



IT&CM
Incentive Travel & Conventions, Meetings

india

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Issue

2

TALKING NUMBERS

12,000 The estimated number of rooms Hilton Worldwide will add to its inventory in Asia-Pacific and the Middle East with 43 new property signings. The additional rooms will span across six brands – Waldorf Astoria, Conrad, Hilton, DoubleTree by Hilton, Hilton Garden Inn and Hampton.

2,400 The number of delegates that will descend on Brunei in four waves this November when The Empire Hotel & Country Club hosts a 16-day Amway Korea event.

Indian meetings, the rising star

THE domestic market for events is looking even more promising than business from abroad for at least one Indian PCO.

Plan It! Meetings and Conferences, associate vice president, Rajiv Pande, observed that with new associations being



Pande: association business picks up formed in India and existing ones becoming international members, the company had seen at least a 20 per cent jump in the number of events held this year, with turnover increasing even faster. About half of its business is from India.

“Association events are becoming more professional and they now want to hire an event manager because they see how PCOs help them to promote the conference internationally,” he said, observing a maturing of mindsets among associations.

The medical sector is growing especially fast, Pande added, and Plan It! will be handling the annual conference of the Indian Orthopaedic Association, which will see 6,800 delegates gathering in Agra in December 2013.

Continued on page 4

Catch yourself in action at IT&CM India. Visit our photo gallery at www.ttgasia.com

Sweeping changes in the winds for India visa

By Shekhar Niyogi and Gracia Chiang

THE current 60-day re-entry gap imposed on multiple entry India visa holders may soon be a thing of the past, according to a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office on August 13.

The Ministry of Home Affairs is presently considering several options to rationalise the current visa regime which is inhibitive for travellers to India. The Indian government is also planning to offer visa-on-arrival to 10 more countries.

The current re-entry restriction has been a bane for business travellers who have existing business interests or future investment plans in India, as frequent visits are impossible.

Amaresh Tiwari, A T Seasons & Vacations Travel managing director, said “a zero gap multiple entry visa will augment business travel immensely as an open visa regime will reflect the country's openness to global

investment and partnerships”.

Meanwhile, Chander Man-sharamani, vice-chairman of the India Convention Promotion Bureau, told the *Daily* that the local MICE trade had successfully appealed to the government to institute a single-window clearance for conference attendees, and the government would “announce the modalities shortly”.

Plan It! Meetings and Conferences associate vice president, Rajiv Pande, said having a single window for clearance would “change the scenario completely”.

“Foreign attendance will increase and business could double,” he added, noting that the number of international delegates currently ranged from 10 to 200. Once implemented, last-minute registrations by foreign participants could also be taken. Pande noted that visas were often hard to get for markets like China, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

R P Tandon, head-depart-

ment of physics, University of Delhi, said he also faced tremendous struggles bringing in academic conferences. “China is emerging in every way, but (the Indian government) is selective in giving visas to the Chinese market.” He said the Indian consulates overseas were “lethargic” and “casual” when it came to assisting in conference applications, and these usually required a lengthy amount of time to process due to the number of government ministries involved, with delegates being informed of the result only two or three days before the event. “A single window is definitely needed,” he added.

Sarab Jit Singh, managing director, Travelite (India), said: “Serious and drastic steps must be taken to remove the bottlenecks that are holding back the growth of India's conventions industry. Permissions and approvals required for conference organisers must be simplified.”

SOUND BITES

“I feel as if I am doing the wrong thing by holding a conference in India...Please help us.”

R P Tandon, head-department of physics, University of Delhi, in an impassioned plea to ICPB to assist in resolving the visa difficulties faced when organising international meetings



Thumbs up to a new partnership



THE organising committee of the first IT&CM India, led by TTG Asia Media Singapore's Darren Ng (centre) and the India Convention Promotion Bureau's Chander Man-sharamani (fifth from right), marked the start of their partnership yesterday at the Official Press Conference & Keynote Speech. Ng said: “Our first show is small but it gives the 64 seller organisations the opportunity to have quality interaction with 151 hosted buyers at a ratio of 2.5 buyers to every seller.” He added that IT&CM India would grow in scale, just as how IT&CM China in Shanghai had blossomed from 5,000m² in its first year in 2007 to 15,000m² this year. - Shekhar Niyogi

Visa woes retard UK MICE plans

By Linda Haden

HAVING established its first Indian office in Delhi in July, VisitEngland is gearing up to court more corporate and MICE travellers from India, but its ambitions are being thwarted by a cumbersome visa regime enforced on Indian visitors.

According to Reem Khokhar, who helms VisitEngland's Delhi office as the regional manager for Asia-Pacific, India is a key growth market for the UK's MICE industry but the “long drawn-out process to apply for a UK visa puts Indians off from holding events in the UK”.

Sanjeev Mehta, Lanco Infratech deputy general manager for administration, added that the rising cost of a UK visa was “a big barrier, considering the (weak) Indian rupee”. Mehta believes that the cost of a UK visa has tripled “since the UK government overhauled immigration policies”.

However, Alpcord Network's director, Amarjit Singh Talwar, remarked that it was the high cost of holding an event in the UK that was truly keeping Indian MICE buyers at bay. He told the *Daily* that Indian MICE groups to the UK tended to be small in numbers, as “holding an event in the UK requires a big financial commitment”.

Despite the obstacles, MICE buyers at IT&CM India regard VisitEngland's move as a step in the right direction.

Jon Baines, managing director of Jon Baines Tours London, expects Indian corporate and MICE traffic to the UK to increase, as Indian investments in the country have been on the rise.

Great Incentives for India



Malaysia
Twin Deal
INDIA

Off to a zestful start

The first day of the inaugural IT&CM India commences with great meetings and deals. Photos by **Patrick Tan**



Air Safety Equipment US' S Rajan and Jaypee Greens Golf & Spa Resort India's Sanjeev Kumar Saxena



Conference-Health UK's Veena Lidbetter, Travel Partners South Africa's Jenny Campbell and Select Travel Service South Africa's Leona Meadows



TTG Asia Media Singapore's Mimi Tam and Dieneshaus Israel's Doron Sternberg



TTG Asia Media Singapore's Darren Ng and GBTA's Welf J Ebeling



Meetings & Exhibitions Hong Kong's Terry Chau and Esther Tang, Hong Kong Sky Deck's Christine Ng, The Mira Hong Kong's Connie Kwan, Royal Plaza Hotel Hong Kong's Eric Ng and Hong Kong SkyCity Marriott Hotel's Carlos Wong



Kempinski Ambience Hotel Delhi's Raag Verma and Plan It! Meetings and Conferences India's Ashish Jagota



China International Travel Service (CITS) Sichuan's Peter Xie and CITS Guilin's Tim Xie



The Difference Italy's Mabel De Bernardi and Jaypee Hotels India's Tapan Nanda



Jon Baines Tours UK's Jon Baines and TTG Asia Media Singapore's Chermaine Poh



STIC Travel Group India's Subhash Goyal, MH Marketing House Poland's Beata Pfeiffer-Posyniak and Ryszard Posyniak, and Minar Travels (India)'s Amitoj Singh



Radisson Blu Hotel Greater Noida's Vipul Mohan and Suraj Kumar Jha



Y S Travel UK's Yusuf Seedat and TTG Asia Media Singapore's Stefanie Yap

Twin Deal to help ease cost pressures

By S Puvaneswary

MICE specialists in Malaysia are looking forward to the launch of the Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau's (MyCEB) Twin Deal programme today, with many saying the incentives offered will help to alleviate the pressure on costs from the depreciating Indian rupee.

Nantha Travel & Tours managing director, M Nantha Gopal, projected a 40 per cent drop in meetings and incentives from India between September and December, and said that two groups had indefinitely postponed their trips to Malaysia as the overall package cost had exceeded their budget.

