can influence the success of a meeting, in the way delegates are engaged, inspired and encouraged to interact with one another.

Understanding this very well, Japanese IT firm Zeeboon has transformed one of its meeting spaces into the interior of a grand medieval castle and taken *Alice in Wonderland* as the inspiration for another.

These Idea Castle conference rooms are rented out for 30,000 yen (US\$281) per hour.

The School of Witchcraft room – which draws heavily on popular fantasy literature *Harry Potter* – is approached through a secret underground passageway, while the room itself is decorated with owl cages and swords.

The stone throne is likely to be taken by the CEO, with leather chairs

either side for his closest acolytes. The rest of the royal court (or company) share wooden tables.

The Alice room, a surreal space that looks right at home in fairytale land, is decorated with pages from the famous Lewis Carroll book and a paper tree.

In spite of the fairytale surroundings, both rooms come fully equipped with what's required for a modern-day meeting, including wireless Internet connection and 60-inch monitors.

Each room is 100m², with The School of Witchcraft room having space for 54 people and Alice's area capable of accommodating 46 people.

Zeeboon says it hopes the unconventional surroundings will stimulate employees' minds and enable them to return to the creativity and free-thinking faculties of a child.

Penfolds Magill Estate adds another space for events

The sprawling Penfolds Magill Estate in Adelaide Hills, just 15 minutes by car from Adelaide city centre, opened the Magill Estate Kitchen in June 2015 to offer visitors more wining and dining opportunities.

The Magill Estate Kitchen is also available for corporate hire, and its sun-lit, wooden interiors make it a suitable venue for casual get-togethers. It can accommodate 60 guests seated or 200 people for a cocktail party setting.

Dining, canape and wine packages are available for event planners to choose from. All dietary requirements can be catered for with prior notification.

While smaller groups can book the Magill Estate Kitchen for a gathering over brunch or lunch seven days a week, private hires are only accepted in the evenings. Private hires require a minimum spend of A\$6,000 (US\$4,448) from Monday to Thursday, A\$8,000 on Friday and A\$10,000 on weekends.

In addition to the Magill Estate Kitchen, the winery also offers a degustation experience in its Magill Estate Restaurant (seats 54 guests), canape-style parties in various locations such as the Magill Estate Gal-



lery (seats 40 for meals or 80 for cocktails), and a nine-course tasting menu for 24 people in the Max Schubert Cellar.

A structured Penfolds Tour and Wine Tasting programme is available as an add-on to a main event. It can take up to 60 guests and costs A\$16 per pax. – Karen Yue

Angsana properties tout CSR incentive programme

Corporate event planners seeking a corporate social responsibility (CSR) element for their activities can consider Angsana Hotels and Resorts' *Meet for Good* incentive programme at Angsana Lang Co in Central Vietnam, Angsana Laguna Phuket and Angsana Bintan.

Meet for Good features various opportunities to contribute to the local community and environment through activities such as visits to local orphanages or nursing homes, beach clean-up, cooking local dishes for the elderly, and giving language classes to disadvantaged children.

As well, Angsana Lang Co – which has four fully-equipped meeting rooms and a

392m² ballroom for 400 guests – offers full- and half-day meeting packages and a range of complementary recreational activities with Connect@Angsana.

Angsana Bintan provides a beachfront venue with meeting rooms where guests can have outdoor meetings by the South China Sea. Two meeting venues allow for a total capacity of 132 people, topped off by 111 guestrooms and suites. The meeting experience can be complete with golfing at the property's 18-hole championship course and activities such as trekking and ATV rides.

And at Angsana Laguna Phuket, planners can choose from 11 meeting spaces, four outdoor venues and a 358m² grand ballroom.



Angsana Lang Co's ballroom



X2 launches luxury cruises on Chao Phraya River

Hospitality brand X2 has expanded into the cruising space with *X2 Cruises*, a luxury cruise offering on Bangkok's Chao Phraya River.

Its two-hour tours feature heritage sites along the river that highlights the significance of Chao Phraya as a waterway in the country.

All tours will be operated aboard custom-designed Italian cruisers with features including leather furnishings, air-conditioning, fridges and a sliding targa-style roof for open-air sightseeing.

Anthony McDonald, CEO and founder of X2, said: "Most people think of Bangkok as a busy city with streets full of cars, tuk tuks, buildings and malls, but actually Bangkok has other interesting sights. We see the lives along Chao Phraya River and canals as one of them."

X2 Cruises is also available for private tours, sunset cruises and boat rentals.



HOT DEALS

Suntec Singapore

Meeting room packages at Suntec Singapore are now available at a promotional rate of S\$7** (US\$5.10**) per pax for business events held from 19.00 to 23.00.

The offer runs until August 31 and applies to groups of 10 to 200 pax using function rooms on the third floor before December 31.

Included in the package are high-speed Wi-Fi; use of projector and screen; an "experience manager"; and access to an in-room water dispenser.

Call (65) 6337-2888 or email sales@suntecsingapore.com to book.

Sheraton Bali Kuta Resort

Events booked at the hotel before October 31, 2016, with arrivals by the end of this year, will get a signing bonus of Starpoints plus a choice of two bonuses. Options include five per cent off master-billed rooms, complimentary Internet in the meeting room, double Starpoints on eligible revenue, double complimentary room allocation, and double complimentary room upgrade allocation.

Planners can also enjoy special group rates from US\$145 net/night for a Deluxe Room.

Terms and conditions apply.

Email bali.sales@starwoodhotels.com for information.



InterContinental Wellington introduces 360-degree virtual site inspection

Event planners can now go on a site inspection of the InterContinental Wellington conference floor without taking a single step, thanks to a new Google Maps feature.

Instead of seeing static pictures, clients can now take a 360-degree view of the hotel's six function rooms and pre-function lounge.

The hotel's business development manager, Julien Albrecht, said that while the ability to show a 360-degree view is not new technology, using it as a room-

space sales tool that can stand in for physically visiting a property appears to be relatively new for the MICE market.

Albrecht added: "Time constraints and geographical distance means a lot of decisions have to be made by the event planner remotely, with the client unable to visit a space before the day of the event. Rather than seeing static pictures, taking a virtual tour around the floor can give the client the reassurance that this (the function space) is the right fit for them."



Hong Kong Airlines flies to Osaka

Hong Kong Airlines is set to launch daily flights from Hong Kong International Airport to Osaka's Kansai Airport this month, beginning July 15.

Aside from flights to Osaka, the full-service airline currently flies twice-daily to Okinawa and Narita; once-daily to Okayama; five times weekly to Sapporo and Kagoshima; and twice-weekly to Miyazaki.

With the new route, Hong Kong Airlines will operate a total of 54 weekly flights to Japan.

A stylish prelude to dinner

Why settle for a predictable pre-dinner cocktail in the foyer of a ballroom when you can do the same inside a tram that travels from Stamford Plaza Adelaide Hotel in the city centre to either its sister property along Glenelg Beach, Stamford Grand Adelaide Hotel, or the Morphettville Racecourse?

The tram ride lasts around 35 minutes door-to-door, a suitable duration for guests to enjoy canapes and wine as well as good conversations and the city's sights before arriving at the next destination for dinner or more ice-breaker or teambuilding activities.

According to Russell Cool, area general manager of Stamford Hotels Adelaide, who takes care of the two five-star hotels in Adelaide, South Australia, the arrangement is flexible as more tram cars can be added to the line for larger gatherings. So far, the largest corporate hire was for 200 guests using two tram cars.

The two hotels also work closely with the Morphettville Racecourse to put together creative offsite events for clients. — Karen Yue



Best Western shows MICE prowess with Bangkok property

Best Western Hotels & Resorts has launched the Best Western Plus Wanda Grand Hotel, its latest property in Bangkok.

A 927m² ballroom with a capacity for almost 900 people is among the nine separate function spaces at the hotel, which is expected to become "a major hub for the MICE market".

"With its extensive conference and banqueting facilities, including four floors of function rooms, Best Western Plus Wanda Grand Hotel will surely become a firm favourite with meeting planners,"

said Olivier Berrivin, Best Western's managing director of international operations for Asia.

The new hotel offers a range of accommodation for short and long stays, a restaurant serving modern Thai and international cuisine, a cafe, an outdoor infinity pool and a fitness centre.

Best Western Plus Wanda Grand Hotel is located close to Don Mueang International Airport, the Thai government complex, IMPACT convention centre, World Medical Center and several major retail and entertainment areas.

Dining with four senses and a conscience

The Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit has created a programme that allows corporate team members to bond over a gourmet dinner while contributing financially to a local charity.

Dine in the Dark is hosted in a pitch-black private room and a four-course meal prepared by the hotel's talented chefs is served by visually impaired guides. Without the power of sight, participants are challenged to identify and appreciate their meal using their remainin

g senses. Conversation with fellow diners in such an unusual setting will enable them to overcome the feeling of disorientation together.

Besides being an excellent teambuilding activity, *Dine in the Dark* also makes a positive contribution to the society as the hotel will donate to the Foundation for the Blind in Thailand for every cover at *Dine in the Dark*.

Dine in the Dark is priced at 1,450++ baht (US\$41) person, and can take a maximum of 40 pax each time.





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MACAO

Mega events city

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Upgraded SilkAir flights elevate Northern Territory's MICE appeal for Asian groups

By Karen Yue

The Northern Territory Convention Bureau (NTCB) has lost no time in spreading the word that its destinations are now more accessible than ever for Asian MICE buyers, as SilkAir stepped up to improve air services between Singapore and Darwin from May 30.

SilkAir now flies five times a week on that route, while services out of Darwin no longer require a stopover in Cairns, enabling passengers to touch down in Singapore in just 4.5 hours.

Describing Darwin as "Australia's closest gateway city to Asia", Daryl Hudson, director of business events with the NTCB, told *TTGmice* that the improved air service will appeal to "MICE programmes, especially those of shorter duration".

Hudson added: "The new timings are also designed to better complement other

longhaul services operated by Singapore Airlines, with the scheduling enabling more efficient transfers via the Singapore hub for event participants from farther afield, especially China."

Seeking to correct a common misperception that the NT is inaccessible, Hudson pointed out that the Darwin International Airport has an Asia-focused international network, serviced by Malaysia Airlines from Kuala Lumpur, Jetstar and Indonesia AirAsia from Bali, Jetstar Asia from Singapore, and Philippine Airlines from Manila.

To raise awareness of the improved services, the NTCB partnered SilkAir to host a fam trip for some Singapore TMC representatives in mid-May. The programme showcased hotels, venues and activities in Darwin, and included a short

trip to the Adelaide River region.

