

## Phuket's time to shine

**By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

The launch of direct services by Middle Eastern carriers to Phuket looks set to be a good conduit of longhaul MICE traffic to the island, traditionally perceived as a leisure beach destination.

Emirates launched daily Dubai services end-2012, while Etihad Airways and Qatar Airways will begin daily non-stop services from Abu Dhabi and Doha respectively, both from October 26.

Sumate Sudasna, managing director, Creative Destination Management and president, Thailand Incentive and Convention Association, said: "The leisure market for Phuket is already very established, so these services will help hotels

to have a better balance of MICE and leisure guests across the entire year."

Sumate said the Middle Eastern carriers will "help open up longhaul markets like Europe and South America for MICE", adding that should any crisis unfold in Bangkok, the direct flights will be a "good back-up" for Phuket.

Phuket sellers, too, are hopeful. Rory Campbell, director of sales & marketing, Outrigger Laguna Phuket Beach Resort, said: "There has been a lot of interest from European operators who prefer the Europe-Middle East-Phuket route. Many have travelled via Asia in the past so new stopover opportunities are helpful. Spain



**Campbell: new stopover is good**

and Italy have also noted that the connections and times are more favourable – especially for large incentive group travel."

Sanjeev Tandon, director of sales & marketing, Dusit Thani Laguna Phuket, said: "We expect the new direct flights will boost visitor numbers from Middle East, Europe, plus North and South America."

Tandon said the resort is contacting Middle East MICE operators to develop this segment for Phuket, on top of conducting roadshows in key markets and attending tradeshows.

While noting that it will take some time to see the benefits, Laguna Phuket director of sales-MICE & corporate events, Prapa Hemmin, said: "We observe growth in sports tourism...the top five participating athletes in last year's Challenge Laguna

Phuket triathlon were contributed by the UAE. With easier access to Phuket, we may see international companies including our sports events in their MICE programmes."

Daniela Linda Mengoni, managing director of Tripware Italy, who is seeking incentive programmes to Thailand at IT&CMA, said the new links will help her sell Phuket to clients from the banking and finance industries.

But Lonni Gulliksen, managing director and owner, Congress Consulting Management Group in Denmark, said Phuket still plays second fiddle to Bangkok, adding: "Phuket still conjures up images of a beach vacation...unless there are direct flights linking Denmark to Phuket, Bangkok will still be favoured by my MICE clients."

## Chasing MICE from Indonesia

OUTBOUND MICE from Indonesia this year took an inevitable dip as its citizens went to the polls in July to elect a new president.

However, the country remains an important market for traditional destinations like Thailand and also newer ones like Japan.

To lure more Indonesian MICE visitors, countries are ramping up Muslim-friendly offerings, while reaching out to the travel trade through fam trips, collaborations and promotions. – **Hannah Koh**



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## Thai Airways rides out turbulence, strengthens position

**By Greg Lowe**

THAI Airways International's (THAI) performance has stabilised after a rocky start to the year, Suraphon Israngura na Ayuthya, executive vice president of commercial, said at yesterday's IT&CMA and CTW Asia-Pacific's press conference.

Fielding questions from the media, Suraphon said: "We planned our cashflow at the end of last year before we were affected by the political situation." He added that the airline is retiring older aircraft

and replacing them with new Airbus A380s and Boeing 787 Dreamliners.

The strongest recovery is coming from markets along its western route. Southern China and Hong Kong have improved significantly, though the market in Shanghai is still soft.

Faced with intense competition from the Gulf carriers for longhaul business, Suraphon admitted he was exasperated by a new partnership between Etihad Airways and Tourism Authority of Thailand to tap the



**Thai Airways International's Suraphon Israngura na Ayuthya, Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau's Supawan Teerarat and TTG Asia Media's Darren Ng addressing the media yesterday. More than 10,000 business appointments are taking place over the two-day exhibition, with over 80 business, education and networking sessions scheduled over three days.**

Italian market, and threatened to recall his senior executives from Rome and Milan if they could not rectify the situation.

The airline is also trying to increase its thrice-weekly flights to the US, which currently transits in Seoul, to daily. "The problem is Seoul will not give us any more timeslots. Next year we may start daily flights transiting through Taipei to Los Angeles and maybe another to Honolulu."

With full-service, "premium light" subsidiary THAI Smile, Suraphon said: "We are trying to manage our costs so we can better compete with LCCs."

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## Grand Hyatt bounces back

EAGER to win back lost MICE business, Grand Hyatt Erawan Bangkok last month launched a *Double Meeting Planner Points* promotion, which runs until December 26.

Director of sales, Pavinna Wattanavekin, said: "Bangkok's MICE market has been greatly affected by the ongoing political situation with major MICE groups changing destinations or making last-minute decisions on where to stay."

"The lack of city-wide MICE groups during the course of the year has also been evident, affecting overall occupancy in the city."

The hotel was particularly affected in the first quarter when one of the main anti-government rally sites was located at its doorstep.

Performance, however, has been on the mend, with the current average stay at about three days.

The hotel's recent renovation has also helped, said Pavinna. "Our newly refurbished rooms are the newest in the market, and we have been receiving great positive feedback on their new design." – **Greg Lowe**

## Confidence in Christchurch

**By Paige Lee Pei Qi**

THREE years after it was struck by a major earthquake, Christchurch is back in the game as a conference destination, having successfully clinched two international bids in recent months.