Arokia Das Anthony, senior manager of Luxury Tours Malaysia, which had registered a 20 per cent dip in volume of MICE business from India this year, told the *Daily* that the incentives would go a long way towards improving the inbound MICE business from India to Malaysia.

He said: "For businesses that materialise, companies have scaled back their packages to the bare minimum as budgets have also been reduced. Many companies used to have at least two gala dinners per event, but now it is just one and the rest of the meals are normal Indian dinners."

First launched in China last September and subsequently rolled out to Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea,

Australia, New Zealand and Europe, MyCEB general manager of sales and marketing, Ho Yoke Ping, said more than 11,260 delegates had benefited from this programme to date. Targeting India-based

corporate meeting and incentive planners who wish to bring their events to Malaysia, the two-pronged programme rewards both the client and the MICE planner.

To qualify, all bookings must be made

between August 27 this year and June 30, 2013 for arrivals between October 1 this year and December 31 next year. MyCEB is looking to draw 10,000 Indian delegates through this programme.



Gopal: Twin Deal will stimulate the market

Hilton debuts APAC MICE deal

RIDING on the success of its MICE promotion for South-east Asian planners last year, Hilton Worldwide has launched its first MICE awareness and incentive campaign for the Asia-Pacific region.

The group's *From MICE to Millions* campaign kicked off on August 1, dangling incentives and a chance to win up to two million Hilton HHonors points in an effort to get regional planners to hold meetings and events at any of the more than 90 participating hotels and resorts across Asia-Pacific.

To qualify, planners must make a booking between August 1 and December 31 this year for events to be held between August 1, 2012 and February 28 next year. At the end of the campaign, the overall top booker, based on the highest cumulative revenue generated throughout the campaign, will be awarded two million Hilton HHonors points. A regional challenge will also award a top booker each from Australasia, Greater China, South and South-east Asia, India, Japan, South Korea and Micronesia one million Hilton HHonors points.

Philippe Garnier, the group's vice president, sales and regional marketing, Asia-Pacific, said: "All Hilton properties in this region are equipped with the hardware for business events. What we need is to incentivise and motivate planners to make enquiries and book with us."

— Karen Yue



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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:**
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HONG KONG DISNEYLAND MEETINGS
 IT'S TIME TO TEAM

HOT LEADS

Rooms, venues in Varanasi needed

The 12th International Asian Urbanisation Conference is calling for venue and accommodation proposals from Varanasi. Some 300 to 400 delegates are expected to attend the conference, which is scheduled to take place in December 2013. It is organised by the Benares Hindu University. Contact B R K Sinha at sinha-brk@yahoo.co.in.

Continued from page 1

Associations go beyond India

Indian associations have also started to venture farther for their conferences. Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Associations of India, for example, is holding its convention in Barcelona in a month's time for 1,000 delegates, the first time it is being held in Europe.

Pande said: "One of our strategies would be to try to sign core PCO contracts. The idea is to have some events that we can always bank on, in addition to the international events that come our way."

Plan It!'s upcoming international congresses in India include one on hand surgery for 1,800 pax in 2013 and another on fertility for 4,000 pax in 2016.

— **Gracia Chiang**

India to write bid guide

By **Shekhar Niyogi**

INDIAN MICE stakeholders, including state governments, the Ministry of Tourism, CVBs, PCOs/PEOs, convention venues, hotels, airports and other suppliers, are coming together to crystallise a guide that will improve the standards of convention bids and raise success rates.

The guide, which is expected to be finalised in two to three months' time, will look at areas such as professional accreditation of vendors as a means of quality assurance, funding for client inspections and the establishment of local ambassadors

who will lobby for hosting rights ahead of time.

The guide is also expected to help organisers cope with the changes in venue and accommodation costs that can set in between the time of the bid submission and the date of the convention, as many association events begin tendering for bids five to eight years in advance.

Monimita Sarkar, managing director of KW Conferences, pointed out that a convention bid was not merely a tender document, but "a business plan with projections into the future that are frozen in time as commercial commitments".

"As 60 per cent of the cost of an event stems from the venue (and accommodation), factoring cost escalations other than increments in taxes will require participation by hotels and venue suppliers," she said.

Shyam Nagpal, managing director of International Conferences and Exhibition Services, concurred, saying: "Hotel expenditure comprises the largest share of the total event cost. A minor escalation not factored in earlier can render a bid untenable. All stakeholders need to address the common areas of concern and draw up a blueprint for successful bidding."

IN BRIEF

New water park for Hyderabad

Leonía Holistic Destination in Hyderabad will augment its existing aqua attractions with a new water park, which will be developed in collaboration with Canada's WhiteWater West, the developers of renowned parks such as Malaysia's Sunway Lagoon.

The 470-room leisure-cum-MICE destination, which already boasts 10 F&B outlets and 36 meeting spaces, with the largest venue capable of hosting 6,600 delegates in theatre style, will add

903 rooms by 4Q2013 to become India's largest integrated resort with a total of 1,373 rooms.

The Leela grows hotel portfolio

The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts will open the seafront 326-key The Leela Palace Chennai in October and the 56-suite heritage-style The Leela Palace Jaipur next January. The Chennai property will have a 1,080m² Grand Ballroom, a 570m² Royal Ballroom, two meeting rooms and seven boardrooms, while the other newcomer will

have two conference halls for 150 pax and 30 pax respectively, three restaurants and a bar.

Night safari to roar into Noida

The Greater Noida region will soon be home to India's first-ever night safari. According to M K Sundaram, the district magistrate of Greater Noida, the city's night safari will be built along the lines of Singapore's version and is due to complete by the end of 2013. The zoo will be spread over 222 hectares along the Yamuna Expressway.

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Snapshots

A brilliant showcase of MICE deals

Exhibitors and buyers come together on the show floor for a fruitful exchange, discovers **Patrick Tan**



Anytime Hotels India's Tarjani Jadhav and SSR Holidays India's Sapneal Rao



Abu Dhabi National Exhibitions Company's Melissa Kronenberg and Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority's Lindsay Fraser



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Plan It! Meetings and Conferences India's Ashish Jagota



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Concorde Hotel Singapore's Brenda Lee-McColl and Gili Lankanfushi, Maldives' Nuaas Mohamed



Hard Rock Hotel Bali's Yuni Kusuma and Concorde Hotel Shah Alam's Margret Lindblom-Lau

Building upon strengths

Thailand trains its sights on Indian travellers to augment MICE arrivals to the country, writes **Timothy France**

The Indian MICE market plays an essential part in Thailand's tourism scene, representing 27.6 per cent of total Asian MICE arrivals.

In 2011, Thailand welcomed more than 100,000 MICE delegates from India, who contributed aggregate revenues of more than US\$250 million. This year, the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) forecasts a 20 per cent year-on-year growth in the number of business travellers and revenue from India.

The south Asian giant is a major source market for the convention sector too. In 2011, India ranked second in terms of overseas visitors attending tradeshows in Thailand, posting an 8.7 per cent rise from 2010. In 2012, visitors from India are projected to increase by 10 per cent.

So far this year, Thailand has hosted several events from India, including the Samsung Forum, which brought 1,000 pax to Bangkok in March, the Abbot Corporate Meeting, which welcomed 1,600 delegates to Bangkok and Pattaya in April, and the Abercrombie & Kent India Meeting, which attracted 1,000 delegates to Bangkok in May. Upcoming meetings include the Globe & Fix Travels Meetings in Bangkok and Novartis meetings in Bangkok and Pattaya.

To promote the exhibition sector, TCEB is ramping up international marketing efforts to elevate the visibility of key exhibition events in Thailand and business matching events to



The reclining Buddha at Wat Pho is one of the many attractions in the Thai capital city

maximise value for participants.

As many companies take on cost-conscious strategies amid the European debt crisis, TCEB has rolled out a range of blanket promotions that are regional rather than market-specific.