Hudson said post-event feedback had been "very positive", with one of the attendees already seeking specific quotes and detailed information from operators presented in the programme.

"There are plans for greater collaboration with SilkAir and Singapore Airlines to attract events from Asia and Greater China," said Hudson, adding that a fam trip for Chinese buyers is in the works.

The Greater China market is a focus for the NTCB in 2015-2016. The bureau aims to improve the marketplace's limited awareness of the NT and correct "misplaced perception of constrained supply and accessibility issues". Other efforts include showcasing the destination at trade shows in Chinese cities.



Hudson: NT is accessible for Asians

Rosy outlook for Adelaide's biomed association conventions

Although only one of many facilities in the Adelaide BioMed City Precinct has been completed – with the rest coming up by 2020 – the massive development along Adelaide's River Torrens has drawn significant attention from health and medical associations worldwide.

This has led to 45 conventions taking place in 2015 and 2016, bringing 16,000 delegates to the city and generating A\$59 million (US\$43.7 million) in economic benefit.

Damien Kitto, CEO of the Adelaide Convention Bureau, told *TTGmice* that a "large majority" of the wins were association events and many of them were led by national associations.

Kitto attributed this success to the Adelaide BioMed City Precinct.

According to Marco Baccanti, chief executive of government agency Health Industries South Australia, the A\$3.6 billion project is significant because it houses facilities that "combine the entire value chain, starting from research at South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI)" and will "bring about a combination of academic and clinical research, training, therapy for patients, and business activities".

SAHMRI, which was the first facility to open in 2013, now houses 600 researchers from across the globe and these individuals "provide rich content to help us to bid and win related events", explained Kitto.

Steve Wesselingh, SAHMRI executive director, said the facility also helps with the bid process by offering high-level speakers, organising site visits for delegates, drawing national and international attendees to the events, and writing letters of support to the international organising committees that extol the scientific strengths of its departments.

In June the bureau held its second Adelaide BioMed City Showcase to raise awareness of the infrastructure developments including the complete Riverbank Precinct transformation as well as the high-level state support available for associations keen on taking an event to the city.

Kitto revealed that 70 medical experts had attended the event – double that of the inaugural showcase in April 2015 – and these participants were "associated with over 100 event possibilities for Adelaide and 90 per cent of those are international gatherings". – Karen Yue



Kitto: greater appeal for biomed meetings

Berlin leads now

Berlin is the new number one city to meet in, according to the latest ICCA ranking of global cities for international association meetings.

Paris now sits in second place. Seven other top cities – Barcelona, Vienna, London, Madrid, Istanbul, Lisbon and Copenhagen – have remained on the charts, albeit taking different positions. Singapore remains at seventh spot.

In country rankings, the US and Germany have clung onto pole and second position respectively, while the UK has climbed a rung to third position. Canada is a newcomer to the top 10 list.

ICCA identified 94 additional international association meetings that took place in the US in 2015, eight additional meetings in Germany and 39 additional meetings in the UK. Spain and France held six and 11 fewer meetings respectively.

The study captured a record number of 12,076 rotating international association meetings in 2015, 571 more meetings compared to 2014.



Fernsehturm de Berlin

MACAO

Mega events city impresses 7,000 Herbalife (China) delegates



Strong government support through IPIM's "One-Stop Service", Macao's unique culture, cuisine and its capacity for large scale events make it the most suitable and attractive city to host this year's Herbalife (China) Extraordinary Tour.

Mr Wang had never visited Macao until he participated in the "Herbalife (China) Extraordinary Tour 2016" and discovered a destination that he hoped to return to for a holiday with his family.

Herbalife (China), the organiser of this year's 7,000-strong incentive trip to Macao, was banking on experiences like Mr Wang's to create a positive impact on its circle of associates in China.

To Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM), the government body tasked with the development of Macao's MICE sector, an event like "Herbalife (China) Extraordinary Tour 2016" testifies to the enduring appeal of Macao and the effectiveness of its "One-Stop Service" support programme for MICE organisers. Macao is also unique in its capacity to host large scale MICE events.

IPIM works with private sector organisations and the local authorities to facilitate the bidding and hosting of not only incentive groups but also international exhibitions and conferences.

Interestingly, Herbalife (China)'s event, held from April 15-17, was not its first in Macao. The event had rotated between several Chinese cities, including Qingdao, Nanjing, Xiamen.

But this time, the reasons for returning were particularly strong. The organiser cited the city's rich history and culture, its outstanding MICE services, venues and other related facilities as important factors contributing to Macao's win.

More events coming to Macao

- Worldwide Chinese Life Insurance Congress and International Dragon Awards (6,000+ delegates)
- The 9th ACM Siggraph Conference and Exhibition on Computer Graphics and Interactive Techniques in Asia (5,000+ delegates)
- NuSkin Star Academy Macao 2016 (6,800+ delegates)
- The 39th Asia Pacific Dental Congress 2017 (3,000 delegates)

One major benefit that allowed Macao to distinguish itself from other candidate cities was IPIM's "One-Stop Service", which enabled the organiser to offer delegates exclusive experiences that are not available to the casual visitor.

Herbalife (China) said IPIM, working with other government departments, was able to offer great support to help make the event a success, such as providing information on numerous leisure activities that was distributed via delegates' welcome kits.

With this information, delegates were able to plan their own post-event activities. It led to some delegates deciding to extend their stays to make the most of their trip, visiting the city's many attractions, restaurants and shops at their own pace.

Even repeat visitors were charmed. Ms Lei, who took the opportunity to visit the famous A-Ma Temple and enjoy Macao's traditional cuisine, said she was especially impressed by the quality of Macao's hospitality services.

"Herbalife (China) Extraordinary Tour 2016" is just one example of how IPIM can help organisers make a success of their event.

IPIM is the most effective first point of contact for organisers considering hosting an international event in Macao. Its support programme covers many areas and its local network of partners can help organisers from around the world plan a most memorable MICE experience for delegates. ■



One major benefit that allowed Macao to distinguish itself from other candidate cities was IPIM's "One-Stop Service", which enabled the organiser to offer delegates exclusive experiences that are not available to the casual visitor.



Aurance Group pledges its love for Incheon



By Paige Lee Pei Qi

The Incheon Tourism Organization and Chinese cosmetics firm Aurance Group have inked an agreement which commits the latter to hosting incentive meetings in the South Korean city until 2018.

Earlier in March, 6,000 Aurance Group employees visited Incheon – the largest single tour group to arrive in South Korea – and took part in various activities such as partaking in a huge beer and fried chicken party in Wolmido, visiting film locations of popular TV shows, and meeting at Songdo

Convensia.

Director of Incheon Convention & Visitors Bureau, Jake Kim, told *TTGmice*: “The event was a huge success and the agreement to continue visiting Incheon is proof that the company (employees) really enjoyed themselves.”

Kim said this “vote of confidence” from Aurance Group helps to endorse the city as a venue ready for business events and incentive activities.

According to Kim, one of the key selling factors of the city is its proximity to the Incheon International Airport, with the city centre just a 20-minute drive away. Moreover, the compact city places luxury hotels within walking distance of the key landmarks.

He explained: “The city (offers) easy access to entertainment, malls and the convention centre. Also unique is our proximity to the sea and we have many water activities to offer for teambuilding and incentive programmes.”

Unlike the more developed cities like Seoul, Kim said Incheon is still considered relatively new for many travellers and that heightens the destination appeal, especially for repeat visitors to South Korea.”

Easier ride for business event delegates in South East Queensland

South East Queensland is trialling Australia’s first public transport travel card tailored to the MICE market.

The *go access Corporate Events* card, an initiative of Translink in Queensland’s Department of Transport, costs A\$12 (US\$8.95) for three days of unlimited travel on buses, trains and ferries throughout the South East, as well as on the Gold Coast’s G:Link tram network.

Speaking to *TTGmice* at the This is Gold Coast Business Exchange last week, Translink’s senior advisor new business and product development, George Chemali, said: “What we found from surveys over 18 months was that (the card) was something the industry was crying out for.”

Chemali added: “It means that a delegate can get on at any mode of transport and travel anywhere in South East Queensland and not have to worry about a deposit, topping up or understanding zones.

“We’ve had (representatives) from other states (in Australia) say they wish their

transport authority would take a leaf out of our book.”

Shannon Thwaites, manager, Gold Coast Business Events, said the card provided a seamless public transport mode for delegates with significant savings.

“The card has also enabled delegates to choose from a wider selection of accommodation venues, with so many conveniently located in close proximity to the light rail corridor,” she said.

The card can only be purchased for events with 50 delegates or more.



{ In brief }

Pacific World expands into Myanmar

Following rising interest from clients in hosting events in Myanmar, Pacific World has expanded into the country through a partnership with Yangon-based inbound tour operator Myanmar Polestar. Aung Lin Htin will head Pacific World Myanmar as country director, supported by destination manager K Zar Lin and senior account manager Tom Wood.

HKIA goes ahead with passenger levy

Hong Kong International Airport will implement an airport construction fee from August 1 despite earlier objection from the trade. Airlines will tax departing passengers, including origin-destination and transit passengers, when air tickets are issued. The fee is being collected to fund the expansion of the airport, which includes a third runway.

For shorthaul passengers departing in economy class, the fee will be HK\$90 (US\$11.60), while shorthaul first/business class passengers and longhaul economy class passengers will have to fork out HK\$160. The levy for longhaul first/business class passengers is HK\$180. The fee for shorthaul transit passengers in economy class will be set at HK\$70.

This arrangement is scheduled to be implemented from 2H2016 till 2031.



Luxperience adds MICE specialisation

The annual Luxperience travel trade show has expanded its Events by Luxperience programme for MICE bookers with more flexible exhibiting options and a more relaxed and strategic appointment arrangement.

Termed the MICE Marketplace, the new offering is said to enable more delegates to participate in the Southern Hemisphere’s only trade event dedicated to high-end travel and event experiences.

Luxperience takes place this year in Sydney from September 18 to 21.

Last-minute hotel bookings 23% cheaper

Same-day hotel bookings are on average 23 per cent cheaper than advance bookings, found a longitudinal study by corporate reservations platform HRS.

An analysis of its corporate customers revealed that 58 per cent of them tend to make accommodation bookings up to two weeks in advance while 32 per cent book far in advance of more than 14 days.

The study explained: “In exchange for the early booking and the feeling of security, they have to accept room prices that are, on average, 10 per cent higher than short-term bookings. Last-minute bookers are able to secure rates that are, on average, the least expensive, paying almost a quarter less than those who plan ahead.”

It added that most of HRS’ last-minute bookings are made through mobile devices.