In August, the city announced it had won the right to host the Environmental Criminology and Crime Analysis Annual Symposium, which will see around 100 delegates visiting in June 2015.

The latest success marks the second conference win for Christchurch this year. In June, the city also secured hosting rights for the 20<sup>th</sup> Pacific Association of Quantity Surveyors Congress in 2016, which will attract 400 Asia-Pacific delegates.

Christchurch and Canterbury Convention Bureau manager, Caroline Blanchfield, said: "It is heartening to see another conference made up entirely of international delegates choosing to meet in Christchurch."

"Christchurch is proving it offers a unique learning environment for delegates across diverse fields of interest. We have a wealth of expertise to share in many sectors including earth



A tram leaves Cathedral Square, the geographical centre of Christchurch

and health sciences, agriculture, technology and education."

In August, Christchurch & Canterbury Tourism also announced it would develop a new convention centre that can accommodate up to 2,000 delegates. Slated to open in 2017, this means that the city can now actively pursue large international conferences.

Tim Hunter, chief executive, Christchurch & Canterbury Tourism, said: "We already have significant interest in events wanting to book at least three years out. Now we have the certainty to go out and sell Christchurch on this scale."

"The new venue will tick all the boxes for conference organ-

isers and fit what the convention industry is looking for."

Tourism New Zealand international business events manager, Bjoern Spreitzer, pointed out that the venue will attract more high-value visitors to the South Island in the off-peak season, and boost the country's reputation abroad.

"With an outstanding venue in a lively central city precinct, Christchurch will help put New Zealand on the map," he said.

Hunter added: "Our location in the heart of the South Island makes Christchurch appealing to delegates and organisers who want to make the most of their time here to explore, either before or after their conference."

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# Egypt makes a comeback

By S Puvaneswary and  
Paige Lee Pei Qi

EGYPT is on a mission to convince Asian markets that the destination is safe to visit, with emphasis on attracting MICE from India, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Japan and the Philippines.

Adel El Masry, director of Egyptian Tourism Office (ETO), said there would be a 25 per cent growth in marketing budget for key Asian markets in 2014, followed by a further 20-25 per cent increase in 2015.

According to Adel, in 2010, Egypt attracted 14.7 million tourists worldwide but numbers dropped substantially after the Egyptian Revolution of 2011. Last year, the destination attracted 11.7 million tourists.

He said: "(In September), we started a campaign in India targeted at tour operators specialising in MICE, corporates in India, and business magazines and newspapers to look at MICE facilities



Adel: Egypt is safe to visit

in Cairo, Luxor, Alexandria and Sharm El-Sheikh. Besides showcasing the facilities, we also wish to show invited guests that the destination is safe."

A similar campaign will be

launched in Malaysia in November, then extended to Indonesia, Philippines and Singapore in 2015.

In addition, ETO will work with travel agency associations in Malaysia, India and Thailand to invite their members to visit the destination over the next year or so.

In early 2015, ETO will organise B2B roadshows in Bangkok, Singapore, India (Mumbai, New Delhi, Bengaluru, Ahmadabad and Hyderabad) and Kuala Lumpur for leisure and MICE. The roadshows will incorporate workshops.

However, despite the roll-out of Egypt's new campaign, several buyers at IT&CMA said they are still apprehensive about sending groups to the destination.

Augustine Barretto, business associate of Mumbai-based Mercury Travels, said: "Indians are generally very scared to tread into any country that may have conflict potential, and safety is our number one priority. A lot is at stake here because we are talking about endangering the life of the whole company.

"Egypt used to be one of the top destinations but over the past five years, interest to go there has dropped to a complete zero. Since the political tension, Egypt has completely fell off the map for our corporates."

Likewise, Shравan Bhalla, proprietor of High Flyer in New Delhi, which specialises in luxury corporate travel, said: "It will still take some time for us to warm up to the idea of going back to Egypt.

"Egypt definitely has a very strong MICE appeal because it has good meet-

ing facilities; its incentive component is very good too as it is an exotic destination."

Egypt's Ministry of Tourism is currently building a new convention centre in Alexandria, the first in the city. Sched-

uled to be ready in two years, it will be able to accommodate 1,000 people.

Bhalla, who is also the general secretary of the Outbound Tour Operators Association of India, said: "Egypt will rebound again but for now, it is still go-

ing up at a slow rate."

Praveen Kumar, senior manager of travel services in Bengaluru-based Micro Labs, said he is open to considering Egypt for meetings and incentives.

"Although it is still a sensitive destination, it is a unique and historically appealing country that we have not visited before," he added. "If we have the opportunity to go, we will definitely explore it."



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"Although it is still a sensitive destination...we would definitely explore it."

**Praveen Kumar**

Senior manager of travel services  
Micro Labs India

# New generation rocks By Patrick Tan



Organised by the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau on behalf of the Asian Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus, CVBs, business events leaders and IT&CMA delegates came together for the 7<sup>th</sup> Asia for Asia: Rock the Generation summit, highlighting major trends in the Asian meeting industry



Viengtai Hotel Thailand's Samart Dansai



The Lantern Resorts and Residences Thailand's Pallapa Kidla-iad



Grand Nikko Bali's Ika Halim and ICCA Malaysia's Margaret Lu



Thailand Incentive and Convention Association's Sumate Sudasna



Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau's Lee Sheau Fen, Faveza Shahnaz Mohd Amar, Zulkefli Sharif, Tuty Elyanie Medali and Nurul Nadiah Basiran



Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau's Nopparat Maythaveekulchai and Thai Exhibition Association's Patrapee Chinachoti



Pan Pacific Hotels Group Malaysia's Dee Dee Pok, YTL Hotels Malaysia's Peh Ai Lin and Tour2U Holidays Malaysia's Anne Tan



ICCA Thailand's Suprabha Moleeratanond and Sampran Riverside Thailand's Suchada Yuvaboon



NCC Management & Development Thailand's Prapha Treamsasithorn and Duangkamol Permpalitapol



The full-day IMEX-MPI-MCI-IT&CMA Future Leaders Forum 2014 yesterday afforded a useful platform for an earnest exchange between students and MICE industry experts



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# Taking a vibrant lead

The city rakes in top accolades in global association rankings. By **Paige Lee Pei Qi**



Singapore's infrastructure and business efficiency are some of its biggest drawcards for international congresses

**S**ingapore continues to outshine its regional counterparts in the business events sector, being the only Asian city to be ranked among the top 10 convention cities in the world alongside Berlin, Paris and Vienna by ICCA last year.

Maintaining its position as Asia's top convention city for 12 consecutive years, Singapore hosted a record 175 ICCA-qualified events in 2013, up from 150 in 2012 – achieving the strongest year-on-year growth since 2005.

Also, the latest Union of International Associations' (UIA) 2013 Global Rankings, revealed in June this year, has once again crowned Singapore as the world's foremost city and country for international meetings – a title the city-state is holding for the third and seventh year running respectively.

UIA reports that some 994 meetings held in Singapore met the criteria for international meetings – a 4.4 per cent rise from 2012's 952 – accounting for 9.4 per cent of its database of meetings.

In particular, the Lion City garnered praise for its excellent infrastructure, efficiency, vibrant business ecosystem, knowledge networks and strategic location in Asia.

Last year, Singapore played host to notable events such as the IFLA World Library and Information Congress, the 60<sup>th</sup> Chartered Financial Analyst Institute Annual Conference, the Amway Japan Leadership Achievement Seminar, the

**994** The number of meetings held in Singapore in 2013 qualified under Union of International Associations' criteria for international meetings – a 4.4 per cent hike from 2012's 952.

**55.4** The proportion, in percentage, of the total economic impact of the MICE industry on the Singapore economy in 2012.

World Engineers' Summit as well as the World Retail Congress Asia Pacific.

Singapore has six world congresses in its pipeline: the Council for Advancement and Support of Education Asia-Pacific Advancement Conference in 2015; the World Congress on Brain Mapping & Therapeutics, the World Congress of the International Society for Diseases of the Esophagus, the inaugural Asian edition of SpineWeek and the Regional Dermatology Conference in 2016; and the Asia Pacific Congress of Hypertension 2017.

"Singapore is well-positioned to stage association congresses in view of its political neutrality and stability," said Edward Liu, group managing director, Conference & Exhibition Management Services.

"In addition, many prominent Singaporeans are playing significant roles in several international organisations, which put Singapore in good stead in hosting global events," he added.

Not only does Singapore possess world-class infrastructure and services for hosting events, the city also harbours the domain knowledge and expertise in various fields, Liu said.

Singex Venues' director, sales & commercial development, Janice Yee, has also observed a "significant upward trend" of events from key industries like medicine and information technology at the Singapore Expo Convention and Exhibition Centre. Events held at the venue include the inaugural edition of Internet of Things Asia 2014 in April and the Singapore Health & Biomedical Congress in September and the upcoming MRO Asia Conference & Exhibition in November.

Likewise, Suntec Singapore has hosted inaugural medical events such as the International Congress on Glaucoma Surgery and the International Diabetes Federation Western Pacific Region congress.

Highlighting the importance of the MICE industry to Singapore's tourism sector, Singapore Tourism Board, assistant chief executive, Neeta Lachmandas, said: "The overall economic impact analysis of MICE activities is approximately S\$3.7 billion (US\$3 billion), or 1.1 per cent of Singapore GDP in 2012. This is an increase from 0.9 per cent of GDP in 2008.

"Beyond the direct economic benefits, MICE also contributed in terms of networking opportunities, branding of Singapore and cross-industry skill sharing," she added.

## Marketplace



### Universal Studios Singapore Halloween Horror Nights

Universal Studios Singapore (USS) has launched its debut MICE packages for the annual Halloween Horror Nights (HHN) scare festival, offering themed dinners and special treats as part of the deals. This year, HHN will run from 19.30 to 01.30 over five weekends: October 3-5, 10-11, 17-18, 22-25, 31 and November 1.

Planners looking to offer clients a tailored event experience can choose scare zones, haunted houses and rides on non-event nights. For more information, contact [mice@rwsentosa.com](mailto:mice@rwsentosa.com).

### Saha Signature Indian Restaurant & Terrace Bar

With a bold new take on world-class Indian cuisine, Saha Signature Indian Restaurant & Terrace Bar is all set to tantalise tastebuds with its eclectic dining menu of Indian dishes with a Western twist presented by the "Gordon Ramsy of India", chef Abuhijit Saha.

Big groups can book the entire venue, which can accommodate up to 42 guests. While no rental fee is charged, the minimum spend for a full hire is S\$4,000++ (US\$3,200++). Additionally, Saha also features a 22-seat alfresco terrace bar for outdoor dining. Contact [info@saha.sg](mailto:info@saha.sg) for reservations.



