

February/March 2017

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What will the new year
bring for Asia-Pacific's
business event players?
How will Asian markets
approach business event
plans? What key trends
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Where is the love for business events?

This year marks my 10th ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) and its B2B exhibition TRAVEX.

Here is a quick introduction to both events if you are not already familiar with them. At the ATF meetings, heads of tourism ministries and NTOs deliberate issues and plans to move South-east Asia's tourism industry forward, from open skies policies to online strategies to brand the region as a single tourism destination.

At TRAVEX, South-east Asian tourism suppliers showcase their expertise and wares to keen global buyers.

But on both platforms, considerations for the region's business events industry are oddly missing.

Leisure tourism and business events share some common links – for both to prosper, the destination must have good international air links, modern infrastructure and conveniences that can cater to a global audience, an educated service force that can speak the common business language of English, and sufficient entertainment to keep visitors busy, among others.

If TRAVEX is all about showcasing the tourism appeal of South-east Asia, then the business event-readiness of the region could benefit from some structured limelight, if not for the more complex trade exhibitions or association meetings then at least for the fun-focused corporate incentive programmes. I say 'structured' because while a business event element is missing at TRAVEX, some savvy exhibitors, like the hotel chains and larger DMCs, have representatives ready to tackle event-related questions.

All 10 ASEAN members are ready for business events, some not quite for the full spectrum of international gatherings but they are nonetheless welcoming.

Leading up to TRAVEX 2017, I asked the Singapore Hotel Association – one of the two organisers of the tradeshow, the other being National Association of Travel Agents Singapore – what opportunities were there for business event suppliers in Singapore and the region to be showcased. No response came through.

Fortunately, a welcome surprise emerged at the high-level meetings this year. Thailand and Indonesia are pushing for actions that will raise the region's business event standards (see In focus, *Forgotten child no more*, page 13). One can only hope that collective decisions towards approval will come swiftly.



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Bonding through a universal language

Who does not enjoy music, even the most tone-deaf of us?

Leveraging the emotional power of music, Australian company Rock and Roll Team Building – led by Irish rock star, Ciaran Gribbin (a Grammy-nominated songwriter and the most recent lead singer) to tour the world with Australian band INXS) – uses the universal language of music to turn ordinary business events into memorable moments.

The company conducts workshops and

keynote presentations, and provides corporate entertainment through a line-up of real rock stars from Australia, New Zealand and the US.

Three workshop concepts are available, all themed around music – The Choir, which sees Gribbin teaching delegates to sing in four-part harmony; Songwriting, with Gribbin teaching delegates how a song is crafted and then constructing a unique and original song using words suggested by participants and which follows the theme of the event; and Rockstars,

which sees audience 'volunteers' being transformed to appear as well-known artists such as Amy Winehouse, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Angus Young and Axel Rose.

Gribbin also takes his inspirational tale of turning his childhood dream into reality to corporate keynotes, presented in an interesting mix of storytelling and acoustic songs.

Hyatt Regency greets Sydney's Darling Harbour

The former Four Points by Sheraton Sydney Darling Harbour has reopened as the Hyatt Regency Sydney following an A\$250 million (US\$187.5 million) refurbishment. The expansion also gave the property a new 24-storey tower and 222 premium guestrooms.

It now boasts a total inventory of 892 keys, along with more than 3,700m² of meeting and event spaces which includes two ballrooms with views of Darling Harbour, and 21 additional meeting rooms.

Corporate events are supported by the hotel's on-site catering and audiovisual services, and event planning staff.

Event planners can also leverage the hotel's dining establishments for social gatherings. The Sailmaker features 272 seats and an Australian-inspired menu, while the soon-to-come Zephyr rooftop bar presents spectacular views and a chic ambience for post-meeting cocktails.



Second Aloft in Taipei opens in hot springs district

Marriott International has planted its second Aloft flag in Taipei with the opening of Aloft Taipei Beitou Hotel. The 292-room hotel reflects the brand's passion for music and technology, with guestrooms and public areas featuring creations of local artists, while guests are provided with the SPG Keyless mobile check-in system.

All guestrooms come with the brand's signature offerings, such as the ultra-comfortable plush bed, a walk-in shower, custom amenities by Bliss Spa, fast and free Wi-Fi, and a 43-inch LCD TV linked to a plug-and-play connectivity panel.

For meeting planners, the hotel offers three Tactic meeting spaces that span 176m² and come equipped with state-of-the-art audiovisual equipment and free Wi-Fi.

A variety of dining and social spaces are available too, such as Nook, an American-style restaurant and the Re:mix lounge.

Aloft Taipei Beitou Hotel sits close to a multitude of hot springs, and is a five-minute stroll to two metro stations.



Coimbatore gets a Blu

Coimbatore, the second largest city in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu and one that bustles with industrial activity, has welcomed the 135-key Radisson Blu Coimbatore on Avinashi Road.

The hotel welcomes corporate events to its 560m² Grand Ballroom which is good for 700 guests, as well as four other function spaces for 12 to 75 people. The venues are equipped with audiovisual equipment and free high-speed, wireless Internet access. Event planners are also supported by a dedicated event manager from the hotel.

Culinary options include the Multi Cuisine Restaurant, which serves international cuisine round the clock, The Great Kabab Factory Indian speciality restaurant, Cake Shop & Tea Lounge, and the Lounge Bar.

For recreation, the hotel offers a fitness centre, an outdoor pool and a spa.



Feast on that view of Uluru

SEIT Outback Australia and Australian Transit Group Downunder have launched a new Uluru Fork and View tour that offers travellers a different way to enjoy views of the iconic Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park.

The tour is conducted in a specially designed double-decker coach, whose lower deck has been converted into a kitchen, and the upper deck into a 44-seat open-air dining space.

Two public tours are offered but corporate groups can arrange for an exclusive programme just for their delegates. The Uluru Outback Explorers Dinner offers a three-course progressive evening dining experience that departs approximately one hour prior to sunset. It includes a four-hour fully guided tour, a drinks package, and pick up/return from Ayers Rock Resort. The main course is served at the base of Uluru while dessert is presented at the Mutitjulu Waterhole.



In the pipeline



Regional carrier **SilkAir's** thrice-weekly services will replace parent company Singapore Airlines' SQ466/SQ467 flights to Colombo in April 2017, as part of the SIA Group's route optimisation drive.



Vietnam's VinaCapital, Hong Kong's Gold Yield Enterprises and Macau's Suncity Group are jointly developing **Hoiana**, a new resort destination south of Hoi An, Vietnam, which will see its first phase ready in 1Q2019.



Centara Hotels and Resorts has come together with developer Nakheel in a joint venture to create its first establishment in the UAE by 2020, a 550-room beachfront resort and waterpark at Deira Islands, Dubai.



Hilton has inked a management agreement with Victory Hotel Joint Stock Company for a dual-branded hotel – 240-key **Hilton Hanoi West Lake** and 320-key **DoubleTree by Hilton Hanoi West Lake** – set to open in 2020.



Perth expands luxe stay options with new Crown Towers

The highly anticipated Crown Towers Perth opened on December 14 last year, adding 500 luxurious guestrooms, suites and villas to the room inventory of the Western Australian city.

Rooms are styled in soothing neutral tones accented with quality furnishings and amenities, and offer the latest touchscreen technology, 24-hour guest service, and access to the resort pools and gym.

The six-star property houses an array of quality facilities that will create many memorable experiences for corporate groups.

There are upmarket restaurants such as Nobu; two exclusive bars; the 1,500-seat Crown Ballroom with an adjoining pre-function area looking over the Perth landscape; a 1,200-seat multipurpose Grand Ballroom; a sprawling resort pool area with private bar, cabanas and expansive seated areas that can serve as a summer party venue; and luxury retail outlets.

The Crown complex, which Crown Towers Perth is part of, also includes Crown Pyramid, a multipurpose dome with more than 6,000m² of unobstructed internal floor space to cater for events of up to 5,000 people.

Marriott's new Phu Quoc hotel exudes a magical vibe

The resort island of Phu Quoc welcomed its first international luxury hotel brand in January this year, the JW Marriott Phu Quoc Emerald Bay Resort and Spa.

The design of the hotel, bearing famed architect Bill Bensley's whimsical touches, is based on a mythical academy of learning, with each building modelled after an academic department and no two spaces are alike.

All 243 rooms, suites, apartments and villas come in generous sizes, starting from 54m². As well, the hotel boasts meeting spaces that span 1,100m², with the 715m² Grand Ballroom being the largest function room. Spacious breakout rooms are designed for various event purposes.

Elsewhere on premises, culinary wonders can be found at three restaurants and contemporary bars. At Tempus Fugit (a latin phrase meaning "time flies"), chefs display their culinary genius in Vietnamese, Japanese and French cuisines. For a casual beachside grill experience, Red Rum satisfies with fresh local produce. But the hotel's culinary crown jewel is Pink Pearl, a Cantonese restaurant set in a beachfront mansion.



Wind down the gourmet journey at the Department of Chemistry Bar, where "chemists" mix up some delicious elixirs while guests take in the views of Emerald Bay.

Various recreational experiences are also on offer onsite. Guests can shop for local crafts at artisanal boutiques, partake in scheduled cultural events and daily rituals, laze at the beach or by the pool, or have city stresses kneaded out of their bodies at the spa.

Hot deals



Holiday Inn Express Singapore Orchard Road

IHG

IHG has launched its newest IHG Business Rewards Promotion, Double Play Double Points, which offers members the opportunity to double the points they can earn on bookings made through participating IHG hotels worldwide.

The new promotion means that IHG Rewards Club members can earn double rewards points on bookings of accommodation, meetings and events (capped at US\$20,000) made from now until April 15, 2017, for events and stays until August 31, 2017.

In addition to the earning of double points, members can reap richer rewards for high value bookings by earning an additional 35,000 supplementary points, with a minimum spending of US\$20,000, on a single event or individual booking.



Pan Pacific Manila

Pan Pacific and Parkroyal Hotels & Resorts

Pan Pacific has launched a new package – Rewarding Meetings – available at more than 20 properties worldwide.

Meeting organisers can now reward their VIPs with a complimentary stay in one of the hotel's suites with a minimum spending of US\$10,000 on a meeting.

Also, the larger the group size, the more privileges. For example, 10 rooms and 15 delegates would yield one perk, while 50 rooms and 75 delegates would yield four perks. Perks include a three per cent savings on the total master bill (excluding taxes), and a complimentary one-hour cocktail session (minimum 20 rooms and 30 delegates).

Book by April 30, 2017 for a meeting to be held by December 30, 2017. Email meetings@pphg.com for more information.

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GREAT THINGS COME IN COMPACT PACKAGES

The development of Macao over the past decade has elevated this tiny island onto the world stage for the business and leisure market.

With easy access to two international airports, the plethora of new convention facilities and hotels on offer and a growing diversity of attractions provide meeting and event planners with an extensive menu of options for their events. Macao has numerous integrated facilities incorporating large scale meeting space, accommodation and entertainment options allowing for business events to take place under one roof helping minimise logistics and costs.

Events on a grand scale

Macao is demonstrating its capacity to stage large scale international meetings and conventions. In September 2016 alone, the city hosted three large-scale events — **Nu Skin Southeast Asia Star Academy Macao 2016** (1,000 participants), **Amway Diamond Recognition Meeting** (14,000 participants), and **Greater China NU Skin Academy** (5,000 participants). These events have significantly contributed

to the local economy dispersing delegates across the whole of Macao.

The organisers of all three events agree that Macao provides an enticing platform for both business and leisure with state of the art facilities, high quality accommodation, landmark attractions and a unique cultural heritage to meet the needs of a discerning meeting and event planners. They expect to hold more large-scale events in Macau in the future.

Evita Quiambao Singson, Regional Vice President of Sales for Asia Pacific of Nu Skin, said her event in Macau was “a perfect match of work and entertainment”. Highlighting that visitors who love to shop would have a very enjoyable experience in Macau.

Patrick Yeung, President of Hong Kong & Macau and Regional Vice-President of Leaderships at Nu Skin Enterprises, said most of the participants of the Greater China NU Skin Academy came to Macau with their families, with a large number extending their stay for one or two days after the event so as to visit some of the city's landmarks and to sample local delicacies.

Meanwhile, Hsu Min-Che, General

Manager of Fulin International that organised Amway Diamond Recognition Meeting, said Macao is benefiting from the attraction of business visitors, that are indirectly contributing to the development of the local economy.

MACAO'S BLEND OF CHINESE AND WESTERN CULTURES STIMULATES THE INTEREST OF MEETING AND EVENT PLANNERS

Two important professional conferences were hosted in Macau in October 2016, namely the **28th East Asian Insurance Congress** and the **Nano-Medicine Conference** (IEEE-NanoMed 2016). The organisers of these two conferences declared that they chose Macao to be the host city of these meetings because of the unique blend of Chinese and Western culture that delivers a fascinating mix of cuisines, architecture and lifestyle for visitors to experience.



Greater China NU Skin Academy (5,000 participants)



Portuguese Folk Dance performance at the dinner

Additionally, the adequacy of the conference facilities allowed the participants to optimise their experience in a comfortable conference environment, permitting many opportunities for networking and social interaction. The organisers of these two conferences also praised Macao for its rapid development, indicating the possibility of future large-scale conferences to be hosted there.

The East Asian Insurance Congress, has had a history of more than 50 years. It is hosted once every two years, and in each instance one of the 12 member cities in the Asian region is selected to be the host city upon the assessment conducted by the executive committee of the East Asian Insurance Congress. Last year, the East Asian Insurance Congress attracted more than 1600 delegates from 41 countries and regions. Vice President of the Macau Insurers' Association and Chairman of the 28th East Asian Insurance Congress Organizing Committee, Chris Ma, said



Amway Diamond Recognition Meeting " (14,000 participants)

that from the successful bid in 2014 to the conclusion of the meeting in 2016, local businesses worked well together in organising the conference. This unity provides a solid foundation for future collaboration.

Ma explained that the organising committee was impressed by Macao's rapid and vast improvement of MICE infrastructure since the last event held in Macao in 1998. This time the participants were able to have meetings and accommodation under one roof, thereby reducing costs in

transportation and manpower, and allowing participants more time to experience Macao's leisure and entertainment options.

Both Mr Ma and Zhidong Wang, Chairman of the 'IEEE-NanoMed 201' Organising Committee, point out that the economic benefits brought about by large-scale conferences can be felt beyond the event itself. Not only have the participants been attracted to spend money in Macao, more importantly they will also play a role similar to that of Macao's promotional representatives, as they promote Macao's distinguished culture and attractions. This significantly contributes to the progression of Macao's international image which in turn improves tourism and economic opportunities within the local community.

Agency with relentless support

The successful organisation of events in Macao has much to do with all-round support from the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM), together with local industry partners. IPIM's task is to enhance the sector's professionalism and expertise, develop the city's MICE brand, promote Macao internationally and support meeting and event planners in staging successful MICE events.

As part of IPIM's support for MICE events

Two subvention programmes have been developed to accommodate the industry's needs.

The **Convention and Exhibition Stimulation Programme** requires a minimum of 100 pax for a meeting or conference to be held in Macao for three consecutive full days, or two consecutive full days plus a half-day activity.

The **International Meeting and Trade Fair Support Programme**, designed for larger-scale events, is slightly different requiring a minimum of

200 meeting attendees for 3 consecutive full day meetings, OR 2 consecutive full day meetings plus half day activity. The meetings must have a history of being held in at least three countries and the attendees are from at least 5 countries with no less than 10 attendees from each country.

Both programmes cover a wide range of eligible expenses for events:

- Accommodation
- Food & beverage/meeting package
- Keynote speaker/head of delegation
- Promotion & marketing
- Interpretation & translation
- Opening ceremony
- Venue rental for exhibition
- Hardware support for exhibition
- Qualified buyer for exhibition

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Rage meets government's plans to shut Tokyo Big Sight

Tokyo Big Sight



down-sizing of 170 exhibitions to be held at Tokyo Big Sight during the seven-month period.

This will cause an estimated 1.3 trillion yen (US\$11.39 billion) in damages, with exhibitors losing out on 1.2 trillion yen and service companies forfeiting some 100 billion yen.

The decision by the city government – which owns Tokyo

Big Sight – also threatens the survival of 38,000 SME exhibitors that rely on events for a large portion of their annual revenue.

Most worrying, the exhibitions industry says, is the high possibility that exhibitions that have been Tokyo stalwarts for many years will go elsewhere in Asia and not return in the future.

“We organise Comiket, the largest manga and anime event in Japan, at Tokyo Big Sight every August and many of the companies that take part rely on

that exhibition for as much as 50 per cent of their annual revenue,” Hajime Okada, president of Hiroshima-based publisher Eikou, told *TTGmice* in an interview.

“To not be able to use the venue for seven months is going to be absolutely devastating to these companies,” he said.

Tad Ishizumi, chairman of the Japan Exhibition Association, said the Tokyo government’s decision was as brutal as the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, which had hit the business events industry just as hard as exhibitors and visitors stayed away from the country.

Ishizumi said: “Even when exhibitions were cancelled for just one month in 2011, many companies were on the verge of bankruptcy. Imagine what the impact will be if Tokyo Big Sight is unavailable for seven months.”

“In Rio de Janeiro, London and Beijing, no exhibitions had to be scaled back or cancelled entirely (during the Games),” he pointed out.

And while a suggestion for a temporary facility is welcomed, the proposal is only for a venue one-quarter the size of Tokyo Big Sight, Ishizumi revealed.

A metropolitan government spokesman told *TTGmice* that a 23,000m² replacement facility will be made available close to Tokyo Big Sight between April 2019 and November 2020, but declined to respond to other questions.

By Julian Ryall

Japan’s exhibitions industry has reacted with fury and incredulity at the Tokyo Metropolitan Government’s decision in January to close Tokyo Big Sight for seven months to use it as the international media centre before and during the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The industry says the decision means the largest purpose-built venue of its kind in the city will be unavailable for exhibitions between April and October 2020, forcing the cancellation or significant

Brisbane scores Dreamtime 2017, readies to showcase new developments for event planners

The Queensland capital, usually passed over by business events planners in favour of sister cities Sydney or Melbourne, has been announced as the 2017 host for Dreamtime, Tourism Australia’s signature biennial business events showcase.

Speaking to *TTGmice* in an interview, Brisbane Convention Bureau’s general manager, Rob Nelson, said: “This is hugely significant for us (but) we won’t shy away from the fact that Brisbane hasn’t necessarily been on the radar of business events planners in past years.”

But things are changing positively

for Brisbane, as the city develops its infrastructure along with “a major event optimisation strategy” as a key part of the bureau’s marketing mix.



Nelson: event optimisation key

“We have a significant number of hotels coming up, including big name brands like W and Westin. We’ve also been working with Brisbane Airport Corporation to grow access to key markets like Beijing and Shanghai,” shared Nelson.

The developments are part of a larger plan to revamp Brisbane city, with an A\$3 billion (US\$2.24 billion) project by Star Entertainment expected to add facilities and attractions

close to the convention centre over the next five years.

Up to six trade fam trips planned for this year will help to spread the word on Brisbane’s evolution.

Nelson said: “We’re also quite focused on leveraging our major events. For example with the World Science Festival, which we were the first to host outside of New York, we explored the opportunities for conferences and businesses aligned with the topic of science. We’re applying a similar strategy when we host the global inaugural Brisbane Rugby Tens this year (February 11 and 12).”

Dreamtime will be held from December 3 to 6, 2017. – **Adelaine Ng**

Japan's Event Services dives into Kanazawa with DMC arm

By Julian Ryall

To promote the city of Kanazawa as an emerging destination for incentive travel, leading Tokyo-based MICE provider, Event Services, will be launching a new division, DMC Kanazawa, in April or May this year.

President of both companies, Lucky Morimoto, said: "Kanazawa has not been spoiled and that is one reason I believe it will be popular for incentive travel."

The city has a reputation for being as attractive as Kyoto, although on a smaller scale, and without the hordes of visitors.