Seoul gains more Singapore groups, offers new support

By Karen Yue

Singapore MICE arrivals into Seoul have doubled over the past year, a result of in-market destination promotions by the Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) Singapore office and the emergence of more four-star hotels in the South Korean capital city.

Speaking to *TTGmice*, Helen Shim, director of the Singapore office, said: "Our hard work over the past three years (in courting Singapore MICE buyers) have paid off. MICE buyers have become better aware of the various infrastructure available in Seoul."

"While we usually get smaller incentive groups to Seoul from Singapore, this year we have confirmed five to six large groups with 300 to 400 pax each. In April, for instance, Prudential led an incentive group to Seoul for four days, with day trips to nearby Gyeonggi Province."

Shim added that the growing supply of affordable four-star hotels in Seoul had helped to attract Singapore clients.

"Clients used to think twice about hosting an event in Seoul because of the high costs. But now that they have cheaper – and brand new – accommodation options, making a decision to visit Seoul is a lot easier," said Shim, adding that her team has been actively promoting these new four-star hotels in Seoul to "swing votes our way".



Shim: larger groups are heading to Seoul

Meanwhile, Singapore MICE buyers will have more reasons to pick Seoul for their next event as Seoul Tourism Organization (STO) has recently expanded its support programme for business event groups.

One of the two latest offerings is a series of special tours that provide delegates an in-depth look at the city's culture and key industries.

Lee Joon, executive director, tourism & MICE division, STO, said: "For instance, we led a group to see the historical palaces in Seoul, had them make kimchi and brought them for a behind-the-scenes tour of the Seoul Traffic Centre which isn't open to the public."

The other new offering is the Seoul MICE Card, which is given to event delegates attending qualifying business events in Seoul. These rechargeable and reusable cards come with a 5,000 won (US\$4) credit and can be used on public transport including the airport express as well as with selected merchants. To enjoy the Seoul MICE Card, the event must be held in Seoul for at least six days and involve a minimum of 2,000 international delegates.

Lee said: "By expanding our range of support for MICE groups, we hope to encourage business event delegates to make repeated visits to Seoul, both for business and for leisure."

Genting fulfils new MICE dream

Genting Hong Kong is launching Dream Cruises, a new product line targeted at the luxury MICE and leisure segments, and deemed as Asia's first luxury cruise line.

Its first ship, *Genting Dream*, is currently undergoing outfitting by shipbuilders in Meyer Werft, Germany, and will arrive in Singapore on November 4 to offer a two-night cruise, followed by a six-night itinerary to Hong Kong.

Thatcher Brown, president of Dream Cruises, said the luxury cruise ship will be homeported in Guangzhou after that, from November 18 to March 26, 2017, offering two- and five-night itineraries.

Michael Goh, senior vice president of Dream Cruises, said he is targeting a guest mix of 40 per cent MICE travellers



and 60 per cent leisure travellers from source markets such as China, India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia.

He added: "MICE groups in China are usually large groups of 500 people or more. Groups from South-east Asia are usually smaller, between 50 and 300 pax."

Genting Dream's Zodiac Theatre can comfortably accommodate 1,000 people.
– S Puvaneswary

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Session 7 | Ground Transportation: Cutting Costs, Reducing Risks

With sharing economy options and new technologies to better help manage this category of travel spend, how can you improve your ground transportation programme?

Session 8 | Game-changing Accommodation Trends

With sharing economy providers entering the corporate accommodation space and hotels pursuing consolidation to strengthen their market position, do corporate travel managers have more options or less? How is your negotiating power being impacted by these trends and what strategies can you adopt? Join this session to learn more.

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The Luxury Collection works its way through the tummies of event delegates

By Karen Yue

Properties under Starwood Hotels and Resorts' The Luxury Collection portfolio are flaunting their epicurean charms to court an "increasingly sophisticated" corporate event clientele that demands quality dining experiences.

Starwood's director, brand management for St Regis and The Luxury Collection, F&B marketing, Yeoh Fay-Linn, said: "Corporate groups want a local taste of the destination during their dining functions, and they don't want to be limited to the usual banquet rooms."

"True to The Luxury Collection's new tagline (which came with a brand rejuvenation last September), *Hotels that Define the Destination*, our properties bring the destination's unique flavour into corporate events," Yeoh said, adding that hotels must provide out-of-the-box banqueting options today.

For example, The Andaman, Langkawi is partnering with The Els Club Teluk Datai golf course to deliver dining functions at a particular scenic hole.

"Understanding that dining plays an important role in the travel and event experience, The Luxury Collection properties also have a strong culinary offering through experienced chefs," Yeoh remarked.

The prowess of these chefs are celebrated in a series of pop-up dining events called Epicurean Journeys. One was hosted in Singapore in May.

Bindu Panicker, general manager, corporate communications with India-based

ITC Hotels which has 11 properties under The Luxury Collection, said her hotels are renowned for their "dedication to culinary excellence" and that a premium dining experience delivered by various chefs from across its portfolio in a single location can be organised.

Such arrangements have been adopted by clients such as Dell, GE and Cisco Systems, shared ITC Hotels corporate chef Manjit Gill.



Dine at a scenic part of The Els Club Teluk Datai

Experient event company makes Airbnb content available to clients

Experient, sister company of US-based DMC Maritz Travel, has taken the plunge to team up with mega sharing economy accommodation player Airbnb to provide city inventory for events it organises.

The deal was signed in September last year and provides a solution for organisations to keep event registration open and provides another option for delegates attending meetings in cities where hotel rooms are lacking during event season.

Gary Schirmacher, Experient's vice president of industry presence, said: "Our clients are considering Airbnb blocks when there is significant compression in a convention centre district offering ample private condo and apartment inventory controlled by Airbnb."

So far Schirmacher said there has not been a client need to activate blocks under those circumstances.

"Clients are still interested in traditional hotel blocks for their overflow needs, However, we have had clients talk about activating Airbnb blocks in San Francisco and Chicago," he said.

He added that Airbnb has designed a process that gets a block online quickly with the right type of inventory, which benefits the client.

Schirmacher believes that this system will work in even in Asia-Pacific. "It will work anywhere with events putting high levels of demand that exceed traditional hotel supply near the event venue," he remarked. – **Caroline Boey**

ITB breaks into the Indian market

ITB Berlin has partnered with Cross Section Media to launch a co-branded travel trade show, Bharat International Tourism Bazaar (BITB) in India, to be held in New Delhi from October 3 to 6 this year.

Touted as the first pure outbound show for the Indian market, BITB will feature traditional exhibitors like destinations and hospitality firms as well as online and technology providers and specialists in weddings, MICE and luxury travel.

In 1Q2016, India registered the fastest growth in air travel globally. Domestic air travel is expected to exceed 100 million movements, while outbound traffic exceeded 18 million last year, growing almost 15 to 20 per cent year-on-year.

BITB aims to attract over 12,000 attendees from India and around the world.



ITB takes its expertise to India

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Positive forces

Companies are increasingly incorporating opportunities for their meeting and incentive delegates to do good for the community of the destination where their event is hosted. By *Karen Yue*, with inputs from *Paige Lee Pei Qi*, *Julian Ryall*, *S Puvaneswary*, *Rebecca Elliott*, *Rosa Ocampo*, *Prudence Lui* and *Michael Mackey*

Here are some outright good news: the number of corporate meetings and incentive programmes that feature Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) objectives has spiked over the past few years, with corporate event specialists reporting increments ranging between 15 per cent and 100 per cent.

When MCI conducted its *2015 Annual Client Sustainability Survey*, it found that 95 per cent of its clients make sustainability a key consideration when planning their events, up from 25 per cent in 2011. Ninety per cent of clients have their own sustainability programmes (up from 15 per cent in 2011) while 68 per cent evaluate the sustainability of their supply chain (up from 25 per cent in 2011).

At FCm Travel Solutions Singapore, client requests for CSR activities have doubled over the past three years, according to Theresa Lee, head of MICE. Six out of 10 meetings and incentives it organises today feature CSR components.

Lee said: "We have received frequent requests (from our clients) to incorpo-



rate CSR activities into their meetings and incentive trips in an effort to build care and concern for people, planet and profit. That translates to a sustainable business and the environment they operate in.”

The numbers have also risen for Intas Destination Management in the Philippines – seven out of 10 meetings and incentive programmes today include a CSR activity compared to just three years ago, said Kevin Jemel Hinahon, marketing and MICE manager of the agency.

Hinahon said many of his clients today take the initiative to make that request, and the change is a welcome one.

He said: “This is a win-win situation. (CSR activities) make the trip memorable and meaningful. The trip will not only help individuals, it also inspires the participants and bolsters their spirit of volunteerism.”

“Even when our clients are not specifically looking at CSR, we will try to craft a teambuilding activity that promotes a CSR concept. Profits raised through some of our programmes are handed to the local community; all materials or light equipment used for the activities are taken care of by us.”

Theresa Lee
Head of MICE,
FCm Travel Solution, Singapore

Destination Asia Japan, which was established five years ago, has seen CSR inclusions blossom from “being very rare then to accounting for one in four today”, revealed its managing director, Jared Stenhouse, who added that “it is becoming standard for us to include a CSR component (in our response to) an RFP for an incentive project”.

Some event specialists said international firms with vast experience in organising business events are the main drivers of this growing interest in CSR achievements as part of business events.

Takayuki Kawahara, general manager of MICE sales division, Tobu Top Tours Co in Japan, observed that large companies, especially international pharmaceutical firms, were putting in the most requests for CSR activities, while Hinahon said his foreign clients were the most active champions.



What drives the desire?

There are various reasons, from an altruistic desire to leverage corporate power and a strong headcount during business gatherings to help the less fortunate in the destination hosting the event, to a more pragmatic need to appear as a responsible corporate citizen under public scrutiny.

Lee believes that the expanding millennial workforce is particularly driving the altruistic push.

She said: “The millennial generation grew up with the Internet and is well informed of global issues, especially those facing the underprivileged and the environment. They are always looking for ways to contribute to the betterment of their local communities and to society.”

And companies seeking to win loyalty from the millennials and retain talent are discovering that they need to be socially responsible too.

“A strong CSR policy is a strategic tool used to attract and retain talent for the business. By providing the employee with the opportunity for individual contribution towards the greater good of a cause, the community or the environment, the company helps the employee to foster a sense of belonging and a feel-good factor about themselves and the employer,” she added.

Talan Miller, managing director of Sabre Corporate Development, Australia, said: “The millennials – be they staff or customers – certainly seem to demand more community-minded values from the big brands. In reality, while some may have genuinely grown in altruism, I think that global connectedness and social media are actually holding some big brands far more accountable to their negative actions in some markets these days. So some seek to add some community credibility and charm to their brands or assuage some guilt after a certain major image crisis.”

