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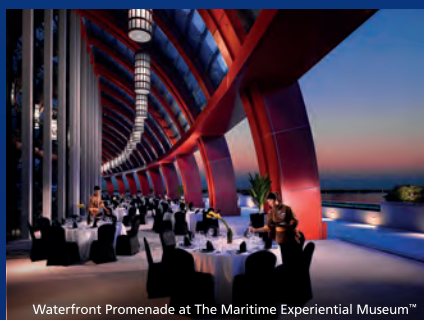
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TALKING NUMBERS

800 The minimum number of participants at the inaugural IT&CM India, which kicks off today. Delegates comprise 160 exhibitors, 151 buyers and 31 media representatives. The rest are made up of Conventions India Conclave attendees and IT&CM India trade visitors.

74 The percentage of international buyers at the show. European buyers (34 per cent) make up the largest contingent, while Asia-Pacific (29.8 per cent) comes in with the second largest representation.

77 The number in square metres occupied by the Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Bureau – the largest exhibiting pavilion.

2,568 The amount in US dollars that each local and foreign delegate spends per meeting in India, according to ICCA.

19 The number of days the UN Convention on Biodiversity will span when it is held at the Hyderabad International Convention Centre from October 1-19 this year. It will be the longest-ever international convention to be held in India and some 7,000 delegates are expected.

India has to do more: Sirk

By Shekhar Niyogi and Rohit Kaul

A REVOLUTION in MICE infrastructure and the way the business is regarded is required to further India's MICE business development, according to Martin Sirk, ICCA CEO.

Sirk, who believes that India has a tremendous potential of attracting international MICE events because of its status as an economic powerhouse, said: "India is certainly on the minds of (MICE organisers) because global companies are interested in doing business in India. (But) one has to understand that MICE is not just a tourism (business). Business considerations take a front seat when a company plans its event in a particular destination. So India has an advantage.

"But India needs better and modern convention venues in major cities such as Delhi and Mumbai. India needs purpose-



Sirk: India has the benefit of being an economic powerhouse

built convention centres that offer facilities such as flexible space and world-class communication systems."

The challenge of India's limited MICE infrastructure is not unfamiliar to A T Seasons & Vacations Travel India managing director, Amaresh Tiwari. "We had difficulty finding a venue for 2,000 delegates for the upcoming Indian Association of Tour Operators convention

in Mumbai (in September), and were forced to reduce the number of delegates. We need convention facilities for large conferences in major cities," he said.

Sirk emphasised the need for a shift in the way the MICE business is regarded by the government and private sector players, saying that "government-private sector partnerships ought to be more cohesive" and that the MICE industry "should be treated more as a knowledge economy".

He encouraged industry sectors to regard conventions as knowledge enhancers that "can help (them) to grow through continued (interaction) with international experts".

"The focus should move away from the immediate bottomline and be more long-term holistic gain oriented," he said.

Chander Mansharamani, Alpcord Network managing director and the India Conven-

tion Promotion Bureau vice chairman called for the industry to "adopt new perspectives on educating ourselves and developing more meaningful MICE events".

Citing an example, Mansharamani said the tourism office of the Government of India had recently helped to organise a roadshow to the UK, where only corporate MICE buyers – and not DMCS – were invited.

"The event helped to cut intermediary costs and, to a greater extent, enabled us to better understand the needs of clients and assure them of the actual cost of possible deliverables. This is a healthy shift in marketing focus," he said.

Vicky Soin, assistant vice president-outbound MICE, agreed that industry cohesion was needed, especially to discourage trade players from "cutting corners on delivery and booking business at lower than workable prices".



A meeting of MICE minds

Organised by the India Convention Promotion Bureau (ICPB) with support from the Ministry of Tourism, the seventh edition of Conventions India Conclave kicked off yesterday at the India Expo Mart in Greater Noida. The two-day event focuses on the positive impact of MICE beyond the tourism sector, as well as key trends and best practices within the industry. Chander Mansharamani, ICPB's vice chairman, delivered the welcome address, offering the audience an overview of the bureau's vision for the future, while ICCA CEO, Martin Sirk, gave the keynote address on the challenges of India becoming a world-class international convention destination and its untapped potential (see story above, *India has to do more: Sirk*). – Linda Haden

Singapore is too expensive for Indian MICE

By Linda Haden

SINGAPORE, once the doyen of Indian MICE planners and corporate firms, is fast losing its shine.

Despite the Singapore Tourism Board's (STB) upbeat projections about this segment's immediate prospects, event planners and PCOs are reporting fewer numbers from India to the city state, as costs – particularly from accommodation – continue to rise.

Rajiv Kumar Singh, Nor-

tel's country operation leader, reported that the firm's Indian MICE volume to Singapore had fallen 30 per cent since 2007.

He said: "The depreciation of the rupee and a slowdown in the (Indian) economy since 2011 has squeezed budgets even further since the financial crisis of 2008/2009, and Singapore is losing out, as it has now become too expensive for (Indian) MICE organisers to even consider.

"Hotel rates are the main bugbear, as Singapore (hotels) charges up to 50 per cent more

than regional destinations such as Thailand or Sri Lanka."

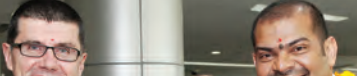
Singh explained that budgets had to stretch to US\$65-US\$70 per delegate per day in Singapore versus spending just US\$25-US\$35 in Thailand and Sri Lanka for similar events.

Rajesh Mahajan, an assistant general manager for special events at ICE, said that on top of India's economic woes, emerging MICE infrastructure within India was also driving business away from popular outbound destinations such as Singapore.

"Organisers are drawn by the fact is that it is cheaper to hold a meeting domestically rather than abroad," he said.

Lanco Infratech's deputy general manager for administration, Sanjeev Mehta, remarked that Singapore may have lost its footing for now, but it is still in the running. "Its attractions, MICE infrastructure and services are second to none, and (STB) works relentlessly to promote Singapore to Indians. It's just that hotel rates must come down."



A photograph of three men standing together indoors, likely at a formal event. The man on the left is wearing a dark suit, a red tie, and glasses, and has a yellow flower lei around his neck. The man in the center is wearing a dark suit and a light blue shirt. The man on the right is wearing a grey suit, a green tie, and has a yellow flower lei around his neck. They are all smiling at the camera. The background shows a modern building interior with large windows and pillars.

A group of five women are posing for a photo at a convention. They are all smiling and giving thumbs up. The woman on the far left is wearing a blue saree. The woman next to her is wearing a red saree and glasses. The woman in the center is wearing a black blazer. The woman next to her is wearing a black top. The woman on the far right is wearing a peach-colored blazer. They are all wearing lanyards with badges. In the background, a banner reads "Hyderabad The Convention Capital of India".

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For centuries, Malaysia has been a nexus for thrill-seekers escaping into the exotic. Victorian ladies came here to ride elephants to explore the world's oldest virgin rainforests. These days, the pace has picked up a lot. Putting an F1 car through its paces at the Sepang International Circuit is now a must-do for adrenaline rush connoisseurs.

Or explore the crystal-clear waters off Sipadan, which Jacques Cousteau called the last "untouched piece of art".

There is so much more. You could help care for Orang Utans, then go dancing with head-hunters in their long house. Or dine in the Mulu Caves, the world's largest and set within a forest unchanged for over 200 million years. And in between some of the best shopping, there is white-water rafting and even BASE-jumping. Make an incentive trip to Malaysia and you'll fast appreciate why Malaysia is light-years away from the everyday.