"Corporate buyers overseas who come to Japan for incentive travel generally start by sending groups to Tokyo and then spread out to Osaka, Kyoto and smaller cities such as Sapporo," Morimoto told *TTGmice*.



Morimoto: clients looking beyond Tokyo

"But mature clients have already been to these places and are looking for attractive new destinations," he added.

As well, Morimoto shared that the shinkansen train line extension launched in 2015 has made the city more accessible from Tokyo (two hours) Osaka (90 minutes).

Morimoto said DMC Kanazawa will target incentive groups of between 50 and 300 people, primarily at the higher end of the market, and he has identified a number of local venues such as Kanazawa Castle as potential locations for events.

Meanwhile, the Ishikawa Prefectural Government is working with the Tokyo Convention and Visitors Bureau to attract more overseas tourists to the region. The organisations have set an annual target of 400,000 foreign tourists.

Dubai clinches record number of business event bids in 2016

Dubai Business Events (DBE) won a record number of 129 bids and proposals for upcoming business events last year, a 79 per cent increase from 2015, with much of this success attributed to its ambassador programme and partnerships.

Notable wins include Congress of the Asia Pacific League of Associations for Rheumatology Annual Congress 2017, World Congress of Cardiology 2018 and World Down Syndrome Congress 2020.

One main driver for this performance was the Al Safeer Ambassador Programme, through which over 350 prominent local scientists, healthcare professionals, business people and government officials assisted DBE in bringing international events to Dubai.

Ambassadors helped secure bids

for 25 meetings and conferences, with an expected attendance of over 30,000 delegates between now and 2021.

Bids were also won in partnership with local stakeholders such as Dubai World Trade Centre, Emirates Airline, hotels as well as DMCs and PCOs.

These events have an estimated economic impact of close to 400 million dirhams (US\$108.9 million) and could bring about 75,000 more visitors to Dubai over the next six years, according to a DBE statement.

Its victories in 2016 also include events held in Dubai for the first time, such as the Annual Technical Conference and Exhibition by the Society of Petroleum Engineers, which saw participation from 7,500 oil and gas professionals from 91 countries.

In brief

Dusit Thani Bangkok gets SEAHIS

Hofel, the world's only global hotel owners' alliance, will host its first South East Asia Hotel Investor's Summit at Dusit Thani Bangkok from June 13 to 14, 2017. Around 200 participants are expected to attend, and no less than 18 hotel sector CEOs are slated to speak at the event.

Korea bureau enhances planning support

The Korea MICE Bureau has relaunched its website to strengthen planning support for business event organisers.

The redesign includes an updated database of venues and accommodation, events calendar and free guides. Another highlight is a Request for Proposal page.

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Wind down at JW Marriott Changfeng Park with an evening of cocktails

22 March: Clink glasses and exchange contacts with fellow industry practitioners. You're guaranteed a casual, captive night of networking with only the most influential decision-makers in the field.

Round off with a 3D/2N post-show FAM trip to Hangzhou

23 – 25 March: Come explore this picturesque city – the second in Asia to host the 11th G20 Summit in 2016. International buyers and media will visit the Hangzhou Olympic and International Expo Center, try their hand at seal engraving, experience silk culture at the largest silk museum in the World, and more. Courtesy of **Hangzhou Tourism Commission**.

IT&CM China 2017 will be held from **21 – 23 March** in Shanghai, China. To find out more about its Business, Education, and Networking showcase, visit www.itcmchina.com

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South-east Asian incentives on crosshairs of Perth CVB

By Karen Yue

Armed with stronger funding for Perth Convention Bureau (PCB) this year, along with new tourism products and softening hotel room rates across the city as a result of Western Australia's mining and energy industry downturn, bureau CEO Paul Beeson said "the stars are aligned" for the destination to intensify its courtship of corporate incentives, particularly from South-east Asia.

In an interview with *TTGmice*, Beeson explained that the focus of the bureau had "really been association conferences" since its establishment in 1974.

He said: "Ninety per cent of our remit for the past 40 years has been on not-for-profit organisations (and their) conferences. Corporate incentive groups account

for only 10 per cent of our remit.

"(But) with the amount of accommodation coming up over the last two years, the range of leisure products we now have, our proximity to South-east Asia and the wonderful air links we have with the region, we've decided to change our strategy towards corporate incentives, particularly out of South-east Asia."

Beeson aims to grow the share of corporate incentives to total business events in Perth from 10 per cent in 2016 to 40 per cent in four years' time.

He believes Perth's offerings are perfect for the South-east Asian markets, as travellers from the region appreciate a safe environment which they can explore at

ease, abundant nature and easy access to varied landscapes available across Western Australia.

Besides the newly opened six-star, 500-key Crown Towers Perth, Beeson pointed to the work-in-progress Elizabeth Quay and Perth City Link as new districts which will house even more accommodation options including The Ritz-Carlton Perth which will offer 204 luxury suites, recreational facilities, as well as varied leisure options and event venues.

Other new products that he thinks will add value to corporate incentives bound for Perth are luxury barges on Swan River that can be used for exclusive events and "countless" new restaurants.

PCB will assign internal business development staff to handle South-east Asian markets, having recently ceased its contract with an external agency based in Singapore that used to cover Singapore and Malaysia.



Beeson: focus on corporate incentives

Anthony Wong donates ICCA prize money to Orangutan conservation

Semenggoh Orang Utan Sanctuary has received a sizeable donation from an Asian meetings industry pioneer, for its conservation efforts of endangered Bornean *orang utans*.

Anthony Wong, group managing director of AOS Conventions and Events, donated his prize winnings of 1,000 euros (US\$1,062) – received for his ICCA Moises Schuster Award 2016 – to the sanctuary, which he had nominated as the most outstanding charity organisation.

"Like many others working over a lifetime to promote sustainability in this sector, I was inspired by Sarawak's efforts to use conferences as an excellent global platform to reawaken interest in conservation or charitable programmes; in this case, to (help alleviate) the plight of our 'Man of the Forest'," said Wong.

Wong's choice is also a nod of support to ICCA and Sarawak Convention Bureau, who jointly ran a successful Borneo Orangutan Project as ICCA Congress 2016's flagship CSR initiative.



Wong receiving his award from ICCA president Nina Freysen-Pretorius

Nay Pyi Taw makes move on business events

With many of Nay Pyi Taw's hotels and conference centres standing almost empty, Myanmar's Ministry of Hotels and Tourism has launched a series of initiatives to try and breathe life into them.

Previous complaints about high rates and inconvenient connectivity have been tackled by slashing hotel prices, while talks are underway to add to the current direct flights from Bangkok and China, as well as four more daily domestic connections.

Kyaw Min Htin, joint secretary general of Myanmar Tourism Federation, also told *TTGmice* that the ministry is working towards boosting the country's international flight network.

There are plans too to promote nearby Bagan, Mandalay and Inle for pre/post-meeting activities. – Marissa Carruthers

What's happening



February 21-22
AMIE
Melbourne, Australia



February 23-25
GITF
Guangzhou, China



March 8-12
ITB Berlin
Berlin, Germany



March 21-23
IT&CM China • CTW China
Shanghai, China

Forgotten child no more

ASEAN tourism leaders are finally paying collective attention to the business events sector, reports **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena** and **Marissa Carruthers**

In mid-January at the ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF), where tourism leaders of member nations have largely focused on the joint development of leisure tourism in South-east Asia, winds of change are finally bringing long overdue high-level and collective attention to the region's business events industry.

Leading the charge in this development is the Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (TCEB), which is taking the existing Thailand MICE Venue Standard (TMVS) – adapted from international ISO quality standards – and remodelling it for use at the regional level as the new ASEAN MICE Venue Standard (AVMS).

Nichapa Yoswee, TCEB's director of MICE capabilities development department, who spoke to *TTGmice* on the sidelines of the 45th Meeting of ASEAN National Tourism Organisations (NTOs) at ATF on January 16 in Singapore, said: "TMVS is a tool used to incentivise business event operators to upgrade themselves. It already sees more than 400 meeting rooms certified in Thailand."

The TMVS covers three categories – meeting rooms, exhibition venues and event events – with the meeting rooms standard further subdivided into three groups of hotels and resorts, convention centres and public facilities (e.g. stadiums, provincial halls, museums, etc).

According to Nichapa, the 45th Meeting of ASEAN NTOs will see the adoption of the final version of the AVMS (in the category of meeting rooms in hotel settings) as well as its Audit and Certification Manual. However, as of press time, there has been no further update.

Even more will happen come March this year. The ASEAN NTOs will have to discuss whether to expand the AVMS certification into exhibition venues or event venues next. And following an audit training, auditors from each member state will nominate certified venues in their country for the inaugural AVMS Awards at ATF 2018 which Thailand's Chiang Mai will be host to.



TCEB is taking the lead to establish an ASEAN MICE Venue Standard system to ensure venues in South-east Asia are operating at international quality levels; Bangkok International Trade and Exhibition Centre pictured

Said Nichapa: "This is the first business events award at the ASEAN level and will mark a good first step for the industry to have stronger presence in South-east Asia. We hope to get at least 10 nominees from each country, but of course this depends on their readiness."

ATF 2018 will also see the launch of the MICE Forum, which will feature seminars and a small exhibition to raise awareness of South-east Asia's business events industry, according to Wiparat Tharateerapab, director, government and corporate affairs department, TCEB.

Another region-wide development on the business events front is led by the Indonesia Ministry of Tourism, as the coordinator for Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professional (MRA-TPA). It has already drawn up proposals to adopt and incorporate MICE competency standards at the ASEAN level.

Ani Insani, director for tourism institutional relations at the ministry, said: "Discussions are still ongoing and there needs to be workshops held with each of the countries. Having these standards means there is a minimum requirement so visitors to each of the 10 ASEAN countries know they can get the same service."



Nichapa: setting MICE standards

These concerted efforts are matched by individual attention paid to the business events industry at the country level.

Said Baby de Luna-Landan, who helms the MICE department at the Tourism Promotion Board: "MICE and Events Tourism is (one of the priorities) of the National Tourism Development Plan of the Philippine Department of Tourism."

Singapore, one of the most advanced business events destination in South-east Asia, has had its Business Events in Singapore fund, offered by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), expanded to support industry-driven business development initiatives and provide

funding for local association members to start lobbying activities prior to bidding for events. STB also recently collaborated with online platforms such as CNN and

Bloomberg to establish Singapore as a premier MICE hub anchored on thought leadership and business opportunities.

On the other hand, Manivong Sounh, director general of Laos' Tourism Marketing Department, says going niche is the way for his country to pursue its business events ambitions.

"We do not have the capacity or resources to cater to big events (so) we will focus on small-scale events and develop the relevant skills and knowledge," he said.

Lending a hand to Laos' MICE plans is the 2017 Mekong Tourism Forum (MTF), which will be organised by Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MCTO) in Luang Prabang this June.

Said Jens Thraenhart, executive director of MCTO: "We wanted to look at how smaller destinations can compete with cities for big events, so we came up with the answer of (showcasing) experiential events at MTF."

"This can be done by creating lots of smaller events such as 'nature-based' sessions at a waterfall. This will make meetings more experiential and could really make a difference to developing MICE destinations in a different way."



Manivong: a niche in business events

Outlook 2017

What will the new year bring for Asia-Pacific's business event players? How will Asian markets approach business event plans? What key trends will impact business travel and events? *TTGmice* reporters get you the answers



Destination outlook

Most destinations in Asia-Pacific are upbeat about inbound business events this year, although different challenges are keeping players on their toes

China

China's inbound business events players are upbeat about 2017, saying China's One Belt, One Road initiative is spurring new business ventures and driving demand.

Other factors such as China's easing of visa requirements, launch of new international flights and increased air capacity to existing key routes are other reasons for the bullish outlook.

Joy Liao, sales director, Inbound and MICE Center, Century Holiday International Travel Group in China, said: "Although competition is intensifying, we are expecting (more) event attendees and to set a new record in 2017."

Liao named India as a source market that will shine in 2017 and expects stronger demand for technical visits. Domestic business will remain strong too, with most demand coming out of Shanghai.

Julien Delerue, founder and general manager of online procurement platform 1000meetings, is optimistic too, saying 2017 is "a year of recovery, having faced weakness from the US and Europe – which either cancelled or postponed events in China – in 2016".

He believes that China's 2017 business events performance will depend on 2016 financial results. "The instability we are seeing is making it harder to read the market, which was not the case a few years ago. Companies are more cautious than ever and are under increasing pressure to be more compliant in procuring goods and services. I see customers demanding more transparency and the rise in the use of technology to control spend and manage events."

Destination Asia (China), Kaci McAllister, deputy general manager, who projected two good years in 2017 and 2018, told TTGmice that her company has been seeing strong leads from Australia, the UK and the US, and that "incentive business from the US seems to be coming back".

However, McAllister cautioned that "if global economic health weakens (further), incentives and large corporate meetings (will) be cut".

She noted: "Longhaul corporate and incentive travel from English-speaking markets tend to decline sharply in years when the global economy is not doing well."

Less enthused about the new year is Nicole Wang, director of resource procurement, CTS MICE Service, who said the continued negative reports on China's air pollution are denting business. She forecasted a flat year forward.

Singapore-based Ik Chin Travel Service, which organises incentives for Singapore and Indonesian groups using Singapore as a hub, saw business to Xiamen, Zhuhai and Zhongshan, slide about 20 per cent in 2016. Nancy Tan, managing director of the agency, said: "The number of incentives to China are being cut or postponed and it is hard to figure out how 2017 will be. We will have to wait and see what airline support we will be getting." – **Caroline Boey**

Hong Kong

Hong Kong's established reputation as an efficient destination for hosting world-class conventions and exhibitions has inspired business confidence among the city's business events players.

Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTb), MICE and cruise, general manager, Kenneth Wong, said: "Hong Kong has been (attracting) world-class conventions and exhibitions as well as professionals from various industries for knowledge exchange, especially in the medical, financial and technology sectors. Riding on the strong momentum, a series of high-profile medical conventions will be staged in the city, reflecting Hong Kong's role as the ideal hub for hosting similar important events in the region."

Wong has predicted "another exciting year for Hong Kong" in 2017, and revealed HKTb's plans to upgrade its *Hong Kong Rewards!* programme to "help delegates get the most out of their visit and attract more (business events) to Hong Kong".

He added: "We also look forward to the opening of various new venues and products that cater for different event purposes, such as Kerry Hotel in 1Q2017."

Grand Hyatt Hong Kong, director of sales & marketing, Cecilia Lo, expects 2017 to be a year of stability with some growth opportunity.

"We've noticed inbound demand (stabilising) over the last 12 months, with fewer peaks which meant minor downward rate adjustments. This has made the city more affordable for travellers," she said.

Hong Kong may also see a rise in association meetings this year, according to International Conference Consultants, director, Katerina Tam. She said China's One Belt, One Road initiative as well as the 20th anniversary of Hong Kong's handover to China as a Special Administrative Region could inspire more association meetings to be held in the city.

The trade believes meetings and conventions will remain the stronger sectors in the business events industry, given the city's strategic location, sophisticated infrastructure and experienced workforce. Leveraging these strengths, Meetings and Exhibitions Hong Kong, part of HKTb, has been reaching out to meeting and convention planners in new and longhaul markets. Its efforts have drawn strong enquiries, but space availability in Hong Kong remains a challenge.

Monica Lee-Müller, managing director of Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (Management), told TTGmice 2017 will be another great year for the venue, as the majority of its exhibitions are repeats. New shows will debut at the Centre too, such as Cloud Expo Asia on May 24 and 25.

What Hong Kong needs to watch for are attrition of event attendance as corporate travel budgets tighten in reaction to the global economic situation and other macro factors, Lee-Müller warned. – **Prudence Lui**



WHAT'S NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL 2017?



"Success tomorrow depends upon our hard work today. We are determined to maintain our efforts to ensure the sustainable long-term growth of Hong Kong's tourism industry in 2017 and beyond."

– **Anthony Lau, executive director, Hong Kong Tourism Board**

"Technology is changing human behaviour in every facet of life, at a pace that continues to increase. Being able to focus on the opportunities this brings and not the distractions will be the key to success."

– **Stuart Bailey, chairman, Hong Kong Exhibition & Convention Industry Association**



India

Indian PCOs, hoteliers and convention centres expect 2017 to be an eventful year for inbound business, with the Indian economy looking up and interest from overseas companies to do business in the country growing.

Some industry stakeholders expect that meetings and conferences will lead the growth for inbound business events.

K B Kachru, chairman emeritus and principal advisor for Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group, South Asia, said: "The meeting sector will continue to grow for India. We will also see more international congresses moving into India. The country continues to develop and grow its second- and third-tier cities – a good complement as meeting planners are exploring new destinations to host their events to deliver fresh experiences."

For Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre & Hyderabad International Convention Centre, events in the IT, medical sciences, aerospace,

defence, agriculture, financial and engineering industries are expected to thrive.

The venue's director of sales and marketing, Gorav Arora, added that North America would be his strongest source market, with 20% to 25% of business hailing from the region.

Industry veterans believe that support from the government and high-level industry associations has helped to boost India's appeal in the business events scene.

"The government sector is putting a lot of business events into the country and this will continue to surge owing to the Made-in-India initiatives," opined Amit Saroj, director, Attitude Events.

"Efforts of industry bodies like SITE India and India Convention Promotion Bureau (ICPB) are paying off too," said Rajeev Kohli, joint managing director of Creative Travel, whose company is seeing good demand for incentives and meetings from markets including the US and Western Europe. – **Rohit Kaul**



WHAT'S NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL 2017?



"With a liberalised visa regime in place we will continue to project India as a year-round destination in 2017." – **Vinod Zutshi, secretary, Tourism, Government of India**



"We expect to complete the restructuring of ICPB in 2017. That will help us to position India as a preferred (business events) destination globally in the coming years." – **Suman Billa, chairman, Indian Convention Promotion Bureau (ICPB)**

Indonesia

An air of optimism is surrounding Indonesian business event players this year, even as the global economic situation remains uncertain and government meetings are few.

Susilowani Daud, PACTO Convex president director, told *TTGmice* that bookings and leads gained by her company are painting a positive picture of the future. Among PACTO Convex's forward bookings is a harbour-related conference which will be attended by some 1,500 national and international delegates as well as a number of medical and government events with 500 to 1,000 delegates expected.

However, she is "cautiously optimistic" and added that "as long as there is no travel warning (against Indonesia), everything will be all right".

Ketut Jaman, president director of Melali MICE Bali, reports a positive outlook too. Leads from incentives are coming in for Melali MICE Bali, and he expects Bali to welcome even more international incentive gatherings this year. But with the bulk of the national budget being channelled into infrastructure development across the country, meetings spend in the government sector will likely shrink along with the number of meetings held locally, opined Jaman.

He has also predicted that association meetings will be affected by weaker participation, as delegates who often have to pay for their own attendance lose spending power in the face of global economic woes. On the bright side, meeting producers in Europe and the US will turn their delegate boosting efforts to the healthier Asia-Pacific region, resulting in a spike in seminars and product launches in countries here, including Indonesia.

For Yasinta Hartawan, general manager operations at Bali Nusa Dua Convention Centre, corporate meetings will be dominated by domestic clients, and business will rise 10 per cent on 2016.

Wisnu Budi Sulaeman, CEO, Puntama Convex, urged his peers in Indonesia to take advantage of the hundreds of trade associations in the country that have international affiliations, to court more association meetings. – **Mimi Hudoyo**

Japan

Business event arrivals in Japan has grown alongside leisure arrivals in 2016, prompting the country's inbound business event players to predict yet another successful year in 2017.

According to Etsuko Kawasaki, executive director of the Japan Convention Bureau (JCB), Japan welcomed more than 20 million leisure

visitors before the end of October 2016. "It is the biggest figure ever, and the business event industry is following that trend," she said.

A number of major events taking place in Japan will likely give business event arrivals a boost, she added, such as the World Congress of Neurology, scheduled to take place over six days in September in

Kyoto and with 7,000 delegates expected.

"We have not set a 2017 target for business event visitors," Kawasaki said. "Our aim is to remain in first place in the Asia-Pacific region and to win more major events. In particular, we want to promote incentive programmes in Japan, especially from other Asian markets."