### Mamma Mia!

Following a 10-year hiatus, Mamma Mia! will be back in Singapore from November 13-30 at the Marina Bay Sands Grand Theatre. This global smash hit will celebrate the magic of ABBA's timeless songs, promising an "ultimate feel-good show" for audience of all ages. Tickets are available and are priced from S\$95. Visit <http://sistic.com.sg> for booking details.

## Spotlight

### What a good sport!

The much anticipated S\$1.3 billion (US\$1 billion) Singapore Sports Hub opened its doors in June this year, boasting a 55,000-seat stadium capped with the world's largest free-spanning dome roof.

"There is no other venue like (the Singapore Sports Hub) – it is a special place for companies to capture a unique experience

for attendees," said Mark Collins, managing director, Singapore Sports Hub.

The 35ha sporting facility houses two 1,000-pax restaurants, a multi-purpose indoor area that can be configured to hold up to 3,000 seats, as well as the Sports Information Resource Centre, which is intended for exhibitions.



According to Collins, the various unique facilities within the Sports Hub can be used to support or host MICE events as the areas can be used in many flexible ways depending on the event requirements.

Since its opening, the Singapore Sports Hub has played host to a string of events and conferences like the Southeast Asia Swimming Championships, the World Club 10s Ruby and the 16<sup>th</sup> Stadia & Arena 2014 Asia Pacific Conference.

A notable event coming up is the BNP Paribas Women's Tennis Association (WTA) Finals Singapore in October, marking the first time the WTA finals are playing in Asia-Pacific. This widely anticipated event will see Singapore welcoming tennis stars

like Li Na, Serena Williams and Maria Sharapova.

With the rise of the Asian middle class, the total sports industry revenue from the Asia-Pacific region is expected to reach US\$27.5 billion in 2015, according to the Singapore Tourism Board.

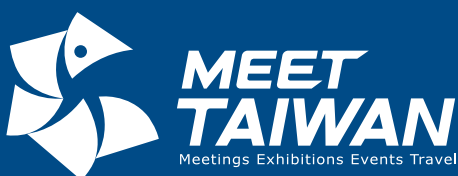
Amid this backdrop of positive growth, the Singapore Sports Hub will play a critical role in accelerating the development of the sports industry and take it to the next level in Singapore, opined Collins.



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## Better fortunes

Business events are on the rise in Hong Kong this year, but space constraints and competition from other destinations continue to worry sellers, writes **Prudence Lui**



Hong Kong Tourism Board is courting more association meetings from the US and Europe; pictured here, Victoria Harbour

**H**ong Kong welcomed 1,955,163 overnight business visitors in 1H2014, an increase of 13 per cent, while MICE arrivals rose 23.4 per cent to reach 894,766.

Encouraged by the outstanding performance of the MICE sector, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTb) will maintain current strategies to uphold the destination's position as "the World's Meeting Place", driving high profile global and regional events to Hong Kong.

Executive director, Anthony Lau, told the *Daily*: "Our comprehensive approach is to reach out to the decision-makers and build a long-term relationship with key market players.

"In 2014/2015, we expect that the growth markets for meetings and incentive travels will continue to be China, India and South-east Asia. As for conventions, we will focus on bidding for mega events from the US and Europe. Partnerships have been secured with some (industry) associations like ASAE and IAPCO."

Hong Kong's business event sector players have also reported

rosy business.

Destination Management Company's managing director, Jenny May, said: "Last year was probably the worst year since SARS, but 2014 is better and it seems business may be coming back. Things are looking even better for 2015 and 2016, and we are getting requests for quotes for events in 2017."

Also sharing good news is The Mira Hong Kong hotel, which has reported a gradual recovery in meetings and incentives from markets such as the UK, Singapore and Australia. General manager Gerhard Aicher added: "Despite slowing growth from China, the market is still Hong Kong's growth engine. Business so far has been in line with our expectations."

However, not all is fine according to both May and Aicher. Aicher said corporate book-

ings are increasingly made later and clients are still "mindful of how they spend their money on trips and meetings".

He also expressed concern that "Hong Kong is in a less competitive position for conventions and exhibitions, as it doesn't have the huge convention space and facilities of Macau or Singapore".

Sharing similar observations, May said: "In terms of conventions and exhibitions we are losing a lot of business to Macau which has the facilities to accommodate the event and all participants in the same venue."

She added that a number of meetings and incentives were lost to Singapore "for various reasons".

To combat intensifying competition from neighbouring MICE destinations, May urged HKTb to court other markets besides China through roadshows.

"Another idea is for HKTb to subsidise Hong Kong sellers' attendance on the Hong Kong stand at regional tradeshows. This is something many other countries do, and some have far smaller budgets than HKTb."

Meanwhile, Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (Management) is trying to spread event demand to quieter months through venue rental discounts.

Managing director Monica Lee-Muller explained that the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (HKCEC) has been battling space constraints, which has hobbled the venue's ability to accept new events and expand existing ones especially during the peak season.

"Our exhibition space during the peak trade fair months of April and October reached saturation point a few years ago," revealed Lee-Muller.

"Hence, Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (Management) is now offering venue rental discounts through the Low Season Scheme (offered in February, May, June, July, August and December) to encourage event organisers to stage events during non-peak season."

**23.4** The percentage increase in the number of total overnight visitor arrivals to Hong Kong during the first half of 2014, reaching 894,766

**45** The proportion of arrivals that was made up by Mainland Chinese visitors during the months of January to March 2014. They numbered 143,578 in all, a 16.3 per cent growth



### Spotlight

## New quarters for events

The heritage-rich Police Married Quarters (PMQ) on Aberdeen Street, Central, which once provided accommodation for rank and file police officers, has completed its two-year-long revitalisation and conservation works.