Whatever the reason is for the CSR

“Many CSR activities can also be effective teambuilding exercises, so companies can achieve two aims with one event. They can also serve as positive publicity for companies.”

Takayuki Kawahara
General manager, MICE sales division,
Tobu Top Tours Co, Japan

inclusion, Miller offers one invaluable advice to companies: ensure a balance in the contribution to charity and the cost of staging the event.

He elaborated: “We once saw a client donate approximately A\$2,000 (US\$1,468) worth of bikes, then with the charity representative still in the room, they gave about A\$6,000 worth of fashion sunglasses as prizes to the winning teams from the team challenge linked to the donation. This looked a little shallow and hypocritical to external observers.”

Adding quality flesh to the bone

The growing implementation of CSR activities as part of a business programme is also simply to better engage an increasingly discerning audience.

Max Jantasuwana, group managing director of Events Travel Asia, Thailand, said: “Corporate clients are now looking at different ways to reward their staff and promote work-life balance. Incorporating CSR in meetings and incentive programmes rewards participants in a spiritual way and engages the team to look at life differently and appreciate what they have achieved.”

Stu Robertson, managing director of Team Up Events in New Zealand, agrees.

He said: “For a lot of (clients), creating a memorable experience for their participants and linking that with the community

“CSR activities encourage teambuilding, promote environmental awareness and offer delegates up-close and personal experiences with the local communities.”

Jeremie Descelles
Sales and account director (MICE,
France, Africa and Asia),
Diethelm Travel Group, Thailand

Cover story

in the destination (and the organisational values is key). Incorporating a sense of giving can help create that memorable experience.”

Stenhouse added that business event participants “are looking for more ways to get involved in the destination they are visiting”.

He said: “They don’t want to just sit on the coach and watch things pass by; they want hands-on experiences.”

Furthermore, with corporate budgets for incentives being tightened these days, CSR activities are all the more attractive because they can add substance to a reward programme without being seen as a cost, Stenhouse reasoned.

What works?

CSR programmes that benefit children and youths, and those that come with immediate and obvious results appear to be a hit, according to event specialists that spoke to *TTGmice*.

Brett Hollis, owner of Big Stick Adventures, Australia, found that activities that have an impact on other people and can provide an immediate visual, educational and emotional result are more popular with corporate clients, in particular those that reach out to disadvantaged and disabled youths and transparent organisations with a blue ribbon vision (in support of child abuse prevention) and cause.

Robertson found that CSR activities that “deliver the biggest impact... and create the biggest smiles” and whose beneficiaries are included in the business event at some stage, are preferred.

Hinahon said activities that empowered local communities to make a sustainable livelihood are also popular, while Tokyo-based Event Services, Inc’s Lucky Morimoto said clients desired programmes that allowed their staff to interact with the locals as that will form part of the training or education.

Swire Travel Hong Kong’s senior manager, Eva Lai, said tree-planting in China are preferred by her clients in Hong Kong as “it is easy to handle and can accommodate groups of all sizes”, but added

that they generally prefer to implement CSR activities on homeground.

Miller opined that while hands-on activities and visits to charity organisations might be great, companies should first consider how useful the donation or activity would be to the beneficiary.

He said: “The thing most charity projects actually need is cash to spend. It is just harder to make cash appear warm and fuzzy for those (incorporating a CSR element) with a pure event focus.”

“A nice example was a global engineering firm that ran an A\$2,500 teambuilding event to link to an A\$12,000 donation to charity. There wasn’t a big song and dance over the donation, as it was just done because the senior leadership had a genuine desire to make a difference.”

Lee also advised care when selecting a local organisation to work with.

“We do our due diligence and conduct background checks on the selected organisations to make sure their books are in order and that they are not linked to any known scams or human trafficking/child labour issues,” she said.

“Corporations may also want to pay attention to the emotional impact of certain CSR activities on their staff,” suggested Brian Kock, senior manager – destinations & events management, Swire Travel Hong Kong.

“Once, we proposed a visit to some soldiers (who were maimed in battle) but that was rejected because it was too impactful on the delegates.”

Destination considerations

As business events have corporate objectives to fulfil, destination choices will not be influenced by the availability of CSR opportunities, as rightly pointed out by Sumate Sudasna, managing director of CDM – Conference & Destination Management, Thailand, who remarked that “(event delegates) do not travel to save the world”.

However, Sabre’s Miller said: “It does compel them to look deeper at what stark contrasts might exist between their five-star resort and the poor local villages.

“Regrettably in the past, the (CSR activities) that seemed to be the most popular were those with ‘cute’ styles, like building bikes for kids. These (bikes) may not actually be required by the (charity organisation). What use is a bike if you are not eating or attending school?”

Talan Miller

Managing director,
Sabre Corporate Development, Australia

When it crosses their minds that just 25 per cent of their gala dinner’s bar bill might save lives, provide safe housing or train several teachers, it can be a sobering experience. When carefully planned, these feelings can help lead to increased awareness and advocacy of local CSR issues.”

Hollis believes that every destination offers worthy causes for corporations to fight for and it is up to the client to decide which best fits their corporate CSR ambitions and culture.

Even Japan, a first-world country, can offer up impactful CSR opportunities, said Stenhouse.

“We had some projects in Fukushima and Tohoku which were badly hit by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami. We brought groups to the temporary housing units for survivors and ran some English language classes. Even just bringing tourism business into these areas is a big help,” he said.

Kawahara added that event delegates visiting Japan are also able to volunteer at sports events and take part in tree-planting activities.

Max said the growing demand for CSR inclusions within business events has made it necessary for event specialists like himself “to be more creative in tailoring CSR programmes that cater to the client’s corporate identity” while using available resources.

Diethelm Travel Group, which has strong local networks in the Asia destinations it operates in, is able to “provide all our clients with CSR activities wherever the destination our client chooses, be it Cambodia, Laos, Thailand or Myanmar”, said Jeremie Descelles, sales and account director (MICE, France, Africa and Asia).

Expecting the demand for CSR activities to rise further, Kawahara concluded that event specialists “need to be ready for that”.



“I believe that every individual has the innate desire to help. It is just that most of us don’t know where to begin. This is why we share our ideas so that help goes through proper channels to the people who sincerely need it.”

Kevin Jemel Hinahon

Marketing and MICE manager,
Intas Destination Management, The Philippines

Leading by good example

From cooking for impoverished children in Auckland to saving a protected bear species in Laos, event specialists show that there are many ways to do good while meeting for business

Spreading the love to brother bear



A Singapore-based investment company – a client of FCM Travel Solutions Singapore – wanted to introduce a CSR experience for the first time to its corporate retreat. The experience involved a fundraising campaign within the different teams in the company, and part of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of the investment teams went towards this company-wide initiative.

Luang Prabang was the chosen destination. FCM Travel Solutions Singapore worked with its local vendor, EXO Travels, to propose the Free the Bears programme.

The group visited the Bear Rescue Centre at Nam Kan natural protected area, home to the largest community of protected Moon Bears (also known as Asian Black Bears) in Laos. Participants were given a project overview before being taken on a behind-the-scenes tour of the sanctuary. They also learnt how the bears were taken into care after their rescue, heard the stories of how each bear came to live at this sanctuary, what they were being hunted for and how Bear Rescue Centre continues its mission to protect, preserve and enrich the lives of bears in six countries – Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam.

Donations raised through the Free the Bears programme went towards food, medical and care for the bears.



A contribution to green education



MCI Asia Pacific helped client Symantec sponsor and co-organise a Plant-for-the-Planet Academy (an official UN education project) for a group of children as part of the company's Vision Symposium.

During the Academy, professionals educated the children about environmental issues and inspired them to become Climate Justice Ambassadors by equipping them with the skills to educate their own friends and family about the importance of the environment.

As a result, the achievements saw US\$10,000 donated by Symantec to sponsor the Academy, and 43 children between the ages of eight and 14 became Climate Justice Ambassadors.

Also, 19,228 pledges to plant trees were collected and US\$15,000 was donated by Symantec to plant trees in Campeche, Mexico.



A talent for fund-raising



The Nu Skin Got Talent Show was a single-night event during the 2014 Nu Skin Greater China Regional Convention, where the global wellness

company arranged for its distributors to form teams and put up a talent showcase, effectively marrying entertainment, team-bonding opportunities and charity. To vote for their favourite team, the audience had to purchase voting tickets and sales proceeds were channelled to the Nu Skin Force for Good Foundation which supports humanitarian projects in more than 50 countries.

Various charity sales booths were also set-up at the convention, to raise additional funds for the Foundation.

According to Avis Chau, vice president of Nu Skin Greater China Success Inspirations and general manager of Nu Skin Hong Kong and Macau, both the Nu Skin Got Talent Show and charity booths raised HK\$2 million (US\$257,625). This amount went into supporting charity projects in Greater China including the Nu Skin Greater China Children Heart Fund.



Helping nature along



A group of 100 delegates from a Malaysian education sector held a two-day CSR programme in the Setiu Wetlands in Terengganu this January. Put together by local DMC Ping Anchorage Travel & Tours in partnership with local non-profit organisation

Sahabat Setiu, the programme saw the delegates learn about the importance of the mangrove ecosystem and take part in activities such as releasing terrapins into the river, planting 500 mangrove seedlings and clearing rubbish in the Setiu Wetlands area.

Alex Lee, CEO of Ping Anchorage Travel & Tours, said: “(The programme) also benefitted the local community in Setiu as (its people) were paid for helping with the tree-planting, and for demonstrating how mats and baskets are made using plants from the wetlands.”

Experimenting with tea leaves



A group of 50 German delegates who were in China for a meeting and incentive sought out a CSR activity that promotes sustainable tourism.

The handling agent, Germany-based Globalevents, organised a tea plantation activity that gave delegates an understanding of cultural preservation and sustainable agriculture. The highlight

of the day was the hands-on tea-growing experience during which a specialist detailed the different methods of the tea-growing process. The group got to learn how to choose and pluck tea leaves, and at the end of it, brewed their own tea using the leaves they had plucked.

According to Frauke Melchert, senior sales manager MICE with Globalevents, the delegates were all very pleased as the experience was unique and they could try the fruits of their labour.



A tale of green commitment



When a major Japanese finance company took 400 employees to New York for a week-long incentive trip, it obtained permission from the authorities to plant a tree sapling in Central Park. According to Japan's Event Services, Inc, president Lucky Morimoto, the client was keen to promote a message of environmental responsibility as well as lasting friendship between the US and Japan. Planting a tree was seen to satisfy both.

Furthermore, the project was warmly welcomed by the company as it could be revisited by employees for many years.