Key markets at present are South Korea and Taiwan, although JCB is aiming to score more groups from China and South-east Asia in the coming year.

Longhaul markets are more of a challenge, Kawasaki admitted, purely because of the distance involved, but the bureau believes that increasing numbers of holidaymakers will spread the word about Japan as an ideal destination for business events.

Okinawa is keen to raise its profile on the world stage for business events, according to Sayaka Mori, spokesperson for the Okinawa Convention Centre. "We are very positive about 2017, in part because the prefecture this year surpassed Hawaii in terms of the total number of tourist arrivals. We welcomed over nine million visitors," she told *TTGmice*.

"We also have a strong pipeline of new hotels with event facilities coming up, including in central Naha, the north of the main island and on some of the outlying islands," she said.

Hotel operators are also optimistic as Japan heads into 2017, with Masafumi Katou spokesperson for the Grand Prince Hotel Takanawa, saying the strong demand has led to a shortage of large venues for up to 2,000 people in Tokyo. – **Julian Ryall**



WHAT'S NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL 2017?



"My plans are for my association to research on the economic impact of MICE, to grow international networks in the industry and to develop human resources for the next generation of the

industry." – **Hirotake Chikanami, chief executive director, Japan Convention Management Association**



Macau

Macau's business events industry has performed well in 2017, according to Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) which is aiming to secure even more ICCA-approved association meetings this year.

Already in the destination's bag for 2017 are a number of large-scale, high-profile meetings such as the 13th China Expo Forum for International Co-operation, held for the first time in Macau from January 12 to 14; the International Cartilage Repair Society World Congress in April; and the 39th Asia Pacific Dental Congress in May.

Sands China, vice president, sales and destination marketing, Ruth Boston, expects a good year ahead, noting that business on the books looks much stronger this year compared to 2016. She said: "Both incentives and meetings are estimated to be strong; all signs are pointing that way so far. Macau is still a preferred destination due to the variety of product offerings."

For Sands China, key source markets in North Asia have continued to post growth, while additional growth in the US and Australia are expected.

Also positive about the new year is Timothy Tan, director of sales for Sheraton Grand Macao Hotel, Cotai Central and The St. Regis

Macao, Cotai Central, who is encouraged by a stronger business performance in 2016.

Tan said: "As long as Asia-Pacific remains stable, inbound business events will continue to grow. IT and direct sales companies will continue to shine in 2017, as they need to hold their customer events every year and require locations like ours that can cater for large numbers of delegates all under one roof. The banking and finance sectors are still soft but the rest of the sectors are doing well."

MCI Macau Office, director of business development and events, Olinto Oliveira, believes the market will begin to rebound in 2017 after subpar performances in 2015 and 2016.

Oliveira identified India as a source market that will deliver strong results for Macau's business events industry in 2017.

"While European markets won't contribute to massive business numbers, they should grow a little as Macau gains global awareness and more clients turn to it as a fresh destination for well-travelled delegates," he said.

Oliveira expects Asia-Pacific's economic health to be on the upswing this year, which will bode well for business events.

"A healthy economy tends to mean more spending on events, particularly incentives and other major public events where ROI may be more about brand presence or rewarding high performers," he said. – **Prudence Lui**



george photo cm/shutterstock



WHAT'S NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL 2017?

"As MISE moves into its second year of operation, the association will continue to focus on growing its membership, value and industry recognition by leveraging the synergies in building the Macau brand, raising the bar through education, expanding our market reach, and creating new business opportunities for our members." – **Filipe Senna Fernandes, vice president, Macau Meetings, Incentives and Special Events Association (MISE)**

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Malaysia

Despite the uncertainties in global and regional markets, Malaysian business event players are optimistic about their core markets in 2017, based on forward bookings and enquiries received end of 2016.

They claimed the weakened ringgit, which had depreciated by seven per cent within the span of a month in November 2016 after the US presidential election results were announced, has helped to secure new businesses.

Arokia Das, senior manager at Luxury Tours Malaysia, told *TTGmice* in December that confirmed incentive groups from India and Indonesia for 1Q2017 was at least 20 per cent better than the corresponding period in 2016. He said many organisers had locked in the rates early as they thought the ringgit was at its lowest.

Nanda Kumar, managing director at Hidden Asia Travel & Tours, said there was an 18 per cent rise in confirmed forward bookings from India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia for 1Q2017, and credited the wins to the destination's affordability. He added: "There are also a lot of sightseeing options that we can recommend to our clients who like to combine Kuala Lumpur with Penang or Langkawi."



Scoring well with markets beyond Asia is Saini Vermeulen, executive director, Within Earth Holidays, whose company is making inroads in Eastern Europe with confirmed bookings for 2Q2017. "There is less competition from Malaysian DMCs in this market. The corporate clients we get like culture and adventure, which is why we like to combine Kuala Lumpur with East Malaysia. They usually choose four- or five-star properties and like to combine at least two regional countries," he explained. – **S Puvaneswary**

The Philippines

Business events in the Philippines are expected to see yet another good year in 2017, buoyed by the guaranteed hosting of the third Madrid Fusion Manila, ASEAN Summit, International Food Exhibition Philippines, UNWTO's 6th International Conference on Tourism Statistics, and many more.

All sector of business events – meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions – are showing strength, especially regional meetings and incentives which are the ones "that bring the bodies," said Maricon Ebron, deputy COO for marketing and promotions sector, International Promotions Department of the Tourism Promotions Board.

Vince S Reyes, managing director, ED IMC Firm Corp., pointed out that most of the inbound business events are from the region.

While interest in the Philippines as a destination already exists and the number of events is expected to climb on the back of the ASEAN integration, Reyes noted that security and infrastructure concerns will continue to influence clients' decisions.

Illustrating the sensitivity of security concerns to business event clients, an event organiser told *TTGmice* that a French group cancelled its event last August due to the spate of extrajudicial killings that has become a part of Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte's war against illegal drugs. Another planner said a Canadian group also cancelled its event after the Davao bombings last September.

To address the country's insufficient infrastructure, the government beginning this year will undertake the biggest infrastructure programme in Philippine history by allotting 800 billion pesos (US\$16 billion) in partnership with the private sector.

Also to have a positive bearing on the business events industry is the recent initiative of the Department of Tourism and the Philippine Association of Convention/Exhibition Organizers and Suppliers, Inc. (PACEOS) to develop a roadmap to raise the industry's competitiveness. Tourism undersecretary for development planning Benito Bengzon Jr said the roadmap will have three parts: industry issues and challenges; short, medium and long-term strategies to meet these challenges; and recommendations on strengthening the linkages among industry stakeholders. – **Rosa Ocampo**



WHAT'S NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL 2017?



"Plan the details. Proper planning spells the difference." – **Marisa Nallana, director, PACEOS**

Singapore

An uncertain economy ahead is making business event specialists in Singapore cautious about business in the coming year.

Judy Lum, general manager, Diethelm Travel Singapore, warned that corporate spending would be "more careful" and "big ticket items like holding overseas events" would be trimmed.

"My concerns lie especially with markets with weaker currencies like the UK, and (those undergoing political changes like) the US," Lum added.

Likewise Linda Low, manager of strategic partnership and product marketing, Pacific World Singapore, said she is "cautiously optimistic" about 2017 in view of the economic uncertainties around the world.

According to Low, the number of business leads have stagnated, inbound business events from Australia is "still slow", and the demand from the US and France has seen no changes.

Low also noted rising competition for business events around the region, which does not bode well for "expensive" Singapore.

While acknowledging the impending economic headwinds, Aloysius Arlando, CEO of SingEx Holdings, said: "The business events industry is a robust one and has proven its worth in many similar economic challenges before, so we are confident of our resilience in riding out the current wave."

Arlando shared that one of their strategies to combat the gloomy outlook is to calibrate their event outcomes with cautious sentiments by industry players and their cash flow management. Hence he said SingEx has adopted a flexible approach both in terms of financial payment schemes as well as in taking on a proactive partnership role with event organisers to reduce costs and increase value.

He said: "The overall pipeline for business events for our venue remains strong in 2017, fuelled in part by bright spots especially in the IT corporate meetings and medical segments."

To tackle rising competition, Melissa Ow, deputy chief executive, Singapore Tourism Board, said work is being done to increase the mindshare of Singapore as a top business events destination.

Ow said: "We are running different campaigns to highlight various aspects of Singapore to industry stakeholders and business travellers. For example, we recently collaborated with CNN, Bloomberg, and other online platforms to establish Singapore as a premier business events hub anchored on thought leadership and business opportunities, and will continue to explore further collaborations to inspire business travellers to extend their stay or return to Singapore for leisure visits." –

Paige Lee Pei Qi



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South Korea

There are concerns among South Korean business event stakeholders over political disputes between Seoul and Beijing impacting inbound Chinese groups, but the industry says it is working hard to build on its recent successes.

In 2015, for example, the UIA ranked South Korea first in Asia and second in the world for the number of international congress it hosted. And in 2016, 21,000 overseas participants took part in the Rotary International Seoul Convention.

"We expect our main incentive market, China, to decline in 2017 due to political issues," said Kim Kap-soo, executive director, MICE Bureau of the Korea Tourism Organisation (KTO). "But KTO is planning a variety of projects in China and we will continue to carry out marketing initiatives in distant source markets such as India, Russia and the US."

China has long been South Korea's largest source of incentive travellers, followed today by Vietnam and Thailand.

To attract more markets, the MICE Bureau will enhance its Conventions and Incentives Support Scheme and introduce a MICE Ambassadors programme. It also sees the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics as a good opportunity to promote "exciting new business event destinations in South Korea," Kim said.

Andrew Moore, director of business development at the Conrad Seoul, is upbeat about the sector in the New Year.

"Early indicators see us ahead of booking pace and enquiry volume for 1Q2017, and we expect this trend to continue," he said.

"All signs show that Seoul is clearly getting it right – and its star is only continuing to rise."

Thanks to Seoul's reputation as the "Silicon Valley of the East," telecommunications will continue to be the dominant sector, alongside education, finance and healthcare.

A recent slowdown in healthcare-related events is only expected to be a blip because "it's a soaring sector which enormous interest," Moore said.



WHAT'S NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL 2017?

"South Korea will find and open more unique venues for business events, including government-owned infrastructure such as the National Museum of Korea and the National Museum of Contemporary Art. – **Kim Kap-soo, executive director, MICE Bureau, Korea Tourism Organisation**

"In 2017, the Korean MICE Association will do its best to make a much stronger connection between global and local business event players." – **Kim Eungsu, president, Korea MICE Association**

Avril Lee, sales manager for the Lotte Hotel in Seoul, expects a "small-to-medium increase" in meetings in 2017. – **Julian Ryall**

Thailand

The Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) has projected continued growth for the kingdom's business events industry, with targets of 1.11 million business visitors and US\$2.9 billion in revenues set for 2017. These are up from 2016's 1.06 million business visitors and US\$2.6 billion in revenue.

A TCEB spokesperson told *TTGmice* that the bureau is "confident" of achieving these targets, as several flagship events have already been confirmed in Thailand, including the 10th International Petroleum Technology Conference (2,500 delegates); the 10th International Convention of Asia Scholars (2,000 delegates); VIV Asia 2017 (30,000 delegates); Bangkok Entertainment Week 2017 (700,000 participants).

Local business events specialists who spoke to *TTGmice* are echoing the optimism too.

Impact Exhibition Management Co, general manager, Loy Joon How, said his venue in Bangkok will welcome several new international shows in 2017, in addition to regular annual events, and he has a positive outlook for the new year. The new wins include INTERMAT, a construction machinery exhibition; SIMA, an agricultural machinery show; and Beyond Beauty, ASEAN's biggest international beauty exhibition.

Vitanart Vathanakul, executive director, Royal Cliff Hotels Group and Pattaya Exhibition and Convention Hall (PEACH), also shared that "many groups (are) repeating their events with us in 2017" and that the number of new enquiries will make the new year a "promising" one. Massive incentive groups from Infinitus (China), Nu Skin, Meltwater and Manulife have been confirmed, for instance.

Vitanart credited the positive performance of his properties to the Thai government's support. He explained: "The government's plan to develop infrastructure including the U-tapao-Pattaya-Rayong International Airport and improve road accessibility will greatly help Pattaya's events business. From our side, the management of Royal Cliff Hotels Group and PEACH have invested heavily in improving our venues and services." Business going into IMPACT Muang Thong Thani will also get a boost when its second hotel, an ibis brand, opens in March. Loy said the new hotel will raise the venue's total room inventory to over 900.

Pornthip Hirunkare, managing director-Thailand, Destination Asia, pointed out a few developments in Thailand that will stand the country in good stead when it competes for international business events – new conference and event spaces within ICONSIAM on the banks of the Chao Phraya River in Bangkok, and Phuket's new and improved airport. – **Karen Yue**

Vietnam

Vietnam will shift its focus towards Asia as business events from longhaul markets are predicted to soften in 2017.

With economic growth expected to be sluggish throughout 2017, coupled with uncertainty following Brexit and the US elections, the country's tourism industry is bracing itself for a slowdown from Europe and the US.

Gregg Allan, vice president of operations (ASEAN) at Pan Pacific Hotels Group (PPHG), which operates Pan Pacific Hanoi and Parkroyal Saigon, said: "Corporates are more cautious about spending on large-scale events. Coupled with an uncertain global economic climate, inbound traffic from these markets is likely to be slightly less robust compared to Asia."

Noting Asia's potential, Vietnam's Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism is putting huge efforts into helping the business events industry grow. Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT), for instance, is intensifying its international promotion of the country's diversity, gourmet and rich cultural heritage. Business events and cruise tourism are key focuses to attract more high-yield visitors.

In a recent attempt to stimulate the market, Vietnamese and Singaporean travel agencies came together at a VNAT-hosted roadshow. The aim was to promote Vietnam as a business event destination while learning from Singapore, a regional leader in the sphere.

The opening of Japan's first tourism office in Hanoi in November is expected to push business between the two countries. PPHG has already noted growth from Japan as well as South Korea, encouraged by large foreign direct investment inflows.

The implementation of a tourism cooperation plan between the ministry and the Russian Federal Agency for Tourism is also expected to see a continued rise in demand from Russia.

Jeff Redl, managing director of Diethelm Travel Vietnam, said: "Due to our specific tourism products for the Russian market – sea-island leisure and sea-island leisure combined with culture tourism – Russia is still identified as an important source market." – **Marissa Carruthers**



Meydollar/Shutterstock

Trends to watch

Industry veterans tell Karen Yue what will shape the various business event and corporate travel sectors in 2017



Greeley Koch, executive director, Association of Corporate Travel Executives

Political US trade policy might reduce the country's international footprint, leading China to increase trade between the Asia region and Europe, creating more business travel within the region.

Social With social media sites like Facebook, WeChat and Instagram boosting the image of travel, more and more millennials are spending their free time and money on extending business trips for personal pleasure, a trend known as 'bleisure'.

Personal Business travellers are putting a much higher priority on finding a work/life balance on the road. The result will be a much stronger emphasis on the quality of sleep, maintaining a proper diet, and supporting an exercise regimen. This will have definite implications for the hospitality sector throughout Asia.



Rajeev Kohli, president, Society for Incentive Travel Excellence

Growing recognition of the impact of incentive travel Ninety-nine per cent of buyers (who participated in the the 2017 SITE Index) believe that incentive travel is effective in achieving important business objectives. Sixty per cent report they plan to increase the number of people eligible for incentive travel awards and nearly half have increased budgets.

Impact of world economy A majority of both buyers and sellers (in the incentive travel space) say that the world economy has the potential to negatively impact their travel programmes in 2017. Creating value becomes paramount amid economic concerns.

Greater need to prove value Measuring the effectiveness of incentive programmes is limited with less than 25 per cent of buyers "always" or "almost always" tracking return on investment. Lack of measurement could make these programmes vulnerable during tough economic times.

The scourge of terrorism Almost 80 per cent of buyers see a negative impact of terrorism on their ability to plan and implement incentive travel programmes, and one in four believe tightening of border security will also have an impact.

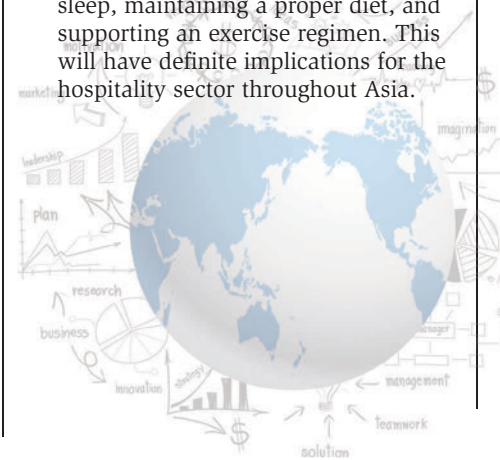


Mark Cochrane, regional manager, UFI – The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry

Changing venue landscape New venue capacity continues to shape key markets. In Shanghai, after opening in 2015, National Exhibition and Convention Center continues to impact China's largest exhibition market. New or expanded venues in Jakarta, Bangkok, and Kuala Lumpur are on the horizon and are expected to unlock growth in those key markets in 2017 and beyond.

Strain on the exhibition labour pool More than a decade of rapid growth has made the Asian exhibition industry the envy of the rest of the world, but there is a downside. Organisers, venues and service providers are struggling to find and retain talented, experienced staff. Look for increased investment in training – especially for mid-level managers.

Emphasis on health and safety Rapid growth and strains on the labour pool have also increasingly put an emphasis on risk mitigation for international organisers operating in Asia. Increased attention on (occupational) health and safety best practices will be an important trend extending well beyond 2017.





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From left: Cambodian firms tend to prefer domestic destinations such as Siem Reap (Angkor Wat pictured); Spain (Madrid pictured) is gaining the favour of Chinese meeting and incentive groups

Asian appetites

With business events in Asia projected to be driven mostly by neighbouring source markets, *TTGmice* finds out how Asian buyers are intending to spend their event budgets this year

Cambodia

Cambodia's appetite for outbound business events has yet to reach its potential, claim industry experts.

Such travels are few but is expected to pick up in the future as the Cambodian economy swells.

Danine Samith, Exo Travel's event department manager, said: "Local companies still don't have the culture of spending much money on overseas events. However, they already have a culture for staff parties and outings, so I believe they will make the move to overseas events soon."

She added the few requests for overseas events had mainly come from local branches of international companies.

Despite many Cambodian companies not looking abroad, domestic corporate travel is proving popular with large businesses organising annual staff parties and teambuilding events spanning one to three days.

The coast of Sihanoukville remains the hottest choice, along with Kep, Kampot and Siem Reap, said Kimhean Pich, CEO and founder of Discover the Mekong.

Those travelling overseas tend to stay close to home, said Samith, adding Thailand is a popular destination – especially Pattaya – because of its easy access. Vietnamese island Phu Quoc, which sits off the Cambodian coast, is another hit with Cambodian companies.

"They rarely go farther than this," said Samith. "Budget is an issue as well as

visas if it's not within South-east Asia."

Yulia Khouri, CEO of Innov8 Events, said: "As the Cambodian economy expands and new companies are opening their doors in the country, events become an excellent way of marketing new products and bringing brand awareness to the public."

Cambodia's liberal investment policy that fosters foreign investment and encourages the creation of local branches is expected to stimulate interest in business events. The arrival of large European banks, such as BRED, and the opening of the new Coca Cola plant are examples of the prospective market.

Samith said: "With the economy increasing by an average of seven per cent, we can bet in the near future outbound business events will become an important segment." – **Marissa Carruthers**

China

China's outbound business event demand is expected to grow by more than 20 per cent, group size will also expand, and Australia, New Zealand and the US will continue to be the hot choices in 2017.

According to Nicole Wang, director of resource procurement, CTS MICE Service, the number of outbound business event groups with delegates in the thousands and mega-size events with 10,000 participants are expected to increase.