It reopened in June this year as a hub for the creative and design industry, and offers a number of venues that can be hired for private events.

Three original buildings within the 18,000m<sup>2</sup> property have been preserved, and a new two-storey multifunctional hall called The Cube has been added.

Besides The Cube, event planners can also book PMQ's

Marketplace/Aberdeen Courtyard, the Hollywood Garden and the 1,400m<sup>2</sup> Plateau on the fourth floor.

Run by the Musketeers Education & Culture Charitable Foundation, in collaboration with the Hong Kong Design Centre, Hong Kong Polytechnic University and the Vocational Training Council's Hong Kong Design Institute, PMQ is today home to nearly 130 tenants, ranging from bookstores and design galleries to cafes and bakeries.

Guided heritage tours of PMQ can also be arranged.

For space enquiries, call (852) 2811-9098 or visit [www.pmq.org.hk](http://www.pmq.org.hk).

### Marketplace

#### Langham Place, Mongkok

A series of new themed events has been rolled out at Langham Place, Mongkok, promising to inject more fun to corporate breakfast meetings, coffee breaks and other gatherings.

Named Picnic in Langham Place, Wellness Ming Court, Tokoro Oyatsu and Secret Sweet Garden, these themed events feature unique presentations.

Call (852) 3552-3388 or visit [hongkong.langhamplacehotels.com](http://hongkong.langhamplacehotels.com) for more details.



#### Regal Oriental Hotel

Regal Oriental Hotel has completed the expansion of its collection of Executive Club Rooms. There are now 108 rooms, up from the pre-renovation count of 71.

Executive Club Rooms guests get to enjoy complimentary Wi-Fi access, mini-bar items, local calls and home direct call access, use of a conference room for two hours per stay (subject to availability) as well as pressing of two pieces of clothing per stay.

Meanwhile, the refurbished China Coast Pub + Restaurant on the ground floor has introduced a new menu that features a selection of American delicacies.

For more information, email [info@oriental.regalhotel.com](mailto:info@oriental.regalhotel.com) or call (852) 2718-0333.

#### Wi-Fi.HK service

Visitors to Hong Kong can now enjoy free Wi-Fi access at more than 5,000 hotspots across the destination, thanks to the launch of Wi-Fi.HK in August.

Users need only to seek out "Wi-Fi.HK" on their smartphones or communication devices at places carrying the Wi-Fi.HK signage. No registration is required.

The service is either provided free for an unlimited time or for the first 30 minutes.

Visit [www.wi-fi.hk](http://www.wi-fi.hk) for more information.

#### Harbour Grand Hong Kong

Complimentary Wi-Fi service is now offered to all guests at Harbour Grand Hong Kong, a hotel located in the heart of Hong Kong Island and a mere five minutes' walk from MTR Fortress Hill Station.

The 828-room, five-star hotel is equipped with 10,468m<sup>2</sup> of function venue space, including a 576m<sup>2</sup> pillarless Grand Ballroom. Other facilities include five award-winning restaurants, a business centre and a spa.





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# Team on board

**Raini Hamdi** looks at a rise in Asian meetings on cruise ships and why teambuilding occurs more effortless at sea than on land, as cruise lines would have us believe

It is hassle-free, complete, all-inclusive – the same advantages that have attracted more Asian leisure travellers to cruise are also winning over Asian MICE planners.

And where the need to bond a team is a key aim of the meeting or incentive, cruise lines are pushing the message that theirs is a proposition that's hard to beat. Ships are destinations in themselves, with ideas for teambuilding limited only by the imagination, they said. But even without as much as having to lift a finger to

execute a team-building exercise, cruise companies argue that bonding happens more "naturally" at sea than on land.

Fresh air and gentle breezes aside, it is back to the nature of cruising as being hassle-free, complete and all-inclusive which they said break even the tiniest psychological barriers to teambuilding.

"We have had many groups and charters where clients commented they had tried repeatedly over the years to bring their various teams together with activities and 'mixing them up' on coach,



Cruise ships' F&B, entertainment and meeting spaces complement teambuilding facilities to offer a holistic alternative to meet on board

Photos courtesy of Crystal Cruises

but failed. On board, the clients said they finally succeeded and they didn't even try deliberately. Teambuilding is a natural occurrence on the ship," said Melvyn Yap, Silversea Cruises' regional director-Asia.

Said Marnie Whipple, Crystal Cruises' regional sales manager, Asia & the Pacific: "Being at sea gives a rare opportunity to be in an environment where guests feel comfortable, relaxed and thus generally more open to candid conversation that may not perhaps take place in a corporate setting.

"Because of this, we often see that incentive groups have a greater bonding experience with their colleagues as they connect in various locations – organised or not – around the ship.

"The environment onboard is more conducive to creative and spontaneous encounters versus a land resort or hotel, where guests tend to adventure more off-site on their own or in segmented groups. On the ship, everyone relaxes in one overall space, yet can mingle and discuss ideas in a variety of settings."

Cruise lines like Crystal and Silversea, which have relatively smaller ships and are positioned at the higher end of the market, do not have a teambuilding department per se but see to all aspects of the meeting organiser's requests, or those of the teambuilding specialist the organiser works with.