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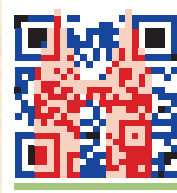


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Fun in the city

From celebrated heritage sites to vibrant entertainment houses to themed restaurants, **Rohit Kaul** shows you where to live it up in the capital city



Akshardham

What The Hindu temple complex was developed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the spiritual

head of the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha. A temple, crafted entirely out of stone, sits in the centre of the complex. Visitors can enjoy the complex's landscaped gardens, water fountains and pavilions, attend an ongoing exhibition, watch an IMAX feature on the early life of Swaminarayan as a teenage yogi, or enjoy a 12-minute spiritual boat ride.

How to use it Include Akshardham in a pre- or post-meeting city tour or as part of an incentive programme.

Address NH 24, Noida Mor

Humayun's Tomb

What Humayun's Tomb is both a UNESCO World Heritage Site and an architectural marvel. The tomb of the Mughal emperor Humayun was built in 1569, and was inspired by Persian architecture.

How to use it The attraction can be included in a pre- or post-meeting city tour or as part of an incentive programme. Special group rates are available.

Address Nizamuddin East

Red Fort

What Built in the 17th century by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, the Red Fort is Old Delhi's largest and most



renowned monument. River Yamuna provides the perfect backdrop for the Red Fort, and the complex attracts visitors with its long stretches of green boulevards and unique blend of different architectural styles.

How to use it Educational tours of the Red Fort can be arranged.

Address Netaji Subhash Road

Qutub Minar

What Constructed with red sandstone and marble, Qutub Minar is India's second tallest minaret and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The minaret towers 72.5m up, and is covered with intricate carvings and verses from the Qur'an.

How to use it Suitable as an attraction to visit before or after a business event.

Address Ladha Sarai, Mehrauli



Delhi Haat

What Run by Delhi Tourism and Transportation Development Corporation, Delhi Haat is an outdoor bazaar with stalls that sell crafts and foodstuff from different Indian states. Shoppers can get their hands on Kashmiri shawls, fruit beer from Assam, Indian artifacts, paintings, traditional jewellery and puppets, and decorative items.

How to use it Perfect for accompanying spouses who enjoy retail therapy

Address Dilli Haat (opposite INA Market), Sri Aurobindo Marg

Khan Market

What Regarded as a posh retail space, Khan Market in southern New Delhi features branded outlets. It is also popular for a selection of quality restaurants, books and handicraft lamps.

How to use it Perfect for accompanying spouses who enjoy retail therapy

Address Near India Gate

Select CityWalk

What Located in the heart of South Delhi, Select CityWalk is a complex that houses shops carrying international brands, entertainment outlets, restaurants and cafes, and beauty salons, among others.

How to use it Perfect for accompanying spouses who enjoy retail therapy

Address A-3 District Centre Saket



Select CityWalk

Janpath

What One of Delhi's most popular and liveliest markets, Janpath is the place to go to for local handicrafts, silver and fashion accessories, leather footwear, Indian artifacts and decorative items at reasonable prices.

How to use it Perfect for accompanying spouses who enjoy retail therapy, or as a shopping destination where event delegates can hunt for souvenirs

Address Near Connaught Place

Chandani Chowk

What Chandani Chowk was built in the 17th century and has various lanes with shops that specialise in specific products. For instance, for fabrics, head to Katra Neel; for gold jewellery, head to Balli Mara.

How to use it Feature this in a pre- or post-meeting city tour or as part of an incentive programme.

Address Old Delhi, near the Red Fort



The Second Sin

What Eat, drink and enjoy is the motto of this classy restaurant.

Although the quality of food and the ambience are similar to that of a five-star hotel, prices are very affordable. Spread over 1,765m², The Second Sin offers one of the largest dining spaces in Delhi. There are indoor and outdoor seating areas.

How to use it The Second Sin can tailor a menu for groups, and can seat up to 800 guests.

Address 4th Floor, MGF Metropolitan, Saket

Website <http://thesecondsin.co.in>

Veda Restaurant

What The brainchild of Indian fashion designer Rohit Bal and entrepreneur Alok Aggarwal, Veda Restaurant serves modern interpretations of old culinary dishes. Interiors are a feast for the eyes too, featuring *thekri ka kaam* glasswork, red bricks and handsome high-back leather seats.

How to use it For intimate dinners with valued business partners or for networking dinner functions. Veda Restaurant can adapt its space and menu to suit groups.

Address Next to Bharath Petrol Station H-27, Outer Circle, Connaught Place

Contact (91-11) 4151-3535

Big Chill

What Big Chill boasts authentic Italian food and party-perfect settings. Located within the upscale Khan Market, the restaurant serves up salads, soups, pastas, pizzas, grilled fish and delicate desserts.

How to use it Although it is not suitable for dining events, Big Chill makes a lovely place to hang out after some intensive shopping at Khan Market.

Address 68A, Khan Market

Contact aseem@thebigchillonline.com

Bukhara

What Serving tandoori cuisine, Bukhara has won over the hearts and tummies of head of states, celebrities and everyone else since 1978. Taking on a sophisticated ethnic look, the earth-toned decor features rough-hewn trestle tables and wooden stools, copper pots and urns suspended from the ceiling and pillars.

How to use it Bukhara offers foreign delegates the perfect introduction to quality tandoori cuisine.
Address ITC Maurya, Diplomatic Enclave, Chanakyapuri, Sardar Patel Marg
Contact reservations.itcmaurya@itcho-tels.in



F-Bar

What Tucked within The Ashok New Delhi, F-Bar is positioned as a party arena for trend-setting city folks. A well-appointed bar serves top quality Scotch whiskies and champagne.
How to use it Perfect for evening socials after business events in one of the function rooms in The Ashok New Delhi.
Address Diplomatic Enclave, 50-B Chanakayapuri
Contact ashokhotel@vsnl.com, ashoknd@ndb.vsnl.net.in

Tips on Delhi

- 1** Delhi is at its best in winter, which starts from end of November to February/March. Temperatures may go as low as 4°C at the peak of winter though, but in general that is the ideal season for outdoor events and post-show city tours. Avoid the monsoon season from July to September.
- 2** India has many festivals, some of which are perfect for foreigners who desire a taste of India's culture and heritage. Recommended festivals to catch are *Diwali* and *Holi*. Republic Day (January 26) and Independence Day (August 15) are interesting too, but offices and shops are closed on these days and security is especially tight.
- 3** If you are planning to hire a taxi in Delhi, it is better to avail the services of reputable car rental companies such as Carzonrent, Meru, Avis and Mango Cabs. These taxis can be booked on-line or by calling a hotline. Avoid other private taxis as they tend to overcharge and are not safe.
- 4** English is widely spoken in Delhi, from taxi drivers to shopkeepers to office workers.
- 5** It is common to tip hotel porters and waiters in restaurants. One could tip Rs50 (US\$0.90) in a good restaurant.
- 6** Avoid wearing skimpy clothes when visiting religious attractions in Delhi.
- 7** One may encounter beggars or hawkers in India. Avoid giving them money or buying anything from them.
- 8** Mastercard and Visa credit cards are widely-accepted.

Hype
What Located in Shangri-La's Eros Hotel in New Delhi, Hype is one of the hottest dance clubs of the moment in the city. It features a huge dance floor and bar area, and attracts a hip, young crowd that

parties till the doors are shut at 03.00. Theme parties are held and different guest DJs are featured throughout the week, although the crowd's favourite appears to be DJ Aqeel. Hype's drink menu features the usual poisons and mocktails, as well as finger food.