"More Chinese companies in the

automotive and direct selling industries are turning to business events, particularly incentives, to drive business performance. As long as there are direct flights and safety is not an issue, Chinese groups will venture overseas. European destinations are OK, but not Turkey. Clients are also picking Japan, Africa and emerging Asian destinations. What appeals to clients are natural scenery, good beaches and culture," Wang noted.

Rubén Casas, senior director of sales & marketing Asia Pacific, Meliá Hotels International, said industries driving outbound event demand are pharmaceuticals, finance and insurance, fast consuming products/direct sales; IT, chemicals and Chinese national companies – in descending order.

"Research conducted following IBTM China 2016 confirmed that 88 per cent of buyers expressed interest in Europe, including Spain, France, Germany, Austria and the UK," Casas added.

Robert Tan, executive director, sales and marketing, Lac Hong Voyages, Vietnam, also expects to see continued growth in Chinese incentives, which had a strong showing from Guangdong.

"We saw 20 per cent growth in 2016 and expect the same in 2017," he said.

Lac Hong Voyages is organising new charters, possibly with Shenzhen Airlines and another Chinese carrier, to facilitate the arrival of more Chinese incentive groups in 2017.

Demand for nearby destinations like Hong Kong and Macau among Chinese clients has unfortunately been waning the past two years, according to Julien Delerue, founder and general manager of procurement platform, 1000meetings.

"Their drop in popularity is political and in the case of Taiwan, it is hard to get a visa. Around the region, safety

and favourable currency exchange make Thailand, South Korea and Japan choice picks. However, Thailand is not perceived to be as safe as before but it is still more affordable to go to Phuket than to Sanya," said Delerue.

With the strong US dollar and an exchange rate of about RMB6.84, Kaci McAllister, deputy general manager, Destination Asia (China), revealed some Chinese clients are looking to hold most of their 2017 meetings and incentives at home. – **Caroline Boey**

Hong Kong

Global economic uncertainty continues to affect Hong Kong companies considering overseas business events.

Nan Hwa (Express) Travel Service, executive director, Jason Shum, expects outbound business in the new year to be weaker due to tighter travel and event budgets but added that certain industries like direct sales, insurance and pharmaceutical will continue to hold events even in tough times.

Shum said Australia, Dubai and Singapore are still in demand among Hong Kong clients.

Rosanna Leung, head of business development and MICE with Towa Tours, also saw bright spots in Hong Kong's insurance industry. She said: "(They) provide the largest traffic overseas. Popular picks for longhaul regions are Australia and Eastern Europe, while Osaka and Taipei are hot for shorthaul options."

When asked what could adversely impact Hong Kong client's plans for overseas business events, Leung pointed to currency fluctuation, terrorist incidents, political instability and health scares.

– **Prudence Lui**

India

This year will likely see domestic destinations emerging as the darling of Indian corporate clients planning their events, according to Indian event organisers who credited a booming national economy and cost effectiveness of organising local events for the trend.

"With new inventory being added in the hospitality market, cost of holding a business event in India has become a much more affordable option than (heading to) other Asian countries," said Manpreet Singh, vice president and head, MICE, FCM Travel Solutions India.

According to Karan Anand, head of relationships, Cox & Kings, the business events industry in India is growing at a rate of 15 to 20 per cent annually, of which a large part hails from the domestic market.

"The reason for this growth is the expansion of the Indian economy which is growing at over 7.5 per cent per annum. This fuels opportunities for companies that incentivise their employees and dealers (towards better performance). The gradual improvement in domestic infrastructure has also allowed companies to focus on Indian destinations for their business events," said Anand.

Meera Charnalia, senior vice president, MICE, Thomas Cook India, believes that international movements will pace up from 2Q2017. "Banking, insurance and Indian consumer (product) companies will lead that demand," she opined.

Singh also identified fast moving consumer goods and agriculture industries as strong drivers of Indian business events, as they "are aggressively providing incentive trips overseas to dealers from the rural and non-metro areas of the country".

While popular business event destina-

tions like Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia in Asia and Switzerland, London and Paris farther afield will remain favourites among Indian corporate clients, Anand said there is a "growing interest in exploring newer and off-the-beaten-track destinations (like) Spain, Finland, Istanbul, Greece, Egypt, Jordan and Turkey."

– **Rohit Kaul**

Indonesia

A growing national economy and the continuous need for companies to motivate their staff and business partners with incentive trips are tipping Indonesian outbound business event players towards a positive outlook for 2017.

Rama Tirtawisata, group managing director, Panorama Sentrawisata, said the government had reported an economic growth of 5.1 per cent, one of the highest in the world in 2016. That, along with a tax amnesty, have given local businesses more confidence in the new year.

"These companies are in turn motivating their staff to achieve more. With that comes more incentive programmes," Rama added.

Vidya Hermanto, managing director of Orange Incentive House, told *TTGmice* that enquiries and forward bookings are painting visions of a good year, and expects corporate event budgets to return to 2015 levels. One of the big wins for his company this year is a gala dinner for 500 people at the American Museum of Natural History.

Golden Rama has also welcomed 2017 on a positive note with groups heading to Japan and Turkey in January. Assistant manager-incentives, Victor Martawidjaja, reckons European destinations will continue to earn the favour of Indonesian

Dubai maintains firm demand among Hong Kong business event planners



companies, based on enquiries so far.

Putu Ayu Aristyadewi, vice president corporate communications, Smiling Tour, said the business event segment is his company's most stable performer because companies will always need to send staff out for meetings and reward staff and partners with trips.

Putu said Japan is popular in Asia now, while Indonesian companies will continue to aspire to take groups and events to Europe.

Smiling Tour expects business to grow by 15 per cent this year. – **Mimi Hudoyo**

Japan

The most worrying clouds on the horizon for Japan's outbound business event industry are the same as those in 2016, said Japanese event agencies.

Economic fluctuations with both short- and longer-term implications, political uncertainties, particularly given the terrorist attacks that have shaken European destinations in the past year, and growing tensions in parts of Asia are casting a shadow over Japanese outbound business events performance.

Atsushi Seki, general manager of the meeting and conventions division of JTB Communication Design, expects "overall outbound business will be slightly smaller than in 2016".

Seki described the situation in Europe and the US as "worrying", and said Japanese incentive groups as a result are preferring to stay closer to home, with destinations such as Taiwan and Hong Kong gaining in popularity due to their close proximity. Slightly farther afield, resort destinations such as Bali are seeing firm demand.

"Companies with a big budget often go to Hawaii or cities in Europe because business event demand mimics what is happening in the leisure travel sector," said Seki. "Europe is still weak because of the risk of terrorism."

Other operators say they are seeing an increase in incentive tours that combine an element of promotional work, particularly among industrial companies, such as those in the automotive sector. – **Julian Rayall**

Malaysia

Malaysian business event players are bracing for a challenging year in 2017, a result of a weak ringgit that has made outbound travels a pricey undertaking.

Citing an example of how the ringgit's decline had affected outbound incentive travel, Abdul Rahman Mohamed, general manager at Mayflower Holidays, said: "In April 2014, the ringgit was trading at RM3.15 against the US dollar. We had incentive clients from the insurance and oil and gas sectors travelling to Europe, as they could get a hotel, accommodation and airfare package for around RM7,000 (US\$1563) to RM8500 per person.

"When (the exchange rate depreciated) to RM3.75, the cost of travel became higher and organisers started to look at Japan and South Korea. In 2016, we saw incentive demand for longhaul destinations dropping by more than 40 per cent."

Another outbound player, Adam Kamal, CEO of Olympik Holidays, said: "In 2016, we saw corporate companies from all sectors cutting costs and revising travel budgets. We think this trend will continue into 2017."

As a result, domestic destinations will benefit from corporate incentive traffic. Olympik Holidays has been receiving RFPs for incentive trips to Sabah, Sarawak, Johor, Langkawi and Penang.

"Bearing in mind that Malaysians are also seasoned domestic travellers, we offer new hotels and new attractions to inspire excitement," he said, adding that numerous travel promotions emerging from the South-east Asia region's *Visit ASEAN@50* campaign this year will encourage even more requests for regional programmes.

Syed Razif Al-Yahya, group managing director of Sutra Group of Companies, expects the cost-cutting fever that plagued companies and government agencies in 2016 will continue into 2017. Overseas meetings will involve fewer staff and a lower class of seat class will be preferred on flights. – **S Puvaneswary**

Myanmar

More Myanmar companies are looking overseas for business events, and China is proving to be a hit, said VIVO Myanmar DMC CEO, Ye Tun Oo, citing the strong trade deals between the two countries as the catalyst.

Other overseas destinations that appeal to Myanmar companies include South Korea, Japan, those in South-east Asia and Europe.

Thida Myint, director of sales at EXO Myanmar, said domestically the coast remains popular with companies wanting to host training, teambuilding or incentive trips. "The beach is always a popular destination for Myanmar companies," she said.

Ngapali and Myeik are expected to be hot domestic destinations in 2017, especially as facilities and infrastructure develops in the two areas.

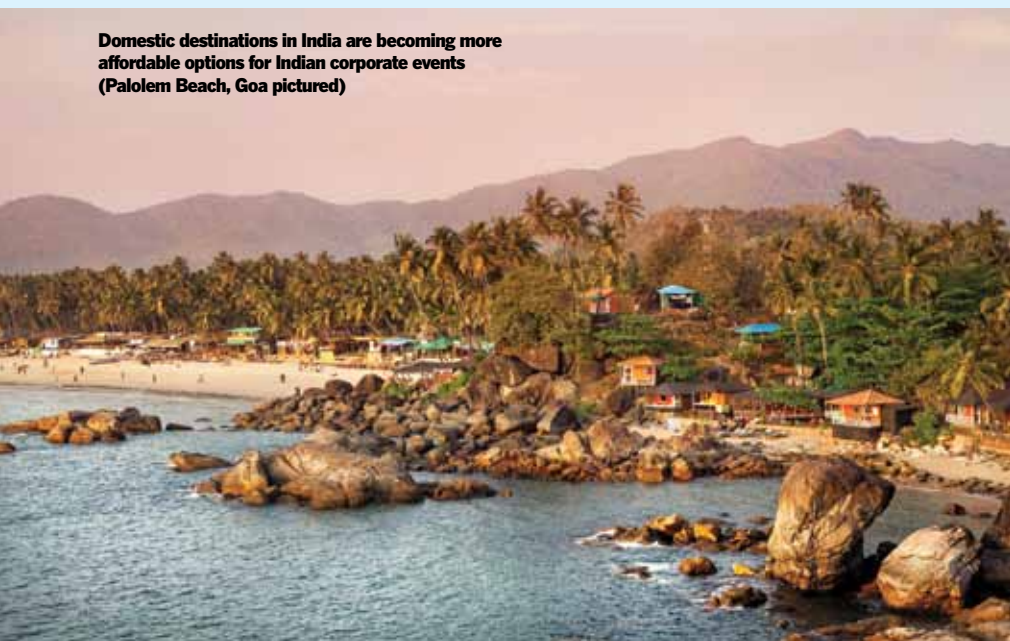
Ye adds that interest in domestic events currently remains low, with attendance at exhibitions and events on home grounds minimal.

However, as the country continues to develop at a rapid pace and more companies invest in Myanmar, interest in business events is predicted to pick up. "I expect this to become significantly bigger in the next three years at least," said Ye.

Until February 2015, tour operators in Myanmar were unable to offer overseas trips. The Ministry of Hotels and Tourism passed legislation that allowed travel companies to apply for licenses to offer trips abroad for Myanmar nationals.

Luke Stark, general manager at ITS Myanmar, said: "The effects of this are being seen and will continue to grow into 2017 as the market becomes more sophisticated."

Domestic destinations in India are becoming more affordable options for Indian corporate events (Palolem Beach, Goa pictured)



Piksoo/2/shutterstock



Curioso/shutterstock

From left: Taiwan (Sun Moon Lake pictured) is gaining popularity among Japanese companies that are increasingly preferring to hold their events in nearby destinations; Cebu (Cebu Taoist Temple pictured) is one of the Philippine destinations favoured by local firms staying on home turf for incentive trips and events

He predicts that as more international companies land in the country, the business event market will grow. “

Myanmar’s natural resource exploration and gem mining sectors are currently driving business events domestically and internationally, while demand from telecommunications and fast moving consumer goods logistic sectors has expanded significantly over the last two years.

– **Marissa Carruthers**

The Philippines

Filipinos’ appetite for outbound business events is expected to remain undiminished this year although travelling abroad has become much more expensive with the US dollar gaining continuously against the Philippine peso.

Marites C Pastorfide, assistant general manager/sales manager of Wayfair Tours said outbound events, especially incentive trips, will continue because companies – especially those dealing in multi-level marketing, investment, insurance, pharmaceuticals and law – need to keep rewarding and incentivising their champions.

Brisk sales as a result of the growing Philippine economy also means more reward trips for top sellers.

Pastorfide said Asian destinations will continue to flourish – they’re preferred over domestic destinations and are more affordable than longhaul ones.

For companies opting for domestic destinations however, Boracay, Palawan and Cebu combined with Bohol are still top choices. Companies would choose

luxury accommodations such as Discovery Shores in Boracay and Pangulasian Island in Palawan.

Pastorfide said the most popular Asian destinations are Hong Kong, Bangkok, Seoul and across Japan, all of which are actively and heavily promoted in the Philippines.

Simon Ang, managing director-operations, Celebrate Life TLC, said Asian luxury cruises are also an option. These floating resorts include Aqua Mekong cruise down the Mekong River with shore excursions in different towns of Vietnam as well as Aman Resorts’ *Amanikan* and *Amandira* cruisers off Indonesia. – **Rosa Ocampo**

Singapore

Industry experts in the Lion City are predicting that outbound business event traffic will be sustained but group sizes may shrink and cheaper destinations will be chosen.

Mice Matters’ director Melvyn Nonis, said: “Companies may reduce their group sizes to control their budget and perhaps even cut down the duration of trips by a day or two, but they will not stop rewarding their employees. Incentive trips are one of the highlights for many so (these events) will still continue.”

According to Nonis, insurance industry clients have been visiting the UK for several years and are hence looking to explore newer places like the US and South Africa. Moreover, with the spate of terrorist attacks in Europe, Nonis added that clients are shifting interest away from popular cities like Paris.

Theresa Lee, head of MICE, FCM Travel Solutions, has observed the same with her clients who are “deserting popular destinations for safer options like Fiji, Japan and South Korea”. And if they do go to Europe, Italy, Spain and Switzerland are preferred.

Lee is optimistic that the industries such as automobile, insurance, direct-selling companies, pharmaceutical and professional associations will continue to have a healthy appetite for overseas events in 2017, albeit with slight modifications to their usual programme to suit market conditions. For instance, she said companies may shorten trips from five days to four.

As for Michael Chiay, senior director, meetings & events, Asia Pacific with Carlson Wagonlit Travel, he said the weakening Australian Dollar and Malaysian Ringgit will work in the favour of corporates picking Sydney and Kuala Lumpur as destinations for meetings and events.

Significantly less expensive cities like Hanoi, Beijing, Ho Chi Minh City, Jakarta and Bangkok will remain attractive spots too, Chiay added.

According to Chiay, pharmaceutical companies will continue to drive MICE traffic.

He explained: “The stricter regulatory environment in the pharmaceutical sector means these companies need to have more meetings before new products can be launched.

“A healthy growth in MICE traffic is also expected from industries and organisations associated with the disruptive innovation movement, such as Fintech,” he added. – **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

Vietnam

Asia is proving to be the most popular for Vietnamese companies planning their overseas events.

While the majority of businesses stay on home turf for incentive trips and events, an increasing number – with the banking, pharmaceutical, insurance, auto-mobile and beverages industries dominating – are looking abroad.

Cambodia and Thailand are popular, along with Bali and the Philippines. Increased connectivity, competitive air fares and a rise in event facilities have helped boost the outbound market, said Robert Tan, business development director at Lac Hong Voyages.

He predicts Taiwan, South Korea and Japan will be popular with corporate clients in 2017. He said: “We expect to see an increase of about 20 to 35 per cent due to visas being easier to obtain.”

The country’s growing appetite for business events has also seen Saigontourist Travel Service Company enjoy a 30 per cent YOY increase in demand. It dealt with 10,500 event tourists in 1Q2016, of which 1,500 went abroad.

Thailand was the most popular destination, with 800 visitors from Vietnam, followed by South Korea (300 pax) and then Europe, the US and Japan.

Company director Vo Anh Tai said the increase was down to Saigontourist cutting prices for outbound corporate tours in 1Q2016 – a move that is being replicated in 2017.

Interest in South Korea is expected to continue, boosted after Vietravel signed an agreement with Gyeonggi province in April to attract business event groups from Vietnam. Under the move, Vietravel offers more tours to the destination and handles local administration. The company handled corporate trips for 5,000 Vietnamese to South Korea in 2015.

Increased external promotion and marketing from other countries is also expected to stimulate Vietnam’s desire for outbound business events and travel.

Jeff Redl, managing director of Diethelm Travel Vietnam, said: “Destinations around the world are stepping up their marketing efforts, giving rise to fierce competition. Several Asian destinations, including Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Malaysia, have been proactively developing business event tourism and launching large-scale marketing campaigns.”

Pham Ha, CEO of Luxury Travel Vietnam said domestically, Hanoi, Danang and Ho Chi Minh City remain the most popular destinations for business events.

– Marissa Carruthers



2016 Chinese business travel in review

Carlson Wagonlit Travel, China and TTG Events join hands to take the pulse of Chinese companies to learn how they are planning corporate travel and events, and the issues that concern them most

The business travel management industry in China has grown rapidly over the last decade. The Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) has reported that China surpassed the US as the top business travel market in the world in 2015, with US\$291.2 billion in spend. It also forecasted that business travel spend in China will grow at 10.1 per cent in 2016 to US\$320.7 billion.

The various stakeholders in China’s travel ecosystem have adapted to the fast-changing environment by developing and implementing better technology and solutions at an unprecedented pace. Chief among these industry players are travel management companies (TMCs), technology solutions providers, travel service providers (airlines, hotels, car rental companies), and the indispensable corporate travel managers. As the link between businesses and service providers, travel managers are often seen as the driving force of advancement in the industry; their views and requirements help shape the direction in which the industry develops.

For the *2016 Survey Report on Business Travel in China*, Carlson Wagonlit Travel surveyed 113 Chinese corporate travel managers and meetings & events (M&E) professionals. Conducted early this year, the survey captured the opinions of respondents in corporate travel-related roles, including purchasing & procurement, administration, business travel management, meetings & conventions, general management and human resources & training.

Respondents were from a diverse range of industries such as life sciences & healthcare, technology, IT & software services, engineering & manufacturing, energy, mining, chemicals & utilities, professional services, automotive, transport and logistics.

The survey respondents answered multiple questions, falling under two broad domains – Transient Travel, and Meetings and Events.

For the Transient Travel section of the survey, respondents were asked to evaluate and rate the importance of nine market trends that would impact their companies’ managed travel programmes in 2016.

In the Meetings and Events section, they were asked to evaluate and rate the importance of six key trends in the meetings and events industry in China in 2016.

In both sections, the respondents also answered a series of follow up questions about their priorities, concerns, budgets and service expectations from TMCs.