Asia's oldest cruise line, Star Cruises, on the other hand, said it is equipped with skilled, trained staff to design and execute teambuilding programmes on board. The company also has a strategic partnership with Focus Adventure in Singapore and at times rope in corporate training facilitators to implement teambuilding workshops.

Said Star Cruises senior vice president-sales, Michael Goh: "These learning programmes are impactful and effective as they are developed based on real-time organisational issues. As a result, dynamic teams with strong synergies are formed. Importantly, the team enjoys a fun time during the 'learncentive' cruise, a combination of adventure teambuilding learning and incentive. What's more, they discover exciting destinations each day, savour up to six meals daily, enjoy entertainment and indulge in recreational facilities and services, with a touch of warm Asian hospitality."

Operations also include the cruise entertainment team, F&B team with celebrity chefs, tours & travel and conference teams, all of whom work together to enhance organisers' expectations.

Royal Caribbean International boasts

having dedicated onboard convention service coordinators providing round-the-clock personal assistance to organisers, although it does not have dedicated teambuilding staff.

Said Royal Caribbean's managing director-Singapore, Jennifer Yap: "These coordinators can work with our clients' teambuilding planners (external parties) to make special, customised arrangements for onboard group programmes, menus for group dinners and facilities for group meetings and conferences. We can also assist to organise exclusive group shore excursions tailor-made or selected from our shore excursion menu."

## Under one roof

Not only do event organisers and teambuilding specialists have a captive audience in hand, what a rich playground under one roof too.

Ships today have a variety of entertainment and relaxation options, outdoor and indoor spaces, and meeting rooms that lend themselves well to teambuilding. In fact, mega ships appear made for it: those from Royal Caribbean, for instance, have a 9m rock-climbing wall, full-sized sports court, ice skating rink, surf simulator, Zip Line, AquaTheatre for aquatic acrobatic performances and 3D movie theatres.

The opening of new cruise terminals in Asia, such as Singapore's Marina Bay Cruise Centre, enable these companies to deploy larger ships, such as Royal Caribbean with its *Voyager of the Seas* and *Mariner of the Seas*, both 138,000 GRT. These ships come with a wider variety and larger MICE and entertainment facilities, which invariably appeal to larger groups and discerning corporate clients.

This does not mean smaller ships are disadvantaged, however. Silversea's Yap recalled: "We have had programmes where all delegates were dropped on land and the ship 'left' them on the island. The delegates had to do a treasure hunt involving getting to another location on land and, bingo, the ship was there again to pick them up.

"Or, how about the time when we had a group of radio-controlled model planes take off from the deck of our ship and participants had to 'shoot them down' with laser guns. All special audio effects were made onboard with the specialist equipment the clients brought."

Entire Silversea ships have also been chartered for incentives, with clients tailoring the programme to give their delegates something they cannot buy off the shelf. Silversea's Yap urged planners to



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“see us (ships) as the venue, the canvas on which the total programme can be projected”.

“There are very few things which are not possible. Whatever you can arrange in a hotel or resort, we can do it on-board and often better! The ships are the venues. Especially when you charter the ship – you can let your imagination run free,” he said.

Cruise companies are also quick to point out that they do not cause much out-of-the-pocket unexpected expenses for meeting planners.

“Our all-inclusive shipboard experience for incentive groups even includes any meetings or events you would like to arrange exclusively for your group. In addition, standard incentive group amenities on a Crystal cruise include one complimentary private cocktail party and US\$200 per person shipboard credit. Our streamlined all-inclusive shipboard experience makes budgeting easy for meeting planners as it removes the concern of unexpected costs,” said Whipple.

Said Royal Caribbean’s Yap: “Most of our corporate groups onboard conduct teambuilding activities. The use of our venues and amenities are complimentary. Manpower for the running of the activities and F&B will be chargeable.”

## Sunrise industry

Cruise lines said they are seeing a healthy rise in Asian meetings and incentives, with most corporate groups conducting

teambuilding sessions on board.

Said Whipple: “Teambuilding is an essential component. Part of teambuilding is networking and developing connections via special, organised private functions onboard and in ports. It also appeals to meeting planners and organisers because all of the services necessary for any event are available onboard, typically at no additional cost.”

Star Cruises observed a double-digit year-on-year growth in Asian meetings.

Royal Caribbean’s Yap said incentive travel is a popular trend for companies in Indonesia, India, South Korea and China – the line’s top Asian MICE markets – and the novelty of something new like cruising raises MICE sales that it now makes up “almost 50 per cent of our total sales, and we expect this to grow”.

Princess Cruises’ director, South-east Asia, Farriek Tawfik, cannot wait to get in the act. “When *Sapphire Princess* home-ports in Singapore for an extended season of cruise trips in the region next year, we will be offering shorthaul trips of three or four days which are highly suitable for teambuilding and meeting purposes.

“We have plans to set up a department to cater to the corporate meetings market and we are confident that as cruise travel in Asia continues to increase in popularity, we will see a healthy pipeline of interest from this sector.”

Luxury cruises have also taken off. Silversea’s Yap said the growth is Asia “is increasing at a rapid pace”.

“We, Silversea, have acknowledged

this quite a few years ago and are expanding our activities in Asia both with financial as well as human capital. We are beginning to see the fruits of our labour in the past and are stepping up our activities on all fronts.”