How to use it For networking events or as a fun way to celebrate the end of an intensive meeting or conference. A cover charge applies for walk-in club patrons.
Address Shangri-La's Eros Hotel, 19 Ashoka Road, Connaught Place
Contact (91-11) 4119-1919



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 - ♥ Cocktail reception at Main Street Railroad Station Platform
 - ♥ Disney in the Stars Fireworks Show
 - ♥ Executive Speech and The Golden Mickeys Show at the Storybook Theatre
 - ♥ Exclusive Fantasyland dinner buffet
- Price:**
- ♥ Dinner Buffet menu starts from HK\$480 per person (plus 10% service charge)
 - ♥ Special discount on Group Park Ticket is available

(Rate is subject to change without prior notice. Venue rental and entertainment atmosphere package fees will apply, subject to group size and special arrangement required. Beverage package is available at additional charges.)

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Shanghai's new target

The Chinese city looks to tap the Indian MICE market but it must first address several concerns, says **Patricia Wee**

The Indian market in Shanghai is still a relatively new sector that has not been effectively targeted for MICE, as evidenced by the lack of information gleaned from local DMCs and the Shanghai Municipal Tourism Administration (SMTA).

No statistics of this market were available from the SMTA at press time, but deputy director, Patrick Chen, said that the NTO has plans to work with the China National Tourist Administration New Delhi office to promote Shanghai as a MICE destination. Fam trips for Indian MICE buyers may be on the cards.

MICE events from India have yet to be confirmed for this year, and Chen said more had to be done to better understand the needs of Indian MICE travellers.

He said: "The challenge for us is the lack of knowledge about the customs and behaviours of the Indian visitors, so we have to learn more about it."

A typical Indian MICE traveller wants a value-for-money package that offers good Indian food, shopping and nightlife, according to Anil Gupta, director of Mumbai-based Anjali Travel & Tours.

"MICE (events) generally do not go beyond three nights and (delegates) need extensive sight-seeing and a (packed) schedule," he said.

Anjali Travel & Tours had brought groups to China in the past and is considering bringing



Shanghai Municipal Tourism Administration is looking to grow Indian MICE traffic into the city

back more in the next two years. At press time in July, the company was close to inking three events to China.

Gupta added that pharmaceutical and insurance companies would be interested in China.

Munind Shah, director of The Travel Planners Gujarat, has also been recommending China as one of the prime destinations to host incentives or conferences.

"Most clients would like us to provide them (with) an array of destinations to choose from and in several cases, China is featured in them," he said.

The demand for incentives and meetings from leading manufacturing, pharmaceutical and IT companies are on the rise, according to Shah.

"Food and language are still some of the major drawbacks. Indian MICE groups want quality hotels, cuisine and good prices, apart from an unforgettable venue."

Munind Shah
Director
The Travel Planners

"Considering that most Indian companies would like their best personnel to be rewarded with an unforgettable incentive trip, they (would) make sure to choose a new country which

would (boost) participants' morale and also provide them with a greater sense of satisfaction," said Shah, adding that a few incentive groups to China have been confirmed while some meetings are being decided upon.

He pointed out that it is less challenging now to lead groups to China, due to the increase in bilateral cooperation between India and China and low cultural barriers.

He said: "It used to be really difficult to convince our clients because of visa regulations, language barriers and other innumerable issues."

Although these challenges were "slowly easing out", Shah said China's tourism board must press ahead in supporting and

marketing the destination to make 'brand China' more popular among Indian travellers.

"Food and language are still some of the major drawbacks. Indian MICE groups want quality hotels, cuisine and good prices, apart from an unforgettable venue," he added.

In Shanghai, there is no lack of good Indian cuisine, especially in five-star hotels. Offsite restaurant options include Bukhara Indian Grill & Lounge, The Tandoor, Indian Kitchen, Bombay Bistro and Hazara.

However, a Bukhara spokesperson confirmed that not much is currently being done to launch joint promotions between the tourism industry and Indian eateries. Bukhara could appeal to Indian event planners, as it offers a bar screening sports events on the first floor, a dining room on the second and a conference-cum-banquet hall on the third.

With the Indian market so new to China, MICE players in both China and India see much potential for growth in the future if Indian travellers' concerns over dietary needs and costs are addressed.

Akram Touma, general manager of Jumeirah Himalayas Hotel Shanghai and a veteran with 20 years of experience in China's hotel industry, believes that China's potential with Indian groups lies more in the meetings and exhibitions segments rather than in incentives for now.

NEED TO KNOW

Meet and swing away

Golf-loving delegates can enjoy a round on the greens before or after their meetings at the Crowne Plaza Shanghai Anting Golf, which will open this month.

The hotel offers 2,000m² of meeting space, including a grand ballroom for up to 1,200 people, and 415 guestrooms with views of the 18-hole golf course.

Located in Shanghai's Jia Ding District, the hotel is 15km from Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport and is close to Huaqiao CBD.

An opening offer of RMB698 (US\$109) per roomnight is available from August 1.



From airport to heliport

The Longhua Airport in Xuhui district, Shanghai will be rebuilt as a heliport, enabling VIPs to take helicopters to Shanghai Pudong International Airport and Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport.

The decommissioned airport spans 30,000m² and will have a taxiway, three terminals and a refuelling base. Over 4,000 helicopters are expected to take off and land at the heliport annually by 2020.

Give a gift of sweet treats

If you are looking for a special gift for your event participants in Shanghai, do consider Jean Georges' customised chocolates.

You can choose from 17 fillings such as Baileys, Grand Marnier, cranberry, cinnamon, anise coffee and blackcurrant, and even customise the appearance of the sweet treats and packaging.

Orders are usually ready in three days, but larger quantities of more than 15 boxes with unique chocolate shapes will require five to seven days.

Prices vary from RMB238 (US\$37) for six pieces of chocolates per box to RMB1,888 for 72 pieces. Contact (86-21) 6321-7733 for details.

Discounted stays at Shanghai JC Mandarin

The 514-room Shanghai JC Mandarin has rolled out a Great Saver Package that is valid for stays from now till December 31, 2012.

Subject to a 15 per cent service charge, the discounted rates start from RMB880 (US\$138) per person per night, or RMB980 for two persons. The package includes overnight accommodation in a deluxe room, complimentary buffet breakfast and high-speed Internet access.

Subject to availability and requiring advanced booking, the deal cannot be used in conjunction with other promotional offers or discounts. For reservations, email resvn.shanghai@jcmmandarin.com.

The hotel sits on the lively Nanjing Road, close to business and shopping districts.

Air-rail service takes off

China Eastern Airlines has partnered Shanghai Railway Bureau to launch China's first air-rail service, allowing passengers to transfer between a domestic or international flight and a train using a single ticket to cities such as Ningbo, Suzhou, Wuxi and Changzhou. More routes will open over the next few months, linking the cities with at least 900 daily China Eastern flights.



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This region is a special place for travellers and our vast experience in handling clients from all over the world allows us to create the most memorable programmes for you. Our excellent relationships across the sub-continent with hotels and others who make up this labyrinth of a destination allows us to get priority when others are just others.

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Sights trained on India

But the country needs to tackle several hurdles to woo the MICE segment effectively, says **Marianne Carandang**

The Philippines is zeroing in on Indian incentive groups and corporate travellers, as “these two sectors are the ‘low hanging fruits’”, said Glen Agustin, Team India head of the country’s Department of Tourism (DoT).

In the first four months of 2012, Indian arrivals reached 14,938, posting a year-on-year growth of 4.2 per cent.