A vision for a happy world



In April 2016, Sabre Corporate Development handled a group of 100 global leaders and their partners

from a major international software company and helped delivered a CSR event in Gold Coast, Australia.

As the client had global operations, it requested a programme that would deliver equally far-reaching results. As such, Sabre used World Vision, an international humanitarian aid organisation, and its Smiles programme as the medium.

Following a three-hour conference and teambuilding activity, the group chalked up dozens of education packages, vaccinations, water projects, livestock animals, solar lights, seeds and other items that were eventually donated globally via World Vision.



World Vision Annual Report

Satiating a need to feed



Some 25 participants from Tonkin and Taylor, a multinational engineering company, visited a low socio-economic school in Auckland to participate in a Feed the Need programme. Their challenge was to prepare, cook and serve lunch for 75 school kids.

A Tonkin and Taylor representative said: “We got way more out of the programme than we ever expected – it was a great feeling and we came away a little awed by the kids’ talent and were hugely impressed with all the organisation that had happened behind the scenes.”



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The Singapore Tourism Board recently began offering curated packages for Chinese incentive travellers

Lion city means bu

To pull in Chinese incentive votes, Singapore's tourism pushes past resting on traditional methods to develop new creative solutions as well, writes **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

According to Singapore Tourism Board's (STB) latest statistics, Chinese arrivals to Singapore from January to November last year recorded an impressive year-on-year increase of 21.6 per cent to over 1.93 million visitors.

While STB does not keep track of MICE arrivals according to countries, Low See Peng, regional director, Greater China, STB, said: "Singapore continued to be regarded as an exciting destination for Chinese MICE groups in 2015, attracting various incentive groups from Greater China.

"These include new incentive groups such as Mafengwo, as well as returning groups New Era Health

Industry Group and Nanshan Insurance (Taiwan)," she elaborated.

Sharing similar positive sentiments, Linda Low, manager, strategic partnership and product marketing, Pacific World, said the number of Chinese MICE groups visiting Singapore in the first eight months of 2015 surpassed the total in 2014.

She said: "The extension of multiple journey visas to Chinese nationals has opened up opportunities for the Singapore tourism sector and has made it easier for Chinese business travellers to Singapore."

In addition, she pointed out that STB's partnerships with Chinese online and media platforms have also helped to reach out to Chinese

travellers.

To better connect with the growing wave of mobile-savvy travellers emerging from China, STB forged new partnerships with four major Chinese digital players last year and launched two products with existing partners in the space.

The agreement will see first-time partners – Chinese OTAs Alitrip and Tuniu and social review sites Dianping and Mafengwo – curate and distribute content on Singapore to their users over two to three years.

Applauding these new partnerships, Joseph Sze, director of China from Siam Express, said: "This (initiative) gives Singapore the first-mover advantage in this aspect because



business

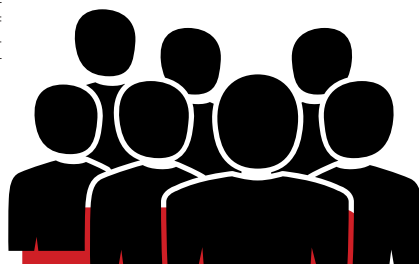
(STB) is the first NTO that has done something so major.

“Chinese travellers are very dependent on their mobile devices and they will (appreciate) the convenience of real-time information on the travel destinations provided by these digital services,” he said.

STB’s Low said: “This provides us with additional touchpoints to business travellers, enabling us to make relevant content such as leisure and dining options easily available through technology, and further helps visitors to customise and maximise their time in Singapore.”

Apart from that, STB also launched the Singapore *Incentives & Rewards (INSPIRE) 2.0* programme for the Greater China market last September. *INSPIRE 2.0* aims to promote Singapore’s unique attractions by packaging curated itineraries that

{ Talking numbers }



8,173

The number of delegates at the International Dental Exhibition and Meeting Singapore 2016 held in April this year



350

The approximate number of business events STB supported in 2015, a 27 per cent year-on-year increase

cater to Chinese incentive travellers.

For example, Resorts World Sentosa could provide welcome cocktails with a meet-and-greet session with movie characters at the Universal Studios Singapore.

To further boost Chinese arrivals, STB’s Low highlighted how the new Chongqing Connectivity Initiative between Singapore and China, launched in January 2016, will help bring both destinations closer. With that, West Air has since launched its inaugural international flight from Chongqing to Singapore, a thrice-weekly service.

While Low admitted that they expect macroeconomic factors to continue to have an impact on business traffic and expenditure from China, she expressed optimism for 2016.

She said: “We believe Singapore remains a vibrant and attractive destination for business travellers, as 2016 brings a variety of key exhibitions such as the Singapore Airshow and Food & Hotel Asia, where we (can) see a healthy percentage of Chinese business travellers (in attendance).”

Pacific World’s Low remarked: “Singapore continues to face strong competition worldwide (in capturing China’s market) as countries constantly roll out new and refreshed initiatives to capture a bigger share of the pie.”

Nevertheless, Low said Singapore’s winning factor is the ease of language and visa facilitation – both key considerations for any business traveller.



“Singapore continued to be regarded as an exciting destination for Chinese MICE groups in 2015, attracting various incentive groups from Greater China.”

Low See Peng

Regional director, Greater China
Singapore Tourism Board

Destination: Singapore

{ Insider }

Arun Madhok, CEO of Suntec Singapore Convention & Exhibition Centre

Indulge in food paradise

Singapore is well-known for its food culture, and rightly so. Great food can be found everywhere, from hawker centres in the heartlands to fancy restaurants in the heart of town. With so many food options, deciding on what to eat suddenly becomes a good problem to have.

My go-to option is definitely local hawker fare including chicken rice, satay and also my all-time favourite – crispy carrot cake from Chomp Chomp Food Centre in Serangoon Gardens. If not in the mood for local food, I can also easily find decent restaurants serving up a variety of cuisines that suit different palates. Some of my favourite restaurants include db Bistro & Oyster Bar, and the Joël Robuchon Restaurant which specialises in the very best of French haute cuisine.

Drink up Singapore's nightlife scene

For a small city like ours, Singapore's exhilarating nightlife scene offers a myriad of choices that caters to everyone. Throughout the week, the array of bars, pubs and clubs in the heart of the city serves up drinks and great music into the wee hours. Be it the partygoers or the casual drinkers, no one should pass up the chance of immersing themselves in Singapore's thriving nightlife!

When I'm looking for a good night out, I'll head down to my favourite microbreweries like Red Dot and Brewerkz to enjoy their wide selection of premium handcrafted beers. After a long day's work, I also enjoy unwinding over drinks at the al fresco rooftop Sky Garden at Suntec City, which offers a plethora of dining options from the classic Western at Dallas to the exciting Indo-Chine outlets with live bands.

Immerse in Singapore's vibrant arts scene

Singapore is a diverse melting pot of cultures with a colourful arts scene to match. On any given week, local and international acts entertain large audiences in the numerous world-class performing arts venues in Singapore. The diversity in the arts scene makes it an ideal platform for people to discover and learn about the country while also being exposed to other cultures. Since moving here, I've been an ardent fan of the quality productions by local theatre company Pangdemonium and I'm definitely looking forward to the *Les Misérables* musical coming to Singapore for the first time in two decades!



Nightlife at Clarke Quay Singapore

myxwater/www.shutterstock.com

{ Spotlight }

Hotel Vagabond

Impress your delegates by transporting them out of the stiff concrete jungle, and hosting them in the glamorous salon in Hotel Vagabond, Singapore's first experience-driven luxury boutique hotel tucked in the eclectic neighbourhood of Little India and Kampong Glam.

Opened last year, this is the first and only hotel in Asia to feature interiors by the renowned French designer Jacques Garcia, who pays due homage to art. Upon entering the 41-room luxury boutique hotel, guests step into a brand new world that is bathed in lush crimson and gold.

The Vagabond Salon, which takes on a modern interpretation of a retro-Parisian salon, spreads across 464.5m² and allows up to 300 guests in a standing cocktail setting, 40 pax in a roundtable setting or



100 pax in a theatre setting.

According to the hotel's general manager and co-founder of Garcha Hotels, Harpreet Bedi, space utilisation there is demarcated by red velvet ropes and thick red velvet curtains, adding on to the Parisian salon vibe. Meeting facilities there include acoustics and sound systems, an in-built projector as well as a dropdown screen.

Bedi said: "Private events of butler passed canapes or sitdown lunch or dinner would be ideal in such an atmosphere."

Hence he proposed that suitable events could include a special product launch, celebration of a brand anniversary or global team retreat, where the host is able to privatise the whole venue by booking all 41 guest rooms.



Destination: Middle East

Dreams of excellence

New infrastructure is helping to speed up Dubai's goal of becoming the preferred hub for international associations and dream destination for business events. By **Karen Yue** and **Feizal Samath**

Dubai's skyline is in a constant state of change as new infrastructure keeps emerging

Dubai has made inroads in the associations congress sector since setting up the Dubai Associations Centre (DAC) in 2013. Some 23 international associations have established offices in Dubai since then, generating a number of meetings in the emirate.

More than offering international associations keen on expanding across the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia a serviced office from which to conduct business, the DAC provides licensing and registration services, association management services through its partner MCI, and event planning services for meetings and conferences held in Dubai.

Layla Derraz, promotion and events representative from the DAC, shared that a further 50 applications are being processed now.

The DAC has drawn great interest from international associations, and those that have already established an office at the DAC include UITP (an international association for public transport authorities, operators, policy makers and other key stakeholders in the public transport field), GSMA (an international associations

for mobile operators and those in related industries) and MENAFA (Middle East & North Africa Franchise Association)," said Derraz.

To better cope with the demand, an expansion project is underway to add to the DAC's current capacity in the Sheikh Rashid Tower, part of the Dubai World Trade Centre.

Steen Jakobsen, director with Dubai Business Events, said: "There is a huge amount of development around the complex where DAC is, and multiple sites are in the pipeline. A second office will open next to the Dubai World Trade Centre and it will support new international associations that are entering the region."

Jakobsen added that the DAC has contributed to Dubai Business Events' ultimate goal of attracting more business events.

Jakobsen shared that a roundtable with several associations in April revealed that they had been hosting more events – both regional and international congresses – since coming into Dubai.

But more than just building Dubai up as a convenient hub for expanding international associations,

Jakobsen said efforts are also being made to "ensure that once delegates are here for an event, they will have a great experience".

He elaborated: "We work with many local partners to ensure that the entire experience is smooth and seamless, from boarding the plane and flying into Dubai, to stepping out of the airport and using the metro, to checking in at the hotel, to attending off-site dinners, taking camel rides, going on a safari cruise and shopping in a mall.