Earlier this year, the organisation launched the *100 A-Head* campaign to entice group visitors from ASEAN plus another six countries. Under this scheme, TCEB offers US\$100 per pax to

2

In 2011, India ranked second in terms of the total number of overseas visitors attending tradeshows in Thailand

event promoters, MICE tour operators, DMCs and trade associations that organise tours of 15 pax or more with a minimum three-day, two-night stay.

TCEB also kicked off a new MICE marketing campaign, *Thailand: Destination of Choices. No matter which path you choose, success is sure to follow*, highlighting the country's product and service strengths in meeting the needs of different types of MICE travellers.

Aware of the lack of an India-focused strategy, TCEB hence aims to sign a MoU with India's

Ministry of Tourism in 2013 to attract more tradeshow attendees.

These additional efforts are likely to spur MICE travel to Thailand, which has emerged the top holiday destination for Indian travellers. Last year, a record 917,832 Indians visited Thailand, a 16 per cent growth from 791,185 arrivals in 2010.

When enquired about the Indian market, most operators in Thailand cited the Indian wedding market as a lucrative cash cow. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has responded with a multi-pronged initiative that promotes niche markets, including weddings and honeymoons, in which Thailand has a comparative advantage.

"The Indian market has matured over time, so we now tap niche segments such as golf, luxury holidays, weddings, medical and Bollywood tourism," said Sethaphan Buddhani, TAT's Mumbai director.

TAT has been working with travel experts and tour operators to develop packages promoting Pattaya and Phuket, which are established destinations among Indian travellers, as well as beach resorts in Hua Hin, Koh Samui and Krabi, which are popular among the international wedding market.

Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai also attract the corporate sector, TAT reported. With new convention, medical tourism and shopping facilities under development, local operators in the north expect to gain a larger slice of the inbound Indian MICE market.

NEED TO KNOW



Riverfront attraction works its charm

The latest retail and lifestyle centre to open in Bangkok, Asiatique is located on the banks of the Chao Phraya River. It boasts 1,500 shops and 40 restaurants, as well as the Joe Louis Puppet Theater and Calypso Bangkok Cabaret. The century-old site was formerly the premises of the East Asiatic Company and, unlike many new developments in the capital, the pier has been refurbished to retain its European heritage.

Second Sofitel lands in Bangkok

In June, Accor opened its second Sofitel hotel in Bangkok, further expanding its vast footprint in the region. The five-star Sofitel Bangkok Sukhumvit offers 345 rooms, including 37 suites and 75 executive rooms, an outdoor swimming pool, two restaurants, a patisserie and a club lounge. Located near Asoke and Nana skytrain stations, the property is a great option for MICE organisers, with 13 meeting and events spaces, including ball rooms, salons and board rooms.

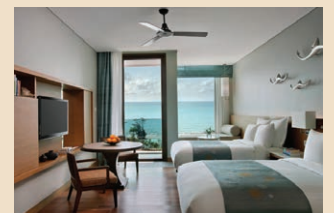


Chiang Mai scores a new MICE venue

Following numerous delays, the Chiang Mai International Convention and Exhibition Centre is near completion and scheduled to officially open in December. The Ministry of Tourism and Sports has handed the centre's operational and management responsibilities to the Tourism Authority of Thailand, and some operators have already made bookings for the first quarter of 2013. Once finished, the new venue will feature a 3,000-pax Plenary Hall, space for 476 exhibition booths and 32 meeting rooms.

MICE-oriented hotel debuts in the north-east

Centara Hotel & Convention Centre Khon Kaen, which opened its doors in end-May, was designed to meet the growing demand of the MICE sector in north-eastern Thailand. Located in Khon Kaen's city centre, the 1,800 million baht (US\$56.7 million) hotel has 196 rooms across seven categories, with facilities such as an outdoor swimming pool, a fitness centre with sauna and steam room, one spa, nine F&B outlets and shuttle service to Central Plaza Khon Kaen shopping centre. The premise also boasts MICE amenities such as 15 function rooms, including the 560m² Prachasamosorn Ballroom and the 1,690m² Centara Khon Kaen Convention Hall that seats up to 2,000 pax theatre-style.



Rayong gears up for its first Marriott

Opening in September, the 206-room Rayong Marriott Resort & Spa is set on the Rayong coastline, an hour's drive from Pattaya. Facilities include three restaurants, a pool, fitness centre, a spa and 7,000m² of function areas – including the 522-pax Grand Ballroom and five meeting rooms. The hotel also offers offsite team building options and leisure excursions to nearby Koh Samet and Koh Mun.

Big on Indian incentives

India is among Malaysia's top 10 source markets but the MICE bureau thinks more can be achieved, says **Karen Yue**

Malaysia has seen a number of prominent meetings and incentives from companies based in India in recent years. The most prominent of the lot was Amway India Leadership Incentive 2009, which brought 3,000 participants to its shores – the largest incentive group from India to date.

Other Indian business events that were held in Malaysia included a 500-pax incentive from a leading Indian automobile manufacturer in 2010, as well as a 770-pax incentive from an Indian chemical manufacturer and a 700-pax incentive from a Mumbai-based insurance firm, both in 2011.

Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB) CEO, Zulkefli Hj Sharif, noted that the country had seen an increase of 2.8 per cent in Indian arrivals in 2011 over 2010. There were 693,056 Indian visitors to Malaysia in 2011. India is now one of Malaysia's top 10 tourism source markets.

"The incentive segment has been performing best for Malaysia's business events market," said Zulkefli, who attributed the destination's popularity with Indian companies to ease of access, varied cultures, value-for-money options, security and stability, ease of communication, and availability of many social and sightseeing programmes.

Zulkefli noted that Malaysia was the third most price



Air accessibility, communication ease and good security are some of the reasons for Malaysia's popularity among Indian MICE groups

competitive country in the world according to the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitive Index 2011.

"Malaysia is easily accessible from any part of India, with direct flights offered by both mainstream and low-cost airlines. Malaysia is also considered a medium-haul destination, as most flights between India and Malaysia take four to seven hours, making it a preferred destination for business events in the region," he added.

In July, flag carrier Malaysia Airlines announced its decision to ramp up its daytime frequencies between Kuala Lumpur and the Indian cities of Mumbai, Chennai and Bengaluru starting September 1.

2.8

An estimated 693,056 Indians visited Malaysia in 2011, registering a 2.8 per cent growth over 2010

Malaysia's Indian citizens, who make up eight per cent of the country's population, also mean that the destination offers many authentic Indian dining experiences at different price points. MyCEB will advise Indian planners on venues that

can cater to the specific dietary requirements of Indian delegates.

"Cultural and language similarities between Malaysia and India make it easy for Indian planners to organise events in Malaysia. Delegates will feel at home and be at ease," Zulkefli said.

Indian event organisers must agree with Malaysia's selling points, as the destination has secured several business events this year. According to MyCEB, 2012's line-up of meetings and incentives from India includes several groups from manufacturing companies, with the largest being an 800-pax gathering, as well as insurance/finance and technology companies.

MyCEB will continue to bank

on its current popularity with Indian meeting and incentive groups. While Zulkefli said Malaysia was "well established" in India, he admitted that the "awareness of MyCEB's role in the market is still not very prominent".

He said: "Malaysia has only seen the tip of India's meeting and incentive market. India is a huge market that we need to work on."

"Having said that, we also see potential in the association conference segment. We will need to understand the needs of this segment and how we can reach out to them."

To boost Indian meeting and incentive numbers, MyCEB will launch its Twin Deal campaign in India at IT&CM India. The campaign, which is now run in markets such as China, South Korea and Europe, rewards both the client and the MICE planner. Depending on the size of the event, the client can enjoy free souvenirs, welcome packages, police outriders, etc, while the planner gains points which can be redeemed for a Malaysia trip.

Ho Yoke Ping, general manager sales & marketing of MyCEB, said Twin Deal saw "immediate" response in China when it was launched last September. As of May, MyCEB secured 9,000 participants from China under the programme.

As well, MyCEB will lead a sales mission to Delhi this month, and launch a tactical campaign for India soon.