Inbound consultants specialising in the Indian market also reported the Philippines’ growing popularity among Indian MICE travellers. Paz Alberto, president of Ark Travel Express, said: “We have a lot of enquiries now from (consultants) handling pharmaceutical and local companies that are sending their top sales people here, both for sightseeing and meetings.”

“Typical peak months for Indian incentive groups were June and July but they are now more spread out throughout the year,” noted James Montenegro, general manager of Cebu’s Crimson Resort & Spa Mactan, which sees the Indian market gaining momentum.

Similar trends are observed at Hyatt Hotel and Casino Manila, where incentives are leading by far, said director of sales and marketing, Joy de Mesa.

Agustin pointed to the Philippines’ good mix of luxury



Mövenpick Resort & Spa Huma Island will soon debut in Palawan

and bargain shopping choices, affordable Indian cuisine, ease of English communication and convenient currency exchange as the selling points that appeal to Indian MICE groups, which usually range between 50 to 150 pax. This segment is particularly value-conscious though, as they seldom use five-star hotels and visit more than one destination, he noted.

Connectivity and airfares remain bugbears in the Philippines’ bid to attract more Indian travellers. Currently, Philippine Airlines is the only carrier offering thrice-weekly flights between Manila and New Delhi.

Most Indian travellers take about six hours to fly direct to



Manila, so “the Philippines may not be attractive and feasible to all in terms of price,” said Agustin.

Alberto said: “Our biggest competitors are Thailand and Indonesia. India has direct flights and a number of low

cost carriers flying to these two countries.

“We are an archipelago, so (travellers) need to buy a ticket to visit our islands, thus making us more expensive.”

Indian and vegetarian food arrangements for large groups

outside Manila, Cebu and Boracay can be challenging, requiring advance planning.

Judy Nieva, general manager, Select Travel, said: “For very big groups, we often have to put them up in large hotels, as not many Indian restaurants can handle capacity over 40 or 50 pax.”

The Hyatt Manila has risen to fill the void by appointing an Indian national as the head of F&B and hiring chefs trained in Indian cuisine. Indian food is also included in the hotel’s buffet, a la carte and in-room dining menu, something uncommon across many local hotels.

Although the Philippine Bureau of Immigration has granted 14-day visa-free entry for Indian nationals holding visas from the US, Canada, Japan, Australia, the UK, Singapore and Schengen nations since May 1, the privilege has not been extended to MICE groups. Ark Travel’s Alberto deems this arrangement a drawback for the country’s MICE pursuits. Fortunately, the DoT is in talks with the Department of Foreign Affairs and the immigration bureau to expand privileges for Indian groups.

Meanwhile, to sweeten the deal for visiting MICE groups, the DoT is offering incentives such as lei reception, giveaways, brochures and airport facilitation.

NEED TO KNOW

A trio of experiences awaiting discovery



Suites in Tagaytay, inclusive of daily breakfast for two in addition to other perks. Soon to be launched is *My Discovery Club*, a corporate bookers programme that rewards stays in all three properties.

The Discovery Leisure Company has launched *My Discovery Experience*, a four-night leisure package that cross-promotes the group’s three properties. For US\$850++, guests can experience a two-night stay in Discovery Shores Boracay, which has a brand-new meeting room, as well as a one-night stay each at Discovery Suites in Manila and Discovery Country

New air connections enhance Davao’s accessibility

Davao’s accessibility as a tourist and business destination has been boosted by the revival of Wings Air’s weekly Davao-Manado service and the introduction of SEAir’s twice-daily Manila-Davao flights. SEAir’s new service complements the carrier’s existing twice-daily Singapore-Manila flights. Meanwhile, trade sources regard Wings Air’s return to the sector after a four-year hiatus as a big gain for Davao.

Huma Island to welcome Mövenpick this year

Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts is opening a luxury resort on Palawan’s Huma Island in 4Q2012. With 82 over-water bungalows, the island resort will feature a choice of six restaurants offering Lebanese, Italian and Asian cuisine, a fitness centre and a six-room spa with glass floors for guests to view marine life while enjoying their treatments. The private island resort can be reached via seaplane and luxury speedboat from the mainland.

Ayala Land brings two MICE-friendly hotels to Makati

Event planners headed for Makati will soon have two new property options from Philippine property developer Ayala Land.

A 150-room boutique hotel, offered under Ayala’s new brand, Kuken, will open in Bonifacio Global City in 4Q2012. The hotel will feature meeting and function rooms, an executive lounge, a gym and a swimming pool.

Ayala is also launching the Holiday Inn & Suites Makati in 1Q2013. The 348-room property will boast meeting and function rooms, a business centre, executive lounge and three dining outlets.

Get your iPad fix onboard PAL

If your delegates are flying between the Philippines and North America onboard Philippine Airlines (PAL), they will get to enjoy a variety of inflight entertainment on an Apple iPad. Full-length movies, TV shows, music, games and the latest reading materials are loaded into the gadget, which is made available to passengers in economy- and business-class.

Do some good in the Philippines

Tour operators in the Philippines are lining up packages with charity elements such as repairing rice terraces and building houses for needy communities, which event planners can use to enhance the learning experience of their programmes.

A consortium of 14 tour operators, with the Philippine Tour Operators Association playing the role of secretariat, will operate a programme that involves repairing the Banaue Rice Terraces, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The Cagayan de Oro Tours and Travel Association will offer the Cagayan de Oro Fun Help Package, which reaches out to victims of a typhoon in southern Philippines last November. Participants can make cash donations and participate in activities such as rafting.

Sowing seeds for growth

Indonesia is not resting on its laurels when it comes to courting the Indian MICE segment, writes **Mimi Hudoyo**

Indian MICE arrivals to Indonesia, especially travellers on corporate incentive programmes, have been on the rise over the last two years.

According to data from the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, the country welcomed three Indian incentive groups with a total of 320 participants in 2010. In 2011, the number blossomed to 25 incentive groups with attendance ranging from 10 to several hundreds. Indian companies that brought incentive groups to Indonesia included Hyundai Motor Group, HDFC Life Insurance India and ICICI Bank. The largest Indian incentive group to descend on Indonesia last year was from Neutrino Observatory, with 500 delegates.

At press time in July, the ministry reported arrivals of 19 incentive groups with more than 1,900 participants between the start of 2012 and May. These groups included a 500-pax Zydus Medica group that visited Bintan, and a 350-pax group led by Cox & Kings that went to Bali.

Despite the encouraging growth in Indian incentive arrivals, the ministry's director of MICE and special interest marketing, Rizki Handayani, told the *Daily* that the Indian MICE sector "is relatively new to Indonesia".

The ministry's deputy director for MICE and special interest promotion, Iyung Masruroh,



Known for its holy spring water, the Tirtha Empul Temple is a popular attraction in Bali, Indonesia

said: "We started courting Indian MICE groups in 2010, and our focus has been on the incentive sector. Our Visit Indonesia Tourism Officer (VITO) in India has been actively working with local tour operators that specialise in incentives to promote Indonesia."

The ministry also connected Indonesian tourism sellers with Indian corporate buyers and MICE agents through a business gathering held in conjunction with SATTE, a travel trade show in New Delhi, earlier this year.

Masruroh said: "The delegation from Indonesia comprised

19

Indonesia welcomed 19 Indian incentive groups with 1,900 participants between January and May this year. There were 25 groups from India in 2011

not only hotels and travel consultants, but also Indian restaurants with Indian chefs. This is

to show that we can cater to the dietary requirements of Indian visitors," Masruroh said.