Likewise, Crystal is seeing “a healthy increased demand”. Said Whipple: “As the economy continues to have a healthy return, businesses are seeking more creative rewards for their top producers. Luxury cruises are presented as an option more than previously. As a result we are experiencing more Asian incentive groups. This year, we had our first two incentive groups, and will have another from Asia next year. We are working on more as we speak. All the groups are of a significant size. Banking is a key incentive market, and the most popular itinerary for Crystal’s Asian incentive groups are seven-day Mediterranean cruises. We typically host incentive groups on our European voyages, but are now experiencing increasing requests for Canada/New England as well.”

## All aboard

Cruise companies said teambuilding onboard is virtually foolproof; aside from the ‘danger’ may be of putting on a few pounds on the waistline, and bad weather, which always is a factor whether at sea or on land, there is little that could go wrong. The trick, they said, is for planners to understand what innovative amenities and unique-at-sea facilities are

available at their fingertips.

“Once they understand and appreciate this difference with shoreside options, they can better leverage facilities to engage the group, instead of replicating a land-based teambuilding experience on a cruise,” said Royal Caribbean’s Yap.

And, as always with teambuilding, event planners must define their company’s business objectives, added Goh.

“From there, we will conduct ship tours with them to identify (potential) event venues, evaluate the integrated cruise options and onboard requirements, before we formulate a detailed cruise programme to fulfil their needs. Once communicated and agreed upon, we will move into event implementation. With such a foolproof plan, pitfalls can be easily avoided,” he said.

As for bad weather, one line at least claims to even be able to control it.

Recalled Silversea’s Yap: “We once had a deck BBQ set up for a client and it began to rain just before the event started. The captain rushed to the bridge and asked both the MD of the client company and I to join him there. He switched the radar on and you could see the rain-clouds around the ship. He lifted the anchor and very slowly zig-zagged around the rain areas. The result was a successful deck BBQ; the MD took pictures of the rain clouds on the radar copies, which were given to each delegate. They talked about it for years!”

– The full feature can be found in November 2013 issue of TTTGmice



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# Taking a turn for the better

MICE business in the kingdom is starting to improve after cancellations earlier in the year, writes **Greg Lowe**

Restoring MICE buyers' confidence in Thailand is now key; Wat Arun, on the banks of the Chao Phraya River, pictured here



Thailand's political crisis has damaged the MICE industry, forcing the national convention bureau to revise down its arrivals and revenue targets for the fiscal year by 12.4 per cent and 1.4 per cent respectively.

Travel specialists and hoteliers say the market has not clawed back the losses from early in the year, however, it is slowly starting to recover. Rebuilding the trade's confidence in the destination remains their key priority.

"It's not about offering discounts, it's

**50,000** The number of attendees, including 20,000 from 23 countries, expected at the 2014 Unicity Global Convention taking place from October 15-18 this year

about restoring confidence in the destination," said Alison Taylor, vice president of sales, Asia-Pacific for Starwood Hotels and Resorts, adding that over the past two months the brand has seen an increase in both transient bookings and requests for proposals from MICE clients interested in visiting Thailand.

Earlier in September, the company held its regional media launch for the SPG Pro loyalty programme in Bangkok. It will host its customer advisory board, which comprises CEOs, property owners and PCOs from across Asia-Pacific, in Thailand later this year.

"We're doing this to show how confident we are about Thailand," said Taylor. "We could have chosen from any destination in the region, but we chose Thailand for a reason."

Max Jantasuwan, director of Events Travel Asia, agreed, saying business has started to improve now that buyers can see the security situation has stabilised over the past few months.

"The MICE market in Thailand has been much better since the situation returned to normal," he said.

"We are fortunate because we deal with businesses which have a short lead time (for booking events), so we will have an average of four to five events per month until the year ends. We hope the situation remains stable."

David Barrett, executive director for events at Amari Atrium and Amari Pattaya, told the *Daily*: "Earlier this year we saw a considerable amount of business

loss (because of the political situation). The outlook is bright though as confidence is being regained."

Thailand's MICE industry had been performing well prior to the political crisis. In fiscal year 2012/2013, which runs October to September, Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau said the country welcomed 1,013,502 overseas MICE visitors. The bureau has since revised down its forecast for fiscal year 2013/2014 to 888,210 visitors, with revenue of 87.2 billion baht (US\$2.7 billion).

Conventions are set to lead the sector with 264,874 visitors, down 16.2 per cent, followed by incentives with 235,191 (-5.5 per cent), meetings with 225,748 (-14.6 per cent) and exhibitions with 888,210 (1-12.4 per cent).

In terms of revenue, conventions are targeting 31.6 billion baht, up one per cent, followed by meetings with 25.7 billion baht (-4.6 per cent), incentives with 16.9 billion baht (+6.8 per cent) and exhibitions with 13.1 billion baht (-1.4 per cent).

Initially Bangkok and Pattaya were affected by the crisis, with resort destinations proving more resilient. However, recent research from C9 Hotelworks reveals that both the lucrative Phuket and Koh Samui markets have suffered as a result of the travel advisories. Both markets slumped mid-year but are now showing signs of growth.

Anti-government groups led street protests and an occupation of Bangkok, which occasionally resulted in violent and deadly clashes with police and government supporters, for almost seven months until army chief general Prayuth Chan-ocha staged a coup on May 22, ousting the elected government and bringing the demonstrations to an end. At press time, Thailand is still under martial law ever since. The general was recently installed as the junta's prime minister.