NEED TO KNOW



InterContinental unveils new look

The InterContinental Kuala Lumpur has completed the first phase of a two-part refurbishment project. It now boasts an elegant main lobby, 110 refreshed Grand Premier rooms and a renovated Tatsu Japanese Restaurant.

The new lobby's signature feature is the Concierge Lounge, a cosy area where iPads and iPod docking stations are available for guests to use.

Phase two has started in mid-July, focusing on changes to the lobby lounge, Toh Lee Chinese Restaurant, meeting facilities and the Club InterContinental lounge.

Feast on familiar delights

Malaysia has no lack of restaurants that whip up quality and authentic Indian dishes.

A popular Indian restaurant chain in the country is Passage Thru' India, which has outlets in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Penang and Langkawi. All restaurants reflect a vibrant countryside vibe and serve favourites such as soup *samundera*, *murgh burtha* and *paneer pakoda*.

For vegetarian cuisine, seek out Saravanaa Bhavan, which has three outlets in Kuala Lumpur and one in Selangor. Saravanaa Bhavan also offers outdoor catering services.

Go shopping in Johor

Malaysia now offers visitors a new shopping experience at the Johor Premium Outlets shopping mall, which opened last December.

The outlet shopping mall, situated about an hour's drive from Singapore and three hours from Kuala Lumpur, is a joint venture between Malaysia's Genting Group and New York-listed Simon Property Group.

Major international brands such as Gap, Nike, Salvatore Ferragamo and Armani Exchange are featured in the mall, with merchandise sold at 25-65 per cent off.

Maytower is now Silka

Maytower Hotel & Serviced Residences in Kuala Lumpur is now known as Silka Maytower Hotel & Serviced Residences.

The Silka brand is a range of value-led properties under Kosmopolito Hotels International, which targets value-conscious leisure and business travellers.

The hotel intends to partner merchants around the vicinity to offer shopping discounts and service privileges for its guests.

Make a souvenir

Royal Selangor Visitor Centres in Kuala Lumpur and Penang have introduced a new workshop for visitors. Called the Accessories Boot Camp, the activity invites participants to create their own pewter masterpiece under the guidance of a pewter smith.

Participants will learn how to cast, polish and decorate their creations with paint and embellishment.





CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE GROUPS *of 50 participants and more!*

Deal 1 -

Value Added Support for
Corporate Meeting &
Incentive Groups

50 participants & more

1. Welcome souvenirs
2. A welcome banner at the hotel

100 participants & more

1. Welcome souvenirs
2. A welcome banner at the hotel
3. Malaysian cultural entertainment for welcome dinner or gala dinner

500 participants & more

1. Welcome souvenirs
2. A welcome banner at the hotel
3. Malaysian cultural entertainment for:
 - Welcome dinner OR
 - Gala dinner
4. Partial sponsorship for F & B, up to MYR20 per participant, per event

Deal 2 -

Rewards for
Corporate Meeting &
Incentive Planners

Accumulative of 500 participants and above

- 3 Days/2 Nights Free & Easy Vacation for 2 persons to Kuala Lumpur including:
 - Return air tickets (exclude airport taxes, insurance and misc. charges)
 - Accommodation at a 5-star hotel

Accumulative of 1,000 participants and above

- 4 Days/3 Nights Free & Easy Vacation for 2 persons to Kuala Lumpur including:
 - Return air tickets (exclude airport taxes, insurance and misc. charges)
 - Accommodation at a 5-star hotel

Accumulative of 1,500 participants and above

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HKTB feels good Indian vibes

Roadshows and new MICE programmes that appeal to Indians' love for culture are rolled out, says **Prudence Lui**

While Hong Kong had celebrated a significant 45 per cent increase in Indian arrivals in 2010 over the previous year, the market has since taken on a muted stance. Last year, Hong Kong welcomed 500,000 Indians, a decline of 5.8 per cent over 2010.

No MICE-specific data on India is available, but trade players have admitted that competitively-priced packages offered by Thailand to win over regional travellers have drawn some Indian business away from Hong Kong.

Despite the sluggish global economy this year, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) remains optimistic about shorthaul markets, and has identified India as a burgeoning MICE segment. The bureau's primary focus is on Delhi and Mumbai due to good air connectivity between Hong Kong and the two Indian cities.

A HKTB spokesperson said: "We are targeting corporate decision-makers, MICE specialists, and industry and trade associations via integrated campaigns to generate more leads for the meeting and incentive segment."

HKTB held roadshows to Delhi and Mumbai in early May and is planning to meet with top MICE agents at IT&CM India to introduce Hong Kong's MICE offerings.

The spokesperson added: "We will promote fly-cruise packages for MICE segments, leveraging on the growing popularity of cruises among Indians."

The effort will get a boost



Many new programmes that centre on Hong Kong's culture have been created, including cooking classes

Hong Kong Tourism Board

TALKING NUMBERS

4 The current number of airlines operating passenger services between Hong Kong and India. They are Cathay Pacific Airways, Hong Kong Dragon Airlines, Air India and Jet Airways.

4 The number of Indian cities that enjoy direct connections to Hong Kong. They are Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai and Bengaluru.

56 The number of roundtrip services between Hong Kong and India each week.

from Hong Kong's new cruise terminal at Kai Tak, which is slated to open in mid-2013.

Various new programmes and products suitable for corporate groups have also been developed according to Indian travellers' love for the local culture. For instance, Chinese cooking classes will be offered at Cuisine Cuisine, a Michelin-starred Cantonese restaurant at The Mira Hotel.

Indian delegates can also pick up traditional drumming techniques from the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, which offers invigorating and unique team-building exercises that involve beating drums. A two-hour drumming workshop will culminate

with a grand finale that puts participants to the test by having them perform with a full orchestra.

However, DMCs in Hong Kong regard India as a challenging market to pursue, given Indian buyers' penchant for bargaining prices down and high price sensitivity. As a result, not many MICE firms in Hong Kong are targeting Indian MICE groups.

Holiday World Tours managing director, Paul Leung, said: "(Indian clients) shop around to get the best prices and their requests (are always) changing, so a lot of manpower (and man-hours) is required to follow up. However, Indian groups are often large in volume and clients have money to spend."

Leung was quick to point out that many "big groups have bypassed Hong Kong" by taking the Macau-bound ferries straight from the Hong Kong International Airport.

He voiced concerns over a potential launch of direct flights between Macau and India, which he heard was slated for August.

Meanwhile, the 1,608-room L'hotel Nina et Convention Centre in Tsuen Wan has started to zoom in on Indian MICE groups, especially those from the pharmaceutical and IT sectors with groups of 400-500 people. However, general manager, George Kuk, said the property would not "negotiate down" its prices to cater to the Indian market.

He noted that Indian MICE groups made up less than five per cent of the property's total MICE business.

NEED TO KNOW

Stay in a heritage hotel

Tai O Heritage Hotel, which opened its doors in March, is the second heritage hotel on Lantau Island.

Built in 1902, the hotel was previously the Tai O Police Station. Occupying a two-storey neo-colonial architecture, the hotel has nine rooms, a heritage interpretation centre and a rooftop restaurant.

Free guided tours of the conserved hotel are available thrice a day. Two groups will depart at 15.00 and one at 16.00.



New fun at Ocean Park

Ocean Park Hong Kong unveiled its latest attraction, the Polar Adventure, in July, offering visitors new areas to explore – the Arctic Blast, the North Pole Encounter, the South Pole Spectacular and the Tuxedos restaurant.

There are also opportunities to interact with animals such as penguins, Pacific walrus, spotted seals, northern sea lions, snowy owls and the Arctic fox.

The theme park has also welcomed other new areas such as Old Hong Kong which are perfect venues for unique corporate events.