The results have been promising. However, the ministry does not have complete data on MICE arrivals, and the number of Indian MICE groups captured are those that had applied for and obtained event support from the ministry.

Available data showed that most Indian incentive groups favoured Bali, and would stay six to seven days. The ministry also found that the average expenditure of Indian leisure and MICE travellers was US\$1,118 per visit.

To enhance Indonesia's presence in the minds of Indian MICE buyers, the ministry is exhibiting in IT&CM India, and is sponsoring a dinner for hosted buyers and media representatives on August 22 at Jaypee Greens Golf & Spa Resort.

As well, the ministry intends to organise familiarisation trips for Indian corporate buyers and MICE agents to Bali and other destinations in the country.

Masruroh said: "We have received an offer from Malaysia Airlines for an incentive familiarisation trip to Indonesia, while Accor has offered accommodation, but we are still in the planning stage."

However, the challenge the ministry faces in the pursuit of stronger Indian MICE arrivals is the absence of direct air links between Indonesia and India, according to Handayani. To tackle this obstacle, the ministry has been lobbying various parties including the transportation ministry and airlines to open direct services to India.

Garuda Indonesia and Lion Air have both mulled over the prospects of flying to Mumbai and Chennai from Jakarta and from Medan for several years now, but the industry has yet to see these routes being materialised.

"We hope to get direct access to be able to attract more MICE business from India, as you can see, the interest is there," Handayani said.

NEED TO KNOW



Trans Studio adds new attractions

Incentive groups headed for Bandung, Indonesia can now get an extra dose of thrills at Trans Studio Bandung, said to be the world's largest indoor theme park.

The theme park has added four new attractions – 4D *Marvel Superheroes*, *Special Effects Action*, *Trans Science Centre* and *Kiddy's Land*.

The 4D *Marvel Superheroes* and the *Special Effects Action* zone unveils behind-the-scenes of action films and invites participants to take part in a mock robbery.

These new features will add to Trans Studio Bandung's current collection of 20 major rides and attractions.

The theme park is part of the massive Bandung Supermall and close to the 606-room Ibis Bandung Trans Studio Hotel.

Get active in a mall

The Pulomas X' Venture Mall, which will open in eastern Jakarta by the end of 2012, will offer many activities besides retail therapy.

The mall will have outdoor F&B establishments encircled by horse racing tracks, allowing visitors to enjoy live equestrian events, as well as a nine-hole golf course, jogging and cycling tracks, trampoline, flying fox and a park with labyrinth tunnel. Emphasising its active concept, the mall will boast a jungle-like interior and a sprawling rooftop park.

The mall also employs environmentally sustainable building practices.

New facility in Medan

Medan International Convention Center has opened in Medan, North Sumatra, in line with the destination's aim to develop MICE.

As part of the Santika Premiere Dyandra Hotel & Convention Medan, the center is said to be the largest facility in the city, with a 2,100m² hall, a ballroom for up to 1,200 guests and eight rooms.

Santika Premiere Dyandra Hotel & Convention Medan caters to conferences, exhibitions, weddings and family and business travel.

More MICE space in Jakarta

Aston International has inked a deal with Paramount Group, an Indonesian real estate developer, to manage a convention centre and three hotels in the Indonesian capital city.

Scheduled to open in 2014, the Paramount City mixed-use development in Slipi, West Jakarta will offer a convention centre with more than 5,000m² of meeting and exhibition space, a 360-room four-star Aston, a 199-room three-star Quest, and a 250-room select service Fave. There will also be a 25,600m² shopping mall.

Get connected

InterContinental Bali Resort is offering free Wi-Fi Internet access in its entire fleet of vehicles, allowing guests the convenience of getting connected during airport transfers or when touring the island.

The move came with the hotel's recent implementation of a new wireless service that blankets the entire property, from guestrooms and meeting facilities to public areas and the beach.



Cheap and chic

Shadows of an economic crisis linger still, but that does not mean you have to cut back on exciting F&B options at your events. Here are some fun and affordable food-related activities from the region that will have your delegates and finance officer beaming from ear to ear

Compiled by Raini Hamdi, Linda Haden, Deborah Cornfield, Mimi Hudoyo and Prudence Lui

US\$30

The Hunt for Local Delicacies

Where Yuyuan Market in Shanghai, China

Number Minimum 30 pax

Suitable for Teambuilding or as an ice-breaker

What is it Each team is provided pictures of six to eight local delicacies, and they must identify and purchase the right ingredients required to make those dishes. Participants must keep to a spending budget.

To win, the team must pin down the highest number of correct ingredients and spend the least. **Why is it good** Yuyuan Market is known for its traditional delicacies, making it the perfect location to introduce foreign delegates to China's food culture and ancient methods of preserving food.

What to watch Most Chinese vendors in the market do not understand English, so a translator or guide book may be needed.

Contact Pacific World Shanghai, china@pacificworld.com

Afternoon Cha-time

Where Any Chinese tea house or in a meeting room in China

Suitable for Networking events, as a component of an incentive programme or as a meeting break activity

What is it Delegates are taken through a tea appreciation ceremony, and will get to learn

about Chinese tea and even create their own tea. Traditional refreshments such as candied fruits, nuts and simple pastries, often enjoyed with tea, will also be served.

Why is it good As part of a networking event, this is a relaxed and informal way for delegates to socialise and share ideas. This activity can also refresh delegates in between meetings, or serve as a perfect finale for a long conference day.

What to watch The tea ceremony lasts only for a short while, and may not be practical as the sole activity in an event. Do prepare other activities such as coffee appreciation in another location for delegates who do not take well to tea.

Contact Destination Asia (China), keith@destination-asia.com.cn

DIY Dumplings

Where Courtyard areas in Beijing's hutong neighbourhood, China

Suitable for Pre- or post-event programmes that include lunch

What is it Participants are led through a hutong neighbourhood before arriving at a courtyard house. A bilin-

gual chef will teach participants to make Chinese dumplings and different fillings that are suitable for different seasons and serve specific medicinal purposes.

Why is it good The activity introduces participants to a traditional Chinese neighbourhood and the local dish, which they can re-create back home.

What to watch There's going to be quite a bit of walking and food preparation, so make sure participants are dressed in comfortable clothes and shoes.

Contact H!Tang & China Creative Connections, info@hitangandccc.com

Connecting with Macau's Rich Heritage

Where Coloane Island, Macau

Suitable for Teambuilding or as part of an incentive programme

What is it Explore the quaint village and narrow lanes of the Coloane area and enjoy cuisine heavily influenced by the Portuguese culture, such as egg tarts. **Why is it good** Groups can learn about the history and cultural diversity of Macau, while escaping from the hustle and bustle of the city centre.

What to watch Don't underestimate the lack of toilet facilities in the Coloane area. Help your group spot clean public lavatories in the area before they embark on this walking tour.

Contact Macau.com, bookings@macau.com

Nude Noodle

Where Selected local restaurants in Bangkok or in a hotel in Thailand

Suitable for Interactive lunch or dinner

What is it Guests are presented

with bowls of hot plain noodles and ingredients, which they can use to create their own dish. Local chefs will be on hand to dispense advice. Friendly competition can be arranged, and participants can sample their creations after. The activity lasts no more than 90 minutes.

Why is it good A fun, interactive and cost-effective way to enjoy cooking and dining together. The free-and-easy nature of this activity suggests that dietary needs are not a worry. Soft drinks, water, tea or coffee are included.

What to watch Not suitable for formal dining events.