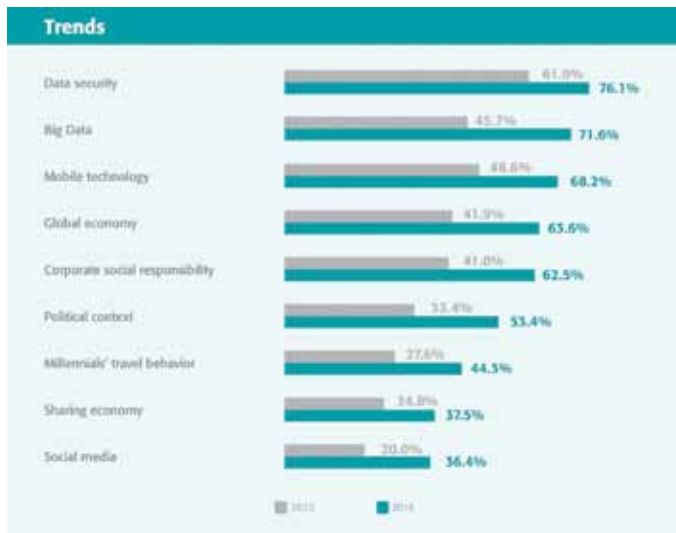
Transient Travel findings

The nine trends in this section that the respondents were asked to rate can be broadly grouped into three categories:

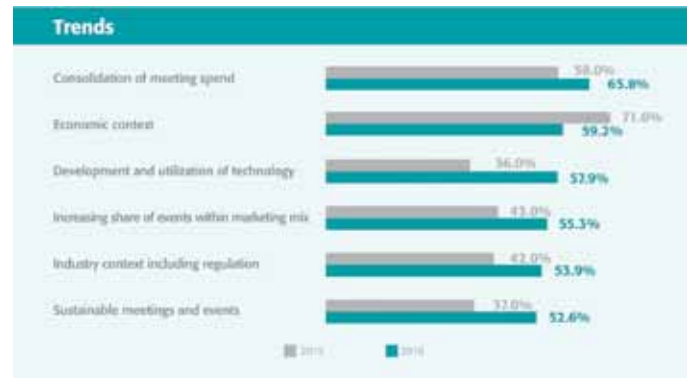
1. Technology trends: comprising “Data security”, “Big data” and “Mobile technology”
2. Economic and political trends: comprising “Global economy”, “Corporate social responsibility” and “Political context”
3. Social trends: comprising “Millennials’ travel behavior”, “Sharing economy” and “Social media”

Technology trends were rated the highest in terms of their expected impact on business travel in China in 2016. These were followed by economic and political trends, and finally social trends that will have both a direct and indirect impact on business travel.

Compared with the 2015 survey results, the three technology trends retained their top spots and continue to be viewed as key drivers of the corporate travel industry in China. Interestingly, while “Data security” was rated the top trend in 2015 and 2016, “Big data” moved up to number two and “Mobile technology” dropped a spot to number three in 2016. The economic and political trends, and the social trends ranked the same as they did in 2015.

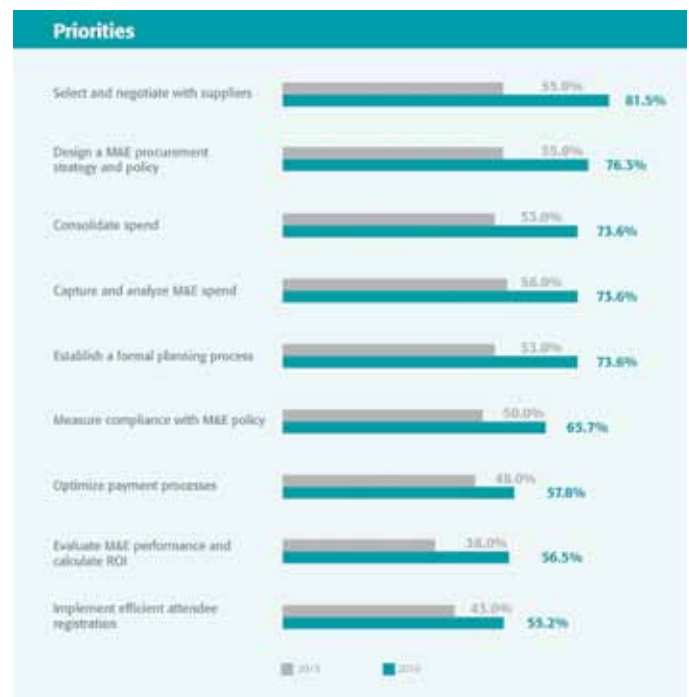
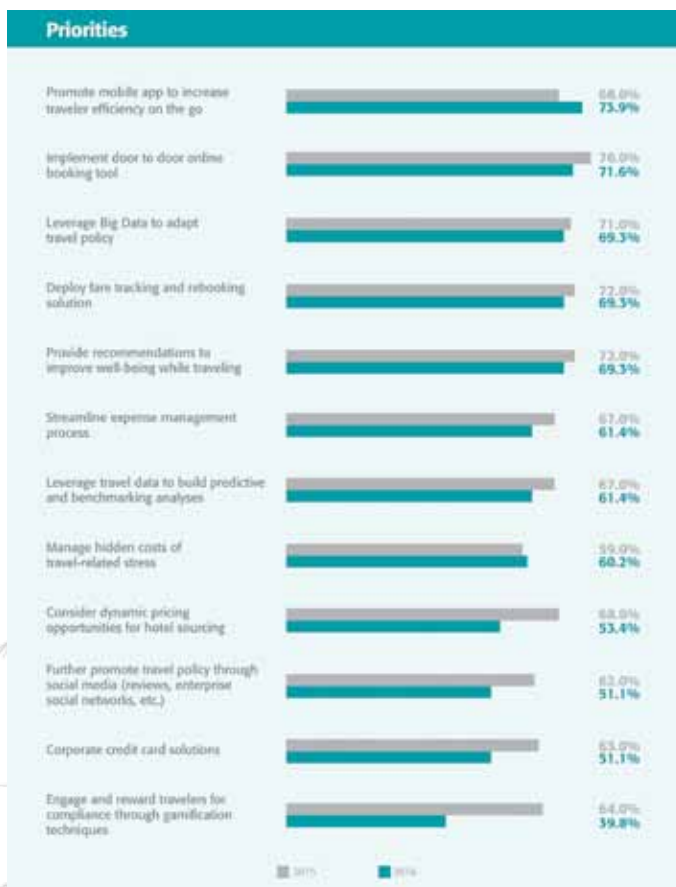


placed economic context as the top ranked driver, implying that there will be a much greater focus on managing costs this year.



The priorities of procurement teams in 2016 have also shifted when compared to 2015. Selecting and negotiating with suppliers moved up two spots to replace capturing and analysing spend as the top priority for procurement teams in 2016.

While capturing and analysing spend dropped three spots from last year to number four, consolidating meeting and event spend moved up two places to become the third most important priority for 2016.



There was some movement in travel managers' priorities for 2016, with promoting mobile apps to improve traveller efficiency moving up the ranks from number four in 2015 to number one in 2016. This comes as no surprise given the rapid adoption of smartphone usage in the travel industry.

Engaging and rewarding travellers for better compliance through gamification techniques was a less popular priority this year, as it dropped three spots from number nine to twelve.

Meetings and Events findings

In the meetings and events space, the development and use of technology was the trend that saw the biggest jump, ranked third in 2016, up three spots from last place in 2015.

Consolidation of meeting spend moved up a one place and re-

The next few sections of this report present an understanding of the relevance of these trends to travel managers, and analyse their impact on managed travel programmes, meetings and events and travel suppliers.

LEARN MORE

More findings from the *2016 Survey Report on Business Travel in China* will be presented at a session during Corporate Travel World in Shanghai. CTW China Forum 2A, *2017 In The Eyes Of Travel Managers*, will be held on March 22, 11.10 to 12.20.

Visit www.corporatetravelworld.com/china/index.php



New Ideas Start Here

JAPAN fires the imagination like few other countries in the world. Its achievements in science, art and industry — a reflection of the talents and aspirations of its people — have created a society that balances tradition and innovation, nature and technology in truly remarkable ways.

A visit to Japan is an opportunity to discover a universe of new ideas. Its tourism infrastructure is very well developed, making it a breeze for groups to travel around to enjoy all that the country has to offer. With strong support from local convention

bureaus, overseas MICE planners are also able to plan fun group activities or excursions to special-interest facilities that are not normally open to the casual tourist.

Numerous attractions can be found throughout Japan (including 20 UNESCO World Heritage sites), not forgetting that Japanese cities — safe, clean and always welcoming — are themselves full of extraordinary sights, sounds and flavours. Explore unique venues, sample local cuisines, or plan an exciting hands-on activity such as sushi-making or playing the taiko drum.

Come experience Japan in all her wonders, and discover a wellspring of new ideas.



Japan National Tourism Organization
Headquarters Tokyo, Japan

Tel: +81-3-6691-4852
Email: convention@jnto.go.jp
www.japanmeetings.org

Singapore office

Tel: +65-6223-8205
Email: mice@jnto.org.sg



UNIQUE
VENUES

New impressions

TOKYO

State Guest House,
Akasaka Palace

Originally built for Japan's Crown Prince in 1909, the State Guest House, Akasaka Palace, is a national treasure that was just opened to event planners. A symbol of Japanese diplomacy and the only neo-Baroque Western-style building in Japan, the majestic complex consists of the Main Building, Front Garden and the Japanese-style annex building Yushintei — all prestigious venues for the highest-level meetings or banquets.



OSAKA

Osaka Geihinkan
(Guest House in
Osaka Castle Park)

The new Osaka Geihinkan, originally built to host APEC '95, is modelled after what was once the shogun's living space at the Ninomaru Palace of Nijo



Castle in Kyoto. MICE planners can arrange for fine dining by a top-ranked chef by the Zagat Survey at this elegant venue within Osaka Castle's Nishi-no-maru Garden through the convention services team, who will ensure that all details will be professionally managed.
http://osakacastle.jp/party/mice/index_en.html

TECHNICAL
VISIT

New insights

KITAKYUSHU

TOTO Museum

Best known for its sanitaryware, TOTO has been in business since 1917. Its role in Japan's modernisation and promotion of a healthy lifestyle is well documented in this new museum. Learn the company's history, product development process and manufacturing philosophy. Only in Japan can a museum about plumbing equipment be so inspiring!
<http://www.toto.co.jp/museum/en/>

UNIQUE
EXPERIENCES

Discovering Japanese culture and traditions

KYOTO

Zen meditation

Groups of 10-100 can take a one-hour meditation class (comprising 20 minutes of introduction, meditation and talk on Zen philosophy) at Taizo-in Zen Temple, part of Japan's largest Zen Buddhist monastery, Myoshinji, whose history dates back to 1404. For groups of 10-40, a vegan lunch can be catered from Ajiro, the only Michelin-starred Zen Buddhist cuisine restaurant.

<http://www.taizoin.com/en/zen/>



HIROSHIMA

Party at a shopping arcade



More than 700 covered shopping arcades can be found throughout Japan. These traditional shopping streets, often thronged with local shoppers and families, are a delightful window into Japanese society. The Takanobashi Shopping Arcade in downtown Hiroshima allows visitors to shop, eat and interact with locals in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere. Takanobashi has hosted large-scale, street party-style gala dinners complete with specially arranged cultural performances and food stalls.

KOBE

Sake brewery tour

Sake (Japanese rice wine) is famous throughout the world. There are more than 1,400 sake breweries in Japan today. One of the oldest and most well-regarded sake-producing centres is Kobe's Nada district, where visitors can drop in at Kobe Shushinkan Brewery — home to the legendary Fukuju brand of sake, the sake served at Nobel Prize banquets. On a tour, learn how rice grown in the area near picturesque Mount Rokko and the crystalline water from the mountain streams are just as important as the sake master's skills. End the visit with a sake-tasting session or a Japanese meal featuring Japan's finest sake and the famous Kobe beef.
<http://enjoyfukuju.com/>



CHIBA/TOKYO/YOKOHAMA

Highlights from Tokyo Bay Area



CHIBA RESOL Seimei-no-mori

This is one of the largest resorts in the Tokyo Bay Area. Just 50 km from Tokyo but surrounded by wide, open spaces, RESOL Seimei-no-mori offers a modern hotel; villa-style log houses in the forest; six restaurants including one that used to be the old Swiss Embassy; two golf courses; a training center with an indoor track, indoor pool and gymnasium, and outdoor facilities for archery, tennis, football and rugby; and a Tarzania adventure park. It is perfect for groups with an itinerary that includes meetings, teambuilding and sightseeing in the Tokyo Bay Area.

<https://www.seimei-no-mori.com/en/>



YOKOHAMA

Sea Kayaking around Pacifico Yokohama

Pacifico Yokohama is a world-class waterfront convention and exhibition venue surrounded by hotels, shopping malls, and dining and entertainment establishments at the Minato Mirai (Port of the Future) area of Yokohama. Nearby, at



the Nippon Maru Memorial Park where the historical sailing ship Nippon Maru is permanently docked, groups can go sea kayaking with a qualified instructor.

Contact Yokohama Convention & Visitors Bureau, Business Event Team at Tel: +81-45-221-2111 or Email: mice@ycvb.or.jp

TOKYO & CHIBA Helicopter night cruise

One of the most memorable ways to experience Tokyo Bay is on a sunset helicopter cruise. Seeing Tokyo transform into a tapestry of a million lights is a breathtaking experience. Many landmarks are easy to recognise and appear even more beautiful when they are lit and viewed from the sky.



FUKUOKA/KITAKYUSHU/HIROSHIMA

Wonders of Southern Japan

FUKUOKA

Taiko drum

A great exercise that requires teamwork and commitment, taiko is an ensemble performance suitable for both men and women. With guidance, even a novice can perform impressively. Taiko drumming has a long tradition and large following in Japan, and overseas groups will certainly find this a fun teambuilding activity.



HIROSHIMA

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park

Follow in the footsteps of President Obama who visited Hiroshima in May 2016, and tour Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Park, the city's top attraction. Learn the message of peace at the park's world-famous landmarks such as the Peace Memorial Museum, the Atomic Bomb Dome and the Cenotaph for A-bomb victims. Volunteer guides are available for tours of the park and museum. The Atomic Bomb Dome is a UNESCO World Heritage site.



Photo: The City of Hiroshima



TOKYO Geisha Performance

It's rare even for a local to meet a geisha nowadays, but with special arrangement, visitors can enjoy a leisurely evening in the company of this most exotic icon of classical Japan in Nihonbashi, one of Japan's oldest geisha districts. The



evening's programme will include a traditional dance performance, parlour games and photo opportunities with the elegant geisha.



KITAKYUSHU Kokura Castle

Located in downtown Kitakyushu in Katsuyama Park (a popular cherry blossom viewing site), Kokura Castle's history dates back to 1602. It was completely restored in 1991 and today boasts a modern interior that includes a museum and theatre. The top floor has recently been made available for private functions, giving MICE planners more options to bring their groups to one of Kitakyushu's top attractions.



FUKUOKA Vege-Fru Stadium



This wholesale market for vegetables and fruits — newly opened in February 2016 — is one of the largest and most advanced markets in Japan. Marvel at the variety of produce as they arrive from throughout Kyushu and observe how technology is used to ensure optimum operational efficiency and food safety. This environmentally friendly market even offers a meeting and event space for international visitors, so they can do more while visiting this high-tech facility.

SAPPORO Northern delights



Moerenuma Park Glass Pyramid

Based on the idea of the renowned sculptor Isamu Noguchi, the entire Moerenuma Park was designed as one large artwork. The expansive, undulating landscape is home to numerous sculptures and

structures, including a glass pyramid which houses a restaurant, museum and meeting spaces. Visitors can explore the park on rental bicycles or go cross-country skiing in winter.

Nikka Whisky Yoichi Distillery

Whisky connoisseurs around the world know Nikka as one of Japan's top whisky producers. Nikka's Yoichi Distillery is the brainchild of Masataka Taketsuru, the father of Japanese whisky who studied whisky-making in Scotland and founded the Yoichi Distillery in 1934. Come for a tour of the original distillery and its museum, followed by a sampling session or a meal at the restaurant.



OKINAWA Island escapade



Fukushuen Garden

Built in 1992, Fukushuen Garden celebrates capital city Naha's special relationship with sister city Fuzhou in China. This traditional Chinese garden features beautiful pavilions, bridges, koi ponds, waterfalls and an abundance of Chinese flora. Private functions can be held in the lush garden or modern indoor facilities.



<http://mice.okinawastory.jp/en/venue-foreign/58>



Seaside fun

Okinawa is a sun, sea and surf paradise and there is no shortage of watersports or leisure activities to indulge in. Diving, snorkeling, surfing, parasailing, fishing, beach volleyball, sandcastle-building, island-hopping, whale-watching ... the list goes on. Both high and low impact activities abound, giving groups of varied interests an abundance of ideas for teambuilding activities or relaxation.

JAPAN
2016Japan Incentive Travel Awards
2016

From left: Mr Ryoichi Matsuyama, President of JNTO; Ms Makiko Yamamoto, President of MPI Japan Chapter (Jury member); Mr Yuji Andreas Wendler, teamtravel premium; Ms Emma Ho, Lion Travel Service; Ms Kumiko Hardy, JTB Australia; and Mr Masataka Ota, Chief Consultant of JTB Tourism Research & Consulting Co. (Jury member).

Best incentive itineraries

Originality, effectiveness and local engagement mark this year's winners



INCENTIVE TRAVEL TO JAPAN has grown rapidly in the last few years as planners introduce increasingly creative ways for visitors to experience the country. In view of the growth potential of this sector, Japan National Tourism Organization has taken a further step to strengthen Japan's brand image by launching

JAPAN Incentive Travel Awards in 2016. The award programme recognises best practices by international incentive travel planners who bring a group of at least 50 to Japan for at least three days.

Submissions are evaluated for the effect the trip has on the participants and their employer as well as the trip's contribution to the local economy, itinerary and sustainability considerations.

This year's winners succeeded in combining originality and effectiveness while showcasing Japan as a unique and inspiring destination. The award ceremony was held on December 7 during International Meetings Expo (IME) in Yokohama.



Enjoying Sapporo - visiting a revitalised school and cheering a compatriot at a baseball match at the Sapporo Dome.



GRAND PRIZE

Reaching for the stars

Destination: Sapporo

Group size: 500 (first group), 6,000 (second group)

Length of trip: 5 days (first group), 7 days (second group)

Incentive planner: Lion Travel Service, Taiwan

In recognition of: Excellent planning for a large group, special programming that included a keynote by a prominent person, attending a sporting event featuring a celebrity from the participant's home country, visits to special-interest local attractions, and generating valuable publicity in the media about incentive travel to Japan

SUCCESS FACTOR

Emma Ho, Senior Manager, Incentive Travel Division, Lion Travel Service, explains her company's winning approach



Japan has a special place in the hearts of Taiwanese travellers, who are always keen to personally experience Japanese culture in various forms, such as tea ceremony (*sado*), flower arrangement (*ikebana*) and martial arts (*bushido*). Our itineraries were designed to not only deliver all that but also an appreciation of the destination's unique characteristics — Hokkaido's breathtaking sceneries, wildlife and environmentally friendly approach to living.

The itineraries were defined

by three themes. The first was 'Beauty of Architecture'. We planned a tour of buildings by Tadao Ando, one of Japan's most famous architects, and invited him to speak at our award ceremony. The participants truly cherished the opportunity to hear this much-revered architect speak about his ideas in person.

The second theme was 'Sportsmanship'. We brought participants to a baseball match at Sapporo Dome to cheer Taiwan-born Dai-Kang Yang, who plays for the Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters baseball team. Considered the pride of Taiwan, Yang is an inspiration to the participants, and a role model for them to achieve their own dreams.

The third theme was 'Sustainability', which is an important philosophy for our client's business. We made a special arrangement to visit an elementary school in Bibai City. This once-deserted school has been transformed by sculptor Kan Yasuda into a beautiful sculpture park brimming with life known as Bibai Art Plaza today.

We are grateful for the assistance from the Hokkaido authority who gave each of our participants a welcome kit that included postcards and chocolates. The special Yosakoi dance performance at the award ceremony was a welcome touch."



Our client's requirement was always safety and less than five hours' travel time from Taiwan. Based

on that, we have proposed various destinations through the years. However, year after year, Japan was their first choice. Since 2012, we have organised incentive trips for this client — an insurance company — to Osaka/Kyoto, Tokyo and Kansai/Shikoku. The 2015 trip to Hokkaido is our biggest group ever.

PRIZE FOR PLANNING

Discover Tokyo on five senses

Destination: Tokyo

Group size: 55

Length of trip: 4 days

Incentive planner: teamtravel premium GmbH, Germany

In recognition of: Innovative teambuilding idea that encourages interaction with local people and discovery

SUCCESS FACTOR

Yuji Andreas Wendler, Managing Director, teamtravel premium, on mixing learning and fun for a new way to experience Tokyo



Our trip was an interactive meeting with an unconventional way to discover Tokyo. Our client was a luxury goods company and the participants came from various Asian countries such as Hong Kong, Singapore, China, South Korea and



Getting ready to explore Tokyo on five senses.