Hong Kong Disneyland to launch world's exclusive Grizzly Gulch

Grizzly Gulch, a themed area inspired by the natural gorges and canyons of California's Sierra Nevada Mountains and historic Gold Rush towns, debuted at the Hong Kong Disneyland Park in July. Created exclusively for the theme park, Grizzly Gulch features the high-speed, multidirectional terrain-style Big Grizzly Mountain Runaway Mine Cars, Geyser Gulch water attraction and lively performances, among others.

Hong Kong Disneyland Park offers accommodation at the Hong Kong Disneyland Hotel and Disney's Hollywood Hotel.

Meet by the sea

Scheduled to open later this year, the Auberge, Discovery Bay Hong Kong on Lantau Island offers 325 sea-facing rooms and suites and 1,300m² of event space.

The largest event facility will be a 700m² pillar-free ballroom.

Other facilities in the resort will include an all-day dining restaurant and the award-winning Spa Botanica.

Cuppa of desire

Starbucks has roped in popular Hong Kong lifestyle brand G.O.D (or Goods of Desire) to launch the world's first outlet that does not carry the coffee chain's traditional design.

Styled after Hong Kong-style snack houses from the 1960s, the outlet in Mong Kok celebrates the artistic spirit of Hong Kong, and is decorated with photos of local people going about their day-to-day business.

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A host of global standing

The Indian capital is steadily rising as a MICE destination, thanks to improved infrastructure, writes **Rohit Kaul**

Boosted by improvements in its infrastructure, including a recently upgraded Indira Gandhi

International Airport and growth in hotel inventory, the National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi is now a rising inbound MICE destination offering diverse options for conventions, seminars and exhibitions.

According to ICCA's 2011 ranking of top meeting cities in Asia-Pacific and the Middle East, New Delhi garnered the 12th spot while its closest rival city in India, Hyderabad, stood at 29th position.

Chander Mansharamani, vice chairman, India Convention Promotion Bureau (ICPB), said: "At present, New Delhi enjoys a preeminent status as far as MICE events in India are concerned. Companies often consider hosting events in Delhi, as it is the Indian capital and part of the famous Golden Triangle (Delhi-Jaipur-Agra) tourist circuit. There are many other attractions nearby, such as Shimla, Manali, Mussoorie and Sariska. Many MICE specialists are based in Delhi so holding a conference of international level is not a problem."

Kamlesh Barot, president of Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) concurred. He said: "Convention centres in Delhi NCR provide state-of-the-art technology and facilities. Delhi has hosted some



Humayun's tomb, dedicated to the Mughal emperors, in New Delhi

of the most prestigious conferences for several organisations in the past few years. The city offers varied choices, from convention centres to five-star hotels with MICE facilities."

Trade sources believe that the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi has placed the capital on the global events map due to the impressive growth in infrastructure.

Acme Events India founder and CEO, Geo Thomas, said: "Delhi NCR already has world-class hotels and venues such as the Pragati Maidan, which has hosted several large-scale events. The region is well equipped for

international MICE activities. New Delhi's infrastructure, including roads and transportation system, was upgraded in the run-up to the Commonwealth Games."

In December 2012, The Oberoi, Gurgaon will host the World Tourism Awards (WTA). Deemed the "Oscars of the global travel industry", the ceremony will be held for the first time in Asia, and will be attended by important decision-makers in the trade.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Tourism of India has plans to organise the Global Travel Mart India (GTMI) this year in Delhi

37

No. of meetings held in New Delhi in 2011, according to ICCA, which placed the capital 56th on its worldwide rankings

NCR. The mart will see participation from major international travel and tourism players, providing another opportunity for the Indian travel industry to showcase its MICE potential.

Even though New Delhi does not have a convention centre that can accommodate more than 5,000 pax, MICE specialists do not consider this as a deterrent.

"According to worldwide figures, 85-90 per cent of conferences are held with less than 1,000 people, (so) that means that Delhi NCR is in a position to host most MICE events," said ICPB's Mansharamani.

He added: "Convention and exhibition centres like The Ashok, Vigyan Bhawan, Pragati Maidan and Delhi International Expocentre are well-known venues. The Leela Palace Kempinski New Delhi is also building a convention centre with a capacity of 3,500 pax."

However, the industry pointed out that much remains to

be done to create a world-class experience for visiting delegates, and the government must recognise the importance of the MICE sector and its benefits.

Mansharamani said: "At present, Delhi lacks venues for social and cultural events in the evenings. For example, a group of directors from Coca Cola, who attended a meeting in Delhi recently, had no other suitable venues besides hotels to host their programme for 2,500 people.

"Most international companies do not like to organise social and cultural evenings in a hotel because (these venues) cannot offer the kind of experience one can get from hosting an event against the backdrop of, say, Lal Quila, Qutub Minar or any other historical monuments in Delhi."

To cater to event planners' interest in cultural venues, the Delhi government and Ministry of Tourism have joined hands to offer initiatives such as allowing incentive programmes to be held at Purana Qila, albeit with some restrictions.

"We have been in talks with central government agencies to set up more convention centres in Delhi NCR. The government considers convention centres as essential tourism infrastructure, so approved venues will be eligible for benefits, such as income tax concession under the Income Tax Act," explained FHRAI's Barot.

NEED TO KNOW



A dazzling world of fantasy

Kingdom of Dreams is India's first live entertainment and leisure destination located in Delhi NCR's Gurgaon, showcasing Bollywood-style musicals, dances, folk events, traditional cuisine and live contests with special offers throughout the day. Since its 2010 launch, the theme park has mesmerised patrons with the critically acclaimed Bollywood musical, *Zangoor-The Gypsy Prince*, in addition to performances by international artists such as American magician Franz Harary and the talented acrobats of the Mongolian Circus. Spread across 24,000m², this complex offers a blend of Bollywood and Broadway experiences in a single venue.

Pullman debuts in metropolitan Delhi

Situated in Gurgaon, Pullman Gurgaon Central Park presents a fresh approach to upscale accommodation in India.

Opened in April this year, the 285-room hotel is ideal for MICE initiatives, with nine conference rooms offering over 1,580m² of meeting spaces, a divisible 390m² ballroom and Wi-Fi connectivity throughout the property.

On the dining front, the hotel offers La Riviera, a fine dining restaurant that centres on French-Italian coastal specialties and wines; Pondicherry, a rooftop restaurant spotlighting creole-influenced south Indian cuisine; and drinks spots such as Citrique and Tiki. Other recreational facilities include a swimming pool, fitness centre and spa.

Greater Noida to get IR

Delhi-based Bhasin Group and Singapore-based Andover Leisure have come together to launch The Grand Venezia, an integrated tourism and hospitality project in Greater Noida by this year-end.

Measuring over 372,000m², the development will house entertainment facilities, a hotel, food courts, malls, offices, as well as India's first oceanarium, Blue Planet. The 9,300m² aquarium will showcase the marvels of the underwater world, with live aquatic species such as shark, lionfish and jellyfish.

JAL ups frequency

From October 28, Japan Airlines (JAL) will add two flights per week to its Tokyo (Narita)-New Delhi route, making it a daily service. To accommodate more high-yield corporate demand, JAL will switch to the larger 777-200ER aircraft – which offers Premium Economy service – three days a week from October 28 to November 30, until the switchover from the Boeing 787-8 currently assigned to the route is complete.

A taste of aristocracy

Nestled in Gurgaon, 21 Gun Salute is an authentic fine-dining restaurant named after the imperial salute reserved for the five princely states during the British Raj.

With its opulent decor adorned by a rare collection of vintage cars and bikes, the 160-seat main dining area offers a mesmerising atmosphere reminiscent of a bygone era. Indulgent dishes pay homage to what seasoned family cooks used to serve for the maharajas.

For intimate gatherings, 21 Gun Salute offers three private dining halls that can host 10 guests each.



Bullish on Bengal growth

The launch of a new airport terminal and upscale hotels will foster the state's MICE ambitions, says **Shekhar Niyogi**

Although not a popular MICE destination traditionally, Kolkata, India's third largest city, is poised to reinvent itself to become a bustling conference centre in the coming two years.