"We believe that when you have this great experience in Dubai, you are more likely to come back."

Supplementing Dubai Business Events' commitment to building a complete and perfect destination experience for meeting delegates is a slew of new products that are coming onstream.

A new convention centre in Al Jaddaf will be completed in two years' time. The complex, which can host events with 10,000 people at any one time, will feature a variety of event spaces including the 17,652m² Shaikh Rashid Hall and five smaller multipurpose halls,

with each being able to accommodate 1,000 people. These halls will be linked to two hotels – a three-star and a four-star – and a 36-storey office building via the Concourse. The air-conditioned 150m-long Concourse corridor will house shops and restaurants.

New accommodation options coming on stream this year is the Viceroy Dubai at Palm Jumeirah with 477 guestrooms and 222 signature residences, and by 2017 are the 100-key Bvlgari Resort & Residences on the seahorse-shaped Jumeirah Bay Island and the 300-key Venu Bluewaters Island Hotel.

Meeting delegates headed for Dubai this year can also expect to find new fun at the Dubai Opera, a 2,000-seat performing arts centre in downtown Dubai, and IMG Worlds of Adventure indoor theme park. Both will open in August.

And before the year is out, Dubai will also be home to Dubai Parks and Resorts, an integrated resort with theme parks like Motiongate (Hollywood), Legoland and Bollywood Parks.

Yet another star attraction on the horizon is the Dubai-I ferris wheel, opening in 2017.

Shopping opportunities are aplenty too, with new retail outlets opening in the destination at a rapid pace.

Investments in public transport now aim to put air-conditioned and speedy cars, trams and buses on the roads to take travellers from the airport to hotels, shopping malls, entertainment centres and parks. By 2030, 25 per cent of all transportation options in Dubai will be smart and driverless as part of a strategy to become the smartest city in the world.

{ Spotlight }

Sandy adventures in the desert



{ Insider }

Justine Thomas-Butler, Head of meetings, incentives & events & congress solutions international, Arabian Adventures

A spectacular orientation

Dubai is one of the world's most dynamic cities, with a skyline to rival Manhattan, yet its roots as a sleepy fishing village, port and trading hub remain one of the destination's highlights. The city exploration offers guests a fascinating insight into Dubai's history and development into a modern metropolis with numerous opportunities for photos. Old and new Dubai promises visits to iconic landmarks and architectural wonders such as the Burj Khalifa which provides you with outstanding views of the city and beyond into the desert.

A cultural insight

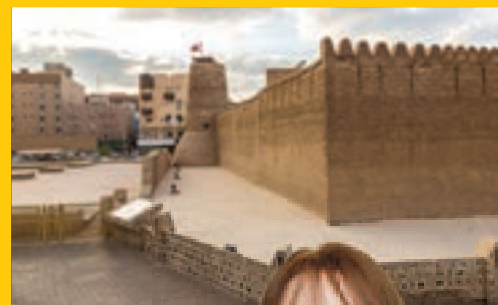
Accompanied by an Emirati, visitors walk through one of the oldest traditional Emirati neighbourhoods to leave their footprints down unique narrow sikkas (alleys) and feast their eyes on beautiful wind towers that adorn these original residences. Visitors then return to the Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding for a cultural discovery.

Later, a traditional meal awaits in a wind tower house that sits in the Al Bastakiya trading village in the Al Fahidi Historic District, one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Bur Dubai.

Shop like a star

Imagine shopping with your very own personal stylist, whose wealth of knowledge and expertise makes for a stress-free, enjoyable experience. The personal shopper connects with the traveller ahead of time, to understand the individual's taste and fashion needs and to plan the day.

A private consultation can be had at The Lounge at Fashion Avenue, the exclusive lounge of The Dubai Mall which offers stunning views over Dubai Fountain and Burj Khalifa.



Above: an ancient fortress in the Al Fahidi Historic District



A mysterious desert always makes an ideal venue for a magical and memorable evening, especially when the experience is enhanced with thrilling four-wheel drives over sand dunes and an elaborate Middle Eastern feast under the starry skies.

According to Steen Jakobsen, director of Dubai Business Events, highlights of the excursion to the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve, located deep in the heart of the Dubai Desert, also includes a sunset photo stop among the dunes, sand-boarding and traditional entertain-

ment by a belly dancer and a *tanoura* dancer during the evening feast in a lively traditional Bedouin-style camp.

Event planners can also weave in camel rides, henna tattoo painting, Arabic coffee making and aromatic shisha pipes for their delegates at the camp.

The six-hour excursion has been strongly promoted at travel roadshows and exhibitions as must-do activity for corporate groups taking their meetings and events to Dubai, according to Jakobsen.

MICE business surges forward

Despite tough economic times, China's financial hub has remained resilient and continues to be a magnet for business events. **Caroline Boey** reports

The 2016 MICE outlook for Shanghai continues to be upbeat as the city has been booked to host a number of international transportation and medical conventions that will attract some 3,000 participants.

The destination is one MICE city that has and continues to reap the benefits of its MICE infrastructure development. Case in point – the opening of the mega National Exhibition and Convention Center last year resulted in 24 new major local and international exhibitions organised in the city in 2015.

Patrick Chen, deputy director – International Tourism Promotion Department of the Shanghai Municipal Tourism Administration, said a number of the 24 events were entirely new ones. He also noted that Shanghai is still a strong draw for events in the finance and scientific sectors.

This year, Shanghai will benefit from meetings like the Ministers of Finance gathering for 700 delegates. It was held at the end of February in the run-up to the 2016 G20 Hangzhou Summit in early September.

Chen added: “We are expecting a few more G20-related events (such as the Ministers of Trade meeting this month) which could bring in more than 1,000 attendees. The recent opening of the Shanghai Disney Resort will also contribute to MICE growth.”

With MICE infrastructure in Shanghai continuing to develop in new areas and in the further reaches of the metropolis, Chen said the city's metro network is similarly expanding with the opening of new stations on Lines 7, 12 and 13.

According to new and established DMC players, Shanghai's MICE performance is strong.

They said that Shanghai is benefiting from high-profile celebrity events

with the likes of British actor Benedict Cumberbatch (of *Sherlock* fame) hosting product launches, which continue to raise the city's hip factor.

The opening of luxury hotels – such as Jin Jiang Tower Hotel and Ahn Luh Zhujiujiao – and new state-of-the-art venues providing even more options for meeting planners and MICE buyers, also helps to make Shanghai a hot destination, they add.

Boutique DMC, Bespoke Shanghai, which set up a presence in the city last year, is upbeat. The company first started in Beijing in 2009, and it specialises in meetings for senior management and groups of up to 50 or 60 people.

Sam Braybon, bespoke ambassador to Shanghai, Bespoke Shanghai, said: “Shanghai has seen a strong 2015 MICE performance and this is expected to grow further this year. The city has invested heavily in infrastructure to ensure that its conference and exhibition facilities are among the best in China, and it has the best selection of luxury hotels and top-end restaurants that help support and attract high-level clients. Then there are a number of new hotels opening in 2016, plus Shanghai Disney Resort, which should mean a lot of publicity and an even higher profile for the city.”

International DMC Pacific World, which has had a presence in Shanghai since 2000, reports good demand for international corporate events.

Violet Wang, Shanghai-based destination manager, Pacific World, said: “Businesses are still choosing Shanghai to open new offices and we are still seeing a lot of business transactions with Shanghai. The US and Asia are major markets for Pacific World and it is enjoying a rise in sporting and product launch events.”

Wang elaborated: “The aviation, automotive and insurance industries are still strong and association meet-

ings in high-tech and clean energy return every year. With the devaluation of the Chinese currency, Shanghai has become more affordable for markets such as the US, and also Australia and New Zealand – but to a lesser extent because their currencies have also depreciated.”

“Incentives are also back and the new trend is CSR teambuilding activities with experiences that engage and inspire staff. China's strong cultural element is important for overseas participants. This year, we expect to see an uptrend from pharmaceutical companies, where compliance has eased and five-star accommodation can now be considered,” Wang said.

For Renaissance Shanghai Pudong Hotel, it expects demand for corporate meetings, primarily for training and education, to come from the insurance and pharmaceutical sectors.

To maintain its MICE share in an increasingly competitive environment, the hotel's ballroom was upgraded in 2014 and renovation of its guestrooms was completed in August 2015.

Shanghai is still a strong draw for events, especially from the finance and scientific sectors



John Cruz/www.shutterstock.com

{ Insider }

Sam Braybon, Bespoke Shanghai's bespoke ambassador to Shanghai, recommends three activities that can be done around the bustling city

Discover something old

Follow an expert guide into Shanghai's Old City and learn about its early days as a Ming Dynasty trading post that was famous for cotton and textile production. Then traverse a tangle of impossibly narrow lanes surrounding Shanghai Confucius Temple and discover its architecture, before marvelling at the discreet villa where Einstein and his wife once dined during a stopover.



The Bund and its forest of skyscrapers

Jackrallipany/23RF.com

A different type of bar crawl

The city is a world-class party town and those looking for a good time can dress up and indulge in a three-hour signature Shanghai cocktail experience.

Accompanied by a doyenne of Shanghai's nightlife scene, visitors can visit three of the city's hidden bars and obtain exclusive access to three bartenders, where each bartender will craft a cocktail based on one's favourite spirits and flavours.

Time hop into the past

A stroll along the Bund will give visitors a feel for Shanghai's luxury business environment, while a visit to the Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Center tells the story of Shanghai's transformation from a sleepy backwater to a global financial hub.

{ Spotlight }

An exquisite space perched up high

The ultra-luxurious Park Hyatt Shanghai is located between the 79th to 93rd floors of the Shanghai World Financial Center in Pudong.

Opened in 2008, its 87th floor Chef's Table is a sought-after venue for exclusive and sophisticated dinners. Or when a special space that embraces the clouds and offers stunning views – which look directly at the Oriental Pearl TV Tower, Jin Mao Tower and the Bund – is called for.

Visitors to the space are greeted by soaring ceilings, elegant European décor

and a well-planned space for an intimate gathering.

One of the most exclusive spaces in the hotel, the interior was conceptualised by New York-based award-winning designer Tony Chi. What resulted was a fully equipped high-end Bulthaup kitchen that features its own music system.

Event planners can play around with the venue's natural light, open kitchen and multifunctional space to enhance an exclusive and tailor-made dining experience that is supported on site with chef services.

The venue is ideal for small gatherings, especially those that require exceptional F&B services. Moreover, wine connoisseurs will delight in the exclusive wine library which stores more than 500 labels from around the world.