Refining, Yield', the seminar featured two expert speakers on customer service and loyalty, topics that would greatly benefit the participants in their daily duties.

The teambuilding activity, which followed the seminar, was called 'Five senses to explore Tokyo'. The group was split into smaller teams to explore the city on different routes. Armed with an iPad, GPS router, Japan Rail/subway passes, they were given tasks to complete and riddles to solve along the way, some of which were related to contents from the seminar. We built in opportunities for interaction with locals so that participants were meaningfully engaged as they explored the city.

We also planned a Wadaiko Japanese drum session for a fun close encounter with Japanese culture, where each team was tasked with creating its own 'HURRY' sound. The farewell dinner was held on a *yakatabune* (Japanese-style pleasure boat), where everyone got to enjoy sceneries of Tokyo in the evening amid the newfound camaraderie.

This trip was the culmination of 10 months of work. The goal was to build strong, positive emotions that will endure."



Creating a special sound to drum up team spirit.



For many of the participants, Japan is a new and attractive destination.

Its culture of hospitality (*omotenashi*) too is very relevant for the participants because they work for a luxury goods retailer. Japan is still a relatively unknown destination for incentives. We have endless possibilities to introduce new ideas and combine it with all that Japan has to offer. It has the perfect foundation for the perfect incentive trip.

the client's home country France. The trip had a seminar component as well as a teambuilding component.

With the theme 'HURRY — Helping, Upgrading, Reminding,

PRIZE FOR CONTRIBUTION

Into the heart of Japan

Destination: Okayama, Kagawa, Tokushima, Kobe

Group size: 25

Length of trip: 8 days

Country of origin: Australia

Incentive planner: JTB Australia

In recognition of: Highlighting Japanese local culture and excellent route planning and time management

SUCCESS FACTOR

Kumiko Hardy, General Manager, JTB Australia, explains how her team created an itinerary that delighted even seasoned travellers to Japan



Our group was made up of very experienced travellers, so the usual attractions on the Golden Route between Tokyo and Kyoto would not be suitable. The client, a manufacturing company with headquarters in Japan, wanted to give the participants something out of the ordinary.



A highlight of our itinerary was taking part in the famous Awa-Odori festival — Japan's largest street-

dancing festival — and giving the participants an opportunity to experience first-hand the vibrant and very unique local culture. Also, the fun part of dressing up in traditional costumes and dancing and mingling with the locals as they parade through the streets really appealed to them.

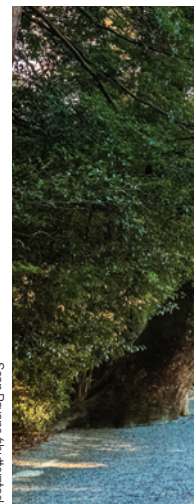


Dancing in the Awa-Odori festival.

JTB, being the largest travel agent in Japan, had the advantage of experience, trust and local knowledge.

We put 'Experiencing local culture' on the priority list and included historical attractions, beautiful sceneries, gardens and theatre. The highlight was having our group participate in the Awa-Odori — Japan's most famous dance festival. It was nothing they had expected! The festival dates back some 400 years, and features groups dancing in the streets of downtown Tokushima in the evening. The participants not only had the chance to dress up in traditional costumes but actually danced and mingled with the locals.

For planners from Australia, Japan's advantages are lack of jetlag, safety, cleanliness, punctuality and reliability of service. Also, Japanese culture is completely different from Australia's. Japan's rich history, nature, culture, technology, cuisine and the welcoming and courteous nature of its people all worked in its favour."



Clockwise from left: Atashika waterfront in Kumano city; Meoto Iwa Rocks, Futami; The Port of Nagoya, Ise Bay; Ise Grand Shrine

Warming up for events

After the 2016 G-7 Summit put it on the international events radar, Mie now has its sights on small- to medium-sized groups. By **Julian Ryall**

Japan's Mie Prefecture hosted just one international convention with a mere 135 participants in 2015, but a heavy-weight conference held there the following year is igniting hope for a change in fortunes for its business events sector.

The world's key leaders were present at the two-day G-7 Ise-Shima Summit in May 2016, bringing attention to a relatively unknown region of Japan, the birthplace of ninja, cultured pearls and unique traditional festivals.

This also raised the business events profile of the prefecture, and 10 major international events have already been scheduled for 2017.

"We consider the hosting of the G-7 Ise-Shima Summit to be the starting point for the Mie Prefectural Government to attract MICE events," said Tetsuya Narukawa, head of the MICE

promotion division of the local authority. "We intend to make the very most of this excellent opportunity."

According to Narukawa, previously, local universities had been the only players in the prefecture's events sector, hosting a handful of academic conferences each year.

"The prefecture set up the new MICE promotion division in April 2016 and is working with town and city governments throughout the prefecture to win new business," he said.

He elaborated: "Conventions with around 500 participants and incentive travel opportunities are our main targets, partly because we do not at present have big convention halls that can accommodate thousands of people."

Narukawa added that the division will start by focusing on conventions in the fields of history, culture, entertainment, marine issues and food.

The city of Tsu is scheduled to open the Sacrena arena in October 2017, with the main facility covering more than 3,000m² with capacity for 4,000 people. A smaller arena will cover more than 1,700m² and be able to hold 490 people. The city of Shima is due to complete renovations of the Ago Arena, to handle 1,700 people, in March 2018.

The prefectural government has no plans at present to construct new venues, although a number of initiatives are underway.

"We do not have the advantage of MICE infrastructure that exists in other prefectures, so we are focusing on providing useful information to (organisers and) anyone planning on coming to Mie for an event, such as on hotels, subsidy programmes, unique venues, local entertainment and so on," said Narukawa.

The G-7 summit did however



Sean Parnes/Shutterstock



TungCheung/Shutterstock



convention/Shutterstock

prompt some hardware upgrades. The Shima Kanko Hotel hosted the G-7 talks, and leading up to that carried out a major overhaul of its facilities.

The largest conference room in the hotel covers 555m², while the hotel's other properties in the district also have a selection of meeting facilities, in addition to lounges, cafes, wine bars and other event venues.

"Since the G-7 summit, the number of fam trips to Mie has increased sharply, so the prefecture is hoping very much to attract both more international tourists as well as MICE events," said Yukimitsu Nakanishi, head of sales for the hotel.

In an average year, the hotel hosts

"Conventions with around 500 participants and incentive travel opportunities are our main targets, partly because we do not have big (enough) convention halls."

Tetsuya Narukawa

Head, MICE promotion division,
Mie Prefectural Government

three major events and Nakanishi hopes that the G-7 summit will have put Mie more firmly on the business events map.

"Now, we are looking to cooperate more closely with the prefecture and the Japan National Tourism Organization to promote this destination, as well as to encourage travel agents to work with organisers of travel conventions," Nakanishi added.

Another property that is hoping to reap new business event opportunities is the Ise Shima Royal Hotel.

"We feel that we are getting more attention than before, but I cannot say that it has been reflected in our numbers yet," Sanae Mukohara, general manager of the hotel, said.

To date, the majority of business events at the hotel each year have been corporate incentive functions, with as many as 500 guests attending a larger event.

Mukohara believes there are solid opportunities in the sector in the future.

"We are currently working on improving the English version of our official website. We are also planning to strengthen our connections with other facilities and local governments in our area and take part in international MICE events," she added.

Developments to watch

1 Japan's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism will start providing low-interest loans for the construction of convention centres in cities that presently lack such facilities in an effort to meet growing demand. To qualify, projects must be for facilities that cover at least one hectare or have meeting space of at least 1,000m². The ministry will provide loans of up to half of the total cost of any new convention centre for up to 20 years.

2 The Japan Tourism Agency has established a cross-ministry committee before the end of 2016 to consider ways of attracting a greater number of international conferences to Japan. The initiative follows in the footsteps of Tokyo, which created its own strategy in July 2015 and has set a target to host 50 per cent more MICE events in 2024 than in 2014.

3 The government has set aside a record budget of over 24.5 billion yen (US\$21.1 million) for the tourism sector for fiscal 2017, 2.36 times the figure for the previous year. Of that total, 9.48 billion yen is going into strategic promotions for inbound markets to attract MICE to Japan.

Talking numbers

70

The number of golf courses in Mie Prefecture



1 million yen

The equivalent of US\$8,606, this is the amount made available by the prefectural tourism bureau for international meetings that attract more than 50 participants, including two from overseas

135

The number of delegates attending prefecture-organised international conventions in Mie in 2015, down from 299 the previous year

SURPRISING / INSPIRING / THRILLING

OKINAWA'S NEW ACT



A party in a limestone cave at Valley of Gangala.

The tourism landscape is changing on this subtropical archipelago long known for its leisure-focused resorts. With a well-developed infrastructure, mild climate, unique culture and an abundance of attractions, Okinawa is reshaping itself into a MICE destination unlike any of those on mainland Japan.

Tourism has always been big business in Okinawa, and it's about to get even bigger as plans to develop its MICE sector unfold. The Okinawa Prefectural Government is midway through its 10-year "21st Century Vision" tourism masterplan (2012–2021) and the transformation is striking.

Rising trend

Arrivals is on the rise, with 8 million forecast for 2016, up from about 5.5 million five years ago. The prefectural government's target: 10 million by 2021, including 2 million from overseas. The big news today is international arrivals, which almost tripled from less than half a million in 2012 to more than 1.5 million in 2015. This growth spurt correlated with improved air access from Taiwan, China, Hong Kong and Korea, which have been the primary focus of Okinawa's tourism promotion efforts. The next target market? Southeast Asia. Japan's low-cost carrier Peach is leading the way by launching a new service between Bangkok and Okinawa's capital Naha this February.

Strong government support

Discussions to improve air links have been initiated and promotional activities are underway in Singapore

FAST FACTS

- Population: 1.4 million
- Average age: 39.1, lowest in Japan, although Okinawa is famous for its long-living senior citizens
- Temperatures: Low: 15–20°C in January; High: 25–32°C in July
- Tourist arrivals 2015: 7.94 million domestic; 1.67 million overseas
- MICE events in 2015: 1,166
- Key industries: Tourism; agriculture
- Visa-free for Asia Pacific countries: Australia, Brunei, Hong Kong, Korea, Macau, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand

and Bangkok, paving the way for MICE planners in Southeast Asia to enjoy the connectivity their counterparts in North Asia have been taking advantage of for years.

Okinawa's ambitious MICE development plan includes a brand new MICE complex just 22 minutes from Naha slated to be ready by 2020. The prefectural government has set a target of achieving US\$10 billion in tourism revenue by 2021.

Experience and capabilities

For international planners, Okinawa may be a novelty but to local operators, MICE is anything but new. Okinawa's hotels, venues, DMCs and PCOs have

a long, proven track record in hosting events, thanks to Japan's large domestic MICE market and Okinawa's favourable image. Overseas planners can expect the same level of professionalism, creativity and resourcefulness found in any major city in Japan.

The bigger surprise would be Okinawa's unique identity. While Okinawa may operate with typical Japanese efficiency, its landscape, culture, even the outlook of its people stand distinct from mainland Japan. Okinawa's long history as an independent, trading Ryukyu Kingdom is at the core of its charismatic hybrid identity today. It's an asset that holds immense potential for international MICE.

FLIGHT TIMES FROM OKINAWA



BIG PLANS

"Our 2020 plan includes a new MICE complex with 40,000m² of event space and a second runway at Naha airport. Along with improved capacities and capabilities among our service providers, Okinawa aims to be a top-tier destination for MICE."

Ken Yamashiro

Head of MICE Business Development
Okinawa Prefectural Government

UNIQUE VENUES

Uniquely Okinawan sites for meetings and parties



■ **KATSUREN** is part of the “Castles of the Ryukyu Kingdom”, a UNESCO World Heritage site. In the daytime, visitors can climb the stone steps to the top of the castle ruins, where the 360-degree views stretch from the East China Sea to the Pacific Ocean. In the evening, the lawn in front of the castle can be set up for a private function (cocktail or sit-down dinner for up to 100 persons) with special lighting on the castle. MICE planners can incorporate a guided tour of the site or set up a stage for a cultural performance.

■ **VALLEY OF GANGALA** is a surprisingly accessible geological and archaeological wonder — excavations in 2014 unearthed 20,000 year-old shell tools — that offers stunning views of forests and caves. Its limestone cave is gaining popularity as a unique banquet and party site. Party plans with full-course dinner are available with optional entertainment and a leisurely trek to enjoy the peaceful surroundings, birdsongs and flowing streams. Capacity: 30 (seated) to 150 (standard buffet or casual style). www.gangala.com



■ **CENTLEGENDA** is the new waterfront venue in Chatan that offers an impressive sea-facing chapel, as well as elegant, multifunctional meeting rooms with terraces that are ideal for meetings, seminars and banquets for up to 150 persons. BBQs or garden



parties with set menus are available. There are hotels and a casual shopping-dining market within walking distance. <http://centlegenda.com/>

■ **CHATAN HARBOR BREWERY & RESTAURANT** is a beer lover's heaven by the sea. Enjoy the five signature Chatan Harbor brand craft beers (“Natural flavour of Okinawa”) straight from the brewing facility, plus fine cuisine or seafood. Bonus: Its catamaran can be chartered for a sunset beer-party cruise! Capacity: Group buffet for 70 persons, private dining area for 34 persons, cruise for 57 persons. Restaurant reservation is available only from noon to 4pm. <http://www.chatanharbor.jp/en/>



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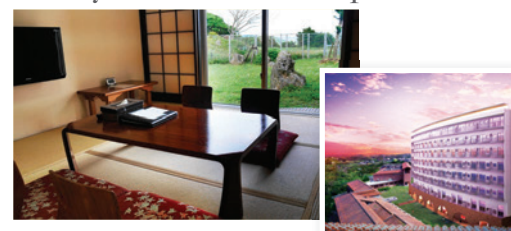
“Access is key to our MICE development. Our connectivity to Southeast Asia is taking a big step forward with the launch of a new direct service by Japan's low-cost carrier Peach linking Bangkok and Naha in February 2017.”

Shuhei Kohagura

Senior Specialist, MICE Marketing Section
Okinawa Convention & Visitors Bureau

HOTELS

Newly renovated and expanded



■ **YUINCHI HOTEL NANJO**

used to be a government wellness centre and today offers classic Japanese-style rooms — a rarity in Okinawa. An additional 94 Western-style rooms will also be available when the annex building opens in July 2017. Together with a neighbouring spa fed from a natural hot spring, meeting spaces, and comprehensive sports and recreational facilities, the area is collectively known as Yuinchi Wellness Resort.



■ **SHERATON OKINAWA SUNMARINA RESORT**

is a full-service destination resort, complete with meeting facilities and 246 rooms.

Private functions can also be held in the garden or on the beach. 2017 marks the completion of its expansion and guests will be able to enjoy a new wellness centre, beachfront restaurant and luxurious rooms.

■ **VESSEL HOTEL CAMPANA OKINAWA**

opened an annex building in November 2016, boosting its room inventory to 324. The hotel, located right on the swimmable Sunset Beach, is a short walk from American Village, a bustling area full of shops and restaurants. There are also cinemas, a mall and a ferris wheel.



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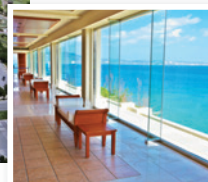
MEETING VENUES

Multipurpose MICE facilities that welcome the world

■ **OKINAWAN CONVENTION CENTER**

is Okinawa's most comprehensive venue for large-scale events. It features a 7,464m² exhibition hall, 1,800-seat theatre and 12 meeting rooms with the largest capable of accommodating 500 persons theatre-style. Nearby is a beach, marina, seaside park and an open-air amphitheatre, giving planners great opportunities to mix business with outdoor activity.

■ **BANKOKU SHINRYOKAN** (“Bridge between nations”) is a resort-style meeting facility located at the tip of a peninsula at Cape Busena. All four meeting areas — the 323m² Ocean Hall, 441m² Summit



Hall, 180m² Sunset Lounge and 144m² Cafe Terrace — are blessed with breathtaking views of the East China Sea. Site of the 2000 G8 meeting, this elegant and exclusive venue has been a popular choice for MICE.

{ Review central }

Hilton Tokyo Odaiba By Julian Ryall

Hilton Hotels & Resorts reopened the Odaiba property in October 2015, and has already embarked on a major renovation while remaining faithful to a location that is arguably the most spectacular in Tokyo.

Rooms The hotel has a curved facade, which means every one of its guestrooms has a view of Tokyo Bay from a private balcony. The best views are from the

west of the property, which look out to the Rainbow Bridge, the Tokyo Tower, the Tokyo Sky Tree and a profile of the entire city.

The rooms are light and airy, the bathrooms are appointed in glass and marble, and most of the suites include a private garden and outdoor jet bath.

Rooms are also fitted with a minibar and Wi-Fi, as well as a wide-screen satellite TV – although a view like that makes this redundant.

MICE facilities The hotel has 20 meeting spaces, including the 1,200m² Pegasus room, with space for 1,600 guests in a buffet configuration or 720 in banquet style.

This is also one of the very few venues in Tokyo where a vehicle can be displayed and has therefore proven popular with automobile-related events.

Each of the four medium-size banquet rooms – Orion, Sirius, Apollon and Jupiter – has capacity for 640 guests.

Events can also take place on one of three terraced areas overlooking the bay and lights of Tokyo.

The fully-equipped business centre is

nearby and the hotel has a full-time team of staff dedicated to ensuring business events operate smoothly.

Other facilities The newly refurbished Executive Lounge serves breakfast, afternoon tea and in the evening, snacks and cocktails.

On a fine day, be sure to arrive early to get one of the outdoor tables. After the sun has gone down, the barman in Captain's Bar pours a sublime gin and tonic and has an impressive selection of whiskies.

The hotel also features a fitness centre, spa and sauna, as well as a number of dining options, including sushi, tempura and a tempura restaurant. Two additional dining facilities are scheduled to be up later this year.

Room count 453

Star rating Four

Contact www3.hilton.com/en/hotels/japan/hilton-tokyo-odaiba-TYOTOHI/index.html
(81-3) 5500-5500



Hoshinoya Tokyo By Julian Ryall

Hoshinoya Tokyo opened in July 2015 as the brand's first urban resort hotel, but stays true to Hoshinoya's commitment to authentic Japanese style and standards – including in its meetings spaces.

Rooms The hotel has three types of guest rooms, each quintessentially Japanese with elements such as bamboo closets, *shoji* sliding paper doors and *tatami* mats and thick futons. The Kiku corner rooms are the largest, at 83m², and can accommodate three futons.

All rooms have a deep bath in which guests can work out kinks and knots left behind by the hustle of city life – and it is remarkable how peaceful the ambience is in the heart of this full-on, full-speed city.

MICE facilities Much like the hotel itself, Hoshinoya Tokyo's MICE facilities are both chic. Located in the city's Otemachi business district, it makes a convenient and peaceful bolt-hole from the frenetic city.

Best suited to small gatherings, the hotel's Reception Room has space for around 20 people, with *shoji* doors and a

minimalist interior design. The room – probably best for workshops and small conferences – is only available to residents of the hotel.

The lobby, also screened by *shoji* doors, is furnished with sofas and soft *tatami* floor mats. A stage at one end of the room can be used for demonstrations of traditional Japanese performing arts, including music and dance.

The executive chef stays faithful to *ryokan* course dining as well as tableware that has been developed in regions around the country to enhance the appeal of local ingredients.

Other facilities Each floor has a common lounge that is exclusive to guests staying on that floor, and where seasonal tea and snacks are served during the day and alcohol at night.

The hotel also has its own open-air



hot spring on the 17th floor, and a spa facility with programmes using a variety of oils and aromas, and with advice from a specialist dietician.