Rachpal Singh, tourism minister of West Bengal, said: "The new (West Bengal) government is trying to develop more inbound tourism, including leisure and MICE. We are working towards a private-public partnership on new tourism products and conference projects and have identified several niche areas to attract more incentive groups."

West Bengal – the state where Kolkata resides – has an annual tourism budget of Rs1 billion (US\$18 million), and ranks ninth in India for domestic tourism and fifth for international tourist arrivals, according to West Bengal's director of tourism, Pritha Sarkar.

Sakara added: "With the new airport and (potentially) many international carriers, there is expectation of substantial increase in tourist arrivals. The new government gives optimism for industrial and business growth, and that will enhance MICE activities in Kolkata."

Kolkata's Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International Airport is scheduled to open its new terminal by early-2013. The



The Victoria Memorial is a main tourist attraction in Kolkata

revamped facility is expected to attract more international airlines and increase the connectivity of the eastern Indian metropolis.

Furthermore, the upcoming Kolkata Convention Centre by Jakarta-based Salim and Ciputra group will augment the city's conference facilities when it debuts in 2013.

In terms of new accommoda-

"We are (confident) that greater air connectivity and tradeshow participation will boost MICE prospects in Kolkata."

Manab Pal
Chairman
The Floatel

tion options, event planners can look forward to the 300-room JW Marriott in the eastern suburbs. Opening in 2013, the hotel is part of a mixed-use development comprising a cultural and retail zone, serviced apartments, office towers and a 2,000-pax convention centre. Four Seasons, Holiday Inn, Radisson, The Great Eastern Lalit and Taj Gateway hotels will also open in Kolkata by 2014.

Event planners who prefer unique residential meeting venues may find the Best Western Vedic Village Spa Resort in Rajarhat appealing. It features an eco-friendly conference space and medical spa facilities in a tranquil environment.

Some existing hotels are also updating their hardware to keep up with the times. The Floatel, which was recently renovated, offers 49 guestrooms, a theatre-style arrangement for 90 pax and open-air banquet facilities for up to 500 pax.

Manab Pal, chairman of The Floatel, said: "We are (confident) that more air connectivity and greater visibility through participation in international trade shows will boost MICE prospects in Kolkata. The region has diverse attractions, from mountains to beaches and golf, as well as rich biodiversity in the riverine estuaries."

Debjit Dutta, director of Impression Tourism Services, who also pointed to diverse ecological and culture settings as Kolkata's uniqueness, said efforts were being made to "provide (delegates) with enriching experiences".

Besides drawing business travellers, Rakesh Ramnani, director of sales-leisure, Vensimal World Travel, said Kolkata must also "provide a sufficient variety of products to make them stay longer".

NEED TO KNOW



A slice of Italy at Casa Toscana

Overlooking the Rabindra Sarobar lake in south Kolkata, the 80-seat Casa Toscana has enjoyed immense popularity among the city's expatriate community and culinary connoisseurs since its debut in January 2009. The restaurant has since shifted to its current location on Sarat Chatterjee Avenue.

At its new location, the 590m² restaurant boasts outdoor seating, two private dining rooms and a 40-seat bar amid a rustic decor. It serves an eclectic selection of food, ranging from imported European cheese and wine to Italian specialties such as red wine risotto and Neopolitan pizza. The entire facility or a section can be booked for private meetings or functions.

Riverfront beautification

Running along the east bank of the Hooghly River, Strand Road was given a facelift this year to include benches, well-lit pedestrian walkways and stalls for food hawkers. The riverside thoroughfare offers views of the illuminated bridges – Howrah Bridge at one end and the Vidyasagar Setu on the other.

Cruises are possible on small country boats or large steamers with accompanying dinner and music. Day sailings are offered by Vivada Cruises.

Incentive planners can also consider The Floatel, a hotel that is moored by the river.



Classic eats

Housed in a century-old bungalow in south Kolkata, the 46-seat 6 Ballygunge Place restaurant offers a good introduction to Bengali cuisine, serving up dishes very much representative of Kolkata, such as prawns in coconut milk, and steamed fish garnished

with mustard and wrapped in banana leaf.

Although alcoholic beverages are not served, but the restaurant's traditional fare and ambience more than make up for the experience.

The restaurant can be booked for corporate groups and events.

An Indian grande dame sets to reign again

The Lalit Great Eastern Kolkata, dubbed the 'Jewel of the East', is a legend in the hospitality history of India. Built in 1840, its grandeur during British India was said to exceed that of Galle Face Hotel in Colombo, Raffles Hotel in Singapore, Peace Hotel in Shanghai and Strand Hotel in Yangon.

This 165-year-old heritage hotel closed its doors in the late 1980s. Presently under extensive restoration, the historic property will reopen in 2013 with five-star deluxe facilities and services, including 244 rooms and suites, four restaurants and bars, in addition to the largest conference and banqueting facility in Kolkata.



Ayatti

Take your pick

From Bengaluru to Delhi and all the other cities in between, India has several convention centres for organisers to choose from. **Rohit Kaul** brings to focus some of the MICE facilities available across the destination

Ayatti

Opening Mid-August 2012

Location Ayatti is located in Delhi NCR on the fringes of Greater Noida. By car, Ayatti is six minutes from the Taj Yamuna Expressway, 12 minutes from the Noida Golf Course and 15 minutes from the Formula One circuit. Hotels nearby include brands such as Jaypee Greens and Radisson Blu.

Facilities Ayatti is a complex that comprises a state-of-the-art convention centre, manicured lawns, villas, suites and recreational facilities. In terms of convention space, Ayatti offers a hall, lounges, pre-function areas and 17 meeting rooms. Event organisers are supported by accommodation options that come in the form of 11 exclusive villas. There are 10 villas that offer three rooms and two suites each, while one grand villa offers seven rooms and two suites.

There is also a spa and a wellness centre with turkish bath, sauna and yoga facilities, among others.

Website www.ayatti.in

Surat International Exhibition & Convention Center (SIECC)

Opened 2010

Location Located in Surat, a major business hub in the state of Gujarat in western India, SIECC is 13km from Surat Railway Station and seven kilometres from Surat Airport.



Surat International Exhibition & Convention Center



Bangalore International Exhibition Centre

The venue is supported by a five-star in-house banqueting service.

HICC, managed by Accor, is also connected to the 287-room Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre.

Website www.hicc.com

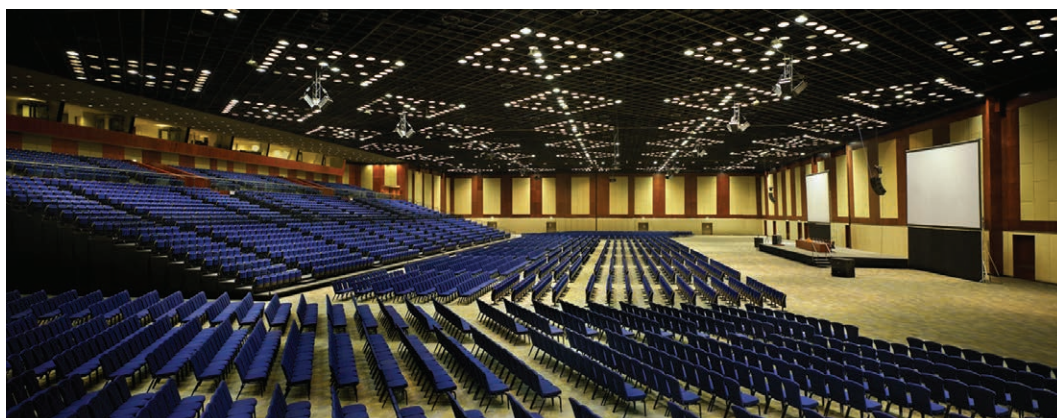
Bangalore International Exhibition Centre (BIEC)

Opened 2007

Location Spread across 137,593m² near the Peenya industrial estate in Bengaluru, BIEC is 13.51km from Kempegowda Bus Station (Majestic Station). Hotels near the centre include ITC Royal Gardenia Bengaluru, Gateway Hotel on Residency Road, Fortune Select JP Cosmos, The Taj West End and Le Méridien Bengaluru.