## Marketplace

### Thames Valley Khao Yai

This recently opened property offers a unique immersive experience, an environment modelled on the Thames Valley in southern England. Along with its F&B outlets and spa, the hotel features three events venues: St Andrew, which seats 36 people theatre-style; the multipurpose 100-pax St Paul; and Tower of Thames, an al fresco rooftop space with room for 60 guests cocktail-style.

Visit [www.thamesvalleykhaoyai.com](http://www.thamesvalleykhaoyai.com) for more information.

### Thailand MICE Rewards

Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau has launched *Thailand MICE Rewards*, a series of special promotional packages including *Meetings Bonus*, which offers organisers financial subsidies for meetings and incentives groups of 200 pax, staying a minimum of three nights; *Conventions Bonus*, which offers subsidies for associations, PCOs, governments and educational institutions that bring in groups of 300 or more delegates to international conventions in the kingdom; *Business Up 2 U*, a fixed subsidy programme for exhibitions based on their previous years' performance; and *Be My Guest*, which provides international exhibition buyers and visitors with financial support for room night allocation, up to a maximum of two room nights per person per exhibition.

Call +66 (0)2-694 6000 for more details on qualifying criteria.

### Holiday Inn Pattaya

Holiday Inn Pattaya recently opened its new Executive Tower which, with the addition of 200 rooms, brings the property's key count to 567. The new workshop meeting floor includes a 950-pax ballroom and three flexible meetings rooms. Other facilities include three swimming pools, six bars and restaurants and a kids-eat-free policy.

More information on the property can be found at [www.holidayinn.com](http://www.holidayinn.com).



### Hilton Phuket Arcadia Resort & Spa

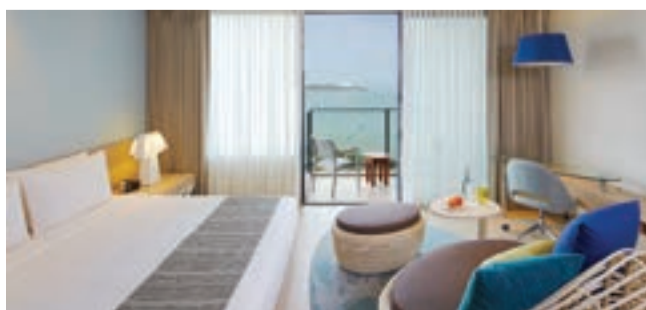
This luxury hotel on the popular Thai island of Phuket has expanded the number of its meeting spaces to 16 with the launch of the Andaman Room, a 180m<sup>2</sup> space which can accommodate 130 people in a theatre-style set up. The venue can be divided into two rooms and is connected to an additional 66m<sup>2</sup> of sheltered outdoor space.

Visit [www.hilton.com](http://www.hilton.com) for more information.

### Indigo Pearl Phuket

This island resort has developed a package aimed at helping high-level delegates recharge their batteries before or after events. A range of special spa treatments, in-room aromatherapy, meditation, yoga and tai chi classes, herbal teas and group sleep sessions have been put together to help send guests off to the land of nod.

Visit [www.indigo-pearl.com](http://www.indigo-pearl.com) for more details.



# Golf is our favourite course

By Patrick Tan

IT&CMA and CTW Asia-Pacific organised a friendly golf game for members of the industry on Monday ahead of the show.

A total of 25 participants, including TTG Asia Media's managing director, Darren Ng, enjoyed a half day out at the Thai Country Club, showcasing their golf skills as well as reconnecting with old pals and making new ones.

It was truly a case of play the course, not your opponent.



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# Sharing of best practices By Patrick Tan



More than a dozen travel managers met in a closed-door roundtable discussion yesterday, focusing on safety and security, supplier negotiation and technology



Oracle Corporation Singapore's Michelle Tan, Atmel Malaysia's Janice Chuah and Gemalto Singapore's Jean Bey



Accenture Japan's Tomoko Lizuka, Accenture China's Miley Jiang and TTTG Asia Media's Jo-ann Siregar



Juniper Networks India's Leena Andrews and Freescale Semiconductor India's Sunil Gupta



Emerson Network Power Philippines' Abigail Jamito and OCBC Bank Singapore's Hung Ling Tsong

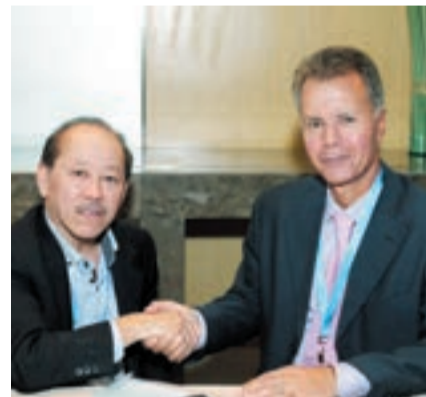
# Buyers stream in By Patrick Tan



Magenta Consulting Services Singapore's George Yeo



The Association of Universities of Asia and the Pacific Thailand's Noel Gindoy and Ruben Umalay



Discover Holidays (Asia) Singapore's Rodney Yew and Darya Masir Tour & Travel Iran's Gh Honarvar



Freme Travel Services Brunei's Michael Lee and Suzhou China International Travel Service's Ding Haiyang



Agriscambi Italy's Cesare Maria Ortis and Destinations of the World Malaysia's Evie Oh



Melia Hotels International Indonesia's Sharon Lee and Gran Melia Hotel China's Joey Qin



Communications & Training Italy's Gianna Brunet and Tripware MICE Italy's Daniela Linda Mengoni



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