Room count: 84

Star rating: Five

Contact hoshinoyatokyo.com/en/
(81-50) 3786-1144



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Exploring new options

The dismal showing in 2016 has strengthened the resolve of its stakeholders to do better this year. By **Chadamas Chinmaneevong**



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Clockwise from top: Bangkok skyline against the sunset; tourists riding in a tuk tuk in Phuket; Wat Phra That Doi Suthep is a major tourist destination in Chiang Mai

Due to the decline of the European economy, Brexit, and the uncertainty of the policies surrounding US president Donald Trump, the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) has turned its attention regionally.

The bureau sees the potential, and has plans to grow the Greater Mekong Subregion's (GMS) – consisting of Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam – meetings and incentives segment. Tougher competition

is also pressuring both TCEB and the private sectors to seek newer source markets.

Apart from roadshows, Supawan Teerarat, TCEB's vice president for strategic and business development, said the bureau will be participating in tradeshows, and organising agent and media fam trips to the country. TCEB also has a representative in Vietnam that oversees the GMS markets.

On why the GMS could benefit Thailand's meetings and incentives as

well as the leisure markets, Supawan put forth that these South-east Asian markets had growing economies and convenient access into Thailand. Moreover, the spending of the GMS market was estimated to be lower than that of the European market by merely three to five per cent.

She added that while TCEB already sees numerous meetings and incentive trips from these markets, it is expected the number would grow thanks to the overlap of their economies.

"Therefore, there is no doubt as to why I think the GMS is a future potential market of Thailand's meeting and incentives market," said Supawan.

Regarding competition in the region, Supawan indicated that TCEB was keeping an eye on Hong Kong, Macau and Shenzhen, as the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge is set to open in December this year. This bridge will shorten the travelling distance from Hong Kong to Macau and Zhuhai from 160km to 30km. The easier access would attract organisers to the region because they could easily combine tour programmes covering the three destinations, she pointed out.

To better compete with the trio, Thailand would need a larger variety of products that appeal to business event groups.

To this end, TCEB kicked off a three-year development project in 2H2016, covering 13 provinces and cities that are already keen on and capable of catering to the leisure tourism market.

The 13 destinations include five cities that had earlier been identified as being ready to welcome business events – Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Pattaya, Phuket and Khon Kaen. The others are Chiang Rai, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Nakhon Pathom, Chonburi, Phetchaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Krabi, Songkhla and Surat Thani.

In those destinations, TCEB held a workshop to educate tourism operators about the importance and benefits of business events and convinced some venues to adopt the Thailand MICE Venue Standard.

The bureau will continue to educate local operators on how to attract business and achieve higher standards of operations and service delivery that meets the demands of both local and overseas event organisers and participants.

However, Pornthip Hirunkate, co-founder and deputy CEO of Destination Asia Group, opined that promoting value-for-money destinations was not enough to attract clients to Thailand, as competition from many other destinations in Asia is intense.

"We have to create experiences that clients cannot find elsewhere," Pornthip said, adding that her company is standing out from the crowd with unique event ideas and support services, such as providing tuk tuk convoys and immigration fast-track.

For now, based on "what (Thailand in general) has to offer and our competitive pricing", Pornthip is confident of seeing a good business performance in 2017.

Just as TCEB has projected Asia to be Thailand's strongest source market for business events, Pornthip too expects Asian markets to perform best in 2017.

"With a boom in business withing this region, more companies will look to Thailand for (reward trips) for

their employees," she remarked.

Also expressing optimism in the new year is Sumate Sudasna, president of Thailand Incentive and Convention Association, who opined that demand for meetings and incentive trips would bounce back this year after a dismal 2H2016. Thailand's business events industry was impacted by bomb blasts in seven provinces in the country's south, as well as the passing of King Bhumibol Adulyadej in October.

Sumate believes that Thailand's natural resources and wide-ranging tourism products put the destination in good stead to regain client confidence, and if the kingdom could better its services, the business events industry would recover faster.

He also expressed optimism that some European markets would shift from European destinations to Asia this year, and expects Thailand's meetings and incentives segment to grow at least five per cent.

Across the board, Thai stakeholders believe that 2017 will be a better year. As well, TCEB projects that the number of international delegates bound for Thailand, as well as earnings, will grow between seven to 10 per cent this year. – *Additional reporting by Karen Yue*



"We have to create experiences that client cannot find elsewhere."

Pornthip Hirunkate

Co-founder and deputy CEO
Destination Asia Group

{ **Developments to watch** }

1 Expecting event organisers to increasingly select destinations for meetings and incentive programmes based on their unique characters, Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau is looking to create a character and unique DNA for each of its five MICE cities (Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, Pattaya and Phuket). According to the bureau, while these cities are all ready for business events, they do not have a clear identity

2 The annual ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF), which rotates each year around the 10 member nations in South-east Asia, will land in Thailand in 2018. Chiang Mai has been selected as host city, and is all ready to showcase both its leisure and business events readiness to international buyers attending the B2B exhibition, TRAVEX. Thailand, which is also taking the lead as ASEAN coordinator for MICE venues, will introduce a MICE Forum and small exhibition at ATF 2018.



{ **Talking numbers** }

1.27 million

The total number of MICE visitors to Thailand, according to TCEB's fiscal 2016 report (October 2015 to September 2016), a growth of 16 per cent. The top 10 MICE delegates to Thailand in terms of volume in descending order were from China, India, Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, the US, Hong Kong, South Korea, Indonesia, and Vietnam

102.9 billion baht

The total amount the MICE segment generated, according to the same above report, equivalent to US\$2.9 billion. It is an increase of 7.4 per cent year-on-year

42,675

The total number of MICE from the US to Thailand. It was ranked 6th among the top 10 MICE countries for 2016, and was among the top 10 rankings for the first time

Seasoned well to taste

Clockwise from top left: An Evening in the Wild by Night Safari; Waku Ghin restaurant by Tetsuya Wakuda; Gardens by the Bay

The city state's reputation as a gastronomy hub has propelled event organisers to deliver more unique experiences. By **Paige Lee Pei Qi**



Singapore may be home to towering skyscrapers, but this concrete jungle has also been busy growing a plethora of unorthodox and authentic experiences to increase the country's business events offerings.

Jeannie Lim, executive director, conventions, meetings and incentive travel, Singapore Tourism Board (STB), said: "The challenge for organisers is to continually create events of outstanding quality, interesting and original content, which are supported by enriching experiences to create more value for delegates."

Lim pointed out how several event venues, hotels and event organisers have begun investing in experiential dining concepts to cater to the evolving needs of their clients.

For instance, with the exhibitions industry moving towards confex (a hybrid of conference and exhibition events), Suntec Singapore introduced a Dessert Safari catering concept as a catalyst to integrate both components seamlessly.

According to Arun Madhok, CEO of Suntec Singapore, the concept was developed as a answer to the organisers of HR Summit's desire to draw conference delegates to the exhibition, and improve the crowd circulation around the exhibition hall.

The Dessert Safari – which transforms a typical lunch buffet dessert spread into a culinary kaleidoscope – encouraged delegates to find the 27 desserts that was spread across nine dessert stations placed throughout the exhibition hall.

Leveraging its Michelin-star-studded dining collection, Marina Bay Sands (MBS) offers a dine-around concept that showcases six celebrity chef restaurants. Delegates start with cocktails and canapés at the first restaurant, then move on to subsequent establishments for starters, mains, desserts and digestifs.

STB's Lim elaborated: "While business events have already been incorporating gala dinners, receptions and networking cocktails as part of the programme, many are looking

towards unconventional venues to host these activities. Singapore offers a variety of unique venues for organisers to customise new concepts.”

At the Night Safari for instance, the attraction recently rolled out An Evening in the Wild package which features the attraction’s diverse wildlife and is designed for organisers looking for an intimate venue for 40 (seating) to 60 (standing) guests. Guests can enjoy a three-course meal in a tepee tent and get up close with the animals at the same time.

And while organisers are already familiar with the picturesque Gardens by the Bay’s cosy indoor spaces and spacious al fresco areas, the new outdoor venue Secret Life of Trees – which made its debut in July 2016 – offers a unique alternative. The space adopts a fairytale-like garden setting, framed by trees of varied species, and offers plenty of photo opportunities.

According to Darren Oh, director of business development at Gardens by the Bay, there has been a surge in demand for outdoor venues at the attraction, and this spot, which caters for up to 120

guests, is the answer to this growing interest.

Another interesting venue option in Singapore is the *Royal Albatross*, an exclusive luxury yacht which can accommodate up to 149 guests. There, guests are able to indulge in culinary delights paired with wine, and take in the sunset as the yacht cruises along Singapore’s coastline.

Andrew Koh, managing director of Events Architects, told *TTGmice* that corporate event delegates are indeed “becoming increasingly hungry for new experiences and would often be adventurous to explore possibilities that are not classified as the norm”.

However, he pointed out that capacity is a challenge for unique venues and activities.

Koh explained: “Most of these fun events must be executed in smaller group sizes (an average of 30) to allow guests to enjoy a fuller experience. But (business event) groups can be large in numbers, and thus it could be a problem.”

Judy Lum, general manager of Diethelm Travel Singapore, who believes her destination is hardly boring, said: “There are endless ideas

{ Talking numbers }

2,700

The number of international attendees at the inaugural European Society for Medical Oncology Asia Congress in December 2016, the first time it was hosted outside Europe

12,000

The number of international delegates who visited during the inaugural five-day Singapore FinTech Festival last November

81.1

The average hotel occupancy rate, in percentage, for November 2016, a year-on-year decline of 1.8 per cent

and possibilities for fun in Singapore and it boils down to creativity among the planners.”

However, Lum appealed for greater flexibility from the authorities.

She lamented: “With many rules and regulations, sometimes it kills the spontaneity and takes the fun out of a great event.”

Citing an example, she said she had an idea to lead a trishaw convoy of delegates down Orchard Road, however it was not permitted as trishaws are only allowed to ride on designated routes.

“Our aim is to provide our delegates with a great experience that ordinary visitors cannot otherwise get,” Lum stressed.



“With many rules and regulations, sometimes it kills the spontaneity and takes the fun out of a great event.”

Judy Lum

General manager, Diethelm Travel Singapore

{ Developments to watch }

1 Myanmar visitors bound for Singapore for short trips no longer need to apply for a visa from December 1, 2016. Under the agreement, both countries will grant an exemption of visa to each other’s citizens for a stay not longer than 30 days, subject to prevailing entry requirements.

2 Another step has been taken towards the development of the Mandai nature precinct, an integrated nature and wildlife destination in Singapore’s north. A ceremonial ground-seeding event took place on January 16, marking the start of the district’s rejuvenation. By 2020, the precinct will welcome two new nature attractions that will sit alongside the current Singapore Zoo, the River Safari and the Night Safari.

3 On December 13, 2016, an agreement for the development of the 350km Kuala Lumpur-Singapore high speed rail project was signed. Three services are slated to run along an eight-station, dual-track line, including an express service between Singapore’s Jurong East and Kuala Lumpur’s Bandar Malaysia.



{ Review central }

The Peranakan By Yixin Ng

Dining is a vibrant and homely affair at The Peranakan, which has aimed to make Straits Chinese cuisine more accessible – including to uninitiated business events delegates – since it opened its doors in June 2016.

Concept Although the kitchen is already in the trusty hands of renowned chef Raymond Khoo, Peranakan mothers

connected to the business still pop in to supervise cooking from time to time, enthused Ho Ken Meng, director at The Peranakan.

Whether in its traditional approach to food or unabashed displays of Peranakan elements (e.g. colourful wall motifs, kebayas, tiffin containers, crockery), the restaurant brings to mind a candour and honesty that stands out amid the glut of trendy, “understated” restaurant concepts along Singapore’s Orchard Road.

Home-style classics such as *ayam buah keluak* (chicken with nuts from a mangrove tree native to South-east Asia) and *sup bakwan kepiting* (crab meatball soup) feature on both its *Tok Panjang* feast and ala carte menu.

On the *Tok Panjang* experience, Ho said: “Traditionally, it is a lavish spread prepared for dignitaries, but here we want to create a little bit of fanfare (for the masses), such as through its presentation.”

MICE application For work-weary foreign delegates, a homely setting where they can loosen their ties, indulge in comfort food, while getting close to the local cul-

ture can be an attractive proposition.

Since its opening, the restaurant has already hosted several association and business events, such as a jewellery talk by the local Peranakan association attended by about 90 participants.

Ho further shared that a smaller group of Chinese physicians in town for a medical conference in 2016 opted for the *Tok Panjang* experience.

The communal-style dining options could do wonders to break the ice for business gatherings, but those with preference for modern European plating can still choose from the restaurant’s customisable eight-course degustation menu.

The Peranakan has capacity for about 130 pax. Round tables are available for groups, and private dining setups can be arranged.

Service Attentive and friendly.

Contact

Website: www.theperanakan.com
Tel: (65) 6262 4428
Email: friends@theperanakan.com



CulinaryOn By Paige Lee Pei Qi

Hailing from Moscow, CulinaryOn is a culinary entertainment studio which provides a culinary experience that goes beyond a typical cooking class. Similarly, at its Singapore outpost, the venue cooks up an exuberant party atmosphere while offering participants the taste of international cuisines, whipped up through fun methods of cooking.

Concept Before participants begin the three-hour cooking class, they first get to tuck into a fine selection of canapes prepared by the studio’s chefs. It is also a time for them to meet and socialise with their fellow participants.

There are various types of cooking activities on offer, for example, the Power Pasta challenge. Teams have to compete against each other to create and cook the longest pasta from scratch. They will also be tasked to whip up a dessert, where the most creative design will win; extra points will be given for personalisation and originality.

MICE application Sprawled across 650m², this venue comes with a conference room, four separate spaces with



16 cooking stations, four chef tables and well-equipped bars. The event areas can also be combined to accommodate up to 200 guests.

CulinaryOn also provides a professional photographer to capture teambuilding memories, the option to print aprons with customised logos, as well as a disco with their in-house DJ to further hype up the atmosphere.

Service It was refreshing to see how their menu of active cooking games truly challenged a team to fully explore our creative ability. It also “forces” everyone to work



together, instead of having the participants come together for just another normal cooking exercise.

The gregarious chefs who accompanied us on the challenge were professional and ever so encouraging which was enough to get everyone – experienced or not – excited and competitive to fight for the winning chef hat.

Contact

Website: www.culinaryon.sg
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Call of the sun, sand, sea

Resort island Boracay is moving up the popularity charts, gaining fans among meeting and incentive groups, discovers **Rosa Ocampo**

With its natural beauty, powdery sand and clear waters, it is obvious why Boracay started out as a beach destination but had rapidly won the favour of corporate groups, particularly for incentive trips and meetings.

The island resort, however, should “dress up its image” and start building a relationship with nearby islands to add more excitement for business event planners, urged Angel Ramos Bognot, president and ultra business event creator, Afro Asian World Events in Manila.

Bognot recommended a multi-destination approach, saying that Boracay could “partner with the province of Romblon for more activities like marble carving and fishing, and with the province of Iloilo for a dash of culture, heritage and cuisine”.

She also suggested adding further value to Boracay with new activities combining sports and adventure because skydiving, parasailing and other activities easily available on the island are “already passe”.

Several posh properties have succeeded so far in becoming destinations themselves as they develop fresh options for corporate groups. For its guests, Shangri-La's Boracay Resort & Spa has a complimentary tour of its 12.5-ha premises which boast its own private beach and port.



Frolova Elena/shutterstock



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Clockwise from top: Boracay Island and its turquoise waters; Willys Rock on the famous White Beach, Boracay; kitesurfers flock to Bulabog Beach; D'Mall D'Boracay provides retail therapy and varied dining pleasures



Andrei Goncharov/shutterstock

{ Talking numbers }

1.7 million

The total tourist arrivals expected for Boracay by the end of 2016

31.8 billion pesos

Equivalent to US\$642 million, the tourism receipts Boracay made from January to July 2016

34.2%

The percentage of arrivals South Korea, making it Boracay's top source market



Photobao/shutterstock

The resort has done well with corporate events through its Sunglasses at Work Meet by Design programme which customises meetings by incorporating fun experiences.

Discovery Shores Boracay aims to capture more corporate groups with its 11 new premier suites with private plunge pool, slated to be launched by 2Q2017, as well as the property's recently refurbished guestrooms and Terra Wellness Spa, hotel manager Erwin Lopez told *TTGmice*.

This follows the trend of competing on luxury among the increasing number of upmarket hotels on the island. The new The Lind, for example, tempts business clients away from other hot island destinations with a roof-deck infinity pool – said to be the first on the island – as well as 109 well-appointed suites and customisable meeting spaces and attractions.

Boracay's culinary delights add another dimension to the destination's appeal. Lopez said that Discovery Shores Boracay, which will be part of Condé Nast Johansens luxury hotel collection in addition to its existing affiliation with Preferred Hotels and Resorts, is expanding its F&B offerings with the 2Q2017 opening of Italian Osteria, a restaurant specialising in

Italian and Mediterranean cuisine and featuring an open kitchen and roof-deck bar with a 360-degree view of Boracay.

This follows the hotel's revamp of its popular Indigo Restaurant menu last year to offer coastal cuisine for lunch. It used to only serve dinner.

Across the island, hotels are improving their quality and more are emerging to compensate for the limited facilities that can support bigger conferences and exhibitions. Boracay's largest convention centre can only handle up to 2,500 pax and logistics, transport, freight and storage can be an issue due to the island's limitations, including connectivity.

But Hannah Paula Yulo, erstwhile director of sales & marketing at Paradise Garden Resort Hotel & Convention Center in Boracay, expects the island to improve its competitive edge in the face of greater competition from local destinations like Palawan and Bohol and foreign destinations like Bali and Phuket.

Yulo pointed out that the expanded Caticlan Airport, planned improvement of ferry and port facilities, and increasing accessibility by air and sea are adding values that bode well for business events in Boracay.

Developments to watch

1 The expanded runway at Caticlan Airport in Boracay, from 950m to 1,800m, enables it to accommodate Airbus A320 aircraft, unlike in the past when it can only serve smaller aircraft with up to 76 seats. Event delegates can now fly together and enjoy check-in baggage allowance. Before, groups had to take separate flights and were not allowed check-in baggage.

2 Philippine Airlines (PAL) and Cebu Pacific (CEB) are mounting more domestic and regional flights to and from Boracay. PAL launched the Clark-Caticlan service in December and will have international flights out of Kalibo in 1Q2017. CEB will mount services from Seoul to Kalibo.

3 China's lifting of its travel advisory against the Philippines in late 2016 means more chartered flights will materialise between both countries. Boracay is Chinese travellers' most preferred destination in the Philippines, and chartered flights are the main source of incentive groups from various parts of China.

Review central

Motag Living Museum By Rosa Ocampo

Motag Living Museum is a unique break from Boracay's usual sun, sand and sea combination, allowing business event delegates to explore local culture and traditions while bonding over creative activities.

Concept Located in the town of Motag, a ferry ride away from the main island of Boracay, the Museum is a real farming community that showcases the basic and simple lifestyle of the people before the advent of tourism.

The daily ablution before toilet tissue, soap and shampoo reached the town isn't for the squeamish. The house, with basic

furniture, a separate makeshift bathroom, deep well for sourcing water, areas for weaving, gathering firewood and the rice-fields, among other things, are testament to the hard life.

The "actors" – children, men, women and the elderly employed from the local community – are not acting; they're being themselves and doing what they do in real life. We love the old lady nonchalantly chewing and smoking tobacco, the smiling lady skilled in harvesting rice, and the friendly carabao.

MICE application A visit to the Museum can incorporate teambuilding activities which can be mounted in the ricefields, plowing the field with the carabao, fishing, climbing trees for coconuts, playing native games, building huts using coconut leaves and native materials, cooking and eating using utensils made of coconut shells, weaving mats and baskets and toys, etc.

Entrance fee is 700 pesos (US\$14) per person including refreshments and tour guides, but corporate rates are negotiable.

Lunch in the Nabaoy River with cool



water flowing around the feet can be arranged.

Service Everyone's sincerity is palpable. They're always on hand to guide us to the rice paddies and going up the house, and always polite in answering our questions.