Contact DBC Asia, david@davidbc.com

The Tipple Exchange

Where Singapore's Boat Quay and its surroundings

Suitable for Pre- or post-conference programmes or as an ice-breaker

What is it Starting from the Asian Civilisations Museum, the walking tour takes participants to the Singapore River Gallery, through the alleyways of Boat Quay and for a tipple at three vibrant pubs with rich stories to tell. Unlike the usual history tours, The Tipple Exchange guide will regale participants with lesser known nuggets of Singapore history.

Why is it good It offers a fun twist to the usual city tour. Furthermore, with such unusual stories, participants are bound to see a different, more exciting side to Singapore's past and resulting present.

What to watch There will be

quite a bit of walking, and drinks at the three pubs are chargeable, although at subsidised prices of S\$5 (US\$4) to S\$6 for a glass of beer. However, considering how The Tipple Exchange costs S\$30 per person, planners can budget for a drink or two thrown into the programme for each person!

Contact The Original Singapore Walks, discover@journeys.com.sg

Secrets of the Singapore Hawkers

Where Hawker centres in Singapore such as Newton Centre, Maxwell Market, Lau Pa Sat or Chinatown Food Complex

Suitable for Teambuilding

What is it Placed in teams, participants must first decipher clues to locate the hawker centre, where they must look for 10 hawkers selling 10 key local dishes. The number of tasks can be adjusted to suit group size and duration. Teams will then have to taste the dish and correctly name the main ingredients used. The team that gets the most ingredients right in the shortest time wins.

Why is it good Singaporeans are said to be passionate about their food, and the typical hawker centre in the city-state is an adventure for the senses. Having to seek out a number of top hawker favourites means that participants will get to sample a variety of dishes at one go.





Chinese Detoxifying and Herbal Course

Where Hotel ballroom, a Chinese vegetarian restaurant or tea house in China

Number Minimum 40 pax

Suitable for As part of a pre- or post-conference activity

What is it

A Chinese doctor will introduce the Chinese philosophy of *yin* and *yang* and the benefits and uses of herbs and tea in food. Later, participants can sample various simple detoxifying dishes and teas.

Why is it good Chinese herbal medicine is lesser known com-



pared to foot reflexology and acupuncture, so the activity promises novelty. It also offers a good introduction to healthy culinary habits.

What to watch Plan for transportation, venue rental and meals, as they are not included in the price.

Contact Pacific World Shanghai, china@pacificworld.com

Wonderland

Where Meeting room or foyer in a MICE venue in Indonesia

Number 50 to 100 pax

Suitable for Coffee breaks

What is it Give the usual coffee break a fairground twist with stalls serving sweet

treats such as ice-cream, cakes, cotton candy, marshmallow, chocolate fondue, as well as beverages such as iced tea, flavoured-milk and syrup drinks. Pepper the area with colourful decorations.

Why is it good A fun way to relax between meetings.

What to watch Do have sugar-free options for delegates who

need to minimise sugar intake.

Contact Panorama Convex, mariaaachti@panorama-convex.co.id

Lift the Spirit

Where Taling Pling Restaurant in Bangkok, Thailand

Suitable for As a half-day programme in a pre- or post-conference itinerary

What is it

Start the afternoon with lunch at Taling Pling Restaurant, where popular Thai dishes such as spicy green curry, catfish salad and roast duck *panaeng* will be served. Later, have tension kneaded out of your participants' muscles with a Thai massage at Health Land, a popular chain of spa centres, before visiting the famous Sri Maha Mariamman Temple on Silom Street.

Why is it good The programme provides a well-paced snapshot of what travellers have come to love about Bangkok – its cuisine, its massage and its temples.

What to watch The restaurant



is packed with office workers during lunchtime, hence plan for a late lunch at 13.00 or have dinner instead.

Contact Asian Trails Bangkok, res@asiantrails.org

Pioneer Stories of Little India

Where Little India, Singapore

Suitable for

Teambuilding or as a component in a pre- or post-conference tour

What is it

Delegates will journey into Little India where they will be treated to a local breakfast of *roti prata*

(local Indian pancake) and a hot cup of *teh tarik* (sweet milk tea) at a local coffeeshop. Sample traditional Indian snacks and sweets, and have their hands painted by a henna artist. End the programme with a relaxing Ayurvedic massage.

Why is it good Little India takes foreigners into the heart of Singapore's Indian community, and there is a multitude of shops in the cultural enclave that sell everything, from Indian sweets to beautiful saris.

What to watch Some foreigners may not take well to spicy



Indian food, so do make plans for alternative meals.

Contact Cityscape Travel Concierge & Events, info@cityscape.com.sg

Kids Play

Where Selected local restaurants in Bangkok, Phuket, Chiang Mai or Pattaya, or in a hotel's function room

Number 50 to 200 pax

Suitable for For corporate programmes requiring a CSR element

What is it Participants will have lunch at a restaurant, where underprivileged children are dressed as waiters, dining tables are topped with colourful drawings, a black chalkboard serves as a menu and party plastic utensils are used. The children will entertain participants with songs during lunch.

Why is it good A percentage of the profits goes to the foundation for underprivileged children.

What to watch Do not be too dismissive towards the child waiters. Catering is done by a caterer or the hotel if the activity is staged on hotel grounds.

Contact DBC Asia, david@davidbc.com



Australian Wine Adventure

Where Adelaide Cellar Door, Hong Kong

Number 20 to 40 pax

Suitable for Teambuilding, networking or group gatherings

What is it Delegates are welcomed with a glass of sparkling wine and guided to five Australian wine boutiques. They will be entertained with wine quizzes and blind-tasting sessions. The two-hour session will end with a dessert of wine chocolate.

Why is it good A hit for wine enthusiasts and a new experience for amateurs. Many of the featured wines have garnered awards and are highly rated by American wine critic, Robert Parker.



What to watch Sip water or have a bite during intervals to avoid getting tipsy quickly. Companies with more than 40 people can opt for a different venue, but the price of venue rental is not included.

Contact Hong Kong Events, admin@hongkongevents.com

Dinner in Bed

Where Bed Supper Club, Bangkok, Thailand

Suitable for Networking dinner parties

What is it Take your dinner to bed with a three-course menu (or four-course on weekends). Bed Supper Club, which is a restaurant on one side and a dance zone/bar on the other, whips up Mediterranean food with Asian touches. The venue is available for private hire, with DJs or other performances on selected days.

Why is it good Bed Supper Club has been around for years, but it is still considered one of Bangkok's trendiest night spots. It also serves up pretty good food.

What to watch Bring along your passport or identification card as there

are strict identity checks.

Contact Asian Trails Bangkok, res@asiantrails.org

Traditional Royal Javanese Cooking

Where Rumah Sleman Private Boutique Hotel Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Number 20 pax

Suitable for Incentive or spouse programmes

What is it Participants will be taken on a 15-minute ride on traditional horse carts to Rumah Sleman. Upon arrival, they will be greeted by children playing and singing, and be served *wedang secang*, a traditional herbal drink once favoured by royalty. It is now one of Indonesia's best treats. Participants will then proceed to a cooking demonstration at the Paseban terrace and learn to make traditional snacks called *jajanan pasar*.

Why is it good How often do city-dwellers get to go on horse-cart rides?

What to watch Make wet weather plans, as traditional horse carts cannot be used in rainy weather.

Contact Pacto Convex, ika@pacto-convex.com

Dining on Ice

Where Ice rink in a central Bangkok shopping mall, Thailand

Number 100 to 160 pax

Suitable for Team dinners

What is it

Delegates are escorted to their tables which adopt an ice-theme decor, and attendants on ice skates will serve a three-course meal on plates made of ice. Talented skaters will entertain guests with acrobatics.