Aside from catering to exquisite dinner parties for 12 guests, a hotel spokesman said the Chef's Table has also played host to pastry and floral master classes for small MICE group events. These, she said, were held during Park Hyatt Shanghai's Masters of Food & Wine Passion Week – a high-profile annual highlight in Shanghai's foodie calendar.

For bigger events, the spokesman added that Park Hyatt Shanghai also has a Private Dining space on the 93rd floor available.

For example, *tai chi* classes for MICE groups can take place in a spacious *tai chi* "courtyard" at one end of the pool area at Water's Edge spa on the hotel's 85th floor. It is one of the city's highest pool, spa and fitness facilities.

Other meeting spaces include: seven salons measuring between 74m² and 171m² on the 86th floor; intimate spaces of 66m² and 240m² (that add up to 600m²) on the Private Dining level on the 93rd floor; while the Sky Arena on the 94th floor has a 760m² space available.

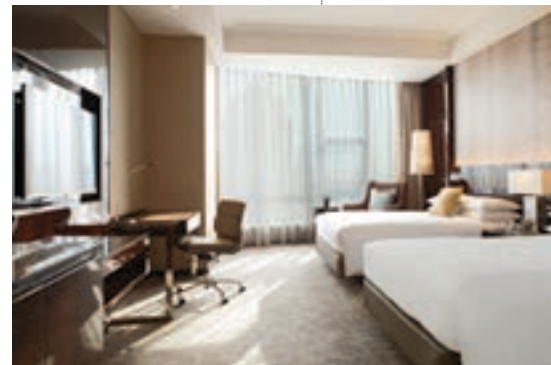
From left: Park Hyatt Shanghai's Chef's Table; a pastry master class in session



Checking in

Five-star, 363 rooms and suites
100 Changliu Road, Pudong New Area,
Shanghai 200135
Tel: (86 21) 3871 4888
www.renaissancepudong.com

Renaissance Shanghai Pudong Hotel



Located a five-minute drive from the Shanghai New International Expo Center is the Renaissance Shanghai Pudong Hotel. Its interior features an attractive mix of traditional Chinese décor and contemporary Western design.

First opened in September 2003, the hotel's latest upgrade of its banquet facilities, Grand Ballroom and guestrooms was completed in August 2015.

Meeting facilities The refurbished 545m² pillarless Grand Ballroom – with a six-metre high ceiling – is now equipped with the latest audiovisual technology and two large LED screens. The ballroom can accommodate 600 people theatre-style or 280 classroom-style, or be further divided into two sections.

The hotel also has 11 meeting rooms of various sizes and is popular among insurance and pharmaceutical companies for corporate meetings, hosting mostly training and education groups of around 100 attendees.

In total, the hotel offers 1,500m² of banquet and meeting space.

Rooms The bed and bedding were to my liking and the choice of pale beige, bleached sage, light taupe, splashes of aquamarine and a sprinkling of nature motifs made the renovated deluxe room feel light and airy. It provided a much-needed tranquil retreat amid Shanghai's hustle and bustle.

So did the luxurious bathroom with a separate shower stall and full-size bathtub. I opened the double doors and was greeted by a dramatic ring of light in the centre of the mirror and a stone mosaic wall.

The Argus toiletries, created by Colorado-based designer Margot Elena,

refreshed and invigorated me each time I washed my hands, and when I took a shower after a long day.

The room features an armchair and ottoman, a glass-topped desk, a desk chair on wheels that provided good lower-back support and a flatscreen Samsung TV. Night, Reading and Master light switches are easily accessible, while USB sockets join universal power adaptors located beside the bed and concealed in a drawer beside the desk. The free Wi-Fi worked perfectly.

Another nice touch is the analogue alarm clocks which has a second hand that moves smoothly and silently. Made of stainless steel, this solid timepiece is lights up when it is lifted off the bedside table.

F&B The Renaissance Shanghai Pudong Hotel features the all-day dining Renaissance Brasserie which has a modern, open kitchen. The brasserie also provides a generous buffet spread.

Wan Li Restaurant, the hotel's signature eatery, offers traditional Cantonese dishes and Shanghaiese specialties.

Indulge in a cocktail at The Shanghai Bar, located on the first floor. The bar is created in traditional Shanghaiese style and decorated with bespoke art pieces. Meanwhile, the Lobby Lounge is ideal for a leisurely afternoon tea.

Also located on the first floor is Reizenya Japanese Recipe, which specialises in ramen, rice dishes and nori rolls, while the Gourmet Shop near the entrance offers freshly baked French pastries, breads and chocolates.

Other facilities The hotel has an indoor swimming pool, a gym and a Club Lounge for guests on the Club Level.

FACT FILE

Largest venue

600 in the Grand Ballroom, theatre-style

Smallest venue

14 in the Meeting Room, U-shape set-up

Events handled

Apart from being a popular venue for corporate meetings, the hotel has also made a name for itself as the caterer of choice for a large annual event held in Shanghai for up to 3,800 people

VERDICT



The friendly service, convenient hotel location and nearby amenities suited my needs as a business traveller well.

Caroline Boey



Monika Hefner/www.shutterstock.com

Destination: Africa

Changes in the wind

Rwanda's diverse offerings include trekking on the Mikeno volcano (pictured)

A new convention centre, upcoming international branded hotels and a growing MICE reputation could change Rwanda's fate, writes **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

Rwanda's MICE tourism is poised for a major lift on the back of the US\$300 million Kigali Convention Centre which had opened last month, along with the entrance of several new city hotels that will boost accommodation inventory in its capital Kigali.

Ranked as the 13th most sought after MICE destination on the African continent by ICCA last year, Rwanda has been steadily building its niche in MICE since the launch of the Rwanda Convention Bureau (RCB) in 2014.

According to Faustin Karasira, acting head of the tourism department in Rwanda Development Board, which oversees the RCB's activities, at least 40 per cent of overall tourism revenue, which is targeted at US\$860 million, is expected to come from MICE by 2018.

Total revenues based on MICE tourism in 2015 were US\$35 million, up from US\$29 million in 2014.

Karasira said: "We are ready to be positioned as a MICE hub within Africa especially with new infrastructure like the Kigali Con-

vention Centre and international branded hotels."

Adding to that, Joseph Birori, managing director of MICE with Primate Safaris, said the increase in meeting and hotel facilities will help him sell Rwanda much better and the destination's potential for MICE will now be "taken seriously".

New and upcoming hotels in the destination include the 251-key Kigali Marriott Hotel, 161-room Park Inn by Radisson, as well as Radisson Blu Hotel & Convention Centre with 292 rooms.

Kigali Marriott Hotel, which opened in May, is expecting 50 per cent of guests to be business travellers, according to Peter Mukulu, the hotel's director of sales & marketing.

Mukulu said: "There are not a lot of international hotels in the city. By establishing a Marriott, we will be able to help drive the inbound MICE market."

While the hotel is expecting the bulk of guests to be from regional Africa, he said his team will be courting the international market especially through their US and Europe counterparts by establishing

a presence at related tradeshow.

Playing host to international events has also lifted the city's prominence. Karasira said: "The growth of international events being held in our country displays confidence in our MICE capabilities which will help us see further growth in MICE tourism as word gets around."

High profile international events this year include the World Economic Forum in May, which welcomed 3,000 delegates, as well as the African Union Summit later in July and the Global Africa Investment Summit in September – each expected to host 2,000 guests.

Birori pointed to Rwanda's reputation for security and tour offerings as other key selling points.

He said: "Business travellers especially are big on safety and Rwanda is well-known to (be a clean place with) low crime rates."

"On top of that, Rwanda has exclusive nature and wildlife attractions for incentive activities like mountain gorillas trekking tours."

Karasira added that the national MICE strategy is in line with diversifying the current tourism product offering while complementing existing gorilla tourism, eco-tourism, cultural and community-based tourism, the mainstays of Rwanda's economy.

Increased air connectivity is also one of the factors that has bolstered Rwanda's MICE sector.

The number of international airlines operating in the country has increased from five in 2010 to nine in 2015. South African Airways, Qatar Airways, KLM, Turkish Airlines, Brussels Airlines, Kenya Airways, flydubai, Emirates Cargo and Ethiopian Airlines are airlines currently operating in Rwanda.

Moreover, Africans arriving in or transiting through Rwanda are not required to apply for visas prior to travel as they can get them upon arrival in the country.

The Kigali International Airport, which went through an upgrade in 2014, increased its annual capacity to 1.6 million passengers, up from 600,000. Also, a new airport, Bugesera International Airport, is in the works and will provide extra capacity for passengers and cargo when opened.

{ Talking numbers }

**1,000**

The number of delegates who attended the 84th Interpol Annual General Assembly in Kigali in November 2015

Zzzzz...**1,600**

The number of three- to five-star hotel rooms that are within easy access of the city centre

**15**

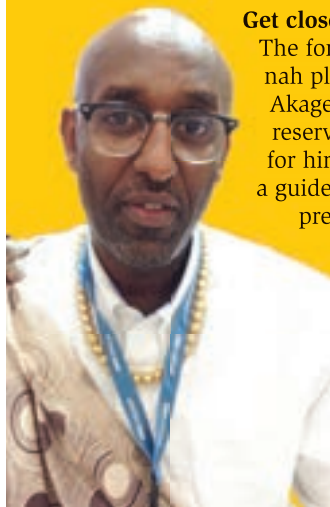
The time in minutes taken to drive from Kigali International Airport to the city

{ Insider }

Manzi Kayihura, owner of Thousand Hills Expeditions, identifies three must-dos in Rwanda

Learn its history

Dedicate at least half a day to the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre, which documents the 1994 genocide during which an estimated one million people died over the span of 100 days. It also serves as the final resting place for over 250,000 victims.

**Get close to nature**

The forest fringed lakes, papyrus swamps, savannah plains and rolling highlands combine to make Akagera National Park among the most scenic of reserves anywhere in Africa. The park has vehicles for hire for game drives, which come with a driver, a guide and a choice of half- or full-day drives. Be prepared to come up close and personal with the wildlife.

Say hello to the mountain gorillas

Visit the habitat of the endangered mountain gorillas at the Volcanoes National Park through a gorilla trekking tour. The adventure takes anything from 30 minutes to a couple of hours, depending on the group's physical strength.

{ Spotlight }

A new gem in Rwanda's MICE portfolio

The US\$300 million Kigali Convention Centre, which opened its doors in June this year, is deemed to be one of the most important infrastructure developments in the country.

Part of the Radisson Blu Hotel & Convention Centre complex, Kigali Convention Centre has a flexible conference hall that can host up to 2,600 seated delegates, and is suitable for summit events, conventions, festivals or even concerts. Another flexible conference room for up to 800 pax, can be divided into six smaller spaces. There are also 18 meetings rooms as well as exhibition foyers.