Solicitous to the extent that after the farm trip, they will wash your feet with their own hands. One can refuse, though. Plus, they don't hound you for service charge or tip.

Operation hours

By appointment

Contact

motaglivingmuseum@gmail.com



Spreading the cheer

MEHK has made its incentive programme for groups and organisers more accessible than ever, benefitting even smaller gatherings. By **Prudence Lui**



From left: The Hong Kong Observation Wheel at Central Piers; event delegates raising a toast at the Hong Kong Jockey Club



{ Developments to watch }

1 The southern part of Hong Kong Island is now more accessible, thanks to the new MTR Island South Line. This is expected to benefit hotels and venues in the area, such as Aberdeen's Hong Kong Academy of Medicine Jockey Club Building which has a range of venues including a lecture theatre and seven meeting rooms.

2 Starting from January 23 this year, all Indian nationals who intend to visit Hong Kong must apply for and successfully complete a pre-arrival registration (PAR) online. Failing to complete this process, Indian nationals will have to apply for a visa directly with the Immigration Department.

While Hong Kong's business events arrivals have enjoyed steady growth in 2016 – up four per cent year-on-year in the first three quarters of the year to reach 1.16 million visitors – Hong Kong Tourism Board's Meetings & Exhibitions Hong Kong (MEHK) division has discovered that group sizes are shrinking.

To support these small- to medium-sized gatherings and to enhance their experience in Hong Kong, MEHK is revising its *Hong Kong Rewards!* programme for 2017/2018 to make some of its highly sought-after offers available to smaller groups.

Also, even more attractive offers are added to the programme.

Unlike last year's edition, *Hong Kong Rewards!* for 2017/2018 will feature more entertainment options that will allow business event delegates to

enjoy the destination like a local.

One of the major additions is free access to the Hong Kong Jockey Club's Happy Wednesday party at the Beer Garden, where business event delegates can dive into free food and beer while dancing to great live music, cheering on races and partaking in other fun activities.

For a more private horse-racing experience, qualifying groups can have a late-night party at the Hong Kong Jockey Club after 22.00, during which free drinks and live music will be featured.

MEHK believes that these corporate hospitality experiences will be appreciated by both longhaul and shorthaul markets, including China.

Free cocktail receptions offered by more than 40 participating hotels in the programme will continue to be a major highlight in 2017 and 2018, encouraged by positive feedback from both suppliers and business event delegates.

Priscilla Hui, account director of W Hong Kong, which has extended its participation in *Hong Kong Rewards!*, said being part of the programme allows the hotel to reach out to a bigger pool of clients.

Hui said: "(It gives us access to) a database that we don't have. (We have obtained) new contacts and queries (through *Hong Kong Rewards!* communications). This is also a good way to let people know there is a W property in Hong Kong."

Hui shared that the hotel will be

offering six extra rewards to business event groups that qualify for the programme, while creating new perks in partnership with its sister hotels in Taiwan and Singapore.

"For example, event organisers could get a complimentary stay with VIP limousine service at our partner hotels after their event (at W Hong Kong)," she explained.

More details on the 2017/2018 programme were unavailable at press time in early January.

Momentous Asia, general manager, Doris Lam, told *TIGmice* that the programme could be even more supportive with some tweaks, such as making the perks more accessible and not subjected to availability which prevents the reward activity from being included in bids; having all-inclusive offers from resorts and hotels in the programme; and featuring offers by restaurant chains that cater to international clientele.

International Conference Consultant's director, Katerina Tam, also suggested including free Octopus electronic payment cards through the programme, which would allow delegates of smaller groups to get around Hong Kong on their own.

{ Talking numbers }

9.7%

The year-on-year growth in arrivals recorded by longhaul markets

1,160,730

The total overnight MICE arrivals to Hong Kong in the first three quarters of 2016, up four per cent year-on-year. The best performing market is the Americas which saw an 18.1 per cent improvement

{ **Review central** }

Grand Hyatt Hong Kong

By Prudence Lui

Opened in 1989, Grand Hyatt Hong Kong has always been a hot favourite among top-tier business and social events. Last summer, the hotel completed an extensive refurbishment that benefitted guestrooms, Grand Ballroom, Grand Club Lounge and Grand Café.

Rooms I had the pleasure of spending a night at the Ambassador Harbour View Suite on the 36th floor. At 110m², this is the second largest room type in the hotel's inventory. Like most quality hotels on the waterfront, Grand Hyatt Hong Kong

brought views of Victoria Harbour as well as the cityscape of Central and Kowloon into the room with floor-to-ceiling windows.

I found my suite to be suitable for business travellers hoping to conduct meetings in their room. The living and dining area can be separated from the bedroom with sliding doors. The living space also comes with a bar, pantry and washroom, and can accommodate up to 10 people.

The new four-seat marble-top work desk was a pleasure to use, as it came with more electric and communication sockets than the previous round table option. Thank goodness too, that all sockets in the suite are placed at accessible heights on walls, and not along the floor.

Another feature I enjoy about the hotel is the separate set of elevators that serve club floor guests between club levels and the Grand Club Lounge.

MICE facilities There are 21 venues for different types and sizes of events. For gatherings requiring a less conventional space, the hotel is amenable to convert-

ing corner suites into breakout rooms. The refurbished Presidential Suites are also a hit with organisers of small-scale events such as fashion shows and social functions.

Elsewhere, the three meeting rooms in the Grand Club Lounge have been revamped along with the rest of the exclusive facility, with each room showcasing a new look with provision of a coffee station.

Other facilities Bellies are never bored with the hotel's selection of 10 restaurants and bars. Private dining rooms in some outlets can be turned into event spaces. For example, the Grand Hyatt Steakhouse has three private rooms for eight to 30 people.

Other facilities include Plateau Spa, an outdoor heated swimming pool, a sauna and two tennis courts.

Room count 545 rooms

Star rating Five

Contact hongkong.grand@hyatt.com



The Garage Bar

By Prudence Lui

Opened August 2016, The Garage Bar on the lobby floor of Cordis Hong Kong at Langham Place in Mongkok is said to be the first outdoor food truck destination in a hotel.

Previously known as The Backyard, the venue has undergone a renovation to create additional space and seating. As outdoor drinking space is rare in Mongkok, The Garage Bar is a welcome oasis for city folks.

Concept The Garage Bar offers an urban food culture experience by blending Western food truck favourites with traditional Asian flavours and pairing dishes with nearly 40 local and international craft beer brands. All that is delivered in a striking red and black setting with two vintage Citroën vans – one from 1966 and the other from 1972.

Must-eats include the Hongkongese Burger, a New Zealand steak in a bamboo charcoal pineapple bun (known among the locals as *bolo bao*); Crab & Cheese Melt Sandwich; and Churro Cherries Dulce.

Beer lovers will rejoice over a sample option that features local and interna-

tional – three different labels will create a personalised "beer flight".

MICE application The Garage Bar is such a stylish venue, and the vintage vans lend many Instagrammable moments. Spanning 322m², The Garage Bar is split into the 134m² Upper deck and 188m² Lower deck.

It is ideal for welcome or closing cocktail receptions with 50 to 150 guests.

Music plays in the bar, but event planners can bring in a live DJ for an additional fee.

The only downside to The Garage Bar is its open-air nature, which makes it susceptible to weather elements. As a wet weather back-up, event planners are offered another bar, Alibi, or a private function room.

Organisations that have used The Garage Bar for their events include Wine Luxe, Mothercare, IATA and Columbia University.

Service Top marks for attentive service. Despite it being a large venue, staff came by frequently to check on diners' needs and to tidy tables. I also like how knowl-



edgeable the staff are about the different beers available and are willing to share tips on how to pick from over 40 craft beer brands.

Operation hours 17.00 till late, daily

Contact (852) 3552-3028

cdhkg.restaurants@cordishotels.com

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Dalip Singh



Michael Murphy



Noella Ferns



Rick Aylett



Stephen England-Hall

Amy Hallam

Perth Convention Bureau has placed Amy Hallam in the newly created role of senior business development manager. Hallam will focus on bidding and securing large-scale international conferences for Perth and Western Australia. Prior to this appointment, she worked with the City of Perth in Economic Development.

Dalip Singh

Marco Polo Hotels has appointed seasoned hotelier Dalip Singh as hotel manager of its three Hong Kong properties - Marco Polo Hongkong Hotel, Prince Hotel and Gateway Hotel. Singh previously served as the managing director of KOP Properties.

Heinrich Grafe

Conrad Centennial Singapore has welcomed the return of Heinrich Grafe as its general manager. He had left the hotel in 2013 after 16 years to lead Conrad Tokyo as general manager.

Michael Murphy

Evason Ana Mandara in Nha Trang, Vietnam has named Michael Murphy its general manager. Murphy was the pre-opening general manager at Six Senses Qing Cheng Mountain in China from July 2014 to October 2015, and

next general manager of Vinpearl Luxury Nha Trang.

Noella Ferns

British Airways has picked Noella Ferns to be its regional general manager for Greater China and the Philippines, based in Hong Kong. Ferns has been with the company for over 20 years. She last led the Hong Kong, Philippines and Taiwan sales teams to drive growth in corporate accounts, trade partnerships and new business, while also overseeing the airline's channel shift strategy.

Patitta Chinin

Sofitel Bangkok Sukhumvit has named Patitta Chinin its new senior director of sales - corporate, leisure and MICE. She was last director of sales and marketing at Movenpick Hotel Sukhumvit 15 Bangkok, and director of sales and marketing at Radisson Suites Bangkok Sukhumvit.

Rebecca Kwan

Dorsett Hospitality International has promoted Rebecca Kwan to the position of senior vice president of sales - Hong Kong and the United Kingdom. Kwan, who is also the general manager for Lan Kwai Fong Hotel @ Kau U Fong, took office as senior vice president of sales - Hong Kong in November 2015.

Rick Aylett

Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre has appointed Rick Aylett to the role of senior manager of operations. Aylett has vast experience in event operations and venue management, and joins the Cen-

tre from Atlantic Group where he held the group general manager position for operations.

Stephen England-Hall

Tourism New Zealand has appointed Stephen England-Hall to the position of chief execu-

tive, with effect from early April 2017. He will be based in Auckland. He has worked across New Zealand, the UK and North America as a senior executive of leading digital marketing, data and technology companies.

One minute with Eileen Khew

Eileen Khew was appointed this January to the position of director of sales and marketing at Marina Mandarin Singapore, a role she took up following four years as area director of sales and marketing for Far East Hospitality. She tackles three quick questions from us

What expertise are you bringing to the table at Marina Mandarin Singapore?

I have exceeded revenue goals and have helped lead various hotels in their sales initiatives. With this experience, I will continue to strategise and activate plans and lead sales operations towards business objectives.

I believe I can bring real passion and energy to this role. I have a strong desire to help others and develop them as a professional, and this is already demonstrated through my past roles.

My energy and positive attitude have served me well in all the jobs I've had. I know these traits will help in this role to bring my team to the next level.

What will keep you busy right away in this new position?

Strategic business planning and activation to enter new markets for Marina Mandarin Singapore.

The key to a productive day is...

to reach the office at least 1.5 hours earlier. This way, I can have a good cup of coffee, prioritise and have important work done without distractions. Come afternoon, I will get my emails cleared and have meetings and calls with clients, potential leads and staff. Finally, I will have a relaxing evening so as to be inspired and refreshed for work the next day.



Putting delegate doubts to rest

Constant communication between STEMfest 2016 organisers and delegates ensures minimal attendee attrition arising from state-wide unrest, writes **Rohit Kaul**



Event brief

The University of Mysore in the southern Indian state of Karnataka was selected as the venue for the third international festival of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEMfest 2016), and had jointly organised it with event management specialist CIMGlobal and Global Stem States, a forum that discusses the role that science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) innovation plays in the needs of industry, export, trade and development.

The University, which is the sixth oldest university in India and oldest in the state of Karnataka, hosted STEMfest 2016 on the sidelines of its centennial celebrations.

The four-day event featured exhibits from leading institutions, corporates and R&D organisations in addition to an educational fair that saw participation from national and international institutions. A mobile planetarium, robotic competition, demonstration of drones, summit for game and app developers, and forum on space and astronomy were among other attractions at the event.

Challenges

Due to political unrest arising from disagreements between the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu over access to water from the Cauvery river, organisers of STEMfest 2016 had to tackle potential attendee attrition.

The conflict emerged a month before the event and saw violent protests taking place across Karnataka – even in host city Mysore – that were covered extensively by various media houses. That worried international and national delegates.

Event
Stemfest 2016

Organiser
Global Stem States, University of Mysore and CIMGlobal

Venue
University of Mysore

Date
October 17-20, 2016

Number of participants
1,559 delegates

The timing of the conference posed another challenge. It was to be held immediately after the Hindu festival of Dussehra, which meant many academic establishments were closed for the holidays and therefore their students were unable to attend the Science, Technology & Education Exhibition held along with STEMfest 2016.

Solutions

To tackle fears of the unrest, STEMfest 2016 organisers communicated regularly with all delegates and assured them of their safety and security while in the state of Karnataka. Details of efforts made by the government to ensure that the general public was protected from the protests were also conveyed to the delegates.



However, Anitha Niranjan, managing director of CIMGlobal, opined that their efforts would have been “more effective” if “state government representatives had made assurances to the delegates” as well.

Despite these challenges, students from various colleges and schools thronged the Science, Technology & Education Exhibition. A robotics exhibition also turned out to be a hit with visitors.

Key takeaways

With hindsight, Niranjan opined that strategic events for the education, science and technology domain needed strong participation from the state and central governments.

She said: “The participation of the government sector has to be ensured in such events, as that can bring about the much needed changes in our education system.”



Boogie this way to Studio 54

Staging Connections delivers on client's order for a 1970s disco party in modern times while highlighting the venue's world-class technology. By **Rebecca Elliott**

Event brief

Staging Connections was tasked with surprising 210 guests with a 1970s Studio 54 nightclub themed party in celebration of the Toyota Material Handling Australia Sales & Service Championships Awards.

The event was set to take place at the new Four Points by Sheraton Sydney on July 1, 2016.

Challenges

The client wanted to return to the heydays of the late-1970s disco era, when parties at the Studio 54 nightclub were all the rage. The client desired a dramatic and colourful celebration that would leave a lasting impression on attendees.

However, to deliver such an elaborate themed event in a hotel ballroom, a combination of audiovisual, staging, styling, theming and lighting equipment was needed.

Solutions

The Staging Connections team set about designing a creative and colourful event that also highlighted the world-class technology present in the new Grand Ballroom at Four Points by Sheraton Sydney.

Setting the stage for the iconic nightclub vibe was a stylised black and white dancefloor under a 1.5m-wide mirror ball. The set was surrounded by multi-coloured illuminated pieces featuring silhouettes of disco dancers and

Event
Toyota Material Handling Australia Sales & Service Championships Awards
Organiser
Staging Connections
Venue
Grand Ballroom, Four Points by Sheraton Sydney
Date
1 July 2016
Number of participants
210

vertical light towers positioned between them, rising to 4m in height.

To further bring the vision to life, the team installed a projection system consisting of 16,000 lumen Panasonic projectors with motorised screens that framed the stage set. Colourful styling and dramatic lighting created a vibrant atmosphere that was perfect for the lively celebration.

Some 80 Martin Rush MH5 moving profiles

were installed to pin spot tables and breakup gobos within the fixtures were used to cast shapes of light throughout the Grand Ballroom.

Bright colours from the LED ceiling panels coupled with sleek black tablecloths and illuminated martini glass centrepieces on top of a light box that oscillated through a rainbow palette of light, all came together to create an upbeat theme.

In addition, disco music set the mood in the pre-function space before guests proceeded down a red carpet to the Grand Ballroom, where the theme of Studio 54 was revealed, much to their delight.

Key takeaways

Staging Connections successfully delivered a colourful and vibrant atmosphere for the awards night. By coordinating all styling, theming, lighting and audio, the environment was cohesive, immersive and ensured a memorable theme was crafted.

The client told Staging Connections that guests loved the mirror ball and dance floor, and the party lasted all night, as if the disco era was here again and Studio 54 had come back to life.

Adding to the memorable night was splendid views of Sydney's Darling Harbour from the Grand Ballroom.

The event also turned out to be one of the first fully styled gala events to be held the new Four Points by Sheraton Sydney.

Mike Cannon

The group CEO and managing director of Sarawak Convention Bureau and Sarawak Tourism talks to **S Puvaneswary** about his past successes

Sarawak Convention Bureau was the first state convention bureau. How has it evolved in the last decade?

Two decades ago, business events was uncharted territory in Malaysia. In 2006, the Sarawak Convention Bureau (SCB) was established, pioneering the rise of business events and making Sarawak the first Malaysian state to cohesively address the pursuit of business events, driven in tandem by the private and public sectors.

We have grown over the last 10 years. New positions have been created within the bureau to meet new demands and to service the industry better. For example, we recently created a new position for a project liaison director as we saw a need to bring conference organisers and suppliers together.

Once a conference is won, we hand it over to the project liaison director who will then liaise with the conference organiser and all relevant suppliers. We do this to ensure quality, which will result in repeat and referral business for the future.

SCB has won 424 international events with almost 167,000 delegates since day one. What is the secret to such success?

It is in finding your Unique Selling Propositions and never losing sight of them. There is a certain charm in Sarawak's people, its scenery and the overall experience – a dynamic composition of these can never be replicated.

We capitalise on the beauty of Sarawak. Our tagline, *Where business meets adventure*, means we have the sophistication and the know-how to cater to events in the heart of what ranks among the world's oldest rainforest. That's a magical experience that is outstanding and unique compared to (what's available in) other destinations. Delegates can get close to nature and take photographs of orangutans, or kayak under towering riverine trees, overlooking the sights of unique limestone formations, all within a 40-minute drive from Kuching city where business sessions are held.

For business events, Sarawak is extremely attractive. It has a vast array of

hotel venues with conference facilities as well as a state-of-the-art convention centre. Our competitive prices are attractive, especially with the current exchange rate (on December 1) of 4.47 ringgit to US\$1.

One of the secrets to our appeal is the business events community of impassioned people whose products and services are bursting with creativity, stories, and authenticity.

Who do you target?

We accept that we are a second-tier destination. Sarawak has decided since 2006 to concentrate on smaller, niche events that yield greater benefits in education, social responsibility, research or trade for Sarawak, or that lend support to the multiple industries or professions that are of state interest.

What are the challenges?

Logistics is an issue, specifically, more direct flight connectivity is needed. However, this is strategically being addressed, a recent example being the new Hong Kong-Kuching direct service. Through this service, we can make Hong Kong the next Asian hub that links more overseas visitors to Sarawak, besides Singapore and Kuala Lumpur which collectively provide 2,500 seats into Sarawak every day.

Marketing is a constant challenge, but also a playing field we use to raise our game. We like to push the envelope with this one by constantly evolving in creativity. We ensure that our marketing translates to a dynamic, integrated and consistent brand for Sarawak that marries business events and leisure tourism.

Some international companies may not be aware of Sarawak, and may not be well informed about Sarawak and what it offers. It is a challenging, complex game, but we play to win.

How has the global economy impacted business events in Sarawak?

The business events industry survives better than most in a softening global economy. Conferences and meetings are all about getting the latest research and education. Most

associations continue to invest in holding meetings as these are opportunities for continued learning, which is mandatory in many professions.

Penang has set up a state convention bureau in early 2016, while Johor is going to do the same. Your thoughts?

It is a positive development for Malaysia. Branding Malaysia for business events is the greatest challenge. So without all the states being involved (by having a convention bureau to drive destination branding), we cannot possibly increase business events for the country.

We hope that going forward, (such developments will enable) MyCEB to focus on branding while the states focus on selling and winning.

How do you see the business events industry evolving a decade from now?

Face-to-face meetings are the best form of communication and problem solving you will ever get. There is Skype, webinars and digital communication, but they will never solve issues as effectively as face-to-face meetings.

Having said that, I predict the number of face-to-face meetings will grow but the average size of these meetings will not be as big as it is currently.





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