Why is it good The experience provides an unexpected break from Bangkok's heat. The dishes, décor and venue create a memorable meal.

What to watch Dining on a public ice rink in a busy mall is only available from 19.00 to 21.00. Loud music is also prohibited.

Contact DBC Asia, david@davidbc.com

Spa Dinner

Where Health spas in Phuket or Pattaya, Thailand

Number 50 to 150 pax

Suitable for Team dinner

What is it Plan a healthy and tasty 90-minute dinner in a popular spa. Neck and shoulder massages are provided along with a selection of herbal drinks, as well as wine, which is considered to have healthy properties.

Why is it good Dinner and massage at the same time? Who would have thought of that?

What to watch As this programme encourages relaxation,



loud music is prohibited. Apart from wine, other alcoholic beverages are discouraged. Bookings must be made three months ahead.

Contact DBC Asia, david@davidbc.com

Seafood with Sea Gypsies

Where A sea gypsy village in Phuket island, Thailand

Number Six to 50 pax

Suitable for Interactive lunch

What is it There are market vendors and fishermen selling seafood at the sea gypsy village, and participants are encouraged to haggle for bargains. The purchases will be passed on to chefs at adjacent restaurants who will prepare a feast.

Why is it good The village is located away from the usual tourist spots and provides a fun and casual lunch experience.

What to watch Put on comfortable walking shoes and cool casual wear, as there is no air-conditioning. Seafood options are bountiful, but those with special dietary needs may face limited options. Also note that only three local restaurants in the village offer lunch venues.

Contact DBC Asia, david@davidbc.com

Melbourne's good harvest

The city's courtship of Indian business groups is paying off, with a 4,000-pax event in the bag, writes **Karen Yue**

India has been on the radar of the Melbourne Convention and Visitors Bureau (MCVB) since the MICE authority first established an incentive and corporate travel unit more than six years ago.

Such attention to India has not waned. Since 2008, MCVB has been participating in the annual India Travel Mission organised by Tourism Australia.

Last year, MCVB took its annual Asia Roadshow to India for the first time. Held in Mumbai, the activity saw MCVB partnering nine of Victoria's premier business events suppliers in hosting pre-scheduled appointments and a networking lunch with 45 MICE agents and 19 journalists. MCVB, together with Tourism Australia and the Gold Coast Convention Bureau, also hosted a corporate networking dinner with 35 corporate buyers and 16 journalists.

MCVB's Asia Roadshow turned out to be a great success, with 88 per cent of participating suppliers saying that they received business leads and requests for proposal at the event.

These activities come on top of the bureau's annual calendar of fam trips for key buyers and media representatives from India. In February this year, MCVB hosted 10 agents and two media delegates from India during AIME in Melbourne, allowing the city and regional Victoria the chance to showcase their corporate and incentive products to the participants.



MCVB continues to reach for more business events from India

In the year ending December 2011, the state of Victoria, whose capital city is Melbourne, welcomed 10,300 business visitors from India.

Karen Bolinger, CEO of MCVB, said: "The Indian market is extremely important to Melbourne, and in terms of incentive and corporate travel, it is certainly comparable with China."

"The Indian market has been

business".

"There are however, an increasing number of association committee members and conference attendees who come to Melbourne from India to attend large international conventions that the city is so well recognised for," she added.

With India's corporate and incentive travel business possessing great growth potential, MCVB will continue to revolve its destination market efforts around this segment. In September the bureau will participate in Tourism Australia's India Mega Famil and Workshop in Melbourne. The event is expected to attract up to 80 Indian travel experts.

Bolinger added: "We also plan to (lead) some sales missions to India this year to meet face-to-face with key MICE travel trade and corporate end-users in Mumbai and Delhi."

"In addition, MCVB will work closely with the Victorian Government who has recently opened a second office in Mumbai earlier this year after establishing its first in (Bengaluru) in 2005. This demonstrates a significant upgrade of Victoria's relationship with India as a trading partner and the role they play in raising the profile of the state as a business brand."

"Next year we will continue to seek opportunities and potential partners to work in-market to increase our share of the Indian outbound corporate and incentive business."

4,000

The minimum number of Indian delegates expected to attend the Amway India Leadership Seminar in Melbourne this December. It will be the largest Indian incentive ever to be hosted in Australia, and will generate an estimated A\$21 million (US\$22 million) for Victoria

of growing importance year on year, and we will continue to work with our key partners to ensure Victoria grows its market share."

The bureau's focus for India has been primarily on the incentives and corporate travel market, a decision Bolinger said was due to India being "home to a number of large corporations rather than associations, which traditionally drive the conference and exhibition side of the

NEED TO KNOW

Take off to Ballarat

The serene and historical town of Ballarat, located 75 minutes from Melbourne by car, is an interesting destination for pre- or post-conference tours.

Corporate groups can stay and have their events at hotels such as the Mercure Ballarat Hotel & Convention Centre or Craig's Royal Hotel.

The latter is a heritage property with 41 luxurious guestrooms and five event venues including the underground Bluestone Cellar.

In the day, pay a visit to the Sovereign Hill outdoor museum which showcases Australia's Gold Rush history and offers visitors great fun panning for gold in its streams; the Art Gallery of Ballarat which has on display an extensive collection of beautiful Australian art; or the sprawling Ballarat Wildlife Park.

After sunset, planners can send their more adventurous delegates off on one of the ghostly tours organised by Eerie Tours. Dinner and tour packages are available.



New look, dining experience at iBistro

The ibis Melbourne has completed full renovations of its iBistro restaurant. The comprehensive transformation included a new induction buffet station, an open plan bar area, and modern decor, as well as a new menu.

iBistro is available for private events including corporate dinners and cocktail parties.

Work it with the penguins

Philip Island Nature Parks has debuted a new teambuilding programme called The Little Penguin Race, which gives participants the opportunity to do their bid for wildlife conservation.

The activity sends participants across the island armed with a backpack and a handful of cryptic clues, and is designed to test teams' problem-solving, communications and teamwork abilities.



Park Hyatt Sydney reopens

Park Hyatt Sydney has reopened after closing most of last year to redesign its rooms, spa, restaurants, bars and event spaces.

The newly-designed hotel features five meeting rooms, the most dramatic of which, according to the hotel, is its Guest House, located on the edge of Sydney Harbour. It offers unparalleled views of the Sydney Opera House, is equipped with a presentation kitchen and has a private outdoor terrace which can accommodate 70 guests. The hotel also has the Gallery, which it dubs a "stylish" venue for 150 guests. Specially-commissioned artwork by local artists are on display.

Encore for Melbourne

One of Melbourne's latest function spaces is Encore St Kilda Beach, 15 minutes from Melbourne CBD. The function space boasts uninterrupted views of St Kilda's foreshore and Port Philip Bay. With capacity for 50 pax to 700 pax, it adds a resort feel to meeting in Melbourne.

Weak rupee draws MICE

By S Puvaneswary

SOME Indian exhibitors at the 7th Conventions India Conclave yesterday reported a year-on-year increase in inbound meetings, incentives and conferences brought on by the depreciating Indian rupee, increased financial assistance from the Government of India and better bidding efforts from PCOs looking to bring MICE business to India.

A T Seasons & Vacations Travel India managing director, Amaresh Tiwari, said he was targeting a 30 per cent year-on-year growth for meeting and incentive business this year, with new clients coming in mainly from South America.