Facilities BIEC offers 42,000m² of air-conditioned exhibition space over three halls, a 5,600m² conference centre and a 3,500m² technology centre. Management offices at both ends of the centre, VIP rooms, control rooms and business centers are attached to the exhibition halls. There is also a three-storey food court.

Website www.biec.in



Hyderabad International Convention Centre

Facilities SIECC has column-free space for exhibitions. It has five halls of various sizes, ranging from 1,800m² to 10,500m², an auditorium that can seat 1,000 pax, and six conference rooms with a seating capacity of 10 to 250 pax. It is supported by other facilities such as an organiser's office, a VIP lounge, a press room, a medical room, a business centre, a travel centre, cafeteria, a bank and ATM services.

Website www.siecc.in

Hyderabad International Convention Centre (HICC)

Opened 2009

Location HICC is located adjacent to the Hyderabad Information Technology Engineering Consultancy City (HITEC), which is home to some of the biggest companies such as Microsoft, Deloitte, Dell, Accenture and UBS. The HICC is surrounded by three- to five-star

served apartments and hotels, with a total inventory of over 3,000 rooms. Inorbit, South India's largest mall which opened in HITEC in 2009, is about five kilometres from the centre.

Facility HICC has a 6,480m² pillar-free internal hall that seats 5,000 pax plenary-style and can be partitioned into six smaller spaces. The pre-function foyer area itself exceeds 6,000m². There are also 32 breakout rooms including specialised meeting areas, boardrooms and VIP lounge.

India Expo Centre and Mart

Opened 2006

Location The India Expo Centre and Mart sits in Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh state. It is

located near the Jaypee Golf Course, and is a 45-minute car ride from Central Delhi. The Taj International Airport is also within easy reach via the new eight-lane Greater Noida Expressway. Shuttle services between the centre and important areas in Greater Noida, Noida and New Delhi are also provided.

Facilities The venue has 28,000m² of space, comprising eight exhibition halls, meeting rooms, banquet halls, a VIP lounge, a business center with Internet cafe, a media room and restaurants, among others. It is also supported by a central Wi-Fi system and uninterrupted power supply.

Website www.indiaexpomart.com

HITEX Exhibition Centre

Opened 2003

Location HITEX Exhibition Centre, which is also known by its longer name Hyderabad International Trade Expositions, is located at Madhapur, Hyderabad. Hyderabad Rajiv Gandhi International Airport is a 45-minute drive from the venue. The nearest railway station is Hitech City.

Facilities Spread over 20 hectares of land, HITEX has three halls each offering 3,500m² of space, a 32,825m² open exhibition area, and conference halls that can accommodate 10 to 200 pax. There are plans to grow the facility with an additional five halls of 3,500m² each. Event organisers are supported by a trade fair office that provides meeting rooms, an organiser's office, a VIP lounge, a media centre, a business centre and a restaurant, among other facilities and services.

The spacious entrance plaza is able to facilitate efficient administration during large event turnouts.

Hyderabad International Trade Expositions is not only a venue provider, but also a PCO/PEO that produces shows held in HITEC Exhibition Centre.

Website hitex.co.in

Renaissance Mumbai Convention Centre Hotel

Opened 2001

Location Renaissance Mumbai Convention Centre is located on the banks of Powai Lake, within close proximity to the Chhatrapati Shivaji Domestic Terminal and Chhatrapati Shivaji International Terminal, as well as important business hubs in Mumbai.

Facilities Renaissance Mumbai Convention Centre is a luxury hotel armed with 21,368m² of flexible meeting space. It has



India Expo Centre and Mart



HITEX Exhibition Centre



Pragati Maidan



Bombay Convention & Exhibition Centre



Renaissance Mumbai Convention Centre

17 meeting rooms, including a Grand Ballroom that can cater to a 1,800-pax reception, and outdoor spaces overlooking the lake and the city skyline. The centre is complemented by state-of-the-art conference facilities and a fully-equipped business centre. Green event planners can request for eco-friendly meeting rooms.

Website www.renaissancemumbai.com

Bombay Convention & Exhibition Centre (BCEC)

Opened 1991

Location Located along the Western Express Highway in Goregaon in north Mumbai, BCEC is 10 minutes from the international airport, 20 minutes from the heart of Mumbai, and within walking distance from train stations. Hotels, attractions including the Sanjay Gandhi National Park and EsselWorld amusement park, retail and entertainment outlets are also found nearby.

Facilities The centre consists of four exhibition halls occupying over 45,000m² of air-conditioned space. The halls are equipped with Wi-Fi access, have ample height, good lighting, well-designed ventilation and strong flooring to withstand even the heaviest machinery.

BCEC also has convention halls, an international lounge, restaurants, cafeterias and an open-air event space.

Website www.nesco.in

Pragati Maidan

Opened 1982

Location Pragati Maidan is three kilometres from the Nizamuddin Railway Station and is most accessible by the Delhi Metro. The venue is located close to tourist attractions such as India Gate, Akshardham temple, Red Fort and Lotus temple, as well as Connaught Place, one of the largest financial, commercial and business centres in Delhi.

The venue is close to hotels such as Le Méridien New Delhi, Shangri-La's Eros Hotel, LaLit New Delhi and The Oberoi.

Facilities Owned and managed by the Indian Trade Promotion Organisation, Pragati Maidan occupies over 60 hectares. It offers show organisers about 61,290m² of exhibition space in 16 halls and 10,000m² of open display area. Other facilities include eateries, a media centre, a medical dispensary, banks, a library and storage space.

Some of the major exhibitions held at Pragati Maidan include the India International Trade Fair, World Book Fair and the Auto Expo.

Website www.indiatrdefair.com

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Baby steps towards India

Taiwan may have its hands full with China, nevertheless takes steps to court the other Asian giant, says **Raini Hamdi**

India is a miniscule market for Taiwan, which is enjoying a boom from the mainland and needs to ensure that its novelty and appeal for Chinese travellers is long lasting.

But that does not mean India is never on Taiwan's mind. After all, it is the other Asian outbound giant next to China. Besides, capital city Taipei's conventions ranking in Asia slipped to number four last year, from number two (its highest ranking) in 2010. Being overtaken by Beijing and Seoul, Taiwan needs all the tricks in the bag to regain ground, while industry players have expressed the need for a more balanced mix of markets.

"Too much of a good thing can be bad," said Sin Chen, project leader, Taiwan MICE Advancement Program, International Marketing and Promotion Project, referring to the China market boom, which he said brought with it new challenges. In particular is the need for Taiwan to promote high quality travel to Chinese incentive groups – not "price-driven, five different places to tick off kind of itinerary", Chen said.

Taiwan had about six million visitors last year, with China as its largest market by far. There were only 23,927 Indians to Taiwan last year, with 1,163 going for leisure and the rest, business.



Taiwan Tourism Bureau

Taiwan Tourism Bureau (TTB)'s move in January to appoint New Delhi-based Think Strawberries to raise awareness of Taiwan as a MICE and leisure destination was a first step in nabbing a bigger share of the Indian market, which grew 11 per cent in the last quarter of 2011.

TTB also organised a workshop in New Delhi in February and Mumbai in March to educate the Indian travel trade about the various products and destinations in Taiwan, among them Sun Moon Lake, Taipei and Taichung. Leading Taiwan DMCs were present at the workshops, which saw around 80 Indian industry members participating.

A print campaign, *Taiwan-The Heart of Asia*, has also been launched by the bureau. More Indian travel experts and media will be invited on TTB fam trips to Taiwan this year.