Apart from meeting facilities, F&B options include an all-day-dining restaurant and a fine-dining restaurant.

The five-star 292-room Radisson Blu Hotel & Convention Centre offers accommodation support to events, and the hotel tower comes with its own event spaces too, allowing it to complement larger-scale gatherings taking place at the Kigali Convention Centre.

These meeting facilities include an arena that spans more than 1,200m², a divisible conference hall as well as 10 meeting rooms.

Sitting on a hilltop in the heart of Kigali near the Parliament building, the convention centre is also conveniently located 20 minutes by car from the Kigali International Airport.

Several global business events have been booked at the new Kigali Convention Centre



Rwanda Development Board

Harnessing elements of success

Grand Hyatt Singapore takes the predictability out of a spring celebration for clients by building the theme around the five Chinese elements of nature. By **Karen Yue**



Event brief

Planning for two dinner events in the lead up to the 2016 Chinese Lunar New Year for valued industry clients of Hyatt Hotels & Resorts' Singapore Global Sales Force had begun in October 2015.

Staff from both the Hyatt Sales Force Singapore and the Grand Hyatt Singapore hotel were involved in the programme that sought to provide an opportunity for sales representatives to thank corporate clients, business event planners and travel agents based in Singapore.

Challenges

According to Lee Lin Ing, senior global sales director, Hyatt Sales Force Singapore, the main challenge faced by the planning committee was having to "find the right creative concept for the dinner and not having to rehash the common associations with the (Chinese) Lunar New Year".

The planners also had to devise a way for Hyatt Hotels & Resorts representatives to have an equal opportunity in engaging all guests during the course of the evening, especially during a sit-down dinner arrangement which is usually less conducive for networking.

Solutions

To keep the dinner concept engaging and fresh, the planning committee involved a broader group of team members, "allowing for a creative exchange of ideas for the central theme of the evening", said Lee.

Event

A Celebration of Elements for Spring – An Appreciation Dinner

Organiser

Hyatt Sales Force, Singapore

Venue

Grand Salon, Grand Hyatt Singapore

Date

January 14 – 15, 2016

Number of participants

210

The result was a theme that was built upon the five Chinese elements of nature – gold, wood, water, fire and earth – which also enabled the spring celebration to be aligned with Chinese culture.

The theme was carried throughout the event, from the decor to the entertainment.

Table settings, for instance, featured vibrant, orange-hued Bird of Paradise flowers and votive candles to represent fire, while an assortment of natural moss, succulents and vines formed an organic landscape to represent earth.

Ten Chinese zodiac animals were used to group guests at the tables in the Loft Kitchen outside the Grand Salon the prosperity tossing

of a giant *yu sheng* salad took place.

The God of Fortune also made an appearance during the dinner, giving away lucky talons to guests.

Chinese culture was further celebrated throughout the event's entertainment and dinner selection.

"A flutist drew the guests' attention to the unveiling of the theatrical show kitchen, opening up to a stunning dessert buffet, accompanied by a trio of musicians on traditional Chinese string instruments including the erhu and pipa. The chefs were also central to the success of the event as there were a number of live stations at the dessert buffet – from freshly-made fresh love letters, hand pulled dragon beard candy to sticky New Year cakes prepared a la minute," revealed Lee.

The second challenge was addressed by having Hyatt representatives take on new seats at different tables at the end of the second and third dinner course.

The pre-drinks and dessert buffet also presented multiple opportunities for guests to mingle.

Key takeaways

Lee told *TTGmice*: "There's no limit to creativity and a great event does not always equate to over-the-top setup and high costs. As a Grand Hyatt property, we promise to unlock the extraordinary in every moment through one-of-a-kind experiences at the hotel that matter to our guests while staying focused on the theme and purpose of the event."

{ Hot moves }



Allan Wong

Allan Wong

Wong has joined Pan Pacific Tianjin as general manager. He was last general manager of Tianjin Modern Group's hotel business and was responsible for the construction of the Four Seasons Hotel and Residence in Tianjin.

ChooLeng Goh

Goh has been promoted to the position of complex general manager of Le Méridien Bangkok and Plaza Athénée Bangkok, A Royal Méridien. She was formerly the general manager of the latter property.



Koen Vermeersch

Dany Lützel

Dany Lützel now leads Niccolo Chongqing as general manager. He was last general manager at Kempinski Chongqing, and before, general manager of Radisson Blu, St Gallen, Switzerland.

Ian Hurst

Hurst has been picked to lead the pre-opening of Best Western Premier Genting Ion Delemen, Malaysia. As general manager, he will also oversee all aspects of operations, sales and marketing at



Kurt Otto Wehinger

the property. He was last general manager of Ramada Plaza Kuala Lumpur.

Jon Loeffelholz

Loeffelholz now oversees five Oakwood properties in Japan in his new role as general manager with Oakwood Asia Pacific. He joins Oakwood from Capital Servicing Group.

Koen Vermeersch

The Ascott Limited has appointed Vermeersch as area manager for its properties in Thailand



Peter Pottinga

and general manager for Somerset Park Suanplu Bangkok. He has held key positions in several companies such as city manager of Tianjin for Ascott.

Kurt Otto Wehinger

Wehinger has been appointed both area general manager Oceania and general manager of Parkroyal Darling Harbour, Sydney. He was last general manager of Marina Mandarin Singapore, and prior to that, the first general



Sharon Seong

manager of Grand Millennium Beijing.

Peter Pottinga

Pottinga has been named general manager at Harbour Grand Kowloon. He was most recently general manager at Crowne Plaza & Suites Landmark Shenzhen.

Sharon Seong

Seong is now general manager of Oakwood Studios Singapore, due to open in November. She crosses over from Club Hotel where she led as general manager.

{ Career inspiration }

Meik G Brammer

Executive chef, Marriott Grand Ballroom at Marriott Hotel Manila

How did you find your way in the industry?

I started 23 years ago when I was 16. I did not do very well in school and my father asked me to either return to school and get better grades or get out of the house. I chose the latter. I knocked on the doors of 50 hotels in Germany to work as chef, with no luck.

At the 51st hotel, the Renaissance Zurich in Switzerland, executive chef Andre Freudiger hesitated due to my lack of experience and training. I told him I would go to Austria and continue applying until I got the job. Because of my perseverance, Freudiger took me in, let me stay in his home and gave me a three-year apprenticeship.

What are your career achievements to date?

At 28, I became the executive chef of Marriott Hua Hin, the youngest to have become one in the Marriott hotels. Also, in 2015, I was voted the best chef among the more than 3,000 Marriott hotels around the world.

What do you like most about your job?

The feeling of creating something that people come here for and are willing to pay for.

What about your job keep you awake at night?

Deciding every year who gets promoted, knowing that it will mean a huge jump in their income and can change their life and that of their whole family. (Note: Marriott Manila and Marriott Grand Ballroom have 100 chefs and the number can reach up to 400 during high season)

Your advice to those looking to join the industry and achieve success?

Believe in yourself and in your goals: don't change your goals, listen to your heart. I am a living example that goals are attainable with perseverance and a never say never attitude.

Don't be self-centered: not everything is about you. You need a lot of people for help so listen carefully and listen to the culture of the country where you are working.



David Peckinpaugh

US demand for meetings and incentive travel is strong and continues to grow, according to David Peckinpaugh, president, Maritz Travel, based in Missouri. He shares with **Caroline Boey** his outlook on growth drivers and the sharing economy

What is the current outlook on US meetings and incentive travel demand and what are key factors affecting travel locally and internationally?

The outlook for the US meetings and events industry continues to be strong. All metrics have rebounded to above what they were in 2007-2008 and we expect that this trend will continue for the next two years.

The key factors at play right now are the lack of supply, which is creating an issue with availability, and the ever-increasing rates with flat budgets. This is especially true in the US.

Internationally, the key factors playing into buying decision continue to be air lift/air fares, economic stability of the destination as well as health and safety.

How is the US presidential election impacting meetings and incentive travel demand?

A change in administration always leaves the potential for change.

The passing administration was very supportive of the travel industry as evidenced by the expansion of the visa waiver programme, improvement with TSA (Transportation Security Administration) and investments in organisations like Brand USA.

We will be diligently watching the ensuing administration's approach and will be engaging our Meetings Mean Business Coalition accordingly.

In your view, will a Republican or Democratic win in the election be a better outcome for the meetings and incentive travel industry and why?

I don't think party affiliation makes a difference. Rather, it will come down to each candidate's views on the global economy and if they embrace policies that will spur growth or restrict it, including those on travel. I think both parties have, at times, demonstrated to be both a friend and a foe and it's too early to tell where each currently falls. Stay tuned!

What can Asia expect from US meetings and incentive travel looking ahead? Which countries/cities in Asia are hot and why?

I think the APAC region will continue to experience steady growth in demand in the coming years. The investments made by governments and hotel companies have been unprecedented, and the quality and appeal of many existing and emerging destinations are on the rise.

I might be leaving out some but certainly Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore and Shanghai continue to be stars with the noted emergence of Malaysia and Vietnam.

What must suppliers and CVBs do to make Asia more competitive?

I feel that education and relationships are at the core of the market. The more Asian destinations educate and build relationships with US buyers, the better the results.

Working with airline partners to improve the travel experience and creating "edufams" for US buyers are critical steps.

Online (digital) information is also key, and should include accurate and current updates on health and safety issues.

It will also help for suppliers and CVBs to explore ways to insulate buyers from currency fluctuations and assist with tax issues, such as VAT for group organisers.

Finally, creativity is a great differentiator. The days of cut-and-paste proposals is a thing of the past and US buyers are looking for truly unique experiences for their attendees. That will put a lot of pressure on the supply chain from convention centres to hotels and DMCs.

With regard to Airbnb, Uber and other sharing economy services, what is your outlook for Asian corporate buying behaviour heading West? How should suppliers in Asia react to this development?

The impact of the shared economy on the meetings and incentives industry is minor



"I feel that education and relationships are at the core of the market. The more Asian destinations educate and build relationships with US buyers, the better the results."

at this time but we'd be foolish to ignore it. That's why Experiment (a Maritz sister company) is working with Airbnb to help our clients – citywide associations primarily – with room block and history metrics.

Attendees will not only be shopping for hotels online but also for alternatives like Airbnb. This will impact hotel contracts, block performance and the financials of the events. It is important that Asian groups heading West have an awareness of this and measure the impact. Selecting the right meeting management firm, or PCO, to assist them in their event execution could be a way to avoid surprises.

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