He said: “We are getting meetings, incentives and leisure business from countries we never had before due to distance

and high airfares, such as Argentina, Mexico, Brazil and Peru.”

A T Seasons & Vacations Travel has also seen more meetings and incentives from Mauritius, Malaysia, Russia and the UK heading mostly to the Golden Triangle cities of Delhi, Agra and Jaipur, as well as Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Chennai.



Tiwari: India is now hot with longhaul markets

“India has become more attractive due to the weaker Indian rupee, better bidding efforts and financial assistance from the government to members of the India Convention Promotion Bureau for bidding of international MICE events,” said Tiwari, adding that the rupee had depreciated by about 15-16 per cent against the greenback over the last six months.

With greater buying power in India, the company’s deputy

manager-inbound, Shiv Singh Kandari, noted that more clients were including event add-ons such as cultural shows and excursions, and that pre- and post-show tour attendance were on the rise too.

G S Mullick, operations manager of Discover India, which has seen a 20 per cent year-on-year increase in meetings and incentives from Europe, specifically France, Austria and Germany, noted that some European clients had chosen to take their events from the US to India because of favourable rates in the latter destination. For instance, according to Mullick, a five-day land programme in India, which includes the Golden Triangle, costs at least 600 euros (US\$742) lesser per person than a similar arrangement in the US.

Mullick added that the Ministry of Tourism had also been helping inbound MICE groups to facilitate visa approvals and secure better airfares.

Meanwhile, the bulk of international conferences and association meetings handled by Kuoni Travel (India) – which grew 15 per cent over the same time last year – were bound for New Delhi.

The company’s general manager, business development, Kalpana Uberoi, said the Indian capital city had become more attractive as a MICE destination due to softer hotel rates resulting from a room boom.

Delhi’s four- and five-star room count has increased by some 5,000 over the last two years, while the average room rate of a five-star hotel has gone from Rs18,000-Rs20,000 two years ago to Rs12,000-Rs14,000 now, according to Uberoi.

Although the softer rooms rates have not helped recession-hit European MICE clients who have turned to budget stays, Uberoi observed that these groups would still hold their meetings in five-star hotels.

TREND WATCH

Kabul hot on the map

AT least two Indian MICE players are planning to leverage on SpiceJet’s new thrice-weekly flights between Delhi and Kabul, which commenced on August 14, to establish MICE and leisure traffic into and out of Afghanistan.

Before the launch of this service, travellers between India and Afghanistan must fly through Dubai, said trade sources.

Kuoni Destination Management team manager meetings, conferences & events, Raju Gandha, saw potential in outbound incentives from India, with maximum group sizes of 150 pax, while inbound specialist Discover India manager (conferences & contracting), Bobby Bakshi, said his company would hire a marketing representative in Kabul to tap the high-yield segment for leisure and MICE.

Kolkata to get two centres

KOLKATA is set to welcome two new convention centres, one in Rajarhat New Town by mid-2014 and another in Alipore.

Debashis Sen, chairman and managing director of Housing Infrastructure Development Corporation (HIDCO), which is undertaking the Rajarhat New Town project, said: “This centre will be one of the biggest in the country.”

Spread across four hectares, the Rajarhat centre will feature a plenary hall with 6,000-pax seating capacity, two other halls and parking space for over 1,000 vehicles.

The Alipore centre, in south Kolkata, will be built on a 1.2 hectare plot adjacent to the new Dhan Dhanya cultural complex.

Welcoming the additional venues, Manoj Saraf, managing director of Gainwell Travel & Leisure, said: “With world-class infrastructure and big international (hotel brands) coming in, this will mean good times for Kolkata that has long been in the shadow of larger business cities in India.” – **Shekhar Niyogi**

HOT DEAL

Hilton New Delhi/Janakpuri Hotel offers all-inclusive meeting deal

Valid until September 30, the package includes a day’s stay with one room upgrade during the meeting duration, use of a meeting venue from 09:00 to 18:00, Wi-Fi, two coffee/tea breaks, business lunch and dinner on the day of check-in and buffet breakfast. Rs7,000 (US\$125) for single occupancy and Rs9,000 for double occupancy.

Cruise incentives pick up steam

BENGALURU-based Comfort Cruise Club, a joint venture between Malaysia-based Jebsen Travel & Tours Services and Bengaluru-based Comfort Leisure, has seen more than 500 sales from the Indian market for luxury cruise products since January.

Lim Chee Tong, managing director of Jebsen Travel & Tours Services, said the majority of bookings was corporate incentives with a minimum of seven nights. He said: “Rewarding outstanding sales staff with a cruise incentive holiday to the Mediterranean Sea is gaining popularity in India. This year alone, we’ve sold luxury cruises to three out of the five corporate groups.”

Comfort Cruise Club, with sales offices in Mumbai, Delhi, Madras and Pune, has ramped up marketing and promotional efforts targeting MNCs to take up meetings for board of directors onboard luxury cruises.

– **S Puvaneswary**

Gujarat eyes trade conventions

By Shekhar Niyogi

BACKED by powerful industries such as pharmaceutical, energy, aerospace and jewellery, the state of Gujarat is looking to court large-scale conventions from these sectors.

To showcase its MICE readiness, the Tourism Corporation of Gujarat has joined the 7th Conventions India Conclave for the first time as a sole state partner. The state’s MICE ambitions are supported by the Mahatma Mandir Convention Centre in Gandhinagar, which can accommodate 5,000 delegates, as well



Mahatma Mandir Convention Centre is said to be the star venue in Gujarat

as convention facilities in Surat, Rajkot and Vadodara.

The Tourism Corporation of Gujarat will also hold the International Travel Tourism Hospitality Expo for the first time alongside the Vibrant Gujarat Global Trade Show investment showcase in January 2013.

Suman S Pathy, senior manager tourism of Tourism Corporation of Gujarat, said the arrangement was a strategic one, as “visitors will be able to see the MICE products on offer, (while) investments in other industries may cascade to the tourism and hospitality sector too”.

India on The Peninsula’s radar

By Gracia Chiang

HONG KONG-based The Peninsula Hotels is starting to make inroads into India, which will see it eventually appoint a representative in the market to work closely with the travel trade and raise awareness in the media.

Having seen impressive triple-digit year-on-year growth in 2011 from the market for its nine properties worldwide, the luxury group launched its first major roadshow in India earlier in the year.

The Peninsula Hotels vice president, sales, Simon Yip, said: “At the early stage, our Bangkok hotel will benefit because of the flight connections and cultural ties. Surprisingly, Manila also gets some MICE business. For



Yip: high-end Indian segment stays strong

our China and Hong Kong hotels, we see growing demand from high-end Indian travellers.”

He pointed out that Indian customers, despite currently comprising less than five per cent for all hotels, were a very lucrative segment that tended to opt for the suite categories.

Aside from outbound traffic, Yip revealed that Peninsula was also looking at India as a potential location for future projects, especially in the major business hubs of New Delhi and Mumbai.

“We need to work harder on

the trade because we have not been to India until recently, so the brand awareness is not at the level we would like it to be,” he said.

When asked if Peninsula would launch tailored programmes for Indians the way it has done for its Chinese market, Yip said: “We need to study more about Indian travellers before we design any programmes for them. Their tourist behaviour is slightly different. (We’ve seen that) Chinese families come and stay with one or two children, whereas the Indian market has really big families.”

Amid the current economic climate, Yip noted a slight reduction in frequencies but rates were not affected, with revenue in 1H2012 up from last year.



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