Taiwan's Bureau of Foreign Trade (BoFT), under which the Taiwan MICE Advancement Program operates, is also promoting *Taiwan Excellence* in India, a campaign to raise awareness of "made in Taiwan" quality, according to Chen.

But Chen said Taiwan still needed the infrastructure to support Indian MICE groups. "It is fair to say we're not ready yet. Indian vegetarian, for example, is different from Chinese vegetar-

ian. The reason why Japan has been more successful in attracting Indian groups is it has a lot of Indian foreign investment, which means more Indian incentives."

A lack of direct flights is another obstacle. China Airlines offers the only direct service, a twice-weekly between New Delhi and Taipei. Indian travellers could fly to Taiwan via South-east Asia, but that region itself is competing for Indian travellers. Indeed, the recent rupee depreciation and higher airfares due to soaring fuel costs are giving the more popular and cheaper South-east Asian destinations such as Thailand a better chance at securing Indian groups, said the trade.

22,764

The number of Indian visitors who came to Taiwan for business in 2011, out of a total of 23,927 Indian arrivals

A newly-launched subsidy from the TTB for 2012-2013 to increase incentive travel to Taiwan by offering grants, planning assistance, cultural performances and souvenirs might help. TTB is selling Taiwan's "soft power" such as art, cuisine, hospitality, advanced IT and bio-technology development and industrial innovation to incentive planners.

The BOFT too has launched numerous cash subsidies to assist meeting and exhibition organisers in bidding, promotion and implementation stages. They range from US\$10,000 to US\$90,000, depending on the size of event.

And the Taipei City Government, eager to regain its standing in conventions in Asia, has raised the maximum subsidy to NT1 million (US\$32,500) per case this year, from NT500,000 previously, to motivate local associations further in their bidding of conventions. Dayton Wang, chief, department of information and tourism, Taipei City Government, admitted Beijing and Seoul were "very competitive" in their marketing, but a factor could also be that not all the meetings held in Taipei were submitted and captured in the ICCA data.

Last year saw 123 events receiving subsidies, bringing 150,000 delegates spending NT3 billion. This compared with 104 events, 134,000 delegates and NT2.7 billion spending in 2010.

NEED TO KNOW

A new lounge worthy of winners

Taiwan carrier TransAsia Airways has opened another airport lounge at Taipei Taoyuan International Airport for its business class passengers.

With seating capacity for 60 passengers, the lounge provides a personalised touch. There is a live noodle-making station, while the lounge's in-house chef accepts à la carte orders. Your road-warriors can also experience rejuvenation at the Oxygen Bar.

TransAsia Airways operates a total of 46 Asian routes, including a daily between Taipei and Singapore using a 150-seat Airbus A320. It also runs one of the most comprehensive networks of internal flights across Taiwan. It has 29 new aircraft on order, in addition to the 18 in operation.



The art of bubble tea

Taiwan Tourism Bureau aims to increase the pie of incentive groups to the country and one way is through the stomach, where it is highlighting Taiwan as the world's food paradise.

At the recent IMEX in Frankfurt, for instance, the bureau organised three bubble tea demonstrations and tastings per day. Bubble tea, which originated from Taiwan, is a frothy drink, often served with small, chewy tapioca balls. Judging by the beeline for it, planners might do well to contact the bureau or DMCs to incorporate bubble tea ideas into their programmes.

The bureau has also launched a new subsidy to increase incentive travel to Taiwan by offering grants, planning assistance, cultural performances and souvenirs (see main story above).

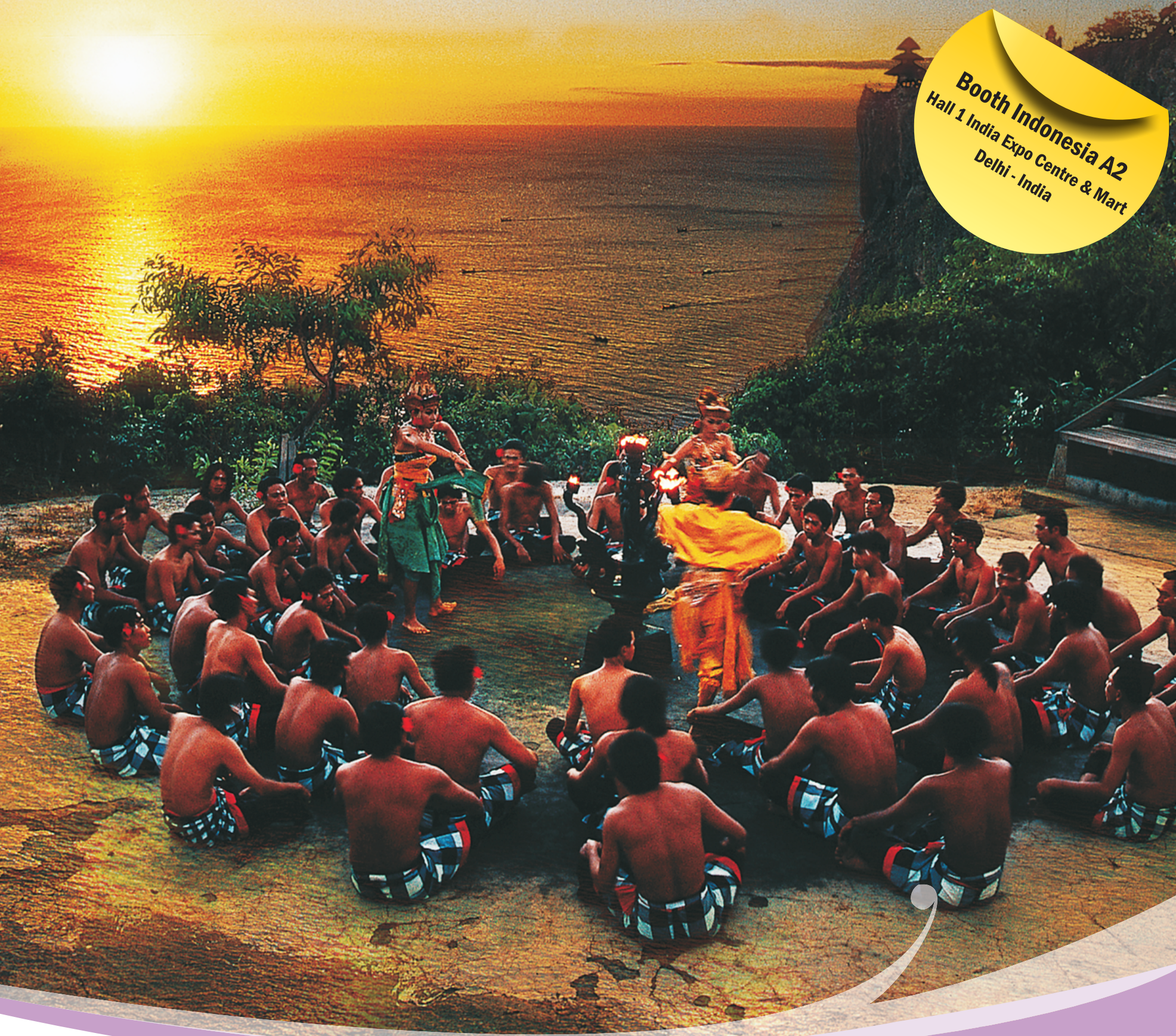


For the hunters and gatherers among your group

Check out a new package jointly launched by Volando Urai Spring Spa Resort and Miling'an Musical Theater, which the Taiwan MICE Advancement Program said particularly impressed media members on a fam trip it organised in April. The package involved a traditional *Atayal* hunting ceremony and wilderness survival skills. The group learned how aborigines use plants in the mountain forest to create "living utensils" and how different tribe members cooperate in gathering firewood, starting fires and cooking meals. In the evening, the group left the mountains to enjoy a performance by Miling'an Musical Theater at the hotel. Media representatives were thrilled by the way the stage merged with the lake scenery as performers sang beautiful ancient songs.



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